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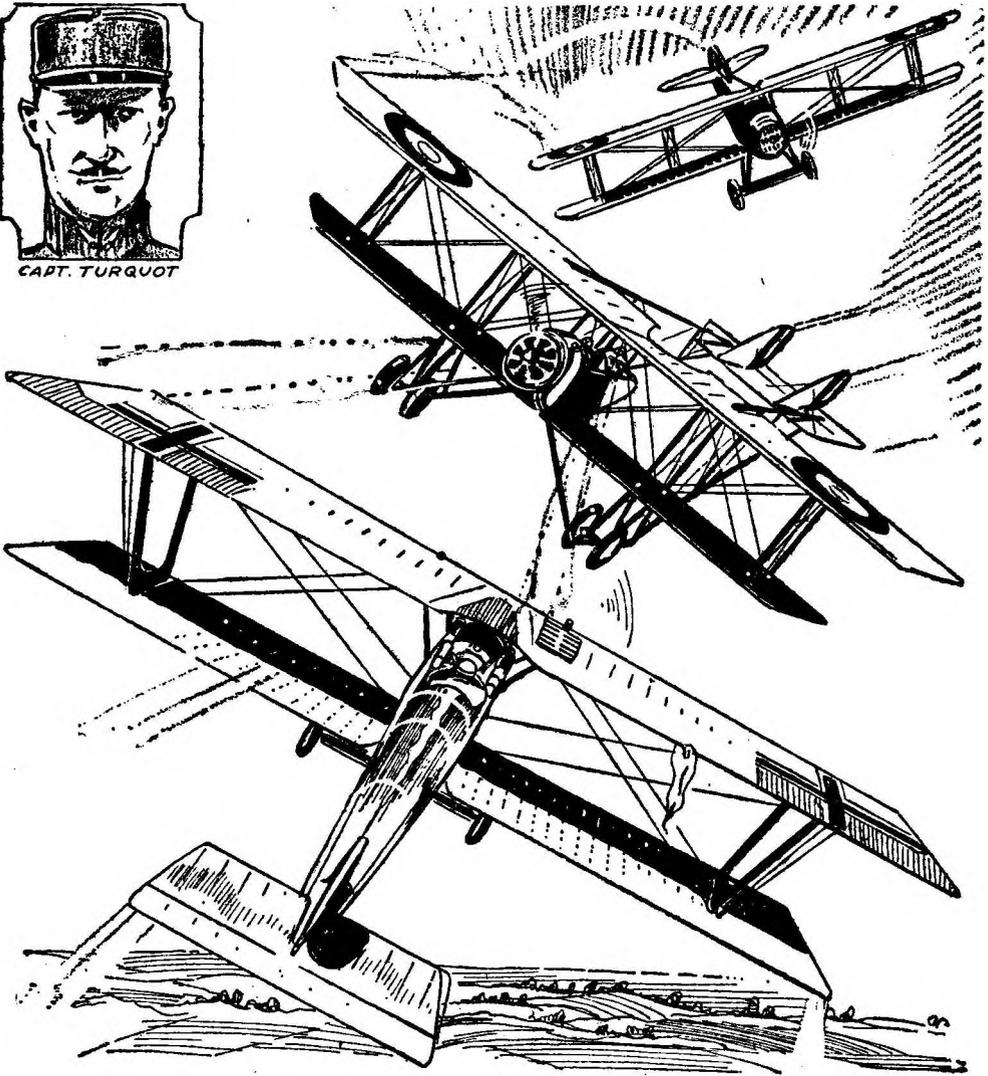
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CAPT. TURQUOT

*Slugs literally chewed the Pfalz to splinters in mid-air*

his own guns and sent a roaring blast of lead into the enemy's tail section.

The Boche whipped around in a flash and dived. A gust of slugs lashed through the fabric over Martin's head. He ruddered out of the way and came back for another shot. As he turned, the Boche turned with him. Again the Spandaus chattered madly and again Martin felt the lurch of his plane as bullets tore into it.

There was something very familiar about this German's fighting tactics.

Where had Martin run into this pilot before? Then, with a cold chill of horror, he recognized his enemy, knew him from the way he fought. Once, over Nuroc, Martin had jumped a Pfalz Scout—and very nearly lost his life as a result. Afterwards he had discovered that the enemy plane had been flown by none other than the famous von Heller. And now, here was the great German ace again riding Martin's tail through bullet-torn skies!

Von Heller was behind and below

him now, coming up in a thundering climb, both guns raging. Martin put the stick in the forward right hand corner and jammed his foot against the rudder. The Spad went down, twisted over and around with the wings screaming. He fired a long, stuttering burst and could see his tracer hosing over the enemy's motor.

In a flash von Heller had turned, tossing his swift Pfalz up on one wing, riding the prop up into the sky. Martin's Spad could climb, but not that fast. He watched von Heller go up, saw him turn and come back for the finishing blow. Helplessly, Martin jockeyed the controls trying to yank his Spad out of the dangerous trap in which he had been caught.

SOMEWHERE close by he could hear guns. The air was filled with a grey lane left by tracer. Looking up, Martin saw that von Heller's ship had buckled and skidded into a turn. He saw fabric trailing away from the wings, watched while slugs chewed the Pfalz to splinters as it hung in mid-air. The Caudron slid in between Martin and the German, all its guns firing furiously. And its timely arrival had saved Martin from that last smashing burst which might have finished him off.

One Pfalz was coasting down the chute, trailing a streamer of smoke. The other, Martin noticed, was floundering about like a duck with a broken wing. The observer in the Caudron had put on a good show.

But there was still von Heller to be accounted for. The Caudron turned and drifted out of the fight, leaving Martin and von Heller to decide the argument between them.

Again the Pfalz came on and this time Martin set himself grimly, teeth clenched, the muscles standing out in ridges along his lean jaws.

His eyes were flaming pinpoints as he took careful aim and yanked the trigger. Twin Vickers hammered viciously. The Boche's plane came plowing into the lane of darting tracer. Martin saw the Pfalz shudder. The propeller dissolved into splinters, the ragged hub raced wildly.

And just at this point the Hiss of Martin's Spad gave a cough and went dead.

Von Heller, expecting the death stroke, now that his own plane was helpless, sat hunched over in his cockpit, his eyes fixed on the American. Why didn't the Yank shoot? Fire away and get it over with. But Martin, to the German's amazement, wheeled off to the south, put the nose of his Spad down and let it slide.

As he went down, he waved one hand. Looking back he saw von Heller, the racing engine now silenced, gliding away toward his own side of the lines.

Scanning the ground below, Martin saw that, during the fight, he had drifted away from the familiar terrain of the home field. The skies, however, were empty of enemy craft, so he felt himself in no particular danger.

He relaxed on the wicker seat of the cockpit, his eyes searching for a landing field. A shadow flashed over his head and he looked up and saw the Caudron sailing majestically along. The observer leaned out of the rear office and wagged a gloved hand in Martin's direction. He wore a black helmet and a black leather coat, and his face was ruddy beneath his goggles. Now what the devil? The observer jerked his thumb toward the ground in that unmistakable pilot's gesture which means, "Go down and land."

Martin shrugged. The people in the Caudron must be daffy. Didn't they understand that his motor was

dead, that he had very little control over his Spad and must land when and how he could?

Again the observer leaned over and made the signal. This time the gesture was a commanding one. At the same time, the pilot of the Caudron allowed the big plane to swerve toward Martin's little Spad as if he intended to nudge it to the ground whether Martin liked it or not.

The men in the Caudron were forcing him down, herding him out of the sky, keeping him always pointed in the direction they wanted him to go. Martin began to boil.

Who were these birds that they could ride a Yank pilot away from his home drome and make him land on some unknown field?

The two planes swooped over some trees and Martin saw that an old deserted drome lay just ahead. The hangars were weather-beaten ruins, the tarmac was weed-grown and pitted from ancient shell fire. The observer in the Caudron gestured toward the flying field.

By this time Martin's curiosity had reached such a pitch that he welcomed a meeting with these two mysterious strangers. He whipped the Spad around into the wind, set it down on the edge of the old field and let it run, bumping and bucking across the uneven tarmac. The Caudron hit right behind him and the two planes rolled to a stop with their wings almost touching.

Dropping to the ground, Martin hitched his holstered .45 around in front of his right thigh so that he could make a quick grab for the gun if the strangers got tough.

The observer climbed down from his cockpit and Martin saw that he was a short, plump man with a very red face and a very comfortable bulge under his belt. The other was tall and dark and he had a great hooked nose over a thin, hard

mouth. Neither man removed his goggles. Shoulder to shoulder they strolled across to where Martin waited.

Ten feet away they stopped and stood staring at Martin, studying him as men might study an animal in the zoo. They exchanged glances, the short man nodded emphatically and said something in a low voice which Martin didn't hear. The other shrugged and folded his arms across his chest.

MA RTIN noted that they both wore leather coats, regulation whip cord breeches and soft leather flying boots. Neither man carried any mark of rank or identification.

Again they inspected him, their eyes gleaming owlishly behind the big disks of their goggles. "Well," Martin called out, "what about it? Now that you've looked me over so carefully you might explain the meaning of this. I am Captain Russ Martin of the 29th Pursuit, and if you two gentlemen don't happen to like it, speak up now and we'll see what we can do about it."

"Tough guy," said the tall, hawk-nosed pilot out of the corner of his mouth.

"He'll do," snapped the short, plump man. "Better take that gun away from him before he gets nervous and starts sounding off with it."

"Now wait a minute," Martin began, sliding the heavy .45 from its holster.

"Hold it!" barked the tall pilot. His arm made a slight movement and a flat blue automatic leaped into his hand. "Just drop that gun on the ground at your feet," he went on in a cold, emotionless voice. "And be quick about it. We've got no time to stall around here."

Slowly Martin's fingers relaxed.

"That's better," said the short man cheerfully. With both hands he

pushed up his goggles and Martin saw that he had the round, merry face and mild blue eyes of a Santa Claus.

"Now Captain Martin," he went on easily, "we'll talk this matter over—as friends."

CHAPTER II

The Avengers



IS IT all right if I smoke?" asked Martin sarcastically. "Now that the big melodramatic act is over and you've got me covered, I might as well relax."

"Certainly, certainly," boomed the plump man. He fished out a package of excellent English cigarettes and passed them to Martin and the pilot. "But to begin," he went on, "I am Colonel Fanshaw and my pilot is Major Patten. I must apologize for our tactics, but you see it is very important that we study our prospects carefully before they are invited to join our organization."

Martin accepted a light from the colonel, dragged smoke deep into his lungs.

"Yeah," he drawled, "I saw you flying around up there this morning, getting an eyeful."

"Precisely," went on the colonel. "We've had reports about you, Captain, so we came down to look you over. We wanted to know how you flew, how you fought, how you handled your plane in the air."

"Well, did I pass my examination?" asked Martin.

"Not bad," snapped Major Patten. "You fly, all right, but you could take a few lessons in marksmanship."

"I didn't see you scoring many bull's-eyes," Martin shot back irritably. "When Pete Smith got killed all you did was sit up there

and watch the Boche knock him down."

"Steady, Captain," warned the colonel. "As it happens we did start down to help, but my Scarff mounting jammed and before I could get my guns in action your man was already dead."

"He happened to be a friend of mine," Martin explained. "A wing folded up and that finished him. I'm going back to the drome and find out about that wing. It didn't look natural to me. If I discover that his plane was tampered with—" Martin's fists clenched and his eyes blazed with anger.

Colonel Fanshaw and the major looked at each other. Both nodded. The colonel turned back to Martin.

"You're the man we want, all right," he said quietly. "Captain Martin, how would you like to have a job investigating these mysterious accidents which have been happening to Allied planes during the last two months? Wings that drop off in the air. Engines that go dead for no apparent reason. Props that fly into bits and leave good American pilots to die under German guns."

"Just what are you driving at?" demanded Martin, the cigarette dangling from one corner of his mouth.

"Ever hear of an organization known as the 'Avengers'?" Colonel Patten said gruffly.

Martin shook his head. "Must be a new outfit. I've run into most of the squadrons along this front, but I never heard of any Avengers."

"You would never have heard of the Avengers unless you had been selected as a new member," Major Patten said gruffly.

"Exactly," went on the colonel. "The Avengers is sort of a secret society composed of pilots from every squadron of the Allied Air Corps. Its purpose is to hunt down and wipe out sabotage behind our lines.

We feel that by ruthlessly and immediately eliminating enemy agents we are destroying the morale of the great spy system the Boche has built up throughout France."

Martin was interested. This Avenger business sounded like a good idea. And he was more than eager to do a little avenging on the person or persons who had weakened the wing on Pete Smith's Spad. "All right, Colonel, go on from there," he invited. "Just where do I come into this organization?"

Colonel Fanshaw nodded approvingly. "You'll operate directly under me," he said crisply. "And you will take orders from nobody but myself. You will be assigned dangerous missions on both sides of the lines. You will get no explanation of the instructions you will receive. For instance, I may send you information that such-and-such a pilot of such-and-such a squadron is to be killed. You will go to him at once, put a gun against his head and blow out his brains—and no questions asked."

"Hey, wait a minute," cried Martin, "if I go around plugging pilots, I'll get yanked in front of a firing squad so fast I won't have time to say my prayers. I wouldn't mind doing a little amateur sleuthing for you, but this murder business—"

Major Patten grinned mirthlessly. "Men die easily," he said. "Suppose you knew that the man you were sent to wipe out happened to be a Boche agent whose very presence behind our lines endangered the lives of hundreds of loyal men?"

"That's all right, but how about the Intelligence Corps and the Secret Service and all those fellows?" demanded Martin. "They're supposed to be the spy chasers of the army."

"And they're doing splendid work," agreed Colonel Fanshaw. "The only trouble is, that practically

all of them are known to the enemy. The Avengers work in the dark. Secrecy and terror are the tools with which we operate. I assure you, Captain Martin, that already the Boche agents are terrified of us. They know that we exist but they have no way of finding out who we are."

"Yes, but I can see a lot of trouble ahead, if I take orders only from you," insisted Martin stubbornly. "The squadron commander might have other ideas on the subject."

"Don't worry about that," Patten assured him. "We back up our men, once they've joined up. The only trouble you'll get into, is if you don't obey our orders. We have discipline of our own to keep up. And we handle our own punishments. As a matter of fact, my particular job in the organization is to see that members don't get out of line."

"THIS field is used—" Colonel Fanshaw began; but before he could finish, the sky was filled with the beat of mighty motors and a British bomber dropped down over the trees and landed.

Three khaki-clad officers descended from the rear cockpit and came hurrying across the tarmac. Martin noted with surprise that the officers in the center of the little group had his hands cuffed behind his back.

His face was chalk-white and his lips twitched nervously. One officer came up to Colonel Fanshaw and saluted. The British captain spoke briefly through dry lips.

"Got him, sir. Found him just where you told us. We brought him along for you to handle. Bit too much for us, I'm afraid. Messmates and all that, y' understand. Even if the blighter is—what you say."

Colonel Fanshaw looked the prisoner over curiously. "So you're the

man who caused all the trouble down at the British 10th?" he said coolly. "Well, I promise you, you won't bother anybody after this. You've tampered with your last plane. The colonel turned to Major Patten. "All right," he said, "take him away."

The prisoner let out a choked scream and fell to his knees. "Colonel—" he wailed; "not that, Colonel. I'll tell everything I know! I'll work for you from now on. Don't turn me over to the major. For God's sake, sir, have a little mercy! I didn't mean to get into the work. They offered me money—"

Major Patten walked over and jerked the prisoner to his feet. He spun him around and shoved him toward the ruined hangars. A final push and the man, still blubbing and begging for mercy, disappeared into the shadowy depth of the hangars.

Instantly an automatic pistol began to bark.

Seven smashing shots so close together that the sound was smeared into a brief roll of firing. Major Patten walked out of the hangars, the smoking gun in his right hand. His eyes were bleak, his face expressionless.

THE two British officers mopped their faces. "Jove, you do handle 'em quick, sir," one said to Colonel Fanshaw. "That ought to put the fear of God into the rest of 'em, and no doubt about it."

"Carry on, gentlemen," Colonel Fanshaw waved them back toward the bomber. "You'll get word from me when there's more work to be done."

The two Britishers moved off unsteadily toward their plane, climbed in. The motor roared, the big bomber lifted heavily and went thundering away over the trees.

Colonel Fanshaw turned and spoke to Martin.

"Well, Captain, you see how we work. And you probably realize by this time that this is not a child's game we are playing. A man of your flight died this morning because of just such fellows as the one we have executed. Make up your mind. Are you going to be with us or not?"

Martin thought swiftly. This was a man's game, all right, he realized that; a cruel, brutal game with death as the stakes. But in what better way could he serve his country than by joining up with this ruthless organization called the Avengers? And he could still fly and fight with his own outfit, that was the best part of the proposition. He would be working with men he knew. Martin thrust out his hand and Colonel Fanshaw gripped it warmly. "I'm with you, sir," Martin said swiftly. "You can count on me."

"Why of course, lad," the colonel changed swiftly from the stern-faced judge who had so recently sentenced a man to death and became again the plump, red-faced, innocent, fatherly old gentleman. "We were counting on you all the time. We've never yet offered an American a chance to join and been refused."

Major Patten came over and held out his hand.

"War is dull, dirty, and dangerous," he said quietly. "We've all got a job to do. We've got to play the game out to the end. Glad to have you with us, Martin. It takes nerve to train with our crowd, but I know you can stand the gaff."

Martin took a deep breath. "Where do I go from here?" he asked. "What's my first job?"

"Fuel your plane from the tanks back of the hangars," Colonel Fanshaw instructed him. "Then go back to your own squadron. Keep your eyes and ears open and your mouth shut. You'll hear from us when we need you."

CHAPTER III

The New C. O.

ONCE in the air again, his plane refueled and headed for home, Martin had time to think over the strange incidents of the morning. He was flattered that he had been selected to join the Avengers, but he realized that the organization was composed of grim, ruthless men and he had some idea of the work, the missions which the future contained.

His jaw clamped down and his eyes grew cold and steely. Pete Smith had died that morning, had been murdered. That made the game worth while. Martin was willing to go anywhere, do anything to find the man who crippled Pete's plane.

The familiar home field appeared under his trucks and Martin shot the Spad in and dropped on the tarmac with the ease of long practise.

As he taxied up to the hangars, two young officers hurried out to meet him. Lieutenants Freemont Horn and Perley Briggs were members of Martin's flight. Horn was tall and dark and quiet. He was a moody man, given to brooding over the war. Briggs was the exact opposite, a fresh-faced youngster, bright and cheerful and boyish. He was a newcomer to the squadron and had had little time in the air, but already he had proved himself a capable pilot.

Both men saluted Martin. Briggs grinned.

"We were sure worried about you, you old Sky Devil!" he cried. "When you didn't come in after the fight, we thought maybe von Heller had jumped you. Gosh, it's good to see you looking hail and hearty as usual."

"We had a report about Smith,"

announced Horn gloomily. "There wasn't much left of him, but they identified his plane. Wonder which one of us will be next?"

"Forget that kind of talk," Martin banged him on the back; "Pete's gone and we're all sorry, and that's the end of it."

"Have you heard the news?" Briggs interrupted eagerly. "We've got a new C.O. Yep, he arrived this morning and he brought a French instructor with him, a Captain Turquot. Just imagine that! We got to learn how to fly all over again from this Frog. As a matter of fact the Frenchman's not a bad guy, but the new squadron commander, Major Peter Hough, looks like a prize fighter and acts like he's got a grudge against the world."

"Hough, did you say? Martin asked. "I've heard stories about him. He was in command of the 15th down at Dijon and he socked one of his pilots and broke his jaw. There was a big row about it, but they hushed the business up. And now we get him. Well I can see a tough time ahead."

"He wants to see you," growled Horn. "Said if you came home alive to rush you right into operations office. He's cooking up some kind of scheme to get us all blasted to hell, unless I miss my guess."

The door of operations office burst open and a thick-set, red-faced man appeared there and began to bellow wrathfully.

"Is that you, Martin? Well, come on in here and get a move on! This is no play school for half-wits we're running here, but a fighting squadron. Save your chatting until after your day's work is done."

Briggs grinned and winked at Martin. "That's the way he is," he spoke in a low voice. "He never sends an orderly with a message or uses the telephone. Just pokes his head out of the door and yells for

what he wants. You can hear him all up and down the front."

"It's birds like that that ruin a war," grumbled Horn. "He's brave enough sitting at his desk, but how is he going to act in the air."

"We'll soon find out," said Martin dryly.

He strode off, removing helmet and goggles and unbuttoning his flying coat as he went. Pushing open the door he went in and found himself in a small, smoke-filled room which seemed crowded with the presence of the new squadron commander.

Hough was big and broad-shouldered and beefy and he had a way of thrusting out his chin pugnaciously as he talked.

"So you're Martin," he growled, thrusting out a hairy paw and shaking hands. "This is Captain Turquot who has been sent to give us a little advice on how to run the war."

MA RTIN turned and saw a small, dapper, smiling French officer with a pointed mustache, smooth brown cheeks and friendly grey eyes. He advanced and shook hands warmly.

"Delighted, delighted," he cried. "We of the French have heard of Captain Russ Martin. We know of his victories in the air. And it is with pleasure that I shake the hand that pulled the trigger that brought down so many of the accursed enemy."

"Never mind the flowery compliments," growled Hough. "You'll give my pilots the big head if you go around telling them how good they are. Now, let's get down to business. I want 'C' Flight to stage a bombing raid at twilight. I'm going along to observe how the flight handles itself in the air."

"This is a pursuit squadron," Martin answered quietly. "We haven't

done much bombing—we've left that to the outfits that have the proper planes and equipment for it."

"That's the trouble with this bunch," snapped Hough. "You men have got an idea that you're pretty good and you feel cocky about your records. But bombing is part of our work and you'll learn how it's done. Now, my idea is to pay von Heller's drome a visit just about sundown. We'll drop a few Coopers just to stir him up a little and let him know that there are American outfits on this front that are not afraid to fight."

"Yes, and if you go over there and stir up that hornet's nest," Martin countered, "you'll have his whole outfit swarming about our ears. And they've got plenty of planes too. Thirty or forty at least."

"What's the matter, Captain?" sneered Hough. "You're not afraid of von Heller are you? Not scared he'll take a shot at you with his nasty little guns."

Martin flushed, but held his temper. "As it happens," he said slowly. "I've had two fights with von Heller and I have a lot of honest respect for his ability."

"But you live to talk about it," Captain Turquot burst in eagerly. "Very few men have survived a fight with von Heller. Again let me say that I am proud to know you."

"Now don't get sore," Hough tried to smooth over the situation. "We all know your record, Captain Martin, how many planes you've knocked down and so on. But we're going ahead with this bombing stunt. I'm the boss of this outfit and what I say goes and I want everybody in the squadron to know it."

The door of the operations office opened and Lieutenant Wellington Cross strolled in. Cross had earned the reputation of being the best-dressed pilot in France—not that it

did him much good when he was in the air. He was apparently a very wealthy young man and his money had spoiled him. He had a round boyish face with a weak chin and watery blue eyes. He bought his uniforms and equipment from the most expensive military tailor in London, and his constant parties and binges had considerably weakened the morale of the squadron.

"Well, well, well," said Cross pleasantly, holding out his hand to the new squadron commander. "If it's not my old pal and playmate Mr.—"

"Major Peter Hough," the C.O. said swiftly as if to cover up the name Cross had been about to mention.

Cross grinned and lifted his eyebrows. "Peter Hough is it? Well that's all right with me. And you're the new C.O.? Well, isn't that nice. What a jolly time we're all going to have from now on."

Hough cleared his throat and thrust out his chin. "Glad to see you again, Cross," he blustered. "You arrived just in time. Captain Martin is going to take out a bombing flight this afternoon, you can go along with him."

Cross sat down on the major's desk and lighted a cigarette.

"Say, that's too bad," he drawled, studying Hough's face. "I happen to have a date in town this afternoon and I can't possibly get away for any bombing raids. You're going to excuse me, I know, for my engagement is really too important to break. Ask me to a party some other time, will you, Major?"

Hough and Cross faced each other across the desk. The major's eyes were cold his jaw jutted out like granite. It became very quiet in the room. Martin could hear Captain Turquot's quick, excited breathing. Then Major Hough looked away, drummed on the desk with his

fingers and cleared his throat harshly.

"A bit irregular," he said gruffly, "but I suppose I can arrange to let you off this once. If you have an important engagement you'll have to keep it."

"That's the way to talk, Peter, old boy," approved Cross, with a dry laugh. "I had an idea you'd see it." Cross turned to Martin and waved his hand airily. "Good luck to you, Captain," he said pleasantly. "And if you meet von Heller over there, give him my best regards and tell him that I'll be over some morning to give him a dose of hot lead."

Cross stood up, deliberately tossed the butt of his cigarette on the floor, stepped on it and left the room.

"As you were saying, Major," began Martin softly, "you're going to be the boss of this squadron."

HOUGH wheeled furiously, his face flushed red. "None of that kind of talk," he bellowed. "Just because I happen to—that is I—I knew young Cross many years ago. His father and I were great friends. I sort of—promised to look after the kid. But don't worry, Captain Martin. After this he'll take his turn of duty along with the rest of the squadron."

"If I might suggest," put in Captain Turquot suavely, "there are plans to be made about the bombing show this afternoon. If Captain Martin wishes, I will be glad to go over the details with him."

Major Hough flopped back behind his desk and spread his great hairy hands on the blotter. "Go ahead," he rumbled. "Don't bother me with the details. When I give orders I expect my flight leaders to figure out how to execute them. And by the way—I want a plane myself this afternoon. Like I said, I'm going along to get a good look at the flight in action."

Just at twilight, six Spads stood on the line, their motors turning over easily. Martin, Horn, and Briggs were gathered beside Martin's Spad, talking in low voices.

"I knew something like this would happen," growled Horn. "I told you the new C.O. wouldn't rest until he'd figured out some stunt to get us all shot up. This is suicide. Six planes won't have a chance against von Heller and that crew of buzzards he's got at his drome. Suppose we do drop a few bombs, how will that help win the war?"

"Like to get a shot at von Heller myself," said Briggs. "Been hearing a lot about that guy. If he's half as tough as they say, he must be a mean actor in the air."

"He's plenty good," Martin told him soberly. "And meeting him is nothing to joke about. He's got more tricks up his sleeve than the whole A.F.C. ever heard about."

It had been a long day for Russ Martin, a day of suspense and worry. There was something very queer going on between Major Hough and Cross.

He was more than ever convinced that, sometime in the past, those two had known each other very well indeed. And he was also sure that the major's name had not been Peter Hough in those days.

Cross had some information which the major did not want known. Martin was also puzzled about the source of Cross' finances. The young lieutenant seemed to have unlimited funds, but he had never given out any information about where they came from. It suddenly struck Martin that there was an amazing similarity between Cross and the young English officer whose execution he had witnessed that morning. Both men had the same weak chins, the same shifty eyes.

Horn's voice brought Martin back to the present. "Here we're about

to take off on a crazy suicide flight and you act like you had bad news from home. Snap out of it, Skipper. We're all depending on you to pull us out of this mess."

CHAPTER IV

Suicide Flight



MAJOR HOUGH arrived and the rest of the men of the flight. The major was covered from chin to knee in a tan flying coat. About his neck was twisted a muffler of brilliant red, the ends of which fluttered over his shoulders as he walked toward his ship.

"Let's go, men!" he boomed in his rough, bullying voice. "And remember I'm expecting a good performance this afternoon. You fellows have got to prove yourself with me. No man's reputation amounts to a damn while I'm in command of this squadron. It's the future, not the past, that counts. Pits, gentlemen, and we're on our way! Captain Martin will lead the flight. Take orders from him. Pay no attention to me. I'm going along just for the ride."

Martin lead the flight aloft and wheeled toward the enemy lines. The ceiling, he noted, was low and, off to the north a great black bank of clouds loomed on the horizon. The air rushing past his face was moist with a threat of rain. There would be a storm before night. Well, this job wouldn't take long. Get it over with quick and come home before the rain hit.

The flight climbed steadily until the grey dome of clouds was just overhead. Then Martin swung to the east and saw, far below, the narrow, shell-torn lane of the trenches. A few Boche Archies popped at them as they went over, but the

shells burst far behind and to the left. Martin swiveled in his seat and scanned the skies.

To the south a flight of English Camels was hurrying to get home before dark. A thousand feet below the Spads, a couple of French observation busses rumbled along like fat, contented cows. Martin looked back and saw that his flight was spread out in a neat formation behind him. Major Hough was flying by himself, had dropped behind and was coasting his Spad along as if trying to lose distance.

Ahead, Martin could see the ruins of a little French village, Bellincourt. Just beyond the town lay von Heller's drome. Archie was going in earnest now, and the sky was dotted with the black smudges of bursting H.E. The planes of the flight rocked and pitched through the rough air as Martin lead them closer and closer to the objective.

The flight leader swept the skies anxiously. This was the most critical moment of the raid. Undoubtedly the Boche knew that the Yank formation was coming; the crash of bursting shells had warned them that enemy craft were approaching. It all depended upon whether von Heller had checked in his ships for the night or whether his twilight patrols were still in the air.

To the north thunder rolled in mighty crashes, and the black wall of the storm was split asunder by jagged streaks of lightning. Studying the clouds, Martin assured himself that it would be at least twenty minutes before the rain hit. And what a lot could happen in twenty minutes!

Looking over the side, he could see the low grey buildings which ran along one edge of von Heller's tarmac. The hangars, he knew from observation of previous trips, were half dugouts, roofed with steel and covered with earth and sod which

made them almost impregnable against light bombs such as the Coopers the Spads carried.

The whole purpose of the raid was therefore pointless. True, it would be a spectacular show, but very little real damage could be done the enemy. If Major Hough was so curious about the bombing marksmanship of his pilots, he could just as well have let them stage a practise raid with dummy bombs on his own side of the lines.

All this flashed through Martin's mind as he wheeled his Spad high over the hangars and examined the field below. To his surprise, no enemy ships were visible. Usually, at this time of day, planes would be coming and going from the various patrols; ships would be outside the hangars being serviced by the mechanics for the next morning's flight.

AND then Martin saw that there was no movement at all below, not even so much as a greaseball hurrying across to the bunkhouse for his supper. Von Heller's drome was deserted, empty of all human life.

Well, orders were orders, Martin lifted his arm and waved it about his head, then he made a quick plunging motion over the side, the signal to let go the bombs. He reached down and jerked the toggle between his legs and felt the Spad lurch and lift as the first Cooper shot free.

He watched the bomb go down, saw it drift in a slow arch to land on the top of the first hangar. There was a brilliant splash of orange flame, followed by a thunderous explosion. The Spad rocked and bucked as the blast of air surged about it.

Then the twilight was ripped apart as the bombs burst below. Dust and smoke boiled up from the hangars, there was the scream of flying steel

splinters and the steady, *rhomp*, *rhomp*, of bursting bombs.

Martin wheeled to the left, tripped his last Cooper, yanked the stick back into his belly, leading his flight up and away from the wrecked drome. As the nose of his Spad lifted he felt a shudder run along the right wing. He looked up and saw, screaming down from the grey ceiling above, von Heller's entire squadron of Pfalz Scouts.

They came down with exhaust pipes cherry-red in the gathering dusk. Green fire danced at their gun muzzles. Automatically, Martin counted the diving planes. Five, ten, twenty— The sky was filled with howling Mercedes motors and racking Spandau guns.

Standing his own Spad on its tail, Martin tripped his Vickers and raked the nearest Boche from prop to flipper. The Pfalz belched smoke, the pilot flung up his arms. The plane shot past and disappeared into the night, the motor howling in agony.

THEN enemy planes closed in on the flight from all directions. Long lanes of tracer sparkled and glittered in the dark. Martin could feel slugs pounding into his ship, but he didn't know from which direction they came. Desperately he wheeled and fired and looped and fought.

All about him the men of the flight did the same. They were caught, trapped by the crafty von Heller who had waited high up under the ceiling with his entire squadron, had hovered there until the Americans had flown directly under them—easy prey—cold meat.

But how had von Heller known that the Yanks were coming? A cold chill of horror raced down Martin's spine. Information must have come to them for, apparently, they had known the exact time the Spads

would arrive. And only that morning Martin had joined the secret organization known as the Avengers. He had been admitted to that select circle whose purpose was the hunting down of enemy agents.

A fine Avenger Martin had made! Some member of his own squadron had betrayed him, had sent von Heller a warning, had laid the trap into which "C" Flight had now fallen.

During one of those strange lulls which occur in any dog-fight, Martin had time to make a quick check of the members of his flight. One was going down in flames; another Spad was staggering drunkenly about the skies as if the pilot had been badly wounded and had lost control of his ship.

Martin looked for von Heller with an idea of singling out the Boche squadron leader and herding him into individual combat. But nowhere could he see the familiar Pfalz with its fluttering streamer. Either von Heller was not present, Martin decided, or he was not flying his own plane.

This seemed a strange thing, as von Heller was noted for his personal bravery and the fact that he always led his fighting flights into battle.

And then it occurred to Martin to wonder what had happened to Major Hough. So far he had seen only four Spads beside his own in the midst of the dog-fight. Hurriedly he searched the skies. Far above the whirling mass of the dog-fight floated a single Spad.

Martin ground his teeth with rage. So that was the kind of commanding officer Hough had turned out to be? Even as he watched, the major wheeled his plane lazily and went drifting away toward the Allied lines.

Flinging himself back into the fight with renewed savagery, Martin leaped on the nearest Pfalz and pro-

ceeded to shoot it to ribbons. When he was sure that the pilot was dead, he spun on one wing tip to find a fresh foe. As he did so, he saw the crippled Spad explode in mid-air. Saw the wings fly off, the motor leap from the bearers. The tail assembly dissolved, the rudder fluttered away on the wind. A blast of orange fire leaped up from the cockpit—and then the sky was full of falling debris in the midst of which spun the blackened body of what had once been an American pilot.

It could have been an accident, of course; a chance shot from a Boche gun, might have struck one of the Cooper bombs. But the flight was supposed to have dropped all its bombs. A shadow of doubt slipped across Martin's mind. This was more work of Boche agents. Somebody could have planted a grenade with a time fuse in the cockpit of that plane.

Two Spads came down and fell into position behind Martin's tail. Martin knew what his pilots meant. The battle was hopeless. What chance did three planes have against an entire Boche squadron? The only thing to do was to run for it, to get out of there as fast as screeching Hisso motors could take them.

The enemy had lost three ships, "C" Flight, two. Martin was no fool. He gave the signal. The three Spads huddled together like migrating ducks, shot down in a steep thundering dive and headed for the lines.

And then the storm broke. Rain sluiced down in stiff, hammering columns. The sky blazed as lightning leaped from cloud to cloud. Thunder bellowed and boomed like gigantic cannon. There was the smell of electricity in the air. Static flames sparkled along the wings of the Spads as they bounced and rolled through the aerial disturbance. The water washed off the goggles of

the pilots, ran down under their collars, splashed off the motors, hissing and trailing clouds of steam. Props seemed to claw their way through the wall of rain, flinging a great pinwheel of spray as the three ships bored through the storm.

Then Martin nosed over and went down and as he let his Spad slide toward the earth, the storm dropped behind them and they came out under the clouds in air that was thin and cold and wet from its recent washing. Water glistened on the wing surfaces and trailed out behind the ships in long sparkling streamers.

What was left of "C" Flight came down to a wet tarmac, the wheels of the Spads splashing through puddles as they hit and rolled toward the hangars.

A MECHANIC ran out, waving his arms. He galloped up to Martin and saluted.

"Sir," he cried breathlessly, "the major's done landed with a stalled motor and he's fit to be tied. He's cussin' and carryin on somethin' awful, and he says for you to come and see him right away."

Martin turned in his seat to see which members of his flight had survived the Boche trap. Briggs' grin greeted him over the edge of one cockpit, the gloomy face of Horn appeared over the other. Horn cut the gun and in the silence which followed remarked sadly. "I told you it would happen. I knew that guy would run from a fight. Cost us two men, that's all. Two Yanks dead, just because the major wants to see how we fly."

Martin dropped from the cockpit and stalked silently toward the operations office. Suspicion battled with anger in his mind. Had Hough's engine really stalled or had he faked that in order to keep out of the fight? Martin meant to find out be-

fore another day had passed. Also, he meant to discover who had sent word to the Boche that the raiding party was on the way.

He pushed open the door of operations and went in, his mind still struggling with the problem. He was greeted by a blast of profanity and heard the hoarse, rasping voice of Major Hough dinning in his eardrums.

"A fine flight leader you are, Martin! Don't think I didn't see you lead your men into that trap. I spotted von Heller's squadron waiting up there when we were still a mile away from the drome. I tried to signal you, but you were so bull-headed and stubborn you wouldn't pay any attention. So you went on anyway and dropped your bombs and the Boche jumped you. That cost me two good men."

"But, Major," stammered Martin, knocked off his feet by the viciousness of the attack. "Your orders were to bomb. Von Heller's squadron was hidden in the clouds when we reached the drome."

"DON'T lie!" thundered Major Hough. "You're through, finished! From now on you'll take your place at the tail end of the formation. I am appointing a new flight leader immediately."

Martin steadied himself, regained his composure.

"Very well, sir," he said quietly. "And who do you intend to appoint in my place?"

"Lieutenant Cross," snapped the squadron commander. "From now on he will be in charge of 'C' Flight."

And then for the first time Martin noted that both Cross and Captain Turquot were in the room. The Frenchman's face was the picture of puzzled amazement. Cross sat on the major's desk, swinging one leg and smiling.

CHAPTER V

Night Prowler



S Martin left the operations office and headed for his hutment, he felt like a man who had been hit over the head with a club. His body sagged with weariness, his mind was in a daze.

So many things had happened, and so fast, that he couldn't sort out the pieces of the puzzle. He knew that there must be an answer to all this misunderstanding and false accusation, but he couldn't figure out what it was.

Cross in charge of the flight? Absurd, ridiculous! Why, Cross couldn't even fly well; was a rotten gunner and, moreover, the men of the squadron had always had a suspicion that Cross was yellow. A hell of a flight leader that spoiled young brat would make.

"By golly, I bet you are Captain Martin," said a cheerful voice out of the dark. "Colonel Fanshaw, he say for me to have a little talk with you."

Martin stopped, spun around in amazement. In the light which flooded from the mess shack window, stood a perfectly strange officer, smiling at him.

The man was of dark complexion and he had short curly black hair. He was obviously of American-Italian descent and his voice had a cheerful sing-song quality which expressed a sort of happy-go-lucky attitude toward life and a tendency to worry about nothing no matter how important or dangerous it was.

"Who are you?" barked Martin. "What do you know about Colonel Fanshaw?"

"I'm Lieutenant Tito Raffetto," announced the stranger pleasantly. "Me, I have just been assigned to this squadron. You lose a couple

of men this afternoon, eh? Well, I am come to take their place—both of them.”

“Colonel Fanshaw sent you?” challenged Martin.

“Sure, sure, but take it easy,” warned Raffetto. “Come, let us go somewhere and have a nice talk. I got plenty of news for you and some of it is plenty damn important.”

“Come with me.” Martin lead the way around the mess shack to the elephant iron hut he occupied. Raffetto shut the door carefully and locked it. Made sure the windows were closed. Then he flung himself down on a cot and grinned at Martin. “Welcome to the Avengers,” he said. “Sure I’m one of ’em. I was sent here for one of them very special jobs that Colonel Fanshaw is always thinking up. I understand you had some trouble with your planes here at this squadron? Sure, sure, we keep track of all them things. Now me, I’m kind of a trouble shooter. My job is to go around and find out who’s doing the dirty work and make a report.”

“You’ll find plenty of dirty work here, then,” growled Martin. “Everything’s in a lousy mess.”

“Sure, sure, I understand all about it,” said Raffetto easily. “Now I’m sort of a simple-looking guy with an ugly mug and a big grin so nobody is suspicious of me and I can find out things.”

Martin went to the window and pulled aside the curtain. It had begun to rain in earnest now; the storm had swept down on the drome and water ran from the glass in solid sheets. He spun suddenly on his heel and faced Raffetto.

“Out with it,” he barked. “I know I’ve been a failure. You didn’t have to come here to tell me that. I lost two men this afternoon. I’m no farther along in finding out who crippled Pete Smith’s plane than I

was this morning. I can guess what you’re going to say. Colonel Fanshaw is disgusted with me. I’m all washed up with the Avengers.”

Raffetto’s face sobered.

“It’s not what you think, Captain,” he said. “We know you’ve had a hard day, but the colonel has got a special job for you to do. You ain’t finished, my friend, you are only started. Tomorrow morning at dawn you got to fly across the lines, land in German territory and meet up with a Boche orderly by the name of Schlemmer. Sure his name ain’t really Schlemmer. He’s one of them French agents whose got the very pleasant job of wearing a German uniform and living right with a bunch of Germans all the time. Well, this guy Schlemmer will hand you a list of the German agents who are mixed up in all this scandal in the air squadrons along the front. Now you see what an important job I brought for you?”

“You mean I’m to go on with the Avengers?” cried Martin.

THE cheerful grin came back to Raffetto’s features. “Like I said, you ain’t even started to fight yet. And while you’re over on the other side meeting Schlemmer, I will do a little gum-shoe work around the squadron. We got our eye on this Major Hough and also a lieutenant by the name of Cross. There is some bird by the name of Horn who has been making a lot of remarks about how the Allies haven’t got a chance to win the war and how dangerous it is to fight against German pilots and so forth. I want to have a little talk with him, too.”

Martin could not help but smile at the suggestion that Horn might be an enemy agent. “You can scratch that last name off your list,” he told Raffetto. “He’s a member of my flight and just naturally sad and gloomy. But he’s as loyal

as they come and one of the best scrappers I've got."

"I'll have a chin with him, anyway," insisted Raffetto. "This is a mighty damn serious proposition and we can't take no chances. We got a rumor that the Boche have got a new trick up their sleeve. We don't know what it is yet, but from all we can find out, they are planning to practically wipe out every squadron along this front.

"How they're going to do this little job, nobody knows. Anyway, all you got to worry about, Captain, is to meet this guy Schlemmer at daylight tomorrow morning behind the German lines. Here is a map of the sector with the meeting place marked on it. For God's sake don't lose it; it's the only one we got. And what's more, we got to walk mighty soft and easy around here. It won't do for us to be seen together.

"When you come back from your flight in the morning I'll get myself introduced to you in front of the gang like we never met before. Maybe I'll even get fresh with you and make a couple of silly remarks, and you can bawl me out like you think I'm poison. Eh? How is that, my friend? We will pull a smart trick that will fool anybody. I got to go now." Raffetto slapped Martin on the back cheerfully, wrung his hand, unlocked the door and slipped out.

MA RTIN gazed after him in wonder. How could Raffetto laugh and grin and crack jokes when Boche spies were wrecking American planes and Yank pilots were spinning down to death every day? And then Martin sensed that Raffetto's grin and easy laughter were a part of the man's disguise. Underneath that rather silly exterior lay a will power as hard as forged steel, nerves like cables, a mind that

worked with traplike precision, shrewd and clever and calculating, capable of dealing successfully, of outwitting the most brilliant of Boche agents.

When he thought of the job which lay ahead of him the next morning, a glow of satisfaction coursed through him. It was a dangerous mission, but he welcomed it. It meant that he would be in action against the enemy, risking his life to bring back information of vital importance to every American flyer along the front.

Suppose Hough's name should be found on that spy list, or Cross'? His nerves jangled and he felt the muscles of his jaw harden in a tight-lipped smile. Martin had reached the point now when he would, without question, have blown out the brains of any man, even one of his own wingmates if he was sure that the traitor had sold himself to the enemy.

Wearily, Martin undressed, blew out the candle and went to bed. So tired was he that his head had hardly hit the pillow before he was asleep, the heavy sleep of a man whose mental and physical machinery had been run to the point of exhaustion.

He did not know what time it was when his eyes popped open, but he lay quietly in the dark listening to the sounds about him. He knew instantly that someone was in the room. That was what had awakened him. And, although he could see nothing, he was sure that the intruder was bending over his foot locker on the opposite side of the hut, pawing through his uniforms and equipment.

Martin tried to recall where he'd left the pistol. On the other side of the room, probably, where he had tossed his uniform and flying clothes when he had undressed. He cursed himself for a careless fool. Why

hadn't he had enough sense to put that gun under his pillow?

That the man in the hut was an enemy, Martin had no doubt. And that he was there for a purpose was fairly obvious. What the devil could the fellow be after? Martin had very little money in the hut, his equipment was worth nothing. What was there to steal? And then the solution came to him in a blinding flash of light. The map Raffetto had given him! The map which told where to meet Schlemmer.

Martin's body uncoiled like a steel spring. He was up, out of bed and halfway across the room before he heard the shuffle of the invader's feet. Martin hit the man with his shoulder and knocked him sprawling. The two went down together with Martin's arms rising and falling like pistons.

The thief was a big man, thick-shouldered, muscular, and possessed of an enormous strength. With a wrench and a twist he tossed Martin clear and lurched to his feet. Martin lunged in again and felt a heavy fist lash past his jaw. He hit out viciously—short, stabbing blows that drove the intruder backwards across the room.

So far, neither man had uttered a word. Both fought grimly, savagely, as men fight whose lives are at stake. Martin received a stunning blow in the face which rocked him back on his heels. He surged forward again driving his fists for his enemy's unseen face. Then something swooped out of the dark and a heavy metal object crashed across the top of Martin's skull. Stars blazed in front of his eyes and he felt himself falling forward on his face.

He tried to keep his feet, tried to stagger forward and throw his arms about the man. His groping fingers found nothing. He struck out wildly—and smashed his fist against the

side of the hut. The door opened and closed very softly. Somebody ran around the side of the hut and was swallowed up in the night.

Still dazed by the blow, Martin fumbled about, found matches, and lighted the candle. As the tiny flame sprang up, he leaped across the room and picked up his uniform. The map! It was still there, in his hip pocket where he had tucked it. He put the map under his pillow and looked at himself in the mirror over the washbowl.

HIS face was white. There was a gash over his temple and a painful lump over his ear, probably inflicted by the barrel of a pistol. Thoughtfully, soberly, Martin washed the cut, and dabbed it with iodine and stuck a piece of adhesive tape over it. He had learned a salutary lesson. Never again would he take a chance with important papers; never would the enemy find him unarmed and off guard.

And the fight would go on day and night, Martin realized. There would always be enemy agents about—listening, planning, plotting. Well, the next time Martin would be ready for them. He locked the door, got his gun, blew out the light and went back to bed. It seemed to him that he had hardly pulled the blanket up under his chin when the orderly was shaking him awake and telling him it was time to get up.

A huge cup of steaming coffee in the mess shack cleared Martin's head. He recalled what his mission was to be and hurried across to the hangars. The night before he had left word that his plane was to be serviced and ready to fly at least an hour before the regular dawn patrol was ready to take off.

His boots crunched in the frozen mud as he swung around to the front of the hangars. His breath smoked out of his nostrils. He shiv-

ered and beat his hands together to warm them. A light glowed through the darkness. He saw that one of the hangar doors stood open and that his plane was waiting, the motor chugging quietly.

A mechanic saluted him. "She's ready, sir; guns loaded, everything set."

"Very good," approved Martin. "Now you chase on back to the bunkhouse and if anybody asks you about me you don't know a thing; understand? You don't know when I took off or where I went. On your way and forget this whole business."

"Yes, sir," cried the mechanic thankfully, and trotted off to his warm bunk.

When he was sure the man was out of sight, Martin pulled out his map and had a good look at it. He wanted to fix the landmarks firmly in his mind before he got into the air.

The directions were clear enough. He first flew to Bellicourt, made a sharp right turn, flew five kilos and then spotted a field behind a white church. He was to land on this field where Schlemmer would be waiting.

"**A**ND where do you think you're going?" The voice seemed to come from over Martin's shoulder.

He spun about, thrusting the map into his pocket.

Lieutenant Cross leaned against the hangar door, smoking a cigarette and smiling mirthlessly. The lieutenant had apparently just returned from town. His face was pale and his breath reeked with the fumes of cognac.

"I'm off on a little sightseeing trip of my own," Martin told him quietly. "Any objections?"

"You're flying without orders," Cross accused. "A little irregular, isn't it, Martin? You may have a lot of explaining to do about this."

"Not to you, anyway," Martin

snapped irritably. "You're drunk. Go sleep it off."

"You stay on the ground where you belong," ordered Cross. "When I want you to make a special flight, I'll tell you about it."

"Since when did you become squadron commander?" challenged Martin. "You're talking pretty big for a lieutenant."

Cross shrugged and grinned.

"Major Hough is not feeling so good this morning," he explained. "Fact is, he got into a fight in town last night and somebody blacked his eye. He didn't want to show up at the drome until he'd been patched up, so he ordered me to take charge of the outfit."

"Got into a fight, did he?" said Martin softly. "Well, that's very interesting. But it happens that I'm not taking orders from subordinate officers."

Then Martin saw that Cross had a gun. He could make out the outline of the weapon which Cross held in his right hand inside the pocket of his flying coat.

"You'll never take off in that plane," Cross said slowly. "I'm in command here and I'm going to be obeyed—or else!"

Martin realized that the precious seconds were ticking away as he stood talking to Cross. He was due at that field behind the German lines in a few minutes now. He couldn't afford to stall around much longer. Cross was drunk and had a gun. There was only one thing to do. Martin laughed and began to pull off his helmet. He walked toward Cross fumbling with his goggles.

"Guess you win," he said. "Anyway, I'm willing to wait until Hough gets back on the job. We can settle this argument then."

Cross relaxed. "Now you're talking—" he began; but saw Martin's fist sweeping up in a stiff uppercut. Before Cross could move or throw

himself on the defensive, the blow landed with a meaty thud.

He crumpled at the knees and fell forward. Martin seized his collar and dragged him inside the hangar, rolled him behind a spare wing and tossed a canvas engine cover over the unconscious form.

"That ought to hold you," he said to himself. "Until I get back, anyway."

He hurried to his plane, vaulted into the cockpit and reached for the throttle. The engine blasted. Flame streamed out of the exhaust stacks, the Spad lurched forward, ran swiftly down the field and soared up into the night.

CHAPTER VI

The Man In the Shadows



HICK pre-dawn darkness was on Martin as he lifted his Spad over the lines and sent it droning toward Bellicourt. The clouds were high and, after the storm, the air was fresh and crisp. It would be a clear, bright dawn, he surmised, which made him all the more eager to reach the rendezvous with Schlemmer, pick up the information he wanted and cross the lines again before enemy patrols were out.

But of course, he couldn't land on a strange field in the dark. He prayed fervently that he would be able to find the white church just before daylight came.

He crossed the lines high up. Boche anti-aircraft ignored him, the guns being helpless in the dark and the gunners not likely to bother with a single plane. His next problem was to find Bellicourt.

The town was a mass of ruins, of course, but underneath those ruins were hundreds of dugouts crammed with German soldiers. Soldiers must

eat, and the cook fires would be going about this time, getting ready for breakfast. Martin hoped that he would be able to locate the town by the glow of those fires or by columns of smoke.

A quick search of the earth below disclosed nothing. Behind him, No-Man's-Land blazed with the light of flares as ever-alert sentries kept the trenches bright with Very lights in anticipation of dawn raids. From the air, the front lines stretched across France like a muddy Broadway, as far as the eye could see in both directions.

Then Martin caught a flash of light below. He put the nose down and let the Spad slide a couple of thousand feet. He leveled off and saw the light again. Bellicourt!

He glanced at the compass, set his course according to direction on the map and went roaring away into the dark. The five kilos passed in as many seconds. Martin slid lower and saw the white gleam of the church, and beyond that the field where he was to land. Jubilantly, he coasted around into the wind and shot for the field. He had arrived at exactly the right time, in that brief interval between night and day.

He cut the gun and came in as quietly as possible, put the Spad down on the edge of the field and let it run. As he slid up to the church, a cringing figure leaped out of the shadows, arms waving. Before the Spad had stopped rolling, Schlemmer had run out into the open and was clawing his way up the side of the fuselage like a cat. The man was small with a wizened, ratlike face, a face distorted with terror. He spoke a queer mixture of French, German and English.

"Take off!" he croaked. "Let us go away from here quick before the Boche come and find us."

"Where is the list?" demanded

Martin. "Hand it over. I've got to get out of here, quick."

"*Non, non, non,*" shrieked Schlemmer. "No list. You go, I go, or else I am shot to kill. *Les Allemands* are after me. Take me along or I am killed."

The man's meaning was clear enough. He was under suspicion, perhaps being pursued by the Boche. If he were caught the Germans would make short work of him. Martin didn't blame the man for wanting to escape. And Schlemmer knew that his most valuable possession was the list of names which he had, most likely, memorized, not daring to put anything on paper which would give him away.

Reaching down, Martin caught Schlemmer by the collar and yanked him up on the wing.

"Lie down," he instructed, "and hang on. I don't know whether I can take off with you, but it's worth trying."

DAYLIGHT was coming fast. Every second was precious. Patrols would be up before long and would most certainly spot the Spad in the middle of the open field.

Schlemmer waved his arms and protested. He was afraid to ride the wing, had probably never been in the air before.

"Lie down, you fool!" Martin yelled at him, goosing the Spad around into the wind and starting it slowly across the rough field. "It's your only chance. Hang on tight; here we go."

Schlemmer howled something which Martin didn't understand. Then the terrified man grasped the edge of the wing, locked one foot behind a flying wire and flattened himself out along the surface. He was afraid of the plane, but he was more afraid of a Boche firing squad. Anything was better than to be caught by the Germans.

The Spad bounced and pitched as the wheels trundled over the uneven ground. Martin gave her full gun, balanced Schlemmer's weight with the rudder, held the nose down with the stick until he had attained sufficient speed, then yanked the stick back into his belly and went up, the Spad rocking drunkenly as Schlemmer's weight threw it off balance.

Martin could hear the little spy screaming, but paid no attention. Up he went, the Hisso laboring, wings shuddering at the extra strain. He was clear of the trees now, soaring up into the dawn. As he rose, light streamed across the world and a new day had begun.

Almost at once it happened, the thing that Martin feared most. He heard the beat of engines, looked up and saw a pair of black-crossed birds swooping down upon him. The Boche had seen his take-off, were coming to investigate.

With a man riding the wing, Martin had little chance to maneuver. He didn't dare hurl his ship through the usual battle tactics for fear Schlemmer would be tossed off into space. He did the only thing possible, wheeled toward the lines, jammed the throttle wide open and ran for it. And hadn't had time to gain altitude. Toward the church he thundered, then whipped around the steeple, leap-frogged a line of trees, climbed steeply to miss a little hill which loomed ahead, shot down again and went rocking along a valley with his wings almost brushing the sides.

Behind him came the two Pfalz Scouts, guns raving, as the pilots, bent on shooting down this lone invader of Boche territory, hurled their planes after him in grim pursuit.

Glancing down, Martin saw that Schlemmer still rode the wing, hands clutching the edge, his face buried against the fabric.

A burst of slugs pattered along the fuselage and Martin kicked the Spad first right, then the left, in a frantic effort to evade the pursuing planes. Again tracer leaped and darted about him. Martin was taking desperate chances now, flying as close to the ground as he dared, hurtling fences and trees and buildings as they loomed ahead.

The two Pfalz pilots tried to herd him into a crash. One came down in a thundering dive to cut him off, but Martin side-slipped, stood his Spad up on one wing and changed directions. The Pfalz pilot waited too long before trying to come out of his dive. Martin looked back and saw the wings fold. The engine dragged the fuselage down in a savage spin. The plane crashed beside a roadway and immediately burst into flames.

The remaining Boche was more cautious after that, but also more determined to knock down the Yank pilot. He came up behind Martin and fired burst after burst, combing the Spad with a steady hail of slugs. Martin felt the rudder kick under his feet and knew that the tail assembly had been hit. Bullets thudded into the dashboard in front of him, the low windshield was washed away by a sudden blast from the Spandaus.

Schlemmer was still riding the wing. Martin was thankful for that. His job now was to bring the spy safely across the lines. A few more minutes and he would be successful.

Right ahead lay the trenches. Already Martin could see a haze of smoke which hung over No-Man's-Land. He swerved to avoid a wrecked tower, banked sharply and shot down over a German battery, so close that he could see the gunners flatten themselves out on the ground in terror as his wheels skidded over their heads.

The trenches flashed under his trucks, he heard a roar of bursting

shells, then he was over and skimming the trees on the American side of the line. He looked back and saw that the Boche pilot had given up the chase, and turned and was roaring away toward his own drome to report what had happened.

Thankfully Martin eased the throttle off, and looked over the side of the cockpit. Yes, Schlemmer was still there, still flattened out along the wing in the same position he had assumed at the start.

Martin recognized his own field and headed for it. He came in gently, put the Spad down as easily as possible so as not to bounce Schlemmer off. He taxied up to the hangars and cut the gun. As he swung himself out of the cockpit, Raffetto appeared, his dark face, as usual, wearing a simple grin.

"The dawn patrol has just taken off," Raffetto informed Martin. "I see you brought Schlemmer with you. Quick, get him inside the hangar so we can talk to him."

"I didn't get the list," Martin explained hurriedly. "Schlemmer was afraid he'd been discovered." He turned and spoke to the man on the wing. "You can let go now. We're home. You're safe."

SCHLEMMER lay without moving. Raffetto ran to him and lifted his head. The man's face was a greenish color and blood drooled from his mouth. "By golly, he's been hit," cried Raffetto. "Look at the holes in the wing. He was riddled with Boche bullets."

Together Martin and Raffetto pulled Schlemmer from the wing. They had to pry his hands loose, so tightly were they gripped over the edge.

They carried him into the hangar and laid him on a bench.

Schlemmer opened his eyes and looked up at Martin blankly. "*Octobre dixième*," he muttered. "Boche

come *Octobre dixième*. Be careful, be careful."

The shadow of death flitted across his face, his head flopped back and he was gone.

CHAPTER VII

Under Arrest



DEAD!" said Raffetto. "Poor devil, he served us loyally and well and he died just when he thought he had escaped."

"What did he mean by that October tenth business?" asked Martin. "The date must have been important. He tried to tell us something but death stopped him right in the middle of it."

Raffetto frowned and scratched his head. "Don't mean a thing to me," he muttered. "But it must mean a lot to the Boche. By golly, I'll bet those fellows are planning a big drive."

Raffetto paused and looked down at the limp body of Schlemmer. "This fellow was a spy," he said slowly, "so all the work he was doing was against enemy agents. Maybe this October tenth has got something to do with Boche spies working behind our lines."

"That's more like it," approved Martin. "He knew something important that was going to happen to us."

Raffetto started to answer, then looked up with a jerk. Standing in the hangar doors, peering down at the crumbled form of Schlemmer, stood Captain Turquot, the Frenchman.

"That one," Turquot said slowly, "died like a hero. Ah, yes, I know who he is, a loyal son of France." He made a clicking sound with his tongue against his teeth. "I was the one who sent him to work with

the enemy," he added sadly. "Captain Martin, I know that you went after him this morning. Tell me how this brave man came to die."

"Just a minute," drawled Martin. "What have you got to do with this business?"

Captain Turquot shrugged and fumbled for a cigarette. "The Avengers," he said softly. "I happen to be a member of the French section. Colonel Fanshaw sent me word this morning to get in touch with you and Raffetto."

"You? Well, I'll be damned!" muttered Martin under his breath. He looked at Raffetto and saw that that young man was smiling his silly smile and nodding his head up and down vigorously. "We are everywhere," he said, "and all of us are working for the same cause."

Assured by Raffetto's lack of suspicion, Martin turned again to the Frenchman. "Glad to know you are with us, Captain," he said. "Anything Colonel Fanshaw says goes with me."

"But, of course," protested Turquot, "we must work, what you call him, hand in glove. Now explain, please, what information this poor dead son of France has brought with him."

Again Martin looked at Raffetto for confirmation, and again Raffetto nodded. "We got very little out of him," Martin went on. "He said something about October tenth and before we could question him he was gone."

"But what is this?" cried Captain Turquot. "October tenth? Is it a code word? I do not understand."

"Neither do we," admitted Martin.

"Attention, my friends," said Raffetto eagerly. "This October tenth is but two days away. So you see, the message was urgent. We must get in touch with the colonel at once."

"Exactly," agreed Turquot. "I'll undertake that job immediately. And

in the meantime, I have special orders for you two gentlemen from the colonel. You are to take your planes and fly to Bailson Forest, which is on this side of the lines. At ten thousand feet over the forest you will make a rendezvous with a squadron of Allied fighting planes. A special mission has been ordered. Major Patten, Colonel Fanshaw's adjutant, will be in charge of the formation. He will lead you behind the German lines, where a great battle is to be fought."

"What time is this to be?" demanded Martin.

"Within the hour," Turquot replied.

"By golly, I'm in on it, too!" said Raffetto, and grinned at Martin. "Now we can work together!"

"I go to send word to the colonel," announced Turquot. "Order your planes out at once. I will give you the exact time of the meeting a little later." He saluted with the awkward, palm forward salute of the French officer which always seemed so ridiculous to Americans, spun on his heel and was gone.

"What are we going to do with Schlemmer's body?" demanded Martin. "The German uniform—it will look a little odd if he's found around here."

"Attention," cried Raffetto. He held up a finger in warning. Martin could hear the tramp of marching feet outside the hangar.

Before either Martin or Raffetto could move, a little crowd of men appeared in the doorway. Lieutenant Cross had shaved and bathed and had breakfast and looked much better. There was a faint bruise on the point of his chin. He stood in the doorway, an automatic pistol in his hand. Behind him were two armed greaseballs. Cross looked at the dead Schlemmer in his German uniform, then his gaze shifted to Martin and Raffetto.

"Captain Martin," he said softly, "you're under arrest. Lieutenant Raffetto, what do you know about this business?" He jabbed at the dead man with the barrel of his pistol.

"By golly, he looks like a German," said Raffetto cheerfully. "I never saw him before in my life."

"Martin, I hold you responsible for this," Cross snarled. "You flew over behind the German lines this morning. You brought this fellow back with you. Which means you got a lot of explaining to do. When the major finds out about this he'll prefer charges. You're working with the enemy and I know it. You've been acting mighty suspiciously around here since yesterday."

Martin's hands opened and closed nervously. This fellow Cross was getting to be a nuisance. Martin and Raffetto had special orders to fly before very long and now here was Cross waving the gun around and talking big. Once before Martin had put him to sleep.

Might be a good idea if he did it again.

CROSS seemed to read his mind, for he backed away and flourished the gun. "None of that, now," he warned. "You make a pass at me and I'll drill you. You haven't got a chance to escape. Major Hough knows all the tricks you've been up to and has given me full authority to deal with you. We've had orders from Headquarters to investigate anything suspicious around the squadron. German agents have been working behind our lines and it wouldn't surprise me if you were one of 'em."

Martin laughed bitterly. "You damn fool," he growled. "Haven't you got enough sense to see—"

"Sure, sure, now we're under arrest," cut in Raffetto swiftly. "What are you going to do with us? Drop

your gun, Martin, and let's get this over with."

Martin tossed his gun on the ground and marched out of the hangar, followed by Raffetto and trailed by Cross and the two enlisted men. He headed for his hut, he and Raffetto went in and Cross bolted the door on the outside.

"I guess you'll be careful who you hit after this," he grumbled. "As soon as the major gets back we're going to send you to Headquarters for trial."

Raffetto winked at Martin and shook his head. "Keep on your shirt," he advised. "We won't be here long. That Frog captain will be around pretty soon."

"You think he's all right, then?" asked Martin.

"I never heard of the guy before," Raffetto confessed, "but he seemed to know the right answers. We'll soon know whether he's with us or not. If he's so damned anxious for us to make that flight this morning he'll get us out of here in short order."

The squadron tender sputtered past the front of the hut, stopped, apparently to pick up a passenger, and then chugged away into the distance. Presently somebody fumbled with the lock. The door opened and Captain Turquot stood there smiling.

"But what is this, gentlemen?" he asked, his eyes twinkling. "I request that you have your planes ready to fly and here I find you loafing in your quarters."

"It was Lieutenant Cross' idea," Martin told him.

"Ah, that Cross!" chided Turquot. "So young, so impetuous. Just now he leaps into a car and rushes away to find the major. He leaves me in charge of the squadron, which makes it very nice for all of us."

Raffetto grinned. "Yeah, I thought it would work out like this."

"Let's get going," Martin began

to buckle his helmet. "What time are we supposed to meet Major Patten's flight? He's one bad actor, that major. We don't want to be late."

"Such spirit, such eagerness!" applauded Turquot. "I tell you, my friends, it is the youth and vigor of the Americans which will win the war. I have just talked with the telephone to the brave major. The rendezvous over Bailson Forest will be in fifteen minutes. *Vite*, gentlemen! You fly to join the finest fighting men in the world. Ah, how I envy you both! But come, this is no time for conversation. I wish you good luck and long life and many happy landings."

Raffetto and Martin hurried to the hangars. Their planes were waiting. "I'll follow you," Raffetto told Martin. "You know this sector."

"The forest is not far," said Martin, chuckling as he swung himself up into the cockpit. "But I'd like to see Cross' face when he gets back and finds us gone. He'll think we deserted to the enemy sure enough."

CHAPTER VIII

To Headquarters



RACING down the field wing to wing the two Spads vaulted into the air. Martin noted with satisfaction that Raffetto flew like a veteran, that he handled his ship with the easy grace which comes only with long experience.

The bright dawn had faded and a grey blanket of clouds had slid down over the skies. As Martin led the way up, he estimated that the ceiling would be at about ten thousand, the altitude at which they were supposed to meet Major Patten's flight.

He wondered what the morning's

mission would be. Knowing the major, he suspected that the group of Avengers were on their way to live up to the name of the organization. He could see the brown smear of Bailson Forest far below and headed for it.

Raffetto turned with him and the two planes coasted along together, their motors droning monotonously. Martin glanced at the line of gauges on the panel and saw that he had not quite reached the right altitude for the rendezvous.

He lifted the nose of his ship and sent it thundering up into the swirling grey mass of clouds above. The fog was thin, but visibility was considerably reduced. Glancing back, Martin saw that Raffetto had followed him up.

And then a familiar roar of motors came drifting through the layers of fog. Somewhere—and very close—a mighty squadron of planes flew through the grey mists. Martin nodded to himself. This would be Major Patten and the fighting Avengers. He searched the skies anxiously.

It would be only too easy to collide head on with planes boring through the clouds. This was the first time Martin had been asked to join Major Patten's flight and he didn't want to make any mistakes.

And then, right ahead, the squadron appeared, ghosting along, each plane in perfect formation, a great flying staircase of ships, grey and menacing.

Martin grunted with relief and nudged the throttle open, guided his own plane into the rear of the formation and fell into position. Raffetto dropped into place behind him and a great fighting squadron swept on through the skies like ships plowing across a foggy sea.

The flight leader turned and the formation wheeled behind him and headed in a new direction. Martin

could see the hunched form of the pilot just ahead, and beyond that another plane, grey and misty and indistinct.

The squadron turned again, the flight leader waved one hand over the side and the formation nosed over and went slanting down through the mists, headed for the clear air beneath.

THE formation flashed out of the clouds and shot into bright, sparkling sunlight. Martin jockeyed his plane into position and leaned forward to signal Patten of his arrival. As he did so, his glance fell on the ship just ahead. On the upper surfacing of the wing was painted a large black cross.

Martin's heart did a flip and the breath whistled through his teeth. His glance leaped to the other ships in the formation. All were black crossed. In the fog, Martin and Raffetto had stumbled into an enemy flight and had joined up with it.

Martin saw that Raffetto had already realized the situation and was banking swiftly away. Martin put his own plane into a steep turn and came howling around on one wing. As he did so, he saw the German flight leader look back, give a sudden signal with upraised arm and then stand the Fokker he flew on its tail in a frantic effort to reverse directions and return to the two luckless Spads.

Raffetto's Vickers were in action, smoke bubbling from the muzzles as he fired a long withering burst into the nearest Boche. Then tracer darted about Martin's head and he found himself in the center of a deadly circle of Fokkers, each Boche determined to be the one to bring down an American.

After that it was like a nightmare, with Martin firing and rolling and ducking, plunging desperately through the skies, blazing away at

the black-crossed wings, tossing his plane through the air with always the circling Fokkers swarming about him.

He could see Raffetto engaged in an equally desperate fight. The fabric streamed back from the wings of Raffetto's Spad. One interplane strut had been smashed and a severed flying wire whipped the linen at every turn, lashing it to ribbons. Then Raffetto dived, his guns pounded and a Fokker reeled out of the fight and went spinning down to the carpet.

Martin had no time to see what happened after that. He could feel slugs pounding into his own ship, could feel the jolt and jar of enemy bursts fired at close quarters. The Hisso on the nose of his plane labored in agony, spilling blistering hot oil back over the cockpit.

Boche bullets had ripped away a slab of fabric on the side of the fuselage and a great draft of wind blew across Martin's legs. He knew that he was being fired upon from all sides, that his plane was literally being shot to pieces. Why he had not been hit was a miracle.

He couldn't last much longer, he knew that.

A GUST of bullets rattled across the instrument panel. Gauges smashed, and more hot oil vomited backward, staining Martin's goggles and scalding his face.

A Fokker appeared ahead of him and he fired at it, short, racketing bursts which drilled the Boche pilot through the body as he hunched forward over the stick. Another Fokker appeared and Martin raked it in passing. Then he felt himself going down, the stick bucking between his knees, knew that the controls had been hit and that he was falling into a spin.

Down he went, earth and sky spinning madly about him. The rudder

bar was frozen against his feet, the stick flopped limply. The tattered canvas of the wings crackled and snapped as he roared earthward.

The Boche squadron had reformed, Martin noted, glancing upward, and was roaring away to finish its interrupted business. And then Martin saw something else. High up under the ceiling and far off to the south flew a squadron of Spads, the ships appearing like tiny, glittering moths against the grey background of the overhead clouds.

That would be Major Patten's formation, Martin decided, and cursed himself for a blundering fool for having hooked up with the wrong outfit there in the high mists. He wondered what had happened to Raffetto and, searching the sky, discovered his wingmate limping along not a hundred feet above the ground, his motor spitting black smoke as Raffetto nursed it into a landing.

His own plane was still spinning wildly; the brown earth was rushing up at him with terrific speed. Martin stood on the rudder, lunged against it with all the strength in his long legs.

Suddenly the stick grew rigid in his hands. The controls were functioning. Carefully Martin eased the stick back and flattened out the Spad.

Just in time, for a field flashed under his trucks and he could see a wavy line of trees just ahead. He leaped the trees and came wabbling down on the other side. He saw a long line of guns and beyond that some new trenches and then what had once been a wheat field.

Even as he headed for the wheat field, Martin's Hisso gave a final groaning cough and died. He let the Spad coast to a landing, felt the wheels touch, made a grab for the buckle of his life belt.

The Spad nosed over and crashed, and Martin went flying through

space. He hit, rolled over and over, bounced to his feet.

Still dizzy and groggy from the shock, he stared vaguely about him. Men in khaki came running out from the guns—Americans. A young lieutenant of artillery arrived at a gallop. He grinned and saluted.

"Some fight, sir. We watched you attack the whole Boche squadron and drive them off. It was a wonderful spectacle, sir."

"Spectacle, hell!" growled Martin. "Get me a car. I've got to get back to the 29th drome at once."

When he stepped out of the car at the drome the first person Martin saw was Raffetto. They shook hands silently. No words were needed at a time like this. They had both come very close to death, had felt the cold shadow brush across them.

But Raffetto could not remain solemn very long. He began to grin and shake his head.

"By golly, when we dropped out of the clouds and I saw all those Boche, I was so surprised I almost run into your tail. Man, man, wasn't that something! We are two very lucky guys to be alive right now."

"It was my fault," admitted Martin. "I led you into that mess. And the strange thing is, we missed Major Patten by about five minutes. I saw him sailing around up high while I was on the way down."

"Maybe it was Patten and maybe not," countered Raffetto. "I was too busy to look. My motor cut out and I just did make it back to the field. Smashed the Spad all to hell. But look, somebody has already delivered a new ship to take the place of the one I wrecked."

Martin saw that a new Spad, shiny and glittering, stood in front of the hangars.

"Where did that come from?" he asked.

"Nobody knows," Raffetto explained. "Some Frogs towed it in

this morning behind a truck. They claim that it hasn't been tuned up yet, and left orders for nobody to fly it until they could come back and put it in shape."

"Where's Cross?" demanded Martin.

"He and Major Hough are waiting for you," Raffetto told him. "Both of them are in a great stew. Come on, we might as well go and report and get it over with."

Martin shrugged and followed Raffetto to the Operations office. Hough and Cross were waiting. The major had a beautiful black eye and wore a strip of plaster across his nose. The bruise on Cross' chin had spread and turned black so that he seemed to be wearing a short beard.

Cross had apparently explained the situation, for Major Hough glared at the newcomers and pounded his desk with a hairy fist.

"So you won't take orders, eh?" he boomed. "Well, I'll teach you. Nobody can get away with anything as long as I'm in charge."

Martin deliberately studied Hough's black eye.

"**B**EEN in an accident, Major?" he asked.

Hough fumed and spluttered. "None of your impertinence, Captain. You and Raffetto have violated orders and I'm going to see that you pay for it. What's more, I'm going to send you to Headquarters where you will stand trial at once."

"You violate your parole, you steal two planes and smash them up," snarled Cross. "You're in a jam now, and I guess this squadron is finished with you. Damn good ride if you ask me."

"Stop it!" snapped Hough. "I'll give the orders here. Lieutenant Cross, you will arrange for a car to take these men to Headquarters. Send armed guards with them. There will be no more escapes."

Captain Turquot came hurrying into the office. When he saw Martin and Raffetto a look of joy appeared on his face. He ran forward and seized their hands. He pounded them on the backs and shouted.

"You are alive after the feat you have accomplished?" he cried. "But yes, I have hear all about it. How you fall in with the Boche squadron and fly along with it until the fog clears so that you can see to attack. How you shoot down one, two, three, of the enemy planes and then escape before the wrath of the Germans can fall upon you and wipe you out. It was stupendous—"

"Lay off that stuff," ordered Hough. "These men are under arrest."

"But that you cannot do!" protested the Frenchman. "You arrest them because they are brave? Because they have the courage to join an enemy formation and shoot down three planes? What kind of a war is it when men are placed under arrest because they have become heroes?"

Hough jerked his thumb toward the door. "Get out of here," he belted. "All of you! Cross, see that these two prisoners are sent away at once. From now on this outfit is going to be run in a military manner, or I'm going to know the reason why."

CHAPTER IX

A Trap



CAPTAIN TURQUOT followed the two prisoners out to the waiting automobile.

"Do not worry, my friends," he consoled them. "Nothing will happen to you at Headquarters. I myself will telephone and make sure that your reception will be a warm one."

Raffetto hopped into the rear of the squadron tender, a battered old Fiat without top or paint. Martin slumped down beside him.

"Who is in charge at Headquarters now?" Martin asked wearily. Raffetto turned and stared at him.

"Don't you know?" he asked. "Why, Colonel Fanshaw, of course."

The Frenchman seemed to think this very funny. His shoulders shook and his tiny mustache bobbed up and down with mirth.

"But, of course," he chuckled. "That is the point of this entire affair. The stern Major Hough ships you off for punishment—by Colonel Fanshaw. What could be a greater joke, I ask you?"

EVEN Martin grinned. The Avengers certainly knew how to take care of their own men, he perceived. The car started with a jerk. Captain Turquot waved and they were off.

The tender was driven by a sergeant who wore a .45 automatic strapped conspicuously on the outside of his overcoat. Beside him rode another enlisted man, also armed with a pistol. They had hardly left the drome before the sergeant turned around and addressed the prisoners solemnly.

"Sirs," he said, "these here guns we are carryin' ain't loaded. Now if you gentlemen wanted to stop off in a cafe as we go through one of these here little towns, me and Henry will wait right in the car for you."

"Thanks, Sergeant," Martin told him, "but we'd better push right on through to Headquarters."

"Yes, sir," agreed the sergeant. "Only me and Henry heard what a swell fight you and Lieutenant Raffetto put up this morning, so if you say the word we'll just turn this buggy around and all go to Paris for a couple of weeks."

"Not this trip," said Martin. "Cut down through the woods behind the Chauton, like we usually go. And step on it; we're in a hurry."

"Yes, sir," the sergeant replied gloomily, and trod on the gas. The car fled through villages and down long white roads between lines of shell-torn trees.

Presently they came to the thick woods which lay behind the town of Chauton and dipped into a long valley. Here the road wound in and out through the trees and the driver was forced to slow down.

They thundered across a wooden bridge and hit the grade on the other side. Suddenly the driver shouted something and stood on the brakes. The Fiat swerved, tires squealing. Right ahead, a log lay across the road. The car skidded up to the log and stopped. "What the hell?" cried the driver.

Then smoke spurted from the underbrush on both sides of the road. The shots crashed hollowly in the silence of the forest.

"Duck!" yelled Raffetto, and flung himself to the floor of the car, with Martin falling on top of him.

The driver grunted and his head fell forward across the wheel. Henry, the enlisted man who sat beside him, was feverishly trying to shove a clip of cartridges into his automatic. Again the hidden rifles barked.

Slugs tore through the body of the car, smashed the windshield, drilled neat holes along the hood. Henry gave a strangled cry and grabbed his belly with both hands.

Martin leaned across the front seat and picked up Henry's gun, shoved the clip into place, threw a shell into the chamber and began to fire into the blank wall of the underbrush. Something moved there and Martin blazed away at it, the big gun leaping in his hands.

A rifle answered. A bullet ripped the leather upholstery not two inches

from Martin's cheek. Then he could hear somebody running through the woods and everything became very quiet.

"You hit?" asked Raffetto from the bottom of the car.

"No, but they got the two men on the front seat," Martin growled. "I think I potted one in the woods. Stay here while I go look."

"Take it easy, now," warned Raffetto. "This trap was laid for us. It sure is funny what a lot of accidents have been happening to you and me lately. You'd almost think the Boche knew about us belonging to the Avengers."

Martin slid out of the car and, crouching low, ran toward the underbrush, gun in hand. He plunged through and took a quick look around.

NOTHING moved. He glanced down and saw a man sprawled on his face at the edge of the brush. He wore the dirty blue smock, baggy trousers, and wooden shoes of a French farmer. But he clutched a wicked looking rifle in both hands and his face was hard and seamed like that of a Prussian noncom.

Bending down swiftly, Martin flopped the man over. The slug from the .45 had caught him in the chest and blown out most of his back.

The man's lips moved and he muttered: "*Oktober zehnte, Oktober zehnte.*" Then his lips stiffened and he died.

Martin hurried back to the car. "Got one of 'em," he told Raffetto. "Just before he kicked off he said October tenth—in German."

"Uh-huh," mused Raffetto. "I expected something like that. Help me move these two wounded men into the back seat. By golly, we'd better get the hell outta here!"

They slid the two wounded men into the rear. Raffetto hopped in behind the wheel, Martin swung the

log out of the way and caught the car as it rumbled past.

Ten minutes later they passed a field hospital where they left the sergeant and Henry. Just at twilight the car stopped in front of the Headquarters building and Martin and Raffetto were soon facing the plump and genial Colonel Fanshaw in his narrow private office.

"So you're under arrest?" the colonel asked pleasantly. "Yes, I know all about it because Captain Turquot, who happens to be one of our very best French agents, just telephoned me."

"Yes, sir," answered Martin, "but he didn't say anything about us being shot at on the way over here."

"What's this? What's this?" demanded the colonel. "Who shot at you—and why?"

"One of them was dressed like a French peasant," Martin told him grimly. "And just before he died he muttered October tenth—in German."

Colonel Fanshaw sat up with a start.

THAT'S what Schlemmer said, wasn't it? And October tenth is tomorrow. There is no doubt that something is going to break. We've had rumors about it before. Our agents in Bocheland sent word that a new superplane was being perfected and would soon be operating along this front.

"But I'm inclined to doubt such stories. We've been hearing about Boche superplanes for years but none have shown up yet. No, I think that it's got something to do with the German agents working on this side of the line. But what the devil it is I do not know."

The colonel fished down in his pocket and pulled out a pipe which he slowly stuffed with tobacco and lighted. Martin studied the man curiously. It seemed impossible that

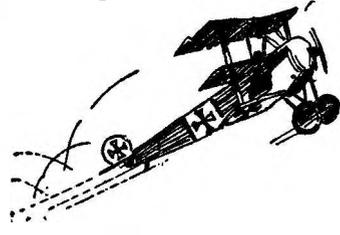
this genial, jolly old gentleman had sentenced the young British officer to an immediate execution, yesterday morning at the deserted drome.

"What about Hough?" the colonel inquired mildly. "I understand he's been acting a little strange lately. And Lieutenant Cross?"

"We suspect a lot but can't prove anything," Raffetto informed him. "Cross and Hough are working together all right, but we don't understand exactly why."

"Nobody has been tampering with your planes lately?" asked the colonel.

"Not that we know of," said Raffetto. "Martin and I smashed up a couple of Spads, but they were so



full of bullet holes they weren't worth much anyway. Fortunately, the French delivered us a new model Spad this morning. By golly, she's a beauty, too! Only we're not supposed to fly it until it gets tuned up."

"So the French delivered you a new Spad?" The colonel tapped his pipe stem against his teeth thoughtfully. "That's news to me. And all orders for new planes happen to go through my department."

"You don't suppose—" Martin leaned forward eagerly.

"In this business we don't guess, we make sure," snapped the colonel. He tossed the pipe aside and grabbed a telephone.

"Get me the French co-ordinator," he barked into the mouthpiece.

A voice answered, and the colonel spoke rapidly in French. When he put down the receiver his face was white.

"No new Spads have been issued," he announced quietly. "Just a moment while I ring up the rest of the squadrons along the front and see if they have had any new planes handed over to them like the lucky 29th."

For the next ten minutes the phone buzzed incessantly as the colonel called squadron after squadron and shot sharp questions at each commanding officer. When he had finished he sank back in his chair and gazed incredulously at the two young officers before him.

"Strangely enough," he announced solemnly, "a new Spad has been delivered to every drome in the sector. And in each case instructions were left that the planes were not to be flown until after tomorrow."

"And tomorrow," rapped Martin, "happens to be October tenth."

Martin could feel the blood pounding in his temples, his mouth was dry and the sweat oozed out of the palms of his hands. They were on the verge of something big, and all three knew it. Something terrible was going to happen, something in connection with the new Spads, but what it was none of them could quite figure out.

The colonel was the first to move or speak. He reached for a telephone and called the air field at Headquarters. "Have a bomber ready to fly in twenty minutes," he ordered. "See that the guns are supplied with plenty of ammunition, bomb racks loaded. Send word to every squadron on the front that all planes are grounded until further orders. Not a ship is to take the air without my permission."

"What do we do next, sir?" asked Martin. His nerves were jumping, his body tensed like a steel spring. What he craved was action.

"We fly back to the 29th," Colonel Fanshaw told him. "I want to take a good look at this new Spad that's caused so much excitement."

CHAPTER X

Bombs

HIGH over the front, Martin, in the bomber, looked down and saw the flash of German guns from behind Bellcourt. As he watched, the gunfire ran in ragged lines along the enemy's entire rear area as battery after battery went into action.

The sky was filled with the wail of giant projectiles as the railway guns far behind the lines began to throw their great cargoes of death at American ammunition dumps and rail heads and supply depots.

"A push of some kind is beginning," Martin pointed down at the gun flashes. "The bombardment has started. More guns than I ever heard going at one time before. Maybe this is what they meant by October tenth."

Colonel Fanshaw studied the terrain below thoughtfully. "Tell more about it in the morning," he mused. "I'll release the patrols at dawn so that they can find out how much infantry the enemy has massed behind his front."

"There is the 29th's drome."

Martin had been studying the ground for familiar landmarks. So well acquainted was he with this particular sector that, even at night, he could tell where he was.

He now slid forward and took his seat beside the pilot who very promptly handed him the wheel and yoke so that Martin could land the big bomber. As they came in, the roar of the enemy guns seemed to stamp out all other noise. Martin could even see where shells were breaking along the Yank artillery lines as the Germans hammered away in an effort to smother all resistance before dawn.

The bomber, for all her size and

weight, handled easily and Martin banked her around into the wind and let her coast down to an easy landing. The bomber hit and trundled heavily to a stop.

It was yet an hour before dawn, but so terrific had been the enemy's shell fire that every man at the drome was awake and stirring. Lights could be seen very faintly through closely curtained windows.

"Let's take a look at the new Spad first," suggested Martin, "and then go and talk to Hough." He led the way across to the hangars, pushed open the door and found the place a blaze of light inside with a crowd of mechanics and riggers gathered about the new ship.

The Spad was, Martin had to admit, a thing of grace and beauty. The wings were sleek and streamlined, the fuselage glittered with fresh paint.

"We've been looking her over," explained a sergeant mechanic. "And as far as we can tell, there ain't no reason why she shouldn't fly. Motor's okay. All the wires are tight. Everything's tuned up to the last pitch."

Colonel Fanshaw turned to Martin. "How would you like to take this plane up for a trial hop?" he asked quietly. "Perhaps by flying the new Spad we can find out something about it."

By way of answer Martin spoke to the sergeant mechanic in a low voice.

"Roll her out on the line and warm up the motor. I'll take her up."

"But them Frogs said not to fly her," protested the sergeant. "They gave me special orders that nobody was to touch this here plane until they come back."

"Never mind the orders from the French," snapped Martin. "Do as I tell you. Have that Spad ready to take the air in twenty minutes."

"Now, let's go and see Major Hough," suggested Raffetto. "He must have heard us land the bomber and will be right impatient if we don't report to him."

"Good," growled the colonel. "Lead the way."

As the little party moved along in front of the hangars in the dark a man stepped out of the shadows and saluted stiffly. "This is, I take it," he said in his clipped, precise voice, "Colonel Fanshaw. I am Captain Turquot, and I wish to report for orders."

The colonel stopped and stared curiously at the erect figure of the Frenchman. Then he thrust out his hand. "Glad to know you, Captain. Never had the pleasure of meeting you before."

"EXACTLY," said Captain Turquot. "And now, I'm at your orders, sir. What is it that you wish to be done? What are the plans for the morning?"

"Don't know yet," the colonel informed him. "The first thing we've got to do is find out something about the new Spad."

"Ah, but that is very simple," cried the Frenchman. "The plane is of a new type and was sent to be used in that—what you say—experiment. It is wished that the Americans fly him and see if he is suited to work in this sector."

"Eh, what is that?" snapped the colonel. "You know about these new planes? Now how the devil did you get that information, I'd like to ask?"

"But it is so simple," protested Turquot. "Recall that I am connected with the French Secret Service. Information is sent out daily. In regard to the new Spad, it was desired that they be kept from public knowledge. Information has a way of getting across to the enemy, as you are fully aware, *mon Colonel*."

"So that's it," growled Fanshaw. "Well, it's a pity the French would not let us know what's going on. Now, let's go find Hough." He stalked away through the darkness. Turquot, Martin and Raffetto followed silently.

They found Major Hough pacing up and down the operations office, his face grim, his great hairy hands working nervously.

Cross was there, pale and apparently laboring under some strong emotion. The colonel introduced himself and Hough saluted awkwardly and invited him to make the office his own.

"Just what I'm going to do, Major," the colonel flung himself into a chair and reached for a telephone. "Hell's popping up and down the front. I've got to move fast if we don't want the Boche on our necks in the next hour."

Major Hough could restrain himself no longer. He leaned both hands on the desk and glared down at the plump little colonel.

"Sir," he exploded, "I want an explanation of all this monkey business. I arrest two pilots and send them to you for trial—and you bring them back with you. All my orders are countermanded, my squadron is grounded on the very morning we are expecting an attack."

The colonel looked up and answered mildly. "Martin and Raffetto are needed at the front. Every pilot must take the air this morning. As for your squadron—it is no longer grounded. Order every man and every available plane to be ready to fly."

"Splendid," cried Captain Turquot. "Did I not say it was the fighting spirit of the Americans that would win the war? Sir, I request that I be assigned a plane so that I can join this glorious squadron in the great battle which is to come."

"You stick with me," the colonel

told him. "I may need you to establish contact with the French. Got to have an interpreter anyway."

"As the colonel commands," replied Turquot stiffly.

Martin looked at Colonel Fanshaw in amazement. Only the night before he had heard the old gentleman spluttering French like a native.

Major Hough wheeled on Cross and roared at him. "Get going! Didn't you hear the colonel's orders? Have every man and ship out and ready to fly within ten minutes."

"Very well, sir," answered Cross sullenly, and slouched out of the room.

The roar of the bombardment had increased to such a thunder of sound that men were forced to shout at each other in order to make themselves heard. The crash of bursting shells shook the flimsy walls of the operations office and made the lights flicker as thousands of tons of high explosives were hurled into American territory.

YANK guns were answering and the dawn trembled with the shock of blasting gun muzzles.

Martin leaned down and spoke to the colonel's ear.

"It's almost light enough to fly," he yelled. "I'll take up the new Spad now and see how it goes. Come back and lead my regular flight for the dawn patrol."

The colonel nodded and Martin hurried out to the hangars. There all was excitement and the bustle of activity. Planes were being rolled out on the line and warmed up. Mechanics in greasy coveralls swarmed everywhere. Pilots in flying coats and helmets were inspecting their ships for the coming flight. Martin ran into Horn and Briggs.

"What's going on?" cried Briggs? "Where you been all this time, Skipper? We heard all kinds of wild

stories about you, how you got arrested as a spy and shipped away to be shot by a firing squad. Man, I'm glad to see you! It looks like we've got a real war on our hands and you turn up just in time to lead the flight as usual."

"You take charge of things until I get back," Martin told him. "I've got to make a trial hop in the new Spad."

The sergeant mechanic appeared and reported. "All ready sir. Here she is."

Martin swung himself up into the cockpit and reached for the throttle. He waved the chocks away, tested the engine and found that the Hisso came to life with a mighty surge of power. He let the Spad roll forward, headed it down the tarmac and gave her the gun.

The ship seemed heavy, awkward, and ran stiffly along the ground, the tail skid bumping and banging. Martin opened the gun wide, but still the plane didn't respond. He eased the stick forward, then back, but the tail remained on the ground. There was something wrong with the plane. It looked all right but it wouldn't fly.

AT the far end of the field Martin cut the gun and let the ship roll to a stop. He got out and began a thorough inspection to see if he could find the cause of the trouble. As he moved along the fuselage toward the tail assembly a faint ticking noise reached his ears.

Strange! He never heard anything like that around a Spad before. He tried to lift the tail, throwing all his lean, hard strength into the effort. He couldn't budge it. Ah, no wonder he couldn't get the plane off the ground. The rear of the fuselage was loaded with weights of some kind—metal!

And then the truth burst upon Martin. He took one look at the

plane standing there so new and glittering—and then turned and ran.

Across the tarmac he sprinted and burst into operations breathlessly.

"Colonel Fanshaw—new Spads—loaded—with bombs—telephone all other squadrons."

The colonel took one look at Martin's face and snatched up the telephone.

The next five minutes was the longest in Russ Martin's life. He could see the plot now. Boche agents, disguised as Frenchmen, had delivered the bomb-laden ships to each American squadron along the front. They had left special orders that the planes were not to be flown, that they were not to be removed from the hangars. And each one of those new Spads contained enough explosive to blow an entire drome into oblivion.

The colonel's orders went crackling into the telephone like electric sparks. Each squadron commander was instructed to roll the new Spads as far away from the hangars as possible and then to allow nobody to go near them.

Squadron after squadron answered the colonel's frantic calls. When he had finished, sweat was glistening on his round, red face. He hung up the receiver and slumped back in his chair.

"Now, he said, "we'll see what happens."

It happened before Martin could answer. The walls of the office bulged. All the lights snapped out. The floor reeled and the world was shattered with a mighty blast of sound. A tall column of flame spurted up from the spot where Martin had left the new Spad. When the fire and smoke had drifted away only a vast hole remained at the edge of the tarmac.

When the colonel could get his breath he addressed Martin solemnly.

"My boy, you've saved us all. Suppose that explosion had taken place in the center of the hangars? And now unless I miss my guess the Boche squadrons will be over in force, expecting all our planes in this sector to be destroyed."

"Wait a minute," cut in Martin swiftly. "Where's Captain Turquot. He knew all about those planes! He's—he's—"

Colonel Fanshaw banged the desk with the palm of his hand.

"Your right, he's not the real Captain Turquot, but a Boche agent. He left this office ten minutes ago. Go get him, Martin. Go get him!"

CHAPTER XI

The Great Drive



JUST as a Spad went screaming down the field and shot up into the air, in a twisting, turning climb, Russ Martin ran out onto the tarmac.

"Who was that?" he shouted at Raffetto.

"Quick, who just took off."

"That Frog captain," Raffetto answered. "He said that Colonel Fanshaw had sent him on a special mission. By golly, he sure was in a hurry to get away."

"After him," shouted Martin. "He's a Boche agent! Come on, Raffetto, we've got to knock him down."

As dawn smeared the shell shattered skies with crimson, two trim Spads roared up into the clouds in pursuit of a third Spad which seemed in a desperate hurry to get across the lines into Germany.

As Martin boosted his plane upward, he noted that the horizon over the German front was dotted with the fighting squadrons of the enemy. Colonel Fanshaw had guessed correctly. The Boche were coming in force.

Looking down, Martin saw that a great barrage was rolling across the countryside. Behind the wall of bursting shells swarmed a vast horde of Boche infantry. The great drive was on!

Raffetto's gun racketed and Martin saw that Captain Turquot had swerved and that Raffetto was almost on top of him. Savagely, Martin flung himself at the Boche agent.

And then a strange thing happened.

Captain Turquot's Spad slid off on one wing and whipped around in a steep spiral, came charging back, guns spitting fire.

Where had Martin seen that turn before? Captain Turquot's tactics were very familiar. Again the Boche agent whipped through a turn and came back with guns hammering.

Why, that was von Heller's trick! Martin knew that maneuver well. Twice before he had fought the Boche ace and each time that savage turn and quick reverse with guns blazing had almost got him.

CAPTAIN TURQUOT was von Heller!

Martin was sure of it now. And in that instant when he yanked his own triggers and sent a burst of slugs screaming at the German, he felt a surging sense of admiration for the Boche. What chances von Heller had taken! What a deadly game he'd been playing!

Raffetto dived on the German and missed and his plane went skidding down the skies. Martin lunged in close, firing at short range and saw his bullets ripple along the Spad like hail. Then von Heller stood the Spad on its tail as he would a Fokker—and this instinctive maneuver cost him his life. For the Spad had not the same design as the Fokker, did not behave the same way in the air.

Almost reluctantly Martin yanked back on the triggers and sent slugs hosing over the cockpit of von Heller's Spad as it hung dizzily in space. He saw von Heller jerk when the bullets hit him. The helmeted head turned, a hand came up out of the cockpit in a stiff, awkward salute. Then the plane was gone, spinning down and down with a dead man still clutching the stick.

Of the great air battle which followed that morning Martin had only a hazy memory.

He knew that he rejoined his own squadron and led his own flight in the attack. He fought and flew and fired at black-crossed ships until his arms were like lead and his feet were frozen on the rudder bar.

He saw men go down in flames—both friend and enemy. He saw ships shot to pieces as they flew, he witnessed dog-fights in which hundreds of planes balled together and drifted in a great tangled mass across the skies.

And then, at last, it was over.

What was left of the Boche armada turned and ran for home and the Yank squadrons, bloody and battered, but triumphant, came limping in to their own dromes.

Martin and Raffetto landed together, crawled wearily out of their

ships and headed for the operations office.

Colonel Fanshaw was waiting for them, pale and solemn.

"Gentlemen, we have won," he began. "The German air force has been driven out of the skies. On the ground, the Boche drive has been stopped. You will be happy to know that, by tracing back and finding the men who delivered the bomb-loaded Spads, we have captured and executed practically every enemy agent behind our lines."

MMARTIN slumped down wearily and reached for a cigarette.

"Hough and Cross?" he asked. "What did you find out about them?"

"Hough was an escaped convict," the colonel replied. "Lieutenant Cross knew it, and was blackmailing him. Neither man was guilty of treason. It is a pity, but they will both have to be court-martialed."

Martin shook his head.

"No they won't," he answered solemnly. "They have both already been tried in a higher court than an army court-martial. Hough died leading his squadron into battle. Cross was killed a few minutes later in a dog-fight. That wipes the slate clean."

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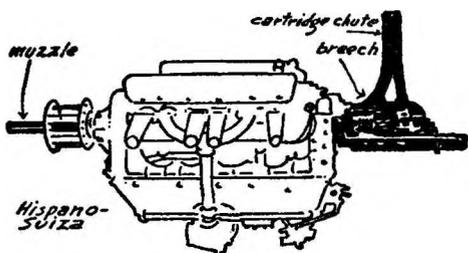


The Ships on the Cover

By EUGENE M. FRANDZEN

THE cannon ship used during the World War did not necessarily have to be one type of plane. Any ship having a "V" type engine with a geared propeller could do the trick. The geared prop was above the crank shaft at the front of the engine, therefore above the center of the round radiator in the Spad. The hub of the propeller was made hollow just large enough to clear the sides of the muzzle of the 37 millimeter cannon which protruded about two inches. In the accompanying drawing this is clearly shown.

The ship with the complicated bracing in the foreground of the cover is the Spad 22, one of the little known crates of the war. It rated a 220 h. p. Hispano-Suiza



motor with a geared prop which could accommodate the cannon. The Spad zooming up in the lower background is the Spad 13 C 1 with geared prop. There were plenty of these "cannon ships" tried out from time to time and words flew hot and heavy from pilots who used this new gun arrangement for and against the stunt.

The Original Cannon

The original 37 millimeter cannon, the type the great French ace Guynemer used to down his forty-ninth to fifty-second victims, had to be fed by hand. Each seven-inch shell weighing about one pound had to be dropped into the breach of the gun. This took about three seconds in which time a pair of Vickers guns could churn out around fifty slugs, one of which might find a vulnerable spot in the enemy or his ship. But said enemy ship in three seconds could vary its position about 600 feet which is about equal to a shooting gallery target being reduced from the size of a wash tub to an aspirin tablet, a comparison which you fans with air guns or .22 caliber rifles will appreciate.

On the other hand a Vickers slug might

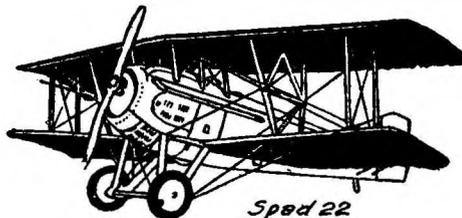
smack into a strut longeron, engine or even the gas tank, if it was rubber housed and not cause any serious damage; but let one of the one-pounder shells which explodes on impact connect with about any part of the enemy plane and the fight is over. The non-explosive one-pounder shell will knock a plane down in from one to three hits. Then there was a "fireworks" shell which was designed to set the target on fire, also a shell similar to a shotgun shell, which when loaded with buckshot would tear a wing to pieces.

A versatile gun, that cannon, and one which certainly did plenty of damage to the Germans.

Later Models Weighed More

The later cannon was semi-automatic, using the recoil, which was eight inches or more, depending on the muzzle velocity, to eject the used shell and slide a new one into the gun chamber. Guynemer's cannon weighed about 100 pounds. The later models, 150 pounds or more. So put this added weight into a plane with a given speed and load, is to cut down its speed and put it at a disadvantage in a fight. To overcome this, the ammunition supply was limited or the fuel supply cut down which naturally decreased the cruising range. There were plenty of arguments for this weapon but also a few plain and fancy arguments against it.

Those two Albatross D 5s zipping down on the foremost Spad are churning out four streams of slugs at a range which only amateurs would fire. The Spad 13 C 1 com-



ing up under them has a better range at a good angle. Not only are the bets on the Spads to come out with flying colors but when those explosive shells from the one pounder connect with the German ships, only one shell is necessary for blasting each one, where dozens of Spandau bullets may whistle through the Spads without harming them.

Winged Death

*McCann Saw Red When Bozo Harly Thumbed His Nose
at the Air Service—and then Came a Strange
Challenge that Led to Breakneck Action!*

A Complete Novelette By GEORGE BRUCE

Author of "The Flying Brats," "Bomber Buster," etc.

CHAPTER I

War in the Crillon



FROM the very first McCann had the feeling that he'd have to subdue the guy with a smack on the snoot.

The "guy" sat across the table from him in the Crillon, his chin cupped in the palms of his hands, his eyes fixed in mock adoration on McCann's battered mug. And, from time to time, the guy made remarks like: "My, my!" "Oh, not rilly!" "It's all too thrilling!" with a silly smirk on his impish pan, while McCann dwelt with great fervor upon the dangers and glories of the Air Service.

The worst part of it was that the dizzy blonde dame hanging onto the guy's right arm, and sopping up the fancy mixed drinks at fifteen francs a sop, giggled hysterically each time the mug made a crack. It was beginning to get on McCann's nerves, particularly because his own girl was eating up the Air Service from tail skid to prop boss.

At first the guy—his name was Harly—Bozo Harly, Lieutenant, U. S. A., A. E. F., had shaped up swell. A reckless, devil-may-care look in his

greenish eyes, his overseas cap cocked at a sketchy angle on his dome, his boots and pants shined and pressed, plenty of the old *dinero* in francs, and a medal on his chest, a genuine *Croix de Gary*, an exact duplicate of the medal the Frog general had passed out to McCann not three days before. And the guy—Bozo—had two wound stripes in gold on his sleeve.

But, the wise-cracking interruptions—that was different. McCann was coming closer to the snoot-busting with every second.

"Well, as I was telling you, Baby," he said sarcastically, "before the riff-raff interrupts me—there I am, all alone, in the middle of so many black crosses that it looks like a cemetery at midnight. I got a one-lunged motor, and the right gun is jammed. I'm countin' 'em up as they come in—every one of 'em a veteran pilot out of Richthofen's circus, green ships and blue ones and yellow ones, and pink ones—all colors. Ships on me left and right, and above me and below me.

"I just kind of laughed at them squareheads—and drew a bead on a pink ship right in front of me and let him have it. Them squareheads ain't never been up against no American sharpshooters like me, and when



The Fokkers rose like sharks ripping at a slow-moving whale

I hit that pink one right on the button with a burst of six, it gives the others the creeps, and they get plenty of respect for yours truly."

"Isn't it lovely?" asked Bozo Harly of his blonde. "Really, one lives the very essence of these brave men. "Isn't it too, too divine—that such heroes still exist?"

"Are you going to keep quiet and let me finish telling this lady about my experiences?" demanded McCann.

"Experiences?" Bozo's eyebrows lifted. "I thought you were describing a nightmare—or your last attack of d. ts. 'Pink ships—green ships—yellow ships'—nerfs!"

"Nobody could expect you ground soldiers to understand the higher things connected with this war," McCann spat. "You've got your mugs shoved into the mud. The most you see of the war is the back of your buddies going over the top, and the rats in the dugouts. Soldier, you ought to wake up and understand that a war is going on."

There was a wicked grin around the corners of Harly's mouth.

"You guys, in your flying box kites, under the delusion that you're actually in the Army—do you give the soldiers a laugh?" he jeered. "Why, I could take one squad of my guys and show you more of the war in ten minutes than you've seen all your life—or ever will see. Going around tossing bricks down on the domes of unarmed people, and taking pot shots at each other with popguns—and calling it fighting! Soon the Brass Hats are going to get wise to you goldbricks, and pass a law to draft you into the service."

McCann came half out of his seat. His nose was very red. There was a dangerous glitter in his eyes. He banged on the table top with his two fists and for an instant conversation and laughter in the Crillon bar came to a sudden halt while the people present stared at the tableau.

"Do I take that crack to mean that you don't like the Air Service?" demanded McCann.

Harly's smile was innocuous.

"Air Service?" he repeated, blankly. "What is that? Oh yeah! You mean those fat little balloons that look like flying sausages? Sure, I get it. But why should they send them to Paris and the Crillon bar, when a guy is out for a good time. You don't see me bringing my tanks to Paris. The devil with the tanks, say I."

"Tanks!" snorted McCann. "Those lousy, creeping sardine cans, in which a guy sits behind ten inches of armor plate and thumbs his nose at anybody that wants to do him something. Tanks—the dirty secret is out. The tanks! Well, here's my hand, pal; I apologize. I'll never tell a soul. The least said about the tanks the better. 'Stoo bad you couldn't buy your way into the Army."

HARLY came up out of his seat very calmly.

There was a wicked smile moving his mouth. His greenish eyes were filled with little fires.

"Okay, hero," he told McCann. "You asked for it. Now get this. For the last four hours I've been sitting here listening to you lean on the ear of the gal with tales of the air. To me it's so much bushwa. I'll lay you five hundred francs cash in the mitt, that you haven't got nerve enough to follow me around for one day in one of those lousy tanks."

McCann clawed at his pocket and the hand came out with a wadded and twisted mass of French bills.

"I'll cover the five hundred francs, and it's the biggest sucker bet I ever took a guy for," he growled. "If you're drunk, we'll forget it. Get up the dough—"

Harly found a wallet. His francs were brand new and uncreased. He

counted five one-hundred-franc notes on top of McCann's pile.

"Get cha hat," he said with the same wicked smile. "I still got ten days leave, but for five hundred francs and transportation I can afford to waste a day. C'mon!"

McCann looked at the girl with him. For an instant indecision crossed his face. Then he caught Harly's sardonic eyes fixed on him. McCann snatched his overseas cap from the chair.

"You wait here, Baby," he told the girl. "We'll be right back. I got to teach this punk a lesson."

He and Harly went out together.

CHAPTER II

Nancy Moves Up



IT was still dark when Bozo Harly led his guest into the tank park just southeast of Basseville. The two of them had thumbed a ride up from the city. They had been lucky. A two-star general's car was going places along the road. It was empty except for a chauffeur who had primed himself for the night run with two bottles of Three Star, and was sociable.

In spite of all orders and regulations, he picked Bozo and McCann up on the road, took them for a wild ride toward the Theater of Operations. He was sociable with the cognac and he hooted and tooted his way up to Basseville in nothing flat.

The tank park was like a section of a circus unloading at night. These strange, bulking shadowy shapes were new to McCann. He took a deep breath and looked around him. The tanks were parked in lines and rows. In the darkness and the uncertain illumination of the flares, the tanks looked like a herd of performing elephants standing at ease. Only they were larger than an elephant.

There was the clanking sound of hammers and tools working on cold metal, and the subdued voices of mechanics and officers.

In the north the sullen, slow fire of German and Allied artillery gave notice that a war was being fought, and McCann jumped every time a flare sizzled and cast a pale illumination over the scene. Every time McCann jumped, Harly grinned.

"What the devil are you jumping for?" he demanded. "Those flares are up at the front—almost a mile away."

"A mile?" asked McCann nervously. "You mean—the squareheads are only a mile away—on the ground?"

"The idea in the Tank Corps, is to get as near them as possible. In a couple of hours now, I'll show you the whites of their eyes—for the first time in your life."

A greasy-faced mechanic swung by. He looked at Harly's face.

"Hi, Lieutenant," he greeted. "I thought you was in Paris, having the time of your life."

"GOT homesick, Joe," Harly said. "Where's Sergeant Murray?"

"Hey, Murray—Lieutenant Harly is back!" the mechanic bawled down the line.

So McCann met Sergeant Murray. He was a grizzled, hard-eyed devil, and he chewed tobacco and spat with uncanny accuracy.

"Murray usually rides with me," said Harly in an aside to McCann. "I've got to fix him before he'll let you near a tank. He's very fussy about things like that."

"Glad to see you back, sir," said the sergeant. "You're just in time for a swell show. We're going to attack through the Bois de Chauvette at dawn. Getting the tanks ready now. We came up this far yesterday, leading the doughboys. Glad to have you back—that numbskull I've got with me now is a mess—"

"Er—Sergeant," said Harly apolo-

getically, "this is—er—Lieutenant McCann, of the Air Service. He's been detailed to do a little liaison work with the tanks—closer cooperation between the air and the ground—specially the tanks—coming up to solve our problems and all that stuff. Not a bad guy. He'll go out with me—in your place, tomorrow. Hope you won't feel hurt—duty, you know."

The sergeant spat expressively as he looked at McCann's face and wings in the flickering light.

"Air Service, eh?" he said, and that said everything. "Well—it's a pleasure—except that I don't think he'll learn much. You can go—but you better bring Nancy back—"

"Nancy," announced Harly solemnly, for McCann's benefit, "is Sergeant Murray's pride and joy—the war-bride he has taken to his bosom. She is that lovely tank over there. She can even cook—when the *Flammenwerfer* get to touching her up."

There was a movement from the head of the line of trucks. First heavy duty motors went into raucous action. Tank after tank was turned over, and rumbled with the power of its motor. A mechanic came out of Nancy's belly after starting her motor.

"**WE'RE** moving up," said the sergeant. "If you're going with the boys, you'd better get in."

McCann suffered himself to be squeezed through a narrow opening. He listened to Harly's confident, authoritative voice giving him instructions.

"That seat swings in all directions. Strap yourself in good and tight. Maybe you think a barrel roll is some stunt—wait until old Nancy here starts twisting herself into knots. You'll learn a couple of maneuvers that will knock the eyes out of any squarehead you meet in the air. Those are Vickers guns. The

turret top swings anyway you want it to go. Look through the slits, but don't get your eyes too close. Lot of guys get blinded by tank shells and .77 bursts on the outside of the tank. If you see any enemy troops, keep those guns going. Knock 'em off—and hang with it. Ready?"

"Let's go!" growled McCann.

It was hotter than the forges of hell inside the tin can. The noise and clanking and grinding of the engine and treads and tracks deafened him—far worse than the noise and slipstream of a plane. The smell of hot oil and the grate and grumble of metal sickened him. It seemed that he was smothering inside the thing—and they were just moving into a line of tank columns.

He saw other tanks moving slowly on either side and in front and behind his own tank. He could see a little of Harly's pants, sitting in the driver's seat, handling the monster like a man driving an automobile.

The roar of the motor picked up. The heat grew worse. Little rivulets of sweat ran down the middle of McCann's back, and the sweat on the top of his head started at the hair roots, and trickled down into his eyes, blinding him.

They passed out into the open. The spacing between the tanks grew wider; they drifted further apart. There was something vicious, deadly, ominous, in the slow, ponderous rolling of the behemoths in the uncertain grey of the morning. Something in the terrific weight of them rolling over the earth, pitching and swaying and rolling—but going forward.

Now and then, Harly's tank nonchalantly nosed over a full-grown sapling and crushed it under the treads. Now and then, it made its way through shell-shattered ruins, crunching over half-fallen brick walls. The engines whined and took the obstructions in stride.

Then, from up in front, hell broke

loose. It fell on top of the tanks and around them. Billowing waves of fire and concussion poured out of the sky. The tank stuck its nose down sharply, and McCann clutched at the walls of the turret to save his head from banging into the metal.

Down—standing on his face, falling, skidding, sliding—then up with a back-breaking, shuddering lurch, with the nose pointed straight up, and the motors screaming, until his brain was chattering with the same frenzy. The heat of tortured metal, and the smell, grew intolerable. It caused his own flesh to feel tortured, itching, crawling with billions of heat lice.

They had crossed a trench line, a trench line battered to a pulp by drumfire. Ghastly things were lying, half buried in that trench. The ground was lousy with greenish tinges of lurking gas.

McCann peered through the slit in the turret. Ahead of him was an open field, surrounded by a fringe of trees. Spiteful lances of flame were darting out of those trees. Machine-guns and light artillery—tank rifles. Suddenly he was aware of the beat of lead and steel against the sides of the tank. He could feel the pulsation and the rolling, snare drum effect of machine-gun slugs scourging the great steel hulk. The turret, around his head, quivered under the lashing. Now and then a heavy tank slug struck hard, and for an instant the tank shivered, before it went ahead with its irresistible power.

Harly lowered his head so that he could see McCann's face. Harly's face was already black with fumes and smeared with oil. He was grinning. He pointed ahead, toward the trees, and made faces at McCann.

McCann was given to understand that they were going straight through the trees, straight into the face of that murderous fire pouring out of the concealment. He saw one

tank surging forward. Saw heavy trees go down under its elephantine charge. Saw men in field-grey swarming around the tank, throwing themselves upon it, being shaken off like flies on a rhino. Saw the spiteful flash of the machine-guns within the tank. Saw men going down—and a lane of crushed trees driven into the heart of the forest.

He drew a great breath and looked at the belt running into the Vickers. He pulled back the cocking handles and squinted through the window over the muzzle of his gun. No power on earth could force a way through the billowing walls of flame, through the thick trunks of those shell-blasted trees.

AND then, Harly opened the throttle of Nancy, and drove her hard straight at a four-foot tree. The shock of collision threw McCann's head forward violently, in spite of his hands flung out to brace himself. His forehead banged against the steel turret.

A million stars of fire were etched on his brain. He felt himself going out, and in the midst of the blackness he could smell the smoke of fire, and could hear the grinding and screeching and groaning of the caterpillar traction under the tanks, digging in to get a foothold on the earth, to knock down the tree.

The engines gave off sheets of heat and fumes. The stuff got into McCann's nose and lungs, seared the tissues, made the blood seem to froth and churn.

Then there was a terrific rending and crashing, and the tank shot ahead. McCann's head bounced against the rear wall of the turret. The shock of the blow seemed to arouse him a little. He saw masks—faces—covered with mud, convulsed with hate and rage, peering at him through the slit in the turret. He swung the machine-gun around.

The thing seemed to fire of its own desire. He saw men going down outside the tank. He saw men leap on the monster, striking in desperate puniness against its armored sides with rifle butts.

A machine-gun nest came up through the trees. Harly sent the tank at the nest. The gun muzzles flamed and the slugs from the Maxims struck viciously against the tank—but the tank went on and lumbered over the position. The men got up, terrified, wild-eyed, and ran—some of them; some of them were crushed into the brown of the earth.

CHAPTER III

What Hell Is Like



THROUGH ravines and gullies, in the face of hordes of the enemy, went the slow procession of the behemoth. Then, suddenly, McCann discovered they were alone.

The other tanks had disappeared. This one tank—Nancy—was alone in the midst of thousands of raging enemy soldiers. There was no escape for Nancy or her crew. Let something go wrong—let that engine falter—let one link in the treads break—and the mad fury of those men in grey on the outside of the tank would sweep over McCann and Harly and would rend them limb from limb.

This was a business of no mercy and no quarter—a berserker battle to the death, between flesh and blood and a machine which killed at the prompting of other bits of flesh and blood. If the machine failed—if those men outside could get their hands on the two inside—a little shudder ran down McCann's back and his body stopped sweating and seemed to grow frigid. He began fighting his machine-gun like a demon.

They broke through the woods. There was another opening ahead of them. Once the opening had been sown to wheat. The wheat was standing stomach-high in the field—what was left of it—gouted and gouged by shell fire.

Nancy thrust her nose eagerly into the clear. The wheat swished under her treads. The enemy troops fell back before her onslaught. The machine-guns in front of McCann were sizzling with heat, and the smell of burning powder ripped the lining out of his nostrils. The turret turned this way and that.

Then, suddenly, the bottom of the world seemed to fall out from under the tank. It fell with a crunching, sickening drop. It thudded to a bone-crunching halt. McCann's head struck the turret walls four or five times. He saw that Harly had been hurled from his seat, the strap about his stomach and hips broken from the supports. The engine was racing. The tank was lashing—nosing up—then sliding down—time after time.

Harly throttled the engines. He was still grinning. There was a sticky smear of blood running down the middle of his face. He put his hands in front of his mouth to make a speaking trumpet.

“**W**E'RE in a tank trap!” he yelled at McCann.

“What the devil is that?”

“They dig a big hole in the ground—like trapping wild animals. Cover it over with light stuff—and the tank comes along and falls into it. It's too steep to climb out. You sit here—praying there are no *Flammenwerfer* units in the neighborhood to roast you out.”

“How do we get out?” McCann's nerves were jerking.

“We don't—unless our doughboys are following us up pretty closely and come up in time to let us get out of here.”

"Then what the devil did you come through it for?"

"In the tank corps, sweetheart, there are no rainy days, no time out for fog, thunder, lightning, or binges." Bozo grinned sweetly. "We fight when we get the word, and go where we're ordered—and we can't take short cuts or fly around nasty places. We go through 'em. I'm supposed to go through here—get it?"

Faces looked down at them. Harly went back to his seat, pawed at his safety belt, adjusted it somehow. He opened the throttle again. The tank shook and thundered. It put its nose straight up—moved forward a foot—or rather moved straight up a foot.

A nerve-shattering thrill darted through McCann. They were coming out—the thing would climb straight up! But they didn't come out. The tank suddenly flopped over on its back—and continued to claw and grab and macerate the earth in the trap.

The world, upside down, was suddenly filled with a jittering insanity, and McCann closed his eyes, and felt the blood pound into his ears.

In the midst of the insanity, Harly flopped the tank back over on its belly again. He cut the throttle.

"No use!" he screamed. "We're stuck."

Above their heads, faces in coal-bucket helmets clustered, looking down, grinning like wolves hot on a kill. Looking up at them, the men in field grey seemed giants, with glittering, rage-filled eyes.

Machine-guns were dragged to the side of the trap. The Maxims combed the length and breadth of the trap, searching for the tiniest crevice in the armor. The slugs pounded and ripped and battered at the steel shell. The stench and heat and noise within the tank grew—and grew.

It seemed that the flesh melted from McCann's body and ran down into his boots, and that the fabric of his shirt was forever pasted to his

skin. Splinters of machine-gun slugs spun through the closed machine-gun slot and whined against the wall. Blood trickled from McCann's face and neck in a dozen places from pin pricks of such splinters.

"Let's get out of here!" he bel-lowed hoarsely at Harly. "What are we going to do—sit here like rats in a trap, until they smoke us out and tear us apart?" A wildness was growing in his eyes.

HARLY lit a cigarette and lounged back in his seat. Sweat was dripping from his chin. His face was gaunt and haggard. But he grinned, and shook his head.

"Tank men don't get out and run," he said. "Tank men have orders to stay with the tank. They die with the tank—they blow it up and keep it from being captured if they have to. You owe me those five hundred francs. I told you you wouldn't have nerve enough to stick it out. They're just strafing hell out of us. They aren't dangerous—yet. Besides, where would you run to?"

"You could get a gun in your fist and get out in the air and go down fighting—like a man—instead of being killed like a rat in this lousy trap."

"Tank men are trained not to give away to such silly impulses," smiled Bozo. "While you stay snug inside the tank, you've got a chance. If you get out—curtains. Calm yourself, hero—this is a lot more fun than you'll ever find in those lousy box kites you spend your time trying to fly—"

He stopped suddenly. He moved the slit in front of his face a trifle and peered out. His body became taut, his face hard. He looked around.

"I'm sorry I got you into this, McCann," he said in the same quiet voice. "If you've got nerve—this is the time to show it. Here come a

couple of *Flammenwerfers*—and they are all set to spout. Keep the machine-gun on 'em. When it begins to get hot, don't touch the metal of the tank with your hands or body. Maybe we'll get out of this yet—but those flame-throwers are hell. They're about all that can lick a tank. Get busy with those guns. Make 'em stay back. Shoot hell out of 'em."

MCCANN jerked the Vickers up to command the top of the bank. He saw terrible, mask-distorted faces looking down at him—and a nozzle from which flame squirted in a fifty-foot arch. The flame was liquid and white hot, and it consumed everything it touched.

The heat about the tank grew deadly. The Vickers drove the *Flammenwerfer* squads to cover—out of sight, but they lay out of range of the buried guns, and poured the flame down on the tank by squirting the stuff up in the air and letting it fall into the trap.

The ground within the tank trap became a sea of flame. It swelled and eddied and belched up around the steel machine. It roared and moaned and sang. The plates of the tank cracked as they expanded with the heat. The odor of scorched metal invaded the lungs, set them to coughing and gasping.

McCann could feel the hair of his eyebrows and forehead singe, and the eyeballs seemed to swell to the bursting point. The guns became too hot to handle. Smoke seeped into the tank, became a thick grey mist, making vision impossible.

And then another thought came to McCann: the gas tanks of the tank! In this flame and heat, they'd last seconds—hundredths of seconds!

Harly's voice came through the fog of smoke and the searing heat.

"This is just an idea of what you're going to get for not living the right kind of life," he said. "Well,

nothing like getting acclimated, says I."

His voice was cracked, almost sobbing, gasping.

McCann collapsed into his harness. His head hung down. He could smell his body burning.

Then there was a series of rapid explosions somewhere outside, and the chatter of Chauchats, and yells of rage.

After an eternity it grew cooler, and it seemed that air came back into the world.

Men were shouting outside the tank—shouting in English. Men were working frantically with picks and shovels. The front door of the tank was open. Harly was grinning, his face like a scorched skull.

"Cut me a little ramp, boys, and old Nancy will ride out of here in high. Come on—cut old Nancy out—the war is still young."

McCann saw it all through eyes that would not focus, with nerves that would not respond. They were cooked—broiled.

But after a while, the engines inside the tank roared again. The treads clutched ground and screeched, and the huge body shook itself free and climbed a sixty-degree incline, flopped down on its belly with a jar, and went ahead, with the doughboys in khaki yelling like fiends and falling in behind. The tank snorted and grunted and destroyed—going forward.

But in the gunner's seat, McCann sat inertly, seeing all, feeling all, but unable to get his body to function after the punishment it had absorbed. The business became a horrid dream, a nightmare.

Then, somewhere, it came to an end. There was a merciful cessation of the vibration of the motors and the grinding and jolting of movement. Someone bathed his face in cold water, and his body sucked it in through the pores. Somebody

poured a shot of cognac down his throat. He heard Murray's voice, and Harly's.

He opened his eyes. He saw Harly—blackfaced, scorched, his cheeks sucked between his teeth—looking down at him, and grinning like a painted devil.

McCann cursed.

His body, shrieking with exhaustion, went dead to sleep.

CHAPTER IV

McCann's Back Yard



"OW, of course," said McCann, half sarcastically, "I can't put on no show like that in an aeroplane, but I figure it was worth my five hundred francs and I've got no kick comin', I guess. But I figure you ought to let me get square. The least you can do is to take a ride with me. Quiet little time, and all that—no *Flammenwerfer*—just good, clean fun."

"You can get even," grinned Harly. "It'll be a kick, getting wafted around in a box kite. How far is it to this alleged field of yours?"

McCann squinted at the terrain.

"'Bout ten minutes, now," he said. "It's a cinch from here. Where will we hide this motorcycle and side car we pinched?"

"Let it roll in a ditch—who cares?" shrugged Harly. "France is crawling with side cars."

They both looked a sight. Eyes bloodshot, faces still blistered, mouths cracked and split, hands burned, hair singed.

But they were going flying.

"My God!" Major Carran greeted McCann. "Did you get caught in an air raid? I thought you were in Paris, celebrating your *Croix de Guerre* with a ten-day drunk. How come you're back?"

"Meet Bozo Harly," introduced

McCann. "Old friend of mine. Picked him up in Paris. Insisted he wanted to go flying when he found out I was in the Air Service. He's in Tanks—a hell of a Service—decided to come up and see some high life. What's doing?"

"Plenty," said the major succinctly. "Whether you know it or not, you're back in the nick of time for the best show this outfit has ever put on."

"Say, listen—no routine stuff!" McCann was indignant. "You forget—I'm on leave."

"You were on leave," said the major lightly. "For the purpose of this operation, all leaves are canceled. Of course, that only applies to the men I can reach—but you're just out of luck. You fly."

"Isn't that what we came up here to do?" asked Bozo innocently.

"What's the business?" demanded McCann sourly.

"We're going to bomb Saarstaat," the major informed.

"Saarstaat." McCann whistled. "What bright boy sat up nights thinking that one up?"

"Order came through this morning. We take off at eleven P. M., do the bombing—and get back—we hope."

"You wouldn't know it," said McCann to Harly, "but they've been trying to crack open this Saarstaat place since the beginning of the war. There's a bunch of Jerry munitions factories there, and its lousy with railheads and things like that. They've got the place ringed around with anti-aircraft batteries, searchlights, and pursuit squadrons. They don't think anymore of that place than they do of Willie's whiskers."

Harly looked up at the sky.

"Well, don't worry," he said, "it's going to rain, I expect, and it'll be all out."

"Sir," said the major severely, "this outfit flies—rain or no rain."

"Pardon me!" exclaimed Harly. "I had an idea this was an Air Service

outfit. You know—no flying when it rains, no flying when it's cloudy, no flying when it's too hot or too cold, or even when anybody thinks it's going to be any of those things. So you really fly up here? That's rather naive, isn't it?"

"You go to the devil!" snapped the major.

"You see?" demanded McCann. "He's like that—he gets in my hair."

"And in your kick, pal—for five hundred francs up to now—and another five hundred coming up."

"In your hat with that other five hundred," grunted McCann. "You're playing in my back yard now. I know all the angles here. You'll have a fat chance getting another five hundred francs out of me."

"So the young man wants to fly, does he?" said the major, with a certain something in his eye.

"And how—and how I want to fly him," came from McCann.

The major nodded.

"Well, that can be arranged. Perhaps he'd like to take part in the Saarstaat raid. Of course, there is some element of danger—but then, it should be interesting."

"I've always wanted to see the world—Saarstaat suits me fine," agreed Harly. "When do we go?"

THE big bomber rose and fell on the gusts like a floating barn-door. The wind howled and sang around the struts and wires. The twin-engines droned on and on. High overhead the sky was an inkpot, splashed with flecks of living light. Now and then, invisible blurs of darkness shut out the stars—clouds moving before the wind.

There were other bombers in the formation. In spite of the noise of motors and the howling of the elements, there was an atmosphere of stealth about them as they plowed through space.

Bozo Harly sat in the nose of Mc-

Cann's crate and gave himself up to the night. He was belted into the seat. The butt of a Lewis gun thrust itself close to his stomach. The wind blew on his face. He seemed suspended in the infinite.

When he looked behind him, he could see nothing but the sheen of the revolving propellers. All else was lost in the blackness. There was no earth. The sky had lost its shape. There was merely motion through a black void.

They had been flying for an hour and a half. There was a suppressed tension in the heights. Long since, at a great altitude, the armada had crossed the lines which separated friend from foe. They were so high that the July night was biting with cold and the glass of Harly's goggles frosted over with the heat of his eyeballs.

Back there on the field Harly had smiled to himself as he crawled into the nose of the bomber. Men were swallowed up inside the bellies of the big ships—bombers, co-pilots, machine-gunners; five men to a ship and the load of iron eggs they were going to lay on Saarstaat.

Twelve big ships standing on the line. Sixty men, trusting their lives to doped linen, tiny slivers of wood, and the pulsing power of cranky engines.

There had been a twinge of pain in Harly's chest as he climbed into the seat and thrilled with the spectacle. Then the roar of the motors, the urge forward of the ships, the blasting of tails into the air, the singing of rubber-shod wheels over the ground — and this movement through black space.

He drew a breath. Saarstaat had to be somewhere near. An hour and a quarter at a sustained cruising speed of seventy-five miles an hour—that covered over a hundred miles, and with a tail wind to help it was probably closer to a hundred and

twenty-five. Saarstaat was somewhere in that distance.

Dead ahead, but far down, a red tinge stained the black sky. It hung on the horizon like an Aurora. It grew to an angry red, and then faded to a faint pink, only to return with new vigor and force. A little shock ran through Harly.

He turned in his seat as if to warn the pilot. But the pilot knew. The throb of the motors diminished, became a whisper. The feeling of tension increased until it was breathless, and the big ships put noses down gently and glided silently through the night.

So, that red smear on the horizon was Saarstaat! That red was the reflection of fire in blast furnaces and steel mills working night and day to provide the enemy with munitions and the sinews of war. There were buildings down there, piled high with explosives and destruction. Men toiling, sweating—unaware that death was swooping for them on silent wings.

Where were the enemy air defenses? Where were the anti-aircraft rifles? Where were the defending air squadrons? Why had not the tin ears picked up the armada long since? Why wasn't the sky rioting with ravening pursuit ships out to check this attack; to save those precious factories and mills?

The Handley Pages were dropping fast now.

Harly felt his eardrums clicking as the ship lost altitude and his hearing seemed thickened. Then, Saarstaat was spread out below. Even the streets were visible. Men down there must feel very confident and safe to be so cocksure in using lights.

Something stabbed through the night—cut a white path through the blackness. A searchlight beam. In an instant there were a dozen other searchlight beams probing space. A dazzling blindness seized upon Bozo

Harly. One of the lights passed over him, illuminated the ship for an instant, passed on, halted, paused for a moment, returned avidly, caught the ship and held it.

From out of the blindness on the earth a red tongue stabbed viciously. Something exploded in space in front of the bomber. The big ship lurched and rocked violently in the concussion. It burst with a core of white-hot heat. There was a ripping, rending sound of shrapnel fragments tearing through the air.

Then space was split asunder with other concussions and other violence.

But the bombers were over the target. Harly could feel the thump of the bomb trips as the iron eggs were dropped. Back there, a bomber was squatting over his sight, lining the targets on the earth on the crossed wires of the device, pulling the tripping handle that sent the big iron eggs whirling toward the earth.

Then, from below, the first of the bombs struck. It struck just as the lights were extinguished—just as blackness swallowed the sullen red flame from the stacks of the mills. The earth became invisible, but the bombers had the position marked.

A GREAT smear of flame leaped from the bosom of the earth. There was the instant glimpse of flying timbers and bricks, and of the eruption of walls, bowed outward by the terrific force of the bomb exploding from within.

Then the whole area was combed over by other bursts, and flame ran riot through Saarstaat, hot, all-consuming flame. No need for lights down there now; the place was a sea of fire. It spread and spread, ripples of flame, widening out—explosions borne out of explosions, shredding roofs and buildings, blowing up whole streets.

The bomber was light now. It was rising, with a rush. McCann was

horsing the controls—pulling the ship up. No need for silence now—need for power and speed. The twin engines were throbbing, giving everything to the business of taking the big ship upstairs in the least time.

The heat from the conflagration on earth came up and bathed the ships. The flickering light of raging flames lit the faces of the pilots and the crews. Those faces were taut, awed, hard, grim.

Here and there, machine-gunners, pulled cocking handles and cast loose the guns as if knowing what to expect.

In the red light, McCann waved his hand at Bozo Harly, as if to say: "Well, how do you like those bananas?"

Below, the world burned, and the sparks and embers sped about on the breeze, like the tails of Roman candles and skyrockets. But still the lights clung to the ships, revealed them nakedly in the night sky.

CHAPTER V

Test of the Air



AND then the Fokkers came up. They came up slashing, raving mad. They came like sharks rising out of a black sea to rip asunder slow-moving whales. The whales banked awkwardly into the south, flew with wide open throttles, but the sharks were swift, deadly shadows flying three feet to the whales' one.

Harly cast loose his Lewis gun. He saw the fireflies of a pursuit ship's exhaust sliding upward. He stood erect, held in place by his gunner's belt, and tilted the gun over the nose of the H-P.

The Lewis squirted flame as he squeezed the trigger. White, ghostly fingers probed through the night toward the pursuit ship. It veered

sharply, sliced around on the flank of the bomber, came in fast with its guns in action, at point-blank range. The shock of the slugs combing the fuselage of the bomber could be felt through its length.

In a beam of light from the ground, the Fokker seemed a black bat squirting its fiery poison from twin nozzles. There was a glimpse of the head of the pilot, set stiffly between the butts of his Spandaus, his teeth bared, his eyes gleaming.

Harly swung the Lewis to port and starboard. Time after time he drew a bead on a flying bat, and time after time the Lewis recoiled and bucked and jumped like a wild thing. The phosphorescent tracers lined through the blackness, crumbled against wings and fuselages in a smear of white.

Then horror came into the picture to mix with inferno and bedlam. A Fokker slashed over a bomber, nosed down, ripped a short burst into the cockpits of the big ship. A wicked tongue of flame leaped from the bomber. In it, men writhed and twisted as the fire lit their faces. The red glow made devils of them, squirming devils, screeching and screaming and tearing at leather-clad bodies as the fire roared up around them.

A shape went overside from the bomber with flailing arms and legs, was swallowed up by the black void below the fight. It seemed to hang there for one awful instant, mocking the still living, gesturing jerkily toward what was to come for all of them.

The H-P, burning over its length, became a red torch as it fluttered helplessly toward the earth. It went into a slow spin. Showers and eddies and columns of spark generated from it. The smell of burning mixed with the smell of hot oil and laboring metal and with the pungent odor of powder fumes.

McCann nosed his ship down and gave it everything the engines would take. The bomber formation was being broken. Here and there individual ships were cut off, assaulted, trampled upon, smashed by the Fokkers. The burning outlines of Saarstaat were far over the horizon.

Harly sat in his seat and worked his gun. The picture of that burning bomber and its burning crew was bright before his eyes. He could feel his own flesh cooking, and his blood boiling. He gritted his teeth. He looked for the Fokkers, strained his eyes to see them.

Finally he was locating them by sound and instinct. He heard them coming, a thin, whining scream over the note of the bomber's motors. And he leveled the Lewis with the sound.

That way he was able to pot shoot the Fokker on the fly. Standing up, he shot over his shoulder, leaning far out over the nose of the bomber to get in under the fuselage.

And nothing but a sixteenth of an inch of linen between him and those Spandau slugs. Nothing to keep him up, but some inch longerons and the power of those motors.

Anything could happen. Just one of the hundreds of slugs snarling and snapping about them could cut a gas line, could puncture a tank. One of those incendiaries the squareheads were using would ignite the linen.

McCann was handling the bomber like a pursuit ship. Squirming, side-slipping, diving, to get away from the Fokkers. They were going down. McCann had to take her down to keep up speed. But there would come a time when the H-P couldn't go down any further. Then the Fokkers would get in their licks—that would be curtains.

Something exploded in Harly's face—a blinding red light. It came from dead ahead. He heard the rattlesnake crackle of machine-gun fire. The slugs screamed and thudded

around him. The gun in front of him was twisted and snatched out of his hand. A terrific blast of air struck him on the head and chest.

He ducked. It was silly, ducking behind the shelter of a sixteenth of an inch of doped linen, but he ducked instinctively. The burst went over him, drilled into something solid behind his head. He heard a choking scream, and then—there was the reflection of little points of red flame dancing in his goggles. The flame was from the H-P McCann was flying. It seemed to gather strength and brilliance.

The Fokker sharks were slashing madly overhead and under them. Harly had one look at McCann's face. It was set; he was working madly with the controls. There was a thundering silence as the motors on the H-P died as McCann cut the switches.

“**H**OW do you like it—you lousy tin-can soldier?” McCann's voice howled. “This is where we get out and walk. Hold your hat!”

The immense wings of the H-P were cocked up in a vertical bank. Then McCann took the rudder off the ship and she went down with a terrific slide. The flame from the starboard motor blew out to the right, licked around struts and wires, caressed the linen, ran along the under edge of the upper wing. It grew larger and larger, and Harly watched it, fascinated.

How far down was the ground? Was McCann only trying to blow out the fire, or was he looking for a landing?

The heat from the flame was starting to blister. It was licking for the pilot's cockpit. Harly turned his head away, and grew sick. McCann was beginning to roast. McCann's mouth was open—he was gasping.

Harly threw off his belt. The broad nose of the H-P was behind him.

Somehow, he had to get out of the nose of the ship—back to McCann. The co-pilot was dead in his belt, his body slanted far over to the side.

Harly put out his hands. He grabbed the sides of the linen-covered nose, flattened his body against the surface—and clawed and crawled. Time after time he felt himself sliding and slipping down into space. He got his body over the angle made by the side of the fuselage and the top, and pushed himself along—toward the fire—toward the pilot's cockpit.

An eternity passed. The H-P was thundering and throbbing with the force of the slip. McCann was going out. His head was lowered. He was blind.

Somehow, Harly got into the cockpit. He cast loose the dead body of the co-pilot. He couldn't hear the hammering of the Spandaus nor the scream of B.M.W.s on the kill. He settled himself in the seat, didn't bother to fasten the safety belt.

"Let go!" he shrieked at McCann.

"Let go, hell—I'm flying this box kite!" McCann mumbled.

Harly slugged him across the jaw with his fist. McCann's head went down, bobbed on his neck.

The fire burned Harly's hands. He threw the controls even further to the right, and nosed the big bomber down. The flame coursed over the top wing—rushed along the fuselage. Somebody in the belly of the H-P screamed and screamed.

Then—there was a faint gleam from below. Harly kicked the rudder hard in the opposite direction and took the ailerons off the ship. She righted herself with a drunken surge. There was a sweep of tree branches under the wings, and the ripping sound of linen. Harly pulled back on the controls—mushed the ship down, felt it stall, drop out from under him.

Even before it struck the ground,

he was dragging at McCann's inert body. He heaved McCann over the side; then leaped after him. He dragged McCann away from the fire—dashed back, got the screaming bomber out of the bomber's cockpit.

Then there was a tremendous explosion, and the H-P blasted itself into atoms.

And with it, it blasted Bozo Harly's consciousness.

MCCANN studied the amber liquid in the little glass, and squinted up at the light. He was a tough looking sight. His face was still scorched and scratched. He tilted back his head and poured the amber stuff down his throat.

The music was very gay, and the floor was crowded with men in uniform dancing with women. It was the Crillon again.

"Those babies ought to be here by now," complained McCann. "They're ten minutes late already."

"They'll be here," promised Bozo Harly.

His hands were bandaged and the hair was half singed from his head. A very fancy bandage adorned his brow.

There was a silence and McCann scowled at Harly's face.

"I only got one question to ask you, pal," he said suddenly and defensively, "and if I get a screwy answer, the war will be brought right here in the Crillon. I've been trying to get up nerve enough to ask it since day before yesterday."

"Shoot!" grinned Bozo.

"Well, I can forgive losin' a thousand francs to a guy like you—it's a pleasure. I can forgive all them wise cracks about the Air Service in front of the dames. But it's kind of rubbin' it in when, in the middle of a hot spot like we was in, you crawl back from the front gunner's seat, knock me out, when I was going crazy with the heat and was as blind

as a bat, and take over my ship and land the damned thing."

There was another silence, and the funny grin was still on Harly's face.

"Well, what's the answer?" demanded McCann. "A guy don't learn to fly a bomber—and to land one at night—in no ten easy lessons from a night school."

Bozo opened the front of his tunic and displayed the left pocket of his khaki shirt. McCann stared, for pinned to the pocket of the shirt was a pair of silver wings—R.F.A. wings—gleaming and worn, and a string of ribbons over the top of the wings.

McCann cursed softly.

"What the devil?" he said.

"Oh, they're mine," nodded Harly. "I didn't lift 'em from a guy. I was—a pilot once. On Camels first—and then on H-P's, like that barn door you were flying."

"Well—I'll be— Listen, fella—I don't get it. How come you wind up in the Tank Corps?"

"I got washed out," explained Bozo, with the same funny grin. "You see—I transferred to the American Army—after being two years with the Limeys on the front—and I didn't pass the tests."

"You didn't what?" screamed McCann.

"I didn't pass the tests. I had flat feet, and the medicos who were examining men for the American Air decided that my nerves were all shot—I was too nervous to fly."

HE stopped for a moment, and there was a glinting light in his eyes. He lifted his glass, and buttoned up his tunic.

"It sure was swell," he said, "promotin' you into a joy ride over the lines. The Saarstaat show was a peach, one of the best I've been on—" His voice broke a little.

"Well, I'll be damned," whispered McCann.

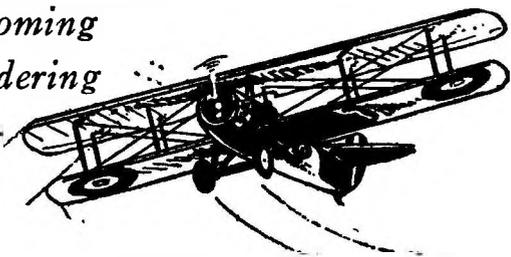
"Well, here's to the tanks—drink 'er down," toasted Harly. "The good old tanks!"

McCann lurched to his feet. His throat was working a little. The liquor gurgled into his glass, and he clutched at the fragile little thing.

"Wait a minute," he boomed. "We'll drink that standing—on our hind legs—to the tanks—by God—the tanks!"

And they drank her down with a single sweep of the arm.

*NEXT MONTH: A Zooming
War-Air Novel of Thundering
Wings! A Great City Threat-
ened from the Skies in*



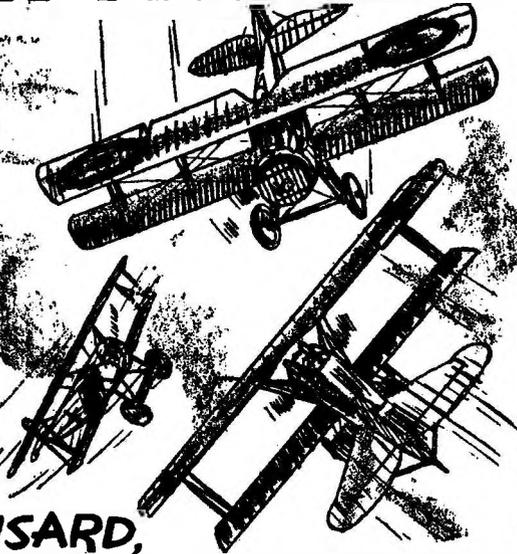
HELL OVER LONDON

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

Author of "Doomed to Live," "The Black Falcon," etc.

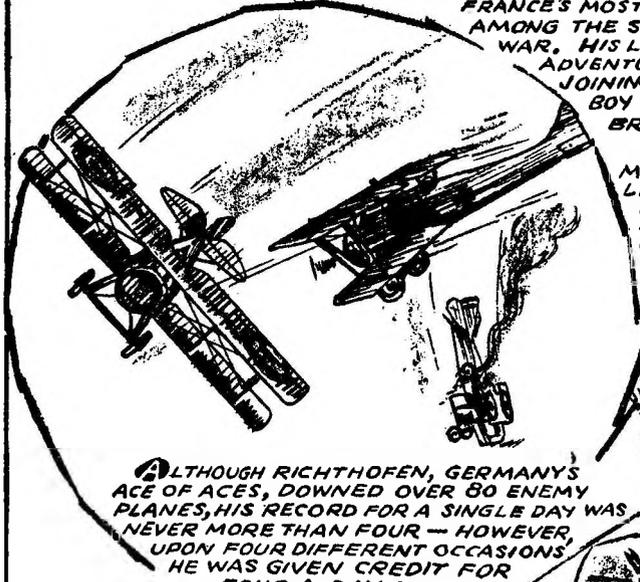
And Many Other Thrilling Stories and Features

Famous SKY FIGHTERS



LT. COL. ARMAND PINSARD,

FRANCE'S MOST COLORFUL ACE AND THIRD AMONG THE SURVIVING ACES OF THE WORLD WAR. HIS LIFE HAS BEEN ONE DARING ADVENTURE AFTER ANOTHER AND SINCE JOINING THE FRENCH ARMY AS A BOY HE HAS HAD MANY HAIR-BREADTH ESCAPES.



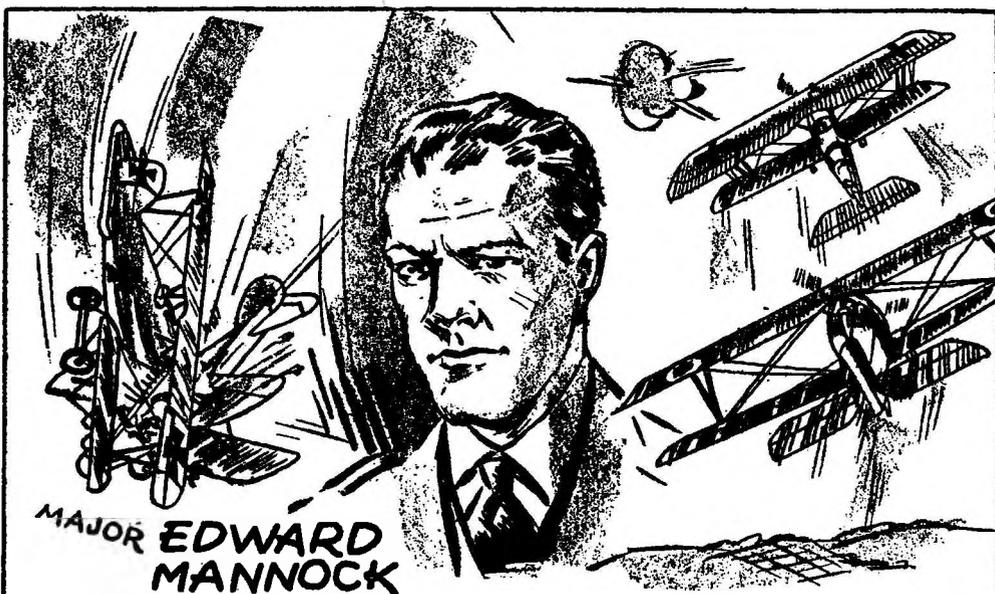
IN 1905 HE RECEIVED THE MOROCCAN MEDAL FOR GAL-LANTRY IN ACTION. LATER, IN 1912, PINSARD BECAME A MEMBER OF THE FIRST FRENCH ESCADRILLE AT THE OPENING OF THE WAR AND SOON BECAME ONE OF FRANCE'S FOREMOST FLYERS.

ALTHOUGH RICHTHOFEN, GERMANY'S ACE OF ACES, DOWNED OVER 80 ENEMY PLANES, HIS RECORD FOR A SINGLE DAY WAS NEVER MORE THAN FOUR — HOWEVER, UPON FOUR DIFFERENT OCCASIONS HE WAS GIVEN CREDIT FOR FOUR A DAY!

CAPTAIN ROY BROWN,

THE CANADIAN SKY FIGHTER OF SQUADRON 209, R.A.F., WHO IS CREDITED WITH BRINGING DOWN THE RED KNIGHT OF GERMANY, THE FAMED ACE BARON VON RICHTHOFEN.





MAJOR EDWARD MANNOCK

FAMOUS BRITISH ACE OF ACES, WAS ONE OF THE MOST SPECTACULAR SKY FIGHTERS OF THE WORLD WAR. MAJOR MANNOCK WAS A NATURAL BORN LEADER AND TRAINER OF PILOTS AND HIS CLEVER AIR STRATEGY MADE HIM ONE OF THE GREATEST OF FLIGHT COMMANDERS. HIS DARING WON THE ADMIRATION OF ALL OF HIS FELLOW FLYERS.

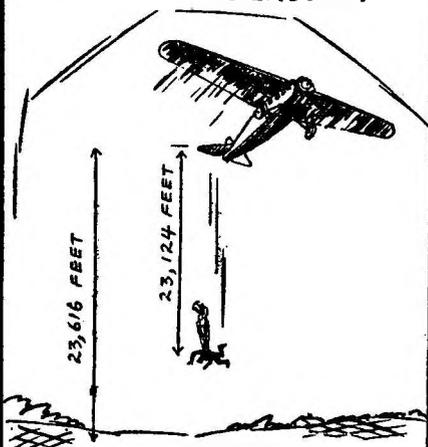
MANNOCK WON ALL OF THE HIGH AWARDS THAT ENGLAND COULD GIVE, INCLUDING THE VICTORIA CROSS. ON JULY 26, 1918, HIS FLAMING CAREER WAS BROUGHT TO A CLOSE WHEN JUST AFTER DOWNING AN ENEMY PLANE HE WAS BROUGHT DOWN BY A BULLET SHOT FROM THE GROUND.



LIEUT. HAROLD NEVINS

AFTER HE HAD LOST A LEFT WHEEL IN THE AIR, WHEN TRAINING IN FRANCE, LANDED A 15 METER NIEUPORT, WHICH HAS A LANDING SPEED OF ABOUT 90 MILES AN HOUR, USING THE RIGHT WING-TIP AND WHEEL.

AFTER BEING PICKED OUT OF THE WRECKAGE LIEUT. NEVINS WAS TOLD THAT FIVE PILOTS HAD RECENTLY BEEN KILLED IN THIS MANNER AND THAT HE WAS THE ONLY ONE WHO HAD EVER ACCOMPLISHED THIS FEAT AND SURVIVED IT.



VICTOR EVCEYEF, SOVIET ARMY PILOT, LEAPED FROM AN ALTITUDE OF 23,616 FEET, AND DROPPED 23,124 FEET BEFORE HE PULLED THE RIP CORD THAT OPENED UP HIS PARACHUTE.

HE LANDED SAFELY AFTER THE DESCENT, WHICH LASTED ABOUT THREE MINUTES.

LOST BUDDY

Norman Archibald and Walter Avery Kept Their Friendship Firm Through the Ravages of Battle in the Flaming Skies! A True War-Air Story

By HUGH JAMES

Author of "Days of Death," "In Enemy Hands," etc.



WAR'S swiftly moving drama ripened friendships in hours. Men became buddies within a day, fighting side by side in the air, risking their lives for others whom they had not known a week before.

Nowhere was this more true than in the American Air Force. Pilots came from the training camps and were assigned to squadrons whose ranks were being constantly riddled. None knew how long he would remain. A pilot who engaged in combat daily for six weeks was a seasoned veteran. Life's span was brief. Friendships, therefore, ripened rapidly and were fiercely loyal.

The Kicking Mules

July 23rd, 1918, saw Walter L. Avery join the 95th Squadron, the famous Kicking Mule formation commanded by Captain Peterson. Avery had been a member of the Paris patrol, but had had no experience at the front.

He flew no patrol his first day, or the second. His third day with the squadron saw the arrival of more recruits. That was July 25th, 1918, twice a red letter in Avery's life. Norman Archibald of Seattle was one of the new recruits, but Avery did not recognize the importance of this meeting. What excited him tremendously was that this was to be his first patrol over the lines.

Captain Peterson himself took his fledglings for a hop into the blue. They were cubs from the base and must be nursed carefully. Although he had flown with the Paris patrol, Avery was tense as they winged over the scarred land that belonged to no man. The sky was clear. No hostile plane was in sight.

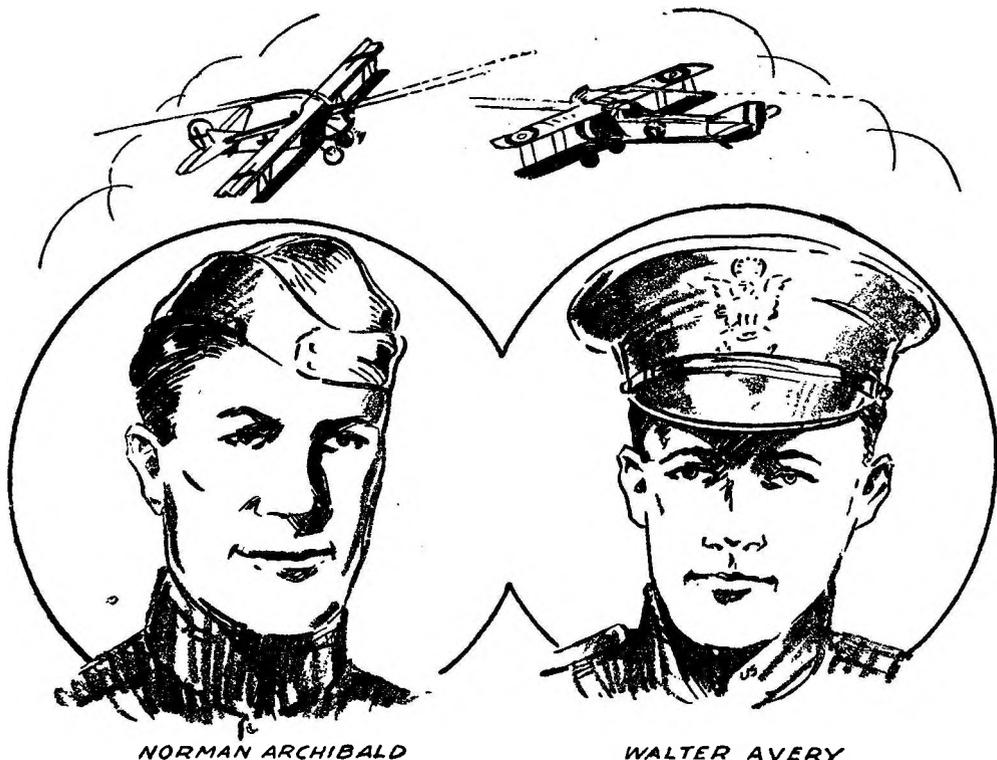
A Skilled Yank

Then a bolt dropped from the blue and Avery found himself in the center of a dog-fight. The other fledglings in the flight were maneuvering frantically as Fokkers appeared magically on every side. The air throbbed with the bellow of engines, the dry clatter of Spandaus raking the Spads from prop to tail.

Avery saw a Boche, whose ship flew the streamers of a flight or squadron commander, strike at him. He could tell by the man's clever maneuvering that a veteran was attacking. But although this was his first day at the front, the Yank was skilled in handling an airplane. He looked up to see the Hun throttle down as he poised directly overhead. Avery also choked his motor.

Both ships threatened to stall and each pilot knew that victory was quivering in the balance. The least unguarded move would give the advantage to the other.

The Boche waited until he could stand the suspense no longer. Then he threw on the sauce, intending to loop and come down on Avery's tail.



NORMAN ARCHIBALD

WALTER AVERY

Famous Buddies of the Blue

But as he zoomed and began to turn, the American drew back his stick and climbed after him. His guns clattered and the Fokker staggered. Next, it was tumbling toward the ground.

Downed by a Fledgling

The German battled to regain control. At last he made a lumpy landing within French territory. *Poilus* surrounded him and he was taken to the French officers' mess.

"I am Captain Karl Menckhoff of the Imperial Army," the German said with cold frigidty. "What great French ace crashed me? Fonck, Nungesser, Madon or—"

He paused as the Frenchmen smiled and glanced toward a young man in olive drab.

"None of them. A young American—it was his first flight over the lines," they told him.

Karl Menckhoff winced, then stared stonily ahead. He refused to

congratulate the youngster who had defeated him. The 95th Squadron seethed over the Hun's ill grace. Some suggested that Avery take Menckhoff's medals. He had the *Pour le Merite*, the Red Eagle, Iron Cross, First Class, and other high decorations.

"He couldn't do that—not and be a sport," Norman Archibald protested, as the talk resounded in the mess hall.

The First Link

It was Archibald's first day with the squadron. He had joined a formation already famous, and glowed with what the future held in store. But he could see no reason for Avery's taking Menckhoff's medals, and said so.

"Of course I couldn't—I wouldn't even think of it," the victor of the strange battle told his fellow pilots.

Thus was formed the first link of a friendship which saw stirring days

upon the earth and in the clouds.

They fought and played, those youngsters who were buddies in the blue. When not battling for their lives and those of their companions, they rollicked and sang, gathering about a piano and bellowing the stirring refrain of Madelon.

Five Days' Leave!

The greatest battle of the war was being fought in the huge salient the Germans had driven into the Artois and Champagne, and the 95th had been flying several patrols a day. Masses of planes took to the air to battle with the Boche. Casualties were an almost daily occurrence. Old faces disappeared; new ones came. Then Frank Luke flamed across the sky, winning fame within two crimson weeks.

"I'll give five days in Paris to any man who gets a balloon," promised Captain Peterson.

Five days' leave in Paris! To the pilots it was like an offer of a furlough in heaven. Avery and Archibald conferred. They had spotted some *Drachen* back of the German artillery lines. They planned a raid and took to the skies the following morning.

A Squadron in Gloom

Five days in Paris! They had planned every minute of those glorious hours. They would scale Montmartre's wine-tinted heights and frolic in the cafes on the Left Bank, where the few artists remaining out of the army were wont to foregather.

But the two buddies found the great sausages far better protected than they had expected. Avery and Archibald were greeted with deluges of shrapnel, flaming onions and sheets of Maxim fire. Archibald's engine was struck and he all but fell within the enemy's lines. Fokkers pursued and Avery was forced to flee for his life. He returned to the

squadron landing field without his partner.

A day of anxious waiting followed. Calls to the front line observation posts brought a report that an American Spad had been seen to fall within the German lines. Gloom gripped the squadron. Its losses had been heavy during the flaming weeks of mid-summer; now there would be a freshly vacant chair at the mess table until a new pilot could be brought from the base.

Night came and the pilots gathered in their canvas barracks. They looked at each other silently. Then one stood up.

"I guess Arch isn't coming back," he said. "We'll draw lots for his stuff—as usual."

The Grim Drawing

Nods of silent assent. Avery sat to one side. He wanted nothing that had belonged to his buddy. It was bad enough, without having something to remind him constantly of his friend.

The drawing began. Blankets, uniforms, sweaters and other belongings were parceled out among the pilots. Only the strictly personal mementos were set aside, to be sent home to grieving parents in far-off Seattle. Finally the bare cot was taken out that its empty presence would not continue to be a reminder.

Avery still said nothing. Words were futile, useless things.

Another Battle Day

Another day of battle in the air. With war's swift drama swirling before their eyes, the pilots were thinking of other things than a missing comrade. Too many had trod that mysterious route for grief to endure long. Another evening came and the flyers prepared for bed. There was to be an early morning patrol. They wondered if they would meet the Tagoes or some of the other noteworthy German formations.

The men squatted on their army cots, taking off their shoes and talking of the day's happenings. Few noticed the tent flap open and a man attired in the same uniform which they wore, step in. Then one of the pilots looked up.

"Arch!" he shouted.

From the Dead!

Others spun to stare at Norman Archibald. He had returned, apparently from the dead. Astonishment made their faces blank.

"Where's my bed?" Archibald demanded, seeing the vacant place.

"Why—" one of the men began.

Then the returned pilot saw his open, empty trunk. He had been through hell since he had last seen his companions, and his nerves were frayed. He had expected acclaim for coming back after being given up for dead. Instead, he had been met with stony faces—and an empty trunk.

"Listen, Arch." Avery laid a placating hand on his buddy's shoulder. "The boys thought you had gone West. We always divide stuff, you know, and—"

"Gimme that sweatshirt!" Archibald had seen a favorite garment on one of the other pilots. "Gimme that—"

His Anger Mounts

Avery tried to soothe his friend, but Archibald's anger raged on. He had managed to cross the lines and then had cracked up. He had been badly shaken, but somehow made his way back to his own outfit—to be greeted like this! He dashed outdoors and retrieved his cot. Then he got his blankets back and made his bed. Gradually his ragged nerves quieted.

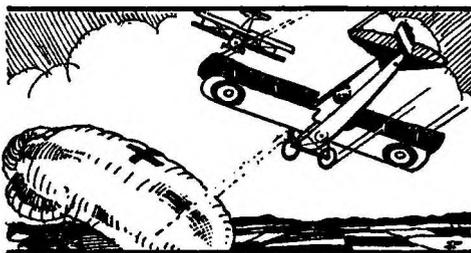
"Listen, old sox," Avery continued. "The boys didn't mean any harm and—"

A flush crossed Archibald's youthful face and he nodded.

"I know," he managed to blurt. "I guess the old nerves are going, but—we'll get that balloon. I owe those babies something."

"Sure we'll get it." Avery slapped his friend on the back. "And get that pass for Paris."

Another day in the air, then others. Came September 9, 1918, and another balloon raid was launched. Archibald had a missing engine when



They streaked down on the Drachen

they started, but he continued, hoping it would pick up by the time they reached the balloon lines. Over the last *Drachen*, they threw their tails into the air. The wind shrieked through their braces as they dove.

Furious Fighting

Once more the Archies and the Maxims sent up their grey curtains of death. Shots whanged into the balky *Hisso* that Archibald was trying so desperately to get into perfect rhythm. Next he was tumbling toward the earth, entirely out of control. His companions saw his plight and rallied, trying to save him, but a double formation of Fokkers drove them off.

"They got him this time—no fooling," the men told Captain Peterson, when they returned to the drome.

Once more Walter Avery mourned the loss of his friend. The flight waited before dividing Archibald's effects a second time.

Eager for Revenge

Week followed week, but no word came. Walter Avery ranged the skies

and harried the balloon lines, seeking always to avenge his lost buddy. Other pilots rode away, never to return, and the same tragic lotteries were held. But Avery took no part in these drawings. He was too gripped with his plans to get revenge from the Boche.

"You're taking too many chances, Walt," his friends told him. "You'd better cut out this solo stuff. Too many Boche in the sky."

But Avery kept on. For three weeks his hunt continued, a tireless search for Boche amid the clouds. Then came October 3rd. The captor of Karl Menckhoff, the famous Hun ace, again took to the skies. His comrades did not see him again.

There was still another vacant chair at the mess table. Another vacant cot in the tent barracks of the frequently moving 95th.

Then, the Armistice!

The Argonne Drive followed, and the drive to the south. The German giant was reeling before the hammerlike blows of the American armies, which were threatening to cut the Hindenburg line in half. October merged into November. And then came the Armistice!

"No more waiting—no more empty cots or chairs," the pilots told each other, as the squadron was withdrawn from the front.

Then came word that some of the lost members of the squad would return. Messages, through the Red Cross, told of captives who would be liberated. Names were given, but those of Norman Archibald and Walter L. Avery did not appear.

"Guess they've gone West for good," the flyers muttered.

Marked by Misery

Days dragged. Finally a trickle of repatriated prisoners began to arrive. Trains came through Switzerland bearing men who had known the tortures of barbed wire camps, misera-

ble food and inhuman treatment. Some bore the scars of battle. All were marked by the misery and hardship through which they had gone.

A train filled with prisoners, homeward bound, crossed the French frontier, to be acclaimed by the enthusiastic people. Champagne was served and sandwiches passed to the hungry men who had been eating potato soup and drinking imitation coffee for endless days. Suddenly two men in the same car stood up and stared at each other.

Reunion

One was attired in a Russian overcoat. He had been cutting up an apple into small pieces and shoving them into his distorted mouth. The other wore a ragged American uniform, torn and dirty.

"Avery!"

"Archibald," called the man in the Russian overcoat.

Next they were slapping each other on the back, shouting their names, dancing up and down.

"What happened to your face?" Archibald looked at his friend's distorted jaw.

"It got busted when I cracked up, and the Boche refused to set it," the Yank answered.

Safe in America

"Just wait until one of our American doctors gets busy on you," Archibald retorted. "He'll make you look like Adonis, or somebody like that."

Avery nodded, but at that moment he didn't care about his deformity. He was too happy. Buddies in the blue were reunited. The specter that had haunted them during the flaming days of war was laid. Vacant chairs and empty cots were forgotten.

Both were so exalted that they forgot to wonder how they happened to be traveling on the same train. Even now, neither knows, although both are again safe in their beloved America.

SLUG SENSE

*Pilot Sam Bowen Carried a
Chip on His Shoulder
Whenever Jim Ryan
Was Around!*

By
LT. FRANK JOHNSON

Author of "Cloud Trap," etc.

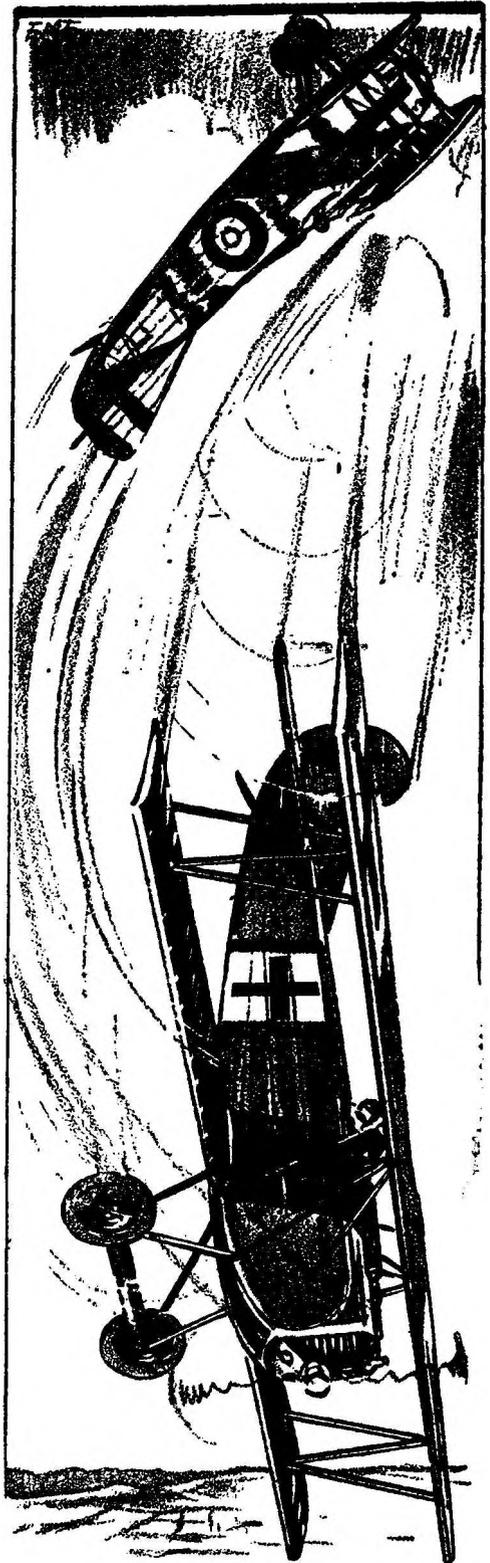
"NOW remember, men," the C. O. warned viciously, "there is to be no more breaking formation on these patrols!"

He glared at the eight pilots standing in the cold grey of dawn outside his Nissen hut. His keen, hard, war-tired eyes lingered a moment upon the stolid, beefy figure of Lieutenant Sam Bowen. It was as though the C. O.'s words were aimed at Bowen alone.

The eight pilots nodded, but said nothing. Bowen's stoney stare shifted slightly and paused, clung an instant upon the rugged, angular face of Lieutenant James Ryan. There was, in that brief, hard glance, a challenge.

Jim Ryan looked straight at the C. O., and ignored Bowen completely.

"You birds," the C. O. stated as a sort of grim afterthought, "have your own problems. I realize that. You've got your motors to worry about, your ammunition to check over. And you probably worry about your guns jamming, too. I used to worry about those things myself.



The Fokker fell off into a deadly spin

But there's one thing I will not tolerate, one thing that no flying outfit can tolerate—"

He paused and looked squarely at Bowen.

A voice spoke up, a mild, firm voice.

"I think, sir, we understand," Jim Ryan said simply.

"You do, Ryan," the C. O. agreed curtly. "I'm sure of that. But you others, get this!" His words came out now like the crackle of machine-gun fire.

"No flying outfit can tolerate personal grievances carried into the air! And this outfit, particularly, won't stand for such kid stuff! If you get mad at each other, come to me about it, or fight it out on the ground! God knows, you're supposed to be fighters! Now get to hell out there and make that patrol!"

It was a long speech for the C. O., clipped and terse as it was. But there was reason for it.

First, the German patrols were keeping their formations, getting out larger and larger unit patrols. The day of the lone ace was gone. This had become a mass war, and mass alone would win.

The second reason was deeper, less pleasant to contemplate. Personal battles had sometimes been carried into the air, and resulted in deadly air duels between Spad and Spad. There had been some of this lately, and the root of it lay in the hate of Bowen for Ryan, a hate that seemed to be without justification.

In a semi-drunken brawl, when Bowen had first appeared in the squadron, Ryan had refused to celebrate his arrival by drinking with him, and had refused flatly to fight about it afterwards. The fact that Ryan did not drink at all was forgotten in the fact that he had not fought, that he had shrugged indifferently and walked out.

That had been the beginning, the

opening wedge to hate, a trivial matter that grew. Other things had added to this first seeming insult. Ryan had gotten a week's leave, Bowen had not. Ryan had been given a new Spad, Bowen had to keep flying his old one. Ryan had been made a Flight Commander by the C. O., and Bowen was still just another man in a pursuit patrol formation.

Twice, Bowen had challenged Ryan to a fight on the ground, and been ignored. Twice Bowen had challenged Ryan to a fight in the air, and Ryan acted as though he had never received the invitation to battle.

But now there could be no avoiding what was to happen. For Bowen had written a note to Ryan this time, and signed it—challenging Ryan to a man-to-man duel. He had pinned the note upon the top blanket of Ryan's bunk, where others would see it before Ryan. And he had watched to see that others did stop and read that challenge, including Jim Ryan himself.

SAM BOWEN grinned as he climbed into his cockpit and strapped himself in. He took extra care to see that his Hisso had the right hum, that his twin Vickers were oiled, loaded, that the extra drums of ammunition were in place, ready for instant use.

Eight Spads, at Ryan's signal, wobbled out onto the field.

Then, in the lightening gloom of dawn, those eight ships took on sudden life as their wheels freed themselves from the earth.

They crossed the lines at twelve thousand feet, still climbing, and five miles beyond in German territory they leveled out at fifteen thousand feet and turned left on the course of their patrol.

Ryan signaled for more altitude, and seven ships nosed up again.

But breaking formation, according to the instructions in his challenging note, Bowen began a long, throttled slant downward. It was at this point that Ryan might have followed him, and did not.

Bowen swore under the cowling as he ducked his head and tried to get a light on a cigarette. The smoke in his lungs turned to a choking glob of suffocation! Spandau tracers were coming at him from ten Fokkers which had dived through the nearest cloud and were hammering hell at him! Ten against one!

Bowen stared about wildly, searching the sky for help, for a sight of the Spad flight he had just left. He saw the second cloud through which they had disappeared. But there were no Spads.

His fingers clenched on his Bowden trips. His twin Vickers chattered, vibrated as he warmed them.

He banked, gunned full throttle, swirled in a tight vertical, orienting himself. He whipped at the nearest Hun, saw his tracers rake the Boche's tail as the German eluded him. Streaks of Spandau tracer and lead slugged into his fuselage, coming from both sides, catching him in a deadly cross-fire.

He ripped out of his bank, dove, jammed up in a loop and half-rolled out at the top in an Immelmann as a trailing bullet hit him.

Red, sticky, warm blood trickled down his arm, down his back, down his chest. Death seemed to ride the cockpit with him.

He dove once more, shot up in another loop, caught a Hun in his ring-sight and watched grimly as he held the aim. His tracers slashed straight into the Boche's cockpit!

The German pilot's arms swept up into sight over his head. The Fokker flung itself sidewise to its course of flight, fell off into a deadly spin, trailing smoke and flame. Bowen came down out of his loop

with wires and motor screaming.

Three Fokkers howled in at him simultaneously.

He spun away in a frantic zoom! This was the end for him!

And as though from nowhere at all seven Spads bearing his own *co-carde* on their fuselages pounded down into the fight!

A second and third slug poured into Bowen's body. Dizziness became like a black blanket as he fought to keep his senses. He weaved the control stick and rudder bar automatically as he slashed and shot through the milling dog-fight.

Then a vague sense of level flight and a steadily droning motor gave him spasmodic flashes of reality. He felt himself sliding down with the Hisso throttled. He felt the bump and grating of his wheels and tail skid touching ground. He started to stand up—and passed out cold!

THE C. O. was standing over his hospital bed; Ryan was there too, and several other pilots whom he recognized. They were eyeing him gravely, yet in Ryan's eye was a slight twinkle.

"You'll be back with us in about two weeks," the C. O. said to him. "I hope you came back with a bit of sense, because you're a good fighter. You held off ten Fokkers for almost five minutes, single-handed. But you're a damned fool—"

"Thanks, sir," Bowen said with a quirk of his lips. "It was damned decent that the flight came back to help me out."

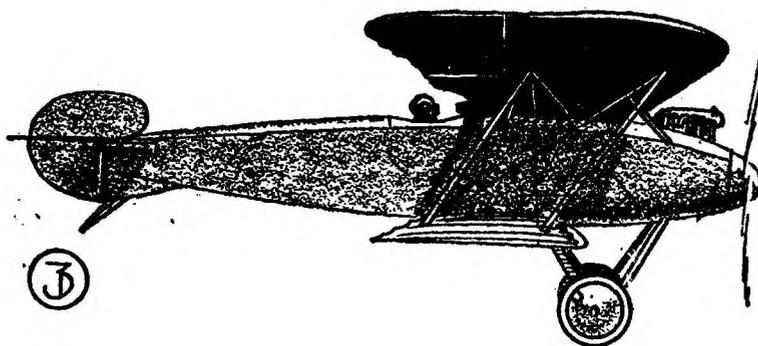
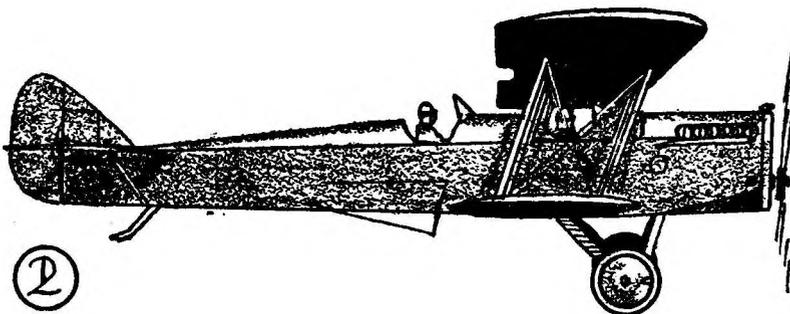
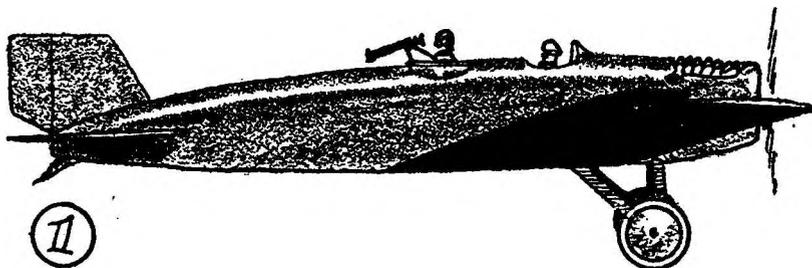
"Help you hell!" one of the pilots said grimly. "We came back, six of us, to blow you out of the sky for picking on Ryan. And Ryan came with us to see we didn't! If you want to fight him—"

Sam Bowen held out his one good hand, toward Jim Ryan.

"Shake, Jim," he said. "I'll stick to fighting Germans!"

Here Are Six More War

Do You Know These Crates—All Used



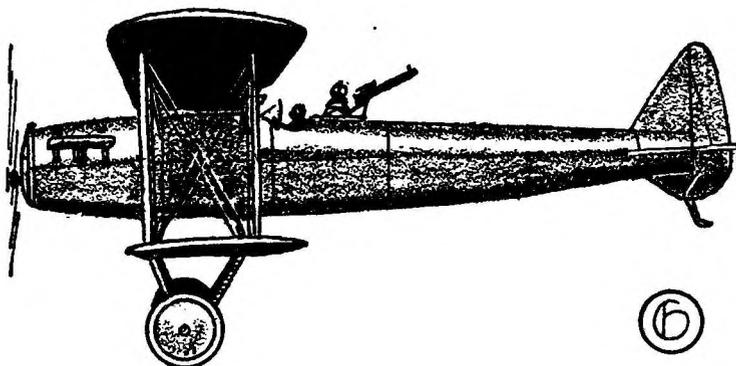
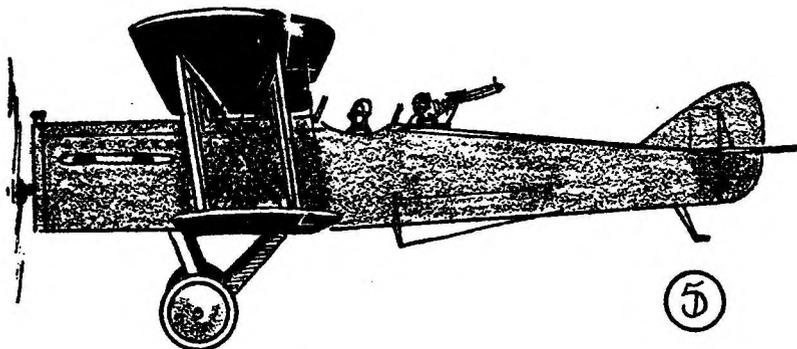
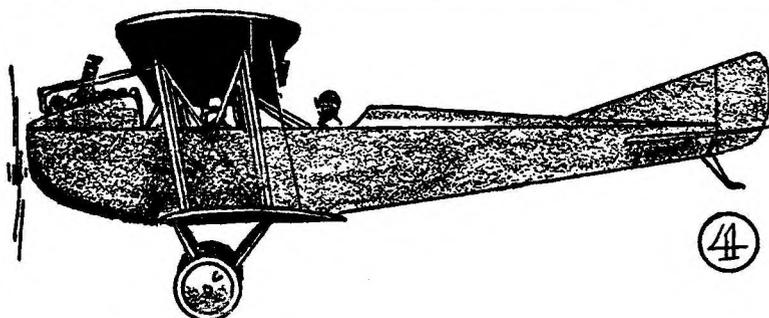
Above are pictures of six planes used in World War combat. Here are their names—but in the wrong order, with the letters scrambled:

1. AKVIITA OWT-D
2. DHEVALINAD A-IENN
3. LBORTSI LAL TELAM

4. RENUKJ KOERFK
5. NALDAHVIED UROF
6. LIP E. BENA G.A.

Planes to Unscramble

During the World War? Test Yourself



COLBY

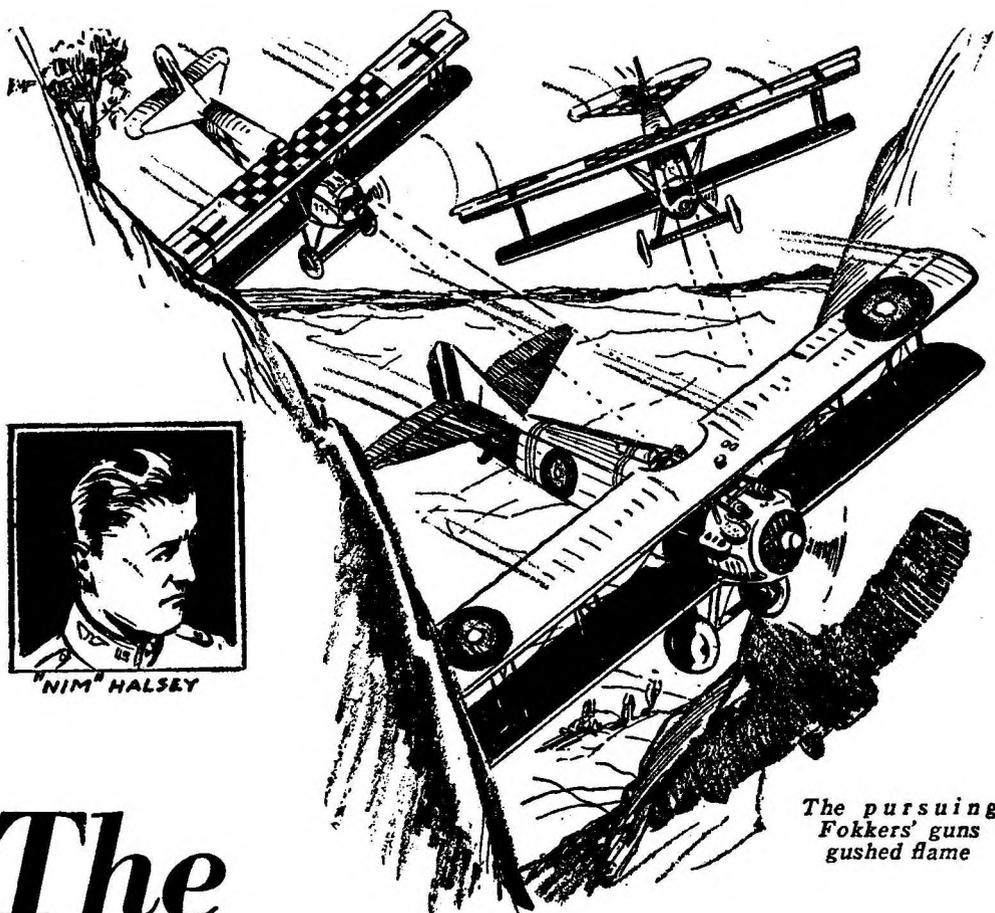
Examine closely the crates pictured above.

Then: First unscramble the names of the planes—second, list the planes in the proper order.

Write your list below before referring to the answer on page 124:

- | | |
|---------|---------|
| 1. | 5. |
| 2. | 4. |
| 3. | 6. |

Deep in the Craggy Badlands of the Ardennes, Grim Horror Stalked—and Halsey Had to Act Quickly!



*The pursuing
Fokkers' guns
gushed flame*

The Devil's Forest

By HAROLD F. CRUICKSHANK

Author of "Jim Peelot," "Night Eagle," etc.

ACTING CAPTAIN "NIM" HALSEY flew his Spad like a bullet through the sky. He was long overdue at his tarmac. As a matter of fact there was more to his absence than only a mere A. W. O. L.

This afternoon one of those lazy empty-skied afternoons, when there

was positively nothing doing in his patrol sector, he had ordered his flight back, while he had struck on to the southeast, deep in over the badlands of the Ardennes. There was a strong fascination for Halsey above those craglands, and forests. He had made many trips to this sector, though secretly.

He touched in a notch of throttle, as he felt the whine of lead past his head. Those two Fokkers which had picked up his trail were burning in very close; and Nim's gas supply was just about napoo. It was a nice cheerful life, this.

He had never been comfortable at Squadron 36, to which he had been assigned since leaving hospital. The gang there didn't seem as friendly as the old boys at Squad 92. But there was promotion in the move, and Nim had been obliged to accept the position of flight leader at 36. He flew at the head of his flight, however, only when obliged to. He preferred to be alone.

This evening he would have some explaining to do. As he shot a glance back over his shoulder, a grin split his hard thin lips. He saw the limp, small body of a young doe.

Halsey's trips to that badland forest country weren't always for nothing.

The last time he had brought back three monster wild Belgian hares. Today, or at least tomorrow, the mess would feed on succulent venison.

"And why not?" he thought. "Why should some puffy-faced old Jerry general have the right to clean up the small game in those French woods?"

At Halsey's side, in the front pit, was a .303 Savage sporting rifle. But as he thought of his sporting urge, and the kills he had made, in the interests of the mess larder, he smiled. The production of game bags was not all that took him to those forests—not by a long shot!

But why the devil should he tell those inquiring buzzards at 36? They might not understand in any case. Halsey had developed into a mysterious sort of chap who was riding for a fall. The C. O. there didn't understand him as had his former

major at 92. Anyhow, Nim was fed up.

At that moment all extraneous thoughts were cast from his mind. The Fokkers were gaining, and Nim was forced to maneuver his ship with a recklessness that threw the attacking Germans off.

A COUPLE of Spandau slugs socked hard into the body of the small doe lashed abaft the pit. Another slug clipped the tip from the lobe of Nim's right ear. It stung like the devil, but he swung his ship over and sent her whirling down in a mad spin, which took him almost into the maw of a gaping crater near the American front line.

Here the Yank ground guns came to his aid. He zoomed clear, but he knew that he would never be able to carry his ship along to Drome 36. His engine was already snorting and belching from lack of gas supply.

He eased her down well within his lines, and handed her over to a battery of howitzers. Then, with the young doe draped around his neck, he strode on for four miles until a truck picked him up and ran him to his squadron.

The pilots of 36 were at their evening meal when the mess hut door burst in, and Nim Halsey strode in.

"Hail, merry men!" he bellowed. "Robin's brought ye a prime doe from yon welkin. He—aw, cripes! Of all the sour-faced bunch of—"

He broke off. The C. O. was on his feet, and Halsey knew that fireworks were about to kick off. He could read it in the expression on Major Dan Durand's face.

"When you've gotten rid of that mess about your neck, and washed up, Captain Halsey," Durand snorted, "I'll see you at my office."

"Very good, sir," rapped Nim.

He would have taken a keen de-

light in sweeping the mess table with the limp form of the small doe. With a grunt, he moved out, handed the gutted deer to the mess cook, and strode to his quarters, where a pop-eyed orderly met him.

"They tell me you're in wrong, Cap'n," grunted the orderly, a man whom Nim had brought from Squadron 92, the only connection with the old fighting unit.

"Yeah? What's happened, Duffy? Did all this squadron come out of some ladies' seminary, or are they just natural born sisters of grace? What's on your mind?" The skipper was peeling off, ready to wash.

"Well, sir, I thought you knew. Only two of your flights got in—Lieutenants Dalkin and Palmer are missing. The others don't seem to know what happened. I heard the flight sergeant talkin' it over with Corporal Blanchard. It seems like after you turned the boys back, somethin' happened. It—"

"Something often does happen up there in the sky lanes, Duffy," cut in the skipper. "I'm sorry; I hate to lose a man. I hate the whole of this mad butchery of warfare, Duff. I kill because I have to, because it's legalized killing, but it cuts in deep when I lose a man. They found out where the boys crashed?"

The skipper's voice broke low, and he leaned forward toward his trusted servant.

"No, sir. That's the worst of it. In the first place, they never saw no German aircraft. Maguire an' Peters were flyin' just a little higher an' ahead of Dalkin an' Palmer. It was Maguire who first knew somethin' was wrong. He shot a glance back to see if you were comin', by any chance. First thing he knew his eyes was poppin' out. He was seein' Dalkin an' Palmer wingin' down toward the German lines. They landed—seemin'ly outa control. But nothin' seemed to hit 'em."

"Good Lord!" Halsey scrubbed his face hard with a towel, then flung it from him, and cocked a leg over the edge of his table.

"You mean to say there wasn't any Archie fire, or anything like that, Duff?" he barked.

"NO—well, there was a few bursts of Archie, but though Maguire reported this, he claimed it never came anywhere near. The squad's pretty upset, Skip. They's a rumor that you're gonna get the air. Gee, it's gonna be tough if they fold you up—with the record you've got."

But Halsey wasn't listening. Something grim was percolating in his mind.

Had the mysterious landing of Dalkin and Palmer anything to do with Halsey's visits to the forests in the badlands?

His slitted eyelids flickered. With a shrug, he reached for his coat, and strode out to join Major Durand at the office.

The news Duffy had given him was, though very sinister and ominous, most gratifying. Nim Halsey had been secretly assigned to scout out the Devil's Forest, in the badlands of the Ardennes, to scout out also a leakage of information purported to exist in the American lines.

Major Durand didn't know this. It was possible, right on the eve of Nim's glimpse of a clue, that Durand would gum up the works. Durand was a man-rider, a disciplinarian of the old military school. Halsey disliked him, and yet there was something in Durand's make-up which evoked a certain amount of the skipper's respect.

As he neared the office door, Nim tightened his lips. If it must come to a showdown, he didn't intend to take anything from Durand. There was serious espionage at work. It

was Halsey's job to play his part in his own way.

At a crisp "Come in!" he thrust open the door. The major was chewing hard on a thin black cigar.

"Sit down," he barked. Then, after a long moment's silence:

"See here, Captain Halsey, if you think you're in this war for the purpose of joy-riding over to an isolated part of enemy territory to hunt jack-rabbits and deer, you're out."

"Which means?" This from Nim in a cold tone which measured that of the C. O.

"Which means you're not to be trusted, Halsey."

It exploded like a bomb in the skipper's ears. He found it difficult to restrain himself, since this man-rider had nearly accused him of something phoney. But he held himself in check. He wanted Durand to play out his hand.

"So what, Major?"

"I'll have to ground you, pending an inquiry into your actions this afternoon, when you lost two men. You will be confined to this squadron area grounds—understand? Why, there are enough whisperings here to make a very serious charge against you."

YOU mean a charge of desertion of my flight in action?"

There was no immediate reply.

"For the moment, we can call it that, Halsey. But I could go further. Figure it out for yourself. An American captain makes repeated trips to enemy territory; is allowed to wander in the woods and pick off rabbits, and the odd deer. Do you expect that we are all dumb, and blind here?"

Halsey took a quick step forward. The major's insinuations were getting more positive. Nim had never gotten a real square break from any of the members of Squadron 36. It wasn't his fault that he had to keep

secret his connection with American Intelligence Branch.

"So—I joy-ride over, drop in some baron's backyard, go in to lunch, then stroll out arm in arm to the woods with the Hun chief, who has a flock of Prussian guards beat the forest so I can shoot a deer! That's your idea, Major. And while I'm at lunch, I suppose I give away all the Allied secrets! Is that it? Why, you—"

He broke off. There was a sudden commotion outside. He heard the call, "Lights!" Then the mad chatter of a pair of ground machine-guns.

Overhead there was the drone of an airplane.

Halsey made a dash for the open, the major at his heels.

Out of the night sky, caught in a splash of brilliance from a searchlight beam, a man-laden parachute was swaying earthward. Nim Halsey caught his breath as he dashed across the field, mechanics and officers at his heels. The swaying body thudded in. Halsey hurled himself forward and clutched at the dragging chute. He gasped as a light flashed across the ashen features of the fallen man.

"Dalkin!"

"Wh—what's that, Halsey?" Major Durand came puffing up.

"It's Dalkin, Major. One of Jerry's damnable little jokes. Now, why the devil don't you ask me where Palmer is, or something like that?"

"Well, where is he? Where—"

He broke off. Dalkin was stirring. Halsey lifted the lolling head, and planted it on one of his legs, bending in close.

"Yes—what is it, son?" he breathed. "Speak, Dalk, old boy. What happened, kid? What happened to Palmer?"

The name, Palmer, seemed to work like a charm. The young pilot stiff-

ened. He attempted to rise, but Nim held him down.

"He — Palmer — he — Palmer's pho-ney—a Ger—"

His voice trailed off, and his limp shape sagged back.

"Dead!" snapped the skipper.

"Dead? Good Lord!" This from the major, whose face was livid under the pressure of an emotional storm. His eyes were shooting flame through their slitted lids—flame at Captain Halsey.

"What was that he said about Palmer?"

"Just what I've suspected for some time, Major Durand. It's the reason I've been making my little joy-riding hunting trips over to the Devil's Forest. Palmer was the cause of the leakage from the American lines. It was he who must have brought about the capture of Dalkin. I shouldn't have told you all this yet—I'll probably need support from you soon. Keep what I've told you under your helmet. Meanwhile I'm—"

"What? Where are you going?"

"Back to the Devil's Forest, to hunt for some bigger game than a measly little doe."

Nim Halsey got to his feet and was moving away, when the major's voice arrested him.

"Here, Halsey, take a look at this."

The major was bending low, a flashlight in his hand playing on the pilot's dead body. He passed Halsey a card which he had plucked from Dalkin's clothing.

I give you back Dalkin. He was beginning to suspect. Thanks for your hospitality at Squadron 36. Halsey is next, and then our Air Service is ready to strike.

Franz von Reichter,
alias Lieutenant Palmer.

"What do you make of it all, Halsey?" The major had turned the body of Dalkin over to the M. O.

"I don't know. Didn't you ever have any reason to suspect Palmer?"

The major's face drew into a hard frown for a long moment, then he suddenly caught at Halsey's sleeve.

"By George! I never suspected him of anything phoney. But a month ago I had a letter from a Mrs. Palmer in Kansas City asking if I could bring my influence to bear on her son, who was not writing home. I—Halsey, are you getting it? Young Palmer never reached us from Issoudun! This clever devil von Reichter impersonated him. Palmer must have been snuffed out. I don't wonder I've lost so many men and ships in the past three months."

"DON'T let this get you, Major," rapped Halsey, drawing the C. O. to one side. "Listen. G-2 has suspected that there was a leakage from one of our brigade's squadrons. Nobody's being blamed particularly. I figured the leak came from our squadron. Twice I've watched a plane, which I figured carried our numerals, land close to the Devil's Forest. Once, I could have sworn that plane was Palmer's. Now I know it was.

"Major, the Devil's Forest is the stew pot for all the frightfulness on this front. It is there that Baron von Reichter, our "Palmer's" uncle, has his secret drome and gas plant. You've known of planes being dropped without any sign of shrapnel burst or machine-gun fire."

Halsey paused to light a cigarette.

"I've been trying to get a line on the tunnels through which von Reichter's gas will be shot to our Allied lines. We have an idea that this gas is something deadly, one that was once used in experimentation on the French. The most fiercest lethal essence known. Planes will be charged with this damnable stuff. Thousands of Allied soldiers will be snuffed out without any warning, for the gas will fume up out of the

ground. Cities and towns will be drenched from the skies. Unless—"

"Yes, yes. Good Lord, man! Go on. Unless what?"

"Unless I get a line on those secret storage tanks up in the forest zone. Now, let's go. Get in touch with G-2 at once. Then the infantry. Troops must be withdrawn, for the most part, from front line areas. Artillery must fill the gaps. Have a composite squadron of bombers ready to rush forward at my call. You can escort them with our ships. I'm gassing up and going across the lines, Major, at once."

"Not alone!"

"Sure. I know a little spot at which I can land. It's at the foot of a canyon where, I'll bet a month's pay, no Hun on wings dare follow me. I—"

HALSEY turned away. There was no more time for talk. Nim Halsey's blood was on fire for action, and ahead—there lay plenty of it. Before long he would be down in the very depths of those wretched, partly isolated wastes of the Ardennes, and then—

Only the faintest lights of the palest dawn offered Halsey visibility as he swept down on the canyons. He had slept little throughout the night. Dalkin's tragic passing had haunted him. As he neared the canyon walls down which he must thrust his ship, his every sense became alert.

He realized that a single slip now would tear off his wings. Three times had he made this hazardous trip, but only once before in this light. His heart beat madly as he put his ship into a skid. The roar of an avalanche seemed to be pounding in his eardrums.

Suddenly he was conscious of the stutter of hard lead striking on his Spad's body. He dared not glance back. He was plummeting down a

terrible elevator shaft, and the manipulation of controls demanded every atom of skill he possessed.

Deeper and deeper he descended into the abyss—fighting his ship, fighting a threatening weakness in himself. Above, two Fokkers dipped their noses and gushed flame. A low, half-hysterical laugh broke from Nim's throat as he glimpsed the sparks from bullets striking against rock.

But the laugh was suddenly smothered in a gasp. The death trap through which he rode was robbed of its oxygen. He slipped a hand to his throat. His eyes stared from their sockets as the realization of his situation flashed to his mind.

Gas!

Those two devils above, afraid to make the plunge between those cliff walls, had unleashed their lethal time bombs, which contained the deadly gas of the Baron von Reichter's manufacture.

Halsey sought desperately to avert the danger. Wheezing, gasping, he tried to hold his breath. He crouched above his stick and tipped the Spad into a steeper dive. But his lungs were nearly bursting as he flattened out to make a landing. His tires slammed in hard, jolting him against the belt-webbing, and then a cataract seemed to roar down on him. With a gurgled groan, he slumped down.

When he awakened, Halsey's first impulse was to tear at his throat. It was sore and full, but he soon found that he was breathing in, though painfully, pure oxygen. In a small pocket in the cockpit there were a half dozen small glass tubes of ammonia, the same as those used by the infantry as a neutralizer.

His trembling fingers fished out one of these. He cracked the glass within its lint binding and slipped the capsule between his teeth. He sucked in the fuming ammonia until

its strength was consumed. Then he applied another, and a third.

He climbed out, stumbled, recovered. He was forced to clutch at the side of his ship for support, as a wave of dizziness almost overwhelmed him. But the fighting spirit of Nim Halsey asserted itself. That, and the sound of voices.

He shot a glance about him. Close by was a fringe of scrub willow swaying in the early dawn breeze. He had cached his ship beneath these willows more than once.

His strength quickly returning, Nim began to rock his plane back to cover. Her wings were barely concealed before he heard the guttural snarl of a German. Gripping his automatic tightly, the skipper stole into the mantle of cover, there to hang in waiting.

He caught the crunch of footsteps on the gravel.

The Hun searchers were moving by, off left. Nim suddenly crept out, inching toward the edge of his cover to the north. Breathing almost cut off, he threaded his way to a point near which a lone German figure must pass in order to avert a fall over a small promontory.

Halsey's gun suddenly leaped out and down. The barrel of the Colt socked hard against skull bone, and the towering Prussian crumpled almost at the Yank's feet. Quickly Halsey pulled the unconscious shape to cover, where he trussed up the German's wrists and ankles. Now to watch the man come to, and then to pump him.

The German's face seemed frozen with horror as he looked up into Halsey's scowling face.

"Listen, *du Kerl*," barked the Yank. "Answer me quickly. I'll tear your heart out of your body if you don't tell me what I want. Where is the *Staffel* of von Reichter? *Schnell!* And talk low." Halsey's German seemed to be under-

standable enough for the man on the ground cringed.

"*Ach, Herr Hauptmann*," he breathed. "I am a veteran who has been wounded many times. I have a wife and four children. Von Reichter would kill me if I gave out any information. I—"

"What matters it who kills you? I shall if you don't talk," thundered the skipper, who suddenly lowered his voice. "Speak, at once, or I begin to slit you apart."

THE German wilted. He nodded, speechless for the moment.

"Follow the dry river bed for one half kilo, *Herr Hauptmann*. Then turn sharp right into the forest. But—*ach, Gott!* You will not get far, for the mantraps of von Reichter are many. You will come upon the secret wireless station. From this point it is but a short step to the tunnel, to the—*lieber Gott!* Must I go on? That is von Reichter's most prized secret. Better you would shoot me now, *Herr Hauptmann*—"

Something in Halsey's mind relented. He would ask for no more from this man. He had learned enough, however.

He had jammed his automatic into his holster. Gagging the man, he slipped through the willows. Availing himself of every chance of cover he moved cautiously, though briskly along the old bed, until he came to the turn. In less than ten minutes he again caught the sound of voices, booming through the Devil's Forest. He gasped as he glimpsed through a port in the trees, a couple of lounging officers, who smoked and laughed.

Then Halsey saw the aerial of von Reichter's wireless station. He took a sharp step forward. His foot caught a hidden trip wire, and he plunged to his face. A bell had clanged. The alarm was given, and Halsey cursed himself soundly.

Scraping himself to his feet, he backed away, and stalked to cover. Men were shouting excitedly, and footsteps began to thrash the undergrowth. A shot was fired from some one whose imagination was playing tricks.

Halsey forced a grin, and slipped back on a northeasterly tack. He moved on through the timber, scarcely cracking a twig. A small red buck snorted nearby, and went bounding deeper into a thicket. Halsey smiled.

Suddenly he brought himself to a sharp halt. He was at the edge of the forest. He caught a rumble beneath his feet. The ground vibrated, and then he was conscious of his presence above the very heart of von Reichter's tunnel plant. Quickly he oriented his position and photographed it clearly in his mind.

It was the sudden raucous roar of a couple of Mercedes engines which snapped him out of a fog of deep thought. He parted a clump of alders and peered out. Almost directly beneath him, running into the gaping maw of an underground hangar, he glimpsed two pursuit Fokkers.

HE waited a moment, then spotted a tall bent form in the uniform of a high German staff officer. Instinctively he knew that he was looking at the Baron von Reichter, the master killer to be. He crowded in closer, for the baron was joined by two swaggering pilots.

Then Halsey's grip tightened on his automatic. One of those pilots was the bogus Palmer—the suave nephew of von Reichter who had so cleverly fooled Durand, and Intelligence officers.

Halsey cocked up his head. Foul, forceful language was pouring from the mouth of the baron. He stamped up and down, flinging out his arms in the face of his nephew.

"But you blundered, right on the eve of success. You had your suspicions of this *Hauptmann* Halsey. Why didn't you put him out before you landed with the *Leutnant*—or Dalkin?"

"For the simple reason that Halsey was down here in the Devil's Forest at the time, Uncle. He is down here now, somewhere. I expect that the whole area is being searched. I—"

Franz von Reichter broke off as a slender officer dashed up. Halsey recognized the man as one of the wireless operators. In a flash the Yank skipper's mind formulated a plan.

That wireless depot would be empty now. He had location on this hell plant of von Reichter's. In this precious psychological moment he must get that information back to Durand, or Intelligence. He slipped away, practising the woods craft he had learned when a boy—and since—in the Maine woods where he had satisfied a passionate urge to hunt.

As he expected, the wireless station was vacant. He heard sounds from nearby, but this was his one big chance!

Easing his automatic in its holster, he crept in, and after a swift glance about him, he shoved in a switch. A drone filled the station. He had established power, at least. Seated at a small sending table, earphones adjusted, he began to hunt for Durand.

It seemed an age before he got any contact, and then he snarled a savage oath, as he made contact with some British searchlight men who persisted in wanting to hold him. The minutes were driving by. It seemed that his daring effort was to be in vain.

Beads of cold sweat stood out on his body. Every now and then, above the drone in the earphones he seemed to hear the clump of footsteps just

outside. Once he turned, his automatic leaping out to the ready, but there was no need to shoot.

Suddenly he caught a buzzed call. His brows jerked up. He was in contact with Intelligence Headquarters of his brigade. With trembling fingers he tapped out his valuable information.

"Have heaviest bombers mass in attack at—"

He broke off. His eyes were staring at a sheaf of operation orders. Here were the stand-by orders for von Reichter's big attack plans. Here they were, deciphered, ready for use by the Hun operators.

Quickly Halsey sorted them, and again he was transferring priceless information on location, nature of attack, and strength to American Intelligence Headquarters.

"May experience trouble getting out myself," he buzzed. "Do you get me clearly? Good. I may have trouble. My Spad located at approximately D 9—H 7—N—dry river bed—willows. I—"

"So. It's you, Captain Halsey!"

Halsey spun to face Franz von Reichter, whose face was livid with burning hatred. He could see that the young spy agent had him covered, and was in a mood to kill. The game seemed up, but Nim thrust from him any suggestion of despair. Instead, he forced a grin.

"Yeah—reckon you've got the drop on me, you two-timing swine," he snapped. "But you'll get only me, Palmer von Reichter. I've fixed things so that—" Halsey broke off. "Well, get it over quickly, but be sure your aim is good. Your hand is trembling now, von Reichter. Your nerve is leaving you. You'll miss as sure as sin. I can see it in your—"

Halsey leaped to one side as a Luger crashed. He reeled at the shock of a bullet in his left upper arm. He dived, coming up with his

automatic flaming. Franz von Reichter staggered back, but recovered. He ducked for cover behind a sending plate.

Halsey hurled himself forward, shooting as he plunged for the open. Again a slug from the spy's pistol staggered him, but he made the open doorway.

Voices sounded. Men were hurrying toward the station.

HALSEY'S blood was oozing from his frame. He thought of his ship, and made a move in that direction. But a better plan occurred to him. He parted a patch of willow scrub and sank down, figuring that the closer he was to this plant, the better chance he had of escape.

As he flattened on the leaf mould, his senses reeled. He jerked open a pocket in his leather, and fished out a small flask of cognac. He drained this at a gulp, then took out a jack-knife and some field dressing.

As the iodine phial broke over his bleeding arm wound, he winced and clutched at a small sapling. Then he bound up his wound tightly.

A second wound in his side he ignored. While it bled, it was of a minor nature, he was sure.

His head throbbed. Only in semi-consciousness did he hear the thresh of footsteps as a searching party combed the woods nearby. He slumped out cold, while the Baron von Reichter stormed and fumed at his henchmen in a blind fury, at the wireless station nearby.

It might have been the distant thunder of guns at twilight that awakened Nim Halsey, or it might have been some sixth instinctive sense. He blinked owlshly about him. A burning thirst assailed him, and his tongue seemed swollen. He felt his left arm which hung swollen and limp.

As he raised himself to a sitting

posture, he was forced to reach out and clutch for support. But his consciousness was quickly returning. He realized his position, and staggered to his feet. He reached his good hand down to his holster, and gasped as his fingers came away empty. His automatic must have fallen from his grasp.

Groaning in pain, he moved on, but he hadn't taken many paces before the immediate sector was shattered by the crash of anti-aircraft guns. In a flash the skies and earth seemed to thunder in a deafening inferno of sound. The crash of guns, the sweep of fiendish searchlights—and then Halsey caught the roar of planes topside.

HE started. Out of the fog in his brain there came clarity. Those monster droning motors he heard were the Eagle eights of Handley Pages, thundering over the badlands. A low chuckle escaped Nim. He had been responsible for this night of terror.

Halsey moved on—on toward the dry river bed. It was still light enough to get his bearings. Now and then he halted to clutch at some small sapling for support. Now and then he saved himself from a bad fall down some precipice by sheer instinct. But he kept on, until he glimpsed that monster Armada coming out of the northwest. His heart bounded.

Could those Allied ships make it? It didn't matter so much to Halsey now, whether he made his ship or not; he had lived to complete his assignment. The tunnel of death would soon be plugged, and von Reichter's gas mains burst, to flood and drown the fiendish baron in his own lethal essence.

As he neared his ship, Halsey was conscious of movement nearby. A search party still hunting for him. He tacked off, and slid down a

green bank for eighty feet. He quickened his pace, then suddenly dropped to a knee as a Mauser rifle crashed from a point up the dry river bed.

Halsey felt the whine of a bullet as it sped by. He struggled to his feet and lunged on, cursing himself for having lost track of his automatic.

Crack! Crack!

Two more German slugs zipped past his head. And then he went down to his knees. A slug had clipped his right leg just above the kneecap. Swamped with pain and nausea, he dragged himself to the ship where for a moment he hung in a daze; and then his mind suddenly cleared. A gasp of exultation escaped him. He lunged for the cockpit and his good hand came back clutching his .303 sport rifle.

Using the tip of the lower wing for a rest, he sighted up the river bed.

There was an answering snarl from his Savage at the touch on trigger. A German guard pitched to his face. Halsey found difficulty in pumping in a new cartridge, but he made it. Lead was flying his way, but he faced the fire and again pulled. He made a hit, and glimpsed a second German groveling for cover.

He was in the act of sighting on a third enemy, when the whole earth seemed to revolt above the thunderous explosion of a salvo of Allied bombs. Flame and debris spurted skyward. Another and another fearful explosion resounded like the crack of doom.

Nim drew back his smoking rifle and replaced it in the pit. He suddenly thought of the German he had trussed up. He required that man's services now. He would force him to start his motor. It was a happy thought. It was his one means of a getaway.

Later, in the cockpit, prop whir-

ring, Nim swung out his Savage rifle and swept the Hun back. A grin split the Yank's features as the guard went scuttling for cover. Then the Spad took the "bit between her teeth," and rocketed up the river bed.

Head overside, to catch the reviving thresh of the prop wash, Nim pulled his ship up into the sky—a sky blasted by a merciless bombardment of shrapnel and machine-gun fire. For a brief moment he watched the plunder of the Allied ships, and then, with a deep-chested sigh, he kicked around and painfully sent his ship into the west.

It was dawn before Halsey was allowed to see anyone back at Squadron 36. He lay pale and weary in a cot at the medical hut. His awakening this time, however, had been out of a sleep, and not out of a semi-coma. They had found him on the fringes of the tarmac, piled up in his wrecked ship, but he was conscious, swearing harshly at himself for having crashed.

NOW he looked up into the face of the squadron surgeon.

"Okay, Nim?" breathed the M. O.

"Yeah—I guess so—Doc. Sort of bleary, but I guess I'm all right." And then he started forward, his eyes staring. "Durand and the boys, Doc—how did they make out? Can I see the major now? I—what's wrong?"

"Sorry, Nim, but the major won't be seen any more on this earth; nor will five of our lads. They did a wonderful job over there at the Devil's Forest. Nim, everyone's talking about you. I've no doubt you'll be heavily decorated for your work on this job. Von Reichter's

whole works were blown to atoms. Son—you're in for a carload of praise. But there's an ambulance waiting to rush you to Boulogne now. I—when you come back to us you'll be—"

"Doc—I'm not coming back to you. I'm going back to Squadron 92. Somehow I never fitted in here. I—"

"You're coming back to us, Nim! The whole squadron, those left to us, have signed an application. We want you back here as C. O. As a matter of fact, it's all ready fixed—Major Halsey. Now pipe down, while I jab a needle into you. Shake, buddy, and luck to you."

"Doc—before I go, couldn't I just see the gang? I've called 'em sisters of grace, sissies, and what not. I'd like to apologize. After tonight's show—gosh! Never mind the gang. They'll be upset over our losses. But tell 'em—tell 'em we're going to get along swell together; an'—Doc, some time, when this is all over, I'd like you to come up to my hideout in the Maine woods. There's deer there as big as mules; not measly little red rabbits like those roaming the Devil's Forest. We'll—What's that roar, Doc? Is it—"

Captain Daniels, the surgeon, smiled faintly as he reached for Halsey's pulse. The skipper had slipped out into a claiming vale of unconsciousness.

The surgeon nodded to a stretcher party.

"Right, boys, take him away, and if you give him one jolt on the way to the coast, I'll—"

He broke off, to turn. His eyes were misted. He hadn't known Nim Halsey long, but long enough to know that they were pals for life.

NEXT MONTH: Meet Pilots of the Toughest Squadron on the Front in CLEAR THE SKIES, an Exciting Novelette of War-Air Thrills by GEORGE BRUCE!

My Most Thrilling Sky Fight

Actual true accounts of thrilling moments in the lives of famous War Aces told by the Aces themselves

Collected by ACE WILLIAMS

ONE AGAINST THREE

by Captain William Erwin

(American Flyer)

Foreword:

Captain William Erwin holds a unique record. He was the only accredited American observation ace, and piled up a string of 9 official victories while flying slow ungainly two-seaters. A Texan, William Erwin enlisted for training the day after war was declared. He received his commission as a Lieutenant after a bare forty hours of flight and was immediately sent overseas and assigned to the First Aero Squadron which he joined on its first day at the front. Before his first week he had downed an enemy plane and the French awarded him the *Croix de Guerre*. He was awarded additional recognition by the French and also received the American Distinguished Service Cross with Oak Leaves. Through the war safely, without ever having been wounded despite his rare courage and daring, he came to an untimely end while flying the Pacific in a futile search for the missing Dole flyers in 1928. Erwin, himself, recounted the following experience to the compiler of these records on a grey day in the Argonne many years ago.



Capt. William Erwin,
American Ace

I HAVE had plenty of tough moments, but the toughest time I ever had was that day we (Erwin and his observer) were sent out to regulate fire on a Hun '77 emplacement that was holding up the advance of the whole 26th Division. Orders came through from G. H. Q. that that emplacement *must* be destroyed. Our squadron got the order, and the C. O. passed the job on to us. "Three Spads from the 95th will be waiting over Somme-Sous to pick you up and furnish protection."

Well, we got over Somme-Sous all right. But instead of finding three Spads, we found a soupy sky chock full of wildly flying crates. The three Spads were all mixed up with about a dozen Fokkers, and I saw right away if we were going to regulate fire on that Hun target we would have to do it alone—without any protection.

I managed to duck the Huns in the soupy dripping sky and find the '77 emplacement. My observer reeled out his wireless antenna and got in contact with the battery. The first salvo came over—wide. Along with it came three Fokkers. I kept circling. The leader dived and sieved the turtleback behind me with a hot Spandau burst, then swept underneath and poked at my belly with snaky tracer. His mates up above were bent on making a mince-meat sandwich out of us. Bursts came from above and below.

Finally my observer got his corrections wirelessed to the battery and went to work with his Lewis on the top Huns. I split-haired and dived for the Fokker beneath.

The second salvo came over—still wide! I could hear a sharp oath from the observer, even above the clatter of his guns. With one hand holding the Lewis, he pounded out corrections with the other. The Spandau pellets rattled like hail through my wings and fuselage.

A quick turn and abrupt stall gave me a chance for a burst at the leader of the Huns, who had zoomed up above when one of the others dived below. I pressed the trigger-trip, saw my tracer eat up the fuselage and bore into the pilot's back. He maneuvered, cartwheeled into a cloud.

The battery meanwhile had got the range and the next salvo did plenty of damage, but a Hun coming head-on at me with both Spandaus flaming, took my mind off that matter. I replied in kind, without budging the stick, then closed my eyes waiting for the bullet with my name on it.

To my surprise, the other plane exploded in flames and went sliding down, leaving a black smoke trail behind. At the same moment a black shadow loomed above me. I glanced up, stick-handled my crate just in time to get out from underneath. The Fokker of the Hun leader was spinning erratically down. The pilot hung out of the cockpit, dead, held in the pit only by his safety belt. Whether he had died after taking that first burst of mine, or whether my observer had got him, I don't know. That left only one Fokker. He dallied for a little while, until the battery had completely destroyed the '77 emplacement, then turned tail and beat it for safety.

Next Month: LIEUTENANT SILVIO SCARONI

Learn to Fly

A Complete Course in Flying

By LIEUT. JAY D. BLAUFox

LESSON SEVEN: THE TAKE-OFF

H! **HO!** Hunkies! Now that you're out of the maze of inverted controls—for which I'll stake a steak you're grateful—we can turn our covetous eyes on the take-off. You know, I'll bet there's a little quiver around the region of your circulatory pump—heart, you Muggl!—as you sense that you are nearing your solo hop. Ain't It The Truth?

Well—you're only two steps away. This lesson is one of them. If you've watched me carefully when I've taken the ship off, you must have learned several things. The first and principal thing is that I ALWAYS TAKE OFF INTO THE WIND! You noticed ~~too~~ that before I jockeyed the stick to help the machine off the ground I had sufficient flying speed. What did I tell you happens if you try to take off before the machine tries to take herself off? You'll stall, pancake and crash. That's right. Boy! you're not so dumb.

Handling the Rudder

Getting a ship off the ground requires plenty skill in handling the rudder. That's why I gave you enough rudder handling

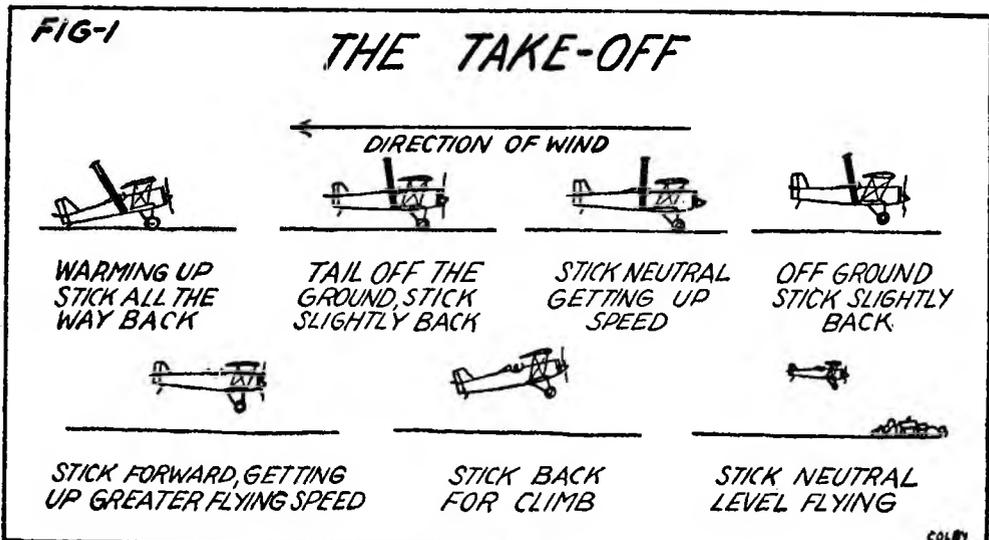
experience in straight flying and turns before I taught you to take off. No, Bozos! we're not doing things backwards in this here man's Flying Course. We like to think we know our stuff.

We're giving you the same training for practically nothing that the various governments spent \$25,000 on for each one of us who rode the fleecy, blood-spattered blue during the Big Show to get. But we're giving you modern improvements.

Crates Are Safe These Days

No lousy crates, which, if you just looked screwy at them—caught fire, or whose wings folded back and left you high and not so dry in a bare fuselage—yes, even before the merry Gerries got a crack at you. You're as safe in a modern airplane, as you would be in your Mother's arms. With certain considerations of course. So don't you worry about the order of things in this Flying Course.

Why did I give you so much rudder instruction so early? Well—when your machine runs along the ground in the take-off, there are slight wind currents, or un-



even ground spots which cause the machine to swerve somewhat to the right or left. You can't get off the ground safely with a ship that's careening all over the airport. If you want to make a clean getaway, you've got to fly as nearly perfectly straight as possible. So you're using the rudder from the moment you gun on for the leave, until the ship lifts off. And you keep using it until you're well in the air. Yes, and *from then on*.

Here's a little tip on the take off. Find an object well in the distance; a tree, a church or a house and fly on that as your marker. Hold on a minute! Before you start making notes, you over there sucking on your pencil, let me explain this marker business. Just because I said find an object to fly on, don't get me wrong.

Where to Point the Nose

Don't head for trees, buildings, or the hangars nearby. Get the object about a mile away from you. Never take off in the face of obstacles if you can help it. *Always fly between them*. Taking off is extremely easy. But don't make it dangerous by flying at objects. So before you start to roll—find some object on which to point the nose and take off straight by that.

Okay, now! We're ready for an imaginary hop. We give the signal for the Ack Emma to remove the chocks from the wheels. We'll assume that your engine is all hot and rarin'—or is it roarin'—to go. You keep the stick back all the way and the tail down so the slipstream from the prop won't get underneath and bowl you over on your nose. We start off now; give 'er the gun—but do it gradually—slowly—until she's wide open. Never give an engine the gun suddenly. It strains her vitals. And **NEVER TRY TO TAKE OFF WITH LESS THAN FULL THROTTLE**. After you're upstairs, you can cut it down to cruising speed.

Taking on Flying Speed

Now then—we've got the gun full on ready to take off. We're rolling down the field. Push the stick forward just enough to raise the tail off the ground and put the nose on a line with the horizon. When you've got her there, center the stick. The ship's taking on flying speed. Don't forget to use your rudder and fly straight. Don't let the ship swerve. Keep the nose right on your marker. Feel the ship becoming bouyant? She's trying to raise herself. Now is the time to jockey the stick back a bit and help her get off.

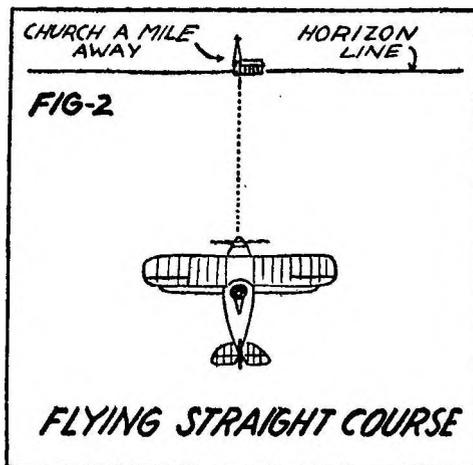
When she gets into the air about twenty to thirty feet, nose it down a bit to get up additional speed, ready for a climb. You know how you'd act in an automobile as you're coming to a hill. When you've got speed up, gently bring the stick back and climb—take the imaginary hill, in other words. But don't climb too long. Remember what I told you about stalling.

Drop the nose again and repeat the same thing, until you've gained part of the height you're striving for. Don't keep it up indefinitely until you've made the complete climb to the required altitude. Fly straight for a few minutes and ease up on the motor. Don't strain it.

Overcontrolling Again

Incidentally, fellows, you'd better let me cut back a minute to the rudder again. I thought of something Gosh Darn important you've all got to remember. I said something about the swerve on taking off. You know, swerving isn't always caused by wind currents and bad ground. It is very often your own fault. Over-controlling comes in here again. In trying to get into flying position with the gun on, you're sometimes inclined to overanxiety resulting in over-ruddering.

If you kick on too much rudder in one direction, you might over-rudder to get around again. That's bad business! Very bad! So be warned not to use the rudder too much in taking off. Another thing, in



giving it the gun, you may unconsciously kick on too much rudder on the side where the throttle control is located.

Keep on Going!

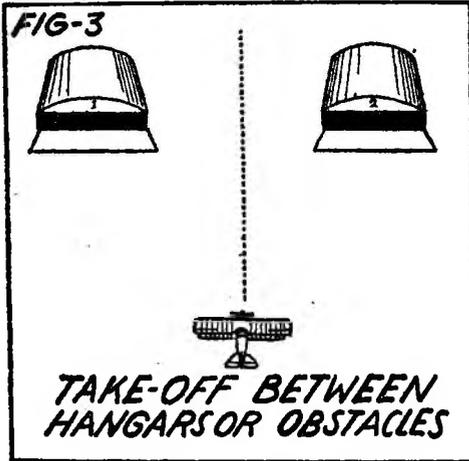
The thing to do in this case, if you're swerving too much, is to cut the gun down and try the take off all over again. **BUT**—if you're in the air, or partly off the ground, **KEEP ON GOING!** and let this burn into your brain, Hunkies!—**NEVER TURN BACK!** Never turn back when you're **IN THE AIR!** I'll explain why in a future lesson. This is too important just to skip over lightly.

What did you say about the instruments? No, you don't pay any attention to them or *anything inside the cockpit!* You've got all you can do to keep your eyes fixed on your marker outside, and keep your attention focused on taking off. And—

Always keep your eyes on the horizon line and see that the nose of the ship is not heading for your girl friend's barn door to bang-up results! After you're well in the air, if you want to watch your speed indicator to tell you when you want to

three or four hundred feet up then make your turn. *And keep the nose on the horizon when you do!*

If you haven't enough speed to get around, nose down a little—yes, even in the left turn—then pull her up and swing 'round. But you do this only if you haven't enough speed to make the turn. Here's another safety measure. **SPEED IN THE AIR ALWAYS MAKES FOR SAFETY!**



pull back for the climb, that's okay! But forget you've got instruments until you're about two thousand feet over your uncle's plough. After that, you can look over anything you want to inside or outside the cockpit.

Your Pet Ideas

You may have a couple of pet ideas about flying that suddenly socked you inside the skull just between your eyes while I was talking. You may feel like trying them out when you've reached a spot well upstairs. That's okay! But wait till you've had about two or three hundred solo hours before you do them. It's safer!

Notice I harp a lot on safety? That's because experience has taught me that it's wiser to be safe—than sorry. And I've seen a lot of sorry Sparrows in my time—and my time isn't over yet by a long shot! If you must experiment, however, *don't* under ten or fifteen thousand feet. Give yourself plenty of room. You may need it. But let all that come later. Just keep your mind on what we're doing now—nothing else.

When Not to Turn

When you get off, you will of course keep going until you've passed the air field—that is, over the edge of it. When you've reached that spot, you will have to make a turn, to go 'round the field. And that's where what I've taught you about turns will come in handy. But here's one important thing you **MUST** remember, if I haven't already mentioned it—**DON'T TURN WHILE YOU'RE TOO NEAR THE GROUND!** Wait until you're about

Use Your Judgment!

You know, Judgment comes into play here in a hot and heavy measure, mister! If you ever had any, now is the time to display it—in the take-off! You'll need a lot more on landing a ship—but we're talking about take-offs now. When we come to that part of the Course, we'll discuss it then; judgment in taking off, judgment in turning. It shouldn't be necessary for me to mention the fact that your turns on the take-off should be gentle ones. I don't care how well you do a steep turn, until you've had plenty of experience in the take-off, just stick to the moderate turns. After you've had several hours solo, you can try the more ticklish ones if you feel absolutely confident about them.

Now let's make a sort of outline on what I've been telling you about the take-off. First: be careful in starting down the field; get your marker, your object to fly straight on well in the distance. Don't over-rudder. Give your engine the gas gradually to full open throttle. Raise the tail by pushing the stick gently forward and stick the nose of the ship on the horizon headed for the marker. When the ship starts to feel bouyant, jockey the stick carefully back to help the ship off the ground. When it is well off the ground, past the field and high enough, make a gentle turn and go round.

Avoid Collision!

Here's something else to think about while taking off; **LOOK OUT FOR OTHER MACHINES IN THE AIR, ON THE GROUND, AND GLIDING IN FOR A LANDING!** The fellow gliding in to land has the right of way. *Wait before you take off until he is down and out of the way.* It's never what you do; the other guy is always the chump, so be careful. A collision is something to avoid as you would the smallpox. And you can avoid it by **ALWAYS USING YOUR HEAD!**

One of you hungry-looking birds get a parachute and I'll take you out for some take-offs!

Will you look at the starving Armenians? I said **ONE** hungry-looking guy—not the pack of you!

Okay, you! Let's hop! The rest of you go fish in the lake until we come down!

Or better still—go over notes you made while I was talking.

You probably need to.

Errant Flight



Great tongues of
flame leaped into
the sky

*Washed Up, the Instructors Said He Was, Because Garner
Couldn't Land a Spad—and Then Fate Gave Him
Something Worth While to Play With*

By F. E. RECHNITZER

Author of "The Sky Hawk," "Spandau Snare," etc.

HE sat in the shade of a hut at the pilots' pool in St. Omer, a fledgling, staring off into space with dreamy eyes. Far off in the east, where the blue dome of the heavens met the hot earth, he saw visions. Day dreams, in which he was the central character, slipped across the screen of his mind.

He saw a grey Spad flashing across the cloud-flecked heavens, tearing and slashing at black-crossed ships with fangs of smoking lead, twisting and turning, tearing through Hun formations with the skill of a veteran.

A slow frown crept across his weathered cheeks, twisting round

freckles into odd shapes. His lips curled from his even white teeth, as the vision of a burning Fokker registered, with the aid of a keen imagination, on his fertile mind. A sigh welled from his broad chest, as he visioned his fifth victory grinding into the blood-soaked earth in the arena of war.

"That's the one that would have made me an ace," he growled. "I was gonna tear 'em to bits when I got assigned to an outfit." A frown crossed his face. "This waiting around gets my goat. If they are gonna send me home, why don't they get it over with? Everybody's laughing at me behind my back—I'm a washout."

Suddenly he jerked erect on the hard wooden bench. His head, with its touseled crop of reddish hair, was cocked to one side. A look of anticipation flickered across his face.

Once again the call came loud and clear down the dusty path between the huts.

LIEUTENANT P. T. GARNER
—Lieutenant P. T. Garner."

Garner leaped to his feet and turned toward the direction from which the hail came.

"Sounds as if I'm being paged," he muttered, a bit dreamily.

"Lieutenant Garner—Lieutenant P. T. Garner." The cry came from in back of the huts.

"Right over here, in section three!" Garner yelled, now fully awake, with day dreams swept from his mind.

He saw a stubble-faced orderly come around the corner of the far hut and stand looking up and down the lane.

"Here you are, orderly," said Garner apprehensively. "Looking for me?"

"You Lieutenant P. T. Garner?" the little orderly stood in front of the six-footer, fiddling with a slip of yellow paper.

"That's me," snapped Garner, eyeing the paper in the orderly's hand with suspicion. "What is it, a letter?"

"No, sir," answered the orderly. "It's an order. The car is waiting for you."

Garner snatched the paper from the surprised orderly's fist.

"Let me see that," he growled. "Bet it's telling me what boat I'm going home on."

He tore the message open and read the typewritten words. A grin spread across his face.

"Listen, orderly," he laughed, grabbing the little man by the shoulders. "It says that they are assigning me to Squadron 18. Gonna give me another chance. I'm getting a break."

The orderly tried to smile.

"I don't understand, sir."

"Neither do I," laughed Garner, waving the slip, "but here she is. You know, they were washing me out—said I couldn't fly Spads—set them down too heavy. Wouldn't give me the fourth shot to show that I could set one down without crashing it. Said I'd cost them too much already."

"Well, I'm glad," grinned the orderly, trying to shake himself loose from the bear hug which Garner had clamped down on him.

"Boy," shouted Garner, "they're sending me to the front! Maybe it's only as an observer or machine-gunner—but I'm gonna see action!"

The orderly slipped from the American's grasp and stepped back, still a bit puzzled over the crazy actions of this pilot who had been moping around the pool for the past three days.

Garner swung away and started for his hut.

"I'll get my kit together right away," he shouted. "An' I thought I was gonna be shipped back home to sell Liberty Bonds." He paused and turned to the orderly, who stood

scratching his head. "Where is this 18 Squadron?"

The orderly shrugged his shoulders.

"All I know is that it's a British outfit. They use American pilots, you know. Sort of break them in and send them down to newly organized American squadrons."

"A British outfit," gasped Garner. Then he smiled. "Oh, well, I'll see some action, anyway. Maybe I can be transferred after a while. I got another chance—that's all I wanted. I'd even fly with the Portuguese. Action's what I crave."

PRESENTLY a tender, with P. T. Garner riding a bunch of mess stores in the back, rattled over the cobbled road leading out to the flying field where 18 had its nest amongst the sand dunes.

Brakes sent their shrill cry out into the gathering dusk as the car came to a grinding halt.

"Here we are, sir." The driver was reaching into the depths of the car for Garner's kit bag. "Better hop in an' see the Old Man right away. He's all in a lather, and it's because you're so late."

Garner crawled out of the car, straightened his cap and turned to the driver.

"All worked up because I'm late, did you say?" He touched a match to his cigarette. "I just got my orders this afternoon. Came right out with you. Don't see that he's got anything to get burned up about."

A queer smile crossed the driver's face.

"I only know that he's very angry, sir. Expectin' you since this mornin'. Better report to him right away. Office is over there." He jerked his thumb toward a shadowy building, where a ribbon of light was crawling out into the gathering darkness from under a door.

Hunching his shoulders, Garner

walked briskly up the path and tapped at the door.

"Come in!" a voice bellowed from the other side.

The American smiled and pushed the door open and stepped into the lighted room.

"Lieutenant Garner reporting for duty, sir."

His heels clicked and his brown hand flashed to his visor in a snappy salute. He knew that the English were sticklers for that little formality.

"So you finally managed to get here?" The C. O.'s voice was scathing as his eyes bored into those of the man standing in the doorway. "Shut the door! Can't you see that the light is streaming out across the airdrome?"

"Sorry, Major," said Garner soberly, as he pressed the door to behind him. "And about being late—"

"Silence," roared the C. O. "And another thing. When you address me, be so kind as to call me Major Larkins."

The major fooled around with a batch of papers on his desk a moment and then looked up at Garner, who still stood at attention, more than a little puzzled over his reception.

"So you are Garner," growled the major. "The wonder pilot. Why this Major Crawford couldn't handle the likes of you I can't understand. I thought by the time a man got to be a major in the American army, he understood a little bit about discipline."

"But Major Crawford is—" interrupted Garner.

"Silence!" bellowed Major Larkins. "Speak when you are spoken to. You're not fooling around with this Major Crawford now. You'll find that you can't get the last word in with me; I'll teach you what real discipline is. Pretty turn of affairs when a man has to allow another

officer to drum something into the heads of you young upstarts."

"But, Major Lar—" Garner tried to speak again.

The C. O.'s hard fist crashed to the littered desk. The pen rack trembled and the ink bottle jumped as if frightened.

"Not a word out of you. I'm giving you your orders, and whether you like it or not you're going to obey them to the letter. You're not here to give me advice on how to run my squadron. I'll break you of that habit. You'll learn to keep your mouth closed around here."

The grizzled old officer paused and wiped his mouth with a big khaki silk handkerchief.

"Trouble with this war," he blustered, "they give young whipper-snappers like you a pair of tin wings and you think that you are tin gods."

Garner's mouth opened and clicked shut under the threatening glare of the major's steely grey eyes.

"I want to tell you, Lieutenant Garner, that it is a fortunate thing for you that you got here in time—even if I wasn't anxious to have you as a member of my squadron." The major stuffed some papers into a drawer and swung around to face Garner again. "If I had my way, I'd ground you for a month. That's what you need. But I'm short of pilots just now."

"On the ground?" gasped Garner in surprise. "Then you mean I'm going to fly again. Why, I thought—"

"Did I ask you what you thought?" blasted the C.O., jumping to his feet. "I just informed you a moment ago that I would give you orders when to speak." He stepped closer to the perplexed American and stood glaring into his eyes. "Now, young man," he continued, "let me tell you for the last time that if you open that mouth of yours just once before you take off, I'll court-martial you

the minute you set your ship back on the ground. Then you'll be through for the rest of the war. You'll be sent back to the United States, where you belong. Just try it, and see if Major Larkins isn't a man of his word."

The red-faced major walked back to his chair and slumped down behind his desk, where he sat and stared at Garner for a full minute before he spoke again.

"Sit down, Lieutenant Garner," he finally growled as he pointed to a chair. "And remember, I'll do the talking. And if you know what's good for you, you won't bother giving me any advice about how to run this show."

The young American pilot sat down, sorely puzzled over this reception. For a moment the two men sat in silence, and then C. O. spoke up.

"Lieutenant Garner, you've been absent without leave for two days and a half." The major picked up a paper, and before Garner could shake off his surprise, continued: "I am informed that you were assigned to my squadron three days ago. Where you've been in the meantime the Lord only knows. I'm going to overlook that, being's you got here in time for the biggest and most important show we've ever put on. If you'd been another day late, I'd have broken you."

GARNER'S lips began to form words, but those steely eyes on the other side of the desk seemed to paralyze his vocal cords. Not a sound came out of his mouth.

"Now," said the major, picking up a slip of paper, "here are the preliminary plans for tonight's show. Five ships are to stand on the alert. They're on the line now, tuned up, loaded with bombs, ready to go. Their pilots and observers are to remain in their huts until Q hour, which is some time tonight. They've

done that to eliminate any chance of a leak about the show. The bombs are to be five hundred pounders."

Garner half arose from his chair, stifled an exclamation, but settled back without saying a word, as the major turned the slip of paper over on his desk.

"The remaining racks are to be filled with sixty-pound fragmentation bombs and incendiary stuff. Q hour will be given to me by phone. You will get sealed orders from me just before the take-off. You will open yours when you reach a five thousand foot altitude. You and the other pilots will follow out those orders."

The C. O. picked up five envelopes with great red seals, shuffled them a moment and then reached over and put them in the safe standing by the side of the desk.

"Wing certainly is making a big secret of this show," he added.

"Then I'm to—"

Garner could contain himself no longer. He started to his feet, but the major held up his hand and waved him back again.

"I think I gave you your orders about speaking a minute or two ago. They still stand. "There was menace in both the hard eyes and the stern face of the burly C. O. "Don't forget, I'm not Major Crawford. I mean what I say. I refuse to be run ragged by your everlasting gab."

The major turned to the orderly who had just come into the office. "Take Lieutenant Garner to his hut and see that he gets something to eat," he ordered.

The orderly saluted and motioned the more than puzzled Garner toward the door.

"That guy's either mad, or I'm crazy," he muttered under his breath as he followed the orderly out into the night.

Q hour had come. Garland was walking down the path leading to the flying field. Already he could

hear the thrum of powerful motors coming from the line.

"More than five ships there," he growled, as he stepped around the corner of the hangar.

He stopped short at the sight of five great, towering Handley Pages, which loomed ahead of him in the darkness. Before he could even say anything to himself a figure had stepped to his side.

"Late as usual," was the sarcastic greeting of the major. "Get into your ship at once. Number six over there—the one at the end of the line."

BUT, Major, I—" Garner tried to speak.

"I'll appreciate it very much if you'll keep quiet, Lieutenant," snarled the major. "I've just about reached the limit of my patience with you. Your job is to fly number six tonight and not to tell me how to run this squadron. Now get into your ship. You only have a few minutes left."

The American turned from this Britisher, whom he had learned to hate in the few short hours he had been on the tarmac.

"I'll crack it up for him and then maybe he'll learn his lesson and give a fellow a chance to open his trap," he vowed. "He'll be on the wrong side of that court-martial he was talking about."

Garner squared his shoulders and walked under the towering wings. He swung on a figure at his side.

"How do you get into one of these crates?" he husked.

The man in the shadows laughed softly and pointed toward the fuselage.

"Ladder under there, sir. Lieutenant Potter, your bombing officer, is up in the cockpit. I'm one of your gunners. Corporal Lacey, here, works the guns in the rear office.

Garner growled and turned away.

As he did, the two gunners laughed.

"I've heard how he's always trying his bloomin' funny work. Always tryin' to make out he doesn't know how to fly. Scares a new man half to death with his foolishness. But they say he's one of the best."

"When he's sober," muttered Corporal Lacey. "Looks steady enough tonight. Come along—about time to shove off."

GARNER found the ladder leading into the ship. Up ahead of him he could see the dim glow of the instrument lights and made his way along the catwalk. He entered the pilot's cockpit and stood breathing the cool night air.

A solitary figure sat hunched over a map in the roomy cockpit. The officer looked up as Garner stepped through the door.

"Hello, there," he said. "I'm Potter, bombing an' all that."

"H'are ya?" growled Garner, without holding out his hand. "I'm your pilot—if I can get this crate off the ground. Get those sealed orders the Old Man was talking about?"

"Get them later," replied Potter, giving his pilot a keen look as he settled into the seat.

For a moment Garner sat behind the Dep control, staring first at the instrument board and then at the two throbbing motors on each side of the cockpit. His hands dropped to the wheel; he pushed it forward gingerly and then pulled it back, as his feet touched the rudder.

"I flew a Jenny with a wheel like this, once," he finally said, leaning closer to Potter.

"No use trying to spoof me, old man," Potter laughed. "I've heard all about you. I've heard about how you can throw one of these busses around." He turned back to his maps.

"Crazier than loons, the lot of them," Garner muttered.

He slumped lower in the cockpit and watched the gunner crawl to his place in the front of the ship. His eyes dropped to the instruments again, and then landed on a group of knobs marked "Throttle." He grasped one of them and moved it forward. The port motor increased its beat. He pulled it back and tried the other one. The quiver of the starboard wing increased slightly as the throttle moved up the quadrant.

He watched his bombing officer out of the corner of his eye while he fiddled with the throttles, but Potter was busy studying the map on his lap.

A shout sounded from somewhere below, and Potter stood up and reached over the side as the motors of the first ship on the line broke into a rhythmic roar. He dropped back to his place again, clutching one of the envelopes Garner had seen in Major Larkins' fist. He glanced at the slip of paper pinned to the corner of the envelope.

"We take off last," the little bombing officer shouted, as he tore open the sealed order.

Garner nodded and then discovered that his heart was throbbing, struggling as if it were bound to keep time with the pulsating motors.

One by one, the big Handleys lumbered away from the line, rolled across the darkened tarmac and bounced slowly into the air.

"We're next," grinned Potter.

But the American was sober-faced as he leaned over the side and watched the men yanking the big chocks away from the wheels.

"All clear," he heard some one below him shout.

His muscles tensed and then quivered as he eased the throttles along the quadrant. The motors on each side of him sputtered a moment as the gas poured into the cylinders, and then took up their deep-throated song.

Garner's lower lip slid between his teeth as the big crate began to move. The tendons in his legs tightened and the muscles quivered as he pressed his insteps hard against the rudder. His hands ached on the wheel of the Dep control as the trucks began to rattle across the dewy sod. His arms pressed tight against his sides, holding the wheel in neutral position.

And before he realized it the big bomber was in the air. The quivering needle on the dial of the altimeter left its post and began to travel upward. Garner held the head of the man in the forward gun position slightly above the horizon and waited with bated breath for the shimmering needle to hit the five-thousand-foot mark.

Three, four and then five thousand feet slid under the trucks. He saw Potter tear open the envelope, read the order and then try to hand it to Garner. But the American refused to let go of the wheel.

"You read it to me," he said. "Just tell me where we are going."

"Wittmundhaven—to bomb the new Zep sheds," shouted Potter.

Garner was about to ask him where Wittmundhaven was, when Potter leaned closer, held the map under the tiny light and pointed to a blue circle he had just marked. The pilot nodded, as if he understood perfectly, but made sure that he kept the tail light of one of the other Hand-levs in sight.

Bit by bit, Garner became accustomed to the controls of the big ship. He found it fairly easy to handle in straight flight. Now and then he tried a gentle turn, to familiarize himself with the ailerons. Some of the turns bordered on skids, and took no little effort on Garner's part to straighten out again. But no matter how clumsy his efforts seemed, Potter only sat back in his seat and smiled.

Suddenly the tail light which he had been following was blotted out. A few seconds later, Garner found himself staring into an enveloping wall of clinging grey mist. His hand dropped to the throttles. He felt the nose of the ship drop as he pushed the wheel away from him.

"Going to be a low ceiling," shouted Potter. "Just your type of weather," he added confidently.

"My type of weather," moaned Garner. "Boy, if they only knew!"

Presently the ship dropped away from the bank of wet stuff, and Garner found himself in the open with the right-hand wing low. A turn to the left of the Dep control and the wing tip came up, and as they hit an even keel, a sigh of relief slipped from his chest.

The needle on the altimeter now said two thousand, and just over the wings the thick blanket of blinding mist still scudded along, splitting now and then as a cluster of searching Archie smashed into the night.

"See any of the other ships?" inquired Garner, searching the skies anxiously for a guiding tail light.

Potter shook his head and grinned. And now that self-satisfied smile was beginning to get the American's goat.

"He'll drop that grin when I try to set down," he growled, and then straightened in his seat as Potter pointed frantically ahead.

"THERE'S our objective!" the officer shouted, trying to make himself heard above the roar of the motors and the incessant crackling of the anti-aircraft shells which were beginning to sprinkle the low-hanging clouds with whining steel. "See the sheds?"

Garner nodded and braced himself against the controls, his heart beating at a merry clip under his flying suit.

Following the signals of his companion, he eased the lumbering ship in toward the long row of buildings

which showed up like faint blurs against the ground. A searchlight knifed the blackness, wavering to the right and left until it caught the big ship in its grasp. He shielded his eyes, as he saw Potter doing, and watched the bomber give the signal which sent a giant egg hurtling through the air.

Beyond the huge field, where Zeppelins were berthed, poised to float over the channel to England with a load of death and destruction, Garner made a wide, skidding turn. He felt Potter slap him on the shoulder and looked to where the excited bombing officer was pointing.

A great red glare was added to the light shed by the withering fire streaking heavenward from the guns of the defenders. Garner smiled, for the first time since he had taken off, as he watched great tongues of flame leap into the sky. Their first bomb had found its mark.

"THERE'S a Zep in that one!" screamed Potter, bending close to Garner. "See how the hydrogen is flaring up."

"But where are the other ships?" Garner yelled anxiously. "We seem to be alone."

Potter didn't hear him. He was leaning over the bomb sight preparing to give the signal to the man inside at the toggles. A few desultory bursts of Archie smacked around them, during the lull in the storm of flaming steel, as Garner kicked his rudder gently under the guidance of Potter's left hand. The hand jerked downward, and the ship lurched a trifle as the second big steel bomb slid out of its rack.

The bombing officer straightened with a smile.

"Think we got the corner of the end hangar that shot!" he yelled. "If it catches fire the wind will fan the flames along the whole row."

While Potter was yelling and wav-

ing him back for another go at the line of hangars with their sixty-pounders, Garner was scanning the murky skies above for the other ships. Since they had gone into the cloud he had not seen a single one of the ships which had taken to the air just ahead of him.

The bombing officer was busy with his sights, and presently five bombs whistled toward the conflagration, to add their bit to the show. The pilot saw the new glow added to the already burning building. Hot gusts of air leaped into the night as gas cells let go in the shattered Zeps.

"We're cleaning them up! They're finished with their flying ships from that field," Potter yelled as he held his hand poised, ready to signal for the dropping of the last of their load.

Garner started to make a gentle left turn, but threw the wheel to the right instead on seeing the gunner in the forward pit struggling to bring his guns to bear over the top wing. Already tracer were snickering through the darkness, streaking between the wings.

Queer looking growths of spruce appeared on the riddled struts, and long gashes in the fabric along the fuselage allowed tattered bits of linen to waver back in the slipstream. He held the wheel against his chest, forgetting for the moment that he wasn't flying a single-seater, and went into a tight turn.

The acrid smoke from the front gunpit was drifting back and biting into his quivering nostrils. The fabric along the lower left wing was puckering as slugs sprayed across it.

Straightening out of the turn to allow his gunner a clean shot at the unseen enemy ship, Garner cut in low over the burning hangars. The big ship rocked and tossed in the eddying air, as great plumes of smoke sought to engulf him.

As he flattened out low over the

field, he saw Potter flinch and reach for his arm, where a dark spot was already beginning to spread across the khaki flying suit.

A cluster of smoking slugs ate their way along the leading edge and jumped into the cockpit, crashing against the instrument board. Garner kicked on the rudder, cursing against this mad flyer who clung to his shadows.

Potter reached over and snapped out the lights on the dash, and the American kicked his rudder first one way and then the other in a frantic effort to shake off their pursuer.

Ahead of him, he caught a glimpse of a pair of unfinished wireless masts, towering behind a billowing wave of smoke. Gritting his teeth, his feet steady on the rudder, his hands clutching the wheel, all nervousness a thing of the past, Garner hurled his ship into the heaving mass of smoke. That fleeting glimpse of the masts, through a rift in the smoke, had given him a wild, desperate idea.

He flew on, straight through the stinking, lung-searing mass of faintly glowing smoke. He came out on the other side. His lips a thin straight line across his determined face, he watched the forward gunner crumple, grab for the Scarff mounting and then slide out of sight, as a mass of fiery sparks buried themselves in his body.

Garner's foot hit the rudder. The ship seemed to halt in mid-air as it careened to the left. His right wing tip appeared to graze the top of the mast, and for a moment his heart stood still. He was sure he had felt the wheel jerk in his hand.

Then the smoke eddied in on him again, curling in great hot tongues through his wings, making him gasp for breath.

Leaning far over the side in an effort to spot the Hun, he saw Potter frantically signaling with his good

arm and pointing toward the ground. A laugh escaped his tensed lips as he, too, saw the thing at which Potter was pointing with a bloodstained hand.

THERE, one wing a crumpled wreck, twisting until it finally smashed into the ground at the base of the wireless mast, was a Fokker. Already it was adding its feeble bit to the mounting fire.

"Clicked its wing against the mast!" shouted Potter.

Garner laughed and laid the ship over on its left wing, just in time to let a slithering burst of tracer waver past from a gunpit on the ground.

One-pounders and then flaming onions whimpered by.

Another split-S turn, and they were weaving around the end of the bending column of smoke. Potter, pale-faced but still smiling, leaned closer.

"What do you think you're flying, Yank, a ruddy Spad?" he shouted.

Garner had no time to answer. It was taking every bit of his skill with the strange ship to weave it in and out of the fountains of tracer which snaked their way up from the shadows.

Then something plucked at his shoulder. He looked down and saw the torn cloth, where a slug had cut its way through. Another hole appeared a bit lower on his Sidcot suit, and a searing pain took hold of his body. Something warm and sticky was trickling across his chest.

He looked across the cockpit and paled. Potter was gone. But the next minute he felt better as the gritty little Englishman came back through the opening which led to the rear.

"Lacey is gone; got a burst right through the head!" the bomber shouted, and Garner noticed that his voice was weaker. "We've got to get

back fast. Head for that bank of mist.

Garner swung his ship around, gritting his teeth as every effort sent burning needles of agony through his body. He looked across at Potter, who sat leaning against the side of the cockpit.

"Hold out until we get back?" he called.

Potter lifted his head. His right hand was stained with crimson where it clutched his left arm. Another blotch showed just at the edge of his collar. He smiled faintly and leaned closer to Garner.

"If you fly a nice straight course, I can. Try any more of your weird maneuvers, and the ship will go to pieces—I will, too."

Garner gritted his teeth and tried to find a position which would ease the strain on his drilled shoulder. Under him the dark land was beginning to disappear as wisps of mist curled under his trucks. He reached for the switch and snapped on the dash light. Only his compass and tachometer were left untouched. He set his course. Bracing himself in the blood-soaked cockpit, he flew on toward the west.

At last he swung under the ceiling and found himself in sight of a group of petrol tins set out in the shape of an L, all of them flickering as the soaked waste burned. He banked carefully over the edge of the field, yanked the throttle back and waited for the crate to settle on the sod.

It seemed to drift forever in the night air, and for one frantic moment he thought he was going to overshoot his mark. But the four-wheeled trucks hit the ground just over the short leg of the L. The Handley bounced awkwardly, just once, then rattled across the hard tarmac and came to rest with the left wing crushed slightly against the recording office.

Then everything went black.

A few moments later he found himself lying on a stretcher in one of the hangars. At his side, and raving deliriously about wild flying, lay Potter. Over in the corner he could see two more stretchers, each covered by a blanket. The M. O. was fussing over him, giving him a shot of anti-tetanus.

"Can I speak to him now, Doc?" somebody in the shadows kept asking. "I've been through hell since you took off, lad."

Garner looked up and saw the C. O. bending over him. A kinder-faced C. O. than the one he had left on the field.

"I've been through a little hell myself, Major—I mean Major Larkins," said Garner, with a crooked smile playing across his blood-flecked face.

"I can see that, son," husked the major, "but I'm still a bit foggy about the whole thing. Lieutenant Garner appeared on the scene just a few minutes after you took off. He was dead drunk. Thought sure you were a spy."

"**B**UT I'm Lieutenant Garner," muttered the American. "Look in my pocket, and see my papers." He tried to struggle up on one elbow, but the M. O. held him back.

"Take it easy, son," smiled the C. O. "Somebody's blundered. Now, did you say that your name was Lieutenant Garner?"

"Lieutenant P. T. Garner is the name, an' I can lick any man that says it isn't. Lieutenant Patrick T. Garner."

"Patrick!" exploded the major. "That clears everything. "This other fellow's name is Paul. If I'd let you talk when you wanted to, I would have caught the mistake—but I'd heard a lot about this fellow Paul Garner. Ruddy gabber. He's under arrest now."

"So that's what it's all about?"

grinned Garner. Then his face clouded. "So I haven't been transferred here at all. All a mistake. Be sent back home on the next boat."

"Not if I can help it," chuckled the major. "I need a man like you in the outfit. You're the only one that got through. The rest got lost—been setting down all over France—two crackups. You're due for a ribbon and a promotion."

Garner lay silent for a while and then turned to the major:

"Wish the birds at training school could hear you say that," he said. "Instructors wouldn't let me have another chance at landing a Spad."

"Did you say Spad?" asked the major, bending closer.

"Sure, I tried to tell you that I never flew a Handley Page before in my life. Nearest I ever got to one was a picture they had in training school. Say, Major, when I get out

of the hospital, could I get a chance to put in a little time on these folding-wing crates, and come back here? I'll promise I won't talk too much."

POTTER leaned across the space between the two stretchers.

"Anybody that can toss a Handley around like you did tonight, Yank, doesn't need any more time." The bombing officer paused and looked up at the C. O. "Just before we hopped off he told me that he's flown something they call a Jenny with a Dep control. That would count as Handley-Page time, wouldn't it, Major?"

Garner and the major were still laughing when the two wounded men were put into the ambulance, and it was a long time before Potter found out from the American just how much a Jenny resembled a Handley-Page.

PARACHUTE JUMPER'S PUZZLE

Throw your duffle in the corners and take a seat on the floor, or the parachute folding table, or up on the ridgepole, or somewhere, and lend me your ears. This month we have with us a collection of nine drawings.

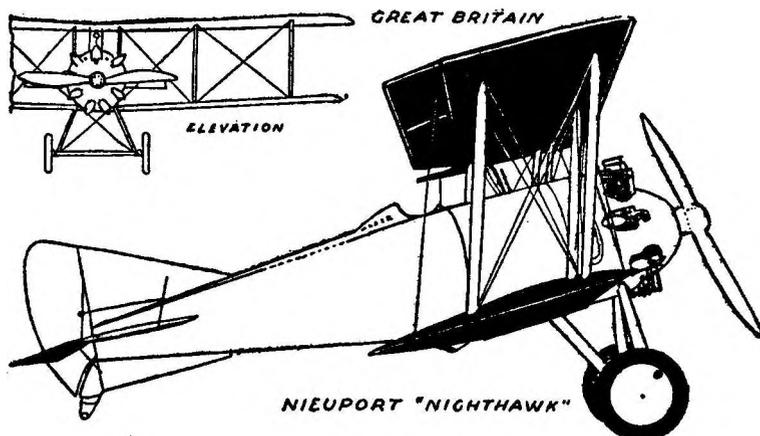
Represented in picture form are the names of three famous war-time ships. The three pictures, in row number one, reading from left to right, represent the name of a famous French ship. The second row, number two, reading from left to right, represents the name of a famous British ship while the last row, number three, reading the same as the other two rows, represents the name of a famous German ship.

Just a hint on that first animal in the upper left corner. You'll find it in the dictionary under the letter "G." You will also find it in the Zoo under a tree, providing it's a hot day. If you get stuck on these, take a look on page 124 where you will find the solution to this puzzle. Good luck and happy landings!



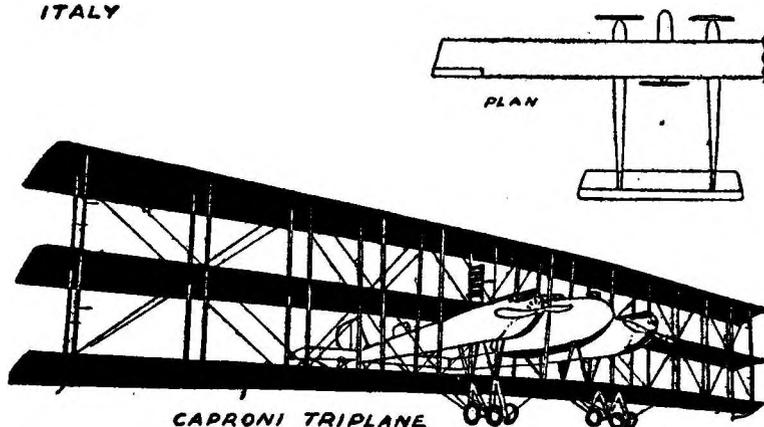
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LIBRARY OF



The Nieuport "Nighthawk" was made by the British Nieuport & General Aircraft Co., Inc. The R.A.F. decided to concentrate on a limited number of types of planes to finish the war. The "Nighthawk" was chosen as the single-seater fighter to be produced. It resembled the Sop "Snipe" in appearance but it used the same fittings as the S.E. 5 because they were easily procured for quantity production. A 320 h.p. A.B.C. "Dragonfly" engine was fitted. Dimensions: Span 28 ft.; length 18 ft. 6 in.; height 9 ft. 6 in.

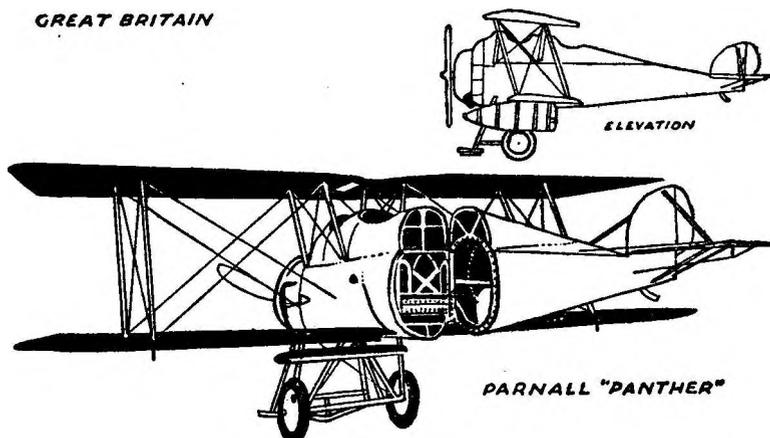
ITALY



The Caproni Triplane was manufactured by the Societa Per Lo Sviluppo Dell'Aviazione in Italia. Gianni Caproni was always an advocate of huge planes and his successful designs for them, employing the principle of cellular construction, guaranteed the rigidity of the large span. These large bombers had three engines—two tractors in front and two fuselages and a pusher in back of the pilot's center nacelle. It used either Fiat or Isotta-Fraschini motors. Dimensions: Span 101 ft.; length approximately 44 ft.

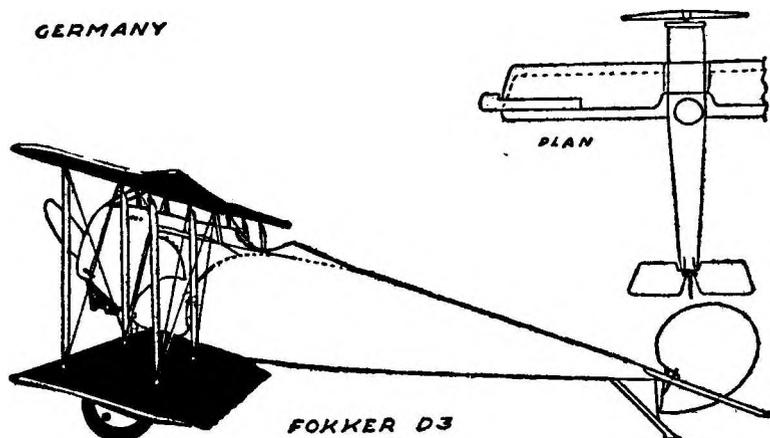
WAR PLANES

GREAT BRITAIN



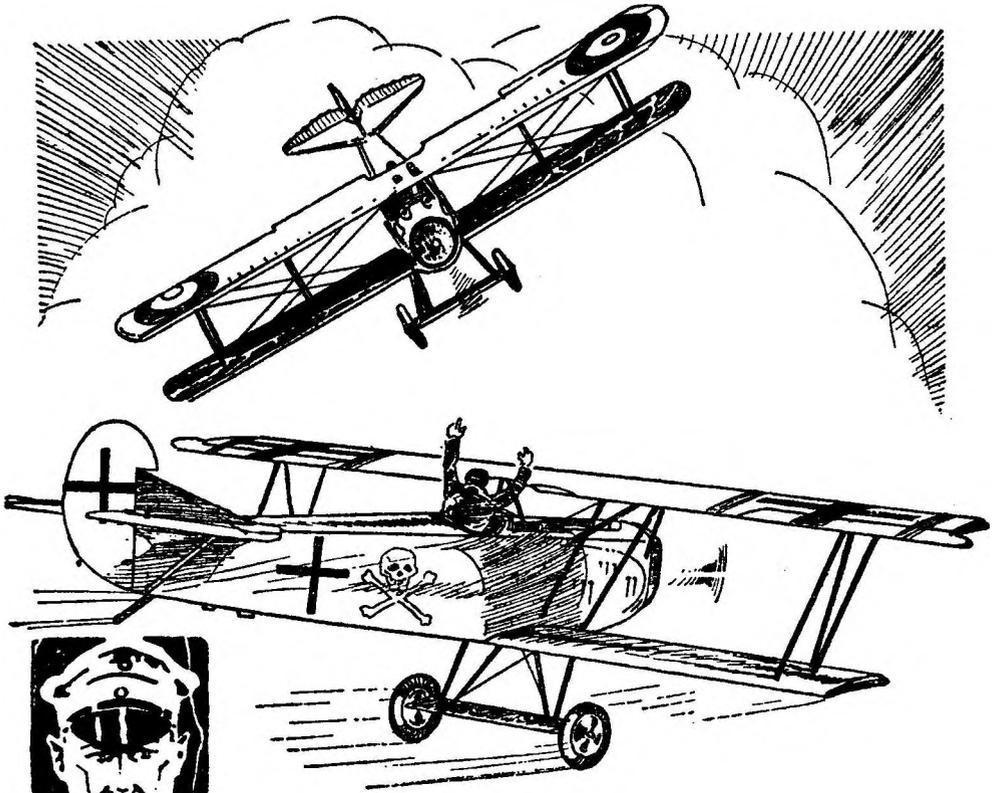
The Parnall "Panther" was designed as a two-seater reconnaissance ship-plane by the British wood-working firm of Parnall & Sons. The water-tight bulk-headed fuselage was made to fold, just in back of the Observer's seat. The equipment of airbags, which could be inflated when necessary, and a hydrovane on the struts in front of the undercarriage prevented the plane somersaulting when landed on the sea. The 200 h.p. B.R. 2 engine gave about 122 m.p.h. Dimensions: Span 29 ft. 6 in.; length 24 ft. 11 in.; folded 14 ft. 6 in.; height 10 ft. 6 in.

GERMANY



The Fokker D 3 was designed for the German Air Force by Anthony Fokker in 1916, an improvement on his earlier "D" model biplanes. The additions of ailerons instead of wing warping on the D 3 proved so superior in maneuverability that the German authorities gave Fokker the coveted Mercedes motors for his later models, making possible the famous D 7. The D 3 used the Oberursel motor which gave it a top speed of between 95 and 100 m.p.h. Dimensions: Span 29 ft. (approx.); length 20 ft.; height 7 ft. 6 in. (approx.)

WINGS *and* STARS



Von Stuber's arms shot up, asking for his life

Lieutenant Johnny Mansel, Horoscope Fan, Gets a Chance to Do His Stuff Against One of the Fiercest Fighters on the Western Front

By DICK MORELAND

Author of "No Man's Ace," "Wings to Glory," etc.

LIEUT. JOHNNY MANSEL sat in his tin cubby casting the horoscope of his enemy, the great Heinz von Stuber. Mansel's eyes bulged as his pencil slid over the chart, for von Stuber, so the stars said, was a worthy foe indeed.

Mansel read again the characteristics of the natives of Scorpio, the

sign under which von Stuber had been born. "Scorpio's ruler is Mars, God of War. The native is squat, thick-set, his skull is broad, face square, cheekbones high, eyes deep with a steadfast and intolerable look."

Johnny Mansel shivered. Well he remembered his one glimpse of von

Stuber's deep-set, glaring, bloodshot eyes. He read on:

"He is ruthless, cruel, and considers himself an avenging angel. He is possessed of superhuman tenacity, bull-dog courage and a savage skill in attacking his enemies."

Johnny Mansel reached for a cigarette with an unsteady hand. He lit up, dragged smoke into his lungs, exhaled gustily. What a man, this von Stuber! And he had challenged a pilot of the 37th Pursuit to a duel in the skies. And Mansel was to be the 37th's representative.

In order to cast a horoscope it is necessary to know the date of birth. Von Stuber had announced his in no uncertain manner. In fact, his entire *Staffel* had come over and helped him celebrate the occasion. At noon that day the swift Fokker flight had come thundering down out of the east and wheeled like striking hawks over the 37th's drome. Bombs had showered down to blast great ragged holes in the tarmac. Number Four hangar had been blown to splinters and two greaseballs, heroically trying to get an anti-aircraft machine-gun into action, had been riddled with cupro-nickel steel slugs. Von Stuber had flown low over the drome and dropped a note, a message typical of that bloody butcher.

The *Freiherr* Heinz von Stuber invites the American swine to his twenty-sixth birthday party to be held at twilight at five thousand feet over Landry. Your best pilot to meet me in a fight to the death.
(Signed) Von Stuber.

Major Carrol, C. O. of the 37th had called in the pilots and grimly bade them draw lots. A deck of cards had been placed on the desk.

"The man who gets the ace of spades goes. Step up, gentlemen."

"No use for you fellows to draw," Johnny Mansel had pushed his way forward. "Today's my lucky day. The vibrations of Gemini are merging

into Cancer. The sign of Mercury is rising. I can't lose."

"Yeah," Gib Stearns had scoffed. "You and your lucky star! Gonna trip over the moon someday, Johnny, and bust yourself wide open."

One by one the pilots had drawn cards. Johnny Mansel had stepped forward and cut the ace of spades with one deft motion. He held it up so that the rest could see, grinned, flipped the card across the room, where it wedged into a corner of the window and stayed there.

"Didn't I tell you?" he had crowed. "When a man's lucky day comes along, nothing can stop him."

"Hope so," Major Carrol had said. "You're going to need plenty of luck this afternoon."

Johnny Mansel hadn't proved himself to be such a hot pilot to date. Well, the boy was going to have a chance to do his stuff—against one of the fiercest fighters on the Western Front.

WITH an hour to go before the fight, Johnny amused himself by casting von Stuber's horoscope. He wanted to know all about the natives of Scorpio, especially any weakness they might have. He went on with his reading:

"To be happy, the native must be occupied with action. He is subject to headaches, dizzy spells, fevers of all kinds. The left side of his brain is more highly developed than the right which effects the left side of his body. In action, he tends to favor his right hand and all movements in that direction, avoiding always the left."

Johnny Mansel chuckled to himself. This was what he had been looking for. So von Stuber favored his right side and avoided action to the left. Good! Mansel would feint him into one of those tail-chasing maneuvers—then pounce on him from the left.

Gib Stearns came in, flung himself down on Johnny's cot.

"Listen, guy," he growled. "You better be out practisin' with a Vickers. T'hell with them star-gazin' books. What you need is a straight-shootin' eye and plenty of fiddle strings below the belt."

"I can't lose." Cigarette smoke gushed from Mansel's nose. "All I got to do is to get von Stuber over on his left wing and then pour it into him."

"Sure. He'll wait right there for you to pot him. Well, kid, you ain't exactly a novice at this game. Got two flamers to your credit, I know that. But this von Stuber is a tough baby. He's knocked down five pilots out of this squadron and you are slated to be his sixth. Better let me take your place. I've tangled wings with him before and kinda know his style."

"Nix." Johnny Mansel closed his books and put them carefully into his foot locker. "This is my smoke today. C'mon, let's go check over the ship. I want to be sure I got all the breaks coming to me. Don't want to run out of ammo or drop off a wing on this flight."

EVERY man of the 37th, including the skipper, took the air behind Johnny Mansel's Spad. They were going along—just in case. The Boche had been known to pull fast ones during an air duel such as this one.

Mansel eased his ship up to five thousand, leveled off and headed for Landry. As he thundered nearer he could see a lone Fokker circling slowly over the shell-wrecked little town. Five thousand feet above the waiting Boche a dozen Fokkers flew lazily back and forth. Evidently von Stuber had brought his flight along to witness his little birthday celebration. Major Carrol led his Spads up to twelve thousand, threw them into open formation, began a slow patrol

up and down the Yank side of the lines. Now let the Germans try anything treacherous!

Johnny Mansel warmed his guns, toed right rudder and charged the circling von Stuber. Just before he came within machine-gun range he flipped the Spad over on its wing, threw it into a power dive and then skidded down the skies, only to pull up sharply, both guns blazing.

VON STUBER was an old hand at this game. He put his ship down, fell into a wide circle, came thundering around on Mansel's tail.

The two ships swung into a steep merry-go-round, each striving to shorten the distance to the other's tail. Johnny gave his Spad full gun, saw the wings of von Stuber's plane tip over as he increased the vertical bank in the hope of cutting in. Instantly Mansel feinted to the left.

Von Stuber followed sluggishly and Mansel could have screamed aloud with joy. Just as the horoscope had said, von Stuber was weak on left-hand tactics. Mansel feinted again, this time to the right, and nearly lost his tail assembly as a result.

Von Stuber had pounced on him with Spandaus yammering. Gusts of slugs had whipped through the fairing of Johnny's Spad, had clawed along the green-painted flipper. It was only by hurling his ship into a savage zoom that he escaped that withering burst.

Now he came slashing around into the circle again, this time with left wing low, forcing von Stuber to throw his Fokker into a savage vertical to avoid a collision. The Fokker darted away, turning always to the left. Mansel leaped after him, both guns raving. He watched tracer whip around the cockpit where the Boche ace crouched, saw splinters fly as slugs ripped into the instrument panel.

Von Stuber looked back and Johnny Mansel saw the square of his face, the deep-set cruel eyes, the lips curled back from his teeth. The Boche went up and over and came roaring down. Mansel saw him reach for his trigger trips, saw his face twist and strain, watched him beat his fists at the breeches of his jammed guns.

Then von Stuber was below him and to the right. Mansel eased the Spad around, took careful aim.

Von Stuber's arms shot up. A signal unmistakable. Guns jammed, helpless, he was asking for his life. Mansel hesitated, his finger curled into the Bowden trigger. He felt his Spad slide off, saw the Boche turn for home.

He felt a queer pounding in his chest. His nerves tingled. He had let von Stuber go—made him a present of life. Why, he didn't know. Something inside of him had clicked and his fingers had relaxed on the triggers.

Back on the tarmac of the 37th, Gib Stearns had been the first to greet Mansel when he crawled stiffly out of his ship.

“YOU idiotic, half-witted, sentimental lily! What in God's name did you mean by lettin' that bloody killer go?”

“It was murder,” stammered Mansel. “I couldn't do it in cold blood.”

Even Major Carrol was disgusted.

“Suppose *your* guns had jammed?” he sneered. “D'you suppose von Stuber would have let you off? Didn't he follow Jenkins down and blast him after his Spad caught fire?”

“I'll get him,” Mansel promised. “I know his soft spot now.”

“That guy's made of steel,” Stearns cut in. “You've missed your chance. And I hope he cuts your ship to ribbons under you the next time you meet.”

Johnny Mansel didn't have to wait long for his next meeting with von Stuber. Two days later, flying an early morning patrol with Stearns, the two Spads were cruising along under the clouds at six thousand when five Fokkers dropped on them from above. Four Fokkers cut Stearns out of the fight, hustled him away, while the remaining Fokker came roaring for Mansel.

And then Mansel knew what it was to fight for his life, felt the dark shadow of death as the seconds ticked slowly past and a madman in a red-and-black Fokker lashed the skies about him with tracer and crackling lead.

Von Stuber was wild, Johnny could see that; von Stuber hated the man who had spared his life—and spoiled his birthday party. He had decreed that Johnny Mansel should die by no other guns than his.

Mansel put on the battle of his life.

He side-slipped and ducked and dodged, but hard on his tail came the vengeful Boche. Time after time, Mansel tried to feint him into the deadly circle so that he could force him off on his left wing. But von Stuber seemed to dive out of Johnny's line of fire at the last split second.

Then a stream of hot lead came lashing up from the Fokker's guns. Mansel heard bullets rattling off his engine cowling, felt his plane lurch and slip, knew that he had been hit in a vital spot.

His Hisso coughed. Mansel swung the nose around for one more try at the Boche killer. The big Hisso spluttered again, picked up, coughed and stopped. Johnny Mansel threw up both arms as a signal that he was defenseless, eased the stick forward and started a long glide for home.

He had drifted down the skies for perhaps three thousand feet when he heard the roar of a wide-open motor

behind him, turned his head and found himself looking into the muzzles of von Stuber's Spandaus. Between the guns he could see the Boche's face, teeth flashing in a gleeful smile, eyes smoky with hatred. With a shock, Mansel realized that von Stuber was going to kill him, that the man hadn't the slightest intention of returning the favor of a few days before.

Johnny whipped the stick to right and left and kicked the rudder viciously. The Spad skidded and bucked, lurched over on one wing, tilted back again, balanced for an instant before it fell off on one wing.

Von Stuber followed, nursing his fire and gloating over the helplessness of his enemy.

The 37th's drome was not far away now, and Mansel headed for it, knowing what was going to happen. Von Stuber was going to let him get directly over the home tarmac, then tumble him at the feet of his wing-mates.

Fighting for his life to the very last, Mansel tried to pancake down to a landing. The stutter of twin guns came clearly from behind. A swathe of slugs chewed at his ship, tossing him over on the left wing. Another blast of fire and bullets ripped through the fuselage.

A strut parted with a snap, the loose wire beat at the wing, slashing out great chunks of fabric. Another burst came boring in. Mansel felt the white heat of it, expected to feel the searing stab of pain in his back.

The sky was suddenly full of planes. Green Spads which zoomed and dived with guns roaring. He looked back over his shoulder and saw von Stuber racing across the tree tops for Germany. Cheated of his easy kill, Mansel could well imagine what the Boche ace was saying as he hedge-hopped home with five Spads on his tail.

He put the wreck of his Spad down, rolled it across to the hangars and climbed down. He was dripping with sweat; his ship was riddled and he had a long scratch along his left cheek where a Spandau slug had raked him.

Again it was Gib Stearns who was the first to greet him.

"WHAT do you think of your Heinie pal now?" Stearns taunted. "Sorta ganged up on you, didn't he? I told you he'd shoot the pants off you the next chance he got."

Mansel was white with rage and humiliation.

"I'll get the dirty swine," he spluttered. "What happened to you, Gib?"

"I fell in a shell hole over by the 168th Infantry sector. The dough-boys pulled me out and shipped me home in a motorcycle sidecar."

Major Carrol summoned Johnny Mansel to the orderly room that morning and gave him a brief but pointed lecture.

"This nonsense has gone quite far enough," he growled. "You and von Stuber chasing each other around the skies, I mean. War going on, and we've got a tough job on our hands. Need every man from now on until the big drive starts."

"That nonsense," Mansel said slowly, "between me and the Boche ace is going on until one of us is dead. The dirty son tricked me. I'll get even."

"I'm putting you and Gib Stearns on special patrol," snapped the C. O. "This squadron has been assigned the mission of protecting the ammunition dump at Fismes. By constant day and night air patrol. And until you learn how to obey orders, you're going to sit on the ground and watch us."

"But suppose the drome is attacked?"

"You'll have to go up and defend

it, of course. But until that happens, you're grounded."

Gib Stearns blamed Johnny for what had happened. "You and your damn stars did this," he moaned. "Now the squadron's got a chance to do somethin' excitin' and we have to sit on our pants and watch—like a couple of kiwis."

Johnny Mansel was busy with his astrology books and horoscope charts.

"Just as well," he announced. "Neptune is in the ascendant. The day is not auspicious for trips by land, water or air."

Stearns made a growling noise deep in his throat. "All you need," he fumed, "is one of them turbans and a crystal ball and you could start tellin' fortunes."

"Well, I was right about von Stuber being weak on his left-hand banks, wasn't I?" challenged Mansel. "And the next auspicious day, when the planets are all favorable, I'm going up and shoot him down."

"Yeah, and suppose he comes buck-etin' over here before you get the right numbers up, then what?"

Mansel shrugged. "*Finis* for me, I guess. You can't beat the stars."

"Nerts!" said Stearns.

THE drome was deserted. All the pilots and Major Carrol were off on the air patrol over the munitions dump. That dump had to be protected. The ammunition there was of vital importance to the Yanks who were going to take part in the big drive.

Stearns could see, far in the distance, the tiny specks which were the Spads of the 37th wheeling back and forth over the little town of Fismes. He wished fervently that he was up there with his wingmates.

A faint drumming sound came to him out of the twilight. The rise and fall of a Mercedes motor. He strained his eyes toward the east. Sure enough, three little blackbirds

in V formation were boring down on the drome from Boche land.

He turned and ran for Number One hangar, shouting to the greaseballs to wheel out his and Johnny Mansel's ships. He grabbed the handle of the siren and sent an eerie wail shrieking through the quiet of the late afternoon.

Mansel came on the run.

"What is it?" he yelled, leaping for the stirrup.

Stearns jerked a thumb aloft. Johnny looked up and spotted the oncoming flight. The leading plane had a familiar look about it. Von Stuber!

A cold chill shot down Johnny's spine. His face went white, his stomach turned over, then twisted itself into a tight, suffocating knot.

Von Stuber.

And this was a bad day for Johnny Mansel. What had the horoscope said? No trips by land, water or air. Well, he was going to a trip anyway. A long trip—to hell, probably.

Gib Stearns got his ship around, went charging down the tarmac, pulled her steeply into the air. Johnny felt his own plane stir under him. He was rolling forward, the gun full on. Tree tops swept under his wheels. He was in the air, rushing up after Gib, his Hisso howling.

Blood like ice-water pounded through his veins. His hands were frozen on the stick. He believed implicitly in astrology. And the stars said that today was unlucky for him. He gritted his teeth, felt the muscles of his jaws stand out in ridges. If he had to die, he'd go down fighting. Try and take von Stuber with him.

The three Fokkers had swerved, were lancing away toward Fismes. Johnny saw other three-ship formations coming in from north and south and west. The Boche had divided his squadron, was launching an attack on the dump from all quarters.

Far off in the distance a machine-gun went into action. It sounded like popping corn on a hot stove.

Johnny looked at the nearest Fokker, saw the deadly grinning skull which was the insignia of von Stuber. He sucked in a long breath, gripped the stick hard, hurled his ship at the enemy for one last glorious battle.

Von Stuber was quick to accept the challenge. He came charging around in a screaming turn, cut in both guns and dived on Johnny Mansel. Lacy cobwebs of tracers lashed the air about Johnny's head. He split-aired and threw his Spad up on its side, gorged the Hisso with gas and spun around on the flippers. There was von Stuber directly in front of him.

Johnny's Vickers chattered. He watched the tracer stream reach out hungrily for the Boche ship.

Then von Stuber was up and over and sliding away behind him. Bullets ripped into the Spad's fairing, came crawling along the fuselage toward the cockpit. Johnny snapped the stick over and slid out of the line of fire as von Stuber shot under his landing gear. Looking down, Johnny could see the big head turned, could make out two glaring red-rimmed eyes behind huge goggles. Hatred was written on that scowling face, and a grim determination to kill.

The sky was dotted with swirling, skimming ships now. The flights had met, balled up, were spinning around and around in a mad circus of death. Gib Stearns and a red-and-black Fokker were doing loops about each other, firing as they came out at the bottom of the spin.

Johnny saw a curl of smoke under the Fokker's hood. Flame blossomed there and then a great gush of burning oil flowed back over the threshing pilot, blotting him out in a smear of greasy orange flame. His ship

stood on its tail, fell off, went spinning down, turning faster and faster as it fell.

Stearns flashed away and engaged another Boche which had dropped out of the clouds to join in the fight.

The smack of slugs into his instrument panel brought Johnny Mansel back to the present with a jerk. Von Stuber was behind and above him. How he had got there, Johnny had no idea. Fire gouted from Spandau muzzles, bullets raked the Spad in long splintering bursts. Johnny felt something tug at his sleeve and, looking down, saw blood dripping over his wrist and hand.

HE kicked his ship into a vertical bank, came around with every wire screaming. Von Stuber fell into place behind him. Around they went, each plane in a steep vertical bank, each pilot grimly urging his motor to the last ounce of energy.

A black fan-tail crept into view. Johnny fired desperately and saw his tracer stitch a pattern along the rudder. Again he pressed his triggers. Bullets ran rippling along the narrow camelback of the Fokker.

Then von Stuber twisted his ship out of the circle, threw it up and over on its back, came thundering down with guns raving. Now! Johnny went off to the left, forcing von Stuber to follow. Then he doubled back, a turn so short that wing pinions screamed a warning, flying wires hummed, high pitched and shrill.

And von Stuber made the turn behind him without so much as faltering. Johnny gasped. Von Stuber had spun to the left as easily as to the right. No weakness there now. Johnny Mansel didn't know that the Boche had spent hour after hour in the air over his own drome correcting that very fault, that he had kept his pilots diving on him time after time until they were all exhausted,

in order to iron out that weak spot in his tactics.

The duckboards bounced under Johnny's feet. A red hot poker was rammed into his instep. He looked down and saw ragged holes in the boards beneath him. He leaned out over the side. Another Fokker was below him, pouring a steady blast of fire into his belly.

He zoomed up and hung on the prop, let the Spad slide off to the left. Von Stuber flashed over the other Fokker, wings wagging savagely. The newcomer got the idea, went roaring away toward Fismes, leaving the Boche ace to bring down his own meat.

With a vicious swoop, von Stuber came thundering around to finish the job. Von Stuber was in a hurry now, wanted to end the thing with a rush and join his squadron in the attack on the Fismes dump.

MANSEL fought the dizziness which sought to drown him, shook his head to free it from the fog which crawled over his brain. His leg was numb, his arm hung on the stick, blood dripping through his fingers. Around he came again in what seemed to him an endless circle.

He looked through his sights and saw something just ahead. Stiffening in his seat, he looked again. Part of a wing was visible and a grinning skull. With nerveless fingers he tripped his Vickers and held his ship steady while the tracer stream harpooned out and pinned that grinning head in a circle of bullet holes. In a flash the Boche was gone.

Again bullets hammered into the Spad. One wing sagged with a crackling sound. He tilted her over, closing the circle still smaller.

Again the grinning skull slid into his sights. A few feet ahead of that was another skull, broad, square-faced with deep-set blazing eyes. A living skull. Johnny Mansel trimmed the

Spad, jockeyed it into position, tripped his guns. The tracer stream lashed out. Von Stuber swerved suddenly to the left. Then Johnny let him have it again.

Twin cones of fire swirled about the leather-padded head in the Fokker. Johnny got one look at a white staring face, a face peppered with little red dots. Then the great head fell forward. The Fokker nosed over and went down.

Johnny Mansel couldn't believe it had actually happened. That he was still alive, that he had shot down the great von Stuber. He turned his ship and looked toward Fismes. Two Fokkers were falling, and a Spad. Five other Fokkers were roaring away to the east with a flight of Spads barking at their tails. For the moment, the dump at Fismes was safe.

Johnny breathed a long sigh, put his head back against the crash pad—

Consciousness returned, in time, and he felt his thigh straps jerk. His leg hurt him. He opened his eyes and found himself staring straight down into a plowed field. The field was rushing up to meet him at an alarming rate—a rough, irregular, shell-pitted field which didn't look at all soft or inviting.

His feet worked the rudder bar; his hands, still frozen to the stick, twitched. The Spad turned over lazily, creaking in every joint. A row of trees appeared and Johnny headed for them.

There was a great crashing of leaves and the rip and splinter of fabric and wood. Something smote Johnny Mansel a mighty blow in the pit of the stomach and again he slid into the dark and lay still.

When he awakened the next time he was on his own cot in the tin cubby at the 37th's drome. The room smelled strongly of antiseptics. His arm and foot were fat with bandage and a voice was speaking irritably somewhere in the distance.

"I tell you it was a damn fool idea bringing him here. The ambulance is coming. He's got to go to a hospital."

"Hey, look out, he's comin' around," another voice said.

Gib Stearns was bending over him, a broad grin on his face.

"The star gazin' fool," said Gib. "Reads their fortunes and then dings 'em to hell to prove he's right."

"No more," Johnny's voice was a whisper. "I'm through. The book was all wrong—about von Stuber. He didn't have any weak spots. I

ought to know. I damn near got killed finding out."

STEARNS chuckled gleefully. "That sounds natural." He seemed pleased. "I guess you'll be out of the hospital in time. Listen, Johnny I want you to be best man for me. Gonna marry that gal in Paris in a month. How about it, kid?"

"Married?" Johnny Mansel sat up hurriedly. "What date? Hand me that chart and tell me the date and I'll let you know whether it'll be a lucky wedding or not."

AIR DICTIONARY

French and German Words

ENGLISH	FRENCH	GERMAN
D IAMETER	Diametre	Durchmesser
Die cast bearings	Coussinets montes en coquilles	Schalenguss Lager
Dihedral	Aile en V Diedre (lateral)	Flachenwinkel V-Form, V-Stellung
Direct drive	Prise direct	Direkter Antrieb
Direction finder	Traceur de route	Richtfinder
Dirigible	Dirigeable: Aeronat	Luftschiff
Disappearing gun mount	Tourelle mobile a eclipse	Verschwindender M.G. Drehkranz
Diving speed	Vitesse en vol pique Vitesse de plongee	Sturzfluggeschwindig- keit
Dope (Airplane varnish)	Vernis	Bespannungslack
Down current	Courant descendant	Luftstromneigung
Downwash	Deviation verticale	Abwind
Double throw switch	Commutateur	Umschalter
Drag (Aero)	Trainee	Widerstand
Drag wire	Hauban de trainee	Fangkabel
Drift	Derive	Abtrieb, Rucktrieb
Driven, operated	Commande	Getrieben
Drop, fall, dive	Chute	Fall, Abfall, Absturz
Drizzling rain, mist	Bruin	Staubregen, Feiner Regen
Dual control	Double commande	Doppelsteuerung

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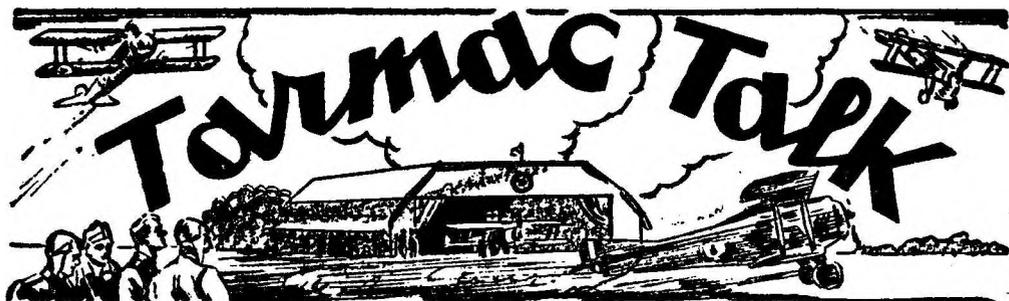
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THIS month the aviation spotlight moves to Juan de la Cierva. What? You never heard of him! Buzzards, you've been leaving your earphones off again! Didn't I tell you always to wear 'em! Because if you had 'em on, you'd know I was referring to the inventor of the autogiro. And, buddies, that was a darned important invention.

It's still a matter of doubt just what the autogiro *will* do—but some aviators see it as one of the main types of flying boats of the future. Cierva's rotating-wing aircraft, or



autogiro, is constantly improving and is being taken more seriously every day.

"Direct take-off" is the latest motto of the autogiro fans, and the phrase means plenty! It holds out interesting hopes both for the private flier and the commercial user.

Back Yard Ships

The development of direct take-off will allow the use of fields with any kind of surface—plowed, stony or marshy. Any back yard will do as a private air field. So, one of these days, you can have your own little autogiro to go joy-riding in with your best girl, and no hangar expenses. Sounds good, doesn't it?

Wouldn't you like to trade your old Flivver for one of 'em?

And if you haven't got a back yard—why, just climb up to the roof. You can take off from up there, too. Any small platform or enclosed space will be enough in the near future when the idea is developed.

How It Works

The direct take-off, or "jump up" with the autogiro is accomplished by throwing in the starting clutch, which allows the engine to spin the rotor—if you get what I mean, peels. If you don't get what I mean, review those flying lessons!

At the same time, the blades of the rotor are set at a very flat angle to provide practically no lift. When sufficient rotor speed has been attained (more than would be used ordinarily for a take-off) the blade position of the rotor vanes is changed to a sharp angle, taking a deep bite on the air and giving maximum lift. Get it?

Anyway, the machine leaps into the air, the clutch is thrown out and the regular prop picks up the work. The craft gets sufficient forward speed—about 15 miles an hour—and we're off! The speed keeps the whole business from toppling back to the carpet as the free-spinning rotor assumes its regular motion and blade positions.

High Speed Possible

So far the autogiro has been incapable of competing with the airplane in speed. But Cierva promises
(Continued on page 120)

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Pages 119 thru 130

New INVENTION

SAVES GAS!

**3 TO 7 MILES MORE
PER GALLON**

**MOTORIST SAVES
\$180.00 a YEAR**



Saves up to Thirty Per Cent On Gas.
Provides Faster Pick-Up—More Power—
Greater Mileage and Smoother Running.

GET FREE INFORMATION

VACU-MATIC

the Carburetor Control
that "BREATHES"

AT LAST! Automotive engineers have smashed down the barriers to perfected combustion! The new VACU-MATIC solves the secret of greater power! With almost magical action, this amazing invention instantly puts new life and pep in any motor. It adds mileage to every gallon of gasoline . . . produces split-second pick-up, sensitive accelerator response, greater speed and smoother running

New—Automatic—Nothing Like It!

The self-starter—four wheel brakes—knee action—streamlining . . . and now VACU-MATIC! The greatest motor improvement of recent years! With it, engineers have achieved a practical means of balancing air and gasoline automatically for all speeds. Vacu-matic is *entirely different!* It is AUTOMATIC and allows the motor to "breathe" at the correct time, opening and closing automatically as required. No idling troubles—no carburetor adjustments necessary. Just put it on and forget it! Sharply cuts fuel wastes, saves dollars in gas costs, reduces carbon and gives your engine new pep, greater power and longer life.

Agents and Salesmen

If you are interested in earning unusual profits, check coupon. Exclusive territories are now being granted.

Fits All Cars

VACU-MATIC is constructed of six parts, assembled and welded into one unit, correctly adjusted and sealed at the factory. Nothing to regulate. Any motorist can attach VACU-MATIC in ten minutes. Once in, its only reminder is the surge of instant power and speed it gives to the motor and the savings it affords your pocketbook.

The VACU-MATIC Co.,

Wauwatosa, Wis.

CHRYSLER

Have tried the Vacu-matic and it sure is fine. Better pick-up with a 30% gas saving.—John C. Martin, Pa.

PLYMOUTH

I am amazed at Vacu-matic performance. It's giving me 5 more miles per gallon.—Walter Zielinski, Ill.

FRANKLIN

With Vacu-matic I have increased my mileage from 10.1 to 14.2 miles per gallon. I figure I save over \$75.00 a year in gasoline. R. K. Radtke, Wis.

ALL WELL PLEASED

Enclosed find order for 12 more. Everyone I have sold is giving from 4 to 6 more miles per gallon. I have 3 more orders for V8 Ford. Every body is well pleased.—J. O. Carl, Texas.

NASH

On my Advanced 6 Nash gained 17½% in mileage. The car will idle down to 3 miles an hour and then take gas without a complaint.—J. Showalter, Mo.

DODGE

Just completed 2310 miles on 92 gallons in my 1913 Dodge 6. This figures 25 miles while before I averaged only 20 miles per gal. on trips.—Al Fruyza, Calif.

V-8 FORD

I installed both Vacu-matics and they work excellent. On my own V8 Ford I notice wonderful performance in pickup, get-away and gas saving.—Burt Burnett, Mich.

BUICK

Everything you claim about Vacu-matic is true. I now get 20 miles to the gallon. Before I was only averaging 15½ miles.—C. Coonstanto, Fla.

CHEVROLET

Please send me a Vacu-matic for a Model A. The mileage on my 1933 Chevrolet jumped from 18 to 22 miles per gal. with Vacu-matic. Paul P. Haas, Mass.

MODEL A FORD

Have been using the Vacu-matic for a month. Used to get 20 to 22 miles per gal. Now I get 30 to 33 miles. It is amazing the difference it makes.—James W. Barr.

OLDSMOBILE

I am well pleased with Vacu-matic on my Oldsmobile. A test proved it to give 18 miles per gal. Before we considered 13 good.—Arthur Williams, N. Y.

Above are just a few of the many unsolicited letters received from Vacu-matic users.

Guaranteed Gas Savings

The VACU-MATIC proves itself on every car. It is guaranteed to give worth-while gas savings, quicker pick-up, and more power or it costs you nothing. "On a test I gained an average of 4 miles on a gallon," writes Alex Wertz. "Vacu-matic is the best I have ever tried." Clarence Rutzin—"I have tried the Vacu-matic on several tests and find that I get between 5 and 6 miles per gallon increase, have more mileage, have greater pickup."

Free Details

Learn about this remarkable device that so greatly affects the entire performance of your motor. Learn why your car is costing you extra money to operate without VACU-MATIC. See why your VACU-MATIC equipped car will leap away from traffic without sputter or hesitation. Discover a new driving thrill and enjoy the savings. Get the facts! Write today!

FREE OFFER COUPON

THE VACU-MATIC COMPANY
7617-87 W. State St., Wauwatosa, Wis.
Gentlemen: Please send me full particulars concerning the Vacu-matic and details of your Free Offer. This of course does not obligate me in any way.

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....

Check here if interested in selling proposition.



ROYAL'S JUBILEE VALUES



KA-1... Smart brand new creation in 14K Solid White Gold or Yellow Gold. Square prong engagement ring at an amazingly low price! Set with a specially selected dazzling, genuine blue-white diamond. (Specify White or Yellow Gold.) *Only \$2.10 a month*

Only \$21.95

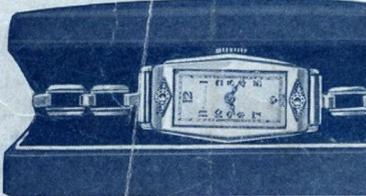


Both Now Only \$29.75

\$2.88 a month
6 CERTIFIED GENUINE DIAMONDS
KA-2... Two exquisitely matched, betrothal rings of beautifully hand engraved and pierced 14K Solid White Gold, for less than you'd expect to pay for one alone! 3 certified genuine diamonds in the engagement ring and 3 matched genuine diamonds in the wedding ring. Now only \$29.75 for both rings. *\$2.88 a month.*
KA-2A Wedding Ring only \$12.50. *\$1.15 a month.*



Only \$19.75
\$1.88 a Month
7 GENUINE DIAMONDS
KA-5... Featuring 7 expertly matched, fiery, genuine diamonds in a wedding ring of stunning beauty. Elegantly hand engraved, 14K Solid White Gold or Yellow Gold—specify your choice. A very special JUBILEE VALUE at \$19.75. *Only \$1.88 a month.*



Sensational Wrist Watch Value!
SET WITH 2 GENUINE DIAMONDS \$19.75
Only \$1.87 a Month

KA-6... One of the greatest wrist watch values of our entire career! Latest style, dainty Baguette effect ladies wrist watch; guaranteed accurate and dependable timekeeper. Set with 2 GENUINE DIAMONDS. Complete with matched link bracelet and handsome gift box. *Only \$1.87 a month.*



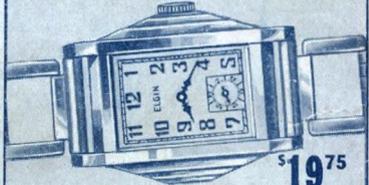
Only \$29.75
5 DIAMONDS
DE LUXE JUBILEE VALUE
\$2.87 a Month

KA-3... A most beautiful and popular, square prong engagement ring of 14K Solid White Gold set with a certified genuine blue-white center diamond of unusual brilliance and 2 matched fiery diamonds on each side. An extraordinary JUBILEE VALUE at only \$29.75. *\$2.87 a month.*



\$19.75
2 GENUINE DIAMONDS
Only \$1.87 a month

KA-7... Gentlemen's distinctive initial ring of 10K Solid Yellow Gold set with 2 fiery genuine diamonds on the sides and a solid white gold raised initial on genuine onyx. Specify initial desired. *Only \$1.87 a month.*



\$19.75
NEW MODEL ELGIN \$1.87 a month
KA-8... The nationally famous ELGIN in a handsomely designed new, step-effect white case; fitted with a guaranteed dependable 7 Jewel ELGIN movement. Sturdy link bracelet to match. *Only \$1.87 a month.*



\$29.75
15 Jewel
BULOVA "AMBASSADOR"
\$2.87 a Month

KA-9... One of the most popular BULOVA Gent's Wrist Watches and only \$29.75. Distinctively designed and engraved rectangular shape case fitted with a 15 JEWEL B-U-L-O-V-A precision movement. Fully guaranteed to give lifetime service. New type close-link bracelet. *Only \$2.87 a month.*



\$24.75
"Miss America"
BULOVA BAGUETTE
Only \$2.38 a month

KA-4... BULOVA'S most popular, slenderized Baguette at BULOVA'S lowest price. Daintily engraved; guaranteed BULOVA "radio time" movement. Lovely tubular bracelet. *Only \$2.38 a month.*

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