

FIGHTING ACES OF WAR SKIES

# WINGS



20c

## CRAZY CRATE

A RICKETY SPAD WITH A LUNATIC CREW—  
A WILD-EYED JOHNNY REB AND A RABBIT-  
HUNTIN' DARKY—A HEADACHE TO THE C. O.  
BUT HELL ON HEINIES.

By  
**FRED McLAUGHLIN**

## HELL'S PILOT

By  
**TOM O'NEILL**

## DOGWATCH FOR THE LIVING DEAD

THE ICY FINGER WAS ON PETE GRANCY. HE'D LOSE EVEN

A GREAT  
WAR AIR-MOVER

By **GEORGE BRUCE**





# THIS BEAUTIFUL DESK FOR ONLY \$1.00

WITH ANY REMINGTON PORTABLE TYPEWRITER

A beautiful desk...  
 Remington portable typewriter...  
 The Remington portable typewriter...  
 The Remington portable typewriter...  
 The Remington portable typewriter...

**ACT NOW!**  
 ON THIS TARGIT  
 THE COMBINATION  
 FOR AS LITTLE AS 70¢ A DAY

## THESE EXTRAS FOR YOU LEARN TYPING FREE

Learn typing free...  
 The Remington portable typewriter...  
 The Remington portable typewriter...  
 The Remington portable typewriter...

## SPECIAL CARRYING CASE

The Remington portable typewriter...  
 The Remington portable typewriter...  
 The Remington portable typewriter...  
 The Remington portable typewriter...

## MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

Money back guarantee...  
 The Remington portable typewriter...  
 The Remington portable typewriter...  
 The Remington portable typewriter...



## MAIL COUPON

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_  
 State \_\_\_\_\_  
 Zip \_\_\_\_\_

THIS IS A MAGAZINE OF FICTION. THE CHARACTERS  
 NAMED AND INCIDENTS DESCRIBED DO NOT REFER TO ANY ACTUAL PERSON



# WINGS

DEDICATED TO AMERICAN FLYING MEN WHO HAVE  
 CARRIED THE STARS AND STRIPES TO THE SKY

Vol. VII, No. 10  
 20c per copy



Fall Issue  
 1938

T. T. SCOTT, President and General Manager

MALCOLM REISS, Editor

- DOG WATCH FOR THE LIVING DEAD** . George Bruce 3  
 A Complete War-Air Novel  
 Three eagles—bound together by ties more strong than blood or duty!  
 Yet two were doomed to die in war-red skies—and one must watch  
 their hell bound flight with duty-silenced guns.
- CRAZY CRATE** . . . . . Fred McLaughlin 40  
 A Novel of Mile-High War  
 A wild-eyed Reb and a cotton-patch coon—the fightin'est pair that  
 ever flew! All the hell-on-wheels heinies in Hunland couldn't  
 choke the mad clatter of their whirlwind Vickers.
- THE CROIX DE GUERRE KID** . . . . . Arthur J. Burks 68  
 A Complete Winged-Spy Novel  
 Black crossed birds of prey stalked the midnight skies. Red wasps  
 of death buzzed! And into that suicide gauntlet Norton gunned his  
 hay-wire crate—fighting to free a blue-eyed girl from the ruthless  
 spy-web of the Hun.
- HELL'S PILOT** . . . . . Tom O'Neill 96  
 A Novel of War Over No Man's Land  
 "Man for a man—life for a life!" Over the riddled bodies of thir-  
 teen slaughtered gladiators he swore it—a sinister air-code that  
 turned a shrinking coward into the merciless devil-ace of that shell-  
 torn Western Front.
- TRACER TARGETS** . (Battles of Our War Birds) . Derek West 122  
 Those seven Spads were only Fokker fodder to the hungry Spandus  
 of the Boche.

Cover Design by R. Belarski

Story Heads by Frank Volp

WINGS: Published quarterly by WINGS PUBLISHING CO., INC. 461 Eighth Ave., New York, N. Y. Printed in U.S.A. The entire contents of the magazine are copyrighted, 1938, by Wings Publishing Co. All rights reserved. This issue dated July 1st, 1938. Entered as second-class matter June 9, 1936, at the Post Office at New York, N.Y., under Act of March 3, 1879. Subscription rate for U.S.A. is 80 cents yearly. While due care is always exercised, the publishers will not be responsible for the return of the unsolicited manuscripts. For advertising rates address THE NEWSSTAND FICTION UNIT, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York City.



**Swift, salty drama of cow-country and action trails . . .**

**O**UT in the great Southwest, in a dusty little cattle town, a man calls a name . . . Colts crash . . . a cowboy dies . . . and a range feud spreads like a grass fire. **Action!** The Pacific. . . Night. . . A hell-ship spawns murder beneath the Southern Cross. That's **action** too!



**ACTION STORIES** specializes in the kind of hell-for-leather fiction that red-blooded men like. The stories

are written by such famed names as Walt Coburn, Rollin Brown, Albert Richard Wetjen, John Starr, Frederick Nebel—the cream of fictioneers.

**Get your copy today**

**ACTION STORIES**

On Sale at all Newsstands



**The romance of the West, written with action . . .**

**M**ONTANA badlands, purple deserts of Nevada, the tawny longlands of Arizona. . . Tried-and-true **LARIAT** carries the smell of wind-worried junipers, the tang of range dust, the pound of stampede hoofs, the flash of Winchesters blistering the Western night.



Every issue packs at least one novel, two novelets, and half a dozen shorts by such outstanding

writers as Walt Coburn, James P. Olsen, Bart Cassidy, Eugene Cunningham. The most for your money in ranch-and-range romance.

**Get your copy today**

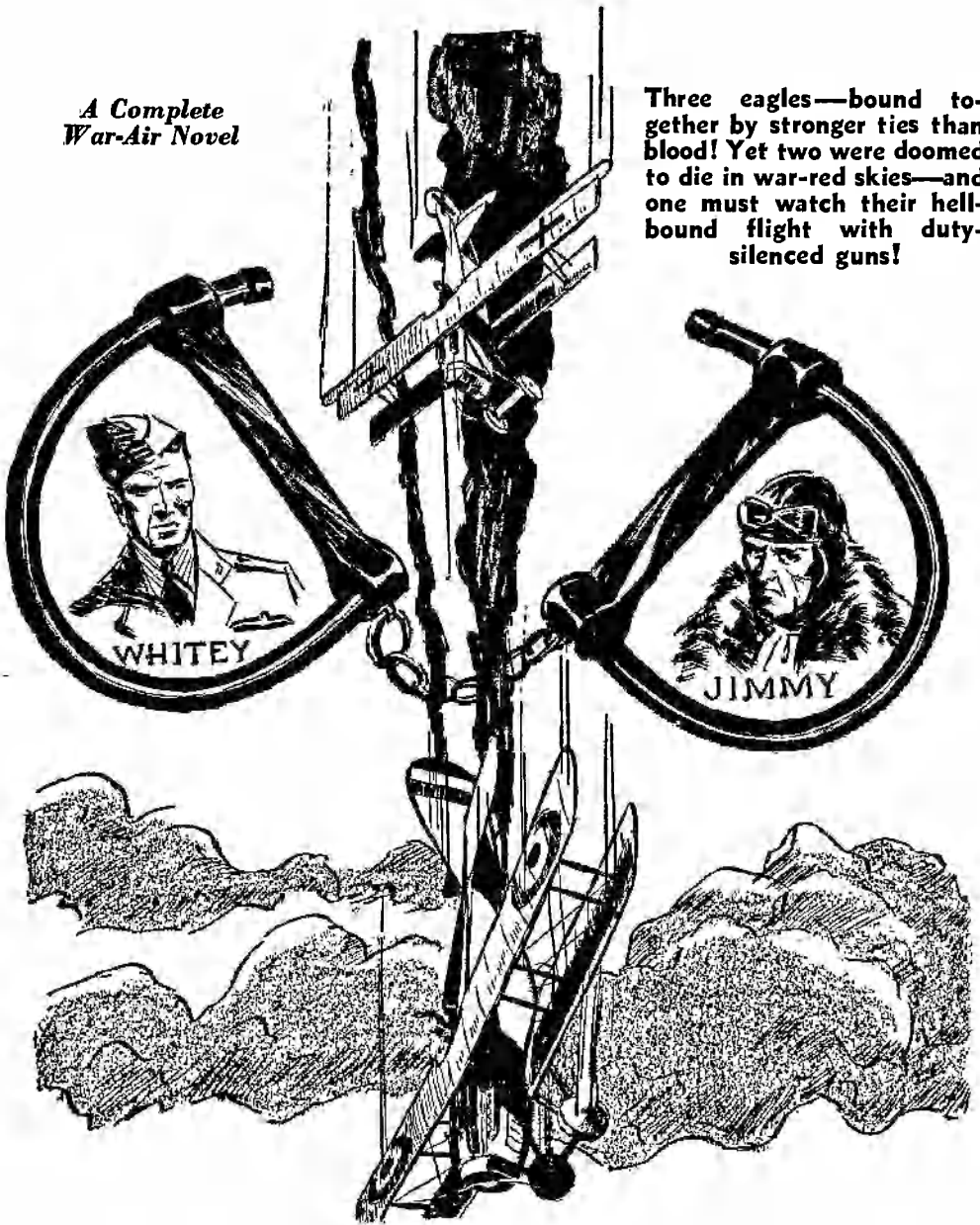
**Lariat**  
STORY MAGAZINE

On Sale at all Newsstands



*A Complete  
War-Air Novel*

Three eagles—bound together by stronger ties than blood! Yet two were doomed to die in war-red skies—and one must watch their hell-bound flight with duty-silenced guns!



# DOGWATCH FOR THE LIVING DEAD

By GEORGE BRUCE

PETER CLANCY had a definite reason for requesting his assignment to the Wasps. Few men would have made a request for service with that hell-bending, devil-may-care gang of pursuit

pilots who fought and flew in the erratic, sharp-stinging manner of the insect for which the army had named them.

Few men cared to share the glory of the 71st Pursuit Squadron, as the Wasps

were known upon the records of the army. The glory did not last long enough. True, there were many men who were fearless, courageous, bold; fighters in every sense of the word, but even these last side-stepped the Wasps. There is a difference between bravery and courage—and recklessness to the point of suicide.

Seldom a week went by without army orders carrying one, sometimes two, and sometimes three paragraphs something like this:

#### EXTRACT

1. Lieutenant Blank Blank of the Seventy-first Pursuit Squadron is posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for extraordinary heroism over and above the call of duty. While flying at 7,000 feet over the enemy lines near Malines, Lieutenant Blank encountered a group of three enemy Pfaltzes. With superb courage he attacked this enemy group single handed, and shot down two of them before he himself was killed.

After scoring his first victory in this encounter, Lieutenant Blank discovered that fire had started about the motor of his ship, caused by the machine-gun fire of the enemy airmen. Disregarding this dangerous condition, he rushed at a second enemy, riddling him with successive bursts from his guns and causing him to crash within our own lines near Malines. The third enemy pilot, taking advantage of Lieutenant Blank's terrible plight and his engagement with the second Pfaltz, flew in under Lieutenant Blank's tail, and sent burst after burst through the crippled ship. After a vicious fight of five minutes, during which time Lieutenant Blank sat in a cockpit swirling with flame, this third enemy succeeded in conquering Lieutenant Blank, but not until his Pfaltz had been so damaged that it was forced to land within our own lines, where the pilot was made prisoner.

2. The French Government has posthumously awarded Lieutenant Blank the Chevalier's Cross of the Legion of Honor.

3. The British Government has awarded Lieutenant Blank the Distinguished Flying Cross.

4. It is ordered that these decorations, upon their receipt, be forwarded to Mrs. John Blank, next of kin, 123 Main Street, Somevillage, Illinois, U. S. A.

True, the Wasps gathered great glory as a unit, but individuals of that unit seldom lived long enough to understand that they were famous—that they were heroes. The roster of the Wasps changed with the passing of every week. Perhaps there were one or two pilots left to the outfit whose names had been included upon the original rolls of the outfit. Certainly not more than two.

Names of the original pilots of the 71st Pursuit Squadron were lost in a long list of names which had been added after their passing. But the new men carried on the

traditions of the old. They carried the war into the skies with a debonair, grim recklessness which was at once the despair of German Air and the Allied High Command.

They were an undisciplined mob of glorious heroes. They cared nothing at all for orders. They laughed at Brass Hats. They guffawed at important-sounding superiors who had been sent to teach them better manners and a deeper respect for the Powers Who Be. They thumbed derisive noses at threats hurled at them by these Unseen Powers and went blithely on their way—until G.H.Q. sighed in resignation and left the Wasps alone—hoping that time and Spandau slugs would solve the situation.

After all, there was little G.H.Q. could do about the Wasps. One can hardly discipline men who die with the *savoir faire* exhibited by the pilots of the Wasps. One can hardly chide men who run up staggering lists of victories during times when victories are few and far between.

**A** GAIN, perhaps G.H.Q. had an illicit admiration for these dare-devils who cared nothing about the war excepting that it gave them a chance to fly and fight. Perhaps there were high officers on the Staff who fretted and irked under the harness imposed by Regulations—the Regulations which the Wasps laughed at and to which they refused to conform. Perhaps it was these officers who saw that the Wasps had Spads and all the fuel and ammunition they could burn.

Somehow the Wasps were never killed off to the point of extinction—to the point of losing the Squadron identity. Sometimes they were perilously near that point. Sometimes there were not more than two or three pilots flying Spads marked with the yellow and black body and gossamer wings of the Wasps.

But always, from somewhere, new recruits appeared. Recruits for the Wasps were strangely alike; of a type; of a similar psychology. Strange that men recruited from everywhere should be so alike.

They were unusually silent, reserved, aloof types. Men who seldom spoke, who desired no companionships. Men who asked nothing of life excepting to be left

alone. Who asked nothing for sacrifice excepting to be permitted further sacrifices.

Usually they were older than the average pilot—men who were no longer to be classed as youths. Men who looked out upon the world with half-grim, half-mocking eyes. Men whose hands never trembled. Who sometimes came to earth with a Spandau tracer in the guts—and walked to the dressing station, still silent—unchanged—excepting for a pallor under the bronze of wind and sun-tanned cheeks—and the ooze of blood from under tunics.

Men who seemed to have known every danger and thus had a supreme contempt for all dangers. Men who had previously looked into the face of death and thus had developed a like contempt for the Spectre Swinging the Scythe. Men who had probed from the eerie attic to the darkness of the damp cellar within the Haunted House of Life, who know every whisper and every clanking of chains, every rapping upon tumble-down doors—every face at grimy windows.

Men whose life was not measured by the yardstick of years but by the eternity of single minutes through which they had passed.

Somehow they gravitated to the Wasps as if drawn by an invisible magnet. They came, lived for a time, fought like fetish-crazed savages, and died in such a manner as to force nations to note their passing. While they lived they seemed to regret each minute they were forced to remain upon the ground—each minute which did not bring its contest; its duel for life.

**A**MONG the Wasps there were no heroics. There were no congratulations and no binges to celebrate the deeds of individuals. No matter what a man might do it seemed expected of him. Extracts from army orders might mention individual exploits—but the Wasps never did. They lived like monks.

In spite of the reputation of the Wasps for reckless daring, the standard of morals among the pilots of the Wasps was probably higher than that of any monastery. They needed no outside stimulus; no outside contact. They needed no word of praise to inspire them to greater deeds. Sometimes a hard handclasp passed between pilots of the outfit. Hard-biting fin-

gers gripping other hard-biting fingers. Sometimes a gruff, half-smothered sentence:

“Nice work, Old Man,”—but that was all.

Neither did the Wasps mourn their dead. Somehow the Wasps were surrounded by the atmosphere of ever-present death. Somehow they suggested men who were merely waiting for death. When a pilot of the Wasps died—or disappeared, they drew a red line through his name. That was the only formality.

They were a grim bunch, the Wasps, so grim that men from other outfits who visited the field at infrequent intervals went away, silent and wondering; sometimes with a little shudder chasing up and down the spine—always with a weight seeming to lift from the chest.

Peter Clancy knew all about the Wasps before he made his request for an assignment to the outfit. He expected the quick upward glance of the Adjutant who sat in the office of the Chief of Air Service, A.E.F. He was prepared for the question which seemed to jerk from the lips of that Adjutant.

“The 71st?” the Adjutant had said quickly. “That’s the Wasps, you know—” He said it as if that would explain everything.

“Yes, sir,” Peter Clancy answered quietly.

“You want an assignment to that unit?” queried the Adjutant, as if unable to understand why a person of apparent sanity should make such a request.

“Yes, sir,” answered Clancy in the same tone.

“The Wasps have a reputation, you know,” informed the Adjutant. “They—er—aren’t a very nice outfit, as outfits go. They’re rather a rough bunch—that is—they’re a gang of hellions in the air. On the ground they seem to be the quietest squadron on the Front. They—er—have a reputation of not—er—living long—you understand, I hope? They have the largest casualty list among all the squadrons.”

“Yes, sir,” Peter Clancy’s answer did not change.

The Adjutant had seemed a trifle exasperated. “They seem to be of one type,” he continued. “Now I might say that you don’t seem to be the type for the

Wasps at all. They're a queer bunch—deucedly queer—hard to understand—impossible to discipline. May one inquire why you particularly desire to be sent to the Wasps?"

Clancy smiled. "Well, I figure they're my type, sir, even if you don't think so. Anyhow, I have a friend—that is, I know a fellow who belongs to them pretty well. I want to be around where he is. Make it seem a lot more natural."

"You know someone," mused the Adjutant. He seemed suddenly interested. The Adjutant had long wanted to know someone among the Wasps—merely for the swank of the thing—to say: "Oh, yes, I know So-and-so of the Wasps—splendid chap—or the very devil—" It seemed that no one really knew anyone belonging to the Wasps. He glanced up at Peter Clancy with a new interest. "May one ask the name of your friend?"

"Sure," smiled Clancy. "His name is Jimmie Spencer."

**T**HERE was more than interest in the eyes of the Adjutant. There was flaming admiration, a great respect. He forgot for a moment the rather patronizing manner of a Lieutenant-Colonel to a First Lieutenant.

"The Jimmie Spencer?" he asked. There was something of awe in his voice.

"Well, I know only one Jimmie Spencer with the Wasps," admitted Clancy. "Do they have more than one?"

The Adjutant shook his head. "Hardly," he almost snapped. "There could hardly be more than one Jimmie Spencer—at least in the same war. The Jimmie Spencer of the Wasps—my God, man!—don't you know the reputation of your friend? Don't you know what he has done? Don't you know that he has been decorated four times? Something like fifteen victories already—and hardly a day passing that he doesn't add another to the list?" He paused, as if for breath.

"You see, I just got in," apologized Clancy. "I haven't had much of a chance to hear anything yet. I know some of the things Jimmie Spencer has done. That's why I'm so anxious to get where he is. I heard he was with the 71st. That's why I'm asking to be sent to that outfit."

The Adjutant studied Peter Clancy's blue eyes. They were almost laughing blue eyes, filled with a lurking humor that might bubble out at any moment—yet that could be grim—very grim. The lines about the mouth suggested an ever-present grin of good humor. The waving mop of reddish-brown hair seemed to have known no other comb than Peter Clancy's fingers. But he wore a uniform—wore it as if he had been born to a uniform. The tunic was tailored snugly about his powerful shoulders. The cuffs were of the right length—the collar was perfect. The beautifully shaped trousers disappeared into polished cordovan boots. The eagles on Clancy's left breast were gleaming. There was no doubt as to the origin of the blood which flowed through the veins of Peter Clancy. It was Irish. Fighting Irish.

**T**HE Adjutant had nothing but approval for Peter Clancy. So many of these men who came to him had no ideas on the subject of uniforms—they were almost slovenly—it actually caused a shudder to pass through the sensitive soul of the Adjutant. He knew that this Peter Clancy was a soldier—yet there was something about him. Something which whispered that he was not the type. That he didn't belong—not with the Wasps. The Adjutant had interviewed other men who had wanted assignments to the Wasps. They were very much like this Peter Clancy—but yet there was a difference. He shrugged his shoulders. After all, he was not dealing in psychology, he was running an Air Service.

"I don't think you'll like the Wasps," he said, as if offering his last futile objection. He knew that Peter Clancy would go to the Wasps—it was written on Clancy's face. "I don't think you're—well, you're not the type—" He stopped lamely.

"I'll take a chance," grinned Clancy. "After all a fellow can't have everything, can he? If I can get close enough to Jimmie Spencer I'll take my chances with the rest of the outfit. Somehow I think you're wrong, sir. I think I'm going to like the Wasps—and very much."

"Oh, well," grunted the Adjutant in petulant exasperation. "If you won't take my advice you'll have to bear with your bargain. I'll give you the assignment you



want. But one thing. Once you go there you'll stay. I'm not shuffling the Air Service records merely to follow the whims of crazy pilots. If you pick the Wasps you'll stick. Understand that?"

"Yes, sir," answered Peter Clancy humbly. "I'll be giving you no trouble at all in the future, sir." He took the flimsy from the Adjutant's hand. The flimsy—an order the average man would have taken as a death sentence. "Thank you, sir," he said as if the Adjutant had conferred a great favor. He stood very erect, snapped his hand to the visor of his cap, did a perfect right-about-face and marched from the room.

The Adjutant stared after him long even when the door had closed behind Peter Clancy. "Fancy a man like that going to the Wasps—" he muttered to himself. "Fancy a soldier—for that man is a soldier—choosing an outfit like that!" He shook his head. It seemed hard for him to forget the broad back of Peter Clancy.

Outside the door Peter Clancy paused to read his order. He saw the type but dimly. A face insisted upon getting between the flimsy and his eyes. A smiling, reckless, glowing-eyed face. An almost-young face. The face of Jimmie Spencer. Peter Clancy's eyes held a reminiscent look. There was a curious smile about his mouth. He was wondering what Lieutenant James Spencer would say when he first saw Peter Clancy.

## II

IT was almost twenty-four hours following his interview with the Adjutant when Peter Clancy first approached the field of the 71st Pursuit Squadron. Somehow the Adjutant had neglected to certify any method of travel upon Peter Clancy's orders. Of course, important officials who are busy winning the war cannot remember small details concerning how a mere First Lieutenant is to reach the outfit he has been ordered to reach. But the matter resolved itself into quite an awkward problem for Peter Clancy.

He had not been in France long enough to understand the matter of personal transportation. He had no idea that individuals moved about from place to place by the simple expedient of hopping aboard the

tail gate of some truck which was moving in the general direction the individual desired to travel. Transportation was at the best a quite informal affair. The major portion of his time overseas had been spent at a so-called "training field," where it was fatuously held men were fitted to fly in the face of enemy experience and superiority of equipment.

So far as Peter Clancy could observe, the major portion of the instruction seemed given over to the shaking of heads and a great indignation concerning methods of instructors at Kelly Field. According to the various speaking instructors who held down berths at this training field, the men back at Kelly were nothing more than a gang of imbeciles doing their best to lose the war for the Allies.

When he was certified for pursuit duty Peter Clancy could not see that he had learned anything of advantage from these new instructors. His brain was filled with a maze of directions and counter-directions. Of one thing he was certain: That French pilots were a very jealous bunch and none of them had a very high regard for the abilities of brothers-in-arms.

His orders stated that he would join the 71st Pursuit Squadron at Sissonne. He had not been quite sure in his mind where Sissonne might be. It took him an hour poring over his field map to run upon the vaguest clue pointing to the place.

After another hour of elimination he decided that it must be somewhere between Loan and Reims. In that event Sissonne would be largely famous for liquid fire, deadly trench warfare, terrific artillery bombardment and grueling aerial combat. He might have deduced the latter—the Wasps were there.

Neither could questions garner a great deal of information. A dozen times he had drawn a blank stare, and an answer: "Sissonne? Er—certainly—Sissonne! Let me see now—oh, somewhere up around—Reims—no trouble at all. No, I really couldn't tell you where the 71st Pursuit Squadron, A.E.F., might be billeted—oh—why didn't you say so? The Wasps? Certainly, everyone knows the Wasps. They're up there. Where? My word, Old Chap, I've just told you—up there—" And a vague arm waved in the general direction of the North Pole, or, more local-

ized, the entire enemy front from Lemberg to Calais.

**B**UT explicit directions. None at all. Evidently Sissonne was not an important factor in the scheme of things—at least not geographically. But then, Peter Clancy was not one to be balked by a mystery. He had decided that the best way to reach his billet was to "hitch hike." Hence, he stationed himself by a roadside on which the traffic was all going north.

After three hours he decided he would not wait for a polite invitation to ride. In that three hours all of the motor trucks in the world had passed him—passed him. So he threw his kit upon the sagging tail-gate of an Air Service camion and composed himself to withstand the punishment of riding over the mass of ruts which passed for roads in wartime France.

He had a wonderful opportunity to study war on the move during the hours he rode the tail-gate of that truck. Imperious batteries demanding the right of way; forcing into the ditches mere truck trains laden deep with food which hungry men needed. Staff cars, snorting impatiently, even a little superciliously, demanding and getting instant attention. Swarms of plodding doughboys, woolen tunics black with perspiration. Gray fatigue settled upon their faces. Carrying rifles which seemed to weigh a ton and packs which weighed ten tons. Dragging huge hobnailed boots through the inch-thick dust and stumbling along amid the ruts, running like sheep for the sides of the road each time a siren shrieked.

A sea of turtles surging along the highway—turtles, because the rounded tops of trench helmets gave them that appearance as one looked at them from a distance.

Peter Clancy's eyes were filled with a musing light. He was wondering what terrific powers of attraction this magnet must have to draw these men from thousands of miles, concentrate them here in a few square miles and then to drag them remorsefully into the churning red sea of destruction, which must be immediately over the next horizon.

He was thinking of Jimmie Spencer—the Jimmie Spencer he knew. What attraction had the magnet exerted upon him? Upon Jimmie Spencer, the exquisite, the

accomplished, the care-free? What had ripped him out of the lap of luxury, as Jimmie Spencer knew luxury, to drop him down amid the stench and grime of swirling days and nights?

In a sense Peter Clancy was a psychologist. In fact, that was the greatest compliment Jimmie Spencer had ever paid him—calling him a psychologist. He knew men, this Peter Clancy—there were a thousand individuals back in the States who would swear—some of them sorrowfully and feelingly—that Peter Clancy could tell what passed within one's heart—that every thought was known to Peter Clancy.

The truck carrying him north lunged off toward the northeast. He decided to stay with it. Progress was progress. They passed through a succession of ruined villages—tumbled-down stones blasted with the blackness of heat and bursting powder.

Shell-torn streets. White-faced people, civilians, passing about like furtive animals. Dazed men and women who had been refugees a few weeks before and who were returning to homes—holes in the ground or a piled-up rubble of cracked stones. Civilians who had no place on earth—who had been hurled into a kind of half-world as the slimy tongue of war had reached out and licked up all that had meant life to them.

**A**T dusk the truck had turned more directly east and reluctantly, as one slides from the back of an exhausted horse which had borne one nobly and far, Peter Clancy dropped into the dust of the road. The truck rumbled on. He wondered if the truck driver had even been aware of his presence on the tailgate.

He found himself in the middle of a ruined village. It seemed strangely silent—empty. He threw himself upon the ground within the ruined walls of one of the houses and flexed his cramped legs. When it grew dark he pillowed his head upon his kit and slept. With the dawn he was at the crossroads. He was well educated in means of travel this time. He swung aboard the first truck passing him, headed north. It made no difference that it was an ammunition truck loaded with H.E. five-point nines for batteries on the line. It was going north—so was Peter Clancy.

After an hour there was a dull rumbling sound—it was constant, like the far-off rumble of a desert thunderstorm. The very earth seemed to rock gently in cadence with the sound. As they penetrated farther north the sound increased. More violent reverberations broke through the constant rumble—heavy guns. He stared about him curiously. It was the first time Peter Clancy had ever heard the rumble of guns. There was a light of interest in his eyes.

He nearly missed Sissonne altogether. The truck rumbled by a crossroads. There was a rude sign there. A splintered board daubed with black paint. It said:

Sissonne—3 miles.

He slid down from his tail-gate, dragging his kit after him. It was hot—and very still, excepting for the constant thunder sound of the guns. A rude roadway led off in the direction indicated by the sign. Evidently Sissonne was not a place on the main route of travel.

Philosophically he shouldered his kit. From the trousers pocket he produced a disreputable briar pipe and stuffed it as he sauntered along the wheel-marked path. His pace was not hurried. Somehow Peter Clancy always produced his pipe when he had walking to do. Back in New York—it seemed a long time ago—his favorite recreation was filling his pipe and sauntering through Central Park.

At those times certain parties remarked to themselves that Peter Clancy was "cooking up things." Somehow it helped him to think. Thinking on Peter Clancy's part was usually fatal to persons upon whom he pondered. At the moment he was thinking of Jimmie Spencer. Jimmie Spencer of the Wasps. Peter Clancy, going up to the Wasps. The prospect seemed pleasant. The curious smile was about the corners of his mouth and his blue eyes held that far-away light—like a man looking back upon memories.

HE had no idea of the distance he had covered afoot when a startling sound rudely scattered his thought train. The wheel tracks were still beneath his feet. A glance ahead discovered a row of squat buildings—they were at a distance—perhaps a mile. The sound came from

above his head. It was a screaming, droning, deadly sound. His head lifted so quickly that it threatened to snap his neck. He knew that sound.

A plane!

Two of them.

He searched for a single instant before he located them. They were high. Between eight and ten thousand feet. The moan of the two motors came down to him in a steady flow of sound. He recognized one.

It was a Spad—marked with the red, white and blue of America. He drew a sharp breath and his eyes narrowed. There was a black fuselage with red wings darting about the gray Spad. Lined on the black fuselage in bold design was a white Maltese Cross. Even from that height it showed clearly and defiantly.

A glow crept into his eyes. His teeth were biting hard upon the scarred stem of his pipe. His head moved slowly as he followed the action above his head. His hands were clenched in trousers pockets. He had wondered—often, there at Kelly—what an enemy plane looked like. Oh, they had given him pictures of enemy aircraft to study—all types—but he wanted to see the real thing.

Something in his brain was whispering: "This is it! This is a Fokker! This is the real thing! This is a battle! The kind of thing you are going to have a part in—soon!" He seemed fascinated by the spectacle. The lithe, gray, wolf-like Spad. The fast, beautifully designed Fokker—the sun shining upon its red wings.

Motor drone more rapid. New sound. Dull, thudding, staccato. Dull because of the distance between earth and the fighting ships. He wondered. How could a fight be taking place within Allied lines? That must be the Wasps' field ahead—it must be Allied territory—but then he had heard that the enemy held the air, and that they were bold in inviting combat even behind the Allied Front. This must be one of those times. He watched the enemy ship with a new interest. It was a bold pilot indeed who would disturb the Wasps in their own nest.

DARTING, slithering, lightning-like bits of motion. Wings weaving through the sky. Noses tilting toward the

vault of heaven and then plunging earthward, only to check, sweep about in sharp verticals and bore in, sharp nose for fuselage—twin guns hammering madly—the scream of vibrating struts rising over the power song of the motors.

The gray Spad feinting, hurtling, pressing. Time after time threatening to drop into fatal position behind the tail of the black and red Fokker, only to have the wily Teuton pilot shake him off when it seemed that the Spad must win the deadly advantage.

In his mind Peter Clancy was running over what he knew about flying in the light of this action above his head. He was wondering if the instructors back at Kelly, or those men who had treated him with such great condescension during his time upon the training field back of the lines, had ever seen a combat to the death in the skies.

He wondered what good all of his training was going to do him when he was face to face with the actual experience—like this affair of the red and black Fokker and the gray Spad.

The joke of it—coming to the Front, imagining he knew something about the game after months of preparation—to feel sweat running in streams down his spine—to know that he, in the place of the pilot of the gray Spad above his head, would have long since been nothing more than a flaming funeral pyre tumbling down in death and defeat. Grimly he told himself that this was not a very nice introduction to the business of war flying.

Grimly he told himself that he would learn in time—everyone had to learn—even this man who flew the gray Spad had had to learn. One thing was uppermost in his mind as second after second passed and the dog fight raged with ever-increasing violence. That thing was the knowledge that the pilot of the gray Spad knew more about flying, had more nerve, and less fear of death, than any man he had ever known. And during those seconds which seemed endless eternities his eyes never left the struggling ships.

At times his breath whistled sharply.

Once the Jerry pulled over in a tight loop as the Spad pressed close. It seemed certain to whip the red wings off the black fuselage—but they held and he roared

down upon the Spad's tail with a wild swoop, the deep voice of the Mercedes rising in a hoarse scream of triumph.

Two Spandaus, flame tipped and eager, ripped a long burst into the after fuselage of the Spad—and then the Spad—without preliminaries, duplicated the Fokker's maneuver—grinding up through space—over on its back to flash down out of danger—to turn the table on the Fokker—at the exact moment when it seemed that the battle was lost.

**R**OUND and round. Wings pointing up to heaven and down to earth—dizzy verticals. Hiss and Mercedes straining to close up the space separating the two ships—straining to give the deadly guns new opportunities to deal death. Motors which seemed certain to burst into shrapnel-like fragments under the terrific strain put upon them. Up inch by inch—back inch by inch—two grim bird machines screaming defiance—battling to the death, driven by men who had learned to master the space above the earth and to turn it into an arena wherein writhed agony and death and flame and steel.

Slipping this way and that. Wires moaning and sobbing with the torture of the effort. Coming closer to earth. Down now to the five thousand foot level. Both pilots depending upon blinding speed and unexpected maneuvering. Both pilots slipping rapidly out of danger to turn in breath-taking arcs—with the nose of each ship always seeming to be on the scent of destruction.

Always a keen nose pointing toward the vitals of the enemy ship. It was uncanny the way those noses, topped by the spinning arc of light, seemed drawn toward fuselage and cockpit.

A hundred times Peter Clancy's breathing stopped with a choking gasp during those seconds the battle raged above him. A hundred times his teeth clamped down upon the stem of his pipe.

The battle was directly above him. Once or twice he had a sight of the round helmeted head of each pilot. They were coming close to earth. The motor drone was more fierce. The throbbing of struts and wings was mingled with the roar of the two motors. He could see white lines of smoke each time the guns were tripped and



hear the rivet hammer stuttering of Spandau and Vickers.

There was a ragged bit of linen flying from the upper wing of the Spad. He knew that it was crackling and snapping in the rush of the slip stream. That was enough to drive the average pilot insane. But the pilot of the Spad seemed to ignore it. He was engaged in throwing his ship about to meet a new rush of a determined enemy.

And then it ended as rapidly as it had started. It seemed to Peter Clancy that in spite of the fact that it had occurred before his staring eyes, he had missed the death stroke entirely. One minute the red-and-black Fokker had been plunging in recklessly—and then it was a fluttering mass of flame, falling with gently rocking wings to earth—to earth—two hundred yards from where he watched.

HE saw the Fokker dart in. It had seemed that the Spad was wavering. Like a fighter who had taken a terrific battering to the body and who feels his knees buckling beneath his weight. The maneuvering of the Spad was not so rapid, so cleanly cut. It was still flying, still defending and attacking, but it was slower—much slower—and the red-and-black Fokker was pressing home the advantage. The Spandaus flamed crimson. The sky seemed filled with the battering of those two guns. The heavens seemed filled with the triumphant roar of a Mercedes motor.

Abruptly, the Spad shot upward. Crowding close, the Fokker threw itself upward to follow through, to riddle the Spad while it rolled over upon its back—while its pilot hung in his belt—and then it had happened.

There was a sudden note of power from the Hisso. The upward plunge into the loop was converted into a swift slip to the right—rudder fighting against aileron pressure—gray nose down—diving—as if toward a premeditated position—gathering speed—more speed.

Above, the Fokker was forced to fly through the loop. It came down—also gathering speed. Perhaps the Fokker's pilot realized that he had been trapped. He went into a fast slip the moment he passed the arc of the loop—but it was too late. The Spad was waiting. It seemed poised

—ready—intent—deadly. It moved with a great rush. Red flame leaped from gun muzzles.

They seemed about to meet head on—but the Fokker passed beneath the lower wing of the Spad—and the Spad followed it to earth, splintering the black fuselage with burst after burst.

Peter Clancy felt the impact of the Fokker's crash. He had heard other crashes—many of them, at Kelly—but none so hideous or so final as this cataclysmic burst of sound. Before his eyes he saw the leaping debris of the defeated Fokker burst into a curtain of flame at the instant it ploughed into the earth.

A demon-like gray shadow passed over his head—so close that it seemed he might have touched the spreader bar had he been so inclined. It zoomed sharply. It was the conquering Spad. It climbed steadily, and flew toward the huddle of buildings that lay at the end of the wheel track before Peter Clancy.

There was nothing to do but continue the walk toward those buildings. He hitched his kit more snugly on his back and found for the first time that his pipe was cold. He was trying not to look at that annihilated mass of wreckage that had been the red-and-black Fokker. He was trying to forget that a man was seated or sprawled in that seething inferno of flame—a man who had been living but an instant before. His hands trembled as he touched a match to the ashes within his pipe. His waist was wet where the sweat had trickled down along his spine to seep into the lining of his trousers where they were confined by his belt. His face was a trifle strained and white.

He was thinking: So that was the way of it! Whirling motion. Dizzy flight! Then a stunning, sudden blow—a deadly inescapable blow—like a blinding bolt of lightning—and then a flaming thing without shape plunging earthward to blast itself into jagged fragments of leaping flame. That was it—the end he had wondered about.

HE found gravel under his feet. A rude sort of pathway. He looked up. He was among the buildings. Without being told he knew that he had arrived at the nest of the Wasps. As if to

confirm the knowledge, he had a glimpse of half a dozen trim Spads standing upon the line at the edge of a great field. They were gray—like all other Spads—but under the cockpit was the black-and-yellow insect for which the squadron was named.

In the orderly room he presented his orders.

A lad wearing captain's bars looked up at him quizzically.

"Peter Clancy, eh?" he said half musingly. "And the adjutant puts the succinct remark on your orders that you asked for assignment to us." He laughed. It was a queer laugh—hard, reckless. "You must have a powerful interest in this outfit to ask to come here. You don't exactly look like a bird who has a lot to forget or a lot to live for—"

His voice trailed away in Peter Clancy's thoughts. He was thinking how ridiculous it was to send a child like this captain to war—he was too young for the part—do better in some military academy where he could play soldier with boys of his own age. He heard himself speaking. The captain's voice had stopped, so it must be time for him to say something.

"Well, I have kind of an interest in the Wasps," Clancy told him. "You see, I have a friend—that is, I know a fellow who is with you—Jimmie Spencer is his name. He knows me quite well. I had a reason for wanting to come up here—you see." The famous Clancy smile was working even if Clancy himself was not aware of it.

The lad with the captain's bars seemed to grow more human.

"Oh hell, that's different," he said warmly. "Why in the hell didn't you say you knew Jimmie? Say, throw that kit into a corner and have a drink. My name is Murray—Len Murray—I'm running this outfit since MacDowell was bumped last week—hell of a job—don't like it." He reached across the table for the bottle. He seemed not to notice Peter Clancy's staring eyes.

Memory doing tricks again with Peter Clancy. Len Murray—God—this boy he had mentally recommended to a tin soldier's job? It seemed impossible. He swallowed hard—Len Murray—why Len Murray was a Name even when he had been at Kelly, before he had started over here. Len Murray—the Kid who had downed eight E.A.

during his first ten days on the Front. The papers back home had raved about Len Murray—and here he sat—across the desk, pouring liquor from a bottle into a couple of grimy glasses.

He took the glass Murray offered and tossed it off at a gulp. Things were different over here. Things had a different value. Boys doing men's jobs—topsy-turvy world—nothing like the well ordered existence he had known. He continued to stare at Murray.

"You'll have a chance to meet up with Jimmie in a few minutes," Murray remarked, glancing at his watch. "He'll be back around noon."

"You mean he's not on the field?" asked Clancy.

"On an offensive patrol—his own offensive patrol," grinned Murray. "It looks like good hunting, considering the advance notices. Maybe you saw him as you came up."

Clancy shook his head. "I walked from that cross-roads," he told Murray. "I didn't see Spencer, however. I was busy watching a fight—between a red-and-black Fokker and a Spad."

Murray grinned appreciatively. "You saw him then," he assured Clancy. "You couldn't miss him."

"Why? What do you mean?" asked Clancy.

"That was him flying the Spad," said Murray coolly. "Couldn't you tell it was Spencer by his flying?"

For the second time in two minutes Peter Clancy swallowed hard. His memory was doing tricks again. Tricks with a red-and-black Fokker and a gray Spad, and the saucy face of Jimmie Spencer—the Jimmie Spencer he knew.

### III

IT was Len Murray who conducted him out on the field and over to the line where the half-dozen Spads stood drawn up under the ministering hands of a flock of greaseballs. They had chinned for ten minutes in the office, the young eyes of Len Murray seeming to probe deep into Clancy's soul. Neither of them could remember anything which had been said during those ten minutes. It had seemed to be a sparring match, trained eyes against

trained eyes, each man making his mental estimate of the other.

When it was finished—when Murray had suggested going out onto the field to watch Jimmie Spencer come in, Clancy had experienced a queer feeling of inferiority. Such a feeling was foreign to Clancy.

Always, in past days, he had known himself to be in a position of dominance. He had met his reverses and his disappointments, but even at those moments he had been aware of that very dominance and the knowledge that sooner or later that mastery would win the game for him.

Now it was different. There was nothing in this world of hard-faced pilots and roaring motors which remotely resembled anything of past days. For the first time in his life he was playing a game in which other men were more experienced—which he was a novice.

HE watched the gray Spad circle easily over the field, point its nose earthward and glide for a landing. Jimmie Spencer was in that Spad. Jimmie Spencer, a hero over here, a wizard at the stick. He wondered if he had not made a grave error in following Jimmie to the Wasps. He was wondering what Jimmie would say when he first looked upon Peter Clancy.

For the first time in several minutes the amused grin was about his mouth—a grimness mixed with the amusement. Then the smile faded. The Spad was coming to a stop. The feeling of inferiority was thronging Peter Clancy's soul.

It grew as he watched Spencer climb from the cockpit of his Spad, lift the battered helmet and goggles from his head and toss them negligently onto the seat. It grew as he saw Jimmie stick a cigarette into his mouth and light it with a single graceful flip of his hand. It grew as he watched the greaseballs swarming about Spencer—awe on their faces, overwhelming respect in every bodily posture. He understood in that single instant that to these ground men, Jimmie Spencer was an idol—a hero—the bravest of the brave.

How would they take it when they saw the meeting between Peter Clancy and the idol?

He saw that the sides of Spencer's Spad were scarred and patched, and that fresh bullet holes were studded in the linen

of wings and fuselage. There were places—the ailerons for instance, where the fabric and wood was smashed and splintered from enemy machine-gun fire—the enemy he had watched Spencer conquer but half an hour before. There was a thickness in his throat. His nerves felt raw. He was wondering what he would say to this Jimmie Spencer—and then, Spencer solved the problem for him.

He suddenly turned his eyes in Clancy's direction. He saw Len Murray watching him—he recognized Peter Clancy. Clancy's respect and admiration for Jimmie Spencer increased with a great leap in that moment of recognition.

Spencer walked straight toward them. There was no change in him—a smile of seemingly genuine pleasure lighted his face and eyes. His step was that cocky, confident motion Clancy knew so well.

He thrust out his hand.

"Clancy!" he said delightedly, and his eyes mirrored his delight. "You know, somehow I've been expecting you. I had the idea you couldn't stay out very long—and I had the idea that you'd be turning up here at the Wasps—and here you are."

Clancy swallowed hard, but his eyes did not waver. There was no lack of warmth in the pressure of his hand as he grasped Jimmie Spencer's.

"I always turn up—like a bad penny, I guess," he said with his famous smile. "Standing down here, I've been thinking that maybe I shouldn't have come—maybe I should have left you alone—until—"

"Horse collar, soldier," scoffed Spencer. "Why, man, it's positively sporting, your being here, and all that sort of thing. I don't know of a single soul in the world I'd rather have flying with me on patrol—we'll have a circus together—that is, providing, of course—"

"Oh, I'm staying," assured Clancy. "At least, until this fuss is over. After that—"

"New York, and—several unpleasant things, eh, Clancy? I can hear them in your voice. Still the little old slave to duty? The personal Nemesis of the lawless, eh?"

He turned to Len Murray suddenly, as if he had been guilty of a breach of good manners. There was a puzzled light in Murray's eyes. He was looking from Clancy's face to Spencer's. He sensed

that a duel was being fought between the two men, a duel of wills, a duel of might, masked by the polite conversation.

"Pardon me, Len," Spencer was saying. "I guess you've met Clancy here in an official way. I mean as a flying officer. Well, therein does not rest his fame. Well, hardly! In fact, I take a great deal of genuine pleasure in presenting to you none other than Detective-Lieutenant Peter Clancy, of the Detective Bureau of the City of New York. That should mean worlds to you, but you, being an upstanding young fellow and all that sort of thing, it doesn't mean anything. You have to have Mr. Peter Clancy close on your tail before you know what that means—and if I may flatter myself, I've probably had him closer on my tail and oftener than any living man—and I've enjoyed it—it's been a great little game—hasn't it, Peter?"

Clancy nodded and grinned.

"It has that," he admitted. "And I must say that I've always finished second best—"

"None of that now," admonished Spencer. "Not after a send-off like I've just given you. I admit that at times you have arrived a little too late, and that at times you have been guilty of incorrect reasoning—but not often—not often. Oh, you'll have plenty of fun here, my lad," he laughed.

"It's too good, really, when I think of it. Why, do you know who my tent mate is? You'll positively have hysterics when I tell you—you can't guess—not in a million years. Well, it's no other than Mr. Whitey Thomas—don't stare—I mean the best hand on bank safes in the world—and you'll bunk with us. No excuses, old man—not a word. I insist—you're coming in with us and you're going to like it. Why, man, this is the biggest thrill of the whole war for me. To think of Peter Clancy, the champion of the New York Police Department, billeted with Whitey Thomas—and Jimmie Spencer."

THE puzzled light was still in Len Murray's eyes. Jimmie Spencer controlled a paroxysm of mirth long enough to enlighten Murray. "He's the best scout in the world," he told Murray, slapping Clancy on the back. "He's that shy and modest that he hasn't a word to say. He won't tell you that he's after a bird who

ran him ragged for three years in New York, laughed at him, played with him, made fun of him—in a sporting way, of course. He wouldn't tell you that he's after The Phantom, the most expert and baffling gentleman burglar who ever lived—outside the pages of Hornung. He won't tell you that he hung on to The Phantom's trail—like the bulldog he is—and finally got something on him that means the end of The Phantom. That must be the truth or he wouldn't be here, eh, Clancy?"

He waited for Clancy's reluctant nod.

"He wouldn't be guilty of such an unsportsmanlike thing as telling you that The Phantom is none other than Jimmie Spencer—isn't that a riot? Or that he came up to the Wasps to take his chances with being bumped off early and often, merely to keep close to the man he wants—and the man he has determined to take back to New York with him the minute this lovely little war is a thing of the past."

Murray was staring at Spencer. His face had not changed—the light in his eyes was a trifle hard.

"I don't know whether you're kidding me or not, Jimmie," he said, the light in his eyes reflected in his tone. "You may be handing me a line. But, if it's the truth, if Clancy here is a New York dick, and he wants you, he'll have to get this through his head right now. First, this is no part of the New York Police Department. Second, this is a fighting air unit, and the men who belong to this outfit are here for that purpose and no other. Third, you are both officers, duly commissioned, and assigned to this squadron.

"You may be a dick, Clancy, and all that, but here you're just another pilot, and the junior ranker in the outfit—sabe—there won't be any false plays made—and no funny work. Further than that, I know Jimmie and I don't know you. I know Jimmie is a square shooter and one hell of a good pursuit pilot. We need men like that—I don't give a damn what they've been before they came here. It's what they are now that counts in this man's fuss. While you're here you lay off Jimmie."

THERE was a softer note in Spencer's voice.

"Thanks, Len," he said gratefully. "I'd expect you to declare yourself like that,



but you needn't tell Pete that. He understands the rules of the game as well as we all do. If he's here it's because he wanted to come and he'll play the game the way we all play it and ask for no favors. I guess I know him better than anyone in the world—having studied him from close range. I know his capabilities. He plays the game—and we know what that means. He's a fighter from the word go, and he'll make a hell of a good man for the Wasps."

He was silent for an instant, then the reckless smile was back on his face. "I'm wondering how you followed me here," he told Clancy. "I have a good idea—it was the fingerprints—eh?"

Clancy nodded.

Jimmie Spencer laughed delightedly.

"Can you tie that?" he asked Murray. "Listen. We played our little game for two years, Peter and I. But it wasn't fair to him—you see, I never gave him anything to grab hold of. Well, one day I decided to make it a little more interesting, so I took a perfect set of impressions of my own fingerprints and wrote him a little note, enclosing them." He stopped with a little chuckle coming into his voice. "You understand, that was before we went into the war. I was thinking of what Pete here would say when he got a set of my prints. They wouldn't do him any good—because I never left prints—that he could compare with the set I presented him.

"Then the war happened and I decided I could have a thrill out of flying. I went to Kelly. I was logged for the Government. Fingerprinted and all that. The records went to Washington—" He paused again, admiration taking the place of amusement. "I'll bet you went down there and mulled through those millions of fingerprints until you found mine—didn't you, Clancy?"

Peter Clancy nodded. "I figured you couldn't keep out of this scrap," he said. "It was a cinch. Not as tough as it sounds—"

"But the tie-up?" asked Spencer. "The prints don't do you any good—" Clancy shook his head slowly.

"No, they don't do me a bit of good. But, you see, that Lawson woman recognized you when she ran in on you frisking her jewel safe. I rather figured it was one

of your parties and I showed her your picture. Well, she had a good look at you—and she identified you immediately from the picture."

"She would," mused Spencer. "Sure she would. Why, I talked to her for five minutes—while I was figuring on how to get by her and out the door."

"Another guy would have knocked her stiff," commented Clancy.

Spencer smiled.

"Fancy striking a woman," he reproved. "You should know me better than that, Clancy."

"I do," assured Clancy. "I knew your bringing up would trip you sooner or later—sometimes a bird has to be tough and ruthless. You're not like that. She must have known that you could have slugged her when she entered the room—from behind the curtains—and she'd never have sighted you at all."

"Yes, she must have known that," mused Jimmie. "But—"

"**B**UT you had a record of never touching a human being," finished Clancy for him, "and you weren't going to spoil that record—"

"That's about it," smiled Spencer. "One could hardly start on a woman. You know I have always said that lawbreaking is a matter of brains and never of brawn. I have always been opposed to violence. It always was the mental contest that I enjoyed—the mental contest with Peter Clancy."

"Sometimes I wish you had taken a crack at that dame," sighed Clancy. "She's an awful dose to take. The morning after your visit she was after the scalps of the whole department—called us names—insisted that we find the 'desperado' who had violated her home. Kept it up for a month. Made a damn' nuisance of herself. All the time I was thinking what might have happened to her if it had been another bird in your place."

"Oh, let's chuck it," grinned Spencer. "In a minute we'll be growing maudlin over past memories—weeping on each other's shoulders and all that sort of thing. But I'm glad to have you here, Clancy. It's just like old times, and you'll have a whale of a lot of fun out of this—as long as it lasts. Come on over to the quarters and

meet Whitey Thomas—you'll get a kick out of him. Wait until he hears your name."

They turned away, chuckling.

Len Murray watched them go. There was a look of amazement in his eyes. Then he shrugged his shoulders and walked slowly across the field toward the operation's office. He posted Peter Clancy's name on the duty board at the bottom of the roster, filed his name in the record file, poured himself a drink and swallowed it at a gulp.

"Hell of a mess," he muttered to himself. "Jimmie seems to get a kick out of it and I'll bet my shirt that this Clancy guy will make good—New York dick or not—he's got it in his face." He shrugged his shoulders again as if dismissing all memory of the conversation on the field. He wrote a report for forwarding to Divisional Headquarters:

Headquarters  
71st Pursuit Squadron  
Sissonne.

From: Commanding Officer, 21st Pursuit Squadron.

To: Commanding Officer — Division.

Subject: Report of victory.

1. The Commanding Officer, 71st Pursuit Squadron reports that at 10:21 a. m. this date, First Lieutenant James Spencer of this Squadron, shot down a D7 Fokker behind our lines and within sight of this field.

2. The number of the enemy ship was FL15623. From papers not burned in the wreck it was discovered that the pilot, who was killed, was one Ober-Lieutenant Franz von Mueller. He was undoubtedly a member of enemy Jagdstaffel Number 18, which is operating in front of this position.

3. The enemy aircraft was completely destroyed by fire.

4. According to the records of this Squadron, this is the eighteenth official victory scored by First Lieutenant James Spencer.

Len Murray,  
Captain, M. P., A. S.,  
Acting Commanding Officer.

It made no difference who Jimmie Spencer might be, he would get credit for his deeds. The Wasps were like that.

#### IV

**A** WEEK after attaching himself to the Wasps, Peter Clancy almost forgot that the New York Police Department existed. He almost forgot the fact that he was doing a double duty in flying with the Wasps. One duty for the United States of America and the other for the

People of the Sovereign State of New York. That is, he did not forget it entirely.

At times a dim remembrance of past things filtered into his mind—a remembrance like a vague memory—an almost unpleasant memory. Sometimes it came to him at night, when there was an utter stillness over the field and inside the tent he shared with two other men as quarters. On those occasions he would hoist himself on one arm until his elbow supported his head and stare through the black gloom of the tent toward the white faces of Jimmie Spencer and Whitey Thomas.

His own eyes would be filled with a wondering, half-confused light. He had a feeling of having entered a room by mistake. Silly to think of men like Jimmie Spencer and Whitey Thomas as a police officer should think of them.

Then, sometimes the memory would come to him high above the earth. Soaring along on lithe wings behind the power note of a black Hisso, sticking in a tight formation along with other members of the Wasps, flying far out over enemy territory, looking down upon the wandering, indistinct trench lines filled with crouching figures, huddling together to escape the hell that hissed and crackled and flared about them.

Dull drone of motors. Rising and falling of the ships upon the gentle air currents. Wheels hanging from beneath the wings—like the talons of a striking eagle. Black gun barrels nestling close to the engine cowling. Helmeted heads turning slowly, studying the sky-scape about them, wary eyes searching for a sight of flying foemen. Len Murray up there in front, flying at Point. And behind him Jimmie Spencer and Whitey Thomas acting as the rear guard—the promise that the Wasps would never have to fear sudden attack from behind. The safety factor against surprise. No enemy squadron could hope to wipe out the Wasps from the rear without first riding over Jimmie and Whitey.

Several enemy squadrons had made the attempt. It had been pitiful. The Wasps had turned in a sudden fury to find Spencer and Thomas flying like raging demons, Spads hurtling into the center of the enemy formation, breaking its compact shape, guns vomiting certain death, motors

screaming a mad pæan of conflict. The two of them, carrying the fight to the enemy, checking them with the sheer fury of their counter attack—and then, of course, the Wasps as a unit had taken a hand—had waded into the affair. The attackers, overcome by the surprise of such violent resistance, feeling the sting of the maddened Wasps, had wilted and dispersed—some of them. After that it came to be common knowledge with enemy pilots that it was not safe to attempt to overcome the Wasps from the rear.

**I**T was a strange thing to Peter Clancy, flying there with the Wasps, knowing that his safety, his very life, depended upon the courage and ability of two men he had once hunted with all of the enthusiasm of a bloodhound upon a hot scent. It made him wonder as to the makeup of a world which permitted such men as Whitey and Jimmie to be outcasts upon one day and heroes on the next.

It was a crazy existence. That fact was driven home to him a thousand times during each day he had served with the Wasps. Crazy as hell. Nineteen-year-old kids flying up into the blue, to return killers and being cheered for it—or flying up to die as heroes. Under the wings of his ship he had seen a field dotted with dead men—men in blue and khaki and field gray—killed by other men—and back home ministers of the gospel were praying to the Prince of Peace to permit men to kill many more other men. Crazy. Why, back in New York they had tried for three years to apprehend a twenty-year-old boy who had stabbed a fellow to death in a street corner fight.

Three years with the whole machinery of the State tracking him down—to find him at last, and to send him to a little room furnished with a squat-looking chair. Over here they were giving medals for almost the same thing—sticking men with knives on the end of rifle barrels.

It made a fellow's head dizzy trying to get the straight of it. After a while Peter Clancy gave it up. He gave up the thought of everything. Life to him was merely a routine of getting up in the morning, seeing that his ship had been serviced, the ammo chests filled, reading the duty board

2—Wings—Fall

—and flying with the gang. It was a grim contest to see who would return at night—to fly another day.

There had been a minute during his first days with the Wasps when a trembling hand had reached out to write a shaky "finis" after the career of Peter Clancy. A day when a red line through his name on the roster of the Wasps would have remained the only indication that he had ever lived.

Even a week after that incident he caught his breath sharply when he thought of it. It had been so sudden, so overwhelming—had threatened to be so final. It had taught him that this business of flying was indeed a contest, as Jimmie Spencer called it—and that life was the stake. There had been a minute when he knew that death had placed a hand on his shoulder—when a man was killing him, and Peter Clancy had been powerless to defend himself. When he had been filled with an overwhelming anguish engendered by the knowledge of his own bitter helplessness.

It had occurred at six thousand feet with Sissonne five miles behind his rudder. In the annals of war it would have hardly warranted notice—merely a name on the casualty list—Peter Clancy's name—and some harassed officer back at G.H.Q. cursing because another Spad had been lost.

**L**EN MURRAY had looked at him quizzically that morning. There was something of mockery in Murray's eyes, something of a fine irony in his voice when he spoke.

"Well, Pete," he had said, "I see you're up on the roster—a solo—feel like it? Figure you can do a little aerial detecting in the manner of the New York's Finest? You won't have a chance to gather any clues—damn' little to work on, not even a set of fingerprints." He paused, studying Clancy's eyes.

Somehow Clancy had a feeling that Len Murray had something akin to a dislike for him. Murray never gave him anything definite to fasten the belief to, but that morning of the first meeting with Jimmie, when he had told him that Jimmie Spencer was a flying officer—and they needed men like him—well, it was the same as saying that the Wasps could get by without Peter

Clancy. Not that Murray was ever unpleasant. He wasn't.

It was merely a feeling deep down in Clancy's heart that Murray believed that he had joined the Wasps for the primary purpose of tracking down Jimmie Spencer—not because he particularly wanted to fight for the United States of America.

That hurt. Peter Clancy had a sensitive soul. More than that, he loved the Wasps, and he loved the game they played with death. He wanted to belong to the Wasps. The mere fact that he would have to take Jimmie Spencer back to the States—some day—if they both lived—shouldn't make him less welcome. It was his duty. Duty was a sacred thing to Peter Clancy. But he wasn't one of the Wasps. He could see it in Len Murray's eyes at times. He was nothing more than a New York dick, taking unfair advantage of a man who had made his name respected, who had helped build up the traditions of the squadron.

The men of the Wasps believed just what Len Murray had stated on that first day. "It doesn't make a damn bit of difference what a man has been before he came here—it's what he is now." Well, didn't that go for him, too? Wasn't he with the Wasps now? But he knew the difference. These other men had definitely left the past. They had nothing but the present. Certainly none of them had a future. They didn't think of the future—not with a casualty list like the Wasps. They lived for the minute only. And Peter Clancy had designs—a future—a time when he would carry out his designs. When he would lay aside the khaki for the job of Detective Lieutenant for the City of New York.

Why should he feel like an intruder? He was willing to do his share, forget everything, until the war was won. He had asked that question of himself a thousand times during the past days. It gave him no answer nor no help. He continued to feel like an outsider. One who was merely tolerated.

HE glanced at his name on the duty board. Three days before it had been at the bottom of the list. Then it had started the move upward. The first day it had jumped three spaces toward the top. That had been because Mahaffey

and Graves and Carlin had been knocked down on an offensive patrol he had not taken part in.

The second day it had taken two more leaps upward. But Parker and Cleve Nelson—cursing because Len Murray had grounded them. Parker had the flesh of his shoulder ripped away, and Nelson had a crease across his belly an inch deep that made it an agony for him to sit erect. A sawbones had attempted to send them to the rear. They laughed at him and beat it back to the field from the dressing station. They would have gone on patrol that afternoon if Murray had not grounded them for a week.

That meant double shift for the men able to fly. It meant that Peter Clancy's name went to the top of the duty roster. It meant that he was to do a solo—an offensive solo. Alone, out there over that hell on earth, looking for trouble, searching for enemies who were all too eager to meet him.

There it was. His name. Peter Clancy. Staring at him from the board. It was like a summons to die.

He forced himself to glance at Len Murray's eyes. He knew that Murray was probing him, studying him. What for? Weakness? Being afraid? Waiting for him to wretch. A hot fury of shame churned about in his chest. He forced a smile. He forced his voice to take on the same nonchalance as Murray's.

"You'll have a bird's-eye view of one of New York's Finest doing a solo," he promised Murray. "Never felt better in my life and I'm rarin' to go. I'd feel insulted if I had a clue. When do I take off?"

"Noon," answered Murray shortly. "It's a nasty job. Somehow they have it in for us—those guys across the lines. It's pick-in's for them if they can get one of us out alone. A sight of a Spad sporting a Wasp makes their mouths water. It's a nasty job, but it has to be done."

Clancy was looking out across the field. A group of mechanics were working about his ship. They had seen the duty roster. They were checking over the crate.

"Of course," remarked Murray in a softer voice, "I can change the assignment for today. After all, it's tough as hell to ask a guy who has only been up three days

to run his own party. You're not supposed to learn everything in the length of time you've been here. I could get one of the boys to fly your trick, and set you back a week. I hardly ever let one of the fellows do his first solo until he's had at least twenty hours over this sector. I can hand the job to Jimmie Spencer or to Whitey—they'd go for it like hungry hyenas. To them a solo is just another chance for excitement."

"You go to hell," requested Clancy quietly. "I'll fly my own tricks."

"Stout fella!" commended Murray. "Had an idea you'd give me that kind of an answer. But anyhow, I can't get over the idea of sending greenhorns out to die for the dear old country and all that sort of thing. Still, if you think you can get away with it."

"I'll get away with it," promised Clancy. "I've always been able to handle my own assignments."

"You'll learn differently," assured Murray.

**T**HERE was a baffled something stirring within Clancy. What did this twenty-year-old kid who wore Captain's bars have that other men did not have? Suddenly he knew. He was looking into Murray's eyes. He realized that for the first time he was looking into eyes which had never mirrored fear—they reminded him of another pair of eyes—he searched his memory—oh, hell, of course—Jimmie Spencer had eyes like that—half-mocking—half-smiling—reckless—devil-may-care eyes. Perhaps that was why he felt strange in the presence of either Murray or Spencer. He glanced at his wrist watch. Eleven fifty ack emma. Time to stir! He lit himself a cigarette and nodded to Murray.

"Time to start things," he said. His voice sounded strange in his ears. "I'll get over there and see if they have Nellie ready for her maiden solo. S'long!"

Murray waved his hand. "You run like hell if you see a gang tailing you," warned Murray. "It'll be good practice."

Clancy made derisive gestures with his hands. "Horse collar, Captain," he answered expressively. "Horse collar—and many of them."

Framed in the doorway, Len Murray watched him stride across the field. There

was a quiet smile about the corners of his mouth. Inside a voice was whispering to him "that bozo will make good—he'd make good anywhere." But he could not resist the impulse to glance along the row of tents to where Jimmie Spencer was industriously putting a high gloss upon his cordovan boots, assisted by the scathing comments of one Whitey Thomas.

Ten minutes later—at exactly twelve, noon, the roar of Clancy's motor sounded from the take-off line. The Spad went hurtling down the field, gathered speed, lifted wheels, climbed rapidly, and headed north. A knot of ground men stood watching him go. They looked after him until he was out of sight, then they went back to the ships on the line.

Jimmie Spencer took a last look to his boot-polishing job, stood erect, took his helmet and goggles from a nail fixed in the center pole of the tent, and nodded to the grinning Whitey Thomas.

"Let's go," he said shortly.

Somehow Thomas seemed to understand. He grabbed up his own flying kit and pulled the helmet over his ears.

"O.K.," he said, in a matter-of-fact voice.

**T**HEY walked onto the field and had their own crates wheeled out. There was no need for a check. At least two Spads in the whole air service were always ready. They belonged to Jimmie Spencer and Whitey Thomas.

A couple of greaseballs gave them a crank. They waited a minute, listening to motors. Then both throttles went forward, both ships swung about, hesitated for an instant on the take-off line until helmets were pulled into place and goggles slipped over eyes. Jimmie Spencer waved his hand. There was an answering wave from Thomas. The Spads blasted away down the field, leaped into the air, banked sharply into the north and disappeared.

From the same doorway, Len Murray watched them go. The quiet smile was still about his mouth. He knew that neither Thomas nor Spencer had a reason for flying that afternoon—they had been on the board for the morning patrol. The only reason was that Peter Clancy had gone barging off into the north on his first solo.

Murray was whistling to himself as he

took a seat before his battered field desk. "Cripes!" he whispered after a minute. "You might think men were a bunch of nuts the way they act."

In the distance the drone of two Hissos was fading away.

## V

**A**FTER the first five minutes Clancy decided that solo flying over the war front was not so bad. In fact, it was a whole lot like any other kind of solo flying. For a while there, after he had taken off, his lungs had seemed choked—a lot like the first time he had ever soloed in his life—back there at Kelly. Then he felt the controls in his hands and remembered the voice of the instructor who had turned him loose. After that it was just a matter of doing what he had done every day for a month or more—coming in—stretching the glide, touching the wheels.

Of course, it was natural that a man be nervous. This idea of sticking a nose up into a sky filled with E.A. wasn't so hot, but a bird could be careful. For instance, here was an empty sky. It would be plenty tough for any Jerry to get close enough to him for damage without being seen. Fellows must be careless as hell to be taken by surprise—to be shot down before they had a chance to squeeze a pair of trips. He knew that he was not going to be surprised. All his life he had been guarding against surprises—it was a part of his game.

Five minutes and he was breathing naturally and looking about. His nerves were calm. His heart was beating normally. The tension had eased itself. He even had time to study the positions of the lines—things that looked like the arms of an octopus stretched crazily over the earth. Batteries shrouded by heavy palls of smoke. Black bursts and white bursts in the air. Had to remember that—black bursts were Jerry.

Over to the north a group of floating o. b. s. balloons, looking like too-fat sausages. Imagine sticking those things up!

Sun was hot. It hung up there like a great brazen disc. It scorched the back of his neck. He watched the shadow of his ship slip over the ground. He was cruising, but the shadow raced over the earth

like a greyhound. His eyes were never still. They searched the horizon on every side—but the heavens were empty. He glanced at his watch. Up twenty minutes—forty to go. It would be a good yarn to tell later—scared to death when he took off for his first solo—and then to find an empty sky—never a sight of an enemy aircraft!

If that sun was not so bright and so hot it would be a pleasure jaunt. First time he hadn't been hemmed in by a formation. First time since coming to France that he had been able to fly where he wanted to and without looking for signals. He ruddered about a little, just to be sure that he was a free agent and that the Spad would obey his whims. He thought of taking off his leather coat. Sweat was trickling between his shoulder blades. Hot as hell! Boy, that sun was a lulu.

And then hell swarmed in his ears!

**A**T first it was like the crackling of wood splintering under a terrific strain. He had heard a sound like that once—a delivery wagon crushed against a retaining wall by a five-ton truck. It brought his heart up into his mouth. It caused him to lean forward in his seat and to peer through his goggles at his prop. It was spinning in its perfect arc. Nothing had happened there.

For an instant he had a picture in his mind of a helpless Spad drifting earthward with the jagged end of a prop attached to the crankshaft of a motor which had wrenched itself free of the mounting due to terrific vibration.

The sound ceased for a single instant. Then it enveloped him anew. Louder, angrier, more vicious, snapping about his ears. Whiplashes of sound. Somehow his hands were trembling, a terrible tension gripped at his heart. His eyes were a trifle wild under the glass of his goggles.

The strange sound needed no interpretation. It was Death. He might not know the source, but he well understood the voice of Death. He had faced it many times.

Then, directly before his face, the metal cowling between his two guns was gutted and twisted. The stiff metal seemed to squirm and twist under the hammering of some powerful force. A center section strut thrummed madly and frayed into



threadlike splinters close to the bottom fitting.

He whirled in his seat. For the first time in his life a scream of pure terror escaped his lips, torn from his mouth by the last of the slipstream, smothered by the sound of the motor.

There was a ship behind him. It seemed incredible, but it was there, hanging onto his tail, flying at reduced speed to maintain its position. A ship, when an instant before the heavens had been empty—shadowless, nothing but blue sky and the distant horizons.

Like seeing ghosts in broad daylight. Like a horrible nightmare, in which one realizes that he is sleeping and seeing visions, but is powerless to escape the horror of the experience. A black ship with orange wings. A great white Maltese Cross painted upon its fuselage and upon each wing tip. Hanging above him, nose down slightly—orange rings of flame about the muzzles of twin Spandaus. Spandaus which seemed as big as field guns—staring straight into his eyes—probing for his life.

Ripping linen about him. The thudding concussion of steel slugs against longerons and ribs. A circle of black dots drilled into the doped surface of his right wing. He could hear the dull hammering of those guns now. Like the rolling beat of a trap drummer during a dance of death.

**H**E was fighting against panic—fighting to think—fighting to control his rioting nerves, but the panic overwhelmed all else. His hand pushed hard against the stick and the Spad went screaming downward, the tachometer hand mounted, as the speed of the Hisso increased.

With a wild sweep of his arm Clancy had pushed the throttle against the forward post. He was trying to escape this ghost ship which had materialized out of the sun-lit heavens. His breath was coming in great gasps. Dimly he could hear the duller beat of the pursuing Mercedes. He glanced back over his shoulder. The black ship was diving with him—coming down like a plunging meteor, its landing wheels seeming to reach out for him—ready to pounce on the back of his neck. Those two deadly Spandaus coming into line for new bursts.

His two hands were clamped about the top of the stick. They came back into his lap with a convulsive jerk. He felt the wings of the gray Spad tremble. He heard the groan of overburdened wing beams. The creaking and gurgling of fittings and struts struggling madly to overcome the terrible strain of that upward zoom. The motor struggled like a living thing.

His brain was spinning drunkenly, the earth reeled below him, a crazy earth, moving in concentric circles. He had a single vision of a black shape, the Fokker, diving under him—then nosing up, following him over in the tight loop. The pilot was looking up at him. He could see his white face, outlined by the roundness of his helmet and the mask effect of his goggles. Looking up, calculating the next fatal thrust.

Over the top Clancy knew he must pull the Spad out of the dive or rip the wings from the fuselage. The first panic was leaving him. He felt hot inside—hot and sticky. If he could only whip around for a single burst at that red and black shape behind him—if he could only smash at it once—wildly, like the charge of a maddened bull.

He threw the stick against the wall of the cockpit and kicked hard right rudder. The Spad went over in the vertical, turned to face the Fokker.

Clancy's hand clamped down upon the trips. His eyes were gleaming. His square jaw was set—the muscles of his jaw bulged under the flesh of his cheeks. He strained forward in his seat, eager to close the gap separating him from the Jerry. He'd get him—fly at his face—ram that Spad's prop down his throat—tear at him. Batter him out of the sky.

The muzzles of his Vickers came into line. His thumb squeezed the trips. There was the smell of burning powder—and then the sky space in front of him was empty—the Fokker had disappeared—leaped out of view—upward—rolling over in a rapid Immelmann, and an instant later the crackling whiplashes sounded in his ears, the scream of ricocheting steel cut through the beat of the motor.

Tears of rage blinded Peter Clancy. He cursed the elusive red and black thing. He banged the controls to the right to fol-

low the Fokker. Insanity thronged his brain—raging insanity—the mad desire to come to grips with the Jerry—to tear at him with his hands. He cared nothing for ripping the wings off the Spad. He was no longer thinking of the Spad. He had the urge to feel flesh under his hands. His face was chalk-white, his teeth set in a grimace of hate.

His arms were rigid, the muscles aching with the force of his grip on the stick.

**T**IME after time Peter Clancy charged the red and black Fokker. Time after time the Fokker slipped away from before the rush. The Jerry never gave him time to bring the Vickers to bear. A dozen times the black fuselage with the White Maltese Cross came into Clancy's gun sights—and Clancy's hand tensed on the trips. But before the Vickers could spit flame the Fokker was gone. Above him or below him.

It was like a skilled boxer holding off the wild rushes of a slugger. Jab—jab—jab—the left in the face, until the slugger is blinded, until he is merely a bloody, battered hulk, staggering about the ring, bubbles of white froth and crimson foam on his lips.

So it was with Peter Clancy. After a little he realized the futility of the contest. The knowledge of his helplessness overwhelmed him. He knew that there was nothing he could do to save himself. It was either run from this black and red ship, or sit still and die. And like the Irishman he was, he preferred to stay and die.

He didn't stop fighting. He continued to rush the Fokker. It was the only thing he could do. But at heart he knew that he would die, that the slipstream and motor of his Spad were singing his threnody. He knew that he was living the last minutes of his life—and that he was seeing the manner of his death—it was flying about him—it was the red and black Fokker.

Something ripped at his chest. He glanced down to find that his flying coat was flapping open, as if cut by a sharp knife. Under the rip a stream of blood was oozing to the surface. It seemed to extend from shoulder to shoulder. He wondered if he had been shot through the lungs.

For an instant he found it impossible to draw a breath—fearing that a gurgling horror would seep up into his throat. It didn't seem to hurt—merely a dull pain, as if a white-hot iron had been touched to his flesh and suddenly withdrawn.

He could no longer see the swirling shape of the red and black Fokker. Dimly he could hear the beat of its motor. He snatched the goggles from before his eyes and hurled them over the side of the cockpit. He twisted his head to locate his enemy—his executioner. Suddenly he remembered Len Murray's answer to his assurance that he had always been able to take care of himself.

"You'll learn differently!" Murray had said.

Murray must be a prophet. He was learning differently. Only he would never be able to take advantage of the lesson. For him the school of war flying was closed—forever.

He had an instant's sight of the Fokker boring in. The Jerry pilot was out to make the kill. Dully Clancy kicked the rudder and forced the Spad to meet the maneuver. He knew that this was the last instant of existence. This was the end.

**A** SHADOW passed across his face. A gray shadow. His ears were filled with a mighty motor sound. His own Spad rocked dizzily. The shadow became actual when it was fifty feet in front of him. It resolved into another Spad. A Spad flying like the furies of hell—tensed—ready to strike—something terrible about it. To his right another Spad leaped out of empty space. It was hurtling forward at the same rate—nose down a trifle—intent—two guns pointing at the vitals of the red and black Fokker.

And then the first Spad struck. There was a livid streak of flame from its guns. It seemed that the flame touched the sides of the Jerry. A searing, curling breath of destruction. Then the first Spad leaped upward, speed unchecked, to roll over on its back, hang for an instant, and come plunging down.

The guns again—this time hammering at the upper fuselage of the Fokker. Flying splinters, gashed linen—and then a bobbing head—a head covered by a black helmet.

A queer grin twisting the face of the Jerry pilot. His head thumped the crash pads about his cockpit. Ailerons wobbling. A belching wave of flame from in front of him. The curtain of fire sweeping up about him. Hiding him. Hiding the grinning, lax mouth. Hiding the rolling, inert head. Tracers of flame reaching out for the wings—running like blazing fingers of water.

Nose down—wings whirling, motor still throbbing. The slipstream fanning the inferno of destruction. Waltzing madly in queer jerky circles. Faster and faster—spinning madly after an instant. Sparks and black column of smoke marking its descent.

Peter Clancy turned his head away. He was sick. His hands were trembling. He was weak. It seemed that he could not summon sufficient strength to handle the controls. The Spad seemed a raging demon about to overcome him—to hurl him to earth in the track of the burning enemy ship.

He fought with himself to sit erect, to keep a black curtain from falling over his brain. With an effort he focused his eyes. The two rescuing Spads were circling about him. He started suddenly. His eyes were staring. For the first time he noticed the insignia under their cockpits. The yellow and black bodies and wings of the Wasp. His own outfit. God, what an exhibition he had put up in front of his own friends! What a laugh they would have out of Peter Clancy. He saw an arm upraised. It was a signal he understood. It meant fall into formation and follow.

**G**OD! They were going to escort him back to the field. Going to stick close to him to be sure that he didn't get into any more jack pots. For a moment the mad desire swept through Peter Clancy to tear away from them and to turn the nose of his Spad northward—over the enemy lines—and to keep flying until he was knocked down.

Then he was suddenly humble. The spirit of humility seeped through him. He realized that the twenty-year-olds who flew Spads were not twenty-year-olds as he had considered them—but that they were men—men who could hold their own

in the face of such a hell as Peter Clancy had just encountered.

**H**E dropped into position behind the first of the rescuing Spads. He flew back to the field with them. He landed. There would be a lot of laughing. A lot of wisecracking. No one had ever before made wisecracks about Peter Clancy. It wasn't exactly healthy. But this time he would listen in silence while the twenty-year-old men frankly discussed his abilities as a war pilot.

There was something familiar about the jaunty swing of the shoulders belonging to the pilot of one of the Spads which had rescued him. There was something about the way he tossed off his helmet and goggles. Something about the negligent sweep of his hand; the way he lit his cigarette. Then he turned to face Clancy. He was smiling, almost encouragingly. And Clancy found himself looking into the half-grim, half-smiling eyes of Jimmie Spencer.

A moment later and the pilot of the second rescuing Spad rolled out upon the ground and came walking toward Clancy's ship. Great shoulders, immense torso, tousled mop of blond hair. Short legs. Impression of tremendous strength. Whitey Thomas.

Clancy sat there. He seemed unable to move. He was waiting for Spencer's first remark. He knew it would come with a laugh—with Jimmie Spencer's laugh.

But there was no laughter in Spencer's voice when he spoke. "Nice work, Peter," he said seriously. "You were flying beautifully. A lot better than I did on my first time up. I hardly expected you to down that bird."

Clancy's jaw dropped open a trifle. He was staring at Whitey Thomas. Thomas waved his hand.

"Sweet show you put on, Old Timer," Thomas was saying. "You were going great guns when you smacked that guy down."

Len Murray walked over from the operations tent. He joined the group of greaseballs thronging about Clancy's ship. He looked curiously at the riddled fuselage and smashed instrument board. His eyes touched briefly upon the blood welling through Clancy's flying coat. Then he glanced at Spencer and Thomas.

"Looks as if you might have had a little brush," he suggested to Clancy, nodding at the blood on his chest. "It also looks as if your friend the enemy got in a couple of nasty wallops—"

Jimmy Spencer interrupted him.

"Why, that Jerry never had a chance with Pete, Len," he said seriously. "Pete waded in and gave him more hell than he ever saw unrolled before his eyes. Sweet bit of flying—didn't think a new guy could do it. We came running up—just in time to see Jerry No. FL21643 spinning down—a flamer. Pete went at it like an old-timer. The Jerry jumped him out of the sun, was on his tail before Pete had a chance to look around—but after he took a look—"

**A** CROAKING sound from Clancy's throat interrupted him. Murray was smiling.

"What say, Clancy?" he demanded.

"I was trying to say that—"

"I told you he was a blushing violet, didn't I?" demanded Spencer. "Well, he had two witnesses. Thomas and myself. That should give him a kill for the books. Fancy that. Getting a kill the first solo. Give us old-timers something to shoot at."

They were helping Peter Clancy out of his seat. He felt weak and sick and the blood was dripping down over his hands.

"I'm not hurt—much," he was saying. "It's like a cut across the chest. I'll be O.K. in a minute."

But they carried him away to the dressing station.

He came back at ten that night, his chest swathed in bandages. Whitey and Jimmie were playing casino under the light of an oil lantern. They glanced up as he entered. There was a question in Jimmie Spencer's eyes as he saw the bandages.

"Oh, it's nothing," assured Clancy. There was the slightest tinge of bitterness in his voice. "I got a scratch, that's all. The sawbones kind of gave me a look for even showing up with a thing like that. Wrapped it up and sent me back."

He threw himself on his cot. His brain was buzzing—had been buzzing since he had discovered the identities of his rescuers. There was one question thronging within him. There was a silence in the tent excepting for the sound of slithering

cards. Clancy was watching their faces. They seemed to pay no attention.

He spoke after a minute.

"I can't figure this thing out," he said aloud. "I've been trying to think it out for myself. Somehow it doesn't make sense. Take yourself, Jimmie. You know I've always had an admiration for you. A genuine admiration, I guess. You've kind of been a life-saver to me. You know I like you—it doesn't make a bit of difference if we are on opposite sides of the fence. But all that aside. You know why I came out here—came to this outfit. You know what is coming if we both get through. You know I'll keep on your tail until I get you back in New York. Yet, when you had a chance to stand by and watch me get bumped—eased out of the picture—you deliberately flew in and got me out of the mess. If that square-head had taken me it would have meant that all the scanty evidence against Jimmie Spencer would have gone with me. You knew that—and yet you brought me back to the field after knocking down the guy who was about to knock me off.

"And take Whitey—we're rivals in a way—of course I'm not as interested in him as I am in you—but you get the meaning. It would have been a break for the two of you if I had taken the place of that Jerry who got his. What's the answer?"

**W**HITEY THOMAS was watching Jimmie Spencer. It was a full minute before Spencer spoke. He continued to play with the cards in his hand—shuffling them over and over. His eyes seemed focused on a far horizon. Suddenly he smiled.

"Hell, Peter," he said mockingly. "Let's say it's only because I enjoy having you around. Because I've enjoyed playing with you in the past. I couldn't imagine an existence without you figuring in it—somewhere. Besides that, I don't like to see a new guy take it on the chin—not his first time up. So Whitey and I kind of flew out to take a look-see right after you took off, and we ran across you—that's all."

"You mean you took off to see that I didn't get into any trouble," charged Clancy in a strange tone. "More than that, you told a lie when we came back,

You tried to make Murray believe that I shot that guy down. You know the truth. I was licked—out on my feet, waiting for the final curtain. And you shot him down."

"Well, you see, Pete, I gave you such a big time reference to Len that I couldn't see you fall down on it—and, anyway, what's a square-head more or less among friends?" Spencer was smiling enigmatically.

A sense of bafflement possessed Clancy—and a sense of deep affection. Two years he had known Jimmie Spencer—at a distance. Two years during which he had wanted to know him at first hand, as he was knowing him now. Yet he could do no more than turn away. There could be no word of thanks. Spencer would laugh at thanks. He relapsed into the silence of a moment before and again threw himself upon the bed. The casino game went on.

It was still going on when Len Murray, sleepy-eyed and grumbling, walked into the tent. He stared owlshly, until his eyes responded to light after the darkness of the walk across the field.

"Bozo out here from Staff," he informed Clancy. "Wants you—called you by name. What the hell you been doing now?"

Clancy leaped from his bed.

"I don't know anyone connected with the Staff," he assured Murray. "What's he want?"

"Got an order for you," informed Murray. "Order to take you back with him. Say, maybe you don't know it, but when the Staff goes around calling out names it means trouble."

"I know," smiled Jimmie. "They're going to decorate Peter for dropping that Jerry this afternoon. Fame leaps upon one quickly in this man's war."

"You go to hell!" snapped Clancy.

"You go out and see what the Brassies want," mocked Jimmie. "That's worse."

And Peter Clancy stomped out of the tent into the darkness of the night. After a minute they heard the purr of a Staff car. It seemed to be going down the road—back toward Headquarters.

It left them staring out into the darkness through the tent flap. Spencer dealt a new casino hand and the game went on with Len Murray sitting on Jimmie's cot watching the play.

PETER CLANCY had known many weird experiences, but that ride through the night, piloted by a grim-faced Staff chauffeur, was outstanding. Perhaps it was because his head still buzzed and he could not think in terms of reality. Perhaps it was because the wound across his chest was feverish and burning. Perhaps it was the way the lantern-jawed driver stared at the road and set the big car driving through the ruts of the ruined road with the speedometer swinging back and forth between fifty and sixty.

It might have been the eerie silence of a strange countryside which floated by them—a countryside dotted with strange, half-hidden lights with half distinct shadows skulking along the roadside—battalions of them—ghost horses and ghost men, their passage made noiseless by the roar of the motor under the floor boards.

Once he had endeavored to engage the chauffeur in conversation. The attempt had been short and final.

"What's the big idea?" Peter had asked, trying to keep a tremor out of his voice.

The chauffeur had turned his head for a single instant. "I don't know nuthin'," he answered gruffly. "I got orders to get you and bring you back. That's what I'm doin'."

After that there was no conversation. The heavy Cadillac drove at the road with a heavy foot on the accelerator.

Half an hour, then cobblestones under the tires. Reduced speed, breath taking sweeps around sharp corners. Ghastly gray buildings walling them in. Buildings with windows blasted out, with facades tumbled down. A cleared space like a town square, and then a group of buildings suggesting a city hall. The brakes gripped hard. The Cadillac seemed to pant as it came to an abrupt halt.

The chauffeur spoke again. "Here we are, sir. This is where I have orders to put you down." He reached across Peter's legs and opened the door nearest the curb.

"You mean I get down here?" questioned Peter dumbly.

"That's my orders," assured the chauffeur. "Get Lieutenant Peter Clancy off the field of the 71st Pursuit Squadron. Drive him at once to the south corner of City

Hall Square, Methieme, and return.”

“But hell!” objected Clancy. “There’s no sense in leaving me on a corner at midnight in a place I don’t know.”

“My orders,” assured the chauffeur. He was closing the door behind Clancy. Clancy stood disconsolately upon the rough flagstone pavement. The chauffeur nodded briskly and meshed gears. “Good night, sir,” he said, almost derisively. “I hope you don’t have to wait long.” The car moved silently down the street. After a moment its red tail light disappeared entirely.

**T**HE streets about the square were entirely deserted. The shell-battered houses were disquieting. The silence was oppressive. The noise of the scratching match as Clancy lit himself a cigarette was like the bursting of a bomb.

He walked across the sidewalk and leaned against the corner of the nearest building. His footsteps echoed hollowly through the street. His nerves were on edge. He was dog tired. A metal band seemed to be binding his head.

He started violently and whirled about, his hands knotting into hard fists. A hand had touched him upon the shoulder. A hand out of the darkness, from around the corner. His breath came in harsh gasps. Then the hand dropped down over his wrists and a voice was speaking.

“It’s very much all right, Lieutenant. I’m here to meet you, if you don’t mind. If you’ll just walk around the corner here without showing any great degree of surprise I’ll thank you very much. After that we’ll get along to the Old Man.”

Peter felt his feet moving. He seemed walking in a nightmare. It was dark around that corner. A screen of trees threw an impenetrable shadow along the sidewalk. The hand was still on his arm, guiding him, the voice speaking cheerfully.

“Lousy thing to do, dump one down like that, without knowing what to expect,” the voice was saying. “Necessary, though. Can’t take chances with eyes we can’t see. Can’t take chances on anything in this business. Don’t blame you for feeling jumpy. However, we’ll have a drink at the Hall, and then you can see the Old Man. By the way, I’m Lieutenant Alan McClain of Intelligence. I know your name, of

course, you’re Peter Clancy of the Wasps.”

“I don’t get this,” Peter was saying. “What’s the idea of all the ‘old bridge at midnight’ stuff?”

“You’ll get it after awhile,” assured the voice in his ear. “You see we’re an outfit that has to work a lot in the dark. I guess maybe we develop that conspirator atmosphere. I’ll tell you what you’re here for. The Old Man wants to talk with you.”

“The Old Man?” questioned Peter.

“Colonel Peterson, Intelligence Officer, A. E. F.,” explained the voice.

“What’s he want with me?” asked Peter.

“Haven’t the slightest idea,” replied the voice cheerfully. “But you can be sure that it means excitement. It always does when the Old Man is on the prowl.”

**T**HEY turned right and seemed to plunge down a flight of steps leading to the basement of the City Hall. They passed along black corridors, the hand still guiding Peter’s way. A door hinge creaked. Board floors under Clancy’s feet. The glow of a match, and then a light from a tallow candle set in the mouth of a wine bottle.

“Cheerful little nest, eh?” asked Lieutenant McClain. “My diggings.” A gurgle of liquid running out of a bottle into a tin cup. Then the cup in Peter’s hand. “Drink hearty,” advised McClain.

The fiery stuff burned Peter’s throat. He replaced the cup upon the table. McClain moved away. He was a husky looking individual. Broad shouldered, blond headed, steel gray eyes. There was a nasty scar running the length of his right cheek.

“Make yourself at home,” invited Clancy’s guide. “The Old Man told me to let him know the minute you arrived so I’ll just pop up and break the news. He’s not seeing you in his office. He’ll do his talking down here—safer, I guess.” The door closed behind him. His footsteps echoed along the stone paved corridor. Clancy was alone.

A single smoking candle illuminated the dark hole of a room. His brain was in a turmoil. He was wondering if he had not gone suddenly insane. Wouldn’t he wake up to find himself in a straitjacket? Returning footsteps sounded along the corridor. They paused in front of the door. The hinge creaked again. Clancy half



leaped out of his chair, only to subside again, a foolish grin about his mouth.

A man in pyjamas had entered the room. A man with a shock of iron gray hair tousled all over his head. A carefully trimmed gray mustache. He must have been awakened from sleep, but his eyes were keen and bright. They were probing Peter Clancy. Studying him. Analyzing him. He spoke.

"Lieutenant Clancy?" he asked.

Clancy jumped from his chair and stood at attention. "Yes, sir," he answered.

"I am Colonel Peterson," he told Clancy, as if that was sufficient to explain everything. He seated himself in the only other chair in the room. "I know something of your record," he continued. "Your record before coming into the Army. That is why I have summoned you here in utmost secrecy. I know you to be the cleverest criminal investigator on the rolls of the New York Police force. I desire to make use of you in that capacity."

Peter was silent. Waiting.

"YOU may think it strange that you are brought here in this manner. I am not an alarmist, nor am I searching for effects to properly impress you. I am far too busy for that. I had you brought here in this manner because it was necessary. In this matter my own men are useless. Each one of them is known. For the mission I am about to give you must employ very able assistants who are not known—at least not to the enemy." The Colonel was drumming with his fingers on the table top. "Yes, enemy," he repeated. "God forgive me for having to say so—to admit that we harbor an enemy within our lines—a traitor." He straightened his shoulders and lifted his head.

"Lieutenant Clancy, there is a man wearing the insignia of an American officer who is betraying his Service. He is transmitting information to the enemy in many ways. We have twice intercepted messages he has sent—in a manner which will not betray our hand. Unfortunately these messages are in code. We have had them worked upon by our experts, but to no avail. They cannot be solved. First, the messages are too brief. Second, the code is of a nature which defies deciphering excepting to one possessing the key.

"It is necessary that we possess this key. I have had operatives working upon this matter for months. Every minute this false officer is shadowed. His every action has been studied. We have decided that he does not carry anything vitally important upon his person—he is far too clever for that. Twice we have searched his effects. Twice we have searched his person. We have been able to do this without directly implicating ourselves. He may suspect, but he has nothing upon which to fasten his suspicions.

"We dare not arrest him without direct evidence as to his guilt. And if he should escape—there is no estimating the amount of damage he might do. We must take him red handed—at least we must possess this code, close his avenues of communication. Stamp him out. Anything to put an end to his treachery.

"We must work carefully. He is highly placed. He is suspected by none excepting this department.

"We are almost certain that all of the papers and information we desire are close to his hand. It must be so for he must have constant reference to them. Yet we have not been keen enough to discover his hiding place. We have searched, have plotted, have planned—but results—none.

"His offices are at 63 Champs Elysees, Paris. The government maintains him in a suite there. His position is that of liaison officer between the French and ourselves." The Colonel smiled bitterly. "In reality he is the liaison officer between the enemy and ourselves. In his position he has first hand knowledge of all troop movements, of all plans, of all munition movements and all transport sailings. You see, he is able to provide first hand information.

"He came into the service through a National Guard unit. He has lived in the United States for eighteen years. But his background is German. His parents were German, and for all those years he has been an agent of the Wilhemstrasse, working in America. Worming his way into the army—building up a background—to use against the country which has given him prosperity and wealth. When we entered the war he was made a general officer, and because of his knowledge of affairs on this side of the water, was entrusted with his present important posi-

tion. He has used it to betray us. He has never been an American. He has only paraded as one."

**H**IS voice changed. It became sharp. The voice of one accustomed to command.

"Lieutenant Clancy, your job is this. You will discover the hiding place of this man's secrets. You will contrive to gain possession of those things, particularly the code book we want. You will deliver them to me. You will be given unlimited leave from your organization. You will make your own plans, choose your own assistants. I have no desire to see you until you can bring me these things and positive proof of the guilt of this man.

"It is a life and death matter. More, it is a service of paramount importance to your country. Service which you are peculiarly fitted to render. I have no orders for you, excepting that I will see that you have every assistance possible, without betraying our interest in the matter. If you bungle the job, the consequences rest upon your own shoulders. I can do nothing for you. It may be murder, burglary, everything that, under normal circumstances, might be considered criminal. If you do not get the proof—and are caught in the attempt—well, it can be nothing but burglary and you must take your punishment without asking for help. You understand?"

"I understand," answered Clancy quietly. "I'm willing to make the gamble."

The Colonel rose from his chair and placed his hands on Peter Clancy's shoulders. "I think you'll come through," he commended. "I know your type. You've got it in your eyes. You'll begin tomorrow?"

"I'll begin tonight," promised Clancy.

"Good," smiled Colonel Peterson. "I'm trusting you with my very honor and reputation."

He led Clancy through the dark corridors of the building. "Don't forget the number—63 Champs Elysees—you'll find what you want there—but God knows where."

Suddenly Peter found himself out on the deserted square. Strangely enough there was a staff car standing at the curb. A voice sounded in his ear. He was guilty

of a violent start. It seemed that everyone spoke out of the thin air on this night. He had a sight of the chauffeur who had brought him to this place from the field.

"I have orders to take you back, sir," stated the chauffeur matter-of-factly. "If you'll get in I'll have you there in a jiffy. And you'll find a thermos bottle of coffee and a couple of sandwiches on the rear seat. I thought maybe you'd be hungry, sir." There was a note of friendliness in the chauffeur's voice, as if he knew that Peter Clancy had changed his status and was now "one of them."

## VII

**T**HERE were only two men in the A.E.F. known to Peter Clancy who were qualified to act as his partners on the mission which had been entrusted to him. They were Jimmie Spencer and Whitey Thomas. He glanced at his wrist watch as he climbed out of the Staff car. Two-thirty ack emma. Events had swirled since his return from the dressing station at ten o'clock.

He spoke to the chauffeur as he closed the tonneau door behind him. "I'd like to ask you to stay—to wait for me for about fifteen minutes, but I suppose you have your orders?"

"Yes, sir," answered the chauffeur. "My orders are to take orders from you until I hear different. If you say stay, I'm glued to this spot."

Peter Clancy chuckled to himself. Colonel Peterson worked rapidly and well.

"I'll be right back—that is, within half an hour," he instructed his driver. "Then we'll be on our way. I hope you have enough gas to make Paris."

"I've got enough to make Berlin," assured the man. "And I can get more anywhere the A.E.F. has a supply dump."

Peter Clancy's form was swallowed up by the blackness engulfing the field. Inside the tent he shared with Spencer and Thomas he lit the oil lantern. At the scratch of the match Jimmie Spencer was sitting erect in bed, motionless, silent, watching.

For a moment Clancy said nothing. He busied himself with waking Thomas. Whitey awoke with a start to find Clancy's hand over his mouth. A minute

later he was seated on Spencer's cot listening as Clancy told the story of his visit to Colonel Peterson.

Jimmie Spencer's eyes were glowing. He was watching Clancy's mouth as he spoke. There was a suppressed eagerness about him. Thomas gave no sign. He merely listened.

"And so he told me I should pick my own men," finished Clancy. "Naturally I knew that you and Whitey were the only two boys in France who could help me pull this deal off. I'd like to have you along. On a basis of absolute equality. I'm willing to admit right now that Jimmie Spencer has more chance of winning out than I have. I'm willing to take orders from him. I don't know where the Colonel got hold of my record. It's a cinch he doesn't know yours or he'd have sent for you first."

Spencer was laughing quietly. "Imagine this. Peter Clancy proposing that we help him burglarize a safe—Peter Clancy turning burglar. You imagining all about it, Whitey?"

**T**HERE was a good-natured grin about Thomas' mouth. "Sure," he admitted. "I'm away ahead of you. I'm thinking what the New York Police Department would say if they knew we were out on a prowl with Pete Clancy."

"Well?" demanded Clancy.

"Boy, you arrived at the correct address," grinned Spencer. "You asked me once, Old Timer, the whys and wherefores of my sinful existence. You admitted that I had no use for any more dough than I was born with. You admitted you knew I never profited a dime from the fruits of my labor. I told you it was excitement—a contest. That's the truth. I enjoyed matching wits with the parties of the second part. This guy, the bird Peterson wants, promises to be clever. He promises to be a problem. He must be an artist."

"If we put this across I think the whole bunch of us can forget New York—and all it means." There was an eagerness about Peter Clancy that Jimmie could not miss. Clancy was saying something he wanted to say. It seemed to get a weight off his chest. "I think I understand you, Jimmie, better now than ever."

"No, you don't," assured Spencer. "Not when you make a crack like that. Why, hell, man, you'd take away the only recreation I have—figuring out how to outsmart you. No bargains, Pete—just a friendly little attempt at all the crimes in the catalogue—under legal supervision. I'll go for that. It'll be the best sport imaginable. But I'm not asking for any rewards. Is that understood?"

There was a tinge of sadness in Clancy's eyes. "It's O.K. with me, boy," he answered. "Only I thought this might be a chance to get even with yourself—maybe you'd like to have it."

Spencer clapped him on the shoulder. "You're a white man, Pete," he said with a little catch in his voice. "You're a powerful preacher without saying much. Why, I believe that after a couple of minutes you could reform me altogether—and then what would I do—get a job on the Force? It's too late for reforming. I've always had the hunch that you'd be rid of me in time. I got it right after I came over here. The law of averages will do what the Laws of the Sovereign State of New York didn't do. Erase Jimmie Spencer from the picture. Get me? You know the old story—'statistics show that the life of a pursuit pilot is seven minutes from the time he lands in France.' Well, I'm away over time now. So's Whitey there. Why worry about the future when the present hasn't been lived? Go on with the gentleman who has a code."

"I'm leaving for Paris right now," advised Clancy. "There's a Staff car outside waiting for me. If you boys want to come—I'd rather have you than anybody in the world."

"Paris!" mused Spencer in ecstasy. "Paris. A bath. Clean clothes. And above all the man with the code. Why, it sounds like heaven. How long will you give us?"

"Ten minutes," answered Clancy, busy throwing things into a kit bag. "We have to clear out of here before anyone finds out that we've skipped, or where we're going."

They were ready in five. Three ghostly forms prowling through the night. Slipping away from the field of the Wasps. Finding the Staff car exactly where Clancy had told the driver to wait. They settled

themselves in the tonneau, kit bags at their feet.

"Paris," ordered Clancy, "and don't spare the horses."

Jimmie Spencer drew a deep breath of anticipation. "Poor old Len," he sighed. "Imagine him waking up to find us vanished. He'll be tearing his hair and using language."

"He'll get an order in the morning," stated Peter Clancy. "It will advise him that Lieutenants Spencer, Thomas and Clancy have been granted indefinite leave of absence."

"It's a great war," grunted Whitey Thomas. "I'm all for it."

"Peter Clancy and Company," laughed Spencer. "Specialists in Crime to the A.E.F."

### VIII

**T**HERE was an air of repressed excitement among the members of Peter Clancy and Company as they sat with heads close together about a tiny table set upon the sidewalk in front of the Select Café.

The hour was late, even for war-time Paris, which seemed to have no night or day. The constant stream of omnibuses and taxicabs along the Champs Elysees had thinned noticeably. The throngs of unformed passers-by had dwindled. The anxious waiter, a one-armed ex-soldier, glanced at them anxiously from time to time, wondering how much longer they would keep him out of bed, and the size of the *pourboir* he might expect.

They had decided to wear their own uniforms. To all intents and purposes they were three flying officers on leave from the front. There would be nothing suspicious about them. The bright eagles of the air service gleamed from breast pockets. On Jimmie's coat were the ribbons for half a dozen decorations. They were provided with copies of orders covering their presence in the city.

Drawn up at the curb in front of the café was a khaki Staff car. It had followed them from the Claridge to this place. During the past forty-eight hours it had followed them like a well-trained hound keeping to heel. The chauffeur never so much as glanced at them. He

seemed to be waiting for someone from across the street. Neither did they ever make use of the car—but it was there—their avenue of quick transportation or escape, in the event they needed something of the sort.

Twice Jimmie Spencer had entered the suite of offices used by the Man Who Had the Code. Twice he had taken his life in his hands. Twice he had searched the suite from floor to ceiling—and with no success. Ten minutes before he had returned from his second search. He had made his report. Failure.

"If it wasn't for Peterson's suspicions I'd be inclined to think him balmy," he told Peter Clancy. "What his own men told him is a fact. There isn't a trace of anything to be found in his offices. I've been through every paper, every crack in the walls. I've sounded the floors and the walls and the ceilings. I can see where he'd be laughed out of the service if he made a single wrong move. If that fellow is running an espionage system in his spare time, he's darn clever about it."

**T**HEY did not question Spencer's report. Peter Clancy was wise enough to refrain from asking him if his search had been thorough; to suggest things he might have overlooked. He knew Jimmie Spencer's methods—or rather he knew the methods of the Phantom. They were very thorough. If Spencer said nothing was to be found—then there was nothing.

They had taken rooms at the Claridge, directly across the street from 63 Avenue Champs Elysees, where the Man with the Code was furnished with offices. They had watched him emerge half a dozen times. They had shadowed him until they were satisfied that he would make no move which might give them a lead. He went downstairs for his afternoon cocktail. He went to his hotel. He did not emerge until morning. Then he went to his office.

He was a powerful-looking man and wore a uniform with a careless grace. He might have been fifty years of age, but his body was that of a youth. His eyes were keen and commanding. His hair was iron gray. If he knew that he was under suspicion he gave no sign. He betrayed no lack of confidence.

Jimmie Spencer had smiled when he

first saw him. "He's a wonder," he had declared. "If that man has a secret you couldn't pry it out of him with a pinch bar. There is only one way to handle him—that's by absolute surprise. He's not the type to carry important papers around with him sewed inside his uniform. When he puts things away, they're safe."

Disappointment was written on Peter Clancy's face as he listened to Spencer's report. "I'd hoped you'd find something," he told Jimmie. "I guess we were a little too confident of our own superior powers. The intelligence men are not so dumb as they're thought to be when it comes down to brass tacks. We haven't turned up a thing they didn't."

There was a queer tenseness about Spencer. "I haven't quite finished," he told Clancy. "Maybe I ought to leave this out altogether. It just doesn't fit into the picture. But then—well, you see, it's like this. I found a wall safe—hidden in the wall of this fellow's own office. It's hidden by a sliding panel. You know the type. Every French business man has one, and it could be opened with a can opener. It's about as much protection as a sardine can. Now, I can't imagine the fellow we are doing business with putting anything of value into that safe. Maybe I'm wrong, but it doesn't fit."

"Here's the idea. If we open it he may have it as a plant—understand? He may have it there, knowing that if any intelligent secret service man ever decided to frisk his offices he'd most certainly find that safe. Next, if he was looking for something valuable, he'd turn the safe off—open it and inspect the contents. Maybe that's our friend's safety signal. Maybe he has something about that safe fixed so that he can tell without question whether it's been opened. If he comes down to the office some morning and finds that someone has gone through his safe he'll be warned that someone is on his trail—and act accordingly. See the point?"

"We don't dare make a false move until we know where we stand. I can't associate a tin can safe with the kind of dynamite he's handling. It just doesn't fit in."

Peter Clancy was thoughtful. "Yes," he said slowly, "but all criminals make mistakes at times. That's how they come to

get caught." He looked up to find Spencer grinning at him.

"Thanks for the tip," said Jimmie. "Not all make mistakes."

"In time," assured Clancy quietly. "In time. For instance—it was a grandstand play to send me a copy of your prints—but it was a mistake."

"Not yet," grinned Spencer. "Not yet, Old Son."

CLANCY shrugged his shoulders. He was too serious to parry Jimmie Spencer's verbal thrusts. "This man is not above making mistakes. Perhaps his mistake is a too great confidence in his powers to hoodwink the American Government. Perhaps he thinks he can never come under suspicion. If he has a safe we should see in it."

"Suppose we could tell whether the papers were there without having to open his safe?" suggested Jimmie with a smile.

Clancy glanced at him. He knew that Jimmie Spencer was not given to idle conversation. He was waiting for him to continue.

"Listen, Pete Old Dear," Jimmie was explaining in the manner of a savant instructing a pupil. "Half the psychologists in the world have established the fact that in a moment of danger or excitement a person will turn at once to the nearest and dearest thing he possesses. Be it a wife, a mother, a child, or an alley cat—it's all the same. With a rich man it's his money or securities, with a rich woman it's her diamonds or jewelry. Reasoning further, we find that the most precious thing in the life of our suspected friend is probably his code book and papers—no?"

"Go on, I'm listening," replied Clancy.

"I spoke of taking him by surprise. If sufficiently surprised, or sufficiently of the belief that his precious secret is in danger, he'll unconsciously make a dash to save them—see? If something should happen in his office to make him think that he might lose his code book—if he has one—then he'll betray the hiding place of that very thing by thinking to save it first. Get the drift? If he has them in that safe, he'll make a dive for the safe. If he hasn't—then he won't. It's simple. By surprising him and watching him we'll be able to tell whether the papers are in the safe with-

out having to arouse his suspicions by opening the darn thing."

Clancy's eyes were glowing. "You are a genius," he told Jimmie. "It's no wonder you've led me a merry chase. I'm lucky to get close enough to you to talk to you. But the question is—how can we surprise this bird—surrounded as he is by a staff of soldier clerks?"

"That makes it all the simpler. We'll rely on the panic of the mob about him. Fire is the thing which frightens humans more than anything else. We set his offices on fire." Spencer settled back in his chair to the dismay of the waiter who still hovered about them.

"And then?" suggested Clancy.

"Well, you'll go to see him on some pretext at exactly ten o'clock tomorrow morning. Make it a friendly or a business call. Tell him you know a friend of his in Oshkosh or Kalamazoo. Only be in his office, talking to him, at exactly ten tomorrow.

"Now Whitey and I will come in at one minute after ten—after you're in there with him. We'll have all the ingredients for a merry little fire and a whale of a lot of smoke. I'll put it in a corner and touch it off while Whitey talks to the orderly. Just as it starts doing its stuff I'll yell *fire!* The clerks will do the rest. Your job is to watch our friend. Watch everything he does—every move he makes—and if you ever used your eyes and brain, do it in that few seconds the alarm will be on—for it means success or failure for us. Understand?"

"It's a natural," breathed Clancy reverently. "It goes as it lays."

THEY paid the score and tipped the garçon a five-franc note. He beamed after them as they walked away down the broad avenue, toward the Claridge. He did not notice that the chauffeur of the khaki Cadillac standing at the curb decided to wait no longer for his officer, but drove a block up the street, turned and came back down the Avenue, keeping pace with the three stalwart "peelots Americans."

At ten the next morning Peter Clancy gave his name to the orderly who guarded the door of the Man with the Code. "Tell Lieutenant Blank that Lieutenant Clancy would like to see him," he instructed the

orderly. "You may say that it is a private matter."

He received a rigid salute and the orderly disappeared. He glanced around these offices. A dozen clerks in khaki were pounding typewriters or working at filing cabinets. He wondered how many of them should be wearing the field gray of the enemy rather than the khaki of America. He wondered whether Jimmie Spencer's plans would work out correctly. He wondered what he should say to the Man with the Code.

Then the orderly returned. "The Colonel will see you, sir," he announced. "Will you step this way?"

Clancy glanced at his wrist watch. It was exactly ten ack emma. He followed in the orderly's footsteps. He thought he had heard footsteps in the corridor, but he could not be sure. Perspiration was trickling down his spine.

He found the Man with the Code sitting before his desk. He felt the steel gray eyes sweep over him, from his cap to his boots. Felt the power of those eyes. Then he heard his voice. It was cold, incisive.

"Lieutenant Clancy?" he questioned. "May I inquire your mission?" He glanced at the eagles on Clancy's left breast. "Ah, a flyer, eh?" he asked curiously. "I can't say that I've ever had the pleasure of meeting one of you lads at first hand. I've been quite interested in your doings—wonderful service—sir—wonderful service. But we can talk about that later. You wanted to speak with me?" His keen eyes held a questioning light.

"Yes, sir," answered Clancy. "You see—"

There was a dull explosion from the outer office. A red glare of flame reflected against the painted walls. A huge cloud of choking smoke billowed up from the floor. It seemed to engulf the outer office in an instant. There was a single agonized shriek of fear. "*Fire!*" And Clancy recognized Jimmie Spencer's voice. His eyes never left the officer at the desk. He had leaped to his feet at the alarm, so had the man he was watching. During the first second of panic the man stood as if frozen to the spot. His eyes darted about as if seeking a means of escape. There was a mad scuffling about in the outer office.



The dense smoke seeped under the crack of the door.

PETER'S nerves were on edge. Would the man never make a move? Was it true that the hidden safe did not conceal the code book—if such a code book existed? Then, abruptly, the man swung away from him and fumbled at the wall. A panel slipped back under the pressure of his fingers, revealing the round knob of an ordinary wall safe. He worked frantically at the combination. The shouting from the outer office ceased. There was a knock on the door, and the orderly stepped into his room.

"It's nothing, sir," he assured his superior. "A bomb or something exploded. It looked for a minute like a bad fire—a lot of smoke and everything—but I put it out with a fire extinguisher, sir."

"Good work, Mullins," commended the man Peter was watching. "I'll see that you are rewarded for that bit of fast work. It had me very much disturbed for an instant."

"Nothing at all, sir," smiled the orderly. "Only someone was very careless, sir. I'd have sworn that thing wasn't there when I came on duty this morning."

"Well, tell the Sergeant Major to see that the men get back to work."

"Yes, sir." The orderly closed the door behind him.

He smiled at Clancy. "Queer how people panic at the word 'fire,' isn't it?" he ventured. "Take me now, I was about to make a bolt for it." He suddenly glanced at the open panel and then at Peter Clancy's face. A nervousness seemed to grip him. His hands trembled for an instant.

"Lot of valuable records in that thing," he said. "Wanted to get them out if possible." He closed the panel, concealing the safe, and seated himself in his chair. His eyes were a blank.

"Now, sir," he continued. "You wanted to see me, I believe."

Peter endeavored to hide his elation. "Nothing important, sir," he smiled. "Only, you know how the folks at home are. I have an uncle in Milwaukee, same name as mine—Peter Clancy. He wrote me saying that he had a friend who was

here in Paris, and that I should look him up if I had a chance. This friend's name is Blank, sir, your name. I came up on the assumption that it might be yourself."

The suspected Colonel shook his head impatiently. "Don't know a soul in Milwaukee," he assured Clancy. "Don't know anyone of your name."

"I'm sorry, sir," apologized Clancy abjectly. "I shouldn't have bothered you."

"No trouble at all," answered the man gruffly, fingering the papers on his desk. "Very glad to have seen you."

Clancy did a perfect right about face and walked out through the door.

THE outer office still showed signs of the scare. The soldier clerks were gathered into knots. They stared at him when he passed out into the corridor. He restrained a wild impulse to dash down the steps and to run across the street.

The papers were in that safe. The words hammered on his brain. And Jimmie Spencer had discovered them with his ruse.

He found Spencer and Whitey Thomas together in the room shared by the three of them. He burst in on them with red face and shining eyes.

"It worked," he said in a hoarse whisper. "It worked like a charm."

"It was simple," grinned Jimmie. "I tossed the smoke bomb in the corner just as the door to his office closed behind you. Whitey had the orderly buttonholed. The next second—*Bang*—and a lot of smoke and very little fire. So the papers are in the safe? I'm disappointed."

"They're there, all right," assured Clancy. "He made a dive for them—for a minute I thought he wasn't going to fall—but he went for it hook, line and sinker. Opened the panel and was working on the combination when the orderly came in to report it all a false alarm."

"So all we have to do is open the tin can—and the papers are ours," said Spencer thoughtfully. "Sounds like a dime novel, doesn't it? I'll admit I'm disappointed. Terribly. In fact, I'm sore at the gentleman. I thought he had a lot of brains."

"I told you they all made mistakes, didn't I?" demanded Clancy. "That's his—falling for your stunt and keeping the things in a safe."

"It's too easy," complained Spencer. "I'm not as interested as I was. Anyone can open a safe—especially a safe like that. Ten minutes with that combination and I can hand him a copy of it."

"We get 'em tonight, eh?" asked Whitey Thomas.

"Sure, why not, why delay?" demanded Clancy. "The sooner the better."

"Suits me," he grunted.

"And then leave in this beautiful city is finished," mourned Jimmie. "It's back to the mines—and to the goldfish and chicory. There ain't no justice, says I."

## IX

**I**T was pitch dark within the offices of Colonel Blank. More, the quiet of the tomb hung over the place. From time to time reflections from automobile headlights upon the Avenue five stories below lit the walls with a ghostly radiance. Three figures huddled against the wall of the corridor outside of the offices.

From time to time a scarcely perceptible sound of metal rubbing against metal broke the complete stillness in that corridor—that and a sound of repressed breathing.

Suddenly there was a sharply drawn breath of triumph and a whisper, "Got it!" Then the creak of a door opening under a steady pressure. The three figures slipped within the reception room of Colonel Blank's office. The door closed carefully. There was a sigh of relief from the three.

"Cinch," whispered Jimmie Spencer. "A two-year-old could open that lock. I've done it twice before. The safe now?"

"Sure, the safe—let's get it over with." There was a tightness in Peter Clancy's voice.

The errant beam of a pocket flashlight cut through the pitch darkness of the offices. It paused upon the door leading to Colonel Blank's private office. They moved forward. The door was unlocked. They passed through, closing that door behind them.

Once inside Jimmie Spencer walked directly to the panel concealing the wall safe. His fingers pushed against the woodwork. There was a creaking and rubbing of wood against wood, and then the round circle of the flashlight revealed the metal face and black knob of the safe.

There was a chuckle from Jimmie Spencer.

"If this was a soup job I'd turn it over to Whitey. He's the best hand on that sort of work in the A.E.F. But it's just as easy as monkeying with a radio dial. I'll have this thing open in five minutes flat. Want to time me?"

"Get started," begged Clancy. "I'm as nervous as a cat. There's something about this joint that makes it hard to breathe."

Again the chuckle from Spencer. He took a round stethoscope from his tunic pocket.

"With this thing falling safe tumblers sound like a railroad wreck," he explained. He inserted the hard rubber ear piece and stood close to the safe. His thin, tapering fingers touched the knob. It moved. A point at a time. It completed the entire circle. Patiently he returned to zero and began the same movement to the left. When the combination showed "18" he stopped. After a slight pause he worked the knob back to the right. They were watching him with bated breath. His fingers hardly seemed to touch that safe—yet the knob moved—slowly—a point at a time. He had made almost another complete revolution when the turning movement ceased abruptly.

"Two!" they heard him murmur to himself. Then the moving knob again. Back to the left.

**A**T twenty it stopped. They heard a definite click from the tumblers of the safe. He took his hands away from the knob and faced them with a queer smile.

"And three!" he whispered. "Sir, Lieutenant Spencer has the honor to report that your safe is now open. Funny! Everybody in the world seems to take a number to the left, then one to the right, and the third to the left. No originality at all. Gets tiresome after a while. Well, Pete, open her up and grab the contents."

Peter Clancy stepped forward. In the light of the torch his face was tense and white. His fingers were like white claws. He took hold of the knob of the safe and tugged. As if by magic the door swung open, revealing the round black interior of the thing. The light went closer to the opening. It flashed up and down.

There was a gasp from Clancy. He glanced at Jimmie Spencer, panic written upon his face.

"It's empty!" he gasped. "There's nothing in it!"

Spencer's hand was probing the interior. There was the crackle of paper. His hand emerged, grasping a single sheet of paper. He looked at it for an instant and held the light close as if to read something written upon it. His eyes were suddenly steel hard and bright. The muscles of his jaw were rigid. He handed the paper to Clancy and watched his face. There was a single line written on the one sheet of paper the safe had contained. It caused Clancy to jump as if stung. Whitey Thomas read that line of typewriting over Clancy's shoulder. It said:

**"LOOK BEHIND YOU"**

As one man they whirled to face the door leading out of the room. As they whirled the bright beam of a powerful flashlight snapped across the room to rest upon their faces. There was a laugh out of the darkness and a voice spoke. They knew the voice. It belonged to Colonel Blank.

"Ah, gentlemen," he said softly, "doing a little burglary, I see. Well, I must say that I have been expecting you."

They saw him standing there behind the beam of the flashlight. He was holding an ugly-looking forty-five in his hand. The muzzle of the gun covered them. There was a raging devil in his eyes—a devil about to do murder—yet the voice was soft.

"You were very clumsy this morning," he said. "You hardly gave me sufficient credit. Did you think I would not solve the reason for the alarm of fire, or that I would not correctly interpret the reason of Lieutenant Clancy's visit? Certainly, it was cleverly conceived, but executed in a most childish manner. You thought I had the papers in the safe and would betray the fact? Well, you were wrong. I never had the papers in the safe. I deliberately opened the panel to permit our friend Clancy to think I had betrayed myself.

"Am I the type of man you would accuse of storing secrets in tin cans?"

Jimmie Spencer lit himself a cigarette with complete nonchalance. "I told Clancy

that it sounded phoney to me," he said academically. "It sounded too easy."

"Thank you, my friend," smiled Colonel Blank. "You probably conceived the idea of the smoke bomb."

"I did," admitted Spencer candidly.

"**WELL**, you at least deserve an explanation, even though you have about three minutes to live." The voice did not change, but they knew that he had pronounced a death sentence. "My work here is finished. I am of no more use. I was about to leave the city. You are quite right in thinking that I have been guilty of espionage—of more than that. You are quite right in thinking that I have nothing but contempt and hate for your wretched country. You are quite right in thinking that I am German—and proud of the fact.

"Listen, years ago I had that code book made a part of me—part of my body—part of my life. I had it tattooed upon the flesh of my back with invisible ink. When I wish to consult my code book I merely strip to the waist, rub my flesh with a certain chemical which brings out the tattooing, as heat brings out invisible writing done with lemon juice. Then I stand with my back to a mirror—and read it off. Simple, is it not? In fact, I believe it is the first time such a thing has been done. But in my business, gentlemen, one must have a certain amount of originality.

"I knew you would be here tonight—to open my safe. I wrote you that little note. In fact, I was concealed in the closet in the other room when you picked the lock on my door. I enjoyed your discomfiture hugely. I nearly laughed aloud when you read the line I had written for you on that bit of paper. Your face, Mr. Clancy, was a study.

"Until this time I have never had the personal satisfaction of performing the duties of a soldier. That is, in personally removing a living enemy. Perhaps when I return to Germany I shall not have that opportunity. Brains are not sent to the trenches. So I am taking this means of assuring myself that I have done some small part. You are dangerous men. Mentally and physically. I am going to kill you. First, because it is my duty as a soldier. Second, because you foolishly sought to match wits with me. The penalty for

failure in this second case is always death.

"Call it murder if you will. War is murder. My killing you here is no more murder than shooting you down on the field of battle. You played the game—you lost." He shrugged his shoulders.

"I leave Paris tonight by plane. I go from here to Le Brugeut. There I will find a two-seater Spad waiting for me. Oh, yes, it is an Allied ship—but the pilot is German at heart and risks his life for his country. He has served for three years in the Air Service of France, awaiting this one minute when he will be useful. You see we are thorough, we Germans. You see how foolish it is for America and Americans to enter the lists against Germany and the Germans. You are so many infants. Bah! You are hardly interesting."

HE lifted the muzzle of the pistol. It covered Peter Clancy's heart. The devil in his eyes flared up into an almost insane blood lust. Inwardly Clancy tensed himself to feel the shock of the heavy slug tearing through his flesh.

And then a catapult launched itself across the floor. A short, squat, heavy shouldered human catapult, moving as if propelled by steel springs. There was a flash and roar from the gun within Colonel Blank's hand. Twice—three times—but the catapult was upon him. It struck him with terrific force. It knocked him out of the doorway.

Peter Clancy screamed in agony. It was Whitey Thomas—hurling himself upon the muzzle of the traitor's gun, shielding them, shielding them with his body. He was staggering blindly. Struggling to forge ahead, to carry the fight of flesh against forty-five slugs to the Colonel. Jimmie Spencer went forward with a rush. His face was white, his eyes blazing. For one single instant the traitor Colonel struggled to get a shot at him or at Peter Clancy, but the bulk of Whitey Thomas was between his gun and the living target.

He cursed in a rage-thickened voice and fired full into Thomas' chest at a distance of six inches. Then he turned and ran, out through the door, closing it after him, and before they could reach the spot, they heard the key grate in the lock—heard an insane laugh echoing from the corridor, and heard the pounding footsteps of the

traitor Colonel receding down the stairs.

Jimmie Spencer was working like a madman upon the lock of the door. His fingers made certain, sure motions. He had never picked a lock under such circumstances. He did not glance toward the center of the room where Peter Clancy squatted on the floor with the bloody head of Whitey Thomas on his lap.

Thomas was speaking. A red froth stained his lips with each word. A sighing sound came from his chest—a sighing, bubbling, sickening sound. The death rattle was creeping into his throat, but his eyes were clear.

"It was one of us or all of us," he was telling Clancy. "I figured that maybe if I could get to him I could keep him from getting the three of us. I'm big. I can fill a doorway—so I rushed him. He got me—every time. I felt 'em ploughing through me—but it didn't hurt as much as I expected it would. Why, that big louse. Standing up to our faces and telling us that he was going to bump us off—along with a lot of other good American boys he played stool pigeon on to his friends. I never could go a stool pigeon anyway. If I could have got my hands on him I'd have broken his neck." He was quiet for an instant.

CLANCY felt his life ebbing away—onto the floor—out of those gaping holes in his chest. He was breathing jerkily. He looked up at Clancy.

"You're a white guy, Clancy," he choked. "I'm glad I knew you. Maybe—maybe this will square things a little. I never thought much about having to square things—but when a guy goes this way he thinks a lot in a single second. I'm glad he didn't get you. I'm glad it was me. I guess maybe it's time to pay off—for me. Maybe dying isn't enough—but it's all I've got and I'm glad to lay it on the line. Sounds like a lot of slush, don't it—but I mean it. Do you think it'll square me?"

"It'll square you, Whitey," promised Clancy. "More than that, I'll do some squaring on my own account—with the Colonel's friends."

"O.K.," sighed Thomas. "Only get that guy. I wish to God Jimmie would get that door open."

There was a decisive click from the

locked door—and a grim word. "Got it!"

Whitey Thomas smiled. "That guy is sure hell on locks," he smiled. "If old Saint Peter ever bars him out of heaven Jimmie will just go to work on the lock." He was suddenly limp. The gurgling stopped.

Jimmie Spencer looked down on his face for one single instant. There was a light of infinite sadness in his eyes. "There goes a white man," he said in his quiet voice. "The fellow who nicknamed him Whitey knew what he was talking about."

Peter Clancy rose slowly to his feet. His nerves seemed numb. His arms were bloodstained.

"Blank has three minutes' start," Jimmie was saying. "His getaway is Le Bregeut. He has to go that way because the out is waiting for him. He'll figure that he can beat us to the field. I'm going to get him if it's the last thing I ever do." He lunged out into the corridor and down the steps with Peter Clancy on his heels. Back in the office Whitey Thomas lay alone and inert upon the blood-stained floor—a smile on his face.

## X

THEY found the Staff car drawn up at the curb in front of the building. The chauffeur was trembling with eagerness. "I saw that bozo come gallopin' down the stairs," he said breathlessly as they piled into the car. "I didn't know whether to trail him or to stay put. I figure to stay put because you must have a reason for staying up there. I figure you can run things best. He jumped into a Panhard across the street, and they lit out toward the Etoile."

"We're going to Le Bregeut!" snapped Clancy. "The sooner we get there the better. If you ever drove this boiler, drive it now!"

THE armed guard at the entrance to the field challenged once, his voice swallowed in the rush of the heavy car, and leaped for the safety of the ditch at the side of the road. They halted with a screeching of brakes before the first hangar. The officer on duty stared at them, his whistle to his lips to blow a blast of alarm. Overhead they heard the roar of

a Hiss opened wide. There was a groan from Jimmie Spencer. Peter Clancy gripped the arm of the French officer with iron fingers.

"Who was that who just took off?" he demanded hoarsely.

"It was the American Colonel Blank," informed the officer in charge of the hangars. "He often flies from one point to another in the discharge of his duties."

"I'm Lieutenant Clancy, special agent of the American Intelligence Service and a pursuit pilot of the 71st Squadron!" snapped Clancy. "I have *carte blanche*. I want immediately two single-seater Spads for the purpose of pursuing this Colonel Blank. He is not an American officer. He is a German—and he is escaping right now with secrets of the American Army which are vitally important."

The officer blew his whistle and gave rapid orders.

"You will have your ships immediately," he promised. "Fortunately, we maintain one squadron in readiness at all times to repulse enemy night attacks. Will you follow me?"

A line of ghost-gray Spads on the line, motors coughing hollowly. "Your choice, gentlemen," offered the officer—"and *bon chance*."

PETER CLANCY found himself climbing into the cockpit of the nearest Spad. Beside him, Jimmie Spencer was already settled into his seat, his hair blowing crazily in the slipstream. There was a sudden roar from his motor as he jammed the throttle against the forward post. The tail of the Spad rose in the air with a rush, trembled for an instant, swung under the urge of the rudder, and Jimmie Spencer was hurtling down the field—a gray shape in the darkness. An instant later and Clancy's Spad was in full cry. They leaped upward, almost as one ship, climbed sharply and headed into the north. They knew that the two-seater carrying the traitor Colonel had a big start. It would be a race to the front lines—they must get him before he crossed that wire-strewn space.

Jimmie Spencer found it. His war-trained eyes, his hours and hours of night flying, gave him a keenness of vision Peter Clancy did not possess. He located the fire-flies upon the horizon, the exhaust flare of

the two-seater. He flew close to Clancy's ship and waggled his wings in the signal. "Follow me!"

Then he plunged ahead into the night. Foot by foot they ran down those vague points of light in the black heavens. Foot by foot they crawled up upon the tail of the two-seater. After an eternity it had shape—being. It was a gray ghost slinking through the night, pursued by two smaller gray ghosts.

There was no hesitation on the part of Jimmie Spencer. Below they were passing over the last fringe of Allied territory. He struck like a bolt of lightning. His guns flared for a brief instant as he dived down upon the quarry, then he suddenly zoomed heavenward.

A single stabbing streak of flame had answered the challenge of Spencer's guns. It came from the rear seat of the two-seater. A thudding, crackling stream of lead combed Spencer's crate. Coming in underneath the two-seater's tail, Peter Clancy realized that Jimmie had been drilled through a vital spot. Above him the gray shape of Spencer's Spad was flying with wobbling wings—like an over-weary bird.

IT seemed to gather itself after an eternity. The wings were again straight. The keen nose was again pointed for the fleeing ship. Coming up fast, Peter Clancy's thumb tensed on the trips. Another fifty yards—Spencer's ship was faster than the one he flew. Spencer was going to beat him to the target again. He was boring in. He leaned forward in his seat as if to urge his own Spad to keep pace with the whirlwind flown by Jimmie Spencer.

He saw a red flare from the mouth of Spencer's guns. He saw the stabbing flame from the after cockpit of the two-seater in answer. Then he screeched like a madman. There was a shuddering collision. Spencer had not pulled out of his dive. He had smashed his ship full into the center of the two-seater's fuselage. The rending of wood and linen sounded above the roar of Clancy's motor. He was staring over the side of his cockpit, his eyes wide with horror. Beneath him, a fused, shapeless mass of wreckage was whirling earthward — down — down —

squirming and twisting crazily—the two-seater with the nose of Jimmie's ship driven deep into its vitals.

The altimeter showed less than a thousand feet. Sick, trembling, almost unconscious, Peter Clancy forced his Spad earthward. It seemed that his eyes would not leave the horror below him. The ground came up through the darkness—earth—studded with shattered trees.

The downward progress of the wreckage seemed to come to an abrupt stop. There was the sound of rending tree limbs and then the metal and splintering wood sound of a crack up. The twisted mass of the two ships seemed to dissolve into a shapeless pile of wreckage.

There was an open space between the trees. It was littered with stumps, but Peter Clancy cared nothing for stumps. He cut the gun and aimed the nose of his ship for the ground. The stick came back in his lap just as the landing carriage was ripped from the fuselage by a fire-blackened obstruction. The fuselage went on, siding on its belly, until it brought up with a terrible thud against something solid—something rooted in the ground.

Peter Clancy's head smashed against the forward crash pad. His senses reeled—he felt himself going out. He sat shuddering a long instant, fighting with his sick brain. He fumbled at his safety belt. His head felt as if it had been split by an ax. Somehow he crawled out of the wreckage of his own cockpit and staggered away toward the spot covered by the mass of the two ships. It seemed an eternity before he stumbled over a splintered wing beam. The two ships were locked in a chaos of destruction.

He fought at the wreckage with his hands, seeking for the remnant of Jimmie Spencer's fuselage. He found it. It was driven deep into the camel back of the two-seater. The two-seater's wings had folded about it as if to hide it forever.

SOMEHOW he got through that welter of crumpled linen and wood splinters—somehow he got to Jimmie Spencer. Somehow he cleared a space about his head. Spencer's face was very white. There was a sticky something running over Peter Clancy's hand as he tried to lift him by the shoulders.



Spencer opened his eyes. "Don't try it, Peter," he begged. "It hurts like hell, and you can't pry me loose. I tried to get out myself—but I couldn't make it—and, anyway, it won't help to free me—I'm done—let me go down with the ship. Isn't that the tradition—down with the ship—"

"Jimmie!" Peter Clancy's voice was filled with a dull horror. "My God—you did it on purpose, son—you dived into him—"

"Sure, I did." Jimmie Spencer smiled like a tired child. "It had to be done. You see, he plugged me with that first burst. I didn't figure that our friend the Colonel could handle a machine-gun like an expert. Remember, Peter, you told me—they all make mistakes—that was mine.

"Take care of the boy friend over there," he said, nodding to the wrecked cockpit of the two-seater. "He probably uses carbon tetrachloride to bring out the fancy writing on his back. I was thinking of that when we came tumbling down together. Bring out the writing and have a photograph made of it—you can't keep the original, you know."

There was a long silence.

"It just fits," he said more softly. "Whitey will probably be lonesome where he's going. It'll help a lot to have me there to show him the ropes. I'm just thinking about what he said when he went away. 'Does this square me, Peter?' I'm wondering the same thing about myself."

"Don't," begged Clancy. "After this what can there be to square?"

"You know," half whispered Jimmie, "I never was much afraid of anything. I used to wonder how I'd act when I came face to face with the trip west. It seems funny to sit here and talk about it. I don't think I'm afraid. I think I'm just wondering what it's all about—but Pete, somehow I'm glad you're here—and I've got your hand. It means a lot—somebody wishing me nice take-offs and soft landings. It'd be a little lonesome if you weren't here, Old Timer. I appreciate the chance you took—cracking your crate to get down here with me. It gives me a little glow inside. I've always liked you a lot, Peter. . . ."

Suddenly his hand was limp. Peter Clancy leaned close to him to see his face. He saw wide-open eyes staring out over

the top of the ruined cockpit toward the western horizon. After a little the hand was cold.

IT was the next evening when Lieutenant Peter Clancy returned to the nest of the Wasps. His face was colorless, his walk lurching. With the dawn he had found a way to a half-ruined road leading back from the lines. After an eternity of walking a motorcycle dispatch rider had picked him up in a side car and carried him to his destination. He made his report to Colonel Peterson.

He seemed moving in the midst of a terrible dream. He even remembered to mention carbon tetrachloride applied to the invisible tattooing on the back of the dead traitor, Colonel Blank. He heard Peterson complimenting him, promising him reward. He didn't mention Whitey or Jimmie. He couldn't. He merely requested to be returned to the Wasps.

Len Murray met him. "You're back, I see," said Murray. "Where did you leave Whitey and Jimmie?"

Peter Clancy ignored the question. "I'd like to ask a favor," he said hoarsely. "Maybe you'll understand when I ask it."

Murray stared at him.

"I'd like to fly Jimmie Spencer's Spad," continued Clancy. "Don't get me wrong. I know I'll never fly it like Jimmie, but somehow, I'd like to think that he was flying with me—that I was using something of his—trying to be the kind of a man I knew him to be. It would help me out—right now—" He was suddenly sobbing.

Murray was too wise in the ways of men to ask questions. He understood that Whitey and Jimmie and Peter Clancy had played the game together—and that Whitey and Jimmie would not return to the Wasps.

He cleared his throat noisily as he half supported Peter Clancy toward the tent he had once shared with men who would not return.

"Sure, Pete," he soothed. "I'll fix that for you. I know Jimmie would rather have you have his ship than anybody else. I'm glad to see you back—you rest yourself a while—I'll get you a shot of cognac and something to eat—you're all in—"

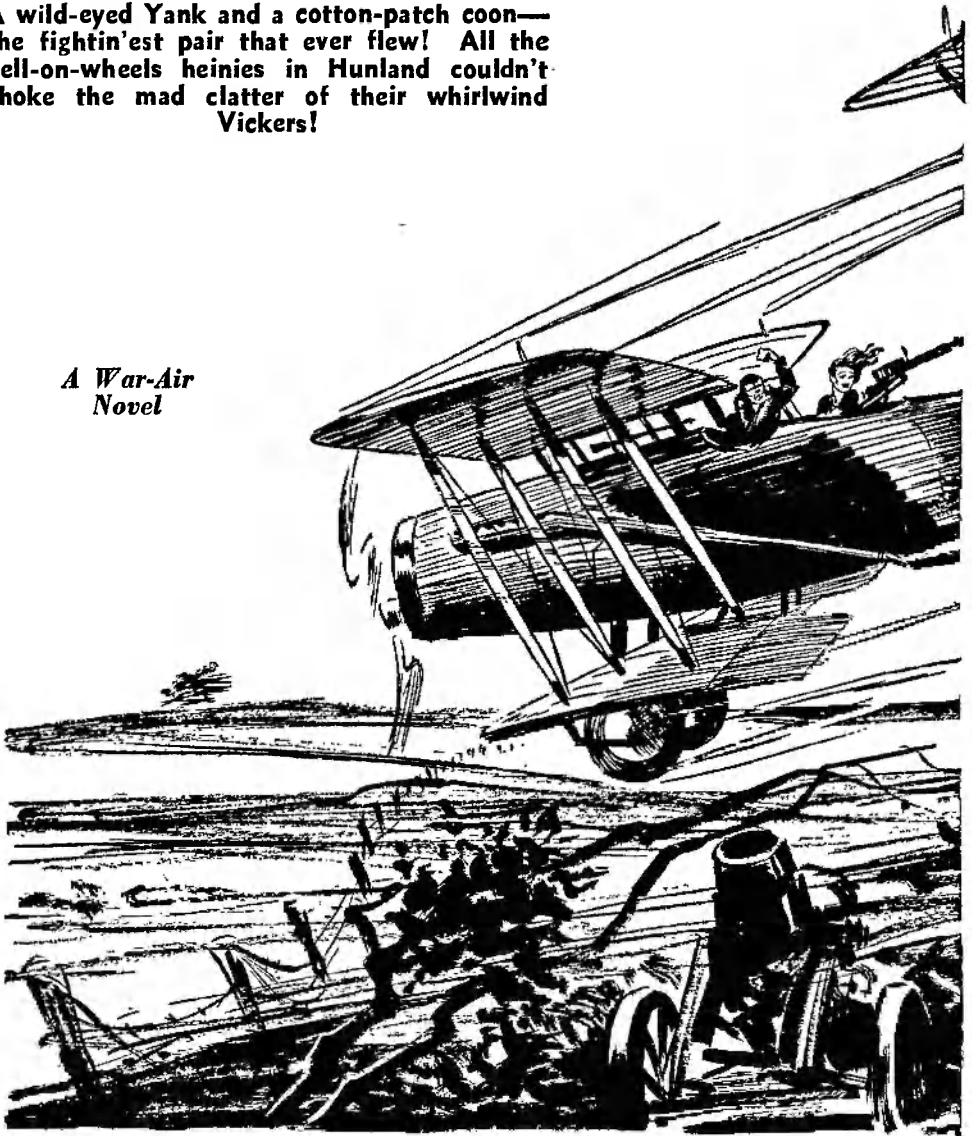
They entered the tent, Murray's voice dying to a soothing murmur.

# CRAZY CRATE

By FRED McLAUGHLIN

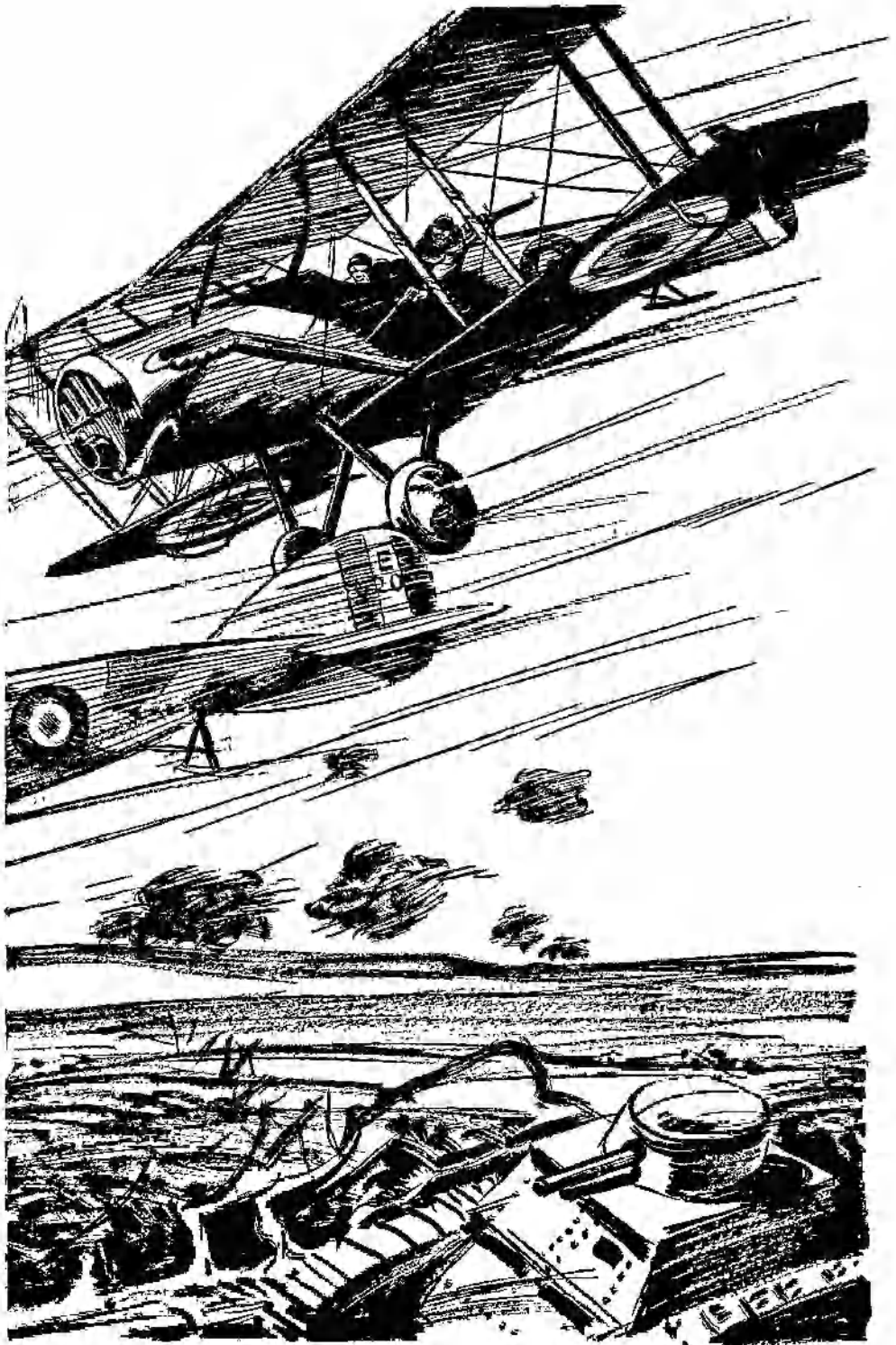
A wild-eyed Yank and a cotton-patch coon—  
the fightin'est pair that ever flew! All the  
hell-on-wheels heinies in Hunland couldn't  
choke the mad clatter of their whirlwind  
Vickers!

*A War-Air  
Novel*



CAPTAIN KIRBY, Adjutant of the Umpty-second Pursuit Squadron, brought the roadster to a sudden stop where the highway bent over the crest

of a low hill between Bernecourt and Noviant. North of them lay the lines of the 89th Division, and eastward and westward between Pont-a-Mousson and St. Mihiel



stretched ten divisions of the American First Army.

"A sweet fight, Colonel," said Kirby, chin tilted to the sky, where three planes

had seemingly put on an exhibition for the especial benefit of Colonel Bannon, squadron commander and his aide. There was one large plane, evidently an Albatross,

and two small ones. The roar of exhausts as ships zoomed, the shrill scream of struts and wings as they dived or banked, and the faint tack-a-tack-tack of machine guns as ship saluted ship added their mite to the other noises of front line activities, noises that had filled the world with tumult for more than four years.

Colonel Bannon put his glass on one of the smaller ships. "A Fokker, Kirby," he said; "the other is a Spad, but not from our squadron, for it's a little two seater, and all our twins are larger ships."

"And doing well, too, sir," said an orderly who was balanced on the running board. The orderly's eyes were good. "He has a sharpshooter with him—must have built another pit in a single seater."

Colonel Bannon swore softly, handing the binoculars to Kirby, whose eyes followed the red tipped German ship. "Hell," said the Adjutant—"it's von Blum, I can see the black arrow on his fuselage. A fast Albatross and von Blum in his Fokker. Those boys have bit off a mouthful they will find hard to chew."

For von Blum, German ace of the St. Mihiel sector, was well and unfavorably known to the Americans. Fifteen allied ships were in his bag, as well as five sausages. Only two days before he had sent down in flames an observation balloon near Regnevillie, and as the observer had come floating to earth under a silken spread of chute von Blum had coasted around him, drilling him again and again with his Spandau, a thing outside the ethics of the flying man. At another time he had raked with his machine gun an enemy pilot who had crashed, something else decent flyers never did.

And with all his deviltry he seemed to bear a charmed life, for good flyers had gone up with the avowed purpose of closing him out, only to crash before the German's attack or come limping home with tales of craft and superb flying skill on the part of the very much hated and very much sought Jerry.

OTHER cars came up and stopped, and marching squads turned their eyes to the heavens to view this sport of birds of prey. A great roar went up from massed lines of marching men over toward the ruined town of Flirey, a roar that rose

and fell with the fortunes of the fight.

The brave little Spad; a camouflaged mixture of green and gray and blue and tan—and slim and fast—dived and banked and zoomed, side-slipped and fell, tilting, straightened out, spewed its stream of bullets and dodged again. To those on the ground who watched the contest it seemed that the Spad was trying to ram its adversaries, for when it charged it made no attempt to avoid a collision, forcing the other ship to veer away.

"A clever thing to do," said the Adjutant, thinking aloud, "but it takes a gorgeous nerve to do it."

Colonel Bannon grinned. "That's what he's got, Kirby. If his observer would only come to life now. What two men can do in a tiny ship like that is something that I can't make out."

What they could do was demonstrated almost before the inquiring Colonel had expressed his doubts, for the Spad, apparently considering the two to one odds a bit too much, turned from the fight and came down in a sharp descent, volplaning with a dead motor, a perfect mark for a fighting ship. And as von Blum circled, waiting, watching, disdaining so simple a task, the Albatross wasted no time accepting such propitious opportunity, for it was on the tail of the Spad in the space of two breaths, aiming its nose carefully for the *coup-de-grace*.

"He's dead," said the Adjutant, "something has happened to his motor, and he's coasting. Not a chance—not a Chinaman's chance! That Jerry will be sure before he cuts loose, and when he does—!"

The Jerry was too sure—and too slow as well—for the Spad observer came to life with startling suddenness. A tracer stream began its journey from the rear pit of the fugitive. It couldn't miss, for the Jerry had put his Albatross in perfect alignment. The bullets traversed the German ship from propeller to flippers.

The little Spad went up in a roaring climb as the Albatross turned over in an uncontrolled barrel roll, wavered like a falling leaf and nosed down, while spreading flames licked around it caressingly. It fell, a gleaming meteor, in the destroyed village of Flirey, the ragged walls of whose ruined houses stood up like half decayed teeth in the brown gums of a hag.

Colonel Bannon eased his heavy body out of the car and hopped around with the grace of a Percheron. "Fine!" he cried. "Two to one, Kirby, they had that rear gun covered up. And the dead motor was only a blind to separate his enemies. Now for von Blum!"

THE zooming Spad flattened out, wavered over and side-slipped to dodge the German ace, who had dived upon him at tremendous speed. Von Blum, leveling off for a loop, found the Spad facing him again, and both ships opened up in passing. They banked, right and left, and came head on again. It was easily to be seen that the German ducked at the last instant to avoid a collision.

"He's crazy," said the Adjutant "—or drunk. If he hits that Jerry with his ship he is sunk."

The C. O. laughed. "And the German is afraid to ride his tail because of that sharpshooter in the rear pit. That Spad is a mule—he's dangerous fore and aft—and von Blum, with all his record and all his reputation, is afraid of him. First laugh I've had today. Yes, he's crazy—crazy as a fox!"

The pilot of the Spad apparently took no note of danger, for he drove his ship at the German as one might cast a javelin, and von Blum spent his skill and his energies dodging. It is one thing to fight an enemy who takes reasonable precautions to protect his life, it is quite another thing to contend with a madman who had no more regard for his own safety than he has for the safety of his adversary. The Jerry failed to evade a wild and reckless dive on the part of the Spad, and the trucks of the allied plane tore through his upper wing, banked in a hairpin turn and came roaring back for another try at suicide.

"He's crazy," cried Captain Kirby again; "no one but a crazy man would do such a thing."

"Crazy or not, Kirby," laughed the Colonel, "he is putting the fear of God into the heart of that Fritz. Von Blum is done, the day of the great German ace is over; those idiots in the Spad have broken his nerve. Look—he has turned tail and is running like the veriest coward. . . . Good work for the bughouse twins!"

ALL along the lines of the 89th a mighty roar went up as the Fokker headed north and east toward Chiacourt and the safety of his own guns, with the Spad in close pursuit. When dark blobs from Jerry archies began to blossom around the winner of the odds-on fight, it turned back and crossed the American lines, winging lower and lower until it was immediately over the headquarters car of Colonel Bannon. It circled once, eased down and touched the ridge lightly, taxiing up within a hundred feet of the car.

Then the gallery could see that it was a small Spad with an extra cockpit that carried a tiny figure and a Lewis gun mounted on a tournelle. In the hands of skilled men it would be a dangerous antagonist for any ship, as, indeed, it had proved itself to be. When the diminutive sharpshooter dropped to the ground and dragged off helmet and goggles, shouts of laughter filled the morning.

"A coon," said Captain Kirby in vast surprise "—burr-head! Wouldn't that sink you?"

"A negro flyer," Colonel Bannon added: "I didn't know we had any." He watched as the negro assisted the pilot out of the forward pit. "Perhaps he's one of those French Colonials."

"Nothing like it, Colonel," the adjutant affirmed, "he's a cotton patch coon—I'd know 'em anywhere. I guess the pilot is wounded."

On the ground at last the man who had driven his ship with such consummate skill and daring stood, swaying uncertainly. Awkward fingers removed his helmet, disclosing a tumbled mop of fair brown hair that gleamed in the sun. He was tall and slim, and his long legs must have required a deal of folding to find room in the limited space of a pursuit plane's cockpit. Followed by the negro he made his way slowly toward the headquarters car.

His walk was the weaving walk of a man in the middle stages of spiffication; he had on what anyone of experience might have judged to be a typical Saturday night bun. He stopped in front of the commanding officer of the Umpty-second, began a labored salute, changed his mind and the direction of his hand, and finally thrust a jocular finger into the Colonel's

equator. "Well, Sweetheart," he said, "how is the old bean?"

"Goshamighty!" gasped the coon, settling his status as an American, and not French Colonial. "Goshamighty, Mista Lennie—ain't you sho' enuff played hell now!"

Colonel Bannon was built on the lines of a limousine, and he was touchy about the excess baggage that fate had bestowed upon him. He was not and had never been a flyer, but every man under him, from Major Howard—second in command—to the lowliest grease monkey spoke of the Old Man as "the best dam' C. O. on the St. Mihiel front."

The Colonel put on his poker face and studied the culprit. That the airman was drunk he had no doubt, and that, with the able assistance of the negro, he had just put over a brilliant fight was a thing of equal certainty; yet, had the flyer come back with the Kaiser's left ear the Old Man would not have stood for the familiarity of that poke in the mid-riff. When the potent silence had reached the popping-off point he turned to his adjutant:

"Captain Kirby, see that this bird is caged for ten days."

## II

COLONEL BANNON, Major Howard and Adjutant Kirby surveyed the diminutive figure of Cabosh across a long table half covered with a jumbled lot of many colored maps. He was as black as the ace of spades, was Cabosh—christened Caleb Joshua in the River-front Baptist Church just off the historic field of old Chalmette. He was barely five feet tall, and as thin as a belt, he wouldn't have weighed a hundred pounds with a seven-five shell under each arm. There were laugh wrinkles around his alert, bright brown eyes—eyes that seemed to miss nothing, and eyes, too, that held in their depths a lambent flame of high human courage. A cotton patch coon, as Kirby had said, but he was kin to the eagles. The uniform he wore had been made for a bigger man, for the American army had no clothes for five-foot soldiers. It enveloped him like a sack, and it gave to him the grotesque appearance of something that had been only half completed.

"Well?" inquired the squadron commander.

Cabosh opened his face in a fascinating grin, exhibiting a double row of white, even teeth. "Thought maybe you might lemme tell you 'bout Mista Lennie, Cunnel, suh."

"What's your name?"

"Caleb Joshua Spram, suh."

"Sounds like somebody fell downstairs," said Major Howard, and Colonel Bannon's massive shoulders shook with silent laughter.

"Then why do they call you Cabosh?"

The negro ventured a high, windy laugh. "Mista Lennie done dat—said Caleb Joshua ain't nuthin' but Cabosh anyhow." He noted the Colonel's appraising scrutiny of his uniform. "Got dis offen a boy," he explained.

"I suppose," said the Adjutant, who had come from Shreveport and knew the negro mind and habits—"I suppose some enlisted man made the mistake of taking his clothes off when he went in bed."

"Yas suh—new recruit, I reckon. Soldiers as careless as all dat don't deserve no uniform. You gotta watch yo' step; anything you don't carry around wid you in this man's war ain't yours long." He considered the ill-fitting outfit. "'Course it ain't whut you might call snug, but I didn't have much time to pick it. When I heard Mista Lennie is gonna be transferred I gotta git a move on."

"You are still a French soldier then?" Major Howard inquired.

"Yas suh . . . corp'ral, but don't git paid 'nough to keep me in van rooch. I reckon the French army ain't gonna miss me much—an' I ain't no good widout Mista Lennie anyhow. Besides, two years wid dem frogs gits you all ready to croak."

"Did your C. O. permit the French flyers to tank up before a dog fight?" Colonel Bannon asked. "Does Lieutenant Murchison have to prime himself?"

"Naw suh, Cunnel—ain't no tankin' up. Mista Lennie is almost a teetotaler."

COLONEL BANNON, who could not forget that unseemly poke in the bay window, stabbed the negro with an accusing eye. "Do you mean to infer that Lieutenant Murchison wasn't drunk?"

"Drunk?" cried Cabosh in vast aston-

ishment. "Naw suh, Cunnel; Mista Lennie wasn't drunk, not a-tall. You can't git full and fly."

"Then why did he—?"

"Dat's de fog of fightin'?"

"The what?"

"Fog of fightin', suh; don't you know whut dat is?"

"No," said Colonel Bannon, striving hard for control. "I have been in this man's army only twenty-eight years and I don't know much; what is it?"

Cabosh explained: "When you git in de middle of a hot fight, Cunnel, suh, you git so het up you don't hardly know whut you're doin'; you git kinda wild. It's a fever, an' it makes you act jes' like you had 'bout a quart of van rooch with half a dozen cognac chasers. Honest to Gawd, suh, you'd think a man was drunk. Dat's de fog of fightin'."

The S. C.'s eyes danced, and the negro was not slow in noticing it.

"An' as fo' dat little playfulness of Mista Lennie—you see he's been in de French army two yeahs, and de frogs ain't picky. If a French soldier feels kinda lovin' and wants to kiss his C. O. ain't no harm done."

The room rocked with laughter, and Cabosh stood, half triumphant, white teeth gleaming in an expectant grin.

"If you give Mista Lennie a chance, suh," the negro went on, deep earnestness in his thin voice, "me an' him'll knock all de Jerries out of de sky and bring back a couple handfulls of de Kaisa's whiskas. If you keep Mista Lennie locked up, wid a guard pacin' back an' fo'th in front of his billet, you ain't got a chance in de world to win dis war—no suh!

"Eighteen ships he's got—two big Gothas fulla bombs, a Rumpler as big as a barn, a Hanoverian wid three men and a lotta photographs, two Albatross fighters, five sky-bags, and mo' Pfaltzes an' Fokkers'n you could shake a stick at. Not once is we down, every time Mista Lennie brings dat baby th'ough. Kin a man do dat if he's gotta prime himself for a dog fight. Naw suh."

"A VERY good case," Colonel Bannon conceded, as the phone rasped its summons. "Very well, Shepard," he said. "what is it?"

While he took the message the face of

the squadron commander registered mild interest, grave concern, surprise, bewilderment and, lastly, amusement. He replaced the phone and scribbled a few words on a piece of paper, dispatching it by an orderly. "That's an order for the immediate release of Lieutenant Murchison," he said.

"Yas suh."

Colonel Bannon continued: "Captain Shepard, flight commander at Royau, phones that von Blum has left a message for Lieutenant Murchison, after which he dropped about twenty pounds of H. E. on an ammunition dump near Bernecourt, and then evaded two of our Bristol chasers. A girl from the Salvation Army tent near Royau delivered the note to Shepard." The S. C. tapped his fountain pen on the heavy table. "Von Blum says he will be in the air above Limey at ten-thirty tomorrow morning, looking for the pilot who flies the hybrid Spad."

"Hot dog!" said Cabosh. "You gotta hand it to dat Fritz."

"If Lieutenant Murchison desires," the S. C. suggested—

"He wouldn't miss it fo' a bar'l monkeys, suh." He saluted and turned toward the door, but Adjutant Kirby stopped him.

"Now that 'Mista Lennie' is free, Cabosh, suppose you come through."

"Yas suh."

"What was he doing in the French army?"

"Wasn't no American army when we come over, Cap'n, suh."

"Humph."

"You see Mista Lennie come from Nawleens. My Mammy work fo' his Mammy and my Pappy work fo' his Pappy. Mista Lennie's Pappy is tall, wid a white goatee and gray eyes dat look right th'ough you. Usta be a Cunnel—owns two plantations down de River 'bout half as big as France, and got mo' money dan he knows whut to do wid. I know Mista Lennie since I'm knee high to a doodlebug—kinda valet for him. He's gotta gal—Marie Venot—"

"A little one," Colonel Bannon interrupted, "with black curly hair and brown eyes—part French?"

"Yas suh, Cunnel—purty as a picture, and more fire dan a volcano . . . funny how you know."

"Go on, Cabosh."



"Yas suh. One day she hand 'im de ice pitcher, and dat night Mista Lennie come home and begun to th'ow his stuff in to a coupla bags. Mad—mad as hell he is. 'Wheah you goin', Mista Lennie?' I ask him. 'Goin' to hell, Cabosh,' he says, jes' like dat. 'All right,' I says, 'I go's too'—and heah we is."

"Rather a quick trip," said Major Howard.

"Took Mista Lennie long time to git a transfer to de American army; didn't take me no time a-tall!" He wound up with another one of his high, windy laughs.

Colonel Bannon nodded, and the negro turned to the door again. "By the way," the S. C. inquired, "do you happen to know why Miss Marie Venot handed the so-called ice-pitcher to Lieutenant Murchison?"

"Yas, suh, Cunnel. . . . I reckon it's because he got full."

Then the door closed behind him, and they could hear his happy, barber-shop tenor:

*"Rufus Rastus Johnson Brown,  
Whut you gonna do when de rent come 'round?  
Whut you gonna say, how you gonna pay?  
Never have a cent till de judgment day!"*

The S. C. explained: "The Salvation Army girl who picked up von Blum's message and delivered it to Shepard answers to Cabosh's description of Marie Venot. Also she added a postscript of her own, which, according to Shepard, reads, 'Leonard, please don't—Marie.'"

"Murchison and von Blum are going to have a gallery," said Kirby. "With the Umpty-second and the Salvation Army behind him, the new pilot should—"

Colonel Bannon chuckled. "We can't lose. Whether Lieutenant Murchison is filled with the fog of fighting or cognac is a matter of no moment so long as he can put up the kind of fight we saw. Any man who licks von Blum is good. I hope Cabosh gets some mademoiselle to make a couple of uniforms out of that clothing store he's wearing."

### III

CALEB JOSHUA SPRAM was at peace with the world. He took no note of the muddy street or of enlisted

men who shouldered him off the narrow, cobbled walk. His eyes were on the sky—with its white clouds winging toward a western sun that neared the horizon—and his mind on the Café d'Or, where, he knew, red wine and cognac and the lowly beer flowed freely for one whose disposition was good, whose laugh was ready, whose tenor songs were varied, and whose feet were educated—and Cabosh's feet were nothing if not educated.

In one night he had sung and danced and laughed his way into the hearts of Madame Sourdez and her aged husband, so that, for the entertainment he had furnished their clientele, he had been supplied with food and drink. And Cabosh's ambition, now that Lieutenant Murchison was free, could not reach beyond the limits of bodily wants.

He pushed open the massive door and eased his thin, grotesquely appareled figure into the big room of the Café d'Or, which resembled almost to the last detail a hundred other cafés he had seen in France. For, off duty, Cabosh was a café hound. He loved the warmth, the camaraderie, the easy familiarity, the physical and mental sustenance of these depots of delight. To the last fibre of his alert, elastic, rubber-colored body he was the epitome of gregariousness, the mixer par excellence of the Western Front.

**M**EN acclaimed the diminutive coon upon his entrance, for his fame had spread since the downing of the Albatross and the past night of revelry. Here was a man who could fight and play and sing and dance and drink; here was diversion. He found a glass of beer in one hand and cognac in the other; he felt fingers upon his elbows and a heave that lifted him to the table-top, where he stood, grinning good-naturedly.

He downed the cognac and chased it with the beer, then he fashioned the first few steps of a clog dance that had won him many a nickel in the New Orleans saloons.

"Come on, Rastus," a drawing Southerner urged, "how about a song?"

And Cabosh, remembering that Lieutenant Murchison had fallen from grace because his Vierzy binge had taken so long to come to a head, made up one as he sang:

*"Champagne . . . ain't no good fo' de white man,  
Champagne . . . ain't no good fo' de coon;  
Champagne . . . ain't no juice fo' de fight, man;  
You gotta drink a drink dat develops soon!"*

A roar of approval followed this effort. The five officers put down their drinks and gave their attention to this new diversion that had come to Toul.

The negro dropped the emptied glasses, swung his arms like an animated windmill, and put his educated feet to work, the overlarge uniform adding to the grotesquerie of his performance. Using the table as a sounding board he tapped out the Marseillaise with the heavy soles of his shapeless shoes, then his swiftly moving feet played Dixie and Over There and other marching songs until the crowd was fairly lifting the roof with lusty if unmusical efforts.

**“WHAT** the hell is all this noise?” In the dead silence that followed this interruption, the negro noticed an officer standing beside the table that had been his stage, a big blond man with huge shoulders and the double bars of a captain. He noted the wings over the left jacket pocket and the dreamy, half-focused expression in the pale eyes, and he knew that this officer had partaken too deeply of cognac or some other potent fluid.

He saluted, grinning good-naturedly. “Cap’n, suh, how come you don’t like noise? Is you de noise doctor of Toul? How come you in dis man’s army if you can’t stand a little racket? Dis heah war is de noisiest war I ever saw.”

“Get down!” the captain roared.

The negro took a closer look and recognized the officer with the cognac head. “Well, Mista Bilky,” he cried, “I ain’t seen you since Heck was a pup. How’s li’l ole Nawleens?”

“Captain Cawthorn,” the officer yelled, “—you rat! I’m Captain Cawthorn.”

“Git off yo’ foot, big boy,” said Cabosh, still grinning. “I’m a corp’ral in de French army—an’ no rat. Besides, everybody in Nawleens calls you Bilky.”

Captain Cawthorn’s cognac must have been the quintessence of scrap, for he grabbed the negro’s foot and gave it a yank, and Cabosh hit the floor with his shoulders and the back of his head. He flopped over on hands and knees, evaded a

vicious kick and came swiftly to his feet, and an automatic, by seeming magic, had found its way into his hand. “Cap’n Bilky,” he said, coldly menacing, “I have killed men fo’ lessen dat.”

Cawthorn backed away, his hands shoulder high, for the good-natured, grinning, dancing, singing Cabosh had become suddenly the malevolent killer. His eyes were hard, his lips curled back, his breath whistled through his teeth, and his right hand held the pistol as steady as a rock. “Drunk or sober,” said the negro, deadly venom in his voice, “no man kin do dat to me—officer or no officer.”

“You draw a gun on me—a superior officer, you—?”

The negro’s laugh carried little merriment. “Yas—I do. You may be a officer, but I sweah to Gawd you ain’t superior. You ain’t nuthin—nuthin’ but po’ white trash. You never did know how to drink, even, you always drunk like a dam’ hawg, an’ you ain’t got no nerve ’cep’n you got a belly full of booze. Ain’t no real man in dis heah army couldn’t lick you. Santy Claus musta brung you dem wings; how de hell you got ’em I don’t know.

“I could put you in a ship and do things wid it dat would make yo’ fish eyes stick out like de eyes of a snail. Jes’ wait till Mista Lennie find out whut you done . . . he’ll push dat fat face of yourn ’round on de back of yo’ haid. Yas suh—he’ll make dis heah town too hot to hold you.”

Awed silence gripped the crowd, a silence that held and held as the seconds passed, for the soldiers knew the negro had committed a crime that could cost him his life.

**I**N the middle of this promising tableau the carved door swung open and a lieutenant of the air service breezed in. He carried himself with the jaunty air of a man who is at peace with the world, for he had just escaped from what looked to be ten days in the brig. He was tall, with the trim lines and the square shoulders of an athlete. There was something about the lithe, easy grace of his movements that bespoke the latent power of a panther. He was fair-haired, blue-eyed, with the clean-cut features and the firm chin of an aristocrat. One looking closely might have found something of the eagle in his eyes. It is

an indescribable thing that air fighters have, and nobody else; it is something more than resolute courage, something more than careless disregard of life, for the airman has looked at imminent death too often even to consider it.

"Good night fo' you, Mista Bilky," said the negro, pocketing his pistol; "right heah is when you git yours."

"What is this, Cabosh," inquired the newcomer, "—you with a gun, and—?" He turned to Captain Cawthorn. "By jove—Bilky!"

"Bilky, hell, Murchison—my name is Cawthorn, as you know."

Lieutenant Murchison grinned. "Sure, but Bilky seems to fit so well. I heard you were at Issoudun, and I knew then that the war couldn't last long. What's wrong? Why should Cabosh—?"

Captain Cawthorn's face was flaming. "Wrong? That damned dog robber of yours insulted me."

"Is it possible?"

"Don't try to get funny, Murchison, or I'll have to take a punch at you." Cawthorn was surely getting his money's worth out of the cognac he had drunk.

"Grabbed me by de foot, Mista Lennie," Cabosh explained, "an' slammed me down on de flo'—an' I ain't doin' nuthin' but a li'l' song an' dance fo' this heah gang."

The pupils of Murchison's eyes contracted to pin points as he turned to Cawthorn, his face a little pale, his chin out-thrust. "Same old Bilky, eh; always jumping on the little ones. Some day you are going to pick a big one, and he's going to knock you for a row of little white crosses."

Captain Cawthorn laughed. "Yeah; somebody like Lieutenant Murchison, maybe, a big frog with the French frogs, but only a tadpole here. You made a heluva splash with those half-portion Frenchies, but you'll have to show us something here. I'm going to see that they stand that chimpanzee buddy of yours up against a post in front of a squad of soldiers."

Anger flamed in Murchison's eyes. "When they do that, Bilky, you won't be able to see it, because I am going to mouse your eyes. When I get through with your face it's going to look like a two-ten had passed over it. The good people of New Orleans who put their real money in you

didn't get it back again will give me a leather medal—"

He half parried a swift blow from Cawthorn's powerful right that thrust him against the table, but he was up again like a flash with a lightning left jab that missed Bilky's chin by an inch.

The soldiers, anticipating more diversion, grabbed the chairs and the table and slid them against the walls, leaving an open arena for this ground fight of the war birds. One of the officers at the alcove table got to his feet. "I think I ought to stop that fight." He spoke with some reluctance.

"No, Major Howard," a lieutenant pleaded, "let them alone, sir; it looks like the makings of a nifty scrap. I'd like to see the new airman in action."

"Sure," said a grizzled captain, who wore a lot of vari-colored ribbons across his chest, "let 'em fight, Major; what's a fight more or less? Five million men are doing it less than a hundred miles from here. Besides, I think that over-sized stew is just about due to get what's coming to him, for the lieutenant has got what looks like a poisonous left. That big washout had no right to jump the coon—the black boy wasn't doing anything. Cawthorn doesn't seem to hold his cognac very well."

Major Howard sat down again. He knew that Cabosh had just lied Murchison out of a bad hole and he hated to see the lieutenant get into another one so soon. He knew that Murchison would be meeting the great German ace on the morrow, and he naturally wanted the new pilot of the Umpty-second to be at his best. "All right," he said, "but I think it's damned poor training for a man who will have to put over the biggest fight of his life tomorrow."

"Don't worry," said the grizzled captain, "two years in the French army isn't going to soften a man any, and that slim bozo don't look like a jelly-fish. As Lieutenant Meredith has said, it has the appearance of a nifty scrap."

AND indeed it was. The "slim bozo," outweighed by forty pounds, balanced on the balls of his feet and, ducking, parrying and jabbing, carried the fight to his antagonist. And no mean antagonist he found him, too, for Bilky—so-called—

could use his fists to good advantage. He had got his training on the lower Mississippi, where a man's best arguments are his fists, where the rule of might is still the rule of right, and where a man can keep what he's got only through the strength of his good right arm.

The soldiers flattened themselves against the walls, wisely applauding well-directed blows on the part of both fighters, while Cabosh, frankly and enthusiastically partisan, leaped to the top of the long walnut table and, dancing back and forth upon it, yelled encouragement to his idol.

"Sink 'im," cried the coon, "—hot shot to de fuselage! Loop 'im, Mista Lennie, put 'im in a back flip. Dat's it, bust 'is wing, cave 'is struts, kick 'im in de trucks. Haw . . . lissen to dat engine. Too much body fo' de motor—got a Gnome engine in a freighter. Give 'im time, Mista Lennie, and he'll crash by hisself."

The negro's keen insight had read the picture. Bilky *was* too big for his engine. He had lived an easy life at Issoudun, training center for flying men, where too much drink and too much food and too little work had softened the bulk of him. As he dodged and jabbed and tried to block, his foot work—always a necessary thing in a good fight—slowed up, and his breath became an asthmatic tragedy.

He opened his swollen lips in a blasphemous outburst, and Murchison, laughing gaily, closed them again with a lightning right that rocked the bigger man from heel to crown. The lieutenant swung a swift uppercut that landed on Bilky's jaw and popped his head back in a manner that gave one the grotesque idea that the captain's neck was made of rubber. He drove a straight right to the belt that folded Bilky together like a jack-knife, and he straightened him up again with another left uppercut. Finally he swung a "round-house" right almost from the floor that struck just under his opponent's left ear.

"Wing slide!" yelled Cabosh as Bilky hit the floor with his right shoulder and the side of his head and lay, gasping feebly.

**L**IUTENANT MURCHISON picked up a half-filled mug of beer and dashed the contents into the face of the prostrate man, who sat up, sputtering and

swearing impotently. One of his eyes was closed, and the other, sadly out of focus because of the rain of bruising blows, peered in owlish futility, seeking to make out recognizable things.

The grizzled captain caught his arm and helped him to his feet, where he stood, swaying drunkenly. Major Howard, counterfeit anger registered on his flaming face, stood before him threateningly.

"What the hell do you mean, Cawthorn," the major roared, "by coming into this café and starting a fight like this? Are you dumb—or crazy? A fine specimen of officer and gentleman you are—a fine example before these enlisted men. What do you mean, I say? Is this the kind of officer we have in the Umpty-second, is this the way—?"

"S'perior officer," Bilky mumbled, trying hard to bring the major into the astigmatized line of his vision, and failing miserably.

"Superior hell, Cawthorn. When Colonel Bannon hears of this he'll billet you for a month—if he doesn't wash you out entirely."

Bilky tried a new defense: "Pulled a gun on me. . . . Dam' coon pulled a gun on me—a captain—tried to shoot me."

The grizzled captain laughed. "You're dreaming, Cawthorn—or drunk; there was no gun. You don't see well."

Bilky attempted to locate this new tormentor, with scant success. He sighed, for his faculties were functioning none too well, and all the world seemed suddenly to have gone against him.

Major Howard continued his arraignment: "You insulted Lieutenant Murchison; you hit him, and he had to defend himself. You're just a common saloon fighter, not a captain of the air service. Jump on an enlisted man, try to lick a fellow flyer. I am ashamed of you—you're drunk."

"Sorry," said Bilky, at last.

"Nobody pulled a gun on you," Major Howard emphasized.

"Maybe not; I—I don't remember."

"There was no gun."

"No, sir," Bilky conceded.

"And you owe Lieutenant Murchison an apology. Is that the way to welcome a new officer to the squadron?"

"Sorry," said Bilky again, reaching

out a hand blindly; "sorry, Leonard."

"Okay, Bilky," said Murchison, taking his hand.

"I won't report this to the S. C., Captain Cawthorn," said Howard, magnanimously, "if you think in the future—"

"Yes, sir, Major—thank you, sir," Bilky mumbled.

And all the time Caleb Joshua Spram—nicknamed Cabosh—who had started this thing, lay on his back on the long table, a prey to smothered merriment, his hands and feet beating the air like a big black bug in a convulsion.

#### IV

COLONEL BANNON minced across the sodden tarmac, jumping and stepping sideways like a playful hippopotamus to miss the tiny puddles of water that dotted the field, for it had rained in the night. But now the sky, save for a few feathery clouds that floated lazily northward, was the deep, topaz blue that a flyer loves to see.

Eight ships stuck their noses over the dead line. Some were cold, with mechanics and pilots giving them a last lookover, some were revving toward that sweet, sustained song of safety that the careful airman is willing to wait for, while others, warmed up and ready for the air, were voicing the husky whisper that a slowly moving prop will make.

Murchison's hybrid Spad stood at the end of the line, with the fighting pilot in the front seat and the diminutive coon, enveloped in flying suit and helmet and goggles, snug in the extemporized pit in the rear. The lieutenant cut the gas and the switch when he realized that his ship was the goal of his squadron commander.

The Old Man's face was grave when he reached and gripped Murchison's hand. "I want you to know, Lieutenant, that you don't have to accept this challenge of von Blum's if you don't want to. He's probably got a card up his sleeve anyhow."

Murchison grinned. "I wouldn't miss it, Colonel, for anything in the world—and I'll try to send a tracer up his sleeve for that card."

The colonel noted the pilot's discolored eye and the crossed strips of adhesive on his cheek. He raised his bushy eye-

brows inquiringly. "I didn't know that you had been injured."

"Not at all, sir; a mere scratch. I was playing with a strange dog, and he tried to bite me."

If the S. C. knew anything about the misadventure of the strange dog his face gave no sign of it. He indicated Cabosh with a nod of his head. "You are taking Corporal Spram with you?"

"Only to Royau, sir. The challenge, I think, does not include Cabosh. I am willing to abide by the letter as well as the spirit of the Jerry's challenge."

The negro slumped lower in his seat. Colonel Bannon beamed. "I am very glad to discover, Lieutenant, that my judgment is not at fault. I have had good luck in reading men. I must tell you that I went through the records of every American flier on the western front, and finally asked GHQ for you."

"Thank you, sir."

Cabosh disappeared under the coaming of his cockpit, the S. C. waved an arm, a greaseball dragged the propeller down, and the little Spad became a thing of life and racket, winging away to the south, to rise, to bank sharply to the right, and finally to straighten out on its northward flight.

FOR a few miles they followed the Bernecourt Road, a broad national highway, which unfolded a scene of tremendous activity, because preparations for the great September push were on, a push which drove at the two-bladed knife known as the St. Mihiel Salient—a German weapon thrust deep into the side of France. The north edge of this threatening blade bore on Verdun, the south edge menaced Nancy and Toul. To slice off this salient and to curve it back upon the stronghold of Metz was the task of the American First Army, a task which, in the next few weeks, was to be accomplished brilliantly.

Below the roaring Spad, in the illimitable mud of France, khaki-clad troops moxed slowly, in apparent aimlessness, but moved to a set purpose. Endless lines of trucks were converging upon certain depots, and heavy artillery crawled along. Far to the north of them observation balloons—the eyes of the artillery—swayed

like flying tethered elephants, and all along the northern horizon orange jets of flame stabbed the gray-blue haze.

Above Royau Murchison cut the gas and coasted down in a wide curve. This was the negro's first chance to make himself heard, and he took quick advantage of it: "Ain't you gonna lemme go wid you, Mista Lennie?"

"Not this time, Cabosh. I don't want to take advantage of even a Jerry. I think he expected me to come alone."

"Dat Fritz'll play a trick on you sho'; never was one dat could shoot square. Better lemme go wid you, you always had good luck wid me—I'm jes' like a rabbit foot."

"I'll have to take a chance on it alone, Cabosh."

"A trick, sho' as hell," Cabosh insisted. "He'll have a flock of Fokkers hidin' in a cloud, he'll shoot inflammable bullets at you. Bet a keg of nails he's got a ace in de hole."

Lieutenant Murchison laughed as he feathered the narrow field, and Captain Shepard, flight commander at Royau, ran across the tarmac to welcome him, for Shepard and Murchison had been pals and fellow fliers for the French at Soissons.

Shepard fairly dragged him from the cockpit. "Come on, son," he cried, "we've got a drink waiting for you—and some home cooking. The Salvation Army girls have sent us waffles."

Murchison looked at his watch. It was nearing ten o'clock. "It'll have to be a quick drink, Shep., and a quicker eat; I'm due up yonder soon." He faced northeast, where, five minutes away, lay Limey and the site of his rendezvous. He turned back to the coon, sitting disconsolate in the rear pit. "Come on, Cabosh, and get a drink."

"I don't want no drink," said the negro sullenly.

"Well, a waffle, then; I never saw you when you couldn't eat."

"I don't want no waffle."

Murchison laughed. "All right, have it your own way. I wish you'd see that the gun and the back pit are covered up."

"Yas suh."

empty, for he had a deep and abiding love for the fine, considerate, courageous white man who had been good to him, who, for two years, had fed him and protected him. He had gained, from Murchison, that clean, high courage that is the heritage of the white man, for he had seen his "Mista Lennie" smile into the face of imminent death and carry on with no sign of fear; he had learned that fear was only a weakness, while courage was strength.

Cursing the luck that had made his idol a bit too fine a sportsman, he eased out of the seat, dragged from behind it a piece of canvas that had been cut and fashioned for a particular purpose, covered the gun with it and clamped the edges of the waterproof material snugly around the coaming of the cockpit, then he dropped, by way of the wing, to the ground. With no backward look at the ship he turned his face to the south and trudged along the muddy ground, a shambling, woe-begone figure, all bagginess and wrinkles and shoes.

He came at length to a rock fence that crossed the south end of the flying field, half buried in waist-high brush. He got down on his knees beside the fence and lifted up his prematurely wrinkled face. "Oh, Lawdy," he moaned, "—Lawdy, dat fine gemman gonna get his'n. All he needs is a square deal, a fair break. I ain't askin' you, Lawd—"

A clear, feminine voice broke into his prayer, a sweet voice full of sympathy and wonder: "Why, Cabosh—isn't it Cabosh?"

He stopped, amazement and fear written large on his face, then—eyes wide with terror—he opened his mouth in a wild rush of words: "Goshamighty—I ain't ask fo' no angel!"

The voice carried a bubbling note of merriment: "How sweet a compliment, Cabosh; since you have lived with the French—"

He came quickly to his feet, peering across the fence, where, scarce ten feet away, stood the slim, graceful figure of a girl in the garb of the Salvation Army. "Huh," he said at length, "—ain't nuthin' but jes' you."

The girl drew off her cap and thrust her fingers through a profusion of black, shining curls.

"Land sakes," he gasped, "—Miss Venot, Miss Marie!" He stared in

**C**ABOSH watched them as they went arm in arm across the field, and his heart was sore, and his very soul was

wonder at the dancing brown eyes, the piquant, olive face, the half-parted, red lips, and the sweetly pointed chin that trembled even as she laughed. "Ain't no angel half as purty as you; no wonder Mista Lennie—"

"That's better, Mister Spram."

"How come you so far f'om home?"

She evaded his eyes. "We must all help, Cabosh. What are you doing here?"

"Me? I come over heah to help Mista Lennie go to hell."

"Cabosh!"

"Yes'm." He grinned. "You see, when you th'owed dat gemman down you sho' made it hard fo' de Jerries; whut Mista Lennie ain't done to Fritz cain't be done. I reckon de ole Kaisa is settin' at home right now, pattin' 'is foot an' pullin' 'is whiskers out one at a time tryin' to think up some way to stop me an' dat good-lookin', sky-bustin' ex-friend of yourn."

"Cabosh, is he—is he going up this morning to—fight von Blum?"

"Yas'm sho' is; wouldn't miss it fo' nuthin'."

She put her arms on the rock fence and her head on her arms, and sobs shook her slim shoulders. He touched her elbow. "S'all right, missy, he'll flatten dat Fritz jes' like a Nawleans pancake; not a chance is de Dutchman got. Gonna make dat big German ace look like de deuce; gonna fill dat baby so fulla bullets he'll be a lead mine fo' a hunderd yeahs."

She nodded. "I—I hope so. Are you going up with him?"

"No'm—ain't gonna lemme go; wouldn't be no fight if I put dat Lewis gun on 'im."

"But, Cabosh, don't you always go with him?"

"Yas'm, 'cep'n' dis time. Dat Jerry is fulla tricks. I ain't scared Mista Lennie can't lick 'im—some funny bizness I'm lookin' fo'."

She looked over the field to where the tiny Spad stood, waiting. "Can't you show me his plane, Cabosh?"

"Yas'm; only two minutes' walk; but we gotta git a move on."

**I**N the tin mess hall that stood against the spacious hangar Lieutenant Murchison came into his own again. Of the ten pilots of Shepard's flight he knew two besides the flight commander. There was

Durkin—lean, dark, cadaverous, silent—a product of the Tennessee mountains, and a veritable wolf in the air. He drank with the best of them, fought with the worst of them, and asked no quarter of any of them. When he crashed a crate he always followed it to the ground. Hunting a fight—as had ever been his wont—he had come over early in the scrap with the Canadians and had been later transferred to his own again. He took Murchison's hand in a grip that pressed a ring into the flesh of the lieutenant's finger, and his steel-gray eyes were warm with regard. "Well, Leonard," he drawled, "you're as welcome as a shot of moonshine."

And there was the trim, alert, soft-spoken Prentiss, last of a long line of warriors; a dignified gentleman always, a cool, calm, clean fighter with high courage stamped on his fine face. "I think, Lieutenant," he said, "that the Umpty-second is now complete; you are just what it has needed."

Murchison was surprised to find Captain Cawthorn in the crowd. Bilky's head and face carried about a pound of bandage and adhesive, and he looked as though he had tried to ram a propeller. "I had to come over and see this duel, Leonard," he said, extending a fat hand; and as the lieutenant took it he continued: "I want to offer apology again, old man; cognac is no friend of mine—and I'm off it for good." His grin was a ghastly thing, but he seemed at least to be trying.

"That's all right, Bilky," said Murchison, yet he knew that Bilky wasn't his friend, and would never be.

Only Shepard accompanied him to the waiting ship, watching while he examined the belts of ammunition in his twin Vickers. "That all the shells you're taking, Leonard?"

"Plenty, Shep; if I can't get him with this I'll never get him. This fight won't last two minutes." He grinned. "If I can cross-hair him just once that is all I ask; these babies never have failed me." He put his hand caressingly on the trip of one of his machine guns. "All you need, old son, is a good ship and a good gun."

"Yeah," Shepard agreed. Evidently both men took iron nerve for granted. "Yet I have a hunch von Blum expects



to trick you; it's his idea of sportsmanship."

"All in the game, Shepard. If the ship and the gun are right, old head, trips and not tricks will win."

"Okay, Leonard, but von Blum isn't our only problem. There's a leak somewhere in this sector—a dangerous leak. Jerry knows what we are going to do before we do it; he has our plans as soon as we have formulated them; he knows the exact location of every ammunition dump we have, and he can hit it in the night. Von Blum might be the key."

Murchison grinned. "Perhaps I can stop von Blum and the leak at the same time."

"Good." Captain Shepard drew a slip of paper from his jacket pocket and professed it to Murchison. "Colonel Bannon told me to give you this only when you were ready to shove off."

The lieutenant read it at a glance:

If the pilot of the hybrid Spad is not a coward he will meet me tomorrow morning above Limey at ten-thirty.

It was signed by von Blum.

"Fair enough," said Murchison, but it was the postscript that held his eye, that made him catch his breath, that caused his heart to beat a swift tattoo against his ribs: "Leonard, please don't—Marie." He knew the handwriting, of course.

Marie Venot, the dainty, delicious, beautiful lady who had held his happiness in her hands! All the breath-taking, heart-breaking, overwhelming love that he had tried so hard to put out of his life came back to him, sent the hot blood racing through his veins again, deluged him in a flame. He took a long breath and held it before he spoke: "Where is she, Shep?"

"In the Salvation Army tent, less than half a mile from here."

He remembered that he had seen the big brown tent with its characteristic markings as he and Cabosh had coasted down. He looked at his wrist watch. Ten-twenty. In ten minutes he must meet von Blum. Ten minutes—and he hadn't seen Marie for two years; except in his dreams, and in the mists of evening, and in the soft, feathery clouds; for, in spirit, she had ridden the air with him. She had seemed half real, half angel, always very close to

him—and always very far away. She had written him; perhaps she wanted to see him.

What was it Colonel Bannon had told him, what was it the grizzled soldier had said? He remembered—remembered with a sinking of the heart. . . . "He must have—first and last and all the time—an undivided mind in his service." Well, Colonel Brannon would get it.

Lieutenant Murchison laughed—a laugh that had no note of pleasure in it—and thrust the challenge with its disconcerting postscript into his pocket. "Where the hell is that coon?" he said. But Cabosh was not to be found, and Murchison, remembering the negro's disconsolate look, laughed again.

A grease-monkey swung the prop, and the still warm motor fired readily. The pilot revved it two minutes and cut it down until the roar of the propeller was only a vast whisper. The chocks were removed. "Well, so long, Shepard; see you in church," he said, pushing the throttle bar ahead. He was off to meet the menace of von Blum.

Half dreaming, he took all the length of the field before he lifted his ship. He ruddered to the left, straightened out and, scarce two hundred feet high, aimed the nose of his bus in the direction of the Salvation Army tent. He dipped a salute at two people who stood in front of the tent: a graceful figure, poised on tiptoe and swinging her arms—a figure he would have recognized among a million; and a big, blond, broad-shouldered man in uniform, with his head swathed in white bandages.

"Well, I'll be damned," Murchison said, "—Bilky!"

## V

LIEUTENANT MURCHISON pulled back on the stick, pushed the throttle bar all the way forward, kicked a light right rudder and listened to the swelling roar of exhaust and prop as the brown and green landscape streamed southward beneath him. It was a good ship—his Spad—a trustworthy ship, thanks to the constant nursing of Cabosh, who, according to his own admission, "could tell whut a engine wuz thinkin' 'bout." The little negro had almost lived with the camou-

flaged mechanical bird; many a night—tired after hours of grooming—he had slept curled up like a 'possum in one of the pits. To the negro, and to Murchison as well, the frail craft was not an inanimate thing of artfully fashioned metal and wood and linen, it was a very personal part of the fighting trio, and it held a place in their hearts.

Murchison reached again for the potent postscript that had seemed to put a new complexion on the war. He read it, reread it, and pressed it to his lips. "I am coming back, chérie," he said, "and when I do—"

He returned the missive to his pocket and swept the heavens with a careful look. Far above him, a tiny dot in the azure sky, floated a toy ship. Limey lay before him, a small town, half destroyed, that hugged the main highway, a town alive with khaki-clad soldiers, many of whom waved their hands at the lone corsair of the air, for word had gone out from the Umpty-second that an American ace would meet von Blum in a duel, and that American archies would direct their fire away from the red-tipped, black-arrow ship of the German flyer. This was to be a fight to the finish between the eagles—the best the Umpty-second had to offer against the lucky Jerry.

Over Limey he began to climb, climb in a tight corkscrew, for the front line was hardly a rifle-shot away, and beyond, to the northward, the criss-cross pattern of German trenches and wire entanglements stretched for miles and miles. At five thousand feet he leveled off, widening the arc and idling his motor. He looked up again, grinning. "Am I host this morning, or guest; do I go up and ask him to come out, or do I wait for him?"

He wondered vaguely what Marie might think of this game of legalized murder that he had gone into, wondered what she thought of his projected duel. If he had had only a minute to see her, to hear her voice again, to—to hold her close to his heart. Ah, well, He wondered why she had come to this raging inferno, leaving the sweet, refined quiet of her home to come to an evil place like this—a place of filth and infamy, of hatred and horrors, of an insane, insatiable lust for killing.

WITH death above him he wondered thus, half dreaming, until the scream and roar of struts and wings awakened him to his danger. He held his ship on an even keel, with half throttle and kept to the wide arc that he had begun, while he watched von Blum's terrific dive. The German ace came down like a meteor, straight for the Spad, which made no move to defend itself.

"If he can shoot with certainty at that speed," said Murchison, "I'll give him an open chance, but no man can do it." He continued on his curving path as though he were alone in the air, giving von Blum every opportunity to develop his attack. He felt sure that the German ace, diving almost straight down, would have to shoot at a mark moving across his path, and would have to bank or level off sharply to keep from colliding with his target. He didn't give von Blum credit for having nerve enough to crash into him, and his judgment was not at fault, for the attacker, doubtless expecting the Spad to dive away from him, had to flatten out after a too hasty volley, and to flatten out so abruptly as to put a tremendous strain on his Fokker. But the Fokker—steel frame and with struts of steel—is a sturdy ship, and built for such work.

While von Blum swung around in a left blank, wondering, no doubt, if his quarry was crazy not to have made an attempt to avoid his dive, Murchison gunned his motor and zoomed. A tracer bullet had scored the coaming of the cockpit almost under his hand, and another bullet had pinged against the motor hood. Close shooting it was, especially under the conditions the German had chosen.

He straightened out and waited for von Blum, who was climbing steadily. He came around on a hairpin turn, pushed the stick forward until the nose of his crate pointed at the zooming Fokker and gave it the gas. He determined to try out the German's nerve. He came angling down in a roaring dive, holding his ship on the red-tipped bus without a hair's deviation from its course. He made no effort to bring his guns into play; he was still experimenting in Jerry psychology. He drove straight at the mark, wide-open throttle.

At the last instant von Blum, who

must have realized that the diving Spad was not going to veer from its course toward certain destruction, offered a wild tracer stream and ducked, and Murchison's trucks missed the Fokker flippers by less than a foot. The American waved his hand. He merely wanted to show von Blum that he wasn't afraid of him.

Straightening out again, both ships were on the same level. Murchison ruddered through to the right and passed in front of his adversary, who raked him with another harmless machine-gun volley. He waved at the German again. He had not, as yet, touched the trips of his guns. As von Blum came around in a wide right bank Murchison did a lightning loop—a loop so tight that the ship seemed almost to turn on its own tail as axis—and found the Jerry just below and ahead of him. He wasn't fifty feet from the Fokker's rudder; a sweet and satisfactory position for a nifty bit of shooting.

For an instant the smile left Murchison's face, which set suddenly in iron lines of grimness. No more was he the easy-living, easy-drinking, laughter-loving pilot of many a roistering binge; he had become a part of the engine of death that he drove. Right hand on the stick, left hand caressing the trip of his trusty Vickers, he waited until von Blum's neck came in line with the crossed hairs of his sights, then he sent his first bullet stream under what he considered ideal conditions for success. That had always been his method—never to shoot wildly, never the chance shot—to wait and wait until everything was right, then to do his strafing in a scientific way. He couldn't miss. He felt the staccato tremors of the twin guns, but saw no effects of the streams of lead he had poured at his enemy.

That should have won the fight, but it didn't. Zooming, he rubbed a hand across his goggles. Was he blind, was he crazy? His ship was working, and his guns were working, but he had missed—and missed. It seemed to him that he couldn't hit the ground with a balloon. He looked to his ammunition. One belt was bare of cartridges, the other less than a third full. Von Blum had grinned as he passed, kidding him—kidding Lieutenant Murchison, who had a formidable string of washouts to his credit.

He swore softly. He hadn't seen a tracer bullet from either of his guns. Strange—yet someone might have made a mistake in loading the belts; but they were bullets, nevertheless, and, fired with that care and precision which had always been Murchison's pride, should have found their mark. Tracers were only guide lights anyway; any bullet, properly placed, would conk a pilot and bring a ship wavering down to a crash.

He tried again—and again. With all the skill at his command he maneuvered for a favorable setting, and, winning finally, poured the last of his shells at his adversary. It seemed like a dream fight, which contained all the action of deadly combat with none of its tragic consequences. "Well, I'm a groveling boll-weevil," he said, "—if that damned flat-head hasn't got me buffaloed. I've hit him a dozen times."

He drew out a Colt automatic and held it under the coaming of the cockpit so the German couldn't see it. He angled down to the Jerry's level and straightened out, paralleling the course of his antagonist. Von Blum, less than a hundred feet away, turned a face that bore a wide grin but wiped it off in a hurry when the American pilot raised his right hand, from which flamed a stream of bullets.

The German ducked, kicking his ship to the right, came all the way around and raked the Spad from propeller to tail skid. He looped and would have nosed into Murchison's flippers—Spandaus sputtering—if the American hadn't wavered over into a side-slip, right wing pointing straight down, and using stick for rudder and rudder for vertical control.

He slipped the pistol into his belt and gave himself over to the business of self-defense, for the Jerry had begun to attack in earnest now. And his attack was a daring, brilliant, skilful thing. Luck must have ridden with the Umpty-second pilot, for many bullets had found his bus, but none had touched the driver.

He maneuvered an unarmed ship against a master craftsman who seemed to have an unlimited supply of ammunition, yet the thought of flight had never entered his head. He had come to get von Blum, and he would get him or crash in the attempt. He would not go back to the Umpty-second

with a sorrowful tale of defeat. He knew there was more at stake than his own life—in war there always is. He knew the task for him was to bring down the enemy, regardless of the costs. Means were immaterial, the result was the only thing of importance. And there was one way to bring him down, a sure way, a way that couldn't possibly fail.

His eyes hardened, his muscles tensed, his breath quickened while he waited for the Jerry's next attack. He still had a weapon at hand, a weapon that wouldn't miss; the good old Spad would go where he shot it, and enemy bullets couldn't stop it. So he waited, watching.

**J**UST like a toreador leans away from the mad rush of a bull, so Murchison tilted his wings and leaned away as von Blum and his rattling Spandaus flashed past. Then he gave the motor all it had, centered the stick and pushed it forward and went careening toward his target. This was his chance to sink the German ace, and he figured the price of his life and a ship as cheap if the end should be accomplished. He forgot New Orleans and all the people there who would miss him, he forgot Marie Venot, forgot everything except the one grim task that lay before him—to crash the Fokker and its passenger. "I won't miss this time," he said, "I won't miss this time."

Von Blum was climbing slowly as the American pilot dived upon him. Murchison's recourse to the automatic was sufficient advertisement of the impotence of his Vickers. He reasoned correctly that the Jerry had no fear of him, and he played his hand on the basis of that reasoning.

The German made no attempt to avoid him until it was too late. He tried to level off and lacked the time. Murchison drove his ship straight at the helmeted head, hoping at least to rake him with his trucks. He cut the gas and closed his eyes for an instant as he felt the shock of contact, pulling back on the stick and gunning the motor to drag away from the wreck if possible. What had happened to his Spad he didn't know, and he could only wait, and hope.

He looked over the edge of the fuselage. His axle had caught the propeller of the Fokker, and the prop, shattered to a hun-

dred deadly fragments, had torn the German's upper wing to shreds. Already the Fokker had begun to nose down, tail weaving, and Murchison knew that he had not failed in his task. He felt sure that the famous black-arrow ship was done, a poor washout that would be in flames before it struck the forest. His heart missed a beat when he thought of the German ace in a dead ship that hurtled to destruction. Yet pride touched him, for he had won with an unarmed plane.

Always careful, he followed the wreck down, for his report on the fight must be full and complete. The collision had occurred at nearly ten thousand feet. A cloud lay between them and the forest. When the disabled Fokker disappeared into the cloud, Murchison, expecting always some Jerry trick, dived after it at tremendous speed. It was a vast relief to him to know that, mechanically at least, his Spad was good. He gave no thought to possibilities of a wrecked undercarriage—he would find that out when he tried to land.

He emerged from the pearly vapor into the sunshine again and saw the Fokker far below him, a comet with a forty-foot tail of flame. "Well," he said, "that's that." He ruddered sharply to the right. He would go back to Royau and get Cabosh and, perhaps, see Marie for a minute, then he would fly to Toul and report the washout of the great German ace. His first task in the Umpty-second had been accomplished.

## VI

**T**HAT'S what Lieutenant Murchison thought, but the Jerry had more lives than an insurance company, for he popped out of the cloud like a huge spider, the silky web of chute spread out above him. "Well, I'll be drowned in cognac," said Murchison; then he laughed, for he was more than half glad that the German hadn't crashed. Down in Puvenelle Forest, miles behind the American lines, von Blum would be, he knew, just about as safe as a mouse at a tabby convention.

He coasted around the parachute jumper, disgust in his heart for a fighter who would be so great a coward as to fortify himself thus with an anchor to windward. Espe-

cially after the Fritz had written him that blowsy challenge. He thought of von Blum as just the kind of mut who, at a boxing contest, would put a horseshoe in his glove for luck, and he wondered what it was in the make-up of the German that kept him from being a clean sportsman. He remembered that Colonel Bannon had said von Blum would have a card up his sleeve.

He saw a Luger gleaming in the Jerry's hand, and he kept his descending circles wide enough for safety. As they approached the roof of the forest he saw that von Blum would probably land in a narrow, limited clearing, which had doubtless been a bit of grazing land for goats.

As the parachute draped itself across the trees on the edge of a grassy glade, and the pendant figure swung to the sod beneath it, Murchison grazed the crest of the foliage, dropped abruptly, wing-washed to kill his speed and held his breath as his trucks touched the earth. The collision, fortunately, had left his undercarriage undamaged, and he taxied up until he was within fifty feet of his quarry, where he stopped.

On the ground at last! It had seemed an age since he had taken off at Royau. The duel was over, and he had won; he had beaten the famous German ace with guns improperly ammunitioned, for he had a hunch that not only the Jerry's parachute, but also the impotence of his twin Vickers were in the same deck with the card in von Blum's sleeve. In time that would be settled, and someone would pay for it; with the menace of his Colt automatic he might even now force it out of the German. He determined to try.

Gun in right hand covering the prostrate figure, Murchison loosened the safety belt across his knees and climbed out of the cockpit. Cautiously he approached von Blum, automatic to the fore, for he knew from varied experience that the Jerry is as tricky as a Chink. He was lying, face down, arms outflung as he had fallen. The Luger was not in sight; evidently it had been hurled from his hand in his fall. The American turned him over on his back. Von Blum's breathing and pulse were normal, his face a little pale, and his body limp; and Murchison concluded that a bump on the head in his swift descent had laid him out.

He freed the German of the parachute harness, dragged the billowy fabric from the trees, folded it neatly, and deposited it on the lower wing. In the cockpit of his Spad he found a metal container of cognac, a part of which he forced between his prisoner's teeth, with no results that he could notice. "Well," he murmured at length, "I guess I'll just have to take him in."

He replaced the gun in its holster at his belt, raised the German to a sitting posture, drew the limp right arm over his shoulder, and half carried, half dragged, the overlarge body of his late antagonist to the ship, where, turning his back to the lower wing, he sat the figure upright upon it. Then he slipped his shoulder out of the compass of the Jerry's arm. Turning around, he discovered, to his amazement and chagrin, that von Blum's right hand held his Colt automatic and that von Blum's face registered unholy joy. He had fallen for the cheapest and most transparent of tricks.

"A VERY brave man," said the German, laughing, "but a poor *dummkopf*."

Murchison could see that, although there was laughter on von Blum's lips, there was murder in his eye, so he raised his hands shoulder high and waited. There wasn't anything to say, for he had indeed proved himself to be a dumb head.

The German ace, sitting comfortably on the wing, legs crossed and left arm around the trailing strut, kept the gun on the American while he went over him with calm, appraising eyes. "Who are you?" he said at last, in perfect English. "You must be new to this sector—I have not met you before."

"A good thing you haven't," said Murchison. "I'm just another one of the American flyers." He grinned. "The air will be full of them soon."

Von Blum swore, then he, too, grinned. "There will be one less, anyhow." With a quick glance he swept the rear cockpit, snugly covered with canvas. "You did not bring the sharpshooter—why?"

"I assumed that your challenge did not include him."

Admiration touched the German's face for an instant. "Once in a while I meet

an American who gives me some respect for America."

"I am sorry," said Murchison grimly, "that I cannot say as much for Germans and Germany."

Von Blum laughed again. "You allude to the parachute. Does it seem an improper precaution?"

"As a precaution—no; as a protection in a duel in which you are the challenger—it is improper." Murchison thought a moment. "I am thinking not only of the parachute but also of my guns."

Now the German laughed loud and long. "Do you hold your poor marksmanship against me, am I responsible for that?"

"You were not afraid of my Vickers," said the American, "you *were* afraid of the pistol. There is something rotten about that."

"Figure it out then, my friend, and win a promotion from the fat Colonel Bannon; the poor fool is losing sleep." His voice went hard as steel: "In the meantime stand where you are while I put on my safety wings again. It was good of you to arrange the parachute for me—because of that I shall not shoot you if you stand still."

Into the chute harness again von Blum backed warily to the cockpit, one eye and the gun on Murchison. "Turn it now, my fine young American, for I must be on my way. Friends in Thiaccourt will be looking for me—as well as enemies in Puvénelle Forest."

**T**HE motor—still hot—sprang into life on contact after the slightest movement of the prop. Von Blum throttled it down to a whisper. "Your name!" he rasped, still pointing the pistol.

"Murchison."

The German's face flamed. "You—Lieutenant Murchison . . . you are he who has been with the French? They have transferred you to this sector . . . are you the Murchison who has spent two years with the French?"

The American nodded, every muscle tensed, every nerve alert, for the Jerry's eyes were talking murder as plain as day.

"And you and that wrinkled little baboon have shot down—?"

"You tell it!" Murchison leaped for

the protection of the wing as von Blum fired—leaped and dived as a bullet scored his helmet. "You dog," he yelled, as the German gave the motor the gas—"you dirty dog!"

He grabbed wildly as the wing, whirling around on a half turn, swung over him—grabbed and held to the edge of it while it dragged his body along the grass. He raised himself and hooked an elbow around a leading strut, his feet swinging free as the Spad, roaring mightily, took the air, tilted in a bank toward the northward, and began to climb.

Murchison's brain was reeling, his head was singing, anger burned him while the air stream flattened his body against the under side of the wing. He had found it hard to believe the tales of von Blum's lack of sportsmanship—now he could believe anything about the man. Plan after plan raced through his head, each to be discarded as impossible, useless. He had to think—think. The German had the gun—his pistol; he had shot once and brushed his helmet. He himself had fired five times at von Blum in that passage of arms after his Vickers had failed. There had been seven shells in the automatic when he left Royau. One was left—one shell remained. The Jerry could fire once, and that was all. When he had fired one more time the gun was useless. Not so bad. . . . He grinned again, looking down. Three hundred feet below him the forest streamed along.

Until he had tried to level off von Blum probably didn't know that he had a passenger, but the pull on the right wing evidently drew his attention; he could not overlook it. He raised the gun and Murchison ducked under the wing, leaving only half of his arm in view, a precarious target indeed. The German realized this and withheld his fire.

Murchison knew that whatever he was to do must be done quickly, for soon they would pass the archies and von Blum would land with his prisoner. And a German prison camp had no appeal for him; he preferred a crash with von Blum rather than that. He pushed his head above the wing, and the Jerry, alert, swung the gun upon him. He ducked, as though in fear, then popped up again, and von Blum fired. A bullet ripped through the wing beside

his face, blinding him for an instant, but only for an instant.

With a mighty wrench on the strut he brought his lithe, muscular body over the leading edge of the wing. He crouched, resting, for a few seconds. He grinned at his enemy as the German raised the gun and pulled the trigger. His count had been correct—the pistol was empty—and there was von Blum, unarmed, as he himself was unarmed, except for a pair of efficient fists and a wild desire to crush the tricky Fritz.

AS a last resort the German pushed the nose of the ship down. They were almost above a town—Thiacourt—but flying high, for von Blum had climbed to get beyond the reach of his own archies, who, naturally, saw only a Spad—and Spads belonged to the Allies. Murchison lunged at the man in the cockpit, who rose up to meet him. The American's foot caught in an angle of guy wire and strut, and he fell headlong, with von Blum on top of him as the uncontrolled ship leveled out of a shrilling dive.

Upon the limited space of the lower wing the two contending figures rolled over and over, clawing, gasping, clutching, thumping, apparently unmindful of the fact that the Spad would not fly automatically. Murchison's sole desire was to get von Blum, regardless of the cost, and he knew that their combined weight placed as it was would put the ship into a wing slide. He was willing—so long as Jerry went along.

He got to his knees, and found that his enemy was also on his knees. He swung a quick left and bruised his knuckles against a strut. He offered a lightning right that von Blum blocked with his shoulder and returned in the shape of a left jab that awakened Murchison to the fact that his adversary was no novice in the manly art.

Both had evidently forgotten the ship—the frail craft that could not fly without human control—each was intent on the task of murder, each paying no heed to the death that awaited him, each in a ruthless, insane urge for the destruction of his enemy.

Von Blum found his feet and raised one knee swiftly, bringing it into violent

contact with Murchison's chin. Murchison, shaking his head to free it of the constellations that filled it, kicked wildly, and von Blum, whose shin had stopped the lucky kick, let out a yell that lifted above the roar of the Spad.

Because of the limited space between the wings neither man could stand erect, each must crouch like a pugilist. Holding to struts and guy wires they swung free fists at helmeted heads and clutched vainly at throats. They went into a clinch, leaning against the air stream, which, but for the protection of the maze of wires and struts, would have washed them off. In the clinch Murchison poked an effective uppercut to von Blum's chin that rattled his teeth; he drove a straight jab to the German's unprotected stomach, and followed it with another lightning uppercut to the jaw that put the Jerry out for the count of a thousand.

Murchison knew when his adversary toppled backward that the blow had rendered him senseless, and he grabbed wildly, trying to stay the German's fall. By chance his fingers touched the iron ring of the rip cord and held for the precious second necessary to open the chute. With one arm around the trailing strut he watched his enemy fall, saw the parachute open, saw the pendant figure swing in a vast, pendulum-like arc and disappear under the spread of fabric that meant safety for the descending man. "More damned lives than a cat," he rasped; "that Fritz is as lucky as money in the bank. Ace in the hole—a sweet ace in the hole he's always got. Now I must do the thing all over again."

AT last he gave his mind to the ship, which, despite his weight on the wing, maintained an almost even keel. The thing was impossible, unthinkable. He faced the cockpit and stared in wonder, half expecting to find some vague, formless shadowy spirit at the controls. But the pit was empty, and the Spad, under the surge of a full throttle, thundered around in a smooth curve toward the south.

Crossing his own lines he swung lower over Siecheprey, Mandres, and Hammonville, followed the highway through the Rehanne Wood and dropped at last to the tarmac at Royau. He kicked the Spad around and taxied almost to the rolling



doors of the metal hangar, where the Royau flight circled around him. There was Shepard and Skelley and Prentiss and Durkin, Captain Cawthorn, Meade, Dupre, and a half dozen curious grease-balls.

"That two minute fight," said the flight commander, "has taken you over an hour, Leonard." He was grinning broadly, for Lieutenant Murchison, out to fight a duel with von Blum, had returned uninjured and therefore doubtless victorious.

"Coming from Pont à Mousson," Skelley volunteered, "I saw a washout flaming into Puvénelle Forest. Was that the black arrow ship, Murchison; was that von Blum's crate?"

"Yeah, Skelley," said Murchison, "that was the black arrow ship."

"And von Blum," Bilky questioned "—you shot him down, Leonard?"

"Why not, Bilky?" He studied the crowd, seeking his striker. "Where is Cabosh—what has become of that coon?"

"We haven't seen him," said Shepard; "I'm sure he isn't here, Leonard."

Now the queer antics of an uncontrolled ship began to explain themselves to Murchison. He reached back and jerked the canvas covering from the rear pit, and the crowd let out a wild roar of laughter. "Cabosh," he said, "I've got a mind to break your back!"

## VII

**T**HE little negro, grinning, straightened up. Painfully he worked the kinks out of his back; he swung his arms and he kicked his feet to bring the life back into his legs again. "Sardine—I feel jes' like a sardine," he said at last; and, after the merriment had died down again, continued: "Gemmen, we been places!"

Anger blazed in Murchison's eyes. "Didn't I tell you, Cabosh, that I would make this flight alone?"

"Yas suh, Mista Lennie—you fit 'im alone; I ain't done nuthin'. You licked 'im two-three times. Ain't you never satisfied?"

"But you—"

"Yas suh . . . I ain't done nuthin'. Any time I coulda reach out an' knock 'im on the haid. Did I do it? Naw suh! Any time I coulda put a bullet in de back of dat Jerry's fat neck. Did I do it? Naw suh!

I ain't done nawthin' but kick dat lef' rudder and bend dat stick pushin' it over to de lef', tryin' to keep dat right wing up whiles you an' von Blum is doin' a highlan' fling all over de ship. Whut you think a Spad is, Mista Lennie—a ball room?"

"Wing of a ship ain't no place to sashay 'round wid a big fat Dutchman dat carries a coupla horseshoes in his pocket. Lucky? Dat Fritz ain't got nuthin' but luck—fall in de sewer an' come out wid a diamond ring." He voiced that shrill, windy laugh of his. "Gran'stand seat I got, gran'stand seat fo' de big fight. You ain't seen no fightin'—" He noted Murchison's cautioning look and stopped.

"When I get through thinking you over," said the lieutenant darkly, "I will let you know, Cabosh, whether you win a medal or a coffin."

"Tell us, Leonard," the flight commander urged "—come on."

Murchison studied the half circle of smiling, expectant faces. He knew that someone in Shepard's flight was a traitor, knew that the ammunition for his Vickers was not what it should have been. Von Blum himself had practically admitted it; it had been one of the cards in the wily German's sleeve. His investigations must be carried on in secret. "Sorry, Shep, old head," he said as last, "my story is for the Big Chief. Give me some gas and oil, and a couple of belts of shells, and I'll push on to Toul."

**L**IEUTENANT MURCHISON skimmed the field, lifted over the fence and the brush at the end of it, banked at a dangerous altitude and aimed his ship for the Salvation Army tent. Before he had to go back to the grim tragedy of war he would have his minute with Marie—he would see her again, would hear her voice. . . . How beautiful she had made this drab land!

Facing a score of enemy guns had cost him fewer heart tremors than he experienced as he eased the bus down and taxied up to within two hundred yards of his goal. He idled the motor. "Cabosh," he said, contrition in his soul for the way he had talked to the little negro whose only desire had been to aid him, "you saved my life."

Cabosh chuckled. "Yas suh, Mista Lennie. . . . Savin' each other's life is sump'n

we is fondest of. If you got any visitin' to do I kin watch dis heah double-action rollickabo."

Murchison removed his helmet and goggles, dropped to the ground and walked toward the tent, from which a little figure ran out to greet him. She swayed toward him, caught herself, and held out a hand. "Lennie—I'm so glad to see you!"

In the depths of the bright brown eyes he found something that filled him with wonderment and awe, and something that made him gloriously happy too. It had seemed an age since he had seen her, and he drank in her beauty like a man famished. She was lovelier even than he had pictured her in his dreams, and he stood, staring like one in a trance.

"What is it, Lennie; what's the matter?" she questioned anxiously.

Awakening, he drew in a long breath. "Nothing, you—you just don't seem real. I can hardly believe it."

"I tried to come over as a nurse," she explained, "but the medico major in New Orleans couldn't see it; he said I might prove too—er—"

"Disconcerting," Murchison suggested. "Yeah, everybody would want to go to the hospital."

She laughed delightedly, then her exquisite face drew down in serious lines. "You—you have met von Blum?"

He nodded.

"And—?"

Even in the fullness of his love he could not forget that he was the soldier. "Von Blum's ship crashed in Puvénelle Forest."

"Oh!"

"And I would have crashed if it hadn't been for Cabosh, who disobeyed my orders—"

"I tucked him in, Lennie; I made him go with you. If he was of assistance I am glad."

He chuckled. "And the waffles, Marie?"

"I—I knew you were coming, and I remembered how you liked them."

"Bless you!"

"The Umpty-second has another New Orleans man—Captain Cawthorn. He's been here a month or more. Do you know him, Lennie?"

"Billy Cawthorn? I'll say I do."

"What an awful nickname . . . he took me up in his plane—twice, Promised to

take me again today. He's been very nice to me. He's got a beautiful plane, a Bristol, I think he said. It's got a navy blue nose, white wings and a body of flaming crimson. It's a two-seater, and looks like a very patriotic butterfly."

"Rather striking camouflage, don't you think? Looks like he wants his ship to be seen." Doubts and suspicions were tumbling over each other in Murchison's mind. He knew that even the vaguest trail might lead to something important.

"I told him I thought it wasn't good camouflage, and he said he wasn't afraid to show his colors to the enemy."

Lieutenant Murchison laughed. "Then Billy should have painted his ship a deep yellow."

"That's horrid, Lennie. . . . Maybe you're jealous. And Captain Cawthorn is such a brave fighter. He told me this morning that he was in an air fight near Pont a Mousson, and that anti-aircraft shells had burst so near him that his face was cut atrociously."

"Oh, yeah," said Murchison, caressing a bruised eye reminiscently, "as a fighter Billy's hot."

Now she noticed his eye and the criss-cross pattern of adhesive on his cheek. She had known Leonard Murchison since they were children, and she could read him like an open book. She hooked a forefinger around a button of his flying suit. "Lennie," she said, "have you been fighting with Captain Cawthorn?"

"Oh, no indeed, Marie; I was in an air fight yesterday near Pont a Mousson and an archie shell busted right in front of my face."

Her chin trembled and tears shone in her brown eyes. "I'm sorry, honey," he said contritely; "Billy jumped on Cabosh and I handed him a flock of knuckles. If they seemed like archie shells to him I am charmed. I'm sorry. . . . Please, sweetheart—don't cry."

"Lennie, you—you're impossible!"

He put an arm around the slim shoulders. "Why did you come to this Godforsaken land, Marie?"

"Because I c-couldn't stand it any longer. I made a mistake; you're good—and fine, Lennie—and I didn't want you to go away. I—I made a mistake. If you—you—" Her voice trailed away in a pathetic little sigh.

MURCHISON stood speechless and happy. Before he could fashion a fitting response a roaring medley lifted from the flying field. Swift ships took the air—Spads, Bristols, and a Nieuport—banked in crescendo thunders and climbed, speeding northward. Murchison's Spad came to life as Cabosh gunned the motor. It taxied to the waiting couple and stopped, and the negro cut the screaming prop down to a whisper again.

"Look, Marie," said Murchison, pointing to the north, where a German jagdstaffel came out of the haze—"just like geese going south at home."

"What is it, Lennie—tell me?"

"A couple of German bombers, with an escort. Shepard's flight has gone out to engage them."

"Git hot, Mista Lennie," cried Cabosh, vastly excited; "les' go befo' Mista Shepard's gang knocks all de Jerries outa de sky."

"You are going up to fight with them, Lennie?"

"Of course, Marie; what would you have me do?"

She lifted up her arms and he held her close, kissing the warm red lips and the tear-dimmed eyes. "Goodbye, Lennie," she whispered, "good-bye, my own—I love you so!" Then she stood alone, waving a hand until the Spad disappeared in a mist of tears.

MURCHISON corkscrewed for five thousand feet and leveled off, pointed northward, to where seven of the Royau flyers were speeding to meet the jagdstaffel. In the German circus there were fourteen ships, two huge bombers and six escorts on each side, forming the letter A. He wondered why a bombing party should make for the Royau field, where, it had to be assumed, the American flight would come out to greet them. They could have gone east of Royau for many miles without encountering allied ships, or they could have gone by on the west and have passed no flying field short of Commercy.

It looked to Murchison as though the Germans had come out to hunt a fight. Well, they should find it; he for one would bend every effort to accommodate them. He was sure also that the bunch of flyers Shepard had—Prentiss, Durkin, Skelley

and the rest of them—would give the circus a run for its money.

In the ruck of the Royau flight he saw the brilliant butterfly that was Bilky's ship, and he chided himself for his doubts of Cawthorn, for the Captain was there with the crowd, offering his life with the best of them.

As Murchison well knew, Bilky didn't even belong to the Royau flight. Because of the Captain's knowledge of French he had been employed principally as liaison officer. He had an idea that Marie Venot was the principal reason for Cawthorn's periodic visits to the Royau field, and he couldn't find it in his heart to blame Bilky at all.

He banked and wing slid to avoid the rush of a speeding Fokker that streamed a broadside at him. He felt the wind of a bullet that barely missed his face. Passing, the Jerry in the pit waved a hand at him, and in the same instant Cabosh poked him in the shoulder. He turned and read the little negro's lips: "Von Blum!"

HE nodded, grinning. Von Blum—of all men! This dog fight had become suddenly just what Murchison wanted, for the great German ace was the one man he was most anxious to meet. There were important things he desired to do to the famous flying Fritz, and here at last was the chance to polish off his enemy. For this he had been transferred to the Umpty-second.

He climbed, almost reaching the undercarriage of the Fokker before the Jerry chose to act. Above and behind von Blum he saw the red and white and blue of Bilky's bus, and he hoped Cawthorn wouldn't attack, wouldn't take his victim away from him. This particular Jerry, he felt, was his.

But he need not have worried, for Bilky didn't attack. From an ideal position from which he might have sunk the enemy, he chose to veer away in a tilting bank, looking for all the world like a giant butterfly. Why hadn't Cawthorn raked the German with a tracer stream, why hadn't he driven his bullets into the back of the helpless pilot?

Ah—there was his answer, for Bilky was coming back. He dived past and, grinning broadly, waved a hand and pointed

toward von Blum's ship, which had begun a roaring climb. That was it—Cawthorn had passed up his chance to crash the Fokker so the hybrid Spad might finish the work of the morning, so Murchison might taper off his half-completed duel with the German ace. Not so bad; he would remember that, and express his gratitude to Bilky.

His eyes swept the field of conflict. He leaned back and aimed his crate at the sky, for von Blum was above him. He smiled grimly when he thought of the Jerry trying to ride his rudder while the sharp-shooting Cabosh—that son of Mars—sat behind the potent Lewis gun in the rear pit. As Colonel Bannon had said, the Spad was a mule—dangerous at both ends.

A falling ship swept past him, a Spad with a limp figure leaning halfway out of the cockpit. "Meade," he whispered, "by heavens—Meade! That's two." The Royau flight was not doing so well.

He described a lightning loop when he saw von Blum straightening out a hundred feet above him. But the German was not to be caught so easily, for he fell into a slide-slip, leveled off swiftly and raked the Spad as it went by. Tracers hissed past Murchison's face, ripped through the wings over his head, and punctured the frail fuselage. He kicked a right rudder and swung around in a circling ascent. He found von Blum head on and pointed the nose of his ship directly at his enemy. His left hand went to the trip of his Vickers and he sent a stream of slugs at the Fokker. He felt the quick pulsations of the gun and looked to see what damage he had accomplished.

None—no damage—he had missed, even as before he had missed. He remembered with a shock that he had seen no tracers, and the recollection of that futile fight with von Blum came back to him. His ammunition, then, was phony, even as it had been phony during the morning contest. And if he were shooting blanks, the whole Royau flight was also shooting blanks, for his ammunition had come from there. That's why the courageous Dupree had driven his ship into the heart of his enemy, that accounted for the look of wonder on the face of the flight commander, that's why no Jerry had fallen victim to

the men of the Royau field. Pop-guns at a German circus. . . . It was a laugh—if one could laugh at tragedy so grim.

As he coasted down, idling the motor, he slipped one of the cartridges from the canvas belt, studied the well-formed bullet, pinched it, bit it, tasted it—and spat it out with an oath. He turned to the negro, sitting expectant and hopeful, and yelled: "Soap—by gosh; it's soap, Cabosh! We're trying to kill 'em with soap bullets."

**B**UT Cabosh, secure in the possession of his cherished Lewis, only grinned. "Tail us aroun', Mista Lennie," he cried, "tail dis mule aroun'. I ain't makin' no soap bubbles; when a bubble from dis heah baby busts in a Jerry's face it ruins 'im."

Murchison had one consolation; he knew that the negro always carried a tremendous stock of ammunition for the cradled weapon that he manipulated with such abandon, so one ship at least could give a good account of itself. He was certain that, unless Shepard signaled for retreat, the entire Royau flight was riding to a fall, the jagdstaffel would shoot them down one at a time. But Captain Shepard was not the kind of man to give a signal for flight, for the heavily laden Rumplers, unmolested, would continue to drop their eggs on ammunition dumps, on massed formations of troops and on railroad lines and main highways.

He remembered Shepard's words: "Jerry knows what we are going to do before we do it, he has our plans as soon as we have formulated them, he knows the exact location of every ammunition dump we have, and he can hit it in the night."

The bombers, then, should be their objects of attack. He passed up von Blum for the moment, as well as a Pfaltz that spun around him like a hornet, and he directed his attention to one of the huge, bomb-laden planes nearly a mile away.

Another ship thundered along beside him—a Spad with a grim-faced, iron-jawed man at the stick. Durkin, the air wolf, he who seemed to have been born with the lust for killing, the cold, calculating machine of destruction. He waved his arm and Durkin nodded. They were scarce a hundred feet apart, and Murchison could see the rigid set of Durkin's head, the thin line of lips, the malignant inten-

sity of the half-mad human who had offered and asked no quarter.

He had seen that look on the faces of desperate men who were going to certain death. He thought he knew what Durkin would do, so he gunned his motor to the utmost, but his ship, doubly laden, lost distance. He even yelled, and could hardly hear the sound of his own voice in the blending, clattering turmoil.

The Rumpler carried three men—a pilot and two others who busied themselves with a pivoted gun. Murchison saw them swing the weapon upon the approaching Spad, saw the lances of flame, and imagined that he heard the staccato rattle of a machine gun in action. He noticed that Durkin made no attempt to bring his Vickers into play, so the grim wolf must have known that the Royau shells were useless.

Too late the bomber tried to veer away, but the ship was heavy, unwieldy and slow; and the air wolf, driving his Spad at tremendous speed, plunged in between the wings of his victim. The two ships became in an instant a mass of twisted metal and splintered wood and torn wing fabric, which hurtled to earth with the four doomed men. Where it struck, a geyser of flame spewed up, and the roar of a hundred thunders beat up into the sky. The Germans had never meant to use their bombs in such a manner.

Murchison found himself talking aloud: "A magnificent finish for a hero—I think that's the way he would have liked to go." He turned to his sharpshooter and tried a grin that was half a failure.

The little negro's eyes were wide. "Atta boy!" he yelled, but Murchison could see only the movements of his lips. Cabosh pointed southward, where the other Rumpler, flanked by two Fokkers, floated along; and Murchison, reading the coon's appeal, kicked a left rudder and put out in pursuit.

He ducked under one of the Fokkers, whose Spandau sent a tracer stream above him, and he went up alongside the bomber in a screaming climb. A burst of bullets from the Rumpler's gun angled through his undercarriage, and he imagined that he felt slight jars as some of the missiles struck. He had no time to wonder what damage had been done—he would find that out soon enough.

The other Fokker, winging up, faced

him, and he swung over into half a loop and leveled off at the top of it. The Jerry chaser described a rising bank, and Murchison nosed up, held his ship so, and cut the gas, stalling. He went into a tail slide as the Fokker flashed by above him. Looking back along the fuselage, he saw the Rumpler in line and knew that he had indeed "tailed the mule around." The little negro leaned against the Lewis, tensed, alert, waiting. Murchison felt the tremors of the machine gun's blasting fire, then he gave the Spad the gas and lifted it out of the dangerous slide.

Evading the Fokker again, he swung around in a descending curve to watch the effect of Cabosh's marksmanship, for the ebony son of Mars was not one to miss so easy a target. The giant bomber was winging down, injured but not seriously, for it remained under control. Riding the Rumpler, he cut the gas and listened. The booming roar of the Jerry's motor was stilled. Hurt vitally, the great bird was still able to use its wings.

Murchison looked to the southward, where, scarce two miles away, lay Royau. Very plainly he could see the narrow flying field and the tent of the Salvation Army, and he wondered if Marie were witness to this contest. He hoped, somehow, that she wasn't; it was a frightful exhibition—this game of murder.

With the contending circuses far above them, they angled down in a sort of awed silence—the disabled bomber and the tiny bird that seemed almost to be perched upon its upper wings, directing its descent. In the fullness of a great victory, the negro took up his barber shop chord again, singing an absurd repetition that was all sound and no sense:

*"Possum a lá . . . possum a lá,  
Can't do a thing but possum a lá!"*

THE Rumpler came easily and safely to rest in a brown field of cut grain, and khaki figures raced from a narrow road to surround it. Cabosh let out a wild yell of warning, and Murchison, wasting no time to speculate or to look for an enemy, gunned his motor and roared around in a steeply tilting bank. Von Blum swept by in a shrilling dive, missed his quarry and leveled off less than a hundred feet from the ground, and a lot of American

soldiers had the joy of shooting at him as he nosed up again.

It was another duel now—the thing that Murchison wanted, even though his Vickers were impotent. He had the little negro with him this time, and the presence of the coon, who had always delivered the goods, was a vast satisfaction to him. So he grinned as he zoomed, feeding the good old Hisso all the gas he had. He forgot for the moment the desperate plight of the Royau flyers, forgot everything save the one great desire to crush his enemy—the cheap coward who had challenged him to mortal combat and had fought him knowing that his machine guns were useless.

Murchison swung over into a loop and found his ship riding the Jerry's rudder. Mechanically he cross-haired the helmeted head, holding his Spad in line. Von Blum, who must have realized his helplessness, made no effort to evade him. He even waved his hand at them. "If I had a shell," Murchison rasped, "—one good shell is all I need. I'd give a thousand dollars—"

Cabosh interrupted his fervent cry for healthy cartridges with another poke in the shoulder. He turned and grasped the Colt automatic that the negro handed him. Good old Cabosh—the wily coon was always there! Here was a chance—a slim chance, to be sure—but a chance that offered a possible solution, for Murchison was an excellent shot with a pistol.

Von Blum had come around on a hairpin turn and, cutting diagonally across the course of the Spad, raked it with a flood of bullets. Missiles spattered against the Vickers, filling the air with the shrilling note of metal bees, they ripped off a square yard of upper wing above the pilot's head, and they plunked through the fuselage in a dozen places.

Murchison climbed to escape another volley, looking back to see how his sharpshooter had come out of the deluge of shots. Cabosh sat beside his gun as unconcerned as though he were riding a street car, and the American's heart warmed to the crafty little coon.

HE fashioned a wide loop, straightened out halfway over and tilted down upon the unsuspecting Jerry who,

secure in the knowledge of soap bullets in the Spad's Vickers, paid little heed to the front end of his adversary's ship. It was the other end of the mule that he had been avoiding. With his weapon resting upon the cowl Murchison therefore had all the opportunity and all the time he required to line in the figure of von Blum with the sights of his automatic. Left hand on the stick, his body tensed, rigid, and his right hand as steady as iron, he sent a stream of bullets at the pilot of the Fokker, emptying the gun.

He slipped the pistol into his belt, cut the gas, and coasted down in a flat line. He heard the sustained roar of many ships passing above him and, looking skyward, saw a V of seven planes pointing northward. They were flying high and fast, and his heart gave a great leap of joy, for the flight was made up of Spads and Bristols. He knew then that the remnants of the Royau crew were saved.

"Hot dog," the negro yelled, "—ain't no soap bullets yonder. Good night old Jerry circus!"

Murchison gave his attention to von Blum, who had slumped forward in the pit. He flew alongside, and the pilot of the Fokker twisted his body partly around and shook his head slowly. The German raised his left hand—a gesture of surrender—and let it fall again, and the American knew that his enemy was done. He swung his arm down, for the Royau field was almost beneath them. Von Blum nodded weakly and pushed his ship toward the earth, winging to a crude but safe landing.

When the Spad came alongside, the German's helmeted head lay against the coaming of his cockpit. With Cabosh's assistance, and the aid of two excited grease-monkeys, Murchison lifted the limp figure of his adversary out and laid him on the ground. He removed the injured man's helmet and goggles, opened the heavy jacket and shirt and found two bullet holes in the left shoulder. Serious wounds, but, unless the lung had been pierced, not fatal.

Von Blum groaned and opened his eyes. Murchison's chin squared, his eyes hardened, and his voice was the rasping voice of hate as he thrust the empty automatic against the German's ear. "You have been shot in the shoulder, von Blum,

and you will live; if you don't answer my questions you will get a bullet in the head—and you won't live."

"Prisoner of war," von Blum whispered.

"A dog who isn't good enough for a bullet. . . . You challenged me when you knew my shells were useless. I'll kill you for that. How did you get your information, how did you know our plans, how did you get the dope about our ammunition dumps? Quick—or out goes your light. You're a prisoner of war if you answer—you're a corpse as sure as hell if you don't."

Von Blum, looking into the blazing eyes above him, had no way of knowing that the gun was empty, no way of knowing that Murchison was bluffing. He drew in a deep breath. "It came over tied by a string to little balloons," he whispered, "when the wind was from the south . . . notes, and pieces of maps. We paid him a lot of money for the information."

"Paid who," cried Murchison, "—quick?"

While von Blum was considering an answer, whether evasive or not no one might ever know, two ships swung down and taxied up beside them. Shepard slipped out of one of them. His face, freed of the goggles, showed the traces of tears. "My God, Leonard," he gasped "—two of us left; all our flight but Prentiss and me. . . . And murdered," he rasped, "murdered by some blackhearted traitor!" He noticed von Blum on the ground. "Good work, Leonard; thank God you got that dog!"

"Was Captain Cawthorn shot down?" Murchison asked, his carefully built up fabric of suspicions falling about his ears.

"I don't know, Leonard. When the Toul flight got into the scrap Fritz gathered up his doll rags and went home. I don't remember—" He raised his head and faced northward as the rainbow ship of Bilky Cawthorn nosed down. "There he is now."

Captain Cawthorn leaned out of the cockpit of his brilliantly colored Bristol, studying the field as he dragged it. Instead of cutting the gas and easing to the tarmac, he suddenly gunned the motor and pointed at the sky again. Half a mile south he banked sharply to the left, came down and disappeared behind a fringe of timber.

"Well, I'll be damned!" said Captain Shepard, staring. "Wouldn't that knock you?"

Murchison laughed and shoved the Colt back into his belt again. "Yeah, Bilky's safe—he's always safe where the Fritz is concerned. That butterfly camouflage of his is good business."

"You mean, Leonard, that Cawthorn—?"

"Absolutely; he's the leak—and I'm off to stop him now."

## VIII

MURCHISON scrambled into the forward cockpit of the badly used Spad and Cabosh dived into the seat behind him. Shepard himself grabbed the propeller blade and dragged it down, leaping to safety as the faithful little craft shot forward. Clear of the ground, Murchison kicked a left rudder, winging away to the north and eastward, for he saw the patriotic Bristol lift above the trees and straighten out for its northward flight. The race was on, with Cawthorn something more than a mile in the lead.

Murchison wondered why Bilky hadn't kept to the air after he had kicked the Royau field behind him. What had possessed the man to come down again? He must have recognized von Blum's ship, which told him that the game was up, and that safety lay in flight.

There was no doubt now about Cawthorn's destination, for yonder were the front lines and the geometrical pattern of Jerry entanglements and trenches. He wondered if Bilky dared to brave the German barrage, for, at a thousand feet, a ship would be an easy mark for archies. When he saw that the Bristol made no attempt to climb he remembered that Bilky had a white ticket. German artillery doubtless knew the brightly colored bird, and had their orders concerning it.

OVER the forest of Villecey, a stretch of woods and bare ridges, Murchison drew up even with the fugitive. He dropped like a hawk, and the Bristol cut around to avoid him. He smoothed out and throttled the motor down. His face was as pale as death when he turned to the negro. "Cabosh," he said grimly, "if you fire one shot at that ship I'll kill you."



"Yas, suh, Mista Lennie." The coon's eyes had long since taken in the girl in the rear pit of Bilky's bus. "Kin I step out an' bite 'im on de ear?"

Despite the sudden fear that possessed him, Murchison had to laugh.

"Bilky ain't no air man, Mista Lennie," Cabosh continued; "he ain't got no nerve. You don't need a gun to groun' dat houn'—you kin push 'im down."

And push him down he did—in as brilliant a bit of flying as one might see in many a day. He zoomed to avoid Cawthorn's dash, watching the tracers flash below him. Of all the Royau flyers, only Bilky's gun carried bullets. Hot anger surged in Murchison's heart. And von Blum had said a lot of money had been spent to buy this man.

He looped when Cawthorn put his butterfly around and charged again—looped and shoved his ship against the Bristol's rudder. The figure in the back seat waved a hand at him. He nosed ahead until he blanketed Bilky's plane, and he held that position while the man who had sold his honor to the enemy banked and dived and circled and tried to climb, but failed because the Spad had become a sort of moving ceiling above him.

Bilky's guns were useless, because he couldn't bring his ship to bear; his skill in flying was limited, or he could have escaped the constant menace of the trucks that nearly touched his upper wings. A coward at heart, he gave it up at last and swung down to a bare, narrow ridge that showed brown and smooth for a landing. Murchison, empty automatic in hand, taxied up behind him. "Get out, Bilky," he rasped.

Marie Venot raised her arms. "Oh, Lennie," she cried "—Lennie!"

"It's all right, sweetheart—just stay there a minute and I'll take you home."

Murchison came to the side of the Bristol and Marie leaned out of the pit and put her arms around his neck. "He—he told me you had been wounded," she sobbed, "and that you wanted t-to see me!"

"He's half right, cherie—I did want to see you." He faced the prisoner, who stood, head bent, arms hanging limp in a posture of utter dejection. "I am sorry, Bilky, that the presence of Miss Venot

makes it impossible for me to tell you what I think you're are."

Murchison climbed into the front seat of the Bristol. "I am not going to take you in, Bilky, though a firing squad is what you ought to have. You sent the men of the Royau flight to their deaths, you stand as a murderer of those men; the dope you gave to the Jerry brought death to many an American soldier, and that thought is not going to sit well on your soul."

"What dope?" Cawthorn challenged.

"Von Blum has told us about the little balloons that floated over the lines to German territory, carrying maps and information about allied plans—American lives you sold to Germany. And the brilliant markings of your plane was quite a clever stunt . . . the very fact that you went through the Jerry barrage convicts you. When the New Orleans *Gazette* nicknamed you Bilky Cawthorn, it sure looked at your hand, for you have bilked your friends, the men who trusted you and put their money in you. You have bilked your own people, your own country, and your own honor."

Cawthorn fashioned a ghastly grin. "Quite a preacher, aren't you?"

"Yeah. . . This war will be over pretty soon, and the American soldiers will be going back—back home, back to their work, to those who love them, to the people who are waiting for them. The only thing that will be waiting for you in the United States will be a prison door. You can't come back. You can hug that thought to your damned black soul—and it isn't going to make your sleep any easier."

A wave of gray-clad soldiers poured over the crest of the ridge less than half a mile away. Murchison laughed. "Yonder are your friends, Bilky." He spoke to the negro: "Take the Spad to Royau, Cabosh—and fly high. Don't try to drag any Jerry barrage."

"Yas, suh can't I lam him once, Mista Lennie—jes' once?"

"Beat it!"

"Yas, suh."

The Spad took the air in a roaring climb, and the brilliant red and white and blue ship, bearing a man who had fought a good fight and the woman who loved him, sped along the ridge and lifted toward a cool blue sky.



*A Complete  
Air-Spy Novel*

# THE CROIX DE GUERRE KID

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

**Black-crossed birds of prey stalked the midnight skies. Red wasps of death buzzed their tracer song! And into that suicide gauntlet Norton gunned his haywire crate—fighting to free a blue-eyed girl from the dread spy-torture of the Hun!**

**T**HERE was a moaning and shrieking of taut flying wires as Jimmy Norton spun his crate in. Watchers on the ground could see plainly that the flyer's gray Spad had been riddled with bullets.

A sure crash. Too bad. He was one

of the surest fighters in the squadron. And now he was crashing in on his own field, out at the stick, with home in sight.

But somehow the gray Spad righted herself in time, came down to a pancake landing, a splintering of struts and longerons, and when the dust had cleared



away Jimmy Norton came forth from the wreckage, trying to appear nonchalant.

He was staggering. There was blood on his face. Now and again he pressed his right hand to his side; but when friends reached him he did not do it again, and grinned at them cheerfully through the blood on his cheeks.

"What happened? Who did it and why?" queried Tex Lessing.

Jimmy opened his mouth to reply. An orderly ran up.

"Major Hoxey wishes to see Lieutenant Norton immediately, sir!" he said.

Norton nodded jerkily, mumbled to Lessing, and swinging his goggles, trundled his six feet of muscle and whalebone toward the operations office. He stepped through, into the presence of beetle-browed old Hoxey, who had the most caustic tongue, and the biggest heart, of anybody in Uncle Sam's armies.

"The Major sent for me, sir?"

"Yes, Norton—you're grounded until

further orders! But you're not to breathe a word to a soul, no matter what happens! Sti down!"

For two hours Norton listened to his commanding officer, and as the moments sped into eternity his blue eyes grew larger and larger.

There were many peculiar questions asked by Hoxey, startled answers by Norton.

"You served in Intelligence in Santo Domingo, 1916, and got a letter of commendation for doing your stuff?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Involved spotting contrabandists, didn't it?"

"Yes, sir!"

"You were sent on a special mission, in civilian clothes, to La Guayra, in Venezuela, to check up on the contrabandists source of supply, and got back without being unmasked?"

"Yes, sir!"

The major hesitated for a moment, then drew a deep breath.

"Once, back in the States, you were one of five ships lost in a fog. Your leader knew the name of the field where you were to land, but the information was no good to him because he couldn't have come down to it, through the fog. Mountains all around, even up to the edge of the field. He signaled you to take the lead and bring the flight down to the field, through the fog, and without ripping its guts out on a mountain top?"

"How did you discover that, Major?"

The major smiled grimly.

"I've been doping this thing out for months," he said. "Looked you up. How did you know when to come down to that field?"

"Why—I—I—come to think of it, Major, I didn't know. Not the way you mean, anyway. But somehow I knew when we were over the field, and just naturally led the flight down to a landing."

Once more the major smiled grimly.

The discussion continued.

Two hours after Norton had entered the Headquarters Building, he left it again, and his face was expressionless, his lips puckered into a soundless whistle.

The boys started in on him.

"What'd the Old Man want?"

"You get assigned to some cushy job,

in order to save Uncle Sam the cost of busted ships?"

A hundred other questions were shot at him, but Norton, whose face was very grave, evaded direct answers.

Then, in the middle of the badinage, there came a sudden burst of activity at the field. Coming like a bat out of Hades, from somewhere toward Germany, was a fast pursuit ship, bearing the black crosses of the enemy. On it came, making time, paying no heed to the bursts of Archie fire, swooping low over the field, while machine guns swung on their tripods below and gunners tried to rip the guts out of the enemy ship with stuttering bursts of leaden hail.

The enemy flyer never ceased his swoop upon the field, though some of the bursts must have come close. He was relying on his speed to bring him safely through. The flyers accorded him a gasp of admiration. One lone enemy flyer, swooping onto an enemy field, far back of the Allied lines, and seeming absolutely unafraid of what might happen to him.

Then a little white parachute dropped from the ship.

THE machine guns ceased their ominous clatter, as the enemy ship zoomed over the hangars, and her pilot waved his hand in a sort of salute to the group of airmen below.

Airmen tagged the message to the Headquarters Building. Major Hoxey read it through, and his face was a study.

He stared speculatively at his pilots.

Then, he read the message aloud.

"Will the American pilot who shot down Lieutenant Fritz Gettman this morning accord me the honor of a meeting over the front lines at eight o'clock sharp tomorrow morning? Lieutenant Gettman flew an Albatross with a bursting shell on either side of his fuselage.

KARL ERIC GETTMAN, Captain."

Norton stepped forward swiftly, his eyes alight.

"Why, Major," he exclaimed, "I brought that bird down myself! He was a fast baby, too! He's the Heinie who almost washed me out, and filled my bus full of bullet holes!"

"Boy, what you won't do to his name-sake, Karl Eric!" cried Tex Lessing. "It

will be just too bad for the Gettman family!"

A shadow passed over the face of Norton as he met the steady gaze of Major Hoxey. Hoxey gave no sign, just looked deeply into the eyes of Norton. Silence fell, while the pilots looked at one another questioningly. Hoxey was giving Norton his cue, and forcing him to say something he never would have said otherwise. Forcing him to brand himself in the eyes of his fellow birdmen.

"Well?" said Hoxey.

Norton kicked at the ground impatiently, lowering his eyes.

"Sorry, Major," he said, and his voice was so low even those nearest him could scarcely hear his words, "but I'm not taking that challenge!"

Had a flock of Gothas materialized over the drome, out of thin air, the pilots would not have been more surprised. Could they believe their ears?

They stood as though stunned as one of the greatest flyers in the service, after a mute look as his fellows, in which they read what they took to be an agony of fear, turned abruptly and walked away.

The flyers started talking swiftly about inconsequential matters, as though to cover up an unbelievable *faux pas* of a valued friend.

Ten minutes later Norton was back at Headquarters.

"You'll do, Norton," said Hoxey. "It went over great! Too bad we have to give our field a bad name with the enemy, when Gettman goes up tomorrow and doesn't find anyone to do battle with."

"Blast it all!" ground out Norton. "Did you see the faces of Lessing, of Jameson, and of Lord, and all the others when I said what I did? Suppose they never found out the truth?"

## II

**A**BSOLUTE secrecy is necessary for success!"

That was the keynote of Jimmy Norton's orders. He had to allow his best friends to think him a coward, afraid to fight Gettman, in order not to give them an inkling of the truth—for stories fly swiftly, and both sides exercised espionage. If word got back into Germany behind the

lines, men and women might die whose lives would cost the Allied forces thousands of other lives.

Secrecy was the watchword.

Norton reported to his commanding officer near midnight of the day he had been grounded.

"Your objective lies fifteen miles behind the enemy lines!" he told Norton. "At least that's the information I have. I probably haven't the right dope. But of one thing I am sure, Norton, this is no holiday trip you are taking, and even if you come through this trip alive, you'll only have your trouble for your pains, for tomorrow night you'll have the same job to do over again, a trip to some other place behind the lines!"

Norton's eyes were bright with excitement. Here was something that didn't exactly go by route. It was dangerous, and important, and he was eager to be up and away.

There was a motorcycle with sidecar ready and waiting for Norton, and the thing seemed to pant with eagerness. Norton, after asking Hoxey if there were any additional orders and receiving a shake of the head, entered the sidecar and was whirled away. They were going to the rear, and the motorcycle driver was making speed. Norton hadn't the slightest idea where he was going, but he intended obeying instructions. His heart beat high with excitement.

The motorcycle stopped at a dark road. "You get out here, sir," said the driver.

"What the devil . . ." began Norton.

"Orders, sir!" snapped the driver, kicking in his clutch and smashing on down the road without further parley.

Norton glanced right and left. The only sound he could hear was the rumble of distant guns, the intermittent barking of smaller arms of the not-so-distant front, the rattle of machine-gun fire, the explosion of G. I. cans, and all the other noise-making, and havoc-making implements of the Red God of War, which somehow at the moment seemed far away.

"Norton!"

Norton whirled. A figure stood in a shadow behind him, against the wall of trees. As Norton turned around as his name was spoken, the figure turned, too, and vanished back through the trees. Nor-



ton knew he was to follow. He felt his heart pounding as he realized that this was the true beginning of his adventures. What if this man were not the one Hoxey had led him to expect? Well, that was only one of the chances he would have to take.

**T**HEY strode through the trees without sound. Fifteen minutes, twenty, half an hour. Then a clearing, and under the shadows at the further edge, a familiar shape.

The two men stopped beside the airplane. "Salmson two-place," said the stranger, shortly. "Ever fly one?"

"Yes."

Norton studied the man carefully. He was as tall as Norton, and rather broader across the shoulders. He wore the uniform of a German officer, and his eyes were like coals of fire as he met those of Norton.

"Where do we go, sir?" said Norton.

"That is my business, if you don't mind," said the other coldly. "You are to obey me without question. I'll signal when we get up to eight thousand. Take off immediately and climb to that altitude."

The prop was spun. Both men clambered into their pits. The ship needed but little warm-up. The man signaled for him to take off. Norton gunned the ship, filling the night with the thunder of his motor, and as he looked her over he realized that he had a ship under him which would take him places, and give him a chance to do things.

He thrilled at the prospect, though he didn't know exactly what it was. The ship took off like a bird, skimming the tops of the trees at the end of the clearing, and Norton climbed in a steep spiral, hurling the ship aloft, up to eight thousand, where this strange passenger would give him further orders.

He leveled at the desired height.

He cut the gun, turned to his passenger.

"Fly straight across the lines into German territory! I'll signal again when I am ready!"

Instantly Norton gave his ship the gun and flashed ahead, ahead toward that area over which crawled the ants which were contending armies, where shells sent the beloved sons of women into eternity in the blinking of an eye, where white faces shone pale and drawn when the star shells

fell in No-Man's-Land, where thousands of youngsters wondered whether five minutes later would see them still living, where some hoped not, and where others neither hoped nor feared, numbed by the perpetual shock of war.

Hell had spread her black mantle over the ground below, where two armies fought at handgrips, each believing it fought for some sacred thing.

**T**HEN the lines dropped behind, while Norton kept his eyes glued over the side, watched for the exhaust fires of other ships, studied the terrain below, trying to guess the meaning of troop movements below, wondering through it all why men killed one another. They were deep into enemy territory.

The minutes sped.

The passenger jabbed Norton in the back, indicated a sharp bank to the left, and for half an hour Norton held his ship on a new course. Then there was a second signal, a piece of paper upon which was written:

"Glide down to five hundred, then pull up until she stalls. I'm going over! Circle the place until you see three short flashes of fire. I'll be working the flashlight. When you see the signal, come down and land—no matter if all the ships in Germany are on your tail!"

Norton nodded, and his lips drew into a straight line.

He nosed over and dove, pulling out only when the whining of the wind in his wires became too loud. But the first time he did this, his passenger slapped him heavily on the back, motioning him to hold his nose down, and there was fierce insistence in the face of the passenger.

So down he plunged, wondering if the ship would hold together when he nosed her up. He watched his altimeter—four thousand, three thousand, fifteen hundred, eight hundred.

Then Norton pulled her out. There was a clearing below, where nothing moved. At five hundred, with the ship for a moment almost stationary as Norton stalled her, his passenger went over, somersaulting for what seemed like ages. Norton, circling the place, was sure the passenger had waited even beyond the safety limit, that he had caused his chute to open at the last minute.

Then the chute was a white splotch one the ground as Norton circled the place and watched.

Five minutes.

Then Hell broke loose above that clearing. It seemed to Norton that the ships came in from all angles, and with a shout of excitement, which washed back down his throat and almost choked him, Norton prepared to carry out the orders he had received. Three ships were very near him, coming at him in a fan-shaped formation, plummeting down, and Norton gave his ship the gun, flashing up to meet them.

He aimed at the center one of the three. He would take out one, take the bullets from the others, and keep on the move as he had never moved before. He not only must keep his own life, and keep his ship safely under him, but he must get down when the signal came, and land as closely as possible to the signal.

The first enemy ship was quite close above Norton when he opened with his prop-synchronized guns.

Then the enemy opened, and Norton felt the snap and sputter of bullets whizzing all about his head. If his prop went—

But that was one of the chances, desperate chances, upon which not only his life, but many others, depended.

Guns yammered and clattered. Two of the enemy ships were drawing away to either side, banking around. Norton held the stick trigger down, knew in his heart, that his bursts were riddling the enemy ship from prop to rudder, through and through.

He slipped to the right in time to avoid a collision.

As the first enemy ship swept past him he saw the tell-tale tongues of flame whip forth from beneath the motor housing. One ship out of the running; but what was one, when all this country was alive with Hun airmen!

**R** ATATATATAT! Ratatatat!

Norton had no time to watch the ship he had shot down. But he saw her pilot jump. That was all. The other ships were winging in on him from either side.

He glanced swiftly over the side as the bullets began to crackle. Bullets were ripping holes in the air all about him, to right and left, behind and before.

"First thing I know," muttered Norton to himself, "a burst will hit dead center, and then where'll I be?"

Then he saw it—three quick short stabs of fire at the edge of the clearing below.

A hail of bullets swept through his fuselage abaft the after pit.

Norton slumped in his pit, and his ship fell away, apparently out of control. One of the enemy ships swept in for the kill, and he knew that the eyes of that enemy, looking through between the jets of flame which licked about the muzzles of his guns, was staring at the slumped pilot and wondering whether he had made his kill.

The motor of the Salmson was roaring wide open. She behaved exactly as though she were out of control. The enemy ship flashed over her as Norton, awkwardly, and in a way that the enemy could not see, brought the nose of the ship up. As the enemy flashed over his nose, Norton tripped his guns again, and a noiseless cheer burst from his lips as the enemy staggered in mid stride, wounded to death by that long burst hurled into her flashing belly.

Then Norton dipped his left wing, swept down in a mad spiral, leveling for the landing.

Down after him came that other ship, while away to the left, half a mile away, four other ships were coming up to see what all the shooting was for.

Norton landed, rolled to a stop just as the second ship crashed in and her gas tanks exploded with a roar which seemed to tear the silence of the universe asunder.

Two figures materialized beside the fuselage. One was a big man dressed in a German officer's uniform, the other very slight, dressed in the flying togs of an American aviator.

The slight figure was almost hurled into the pit by the larger figure, just as the German flight flashed over the field, and the nose of the foremost dipped, and red flame flashed from her nose!

### III

**T**HE big man stepped back, waved his hand. Norton gunned his crate for the take-off in the face of the guns.

It would be a near thing. The enemy would probably riddle him with bullets before he could pull his trucks free of the



ground, but somehow Norton was not afraid. This was the game he loved.

He now had one task. To get back home the shortest, surest and safest way. So he gunned the ship, holding the stick forward until the tail was off, then blasting her into the air, her nose just above the crest of the trees at the end of the clearing.

He turned and looked back. He saw first the white face of his passenger, barely visible over the top of the camel-back. A tiny chap, this man he was bringing out of German territory.

"Scared green, too," muttered Norton, "and I don't blame him! Wonder how my other passenger will make out."

Flashing down toward Norton were three enemy ships, and their guns already were flaming. Norton hadn't one chance in a hundred against them. He had to depend upon speed, and make for home by the fastest route.

His passenger was looking to the front and the whiteness of his face caused a sort of chill to caress the spine of Norton, a chill he didn't understand.

"Yellow!" he told himself, yet somehow the word didn't seem to fit.

Then ahead of him he made out the death-flames kindled by the Red God of War, and knew that he was approaching the battleground of the warring nations. Hell was loose down there.

Norton looked back. He had to make the safety of his own lines. He knew he had been spotted by both sides, knew that bullets from the ground were probably snarling and snapping all about him; but all sounds seemed dimmed now, even the roaring of his motor, as though he had been flying through a soupy fog that was endless. Any second might be the last. It couldn't go on forever.

Then one of his struts splintered. A flying wire stuck straight out behind the ship. His engine had been hit, and he was losing speed.

He dove for No-Man's-Land, praying that his ship take him down alive. He would crash. The enemy followed him down, guns clattering. The ground rushed up at him, ground whose face was smeared endlessly with splotches of fire, pits of flame and débris.

Then Norton set her down. He heard

the splintering of braces, the snap of wire. The ship seemed to collapse in upon herself. She hesitated, started up on her nose, went over. Norton started to loosen his safety belt as the ship settled. His own guns would be on the ship in a minute or two, blasting it from the face of the earth.

Norton was free, and into the wreckage again, tearing at his passenger, almost sobbing. Wisps of smoke were stealing about his face. But he dragged his passenger free. Machine guns clattered from the German trenches, seeking in the wreckage of the Salmson for the lives of those who had come down aboard her.

Norton was free, carried the slight figure of his passenger in his arms. The passenger's clothing had been almost torn from his torso. He was a limp bundle in Norton's arms. Sobbing with pain, dragging one foot after the other as though each weighed a ton, Norton stumbled headlong into a shellhole.

A terrific explosion sounded behind him.

"There goes the Salmson, for money, chalk or marbles!" muttered Norton.

Then he was disentangling himself from his passenger. He felt for the man's pulse. It was faint, but it was there. Then he put his ear to his passenger's heart. He drew back as though a serpent had bitten him!

"Goodness . . . gracious . . . Agnes!" he said in horror. "Where did this skirt come from?"

#### IV

NORTON did not realize that he had passed out until he came to himself with his head in the girl's lap. She was shaking him feverishly, calling his name.

"They call me Jimmy," he mumbled as he came around.

"Jimmy it is," said the girl, half sobbing, "and you can call me Jean, which is my name, or anything else you like, providing you come around!"

What a funny way to bring a chap out, thought Norton! Sounded silly. But how nice it felt to have a chap's head in a girl's arms like that.

The darkness of just before dawn had settled over No-Man's-Land before Norton made a move. With his heart in his mouth he chanced a look over the edge of the shell hole. The silence was ominous

and oppressive, but he could not see a thing that moved.

He reached back for the hand of Jean, and the two started toward the friendly lines, crawling forward an inch at a time, making slow progress, hugging the ground, faces covered, with an occasional star shell brightened the corner where they were. Then on again, an inch at a time.

"One inch further and I'll slam about six inches of bayonet into your belly!" came a snarled voice dead ahead.

"I'm an American flyer, with a prisoner," said Norton. "Help us in."

THEY were dragged over the parapet into friendly arms. Jean had drawn her torn clothing about her. She was once more the slim boy she had been before the discovery.

"You'll have to go to the C. O.," said the soldier.

"I've got to get back to the drome," snapped Norton. "I haven't time to bother."

"Sorry," retorted the doughboy, "I don't know but what you're both spies! Orders is orders!"

They were taken to the Company Commander, who passed the buck to the Battalion Commander, and the two were about to be led away when Jean Tempest stepped forward and whispered something to the captain. Instantly the captain stiffened and saluted.

They were led to a communication trench, started to the rear.

"What's the secret of it?" said Norton when they were well back of the lines. "Who are you? What was the chap I took over in German duds last night?"

"I'm that odious creature known as a spy," said Jean simply, "and the Heinies were getting wise to me. It was a matter of hours almost before I would have been due to do an Edith Cavell. There are a bunch of us in the same boat, and so Colonel Bain, whom you took over last night in German uniform, is trying to get back those who are in real danger, substituting others in their places. . . ."

"Yeh, I know," said Norton ruefully. "I'm the gazabo, because they think I'm air wise and can find my way home blindfolded, who's slated to bring in the sheaves! Where are you going now?"

"Take me to the place where you picked up Colonel Bain last night."

Dawn wasn't far off when they reached the place.

"I leave you here. Be back here at the same time tonight as last night, and don't be over curious about me—we'll meet again."

"We sure will if I've anything to say about it," said Norton. "I'm not going to drop you over the side after all the time I've waited to find you, because I didn't know you *were*, nor where to find you!"

Jean laughed, a rippling laugh which stopped short off. Her arms went suddenly about Norton's neck. She kissed him swiftly, warmly, then slipped into the trees and vanished.

Norton knew he would see her again. She had promised. He was walking on air as he started for the drome.

## V

ONCE more the sidecar dropped Norton at the side of the road, and this time it was Jean Tempest who met him.

"Listen, Jimmy," she told him. "Over in German territory there's a good American boy who needs us! He's locked up, and they're going to hang or shoot him tomorrow morning. So let's don't be selfish!"

"Why not be selfish!" demanded Norton savagely. "Here the crowd thinks I'm yellow because I don't fight Gettman."

"He'll keep," she said, "and meanwhile you've got work to do. Have you got a weapon?"

"An automatic, with three extra clips."

"Good! We've got to get this chap out of prison, you know."

"We'?" he questioned. "Where do you get that 'we' stuff?"

"I'm going; that's why you're flying a DeHaviland tonight, and besides I'm the only one who knows where to look."

Norton said nothing, but his lips were a straight line. Unconsciously he gripped more tightly the butt of the automatic he carried in his pocket. The ship was a DeHaviland, apparently in the best of condition. Intelligence wouldn't have furnished him a poor one for this, but a DeHaviland of any kind was bad enough. Slow as molasses, any Heine ship could fly circles about her.

"Climb to twelve thousand," ordered Jean curtly.

The motor blasted the first time. Norton didn't take time to warm her up. Too much noise. People might come to investigate. How he hated for Jean to go, but how could he prevent her? She was in this war, same as he was, and had to do her duty. Game little cuss, asked no odds because she was a woman.

**S**WIFTLY the DeHaviland circled for altitude. Away off there the big guns roared, rocking the world with their monotonous concussions. Yonder an ammunition dump crashed skyward under a direct hit. The DeHaviland coughed regularly, an even beating like monster wings against the eardrums. Right wing down, circling, reaching for the sky. Up there were clouds, many of them. Be up among them in a moment, and the world would be blotted out.

Just before they got into them Jean stabbed him with a little fore-finger.

He cut the gun, looked back. Jean pointed and shouted.

"Off there," she said, "sixteen miles from where we took off. You'll have to come down through the clouds, and there probably won't be a chance to get back up and try again. Archies everywhere, and the country well patrolled by air. You'll have to be air wise."

Norton nodded. A cold chill caressed his spine. Good Lord, and Jean was going back into this place, back whence he had brought her last night, where she had been almost discovered, back where they'd hang or shoot her for being a spy, and she didn't seem to be afraid.

"If a fellow could only see the future," mused Norton.

But he couldn't and it occurred to Norton that it was just as well. As for finding that place in the dark, and coming down through the clouds, well, that wouldn't be so difficult. He'd done it before, and with Jean depending upon him he would do it again.

**N**ORTON knew that he was close to the place Jean had ordered him to reach. He looked back at her. Jean's face was ghostly and she was looking at the ground.

From ahead came two flashes of light, as though someone worked the button of a pocket flashlight.

"Head straight for that," Jean's motioning finger seemed to say.

Norton gritted his teeth, held the ship steady. He couldn't see. Had to trust that unknown who had used the flash twice. Not much to gamble on.

He side-slipped to the left, almost vertically. Then he side-slipped to the right, correcting to keep his direction. The ground rushed up at them, a black place of terror.

He saw a wall of trees rushing at his prop, but he had faith in his air wisdom. He dropped his ship lower. The wheels struck, the wall of trees approached as swiftly as ever. Then the trees were over them, but there was clearance for the wing-tips on either side.

Norton cut the gun. The D.H. rolled to a stop.

Men came running, silent men. A light flashed full in Jean's face, then in Norton's. Then came a rasping voice, a guttural voice which never would speak English well.

"So many thanks for bring back the spy! Come out, L32! Tomorrow two will pay instead of one—perhaps three!"

With an oath of fury Norton drew his automatic, and found it exploding in his hand, felt the kick of it, saw its muzzle belch orange flames into broad Teutonic faces.

**T**HERE must have been a dozen of them, and the noise of the shots would bring others. He fired into their faces as he hurled himself from his pit. Jean remained behind for a moment, and he wondered why. He whirled to look back.

Jean Tempest was firing the DeHaviland, leaving them without a steed upon which to return to the drome.

Then, out of the tail of his eye, Norton caught it.

Just two flashes, there in the woods to the left. Norton knew it wouldn't come again, for whoever was signaling would lose his life if caught. The same man, or woman perhaps, who had signaled them down in the first place. Norton would have something to say to that chap for bringing him down into a trap.

Then he remembered the words of Colonel Bain.

"Come down in spite of all the planes in Germany!"

Bullets now were zipping faster and faster about the heads of the fugitives. Men from the other side of the clearing, beyond the DeHaviland, were coming within range and were, luckily, firing wildly, depending upon the number of their shots for a lucky one to bring down either or both of the fugitives.

Norton hurled his weapon full into the face of a man who stood between them and safety. The weapon struck the fellow flatwise across the face. Norton disarmed him, thrust his own bayonet into his vitals. No time for consideration of fine points. He knew what would happen if he were caught:

He whirled. A fourth German was still a score of paces away, and he had little time. Jean was a few strides behind him, and had just snapped two running shots at Germans who surrounded the DeHaviland. Norton couldn't see whether she had scored.

He waited until she came on, noted that she ran tiredly, as though her limbs were of lead, when Norton whirled back, and caught the German flat-footed by hurling his captured weapon, bayonet foremost, full into the enemy's face.

The German dodged. Then Norton was atop him, had caught his throat in his left hand, and was hurling savage blows with his right to a jaw that gave under the pummeling. The fellow's knees sagged. His eyes stuck out fearfully, his tongue lolled. Norton smashed him again and again. Jean ran into Norton's back. Looking back, no doubt, and had misjudged her distance. She fell, just before a rifle spoke, and Norton staggered.

That one had burned a furrow along his left side, high up under the arm. It had been meant for Jean, maybe, and had missed her because she had stumbled. Bullets came from behind them in a steady stream. It was a miracle they had survived so far.

Keep going! That was the theme of this blamed war. Keep going! No matter how tired one got, or how badly wounded one was, one simply kept on going until one dropped, especially when one was in

enemy territory, and in danger of being shot as a spy.

Jean's body was trembling. Norton thought she was dying, but when he looked into her face again her eyes met his bravely. Keep going, her lips seemed to say, though Norton could hear no sound. Bullets zipped and whined through the foliage above them, dropping severed twigs upon them; but Norton, though he panted now with exertion and pain, and staggered as he ran, kept on running, straight ahead.

A bulky body suddenly bared his way. "L60!"

"L32!" came faintly from Jean. Then she sagged. She had carried on to her objective, and had fainted.

"What's next?" panted Norton to the unknown.

"Give her to me," said the other. "I'm fresh and strong!"

"Go to Hell!" snapped Norton. "I'm keeping her!"

The speaker, Norton saw as he turned a flash into his own face for a split second, was Colonel Bain, who had been twenty-four hours in enemy territory!

Jean came around slowly, Norton slapping her cheeks, Bain rubbing her wrists. After a time she said she could manage. Then, deeper into the woods they went, toward a glow of lights through the trees. A dark alleyway through a mass of shell-smashed ruins; then a wall which remained drunkenly standing.

"He's in this building," said Bain.

## VI

"REMAIN here, Tempest!" said Colonel Bain sharply. "Lieutenant, you go around that way, I'll go this. Keep right on going until you reach the front of this building. It isn't exactly a prison, but the guard is a strong one. I know the man we're after. We'll get him and come back here."

Norton moved rapidly. Bain might get ahead of him.

It was even brighter at the front of the building, and when Norton stepped around the corner a sentry was just facing about, had turned just far enough to fail to see the helmeted face of the American airman.

Norton hurled himself forward, his right

hand, grasping the automatic, raised high. It crashed down. The sentry fell, dropping his weapon. From across the narrow street—this appeared to be a small country town—came a hoarse shout, and a bullet smacked into the wall near Norton's head. But right before him came Colonel Bain, running, hand clasping a revolver, a heavy service weapon which looked exceedingly business-like. Had Bain been German he could have dropped Norton easily.

Bain yelled at the Germans across the street in their own language.

"Stop that firing, swine! This man is my prisoner!"

Then Bain grabbed Norton, yanked him through the door, thrusting him to the right, so that the wall would hide him from the men across the street.

There were half a dozen men in here, and against the wall straight ahead of the door a wild-eyed man wrenched at his bonds. He was fastened to rings in the wall with stout lashings, which had been fastened by experts.

"L60!" said Bain.

"L48!" replied the prisoner, gasping with relief. Then he caught himself up as the hands of Bain went to his bonds. He cursed Bain in English, deep, terrible curses. He even spat at Bain, as though Bain had actually been German. A soldier instantly presented his bayonet at the throat of the prisoner.

"Silence, dog!" he snarled. "I'll make you lick his boots when you're untied!" And Bain fired, coolly, surely, and the bullet caught the German under the ear.

Shouts came plainly from outside.

"Grab Killion's wrist and drag him along!" shouted Bain. "Follow me! If Killion falls, drag him!"

Bain ran to the door, and a hail of bullets smashed out at him. Calmly Bain stood there in the door, firing into the faces of men charging into the street, while Norton held back those inside with the threat of his automatic.

Norton reached Bain, who whirled to the right, Norton at his heels, and started for the corner. Rifles roared close at hand. Norton felt Killion wilt in his hands, but gritted his teeth, plunged on. Bain staggered, hesitated, hand to his right breast. Then Bain swore, snapped a couple of shots across his body to the left.

A SCORE of Germans running, shooting from the hip as they came on. A bullet zipped past Norton's head from the rear. He paused at the corner, looked back. That last bullet had been fired by one of the guards. Norton fired, aiming at the man's face just below the coal scuttle helmet, and the man tumbled sidewise, back through the door, his feet sticking out toward the street.

Bullets were snapping past them. Killion was hit again, before they turned that next corner, where they would find Jean. Norton's heart was in his boots. What had happened to Jean while they had been gone? It had been seconds only, but many things might have happened. Jean might have screamed and they not have heard her.

They rounded the corner, looked for Jean. She was nowhere in sight.

"She's gone to the field," gasped Bain, his face covered with blood, his eyes wild, "we'll have to get there. This man and his information must get back!"

Norton was a madman in his frenzy. Something told him Jean had not gone ahead. But what could he do? He had to depend on Bain. Hadn't Bain been here twenty-four hours without being discovered? Hadn't he managed to move from where Norton had left him last night to this place, to remain in readiness for Norton?

Bain probably knew, but Norton wanted to be sure. Then there was this dying man, L48, Killion, to consider. He had vital information which had to get back. Norton *had* to depend upon Bain.

Bullets sang about them. One whisked through Norton's helmet, burning his scalp. Shouts roared out behind them, many shouts. There were many Germans following. There seemed no chance of escaping.

They reached the blessed cover of the woods, and Killion was almost a dead weight in Norton's hands. They paused for a breathing space.

Crashing sounds behind them, shouts in German to spread out and search. The pursuit was hot, and right on their heels. They moved forward, Killion now supported by both men.

They stopped. Bain thrust Norton ahead.

"Go straight ahead!" he snapped. "I'll be with you in a minute!"

Bain went to the rear on a run. There came a shot immediately after Bain had slipped into darkness, and Norton wondered about it. Had Bain been shot down? But Bain had ordered him to go straight ahead. The crashing in the brush seemed to be converging on the place whence the sound of that shot had come.

But Norton went on. Had to get this man back.

Then a clearing. An airdrome. Barking ships at the line. The alert signal had been given then. Ships would be taking off at once, others had already taken off. Some were coming back in. The place was in turmoil.

Norton hesitated, studying the lay of the land.

"Here!" said Bain. "Slip these on. They're bloody, but they're German!"

Then, as Bain tendered the blouse and pants of a German uniform, Norton understood the meaning of that shot he had heard. Dirty business, but necessary. Norton pulled them on over his uniform. That made him a spy, but he would have got the same dose anyway if caught. Even with his own uniform underneath the gray uniform was three sizes or more too large for him.

"Killion," begged Bain, "snap out of it! You've got to walk naturally for a minute or so. You've got to get to that nearest ship with the motor going!"

Killion smiled. His smile was ghastly. It was like forcing a man to come all the way back from the lip of the grave.

"I'll make it, Colonel," he said, and started.

Boldly the two dashed toward that first ship. They couldn't tell whether it was one or two-place. It was the nearest, and the prop was turning. No one seemed to notice them. Norton had hurled his helmet aside. Bain stayed behind:

"I'll get Tempest," he had promised, "and I'll watch till you get off, or . . ."

Norton knew the alternative.

Killion aside, wedged down into the seat. The ship leaped forward as he gave her the gun. An Albatross. Trouble ahead, over the American lines, but they had to get off. There was turmoil at the field. Running figures, pistol shots.

Then, as the ship slashed down the field, a machine gun began to clatter. The ship staggered as bullets tore into her. But she lifted under the sure hand of Norton, who leaned forward to aid her with his will, dragging her wheels free, then climbing in a mad leap into space. He looked back as he banked around, circling for altitude, reaching up to the sky, up toward the clouds where he could hide.

Fear was in his heart for Jean Tempest. But he had to trust Bain. Killion had to get back.

Ships were taking off below. It would be a near thing. But the clouds were dead ahead.

Killion stirred, brought forth pencil and paper. A ship came out of the clouds, plunging down toward the Albatross. Another Albatross, whose pilot would not know.

Then a ship coming up on Norton's tail opened. That would tell the truth to the man coming down. Killion wrote rapidly on a piece of paper, handed the paper to Norton.

"I can't last," he said, but Norton couldn't hear what he said.

Then Killion, with a superhuman effort, did the greatest thing Norton had ever seen a brave man do, and he did it so swiftly Norton could not prevent. He raised erect, leaped.

Norton was alone in the cockpit.

Enemies were converging upon him from all sides, above and below.

All he had was a piece of paper. It would tell. Killion had mutely told him so, had hurled on to this stranger the torch of a mighty resolve. Norton had to carry on. He gritted his teeth, tested the guns of the Albatross.

Guns began to clatter ahead of him, slightly off to the right.

## VII

THEY reached the ship, a single-seater. Norton lifted Killion in. A mechanic darted around the wing, made for Norton. He fired once, straight into the man's face. The man fell. Norton climbed in, thrust

INSTANTLY Norton rolled out of the line of sights. Guns clattered behind him, and his right wing began to shred.

There were now half a dozen ships close to him or coming up. He gave the Albatross full gun, banked to the left, and set his course with the unerring certainty of the homing pigeon for the home field.

For a moment as he banked the enemy was thrown into confusion. Valuable seconds, split seconds, and Norton was fighting not only for his life, but for Jean Tempest, and to get back Killion's information.

Norton was now a spy himself, in German uniform, and bearing information secured by another spy. He didn't know what it contained, and if he were shot down he never would know, and many lives might be lost.

Killion, knowing he had but moments to live, had jumped, thus giving Norton his chance, if he had any chance at all in the first place.

Then he gasped with fear. Coming on ahead, reaching toward him at top speed, were half a dozen other ships. Six to one already, and six others arriving at top speed!

Norton was trapped beyond the ability of an angel to free himself. But he would go out fighting. The ship ahead of him, which had crossed the line which his prop followed through the air, staggered as she took a burst in her belly.

Then Norton was past her, left wing down to keep his right wing from slashing into the enemy.

He got past. It was close, but he made it, and a ship coming in on his tail had to side-slip, level and recover, climb back up, before her fatal guns could open. Precious seconds again, but Norton was plunging straight ahead toward that other flight of ships.

He gave the ship more gun, tilted her nose up, trying to reach the safety of the clouds above him, and two enemy ships swept over him, blocking him off, tilting over to plunge down.

Then, suddenly, the ships were circling, getting into some sort of formation, allowing Norton yet other precious seconds.

With a sob of joy Norton realized then what that meant. The ships which were coming on were friendly ships, and the enemy were preparing to give battle.

The oncoming flight was in a fan-shaped formation, hurling themselves at the Ger-

mans. Norton nosed up, hesitated, realized that if he swept up to the clouds he would be in line with the guns of both Allied and German squadrons. The enemy would fire upon him, knowing who and what he was. His friends would fire upon him, thinking him an enemy.

With the nose of his ship pointing almost at the safe haven of the soupy clouds which were so close above him, yet as far away as the moon, Norton allowed his right wing to fall away, gave the ship full gun, kicked her level, and darted away to the right, at right angles to the converging courses of the two flights.

Down from the German flight swept a red-winged single-seater, her guns flaming. One man had been told off to take care of the spy.

Almost simultaneously, a ship detached itself from the Allied squadron, and dove down toward Norton. The two ships were coming at him full speed. Either one would get him, for he couldn't fire on a buddy, and couldn't take a chance on fighting the enemy and failing to get back with his message.

Then Norton grinned. He knew of a way to signal his fellow flyer. He put the nose of the Albatross down, brought it up again in a mad zoom, turned on his back and half rolled out, started pell mell back toward the German edging in on his tail.

The enemy ship was dead ahead of his nose.

He waited, his fingers aching to set his guns to yammering. Then, just as he started the first burst, the enemy rolled out, and Norton was close enough, despite the darkness, to see the shape and outline of the ship, to see the blurred, almost indistinct insignia under the wings and on the fuselage.

The German flyer was Karl Eric Gettman!

**F**ROM off to his right, guns began to speak, and the right wing, already swiftly shredding away, gathered unto itself more holes. Norton whirled and looked, even as he started into a mad side-slip.

The American pilot of the other ship had opened upon him!

The bullets of a friend were seeking in the Albatross for the life of Norton!



"Fool!" muttered Norton. "What a fool I am! He knows that one of us is German, and one of us something else; but how is he to guess which is which? I should have waited for Gettman to fire on me!"

Swiftly Norton put the Albatross through all the stunts she would stand. How Gettman must be laughing at him! Gettman knew who he was, and was ready to slay him. The Allied flyer must have guessed that a friend rode in the red-winged single-seater flown by Gettman, and when his own buddy had shot Norton down, Gettman would laugh and open fire!

Gettman circled about aimlessly, waiting for Norton's own to shoot him down. He would wait, then sweep in. He would kill Norton with the guns of a friend, then slip in and slay the friend.

Norton, mad with fury at the way he had tricked himself, raised his fist and shook it at Gettman.

"Curse you!" he screamed. "Maybe my friend will shoot me down, but I'm going to get you!"

He banked, leveled, hurled his ship at Gettman. The Albatross shook and groaned. She wouldn't stay up much longer.

Norton set his guns to clattering.

There was a sob in his throat as the bullets continued to come from the rear. He hadn't a chance. The bullets snapped about his body like whiplashes.

Gettman would be laughing!

Information must be got back!

With his face set in a grimace of fury and despair, Norton came back on the stick and reached for the clouds. Off to the right now the two flights, Allied and German, were mixed up in a mad scramble. One ship fell flaming. A second. A third.

But even with the guns behind him slamming home the bullets, Norton held up the nose of the Albatross. The clouds were closer, closer. A bullet plowed through Norton's hair.

He looked back. Gettman was climbing up after the American flyer who rode Norton's tail.

Norton clinched his fists, beat at the sides of the pit in futile anger, but he held steadily to his climb, while ghostly fingers of clouds reached down for him.

Then he was flying safely in the cloud.

He climbed, circling to the left, coming about for the trip home. After two minutes on the new course he cut the gun to listen. Nothing to be heard but the whispering of the white shroud as its waving tentacles flirted with struts and braces.

Sobbing, praying for the American flyer whom he had left at the mercy of Gettman, Norton sagged in his seat, realized that his right side was almost numb, and that his right hand felt numb and useless on the stick.

Fifteen minutes. Twenty. Then Norton pointed the nose of his ship down, dove. He leveled, set the ship down on a muddy road, brought her to a stop. He climbed out, strode into the darkness of the trees, divested himself of his German disguise.

Then he hurried in the direction of his own drome.

He routed out Hoxey, gave him Killion's communication, then collapsed like a man who has imbibed too freely of strong whiskey.

## VIII

NORTON opened his eyes. The odor of disinfectant was in his nostrils. A doctor bent over him, was examining him carefully as he opened his eyes.

"Not bad off," said the doctor relievedly. "A few scratches and the loss of lots of blood! A bit of sticking plaster, and a couple weeks in bed, and he'll be all right again."

"Good Heavens, Doctor," barked a familiar voice off to Norton's right. "Paste him together, fasten him up with whangleather, do anything to get him on his feet! He has to fly tonight!"

Norton twisted around, his whole body full of twinges of pain as he did so, while warm moisture caressed his left side, proof that a wound had opened. Norton winced.

The man who had spoken was a trim officer wearing the silver eagles of the colonel.

He was Colonel Bain!

Bain came to Norton, took his hand.

"Norton," he said, and Bain's face worked convulsively, "I didn't find her! I couldn't do much myself, alone in German territory. I had to get back to my duty.

here. I couldn't risk the lives of thousands of doughboys for one solitary girl."

"Sir!" said Norton, his face suddenly livid, his pain forgotten in his horror. "You . . . you . . . you save your own skin and left Jean!"

Norton slipped from the bed, grabbed for his clothes. His face was a mask of fury as he stared at Bain. His jaw jutted out belligerently.

"I'm going for her, Bain!" he cried. "I'll bring her back if the whole German army tries to stop me!"

Bain looked searchingly at Norton.

"I think," he said softly, "that you are able to navigate. The medico has pasted you together after a fashion. But you aren't going anywhere, unless I say so! You can't do anything for Tempest. You'll either carry out my orders, or I'll place you under close arrest right here!"

He was in the act of slipping into his clothes, his brain whirling dizzily, but suddenly he paused. His mouth opened in furious protest. Then he clamped his lips on what he would have said. He finished dressing, thinking as he did so:

"I can paste Bain in the chin and dash for it. No, won't do. I'll get shot before I'm out of the hospital!"

Sullen, angry, Norton faced Bain when he had finished dressing.

"Your orders, sir!" he snapped.

"You fly at midnight, Norton!" snapped Bain. "I'll overlook insubordination and insolence, because I know what's going on inside you!"

Bain extended his hand. Norton did not seem to see it.

That night when Norton met Bain at the clearing designated, three kilometers or so from the clearing formerly used, and climbed into a Salmson, he had doped out a plan not only to carry out orders, but to search in German territory for Jean.

**C**ERTAINLY this man Bain had guts! He had just spent twenty-four hours in enemy territory, and in enemy uniform, and now he was going back to continue his work.

"Straight toward Conflans from here," Bain said shortly, taking his place in his pit. "Use your own judgment, and cross over the town, which is a railway nerve center for the Huns, awaiting my signal

to go down when you are five miles beyond the place."

How best to do it?

Norton knew that luck had favored him above all mortals during the two nights just past. He had got away from numbers of German airmen, by the grace of a kindly Providence and a fool's luck. It was too much to hope that it would happen again. Airmen would be watching, too, tonight. His last two forays had broken into a hornets' nest.

That Albatross he had stolen, the fuss of last night, the freeing of Killion. Oh, Germany would be watching.

**N**O single ship could possibly get through. Yet Norton was going through. He knew it, felt it in his bones. He could not die until something had been done to return Jean Tempest to Allied territory. Almost anything might have happened to her, many evil things, of which being shot as a spy might be the least.

Great searchlights played across the sky, criss-crossing the darkness with cones of light, cones which seemed to do dervish dances, seeking in the skylanes for the Salmson which had been reported.

Enemy ships behind and before, a thousand bullets which might be marked with the name of Norton, and of Bain.

Straight ahead toward Conflans, Bain had said, and with his teeth tight closed Norton hurled his Salmson forward.

Down under him were moving troops in column, marching up, and he swept over them with his motor in full cry. He saw them sweep off the road to right and left, throw up their weapons and fire.

The Salmson was rapidly taking on the vast resemblance to a sieve, but she was still going forward, still smashing her way through the night, and her engine still screamed defiance at the foe.

Head low in his pit, hugging his stick as a race driver hugs the wheel, or as an engineer hugs the cab window of a fast express, Norton held to his course.

From far behind the Allied lines, Allied guns were reaching out with whistling shrieks for Conflans. Norton was now so close to the town that the big boys broke asunder in the soil below him, and his ship rocked perpetually, like a subchaser in a heavy quartering sea.

A flying wire, though he could not see it, and did not spare a glance to right and left as long as motor and fuselage, and wings, held together, stuck straight out behind.

One of the struts looked as though a rat had been gnawing upon it for hours on end. Fifteen minutes more and it would go. He couldn't dive. He was just above the ground now, which flowed blackly out behind, its blackness now and again dotted with fire geysers as the big guns reached out for Conflans, firing blind.

The guns of the ships behind Norton opened, but they still were far behind. The whiplash cracking of them, however, smacked against his ears. No sign from Bain. Norton whirled for a look back. Bain still sat stiffly erect. He raised his arm and motioned Norton on.

Norton faced the front again, his heart in his throat, for even as he turned to look back a giant invisible hand seemed to have reached up for the Salmson, dragging her down toward the ground, here free of trees. Norton gasped, pulled her nose up gradually. His trucks had almost touched. It had been a near thing.

But the spirit of the thing, the will to match wits against a multitude, gripped him. He yelled as the nose of the Salmson came up. Let them come on. No one nor all of them could bring him down tonight. For tonight, if never again, he was a sort of superman, a fox of the air, an eagle of the night, a taloned bird of prey.

**T**HE Salmson still roared on. Then she was in among those lights which criss-crossed the night sky above Conflans.

Lots of motion down there, but Norton dared not look down. Those lights were blinding, picking him out, exposing him to full view of Conflans, like a thief dragged forth from a closet.

But Norton held to his altitude. Here he needed his sense. He was like a beetle in a bottle, and all the outside was darkness. In all directions the darkness was the same and . . .

Five miles beyond Conflans, Bain had said, and all directions looked the same. hurred at him, that he was passing almost over the muzzles of the Archie batteries, He knew that bullets of many sizes were

hurred at him, that he was passing almost over the muzzles of the Archie batteries, but that he traveled so fast they could not line up on him.

He knew that guns mounted on high tripods hurled bullets at him as he flashed across, and that the eyes of expert gunners aligned the sights, but he was traveling at top speed, and depended upon his speed to bring him safely through.

Archie shells whizzed past. But the Salmson still screamed defiance. Other ships converged upon her, and the staunch craft hastened swiftly over Conflans.

Five miles beyond.

Then darkness beyond, and Norton ducked his head into the pit to listen to the engine. She was missing. Bullets had sought out her soft spots. She wouldn't last much longer. Might conk out any minute. Norton looked at his wrist-watch.

Five minutes at the most. One had gone. Two. Then three.

Bain touched Norton on the back, pointed.

Norton looked where Bain pointed.

Just blackness there ahead, and what appeared to be the headlights of an automobile. Norton just saw them, when they blinked out. He waited, watching the spot. The lights blinked on again, once, then out.

## IX

**P**AST Norton like a plummet swept an enemy plane, diving for the place where the lights had shown. But if a friend had blinked the light, the friend knew what was doing, and would not be caught. Norton knew that that one ship would literally spray all the area about where the lights had shone with hot lead, seeking the life of the invisible somebody who had signaled.

Bain jabbed Norton again.

Norton looked back. Bain signaled for him to cut the gun, and with but a hundred feet of elevation he cut it.

"Go down!" said Bain. "Stall her in as close as possible to where those lights were. I don't know what's there, and we'll have to take a chance!"

Instantly Norton tilted the nose of the Salmson. Down she plunged, the black

earth reaching hungry fingers of night up toward her. No telling the elevation. There was no altimeter. The dash had been shot to bits. All Norton knew was that two lights had glowed, on and off, and that he must go down.

He had to guess about landing. There wouldn't be a second to spare. Ships were firing on him, and when he landed he would be a motionless target for a shorter or longer time, depending upon his luck. If alive after the landing they could run, if dead it made no difference about bullets.

Up came the nose of the Salmson, stalling in, losing speed.

Then she crashed with a rending of struts and longerons. Norton had hurled his goggles aside, held his left arm over his face to keep from batting his brains out when they went in.

A thin cry from behind Norton.

He scrambled forth from the wreckage, feeling numb all over.

Norton fought in the wreckage for Bain, while an enemy flyer swept over, lead from his guns spraying the crashed plane.

"Into the woods, that way!" gasped Bain. "A stone house on a knoll! L37! Go on, leave me!"

Then Bain was dead, and crimson gushed from his lips.

Norton raised his fist and shook it at the sky. Then he sprang toward the woods, knowing that all the countryside would be seeking him.

Then a thought occurred to him. He hurried back, dragged Bain into his own pit.

"He would wish it, if he had had time to tell me!" said Norton to himself. Then he fired the ship. Let them hunt! Bain would have suggested this if he had had time.

A soldier's way to go out, fighting for his country even after death had claimed him.

Then into the trees again, seeking the house Bain had so sketchily described, whose direction he had indicated with the last strength in his right arm.

## X

A GLOW of light through the trees and the darkness. A house looming black at the top of a knoll. An armed sen-

try, rifle over the light from a window. Coal-scuttle helmet, the stiff walk of a sentry on parade along his post.

This was the house Bain had meant.

Norton slipped off to the left, aiming for the spot which he guessed to be the end of the sentry's post. There he waited for the plodding figure to come up, turn about and retrace his steps. Meanwhile Norton rested, conserving his strength. The sentry was moving away. Presently he would be back. There he was, looming up darkly.

Closer and closer. Presently he would reach the end of his post, turn about stiffly to return.

Norton gathered himself together. The sentry reached the end, turned, started back. But he only got turned around, with one heavy foot ready to start the endless treadmill of his duty, when Norton was on him like a jungle cat. He flung his left arm around the German's neck, effectually shutting off his cry for help. Then, with all the power at his command, he drove a vicious right to a jaw that seemed soggy under his hand.

The sentry dropped without a sound.

Norton bound him with his own belt, gagged him with a handkerchief. Then he appropriated the Boche's rifle, brought it to his shoulder, reconsidered, stooped and lifted the coal-scuttle helmet, placed it on his own head. Not much of a disguise, but it was very dark, and officers probably paid little attention to common soldiers.

BACK and forth paced Norton, eagerly examining the stone house, listening for sounds to come forth; but the place seemed silent and deserted, save that its windows were eyes of light.

"What the deuce is going on here?" muttered Norton.

Then running figures come out of the night, from the direction where Norton had crashed in with the Salmson. The ship would still be burning, and these men couldn't know for sure he was not in the wreckage.

Maybe they would know that the ship didn't burst into flames at once, would guess that it had been fired. They were running, talking among themselves as they came on. Norton's heart was in his mouth. Suppose they stopped, gave instructions

to the sentry, bade him watch for a man in the flying togs of Uncle Sam?

He mustn't give himself away, must allow them to think that he was a regular sentry. Then he thought of something else. If there were another sentry, their posts must touch somewhere. Suppose another sentry found the man Norton had slugged, and discovered the imposture?

It would come any minute.

Past Norton fled the men, trim men in officers' uniforms, one or two of them, Norton was sure, flyers.

One shouted at the sentry. But, of course, Norton did not understand, and fortunately for him the shouter did not wait to see how his words were taken by the plodding, methodical sentry. He took it for granted that he would be obeyed.

The men entered the house, slamming the door.

Instantly Norton made up his mind. He dropped his rifle and the helmet, dashed to the door, swung it wide and entered. A narrow hall faced him, and it was unlighted. But ahead he could see lighted open doors, could hear guttural voices raised in protest and alarm, a fist banging a desk savagely.

Norton raised on tiptoe and moved swiftly to reconnoiter.

The first room was empty, save for a table and some chairs, and the remains of a hurried lunch. A telephone in a corner and a headset. At the other end of the room was a door, slightly ajar. Beyond it was light and the sound of voices.

Norton took a deep breath, and tiptoeing to the door, glanced into the room.

A score of officers were here, all standing save one, who seemed of high rank. He was pounding the desk with a savage hand, and laying off the German at a mile a minute. The others stood as stiffly at attention as graven images.

Norton felt in his clothing for his automatic. It held seven shots. He had two extra clips, which he probably would never have a chance to use. He bit his lips, squared his shoulders, and hurled himself squarely into the center of that room with his first leap, closing the door behind him.

"Stand still, gentlemen!" he said coldly in English. "If one of you makes a move I'll drill that fat pig behind the desk right between the eyes! The same goes if some-

body comes in behind me! If I get slugged, just remember that this automatic has a hair trigger, and that my finger is nervous!"

THE graven images became even more graven. Norton saw a man's head start down to his waist.

"Stop it!" he yelled. "Unless you want to lose old fat-face there! Put up your hands, all of you!"

Some understood English, and these obeyed. The others knew the signs, whatever they understood, and their hands went up, too.

"*Gott in Himmel . . .*" began Fat-Face.

"Shut up!" snarled Norton. "Or I'll shoot thirty-seven 'ells out of you! Thirty-seven, see, no more and no less!"

As Norton made this strange statement, his eyes searched the faces of the graven images there, studying the eyes, seeking for a sign. One man started to lower his right hand, as though to scratch an itching place on his neck. He was a good-looking young Prussian officer.

Norton thought he detected a faint flutter of the man's right eyelid. Then he moved swiftly. His right hand thrust forward, the automatic began to bark.

In two shots the place was in darkness. But Norton did not whirl and run. He was depending upon that man whose hand had dropped as though to scratch his neck, whose right eyelid had fluttered down. Norton sprang to the right, even as he fired.

The lights had scarcely gone out when pistols began to bark, spurts of flame lashing out at the place where Norton had stood. Norton hurled himself forward then, toward the spot he had marked, the spot upon which had stood the man who had given the sign when he had mentioned the cryptic numerals.

A struggling mass of bodies, officers striving to slip in all directions, away from where they expected that automatic to hurl its bullets.

Norton crashed into one man, felt he had reached the right place, ran his hands over the fellow swiftly, to find that he stood stock-still, his hands still elevated.

"L37!" breathed Norton in the man's ear. Instantly the hands came down, grasped the left wrist of Norton.

Backward they moved, still away from the door. Then a pause against a wall, hands fumbling for a doorknob.

Then the door yanked open swiftly, both men going through, the German pulling the Yank, slamming the door behind them. Then the hallway in two jumps, while bullets tore through the door they had just slammed.

"Quick, fella!" snapped the "German." "Up this stairway! There's a girl up here! She's to be shot tomorrow! That old goat who was pounding the desk when you came in, was just telling us that there was a spy among us and that he knew his identity. If you had waited a minute more, he would have named me!"

A stairway, and steps taken four at a time, as silently as possible.

Then a door swung open into darkness, the beam of a flashlight in the hands of L37 disclosing the interior of the room. It was empty. They had encountered no sentry in the hall.

The spy groaned.

"That Salmson flying over!" he gasped. "They thought the flyer was after the girl! Two spies have been taken back the last forty-eight hours! They've taken the girl away to make sure!"

"Who was she?" croaked Norton. But somehow he knew, even before the man spoke.

For the fellow spoke the number of the girl Norton knew as Jean Tempest! Terror such as he had never before known gripped his vitals.

"Come on!" he said. "Where can we steal a ship?"

"There's a car on the road below," said L37, "if we can only make it!"

"Who's the chief gazabo of intelligence here?" said Norton.

"Captain Karl Eric Gettman!" said L37.

Norton gasped.

"Let's go!" he said.

They whirled into the hallway, reached the head of the stairs, and started down.

## XI

THEY were half-way down the stairs before they met the Boche coming up, and without a second of hesitation, they charged the massed group of their gray-

clad enemy, firing as they plunged down.

Bullets zipped into the faces of the enemy. The two men went down four steps at a time, leaning forward to increase their speed. They hit the line of Germans as football players hit the opposing line, and when too close to use their guns effectively, they used them as clubs.

Then they were out the door, ducking swiftly to the right, to escape the lead which would surely follow them. The light streamed out ahead of them, and they ducked into shadow, running. Behind them the door of the stone house vomited shouting figures. Guns blazed in the dark as the Hun officers fired at fancied targets, and some that were not fancied at all, as the two men heard some of the bullets zip past them.

Then they were in the woods, running full tilt.

"Quick!" panted L37. "The Boche General's car! It's right down the way."

"How'd you manage to give the signal with the general's car?"

"Told the chauffeur, who's a sort of friend of mine, that I would be coming in from Conflans at such-and-such an hour, timing it to catch Bain coming in, and for him to blink the lights twice to show me the way, since I might be squiffy, you know. He did, but when all that racket happened at Conflans, and all the fuss in the air, he stopped fooling and left his car dark."

"It will be just too bad for that friend of yours," said Norton. "He'll have to drive us to the lines."

"Nope!" said L37 firmly. "That wouldn't be sporting at all. He didn't guess I was a spy, and I can't get him into trouble just to save my skin."

"I owe him nothing," said Norton, "and besides, there's—"

He couldn't bring himself to mention Jean Tempest. After all this fellow might not be all he seemed to be. If L37 had been unmasked this might really be a German trying to play up and find out things. As Norton recalled it, this man hadn't shot anybody in the escape, and it was really singular, come to think of it, that both men had been missed so consistently by the bullets of the German officers.

Orders were orders. He was going to take this man back. If he was a German

spy, he would be found out, if not he could prove his identity.

THEY broke through onto the road, a scattering of shots behind them. Ahead loomed the bulk of a car.

"Outside, Otto!" snapped L37. "We've got to get to Conflans without delay!"

Otto couldn't see it that way, but he got the drift when Norton, crazed with all this delay in carrying out his orders, shoved the muzzle of his automatic half into Otto's mouth. Norton didn't owe this man any friendship, and if L37 did, it was just too bad.

"Tell me where to go," snapped Norton, sliding under the wheel.

"Straight down this road, slow when I tell you to."

The gears meshed. The car started forward with a jerk. Norton shifted to high and the car, a staff car of great size, fairly leaped ahead, swaying and careening along at top speed within a hundred yards or so. Norton crouched behind the wheel, his wounds forgotten in this new excitement. He knew as the car gathered speed until her flight was stupefying, that the hue and cry had long since gone forth, and that all this area would be on the lookout for a German staff car gone wild.

Beside Norton, L37 crouched down, hand on the siren, ready to give tongue with it if troops appeared in the path of the great lights boring into the night ahead of them.

"L37 sounds like a silly thing to call you," said Norton. "What's your real monicker?"

"I'm Captain Allan Shepherd, of Intelligence. Friends call me Shep."

"Okeh, Shep. My friends call me Jimmy. If the Lord is with us we'll both be home tonight, eating American food, sleeping in American beds, and cussing the weather after the American fashion, but we have places to go, and things which must first be done!"

"Slow down here," was all Shep said, "and take this turn to the right. We'd never get through Conflans."

Norton slowed, but scarcely enough, and took the turn on two wheels, giving his boat the gun again as soon as the turn had been somehow negotiated.

Shep looked behind.

"Give this baby the juice," he cried. "There's a Boche ship diving on us, and if I know my stuff, we'll be taking some lead in the seat of our trousers in something less than nothing flat."

Norton chanced a glance back. A ship was diving on them, and already her guns were flaming. Her bullets were spitting into the road behind them, creeping up, and soon would pass them.

The fire stopped, because the flyer knew that he was too far behind. Norton applied all the brakes, and as the enemy flyer opened again, his bullets hammered at the hood of the car, and cut a dusty swath up the road. He had flown over. Norton had outguessed him. He gave the car the gas again, hurled her forward, picking up speed.

The ship swung on ahead of them, started up in a loop, half rolled out, while Norton held the accelerator to the floor. The staff car swept forward like a live thing.

Straight ahead foot troops, all in gray, were moving up. Shep was bringing all sorts of wails from the siren, and the men ahead were making way for the staff car.

The airplane could not fire now, without endangering the marching men.

But she swept low over the car, coming back, and far ahead the men saw something drop from her, down among the marching men, and knew that the word had been dropped bidding the foot troops stop these two mad Americans. Norton gritted his teeth. The siren wailed. Men gave way to right and left.

Then they didn't give way. Men ahead, a whole company of them, whirled at some command which the two fugitives did not hear, and rifles were leveled.

INSTANTLY Norton swung off the field to the left.

The car almost turned turtle, but somehow she managed to stay right side up. She bounced and bucked, and Shep clung to the sides for dear life, Norton with his hands on the wheel holding himself steady.

Ahead of them as the road was left behind, geysers of black earth reached toward the sky from amidst livid flames which died as soon as born. From behind them came bullets from the rifles of the foot troops. Bullets whipped through the top of the car. The windshield vanished from before their eyes, and the wind of their



mad dash across this rough terrain made their eyes water.

"Good Lord, Shep!" cried Norton. "Our folks are firing on Conflans, and are half a mile or so short as usual, and now we're slashing right in among the places where the shells shouldn't be dropping, but are!"

"But think what a small target we are!" replied Shep. "Let 'er buck!" And buck she did. Her wheels must have been made of chrome steel, her body of unbreakable material for surely no car ever was made to take the punishment Norton handed out to this German staff car.

"You'll break her to pieces!" shouted Shep.

"What'n'ell do you care?" retorted Norton crazily. "She doesn't belong to you!"

A geyser of earth sprang heavenward right under the radiator, it seemed, and both men were flung flat by the concussion, but as Norton fell sidewise he dragged the wheel to the right, and the staff car swung around on two wheels, almost going over. Then Norton was erect again, knew they had skirted the fresh crater with inches to spare, and was on again.

Still going full blast, her engine roaring like all the bulls of Bashan, the staff car lurched, careened and plunged ahead.

Straight before them, a mile or so distant, was a wall of trees, while along to the left there seemed to be an opening, and perhaps a road. Norton swung the car toward that opening. That airplane which had flirted with them before now came back, and Norton seemed to go entirely crazy.

With mad jerks he put the wheel over to the left, hurling the car over on her right wheels, leveling her up, only to go back to the right again. Even a great flyer would have experienced difficulty in hitting such a crazy target. First on her right wheels, then on her left, Norton gave an exhibition of plain and fancy driving that would have delighted theater-goers at home, yet he wasn't grandstanding in the least. He was headed for his own lines, and determined to get there.

Ahead loomed the cleft in the woods. The woods would probably be filled with men. Then he saw a road, just now deserted, leading up to the lines—and a ditch full to the brim with water between him and the road.

He swung to the right, paralleling the

ditch, which seemed to follow the road endlessly.

"Well, here goes nothing!" he shouted

He put the dancing wheel over, went into the ditch sidewise, and the car almost upset, but didn't though she didn't miss far when Norton put her at the jump giving her the road. There was water in the tonneau, however, when Norton straightened her out on the road and opened her wide again.

Then ahead of them a flimsy barricade, behind which were many coal-scuttle helmets. Bullets began cracking about their ears.

"Down, Shep, we're going through!" cried Norton.

Then the car hit. It was a foolish thing to do, but hit she did, and through she went. Norton had a glimpse of soldiers giving way to right and left as the remains of the barricade slid to right and left, falling from the hood of the car—which now no longer sported a top.

They were through. Siren going again, soldiers ahead making way.

Then the end of the line, impossible to go further.

Norton flung the wheel to the left again, off the road, down into a gulley that seemed to be angling off in the direction he desired. He heard shouts as the car bucked and careened in the new direction, and knew that pursuit not only was right at their heels but that word had gone everywhere, and that they could expect almost anything ahead.

The enemy finally overtook the car. But there was little left of her that was visible. Just the tail end of her, visible above the surface of a slough, and that end was rapidly sinking.

But of the two mad Americans who had been aboard her, they could find no trace.

## XII

**J**IMMY NORTON was a man beside himself as he made his way to his own drome. It would soon be dawn, and at dawn, if the story were true, Jean Tempest was to pay at the muzzles of muskets for being a spy. Certainly Shep had no reason for lying about it.

Norton scarcely knew what he intended to do, but that he intended to do something

he was quite sure. Back into German territory, back to get Jean out of the clutches of Karl Eric Gettman.

Well, he hadn't gone beyond that, hadn't as a matter of sober fact, progressed that far. He was almost sobbing as he crossed the tarmac of the home field, reeling like a drunken man.

The dawn patrol was almost ready to take off. He had minutes left, if he intended doing anything at all.

He reached Headquarters building, and met Hoxey coming out.

"Major," he croaked, "I've done my job. Now I'm going after Gettman! May I have a ship?"

"Yes, take your pick, as long as you don't take my ship. No, on second thought, *take* my ship! And I'll tell the boys what you've been doing, and stop this talk of cowardice."

"Don't tell 'em anything for me, except that they can all go to the hot place for all of me! They were entirely too ready to think me a quitter!"

"What are you going to do?"

"Take your ship and fly like Hell, right into Germany!"

Hoxey stepped up to Norton, looked deeply into his bloodshot eyes.

"Yes," he said slowly, "you look sane, but I'm darned if I think you are. For the last forty-eight hours, the sky has been full of German ships, and there are six vacant places at the mess table since I grounded you!"

"There'll be some vacant places at German mess tables, if you'll only let me have a ship—sir! There's a girl . . ."

"That explains it," snapped Hoxey. "Get going!"

Norton knew Hoxey's ship, as what American flyer within a radius of a hundred miles did not, and he dashed toward it on a shambling run. Other flyers were coming out, taking last minute drags at life-giving cigarets. These flyers rather studiously avoided looking at Norton. Some of the ships were blasting, and as Norton reached the Major's ship, he stopped, shook his fist at his buddies, and cried:

"Keep off Gettman!" he said, almost hysterically. "He's mine, and I'm after him this morning!"

Then he was in the pit.

"CONTACT!"

"On!"

The motor roared into life. The single-seater tugged at the blocks, and some of the hysterical nervousness went out of Norton as he examined the instruments, made ready to fly. As always, the grip of a stick between his knees, the feel of the motor-throb through his body, calmed his aching spirit, gave him back some of his lost poise. It was always that way.

His face stopped twitching, his nerves steadied. He was going forth on the toughest task he had ever experienced, self-imposed this time.

Then he hurled the ship across the tarmac, and lifted her off wildly in a mad leap into space. A bird a-wing, a bird of prey, eager now to come to grips with Gettman.

Shep had told him where.

At a thousand feet Norton leveled and hurled his ship toward his objective. It wouldn't be far from the house where so much had happened last night, according to Shepherd, and it was due to happen at any minute. Norton tested his guns, but he had no intention of fighting German planes. He tested them for another reason.

He scanned the sky on all sides. There were planes everywhere. Up there over the front lines two flights, one of French ships, the other of Boche, were rushing toward each other head-on. Once upon a time the sight would have thrilled him, but not now. He had something else to do, and nothing was going to stop him. He had gone through enough in the last forty-eight hours to kill three men, yet here he was, on the way to save Jean Tempest, and to the devil with any Heinie who tried to stop him.

Full speed ahead. He was over the lines, over the squirming worms below him who fought for a few inches of muddy soil—the fight for democracy. Last night, even an hour ago, that had been his main task, when he had had orders to carry out. Now, he gave his ship a little more juice.

Grim as a figure of Fate, Norton held to his course.

Ahead of him a Heinie ship flashed upward in a clean leap into space. Her pilot saw him, swung about to face him, leveled and came on. Norton sat low in his pit, aimed his ship in the direction of the place

where Shep had told him *it* was going to happen, and ignored the German ship.

But not so the German.

He meant to pick a fight with Norton, and right now. His prop was aimed at Norton's prop. But Norton never swerved. When the bullets started his prop would be in danger. But Norton would not swerve.

The enemy ship bulked larger and larger. The enemy opened first. Norton yawed to right and left, his only concession to the possibility of the German downing him. The two ships would crash if they continued on as they now were flying.

Between the spurting muzzles of the Spandaus, Norton could see the head of the pilot—or was it fancy? Anyway, he tripped his guns, set them to clattering. The enemy ship came on. They sprayed each other with a ceaseless hail of lead.

But it was the Boche who avoided the sure crash. He stood his ship on her tail, zoomed over Norton, who held doggedly on his course, gaining a few yards on the Boche as the latter leveled off, banked around and started a dive on his tail.

**N**ORTON looked back. This fellow had a faster ship, and Norton might have to turn and down him, but he intended going as fast and as far as he could before that should happen.

The thing he intended would require all his skill as a marksman. He couldn't take chances.

The enemy ship was on his tail as Norton, looking over the side, gasped at what he saw.

Six men with rifles at the order. One man off to the side, an officer. Facing the squad, a girl, recognizable as Norton started his dive, by her free-flying hair. She seemed to face the firing squad with the courage Norton knew Jean to possess.

With an oath on his lips, entirely forgetting the ship behind him, Norton tilted the nose of his ship downward and dove, and as he watched the motions of the ant-like people in the secluded clearing below, he unconsciously repeated the commands given to firing squads.

His engine was roaring full speed, the ship was shaking herself to pieces.

Up came those rifles. The right arm of

the officer in charge of the firing squad was raised aloft. But it never descended. Plainly in his sights Norton had caught the firing squad.

The squad never took aim. They never knew what had hit them. Yawing right and left like a mad creature, his ship a live thing personifying Jimmy's own desire for vengeance, Norton's guns crashed out their yammering paean of savagery.

Down went half the firing squad. Three men pressed the triggers of their weapons convulsively, but Jean Tempest still stood erect. Over to the right came the nose of the ship, its guns spitting flames.

With bullets hurled as fast as they could be fed in, Norton made of that particular section in which he could not see Jean through his sights a dusty mess.

Then he gasped, and for the first time realized what was happening on his own tail.

A bullet ploughed through his right shoulder. His helmet snapped off his head, the chin strap severed.

Black smoke speared forth from under the motor housing.

Norton was afire. Instantly he put his right wing down in a mad side-slip, aiming at the ground, crashing in, causing the flames to be hurled up the wing away from him.

He was finished, but he had sent some of the killers to that bourne from which no traveler returns.

He leveled as he all but touched the ground, tilted the nose up, stalled in, and was out of his cockpit, running, staggering, toward Jean Tempest, even as his gas-tanks exploded.

Men were running toward the place from all sides, men in coal-scuttle helmets, rifles at the ready, fingers itching on the trigger. The Boche ship sent bullets all around Norton as he sped to Jean.

He reached her, saw that her eyes were wet with tears, and sobs racked him as he took her in his arms. For a moment he was unconfiscious of anything save this.

Then he knew that the Boche were all around him, menacing him with bayonets, and that a Boche officer was addressing him in English.

"Captain Gettman will be glad to see you!"

"Take us to him," gasped Norton, "and to the devil with you!"

## XIII

PERHAPS there was a bit of the milk of human kindness in the Boche non-com who took charge of the prisoners and, with a guard of six men, marched them away—for he allowed Jean and Norton to walk side by side, hands clasped, and did not forbid them to talk.

"Jimmy," said Jean, "why did you do it? It is only a respite, and now you'll go the same way, without helping me in the least. And all those men you dropped were merely doing their duty."

"Why did I do it? Jean, do you need to ask me that?"

"Perhaps not," she replied, "but what good does it do us?"

"We may get a break yet. We've got one now. This non-com, if that's what he is, doesn't seem such a bad sort of fellow. He could easily be rough with us."

"Well, they always feed a condemned man anything he wants before they hang him! Oh, I don't mean that, Jimmy! You've no idea how I felt when you crashed in, trying to get me out. It was the biggest thing I've ever seen a man do, and you hadn't a chance from the beginning."

"We're still alive, ain't we?"

And his grin brought a wan sort of smile from Jean Tempest.

The clop-clop of the heavy feet of the Heinies, as the guard marched the prisoners away. Norton surveyed the terrain over which they marched. It looked different by daylight, of course, but he was sure that it was the same area over which he had traveled last night, and that the house on the knoll ahead, through the trees, was the house from which he had begun his mad ride with Shep.

Up to the steps they marched, and in.

The same room there, and some half dozen glowering officers standing around, while seated behind the desk was the *hauptman*.

The man behind the desk surveyed Norton coldly, and stroked his moustache thoughtfully.

As their eyes met, the man broke into very good English.

"You are a very brave man, *leutnant*," he said, "and a very great fool! You killed off some good men of mine, and only delayed the execution of the lady, who has been conclusively proved a spy. What is your name and organization?"

"My name is James Norton, and my organization is none of your business! What's yours?"

The frowns on the faces of the officers grew grimmer at this insolence. But the *hauptman* only continued his speculative stare at his prisoners.

"My name is Karl Eric Gettman!" he said quietly. "I am a captain."

Norton started visibly, and Gettman half smiled. Norton's brain worked with lightning-like speed.

"You have heard of me?" continued Gettman softly.

"Every American airman has heard of you, Captain Gettman," said Norton, "and every American airman respects you! We know that you always fight fairly, and that you are a sportsman! It will be a blow to our faith in airmen, when my people learn that the great Gettman is a killer of women!"

GETTMAN started, and his face paled. "I obey orders," snapped Gettman, "the same as any soldier, no matter how much I may disapprove of them. I would give my life to spare this lady hers, but it wouldn't help her. She has been proved a spy, and sentence has been passed upon her. I have no alternative."

Norton strode to the desk, leaned both hands on its top.

"Captain," he said softly, "if I promised you that in return for the freedom of this woman she would be immediately sent home, that she would not divulge any information she might have gained here, would you let her go—and take me in her place?"

A gasp from Jean Tempest.

"No, Jimmy!" she cried.

"Shut up!" he barked at her, without turning, while the eyes of Captain Gettman roved back and forth between the two prisoners.

"I can make no such compact with an enemy, Mr. Norton," said Gettman. "You know that, without asking."

Norton hesitated a moment, searching

for words. Perspiration came forth in the palms of his hands, wetting the desk top.

"Captain," he said, "I'll make you a sporting proposition. May I make it before your officers?"

Gettman nodded.

"I'll fight you in the air for the freedom of this girl!"

"Why should I accept such a proposition, when I have you both?"

"Because," said Norton slowly, "three days ago I shot the brother of Karl Eric Gettman out of the sky! Karl Eric Gettman challenged me to combat in reprisal, and my orders prohibited my acceptance!"

Gettman's face grew red with fury. His officers stared at Norton, and at one another, a new respect dawning in their faces.

Norton pressed his advantage.

"Think a moment," he said, "you have me now, and can slay me, but forever afterward you will be tormented with the idea that, had we met, I might have shot you down! It's a sporting proposition. I take your word, you take mine. Set me back in my own drome, and I'll keep my friends from jumping you. Then we'll meet, without interference from either side, and fight it out.

"If you win, you still have Miss Tempest. If I win, I trust you to leave the proper orders to see that she is set back behind our lines!"

Gettman, his face pale, was standing now. He looked first at Jean Tempest, then at his officers. In his mind was but one thought that mattered. His brother had been shot down, and here stood the man who had done it. An eye for an eye. He wished with all his heart to pay up for his brother, and to pay up in the same coin. Yet here was an impossible proposition.

"GENTLEMEN," said Gettman at last to his brother officers, in English so that Norton and Jean could understand, "what do you think of this foolish proposition, and how will we account for the disappearance of the lady if I lose?"

His officers smiled. Their captain was game, as they had known he would be. One of them spoke up.

"It is foolish, and we would all be tried

and maybe shot for treason," said one hurriedly, "but if the others agree, I for one make oath here and now to assist in every way possible to see that the terms of this proposition are carried out. But not one word of what has transpired here must ever get beyond these doors!"

Gettman turned to Norton.

"Lieutenant," he said, "I repeat that you are a brave man, and a great fool—and that I am a greater fool to listen to you; but I'm going to and I'll take your word, as you've offered to take mine. I'd like to shake hands with you, but I can't forget that your hands took the life of my brother Fritz!"

"His would have taken mine," retorted Norton.

"I know," nodded Gettman, "but one's brother, you know!"

Norton said nothing.

"Hoffman," said Gettman to one of his men, "bring a two-seater here and land it in the road at once. Then have my own Albatross thoroughly gassed and oiled. Stein, take charge of the lady, and don't let anything happen to her. Take her out into the woods, and if we are pressed too closely for a report on what has happened to her, the rest of you may report that she has escaped. Later, if I win, she can be re-captured!"

Norton looked dubiously at Jean.

"Jimmy," she said, "I'm terribly afraid for you! You're in no condition to fight a man like the Captain. . . ."

"Never mind, honey," said Norton, patting her hand. "You're the one that's out of luck if anything happens to me—which is why I can't let it happen. Send me away with a smile!"

And Jean tried her best to do it. Her smile was a brave one, but it was a smile that came through tears. A lump came up in Norton's throat, and his own eyes filled. Gettman had reseated himself at the departure of Hoffman. He looked from one to the other of his prisoners.

"I hate to do it!" he said suddenly, sincerely. "Little lady, I'd like to see your friend win, if it didn't mean that I would lose."

"Captain," said Jean impulsively, "whatever happens, you're a sportsman!"

Gettman shrugged.

"Perhaps," he said, "I'll get shot twice for it, once by your friend, once by the firing squad."

And there he left it.

Ten minutes later, with an impulsive kiss of Jean's fresh on his lips, Norton was riding toward the lines in the after pit of a German plane, flown by a Boche pilot, while above him hovered a single-seater which was red of wing—flown by Gettman, grimly carrying through his part of the bargain. It looked like a photographing expedition, with a single-seater in escort.

They traveled fast. Norton's field was under them before he realized it. There were ships all over the sky, and many were converging on these which bore the black crosses of Germany. He had to work fast to keep these people from being shot down before he could act.

They circled Norton's field at four thousand feet, and Norton went over with a chute. He dropped for several hundred feet before the chute opened. Every Allied flyer in the air, and those on the tarmac below, saw the jump, and all were surprised and dumbfounded. A German chute jumper dropping onto an Allied field! But maybe . . .

It was that maybe which held them back, as Norton had known it would. His chute came, checking his fall. He spilled the wind to gain speed.

He knew without looking that the two-seater would be smashing back toward Germany, and that Gettman would be circling the drome.

Norton landed. Men came running, covering him with weapons.

"Put 'em away," gasped Norton, "I can't explain now, but give me a ship! That's Gettman up there. I'll explain everything when I come back!"

While waiting for a fresh ship he gulped a cup of coffee, and strode nervously up and down, puffing at a cigarette.

It was not until Norton was in the air again, at the stick of a trim little Spad, that it occurred to him he might not come back to offer explanations.

As Norton climbed up, Gettman banked lazily and started toward his own lines. They would fight it out over No-Man's-Land, where each would have an equal chance to get home.

XIV

NORTON climbed swiftly to Gettman's level, hurtled toward him at top speed. He tried his guns, to find them working perfectly. He was ready, save that he had been through much, and had no business in the air at all—should have been in a hospital cot—to say nothing of fighting a man like Gettman.

It was all business. Gettman, as Norton came closer, loo . . . , firing his guns, leveled slightly above Norton, swung nose down at him, and came on at top speed, guns blazing.

Bullet holes appeared in Norton's wings. Bullets found the motor housing. The prop had escaped for a second or two, but it would go if Norton continued to take them head on.

Norton gritted his teeth.

His guns began to yammer. He yawed right and left, spraying the Albatross. Down went the right wing of Gettman's ship, and Norton slipped past him with his own right wing down, avoiding the crash by a miracle.

Norton leveled, looking for Gettman. Gettman was coming up on his tail, getting into line. Down went Norton's nose, then up in the beginning of a loop, a half roll out, and Gettman was ahead of him, and slightly below.

Norton set his guns clamoring again, spurting their hail of lead through the prop. Through his ring sights he saw the cockpit of the Albatross, and the fuselage behind. His bullets ripped into the enemy ship, etching a pattern down her length behind the pit.

But Gettman came on. That Dutchman had courage.

A BURST came through him from below. The cockpit at his back seemed to disintegrate. Norton stole a look back. The nose of Gettman's ship was coming up behind his tail, propeller invisible as she whirled at top speed. Gettman would come over on his back, and rip Norton to shreds.

Norton started down in the beginning of an outside loop, spun about on the axis of his fuselage while his nose was pointed at the ground, and started to level under Gettman.

He looked up as he leveled. Gettman was coming down the side of his loop, and his prop was lining up with Norton's ship. In a second his bullets would begin to sew their seed of death, ripping Norton from prop to tail-skid.

Norton hadn't yet lost speed by leveling. He came on up himself, into the loop, the same loop down whose side Gettman was even then coming, so that for a moment or two they were on each other's tails, both looping, with Gettman having the slight advantage.

But at the top of the loop Norton half-rolled out, only to find that Gettman had aped his maneuver, perhaps had anticipated it, and was on his tail again.

Gettman's guns were flaming. Norton felt the bullets pound into him. Blackness began to settle over him. He fought with all his will power against it. He was going.

Gettman had won. Blood came out of Norton's mouth.

"Jean. . ."

Norton never afterward could tell how he went through the rest of that fight, save that through it all he refused to die, refused to be shot down, and tried with all his might to keep the nose of his ship aimed at Gettman.

He kept his eyes glued to Gettman's ship, tried to keep his prop aimed at her, and every time he saw so much as a glimpse of her, his guns spoke. There was blood on his chest, and on his hands. His engine was red-hot. So were his guns, but engine and guns still worked his will as he sought through the sky for Gettman.

There was Gettman, dead ahead, slightly above, diving down, his guns clattering. Up came the nose of Norton's ship, and death-flames spouted from his guns. He had seen Gettman plainly, very plainly.

Norton's plane quivered in every strut and brace. Why was that?

Then Norton knew. Gettman had swooped over him, diving, and somehow Norton had got around, was following him down, guns flaming. Funny, though, he couldn't seem to keep Gettman in his sights. Gettman's ship seemed to be bobbing up and down in front of his sights.

His guns, red-hot, chattered.

There was Gettman again, off to Norton's left. Gettman was working franti-

cally at his guns. Gettman's guns had jammed! Into my hands, Oh, Lord . . . no, a fellow didn't do that, not if one made a pact, a sportsman's agreement. . . .

**T**HEN Gettman's guns were going again. Norton was glad he had given him time. Not a bad egg, Gettman, would have given Norton same chance. What was that? Oh, yes, Gettman had waved at him as his guns cut in again, a sort of salute.

"Gotta quit foolin'," said Norton to himself, and blood came from his mouth again. Where was Gettman?

On his tail again? Yes, well back, but coming up like a shot out of a gun. Norton tilted his nose down. It looked like he was beginning a loop or an Imelmann. But he only started up in the beginning of a loop, stalled his ship, hanging to the heavens by her prop, came over almost lazily.

Norton looked down and saw the sun, looked up and saw the earth, and *down* against the sun he once more saw Gettman's Albatross in his sights, blurred of outline, but there just the same.

Convulsively Norton set his guns to going again.

Gettman's ship shuddered.

"Dead center," muttered Norton soundlessly. "Your move, Karl Eric!"

Norton knew he was talking silly. Funny, too, chaps about to die shouldn't talk silly like that. But by all rights he should have been dead minutes ago. Living on borrowed time, that's what was funny.

**"JEAN. . ."**

Even thoughts of Jean were hazy. He wondered. . . .

"Where is Gettman?" cried Norton, arousing himself. Norton was going down in great spirals, he discovered, and below him, fighting for control, fluttered a red-winged Albatross. Strange how she behaved, too. Norton rubbed his eyes, then looked at his hand. Hand covered with blood. Then his view of Gettman and the Albatross blurred. His face felt all hot. Yes, the Spad was in flames, and it was smoke obscured Gettman and the Albatross.

But Norton had seen enough to know



that Gettman didn't have much left in the way of wings. Nor did Norton! And wouldn't have even that if he didn't do something about the flames!

He would follow Gettman down, and keep the flames away from himself at the same time. Almost lazily, uncaring, Norton dropped the right wing down and slashed toward the ground, unseeing what transpired below, or where he was going to land, in a terrific side-slip which caused the flames to wash out along his already charred left wing.

How crazily the Spad tumbled. Once or twice he saw Gettman. He was beating Gettman down, could see that Gettman still fought his controls.

He leveled. Flames reached for his face. He put the left wing down, side-slipping to the left.

This gave him a better view of Gettman, who had almost reached the ground. The Albatross was landing, landing like a broken-pinioned bird, but landing. Gettman had won, unless that ground belonged to the Allies.

Gettman had struck the ground first. But Norton was crashing, too. As he thought of the pact with the Boche, and wondered what Gettman's friends would do in case of a draw, he hurled his goggles aside, and with a tremendous effort raised his left arm over his eyes. How heavy that arm felt.

And the crash, right after Gettman, was strangely harmless.

**"B**URNED until his own mother wouldn't know him, but he'll live!"

Norton heard the words hazily. He knew he was in a bed, and that he was all stiff with bandages, couldn't move a muscle. But of one thing he was sure, even as his mind went back and he remembered that fight—the words were English, and he had fallen among friends!

"He's been lying like that for three days!" said another voice.

Three days! Then Jean. . . .

But the doctor was speaking again.

"He's coming around now. That new nurse can look after him for a while. Call her in!"

A long pause. A hand touched his wrist, just a touch with the finger-tips. A thrill coursed through Norton. In spite of twinges of agony he raised his right hand, moved the bandages from his eyes so that he could see. Stabs of white hot flame seemed to go through his eyeballs as he looked, but through the flames he caught a glimpse of a face he knew!

"Jean!" he said. "So they kept their word! How about Gettman?"

"Alive, but finished with the war, as you are—darling!"

"Say it again, Jean. Say it! Who cares about Gettman?"

## The Big Guns of '38 Baseball . . . .



"JOE DIMAGGIO"

the primest collection of horsehide artists on record—Hubbell, Dean, Gomez, Greenberg, DiMaggio, Gehrig, Gehringer, Medwick, Van Mungo. . . . Sportswriter Jimmy Kahn swings the circle from Florida incubators to major league ball lots. From behind the scenes he shows you the slug kings and the slab specialists at work and at play.

### MISS HOLLYWOOD'S NINE . . . .

a great novelet of Coast League Ball by Lin Davies.

### Also Two Diamond Novels

**GAMBLER'S GAME**

by Ted Winslow

**SLUGGER!**

by Harold M. Sherman

### Five Smoke-ball Short Stories

**MONEY PLAYER**

by Joe Finley

**BLEACHER BAIT**

by Frank T. Blair

**EX-BIG LEAGUER**

by Mark Adam

**TRADED DOWN THE RIVER**

by Tarleton Collier

**KILL THAT GUY!**

by Edward L. Leamon

**BASEBALL STORIES** *On Sale at All Newsstands*



# HELL'S PILOT

By TOM O'NEILL

**"Man for a man—life for a life!" Over the riddled bodies of thirteen dead gladiators he swore it. A sinister air-code that turned a shrinking coward into the merciless devil-ace of that hell-ridden Western Front!**

*A Novel of War Over No-Man's-Land*

**T**HE quivering rattle of a machine gun destroyed the silence hovering above the wheat field. A welter of screaming lead swished through the grain into the darker blurs of olive drab

crawling forward. Its raucous clatter lasted for perhaps two minutes, and as abruptly as it began, the clattering ceased.

Again the silence of noonday clothed the field. Hotly the sun blazed down. How

Oppressive, and filled with feverish heat. In the distance a man groaned with pain. The tops of wheat swayed slightly as an officer pushed forward to a group of men.

"Get that machine gun," he croaked. "You men aren't cripples."

"We don't want to be neither," mumbled a voice.

"Who made that crack?" gritted the officer.

Nobody answered.

"All right. We'll see. You, Corporal Dolan. Is this your squad?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you refuse to go forward, eh?"

"No, sir. We're crawling ahead as fast as we can."

"It's murder, Lieutenant," broke in another voice. The speaker looked the lieutenant squarely in the eyes. His uniform fitted his powerful form like a glove and was of better material than those of the other men. And there was something in his whole bearing that caused the officer to withhold a scathing retort.

"You're a stranger to me, Private. A late replacement?"

"Yes, sir."

"From where?"

"Air Service."

"Ah, transferred?"

"Yes, sir."

"What reason?"

"Incompatibility, sir."

"Meaning?"

"I didn't fit in. Don't believe in killing." A slightly sardonic smile parted his lips. "I was perfect in everything but destruction of human beings. They sent me to Blois; took my commission away and relegated me to the ranks. They could have transferred me to some other branch of the service. But they didn't. The general lost his temper. And here I am."

"Oh, God!" breathed the doughboy officer. "And you mean to say they shoved you in the infantry when you held out against killing?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why didn't you say something about this before?"

"I didn't think."

"You didn't think." A world of scorn was in the officer's tones. "And why didn't you."

"A private isn't supposed to think in this army."

"Do you absolutely refuse to obey orders?"

"No, sir. I'll go forward along with the rest. But I'll not do any killing."

The officer's face purpled. He became inarticulate. But before he could voice an appropriate reply a whistle screamed off to the left.

"Forward," barked Corporal Dolan.

THE squad clanked to its feet and started ahead at a crouching run. Close to the non-com ran the big ex-airman. He held his rifle in the same manner as the others. His clean, square-cut face was outthrust, as if inviting a leaden slug to smash into it.

Grrrrrrrrrrack! The machine gun growled deep and steady. The line of doughboys dissolved in a tumbling heap. The ex-airman kept pushing on, shoulder to shoulder with Corporal Dolan.

Frantically the gunner checked the uproar of his Maxim and swept it around till it pointed squarely upon the two figures in olive drab barging upon it.

Dolan stopped and raised his rifle. But the ex-airman was even quicker. His stride had lengthened until he was sprinting at top speed. With a sudden push of his powerful legs he slanted head foremost above the spitting maw of the jumping machine gun.

So swift was his action that he appeared only as a tawny blur to the gunner and his loader.

Before they could make a move to defend themselves two lean brown hands encircled their throats. Three bodies crashed into the hole behind the gun in a snarl of field gray and olive drab. Heavy boots clawed at the air. Grubby fingers scratched and dug at those lean brown hands. But their grip was like two steel bands.

And when the booted figures in gray no longer kicked and thrashed about, the ex-airman straightened and flung the unconscious bodies of the gunners into a patch of trampled wheat.

"There's your machine gun, Corporal." He glanced up into the admiring eyes of Dolan.

"Geez!" raved the non-com. "That was

swell. You've got guts. I'll say that much for you."

The officer pushed up to the gun emplacement. "Good," he approved, seeing Dolan engaged in examining the smoking instrument. "This is as far as we go today. Dig in and wait for further orders. You come with me, Private," glaring at the ex-airman. "I'm turning you in."

"Just a moment, Lieutenant," broke in Dolan. "This new guy may be all he says and a lot more, but if it hadn't been for him we'd never have captured this gun. He took it single-handed and didn't ask odds of anyone."

"I thought—," began the lieutenant.

"I didn't kill the gunners, if that's what you were going to say," spoke the ex-airman. "I choked them into unconsciousness. They're lying over there in the wheat."

The lieutenant whistled softly. "At that, soldier, I don't trust you. Come on."

"S'long, Mansfield," called Dolan.

Private Eric Mansfield, who had been kicked out of the air service because he refused to kill human beings, turned and smiled.

"S'long, Dolan. Thanks for what you just said. It might help."

HE turned and followed after the lieutenant commanding his platoon. Directly he stood before his commanding officer in the shelter of a sheet of elephant iron. Quietly he listened while the lieutenant explained everything that had happened out front.

Captain Conway remained impassive throughout. When the lieutenant had finished he turned to Mansfield. "Is this true?"

"Yes, sir, Captain."

"You're one of these conscientious objectors, I suppose."

Mansfield smiled bitterly. How he hated the term. His mind flashed back to that fatal day on the gridiron when as the star tackle he had brought down the opposing team's faster runner. He had kept a rival college from scoring and had won the game for his own Alma Mater. But at what a cost. The other player had died almost instantly from concussions on his head after Eric Mansfield had hurled him violently to the ground.

Vain, useless regrets. His mates had tried to cheer him up. An accident they said. Couldn't be helped. But their comforting phrases pierced his heart like invisible lances. The contorted face of the player for whose death he had been responsible became mirrored in his mind. He couldn't shake off the horror.

Yes, Eric Mansfield felt that he could never again take a human life. The feeling became an obsession. He would do anything but that.

"I object to killing, Captain," he replied, flatly.

"A summary court might change your mind, Private."

Mansfield shook his head. "That's up to you, sir."

Captain Conway rubbed the bristles on his chin. He hadn't forgotten the report concerning the capture of the machine gun. "I admire courage in a man, Private Mansfield. Instead of bawling you out and preferring charges as an officer should, I'm recommending that you be placed in charge of the stretcher bearers working close to the lines. Your courage will be useful there, and you won't be called upon to do any killing."

"Thank you, Captain."

"Report to the medical officer at once."

Private Mansfield saluted, about faced, and walked away.

Terms of "softy," "yellow livered," and "big tub of lard," fell from men's lips as the rumor spread that this big, new replacement refused to fight. But these terms of abuse died upon their lips as the former airman stalked among them when they were wounded and lifted them as if they were so many children to the spotted stretchers.

He was deft in the application of a tourniquet or stopping the gushing flow of blood. His lean brown fingers had an uncanny way of dealing with fractured leg and arm bones. Yet, it was only the wounded who gave him the ungrudging stint of praise.

And now Eric Mansfield stood on the late afternoon of the tenth day following his capture of the machine gun, in a shallow road waiting for his stretcher bearers to come up. Tirelessly had he labored gathering up broken bodies of his comrades. They lay now side by side in the

narrow ditch, biting their lips against the pain of wounds.

From far and near Private Mansfield had gathered them, carrying them, not slung across his back, but in his cupped arms. Unmindful of the whip and blast of machine guns and shrapnel. Thirteen of them.

He removed his helmet and wiped the sweat from his forehead. Long and anxiously he gazed back across the pock-marked fields. One of the men groaned. Eric crossed to his side and bent down.

"How much longer?" sighed the wounded one.

"Only a few minutes, Buddy."

"We've been waiting an hour," protested another, feebly.

"Take it easy, men," called Eric, cheerfully. "I told you I'd see you through. Within ten minutes I'll have you all on the back road where the ambulances will pick you up, if I have to carry you there myself."

The wounded relaxed. They felt somehow that they were safe under Mansfield's big, protecting body. He'd see them through.

**A**BRUPTLY an ominous hum filled the late afternoon with uproar. From the windy silence of the vast upper stretches shot a single plane. For a tense moment it circled the shallow road.

Private Mansfield stood straight and stiff, watching. He saw its black nose and yellow wings; he saw the black Imperial cross on the lower wings; and as the Fokker swooped down, lower and lower, and its pilot leaned over the edge of the pit, he saw a malevolent face shot with inhuman cruelty staring down.

The ex-airman felt his throat constrict. Slowly the corded muscles in his wrists and forearms tightened. His fingers twitched and doubled until the knuckles became white under the taut skin.

Past the prone figures lying in the shallow road roared the plane.

"Thank God!" breathed Mansfield, thinking the danger was past.

But the prayer was spoken just three seconds too soon. The Fokker banked; came up with the wind; then in a straight, unswerving line of flight roared back. As it approached it swooped lower and lower.

Eric Mansfield felt again that tight feeling around his throat. He opened his mouth as if by mere words he could drive the black and yellow plane from its course of destruction.

But the chattering crash from its Spandau profaned the air. Yellow-green flames slanted downward, beginning at a point a few yards away from the row of wounded men. Tracers stabbed groundwoods; biting, probing tracers that lashed each pitiful body Mansfield had so patiently gathered for evacuation.

One of the men screamed in mortal terror. And that one scream sawed on Mansfield's jumping nerves until his eyes saw only a blur of twitching bodies beneath the murderous blast of the Spandaus from the black and yellow Fokker.

During that frenzied moment of time, the world stood still while the slaughter went on. And then the air was suddenly hushed overhead. Off to the north scudded the killer plane. And in all that vast horizon over the front lines there wasn't one ship that might bar its way to freedom or avenge the horrible wrong it had wrought upon thirteen helpless men.

Slowly, as though infinitely tired, Private Eric Mansfield paused at the side of each riddled body lying in the shallow road. Tears of rage and pity smarted his eyes. Not one man lived.

And having reached the body of the thirteenth man, Eric Mansfield dropped face downward on the pitted ground and battled with his soul.

The haunting memory of the tragedy during his college days vanished like a wisp of smoke in a breeze. No longer did it loom stark and ugly before his eyes. The shackles that had bound him fast, making him the scorn and ridicule of other men, burst.

## II

**N**O one saw Private Mansfield leave, for he pulled out in the dark of the night under the tarp in the back of a Liberty truck. He left the truck at a ration dump north of Chateau Thierry and climbed a troop train headed for Paris. For a day and a night he kept himself hidden in the *vigie*—a tower on the 40 Hommes and 8 Chevaux, where normally

the brakeman of the train was supposed to sit. He eluded the vigilant M. P.'s at Paris and caught another train westward passing through Bar-le-duc to arrive at last at the classification center at Blois.

But during all this long trip his mind had not been idle. From the moment he had risen from his knees beside the shallow ditch his mind held but one thought. Vengeance. And since the menace had come from the skies he was determined to take to the skies in pursuit of it.

He recognized the futility of applying for re-instatement. Therefore, he must use other means. That was why he was now in Blois.

The chateau that housed the bureau was a hive of industry. Officers and enlisted men passed in and out, black despair written upon their haggard faces. For two days Private Mansfield hung about the chateau waiting his chance. He saw orderlies running about carrying papers. This gave him an idea.

Pocketing his cap he walked into the building. From a huge bulletin he removed posted orders. With these under his arm he walked boldly inside. No one molested or bothered him. He sat upon the bench reserved for orderlies and was shortly called to deliver papers in another part of the building.

For a day and a half he applied himself to his new duties, and ate at a nearby kitchen. And then the Goddess of Chance placed an important document in his hands for delivery in a distant part of town. Eric read the order and was content. His mission at Blois was ended.

He worked a little later that night than usual, emptying waste baskets and sweeping up. For a brief period during supper hour the field clerk in whose office he worked left the room.

Eric rolled the orders into a typewriter; erased the name of the man for whom they were intended, and printed his own name. It took less than ten minutes, but when he had finished he had an original and several duplicates that ordered him to the field of the 415th Provisional Pursuit Squadron to the west of Apremont.

His eyes glinted strangely as he hurried toward the railroad station.

"A week," he murmured. "Perhaps less. Then discovery. They'll give me the works

for impersonating an officer." His jaw hardened. The soft, squashing sound of tracers boring into the flesh of those thirteen helpless bodies came to his ears. Hard, implacable anger returned—an anger such as he had never known before. "God!" he muttered. "Don't let me weaken."

**N**ORTH of Apremont the skies hung heavy with scud and fog. Swift, gray shapes scuttled through it, headed for the area around the ghostly Montsec—four Spads and two Nieuports. The pilot in the lead plane strained his eyes ahead. Visibility was poor. He nosed down. The ground appeared in a blur of rolling mists.

Something else appeared, too. Up from the ground slanted enemy ships. Mechanically the leader counted them. Eight in all. He banked sharply to the east. The patrol wasn't out for a fight. Orders had been strict on this point. They were merely to locate the defenses around Montsec and beyond.

The enemy planes were flying parallel now, and climbing for altitude. No escaping a fight. It was down on the cards. The leader of the observation patrol signaled his flight to remain bunched. Up, up, up they climbed. The enemy staffel climbed with them. The fog thinned. Blue sky showed beyond the whirling props.

And with a sullen roar the swift moving staffel of Fokkers roared in a double wedge on the Spads and Nieuports. The leader thumbed the Vickers in front of him, wondering how he was going to explain to his squadron commander how it all happened.

While yet he wondered, a black comet of destruction dropped from the eternity of sky above the double wedge of Fokkers. Sharply outlined against its black body came darting flames of orange fire. Before the pilots of the Fokkers could swing their Spandaus on this sudden menace, two of them crumpled behind their controls.

Without pausing to pull up the pilot of the mysterious black ship flipped to the right and unleashed a second burst. The tail of a third Fokker shot into the air. And then the air immediately surrounding the black ship became criss-crossed with tracers. The downward speed of the black

ship carried it well into the fog below.

The leader of the American patrol saw a chance to escape with his flight in the resulting confusion. No one could blame him for following out his orders.

Up from below shot the black plane. The pilots of the Fokkers slanted down to meet it. Again it was too quick for them. It seemed to hang on a whirling prop with its tail almost straight down. Before they could check their forward speed, two Fokkers overshot their prey. Once more a deluge of orange-hued tracers.

One of the Fokkers exploded violently, throwing flaming wreckage far and wide. The second heeled over. A wing snapped loose and fluttered grotesquely.

The leader of the American patrol hesitated no longer. As the remainder of the Fokkers barged down upon the black ship now side-slipping downward, he struck. Above the throb of motors came the stuttering crash of Vickers. The Spandaus chattered in return. In the melee that followed two more Fokkers dropped limpingly out of the dogfight. Into the shadowy lanes of the fog they disappeared. The leader of the patrol signaled his flight down. A Nieuport was missing. Too bad. It might have been worse if it hadn't been for that mysterious black ship.

No sign of it now. It had vanished utterly. The patrol didn't immediately return to its base. It continued northward; took a leisurely survey of Montsec, then winged back to the drome.

AS the five ships swooped down to the tarmac the leader saw the black plane again. It stood close to the deadline. Mechanics were refueling it. Beside the black ship stood a powerful figure, a stranger. The flight leader's smile was friendly as he approached.

"Hello!"

The stranger turned his head. "Hello!" His face was grim and foreboding.

"My name's Jones. I was in command of the patrol up above. Thanks for butting in and pulling me out of a hole. I had orders not to get into any fight. It wasn't pleasant."

"Don't mention it. My name's Mansfield. This the field of the 415th?"

Lieutenant Jones nodded. "Yes. Such as it is. We're new, and not yet fully

organized with pilots and ships." His eyes were studying the red crosses painted on the side of the black ship's fuselage. "What are those crosses for?" he asked.

Eric Mansfield fumbled at a small can of black paint and a brush resting on the lower wing. "Each of them represent a human life," he spoke, softly. Carefully he painted out three of the red crosses. "I'm paying off dead men's debts," he continued. "And I want to be sure that I don't forget."

"There's still ten crosses left," commented Jones.

Eric Mansfield nodded. "I know it."

"But you shot down five planes."

"True enough. But two of them were merely crippled. I lost them in the fog."

"You said something about looking for the 415th," reminded Jones.

Eric nodded as he returned the paint and brush to a pocket in the pit of the plane. "I wasn't sure. My orders were to report here, and I've been delayed."

"That's a keen looking ship. Where'd you pick it up?"

"I'd rather not say," shrugged Eric. "It's one of the new Spads powered with the Hispano Suiza geared motor. Fast, too. Mind taking me to the operations office?"

They crossed the field together and stopped before a long building. "In there," pointed Lieutenant Jones. "Hope you like it here."

"I will. And thanks."

MAJOR GETZLER, commanding the 415th examined the orders that the pseudo-Lieutenant Eric Mansfield dropped upon his desk. He saw that they came from the classification center at Blois. His eyes snapped suspiciously as he raised them to Mansfield's.

"Yes, I'm from Blois," admitted Eric, levelly.

"So I see. And where before Blois?"

"Kelly Field, Issoudon, Souilly."

"I'm doubtful of men coming here from Blois. As a rule, they can't be trusted. However, I'll put your name down on the roll. Your papers ought to be here within a week. We're short of planes. I'll have to use you for ground work."

"I'm a pilot, Major. And I have my own machine."

"Oh!" He ruffled the papers Eric had



placed on his desk. "Very well. You'll find an empty cot in the last tent." His eyes flashed meaningly. "A word of advice, Lieutenant. I'm a hard taskmaster. Let me down, and I'll make your life a hell on earth; but if you'll play the game according to my standards, I'll go to the mat with the commanding general of the Air Service to see that you get a square deal. Blois is of the past. Forget it. You'll find the orders of the day posted on the bulletin-board outside the mess shack. But keep yourself in readiness for duty every hour of the twenty-four. That'll be all for now."

"Thank you, Major."

He left the operations office and started across the field. His eyes glittered somewhat as he recalled Major Getzler's words. "Let me down, and I'll make your life a hell on earth."

"A hard, old man," thought Eric aloud. "I'll bet he's been in the army since he was a kid."

His thoughts turned inward. His hell on earth had already begun. He was a deserter. He had stolen an officer's transfer and used it to further his own ends. Following that he had boldly gone back to his former squadron; told the chief mechanic what he wanted and had gotten it. Of course, the man didn't know about Blois. So when Eric pointed out that he was there to test out the C. O.'s new plane, the chief mechanic turned it over without argument. In a field far back of the lines Eric had landed, and with no one to help him had painted the ship a dead black, covering up its former markings.

This ship was to be his, and his alone. He had thought about the red crosses while in the air. A visit to another drome and the thing was done. And it had all been so easy. Now three of them had been painted out. Ten remained.

**H**E reached the line of tents. As he neared the last one his ears caught the strain of a familiar song, sung by a vaguely familiar bass voice.

Beside a Belgian 'staminet,  
When the smoke had cleared away  
Beneath a busted Camel, its former pilot lay;  
His throat was cut by the bracing wire  
The tank had bashed his head,  
And coughing a shower of dental work  
These were the words he said:

A cold shiver passed along Mansfield's spine. He stood for a moment in some uncertainty. He hadn't given a thought to this angle of the game. The 415th had seemed so far away. Yet, here was a fellow pilot who had served with him in his former squadron. That ponderous voice couldn't have belonged to anyone but Joe "Three-Star" Hennesey.

The singing stopped abruptly as Eric Mansfield pushed through the canvas folds of the doorway. There was only one man present. He lay sprawled at full length on a canvas cot.

"Blow me down," he rumbled as Eric stopped just inside the door. "If it ain't my soft-hearted friend, Eric Mansfield." His mud-caked boots thumped to the floor as he swung to a sitting position. "Where the hell did you blow from? They told me that old Squint Eye railroaded you to the nightmare at Blois."

Eric sat down on an empty cot and lighted a cigaret. "Maybe he did. But I'm here same as you."

Three-Star extended his hand. "Shake, Eric, old son. You're the first man I ever met that went through Blois and came back to tell of it."

Eric had a sudden desire to take Three-Star Hennesey into his confidence and tell him everything. But he wasn't sure the other would approve. "I'm not saying anything, Three-Star. Perhaps later on, after I've finished with a certain duty. . . ."

"It's all right," grinned Hennesey. "I ain't a guy to ask about someone else's business."

"As a personal favor, I wish you'd forget whatever you knew of me when we were together at the other squadron. I've got reasons."

"I won't say nothing. If yuh haven't got guts these birds will soon find it out, same as Getzler. He's a hard egg. And he don't know the meaning of an alibi. No excuses go with him. Yuh either do like he says, or out yuh go."

"So he's given me to understand," said Eric, dryly.

Hennesey once more stretched out on his cot and rumbled his song of the dying airman:

Beside a Belgian 'staminet  
When the smoke had cleared away,  
Beneath a busted Camel, its former pilot lay . . .

The sudden blare of the alert signal brought both men to rigid attention. A daylight raid? Abruptly Eric Mansfield laughed.

Three-Star Hennesey stared curiously. The light in Eric's eyes was hard and totally devoid of mirth.

"Hell!" he choked. "What's happened to you?"

### III

**B**EFORE Eric could answer the anti-aircraft guns were slamming shells into the high fog above the drome. Speech was impossible. Voices came to their ears as the flyers pushed out onto the field. Excited voices. Men were shouting unintelligible orders as they raced for their planes.

Motors roared. Downwind ripped the rapid tac, tac of Spandaus as three yellow and red destroyers roared past. A Vickers crackled as the first Spad climbed to mix with the enemy planes.

Eric leaped forward on a run. A flaming crate crashed sickeningly some distance ahead of him. Brownish smoke billowed high into the air.

Eric felt choky in the throat as he saw the doomed plane twist and squirm like a thing alive. Two planes winged close to the ground, so close that the startled pilot flung himself headlong to escape contact with their landing gear.

Tracers spewed into the ground close to his prone body. They passed over. He shuffled to his feet conscious of Major Getzler immediately in front of him.

"Up, up!" shouted the squadron commander. "Drive 'em down. Blow 'em to hell. And don't come back till they're all down."

A song vibrated in Eric Mansfield's heart. A wild, fierce song that pulsed through his veins like a clarion call to arms.

Madness gripped him anew as he climbed behind the controls. He heard himself cursing the mechanics because they didn't move fast enough. A flip of the prop. The warm motor took hold. Down the field tore the black ship.

It hummed. It growled. It lifted. A short spiral. A second. No time to get up more than five hundred feet. The

enemy was poised above him and waiting.

Tzing, tzing, tzing! Their Spandaus pounded his ship. He felt it jerk beneath him.

"Break it up! Break it up!" he heard himself screaming. His thumbs found the gun trips.

The twin mouths of the Vickers snarled a warning burst. Two Fokkers roared upon him at opposite angles. The Spad was bracketed between their streams of metal. Eric headed for the nearest. Again the snarl from the Vickers. Useless. The Fokker melted away from the screaming tracers.

**T**HE black Spad rocked beneath the blast of the second Fokker's guns. Eric's mouth closed with a savage snap. The stick jerked back until it touched the belt of his leather jacket. Into a tight loop hummed the Spad.

It came out of the loop barely skimming the ground. The Fokkers climbed upon the Spad's tail and hammered it vengefully. Eric snaked out of their combined bursts.

"Keep cool!" he muttered to himself. "Get up in the air before you crash."

The tracers found him again. There seemed no throwing his pursuers off long enough to climb. He jammed on right rudder, slid away from the punishing streams of metal and climbed hard and fast. But the pilots in the Fokkers were devils.

A scorching blast of steel quivered the length of the right wing. Still the Spad fought upward. The Fokkers climbed with it, maneuvering closer with each passing second. Their tracers burned into its tail. A few seconds of this and they'd tear it loose.

Eric yanked the Spad savagely around, lost speed in a quivering stall, then yawed off in a flat spin that took him clear of the blasts.

His eyes hardened. The yellow and red planes were squarely in front of him. Without pausing to sight he jammed the gun trips. He saw his tracers burn out into space and melt into the under-carriage of one of the Fokkers.

Now the second Fokker was crowding him, nose on. Coming in for the kill. Tac, tac, tac! The Vickers quieted. Eric

grabbed the stick and jerked the Spad into another loop. Then he shoved it to the left and jammed hard on left rudder. Into a vertical bank shot the little ship barely clear of the murderous blast creeping from tail to pit.

Free again. A jam on the throttle. The Hisso pulled its heart out in a breathtaking climb. The Fokkers were behind him and coming fast. The Spad flattened. With thundering roars the Fokkers followed. They were still well above the Spad. Now they were gaining. Eric had never realized their speed before. On the day before his victories had been easy. Too easy.

He glanced over his right shoulder. A yellowish red shape poised above him two hundred feet behind. Abruptly his guns spat. Eric weaved out of the blast. It came again brushing the edge of his wings. In another second the bursts would crash squarely into the pit.

He plunged the Spad into a steep dive, gathered speed, and banked on wing tip. The sudden wrench crowded him against the straps. The nose weaved around. Overhead pounded one of the enemy ships. Eric leaned forward. For a moment the pursuing plane showed in a half circle on the ring sights.

**H**ARD on the gun trips he jammed his thumb. The tracers from the Vickers snagged into the wings of the yellow and red plane and burned hotly through its fuselage. Abruptly gray sky leered beyond the crossed lines of the ring sights. The Fokker was no longer there. It had shot skyward in a bewildering bank.

He reached for the stick to follow. Burning metal ripped through the upper wing and clawed at the left sleeve of his leather coat. It was like being hit with a club. His head reeled.

Weak and nauseated for the moment his right hand froze to the stick. Above him passed a shadow and Eric Mansfield knew that he couldn't escape.

Slowly twisting in the narrow pit he allowed his eyes to waver upward. Abruptly he crossed his controls. The stunt was at best a foolhardy thing. Yet, there was nothing else to do.

With a slight quiver the little Spad responded. There followed a wrenching

side-slip as the tail-fin shot into the air. Eric felt the straps pull against his chest, then the Spad hurtled downward in a steep dive.

The yellowish red Fokker screamed down with flaming guns. Tracers smashed against the wings. A control wire leading aft snapped. Eric tried to pull out of the dive, but that broken wire wasn't working. He shot instead into a left bank that partly checked his terrific forward and downward speed.

A shadow flicked before his glimmering prop. Savagely he reached for the gun trips. On the verge of riddling it with tracers he saw that it wasn't one of the yellowish red ships, but another Spad.

He wiped the oil spray from his goggles. The pilot of the other ship bulked well above the top of the pit. No mistaking him now. It was Three-Star Hennesey. His guns were crackling. The yellowish red plane swerved to meet this new enemy.

Hennesey smeared it with a savage prolonged burst. Straight into its pit poured the deadly stream of metal. The Fokker slid into a tail spin, its pilot already dead. The second ship lurched hungrily from above. Hennesey's Spad whirled on wing tip still spitting flame. The tail of the second Fokker folded up as though made of cardboard. In another second it was wobbling groundward.

Eric's eyes strayed above him. The sky was now empty of craft. He spiraled downward over the field, somewhat chastened in spirit. His self-appointed task wasn't going to be so easy after all. He realized with a sinking heart that he lacked experience. It was all very well to shoot down enemy planes when he had the advantage as he had in the morning. This afternoon things were different. He'd been up against veteran aces.

"Go over to the infirmary and have that wound taken care of," ordered Getzler as the pilot climbed from his ship. "I'll relieve you of duty for a few days."

"I'd rather you wouldn't," interrupted Eric. "It'll be all right after it's dressed." He didn't want to be relieved of duty. Days were passing. Precious days. He had a task before him. A duty to perform. Only a few days left. Then his records would come in from the classification cen-

ter, or rather the records of the officer whose transfer he had stolen.

"Suit yourself," shrugged the Major.

ERIC turned on his heel and headed for the tent. It was empty. He sat upon the bunk and lighted a cigarette. Presently Hennesey came in. Behind him came Lieutenant Jones.

"What's the matter?" asked Hennesey. "Get cold feet?"

"Cold feet nothing," cut in Lieutenant Jones. "I saw him shoot down three ships this morning and cripple two more."

"I don't know what happened," said Eric. "Somehow I couldn't get going."

"I dunno," rumbled Three-Star. "I saw you do all kinds of stunts but you weren't shooting for sour apples."

"These squadron raids are getting to be a regular thing," observed Jones, dropping to the bunk beside Eric. "We lost three ships. Three-Star here was the only man to ring the bell. He shot down those two who were out to get you, Mansfield."

Eric turned to Hennesey. "Thanks, old man. They had me groggy for a time."

Three-Star grinned. "It was nothing. I got 'em by surprise. Nothing to it. S'matter with your arm?"

"A scratch. Nothing serious."

"The hell it ain't," exploded Hennesey. "Them tracers is plenty poisonous and your sleeve is covered with blood. It's the hospital for you. Come on. We'll take you over."

Eric rose obediently to his feet. He didn't feel equal to dressing the wound himself. And it was burning and throbbing painfully.

The surgeon took one look at the messy hole and spoke with grim finality. "You're out of the game, Lieutenant. It looks as though the bone was shattered."

"Listen, Captain," pleaded Eric. "I'm all right. . . ."

"You only think you are. Lie down on that table over there. I'll see what I can do. But from the looks and feel of it, I'd say your work of piloting planes is over. You men want anything?" he asked of Hennesey and Jones.

"We'll stick around," rumbled Hennesey, "to see how Mansfield comes out of this mess."

Eric suddenly felt light in the head.

The room whirled about him. Then oblivion.

When he came to his senses he was lying on a cot. Nearby lounged his two brother pilots.

"How do you feel now?" asked Hennesey.

Eric saw to his disgust that his left arm was heavily bandaged with splints and fastened to a sling around his neck. He sat erect. "Give me a cigarette somebody."

Jones lighted one and stuck it between Eric's lips. "The Doc has relieved you of duty, Mansfield."—

"Did he say for how long?"

"A couple of weeks."

"Oh, God! Listen, I can't hang around that long."

"Sure you can," boomed Hennesey. "Why not?"

ERIC MANSFIELD suddenly saw his house of cards tumbling about his ears. In less than a week Getzler would hear the echo of the howl of protest from the officer back at Blois—he whose orders Mansfield had taken for his own use.

The accusing eyes of thirteen helpless men lying in a shallow ditch burned into his own. A shadow passed over them. He heard again the rattling smash of Spandaus and the thud of bullets. His body quivered as if those bullets were entering his own flesh. Black despair overcame him.

He dropped back upon the cot overcome by his emotions. Why should those thirteen men expect so much of him? Because of them he found himself guilty of desertion, theft of a plane, impersonation of an officer. Now his arm was shattered.

A sigh of protest escaped his dry lips. He covered his streaming eyes with his uninjured arm and wept convulsively.

"Hell, kid," boomed Hennesey. "Don't take it so hard. Many a guy would give anything to get out of it as easy as you have."

"It isn't that," choked Eric, ashamed of his tears. "I've got a duty to perform. And the time is short. After that—" He left the penalty unspoken.

"Forget about it," brusked Jones. "Come on. We'll take you back to the tent. I'm having my stuff moved. You, I and Three-

Star will have it all to ourselves. Maybe we can help you out."

"It's decent of you, fellows," gulped Eric, rising to his unsteady feet. "But I'll get through somehow."

## IV

**B**UT he didn't get along. All next day he stood on the sidelines and watched formation after formation wing into the air. Sometimes they returned full strength. More often they didn't.

He had the feeling of being cheated out of something infinitely precious. It was two days now since he had arrived at the field of the 415th. Three days were used in getting here from Blois. Five in all. At any moment the fatal official envelope exposing his trickery might be laid upon his squadron commander's desk. That would end him. Retribution would be swift and sure.

The thought made him wretched and uneasy. Late in the afternoon he walked back to the tent. Three-Star was stretched out on his cot as usual moaning his never-ending songs. Perhaps it was his way of avoiding a case of nerves.

"I'm done hanging around," interrupted Eric. "Will you help me change the bandage on my arm?"

"Listen, Eric. Take the advice of one what knows when to leave well enough alone. Forget it."

"I'm in earnest, Three-Star. I'm going up in that black crate tomorrow if they give me a summary court afterward. And if you won't help me, somebody else will."

"In a case like that, they ain't nothing I can do. What is it yuh want?"

"Unroll this gauze."

Three-Star hummed dolefully as he removed the bandage.

"Now throw them damn splints under my cot." He reached in his pocket for a roll of wide adhesive tape. "Now. Wind this over the dressing. Roll her tight. Don't be afraid of hurting me. That's fine. All the way down to the wrist. Now back again."

"How come you know all about dressing?"

"I was studying medicine and surgery when the war broke out. But that's an-

cient history now. Roll the sleeve down, will you?"

Hennesey rolled the sleeve over the bandage which concealed all trace of the wound. "Damn good job at that," he muttered.

An orderly stuck his head into the doorway. "Is they a Lieutenant Mansfield here?"

"What is it you want?" asked Eric with a sudden sinking feeling in the region of the heart.

"Major Getzler wants you to report to him at once."

"Thanks. I'll go now."

"Well," sighed Hennesey after the orderly had left. "It's a safe bet that Getzler's got a job for you. Every once in a while he calls us at about this time of day. It means an overnight trip to Orly piloting crates from the Acceptance Park. Good luck and good bye."

**L**EISURELY Eric Mansfield got into his leather coat. The mention of Orly, a flying field not far from Paris, gave him an idea. Ships flying from there to the different fields in France generally stopped at Vinets, a gas and oil filling station.

Vinets. Why hadn't he thought of it before? He fastened his helmet and pulled on his goggles. Vinets. He would make that air station his headquarters until. . . . He shrugged his shoulders.

"S'long, Three-Star," he called from the doorway.

"S'long, Eric. Drop me a postcard from Paris. One of those kind of the made-moiselles . . . you know what I mean."

Mansfield laughed hollowly. "They don't make postcards where I'm going."

He walked out into the dusk. The field was ghostly with emptiness. From behind the doors of the hangars came the hum of motors and clank of pounding hammers.

Eric stood quiet for a time gazing up into the darkening sky. Night was at hand, night with its coldness. He hated to leave the tent. It wasn't warm there, but it meant some kind of a home. From now on his only home would be the pit of the little black ship, and Vinets.

He had not the slightest intention of reporting to Major Getzler. To his mind there was only one answer. The other officer from Blois had turned up. Ex-

planations were in order. Well, he had none to give. Let Getzler find out for himself.

Across the field he hurried. Before him loomed the black Spad, bullet nicked in the dusk. A mechanic pushed his head out of the hangar.

"Special orders from the C. O.," spoke Eric, brusquely. "I'm leaving at once."

"That black ship yours, Lieutenant?"

Eric nodded.

"She's all set. Haven't had a chance to cover the holes in the wings. Give me till morning."

"Can't," clicked Eric. "Got to go at once."

The mechanic called to a second man. One of them grabbed hold of the prop while Eric laboriously climbed in the pit. The pressure put on his injured arm caused him to wince. He set his teeth against the pain and grasped the controls. The Hisso sputtered into life. Forward drove the machine lurching quickly into the air.

High above the drome he climbed then circled due west. The light was brighter at six thousand feet. His eyes followed the curve of the sky northward. It was lonely and cold.

The Hisso was purring quietly and steadily. Eric twisted in the straps. Some warning quiver passed through him. He had the feeling of being watched. He shoved the throttle up another notch. Still he saw nothing. He nosed the ship higher.

**T**HEN he saw it. Far into the north a huge, bulky mass rocked into the air—an enemy observation balloon. From it would peer binocular eyes. There came to his ears at the same moment the pounding roar of guns. He could see the sudden bursts of flame to the south. This balloon was spotting for the German gunners.

Sudden madness inflamed Eric's mind. All the unleashed emotions in his heart cried out for relief. Grimly he pushed the stick forward. The little Spad groaned as the Hisso responded. Straight ahead and downward, gaining speed with each second.

Through the struts and brace wires hummed a ninety-mile gale. Straight for that bulging mass of silk flashed the black Spad.

The men at the winch that controlled

the balloon must have heard the pound of the Hisso even before they could make out its black shape in the gloom. Frantically they tried to drag it down from the ground.

Eric thumbed his Vickers. Its tracers veered out into solitude. A second. Two seconds. In a third he would be within striking distance.

On the tick of that third second he pressed hard on the gun trips. The recoil mechanism snapped back and forth. Orange and green flames played about the muzzles of the Vickers. Eric drove the Spad ahead and downward. The twin muzzles of the guns poured forth their deadly stream of fiery metal. They bit and clawed at the bulging mass of silk.

The wild shrieks from below were drowned by the roar of the Hisso. They released their holds on the winch handles. The wheel spun around. The bag shot into the air.

Brrrrrip! The Vickers pounded it unmercifully. Abruptly it sagged, bellied and collapsed swiftly earthward in grotesque eddyings.

The black Spad shot past without pause.

"Four!" gritted Eric. "Nine more. Where in hell is everybody? Why doesn't someone come up and start an argument? Why doesn't. . . ."

The words died upon his lips. A dark blur was coming up to meet him. Coming with the speed of a rocket.

The Spad circled. It might have escaped in the failing light. Faster and faster drove that blur.

Eric could see it fairly plain now. A two-seater. He saw it sweep across the zenith with the swiftness of an eagle. And then, like a bird of prey, it flung itself upon the lone Spad.

The Vickers spat sharply. The two-seater swerved out of the stream of tracers. It was racing parallel now to give the gunner in the observation pit a chance. Across the intervening space separating the ships hissed death.

Eric saw the tracers spew above the cowling. A frenzied moment and he had dropped below. The two-seater followed. Flame spat from the cockpit aft. Burning tracers splattered along the fuselage.

With a vicious yank on the stick, Eric hurled the Spad upward. The two-seater

followed, raking its tail with short, furious blasts.

ERIC lurched the Spad back and forth. The tracers continued to snarl first on one side then on the other. Savagely he nosed it down. It trembled and gathered speed. The two-seater followed close. Abruptly the black ship nosed violently upward. Its rudder careened loosely like the tail of a flapping kite. On right wing it spun. Twice around it whirled before Eric could snap it free from its wild gyrations.

Across its bow flashed the two-seater unable to check its forward speed.

The lips of the pilot in the avenging Spad became a hard, straight line.

No need to peer into the ring sights. The target was there straight in front of the parallel muzzles. He pressed firmly upon the gun trips. Red slugs from the Vickers winged out in a straight line. They battered through the side of the forward pit for just the fractional part of a second. But that infinitely short period of time was more than enough.

The two-seater clawed frantically at empty space, then with a wild roar from an unleashed motor, skidded into a flat spin and rocketed downward into the pit of blackness covering the earth.

Eric jerked the Spad level and sent it careening in a circle. His lips were working strangely. "Two that time. That leaves seven." He peered over the edge of the pit. Nothing in sight.

"Ah!"

A blinding flare shot up from below. The two-seater had crashed and burst into flames. Twice more Eric circled the spot. But no other machine came up to dispute his presence in the dark solitude.

It was pitch dark when he again headed westward. A searchlight from the field at Vinets picked out his plane, and seeing its markings flooded the ground with landing lights.

Barely had the wheels skipped over the field when the lights winked out. Mechanics took the ship in charge. At officers' mess that night they plied him with questions. To all of them he had the same answer.

"My mission is to kill and destroy until such time as I am recalled to regular duty."

"But what squadron are you from?" asked the officer in charge of the field.

Eric's eyes narrowed at the question. "None. I'm responsible to no one but the commanding general of the Air Service."

And because Eric Mansfield sought to cover his plan of revenge with secrecy, men began to talk. Whispers mouthed in the darkness reached the ears of convoy pilots passing through Vinets with ships for far-away squadrons. By word of mouth rumors of a lone pilot flying a black Spad carried the length and breadth of the front lines.

Unconscious of all this, Eric slept fitfully through the dark night, vaguely uneasy, and tortured somewhat by the throbbing pain in his bandaged arm.

## V

HE was up at dawn drinking strong black coffee. Afterward he returned to his ship and smeared out three red crosses. Only seven more stood outlined against the fuselage. Did he dare hope to live long enough? His mind wouldn't grope that far. The future seemed dark and lonely. No one would ever understand the mental agony he endured while those thirteen helpless men had been wantonly murdered.

The sky was suddenly clear. Eric examined his machine. The wings were punctured with dozens of bullet holes. And oddly enough the last red cross he had painted on the fuselage was pierced with two holes. Did that mean anything?

He motioned to a mechanic. The Hisso roared impatiently to be off. Free of the chock blocks it rolled swiftly down the field. It flung itself against the early morning breeze and climbed into the sky.

Eric had no definite plan in mind. He could think only in terms of kill. The lust grew stronger with each passing minute. His eyes searched the skies for something upon which to feed their lust. Off to the west he saw two planes.

He jammed hard on the throttle. Odds meant nothing. Then he saw to his disgust that they were slow-flying reconnaissance planes probably taking pictures. They were antiquated crates, R. E. 8's, of the British Royal Air Force.

"Nervy chaps," he thought. "Why if a



couple of Fokkers should drop down. . . .”

And with a suddenness that took his breath, Eric saw that very thing happen. From high in the clouds dropped two ships. Red planes with lavender wings, marked with the Imperial black cross.

“Oh, God!” choked the pilot of the Spad.

In a flash he hurled his ship in a winding spiral. Up, up, up he climbed. Could he get there in time? They saw him coming up and left the easier targets below to blow him out of the sky.

**D**OWN through the morning air they gibbered like flame-spouting vultures. Eric banked from their combined streams of tracers. They circled, trying to get behind and above. He knew what that meant. He gunned the Hisso and kept well ahead.

A darting glance downward. The reconnaissance planes were lumbering for their own lines. Now that they were off his mind, Eric turned his immediate attention to his enemies. His wet tongue moistened his lips. All fear left him. Cool and calculating he maneuvered his ship around.

Brrrrack, ack, ack! The Spandaus were vomiting metal at him. He saw the smoking lines of tracers pass within a few feet from his prop. He zoomed in a sudden wingover. A blur of lavender crossed his ring sights. The Vickers rapped out smartly. But before Eric could concentrate on the other's cockpit the Fokker pulled out in a steep turn.

Round and round swooped the three ships, each determined to get above the other's tail. Seeing this was getting him nowhere, Eric jammed viciously on right rudder and careened at an angle across the circle of flight. The maneuver brought him on the flank.

The Vickers snarled against the fuselage of the nearest ship. He had an instant's vision of a staring white face over the edge of the cockpit, then the thunder of the other ship's guns pounded his ears. Eric snapped the Spad out of its dangerous position. It whirled on wing tip. A metallic blast whipped the upthrust wings to ribbons. It dropped into a sideslip. The Fokker winged over and followed him down.

The earth was reeling. Eric paid no attention to the antics of his machine. He

was aware of only one thing. That punishing menace bearing him down. Handicapped by an almost useless arm he was finding it difficult to control the machine.

Eyes glued to the ring sights he waited for the pit of the other machine to slant into it. The Spad quivered under a brutal blast. As Eric tugged at the controls to work it free, a probing tracer dug viciously at his already wounded arm. He abandoned the controls and leaned weakly against the straps.

The pain had made him dizzy. His eyes glazed. The horizon rocked loosely beyond his ring sights. He was aware also that the struts were vibrating to a point beyond their strength. Still he made no move to control the little ship. It rocked, weaved, and slithered down like a wounded bird.

Eric quivered to his senses with a sudden shock. He must have fainted for a full minute. The ground was coming up from the side of the ship.

The pilot of the remaining Fokker must have thought that the Spad was beyond all control. He swooped down for a final punishing burst squarely in front of the shimmering prop. Death closed its clammy fingers around him, for the Vickers came into violent life as Eric Mansfield squeezed the gun trips home.

For an awful moment the surprised pilot in the Fokker wondered what struck him but before his fuddled mind could function, he died.

**T**HE skies were empty again. Eric headed the nose of the Spad upward. He leaned back now on the straps and allowed the rushing torrent of air to enter his lungs.

He felt no flood of satisfaction at his victory. It was simply two more victims. There still remained five to account for before his debt to those men lying in the shallow trench would be paid in full.

“Five more,” he whispered. And the slipstream carried the whisper beyond him to endless skies.

His eyes faltered to the crimson splotch forming over the lower part of his left arm. He released his hold on the stick and felt of it gingerly.

“God!” he breathed. “In the same arm.” His brain reeled. Of all the places he might have stopped that one bullet, it had

to be that portion of his left arm that had been wounded before.

All these last few days of healing would count for nothing. It meant days more in a hospital. And time was getting short. Perhaps even now, since he hadn't reported to Major Getzler when he had summoned him the night before, the commander of the 415th was checking him up through Blois.

That would mean a general warning throughout all the American squadrons along the front lines. Discovery. Arrest. And then the swift-turning wheel of a rapid court-martial.

"I can't go down," he muttered, fiercely. "I'll stay in the air till vengeance is complete."

Mechanically he glanced at the fuel gauge. He didn't want to believe what he saw registered there. He wanted to ignore it. But the cold fact couldn't be put aside. His fuel wouldn't last for more than twenty minutes.

With a smothered oath he whirled the Spad around and headed for the field at Vinets. All the way in he figured his chances, not of coming through alive, but in the time required to carry out his vengeance in the skies. Suppose his papers were delayed in reaching Major Getzler? It was possible. A glimmer of hope spurred him on. It was never too late until they actually had placed him under arrest.

**H**E landed close to the deadline and clambered down. The officer in charge faced him as he started for a long barrack building.

"That was a fine piece of work, Lieutenant. I just heard it over the wires. Those four men in the R. E.'s. have phoned all the squadrons in the neighborhood to get the name of the pilot in the black Spad."

"I'm not looking for glory," smiled Eric, pleased in spite of himself. "I hope you'll bear in mind, Major, that anything I do must be kept under cover. At least for a week. Is it asking too much of you?"

The Major placed both hands on Mansfield's shoulders. "Officially, Lieutenant, a report has to be made. However, I'll do everything in my power to keep your name out of it for the present. But you're wounded. I never noticed it before."

"It's nothing. At least . . . oh hell! It just happens I was hit in the same place a few days ago."

"Come," suggested the Major. "We have the finest surgeon in France on duty here."

As Eric removed his shirt and revealed the swollen, bloody arm above and below the adhesive tape the surgeon looked at him sharply.

"Whose work is this?"

"My own," answered Eric.

"Hm-mm!" He turned to an assistant and ordered the tape removed. The second bullet had missed the bone by a matter of a fraction of an inch. The surgeon shrugged. "Amputation. There's too much poison from the first wound."

"Just a minute," protested Eric. "You think I can't stand the pain. I can. And I don't intend to lose my arm. Besides I have a practicing knowledge of surgery."

"Army efficiency," grunted the surgeon. "They make a flyer out of possible medical material. My judgment is questioned." His brittle eyes held more respect for the pilot nevertheless. "I'll do what I can to save your arm, Lieutenant."

The ordeal of dressing attended to, Eric was helped to the building where he had spent the previous night.

"Hungry?" asked the orderly who had helped him.

"Thirsty," gritted Eric. "Something hard and smooth. Preferably brandy."

The orderly grinned and held out a grubby hand. Eric dropped a twenty franc note into it. Shortly afterward he found himself the possessor of a full bottle of warm brandy. For the balance of the morning he filled his food starved body with potent liquor. His cares and pains fell away. He felt light-hearted and free.

**S**HORTLY after the other men had gone to mess he left quarters and tripped confidently to his ship. The mechanics eyed him curiously as he painted out two crosses from the side of the fuselage. He tried to tell them how it happened. But speech died in his throat. He was too far gone. By not a single action did he reveal his condition. If anything, he walked a little more erect and carried his head even higher.

He grasped the edge of the pit with

his good arm and tried to scramble in. The ship lurched away from him. He eyed it gravely. What had happened? He tried it again. His foot slipped from the lower wing and he sprawled awkwardly upon his twice injured arm.

Slowly he scrambled to his feet all color drained from his face.

"Can I help the Lieutenant?" asked the mechanic.

Eric pointed to his injured arm. The roll of bandages showed beneath the sleeve of his leather jacket.

"Hell, Lieutenant," gasped the man. "You hadn't ought to go up and pilot this crate with an arm like that."

Eric shook his head doggedly. His lips opened. "Help me inside," he croaked.

The mechanic shrugged carelessly. It was no concern of his. "Geez, what a breath that guy's got. If he comes down alive, I'll buy him a whole case of stuff."

Aided by the mechanic's strong shoulder, Eric wedged his body into the pit. Without being conscious of the action he fastened his safety belt. The Hisso roared out its challenging note and dug in its toes for whatever task lay before it.

High above the drome it spiraled. At eleven thousand Eric leveled off and glanced around. His thoughts were muggy and thick. For the moment he could not fathom his purpose in the air. Since he saw nothing, there seemed nothing he could do.

He jammed hard on the throttle and listened for a while to the note of the engine. Like a boy with a new toy he fumbled with the gun trips of the Vickers. His interest waned after a few moments and his eyes strayed to the tachometer and altimeter. The jumping indicators puzzled him. His eyes smarted from the blast of rushing air.

Reaching up to discover what was wrong he found his goggles high upon his helmet. He snapped them into place. The pain in his arm claimed his attention. He relinquished his hold on the stick and stared dully at the lower edge of the bandage roll.

THE sun momentarily blinded him. He shut his eyes against it and when next he opened them the Spad was hurling itself toward uprushing earth.

Carelessly he yanked the stick back. The

wings cracked from the sudden strain. Due north plunged the Spad, its pilot half dazed from the loss of blood and the benumbing effects of the brandy.

A swift shadow passed between the Spad and the sun. Eric failed to see it. It dropped closer. The rise and fall of its engine's beat made no impression on him. And then the shadow fell athwart the pit.

Some subtle instinct quivered along the pilot's dormant nerves. That shadow shouldn't be there. He struggled to bring his disordered mind to attention. It responded sluggishly. That shadow hovering over the pit. What was it?

Abruptly he heard a rattling smash. It sounded above the pulse of the Hisso, harsh, cruel and utterly merciless. Splintered bits of fuselage whined within a foot of his head. Without being aware of what he was doing he yanked the stick clear back into his lap. The Spad nosed high into the air into a humming loop. Its landing gear barely brushed that of the enemy Albatross above.

He came out of the loop with wildly distended eyes. What had happened? His eyes probed the skies for the answer. It darted before the prop, a misty blur of a triplane.

Slowly the answer filtered into his soggy brain. An Albatross. It was out in front of him. But a moment before it had been overhead firing its Spandaus.

Furiously they chattered a second time. Eric felt the ship rock as tracers slammed along the forward edge of the wing.

"I'm drunk!" he muttered, thickly. "Rot-ten luck." He peered over the cowl. "Hell! There's two of them. Twin Albatrosses. Now where the hell did the other one come from?"

## VI

WHILE the sudden shock tended to sober him, it didn't relieve the double image in front of his eyes. He stared again, marveling that such co-ordination could exist between two ships. He fumbled at the gun trips. The Vickers exploded harmlessly into space.

A snarling burst of enemy tracers checked his bungling efforts. One of them tore a gash in his leather helmet. He let go the stick to ascertain the damage. That

action probably saved his life. As the Spad reeled nose downward in a tail spin the Spandaus yammered violently, missing the cockpit by scant inches.

The furious corkscrewing downward warned the bewildered pilot that all wasn't as it should be. He was losing altitude too rapidly. Habit causes men to do strange things. Had Eric Mansfield been in full possession of his faculties he would have instinctively done the one thing to gain control of his machine.

Yes, in spite of his condition, habit persisted. Without knowing quite what he was doing he forced opposite rudder forward and then neutralized all controls. The sturdy Spad righted itself and leveled off.

The sudden lashing around of the plane brought Eric a little more sense. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the speedy Albatross whipping behind him to get on his tail.

He saw also that the double plane was merely an illusion, a product of a disordered brain. He batted his eyes wide open now. Intelligence began to pierce through his consciousness. Jamming the throttle wide, he attempted to close the circle and get on the tail of the Albatross.

Once, twice, three times they circled to the right. Abruptly the Albatross banked sharply upward to end the furious circling. Eric followed like a shadow.

Down now, in a steep dive that ended in a horizontal sideslip. It was impossible to shoot because each ship was on opposite sides of the circle, and their guns would only shoot forward.

Abruptly the Albatross shot into the air in a swift climbing spiral. The Spad followed. But the other machine had the advantage in speed. Higher and higher it mounted. Eric chewed his lips. His enemy was getting away.

And then before his eyes the noise of the Albatross shot violently into the air, flicked over on its belly in a sudden Immelmann, and screamed down nose first on the slower climbing Spad.

Smoky gray tracers winged through space. They churned the Spad with sharp, ringing cracks. It staggered. Eric fumbled stupidly for the gun trips. A perfect target. He couldn't miss. His thumbs clamped down. The Vickers coughed once and jammed.

HE cursed thickly and tried madly to free the guns with his one good hand. The Albatross was coming down like a whirlwind. Its tracers were whistling nearer and nearer. Eric could feel the Spad rocking crazily in the blast.

Their combined speed was bringing them together at almost three miles a minute. No time to think or reason. Muscles must work independent of everything.

The bewildered pilot of the Spad saw the grayish shape barging down upon him as if the other machine was determined to crash. The pounding staccato of its Spandaus drummed hollowly in his ears.

Between the onrushing planes the distance narrowed. Two hundred. A hundred yards. It probably came to the pilot in the Albatross that his enemy in the Spad wasn't going to give way before his rush. Of course he didn't know the befuddled condition of Mansfield's brain during these torturous moments.

Too late did he realize that he had made a grave mistake. He attempted to climb upward so as to clear from the inevitable crash.

Eric Mansfield saw his danger at the same moment. His feet pounded rudder controls. The Spad tilted on its side, dropped its right wings and raised its left. And like a ripping scimitar it hummed sideways into the left wings of the Albatross.

The splintering crash spun the Spad around like a leaf in the wind. Eric straightened it out with difficulty. That the Spad could have come through that crash without some part of it missing or broken seemed a miracle.

He shook his head doggedly and peered over the edge of the pit. The Albatross was flapping grotesquely downward, its broken wings whipping from side to side. The eyes of the pilot in the Spad bulged. He couldn't believe what his eyes told him had happened.

"Hell!" he hiccupped. "He brought it on himself."

The cobwebs were still thick over his mind. The stimulus of the fight had not entirely brushed them free. He felt punch-drunk over easy victory. The heady effects of the smooth brandy gave him an exaggerated notion of his own importance. At that moment he felt himself the

equal of a whole staffel of German planes.

He should have winged back to the field at Vinets and gone to bed. But some inner voice prompted him to further combat. With a derisive smile of contempt upon his lips, he hurled the Spad into the blue.

"Me and Rickenbacker," he muttered, thickly, "can whip 'em all." His eyes became darkly bloodshot. He felt ugly now and utterly careless.

He hung his helmeted head over the pit's edge and stared at the smooth rushing carpet of browns and greens over which the black Spad was pulsing.

**T**RIACOURT slid underneath, its grayish steeples appearing like children's blocks. Over the Aire River, now across the bulge of the Allied lines extending north to Verdun. St. Mihiel standing ghostly and wrecked. Beyond this city lay the field of the 415th.

His mind was confused. What was he doing in this sector? He must turn around and go back. A cyclone raged off to the north in the vicinity of Vigneulles. Funny place for a cyclone. This wasn't Kansas.

Black slivers filled the air. Cross winds beat them back. Upwinds lifted them high. They swooped, circled and fell, one of them smoking. No upwind bothered this smoking one. It slipped down the troubled skylanes with nothing to bar its passage until it brought up silently against the carpet of mottled earth.

Curiosity held Eric Mansfield spellbound. He banked mechanically toward the center of the cyclone. He wanted to see what caused this violent upheaval.

It took him six minutes to reach the whirling vortex of the battle in the skies. The first two minutes were filled with dumb questionings. The next two were definite danger signals that death was stalking ahead. But Eric Mansfield was in no mood to turn back at any kind of a signal.

The cobwebs were whipping free. He understood now. These whirling things in the air weren't slivers. And he wasn't anywhere near Kansas and its cyclones. They were planes, Spads and Fokkers.

An eager cry trembled upon his lips as the six minutes ended. His confused senses rallied. He made out the squadron markings on some of the Spads.

They were from the field of the 415th.

Savagely he nosed toward the ceiling. He could see that his squadron was hopelessly outnumbered by nearly two to one. But the fact didn't register in his mind as being important. The one thing that stood out clear, however, was the presence of enemy ships.

At twelve thousand he nosed downward. The blunt nose of the Spad seemed to be attracted magnetically to three Fokkers that had ganged a lone Spad.

A swift Albatross with scarlet wings appeared out of nowhere and barred his way. Eric laughed wildly. His body shifted around so that he could get the elbow of his injured arm around the stick. Crouching low he peered through the crossed lines on the forward sight.

Swift appraisal. A hard jam on the thumb piece. There was scant mercy in his heart at that moment. His was a murderous lust to kill and destroy.

The Albatross sagged away, its pilot clutching madly at a bleeding leg.

The slant of the down-dropping Spad straightened to a power dive. Eric wasn't concerned as to whether the wings would fold up or remain firm. All he could see was that punishing trio of Fokkers relentlessly hammering a single Spad.

The wind through struts and brace wires increased to a humming gale rising higher and higher in pitch. Eric found it difficult to breathe. But still he made no move to check the tremendous speed downward.

**N**EARER and nearer loomed his enemy. Someone must have signaled Mansfield's approach. Two of the Fokkers banked port and starboard in a frantic effort to escape.

But there was no escape. Death had already marked them for his own. The advantage lay entirely with Eric Mansfield, and he pressed it to the limit.

Even as the planes banked up to escape, a twin stream of burning metal lashed the ailerons and whipped along the upper wing of the ship banking to port. The figure behind the controls jumped convulsively as the tracers bathed the darkened pit.

The nose of the avenging Spad twisted slightly in its downward arc. Flames bathed the double muzzle of the Vickers for the second time. The starboard ship caught

the first blast full in the pit. It lasted not more than a few seconds. But those few seconds were more than enough for death to summon the doomed enemy pilot to the outer spaces of that invisible Valhalla of fighting airmen.

The third escaped the guns from the black Spad, but only because of the terrific speed at which it was moving. Down, down, down, it shot, gathering speed with each passing second.

Far behind him now the dogfight continued. Eric's bloodshot eyes saw the ground whirling up to meet him. He was a little slow in comprehending. The swift drop was beginning to tell upon him. He had a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach that doubled him up even more than the crazy position he had assumed in holding the stick with the elbow of his left arm.

He struggled against the lethargy that gripped him. Have to check the down-plunging ship somehow. He cut down on the petrol. That helped a little. Painfully he unwound his body and took a good grip on the stick with his right hand. He pulled.

Nothing happened. A little harder the second time. The nose tilted. Straight ahead showed trees. The arteries in Eric's right arm pounded. Corded muscles heaved. Back came the stick for a third time. Once more the nose lifted. Eric braced his feet and tugged even harder.

The straining wings caught the back draft. Brace wires became taut as piano strings until the wind caused them to throb a minor note of high tension.

Swish. The topmost branches of the trees whipped against the undercarriage. The Spad winged over on its side clear of them. Abruptly the motor missed, stuttered and died.

Eric felt the machine tremble. The Spad lurched lower. He cut the switch and attempted to bring the ship level. It was going to crash. No doubt about it.

Upward rushed the ground. With a rending crash the dropped wing tip bit into the ground. Ailerons and lower panel crumbled like so much cardboard. A splintering crash and the prop disintegrated into matchwood.

For some unknown reason the landing gear withstood the first terrific shock. With

its forward speed considerably slackened the Spad bounded upward and onward lifting its crippled wing above the racing ground.

A treacherous crosswind caught the wrecked ship and hurled it sideways. Ailerons were useless. Eric realized it with a sinking heart. He threw the tail of the ship hard over from side to side, slowing the forward speed even more. And then the tail skid bit deep, throwing up twin sprays of dust. A hump appeared. The wheels struck it and rebounded once more into space. The Spad shot clear like a soaring bird for perhaps twenty feet. Air pressure on the unbroken wing sent it high. The broken wing sagged, dug in for the second time, and abruptly telescoped into the fuselage.

The bewildered pilot leaned back against the straps as if to get as far away from the motor as possible. He could almost feel it tearing loose and jamming him against the back of the pit.

But this particular Spad had been strongly made. It resisted the tremendous pressure as its nose burrowed a deep gash into the ground. And having buried the stumps of its prop deep, it swished its tail high and over. With a splintering crash it sprawled flat on its back, its wheels spinning idly.

## VII

**B**ECAUSE of his huddled position in the pit, Eric Mansfield missed being decapitated by a matter of inches. The fact that he had cut the switch saved the plane from catching fire. But he wasn't worrying over fire at the moment. Consciousness had quietly left him.

An outpost of infantry swooped upon the ship like a horde of ants. While they were pulling Mansfield free of the wreckage, one of the Fokkers Eric had shot down hit the ground and burst into flames.

"Get this guy back to the dressing station," ordered a noncom.

Willing hands bent to the task. They carried the unconscious airman back to a barn at the road's edge and deposited him on a straw-covered floor. A florid faced major bent to examine him.

"Drunk!" he snorted. "No wonder they

shot him down. It's a disgrace to the service."

An elderly man stood nearby, his uniform wrinkled and dusty. The cheeks above his silvery white mustache were ruddy as red wine. And he had the appearance of a kindly welfare worker sent out to watch the morals of the boys.

But this elderly man was no welfare worker. The two stars upon his shoulders destroyed the illusion. And the band of black on the sleeve of his trench coat proclaimed him as a member of the general staff. Here was a general of some importance.

"You say he's drunk?" queried the general, frowning. "Upon what do you base such a charge?"

"His breath, General. It reeks to high heaven."

"HmMMMM. Have any idea who he is?"

"I've made a memorandum of his plane number. Papers in his pocket show him to be Lieutenant Eric Mansfield of the 415th Pursuit Squadron."

"HmMMMM!" The general cleared his throat the second time. "He may have been drunk, Major, but he brought down two enemy ships. I saw the whole affair."

The medical officer shrugged. It wasn't within his province to argue with a general of staff. Still he boiled with righteous indignation. He should have been a welfare worker instead of a medical officer.

At that moment Mansfield's eyes popped open. He struggled to a sitting position. The reek of medicine and dressings filled his nostrils. A faint oath trembled upon his lips.

"Don't tell me that I'm in another hospital," he gasped.

"You're at a first-aid dressing station," answered the medical officer. His eyes narrowed. "Of course, Lieutenant," he continued, "it's none of my business. But in making my report I'll have to turn you in for being drunk while in the performance of your duty."

**T**HE ruddy faced general had stepped back into the shadows. Eric saw his figure but didn't regard him as anyone of importance. "I was drinking," he admitted. "Brandy. It was the only thing I could force inside of me. For three days I haven't eaten a scrap. I've been wounded

twice in the same arm. Normally I'm not a heavy drinker."

"Nevertheless, you were drunk. Your commanding officer will never condone the fact, and I'll make it my business to inform him of your condition at the time of your crash."

Eric rubbed the fingers of his right hand over his body feeling for possible injuries. "I won't argue with you, Major. Do as you damn well please."

The general stepped out of the shadows. "How do you feel, Lieutenant?"

"Rotten!" sighed the flyer. Then noticing for the first time the black band on the elderly officer's sleeve and the two silver stars he snapped into attention.

"You needn't salute," gruffed the general. "It isn't required in the lines. Where is your squadron headquarters located?"

"About seven kilos west of Apremont, General."

"I'm passing through Apremont, Lieutenant. I'll drop you off—that is, unless you feel the need of medical attention."

Eric hesitated. He didn't care about returning to the field of the 415th. His task was still uncompleted. In spite of his muddled condition while in the air his brain had clicked with each victim brought down. Eleven in all. Two more and his task would be at an end.

The medical officer broke in. "There's nothing the matter with him, General, except the two previous wounds in his left arm. I'll make my report at once and turn it over . . ."

"I wouldn't do it, Major," purred the general. "Give me the memo and his papers. I'll personally see that they are placed in the hands of the proper authorities."

The medical officer passed over the papers taken from Mansfield while he was unconscious, also a penciled report of his condition at the time he was brought in for examination.

"We'll go at once," nodded the general.

"Oh, hell!" raged Eric, inwardly. "the old fossil. Why couldn't he have kept out of it?" Nevertheless, he followed the elderly officer to a Cadillac parked on the road outside.

When Eric moved as though to ride with the chauffeur, the general motioned him inside with him. The pilot climbed in. The general bit the end from a black



cheroot and lighted it. Eric squirmed uncomfortably. He wondered how he was to rid himself of the staff officer.

"You can let me off on the main road," he told the general. "From there on it's only a short ways, and I can walk."

"I'll take you all the way," replied the general from behind the smoke screen of his cheroot.

ERIC relaxed on the far end of the seat and gazed distractedly out the window. He realized with a heavy heart that his little game was virtually at an end. Getzler would pounce upon him with all the avidity of a hardened drill officer.

"I saw you bring down two Fokkers," remarked the general. "Also cripple another ship higher up. You knocked out three ships. What made you crash?"

"Came down too fast," murmured Eric. "Couldn't pull up."

"Does that happen often?"

"It was my first crash, and I imagine it will be my last." This last came a trifle bitterly.

"How many ships have you brought down, Lieutenant?"

"Ten and an observation balloon. And crippled two or three."

"Hmmm! You're an ace, then?"

Eric shook his head. "No, I don't think so. My killings have never been officially confirmed. I've never turned in a report."

The general began to fumble into a musette bag hanging on the back of the front seat. His fingers came free, holding a bottle partially filled with topaz radiance. With a gesture that would have done credit to a Kentucky colonel, he wiped the neck with an immaculate handkerchief and quietly drank half its contents.

"Ahhhh!" he sighed. "They have very fine liquor in this country, Lieutenant." His ruddy cheeks glowed happily as he set the bottle between his knees.

Eric eyed the bottle moodily. "So I've been told before," he hinted.

The general took a long drag on his cheroot, paying no attention to the hint. "I've got a son in the Air Service, Lieutenant."

"That's fine, General. You ought to be proud of him."

"Proud hell!" snorted the old general in a booming, parade-ground voice. In-

dignation got the better of him. He shook his grizzled head violently, raised the bottle to his lips, and with a wrathful gurgle drained it dry.

Heaving a stupendous sigh he swung upon the pilot sitting beside him. "All that young scoundrel can do is smash up planes. For every enemy ship he brings down, he wrecks two of our ships. He's too damned careless. Still," and the old general beamed happily once more, "he's doing the best he can and having the time of his life."

He reached into his pocket and brought out the papers he had secured from the medical officer. "They're yours, Lieutenant. I'd destroy the memo, though. It might get you into trouble."

"Thank you, General," murmured Eric. "Nothing can get me into more trouble than I am in at the present moment."

"Lieutenant," pronounced the ruddy-cheeked general, "when you get to be my age you'll know what trouble is. If you ever meet up with my son, tell him you've talked with the old man."

Eric smiled in spite of himself. He had no idea who the old general was. "I'll do that," he promised.

THE limousine flourished in front of the operation office not long afterward. Heels clicked smartly at the general's arrival. Eric followed him straight into the inner office of Major Getzler.

"I picked up one of your pilots in a dressing station on the lines," smiled the general, benignly. "Thought maybe the squadron might need him."

Getzler looked sharply at Mansfield. Eric felt his heart drop. There was something hard and questioning in the eyes of the squadron commander—something that boded no good to the pilot of the former black Spad.

"That was kind of the general," nodded Getzler. Turning to Eric he continued, "Return to quarters, Lieutenant. I'll see you later."

Feeling himself dismissed, Eric turned to go. As he passed out the door he heard the general's voice.

"Nice, quiet chap, the Lieutenant. Saw him bring down two ships . . ."

The closing of the door shut off the rest of his words. Eric shrugged help-

lessly. As he slogged across the field toward the last tent in the row he recalled again Major Getzler's threat upon his reporting at the field. "I'm a hard taskmaster. Let me down, and I'll make your life a hell on earth."

He hadn't let the squadron commander down. His offense was infinitely worse. He tried to shrug the feeling away. Two more ships and his debt would be paid in full. Only two more.

The roar of engines around the hangars drove all thoughts out of his mind. Ships were ascending and descending. Ships that were barely able to stay in the air. Their fabric was hanging by shreds. The wings bullet-riddled and twisted. Eric stopped suddenly. His eyes flashed behind him toward the building housing the squadron commander. From there glanced toward the row of sagging tents referred to as quarters.

A figure moved toward him coming from the last tent. A low, rollicking voice preceded the figure:

I want to go home! I want to go home!  
The gas tank is leaking, the motor is dead  
The Pilot is trying to stand on his head  
Take me back to the ground;  
I don't want to fly upside down!  
Oh, my! I'm too young to die!  
I want to . . .

The song broke off abruptly. "Eric, you young buzzard, what are you doing around here? I thought you were piloting crates from Orly."

Eric slowly shook his head. "I don't know what I was supposed to have been doing, Three-Star," he spoke, "but up to an hour or so ago, I was piloting that black ship around looking for trouble. I found it. Plenty. I brought down two Fokkers . . ."

"Oh!" gasped Hennesey. "So you're the bird. I thought that looked like your ship, but it all happened so quick I hadn't a chance to look a second time, and by then you had disappeared. Getzler was in on that fight and he got your number as you passed him."

"There was only one plane close enough," began Eric.

"And that was the old man himself. Three Fokkers were tying him into a knot when you took two of them off his tail and scared the third so badly that the ma-

yor pumped him full of lead before he recovered."

"Then Major Getzler didn't recognize me?"

"Nope. And I wouldn't have, either, if you hadn't mentioned . . ."

Eric waved his hand impatiently. "It doesn't matter, much, Three-Star. My career with the 415th is about ended. I'm taking that new plane standing on the line, and I'm going up."

"Use a little discretion, Eric. That ship belongs to the C. O."

"The hell with Getzler. I'm through here anyways."

"What do you mean?"

Eric Mansfield raised his haggard eyes to the sky before replying. "I suppose I ought to tell someone. You've been decent to me Hennesey, and my one friend."

"Hell, Mansfield, I still am. Now tell me what's weighing yuh down. Maybe I can help."

"No, Three-Star. I'm past that stage. Listen. I was fool enough to imagine that I could take the place of God Almighty. I've played my hand on the altar of revenge. I've sacrificed everything. And I've lost. I've still time enough to play out my last few cards, but whether I win or lose, the answer will be the same. Rotten disgrace."

## VIII

FOR several minutes Lieutenant Joe Hennesey stared with a wide-open mouth at his friend. "For the love of Mike," he finally blurted, "what are you raving about?"

"It's a long story," sighed Eric, "and time is passing."

"T' hell with time. Spit it out."

"It happened back at the first squadron," began Eric. "I didn't realize . . ."

The adjutant of the 415th stood suddenly beside them staring intently into Eric's drawn face.

"Major Getzler will see you in his office at once, Mansfield."

Eric nodded stiffly. "Very well, Captain." He turned to Hennesey. "That summons means curtains for me, Three-Star. If I don't see you again, here's my hand."

Lieutenant Hennessey's face wore a puzzled expression as he shook his friend's hand and turned away. He said nothing. But the firmness of his handclasp brought comfort to the troubled pilot, left standing alone.

Then, like a condemned man going to his doom, Eric Mansfield plodded heavily across the field.

The squadron commander's face was dark and glowering as Eric entered. He rose from his chair, closed the door leading to his adjutant's office and returned to within a foot of the pilot standing stiffly before him.

With a sudden movement he tore the silver bars from the shoulders of Eric's uniform along with the silver wings from over his heart.

Eric's face blanched. He felt as if he was dropping into a bottomless pit. Getzler's voice reached his ears from a great distance.

"You're under arrest, Private Mansfield, for desertion and impersonation of an officer. Have you anything to say?"

Eric shook his head slowly. "Nothing, sir."

Getzler frowned. He had expected a sudden weakening in the man before him. Instead he saw steely determination in Mansfield's steady eyes.

"Do you realize the charges hanging over you, Private Mansfield?"

"Perfectly, Major. And I'm not ashamed. I did what I considered inherently right and just. I expect no mercy; and I make no plea for it."

**MAJOR GETZLER** frowned again. **HE** was a strict disciplinarian who believed strongly in punishment. An old army man with old army ways. But his desire for swift punishment was tempered with the leaven of justice. He had to be sure of a man's guilt before he could hurl him down to imprisonment and disgrace.

"Within the next ten minutes, I can make or break you, Mansfield. Tell your story. I want only the truth."

"The reasons back of what I have done would mean nothing to anyone but myself."

"All the more reason for telling me."

Eric's eyes glowed with a sudden fire.

Memories assailed him anew. He was standing close to a shallow trench promising thirteen helpless and wounded men that he would see them through. These men had put their faith in him; and trusted him; had believed implicitly that he would get them out of the hell of the front lines to a place where their pain-wracked bodies might be soothed and healed.

A choking sob wrenched his body. He had failed them. It hadn't been his fault. And now he had failed to avenge them to the last man. Eleven down, two to go. It was like the old football cry ages and ages ago. His lips opened and he began to pour out his whole disconnected story. He spared himself not the slightest. And when he had finished, he dropped into a chair and buried his face in cupped hands.

Major Getzler paced back and forth behind his desk, his face a mask. Abruptly he stopped his pacing and swung upon Eric.

"I told you, Mansfield, when you reported to this field for duty, that if you ever let me down, I'd make your life a hell on earth. But I also added that if you played the game according to my standards, I'd go to the mat with the commanding general of the Air Service to see that you got a square deal."

Eric Mansfield straightened to his feet. "I remember perfectly, Major Getzler."

"Very well. I've never yet gone back on my word. I'll see you through this mess. It won't be hard. You have a powerful friend in that staff officer that brought you in a short time ago. And I think we can use him to our advantage."

He took a sheaf of papers from a wire basket on his desk and tore them into small pieces. "Temporarily," he growled, "we'll ignore their contents. That will give us time to get things straightened out."

Eric watched the squadron commander with unbelieving eyes. "But, Major, you surely don't intend to jeopardize your own rank and position because of . . ."

"Jeopardize!" choked the squadron commander. "Why, man alive, I'd go to hell and back to see you through. I'm an old man. I had a son. A shavetail lieutenant in the Infantry. He was killed, murdered in much the same way as were your thirteen men. It was brutal and unnecessary."

For a single never-to-be-forgotten mo-

ment, Eric Mansfield gazed into the soul of a father. And what he saw brought a wave of contentment over his own troubled soul. Everything was going to be all right.

At the end of this precious moment a veil of discipline shrouded the squadron command's human understanding. He became again the product of a relentless machine—a machine that was conceived but for one purpose—war.

Major Getzler pointed toward the door. "My machine is on the deadline. Carry on with your vengeance in the skies. And when you have finished, come back. Your bars and wings will be waiting for you."

The world rocked dizzily around Eric Mansfield as he hurried out onto the field. But his step was firm and elastic. A song throbbed in his heart. A ray of light gleamed through clouds of despair. And then the light faded. He remembered the thirteenth red cross painted on his wrecked Spad. It had been pierced through with two smooth holes.

## IX

THE brilliant rays of a midday sun scintillated on the fuselage and wings of a low-flying Spad. Eric Mansfield was searching. His eyes probed the road below. Yes. There was the high bank of chalky earth where he had leaned with his pack for ten minutes rest. That was when he was going into the lines.

Here was the village where they filled their canteens from a well labeled "poison." Beyond, the road twisted tortuously between dense forests.

It had taken hours to tramp over this long stretch. Now it was but a matter of minutes. Shell pitted earth leered to the right. The Spad left off following the road and slanted north. Here were the dark pockets where they had spent the night before the attack. Ahead loomed a trampled wheat field, and Eric Mansfield felt his heart pound. Directly below he made out a depression in the ground—couldn't be far ahead.

It was empty now. The Infantry had moved slowly and painfully farther north. Well, he'd catch up with them. They couldn't far ahead.

Another road, dust-clouded from shuf-

fling hobs. And then the squirming bodies of men inching forward. The pound of the Hisso drowned the furious chatter of machine guns. But Eric knew they were in front and below. He could see smoke curling up from grayish mounds of concrete.

Savagely he swooped down. The Vickers yammered their blood cry. Out of the hole in back of the first machine-gun nest crawled grayish figures. And suddenly they were quiet. Smoke no longer curled upward from the grayish mound.

A swirl of lead ripped into a lower wing and Eric laughed hollowly as he banked around. The Vickers coughed cruelly, accurately. Tracers rippled along the ground toward a second grayish mound. Into the pit behind it they howled. And machine-gun bullets ceased to pound the lower wing.

The hoarse cheers from the harassed doughboys below came not to the ears of the avenging pilot above. All he could hear was the ripping snarl of that murderous Spandau above the shallow road.

Something tingled along his spine—a warning quiver from a sixth sense. He wheeled the Spad for a quick survey. Saw. Knew. And understood.

Out of the eternity of space above him raced two ships. One, a pale green; the second, yellow and black. Blood raced madly through the pilot's mind. Blood that seethed and raced through swollen arteries. God had been good. God give him strength to mete out punishment.

Like a gleaming scimitar the green plane swished down on the Spad, its Spandaus rattling a song of death.

Eric banked sharply out of the death spray. It followed. Again the Spad eluded it. Cheated for the time being, the green ship climbed high to join its mate.

WITH Teutonic thoroughness they swung port and starboard to pocket him between them. Eric pushed the Spad straight ahead and upward. They were spiraling around now for diving positions. Eric watched them like a hunter his quarry. The first gray tracer whistled downward followed by another. They passed overhead like a sighing breeze.

Into a humming bank climbed the Spad, continuing on in a twisting spiral. At the

end of the third turn it whipped into a violent hail of tracers. Eric hurled it to one side only to blunder into cross fire from the second machine.

A victorious yank on the stick bore the ship clear of the tearing tracers. Its nose plunged downward for a second; then zoomed into a half-loop and side rolled over so that it came level with the greenish Fokker on the port side.

The green ship nosed violently upward exposing its undercarriage for a single flashing moment. Brrrr, rip! The Vickers deadly chatter sounded high above the roar of the Hisso. The blast struck the underside of the engine, and the forward motion of the climbing Fokker pulled the entire length of the fuselage into the screaming tracers.

Chaos aboard the greenish plane. It quivered as the feed line snapped and the engine went dead; it stalled as the pressure of air against its tilted wings slackened; and since its pilot slumped dead behind his controls, it sagged like an ungainly bird with a weight around its legs, and side-slipped down to total destruction.

Eric brought the Spad out of the beginning of a slip and flung his eyes about for the yellow and black plane. It passed so close going in the opposite direction that their wings brushed. And as Eric stared across the space that separated the two ships he had a sudden glimpse of the pilot's face. "Oh, God!" he gasped.

He had seen that face but once—only once, and for a fraction of a second only. A malevolent face shot with inhuman cruelty. It was the face of the killer who had turned his Spandaus loose on thirteen unarmed and wounded men lying helpless in a shallow road.

Eric Mansfield felt exalted and uplifted. The spirit of a crusader pulsed through his body. Only once in a lifetime could such a thing happen. But it had happened. That was all that mattered.

Tracers hammered into the Spad's tail. Precious minutes wasted in thinking while the other had Immelmanned around for the killing position in the rear.

ERIC laughed joyfully. Nothing hollow or forced about it now. He jerked the ship into a tight loop; shoved stick to left and jammed left rudder. The Spad

banked vertically from out of the hail of death.

The yellow and black plane followed like a shadow firing with uncanny skill into the rudder. The Spad creaked protestingly as Eric gunned the throttle and circled away from trouble.

Spat! Flying bits of glass from one of the gauges on the dash stung the pilot's face. The yellow and black machine was hard upon the Spad once more. Into a vertical dive winged the Spad and when it had gained a terrific speed Eric pulled the stick hard back. Groaning from the strain the little ship responded. A swift Chandelle and Eric had the other ship plotted on his ring sights.

The yellow and black ship flopped into a yawning spin. Twisting, turning, and banking they maneuvered about each other like prehistoric birds of a forgotten age.

Then as if the pilot of the Fokker had tired of the game he hurled the blunt nose of his machine into a shuddering arc upward. Up it zoomed into a half-loop; straightened and hanging upside down, it bore down with a menacing crackle of its guns.

The tracers ripped the length of the Spad below. They smashed against the instrument panel; they tore through the floor boards; and two of them whined within an inch of Mansfield's head and gashed through his shoulder with sledge-hammer blows.

Eric sagged wearily against the straps. He was too stunned for the moment to feel pain. Then as the sawed and frayed nerves began to flash their messages through the nerve centers along his spine and in his head sudden anguish gripped him.

He thought of the thirteenth cross that had been pierced by two holes. Vaguely he looked sideways at his shoulder. Twin streams of scarlet were already running down his leather jacket.

From downwind came the sharp staccato of the killer's Spandaus. Downward plunged his yellow and black ship. The Spad careened to the right in a savage bank brought up sharply, spun on wing tip and dived vertically.

The yellow and black machine followed. It viraged, swept past with rocket-like speed, Immelmanned and returned head on its guns flashing.

The Vickers spat sharply, and missed—

missed by yards. Eric shook his head doggedly. He wasn't seeing very well. The crossed lines of the ring sights were wavy and indistinct.

A swift bank right and left and both ships were climbing into the blue. The Fokker banked first. Its yellow wings flashed in the sunlight. Now it was coming down straight on its twin guns coughing their stream of smoky metal.

ERIC cringed unconsciously as the tracers whirred through ailerons and wings. He jammed the stick hard to the right and pressed the corresponding rudder. He had an instant of blindness as the Spad banked into the blazing orb of the sun. His ship was jerking crazily. Eric could feel the straps sawing into his chest.

A blur of black fuselage raced between it and the sun. He had a second glimpse of a malevolent face. The mouth of the other was drawn back in a savage snarl.

"There, damn you!" gritted Eric. He thumbed the Vickers savagely.

Red bursts leaped out into space. They slammed into the other's fuselage like a swarm of angry hornets. They shattered against the engine block. But that wasn't enough. He yanked the ship around and pointed it at the other's gas tank.

And then the guns from the yellow and black ship thundered in return. Spandau tracers clawed at Eric's clothing. He felt their burning passage against his skin.

He nosed the Spad into a vibrating lurch to escape them. The taut wires howled protestingly. A sudden whip around. His enemy shot squarely across the ring sights.

Vermilion jets bathed the muzzles of the Vickers. From the Fokker's yellow rudder along its sleek black body crept the pattering death metal.

The pilot of the Fokker lost his nerve. He tried to bank out of the punishing blast. It crawled upon him with insidious directness as final as the day of judgment. There was no escaping it. Eric Mansfield was seeing straight now. The lines of his ring sights crossed in the exact center of his enemy's cockpit.

Grimly he held it there. Held it until the drum was empty of shells. Held it until burnt powder no longer stung his nostrils. Sharply he pulled away.

He started to bend down to the drum rack. Abruptly he straightened into rigid immobility. His eyes narrowed. The Fokker was behaving strangely. It was out of control. The head of its pilot was lolling from side to side.

"That last burst must have got him," breathed Eric. "Careful now. He may be up to some trick. Watch him. He may turn and strike like a rattler."

But the yellow and black Fokker had been shorn of its death sting. It was doomed forever along with the last of the thirteen. Eric's eyes never once left it. He followed it down through the sunlight until it crashed and became a pillar of smoke.

And only when that happened did Eric Mansfield realize that his duty was at an end. Major Getzler's last words still rang in his ears. "Carry on with your vengeance in the skies. And when you have finished, come back. Your bars and wings will be waiting for you."

A happy smile bathed the face of Eric Mansfield, the first in many long weeks. The smile persisted throughout all the weary miles back to the field of the 415th.

And it was still on his face as he brought his ship safely to the field and passed out (in a dead faint from the pain of his wounds.

## PATENTS and TRADE MARKS

Protect Your Most  
Valuable Assets...

Expert Service Write today

**LESTER L. SARGENT**

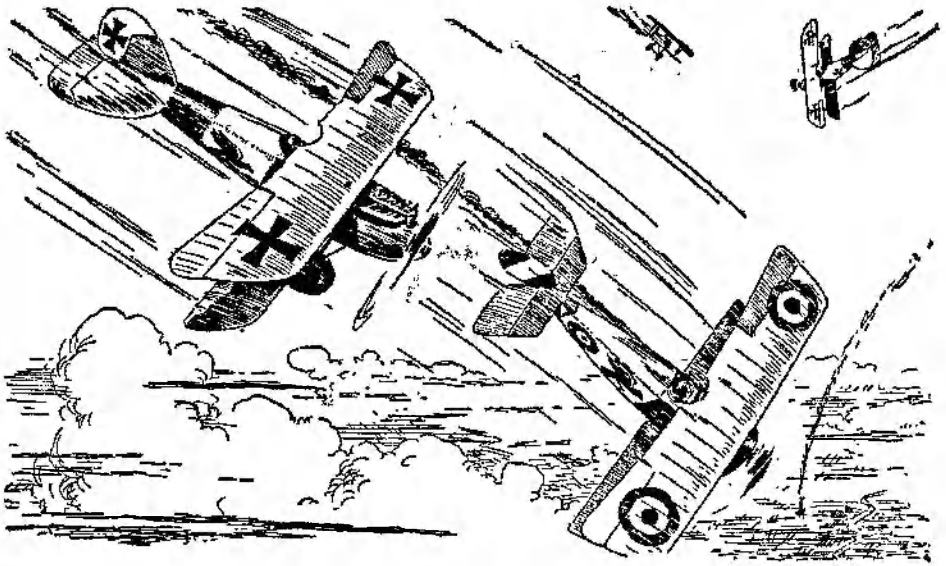
Registered Patent Attorney

1115 K Street

Washington, D. C.

AFTER SCHMELING—WHO? Who will it be? What unsung Scion of Slug will rise to hook the crown from the champ's cocky head? Jack Kofeod gives a glimpse of some of the young comers. In the same issue, short stories, novelets, novels, and the full life story of KID MCCOY, LONE WOLF OF THE RING!

## FIGHT STORIES



---

The truth is told!—From the relentless facts, reports that litter the pages of every squadron that flew, have these tales come. Most of their heroes have flown on—have landed at another tarmac, but their glory will live forever!

---

# BATTLES OF OUR WAR BIRDS

## Tracer Targets

By DEREK WEST

FROM THE OFFICIAL REPORT

Mission: Patrol of sector.  
Aircraft down in flames: Allied, one.  
Aircraft down out of control: Enemy, one  
Confirmations requested: One.

**O**CTOBER 18, 1918. Five pilots chatted on the field of the One-Thirty-Ninth Squadron, A.E.F. It was mid-morning, and the Spads were coming, one by one, out of the hangars as the ground crews heaved.

"How do we go up today?" Lieutenant Russell L. Maughan asked the question idly.

"Strong," promptly answered Malcolm. "Sixteen ships, in two flights—above and below."

Maughan nodded thoughtfully. "The Jerries are figured to sneak over and try to bust up the Big Doings," he reflected aloud.

"Well," Carpenter suggested, "we ought to pick up something between the ceiling and the carpet. Eh, Smythe?"

The pilot he addressed returned the grin.

"If the motors hold out. With the luck we've been having lately, maybe some of us will stay in the air."

"They tell me a First Pursuit pilot came near getting burned up the other day." Russell spoke nervously. "His Hisso had a fit just after he took off, and if it hadn't been just above the field, and close—well, I hate to think of what he missed."

Smythe laughed. "Anyway, he missed it, didn't he? That's the main thing."

"The same luck," Maughan chimed in feelingly, "to all of us."

The other four nodded in agreement.

**S**IXTEEN Spads took off the tree-hedged field in the valley of the Meuse River. If Jerry chose to get into the air today, he'd get up in a gang.

Unless there happened to be a lone observation plane out for an eyeful of American troop movements. Tough, those Rumplers. They could take a look at a road, and as if by rubbing Aladdin's lamp, they could shower high explosive down on trudging doughboys from Pennsylvania, New England, Kansas, Missouri. . . .

And in the air, they were no picnic.



Fast. Twin Spandaus in front of the pilot, twin guns too far for the observer in the rear pit. And it wasn't natural for any one Yank or for any two Yanks to think too much of their chances against those four guns.

The sixteen Spads took altitude. At the two thousand level, the formation divided and became two formations. The top flight continued to climb; the main group flattened the ascent for a gradual rise another five hundred feet.

Maughan, in the low flight, cut his speed with the rest. The ceiling scrapers would need a few minutes to get all the way up—the low flight must mark time while the high flyers got to their places.

The town of Dieppe came into sight below. Maughan squinted overside. Good visibility today. Some clouds.

Eleven-thirty by the clock on the instrument board. Sixteen minutes in the air. The top formation was lined out. Throttle open and away! Clery-le-Grand below.

It was a familiar sight to Maughan. Always on the route was Clery-le-Grand, and the villagers would be disappointed, probably, if a day went past without a One-Three-Nine flight passing over on patrol.

A ship on the left falling behind. Maughan turned for a look.

It was George. His thumb and finger pinched his nose—eloquent gesture signifying nauseous fumes coming from his motor. And he was pointing now in evident disgust at his Hisso.

Maughan grinned and waved him home. Let's see, the First Pursuit was only a few kilos to the left. He'd make that field. Looked bad, that motor, but George could coax the necessary kilometers out of it.

The low flight plowed on.

Blue sky, and then lazy clouds that obscured those tiny specks that were the top formation.

The town of Beffu below.

And still no Jerries.

**T**HEN came a moment of stark terror for the flying Yanks in the low formation. Maughan was conscious first of a billow of smoke at the nose of the crate second from him on his right. He turned, startled.

Smythe's Spad was aflame.

Maughan cursed. Even as his lips tight-

ened to a thin bloodless line, he shot a hurried glance above.

Nothing there, nothing but the tiny specks that were the top formation. He peered below. Not a single blot of Archie in sight.

It was Smythe's Hisso, gone bad.

Maughan saw the Yank pilot send his plane down and away in a dizzy sideslip. His heart leaped as he noted the brief reprieve that the maneuver gave Smythe. The flame that was whipping around the Spad's nose now nicked out toward the wings instead of back into the fast-thinking flyer's pit.

The whole formation whirled, consternation and horror apparent in their faltering circle. Fire! Not one in that formation but had dreamed of its menace. And here it was among them.

Smythe was fighting it. From his first sideslip he had shot into a short dive—with less risk than before, for he had cut his fuel off and the flames were now short-tongued.

But could he fight it down—down a full two thousand meters? Maughan shook his head despairingly. He saw that short dive turn to another slip, and still Smythe was clear of the reaching blaze.

Down, down—to a thousand. And still the flames held off, as if taunting the desperate pilot at the stick of the burning crate. Down—Maughan was breathing hard, holding his breath. Fight 'er, Smythe! Only a few hundred more!

Slip, dive, slip—

And made it!

Anxious eyes peering down two thousand meters saw the Spad touch ground. A bounce and a wild roll—then a figure darting away from the smoking, doomed crate.

Smythe was safe!

Maughan grinned hugely as he wiped the perspiration from one cheek. Into his mind had flashed Smythe's own careless words of the morning.

*"—missed it, didn't he? That's the main thing."*

Good old Smythe! Down a flamer, and able to walk home. Must be a record. Maughan grinned again. They were over Pretz-en-Argonne, and that meant a long walk for Smythe. And a standing joke for the squadron.

NOON. Briettes-sur-Bar below. Still nothing in the sky—nothing but the onrushing Spads of the low flight, and up in the blue the tiny specks that were the top formation.

Steadily the double formation followed the Front line westward. Up to the sector boundary, turning point for the patrol.

Planes in the sky!

Maughan sighted them at the same moment that the top formation veered in its course. And the low flight followed the directional shift of those dots above. "Investigate!" they signaled by their turn.

The low flight tightened its formation. Spads flew wing to wing, up to the very sector boundary. Twelve planes ahead!

Then suddenly the top flight whirled in a quick turn as if in retreat. For a moment Maughan scowled; then he saw the reason for the move. Those twelve ships were Spads of the First Pursuit Group, American, patrolling their own wedge of the Front.

Top flight and low flight, wagged wings in greeting. Then away, howling through the sky for a tour to the east and the return home.

The main formation bore along on the five-thousand-meter level. Maughan took a look at his clock; twelve-thirty. He noted the countryside below. Near Vespel, now. Yes, there was that triangle railway, narrow gauge—

A movement in the heavens caught his glance and held it. A ship was coming down.

Maughan craned his neck for a glance at the top flight. There they were—but the second Spad from the left was no longer there.

Malcolm was coming down . . . down like a shot! Scooting in a slanting dive across the course of the low flight, one arm held high above his helmeted head.

On the five-thousand level, Maughan read the signal. He raised his own arm high, waving at the pilot on his right, and swept it down and forward. The low-flight leader waved in assent, adding a "Good luck!" flourish, and Maughan cut away from the flight.

He turned to the left, gauging Malcolm's dive. The low flight passed out of sight on its prearranged course, and the little specks that were the top flight dis-

appeared above and on the same line.

The top flight had sighted something, and Malcolm had taken the job. Diving to warn the low flight of the trouble in the air, he had "tagged" a carpet-sweeper—taken a man out to cover the impending combat.

For combat lay ahead, Maughan knew. And he thought he could guess just what it would be.

Peer ahead as he might, he could see nothing. Not yet. Malcolm, with a view from nearer the zenith, had seen, and was on his way with a helper.

ENEMY reconnaissance—that was the answer. Most likely a Rumpler. Haight was sending two men—that meant a single Jerry plane. The top flight leader had parted with two veterans of the double formation—that meant that the enemy crate was a tough nut to crack, one that would give a couple of Spads plenty of battle.

Maughan bored on at five thousand, and still no sign of an enemy plane. With one eye on the fast descending Malcolm, he speculated on the presence of the Jerry ahead.

Photo ship, probably. The German High Command knew that big things were brewing in the Forest of the Argonne. How many American divisions? The camera's eye might tell. How many big-gun batteries, and where? The single optic in the belly of a Rumpler could take the story back to German headquarters.

A dozen clicks of the big camera—and the massed Jerry guns would have information enough to blow a slow-marching Yank division to shreds. Information enough to batter down a long lean line of hard-won foxholes that sheltered weary doughboys.

Quick work, this snapshot stuff. And quicker work if Yank pilots were to catch it in time. If the Spads were on the *qui vive*, well and good. But if they missed a quick-darting two-seater—German guns could belch forth steel for another twenty-four hours. And the casualty lists of American dead and wounded would mount, back at Chaumont.

Maughan saw the ceiling-scraper ease out of his long dive and slowly level off. And at the same instant he saw Malcolm's objective.

Archie was bursting on the right—and

out of danger from the anti-aircraft fire, a Rumpler wheeled over the American lines. Maughan shoved his throttle open to the limit and raced Malcolm to the goal.

The high flyer was a level now, darting straight for the Rumpler. The two Yank pilots shot in like two bullets converging to a common target.

Now Malcolm was diving again, and what a dive! Maughan, sliding down in concert, watched his flight mate. From five thousand to four—and still going down. Maughan breathed a prayer for the flyer Scot, even as he shot along in a dash that would take him to the E.A., almost even with the top flyer.

He turned to sight on the Rumpler. It was running. Two thousand feet below, it was heading for Germany in a fast climb.

Maughan flicked another glance at Malcolm, and blinked behind his goggles. The other Yank was losing speed—was no more than abreast of Maughan by now. Maughan shook his head. Hisso motors had been known to develop temperament in a long pounding dive.

HE glanced again at Malcolm. The Yank was firing. "Too soon, son, too soon!" Maughan muttered. He knew the impulse that had pressed gun trips in that other Spad—it was the knowledge that the enemy was making his escape before a failing Hisso.

Down to three thousand meters now. And going down! The Rumpler had forsaken its climb—was climbing out on the level for the speed that was in it.

Malcolm was dropping back. Now he pulled up. With the Yank lines behind him, he'd need altitude if it came to a glide with a motor gone bad. With a wave to Maughan—a wave that seemed to plead "Let the damn thing go!"—Malcolm quit the chase and turned for home.

But Maughan hung on. Let the damn thing go? With its cargo of hell for dough-boys? He tugged at his throttle, and ground his teeth when it gave no further speed.

He was gaining, though. Still five hundred meters above the running two-seater. He could see the Jerry gunner tense in his rear cockpit, could see twin eyes that were Spandau muzzles warily reckoning his approach.

Maughan knew the danger in those guns. They could sweep the sky right, left and rear. And if a Spad were to seek shelter behind the Rumpler's tail feathers, the Jerry pilot would slam into a slip, and give his gunner a perfect shot at a helpless Yank.

He could overshoot the Rumpler, bank and heave at it nose on—with the pilot's twin guns to match bullet for bullet, and the gunner waiting for the Yank's first swerve. Heavy odds for even a fool.

No. There was one way to take a Rumpler.

Maughan flashed over the two-seater at an angle, out of range. Then he whirled in a dizzy bank, ahead of the E.A.

Down he shot for a quartering attack. Out of the line of the pilot's guns, too far forward for the observer's reaching fire. Down in a hurtling dive.

In range! He tripped his Vickers, and the tracer slithered through the intervening space to play around the Rumpler's wingtip. And the Jerry slipped away.

Maughan recovered, with a steady touch on the stick that swept him forward again. Then he dived again; but this time his fingers played idly with the gun trips, and he smiled tightly as he watched the Jerry pilot roll her level.

He flashed down, and sent a burst at the two-seater. This time his tracers went wide, and he whirled away as if in disgust.

But his ruse had won. The Rumpler was down to fifteen hundred! Not much more room for those tricky slips!

Maughan timed his dive a trifle slower—pulled his punch. He dived barely out of range of the Rumpler's gleaming camouflaged snout.

Then at the moment of passing he flicked in and slammed a burst over the tilted wing . . . through the Rumpler's fuselage . . . squarely into the gunner's pit. He saw the Rumpler's nose swing toward him, and banked away from the forward Spandau.

With a wide swing off to the right, he ducked out of range. Then he came back for a look at that rear pit.

Above the enemy two-place and forward of it, he peered down. The guns pointed fixedly off to the empty sky in the rear, and in the pit a figure slumped, arms dangling limp in the cockpit.

The gunner was out of it.

MAUGHAN saw the Jerry pilot cast one hasty look behind him, and turn back. The Rumpler swooped and banked away from the Spad, away toward Germany.

But Maughan was down on it like a pouncing hawk. From the rear. He threw a burst from his Vickers, and saw tracer playing with the Rumpler's rudder . . . up the fuselage . . . and the two-place was gone in another slip.

Maughan, banking back, saw the Jerry pilot pull out of the slip and level off. Then the Rumpler made a sudden shift and zoomed.

The Yank stared. Then with a sudden intuition he looked up in the line that the Jerry flew. The Rump was streaking for sanctuary.

Up to the left, a few hundred meters above, was a cloud that could hide a hundred Rumplers. And this one was on the way.

Maughan gritted his teeth and tore after the fugitive. He must catch this Rumpler. And he must catch him this side of the cloud.

He dived, and came up under the black-crossed crate. Standing the Spad on its tail, he poured a burst into the Rumpler's belly. Missed!

But the Rumpler veered to the left again. That was better. Maughan cut in on the right, and with a glance verified his hunch that he flew a barrier between the Rumpler and the cloud. The edge of the cloud was above—now they were in it.

Then the Rumpler made its try.

But Maughan was ready. Whipping in on its quarter, he threw his rudder hard right, and pressed his gun trips.

His snap aim was straight to the target. His tracers drilled the Rumpler's fuselage from cowl to rear pit. Then she was away, out of his sights. And his guns were jammed.

Maughan swung back to the Rumpler's course. He saw empty sky. Nerves on edge, he looked up. The cloud seemed empty. He shot a quick look down.

The Rumpler was hurtling earthward in a vertical nose dive.

Maughan followed. A nose dive faking the finish—playing 'possum—was the Rum-

pler's move, if the Jerry was not actually done for. And Maughan had no intention of letting this one go.

He followed the Rumpler down. Down through blue sky. Then cautiously into a low-hanging cloud. He shoved the throttle close to the choking-off mark and listened for the throb of other engines. The cloud was his alone.

He went on down, emerged from the cloud—and ducked back into it again like a fox doubling on its track. What he had seen was cause for satisfaction and for alarm.

His Rumpler was done for, Maughan pulled back into the cloud, emerged top-side. Hastily he scanned the sky.

Not a ship was in sight. With a deep-drawn breath of relief he glanced idle at his clock. Twelve-thirty-six—what? He looked again, made sure it had not stopped. But no. Well! Just about five minutes of fighting! Strange what a difference just a few minutes make!

Maughan briskly set to work on his jammed guns. In a few moments he was convinced that there was no more to be expected from them on this flight.

He headed for the lines. Not a plane was in sight as he crossed over and followed a bee-line for the field of the One-Thirty-ninth.

LATE that night Smythe arrived. He clambered off the seat of a truck, gingerly found his footing beside the road, and slowly made his way to where Maughan and Malcolm sat behind a hangar.

"Lo, aviators!" he called as he approached. "Get anything?"

"Got a Rump." Maughan replied. "On a relay. Malcolm passed him on to me, and I passed him on to the hillside."

"Fine!" Smythe exclaimed with a grin. "That makes it even—one Rumpler for one Spad."

Malcolm looked up with a chuckle. "Not quite even," he demurred. "We didn't have to swap pilots too."

"No," Smythe agreed soberly. He gazed thoughtfully, unseemingly into space for an instant, then sank down with a sigh that bespoke weariness.

"Gosh, my feet hurt!" he moaned.

**F**RONTIER STORIES carries the drama, the fire, the vivid adventure of the days of the Old West. Days when the Horse-Indian tribes, the dapper Dons, the gaunt, long-rifle buckskin men, and the homespun pioneers mixed and clashed, laughed and died on the edge of the great untamed, uncharted West.



## FRONTIER STORIES



Every issue of **DETECTIVE BOOK MAGAZINE** features a genuine book-length detective novel, condensed to make swifter, more exciting reading. Also two long crime-mystery novelets and a number of rapid-fire short stories.

## DETECTIVE BOOK MAGAZINE



**ARE YOU WAITING FOR LOVE?** In the current issue of **LOVE ROMANCES** Elizabeth Barton, Ph.D., tells how putting one's mind to being loved can make a woman beautiful. Also **ISLE OF BONDAGE**, a novelet of love in a tropic paradise.

## LOVE ROMANCES



**NORTH•WEST ROMANCES** features three big novelets of the Northland: **VALLEY OF GOLD**, a stirring story of red coat law; **PLUNDER OF THE HELL-PACK**, the strange tale of a forgotten ice-fettered treasure fleet; and **DAUGHTER OF THE WOLF**—a wilderness girl caught in her own booty trap. Also a big snow-country novel, five thrilling short stories.

## NORTH•WEST ROMANCES

**ON SALE AT ALL NEWSSTANDS**

---

---

# Laughing Heirs



1st Heir: Did Bill leave a Will?  
2nd Heir: No, we get twice as much as the widow.

## A Life Savings is Protected By a Will

Make Your Will NOW. Safeguard your Loved Ones.

Everyone needs a Will, those who have little, more than those who have much. Neglect to make a Will causes untold grief, suffering, family disputes, much totally unnecessary expense, and delay in settling an estate.

A widow generally loses two-thirds or more of what she would have had, if a Will had been made. An executor must be appointed who receives five per cent of the total Estate with one year to settle it in. Extra lawyer's fees, a bond, disputes over division of the property, often want, sometimes destitution of one's loved ones. All this can be prevented by making a Will, at a total cost of only one dollar. Your Will can be made in secret, without a lawyer. It does not even need a notary public.

Our booklet of Standard Wills with extra clauses to cover personal wishes is so simple and plain that a perfectly legal Will can be made by just copying Will desired on the blank legal form we furnish and following directions as to filling in your names, properly signing and having it witnessed. Both husband and wife should have a Will. If either dies a new Will is needed. A Will is the most important legal document one will ever sign. Will Booklet and Legal Form blank complete, One Dollar.

---

Charles Francis Press  
461 Eighth Avenue  
New York, N. Y.

Dept. F. H.

*Money Back if not satisfied.*

I enclose herewith one dollar for which send me, postpaid, your booklet "How to Make Your Last Will & Testament" and blank Legal Will form.

Name.....

Address..... City..... State.....

---

---



# "Give Me Your Measure and I'll Prove in the First 7 Days You Can Have a Body Like Mine!"

No other Physical Instructor in the World has ever DARED make such an offer!

I'll give you PROOF in 7 days that I can turn you, too, into a man of might and muscle. Just think of it! Right in the first week under my guidance you will see and feel the improvement! Then as my weekly instructions arrive in your home you continue to re-build, renew and "overhaul" your body. By the end of three months you are the owner of a powerful body that you will be proud to display on the beach this summer! People will notice the ruddy glow of health in your face, the sparkle in your clear eyes, your broad shoulders and they will seek your company. You will be the fellow who will walk off with the prettiest girl and the best job while others wonder how you did it!

Write your name and address carefully on the coupon below. I'll send you absolutely free a copy of my new book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." It reveals the secrets that changed me from a 97-pound flat-chested weakling into a husky fellow who twice won the title of "World's Most Perfectly Developed Man" against all comers! And it shows how I can build you into an "Atlas Champion" the same way.

Are you underweight? I'll add pounds where they are needed! Are you fat in spots? I'll show you how to pare down to fighting trim.

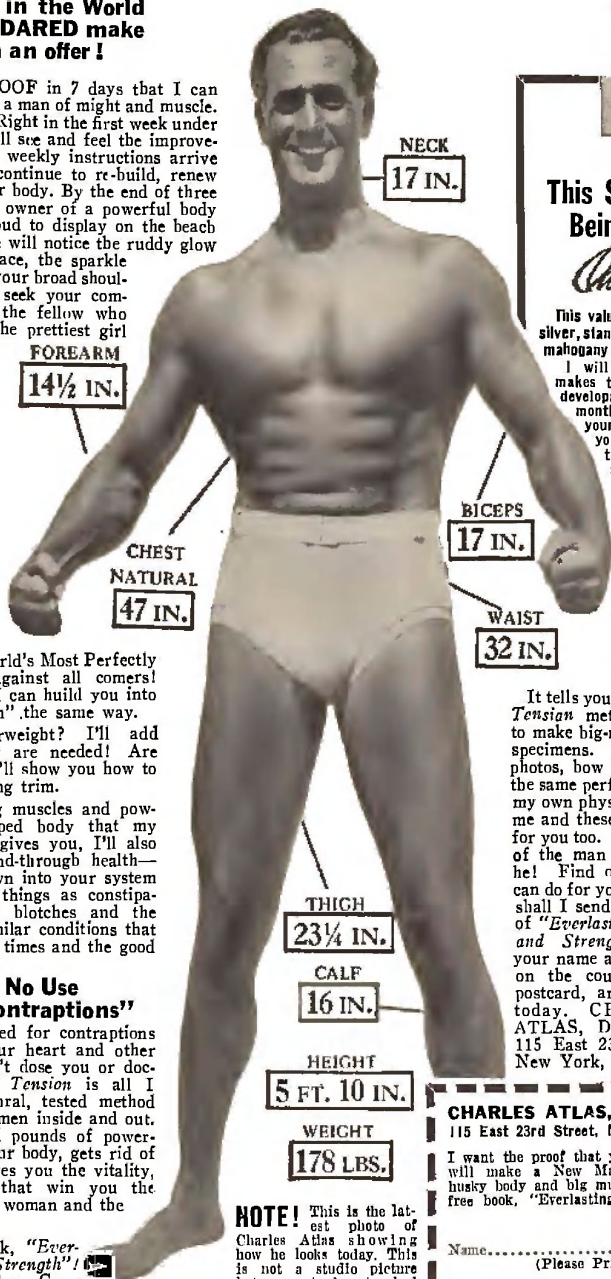
And with the big muscles and powerful evenly-developed body that my method so quickly gives you, I'll also give you through-and-through health—health that digs down into your system and banishes such things as constipation, pimples, skin blotches and the hundred-and-one similar conditions that rob you of the good times and the good things of life.

## I've Got No Use At All for "Contraptions"

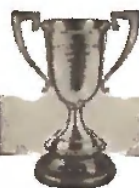
I haven't any need for contraptions that may strain your heart and other vital organs. I don't dose you or doctor you. *Dynamic Tension* is all I need. It's the natural, tested method for developing real men inside and out. It distributes added pounds of powerful muscles over your body, gets rid of surplus fat, and gives you the vitality, strength and pep that win you the admiration of every woman and the respect of any man.

Get my free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength!" Mail my coupon today. Gamble a stamp to prove I can make YOU a new man!

**MAIL COUPON FOR FREE BOOK NOW!**



**NOTE!** This is the latest photo of Charles Atlas showing how he looks today. This is not a studio picture but an actual untouched snapshot.



This Sterling Silver Cup Being Given Away by

*Charles Atlas*

This valuable cup, made of solid sterling silver, stands about 14 inches high on a black mahogany base.

I will award it to my pupil who makes the most improvement on his development within the next three months. Therefore, no matter what your measurements may be now, you have an equal chance to win this cup for permanent possession — and with YOUR name engraved on it! Get my free book by mailing coupon below.

48-PAGE BOOK  
**FREE**

It tells you all about my special *Dynamic Tension* method, and what it has done to make big-muscled men out of run-down specimens. It shows you, from actual photos, how I have developed my pupils to the same perfectly balanced proportions of my own physique. What my system did for me and these hundreds of others it can do for you too. Don't keep on being only half of the man you CAN be! Find out what I can do for you. Where shall I send your copy of "Everlasting Health and Strength"? Put your name and address on the coupon, or a postcard, and mail it today. CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 1504, 115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.



**CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 1504**  
115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.

I want the proof that your system of *Dynamic Tension* will make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Name.....  
(Please Print or write plainly)

Address.....

City..... State.....





# FOOT ITCH

## ATHLETE'S FOOT

*Send Coupon  
Don't Pay Until Relieved*

According to the Government Health Bulletin No. E-28, at least 50% of the adult population of the United States are being attacked by the disease known as Athlete's Foot.

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.

### BEWARE 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 legs.

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

### H. F. SENT ON FREE TRIAL

Sign and mail the coupon, and a bottle of H. F. will be mailed you immediately. Don't send any money and don't pay the postman any money; don't pay anything any time unless H. F. is helping you. If it does help you, we know you will be glad to send us \$1 for the treatment at the end of ten days. That's how much faith we have in H. F. Read, sign and mail the coupon today.



**GORE PRODUCTS, INC.** N. F.  
845 Perdido St., New Orleans, La.

Please send me immediately a complete treatment for foot trouble as described above. I agree to use it according to directions. If at the end of 10 days my feet are getting better, I will send you \$1. If I am not entirely satisfied, I will return the unused portion of the bottle to you within 15 days from the time I receive it.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY..... STATE.....