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WAR BIRDS



AUGUST
10¢



When South Sea War Birds Took To

WINGS OVER MALEKULA

A Smashing Adventure Novel by

F. V. W. MASON

TWO WAYS to GET RID of ATHLETE'S FOOT (or Foot Itch)



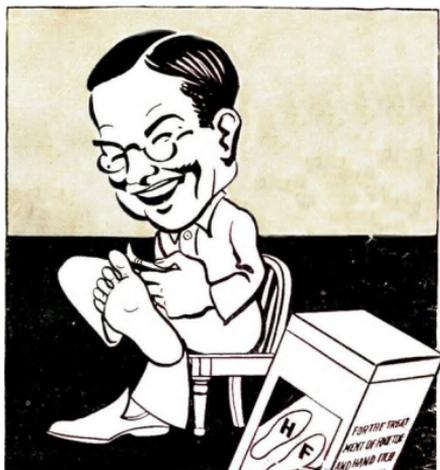
BOIL YOUR FEET 15 MINUTES OR LET H. F. DO THE WORK IN 15 SEC.

United States Public Health Service
Bulletin 12-38 states:

"Ringworm of the hands and feet is caused by a vegetable parasite which is a distant cousin of the well-known mould that grows upon stale bread. In addition to living upon the human body it can probably live and grow elsewhere, and can resist drying for a long time. In fact, it is a remarkably resistant organism, for it takes at least FIFTEEN MINUTES of boiling to kill one."

Drs. Courlet and Hauser, ranking among the foremost of pathologists, state:

"We hereby submit results of examination of your preparation known as H. F., submitted for determination of Bacteriocidal properties. The determinations were carried out against the fungi Trichophyton and Epidermophyton, the type of parasite causing foot itch known commonly as ring worm of the feet or Athlete's Foot. Standard methods of technique were used. Your preparation killed the Trichophyton and Epidermophyton in LESS THAN 15 SECONDS."



DRUGGISTS NOTE
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Usually the disease starts between the toes. Little watery blisters form and the skin cracks and peels. After a while the itching becomes intense and you feel as though you would like to scratch off all the skin.

BWARE OF IT SPREADING

Often the disease travels all over the bottom of the feet. The soles of your feet become red and swollen. The skin also cracks and peels, and the itching becomes worse and worse.

Get rid of this disease as quickly as possible, because it is very contagious and it may go to your hands or even to the under arm or crotch of the leg.

Most people who have Athlete's Foot have tried all kinds of remedies to cure it without success. Ordinary



mercurials, antiseptics, salve or ointments seldom do any good.

HERE'S HOW TO TREAT IT

The germ that causes the disease is known as *Tinea Trichophyton*. It buries itself deep in the tissues of the skin and is very hard to kill. A test made shows it takes 15 minutes of boiling to kill the germ, so you can see why the ordinary remedies are unsuccessful.

H. F. was developed solely for the purpose of treating Athlete's Foot. It is a liquid that penetrates and dries quickly. You just paint the affected parts. It peels off the tissue of the skin where the germ breeds.

ITCHING STOPS IMMEDIATELY

As soon as you apply H. F. you will find that the itching is immediately relieved. You should paint the infested parts with H. F. night and morning until your feet are well. Usually this takes from three to ten days, although in severe cases it may take longer or in mild cases less time.

H. F. will leave the skin soft and smooth. You will marvel at the quick way it brings you relief; especially if you are one of those who have tried for years to get rid of Athlete's Foot without success.

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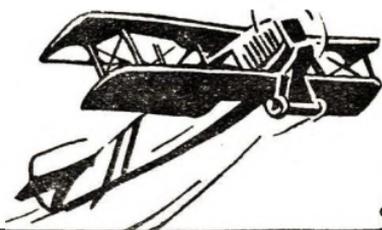
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WAR BIRDS



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Vol. 33

August, 1937

No. 3

GRIPPING WORLD WAR NOVEL

- WINGS OVER MALEKULA**.....F. V. W. Mason 8
 Young Lieutenant Kenny had to face the enemy alone, in those stormy waters of the South Pacific—alone save for that juggernaut of death.

TWO NOVELETTES OF WARTIME FLIERS

- TERROR OF THE CASKET CREW**..... Arch Whitehouse 54
 Death—and the Casket Crew—never take a holiday.
- HELL FLIGHT**.....Andrew Caffrey 72
 It took just twenty-seven minutes' work for little Tad Pole to convince that hard-boiled crew that he wasn't just a mascot.

THRILLING STORIES AND FEATURES

- BULLETS FOR THE BRAVE**.....Franklin H. Martin 40
 Those two Yank aces fought side by side and yet, more than the enemy, they hated each other . . .
- WAR BIRDS OF TODAY**.....Frank Tinsley 50
 An album of modern fighting planes and their equipment.
- WAR GODS OF THE AIR**.....H. T. Sperry 69
 An illustrated feature.
- SUICIDE SPOT**.....O. B. Myers 88
 It's hell when you're forced to send the man who's saved your life to face a firing squad!
- CARRY ON**.....Lieutenant James Kent 98
 Deeds of the valiant dead show the way to those who follow after . . .
- PENGUINS PATROL**.....Kenneth L. Sinclair 101
 How could Weak Wings match his skill with the Boche when they wouldn't let him cross the lines and fight?
- THE COCKPIT**.....Kenneth Brown Collings 111
 Behind the scenes with War Birds' Consulting Editor.

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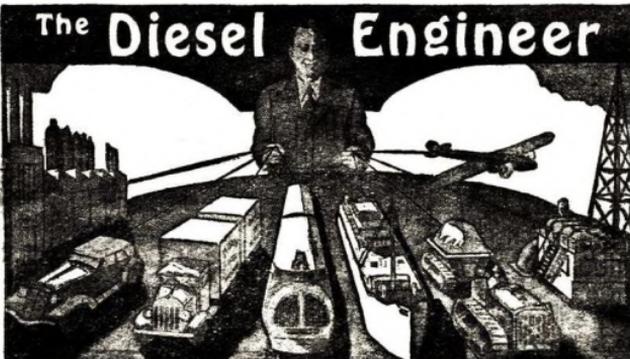
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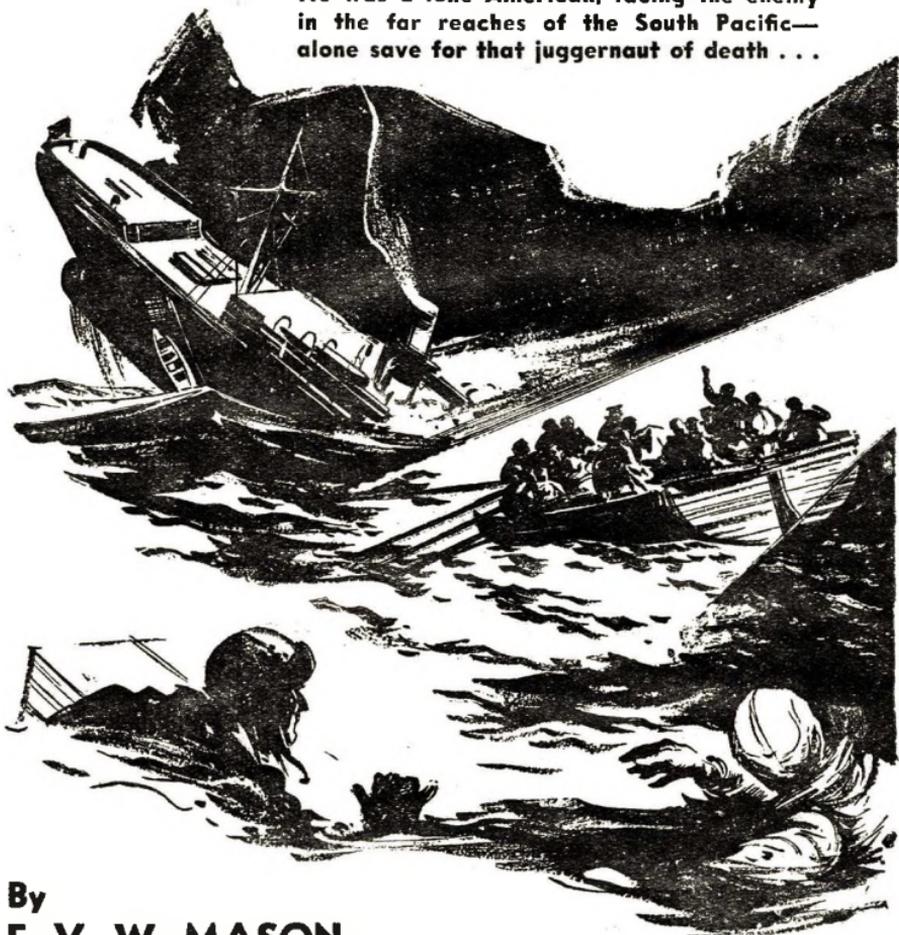
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Wings Over Malekula

He was a lone American, facing the enemy in the far reaches of the South Pacific—alone save for that juggernaut of death . . .



By
F. V. W. MASON

CHAPTER I
Going to Face Death!

THE late afternoon sun, pouring in through the messroom windows, redly illumined the features of four khaki-clad officers deeply intrigued in a game of poker. At first glance they were an unusual

group, young men with old eyes and bitter mouths and clad in the usual weird miscellany of garments which the aviator affects off duty. Faded campaign and decoration ribbons glowed without exception on various threadbare tunics slung on chair backs or tossed carelessly on tables and benches.

Watching them stood a dark haired

A
NOVEL
OF
VALOR



The aviators saw the Mulheim bearing down on the scene of the disaster, her great searchlight wavering over the jet water . . .

young man in a new, green khaki uniform of the sort worn by American naval aviators and, as the others pushed back their chairs preparatory to a round of drinks, he nodded.

"Lockhart seems to be having all the luck."

"He always does," complained one of the players casting an affectionate glance at the one-eyed veteran who

was senior officer of the new patrol on Malekula. Lockhart grinned and turned a face that was craggy as a mountain peak, and Kenny could see how the lid over the Australian's left eye sagged inwards, to mark the absence of an eye lost amid the gray fogs of the North Sea. Curious, how the war had left its stamp on these war-tried veterans who were no longer

fit for the terrific tension of the Western Front, and who were eating their hearts out because this was so.

"Sit down, Kenny," Lockhart invited, "and take a hand."

"Thanks, but I've still got one of those motors to check again. What do you think of the Libertys?" His gray-blue eyes swept the assemblage questioningly.

"They are jolly fine," said Captain Goodhue, a short, red-haired Englishman who had a piece of silver for the back of his skull. "Better than anything we get from home."

"Glad you like 'em," replied the young American and wished his blouse were not quite so destitute of ribbons. "I hope you can keep a lot of head-hunters in order with 'em. That'll be my only consolation for getting shipped about as far from the war as a man can." The goldbraid on his broad epaulets flashed as his shoulders rose in a resigned shrug. "It's tough being shipped off to install Libertys in New Guinea while the rest of my pals are making a name in France. I've been crazy for three years to get a crack at those damn Boche—I'm afraid I'll never get it now."

"Cheer up. I've noticed that queer things sometimes happen these days. I'll be sorry for the Jerries if you do," said Lieutenant Scott. "Just last night we were saying you've the makings of a good combat pilot in you."

A grateful smile spread over the young American's broad features. "It's damned nice of you old-timers to say that, but I know I'm as green as grass, though I did pass the Key West combat tests."

"Plenty of excitement to be had around here you know," put in Lockhart. "You see the Germans have a lot of the natives all stirred up. They've murdered a lot of our people and since the navy can't spare ships these days, the Colonial office patched together a lot of old pilots like us

and plans to police the islands by air, and—"

HE broke off short for, from the hangars along the lagoon edge dashed a runner, bare brown knees flashing, head back and a slip of yellow paper fluttering in his right hand.

"Hello, something's wrong," he said quietly laying down his cards, and for a moment all the patrol officers remained as though suddenly deprived of the power of motion. Eight pairs of eyes became fixed on the door as through it dashed a wildly excited wireless operator, with head phones still clamped to his ears.

"My God, look at this, sir," he panted and, jerking a hasty salute, placed a sheet of yellow paper in Lockhart's hands.

Crowding with the rest to peer over the Australian's khaki-clad shoulders, Kenny read:

Enemy cruiser thought to be *Mulherm* rumored in these waters. Only one warship available for immediate pursuit. Search your area. Wireless report to H. M. S. *Colfax*.
Signed Kennard.

An indefinable tension reigned in the messroom and Kenny was aware of a queer buzzing sensation in his spine. Germans—probably not a hundred miles away. Perhaps he might yet get that crack at the Boche!

"Attention, gentlemen." Very straight-backed, lean and brown did Captain Lockhart look as he stood against a gray-coral wall of the messroom. "Snider," he snapped turning to the shortest pilot in the room, "is your plane fit?"

Heels clicked as the little man jumped to attention. "Yes, sir. Tanks nearly full."

"Very good. You and Haynes will take off at once, mission to search area southwest of this base."

Forlorn and envious, Kenny stood to one side as assignment after assignment was given out to the hard-

featured, war-scarred pilots, fiercely eager to retaste the deadly joys of the past.

"Captain Lockhart, sir," he cried desperately. "For God's sake don't leave me out of this!"

Lockhart straightened and, apparently forgetting the tall young American at his side, called out, "Do your best, gentlemen, to find this cruiser. Hundreds of lives and millions of pounds worth of shipping depend on our finding the raider if, of course, she is in this area. You will search to the extreme limit of your fuel supply."

"Yes, sir." At once the veterans hurried, some limping, some running out of the messhall, stripping off blouses as they went and yelling at the top of their lungs for mechanics, for a supply of fuel, for charts and a dozen other necessities.

"Well, sir," demanded Kenny breathlessly, "what about me?"

"Thought maybe you'd like to come along with me, lieutenant," smiled the Australian. "But I warn you it'll be risky—I go a little crazy when I see a Boche in the offing."

"What ship, sir?" cried Kenny starting for the door.

"We'll take the Handley Page, N-2A," replied Lockhart grimly. "She's slower, but she's got more cruising radius."

But he found he spoke to an empty room; Lieutenant Kenny had dashed out of the room in the direction of his quarters.

NEVER in its brief history had the air-patrol base on Malekula boiled with such activity. Mechanics, both white and black, cursed and shouted, as out from the yellow and green camouflaged hangars of sheet iron they hauled four two-seater Campanic seaplanes and carefully dragged them down the broad apron which led to the placid waters of the lagoon.

Kenny, buckling his helmet, noticed

little Snider, ridiculously garbed in a gray woolen sweater, pumping up his compression. Goodhue had his bloodied Western Front helmet already strapped on and his goggles gleaming above, like an extra pair of eyes.

"I wish to hell the m. g. s. for these crates had come." Snider nodded to the quartet of khaki-painted Campanias and the single ponderous Handley-Page that, like huge dun-colored ducks, were now riding smoothly on the lagoon, their red, white and blue cocardes gleaming bright in the afternoon sunlight and reflected by the placid waters.

"Yes," replied Goodhue, "bloody shame the guns haven't got here yet. I say, Joe," he hailed Lockhart who, with a heavy Webley pistol belted to his waist, came swinging down to the launching apron. "Do you suppose the radio people will have warned our base on Mathew?"

"Very likely; so they'll probably be on the lookout. You'll have to be careful," the Senior officer cautioned his grimly eager pilots. "That cruiser must be positively identified. A mistake would be very serious. I've looked her up in 'Jane' and she has three stacks, like the damned old *Emden*, very high bows and her deck will very likely be all cluttered up with coal. You'll have to go close enough to see that, so be damned careful she doesn't pot you with her A-A guns."

Thereat a deep silence fell over the flight, for not one of them but knew that to recognize a false funnel and to see such small articles as coal bags, they would have to penetrate far inside the zone of intense anti-aircraft fire delivered by expert gunners.

"You've all got pistols?" snapped Lockhart. "Snider, you will take off first; Goodhue next, Sprague next and Morton after that."

With a heart that beat like the clatter of a clog dancer's feet, Kenny

watched the first of the seaplanes move off, and commence to test various parts of the equipment. Then little Snider taxied off, skimming along the surface and raising a long, frothy plume of snowy spray behind him.

It did Kenny's heart good to hear the deep steady roar of the Libertys and he wished that the Handley Page was likewise equipped.

Almost before he knew it a Papuan sergeant mechanic, flat-nosed, black as the ace of spades and with the usual huge halo of fuzzy hair, was stooping at the edge of the apron. Promptly Kenny bestrode the black man's shoulders and was waded out to the Handley Page, only a stride or two behind Lockhart.

He was soon seated in the observer's cockpit and closing his safety belt while Captain Lockhart, with expert skill, made the lagoon quiver with the roar of the powerful Hispano engine. They were going to face Death!

He felt a little sober. What would it be like when the *Mulheim's* machine guns and anti-aircraft guns began firing at them? Then the empty gun mountings met his eye. If there only was a machine gun there! Yes, there would be some bad moments when, to find out what must be found out, the Handley dove at the *Mulheim* through a deadly hail of anti-aircraft. Moreover, the Handley Page was not a really fast ship . . .

CHAPTER II

Hidden Muzzles



THE altimeter read ten thousand feet, the fuel tank showed one quarter full and the sun was just sinking in fiery splendor beneath the horizon when Kenny leaned forward, slapped Captain Lockhart's leather-clad shoulder twice and point-

ed to two feathery black columns of smoke that arose far to the southwest.

Promptly the Australian veteran nodded and banked over, to tear along on the new course.

"Two ships yonder. You're right—better investigate," his nod seemed to say.

Through his glasses, Kenny continued to study those smoke columns and fervently prayed that they might be caused by the elusive German *Mulheim*.

Quite suddenly Lockhart pointed the sea plane's blunt nose into a sharp climb, whereat Kenny glanced anxiously at the oil temperature gauge, then the rev indicator—both gave no cause for alarm. Why climb? Lockhart must know the gas supply was getting perilously low, and it scarcely fitted the program to be forced down on one of those New Hebrides, populated as they were by savage and often cannibalistic Melanesians.

Presently he understood when Lockhart snapped off the ignition and the motor died, to create a deafening silence in which the hissing of the wind through the guy wires and the dying coughs of the engine sounded very loud.

The Australian turned his narrow goggled head and, motioning the American lieutenant to take the dual controls, stripped off his helmet so that his thin sandy hair snapped in the warm evening breeze.

The veteran's head jerked up suddenly and he nodded. "Hear that?" Through the ear-holes of his helmet Kenny heard a faint booming sound.

"Big guns firing," Lockhart shouted and a queer gleam played in his single deep-set eye. "Fight going on down there."

He switched on the ignition and, while the Handley leaped forward with the sunlight gilding its under wings, he pulled on his oil-stained helmet.

The enemy must be down there! In

a few minutes now Kenny would be in the war as much as those lucky devils who'd gone to France.

"A crack at the Boche," he muttered through locked jaws and he glared furiously at the bare machine-gun bridge above his head. "Guess it'll be all one way, though."

He guessed Lockhart's intent when that wily pilot put the seaplane into a steep, breathless dive that made the whole fabric shudder. One glimpse, however, Kenny had had through the dusk of a two-funnelled passenger steamer tearing wildly along over the Coral Sea, her creaming white wake making a widening streak through the ever increasing gloom.

Not a mile behind and closing in fast on the camouflaged merchantman came a narrow, gray-painted cruiser with three of her four funnels spewing out streamers of woolly black smoke.

From the Handley's altitude there was certainly no way of telling whether that fourth funnel was real or not. It might very well be a British cruiser with one boiler out of commission engaged in pursuit of a German auxiliary cruiser—an expassenger liner—which, like the *Cap Trafalgar* and the *Prinz Eitel Freidrich*, might have escaped the North Sea blockade to harry British commerce.

It was only a glimpse the young American had, for the swooping Handley swiftly eclipsed the scene by power diving down behind the island.

"I see," Kenny told himself as he struggled to draw breath. "Old foxy is going to stay out of sight by bush-jumping across the island. Then we can get a quick look at close range before the archie gunners can get set for us."

RIGID he sat while the dark-green tree tops flashed by just below the long, cigar-shaped pontoons. Sud-

denly a vista of purple-blue ocean appeared above the soft-looking tops of palms and baobabs. Great God! That fleeing passenger ship was now spurting orange flames from her superstructure and the high sided cruiser had transfixed her victim in a blinding, blue-white glare of searchlights. All the while her guns hammered away at the fleeing merchantman.

Then, very suddenly, daylight seemed to have enveloped the Handley's cockpits, for the cruiser, not a quarter of a mile away, trained one of her searchlights on the speeding seaplane. It was a ticklish moment; surprise was something of the past now.

Lockhart put the Handley into a slow loop intended to plainly display the cordaces on the seaplane's under wings. If this lean black outline not far below was a British ship she would recognize them and there would be no firing but if she was the *Mulheim* . . .

There was a queer void where Kenny's stomach should be when he heard something rap on the coaming of the cockpit in line with his head. Miraculously, a splinter of new yellow wood was before his eyes. An enemy bullet had done that! The Handley was already under fire. No doubt now that this black, flame-spitting warship was the raider.

Promptly Captain Lockhart banked over in a mad dash for the shelter of the island, only to veer as frantically off to the left.

The merchantman had halted but was doomed, Kenny realized subconsciously when he noted flames leaping mast-high in the air and illuminating the whole tragic scene.

Inexplicably, the veteran pilot began a series of sickeningly sharp zig-zags and barrel rolls that threatened to rip the wings from the none-too-well groomed Handley.

Why in hell was Lockhart zigzag-

ging? Why did aviators zigzag? Amid his excitement Kenny recalled how he had been taught at Key West to maneuver thus when—Great God! Ice water seemed to have supplanted the blood in his veins. He whirled in his seat and beheld, not a hundred yards behind, the dim black outline of a gray-painted combat ship that, trim, deadly and quick, seemed poised in midair like a king fisher waiting to strike.

The burning merchantman flared brighter and Kenny, who had been frantically assuring himself that this must be a patrol plane from another base, vented a wheezing, whistling gasp of dismay. On the trim pursuer's underwings the leaping orange red pillars of flame revealed two straight armed and sinister black crosses! The emblem of Germany . . .

Motivated by the innate human instinct to die fighting, he jerked his heavy Colt automatic from its holster, well aware that this was a tragic attempt to defy the grim dictum of Fate.

"Might as well try a clip full," he said aloud and, turning in his safety belt, he leaned far out of the after cockpit. Extending the automatic at arm's length, he sighted hastily and saw the brief jet of wind-whipped flame spring from the barrel when he fired, but Lockhart swerved just as he pressed the trigger.

BELOW, the crippled liner was in her last throes. Kenny had a fleeting glimpse of her going down by the head and burning furiously. A lifeboat crowded with struggling black shapes was pushing off.

Only by use of that lore learned in France was the Australian veteran able to prolong the one-sided struggle. Again and again he banked sharp left to dodge a shower of bullets; next he went into a sickeningly abrupt Immelman that brought the Handley back almost over the spot where the

burning merchant ship had all but disappeared.

Again Kenny fired at that fleeting, bobbing black shape which, like the shadow of the Angel of Death, clung to the tail of the Handley Page. No use to struggle any more. The end was coming now, he felt it. The black, short-winged outline of the German seaplane was now not twenty yards behind, with the flash of its exhausts briefly showing up rudder and elevators.

As in an evil dream Kenny beheld the rounded outlines of the machine-gunner in the after cockpit. Head bent forward, body braced, the German stood ready, waiting to deliver that second withering blast which would knock the Handley into flaming wreckage.

He knew he was going to die, but shrieking inarticulate defiance, Kenny emptied the balance of his clip in the direction of that black outline. Then something happened.

Coincidentally with the appearance of spurts of fire along the fuselage of the enemy's ship, the Handley Page staggered like a duck struck with a heavy charge of shot. The air was bright with greenish tracer bullets as, marked by streaks of flame from her exhausts, the enemy seaplane shot out of sight below.

Instantly the motor coughed and died, and Kenny felt the whole fabric of the Handley shaken by a succession of savage impacts. When would a bullet end the misery of defeat? There was no time to think for now the doomed seaplane went into a dizzy, hopeless spin toward that oily black water which waited not two hundred feet below.

Around and around, Kenny clung blindly to the cockpit's edge while searchlights, stars and the burning merchantman wove a crazy pinwheel pattern before his eyes. With snapping of struts and a snarling of ripped canvas, the crippled seaplane crashed

into the water just as the American pilot cast loose the catch of his safety belt.

Blinding spray shot into Kenny's eyes and mouth. Unseen things struck at him for a split fraction of a second and then a whirling shower of sparks filled his eyes. Unseen demons tugged at his ankles to drag him farther and farther down into a cold, black, and limitless expanse.

He commenced to struggle, weakly, blindly, like a kitten in a bag. To his surprise the effort apparently did some good, for the devils seemed to have released his legs and his body commenced to rise leadenly. Up, up he shot through the reeling icy depths. He couldn't help swallowing water now and a huge invisible iron band seemed to be squeezing the air and life out of his lungs.

He bumped something, while suffering all the agonies of a man about to drown. His brain seemed to be bursting his skull and wide sheets of red fire flamed before his open, protruding eyes; then all of a sudden his head was up in the blessed air again. Gasping, spluttering, he snatched at, and weakly clung to, a piece of broken boat that bore the name *S. S. Ratak*.

A moment later the pilot was able to open his eyes and discovered that the sea about him was thickly littered with an indescribable amount of wreckage. Boxes, barrels, oars and a hundred other indistinguishable ob-

jects floated near, but of the Handley there was nothing to be seen . . .

CHAPTER III Sharks or Boche?



WITH a shudder of fear, the American remembered one of Goodhue's grim jests about the sharks. Attracted by the bodies of the men who had died aboard the wreck, they would soon be approaching in numbers.

"Must be something somewhere I can crawl out of the water on," he encouraged himself and peered around dazedly. "Maybe the cruiser will pick me up, or perhaps I can get to that lifeboat." Where was the boat he had seen? With Lockhart and the others he might row ashore and so escape capture.

He dashed the water from his aching eyes and with an effort studied his surroundings while stripping off his hampering uniform blouse. Yes, there was the lifeboat, a white, bobbing outline less than two hundred yards away. It was real, for now and then the moon glinted on a half turned oar blade. The men in it were pulling swimmers from the water. He could hear voices calling out for help.

Where was the author of the tragedy? Kenny swam about and be-



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held the high-sided *Mulheim* bearing down on the scene of the disaster, her great searchlights wavering over the jet water, to create diamantine splashes of color. The swimmer saw that she was camouflaged and looked positively enormous from his low position.

"Cruiser ahoy! Over here!" Above the rushing beat and throb of the cruiser's screws, Kenny heard a man's deep voice raised in hail, "Help! Our lifeboat's leaking."

A sudden pang of fear that he would be run down seized Kenny when it became evident that the *Mulheim* would, in a minute now, pass directly over the grave of the S. S. *Ratak*. He commenced to swim frantically, for the commerce destroyer was rushing down on him like a black mountain of steel.

His arms and legs felt leaden while Kenny struggled frantically to avoid the cruiser's course, but he managed it and clung to a piece of wreckage when the *Mulheim* roared by, flinging a wet smother of spray to either side. The weakened swimmer had a brief impression of guns, boats, cranes and sponsons just above his head. Then the bow waves filled his eyes and mouth with water before he began to struggle in the wake. Next the churning propellers made efforts to draw him below the surface, but in an instant the cruiser was by, a projectile of dazzle-painted steel, rushing away through the night at twenty-four knots the hour.

When Kenny could see again, it was to distinguish the white outline of the S. S. *Ratak's* lifeboat caught in the beam of one of the searchlights.

Lower and lower swept the dazzling searchlights. Didn't the cruiser's officers see the lifeboat in their path? An icy lance pierced the survivor's heart and a scream of horror burst from Kenny's wet lips as the *Mulheim's* bulk eclipsed the lifeboat from sight an instant before there sounded a

dull, crunching noise, like a trunk dropped from a height.

The *Mulheim* had deliberately run down the helpless lifeboat . . .

APPALLED, sickened, shaken to the depths of his soul, Kenny commenced to swim hurriedly toward the spot where the lifeboat had last been seen.

Suddenly, in the water just below him, a long shape rushed by, its course marked by a livid streak of phosphorescence. A chill of horror coursed through the man when the streak darted by again.

"Get away!" he yelled frantically, as he scrambled astride a floating spar, and lifted as much of his body from the water as he could. A money belt of gold, which he always carried about his waist, proved quite a drag. Should he let it go? Before he could decide, more evil phosphorescent shapes drew near. No hope of ever reaching the beach now. He'd never have to swim fifty feet—and he must live to make those devils aboard the *Mulheim* pay and pay heavily for what they had just done.

More phosphorescent streaks commenced to circle about and he thought he would go insane from sheer horror. Again he commenced to splash to scare the monsters away; someone had said if you made a lot of fuss a shark would let you alone.

"Hello," hailed a voice from amid the wreckage not far away. "Who's there?"

"Rocky Kenny," yelled the pilot—"till these damned sharks get me. Who are you?"

"Joe Lockhart. Better swim over here if the tigers are coming around. I've got an overturned lifeboat. It'll keep us both clear of the water.

Hardly had Kenny clambered up on the white bottom of the capsized lifeboat when the *Mulheim's* searchlights commenced to waver back and forth over the wreckage. She had stopped

her engines now and drifted, a great black shape, perhaps a quarter of a mile away.

"Dirty rats," grunted the Australian. "Did you see them ram the lifeboat? They did it deliberately."

"Yes," was Kenny's bitter reply. "It was horrible . . ."

"They're a hard lot," said Lockhart, who was now clad only in a shirt and a pair of drawers. He studied the distant cruiser in the glare of the searchlight which had come to rest on the capsized boat. "Hello, they're starting up their engines again. Like as not they'll ram us too, the blighters. But we can't go down into the water—see that?"

Several streaks of dull green light marked the course taken by a trio of triangular fins that were cleaving the still black water. Around and around the overturned boat the huge monsters cruised with powerful flips of their pointed tails.

All at once the two survivors were aware that the *Mulheim* had again shut off her engines and, travelling only under her impetus, was bearing down, her searchlights all the while playing over the wreckage-littered waters. Nearer and nearer she came until she towered almost above the chilled wretches on the lifeboat.

"Sharks or Boche?" demanded Lockhart grimly.

"Boche," was Kenny's stony reply.

"Hey there! Help—Sharks all about us!" Kenny raised his voice in a weak hail, while the Australian ace, revealed to the last detail by the blinding blue-white light, glowered up at the crowded bows above their heads. This plea resulted in a brief consultation among a group of officers collected at the rail of the cruiser which now lay not fifty yards away, with her long lean guns peering out of the sponsons, as though eager for fresh prey.



The fugitives reached the black uncertain shelter of the jungle

A CRANE with a boat dangling from it soon groaned out over the water, and in very short order the two half-naked survivors found themselves in a lifeboat and on their way to the dark and shadowy *Mulheim*.

"What in hell," Lockhart choked, "are they saving us for? They haven't spotted us for flyers—they think we're off that ship."

Kenny made no reply as he watched the tanned and frowning faces near him. He did not think it wise to betray his working knowledge of German. It might come in handy . . .

As they came alongside the *Mulheim*, being lowered by a crane to the cruiser's stern was a neat little seaplane, which Kenny recognized as a swift little Halberstadt two-seater fitted with pontoons.

"Guess that's why the *Mulheim's* sunk forty ships without getting caught," he mused.

When the boat was hoisted inboard and rested on the deck, the two prisoners were roughly seized and haled forward to a cabin whose door bore a small brass plate labelled, "*Kapitan.*"

"*Herein kommen!*" barked a harsh voice in answer to the marine's knock. Like automatons the marine guards stiffened and clicked their heels, then two of them stepped inside and presented arms. The other two pushed Kenny and Lockhart forward, into a small buff painted cabin.

Before them was a large desk behind which were seated three officers clad in parts of dingy white uniforms and otherwise dressed in a most un-military array of shirts and jerseys.

"*Ach so?*" The central figure leaned back abruptly and Kenny saw he had a long, thin face across the right cheek of which ran two purple-red *schmisses* earned in student duels. The small blue eyes of the German commander as he studied his prisoners were the coldest, most forbidding ones Kenny thought that he had ever seen, and the fellow's mouth was just a pale slash in his bony face. The two other Germans wore eyeglasses and had stiff upstanding blond hair that gleamed a little in the lights from above.

"Do either of you rascals speak German?" the big man abruptly inquired in that language.

"No," said Lockhart and Kenny together.

"Then I haff to speak English. *Vot ship vas dot?*"

"You've got us wrong, Captain," said Kenny. "We're not off that ship you sank. We're the aviators your seaplane shot down." I'm Lieutenant Kenny of the United States Naval aviation and the Australian is Captain Lockhart."

"So? Then where are your uni-

forms? You the laws of war know." There was deadly menace in the Prussian's eyes.

Both prisoners knew well that flyers in action were expressly warned to always fly in uniform. A technicality classed a non-uniformed man as a spy.

"Where did you take off from—" inquired the *Kapitan* icily.

Both men were silent.

"Name, age, home?"

The prisoners gave the information curtly and it was solemnly entered in the lead-bound ledger by a stiff-backed and arrogant-mannered lieutenant sitting at the right of *Fregattekapitan* von Stahl.

"It is too bad for you, *mein freunds*, that you are so ignorant of the laws of war. The *Ratak's* people were killed because her *Kapitan* failed to raise his flag before he opened fire. For a ship to begin shooting without raising her true flag iss, by international law, piracy. And you and your friend are no better than spies. You will be hanged tomorrow morning." Von Stahl made a curt gesture. "Take them away, *feldwebel* . . ."

CHAPTER IV Gold Dice



BETWEEN a pair of hulking, heavy-mustached marines, in stiff shakos and coal-grimed dark blue uniforms, the captives were presently conducted out into the moonlight again and haled over the *Mulheim's* deck. For all their trepidation, amazement filled the pilots when they saw how filthy the cruiser was. Her decks were oil spotted, scarred and pitted. Coal in dingy bags lay stacked in every conceivable corner.

Past members of the crew who looked more like coal heavers and

navvies than seamen belonging to the Imperial German Navy, the guards conducted their shivering, barefooted prisoners. The close-shaven, hard-faced officers, too, were clad in a weird array of sweaters, jerseys and shirt sleeves, but for all the general untidiness, the captured pilots noticed that the guns and all other essential equipment were bright and clean.

The anchor chain raised a terrific clatter as the *Mulheim's* anchor shot downward. Gradually the cruiser rounded to the restraint, her sharp prow headed straight for one of those shadowy islands.

An ingeniously rigged crane was engaged in lowering a black hook over the airplane. Beside the Halberstadt stood a pair of men wearing aviation helmets and goggles.

"Going on reconnaissance," thought Kenny bitterly—and he and Lockhart would never fly again . . .

"Get in there." The black mustached sergeant of marines shoved Kenny and Lockhart roughly into a companion way and pointed to a set of steep stairs. The detail finally halted before a tiny barred cell into which the prisoners were bundled without ceremony. The sergeant of marines fell back, accompanied by three of his men. To the fourth he entrusted the key to the cell, then swung off down the steel-walled passage.

"Well," remarked Lockhart, "looks like a case of here we are and here we stay, until we get what they give us!"

Kenny made no reply, his eyes being busy in their scrutiny of the narrow cell. A single, heavily barred porthole afforded a view of moonlit water which must be shadowed by the *Mulheim's* counter. Two small steel benches were the only objects to break the boxlike emptiness of the prison, one side of which sloped sharply outward from the floor to the ceiling, which fact proclaimed that the cruiser's lockup was located just over the propellers.

A loud banging overhead drew the American's attention to the porthole. Something was dangling before it. "They're lowering that seaplane, Lockhart," he murmured.

"Hope to hell they drown," replied the Australian captain bitterly.

Curiously, they watched the *Mulheim's* crane lower the Halberstadt to the black, glassy water. Beyond the seaplane one could catch an occasional glimpse of one of the islands. Was this a regular base for the commerce destroyer? The Germans seemed very much at home here.

Kenny's heart commenced to pound as he watched one of the aviators clamber up on the Halberstadt's wing and cast loose a hook by means of which the pontoon-fitted pursuit ship had been lowered. Now by the moonlight he could see both the helmeted and begoggled aviators quite plainly. They were seating themselves in their cockpits and calling to people who must be on the deck above them.

By straining his ears the American could catch an occasional word and dimly he heard some one yell about a hospital ship being easy to see because she would be painted white. With a wave of the hand, the pilots settled back letting the onshore breeze blow them well clear of the *Mulheim's* shadowy stern.

"Hello!" Lockhart was quite startled when the Halberstadt's blunt-ended propeller commenced to turn over. "Must be some special apparatus in that job. I've seen plenty of Boche before I lost my bloomin' eye and never a one did I see with a self-starter."

ALL at once there came to the ears of the doomed pilots a familiar, crackling roar of exhausts, and the moonlit water behind the seaplane became all wrinkled and blurry with the back draft.

Slowly the Halberstadt gathered speed and, amid a welter of silver-lit

spray, taxied in toward the ragged coral beach, until, with a final gleam of moonlight on its wings, it roared off to find victims for the next day's slaughter.

An immeasurable depression seized the prisoners when the last faint drone of the Halberstadt's motor had died away and only the methodic *clump-clump* of the guard's clumsy shoes sounded in the little cell.

"Look here," said Kenny, pale features quivering. "I understand some German; just now I heard they're after a hospital ship! By God, Lockhart, we've got to stop it somehow."

"Oh yes, but we can't do it after we've been hanged." Lockhart, angular and bony as a shad, in his underwear, blinked gloomily from his seat on the iron shelf.

Suddenly Kenny shifted his gaze to the blue-clad back of the stalwart marine guard. With rifle slung to his shoulder the German was tramping steadily back and forth, always casting a look into the cell when he drew near.

"It's all very well to talk," Lockhart muttered, "but what can we do?"

"This," whispered the American. "It's a risky thing, but it's our only chance. Here." Pulling up his undershirt Kenny revealed the money belt, and launched into a plan so wild and desperate that Lockhart frowned and shrugged.

"It's a hundred to one shot, but we may as well try it as get hung in the morning." Kenny's own bronzed head inclined as he commenced pulling a plentiful supply of thick twenty dollar goldpieces from the belt.

The guard, reaching the far end of the post, turned and his eyes narrowed a little when he noticed the strange spectacle presented by the two nearly naked condemned men kneeling solemnly on the steel floor of their cell, engaged in tossing the red-yellow discs and calling loudly for heads or tails.

He stacked the heavy coins near the barred door where their rich lustre could dazzle the eye. The guard's tread carried him one full pace nearer the barred iron door. Neither Kenny nor the dishevelled Australian looked up, but went on about their gambling.

"Heads," chuckled Lockhart. "Now then, Yank, that puts me forty dollars up on you." Then in a lower voice, "Keep it up, that squarehead is interested."

Again the marine drew near the cell and came to a halt and, as he watched the play, his lips quivered a little, and well they might, for nearly a thousand dollars in gold lay there.

Gradually Kenny's pile grew, until finally the Australian sprang up and flung his remaining gold pieces away so that they fell with rich clinking sounds on the floor of the cell. One of them rolled out into the corridor to be promptly retrieved by the marine's sausage-like fingers.

"Ah, take the damned stuff away!" Lockhart growled. "What use is it anyhow?"

In the darkness outside the roar of airplane motors grew loud then died away. The Australian jumped up with a hearty curse.

"To hell with that bleeding gold! Let's pitch the whole bloody lot out the porthole."

The guard looked up sharply and scowled.

"Oh, no," objected Kenny carelessly. "Somebody might as well have the use of it, even if we can't." He picked up a huge double handful of the red-gold coins and approached the barred door. "Here," he called in broken German. "Do you want this?"

The German, disciplined to a degree, shook his shaven head, but with obvious reluctance. "I do not take bribes," he said stiffly.

"Bribes, hell! I'm not bribing you. You might as well have this gold as any one. Of course if you don't want it, I'll pitch it—"

"*Warten sie,*" the German called when Kenny turned on his heel. "Please, if I am not to help you—"

"No, you couldn't do anything alone. All I want you to do is answer a couple of questions." Kenny spoke in halting but understandable German.

"Questions?"

"Yes. On deck they spoke just now of a ship that was expected."

"*Gewiss.*" The German's head inclined. "The *Union Castle* is the name. The seaplane saw her at sundown."

"When will she pass here?"

The marine's eyes glittered as they viewed the broad goldpieces. "No one is sure, but perhaps it will be in the morning. We will sink her then."

"Here you are." Kenny's smile was not reflected in his eyes. Hands filled to overflowing, the American paused just inside the bars. Lockhart stood to one side scowling and looking very disgusted with the whole proceeding.

"**H**ELP yourself," the American invited as the marine's big red hands came reaching eagerly through the bars. The guard snatched a handful of the coins, crammed them in a side pocket and then reached for more. He started back with a brief hoarse cry of alarm for, in a split fraction of an instant, Kenny's hands dropped the remaining gold in a jingling torrent and clamped themselves about the eager paws of the marine.

"Grab him!" With the desperation of a man who sees a halter dangling before his eyes, Kenny clung to both of the German's wrists, braced bare feet against the chill iron bars and hurled his weight back.

Though the German struggled furiously he did not cry out, for the good and sufficient reason that Flight Captain Lockhart had seized his jailer's throat with hard brown hands that might have been fashioned of Krupp steel for all the give in them.

Furiously powerful were the German marine's struggles to free himself while his face went from red to purple and from purple to black, but it was to no avail. The airmen knew only too well that their lives, as well as the lives of several hundred other people, depended entirely upon their keeping their grip. Like bear dogs they hung on until the marine's white-clad knees gave way and, with a clatter of accoutrement, he sagged limply to the floor plates. Even then the wild-eyed prisoners did not release their victim for two full minutes.

"Better be sure," Lockhart gasped.

At last Kenny, trembling with excitement, reached through the bars to pull the key from the dead man's belt. He inserted the key in its lock, there was an encouraging click and then both men stood in the narrow steel corridor outside, with the pale yellow electric lights beating down on their naked shoulders and quivering features. With incredible speed Kenny donned the dead marine's uniform.

"Do I pass?" he panted.

"You look as German as kummel," Lockhart assured him with a cool smile. "Hurry now, my lad, and don't make mistakes."

Lockhart, following stealthily in Kenny's wake saw the American beckon vigorously. "What's up?"

"Clothes. Make it snappy."

To the great joy of the desperate pair, they had stumbled on a squad room which, for the moment, was tenanted only by snoring seamen of the Imperial Navy. Various articles of clothing lay scattered about, and of these the Australian pilot made a quick selection.

"Lucky everybody aboard is wearing rat-catcher uniforms," Lockhart muttered as he pulled on his stolen garment. "All right. Got that rifle ready?"

"Yes, here's the bayonet."

Then with cautious tread the condemned men commenced the next step

in their fight for life, realizing that their chances were very slim indeed.

NERVE-RACKING ages seemed to pass while Kenny, with the German marine's helmet set low over his eyes, marched with truly Prussian stiffness along the supply flat of the *Mulheim*. At last the two prisoners climbed an iron ladder and found themselves in the comparative coolness of the deck, but they shrank back, wide-eyed, on discovering a large part of the crew sleeping there. Only the tread of marine sentries patrolling the deck broke the heavy stillness.

Kenny crept along among the shadows to port. He could see a marine on duty on the bridge, another at the bow and there were no doubt two more posted in the crow's nest.

"I hope that bloody plane is all set," the Australian whispered. "We'll have to take off damn quick. They've machine guns mounted on the bridge."

"It ought to be okay since it's lying ready alongside."

Lockhart's leathery face, Kenny realized, was very drawn and anxious. And well it might be, for Death hovered ready to swoop down on them both.

In the lee of a camouflaged barrette the two aviators paused with bated breath to study anxiously the broad expanse of moon-silvered deck ahead. More than ever they realized that from now on luck was essential.

"Damn! There's a guard by the seaplane boom," Lockhart whispered.

The marine had, until this moment, been out of sight behind the after turret. But when the ship's bell jangled out the hour of three-thirty the sentry sauntered over to stand by the long boom to which the Halberstadt was secured. He straightened, shifted his Mauser to the other shoulder and then recommenced his patrol.

High up in the conning tower the officer of the deck was casting his eye toward the stern.

"*Ach*," he rumbled to the bearded *Oberzahlmeister* at his side, "you would think the men after a day like this would be able to sleep. Look."

The petty officer glanced downwards and beheld two men, one in marine uniform and the other in ill fitting sailor's garb, who were strolling casually toward the stern. The marine on guard nodded pleasantly when the sleepless ones halted at the rail, apparently enchanted with the sight of the palms which, swaying in the moonlight, created a beautiful shimmering effect.

"*Ganz gut, nicht wahr?*" murmured the officer of the watch. "No in the North Sea freezing; no Britishers out of your bunk to blow you."

"*Gewiss, Herr Leutnant*," the petty officer returned with sleepy, respectful accents.

The two Germans on the bridge fell into conversation; when the officer of the deck turned again, he sighed. "*Ach*, so those fools back to bed have gone."

And so it seemed. Only the marine stood on guard beside the seaplane and when a moment later he also disappeared, the deck officer thought him to be behind the turret. But the real guard was lying stunned and very limp beneath a tarpaulin.

As, Mauser on shoulder, he tramped the deck, Kenny's heart was banging about in his chest like a golfball in a pail. Had anyone seen him down the guard?

"Kenny?"

From below came a cautious hail. Lockhart straightened from his efforts over the Halberstadt's motor.

"All right," he whispered, his face looking very white in the moonlight. "Come out along the boom; we'll drift as far as we can before I try her."

Quickly Kenny put down his rifle and with catlike agility crept out on the dew-wet spar to drop onto the upper wing. It was the work of a moment to unhook the tackle which

secured the seaplane to the side of that silent steel monster.

Casting an anxious glance at the towering masts and the bridge, he slipped from the upper wing out of sight among the deep shadows of the after cockpit. Lockhart, too, had ducked out of sight the instant that iron side commenced to recede.

THERE was only a feeble wind and the seaplane drifted away with an exasperating slowness. Sweat broke out on the American while he waited for the alarm. Let one eye spy the Halberstadt's departure and the chase would be on.

Through a dark tunnel formed by the fuselage, he could see Lockhart in the front cockpit, one hand ready on the magneto switch.

With a gentle bobbing motion, the Halberstadt commenced to slide gently downwind, heading toward that coral beach where placid waters whispered.

"Lucky we're on the leeward side," Lockhart murmured. "We'd get smashed to hell if that swell on the other side of the island caught us."

When the plane had travelled perhaps two hundred feet a deep, startled voice rang out from the cruiser's bridge.

"*Achtung! Achtung!* The seaplane loose has broken!"

The crisis was at hand; life and death wavered on the scales of Fate. Another voice took up the alarm, another and another. Kenny felt cold shivers running four forties up and down his spine.

Would some thoughtless idiot turn loose a machine gun and drench the silent plane with lead? Probably not for, seeing no one in either cockpit, the guards would assume that the plane had simply broken loose of its own accord.

"When are you going to start warming up?" Kenny demanded hoarsely.

"When that ruddy boat gets so

damn near us the Boche aboard the cruiser won't dare fire," coolly returned the Australian.

Kenny turned his gaze skyward to study the seaplane's machine gun which, mounted on a sort of bridge, had its contours disguised by a canvas cover. The harassed American's mind groped back in a frantic effort to recall the instructions he had received at Key West concerning the Spandau machine guns. Across the decks of the alarmed cruiser many feet clattered. Then the voice of authority said, "Quiet! Lower away cutter to take plane in tow!"

A whistle piped away a boat crew and promptly the excitement subsided, only to rise again as the boat shoved off. Dimly, the sound of rowlocks and oars beat in Kenny's ears.

"Better get ready," he called to Lockhart, "they're coming close. Let's go!"

When, like jacks-in-boxes, he and his companion straightened from their cockpits, a loud startled shout rang across the moonlit water. Kenny snatched off the Spandau's cover and threw a quick look over his shoulder to see that the seaplane had drifted only a scant hundred yards from the cruiser's stern and, moreover, that a cutter was surging forward, propelled by eight pairs of brawny arms. A burly seaman was standing in the bow ready with a boat hook.

WHILE he fitted into place an ammunition drum snatched from the rack at his side, Kenny's whole consciousness was trained for the initial roar of the Halberstadt's motor. Presently it came, a heart-warming sputter of exhaust reports. The hair on the back of the American's head stirred and with savage joy he swung the Spandau's lean muzzle around to cover the onrushing cutter. Subconsciously he noted the *Mulheim's* rail black with figures.

A search light hissed into being as

eternal seconds dragged by. Lockhart was bent forward, working with the engine. He jiggled the throttle, whereupon the powerful motor set the whole plane to quivering. It began to slip slowly over the water.

"Get going, for God's sake!" desperately Kenny yelled as he found the Spandau's unfamiliar safety catch and threw off the lever.

He braced his weary body against the coaming of the cockpit and found the white bow of the cutter over his sights. Suddenly a cool inner voice warned him not to begin firing until the plane was ready to take off, because if he did, the gunners on the *Mulheim* would lash the seaplane with machine-gun bullets the instant the boat crew was dead.

Gradually, the plane commenced to gather speed and Kenny's heart was warmed at the sight of six brass levers arranged beside the observer's seat. Very well he knew these were the releases of bomb racks. In his mind's eye he already visualized the *Mulheim* reeling and spouting smoke as he loosed her own bombs upon her.

With a feeling of savage pleasure he pressed the Spandau's trigger, smelt the bitter reek of burnt cordite, saw brief red flashes and felt his hands jarred by the Spandau's recoil. The water just in front of the cutter became lashed into frothy activity, as though a hail storm had suddenly struck there. The seaman with the boat hook crumpled and two of the oarsmen sprang to their feet, their bodies jerking queerly before they collapsed across the thwarts. Oars flashed erratically through the air, then fell overboard.

Without warning the Halberstadt's motor ceased its even roar, hiccupped drunkenly and fell silent.

"What the hell?" Sulphurous were the Australian pilot's curses as, revealed by the searchlights, he bent forward, his hands flying over the controls, testing and adjusting them.

"What's wrong?" yelled Kenny, heart in mouth. "Quick! They'll get us in a minute."

"We're cooked! No gas in the carburetor; bloody tanks must be empty."

An appalling sensation of defeat smote Kenny and that shadowy noose again swayed before the bloodshot eyes of the American pilot. Fortune had turned away her face at the most critical moment. In desperation he sent a final, savage burst smacking into the riddled cutter which, with her load of dead and dying, began to sink lower into the water. Promptly a pair of triangular fins commenced circling about it.

"No gas!" cried the Australian, his single eye alight with desperation. "What shall we do?"

"Swim for it," yelled Kenny, scrambling out of the cockpit.

The beach lay a scant two hundred feet away. Could they make it? Might as well try, it was death to stay where they were and already three boatloads of raging German seamen were pulling over the water while two guns of the cruiser's secondary battery swung their muzzles in line with the helpless patrol plane. Let it make one move and it would be blown to atoms.

Pausing just long enough to strip off the marine's cartridge belts and tight fitting blue-serge blouse, Kenny followed Lockhart into the warm salty water and struck blindly out for the jungle fringing the beach.

CHAPTER V Marked for Doom



RIFLE and machine-gun bullets were raising little geysers all about him, Kenny realized when his feet encountered the first coral branches along the shore. Damn those pitiless searchlights!

A few strides ahead of him was the Australian pilot. For a couple of moments the dripping fugitives could only gasp and peer back at the little bay which had witnessed their nearly successful efforts to effect an escape.

"What island do you think this is?" Kenny said when he had recovered breath.

"Blest if I know." The Australian shook his narrow brown head, and moonlight beating through the palm fronds above gave his face a queer tigerish effect. "Might be Mathew, Annaton, or Walpole, but it looks a lot like I remember Erromanga."

A little silence fell while the panting, insect-tortured fugitives watched a boat from the *Mulheim* take the deserted seaplane in tow and drag it back to its place by the stern of that formidable fighting machine.

"Think the island's inhabited?" asked Kenny glancing about uneasily.

"No way of telling, but most of the Melanesians aren't nice chaps to meet up with unarmed!"

At the sound of oars, Kenny started and peered intently through the leafy screen. "Look!" he cried, "if those damned Boche aren't sending a shore party after us!"

It was so. Two boats, deep in the water with German sailors, were pulling in toward the beach with long powerful strokes and the moon shone on more than one Mauser barrel and cutlass sheath.

"Our best chance is to get to the other side of the island," Lockhart said, jerkily. "They'll most likely think we'd be skirting the beach on this side."

"Okay. Let's go."

Half an hour later the fugitives could hear the dull rush and rumble of long rollers which, born in the broad Pacific, were shattering themselves in leisurely grandeur against the coral barrier reefs beyond Erromanga. Suddenly the Australian's stubby forefinger pointed down the

coast to a tiny white speck which stood clearly outlined against the dark shore.

"Looks like a trader's go-down from this distance," said Lockhart wearily.

"I suppose we may as well go and see what's there," suggested the American after a pause, and in silence broken only by the crunch of coral under their feet the two bedraggled aviators resumed their painful journey.

"Well, I'm damned!" The Australian had checked his stride for the two had emerged upon a little promontory which afforded their first real view of the structure.

"What's that thing running down to the water?" Kenny queried eagerly.

"I know now," Lockhart said suddenly. "That's a slide for either a lifeboat or a seaplane. We're on Erromanga all right and this is an emergency station for our seaplane patrol, based on Kongi, built since my time."

"Hold on," Kenny cried laying a hand on his companion's arm. "There's something wrong over there. See? There's a big hole in the roof."

The Australian pilot's one eye blinked a moment then he nodded. "Right you are and, by God, it looks like a shell hole!"

"Has the earmarks of a recent job," Kenny remarked. "See? There's another shell hole in the ground alongside."

The Australian nodded vigorously. "Shouldn't wonder but our friends on the *Mulheim* hadn't been around here and chucked a few shells into the station just for luck."

A deal of careful stalking took place before the ragged fugitives found themselves before the square-built, white-washed building which appeared to have been solidly constructed of blocks of coral. Its windows had apparently been shattered by a shell which had entered from the

ocean side, they could see the shattered glass lying in the grass outside and catching the moonlight. Also most of the sheet iron roof was gone.

"Must have made a direct hit with a small caliber shell," observed the Australian after they circled back toward the front of the station. "Struck the bleedin' living quarters. You can see the shed next to it hasn't been hurt much. Wonder if the poor devils were in there?"

It was with difficulty that the two aviators distinguished among the ruins of the interior the bodies of two men horribly mangled by the fatal shell.

"What a shambles!" cried Lockhart. "The first shell must have caught 'em asleep."

"Let's see what happened to the shed alongside," Kenny suggested.

Over a long wooden runway which led down to the restless waves, the two pilots scrambled and found themselves before a sliding door of sheet iron.

Beside the living quarters, and separated from it by a thick wall of coral block which had successfully withstood the force of the explosion, was a long, iron-roofed shed.

"If there's a plane, it'll be in here," Lockhart predicted as he pulled back the powerful bolts securing the door.

"A plane?" The germ of an idea stirred in the back of Kenny's weary brain and grew rapidly while they occupied themselves with unbolting the door. Suddenly the fugitives paused as though deprived of the power of motion. In the distance sounded a deep, muffled roar, a roar which both men recognized.

"The Boche are warming up that Halberstadt," Kenny said breathlessly. "Do you suppose they'll look for us over here?"

The Australian captain's jersied shoulders rose in a shrug. "Maybe, but it's the blokes on the ground that worry me. Let's listen."

The two fugitives stood quite still before the shed, peering anxiously up into the star studded heavens.

"Still warming up their engine. Let's see what's what," Kenny eagerly returned to the immediate problem.

The green-painted iron door swung outwards presently and hope beat high in the hearts of the two pilots when the moon flooded the shed's interior to reveal the shadowy outlines of a small and unfamiliar type of seaplane.

"What is it, Lockhart?" Kenny demanded, setting his shoulders to the door and pushing it further open. "I see she mounts a machine gun—Thank God. Maybe we'll stand a chance this time."

Fierce hope throbbed in Kenny's being as he strode inside and touched the long lower arm of the propeller. From the depths of the shed came the Australian pilot's deep voice.

"I say, Yank, this job is a Wight seaplane. I've just remembered the blinkin' serial numbers. Maybe it's good and maybe it's not. Anyhow this here overhead exhaust is a bloomin' nuisance."

"Ever fly one?"

"No," grunted the Australian. "Do you think you can?"

"Tell you in a minute."

Trembling in every limb with renewed hope that the death-dealing *Mulheim* might not escape after all, Kenny scrambled nimbly up onto the lower wing and peered into the forward cockpit.

"I think I can fly this job all right," he stated slowly. "Of course you can work that machine gun on the stern?"

"Jolly well ought to, since it's a Lewis. But," the Australian suddenly became very thoughtful, "just what the hell are we going to accomplish with only a machine gun? It takes bombs and six-inch rifles to argue with that damned *Mulheim*."

Kenny's elation faded rapidly, then flared back into being. He turned an

eager, unshaven face on the man below. "Say, Lockhart, these patrols might have some bombs lying around. Doesn't it stand to reason they'd use 'em in suppressing native uprisings?"

"That's true," the Australian agreed. "I'll have a look about while you go over this here flying curiosity."

WITH great care the American pilot studied every detail of the ship he hoped to fly. Apparently the Wight had been recently flown and was outwardly, at least, in sound condition. But real airworthiness could not be proved save by the Squeers method of taking the patrol plane into the air.

That was risky since they didn't want to alarm the cruiser on the other side of the island.

"Good old girl." After his long separation from planes it was with an almost sensual delight that Kenny ran his hands over the familiar fittings in the cockpit. Ah, there was the machine-gun trigger conveniently secured to the joystick.

He tested the controls and felt his heart quicken with apprehension. Lord, but they were loose!

"A regular flying coffin, by God," he pronounced, with a frown of apprehension, after a more detailed study of the Wight.

It was growing gray out there on the broad black lagoon, shore birds were whistling and before long a new day would be at hand.

In the back of the shed he could hear boxes being opened and shut to the accompaniment of the Australian captain's inspired cursing. Methodically, Kenny sounded the Wight's main fuel tank and found it about half full. Next he inspected a smaller reserve tank tucked beneath the cowl-ing, evidently one of those *nourrice* emergency tanks with a gravity feed, useful if the regular pressure system got out of order. But if a bullet hit it there'd be hell to pay.

"Everything's in flying condition and there's gas enough," Kenny called as he scrambled down and kicked away a set of chocks wedged beneath the tri-stepped pontoons. "Anyhow, one thing will be easy; these fixed rollers will help our getting her to the water. Maybe we'll have to keep a tackle on her to keep her from sliding down too fast."

"I'm glad there's one thing easy," growled Lockhart, reappearing, dust-covered and wrathful. "There are just two blinking little five-pound demolition bombs in the place; some detonating apparatus and dynamite fuses, too, but they're no help."

Kenny's hopes faded. "Only two bombs?" he demanded sharply.

"Yes. But if we can drop one down the *Mulheim's* stack, they'll jolly well settle the Dutchman's hash."

"Some target! Say, which one of us is going to drop these souvenirs of ours?" Kenny demanded passing a weary hand over his salt-encrusted features. Never in his life had he been so thoroughly exhausted. "As a bomber I make a swell cavalryman. How about you?"

Stridently, the Australian pilot's laugh boomed out in the shed. "Hell, I'm a pilot, too. I can handle a machine gun for a fare-you-well, but when it comes to laying eggs like these," from beside his feet he raised two smooth, pear-shaped bombs fitted with metal fins to guide their flight, "I go to the foot of the class."

In helpless, disgusted silence the two pilots studied each other across the Wight's tail.

"You've flown a lot more than I have," Kenny said at last, "so you ought to be able to judge speed and distance better. Suppose I pilot, and you try to chuck our eggs down the Jerry's funnels—" The American's sentence was clipped off short for, from the other side of the island, sounded a deeper and louder roar of an airplane's motor.

"They're off all right and heading this way," Lockhart cried. "Come on!"

BOTH aviators dashed out of the shelter of a nearby clump of palms. They were just in time to see the Halberstadt's swift outline momentarily silhouetted against the sinking yellow-red moon. Closer and closer it came, with moon-silvered wings shining bright, and swooping down like a bird of ill omen.

The German seaplane was almost above the station now. Would it sidleslip to loose a bomb?

If so, all hope of revenge was lost!

But nothing aroused the suspicions of the enemies aloft and they headed the cruiser's plane out over the glassy rollers of the Coral Sea, intent on some other mission.

"Gone out to see just where the hospital ship is, shouldn't wonder," Lockhart muttered. "Well, Yank, now's our best chance to settle with that blinkin' cruiser. How about the Wight? Will she do?"

"She's had some pretty hard work," Kenny tried hard to instill a confident tone in his voice as he added, "but she seems fit enough."

Employing a block and tackle hooked to the pontoon carriage and evidently designed for the purpose, the two aviators had no great difficulty in sliding the seaplane down the runway and presently the khaki-hued Wight floated free on the lagoon.

In silence the two pilots waded out to the floating biplane, carrying various objects essential to their desperate venture. Kenny clambered to his post in the forward cockpit and primed the motor while Lockhart eased the two five-pound bombs into the rear cockpit.

"Shove this crate out a little further," Kenny directed presently, "so that the land breeze can push us to the middle of the lagoon. Don't want to snag a pontoon."

Lockhart obeyed, wading out up to his armpits, then he hoisted himself onto the starboard pontoon and, from the rear, prepared to turn over the Wight's long yellow propeller.

Day was certainly not far off now, Kenny realized. His hands shook with suppressed excitement when he switched on the magneto, opened the bronze fuel cock and yelled "Ready!"

"Ready." After revving the propeller slowly a few times, the Australian gave a short, sharp heave. Nothing happened.

"Got your juice on?" demanded Lockhart, panting.

"Sure have. Try her again."

On the third try Kenny's heart was gladdened by a series of coughing reports from the exhaust. The propeller commenced to turn over and the motor stuttered and stammered like a frightened school boy. From the exhaust above the American's head burst brief puffs of woolly white smoke.

Lockhart scrambled, dripping, into his cockpit and made a brief inspection of the Lewis gun from which Kenny had long since stripped the cover. Meanwhile the American warmed the motor carefully, opening and closing the throttle with a sure touch. The ensuing violent vibrations were far from reassuring.

"God, what a crate!" yelled the Australian over the sputter of the exhaust. "She's loose as a bushman's joints."

At last mercury in the oil temperature thermometer showed 70° C. and with great care Kenny opened the throttle a little wider. At once the seaplane commenced to slide over the starlit water at a faster rate, heading down the long lagoon.

WHERE was the *Mulheim*? Had she already steamed from her anchorage? He thought she hadn't, for the dark skies showed no trace of smoke. No sign of the Halberstadt

either. He hoped she'd stay away, it would be no fun to fight a modern ship like that.

Only then did Kenny realize how thoroughly foolhardy was this wild gamble of theirs.

The Wight was an ungainly brute; she handled with the dexterity of a box kite. Lucky thing that Halberstadt was out of the way!

Because he was helmetless and goggleless, the warm wind immediately made itself felt on his sweating forehead when the Wight's tail lifted a little. It rose a little more and now the patrol plane was skimming over the surface of the lagoon like a gigantic ruddy duck. Kenny pulled gently back on the joystick. No dice. You had to be brutal with this flying hayrick. He further depressed the joystick, whereat the Wight rose heavily, unwillingly from the gray waters, but the motor, a D.H., commenced to respond to his careful nursing.

THEY were flying on a level with the palm tops. Now they could see the vapor-veiled interior of Erromanga. The world was neither light nor dark now, because of a treacherous half-light emanating from a pinkish-gray splash of color in the eastern sky.

Up, up. The air was getting chilly, but it was fine to be flying again. Kenny turned his head and saw the Australian pilot peering over the side, his good eye burning with a savage gleam as he sought to catch a glimpse of that cruiser on which they had spent those ghastly hours.

The altimeter was showing six hundred feet so Kenny banked over to the right toward a spot where the gray mists seemed to be blacker than elsewhere.

Fierce delight filled the chilled American when, through the shifting vapors, he spied a very flat black ellipse lying far below. The *Mulheim* was still at anchor!

He dashed wind-formed tears from his eyes and glanced back. Lockhart was nodding and pointing downwards and with his hand he imitated the course of a diving plane. Kenny's haggard and unshaven features parted in a savage grin; he understood.

To get the wind at his back, he circled off to the east. From the lack of excitement below, he perceived that the crew of the *Mulheim* were not aware that a seaplane other than their own had arrived on the scene.

When the altimeter needle showed seven hundred feet, he stopped climbing and banked around. Carefully, he gauged the distance, a difficult feat in the half light. He would dive so as to whirl the patrol plane over those three furiously smoking funnels at a height of about sixty feet. That would call for real flying; it would be all too easy to foul his wings in the wireless aerial or in a bit of rigging and if that happened, well . . .

Exasperation seized him as he cut off the motor. Would this clumsy ship stand even the easy dive he contemplated? The canvas on that right wing was patched and worn in a dozen places. But to hell with it! In a minute now he was going to have that long-deferred crack at the Boche!

Setting his teeth, he brought the fuselage in line with the cruiser's beam. Long since, he and Lockhart had settled just how the bombing was to be done. Toward the end of the dive, Kenny would sideslip to lose speed and, as the seaplane veered by, Lockhart was to drop one of the little demolition bombs down a funnel.

While the resulting explosion was not likely to sink the *Mulheim*, it yet would certainly wreak such havoc with her boilers and engines that her usefulness would be permanently destroyed. Of course they would have to risk the anti-aircraft fire, if the *Mulheim* became aware of her danger.

He steadied the Wight, noting that the overhead exhaust was now white

hot. Good. Another look at the Australian pilot showed his useless eye looking a small black pit in the half light, but the good eye was bright with excitement as he stood up in the cockpit, engaged in removing the safety pin which controlled the detonator on that gray pear-shaped bomb. A bleak smile was creasing his lean, dark features, and in the rush of the wind his black hair snapped strongly.

The American waggled his wings once in warning, then nosed down, heading straight at the black monster below.

CHAPTER VI Ashes of Hope



HEART in mouth at the uneasy straining of the fabric about him, Kenny felt the patrol plane gather speed as it went further into its dive and his nerves set themselves for that heartrending crack which would mean that the wings had given way. It was worse than useless to pull out of the dive, for now the *Mulheim's* people had awakened to their danger and, on the decks below, rifles were cracking spitefully.

Down, down. It seemed to the pilot's staring eyes that his objective, the three smoke-belching stacks, were springing up to impale the swooping seaplane.

Down, down. Louder grew the crack and crackle of the rifles and presently a machine gun's mad chatter sounded over the scream of the wind in the Wight's guy wires. Suddenly, when the patrol ship was almost on top of the raider, Kenny expertly went into a sideslip which slowed the arrowlike descent. Like an old race horse that is pulled up too suddenly, the seaplane shuddered. It was almost alongside one funnel which was giving off thick black clouds of smoke.

From the tail of his eye Kenny saw something flash downward, then he gave the Wight the gun, immediately banking over to the right. Hardly had he sheered off than the whole plane seemed to leap in midair. Below sounded a deafening roar, as dazzling lances of flame and smoke shot up through the clouds.

Up zoomed the Wight and Kenny dimly heard the Australian shouting. After reaching a safe position he looked over the side, past the khaki-painted wing. Damn! The *Mulheim* seemed to be just as before. But no. Just back of the boxlike conning tower a burst of flame and a wooly spiral of gray-white smoke marked the spot where the bomb had struck, a scant twenty feet from the forward stack. Only twenty feet from victory, an exasperatingly small margin of error!

"Guess that scrambled her range finders and fire control instruments," Kenny told himself in an effort to smother his disappointment. Tight jawed, he began preparations for the second and deciding dive.

The Wight commenced to climb with exasperating slowness. This time there could be no question of missing, in spite of a hotter defensive fire he would have to go lower. That second bomb must explode in the tender, unarmored vitals of the monster lying torpid on the dark-blue water below.

He reached a determination that approximated suicide. On the next try he would risk neck and plane in passing not ten feet over the camouflaged funnels. Of course he might misjudge the distance and crash into his goal; it was very easy to do that, being unfamiliar with the Wight as he was.

More machine guns on the *Mulheim* came into action and the marines were shooting like the devil down there. Fear, ugly and unnerving, climbed into the cockpit with Kenny when he watched a series of evenly spaced

black holes being punched in the worn, khaki-hued fabric of the left wing.

SUDDENLY a hand smote the pilot on the back of the head. He whirled about, amazed and dismayed to behold Lockhart, wild-eyed and pointing frantically off to the right. Then he beheld, with a sickening stab of despair, the form of the fleet Halberstadt nosing out of a cloudbank.

Aware that the doom of the slower ship was at hand, he at once commenced to climb frantically. Doubts and fears assailed him. This was his first air battle! Why hadn't they decided to let Lockhart take the pilot's seat? That veteran probably knew a dozen tricks that might save the situation. The Wight was equipped with dual controls, but unfortunately they were disconnected, so the flying of the patrol plane was strictly up to him.

In an effort to keep his head he desperately tried to reconstruct the familiar surroundings at Key West; tried to make himself believe that in the grimly approaching plane yonder was Lieutenant Perrier, that dauntless Frenchman who had instructed him in the art of aerial combat.

Frantically he put the Wight into as sharp a climb as the sluggish old seaplane would stand and, in a tight spiral, struggled up into the pink-gray sky.

A quick, backward glance revealed that the Australian had secured the safety belt about his middle and was now calmly, methodically preparing his Lewis gun for the impending action.

Abruptly, the sense of panic gave away to a queer, cold desperation that let Kenny think with unnatural speed and perception.

The German plane was coming on fast now, almost in line with the pink streak which heralded the coming sun. What to do? He would try

circling once or twice, to gauge how much speed the Halberstadt had on him. Thank God, they had stopped shooting down below. It was hard to see now, for he had no goggles and tears drew cold courses over his cheeks.

"Try your gun," advised that surprisingly calm inner self. His forefinger depressed the cold steel trigger on the joystick and to his relief a stream of white-tailed tracers went streaking off through the dawn light.

What a weird battle this was going to be, fought ten thousand miles away from the parent struggle in France.

Straight at the khaki-hued Wight sped the gray, blue and black camouflaged plane, its long aluminum pontoons dimly reflecting the pink glow from the east. Now Kenny could distinctly make out the enemy observer crouching ready behind his machine gun.

The Halberstadt was about five hundred yards away now, still long range, but he banked over and, pointing the Wight's nose toward the distant ship, loosed a brief burst. It gave him a queer sense of self-confidence to watch the other plane dodge quickly off to the right.

"Dive under him." Cupping both hands, Lockhart yelled the command.

DIVE? Kenny hesitated. Did the Australian realize how very shaky the Wight was? Probably not. Two hundred yards away the German was bearing off slightly to the right in an effort to determine the speed of his adversary.

Quite by accident the fight was beginning directly above the tapering masts of the cruiser.

Kenny signaled with his hand and, from his position slightly above that of the Halberstadt, he started a power dive, but almost as soon pulled out of it; instinct shrieked warnings that the old seaplane could not long stand such a strain. Like a startled teal, the

Halberstadt veered away, momentarily exposing her vulnerable belly.

It was a very long range but the Lewis chattered at once, shaking the fabric of the Wight with the recoil. Stung into action the German pilot now dove to Kenny's level and his observer began to fire as both ships began that aerial merry-go-round which is part and parcel of most air duels.

Around and around the two seaplanes roared, giving off occasional bursts of white smoke as their gunners loosed savage bursts at each other. Then, inevitably, the slower Wight began to lose its position in the circle and Death gained on the khaki-painted seaplane.

Inexorably, the Halberstadt drew closer and would shortly be in a position for a terrific power dive that would give it that cherished under-tail position from which it could rip out the English ship's belly, or at least shoot away a pontoon which would make Kenny's landing an almost necessarily fatal proceeding.

He would have to do something quickly and, feverishly adjusting his safety belt, Kenny sought the solution.

Even while he racked his brains, a pair of white-tailed tracers hissed by just above the upper wing, darting through the fumes spewed out by the overhead exhaust.

Lockhart was screaming something, but the American could not understand a word. He wanted so much to win, so much to prevent the impending massacre of helpless men. A quick glance over his shoulder showed the German plane not seventy-five yards behind. Confident of his superior speed, the German pilot was rushing forward. In a minute he would begin that fatal dive.

"May rip the wings off, but here goes!"

Kenny set his teeth and, while the gray world reeled crazily about him,

he executed as pretty an Immelman as the lumbering patrol plane was capable of. The fuselage groaned in every joint, but Kenny had the satisfaction of seeing the German's belly flash by a few yards overhead.

Quick as a boxing champion who senses a momentary opening, Lockhart got in his blow. The Lewis gun chattered like an enraged ape. Had it done the trick? No, as the Wight leveled out, the German pilot duplicated the maneuver and so was back in the relative position he had occupied a moment before, but both planes had lost some five hundred feet of altitude.

The breath came, panting into Kenny's lungs. His glazed and straining eyes flashed backwards. He must do something else quickly. What? What? God! This was a deadly game of tag; every time you thought you had dodged the pursuers they were after you again.

When a fusillade of tracer bullets flashed past, Kenny banked to the left with the suddenness that made one of the left-wing guy wires snap. His heart leaped to his throat—would that wing give way? It held, but he knew that he would have to be very careful.

Relentless as a falcon pursuing a dove, the German plane dashed after him, dodging back and forth to gain a favorable position. Kenny saw the dive coming but it was suicide to try any stunts or even sharp evolutions. Hell! The battle was already over.

His heart seemed to freeze when the German plane dove. In desperation Lockhart's Lewis spat fire, then fell silent when the German gained the safe under-tail position. Over the crackle of the exhaust sounded the brittle clatter of that same Spandau which Kenny himself had served not three hours back.

The plane was being hit. Kenny could tell that from the queer jouncing motion it made. Then, with the suddenness of a magician's coin, the

Halberstadt reappeared off the right wing. She had delivered her burst and, believing it fatal, was striving to win clear. Kenny unerringly sensed opportunity and, banking over, depressed his nose to fire a long burst squarely into the cockpits of the gray, blue and black plane.

"Got him!" With savage delight he screamed out the words when the black-clad enemy machine gunner sagged back heavily into his safety belt. At once the Halberstadt's pilot commenced desperate zigzags to avoid Kenny's fire. But, unfortunately for him, the zigzags were evenly spaced. Kenny timed them until, at extremely long range, he fired an anticipatory burst into that area where he calculated the Halberstadt would appear.

"I hit him!" Insensate delight filled the watery-eyed pilot's being. "He's hit! Look! Look!" he screamed over his shoulder to Lockhart. "See that? The Boche is on fire."

And indeed the Halberstadt was going into a furious spin, flinging off flame and smoke like a pinwheel.

"Get your bomb ready!" he yelled jubilantly. "We'll blow those damned Dutchmen to hell!"

HE was about to change course when an inner instinct prompted him to glance back. Like the flame of a snuffed candle his elation vanished. The angular body of Captain Joseph Lockhart, D. S. O., lay half in, half out of the after cockpit with his bright blood making long ugly red streaks along the bullet-scarred fuselage. Above the dead Australian the Lewis canted up into the sky at a forlorn angle and, sick with dismay, Kenny realized that there was now no earthly way of launching that bomb.

Poor Lockhart! Imagine having fought three years on the Western Front, having flown over the foggy North Sea, only to die above a peaceful tropical island. He aroused him-

self when a shower of bullets from the *Mulheim* struck the plane. One crashed through the instrument board and, narrowly missing his head, moaned viciously off into the sky.

He hadn't realized he had lost so much altitude. He was now perilously near the cruiser whose enraged crew reopened a hot fire. Before he could get out of range, bullets from the Maxim on the *Mulheim* penetrated both the main fuel tank and the smaller reserve container. At once the cockpit was bathed in a chill, blinding shower of gasoline.

Fire! The thought appalled him. Promptly he switched off the ignition and, with mute motor, commenced a long glide for the far side of the island.

Had he enough altitude to reach the lagoon? Kenny wondered. It was sudden death to start the motor again. How still everything had become—no motors, no machine guns, no voices, only the wind sighing in the guy wires. Hope filled him that perhaps Lockhart wasn't dead, only wounded. It would be awful to be left alone like this . . .

Off to the right he glimpsed the Halberstadt's smoking ruins lying shattered on a coral reef, half in and half out of the water.

How far away was it now to the lagoon? He had no idea. Only two things were sure, first, that the patrol plane would never fly again and second, that the *Mulheim* had not been badly hurt.

Then everything else was forgotten in his effort to lengthen the battered Wight's glide across Erromanga. That bullet which had passed through the instrument board had evidently severed several of the lubrication lines, for scalding oil vapor began to spurt through the wreck of the tachometer, forcing him to lean far over to the left.

The island he knew to be considerably less than a mile wide, but his al-

titude—well, with luck he might just make a landing on the lagoon in front of the shell-wrecked patrol station. Then—well, he'd worry about Lockhart after he had made a safe landing.

Summoning to his aid every bit of flying skill, he cut down the forward speed to the least possible margin of safety. Meanwhile, the sun suddenly sprang into being, warming his haggard features, but momentarily, blinding his gaze on that far line of palms. The nearness of a clump of towering baobabs demanded his attention and he had to nose down to maintain flying speed.

"It's going to be close," he whispered, his lips tightening. "Damned close. By God, I—I can't make it."

With sweat beads breaking out on his forehead, he banked off a little to the left; the trees looked lower there. No use! The earth seemed to be rushing up to meet him. Green, gray and yellow were the colors predominant before his wild and bloodshot eyes.

Instinct told him the crash would come in an instant now. He was going to die; nothing could prevent it. Mental pictures of a dozen crackups flashed through his mind. Forcing a smile to his lips he cast a farewell glance at the splendor of the sunrise just before the Wight crashed into a dense clump of palms amid a terrifying crackle of smashed fabric.

CHAPTER VII

Juggernaut of Death



IT was in a queer, unrecognizable and disoriented world that Lieutenant Rockwell Kenny found himself when his senses cleared.

With a painful effort he turned a head that ached unbearably. He was lying on his side with the main part of the fuselage still about his legs;

that tight feeling about his waist was caused by the safety belt. He was dangling in midair, entangled in the wreckage of the Wight. Evidently the resilient palms had broken the patrol plane's fall.

It took the nauseated, nearly exhausted pilot the better part of half an hour to unfasten the safety belts and, very gently, to free himself and slide down a palm trunk which afforded a means of reaching the ground. When he stood among the thick ferns he peered up to discover that the seaplane's fuselage had broken off just back of the pilot's seat. One wing lay perhaps thirty feet away with its red, white and blue co-carde gleaming bright against the green background. The other was draped over the top of several palms.

Then Kenny slumped to the ground feeling very, very sick indeed, for his eyes had fallen on Captain Lockhart's terribly mangled body lying very flat among the ferns and tropical plants.

An innate stubbornness of character prompted him to sit up and to consider his situation. One of the pontoons had crashed into the earth and lay there, half buried and all dented out of shape. The propeller and engine had kept on of their own accord and lay in a small crater; other parts of the plane lay scattered for a radius of fifty yards. Between the engine and him something gleamed dully.

"I'm damned!" He limped to his feet and dazedly retrieved the second of the demolition bombs. "Lucky Lockhart didn't pull out the release pin," he mused, "or there'd have been nothing left around here but one big hole."

Drearly, he swayed beneath the palms, trying to lash his weary brain to further effort.

The smooth deadly outline of the bomb struck his eye and forthwith suggested a scheme so fantastic, so outrageous, that he laughed at himself.

"You're crazy as a barnful of bats," he told himself aloud, "but you might as well try it. Let's see now. It'd be better to make the Boche think I'm dead."

A long moment the bruised and ragged aviator regarded the wreckage overhead, then he noted the gasoline trickling from the pierced tank. From his pocket he fished a match safe such as most seamen use to keep their matches dry. A scratch, a sputter of flame and Kenny held the flame to the dribble of gasoline, then stepped back when, with amazing speed, the flames shot upwards and, following the gasoline stream to its source, set fire to the wreckage of the fuselage. In an instant the remains of the Wight were burning brightly and giving off convincing black clouds of smoke.

"And that," he told himself when he caught up the bomb and moved dazedly off in the direction of the patrol station, "ought to go a long ways toward removing Boche suspicions . . ."

A moment he stood over Lockhart's body, eyes filled and mouth a-quiver.

"Goodby, sir," he murmured as his heels clicked and his grimy hand flashed up in salute . . .

The sun was now well over the horizon, and casting its rays into the sunken features of the survivor, when Kenny found himself before the shattered patrol station. "Wonder if there's anything left to eat in here? I'm famished," he said wearily.

After a few minutes of aimless search he came across some bars of chocolate, a can of peaches and a few sea biscuits in a charred locker. On these and on long draughts of cold water from a spring, he dined sumptuously in the shelter of a dense palm clump.

When he had finished there was new energy in his weary arms and legs, a new clearness in his brain and fresh determination in his soul.

REFRESHED, Kenny searched the ruins inside, until he found what he wanted, a sharp kitchen knife. He went next into the shed and, from a shattered tool chest, selected a pair of wire nippers. For a moment he stood over that detonating apparatus Lockhart had mentioned, some two hours before, lost in thought.

"Detonators and dynamite fuses," he muttered, "wouldn't that argue that the patrol kept dynamite for blowing up wrecks or opening channels? Where would it be?"

Common sense advised him that the patrol men would not be likely to have stored it in the vicinity of the station, since lightning is common in the New Hebrides and dynamite isn't a comfortable bedfellow.

Armed with a crowbar and carrying a short loop of bailing wire, Kenny commenced to reconnoiter the vicinity and very soon came upon what he sought. In the center of a clear space was a small concrete bin with a lid of sheet iron. Painted across the lid was a large red skull and cross bones, beneath which were the significant words, "Explosives—Dangerous."

Critically, the ragged pilot eyed a stout padlock securing the lid hasp. Desperately he applied his weight to the crowbar and, with a sharp twist, snapped off the hasp, just above the lock. He raised the bin's lid and discovered a small wooden box painted blue, with a yellow band encircling it. Relief surged through the disheveled survivor. At last he was getting a break . . .

Hopes rekindled, he tried to estimate what time it was and decided he'd have to work fast. It must be well after eight, and there was so much to do. Hadn't the marine guard said the *Union Castle* would appear during the morning?

It required all Kenny's will power to force his battered, aching body forward, and at the end of twenty

minutes, he was lurking like an Indian in the jungle above the beach. There lay the *Mulheim*, her three tall stacks now giving off only a faint vapor.

"They've cut off the drafts. Guess von Stahl doesn't want to scare the *Union Castle* with a smoke cloud," murmured the American.

As he had foreseen, the bay, being on the lee side of Erromanga, was dotted with flotsam from the wreck of the S. S. *Ratak*. In fact the whole surface of the little bay was thickly strewn with floating objects.

Patiently, the wearied pilot studied the shore line until he found just what he was looking for, a large packing case which had drifted in to become half stranded on a weed-grown reef. A hard smile flitted over his unshaven, haggard features as he slid back the top of that blue and yellow box and selected from it four stubby yellow dynamite sticks. With infinite care he wired these about the demolition bomb. Then, to the steel vanes on the bomb's tail, he secured two more long strands of wire which he fastened together so as to form a large loop.

"And that," he muttered, giving the wire a final twist, "ought to make a nice little bang when, and if, it goes off."

Taking the bomb with him, Kenny, knife at belt, crawled cautiously down the far side of a gray coral ridge, his hair roots tingling every time the rough going made him touch the bomb to earth. Again and again he reassured himself that the detonator's safety pin was still in place.

At last he was at the edge of the clear, blue-green water and, as far as he could tell, quite unobserved. To his joy he found the packing case to be lacking a top and floating conveniently upside down.

Drawing it into the shelter of the coral ridge, Kenny furiously applied himself with the kitchen knife and cut a narrow slot in one side. He

slipped about his neck the wire loop from which the bomb dangled. Next he patted his pocket to make sure the pliers were still there and then stepped into the water to duck under the box with the bomb clutched convulsively to his breast. Inch by inch he raised his head under the box. . . . Ducking his wet head under water to clear his brain, he took stock of the situation.

Occasionally using the peep hole to be sure of his direction, Kenny patiently urged the packing case away from the shore and out among the floating debris. It was hard work, what with the bomb banging against his chest and the knife he held firmly between his teeth. When he reached deeper water, he could see many schools of bright little fishes darting beneath him and on the bottom crawled quantities of crabs and the curious clawless lobsters of the Pacific.

Where were the sharks? Perhaps they were all busy on the grisly offerings of the S. S. *Ratak*, but he could not be sure. That was his principal danger. . . .

HE was infinitely weary by the time his packing case floated under the stern of the *Mulheim*, for it had been no easy matter to propel that heavy box through the water when weighted down with the demolition bomb. But now he could very plainly see the men busy about her decks. They were rolling up the awnings beneath which they had slept, stowing gear, and otherwise preparing for action. Just then a one pound gun was fired and what must have been a recall flag fluttered up to the signal gaff. He had better hurry, Kenny realized; very soon the *Mulheim* would be getting under weigh.

With infinite patience he worked the box aft, until, in the overhang of the stern, he found a measure of safety. When the rudder, white with

marine growths, loomed before his eyes, he knew that the final phase of his struggle was at hand. Carefully he lifted the wire loop over his head and, treading water, drew the pliers from his pocket. Then he drew a deep breath and swam under the cruiser's pointed stern in search of the propellers.

At any instant now an engineer deep in the bowels of the ship might throw over a short brass lever, and Kenny would be instantly cut to shreds by those ponderous steel blades.

Breath was now growing heavy and poisonous in his lungs, so he paused only long enough to hook the bomb's wire loop over one of the blades before darting back to that dark patch of surface under the stern.

Again Kenny sank below the surface in his attempt to wire the bomb more securely to the propeller. He used his pliers to twist together the strands of wire. Twist, turn! His body scraped the barnacles and bumped heavily against the steel plates above him. Hanging from the propeller's uppermost blade the bomb and the four dynamite sticks wrapped about it dangled and swayed back and forth.

The pilot grimly hoped that when the cruiser's screws started to revolve, centrifugal force would detonate the improvised mine against the *Mulheim's* bottom. Though his lungs felt ready to burst, Kenny wrenched the safety pin from the detonator of the bomb. He bobbed to the surface, puffing, purple-faced and dizzy. Directly beside a ladder up which a shore party was clambering!

"*Du lieber Gott!*" Startled red faces loomed above him, hands shot out, but Kenny was too weak to dive again, and a boat hook caught his canvas trousers by one of the belt loops. In an instant, he was in the boat.

As from another world he heard deep voices muttering. "The English flyer—a brave man."

He hardly knew it when, at the bight of a bowline, he was hauled over the *Mulheim's* rail to collapse a wet, bleeding heap on deck plates which were just beginning to be warmed by the tropic sun.

"So again you are back?" Above him, and swaying amid a queer greenish mist, were the hard features of *Fregattekapitän* von Stahl. "For the third time."

Kenny opened one eye. "Bet your life," he wheezed feebly. "How did you like my second trip?"

To his surprise the German stiffened and his hand flashed to his cap visor. "To attack in such an old plane was very daring, *mein Herr*. That you shot down our Halberstadt was almost incredible. I respect your courage and very much regret that the laws of war leave me no choice but to carry out the sentence passed on you last night."

So they would hang him shortly. Kenny said nothing. It didn't matter; nothing mattered now except rest, for reaction to the last crowded hours had set in leaving him weak as a puppy.

"Take him to the infirmary," von Stahl directed crisply. "He must be made comfortable until—"

"*Achtung!*"

High on the bridge above a white-capped officer was hailing excitedly.

"*Was ist los?*"

Von Stahl began to run and the seamen about Kenny peered up at the man with the megaphone.

"A ship, white painted, is in sight," yelled another officer from the crow's nest.

"*Gut.*" *Fregattekapitän* von Stahl's bleak features set themselves in a hard, tight grin.

All over the *Mulheim* there was activity. Kenny, under guard of a single mustached marine, raised himself feebly on one elbow; saw the boats being hurriedly stowed, saw breech covers being snatched from

the secondary guns and saw other members of the crew busy about the winches which would shortly raise the anchors. What irony! He now stood every chance of being blown to pieces by the engine his own ingenuity had conceived.

"Mustn't let them take me below decks," he told himself. "They'll stand absolutely no chance below decks, if it works."

His eyes fixed themselves on a tiny smudge of smoke on the horizon and, by every artifice Kenny strove to prolong his stay on deck. Yonder came the *Union Castle* with her heavy cargo of sick and crippled soldiers. Probably a thousand people were aboard her—and not one of them ever dreaming that a holocaust impended.

The German marine tapped him on the shoulder. "Come on," the marine said gruffly. "You're dirtying the deck."

Slowly, very slowly, Kenny got to his feet. There he swayed and, pleading weakness, clung to a stanchion for another three minutes, then started forward. The further forward he could get, the better, for the anchor would be coming up in a minute now, and that meant that the engines would begin turning over.

Kenny saw the *Mulheim's* crew peeling off their shirts and jumpers as they trotted to their battle stations.

Because concealment was no longer an advantage and the *Union Castle*, less than ten miles away, had no speed to match that of this swift sea hawk, smoke, black as midnight, commenced to pour up into the sky.

The engines would start in a minute now, Kenny knew, and his muscles tightened. On the bow a petty officer in a dingy khaki shirt waved his tattooed arm, and the anchor winch commenced to puff noisily. Kenny resorted to a final subterfuge and fell to the deck in a pretended faint.

Whereupon the marine cursed and called loudly for a stretcher.

EVERY nerve in Kenny's body quivered as he waited for the initial throb of the engines. Ah! A tingle in the hair at the back of his head became evident when the deck commenced to vibrate gently beneath him. More pronounced grew the vibration. The propeller must be turning for, through half-opened eyes, he saw palms on the shore shifting their alignment. What in hell was wrong?

Bitter was his despair when the *Mulheim* got under weigh and, quite unharmed, commenced a wide circle to port, that would end by pointing her sharp bows out of the bay.

"Sorry, Lockhart," he whispered and a miserable groan was wrenched from his soul. "I—I tried as hard as I could."

Already he guessed what had happened; the bomb, insecurely fastened to the propeller blade, must have been wrenched loose to drift harmlessly into the blue-green depths. Like his hopes, the sun paled because of the black smoke rushing before it, as the *Mulheim* gathered fresh speed.

Gradually the cruiser's course straightened out and she headed for the sparkling expanses of the Coral Sea.

Suddenly a renewed hope filled the thoroughly wretched pilot. Perhaps, to get out of the narrow bay more easily, the *Mulheim* had used only her port engines!

A bridge telegraph bell jangled deep in the interior of the iron monster. Instantly the deck plates beneath the prostrate aviator heaved, the whole ship leaped like a spurred bronco and then chaos broke loose.

From the stern of the *Mulheim* sounded a frightful detonation. Thick yellow smoke, greenish yellow flame and cataracts of water soared high into the air, the last falling with thunderous reports. Shuddering, retching

Like a sick human, the *Mulheim* reeled under a series of internal explosions. In less than half a minute the *Kaiserlich Kreuzer, Mulheim* had begun to go down, for a ship must sink when her entire stern has been blown away.

Uttering hoarse, insensate shouts of terror, the crew commenced leaping over the side, as, out of the turrets, up from below, down from the conning tower poured streams of seamen. All too well they knew there would be no time to launch boats.

In a last supreme effort Kenny got to his feet and tumbled weakly overboard. Presently, he found a piece of wreckage from the *Ratak*, clung to it and so won clear when the *Mulheim's* boilers blew up with a cyclopean roar that drowned out even the first explosion . . .

"Hello, pilot," greeted a cheery voice. Thought you were jolly well never going to wake up."

Kenny slowly opened his eyes to see, bending over him, a girl who

could not have been anything but English. On the pocket of her neat blue and white uniform was embroidered a small red cross.

"Where—where am I?" he asked, smiling weakly. "Am I dead?"

"Not a bit of it. But you've got a concussion that knocked you out for a week." The girl smoothed the coverlet with professional brusqueness and dropped her eyes—this American wasn't a half bad looking chap! "You're on the hospital ship *Union Castle*. We've all been wondering how you, an American, came to be on that German cruiser. While you were unconscious you raved."

"What did I say?" Kenny wanted to know.

"Well, you seemed to have an obsession about getting what you called, 'A crack at the Boche,'" said the girl. "Did you get it?"

The wounded aviator's pale lips set themselves in a grin that was almost boyish. "Did I? I'll say I did!"



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sprouted in the darkness



Bullets for the Brave

By

FRANKLIN H. MARTIN

**The story of two Yank
aces who had to conquer
another enemy besides
the one across the
lines . . .**

THE drone of three Renault motors, three hundred horsepower each, grew louder in the purplish gray dusk as the flight of Breguet bombers slanted down from the clouds toward their field at Belrupt. Over the spires and fortified walls of Verdun the three ships dipped their wings in salute.

The third ship flew lower than the

others and as it passed over the most thickly populated section of the venerable old town the pilot's arm whipped over the side of the cockpit and he tossed a small white object into the propeller stream. A napkin-sized parachute opened, floated gently down with its ballast swinging slightly back and forth. The miniature chute came to rest in the small

walled-in yard of a building marked the length of the roof with a huge red cross.

The pilot turned in his seat. His words, swept away by the windstream, formed the sentence, "How do you like that one, Red?"

The wide shouldered man in the observer's and bomber's cockpit made a gesture of derision. "Luck!" He pointed over the side. "Just luck."

The pilot laughed and turned back to his controls. He was dark and lean with thin Roman nose and a wide slit for a mouth. In his helmet and goggles he looked a little like the popular conception of Satan. To add to the illusion his soft leather helmet was painted a glistening black and he wore a coal black waxed mustache with stiff pointed ends.

The man riding the rear cockpit wore a red helmet, but no redder than the blazing thatch beneath it. His face was square with a belligerent set to the jaw and his eyes were the gun metal gray of a pair of gun barrels. His two huge fists rested in lined gloves on the rear cockpit combing. The twin guns were tracked back out of the windstream but the observer's eyes kept scanning the horizon.

On the field of the 309 Renault Bombing Escadrille mechanics, pilots, and observers trotted toward the hangar line as the formation of Breguets circled for a landing. The third ship taxiing in had a roulette wheel painted on each side of the fuselage, complete with all the red and black numbers. Under it was painted in French, "*Rouge et Noir.*" Red and Black. Red for the husky, barrel-chested bomber and rear gunner. Black for the tall, lean dark man who looked like Satan and flew with his cunning.

They were the only Americans in the 309th Escadrille and as a team in the air they had established an enviable reputation. On the ground, however, they fought with each other like

stray dogs. The French Commandant had suggested the *rouge et noir* idea and had the roulette wheel painted on the ship's fuselage. He tried to foster a more cordial relation between the two men on the ground but they always seemed to have some reason to tangle.

Red Moore was almost a head shorter than Blackie Halpern but his arms and torso were those of a giant and he had the strength to whip his guns around against the propeller blast and the windstream and hold it on his target, follow the enemy's ship maneuvers closely and accurately. His bombing accuracy was more a sense than a scientific achievement.

Halpern handled the big ship, often heavy with demolition bombs, with such skill that Red, in the rear cockpit, could get good shots at any attacking enemy pursuit ships. They never had to signal each other, each knew his job and knew what the other would and could do.

CONFIDENT of a little excitement the other members of the escadrille gathered around the Breguet as Moore and Halpern climbed out.

"Well, Red," Halpern shouted above the ring of motor and guns in his own ears, "how about that little drop I made?"

"Luck!" Red yelled back.

"If you could do that you wouldn't be dumping our bombs in the middle of an empty field."

"Yeah?" Red Moore's chin jutted. "If I had a real pilot up in front I'd make more trouble for the Boche than I do now. And I'm not doing so bad right now, even with a near-sighted dude like you in the chauffeur's seat."

"Trouble with you, Red," Halpern jibed, "You're suffering from a complex. Ever since we were kids I could do things better than you, and you just can't get over it. Why don't you just admit to yourself that I'm your superior and stop snarling?"

"My superior!" Red roared. "Why I could knock you stiffer than that phoney mustache you're wearing, and with one hand tied behind my back!"

The members of the French escadrille crowded close delightedly. *Rouge et Noir* were at it again.

"Why, you East Bend punk!" Halpern gave the waxed tip of his black mustache a twist. "It would be beneath my dignity—"

Sock! Red Moore feinted with his left and his big right fist nailed Blackie Halpern on the point of the chin. The tall, dark pilot sprawled flat on his back, lay there for several seconds, then started to turn and crawl to his feet. His voice came in a venomous hiss. "I'll kill you for that, you low down scut." He came up off his knees in a sprinting start and his hands beat a tattoo on Red Moore's face. Moore backed a little, set himself and swung one that made Halpern sway backward from the waist.

Moore stepped close and Halpern brought one from his knees on his recovery and gore sprouted from Moore's nose. For a minute it was toe to toe with Halpern hitting three times to Moore's once. But Moore's thick arms and heavy shoulders were putting terrific power behind his blows. Halpern tried to stand his ground. He called Moore every name in the mule-skinner's book and the pair of them stood there and slugged. Their mates loved it. They shouted

for both impartially. The commanding officer, Roget, came running down and pushed through the ring of spectators. "Attention!" he barked, "I tell you to stop fighting. It is a command! I will ground you if you do not cease!"

Red Moore backed away, dropped his two big fists, their knuckles red and dripping. "All right—for now, Blackie."

Blackie Halpern wiped the blood from his mouth with the back of his hand, gave the end of his mustache a twist and smiled a superior smile. "Any time at all, East Bend."

Moore began to rumble deep in his chest and his fists knotted again. The commanding officer stepped quickly to his side. "I want to talk with you, Corporal."

"Yes, sir." Moore walked across the field beside the dapper commandant. The C. O. fingered his black Van Dyke. "Why is that bitterness between you and your countryman when you are such a splendid team in the air?"

Moore mumbled something. The C.O. said, "Pardon?"

"What is the French for rat, Commandant?"

"The same as English, only one says like this, 'rah'. It is spelled the same."

"Yeah," Moore nodded. "A rat is a rat in any man's language. And Blackie Halpern is a grade A rat." He saluted and walked away.

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The C.O. walked slowly to his office. "Renard," he asked his adjutant, "have you any idea what the trouble is between these two Americans?"

"Only this," the adjutant told him. "There is a river in Kansas called Bear River. These two Americans lived on opposite banks and they have hated each other since they were in diapers. Beyond that I know nothing of them."

Red Moore walked into the washroom behind the pilots' barracks. Blackie Halpern was there, standing before the wash trough, sloshing cold water on his bruised and cut face. Moore stood there watching him for a minute, then said, "Tell me something, Blackie. Why do you always have to use underhand tricks and lies to beat my time?"

Blackie raised his dripping face and tried to assume an annoyed expression. "What's eating you now, you red-headed prairie dog?"

"You told Danise Du Bois who lives down the road to have nothing to do with me. You told her I was married in the States and had deserted three French girls in different towns. You said my fat wife had three kids and they were all funny looking, had pigs' heads. If I hadn't promised the C.O., I'd give you another beating, right here and now."

His jaw jutted and his fists came up clenched. Then he remembered he had promised the C.O. to stop fighting on the ground. He turned and walked out of the wash shack. On the outside he whirled fiercely and drove his fist through the pine and tarpaper wall. "Some day I'll kill that guy!"

ALL ships of the 309th Escadrille were back from patrol, and safe in their hangars.

From behind the hangars came the alternate purr and roar of two three-hundred horsepower Renaults being run on the block. A blue Fiat touring car swung in from the road and along

the drive to stop in front of the commandant's shack. On its horizon blue doors was the "R. F." with an army number and the insignia of General Headquarters.

An officer, bristling with gold braid, stepped from the blue Fiat and walked briskly to the commandant's headquarters shack. He was there half an hour, then came out just as briskly, got in his car and was driven away.

After mess the commandant called Red Moore and Blackie Halpern into his private office. He asked them to be seated and brought out a bottle of wine of ancient vintage. There were three glasses on his desk and he filled them all to the brim.

He raised his glass. "Sergeant Halpern and Corporal Moore, I give you best wishes for good luck."

Moore and Halpern did not look at each other. A long gulp, then the commandant put his glass down. "I have been proud to have you two boys under my command. My daily reports to headquarters almost always contain your names. Soon as the red tape is cut at headquarters you will, no doubt, be cited, perhaps decorated. But," he spread his hands, "it seems I have built you up too well. Headquarters has worked out a perfectly insane sortie for one of our Breguets and the general himself has picked you two boys to carry it out. This is a surprise sortie and only one ship is to go. A flight of heavy-motored bombers would be heard and the alarm given before they could reach the target."

"Our spy system," the commandant went on, "reports a huge convoy of trains will leave Metz at fifteen o'clock, which is three A.M. by your watches. There will be three trains of more than twenty cars in each. These cars will be loaded with men and ammunition and will leave Metz at only five minute intervals. They might switch one train in the convoy at Conflans but the other two are scheduled

to reach the German side of the Meuse to reinforce the Boche troops assaulting Verdun. This entire maneuver is to be completed by seventeen o'clock, which would be about dawn."

"And what do we do about it?" asked Halpern.

"You take off before dawn," the commandant answered. "You get up to your ceiling and stay there, picking up the railroad line from Verdun to Metz. You might pick the enemy train convoy up around Conflans because they are long heavy trains and following close, one after the other, which always slows trains up, especially as these will be running at night and without lights."

"And you want us to go out alone, in the dark, and blast the whole German convoy, eh?" Halpern asked.

"I want you to take off in the dark," the commandant said quietly, "so that you can be over your target when visibility is better. I am sending you two in a single Breguet because headquarters insists that is the only way to avoid detection before you get the chance at your target. There will be a moon tonight and a layer of alto-cumulus at about fourteen to fifteen thousand feet. Above that layer should be clear flying but you would have to depend upon your compass and go down under the cloud carpet from time to time to pick up your landmark, the railroad track.

"Study your maps carefully, Halpern. You will carry sixteen bombs—not large ones but each containing fulminate and trinitrotoluene. They, as of course you know, will demolish and set fire to your target if you hit within sixty feet of it. The drawback to these bombs is they might explode in case of a rough or forced landing, or take-off, so it's up to you, Halpern, to handle the ship more carefully than ever. And you, Moore, will have to make every bomb count. They are rigged to drop two at a time, which is eight cracks at the target."

Halpern stood up, yawning. "We'll see what happens. What time is the take-off?"

"About four tomorrow morning. I've had the dual control rigged in the observer's seat so in case you become—er, well, incapacitated, Moore can fly the ship from the rear cockpit."

Halpern growled. "Listen, Red. The controls may be hooked up but the stick stays out of the socket, understand? If you touch it or the rudder bar I'll dump you and the load of T.N.T. all in one hot heap. Get it?"

"All right," answered Moore sulkily. Halpern yawned again and stretched. "Guess I'll go over my maps before I turn in."

But soon after Moore heard him go out and leave the field in the escadrille's sidecar. Going to call on little Denise DuBois, the sneak, instead of studying the maps so he could find the target the first crack out of the box.

RED MOORE got out his own map case and scaled the section they were to fly over the next day before dawn. If he saw Blackie getting off his course, in danger of losing the ship over enemy ground with nothing to bomb, Red made up his mind to clip Halpern over the noggin with the fire extinguisher and fly the Breguet himself . . .

Moore finally put his maps away and rolled in the blankets on his bunk. No use taking any clothes off. It would be too darn cold dressing before four in the morning.

His first conscious moment found Halpern standing beside his bunk, prodding him with the toe of his boot. "Come on, Red, snap out of it. Where do you think you are, the East Bend hoosegow?"

Moore tossed back the blankets and jumped to his feet. "Once a sneak, always a sneak, eh, Blackie? Cut telling lies to my girl instead of checking—"

"Nuts!" Halpern gave Moore a shove, tripping him over his bunk.

A voice with command in its ring bellowed, "Damn it! Stop that and come out on the line. *Sacre nom de Dieu!* You'll have fighting enough before the sun is up. Attention, you two."

They followed Commandant Roget across the field to the kitchen, gulped strong, hot coffee in silence, then walked to the hangars where their ship was standing just off the apron while busy figures in the dark scrambled around it.

Commandant Roget came down to the line, a great woolen muffler wrapped around his neck. Using a flashlight he went over the map once more with Halpern, poured both Halpern and Moore a slug of cognac from a canteen and took one himself.

"If anyone can do this job, you two can." The commandant shook hands with the two Americans, stepped back and saluted. Halpern barked the word for the mechanic sitting in the pilot's cockpit to open her up. Only when the motor developed a deep-throated hum in its roar and the exhaust flashes turned from yellow and purple to deep, sharp red, did he thump on the cockpit combing and tell the little French mechanic to cut the throttle and crawl out.

Halpern swung into the front cockpit and Moore hooked up his twin Lewis-type *mitrailleuses*, swung them on the ring once or twice, then hammered on the camelback. Halpern turned to look at him.

The other members of the escadrille were all out for the take-off. The double row of essence bedons, filled with oil and essence soaked waste, leaped into flame as Halpern signalled for the chocks to be yanked out. The line of oil torches marked the runway and Halpern taxied into the wind, jammed the throttle home and went rocketing between the flares, lifting slowly, carefully, because rough handling might cause a bounce which would explode the T.N.T. bombs.

Off the ground Halpern held the Breguet's nose steady, missing the treetops rather than risk a turn. There may have been a moon but in that sector it was hidden behind a thick carpet of alto-cumulus clouds. Below and around the climbing Breguet were dark stretches of sky and the carpet below was a bottomless pit of sheer black opaqueness. Halpern changed the course of his bomb-laden ship a few degrees every ten seconds, kept the Meuse River off his left wingtip until he climbed above the clouds, out of sight of ground batteries.

It was bright above the cloud layer. The moon made the wide stretch of clouds look like a sea of soap suds. Halpern's eyes switched from air speed indicator, to compass, to altimeter. Every few minutes he looked at the clock with illuminated hands and numbers on his dash. Then he nosed down and went gliding through the thick cloud blanket. Down to ten thousand feet, then eight thousand feet, a little lower. Halpern levelled off and coasted. Down here, someplace, should be a double track that went through Conflans on the way to Metz.

He turned several points north. Soon they were flying high over a straight line of two sets of rails that, by all maps and calculations, should lead to Conflans and thence to Metz. The rails were clear of traffic and Halpern slanted down to three thousand for a better look. The town of Conflans came down the tracks toward them. Still the tracks seemed unbroken by long strings of cars. Halpern passed over Conflans at less than three thousand feet.

Red Moore hammered on the camelback and jabbed the back of Halpern's neck with the extra joy stick he wasn't supposed to take out of its slings. When Halpern turned his head, scowling, Moore jabbed his finger over the side. Halpern throttled the engine down so he could hear.

"Trains down there!" Red Moore bellowed into the windstream. "Camouflaged. Look like empty rails. Pink glow from engine dead tip-off. Just outside Conflans. Let's go back and give it to them."

Halpern studied the dark carpet for a few moments, then swung the Breguet around and went down the chute at a forty-five degree angle. Moore crouched over his bomb-levers, peering down the black square of his bomb bay. His hand gripped around the release handle and two graceful eggs with finned tails fell away from the Breguet's underside and went down, straight as plumb lines, to the dark smear of the railroad below.

Halpern was climbing it again by the time the first explosion flattened the air against their undersurfaces. On the ground red geysers sprouted in the black. Almost instantly fire flared and there were a series of explosions as the shells on the camouflaged train were exploded by percussion. The track below was a burning, exploding inferno and in the glare of the fire countless figures could be seen, scrambling, falling, victims of their own exploding ammunition.

Halpern's arm went up and over. He was going to give Moore another crack on the way. The ship banked sharply, its nose dropped and once more Moore released two deadly incendiary and demolition bombs on the edge of the train where it faded away into darkness from the burning, exploding section. The rest of the train was blown clear of the tracks.

Moore hammered on the camelback. On toward Metz. Get the two other trains reported to be in the convoy. He still had twelve lethal eggs ready to send down to fill the Boche's mess-kit.

THE sky was fading from black to gray over toward Metz. When Halpern climbed the ship a little the first faint pink of the coming sunrise

was visible. But the void below was still dark. The second train was also camouflaged so the top of the cars from the air and in a dim light, looked like empty tracks. Halpern swooped down to fifteen hundred and Moore let go four of the T.N.T. bombs.

In another moment the ammunition train was sending great red flames skyward and the shells were exploding like a whole regiment of artillery firing on the line. Moore looked up from his bomb bay and saw three coal black enemy planes, each with the white cross, Germany's insignia, marked plainly on wing and fuselage. Moore seized his twin guns and whipped them around. His heavy shoulders and thick forearms held the guns upon the target while his steely gray eyes lined the first ship up in the sights. Moore waited until the black ship was so close in the gray morning air that it seemed they must collide.

Then Red Moore's fist clamped around the grip and a double stream of slugs and red-tailed tracer poured into the nose of the nearest enemy pursuit plane. Halpern turned his head for the first time as the rapid fire of Moore's gun shook the fuselage. He saw the two remaining enemy ships and deliberately slammed the throttle and swung the ship's nose on toward Metz. The two remaining enemy planes converged on the Breguet's tail, making a cone of fire and lead slugs that ripped fabric and kicked the horse hair padding out of Moore's cockpit combing.

But Red Moore had the arms and shoulders to swing those guns and Halpern the skill to make the clumsy Breguet tango like a little Nieuport. Halpern's second burst ripped the up-turned floor of the second black ship from spinner cap to flippers. Then, with one enemy plane still firing on their tail, he resumed his course along the railroad toward Metz. They had been told to get all three of them . . .

But the blur on the tracks that he had

come to recognize as a camouflaged train, loomed ahead. Red Moore was kneeling up on his seat, blazing away at the pursuing enemy plane. Halpern took a handful of unexploded shells and threw them back at his observer. Moore whirled from his task and made an angry face. Halpern poked his fist at the ground and signalled with his fingers in pantomime for Moore to get ready to lay eggs.

Red Moore was sore at the lone enemy ship that tailed them so closely. He wanted to pick this bird off rather than release bombs on an ammunition train. But that was his first job. He waited until his target loomed, then dumped all remaining eight bombs at once. Halpern couldn't climb fast enough to keep the Breguet from being tossed by the up blast from the eight bombs exploding all at once. He finally righted the ship and Moore smiled diabolically as he saw the lone plane lancing down on them again.

Red lined the black ship in his sights. Dawn was near enough so the enemy ship stood out like a black silhouette against the dark gray sky. His twin guns were silent until the Spandau in the nose of the pursuer blinked red. Then Red Moore let him have it. Moore had hardly picked his man off before Halpern threw the big Breguet up on one wing, a screaming vertical bank with Moore hanging grimly to keep from being tossed out. Then Halpern dived and looped the clumsy bomber.

Moore clutched his safety belt and managed to loop it around him before Halpern's next crazy maneuver. Then he saw what was making the pilot seem to go haywire. Out of the gray-ing, pre-dawn sky a whole flock of black ships with white crosses was closing in on them. Red Moore counted seven before he yanked his guns around on the tourelle and blasted a burst at the lowest ship in the flying staircase formation.

The black ships split, broke forma-

tion and attacked from two sides at once. One contingent dived toward the Breguet's right wingtip and tried to spray the fuel tank in the fuselage, right behind the motor. It was a gravity feed and two reserve chambers were mounted ahead of the carburetor. A tracer bullet fired anywhere along the base of the motor block had a very good chance of setting the Breguet on fire.

Halpern knew that due to the forward fuel reserve chambers a loop might spray the hot motor with enough essence to start a fire. Also he knew the hazard of having the fuel mounted right behind the motor and he knew the Boche knew it, too. The Breguet was an excellent day bombing ship if properly convoyed by a protecting flight of scouts and no ship of its weight and load capacity responded better to the controls. But it was not designed for dogfights. Halpern whipped the Breguet around in every known maneuver to keep the attacking Fokkers from getting a shot at one of the Breguet's well known vulnerable spots.

Moore, in the back cockpit, braced his feet, strained against the safety belt and whipped his guns, first one way, then the other, even shooting effectively over the top wing by pushing the gun ring up to its limit. Several Fokkers went down, either hit or to get momentum for another attack. Halpern turned the nose of the ship back toward the Meuse. Again and again the Fokker *staffel* dived from above or went under the Breguet's belly to hammer a burst from below.

Like black, angry hornets swarming around a broken nest, the Fokkers increased their efforts to smash down the French bomber before it could reach its lines in safety. Halpern opened the throttle and gave the big Renault all she'd take. The sun was sending advance couriers, and landmarks on the grounds stood out like objects on a stage.

MOORE crouched low and spayed an attacking ship with a short accurate burst. The black Fokker started down but Moore thought the pilot was giving him what the French call, "*la blague*." The Boche looked as if he was playing possum. Moore turned to watch the Fokker's descent and for the first time in five hectic minutes, looked at the back of Halpern's head. It was low between Halpern's shoulders. The glistening black leather of the helmet was smeared with blood.

Moore snatched out the extra stick, was about to fit it in the socket, instead he poked Halpern with it. The pilot turned his head slowly. His black, dominating eyes were a little glassy behind cracked goggles. He shook his head slowly from side to side, then his eyes saw the extra stick in Moore's fist. He straightened as if by an electric shock. Moore heard the words clearly, even over the roar of the motor and the chatter of guns, the wind in the rigging and the church bells and crickets ringing in his ear. He heard as if they were walking along a quiet countryside road.

"Put that stick away!" Halpern belted. "I brought her out and I bring her back!"

Moore spun back to bring the guns down on a lancing Fokker. One drum in his twin guns was empty. Just as Moore ducked to get a fresh drum from the shelf the black ship's nose spouted red and tracers kicked the fabric, ricocheted off the tourelle. One slug hit Moore in the left forearm, driving him back into his seat. The rest of the burst went over his head to chew the trailing edge of the top wing.

Cursing with rage and pain Moore was on his feet again. He yanked the empty drum off with his right hand, shifted it to his left to replace it with a loaded one. But the strength was gone out of his husky left arm. The wind spun the empty drum flat,

snatched it from his hand and sent it tearing through the air to rip out the complete top section of the rudder.

Halpern turned his head. His helmet was almost as red as Moore's now. He wagged his rudder bar and stared back at the skeleton that was left of the rudder. His black eyes started to glaze over again, then red hot fury filled them. Moore had done that. Red Moore from East Bend had let an ammunition drum slip out of his hands and it had ripped the fabric off the Breguet's rudder. Once more his eyes were clear and hard looking.

Moore tried to explain in their wordless dialogue that a bullet had creased him and made him drop the drum. Halpern gave one sarcastic, diabolical grin and turned back. Over the Meuse now. The pursuing Fokkers made one last frantic rush, firing from all angles. But the Breguet seemed to take itself out of Halpern's tired and bleeding control.

Moore kept firing, leaning hard against the gun-butt with his wounded left shoulder to steady him, squeezing the grip with his right, scaring the pursuers back, clipping them so dangerously close they dived for safety. Then he got one. There were ten bullets left in his last drum. The Fokker came up from underneath. Moore weaved to his feet, swung the guns around, laid his cheek to the red hot butt and slammed the last ten bullets in a straight burst right into the Fokker's motor, fuel tank and cockpit.

Then they were in the air all alone. The Breguet was still tangoing as if dodging black enemy ships all by itself. Halpern did not once look back, even when Red Moore poked him in the back of his gore-smeared neck to tell him the Boche had gone. Over Verdun the old, lead-riddled Breguet, its fabric torn and whipping back like pennants, its once clean fuselage smeared with oil and dotted with bullet holes and its rudder an empty skeleton, dipped its wings in the

salute every French aviator gave when flying over that city.

Smashed rudder or not, Halpern kept the big stable ship on a fairly straight course. The field at Belrupt was dead ahead, as if some unseen spirit had kept the wobbling bomber on its course. The wind-sock atop the water tower showed they were coming in down wind but, with the rudder washed out a turn now would be fatal. Halpern nosed her down, the wind at his tail. The big Breguet scooted along, its wheels touched, bounced, faster as Halpern fought the tail down. The motor was off when the Breguet knifed between two hangers. The wings were sheared off and the fuselage rested, without landing gear or wings, on the far side of the twenty-foot space between the hangers.

Mechanics, pilots, the commandant himself, dragged the two men out of their seats. "*Vive Rouge et Noire!*"

In their excitement they pulled and yanked the two wounded men until the commandant halted them. The medical sergeant cut off Halpern's helmet and Red Moore's leather flying coat, gave them each an anti-tetanus shot and barked tersely, "Hospital. *Vite!*"

The ambulance parted traffic on the road to the field hospital. The commandant and as many others of the

escadrille as could, hung from the back, sides, and running board. One yelled to a man on the tail board. "Do they still fight, lying there?"

"No! The Red one is on the top stretcher and he put down his hand to the black one below him and the Black one cursed at him in American and grabbed his hand. They are lying there, holding each other's hand, from the top stretcher to the bottom stretcher."

Halpern, on the bottom stretcher called in a weak but sarcastic voice, "Hey, Red, are you still alive?"

"Alive enough to beat the melon off you soon as we get out of this meat-wagon, Blackie."

"Red, you're right. I did go over to see your girl last night."

"A sneak to the end, eh?" Red growled.

"I told her I was fooling about your wife and the three kids with pigs' heads and the rest of the stuff about your women. I had a hunch I wasn't coming back this morning and I wanted to square you with her."

"Why, Blackie!" Red Moore's hoarse voice was much softer than his words. "Why, you old double-dealing dude!"

"Forget it, old-timer. Guess we'll make East Bend and South Bend into one big happy town when the old bugle blows the last recall, eh, Red?"

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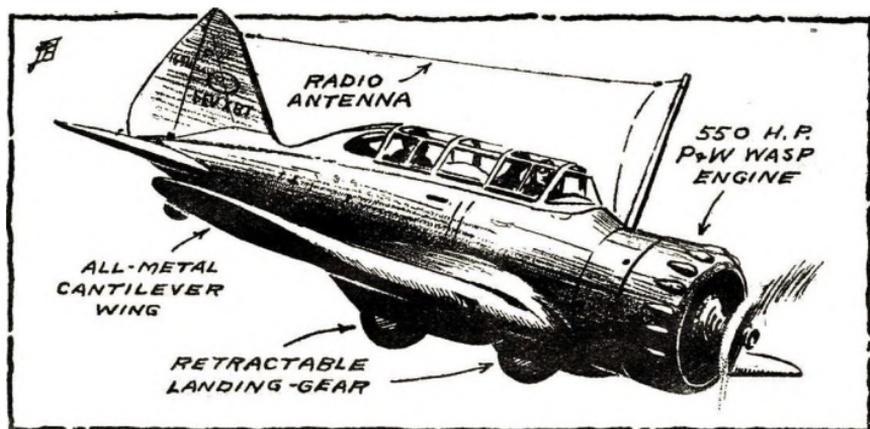
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WAR BIRDS OF TODAY

Army Co-operation Planes

By

FRANK TINSLEY



U. S. A. SEVERSKY—GENERAL PURPOSE MONOPLANE

Span.....36' 0"
Length.....25' 3.5"
Height.....9' 5.62"
Gross Weight.....4690 lbs.
Horse Power.....550

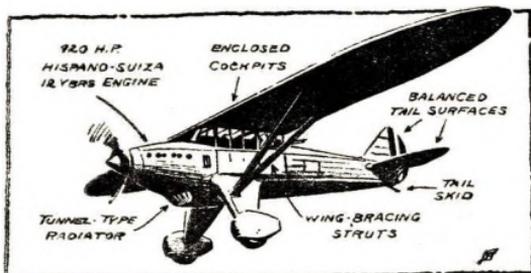
Max. Speed.....260 m.p.h.
Landing Speed.....65 m.p.h.
Climb.....1350 ft. per min.
Service Ceiling.....26,300 ft.
Normal Range.....950 miles

THE military aviator who draws an assignment to army co-operation work suffers a rude awakening from his rosy dreams of slashing sky battles and medals of honor. A few months' service in an observation or communications squadron suffices to teach him that the fame and plaudits of acedom are not for the likes of him. He has unwittingly slipped into the harness and become one of the lowly work-horses of aerial warfare. Like a bird with clipped wings, his flight is limited by the everyday needs and desires of the doughboy in the mud below.

The term, army co-operation is self-explanatory. It includes all the vari-

ous types of flying that exist merely to serve the ground forces of an army. While the bombers and fighters are off on independent missions and far flung raids, the hard-working observation pilot shuttles back and forth, day in and day out, at the behest of some divisional commander, supplying eagle eyes for his batteries, contacting his armored cars and dropping information and orders to his advanced elements. The earth-bound pilot's only consolation lies in the knowledge that his humdrum, everyday job is a vitally important one, for well he realizes that an army deprived of eyes and communications is a blind huddle of futility.

Span.....47' 2 3/4"
 Length.....30' 2"
 Height.....?
 Gross Weight.....5060 lbs.
 Horse Power.....930
 Max. Speed.....223.5 m.p.h.
 Landing.....59 m.p.h.
 Climb.....2523 ft. per min.
 Ceiling.....35,260 ft.
 Range.....803 miles



BELGIAN RENARD—R. 32—RECONNAISSANCE

The scouting or observation plane was the earliest type of military heavier-than-aircraft. At the outbreak of the World War, the flying equipment consisted of a few rickety, underpowered crates that were a greater danger to their pilots than the enemy below.

Yet even these inadequate machines performed yeoman service and were of inestimable value during the early campaigns. As the war rolled along its bloody course, increasing aerial specialization demanded more definite types of planes for definite jobs. From the early two-place scouts, heavy bombing planes and fast tiny fighters were evolved. The scouts themselves were developed into the sturdy, efficient observation planes that made up the great bulk of fighting aircraft in use when the armistice was signed.

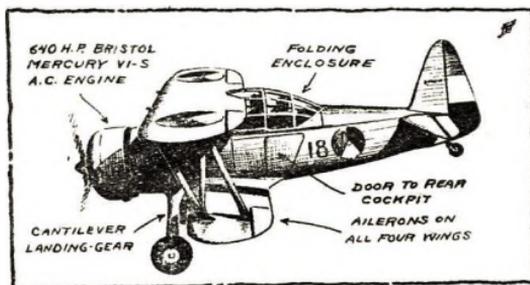
Today, this type of plane still holds its position of importance in the world's aerial armadas. Equipped with improved radio sets and more efficient cameras, armed with more formidable defensive weapons, twice as speedy and maneuverable as their war-time progenitors, the observation planes of today have more than kept pace with the bombers and fighters.

There seems to be a definite trend in all countries toward a more or less standard reconnaissance design. This has taken the form of a semi-cantilever, high-wing monoplane with external V-type wing bracing. Radial

and liquid-cooled power plants seem to be about equally popular and enclosed cockpits have become almost universal. Prominent examples of this new school of design are the British Westland A-39/34, the French Mureaux 113.R2, the German Henschel Hs. 122 and our own new Douglas O-46A. Let's examine a perfect example of this type which has been recently adopted as the standard observation plane of the Belgian army.

THE Renard R.32 is a high-wing externally braced monoplane of all-metal structure and fabric covering. Two power-plants are available, the 920 H. P. Hispano-Suiza 12 Ybrs and the 870 H. P. Gnome-Rhone 14 Krsd. The wing is in two sections, joined on the center-line and supported by vertical struts. It is braced by streamlined V-struts springing from the landing-gear Vees to a point half way out on the wing. Long tapering-chord ailerons are inset from the wing tips.

The pilot's cockpit is situated between the spars of the center section with the observer just aft of him in line with the trailing-edge of the wing. Both cockpits are enclosed by transparent side panels which fill the gap between the fuselage and the wing. A sliding roof of similar material provides upward visibility and escape in an emergency. The pilot's seat is adjustable. Dual ball-bearing



Span.....	32' 6"
Length.....	24' 7"
Height.....	10' 10"
Gross Weight.....	4,840 lbs.
Horse Power.....	640
Max. Speed.....	229.7 m.p.h.
Landing Speed.....	?
Climb.....	1690 ft. per min.
Ceiling.....	30,176 ft.
Range.....	683 Miles

DUTCH KOOLHOVEN—F. K. 52—GENERAL PURPOSE

controls are provided as well as full night-flying and radio equipment. The armament consists of twin fixed Vickers guns firing forward through the propeller arc plus a flexible Lewis gun in the rear office.

The combination of a 223.5 M. P. H. top with a landing speed of only 59 m. p. h. answers any question as to the ship's speed range. She climbs 2523 feet per minute, reaches a service ceiling of 35,260 feet and has a range of approximately 800 miles. Fast, sturdy and well armed, the Renard is a perfect example of the modern observation plane.

NOW let's see what the peace-loving Hollanders have to offer. Take a look at the Koolhoven F. K. 52 General Purpose military two-seater. It is a single-bay staggered biplane of varied construction. The wings are built up of two spruce and plywood spars, three-ply ribs and polished bakelite plywood skin. The ailerons, however, are of duralumin and the fuselage of welded-steel, fabric covered.

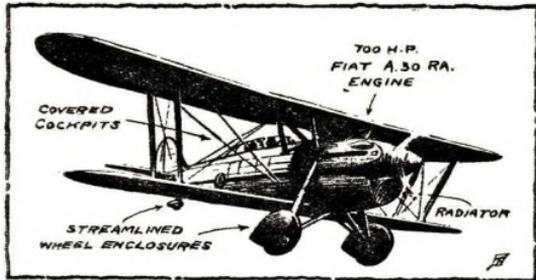
The F. K. 52 is powered with a Bristol "Mercury" VI-S, nine-cylinder, radial, air-cooled, supercharged engine enclosed in an easily removable N. A. C. A. cowling. Twin fuel tanks placed beneath the pilot's seat are droppable in an emergency. The crew of two are accommodated in a large single cockpit, enclosed and heated.

The pilot climbs into his seat through the hinged roof, while the observer enters through a large side door. The rear section of the enclosure may be opened to permit the observer to use his flexible guns. The pilot's armament is optional. He may be provided with two cannons or two machine guns. These are mounted in the upper wing outside the propeller disc. Both members of the crew are free to amuse themselves with bomb releases and the observer has the added pleasure of taking snap-shots through the camera aperture in the cockpit floor. A two-way radio set is also provided.

ITALY'S entry in our own little observation-plane show is also a two-place biplane. The Romeo Ro. 37 is powered with a Fiat A.30 RA, twelve cylinder V-type, water-cooled engine developing 700 H. P. The water radiator is located under the engine inside the fuselage with a circular opening just below the propeller boss. The wings are unequal in span, staggered and connected with a single pair of inter-plane struts on either side. The wing structure consists of dural spars and wooden ribs covered with fabric. Only the upper wings are equipped with ailerons.

The two cockpits are placed in tandem just aft of the trailing-edge of the upper wing and are covered with a sliding, transparent enclosure.

Span.....36' 4"
 Length.....28' 3"
 Height.....9' 8"
 Gross Weight.....5027 lbs.
 Horse Power.....700
 Max. Speed.....209.8 m.p.h.
 Landing Speed...62.1 m.p.h.
 Climb.....1543 ft. per min.
 Ceiling.....?
 Range.....1090 miles



ITALIAN ROMEO—Ro-37—RECONNAISSANCE

Dual controls are provided, as well as the usual radio, photographic and high-altitude oxygen equipment. The pilot's armament consists of two synchronized BREDA-SAFAT machine guns firing forward through the air-screw. A similar gun on a flexible mounting guards the tail. The bomb-racks are fitted beneath the plane's fuselage.

The performance figures of the Ro. 37 lag considerably behind those of the Belgian and Dutch ships already described. Mussolini's baby hits a top of 209.8 m. p. h. at 9840 feet altitude and lands at 62.1 M. P. H. In spite of the advantage of 60 more horses under the hood, she climbs more slowly than the Koolhaven (1543 feet per minute). Her range, however, (1090 miles) far exceeds any of the other ships. It may well be that the mediocre performance of this standard Italian reconnaissance plane is the explanation of why Il Duce's war-torn aircraft don't seem to be doing so well in the Spanish imbroglio. Quien sabe?

AT last we get around to Uncle Sam's "aerial eyes." Unfortunately, no performance figures are available on the latest observation models (Douglas O-46 a—North-American O-47, etc.), so we will have to be content with one of the older types. As an example of American airplane design efficiency, I have se-

lected the Seversky General Purpose military two-seater.

This is an all-metal, full-cantilever, low-wing monoplane with semi-retractable landing gear. In spite of its comparatively low power (550 H. P. Pratt and Whitney "Wasp") it displays a very remarkable turn of speed, exceeding that of all the other entries.

The Seversky clocks a maximum of 260 m. p. h. at 8000 feet altitude. She cruises at 224—about the top speed of the others—and lands at 65 M. P. H. In her other figures, however, the lower power slows her up. Her rate of climb of 1350 feet per minute is far below even the Romeo and her 26,300 foot ceiling looks pretty sick alongside of the 35,260 feet of the Renard.

Give her the same number of horses as the Belgian though, and I'd bet on Uncle Sam's baby as far as climb, ceiling or anything else is concerned. And in the little matter of speed, don't forget that even with a measly 550 horses, she leads the field by a margin of more than 35 M. P. H.! Why, brother, with 900 horses in her nose, Uncle Sam's little Seversky would walk away from them "furrin'" planes so fast that she'd just about snap the stars and stripes right off in that high-flying flag at her masthead.

Am I right, now, brother? Or am I right?





Terror of The Casket Crew

A THRILLING WORLD WAR NOVEL
By ARCH WHITEHOUSE

CHAPTER I
Night Flying Squadron

THE Casket Crew was back in action! Their amazing furlough ended, a rest cruelly spiked by nerve-shredding adventure that gave

them no respite even under the shelter of a leave warrant or the sturdy stone walls of an English mansion. Two weeks of mad effort, battle and bloodshed had passed like a wild and thunderous cinematograph film splashed against the white screen of a Niagara. And yet, it had been different. A

change, they say, is as good as a rest, but the Casket Crew knew that whatever dollop of vigor they might have sucked into their vitals would be burned up within forty-eight hours at Cassel.

Old No. 11 in new war paint, varnish and dope was ready for them when they hopped out of the tender. She stood out on the tarmac glistening and stiff with new guy wires, fabric and struts. Her engines had been rebuilt and the Flight Sergeant was giving her a warm-up test and working in the new gudgeon pins and rings. Their eyes gleamed as they spotted the breezy insignia of the Casket Crew flaunting on her gray-green snout.

But the contrast of this aerial battleship, against the battered background of the Cassel field caused Harry Brown to let out a gusty exclamation.

"Gawd bli' me!" he blossomed out. "Wot the 'ell 'as been goin' on 'ere?"

The members of the Casket Crew peered through the opening between A and B Flight hangars and saw that wreckage was strewn everywhere. A small petrol shed had been blown from its moorings and planted in a shell hole sixty yards away. A hangar that had been used by the night-flying Bristol outfit had gone somewhere and left nothing but a few gaunt splinters of Besseneau frame and a heap of flame-stained earth. Long narrow wooden boxes were piled outside the carpenter's shed and a chaplain walked across the pathway with a flag draped over his arm.

Lieutenant Graham Townsend stared at Lieutenant Phil Armitage.

Corporal Andy McGregor placed a great hand on Sergeant Mike Ryan's shoulder strap and peered out under broad bushy eyebrows. Corporal Horsey Horlick stood straddle-legged and followed their gaze.

"What a lovely mess to come back to," Townsend muttered.

"Looks bad to me," Horlick offered. "D'yer notice that our boiler seems to be the only one left with all that belongs to it?"

"Ay," agreed McGregor, fingering his great sporran. "Thot means work fra us."

"Here comes the major," Mike Ryan chipped in. "He'll give us the bad news."

"Hullo, you birds," Major McKelvie greeted. "Glad to see you back again."

"What the devil has happened?" Townsend asked without offering much in the way of an official salute.

"Jerry! He's been after you birds ever since you went. You'll have to fork them out somehow tonight before they get off. They're coming out of that drome behind Tourcoing."

"What about the day bombers?" asked Phil Armitage. "They ought to have nailed that place, days ago. And those night-flying Camels with four Coopers apiece could have done a lot of damage."

"They could, but somehow they haven't."

"What time's the show, Major?" asked Townsend. He was used to all this, and accepted the situation. Besides, if it wasn't a Jerry drome, it would be a rail-head or a munition dump. What was the difference?

"Get away at 11:30. No other ships available. Better get some doss before supper. You'll probably need it."

THAT was twelve hours before. Since then, they had gone to work and scraped together what was available in the way of a shed to sleep in until new Nissan huts were erected. They grumbled and grouched and worked up a swell hate, for there is nothing quite so annoying as to find one's dunnage scrambled in a heap with pots of grease, burned boxes, lengths of bacon and the remains of someone's breakfast of four days before. They had managed to get a few hours of sleep, and were scrambling

up the throat ladder, carrying Lewis guns, first aid kits, ammunition drums and map-cases a few minutes before the take-off time.

The newly varnished No. 11 wound her way out from the tarmac and headed into the cleared stretch that was illuminated with petrol-tin flares. Townsend, the cold emotionless Englishman, was at the controls. Armitage, of the Long Island Armitages, was in the bomber-officer's seat. And McGregor, more than ever devoted to his Black Watch kilt, huddled over his guns in the front turret. Down inside, Sergeant Mike Ryan and Trooper Harry Brown sat watch over the bomb-toggle boards and waited in the gloom of the explosive-loaded cabin. Horsey Horlick stretched his long bowed legs on the platform of the rear turret and fingered his guns reflectively.

They got the signal from the adjutant who was on deck in place of the major, and Townsend rammed the throttles up the quadrant and steadied her wind-fanned tail with deft pressure on the rudder bar. They rumbled away and gradually the big biplane tail came up and she thundered on, creaking and swaying into the motionless glare of the flares and then hurtled her great shape into the darkness beyond.

Over Hondeghem they roared and headed toward Bailleul. They turned slightly at Neuve Eglise and shot for the battered scar that had once been Quesnoy-s-Deule. Armitage took sights every so often and checked with the small compass course they had lined up before starting. Already the German defense batteries were opening up, and splattering the sky with death glare and screaming shrapnel.

Then a queer thing happened.

Out of nowhere came a Spad. It carried the markings of an American squadron. Armitage raised his eyebrows and turned to the Englishman.

"Hello!" he beamed. "Uncle Sam is getting up here now. Didn't know they had night-flying squadrons in this sector."

Townsend watched his lips and read the conversation.

"What the devil is he doing up here?" the Englishman demanded, using the same exaggerated lip-language of Handley Page airmen. "We should have been tipped off about him. Mac will be having a shot at him, unless he has seen his cards."

Then before they could attract the Scot's attention, they saw the Spad whirl and come down at them with both guns flaming. The Scot saw him, however, for he had been watching him with suspicion from the minute he came in sight. The two Lewis guns in the front turret began to dance a flaming fandango on the Scaarf mount, and the Spad sheered off.

Horlick took up the action when it came into his arc and with another half-hearted attempt to dive on them again, the pilot in the American ship gave it up and went down into a mist rift with the bullets of McGregor showing him the way.

"Whew!" gulped Townsend. "That's damned queer. Why the devil did he do that? Surely he knows a British bomber by this time."

Armitage sat worried and stared over the side trying to make out just what had happened. He somehow felt responsible for that American airman.

"He's lucky at that. It isn't often that McGregor misses that way. That leave must have affected his aim," the American bomber officer reflected. "Cripes! I hope we're not all going hoop-la after that damned leave. Maybe that wasn't a Spad after all, but I could swear it was."

BUT No. 11 had been flying at 6,000 feet and had Townsend refrained from playing so safe, he would have seen another side to the

strange Spad angle. The streak of mist that had offered the mysterious American ship a haven from the storm of lead from Mac's guns, also shielded another angle to the queer happenings of the night.

The Casket Crew could not know this, of course. They bashed on again heading due east, once they were certain that the American Spad had been taught a lesson.

But it had all brought a new twist of fear to every man on the bomber. It was the fear that their short leave had robbed them of something vital, something they had and could not put their finger on, before they all left on that strange furlough. Airmen on all sectors had experienced it before and many had spoken of it. Was there a strange superstition about the first patrol after a leave?

"That damn fool Yank," growled Armitage to himself. "They must be sending veritable greenhorns out here now. Still, if the bird was capable of night-flying, he ought to be able to recognize a Handley Page in the air. I wonder if he figured that we were flying a Gotha."

Horsey Horlick was puzzled too. "I might have hit that bird," he moaned to himself. "After all, he may have made a mistake. I'd hate to go down some night knowing that I'd knocked off one of our own guys. But why in hell did he do it?"

Down inside. Sergeant Mike Ryan, who had found out what had happened by inquiring in the control pit, sat with his back to the bomb-racks sucking on his cold clay pipe.

"Wan o' them Spalpeens," he growled. "Ye can't trust 'em as far as ye can thro wan anvil. Won o' them Yankee-Jarmins, I'll bet. Hot-bed o' them Jerries, that America. Crammed full o' spies and they all get in the American army. The good Yankees joined up with us years ago."

McGregor had another angle to squawk about. He wondered why he

had missed the Spad. After all, it had been an easy shot. He too, wondered whether the leave had anything to do with his aim and accuracy. After all this was no time to start practicing. This would be a real show and there would be plenty of gunning to do.

"Ye canna loosen up on this game," he growled. "The dom leaves will be the death o' us, yet."

Townsend was uncertain about everything. He tried to find reasons for all the twists, but there were no answers. He sensed already that his own flying was rusty and that he was not handling the ship well. He had an idea that he ought to turn the wheel over to Armitage, but that business of the American Spad stuck in his crop.

Now the flat outline of the Tour-coing field came into view. With a nod to Armitage, who then ducked down the companionway to warn Ryan, Townsend eased back on the throttles and set the Handley into a raid glide toward the gray patch ahead. McGregor drew himself up into a fighting crouch, and raised his spade grips. A strange tension crept over everything as they slid down toward their target.

"**N**OW!" barked Armitage, who was now in charge of the ship.

McGregor nodded. Townsend gave the American a knowing glance and the ship nosed down steeper. The American placed one knee on his seat cushion and peered through the cross-wires of his bomb sight. His left arm went up and Townsend stuck the nose of No. 11 dead on the row of hangars. Wind screamed madly and played wild tunes on the cross-bracing wires. The crang of shrapnel and the wail of Spandau slugs reached their noise-battered ears and the blasts of concussion and the pressure of the dive rammed the charge home harder against their pounding eardrums.

Guns below suddenly roared out to

greet them and No. 11 danced in the pounding surf of concussion. Townsend fought to hold her on line. Phil's hand remained aloft until it seemed that the Handley's wheels must bash into the streaked roofs of the hangars.

Then Armitage's shoulders jerked. His arm came down with a slash. Ryan down the companionway caught it and slapped Brown's shoulder. The Cockney yanked twice at a toggle board and No. 11 leaped like a gaffed salmon.

As she recoiled under the release of the 250's, Townsend drew her up again.

The two projectiles bit into the hard earth inside the hangars and belched their wrath. A double jet of flame shot out and then a thunderous concussion.

No. 11 went over on one wing tip, came around and tore back at the line of hangars. Blaze and flame streaked their line and both Armitage and Townsend turned and their glances met.

There were no Gothas in the hangars!

"Give it to 'em anyway," snarled the American.

"You know what that means," Townsend squeaked.

But the American was slashing his arm down again and No. 11 was jerking like a steam-horn. McGregor and Horlick were pouring terrible bursts into the swirling groups of men who were scrambling for cover. Their Lewis fire swept into them and cut them down like wheat. They rolled over, crawled away, screaming and clawing with bloody fingernails at the oil-packed earth.

Again they caught the structures of canvas and frame. Chunks of metal roofing went sky high and floundered helplessly in the storm of smoke, flame and sparks. Slabs of planking twisting and twirling, went end over end through clouds of inky smoke and

fanned strange designs. Geysers of dank earth spouted up, held their form for several seconds and then erupted in mid-air and fell back in a Satan's storm of mould and crushed rock.

But there were no Gothas in the sheds at all!

Armitage, a raging maniac, signalled to Townsend to swing back again. He raised two fingers to Ryan and got a nod. They went over to the "fifties" and set to work on peppering the airdrome.

Through a storm of lead, light and lethal smoke to gouge pot-holes in the landing field.

McGregor, standing high now, was pouring burst after burst into every inky group that tried to get across to the Ack-Ack mounting. One crew already lay in huddled heaps around the wagon-wheel and as fast as others tried to get there and carry on, the mad Scot blew them to soggy trembling heaps of flesh. Horlick picked up where Andy left off and finished anything that remained. It was nice gory teamwork—but stark necessity.

"I'll bet a million that Spad had something to do with this," Townsend yelled.

Armitage winced and wagged his head wearily.

His arm went down again when they had made the turn and the last deluge of death wrapped in shrapnel steel went spinning out of the racks. The ship lunged again and swept over a burning pile and they were clear. What was left of the Tourcoing field was not worth tossing into a wheelbarrow.

But the Gothas were not in their sheds.

Townsend hung over his wheel and watched McGregor. The big Scot was sitting like a carved figure, staring over his guns. He was a study in frustration and Armitage caught the feeling. It ran through the whole ship like an acidic current.

Through a storm of Archie shells and back area searchlights they plodded, fighting to get back. Over Haluin they met a triune of Fokkers on the prowl and Mac picked them up quickly and opened fire.

"Jees, Mac!" screamed Armitage. "Why did you do that? They were giving us the go-by. Don't believe they saw us."

But the Scot was game for anything now. His guns flamed and rattled against the mad thunder of the night. The Fokkers came down like a ton of brick, but Horsey blew into the picture with his little lesson and they were split wide. Townsend nosed down for speed and hurtled on toward Wervicq. The Fokkers tried to come in from three angles and both Horlick and McGregor threw lead like madmen.

"Get down through that mist layer!" roared Armitage.

"I'm trying to," Townsend replied. "Someone must have tossed over an anchor. Can't get any real speed with no load."

The mad fight went on for what seemed hours and neither side seemed to be gaining any headway. Then before they could reach the sheltering layer of mist, a new figure slammed into the picture on the wings of speed and Hisso lungs.

The same American Spad!

For an instant McGregor stood back stock still and watched it as it plunged out of the inky blackness from the Allied side of the line. He started to swing his guns around and try a new target when, to his surprise, the Spad tore down on a Fokker and cut its wings off as neatly as a butcher carves a fricassee. Over and over went the battered scout ship and before the other two could figure where this new menace had come from, they were trying to scramble out of the carnage.

The *bripping* of his guns flamed again in deadly bursts that seemed to change their course and direction like

swords that were being manipulated through a black velvet curtain.

Another Fokker folded up in a welter of flame, struts, lead and smoke.

"God!" gasped Armitage. "Look at that! One minute he smacks us around and then he comes to our aid and pops into three Fokkers. There goes the third!"

McGregor, ever the shepherd, had driven the remaining Fokker dead into the Spad pilot's guns. The American took care of him with a tremendous smash into the Fokker's tail. The control surfaces folded up and ripped themselves clear and the ship lunged on, just missing the undercarriage of the Handley and then jerked over into a swirling spin and started down.

When the members of the Casket Crew found time to look up again, the American Spad was nowhere to be seen.

CHAPTER II

The Mystery Spad



A puzzled, mystified and yet somewhat disappointed Casket Crew crossed the line at Poperinghe and headed for Cassel. The strange actions of the American

Spad had them completely baffled. On the other hand, while they were delighted to have broken the so-called spell of the first patrol after a leave, there was something about it that left them with a cold, stony pebble that bounced around somewhere under their belt buckles.

But when they reached the outskirts of Cassel, a new fear crept into their hearts and they instinctively clutched at the framework of their cockpits.

"There's your answer," Townsend raged. "Those bloody Gothas have been to our shop while we were gad-

ding about over Jerry-land. Look, the place is in a blaze again."

Armitage winced and peered ahead. Then he caught an Aldis lamp signal from the ground and made Townsend fly steady until he had caught it. The beam flashed in jets and threw her Morse signals up at them.

"Get it?" Armitage asked. "They can't take us in. Field gutted. We're to cross over and use the emergency field on the other side of the wood. Can you make it?"

"Righto!" Townsend remarked, swinging the wheel over. McGregor stared back and frowned, not understanding the move for a minute. Phil Armitage took his expression to mean something entirely different.

"Mac's sore about that Spad, yet," he growled to himself. "But I can't figure it either."

They swirled around the corner of the wood and dropped down on the emergency field. A single hangar which had been used for the housing of spare parts was being cleared by a group of chalk-faced mechanics under a flying officer and two flight-sergeants. Townsend rolled her up to the front of the hangar and they clambered down, disgusted, disappointed and dejected.

"Bad one this time, Armitage," the flying officer explained. "Got three men cold, several badly wounded and the last two hangars cleaned out completely. Looks like we shall have to disband for a few weeks until we can get the squadron up to material and personnel strength."

"Swell!" growled the American. "We can get a chance to work a few free-lance shows then."

"Who will?" growled Townsend.

"We will, won't we?" asked Armitage, puzzled. Then he stared around at the rest of the mob and sensed that there was something queer going on. Before he could make an appeal, however, the flying officer added:

"Oh, by the way, Armitage. Just

before the raid, we had one of your old friends drop in here looking for you."

"Who was that?"

"A chap named, let's see—named Lieutenant Roy Warner, an American Air Service man."

"Was he flying a Spad with American markings?" snapped Townsend.

Armitage looked at the Britisher with a pained glance. "Roy Warner was a classmate of mine," he explained. "A swell chap, too. No funny work there."

"Yes," broke in the flying officer. "He had a French Spad with American markings. He checked in with the ground staff. Someone took his name and ship numbers. You can trace him all right."

"When did he get here?" Townsend asked.

"A short time before Jerry blew in with his ironmongery. As a matter of fact, he took off the instant they came within range. I suppose he had a smack at them and then went back to his squadron."

Armitage caught Townsend pondering and biting his upper lip. The gunners and toggle men were standing around in a half-moon of distrust.

"Look here," the American finally blurted out. "There's no use hanging on like this. We'll check Warner through his squadron and find out whether that was he over the Jerry lines tonight. If it was, we'll raise hell!"

THE gunners mumbled, grabbed their weapons and placed them in a temporary shed near the hangar and the Crew sauntered off toward what was left of their field in the old orchard. Nothing further was mentioned until they found the Squadron office which was still intact, and offered a wire through to the Wing H.Q. at least.

Townsend sat down and worked on the patrol report. The gunners and

toggle men went off to find how much damage had been done to their hut. Armitage climbed out of his flying kit and went to work on a series of telephone numbers, painfully dragged out of the Hesdin office.

Before Townsend had finished, Armitage was back, a ghost in khaki. His face was lined and blocked in with putty-like daubs. His eyes stared ahead as though there were phantoms dancing on chains somewhere before him.

"What's up?" asked Townsend.

"That wasn't Warner—the guy who landed here. Warner went west two weeks ago on a night show somewhere down in front of Nancy. In a Spad No. 484."

There was a ton of remorse oozing about the Recording Office as Armitage explained, but the cold challenge moulding Townsend's face would not soften.

"Don't look like that, Gra," Armitage pleaded. "God! It's bad enough to hear he went west. Warner was a swell guy. One of the best—and somehow I can't believe it . . ."

"Neither can I," the Englishman said hoarsely. "In the first place I don't believe a Jerry is using his ship. That stuff sounds good in penny dreadfuls, but it doesn't go in actual warfare. If he was shot down, it's ten to one he piled the ship up, and no Jerry is going to all the trouble to rebuild it for some boss-eyed trip for a spy. They have too many other ways of getting over."

"You don't mean to say you—you think Warner is pulling something, do you?" Armitage replied aghast.

"I'm not saying anything," Townsend answered. "But you know someone will have a devil of a lot of explaining to do. After all, a lot of these Americans have already been nailed working for Germany. It's quite natural. Many have German ancestors, and blood is thicker than water. I'm trying to look at it sanely. Here we

have a man flying a French Spad with American markings. He fires on a British bomber at night on the other side of the line. No explanation for that.

"Then the same man apparently blows in here claiming to be an American pilot who went west two weeks ago. A few minutes after he lands, a Jerry Gotha outfit comes over and blows hell out of our place, but strange to relate he takes off and gets away just before they start throwing their weight about. You surely are not going to swallow that, are you?"

Armitage stood staring at Townsend like a man who had suddenly been transformed into a straw-stuffed scarecrow.

"I'm sorry," he finally said. "Maybe I'm wrong, but you don't know Roy Warner, Townsend. He couldn't be mixed up in a thing like that."

But when they went back to the demolished field and looked over the check-in book, the Spad that had landed had carried American markings and was listed as No. 484. The pilot was Roy Warner . . .

A restless night, nightmare tortured and trimmed with turmoil was the reward of the Casket Crew. In the temporary Officers' Quarters Armitage paced up and down in slacks and sweater, his palms damp with perspiration. Townsend, huddled beneath his pile of blankets, tried to reason with him, but the American was fighting a grim battle with his loyalty to a countryman and that strange quality known as horse-sense.

Across the road in a Nissan hut the gunners sat around a tin stove smoking cigarettes, trying to settle it in their own minds and getting further muddled. Horlick alone was silent, for he like Armitage could not explain it.

Andy McGregor was restless too. He would get up every so often and go to the window that had a three-

cornered tear in one of the oil-linen strips to peer out.

"Wadderyer looking for, Mac?" Horlick asked three time before he got a reply.

"Ah heer the night skirl o' a war pipe . . . soomwhere." the big Scot answered and peered out again.

"An' what the hell is a war-pipe?" Horlick demanded, rolling another cigarette with one hand while Brownie looked on amazed at the trick.

"Ye'd be thinkin' o' an Indian pipe, eh?" Mac said.

"Them's pipes of peace. Yer pass it round . . . and all get sick, I think."

"Ah weel, ye wouldn'a understand the pipe o' the glen."

"I can't hear one, either."

"Ut's for the ears o' them wie the blood o' Bruce in their veins."

"He's off again, boys," Horsey groaned.

"Ay," agreed Mac, catching sight of the tall wiry form of Lieutenant Armitage striding across the field into the night. "He is."

There was no rest for the weary as Mike Ryan said, for No. 11 had to go off again the next night. There was but a mere handful of mechanics to prepare the big Handley for the show, and the air of the field was reminiscent of a first class morgue.

A few staff officers blew in about noon, looked about, shrugged their shoulders and climbed back into their Lanchester. Major McKelvie was seen pleading with them about something, but apparently got nowhere, for they drove off, weary-eyed and stoop-shouldered.

There was something about "You've got to stop them," in the last few words thrown over the folded top.

Ryan and Lieutenant Townsend busied themselves with ship details, bomb racks and toggles all the early afternoon. Mac and Horsey went over their guns and tested the ammuni-

tion themselves. Harry Brown just mooned about and wondered where Armitage was.

No one had seen him since he had left Townsend the night before.

They ate supper under a shrapnel-slashed tree, cleaned up their dixies in a sand-pile and sat about waiting for something to happen, and Armitage came back, tired, unshaven and silent about seven. Without a word he threw himself on his bed and dropped off to sleep. They aroused him without any questions a few minutes before they were ready to pile off again.

It was a beautiful night when Townsend hoiked No. 11 over the trees. A great paring of moon augmented by a clear sky and a generous sprinkling of stars gave a treacherous display of gray velvet glare.

Armitage sat still all the way to Poperinghe and then reached forward and took down the small compass course Townsend had checked off that afternoon. He studied it carefully for some time as if he were not sure of the objective.

Suddenly he mumbled, "Oh yes. Tourcoing . . . the sheds . . . Gothas."

Townsend caught the mumbling and by the sixth sense developed by wartime airmen, interpreted the meaning, if not the words.

"Course all right, Phil?" he barked across the cockpit. "I reckoned on cutting in behind Langemarck and then turning southeast almost to Courtrai. Suit you, old chap?"

Armitage nodded absently and studied the map. He fingered over the celluloid cover for some time, still mumbling and then looked up and said, "Right! Could you stretch it all the way to Coutrai? I'd like to take a look-see."

"Risky," answered Townsend, more to himself than to the American, "but if you say so."

They were at 7,000 now and hammering on toward what had been Langemarck. Below the Devil's Neck-

lace of Very lights, star shells and parachute flares marked the front line. Dull splashes of yellow flame bit out here and there indicating that the Minnies were singing their evening carol. Sudden sparkles of tracer brought out fan-shaped brooches and more flares came up to blot out the gleam of such tawdry jewelry.

DOWN the catwalk, Sergeant Ryan sat and rubbed his rheumatic knee and cast a beady eye forward. Brownie huddled against him for warmth and sought the animal heat that might be found.

"You wait," the Mick Sergeant mumbled, and Brownie turned so that his ear could catch the sage comments of the three-striper. "You wait. You'll see something tonight, me lad."

"Mister Armitage, yer means, Sarg?"

"Ar, Mister Armitage. He's got something in his crop. You'll see, my boy!"

"Ah well, anything for a change," Brownie grunted as he settled back again against the bomb rack.

They had turned now and the searchlights were beginning to finger through the sky behind Iseghem. Mac sat huddled under his guns and watched the massive sword blades slash back and forth. He got to his bare knees once and gripped a spade grip and peered over the top plane, but in a minute he settled down again and Townsend let out a low breath of relief. Armitage sat staring at the map, checking distances and marking figures on his note pad. He took no notice of the bomb sight which he should have been adjusting by now for drift and wind.

Townsend was keeping the Roulers-Courtrai railroad tracks under his left wing, and checking his speed on a sheet. Armitage paid no attention of any sort. He simply sat and stared at his map.

Further off to their left the Lys

split itself, or appeared to, by joining with the canal out of Roulers, and the water caught the fanning searchlight blades and reflected the light back on a low tangle of cottages and huts.

They were watching all this when suddenly, Mac stiffened into action. Two Archie bursts had slammed themselves against the sky above with a splintering of saffron and in the low glare he had caught the flick of a wing-tip. He was on his feet in a minute, crouching under the dull handles of the double-Lewis guns. His chin jutted forward and he held his fire until the last minute.

Townsend, watching Mac's eyes carefully, made a sudden but sure turn to the left and Mac nodded, imperceptibly. But it was enough. There was a lightning flick of the gun muzzles and twin streams of fire. Mac banged out a short ten-rounder and held it. He gave Townsend another glance and fired again.

Armitage got to his feet, steadied himself somehow and peered up. Then with a low wail that seemed to come all the way up from his flying boots, he turned and hammered on the space between the front turret and the cockpit.

"No, Mac! Let him go!"

Townsend yanked at Armitage's short flying coat belt but the American reached further forward again, and screamed at McGregor. Mac pounded one short burst and stopped, staring wild-eyed at the bomber-officer.

"Ut's the Spod, Sor! The same damn Spod!"

But before either Armitage or McGregor could make another move, Townsend pulled the unbelievable and yanked the Handley Page over on its ear.

There was a wild scream of wings knifing the air and a Spad shot past the nose of the Handley so close that Mac could have reached out and spun

one of the wheels with his gloved hand.

Mac ducked instead and Armitage lay across the combing between the cockpit and the gun turret and stared as the single-seater shot past.

"Whew!" gasped Townsend.

"Never mind!" screamed Armitage. "Down—down after him. Look, he's going down there. After him."

Why he responded, Townsend never knew. But the big Handley nosed down with Mac peering over the edge at the two strange men in the control pit.

"Keep your eye on *him*, Mac," screamed Armitage, pointing ahead. "Don't let him get away."

"Get awa'— He's done," Mac growled. "Yon engin's gone burkie, wi' a slobber o' bullets."

Ryan, anxious and chalk-faced, came up the companionway and peered out. He wondered why he and Brownie had been hurled so rudely down the catwalk all the way to Horlick's platform and then, equally as rudely, all the way back again to the foot of the steps that led up into the control pit.

Brownie was still down inside on his knees trying to stop the flow of blood from his bashed beezee.

Ryan took one look and saw what they were after and said, "Holy Mither o' Moses!" and went back into the darkness . . .

TOWNSEND followed the Spad all the way down, checking his headlong dive now and then with a slight movement of the wheel, until they saw the single-seater slip past a long narrow grove of alders and curl gently to a glide across a fairly wide field.

Townsend looked hard, made a quick calculation while Armitage and Mac stared at him.

"You can't get in there," moaned Armitage.

"Who can't? Watch me."

Townsend was equally as determined now to find out what this was all about too. He was convinced there was something sticky about it all, and if getting a Handley in there would help, he'd see that the Handley went in.

They hung on, wild-eyed while the Englishman brought the big No. 11 around; they held their breaths while he side-slipped her and they almost leaped overboard when he fish-tailed her like a dolphin to keep her within bounds.

But Townsend did it.

Armitage was over the side like a flash. Mac gave Townsend a look and got the nod. He too went over, taking a big automatic from his pilot. He raced after the running Armitage who was thundering toward the Spad. Mac in bare legs, flaunting kilt and sporran, pounded after him.

Armitage was at the Spad now, both hands on the cockpit combing. Mac came thundering up and stared at the marking on the fin.

"That's the same one, Muster Aarmitage," Mac gulped. "The same number—look."

"This is her, all right, Mac. No. 484, but where's Warner?"

"He's not here?" asked Mac amazed. He was under the impression that the pilot had folded up and had slumped down after landing.

"No, he's not here." Armitage said, with a puzzled air.

"Hello, there! Coom on, Muster Aarmitage," Mac husked. "They're a'coomin'."

There was a low thump of feet, and a splash of tracer from the back turret of No. 11. Brownie had spotted something and was warning them. More shots rang out from a hedge about seventy-five yards away and Armitage growled. "Go on, beat it, Mac!"

Mac was all for beating it and was about twenty yards on his way before he realized that Armitage was

not following. He turned to see if the American had stopped one, but Armitage was still standing with both hands on the combing, but he now had one foot in the fuselage stirrup.

"Come on, Muster Aarmitage," Mac yelled.

"Go on Mac. I'll be along. Beat it quick," came the reply over the crackle of gunfire.

Mac, hesitant, finally turned and raced toward the Handley and hurled himself at the rope Ryan had dropped through the throat hatch. He was up in an instant, sitting in Armitage's seat.

"What happened?" Townsend demanded. "Why did you leave him?"

"Leave him?" grunted the breathless Scot. "He wouldn't a coom!"

"What the devil? The damn fool. We can't stay here."

Old No. 11 was taking a bad fire now from the hedge, and Townsend was forced to let in the throttles. Old No. 11 moved away and Mac darted down his companionway and bobbed up again inside the Scaarf ring. He grabbed his guns and sprayed the hedge generously as the Handley picked up speed and pounded past the Spad. As they passed they could see Armitage sitting in the cockpit of the Spad, calmly waving them on.

Ryan who had popped out again, stared at Townsend and the Englishman stared back in return. What did it all mean? What was Armitage's game? Did he expect to start that Hisso motor and get away?

Mac turned quickly and frowned as he saw what Armitage had done. With a low snarl he whirled about and battered the hedge again and sat down with a gesture of disgust.

Ryan stayed up front all the way to Turcoing and handled the bomb sight. They carried out their raid, almost unhindered and discovered that several new, but widely scattered hangars had been erected, which they promptly blew to smithereines. They

plastered a new Ack-Ack gun mounting and planted a flock of 112's all over the landing field and then cleared off.

Ryan looked at Townsend again and wagged his great head.

"I know—I know, Mike," Townsend agreed. "There's something smutty about all this. They don't care what we blow up, somehow. As a matter of fact, for all the trouble they gave us, I think they *wanted* us to mess about here, for some reason or another!"

"Rather than bother *something* else, eh, Sor?"

"Right! And I'd give a quid to know what it is."

"Ah," agreed the worried Mick "And so would I, Sor."

They were racing back toward Armentiers now and heading through the curtain fire from the advanced area batteries. The aerial lighthouse behind Bailleul flashed intermittently and guided them on, while Mac and Horlick fought sporadic rear-guard actions with night-flying Fokkers until they crossed into more friendly area.

They all huddled down, speechless from Armentiers to Cassel and left Townsend to it. Ryan in Armitage's seat, sat with his arms folded, his short clay pipe stuffed between his browned tusks, cold and comfortless. He stared ahead at nothing, but was thinking hard.

Mac changed his drums, just in case, and then huddled up under the guns and tried to keep warm. He lay pondering on what had happened and tried to find the answer. Brownie down inside, humble and alone, scotched against a rack strut and contemplated the feet of Horsey Horlick who was draped over his gun mounting, staring off into space like a drunk over the sticky rail of a bar.

That was the Casket Crew, returning home from a successful raid, much too puzzled and worried to be jubilant.

CHAPTER III
Rescue Flight



"I don't understand it," Major McKelvie argued, when they had all thumped into the shack that was serving as a Recording Office. "You

mean to say he stayed there, on his own hook, and made no effort to go back to the Handley?"

He was directing his questions at Mac, who sat his great head in his hands, staring at the floor.

"Ay, Sor," Mac replied without getting or looking up. "Thot he did."

"And you left him, Mac?" McKelvie asked in a tone that had acid in it.

"He sent me, Sor. I was awa' before Ah realized he was not runnin' wie me."

"We were under fire from two sides, Sir," Townsend broke in. "I don't know how Mac got back to us."

"Shut up. I'm asking the questions, and McGregor's answering them," the major snapped. "He's the one who was there."

"Ay, I was there," agreed Mac, still sitting.

"But what did he say? Didn't he give no hint as to what his game was?"

"We both looked, an' saw that it was the same Spad—same noomber—but there was no one in ut, Sor."

"So Armitage started to get in, making out he was going to fly it, eh?"

"Ah dinne ken wut he was going tae do," Mac said wagging his great head. "Ah think he was daft, Sor."

"It was evident, wasn't it, that the motor couldn't be started?"

"Ay, Sor. Take a week tae repair thot."

"Then what was his idea in trying to make out that he was going to fly it?"

"Ah dinna ken, Sor."

"All right. Buzz off, everyone. Get

some sleep and forget it," the major replied.

But there was no forgetting it. None of them went to bed. Instead, they wandered about the splintered ruins of the sheds, bumping into sleepy-eyed sentries and stumbling over partially filled-in shell holes, swearing and cursing under their breaths. They spoke very little, making starts toward their own versions and interpretations.

"For some reason," Townsend suddenly remembered, "he wanted to fly over Courtrai."

"Ay," recalled the Scot, staring across at the glow of the early morning activity of the cook-house. "An' he didn'a want me tae fire on the Spod."

"He was out all last night," Ryan added, staring into the sky as though he expected to find something written across the clouds.

"Ah," Townsend agreed, drawing his flying coat belt about him tighter. "I wonder what he was up to."

There was a distinct clangor about the cookhouse now and the welcome aroma of strong tea. They started that way as if drawn by strings.

"He wanted to get to Courtrai, for some reason," Townsend said, as they stumbled over the cookhouse door-sill.

They swilled down a dixie of tea apiece and then wandered back warmed inside and aglow throughout so that they could now settle down to their blankets. In the gunners' Nisson hut their conversation continued for another hour until one by one they dropped off and McGregor was left talking to himself. He got to one elbow, stared about and started to get out of bed, but on a second thought, he drew his blankets high over his head and curled up.

"IT looks bad for No. 129," Major McKelvie said gloomily at noon. He was holding a sheet of paper in his

hands and sucking on his worn briar, reflectively.

"No news of Armitage, Sir?" Townsend asked.

"No news about Armitage. It's the Squadron."

"The Squadron?"

"Looks like we're about to be disbanded," McKelvie went on. He rustled the paper during the resulting silence, just to do something.

"But—they can't disband a squadron, not without specific charges," Townsend tried to argue.

"Oh, no charges. It's just convenient—for them. They find that we're practically wiped out and that the two-motored Handley Pages are to be replaced by the four-engined machines, so they figure that they might as well get off to a new start."

"But the Crew," Sergeant Ryan began, "and No. 11— They can't—"

"Sorry, Ryan. But I'm afraid they can," McKelvie answered applying another match to his pipe.

"But can't we stick together, Sir?" Townsend argued.

"Hardly. At least, I can't see who or what—that is, I don't think any of you will be able to stay together. There'll be transfers from squadron strength to Pool, and most likely you'll all be shipped all over the front to other squadrons. That's what war does, you know."

"But Mr. Armitage?" Townsend began again.

"Mr. Armitage is out of the question, now, isn't he?" said McKelvie.

They all looked at the major amazed. This was a new tone—or had the C.O. gone bitter about it all?

"But Muster Aarmitage'll tur-rn up, Sor," McGregor finally broke in.

"Ah yes—in some Jerry prison, I suppose."

"But Muster Aarmitage went doon hi'self fra a reason. He had nae idea o' being taken prisoner. He'll be back, Sor, an' we can keep the crew taegether."

"You'll have to stop reading those penny-dreadfuls, Mac," the major smiled. "However," he continued, "we'll know more tomorrow. In the meantime—carry on."

"A show tonight, Sir?" asked Townsend, expectantly.

"No, not tonight. You chaps like a tender to run into St. Omer for the evening?"

"No, Sor!"

The reply came like a burst of grape-shot from McGregor. He had answered for the lot, Lieutenant Townsend, included. The Englishman was about to protest, but something in McGregor's face made him change his mind.

"No, I've got a few letters to do, and there's Phil's things to get off. I'll take care of it, Sir."

"As you like," smiled McKelvie, returning to the shack that was doing duty as an orderly room.

"What was the idea, Mac?" Townsend asked.

"Ah don't know, Sor. Just something made me say ut."

"You're not going to try anything silly, are you, Mac?"

"No, Sor— But Ah'd like tae be heer all night—just in case."

"His highland fling is going to have another flung," beamed Horsey Horlick. "Anything can happen when McGregor gets one of these."

"Ye'll be glod tae join me, won't ye, Horsey?" smiled Mac.

"We'll all join you, if you have an idea," Townsend said.

"Ah havn'a a idea," said Mac quietly, "joost a feelin' . . . joost a feelin'."

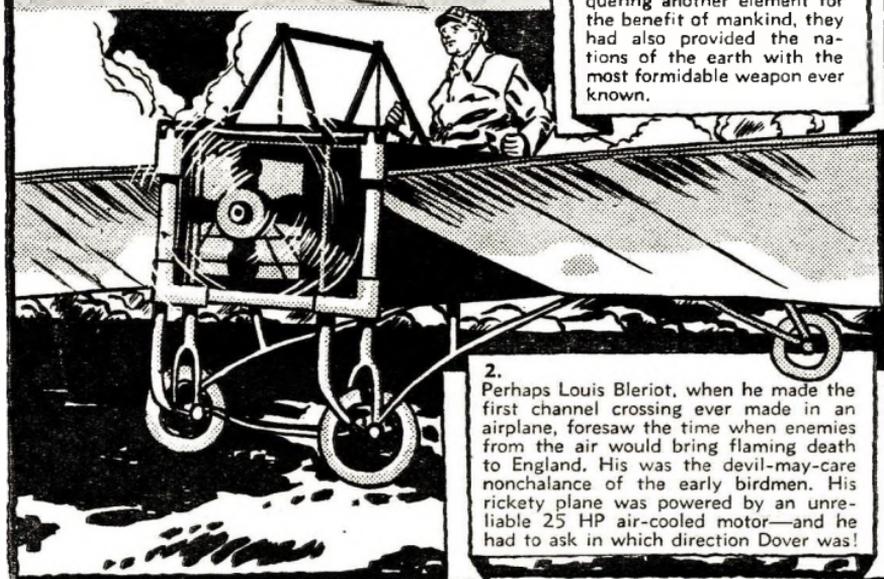
THE crew stood about the gaunt shed that housed No. 11, like a group of men awaiting their execution. Why they were there, they had no idea, when for the walking of a mile or so they could have enjoyed the companionship and warmth of an estaminet. Only McGregor seemed to

(Continued on page 119)

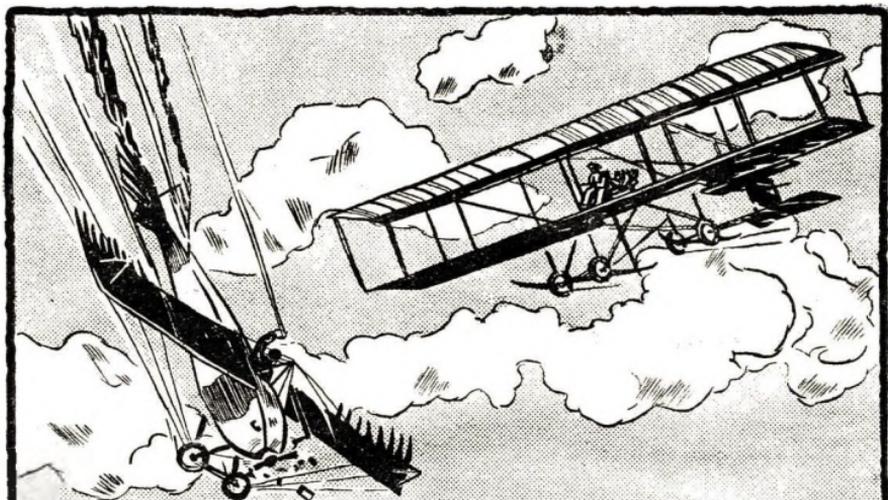
WAR GODS OF THE AIR



1.
On December 17, 1903, two young Americans made the first successful flight in a self-propelled heavier-than-air craft, on the Kill Devil Sands near Kittyhawk, N. C. Wilbur Wright and his brother, Orville, achieved this history making feat, little dreaming that in conquering another element for the benefit of mankind, they had also provided the nations of the earth with the most formidable weapon ever known.

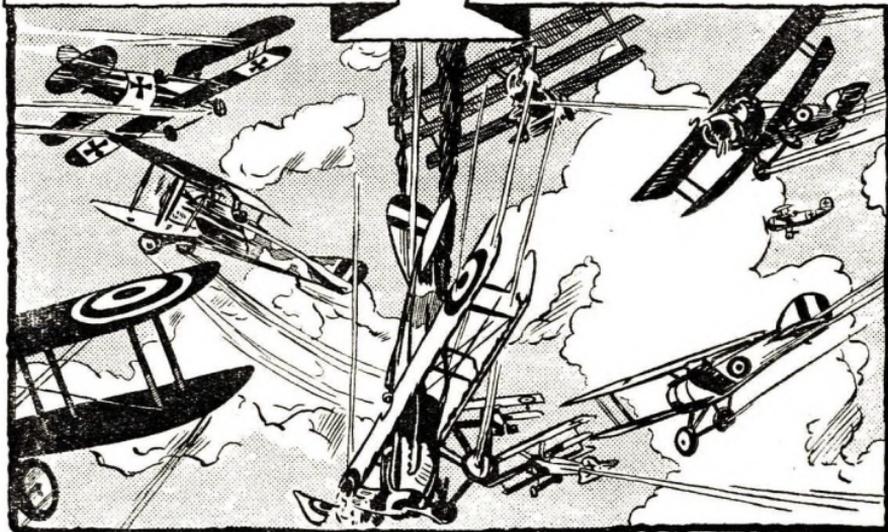


2.
Perhaps Louis Bleriot, when he made the first channel crossing ever made in an airplane, foresaw the time when enemies from the air would bring flaming death to England. His was the devil-may-care nonchalance of the early birdmen. His rickety plane was powered by an unreliable 25 HP air-cooled motor—and he had to ask in which direction Dover was!



3. But the early flyers of war days soon found in which quarter the wind lay! At first enemies would pass each other in the air, bound on reconnaissance tours, and wave friendly greetings. All this was changed, one day, when a Frenchman heaved a brick through the propeller of a German ship, and when, shortly afterward, Wing Commander W. S. Douglas, of the R. A. F., began taking pot-shots at enemy craft with a carbine. Soon machine guns were being mounted on turrets in the observation cockpits, and the war in the air was on!

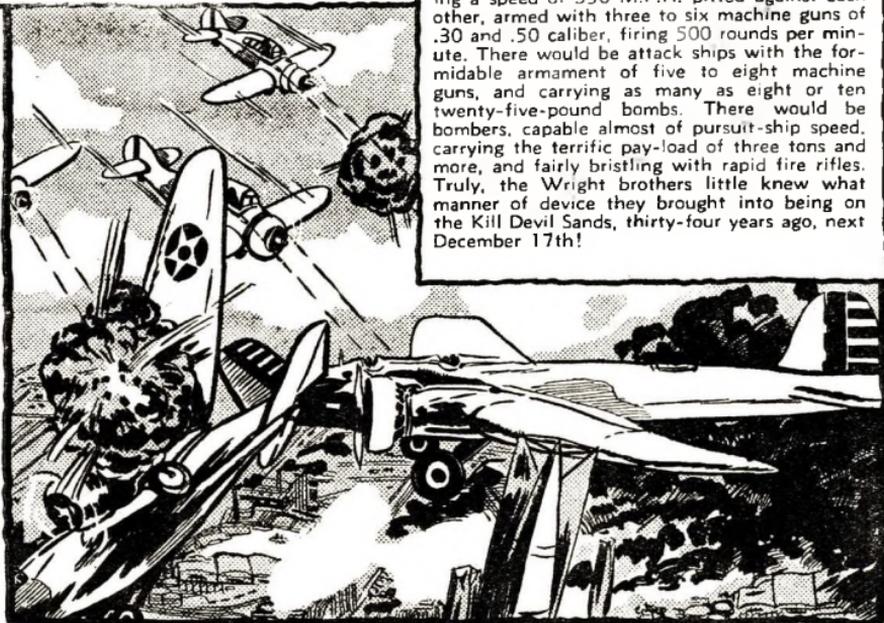
4. Daredevilry was the watchword in the early days of aerial warfare. The pilot who had the nerve to hold his plane in a roaring power-dive, while his Spandaus, Vickers, or Parabellums poured flaming lead at an enemy, until the nose of his ship seemed ready to crash bodily into his target, usually came off the victor—if he didn't crash. It was the era of rugged individuality which created such immortal heroes as Guynemer, Fonck, Boelke, von Richtofen, Bishop and Mannock. Later came organized team-work, formation flying, and massed attacks. Present day aerial tactics leave little to individual initiative.





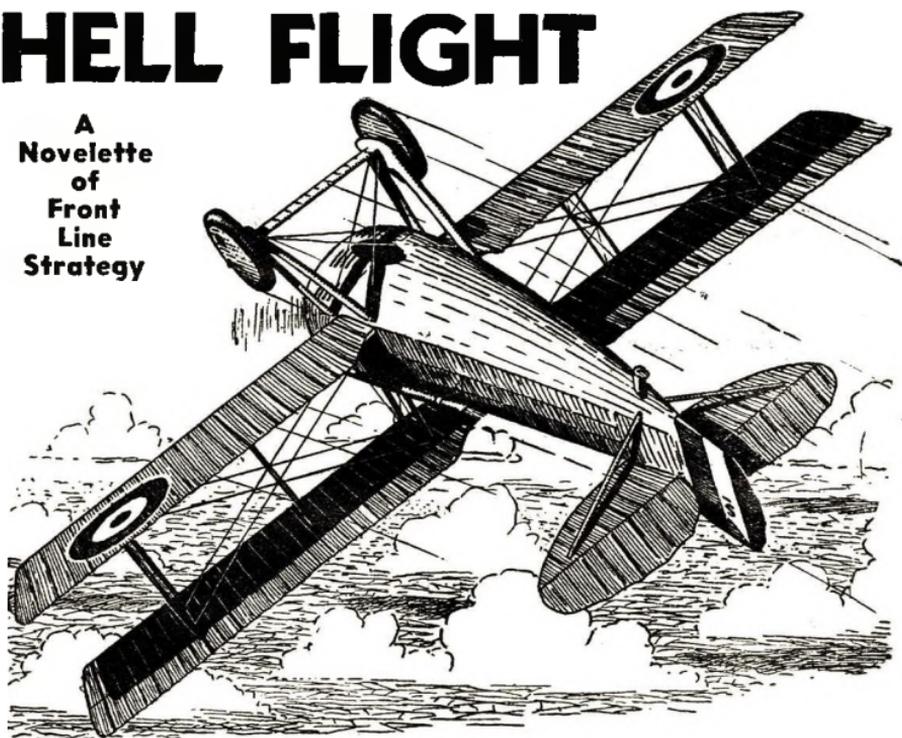
5. It was pure sport, potting those rubber cows as they swung helplessly aloft at the ends of their tethers, but it was dangerous. The ungainly drachens were closely guarded by their keepers on the ground, and the daring balloon-buster had to fly through a hail of lead and bursting "archie" fire to reach his objective. The favored method of attack was to get all the altitude a ship could take, poise above the drachen, and then dive, holding fire until the great bag was practically in one's face. A short burst of tracer was sufficient. The observers went over the side, their parachutes blossoming out behind them, and the next moment, with a dull, booming report and a billow of flame, the great air-beast plunged earthward.

6. We know what followed but who can foretell what is to come? If we went to war tomorrow we would have pursuit ships capable of developing a speed of 350 M.P.H. pitted against each other, armed with three to six machine guns of .30 and .50 caliber, firing 500 rounds per minute. There would be attack ships with the formidable armament of five to eight machine guns, and carrying as many as eight or ten twenty-five-pound bombs. There would be bombers, capable almost of pursuit-ship speed, carrying the terrific pay-load of three tons and more, and fairly bristling with rapid fire rifles. Truly, the Wright brothers little knew what manner of device they brought into being on the Kill Devil Sands, thirty-four years ago, next December 17th!



HELL FLIGHT

A
Novelette
of
Front
Line
Strategy



By **ANDREW CAFFREY**

CHAPTER I
Stunt Flyer

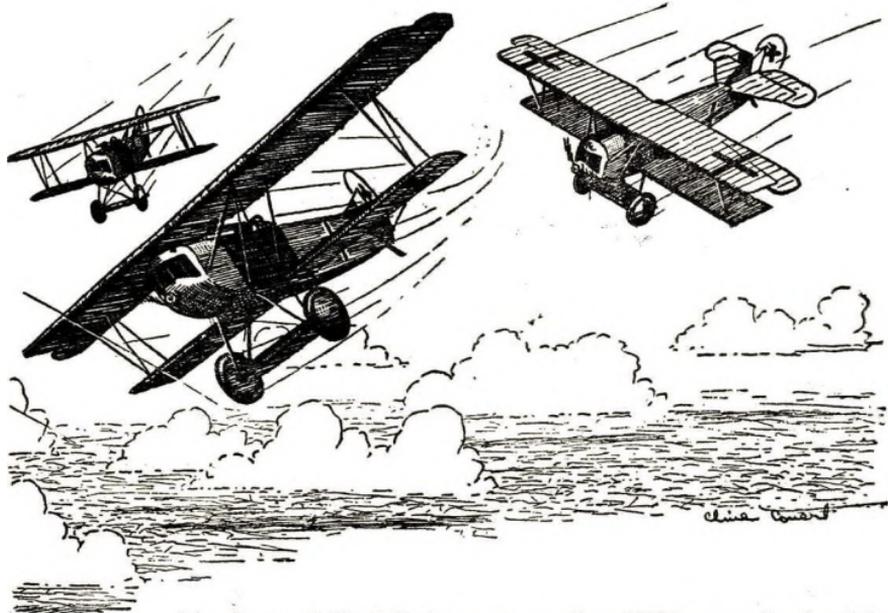
THERE was a Spad stunting high behind the front. And three Fokkers were coming out of the northeast. American airmen on the ground watched and waited. This lone Spad they were watching was a new ship, and the guy didn't belong to them. But the stunting fool was attracting enemy eyes to their just-behind-the-front airdrome—and that, in the eyes of the men on the ground, was bad.

What's more, the American ships of this particular airdrome were all out on patrol. And the sky was clear. However, the oncoming Germans

were still beyond where they could do any damage.

Well, if that lone bird was trying to show this Yank unit how good he was at acrobatic flying, then he was sure wasting a whole lot of time. This Yank front-line unit had seen about all there was to be seen in the line of stunting.

There came a minute when things looked bad for that stunting fool. That minute found the three Fokkers diving on the silly bird. The stunter had been doing his stuff at about 7000 feet, holding that altitude throughout all his maneuvers. The Fokkers, when first seen, were up pretty close to their ceiling, mere dots at about eighteen or twenty thousand. But at the tight minute, with that stunter



Lieutenant Tad Pole was such a little guy he had to outfight that whole hard-boiled crew to prove he hadn't been sent to the front just as a mascot . . .

looking like sure, cold meat, the Fokkers had dived down to less than the 10,000 level, and still that Spad carried on with its stunts.

As near as any of the onlookers could guess, the Spad man figured that that he was the only bird in the sky. It looked like his last bright afternoon on this earth; and that bright, high sun, no doubt, was to be his last. That bright, high sun, however, was the thing upon which the Spad stunter had been counting most. That bright sun ambushed a flight of four more bright, new Spads. And as the onlookers on the ground stood and stared, those four new Spads came down out of that sun.

At about eight thousand, those four contacted the three Fokkers, and the Germans never did know what struck them. U. S. Air Service still records

that as one of the cleverest, most unusual ambushes of the whole war; for the five men flying those new Spads, the four in the sun and the one stunting as a decoy, were all new men to the front.

FACT is, they were just ferrying the five ships up to the outfit that stood down there at that front-line airdrome. Never before had any one of the five met an enemy. The whole idea was their own and, when it was all over, the new five had knocked three Fokkers out of that sky for keeps. Then the five came down, and, believe it or not, reported at once for duty.

Four of those five were just regulation Yanks. That is, they were about twenty-one or younger, stood anywhere from five-foot-eight to six-

foot-several, and weighed accordingly.

The fifth man, who was the stunter, attracted most of the attention when the five had landed. As the ships taxied up to the deadline, the onlookers had to look two or three times before they were sure that that Spad wasn't flying itself. But no, there was the pilot, standing on his rudder bar, trying to look over the dirty windshield. Now, with his motor killed, he threw off his safety-belt's shoulder straps and slid to the ground.

The fifth pilot, Lieutenant T. A. D. Pole, was small. And it's a fact, he brought all those initials into the army with him. And before the ink was dry on his official sign-up papers, they were calling him Tad Pole. Yep, Tad Pole was small, and that thing of being under-sized is a hard hump for any guy to clear. Worst of all, a small man never gets a chance to grow up in the army. But Lieutenant Tad Pole was a runt in size only. He was man-sized Yank in every other way, and he sure could fly . . .

A little guy has to convince a new outfit that he can fly, and that he's not there just as a mascot. And what's a few stunts, even coolly flown under three diving Fokkers? Maybe that good work was nothing but an accident. But, hells bells, small fella, you've got to do more than that, and especially when you need two or three seat cushions at your back, to help you reach the rudder bar.

The colonel commanding that front-line air field was the first member of the new outfit to give Tad Pole the official once-over and decide that here was one flyer that couldn't be anything but a complete washout. That hard gent, Colonel Call, almost laughed out loud when Lieutenant T. A. D. Pole sneaked in, stood on the official carpet, and reported for duty. Duty, thought the colonel, well, maybe this small-sized flying officer can be polished up a bit and pressed into

office use as a first-class paperweight. Not a bad idea, but it would only be a flyweight paperweight at that. Not a whole hell of a lot of good should somebody leave an office window open during a strong wind.

ON second thought, he suddenly recalled that his outfit was in need of a mess officer. The colonel sort of eased that suggested office idea to Tad Pole, in a nice, patronizing manner.

"Lieutenant Pole," the colonel said, "it isn't good for a new man, green on the front, to go right up and out to meet hostile ships. Now, it just happens, and lucky for you, that we are in need of a mess officer. That's a good assignment, too, lieutenant. It gives a man lots of free time to run around these French towns. And it will give you a chance to get the feel of the front, as it were. And—"

"And, sir," cut in Tad Pole, smashing all rules of military courtesy forty ways from the center, "you're not talking to me, at all!"

Yes, sir, right there, without batting an eye, the little guy sure broke every rule of the game. Never before, perhaps, had a lowly U. S. Army lieutenant told a colonel such a mouthful in such quick and snappy words. And to say that Colonel Call was surprised is to put it lightly.

The Old Man sat up as though somebody had reached out and tapped him a quick bop to the button. And to make matters worse and even more unofficial, Tad Pole followed up with more and hotter patter.

"You see, sir," added Tad Pole, "I've been this way, a small guy, for a long time. And I've been with me, taking the hell, all the time. Yes, sir, I've been right with me everywhere, ever since this small guy came into this hard world, and began getting himself kicked around. And, sir, if I don't hop in and stick up for me, well, nobody else is going to do the

thing for me. I was sent here to fly—and to fly pursuit. Uncle Sam spent a whole whale of a lot of jack bringing this small guy up to his present place of so much on-the-hoof, on-the-wing value.

"If I don't go out against the enemy, flying pursuit, then I don't do anything. And I know enough to know that this line of talk is liable to win me a court, a quick bust, and a well-known bum's rush, but I've got to play the game this way. That's the way she stands, sir."

They were alone in that small office, the small pilot and the big shot of the whole command. And do you think that the big brass hat, Colonel Call, an old army man, took that talk from a mere loot?

Well, as before said, they were alone in that small office. The drone of distant planes came to them, where one stood and the other sat and stared. And the roar and thud of more distant, heavy guns came to them too. All that sound that is a part of war came back to them. And, again, do you think—do you guess that that was any place for half-pint, personal strife? Not by a hell of a sight! Colonel Call was a man. And as the colonel then realized, this small portion on the carpet before him was also a man.

The colonel got out of his well worn swivel chair and shook hands with Lieutenant Tad Pole. "And," warned the colonel, "don't ever tell anybody that I offered you a mess officer's job. Hell's bells, man, you wouldn't do at all. You'd feed us ground glass, and laugh like the very devil while we writhed in misery on the floor. So, lieutenant, report to Operations Office—and tell them you're hired. Good luck to you. Maybe you'll be of some use to us."

"You can never tell, sir," laughed Tad Pole, as he went through the door of that office. And, with no loss of time, he did report at Operations

Office, for assignment to squadron duty.

CHAPTER II

Second Blood



THE officer in charge of operations saw Tad Pole pushing his big, soldierly flying boots through the door and guessed, as he told some friends that

evening, that the squadron had adopted another French war orphan. "But I was sure wrong as the devil, men," the operations officer went on. "This man Pole is one tough son. He doesn't kid worth a damn. I tried it and, gang, that little bird is all knots.

"Now look here, Mr. Officer in Charge of Operations—" he says right off the bat, "I'm the new man called Pole, reporting for flying duty with this squadron. I'm here to fly. F-I-y—that spells fly. And when you stretch your beautiful ears and hear me say fly, I mean just that. Don't get me wrong. I know I'm not the hottest pilot that you front-line men have seen up to date. Put this in your hat and remember that it's marked down there as a reminder: You or no other bird in charge of operations has ever issued flying orders to a more willing one than this small guy you now see standing humbly before you. I'm not here to fight this outfit. I'm saving that for the guys to the east, on the wrong side of the front. But, on the other hand, I'm not going to allow anything—or anybody—in this outfit to stand in my way! I'm one of you now, starting today, and I'm all set to do the right thing. When do I fly?"

"Yes, mates, them there bold utterances were Lieutenant T. A. D. Pole's very words," concluded the officer in charge of operations. "And you'll notice that I'm not removing any pe-

riods from between them there three front initials!"

Eleven planes, all Spad-220's, took the air on the outfit's dawn patrol the following morning. That particular pursuit squadron was one of the oldest units that Uncle Sam had on the front. Now, as always, the outfit was in a plenty-tough sector. Every available pilot was needed all the time, and there wasn't much goldbricking being done there. It was a fifty-fifty chance that a man had a date with the boys at the morgue as soon as he was assigned to the unit.

DURING the past five days, ending with Tad Pole's arrival, the squadron had lost four of its pilots, and, of course, four of its ships. That's why Tad Pole and the other four replacements had won their chance at the front. A very merry thought—that wartime assignment to a squadron: You got a job just as soon as some other boy went west. But that's how she stood. And the hangar mechanics, seeing Tad Pole show up for flying that first morning, said that Air Service Headquarters must have had no idea of the size of the men killed off, if Air Service Headquarters thought that this pint-sized, hammered-down squirt could fill the boots of any one of the four that had been recently lost. And to prove what the macs said, Tad Pole had forthwith asked the sergeant in charge of crew for a few extra seat cushions, just so's he could fill the cockpit.

"One seat cushion is regulation," the tough sergeant had answered, taking a chance that he could "tell" this little guy. "And there's one cushion in your ship's seat now, lieutenant." So saying, the sergeant of crew walked to the ship that had already been assigned to Tad Pole for that morning's patrol. The sergeant looked into the cockpit. "Yes, sir, here she is—one regulation, hair-filled, non-bullet-proof cushion."

A group of greaseballs and a few flying officers stood not far away and they were all set for a laugh. Yep, a new guy had been squelched, for that tough sergeant had a rep for telling all and sundry just where they were supposed to head in. Up to then, the hard sergeant had managed to get away with it, too.

"Sergeant," Tad Pole said, and how he said it! "Sergeant Loose Lip, I called for two extra seat cushions. Two. T-w-o! Now you just get the rag outa your back pocket. Shag your lazy, raggedy-tailed sitter into that hangar, and rob a few of those out-of-commission wrecks that are cluttering up the back wall. And do it now! On your way . . . That's a wise guy, hump!"

The tough noncom had been called. The sergeant went toward the hangars. Then he came back with the extra cushions, as per orders. He even adjusted those two extra cushions at Tad Pole's back.

"You win," the sergeant mumbled. "I'm your dog as long as you're on this field, lieutenant. And the best of luck to you, too. She's one hell of a hot sector, and getting hotter. You're new. I'm old. So look up, and down, out front—and behind. Always look behind. That's where they get you from, lieutenant. And I don't want to see you got . . . Okay, lieutenant. The leader's taking off. So long."

SECOND blood for Lieutenant Tad Pole. So, as things stood, he was taking off in a zoom, away on his first patrol, with the full respect of the new outfit behind him. . . .

Eleven planes falling into their formation positions as they climb for altitude don't leave much room for things or thoughts beyond the busy business at hand. And the big business at hand is the crowded, close work that goes with those eleven ships. Eleven whirling props, their

backwash of slipstream, and the bob and bounce that slaps ships here and there. Better be on the job, every second and every foot of the way; for it's a long way down if a pilot makes a mistake. And the game only allows one mistake per man, under those conditions of close flight.

Tad Pole realized that he was in fast company from the first minute of that flight. It was to the little guy's liking, too. He was now behind a flight leader who pulled them up and up, from the second the outfit was clear of the ground. No circling. No walking the dog. The gasoline of such a pursuit flight was limited, so no time was to be wasted in parlor tricks or clubby stalling.

The warring front was eight kilometers away by the time the eleven had reached the 2000-foot level, and the formation was in its battle shape by then. The smoke and dull gray of the early morning haze was thick on the front, and she wasn't a very cheerful looking flying dish. The formation was the regulation V. Ten ships were in the main body, while the eleventh and last man flew in high defense, rear. That high-defense man was well above the rest. From his elevated position, he'd be the first to handle anything coming from behind and above.

From Tad Pole's place at third from the front, right echelon, he could watch them ahead and behind. And there was plenty for new eyes to see. A man would have to be made of cast iron were he to make a first patrol without getting the old wind up several times during the first several minutes. Tad Pole was no exception.

Off toward Germany the low clouds rolled away as far as the Yank airmen could see. Same sort of a cloudy sky to the south of the sector. But north and west, back over France, the flying visibility was good. As Tad Pole sized that up, it was both good and bad. It was good to know where the

flight was going, at this time, right after the star, but not so good when the patrol went over the lines later on. And he supposed that they were going to cross the front, naturally.

At 5000 feet, the flight was soon nearing the front lines. That stuff was all new to Tad Pole. And it was an eye-ful, too. Troop movements, that seemed not to move at all. Artillery positions, shoving their old iron eastward in salvos.

Two towns were burning. The smoke from those towns was moving north and east along the river. Smoke. Moving north and east, along the river. That was something to note, and Tad Pole told himself to be sure and remember that. And he'd try and remember the position of that other town, the little one to the west. It wasn't burning. Good airman, Tad Pole. He was seeing things, making notes in the old head, and it is by such keen things that your wartime airman keeps alive.

There were 10,000 feet of altitude now under the flight. They had crossed the river. Troops, Yanks, no doubt, were seen crowding ahead along the west bank of that stream. And the Spad flight, the eyes of that troop movement, was carrying on, and always east. The clouds were pretty close by then. Tad Pole began to realize that he was really at war, and the thought called for a stiff upper lip. It made him feel alone. It made him realize that at any second now it might be every man for himself, and the Hun take the hindmost. But there was ten thousand feet of safety between that flight and the tough old war on the ground.

CHAPTER III Visit In Red

TEN thousand feet of safety? There was no such animal as safety running loose on the front, that

day. Tad Pole suddenly awoke to that fact and it was sure hard to take. Hard, too, for a new man to handle, without warning.

One second everything was okay, with the flight topping the world, and then—what was that?

Tad Pole's blood ran cold as the plane that had been cruising safely in high defense, rear, shot down past his own ship. It was in flames! The rest of the Spad flight, the keen men all around Tad Pole, had snapped into action.

The flight had been jumped and a party was on before Tad Pole could make up his mind that anything out of the usual had happened. It was a hot spot for a man so new to the game; and the little guy was going to have his hands full if he was to hold up his end of the scrap.

And one of their ships, that high-defense man, had already gone down, "in the red." What's more, the sky was streaked with smoke-trailing, flaming slugs. Tad Pole remembered, later, that he was quick to notice that—flaming slugs. Those incendiaries were enemy slugs. Tad Pole knew his own guns, and those of his mates, and how they were loaded. Those Yank guns were loaded as they should be, hard-nosed shot for planes—not fire bullets. There was dirty work being pulled off in that sky, contrary to all laws of the game. It was hard to face—that fire stuff, and wasn't it tough enough to take the bump according to the international law of the sky?

Lieutenant Tad Pole got mad. So did his mates, especially the long-time men among them. Those long-time men who had been with Harry Hall, the high-defense pilot, for a long period in the outfit. Tad Pole was new but he knew that this deal was all wrong. And when Tad Pole got mad he got mad all over. He only hoped that he could stay in the fight long enough to knock one of those fire-spewing enemies out of the sky.

Fire is hell! The quick Visit in Red comes with no way to stop it, and another good Yank pilot has gone west. And once on fire, there wasn't a chance in a thousand that a man could slip it out, or dive it back and out. In that crazy, milling sky that whirled all about him, Tad Pole saw two other Yank ships burst into flames. Two at least, maybe more; and he couldn't be sure. And from each of those ships, Tad Pole saw the Yank pilot stand, try to wave a last earthly salute, then jump free of the burning mess. Would he have the guts to stand, wave and jump? Would—

LIEUTENANT TAD POLE went hog wild then. As he flew hard and wheeled his ship in a tight *verage*, Tad Pole felt something hot spread across his face. Again it chilled his heart, for he guessed that he might be cheated—if that was blood. But it might be a blurb of hot motor oil, from his own laboring engine. Hot oil, nothing! It was warm blood. His own red brand, too. The small guy had been hit.

But he wasn't out. Just grazed, no doubt. Still, that was too close. Too damned close for a fellow who had made up his mind to live a little longer, so Tad Pole must hurry. Thinking that way, and pushing the blood out of his eyes, Tad began to kick that Spad-220 through its fast paces. But good battle position seemed to be hard to fix. Try as he might, he couldn't seem to bring an enemy ship under his guns. Now and then he almost brought a Fokker into his burst of fire. It wasn't easy. What's more, a new man must not get his own flightmates with cross-fire. That fear was the one thing above all others that slowed up any good, new man on a first patrol.

Against all those drawbacks, Tad Pole whirled, flew like the very devil, and gave the best fight he could. There's where it's tough to be small.

The little guy was off his rudder bar half the time, it seemed, and a man must be on that rudder bar if he's to kick a ship through combat maneuvers. Yep, Tad Pole would have agreed, the knockers were right when they said that a sawed-off didn't belong. So the very act of handling the ship was a man's job. Add to that the struggle to get your brace of guns trained on the whirling, enemy target, and you have something. And hell! it wasn't easy for Tad Pole to look over his oil-smearred windshield, even. What's more, he had to look either over or around that dirty, obstructed windshield if he was to see anything.

Upside down now. Tad Pole found himself, with an enemy ship coming right at him. There were other ships above and below, and to all sides. It was hard to tell which was up and which was down, except that the dust and dirt was falling from his floorboards, into the eyes from which he had pushed his oil-smearred goggles, a long time ago.

His propeller was beginning to flutter, under the added load of a motor in labor, which wasn't good for machine-gun action. Over on his left side, he worked his Spad, all the time trying to shake off that charging enemy plane. He shook that one off, only to have another and still another come right at him. All the time, wherever Tad Pole looked, the sky was being crossed by those enemy-fire slugs. Time, from then on, meant nothing to the new man. Tad Pole found himself living in one small, whirling cockpit, and beyond that nothing else mattered . . .

Another Yank plane was burning down. It seemed to be above Tad Pole, but falling up. Tad Pole knew that he was on his back again. He kicked out of that mess, and saw the burning Spad fall as it should—down. Strange that a man should feel thankful for such a marker—a burning mate—to show him he was on his back. That

falling, burning Yank jumped from his ship as Tad Pole took a last look. How many of the eleven Spads had gone that way, in flames? Tad Pole wasn't sure. It was too hard to spot all his mates in that milling mess. The dogfight was carrying the whole party east or northeast, leading into enemy territory, at any rate. That was certain, for Tad Pole caught a flashing glance at two burning towns. Beyond the two that were burning was that third one that wasn't in flames. And those three spots on the ground were far away. Funny how that marker should flash in across this crowded minute when a man should have all his attention glued to the job of saving his neck.

CHAPTER IV Smearred With Luck



OTHER things flashed across that red minute in a great, red parade—a very red Fokker with a Yank hard on its tail. The Yank Spad was ship No. 7. Tad Pole knew that Bugs King was in "7." King and Tad Pole were flying pals of long standing. Judging by the looks of things, Bugs King was going to hang it on that red enemy ship. Just as sure—no, not so sure for, out of the clouds above, dived another Fokker. And that new menace was hot on old Bugs King's tail. Already, as Tad Pole bore down on the doings, the new Fokker's guns were circling Bugs King with that ever-present burst of burning, smoking fire-slugs.

This bit of dogfight was just a little below Tad Pole's altitude. He knew that here was where he was being called for, and that seconds were the things that counted now. He dropped the heavy, blunt nose of his Spad into a dive. He stood on that rudder bar,

with full gun to the howling motor, and 220 wild horsepower sucked the rambling ship down in its hellish dive. Down after Bugs King, and in across the path of the following enemy Fokker that was bearing down on King's tail, went Tad Pole's streaking ship.

And in that rush, Tad Pole saw Bugs King hang it on the ship out front. That Fokker, like so many of the Yanks, went down in flames. While Tad Pole still held to that hard dive toward his mate's ship, he saw Bugs turn slightly to the right and start for a second Fokker. By then Tad Pole had the Fokker between him and King, just for a split second. But fire from Tad Pole might get Bugs too; so Tad Pole's hard dive went right on, and sent him ahead to turn the diving Fokker through force of guts and dive of ship.

A tough decision to make, and carry out. By then Tad Pole just about had that diving Fokker on his own tail, which was plenty game but plenty bad joss for the little guy. He knew that the next few seconds were bound to tell a story, and it looked as though his number was up. Even at that drastic stage of the game, Tad Pole found a small bit of his attention going out to Bugs King. Just as Bugs was getting set to pump slugs into that second Fokker, his guns jammed. There was the curse of 1918, jammed guns. That was the thing that put your Allied pilot out of the running more times than enemy fire.

TAD POLE saw Bugs reaching ahead trying to clear his jam. At the same time, Tad Pole saw some flaming slugs pass by his own ship, for for he was being shagged ragged by that other Fokker. He felt a strange, hot spot in the small of his back. He guessed that he had been hit again.

Bugs looked up at Tad Pole and, after waving, stood on his rudder bar, with the nose of his Spad straight

down, and went away from there, pronto. The clouds a few hundred feet below took him quickly. Tad saw that that was the quick way out of it all for him too. He knew what every Spad man knew, that a Spad would outdive anything in air. That is, his Spad would take him away from any diving enemy, just so long as one of those burning slugs didn't get to him before he had time to stand on it and get out from under. With Bugs King gone, and that other enemy ship circling Tad Pole's plane with slugs, the time had arrived for Tad to go away from there too. He was outnumbered, and there was no cause to remain as things stood. So he did the standing, and on the rudder bar.

He went straight down. And when a Spad went into its very best dive straight down is what was meant. No steep angle. No heavy glide, but straight down; with the pilot standing on that rudder bar, head in its padded rest, and his but free of the seat, perhaps. Full gun was on Tad Pole's motor; and the tachometer's registering arrow went clean to the "stop" pin. All struts and wires wailed and yelled. The thin upper wing bowed back at either tip; and the ailerons were "washed out" like the pinion feathers of the American eagle in flight. The fine, stout little Spad quivered and shook in every one of its members; and Tad Pole, close now to Bugs King's slithering tail, shot into the clouds for refuge. There was shelter there, for the present.

Tad Pole eased his ship out of that awful dive, easy at first so's the change of direction wouldn't tear her apart. And, being lucky, he got that Spad out of the vertical all in one piece. It wasn't always that a pilot had that kind of luck, at the end of such a dive. But, getting out of that fall, Tad Pole lost track of Bugs King. He didn't spend any time worrying about that, however. He found himself alone.

Tad Pole went right back to work, starting another climb for altitude. He wasn't through with that day's work yet. He knew that there was plenty of war up there, somewhere, and it was up to him to feel his way back and locate the dogfight again. He was climbing steadily with full throttle. He held that stick back, and let her ramble. Up through those clouds she went. It was dangerous, blind climbing. There was no visibility. But there was every chance in the world of colliding with those higher, battling ships, both Yank and enemies.

That kind of a hard climb took lots of the well-known guts. But a fighting, flying man of the wartime air had to have those guts. Back he went to the 10,000 foot level, and the clouds had sneaked in there. Then, grinding ahead, he reached 11,000. There was no action to be seen there, and the whole place was given over to tossing, drifting clouds. Still there was no flying visibility beyond the ends of his wings; and the view ahead ended where his whirling propeller swirled a gray disc of light in the murk.

IT WAS no easy thing, that stunt of flying a ship level without any markers beyond his own plane. But he watched his tachometer's speed and the dancing float of his liquid compass; and by the limited aid of these two instruments he managed to keep his Spad in its steady climb, and on an even keel. With nothing else to bother a pilot, that method of blind flying wouldn't be too hard. But add the ever-present danger of collision, plus the threat of ambush, and you have some idea of the unlimited dangers that Tad Pole faced during those tight minutes of hard climbing.

Time was playing out on him too. 12,000 feet was showing on the dial of his altimeter. Then the 13,000 and 14,000 level was reached. But not a sign of the battling ships came to view. He reached 15,000 and the

clouds were the only things up there, as far as he knew. No sound came above the drone of his own power; and the little guy began to feel very much alone. He wondered where in the devil that mess could be. See it through, though—that was the grand idea now. Go up and up; for the stunt of starting down through all those hundreds of feet of clouds was even harder to face. Get on top of this pile of clouds. See what's up there, if it's the last thing you ever see. Then, finally, at 15,500 feet, Tad Pole saw a faint show of light out over the blunt Spad nose. The whirling prop came out of its gray disc and seemed to splash the sun's rays all around, and back at Tad Pole. With a joyous suddenness his ship shook the last slithering clouds from its wings and darted out into the clear. It was perfectly clear there, and the sun was bright and fairly high in the east. For miles and miles, in all directions, a sea of white clouds rolled away to the far horizons. Tad Pole, looking around and trying to take stock of his setting, made note that the sun was on his right; which fact told him that he was still flying into enemy territory. Up there he was alone. Not another ship, of either warring party, was to be seen; and the new, little guy witnessed a quick loneliness that comes to a fellow only a few times in a long lifetime. He glanced at his wrist watch and could hardly believe that he had been in the air only twenty minutes. Twenty minutes! and ships had gone down in flames, men had died, and he, Lieutenant Tad Pole, had known a million sensations . . .

CHAPTER V Ceiling For Three

TAD POLE knew then what it meant to feel helpless. A new frenzy swept over him. Where was he

to go now? What was he to do? And where were his teammates? Could he chance another passage down through that thick layer of clouds? If he went down, would that get him anything, or anywhere?

Again he took stock. Were his two guns still on the job? He squeezed his triggers; and the burst of fire was good. He circled wide and tried to clean his goggles and the smeared windshield, over and around which he was tired of stretching his neck. Just as he managed to get reorganized an enemy ship popped above the clouds, off toward the sun. And at that instant, without any effort of conscious thought, Tad Pole ended his circling flight. At once, he lifted the Spad's nose and went up for the quickest altitude he could reach. Altitude was what he needed for at that great altitude the Fokker could out-climb the Spad, hands down. What's more, the German ship could also out-speed the Yank at that ceiling. Tad Pole had to get the jump on this ship to the east. Seconds and even feet would count, and as long as the other pilot failed to see the Yank, just so long would Tad Pole have a good chance to do something for himself.

The German flyer, having come out into the clear sky just as Tad Pole had done before him, seemed perfectly content to be just where he found himself. The sun was on his right too, so he was headed for home. He failed to look back over his shoulder to check up on the rest of the sky; and that was very bad. However, the German pilot did hang his head over the Fokker's side and give some time to the watching of the clouds below. He acted as though he expected to see something else come above the fleecy surface.

From Tad Pole's position, half a mile to the rear, he could watch closely while climbing steadily, and missing nothing of importance that might come off. Suddenly, however, the

Fokker man decided to fly a turn. Still watching the clouds below him, the German pilot dropped his Fokker's nose, just a bit, hit the motor with full throttle, and wheeled in a tight *verage*.

HIS left wings were down, with the motor pouring out its thin, blue ribbon of exhaust. Tad Pole took note that the German was so close to the surface of the clouds that the shadow of the ship and the plane itself seemed almost as one. And still the German watched, always looking down, with his high side and the bright sun killing his flying visibility in nearly all other directions. Being careless and plenty cocky, that German had never once looked up to study the sky overhead.

Tad Pole had what shaped up as a swell set-up right then, but the job called for careful handling. So far, the American had been pretty well cheated, through no fault of his own, and this trip to bat began to shape up as his one chance during the present game. Tad Pole told himself to be cool. He played the game like a vet too. So he decided that he'd take his time, and make the kill definitely sure.

In a short space of flying time, Tad Pole had won all of five hundred feet of altitude over the Fokker. Even then, he saw no cause for hurry, so he decided to fly around the cocky, cloud-watching enemy. He'd get his Spad to the east of the *veraging* Fokker. Get it up there in the sun. That's good form on any man's air service, for the sun's a swell ally.

It seemed as though Tad Pole could take the rest of the day on that job; for the enemy pilot, still circling in his tight turn, was flying wings down and with the usual full throttle. The Fokker was grooved in that *verage*, so the enemy pilot had plenty of time for his cloud study. There was just a chance that he had lost a flying mate,

one that had started up and failed to arrive. But on the other hand, there was a chance that the German circler was waiting for a Spad that he knew was coming up. It might be a slower-climbing Spad that had actually shagged the Fokker out of the fight, and upward through the sea of clouds. Tad Pole thought of that, too, for the Spad men were of the shagging kind, in more ways than one.

Well, if the second idea was right, Tad Pole must not take too much time before going into his dance of death. If that enemy pilot got the jump on a rising Spad, it would be pretty tough on said Spad. Tough on Tad Pole too, for allowing the enemy to get away with any such thing, now that Tad Pole had the upper spot on the Fokker. So the little Yank kept a keen eye peeled for anything that might break clouds below or near the waiting enemy craft. By then Tad Pole was right smack in the sun. Flying his final turn before getting set for the strike. A strike that was to come at the howling end of a quick, short, hard dive.

He still sat on five hundred feet of jump ceiling, over and to the east of his almost stationary target; for a veraging enemy is just that. This German was never going to know what hit him and it was sure a dirty shame that Tad Pole had no certain way of putting fire aboard the enemy craft. Of course, there might be a fire if one of his tracers hit the Fokker's fuel tank, but that would be too much luck to expect.

THE American straightened out of his last turn, and redressed the Spad's line of flight. He took a last look at his ship, felt her all over, and she was jake. So was he. He squirmed his shoulders snugly into the straps of his four-way, French safety-belt. He made sure that those extra seat cushions were firmly in the small of his back, just where they should be

if a small guy was to do his best work. He stiffened his two good legs against the staunch rudder bar, and got all set to drop his ship's nose—with full power, and a hellin'!

The big second came. Again the blunt nose of the Spad dropped into its dive. Once more the yell of struts and wires crashed with the wail and roar of power as Tad Pole's good left mitt shot full throttle to the snappy 220-Hispano Suiza. Everything was tight, and power was sucking that Spad on its way. Straight ahead before him, way down there at the vertex of the acute angle of dive, the enemy Fokker came into Tad Pole's ringsight, and the picture was framed. It was the greatest picture any war-time flyer could possibly hope to see. Wailing and making an awful place of that fine sky, the crazy demon of hell took Lieutenant Tad Pole on his way.

It takes only a few moments to send a hard-driving Spad through 500 feet of vertical, rare air. And a hard-diving pilot, with his head couched snugly in the leather diving pad, doesn't have to wait so very long before the time arrives for the steady and deadly pressing of machine-gun triggers.

The tight-and-ready Tad Pole was all set to make that final press of triggers when something else broke clouds just beyond his target. It was a complete surprise for the diving Yank, and disappointing. But life's that way . . . The something breaking clouds wore a big "7" on its fuselage. Needless to relate, and sad to say, Tad Pole's brave Yank heart missed more than a few throbs. Here was No. 7 and Bugs King again.

One more split second and Tad Pole surely would have poured slugs into both the enemy and No. 7. Tough break for Tad Pole. Swell break for the German flyer, who must have had the old hind foot of the rabbit right there in the cockpit with him.

CHAPTER VI
Jump Chance



BUT luck was with Bugs King in his rising No. 7 too, for when he popped his upper wing above the clouds, and broke into the clear, the waiting, circling Fokker pilot happened to have his *veraging* ship just out of firing position. That cocky enemy had missed the opening chance by the scant width of the traditional thin red hair. His *veraging* ship's bow, with the set, in-position guns on the engine's top, had just swept past the line of fire that would have sent Bugs King's Spad down with the usual plume of red waving after it.

So, having missed that jump chance, the Fokker pilot must take the time that was required to make a full *verage* turn. That, of course, wasn't much time, but it added seconds to the stunt. By then Bugs King had spotted the enemy ship overhead and he knew that the Fokker was waiting for him. All the time, right into that danger, Bugs held the hard prod to his climbing ship.

Old Bugs King! What a man! was Tad Pole's flashing thought of utter appreciation for the stuff that made up that other Yank airman. Tad Pole could hardly believe that King was there before him. King, had cleared his gun jams and made the return climb in almost as short a space of time as had Tad Pole himself. Here was Bugs King again in his damned No. 7, just in time to spoil Tad Pole's party.

Tad Pole felt as though he'd been cheated a second time. But he had pulled his ship's nose up out of the dive, and zoomed a hell of a fine zoom. Tad Pole was mighty close to the Fokker when that zoom lifted the Spad into its vertical climb, and the

little guy's ship just missed the enemy craft by feet, for the Fokker, in flying that gun-lining turn, had lifted a bit above his former circling level.

Tad Pole, on the top of his hard zoom, hung his stalling Spad on its prop. Then before the heavy, small Spad could fall into an out-of-control, altitude-losing stall, Tad Pole wheeled off the top of the zoom in a flat, powerful, dizzy, wing-over turn, and that brought him out of the maneuver just behind the charging No. 7. He was behind that other Spad, and still well above, and Bugs King, cuckoo that he was, even took time out to turn and wave a full Air Service salute, which salute is made by bringing the right arm up, stiffly, till the thumb of that hand meets the nose.

But Bugs King, "Bugs" is right. was in Tad Pole's way. Tad Pole knew right then that he could not make the rest of his turn, so he straightened out, still above No. 7. And King went right at the Fokker as before.

Tad Pole swung in close on King's hurrying tail. The German, still wheeling, looked back over his shoulder, and he realized that he couldn't hope to get away with the rest of his attempted turn. That wild Yank in No. 7 was too close, and deadly, already he had tried his first burst of fire, Yes, Bugs King had his two good guns back on the job. There was fear on the map of the German who looked back over a shoulder and tried to size up the thing that had suddenly happened to him. He was on the spot, and it was going to be plenty hot.

TAD POLE saw King's burst of machine-gun fire reach out and circle the Fokker. The tracers showed him, and the German, too, just how close that shower of death-carry slugs was coming to the Fokker. Then, within the tracers' tracings, that enemy pilot kicked his ship into a

full barrel-roll turn. Snapping out of that chancy maneuver as fast as he had gone in, the enemy managed to pull up for a small gain in altitude. At the same time, he brought his slick Fokker fully around, keenly intent upon forcing the fight right back to the brace of crowding Yanks.

That was a brave, game move. Of course the German had seen Tad Pole's ship during that dive and zoom, plus the overhead, stalled turn. And by forcing the fight back to the two, the German would have a better chance for his white alley. That is, if he could get in there between the Spads. If he could do that, he could make the Spad men endanger one another by their cross-fire. Then the lone enemy might be able to duck out and again take refuge in clouds.

But Bugs King still held his firing position.

Once again Bugs' guns jammed. The damned things jammed just when he and the quick-thinking German were almost nose to nose. And once more Tad Pole was close enough to see all that was happening to King. Right off the bat, Tad Pole was there to make his quick decision. With that awful second of gun stoppage, Bugs did the only thing that a pilot could do under the circumstances. He shoved his joystick clear ahead to the instrument-board, found himself standing on that old rudder bar again.

Old Bugs, in the flash of a jiffy, was looking straight down into that fine mess of protecting clouds, and praying that the ground would come up fast enough to snatch him from under those fire-vomiting enemy Spandaus. Bugs King had sure had an overdose of bad guns that day.

Getting in as fast as he could, Tad Pole saw the German open his guns on the diving No. 7. Tad saw those guns blink, hot and red. He saw a spew of fire, and right there the small Yank went hog-wild for keeps. More fire bullets! Fire slugs against Yank

planes! Not fair! Not at all sporting or white-man stuff. It was as wrong as hell; but hell wouldn't be at all wrong for such an enemy.

Tad Pole forgot his own safety. Nose to nose, directly head-on, he was then flying to make contact with the hell-roaring, confident German, and the Fokker pilot had every reason to feel cocky, and lucky. He was getting the breaks—for jammed guns, on the other fellow's ship, are sure swell allies. Gun to gun, almost, Tad Pole made the rush sure. And he did all those things which a good airman promises himself he'll do when the big moment comes into his fighting life. The small Yank pressed triggers and opened fire—and there was no jam there. There was one quick burst, then a long, sure burst, and Tad Pole knew that he'd done the job of work at hand. He saw that Fokker pilot toss up his hands. The roaring enemy ship was turned loose, on its own.

The German was slouched low in his snug seat. Then, with its pilot off the controls, the enemy craft tossed crazily for a few seconds, seemed to ricochet off the clouds, then steadied for a few seconds of almost normal flight. But fire was spreading in its motor bays. Its fuel tank had been hit. It fell away, into the first turn of a spin, and was lost to Tad Pole's view. That had been quick, hellishly quick, and the new, small Yank was the most surprised guy in France.

CHAPTER VII

Twenty-Seven Minutes' Work



AND again Tad Pole was all alone. In spite of the steady drone of his own motor, the surrounding world seemed to have an uncanny quiet. So once more the small flyer began to look himself over, and size up his equipment.

Then he looked at his wrist watch for another check of the time. Seven minutes more had passed. That made twenty-seven minutes, and only twenty-seven, since the flight of eleven Spads had taken off.

Somehow or other Tad Pole felt that his ship was no longer needed up there on top of the cloud bank. The guy was as lonesome as he'd ever been in his life, and plenty excited too. What's more, the morning's work hadn't been cleaned up yet, for Bugs King was still in the air. And King, at that minute, must be working on those jammed guns of his. What a swell pair of drawbacks those guns were for Bugs King!

Besides King, there might be others in need of a hand from Tad Pole: At any rate, Tad Pole made up his mind to give the down-flight thing a try. He cut his power a bit, letting the nose fall. Down into the clouds, feeling his way to lower altitude, he went. And the thick, pea-green, messy murk took his ship again.

Tad Pole went slowly. At no point in that long glide did he locate any members of the dogfight, either Yank or German. He began to figure that the others had given up the thing and cut for home. That is, if there were any others, besides himself and Bugs King, left to go home.

Down at about the 11,000 foot level he flew into the clear again and it was a welcome sight. For a while after that he was lost. Well, that didn't surprise him, but it sort of chilled his stout, Yank heart for a minute. Then he put the old bean to work, and began looking around in earnest. Must do something, right quick, about getting himself out of enemy territory. That's no place for a Yank to be found.

He tried to locate something that looked like his former view of No Man's Land. There was nothing below that showed any signs of having felt the rake and rape of war, so he must

be pretty deep into peaceful country. But away off to his left, the sun was breaking through enough to cast cloud shadows on the ground. That showed Tad Pole where his sun was, and the good old law of returning Allied ships came to him: When returning, put the sun on your left.

To put the sun on his left Tad Pole had to turn right around. Maybe he wasn't thankful for that old sun that came through the clouds, for he'd been flying directly into enemy country before the turnabout. After five minutes of steady flying, and mighty close search, he once again spotted those two burning towns. And the smoke was now moving toward him. He knew just about where he was.

Onward toward those two towns Tad Pole flew his course. At the same time, always watching his sky, he held his 11,000 feet of altitude. That kept him just under the protecting canopy of clouds. He recrossed the river. And a few kilometers ahead, down at about 8,000 feet, was Bugs King in his No. 7 ship.

Tad Pole could see, judging from King's flying, that Bugs was still working on those guns, trying to clear the jam. All the while, King was flying with the stick between his knees. And he was watching his sky, losing a bit of altitude, and cutting out for home. No. 7, as Tad Pole saw it, seemed like a dark shadow drifting across a mottled blanket, and a fellow could almost forget that this was hellish war.

HOME seemed to be the logical place to go, what with the flight broken, the job done, and nothing else showing any signs of business in that sky. But before reaching home, Tad Pole spotted a few more of his flight-mates far out front. So a few of the eleven had lived to tell about it. Just about then Tad Pole recalled that he had had hot blood on his own face, to say nothing of that hot spot that was

still in the small of his back. He began to wonder if he, too, was a wounded soldier.

Bugs King shot his landing, then Tad Pole came in and rolled to a stop, alongside King, where the field crew were meeting the returned men. There were six returned planes on the line. There were many long faces among both enlisted men and flying officers.

Colonel Call and the officer in charge of operations came alongside to ask Tad Pole how things had gone. With them was the flight surgeon. Tad Pole said that he guessed that his head had been grazed. The flight surgeon took a look, laughed, and said that Tad Pole had merely skinned his forehead on the iron arm of the diving pad. Third blood for Tad Pole.

"Sir," Bugs King came up to say, to the colonel, "our new friend, Lieutenant Pole, got me out from under enemy guns no less than twice on this patrol. He saved my valuable Yank neck just that many times—twice . . . And many thanks, Pole."

The colonel said he'd remember that and there'd be a bit said in "orders" about it.

Slowly, a bit lame and stiff, Tad Pole swung his legs overside and slid to the ground.

"Let me take a look at you," said the flight surgeon. "Yep, m'boy, you have a bit of dark-red stuff here in your back. Open that suit and pull out your shirt. . . . Ah, that's lucky—just a flesh wound, a burn. Sore, no doubt, but not too bad. . . . You're lucky, Lieutenant."

"Looka here," the hard-boiled sergeant of crew was now saying. He had lifted two extra cushions from the snug seat just vacated by Tad Pole. "Both of these cushions have been holed, and burned. And looka here, the fuselage cross-brace wires, just behind the seat, have been snapped. What luck, gang, what luck! Them there brace wires, plus the seat back, added to two extra cushions, all add up to make the sum total of what saved a new man's life. . . . And me—I was the fat-head that tried to hold out when the lieutenant asked for the two extras."

Well, anyhow, it was a good morning's work. One small guy, in spite of a hot spot in the small of his back, felt pretty good. And the new outfit seemed mighty glad that the new man was among them. And, as Tad and the rest were to learn within the hour, there were four of the eleven pilots that weren't coming back. . .



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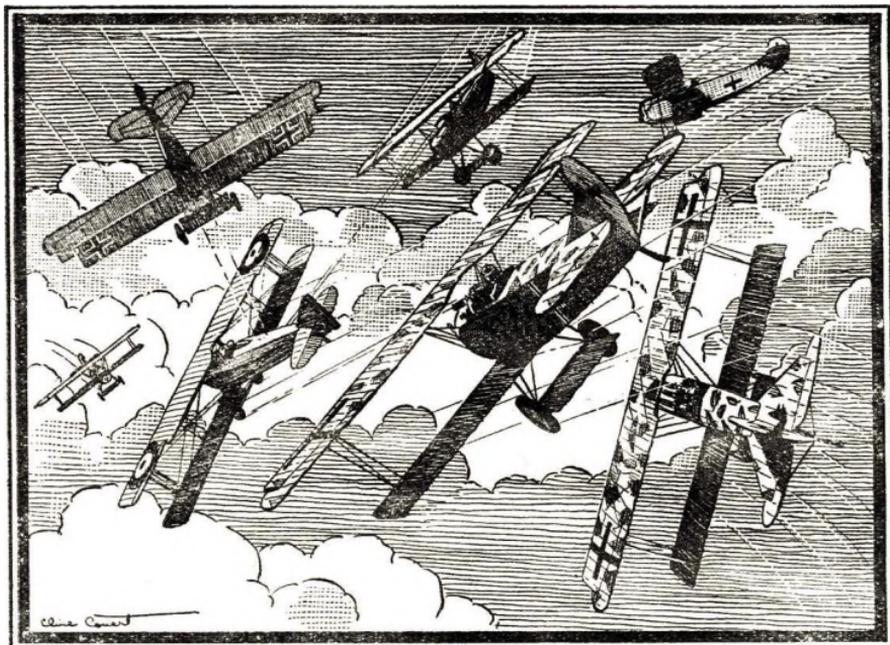
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SUICIDE SPOT

It's hell when you have to send the man
who's saved your life to face a firing squad!

By O. B. MYERS



IT was the last week in August when Sam Barrick came up to the 60th. His arrival caused no excitement; he was merely another replacement, and a rather colorless one at that. Having originally enlisted in the Lafayette Escadrille, and taken all his training on French fields—Chateauroux, Avord, and Pau—he had no friends among the pilots who had been going through the American flying schools in the States, or Issoudun. He was, furthermore, the quiet, reserved type, who took his war seriously and minded his own business, even shunning the binges, with the result that

he didn't make new friends either.

Drover Jones, leader of B Flight, had been on the front over two months. He was a veteran of the Chateau Thierry dogfights, and owned a decoration for valor which he never wore. It was Drover who fell heir to the task of breaking in the new recruit.

Sam was, at first glance, a good pupil. He listened closely to instructions, and then carried them out to the letter, even, perhaps, to an absurd extreme. If Drover told him to stay close, he hugged the flight leader's tail from the moment the two Spads

left the ground until they returned to earth. Through all of Drover's most violent maneuvers, he clung like a stubborn shadow.

"I thought you were trying to climb in the cockpit with me," grinned Drover at him. "By the way, did you see those Boches, by Verdun?"

Sam shook his head, without a smile. "I was watching you, all the time. You said to stick close."

"Well, now, that's all right, but you have to use your own eyes too, you know. Maybe you won't always have a leader to tag after and you've got to develop some judgment of your own. We'll take a little jaunt up west, this afternoon, just the two of us. Then you ought to be ready for regular assignment."

The recruit had twice been present on the scene of a light brush, but had never yet gotten tangled himself in a real, close-quarter scrap to taste the thrill and fear of kill-or-get-killed combat. Therefore Drover was glad when, after cruising over the forest for half an hour, he spotted a two-seater Hanover all by itself.

He swung his Spad sharply into Germany, and then back again on a long, climbing slant to cut off the retreat of the Boche observation ship. He warmed his guns with a quick, short burst, and turned his head to see that his pupil did the same. The German pilot saw them then, and tried to swerve toward the north. But Drover nosed down and splashed a long range volley that forced the Hanover back onto a course parallel with the lines. Then he proceeded to give a lesson.

With a quick, swirling turn he dove, both guns blasting a blazing stream of tracer trails. For the first moment he was heading into a blind spot, and met no return fire. But promptly the Hanover banked, and the German observer opened up with his swivelled Spandaus in the rear cockpit. A vicious hail of steel poured upward to greet the attacker, but it was not for

that reason that Drover pulled aside. He didn't care if he shot that Jerry down or not. What he wanted was to see Sam Barrick shoot it down, if possible.

He looked up and back. Sam was diving. His dive was the duplicate of Drover's. But he lost a fraction of a second before opening fire, and the Hanover was ready with its defense. Sam's hurried burst went wide of its mark; no doubt the savage whine of Spandau slugs about his ears upset his aim. He pulled off, following Drover.

Three more times Drover executed a swift gesture of attack. Each time he left the coup de grace to Sam, and each time Sam flubbed it. Though he appeared to copy Drover's maneuvers perfectly, his aim was bad, his turns were hurried, or his timing wrong. The German plane stayed aloft, and continued to give battle desperately.

Drover resolved to try a stab from underneath, the deadly *coup a ventre*, as the French called a volley in the belly. It was, after all, the best method of dealing with a two-seater, requiring only nerve enough to zoom close, and the ability to dodge quickly.

As the Hanover levelled out, he put his Spad into a long, slanting plunge. In a moment he was a hundred meters lower than his prey; up he swooped. Before the Boches realized where he had gone to, he was hanging on his prop underneath them, his sights centered squarely on the bottom of the Hanover's fuselage.

Had he been alone, and serious, the affair would have ended right there. But he barely touched his triggers; his guns flicked a couple of shots apiece and stopped. Just enough to show that it could be done. His head turned, and with his left hand he gestured toward Sam Barrick's Spad, pointing vigorously upward. See, he seemed to say; right there—that's the place to give it to him—go ahead.

But he had not figured on the Jerry pilot being quite so quick. His head

turned back again, to see that the Hanover had flung itself into a bank. The observer's guns, canted over the side, were belching furiously. Drover jerked his stick, but the Spad, half stalling, was slow to answer. A rain of steel poured down on him. There was a red-hot flash of pain in his leg, and then his plane seemed to go berserk.

As he fell, he knew that a control cable, somewhere, had been cut by a bullet. The Spad only half answered his most desperate tugs at the controls. He fought it out almost level, but could not hold it there. The horizon whirled as the spin began again and, before he could struggle more, a rending crash wiped out all consciousness.

Up above the Hanover fled, unmolested, Sam Barrick's Spad, sliding low, circled the spot where Drover's plane was a wrecked heap in the middle of No Man's Land. Peering down, he could see that Drover had been thrown half out of the cockpit, and lay exposed across a section of upper wing. He was wounded, for there was blood on his hip; and he was alive, for his arms moved feebly. But he was plainly unable to help himself.

Sam's Spad made a wider circle than before, and slid lower still. The motor idled, as the throttle was closed; then the prop ceased turning entirely, and the glide steepened. There was no such thing as a normal landing in that lumpy, shell-pitted region, but Sam did the next best thing. The Spad pancaked flatly on an upward slope, grinding off undercarriage and most of the tail, but ended still upright on the lip of a crater larger than the rest.

Immediately Sam sprang out of his crumpled cockpit and hurried across the bleak desolation of No Man's Land. The crackle of machine guns and the hollow pop of mortars sped his steps. He reached Drover just as the latter opened his eyes. Without

ceremony he grabbed the wounded man's shoulders and slid him quickly to the bottom of a shell-hole. Unseen slugs were already plucking at the wrecked Spad.

From the first crater Sam dragged his helpless burden to a second, then along a section of caved trench to a fold in the ground. When they had covered twenty perilous, laborious yards, Sam looked back. One-pounder shells had found the wreck now and the wings were spouting ribbons, flames licked the fuselage.

Anxiously they pressed on, but their progress was slow. The air hummed with missiles, and they had to hug the low spots. Part of the time Drover managed to crawl by himself, but most of the way Sam had to drag him bodily from hole to hole. It was two hours before he got within hailing distance of an American listening post, and another twenty minutes before he slid, with Drover unconscious in his arms, down into the bottom of a sap behind the barbed wire.

Drover didn't stay in the hospital very long. The blow on the head that had dazed him when he hit left no after-effects, and the gash in his leg was only a flesh wound that healed quickly. Within ten days he showed up on the field, and a week later was flying. But no longer as B Flight leader. Major Daley was transferred to staff; they made Drover a captain, and gave him command of the 60th.

Now there are some men who are fitted to fight in the rank and file, and some who are cut out by nature to lead. But modern warfare has changed the meaning of the term leader. Instead of being the one who precedes his men into action, the commanding officer now is the one who sits back in a remote P.C., or in a deep dugout, or on a drome thirty miles behind the front, and sends others out to die.

This type of leadership did not appeal to Drover Jones at all. He would have preferred to remain a

simple pilot, or at most a flight commander, with only his own life to worry about. He found it harder to sit at his makeshift desk while a patrol was out, wondering how many would return, than to face half the German air force single-handed. Though warned by staff to stay on the ground, he would have liked to fly every patrol himself, and did accompany many. He was wholly a man of action, and expected the same of others.

Therefore he was surprised and annoyed when Brad Connors, now B Flight leader, spoke to him one evening after mess.

"This fellow Sam Barrick," said Brad, frowning. "How about dropping him, and asking for a replacement?"

"Sam?" exclaimed Drover. "Why, what's the matter with Sam?"

Brad shrugged. "Don't ask me. But he doesn't seem to get anywhere. He's been up here a month now, and hasn't got a single victory to his credit. Oh, he flies a lot of patrols—at least he starts out. But he's always having some kind of trouble with his bus that brings him back."

"How does he get along with the gang?" asked Drover.

"The boys don't take to him at all. He's got no pals—spends his time by himself, mostly down in the village *estaminet*. In short, there's something queer about him."

"If you mean you think he's yellow, you're crazy," began Drover hotly. "Give him a chance—remember Rick-enbacker himself was on the front nearly a month before he got his first plane. But I'll speak to him anyway, Brad."

However, a couple of days passed without his seeing Sam. Then, one morning, he encountered Brad Connors in front of the hangars.

"B Flight off duty, Brad? Why not send Sam Barrick up now?"

"He's not here—he's in Paris."

"In Paris?" exclaimed Drover. "How come?"

"Those new ships at Orly," the flight leader reminded him. "You said there were no ferry pilots to fly them up, but we could get what we needed by sending for them. I figured we wouldn't miss Barrick much."

Drover nodded, and thought no more about Sam for the moment. But later in the day an idea came to him, suggested by Brad's remarks. Two ships were washed out on the drome by bad landings, and the shortage of Spads became acute. He disliked taking pilots off duty to ferry; suddenly it struck him that he himself would be missed less than anyone else. After a few hurried preparations he drove into Bar-le-Duc and caught the evening train.

At eight-thirty the next morning he alighted at the Gare de L'Est in Paris. He drove direct to Orly Park. Alighting in front of the main gate, he was met by a provost officer and two M.P.'s, all armed and looking very grim.

"Coming from Paris, captain?" asked the officer. Drover admitted it. "Let's see your papers."

After examining Drover's identity card closely, he asked, "Is there anyone here on this post who knows you personally?"

"Yes, Wilkins, supply officer, knows me well."

"He'll have to identify you before you're admitted to the field." He spoke to one of his men, who vanished through the gate, then he asked, "Where did you come from? How long were you in Paris?"

Drover explained that he had only crossed the city from the Gare de L'Est, within the last forty minutes.

"Got anything to prove you were on that train?"

Drover fished out a ticket stub, bearing the date and the name Bar-le-Duc. Just then Major Wilkins emerged from the gate.

"Well, what now? Oh, hello, Jones. What are you doing here?"

"I just came in from the front this morning to fly back a new Spad. These fellows seem to think I've stolen the Louvre, or something."

The major spoke to the provost officer. "It's okay. His name actually is Jones. I've known him for years. I'll vouch for him."

The M.P. examined the ticket stub in his hand, and returned it to Drover only after a sharp scrutiny. He actually seemed disappointed.

"Say, what is all this rigamarole at the gate?" demanded Drover, after he and the major had passed inside.

"Since midnight last night," explained the other, "every exit from Paris has been closely guarded. It seems that the intelligence people pulled off a coup yesterday, but something went wrong. They've had their eye on certain Boche spies for some time, but what they wanted was to grab the whole ring at once.

"So they deliberately allowed some important documents to be stolen, and then trailed them. After passing through several hands, the papers were last seen in the possession of a woman, a notorious dancer. They followed her to Maxim's. She obviously was going to pass them on; probably to the head of the ring they were after particularly. But then something slipped. At the right moment they closed in and blocked the doors. Immediately someone put out every light in the place. There was a wild scramble, and some shooting. When they got the lights on again, and things quieted down, they had the woman, but no one else—and the papers were gone.

"They're trying to check up on every person who was in Maxim's, and they're particularly looking for a tall, dark man who was wearing the uniform of an American aviator. He was seen in Maxim's at that time, and hasn't been seen since."

"Well, I hope they find him," said Drover casually. Like most Americans who did their fighting at the front, he had never come in direct contact with a spy, or with intelligence work of any kind, and knew of such activities only by hearsay. Suddenly he started.

"Say, I wonder if Sam Barrick is caught in this mess? He came in on the day train yesterday; has he showed up here this morning yet?"

The major shook his head. "Barrick was here yesterday afternoon. He must have come directly from the Gare de L'Est, without going any nearer Maxim's than you did. He took off in a new Spad about five o'clock, just in time to reach your field before dark."

"He never arrived there," cried Drover.

"Probably had a forced landing on the way," shrugged the major. "Maybe you'll catch up with him. How soon you want to push off?"

Within half an hour Drover was in the air in a Spad that still reeked of fresh paint. He droned smoothly across half of France to land on the drone of the 60th half an hour before noon. He noticed at once that there was no other brand new ship on the tarmac, and asked for Sam Barrick. No, they had seen nothing of him.

Drover gave a few orders to the hangar sergeant, and had started toward headquarters when his eye caught a speck against the sky to the north, the direction of the lines. He looked again; the speck was growing larger. As he watched it drew near, and began gliding. Soon he saw that it was a new Spad. It landed, rolled up to the hangars, and out jumped Sam Barrick.

"For the love of measles!" cried Drover, gesturing toward the north. "What were you doing up there?"

"That compass must be about twenty degrees off," said Sam levelly. "I was farther north than I thought,

almost drifted across the lines before I discovered where I was."

"But what happened to you? They told me you left Orly at five o'clock yesterday afternoon."

"I was hardly off the ground before the motor heated up, a little trouble with the pump," replied Sam. "So I landed at Neuilly. By the time I got a mechanic to fix it up, it was too late to get here before dark, so I stayed over night and came on this morning."

Neuilly, thought Drover; no farther from the city than Orly. "Did you go back into Paris?" he asked.

"Yes, I did," said Sam gravely.

Drover grinned at him. "Well, why so solemn? I don't give a damn if you did. You're entitled to a night off, I guess." He turned away, then halted. "Bu the way, you have any trouble leaving the city?"

Sam regarded him with a blank expression. "Why, no. I rode out in a cab, this morning."

"You were lucky," remarked Drover, and walked on into headquarters. For the time being he dismissed Sam Barrick from his mind. After all, even if the story about the heating motor was imaginary, Sam had done no more than a thousand other pilots before him, invented a forced landing in order to spend a night in Paris.

It was one o'clock when Colonel Wirelane phoned from Souilly.

"Keep your patrols out of the Gredolles area, captain," he ordered brusquely. "There's been some kind of a leak of information to the Boches, and things may get hot in that region. We're not quite sure yet, but until further notice tell your flight leaders to stay west of the three-fingered lake. More later."

Drover didn't connect this at first. It was not until he had hung up that he realized the leak the colonel spoke of must refer to the events of the previous night, in Paris. However, he issued the necessary instructions without offering any explanations.

The following morning he watched B Flight take off; the six Spads circled once quickly, and climbed out of sight toward the north. He turned and entered his office to get the day's routine paper work out of the way, but had not been seated more than five minutes before the corporal announced visitors.

He looked up. Three men were walking in on the orderly's heels without waiting to be invited. One was a captain, the others second lieutenants; none of them wore collar ornaments or insignia, but all had Colts holstered at their waists.

"Have you a pilot named Barrick, first lieutenant?" asked the captain without so much as a good morning.

"Yes, we have," said Drover. "Who wants to see him?"

"Does he answer the following description?" The captain read from a typed slip of paper. "Just over six feet, about one hundred and eighty pounds, dark complexion, brown eyes, sharp features, long, slender hands?"

"That sounds like Sam," admitted Drover.

"Was he in Paris night before last, to your knowledge?"

"Yes, I believe he was," said Drover, suddenly tense. "Why—"

"We want him," was the terse statement, like the crack of a gun.

Drover simply stared in silent horror, until the captain pulled a pink card from his pocket. Drover glanced at it once, saw a photograph, and the heading, 'U. S. Intelligence Service.'

"What do you want him for?" he asked stiffly.

"He's wanted in Paris—for questioning."

The curt, cool way in which he said, "for questioning," told the tale.

"He's out over the lines, right now," said Drover. "Left with a B Flight patrol, only a short time ago. They won't be back for an hour and a half, at least. You'll wait?"

The three officers looked at each

other. The captain asked, "Was he in the habit of spending his time in that café in the village?"

"I understand he did go there frequently, yes," admitted Drover.

"We'd better go in and have a talk with that frog," growled the captain. "We'll be back here in an hour or so," he told Drover. "If Barrick gets home early, hold him for us, under close arrest."

They left the office, stepped into a car, and were gone toward the nearby village. Drover sank into his chair and stared blankly at the wall. Sam Barrick, hooked up with a ring of German spies? It seemed incredible, and yet the facts were ominous. He had been in Paris—he admitted that much himself. And the stratagem of leaving Orly, and parking the plane at Neuilly where there was no gate to be guarded; that looked significantly like a device to assure him of a quick and safe exit from the city in case of trouble. Now Drover remembered again how Sam had appeared *from the north*, the previous noon. Why had he gone off his route to approach, or cross, the lines? To drop a message containing the stolen information?

But the most damning factor in Drover's mind, the more he weighed it, was Sam Barrick's record. A month on the front and never yet shot down a German plane . . . What Drover had previously tried to excuse as mere bad luck now assumed huge proportions in his mind.

He stared in disgust at the order for Sam's arrest which the captain had left open on his desk. A fine name that was going to give his squadron, the 60th. But it was inwardly that Drover suffered most. Never again would he know whom to trust . . .

The drone of a motor overhead roused him from his gloomy reflections. He stepped to the window and peered up. Spad Number 17 wheeled over the hangars. Sam Barrick!

Drover emerged on the tarmac as the ship rolled into a landing. It taxied up to the hangars and the motor was cut; he saw Sam leap out and speak quickly to a mechanic. Sam turned and came toward him.

"My radiator shutters jammed, I couldn't open them," explained Sam. "Motor was getting hot. They'll have them fixed in just a minute."

Drover hardly heard the words. He was looking at Sam as if at a stranger. "Go in my office," he said stiffly.

Sam said nothing more, but turned and entered the door of headquarters. Drover did not follow immediately. He stood staring grimly at the horizon without seeing it. His fists were clenched at his sides, and he bit his lip furiously. He was angry, not at Sam Barrick, nor at the Germans, so much as the twist of chance that had placed him in this intolerable position.

In a few moments he must go inside and tell Sam that he was under arrest for espionage. In a little while he would be turning over to the intelligence people for trial, and possible execution, Sam Barrick—the man who only a few weeks before had saved his life . . .

Very slowly, moving like a wooden man, he turned and entered his tiny office. As he came in, Drover saw that Sam was just lifting his eyes from the desk. Drover glanced down, and saw lying there the arrest order, with Sam's name typed on it. Sam's face was very red, and he avoided Drover's eyes.

Drover cleared his throat. "Lieutenant Barrick," he said in a forced monotone, "I have a special assignment for you. You say your plane will be ready to fly again in a few moments. You will take off at once. Make no attempt to rejoin B Flight, but proceed direct to the three-fingered lake. You will cross to the east, and proceed to patrol the Gredolles area to the full time limit of your gas . . . That's all."

At last Sam looked at him, and there was amazement and horrified uncertainty in his eyes. "The—Gredolles area?" he stammered.

"The Gredolles area," said Drover flatly. "Those are your orders. See that you carry them out."

Abruptly, as if to forestall a break in his stony composure, Drover turned on his heel and left the room. With never a glance behind him, he strode straight out across the open field, stumbling slightly as he went, as if he could not see where he was going. On and on he staggered blindly, until he had crossed the wide expanse of the aerodrome, and come to the fringe of trees on the far border.

Here he paused, and turned to look back. After a few minutes he heard the distant roar of a motor, and then saw a single plane move out from the hangars. It gained speed across the level ground, and rose into the air with a graceful lift. Wheeling gently, it pointed into the northeast and gradually faded into the distance.

"So long—Sam," muttered Drover through stiff lips.

Then he sank down against a rock and beat the ground with his fists. God, what had he done! He had sent Sam out to patrol a region where the control of the air was conceded to the Jerries, at least for the present. There would be no other American planes near him. Of course, if Sam was in truth a German agent, his risk was slight. Knowing that his arrest had been ordered, his status exposed he had only to land in German territory and make himself known, to be safe.

But if that were the case, then Drover had permitted a spy to escape, had actually helped him. He had betrayed his oath of enlistment, betrayed the allied cause, betrayed his own honor. Nothing was left for him but disgrace, court-martial, perhaps death.

For a long time he crouched there, peering at his black future. Slowly

another thought crept into his mind; a more horrible one still. He had assumed that Sam was guilty. What if he were not? What if there had been some terrible, grotesque mistake? Then he had deliberately sent Sam out to die. In that case, he was guilty of an even more heartless betrayal of his honor; he had delivered into the hands of the enemy the man to whom he owed his life . . .

Stiffly he rose to his feet and plodded listlessly back across the field. Then his steps quickened; after several moments he was running. Suddenly he was anxious to have it over with, to finish everything at once. Whatever happened, he was lost. But at least he could sell himself dearly.

"My ship!" he shouted at the startled mechanics. "Pull it out! Start the motor! Don't bother with gas; half a tank is enough!"

He stood over them, hurrying them, cursing them for their slowness. At any minute that car with the three intelligence officers might return. In two minutes, that seemed to Drover like two years, the Spad was ready, the motor turning over smoothly. He jerked on helmet and goggles and vaulted into the cockpit.

"Tell them I've gone after Sam!" he yelled at the mechanics who stared back at him uncomprehending.

He slammed the throttle open, and the ship rolled, shuddering. After fifty yards he yanked her into the air with a brutal twist, and banked so sharply that a wing-tip grazed the hangar roof. With wide open throttle he careened off into the northeast.

A few minutes later he was roaring over the three-fingered lake, with the Gredolles area ahead of him. His roving eye caught a few scattered specks, high above the horizon in front of his center section. He settled himself nervously in his seat, and licked his lips like an animal dreaming of the taste of blood. Those were Germans, or if they weren't, Germans wouldn't

be hard to find. And the Germans that he found were going to get a surprise. This would be a combat such as he had never fought before, a *fight that he did not mean to win!*

Savagely he drove the Spad onward, cursing impatiently. The specks were planes now, and much higher than he, for he had not bothered to climb. Altitude was something that a man was careful to get if he hoped for victory; it meant nothing to Drover now.

Nearing the group of planes, he recognized them for Fokkers, and saw now that they were milling around in a strange manner. Six or seven of them whirled and dove and zoomed about a central point, and the blue sky there was laced with silvery threads that could be nothing but tracer streaks. He stared fixedly, and suddenly saw that not all of those ships were Fokkers. One of them was a Spad, and even before he could make out the number 17 on its side he knew who sat in that cockpit.

He hauled his nose up into a cloud-cracking zoom, and the Spad answered nobly. But a thousand meters was too much to make up in one leap; just before he wavered in a stall, he let off a burst in the general direction of the melee, to warn his guns, and to let them know that he was there. That handful of bullets reached no target, he was sure of that. But at that very moment a Fokker lunged onto its back and plummeted downward, flame streaming from its cockpit.

He emitted a hoarse shriek, this time a cry of crazy joy. For he had seen the thing that set his suspicions at rest for once and all. Sam had just shot down a German plane. Sam Barwick was as innocent of treachery as he himself . . .

But his joy turned immediately into a kind of desperate fury. Sam was in a frightful jam, a suicide spot and it was Drover who had put him there. Sam must not die now, Drover told himself frantically.

His Spad leaped under him as he slammed the stick into his lap, and held it there. Four Fokkers still wheeled about Number 17, like hawks about their prey. With slitted eye glued to his ring sight, Drover slashed a long burst upward. One Fokker flicked over into a side-slip, not hit, but warned by those flashing tracers to be on guard. It dropped two hundred meters, then nosed out.

Without waiting for perfect position Drover sprang upon it like a tiger. His volleys raked it from the side, forced it into a turn. The turn quickened into a spiral; still his guns belched hotly, and his bullets clawed at black-crossed fabric. Nothing human could withstand the devilish fury of that attack and the Fokker whipped out into a dive, and began to run. Savagely Drover lunged after its tail, and did not turn aside until he had seen his tracers spitting the cockpit, and a lifeless form topple forward against the stick.

He whirled on a wing-tip, back toward the center of the battle. The three remaining Fokkers had Sam between them, at their mercy. Sam's Spad was in a defensive spiral, the Boches outside, raking him with one cross-burst after another. In from the side came Drover like a charging fullback. With guns blasting he plunged into the thick of the tangle, heedless of what was before him. The Germans had no choice. They had to swerve aside, or take the risk of shattering collision. They moved aside, and Sam was freed.

For a few moments there was a dizzy scramble. The Boches were trying to cage one of these Spads first, they did not care which, drive it down, and then dispose of the other. But Sam and Drover would not be separated. Grimly they covered each other's tails, until the moment when two Fokkers converged on them at once.

As if at an unseen signal the Spads wheeled apart. One knifed around in

a wing-over to meet the first Boche, the other flipped through a lightning Immelmann. One German discovered himself attacked from the left, the other was being raked by a vicious volley from his right. Instinctively they both veered, one in one direction and one in the other. Their wings touched, locked. In an instant the two Fokkers melted into one crumpled mass of struts and wings and fabric, with Vickers slugs stabbing it from side to side, and together started the long plunge.

Even then Drover, his anger unappeased, would have pursued the last Jerry in his headlong flight. But he saw that Sam's Spad was in trouble, sinking lower and lower as it spiralled drunkenly toward the lines. He hovered near, pointing the direction of friendly territory, praying for luck as he had never prayed before.

With his heart in his throat, and his limbs cold with apprehension, he watched the other ship stagger downward. Two thousand feet shrank to one, then to a few hundred. No Man's Land slid past below—the first line of trenches—then the second. A puff of black smoke bellied from Sam's exhausts, and his prop stopped turning. He could keep the motor going no longer. The Spad sagged rapidly, but at the last moment he somehow got it flattened out and it hit on the edge of a road, flipped over and lay still.

Luckily the trees that had once lined that road had been shot away to mere stumps and Drover used it as a runway. His landing was perfect, up to a point; at the last minute he could not control the direction of his roll, however, and crashed his wheels into the ditch. It was necessary for a squad

of doughboys to drag them both out, patch up their scratches with first-aid kits, and help them into an ambulance for the long ride to the drome.

It was some time before Drover could find words. Finally he blurted, "I should have known better than to believe it, Sam. But that order for your arrest—it scared me, I guess."

"My arrest?" exclaimed Sam. "What order?"

"Didn't you see it, on my desk?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Then you don't know what happened in Paris night before last?"

When Sam shook his bandaged head blankly, Drover proceeded to tell the whole story, to which Sam listened in amazement.

"I wasn't near Maxim's that night, and I can prove it," declared Sam indignantly. "Let them take me back for questioning, if they want. They can't convict an innocent man, can they?"

"I don't know," muttered Drover. "But if they convict you of anything, they'll have to convict me, too. We'll go together."

When they finally reached the field, the intelligence captain was waiting for them with a sheepish grin on his face and an open telegram in his hand.

The wire came from Paris, and read, "Cancel order for arrest Lieutenant Barrick stop Have captured guilty party here in Paris and obtained confession stop documents recovered intact stop return immediately stop—Stanton, G-2, Confidential."

Drover jabbed Sam in the ribs. "How about having a drink on this—you damned spy, you?"

FEDERAL AGENT

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Ghosts of the valiant help
those who follow after to

CARRY ON



By **LIEUTENANT JAMES KENT**

THE SKY was empty. Which was, perhaps, a strange way of putting it, because black-crossed, straining wings were everywhere, hemming in the trapped 49th. Spandau guns kicked out ugly, crimson stabs of tracer. Goggled Boche heads peered over smoking Mercedes. But to Lon Farrar the sky was empty.

Fred Nelson was not here at his side. Fred would never be here again—Fred had spun down yesterday, in flames, and all this frantic motion was a mockery . . .

Death would come, mighty quick. Lon Farrar shrugged, pulled his bloodless lips into a bitter smile. Without Fred Nelson to guide him, protect him, inspire him, he wouldn't last long. But that didn't matter, either. He was ready to die. He was a man stricken by the most deadly malady which can hit a combat pilot—and he knew it. Hell, the thing was simple enough—it was just that he no longer gave a damn what happened. Why should he? Fred was gone.

"Wingover" Walden, the beefy blond leader of B Flight, streaked close past Farrar, gave him an encouraging one-sided grin and a wave of the hand—and then, at risk of his life because of the danger of ramming another ship, peered anxiously back toward Farrar's Spad.

Sure, Walden knew what ailed Farrar. Walden was an "old man" at this game, veteran of two years with the French and nearly a year in the American air service. Not yet thirty,

yet gray, Walden was a plodder. His air work was methodical and colorless, when compared to Fred's. But Walden understood . . .

The roar of motors, the groaning of strained spars, the scream of wires were all around him, peppered with the deadly rattle of the guns. A burst of slugs laced through his left wing-tips, striking the aileron and making the stick whip aside like a live thing in his hand, but he hardly noticed.

He had lost his idol—and his buddy—yesterday. Fred Nelson, quick-moving, tense, had been the most brilliant sky-fighter in the sector. He had taken Farrar under his wing, in more ways than one, on the day when the gangling, over-serious Farrar first hit the 49th, a raw rookie. Hell had been popping on the front, then, with the enemy sending over everything that would fly and carry guns. Farrar wouldn't have lasted a week, had it not been for Nelson's guidance and protection.

There was the beginning, and out of it grew a bond of friendship which was the strongest thing in Lon Farrar's life. He worshipped Nelson, tried to be as nearly like him as possible. And he stuck, always, to his old formation position, slightly ahead of, below, and to one side of Nelson. It was not that Lon Farrar wanted the protection which the setup afforded him—he no longer needed that. It was simply that the two of them had become used to fighting in this formation, and that Farrar wanted to be where he could watch, and try to

emulate, every one of Nelson's lighting-fact, smooth, deadly maneuvers.

But now hell was popping again in the sector—and Fred Nelson was gone. Ships were being knocked down every day, by the overwhelming fleets of the E. A. But Nelson's position was empty and Farrar, who had built his whole sky-lighting technique to the pattern of Fred Nelson, felt utterly lost . . .

A BOCHE flashed past, so close that Farrar could hear the guttural, morose grumble of the Mercedes, and the vicious chatter of the Spandaus, could see the blood-red glint of the rising sun on the man's huge goggles. Farrar's Spad reeled and staggered and dipped under the impact of well placed lead—and the German wheeled, on a wingtip, and came back with another dose of the same medicine.

Smiling faintly, Farrar sat and watched the Fokker come on. He felt detached from all this. Even the tracers which stabbed the air all around him carried no threat, no menace. Grief, when it is deep enough, can stun the very core of a man, deaden him to everything else.

Walden, the wise old bird of the outfit, came plunging past, Vickers clattering and bucking and flinging lead at the Boche who had jumped Farrar. Good old Walden—but the man was wasting his time. The spark which had driven Lon Farrar on and on was gone . . .

But Walden was waving, gesturing wildly, pointing downward. Lon Farrar poked his head out into the slipstream, looked.

Mel Rane, the rookie pilot who had come up to the outfit last night, was down there, flying below, to one side, and slightly in front of Lon Farrar—in exactly the same position that Farrar so often had occupied in formation with Fred Nelson! And this time, Farrar was in top place. The

kid, teetering and uncertain, obviously bewildered by the hideous, flashing tangle of ships and tracer-lines, was looking up at Farrar's Spad, with a sort of stricken expectancy.

What the hell? Did this kid think . . .

Lon Farrar remembered the first time he had gone over the lines. Fokker-fodder, that's what he had been. If Nelson hadn't protected him, guided him, reassured him . . .

Farrar remembered that Walden had dragged this rookie out on the tarmac this morning after all the other men were in their ships. Farrar, holed up in his billet with his head in his hands last night, had not met the kid then, and Walden had not brought the newcomer over to introduce him this morning. Which was strange. But at the time, sunk deep into the morass of his grief, Lon Farrar had thought nothing of it.

Now, with enemy lead lacing through his ship, Lon Farrar came suddenly to the realization that this kid was depending upon him.

For the kid's sake, he must come through.

With flaming guns, he slammed after the nearest Boche. Crouched, peering grimly through the shuddering Aldis, he watched the black-crossed crate jerk and poise and then plummet downward. Then he whirled, with a smooth, precise savagery which astonished him, upon the next opponent.

This one fought back, doggedly. Farrar crossed controls, let the war-torn disk of the earth tilt far on edge while he sideslipped; then he jerked suddenly level, poised in a stall, poured lead into the belly of the Boche crate. The E. A. burst into flames as it slid into an erratic spin.

With nerves thrumming from the strain, with motor and cordite fumes clogging his breathing, Farrar stiffened in his pit. That trick he had pulled just now—it was Nelson's

favorite! Without realizing that he was doing so, Farrar had adopted the tactics of his fallen idol—had put them over!

Well, here was another of Fred's tricks . . . Farrar zoomed, rolled at the top, whipped out of it and dropped onto the tail of an unsuspecting enemy. His Vickers jerked and stormed, like venomous, live things eager to be free of their mounts. Tracers whipped toward the nose of a crimson Pfalz. The Pfalz's exhaust horn jerked, belched black carbon as lead tore through it. And then the Boche pilot was jerking erect in his pit, clawing at his face as his ship cocked lazily over on its side and went down . . .

Cold sweat drenched Lon Farrar. Three ships in thirty seconds! For the moment, he was Fred Nelson! He stood in the shoes of his idol!

And he must measure up, somehow!

After making sure that the rookie pilot was safe, he tore into the enemy with unprecedented fury. The E. A. scattered before him. Relentlessly, he plunged after them and, after each move, he swung back, made sure that the young pilot was safe.

His success encouraged the rest of the outfit. Motor thunder shook the sky. Tracers spun sinister webs. Flaming gun-muzzles were everywhere, questing eagerly for chances to drive home their messengers of death.

The Boche, however, did not yield easily. They gathered themselves, fought back doggedly, stubbornly—but then their resistance wavered again, collapsed entirely. Those who could, high-tailed it for home. Probably they were short on petrol. Certainly, for the time being, they were short on nerve. Yesterday, they had downed the famous ace of the 49th. Today, they had expected to wipe out a grief-stricken, leaderless outfit. But a new ace had stepped into place . . .

And the rookie pilot had come through his first dogfight alive. Lon

Farrar was proud of that. As proud as Nelson must have been, when for the first time he brought Farrar back to the home tarmac.

Farrar, automatically taking Nelson's place, waved reassurance to the rookie.

On the home field, at Vaubecourt, the Spads taxied to the line. Stiff, cold, weary pilots climbed from the pits.

Mel Rane, the rookie, came darting to Farrar's ship, grabbed Farrar's hand, pumped it.

"Lieutenant Nelson!" the kid said in a gasp. "I—I'm proud to have the chance to fly with you. And thanks—thanks for everything you did. I—I—" choked by embarrassment, he whirled and fled.

Walden came lounging around the wingtip. Wise, steady old Walden, pulling his tired mouth into a grin.

"You told that kid I was Nelson!" Farrar accused. "You told him to fly under me, that I'd protect him!"

"Why, sure I did. I've seen men in your spot before, Farrar. You were all cracked up, inside—what you needed was a new purpose. You've got it, now."

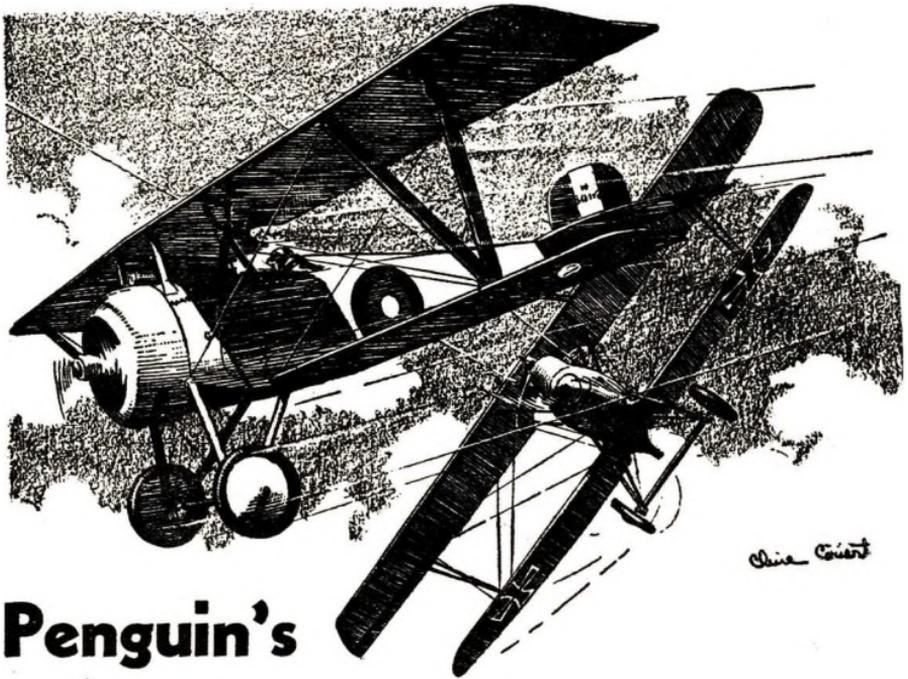
"But that kid—he'll have to be told that I'm not Nelson—"

"Sure. But the show you put up today will cinch his opinion of you. You're his idol, now—he'll try to be like you. And did you ever notice how hero-worship builds a man, sometimes? More than that, it's a thing that works both ways." Walden, the wise one, grinned again and turned away.

Lon Farrar wheeled, straightened, looked toward the far, flame-tinted horizon.

Fred Nelson was dead—and yet, somehow, he would still fly along, with the 49th.

"I'll—carry on, Fred," whispered Lon, his voice low against the purr of idling motors and the grumble of distant guns . . .



Penguin's Patrol

By

KENNETH L. SINCLAIR

They wouldn't let Weak Wings cross the lines and learn to fight, so how could he match the skill of the Boche who finally caught him alone in the sky?

THE blood-red Pfalz plunged from its perch in the sun, pounced upon the unwary American's Nieuport. The ugly clatter of Spandau guns rose above the uneasy rumble of Mercedes. Snaky tracer-lines whipped toward the American. The helmeted head of the Boche pilot jerked in his pit as he sought to make a quick, clean job of this kill.

The job should be easy. Even the enemy pilots knew the story of the Penguin, they called him Weak-Wings, the man who had to be helped to fly. This American was never allowed to cross the lines unless an-

other ship from his own outfit was along to protect him.

And now, seemingly by a stroke of luck, the Boche in the red Pfalz had caught the Penguin alone in the sky!

One more Allied rudder insignia would be tacked to the wall of a certain squadron mess-hall tonight, the Boche had decided. He knew just the spot for it. And about three bottles of brandy, he thought, would provide a proper celebration.

But—the Boche was dead wrong . . .

GLENN CARTER, in the cramped cockpit of the little Nieuport job, came to life with a painful jerk.

He had been caught napping. Glorifying in his new freedom, lulled by the purr of the rotary, he had almost forgotten that there was a war to be fought. It had been so long since he had been his own boss, even for a moment . . .

But now bullets were snapping about his head. The ship was shuddering under the savage impacts of the slugs. The sulphurous fumes of a tracer choked the American's nostrils.

Carter whipped the responsive little ship into a snap roll. Gripped by a strange excitement, he watched earth and sky change places in front of his eyes.

Here, at last, was Glenn Carter's chance to prove that, when it came to fighting, he could stand on his own hind legs!

Twisting in his pit, he spotted his antagonist. The Boche had been carried, by the speed of his dive, below the gyrating Nieuport, and now, with Teuton persistence, the Kraut was going into a climbing turn in order to get into position for another attack.

Carter grinned, warmed his guns with a couple of short bursts, and drove straight for his enemy.

The Kraut's face was a white blob as he turned his head and saw Carter's savage rush. Quickly, the man turned back to his controls, hunching down in his cockpit.

Carter waited, tensely, until he was well within range, then he let go a long, deliberate, vengeful burst.

The black-crossed ship lurched, twisted like a living thing gripped by sudden agony, as slugs and tracers lashed through it. The Boche pilot tried a flipper turn, then a short dive, then a zoom. At the top of the zoom he rolled suddenly away, then dived again, looking back over his shoulder.

All this, without result. Carter, poised and alert, held the Pfalz centered in his ring-sight.

The American's hands were steady, his eyes were chill beneath the

goggle-lenses, yet a wild elation surged through him. At last he was on his own— No one was here to protect him, to wet-nurse him through the sky.

And no protection was needed. Carter was proving that. He had nailed this Boche to the wall, had proved himself the master. When Fred Gaynor heard about this . . .

Carter crouched, peering through the sight ring. He must make dead certain of this, his first victory.

But sudden alarm stabbed through him. By some sixth sense, he was warned of the swift approach of a third ship. The newcomer was diving upon the Nieuport, streaking close past Carter's head.

CARTER twisted in his pit, looked up. There was no mistaking this newcomer. The ship was a Nieuport, carrying the insignia of the 46th. Carter's outfit. Fred Gaynor's lank shoulders projected from the cockpit.

With one arm, Gaynor made imperative gestures, ordering Carter to veer away. Instinctively, and in spite of the rebellion which surged within him, Carter obeyed. Then Gaynor continued his dive upon the Boche.

Gaynor fired just one short burst and it was plenty. The red Pfalz jerked, nosed upward, seemed to hang motionless in the empty air for an eternity. Then suddenly it burst into flames, and dropped with incredible speed . . .

Glenn Carter yanked his Nieuport around in a turn which should have torn off the wings, and headed straight toward Gaynor. Carter was mad clear through. At the moment, he didn't care much whether he rammed his friend's ship or not.

Suddenly the air was full of Nieuports. It was the 46th, the outfit had taken off, half an hour ago, on an important mission. Carter had been left behind, grounded.

Major Sarley, the C. O., waggled his wings in a savage wash-out signal; and the 46th headed for home.

Gaynor, Sarley, Carter, all of them flew with an odd stiffness. Each looked at the others with wrath smoldering in his eyes. The minute this outfit hit the home tarmac, hell was due to break loose and Glenn Carter promised himself that he'd be right in the middle of it.

HE was. The outfit crossed the Meuse near Domremy, swung toward Chatenois, dropped down on the home field. Tired mechanics seized the wingtips of the little ships as the pilots blipped motors and waggled rudders, taxiing to the flight line.

Carter leaped from his ship, hit the ground running. He rounded the wingtip of Gaynor's crate, just as the lean, grave veteran of hundreds of dogfights jumped down to the ground.

"What in hell's the idea, Fred?" Carter blazed. "I had that Kraut nailed right to the wall, then you horned in, stole him. I ought to sock you so hard you'll never be the same again. An' I got a good notion to do it!"

Gaynor pulled off his helmet. Carefully he placed his goggles inside the chamois lining, then rolled up the helmet and stuck it into the pocket of his flying suit. There was a queer depth of understanding in his expression as he looked down at the younger pilot.

"You've still got a couple things to learn, Glenn," he pointed out. "You let that Kraut catch you completely off-guard. A hundred times I've told you that it's plain suicide to fly over the lines without keeping watch in every direction, every second of the time you're in the air. I didn't jump the Kraut because I wanted to steal him from you, I went after him because I knew he might uncork some trick you aren't wise to yet, and

knock you down before I could help you."

"Good grief!" Carter stormed. "I've been here three weeks now, an' if I can't stand on my own hind legs by this time—"

"And another thing," Gaynor went on as if the younger man had not spoken at all. "You kept your guns going in one long burst, when you jumped the Kraut. You ought to know by now that that's a swell way to ask for jam trouble. Then too, there's a little matter of broken orders. You were grounded, ordered to stay right here till the patrol got back."

"Sure I busted orders, an' headed for the lines! Why should I sit here an' twiddle my thumbs when there's work to be done? At Issoudun they said I was one of the best pursuit pilots they ever turned out, an' all I ask is a chance to prove it!"

"You'll get your chance," Gaynor said, grimly. "Too damned soon! You've got a lot to learn yet, and until you've learned it, sending you up against Von Wendel's outfit would be like sending a lamb to slaughter. You'll be one hell of a good combat pilot one day, Glenn, and I'm going to see to it that you aren't killed off right at the start."

Carter's rage was subsiding. Somehow, although he knew that Gaynor was wrong, he just couldn't stay angry at the man.

It was a strange bond of friendship which had been forged between these two. The minute Carter set foot on the tarmac of the 46th, a rookie replacement, Gaynor took charge of him. The veteran of the Escadrille Lafayette drilled the younger man in flying, gunnery, tactics. It was due to Gaynor's insistence that Carter had been grounded today. The job which the outfit faced, protecting a photo recon which was heading deep into Von Wendel's territory, was too dangerous for a rookie pilot, Gaynor had said.

"How," Carter demanded, "do you expect me to learn to stand on my own hind legs, when it comes to combat flying, if you keep shielding me this way?"

Gaynor started to answer, but the argument was broken up by the approach of Major Sarley.

THE C. O. was a man who had attained his position by means of luck, Congressional influence, and plain bluff. Hulking, glowering, he worked very hard at being hard-boiled, hoping perhaps that in this way he could conceal his basic weakness of character. He had a huge lower lip which kept sagging outward, and every so often he would remember it, and would draw it back, noisily, against his teeth. He had a terrific temper and when it was aroused, which was often, no one could tell whether he was about to go entirely berserk or merely to break down and sob like a disappointed child. Often enough, he looked as if he wanted to do both.

Sarley, when flying, always wore a bright red scarf, which streamed out behind his head, whipping in the slipstream.

"Gaynor!" he roared, much louder than was necessary to lift his voice above the throb of idling motors. "I've stood about enough of this stuff. This time you'll face a court-martial! You deliberately deserted the formation, broke up the patrol, merely because this young coward was in a jam—"

Glenn Carter took a quick, impulsive step forward. But Gaynor stepped between Carter and the C. O.

"Careful, Sarley!" Fred Gaynor warned, in a deliberate, brittle voice. "I saw Carter's ship heading across the lines, saw that Pfalz dive—"

"Why in hell should I be careful?" Sarley roared. "This is *my* outfit. I'm in command here, and I'll do as I damned please! You are responsible for the breaking up of the protective

patrol, and I'm going to see to it that you—"

"There was no need to wash out the patrol and follow me," Gaynor pointed out, rigidly. "You could have gone on ahead anyhow. One ship, more or less, wouldn't mean so much!"

That stopped Sarley, for a while. His action in breaking up the patrol after Gaynor had deserted was based on the simple fact that Fred Gaynor was, by a very wide margin, the best pilot in the outfit. In fact, Gaynor was perhaps the best combat flyer on the Western Front, and without Gaynor, the C. O. of the 46th was downright afraid to tackle any tough assignment. Though he would never admit the fact, that was why the C. O. had washed out the patrol. It had been plain that Gaynor intended to escort Carter back to the home tarmac . . .

Savagely, the C. O. turned upon Carter.

"You damned—*penguin!*" he raged. "You've caused me more trouble than any other man in the outfit! Why in hell did they ever send you to the front? You can't fly, you can't fight. You've got to be coddled and protected, you little yellow—"

Glenn Carter lunged toward the C. O.

And got there a split-second too late. Fred Gaynor was ahead of him. The lean, grave veteran of the Escadrille Lafayette poised, twisted slightly, and drove home a blow which snapped Sarley's head far back. With a shuddering groan, the C. O. of the 46th went down on the oil-soaked grass.

And he stayed down.

THERE was a thin, taut, thrumming silence, during which Carter and Gaynor stared at the unconscious C. O. and the rumble of the distant artillery seemed abnormally loud in their ears.

Glenn Carter was just beginning to

appreciate the depth of Gaynor's friendship. It is not often that a man finds a friend like Fred Gaynor, a man who will sacrifice his own interests, at any time, in order to help his friend.

And in that, perhaps, lay the cause of all this trouble. Gaynor, overly zealous in his desire to help Carter, had done a lot more harm than good. Yet Gaynor was so deeply earnest and sincere about all this, so dead certain that he was doing the right thing . . .

And what was there for Carter to do about it? Had this been any other man in the outfit who was horning in on Carter's affairs, the blocky and hot-tempered replacement pilot would have blown up completely, and things would have been so very damned simple, that way! But the deep sincerity of Fred Gaynor made this a different sort of a proposition.

And now, things were gummed up worse than ever. Fred Gaynor had struck a superior officer. Bad news, in any man's army.

Gaynor, slowly rubbing his knuckles, turned to Carter.

"Glenn," he began, choosing his words carefully, "I didn't realize that I was putting you into a spot. It was only that I was trying to help you. I've seen so many young replacements go down in flames before they had a chance to learn what this mess is all about. Maybe I've been dumb, I've been taking that penguin business as sort of a joke. And I see now that it's no joke at all, to you. Glenn, I—"

Several of the pilots had seen what happened to the C. O. Looking hugely pleased, they were converging upon the scene. But Garfield, the grease-smearred and scurrying little mech sarge, came streaking from the operations shack, and broke into Gaynor's talk with a yell.

"Gaynor! Hell's poppin'. Wing is on the wire! That recon outfit turned back when you didn't meet them at rendezvous. Wing is hoppin' mad,

ordered them out again, ordered this outfit to meet the photo ships this time, or else! Seems that recon mission has to be carried through in a hurry. An' Colonel Scott is on his way over here in a staff car, to make damned sure that we carry out the assignment this time. From the way Wing talked, Scott is ready to take this outfit apart!"

Carter stiffened. Colonel Scott was the most dreaded martinet on the front, an old cavalry man, and, as might be expected, a fanatic on the subject of discipline.

CARTER made a grab for the slumbering commandant.

"Get some cold water, somebody! We've got to bring Sarley around before the colonel—"

"No." Fred Gaynor's voice was flat, incisive. "If Sarley has a chance to shoot off his face to the colonel—" Gaynor stopped, frowning. In his careful, deliberate way the ace was trying to think this situation through.

But this setup called for Carter's style of doing things, it called for action, in a hurry.

"Fred!" the blocky replacement pilot said, swiftly. "Get the ships gassed up! I'll drag Sarley into the op shack, pour liquor down his throat till he's swacked to the gills. We'll take off, carry out the mission. And when the colonel shows up he'll find Sarley drunk and us on our way, carrying out orders. Sarley will have one hell of a time talking his way out of that setup!"

Gaynor looked down at the younger pilot with an expression of surprise which was tinged with mild disappointment. The reason for that was plain enough. Carter's scheme smacked strongly of deceit. And that was not very well lined up with the sort of a guy Carter had always seemed to be . . .

But Gaynor realized that something drastic had to be done.

Gravely, he nodded his agreement. "Garfield," Carter ordered, "help me get Sarley to the op shack."

With the help of the non-com, Carter lugged the commandant into the operations office, deposited him in the swivel chair. Out on the field, there was wild activity. Under Gaynor's direction, pilots and grease monkeys were swarming over the little Nieuports, filling tanks and checking ammo belts. Garfield turned to go, his job was out there, directing his men. But Carter stopped the non-com at the door.

"Sarley's ship, and mine—I want them gassed, too. And keep Sarley's motor ticking!"

Garfield hesitated, frowned. The man was puzzled.

"That's all, Sergeant!" Glenn Carter snapped.

Garfield saluted, and left.

FOR a minute Carter stood motionless, staring down at the gross face of the commandant. Then a step sounded outside and Carter darted to the desk, yanked open a drawer, pulled out a bottle of whiskey, and started sloshing the liquor over the C. O.'s tunic.

Fred Gaynor, pulling his helmet onto his head, came into the office. "We're taking off," Gaynor said.

"Okay."

Gaynor looked sharply, searchingly, at his friend. "You staying here?"

"Sure. Somebody has to ride herd on Sarley. Reckon I'm elected."

Gaynor yanked at the chin-strap of his helmet, cinched it far tighter than was necessary, fastened the buckle, wheeled, and was gone.

A moment later, the roar of gunned motors shook the air. Carter, looking through the none-too-clean window of the op shack, saw the Nieuports lift their tails, trundle, then nose upstairs, swing toward the lines. Swiftly, the ships seemed to dwindle in size. The motor-thunder dropped away to a low

throb which presently died out altogether, then a sort of tense silence, except for the low cough of an idling motor, gripped the drome of the 46th Pursuit.

Sarley stirred, groaned uneasily. The man was coming around . . .

Glenn Carter put away the bottle of liquor, reached for a water-pitcher, poured cold water on the C. O.'s head.

That snapped the commandant out of his slumber in a hurry. Sarley grunted, waggled his jaw, blinked, pulled back his sagging lower lip with a hissing sound, and got his shoebutton eyes to focus upon Carter's face.

Fury went through the C. O.'s frame like a shock going through a figure made of jelly. He stirred, let out a sudden bellow of rage, scrambled to get clear of the swivel chair and the desk, and lunged at Carter.

Easily, Carter dodged. He had placed the C. O.'s helmet, along with the crimson streamer, on the desk. Now Carter snatched up both helmet and streamer, and darted through the doorway.

Sarley followed, roaring commands which were just so much loud noise to Glenn Carter.

Once outside, Carter raced along the flight line. Only two ships were left, now. One was Sarley's new and gleaming Nieuport job, with the motor idling and Sergeant Garfield crouched in the cockpit, checking the instruments. The other ship was the ancient and creaking crate which had been wished onto Glenn Carter, mainly because he was the rookie of the outfit and hence was in no position to talk back. Fred Gaynor had done plenty of talking back, about that asthmatic crate, but his efforts had done no good.

The penguin insignia which Carter had painted on the side of his ship showed up very clearly in the sunlight. Carter did not know, exactly, why he had chosen that insignia, per-

haps it was a gesture of defiance to the enemy pilots, who had dropped some taunting notes about "Weak-Wings." Perhaps Carter had chosen the penguin with some obscure hope of jarring Fred Gaynor into realizing that he was overdoing things.

At any rate, the insignia was there, plain for all to see. But Carter raced right past his own ship, darted to the side of Sarley's ship.

"Get out of that pit!" he flung at the astounded Garfield.

The mech sarge gaped, but saluted and obeyed, mechanically.

"But—this's Sarley's bus!" Garfield objected.

"I know it!" Carter retorted, as he eased himself down into the pit. "Get on that wingtip! Where's the rendezvous?"

"At—at Pont St. Vincent," faltered Garfield. "Two thousand meters. But lieutenant—"

Carter fumbled with the gas manet, sent the motor to full revs. The ship trundled forward, and Garfield made a grab for the lower wingtip, caught it, threw his strength against it.

Carter kicked full right rudder to assist. Sarley was close, now, his bellows of frustrated rage reached Carter's ears even above the roar of the motor. But the little ship spun around, headed into the wind. Garfield released the wingtip, and the Nieuport streaked across the field, lifted into the air. Sensitive to cross-currents, the little ship pitched and teetered. But Carter steadied it, and then he looked back, over the vibrating empennage.

Sarley was leaping into the cockpit of Glenn Carter's penguin-marked ship. Garfield, under the commandant's screamed orders, was starting the motor. In a moment the Nieuport swung out of its position, raced across the field, nosed upward.

Grinning broadly, Carter swung toward Pont St. Vincent. Crouching down in the cockpit, pulled Sarley's

helmet over his jet-black, slipstream-tangled hair. After fastening the chin-strap buckle and lowering the goggles, he tied the crimson silk scarf around his neck, allowing it to stream out behind his head, over the turtle-back.

Then he settled down for the flight. Sarley would not be able to catch this better ship until Carter got good and damned ready to let him. Carter wanted to sing . . . For the first time since coming to the 46th, he saw a way out of his predicament.

BUT THE 46th was not at the rendezvous over Pont St. Vincent. The outfit had met the recon squadron, undoubtedly, and already the ships were well on their way across the lines. No matter. Carter knew that the photo mission was aimed at Albesdorf. He swung toward Nancy and the lines.

Twisting in the cockpit, Carter peered back over the vertical fin and saw that Sarley was still sticking doggedly to the chase. Which made everything lovely . . .

The two ships crossed the lines at three thousand meters, near Vic. This sector, usually rather quiet when it came to ground activity, was whooping it up today, and no mistake. The artillery on both sides was throwing over everything it could lay hands on. Greenish, sinister clouds of poison gas drifted lazily across the shell-pocked No-Man's land.

Archie was filling the air with black pincushions. Down on the floor, an Allied two-seater outfit was doing some ground strafing. Another two-seater outfit was cruising up and down behind the Boche lines, ringing artillery. Off toward Nomency and Chateau Salins a French pursuit outfit was attacking a *drachen* which was being rapidly hauled down to its nest.

A busy day but Carter could not even swerve from his course. He must

get to Albesdorf before the scrap between the 46th and Von Wendel's outfit was ended. Everything depended upon that . . .

And he made it. Far ahead, he saw red specks wheeling and twisting and dipping in the sky. Von Wendel's Pfalzes. And as he came closer, Carter could make out the brownish shapes of the Nieuports which, tangling furiously with the Boche, were trying to keep the Pfalzes away from the photo ships, so that the recon outfit could complete its dangerous mission.

But the 46th had hit some tough sledding, today. Even Fred Gaynor's fighting leadership, it seemed, could not pull the Americans out of this hole. They were out-numbered two to one.

Carter grabbed off a thousand feet more altitude. Then, after making sure that Sarley's crimson scarf was streaming out behind his head, the 46th's rookie pilot fired a short burst to warm his guns and plunged into the fight.

IT WAS like dropping into the middle of perdition. The stentorian bellowing of motors blended with the ugly and unclean cackle of guns and crammed the sky with sound. Curving trails of smoke were left, by tortured motors, to taint the air. Guns spurted the crimson breath of death; and the white, wavy lines of tracer-smoke remained to show, for a few seconds, where death had clutched—and missed.

Helmeted heads jerked this way and that, in tiny cockpits. Somehow, Carter could sense the terrific tension of all this, the creaking and groaning of tortured spars and struts, the thrumming of human nerves drawn to the breaking-point. Maybe that was due to his imagination running away with him, but there it was. In this mile-high duel, death was the reward for the man and the ship who were

just a fraction of a second too slow. Whole lifetimes were lived in split-seconds, here.

Right at the start, Carter spotted his friend. Gaynor was in the middle of the melee, holding two of the red Pfalzes at bay. The other pilots of the 46th were scattered, twisting and turning and rolling and zooming.

Carter plunged straight down through the fight, without engaging any of the enemy ships. He had a good reason for doing this—he was flying Sarley's ship, was wearing the C. O.'s scarf. In the eyes of the 46th, Glenn Carter now was the commandant!

And he played the part. Imperiously he wagged his wings.

Obedient, the outfit dropped into formation behind him, just as quickly as the individual ships could fight free of their Boche antagonists.

There was a quick, yet distinct lull in the fighting. Each faction pulled aside, reached for the advantage of altitude, and gathered its forces together. From an every-man-for-himself melee, this battle was due to develop into an exhibition of sky generalship.

And, for an instant, paralyzing doubt stabbed through Glenn Carter. The Nieuports were swinging into position behind him, depending upon him for leadership. Could he supply it? Or was he flying under false colors, if one cared to pin the thing right down to cases, leading his wing-mates to destruction?

Not a pleasant thought, that one. And until this moment, Carter's brain had been so busy with his predicament and his plan for getting out of it that this angle had not even occurred to him.

The Boche, massed behind Von Wendel's gaudily-painted ship, were pivoting toward the 46th, forcing the fight. It was too late, now, for Carter to back out, even had he been the backing-out kind, which he wasn't. All he could do was go ahead.

The responsibility which he had shouldered was a crushing thing and yet it brought to him a strange and exhilarating sensation of power. He was the master, not only of himself, but of a whole crack pursuit squadron. The pilots of the 46th, their eyes upon the red streamer which whipped behind Carter's helmeted head, were following his every move.

He wheeled, plunged toward the enemy.

There was a sinister, tingling beauty, in all this. The two formations swung deliberately, with each ship keeping precisely to its position; then the formations plunged toward each other, swiftly picking up speed, as if each side sought, by the impact of collision, to wipe out the opposing force.

THIS was sheer audacity. The Americans, in the face of long odds, were borrowing the enemy's "circus" tactics of fighting!

And, just an instant before the two formations tangled, Glenn Carter sensed a quick change in the setup of the 46th. He glanced, quickly, back along the formation . . .

And saw that Fred Gaynor was pulling away! Gaynor was zooming toward the penguin-marked Nieuport which was attempting to join up with the outfit. Gaynor was blocking the path of that penguin-marked ship—

But that was all that Carter had a chance to see. With horrible abruptness, the 46th clashed with the enemy formation, and the whole sky was crammed with fury.

Guns clattered, on all sides. Von Wendel, with the weight of numbers on his side, stuck doggedly to his course, seeking to break up the American formation.

Carter blocked that play by leading his outfit upward. Then, quickly, he made a flipper turn and dived on the tail of the enemy formation. Looking back, he saw that every ship of the 46th was sticking with him. Every

ship—except Fred Gaynor's. Gaynor and Sarley were staging a battle all their own, several miles from the main fight. Sarley was trying, wildly, to get past Gaynor, to join up with the battle. But Gaynor, without any apparent effort, was blocking Sarley's every move.

Their bullet-less battle was almost funny. Gaynor thought that the C. O. was Glenn Carter—and the veteran of the Escadrille Lafayette intended to keep his fledgling out of the battle.

Carter, however, had only a split-second in which to watch that. He, the penguin of the 46th, had put one over on the great Von Wendel, and now, swiftly, he must follow up the advantage.

He did. Leading his outfit, he plunged down upon the startled Boche.

The enemy pilots had been expecting the force and speed of their drive to scatter the Americans like chaff. And the Americans had suddenly zoomed, swerved, but now they were diving upon the Boche, still in perfect formation. The Pfalzes teetered, wobbled uncertainly, lost their alignment of formation.

Carter centered a black-crossed ship in the ring-sight, started firing. The E. A. jerked, stalled, whipped into a spin, and was gone, leaving an ugly gap in the formation.

Then guns were cackling on all sides of Glenn Carter as the other pilots of the 46th went into action.

The rest of the fight was swift, and terrible. Two E. A. went down in flames. Von Wendel fought, savagely, to pull his outfit together, to beat off the American attack. But Carter blocked every move. Cackling Vickers guns were everywhere in the sky, it seemed. Another Boche ship went down, and then, suddenly, Von Wendel decided that he had had enough. The recon ships, finished with their mission, were heading back toward the Allied lines anyhow—they could

not be stopped now. The Boche swung away, flying a ragged formation, and headed for home.

THE 46th pulled itself together, followed the recon outfit. Suddenly two ships slammed down into position alongside Carter, at point. One was Carter's own penguin-marked ship, with Sarley twitching with rage in the cockpit. The other was Gaynor's ship. Gaynor sidled close beside Carter, stared across the intervening space, then abruptly the veteran ace grinned, saluted.

One by one, the Nieuports settled to tired landings on the home tarmac. In the soft dusk, they taxied to the line.

Sarley, as was his custom, circled overhead until all of the pilots had landed, and thus, Carter and Gaynor had a chance to talk a bit.

Carter was still busy untangling the crimson scarf when Gaynor flung himself from his still-rolling ship, rushed forward, gripped the younger man's hand.

"Glenn, you sure opened my eyes! I reckon I've been a blind fool, overdoing things—now I see that you're too good a combat pilot to need any coddling. And of all the jokes, the way I thought it was you in that ship of yours, and blocked Sarley off from the fight, was the best yet. But Glenn, you sure had me scared for a minute, there in the op shack, when you didn't seem even to want to go over the lines with us. I was afraid I'd really spoiled you, had broken your spirit. But now I see why you wanted to stay behind

—to wake up Sarley, have him chase you *in your ship*. I—"

"Lieutenant Carter!" Sarley was on the ground. Bellowing, he came pounding toward Carter, yanked the crimson scarf from the hands of the younger man. Then the C. O. drew back, pulled his lower lip against his teeth. "I'll see you court-martialed for this!" he roared. "Both of you! I'll—"

The commandant blinked, as the lights of a staff car struck his face. With a squeal of brakes, the car stopped at the flight line. Stiffly, Colonel Scott climbed out.

"Major Sarley! Allow me to congratulate you, sir! The way you led your squadron this afternoon, in combat, was magnificent, sir! I've had a full report from the leader of the photographic patrol. My man, I shall see that you get a medal for this. Let's have a drink on it!"

Sarley, standing stiffly at attention, looked as if he wanted to cry. He managed to swivel his eyes around—to look, with an expression of meek inquiry, toward Fred Gaynor.

Gaynor, allowing himself the ghost of a smile, nodded.

The C. O. and the colonel headed for the op shack.

Gaynor and Carter tried to keep back their laughter.

"We'll hear no more about that sock on the jaw, nor about anything else that happened today," Gaynor said, softly. "Sarley will be too afraid that we'll spill the beans about who really led the outfit, and cheat him out of a medal. So that, my lads, is that!"





KENNETH BROWN COLLINGS (WAR BIRDS' CONSULTING EDITOR)



THE COCKPIT

Through this department Mr. Collings, a World War flyer and transport pilot, will answer your questions concerning aviation and tell you many strange tales about flying and flyers.



C L A Y T O N KNIGHT, who is probably America's foremost painter of airplanes and illustrator of flying stories, is such a quiet, unassuming chap that few people are aware of his fighting background as a war-time pilot in France. And only his close friends know that he is the survivor of at least one knock-down and drag-out air battle that makes the stories he is called on to illustrate seem tame by comparison.

For years, I have been trying to get Clayton to tell me the story of that fight—without success. Getting him to talk about himself is difficult. But the other night I pinned him down and here, at last, is the story of the fight which ended the war as far as Clayton Knight was concerned:

I was attached to 206 Squadron of the R. A. F. (said Clayton). We were a day bombardment outfit equipped with DH9s. Whenever wing headquarters could not think of anything else for us to do, they sent us over to bomb the German ammunition dump at Courtrai. We bombed hell out of the place all summer, and the joke of it was that there wasn't any ammunition dump there and never had been. We found out after the war was over that Jerry had camouflaged the place to look like a dump and succeeded so

well that we never knew the difference.

We started out early one morning to bomb it as usual. We took ten ships along, flying in two Vs of five planes each, one a little above and behind the other. My own ship had been laid up for several days so I was flying a strange crate with a motor which had let me down just the day before. Knowing that, the squadron leader had assigned me the right rear of the last formation.

My motor was not right from the first; it spit and it kicked. I would have turned back except that I was an American in a British squadron and trying to make a good impression. I was afraid that if I turned back too often the word might get around that I didn't want to go to the war very badly. So I kept on going, but could not avoid lagging a little and dropping quite a distance below my formation which was now up to sixteen thousand feet—absolute ceiling for the old crates.

I was still below the other boys when we arrived over the supposed munitions dump. That was the reason I was looking up when every other pilot in the outfit had his eyes glued straight ahead and all of the observers were looking down. The pilots were watching for the squadron leader's signal to drop bombs and the observers were looking over their target and having a lot of trouble seeing it on

account of haze and a scattering of archie bursts.

I saw the signal, and I saw something else which made my hair stand on end!

A flock of Fokkers was crashing down on us! There were twenty-five of them if there was one! They had timed their attack for the exact instant when we were busiest and I was the only one who saw them. They would catch the rest of the boys flat-footed unless I could give the alarm.

I motioned frantically to Balderston, my observer, and also an American, to fire a red Very flare to attract their attention. Baldy fired two in rapid succession, but nobody saw either of them. Then the Fokkers were on our necks!

Exactly five of those babies ganged on me because I was a cripple and easy meat. One Jerry in a black and white painted job jumped my tail. A burst of Spandau slugs tore into my fuselage just as I kicked the DH into a spin. The bullets punched so many holes around Baldy and myself that I still can't understand why we weren't hit. I was just congratulating myself on how lucky I was, when I looked down and saw fire slowly spreading across the bottom of the cockpit.

"Good night!" I thought. "Here's where we cook."

But evidently the gas tank had not been drilled. It was only a patch of oil that was on fire. The fire spread slowly, but it spread. While the old DH spun drunkenly, I shuffled my feet around and put out the fire on the floor. I used my elbow to rub out a patch that had eaten its way up the fabric side-wall.

The fire was out, but that was not much help. The five Fokkers were right on top of me, following me down and waiting ghoulishly for the cripple to stop spinning and give them an easy shot. And I couldn't help giving it to them because the ground was

coming up at me fast. I was down to fifteen hundred feet and had to pull out of that spin before long whether I liked it or not.

I pulled out and levelled off at about a thousand, and the whole mob of them came after me like so many hornets. I twisted, I turned; I almost stood the old crate on end, but you know how much chance a DH has of outmaneuvering five Fokkers.

I'll be perfectly truthful and admit that I wanted to run for home, but dammit, I had no more idea than a jackrabbit where home was. I had lost all sense of direction on my long spin down and my compass was gyrating around so much as a result of my violent maneuvers that it told me exactly nothing.

I tried to fly straight long enough to let the compass-card stop spinning. Every time I straightened out for two seconds, here came the Fokkers!

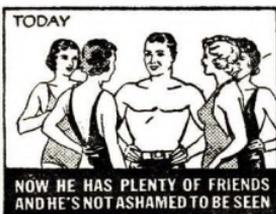
Baldy banged away with the Lewis guns out back and did nobly; he nailed one Fokker cold. But that still left four, madder than ever because of what had happened to their buddy.

They all closed in for the kill. And as they did, first one and then the other of Baldy's guns jammed. And he couldn't fix them because this was not our regular plane and just at that second he discovered that the mechanics had not transferred the spare Lewis parts to this ship.

I started throwing my crate around again, trying to get a shot with my fixed guns up front, and I tell you, Ken, if there ever was a scared young man, I was it. I remember being positive that I would get it in the back of the head. Why I picked on that particular spot, I don't know, but I was so sure about it that I scrunched down just as low as I could get in the cockpit—as if that would do any good.

But maybe it did help. Bullets were drumming into my wings, my fuselage, and just as I pulled my head

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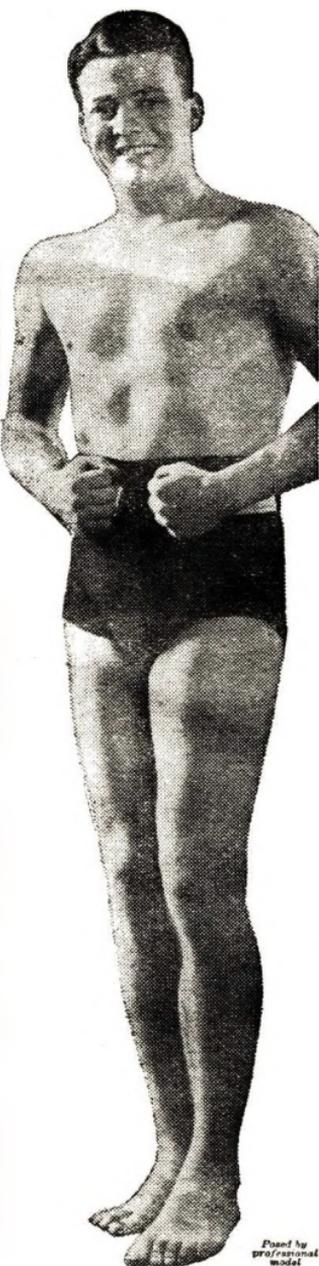
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down, a burst hit the center-section strut in front of me like a hurricane; it ripped it right out of the ship. With that, the black and white Fokker circled and started a long dive from my front.

When I saw what he was up to, I think my heart stood still. It was a sure sign that they thought I was all washed up.

But if I had to die, I sure wanted to take that Jerry with me. I had plenty of speed, so I pulled up and came at him head on, firing as I came. I glued my eyes to my telescope and what I saw is carved on my brain in every detail, like a slow motion picture. I saw my tracers eat into his engine and center section, and still he wouldn't fall. He kept coming, his bullets making a sieve of my DH. None of them had hit me yet, but that luck couldn't last forever. Even if he failed, his three partners were hanging on my tail and waiting their chance. It was a sure bet that I was a goner so I determined to crash the man in front head-on and take him down with me.

I heaved up on my stick to make sure I hit him—and missed! At the same instant, he dived and passed under me. As he passed, something burned up my right leg from knee to hip, something that felt like a red-hot knife.

One of his bullets had come up through the floor and drilled my leg lengthwise—front to back—and just then my motor quit, cold . . .

My leg was numb but we had loops on the rudder bars. By pulling with my other foot I could still control my rudder. I probably had five hundred feet and altitude and might get down, if those Jerries would let me. For some reason or other, they did. They just must have been good sports, because I was cold meat.

"Are you hit?" asked Baldy, as I headed for a little clearing with some tents at the other end.

"Yes, are you?"

"Yes, but forget mine, it's only a scratch. Climb out as fast as you can after we land and we'll burn the plane."

I thought fast during the few seconds before we hit. We were way behind the German lines and that meant spending the rest of the war as a prisoner. I was flying in my awkward, fur-lined flying boots, and if I was going to be a prisoner, I wanted my shoes. They were behind Baldy in the fuselage, I had put them there with some other junk because later in the day we were moving our flying field and that was the usual way pilots moved their duffie.

"My shoes! Baldy," I called. "Get my shoes!" I motioned behind him.

"To hell with your shoes!" said Baldy. "We've got to burn this plane —" and there was no more time to argue. We were down.

We hit in some underbrush and unharvested grain. We rolled a little way, then turned over. The old DH settled on her back with a resounding scrunch as the dihedral mashed out of the wings. Baldy and I were upside down. All we had to do was unfasten our safety belts and drop. We scrambled clear of the wreckage and Baldy fired a Very pistol into the gas tank.

There was a flicker of flame, but nothing like we expected. One of those bullets must have pierced the tank and let all the gas run out. I was so weak from loss of blood that I didn't care much about that, or anything else. I collapsed and sat in a heap on the ground.

A lot of German soldiers ran out and just stood around in a circle. They were a little interested in our American uniforms, the first they had seen, but that was about all.

I called to one of the Germans and motioned to my leg. Somebody went for a stretcher. Two of them carried me into their headquarters and about that time, I saw an orderly come in

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with my map case. I knew that if he had salvaged that, the plane had not completely burned, so I made motions and asked for my shoes.

The orderly was very decent about it. He brought me my shoes and all the rest of my gear—not a thing was missing. I spent the next two months in a hospital, and in the meantime, the armistice was signed. I received good medical attention from a Belgian civilian doctor, my leg healed, and that is the end of my story except that I later found out that I was only one of four casualties in that disastrous fight. 206 Squadron lost four planes that day—one more was forced down behind the German lines and two others managed to cross into Allied territory before they crashed.

But that's not the end of Balderson's story, not by a long way. His wound was so slight that instead of being sent to a hospital, he went to a prison camp. Not only that, they shunted him from one prison to another until he wound up somewhere way up towards Russia—or maybe in Russia. I never got the straight of it.

I could not understand how German prisoners could be sent into Russia, but that is where Balderson was discovered when the war was over. I've always intended to ask him whether he was sent there, or being in that vicinity, he went there voluntarily when they let him out of prison, but I've never had the chance.

But 206 Squadron finally got even for that ambush. They went out a few days later looking for that Fokker outfit—and found it. It cost three more DHs but they nailed ten Fokkers and that more than evened the score . . .

OUR old friend, Bill Strawn, of Copper Hill, Virginia, asks: Does the United States Government maintain an aerial patrol along the Canadian and Mexican borders?

There have been special occasions in the past when the Mexican Border has been patrolled by airplanes, but in general, no.

Reynolds Baxter, of Des Moines, Iowa, sends in the following very interesting question: I understand what the observation and bombardment branches of military aviation are supposed to do, but I am confused about the difference between pursuit and attack.

Answer: You are not the only one who is confused. The name, "Attack," is what causes all the misunderstanding. Attack aviation does *not* attack other airplanes; it attacks troops and fortifications on the ground. In trench warfare, squadrons of attack planes fly low along the trenches, machine-gunning and bombing. And attack planes can just naturally raise the old hurray with troops on the march. The attack formations of which every side gets aerial supremacy at the outbreak of the next war can go a long way towards preventing their opponents from mobilizing their army. Then they can make life miserable for enemy troops trying to reach the front after they have mobilized.

Mass troop movements clog every available road to the front with an unceasing stream of soldiers, guns, trucks, wagons, rolling kitchens and the thousand and one other things that make up an army. The movements of all of them are laid out on a timetable; every unit must move to exact schedule or paralyze everything behind it, and that picture is made to order as a target for "Attack" airplanes.

A formation of attack planes hurdles over a hill. It is flying two hundred and fifty miles an hour and just off the ground. The enemy soldiers do not see the planes; they scarcely have time to hear them before they are on their necks, coughing death and destruction.

The attack formation roars down

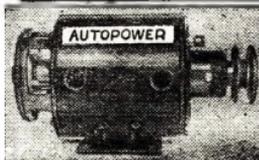
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the road! It deluges it with machine-gun fire. Every plane mounts four fixed guns, each gun fires twelve hundred shots a minute and the combined fire cuts a swath down the road that sweeps all before it.

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What is the very *mildest* effect that such an attack can have? Well, if the troops on the ground are seasoned soldiers who did not bolt, and, when the attack was over, they obeyed the orders of their officers and cleared the debris off the road with all possible speed, the column may possibly get in motion again after a delay of forty-five minutes to an hour, but probably longer. And assuming even the lesser figure, can you picture what that delay has done to the countless miles of dense traffic behind?

The column is piled back on itself in a hopeless snarl. Cross roads are blocked, all traffic is paralyzed. It is probable that no troop unit will reach its assigned destination on time. Any slight chance of so doing by making up the lost time is ruined by the necessity of keeping one side of the road open for the ambulances racing to and from the scene of the disaster ahead. The net result is that the tired troops will march until far into the night. They will get little sleep, if any and the morale of an entire army has been shot to hell as the result of a paltry little attack lasting four or

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Pursuit may act in either an offensive or defensive capacity. If a pursuit squadron, or wing, had been assigned to defend the road used in our illustration above, it would have tried to jump the enemy attack planes and turn them back long before they reached their destination. Had the attackers come unprotected by pursuit ships of their own, then the fight would have been a clear-cut issue of pursuit vs. attack.

But remember, the attack planes are not out to fight other airplanes. They are out to strafe that road and delay the march of an army. They will, therefore, avoid the aerial fight if they can, and if they have brought along an escort, that will make it easier. Their escort will engage the defending pursuit ships on sight and the outcome of that battle may determine whether or not the attack planes reach their objective. There is, however, one other angle to the situation: nowadays, both bombers and attack planes are so fast and so well armed that many experts believe them to be self-defending.

We will find that out in the next war . . .

The Cockpit, bringing you Kenneth Brown Collings' interesting comments on aviation and aviators, appears in every issue of War Birds.

(Continued from page 68)

have any idea what it was all about.

Horlick had been battering a bully-beef can about the aerodrome with his Colt .48. Brownie was playing darts with a horseshoe nail stuck in a rum-jar cork and tipped with a feather. Ryan sat on a petrol box sucking on his short clay pipe and Townsend stalked up and down in silence.

Phil Armitage was in a brewery thirty-four miles away, undergoing the tortures of the damned.

Suddenly out of the sky came a new tone. Mac gave a start and turned and looked at Lieutenant Townsend.

"The Spod, Sor," he husked.

"What Spad?"

"The Amurican Spod."

"The one you shot down last night? With Armitage?"

"Ah canna say, Sor."

They were all up on their feet now, listening intently. They heard it circle for a few minutes and then the engine was cut off, and they could only get the low whine of the wires and prop. Horsey Horlick snapped a fistful of bullets into the chamber of his revolver and walked out to the darkness.

"Stand still," ordered Townsend. "Let Horsey nick him."

The whine increased and then they saw the flame pennons of the Hisso exhaust as the Spad came around again and set itself for the landing. They heard the wheels hit and the axle rasp up the guides and then she settled and clawed at the turf with her skid. She came up slowly to the worn area in front of the shed. Horsey was trailing it at the canter with his gun at his hip.

"Take no chances, men," Townsend ordered. "Sit tight here in the shadows until he gets out and Horsey nails him."

They watched the man raise his arms over the edge of the cockpit and look about. They watched him drop one arm to loosen his belt and then he got out and peered about.



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Horsey was on him like a shot—with his gun rammed in his back.

"Okay, partner," he growled. "Reach—and trot over there. The reception committee is waiting for you."

"Ye see ut?" McGregor gasped. "The same number—484!"

"Strike me pink!" gasped Brownie.

The pilot came on, shoved by Horsey, who was in his element, ordering an American officer about.

"Here he is, Mr. Townsend," he said joyously. "Caught him pretty, eh?"

The American came up, his arms raised and then he grinned when he saw the English officer.

"You're Townsend, aren't you?" he asked grinning. "Make this lug take that cannon out of my back. I'm—"

"Are you Lieutenant Roy Warner?" Townsend asked first. "What's your game?"

"No, don't waste time asking a lot of damn fool questions. You've got to work fast."

"Should I get the Flight to warm up No. 11, Sor?" McGregor boomed.

Townsend was mystified, and stared from McGregor to the American.

"That's the idea, Scottie," the American said. "You think fast, don't you?"

"Wait a minute," argued Townsend. "What are you two up to?"

"Don't wait too many minutes. We've got to get Armitage out of that mess."

Mac was off like a shot.

"All right, Horsey. Ease up," Townsend said. "Now what's your story, er—Warner. You're supposed to be dead, you know."

"EVER hear the story about Mark Twain?" grinned Warner. "But come on, I'll talk while you birds get ready. They've got Armitage—my old pal of McGill University; racked up over there and they're going to shoot him at midnight."

"How do you know?"

"I just left him. I'm supposed to be a spy."

"For who?" bellowed Ryan.

"Yeh, who you working for anyway? You got us nuts now," Horlick growled twirling the gun around his trigger finger. "First you shoot at us and then you knock off a Fokker. Next time you take a crack at us and we hop you off. What happened down there, anyway?"

"I don't blame you, but I had to work—and think fast," Warner said. "I had to fake shooting at you because they were watching me. You didn't do me any good either, when you conked my motor last night."

"Were you in the Spad then?" asked Townsend. "There was no one there when Armitage went over to see."

"No, I cleared out for a time, and that damn fool jumped in my ship, to make out that he was me—get it?"

"No, we don't," said Ryan curtly.

"I can understand that," answered Warner. "It's dizzy as hell, I'll admit."

They were at the shed now and Mac and the Flight Sergeant were starting the motors on No. 11.

"He tried to kid them that he was me," Warner went on to explain, "and he got away with it until he got to the brewery, where he ran into some Hun staff officer who really knew me. So they gave him a court martial—just a formality and decided to shoot him."

"For trying to get in a brewery?" gasped Townsend.

"Well, it was a brewery, but now it's a giant laboratory where they are making the Yellow Cross gas."

"Yellow Cross gas? What the deuce is that?"

"You'll never know—if you once get a sniff."

"Then I will know, you mean," smiled Townsend.

"No, not even then. This new gas they are brewing is odorless, tasteless and invisible. You get a whiff and you know nothing about it—until

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about eighteen hours later. Then, well, it's too late then..."

"Good God!" gasped Townsend. "But what can you do about it?"

"Never mind that part now. We've got to get Armitage out of there first. Then we can take care of their factory, where they brew the stuff."

"But I can't make out how Armitage knew all this."

"He didn't. He went looking for me, the damn fool, and together we stumbled on the whole thing, because for a time they thought he was me and they blabbed the game, just before they found out that he was not Warner."

Ryan ran off, bellowing at the top of his lungs. He had the armament sergeant out and they were soon rolling crates of bombs out and filling the racks.

"Then you are supposed to be a German spy?" asked Townsend.

"Certainly. You see, I have some German in my blood, and two hundred years back, and so we faked a run-out, I used the name Wehner and gave them a lot of guff that was phoney, and went looking for this dump we'd been tipped off about."

"How interesting. Then you faked being shot down some time ago, just to get into the German lines and play this double-barreled spy game, eh?" asked Townsend. "They should have told old Armitage. You had him worried."

"They didn't dare tell anyone. Too risky. I did try to, you know."

"What did Armitage say when he saw you?"

"What could he say. He still thinks I'm a spy for Germany, and I had to betray him and denounce him—as a spy. That's how I got the story straight."

"Good God!" Townsend gasped going white. "That took some doing, didn't it?"

"You'll never know," Warner replied quietly. "But it had to be—

save a few thousand other chaps. I hope Phil will understand . . . later on."

"He won't care, once we get him out. What's the time?"

"About half-past ten. We've got to work fast."

"I'll get my things. What about you?"

"I'll go with you—to show you the layout."

"Yes," nodded Townsend. "I think that will be the best idea. I want to be sure, you know."

"Don't worry. I want to get him out."

"If we don't," muttered Horsey, still twirling his gun around his trigger finger, "you'll get a bad case of lead poisoning."

"If we don't," grinned Warner. "I'll show you where the soft spot of my bean is, just so there won't be any mistake."

CHAPTER IV Firing Squad



IN spite of the rush and frenzied excitement of the highly out-of-order patrol, it was well after eleven o'clock before No. 11 was actually thumping across what went for the Cassel aerodrome, and scrambling to get her huge bulk into the air.

Mac, a strange creature, uncertain now and studying Lieutenant Warner intently at every opportunity, curled up with his back to the nose of the ship and watched Townsend and the young American in the control pit. He had been certain all along that something would turn up concerning Armitage, but it had not turned up the way he had expected. There was something mystifying about young Warner, something so frank that it was easy to question.

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"If I hadn't seen you put this boiler down on that elongated tennis court last night," young Warner said to Townsend once they were in the air, "I'd never have risked this trip back tonight."

"We have to do a lot of funny things like that," grinned the Englishman. "It's the heritage of the Casket Crew, I suppose."

"I'd like to be a member," said Warner, reflectively.

"You are—for the time being."

"Yes, but after tonight—what?"

"You worry about tonight. There may be no Casket Crew after tomorrow."

"That's war, I suppose."

"No, that's Staff."

"Same thing."

"What's the game now?" Townsend asked. "There's the line ahead."

"Cut in over Wervicq and follow the river until it hits the canal. Then turn southeast out of Courtrai until I show you the factory."

"We are landing near the factory?"

"In the back yard, but we have to time it beautifully—right on the dot, as they bring him out. We can't get it—too dangerous."

"I see. A touchy bit of contact work, if I'm any judge."

"Wait until you see—Hello!"

Mac was up under his gun and drawing a bead on something above and behind them. He fired one short burst and Horsey in the rear turret took up the song. The two guns slashed a tracer-streaked flash across the sky and caught a black Fokker in their fire. The single-seater writhed and twisted to get clear, but Mac and Horsey had roped him tight with their Lewis lariats. He tried again and swerved up with a quick jerk and Horsey slapped a pounding burst dead into him from below. There was a crack like that of a massive whip. Every man aboard the Handley winced, for they knew.

The Fokker wing went back, and

slapped the side of the fuselage. Mac gave him another just for good measure.

"A maifciful thing," he said. "He'll never know what hit him."

The tangle seemed to hang in the sable sky for minutes, and then it tilted forward, the fuselage slid clear and left the frames of the wings and started its doom dive, with a slow twisting movement that tuned the pipes for the dirge.

"You guys are inhuman," gasped young Warner. "The scouts have more pity than that."

"There's no pity in war," Townsend said. "Here come some more."

Warner ducked while Mac and Horsesy held off the hammering attacks of the black Fokkers that came up to revenge their fallen comrade. The sky was dotted with bursting Archie and slashed with tracer. The flame pennons of exhaust went hurtling across the sky carrying the hopes of the aerial knights, but the gunners of the Casket Crew mowed them down and chewed away their props with terrible broadsword slashes with the gun barrels. Townsend sat tense but flew beautifully, answering every signal given by Mac.

The big Handley Page slammed back and forth across the sky, cutting in and cutting off to give the gunners their best arcs of fire. One by one the enemy Fokkers were battered out of the play and forced down wailing and whining with shroud-like trails of smoke attached to their tail skids.

The American Spad pilot looked on, speechless, breathless and somewhat shaken by the fierceness of the gunnery attack. Never in his days as a so-called fighter pilot had he ever experienced such bitter and lasting frenzy.

"I'll take Spads," he muttered. "This is too tough for me."

BUT before they knew it Townsend had hurled them across the line and was heading for Courtrai, seeking



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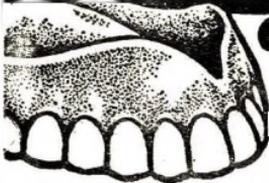
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the point indicated by Warner. Gradually the young American got his breath again and was able to take part in the business.

"See that black shadow over there?" he said, pointing off to the southeast. "That's it, but keep clear and handy until I say 'go'."

"I hope you time it right," Townsend said. "I'll never forgive myself if we mess it up."

"Don't worry," grinned Warner, staring at his wrist watch. "You can always rely on the Germans for being methodical. They'll stage this right on the dot if the Kaiser walks in on them."

Then Warner suddenly did a strange thing. He peered over the side and then yanked both throttles back.

"Now!" he grunted. "Down there inside that long yard. The wall at this end is about eight feet high. Don't use your flares."

"You're mad. We can't get in—"

"We're all mad, or we wouldn't be here."

"Well, if you say so, but—"

"Look! That floodlight in the yard there. You know what that means don't you?"

"God's truth!" gasped Townsend. "A firing . . ."

The wailing Handley curled back into the darkness and Townsend mumbled a short prayer and let her drop. Warner darted down the companionway and barked orders to Ryan and Brown. They came back, dragging the throat ladder with them.

The yard was long and narrow. It had once been used for the storage of brewery wagons, casks and coopers' supplies. It was clear now and Townsend made the most of it.

They flipped over the stone wall and the Englishman fought hard, so that his wing-tips almost scraped through the barbed-wire that lined the top of the side wall. Then they dropped hard and the oleos rasped and grunted like weary old men. The

Handley came up with a wabbling lunge with her great nose just poked into the wedge of light that fanned out from the wall of the factory wing.

"Hold it a second," gasped Warner, "until they move him up. Look, they're going through with it fast now. I told you they were methodical. Now! The guys with the rifles, Mac."

They could see a weary figure in khaki moving away from the eight men who stood at slope-arms. An officer in scarlet and silver braid was attempting to understand what was going on outside that wedge of light, but he was also well occupied with his particularly unpleasant duty. He did not live to find out what it was that had rumbled with that eerie wail into the brewery yard.

MAC'S guns rattled, flamed and mowed down the firing squad. The young officer came to the last wheeled a trifle and fired toward Armitage who pivoted fast and planted his right flush under the sergeant's chin.

Again Mac's guns spattered leaden death, and two of the sentries tried to get to their knees and fire. Mac held on while the nose of the Handley gradually swung around, for Brownie, Ryan and Horsey Horlick had slithered down the ladder, raced to the tail and with a superhuman effort had hoisted it clear and were walking around with it to get her nose reversed for the take-off.

There was a clatter of metal, a scrape of the ladder and four anxious faces came up through the throat and staggered down the companionway.

"Get off!" screamed Warner.

Horsey's gun took up the chant now, as the big bomber rumbled back down the long yard. Townsend, his jaw firm and his upper lip curled back slightly, fought the wheel and kept her steady until the last possible second. Then calmly he drew the wheel back as Warner curled up in a

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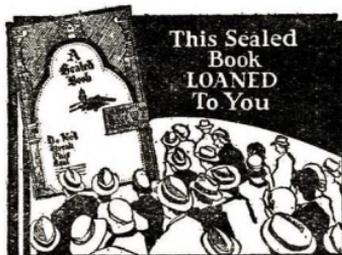
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tangle with his arms around his head.

There were three breathless seconds, a low thump somewhere behind and then a touch of tail-flutter as they scraped the tail-skid mounting away.

"Got it!" gasped Warner. "Whew!"

But he was dragged away as the hatless, wild-eyed Armitage plunged back into the control pit. "Out of the way, Mut! Let me at that bomb sight."

Townsend laughed wildly, slapped Phil across the shoulders and wheeled her back over the outer fringes of the factory. Armitage stood over Townsend, yelling and pointing at something.

Old No. 11 went over on her ear and slammed her way through a barrage of machine-gun fire that came up from the roof of the brewery.

"There! That building over there!" Armitage screamed.

No. 11 dipped her nose again and Armitage nodded. Mac was fighting it out with a Spandau crew on an extension roof, while Horsey was taking on two black Pfalz that had skimmed into the picture from nowhere.

Armitage's arm went down fast—twice. No. 11 jerked as the heavy projectiles went out.

"Again!" he screamed over his shoulder. "Then clear out!"

No. 11 staggered again on a turn and came around while a Pfalz nosed up in front of them, and then went to bits under a battering from Mac's guns. It dropped with a fiery thud somewhere in the yard.

Armitage leaned over his sight again, one arm up.

Townsend slammed her at the factory hard. Armitage's arm went down. Inside Sergeant Ryan slapped Brownie's back and the Cockney pulled everything he could get his hands on.

Again No. 11 jerked at the release and danced wildly. Below blazed a small fire and then like a double clap of thunder two of the 112s burst. There was a splash of yellow glare and then a splintered curtain of scarlet.

The gaunt sharp-cornered building, kicked out its own foundations and seemed to stand for several seconds on nothing but a cushion of mushrooming flame. Then she gave in, her walls peeled out from below, as though some monster unseen hand had torn them upward. She dropped with an ear-splitting crash and hurled brick and mortar several hundred yards.

"Beat it!" gasped Armitage, sitting down. "Don't stay here, for God's sake!"

Townsend took one look over, and then nosed down hard and went hedgehopping toward Halluin with the river slipping into a nothingness beneath his right wing.

They got back, somehow, after a rear-guard action against the black Pfalz fighters who did not stomach this low-down method of night flying. Horsey had a field day in the rear turret while Mac had to content himself with short pumping bursts through the struts, which made Townsend wince every time he saw the tracers sparkle through.

They reached Cassel, thoroughly exhausted and on the verge of quarrelling. Armitage would not speak to Warner and Townsend had worked himself up into a terrific lather trying to explain everything. All they could get out of Phil was: "Never mind, I got Berndorff. I got Berndorff."

McKelvie listened to their story, a garbled and incoherent adventure, for some time and then ordered them all off to bed. He knew he would get it straight in the morning, after sleep had soothed their nerves.

It was all very simple, once Warner's status was explained.

ARMITAGE had been puzzled and suspicious. "I found out that Warner had disappeared somewhere in the vicinity of Courtrai," he mumbled, "and I was suspicious because I had been watching that brewery build-

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28x40-96	27.65	28x40-96	27.95
28x40-97	27.95	28x40-97	28.25
28x40-98	28.25	28x40-98	28.55
28x40-99	28.55	28x40-99	28.85
28x40-100	28.85	28x40-100	29.15

HEAVY DUTY TRUCK TIRES

Size	Price	Size	Price
30x38-15	3.95	30x38-15	4.25
30x38-16	4.25	30x38-16	4.55
30x38-17	4.55	30x38-17	4.85
30x38-18	4.85	30x38-18	5.15
30x38-19	5.15	30x38-19	5.45
30x38-20	5.45	30x38-20	5.75
30x38-21	5.75	30x38-21	6.05
30x38-22	6.05	30x38-22	6.35
30x38-23	6.35	30x38-23	6.65
30x38-24	6.65	30x38-24	6.95
30x38-25	6.95	30x38-25	7.25
30x38-26	7.25	30x38-26	7.55
30x38-27	7.55	30x38-27	7.85
30x38-28	7.85	30x38-28	8.15
30x38-29	8.15	30x38-29	8.45
30x38-30	8.45	30x38-30	8.75
30x38-31	8.75	30x38-31	9.05
30x38-32	9.05	30x38-32	9.35
30x38-33	9.35	30x38-33	9.65
30x38-34	9.65	30x38-34	9.95
30x38-35	9.95	30x38-35	10.25
30x38-36	10.25	30x38-36	10.55
30x38-37	10.55	30x38-37	10.85
30x38-38	10.85	30x38-38	11.15
30x38-39	11.15	30x38-39	11.45
30x38-40	11.45	30x38-40	11.75
30x38-41	11.75	30x38-41	12.05
30x38-42	12.05	30x38-42	12.35
30x38-43	12.35	30x38-43	12.65
30x38-44	12.65	30x38-44	12.95
30x38-45	12.95	30x38-45	13.25
30x38-46	13.25	30x38-46	13.55
30x38-47	13.55	30x38-47	13.85
30x38-48	13.85	30x38-48	14.15
30x38-49	14.15	30x38-49	14.45
30x38-50	14.45	30x38-50	14.75
30x38-51	14.75	30x38-51	15.05
30x38-52	15.05	30x38-52	15.35
30x38-53	15.35	30x38-53	15.65
30x38-54	15.65	30x38-54	15.95
30x38-55	15.95	30x38-55	16.25
30x38-56	16.25	30x38-56	16.55
30x38-57	16.55	30x38-57	16.85
30x38-58	16.85	30x38-58	17.15
30x38-59	17.15	30x38-59	17.45
30x38-60	17.45	30x38-60	17.75
30x38-61	17.75	30x38-61	18.05
30x38-62	18.05	30x38-62	18.35
30x38-63	18.35	30x38-63	18.65
30x38-64	18.65	30x38-64	18.95
30x38-65	18.95	30x38-65	19.25
30x38-66	19.25	30x38-66	19.55
30x38-67	19.55	30x38-67	19.85
30x38-68	19.85	30x38-68	20.15
30x38-69	20.15	30x38-69	20.45
30x38-70	20.45	30x38-70	20.75
30x38-71	20.75	30x38-71	21.05
30x38-72	21.05	30x38-72	21.35
30x38-73	21.35	30x38-73	21.65
30x38-74	21.65	30x38-74	21.95
30x38-75	21.95	30x38-75	22.25
30x38-76	22.25	30x38-76	22.55
30x38-77	22.55	30x38-77	22.85
30x38-78	22.85	30x38-78	23.15
30x38-79	23.15	30x38-79	23.45
30x38-80	23.45	30x38-80	23.75
30x38-81	23.75	30x38-81	24.05
30x38-82	24.05	30x38-82	24.35
30x38-83	24.35	30x38-83	24.65
30x38-84	24.65	30x38-84	24.95
30x38-85	24.95	30x38-85	25.25
30x38-86	25.25	30x38-86	25.55
30x38-87	25.55	30x38-87	25.85
30x38-88	25.85	30x38-88	26.15
30x38-89	26.15	30x38-89	26.45
30x38-90	26.45	30x38-90	26.75
30x38-91	26.75	30x38-91	27.05
30x38-92	27.05	30x38-92	27.35
30x38-93	27.35	30x38-93	27.65
30x38-94	27.65	30x38-94	27.95
30x38-95	27.95	30x38-95	28.25
30x38-96	28.25	30x38-96	28.55
30x38-97	28.55	30x38-97	28.85
30x38-98	28.85	30x38-98	29.15
30x38-99	29.15	30x38-99	29.45
30x38-100	29.45	30x38-100	29.75

TRUCK BALLOON TIRES

Size	Price	Size	Price
30x38-15	3.95	30x38-15	4.25
30x38-16	4.25	30x38-16	4.55
30x38-17	4.55	30x38-17	4.85
30x38-18	4.85	30x38-18	5.15
30x38-19	5.15	30x38-19	5.45
30x38-20	5.45	30x38-20	5.75
30x38-21	5.75	30x38-21	6.05
30x38-22	6.05	30x38-22	6.35
30x38-23	6.35	30x38-23	6.65
30x38-24	6.65	30x38-24	6.95
30x38-25	6.95	30x38-25	7.25
30x38-26	7.25	30x38-26	7.55
30x38-27	7.55	30x38-27	7.85
30x38-28	7.85	30x38-28	8.15
30x38-29	8.15	30x38-29	8.45
30x38-30	8.45	30x38-30	8.75
30x38-31	8.75	30x38-31	9.05
30x38-32	9.05	30x38-32	9.35
30x38-33	9.35	30x38-33	9.65
30x38-34	9.65	30x38-34	9.95
30x38-35	9.95	30x38-35	10.25
30x38-36			

ing and the way they had apparently cleared it for something useful. I was certain at one time that Warner had sold out to Jerry, but I wanted to make sure, so when we downed his Spad, I decided to go down and make sure."

"But I had cleared off, for the same reason," Warner added. "I didn't want you to find out."

"I took your seat, and decided to take a chance on kidding them that I was Warner. I even went over to your old outfit, and got some of your papers and personal items, without anyone knowing."

"So that's where you went the other night," muttered Townsend.

"I nearly got away with it. They hurried me to the brewery and started to tell me all about this new gas which they hoped to have ready in quantity, for a mass attack. Then, just as Berndorff was explaining what I would expect to see on the other side and what areas to stay away from, in walked an officer who knew Warner. That finished me."

"But you said you got Berndorff—the inventor," Warner prodded.

"Yes. I got Berndorff—and his formula for Yellow Cross gas," said Armitage quietly. "It's in there, Major. You'd better see that it gets into the right hands."

He tossed a small leather wallet across the table.

"Good Lord!" gasped the Major. "How did you manage that?"

"I made a bet with him—and he lost!"

"What are you talking about?"

"I bet him that if he would let me go to the wall, carrying his secret in my pocket, that is, the formula, I would escape, even though he himself was the man in charge of the firing squad."

The rest of the crew stared about at each other amazed.

Armitage laughed. "I fooled him by saying if I carried that formula in my

breast pocket over my heart, the firing squad would attempt to shoot me in the head, and—miss."

"And he took you up?"

"Yes. I think the idea fascinated him, and he took my bet."

"Then you actually walked out to that wall with this leather wallet in your breast pocket?"

"Sure! I had to try something, and I figured, in spite of myself, that Warner, if he was on the up-and-up, would pull something to get me out. Anyway, it worked."

"But this Berndorff?" the Major went on.

"Oh well, I suppose I shall have to give Mac credit for getting him, but I planted him for Mac to push off," Armitage laughed. "Berndorff was the officer in charge of the firing squad!"

"Thanks," said McKelvie. "I'll rush this through."

"Wait a minute, Major," Mac's voice boomed out. "Whut about the crew—an' the squadron?"

"The crew—squadron, Mac?" the major said puzzled. "Oh that. Just a bit of a game on my part. I made a bet too. I bet the Wing Colonel the Casket Crew would get Armitage out within twenty-four hours."

"But—but the paper, Major," Mac gargled hopelessly, "ye had a paper."

"Paper? Oh yes, that was the colonel's acceptance of my bet. He lost and 129 has a binge tonight, at the colonel's expense."

"Well, I'll be blowed!" glugged Brownie.

Roy Warner went to the door with a particularly satisfied gleam about his eyes.

"I don't care what you think of me, Phil. They won't turn out any of that gas at *that* brewery for months and months and months. And I'll know where to come when I want help after this."

"But don't shoot at No. 11 again. We don't miss twice, Muster Warner," Mac warned.

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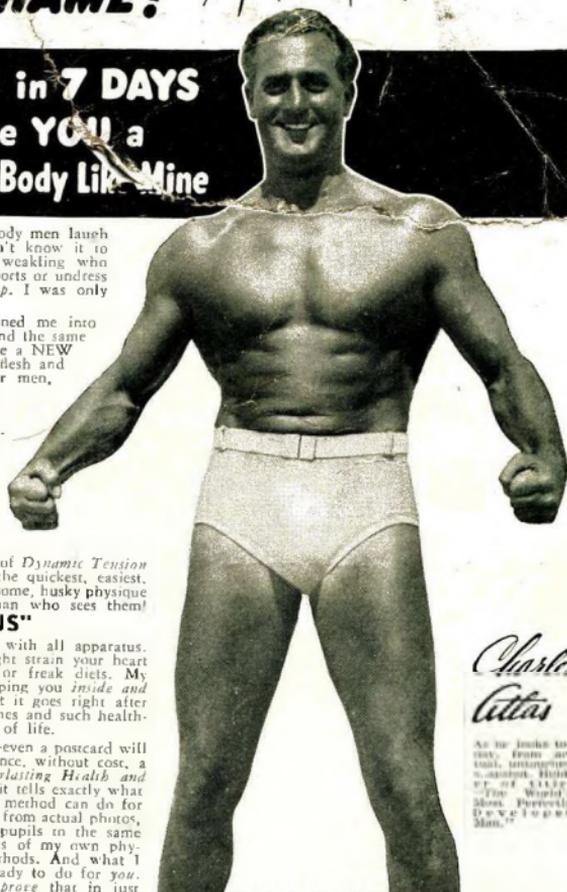
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