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SCRAMBLE!

Great Novel of an
American Fighter
Squadron

Major MARIO CAPPELLI
U.S.A.F.



INTERCEPT—IDENTIFY—OR SHOOT IT DOWN!

The task of the men who fly the supersonic fighter-interceptor planes of the Air Defense Command calls for constant alertness. Any unknown pip on the radar, any strange plane, must be investigated without delay. Any goof-up could easily cause the loss of a great city or even the whole nation should the day of a sneak attack ever dawn.

But they're only human these men, and the novel **SCRAMBLE!** is their story. Particularly it is the story of one base's commander, Colonel Gormann, a man who had to outthink, outguess and outplan both his own men, the men over him, and the mystery that might lurk just beyond the horizon.

SCRAMBLE! is a novel which combines action, suspense, romance, intrigue and a touch of humor with darned good edge-of-the-seat reading enjoyment.

Author's Note:

"Why don't you put that down and come to bed? You'll be able to think better after a good night's sleep." During the more than two years that this book was in preparation my wife issued her plea almost nightly. It is a tribute to her she always remained calm and cheerful, for behind each word there was more than a month of near isolation.

But there were others too. I soon descended on Captain and Mrs. Richard E. Conaway. Mrs. Conaway read the drafts so many times, I'm sure she can recite the book from memory. She spent so many hours correcting spelling, outlining chapters and assisting with the rewrites, that Captain Conaway became my wife's counterpart. He suffered his isolation in silence, and even volunteered valuable advice of his own. How either of them put up with my pounding around their home, waving my arms and glaring threateningly whenever someone suggested a break, can only attest to their deep friendship and good nature towards myself and my family.

Last but not least, to Technical Sergeant and Mrs. Levi Hutton, who typed and retyped hundreds of pages hundreds of times, I offer my heartfelt appreciation.

—Mario Cappelli

SCRAMBLE!

by

MARIO CAPPELLI,
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SCRAMBLE!

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All characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to actual persons or events is purely coincidental. Such units as the 29th Air Division, 29th Fighter Squadron, 54th Fighter Squadron and the 186th Fighter Squadron (Montana Air National Guard) are, of course, references to actual Air Force or Air National Guard (Active) units. As far as the author knows, there has never been an "Exercise Snowboy" conducted by the Air Force or any of the Air Force's subordinate commands or units. Further, the author is unaware of any SAC squadron with the numerical designation 420th. The selection of the designation 420th Bomb Squadron is not and was not designed to represent any actual SAC or other USAF bomb squadron.

In the course of nearly seventeen years of military service, I have been impressed with the energetic and serious application by many officers in their efforts to solve difficult and demanding problems. This book is dedicated to one of them:

Lt. Col. William Peter Benedict

Printed in U.S.A.

PROLOGUE

"KEEP HIM in sight! Keep him in sight!"

Lieutenant Dick Lyle repeated the phrase to himself several times, then unconsciously held his breath as he strained his eyes in an effort to keep from losing Tango Lead completely in the mist-filled night sky.

Lieutenant Aaron Butterworth, in the rear cockpit of the F-94C, was busily working the controls of his radar set. Finally satisfied that the weapon was working at its best, he tried to make himself more comfortable in his cramped position. He lifted a gloved hand to ease the pressure of his oxygen mask and then tugged at the shoulder harness to ease his upper torso. He then tried moving his buttocks in a circular motion while massaging the top of his thighs. The safety belt allowed only limited motion; and the radar scope, which almost completely covered his lap, did not allow much room for massaging. In any case, the "cockpit gymnastics" would help the blood flow more freely and in some measure ward off muscle fatigue.

Settling himself as best he could, Butterworth glanced at the radar scope for a quick check, then looked across his left wing tip and was surprised that he could barely make out Tango Lead's aircraft. He watched his altimeter wind up past seven thousand feet.

If this weather goes as high as the weather briefing indicated, he thought, this is going to be a rough mission. He looked over at Tango Lead again and could only see a faint, luminous glow from the wing tip light. As he watched, the light started to fluctuate rapidly, as if it were connected to

SCRAMBLE!

a rheostat that had gone out of control. It grew dim, disappeared, reappeared as a diffused glow in space, blinked brighter and disappeared again.

Suddenly, Tango Lead exploded into full view so unexpectedly that a collision looked inevitable. Butterworth's heart jumped and he instinctively closed his eyes. When he opened them a moment later, the aircraft had receded into the mist again and only the almost smothered green light was left as a reference point.

Butterworth wasn't surprised when the throbbing glow of the oxygen warning light caught his eye. Although he automatically checked his own equipment, he knew that the cause lay with his pilot. During sixteen months of close association, he had become familiar with Dick Lyle's habits and actions. One of these was a reaction to circumstances demanding extreme concentration and flying ability, when Lyle would invariably hold his breath. It seldom lasted for more than a few seconds, and if it did, Butterworth would break the spell by asking a question over the interphone. He had never said anything to Lyle about the habit and Lyle was unaware that his secret was out.

Butterworth watched the oxygen warning light for a few seconds before it returned to its normal faint glow and he heard Lyle begin normal breathing once more.

"Tango Two, this is Tango Lead." The crisp voice of Lieutenant Olsen broke the silence. "This stuff is getting worse. If it gets too bad don't be a hero; fall back about a half mile and have your RO pick me up on his scope."

Lyle pressed the mike button on top of the throttle with his left thumb and spoke into his mask. "Rog, Tango Lead, but I think I'll be able to stay with you."

Even as he spoke, he instinctively turned his head toward his leader as the thickening weather tried to swallow the fighter. He didn't dare watch that green finger tip of light too closely or it would hypnotize him, with drastic results. He made it a point not to stare directly at it, but rather to one side, and to adjust his position whenever the aircraft itself became visible.

The light started to play hide-and-seek. Lyle was tempted several times to drop back as Tango Lead had suggested,

SCRAMBLE!

but each time the light would reappear and beckon him to follow. In addition, he was becoming increasingly fascinated by the light. As it raced through the moisture laden mist, it would illuminate a small area around it, giving an impression of great speed and motion.

"Where do you suppose they're sending us?" came the inquiry over the interphone.

"I don't know. You have anything on the weapon yet?" he countered, knowing even before his radar observer answered that they were still too far from the target for it to show up on the scope. But he needed time to re-establish his equilibrium before Butterworth asked any more questions. He could make out the dim outline of his leader's aircraft now, but suddenly he couldn't determine just how far away it was. Furthermore his own ship seemed to be flying strangely.

"Give me an airspeed, altitude and attitude check," he asked his RO. The request did not surprise Butterworth. Often when the pilot's entire attention was taken up with maintaining formation, he would get periodic checks from the RO. Butterworth consulted his instruments.

"We're passing through 19,000 feet, heading 330 degrees, airspeed 260 knots, climbing normally."

"Thanks." It took Lyle only a moment to turn the facts over in his mind, but still every nerve in his body told him that they were flying upside down!

Lyle had heard enough lectures by the Flight Surgeon to realize that he was suffering from vertigo and, although in truth they were performing a normal climb, the weight and balance mechanisms in his body were sending out false information. His only defense now was to fight the impulse to roll the aircraft over. He must stay with Tango Lead until the vertigo wore off.

Butterworth looked up from his scope and listened for a moment. Lyle was breathing very rapidly.

"Hey, Dick, what's the matter?" he asked and his voice betrayed his concern.

It may have been the tone of Butterworth's voice or maybe it was only a normal sequence of events, but the vertigo

SCRAMBLE!

suddenly wore off and Lyle was able to adjust his mental attitude before he replied.

"Nothing's the matter, why?"

"You sounded like you thought breathing was going out of style and wanted to get your share," his RO retorted.

"No sweat," Lyle replied, in an effort to allay Butterworth's obvious apprehension. "Olsen should be giving Jessie Control a call before long," he continued, hoping the conversation would give Butterworth something else to think about. His friend's reply was lost as Olsen's voice crackled in the headphones.

"Jessie Control, this is Tango Lead."

"Guess we're finally getting into Jessie's area," Lyle thought as he listened to Tango Lead's transmission.

"Roger, Tango Lead, this is Jessie, receiving you five square. How me?"

"Loud and clear," came the immediate response from Lieutenant Olsen.

"Roger, Tango Lead," continued Jessie, "we have you on our weapon. Continue heading three-three-zero degrees, climb to two-five thousand. Bogey is twelve o'clock for eight five miles, tracking one-five-zero degrees at 300 knots."

Lyle heard the target information and knew that it would not be too long before they broke formation and performed individual interceptions. The realization that he would soon be able to fly his own airplane, without the constant necessity of watching his flight leader, seemed to lift a weight centered around his stomach muscles. The mist suddenly had dissolved too. They were flying in an almost clear sky.

"How we doing, Butterball?" Lyle never used the nickname unless he was completely relaxed. Butterworth did not miss its significance now and smiled to himself as he thought, I'll bet his own mother doesn't know him as well as I do.

"We're just passing through 26,000," he answered, after checking his altimeter. "Still no contact on our weapon. It will probably be three or four minutes before we pick it up."

"Tango Lead, this is Jessie Control. Your target has turned port to a heading of zero-three-zero degrees. Turn starboard to zero-one-zero degrees, descent to two-two thousand. This will be a tail chase."

SCRAMBLE!

Lyle watched his leader start the right turn to the new heading and tightened up his position in formation as he followed along. "Roger, Jessie," the leader replied, "starboard zero-one-zero degrees, two-two thousand."

"This makes the problem more difficult," Lyle remarked to Butterworth, adding, "what do you suppose . . . ?"

His question was cut off by another transmission from Lieutenant Olsen. "Jessie Control, this is Tango Lead. For your information we are going Popeye again!"

"Understand, Popeye," replied Jessie.

Great! Lyle said to himself in disgust. That's all we need. . . . Popeye! Back into this lousy weather again!

At Jessie Control, Lieutenant Henry Bauer checked his scope again and could see that, although the fighters were behind the target, they were moving at a faster rate of speed. He could instruct them to increase their speed if the need arose by simply ordering, "Gate," the intercept terminology for increasing engine power to maximum available. The pilots would then cut-in their afterburners, thereby increasing their airspeed considerably, but also upping their fuel consumption by a high ratio.

Bauer weighed the possibilities and decided to let the fighters overtake the target at their present rate.

"Tango Lead, this is Jessie. Your target still tracking zero-three-zero degrees, speed now 250 knots, angels two-one thousand." He waited for Tango Lead to confirm the transmission and then started to consider the added difficulties of completing an intercept in weather. If the target remained in the weather, one of the fighters would have to slide slowly up behind and slightly below it to make an identification.

Bauer was fully aware that the problems involved in performing this maneuver were complex and would require extreme coordination between all members of the intercept team. He would direct one fighter into an attack position and pass instructions to him every few seconds to keep him in proper alignment. At the same time he must guide the fighter making the identification closer and closer to the target until the RO could pick it up on the fighter's radar; and, although he would continue to monitor the final phase

SCRAMBLE!

of the identification even after the RO made a radar pick-up, it would be up to the pilot and his radar observer to complete a successful run.

Bauer looked at a point only a few inches in front of the white line on the plotting board.

I'll wait until the fighters are there, he figured to himself. They should have picked up the target by then, so I'll separate them and have Tango Lead make the actual intercept and identification. The target had been flying in the new direction for one minute and Bauer quickly calculated the point at which the fighter and target would meet.

"Target's changing heading again, Lieutenant."

The operator's report brought Bauer back to the scope. He watched the blip slowly swing around in another left turn.

"OK . . . that's it!" Bauer announced. "The target will pick up a heading of two-seven-zero degrees. That's an aircraft in distress executing the emerg. . . ." His voice trailed off as he became aware that the last revolution of the radar beam failed to spotlight the fighters.

"Fighters have faded!" reported the operator, and he immediately drew a short white line perpendicular to the long, white track of the fighters to indicate the position of last radar pick-up.

Bauer spoke into the transmitter. "Tango Lead, this is Jessie Control, we've lost radar contact with you. Continue on your present heading."

"Target is steady on two-seven-zero degrees," announced the operator.

"OK," replied Bauer, as he waited for an answer from Tango, "He'll fly that heading for one minute. Let me know if there's any change. I'm going to try and contact Tango flight again."

When several attempts to contact the fighters failed to gain a response, Bauer ordered the radar operator to switch over to the emergency radio channel and to try and contact the target. He pointed out, however, that there would be little chance of success because the target was flying a left hand pattern, indicating loss of all radio functions.

"Give it a try anyway," he ordered, "and give Tango flight a call on the same channel too. Something had better

SCRAMBLE!

work, we don't have much time if we're going to get help to that aircraft!"

While the operator complied with the orders, Bauer placed a call to Bridesmaid, the 29th Air Division Control Center. "Bridesmaid, this is Jessie. We've got an emergency in progress!"

"Roger, Jessie. Your plotter just passed the last maneuver by the target to our plotter and it is definitely an emergency pattern. We have placed a call to SAC headquarters, asking them to check on any of their aircraft that are overdue or have not been heard from during the last hour . . . stand by . . . SAC is coming through now."

Bauer could hear the Bridesmaid controller talking in the background but couldn't make out the conversation. Waiting for the controller to end his discussion with SAC, he watched the plotter draw another change in course by the target as it turned from two-seven-zero degrees to one-five-zero degrees. The radar operator reported the change to him.

"OK, he'll follow that heading for a short time, then go through the whole procedure again," he told the airman behind the radar scope. "Keep a close check on his speed and altitude. We won't have much time for more than one intercept attempt, so maintain an accurate and close watch on him."

"Jessie, Bridesmaid here." Bauer returned his attention to the phone. "SAC reports no aircraft scheduled through this area; however, the B-47 that was heading for Alaska has not made a position report for more than an hour and it's possible that the aircraft in distress is the B-47 returning."

"He's probably getting low on fuel by now," said Bauer.

"Right, so we'll have to get some assistance to him immediately. Have you picked up your fighters yet?"

"No, we're still trying," replied Bauer, with an uneasy sensation in his stomach. "How long before you'll have another crew ready to scramble?"

"We only have two on alert tonight with two more on thirty minutes standby. I've already called the crew from their quarters, but it will be at least another five minutes or so before they are set to go. However, I'll call the alert room and tell them to be prepared for an immediate scramble."

SCRAMBLE!

"OK, Bridesmaid, thanks. If I can't contact Tango in the next minute or two, I'll order another scramble, but only one fighter this time. The other one can stand by in case he's needed."

"Roger, Jessie. I'll pass the information. Bridesmaid out."

"Still no contact with Tango, sir," reported the radar operator. Bauer nodded and checked the radar scope, then looked at the plotting board as he calculated the available time remaining if a successful intercept were to be accomplished. The mental strain was beginning to tell. The rivulets of perspiration ran down his forehead and the back of his neck. He blotted the dampness from his forehead with his sleeve. He was seized with a great desire for coffee. Remembering the untouched cup on his desk, he went over, picked it up and downed the lukewarm liquid. "Could use another one," he thought, as he started to his scope.

"Jessie . . . control . . . Jessie . . . control . . . this is Tango two . . ." Bauer covered the few feet from his desk to the control position in two giants steps, grabbed the transmitter to reply to the obviously strained call from Tango Two.

The wing light was pulsating rapidly now, and ever since they had re-entered the weather, nearly two minutes ago, Lyle was finding it increasingly difficult to maintain formation. Little trickles of perspiration, falling down his spine until blotted by the flying suit at the small of his back, were slowly building a waistband of moisture.

"Have anything yet, Butterworth?" he questioned, feeling the steady return of vertigo beginning to confuse his perspective.

"Negative. Nothing yet, but we should be picking it up any second now." Butterworth kept his eyes glued to his scope as he replied to his pilot, and, at the same time, tried to make himself more comfortable under what seemed to be a tightening seat belt.

"If we don't make contact in the next sixty seconds, I'm going to break away from Tango Lead," Lyle continued. The wing light began playing tricks. It seemed to be gliding away from him like some luminous ghost, flitting into a forest

SCRAMBLE!

and permitting only a momentary glow to be observed as it flashed through the trees.

"Rog," Butterworth answered, noting that his friend was breathing rapidly now.

Lyle tensed and his heart almost jumped out of his chest as, without warning, the ghost came out of the forest, rushing at him with incredible speed. He applied right rudder in an effort to miss the charging demon. The light arched up and almost over him.

"What the . . ." Butterworth yelled as the sudden skidding of the fighter nearly jerked his head around on his shoulders. Before he could complete his complaint, Tango Lead popped into full view. Lyle saw that he had opened the formation and now there was a good dozen feet between the two aircraft. In addition, he was slightly below it and in a twenty degree bank to the right. He could only see the underside of the wing and fuselage of Tango Lead. Several lights blinked.

We've broken out again, Lyle breathed to himself. The lights were not stationary and a few of them cast long thin beams. For one terrifying instant he was shocked speechless, then he pressed the mike button and screamed into his mask, "Olsen we're upside down! That's the ground. Roll out!"

Lyle was acting out of pure desire to survive, and although he was fully panicked, he still managed to jerk the stick over to the right. The fighter reacted violently in a swift roll.

Lights were flashing by off to his left. A brilliant blast of orange from behind outraced them and illuminated the ground for a fraction of a second before it died, reflecting off the base of the clouds.

Butterworth, looking out the left side of the canopy and nearly in shock himself after hearing Lyle's warning to Tango Lead, saw the origin and cause of the light. His hands flew to his face and covered his eyes as he managed to whisper, "Oh my God!"

The dark outline of a building loomed up before them and Lyle held back on the stick in frozen fear, waiting to smash into it. He didn't see the house as they roared across its roof with twenty feet to spare.

He was still below the overcast, but they were climbing

S C R A M B L E !

and the ground was falling away behind him. As the fighter began to accelerate, Lyle held firm back pressure on the stick and the nose of the fighter increased its climb angle. He still had not completely returned to his instruments and, as he glanced into the blackness, his heart nearly stopped.

The glow of his left wing tip light (which he could not normally see), was reflecting on a rounded ridge, running parallel to his flight path. It was less than ten feet away and it was climbing just as fast as he was, if not slightly faster.

The mountains! The Bear Paw Mountains! If he thought he had screamed out his sudden realization, he was wrong, since only a slight groan came from his throat. He yanked full back on the stick and simultaneously cut in the afterburner. The fighter shuddered under the sudden strain, but obeyed the command by standing almost on her tail, as if in an effort to fulfill the breathed prayer, "God, help me!" The afterburner burst into life with its catapult action and they sliced into the overcast.

Lyle waited for the gates of death to slam shut. For several seconds, the ridges rose up to block their path, fell away, rose again so close that the blackness and mist failed to hide them and Lyle knew terror.

As the last of the ridges fell away, the nose of the fighter was in a dangerously high attitude. Reacting instinctively, Lyle dropped his left wing. The nose lowered and he watched the gyro come up to a proper climb indication. He let his breath out slowly, then refilled his lungs to capacity, eased the throbbing in his chest. His forearms and legs began to quiver and he realized, for the first time, that he was very wet. Even the hair on his head felt damp. Saliva had run out of the corners of his partly opened mouth, building up a little pool where it was trapped by the oxygen mask. He wanted desperately to remove his mask and wipe his face, but pressed the mike button instead.

"Tango Lead, this is Tango Two. What's your position?" Lyle was not fully aware of the significance of the flash of light which had brought the cry from Butterworth. After a few seconds of silence, he tried again.

"Tango Lead, Tango Two here, how do you read? What's your position?" He paused again, checking his own position

SCRAMBLE!

and heading. They were climbing on a course of nearly due north, and he planned to wait until they were on top of the overcast before heading for Great Falls. He cut the afterburner as they passed through fifteen thousand feet, to conserve fuel. After a third attempt at contacting Tango Lead failed, he sensed an uneasiness in his stomach which seemed to accentuate the motion in his still trembling muscles.

Butterworth heard his pilot making the radio calls and had not interrupted him, because there was the bare possibility that he had not actually seen what he thought. It was, perhaps, only an emotional safeguard on his part, and he had almost convinced himself that there was no meaning to that one horrendous second. But after Lyle called three times, there was no longer any doubt left in his mind. Swallowing rapidly two or three times, in order to remove an aching sensation in his throat, he finally spoke.

"Don't bother calling, Dick. They won't answer." He said it quietly and unemotionally. It was a good effort on his part. He wanted to sound unemotional and thereby give whatever strength he could to his friend.

His effort was not wasted, although at the sound of his RO's voice, Lyle was momentarily startled. For the last few minutes, the world had consisted only of his airplane and himself, both fighting for survival. He regained control of himself after only a slight pause and, though he knew the meaning of Butterworth's remark, he questioned him anyway.

"What do you mean?"

"They went in . . . near U.S. 87." Butterworth was having difficulty keeping his voice from breaking.

"Are you sure?" Lyle was trying to sound unemotional now. He still had to get back home and he would need steady nerves to make the letdown. He didn't want Butterworth to know how shaken he really was.

Without waiting for Butterworth to reply further, he started calling Jessie Control.

"Jessie . . . Control . . . Jessie . . . Control . . . This is Tango Two."

He was having difficulty now, trying to talk without any

SCRAMBLE!

show of emotion. As he finished his transmission they passed through twenty-one thousand feet, and they were on top.

Breaking out of the weather helped his nerves, but the cough and clearing of his throat to cover up the show of concern he had displayed while calling Jessie did not fool Butterworth. Indeed, it helped the RO calm his own nerves since it brought to focus the role he must play if they were to get home without additional difficulties. He started concentrating on his radar scope and prepared to give whatever assistance his pilot would request. He had just removed all other thoughts from his mind when the voice of the Jessie controller came over the radio in an unmistakably excited tone.

"Roger, Tango Two. What happened? We lost you several minutes ago. We've got an emergency in progress. What's your position? Squawk three." Bauer was trying to say everything at once as if he expected to lose radio contact with Tango Two before he could finish.

Lyle switched on his Identification Friend or Foe and turned it to the requested indication, waiting a few seconds to be sure that Lieutenant Bauer was finished talking.

Bauer saw the telltale blips of the IFF appear on the radar scope and almost jumped with joy as he realized that Tango Two was within five miles of the distressed B-47. Both aircraft were flying in the same direction and Bauer knew that the B-47 would soon start a turn to the left.

All he had to do was wait for the 47 to start turning.

Then he could have the fighters make a tight turn and bring them up right behind, and a little to the right of the bomber. For a moment he was so engrossed with the ideal setup of the problem that he did not catch all of Tango Two's next transmission. He caught something about "crashed . . . highway 87. . . ." The plotter had placed an indication on the board as soon as the fighter had been picked up, but now he was standing motionless, with his right hand still poised in air as if he were afraid to move it. He stood looking at the controller.

The radar operator at his left had turned around and was staring at him also, and in doing so, missed the first indica-

S C R A M B L E !

tion that the B-47 was starting to turn. The change in course was not missed by Bauer.

"Tango Two, this is Jessie. Turn hard port to a heading of one-eight-two degrees and repeat your last transmission." Before Tango Two had time to repeat his last remarks Bauer turned momentarily to the radar operator. "Get back on your scope and don't take your eyes off of it until this emergency is over!" The radar operator almost spun around at Bauer's unusual tone.

Lyle repeated the turn instruction, then began to repeat the transmission which Bauer had missed.

"Tango Lead crashed about one mile north of U.S. Highway 87, about ten miles north of Big Sandy."

Bauer listened and the information stunned him. He had supposed that Tango Two had taken over the action due to radio difficulties suffered by Tango Lead. He had in fact planned to ask Tango Two about his leader, but events during those first few seconds had moved too fast. He had never been confronted with a problem like this before, not, at least, where the full weight of responsibility rested on his shoulders. He knew that whatever he did, it had to be done fast and it had to be accurate. An error now could mean the loss of additional lives and equipment.

"Roger, Tango Two. Understand, Tango Lead crashed one mile north of U.S. Highway 87, about ten miles north of Big Sandy." He continued in a voice of unmistakable authority. "Now . . . listen . . . carefully. After you complete your turn, your RO should pick up a target about five miles in your twelve o'clock position. It's a B-47 flying an emergency pattern. He has no radio and probably has no position or wing lights. He is holding an altitude now twenty to twenty-one thousand feet. If he is not flying just above the overcast he is in the thin layer at the top. It is possible that he may have lost one or two engines in addition to his radio and electrical equipment, otherwise he would be flying well above the overcast." Bauer spoke clearly and slowly enough not to run his words together. "If we don't intercept him in the next few minutes we may have another crash. One that we can prevent! We are passing your information to Bridesmaid."

SCRAMBLE!

Bauer could see a sergeant talking to Bridesmaid and could hear part of the conversation.

"What state fuel?" he continued, realizing that not only the B-47 may be getting low.

"Eighteen hundred pounds," came the quick response.

"Rog. Understand, eighteen hundred pounds. Your first attempt will have to be a good one. You won't have enough fuel for two tries." Bauer didn't wait for the fighter pilot to agree or disagree. The controller was in command now and his instructions must be obeyed.

Lyle read the authoritative tone in the controller's voice and knew that Bauer had weighed the problem facing them.

"Let me know the instant you pick up the target, Butterworth." His voice was crisp now, reflecting the authority of his position as pilot. Butterworth didn't answer. There was no need for a reply, the order was clear. They were going to give assistance to the B-47 before any thought of home could be considered.

"Contact forty degrees port for four miles. Come around to one-seven-five degrees." Butterworth was now giving the orders.

Lyle did not repeat the instructions from his RO. He just followed them. He did, however, inform Jessie.

"Jessie, Tango Two here. Contact forty degrees port for four miles."

"Roger, Tango Two. Understand. Contact." Bauer breathed a sigh of relief. All he had to do now was monitor the flight and make sure that the radar site at Great Falls was alerted to receive control of the aircraft when the intercept was completed and they were headed for home.

"Steady on one-seven-five degrees," Butterworth instructed. Then as an afterthought added, "You keep your eyes open for the target. I'll guide you into a position off his left wing tip."

"Rog, I'll keep my eyes out of the cockpit," his pilot responded.

"Target is in your eleven thirty position for three miles level." The target showed on Lyle's scope now, but he was looking into the night sky in an effort to visually spot the target. If they had been making an attack or were in the

SCRAMBLE!

weather he would have been watching his scope and listening to Butterworth, steering by radar information only. Fortunately however, the B-47 seemed to be holding just above the overcast. He could see the tops of the clouds flashing by a few hundred feet below him. They were much lighter than the darkened sky, a fact which he hoped would allow him to spot the larger aircraft more easily.

"Target still eleven thirty for two miles."

"Rog, I still don't see him," Lyle replied, just to let his RO know that he was expending every effort to locate the target.

Bauer watched the fighter and target closing.

"Bridesmaid wants more information about the crash," the sergeant interrupted.

"Tell them they will have to wait. I'm not going to ask Tango Two any further questions until this intercept is complete." The fighter had moved closer now.

"Target moving slowly into the twelve o'clock position for one mile. Reduce speed one hundred knots."

Lyle pulled back on the throttle until the engine read eighty-five percent and at the same time opened his dive brakes. The airspeed fell off to the desired figure and he retracted the dive brakes.

"Target moving slowly right for one-half mile. Closing speed fifty knots."

"Good," thought Lyle, "at least we won't overrun him." He continued to strain his eyes.

"Target six hundred yards. Reduce speed twenty knots."

Lyle opened the speed brakes just a little, then retracted them.

"Target 500 yards . . . 400 . . . Target is starting a turn to the left. *Heads up!*"

The caution signal from Butterworth came just as Lyle caught the shadow of a black object moving against the clouds.

"Tally Ho! Right on the button Butterworth. Good run too, I might add . . . even if you did think I was going to collide with him."

The RO accepted the praise and jibing remark without comment. Looking up from his scope, he waited a couple

SCRAMBLE!

of seconds while his eyes adjusted themselves to the outside blackness, then peered across the right wing. The silvery body of the large aircraft was surprisingly near, less than a hundred feet, he judged. Already their own navigation light was reflecting off the shiny surface.

Lyle slowed the fighter to a speed barely in excess of the bomber's, allowing the distance to close yard by yard. "He should see us by now . . ." he thought, moving the throttle back slightly as they closed to within fifty feet of the left wing of the 47.

"They see us!" Butterworth announced as the bomber began to level its wings. A light flashed from the front cockpit of the distressed aircraft."

"... - - - ..."

"He's signaling SOS with a flashlight," the RO continued.

"Right, I see it. I'm going to pull up ahead of him. Take your flashlight and signal him to follow us."

"Rog," Butterworth agreed, reaching for the flashlight in the right leg pocket of his flying suit. "I don't think they need an invitation," he mused, lining up the flashlight as best he could with the cockpit of the bomber.

"TIE ON!" The message was short, but understood.

"Butterworth, keep a close watch and let me know if we're losing him. Whoever is flying that big bird had better be good or he'll have difficulty following us during the let-down."

"I'll keep an eye on him. I don't think you'll have to worry about the pilot's ability. He's hanging onto us like a leech."

A glance over his shoulder confirmed the RO's opinion. The cockpit of the 47 was almost over the fighter's right wing tank and the white helmets of the pilot and co-pilot were plainly visible each time the navigation lights flashed.

"Hope he doesn't get too confident in his ability," Lyle muttered to himself as he switched his navigation lights to the steady position. "He'll have enough trouble following my wing light without having it flash on and off." A look at his fuel gauge informed him that they had better get on the ground soon.

"Jessie Control, Tango Two here. Mission accomplished. Guide us home."

SCRAMBLE!

CHAPTER ONE

THE L-20 liaison plane banked sharply and disappeared momentarily behind the 29th Fighter Squadron hangar. Sergeant Littlefield waited until the light airplane reappeared and muttered to himself, "He's a little low. Can't be over two hundred feet."

The aircraft banked sharply again, turning onto an improvised base leg which ended with the L-20 directly over the runway, its wings still in a steep bank. If the crew chief was worried by the unconventional approach of one of his airplanes, he didn't show it.

"Here he comes, Morton!" he called to his young assistant. The wings of the L-20 leveled out and seconds later the aircraft touched down. It always interested the crew chief to guess how fast this particular pilot taxied.

Must be still close to flying speed, he mused, as the L-20 swung off the runway onto the taxi strip.

The L-20 turned off the taxi strip and came on with every indication that the pilot had no intention of wasting time. The crew chief hurried to a spot where he wanted the airplane parked, and held up his arms, signaling the pilot to the selected area. The L-20 pivoted to the left, moved a few feet toward the waving airman and came to rest with the propeller slowing to a stop.

Morton rushed to the left side of the aircraft and prepared to open the cabin door. Before he managed to get a good grip on the handle, the door flew open with sufficient force to knock him into a sitting position on the still damp concrete.

Lieutenant Colonel T. Wesley Gormann slid his tall heavy

SCRAMBLE!

frame from behind the control column, and dropped to the ramp over the sitting figure of a very surprised Airman Third Class. Seeing the Deputy for Operations standing over him, Morton tried to get up, but only succeeded in banging his head on the slanting wing brace. Before he could do further damage to himself, he was lifted bodily to his feet by a strong force which held the upper half of his left arm.

"You hurt?"

At the sound of Gormann's voice, Morton started to step back but he was still held by a firm grip which had not released its pressure.

"No sir," he managed to whisper, noting that the Colonel's left shirt pocket was unbuttoned.

"Well, see if you can stand on your feet long enough to reserve this airplane!"

"Yes, sir."

Gormann released his grip, reached back into the cockpit, picked up his hat from the space between the two pilot seats and headed for the concrete block house several hundred yards away.

"I don't think he filled out the flight log," Morton said, as the crew chief joined him after placing chocks under the wheels.

"He filled it out," Littlefield replied, watching the rapidly receding figure. "I don't know how he does it," he continued, "every time he lands he bursts out of the cockpit like the airplane was about to explode. I've never seen him fill out the form, but it's always completed."

Morton checked the log himself. Each item was properly entered with large clear lettering or figures.

"Sure not hard to read," he volunteered, "but is he always in such a hurry?"

"You haven't seen anything, Morton," replied the crew chief, as he watched the fuel truck start up and head toward them. "You've only been here a week, but you've learned one lesson already. . . . *Don't stand in his way!* I've never seen him when he takes his time. He always operates on all burners and you noticed that he didn't wear a flying suit over his uniform. Well, for your information, and, I might add, future guidance, he never wears one when he flies the L-20; there-

SCRAMBLE!

fore, I suggest that you make sure that the airplane is clean. If he should get some oil on his uniform because some crew chief didn't keep a clean house . . . well. . . ." He made a gesture of running a knife across his throat.

The sound of a jet engine starting up drifted across the air base and Gormann cast a last glance at the sky before entering the windowless headquarters building. The overcast had risen considerably and patches of blue sky peeked through in several places.

The guard at the reception desk looked up as the steel door opened. He was allowed only a second to recognize the figure hurrying by him and to voice a "Good morning, sir!" before the Deputy for Operations started up the metal-tipped concrete steps, two at a time. If there was a reply to the guard's greeting, it was lost as the Colonel disappeared into the hallway of the upper part of the building.

Gormann nodded in response to the greeting from his secretary, sat down at his desk, pushed three or four pieces of correspondence aside and picked up the phone. The secretary stopped to wait out the conversation but returned to her work when Gormann extended his right arm and waved his fingers in a circular motion, clearly denoting that she was to resume her typing.

"Gormann here! You people conducting flying operations today?"

The resonant voice speaking into the telephone could easily be heard at a distance of sixty feet even under normal circumstances, but the concrete surfaces of the hallways amplified it to a booming quality. Several officers within earshot screwed up their faces in mock pain and mopped their brows in a manner to indicate that they were happy not to be on the other end of the discussion.

Gormann listened while the fighter squadron Operations Officer explained the lack of aircraft activity. He picked up a pencil and doodled an acceptable facsimile of a F-94C. As the explanation continued, he printed below the picture in ever increasing size—excuses!! EXCUSES!!! E X C U S E S!!!! With the last exclamation point, the tip of the pencil broke and he stopped the flow of words.

SCRAMBLE!

"OK! It's Colonel Dyer's squadron, so it's up to him to fulfill the flying requirements. However, if you're waiting for better weather, I suggest you gather the squadron and go out on the ramp and do a sun dance, because that's the only way you'll get any flying for the next few days. While you're waiting for fair skies send Lyle and Butterworth to my office at three-thirty this afternoon!" Without waiting for a reply, he replaced the receiver vigorously, picked up another pencil, thought for a moment, and printed LYLE-BUTTERWORTH over the picture of the airplane.

Gormann's energetic replacing of the telephone was the signal for Lieutenant Warren Summers to pick up his notebook and head for the conference room.

The Division's conference room was not impressive in size or dress. With the exception of a few charts, the walls were bare. The room itself had been established through the simple expedient of removing the wall separating two adjoining offices. The requirement for this modification became apparent to Gormann within the first week of his assignment as Deputy for Operations. Originally it was necessary to enter the two offices through a common doorway, pass several desks and finally enter the rear office through an archway in the separating wall. Gorman wrote a letter to higher headquarters himself, requesting permission to make the desired change. Three weeks later he received a letter complete with no less than six indorsements. They all, without exception, expressed wholehearted disapproval. That was on a Friday afternoon. By Monday morning the Division had a conference room, and four officers, five airmen and one secretary were relocated without being unduly cramped.

The change was accepted and before long became part of the daily routine. Several months later inspectors from the Corps of Engineers were perplexed at the missing wall. However, all their efforts to unearth information relative to the modification gained them only, "Good heavens, I don't know, there's always been one large room near the Deputy for Operations' office."

As administrative assistant to the Deputy for Operations, a position not completely authorized by manpower studies, it fell to Summers to prepare the conference room for the

SCRAMBLE!

daily meetings. In addition, at the outset of each staff meeting, he presented an up-to-the-minute account of all correspondence received since the previous meeting and reminded all concerned of upcoming suspense dates. Gormann had little patience with anyone who submitted late correspondence, though he himself would violate even the most elementary rules of good filing. At first Summers tried to impress upon the staff the advantages of an orderly and approved filing system. He hoped that his suggestions would find fertile ground and bear fruit through better administrative practices. Gormann had listened to this approach for three meetings before interrupting the discussion.

"Summers, you've been here two weeks. It appears that you have a keen interest in your job."

Summers brightened noticeably at this seeming praise. "Yes, sir! I like it and I . . ."

Gormann continued before the administrative officer could offer more proof of his efforts on behalf of the 29th Air Division.

"It's still a little too early for me to accurately determine the quality of your work. However, I'll know more about that before another two weeks have gone by."

Summers' face fell and a few of the older officers felt sorry for this brand new second lieutenant, fresh out of ROTC, but he remained silent and swallowed heavily.

Gormann continued to address him, not disrespectfully, or even what could be termed unpleasantly. His hard stare, however, and chilling manner of speaking produced what was surreptitiously referred to by certain elements as the "Gormann effect."

"Has . . . Lieutenant . . . any member of my staff ever given you a hard time in the conduct of your duties?"

"Nnnnno, sir." His throat was choking up and his face felt flushed. Gormann turned his eyes on the staff before proceeding with the questioning.

"Has any member of my staff taken more than a reasonable time, say thirty seconds, to find some piece of correspondence when I sent you after it?"

"No, sir!"

S C R A M B L E !

"If that's the case, I don't care if they bundle it in bales and stack it in the corners! Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir."

After that unpleasant encounter, Summers devoted himself to the basic task of listing the correspondence, suspense dates, or any special designated by his boss. The filing system continued to leave a lot to be desired. Gormann still dropped letters and messages into the upper right drawer of his desk and Summers learned to search that area whenever something was missing. All in all, however, he had to admit that the Operations Section of the 29th Air Division had not submitted a late report or missed a suspense date in six months. The last time such an event occurred was shortly after his run-in with Gorman on the filing system. Then Summers learned his first lesson regarding the DO's corrective measures.

Gormann sent for the offending officer with a curt phone call. "I want you!"

He listened to the explanation offered by the offender with obvious distaste.

"Captain. . . ."—again the same pause for effect—"In a short time I will be preparing your efficiency report and it goes without further discussion that such haphazard attention to duty will be adversely reflected on said report. . . ."

Summers listened to Gormann's remarks with a guilty feeling. He had brought the matter to Gormann's attention, but certain had no desire to be the cause of a bad efficiency report. The officer in difficulty had twelve years of service and such a report could spell "pass over" when his promotion cycle came due.

"Sir, I would like to point out that an administrative tie-up was largely responsible for delaying this report. Besides, sir, the contents of the letter are not of an urgent nature, it's only a request for . . ."

"Summers . . . I don't care if it's a request for toilet paper for the fiscal year 1970! It was due out yesterday!" With that final admonishment, he picked up the phone. In a few seconds he was talking with the Operations Officer of the 29th FIS.

SCRAMBLE!

"Gormann here. I'm sending over two officers. See that a T-33 is made available to them." He dropped the phone back in the cradle and returned his attention to the two puzzled officers.

"Now . . . report over to the flight line. Both of you. You will find a T-33 waiting. Sixty minutes from now I want you to be on your way to CADF with that correspondence. You will deliver it personally to their mail room. *Questions?*"

There were no questions.

"Good! If this happens again I'll fire both of you!"

It was five o'clock by the time they became airborne and two-and-a-half hours later Summers climbed out of the rear cockpit of the T-bird. They had to wait until eight o'clock next morning in order to deliver the tardy letter and it was noon before they arrived back at Malmstrom.

"It's a good thing you're a pilot," he had remarked to his companion. "Otherwise he might have suggested that we run all the way to Kansas City!" His friend nodded in agreement; sadder, but somewhat wiser.

Summers had been letting these thoughts run through his mind since entering the conference room. He arranged some chairs around the ten-foot table, pushed a few ash trays into strategic positions along the top, then sat down to await the arrival of the staff.

"Looks like somebody stole his best girl!"

"Or his correspondence log!" suggested the second of the two officers entering the room.

Summers looked at Captains Harry Locke and Bill Heeney and broke into a grin.

"Neither, just the weight of responsibilities pushing down on my overworked shoulders," he replied.

"Work!" cried Locke. "At least that's a new name for it anyway."

"Yeah, boy! Let's face it, you're nothing but an expansive postal box," added Heeney, playfully trying to shove a piece of scrap paper down Summer's shirt front.

"Someone has to ramrod you frustrated toytime executives, otherwise you'd mail your Christmas cards in time to arrive for Easter."

"Now that's youthful inexperience for you," Locke con-

SCRAMBLE!

tinued, shaking his head ruefully. "Here is a young officer whom we all thought showed some signs of promise. Now we find he doesn't recognize true ability."

"Ability!" Summers shouted in mock surprise.

"Yes, ability, my boy. Of course, some of us are destined to be leaders." Both Locke and Heeney held their heads high with an exaggerated expression of superiority.

"I haven't observed that either of you noble leaders were the guiding force behind your own destinies," Summers remarked jestingly. "In fact," he went on, "when the guiding light around here says 'let's go,' everyone sings one line of the chorus 'Wither Thou Goest!'"

"This is true," agreed Heeney, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Of course, one could stress his individualism. . . ."

"And get fired!" Locke broke in, touching a lighted match to a cigarette firmly entrenched between his lips.

"Who's going to get fired?" questioned Major Conrad, pulling up a chair to join the others, "not our mailman!" he jested, giving Summers a friendly pat on the back.

"No such luck," Locke laughed. "We'll be plagued with him for two years yet."

"Yeah!" added Heeney, "not only do we get assigned to Montana, but we get him, too."

"At least you'll have to agree that the hunting season is great around here," Locke said. "It only took me three days to get my deer last year."

"Gormann got his in three hours," Heeney reminded him.

"Where did he get it?" Summers questioned with interest, missing the wink that passed between the other officers.

"Oh, he happened to be on his way to Helena, but the area doesn't matter, because the results would have been the same anywhere. He spotted a young buck fifty yards from the road and stopped the car. Looking at the deer, he called, '*I want you!*' The animal obediently walked up to the car and dropped dead across the hood."

"Next they'll tell you the Colonel actually led it home, where it dressed itself out," Major Conrad laughed, as Major Able and Lieutenant Haversack entered.

"I think he's coming now," Major Able warned, taking his place at the table next to Conrad.

SCRAMBLE!

"Good morning, sir!" Summers jumped to his feet at the first sight of his boss.

Gormann nodded acknowledgement, and with remarkably few strides, arrived at the head of the table.

"Where's Millard?" he questioned, after having studied the group before him for several seconds.

"Captain Millard went to Fargo yesterday sir," Conrad responded, referring to the Division's Director of Intelligence.

"OK. Good."

Summers watched Gormann's reactions and decided that his last remark was the signal to start the meeting. He opened his log book. His efforts were rewarded with a stare.

What have I done now? he thought, steeling himself for a verbal onslaught.

"You're not married, are you Summers?"

The question caught him by complete surprise. "No, sir . . . I mean . . . I don't think so." he stammered, bewildered. Two or three of the officers laughed and winked slyly. Gormann ignored the laughter.

"You're not *living* with some girl, are you?" he questioned sternly.

"Oh no, sir!"

"Engaged?"

"The others looked with interest at Gormann, knowing that he seldom jested and that there must be some logical reason for this unusual interrogation.

"No, sir, I'm not."

Gormann looked at him for another few moments, nodding slightly to himself, while slowly twisting a pencil between the thumb and forefingers of both hands.

"OK. Good! Let's have the correspondence rundown."

Summers returned to the log book with relief. But disappointment showed on several faces.

Luckily, the volume of correspondence was light and he was able to complete his presentation very quickly. For some reason, he was perspiring, and, when he was through, Gormann was still considering him speculatively.

"That's all I have, sir," he said, closing the log book.

It was obvious that Gormann was thinking of things other than correspondence; however, each member of the staff

S C R A M B L E !

knew that it would be a mistake to assume that he had not caught the information just given him. Undoubtedly, in a few days he would be asking for the results of each piece of correspondence received in these last twenty-four hours.

"OK. Good!" He turned his attention to the next officer.

"Heeney?"

"I have only one item, sir. The quota for the instrument school has been filled. The 28th FIS is sending two pilots and the 54th is sending one."

"Good. Is that all?"

"Yes, sir."

"Locke?"

"I'm going over to Gore Field this afternoon and talk with the commander of the National Guard squadron concerning the jet let-down into Gore Field. We're still using the let-down published on eight March fifty-five. I ran several flight tests on it and found the following," he referred to his note book before continuing. "If the penetration is well executed, the aircraft will level at 6000 feet, less than seven miles from terrain rising to 6151 feet, and less than nine miles from terrain rising to 6300 feet. If a turn of anything less than standard rate is held, if only for a few seconds, and a descent is made to 6000 feet by the completion of the penetration turn, it is possible to come dangerously close . . . or worse . . . to this high terrain." He studied his notes again before closing the book.

"OK, bird-dog it until we get some results."

"Yes, sir. That's all I have."

"Able?"

"I have nothing, sir. We covered all our problems at the meeting in your office yesterday."

"I have nothing either, sir," Haversack, said and then added quickly, as a reminder that he also had attended the meeting with Major Able.

"OK" Gormann nodded, accepting this negative approach and shifting his attention to the last of the staff officers.

"Major Conrad?"

"I have two subjects of major interest for the staff, sir." Conrad began. "First," he picked up a three page TWX telegram to emphasize his remarks, "USAF has approved the

SCRAMBLE!

period one through nineteen July for the ADC Rocketry Meet."

Gormann leaned forward in his chair, allowing both arms to rest on the table, giving the impression that he was about to spring up. The staff recognized the posture as a normal reaction to subjects of vital interest.

Conrad paused to allow his announcement to take effect, noting at the same time that there was an ugly red welt on side of the DO's right hand. It had obviously bled freely. There was a dark stain on the cuff of Gormann's shirt just below the wrist bone. He continued, however, without making vocal or facial indication of his discovery, strongly suspecting the origin of the wound.

"Eastern Air Defense Force will be first. They will have the period one through seven July. Central will be second, eight through thirteen July, and Western will be last, fourteen through nineteen July."

Gorman remained silent while Conrad paused again, this time to allow those taking notes to catch up.

"The air base at Yuma, Arizona, has been designated as the site for the competition. Full instructions will be received not later than twenty May; however, we are to select four pilots from either of our fighter squadrons to represent the Division. In addition, a fifth pilot must be chosen to act as Team Captain. Only two officers in the Division are eligible for this position." Conrad focused his attention on Gormann.

"You, sir, or the Vice Commander, must act as Team Captain since the rules of the competition state"—he picked up the TWX again and quoted—"The Team Captain Must be either the Division Deputy for Operations or the Division Vice Commander'."

Gormann took the offered TWX, glanced at it briefly and placed it in front of him for transport to his office.

"OK. Good! Get together with the commanders of both fighter squadrons. Have them pick four of their best crews for an inter-division shoot off." Gormann sat back in his chair and thought for several seconds. "We'll hold the competition on the 54th FIS rocketry range from five through fifteen May. The top team will represent the Division at Yuma."

S C R A M B L E !

"Which team will you fire with, Colonel?" Conrad questioned, waiting with poised pencil to complete his notes.

"I'll pilot the 29th."

The subject of rocket competition was closed for the moment and the order to move on to the next subject was clearly implied.

"We also received information this morning, sir, that the Strategic Air Command will conduct a full scale simulated strike against the Continental United States and Canada sometime between one November and thirty-one January."

Gormann moved forward in his chair again, but Conrad continued without pause. "They plan to employ every type of bombing vehicle in the SAC inventory. The strike date has been set. However, only a few USAF, ADC and SAC commanders have been given this information. In order to provide maximum operational testing, SAC has invited ADC to use every method at its command to compromise the strike date. This, SAC says, will give them an opportunity to test their own security system. The overall operation has been assigned the code word, 'Exercise Snowboy'."

"Millard! Where's Millard?" Gormann was making some notes of his own now.

"He's at Fargo, sir," Conrad quietly reminded. Gormann made no sign that he had heard the reminder. He was thinking half-aloud.

"I want him to find out *when* they plan to strike. . . . I don't care if he has to steal all the SAC operations plans or kidnap a few of their lead crews." The slightest trace of a smile grew on his face as he savored such a pleasant possibility, but it died as rapidly as it was born.

"I suppose we're limited to dry runs only . . . no actual firing passes?"

"I'm afraid so, sir," Conrad confirmed, not surprised at the DO's ludicrous question. All the officers on his staff were aware of Gormann's displeasure at the very mention of the Strategic Air Command. They knew, however, that he actually had a mature respect for SAC's readiness and visible power. Its latent threat drove him in his efforts to develop a better defense against the day when some foreign power would approach SAC's capabilities.

SCRAMBLE!

"What do we benefit," he often asked his subordinates, "if SAC goes off to war and returns to the United States, fresh with stories of great successes, only to discover that they have no one to tell?"

More than one senior officer had remarked, usually in a joking manner, "It's difficult to find a true isolationist these days, especially in the military, but Gormann fits the picture. He'd have ninety cents out of every defense dollar channeled into the Air Defense Command." In this, Gormann offered no excuses, in fact, for several months a sign hung over his office door: "A STRONG OFFENSE SUPPORTED BY A COMPLETE DEFENSE!" He removed it to save the commander further embarrassment after a visiting congress man was offended by the idea. "Complete defense can't be achieved, Colonel," he had said smiling. "I think your sign is out of place." He hadn't been smiling so superciliously when he finished.

Gormann thought of the congressman as he completed his notes.

"OK," he said, closing the notebook. "We'll use what we have and we'll be ready when they come. Anything more?"

"No, sir."

"OK. Good!"

Summers slid his chair back, thinking the meeting was over.

"You have a pressing appointment, Summers?" Gormann had both elbows on the table with hands folded in front of his face.

"No, sir, I thought . . ."

"Suffer from weak kidneys perhaps?"

"No, sir." His face flushed again.

Locke and Heeney suppressed grins, although in truth they had begun to follow Summers' lead.

"OK. Good." Gormann divided his attention between Locke and Heeney for a moment before continuing. They squirmed uneasily and were grateful when he started on another subject.

"Early this morning, the defensive capability of this Division was reduced through the unacceptable loss of one complex and expensive aircraft. If we were attacked today

S C R A M B L E !

that airplane could spell the difference between life and death for Denver!"

Now there's a cold-blooded approach if I ever heard one, Summers thought, waiting for the DO to continue. We can always build more F-94's.

Gormann sat back looking directly at Conrad. "This morning I went to the crash scene. I arrived about twenty minutes before the crash crew. There was already a sizable group of citizens assembled around the crater, including one Mr. McGregor, the irate land owner. Fortunately, the Montana police were on hand to prevent souvenir vultures from collecting gut-covered momentos."

"Where did you land, Colonel?" Conrad questioned, suspecting that Gormann had cut a few corners in order to arrive before the crash crew.

"In one of McGregor's winter-wheat fields, about fifty yards from the impact area." This explanation confirmed the suspicion in Conrad's mind. "The 94 hit the ground upsidetdown in an eighty degree dive," Gorman stated, relating his findings. "Must have been going 350 knots or more . . . couldn't find a trace of the engine . . . it probably buried itself several feet down. The speed brakes were not open and the canopy had not been blown. Except for a portion of the tail section, there wasn't anything left bigger than this." He held his hands about three feet apart. "I couldn't tell if the afterburner was on, but I suspect a detailed investigation will prove that it wasn't. I waited until the medics dug around for pieces of the crew, then flew around the area trying to find any part of the aircraft which might have come off prior to impact. I found nothing! That airplane hit the ground intact and not because of mechanical failure. Further, the pilot apparently made no effort to correct his dangerous attitude until the last second, and then only pulled the aircraft into the ground. *Why?!*"

"He might have had a bad case of vertigo, Colonel," Heeney suggested.

"Then why didn't he say something? Have you read Lyle's statement yet?" Gormann was looking at Conrad again.

"Yes, sir."

SCRAMBLE!

"Did he mention anything about Tango Lead saying he was in trouble?"

"According to Lyle and Butterworth, Tango Lead made no transmissions for several minutes prior to the crash."

"I thought not. If he had, his RO would have been alerted and tried to talk him out of it. If he found that he couldn't, he'd have bailed out. RO's have bailed out before with less excuse!"

"The RO was probably watching his scope and wasn't aware anything was wrong."

Gormann studied Locke for a second.

"That's my point! How in God's name did they descend thousands of feet . . . end up on their backs . . . and *neither* of them realize that anything was wrong?"

Locke was about to suggest another possibility, but Gormann continued.

"We can rule out instrument malfunction. There were four flight instruments in that aircraft which would indicate that he was going down, not to mention his associated instruments, turn and bank, gyro compass, and the radar scope horizon as back-up, should any of the others go out.

"Did Lyle mention anything about Tango Lead's wing lights going out?"

"No, sir," Conrad responded.

"Then we can rule out electrical failure, and we can also rule out that the pilot was unconscious. The RO would have noted that regardless of his preoccupation; any irregularity in the pilot's breathing would have hit the RO like a bolt of lightning. Did Lyle call any warning to Tango Lead?"

"Yes, sir, he states that he yelled, 'We're upsidedown!'"

"Hmm—good! That explains one thing. Tango Lead heard the warning and pulled back on the stick. Why he didn't roll out as Lyle did, I don't know." Gormann paused a moment to consider a new thought.

"I doubt if he would have made it even if he had rolled out, but at least he'd have hit a little flatter."

Great! Summers thought. They could have died in an upright position.

"How Lyle made it will remain a mystery to me," Gormann continued, unaware of his administrative officers' displeasure.

SCRAMBLE!

"According to McGregor, Lyle all but flew through their second floor. In addition, he was headed for the mountains less than two miles behind their house. I suspect he came very near hitting them."

"The accident is unusual in one respect only, Colonel." Gormann rested on his elbows again, hands folded in front of his face, waiting for Conrad to continue. "The unusual aspect of this accident lies in the fact that the wing-man survived. Similar accidents have occurred with two, three, and more wing-men who followed their flight leader right into the ground. Usually, the accident investigation board finds the cause to be pilot error, suggesting that the flight leader misread his altimeter, misinterpreted his gyro horizon, or a combination of both. The reasons behind this pilot error are never satisfactorily explained, and I doubt if any factual findings come out of this investigation." Conrad paused to accept a cigarette offered by Locke, nodding his thanks as he continued.

"I will not be surprised if the aero-medical people announce that they have discovered psychological effects—not previously suspected—which play an important role in a fighter pilot's ability to react during periods of night-weather operation. All of us here, who have been in the fighter business for any length of time, can recount numerous strains and pressures we go through every time we fly. Most of these—let's call them nervous tensions—are not apparent, even to some of the more astute flight surgeons. One example of these tensions is the psychological desire to urinate. In fact, the last thing a pilot does before he goes to his airplane is visit the nearest latrine, even though the flight will last less than an hour-and-a-half. Pilots on alert waiting to be scrambled are denied this last minute luxury and consequently the tension centers around their stomach in the form of uneasiness. Once he is strapped into the cockpit the strain seems to be relieved somewhat, although he will never really relax until he's back on the ground. Due to this period of compressed tension he feels completely enervated after only one flight. The fact that he may fly two or three times per day does not in any way negate the fact that he had gone through the strain—mentally—in one flight, equal to a

SCRAMBLE!

day of demanding concentration. What I've said applies only to daily routine flying or scrambles. Night-weather scrambles are worse.

"I think we will all agree that fighter pilots approach night-weather from a completely different point of view than, say, day or even day-weather flying. Psychologists would probably argue that, since the airplane operates fundamentally the same night or day, in good or poor weather, the underlying cause must be a personality complex; therefore, through proper screening, men of this type could be weeded out before they go through flying school. For myself, I am not equipped scholastically to argue with them; however, few of them have experienced the feelings of a pilot as he drives into a night overcast at over 400 knots only to become engulfed in a great, black sheet of nothingness."

"Head-shrinkers! They're nothing but a bunch of head-shrinkers!" Gormann muttered, waiting for Conrad to continue.

"Let's consider Tango Lead for a moment. He was in bed and we have to assume asleep when the scramble was sounded. In all probability he didn't even remember hearing the scramble order when he found himself running to his airplane. Starting the aircraft was second nature, as were taxi and take-off. The chances are that he wasn't fully awake until sometime after he was airborne. This sudden transition is, in itself, a tremendous psychological jarring into reality. Add to that his responsibility as flight leader, not to mention a responsibility for his own safety. From sleep he is now in a struggle for life, with his only hope of salvation an instrument panel full of rapidly changing gauges and dials. In addition, he must receive instructions from the GCI controller, convert them into physical movement which will place his fighter on the right track. During all of this, he must not take his eyes from the instrument-life line. Changing radio frequencies, adjusting cockpit lights, and the many other tasks allotted to the throttle arm are accomplished without visual guidance. It goes without saying—*this man is a prime target for vertigo!*" Conrad touched a match to the cigarette and drew in a deep supply of the relaxing smoke.

"Olsen was an experienced pilot and would certainly

SCRAMBLE!

recognize the dangers of vertigo. With determination he could fight off its effects without his RO being any the wiser—especially if he broke into the clear on top of the overcast before the vertigo became too serious. I'd venture to guess that Olsen breathed a sigh of relief when he topped the weather. Shortly after breaking into the clear, Tango Lead received instructions to descend, which meant re-entering the overcast. Olsen had probably ceased monitoring his instruments with the intensity required for weather operation as soon as he found himself in the clear—now he was back on them again. The dangers inherent in rapid change from instruments to visual flight, then back to instruments, is well known. It's a perfect set-up for vertigo and I'd wager that he felt the effects. The RO, of course, busy at this point trying to locate the target, was not aware that his pilot was having difficulty. Olsen more than likely could have fought his problem and won, but at this point a new factor is introduced: the little fright, those sudden, horrifying moments resulting from insignificant events, the sudden blinking of one of the many cockpit warning lights, a vibration of one of the engine instruments, the throbbing of the altitude regulator, a change in engine harmonics. I could go on and on. Little frights may be caused by a million things, even fly speck on the canopy. Too many little frights, especially if they come on top of an already strained condition, might conceivably induce a mental freeze. The pilot might still maintain a certain control, mechanically, but could not adjust to the rapid loss of altitude or changing attitude unless his environment changed before he was too close to the ground.

"For Olsen his environment was the weather. He broke out of it only a few hundred feet above the ground. He may have conquered the effects within seconds after breaking out, but it was too late and his corrective application in error." Conrad paused to take a drag on his cigarette, which by now had burned halfway down.

"He must have made dozens of scrambles just like this one," Heeney remarked pensively. "Why should he react differently now?"

"Because," Conrad answered, "this scramble wasn't like

SCRAMBLE!

dozens of others. Something must have been added, perhaps only one small factor: Exactly what it was we'll probably never know. But this I do know. Some pilots will scramble consistently without encountering all the factors. Some will meet and luck-out through some fortunate set of circumstances. Some will quit before it catches up with them, and, unfortunately some will die!"

"OK. Good! What's your solution?" Gormann said.

"Colonel, I can see only one solution. Don't wait for bad weather before scrambling. Seek it out. Fly in it all the time even when the fog hides half of the runway and you can't tell where the ceiling begins. An all-weather pilot should be capable of landing without incident when the weather is fifty feet and visibility less than one-third of a mile. In addition, every ADC pilot standing alert should fly his aircraft a minimum of six times per week and log at least five hundred hours per year in that aircraft. Furthermore, he should have three years of experience as a fighter pilot before assignment to the Air Defense Command. I doubt if the Air Force will ever buy the three-year idea so we will have to do with what we have. Therefore, I'd fly them every day, regardless of the weather. We may lose a few, but in the long run we would have a better all-weather capability and a better flying safety record, too."

"OK. Good!" Gormann had long ago arrived at this same solution and was secretly pleased to have the opinion shared by his senior staff officer. "You may find that solution a little difficult to sell to the 'Boy Scouts' who build their reputation on a flying safety plaque!"

"I've run into that problem before, sir, and my opinion has not changed."

"OK. Good!" Gormann stood up and started for his office, calling over his shoulder, "Summers, come into my office; I want you."

I knew it, Summers thought as he replied, "Yes, sir."

Gormann was seated at his desk, searching for something or other in his correspondence drawer, when Summers presented himself.

"Sir, you wanted to see me?"

SCRAMBLE!

Gormann looked up and was about to say something, but Colonel Hastings stepped into the office at that moment.

"Wes, do you have a minute?"

"Yes, sir." Gormann started to get up, but Hastings motioned him to remain seated.

"Summers, how are you today?"

"Fine, thank you, sir."

"Wes, you know a Mr. Lloyd C. Roundtree?"

"I've heard of him. He's one of the important citizens of Great Falls."

"Probably the most important. He has connections from one end of the country to the other and he's up to his ears in politics on a national level."

"Are we to be honored by a visit?" Gormann questioned, suspecting the worst and not hiding his displeasure.

"I'm afraid so, Wes, and I think I know what's on his mind. This morning his secretary called, informing me, I might add, that Mr. Roundtree is a very busy man and could only spare the time between three-thirty and four-thirty, but that it was absolutely imperative that he see me. Therefore, it would be appreciated if I set this time aside for his visit."

Hastings took one of the chairs near Gormann's desk and made himself comfortable. "As you know," he continued, after he was settled, "a small group of people around Great Falls have started an anti-noise campaign aimed at curtailing jet operations from Malstrom and Gore Field. The Air National Guard will have to fight the problem as related to Gore Field, but on Malstrom the problem is ours. Most of the city fathers, and that includes the mayor, understand our problems and continually strive for better community-Air Force relations. I think we will both agree that in this respect Great Falls has set an outstanding example; we have been accepted as full community members, not as unwelcomed visitors."

Gormann nodded his agreement.

"When I heard the two fighters scramble last night I was prepared for a call from the anti-noise group. This time, however, it was more than a call! Mr. Roundtree and two of his anti-noise associates will visit us this afternoon at three-thirty."

S C R A M B L E !

"I'll be here, sir," Gormann said. "Do you want me to get anyone else?"

"No, Wes, you'll be enough. I'll call you when they arrive."

"Call the squadron and tell them I want Lyle and Butterworth here by two-thirty," Gormann instructed his secretary, as Colonel Hastings departed. Then he began to search through his drawer. When he located the papers he wanted he motioned for Summers to sit down.

"The two officers will be here at two-thirty, sir," the girl stated, placing the phone down. "Is there anything else before I go to lunch?"

"No, go ahead."

Summers watched the pert figure leave the office.

"Summers, I'm gratified to see that you have an eye for a well-turned ankle."

"I . . . Yes, sir."

"Good! Now forget it. I have more important work for you. But first," Gormann picked up the papers he had placed in front of him, "I have an application . . . signed by you . . . requesting pilot training."

Summers remained silent.

"I am, of course, delighted that you have a desire to fly for the Air Force. It's very commendable indeed and I shall do what I can to assist you. I have also noted that you applied for a regular commission, which indicates that you plan to make the Air Force your life-time profession."

"Yes, sir!"

"Good! Then you must be deeply interested in community relations?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Good! You just heard Colonel Hastings and, I assume, recognize the position the Air Division is in, at least from an anti-noise viewpoint."

"Yes, sir."

"Good! I'll see Mr. VIP this afternoon and endeavor to cement relations in my own way. But, it so happens there is another little trouble area. That's where you come in!"

Oh! Oh! Summers thought, wondering what the outcome of this would be.

"A good commander will utilize every method and weapon

SCRAMBLE!

at his command to achieve a victory. I fancy myself a good commander, if somewhat unorthodox in my approach, at times."

True, Summers agreed to himself, but what an understatement!

"You, Summers, are to receive the opportunity of being both my method and my weapon."

"Yes, sir." Now he was really confused.

"This morning—as you will recall I mentioned at the staff meeting—I met a Mr. McGregor. Although this was our first face-to-face encounter, I knew something of him through indirect association. It so happens that he thinks the government, in general, and the Air Force, in particular, is trying to run him off his land. He's a big land owner and consequently it was inevitable that sooner or later a highway would be run through his property. According to him they selected some of the most productive areas. Not too long ago the Air Force built a radar station on his land and it is currently looking at more of his holdings elsewhere in the state. He, of course, was well paid for the land, but money is of little interest to him. He has more than he will ever use, but he claims land is getting harder to find. To add fuel to the fire, one of our fighters dug up a wheat field near his house this morning, and, I might add, I ran over a little of it myself when I landed."

Great, Summers thought. How to win friends and influence people.

"I need hardly point out," Gormann continued, "this man has a singular dislike for the Air Force." Gormann allowed time for the words to strike home. "McGregor is a man of large stature and many interests, both in Havre and Great Falls. He is a member of several influential organizations and a man who likes to get things done. I'm sure I could like him if I had the time. *That's* where you come in! I want you to bring him into the fold—an Air Force supporter, so to speak."

Summers swallowed heavily. "I'll do my best, sir," he said, not having the slightest idea where to start.

"Good! The next pilot school begins in three months.

SCRAMBLE!

Complete your assignment by then and I'll see that you are in that class."

"Thank you, sir."

"This doesn't relieve you of your daily responsibilities to the Air Force, you understand."

"Yes, sir."

"However, if you need any assistance for the proper accomplishment of this project, see me. I've been known to cut corners or stretch regulations . . . if it's for the good of the service."

"Yes, sir. I'll remember. Is there anything else?"

"No. Go to lunch."

"Yes, sir." Summers started for the door.

"Summers . . .!"

"Yes, sir."

"You might be interested to know that McGregor has a daughter, a senior at the College of Great Falls. Nancy is her name, I believe . . ."

"Yes, sir, thank you, sir," he replied, thinking, I'll never figure this man out. He never misses anything.

Summers felt a little better as he returned to his office. He did, in fact, have one or two connections in the College of Great Falls.

A light snow had begun to fall by the time Lyle and Butterworth pulled into the Division's parking lot.

"I can think of a million things I'd rather be doing," Butterworth announced, when Lyle finally located an unreserved area several yards from the Block House.

"I'll bet more sleep heads the list," Lyle replied, climbing out of the car without bothering to remove the ignition keys.

"You guessed right," Butterworth answered. "I didn't get to bed until after nine o'clock and then I didn't get much rest. You woke me once to tell me about the new hour of our appointment with you-know-who. Then, that cleaning woman can't read. I had a 'Do Not Disturb' sign in plain sight on the door—in three languages, yet—but that didn't stop her."

He was still complaining when Locke greeted them at the reception desk.

SCRAMBLE!

"You the welcoming committee?" Butterworth asked, pausing long enough to receive an answer.

"Let's say I'm your guide, Butterball," Locke replied with a grin.

"The only guide I want is a bell-hop to show me to my room."

"If you get any more sleep they'll have to send you to the dispensary for bedsores."

"Well, let's get it over with," Lyle suggested wearily, not feeling much like bantering. They followed Locke up the stairs and into Gormann's office. Lyle was relieved when he found that the Colonel was not in.

"He'll be here in a few minutes. Pull up a chair and make yourselves comfortable." Locke pointed to a couple of chairs next to Gormann's desk.

Butterworth dropped into the nearest chair, forcing Lyle to take one closer to the DO's desk. Lyle sat down, unbuttoned his topcoat and wished his eyes wouldn't burn so much.

"See you later," Locke announced, heading for the door.

"OK," Lyle nodded.

"Yeah—see you later." Butterworth chimed in, adding, "No witnesses to the third degree . . . not even a secretary!"

For a few minutes both remained silent. Lyle occupied his time by looking through the pane glass wall behind Gormann's desk. The majority of the Combat Operations Center could easily be observed and Lyle noted that the large, vertical plotting board was bare of aircraft tracks. He allowed his eyes to wander over to the Weather Status Board.

"Not much improvement," he mused, as he checked down the lengthy list of weather reports from all corners of the 29th Air Division. For a moment his attention was drawn to two figures behind the plotting board. They both had paper cups in their hands and appeared to be sitting comfortably, sipping coffee. The sight turned his mind to the events of a previous evening. He was flying formation again. He closed his eyes and the rushing weather and blinking lights were there. He was mentally on his back again when Gormann entered. He jumped to his feet—a little too rapidly perhaps, and he was slightly confused for a moment.

SCRAMBLE!

"Take off your coats," Gormann ordered, pointing to a coat-rack behind the partially closed door.

Lyle followed Butterworth, taking the opportunity to remove his handkerchief and mop his forehead.

"OK, let's have a rundown on your part of this fiasco!" Gormann said, directing his remarks to Lyle.

"I hardly think it was a *fiasco*, Colonel." Lyle's eyes blazed.

"No? What would you call it—skill and cunning? A display of consummate flying ability? A successful showing of Air Defense Operations, perhaps?"

Lyle had come to this meeting fully expecting to give an account of the accident. He thought Gormann would ask some direct questions and even find fault, but his was more than he could take and he was angry, damned angry!

"I don't care what *you* call it Colonel!" Butterworth placed a restraining hand on Lyle's arm, but he shook it off and looked straight into Gormann's face. "We were called upon to do a job and we did it to the best of our ability. We didn't ask to be scrambled last night, Colonel." Lyle was speaking well above a normal tone of voice and over-emphasizing "Colonel." "We answered that scramble order and two damned good men gave their lives because of it!"

Gormann met the hate-filled eyes without blinking.

"'Killed themselves' would be a better term, and 'took their own lives' would be more descriptive, I think," Gormann suggested, dropping his head and studying Lyle from under his eyebrows.

Lyle gripped both arms of the chair to keep from jumping over the desk and bodily attacking the Deputy for Operations. His knuckles grew white with the strain, but he finally managed to control himself and he drew a deep breath.

"What were you doing, Colonel, when these two men 'took their own lives?' "

Butterworth's eyes were wide with amazement and fear. He had never seen Lyle like this before.

"Me . . .?" Gormann almost sounded surprised. "I was sleeping peacefully."

"Hmmm!" Lyle sat back with an unmistakable sneer on

SCRAMBLE!

his face. He felt as if he had driven a sword through the earthly embodiment of pure evil and destroyed it.

"That was my assignment at the moment . . . Lieutenant. What was yours?"

Lyle was caught off-guard. The thrust of the sword had been expected, encouraged, and fatally countered. Gormann had been trying to rile him.

"OK. Good! Start from the beginning and don't spare me the details." Gormann sat back toying with a pencil while Lyle and Butterworth recounted their actions of the preceding day. It was 3:35 when they finished and Colonel Hastings's secretary entered to announce that the "gentlemen" had arrived. Gormann nodded his understanding.

"OK. Good! I've found out what I wanted to know. You may take off until tomorrow. I've had you placed back on alert tomorrow night. Questions?"

"No, sir." Lyle answered for both of them.

When the two officers departed, Gormann took a small note book from his desk. Most of the pages were filled, but he found a clean one and made an entry.

"Lyle—good pilot. Competent officer. With help can be an excellent pilot and an outstanding Air Defense officer!"

"Colonel Gormann will be here shortly, gentlemen."

Gormann paused in the anti-room adjoining Hastings's office as the Vice Commander addressed the visitors.

"Is it absolutely necessary that he be present, Colonel?"

"Roundtree!" Gormann muttered to himself, detecting an edge of impatience in the hidden speaker's words.

"After all you are in charge—or so I've been told—while the General is away."

"That's true, Mr. Roundtree. I am in command during the absence of the General, but Colonel Gormann is our most capable and experienced officer and I feel that his presence will be beneficial."

"More capable and experienced than yourself, Colonel? I'm surprised to hear such a candid appraisal of one who probably covets your job."

Gormann recognized the conspicuous attempt by Round-

S C R A M B L E !

tree to throw the Vice Commander off balance. He decided to wait a moment before going in.

Colonel Hastings had obviously walked over to his desk to sit down before immediately responding to the pointed question.

"In many respects, Colonel Gormann is more capable and experienced than most of us. I doubt if he covets my job, however, since it is an Air Force policy to advance capable officers to greater responsibility as they develop in stature and maturity. Colonel Gormann already has these prerequisites and in due time will be moved up."

Let's see what his answer is to that, Gormann mused, neither moved or displeased at the esteem voiced by his superior, but admiring the composure of his tone.

"Very laudatory praise for one who is only a lieutenant colonel, I'm sure, but be that as it may, I am a busy man and so far I've received nothing but the run-around treatment ever since I tried to call the commander of this base last night. It seems you are the only one in authority on this entire installation. Therefore, Mr. Wilson, Mr. Newwater, Mr. Carroll and myself will present our complaint to you and hope for some satisfaction."

Must have brought an extra citizen, Gormann thought, recalling that the original group was to consist of three.

"It is our sincere desire to make Great Falls a model city. All four of us have business interests in this area. And some of us, I might add, have far-reaching business interests which are not unknown in our nation's capital."

The hidden meaning in Roundtree's words was clear.

"Every city and town in the United States, it seems is forced to accept some type of association with the military. Our *law makers* have seen fit to wish this upon the people, even though there are hundreds of places in the country where the military could operate and not interfere with the peaceful pursuits of hard-working citizens. This association is at best unsavory—"

"Unsavory, Mr. Roundtree?" There was a note of severity in Hasting's question.

"Yes, unsavory. Take the field here. The government selected the best land adjoining our city on which to build

S C R A M B L E !

this base. Then, not content with endangering our lives every day by flying recklessly over the city, they have to introduce the noisiest airplanes they can find to disturb the peace and quiet—not to mention lowering the value of the surrounding real estate.”

“I don’t think we can say that the airplanes are flying recklessly over the city, Lloyd.”

That would be Paul Wilson, Gormann speculated, not missing the familiarity with which he addressed Mr. VIP.

“The aircraft generally fly around the city, but when they do fly over it they remain at a safe altitude.”

“Well, Mr. Carroll will attest to their adverse affect on real estate,” Roundtree said politely, displaying the first sign of respect since they had gone into the Vice Commander’s office.

“I certainly can, Mr. Roundtree. I’ve been fighting against the location of this base since they decided to build it in 1939.”

Gormann listened to this little speech with interest and marked Carroll down for a yes man. On the other hand, Wilson had recently been a guest of the President for a week-end of golf, something Roundtree had not yet achieved. Gormann decided Wilson was the key to Roundtree.

“I agree with Paul. The problem isn’t one of endangering our community. It’s simply one of noise, Lloyd.” Gormann guessed this was Newwater talking. “Maybe Carroll has suffered some in the real estate business, but the bases around the country have generally been a shot in the arm to the local economy, and Great Falls is no exception. However, Colonel Hastings, we would like to discuss the noise problem. Mr. Roundtree, as one of our most prominent citizens, was selected to conduct an investigation with the aim of reducing the jet noise. We have, as you know, written two letters to the General asking for his cooperation. We received replies expressing his whole-hearted approval and stating that positive action was being taken. I, for one, have to admit that there has been a noticeable improvement.”

“Maybe *you* think so, Ken,” Roundtree stated, “but you live further away from it than I do. I can hardly say last night was any indication of improvement. To wake an entire

SCRAMBLE!

city in the middle of the night, just because a couple of pilots, who probably slept all day, had nothing better to do is not positive action in my book!"

Hastings was about to say something, but Gormann stepped into the office. "Sorry I've kept you waiting, gentlemen, but I was detained at the last moment gathering some information."

Hastings stood up. "Wes, I don't believe you've met any of these people. This is Mr. Lloyd C. Roundtree. You've heard of him I'm sure!"

"No, sir. Can't say I have." Hastings made no show of surprise.

"What was the name again, sir?" he asked, extending his hand. Wilson grinned knowingly.

"Roundtree! Lloyd C. Roundtree!" There was a look of incredulity in his eyes. Gormann shook his hand forcefully. "Nice to meet you, Mr. Roundtree," he said.

"This is Mr. Fred Carroll, Wes, of Carroll Real Estate."

"Mr. Carroll." Gormann clasped the offered hand firmly but momentarily. Like shaking hands with a wet fish, he thought.

"Wes, this is Mr. Kenneth Newwater, whose interests lie in the oil business, I believe."

"Ah yes, Mr. Newwater; first wave, Omaha Beach, June '44. You have my deepest admiration and respect, sir."

"Thank you, Colonel." Newwater expressed his appreciation in a warm handshake.

"And this is Mr. Paul Wilson, one of Montana's most successful attorneys."

"Yes, I've met Captain Wilson briefly." It was Wilson's turn to be surprised.

"First Fighter Group . . . 1943 . . . Africa . . . Operations Officer . . . 94th Fighter Squadron."

"Yes! How did you know?" There was keen interest in the Attorney's voice. "I don't recall running into you before—though I will admit I've heard of you before."

"It was on a Sunday morning in August '43, about ten o'clock, I believe," Gormann continued. "Your boys were returning from a sweep over the desert. All the squadron had landed except two fighters. They were five minutes

SCRAMBLE!

behind the rest. One was shot-up and the other was escorting him back." Wilson's eyes were wide and his mouth half-open. "The crippled aircraft landed OK, but the second started to go around, dropped his gear and flaps for landing when an ME-109 bounced him. Shot off his right flap with the first burst, as I recall, before another American fighter pilot in a P-51 with blue wing-tips sent the 109 down." Wilson was making strange noises in his throat. "The 109 crashed at the approach end of the runway and the blue-tipped 51 escorted the cripple around the pattern to a safe landing, then went on about his business."

"You!" Wilson yelled, grabbing Gormann's hand and throwing his other arm around the larger man. "I tried for weeks to find out who you were, but could never catch up with your squadron." Wilson stepped back to look at this man whom he had often wondered about. "I even knew that a Captain Gormann was the commanding officer of the blue-tipped P-51 outfit, but we were moving so fast in those days that it was difficult to keep in touch. How did you know it was me?"

"When our intelligence checked on my kill report, I had them find out who the pilot was in the aircraft that nearly got shot down in the pattern. They filled me in on the details."

"I can't get over it!" Wilson exclaimed. "All this time you've practically been my neighbor."

"We'll have a lengthy chat soon, when everyone isn't so pressed for time," Gorman concluded, noting that Roundtree and Carroll had already returned to their chairs.

"Finel" Wilson agreed, not at all pleased at the way Carroll was tapping his foot.

"Now, how may I be of service to you, gentlemen?" Gormann questioned, moving his armchair into a position facing the group.

"I don't know, Colonel. What can you do for us?" Roundtree's voice was contemptuous. Gormann simply sat back, crossed his legs and considered Roundtree silently.

"I'm afraid, Wes, Mr. Roundtree is disappointed with our efforts at reducing the noise factor associated with jet operation."

S C R A M B L E !

"What effort has been made, Colonel?" Carroll questioned dubiously.

"We have introduced several changes in our operation, Mr. Carroll, and several more are under study." Gormann had not changed his relaxed position in the chair. "As the General stated," he continued, "the noise problem is not one of local concern only. Many metropolitan areas, from Tacoma, Washington, to Dover, Delaware, have been fighting this same problem."

"Our problem is local, Colonel, not national, although it appears that we may have to seek assistance from higher governmental sources to solve it."

"A conceivable solution, Mr. Roundtree, but less effective, perhaps than local cooperation."

Wilson and Newwater nodded approvingly.

"As you know, sir, our runway is aligned approximately in a north-south direction, with Great Falls situated about three and a half miles to the west. Therefore, our first action consisted of instructing all pilots to turn toward the east immediately after take-off. When aircraft take-off toward the north, and this can only be done when the wind is from the north, our problem is nearly solved. We have discovered that taking-off to the north causes little complaint from the town. The reason, of course, is that we are immediately moving away from the city and, therefore, the engine sound is only heard as it goes away. On the other hand, taking off to the south brings us parallel to the eastern edge of Great Falls for some seconds and the engine noise rapidly builds up deafening vibrations. We can reduce the build-up factor by cutting down on engine power right after take-off, and we do so by moving the throttle out of afterburner operation.

"The solution, it would seem then, Colonel, is to instruct your pilots not to use this afterburner device during take-off."

Hastings was surprised at the pleasant and almost understanding tone of the suggestion offered by Roundtree.

"That would endanger the pilots, Lloyd," Wilson interrupted. "I'm sure Colonel Gormann can explain why."

"Mr. Wilson is correct," Gormann continued. "Not only is it dangerous, but it reduces the entire effectiveness of the aircraft as well. The F-94C, like all Air Defense Command

SCRAMBLE!

interceptors, is powered for rapid acceleration to climb speed. Taking off without afterburner would require a longer time plus considerably more runway. In fact, during hot weather, it might require more runway than is available. However, I'm sure that you must have noticed a sudden decrease in afterburner noise—it's almost as if the engine had stopped—shortly after the fighter passes over the southern end of the runway."

Roundtree and the others nodded, all except Carroll, who still showed animosity.

"The cause of this sudden reduction is the result of the pilot's coming out of afterburner. As soon as he is away from the city he may go into burner operation again, but by then he is well away from populated areas. There is an exception to this, of course, and that is when aircraft are on an actual scramble. At this time the prime concern is getting airborne and up to target altitude as fast as possible. This operation is necessary and must be accomplished if we are to fulfill our mission.

"There has been some question raised by other communities concerning the necessity of basing fighters with such a high noise ratio near metropolitan areas at all. This type of questioning is the result of little knowledge, and I fear, gentlemen, less thinking. Our ADC fighters are located at points throughout the country where they will be most effective. There are other considerations as well, such as access to transportation, housing, logistics and many others."

"What about last night, Colonel? Was it absolutely necessary that your fighters wake everyone in the middle of the night?"

Gorman ignored the sarcasm in Carroll's voice, but answered the question by replying, "They were on an active scramble, Mr. Carroll. Our radar sites reported an unknown aircraft heading toward the U.S. and these two airplanes were sent up to find out what markings that aircraft was displaying."

"Are you trying to tell us that one unknown airplane must be identified? Really, Colonel, I'm not a military man now, but I hardly think one lone bomber will attack the United States!"

SCRAMBLE!

"No, you're not, Mr. Carroll, and that's why as a taxpayer you pay the bill for people who are. If we did not require that every unknown aircraft be identified we would be poor military planners. In a business sense, we are trying to give you what you're paying for. If you want police protection only when it's convenient, then yes, one bomber could knock a large hole in the U.S. defenses, big enough to allow unopposed formations to enter. *We cannot permit this to occur.*"

"I'm convinced that you have made a serious effort, Colonel," Newwater said, looking at Gormann, then at Wilson.

"I agree. How about you, Lloyd?" It was the attorney's turn to question Roundtree.

"I'm beginning to see the problem in a different aspect, Paul. I'm not at all sure I follow Colonel Gormann's reasoning about one bomber so weakening our defenses that numerous others could enter unopposed," Roundtree said. "However, as he says, that's what he's paid for, and I will accept his appraisal of a possible situation. I think though, that more study by our community, as well as by the military, will have to be conducted if we are to achieve even greater gains than those outlined by Colonel Gormann."

"I for one, Mr. Roundtree," said Carroll, "find Colonel Gormann's theory lacking in reality. I served in the army during the war and, although I wasn't fortunate enough to serve in one of the more glorified arms of the service, I nevertheless learned something of tactics myself."

Corporal in the Army Procurement Agency, Gormann speculated, and was not far wrong. The realtor had served three years in procurement, rising to the rank of staff sergeant.

"I suspect that the Colonel's bomber scare is only an excuse to pass the buck, Mr. Roundtree. How else can he justify not taking disciplinary action against those irresponsible pilots who subjected the entire town to the terrifying experience of waking up in the middle of the night to the sound of screaming jets!"

Roundtree was about to say something but decided to let Gormann speak. The latter's jaw was set so firmly that it gave the impression his whole face would shatter if anyone touched it.

S C R A M B L E !

"Did the screaming jets awaken you, Mr. Carroll?" Gorman's words were pure ice.

"You're damned right they did! And everyone else too!"

"Did you go back to sleep, Mr. Carroll?"

"What difference does that make?"

"I take it then that you remained awake for the rest of the night?"

"I went back to sleep, but that doesn't excuse your pilots or your policies either." Carroll was trying to stand up to his questioner, but was finding it increasingly difficult.

"Were the screaming jets the only screams you heard, Mr. Carroll?"

The realtor looked puzzled, but Gorman continued. "Do you live anywhere near 3rd Avenue North and 19th Street, Mr. Carroll?"

"What's that got to do with it? Yes, I do, and if you're going to tell me that the jets can't be heard from there . . . well, I've got news for you!" Carroll's voice was defiant.

"No, I'm not, Mr. Carroll. I'm well aware how far sound travels at night." Gorman studied his angry opponent.

"Tell me, Mr. Carroll, was the screaming of the jets the only screaming you heard last night?" Carroll's face still showed puzzlement at the question. Roundtree and Newwater were just as puzzled but Hastings lowered his head—he knew what was coming next. Wilson's eyes were wide with sudden understanding.

"I didn't hear them coming back if that's what you mean," his voice was a little lower now.

"I'm surprised that you didn't hear the other screaming. Mr. Carroll. Think, Mr. Carroll, about 3:30 this morning. The screaming at that hour woke up many people in the neighborhood. It was much more terrifying than the jets, Mr. Carroll. It was a screaming of agony, a screaming of hate, a screaming of pathos, a screaming of loss, Mr. Carroll. A screaming to God!"

"Wh-what are you talking about?" Carroll was having trouble speaking now.

"Last night after you went back to sleep, Mr. Carroll, I drove to a house in Great Falls. With me, Mr. Carroll, was a doctor and a chaplain. I stopped in front of that house and

SCRAMBLE!

paused several seconds to ask for strength for what I was about to do. I walked up to the house—it was dark and sleeping—but, all too soon, a light appeared in the doorway in answer to my ring. A man opened the door and I heard a woman's voice call out, 'Who is it, Harry?' 'Three Air Force Officers,' he called softly, still keeping us standing in the doorway. 'They want to see Mrs. Olsen,' In a moment, Mr. Carroll, a middle-aged woman joined her husband. They rented part of their house to the Olsen's. She took one look at me—perhaps my face told the whole story. She drew in a deep breath, put her hands over her mouth and gasped. *She looked at me in terror*, Mr. Carroll.

"I was about to ask them to get Mrs. Olsen when the young lady herself appeared at the head of the stairs. 'What is it, Mrs. Baker?' We all remained silent as she came down the stairs. When she saw me, she started to smile! 'Colonel Gormann, what are you doing here at this late hour?' The smile began to fade when she noticed the doctor behind me and then I knew her eyes were focused on the little silver cross on the chaplain's uniform. Slowly she let her eyes return to mine. Her lips were trying to speak. Quietly at first, she began to whisper, 'Colonel . . . you . . . promised . . . Colonel, you promised . . . *Colonel, you promised!*' In a moment the soft pretty face started to change. She wasn't whispering now, Mr. Carroll. She was screaming words that shouldn't have to come from her. She attacked me, and it was all I could do, with the help of the others, to hold her. I suffered the loss of this button"—Gormann moved his hand to his left pocket—"and a few minor scratches." He held out his right hand.

"Before the doctor could quiet her with a sedative, the police had arrived, in answer to the reports of screams coming from a usually quiet home. With their help we got her back to bed and mercifully asleep. But do you know what I remember most of all, Mr. Carroll? Her tears! Tears which continued to flow even when the sedative had taken effect. They ran down her face, wetting the pillow her husband must have used. She pulled it to her breast, and held it even in sleep!

"What, Mr. Carroll, do you think she will say when she

SCRAMBLE!

learns that her husband woke you in the middle of the night?

"You see two weeks before they were married, she came to me—the first woman to do so—and told me she didn't want her future husband to fly. I assured her that Lieutenant Olsen was a fine pilot and his prospects for an outstanding career were excellent. I told her not to worry and even attended the wedding. Her husband never knew of her visit. He only knew that a scramble was ordered. He answered it; he died because of it.

"No, Mr. Carroll, I don't think she would consider your loss excessive. This was her second night of terror. The first was when her brother died on a scramble in the New York area. In fact, Mr. Carroll, I doubt if she would consider you at all. She will, however, for a time blame and hate me. Therefore, I suggest, Mr. Carroll—let my pilots alone and concentrate on me!"

CHAPTER TWO

SHORTLY AFTER reservicing the L-20, Sergeant Littlefield was ordered to pick two men and report to the scene of the crash. He didn't consider the assignment an unusual one. After all it was a 29th Fighter Squadron aircraft.

In the selection of airmen, however, he met the usual resistance. He hoped to find two fairly experienced men with a reasonable knowledge of what to look for after they arrive at the crash site. It was more easily considered than accomplished. Each airman approached had, it seemed, other vital and pressing duties which demanded his closest attention.

Littlefield finally settled for Morton and Beasley. Morton,

SCRAMBLE!

of course, worked for him and that ruled out any excuse whatsoever. Beasley, who was the same age as Morton and just as inexperienced, was driving the fuel truck that rolled to a stop in front of the L-20. His greeting to Littlefield was innocent enough, if untimely:

"Sure not enough activity around here to keep a man busy when the weather's bad . . . eh, Sarg?"

When the doomed fighter smashed into the winter-wheat field, the damp ground reduced the explosive effects of fire and JP-4 fuel. The blast, however, generated sufficient heat to scorch an area fifteen feet around the point of impact, but for the past twenty-four hours, an intermittent snowfall had succeeded in erasing any trace of scorching. During the night, the temperature had dropped into the teens and had not risen above twenty as Littlefield and his two helpers struggled hour after hour to unearth any remaining pieces of twisted metal still buried in the hardening crater. Each new find was transported to the top and deposited on a small canvas rug. All larger sections of the aircraft, and there were few, other than a metal ball that had once been an engine, were removed the previous day.

The base crash crew did not show up the second day, probably convinced that the personnel from the 29th FIS could locate those last pieces which the aircraft accident investigators would require for a complete study and analysis. Littlefield adjusted the parka hood over his head for the hundredth time. It managed to slip back every few minutes while he was digging and the snow falling down his neck caused him increasing discomfort. He poked the ground several times testingly with a pointed shovel. It slid easily through four or five inches of snow, then clanged dully.

Can't win this way, he thought, and began climbing the steps scooped out of the side of the crater, using his shovel like a ski pole. Some distance away, two vehicles, one of them a truck from Malmstrom, the other an enclosed jeep from the nearest radar site, were almost entirely shrouded in snow. Three figures, their features indistinguishable, stood against the jeep. One of the figures began wiping the snow from the windshield of the small vehicle.

SCRAMBLE!

Snow's really coming down now, Littlefield mused, trying to peer through the whiteness for further evidence that preparations were under way to depart.

"What's the pitch, Sarg?" Morton called anxiously, hoping the NCO would give the order to quit work.

"I'm going over and talk to the Lieutenant and find out if we can knock-off for the day."

"Good! I'll join you."

"You and Beasley continue working until I get back," Littlefield ordered, when Beasley started to come along too.

Another figure was approaching the group from the direction of the highway and Littlefield recognized the uniform of the state police as the man stopped and kicked the snow from his boots against the wheel of the jeep. When he was reasonably satisfied with his snow removal campaign, he began speaking. Littlefield was near enough to hear the words.

"Ready to pull out, Lieutenant?"

"Right. I was just about to call Sergeant Littlefield here and tell him to get started back to Malmstrom." The lieutenant nodded in Littlefield's direction indicating he was aware the NCO had joined them.

I'll bet, thought Littlefield. He was surprised the lieutenant knew him.

"Roads are still passable," the trooper continued, "but in a few hours it's going to be difficult getting through if this snow keeps up."

"How about the road to Jessie?" The lieutenant asked.

"It'll probably be OK if you get started in the next few minutes," the trooper informed him.

"We can always stay in Havre, if necessary," the lieutenant continued. "I'll call the site from town before we attempt the trip. How about a cup of coffee before you leave?"

"Fine. I can use one," the officer agreed, surprised that his acceptance should result in such apparent delight from the lieutenant.

"You would? That's great!" The lieutenant walked over to the jeep, brushed snow away from the door before opening it, and removed a large thermos jug.

Bet that thing holds fifty cups, Littlefield speculated, watching steam rising as the paper cup was filled.

SCRAMBLE!

"Sarg, call your men in and get ready to leave," the lieutenant instructed, handing the thermos to an airman at his side and delivering the coffee to the trooper himself.

"Yes, sir."

"Tell them there's coffee, if they want some before they go," the lieutenant added, as Littlefield moved away.

"Yes, sir, thank you," he answered over his shoulder, noting that the lieutenant had handed a large cup to the airman holding the thermos.

Morton and Beasley were beating their arms vigorously, trying to keep warm when Littlefield returned.

"OK, let's go home!" he ordered, kicking the snow with his boot searching for the shovel he had dropped. Both airmen charged out of the crater with Morton in the lead, until he struck his toe on the NCO's buried shovel.

"Yours, Sarg?" he asked, jumping around on one foot with exaggerated pain.

"Yeah, thanks! Try not to bleed all over the snow, Morton," he added, as his assistant limped toward the vehicles, using his shovel for a crutch.

"Maybe we can get him a purple heart, Sarg," Beasley grinned.

"The only thing he'll get is three days of extra duty if he doesn't come back and help you carry our little treasure trove."

Morton hobbled back to the canvas rug which Beasley had dug out of the snow and reluctantly lifted one end.

"Hurt yourself, young man?" The voice emanated from above and behind them, and they all looked back with undisguised astonishment and saw a man observing their preparations. He was a big man; how big it was difficult to determine. He was covered from ear lobes to knee caps in a heavy range coat and sat astride a remarkably large and obviously well-trained horse. His head was covered with a low-crowned, wide brimmed Stetson pulled down over his eyes against the wind. The stock of a 30.06 was plainly visible in a saddle boot under his right leg.

"If you're hurt, son, give me your arm. You can jump up behind me and I'll carry you to the truck."

Morton was the first to find his voice. "Oh no, sir! I am all

SCRAMBLE!

right, see. . . ." He began hopping up and down on both feet to emphasize the soundness of his limbs. Beasley pranced with him. Not because he wanted to, but because he had to or lose the contents of the canvas rug.

"He's fine, sir. Thank you anyway," Littlefield managed, wishing Morton would stop his silly jumping. The rider considered the group for a moment and then moved on toward the parked vehicles.

"What was that?" Morton gasped, trying to catch his breath, once the rider was out of earshot.

"I don't know who *that* was," Littlefield hissed, "but I'll bet he recognized you, you *jackass!*"

The airman was filling Bauer's cup for the second time in five minutes when the horseman appeared out of thin air, or so it seemed. Bauer's back was to the approaching visitor and he failed to notice his arrival. He did, however, notice that the airman was allowing the coffee to run from the spigot unchecked. The sight horrified him.

"Watch what you're doing!" he screamed.

The shaken airman stopped the flow, but not without spilling half the contents of the cup into the snow. Bauer studied the splotches in dismay and the airman was certain the lieutenant was going to order him to scoop it up and put it back in the jug.

"Good afternoon, Mr. McGregor."

It was Bauer's turn to register surprise when he saw the rider to whom the trooper had addressed his greeting.

"You in charge here, son?" McGregor questioned, raising his hand in a friendly acknowledgement, but speaking directly to Bauer.

"Yes, sir, I am," Bauer replied, not at all happy with the 'son' connotation.

McGregor urged his horse several steps closer to Bauer. "What's your plan? Going to keep digging or strike out for the city?"

"We're calling it a day now, Mr. McGregor," Bauer responded, nodding toward Littlefield, who was already placing shovels in the truck.

SCRAMBLE!

"Coming back tomorrow, I suppose?" The landowner questioned.

"Yes, sir. Someone will be back tomorrow or whenever the weather clears. It shouldn't take much longer though, at any rate."

"I hope not, young man! Someone ought to run a highway or something through that tunnel the Air Force dug!"

"I'll have to apologize for the pilot, sir. I'm *sure* he didn't want to dig up your land." There was more than a trace of sarcasm in Bauer's tone.

"I don't blame the pilot or the other man with him, son. They only dug a grave for themselves," McGregor countered without malice.

Bauer decided he'd better change the subject. "How about a cup of coffee before we leave, Mr. McGregor?" he asked, hoping to get off on a friendlier footing.

"Thanks, no. Just came by to find out if you planned digging until nightfall. If so, thought I'd send over a couple of my boys to stand by with rifles." Bauer's eyes widened. "Pack of wolves running around this area lately. Killed two antelope not far from here this morning. Didn't want you meeting up with them and thinking they were a pack of friendly dogs."

Morton hurriedly climbed into the truck and closed the door. "Thanks, Mr. McGregor, we'll be careful."

Bauer didn't miss the grin on the rancher's face and couldn't help smiling himself at Morton's obvious haste. "Sure you won't have some coffee before you go?" Bauer asked again.

"No thanks. I've got to get on down the fence line a bit and see if any stock are being harrassed."

Littlefield recalled having seen a large hay mound not far off the roadway two or three miles back and supposed it was for winter feed. He remembered a few head of cattle around it. Didn't seem like they were worried about wolves though, he thought.

McGregor hadn't moved from the saddle and the horse remained perfectly motionless, permitting a ridge of snow to build up along its mane. Brushing it off gently, McGregor backed the animal out of the group which had formed

S C R A M B L E !

around him and, without further comment, disappeared seconds later in the falling snow.

The airman, still holding Bauer's half-filled cup, peered after the rider even when he could no longer be seen. He returned to reality when Bauer took the cup from his hand and drained it.

CHAPTER THREE

SUMMERS ADJUSTED a small stand-supported mirror that shared the top of his dresser with tie-pins, cuff-links and various other male paraphernalia. The face looking back at him grinned slyly.

"You're nothing but a crafty fox, Summers," he cooed cunningly, mentally lavishing praise upon himself for the successful execution of point one of Operation McGregor. That very afternoon, soon after leaving Gormann's office, he devised a five-point plan of attack—a plan, that, if carefully handled and expertly, carried out would capture for the Air Force the respect and affections of one Mr. McGregor. Point One: Arrange for an introduction between himself and Nancy McGregor. The introduction must not be planned—at least from her viewpoint, he cautioned himself. It must be the normal result of a reasonable set of circumstances.

Point Two would be the actual getting acquainted. For Point Two, Summers allowed two or three hours after the introduction. Points Three, Four would be developed in the following days—dining, dancing, meeting the parents, including, perhaps, a weekend at the McGregor home. Then point Five: Winning McGregor. Well, he'd think of something. . . .

SCRAMBLE!

Before quitting time, Summers had the wheels in motion and Operation McGregor went into the first phase with the phoning of one of his "contacts" at the college.

This will take finesse and diplomacy, he reminded himself, while waiting for Janet McBride to come to the phone. She should know Nancy, he reasoned. After all, they're both seniors, and the student body is hardly on the numerical level with the University of Illinois.

When Janet finally came to the phone, Summers suggested that she might enjoy an evening of dancing some Saturday at the Malmstrom Officers' Club. To this she readily agreed; she and Summers had only gone to the movies on their previous dates. She was equally cooperative when he asked if she could recommend two or three other young ladies—"for some friends of mine," he quickly added, pointing out the advantages to be gained with a party of three or four couples. He was delighted when Janet mentioned Nancy as the first name on her list of nominees.

"She generally goes home over the weekend, but I'm sure she'd stay over if she were invited," she said.

"Great! Who's Nancy?" he asked, trying not to suggest that Nancy was of any real interest to him.

"Nancy McGregor. She's one of my closest friends," Janet replied with just the slightest edge of suspicion.

"Don't ever recall your mentioning her before," he chuckled disarmingly. "I've told you all my secrets and even introduced you to some of my friends."

"I would have been happy to introduce you to her," she laughed, "but like I said, she goes home over the weekend and that's the only time we've gone out."

Summers dropped the subject for a new approach. "Talking about going out, how about a movie tonight?" he asked hopefully, thinking he might learn something more about the McGregors over a cup of coffee after the show.

"Golly, Warren, I sure would love to, but I have exams tomorrow and I simply must study—can't even go bowling with the girls this evening. . . ."

"Bowling?" he said too loudly. This piece of news was more than he'd hoped for. Perhaps Nancy would be included in this athletic gathering. "Didn't know you were a bowling

SCRAMBLE!

enthusiast," he added, concerned that his delight might have registered unfavorably.

"We go almost every Thursday—"

"What's your average? . . . Two hundred?" he interrupted playfully.

"Don't I wish. I'm lucky if I break one hundred."

"I'll bet you're better than that."

"No, I'm not. One thirty's my high game—but that's just Nancy's average!"

It was a simple matter to find out which bowling lanes the girls customarily used. Janet also told him that they usually had to wait about half an hour before they could get an alley.

Summers took another look at himself in the mirror and straightened the ends of his bow tie.

"Good!" he whispered at his own image and began searching the top of his dresser for one last item. "Now what did I do with it . . .?" he muttered, abandoning the littered dresser top to rummage through a shallow cardboard container in the upper right hand drawer.

"Ah! Here it is." He beamed, selecting a watch chain from among the box and beginning to polish a small, gold Phi Beta Kapa key that hung conspicuously from a center link. Gormann had said, "Use all the weapons at your command," and when the objective involved a female college senior—well, what better than the key of scholastic achievement?

He took one last look around the room, checked the contents of his wallet, picked up his overcoat and went down to his car.

The roads were slick, but he managed to navigate along Second Avenue North without mishap. His plan for the evening called for as much luck as skill. First, since it was early, he should be able to obtain an alley all to himself before the girls arrived—that was of prime importance. Then, of course, being a gentleman, he would offer to share *his* alley with them.

All of the nearby parking spaces were already taken and he had to park nearly two blocks from the door. Must have early leagues tonight, he decided, noting that it was only

SCRAMBLE!

six forty-five. Well, the girls shouldn't get here until seven-forty and by then I'll have an alley, at least I hope so.

Summers hurried toward the neon lights and entered the building.

"You can have alley four," a man behind the counter was saying as he handed a score sheet to one of three girls. His heart sank as he realized who they were.

I've been had! he thought, as one of the girls accepted a score sheet. "I'll bet that's Nancy," he grumbled, wondering where he had miscalculated. Without warning she looked directly at him, held his eyes for a moment, then returned her attention to her companions.

She was beautiful and suddenly he forgot his plans completely. The girls remained a few feet from the counter, apparently in deep conversation, and he endeavored to act nonchalant as he waited for the attendant to finish some business which was holding his attention. As the girls continued to talk, Summers tried to pick up the subject of the conversation, but only muffled words and occasional laughter reached his straining ears. He suppressed the urge to look at them. The hair on the back of his neck was tingling and he was certain at least one of them was watching him. The voices quieted and he turned casually—the girl with the score sheet smiled pleasantly and her white teeth accentuated the light in her reddish gold hair.

"Would you like to bowl with us, Lieutenant Summers?" she asked, and her blue eyes flashed mischievously.

". . . Oh . . . I don't . . . I mean . . .," he stammered, ears burning.

"We'd love to have you join us, Lieutenant," she continued, extending her hand. "My name's Nancy McGregor. Come on," she urged, pulling him gently but firmly, "I'll introduce you to my friends." Summers followed meekly, unable to resist. His feet felt as if someone had fastened a cord of wood to each foot.

How he got through the introductions, he'd never know. "You can keep score," the one called Betty laughed. "And maybe give us a few pointers to improve our game!" the one called Louise joined in. Summers grinned idiotically. If last names were given, he couldn't remember. The only

S C R A M B L E !

name running through his mind was Gormann. *Gormann. . . . How I hate that man!*

"Let's get you some shoes," Nancy suggested, and with the same firm grip directed his movements.

"Eleven, please," he responded to the counterman's question, his voice seeming to come from the other end of the building. But even at that it was probably the first coherent remark to come out of him in the last five minutes. As he accepted the shoes a new thought struck him like a thunderbolt.

Nancy! . . . She called me lieutenant! How did she know . . . unless. . . ?

"Nancy, how did you know I was a lieutenant?" he questioned, with as much composure as he could muster.

"Janet thought you might be here," she answered innocently and Summers felt his stomach turn over. "She suspected that there was more on your mind than a Saturday night dance," Nancy continued, as they headed for the assigned alley. "We decided if you showed up, our suspicions would be correct. I put myself in your place—then talked Betty and Louise into bowling an hour earlier. It was really very simple," she added, laughing, and Summers suddenly pitied married men.

They must lead a miserable existence, he thought, wondering how disrupting a woman's intuition could be if you had to live with it.

"How about Betty and Louise? Do they know all the intimate details?" he asked, feeling like a fool and hoping that Nancy's friends were not in on the plot.

"No, I just told them you were one of Janet's friends and suggested that we invite you to bowl with us." Summers breathed a little more easily.

"They don't know our secret," she went on, "but I'm dying to know why you wanted this 'chance' meeting."

"Well, that's a long story," he said, realizing that he did have a foot in the door, a bit crushed perhaps, but not amputated. Now was the time to suggest that soul revealing secrets should be told in a more secluded atmosphere.

"If you were thinking of inviting me for a cup of coffee

SCRAMBLE!

after the game, I accept," she said and Summers cheered noticeably.

He smiled. "Say, you really are a mind reader!"

An hour later they were comfortably seated in a booth at a nearby restaurant and Summers was eager to continue with Operation McGregor. The operation had now taken on aspects of a much more pleasant—and personal—nature than originally conceived.

"What did I say to Janet that aroused her suspicions?" he asked.

"Actually, she wasn't suspicious at all—that is, until we started talking about your conversation. Then as we hashed it over, she said, 'I don't think Warren was really interested in dancing, at least not when we were talking. There's something else on his mind and it wouldn't surprise me if he shows up at the bowling alley tonight! You know the rest.'"

"She's probably furious with me by now," Summers said.

"Janet's too sensible a girl to become upset over this. Besides, she even suggested that I introduce myself if you did make an appearance. I probably would have done it anyway." She laughed. "Equivocation is not one of my shortcomings—father's influence, I'm sure," she added gaily. "Now, exactly what are you plotting, young man?" she whispered, eyes twinkling and leaning forward provocatively.

Summers felt himself melting inside and decided to tell her the truth.

"Your father is a highly respected personality," he began, "and therefore the Air Force, in general, and the 29th Air Division, in particular, would like his respect and support."

"So it's father you want to meet and not me after all," she teased.

"That was my original purpose," he confessed, "but I'm more interested in winning something for myself now," he added, surprised at the sincerity in his voice.

"How did you get selected for such an assignment?" she asked.

"All officers have a responsibility for promoting community relations and I guess it was my turn," he replied, not wishing to bring up Gormann's name. "So now you know

SCRAMBLE!

my innermost secrets, and I hope you're not too angry with my attempt at deception."

"Warren, you couldn't deceive a two-year-old baby!" There was merriment in her voice and she shook her head playfully.

"Now, I suppose you want some information about father?" Summers grinned. "It would help."

"Well, let's see . . . He's forty-one, married twenty-one years, loves his wife and three daughters—Ann seven, Donna fourteen and Nancy twenty-one. He wants a son and claims he's not through yet.

"In the business world, father's main interest is land—ranch land mostly," Nancy went on. "He does very little of the actual ranching himself, trusting managers and foremen whom he hand-picks, to handle those details. Father does have a small herd of what he calls 'experimental stock.' There's something over sixty head, I think, and father won't allow anyone except himself and two veterinarians near them. Exactly what he's doing, I'm not sure, but it has to do with immunity to certain diseases and even sub-zero temperatures."

Summers wondered to himself if he'd ever tried to cross-breed them with polar bears. He smiled.

"Father gets touchy when anyone makes fun of his work," she cautioned, "so please don't ever ask him if he's tried crossbreeding them with polar bears or Alaskan Huskies!"

Summers gulped heavily and wondered if there were any hereditary clairvoyant traits in the McGregor family tree.

"That about completes the picture of father, except for his two hobbies. He grows roses and has been trying to develop a rose that will grow and bloom in the snow."

Summers mouth dropped open in surprise. "That's a different approach anyway," he conceded.

"Some of his friends do think he's slightly eccentric, but they don't say anything about it to him.

"His other hobby is shooting."

"No wonder they don't say anything to him," Summers joked.

"He's a member of several rifle clubs and has won numerous prizes, including five Firsts in national competition."

SCRAMBLE!

Noting that Summers seemed pensive, she asked, "No questions?"

"Yes, I wonder if a certain colonel would consider my request for transfer?"

"It's not that bad, Warren. You and father will get along famously, I'm sure."

"I hope so," he agreed, but he was not at all sure.

"You will have to visit with us some weekend. You'll find father isn't so bad after all. I do have a suggestion to offer, however. Please, leave your Phi Beta Kappa key at home. You don't need it to impress me any more and it would only enrage father. He would probably toss it up and treat it as a moving target."

"What does he have against Phi Beta Kappa keys?" Summers asked as he tried awkwardly to remove it on the spot. Actually he had forgotten about it immediately after leaving his room.

"A former neighbor wore one—wore it all the time, in fact. Normally father couldn't have cared less, but this neighbor was the first to suggest that father would have more success with his cattle if he crossbred them with polar bears or Alaskan Huskies, and even worse, that it was a big waste of time anyway. Father became angry and asked him what the key was for. The neighbor replied that it was for scholastic achievement." Nancy paused, apparently not sure whether she should continue. Summers ceased in his efforts to remove the chain, waiting for her to proceed.

"Oh well," she laughed, "father suggested that friend neighbor utilize the key to lock his outhouse, adding that he was dissipating his mental capacities at a prodigious rate every time he visited that structure, and therefore, he was in danger of having some uneducated clod cart it off thinking it was only . . . well, you can guess the rest." She was blushing now, but Summers broke into hearty laughter and in a moment Nancy joined him.

"The neighbor did get in one final word before father went after his rifle. He remarked that anyone with the name of McGregor should be chasing rabbits out of the cabbage patch and not experimenting with cattle!"

"Well, if your father is going to shoot this key while it's

SCRAMBLE!

still in the air, he will have to get it off of me first." Summers grinned, finally giving up.

"No, he wouldn't," Nancy laughed, "you'd still be fastened to it!"

CHAPTER FOUR

THE FOLLOWING morning, Summers turned off the alarm, squinted sleepy-eyed at the clock, and decided he could hibernate for another half-hour if he skipped breakfast. He slapped the pillow a couple of times, yawned, pulled the covers over his chin, thought of Nancy, vaulted from bed and looked out the window.

"Ah . . . snow! . . . not much yet, but promising," he breathed, recalling that Nancy had said she might remain in the city if the weather was too bad.

She's going to call me at four-thirty if she decides to stay, he thought happily, noting that the visibility was down to less than a mile.

He joined two 29th Fighter Squadron lieutenants for breakfast and the topic of conversation was the current weather.

"May even have difficulty keeping the highways open," he suggested, and the officers said they thought this was entirely possible. They expressed regrets over the outlook for a bleak weekend. Summers did not share their gloom and was in high spirits when he arrived at the office, whistling, "Let it snow, Let it snow, Let it snow."

Later he listened with interest as the Weather Officer briefed the Staff Meeting and his was the only face which glowed with satisfaction at the grim report.

"We're still under the influence of a slow-moving, low

SCRAMBLE!

pressure system, sir," the officer reported, pointing to a weather chart held to the briefing room wall by several pieces of scotch tape. Gormann glared at the chart as the pointer traced the low pressure system.

"When's it going to improve?" he growled.

"I don't expect improvement in the Great Falls area before Sunday noon at the earliest, sir. Until then we will have fairly heavy snow, low temperatures and fifteen to twenty knot winds." He paused for questions, but Gormann sat sullenly, still glaring at the surface weather chart.

"It doesn't look like either squadron will be able to fly before Monday," Heeney ventured, as the Weather Officer departed.

"Well, *somebody* will fly," Gormann muttered to no one in particular. Summers took this as a cue to open his correspondence log, but Gormann suddenly pushed his chair back and stood up.

"If any of you have pressing problems, bring them to my office." With that he walked out of the room, muttering something about, "at our present level of flying activity, we'll all be going out of business soon!"

There were two fire exits on the second floor. Both were constructed of metal and could only be opened from the inside; however, each had a narrow slit of a window, six by four inches, and through this opening Summers managed to observe enough of the sky and ground to satisfy his newly acquired weather interests. Almost every hour, both before and after lunch, he journeyed down the hall to the fire exit. By three o'clock, the snow was falling heavily and he was delighted, convinced that Nancy would remain in the city. Twice during his hourly excursions, he turned away just in time to see Gormann approaching. The first time Gormann went into another office and Summers exhaled gratefully. The second time, Gormann was on him before he had time to react. The DO looked at him for a moment, one eyebrow raised in annoyance, then turned into the officers' latrine a few feet from the door.

Boy, if he knew I wanted bad weather, he'd have me shot as a traitor, Summers thought. Retreating hastily to his

S C R A M B L E !

office, he put on his coat and went to the personnel building adjacent to the parking lot. On his way back he stopped by his car to brush off the snow and make sure he could start the engine.

"'TGIF,' Summers old boy," Heeney exclaimed when Summers returned to the office.

"Let's go over to the club and get a hot toddy for the body."

"No thanks. I think I'll go to town this evening."

"What! In weather like this?"

"Why not?" Locke joined in, holding a piece of paper in his hand which he kept carefully folded. "After all, it is springtime, and what does a young man's fancy turn to in the springtime?"

"Well, if it's springtime, somebody didn't get the word," Heeney said, putting on his coat.

"When a bonified member of the Thank God it's Friday Club becomes remiss in his responsibilities to an old and respected military way of life, I suspect females," Locke said, handing the folded paper to Summers. "While you were out a Miss McGregor called to say she was leaving for home—road permitting."

Summers face dropped as he took the note.

"Cheer up, she's invited you to spend Saturday and Sunday at her home if you can make it," Locke added, as Summers began to read the note with revived spirit.

"My, you've been a busy little beaver," Heeney said, lowering his voice to a confidential whisper. "Remember one thing old boy, females are tolerated only as long as they don't interfere with flying or Air Defense Operations. *Is that clear?*" he concluded in a tone which emulated the Gormann resonance, but which would not carry outside the immediate office.

As soon as the two officers disappeared into the hallway, Summers began dialing Nancy's number.

"Hello! This is Lieutenant Summers. Would you please see if Miss McGregor is in?" he asked, hoping Nancy might have returned already.

"Oh, hello, Warren. This is Betty. I have switchboard duty this evening."

S C R A M B L E !

"Hi, Betty. Nancy in?" He still didn't know Betty's last name.

"No, she left for home about twenty minutes ago, but I think she'll probably turn around. I hear the roads are pretty bad."

"Oh!"

"Yes. Besides her father called about ten minutes ago—wanted to tell her not to try driving home tonight."

"Tell her I called when she returns, will you?"

"Sure will . . . Bye."

Think I'll tell her myself, he decided, when he had almost reached his car. I'll just drive into town and see if I can meet her on her way back.

He had to rock the car back and forth before the rear wheels would stop spinning and work through the soft snow to firm ground.

As he drove out the gate onto Second Avenue North, an Air Force truck coming from town threw billows of snow over his windshield and he was forced to stop until the windshield wipers could cut holes in the white blanket.

Twenty-five minutes later, he turned off Second Avenue North, passed under the bridge on First Avenue North and picked up Highway 87, but with still no sign of Nancy. Probably stopped in Fort Benton, he thought, after he had driven another fifteen miles. It was dark enough now for headlights, and drifts were beginning to block sections of the road. It was necessary to drive on the opposite side of the road to get around some of them. Several times, he nearly drove off the shoulder and into a ditch, but luck and quick response saved him.

At the Fort Benton turnoff, a car was stuck, half blocking the road. It was empty, almost completely snow covered. Only the left side was visible and it had quite obviously been abandoned some time ago. Nothing's gone down that road for over an hour, he thought, reasoning that Nancy couldn't be over forty-five minutes ahead of him. She must still be on U.S. 87. He considered turning back but decided it wouldn't hurt to continue for another five or ten minutes.

He might have changed his mind if he had turned on the radio. Road condition reports were being broadcast at fre-

SCRAMBLE!

quent intervals and motorists were warned to find shelter until snow removal equipment could clear the highway. Some roads were already capable of supporting a reasonable flow of traffic, but U.S. 87 between Great Falls and Havre was not one of them. Summers, however, felt with youthful confidence that he could go a few more miles anyway.

The road up to Fort Benton was fairly straight and level but now it began to twist and undulate. Summers had to rely on the telephone poles following the road for advanced warning that a curve lay ahead, but these too proved deceptive. At 6:30 he skidded into a snow bank.

"Great! That's all I need," he grumbled, trying without success to work free of the drift. Can't be much above zero, he thought, as he walked around the car and began kicking heavily at the snow blocking the wheels. "Might as well try kicking back the ocean," he muttered when his feet and hands were nearly frozen. Getting back into the car, he rubbed them vigorously, then sat on them and waited for feeling to return before attempting to work the car out of the snow again. His footwork had been more successful than he realized, however, because the car rolled free when he engaged the gears and gained momentum on a downhill grade. He dismissed any thought of turning around. To go back through the drift on an uphill grade was more than he cared to face before morning.

"Here I come, ready or not," he whispered, hoping that the McGregor homestead had some large and prominent means of identification.

Nancy must be home by now, he thought, glancing at the fuel gauge and realizing that he had better find refuge soon. He shivered, thinking of the unpleasant possibilities, and redoubled his efforts to locate any sign that would indicate proximity to shelter. His headlights refused to penetrate more than a few yards and it was becoming extremely difficult to follow the road. Twice in the next mile, the lights picked out a barbed wire fence just in time to warn him that he was about to drive off the road.

He glanced at the fuel gauge again. It rested quietly on empty and he studied it closely for even a slight suggestion

SCRAMBLE!

of space between needle and empty marker. There was none.

Better find something soon or. . . Further thoughts were cut off as he jammed on the brakes. He was traveling slowly—fifteen or twenty miles per hour—when he suddenly saw the car standing half on and half off the highway blocking the road. He pulled hard to the left and immediately entered a skid, which planted him neatly, but securely in a deep drift with his engine stalled.

"Damn. . . ." He hit the starter and glared at the bumper of the other car, not five feet away.

"What lame-brained. . ." he muttered through clenched teeth, then stared at the figure approaching from the left side of the other car.

Nancy! . . . I should have known he thought, opening the door.

"I hope you're not hurt!" the girl said. "I'm awfully sorry. I know it was my fault, but I'm caught in a drift and . . .
Warren!

Summers climbed out of his car.

"Nancy, I'm glad I found you. Are you all right?"

Suddenly he gave a hard sneeze.

"Oh, Warren—are *you* all right?"

"Won't freeze to death. At least, not right away," he said.

"But how did you get here?"

"It's a sixty-five-mile, snow-covered story, Nancy." He was able to find his handkerchief in time to block the next sneeze.

"Whatever it is, you're not dressed for this weather," she scolded, leading him to her car which still had its engine running.

In the warmth of the front seat, he removed one shoe, exposing a cold, damp, stocking-clad foot. He rubbed the foot briskly then performed the same operation on the other foot, while he explained his presence.

Nancy was openly relieved when he mentioned that her father had called shortly after her departure. "I was getting a little concerned," she confided. "I kept waiting for someone to come along. I've been stuck here for more than thirty minutes and you're the first person to come by . . . and I

S C R A M B L E !

didn't see your car until the last second, otherwise I would have turned my lights on to warn you."

"That makes two of us. I didn't see you either and I'm not so sure that your tail lights would have given me sufficient warning."

"Father's bound to be along any minute." There was confidence in her voice and Summers felt some of the concern lift from his own mind. He did wonder, however, how Mr. McGregor would manage to get through the snow.

"Another half-hour and we'll really be cut off," he speculated, glancing at the luminous dial on his watch and noting that it was 8:45.

"How far is your house from here?" he asked, calculating their chances of success if all else failed and they had to try walking.

"About a mile and a half, but it might as well be fifty," she answered, guessing what was behind the question. "We could never make it in this cold and snow, especially you with those low cut shoes. We'd better stick with the car. Someone's bound to come along soon."

"Well, I hope you have some blankets, because 'bundling' may be back in vogue before this night is over," he retorted, as the engine labored. Nancy pressed the accelerator and the motor ran smoothly again.

"I don't even have a flash light," she replied, afraid to remove her foot from the gas pedal.

"I don't either," he confessed, "but I do have three road flares in my trunk. I'll get them before the lights on my car go out completely and I have to grope my way." He buttoned his coat, but didn't bother to tie his shoes. He promptly lost one when he slid across Nancy to get out on the road side. He recovered the snow-clogged shoe, scraped what he could from the opening and replaced it on his foot, still untied.

"Probably won't even get 'Line of Duty' if I get pneumonia," he muttered, stopping long enough to brush the snow from the driver's side of the windshield. He exhaled hot breath into his cupped hands before proceeding toward his own car.

Then he saw something in the darkness.

SCRAMBLE!

"Well . . ." he whispered, when he completed the heating process. "We can't be far from civilization after all. Somebody let their dogs out. Too bad they're not Saint Bernards, he thought, and began making a kissing sound to draw their attention. Don't act very friendly, either. Not wagging their tails. . . .

"Warren! Get back in the car . . . quick!" Nancy's voice was low but sharp and it conveyed unmistakable fear.

The two wolves, confused by the headlights considered Summers with undecided but deadly interest. Their noses worked the air heavily and Summers moved slowly toward the partially opened door only a few feet away. Nancy held the door open with one hand, keeping her eyes on the wolves. She was ready to blow the horn in an effort to distract them. If they attacked, Summers would be hard pressed. But something else—something undetected by Summers or Nancy drew their attention, and they half turned to sniff downwind. The sound was lost in the wind and no new scents reached their noses. Summers capitalized on the sudden distraction and made a bound for the opened door, reaching the safety of the car just as the wolves attacked. He was, however, without shoes. They remained in their tracks with his first leap. The wolves, disappointed at losing their victim, soon discovered these missing tidbits and attacked them viciously. Finally they trotted off, each with one shoe firmly grasped between eager jaws.

"They've got my shoes!" Summers cried in distress, realizing what had happened for the first time since re-entering the car.

"Just be glad you're not in them," Nancy whispered, her heart still pounding rapidly.

"I thought they were dogs. . . ." The remainder of the remark trailed off as he stared through the windshield.

"I think someone's coming," he said, rolling down the left window enough to stick his head out. Lights blinked ahead and he turned their own lights on as Nancy leaned over him to look for herself.

A tractor with two heavily clad figures pulled alongside and stopped. Summers opened the door when one of them climbed from the tractor and started toward them.

SCRAMBLE!

"Father!" Nancy cried, when Summers was about to slam the door again after noting that the figure carried a rifle.

"Thought you might be stuck out here someplace," the rancher replied, eyeing Summers.

"This is Lieutenant Summers, Father."

"The Air Force again," he retorted, looking back at Summers' car. "Yours, son?" he asked, pointing a gloved thumb.

"Yes, sir."

"Look's like it will have to stay here until morning. Know how to drive, young man?"

"Of course he does, Father. That's his car. . . ."

"Yes, I know," the rancher replied, looking again at the displaced vehicle. "Well, you two stay put. We'll tow you home."

Summers was having difficulty holding back a sneeze and he was grateful when the door closed again.

McGregor went to Summers' car, stopped to study the tracks, and decided the wolves wouldn't give further trouble. But he shifted the rifle back to his right hand after he had turned off the weakening headlights and removed the ignition key. The ranch hand backed the tractor in front of Nancy's snow-locked car. After clearing the windshield and giving Summers a brief glimpse of a weather beaten face, he hooked chains under the bumper, remounted the large metal tractor seat, and waited for McGregor to perch on the jump-seat beside him. Then slowly he took up the slack in the chain.

None too soon, Summers thought, as they moved jerkily. The last dregs of gas ran to the engine . . . it sputtered, coughed then gave up the ghost. Almost immediately cold air came through the heater and he flipped it off.

"Just like the movies," he said. "The cavalry rescues the wagon train from the hostile Indians. Or in our case, the hostile elements.

"Well, at least we didn't lose our scalps," Nancy said, laughing. "You will have a good story to tell your grandchildren about how you outraced your shoes escaping from a pack of wolves!"

SCRAMBLE!

"Very funny," Summers answered lightly, wishing he had some better covering for his feet.

The electric windshield wipers maintained a satisfactory cleaning program and Summers had little difficulty observing the two figures riding the tractor. McGregor sat facing them with the rifle across his thighs. He held his head down, but frequently looked around, holding a hand over the brim of his Stetson to peer into the wind. As they drew closer to home, his vigil never decreased, although he did seem to relax somewhat.

The tractor turned into a wide driveway and before long, lights and the outline of a house reached out and drew them in.

Looks like the snow's letting up a little, Summers thought. They stopped several yards from a side entrance and McGregor, handing his rifle to the driver, approached the car. Summers opened the door and prepared to get out.

"Warren, wait until I can get you some boots," Nancy said.

Her father looked at Summers' stocking feet. "Maybe we don't pay enough taxes," he said. Summers stepped into the snow, deciding his feet were as cold as they could get and that a few more yards would make little difference. Without fanfare, however, McGregor picked him up, much the way a mother picks up a baby, and carried him into the house, depositing him shaken, embarrassed and speechless before Mrs. McGregor.

"I'm . . . I . . . My—" Summers sputtered.

"Forgot his shoes," the older man said simply, in explanation, and began removing his own boots.

"This is Lieutenant Summers, Mother," Nancy said by way of introduction. She tried not to laugh, but the picture of Summers standing in a semi-crouched attitude—the position in which McGregor unloaded him—one stocking extending limply a good six inches beyond his foot and his overseas cap twisted over his ears was too much. She had to sit down until she could control herself. Summers was ready to hike back to Great Falls, shoes or no shoes, but all he could do was sneeze and sniffle miserably.

A short time later, he was sitting in the kitchen with both feet in a tub of water. Mr. McGregor frequently poured

SCRAMBLE!

additional boiling water into the tub from a steaming kettle. Each time he performed this little task, he was heard to mutter, "leaped right out of his shoes," after which he would smile broadly.

"Ennis! *That's enough!* You have the water almost up to his knees," Barbara McGregor scolded, setting a heavily laden platter of steaks on the table and taking the kettle from her husband. Nancy handed Summers a towel and a pair of large heavy stockings.

"These will be as good as slippers," she said, waiting for Summers to dry his red feet. He blotted them tenderly. "Maybe we should stick a fork in them to see if they're done," Mr. McGregor quipped as he began to remove the tub. "Good for you, son. Boil the miseries out before they get started."

Summers had to admit that he was feeling better and, when they sat down to eat, he forgot his feet and concentrated on his stomach. Nancy had, of course, briefly told her parents what had happened on the snow-blocked highway, but when they were all seated at the table—the two younger sisters having already eaten, and gone to bed—Nancy related the story more fully, including Summers' part in it all.

"You had a close call, son. Those wolves have already killed some of my stock today and are hungry for more blood."

"Did you ever consider using an airplane to hunt them?" Summers asked, recalling that Gormann had mentioned such a technique during one of the staff meetings. It was, he remembered, just before last year's deer season opened, and the DO stated that he was going to fly around in the L-20 and get the lay of the land fixed in his mind before going after his deer. "Saves time if you know where the game is to be played before you go," he had remarked. "While I was stationed in Alaska, we hunted wolves from the air and used the L-20 as our gun platform. Extremely satisfactory arrangement," he had concluded.

"It might work," McGregor agreed, when Summers explained that such a system was used in Alaska.

"I could probably arrange to have an airplane here in the

S C R A M B L E !

morning, sir," Summers volunteered, before he could stop himself.

"You can? How? Who would fly in weather like this?" the rancher questioned. Summers knew he had been too eager.

"Well. . . . I. . ." he began, conscious of searching eyes on him. "May I use your phone to call Malstrom?" he asked, hoping to hear that the wires were down.

"Certainly, help yourself," McGregor replied, pointing to an instrument across the room.

The operator was most helpful and even though he couldn't remember Gormann's home phone number, she was soon announcing cheerfully, "Your number's ringing."

Maybe he's not home, he hoped, seconds before a voice came over the phone and was heard by all present.

"Gormann here!"

"Yes, sir. This is Lieutenant Summers. I wonder if you would do something for me?"

"Summers! Are you drunk?"

"Oh! No, sir! I just wanted—"

"Do you know what time it is?"

He didn't but a look at his watch told him it was ten minutes to one, and he almost dropped the phone.

"I'm sorry, sir, but I have a favor to ask of you . . . an operational favor."

"Let's hear it." The voice quieted some and Summers explained his mission. Gormann was heard to say, "H'mmm," when Summers mentioned that he was at the McGregor home. "So you see, sir, if you could bring an L-20 here in the morning. . . ." Summers paused, waiting for an answer. He felt McGregor's eyes on him and he knew that the success of Operation McGregor might rest on Gormann's next response.

"I'll be there at ten o'clock—meet me at the crash site."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir," he said happily. Then remembered one other favor he would need. "Sir, would you mind stopping off at my BOQ room and picking up a pair of shoes for me? A couple of wolves got mine and—"

"Summers! Are you sure you haven't been drinking?"

"No, sir, I haven't. I really did lose my. . . ."

SCRAMBLE!

"Summers, I'll be there at ten o'clock, and if wolves didn't get your shoes, I'll get something more dear than footwear. *Is that clear?*"

"Yes, sir," Summers groaned. "I'll be there, sir."

"OK, good!"

"Sounds like a man who gets things done," McGregor said, when Summers replaced the phone.

"Yes, sir, he does—and he expects everyone who works for him to do the same," Summers replied, suddenly very tired.

"Suspected as much," McGregor nodded, recalling that he had met Gormann the day before. Gormann, he recalled, had acted civilly but somewhat abruptly—even so, he had admired the manner in which he got things started.

"Let's go to bed," he said, when Summers tried to stifle a yawn. He led the way to one of the two spare rooms, stopping only long enough to peer through a window. "Snow's letting up some. Maybe we'll have some luck tomorrow," he said, with undisguised pleasure.

"There's some extra blankets in the closet if you need them," Nancy said.

"Hope you sleep well. We'll have breakfast about seven-thirty," Mrs. McGregor added.

"Thank you, I'm sure I will," he replied, as the two older McGregors started for their own room.

"See, I told you father wasn't so bad," Nancy winked, as she too departed.

CHAPTER FIVE

ESTHER GORMANN was a tall, handsome woman whose primary interests in life were her husband and four sons. The latter, whose ages were 13, 11, 8 and 6, had not inherited

SCRAMBLE!

all the attributes of their father, but all shared one of his characteristics—the vigorous and uncompromising pressure he exerted on each waking second of the day. Esther was convinced that she was born without the proper number of hands with which to cope with them.

Esther looked out the window. It had stopped snowing, but the sky was still a dull gray with promise of yet unfinished business. Gormann and the four boys had gone out the back door just as the radio announced seven o'clock, and she was setting the table for breakfast. She saw them now, marching in single file to the front of the house. Gormann wore a blue uniform shirt and trousers, and boots with trousers tucked in. On his head was a black-billed garrison hat. The four boys were dressed in boots and parkas. Each shouldered a snow shovel of a size proportional to the marcher. Gorman brought the file to a halt, lined up the two older boys back to back and pointed down the sidewalk in opposite directions. Mark and Wesley, Jr, were assigned the front porch while Gormann himself chose the walk leading from the front door to his car. He supervised the operation for a moment, decided the project would be satisfactorily executed, then dropped his own shovel into position, moved back to the porch step and began rushing forward until the snow offered too much resistance. With a few scoops and the obstacle was removed and he repeated the rushing tactics.

"Wes, come in the house and put your parka on!" The boys stopped working to look at their mother standing in the doorway.

"Continue operations!" Gormann ordered, and four shovels began scraping again.

"I'll be right there," he replied to his wife, making one more rush that cleared a shovel's-width path to the car. After a quick trip into the house, where he put on a flying jacket in lieu of the heavier parka, he was again clearing the walk. Using identical procedures for the uncleared portion, he removed remarkable volumes of snow in a remarkably short time.

"Mark . . . Wesley . . . Return your shovels to their proper places and go inside and get washed for breakfast."

SCRAMBLE!

"Yes, sir," Wesley answered, trying to conceal a snowball behind his back.

"Paul . . . John . . . You can help me clean the snow off the car and away from the wheels."

"Yes, sir," they both replied as Wesley threw the snowball. It missed Mark, its intended target, but achieved a heated chase as Mark tried to retaliate.

"Boys!"

"Yes, sir." The chase ended.

"Breakfast!"

"Yes, sir."

Snow removal equipment had cleared the runway and ramp, but it was still cold and Morton, busily brushing the snow off an L-20, grumbled to himself. I can think of a thousand things I'd rather do than mother an L-20 on a Saturday morning, especially when it's cold. Oh well, it should be a slow day and maybe I'll get to sit around in the crew chiefs' lounge and play some cards. Only a madman would be flying today anyway, he told himself, taking a last flick at the snow on the windshield, then looking up to see a figure briskly walking toward him.

Morton was all thumbs as he tried to open the cabin door. He finally managed it just as Gormann came around the tail section with a pair of shoes tucked under one arm.

"Here, find a place for these in the rear cockpit," he ordered, handing the low-cut black shoes to the uneasy airman. He immediately began examining the landing gear and giving special attention to the wheels themselves.

L-20's could be equipped with skis, but at the moment the 29th Air Division did not have any skis in stock. Skis were for arctic climates and Great Falls did not fulfill the climatic requirements; therefore, they would hardly have need for such an item of supply—so someone in the higher echelons of supply had decided. Under his breath, Gormann said, "We'll need some skis for this trip with or without the consent of those visionary planners."

Guess he won't be flying after all, Morton thought, as Gormann's words carried the short distance between them.

"Come with me," Gormann ordered, and he led the

S C R A M B L E !

way back to the hangar and into the sheet metal shop. There was only one airman on duty in the shop and, on Saturdays, he handled the tool room as well. Gormann ignored him completely as he moved around the shop and into the tool room, selecting the necessary material.

The shop attendant was a squat, muscle-bound Airman Third Class. His name was Hugh Swanson, but he preferred his nickname Hercules. It was apparent that he was unhappy at Gormann's actions. He considered the sheet metal shop his own domain. It was probably the one thing he knew and liked best in the world, next to girls. No one had ever questioned his ability within the air force specialty of sheet metal working. He was good, very good, and this accounted for the fact that he was still in the service. All the airmen and NCO's—and most of the officers, for that matter—gave him a wide berth. He had a quick temper and would go into a rage at the slightest provocation. His taste in girls was quite democratic. He liked girls—anybody's girl. For some unexplained reason, he enjoyed unusual success with them and he was not adverse to describing the intimate details of his "conquests." He especially enjoyed giving detailed descriptions if the girl belonged to one of the men in his unit. Those who complained always came out second best. He was not a good fighter, but he could withstand heavy blows on the face and body without any apparent effects, then move in to grab the unfortunate individual in a steel bear-hug, or seize one arm and wrench it until the limb was nearly pulled from its socket. In either case, the opposition always ended on his knees pleading for mercy. "Now, you don't care what I do to her, do you?" he'd ask, and continue the pressure until they screamed. "No! No! I don't care!"

Hercules watched Gormann for some time. When it appeared that whatever he was doing was nearly complete, he walked up to Morton who had been sitting on a work bench near the door ever since he followed Gormann into the room.

"What the hell's he doing?" he asked in a voice that was purposely more than a whisper.

SCRAMBLE!

"I think he's making a pair of skis, Hercules," Morton replied respectfully.

"Skis! What the hell does he think—"

"I think you've got a big mouth, fat boy!" Gormann snarled, turning suddenly.

Hercules was taken by surprise. His face began shading red and the cords in his neck swelled. He pushed the heels of his hands together and the muscles bulged under his fatigues.

"*Nobody calls me names!*" he hissed, and Morton slipped through the door.

"Don't they, fat boy? I'm impressed!"

Hercules was almost in a lather. His eyes bulged and he breathed deeply and rapidly. He took one step toward Gormann and stopped dead. Gormann had moved his right foot a half pace back, allowing his body to bend forward at the waist, both arms hanging limply at his sides. His eyes focused directly on Hercules, and Hercules saw something in them he had never seen before. He didn't know what it was, but it pierced through his anger to make him think of what he was about to do.

"You don't scare me," he said, "but I'm not going to fight an officer—not now anyway." With that he turned and lumbered out of the shop, still wondering what it was he had seen in that stare. He'd figure it out—then there would be another day.

Gormann straightened out, dismissing Hercules from his mind. He picked up the completed skis, located Morton who was standing just outside the shop door, and returned to the L-20.

You would think he was coming from a church social rather than from an encounter with that big elephant, Morton thought, wondering if Gormann would have Hercules court martialed.

"Run up the engine while I go fill out a clearance," Gormann instructed, when the skis were placed on the wheels.

"Yes, sir," Morton replied, looking at the skis admiringly. "Looks like they'll work, sir," he added, tapping one of the

SCRAMBLE!

skis with the toe of his work shoe and finding that it was securely fastened.

"They'll work," Gormann said it as if it were an order rather than a statement of agreement.

Filing a flight plan, even during good weather, does not envisage—at least from an Air Force point of view—the inclusion of flights between airfields and a rancher's wheat field. This oversight on the part of the Air Force was hardly an insurmountable obstacle so far as Gormann was concerned. He had developed procedures for such contingencies, which were acceptable to the air traffic control centers, although they were not always aware of the shortcuts or improvisations Gormann adopted to achieve a specific result. The arrangements were usually between himself and the radar site nearest to the meadow or pasture on which he intended to land. He found this method expeditious and it eliminated those factors he referred to as "Kings of the empire of can'tism." Of course, there was always the possibility of a landing mishap or malfunction enroute. However, even his most ardent enemies, and there were many, considered this possibility extremely remote.

In fact, it was said that while he was flying over Denver one night in an F-86D, the fire warning light came on. Instead of bailing out (which many would have done) Gormann simply said to the airplane, "I have a parachute! How are *you* going to make it?" The fire warning light, so it was said, went out and Gormann continued on his way.

"You may have some difficulty landing, Colonel," the Weather Officer said, as he wrote the latest weather conditions on the clearance. "They've had quite a bit of snow in that area."

"OK. Good!" Gormann nodded, picked up the clearance and signed his name as the clearing authority. Then he handed it to the NCO behind the desk, who immediately called it in to the air traffic control center. Gormann checked his watch and headed for the L-20.

Morton held the throttle back in idle position while Gormann fastened his safety belt and adjusted earphones over his head.

SCRAMBLE!

"She's already to go, sir," he reported, when Gormann looked up from the radio.

"OK, good! Pull the chocks!"

"Yes, sir!" Morton replied cheerfully, more than ready to get the L-20 on its way so he could return to the crew chiefs' lounge.

"*I want you!*" The window by the pilot's seat had been lowered and Gormann's voice roared over the sound of the engine.

"Yes, sir! Anything wrong, sir?" Morton asked, scurrying around the wing and positioning himself by the open window.

"You're going with me! Get in!"

"Me, sir?" he choked, eyes as wide as dinner plates.

Gormann pointed to the seat beside him with a flip of his right thumb and Morton realized his secret plan to remain on the ground throughout his Air Force career was about to be shattered. He climbed in the plane.

"Sir, I think you ought to know . . ."—he was trying to yell over the engine noise—"I'm not in very good . . ." The L-20 began taxiing bumpily over the snow and Gormann motioned for the airman to fasten his seat belt.

"Shouldn't I wear a parachute?" he asked, hoping Gormann would be forced to stop long enough for such an arrangement. This of course, would give him time to explain a sudden urge to visit the latrine, an excuse which was not entirely unjustified, even though the necessity had become apparent only during the last two minutes.

"You won't need that!" Gormann said loudly, and seconds later it lifted smoothly into the air.

The world suddenly tilted as Gormann banked sharply, and Morton's need for a latrine became urgent. The large smoke stack of the Anaconda Copper Mills loomed into view.

"*We're going to hit!*" he screamed, closing his eyes. The stack passed off their left wing a mile away and Gormann held two hundred feet altitude and one hundred and twenty knots air speed. Soon, telephone poles, trees, and crests of snow-covered hills, appeared in front of them, only to rush by at what Morton considered frightening speeds. He closed

SCRAMBLE!

his eyes again when a barn blocked their path and didn't open them again until they had squeezed by it—with at least a quarter of a mile to spare. His need for a latrine became critical. After several more barns, a herd of racing antelope and a two-hundred-foot brush with some high tension lines, the critical requirement was reduced to one of damp embarrassment.

"Keep your eyes on the ground to the right!" Gormann ordered. "If you see anything that looks like cattle tap me on the shoulder and point them out!"

"Yes, sir," Morton mumbled, wondering if the DO had noticed what had happened. A quick glance at Gormann gave him some reassurance. He was watching some objects passing under the left wing.

Guess they weren't cows, Morton thought, when the L-20 continued on a straight course and Gormann shifted his attention to the landscape ahead.

"Wonder why he's looking for cows?" he muttered, with interest. Maybe it's government beef that got lost in the snow and we're supposed to find it. The idea pleased him and for the moment he forgot his recent discomfort. It's like being an air age cowboy, he thought, risking a quick peek at the ground through the window by his right shoulder.

They weren't going as fast as they were before. Snow-covered terrain and grey sky blended and became one. Morton strained his eyes trying to locate the missing cows. He searched the horizon and reported three herds of cattle before they had flown another fifteen miles. His first herd of cattle were identified, upon closer observation, as a cluster of wind swept rocks, followed shortly thereafter by a second sighting which turned out to be a small grove of trees. Each time Morton was more surprised than the last when he finally recognized his error, but he was not discouraged and he tapped Gormann on the shoulder for the third time.

"There's lots of cows over there," he reported happily, pointing to dark shapes standing out against the snow three miles away.

Gormann immediately recognized the shapes as the town

SCRAMBLE!

of Virgelle, but remained silent and guided the L-20 toward Morton's discovery.

"Sure looked like cows to me," the undiscouraged airman remarked, without further excuse, after Gormann circled the town for the second time.

Really nothing to this flying after all, he thought, when they left Virgelle behind and Gormann headed for a rise of ground which had suddenly absorbed his full attention. I learned something today, anyway, he conceded, as they passed over the rise and Gormann seemed to relax a little. Everything on the ground looks like cows!

The ground leveled and Morton thought he saw a highway off to the left. "Not many motorists on that road," he muttered, taking a closer look. But he closed his eyes when Gormann suddenly stood the L-20 on its left wing. Morton held the edges of the seat as the airplane pivoted and built up a force of three G's. When the wings leveled and Morton opened his eyes, they were skimming the ground only inches above the snow. He closed them again.

Gormann rolled into a steep bank to the left, held that attitude for several seconds, rolled level once more, then pulled the throttle back until it was barely above the idle position. The change in engine pitch had an immediate effect on Morton.

"We're landing," he rejoiced aloud, opening his eyes.

The L-20 was ten feet above the ground, flying at near stall speed. Directly in front of them were three steers. Two were obviously dead, lying on a crimson carpet of snow. The third steer a few yards beyond was down on its forelegs with blood pumping from a wound in its neck.

Morton leaned forward attentively.

"Wolves!" Gormann snorted distastefully, pushing the throttle forward and banking for another run. Morton reacted at once by endeavoring to make himself as inconspicuous as possible, and he even considered climbing into the rear seat.

"Ah ha! Tally Ho!" Gormann yelled, suddenly pushing the L-20 to within inches of the snow and racing off toward a new discovery.

Morton abandoned further evacuation plans and again

SCRAMBLE!

seized the edges of the seat, paling noticeably at the possibilities inherent in Gormann's new-found interest.

The wolves were spaced over several hundreds yards. Two stragglers were knocked off their feet by the propeller blast as the L-20 roared over them. In seconds the lead group had been overtaken. Some of the animals swung around menacingly, and Morton saw the gaping jaws of one a split second before Gormann raised the right wing, just high enough to strike the beast full in the face with that portion of wheel extending below the right ski.

"You *killed* it!" Morton cried in horror as blood, ripped by the wind, sprayed from the rotating wheel and streaked along the top of the back half of the ski.

Gormann remained silent, face expressionless. He pulled the L-20 into a steep climb, rolled over on one wing and went diving down. The maneuver put them directly ahead of the lead wolf. They were so low that Morton was certain the animal would either be sliced by the propeller or impaled on one of the skis. But Gormann was trying neither. At the last moment, he pulled back on the control column, pushing the throttle and propeller control full in, and rolled over on the right wing. Again the same G-force, until the course was reversed and they were on the wolf pack from the opposite direction. Twice more Gormann performed the same maneuver and now the wolves were running in the opposite direction.

"OK, good!" he said, satisfied with the results.

The engine maintained a steady drone for three minutes before Morton decided to come out of hiding. Gormann showed no sign of interest in his crew chief's "coming out" activities but continued on a steady course which was drawing them closer to a black smudge of smoke on the horizon. Morton sat up uncomfortably and looked around. Then he saw the smoke. It was coming from a point on the ground less than half a mile away.

"Looks like an oil fire," he said, noting that the smoke was being blown toward them by a light wind.

Gormann adjusted the throttle and propeller control and pumped down a few degrees of flaps before banking gently. Morton saw three figures standing around a tractor a short

SCRAMBLE!

distance from the smoke-producing fire. Someone had thought to lay two trails of oil on top of the snow, and the parallel lines snaked along for several hundred feet, about ten yards apart. The wind was blowing the smoke across the landing area at a thirty degree angle and Gormann dropped his left wing to compensate for drift. He touched down lightly on the left ski, allowed the right ski to settle gently and pulled the throttle full back to idle. The skis rode just below the surface of the snow then the tail wheel dug in, acting as a brake. The main wheels, forced through the last few inches of snow were rolling on solid but bumpy ground.

"Open the trap door in the passenger cockpit!" Gormann ordered, cutting the engine and jumping to the ground when the airplane came to a full stop.

"Good morning, sir!" Summers greeted, running toward Gormann and saluting as militarily as his pace would permit.

Gormann looked up from the right ski which he had stopped to examine.

"Shod again, I see," he said sourly, noting the fur-lined boots on the beaming officer.

"Yes, sir, Mr. McGregor loaned me an extra pair," Summers replied, nodding to the rancher who had just joined them.

"Well, see if you can retrieve the shoes I placed in the passenger cockpit before my crew chief manages to drop them through the trap door." Summers and McGregor looked at the L-20. Morton had the passenger door opened and had succeeded in removing the fourteen inch section of floor, but had also managed to get his left leg extended at full length through the opening; it was plain that he was unable to extricate himself. The leg wiggled energetically, neither touching the ground nor able to withdraw. McGregor smiled but said nothing as Summers scurried to the aid of the stricken airman.

Gormann faced the rancher, shaking his head grimly.

"Gormann," he said, extending his hand without the slightest hint that he had ever set eyes on the tall man in front of him before.

"McGregor," the rancher replied warmly, taking the extended hand in a firm grip.

SCRAMBLE!

"What weapon do you plan to use?" Gormann asked.

"30.06," the rancher answered, waving to the one remaining figure standing by the tractor.

"OK, good!" Gormann agreed, without further question. "You get in the back cockpit with Summers. I'll fly directly over any wolf I see at about fifteen feet and as slow as possible. That will give you anywhere from one to four seconds to get off your shot through the opening in the floor. After you fire, sit down. I may have to maneuver sharply for the next kill.

McGregor nodded his understanding. "Think we can find them?" he asked.

"I've already found them. About three miles from here near three dead steers."

"Let's go!" McGregor urged, grim faced. He took the 30.06 and a box of cartridges brought to him by the ranch hand who had joined them. When he climbed into one of the rear seats, Morton recognized him as the man on the horse. When he saw the rifle, he guessed the entire purpose of this operation. He could only shudder at the possibilities that existed with both Gormann and McGregor in the same airplane at the same time.

"Sir," he said when everyone was on board, "is there any . . . I mean, don't you think I should stay here and tend the fire?"

"No! We're going hunting," Gormann replied unequivocally.

"Yes, sir. I know. . . ."

The engine coughed and further argument was lost as Gormann swung the L-20 around, ran the engine to take-off power, allowed the tail to come up, released the brakes, and started the take-off roll down wind. When the oil lines marking off the extent of the runway were about to pass under them, Gormann pumped down half flaps and the L-20 rose into the air like an elevator.

Minutes later, Gormann called "Tally ho!" and circled the wolves. He slowed the airplane down to less than fifty knots, and they passed over the first animal in a nose high attitude. The explosion of the 30.06 sounded even before Gormann was ready for it.

SCRAMBLE!

Too soon, he thought glancing over his shoulder at McGregor.

"Dead!" the rancher replied loudly, but casually securing himself for the next run and Gormann grinned happily.

Another eight runs produced the same exclamation, "Dead!" from the rear cockpit and Gormann glowed in delight at the efficiency of the man behind him.

"Let's go home!" McGregor yelled, after the ninth wolf dropped and the few that remained were seen heading for the nearby mountains. Gormann nodded and banked toward the make-shift runway five miles away. During the activity, Summers just sat back observing in amazement this marksman at his left who dispatched one animal after another with a single shot for each.

"A most satisfying morning, Colonel," McGregor said after they were on the ground. "How about joining me for lunch?"

"Kind of you to offer, but I must get back. There are still one or two details that need my personal attention." Gormann extended his hand and added, "If Summers gives you any trouble send him back to the base. I'm reasonably sure something can be found to occupy his unproductive moments." Summers gulped heavily.

"No trouble at all, Colonel," the rancher said, shaking hand. "In fact, we rather like him. . . . Appears to be a man who knows how to get things done."

"Been hiding your talents from the Air Force, Summers?" Gormann retorted gruffly. Summers' face dropped. "Well, we may make a good pilot out of him yet!" the DO added. Summers understood the implied praise. "Next time you get to Great Falls, look me up," Gormann said to McGregor as he opened the door to the L-20's cabin. "Perhaps we can have dinner together."

"Well, I had planned to take the family in tomorrow if the roads are open, and they should be by then. Maybe you would care to have dinner—"

"Fine!" Gormann interrupted. "We'll expect you for dinner at four. Summers will direct you to the house."

"There will be five of us, not counting Summers," McGregor said simply, and Summers decided that here was

SCRAMBLE!

another man who made up his mind without relying on excuses.

"OK. Good! See you tomorrow at four."

"Remarkable man," McGregor said, when the L-20 disappeared from sight. "I wonder how many there are like him in the Air Force or even in the country."

"Yes, sir," Summers agreed, "and I'm sure the mold was broken after he was cast."

"Probably true," McGregor nodded.

And a good thing, too, Summers thought. I doubt if the universe, let alone this small planet, could cope with two of them.

It was pushing two o'clock when Gormann parked the L-20 in the same spot it had occupied earlier.

Never thought I'd see this place again, Morton said to himself, as he replaced the chocks. His brain flooded with all the hair-raising experiences he could relate. Got to hurry and get this thing refueled, he thought, as Gormann completed an inspection of the airplane which disclosed no damage.

"Thank you for the flight, sir," the airman said, delighted now that he had a wealth of experiences to tell.

"Enjoyed it, did you?" Gormann asked lightly.

"Oh, yes, sir. I'd love to do it all over again," the airman replied, full of confidence which was straightened by the feel of his feet on solid home ground.

"Interesting," Gormann replied thoughtfully.

"Yes, sir, I can take it!" Morton bragged and his chest swelled.

"Good! I hope your fatigues can!"

SCRAMBLE!

CHAPTER SIX

MIDNIGHT! Gormann reminded himself and tugged at his side of the bedding until sheet and blanket were worked free and his feet lay exposed.

"Cover your feet," Esther mumbled mechanically, through a veil of half sleep.

"Ummm." Gormann kicked passively at the coverings.

The luminous hands of the clock pointed straight up when he opened his eyes and slid out of bed. Esther re-adjusted the covers under her chin and watched the figure of her husband move around the darkened room noiselessly. She always marvelled at the way he could dress in the dark and not bang against furniture or stumble over shoes.

He knew she was awake. He always knew, and he would say something before leaving—he always did. She wouldn't say anything—she never had. It was better that way.

"Be back in a couple of hours," he said, pulling the zipper of the flying suit just enough to hide the outline of his tee-shirt. She remained silent but followed him with her eyes until he disappeared through the bedroom door.

He took his hat and flying jacket out of the closet at the foot of the stairs, went out the front door and closed it quietly. Snow was falling again. Not a heavy snow, but it shaded the street lights as he drove slowly.

About a quarter of a mile visibility, he thought, as he parked in the reserved area by the 29th FIS for the Deputy for Operations. Only the nearer runway lights were visible, and they resembled fireflies as the snow seemed to turn them on and off in an irregular pattern. The Alert lounge was deserted and he could hear deep breathing coming from the bunk room. The airman in the upstairs operations room was sprawled in a large leather chair with both legs propped on another chair, he was snoring lightly. A green bulb on the communications panel near his left elbow glowed dimly and a faint hum emanated from a nearby UHF receiver.

Gormann looked at the sleeping figure for a moment then

SCRAMBLE!

stepped over to a large aircraft status board. He ran his finger down the list of serial numbers and counted the number of aircraft out of commission.

Fifteen! he said to himself, and they're not even flying. Well, that will change as of *now!*"

"I want an airplane!" he ordered in a voice loud enough to awaken Lyle in the bunk room. The sprawled figure of the airman stiffened and he stared unbelievably; for a moment he actually considered closing his eyes again, positive it was a bad dream.

"I'll take this one!" Gormann said pointing to one of the serial numbers on the board that was listed as "in commission."

"Now, sir?" the airman asked incredulously, all thoughts of sleep having suddenly dissolved.

Gormann took a tactical clearance form from a neat pile on the counter and filled it out. He assigned himself the callsign "Keystone 48" and handed the paperwork to the airman dispatcher.

"Now!" he said, reaching over the counter and selecting a key hanging under a small placard that identified it as the key to the personal equipment room.

"Tower," the airman said, flipping one of the switches on the communications panel and speaking into the transmitter.

"Go ahead, 29th," a voice responded almost immediately.

"One F-94C . . . Keystone 48 . . . local for one hour . . . requests GCA standby."

"Very funny, 29th. Got any other funny stories?" The voice retored sarcastically.

The dispatcher jumped out of the way hurriedly as Gormann moved—with five pounding strides—from his position in front of the counter to the area behind the counter that had been occupied by the dispatcher. He placed his face close to the transmitter.

"Gormann here! I have a funny story! It's about an unhappy tower operator! *Questions?*"

Dead silence. Then hurried whispering, some of which carried over the wave length between tower and the 29th Operations.

"... fooling?"

SCRAMBLE!

"I don't know . . . maybe . . . better go easy."

A deep breath.

"I'm sorry, sir. The field is below minimums. . . . We didn't expect anyone to fly tonight."

"If they have any more to say, you take it," Gormann instructed the dispatcher. "And get a crew chief out to my airplane," he added, as he started down the stairs.

"Yes, sir," the airman answered.

Less than three minutes later ran down the stairs himself. "Sir," he called, nearly out of breath, but just in time to catch Gormann before he walked out the door with a back pack over his shoulders and a helmet in his right hand.

"Base Operations advises that Malmstrom is below minimum and so is Gore Field, and they can't approve your flight."

"OK, good! Tell them I've been advised!" he snapped, and stepped out the door.

"What's he up to?" Lyle asked, emerging from the bunk room followed by Butterworth and two other officers.

"I don't know, sir. He just said he wanted an airplane for a local flight."

"In this weather?" Butterworth exploded, running for the stairs. "I'm going to listen in on the UHF," he explained, taking the steps three at a time with Lyle and the others right on his heels.

The crew chief had already removed the canvas covering that protected the upper half of the fuselage. The plexiglass canopy was full open and snow drifted into the cockpit unchecked. Gormann was only a few yards away from the fighter when the crew chief plugged the electrical leads from the auxiliary power unit into the airplane and the fighter's navigational lights began to flash rhythmically. Gormann climbed up the access ladder, placed his parachute in the seat, hung the helmet over the wind screen and removed the aircraft forms from the map case.

"She hasn't been flown for several days, sir," the crew chief explained when he joined Gormann on the cockpit ladder, "but I gave her a good preflight and run-up when I came on duty." Gormann continued to leaf through the form.

"OK, good!" Gormann said replacing the form and lower-

S C R A M B L E !

ing himself into the cockpit. The crew chief assisted him with the parachute and shoulder harness, then removed the safety pin from the canopy firing mechanism. For nearly a full minute Gormann studied the cockpit. Finally he waved the airman off the ladder and reached for the starting switch.

As the engine rumbled into life, five faces appeared at the two windows behind the dispatcher's desk.

"I guess he's really going to fly in this stuff," Butterworth said.

"What's he trying to prove?" Lieutenant Cranford, the pilot of the second section of the alert crew, asked disdainfully.

We'll find out soon enough, Lyle thought, as a slight shiver ran down his back.

"Malmstrom Tower . . . Keystone 48 taxiing out!" All faces turned toward the UHF receiver.

"Keystone 48, this is Malmstrom Tower . . . Base operations advises that the field is below minimum and they cannot clear you for take-off."

"Think he gave up?" Butterworth asked, when there was no further response from Gormann.

"29th Ops, this is Bridesmaid!" The Division Control Center was calling.

"Go ahead, Bridesmaid," the dispatcher replied, reaching for the buzzer that would send the crew chief racing for the fighters if Bridesmaid was about to order a scramble. Both alert crews held their breaths and Cranford muttered, "Oh, no!"

"We're scrambling Keystone 48. He should be in his aircraft now." Bridesmaid continued, and there was an audible hiss as the alert crews relaxed.

"Roger, understand, scrambling Keystone 48. . . . He's already taxiing out."

"Roger. Thank you, Bridesmaid out."

"So you thought he was about to give up," Lyle laughed. For some reason he was happy that Gormann had found a method for getting around the objections of base operations. "He just switched over to Bridesmaid's frequency and ordered them to scramble him," he explained.

SCRAMBLE!

"Well, that's one way," Butterworth agreed. "Weather, time or place can't interfere with a scramble."

"Keystone 48 . . . vector three-six-zero . . . climb to four-zero-thousand. . . . Contact Canadian Club on channel ten after take-off."

Cranford ran to the window as the explosion of the afterburner shook the building. "Can't even see him!"

"No, but we can hear him and so can everyone else on the base," Lyle said, leaving the window and stationing himself near the phone. It rang once and he picked it up.

"29th Operations," he said into the mouthpiece.

"Yes, sir, it was. The Air Division scrambled Colonel Gormann . . . Colonel Gormann, sir . . . I don't know, sir . . . I guess he just wanted to be scrambled. . . . Yes, sir." He replaced the phone.

"The CO," he said in answer to the questioning looks.

"He's coming down?" Butterworth countered.

"No, just said to let him know if any difficulties arise."

For the next hour they listened to channel ten as Gormann called Canadian Club, Sausage, Jessie, and Doll controls. They couldn't hear the replies from the sites, but Lyle could well imagine the faces of the controllers as Gormann's voice boomed over their receivers. He had to smile when he heard the one sided conversation between Gormann and the Doll Controller.

"Doll Control . . . Keystone 48 here." A period of silence followed.

"I don't think they answered him," Cranford said casually as he straddled a chair with chin resting on his hands.

"*Doll Control . . . Keystone 48 here . . . Gormann here!*" Cranford turned around in the chair and almost sat at attention.

"I called you over a minute ago. *Why didn't you answer?*"

"They answered him now," Butterworth grinned.

"*Well, there is someone flying!* And I expect to receive a reply on the first transmission! I want the controller and the Commanding Officer in my office Monday morning at eight o'clock! *Questions?*"

"How far is Doll from Great Falls?" The dispatcher asked, when the radio grew silent again.

SCRAMBLE!

"It's over two hundred by air and close to four hundred by road," Lyle answered.

"That means they'll have to leave pretty early if they have to make it here by Monday morning," the airman said, thinking aloud, and Lyle nodded agreement.

"Canadian Club . . . Keystone 48 here. I'm switching over to Approach Control for a let down.

"Switch the Ground Control Approach channel," Ryan suggested. "He'll be giving them a call in a few minutes. I want to hear how he makes out when he discovers he can't see the ground until his wheels are almost touching."

For the next few minutes, no one spoke. Lyle went to the window and shielded his eyes with his hands and pressed his nose against the glass. He couldn't even see the runway lights.

"Malmstrom GCA . . . Keystone 48 here . . . Great Falls range . . . six thousand . . . one-one-zero degrees."

"Roger, Keystone 48. We have you in good radar contact. Maintain six thousand; continue heading one-one-zero degrees."

Lyle remained by the window, but faced the receiver. Butterworth joined him and he looked worried.

"This could be a rough one," he said softly.

"Gormann isn't a man who does anything foolish," Lyle replied almost in a whisper. "Let's listen. I think we may learn something about flying GCA's by the time he lands."

Gormann's voice was calm and he repeated all instructions clearly.

"You'd think it was high noon on a cloudless day," Butterworth remarked, when Gormann was coming down the final approach and the GCA operator's chatter was a monologue of repetition.

"On course . . . on glide path . . . one mile from the end of runway . . . on course, on glide path . . . approaching GCA minimums . . . on course . . . on glide path—"

"This will be a touch and go!" Gormann's voice interrupted the final controller's soliloquy.

"What!" Ryan and Cranford yelled simultaneously.

"Understand, touch and go," the GCA controller repeated

SCRAMBLE!

and continued with the glide path information. All faces were pressed against the windoys.

"On course . . . on glide path."

"There he goes! I just saw his lights flash by." Cranford said excitedly.

"Over GCA touchdown point . . . touchdown . . . *Now!*"

"OK, good, GCA . . . on the ground and going around."

"I didn't even see him go by," Ryan said, as GCA began passing instructions again.

"I only saw him for a second myself," Cranford admitted, then listened in silence as Gormann executed another GCA landing. Lyle thought he saw the navigation lights flash seconds before GCA announced, "Over GCA touchdown point . . . touchdown. . . . *Now!*"

"OK good, GCA . . . 48 switching to tower frequency."

Lyle and Butterworth remained at the window until they saw the fighter taxiing on the ramp and finally stop at the refueling pit. When Gormann entered, they were sitting in the alert lounge and Cranford called attention. Gormann motioned for them to resume their seats and walked over to the telephone in the corner of the room. He hadn't returned with his parachute or helmet and Butterworth looked at Lyle questioningly. Lyle shrugged his shoulders.

"What's your callsign?" Gormann asked, holding the phone in one hand and looking directly at Lyle.

"I'm X-Ray Lead, today, sir," Lyle responded, and he experienced a sinking sensation in the muscles of his stomach.

"Gormann here! Scramble Keystone 48! Altitude four-two thousand under Jessie control . . . *Now!*" He replaced the phone, looked from Lyle to Butterworth, said nothing and was out the door with the first sound of the scramble bell.

"Scramble Keystone 48!" a hollow voice ordered over the loud speaker.

"I thought sure he was going to scramble us," Butterworth said, and he knew that Lyle had the same thought because Lyle was slowly releasing his breath.

"What's he trying to prove?" Ryan grumbled, as they all started up the stairs again.

Gormann was off the ground in four minutes and the

SCRAMBLE!

phone rang again, but Lyle remained by the window while the dispatcher answered and satisfied the caller's curiosity.

"Jessie control . . . Keystone 48 here . . . four-two-thousand . . . heading three-four-zero degrees. . . . Affirmative! . . . I'll fly this heading for five minutes."

"Wonder what he's up to now?" Butterworth questioned, and then supplied what he considered a possible solution. "Maybe he's trying to accustom the townspeople to the noise of jets operating after midnight."

Lyle shook his head, "I doubt it. He could do that on any night. Besides, the snow and clouds probably absorb most of the noise before it travels more than a mile or two."

"Jessie control . . . Keystone 48 here. Turning port to one-six-zero degrees. . . . *Scramble X-Ray Lead*. . . . Now! I'm the target!"

"So that's what he planned to do all the time," Ryan gasped, as Lyle stood motionless, looking at the radio and unable to believe—or not wanting to believe—what he had just heard. His face felt hot and his hands clammy. His feet were frozen to the floor.

Suddenly the bell sounded.

"*Scramble X-Ray Lead!* the voice ordered. "*Scramble One!*"

They made the intercept thirty miles northwest of Great Falls. It was a good intercept. Well timed and well executed and neither pilot nor RO saw Gormann's fighter because he had turned off all the navigation lights; but Lyle's radar told him that had he actuated one switch and held the trigger, the target would have been destroyed.

"Nice run!" Butterworth exclaimed happily. "If that had been a firing pass there would be one less fighter in the sky right now."

"OK, good, X-Ray Lead. Join up and I'll fly your wing. Make a range let down!"

"Roger," Lyle responded, and with the help of Jessie control and Butterworth, he found and joined with Keystone 48. Gormann flew steady for several seconds then slid smoothly into position on Lyle's right wing. Butterworth

S C R A M B L E !

checked Gormann's position several times during the let down and the fighter was always in perfect formation.

"Gear down. . . . Now!" Lyle ordered, when they were on the GCA base leg.

"Right with us," Butterworth said, not expecting, nor receiving, an answer."

"This will be a touch and go," Lyle announced, breaking into the final controller's chatter. Butterworth's first impulse was to scream out, "What are *you* trying to prove," but he suppressed the urge and looked over at Gormann. He was holding tight formation, tip tanks not three feet apart and he followed Lyle without question. Butterworth felt a sudden surge of pride in his friend.

He hasn't held his breath once during this entire flight, he thought, returning his attention to the final controller's words.

"Over GCA touchdown point . . . touch down. . . . Now!"

"Speed brakes up. . . . Now! . . . 100% . . . Now!" Lyle ordered, when the main gear touched the runway.

Butterworth looked at Gormann again just as Lyle called, "Burner. . . . Now!"

"Right with us," the RO announced, and began calling off the airspeed even though he knew that Lyle was already flying instruments and would be checking that instrument continually as he did the others.

Gormann held the same tight formation throughout the second GCA and landing, and didn't drop behind until they approached the fuel pit at which point the aircraft were required to line up in single file.

"Rough flight, Lieutenant?" the crew chief asked, as soon as Lyle opened the canopy and a ladder was in place.

"No. . . . No, not bad at all," Lyle replied, and he meant it. He was tired, but he felt relaxed.

The clock on the nightstand ticked off the hour of 4 o'clock when Gormann gently lowered himself back into bed.

"We'll have to get up by eight if we're going to get the boys to Sunday School on time," Esther whispered, more to let her husband know she was awake than for any other reason.

SCRAMBLE!

"I'll be up," he promised and pressed his lips against her shoulder.

"You've had a busy day today," she said softly. "I hope you'll be able to stay home tomorrow."

"A productive day, Esther. . . . A very productive day. . . . And I'll be home all day today," he corrected. "I invited Lieutenant Summers to dinner." Esther opened her half closed eyes. "And the five McGregors," he added, dropping off to sleep as his wife sat straight up in bed.

The McGregors arrived at three-thirty and Summers promptly at four. He had found it necessary to detour by his BOQ room to obtain fresh clothes.

It was obvious from the beginning that Esther and Barbara McGregor would become close friends.

As for McGregor, he eyed the four Gormann boys with open envy. After hearing some of the stories that Summers related about him, he thought, I would have been surprised if he had any daughters. Probably has an operational agreement with the stork!

"A wonderful family," Esther said when the McGregors drove off.

"And, if I'm not mistaken, they'll have a new son-in-law after Summers completes flying training," Gormann observed, removing a little black notebook from his suit pocket.

"I'll be looking forward to the weekend at their home," Esther added, as her husband finished the entry in his notebook: "*Mission Accomplished!*"

CHAPTER SEVEN

"**THAT COMPLETES** all the target assignments with the exception of the Denver, Colorado Springs and Salt Lake City complexes. These have been assigned to the 420th Bomb

S C R A M B L E !

Squadron and will be considered in a moment, along with a few additional details on the over-all operation." Soft light played with the two stars on the speaker's shoulders as he faced the twenty-six squadron and group commanders assembled in the Strategic Air Command Headquarters' closely guarded briefing room. He walked to a large wall map behind him on which were long, wide, red arrows emanating from North Africa, England, Greenland and Alaska, and terminating in the United States. Some of the arrows separated into three or four prongs before entering the coast or penetrating the Canadian-U.S. border line.

"The 420th will receive initial deployment orders sometime prior to the first of November," the General began again. "They will deploy to Hawaii and, while there, execute several practice operational missions. However, before the actual strike date they will deploy again to Alaska, where they will maintain full strike readiness. At least two times—possibly three or more—the entire strike force, including those in Africa, England and Greenland, will receive the execute order. All aircraft will take off as briefed for their planned targets, but the *recall* signal will be sent and all aircraft will return to their respective deployment bases." He took a pointer from a hook near the edge of the map and held it pool-cue fashion.

"This maneuver will serve to drop a fair share of the Air Defense Fighters in the corner pocket!" He pushed the pointer through his fingers at an imaginary cue ball.

"As you know, within each Air Defense Area there are numerous airfields, which, although they do not now have fighters in place, or any other aircraft for that matter, could readily be utilized as deployment bases by the respective defense commander. We want to know what bases will have fighters available to resist our strike forces. Therefore, a false start or two will provide us with much of this information." He pulled the pointer back for another shot.

"Guess we're playing this one to the hilt," one colonel whispered to the officer on his left, then fell silent as the general continued.

"On the first day of November, SAC representatives will be assigned to each Air Division as observers. They will *not*

SCRAMBLE!

know the exact strike date, nor will they know if the force is actually on its way or if it is to be recalled. *But*, they will observe the activity within the Air Division and provide that intelligence to this headquarters via pre-arranged code. There will always be at least one SAC representative in the Air Division Control center during the entire time period of this exercise. By just watching and listening they will be able to glean volumes of data concerning alert status, new tactics and perhaps size and type of planned deployments. Actually, it's like having a legalized spy in the enemy camp." He paused, allowing humor of his simile to take its course before proceeding.

"We have made a study of every airfield within each Air Division and only those capable of supporting jet operations have been held for further consideration. For example, let's examine the 29th Air Division—the area through which the 420th will fly eighteen B-36's on the way to target.

"The 29th has two all-weather squadrons. One here at Great Falls, consisting of twenty-eight F-94C's; and one here at Rapid City, consisting of twenty-five F-86D's." He drew an imaginary circle with the pointer around each location on the map.

"There is also a squadron of F-86 day fighters at Gore Field in Great Falls, belonging to the Montana Air National Guard, but we have a surprise in store for them. This entire operation will be conducted at night and in the hours of darkness. Therefore, the only fighters the 420th will have to contend with will be the combined total of fifty-three, and these fifty-three fighters will have more than 838,000 square miles of sky to defend. They won't even know until their radars pick us up exactly what portion of the sky the 420th will invade. The 29th Commander, of course, may choose to deploy some of his fighters to one or more of four possible deployment bases in Montana—Cutbank, Lewistown, Billings, or Glasgow.

"If the commander plans to utilize any of these fields there is one vital prerequisite he must meet before the exercise begins—fuel. And Billings does not have enough for sustained exercise operations. To solve this problem, fuel must be shipped in sometime prior to the actual arrival of

SCRAMBLE!

the fighters. The commander may hold off his fighters, but the fuel will have to be hauled into place by Air Force fuel trucks, nice big *yellow* fuel trucks, and when the fuel is brought in that unit of fighters is destined for a quick trip to a side pocket, because we'll fly where they 'ain't,' or at least where they're the weakest.

"How this will be accomplished—the knowledge of fuel truck arrival—is quite simple. On the first day of November, we will have two agents on duty in each town throughout the country that is located near any airfield in question. If any unusual activity is noted it will be reported immediately, and we will notify our strike force aircraft at once, even if they're more than half way to their respective targets.

"The 420th, for example, will send five aircraft on a route that passes within sixty miles of Glasgow and thirteen on a route passing near Great Falls. Once the main force passes Lewistown, five of the B-36's will proceed on course to Salt Lake City. There will, of course, always be a ten to twenty mile separation between any two B-36's at all times, and they will approach both Great Falls and Glasgow over a hundred-mile front. The timing will be such that it will keep fighter controllers jumping. Sometime before either force is within fighter range, a coded message will be passed to each aircraft commander.

"It will simply state Condition One, Two or Three, followed by three letters. The letters will represent the airfields with fighter range of their planned course. Condition One will mean fighters have been deployed to that airfield. Condition Two will mean no fighters at the moment but activity suggests that deployment is imminent. Condition Three, no fighters, no deployment possible. If fighters have been deployed or soon will be, each aircraft commander will take whatever tactical action he deems necessary to stay out of fighter range, or to reduce fighter effectiveness.

"Finally, gentlemen, each strike force will be proceeded by at least two Electronic Counter Measure aircraft. The 420th will have two of these aircraft in front of them. Once the ECM aircraft are within maximum possible fighter range, they will orbit and not participate in the actual target strike. They will listen to all fighter frequencies and commence

S C R A M B L E !

jamming operations every time a fighter pilot or GCI controller transmits. Without the use of radios, the fighters will find it extremely difficult to intercept any of our strike force. Our theoretical losses should not exceed twenty-five out of a force of four-hundred and fifty B-36's, B-47's and B-52's. Are there any questions?"

"Yes, sir. I'm Colonel Emerson Edwards. I am not a member of the 420th Bomb Squadron and my target assignment for the exercise is outside the 29th Air Division. However, I am stationed at Ellsworth Air Force Base, which is within the 29th Air Division area. I have *flown* against their fifty-three fighters and I have seen them land at Miles City, Montana, which was not included as one of the four bases mentioned during your briefing."

"We haven't neglected Miles City, Colonel. However, we consider the runways marginal for sustained jet operation; but, to be on the safe side we have assigned one agent to cover it. I, for one, seriously doubt if the commander of the 29th Air Division will allow it to be used—not if he wants to maintain a good flying safety record."

"Yes, sir, but have you considered personalities?"

"Yes, Colonel, we have. We have studied the military careers of both the commanders and vice commanders of each air division, and we feel that we know how they'll run the show."

"Sir, have you gone down to the deputy for operations level? In the case of the 29th, I think it might be—"

"I hardly believe that will be necessary, Colonel Emerson. The Air Division's commanders still control the over-all operation. If the 29th happens to have a deputy for operations . . . some colonel or other . . ."

"A lieutenant colonel, sir, but—"

"Ah, a lieutenant colonel then . . . who happens to be a r-e-a-l t-i-g-e-r, I gather. Well, I think I speak for the commander of the 420th as well as for all of SAC when I say we will make a puddy cat out of him!" It was obvious that the majority of the officers agreed, since they nodded their heads affirmatively.

"Well, that's it, gentlemen," the general continued with a cursory grin at the undue concern displayed by a Strategic

SCRAMBLE!

Air Command Strike Force Commander about some tigerish lieutenant colonel. "Remember, when you leave this room," he said, returning to complete seriousness, "that we are the only ones who know the overall scope of this exercise, outside of a very few commanders who have all the details including the strike date. ADC will be doing everything in its power to compromise the strike date and whatever else they can. They must be kept in the dark until their radars actually pick up the strike force. Our entire operation has been planned within the tightest security measure. Our strike forces will not even transmit one radio message once they become airborne. They will only receive messages from this headquarters . . . and, of course, listen in on the ADC fighters and controllers. Let *them* transmit and we will jam them!"

When the meeting adjourned, most of the officers returned to their BOQ's or the Officer's Club; they would not depart for their home bases until the following morning. Colonel Edwards, however, proceeded straight to the flight line and boarded a waiting C-47. A few minutes later, he was on his way to Ellsworth Air Force Base, Rapid City, South Dakota. There were only two other passengers aboard. They both contented themselves with books to while away the three hour confinement. There were several magazines scattered about the bucket seats and, for a time he tried to read, but his mind kept returning to the 29th Air Division.

The general may think Miles City is not suited for sustained jet operations, he thought, but he had better have a well trained agent living on the end of the runway until the exercise is over—and even then I'd place my money on Gormann. He still has about six months before Exercise Snowboy gets under way. I sure would like to know what deception *he's* planning for the 420th Bomb Squadron! Edwards hoped he'd learn something when the 29th Rocket Team started competition against the 54th the day after tomorrow.

The family of five stood aloof, their long aluminum snouts mirroring the first minutes of a glistening dawn. Even the two alert airplanes, their canopies opened with helmets resting on the wind screens, seemed less attentive to the day's

S C R A M B L E !

responsibilities, than the five Rocket Team aircraft. Further down the ramp, the pilot of a T-33 looked at his watch and compared it with the clock on the instrument panel. They agreed . . . 0435.

He held the starter switch with his right index finger until the RPM climbed to nine percent, then lifted the cover on the fuel sequencing switch and moved it to the up position. The tailpipe temperature gauge reflected a sudden increase, slowly rose to 690°, before settling down to a cool 550°, as the RPM climbed to thirty-three percent. He eased the T-33 out of the parking area and taxied by the five F-94C's. He turned toward the runway and a green light flashed from the tower, indicating that he was cleared for immediate access to it.

At 0444, he ran the engine up to sixty-five percent then waited for the tip-tank light on the panel below his left forearm to blink and go out.

"Fifteen seconds," he said quietly, and opened the throttle to one hundred percent. The increased power made the airplane strain forward and he was forced to increase the pressure on the brakes to prevent the wheels from creeping forward.

At 0445, the tower flashed another green light and he released the brakes. No one had broken radio silence!

The windows behind the dispatcher rattled lustily as the T-33 rolled down the runway, then hummed with a decreasing intensity as the airplane droned off in the distance. Gormann emerged from the briefing room several yards down the hall, as the sound of scraping of chairs and low voices signalled the termination of the early mission briefing. The dispatcher switched the UHF set to the GCI frequency just as Gormann started down the stairs, followed by his RO and the other members of the Rocket Team. The UHF remained silent except for a little background tone. He didn't pretend to understand what Colonel Gormann was trying to accomplish, but he could recall the Deputy for Operations's words of two weeks ago when Gormann had sent for him.

"We are about to enter a phase of training for the 29th Rocket Team activity."

"Yes, sir," the dispatcher remembered having answered,

SCRAMBLE!

recalled also that he had not been overcome with joy at the prospect, since it would certainly mean long hours and probably two full weeks without a day off.

"This operation may have some characteristics which are . . . different; however, under no circumstances will you speak of, or discuss, any of these unusual aspects. Is that understood?"

"Yes, sir!" He had been clearly puzzled.

"Of interest to you," Gorman had continued, "and of prime concern is that there will be absolutely *no* radio transmissions from the tower, from the Rocket Team, or from the target T-33 at *any* time during the next two weeks. If you note any breach of radio silence, no matter how minor or insignificant, you will record the time, call sign and any other supporting data and report to me directly!

"Questions?"

"No, sir."

"OK. Good! Your work will be observed . . . but your past record shows competence and ability; therefore, I'll number you among the key members of my team."

The dispatcher had departed determined to do his damndest.

The other members of the Rocket Team, including those who would assist or support the practice, had also been individually selected and, one week before the operation began, Gormann assembled them in the 29th FIS briefing room and lectured them into what he termed, the "right frame of mind." There were questions from some, quizzical expressions from others, especially when he outlined his plans for the upcoming two weeks of practice missions with, as he said mysteriously, "an eye toward future events!"

"Sir?" Lyle said.

"What's on your mind?"

"Sir! What about the tower operators?" Lyle blurted out. "They aren't members of the 29th, sir, and since they control all landings and take-offs, they may not understand our strict adherence to radio silence." Gormann said nothing. His eyes were half closed and he began rotating his pencil between the thumb and index fingers of both hands. Lyle

SCRAMBLE!

was convinced that his words had not penetrated into the DO's mind, but he was determined to have his say.

"They'll certainly question our procedure and undoubtedly report it to their commander, and subsequently to the Wing Commander—a SAC commander!" He almost whispered the last words and Gormann's head jerked from its half-turned position. He glared at Lyle. Gormann continued to stare at Lyle for a long moment, then his eyes softened and his words came in a low, confidential whisper.

"I have had the tower operators assigned to the 29th Air Division for an indefinite period. It's only the beginning, but we'll be ready for them!"

Somehow everyone knew he meant SAC.

It was 0520 when the scramble sounded.

"Scramble . . . Jessie . . . Burner . . . Angels forty-one!" the voice coming over the loud speaker ordered curtly, and in a much abbreviated form.

While the pilots started engines the RO's wrote down the instructions passed over the loud speaker. Memory was not to be trusted.

At 0524, Gormann rolled down the runway, followed every fifteen seconds by the next fighter in turn. Lyle was last, at 0525.

"Channel twelve!" Butterworth instructed Lyle once they were airborne.

"On twelve," Lyle confirmed, when the frequency change was accomplished. Butterworth was already devoting his full attention to his radar set and the problem at hand. He must maintain a precise separation of one mile, directly behind number four.

"Come back two," Butterworth ordered, as the radar display indicated slightly high overtaking speed.

"Ninety-eight percent!" Lyle replied, moving the throttles back from the original one hundred percent setting.

"That's holding it."

At 0532 they passed 23,000 feet in position, one mile behind number four, with speeds synchronized.

At 0532 and ten seconds, the jamming commenced.

S C R A M B L E !

At Jessie Control, Lieutenant Bauer followed the green finger of light several minutes around the scope, then returned to his desk and absently picked up his coffee cup while his mind worked on the problems of the morning mission.

The fighters were in trail and he'd keep them that way, vectoring the entire flight in such a way that he could turn them toward the target on a ninety degree course, at predetermined intervals. But, there were one or two complicating factors in this operation which, even after days of practice, kept him doubly alert. One, he could pass instructions to the fighters, but they were not permitted to reply. Also, someone had decided that jamming should be introduced and this limited his capability to pass instructions. He was seldom permitted more than two or three seconds before the T-bird pilot sent out a D/F signal and jammed the frequency. One thing anyway, the T-bird pilot didn't play favorites. He jammed every time he had the opportunity, and seemed particularly aggressive when Gormann was about to make the attack.

The GCI controllers had worked out a system which helped to overcome, at least with some degree of success, the jamming methods employed by the target aircraft. The system consisted of a numerical sequence of frequencies. When jamming was detected, each pilot switched to the next pre-planned frequency. The mathematical possibilities were almost endless, but usually twelve to fifteen changes per mission would see the fighters through their target run. There was a different sequence for each mission, which meant three sets per day for fifteen days. This was the last day. Of course, to complicate matters more, someone often gave the frequency code to the T-bird pilot before each mission, and Bauer had a strong suspicion concerning the culprit. The target pilot made a pretense, at least, of searching for the frequencies . . . sometimes he'd search for a full five seconds, but more often than not, it was three or less. So far, Bauer thought, I've been lucky. Fourteen missions completed without one miss. He felt good about that, because the controllers at Doll and Sausage had already missed one or two.

Target's holding about ninety-eight percent, he calculated,

SCRAMBLE!

as he consulted the winds aloft chart. Then his thoughts were interrupted.

"Fighters . . . one-nine-zero . . . heading zero-one-zero!" the scope operator called, his words punctuated by the D/F tone suddenly blocking channel twelve.

"Going to make it difficult today, are we?" Bauer snapped tersely.

"*Three-fifty . . . Forty-one!*" he ordered, when the channel change had been accomplished. The D/F tone was less than two seconds behind.

"Fighters changing to three-five-zero, sir."

"Good!" Bauer nodded with satisfaction. "If he wants to play footsy, I'm all for it!"

The yellow line on the plotting board was rapidly approaching the white line representing the fighters. The target was still about sixty miles north of the fighters and about twenty miles further west, but, even as Bauer glanced at the board, the yellow line moved two inches further south and the fighter line three inches further north.

"Closing at nine hundred knots, sir" the radar operator reminded him. Bauer checked the frequency code; two of them had already been scratched off.

"One minute and fifty seconds," he said, calculating the time before he must turn the first fighter on to attack heading. At the rate the fighters were burning fuel, there would be little time to compensate for errors.

He rechecked the UHF channel.

"One . . . Port . . ." Jamming. Another channel change, a two-second pause. "Two-sixty for nineteen!" Jamming.

"One's turning port, sir."

Bauer was concentrating on number two now. If he continued on his original heading, everything would be fine. But, if he misunderstood and also began turning port, Bauer wanted to catch it immediately and get him back on course.

"One's steady, sir! Two, proceeding on course!" Bauer returned his attention to number one. Time for one quick correction, and then he had to hope the target had been picked up on the fighter's radar. If so, the pilot and RO could take it from there without GCI instructions.

"One . . . two-sixty-five!" Jamming. Channel change.

SCRAMBLE!

"Two . . . port . . . two-fifty-five . . ." Jamming.

"One's got the target, sir. . . . Two's turning port." Another channel change.

"Three . . . port . . . two-sixty!" No jamming.

"Ah! Caught you napping, did I?" Bauer snapped at the target blip on the radar scope.

"Target and one merged, sir. Two's picked up the target . . . *Three's not responding!*"

"Three port!" Jamming. Channel switch.

"Three port! Two five-five!" Jamming.

"Three not responding, sir."

"He's got the frequencies mixed," Bauer groaned, hoping to catch him by returning to the previous channel.

"Three's turning port, now, sir . . ."

Bauer had his mouth open, about to transmit. He closed it, and corrected to the next channel.

"Four . . . port . . ." Jamming. Change. "Two-thirty . . . four seventeen!" No jamming, but Bauer didn't gloat over this piece of good fortune. He still had problems.

"One's off the target . . . two's merged . . . three's five miles behind, correcting for target . . . four's steady on attack heading."

"Five . . ." Jamming. Channel change. Jamming. Another change. Jamming. Change again. Jamming.

"He's blocking all transmissions!" Bauer growled, making another attempt and meeting with the same result.

"Five's turning port, sir!" the operator said with unmistakable surprise quickly looking over his shoulder at Bauer's scope for confirmation.

"Five's going in on his own," Bauer responded. "Probably had a time limit set for receiving instructions. If they didn't come through or were blocked, he'd try it alone, using number four as the initial guide to the target. Look, he's three miles behind number four, probably locked on . . . there, he's picked up the target himself and correcting port." They watched in silence as four completed his run, with number five less than thirty seconds behind.

"It's a good thing this was only practice and the fighters were not actually firing rockets at that T-bird! He would

S C R A M B L E !

have been shot down seventy-five times in the last fifteen days, during the morning missions alone."

"Yes, sir." Sergeant O'Neal agreed, having come up behind Bauer to observe the action over his shoulder. "How about some more coffee?"

"I could use about six eggs and a pound of ham to go along with it," Bauer grinned, relaxed in the knowledge that his workout for the day was terminated. If Gormann followed his original schedule, the afternoon missions against Doll and Sausage should complete the training.

Shortly after twelve Bauer was awakened by the phone beside his bed.

"Lieutenant Bauer," he said sleepily.

"Yes, sir. This is Sergeant Keeler. We just received word from Bridesmaid that you are to report to the 29th FIS tomorrow morning, not later than 0700. You're going to Rapid City to act as GCI controller for the 29th FIS. I'll have your orders ready within the hour, sir. You may pick them up anytime after that."

"OK. Thanks, Sergeant. Anything else?"

"Yes, sir. A Lieutenant Lyle called and said to tell you that number three had radio failure right after take-off. Said you'd probably be interested."

"I am. Thank you."

"Yes, sir."

Boyl! Bauer thought, that's real agressiveness! Gormann must really have these boys in the right frame of mind. Not only do they refrain from making transmissions, but they won't even abort when they can't receive.

SCRAMBLE!

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE FLIGHT to the 54th Fighter Interceptor Squadron's base at Ellsworth took off at 0930 the following morning. The Rocket Team cruised at thirty-five-thousand feet and only a few, puffy clouds drifted many thousands of feet under them. They started descending when they were still seventy-five miles away, but the white ribbon of the Ellsworth runway was clearly visible even at that distance. They pulled into a tight echelon to the right as soon as Gormann received landing instructions. Minutes later, they crossed over the runway and Gormann broke to the left almost immediately.

"Gear down and locked. Pressure!" Lyle called, easing the fighter into the final turn.

"Recheck your gear," the tower advised, as it did each and every time an aircraft was landing.

"One-sixty," Butterworth began, when they had rolled out and Lyle had adjusted the throttle for approach speed. He was concentrating on the two mile runway reaching up to receive them.

"One-forty."

Lyle saw a B-36 out of the corner of his eye as they passed over the edge of the concrete. The big bird was waiting for the fighters to clear the runway, before taxiing into take-off position.

"One-twenty." The wheels touched.

"Looks like the 54th has turned out en masse," Lyle said, noting the number of people standing around the parking area.

Butterworth nodded.

"No doubt they'll greet us with a few well chosen words designed to spark the flames of rivalry."

"Well, here's our welcoming committee," Lyle said pointing toward two fliers from the 54th. Standing with hands on hips, heads tilted to the right they were observing the F-94 with undisguised distaste.

S C R A M B L E !

"That is it?" the smaller of the two asked, as Lyle climbed out of the cockpit.

"I don't know . . . certainly not an airplane, though," the second one replied. They began to walk slowly around the fighter, stopping periodically to peer under the wings or tap the fuselage lightly, until they had both conducted a complete circuit around the aircraft.

"Why, of course," the second one continued, stopping by the left wing only a few feet from Lyle and Butterworth, who were filling out the form, "I should have recognized it at once. Look at those classic lines. How could we have mistaken it for an airplane? *It's a garbage scow!*"

"You're absolutely right, John," the smaller one agreed, nodding his head approvingly. "Not only that, but now it's clear exactly what they have in mind. They're going to throw garbage at the target and smell up the airways. Perhaps they'll have the decency to place a sheet over that thing before they leave the flight line—in deference to the gentlemen of the 54th."

"You fellows get cited by the Bureau of Sanitation when you crossed the state line?" the one called John asked, when Lyle had closed the form and he and Butterworth turned to face them.

"Two staunch, stout hearted, outstanding examples of the 54th Junior Birdmen's League, I presume?" Lyle asked, patting the smaller one on the head and testing the muscle of the other's left arm. "You really shouldn't be out here trying to fly airplanes without your parents," he added, shaking his finger in warning.

"*They fly?*" Butterworth asked, with loud skepticism. He stared at them in horror. "It's not safe . . ." the remainder of his words were drowned out as the B-36 roared into the air.

"Lyle," Lyle said, extending his hand to the taller one.

"John Dole," the latter said with a broad grin.

"Henry Harrison," the other replied in response to Butterworth's introduction.

"Well, SAC won that round," Dole remarked, as the quartet of first lieutenants piled into a weapons carrier and headed

S C R A M B L E !

for the BOQ. They had a quick lunch and, at 1300 hours returned to 54th operations for a briefing.

The briefing was conducted by Colonel Hastings. He introduced the Commander and Operations Officer of the 54th FIS to the members of the 29th Rocket Team, and then settled down to a briefing on the rules and regulations governing the inter-squadron shoot-off.

"Tomorrow morning the 29th will fly the first mission. Take-off time will be 0600. The second mission will be flown by the 54th and will be off at 0900. The 29th will fly third, at 1300, and the 54th, the last mission of the day, at 1530. The following day, the 54th will fly first, and so on. If all goes well, we will have flown twelve missions per team, per aircraft, by 1700, next Saturday." He paused before continuing.

"You are all familiar with the target operation; however, I will run over it again briefly.

"The first T-33 will be airborne at 0530. He will not, of course, take off with the target in place. It would be next to impossible for a T-bird to pull three thousand feet of cable, plus a 6 x 20 foot 'rag', into the air from a standing start. Therefore, each time a target is towed it will have to be 'snatched' from the ground by a flying start. Once the T-bird is airborne, the pilot will turn out of traffic, but remain below five hundred feet, and proceed to a point three miles off the approach end of the runway and one hundred yards to the right. At this time, he should be at two hundred feet, with an airspeed of 175 knots. Directly in front of him, he will see several large, brightly colored panels, spaced at fifteen hundred foot intervals, and extending for two miles in this direction. He must fly right down this line of panels and pass over the last one at an altitude no higher than fifty feet.

"If he is properly lined up and at the correct altitude when he passed over the last panel, he will see two flexible poles perpendicular to his flight path. The poles are twenty-five feet high, and the hook on the underside of the airplane will grab a loop of cable extended between these two poles. That loop of cable is the terminus of three thousand feet

SCRAMBLE!

of cable, stretched, in a line directly down his line of flight. Once the cable is hooked, the pilot will apply full power and climb sharply until the rag itself is snatched off the ground. The tower will inform the pilot when the target is clear, at which time he will reduce his angle of climb and proceed to the range, at 175 knots indicated airspeed. If the 'snatch' is unsuccessful, we may have to extend the meet into the grace period."

"At that rate, we may never complete a mission," one of the 54th team members quipped, and he was rewarded by laughter and more good natured insults directed at the tow-target pilots.

"I think you'll find that the target pilots are experienced and will do their jobs with professional precision," Hastings said, laughing himself at some of the digs taken at the target pilots' expense. "Besides," he continued, "a range umpire will ride in the rear seat of each T-bird towing the rag. He'll be much more desirous of achieving the earliest possible completion date after a few rides snatching targets!" More laughter.

"Once the rag is off the ground, a second T-bird will take-off and join up with the two target aircraft. This second T-bird will be range judge. He'll check the target before and after each pass, and inform the fighter if there were any hits. To reclude arguments, there will be a photographer in the back seat of the judge's aircraft. He will confirm the judge's ruling on film. After the target is checked, the judge will join up with the two aircraft and fly *very* tight formation. This will preclude the loss of any judges, should the fighters lock on to him rather than the rag." Again general laughter and remarks, mostly about the expendability of judges.

"And don't think I don't believe you'd try," one of the judges returned.

"It is for that very purpose—to prevent the loss of judges, as well as the two aircraft itself—that the range umpire will be riding in the rear seat of the first T-bird," Hastings continued, after a brief pause to light a cigarette.

"When the radar display in the fighter indicates twenty seconds to go before rocket release, the pilot of the fighter will transmit over the designated frequency, 'Twenty sec-

SCRAMBLE!

onds to go!" The range umpire will call 'Clear' or 'Break-off.' If the pilot receives 'Clear' he may proceed with the attack. If he is told to 'Break-off,' he will do so at once, and in the direction down and away from the two aircraft! If, for some reason, the pilot fails to hear either one or the other of these transmissions after he calls "Twenty seconds to go," *he will break-off*, secure his armament switches and call GCI for further instructions."

"For the firing itself, each fighter will be permitted three attempts per mission. If, of course, he fires on the first attack, he won't need a second or third try, since all rockets will be gone. But, if he is out of position or doesn't like the attack profile, he may try again for a maximum of three times. If he hits on the first attack the team will receive 1,000 points; 800 points if two attempts are needed, and 600 points if three are required. Each fighter will fire twenty-four rockets in salvo, and, regardless of the number of holes made in the rag during any one pass . . . even if some 'Hawkeye' should put all twenty-four in it, it counts as one hit—singular."

"How about if we shoot it off altogether, sir?" one of the team members asked.

"If you shoot it off right at, or near, the cable attached to the rag, you'll receive a pat on the back and be credited with a hit. If you cut the cable some distance between the rag and the two aircraft, the pat will be administered much lower down and we'll let you tow the rag while the other pilot—perhaps even the umpire—perform a few runs on you."

"Cheez, what a grouch!" the questioner concluded, shuddering in mock terror at such a possibility.

The large circle of light began to shrink rapidly toward the center of the scope, until it was only a fraction of an inch in diameter. Lyle eased the controls as smoothly as possible, using finger tip pressure on the stick and only ounces of pressure on the rudders. A dot of light on the scope bounced irregularly as the fighter encountered turbulent air. Again light control pressures. The dot must be kept in the center of the circle. Butterworth passed a continual flow of instructions. The circle vanished and became a small horizontal line. In just over four and one-half seconds the rockets would

SCRAMBLE!

go. The dot settled uneasily on the bar. In the final critical seconds, Lyle squeezed the trigger with his right index finger and held his breath. He was flying a gun platform now. The wings, the engine, the training, were only the means for getting the rocket tubes in the right place at the right time. The fighter shuddered through rough air. The dot rose above the bar and slid to the right. No time for another correction. A bad pass. He released the trigger—too late! A large X flashed on the scope and the aircraft braked noticeably. The air ahead was instantly lined with streaks of grayish white smoke, as twelve rockets in each wing pod raced for the target.

"Missed!" Lyle growled, slapping the stick to the left and rolling away from the target.

"Rollerskate! Boardpipe-Five off the target. Fired!"

"Roger, Boardpipe-Five. Pigeons to Home Plate, two-seven-two degrees for twenty-five miles. The pass looked good from here!" Bauer's voice sounded hopeful. The 54th was leading by two thousand points. A hit now would end the day's firing still in favor of the 54th, but there was one day to go. He was convinced that the 29th would make up the difference, and more, during the final missions on the following day.

"Roger, Rollerskate. I have the field in sight," Lyle replied, realizing that Bauer had little way of knowing about their last second unfortunate encounter with turbulence.

"Boardpipe-Five. Judge here!"

"Roger, Judge. Five here!"

"You have a hit!"

"What!"

"*I repeat! You have a hit! Dead center in the rag.*"

"That's the way to go!" Bauer broke in jubilantly, promptly cut-off by the 54 controller with a remark of his own.

"The 29th lucks out again!"

Lyle quietly agreed with him, but switched to the tower frequency for final landing instructions.

"We couldn't have hit, Butterball," he argued, when they were on the ground, heading for the parking area. "We were high and to the left."

"Well, if there's a hole in the rag and the judge says we

SCRAMBLE!

put it there, I won't argue with him," Butterworth responded, delighted with the outcome.

"For your information," he added, after consulting a small score card attached to his kneeboard, "the elite team of Lyle and Butterworth have a total score of 6,200 points—with the thousand just accumulated—and we still have two more goes at the rag!"

Butterworth's tally was confirmed on a large score board, prominently displayed outside the 54th Operations building. Lyle paused to look at it as he and Butterworth hurried the gun camera film into the processing machine, located in the central section of the operations building. It required forty minutes to process the film. Lyle utilized the interval to rehash the mission with the three other crews of the 29th. Gormann's RO was there too, as were several interested members of the 54th team. Gormann, however, had departed immediately after his own mission was completed to visit, so his RO said, the engineering office in one of the SAC hangars.

The tow T-33 dropped the rag before the film was ready for viewing. There was one hole, unquestionably made by a 2.5 inch rocket, dead center in the rag. There could be no question as to who had placed the hole. Boardpipe-Four had also gotten a hit on his second pass, but he had shot the target off the cable. Lyle was already airborne at the time, but he was able to orbit near the range until another rag was towed into position.

"Well, let's take a look at the film," Colonel Hastings suggested.

"Yeah! This I've got to see!" Lieutenant Jackson chided, leading the group toward the projection room. The projectionist snapped off the lights when the machine was ready, and began to hand crank the 16mm film through the projector.

"A little hazy," Hastings commented, observing that there was little contrast between land and sky.

"And a little bumpy, too," Lyle added with emphasis. Billowy clouds marched down the screen jerkily. They all seemed to be below the camera, but not by more than a hundred feet. The T-bird, pulling the extended cable and

SCRAMBLE!

rag, appeared, to the left and slightly below center on the screen. The rag was almost indistinguishable in the haze, and only momentary views of the judge's T-bird were seen, as it attempted to hide behind the tow aircraft. The rag grew larger as the T-birds approached the right edge of the screen. It appeared to be about three inches long and half to three-quarters of an inch wide. Wisps of smoke appeared to the right and left of the central section of the screen, and, even with the slow pace maintained by the projectionist, the smoke grew into long trails and rapidly closed the distance between camera and target.

"Hold it a second," Lyle ordered, walking up to the screen.

"Here, you can see the rockets," he said, pointing to numerous, tiny, black specks just ahead of the smoke trail. The rag was still off to the left and on a course which would bring it near the rockets, but it was clear even at that point that they would be high.

"Looks like a clean miss to me, so far," Hastings said, when Lyle returned behind the projector again. Lyle nodded and motioned for the projectionist to continue.

"Hey! Look at that one!" Butterworth exclaimed, as all but one of the rockets continued on, passing above and slightly to the left of the rag.

"It's a Golden Rocket!" he yelled excitedly, and slapped Lyle on the back heartily. The smoke trail of the independent missile had suddenly curved down and to the right. Everyone knew it happened occasionally. Perhaps one of the fins was bent, or perhaps uneven burning caused it to veer; but, whatever the reason, all of them had experienced it at times. Usually, of course, it went tooling off into the empty sky, resulting in nothing more than a wide miss. If, however, the unpredictable maneuver resulted in a hit from an otherwise certain miss, it was crowned in glory and reverently proclaimed as "a Golden Rocket."

The smoke trail ended in the center of the target. The projectionist stopped the machine and everyone moved forward to examine the picture a little more closely.

"A Golden Rocket! How lucky can you get?" a 54th man groaned.

SCRAMBLE!

"Well, they've got to have something to make up for lack of skill," another said, as they filed out of the room.

Bauer was outside looking over the target with Colonel Gormann when Lyle and Butterworth left the operations building.

"Good hit!" Gormann said, and Lyle thought he sounded extremely pleased.

"I'm afraid we lucked out, sir," Lyle confided. "It was a Golden Rocket."

"So much the better," Gormann muttered. "Golden rewards belong to those who seek them."

"Now what did he mean by that?" Butterworth asked, when Gormann departed.

"I don't know," Bauer said, with a shrug of his shoulders. "I was standing here when he walked up, all he said was 'A good day's work, Bauer.' I said, 'Thank you, sir,' assuming he was referring to our mutual efforts, but he said, 'Yes, a most productive day!' I thought he meant the missions were good, but somehow I get the impression that they were only of secondary importance."

Gormann had little to say the following morning when they gathered around his fighter waiting for the T-bird to swing around and snatch the target. Earlier he had said, "You all know what you have to do, so let's be on with it."

The T-Bird stood out against the Black Hills, still some three minutes before it would be in position to pick up the cable.

"Holding about two hundred knots," Lyle calculated from habit, just as a staff car drew up behind them. A relatively young-looking full colonel climbed out and approached the group.

"Good morning, Colonel Gormann," the visitor said pleasantly, extending his hand.

"Colonel Edwards! Good to see you again!" Gormann acknowledged, shaking his hand warmly.

"It's been about three years," Edwards said, searching for an opening which would permit him to reacquaint himself with the 29th Deputy of Operations. Could be that time

SCRAMBLE!

and added responsibilities have slowed him down a little, Edwards thought. After all, I've been observing him quietly for the past week and he has displayed no unusual aggressiveness.

"I see you're still in the fighter business," Edwards continued, nodding toward the six F-94's and the Rocket Team members, who had moved back a few feet and were watching the T-33 as it approached the inner marker. "I've been stationed here just about as long as you have been in Great Falls."

"I've been aware of it, Colonel," Gormann replied, with a slight smile. "I'm happy to see that SAC recognizes talent when they see it," he said with sincerity, indicating the eagles on Edward's shoulders. They were not yet a year old.

"Guess I lucked out," Edwards laughed, but singularly pleased somehow, that Gormann had said it.

"Seems to be catching," Gormann remarked, half turning to watch the T-bird complete its run.

"Your boys getting hits these days?" Edwards asked, when the T-bird started its climb with the cable securely attached to the hook.

"My boys always get hits!" Gormann countered and Edwards understood the full significance of the reply.

"I believe it!" he said. "See you when you get down," he added, as Gormann went up the ladder to the cockpit, followed closely by his crew chief, who waited to help him with the parachute.

"OK. Good!" Gormann nodded and prepared to complete his strapping in.

He hit on the first pass and the 29th was tied with the 54th. Numbers Two and Three missed. Their gun camera film indicated a good pass, but the rockets bracketed the rag. Some passed over it and few passed directly under it. If it had been an airplane, with its much longer fuselage and wing, one of the twenty-four rockets certainly would have resulted in a hit.

Number Four scored on his first pass and Lyle hit on his second. The 29th was leading by 1800 points, but after the 54th fired, the lead was cut to only 200 points. The pressure was on!

SCRAMBLE!

Gormann, was off on time for his second mission of the day and his last mission of the meet. Lyle and Butterworth listened to the action from the cockpit of their fighter.

"Fired!" Gormann's voice came over the radio loud and clear, and Bauer could be heard issuing vector instructions to Home Plate.

"Come on Judge. Let's have the results," Butterworth pleaded, after several minutes of complete silence from the range.

"Boardpipe-Lead. This is the judge. You have a hit!"

"OK. Good!" Gormann returned, and then informed Rollerskate that he was switching to tower frequency. Butterworth recorded another thousand points for the 29th and waited for Number Two to complete his run. Number Two had some difficulty, and he made three passes before being rewarded with six hundred points.

"Every little bit counts," Butterworth said, as they started taxiing to the runway.

"You have negative hit!" they heard the judge say when they returned to the range frequency immediately after take-off.

"Too bad," Butterworth noted sadly, and recorded a zero for Number Three. His disappointment turned to angry displeasure after Number Four missed on his first pass.

"Rats!" he said, "the judge probably needs glasses," Lyle remained silent and listened to Bauer's instructions until they were turned toward the target. The turn on was smooth and Butterworth picked up the rag almost immediately.

"We still lead by a thousand points," he said, beginning the never ending flow of target data without a break in rhythm. He locked on with plenty of time to spare. The fighter bounced once or twice in light turbulence, then settled down. The dot was right on the line; wings level when the X flashed. The rockets raced for a point in the sky where the target would be one and a half seconds later. Lyle was already rolling away from the target when they converged.

Looked like a good pass, he thought, but neither he nor Butterworth broke the silence, other than to acknowledge vector instructions from Rollerskate. They were almost over the base when the judge completed his investigation.

SCRAMBLE!

"Boardpipe-Five. This is the judge. You have negative hit!"

"Thanks, Judge."

"No sweat, Lyle," Butterworth comforted, "We still lead by a thousand points and those 54th wienies will have the rough air to reckon with for a change. They won't even be able to hit the ground, let alone the rag."

Colonel Hastings hit on his first run. Number Two hit on his third try. Numbers Three and Four missed and Lieutenant Jackson, flying Number Five, hit on his first pass. The pilots, crew chiefs and operations personnel of the 54th FIS ran around in boundless glee. Colonel Hastings had tied the score. Number Two had won the meet, and Lieutenant Jackson had added the 'coup-de-grace.' They were greeted boisterously by the entire complement of the 54th FIS.

Colonel Gormann shook hands with Colonel Hastings and congratulated him on "a good show." The pilots and RO's of the 29th shook hands with each member of the victorious team. The margin of victory was not a big one, considering that each team had flown a total of sixty firing passes, but that was of little concern to the winners. The 54th Operations Officer wrote across the score board in large letters:

"WINNER BY 1600 POINTS THE 54TH FIS." Then, as an afterthought, added, "THE HOME OF THE PROFESSIONAL FIGHTER PILOT!"

Everyone cheered. Everyone, that is, except the losers. They grinned weakly. Their turn would come next year.

"Sir," Bauer said cautiously the next morning, after final arrangements for the return trip to Malmstrom had been completed, "I would like to become combat ready in the F-94C." He had intended to be a little more indirect and feel his way into the subject, but Gormann was moving about the operations building in such a manner that he never seemed to be in any one spot for more than a few seconds. Besides, he didn't appear to be in the mood for any prolonged discussions. Gormann didn't look at him, even after the question had been asked.

"Lyle!"

"Yes, sir!" Lyle stuck his head out of the personal equip-

S C R A M B L E !

ment room. He was still holding a parachute over his shoulders by the leg straps.

"When we get back to Malmstrom you have exactly sixty days to bring Bauer up to combat ready status in the 94. Questions?"

"No, sir." What could he say? Usually a pilot assigned for checkout was placed in a squadron training flight. If he was current in jet fighters he would probably be combat ready in sixty to ninety days. Bauer had not flown a jet for some time as first pilot, and would need at least forty hours in the T-33 before he could be checked out in the 94. Then he would need considerable practice on instruments in order to receive a jet instrument card. Then there was a matter of thirty special training flights in the 94 before he could even be considered for a combat ready status.

"Sixty-one days from now, I want to see you on alert!"

Bauer just stood there nodding his head up and down and swallowing hard, trying to regain his voice.

"I thought I'd at least ask," he confided to Lyle when Gormann had gone on to other business. "But I also thought we would discuss it a little first."

"If there had been anything to discuss he'd have cut you off with a simple, but clearly enunciated, *No!*" Lyle laughed. "Come on, let's get our things together. We have lots to do back at Malmstrom."

Colonel Edwards breathed a sigh of relief when the last 94 was airborne.

"He certainly behaved like a lamb all the time he was on the base," he remarked to the Intelligence Officer.

"Yes, sir," the latter agreed. "He stayed on the flightline most of the time and he never once snooped around in the Headquarters building."

"Other than a pleasant discussion with us about better maintenance support for the 54th FIS, he didn't give us any trouble either," the base engineering officer added.

"What complaints did he have about our supporting the 54th FIS?" Edwards asked, with suspicion.

"He said the 54th FIS needed more support in order to improve their aircraft in commission rate. I assured him that

S C R A M B L E !

we were cooperating fully. I even showed him our maintenance work schedule for the next six months. I explained how the schedule is controlled by SAC Headquarters even down to the times each aircraft is to be grounded for periodic inspection. I pointed out in the log when our aircraft were due for inspection, and I convinced him that we would support the 54th FIS as we have in the past. He thanked me and said he knew he had come to the right place."

"That's all he said?"

"Yes, sir!"

What was he looking for? The thought ran through Edwards' brain all during the lunch hour. He had purposely picked a table where he could sit by himself. The tables around him filled, but no one asked to join him. Probably because he was so deep in thought that he hardly looked friendly. Some elusive solution tried to penetrate his mind, but it always managed to slip away before he could grasp it.

"He wasn't interested in SAC maintenance support," he said aloud, and the officers at a nearby table looked at him quizzically. He ignored them and continued searching his brain for the answer he knew had to be there.

There's only one thing he's interested in at the moment, Edwards thought, and that's the strike date. No one on his base has that information, but I'd swear he knows something we don't, and I'd be willing to bet he found it right under our noses. But where and how? There's nothing in the Engineering Office that would give him that information. I go in there a dozen times per week, so do the 54th FIS engineering personnel, to say nothing of SAC inspectors. No, the information can't be there . . ."

It wasn't more than three hours since the 29th Rocket Team took off from Ellsworth A.F.B., when Captain Joe Millard presented himself in Gormann's office. The second floor was nearly deserted with everyone out to lunch. Gormann sat behind his desk. The drapes were drawn across the wall behind him. It was the first time that the 29th Air Division Intelligence Officer had seen the drapes drawn. Gormann was not in the habit of cutting off his view of the control center, even for a moment. It was apparent that he

S C R A M B L E !

didn't plan to keep them drawn very long. Gormann got right to the point.

"I have some information which may be of some value to you, concerning the forthcoming SAC exercise."

"Yes, sir." Millard was alert. He could use every piece of information available.

"What I am about to tell you is to be kept between the two of us. I'll get together with you later for some discussion concerning additional plans I have in mind, but meanwhile, you may utilize the information for your own planning. It must not go beyond the two of us. Is that clear?"

"Quite clear, sir."

"OK. Good! The SAC combined strike force will attack the U.S. on December fourth. Prior to that, they will initiate two false starts. One on the twenty-eighth of November, and one on the second of December. But, on the fourth of December they will commit themselves. The exact time of day I do not know at the moment, but I suspect sometime after sunset, but prior to midnight. They will not be unopposed when they enter this division's area!"

CHAPTER NINE

LITTLEFIELD examined his reflection in the window on the co-pilot's side of the L-20. His face appeared to be covered with mud and grime. He walked around the airplane, examining the other glass sections, and swore softly. The airfield at the radar site had obviously been muddy, at least sufficiently so for the propeller blast to splatter the windscreen and fuselage area.

"Morton!" he shouted, through cupped hands.

SCRAMBLE!

His assistant erupted from the doorway of the crew chiefs' lounge. Littlefield hardly expected such response.

"Boy, have I got news!" Morton called excitedly, at a fast run. Littlefield had to leap aside or face certain collision with him, as Morton skidded the last yard and only managed to stay on his feet by seizing a wing brace at the last second.

"You're trying to make airman second class . . . so you're racing against time to complete a job that should have been completed thirty minutes ago!" the senior crew chief snorted reprovingly.

Morton ignored the reproach. "Remember when Colonel Dyer received orders some weeks ago assigning him overseas as commander of an F-100 squadron?"

"Don't tell me he's been reassigned to the Soviet Air Force and he's going to take *you* with him!" Littlefield suggested facetiously.

"You know how everyone's been wondering who would replace him?" Morton raced on.

Actually, Littlefield had given the problem little if any thought, but it was apparent that Morton would have his say.

"Well, I've got a friend in the division message center, the same one who told me—before anyone else around here knew it—that the 54th FIS placed fourth in the Yuma rocket meet. He just called to tell me who the new 29th FIS commander will be. Boy, is everyone around here going to be surprised!"

"I'm impressed," Littlefield said disinterestedly. "Morton, the only thing that surprises me is that you had the unmitigated gall, two weeks ago, to suggest that I recommend you for airman second class! Beyond that, nothing would surprise me—unless by some horrible quirk of providence *you* made it!" He shuddered, and shook such an unpleasant thought from his mind.

"Oh, yeah? Well, Colonel Gormann's the new CO!"

Littlefield's mouth popped open in spite of himself.

"And what's more, the L-20 section has been transferred with him. We're to be under the 29th FIS until he returns to the division, on the first of November!"

"What do you mean, 'transferred' to the 29th FIS? What

SCRAMBLE!

has the first of November got to do with it?" Littlefield was deeply interested now.

"I'm told that Colonel Gormann is only going to be CO for three months, starting the first of August, and that he personally requested that the L-20's be assigned to him during that period. Major Conrad is to be acting Deputy for Operations during his absence. He requested that, too."

"Wonder why he wants the L-20's?" Littlefield pondered, more to himself than as a request for Morton's opinion. The opinion was offered anyway.

"Some of us have flown with him, you know?" His chest swelled and he tapped the wing brace indicatively. "He knows where he can find help when he needs it."

By seven o'clock most of the officers and men of the 29th FIS were assembled in the hangar. The airmen were formed in a semicircle of three loose ranks. The officers were grouped around the tail section of a partially disassembled F-94, a few feet from the entrance of the pilots' lounge. The air of uncertainty that is always present when a commander calls a special meeting—especially a new commander—was reflected in the low murmur of voices emanating from ranks of airmen as well as from the officers.

"Here, a couple of you men move that crate over near the door so the commander will have something to stand on." The talk quieted some, as the first sergeant pointed to the wing tank crate and waited for two airmen to move out of rank and start pushing.

"I'll do it! Get out of my way!" Hercules shoved the two volunteers aside and placed his hands against the crate as if he planned to shove over a building. The sleeves of his fatigues were cut off three inches above his elbows, and, when the crate was in place, he laced his fingers together, raised his arms to chest level and flexed his muscles. His biceps filled the entire arm openings and strained at the heavy material.

"I'll bet he could split the sleeves if he wanted to," one of his friends said, loud enough for him to hear.

"It'd be easy," he grunted, "but it's too hard getting

SCRAMBLE!

fatigues that fit." He returned to his place in rank, just as the door to the pilots' lounge opened.

"*Atten-hut!*" The adjutant stepped through the door ahead of Gormann and brought the squadron to a rigid stance. The two alert crews were the last to enter and they remained by the door. In four steps Gormann reached the crate and, without a break in stride, mounted it in one motion. He faced the ranks of airmen, the heels of his hands on his hips and his fingers extended down over his back pockets.

"The name's Gormann! My job, commander of this squadron!" he said abruptly, sweeping the ranks with expressionless eyes and half turning his head to take in the officers.

"My authority is far reaching. Do not allow the silver leaves to mislead you! As far as each and every man under my command is concerned, I'm a field marshal! If there is any question in your mind, try me! I know more about running a fighter squadron than any man in this, or any other air force!" Again he searched the ranks, finally settling on the line chief.

"Sergeant! How many F-94's are in commission at this minute?"

"Fifteen, sir."

"How many have radar fully operational?"

"Eleven, sir."

"How many F-94C's do we have in this squadron?" The question was superfluous. He knew the exact number.

"Twenty-eight, sir."

"It is now seven minutes after seven!" he said, looking at the engineering officer. "The status board in my office shows sixteen F-94's in commission and only nine with radar operational. The next time I look at that board, it will be correct! And from that moment on, it will never be incorrect—regardless of the time, day or night! *Questions?*"

"No, sir."

"OK. Good! Effective today, we will have twenty-one F-94's in commission with radar operational!" The groan that greeted this edict fell on unsympathetic ears.

"To assist you in this undertaking, the work schedule

SCRAMBLE!

will be from 0700 in the morning until 1800 in the evening. Seven days per week!" More groans.

"Some of you have worked for me before. So much the better for you! Some of you do not want to work for me! Those of you who fall into this latter category see the adjutant at 1300 today, to arrange for transfer from his squadron!

"Dawson! Assemble the officers in the pilots' lounge!" he ordered, and was off the crate and through the door before the first sergeant, who was standing below with his back to him, realized that any change had occurred.

"All right. Back to your jobs," the first sergeant ordered, after all the officers had filed out.

"Who's the best instrument pilot in the squadron?" Gormann asked, when the last of the officers entered the room. He was standing by the coffee bar, near the entrance to the personal equipment room. The few available chairs were filled, since he had motioned for the first ones in to take them. The rest stood, lining the walls. Now they all looked around at each other, not sure exactly what to expect.

"Captain Dawson is, sir," Lyle answered, certain that Gormann already knew of Dawson's qualifications as a first-rate instrument pilot, plus his experience as an instrument instructor at the Air Force Jet Instrument School at Moody AFB.

"Dawson, get your parachute! You're going to give me an instrument check, *now*! You will consider every aspect of my instrument technique, and flunk me if you can!" It was an open challenge and everyone knew it. "If you can't flunk me, I'll give you an instrument check, and I think you know the outcome of that ride already! Questions?"

"No, sir."

"OK. Good! Fill out a clearance." He stood there for a few seconds, while Dawson went upstairs, studying the condition of the pilots' lounge. There were a few unwashed cups on the coffee bar, and several still damp stains attested to the hasty last minute attempts to enjoy a quick cup before the morning meeting. He seemed especially interested in an area around the base of the bar. He ran his foot

S C R A M B L E !

through the area gingerly. It grated noisily, and he looked up distastefully.

"Two hours and forty-five minutes from now, I will again enter that door!" He pointed a hooked finger toward the exit utilized by the alert crews to gain access to their aircraft.

"By that time, this 'Augean Stable' will be cleaned! The windows will again serve a dual purpose! They will continue to repel the elements, and from now on, they will permit the free entry of available light, as well! *Questions?*"

Lieutenant Ryan raised his hand and Gormann looked at him darkly.

"Sir, we will have to get some enlisted men from the engineering section to do the work. We don't have enough of them in the operations section."

Gormann's eyes shot sparks, but his voice was unusually calm.

"Lieutenant, I'm always favorably impressed when a young officer volunteers for extra details. Your ambition is commendable. You will personally attend to the alert crew sleeping quarters. Linen will be changed. Beds made. Lockers cleared and dusted. You will undoubtedly locate an accoutrement or two, such as dirty socks, or perhaps a set of drawers, left in the locker or abandoned to rot under beds by some of the more tidy members of some past alert crew. You will handwash these articles and endeavor to return them to their rightful owners. You will wash the floors and generally fumigate the room. With proper application you can have it smelling like a sprig of lilac, rather than its current similitude of an overworked urinal."

"Sir, that's not officer's work!" Ryan gasped.

"Still volunteering? Excellent! When you complete the sleeping quarters, direct your operations to that 'Mongolian Slit Trench' that the optimists of this squadron chose to dignify with the name 'latrine.' I suggest that you exercise respectful attention to the sanitary aspects of your final results. I may ask you to join me while I wash my hands in one of the toilet bowls before we go to lunch!"

Ryan gasped again. His mouth remained open, but if he had more to say, it would have to wait. Gormann picked up

S C R A M B L E I

his parachute, which Dawson had brought from the equipment room along with his own, and was out the door.

Dawson had to concede that the new commander overlooked nothing during the external inspection of the airplane. He had heard that Colonel Gormann seldom conducted a really thorough pre-flight inspection, but he had today, and Dawson duly recorded it on a special check sheet.

There were few pilots in the Air Force who could pass an instrument check if the check pilot wanted to be difficult. True, they might succeed in satisfying Air Force requirements and standards, but the check pilot could insist on standards of his own. The Instrument Flying Regulations state that a pilot must fly within two hundred feet, at all times, of his assigned altitude. Dawson decided he would permit fifty feet for this check! The commander could question the decision all he wanted, but as check pilot, Dawson's word was final. If the CO wanted to ride with another check pilot that was his prerogative, and he would probably pass that check. But Dawson planned to make a complete and careful list of each and every maneuver, and he would permit small margin for error.

"OK. Good!" Gormann closed the form and faced his check pilot. "We will run through the complete routine," he said, stepping aside to allow the crew chief to move the parachutes from the wing and place them in the cockpits.

"When the APU is unplugged, I'll take over. I'll taxi out, line up and pull the hood over the cockpit. When the tower clears us, I'll take off, make a normal IFR departure, intercepting the northeast leg of the Great Falls range, turn southwest and track inbound to the station. I'll pass the radio range at twenty thousand feet. I'll pass all position reports to you over the interphone and you will simulate Great Falls radio. From that point on, and for the following hour and thirty minutes, you will tell me what to do! You will *not* touch the controls, except to place me in a series of unusual positions. You need *not* tell me when you are going to place me in some unusual position. You may do it any time—while I'm completing a turn, executing climbs or any time you think propitious. If you're foolhardy enough to do so

SCRAMBLE!

when we are close to the ground, while performing a GCA or ILS, I will recover, but you may sweat a little. Questions?"

Dawson wanted to ask if he planned to land while still under the hood, but decided he'd find out soon enough.

"No questions, sir."

"OK. Good! Get in and fire-up!"

Once in the air, Dawson waited until the radio compass indicated station passage over the Great Falls range, then instructed Gormann to take up a heading of zero-one-seven degrees and continue on that heading for three minutes. While Gormann executed the turn and picked up the heading, Dawson recorded the results of the take-off and climbed to altitude.

"One. Positive control was maintained during all phases of the take-off roll. Pilot utilized brakes effectively, holding the proper alignment in this manner until aircraft accelerated to 50 knots—at which time pilot smoothly reverted to rudder control. Pilot informed me that he would pass over the Great Falls range at 0901. Actual time over the range was 0901 and 5 seconds! Pilot has demonstrated excellent technique . . . so far!"

The three minutes were up.

"Colonel, execute a standard rate turn to the right—three hundred and sixty-five degrees. Then perform the same maneuver to the left, only increase your bank to forty-five degrees. End up on a heading of zero-one-seven degrees!"

Dawson waited until the second turn was nearly completed, then pushed the stick forward and to the left and moved the throttle to one hundred percent. Gormann didn't fight it. He waited for Dawson to release the controls. The airplane was in a sixty degree dive, upside down. Gormann rolled the aircraft to the left, pulled the throttle back to idle until the wings were level, dropped the dive brakes, held light pressure on the stick, waited for the gyro horizon to indicate that his nose was passing through the level altitude, pushed the throttle up to eighty-five percent and retracted the dive brakes. The airplane seemed to float up to its original altitude of twenty thousand feet, speed stabilized at two hundred and fifty-knots. Heading zero-one-seven degrees!

SCRAMBLE!

"Hold that heading, please," Dawson instructed, and began recording again.

"Two. Pilot executed standard rate turn to the right. Well timed and co-ordinated. Altitude, 20,000 without noticeable variation. Pilot then executed a forty-five degree angle of bank turn to the left. Approximately thirty degrees prior to completion of turn, I increased power, pushed stick to the left and forward. Aircraft ended up in a steep dive on its back. Pilot recovered smoothly (unbelievably accurate). Both turns started from a heading of zero-one-seven degrees. Both were complete on the same exact heading! Pilot may have been lucky . . . we'll see!"

"Pick up a heading of three-four-nine degrees, sir." There was new respect in his voice. Not the respect associated with a junior officer's conduct when addressing a senior officer, but the respect one pilot has for another when one of them has demonstrated an unusual mastery of the air.

The fuel load was still too heavy for any violent maneuvers, but Dawson rolled the airplane by easing back on the stick and pulling the throttle back to idle. He allowed the aircraft to roll around completely one full turn, then let it continue on halfway through a second roll. They were upside down, but this time in a steep climb, with airspeed falling off rapidly. Again Gormann didn't fight Dawson's overcontrolling. When the controls were free, he held them in the same position in which Dawson had released them, except for the throttle. He moved that to one hundred percent, smoothly but rapidly. The airplane began to roll slowly. When the left wing was pointing straight down, he allowed the nose to drop below the horizon and as the airspeed began to build up, he readjusted the throttle and rolled a little more rapidly. When the recovery was complete, they were again at twenty thousand feet, airspeed two hundred and fifty-knots, heading three-four-nine degrees.

For the next twenty minutes, Dawson had Gormann perform an Aural Null and a Range Orientation; and three times during the course of the operation, Dawson placed him in dives, climbs, rolls and steep spirals. He recorded.

"Three. Aural Null, Range Orientation, tracking to and from the station unusually accurate. Pilot's control of air-

SCRAMBLE!

speed, altitude and heading is uncanny. Twice I've tapped the altimeter and gyro compass, thinking they may have become stuck!

"Four. Jet penetration and GCA to Malmstrom. I rolled the aircraft twice during the initial penetration. Pilot recovered immediately. Unusual maneuvers don't seem to phase him. *I'm getting slightly airsick!* From here on in, I'll let him fly without interference! Pilot went down the GCA flight path smoothly. He touched down easily. I instructed him to execute a missed approach and shoot an ILS at Gore Field. Two hundred and forty gallons of fuel remaining when we passed over the inner marker. Pilot maintained one hundred and fifteen knots and was lined up the runway. He descended to fifty feet. Pilot stated he would touch down except that it would require more fuel than he wanted to expend at that time. Pilot said that terminated the check and he would do some flying of his own."

"Five. Pilot leveled out at twenty thousand feet. That's the last time we were level for the next twenty minutes! Pilot performed acrobatics! Loops, Immelmans, clover leafs. Pilot called off airspeed and final headings for each maneuver. They were as advertised, as were two eight-point rolls, one to the left, one to the right. Final maneuver prior to making another GCA and full stop landing—pilot lowered gear, flaps and dive brakes; slowed aircraft to one hundred and ten knots! *Pilot started roll at twenty thousand feet. Pilot completed roll at twenty thousand feet! It can't be done!* Pilot finally let me take over at the end of the runway, after he had braked the airplane to a stop. I taxied back to the fuel pit. Pilot removed instrument flying hood. It's my turn next! *I'm scared!*"

Bauer's flying suit was wet enough from the shoulders to the waist, but from the waist down it was drenched. To add to his discomfort, his boots squished noisily when he walked. Lyle was having his own troubles just trying not to laugh. Butterworth didn't bother trying to hold back, he was already holding his sides and, to add to Bauer's difficulty, Gormann was only seconds away from the pilots' lounge. For a moment, Bauer considered hiding in the latrine—perhaps in the

SCRAMBLE!

shower with the curtains drawn; but if the Colonel should happen to look in there and find him in his already soaked condition . . . well, it might be even more difficult to explain exactly why he was taking a shower with his clothes on. It was too late anyway, Gormann was only seconds away from the door. He'd just stand there in the center of the room. Maybe Gormann wouldn't notice him if he remained very still. After all, there were thirty other officers in the room with him.

He waited for someone to call attention. Gormann paused just outside the door, saying something to Dawson. Then every one broke into laughter when an RO, mopping the floor said, "Here hold this a minute," and Bauer found himself attached to a soggy mop.

His troubles had begun immediately after Gormann went out for his instrument check. "Gentlemen," Bauer had said, addressing Lyle and Butterworth, "as soon as I have a cup of coffee, I will introduce you to the Bauer plan. A plan designed to expedite window washing. Butterball, if you will be kind enough to obtain the two household type ladders I saw recently in the paint shop, I will prepare coffee for the three of us. When we have relaxed for a minute, I will instruct the two of you in the workmanlike art of window washing."

He prepared the coffee, which simply required filling the cups. The large coffee pot had been connected all the time, behind the bar. Lyle found two large sponges and a foot-wide squeegee. Two pails and some soap were easily obtained from the L-20 section, and Butterworth filled these with water and placed them by the nearest window.

"Now, Butterball, if you will wash each window with plenty of soap, I will follow behind with the second ladder and rinse them. Lyle can tie his squeegee to a broom handle and wipe. Any water that splashes on the floor will serve to ease the task of the mop and bucket brigade, which I see has already formed. I predict that we will complete our work within the hour, thereby having sufficient time to enjoy a second cup of coffee prior to Colonel Gormann's return. Simple! What?"

Unfortunately they could find only one ladder.

SCRAMBLE!

"I've got it!" Bauer said again, still full of confidence. "We'll both use the same ladder. You wash the top section of the window and then I'll climb up the other side and rinse it while you wash the bottom half. That way we will minimize the delay of waiting for you to complete one whole window before I can get at it." Both Lyle and Butterworth thought it might be better if Bauer waited, but he argued strongly in favor of his time-saving method, and they agreed to give it a try.

Within seconds after Butterworth washed the upper half, Bauer attacked with a dripping sponge and effectively removed the last traces of soap. But while he was rinsing, he was also dripping water on Butterworth's head; and Butterworth in an effort to keep out of the rain had to keep moving his head away from the window. Soon he was working blindly, holding onto the ladder with his left hand and groping for the window with his right.

"Hey!" Bauer cried. "You just washed the front of my flying suit!"

"Oops. Sorry. I'll be more careful. But don't shake the ladder so much. You almost upset the pail."

"Don't you think it would be safer to do that one at a time?" Lyle asked, beginning to get a little worried about the unsteadiness of the ladder.

"No sweat!" Bauer replied, "We have this program hacked. Only two more windows to go after this one."

It took a little longer than he had expected. The T-33 was already taxiing in when Butterworth completed the upper half of the last window. Bauer conceded that he had better wait until the entire window was finished, since it had become necessary to run the legs of the ladder closer together, to compensate for the uneven ground. He tried to assist Butterworth by steadying the ladder as best he could, and Butterworth did the same for him while he rinsed the upper window.

"How about getting me a little more water, Butterball?" he asked, handing the nearly empty pail to Butterworth. The ladder wobbled warningly and Bauer held onto the window casing with his left hand, while waiting for Butterworth to return.

SCRAMBLE!

"Here you are," Butterworth said, trying to hand up a pail that was filled to within three inches of the top.

Bauer retained his grip on the window casing while stepping down to the fourth step. He reached behind him with his right arm outstretched, searching for the handle. The ladder was wobbling again and he kept his eyes straight ahead for fear of losing his balance altogether. Of course, he could have climbed down and started over again from the bottom, but somehow that seemed like retreating in the face of the enemy. He found the handle, but was totally unprepared for the weight.

"Aaaah!" The ladder wobbled dangerously. Lyle dropped his squeegee and ran over from the next window. Butterworth grabbed for the ladder and Bauer dropped the pail, jumping backward. The pail hit on the third step and, with Butterworth trying to steady the ladder, momentarily performed a balancing act. It might have actually steadied itself, if Bauer hadn't seized the legs of the ladder to steady himself as he hit the ground. The pail tilted forward threateningly. Bauer grabbed for the handle. He was a little too slow. The pail came to rest, its mouth flush against his stomach. Bauer looked at Butterworth dolefully, without attempting to stem the cascading water which appeared to be gushing out of the legs of his flying suit.

"Why'd you do it?" he asked glumly.

"Do what?"

"Hand me a full pail of water."

"You asked for it!"

"I asked for a little water."

"H'mm" Butterworth said, and then Lyle announced that Colonel Gormann was on his way to the hangar. And now here he was, standing and holding a mop in the middle of the room, and somebody was calling attention.

"Continue operation!" Gormann ordered, and started for the stairway. Bauer breathed a sigh of relief as Gormann walked by him. But he was a little premature.

"Toilet run over, Bauer?" Gormann asked, stopping in his tracks and considering the mop holder over his right shoulder.

"No, sir."

SCRAMBLE!

"A flash flood then, and now you're waiting for it to return so you can attack it with that mop!"

"No, sir." He looked around unhappily and finally handed the mop to Butterworth as Gormann continued on his way upstairs.

"What happened to you?" Dawson wanted to know, when Gormann's footsteps faded along the upper floor.

"Never mind him. Tell us about the check ride," Ryan urged, and every pilot and RO, plus about fifteen or twenty airmen from the maintenance section, crowded around him. Half of them tried to ask questions all at one time.

The small sandwich and coffee shop that had recently been added to the west side of the hangar directly opposite the pilots' lounge, was designed to accommodate twenty-five persons. However, at least forty-five jammed in to hear Dawson's account of the flight. Those who could not get close enough to his table relied on others to pass choice selections back to them. Some nodded approvingly, others shook their heads in disbelief, and one or two thought it was all a fraud. By twelve forty-five, at least four officers had turned their names in for transfer. But all were assembled in the lounge by 1300. The room still buzzed with excitement, and Dawson was questioned and requestioned on every possible aspect of the flight.

"Do you think he'll expect us to do the same thing?" one of the newer pilots asked, and he looked worried.

"I don't know, but I'll probably find out shortly," Dawson said, and he was worried.

It was a few minutes after 1300 when Gormann entered. The first thing he did was tell Dawson to fill out a clearance, and as the Operations Officer went upstairs to comply with the order, Gormann took up a position near the coffee bar.

"In the paint shop, you will find ample supplies of green and white paint. When I re-enter this building again, all the walls of this room, the crew sleeping quarters and the latrine will be wearing a pleasant shade of green. The ceilings will be a spotless white and the few remaining articles of furniture will be undamaged!" He was looking directly at Bauer now.

"I have reason to fear for their safety. So the next time,

SCRAMBLE!

Lieutenant, I see you with more than one foot off the ground, you had better have a parachute on your back! Questions?"

"What's your plan now, our great organizer?" Butterworth chided, when Gormann left the room.

"I plan to work alone," Bauer replied, with spurious indifference, "I shall clean, wax and polish the coffee bar, and perhaps brew just enough coffee to carry me through an arduous afternoon's labor. Questions?"

"Great ideal" Butterworth said, "I'll paint the wall behind the bar and Lyle can paint the wall in front of the bar. In that way we will enjoy your company and hospitality."

"Thanks! I've already been done in water colors once today. If you don't mind, I'd rather not be done in oils, too."

They were all lined up again at 0700, the following morning, and the first sergeant faced a hostile group of airmen.

"Who does he think he is, Sarge?" a maintenance man from the hydraulic section asked hotly. "We worked all day yesterday, until midnight, and now he has a notice on the bulletin board that the barracks will be scrubbed and painted tonight!"

"Do a little more soldiering and a little less arguing," the first sergeant said unsympathetically, and indicated that the hydraulics man should get back in ranks.

"Lots of us have families, Krausel" an assistant line chief said, just as hotly as the reprovved hydraulics man. "We don't live in the barracks. Why should we have to paint them? I don't ask the single personnel to paint my house. That's my responsibility and—"

"Sergeant! You have a responsibility to the military!" Krause interrupted, pleasantly but firmly. "Now, just get back in ranks and let the CO do the planning around here."

"*Atten-hut!*" Gormann was in the hangar and up on the crate before the adjutant's voice stopped ringing through the building.

"Sergeant!" He isolated the line chief again. "No F-94's flew yesterday—not even the alert aircraft. This same condition will exist for the remainder of the week, with the exception of the T-33's and a few L-20's. I make two additional exceptions to this order. One—active Air Defense

SCRAMBLE!

scrambles, if ordered, and two—test hops at the discretion of the engineering officer. This will allow you through Sunday to have a minimum of twenty-one F-94's completely operational. After that, we will fly at least two hundred hours per week! You will be hard-pressed to maintain twenty-one fighters in commission under such circumstances; therefore, I suggest that you restudy your management procedures to determine exactly how you will meet this continuing requirement. If you can satisfy these operational minimums, you and your men may get a day off in the next six or seven weeks!"

The groans from the assembled group attested to the disapproval of this proclamation. Gormann ignored the complaints.

"I have one more remark. Yesterday I said that anyone of you who didn't care to work for me should report to the adjutant for transfer. Thirty-one of you had the courage of your convictions and that includes four officers!" He glanced at the officer corps coldly.

"You will *not* get your transfers!"

More groans and whispers emanated from both groups. Gormann waited for silence, his face reflecting complete indifference.

"You feel oppressed, I'm sure," he continued icily, "but all is not lost, because I know who the malcontents are!"

"Big man!" a voice whispered loudly, from the back ranks of the assembled airmen.

Except for his eyes, Gosmann remained perfectly immobile. A dead silence fell throughout the hangar. Many actually held their breaths, as Gormann's eyes literally bounced from one airman's face to another, his own face a mask of stone. Without further comment he turned, stepped to the ground and, with three strides, was in the pilots' lounge.

"Who said that?" Krause was moving through the ranks to the back row and stopped when he located Hercules.

"You gonna fight his battles, Sergeant?" Hercules asked, grinning broadly. Some of his friends had already congratulated him, saying "That's telling him!" or "He's afraid of you!"

Krause studied the hulking figure and a circle of expectant

SCRAMBLE!

listeners tightened around them. The first sergeant said nothing for almost a full minute. He just kept looking at Hercules, who began to grow uneasy.

"No, Hercules, I'm not about to fight his battles for him. I was prepared to start court martial papers on you, and for a moment, I was surprised when the commander ignored your belittling remark. Then I knew he hadn't ignored you.

"I've had twenty-four hours in which to do some research on our new commander. I've worked for many commanders and few have a record to equal his."

"Ha! He's a real, big man, huh?" Hercules scowled sarcastically, and drew rewarding chuckles from a few bystanders. Krause looked at them for a moment and they grew silent. Then his expression changed to one of pity. If Hercules had really known the first sergeant, he would have known that Krause was a past master in dealing with troublemakers; but in the two months since Krause assumed the post of first sergeant, Hercules had not stepped out of line—at least to the degree that Krause could do anything about it.

"At first, some of the things I learned and heard about the colonel shocked even an old, hardened soldier like myself," he continued, moving to within inches of the slowly retreating offender. "But now, I can appreciate what he has done to your kind before. I'm sorry for you. You've made an enemy!"

"I've made 'em before. He can't scare me."

Krause began to shake his head.

"Hercules?" he said, and his brows knitted as if he was trying to recall the name of a long-forgotten acquaintance. "Oh, yes . . . I remember him . . . but he's dead now. . . !"

Hercules swallowed hard. He looked stunned for a moment. It didn't help any when one of the older men in the group remarked, "I believe him! I worked for Colonel Gormann in Alaska. I wouldn't tangle with him. I'd work for him till hell freezes over, but push him . . . never!"

"We'll see!" Hercules spat, finally regaining control of himself. But he was standing alone.

"Close the door," Gormann ordered, when the last of the

SCRAMBLE!

officers had entered the pilots' lounge. He had apparently dismissed the scene from his mind and replaced it with more pressing problems. Bauer even wondered for a moment if Gormann had actually heard the remark from the airmen's ranks.

"Yesterday afternoon, I gave Captain Dawson an instrument check." He looked at Dawson and Dawson grinned weakly. Gormann had said nothing about the flight to him and his stomach suddenly felt very heavy, now that he, and everyone else, was to share the knowledge of the outcome of that flight. It had, he thought, been a good flight, but certainly anything but perfect. He steeled himself for the blow.

"He's probably the best instrument pilot in this squadron," Gormann continued. "I'll fly with him anytime, under any weather conditions."

There were nods of agreement all over the room, and at least two sighs of relief from the two remaining squadron instrument pilots.

"Dawson! I want you to give checks to the other instrument pilots, today. Your standards will be my standards. If they pass, I want the three of you to check every pilot in the squadron before the week is out. Those who fail will be given ten days to requalify, and will not be placed on the alert schedule until they do. Additionally, each ninety days, you will recheck each pilot. From time to time I will spot check the pilots myself. If they have recently passed an instrument check, but flunk with me, *that* instrument examiner is in trouble! *Questions?*"

"No, sir," Dawson replied, answering for the three of them.

"OK. Good! If any of you do have questions about my policies, I am prepared to set you on the right path now! The flying in the squadron will be professional and will be accomplished by men! If you are not men, I don't want you; I don't need you, nor does the Air Defense Command! You will maintain a wartime capability at all times, and, if or when war comes, you will not need a transition period. You will be ready! In fact, if anything, it will seem easier. Ninety days from now, this will be the most combat ready fighter squadron in the Air Defense Command. Not on paper

S C R A M B L E !

only, but in proven capability. And the only one you have to prove it to is me!"

"Bauer!"

"Yes, sir." He was prepared for another assignment involving either paint or mop, or even worse—both.

"You're still current in the L-20, I presume?"

"Yes, sir."

"See that four pilots besides yourself are checked out in the L-20 and have a minimum of fifty hours prior to November first. Volunteer to fly missions to the radar sites . . . especially at night. Do whatever you have to do, but be ready."

"Yes, sir," Bauer responded happily. Flying was always better than what he had been doing for the last day or two, even if it had to be in L-20's again. He didn't bother to try and fathom the purpose behind Gormann's thinking, and accepted Lyle for his first student.

"It's only fair," Lyle said, "I checked you out in the T-33 and F-94, so now it's your turn to work on me."

"Delighted, friend!" Bauer grinned, and rubbing his hands together in anticipation. "It's going to be scary, though!"

Sergeant Krause was waiting for Gormann when he returned to his office.

"May I have a moment of the colonel's time, sir?" he asked.

"What's on your mind, Krause?" Gormann asked.

"It's Airman Hugh Swanson, sir. I've warned him several times about bullying the airmen around him."

"Terrorizing would be a better word!" Gormann cut in sharply. "I'm aware of his methods. I'm also aware that he's an efficient, productive worker, when he puts his mind to it."

"Yes, sir, that's true, but if the colonel will permit, he's also a troublemaker. More than one airman has complained about 'his funnin,' as he calls it. Last night, I entered the barracks just in time to prevent Airman Redding from attacking Hercules with a hammer."

Gormann placed both arms on the desk and leaned forward with interest.

"From what I could determine, Redding started the trouble

SCRAMBLE!

last night, but it was the result of some razzing Redding had taken earlier. Hercules just stood there, daring Redding to hit him."

"Did he?"

"No, sir. I broke it up. I sent Redding to his room and restricted him there for the evening. He threatened to get Hercules the next time they met."

"What did Swanson say to that?" Gormann queried, sitting back slowly.

"He seemed undisturbed, sir. He only said, 'You'll have good reason by tomorrow.'"

Gormann was on his feet so suddenly that Krause jumped back.

"Did you restrict him too?" he barked.

"No, sir. From what I could learn, Hercules had been minding his own business when Redding went after him," Krause answered, with a puzzled expression.

"Sergeant! You were in error!"

"Sir?"

"It is the responsibility of every commander and first sergeant in any squadron, especially a fighter squadron, to know his men. That means by their first names, the names of their dependents, their family backgrounds, their personal problems and *most* of all, their individual characteristics. If you could satisfy half these requirements, you wouldn't be standing there wide-eyed! You would have restricted Swanson."

"If the Colonel will excuse me, I don't understand."

"Never mind," Gormann muttered, "it's becoming a lost art anyway." He began rummaging through his pockets. "I had planned a different approach for Fat Boy," he said in a low voice, "but if he's to be salvaged it will have to be done now, the hard way." He pulled a silver dollar out of his pocket and held it up.

Krause was watching him curiously.

"I'll be back shortly."

"Yes, sir," Krause responded, and stood there for several seconds listening to the heavy, retreating footsteps, as Gormann went down the back stairs to the hangar.

The hangar doors were open and most of the maintenance

SCRAMBLE!

personnel were working outside in the warm sunshine. Gormann passed no one as he crossed the hangar to the sheet metal shop. The door was partially closed and the voices emanating from the interior of the shop were unmistakeable. He stopped to listen.

"What did you do . . . you . . . you filthy moron?"

Gormann recognized the high-pitched voice of Redding. He slipped through the doorway quietly. Littlefield was trying to restrain Redding, and it was plain that he was having difficulty.

"Come on, let's go!" Littlefield urged. "He didn't do anything. He's just trying to get you mad enough to fight him. He didn't even go off the base last night . . ."

"I don't care! I'll kill him!"

"Now, what was her name?" Hercules began, "Mary? Marty? I didn't have time to get it straight. We had more important things to do." His words slurred suggestively.

"You're lying, you dirty bastard!" Redding screeched, and he shook free of Littlefield's grasp.

"Put it down!" Littlefield yelled, as Redding seized a piece of metal tubing and lunged at Hercules. The metal went spinning across the room when Hercules grabbed Redding's arm and forced him to the floor.

"There, that's it! Down on your knees, hero. You can lick the floor while I tell you more about your friendly girl friend!"

"Let him alone, Hercules," Littlefield ordered. Then he looked up and saw Gormann not more than ten feet away. Gormann's arms were folded across his chest and the look on his face stunned Littlefield into silence.

"Now, let's see," Hercules continued, ignoring Littlefield's order. "She had lovely legs, especially above the knee. . . ."

Redding babbled some unintelligible words. His mouth was pressed against the cement from the pressure of Hercules' foot on the back of his head.

"Now, you can start licking the floor while I tell you about her . . ."

"Tell *me*, Fat Boy!"

The words came in a guttural snarl and Hercules spun

SCRAMBLE!

around, releasing his hold. Redding was on his feet instantly, still full of fight. Littlefield grabbed him.

"Keep out of this!" he said, and half-dragged Redding toward the door, when Gormann jerked his head in a signal that they were to leave.

Gormann waited for the door to close, his eyes never leaving Hercules' face. Hercules curled his lips and was about to say something, but Gormann spoke first. His words were delivered with perfect timing.

"Have you ever killed a man, Fat Boy?"

The question rang like a death sentence, and fear seized Hercules as he remembered Krause's prophecy. Then he understood the look in Gormann's eyes. He had been warned before. Now it was too late. He's a killer! Watch out! He's a killer! The eyes seemed to scream at him.

Gormann was moving toward him.

"See this, muscle man?" he said, balancing the silver dollar on his right thumb with the index and middle fingers. He moved it back and forth slowly.

"Watch it, muscle man! Watch it while I squeeze it together between my fingers. Appreciate the power in these fingers."

Hercules watched in awe. He couldn't take his eyes off the slowly folding coin. He tried to back away, but Gormann followed, always holding the coin at his own eye level but with his arm nearly extended.

"Now, watch the other hand." His voice was much lower, almost soothing as he switched the coin to his left hand.

"Watch these fingers do the same thing . . . in either hand the coin is unable to resist the pressure. Watch it! Watch it! Think what these fingers could do to your muscles. Your bear-hugs would be useless. They could not restrain my fingers. They would always find your flesh!"

Hercules moved his mouth, trying to say something, but only a gurgling sound came out. He began to back away. A metal workbench blocked further escape. Gormann moved in, talking, always talking, until Hercules was bent backward over the workbench.

"All I need is to get one hand on any part of your body . . .

SCRAMBLE!

any part . . . and you won't like the way I fight. Once I get hold, you'll liquefy in searing, tearing pain. Your muscles will respond. They'll just twitch convulsively . . . your throat will rupture from your own screaming, before you sink into merciful unconsciousness." Gormann hulked over the panic-frozen airman, his face only inches from the terror-filled eyes.

"Your face will be lying in a pool of your own blood. You'll feel it trying to strangle you when you close your mouth. You won't be able to get your breath. You'll try to get up and your muscles won't hold your weight. Then your friends and enemies will gather around you and laugh!"

"'Ha! Ha!' they'll say, 'Hercules is no longer a man. Our women are safe. No one is afraid of him now!'"

Gormann stepped back and Hercules struggled to an upright stance. His legs were shaking and his mouth dropped. He was trying desperately to say something, but Gormann pressed on.

"'Hercules' they'll laugh, 'Ha, ha, that's rich. From now on let's just call him Ferdinand!'" Gormann's face darkened again. He put the coin back in his pocket and took one more step backward.

"I am a big man, Ferdinand! Try me!"

Hercules' knees wobbled unsteadily. Gormann half crouched, his arms partially extended, three fingers on each hand hooked and working in a pinching motion.

Hercules tried to move away. His feet refused to obey. A low moaning came from his throat. Gormann began to circle slowly to his right, his left hand moving out threateningly.

"No. . . . No, no, no . . . no," Hercules whimpered. With arms flailing uncontrollably, he was like a little boy trying to beat off a mad dog. His legs gave way and he fell to his knees with his arms over his head, trying to protect himself.

"No, no. Please, don't touch me," he gasped, and his shoulders began to heave in heavy sobs.

Gormann straightened. For a full three minutes he stood there silently. When he did speak his voice was firm, but understanding.

"Hercules," he called, and Hercules looked up slowly, his eyes pleading.

SCRAMBLE!

"Come over here and sit down. I want to talk to you."

It was Sergeant Krause's turn to stare wide-eyed, when Gormann returned to his office. Hercules was ambling along behind him, like a faithful pet.

"Sergeant Krause," Gormann began, before the surprised first sergeant had time to stand up.

"I'm assigning some additional responsibilities to Airman Swanson."

"Yes, sir," Krause said, noting with increasing incredulity that Hercules was actually beaming.

"Effective tomorrow morning, from 0700 to 0720, all the airmen in this squadron will assemble in the hangar and Swanson will conduct a class in muscle building. I have entrusted him with the task of seeing that every airman is physically fit. I will encourage the officers to attend as many of these muscle building programs as their operational responsibilities will permit. The program will run five days per week and Swanson will report to you personally, concerning the success of his work. I think everyone will agree that Hercules is the best man we can get for such a program."

"Yes, sir," Krause agreed.

"OK. Good!" He turned to Swanson. "I'll expect you to carry on with your work in the sheet metal shop as well plus the other programs I've outlined for you."

Hercules responded with an enthusiastic, "Yes, sir!"

"Fine. Get back to work."

"Someone said that the whole world is a stage, Sergeant," Gormann said when Hercules left the office.

"Yes, sir." Krause nodded, but not at all sure what the CO was getting at.

Gormann took a small, black notebook from his shirt pocket and made a few entries, before going to lunch.

At home, while Esther put lunch on the table, he removed a cigar-sized metal box from the lower drawer of his dresser. He transcribed the notes from the pocket notebook into a like sized book from the metal box. Then he took the silver dollar from his pocket. He examined it closely.

"Hardly bent," he muttered, "but then none of them are,

SCRAMBLE!

really." He put the book back in the box and tossed the coin in after it.

"Getting expensive," he said, as the coin clanked noisily before settling down to join its fifteen predecessors.

CHAPTER TEN

BAUER WAS DELIGHTED! One hundred hours in the F-94, plus fifty-five hours in the L-20 and twenty hours in the T-bird, and still one day to go before the month of October drew to a close.

All in only ten weeks, too, he thought, calculating how much more he could get in before the last of December. Another hundred hours in the '94, anyway, he figured as Cranford and Ryan drove up for him in front of the BOQ.

"Looks like you'll be standing a solo alert tonight," Ryan greeted.

"At the rate I've been going through RO's, I wouldn't be surprised—three in ten weeks. That's a high turnover!" Bauer said, with a shake of his head. "But what can you do when they return to civilian life before they've flown with you a month?"

"Did you ever consider 'Lifeboy'?" Ryan posed.

"If it would keep them in the service, I'd swim to work."

"Last week, while you were off on one of your L-20 jaunts, two new RO's reported in to the squadron," Crawford said, grinning at Bauer's sudden interest.

"First I heard of it," he said, leaning over the front seat and waiting for further information.

"Captain Dawson said that Lieutenant Towne was to be assigned as your RO. Looks like a sharp lad, too."

S C R A M B L E !

"And he doesn't drink *tea*, like your last two RO's," Ryan interjected. "You should make a great team."

Dawson met them at the door to the pilots' lounge.

"Henry, this is Lieutenant Frederick Towne. I'm assigning him as your RO."

"Hi!" Bauer greeted cheerfully, grasping the RO's hand warmly.

"Happy to be with you," Towne responded pleasantly, and with such a deep voice that Bauer stared in disbelief.

"You'll get used to it," Towne said, then nodded to the other half of the alert team. "How are you?"

"Fine," Cranford answered for both of them, adding, "we'd better get set up if we plan to relieve the day alert crew on time."

"Right!" Dawson agreed. "You go get ready. I'll send Bauer and Towne along, in a minute."

"This will be Lieutenant Towne's first night flight from this base, Henry, so give him an orientation flight sometime before morning," Dawson instructed. "If you get scrambled before you have time to get the orientation flight in, let Cranford take it; if it requires two fighters, let Cranford make the identification run. That will give Towne an opportunity to get the lay of the land during night operations, without putting too great a burden on him during his first night flight."

"Right!" Bauer nodded.

"We cut Towne's indoctrination training a little short, so you could have an RO," Dawson concluded.

"We'll play it safe," Bauer promised. "See you in the morning."

"You know about the after midnight flights?" Bauer queried later, when the fighters were set up and they had time to relax.

"Heard about it," Towne acknowledged.

"Well, if Cranford doesn't object we'll take off around three-thirty, to fulfill the obligation."

"Sounds good to me," Towne nodded.

"I've plugged the coffee pot in and told the dispatcher to wake us at three-fifteen," Bauer said at ten o'clock.

"OK," Towne acknowledged, looking up momentarily from

SCRAMBLE!

the magazine he'd been reading for almost an hour. "I'll be in later." He was still reading when Cranford and Ryan retired thirty minutes later.

"Looks like a quiet night," Ryan speculated, as he disappeared into the sleeping quarters.

"Taxpayers may have squandered their money for nothing tonight," Cranford added, receiving a short "I hope so," from his RO.

At eleven-thirty, Towne was completing a task which involved the washing and drying of a small plastic-handled pan, when the scramble bell shattered the night.

"Scramble papa flight. . . . Scramble . . . one!" The loudspeaker ordered, and the crescendo of activity in the sleeping quarters was instantaneous. Cranford and Bauer hit the floor simultaneously, and Ryan, fully booted, came down between them from an upper bunk.

Towne fell in behind Bauer, and both raced for their fighter—Towne still wide awake and light-footed; Bauer groggy and trying to get his right arm into his flying jacket. He succeeded in time to grasp the rungs of the ladder, without breaking stride. Towne, who had remained less than a step behind him, hardly had time to swing one leg into the cockpit, before the engine was revving to life.

Cranford's airplane rumbled and there was a dash of yellowish orange flame from the tail pipe. Then Bauer's fighter was alive and ready. Bauer sat there with engine running and radio channeled to tower frequency, waiting for Cranford to start his take-off. If he aborted or had to turn back for any reason short of a scramble cancellation, Bauer would take his place. They waited until Cranford was airborne, then Bauer pulled the throttle full back. The fighter gave a soft, whining sound as the engine unwound and coasted to a stop.

"How about some coffee?" Bauer suggested, when they were back in the pilots' lounge.

"Thanks, no. I just had something to drink. I think I'll get a little sleep, before it's our turn to fly," Towne replied.

"OK," Bauer nodded, and proceeded to fill a cup for himself. He eyed the small pan resting on the drainboard under the coffee bar. He examined it casually for a moment, noted

SCRAMBLE!

that it was clean and dismissed it from his mind. He drank his coffee and went back to bed.

Bauer opened one eye when Cranford and Ryan returned.

"How did it go?" he whispered, promptly falling back to sleep, without waiting for an answer.

"C-124," Cranford replied sleepily. "Flight plan delayed somewhere along the line, I guess. Didn't make an intercept. Sausage received the flight plan—we came home." He muttered a few more words and was asleep himself.

Towne didn't have anything to do but look around and try to identify groups of lights. Great Falls was a hundred miles behind them, but from twenty-five thousand feet he could spot the city easily. For almost an hour Bauer worked with Doll and Jessie. The controllers gave him headings to fly and requested radio checks on various frequencies. From time to time, Bauer would point out lighted landmarks, and Towne would note them on his map.

"That's Havre, Fred, at ten o'clock. They have a small airfield, just before you enter the city from the direction of Great Falls; but the runway is too short to set a '94 in."

"I see it," Towne confirmed. "I've also noted that you can see Great Falls from a considerable distance. That illuminated smoke stack sticks out like a bright thumb."

"Good landmark," Bauer agreed. "On nights like this, you can see Great Falls from thirty thousand feet over Billings. I guess that's why they call Great Falls the 'Electric City.' It sticks out of the dark prairie like a spiral galaxy."

"Certainly is beautiful," Towne said softly. "I don't think I've ever seen such a clear night—or so many stars."

"True," Bauer agreed, and began opening the throttle. "You want to see something really breath-taking, wait until we get up to forty-five thousand, then you'll know why I like these after midnight runs."

Towne turned his instrument lights to dim and sat back to enjoy the panorama unfolding before him. Bauer held the fighter's nose in a steep climb and slowly swung around to an easterly heading. The altimeter passed through thirty . . .

SCRAMBLE!

thirty-five . . . forty . . . forty-five . . . and the stars were in their laps.

"Have you ever seen anything so magnificent?" Bauer whispered. For the earthbound, dawn was still a dream, something yet an hour away; but from eight-and-a-half miles above, there was a chink in the armor of night, through which the eastern horizon smiled. In the fighter there was silence. The sky sparkled, and the heavens did all the talking.

Towne was the first to climb from the cockpit, after they landed. He pulled the collar of his flying jacket around his ears.

"Winter's just about here," he speculated, when Bauer stepped from the ladder.

"Excellent! Coffee always tastes so much better on a cold, winter's morning," Bauer chirruped expectantly, removing his gloves and rubbing some circulation into the oxygen mask creases on his face.

"Rather have warm milk myself," Towne said, and Bauer stopped rubbing to peer between spread fingers.

"*Warm milk!*" He exploded in disbelief.

"Don't knock it if you haven't tried it," Towne returned easily, and began walking toward the pilots' lounge. Bauer suddenly felt ill. The headlights from the vehicle, waiting to tow the aircraft back to its alert position, cast a bilious glow on his face.

"You feel all right, Lieutenant?" the crew chief said, as he prepared to refuel the fighter.

"Warm milk," Bauer said, and his lips curled back in disgust.

"Huh?" the crew chief said quizzically, but Bauer was hurrying to catch his RO.

"Warm milk!" he gasped again.

"Nothing like it, Henry. Especially before going to bed."

"Who's going to bed? It'll be daylight in less than an hour. Come on, let me introduce you to the finest drink ever concocted by man's genius!"

He hurried through the door, and, without removing his flying jacket, prepared to fill two cups from the ever ready coffee supply.

"Thanks, no. I'll prepare my own," Towne declined. He

SCRAMBLE!

picked up the pan and, while Bauer watched in horror, poured a generous supply of milk into the pan and placed it on the hotplate.

"Try some," he said a few minutes later, after he had filled two cups and handed one to Bauer, who had moved around to the front of the bar.

"Whaaal" Bauer cried, and leaned backward like someone had just offered him a cupful of snakes.

"I've been drinking coffee since I was ten! I'm not going to ruin my health now, by drinking that bilgel!"

"Make a man of you. Why, even Colonel Gormann likes it," Towne said, setting the cup down within easy reach of his pilot.

"Never! He'd die first!" Bauer huffed, and moved his own cup, which he was allowing to cool, a good foot further down the bar.

"Nonsense," Towne continued. "Why, only last Sunday afternoon, I was right here preparing some warm milk, when the colonel walked in. There were several other officers in the room, as I recall, including Cranford and Ryan. One or two of them looked at me in undisguised pain when I told them what I was doing, and one of them exclaimed, 'Oh, oh, here comes the colonel!'"

"I've always enjoyed warm milk. I saw no reason to conceal the fact from Colonel Gormann, so I continued with the preparations."

Bauer was looking at him in complete abjection. He not only had difficulty keeping RO's, but now he had one who drank warm milk. Cold milk was bad enough, but *warm* milk. And in front of Gormann, too. He feared the worst.

"Colonel Gormann came in and started to walk by me, then stopped and came over to observe my preparations. I introduced myself, since it was the first time I'd had the opportunity. I noted one of the officers at the rear of the room actually grimacing in pain, at what I'm sure he thought was my forthcoming demise."

"I said, 'Warm milk, sir. Would you care for some?'"

"You offered him some?" Bauer groaned.

"I poured him a cupful. He accepted it, drank it ap-

S C R A M B L E !

provingly and said, 'Hmm, good. Glad to have you aboard,' and went upstairs."

Bauer stared at his RO, then at the cup of milk still within reach. Gormann was an unusual commander. It was possible that he would do such a thing. If he had, he had a reason. He always had a reason!

"He did?" he asked uncertainly.

"He did. Here, try it. You'll enjoy it," Towne said, and pushed the cup closer. Bauer picked it up hesitantly, positive that the contents would attack him without delay. He drank it slowly.

"Not so bad after all?" Towne grinned.

"Hmm. N-oo," Bauer agreed. "It's good."

"Well, our coffee bill just went down." Cranford observed from behind Bauer, where he and Ryan had been watching for the last minute or two. Bauer looked at them, shrugged his shoulders and drained the cup.

"Would you care for some?" Towne queried, holding up the pan.

"No, thanks," Ryan said.

"Coffee will be fine for me," Cranford said, shaking his head negatively. "We successfully completed the 'Warm Milk and Burp' route several weeks ago. I'll stick to coffee,—black coffee."

The day alert crews arrived at 0630, and by 0700 the entire squadron was assembled in the hangar. Sergeant Krause had the wingtank crate moved into position and called attention as Gormann entered. Major Conrad was with him. Everyone knew by now that Major Conrad was to be the new commander. The officer originally slated for the position had been diverted to the 54th FIS. to replace their commander, who had assumed a new post with Central Air Defense Force Headquarters.

"Sergeant!" Gormann began, singling out the line chief as soon as he was on the crate. "What day is it?"

"The first of November, sir."

"How many '94's are operational?"

"Twenty-two, sir!"

SCRAMBLE!

"OK. Good!" He surveyed the ranks, missing no one. He paused, when he saw Hercules.

"Sergeant Krausel! What is the physical condition of the men in this squadron?"

Hercules looked uneasy, but his face beamed when the first sergeant answered without hesitation. "Excellent, sir. They've received some first rate instruction and training."

"OK. Good!" Gormann said, surveying the entire group once more. "I'm pleased."

There was a general murmur of approval and a voice from the rear ranks spoke out unashamed, "We'll miss you sir!"

Some would testify that a flash of pride crossed Gormann's face, but it was replaced immediately by a stern expression.

"I'm turning this squadron over to Major Conrad. You'll discover that he is no less demanding than myself! Questions?"

"OK. Good!" He turned on his heel and looked down at Conrad for a second. "It's all yours!" he said, and was off the crate and through the door in three strides.

When the steel door slammed, the guard hardly had time enough to say "Good morning, sir," before Gormann was up the stairs, two at a time, and out of sight.

"The vacation is over," the airman grinned, and began to tidy up the reception desk.

"He's coming now!" the secretary said, as she heard the familiar, heavy tread on the concrete floor. There were three officers waiting in the office, and they nodded pleasantly, then stood up as Gormann came in. He gave them a cursory glance, noted their ranks, pilot ratings, combat ribbons and a heavy, overstuffed and locked, brown briefcase.

"Have my staff assembled in the conference room at 0830!" he ordered over his shoulder, and proceeded directly to his desk, with a curt, "I'll be with you in a minute," to the three officers.

The secretary picked up some unsigned correspondence from her desk and laid it neatly before Gormann. Paper-clipped to the bottom of the first letter was a square, three-inch slip of paper. Gormann leafed through the correspon-

SCRAMBLE!

dence briefly and memorized the information on the attached slip.

So, this is the terror of the 29th Air Division? the senior of the three officers, a major, thought to himself, as he waited for Gormann to signify that he was ready for them. Like the general said, this character is probably more bluff than fact. But SAC wants us to take a close look at him and report any unusual actions. Don't know who managed to get Omaha all excited about him, but if that's what they want, we'll get it. Actually, I already know more about this character than he knows about himself.

Gormann tossed the correspondence into his upper right-hand drawer, then sat staring at the desk.

If he thinks he's accomplishing anything with this outdated approach of keeping us cooling our heels, he's mistaken, the major mused. He's trying to size us up. He knows we're from SAC and he's trying to impress us with his contempt for acknowledged ability. Well, he'll find we don't do things by halves.

"Interesting," Gormann said suddenly, and all three of them looked at him in surprise. Two of them had been observing the activity in the control center, through the plate glass behind Gormann. The major's face flushed slightly when he realized that Gormann must have been observing them silently for some seconds.

"Let me see," Gormann continued, "you would be SAC's Major Daniel Wently, from Mountain Home Air Force Base, assigned to observe the 29th during the forthcoming exercise?"

"Yes, sir. We . . ." the major began, unaware that Gormann's secretary had not forgotten her training and had supplied Gormann with the names and organizations of each of them. These she had obtained from the officer's sign-in book, as she did each morning while Gormann was deputy for operations. From there on, it was educated guesswork.

The major wore a European Theatre ribbon, the Air Medal, the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Purple Heart.

" . . . Eighth Air Force, Europe . . . B-17's over Germany," Gormann continued, studying the major's eyes carefully. "About fifty-five missions, I believe," he said, matter-of-factly.

SCRAMBLE!

The look on the major's face was sufficient to testify as to the accuracy of Gormann's little game.

"Yes, sir. That's correct."

Gormann nodded his head, as if there had never been any question in his mind, and turned his attention to the next officer. When he was finished with the background and personal history of Captain Jesse Potner, including the facts that the captain had been shot down over Germany and had gotten out of the service after the war, only to return during the Korean conflict, the major found himself licking his lips. Gormann had simply counted the Air Medals on Potner's uniform. He had three of them, and the Purple Heart twice, but no Distinguished Flying Cross. One Air Medal for each five missions added up to fifteen missions, he had reasoned. There was the chance that the war had ended before he had the opportunity to fly additional missions, but the two Purple Hearts suggested that he had either been shot down somewhere between his fifteenth and nineteenth mission, or received wounds prohibiting further flying. The first was the most logical, he decided, and he worked from there. He guessed the captain's age at about thirty-five. Therefore, he must have been discharged from service as a first lieutenant and called back to SAC as a captain—or promoted shortly thereafter.

"Ah, yes," he said, turning to the last officer. "Captain Lawrence Atkins. Or perhaps you prefer, Larry?"

The captain nodded weakly and hung on every word from this officer, who obviously had full access to their military records.

"You are a new hand in the bomber field, less than two years, I'd judge."

He's managed to get our complete military records! the distraught major thought. But how? He was not aware that Gormann had again counted the ribbons on Atkins' blouse, decided that the ten Air Medals, one Distinguished Flying Cross, plus the Silver Star, all added up to a fighter pilot with Korean combat experience. He was much too young to have obtained them anywhere except Korea, and the theatre ribbons attested to this, too. No, he had to be recently assigned to bombers. It was true that SAC did have some

S C R A M B L E !

fighter pilots of their own, but only qualified bomber commanders were to fill the slot of observers during the exercise. Therefore, Captain Atkins fell into the only possible category, an ex-fighter pilot.

"F-80's in Korea, I believe," Gormann said.

"Yes, sir," Atkins nodded again.

"How do you like the B-47 after flying fighters?" Gormann asked, sitting back and studying them from under his eyebrows.

"Fine, sir," Atkins said, "I've really learned to like them."

"OK. Good!" Gormann said, and placed his hands behind his head disarmingly. "You, of course, know my name and background, I'm sure; therefore, you know that I have nothing to conceal from SAC!"

"Yes, sir," the major began again, but Gormann interrupted him.

"You will understand, I'm sure, my reluctance to shake hands with you!" His voice dropped an octave and he placed both arms on the desk. They were certain he was about to spring at them. "I'm not in the habit of greeting my *foes* with open arms!"

"Foes, sir?" Wently gasped.

"You came here, then, to give us information about SAC?"

"No, sir. We're here as observers!" the major replied curtly.

"You won't, then, pass information concerning the 29th Air Division to your higher headquarters at anytime during your stay?"

"Well, we . . ."

"You will exchange communications with SAC? But you will refrain from passing information concerning 29th operations plans in relation to the forthcoming exercise?"

"Yes, sir. That is, we have instructions to contact SAC Headquarters daily. We're only here as . . ."

"Spies!" Gormann snapped.

"Spies!" The Major repeated, unintentionally.

"Precisely!" Gormann said and stood up.

"These officers are from SAC. They will be here until the forthcoming exercise is concluded," Gormann explained, when Captain Locke arrived in response to the summons on the

S C R A M B L E !

inter-office call box. "See that they are given adequate accommodations in the Combat Operations Center."

"Yes, sir," Locke nodded.

"How long have you worked for *him*?" Major Wently queried, when Gormann walked out and they had introduced themselves.

"About two lifetimes!" Locke grinned, leading the way toward the COC.

Locke pushed the buzzer on the wall beside the closed, metal door, without comment.

"How is he to work for?" Wently asked casually, hoping for some useful information.

"He's an S.O.B."

"Ha! I thought as much," Wently snickered. "I'll bet everyone around here would rather work for someone else."

The door opened and Locke identified the visitors before guiding them toward two desks on the far side of the Center. Locke waited for the major to place the briefcase on the first desk and sit down, before speaking again.

"Major," he said in a low whisper, bending toward Wently's upturned, eager ear, "we'd die for him."

Locke was in the conference room ten minutes later describing his meeting with the "SACites" to Heeney.

"What did he say to that?" Heeney questioned.

"Nothing. He just glared at me unpleasantly," Locke explained, and then stood up as Gormann entered with Captain Millard.

"This will be brief," Gormann said, when he reached the head of the table, where he remained standing. "I'm leaving for Kansas City tomorrow morning. I will be back in three days. When I return, have the following information available:

"Where would an enemy plane designed to provide jamming cover, set up an orbit point to effectively jam Sausage, Jessie and Doll, while the main force slipped through?"

"They'd need more than one to do the job properly, over such an extended front, sir!" one of the staff officers advised.

"OK. Good! That's what I want to know. Figure the problem for two such aircraft. Consider that they will want to re-

SCRAMBLE!

main as far from fighter attack as feasible, but close enough to accomplish the mission. In addition, I'll need two fuel trucks and refueling crews ready to travel at my order. Heeney, that will be your responsibility."

"Yes, sir."

"Check on the availability of fuel at Billings and instruct the 54th to schedule several 'dogs' into that airfield, during the next fifteen days. Just have the fighters land and refuel, and then immediately return to Rapid City. What is the state of fuel at Miles City Airport?"

"They have about fifteen thousand gallons of JP-4 available, sir, but I'll check and obtain an accurate accounting," Heeney said, and began making some notes.

"Don't!" Gormann ordered, pointing a waving finger at Heeney's note-taking.

"There'll be no records of what we discuss concerning the exercise! Nor do I want anyone making inquiries about fuel storage at Miles City!" Heeney tore the note into small pieces and placed them in a container marked "Classified Waste."

"The information about fuel at Miles City is available in the Pilot's Handbook," Gormann continued. "There are three SAC observers in the division at this moment. They will remain here until the exercise is over. They are supposed to correlate the tracks picked up by our radar once the SAC force enters our radar coverage. This will preclude the possibility of some unfriendly nation slipping a few of their own birds into the system under the guise of the SAC strike force. However, these observers will be searching for whatever intelligence they can gather concerning our posture and plans." He looked at the intelligence officer for a moment, before continuing.

"They are already in contact with their headquarters," he said, "and they are using our communications facilities to pass coded information, undoubtedly about our methods." He accepted a piece of paper from Millard.

"They are using a simple but effective code over the phone—like this, 'Blue shoes . . . red-red three . . . five-fiveer-yellow . . . steamer-nine . . . Zulu-X-ray Green.' The man on the other end probably has the only other key to this code, so we'll have little success in breaking it. Millard will keep at it

SCRAMBLE!

and may gather some valuable data for our side, through the simple study of semantics. However, be that as it may, these officers are to be treated as spies. If they enter any part of this building, except the COC, I will be immediately notified. Questions?"

The following morning Lyle was surprised to see his name removed from the flying schedule.

"You scheduled for an L-20 trip?" Butterworth asked.

"Not that I know of," Lyle responded, "but I'll soon find out. Let's ask Dawson. Maybe he's been keeping secrets from me."

"You're going to Kansas City with Colonel Gormann," Dawson said, before Lyle had gotten the question out of his mouth. "Major Conrad informed me that the colonel had requested you. He'll be in here at nine o'clock, so be ready to go."

"Can't find the way by himself?" Butterworth grinned.

"I doubt if it's my company he's seeking," Lyle returned.

"Maybe he's going to give you an extended instrument check," Butterworth offered, in jest.

Lyle soon found himself in the rear cockpit of the T-33 with nothing to do but observe Gormann's flying technique. They leveled out at forty-one thousand feet and Gormann began calling the radar site near Miles City.

"We have you on our weapon," the controller acknowledged, after contact was accomplished on Channel ten.

"Inform Rollerskate that I expect to be intercepted at least fifty miles northwest of Rapid City."

"Roger. Understand you are available for intercept target."

"Affirmative!"

"Rollerskate scrambling two F-86D's and diverting four airborne fighters," the controller returned, two minutes later.

Good! Lyle mused. I'll be able to sit back and enjoy the action for a change.

He began searching the horizon for contrails, judging that he should be able to see them at least thirty miles away. The first contrail appeared to their left front, about the time they were passing over Devil's Tower National Monument, in northeast Wyoming. The T-33 moved another twenty-five miles, arriving just to the left of Sundance, when the first

SCRAMBLE!

fighter called "Twenty seconds to go!" Gormann held the T-bird level and the F-86D loomed large off their left wing. It seemed to hold steady for a moment, then flashed behind them.

Looked like a good pass, Lyle thought.

"Splash one T-bird!" The attacking pilot informed Roller-skate confidently.

Lyle spotted three more contrails on an intercept heading. He checked their own altitude. Gormann was holding steady at forty-one thousand, permitting the pilots a good target. They streaked by at thirty second intervals and each pilot claimed excellent results.

"Here come two more," Lyle said, as the two scrambled fighters turned toward the target.

"Hmm," Gormann acknowledged, and commenced a shallow, diving turn toward the approaching fighters.

"Twenty seconds to go!" the first alert pilot warned, and Gormann increased the angle of bank to about twenty degrees. The fighter snapped into a sixty degree bank, held it for less than three seconds, leveled out and passed behind them.

"Scratch one shady character!" the alert pilot radioed, entering a victory roll.

Has a reason to crow, Lyle thought, that was a good run.

"Twenty seconds to go!"

Lyle turned his head to the left to watch the last intercept. Gormann started to turn to the right this time, increasing the angle of bank to thirty degrees, then starting a slow climb. The fighter snapped violently to the left, then even more violently to the right. He leveled his wings at the last, critical split-second, and disappeared behind them.

Well done! Lyle thought, and grinned as he observed the last alert pilot doing a series of victory rolls.

"The gallant 54th wins once again! Splash a T-bird of 'wienies!'" the jubilant pilot transmitted.

That would be Lieutenant Jackson, Lyle guessed, and wondered what Jackson would think if he knew Gormann was one of the 'wienies' aboard the target.

"OK. Good!" Gormann transmitted, and Jackson did know the identity of at least one of the 'wienies.'

S C R A M B L E !

"Thank you, sir," he replied, and Lyle chuckled silently at the noticeable change in Jackson's tone.

Except for position reports, Gormann said little until after they had landed at the Central Air Defense Force Headquarters. Then he surprised Lyle by immediately filing another flight plan for Ogden, Utah. Lyle was even more surprised when they landed at Ogden, took time out for a quick hamburger and departed for Tacoma, Washington.

"Let's have some dinner," Gormann said, when they had entered the base operations building at McChord AFB, in Tacoma.

"Yes, sir. I'm ready."

"Fine. Then after dinner, you can climb into the front cockpit and fly us to our final destination, Edmonton."

"Edmonton?" Lyle gasped.

"Edmonton," Gormann repeated. "The Royal Canadian Air Force will be happy to receive us, I'm sure."

Eleven hours and forty minutes after departing Great Falls, Lyle guided the T-bird on a circuit around the field at Edmonton.

"Take a good look at the runway," Gormann ordered. "Make certain you have a clear picture in your mind of its dimensions and general lay-out."

"Yes, sir," Lyle answered with absolutely no understanding of the purpose of flying nearly nine hours, only to end up less than four hundred miles north of Great Falls.

"Deception is a two-way street, Lyle," Gormann said, and Lyle realized that he must have been thinking out loud. "SAC may discover that others beside themselves are intimately acquainted with the rules of *that* game!"

"Yes, sir," Lyle replied, beginning to suspect the purpose behind the round-about flight.

He hardly had time to open the canopy, before a ladder was thrust over the cockpit ledges and a face peered in at him, then turned to the rear cockpit.

"Wes! You old tiger! Finally got you caged!"

Lyle missed Gormann's greeting, but from the hand-shaking and back-slapping on the ground after Gormann climbed out

SCRAMBLE!

of the cockpit, it was evident that the DO was an accepted comrade in the RCAF.

"Lieutenant Richard Lyle, Group Captain Peter Delany," Gormann introduced, and Lyle saluted before grasping the outstretched hand.

"You're losing the touch 'old man,' " Delany said, with a look at Gormann, "this one can still stand. That's more than I could do after several hours on your wing."

"Tougher stock these days," Gormann returned.

"Must be" Delany said, and then he introduced Lyle to the other two RCAF officers who had turned out to welcome them.

"Lyle was tired when he landed, but within an hour they were all gathered in Group Captain Delany's billet, and the talk turned to the Battle of Britain. Lyle was wide awake.

"I'll never forget the day you reported to the squadron," Delany reminisced. "Jerry was trying to give us the business, day and night. I hardly had time to introduce you to Squadron Leader Kelly before you said, 'OK. Good! Let's go get them!'"

"Youthful vigor seasoned with inexperience," Gormann nodded.

"Kelly didn't even have time to argue with you, because the Klaxon blared and ordered every available man and machine into the air. 'OK. Good,' you said again, like you had expected Ops to give that very order. You were out the door, ready to claim your first victory."

"I became someone else's victory, as I recall," Gormann grunted, and Lyle moved to the very edge of his chair.

"Squadron Leader Kelly bought it a couple of weeks later," Delany continued, "but that afternoon I flew his left wing and, Wes, you managed to hold on to his right, with some difficulty. I remember thinking that you had lost control and were 'fore-it,' before you got your wheels off on your first sortie. But, when your flying record finally caught up with you, and I found out that you had never flown a Spit before, I marveled that you got off at all."

Delany looked at Lyle and said, "You might be interested to know that your boss flew six sorties before we learned that he had never flown anything larger than a 120 H.P. trainer,

S C R A M B L E !

prior to reporting to the squadron. A neat trick too, and some fancy paper shuffling, I'll wager, because we also learned that he only had a total of fifty hours in the air, up to that time."

"Fifty-six," Gormann corrected.

"Oh yes, you did have six hours in a 65 H.P. craft of some off-make," Delany amended, with a polite bow.

"What happened then?" Lyle questioned excitedly.

"Nothing!" Gormann retorted. "The war went on!"

"Nothing?" Delany laughed. "Squadron Leader Kelly didn't know what to do about it, 'Lad's already flown six sorties, including two night missions, and he's accounted for one Jerry,' he said. So he told Wes to continue flying. When the front office found out about it some weeks later, they were somewhat upset!"

"Hmmm," Gormann reflected.

"And all the while he was recovering from the wounds of his first sortiel" Delany added, and Gormann uncomfortably drummed his fingers on his knees.

"How did it happen, sir?" Lyle blurted out.

Gormann considered him darkly for several, long moments. "Hmm," he hemmed finally, and it was plain that he was weighing some problem of importance.

"Peter and my two comrades of later months were about to relate how, on my first sortie, I managed to collect a little shrapnel in the seat of my britches." He looked at his friends from under his heavy eyebrows. They flashed wide grins at him and waited, with as much enthusiasm as Lyle, to hear the account first-hand from Gormann.

"I was not wounded by shrapnel, or any other device thrown by the enemy," he said, and the RCAF officers looked at him in unmistakable surprise. "They just assumed that, and I did not enlighten them further."

"More than sixteen years later, and we finally get at the truth!" Delany interrupted, moving up on his chair, with the same interest already displayed by Lyle.

"As you said, I did have some difficulty with the Spitfire, during that first take-off; and for the first few minutes after we were off the ground I wondered how I would get it back

SCRAMBLE!

down! I was saved that trying experience via the aggressive fighting ability of some unknown German pilot.

"We sighted the enemy formation, just before they crossed over Dover. Kelly had climbed to twenty-five thousand, about five thousand feet above the approaching fighter-escorted JU-88's. Kelly maneuvered us into the sun and pushed over into a steep dive. I had my troubles, overcoming the stick and rudder forces built up in that dive. I saw Kelly let go with a burst, but I never did see what he was shooting at. I figured if he was shooting, I would too—if I could ever find the damn trigger!"

Lyle burst into such hilarious laughter that he almost fell out of his chair. Gormann waited for him to resume a more dignified position.

"When I did find it," he continued, "Kelly and the entire flight was nowhere in sight."

"I wondered what happened to you," Delany chuckled.

"I found myself heading due east, as number four man in a flight of ME-109's. Unfortunately, the Germans realized the error at almost the same time, but not before I had lined up directly behind the number three man. I fired a full three-second burst, the bullets of which immediately took up a heading for Norway, due to my uncoordinated flight. Fortunately, the 109's must have been getting low on fuel, because they didn't chase me very far.

"However, I ran into several more enemy fighters over Dover and went in, determined to get at least one. For a moment, I thought my gunnery had improved. A 109 directly in front of me began to smoke and then passed below me to the right. I saw the pilot jump about the time a Spitfire rolled up from under me. He was responsible for the downed 109 and he had another one on his tail. 'To the rescue!' I thought. Then my own fighter exploded. There had been a 109 behind me, too! The thought of such a possibility had never crossed my mind." Gormann paused to think then spoke again.

"I remember my Spit trailing smoke and pieces off in the distance, as I floated down, to land not three hundred yards from the still smoking ME-109. The German pilot was nowhere to be seen. Probably drifted and landed several miles

SCRAMBLE!

away. I, however, was about to experience my first encounter with an irate landowner.

"I landed rather hard, and when I did get to my feet there were three, what I thought to be friendly natives. One middle-aged man and woman and an extremely athletic, younger female. They, it seems, immediately determined that I was the enemy pilot and set out with vigor to capture this alien invader.

"I was quite prepared to surrender. I began talking to them, trying to explain exactly what I was doing there. The younger of the two women looked at me suspiciously.

"'How do we know you're not a bloomin' Nazi?' she said, or that's what it sounded like. Summoning up all the dignity I could muster, I replied with twenty-one years of mature stupidity, 'Now do I look like one to you?'"

"They considered my question in hushed tones, for some seconds, while the 'Olympic hopeful' balanced a threatening pitch fork. 'E does to me!' she said, with positive assurance lowering her weapon, an act which led me to believe they had decided I was not a Nazi agent. It developed, however, that she was just getting a better grip on the five-foot handle, before testing the thickness of my hide. I reasoned from the look in her eyes as well as those of the older couple, that my best course of action lay in the safety of the anti-aircraft position, I had sighted on my way down. It was only a matter of a half-mile, and members of that unit were already coming to my assistance—so I discovered later—but for the moment I turned on my heel, with every intention of setting a new sprint record. It was at this juncture, that my right leg nearly failed me. I had sprained it slightly on landing, and under more favorable circumstances, I would have tread lightly for a day or two. But the shrill voice behind me proclaiming, 'I'll get *im*,' was sufficient incentive to overcome my minor handicap. So, with a mighty leap on my left leg, and a gingerly skip on my right, I was off to my rescuers, who by now had come into view a quarter mile away.

"The chase must have had its humorous aspects," Gormann continued with sarcastic overtones, "because the four members of the AA unit stopped in their tracks to stare, and burst into riotous laughter, while I barely managed to main-

SCRAMBLE!

tain a distance of two yards between myself and my determined pursuer. Unfortunately, the pitch fork, when held in outstretched arms, breached this interval by two-thirds of an inch!" Gormann placed the coffee cup he had been holding during the narrative on the coffee table, and looked at Delany pensively.

"You, of course, understand that when one is running, his shoulders are thrust forward and his legs provide only fleeting targets. This leaves one unprotected, overexposed area, which is thrust one hundred and eighty degrees from the direction of motion.

"I'll get 'im," she promised gleefully again, when she observed this phenomenon. "I got 'im" she cheered lustily when she proceeded to make good her promise. She tatted herself a pattern of punctures with that infernal, three-pointed knitting needle for the last two hundred yards!"

It was minutes later before any of them could talk, let alone ask questions.

Lyle finally got to bed sometime after two o'clock, and he lay awake, unable to sleep, for almost another hour. His thoughts returned to the stories recounted during the course of the evening, especially those of the exploits of Group Captain Delany and Colonel Gormann, when they flew together as night fighters, during the latter months of the Battle of Britain.

"Never did know how many we actually destroyed, and you were not one to count yours anyway," Delany had remarked earlier in the evening, when Gormann shrugged off a request for his estimate of the number they probably destroyed, but for which no credit was given.

"I have little interest in the number I destroyed," Gormann responded dryly, "only in how many reached the target because we didn't stop them!"

"SAC will come through this area sometime after dark," Gormann stated categorically the next morning, in Delany's closed office. Lyle picked up his ears and leaned forward in the chair, elbows resting on his legs and hands folded under his chin. Besides himself, only Gormann and Delany were in

SCRAMBLE!

the office, Gormann spoke with positive assurance, but in subdued tones.

"They'll probably employ ECM aircraft to jam our sites, with the actual jamming commencing fifteen to thirty minutes prior to the arrival of the main strike force," he continued, and Delany nodded agreement.

"Any force entering the Continental United States, through Montana or North Dakota would logically emanate from the complex of bases in Alaska. When they depart, I'll be advised! It will be a simple matter to keep in touch with the progress of those aircraft via your own COC or listening posts—plus one or two methods of my own. But, be that as it may, once the force is airborne and within three hours of our borders, I will dispatch Lieutenant Lyle with a flight of six F-94C's here to Edmonton."

"You want us to service them and have them ready to scramble against the aircraft sent to jam your communications!" Delany said, reading ahead of the problem and wholly prepared to give his full support.

"Reservice them and make a phone available to Lieutenant Lyle in the proximity of the fighters, where I can call him and order the actual scramble," Gormann nodded. "I'll provide the initial vector, altitude and estimated time of arrival over orbit points. Lyle will be operating with pylon-equipped fighters, and will have sufficient fuel to spread his fighters along a hundred mile front, perpendicular to the course of the approaching ECM aircraft. If they should miss the ECM aircraft, which is highly unlikely, since we will know when and where they will be at a given time, the fighters will proceed to the suspected orbit points and set up a search pattern, using their airborne radar. Lyle and his flight will be given further and more detailed plans and instructions, prior to the execution of the exercise, including several alternate plans."

"Will the 94's return to Edmonton?" Delany queried.

"Where they will recover will be determined later," Gormann said, and offered no further explanation.

"Let us know thirty minutes ahead of time, and we'll be ready to reservice your fighters and get them under way," Delany promised.

SCRAMBLE!

"OK. Good!" Gormann said. "Expect them at 2030 hours, on the fourth of December!"

The B-36 responded readily to the control pressure as Colonel Edwards applied left aileron and rudder, and lined up with the runway. The two flight engineers, behind and to his right, adjusted RPM and power settings, and minutes later the huge airplane settled smoothly on the North African air base's runway.

"Thought we might be going all the way that time," the officer in the co-pilot's seat remarked, after the engines were shut down.

Edwards treated himself to a luxurious stretch, and bent his left arm behind him to scratch at his shoulder blade with an extended thumb, before replying.

"Went halfway, anyway," he said, and leaned forward to look through the windshield, as another B-36 started down the final approach. "I suspect that the Air Defense Command is not too happy with our methods either," he continued, "two false alarms in one week has probably put them in some degree of controlled turmoil."

"The fighter boys probably think migration season has arrived, the way they've been flitting from one fighter base to another this past week," the co-pilot said. "I'll bet ADC has fighters in every advanced base throughout the country."

"Possibly, but not probably," Edwards said, as another B-36 passed over the field and temporarily curtailed further discussion. I'd like to be sitting in the 29th Air Division COC myself right now, Edwards thought. I'll wager that not one fighter has deployed from Malmstrom or Ellsworth to advanced positions. Think I'll check in with 'Chet' and see what intelligence he's collected on 29th preparations.

"Complete the shut-down," he ordered, "I'll be in the BOQ after we're through, if you need me."

Edwards gave a nod of understanding and walked down the stairs behind the pilot's seat, his mind thousands of miles away over the northern approaches to Montana.

The headquarters building was a beehive of activity. Officers and airmen were moving about in every hallway, rushing into or out of offices, some empty-handed, others

SCRAMBLE!

clutching heavy documents or briefcases. Edwards threaded his way around two airmen pushing a cart loaded with teletype equipment, and entered his own office area. His desk had accumulated a sizeable stack of messages and communications during his nine hour absence, and it was more than an hour before he had worked his way through the last of them. The engineering officer was waiting for him in the adjoining office when he came out.

"Come in," Edwards said to the engineering officer, and then handed a report to the administrative NCO. "We have thirty minutes to get that on the wire and into Omaha," he warned. "Make sure you have the transmissions time stamped on it prior to 0300."

"I'll get it out, sir," the NCO assured, and hurried into the heavy hallway traffic. "Send this to the 'Puzzle Palace'," he said, when the NCO of the communications section opened the window in response to the insistent ring. "Before 0300, too, if you don't mind, otherwise SAC will take some of our Brownie points away."

"Pull up a chair," Edwards said, when he was back in the office with his engineering officer. He took a cigarette from the pack still lying on his desk and hoped, as he lit it, that the engineering section was not about to come up with some difficult problem. He was anxious to go to the intelligence office and read the latest information concerning ADC fighter deployments.

"The maintenance schedule calls for a thirty hour stand-down," the engineering officer began, opening the maintenance log to the center section and unfolding the accordion-creased page. He ran his fingers along a line graph that delineated the monthly maintenance schedule, from January first through December thirty-first, 1956. Each month had little peaks of maintenance activity programmed, but three swept up the chart well above all others. These were spaced between November twenty-seventh and December third.

"See," the engineering officer said, pointing to the last and highest of the peaks, "everything in SAC, with the exception of the alert aircraft, is scheduled for a stand-down maintenance period. This will be the third time in eight days, but

SCRAMBLE!

I guess SAC wants all aircraft in tip-top shape before we do any more flying."

"Shouldn't give you much trouble," Edwards nodded, relieved that his plans for an intelligence briefing would not be interrupted. "As far as I know, no one in our squadron had any difficulties during the last flight."

"No, sir, but we'll give the aircraft a careful going over, just to be sure."

"Fine. I'll be in the intelligence shop for the next hour, if you should need me," Edwards returned, and walked out of the office before some other distraction could further delay his plans.

The area assigned to intelligence was not only behind a steel door in its own section of the building, but there were three check points at various intervals along the single approach corridor to this area. At each point he had to be properly identified. The air police at each station recognized him at once, but still asked for his identification card and pass. He yawned a little at the last point, but complied with the request without argument.

"What's the latest?" he asked when the door at the end of the corridor was finally opened.

"Be with you in a moment, Em," a rather portly full colonel greeted.

He peered over black, horned rimmed glasses at his visitor before resuming his conversation with two officers, both of whom had their backs to Edwards. A plaque on the colonel's desk identified him as Chettly Browne, Deputy Chief of Staff, Intelligence. Edwards had known him since they were both captains and members of the 8th Air Force in England, in 1944. Browne was not an air crew member, but he knew flying and flying operations. He knew what intelligence air crews needed to fulfill their mission successfully, and he knew how to get it. He had become particularly interested in the 29th Air Division after Edwards had related some interesting data about the Deputy for Operations of that division. He kept a special folder on the 29th Air Division, and he and Edwards carefully studied each report added to that folder.

"Things seem to be going our way," Browne said, after he had dismissed the two officers. He carried several folders to a

SCRAMBLE!

table where he and Edwards could look them over together. "About two-thirds of the air divisions have deployed fighters as we anticipated," he continued. "A few others have moved fuel and support personnel, so we know they will follow suit later."

Edwards regarded him expectantly.

"The 29th hasn't moved a man, a plane or a load of fuel. What's more, these agents' reports indicate that the 29th has done nothing, absolutely nothing, to increase their state of alert!"

"What about Billings? I read somewhere here," Edwards said, shuffling through the 29th folder, "that F-86D's have made several visits to Billings."

"That's true, they have," Browne agreed, "but they've done that before. At the moment, it's difficult to say if the 29th plans to send fighters to Billings, simply because there is no problem involved. Billings has a limited quantity of jet fuel stored all year around, and they have sufficient oxygen on hand for half a squadron of jet fighters. All they have to do is send some support personnel to service the aircraft—and this they can do by vehicle, at the last minute—and Billings becomes a fighter base with effective operational potential, for short periods of time."

"How about Miles City?" Edwards countered, eyeing the negative report concerning that airport.

"They have some jet fuel stored, but there hasn't been a fighter in Miles city since mid-October. Even if they do go in there during the exercise, they will suffer from lack of oxygen." The intelligence chief pointed to the last statement on the most recent Miles City report which said there was no oxygen, or oxygen servicing facilities. "And this report was sent out less than two hours ago."

"Doesn't mean a thing, Chet, believe me." Edwards tossed the report back into the folder and studied his friend with seriousness. "Fuel, oxygen, personnel, these are small problems. No, they are not even problems for him. They're all part of the game; a game he understands and plays for keeps."

"He still has to abide by the rules and regulations, Em, and we have copies of these, just as well as he."

"Chet, when I was in Alaska, I overheard an operations

SCRAMBLE!

colonel from SAC headquarters accuse Colonel Gormann of not abiding by regulations. Can you guess how he replied to that accusation?"

"No, but it was probably quite cryptic," Browne said with interest.

" 'Colonel,' he said, and he almost sounded as if he was talking to a teen-aged son, 'regulations are guides, not crutches. The weak will find excuses in them, while the leaders will build upon them.'

" 'Colonel,' the operations type sputtered, 'you can't just go through life pushing on every door marked pull!'

" 'Try it!' Gormann returned, 'you'll find the scene is changed and the results more gratifying!'

"I can't argue with him there," Browne laughed, "but according to all these reports, he's not planning to break down any doors during this exercise. He may send a few fighters to Billings, but otherwise both fighter squadrons are conducting normal training operations."

Edwards opened the folder again and found the reports on Cutbank and Glasgow.

"Nothing there, either," Browne said softly, "it would at least seem that some type of communications gear would have to be readied, if he plans to use Glasgow. The other fields have CAA facilities which might be utilized for scrambles and what have you, but Glasgow can't even offer that much."

"They have telephones," Edwards said, as he ran the possibilities through his mind.

"A little impractical for full-scale, air defense operations," Browne said, shaking his head negatively after considering the possibilities himself. "No, they'll need communications personnel to handle take-offs and landings, and pass scramble instructions."

"OK, Chetty, I'm going to bed," Edwards proclaimed, shoving the folder aside and getting to his feet. "I know what to expect in my area, but I'd feel much better if Gormann were on our side."

"Me too," his friend grinned, "but I'll keep watch for the first clue of 29th intentions."

"Good," Edwards said, as Browne opened the door for him,

S C R A M B L E !

"maybe that way we will keep SAC's losses down to one squadron of B-36's."

The first hint of dawn streaked the sky, when Colonel Edwards suddenly sat bolt upright in bed. "The log—the maintenance log!" he said aloud, and the thought galvanized him into action. Minutes later, he was back in the intelligence office.

"He *knows* the exact strike date!" he said excitedly in response, to Browne's 'Back so soon?' greeting.

"How?" the latter asked with immediate interest.

"The strike is set for the fourth—only hours from now!" Edwards raced on, ignoring the narrowing eyes and the implied question, 'How do *you* know the date?' He picked up the phone and seconds later, was ordering the engineering officer to report to him immediately, with the maintenance log.

"Seel!" he said, when the huffing officer arrived with the document and it had been opened to expose the line graph. "Look at the maintenance schedule. We go along all year with normal peaks of scheduled maintenance. Then, on the twenty-sixth of November—two days prior to our first recalled strike—we have a high peak of scheduled maintenance. On the thirtieth of November another peak, again two days prior to a recalled strike. Now, during the night hours of the second of November—just after returning from the second prestrike operation—we enter another heavy scheduled maintenance period. After that the remainder of December is normal . . . *this document says we go tomorrow!* I know it now, and *he's* known it for months!"

Browne studied the log silently, then told the engineering officer he could take the log and return to the hangar, and to forget what he had heard.

"Em," he said, when they were alone, "I received word an hour ago that the strike will take place tomorrow."

"I knew it," Edwards groaned, and then proceeded to enlighten Browne regarding Gormann's interest in the maintenance log, during the 29th-54th FIS rocket meet.

"There's always the chance that Gormann's interest was based solely on a 54th maintenance problem, and not on exercise 'Snowboy's' strike date."

SCRAMBLE!

"Hal" Edwards spat disapprovingly.

"Here's the latest report from the 29th area," Browne continued, "there has been absolutely no activity, other than that at Billings which we discussed earlier, to suggest that Gormann, or anyone else outside the selected few, knows the exact strike date. Read this report from the SAC observers with the 29th," he said, holding the report before Edwards and then reading aloud himself.

" 'No unusual activity. Deputy for Operations in apparently relaxed and unusually good mood. Invited us to his office today for coffee . . . first time we've been allowed outside the Combat Operations Center since our initial meeting . . . talk consisted of generalities. A periodic check with base operations indicates that two L-20's, one piloted by a Lieutenant Lyle, the other by a Lieutenant Bauer, are scheduled for a flight to the radar site near Opheim, Montana. Both pilots currently assigned to 29th Fighter Squadron, both considered combat ready. No additional passengers or crew listed for flight. Purpose of flight unknown. However, information available here suggests that these flights have taken place on semi-regular basis, since August or September. Therefore, connection between these flights and forthcoming exercise unlikely.' "

"Doesn't it strike you as being rather odd that two combat-ready fighter pilots are tooling between Malmstrom and Opheim, when the division must be overrun with qualified L-20 pilots?" Edwards asked thoughtfully.

"A bit unusual, perhaps," Browne agreed, "but then you said that Gormann himself is unusual."

"Unusual in the sense of cunning, not unusual in the sense of odd, Chet."

"Still, these flights have been going on for several months," Browne argued. "It could be that he was only creating a pattern—one that would seem innocuous enough—especially when we learned that it had been going on for sometime, prior to any possible strike date, but . . ."

"Chet, I'm positive these L-20's have something to do with exercise 'Snowboy.' I don't know what, and we probably won't find out until after the exercise. But of this much I'm

SCRAMBLE!

positive: this exercise has never been out of his mind since the moment he first heard about it."

"Well, if he's planning anything, he's keeping it to himself. Even if I did report your suspicions to higher headquarters, it would be of little value, Em. They read the same reports we do and they would arrive at one conclusion, no matter how erroneous we may think it is. No activity, no preparation . . . only normal routine training. On the surface, it appears that the 29th doesn't know or doesn't care that exercise 'Snowboy' may soon be breathing down their necks. Omaha would laugh, if we told them that a certain officer within the 29th Air Division may have compromised the strike date, some months ago. All we can do now is hope our agents come up with something of intelligence value."

"I wonder if they even know what to look for," Edwards moaned in disgust.

"They do," Browne assured him. "They've been well schooled. If Gormann makes a move toward any airfield, they'll provide us the details within minutes."

"Yeah!" Edwards grunted skeptically, "if they're still alive."

The flight from Malmstrom to Opheim mentioned in Browne's report was uneventful, with the exception of a momentary stop at Havre's civilian airport. An airport much too small to be considered as a potential fighter base—but useful if one wanted to load four passengers into each of two L-20's, and transport them to the radar site at Opheim unobserved. Bauer was the first to land on the dirt runway just outside the radar site and he had his four charges assembled under the left wing, when Lyle landed ten minutes later.

"We're all set," Bauer said, when Lyle walked up. "I'll drop my passengers off at Glasgow tomorrow night, at ten-fifteen exactly. They'll be waiting for you to arrive with the fighters."

"I'll be there," Lyle promised, "but our success or failure depends on Littlefield and his crew."

"We're ready, sir," Littlefield responded. "I'll leave here tomorrow night at seven o'clock, with Morton. We will meet and escort Captain Locke and Captain Heeney to the Glasgow airport. The meeting place is to be right here." He pointed to an X two miles west of Glasgow, on the road map.

SCRAMBLE!

"If there is any change in plan, due to weather or otherwise, Captain Locke will know what to do," Lyle cautioned. "Now, describe the trucks you and Morton will be looking for."

"They will be regular fuel trucks, with a heavy coating of white, water-based paint. On each side will be printed in blue lettering, 'MILK.' Under that will be the additional lettering and words, 'T.W.G. AND COMPANY.'"

"Besides Captains Locke and Heeney, there will be two drivers," Lyle reminded him.

"Yes, sir, I know. Beasley and Hendricks."

"OK. Now, Hercules and Litner, run through your instructions."

"These two people won't be allowed to make any more phone calls after ten o'clock tomorrow night," Hercules boomed, and held up a photograph of two rather slightly built men. "We know where to find them and we know what to do."

"No rough stuff, Hercules!" Lyle warned.

"No, sir, we won't even touch them. Maybe stand in their way a little . . . if they try to reach a phone after ten o'clock; but no physical violence." Litner nodded his approval.

"Boyl" Bauer laughed, when the airmen moved off to meet an approaching truck from the radar site. "How would you like two bruisers like Hercules and Litner 'maybe stand in your way just a little'?"

"I'd say they had a convincing arrangement," Lyle said, and started toward his L-20. "If we get the execute order tomorrow, Henry, I should be landing at Glasgow between ten-thirty and eleven o'clock, tomorrow night. I'll be counting on you to be in place."

"Right, Dick. I'll be orbiting Glasgow airport from ten-fifteen on. I'll make one quick landing to unload my passengers, but I'll still make the ten-fifteen deadline, and provide at least four hours of continuous communications relay before landing again for a quick refill."

"Remember to keep a continual check on wind and runway conditions, and, if the weather takes a turn for the worse, we'll be relying on you and GCI to get us on the ground at Glasgow," Lyle concluded.

S C R A M B L E !

"I'll be there," Bauer answered, with a wave, then stepped back and signaled that it was safe to start the engine.

When the L-20 was off the ground and heading southwest toward Malmstrom, Bauer joined the airmen and rode to the radar site which was only minutes away.

"Littlefield," Bauer thought aloud.

"Yes, sir," the crew chief responded alertly.

"I was just thinking out loud," Bauer said, but went on to explain what was on his mind. "If those two redecorated fuel trucks should arrive at the Glasgow airport before Hercules and Litner corner those agents, we may be, like the saying goes, caught with milk on our chins! They may not recognize a fuel truck when they see one, but they would certainly question the presence of two milk trucks on Glasgow airport."

"I think that there is more chance that the motor pool officer at Malmstrom will discover he is missing two large, trailer type, yellow fuel trucks," Littlefield said. "We know the habits of the two SAC men. Hercules and Litner will be waiting on the airport, when they drive up to make their nightly inspection. They'll drive around the ramp, see nothing unusual, drive to the one makeshift hangar and, at precisely nine-forty, call Omaha, collect. The only phone on that field is located in that hangar. Hercules and Litner will have no difficulty concealing themselves until that call is completed by nine-forty-five. If for some reason, the call is delayed beyond nine-fifty-five, Hercules and Litner will insure that no calls are placed after that time, regardless!"

Bauer nodded. Hercules would undoubtedly carry out his part of the plan successfully.

"I don't think the motor pool officer will miss those two trucks right away," Bauer said, returning to the expressed doubt voiced by the crew chief.

"All you have to do now, is get them back," Littlefield grinned.

"Interestingly enough," Bauer went on, "Colonel Gormann plans to have the trucks returned with the paint still on them."

"I can see the motor pool officer, now," Littlefield chuckled. "His mouth will drop six inches when he finds two milk trucks, nestled among his fuel trucks. It won't take him long

S C R A M B L E !

to figure out who owns the majority of stock in the T.W.G. Milk Company."

"This possibility was mentioned," Bauer nodded, "but the Colonel's answer to that was, 'OK. Good! This is a SAC base! Those are SAC trucks! What better containers to satisfy the voracious appetite of a very thirsty Puddy Cat?'"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE SIX pusher engines clawed steadily at the cold night sky and enormous swirling tubes of air formed into contrails behind them. They stretched for twenty miles, before dissipating into curled, feathery shapes, finally fading once again into cold, undisturbed air. An Eskimo family, at Demarcation Point, saw two groups of them turn from a northerly heading and swing east over Canada. A trader, at Good Hope saw them through a break in the clouds. A Mountie spotted them as they passed two hours north of Ft. Saint John, and radioed the information to a Canadian Filter Center. At Peace River, a Ground Observer heard them, and, before actually seeing the white, racing contrails, began sending in a report of unidentified aircraft. Minutes later, the Canadian Air Defense Command passed the information to Colorado Springs. The 29th received it seconds later, and an estimated ground speed, course and predicted intercept point were worked out.

The six fighters that had departed Malmstrom were listed in Base Operations as being enroute to Billings. A message from the SAC observer in the Combat Operations Center informed Omaha that six F-94's were headed for Billings. Some confusion was generated, when six F-86D's, instead of

S C R A M B L E !

94's, arrived at Billings and were reported by SAC agents. An error in transmission was blamed, and further reference to the six 94's was dropped. Actually the 94's had climbed to altitude over Lewistown, and headed northwest for Edmonton. Lyle received the latest data on the two southbound B-36's, briefed the fighter crews and stood by for scramble instructions.

Fifteen minutes earlier, two SAC men at Glasgow completed a call to Omaha and ran into some unusual and unexpected difficulties, when they decided to take one more turn around the airport.

A SAC agent at Miles City placed his call, yawned sleepily and gulped in disbelief when six F-86D's flew over the field and broke into a landing pattern.

"You're under arrest!" two Miles City policemen said, and rushed the sputtering SAC man off for interrogation. He was released four hours later, after the two 29th Air Division airmen withdrew their complaint.

"Guess we fingered the wrong man," Master Sergeant Krause apologized, "but he certainly looked like a spy to me."

The agent was not around to witness the C-119 that landed at Miles City, with oxygen equipment and support personnel.

Everyone in the Combat Operations Center seemed to be holding individual phone conversations. The normal crew had been nearly doubled. Each of the four airmen behind the plotting board wore head sets and were checking with the plotters at each site. The two airmen behind the Tactical Action Board, which formed a left wing to the plotting board, were checking with the fighter squadrons as well as the radar sites. They were prepared to record all track numbers assigned to friendly and unfriendly aircraft. In addition, they would note all scramble times, scramble results and the overall data concerning the air battle.

To the right of the plotting board another wing, consisting of an upper and lower section, carried information regarding aircrews combat ready, the number of fighters available and

SCRAMBLE!

ready for scramble. There was also a space to record the in commission status of each radar site.

The bottom section of the right wing consisted of an outline map of the division area with the exact location of each site and airfield clearly marked. On this map the latest weather was drawn. Both sections had one or more airmen working steadily, and it was at these two sections that Gormann studied particularly from his office.

OK. Good! he said to himself, when the data on the upper section was completed and all radar sites were reported fully operational, and that each fighter squadron was reporting twenty-two fighters ready for scramble. He sat back in his chair, hands folded behind his head, and studied the movements of the senior controller and the airmen around him. All were busy on one or more phones, checking, rechecking with sites, adjacent air divisions, Central Air Defense Force Headquarters and Colorado Springs. Directly behind, and slightly to the right of the senior controller on an upper tier, Captain Millard and his intelligence staff were checking their intelligence network.

The SAC representatives, Major Wently and Captain Atkins, observed the activity without comment. Neither had spoken for some minutes, although, Wently periodically glanced at the DO's darkened office. He could make out Gormann's face behind the glass and it resembled a pale mask hanging in space.

"The 'Puddy Cat' looks sick," he said, but drew no reaction from his associate. Atkins was studying the activity around him and missed the almost whispered observation. In Gormann's office, a specially installed speaker repeated Wently's words obediently, but the DO gave no sign that he was aware of the major's remark. In addition, to hearing any conversations held in the neighborhood of the desks occupied by the SAC crew, Gormann could hear both ends of any conversations conducted over the two phones on Wently's desk. He had also seen to it that a switch was placed in his office where he could, should the occasion demand, disconnect both phones. So far, however, he had only contented himself with the substance of all SAC conversations and discussions.

"Surprise Party flight in place, sir," Captain Millard said,

SCRAMBLE!

entering the office and closing the door. "Latest information indicates that the ECM aircraft will be in the Edmonton intercept area at 2200."

"OK. Good!" Gormann said, without turning around. He waited for a few more seconds after Millard left, then got up and headed for the commander's office.

The general, the vice commander and several members of the general's staff, plus two visiting colonels were sitting along the wall facing the COC. The upper-half of the wall, like the wall in Gormann's office was plate glass, and presented an unobstructed view of the COC.

"Wes," the general acknowledged, when Gormann entered.

"The division is ready, sir," Gormann announced, without further amplification.

"It's your show, Wes," the general said, as he stood up. "Wes. I'd like you to meet Colonel Mooney and Colonel Galletin."

Gormann shook hands with the two officers as the general continued the introduction.

"Colonels Mooney and Galletin were on my staff some years back. Currently they're with the Air War College."

"Your name is not unfamiliar to students at the Air War College, Colonel Gormann," Mooney said pleasantly, "Some of your operations in the Alaskan area, and, that remarkable, if some what unusual rescue operation on the Greenland ice-cap, are classic examples of good planning."

"And leadership!" Galletin added.

"Your names are not unfamiliar to me," Gormann returned, his eyes glowing with momentary pleasure. "Perhaps we can work together someday."

"I hope so," Galletin said, as Mooney nodded in agreement.

"Sir, I'll be in my office if you need me," Gormann concluded, addressing the general.

"OK, Wes. Have all of our little surprise packages been sent?"

"Some have already been delivered, sir. The remainder are in the mail."

The general smiled and resumed his seat. "If you need anything, Wes, assistance, command, support; we'll be here."

"Yes, sir." Gormann replied, then hurried to his office. He

SCRAMBLE!

had observed Captain Potner entering the COC and rushing to join Major Wently.

Captain Potner was talking excitedly, and Gormann slid into his chair to listen.

"I've been trying to contact our men at Billings for over thirty minutes, major. There's no answer, and, no one on the field seems to know anything about them. I wanted to check on those 94's that left here some time ago. I wanted to know if they were still at Billings."

"Why wouldn't they be?" Wently questioned.

"Because, I also discovered, while I was in base operations, that a C-119 was on its way from Malmstrom to Miles City!"

"I thought that transport was headed for Rapid City," Wently said, and the first trace of concern ran through him.

"It was, but the pilot must have changed his flight plan after he was airborne. Base operations only received the change ten minutes ago. By now that C-119 has probably landed at Miles City. In addition to that, a 29th Air Division C-45 departed Malmstrom for Billings right behind the C-119. Something's coming off. I don't know what, but something. . . ."

"Give me the Miles City airport!" Wently ordered on line one.

Gormann consulted his watch. It was 2138. While the senior SAC representative waited for the operator to make the necessary connections, Gormann placed a call of his own. There was no delay when he picked up the special phone. Lyle answered immediately. Neither identified himself by name, but Lyle responded to Gormann's "How's the family?" challenge with the correct counter sign, "Healthy and ready to travel."

"Try forty . . . and zero-four-zero . . . with a fifty spread!" Gormann said, and Lyle copied the instructions on his knee board.

"Will do!"

The fighters would be airborne within five minutes the DO knew, and now he gave his undivided attention to Wently who had already asked for a Mr. John Ball.

"No one here by that name," the voice on the other end said some seconds later.

SCRAMBLE!

"He must be there somewhere!" Wently argued.

"Might be over at the CAA building," the voice suggested. "I'll ring the operator and have the call switched."

"No one here by that name," the man on duty at the CAA building said, after Wently repeated his desires.

"Isn't there anyone else around?" Wently pleaded.

"There's a couple of fellows in here with me. I'll ask them if they know anything about your Mr. Ball." There was an exchange of words in the background followed by a new voice on the phone.

"Hello, this is Mr. Krause. The man you want was picked up by the police."

"What?"

"Yeah! Seems he was suspected of being some sort of spy, or maybe it was just for loitering. I'm not sure which."

"Would you mind ringing the operator on your end and have this call switched to the police department?" Wently groaned.

"I'll try," Krause agreed, "but I'll have to use another phone."

It was nearly three finger-nail-biting minutes later when Krause returned. "Sorry, you'll have to go through your operator. Can't seem to raise the one on this end."

"Nuts!" Wently exploded, and banged for the operator. "Get me the Miles City Police Department!" he ordered gruffly.

"Miles City Police Department," a heavy voice answered a minute later.

"This is Major Wently at the 29th Air Division in Great Falls. Do you have a Mr. John Ball. Hello . . . Hello . . . Operator, I've been cut off!"

"I'm sorry, sir. I'll try again."

"Hmm, works!" Gormann sniffed, holding the switch back to the open position, but ready to cut Wently off at the proper moment.

"Here's your call, sir," the operator announced, seconds prior to the same heavy voice identifying itself as the "Miles City Pol—"

"Hello . . . Hello . . . Operator . . . there's something wrong with this phone!"

SCRAMBLE!

"I'll try again, sir."

"Never mind! Get me the SAC Command Post on line two!" He slammed the phone down and picked up the second line.

"Command Post! Major Freely!" the officer manning the command post line answered.

"Major Freely, this is Wently. Something . . . Hello . . . HELLO! What the hell's going on here?"

Atkins and Potner looked at each other. "I'll get a communications man, sir." Atkins volunteered.

"Potner, you go to base operations and use their hot line. Get Major Freely and tell him that we're having trouble . . . and I'm not sure it's accidental!"

Potner hurried for the door, but not before Gormann placed a call to the guards on duty at the reception desk.

"Has the guard been doubled?"

"Yes, sir," the guard confirmed, as the door to the COC slammed down the hall.

"OK. Good! There's a Captain Potner—one of the SAC observers—leaving the COC now. Arrest him! Confine him to the duty officers' room for the next forty-five minutes. Make sure the phone in that room is removed! Questions?"

"No, sir!"

"Half measures meet with less than half success," Gormann snorted, as he picked up the COC line. The senior controller had been ringing him for several seconds.

"Sir," the controller began, "Major Wently would like to see you. He has been having trouble with his telephones. Shall I send him up?"

"No! You come up here!"

"You will note that the switch is off," Gormann said, when the controller arrived. He pointed to the disconnect switch on Wently's lines. "I'm going down to see Wently. When I scratch my head, you will place the switch back in the on position. After that you will return to your position in the COC. Questions?"

"No, sir."

Wently made no secret of his displeasure. "Colonel Gormann, I'm not only suffering from a sudden lack of communications facilities, but I can not obtain help from your

SCRAMBLE!

communications personnell They all say that they are too busy at the moment." The last was soggy with sarcasm.

"Phones dead?" Gormann asked sympathetically.

"I keep getting cut off each time I open my mouth, and I'm not convinced that the trouble emanates within the phone system!"

"Probably a temporary tie-up," Gormann soothed, scratching his head. "I've been known to experience some success with communications. Perhaps I can get you a clear line. What's your pleasure."

"Command Post at SACI" Wently retorted, glaring at the DO distrustfully. Gormann returned the look with wide-eyed innocence.

"Here you are," he said moments later.

"Major Freely?" Wently questioned testily.

"Where have you been?" Freely snapped. "I've had two of my officers trying to contact you for the past ten minutes!" All they could get was a busy signal."

"I've been right here!" Wently defended. These phones have not been off the hook since I was cut off when I called you."

"Hmm," Gormann muttered. "Time does fly." When he returned to his office, Wently was just completing his dissertation concerning the C-119.

"I don't know about Miles City," Freely said, "but our two men at Billings were kidnapped!"

"Kidnapped! *How!*"

"A C-45 landed at Billings right after the six F-86D's from Ellsworth took-off."

"F-86D's?" Wently interrupted. Gormann moved his hand toward the cut-off switch, but Freely continued before Wently had time to question him further.

"After the C-45 landed at Billings, an officer ran from the aircraft, which had pulled-up near our two men, and began searching up and down the ramp like he was really troubled. Finally, he spotted our men—we have reason to believe that he knew exactly where they were all along. He ran up to them and said he needed help. He said that there was an injured man aboard and asked our two men to help him carry the injured party off. They agreed, of course, and ran

S C R A M B L E !

to the airplane, entering it ahead of the unidentified officer. They could see a pilot sitting in the cockpit and also a man lying on the floor between the row of seats. They were aware that the engines were still running, but gave it no thought until the officer behind them slammed the door and the airplane headed for the runway and took-off. At this time the injured man suddenly recovered and sat up. He had, it seems, the unmitigated gall to welcome our men aboard the T.W.G. Transport and Hijack Service! The C-45 landed thirty minutes later at Sheridan, Wyoming, where our men were let off at the far end of the runway—three quarters of a mile from the nearest building! I had just finished talking to them when you called.”

“Interesting,” Gormann said aloud, and moved the switch to off.

“Hello . . . *Hello!*” Wently screamed with exasperation, qualifying his frustration with a few well chosen blasphemous phrases.

“Line two is dead also, sir,” Atkins advised.

Wently would have issued a few more words of questionable character, but the senior controller’s words drew everyone’s attention.

“Doll, Jessie and Sausage report intense jamming!”

Ah, ha! Wently thought. This is *it!* Forget the phones. The Strategic Air Command is upon them. The ‘Puddy Cat’s’ little game is about to explode!

“Edmonton on the radio compass,” the B-36 navigator said, and both pilots of the lead ECM aircraft watched the compass needle settle down and indicate that the station was in their one-thirty position. Behind them, sixty-eight miles northwest, flew the second ECM plane. The aircraft commander of the lead ship pointed to the lights of Edmonton, blinking at them some seventy miles south-southwest, and listened to a report from the radio operator.

“Cutbank . . . condition three. Lewistown . . . condition three. Miles City . . . condition three. Glasgow . . . condition . . . three.”

“Guess the 29th isn’t planning to move any fighters,” the

SCRAMBLE!

aircraft commander speculated as the radio operator continued with the report.

"Billings . . . condition . . . one . . . changing to condition . . . two."

"What's that mean?"

"Evidently they had some fighters at Billings during the last hour, but they departed and haven't returned yet," the radio operator explained.

"Anything on UHF?"

"No, Skipper, not a thing," the ECM officer answered, and began checking the eighteen frequencies assigned for the exercise.

Well, the aircraft commander thought, the boys behind us will probably try to skirt Billings as much as possible. More than likely fly over Miles City and stay out of range of the Billings fighters.

"Twenty-five minutes to orbit point, Skipper," the navigator said. "Continue present course and airspeed."

"Right!" the skipper acknowledged, and adjusted the altitude control on the automatic pilot for a slightly nose-up attitude. The altimeter moved from thirty-five thousand, eight hundred slowly, and the auto-pilot was trimmed for level flight when the altimeter reached thirty-six thousand.

"UHF is still quiet, Skipper," the ECM officer reported again, "I haven't even heard anyone click a mike button."

"You won't, this far out," the navigator retorted slyly. "We're still three hundred and fifty miles from the nearest fighter base. Never knew a pilot yet who wouldn't get lost in the traffic pattern, unless he had a competent navigator along!"

"You just eliminated yourself with the 'competent' bit," the aircraft commander responded lightly.

"As I was about to say," the navigator retorted with feigned disdain, "SAC pilots are bad, but fighter pilots couldn't find their . . ."

"*Twenty seconds to go!*" channel ten crackled, with electrifying suddenness.

"There he is!" the right scanner yelled over the intercom, as the fighter pilot moved the navigation light switch to full

SCRAMBLE!

bright. The lights flashed warningly then disappeared behind the ECM aircraft.

"Twenty seconds to go!" channel ten crackled again, and another fighter was on them!

The second ECM aircraft heard the interceptors attacking the lead B-36 and the aircraft commander ordered immediate jamming on all eighteen frequencies. The ECM officer started jamming. The last words he heard before the tone blocked out further reception were, *"Twenty seconds to go!"* He didn't hear the second fighter, but he saw it complete a perfect pass.

Several of the main strike force B-36's, less than a half-hour behind heard the warnings and determined that the fighters had come from Edmonton.

"Give me a new course that will put more distance between us and Edmonton," the aircraft commander ordered. "We'll swing around by Glasgow and Miles City and bypass all the 29th fighters!"

Lyle rolled into a steep bank immediately after the attack, passing a half-mile to the left and two thousand feet below the lead ECM aircraft. The B-36 commander saw him as the fighter formed a contrail like a silvery river against the darkened ground. It looked, he thought, like the phosphorescent wake of a tracer racing for some distant objective.

Butterworth looked up for the first time since leaving Edmonton and saw the B-36's swirling contrails off to his right and rapidly dropping behind him.

Bet they think the sky is getting crowded all of a sudden, he thought. The B-36 passed from his sight and another, smaller contrail appeared, rapidly closing on them.

"Number Two's joining up," he said, as he recognized the outline of their wingman's fighter.

Lyle glanced over his right shoulder, but the fighter was just out of his line of vision.

"Keep an eye on him," he asked. "Glasgow's just ahead. I'll be dropping speed brakes shortly."

"Rog," his RO responded, and continued to observe their wingman until he settled down and maintained a wide formation. Jamming was already intense in all eighteen UHF frequencies and Lyle checked each one twice, nodding to

SCRAMBLE!

himself when the second check clearly indicated that the SAC ECM aircraft had fully recovered from their initial surprise and were conducting extremely effective jamming.

"OK, Butterball," he said, "re-channelize according to alternate plan two!"

"Rog," Butterworth replied, and removed the black metal covering on the frequency selector box. He read off each change as he accomplished it and Lyle confirmed the settings from his own code table.

"Give it a try," Butterworth said, when the job was accomplished.

"Bauer Control," Lyle transmitted immediately, "this is Surprise Party Lead. How do you read?"

"Surprise Party Lead, Bauer Control here. Reading you loud and clear. How me?"

"Five-by," Lyle returned, "we're ten miles northwest of Glasgow."

"Roger, Surprise Party Lead . . . landing to the northeast . . . wind calm . . ."

"Bauer Control, this is Surprise Party Two. I'm reading you and Lead loud and clear, also," Lyle's wingman advised. All transmissions on the first of these new frequencies remained unjammed, and Lyle nodded with satisfaction before transmitting again.

"OK, two. Watch yourself during landing. The runway is rough in spots. Don't use your drag chute unless absolutely necessary."

"Rog, Lead," Surprise Party Two acknowledged.

"Bauer Control, Lead here. Inform Doll that we splashed one B-36 approximately one hundred and eighty miles northwest of Doll at 2203!"

"And again at 2204!" Surprise Party Two broke in.

"Roger. Understand, one B-36 splashed . . . twice!" Bauer acknowledged.

Lyle was guiding his fighter from the runway on to the taxi way when Surprise Party Three called in.

"Splash one B-36 two hundred and thirty miles northwest of Doll at 2204 and again at 2205!" Three announced briefly, before requesting landing instructions.

"Bauer Control, Lead here," Lyle began, once the neces-

SCRAMBLE!

sary information had been passed. "Have you heard from five and six?"

"Negative, Lead. Doll and Jessie are painting the two ECM aircraft on their weapons, but are not reporting our two remaining fighters."

"OK," Lyle answered. "We'll be sitting in our aircraft with radios and helmets on. We should be ready for scramble within ten minutes."

"Rog. Lead. When Doll or Jessie have further targets I'll pass the word."

Lyle pulled up as close to the fuel trucks as considered safe then unfastened the right side of his mask and let it hang limply down his left cheek. The engine was still and most of the electrical equipment turned off, and he tried to relax for a few minutes while the ground crew reserviced them. Bauer flew directly over the field and he watched him in silence until the L-20 banked, headed back in the direction from which it had come.

"Five and six should be orbiting about thirty miles north of those two ECM aircraft," Butterworth said, looking away from the blinking navigation lights of the L-20 which he had been following for the last two minutes. He had released the right side of his mask also, and he had to hold it to his face while he talked.

Lyle drew a deep breath before responding. "Let's hope they pick up the first of the main force before they run low on fuel," he said, releasing his breath at the same time. Number three and four taxied into position off to their left and Lyle looked them over until Captain Heeney climbed up the cockpit ladder.

"How'd it go?" Heeney asked, standing by the front cockpit and looking at Lyle.

"Both ECM aircraft have been splashed," Lyle said. "Even if they don't believe it!"

"Are they jamming?"

Lyle nodded his answer. "How did it go with you?"

"No problems so far. One of the SAC men tried to get to a phone over Hercules' objections, but nothing serious came of it. SAC man hurt his toe a little, but that was the extent of any injuries."

SCRAMBLE!

"Hmm," Lyle murmured. He was about to question Heeney further, but a house trailer drawn by an automobile moved into the lighted area of the ramp. "What's that?" he asked, pointing a gloved finger at the two vehicles.

"Colonel Gormann's summer camping trailer," Heeney explained. "Locke pulled it behind his car. Remained about a mile behind the trucks. It contains our oxygen supply and spare parts."

"A real mobile hangar, I'd say." Lyle smiled.

"That's what the colonel calls it," Heeney laughed. "We have everything that we might need for minor repair in that thing. In fact we are capable of supporting twelve fighters over a thirty hour period if necessary, even if—"

Lyle held up his hand for silence. Bauer Control was transmitting.

"Surprise Party Lead! Jessie and Doll are each reporting single unidentified tracks heading southeast toward Glasgow!" Lyle waved Heeney off the ladder and refastened his mask, but withheld the actual starting of the engine as Bauer issued additional instructions.

"Negative scramble at this time, Surprise Party Lead. Each of the unidentified tracks has one fighter executing an attack run on it!"

"That will be five and six," Lyle said over the interphone as Bauer began talking to Doll Control.

"Negative jamming on any of plan two's frequencies," Bauer said. Probably in response to some question by the Doll Controller.

"Surprise Party Lead," Bauer called again less than a minute later. "Doll advises that five and six have claimed splashes on two additional B-36's. Both fighters now heading for Glasgow. All sites report negative jamming these frequencies." There was an extended pause before Bauer's voice came through again, crisp and clear.

"Scramble Surprise Party Lead and Surprise Party Two . . . vector three-zero-zero . . . angles three . . . eight . . . thousand . . . contact Jessie on channel ten . . . Scramble Two!"

"Here comes the entire force," Lyle breathed, already watching the RPM gauge register engine life. The ladder

SCRAMBLE!

was removed, the canopy lowered and they raced by three and four on the way to the runway.

That was fast work, Lyle thought, noting that the fuel trucks had already moved away from five and six. Ground crew's really on the job!

Butterworth began calling off the airspeed until the wheels left the ground. Lyle pulled the gear up.

"*Scramble Surprise Party Three and Four! Scramble Two!*" Bauer ordered.

"All the guests are arriving," Butterworth remarked, without removing his eyes from the scope.

"It would seem so," Lyle grunted, and switched to channel ten. "I hope they're dressed for the occasion because this is going to be a 'Splash Party!'"

"Surprise Party One and Two claim splashes on two B-36's," the senior controller announced over his lines to the commander and the DO's office. "The first B-36 was splashed at 2203. It was hit again at 2204."

Wently watched with disbelief as the men behind the Tactical Action Board recorded track numbers for the two ECM aircraft, which were now being reflected by radar. Under the identification column the aircraft were identified as two B-36's. Under the Tactical Action column both were listed as splashed.

"Check that!" Gormann ordered over his call box.

"Yes, sir," the senior controller responded, and immediately called the Doll Controller.

"Surprise Party One and Two claim a double splash on one B-36, sir. That would be track EM-119, reflected on the plotting board just north of Doll. Time of splash was 2203 and 2204."

"What about track EM-120?" Gormann questioned, referring to the track north of Jessie.

"We're checking on that now, sir."

"A foul-up already," Wently said, recovering some of his lost composure.

"Doll reports that track EM-120 was splashed by Surprise Party Three and Four at 2204 and 2205, sir."

SCRAMBLE!

"OK. Good!" Gormann said. "Correct the information on the Tactical Action Board!"

"Yes, sir."

Wently was out of his chair with the announcement from Doll. He attempted to go out the upstairs exit, but two air policemen stopped him. "You'll have to use the downstairs exit, sir if you want to go outside," one of them advised.

Wently stopped below Gormann's office and glared at him through the glass. Gormann smiled pleasantly, stifled a yawn, leaned back in his chair and folded his hands behind his head.

"Wait until the main force arrives," Wently growled to no one in particular. He picked up the phone again and was surprised when his call to base operation went through without difficulty, but base operation had no information regarding the location of Captain Potner.

"Unidentified tracks being reported by Jessie and Doll!" the senior controller warned.

Ah, ha! Wently thought again. Here they come and not one single fighter within hundreds of miles. He watched as the plotters drew yellow lines north of the two reporting sites. They were assigned track numbers EM-121 and 122. The yellow lines were still north of the Canadian border, with the pick-up time listed as 2245.

"Doll reports that EM-121 and EM-122 contain one aircraft each," the controller said.

"Correct!" Wently answered, after consulting his own track book. "That will be the commander of the 420th in track EM-121," he said to Atkins who was looking over his shoulder, "and the operations officer in track EM-122."

The tracks were fifty miles north of the border, seemingly unopposed. At the point nearest the border of each track, the plotters marked the time, 2255.

"Doll reports that track EM-121 was splashed at 2235 and EM-122 splashed at 2233!" the senior controller announced, and Wently was out of his chair running over to the senior controller's desk.

"What do you mean splashed at 2233 and 2235?" he roared. "Radar didn't pick them up until 2245!"

"I know," the controller answered calmly. "But our fighters

SCRAMBLE!

did." He pointed to the plotting board where the plotters had already drawn white lines to a point where the B-36's should have been at the indicated splash times.

The first of the strike force aircraft continued to head southeast, until they passed over the Canadian-U.S. border. From there they headed due south for a few minutes then southeast again, where they were hit, later, by fighters out of Miles City and again several times by fighters out of Ellsworth.

Wently paled when he saw the fighter tracks terminate at Glasgow. It was too late to alter the strike force route, and when Gormann ordered six additional pylon-equipped fighters out of Malmstrom, he made no secret about it.

When the next tracks appeared, radar advised that there were four aircraft in those tracks spread over a forty mile front. In the next breath, radar advised that Surprise Party One, Two, Three and Four were executing attack runs.

"Recover the Surprise Party aircraft at Malmstrom!" Gormann ordered. "You still have two Surprise Party fighters on the ground at Glasgow. Keep them there until I order otherwise!"

Surprise Party flight no sooner called in four splashes than five more tracks appeared. This time they were spread over a ninety mile front. The pilots in the first and second of these five B-36's sighted the fighter contrails about the time the fighter pilots were calling "Twenty seconds to go!" But it was too late, and all five were claimed destroyed.

"Where'd they come from?" the crews said, but there were more to come. When they passed near Miles City they were hit again. This time by F-86D's out of Miles City and ten F-86D's out of Ellsworth. Gormann ordered the ten 86D's out of Ellsworth to recover at Billings.

"I can't understand it," Atkins said. "He seems to know when they're coming, how many there are and where they're going to be!"

Wently could only mutter, "Why isn't our jamming effective?"

"Sir," the senior controller said, as Gormann entered the COC, "Surprise Party flight is recovering at Malmstrom. They are in the landing pattern now. The six fighters scrambled

SCRAMBLE!

out of Malmstrom are recovering at Glasgow. They should be on the ground now. The ten 86D's out of Ellsworth will land at Billings after they complete their runs."

"OK. Good! Scramble all the fighters out of Glasgow *now!* If some of them are not refueled, scramble those that are and have the others follow. Have them orbit along a hundred mile front between Jessie and Doll. After you issue those scramble instructions scramble six more pylon-equipped fighters out of Malmstrom. Have them orbit directly over the U.S.-Canadian border between Jessie and Doll. When Surprise Party flight has been refueled scramble them, too. We should have targets by that time. Have Surprise Party flight recover at Glasgow. In exactly twenty-five minutes the last of the SAC strike force will be in our radar coverage. There will be seven aircraft in that little group. We will be waiting for them with eighteen F-94C's. I want to greet them properly! Questions?"

"No, sir!"

It was exactly midnight when Sausage, Jessie and Doll reported seven tracks heading southeast. The last of the Malmstrom fighters had been airborne ten minutes earlier. The plotting board was a cob web of white fighter tracks, all heading north of the border. The targets continued on their heading, seemingly unconcerned.

"They don't know about the fighters at Glasgow," Wently groaned, "and they probably think that the fighters at Malmstrom are exhausted from scrambling against tracks at the limit of their range."

The eight fighters nearest targets turned almost as one, and the plotters drew lines that were clearly intercept headings. A few of the strike force crew members saw the contrails. At first there were only one or two, but within minutes the sky was laced with them. Navigation lights were turned on as each fighter called the twenty second warning, but the strike force radio monitors failed to hear the warning. They were listening to the wrong frequencies. Each of the seven B-36's was hit at least twice before it crossed the border, and some of them as many as six times before they passed west of Rapid City. There were many long faces. Wently's was a classic. It grew longer each time a 29th fighter claimed a

SCRAMBLE!

splash, and Gormann's habit of sniffing delightedly with each such announcement hardly had a soothing effect.

Wently considered Gormann glumly, but said nothing. He had even forgotten about Potner. Gormann had him released as soon as he returned to the office, but first he looked at everyone in the COC, including Wently.

"This exercise is over," he said, and left the Combat Operations Center.

At two o'clock in the morning, Major Wently held a phone to his ear with his left hand, and picked the skin away from his right thumb with his index finger.

"*What happened?*" the voice from Omaha snapped. "Why wasn't our ECM effective against 29th fighters? How did they move fighters into Glasgow and Miles City without being reported by you or anyone else? Why did one of our men at Glasgow suffer a broken toe when he tried to warn us that fighters were landing?"

When Wently replaced the phone, he approached the senior controller and asked to see Colonel Gormann.

"Major Wently would like to see you, sir," the senior controller said into the phone and Gormann turned around in his swivel chair to peer through the plate-glass window.

"Send our friend up," Gormann responded pleasantly. "The exercise was over hours ago."

"Sit down," he said, when the flushed-faced, red-eyed major entered his office. "What can we do for you?"

"Colonel . . ." the Major began haltingly, obviously not knowing exactly how to approach the subject. "Headquarters wants to know what happened."

"Happened?" Gormann repeated quietly. "We destroyed twenty SAC B-36's! Theoretically, of course, but scope photography will prove that the simple activation of a switch or two, plus a little trigger pressure, would have replaced theory with fact. The only actual casualty, I understand, was a certain spy at Glasgow. He became somewhat over enthusiastic when a few fighters began to land. Seems he wanted to place a long distance call, an airman from the 29th FIS 'stood in his way a little,' accidentally stepped on his toe." Gormann yawned and stretched back in his chair.

"A few additional details for your Headquarters might go

SCRAMBLE!

something like this," he continued dreamily. "Moving fighters from one base to another and planning for their support—all undetected, of course—requires a little leadership, perhaps, but could be figured out by a simpleton! I won't bore you with the details." Wently's face flushed a darker red and he slouched down in his seat.

"An L-20, of course, provided the communications relay for our Glasgow fighters. Miles City used a direct phone system from the nearby site to the CAA facility, which kindly passed scramble instructions to our F-86D's. Three additional L-20's orbited between Cutbank, Havre and Ophim. They did nothing other than try to break through your jamming. Occasionally they did, and the nearest radar controller passed them vectors. The L-20's, of course, had no use for the vectors, so they continued orbiting and searching the allocated frequencies, trying to make further contacts. Your ECM aircraft did a very effective job. Why, during the four hours of orbiting, they managed to jam the L-20's ninety percent of the time!

"To add a little further realism to the picture, we flew several T-birds and six or seven fighters from the Air National Guard at Gore Field. The ANG's 186th Fighter Squadron was most cooperative. Their fighters flew around in circles between Havre and Great Falls, making useless radio transmissions. The ECM aircraft jammed them very effectively too, but the ANG pilots had a glorious time trying to work the various radar sites, trying to outwit the ECM operators, as it were. Occasionally they, too, would succeed, and they exercised their vocal cords with such phrases as, 'I see him' . . . 'There they are' . . . 'Let's go get 'em' and the like. From what I understand, they never actually climbed above twenty thousand feet. They wanted to be sure the 29th fighters had full and free access—no sense cluttering up the sky—especially when the 29th and 54th fighters were working on radio frequencies other than those allocated!"

Major Wently sat straight up; his mouth dropped open. Gormann held up a finger indicating that he had more to say.

"Your ECM operators never thought to search beyond the 18 frequencies, because they overheard our L-20's, T-birds and ANG fighters and gloated with pleasure, I'm sure, every

SCRAMBLE!

time they broke up a transmission with their jamming apparatus."

"Colonel, you weren't allowed to do that!" Wently screamed. "Those frequencies were agreed upon by ADC and SAC. You had no right to change them!"

"No? That's an interesting argument, Major. We had prepared other plans—not involving frequency changes—had we, for example, missed the two ECM aircraft. But we *did* intercept and destroy each of them—twice, as a matter of fact—but they continued to jam—"

"That makes no difference. You still can't do that!" Wently protested. "SAC will be furious!"

"I wouldn't be surprised," Gormann whispered. "But I'll play the game their way—" he lowered his voice a full octave—"when SAC proves to me they actually can return from the dead!"

CHAPTER TWELVE

DURING THE FIRST week of March, fifteen officers met in Washington to examine the final results of 'Exercise Snowboy.' Colonel Emmerson Edwards was one of the five Strategic Air Command representatives, who were headed by a major general. The Air Defense Command had a like number of officers of equal, or comparative rank, although one of their members was a naval captain and one an army colonel. Headquarters USAF provided the last five officers, including the senior member—a three star general—who acted as chairman.

The task before them was not an easy one. Logs from Nike batteries, from radar sites and from SAC navigators

SCRAMBLE!

had to be studied and analyzed. Every scramble order would be questioned and the motion picture photography of the fighters' radar scopes—photographed during the actual intercepts—would be scrutinized and compared with the controllers' and navigators' logs.

Tactics employed by SAC would come under close study, as would ADC's ability to cope with them. Notes would be made and records kept, and next time SAC would be harder to stop. But ADC would gain, too. They would redeploy fighters to better advantage and relocate certain Nike sites to provide more complete coverage. Congress would hear more of it, too, in the form of budgetary requests for newer and more complex equipment.

The costs would be enormous—the profits astronomical. But the people would live more safely—and more comfortably, too. The results of advanced research, based on the quest for improved weapons systems, would ultimately be felt on the civilian market. Commercial aviation, metallurgical and electronic industries, as well as medicine, would be among the first to adapt this advanced research to the civilian welfare, once SAC and ADC had their weapons.

The officers meeting in Washington were aware of these 'secondary' profits, but at the moment, they were interested in 'Snowboy's' primary objective—attack and survival.

ADC brought up the question of unauthorized frequency utilization themselves, and SAC sat back to listen.

"We are not in full agreement with the umpires' decision concerning the theoretical destruction of one entire segment of the SAC strike force," the ADC spokesman argued. "If all air divisions had changed frequencies at will, they would have run up a much higher kill rate, also." The case was discussed for nearly two days and still SAC said nothing, other than to review the facts.

"According to the record," the chairman said, on the second day, "the 29th Air Division has an officer who has done some original thinking before."

"Audacious!" the SAC spokesman said. "That milk truck routine was well executed. I would love to have seen the motor pool officer's face, when he discovered that little piece of deception."

SCRAMBLE!

"Kid-stuff!" the ADC type snorted. "What would he have done if the trucks had been picked up for being improperly licensed, or had stalled on the highway, where reporters could get hold of the story? The politicians would accuse us of playing games!"

"I don't think he was playing games, sir," Edwards said softly, but loud enough for all to hear. "SAC thought he was. They know better now." The major general from SAC nodded his head in agreement.

"I'm not denying that he's a good combat commander—his record proves that," the ADC officer argued. "But he is rather a poor example for a peacetime commander . . . can't adapt himself! In my opinion, ADC needs officers who can adapt themselves, not individualists."

The SAC general considered this opinion in silence, then his eyes suddenly glowed with interest.

"His adaptability has proven costly to SAC before," he said. "Perhaps this inadaptability can be adapted profitably . . . in the future." He refused to say anything more on the subject, even to the other SAC members.

"Fourteen hours after 'Exercise Snowboy' began," the chairman summed up on the last day of the meeting, "all major targets in the United States were destroyed by nuclear or thermonuclear weapons . . . all, that is, except those targets assigned to the 420th Bomb Squadron." He paused for objections.

"We won't argue the umpires rulings any further," the ADC spokesman said.

"SAC has no objections, sir. Scope photography and other supporting data confirm the loss of 20 B-36's. We would like to say, however, that we feel the 29th's solution to continued jamming, after the ECM aircraft had been theoretically destroyed, was a logical approach to an otherwise unfair advantage. We also feel that certain statements, concerning SAC's ability to 'return from the dead,' are justified. However, there may be those who can raise the dead!" Again, he refused to elaborate.

"That leaves," the chairman continued, when the SAC general resumed his silence, "Denver, Colorado Springs, Ogden, Salt Lake City and several other purely military targets,

S C R A M B L E !

unscathed. That is not sufficient to alter the grim fact that the United States was dealt a fatal blow, but it is of interest that of the thirty-nine theoretical losses, suffered by SAC at the hands of Air Defense fighters, twenty were accounted for by . . .” He was about to say 29th and 54th fighters, but after a moment’s reflection, he said, “. . . by a Montana fox!”

The SAC general was in the military personnel offices in the Pentagon within minutes after the meeting was over.

“Everything’s been arranged,” the general in charge of officers’ personnel assured him.

“Ah! Good,” the SAC general exclaimed, and rubbed his hands together. “ADC won’t know what hit them next year!” he said to no one in particular. “Especially when the 420th comes through.”

He went out of the building and drove to Bolling AFB for a flight back to Omaha.

“If you can’t beat ’em,” he muttered happily, “join ’em. And in this case, that’s exactly what it amounts to.”

Morton was the first to hear the news. He sat in the crew chiefs’ lounge smoking a cigar—a habit he picked up when he was promoted to airman second class. He had passed most of the box of cigars to well wishers, but ten or so remained and he began smoking them. Now, it was a matter of prestige. Especially with his new responsibility as a fully trained and accepted crew chief. Littlefield was still his boss, but the NCO treated him with more respect. There was even some talk of assigning him an assistant, when the new batch of airmen third class arrived.

They won’t know a thing, either, Morton thought, and sent a bluish-white cloud of smoke toward the ceiling. For a while he just sat and thought of the difficult days ahead of him “whipping those youngsters into shape.” Then he watched the rain on the windows. It came down heavily and thunder shook the building. He crouched further down in the chair everytime lightning flashed.

“Phone . . .!” Littlefield yelled, for the second time. Morton removed his hands from his ears, where he had been holding them since the last flash of lightning, waiting for the ensuing

S C R A M B L E !

crash of thunder. It rumbled in the mountains to the southeast.

"What?"

"Phone!" Littlefield rested the phone on a table. "It's your buddy in the message center, or wherever it is he works. Now, where was I?" he questioned, returning to the discussion he had interrupted.

"You were telling us about enlarging the crew chiefs' lounge, now that the 29th FIS has new alert hangars," one of the five airmen in the little discussion group reminded him. Morton hurried to the phone. "Got some hot poop?" he queried loudly, and the five airmen and Littlefield paused to wait him out.

"I don't believe it," he said softly, and with unusual seriousness. Littlefield regarded him quizzically.

"I don't believe it," Morton said again. He shook his head as if to impress the speaker on the other end. There was a long pause, and all the airmen, including Littlefield, formed a half circle around him.

"What is it?" Littlefield asked, when Morton put the phone down and looked at them. His face was a mask of rejection and disbelief.

"They got him. They got Colonel Gormann."

"Who got him? Is he hurt?" Littlefield demanded.

"SAC got him," Morton groaned. "He's to be the new commander of the 420th Bomb Squadron!"

Colonel Gormann's secretary was busily admiring her recently acquired engagement ring. The central stone was hardly larger than the watch stem on her wrist watch, and the entire setting, if collectively weighed, would have fallen something short of a half-carat. But, on her finger, it was a ton of warm happiness. Gormann sat facing the plate glass window carrying on a conversation with an officer in the fighter squadron. She held her left hand up to get the most from the fluorescent lighting.

"Congratulations," someone whispered, and she looked up, startled to see a visitor in the office.

"Oh!" she said in recognition. "Thank you. When did you get back?"

SCRAMBLE!

"Came in over the weekend—just signed in at the squadron a few minutes ago—thought I'd come up and say hello."

"Congratulations to you, too. We heard about your marriage. How does it feel to be a married man for a whole three weeks?"

"Great!" the visitor replied exuberantly, then lowered his voice again as Gormann started to turn around.

"I still have sixty days," Gormann said, without completing the turn. "The 29th will be fully alert—ready by that time—we don't need six months! OK. Good!" He dropped the phone in the cradle and swung around to consider his visitor darkly.

"Lieutenant Warren Summers reporting, sir!" the ex-administrative officer bubbled. He expanded his chest and the fluorescent lights reflected merrily on his shiny new wings. Gormann eyed them for a moment, then considered the administrative logbook on his desk. When he looked up again, Summers grinned weakly, and Gormann's brows knitted.

"I've been gone for thirteen months, sir," Summers tried to explain hurriedly, and for some reason he felt guilty. Maybe I should have taken it with me, he wondered.

"Summers?"

"Yes, sir." The words were almost a plea.

"Are you suffering from pneumonia?"

"No, sir!" Come to think of it he did feel a little flushed.

"No, sir, I feel fine."

"Odd," Gormann muttered softly, and his face expressed puzzlement. "Injured at some point during your flying training, then?"

"No, sir. I . . ."

"Interesting," Gormann muttered again. "Your physical handicap escaped me prior to this visit."

"Handicap, sir? I don't have—"

"Your deformity, then."

"Sir! I'm not deformed!"

"No? . . . Then how do you explain your bloated left lung?"

Summers stared down at his chest and Gormann's line of questioning became clear. He had been standing with his left shoulder thrust forward, unconsciously giving his new wings maximum play.

He grinned sheepishly and re-aligned his posture.

SCRAMBLE!

"Congratulations," Gormann said, and came around to the front of his desk, where he shook Summers' hand strongly.

"Thank you, sir," Summers beamed, recovering his composure. "I was delighted to learn after graduation that I was to be assigned to the 29th Fighter Squadron."

"I was congratulating you on your recent marriage to Miss McGregor," Gormann said. "If the Air Force sees fit to risk their aircraft and reputation by permitting you to graduate, I hardly need to congratulate you on their oversight."

"Yes, sir," was all Summers could think of to say.

"Graduated number five, out of a class of one hundred and six, I understand," Gormann continued, and Summers glowed. The DO had taken some interest in his efforts, after all.

"How much time do you have in the F-89?" Gormann asked.

"Sixty-five hours, sir. I went to Moody AFB right after pilot training. I don't have an RO though. They kept my RO at Moody for instructor duty."

"We'll get you an RO," Gormann said. "Get over to the squadron and have Lyle give you a field check. I expect to see you standing alert by next week!"

"Was he happy to see you?" Butterworth asked, when Summers entered the lounge on the second floor of the recently completed alert building.

"He was happy to see someone who had already flown the F-89," Summers said. "He gave me all of one week to get ready for alert."

"I know," Lyle nodded, "we just received a call from the operations officer. Said Colonel Gormann was sending an officer over who could relieve the strain on the 54th."

"What's with the 54th?" Summers wanted to know.

"They have been standing alert for us while the 29th gets checked out in the '89," Lyle explained. "That means that they have to stand two alerts. One here and one at Ellsworth."

"How long have the '89's been here?" Summers wondered how long the 54th had been pulling double alert.

"We've only had them two months," Lyle answered.

SCRAMBLE!

"Should have had them four months by now, but they were delayed for two months. Central gave us six months to get fully combat and alert ready, but Colonel Gormann reduced that some."

"How much is some?" Summers laughed, suspecting that the DO had carved at least sixty days from that schedule.

"Fifty percent!" Lyle answered. "And even that has some modifications. He wants us to be standing alert, no later than next week—two months and fifteen days after the first '89 was delivered to the 29th."

"Think you'll make it?"

"We'll make it! By next Monday there will be four crews ready for alert duties . . . Cranford, Bauer, Lyle and *you!*"

"Sounds good. When do we start?"

"As soon as you are fully checked in on the base."

"Great! I'll get with it right away," Summers responded with delight.

"Good! Our first flight will be set up for 1500 this afternoon. And we'll get a couple more in before midnight."

Oh fine, Summers thought, Nancy will be delighted. She expects me home before six.

For the following six days he kissed her hello some time after ten o'clock at night, and kissed her good-bye before seven the next morning. He was lucky though; he received a half day holiday on Sunday. Lyle wanted him to be rested for night alert on Monday.

After nearly four weeks of alert—alternating between a week of nights, then a week of days—Summers was happy to hear that two additional crews had become alert ready and would relieve them the next day.

"A little respite at Glacier National Park would not be refused," he said to Lyle. "Nancy is a very understanding girl, but she is unwilling to share my affections—even if the other girl is an F-89,"

"Oh, the problems of married bliss," Butterworth sighed, resting his feet comfortably on a metal coffee table, "I'll place both my feet firmly on the floor when I get married. There will be no question as to who's boss."

"Don't be surprised to discover that she's standing on your

SCRAMBLE!

toes," Summers chided. "You'll find that it pays to tread lightly. They all weigh a thousand pounds when their dander is up!"

"If you would wear flying boots rather than those lowcuts, it probably wouldn't hurt as much," Lyle said, referring to Summers' liking for street shoes rather than the required flying boots.

"They hurt my ankles," Summers said. "As soon as they get some to fit, I'll buy them! Besides, I can feel the rudders better with these." He rested his feet on the table, alongside Butterworth's. Butterworth's boots resembled snow shoes in comparison.

"At least, you won't get your feet wet," Lieutenant John Heartly, Summers' RO said, "not as long as we have these alert hangars. Six months ago, if we had been scrambled when it was pouring like this, your low-cut shoes would scoop up all the water on the ramp before you reached your airplane."

"That's not the only improvement these hangars have made," Lyle said, his thoughts returning to the days of alert when they had to run seventy-five or a hundred yards, through rain, or snow, before getting to their fighters. Now, the alert aircraft remained behind closed doors until the engines were started and canopies closed. Now, it was only a matter of racing down a flight of stairs, from a warm crew lounge to a warm hangar, and into their 89's. No longer would crew chiefs suffer frozen fingers, when they had to remove their mittens in order to correct some last minute, minor malfunction. No longer would they shiver in the icy winds, waiting for one fighter to scramble, while the second stood by, engines running, as back up. It was much faster, too. Once the hangar doors were opened, the fighter could roll straight ahead with increasing momentum, make a half-right turn onto the runway and ignite afterburners. A three minute interval from scramble order to wheels up was not uncommon, day or night.

"Talking about changes," Summers observed, "there has been considerable change in personnel, over the past year. The commanding general, the vice commander and two or

SCRAMBLE!

three others have rotated to new assignments while I was absent. Now Gormann is on his way out."

The sounds from a taxiing F-89 vibrated the windows, and Summers stretched, got up and walked over to the window.

"There's been a few changes in the fighter squadron, too," Butterworth added. "And a few more in the offering."

"Maybe Gormann's going," Summers interjected, as he watched the F-89 line up with the runway, "but he has everyone in the right frame of mind. Before I went to pilot school, it wasn't often that the 29th flew in weather like this—at least, not on local training flights."

"For the last year, they have," Lyle grinned, taking a look out the window himself.

The early afternoon sky was covered with a low overcast, and a light rain reduced the visibility to about two miles. They waited for the '89 to roll down the runway.

"Dawson's going, too," Lyle said, returning to one of the overstuffed chairs circling the coffee table.

"You've been here some time yourself," Summers said. "It probably won't be long before you get overseas orders."

"I expected them long before this," Lyle nodded, and Butterworth shook his head in agreement before adding, "It's too late now!"

"Why?" Summers questioned, looking from Butterworth to Lyle, his feet halfway between the floor and coffee table.

"Lyle's getting out of the service the day after tomorrow." This is his last day of alert."

"What?" Summers exploded. His feet banged to the floor heavily.

"It's true," Lyle confirmed. "I never planned to make the service a career. I've been in four years already."

"Why?" Summers asked again. The thought of Lyle leaving the service had never occurred to him.

"I plan to enter law school next month," Lyle said, placing his own feet on the coffee table.

"Didn't Colonel Gormann talk to you?" Summers wanted to know.

"He talked to me," Lyle acknowledged, "but he didn't try to change my mind."

SCRAMBLE!

"He didn't?"

"No," Lyle said as he remembered his last talk with the DO.

"You're a good pilot," Gormann had said, "the Air Force will miss you." "Thank you, sir," Lyle had replied, "I'll miss the Air Force, but I'll take part of it with me, too. Especially the memories of the past months . . . and—" "OK. Good!" Gormann had interrupted, placing a hand on Lyle's shoulder and grasping his hand firmly. "We still have a few days of your time. After that, I'll pick you out in court. You'll be on the winning side."

"Everybody's getting out of the service," Summers complained. "You in a couple of days, and my RO next month."

"Butterball's staying behind," Lyle said, walking over to the alert status board where he began rearranging the names. "Since I'm getting out—and Heartly is too—I am bequeathing Butterball to you. That will be an unbeatable team if I ever saw one."

Summers watched in silence. Butterworth tried to look nonchalant.

"I'll remove my equipment from Lyle's bird and put it in yours," Butterworth said, and his voice was not entirely steady.

"I'll get mine and put it in your aircraft," Heartly joined in, speaking to Lyle.

"OK," Lyle nodded, "I'm putting Summers and Butterworth in the number one slot. If we get a scramble today, they can take it. Give them time to get used to each other."

"Who's on alert?" Gormann asked when the senior controller came into the office.

"Tango Flight, sir," the officer answered, "that's Lyle and Summers."

"OK. Good! Scramble one of them. That bird holding on the Cutbank range may need some help."

"Yes, sir."

"Lyle, this is Captain Coons, senior controller."

"Hil" Lyle returned, waiting for the senior controller to let him know what was on his mind.

SCRAMBLE!

"We are not moving another '89 up to take the place of the one just scrambled."

"Oh?" Lyle said, puzzled at this unusual procedure. Normally, when one fighter was scrambled the squadron was notified to have another crew placed on fifteen minute standby. The crews need not report to the alert hangar, but they were to be immediately available. If they were in the BOQ, they had to remain in their rooms, near the phone.

"This is only a precautionary scramble," the controller explained. "We had an '89 call in a few minutes ago, stating he was having radio difficulties. We haven't heard from him since, but our radar is painting him. At the moment, he is holding on the Cutbank range. We think his receivers went out, but he must have been tuned into the range, before they went out. Tango Two should be halfway there by now."

"How much fuel does the '89 have?" Lyle asked, suspecting that it was the airplane that he and Summers had observed taking off forty minutes earlier. If so, it should be in good shape.

"He should be able to hold for two hours if necessary," the controller answered, "but Tango Two will be—hold on!"

Lyle held the phone by his ear, for nearly three minutes before the controller returned. His voice was shaken.

"Stand by to Scramble! Tango Two just blew up!"

The phone slipped from Lyle's fingers and crashed to the floor. Lieutenant Heartly ran over to pick it up.

"What is it?" he whispered. Lyle looked at him blankly and his hands began to shake. He tried to say something, but the words refused to form.

Gormann was on the phone. "I'm not sure," the controller at Jessie was saying, and his words were clearly audible to Gormann's secretary.

Two more phones began to ring. She answered them, asked the caller to wait, then tried to pick up the remainder of the controller's statement.

"Tango Two called in and said they were having difficulties. The fire warning light on the left engine was on. That was fifteen minutes ago. We haven't heard from them since."

"Didn't you have them on the scope?" Gormann de-

SCRAMBLE!

manded. His words carried down to the guard at the reception desk.

"No, sir. We never picked them up, we are painting the '89 over Cutbank, but we never painted Tango Two. We heard them transmit, but they never acknowledged our transmission. I think they had an explosion!"

"Stay with it!" Gormann ordered, and slammed the receiver down.

"Sir, we still have that '89 orbiting Cutbank," the senior controller reminded, when Gormann was on his line.

"*He can hold for a while!*" Gormann roared, then took a breath and spoke softly. "If we don't hear from Tango Two in the next twenty minutes, scramble another alert aircraft."

"Yes, sir."

Another phone was ringing now and Gormann motioned for his secretary to answer that one too.

"It's the State Police," she said, indicating one of the two open lines she had been holding, "and the commander of the 29th FIS is on the other."

"Tell him to call back," Gormann ordered.

"Colonel Gormann here! Go ahead! . . . Where? . . . not *again!* I'll have the crash crew on the way in one minute!" He flipped the switch connecting his phone to that of the controller. "Get a crash crew and fire fighting equipment to a point five miles north of Big Sandy—half-mile off Highway 87!"

"Any survivors?" the controller asked, and he looked up at Gormann behind the plate glass. His face was tense with suspense.

"I don't know. State Police can't get within fifty yards. . . too hot."

"Yes, sir," the controller replied and drew a deep breath.

"Who was in number one slot?" Gormann asked, before replacing the phone.

"Summers and Butterworth, sir," the controller answered, and Gormann glared through the glass.

"Sir, we'll have to scramble, but perhaps we should have the squadron replace Tango Lead. Lieutenant Lyle is probably badly shaken. I'll call the squadron and—"

SCRAMBLE!

"No. Lyle will take it. Try to contact the '89 over Cutbank a couple more time first, if you fail to make contact, scramble Tango Lead."

"Yes, sir."

"Colonel, it's Mr. McGregor," the secretary said, handing Gormann another phone and not trying to hide her tears.

"Wes, this is Ennis. One of your machines did it again!"

"I'm aware of it, Ennis," Gormann said softly, and drew a deep breath himself.

"What?" he suddenly roared, and the secretary who had returned to her desk, removed the handkerchief from her eyes. Gormann's face was wreathed in smiles.

"They *did*, did they? They hurt? Let me talk to Summers!" He looked at his secretary. Tears were running down her face freely, but her face was laughing. "They both bailed out," Gormann whispered, "and they landed in a plowed field, behind McGregor's house."

"Summers! . . . you hurt?"

"No, sir."

The secretary was standing by Gormann's right elbow.

"The fire warning light came on and the engine blew—"

"Never mind that now. How about Butterworth?"

"He's in the kitchen, sir. Mother's fixing him a sandwich."

"Hmm," Gormann muttered. "Both of you stay right there. I'll be over in an L-20 within the hour."

"Yes, sir, but I wonder if you would do me a favor before you leave. Call Nancy and have her bring you an extra pair of shoes?"

"Summers!" Gormann threatened.

"Yes, sir. I lost them when I bailed out—snapped right off my feet."

"I'll bring them," Gormann promised. "You might ask your father-in-law, though, if he has any extra horse shoes. I think I may find some use for them."

He looked at his watch when he replaced the phone, then immediately rang the controller.

"Pilot and RO are OK," he said. "Call Lyle and give him the information."

"I just hit the scramble bell, sir. Shall I recall the scramble?"

S C R A M B L E !

"No," Gormann said simply, and lifted the switch on the inter-phone between his office and the alert crew lounge. The order was already coming over the loud speaker, and he could hear it clearly.

"Scramble Tango Lead!" the voice intoned. *"Scramble One!"*

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