



# ACES

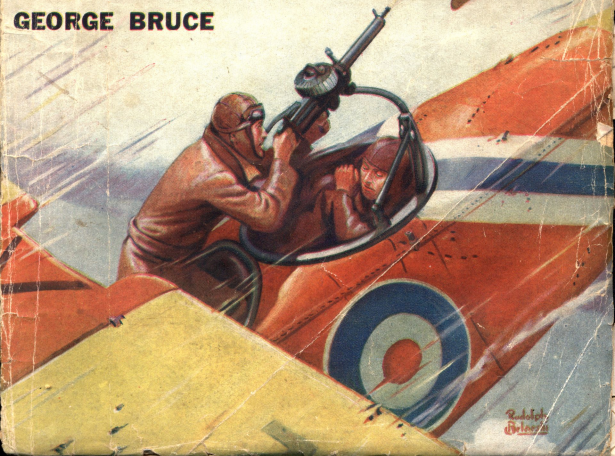
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# ACES

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TO THE SKY

Vol. I, No. 11

OCTOBER, 1929

20c a copy; \$2.50 a year

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*He was a flying demon with the yellow streak—and he sought for death or salvation along the red trail that was Hell's own airway!*

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*Outlawed and hunted—yet they haunted the gray dawn, asking no quarter; and giving none!*

## High Spy . . . . . Robert Carter 103

*Out of a sinister sky drops a challenge and a clue, and Mallory wings the lines on the trail of a strange thing . . .*

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*"I fired two hundred and fifty rounds into a Fokker . . . It was last seen spinning out of control"—The true tale of a fateful day when all the world knew madness.*

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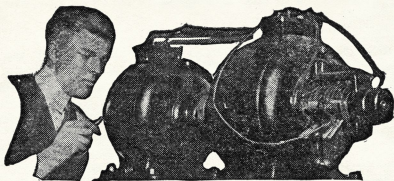
*Keep your eye on the clouds, kivi, there are Huns in the air!*

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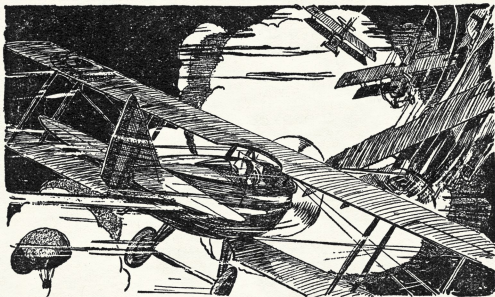
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# The Solo Kid



**By George Bruce**

*Author of "The Deacon from Hell," "The Flying Scimitar," etc.*

**A fighting fool—sky demon—gang flyer. . . . A killer of the skies with a yellow streak! A flying freak who rode the red air trails for the salvation of his soul!**

**A Complete Air War Novel**

**"BRICK"** SUTTON was a "hard guy." No one in West End would dispute that fact, and when West End termed a fellow a "hard guy" they meant that he was plenty tough, spoiling for a fight, and just plain ugly. West End is a section of West Philadelphia, situated between Cedar Avenue and Pine Street and from 60th to 63rd Streets. It is the kind of a neighborhood which produces most of the "pugs" who show their wares in small-time "fight clubs" for twenty-five bucks a fight, doctor bills not included.

To live in West End it was necessary to fight and to know how to fight. There may have been rougher and tougher neighborhoods but no one

seemed to remember where they were located. Brick Sutton was born in this locality. His father, "Micky" Sutton, was a chief kiln tender for the Connelly Brick Yards, and Brick grew up amid a wealth of Irish confetti, his skill in hurling the same at rapidly moving targets provided him with his nickname in early youth.

Brick's early life was spent in sordid surroundings. In those days there was a saloon on every choice corner in West End and the saloon keepers prospered mightily. In fact, it would not be overestimating to say that three-fifths of the total earnings of the neighborhood passed over the wet and shining mahogany bars and into the ornate and expensive cash registers set up in front

of the frosted mirrors on which choice designs were drawn each week by floating artists who traded art for the stock in trade of the saloon keeper. The tread of sawdust on the floor, the tantalizing smell of raw whiskey, the clink of money being tossed carelessly into tills, the brawling conversation of tipsy men—these were as common to the young Brick Sutton as the dugout clay hills on which the brickyard was built.

Each Saturday, when his father received the munificent sum of eighteen dollars, paid him by the brickyard for his weekly toil, the young Brick knew exactly what to expect. It would come three o'clock, with his father not returned home from work. Saturday was a half-holiday at the yard. The men trooped up to the pay window, received their yellow envelopes and turned away, wetting lips with expectant tongues, to drift in a body to the nearest saloon on the route home—where they usually remained until the week's salary was but a pleasant, if hazy, memory.

That had been the Saturday afternoon routine for as long as Brick could remember. Always, on Saturday afternoon his mother, a red-faced, rough-handed woman, crushed by heavy toil and rough association, would pace up and down the floor of the Sutton kitchen, wringing her hands and making sounds of misery in her throat, her eyes looking out onto the dirty street. She said the same words every Saturday afternoon. It was like playing a phonograph record once a week. Brick knew the lament by heart.

"Oh, the low-life dog," she would moan. "To be a guzzlin' the very wages we need down at Dugan's, when it's me that has to stay at home and keep a face on for the neighbors and for the collectors which pester me to death. Me with hardly a stitch to cover me and with me feet stickin' out of me shoes, and that fine gentleman of mine down at Dugan's a settin' up for such swine as Mike Grogan and Paddy Duff. If I could but lay me hands on him

I'd show him a thing or two, I would. Reelin' home at nightfall, not a cent in his pockets and with me a smilin' at old Hassenpfeffer, the grocery man, and a tryin' to explain to him why we don't pay the bills—and him knowin' that Micky guzzles all the money he makes.

"You Brick, you go down there to Dugan's and fetch your father home—and watch him close to see if he has any money left."

Which was exactly the thing young Brick wanted to do above everything else. Dugan's with its cool interior and frosted mirrors and sawdust floors, with its laughing men and nickel pianos playing, with the smell of beer and whiskey, with the card games going on over in the corner, with his father leaning up against the bar, four or five of his cronies standing back and listening to him talk in breathless interest, hanging onto his every word and agreeing with his every utterance—well, it made the young Brick feel big to see how admired and respected his father was, here in this meeting place of all the men of the neighborhood.

He was too young to understand that the listeners were not hearing a word of Micky Sutton's speeches on "polytiks." They were wondering how long it would be before Old Man Sutton, with a majestic and commanding sweep of his arm, would order the barkeeper to "set 'em up again for the boys."

THE barkeeper would nod his head respectfully, and with a "Yes sir, Mr. Sutton," would set out the bottles filled with the shining golden liquor—and the cash register would tinkle merrily, the barkeeper would wink widely at owner Dugan and present Micky Sutton with a red banded cigar, bought in gross lots at three for a nickel—and more of the weekly stipend of eighteen dollars would be gone forever, into the deep tills of Michael Dugan.

Micky Sutton always had the idea that if he had not turned out to be the

best kiln tender in the employ of the brickyard that he would have developed into the heavyweight pugilistic sensation of the day.

"That bum, Johnson, and that bum, Willard," he used to mutter, sitting in his arm chair, his chin stuck out at a belligerent angle, his fists clenched, the room smelling a lot like Dugan's bar. "Why I could whip 'em both in the same ring." And then he would lurch to his feet, "put up his dukes" after the manner of John L. Sullivan in his prime, and spar around the room, making passes at imaginary opponents, calling upon Brick to watch him "put Johnson to sleep with me left."

"Never drink, me lad," Micky Sutton would admonish his only son. "Never be tempted by the demon alcohol. Never throw your money away in grog shops."

Which was strange advice, coming from Micky Sutton.

The mere fact that Brick's Old Man was the head kiln tender at the brickyard, where some two hundred and fifty men from West End were employed gave Brick a standing in the community, even while he was in his very early teens. In fact it gave him a standing from the day he was born. That coupled with the knowledge that his Old Man was the highest salaried employee in the yard—drawing down the almost unbelievable salary of eighteen dollars each and every week.

It was natural that the "gang" should cluster around Brick, just as naturally as their elders clustered about the Old Man, and it was natural that Brick should assume a leadership over the gang and should become the champion of the gang.

When he was fifteen Brick was a big, powerful, tow-headed, blue-eyed devil, with large and bony fists, rippling muscles beneath his white skin, his nose slightly battered from contact with flying fists thrown at him in numerous bloody encounters, and he was

the undisputed pugilistic champion of the neighborhood.

The terror of his name as a scrapper had penetrated as far east as the Arena, and West End stared in amazement one afternoon when Curley Hodges, matchmaker for the Arena, drove up in front of the Sutton domicile, descended from his brand new roadster, and offered Brick a chance at a preliminary at the Arena.

**F**AME! Fame without effort. Thrust upon the shoulders of Brick Sutton. His father was almost apoplectic with importance—and then his mother stepped in. "Not for my boy," she said with a meaning look in the direction of Brick's Old Man. "Not for my Brick. One low life in the family who thinks he could have whipped John L. is enough. I'm niver goin' to have the experience Mrs. Murphy went through when her Red came home from a fight, blinded for life, when somebody hit him in the eyes with a glove that was covered with resin. He'll never do any fightin' for twenty-five dollars a fight—not while I'm alive and able to lift me hands and raise me voice.

"He's goin' to get his learnin'," his mother would declare over and over in a voice that defied argument, "he's goin' to school, he's not goin' to be an ignorant know-nothin' like his Old Man."

So Brick went to school, when the boys of his acquaintance quit as soon as they could lie the municipal authorities out of working papers. Brick graduated from the West End Grammar School when he was seventeen.

It was a great occasion in West End. The Dugans and the Murphys and the Rileys and the Duffys in their Sunday clothes thronged the auditorium of the grammar school to see Micky Sutton's boy get his "deplomor" as a full-fledged school graduate.

His father and mother were there—his mother sitting primly in the front row of seats, her red face wreathed in



proud smiles, his Old Man sitting next to her, his neck an angry red from where the stiff collar of his boiled shirt jabbed him in the Adam's apple, his lodge hat carefully placed between his feet under his chair, and the dress suit he wore only upon such great occasions as parades of the Order of Hibernians, the St. Patrick's Day Parade and to the most exclusive of wakes.

One thing he was not wearing. His shoes. The narrow shiny things he wore once in a great while pinched his great feet, and so he kicked them off, gazing fearfully out of the corner of his eye at the "Old Lady" as he did so. Dire things would happen to that "gradyating" if she discovered this breach of social etiquette.

SO far as that "gradyating" was concerned Brick stopped the show dead. They handed out the diplomas and West End carried Brick Sutton home in triumph. It was not altogether a successful occasion for Brick's Old Man. In the excitement he left with the West End delegation, forgetting that his shiny shoes were still under his chair, and parading with a "stove pipe" and "swallow tails" up Cedar Avenue, his red-wool sock encased feet treading the concrete. Losing the shoes was going to be hard to explain.

Even Brick's mother was satisfied with Brick's education now. That "deplomler" hanging tastefully framed in the parlor was proof positive that her Brick was educated. She made no demur when Brick announced that he had taken a job in a garage. No joining the U. G. I. street-digging gangs for Brick. Always a gentleman. Driving by the door in big cars, sent into the garage for repairs, honking the horn as he sped past, taking out his favorite girls after hours, even taking his old mother to ride in the back seat of expensive limousines. And strange to relate, Brick developed into an expert mechanic—into one of the kind of mechanics who seem born and not trained.

His fame spread until people brought cars for his expert advice all the way from Fifty-second Street, and his boss rented the storeroom next door and increased his business. Of course, that took time—three years almost—but when Brick was twenty he had an assured position in the neighborhood, he made more than his Old Man had ever earned in his life—and he was still the bruising, mauling, hard-fighting gang leader he had been at seventeen.

Brick was proud of his great strength. It was his glory to stand on the corner of Sixty-first and Cedar, his chest thrust out, a gang of younger luminaries about him feeling his biceps and pounding away at his stomach. It was his delight to fight in front of the gang. He did it on every opportunity.

It was Brick who had invaded Cardington, where the boys were just as rough and tough as in West End, and when a gang battle seemed inevitable, offered to fight it out with the leader of the Cardington gang—both factions agreeing to settle the dispute by this meeting of champions. What Brick did to the Cardington leader is still history in West End. In there, surrounded by a circle of watchful friends, battling under the eyes of West End, he handed out one of the worst beatings Cardington had ever seen. In fact, they were so subdued they permitted West End to go home unmolested without hurling beer bottles and half bricks out of dark alleys.

THERE was something that West End did not know about Brick. Something that caused him a great shame. Something that would have disgraced him in West End had it been known. Brick hadn't discovered it for himself until after his fight with little Danny Martin. Danny was a West Ender. He had been fresh one afternoon. Brick had decided to take some of the freshness out of him. Danny was four inches shorter and twenty pounds lighter than Brick.

Standing up there in Mayer's alley, behind the stables, stripped to the waist, he seemed almost frail beside the towering and powerful Brick. In spite of the fact that West Enders expected it to be a short and easy victory for Brick, Danny Martin had fought like a tiger.

Elusive as a ghost he had danced around Brick, rolling with Brick's driving punches, ducking under Brick's leads, and his left hand was stuck into Brick's mouth every second of the time, while all too often his right crossed over and smacked Brick on the jaw with the velocity of a mule kick.

Enraged at his inability to hit the smaller Danny, and knowing that the eyes of the gang were upon him, and that he was getting tired and Danny seemed to be as fresh as a daisy, Brick, throwing caution aside, leaped in, swinging wildly from the hips, his mouth muttering meaningless words, his eyes blazing savagely, blood streaming from his nose and split lips. He felt the spat-spat of Danny's right and left on his jaw as he bored in, and then the crack of the right again, squarely on the button, but he knew that he dared not go down—the gang was watching him, so he pinned Danny against the brick wall of Mayer's stable, drew back his powerful fist and crashed it against Danny's jaw.

MARTIN'S head snapped against the rough cold bricks. His eyes glazed and he dropped at Brick's feet—out cold, while the gang rushed in and patted Brick on the back.

"Nice fight, Brick," they were gloating. "Who'd think that Danny could put up an argument like that—against you? Why for a minute there we thought he had you going—but then we knew you was only foolin' him to get him to lead and come in close so you could pulverize him. Boy, that last wallop on the jaw. . . ."

"I didn't want to hurt him much," Brick was telling them in a loud voice. "After all he's one of the gang—and all

right if he don't shoot off his trap—but he got my goat today. I had to shut him up. I let him hit me—I wanted to drop him with a punch—not hurt him much, just stop him. Then he took advantage of me and wanted to make a fight out of it so I had to lay him out."

Even as he said it he knew he was lying. He knew that he would have gone down under those murderous rights and lefts Danny had let fly at his jaw as he charged in if his buzzing brain had not retained the picture of the gang watching him. He didn't let a word out of him as Danny came to with a deep groan, rubbing the back of his lacerated head, where the bricks of the wall had cut the scalp. For a minute Danny had leaned up against the wall, trying to clear his brain, and get his bearing, then he saw the crowd about the victorious Brick.

Martin's face went white. He walked over to the group. He was trembling and his face was white and there was a large lump forming on his jaw. Tears were running out of his eyes.

"You big bum," he spat at Brick Sutton. "You big bum. I can lick you the best day you ever saw. I'll prove it too. You think you're a great guy. Why listen, fellow, you're as yellow inside as a Chink. I could feel it when I was fighting you. You're a swell gang fighter—but we'll see what kind of a guy you are the next time I take a poke at you."

And to the surprise of everyone in the gang, Danny walked away, still shaking his head, while Brick stared after him, saying nothing.

"No use in rubbing it in," said Brick to the gang a minute later. "He's not such a bad little skate, and he was hurt bad. Don't believe in rubbing it in like that. He was sore at losing and had to say something to square himself."

So the gang voted Brick a real sport. "I'd have smashed him one in the teeth for good measure after he piped off like that," assured Joey McGuire.

"Not me," grunted Brick, putting on

his coat and wiping the blood off his mouth and nose and cheeks with a white silk handkerchief. "It don't do no good to kill a guy just because he's a little fresh."

But he knew that was not the reason. There was a haunting fear in him somewhere—he could not tell what it was, but it was a lot like when he was a kid and he had to go into a dark room after something—alone. With his mother the dark room held no terrors—but alone—his blood used to turn to water, and his knees would tremble.

"Gang fighter," Danny had said. "Gang fighter! Big shot in front of a crowd—but we'll see how you are alone."

My God but he hated that word alone. . . .

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## CHAPTER II

### *Danny Gets a Return Bout*

---

THEN one night he had been coming home from the movies. He was walking with a quick step. He was alone. He hated to walk on the streets at night by himself. Yet when he was with the gang he didn't seem to know it was dark. He heard his footsteps pounding on the cement of Sixty-first Street. It was only three short blocks from the movies to home. He felt like running the distance madly. Inwardly he was cursing himself for the desire. Then he was passing the alley behind Mayer's stables. Someone popped out of the alley. Someone who grabbed him by the lapels of the coat. Someone who thrust a white face into his and said in a husky voice:

"Know me? It's me, Danny Martin. Come on in the alley I got something to tell you."

Brick had tried to shake off Danny's clutching fingers, but they held on like steel claws.

"Forget it," he told Danny gruffly. "Forget it, see me tomorrow. I got to

get home now . . . hard day tomorrow."

"No, I'm not forgetting it," Danny had muttered. "This is the night. Tonight. I've been waiting for it for a couple of weeks now. Waiting to see you when you was alone. I got a lot of things to say to you—in fact I'm going to beat your can off."

"Don't be a nut," Brick had growled. "I don't hold nothin' against you on account of that fuss we had. I forgot it long ago. Maybe I was a little too quick on the smack."

"I'll say you were," grinned Danny. "I'm going to show you how quick you were, you big ox. I told you I'd get you alone and smash you flat didn't I? Look, I'm the same guy you knocked for a row in this same alley two weeks back. I'm twenty pounds lighter than you and a lot smaller. You're a big shot—you think you are—I'm going to ram so many knuckles down your throat you won't be able to swallow for a week. Come on in this alley, or stand for a yellow rat who ain't got nerve enough to take on a guy he licked once."

"No alleys for me at night," snapped Brick. "What you think I am—a nut. . . ."

"O.K.," smiled Danny dangerously, hurling off his coat. "I was going to try to save you from this in front of people, but if you don't come back in the alley where we can't be seen I'm going to smack you down right here in the street. And listen, Big Boy, get this straight, if you lick me again tonight I'll still think it's an accident, and from now on you've got to lick me every time we meet until I lay you out proper. Don't forget that—and I can take plenty of punishment—and you can't."

SO Brick went into the alley. Things happened. They fought for a couple of minutes—until Danny whipped a left hook to the stomach that shook Brick from head to heels and made his brain reel dizzily. Then the wicked right cross came over on his jaw—and then there was a barrage of punches smack-



ing him about the head, punches that snapped his head this way and that, that stung and cut and blinded. That caused his ears to buzz and his breath to come in great gasps. He felt himself giving ground, going back, until his back was against the brick wall of the bakery—and all the time, with beautiful precision, Danny Martin was throwing punches . . . one . . . two . . . three . . . and with each punch, new lights danced before Brick's groggy eyes.

He knew that he should be fighting back like a lion—meeting a rally with a rally but he had no fight in him, no desire to fight. Then he was listening to blistering words coming from the white lips of the punching Danny.

"Listen . . . guy . . ." Danny was saying, emphasizing each word with a swing. "Learn this. You ain't nothin' but a big yellow bag of wind. Unnerstand? You've been beatin' up on guys—little ones and big ones—while the gang's lookin' on because you're too yellow to listen to them in case you ever got licked. You'd rather die than have them think you yellow, so you fight like hell to win—while they're watching you—but when you're away from them your stomach turns sick every time you think about fightin'. They're not with you tonight, so you can't hold your arms up and you're taking the worst lacin' you ever had. After this you better steer clear of guys that may wait for you when the gang ain't with you . . . get me?"

"I'm not goin' to peach on you. I'm goin' to be around tomorrow when you're tellin' lies about how your face got this way and how you got that bum lamp—and I'm goin' to keep my trap shut—I'm just goin' to wink at you while you're lyin'—but handsome—if you ever try to beat up on another guy smaller than you are in front of the gang—like you did on me—well, I'll talk to you about it like this. I've got your number Brick. You're a swell gang fighter because you're too yellow to let the gang know that you don't

want to fight—but you're a total loss by yourself."

And then he measured Brick's jaw. Brick was close up against the wall—Danny's right shot out like a piston and cracked against Brick Sutton's chin. Brick's head snapped back against the stone wall. He slid down into the dust of the alley. Just as Danny Martin had slid down in that dust two weeks before. And then, in a matter-of-fact way, Danny put on his coat, lifted Brick to his feet and pushed him out on the sidewalk.

**I**N spite of the environment into which he had grown, and in spite of the misery and poverty he had known at home, in spite of the vicious element of his association with the gang, there was something clean and fine about Brick Sutton. One thing, he never took a drink.

It may have been his mother's influence—it may have been that when he grew older he understood better why she wrung her hands in the kitchen on Saturday afternoons while the Old Man was throwing eighteen dollars into Dugan's till. Somehow Dugan's bar lost its interest for Brick. He looked with disgust upon the wind jammers who cluttered up the place spending money their families needed desperately.

He did what he could to change that. He slipped his mother half of his salary on the side. He did it with a prayer that the gang would never find out, for the gang could never understand such a weakness in the gang champion.

While he worked he was a different Brick. He forgot gangs, he forgot to bully. He remembered nothing but his motors, and he loved motors intensely. Inwardly he was far more proud of the fact that he was the best motor man in West Philadelphia than he was of the fact that he was the champion of the West Enders. He had a different look on his face as he labored over balky motors. He stuck to them until they were purring as smoothly as new jobs.

He took pride in the fact that he could fix them. It was only when he took off his overalls and started home that he remembered he was the champion of the gang, and he got the scowling look on his face and carried his fists clenched at his sides.

Then one day, when he was bending over a Packard with wheezing valves the Boss came up behind him. "Hear the news?" he asked Brick in a strange voice.

"No, what?" asked Brick absently, not looking up. "Who's dead?"

"Nobody's dead yet, but plenty is going to be," answered the Boss in the same strange voice. "They've declared war against Germany."

"They've what?" asked Brick wiping his hands on a bit of waste and taking the grease daubed paper from the Boss's hands. "You mean we're going over there to help out a lot of monkeys that start a scrap and then haven't got sense enough to know how to finish it?"

"I guess we are," answered the Boss. "Leastwise that's what it says in the paper. They're sending the Navy right out and they're calling for volunteers. They're also talking about drafting a couple of million men."

"What's this draft thing?" asked Brick suspiciously.

"Why they take a bunch of guys and put 'em in the Army whether they want to go or not," informed the Boss.

"Don't look like it's fair to me," said Brick. "Making us Americans fight for a lot of Frogs we don't even know and making us fight whether we want to or not."

"They'll do it though," promised the Boss. "They can do anything in the war—I remember how it was in the war in Cuba—they almost drafted a gang for that and that was just a little fuss."

SO the war came to Brick Sutton and the West End. At first it wasn't very important, except that wages were boosted right away and the newspapers talked a lot about battles in places that

couldn't be pronounced by West End.

"Well," Old Man Sutton would say, looking up from the *Bulletin* at night, "I see where them Rooshens took Pretzel again today—must be great fighters, them Rooshens. Don't ever remember fighting with none of 'em, but I've fit with lots of bohunks and such—and these Rooshens are lickin' hell out of them bohunks—and them bohunks is plenty tough—I remember one night, now, in Dugan's back room I got in an argument with one of the bohunks that I fired out of the yard and before I could smack him with me fist he bounced a beer bottle off me head—that quick they are—and don't care nothing at all about the consequence—so them Rooshens must be pretty good fighters. The A's beat Detroit today seven and nothing. Boy, I bet old Connie Mack runs off with another pennant."

The war didn't have much importance at first, until Young West End learned that there was an actual free for all fight going on. Rough and tough was West End, and illiterate and gangy as it was, there was no need to put numbers in a glass ball and have a little girl draw them out blindfolded in order to see who in West End was going to the Army.

Eddie Lyons went first. He came home in his uniform—he enlisted in the First Regiment at Broad and Callowhill. He had a swell khaki uniform and a round hat with a blue cord around it. "Infantry," he told the gang. "Guts of the Army. Goin' over pretty quick. We'll be called out any old day now—and oh boy—France and the Madame-muscles—I'll send you all post cards," and he strutted away in a superior manner.

That started the rush for the colors in West End. Ninety per cent Irish, ninety per cent hell raisers, they needed only to know that there was a chance for a fight. The stampede started. In the first week nine of the gang enlisted in Eddie Lyon's company.

Strange impulses were running

around inside of Brick Sutton. There was a poster on the corner of Sixtieth and Cedar Avenue, right on the border of the "respectable" neighborhood. Every morning as he passed the corner on the way to work and every evening when he returned by the same route he stopped and read the poster through on both sides, looking at the pictures in fascination. Looking at the piled up heaps of motors in the photographs—looking at the big black barn-like buildings they called hangars. What were hangars? Sounded like somebody that sprung the trap when they bumped a guy off for murder.

AVIATION NEEDS MEN!  
SERVE YOUR COUNTRY  
LEARN! EARN! PROMOTION!

The Air Service Section, Signal Corps, U. S. A., needs trained men immediately for its war expansion programme. Expert mechanics, engineers, draughtsmen, riggers, skilled airplane builders, motor men. All these have a splendid chance for quick advancement in the most fascinating branch of service. Come now before your place is filled by someone else.

**E**ACH time he read the poster it caused him deep thought. Then one night at the supper table he blurted out the announcement:

"I'm going away, Mom. I'm going to the Army. I'm going to be a big guy in the Air Service. I'd hate to think about them Squareheads giving us a lacing just because we ain't got anybody to take care of our motors. I been reading where they want trained men in the Air Service right away to take care of motors—and I been figuring that I better go down there and give 'em a hand. You know, Mom, I'm the best motor mechanic in West Philadelphia and I can show 'em lots of short cuts and things when I get into the Army—maybe I'll be a General or something or other."

He stopped suddenly. He hadn't meant to say it just that way. In fact he hadn't meant to say it at all. He had spoken out of a dazed mind—but

the words were said—they could not be recalled.

His mother looked at him. For the first time he was conscious of the love hunger in her eyes. He noticed that she was old looking and her hair was streaked with gray—and how red her hands were. There was a stinging sensation in his eyes. He was surprised that he wanted to go over to her and take her head on his chest and stroke that gray hair and whisper soft words in her ear. He was telling himself that he was a fool to act this way, the Old Man would think he was a baby or something. He found that he had to clear his throat violently in order to breathe. He had no way of estimating the depth of misery in the eyes of the old woman, nor the poignant pain that was eating at her breast. He had no way of knowing what a loss he would be to her—that he had been the only happiness she had ever known—excepting for a few short years after she and the Old Man were first married.

She was trying to look unconcerned, but her lips were trembling a little.

"I've been expecting you to come around here with a tale like that before long," she told him, trying to get a note of scorn in her voice. "You're going because you're tired of it around here and want to be off somewhere where I can't watch you and give you the back of me hand when you get lippy."

"No, I ain't Mom," he argued. "Honest. I got to go somehow, you know, I'd hate to see them lick us just because we didn't have no good mechanics. I been thinking it over a lot. They've got good jobs for guys like me."

"Go along with you," she told him. "Go along to your Army if you want to. I'll be the last to hold you some place where you didn't want to stay."

**H**E wanted her to say something else. Something about how sorry she'd be to see him go and how she'd miss him, but while the words trembled upon her lips, and while her arms were



aching to feel the head of her son pil-  
lowed upon her breast just once more—  
as she had held him when he was a little  
child—she couldn't speak the words.

Years of living in West End and  
fighting the influence of Dugan's bar  
had robbed her of all the sweet words  
she had ever known. She only knew  
that there was a dull, gnawing pain in-  
side of her—where they told her her  
soul was. And that her eyes were so  
dimmed by a sudden something that she  
could scarcely see the dish pan. She  
listened from far off as the Old Man  
had his say:

"That's spirit," he was telling Brick.  
"Fight 'em to a standstill. You'll be a  
grand soldier like your father would  
have been if he hadn't been poisoned on  
canned Willie at Pensacola just when  
he was getting ready to sail for Cuba  
with the boys. I ain't been able to eat  
corned beef ever since. However, they  
won't feed you nothing like that. The  
Air says you? Well, says I, be careful  
about knocking off the tops of the  
churches you fly over—and don't drop  
no monkey wrenches down on people."

But the Old Lady didn't feel like  
talking. Neither did Brick. He was a  
little disappointed. A lot his people  
cared whether he was going to war or  
not. His Old Man telling him about  
getting poisoned on canned Willie and  
his mother not saying a word.

But that night Molly Sutton lay with  
her hot face pressed against a wet pil-  
low, her hands clenched under her heart,  
her shoulders quivering, dry, hard, ter-  
rible sobs in her throat. The sobs of a  
woman who has forgotten how to cry  
—and who has no way of expressing  
grief other than through silent, grind-  
ing agony. She was sobbing over a  
little tow headed kid with a smeared  
face and blue eyes—a little boy named  
Brick Sutton—who was going away—to  
war—where men were killed—she was  
still sobbing when Micky Sutton—  
aroused out of a sound sleep by the  
jangling alarm clock, stumbled out of  
bed to go to the brickyard.

Two days later Brick was accepted  
by the Air Service as a mechanic and  
sent to San Antonio.

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### CHAPTER III

#### *The Biggest Gang in the World!*

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AT Kelly Field, Brick Sutton found  
himself a single member of the  
biggest gang in the world. He had  
been in throngs before. He had been  
a unit in the great population of Metro-  
politan Philadelphia, but the Army.  
That was different.

Mobs of men in khaki, all doing  
things together, all of them jumping  
when some gang boss snapped an order  
at them, running this way and that,  
hardly knowing why they did the things  
they were ordered to do, laying on  
backs and kicking feet up in the air  
like a bicycle—calisthenics—the officers  
called the foolishness—every morning—  
couldn't fight Germans by laying on  
your back and kicking your feet while  
a loud mouthed sergeant yelled: "one,  
two, three, four! One, two, three, four!"

Over and over until your whole body  
ached and you wished he'd let you stand  
up and do some full bends just for a  
change of torture.

He had been assigned to the Second  
Provisional Training Group upon his  
arrival at the Field. His service record  
had been taken. He had brought letters  
of recommendation with him attesting  
to the fact that he was a first-class  
mechanic. He found that he was not  
to go to work on motors right away.  
Far from it.

The Air Service didn't have enough  
surplus motors as yet to let fool  
mechanics ruin them with monkey  
wrenches. Brick found that his outfit  
was drilling as infantry. Out under the  
hot sun all day, marching over soft  
sand, sweating like struggling horses,  
listening to voices yelling:

"Squads left! Squads right! To the  
rear march!"

Spinning around in obedience to those yelled commands until he was dizzy and red faced, coming in at noon to throw himself face down on the shaded porch of the rude barracks, too sick at the stomach to eat, cursing the wretched, sticky, prickly, shoddy O. D. uniform they had given him, which absorbed sweat like a mop absorbs water and which clung to hot flesh until it seemed that the very maddening, itching contact would drive him insane.

Then back out in the afternoon—more drill—more torture under the sun—arms stiff, legs a numb misery—face parboiled with sweat and heat. Marching, march—always someone bellowing:

"Right by Squads!" or: "Left front into line—take it on the double." Then trotting. Actually running forward through the deep sand and heat—swirling dust devils leaping up before stinging eyes—not what Brick expected.

Then in the mornings—sometimes right after breakfast, they had physical drill. Boxing gloves, medicine balls, horizontal bars, other equipment was carried out on the sands, and they went through their paces under the eyes of the hard-boiled athletic instructor who had been a welter weight runner-up before the Army called to him to teach men to fight with their hands as well as with bayoneted rifles.

**T**HE first morning they were called out for this type of training, Sergeant Dunn had noticed that big, husky, Irish looking Brick Sutton was standing alone, watching the other men fight. A queer grin passed over Dunn's face. Big men who were frightened to death at the thought of a boxing glove colliding with their chins were no novelty in his life.

The pleasure of introducing such reluctant men to the delights of a poke on the nose from a ten ounce glove was one of the diversions of Dunn's army career. He didn't mean to be cruel—but he couldn't stand to be near a man he knew to be yellow or afraid of phy-

sical punishment. He laced a pair of the ten ounce pillows upon his own hands as he glanced across at the unknowing Brick. When he had finished he called across to him in a sharp voice:

"Hey Recruit! You there, Unconscious, come over here and put the gloves on with me."

Brick started violently and glanced at him dubiously.

"What's your name, Recruit?" demanded Dunn.

"Sutton, sir," answered Brick.

"Well, Sutton, when a sergeant speaks to you in this man's army you jump to it—don't stand staring at him. Get those gloves on. You're big enough to eat me up—but I'm going to teach you something."

The rest of the training company heard the half-jeering half-serious remark. They stopped slugging one another and drew close about the sergeant, and the reluctant Brick Sutton.

There was always a lot of fun when Dunn put the gloves on with a recruit. Dunn could fight like a wild cat and he was very, very clever. They looked half pityingly at Brick, in spite of his bulk and bulging muscle. Dazedly Brick put the gloves on his hands and stepped into the circle the onlookers had formed.

"Now," said Dunn, condescendingly. "Stand up and remember you're a man and a soldier and that a little leather pad can't hurt you—much. I want you to fight me as hard as you can—if you can knock me out I'll see that you get a pass to town. How's that?"

**T**HERE was a snicker of amusement from the ring about them. That was always Dunn's favorite bait. A pass to town? Knock him out? Two guys had tried it—they found themselves looking up into a water bucket.

Sutton nodded his head. "Yes, sir," he said in a puzzled voice. "You want me to fight you—as if I meant it—as if we were fighting in earnest."

"That's what I mean," smiled Dunn.

"The better you fight the better I'll like you—and don't quit if I bang you one on the whiskers. Shake it off and keep coming."

"O.K." said Brick through grim lips. Something new had come into him. Something he thought he had left behind in West End that day he had boarded the train—the gang champion feeling. The feeling that the gang was looking on—that he didn't dare go down to defeat. He could not bear to hear them razz him for a licking.

He dropped into his fighting pose—his head down between his shoulders, sidling toward Dunn, his left hand carried a little out from his waist, his right hand drawn back and dropped to the belt line. He was dancing the little, nervous shuffle so common to pugilists. His eyes were burning and staring at Dunn. He could hear the gang whispering around him—a new gang—a new gang that would make life miserable for him if he failed. He gritted his teeth.

"Wait until Dunn tags him on the chin with that left hook," grinned someone behind him.

"But this Sutton guy looks like a fighter," murmured another. "Maybe Dunn stepped out of his class for a second—maybe this guy is playing him for a sucker. Maybe he isn't a comeon like Dunn loves to smack down."

"Blah!" snorted the other. "Dunn was going to be the next welter champ before he decided to come into the Army while the coming was good—don't be a chump."

But Dunn himself was beginning to have some doubts. He knew a fighter by instinct. He knew that this powerful Sutton who faced him was no chump when it came to fighting. His pose, the way he handled himself. His confidence. He decided he'd try him out.

No use in being cautious until there was something to be cautious about. He stepped in close and led with his left for Sutton's nose. Something flew up from the ground and smashed home on

his ribs, under the heart. Something that hit with the dull force of a battering ram on flesh. Something that sent a wave of nausea through his stomach and caused the blood below his heart to gurgle strangely as if shocked into seeking a new channel. He could feel the dull agony of that single blow. He knew that he had been hit. He knew that the first punch that Sutton had landed had come near to knocking him out. A little more force, a little nearer to the center of the body—and Sergeant Dunn would have been down on the sand, helpless.

THERE was a new respect in his eyes as he backed away and fiddled around with his hands looking for a place to throw that famous left hook. Sutton was pressing forward, foot by foot, weaving and ducking, his head bobbing from one side to the other. Dunn threw a triple left jab at him, but Sutton's chin was down behind his shoulder and the jab rapped off the side of his head. He came on and on, never letting Dunn get set for a solid punch, on the aggressive constantly. Holding his own punches, covered up as he came on, a difficult and puzzling target.

The circle about them was staring. Dunn could feel that they were astounded, surprised—here was a recruit—a boob—a goof—whom the mighty Kid Dunn had not walloped in the first minute. A recruit who had thrown a punch at Dunn's belly—and Dunn's face had gone gray. They were watching in breathless interest. None of them saw a group of officers approach from the side of the barracks and join the group. They had eyes only for the two men, stripped to the waist, steaming with sweat, circling round and round, with Dunn on the defensive, and the recruit pushing him every second.

A wave of rage passed through Dunn's brain. What was this simp trying to do? Show him up? Him? Kid Dunn, who was put in charge of the

boxing branch of athletics to teach these clumsy goofs to take care of themselves? What was the matter with him, backing up from this guy just because he bumped a lucky punch off his ribs?

Dunn gritted his teeth. Like a wild cat he leaped in on the offensive. He cut loose with a two armed smashing attack at Sutton's belly. He felt his gloves sink deep into Sutton's flesh on the first two punches, then Sutton was taking the play away from him. Sutton, experienced gang fighter, knew that an offensive must be met with an offensive, a rally with a fiercer rally. All of his success with the West Enders was the result of waiting for the guy to start a rally and then outfight him at his own game.

SUTTON'S arms were pumping leather at Dunn's belly as fast as he could draw his arms back and shoot them forward. The dull thud of his punches could be heard to the last row of on-lookers. With the fourth punch of the rally, Dunn suddenly wilted. He backed away. His punches had lost steam. Another smash under the heart had slowed him up to a walk—and then—as he gave ground and backed away, a curling, overhand right, snaking up from around Sutton's hip, smacked him flush on the jaw.

There was no fluke about it. There was no doubt what was to happen even while the punch was in mid air. After it landed, Dunn stood there an instant, staggering on his feet, his eyes blank, his knees trembling and then without so much as a grunt he settled down on the sand, down to his knees first and then pitching forward on his face, ploughing up a furrow in the scratchy stuff.

Brick knelt beside him and picked him up. He stood there for a second holding him as if not knowing where to put him. There was a babble of voices about him—but Dunn was limp in his arms. They were crowding

around him—slapping him on the back trying to shake his hand. They were converted into an idol worshipping mob on the spot. That smack to Dunn's jaw had won Brick Sutton the highest place in their esteem.

Suddenly they fell back respectfully. Brick glanced up from Dunn's face to find himself staring into a pair of cool blue eyes and a gray mustache. The man before him was wearing a tailor made uniform of fine cloth with eagles on the shoulders. There was a faint smile at the corners of his mouth. Behind him was a group of other officers, all of them looking at Brick and then down at Dunn.

"You certainly hit a terrible wallop, Soldier," commented the colonel. "That's Sergeant Dunn you're holding in your arms, isn't it?"

Brick looked down at Kid Dunn's face stupidly. Then he blurted out:

"Yes, sir . . . that's Dunn all right."

"You knew Dunn was the welter weight champion—the uncrowned king—only waiting for a chance at the title-holder?"

"No, sir," answered Sutton truthfully. "I thought he was an Army Sergeant."

The colonel nodded his head. There was a twinkle in his eye. "That's all," he told Brick. "You'd better throw some water or something on Dunn's face. Can't let him go like that. You'll hear more of this later." He turned away to join the officers behind him. They were all laughing delightedly. They slapped one another on the back. The colonel seemed very pleased about something.

THEY brought Dunn back to life by throwing a bucket of water over him. It was funny. They had thrown a lot of buckets of water over recruits who had been "instructed" by Dunn.

This was the first time the tables had ever been turned. They seemed to take a lot of pleasure in the amount of water



they poured on him. He was half drowned when he opened his eyes. He found himself looking up at Brick Sutton, the soaking gloves still on his hands. He shook his head vigorously. Then he jumped on his feet and offered Brick his hand.

"You sure can hit, young fellow," he said, grinning at Brick. "You pack a wallop like a batch of T.N.T."

Brick knew that he had to be hard. He had to be like he was when he was champion of the West Enders. His face was scowling as he returned Dunn's grin.

"Hell—fellow," he said coolly. "I could have told you not to rush in and trade wallops with me like that. Why you're a sucker for an overhand right, and a right to the heart. That first punch I hit you in the belly nearly dropped you. I can tell it by the way they fold up under the fist."

Dunn stared at Sutton in astonishment. "Say, do you know who I am?" he asked in a strange voice.

"Sure, I know who you are," answered Brick coolly. "You're Kid Dunn, the guy who would have been welter champion if you could have got a battle with Billy Doyle. What difference does that make? When you hit a guy he stays hit. Nobody can stand that kind of punch. I know."

"Where did you ever fight?" demanded Dunn suspiciously. "Maybe you're in this Army under a phoney?"

"Guess again," advised Sutton in the same cold voice. "You bruisers have the idea that everybody that can sling a fist is fighting for a living. Listen, I used to fight guys, three and four times a week, that could take a half dozen ham and egg fighters in the same ring on the same night and whip 'em one after the other. You aren't anybody's bargain, even if your name happens to be Dunn. You're still a sucker for an overhand right and a right to the heart in close. You fight like a monkey in the clinches, and you can't hit hard enough to make me blink. I could have been anybody

I wanted to be in the fight racket. The Arena in Philadelphia drove me crazy trying to get me to start there. I didn't—see—I had my own way of making a living and I stuck to it."

**E**VEN as his voice took on the cold, boasting tone, he hated himself. He wanted to tell Dunn that he was a great little guy and that he was sorry that he had beaten him in front of the men he had to make respect him. He wanted to tell Dunn that he didn't like fighting—but he was out in front—with a gang looking on. He knew what kind of a front a gang champion had to have in front of his gang, so he rubbed it in.

"Well, you're a sweet fighter," Dunn admitted in a strange voice. "You can hit and you can box. It's a crime you didn't go into the ring. How much do you weigh?"

"One seventy five," answered Sutton gruffly. "Stripped and in condition."

"Twenty pounds more than I weigh," commented Dunn.

"I didn't ask for that fight—you pushed me into it," reminded Sutton in a nasty tone. "You thought you had a monkey and you woke up facing a bear cat—don't be so sure that the dumb recruits can't take care of themselves after this. You may get another lacing."

Dunn's face turned crimson. He was about to say something. Something hot, but he shook his head, turned away, blew the whistle and called the company to attention.

As they marched in from the field the group of officers, headed by the colonel, were talking excitedly in front of the orderly room. They nodded in Sutton's direction as the company passed them.

Sutton felt a sick sensation in his stomach. He knew that they were planning something disagreeable for him—some punishment for beating up a non-commissioned officer. Maybe the guard house.

## CHAPTER IV

*Brick Is Assigned to Duty*

**B**UT the sudden interest of the officers, including a colonel, in the affairs of Brick Sutton, was in no way connected with any dire punishment for Brick. They continued to talk among themselves there in front of the orderly room. The colonel was speaking with a tremendous enthusiasm in his voice. His hands were clenched at his sides and his eyes were shining.

"Gad, gentlemen," he told the officers clustered about him. "I'd just about give my commission to pay back old Summers for the drubbing he gave us at baseball. He thinks that he has the best all round gang of athletes in the service in that doughboy bunch of his. He has the pick of the athletic possibilities, and now that he has drawn Young Griffin, who was a terror in the heavy-weight ranks before he came into the service, there'll be no holding him. Especially when Young Griffin is being touted as the coming heavyweight champion of the Division.

"I've been so sick with hearing the Old Boy brag about his men that I'm staying away from the officers' club for that sole reason. Every time he sees me he buttonholes me and drags me away to a corner and proceeds to chortle in my ear about the success his boys have had—especially over us—over me. Why, it's insufferable. I'd give anything to take him down a peg or two. He doesn't give us any credit for trying and against odds, because we don't have the choice of men like he does. That doesn't stop him from gloating however. If I could only develop a man to lick the tar out of that Young Griffin of his—well, I'd be the happiest man in the service."

Major Banks nodded sympathetically. "I know how you feel, sir. All of us feel the same.

"Did you see that young fellow hang

that right to the heart and that overhand right on Dunn's jaw? Dunn went down like a man struck with a black jack." There was an eager light in the colonel's eyes. "If it only wasn't an accident—if it only wasn't a lucky punch or a flash in the pan—if this boy would only stand up to Young Griffin that way—Gad, gentlemen, I'd make him a Sergeant First Class. . . I'd almost make him a General but a Sergeant First Class is as high as I can hand out."

"I don't think it was a flash in the pan, sir," put in one of the younger officers, in the same enthusiastic voice. "That boy handles himself like a finished fighter. He punches straight from the shoulder and with terrific force. He had Dunn looking like a monkey. He gave him an awful body beating before he knocked him out—it did my heart good sir. I like Dunn. But at times Dunn has the idea that he is the 'Great I Am'—and he likes to make monkeys out of the recruits. However, this was one recruit who was not a monkey."

"Get Dunn in here," said the colonel suddenly. "I want to talk to him."

**I**T was a great event, the colonel visiting the orderly room of the Second Training Group. Sitting there in Captain Bell's chair, puffing on a big cigar, at peace with the world, eagerly awaiting the coming of Sergeant Dunn.

A second lieutenant, red faced from hurrying, snapped into the room with Dunn in tow. There was a nasty puffed-up lump under Dunn's jaw. He was stripped to the waist. The lieutenant had caught him as he was washing up and refused to permit him to don his shirt. He dragged him away to the impatient colonel.

Dunn stood before the group of officers in some embarrassment. The colonel smiled at him kindly.

"Don't mind being out of uniform, sergeant," he said. "I was anxious to ask you a question or two. Now, Dunn, suppose we forget professional pride

and all that sort of thing. I want you to answer my questions to the best of your ability. It's about that recruit you fought with this morning—what's his name?"

"Sutton, sir," answered Dunn. His face was red with embarrassment.

"He defeated you fairly, did he not?" asked the colonel.

Dunn gulped and the red grew deeper on his cheeks.

"Yes, sir," he said slowly after a minute. "I guess he did. I wasn't looking for that kind of a lad, though, when I put on the gloves with him. The first lick he hit me under the heart made me sick. I wasn't much good after that. I'm sorry to have lost like that in front of all the men and in front of you, sir."

"Don't mind that, Dunn," said the colonel in sympathy. "I know just how you feel—however, what I'm driving at is this. Do you think this recruit—this Sutton—could do it all over again? I mean beat you just as decisively, in another contest. Could he knock you out again—or was that just a fluke? Answer honestly now."

Dunn was shuffling his feet and looking down at the board floor of the room. He lifted his head after a minute and looked the colonel in the eye.

"Yes, sir," he said half defiantly. "He could take me again. No mistake. If I went in to fight him again, I'd use different tactics. I'd keep away from him and box him. Maybe I could keep away from him for a couple of rounds—until he hit me—and then it'd be the same story. Not only me, but anybody else that gets hit by that guy is going to feel it—and I'm not going to bar the heavyweight champion of the world when I say that, either."

"What's more, sir, he's no mean boxer himself. He beat me to everything I tried against him. I tried to rally like hell after that punch and waded in, throwing punches at him, but he took the play away from me. He fought back like a tiger. He knows the best way to meet a rally is to take the

play away from the other guy—and when a bird knows that in the fight racket, he's a bird that is always dangerous and usually on the winning end."

THE colonel nodded eagerly.

"That's fine, Dunn," he said. "Don't think we disrespect you for admitting another man is better than you are. We have to do that often in life. However, you've done us a great favor today in fighting that recruit. Maybe we'll wipe out several unpleasant memories of the past two months through your little exhibition. Do you think this fellow could beat—say, Young Griffin?" The colonel's eyes were burning with an eager light.

Dunn was silent for a moment.

"If he fights in the ring the way he fought me, he can lick most anybody," Dunn told him. "This Griffin bird, now, he's plenty tough and he's a scrapper, game to the finish. He hits like a sledge hammer—but he keeps boring in to get in close—he's a body puncher. To my mind that kind of a fighter is made to order for Sutton—Sutton is at his best in close, and he murders you when you walk into him—like Griffin does. I've seen Griffin in the ring and he's a sweet little battler—but I think that Sutton could take him—everything even."

"Bring Sutton in here," ordered the colonel with a snap in his voice. "I want to look at him up close, and I want to talk to him."

Breathlessly, Dunn went out to find Brick Sutton. He found him sitting in the shade on the barracks porch. "Come along with me," snapped Dunn, "the colonel wants to talk to you."

BRICK rose dizzily to his feet. He knew that the punishment he had dreaded was about to fall. The guard house—or extra fatigue—something drastic for his punching of Sergeant Dunn. He followed after Dunn with dragging steps. It was going to be plenty tough with the colonel himself taking a hand in matters. To the re-

cruits the colonel was a far off creature of vast influence, power and importance—almost as far off and as powerful as God—if he took an interest in Brick's punishment. Brick looked up to find himself staring into the smiling face of the colonel.

"How much do you weigh, son?" asked the colonel.

"One seventy-five, sir," answered Brick in a chilled voice.

"How much fighting have you done in your life?"

Brick was staring at him trying to fathom the reason for the peculiar questions.

"Well, sir, I never fought a single fight in the ring, if that's what you mean, sir. But I used to fight about three times a week back home. I had to in order to keep my place."

"How would you like to fight for the honor and glory of your field—of the whole field? How would you like to walk into a ring, carrying the hopes and prayers of twenty thousand men, who were pulling for you to win, who were betting every dollar they had on you to win? How would you like to fight for the Heavyweight Championship of the Southern Department—and maybe later for the Heavyweight Championship of the Army?"

For a moment Brick's breath left him. He could only stand there and stare. There was a little sick feeling at his stomach again. The thought of combat—and then the thought of the biggest gang in the world pulling for him. He couldn't back out now. He couldn't tell these officers, and the man he had just defeated, that he hated fighting above everything else in the world. He could see that the colonel was staring at him with bright eyes, just waiting for Brick to declare his readiness to fight for the glory of the colonel's men.

"It'd be great, sir," answered Brick. His soul was screaming out at him for the words, but he was speaking them. "Gee, that'd be swell. I'd like it. Going in there with all those birds watch-

ing me win. I'd fight like hell sir to bring the championship home, here, if you think I'm the man to fight for you."

"You'd have to fight Young Griffin," advised the Colonel, a queer note in his voice, and watching Brick's eyes, "He's dangerous. You know who he was before he came into the Army?"

"Yes, sir, I know, but that doesn't make much difference to me sir. Everybody can be hit. All I want is a chance to hit him."

THE colonel nodded his head like a pleased child.

"Dunn," he directed the sergeant. "You take charge of Sutton, here. See that he has everything in the world he needs in the way of training equipment. Charge it to the expenses of the athletic department. Get him training quarters, get him sparring partners—and above everything, keep our man under cover. Don't let him work out in public, so that Griffin can have any line on him, and see that he's in condition in a hurry. We have ten days until the Championship. Get him ready."

"Yes, sir," answered Dunn grimly. "He doesn't need much conditioning, sir. He's in first-class shape right now. A couple of days shooting at the heavy bags and rapping the light bag to get his punching eye sharp, and then a few rounds with some sparring partners to get his timing right—and well, he'd be ready for anyone sir."

"Good," laughed the colonel. He turned to the officers about him who were grinning delightedly. "I hope you gentlemen will be able to find sources of credit large enough to provide you with enough cash to put a sizable bet down on Sutton. I have a feeling in my bones that he is going to bring us home the bacon."

Brick stood there for a minute, trying to say something.

"How about the motors, sir?" he asked the colonel. "I joined up to the Army to help lick the Squareheads by keeping our motors in good shape. I'm



the best motor mechanic in West Philadelphia, and I haven't seen a motor since I've been here."

There was a loud laugh from the officers.

"Don't you worry about winning the war," grinned the Colonel. "It's a laudable enterprise and a patriotic thought, but you take in a little too much territory for one man. You concentrate on winning from Young Griffin, and let it go at that. Forget the motors for the time being. I'm officially assigning you to the duty of winning the Heavyweight Championship of the Southern Department for this outfit. After you do that we'll give you another assignment. Maybe to win the title from the whole Army."

Brick nodded dubiously. Then he forced a smile on his face. "O.K. colonel," he said, trying to make his voice sound confident. "If you say so it must be right."

And the colonel was so pleased he forgot to be angry at the note of familiarity in Brick's voice.

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## CHAPTER V

### *Brick Earns His Wings*

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FOR the next week Brick's life was a busy one. Dunn seemed to be possessed of the same spirit which had animated the colonel. He seemed to forget that Brick had usurped the place which was rightfully his as athletic hero of the outfit. He toiled with Brick through hour after hour. He taught him ring tricks, how to block in close, how to hold cleverly and to hit with one hand free. Brick absorbed the finer points the veteran Dunn taught him easily and quickly. At the end of six days working with Dunn he was a much improved fighter.

There was a great celebration in the doughboy end of the camp the night that Young Griffin defeated his last foe by a quick knockout in the third round

and was officially crowned the Heavyweight Champ. Then, the next day, Sutton's colonel called a meeting of the board of officers controlling departmental athletics and threw the bombshell.

"Gentlemen," he told them when they were all seated. "This may sound like shenanigans to you, but I assure you that it is strictly on the up and up. The Air Service desires to challenge Young Griffin for the Heavyweight Boxing Championship. We had no candidate to enter into the trials—and we are not sure that we have a fighter now who can bring us the title, but we have a likely looking recruit who is anxious to try and I think in all fairness he should be given a chance to prove his mettle."

The doughboy colonel immediately pricked up his ears, and sprang to his feet.

"The trials are over," he declared testily. "My man has won the title against all comers. If the colonel had an entry why didn't he enter him then and let him represent the so-called Air Service? I'm not going to permit Griffin to fight against any hand-picked opponent for a title he worked hard to win—that's that!"

SUTTON'S colonel rose to his feet with a resigned shrug.

"Of course if that's the way you gentlemen feel about it," he said in a sarcastic voice, "there's nothing I can do. I thought, however, that this championship thing was a test to discover the best man. I didn't know that men were barred just because they happened to be in the Air Service. Unfortunately, we are limited in our choice of men—we have high standards in our branch and do not get the riff-raff which can be called to other branches."

He paused with a meaning glance at the doughboy colonel who was biting the ends of his mustaches.

"We have no outstanding professional pugilist to fall back on to repre-

sent us. We have only the few men who come to us voluntarily. The boy who desires to fight the eminent Mr. Griffin has never fought inside a ring in his life—has never had a professional nor amateur bout. Yet, he is game enough to take on Mr. Griffin for the honor of his outfit. I see that his type of sportsmanship does not meet with approval here, so I shall return and tell him so. I shall also have the satisfaction of telling him that the doughboys are afraid to risk their hand-picked champion against a green boy who has never fought a ring battle in his life. It will give him a lot of pleasure to hear that, I'm sure."

He rose to his feet and snapped his cigar into the cuspidor.

"Come on, Banks," he said to the major who accompanied him. "I thought this was a sporting proposition, and not a closed corporation."

The Department Athletic Officer was glancing curiously at the doughboy colonel. So was every other officer in the room. They knew of the intense rivalry between these two men, and they knew that the Air Service had been second best too many times in the past.

The doughboy colonel cleared his throat gruffly.

"Come on back here, you fool," he growled at the Air Service colonel. "Who said my man was afraid of yours? No doughboy is afraid of anybody in the Air Service. Are you crazy, sending a green boy into a fight against a professional, just because you want a chance for victory? Why Griffin would murder a green boy with no experience."

"Well," replied the Air Service. "This boy is dead game. He isn't afraid of Griffin. So I guess I can encourage his gameness, and be just as game in another way. I'll bet you a thousand dollars cash that he beats Griffin . . . just because I have such a great respect for courage. If that's any inducement, put the money on the table."

The doughboys were red in the face.

"You mean to say that you'll back an unknown for a thousand in a fight against Griffin?" their colonel demanded, as if unable to hear rightly.

"That's what I said," snapped the Air Service.

"You're sure that this man of yours has absolutely no experience in the ring?"

SUTTON'S colonel took a step forward, fire flashing from his eyes. "I haven't been in the habit of lying about anything," he said in a cold voice. "If that's an insinuation . . ."

"Oh, stow it, you two game cocks," grinned General Gaston. "Let's have the match and the bet. I'll take Griffin myself if you have any more spare change."

"Another thousand?" suggested the Air Service sweetly.

"Done!" snapped the general. "I'm a doughboy myself."

So Brick Sutton, through the cleverness of the colonel's sales talk, got his shot against the champion without any formalities other than climbing into the same ring. He heard the news in silence. He glanced down at the four-ounce gloves tied onto his ham-like hands and nodded his head.

"O. K.," he told the colonel. "I'll be ready for him."

During the week which followed every available dollar at Kelly hidden away in Air Service pockets went on the line behind Brick Sutton. Beg, borrow, gamble, anything to get it—but they were backing the Air Service to the limit—and then came the night of the fight.

The ring was pitched in the center of a rolling mass of sand hills. There were no seats around that ring—merely the rising dunes, but upon them clustered every man who was free from duty in four Divisions of the Army. Forty thousand of them, perhaps more, hardly less. They were singing and whistling, joking, laughing, tumbling

about. The officers were down front. The Air Service colonel sat in the corner Brick Sutton would use, and the doughboy colonel sat close to Griffin's corner and glared across at his rival. There was a tenseness in the night air. The feeling that a drama was about to be unrolled. An unexpected drama—a startling something—no one knew what.

Then there was a shouting and cheering from behind the dunes. The Air Service was coming to the fight in a body. Five thousand strong they marched along, and in the center of them rolled an old Ford, and in the back seat sat Brick Sutton and Sergeant Dunn.

Brick was dressed for the ring. He had his fighting trunks and shoes under a heavy bathrobe. The Ford had no motor. It needed none. Ropes were fastened to the axles in front. A thousand Air Service huskies walked it along without effort. Taking their champion to the wars in state. They were singing lustily as they went along:

"There's never a gang in the whole Army  
Like the brawny sons of the Air  
You can travel the world, 'Frisco to Bombay,  
But never a gang so rare.  
The doughboy has fun, the son of a gun,  
Artillery makes quite a noise,  
But the cream of the lot,  
You'll find on the spot,  
That takes care of the Air Service boys.

"So it's HEY! HEY! Strike up the band,  
The Air Service's coming to town,  
They're one husky bunch,  
And they pack a mean punch,  
And they have to be up 'fore they're down!  
HEY! HEY!  
"They have to be up 'fore they're down!"

They sang it over and over at the top of five thousand hero worshipping young lungs. It beat and beat against Sutton's ears until the melody of the song was running through his head in a mad flood of sound. Then they stopped before the ring. A hundred husky arms reached into the back seat for him. He felt himself lifted free, raised up in the air and deposited upon his stool in the ring, under the lights the Signal Corps had rigged up, facing

the scowling, stubble-covered face of Young Griffin.

THE Air Service officers had sprung to their feet as Brick entered the ring. They cheered long and loudly. Then they were in a huddle.

"He'll win," the colonel was saying in a low tone. "I wish I had two thousand more to bet. He'll win. I can feel it in my bones."

They were in the center of the ring now listening to Patsy Haley give them instructions. Patsy was a professional. He knew his stuff.

"Break when I tell you," he told them in his fierce voice. "Protect yourself at all times. Hit with one hand free—and fight—you hear—fight or I'll throw you both out on your necks."

They nodded as he spoke. Dunn was listening intently.

He turned to the corner with Sutton. "You can hit on the break according to the rules," he whispered to Sutton. "Don't let this turnip scare you any. Try for a chance to sneak over that overhand right as you go out of a clinch. He'll fall for it like a fish. And fight him every minute. Never let your arms quit punching."

There was the clang of the bell. Sutton whirled in his tracks, lifted his hands and trotted toward the center of the ring.

Inside he was trembling. He knew that he could not lose. He must not lose. The gang was looking on. If he lost he'd be an outcast. He was the King Pin here as he had been the King Pin with the West Enders. He had to fight. He had to win...even if his belly was trembling and his arms felt weak.

Griffin was scowling fiercely. He was angry. He felt that he had been tricked in having to meet this boy for a title he counted as his for a year at least. He had been reluctant to fight. His colonel had had to order him into the ring. Scouts had reported that it was the truth—this Air Service man had never fought professionally in his life.

"I'll give him something from the profession to remember me by," Griffin had muttered. "I'll cut him down until I get tired and then I'll knock him for a row."

THEY faced each other for a minute, hands fiddling, searching for openings. Suddenly Griffin, weaving in, lashed out with both hands to the body. The shock and thud of those punches shook the ring. They landed cleanly and squarely, both to almost the same spot. Sutton went back on his heels, he backed up slowly, watching Griffin. He had not expected Griffin to lead so quickly. The punches had shaken him up. He heard the cheer of delight from the doughboys.

"There goes the cheese Air Service Champion," they were gloating. "He doesn't like 'em downstairs, Griffin Old Kid, lace him a few more—and we'll all go home early."

Griffin grinned nastily and bored in. He was hard to hit. His head was buried between his two gloves and he weaved in, peering at Brick's body for an opening for more body punches. Brick was backing away slowly. His arms were tense. He was waiting—waiting for Griffin to lead.

Suddenly Griffin's arms again lashed in, aimed for the body, and at the same instant, Sutton stepped in, his right drawn far back, his left knocking aside the terrific punch Griffin had thrown for the body—Sutton's own right shot forward, a mere six inches and stopped with a sudden shock as the glove buried itself in Griffin's flesh below the heart.

The smash straightened Griffin up in his tracks. There was a strange look, almost a stupid look, in his face. He was gasping for air, trying to conceal the fact from Sutton.

But Sutton was not deceived. He knew that that punch had hurt. He was wading in, both arms driving like pistons; Griffin gave ground, and Brick followed him relentlessly about the ring. Left and right—left and right—pumped

steadily at Griffin's body, until there was a red mass of flesh under the champion's ribs. That first blow, the right under the heart, had hurt Griffin badly.

There was a great glove bruise on the flesh under that heart, for Brick had corkscrewed the punch at the minute of impact. The dry leather had taken hold and split the flesh. There was a trickle of blood running down Griffin's side.

Brick shifted his attack to the head. Griffin was fighting back furiously. Gloves thudded against Sutton's jaw with beautiful timing. Griffin was scoring—but he grinned to himself—that smash to the heart and the body beating had taken the steam out of Griffin's punches for the minute—it would take him an entire round to recover this strength. Meantime—Crash! Brick's glove to the body again driven with the entire force of his shoulder, back and right arm. Doubling Griffin up into a knot.

Sutton wading in, never stopping his throwing of punches, Griffin backing around the ring, stepping in to throw a punch and then to hug Sutton in a tight clinch. Desperately fighting to weather through the round for the precious minute of rest, during which the sapped strength would rush back into his body, and that stomach would have time to get over the sickening shock of those body punches.

Sutton fought himself out of the clinches like a wild man. He tugged and wrestled, smacked Griffin's kidneys with sharp down strokes until the referee stepped in and parted them. He had not tried the overhand break yet. He was waiting his time—he knew there would be a minute in the fight when that right hand would stretch Griffin out on the canvas. Griffin was not softened enough yet to stay down from a single punch—unless it was smack on the button. Punches like that were rare. He had to stay down if the punch was three inches off the target. So Sutton waited for the opening.



THEY were locked in a clinch, with Sutton throwing short hooks to the belly, when the bell broke them. Griffin went to his corner with lagging steps. It was plain to see that he was hurt—and very tired. Sutton danced to his corner, and the Air Service shrieked in ecstasy, and the colonel surveyed the world proudly especially the doughboy corner in which the doughboy colonel was glowering up at Young Griffin.

That second round made history in Southern Department Athletics. Men talked about it afterward when they lay under shell fire outside little towns in France; when machine-gun fire snapped over steel helmeted heads; when bellies were gnawing with hunger; no one who witnessed that second round between Brick Sutton and Young Griffin ever forgot it. It was a ring classic.

"Keep fighting him," Dunn had told Brick in the minutes between. "You're going swell. You had him bending at the knees that time. He don't like them jolts under the clock. See that he gets plenty of 'em—and stay in close with him—all the time. You have him tied to the post at infighting. That body beating he took in that last round is going to make him leary. He'll try to out box you in this round and try to keep you away from his body. Remember, stay close and keep them arms working. Got me?"

Brick nodded his head. His nervousness and the fear was gone. After all, fighting in front of forty thousand was just like fighting in front of the old gang. He had a man in front of him he knew he could lick—and the gang was yelling for him to come on. They had been working hard on Griffin during the round. He was stretched out on his stool, his head resting on the top rope, his belly an angry red.

THE bell clanged suddenly. They were both on their feet—out in the center of the ring. Griffin doubled up, trying to fight from underneath, his

arms hanging at his sides, his stubble covered face scowling up at Brick. Griffin led with a left to the body, at the same instant, Brick started his own left, a vicious hook to the jaw. Griffin, off balance in his lead, could not get his guard up in time. The left hook crashed home with terrible force. He went down...spread out on the canvas, a frozen sneer on his face.

Outside the ring, forty thousand men—lost in the darkness outside the bright lights, were going mad. They were struggling with each other, climbing upon each other, to see into that ring. The referee took the count from the knock-down timekeeper at "Three!"

"Four!" he counted. "Five..."

The doughboys were yelling for Griffin to get up. The doughboy colonel was staring into the ring with wide eyes, chewing on the ragged stub of a cigar which still smoldered, the coal of fire was perilously near to his lips—right under his nose, but he chewed on and stared like a man in a trance at the still figure of his champion.

"Six!" Griffin stirred, rolled over on his back, opened his eyes, shook his head, and raised his knees. Brick was crouched in a neutral corner, his gloves close to his body, his eyes glaring at Griffin. "Seven!" Griffin struggled to one knee and shook his head.

Then he was up on his feet, staggering a little, weaving a little as he faced Brick. He was carrying his chin behind his gloves again. Brick walked in close, measured him, drove a right and left to the body that made Griffin wince with pain. Then Griffin went into a clinch, holding on tight. Brick held his arms out wide to show that he was not holding. The referee parted them. Brick drove another right to the body. Again Griffin clinched, hauling Brick in close to his chest. His right arm was curled up inside the two straining bodies. It was a hard fist. Brick's arms were again outspread to show that he was not holding. "Patsy Haley parted them again.

THEY broke.

Just as they stepped away Griffin lashed upward with that hidden right. It was a terrific uppercut, straight up from the floor. It collided with Brick's chin with a deadly crack—the crack of a knockout. For an instant, Brick stood there, his eyes open in a glazed, fishy stare, his jaw sagging, his hands settling to his hips. Griffin was measuring him for another murderous right to the jaw, when Brick suddenly crumpled and fell face forward, his chin resting on his gloves, his neck bent at a queer angle.

For an instant there was an absolute stillness outside the ring. Victory had been so sure with Sutton that they were taking the rest of the bout as a matter of course. He had outfought Griffin, outgamed him, outpunched him and outgeneraled him. Then the Griffin rooters, screamed their triumph. The referee had to push Griffin away before he began the count.

He took it up at "Three!" as he had taken up the count when Griffin had been on the floor. His arm rose and fell. The Air Service Colonel was gnawing on the peak of his cap, in Brick's corner. Dunn was standing rigid, a look of horror on his face, staring down at Brick Sutton's limp form.

"Five!" chanted Patsy Haley, looking down over the shoulder of the fallen man. He stirred. The Air Service suddenly came to life with a rumbling roar of encouragement. "Get up!" they moaned in unison. "Get up, Sutton—get up."

He heard them like one hears the roar of Niagara. He knew that he was sick—out—he didn't seem able to make his arms move. And then the fear of what the gang would say if he should be beaten leaped naked into his mind. He found that the fear overcame the hurt—he was struggling to get up. He heard a voice in his ear chanting: "Eight!" God, he had only two seconds to get on his feet, to clear the weight on his brain. He lunged upward as Patsy Haley's arm went up for "Nine!"

He knew he could not stay on the floor. Something charged in toward him. He grabbed hurriedly and found flesh under his hands and arms, flesh that was trying to tear away from him. He hung on desperately, praying for his head to clear. An arm snaked up over the back of his neck and fell on his head. It seemed to clear up the fog a little. He could see now. He could see Sergeant Dunn signaling him to hold on. Dunn was hugging himself in a delirium of excitement.

"Hold on!" he was shrieking, forgetting that it was against the rules to coach from the corner. And Brick held. His head was still buzzing. His jaw seemed nothing but a dull, searing pain. Griffin wrestled from the clinch.

Dimly Brick knocked down two left leads for the jaw. Knocked them down automatically. He felt his own right lash out. It felt weak—futile. Then the pressure of Griffin's sweating body against him and the rasp of Griffin's stubble on his neck. He was not throwing punches in the clinches now—he was content to gather strength, to ride on Griffin's shoulders, and Griffin heaved and struggled to free himself from the iron grip.

Patsy Haley was behind them.

"Come on," he shouted at them. "Break now—break when I tell you, Sutton, or I'll throw you out of here—so help me." He slapped them both sharply on the back.

THEY broke. Griffin stepped back. From somewhere Brick's lowered right hand leaped forward in that terrible overhand right. The same punch that had knocked Dunn off his feet. The same punch that had won him numberless fights. It went with Brick's whole body behind it. It whistled through the air. It smacked dead center on Griffin's jaw. There was no hesitation in the manner in which Griffin fell—he plunged forward on his face, ploughing up the resined canvas for a foot with his chin and nose. He lay

there, slobbering out of the corner of his mouth, with Brick standing over him . . . looking down, dazed . . . too dazed to move back. Haley pushed him away.

There was no doubt in the mind of anyone about that punch. It did not take the descending hand of Patsy Haley and the shouted "Ten and out!" to tell them that the Southern Department had a new champion. They knew that as that overhand right had whistled through the air. They were cheering now. The Air Service was storming into the ring. They snatched Brick away from Dunn. His head was still dizzy. He felt himself being lifted. Then he was seated upon a cushion—in the back seat of the old Ford again, and they were bearing him away in triumph. Back to the Air Service. The band was playing in discordant triumph.

Brick's head slipped back on the cushion. He didn't know anything more about that ride home. He was out until they lifted him out of the old flivver and sat him up on the steps of the orderly room and formed an impromptu snake dance around him.

Back of the officers' quarters Brick's colonel was leading another snake dance. It was just as wild and just as exultant. There were fewer celebrants in that snake dance, but they were all officers.

"Did you see the look on Gaston's face when Brick got up off the floor? And did you see the look when Brick smacked him on the jaw for the knock-out?" the Colonel was demanding of the Universe. And then they yelled some more and danced some more.

**T**HEY returned to a semblance of sanity the next morning. The colonel and all the officers were again in the Second Training Group's orderly room. The colonel was smiling at Brick.

"Well, how do you feel?" he asked jovially. "My boy, it's a great day for the Air Service, and I thank you in the name of the field—Heavyweight Cham-

pion of the Southern Department. Gosh, that does roll nicely off the tongue, especially when we took it away from the doughboys. Sutton, I'm proud of you. I'm as proud of you as if you were my own son—because I look on all the boys here at the field as my sons. The way you got up off the floor and carried on—and won—in the face of the terrible odds against you like to make me cry real tears. You upheld the best traditions of the Air Service. We're all proud of you. What can I do for you?"

"I'd like to take training for a pilot, sir," answered Brick boldly. "Maybe I would make a good pilot—I'd like a crack at it."

"You hear that?" demanded the Colonel proudly. "That's the kind of men I have in the Air Service. Wants to be a pilot—wants to get in the lousiest, most glorious, dangerous, fool-killing game in the world—the saddest, cruelest, sweetest, rottenest, blessed Air Service. With the life of a fighting pilot lasting seven minutes from the time he gets to France, this boy, who has the world at his feet and a fortune in his hands, asks me to send him over there where he'll live seven minutes—asks it as a favor—and by God I'm going to grant it. Simmons, make out the papers at once."

And so Captain Simmons, Adjutant, wrote the order, and it was posted on the bulletin board the next morning.

Headquarters, Kelly Field.

June 25th, 1917.

General Orders No. 147.

Private First Class Michael Sutton, Second Provisional Training Group, A.S., C.S., is hereby relieved of his present duties and is appointed Cadet, A.S., S.C., to rank as such from this date.

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## CHAPTER VI

### *Gang Fighting in France*

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**B**RICK SUTTON was far from a brilliant student. The men at Kelly, not possessed of the qualifications

demanding by the Army for cadets—that is, primarily a college education or its equivalent—were inclined to scoff at such requirements. They wanted to know what a college education had to do with keeping a balky JN4C up in the air. Or what it had to do with machine-gun practice or flying right wing low. Was a degree from Dear Old Whoosis going to help when a wing folded back? They called apple sauce in long, loud terms and pointed to the successful pilots in civilian life who never had been any nearer to a college than the idea.

But after Brick Sutton started instructions he knew why the Army demanded college-trained men: College-trained men had been taught to use their thinking apparatus. They could concentrate, having had to study in past days. They learned more quickly because they had the ability to learn from past experiences. They grasped more readily the rather abstract studies demanded of a cadet, and they could understand the new language of the air.

Brick found himself handicapped. He decided to bluster his way by that handicap, as he had blustered his way by the major obstacles in life. So he went about the cadet barracks with a chip on his shoulder, trying to cover the fact that he was miserable at heart because his brain did not work as rapidly as the brain of college-trained companions.

He found that bluster went for very little with these men who flew or were training to fly. Somehow they belonged to a different class of men than any Brick had ever known.

FOR the most part they were quiet, unassuming, soft-spoken boys, dead in earnest about this flying thing, knowing they were going into a service which was quick suicide once the other side was reached, and yet working like slaves to get over there as quickly as possible.

Brick had decided to be a pilot after he had watched the training ships flying around over his head, and after he

learned that pilots were the chosen of the Army. That grinding discipline of the infantry was not theirs. They came and went almost as they desired—excepting, of course, the cadets, who were under far more rigid discipline than the men in any other branch of the service.

He learned that it took four to six hours to teach a man to fly, after which he was commissioned a pilot and sent across the sea, or kept as an instructor at Kelly, if he proved to be an exceptional student.

After five hours of instruction Brick was no nearer to a solo than he had been in the first minute he had ever stepped into a ship. Further than that, his instructor held out no hope for him ever learning to fly, and reported the case to Headquarters as such.

Harassed, overworked, tense-nerved instructors, risking their lives throughout a ten-hour flying day, flying junk equipment, guarding against frozen controls, watching young fellows die, sending them off on their own hook after four to six hours at the duals—and then beginning the grind all over. It is no wonder that they had short patience so far as Brick Sutton was concerned, when after seven hours he was still practicing landings and overshooting the largest flying field in the world as regularly as he tried a landing.

Still the word came back from the colonel himself that Brick was to continue until he soloed. The colonel did not believe that a fighting man of Brick's ability and courage should be lost to the Air, and he wagered on Brick's making good, even though it took him more hours than the average to fly.

HIS instructor was not gentle with him. He had a rasping tongue that sounded harsh and insulting through the earphones. It was that harsh and rasping tone that taught Brick that so long as he stayed with men who flew he could not bluff his way. He had been twenty minutes in the air, flying a



rather good lesson, when his instructor, speaking into the earphones, had ordered him to try a landing.

Brick cut the gun and nosed down. He picked out his spot and glided down, feeling control for the first time in his experience. The wheels hit the ground and he pulled the stick back a trifle too late. The Canuck bounced crazily, rebounded into the air, settled again, bounced some more, while the exasperated instructor snatched the stick out of Brick's hand, gave the crate the gun and flew it around the course without letting Brick touch the controls. He took the ship in to land, let it stop rolling and then crawled out of his cockpit, his eyes filled with disgust.

"Well," he told Brick as Brick crawled out onto the ground. "Of all the pinheads I've ever had in this crate you're the lousiest and dumbest. If they were giving prizes for the rottenest cadet on the field you'd win 'em all, hands down, without half trying. You're through for the day. Go on back to the barracks and knit a while. Maybe you can learn when to bring the stick back that way. I've told you a thousand times, and I'm wearing out my throat. You're hopeless."

Brick's face was congested with rage. He had thought that he was about to make a perfect landing when the crate bounced. He was sure that if he had another chance that minute he could land the crazy thing. He took a step forward and doubled his fists.

"Listen, you big false alarm," he told the instructor. "I don't give a whoop if you're an instructor or not. Nobody can talk to me that way. Nobody can call me a simp. Why, I'll lay you like a carpet if you ever use that tone to me again. You don't know who I am, do you?"

The instructor whirled toward the side of the crate. He moved so fast it seemed all in one motion. His hand darted for the outside of the cockpit. He snatched a Pyrene hand gun from its nest, the handle snapped out as his

arm drew back. The gun whistled through the air and bent itself around the top of Brick's leather helmet. The shock of the smash sent Brick to his knees. The instructor was standing over him holding the ruined gun.

"Sure, I know who you are, you louse," he was yelling at Brick. "You're the guy that's the colonel's pet, just because you smacked down an ugly bruiser by the name of Griffin and gave the Old Man a chance to laugh at the doughboys. If you think that gets you any rating around here you're a bigger simp than I thought you were. You'll do your stuff when you're a cadet, or you'll get\*out. You'd have gone long ago if the Old Man hadn't been so sweet on you that he gave you extra consideration. You get the hell back to the barracks like I told you, and the next time you give me any lip I'm going to smack you down with a wrench—that's lot harder than a Pyrene gun."

**B**BRICK staggered to his feet. He was dizzy. He hadn't expected that fierce comeback. The other men on the field gave him a respectful wide berth and jumped when he talked to them. Only the flying cadets and the instructors didn't seem to consider him the Champion of the Southern Department—didn't seem a little afraid of him. That little yellow something came flickering up inside him again. There was no one watching him now—only he and his instructor.

"It's O.K.," Brick said, dizzily. "No use getting mad over it. I don't blame you for banging me. I suppose you're worn out with this job. I'd be. Only I was sore because I thought I was going to make my first decent landing, and you got peeved because I bounced a little. I was trying hard and you bawled me out."

The instructor looked at him for an instant, his keen blue eyes boring into Brick's soul.

"When you talk like that," he told Brick, "you sound like a regular guy."

Maybe I was a little hasty in socking you. If you were trying I had no business getting peeved at you. You're a case you know, Sutton. All your class have graduated and gone. You're the only lame duck left. If you think you can do a landing crawl back into the crate and I'll help you all I can."

That afternoon Brick learned to land. The next day he soloed, ten days later he was on his way to France, wings glittering on his breast, the belt, symbolical of the Championship of the Southern Department, packed away in his foot locker.

He felt a little shaky about going to France. He knew what to expect, of course, every man who went away from Kelly with wings on his breast knew what to expect. The Old Man gave him a talking to the night before they entrained for the Point of Embarkation.

"You're going over there to fight pilots who are better than you are or better than the pilots of any Allied country. You're going to fight against ships which are better than any the Allies possess or are building. You're going to find that at the present moment the enemy has four ships to our one. You're going to find that the Spandau is the best machine gun in the world and never goes haywire—understand? You're going, knowing that the average life of an American pilot, from the time he steps foot on French soil until he is killed, is seven minutes.

"I want you to know all of those things. First it will make you careful—second, it will make you fighting mad, and third, you'll win, just because we Americans love a fight when we are the under dogs and when we should be whipped before we start. That's why those people over there don't understand us. We don't lay down and die when they shoot and say . . . 'Boom, you're dead!' First because we want to find out for ourselves whether we are really dead and second, we wouldn't believe it if we were. Get the idea? You'll lick the Squareheads just because

you know they can't lick you—superior ships—superior pilots and superior machine guns notwithstanding. So I'm telling you goodbye—and wishing you the best of luck—you'll need it."

AND with that parting blessing in mind he left the field.

France was a place on the other side of ten days of water. Of ten days of sea sickness and short rations, of peering into the thick mist which hung over the sea for submarines or von Terpitz's battle fleet, which rumor had cruising the English Channel and the Atlantic Ocean hunting down this very convoy.

Little destroyers darting around and around like hungry bloodhounds, smoke belching from rakish stacks, big white bone at the prow, in and out among the huge transports, never still, pitching and tossing, rolling each rail in turn under water, rearing up on the crest of some forty foot wave until the entire keel was out of water, flopping back with a jar that could be felt on the transports, men on their decks hanging onto life lines as they made perilous way about constant duties.

Flags flying at signal halyards. Each time a new flag went up there was a new buzz of conversation among the men on the transports. "Look at them flags," a soldier would say. "I can read that junk. That's telling the flag ship that we've sighted a sub."

Whether it was the truth or not the submarine alarm passed along the deck and men, muffled up in grotesque life belts, crowded to the rail, watching the Navy gun crew standing to quarters.

Then a fog-bound, gray looking coast, seen through a sheet of rain. A low lying, flat looking land with water pouring off of it and down into the harbor in yellowed torrents. And Brick Sutton came to Sunny France.

They marched him away two hours after he landed. He was introduced to a five ton truck, still in a downpour of rain. He was soaked to the skin but no one seemed to pay any attention to that.

Everyone was wet. The truck rumbled off. It ran for six hours, until it pulled up before another supply depot, took on gas for the greedy engine and oil for the crank case—and went on. At five in the morning, hungry as a lean belled wolf, the truck having stopped nowhere for food for its cargo, they were deposited in the midst of absolute darkness, looking about them in dismay.

Suddenly a tiny light passed over their faces and a voice sounded gruffly through the dark. "This way men, step lively, if you please."

They found a cheerless barracks with soggy cots and men sleeping. They walked on tip toes, water draining from soaked shoes. They threw themselves down upon the cots pointed out to them without undressing. They were too weary to undress. A few hours later they found that they had reached the tarmac of the 8th Provisional Pursuit Group, A.E.F. and were members of that outfit.

The 8th Group was a hard-boiled unit in America's warriors overseas. The rest of the Air in France knew them as the "God Forsaken."

Once a general had remarked, referring to the 8th: "I don't know what I'd do if it were not for that God Forsaken 8th Group up there at Longres." After that the 8th was the God Forsaken. The name fitted them exactly.

They had no discipline, excepting of their own kind, which was the most rigid in the service. They fought like demons; they played like demons and they acted like a bunch of demons on a holiday. They had written a record of American prowess across the sky of three sectors and in doing it had succeeded in getting over half of the original roster of the outfit crossed off in red ink.

They were commanded by a bull-dog-jawed fire eater by the name of Hastings. No one knew what Major Hastings had done before the war. The whole world knew what he had done since. Eighteen enemy pursuit jobs,

half a dozen balloons, two Gothas, an even dozen two seater Pfalzs on the American side of the lines. All of the other conquests were over enemy territory.

HALF a dozen pilots had gone up to the 8th with Brick. One of them he knew very well, the rest were strangers, drawn from other Training Groups at Kelly. The one he knew he disliked. Why he disliked him he never could tell. Perhaps it was the way "Midget" Parker looked at him. Midge had gray-blue eyes. Brick felt naked every time Midge looked at him. Even the day after Brick had knocked off Young Griffin for the Heavyweight Championship of the Department Midge's congratulations had been different from the rest. Midge had shaken hands with him, a funny smile on his face.

"Well," he had said, still smiling. "That makes you the Champ now, doesn't it? You sure are a hell cat in the ring under the lights, but you'd better look out, Old Timer, some boogey man will jump out of a dark alley some night and scare you to death!"

The rest of the gang had laughed and slapped him on the back, but the sally had dug down into Brick Sutton's soul. It sounded like something Danny would say—the Danny who waited for him that night in Mayer's alley. Somehow, Midge reminded him a lot of Danny. His eyes—they seemed to look right down in a fellow's soul. Somehow, in an abstract way, Brick was afraid of Midge—afraid of his eyes. So he decided to cover it over by blustering. Midge was about three quarters Brick's size. He could squeeze him into a small lump in his hands, but Brick never squeezed him. He wanted to a lot of times. Now Midge was here with the 8th—a mess mate—a wing mate.

He found that the gang over here was a lot like the gang he had known back there in West End. Rough and tough. Ready for a battle at the drop

of the hat. All for One and One for All. There was no Dugan's bar on the tarmac of the 8th, but they made up for that by piling down the rutted road that led from the tarmac into Longres, and mopping up on Old Pierre's pre-war cognac.

They were not such a bad bunch. They fought the M.P.'s to a standstill every time they threw a binge. It made no difference to them that they wore the insignia of officers. They weren't thinking about dignity. They were thinking about filling in the time that stretched between tricks in the air. Time when old memories of fellows who had occupied tables in days gone by now taken up by new faces. Of friends who whispered words of encouragement in the night. Of friends who had carried the torch of the 8th over the war front and who had carried it down to earth, flaming and dying—but unafraid—screaming a last defiance.

Some men could have suffered that kind of agony in silence, but the 8th had been battered too hard by the god of war; they had to keep minds busy from dawn to dusk and from dusk to dawn. A hard life, a life that marked them old men before they knew the mellowness of the middle twenties. A life that brought them gray shocks of hair, made them tight lipped, silent creatures—except when they thronged about Old Pierre's bar—then they cut loose.

When they piled into town, especially after they had made an outstanding kill, or when one of them had left a smoking trace of farewell on the heavens, the infantry M.P.'s detailed by an unwise Headquarters to guard the morals of errant doughboys, tightened belts, polished up clubs, took off overseas caps for tin helmets, and prepared for a busy night. Even so the mess hall of the 8th was hung with no less than nineteen of those very same clubs, four tin derbies once adorning the heads of M.P.'s, three brassards taken in gory combat and any number of strident whistles. The major portion of those trophies

had been garnered by no less a person than the Commander of the 8th, Major Hastings himself.

Two weeks after his coming to the outfit Brick Sutton stepped into his usual niche as idol. Fate helped him. He had a lot to do with it himself—his name found its way into the Orders of the Day, and Hastings bought him a drink. No greater honor could come to any man.

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## CHAPTER VII

### *Brick Knocks 'Em Out!*

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IT happened on that particular day that Brick was making a flight with the rest of the outfit. Up to that time Hastings had permitted him to fly his own way. No one had given him any pointers.

As old "Tin Ear" Krug had said: "It don't do anybody any good in wasting time telling a new fellow what to do when a Heinie gets on his tail. The only thing he can do is to fly out there, look for the Heinie and then let Nature take its course."

Tin Ear got his name from having a splinter completely wreck his left ear during a combat with half a dozen Avatiks. Tin Ear was "old" at twenty-four. The rest of the 8th felt the same as Tin Ear about the matter. The only encouragement Brick or any of the other new fellows received was:

"Well, here's your crate, better take a look-see around the front and fly-back. If you see any of the Jerries out use your own judgment, fight or run. If you find one, ignore him, if you see two, tear in like hell and bat 'em down, if you see three, kind of wait around and let them begin the celebration, but if you raise four of 'em why run like hell back home. Nobody can lick four Jerries."

So with instructions such as these Brick and the other boys had been flying



for a period of two weeks. Nothing much had happened. Midge Parker had a brush with a Fokker and smacked it full of lead until his guns jammed, and then like a sensible fellow he lit out for the home tarmac. Once or twice Brick had flown in, his pulses hammering, his eyes shining, his face a little white, but nothing had happened to him, according to his reports. He merely wrote:

"Completed mission at nine-forty. Nothing to report."

**T**HEN came the day when he flew out with the entire 8th. Hastings had been doing a lot of cussing over a particular Jerry outfit which insisted upon warming things up for the infantry in the advance trenches at exactly two o'clock every afternoon.

As surely as two o'clock rolled along this Jerry formation would materialize out of the sun, and diving down upon the American front line, would spray it with lead until the men hid in the dugouts, or until they amused themselves sufficiently, after which they would spend ten minutes in an exhibition of acrobatics and go home.

For two weeks the infantry had been raising the dickens with Hastings over the antics of this particular bunch of Jerries. It was an insult to the gang who ran their noses in the mud to have a gang of Jerry flyers make fools out of them at two o'clock every afternoon. For two weeks Hastings had growled back fierce answers to the insistent demands from Headquarters that he do something to this circus outfit.

Then one day, after a sulphurous comment on the general worth of the 8th to the American Service, from a tin hat safe behind the lines, Hastings trotted out on the tarmac, called his gang around him, flipped his cigarette away and bellowed:

"Get into them lousy crates. I'm sick and tired of hearin' about them

Jerries playing tag with the dough-boys. I'll never get a good night's sleep until we teach 'em a lesson. Everybody up—and mean business, get mad."

So the 8th, with Brick flying Number Four, pulled off the tarmac for the front at exactly ten minutes to two. There were twelve ships in the 8th's formation that day.

Five old-timers and seven newcomers. The old-timers took it as a matter of course. The newcomers sat in tight little cockpits, glancing from one side of the fuselage to the other, hands a little shaky on the controls, wondering what a general dog fight was like. Up front, riding at Four, Brick Sutton was aware of an empty feeling in his stomach and a weakness that seemed to cause his eyes to film over.

They jumped over the lines at Cains. There was a lot of ground activity around that collection of tumbled down walls and ruined fields. Jerry batteries were shelling the place for the thousandth time that month. Mud stained khaki-clad men were digging in or cowering in shell craters, machine guns set up behind piles of rubble, their own artillery conspicuous by its silence.

**T**HEN, over the trenches a mile ahead, they saw the buzzing devils strafing the front lines. Nine or ten of them, diving down nose first, pulling out in dizzy zooms, guns clattering in the dive, motors screeching like demons sick with laughter. Up and down, up and down, following one another as in some grotesque game of follow the leader, the sun glinting from gaily painted wings and fuselages—a great blur of crimson flame where the sun touched the madly spinning prop at the nose of each.

The 8th was flying low and fast. They skimmed upward over wrecked trees, slipped under military wires and wrecked buildings, gliding along

like gray wolves with bellies close to the ground. Motors turning up under full throttle. Pilots forward in cockpits. Trying to get in the first blow before the Jerries knew they were taking a hand in the game. Tense, eager; a dog fight, the big moment in the life of any squadron. Whole squadron might be wiped out in one scrap . . . who cared?

Luck favored them. The Jerries were too busy playing leap frog with the trenches to do much looking around. However, one of their number, flying above the rest and taking no part in the daily acrobatics sighted the 8th, just as Hastings leaped in to the attack. There was no time to give his comrades much warning. He merely turned his nose downward and plunged to intercept Hastings' hungry rush upward at the nearest of the stunting ships.

The 8th leaped in like a pack of hungry wolves. There was a sudden space about Brick. He found that his speed had carried him almost into the center of the enemy group, before he had a chance to bank wickedly to the right as Hastings had done before him. He found that he was alone, that he was out in front of the squadron, in front and to the left. He saw that Tin Ear and Midge Parker cut away from the formation to come to his assistance.

The three Jerries nearest to him were closing in. A chill passed up and down his spine. He mustn't let the gang think he couldn't take care of himself. He mustn't get into a jam he couldn't get out of. He kicked the rudder bar to the left and swung over in a vertical slip to meet the challenge of the first of the enemies to reach him. He saw the nose of an Albatross directly in front of him. There was not time to lower his head to line the enemy crate in his gun sights. He squeezed the trips of the Vickers and saw the green and orange flame spit from their muzzles.

Then, strange above all strange things, the Albatross was no longer in front of him. It had turned in its mad

forward career. Slipped down on one wing, and had flown straight into the earth, hardly more than three hundred feet down.

A WAVE of exultation passed over Brick Sutton. So it was that easy, eh? Ride at 'em. Squeeze the trips, and they were gone, folded up, grim looking masses of twisted wood crumpled up into a rotten looking field. He felt that he could beat the world . . . and the gang was looking on. He knew they were watching him to see how he would handle himself in his first fight. He found that he was ruddering at the next nearest enemy.

This Jerry was a bit more careful. He went around Brick's crate, in a climbing bank, trying to get in a position over Brick's tail. Brick knew that if he hung there for even as much as an instant it would be the end of Brick Sutton. He pulled the nose of the Spad straight up in a wild zoom.

The man above him, expecting him to rip or burst through his under fuselage, slipped away, went into a vertical bank to the right. Brick, following him with his eyes, whipped the Spad around on its tail. He knew that he was not in range. He knew that he could not possibly hit the slipping phantom before him, but somehow he felt that he had to hear those guns going in front of him.

He squeezed the trips. And then a smiling Fate favored Brick Sutton a second time that day. The third of the three ships which had made the dash after Brick's Spad came hurtling down out of the heavens and passed directly in front of his nose. His descent was so sudden that Brick jumped backward in his seat, his heart leaping into his throat, his nerves frozen. The shadows of the Albatross passed over his cockpit. Its left wing seemed to graze the Spad's propeller. The Vickers in front of Brick were still blazing, aimed at the far off tail of the second of his attackers.

He jerked wildly on the stick. He seemed to hurdle this third Albatross with inches only to spare. His knuckles on the stick hand were trying to burst through the flesh and his thumb was riveted to the gun trips.

The diving Albatross went tumbling on by him. Its wings were weaving back and forth as if in some wild signal to its mates. With horror-filled eyes Brick watched it fall. He was wondering when the Jerry pilot was going to pull it out of that mad dive. But it did not pull out. It flew in, nose first, tail high, under full throttle. It struck the soft mud of the space between the lines with a shattering impact and exploded into a black cloud of fractured bits of wood and ripped fabric. It was down, the body of its pilot riddled with slugs from Brick's guns. A single instant as it had flashed by and the flaming Vickers had picked it up filled the cockpit with snapping death. Two for Brick, and his hands were shaking with a strange palsy.

TIN Ear crossed over before him and buzzed down on the tail of the third Albatross. Tin Ear was far forward in his seat. His motor was coughing red, his wires were whining like the scream of a lost soul. Brick saw the muzzles of Tin Ear's guns engulfed in a hazy flame. He saw splinters flying from the empennage of the third Albatross. The Jerry turned suddenly to face Tin Ear. Spad and Albatross, hanging back, holding fire, each waiting for the other to lead.

Tin Ear went in, cutting into the center of the circle they had been flying, trying to head off the Jerry as it passed on the other side. As he swerved, the Albatross swerved also. Brick saw him slipping away from Tin Ear—outflying him, outguessing. He forgot that the Jerry was heading for him, about to pass over him at a distance of fifty feet. He forgot for a moment the Vickers before him; he was rapt in watching the duel between Tin Ear and

the Jerry he had not been able to reach.

Then the shadow of the third Albatross fell across his cockpit. There was a sudden inspiration thronging his brain. If he pulled up and cut in his guns—the Jerry was trying to escape Tin Ear, he would hardly expect a ship from below to be a menace to him.

The throttle in Brick's Spad was jammed open and the motor roared. He pulled the stick back into his lap. He was looking straight up, even though his own motor was still before him and the blur of his prop caused the heavens to look like a crazy motion picture. He had another instant of panic. He could feel the Spad shooting up like a sky rocket, and as yet he had not sighted the Albatross. The motor was laboring.

The Spad was beginning to stall. The sickening feeling came over him that he had overshot his target. He eased off on the stick, kicking rudder as he did so, and the Spad winged over. As he fell—as the nose came around, he saw the Albatross he had attempted to trick, fasten its fangs upon the tail section of Tin Ear's Spad. Tin Ear, flying like a demon, slipping this way and that, was trying to shake him off, but the Jerry was a master of his craft. He met every move of the Spad and countered perfectly, while the Spandaus snapped death at the gray wraith attempting escape from certain destruction.

HARDLY realizing what he was doing, Brick pushed the stick against the instrument board and sent his crate into a screaming dive. That enemy ship had tricked him. It was showing him up for a bum. It had escaped that wild upward rush when he had hoped to blow it to pieces as it went over him. He was grinding his teeth as he went in that fierce dive. The gang was going to laugh at him. The gang would think it a swell joke on him—to be outwitted by a Jerry. He had to get that crate. To save his face he had to knock it down.

Then he was on top of it, his eyes peering through the circle of his gun sights, his thumb ready on the trigger. He forgot that he was flying a ship. He handled it automatically. His whole brain was focused on the sights of his guns and the red and blue tail of the Albatross in front of him. He was not even conscious of the fact that the ship he was after was giving Tin Ear a bad time of it. He held the nose of his Spad on line with the center of the Albatross' cockpit until he came within fifty feet of it, then he pushed the stick even a little more forward, and his thumbs closed over the trips.

There was a splintering from the camel back of the enemy crate. Tattered strips of fabric jumped into the air and jagged splinters of thin wood flew in a shower. The Jerry pilot turned in his seat, a grin of rage on his face. Brick eased up a little on his stick, and the path of steel crept up along the upper fuselage of the Jerry. Suddenly the pilot shuddered horribly. He half leaped out of his seat, then his head sagged down on his breast.

Tin Ear had slipped away. The Albatross was not following him. The Albatross was doing nothing but heading earthward. Brick, with his terrific speed, leaped over it, pulled up with a suddenness that caused something in the wing to creak ominously, and throttled his motor.

His heart was racing madly. His ears were roaring with the sound of Niagara. He felt a weakness coming over him. Then he was conscious of the fact that the skies were clear of ships and that the battle was over.

Three or four little dots on the distant horizon marked the last of the Jerry circus for that day. He saw a group of gray shapes moving toward the south, still flying low and fast. He looked down over the edge of his cockpit. The third of the Albatrosses he had fought was blazing sullenly on the ground. He held his crate in a slow bank as he watched it. It seemed to

have a horrible fascination for him—three of them down there.

Tomorrow it would be different. They had friends—those friends would lay for Brick Sutton, and they would get him some day—some day when Brick did not have his gang with him.

A GRAY shape flashed by him. He glanced up with a start of surprise. He recognized Tin Ear's number on the rudder of the crate. Tin Ear was waving his hand toward the south—pointing, as if telling him to go that way. Brick nodded his head and waved his arm. Couldn't let Tin Ear know about that uncertain feeling, that frightened feeling. He swung his Spad around and headed after Tin Ear.

They came to the field after twenty minutes of flying. The others were down. There was a cluster of ships in front of number one hangar. Mechanics were already wheeling them onto the line for the next mission. Brick and Tin Ear went down to land, side by side.

They stopped rolling together and Tin Ear piled out of his crate. He trotted across to Brick's Spad before Brick could crawl out of the cockpit. He grabbed his hand and squeezed it hard.

"Nice work, Brick," he said in a queer voice. "I could hear those Spandau slugs whispering my name back there, just before you knocked that Jerry off my tail. I was a sure goner. That guy could fly—and I don't mean perhaps. How'd you get him? I had to keep my head to the front pretty much. I saw you make a stab at him from underneath, but just when I thought you had him he pulled a wing over that brought him back on my tail and you missed him by inches, and then he was filling me full of lead. How'd you get him finally?"

"Aw, I got tired of playing with him," said Brick. "I just bored in and gave him the works."

Tin Ear looked at him for a minute, a queer light in his eyes. "I'll say you



gave him the works," he admitted in a quiet voice. "Nothing else but."

Someone shoved him away from the side of Brick's crate. It was the major and most of the pilots of the outfit were behind him. There were two less now—the Jerries had drawn blood. One of the old-timers and one of the men who had come up with Brick would be struck off the roster . . . a red ink line drawn through their names.

"Boy, I just want to say that I've seen a lot of new guys fight that came up to this menagerie in the past, but I never knew one to knock down three ships on his first fight with the 8th. Nobody. Not even me. I got one on my first time up in a dog fight. I thought that was pretty hot. I'm beginning to understand now why it is that you won the Heavyweight Title of the Southern Department. If you fight in the ring like you fight in a crate. . . . Well, it's just too bad for the parties of the second part. Climb down out of there and have a drink. This outfit is due for a celebration."

In spite of his attempt to appear unmoved Brick's face flushed crimson as he listened to Hastings' praise. One thing marred the triumph of that minute. Midge Parker was standing on the outer edge of the circle. As Brick's eyes rested upon him Parker shook hands with himself in congratulation. But that queer, understanding, half-mocking smile was upon his lips.

"Better look out next time you go out alone, Brick," he called over the heads of the crowd about Brick's ship. "That circus is sure going to try for your hide. They'll be laying for you." He turned away to swab the blood off his face and lips. There would be a gold star after his name on the board tonight. He had knocked down an enemy in combat also.

Brick shivered inside. He wondered if Midge had eyes that could look inside a person. He wondered if he could understand what he had been thinking as he looked down upon the wreckage

of the ships he had defeated. He tried to smile. It was a poor attempt. They dragged him down the rutted road leading to Longres. The 8th felt like a binge. Hastings was leading the procession, one leg of his trousers ripped and torn with blood welling through the tear and seeping down into his boots.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### *Sometimes a Gang Stays Home*

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OLD Pierre crossed himself despairingly as the 8th walked into his estaminet in a body. He had experience with this same gang before.

Usually whistles blew outside in the streets and those accursed large and hard-boiled men, with a brassard marked M.P. in large letters burst into his shop to break up the festivities. When that happened the solid furniture of the place was well battered and heavy chairs were handled like tennis bats. Why protect him from the Huns when the protectors did as much damage as a good shelling? But at least the invasion of the 8th had one recompense, much cognac was consumed, and Old Pierre always charged the Americans double the amount he charged anyone else. Not a patriotic gesture certainly, but then the Americans were paid huge sums of money monthly when the French had only five sous a day.

He hurried about, taking out bottles of cognac from the straw wrappers and placing them on the bar. The place was filled with a babble of staccato conversation, much like the barking of machine guns, and then there was a sudden silence as the 8th tilted heads back and inhaled the potent liquor which passed for liquid refreshment in France. They looked questioningly at Brick.

"Drink?" offered Hastings laconically.

Brick shook his head. "No thanks," he refused. "I never went for the booze much. Always in condition—

don't know when I might have to start training for another fight. Can't booze and fight."

"That's right," commended the C. O. filling his glass to the brim for the third time and emptying it at a single gulp. "Booze is bad. No good. Curse of the nation. Curse of everything." He poured himself another drink as he was speaking, and winked at Tin Ear. "But it's an easy curse to take."

Over in a corner the "Agony Trio" was harmonizing cautiously. Hastings looked at them in pity. "Think of that now. See what booze does, makes a gang of birds like that have the idea they can sing after three shots." He listened for a minute. "They need a bass, bad!" he commented. "'Scuse me." He walked over to the trio and took a position on the left end of the group. He opened his mouth and let out a single bass note that filled the room. The gang whooped in appreciation. "Sing 'em out of the basement, Major," they yelled at him. "Show 'em a bass as is a bass."

**T**HE trio, now become a quartette, opened its mouth and took a long breath and burst into sound. They sang to the music of the Battle Hymn of the Republic—but the words were a lot different:

John Brown's body lies a mouldering in the grave,  
Down went McGinty to the bottom of the sea,  
She's my Annie, and I'm her Joe.  
Listen to my tale of

WHOA!

Any ice today, lady?

No!

Get up Napoleon!

Glory, glory, hardly knew ya,

Glory, glory, hardly knew ya,

Glory, glory, hardly knew ya,

AND WE'VE TIED OLD WILLIE'S  
GOAT BEHIND THE HANGAR!

They were all well oiled at nine-thirty that night. Brick was the only sober pilot in the outfit, with the exception of Midge. The quartette was going strong and the noise was shaking the age-old rafters of Old Pierre's estaminet—and

then the door flew open, and a gruff voice sounded over the festivities.

"You guys get out of here and make it snappy. Back to the field or I'll run you all in." There was a pugnacious looking face thrust through the door. A square chin and a pair of angry looking green eyes. The face was held up by an arm which was thrust through the door. The arm was tied around with a blue and white brassard on which was written in bold letters . . . "M.P." There was a tin hat cocked over one ear, an ugly looking automatic draped about his hips, a whistle chain running into a breast pocket and a police club dangling from the right wrist.

**H**ASTINGS was the first of the 8th to speak.

"Well," he said resignedly. "They're back again, men. These guys don't seem to understand that we don't like 'em. They invite themselves to every party we stage. Somebody tell that nasty looking thing in the door to take the air."

"No back talk," snarled the voice at the door. "Get out of here or I'll drag you out."

"Imagine that," said Hastings, half sobbingly and turning to the 8th for sympathy. "Imagine the disgrace of seeing old Hastings dragged about by an M.P. The disgrace would kill the service. Has anyone a spare bottle?"

Someone had. It whistled through the air and bounced off the door, a foot from the M.P.'s head with a vicious thud. He sprang into the room, his mouth in a nasty snarl, his club lifted. There were four other M.P.'s behind him.

"Bad mistake," warned the major. "Crashing parties you haven't been invited to."

"You'll see if it's a mistake," barked the M.P. sergeant, "after we hand you over to the M.P. officer. Take 'em boys."

Then the fireworks went off with a bang. The room was filled with flying

fists. The thud of knuckles on head and jaw filled the room. Old Pierre, his face terror stricken dropped down behind his brass inlaid bar and put his face to the floor. He could hear his precious tables and chairs being banged around.

Hastings swung a right cross to the jaw of the M.P. sergeant. It collided with that jaw with a mighty crack. The sergeant reeled back. He lifted his heavy billy. It crashed down through the air. It took the major behind the ears. The major went down with a thud and lay still. Then somebody was face to face with the M.P. leader.

Brick Sutton took the major's place. Before he knew what it was all about he was standing over the inert form of his chief, jaw to jaw with the Service law. He drew back his right and let it go. It smashed off the sergeant's jaw. The billy was lifted again. Brick caught it in the crook of his arm as it came down and jerked it out of the M.P.'s hand with such force that the cord about his wrist cut into the flesh and snapped. He tossed the club behind him. He tore in at the fellow like a wild cat. His fists flailing before him. Left hook, and right cross, battering on the fellow's jaw. Then he sent the right up from the floor. It socked home with a sickening thud. The big M.P. stood for an instant, his eyes glazing and then he flopped down on the floor beside the major.

**B**BRICK found that the 8th was sitting solidly upon the three buddies of the man he had knocked out. They had been watching Brick smack the leader of the invaders. There was a light of admiration in the eyes of all of them. They were a sorry looking gang. Uniforms were torn, faces were scratched, eyes were blackened, some heads were marked by raising lumps.

Tin Ear was grinning delightedly out of a bloody mouth.

"Nice punching, Brick," he called to Sutton. "Let's get out of here. They'll

have the Army after us in another ten minutes."

Brick nodded. He was still a trifle dazed. He picked the major up over his shoulder, then he put him down on the floor again. He ripped the chevrons off the sleeve of his fallen opponent, took his M.P. brassard and his whistle.

"We'll add 'em to the collection," he grinned at Tin Ear. "I didn't see no sergeants' stripes in that collection."

He picked up the major again and walked away with him. Then went back to the field. Up ahead, the quartette, minus the resounding bass, was singing:

WHOA!

Any ice today lady?

No!

Get up Napoleon!

After Brick had put the major in his cot the gang gathered outside the tent and slapped Brick on the back. "Sweet left you throw, Brick," laughed Tin Ear. "Hate to be in the ring and have that left land on my ear. I'll bet Griffin caught plenty of 'em. We read all about that scrap in the *Stars and Stripes*. We got a great kick out of it, especially because the Air Service gave the dough-boys a trimming. We never thought we'd have the champion in our outfit. Boy, you make us gladder every day that we have you. I'll bet that M.P. guy will have a sore head for a week."

"I rapped him a couple of sweet slugs," agreed Brick. "He was a tough bimbo to stand up as long as he did."

There was a little laugh from one of them. Brick looked for the one who had laughed. He found himself looking into the eyes of Midge Parker.

The laugh sounded again. Midge's voice held a faint trace of sarcasm as he spoke. "Yeah, Brick," he said in a low tone. "Nice little exhibition you put on . . . for the gang."

**H**E turned and walked away. The rest followed him. Brick stood there for a moment looking after them. Then he took a quick step forward. He was going to bust Midge Parker wide

open. He was tired of listening to Midge. He caught up with Parker just as Parker was going into his tent.

"Listen, fellow," Brick snapped as he whirled Parker about to face him. "If you got anything against me, spill it here and now. I'm tired of listening to that laugh of yours."

Parker looked surprised. "I haven't got anything against you Brick," he answered quietly. "Only I understand you and these guys don't. I know you for what you are. I know that all the bluff and tough-guy pose is only the old oil—down underneath you're soft—soft as pie."

Brick's fist doubled. His arm was drawn back. In the darkness his face was like a white mask. He'd have to bluff Midge out of talking that way. If the gang got next to the fact—he groaned in his heart—the truth—that he didn't want to fight—didn't like it. . . .

"So you think I'm soft, eh?" he growled. "I'll show you how soft I am, you little runt. I'd hate to smash a guy your size, but I have a notion to slap you down, just for a lesson."

He reeled backward in the next instant. Something had struck him out of the gloom. Something that bounced off his jaw with a sharp crack and left suns and moons and stars glittering behind his eyes. Then he heard a voice, speaking sharply and in a deadly tone.

"Listen, Briek!" the voice was saying. It didn't sound like Parker's voice at all. It sounded like a whip lash. "Bully everybody else you run across as much as you want to—but lay off of me. If it pleases you to know it I was a student of psychology back in the States. I know a lot about what makes people click—in the language you can understand I know that down in you somewhere there is a fear—of what people will think—so you've made yourself into a tough guy—just to keep 'em from guessing that you hate to fight. You can't fight unless you have an audience, I know that. I just smacked you one

then to prove it. If that had been in front of the gang you'd have cleaned up on me. But the gang isn't here—and I got away with it. You're yellow in lots of ways. You made a grandstand stunt when you dropped those ships—the three of them. You had a lot of luck—and the gang was watching.

"You know I'm telling the truth—you know it—otherwise I'd be stiff here on the ground and you'd have a pair of busted knuckles. Listen, I'm keeping quiet, you understand. I like you a lot, in spite of the fact that I can see down inside of you. I'll never open my mouth—but I'll prove to you beyond all shadow of doubt, that what I'm saying is the truth—that you are yellow in spite of the bluff and bluster—and that you won't fight unless you have to. When I prove it I'll just pass you by and I'll be whistling—I'll whistle 'hail, hail the gang's all here,' and I'll wink at you. You'll know what I mean."

"If you wasn't pint sized I'd knock you end up," growled Brick, trying to lash himself into smacking Parker.

"No you wouldn't, not now," smiled Parker. "Better go home before you catch cold standing out here." He whirled on his heel and entered his own tent. Brick stood there for a minute. His head went down between his shoulders. He was thinking of Danny and that lacing he had taken in Mayer's alley—when the gang wasn't there. He walked away. There was a moan of grief in his soul. If he only had socked Parker—it would have wiped out a little of that picture of Danny. He rolled about on his cot all that night.

**M**ORNING came with a gray chill in the air. Someone was shaking him by the shoulder. He found that it was a greaseball on the night trick.

"Better get up, major wants you." the greaseball was saying. Brick struggled to his feet and reached for his tunic and flying coat. He was fully clothed. There was no wait for him to dress. He plunged out into the half



darkness. There was a faint light from the major's tent. He walked over and pushed the flaps apart with his hands. He thrust his head inside. "Want me, Major?" he asked.

The major lifted his head. There was a great lump over his ear where the M.P.'s billy had descended.

"Yes," he said with a wry grin. "Come inside you big stiff. I got an errand for you. Say, I want to thank you for standing by me like you did last night. We'll have to stop fighting these M.P.'s, though. I get into a hell of a mess everytime we have a shindig like that. The Army gets huffy and insulted. They'll make it hot one of these days. Boy, that louse with the club sure caught me a smack on the dome. My head feels as big as a dishpan."

"He got plenty for that," said Brick. "He was down on the floor beside you about three minutes after he smacked you with the club."

"The boys were telling me about it. Tin Ear and Clarence went off on an early dawn just before I had you called. They gave me the details. Must have been a nice riot. Sorry I passed out before it got underway in good shape."

"Didn't last long," grinned Brick, "and you didn't miss much."

THE major's face was suddenly grave.

"Listen, Brick," he said, lowering his voice to a whisper. "They've wished one of those graveyard missions on to me. A man from G.H.Q. got in early this morning and left again as soon as he handed me this. I have orders to fly the mission. It's a tough assignment. I'm ordered to send my best man on the job—and Brick—I'm picking you because you're a fighter—and because I think that if anyone can make good you can."

There was an ominous sinking sensation in Brick's stomach. He continued to stare at the major's grave face.

"You know we have agents working inside the enemy lines. Men who take

their lives in their hands and think nothing of it. Who stand in the shadow of the noose every minute of the time they are on duty. A single slip and they die—and no one ever knows how or when. Once, when I was with the 13th, I had to carry one over the lines in a single-seater. I dropped him down inside the enemy lines—in a little clearing—he waved his hand at me as I took off. I saw him sneaking in through the woods around the place, and when I got into the air again I could see that the place was lousy with Squareheads. I never saw him again. I don't know whether he got through or not—but it's a dangerous game.

"Well, G.H.Q. has to get a message to a fellow like that who is across the lines in this sector. It's not an easy mission and you have to perform it in the daylight. There's a map here showing the exact location of the place where you are to drop this package. It's weighted with lead, so it'll fall right straight down. The idea is, that you are to fly over there, skimming the tree tops, keeping close to the ground all the time, and when you get to this place, you'll see a square of white cloth on the ground. That will tell you that your man is down there waiting for the message. You drop it. Don't fail, remember that poor devil's life may depend upon receiving this package."

Brick nodded.

"I know where the place is," he said in a strange voice. "I have to go alone . . . don't I?"

Hastings glanced up at his face.

"Sure you have to go alone," he told Brick. "We couldn't send the outfit on a matter like this. It would attract attention—and besides it's too dangerous. The air over there is lousy with Jerry crates. They'd wipe us out before we could get to the place marked on this map." He handed the silk covered package to Brick. It was heavy. Forty pounds perhaps. He gave it to him as a man assigning a solemn trust to a proven friend. "You'll get it there?"

the major asked, looking into Brick's eyes.

"Sure," answered Brick in a voice meant to be scoffing. "This will be a cinch. It'll give me something to do."

The major smiled and slapped him on the back. "Good!" he exclaimed. "I knew you'd take it like that. Best of luck—and get back—if you can." His hand was pressing Brick's hand tightly. There was a lump in Brick's throat. He turned away, carrying the message for the man across the lines as if it were a huge bit of red-hot metal.

Midge Parker was standing before his ship as Brick walked out on the tarmac. Brick's motor was warming up at idling speed. There was a quiet smile on Midge's face.

"Going to leave us so early in the morning?" he asked pleasantly as if they had not been at dagger points the night before.

Brick nodded his head. "Yeah," he said gruffly. "I've got a mission."

"Good luck," called Midge as Brick crawled into his seat. There was something mocking in the tone of voice. Brick gunned the Hisso to shut out the sound. His hand was trembling as he held onto the round knob. He ordered the blocks pulled. He waited for a long minute as he fussed with his goggles, and then he blasted the Spad's tail into the air and the crate skimmed down the field.

HE was at three thousand feet, heading north before he realized that he was going out to face death—alone. Then a clammy hand settled down upon his heart and at the same time seemed to squeeze the breath out of his lungs. His eyes held a light of terror. He knew that he had been ordered to stay close to the ground—to hedge hop all the way to the front, but down near the ground his speed—on the way to death—seemed much greater than it did up here. His hand reached out to the throttle. He eased it back. He was trying to tell himself that he

was saving his motor—but in his heart he knew that he was trying to delay the minute when he would find himself inside the enemy lines—alone.

With each turn of the prop his panic increased. He felt alone, horribly alone. The gray mist and the chill of the morning ate into his soul.

There seemed nothing left in the world but himself and the death which lurked over the edge of that grim horizon before him. His mind was filled with pictures of flaming guns and of buzzing aircraft about him. Friends of the three pilots he had sent crashing to death—out to give him a taste of his own medicine. The crackle of flames in his ears, the feel of hot fire burning his flesh. He put his head down on his arms and tears seeped into the felt of his goggle lining.

The Spad was flying like a crazy thing. Nose up and down, wings careening as if a dead hand held the controls. He tried to grit his teeth and banish the terror that gripped him. He succeeded only in whipping himself into new terrors. He looked down. He had been flying for fifteen minutes. He had a slight tail wind with him. The space between the lines was down there.

Grinning skulls at the bases of gnarled and knotted posts from which barbed wire was strung. Stuttering machine guns poisoning the air with lead. Rotting flesh dissolving into the earth, shell creators like giant small-pox marks. His hand was trembling on the stick. He saw wreckage down there. A sudden film went over his eyes. One of the Albatrosses he had downed the day before. A graveyard of twisted wires and splintered wood, a dead form in the pilot's seat with cold hands holding the stick. His stomach was sick. He was over the lines. Afraid to go ahead. Afraid to turn back.

AND then—in front of him, rising up like a red fury, an Albatross climbed to meet him. A single Alba-

tross. Not a flight of them such as the 8th had faced yesterday. But one lone ship, with evil-looking Spandaus peering out from behind the propeller, looking for all the world like a set of big eyes, fixed on the gray belly of the Spad. Brick glanced down at it in horror. The strength seemed to leave his arms. His body was aflame, as if already pierced with hot slugs from those two grim looking guns.

Before he knew exactly what he was doing his foot had kicked right rudder and his hand had thrown the stick all the way over. The Spad went around in a vertical bank to the right. His hand threw full throttle to the motor. He held it there, while his left hand pushed the stick forward. The Spad picked up speed. It was in its best flying position, the nose down a trifle, the motor under full gun. He held the throttle tight against the post as if fearing that it would slip back and he might lose a few precious r.p.m.'s.

The Jerry crate on his tail seemed surprised at the maneuver. It had never before encountered a Spad that would not show fight. It hung back for a minute studying the strange manner of fighting exhibited by this particular Spad, suspecting trickery. The Americans were the trickiest fighters on the front. One minute they pretended flight, only to whirl, with blazing guns, and to wipe out the attacking ship. This Jerry was wise in the ways of American pilots.

He held his position, permitting the Benz in his nose to run full blast, content to pursue keeping his place.

Then, after three minutes of flying, he gained confidence. The Spad was crossing the lines again into Allied territory. It was trying to escape. A queer smile came over the face of the Jerry pilot. He cut in his guns at long range. He was a hundred yards behind the Spad—but he might get in a lucky burst. With the second burst he was rewarded. Chips flew from the tail section of the Spad and it wavered a bit—but then it

put its nose still farther down and widened the gap between them.

Brick sat in his seat, his eyes fastened on the blur of his prop. He did not dare look back at his pursuer. He could not risk finding him directly on his tail, ready for the killing burst. He knew that if he should discover him in close, ready for the kill that his brain would snap and he would go rocketing down, raving, insane. He sat there, driving the Spad for the 8th tarmac. Wondering why the Jerry did not close in and finish him.

A shadow passed over his cockpit. He heard the hammering of guns behind him. He did not look back. He thought it to be the guns of the Albatross blasting at him. Then a second set of guns cut into the nightmare of sound. This time he half turned his head. A great feeling of relief and thanksgiving passed through him. There was another Spad back there. A Spad diving down upon the pursuing Albatross, Vickers disputing further progress with the Jerry ship, motor howling with the labor of the dive, the head of the pilot down close to the gun sights.

**B**BRICK SUTTON was sobbing with relief. He was trying to thank God that another Spad had saved him from being a crumpled mass of wreckage in the midst of a stinking hell on earth. Then—his brain went numb—suppose it had been one of his own gang—suppose they had watched him run from one ship which had barred his way to the carrying out of his mission. What had the major said? "This message may mean life for the poor devil over there who is waiting for it—don't fail!"

Perhaps he was a murderer. Perhaps he had sent that agent within the enemy lines to the firing squad or to the gallows. He looked back again. There was a great cloud of smoke hurtling toward the ground. He ripped his goggles up from over his eyes to see better. He saw that the Spad was the victor.

The Albatross was beaten—a flamer—going down—the gray Spad was turning away to the east.

Brick breathed more easily. After all it was not one of his own gang. If it had been one of the pilots of the 8th he would have taken up a position on Brick's tail and would have gone back to the field with him.

He saw the tarmac a mile in front of him. Suddenly his hand went forward to the choke ring. He was within easy gliding distance. He had to have an alibi for returning without completing his mission. The choke would give it to him. He pulled out on the choke wire. Instantly the motor coughed and spat, backfired and popped. He adjusted the choke to where it made the motor sound the worst without killing it entirely.

Then he flew over the field twice as if trying to be careful in his landing. He wanted to be sure that everyone on the tarmac was listening to his motor missing. Then he cut the switch to dead stick, pushed the choke wire back into position and glided down with a dead stick.

He hit the field running, the prop at nine and three. He made a sweet landing on three points, pulling the crate out of a sharp slip and easing it up to the line before it lost way. He crawled out, trying to make his face and bearing seem angry.

"Hey," he called to the chief mechanic. "Come here and take a look at this motor. A fine gang of clucks you guys are, sending a fellow out with a piece of junk like this. Like to cost me my neck. It started cutting on me right after I got over the lines. I was in the middle of a scrap when it when dead. The major will raise hell about this."

THE major was coming over to him. There was a worried look on his face. He saw that there were bullet scars in Brick's tail section. Round holes and splintered wood.

"What's the matter?" he asked Brick. "Did you carry out your mission?"

Brick shook his head. "No, I didn't," he told the major in a tone of disgust. "Just as I got over their lines I got jumped by an Albatross. I was set to give him the works after shaking him off my tail and then that lousy motor went haywire. And I was lucky to get back—alive."

There was a low whining sound from overhead. A ship was slipping onto the field. It came down in a series of clever fish tails, killing its forward speed. The wheels hit and it rolled to a stop close to the line. Brick was watching it with fascinated eyes. Somehow he felt that this was the ship which had downed the Albatross which had chased him home. If it was—he felt sick inside—he had thought that ship had gone off to the east. He saw that it was Midget Parker who climbed out of the cockpit.

The major was talking on. Brick was hoping that he kept quiet until Parker had a chance to speak.

"I don't know what I'll do," the major was saying. His face was lined with care. "I phoned G.H.Q. that I had sent the message. They called right after you left—they seemed steamed up about it. Wanted to know if I was certain that the package would reach its destination. I told them that I had sent my best man and that he'd take it through or die in the attempt."

Brick felt a great contempt for himself. He wanted to blurt out the truth. Midge Parker joined the group.

"Something wrong?" he asked of the major, watching his worried eyes.

"Something as wrong as hell," snapped Hastings. "Sent Brick here with an important message to drop inside the enemy lines. He was forced back with a bad motor after a Jerry took a pot shot at him. Like to lost his neck in the fight when the motor conked. Now we have to make the try all over again."

"Oh, did Brick have motor trouble?" asked Midge in a queer voice. He



turned away from the group. He was whistling softly to himself, but loud enough for Brick to hear. "Hail, hail the gang's all here!" he was whistling. Then he looked at Brick, and the funny little smile on his face.

BRICK remembered.

"I'll whistle 'Hail, hail the gang's all here,' and you'll know what I mean," Midge had told him the night before. He knew what Midge meant—he knew that it had been Midge who shot down the Albatross he was running from. Midge knew that he was yellow. He had watched him prove it.

"Don't worry about that, Major," Midge was saying. "I can see from Brick's face that he hates it as much as you do. I'll tell you what. I never was on a mission like that and I'd like to have a part in the excitement. What say that Brick and I take that Spad dual control two-seater in hangar number one? It seems to me that two men can get through easier and quicker than one. If somebody gets gay on Brick's tail I can shoot 'em off with the gun in the rear seat. That job is as fast as a pursuit crate—and there'll be a man to carry on in case one gets hurt."

Brick's heart was leaping. Midge in the back seat? Midge going up with him? What devil was in Midge Parker now? He watched the major's face anxiously. The care lines were lighter.

"Good idea," the major was saying. "Yeah, that's the ticket. You and Brick go. Let Brick fly the crate and you sit in the back seat. If anything happens, you take the controls and go on. That thing has to be dropped inside their lines or we'll be disgraced. It's a matter of life and death to a poor guy who is waiting for it."

He motioned to the mechanic to wheel out the two-seater. Midge was climbing into the rear seat, checking on the ammo cases before the motor was warm. He beckoned to Brick.

"Come on, Old Timer," he said.

"We'll play post office this time and I don't mean maybe."

He was smiling that queer smile. Like a mechanical man, Brick Sutton squeezed into the front seat and strapped on his belt. He listened to the motor for a minute, then he waved his hand. He was still staring straight ahead—at nothing—when the two-seater left the ground.

THERE was nothing to stop them until they reached the lines. Brick did not look around. He knew that Parker was in the rear seat gloating over his misery. He knew that he had come for the sole purpose of humbling Brick Sutton. The same old terror was gripping him. The space between the lines—and a still smoking ruin which had been an Albatross. Then they were over the lines and inside the enemy territory. Brick was studying the ground—looking for the clearing that showed on his map. His heart leaped into his throat. He saw it, dead ahead—two miles distant perhaps. Maybe they were going to get through without trouble. Maybe it was just a matter of flying over the place and dropping the message. But Fate ruled otherwise.

There was a droning roar from the ground. There was a drome down there. A Jerry drome with a flock of Fokkers taking off in formation. They were nosing up, astounded at the sight of the single two-seater above them. Four of their number detached themselves from the main formation and veered to intercept the one American ship.

For an instant the two-seater faltered. Then Brick felt the throttle pulled back with a jerk and there was an ice-cold voice screaming in his ears.

"Listen, Brick," the voice was saying. "You're going to take this crate through there—you understand? This is a matter of life and death. If all the Jerries in the world were in front of us we'd get through them. That's an order from the front. Listen—you fly the crate and fly it right. Head it for that field,

open your guns and stay with it. I'll take care of the tail. So help me, if you try to welsh like you did in front of the one ship I shot down for you just a little while ago, I'll turn this gun around and blow you to hell. Fly on boy, and remember I'm behind you."

Then the Hisso was roaring ahead under full gun again. The Fokkers were coming up fast. A burst ripped through the floorboards of Brick's cockpit. He felt his senses reeling. His hand was tight on the stick. He was trying to hold that Spad for the field. He cut in his guns—more to let them out clatter the Spandaus that were probing for his life. Splinters were flying from the camel back. He could hear a Lewis gun behind him growling defiance at the ships trying to get on his tail. The field was looming up larger and larger.

A Fokker cut across in front of him and was flush in his gun sights. He raked it with a quick burst and saw it dive wildly to escape the hail of death from his Vickers.

**D**EATH snapped about him. His hands felt limp on the controls. He could feel himself being swallowed up in a black void. He heard a voice in his ears. The motor was suddenly quiet. "Throw that thing overboard!" the voice was screaming. It was Midge Parker's voice. He felt the controls jerked out of his hands. The motor roared again. The Spad went over in a dizzy bank. He felt the heavy package sliding around on his lap. He lifted it blindly over the edge of the cockpit and felt it drop out of his weak fingers. Then he collapsed in his seat. He was not out altogether. He could hear the sound of the guns. He could feel the ship surging under him as Parker handled it with the skill of a demon, weaving in and out among the attacking Fokkers, running the gauntlet of Jerry steel.

The fabric about him was ripped and torn. He knew that Parker was fighting

for the life of them both. He was cursing himself—tears were coursing down his cheeks—but he was limp—too sick with terror to move.

Then it was quiet.

It seemed an eternity before that quiet came. He wondered if this was death. This peace after bedlam. He had a glimpse of a field coming up over the right wing and he knew that Midge was slipping down fast. He sat up in his seat. It was his own field. The field of the 8th. In another instant he would be branded a coward forever.

It was funny. Midge stopped the ship at the far end of the field. His face was blood smeared as he crawled out of the rear seat.

"I knew it," he said in a grim voice. "You quit on me. You left me without even a gun to fight—to escape those devils who were after us. You sold me out because you didn't have guts enough to fight for your own life. I told you what you were—a gang fighter—and a yellow bellied louse when you haven't got the gang with you. Now listen. Taxi this crate up the field as if you've been flying it all the way. I wouldn't ride with you another foot." And Midge staggered off toward the distant row of tent hangars.

Like a dead man Brick made the motions which taxied the two-seater up the field. He brought it to the line. He crawled out weakly. The major was standing there, an anxious look on his face. The major was waiting for him to say something. "Mission completed, sir," Brick mumbled in a far away voice.

"What's Midge walking in for?" the major asked in a surprised tone. Brick glanced toward the plodding figure. "He's sick, I guess," Brick said miserably. "He's sick—we had a fight—tough time—he told me to taxi in when we stopped down there—he wanted to walk."

**H**E turned away toward his quarters. He knew that when Midge came in he would be finished with the Air.

Midge would brand him a coward in scalding words. The rest of the gang wouldn't spit on him, after that. He threw himself down on his cot. He was weeping, bitter tears.

He did not come out until dark. Then there seemed to be no change in the attitude of the gang. They still greeted him with a hearty: "Hello Brick—nice trick you pulled this morning." He ate with them watching his plate—he did not dare to face the bandaged head of Midge Parker.

That night he paced the tarmac about number one hangar. That night his soul rose up before him like a gray ghost. His life—the life he had lived back there in West End—everything he had ever done passed before him like a motion picture. He had heard that when one is about to drown all his life flashes before his face. He was wondering if he was about to die—and he listened to a voice far distant—down within him—where the pictures were coming from and he discovered that the voice was telling him he *was* going to die.

He knew himself during that night. He realized that he had fought because he was afraid—more afraid of being called a coward than of the punishment fighting brought to him. He knew that Danny had been right and Midge Parker. He knew that he was sailing under false colors and that he could not tell these other fellows that. He told himself that he was not fit to live. He even was more harsh with himself than he deserved but he was deep in his own misery and his own contempt for himself. He drew a deep breath and clenched his fists. He turned toward his quarters.

Tomorrow he would show himself that he was not afraid to face danger alone.

Alone—that word had a terrible sound. Brick had always dreaded being alone. He walked swiftly toward the tent in which he lived. Tomorrow he would go out alone—and he would

fight until he died—then Midge Parker and Danny could see that he was not yellow. He'd force himself to go through with it. The gang would never know what he had suffered in finding himself. He threw himself upon his cot. His eyes closed. He slept like a baby.

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## CHAPTER IX

### *Brick Fights Alone*

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HE awoke while it was still dark. He fumbled about in his tent, flashing a pocket searchlight about until he found his clothes. He seemed buoyed up by a flame burning inside of him. He felt clean. He felt that fear had been burned out of him somehow. Perhaps it had been Midge Parker's voice. Perhaps it had been the danger of the day before. Perhaps it had been the soul scourging of the night before.

He seemed to breathe easier. He drew in a great lungful of wet, cold air. He was studying himself. He did not feel like a man who was going out to die—die? The word re-echoed within his brain—but it brought him no terror on this morning. He sauntered over to the hangar. The mechanics were wheeling ghost gray ships out on the line. He picked his own out of the lot.

"Ready?" he asked his mechanic.

The mechanic glanced up in surprise.

"Gee, you gave me a scare," he said to Brick, in a sheepish tone. "No, sir. It'll be half an hour yet. We have to gas her and drain the crank case—then we'll warm her for you. I didn't know you had the early trick today, sir. I thought Midge Parker had it."

"Has he?" asked Brick as if it were of no interest. "Well, get her ready. I'm going out on a little trick of my own."

He sauntered away, his hands in his pockets, breathing in the air. He looked at the field as the darkness lifted. Somehow it seemed strange to him, almost as if he were seeing it for the

first time. He thought he would like to go over and say goodbye to Tin Ear and the major, but that would be betraying his plans. He merely walked by their tents. They were snoring away inside. He said "goodbye" in a whisper before each tent as he passed.

The cook handed him a cup of coffee and a thick sandwich. He ate the food and drank the scalding coffee without thinking that he would not need food—he could go hungry for an hour or so—what did it matter?

He turned back toward the field. There were two motors warming. Yes. He remembered. Midge Parker had the early trick. It would be his crate. He glanced at his mechanic.

The greaseball nodded.

"She's ready to go now, sir," he said. "If she warms a little more she'll be right as rain."

"O.K." said Brick. "I'll warm her after I'm up there."

The mechanic grinned as if he understood thoroughly.

**B**RICK wondered where Midge was. He found out that he didn't hate Midge this morning. He wished that he had never disliked Midge. After all Midge was the kind of a guy that a fellow could depend upon. Birds like Midge would wade hip deep in hell fire to help a pal. He wondered if he could find him if he walked back to the kitchen. He'd like to say goodbye to Midge. He shook his head after a minute. No, that would spoil it. Midge wouldn't understand.

He waved for the blocks to be pulled. The mechanic nodded and jerked on the lines. The Spad was free. For a tremulous moment Brick let it stand as he looked about him. There was a stinging something in his eyes and a hard lump in his throat. He suddenly remembered that this was the last time he would ever look upon the tarmac of the 8th Squadron. He was going out to prove to himself that he was not yellow. To do that it meant that he must never

come back. He was going to prove it down to the quick.

He gave the ship the gun. It skimmed down over the field as if glad to be away from the earth. He took it up in a wild zoom. He pointed it toward the north.

A figure came running out of number one hangar and over to the side of the second ship standing on the line, ready for flight. The mechanic stood back respectfully.

"You're all ready Lieutenant Parker," he said. "I've got her hitting like a million dollars in Wall Street."

Midge Parker seemed strangely tense.

"Was that Lieutenant Sutton who just flew off the field?" he asked sharply.

"Yes, sir," answered the mechanic.

"He said he was going on a trick of his own."

Something like a groan sounded from Midge. "Oh the poor fool, the poor fool," he was whispering. He climbed into his seat and fastened his belt with fingers that shook a little.

"Pull the blocks," he barked. The mechanic sprang to obey. Then Midge Parker gave his own crate the gun and leaped up into the air on the trail of Brick Sutton.

**T**HERE was a fear in Midge Parker's soul that morning as he took off after Brick. It was a fear that he would not be in time. He would lose Brick in the mists. He was telling himself that he was a murderer and that he had sent a man to his death. He peered ahead into the mists. He could make out the tail section of Brick's Spad far ahead—pointed toward that grim shadowland of the north. He was trying to squeeze every rev out of his motor, trying to make up that gap.

They flew along like that for twenty minutes.

Brick had no glimpse of Midge Parker on his tail. He came to the front. He swooped low over the lines. Yesterday he had been afraid of those lines, especially the German side. He went low over their front line trenches



and stuck his nose toward the earth at a sharp angle. He saw that concrete trench line leap up into his gun sights. He opened his Vickers on them ruddering back and forth as he went down to be sure his fire covered as wide an area as possible.

He was waiting for the fear signal to flash into his brain. It did not come. Not even after a machine gun from the ground dotted his wings with little round holes. He saw the men in the trench below him darting for cover. When he pulled up his wheels were inches away from the parapet of the trench. He banked around for another try. He found that it was exciting to strafe trenches. He understood how the Jerries like the game so well.

He was still low over the ground. He had pulled out of the zoom at five hundred feet. He was facing toward the south now. Then he was sitting straight up in his seat. His eyes were riveted on a point directly over his whirling prop. He could make out four ships—one a grey Spad and three fast flying Fokkers, locked in mortal combat. A thousand feet above him.

He knew what they were. A Jerry flight of three ships, out on a dawn patrol had jumped a single Spad. There was a fierce joy in his heart. What had they said at the field. "No man could beat three Jerries? A Fokker was more than a match for a Spad?"

Well, here were three Fokkers and one Spad going in to fight them. He did not count the Spad they were attacking. That would be down before he could reach the brawl. He was going to take this way out—with three Fokkers trying to get him—just to prove to himself that he wasn't afraid. That he could take the gaff—alone—when the gang was not with him.

**T**HE Fokkers were having a hard time boxing the lone Spad. The Spad was being handled by a master. It slipped through them, slipping right and left, from time to time ripping a

savage burst at the nearest enemy ship, slowing it for an instant, like a master boxer throwing a slugger off balance with rapid left jabs to the face.

Brick was coming up fast. He was close enough to make out the number on the Spad's tail. He glanced at it and for a second it had no meaning to him—then a surge of fierce exultation shot through him. Midge Parker! Midge. Alone—with three Fokkers riding him down—and Brick Sutton, the guy who was yellow, who couldn't fight without his gang was all that stood between him and grinding destruction.

Brick took the first of the Fokkers with a wild rush from below. He was climbing at a shallow angle. Forcing his crate up without loss of speed. He was coming out of the north. The Fokkers were not expecting danger to come at them from the direction of their own lines. He pulled up into a steep zoom as he closed in under the nearest of the enemy ships. He saw the belly of the Fokker outlined in his sights and he squeezed the triggers hard. Some of his soul rode each of those tracers which cut across the murky sky and buried itself into the under fuselage of the Jerry.

He laughed aloud in his seat as he saw the Jerry go over in a rapid bank and peer under his wing, looking for the assailant who struck without warning. Brick held his nose to the target. He forgot to fly his ship. He was moving after that frightened Fokker. The muzzles of his guns followed it through the arc of the slip. He saw smoke curling up from its side where the tracers were probing for the gas tank.

Then there was an orange burst of flame from around the motor base. He stopped watching it. No need to watch a flamer after the first puff of smoke from around the motor. He turned for the other two of the enemy. He found that they had Midge boxed in into a death trap. One on each side of him, herding him toward the earth, each of them veering inward in turn, ripping his right and left sides full of lead with

each swerve. Riding him down—down—with Midge fighting desperately to escape them, to escape the trap they had made for him.

Brick was throwing the Spad through the little space which separated him from the three ships. If Midge could only hold out another minute— He risked a long burst at the Jerry on Midge's right. He saw splinters fly from a wing tip. He pushed his stick to the instrument board. And then he saw Midge's crate wobbling about like a drunken thing. It fluttered for a moment, sticking his nose straight up into the air. Midge's head was lolling back over the camel back. It flopped forward again as the nose of the ship went down. It bobbed about as the Spad went into a fast spin.

**L**IKE a demon Brick struck at the nearest ship. He was in point blank range. There could be no miss. He knew when he tripped his guns that his first burst would rend and tear a path through that Fokker so big that all the air in creation would flow through that gap. But it was too late! Midge was going down—spinning drunkenly—a Fokker still throwing lead at him.

The Vickers spat flame and death at the nearest ship. The burst, with its full fury, smashed into the side of the fuselage, close to the lower wing hinge pin. There was a rending and a grinding from the Fokker. The wing swung free and the flying and landing wires curled and twisted as the tension which held them in place relaxed with the splintering of the wing. It flapped there for a minute, vibrating with the noise of a drum—a big drum—sounding over the roar of motors and the clatter of machine guns, then it collapsed into a shapeless mass that folded itself back about the neck of the pilot. The good wing thrust itself upward toward the patch of red in the sky where the sun was trying to shine away the murk of early morning, and, diving like a plummet, it smashed into the earth.

The third Fokker escaped Brick. It took alarm at the sight of this second victim going to destruction. Reluctantly it gave up the pursuit of Midge's crippled ship. It turned about and zoomed upward for a brief second, turning loose a vengeful burst that sent splinters flying from the left wing of Brick's ship. Then, as he dived after it, it turned under full gun and hedgehopped away toward the north.

For a moment Brick turned as if to run it down, but then he had a sight of Midge Parker going down into that soup below him, his ship spinning in a slow spiral as if a weak hand were trying to right it and to bring it down without washing it out. He went down beside it. He could see that Midge's head was straight with the crash pad now. It meant that Midge must be sitting up. He forgot where the earth might be. He was watching Midge trying to bring his ship down safely.

Then they were over a rough field. It was behind the lines on Allied ground. Once an ammunition dump had occupied the field. It was still littered with empty cases and the refuse of war. He saw that Midge had succeeded in getting his nose up and his wings straightened out. The spiraling spin had stopped, the Spad was mushing in—but still with a lot of forward speed. Midge was too close to the ground to do anything about it. Brick could not tell that he was flying half blind—with no idea how close he might be to the earth. He was slipping to kill that forward speed, then the right wing dug in. The beam snapped with the report of a shotgun. Midge's crate stuck its nose into the ground, shuddered for a moment and went over in a complete somersault, landing on its back.

**B**BRICK, his eyes fastened on the ground, pancaked his ship in. He felt his spreader bar smack against some hard object. He felt the nose of the Spad tip down. With a lightning-like motion of his hand he gave her full

throttle for an instant and pulled the stick back in his lap, blasting the tail back on the ground and digging the tail skid into the ground. Then the landing gear collapsed with the strain. The fuselage settled to the ground. The prop dug in, still under power, and shattered itself into a billion bits of flying splinters, and the Spad came to a shocking halt.

Brick was out of his ship almost before the splinters had stopped flying. He dashed back to where Midge lay in the wreckage. He was praying that the washout would not burn. It did not. He found Midge, still strapped inside his seat, dangling upside down in the wreckage, gas and oil soaking through his clothing. He cut him out, somehow, still praying that it would not burn.

There was an ugly smear of blood flowing down Midge's face. He stretched him out on the ground. The smear ran from a wound in the head under the helmet. He ripped the helmet off and wiped away the blood with his handkerchief. He breathed a sigh of relief. It was not bad. A glancing slug against the bone. Knocked out. Even as he looked down at the wound Midge opened his eyes.

That quiet smile was back on Midge's face.

"Brick," he said softly. His hand touched Brick's hand. "I'm glad, Old Timer. You didn't understand, I guess. At first I hated you like hell, because you were big and I was little. I always wanted to be big and strong like you are—to make guys like me because I could fight like you can. Then I found out that you were forcing yourself to fight, and I pitied you. You see, I knew that fear with you was just a matter of finding out that you were just as good a man alone as with a crowd. I wanted to teach you that. I thought perhaps that if I could taunt you enough you'd go out and make the test to find out the truth. I knew if you ever did that you'd be the Brick Sutton you wanted to be,

and the Brick you wanted to make the world think you were. . . .

"I went a little too far, I guess. I didn't want to make you hate yourself like that—so that you'd take it all at once. I've liked you a lot, Brick—better than anybody else I ever knew, I guess."

**T**HERE was a weary note in his voice.

"Don't think too hard of me, Brick. I did it for you. I wanted you to be you—to make that magnificent body of yours a thing of fearless nerves—and not a hollow shell into which the soul of Brick Sutton cowered at the thought of going it alone.

"I watched you today. I was watching you when I got that rap on the skull. You were great—you'll never hear me whistling again 'Hail, hail, the gang's all here.' You were a gang fighter all right, Brick. You take 'em on in gangs—and you're yellow like I said—yellow like gold. Now go 'way and leave me die in peace."

"Hell," snorted Brick. "Where do you get that dying stuff? You got a scratch on the bean—a little one that don't amount to much. I'm going to pick you up and carry you out of here to the first transportation I see, and then I'm going to take you back to the field—you little runt. You and me is going to show that gang some flying as is flying—pronto."

There was a light of great joy in Midge Parker's eyes.

"You mean I'm not drilled through the brain? You mean I only got a scratch and it knocked me out?"

"Sure," grinned Brick. "It bounced off your ivory head. Come on, crawl up on the shoulders. I'm not going to lift you. . . ."

And so they came to the road and found a motor truck that gave them a lift back to the tarmac of the 8th. They spoke but little on the way back. A lot of curious doughboys looked in the truck and saw a big pilot and a little

pilot. The little pilot had his head pil-  
lowed on the big pilot's lap. They  
grinned and went on.

Aviators were all crazy, anyhow.  
Those two cuckoos had burned up some  
more government money—somewhere  
there was the wreck of two airplanes,  
and these two birds had crawled out to  
go back for two more. So the dough-  
boys swung up the road. They did not  
know that in the body of that truck one  
of the greatest flying partnerships the  
war saw was being formed, and that  
Midge Parker had found the man he  
wanted Brick Sutton to be and that  
Brick had found himself.

**B**ACK in Philadelphia, in that dis-  
trict west of Sixtieth Street, known  
as West End, the war had wrought  
great changes. Dugan's bar was a thing  
of the past. The area was drained of  
young men. There was an air of sad-  
ness over the whole district—and an  
unusual quietness. Perhaps it was ex-  
plained by the windows in which were  
hung little red and white flags, most of  
them with blue stars on the white field  
—but several of them with gold stars in  
place of the blue.

Still, in one house in West End there  
was a festive spirit. In the house of  
Micky Sutton, boss kiln tender for  
Connor's brick yard. Old Mike, dressed  
in his full dress regalia, top hat and all  
dug out of the trunk only for the an-  
nual parade of the Sons of Hibernians  
and for the Seventeenth of March, was  
standing in the midst of a host of his  
friends, reading laboriously for the sev-  
enteenth time from that day's edition of  
the *Inquirer*.

"Lieutenant Michael (Brick) Sutton,  
8th Pursuit Squadron, A.E.F., was to-  
day decorated by the French, Belgian  
and American governments for out-  
standing gallantry and bravery in the  
face of the enemy. Lieutenant Sutton  
on his first time in action shot down  
three enemy ships. Later he performed  
at the risk of his life a perilous mis-  
sion entrusted to him by General Head-  
quarters, and then, again at the risk of  
his life, he met and defeated, single-  
handed, three enemy Fokkers who had  
a moment before shot down his flying  
mate, Lieutenant Alfred (Midget)  
Parker.

"The *Inquirer* congratulates Mr. and  
Mrs. Michael Sutton, Sr., of 6310  
Cedar Avenue, West Philadelphia, on  
the bravery of their son, as does the  
whole of the country."

Micky Sutton reached for the bottle  
on the shelf and nodded his head. The  
whole of West End did likewise.

"Sure, he's one foine broth of a boy,  
as I always said," remarked Mr. Sut-  
ton. "He handled thim Huns just loike  
he handled the gang of boys around  
here—no less—and he hasn't got a bone  
in his body that won't foight at the drop  
of the hat." He nodded his head in sat-  
isfaction. "It's after his father he takes.  
I mind me that I would have been a big  
soldier in that scrap with Spain if it  
hadn't been for the fact that I had the  
bad luck to get poisoned with the  
canned Willie they fed us soldier boys  
—and I haven't been able to eat corned  
beef ivr since—no less."

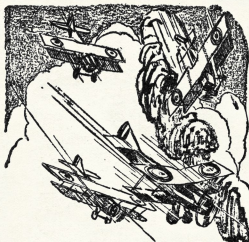
And West End nodded. After all,  
Brick Sutton belonged to them. They  
had a right to nod.

#### THE END



Look for the bull's-eye on the magazines you buy.  
The sterling-silver hall-mark of action-adventure fiction!





# The Sky Trap

By Wallace Bamber

A Complete  
Air War Novel

The wildest crew that ever roamed the skies—Rascals of Hell!—They rode the lone air trail of death, until they tricked it!



**F**RAMED against the afterglow of the long set sun were five shimmering specks. Captain "Wild Bill" Donovan stood out on the western hangar line of the "Rascals of Hell" squadron's mountain encircled drome, chewed the tips of his waxed mustache, ground his teeth, and beat the ground savagely with his bullet-tipped swagger-stick. From his tightly creased lips sputterings came. Word sputterings, curses.

"Are my men coming back? Or is it the damnable Huns of von Hoffman who have blasted them from the sky, and just flying back this way to tell me about it?"

The Captain shaded his eyes with his

tensed fingers, peered intently into the afterglow.

"Damn it!" he cursed, and kicked his boot into the turf. "One. Just one of my ships is coming back. The rest are Huns."

One thin winged shape was being chased by four planes with heavy, thick, upper wings, and thin spindly, lower ones. Four Hun Fokkers were after one American Spad.

"One. One," Wild Bill mumbled over and over again. "And I sent out four. What to hell has happened to the rest?"

Donovan paced up and down the hangar line alternately swearing and praying. Swearing at von Hoffman's

Huns, and praying that his lone returning pilot could stretch his flight long enough to make it back safely to his own drome. On and on the fleeing Spad came, one wing hung low and black smoke poured brokenly from the exhausts. But the Huns were gaining.

"God," Donovan stewed. "There isn't another Allied ship within miles. Mitchell was right when he said I would have it all to myself up in this sector. Yeah," he sneered, and whirled the swagger stick around his head savagely. "Yeah, von Hoffman and I have it together," he ranted sarcastically. "Me with ten ships and him with about forty."

**T-R-R-R-R-R-R!**

A tracer stream from the Hun's Spandaus spewed over the Spad's wings and kicked up dust at Donovan's feet. The machine gun at the ordnance tent started yammering. The nut twisters of the Rascals of Hell were going into action. One made a jump for the only two-place plane on the deadline, leaped into the rear seat, and threw the muzzles of the twin Lewis' upwards.

**T-r-r-r-r-r-r! T-r-r! T-r-r!**

The Spad with the crippled wing and the sputtering engine sky-stumbled into the area over the drome. The Hun pilots dipped their noses and, disdaining the fire from ground guns, piqued downward with their own guns blazing. The bullets splattered and ricocheted on the hard earth of the drome.

"Zoom up and give 'em a last belt!" Donovan yelled, and recognized the pilot of the returning ship. "Show 'em, damn it, that Rascals of Hell fight to the last. Show 'em, Weber. Show 'em. It's your last chance."

And "Pinky" Weber, even though he never even heard the captain's charge, knew that it was his last chance. He turned quickly, like a stag at bay, headed his crippled ship right into the midst of the oncoming Fokkers, zoomed as though he was going to cut right through them. The Fokkers spread out,

parted. Pinky pressed his Bowdens, hopefully.

"One burst," he mumbled. "Just one burst to show the C. O. I've still got fangs."

There was no answering stream of tracer feathering out of his nose. Both guns were still jammed, hopelessly jammed. The engine sputtered a few times more, erratically, then went dead. The Spad fell off its zoom, slipped, started to spin. The Huns came in again. Bursts from their Spandaus ripped the sliding Spad from wing tip to wing tip. Pinky held his breath, kicked in with rudder for all he was worth, got the nose down again, sensed the whirl of bullets around his head, ducked, flipped back on the stick, just in time to prevent his ship from tearing into the tarmac head on.

There was a cloud of dust and resounding crash when his gear hit the ground. The back of the seat was telescoped into the gas tank, and Pinky was sandwiched between as the Spad went over on its nose paused a minute precariously, then flopped over on its back.

Still gasping, he held the stick with one hand, the fingers were clamped rigidly to the Bowden trips. When the Hun Fokkers exhausted their ammo strafing the drome, they zoomed away and flew homeward.

Donovan reached the cracked ship at just about the same time Sergeant Long John Maloney did. Together, they got the senseless pilot out of the wreckage.

"Water," Donovan yelled. "Water! Can't you guys see he's out?"

Captain Wild Bill Donovan was hard, hard as nails. When he gave commands, the words rattled out of his mouth like ice cubes falling on a marble floor. A nut twister jumped to obey his orders. Long John Maloney rolled the fat, pudgy pilot over on his back, patted his alabaster cheeks, spoke to him softly in his rich Irish brogue.

"Git oop, Lootinunt. All th' Hoons in th' sky can't knoock ye doon an' kape ye theer."

"Lay off, Sergeant!" Donovan barked. "Do you think he's a baby? Give him a kick in the ribs and bring him to. He ain't hit."

WHEN the nut twister returned with the pail of water, Donovan grabbed it and threw the whole thing over Pinky's head. Pinky's eyes opened, blinked. The color returned to his cheeks and he flushed when he recognized the C. O. standing over him.

"I-I-I did my best, Captain," he stammered, weakly. "But there were just too many of 'em. Rascowitz and Bradford and Garner went down. I-I-I think I'm lucky to get back."

Captain Donovan pursed up the corner of his mouth, sneered.

"Yeah, it had to be you that would come back. All my good men got it in the neck. How in hell you ever sneaked into the Rascals of Hell is more than I know. Major Hawkins knows what kind of pilots I use up here. He must have been drunk when he sent you up. Well, by God, he'll get you back. And he'll get you back on the first available transport. I need men up here, he-men." The captain laid heavy stress on the "he." "Yes, he-men. Not pink-faced boys with school-girl complexions and yellow streaks running up and down their backs—"

Long John Maloney glowered at the captain, pinpoints of fire flashing in his steel-blue eyes.

"I-I-I ain't yellow," Pinky broke in, feebly, and brought himself up to a sitting position. "There were just too many of them."

"Why didn't you shoot at 'em?" Donovan countered.

"I did," Pinky answered and struggled to his feet, unsteadily. "I did, until my guns jammed, both of them."

Captain Donovan walked over to the cracked plane, ordered the nut twisters standing around near it to get a hold and turn it over right side up. Pinky Weber stumbled over after the captain leaning on his big Irish sergeant's shoulder.

When the machine was right side up, the captain got up on the step, fingered the breeches of the twin Vickers guns, extricated in a second the jammed shells from each one. He stepped down, turned his gaze on Pinky and bored him through with a leering stare.

"Lieutenant?" he asked, and the tone of his voice was icy, while in the depths of his eyes there was a flicker like frost that has passed over steel. "Don't you know how to clear a jam?"

Pinky nodded his head affirmatively. Maloney glowered again.

"Well, why didn't you do it?" Donovan rasped. "Did you think you could scare von Hoffman's men by aiming your guns at them?" The captain's voice was biting sarcasm.

PINKY WEBER hung his head sheepishly, didn't answer. For the second time in the past few weeks, his roseate world of hope had gone glimmering. Some days before he had been picked up on the Paris streets at night, drunk. That day he had spent in the brig. A new pilot with wings just sprouted he had been sent up to the pilot's pool at Orley for assignment to front line duty. But he sneaked off to see the sights of Paris without a pass and landed in the brig. In the brig he had gone berserk with rage and tried to kill half the Marine M. P.'s on duty there.

"Humph!" the Orley C. O. had exclaimed when an A. P. M. brought him back and handed him a letter from "Hard Boiled" Smith, the Marine commandant there. "So you're hard boiled, eh? Well, I've got just the place for you. I'm going to send you up to Wild Bill Donovan. He's just ordered a replacement for his Rascals of Hell squadron, the 19th Chasse. From what it says in this letter, you are just about what he wants. A tough egg? A hard boiled guy? One who eats nails? You can be as tough as you want up there, but you'll do all your hard boiled stuff on the German side of the lines. Those

pilots in that outfit never get leaves until they have distinguished themselves in action. It's the Foreign Legion of the American Air Service. You ought to fit in there okeh."

With a wave of his hand the C. O. dismissed him, and was glad of the chance to. Wild Bill's orders were usually hard to fill and took time. This time he had been lucky, for Donovan's order had just come in that day.

And Pinky Weber was happy. What he wanted most of all was to see action, action and lots of it. The Rascals of Hell seemed to hold out that promise, but when he got to the squadron H. Q. at that time way up in Alsace, his first ray of hope went glimmering. For he fit into that outfit just about like a square plug fits into a round hole. Every pilot in it was an Ace with more than five enemy planes to his credit, and the C. O.'s tunic front glistened with medals and ribands. Pinky was just a fledgling flyer, his glittering new silver wings meant nothing in that outfit. It would have been better if the silver threads had not been so new, had lost some of their burnish. And it would have been much better if Pinky's name didn't show on his service record as being Clarence Percival Weber.

"Clarence Percival Weber," "Wild Bill" had exclaimed when he first glimpsed the name. "Good Cripes," he spoke to the adjutant. "Do you see what the cat has just brought in?"

From that moment on, Pinky's life in the squadron was one long nightmare. If it hadn't been for Rascowitz, a former pilot of the Russian Imperial Flying Corps who had transferred to the Rascals of Hell from the French, Pinky would have been tempted to go "over the hill." But Rascowitz who was his bunkie, called him, Webby, and kidded him out of those foolish notions.

"Stick it out, Webby," Rascowitz had said, and patted his massive hand on Pinky's flabby shoulders. "You'll belong yet. The boys ain't bad, just tough. And 'Wild Bill's' got a heart of gold.

You gotta do something before he notices you, but just keep a stiff upper lip and keep pluggin'. You'll get your chance."

And now for the second time Pinky's hopes were dead. Wild Bill was just as hard as ever, and Rascowitz had gone. No more would he be able to hear the big Russian's cheering words, his last officer friend in the outfit was gone, shot down by a diving Hun of von Hoffman's Flaming Circus, so named because of the variegated colors in which their Fokker planes were painted. He walked over toward his hangar with Long John Maloney.

"I guess it's the end," he mumbled, and his lips quivered. "The Captain will be sending me back. I suppose I'll end up at Blois?"

"It ain't so," his big Irish sergeant replied. "Oi'll twist 'is bloomin' head off wit' me Stilson if he sez anither woord."

CAPTAIN DONOVAN half walked, half ran back to his squadron H. Q. He was red hot, and his eyes flashed fire when he burst in the H. Q. door. For the third time in as many days von Hoffman's Flaming Circus had blasted his flights from the skies. Not a single Spad pursuit ship remained in his hangars. The von Hoffman's flyers had downed them all, and the last remaining one was a washed out wreck right in the middle of his own airdrome.

"Murphy!" he snapped at the adjutant. "Get me Corps Air Service H. Q. and make it snappy. I want to tell that swivel chair colonel down there what I think of him. Sending me pilots like Weber, Good Cripes, what does he think I'm runnin' up here, a nursery?"

The adjutant passed the buck on down to the sergeant major who got busy on the phones.

"What about those ships coming up from Colombey?" the adjutant asked, when "Wild Bill" had cooled down sufficiently to sit down at his desk. "The



men ought to be here about any time now, hadn't they?"

"Ought to be! Ought to be!" snapped Wild Bill in reply. "They *ought to be* here right now. In fact they should have been here long ago. I should have known better than send that gang down after their own ships. They're perhaps laying around in some Nancy café draped over their glasses fighting the battle of the S.O.S. with the madamoiselles."

Captain Donovan was right. At the precise moment he was talking, everyone of Tegner's flight, from the Big Swede flight commander down to Leo Ritz who was the youngest and smallest of the lot was having one wild time in the *Café Stanislaus* in Nancy. Merri-ment, song and laughter filled the main room as the pilots of the Rascals of Hell squadron filled their glasses and drank to the health of each one of them.

When they were on the front they were hell flying pilots, winged death to everyone that loomed in their path. Cursing, swearing, fighting, they went to their dooms in the sky just as easily as different men would walk up to the ticket window and buy tickets for a prize fight. Nothing phased them. Not one of them cared whether he ever saw the States again or not. Most of them would have been taken in by the authorities if they did.

"That's a quiet sector," General Mitchell told Wild Bill when he ordered the squadron to Alsace. "You can give your boys a rest. They need it."

And Wild Bill despite his better judgment took the general's word for it. He split the squadron up, took two flights over with him, and sent the third under Lieutenant Tegner to Colombey, the Air Service Advance Depot, to get new equipment.

NOW, his first two flights were no more. Despite the general's word, that the sector would be a quiet one, he found it entirely different. Von Hoffman and his Flaming Circus which

he had encountered before on the front was there, and with just about three times as many planes and pilots as Wild Bill Donovan could muster under his wing. Three days had sufficed to clean him out.

No wonder he was mad, storming, raving. Any other C. O. without Donovan's irascible temper would have been almost as bad under the same circumstances.

His Rascals of Hell had been blasted from the sky. Donovan was a proud commander and he felt his defeats bitterly. After being used to the men he had under him, to have to put up with a new pilot like Pinky Weber made him worse than ever.

"Is this Colonel Higgins?" Donovan rasped into the mouthpiece when the sergeant handed the phone over to him. "Well, all hell has popped open up here," Donovan went on when he got the answering "yes" from the other end of the wire. "I need ships and I need men. And I need them right now. Get me colonel, I say, *men*. I want real men, hard eggs, not any more blooming pansies like Major Hawkins sent me the last time." The transmitter fairly smoked as Wild Bill rattled on with his seething vituperation. "And tell the general that if he thinks this sector is quiet I would like to know what his idea of an active one is. Von Hoffman is over here with his whole damn circus, and all I got to pit against him is one flight with six pilots and I don't know where in hell they are. The general told me to give 'em a rest, and they're taking it. God knows where? Get me some ships and get me some men. Men! Men!" Wild Bill's voice rose in pitch as he talked, and when no more words would come from his rasping throat, he slung up the receiver angrily and broke the connection.

"And when Tegner and his gang do get back," he snapped at Murphy, "slap arrests on every one of them. Confine each one of them to quarters. I'll let 'em know there's a war on. That the

Rascals of Hell squadron is no place for good time Charleys. They'll eat mud before I get through with them this time!"

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## CHAPTER II

### *The Ghost Flyer*

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**D**ESPITE all the cheering words that Pinky Weber's big Irish sergeant could muster up, Pinky was in the dumps, and in the dumps plenty when he crawled into his bunk that night. Mess had been a morbid affair. But five officers sat at the table where from 15 to 20 were usually gathered. The chairs in the empty places were turned back side to. They would never be filled again by the pilots who had sat in them before. Of the five officers that ate silently that night, the silver wings of the pilot were missing from three. Pinky was one of the two who rated wings, the other was the C. O. himself.

"Lieutenant!" The C. O. had snapped, just before the mess was over. "I'm going to give you one more chance." Pinky had straightened, his eyes brightened and hope revived in his breast, only to fade again as the C. O. went on. "I'm going to make you or break you. you're goin' to be a Rascal of Hell or you're goin' to be a corpse. You've got wings, and by God you're goin' to use 'em!" Donovan's voice was like chilled steel. "You're goin' to fly with me tomorrow, and you're goin' to do something."

"What am I going to fly?" Pinky had broken in, knowing that there wasn't a single pursuit ship left in the hangars.

"The Salmson," Donovan snapped in reply. "You're goin' to fly it, and I'm goin' to ride in the back seat and show you how."

Pinky had gulped a couple of times, tried to swallow the food that was in his mouth, but somehow he couldn't, it swelled and stuck in his gullet, and his face flushed alternately pink and white;

while the nails of his fingers tore convulsively into the flesh of his palms.

Flying a plane in Wild Bill Donovan's squadron was bad enough. Flying a plane with the C. O. himself riding in the back seat was worse. Somehow all the strength seemed to sap from Pinky's body when the C. O. delivered his final ultimatum, and Pinky was just able to stagger to the door when his stomach rebelled on him. The food he had eaten came up and out, and bright spots swam in a black void before his blinking eyes.

Now, he rolled and tossed in his bunk and couldn't sleep. And every time he turned, his half-closed eyes glimpsed the empty bunk of Rascowitz' across from him. Half dreamily, half deliriously, he imagined he saw the big Russian sitting there, one hand on his knee and the other wrapped around a bottle of Kummel. There was a smile on his bronzed face. His lips were moving, and he was talking to Pinky.

"Have a drink, Webby." The hand holding the bottle seemed to come toward him. "Cheer yuh up, Webby old kid. Get yuh all primed up to knock off von Hoffman tomorrow. And I'll be ridin' right on your tail to verify it. That'll make you belong Webby old kid. You'll be a Rascal of Hell then. Wild Bill can't overlook any guy who downs von Hoffman."

Then the big figure of the friendly Russian seemed to shrink, grow dim, melt away into the darkness of the cubicle like a fadeout in the movie. Only the ruffled white sheets of his unmade bunk revealed themselves to Pinky as he stared wide eyed into the blackness.

"God. God." Pinky mumbled, and hid his head beneath the covers of his own bunk. "He's gone. I know he's gone. . . . He buried his face in his hands, tried to hide from himself.

"The Silent Squadron?" he mumbled. "Yes. Bradford and Garner have joined it. And Rascowitz, too. Maybe there's a place for me. Saint Christopher can't be half as hard boiled as Donovan. Surely I can make the grade there?"

He jerked spasmodically once or twice, then fell asleep talking to himself.

"BIG SWEDE" TEGNER came out of his stupor about 3 ack emma. Undrapping himself from the marble topped table he had flopped over, he stuck up his head and looked around woozily. The single lamp still burning in the now deserted café multiplied itself into a dozen or so by the time its rays permeated into the Flight Commander's cognac sopped brain. The lieutenant was drunk, painfully so.

"Hey, Ritz," he shouted, and laid back in his chair sloppily, and awaited an answer. He was asleep and dead to the world again, when Ritz pulled himself together from off the sawdust covered floor, spit mouthfuls of dirty sawdust out of his mouth, as he tried to answer.

"Yes sir, but how can I take off when my motor ain't runnin'? Answer me that, Lieutenant, answer me that."

The Big Swede's massive head rolled back and forth on his barrel chest like it was fastened on with a string.

"Prime her," he mumbled. "Prime her. Get her hot and she'll shoot every time."

Ritz gained a handhold on a post near his back, and inched himself gradually upright. Sighting the Big Swede in the hazy distance on the other side of the swinging light, he swung about, half-turned and staggered toward him. Tegner lifted both arms, extended them sideways, then wiggled his hands like he was signaling for a left turn.

"Got you, Lieutenant, got you," Ritz answered, and looked back over his shoulder. "But where in hellsh the rest of the flight?"

Tegner shook his head violently from side to side, like a box fighter who has just been popped on the button, threw back his massive shoulders, straightened in his chair and managed to stagger upright.

"Follow me, men," he stammered. "We got to get back to Wild Bill and the Rascals of Hell or he might move

out and leave us without any hooks to hang our helmets on."

Ritz stumbled around the floor, found three or four more huddled shapes in the grime of the dirty sawdust, and by means of his sharp toed boot kicked enough sense into their befuddled brains to get them to move, stand up, shake themselves and fall in line behind the Big Swede who was weaving a snaky path toward the door.

Once outside in the fresh air of the early morning, the pilots of the Big Swede's Flight shook their collective heads together, and breathed in copious draughts of fresh ozone that were sufficient to bring them out of there stupor long enough for all of them to get oriented in a straight line behind the Flight Commander.

"Have you got formation?" Tegner yelled back over his shoulder at Ritz who was bringing up the rear. "If you have, let's go."

With a sense that must have been instinctive, for the Flight Commander was certainly too many sheets in the wind to know what he was doing he led his cockeyed brood straight to the Nancy airdrome where they had tethered their air mounts a day or so before.

The French poilu on guard there, halted them at the hangar boundary, but they paid no attention. On they went and crashed the guard lines. The poilu twisted his forefinger around the periphery of his right ear and mumbled to the night air.

*"Toute le temps, zig-zag, Les Américains."*

But zig-zag as they were, not one of them failed to find his own plane, and without the help of any ground men or mechanics, one after another melted into the sky at the tail of the Big Swede who took off first.

PINKY WEBER awoke from his sleep, startled, and almost terror stricken, just as a fringe of luminous gray swelled up from the eastern horizon.

Pandemonium had broken loose over the airdrome.

The mutiple tac-tacs of numerous machine guns firing simultaneously, blended in with the roar of wildly revving motors and ghastly shrilling of flying wires to make an unearthly wail that would rack anyone's tympanum, even if they had not just been awakened from a deep sleep.

Big Swede Tegner's flight had come home and was taking the last opportunity to celebrate before they sat down on the ground again and became once more Rascals of Hell with but one thought in their minds.

Kill! Kill! Kill!

Pinky bounded out through the cubicle door into the night. Tracer bullets splattered and ricocheted all over the drome. The blue blazes of engine exhausts traced fanciful grotesque paths in the sky. It looked like the whole German Flying Corps had come over en masse to blow the last remaining Rascal of Hell off the face of the earth. He bounded over toward a shallow trench with all the speed he could muster. The pajama clad figure of the C.O. appeared from nowhere 'out of seemingly miasmatic aura, held up a staying hand, shouted.

"Get to the guns and give those damn fools Hell!"

At the same moment the floodlights of the drome were flashed on. Pinky looked up and gasped, for the planes revealed in the light were Spads with the red-blue and white cocade of the American Air Service painted on the wings and fuselage.

Donovan's commands could be heard all over the drome, above the roar of the engines, above the shrill of the screeching, flying wires.

"Kill 'em! Knock 'em down! Feed the lead to 'em!"

But the machine guns on the ground stilled when the nut twisters who had jumped to operate them saw just who it was flying overhead, and Donovan, despite all his authority and command

could do nothing about it. The Rascals of Hell were just having a lark like a wild bunch of cowpunchers on payday, and the enlisted men knew that even though the bullets from their flaming Vicker's guns might come close, none of the bursts would hit anybody. For the pilots of the Big Swede's flight were knock 'em dead shots with the synchronized guns, and at that precise moment were having the time of their lives watching the scared soldiery below scurrying for cover.

Wild Bill Donovan stood in the center of the tarmac and shook his tightly balled fists at his returning pilots.

"Cut out the monkey business, you blankety-blankety fools. There's a war on. This ain't no carnival!"

He might as well have shouted to the moon and ordered it to obey his commands as to shout upskies to the Big Swede and his playmates. Tegner, of course, never heard him, but he could see the pajama clad C.O. down below chasing around, raving and ranting, so he answered by putting his Spad through all the stunts in the book, and then some. Every one of his pilots followed the leader and dittoed.

**P**INKY WEBER sneaked around from one hangar to another and watched the show. It was good. As an exhibition of stunting he had never seen anything to equal it, not even down at the acrobatic field at Issoudon, where the instructors were supposed to be the last word in fine flyers. Down there, the exhibitions weren't accompanied by a display of fireworks like Tegner and his mates put on with the Vickers and their flaming tracers.

It also tickled Pinky to see the C.O. so put out and helpless. For once somebody had the jump on Wild Bill and he was powerless to do anything about it. At least that was what Pinky thought until he gave himself away by laughing too loud, so loud that the C.O. discovered his presence in the shadow of one of the hangars.



"Weber," he yelled. Pinky stopped his tittering instantly. "Get that Salmson out on the line. Start the motor up and be ready to take off as soon as I get back from H.Q."

Pinky started over toward his cubicle to get his clothes.

"Never mind getting dressed," Donovan snapped. "Go up just as you are."

Pinky Weber looked down at his pajamas, then at the dim shape of the two-seater Salmson just barely inside the nearest hangar, and he shivered. The night was cold, and it would be a darned site colder flying that Salmson. Still the C.O. had ordered it, and there wasn't anything to do but go over and roll the Salmson out. But his sergeant Long John Maloney heard the order, and had the plane out on the line before Pinky got there.

"Tyke 'im oop," Maloney spoke out of one side of his mouth, "an' whipstall 'im. Doomp 'im oot!"

Wild Bill was back and raring to go before Pinky was comfortably installed in the pilot's seat. He swung the gun cradle around and pointed the Lewis' toward the ground and pressed the triggers. Two streams of red-hot slugs poured into the earth.

As soon as he adjusted the phone helmets over his head, he shouted into the transmitter.

"Let's go. Get up there quick and feed those guys some of their own medicine. I'll show them who's running this outfit. And by God I'll show them with tracer!" Wild Bill's voice was scorching, and Pinky's bare feet shook on the rudder bar, and his hand wobbled on the joy stick when he hollered back a meek "Yes sir."

Pinky lifted his left hand and waved it. Maloney pulled the chocks, and Pinky shoved in on the throttle and away on the stick. After a few hundred yards run, the Salmson slid into the air. Donovan stood up in the back seat and aimed his twin Lewis skyward. Even before the Salmson was anywhere near range, he started blazing away with the

Lewis' and he punctuated every burst with a violent oath.

"Get down, you—or I'll blow every-one of you out of the sky. The squadron drunk is over. And it's over now!"

WILD BILL'S words sputtered out of his mouth like exploding fire-crackers, and he squeezed the trips on his guns so hard that he almost bent them. The Lewis' grew red hot from their belching fire. Pinky ruddered his plane toward the nearest cavorting plane and held its nose up while he fed all the gas to the motor. His whole body shook all over and alternate hot and cold flashes passed over him. There were a thousand places he would like to be, any place in fact, but riding in the front seat with the sputtering C.O. behind him. Pinky hoped against hope that Wild Bill wouldn't order him to trip his guns and fire bursts at the renegades, but his hopes went glimmering when the Salmson came into close proximity of the darting Spads.

"Give 'em Hell!" Donovan boomed through the phones. "Feed 'em both guns and feed 'em fast!"

Mechanically, Pinky reached up and tripped the breeches. His heart jumped to his mouth and he felt suddenly weak all over. Limply, his left hand slipped down on the control stick and felt for the Bowden triggers. When a fleeting shape scooted in front of him, he pressed the triggers. A fiery burst shot out through his propeller arc and spewed right through the wings of the Spad. Pinky shut his eyes and released his thumb from the trigger. He just couldn't do it.

Another burst!" Donovan yelled.

"Yes sir," Pinky managed to mutter feebly, pressed his triggers again, and fired wildly. But he closed his eyes and refused to look ahead. He couldn't. For minutes he flew and maneuvered his ship with his eyes tightly closed and every so often he pressed the Bowdens, just so the C.O. wouldn't think he was refusing to obey his orders.

An ungodly screech right in front of him sent terror to his heart, and he opened his eyes quickly, just in time to dip his nose and escape being rammed out of the skies by an oncoming Spad.

"That's it," Donovan boomed. "Cut off their tails if they don't go down!"

But Tegner and his mates had about enough. Their alcohol sopped brains were beginning to clear and the effects were wearing off. The Big Swede wagged his wings and signaled a descent, then dipped his nose and cut the motor. One after the other, they glided down and landed on the tarmac. Donovan kept Pinky flying over them until the last one had landed then he ordered Pinky to go down too.

Tegner and his mates were making a bolt for the mess shack when Pinky's ship set down. The C.O. jumped out of the rear seat before the ship came to a full halt and tore after them.

"Halt, you hyenas!" His booming voice stabbed through the blooming dawn. "Move another step and I'll shoot you all down where you stand!" Donovan brandished his automatic in the air and fairly flew over the intervening ground that separated him from Tegner and his mates.

Tegner drew up with a funny smile on his face and turned about.

"Yes sir, Captain," he answered weakly, and swayed on the balls of his feet.

"You're under arrest!" Donovan snapped when he got up to them. "Get to your quarters and stay there. Don't even stick your noses out until you get orders to do so."

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### CHAPTER III

#### *Turn Back!*

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THE captain herded them into their cubicles like so many sheep, and Tegner's men were just smart enough to go silently and quickly and say nothing back to him. They had soldiered

under him before and knew how to act when he got all heated up.

But Pinky was so weak he couldn't even climb out of the pilot's seat when he taxied up to the line and cut the motor. His big Irish sergeant had to grasp him under the arms and lift him out.

"Niver mind, Lootinunt," he said. "Yere in good wit' 'im noo. Yere flyin' high."

But Pinky didn't care whether he was in good with the C.O. or not. To him it seemed that the whole world had come crashing down and pinned him against the earth. It was all he could do to lift up his quivering limbs and start shambling back to his cubicle, where he stumbled in the door and threw himself down on the bunk, covered his face with his hands and sobbed.

The tongue lashing that Wild Bill Donovan layed on Tegner and the rest of his flight seared into their very souls. They stood silently and listened but their very souls itched to cry out, get out and take the skies against von Hoffman and his Flaming Circus.

"Men!" Wild Bill roared, and his voice almost lifted the rafters of the low ceilinged cubicles. "You play and take perilous chances with machines and yourself while your own buddies are just beginning to rot into the earth they were buried in. Von Hoffman has just about wiped the Rascals of Hell out of the skies. Bradford is gone. Garner, Ras-cowitz. Not one of the boys you flew with on the Somme is left. And here you were, while they were fighting their very hearts out, going to their deaths against tremendous odds—" The pilots sucked in breaths of air. "Yes, you know what you were doing, fooling with the flesh pots of Nancy and sopping up liquor until you were senseless. Yes, you were doing that, while your own squadron mates up here were trying to carry on, carry your load on their shoulders. Now they're dead, every last one of them! What are you going to do about it?" Donovan's voice shrilled off

to nothingness, and he stood before the burned pilots quivering with rage, his hands alternately clenching and unclenching, nervously.

"We'll blow 'em out of the skies," Tegner exploded, and turned on his heel. "Come on boys, let's take to the air and draw the sneaking Huns out of their lair."

They started a rush for the hangars.

"Halt!" Donovan held up his hand and stayed them.

"You're all under arrest in quarters," he snapped. "You made damn fools out of yourselves. Now you're going to pay the penalty. You're going to sit right here on the ground, while I do the flying. Yes, me and Weber. It's up to us to keep up the good name of the Rascals of Hell."

With the words he turned and left them.

"That damn shadow," Leo Ritz exclaimed. "Did you notice him taking pot shots at us up there this morn'g?"

"Yeah," the Big Swede replied, and there was a smoldering fire in his eyes. "I could have killed him. In fact I damn near did. I made up my mind to ram him and started to, but that would have meant the C.O.'s end too, so I pulled away."

"Humph," Whitey Thomas butted in. "If that guy's a Rascal of Hell I'm an ambulance driver. He sucks around the C. O. like a fairy godmother."

"How for a little drink?" Blinky Weinstein broke in and changed the subject, which was becoming all together too personal.

"You said it," the Big Swede replied and made a dive for his trunk locker. "If we can't fly, I guess we can have a drink or so, and if one of you guys will get out the cards we can start a little game. I've still got about 15 francs which says none of you guys can take it from me."

WHILE the singed war birds dived into a high flying poker game, Donovan hurried over to Weber's cu-

bicle and slammed on his door. Pinky rolled over on his bunk and wiped his red eyes hastily, answered.

The C.O. opened the door and strode in.

"Get your clothes on," he ordered. "You and I are going over von Hoffman's drome and raise Hell. I'm goin' to make you a Rascal of Hell or feed you to the worms, one thing or another."

Pinky got up and threw on his clothes half heartedly. He was billed for another flight with the C.O. Pinky would have almost preferred the firing squad than a second flight with him in the back seat, but he stomached his fears and put on a bold front, walked out haughtily when he had finally laced his boots.

"Have your sergeant gas up the Salmson, Lieutenant." Donovan ordered before he left. "And have the Ordnance sergeant refill the Vicker's bandoliers and the Lewis drums. I'll be with you in less than a half hour."

When Pinky passed the Third Flight cubicles, he saw the men in there look out at him hatefully. He turned his gaze and looked at the ground. As he walked past, his face flushed. The jibes hurled at him were far from complimentary. He hurried his step and got out of earshot as soon as possible.

"Gosh," he mumbled dismally. "If Rascowitz was only here it wouldn't be so bad. I could fight it out with him alone. Those guys think I'm playing up to the C.O. I know they do."

Long John Maloney saw the wretched look on Pinky's face as he walked over toward the hangar, and he greeted him with a broad smile on his own.

"'Tis a foine day, Lootinunt. Th' Hoons 'll be fallin' thick an' fast fer ye this mornin'."

"If I don't fall myself?" Pinky replied, and tried to force a half smile to his own face, but the attempt was in vain. His features only contorted up more hopelessly. "But gas up the old bus and I'll give it a try."

"Th' Hoons can't git ye doon, Lootin-

unt, ner th' C.O. ayther. Ye got 'em licked right noo."

Donovan came back before the Ordnance sergeant finished with the guns.

"Hurry, hurry, Sergeant," he rasped. "I haven't got all day to wait."

The sergeant looked over at him coldly, muttered something to himself, but was careful enough to turn his face when he muttered.

"All right, sir," he finally answered. "All the drums are loaded, but you had better watch that right Lewis. The breech is sticking a little."

"I'll use the left," Donovan answered, then climbed in the cockpit and adjusted his belt and phone helmets. Maloney spun the prop, and Pinky let it warm for a few minutes before he waved at Maloney to remove the blocks.

"Take off and fly over to Fraise," Donovan spoke through the phones as the plane taxied over the ground to the starting point. "Pick up the lake there and fly down it until you get to the dam at the other end. The trenches are right beyond it, and I have got to do some observing there. De Mitry's H.Q. says the Germans are moving in there under cover of night, preparing for the attack. When I signal you there I'll be done, then I want you to fly over von Hoffman's drome. I'm going to give him some of his own medicine."

Pinky nodded his head slowly up and down as Donovan talked. He understood him fully, too fully. He knew that strafing von Hoffman's drome would stir up a hornets' nest, and he couldn't figure how the C.O. could have a chance. "Still," he reasoned with himself. "He's with me and he'll get it if I do."

At the end of the field Pinky ruder and swung around to face his ship into the wind. The sun was just breaking into view over the mountains to his back. With a look to each side of his plane, he opened up on the throttle and gave the gas to his engine. His hands and feet shook so much that the Salmson wobbled all the way down

the field, but thanks to Maloney's proper rigging, it took off of its own accord when it gained flying speed. Pinky's strength wasn't even sufficient to pull back on the stick and depress the tail. He did manage to kick in enough with his rudder to get it to circling, and while the Salmson circled around in the now pearly skies above the drome, Pinky was able to pull himself together sufficiently to straighten it out and head for Fraise.

Fraise was just a small village hidden among the mountain peaks of the Vosges, but it served as the H.Q. of the only two American regiments doing duty at the far off tip of the far flung Western Front. Beyond Fraise was Lac de Longemer, an artificial lake that had been made when the waters of the Lauch were impounded years before to operate a gigantic power plant. Since the war it had been idle, and now the trench lines separating the French and German fronts were just a few hundred yards beyond the spillways. In fact the 371st and 372nd American Infantry working with the French under De Mitry were holding that precise sector guarding the dam and the old power plant.

French Intelligence had information that the Germans were going to attack and take the dam and lake in order to convert it into a power plant and nitro factory for their own war use. Corps Air Service had ordered Captain Donovan's squadron to make a reconnaissance there and see if the Germans were moving in troops for an attack. The presence of von Hoffman's Flaming Circus in that sector made it look likely, for they were a crack group of pursuit flyers and were usually used where the fighting was hardest and toughest. The tip of the line in Alsace had always been considered a quiet sector. General Mitchell thought so when he sent the Rascals of Hell over there for a rest. Wild Bill Donovan found out differently the very first day he arrived. Von Hoffman had cleaned him out of planes and pilots.

Now he was up in the air with an in-



experienced pilot attempting to do what a whole squadron had been ordered to do. Pinky didn't know just what sort of a mission he was on. Any mission with the fiery tempered C.O. in the back seat was a desperate one for him. And flying over Lac de Longemer made it worse. The area over the lake was a hell hole for flyers, and all experienced ones most studiously avoided it. Mountain encircled as it was, the down drafts of air from the icy peaks swirled down the slopes to the lake surface then bounded up into the skies crazily forming a seething vortex of air eddies that rocked even the staunchest of air crafts.

But Wild Bill Donovan disdained nothing, man made or natural, he boldly ordered Pinky to fly right into the teeth of the seething eddies. Donovan had Pinky circle the Regimental H.Q. at Fraise twice, while he signaled the commander below. Then when answering panels were laid out on the ground, he ordered Pinky to pull away and head down the lake toward the spillway.

Even though Pinky gained an altitude of 10,000 feet before he headed out over the lake. He lost almost half of it the minute his plane flew over the water. Down, down, he dropped like a shot in a tube. The snarling waters of the lake seemed to be rushing up at him like a gigantic geyser. He threw in stick, rudder, and everything he had to try and stop the downward descent, but the ship acted as though it was gripped by a giant hand and being drawn into the bosom of the waters.

**D**ONOVAN in the back seat froze onto the gun cradles and shouted at Pinky through the tubes.

"Stick your nose down and give her the gas!"

Pinky reached up to give the throttle a push, but at the same moment an up-draft caught his ship and hurled it upward almost as fast as it had dropped downward.

Pinky jammed in rudder and stick frantically, managed to get the Salmson

headed back toward Fraise. Still it shimmied and shook in every joint and groaned like it was going to fall apart.

"Back! Turn back!" Donovan shouted.

Pinky looked back over his shoulder pitifully. He was scared, every contorted line on his usually smooth features showed it. Flying against a foe one could see was one thing. Flying against an unseen foe, the elements, was another. Pinky was beaten.

"Go on! Turn back!" Donovan boomed, and bracing his feet inside the cockpit, he swung the guns around until both muzzles pointed directly at Pinky's helmeted head. "Turn! Turn back or I'll press the triggers."

Pinky Weber, with the fear of God in his heart, threw all caution to the winds. With a violent twist of his controls he threw the Salmson up on one wing and went around in a 90 degree bank. Wild Bill Donovan was hurled out of the after cockpit, but he grasped a hold on the Lewis muzzles, and though the sights tore his hand unmercifully when they slipped through his grip, he clenched tighter. His safety belt kept him from being hurled off completely. When Pinky turned back to look again, he was clambering back into the cockpit, hand over hand up the swinging muzzles of the Lewis guns. And on his face there was a smile, a defiant smile. The C.O. had dived with death and beaten it. When he was firmly settled back in the cockpit, he motioned Pinky on with a wave of his arm. And Pinky saw when he looked that the C.O.'s hand was gorey, crimson, where it had been torn by the jagged sights.

He turned forward and gritted his teeth. In that desperate moment in the turbulent air over Lac de Longemer, the pilot inherent within the chubby body of Clarence Percival Weber was born.

"To hell with the currents," he swore with sudden decision. "I'm going to drive this bus to hell and back if the C.O. wants me to."

## CHAPTER IV

*Hun Lead*

THE staggering Salmson rocked and shook like a cork on a stormy sea, all the way down the lake, Pinky held it grimly to its course, and laughed inwardly at the Old Man of the Winds who was trying to hold him back. The gigantic dam, hundreds of feet high and impounding millions of tons of water, passed by fleetingly under his wingtips. The jagged trench lines, crossing and criss-crossing a narrow green valley, loomed directly ahead. Doughboys of the 371st and 372nd Regiments lolled in the trenches and looked upward.

Planes with the red, blue, and white cocarde were curiosities in that neck of the woods. The Germans in the opposite trenches looked up too. They had never seen an American plane before either. But they didn't spend all their time looking.

Black puffs of smoke began to dot the sky around Pinky's plane. The archies started slowly, then they began to fire faster as the Salmson plunged farther into German territory. Pinky zig-zagged and side-slipped and had no trouble eluding their fire, for he was still high up out of effective range.

"Down now, get down," Donovan shouted, and pointed straight ahead to a small woods where three roads seemed to converge.

Pinky threw his stick forward and piqued. The wind shrilled through his wires and struts as the plane gathered speed in its downward plunge. Coming closer it could be seen that there were five or six roads converging at the woods instead of three that were easily visible from the air. But the vaguely discerned roads were camouflaged over top, and dark shadows seemed to be moving beneath the camouflage, coming from the rear and creeping forward toward the lake and the dam.

Pinky held his ship nose downward until his landing gear almost brushed into the tree tops, then he wheeled around on one wing, circled steeply, and looked down through his outer wing struts at the terrain below.

Machine guns on the ground and hidden in the woods opened up with a veritable hail of fire. Pinky felt a crackling and spitting in his wings. Donovan turned his guns downward and opened up on the camouflaged road. The dark shadow beneath the camouflage seemed to disintegrate, dissolve and fade into the woods on either side.

There was no doubt now that the Germans were preparing for an attack. The roads leading to the woods were fairly choked with troops.

Pinky went up in a fast zoom, then *reversed* quickly, and dived down with both his guns blazing. A section of burlap camouflage ignited from one of his tracers and burst into flame and smoke, revealing clearly a German ammunition train moving beneath it.

"Traverse the length of the road!" Donovan howled, and punctuated his command by swinging his own guns into action again.

PINKY zoomed up again *reversed* once more and came back in the opposite direction, two streams of flame belching from his Salmson's nose. More of his incendiary and armor piercing bullets took effect. One motor lorry loaded with ammo exploded, then burst into flame. Soon the whole road was a shambles, trucks burning and exploding, and the traffic becoming so jammed that panic broke. German foot soldiers coming up on the road broke from ranks and ran, ran crazily in any direction to get away from the menacing flames and explosions on all sides.

Finally Donovan called to Pinky over the phones.

"Get out now and get away. Head for von Hoffman's drome. We don't want to waste all our ammo here. Save some for that pig von Hoffman. Show

him that the Rascals of Hell are not through yet."

Pinky had had just enough action to make him thirst for more, and he zoomed away hesitantly, regretting that he couldn't spend more time strafing the troops on the road. Von Hoffman's drome was about ten kilos further south, so he headed the Salmson that way and climbed for altitude at the same time. When he looked back over his shoulder the whole woods behind him seemed to be on fire. Black columns of smoke poured upward, and ever so often a vast mountain of flame would break out, glow for a minute then pale into dark smoke. Apparently, different ammunition dumps were exploding one after another as the fire licked into them.

"Funny," he mumbled to himself as he flew along. "I haven't seen a ship in the sky. I wonder where von Hoffman's Circus is?"

He didn't have long to wonder. For as soon as the Salmson broke out of the cloud patches over the Hun's airdrome, he saw where they were. From twenty or thirty ships were out on the hangar line below him. Painted in their vivid, gaudy hues, they stood out boldly against the brown earth of the drome.

And almost as soon as Pinky began his pique downward, the pilots rushed from the hangars and jumped in their ships.

"Open up on 'em and give 'em hell before they get off!" Donovan shouted through the phones, and went into action with his own guns while the Salmson was streaking earthward.

Pinky gritted his teeth again, threw the stick far forward and sent the groaning Salmson into a vertical power dive. The exhaust belched black smoke and the wildly revving motor roared demoniacally, shaking the fuselage longerons like they were frail scantlings. The sky filled with black mushroom puffs, exploding archies bursts, but Pinky threw on more gas and dived through them like a flaming meteor. When the first Hun ship taxied off the

deadline, Pinky ruddered his nose right over it and pressed both Bowdens. Two blue white streams gushed out of his propeller arc. The flaming tracer bored into the Fokkers wings, Pinky eased over a little on the rudder. The tracer stream traversed the cockpit and the Hun pilot wilted over like soft butter.

Donovan got a brilliant red Fokker trying to get off, by firing his Twin Lewis over the wingtips above Pinky's head, as the Salmson dropped vertically. An explosive bullet pierced the gas tank. The ship burst into flames and ignited another one right beside it.

But Donovan and his pilot couldn't watch all the ships at once. Although they got two more trying to take off, five or six managed to take the air and climb upward. Pinky eased his stick back, leveled off, went up in a zoom and came down again in a downward pique for his nearest opponent.

"Get him!" Wild Bill shouted. "It's von Hoffman!"

**B**UT von Hoffman was wary. He hadn't gained his reputation for nothing. When he saw the round nose of Pinky's Salmson pointed right at him, he pulled back on his stick, then fell away in a fast sideslip. Pinky's Vicker's burst passed harmlessly over his upper wings. Donovan swung his Lewis guns around at him as he zoomed away, but von Hoffman anticipated his burst and zoomed out of the way easily. The German commander was a veritable demon on wings, elusive as a will-o'-the-wisp. Pinky ruddered quickly and tried to line him again, but by that time other Fokkers were in the air, and one had already gained a position on his tail. He no sooner began his bank until the dash in front of him splintered and cracked as a Spandau burst pored in from behind. Pinky's heart jumped to his mouth and he jammed in more rudder, managed to elude the second burst which passed harmlessly between his wings.

"Run," Donovan shrieked through the phones. "Run back over the lake. We can't down them here. We've got a chance over there."

Pinky stuck the Salmson's nose down, and fed all the gas to his motor. The Fokkers darted after him like a hungry wolf pack. Wild Bill Donovan turned backward in the rear seat and blazed away with both guns, managed to keep the Huns far enough off so that their Spandau bursts were ineffective.

Tac-tac-tac! T-r-r-r-r-r-r-r!

Spandau and Lewis clatterings merged into each other. Bullets ripped and tore into fine shreds the linen covering on the Salmson's wings and fuselage. A strut shattered and broke loose, gnawed in two by a vicious Spandau burst. The Salmson yawed over, one wing drooped. Pinky saw the strut go out and froze in his seat. The stick whipped over to one side and the rudder bar kicked against the sole of his foot. Pinky summoned up all of his strength and jammed the stick and rudder over against the pressure. The Salmson straightened. The dam loomed up farther ahead. Pinky pushed on the cockpit rim, jammed in all the throttle he had and prayed for more speed. The six Fokkers after him had swelled to ten now, and the blue gray tracer streams of the Spandas came from all directions. Wild Bill Donovan in the back seat sweated and swore. One Lewis gun jammed, the right one, and he took the drum off and hurled it at the close pursuing Fokker. His aim was good. It drew into the whirling propeller arc of the Fokker and smashed it into bits. The wildly turning Mercedes engine revved up crazily. The uneven propeller hub vibrated it loose from the engine studding, it shook itself from the nose of the Fokker. The plane went down in an uncontrolled spin, to crash right at the foot of the dam.

Pinky sighted the dam and headed right over it. The rising air currents from the now warmer water whisked his ship straight up like it was a feather.

The Huns following behind were wary, and flew to either side. The downdrafts on either mountain side caught their ships and hurled them downward. Pinky's Salmson was thus enabled to open up a wide gap between him and his pursuers by the time he managed to weather the swirling air currents and reach the opposite end of the lake.

AT Fraise the archies of the American troops went into action and harassed the attacking Fokkers, enabling Pinky to gain a little more respite. The wing heavy Salmson had just about exhausted Pinky's none too mighty strength, and he was having all he could do to keep it in its course, let alone reload the Vickers which had long since run through the last bandoliers.

Despite his crippled ship and fastly ebbing strength he managed to keep his speed up until his own airdrome loomed in view in the distance, then all his reserve strength seemed to sap from him. The Salmson yawed over, the nose dropped and it started to spin. The Fokkers were coming on fast, ready to pounce in for the kill. But Pinky didn't care.

What of it? He had done his best and could do no more. The spirit was willing but the flesh was weak. Try as he would he couldn't seem to get the Salmson out of its wing heavy spin. The joy stick threshed about in the cockpit and beat his legs terrifically until they were black and blue all over.

"Nose down and feed in opposite rudder and stick," Donovan yelled frantically through the phones.

Pinky heard him but his voice seemed far away, faint. Fleeting fancies whipped into his tired brain and he saw the old members of the Rascals of Hell flying up toward him and waving to him, beckoning him to come and join the Silent Squadron. The good St. Christopher, his white whiskers trailing in the slipstream of the propeller wash,



flew point in the leading machine, a trim Silver Spad that seemed to glisten and shimmer in the bright sunlight, and smiled at Pinky warmly. The good saint's lips pursed up, quivered framed words.

"Come, come, join us in the Silent Squadron."

Pinky seemed able to read the lips of the old saint, and he nodded his head affirmatively.

"Yes, yes," he mumbled, "I'm coming."

**H**E stuck his hand out instinctively to grasp the joy stick. At the same moment one of the pilots of the Silent Squadron flying before him waved his hand, pointed up. Pinky recognized the pilot as Garner, or thought he did, and he looked up where Garner indicated. A whole flight of Fokkers, Hun Fokkers with brightly painted fuselages and gaudy noses were making ready to pique. The smile passed from the good St. Christopher's wrinkled face, and he drew in his whiskers, fed the gas to his Spad and zoomed after the Huns. Garner, Bradford, and the rest of the Silent Squadron followed him into action.

Pinky grabbed hold of the threshing stick automatically without conscious effort and ruddered after them. He kept looking from one side to the other searching the sky.

"Rascowitz?" he mumbled. "I don't see Rascowitz. I wonder if he's down?"

There was a sudden clattering above Pinky's ship. A Spandau burst tore through the control pit, ripped the linen lose from one side. Wild Bill Donovan's voice, shrill and piercing, blasted in on his eardrums.

"Pull up! Pull up!"

Pinky shook his head like a man coming out of sleep, blinked his eyes, gasped, when he looked forward through his center section struts and saw the hangars of his own drome rushing up to meet him at breakneck speed. He jammed the stick in his belly. The flippers caught.

The wings shimmied, groaned, but held on. The Salmson came out of its dive just a few feet shy of the hangar roofs. Pinky shook his head again, looked to one side, saw a Spad zooming after a Fokker.

"Garner?" he mumbled, still half dazed.

When he looked closer he saw that it was Big Swede Tegner. On the other side of him was Ritz and Weinstein, and above him giving the now fleeing Fokkers a dose of their own medicine was the rest of Tegner's grounded flight. Seeing the predicament their C.O. was in when Pinky's ship stumbled home from Fraise with all of von Hoffman's Flaming Circus on its tail, they had taken the air of their own accord, without any orders, and despite them.

They were just in time. For a few minutes more elapsed time would have seen the end of Pinky Weber and Wild Bill. As it was they got up in time to chase the Huns home, and Pinky came out of his dead stupor just in time to prevent his ship from crashing into the earth headon.

He was still in a daze when he set the ship down on the tarmac and taxied up to the deadline. One after another the pilots of the Big Swede's Flight cut their motors and glided in. Wild Bill Donovan jumped out of the rear cockpit as soon as the ship stopped still, and dashed over to H.Q. Donovan had valuable information and he lost no time getting it to H.Q. He rushed off and left Pinky sitting in the ship. Long John Maloney, his big Irish sergeant who watched over him like a child, unfastened his safety belt and lifted him out. Once on the ground and securely held up by Maloney, his dimmed senses began to return to him.

"Did I get him?" he asked.

"Ye moosta got more'n wun uv thim, Lootinunt," Maloney answered. "And ye got back wit' th' C.O. Ye better git tuh yere mess fer some Java to warm ye oop!"

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## CHAPTER V

### *Leopard Spots*

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PINKY handed his helmet and goggles to Maloney and staggered over toward the mess shack. Maloney took one look at the bullet ridden plane, and shook his head from side to side negatively. It was almost done for. Bullets had riddled the longerons and main wing spars, and there was barely enough linen still in place to sustain it in air.

Tired though he was, and just about all in both physically and mentally, Pinky in his heart felt happy. He was sure he had proved himself now. He felt certain that from now on he would rank as a full fledged Rascal of Hell with all the glories appertaining thereto. He had been through Hell and come back whole. Surely that was the main requisite.

But he reckoned without his fellows. Leo Ritz who had just landed, bumped into him intentionally as he walked down the hangar line. Pinky looked up, into the little pilot's leering face.

"Why hello, Ritz," he stammered. "Glad to see you back."

"Skunk!" Ritz hissed, and there was venom in his tone. "Suck around the C.O. will you, and shoot up your own squadron mates?"

"Captain Don—" Pinky started to reply.

"Captain Donovan nothing." Ritz snapped back and he drew himself up to his full five feet four and stood erect before Pinky. "I'm just tellin' you to watch your step the next time we go on patrol together. There'll be bullets pouring into your ship and they won't be from von Hoffman's men either. It'll be me." Ritz tapped his right forefinger on his chest. "I'm tellin' you now so you'll have a chance. Rascals of Hell don't stab in the dark and run."

Pinky listened with open mouth. Leo Ritz's face blanched white when he spoke and his fists clenched.

Pinky was too tired, too listless, to combat the little ball of fire who confronted him. He dropped his head and moved on toward his own cubicle.

"Yellow," the Big Swede hissed at Whitey Thomas. Even Little Leo backed him down.

"Maybe we'd better wait until we fly with him?" Blinky Weinstein suggested. "Maybe he's okeh in the air?"

"The leopard can't change his spots," Tegner came back. "His spots are just as yellow on the ground as they are on the limb of a tree. He's nothing but a dog robbin' skunk and I know it."

The Third Flight pilots stopped their talking instantly, when Wild Bill Donovan reappeared on the scene. Wild Bill was hot, plenty hot. The pilots sensed it before he opened his mouth.

"Men," he started when he came up to them, all gathered around the Big Swede. "You were under arrest and grounded. Who told you to take the air?"

Big Swede Tegner shifted on the balls of his feet, looked down from his full six feet four to the dynamic little C.O. confronting him, answered slowly.

"Rascals of Hell don't sit idle with folded wings when their C.O. is in trouble. Orders or no orders, no Hun is going to shoot any of our men down if we can help it."

Donovan started to answer then paused. He looked from one pilot to the other interrogatively, finally replied.

"You're right. Rascals of Hell fight to the last despite all obstacles and handicaps." The pilots relaxed, smiles suffused their faces, but Donovan brought them up short again. "But you violated an order, violated your arrest in quarters. You have to be punished. You're confined to the drome until further notice. Don't let me catch any of you down in the *estamint* as the village. Anyway, I think you were just a little hasty. Weber and I could have made it back all right by ourselves. We didn't call for any help."

The C.O. turned on his heel and left them with that parting shot.

"There it goes again," Tegner spoke. "Weber, Weber, did you get it? He must think that barrel of mush is a second Guynemeyer."

"Never mind," Ritz broke in. "I'll take care of him when we get up in the air."

Whitey Thomas said nothing, but he was thinking. When the pilots made for their cubicles. Whitey detached himself from the rest and went over to Weber's cubicle and knocked on the door. Getting no answer he pushed on it with the toe of his boot and went in. Pinky wasn't there.

"It's a good thing," Thomas mumbled as he backed out. "I'd lammed the daylight's out of him if he had of been."

Pinky at that precise moment was on his way to the village *estaminet*. A few minutes later he and Long John Maloney pushed open the door of the Coc d'Or and walked in. A few doughboys and French poilus lolled about at the tables, but it was comparatively quiet. Pinky slumped down at one of the tables and ordered a bottle of beer.

"Sergeant," he spoke when the garçon brought the beer in and set it down on his table, "why is it Tegner's Flight have it in for me? Gosh, I never done anything to any of them." The tone of Pinky's voice was hopeless, and he spoke languidly.

"Ye shot at 'em this marnin'," Maloney replied.

"But it was the C.O.'s orders," Pinky parried.

"Ye shoulda faked a jam, Lootinunt. They think yere tryin' to git in good wit' th' C. O. They think yere a sneak an' a stool pigeon."

PINKY threw his hands on the table palms upward in a gesture of utter despair.

"What's the use?" he mumbled. "I overcome the C.O.s prejudices against me, now I've got all the rest of the squadron against me."

"Ye gotta keep pluggin'," Maloney broke in. "An' I'll help ye, Lootinunt. I know yere all right."

"Keep plugging." Pinky repeated. Rascowitz told me that. Now you tell me. The more I plug the deeper I get. I wish I'd never seen the Rascals of Hell. They're a bunch of snobs. All of them from the C.O. down to the lowest dogrobber."

A scowl flashed over Maloney's face. He pursed up one corner of his mouth. Pinky hoisted his glass of beer. Maloney kept his on the table and glowered at Pinky. Those last words were strong ones. Maloney had been a Rascal of Hell since the squadron was organized. He had been with it all along the front. He knew the men for what they were, tough and hard, but sterling at heart, with the courage of jungle lions and faithful to the very end.

"Lootinunt," he answered. "Them's tough words. Oi can't talk wit' ye man t'man. Oi'm oonly a sarjunt, but yere on th' wroong track, ye better skid oover er ye'll git it in th' neck. Oi said oi'd hilt ye, an' oi' will. Ye gotta keep pluggin' though."

Tears welled up in Pinky's eyes. He shook his head. They broke and slithered down his cheeks. His lips trembled and although he tried to answer no words came. His last friendly contact in the squadron seemed to be slipping from him. He felt like he was in a flat spin with no means of getting out of it.

The door of the cafe was banged open suddenly. Pinky and Maloney both lifted their eyes and looked in that direction. A burley man, an officer, with his head all swathed in bandages and one arm in a sling burst in the open door.

"What?" Pinky gasped, and opened his eyes wide. "God, it can't be. It can't be Rascowitz. He's dead."

"Rascowitz. Lootinunt Rascowitz!" Maloney exploded and jumped up from the table and ran over to him. "Hooly Saint Patrick an' where have ye been?"

Pinky stood up transfixed. He was sure he was crazy. Rascowitz smiled.

"Hey Webby old kid," he greeted the surprised Pinky. "How yuh makin' it?"

Pinky's world suddenly blossomed with new light. Rascowitz, good old Rascowitz was back. Along with Rascowitz' coming returned Pinky's already faded hopes for making the grade in the Rascals of Hell.

"Have a drink," he proffered, and pounded on the table top for a garcon. "Sit down, Ras, and tell us where in hell you've been, and how you got all bunged up."

Rascowitz hoisted one with his good arm.

"To the Rascals of Hell," he toasted. "You can't down them." He swallowed his shot of cognac in one gulp, wiped his lips dry with a flick of his tongue. "But I can't tarry with you boys," he went on. "I got to get back and report to Wild Bill. All hell is going to pop over here on this sector and I got to put him wise. The Huns are massing for an attack and they are going to hit right at the American sector in front of Lac de Longamer. And they have got plenty of troops massed behind the lines to break the hearts of the doughboys. I saw it all before I was able to make my escape and get back here on this side of the lines."

**P**INKY left with Rascowitz and went back to the squadron. Maloney stayed at the Coc d'Or. After Rascowitz made his report to the C.O. he came back to Pinky's cubicle which he had shared with him before he was shot down.

"Webby," he asked and his voice was friendly. "What to hell's the trouble between you and Tegner? His boys are madder than Hell and want to eat you up. Donovan says you are okeh. What have you done?"

Pinky looked up at Rascowitz pitifully.

"I shot at them, Ras. They came home celebrating and shot up the drome. The C.O. sent me up in the Salmson and he went with me. He shot at them

and ordered me to. I did what he said, but honestly Ras," Pinky's lips were quivering. "I shut my eyes and shot blindly when I pressed my Bowdens. I couldn't shoot at them. My heart wouldn't let me. But I know it looks like it. Tracers came from my guns and they saw them of course."

Rascowitz didn't answer right away. His swarthy face scowled up, and he moved his head up and down as if in thought.

"And Ritz chose me," Pinky went on. "But I paid no attention to him. I was too all in to even talk back. The C.O. and I had just set down from a hell strafing fight. I guess Tegner thinks I'm yellow." Rascowitz continued to nod his head. "But I'm not," Pinky went on brokenly. "If you think so I'll go right over and challenge him now, and Tegner, too. If you think it's best."

"No, Webby," Rascowitz replied. "I'll take care of them. You're in my flight and responsible to me. To hell with Tegner and Ritz. You do your flying and fighting against the Huns of von Hoffman and I'll take care of those birds."

The big Russian clenched his fist and the muscles of his huge arm rippled beneath the cloth of his tunic sleeve. He and Pinky said nothing for a moment. Then the cubicle suddenly began to quiver and tremble like it was being shaken by a violent earthquake. And at the same moment a terrific, rumbling roar, split the heavens outside.

The German artillery barrage on the front had begun.

The rumbling increased in intensity, droned thunderously like thousands of cataracts spilling their waters at once.

"I knew it," Rascowitz bellowed. "I was afraid they would start before the French could shift in more troops to stop them. He looked out the cubicle window toward the west. Numerous black specks blotted against the disc of the afternoon sun, seemed to grow in size as Rascowitz looked. "They are



sneaking in behind us," he mumbled and dashed out.

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## CHAPTER VI

### *Desperation!*

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OVER the whole tarmac there was an air of intense excitement and activity. Mechanics were starting up the motors of Tenger's flight, and the pilots were dashing across the field putting on their helmets and goggles as they ran. But when the specks came closer, "Wild Bill" Donovan called a halt. The oncoming specks were not Fokkers, they were Spads, evidently the replacement planes and pilots the C.O. had ordered the day before. One after another they came on in single file. The flight leader circled the field once then came in for a landing. Ten in all, spick and span new 220 Spads, set down and taxied to the deadline.

"Thank God, you're just in time," Donovan snapped at the flight leader when he handed over his orders. "You fellows slip over to the mess now and get some chow. The mechanics will gas-up your planes while you're eating. Come back as soon as you get through ready to take the air for combat."

Maloney came running up the road from the village all out of breath, Pinky saw him and ran to meet him. When ever that big Irishman broke into a run something was up.

"Th' Hoons are breakin' through," he gasped when he met up with Pinky. "A dispatch rider popped in the cafe an' oordered every wun there to his outfit t' prepare fer retreat. The army's going to blow oop th' dam at Longamer—"

"Blow up the dam?" Pinky asked credulously.

"Yes soir, an' wash th' bloomin' Hoons down th' valley like rats."

A sudden light flashed to Pinky's eyes. An idea bloomed in his mind. He rushed back to Rascowitz who was talk-

ing animatedly with Wild Bill Donovan. Maloney went on to his hangar and got busy along with the other mechanics in gassing up and cleaning the spark plugs of the new ships that had just come in.

The thunderous rumbling off to the east still continued, and although it was still early afternoon, the eastern skyline was tinted a soft pink, and farther up in the zenith gray smoke palls hung in the sky over the German gun positions.

Pinky was nervous, and obviously anxious for Rascowitz to terminate his conversation with the C. O. Lieutenant Tegner passed by him as he was waiting and gave him a sneering look. Pinky turned his eyes and looked away. When Rascowitz came over in answer to his beckoning he led him away toward their cubicle, spoke all the time to him in low tones.

"I know it Ras. I know I can do it," he said. "I know the area over the lake like a book. I have figured out just how to do it. But I know the C. O. won't listen to me. He hasn't enough confidence in me. If you put it up to him he'll listen."

"But are you sure your sergeant Maloney can do what you have planned on? That's a risky job you're giving him, you know."

Rascowitz was interested. Pinky's plan if it was successful would make him a Rascal of Hell beyond any question of doubt. What was more important to Rascowitz however, the whole American Army in fact, was that the coup if it was successful would mean the end of von Hoffman and his flaming circus.

MALONEY was called in when the two got to their cubicle. The big Irishman was all ears and listened intently. He'd been a Flight Sergeant in Rascowitz' First Flight since the squadron was organized, and he'd go through hell for him if the Lieutenant told him to.

"What do you think, Sergeant?" Ras-

cowitz asked him, after he put the task before him.

"Oi'll do it or bust a gut tryin', soir," he answered. "Whin do oi start?"

"I'll send you word," Rascowitz answered. "We've got to put it up to the C.O. first. Maybe he can fix it for you, but I doubt it, there isn't time. I think you'll have to figure out your own way."

"Oi'll do it," Maloney replied as he backed out the door, and anybody that could have seen the look of determination on his face when he answered would know that he was just about telling the truth.

Rascowitz left Pinky to pace back and forth in the cubicle, nervously, while he went over to the C. O.'s H.Q.

Wild Bill Donovan shook his head at first negatively, refused to see the idea at all.

"Why, it's all he can do to handle a ship," he replied. "What to hell will he do with all of von Hoffman's Huns on his tail?"

Rascowitz was firmly convinced, however, and he didn't take no for an answer, not even from Wild Bill himself.

"You can use your new men for decoys. They can fly over with Weber and draw the Huns out of their hole. Tegner and his men can hide on the roof out of sight and follow along above them. They have got the experience and will have the altitude. And knowing what to expect they can clean von Hoffman out before he recovers his surprise. It'll be a slaughter. Brains is what it'll take to get von Hoffman, not pure guts. Weber's got the brains and the guts. Tegner and his men have got the guts and experience. It's a cinch."

"How sure is Maloney of pulling his end?" Wild Bill asked, appearing to be about half convinced that the plan was workable.

"He's a tough Irishman," came back Rascowitz. "You can't beat the Irish you know."

A faint smile rippled over Wild Bill's

stern features. Even in stressing moments, smiles have their place. Rascowitz clinched his plea by smiling back.

"I'll try and get through to Division H.Q. and ease his task a little." Donovan said. "But even if he fails or I do, the gain is worth the chance. Call in the pilots."

Rascowitz sent out an orderly, and presently every one of the pilots, both new and old, were gathered in the C.O.'s H.Q. Pinky came in with the replacements, two or three of whom he had known down at Issoudon. Tegner and his flight lined themselves up in the front line next to the C.O. Pinky remained in the background. Every so often Leo Ritz turned back and gave him a dirty look.

"Men," the C.O. began, "I have decided on a desperate plan. Right now the Germans are pouring through our lines like water through a dyke. They started their drive before De Migtry could move in forces to stop them. Von Hoffman has command of the air. He has just about blasted us from the skies. With my new men here I have just sixteen planes and pilots to pit against thirty of his. That's two to one odds in his favor, better even than that. His men are all experienced. Mine are mostly new. Still I have decided to give him battle, squadron against squadron. My squadron will be divided into two flights. Lieutenant Tegner's flight intact will fly the ceiling. The second flight will be divided into two parts containing all my new men and Lieutenant Weber. Rascowitz is crippled and can't fly—"

"The hell I can't!" The big Russian broke in. "I can fly with one hand good enough to knock any of von Hoffman's kiwi fighters off their mounts."

"But there isn't any ship for you," Wild Bill went.

That fact brought Rascowitz up short. There wasn't.

"Weber will lead the lower flight in the two-place Salmson."

**B**IG SWEDE shuffled erect and looked back at Pinky. He said nothing, but the look of disgust that flashed to his face told more than any words could have. The idea of Pinky Weber being put in charge of a flight was more than he could stomach without appearing to notice. Rascowitz turned his eyes toward Tegner and gave him stare for stare. His massive shaggy brows scowled, and his black eyes flashed. There was an immediate hushed tension spread over the assemblage. Wild Bill Donovan sensed it and got the men's attention again when he snapped.

"Listen intently you men. This is important instruction I'm giving you and I won't have time to go over it. Lieutenant Weber will lead the lower flight, fly over the Hun drome and lure von Hoffman's men into the sky. You new pilots flying with Weber will follow behind him and stick on his tail like leeches. Whatever he does you will do. Don't pay any attention to von Hoffman's men. Don't even try to shoot them off. You keep your minds on your ships and keep them from capsizing. You are going to fly through hell and you'll need all you got to get through without worrying about the Huns behind you. Tegner and his men up on the ceiling will take care of them. Follow Weber, get me. Stick right behind him and match every manouever of his ship with a similar one of your own."

The C.O. turned his gaze toward Tegner. "And on you and your men, Lieutenant, falls the task of blasting every single one of von Hoffman's men from the sky. When Weber lures them out over the lake you will be following along above on the ceiling. If there are clouds it will be so much the better, you can keep the planes in sight below, but remain hidden yourself. Sometime seconds after the whole formation gets over the lake you will feel a blast that will shake your planes like they are being lifted by a giant hand. That will be your signal. Dive down then and

do your dirty work. Von Hoffman's men will be so surprised and busy in keeping their ships right side up that you can get them without any trouble, one after the other, but you will have to work fast. And don't worry about the way your ship handles. It will be rough going, but I want you to expect it. The fact won't surprise you because you have been forewarned. Von Hoffman will know nothing about it."

Wild Bill Donovan paused, looked over his pilots.

"Are there any questions?" he asked. No one spoke.

"All right then, get to your planes."

The pilots piled out of the H.Q. like schoolboys at recess, made a dash for the hangars. Maloney was called in. The C.O. assigned him a motor and side car. Rascowitz asked Wild Bill a last question.

"What about me going up with Weber in the Salmson?"

"I'm going myself," Donovan replied.

"Then I'm going along with Maloney," snapped Rascowitz. He turned and grasped Pinky's hand. "Good luck, Webby, old kid, you can depend on us. Come on, sergeant."

**I**N a flash they were out the door. The motor engine sputtered, roared into action, and a few seconds later Maloney and Rascowitz were lost in a cloud of dust down the road towards Fraise.

Donovan tried to get through by phone to Division H.Q., but the lines were rushed with a flurry of orders and counter orders, and he had to cease trying. With Pinky he rushed out to the tarmac. Tegner's men were all set in their ships with the motors turning. The C.O. waved his hand and they were off one after another on the tail of the Big Swede. Donovan divided the new pilots into two groups, put four of them under Lieutenant Merton, who had acted as flight commander coming up. The other five he put in his own and Pinky's flight.

"Men," he said in final instructions,

"You won't have to fire a shot. But you are going to have some hellish flying to do. You'll have to dodge the bursts from the Huns, but above all, keep right on Weber's tail. Do what he does and you will come out all right. If you don't you'll get it in the neck sure'n hell. Now go to your ships and take off after us."

Pinky climbed in the front seat of the Salmson, and the C.O. in the back. Pinky was trembling, he shook all over with nervous excitement. His usual pink face was as white as alabaster and his lips were drier than cotton.

This was a mission, and the C.O. was going to ride with him again. He was certain he would have felt better if Donovan hadn't been along.

A corporal came up and twisted the propeller when Pinky waved. The motor caught on the first twist. Pinky gassed it, warmed it up, offered a silent prayer to the good St. Christopher as he jammed on full throttle and tore off across the tarmac, and took off.

Meanwhile on the Fraise road beneath, winding through perilous mountain stretches, and belching forward with gas wide open was Sergeant Maloney and Rascowitz hanging on tenaciously to the side-car gunwhales as the big Irishman sent his mount around the skidding curves on two wheels with the side car high in the air. Shells, shrapnel and H.E. burst on all sides. The heavens were split with ear-splitting roars and rumbles. The German artillery barrage was pounding mercilessly.

Maloney tore through the main street of St. Die like a streak of lightning, causing doughboys and poilus to scurry for cover. On to Longchein, over a rickety bridge, along a deep gorge, through Lavelin, then to the head of the lake. High overhead were the two flights of the Rascals of Hell. Ten planes clearly visible, six almost obscured in the fleecy cloud wisps that lay higher up. Lac de Longamer was six kilos farther on.

Maloney laid forward over the han-

dle bars, reached down with one hand and adjusted the carburetor, managed to coax another five miles per hour out of the purring Harley. Rascowitz got down in the nacelle of the side car, lowered his head to cut down the resistance. The tip of the lake came in view around a rock pinnacle. An M.P. darted out into the road and held up his hands to halt.

"Git oot o' th' way!" Maloney boomed and flashed past so fast the breeze almost knocked the scared M.P. off his feet.

The road was cut up and jagged now from shell bursts. Maloney weaved his way through like a snake, never cut down his speed one bit. Rascowitz bounced and jounced in the side car.

"Carry on, sergeant," he shouted, although every bump was torture to him.

Around curves and through tunnels Maloney whirled. Bursting shells made the lake surface like so many geysers. Its waters boiled and swirled. Foot soldiers, artillery, were scurrying back from the front running in disorder, full retreat.

"Stop you damn fools," an officer shouted.

The words were lost in a trail of dust, Maloney went on.

"The dam's going to be blown!" Some one else shouted farther on.

Maloney only bent down lower.

**F**INALLY the towers of the spillway loomed before him. The road was almost impassable. The machine bounced, plunged into a shell crater and smashed to pieces. Maloney was hurled over the handle bars. Rascowitz did a flip-flop over the rim of the crater. Spitting mud and blood and a couple of knocked loose teeth out of his mouth, Maloney struggled up on his feet. Rascowitz got up, too. They ran now. The last remaining American troops of the 371st and 372nd had scrambled up the mountain side above the surface of the dam. Only a few engineers were left to set off the charge at the dam. The



oncoming German hordes could be seen approaching from the valley floor beneath the spillways.

An army motorcycle approached from straight ahead. A shell burst right in front of it. The motor, rider and passenger flew up into the air, came down dead. Maloney and Rascowitz rushed up. One of the dead men was a colonel, an American colonel of engineers. Maloney thought fast, acted on the instant, reached down took the dead colonel's cap and pulled the mud splattered tunic off his already stiffening cadaver. The two silver eagles still shone resplendant on the shoulder epaulets.

Then he threw his own cap away, donned the colonel's, while he stripped off his blouse and slipped into the colonel's tunic. The planes of the "Rascals' of Hell" squadron, which had been over the lake but a minute before had disappeared now, swallowed up by the cloud racks farther east.

Maloney then beckoned to Rascowitz, who had been looking on querulously, while he was robbing the dead.

"Come oon, Lootinunt. Noo oi got th' atharity no wun will stop us."

When the colonel of engineers had taken to his sidecar and hiballed away, he left but a single man behind, a lone sergeant whom he had delegated to explode the charge that would blow up the dam. The sergeant stood his vigil silently, dodged hurling shrapnel and H. E. but kept his hand poised over the handle of the firing machine. His eyes he kept glued on the advancing German hordes in the valley below. His instructions were to push the handle when the Jerries started climbing up the roads on either side of the dam, then run for his life in any direction where he could find sanctuary.

Maloney with his eagle eye caught sight of him, high up on the mountain side above the spillway tower. Immediately he started picking them up and laying them down, darted over the rocky crags with the agility of a mountain

goat. The willing but slow-footed Rascowitz was hard put to keep in sight of him let alone keep up with him, but he puffed along on the wild Irishman's trail with all the speed he could muster from his sore and fast-tiring dogs. He knew as well as Maloney, and as well as Pinky flying high up in the clouds above the lake, that the success of their plan depended on whether or not Maloney could reach and gain control of the firing machine before it was too late. The sergeant who had been detailed to fire the charge didn't see the wild-eyed men tearing at him. He couldn't, for his eyes were turned in the other direction watching the slow but certain progress of the Jerries marching over the valley floor. And the roar and rumblings of the fast-firing guns and exploding shells blotted out all sounds of the heavily pounding footsteps.

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## CHAPTER VII

### *The Maelstrom*

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WHEN Pinky approached the area over von Hoffman's drome, he threw his control stick abruptly forward, went into a screaming nose dive that almost threw Wild Bill Donovan out of the rear seat and over the upper wing. He only managed to save himself by grabbing leather and doing it on the instant. The planes following after Pinky went down in steep dives, too, kept their close formation like they were tied together with a string. The Hun archies opened up as soon as Pinky's plane thrust its nose through the protecting cloud wisps. The black mushroom puffs pockmarked the sky on all sides of him, but Pinky ruddered back and forth and dodged them all.

Consternation reigned on the drome below. Von Hoffman's pilots ran out of their barracks and leaped to their ships. One, two, three of the ships, gaudily painted and brilliantly outlined

against the smudgy earth, started moving out toward the tarmac, gaining speed as they ran along. Soon they were in the air. But Pinky never even bothered to watch them, continued in his screaming dive until his plane was almost to tear into the nearest climbing Hun. Then he drew back on his stick and zoomed upward, fell off into a tight bank and circled the enemy drome, with the pilots behind him matching his moves turn for turn. By this time ten or twelve of the Hun ships had taken the air, and half of them had their menacing blunt noses pointed at the Salmsons in Pinky's flight.

Pinky lifted the nose of his plane a little, kept just ahead of the Jerries coming up. Twenty or more were in the air now. And scorching bullets, Spandau bursts, outlined with flaming tracer, commenced pouring in from all directions.

This was the moment Pinky had been awaiting. He jammed on full throttle now. The nine cylindered radial roared and spit out black smoke, while the Salmson seemed to leap from under him. He drew back on the stick, rudered toward the dam and started to climb for altitude. The pilots behind him jammed on full gun and followed suit. The Jerry Fokkers, which were the speedier, continued forward and climbed at the same time. Despite the fact that their angle of climb was steeper they were making as much speed as the slower flying Salmsons above them. Apparently they were trying to cut off Pinky's flight, get between his formation and the front lines, after which they would battle for the ceiling, then come down in a downward swoop with all guns blazing. It was the old von Hoffman trick just as Pinky has figured. Von Hoffman was nibbling at the bait in his trap. He shot a quick glance at the sky above him, but his eyes could not pierce the dense layer of cumulus clouds that laid not more than 3,000 feet above and perfectly shrouded the top-most flight of the "Rascals of

Hell" from the unsuspecting Hun eyes.

Pinky laughed inwardly.

"Gees, there taking the bait hook, line and sinker. If Maloney—"

But he didn't finish his thought. A black mushroom puff balled out right under his wing tip, threw the Salmson almost over on its back. Pinky fed the nose to it, breathed in relief when it gathered downward speed, so's he could pull it out of it's uncontrolled flight. When he looked forward again he saw that the Jerries were just about on his own level and still climbing, so many of them it seemed that they darkened the partially obscured disc of the sun.

Now he stuck the plane's nose down to gather more speed. The great wall of the dam loomed up just a few kilos ahead. Below him he saw the massed German troops moving forward, their advance was just starting the ascent of the winding roads leading up to the spillways. The Jerry squadron, with von Hoffman's gaudy purple-painted Fokker in the lead, made a sudden maneuver now. All zoomed, then turned as one, came down toward Pinky's formation with all guns blazing and motors belching black smoke, each man lined out behind von Hoffman and coming down abruptly in a full-power pique, like successive boats coming down a chute the chutes.

**P**INKY jammed far forward on his stick, threw in full throttle, started his run for the lake. The Fokkers banked over and followed, gradually narrowed the now short distance between the two formations, the foremost Fokker of von Hoffman's was almost within range of the rear plane in Pinky's formation. Tracer streams began to come now. The Jerries were warming up their guns. Pinky wiggled his rudder from side to side, zig-zagged.

Whing! Sh-hush!

Pinky's Salmson suddenly dropped like a leaden pellet.

The downdraft of the lake had fastened its relentless talons about his ship

and was hurling it downward. The drop was so abrupt that Pinky gasped for breath at first, then he resigned himself to it, knew that was just what he had planned to do. He fed in more power, stuck the nose down steeper, and ruddered closer to the center of the dam. The green pilots behind him froze in their seats while terror gripped their hearts when they were first sucked into the air whirlpool. But despite their terror they kept their eyes glued on Pinky's plane, dipped down when he did, and tried to hang on his tail. The C.O. had given them instructions and they didn't forget them now. Despite the fact that the blood that coursed through veins turned frigid, and their hearts pounded like mad, they kept the noses of their planes lined on Pinky's.

Pinky stole a quick glance at the vibrating needle of the altimeter. He still had about 5,000 feet, so he risked a little more nose and scooted out farther over the water. Then the down-draft ceased, and he was whisked up almost as suddenly as he had dropped. Meanwhile the Jerry pilots were fighting their controls madly, strenuously, trying to keep their wildly careening Fokkers right side up. For the moment they had no time for fingering gun trips.

Pinky's plane and following formation had scooted half-way across the lake when he thrust his head overside and stole a quick glance at the dam and lake surface. The dam was still intact and the surface of the water was just barely rippled. The German troops advancing up the roads were almost to the spillways.

"Maloney must have failed to get there," he yelled through the phones.

"Can't help it," Wild Bill snapped in answer. "If he don't make it we'll have to fight 'em off the best we can."

The Jerry pilots finally got their ships straightened out and flying on level keel, when they reached the same comparatively smooth area Pinky was flying over. Now they jumped in for

the kill. They opened their throttles wide and closed up the distance between the two formations. It looked easy. Only ten planes below them and they numbered over twenty themselves.

T-r-r-r-r-r-r! T-r-r-r-r-r-r-r!

The Jerry pilots opened up simultaneously just as the two formations reached the middle of the lake.

Maloney, with one wild dive, hurled himself on the one lone sergeant at the firing machine, just as his hand started downward on the plunger of the machine. One of his massive hands shot out like lightning, grasped the sergeant's wrist, twisted it free from the handle.

"What to he—?" the sergeant started to exclaim, then turned and spied Maloney in his colonel's raiment standing behind him.

"Bate it. Roon fer your life!" Maloney boomed. "Oi'll take charge here."

**T**HE sergeant didn't wait for a second command. He tore off down the Fraise road with all the speed he could muster.

Rascowitz, who had been pounding along after Maloney reached his side now, grunting and puffing. He was almost out of breath but managed to grab Maloney's arm and point skywards.

"Push it! Push it now," he wheezed. "They're right overhead."

Maloney grabbed the plunger, shoved it down with the same motion.

Nothing happened.

He pulled it up and slammed it down again.

No go.

The planes overhead were getting farther and farther away and the streams of flaming tracer were literally criss-crossing the sky.

Twice, three times more, with his heart stock still in his barrel chest and his tongue glued to the roof of his mouth, Maloney slammed the plunger down with no results.

"Circuit's broken," Rascowitz yelled, and leaped down the mountain side

tracing the course of the connecting wire. An exploding shell or bit of shrapnel had severed it.

Rascowitz picked it up in his hand, allowed it to run through the loop made by his closed forefinger and thumb, as he ran for all he was worth down the hillside.

The fighting formations up above had almost reached the head of the lake now, and the first Jerry troops stuck their heads up above the spillways. A Jerry sharpshooter spied Maloney and level his rifle on him. The bullets kicked up dust near the Irishman's feet. Maloney ducked behind a protecting rock and dragged the firing machine after him.

Rascowitz gave a bull-like bellow when he had almost reached the spillway. Maloney heard him and looked. Rascowitz thrust his good hand high above his head, waved it frantically. In the other he held the two ends of the broken firing wire. While Maloney watched him he spliced the two ends together hastily, made contact.

Maloney slammed down on the plunger again.

Wham!

The hillside trembled, rocked and shook like jelly on a plate. There was a rumbling roar accompanied by a tremendous geyser of heaving water. Then followed a weird, sucking, hissing sound as the ramparts of the dam crumbled away and allowed the millions of tons of water to disgorge into the valley.

Pinky's careening Salmson was suddenly hurled violently upward and the struts and bracings groaned and cracked. Pinky knew what caused it though and half smiled.

"He did it. He did it." He kept mumbling over and over again crazily, as his plane swirled up on its wing tip, then plunged off violently and sunk like a plummet.

**T**HE long impounded waters of the ten-mile lake went out all at once when the dam blew up. The sudden

dropping of the surface caused a vacuum in the skies above, and the air poured in from all sides to fill it. Into that seething maelstrom of whisking wind Pinky's plane was drawn just like it was a bit of paper. But he didn't fight to get out of the terrific down-draft, instead he stuck down his nose, poured on all power, and feel right in line with it. Each one of the frantic and quaking pilots behind him followed suit, dived down after him into the now deep gorge which once had been Lac de Longemer.

Von Hoffman's men, even von Hoffman himself, were not prepared for any such fury of the elements. They fought like crazy men trying to keep their wildly hurling Fokkers from being drawn into the powerful downdrafts. Three spinning Fokkers came together in a headon collision, smashed themselves to bits. Now more than ever the Jerry pilots fought their controls with fear in their minds and terror in their hearts. But their planes were gripped in the powerful clutches of the seething whisking maelstrom, and there was no direction they could go but down.

Big Swede Tegner flying higher up above the bank of clouds didn't feel the draft so much, but it was enough for him to get it as a signal, so he threw his plane over on its nose, stood on his tail and piqued downward with full power on. The rest of the pilots in his flight followed him. When the down-draft did catch him as he whisked through the cloud wisps he was nose down and ready for it. The struggling Jerries were bunched right under his flight, flying and careening crazily in the sky, just like a flock of crippled ducks wounded with shot. The Big Swede caught sight of von Hoffman's purple plane and made for it, pressed his Bowdens at close range, and literally blasted the famed Jerry leader from the skies. A Jerry on the right of him got it next. One after another and almost simultaneously each of his



men opened up. The Jerries so busy struggling with their own flying craft were taken completely by surprise, and didn't have time for a single burst of retaliatory fire before they were either shot down or hurled to destruction in the rocky gorge below.

The ensuing terror that took place takes minutes and pages to write and describe, but it all happened in seconds. What Jerry planes that weren't shot down by Tegner and his men in the top-most flight, were caught up by the winds and crashed against the rocky walls of the gorge.

Pinky, himself, at the mercy of the same winds as the Jerries let his ship follow through with the current, knowing full well that if he didn't fight the controls he could get through safely, for at the bottom of the lake the whirling current of wind would be deflected one way or another. But the longer he held his plane in the vertical dive the lesser his confidence became.

The bottom of the now waterless lake was racing up and through his center section struts like mad.

"Gees," he shrieked through the phones to the C.O. in the back seat. "We're going to get it, too, but von Hoffman's gone."

But because of the screaming shrilling wires and struts and pounding motor Donovan heard not a word of Pinky's resigned plaint. At the moment he was huddled down in the cockpit hanging on for all he was worth.

**S**UDDENLY the ship's nose lifted, deflected. Pinky, with renewed hope now, eased the stick back toward his stomach. The nose came up farther and the speeding Salmson slid out over the great wall of water that was rolling down the valley, the landing gear almost touching them and riding the crests at times. Rocky and bumpy as the air was Pinky managed to ride it out as did all his mates following behind him.

But not so with von Hoffman. They were taken completely by surprise, and

every one of them perished in the sky trap Pinky had set for them in that hell hole over Lac de Longemer.

And along with von Hoffman and his flaming squadron went the massed troops of German infantry which had been advancing over the valley floor. All of them were drowned like rats in a sewer when the dam went out. For miles upon miles the wall of rushing, pouring water engulfed everything before it until it finally spent its energy on the flat plains of the Rhine.

Pinky let his Salmson ride with the air currents until he was confident he was out of the worst of them, then he ruddered carefully and swung about, flew back over the hurricane-strewn mess beneath him. Here and there were masses of floating debris that once had been Fokkers, and on the bare mountain sides were other patches of wreckage.

Tegner's flight closed in behind him now, and when Pinky turned to look back he saw that there was an expansive smile on the Big Swede's face. Even little Leo Ritz, who flew in the plane right alongside Tegner, had his swarthy face wreathed in smiles. Wild Bill Donovan, who had been so busy hanging on to anything he could grab hold of in the rear seat that he had no time or urge to say anything to Pinky, finally spoke, but when he did he was so excited and happy he couldn't do anything but stutter.

"H-h-ome, Weber. We're all through here."

And Pinky did turn homeward when he got the word from the C.O., with the whole of the "Rascals of Hell" tailing along behind him. It was almost dark when they sat down on their own landing field, but it was a gay bunch of pilots who did, tired though they were.

"To the Coc d'Or every last one of you! Wild Bill Donovan boomed, when the last of the pilots had jumped out of his plane. The drinks are on the commanding officer."

It was hours later when Rascowitz and Maloney got back, but they stopped

in at the Coc d'Or for a drink or so before they went on to the squadron.

When Wild Bill Donovan saw Maloney and Rascowitz come in the door he ordered more drinks and offered up a toast.

"To Lieutenant Clarence Percival Weber, who is now a full-fledged member of the 'Rascals of Hell,' because he figured out this scheme that enabled us to blast von Hoffman out of the skies."

Pinky flushed and turned his head. Big Swede Tegner and the boys of his flight were the first to hoist their glasses. Pinky held up his hand, stayed them, turned toward Sergeant Maloney.

"To Sergeant Maloney—"

All present turned their eyes toward the gangling Irishman.

"Who set off the blast at the right moment." Pinky corrected.

"No soir, Lootinunt." Maloney hoisted his glass toward Rascowitz. "T' Lootinunt Rascowitz, who foond th' bryke in th' wire an' hild th' inds t'gether wit' his hands."

Rascowitz shook his head from side to side, negatively.

"To the 'Rascals of Hell' who always stick together and work for each other," he toasted. "May von Hoffman and his pilots enter the rolls of the Silent Squadron in good standing."

The "Rascals of Hell" downed their drinks silently.

#### THE END

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### FIGHTING METHODS

THERE was a good old Hunnish hoax—the dive and good-bye method of attack. A single dive, from far above, a single burst, and never to return. Many of the greatest pilots of the war used it. There was little chance getting knocked off doing that sort of thing. It never gave anyone a chance.

Some of the men liked dog fights. It was the only way they got any victories. But that was bad. It was always a fifty-fifty chance.

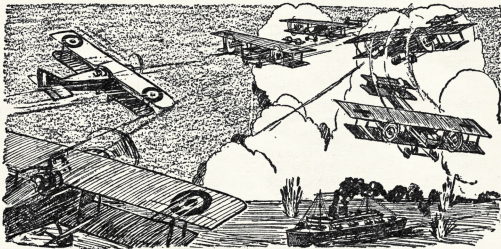
Then there were some who stood off at a distance and shot. It took a good gun man to do that. Fonck was that sort. He could take a pop at a man three hundred meters away, and it was just too bad. There were few who could do that sort of thing, though. Some just waited for the odds to be in their favor. That was the proper way to fight. If one waited long enough the chances would come. Some never gave the enemy an even break. No fifty-fifty fights for them. They waited for the sure victory, and then they took it. Some poor, slow-flying bus that was doing a rotten job over the lines—easy meat, that. But they were the men who did well for their country. They were the men who got the thing they went after. As much as one disliked them, they were the ones who cleared the air for the safety of the men beneath them. Toward the last of the war, the Americans adopted a system of flying which aided them in their safe coming and going. Their flights never flew a straight line. They S'ed from the moment they took off from the home field. It looked strange to see them moving through the air like a snake, but it made them an almost impossible target for the German Archies, and none of the flying Huns ever took them by surprise.

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*On the Newsstands every 10 days: AIR STORIES the 1st, WINGS the 10th, ACES the 20th.*

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# Flying Mutineers



By Lieut. S. G. Pond

The winged three—outlawed because they fought—condemned because they saved . . . until their guns of mutiny found a flying justice!

**D**IPPING through the ghostly gray of early dawn and plunging into the enveloping secrecy of a shadowy cloud, three night flying "Sop" Camels disappeared momentarily from view. Beaded mist spat viciously over engine parts, windshields, and taut linen wings, biting into the tired cheeks of the three combat pilots.

The leader, "Dutch" Oberlin, *vrilled* off in a tight bank. As one plane, the two at his left and right wing followed in close duplication of his every move. A magnificent flyer was Dutch, one of the best in the A.E.F. He was huge, in body, heart, and soul. With clear, frank, blue eyes and a contagious smile. His comrades were many and faithful.

"Red" Atkinson, youthful soldier of less than a month's air fighting over the Western Front, clenched his teeth and laughed into the wind.

"C'mon, baby!" he yelled aloud, to his taut little battle plane, and added with zest, "C'm-on Fritz, an' do your

stuff! Forty-eight full solid hours and no powder from these guns! Boy!"

**I**N a flashing streak the three sped away from the last few twinkling morning stars and dropped through a cloud. Beneath them the earth was still shrouded in its shadowy sleepiness. Red's eyes remained glued to his leader's wings. Red, impulsive, loyal, and fearless, plunged his stick, kicked on rudder bar, and followed Dutch's Camel in agile pursuit. Dutch was an old-timer—an ace, with seven Boche to his credit. With all his heart and soul Red worshiped that curly, blond head leading. It had taken him and Walt fearlessly in and out of four more than thrilling air battles that had chanced along their thin sky trails.

On the left wing, Walt Farnsworth throttled his motor and wheeled smoothly on his turn, pivoting slower than the rest to allow his two buddies the wider course and enable them to

take the wider turn without forcing their motors. Walt was a tenacious fighter, a shrewd gunner, and an incomparably considerate and splendid comrade.

In less than a month these three ardent pilots had become as brothers to one another. Captain Bradley Mathews, commander, or "skipper" as he was known to the Black Cat Squadron of night flying Camel pilots, had vigorously endeavored to break up the friendly pact between the trio, fearing that the loss of one of their number would reduce the remaining two valued pilots to a disheartened state entailing shattered nerves. Personnel losses came suddenly, often unexpectedly, and all too frequently. However, his entreaties, he had come to realize, only acted to bring the three men closer together.

As a last resort he had decided to make the most of their team work and push them to the limit—while they lasted! But the results, and their lasting powers were becoming more and more phenomenal to him as the days pressed on into war-routined weeks.

When Walt and Red got themselves into a tight hole through their over-eager impulsiveness, the veteran hand of Dutch would literally yank them from the mess. Then as if to balance the trio, there were times when it was a battle royal and the more philosophical Dutch would hesitate to take his pals against odds he considered perhaps too heavy. Red and Walt, sensing his watchfulness over their hides, would assume the responsibility, zoom neatly over his blue and silver wings and splash into the heart of a fight, forcing their leader to follow them.

AND so it came to pass that within less than three weeks' time their names were becoming tradition to American courage. Their battle recklessness won them the admiration and esteem of all the doughboys and troops of other nations under their weaving sky trails. Revleux, the French Le Rhone engine

expert of the Black Cats, in pride and affection had one day exclaimed:

"*Mon Dieu! Magnificent fighters!*" It could not have been more aptly stated.

From twelve thousand feet the three did Immelmann turns, tight spirals, loops, spins, rolls, figure-eights, vertical "S" turns, and half-rolls, to keep Archie off their track as they spun along on their destined mission. Then, sliding down the misty heights they headed for Fonsomme to release over the Hun railhead, the twelve "H. E." bombs that hung neatly from their Camel racks.

Their orders, given them caustically by a dour-faced sergeant major, had commanded them out on three Boche objectives before sun-up to break up the morale at those points, viz., to first, bomb the railhead at Fonsomme, then to proceed to the Ribemont Road where Hun troops were advancing and dispersing toward the front, and thence on to Montigny where, with their machine guns, they were to strafe the Hun cavalry.

Suddenly Red snapped his neck about. It was an instinctive movement. He looked toward the west. At the same moment Dutch wig-wagged his wings toward the northwest. Red snapped his neck back even farther; the eagle eye of Dutch had seen even more. There beneath them five American photography planes were anxiously working their way back into the interior of Germany for pictures. Above and to the northwest five gray Hun scouts hung onto the trail, awaiting an auspicious moment when they could pounce onto their adversaries with sudden, lightning-like surprise.

"By the Kaiser's seven pups! Wouldja look at 'em!" Red stammered. "As I live and look, five German Pfalfs!" he yelled, in sheer hilarious glee at the possibilities the coming fight offered.

It was quite evident that the Huns had not seen the Camels, having, as they did, the first rays of the morning light dead against them. In an easy but cautious glide the five Pfalfs swung down



toward the four photography ships—easy kill for the Hun! Simultaneously, the Three anticipated the Hun's moves.

Dutch Oberlin took in the situation with a glance. Here was a gay, good fight where their help would be needed before the score was finally settled. Should he push on into the fray? If he did, by the time the scrap would be over the sun would be above the eastern rim of the skies and their strafing mission would be absolutely cut off. His hands itched over his triggers as he watched the Hun driving down toward his American comrades. He yearned for the fight, but . . .

In a flash, two glinting pairs of blue and silver wings zoomed over and past him. Red, and Walt, as before, had taken the law into their own hands while Dutch had hesitated over the seriousness of breaking orders—regulations of the Army. Dutch put his nose down and followed his two buddies. Laughing at the recklessness of their deed, he flung himself down.

To outwit the Boche was their next problem. Had the photography ships seen the Pfalfs? Yes, the formation was already closing in for protection and circling, all the while moving farther into Germany and their objective.

Dutch watched and studied his adversaries, intently.

"Hm-m-m," he summarized, "five to three," and laughed, "—an even break with the Hun!"

Red and Walt watched their leader cautiously hold off for a vantage point.

"Oh, Mad-el-one, sweet Mad-el-one," sang Red, impatiently, "why doesn't that bonehead dive? Wh-y wait?"

**D**UTCH held off until the Pfalfs were within range of the observer's rear-pit guns so that he could depend on the photographer's fire in case he needed it. Then together, as one, the Three dove in shrieking, maddening speed. Down to meet the Hun.

The three fighting Camels and the five Pfalf scouts reached the photog-

raphy ships at about the same split second. In signal, Dutch zoomed, did a cartwheel over the Pfalfs and the Three released all their bombs over the Hun. Excepting a hole through the left end of one Pfalf wing the entire spread of bombs went wide and spun off below into Hunland.

Surprise, the greatest of all aerial combat disadvantages, gripped the Hun. The Pfalf leader, staring into the morning light and the graying half-colors in startled haste, zoomed for altitude, his flight following—just a trifle too late.

Selecting the squadron leader, Dutch streaked after his zigzagging, rolling enemy. It was easy to see that the Boche were well trained and seasoned pilots. Streams of white tracers intermingled with flaming incendiary bullets. Dutch watched the black stream of lead pouring from his Camel's nose into the Pfalf before him—like water from a hose the black lead followed the Hun in his every turn. In frantic, but poor strategy, the Hun leader looped. In his rising climb he passed through the center of fire of the death-sure aim of Dutch Oberlin.

An explosive burst of red, licking flame! Engine parts, wing spars and wheels careening off into space! Yellow and black smoke curling upward from a gyrating, slipping, dizzy speeding furnace of death. Driving straight through the center of the photography formation the flaming Hun was lost to view in the dim mists below.

Levelling off from his pursuit climb, Dutch slapped on two fresh Lewis ammunition drums over his twin guns. Then he swerved off toward his next nearest Pfalf.

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## CHAPTER II

### *Mutineers' Luck*

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**R**ED, in the meanwhile, was circling round and round with his own Hun. He caught sight of his leader's

victory as it spun and turned like a great piece of smoking tissue paper, earthward, its tail stretching out behind in a long wisp of black.

He pulled his stick back and jammed on rudder throwing his Camel into a dizzy Immelmann as his Hun strove to get at him from the rear. The Hun followed suit. Together, the two opponents rushed upward in a screaming climb. Together they straightened and once more leveled off on the same basis as they had started.

"Yuh big sausage-eater," ground Red, "yuh sure know your stuff!"

Once more the Hun zoomed. "He'll make another Immelmann as sure as the sun comes up," figured Red, aloud, and zoomed to outdistance him in that self-same Immelmann.

A trick!

Red straightened out. The Hun was not with him, nor behind, nor above. Careening his neck in all directions, doing a half roll to look to all sides, Red heard the bullets whining along under his seat and fuselage and at the same split second saw the Pfalf streaking it along underneath him! Red did a cartwheel skid to throw the Hun off range, side-slipped and dove.

The Boche had already started his dive so that he had the reach on the Camel, after releasing his first burst of lead. Seeing the situation was reversed the Hun fled off toward a photography plane; easier prey.

"This joke has gone too far," blurted Red, "you can't get away with that, Fritz boy!"

He drove after the Hun with his engine full on until his head swam, his eyes blurred, the blood pounded in his temples and the very air vibrated with the screaming speed. He feared for the safety of his little Camel's wings, but hoped for the best and leveled off just over and to the rear of his fleeing Hun!

His fingers were wet with perspiration as they gripped the joy stick. He ran them over his Bowden controls and ached to let them plunge onto his trig-

gers. Must lower the nose a bit. He was closing. Two hundred feet. One hundred. There, that was it. Pressing his fingers over the steel triggers until the whites of his knuckles showed he held them down on twin guns.

The crackle of the guns was music to his ears! The Hun pilot threw up both hands and disappeared from view into his cockpit. Red, less than twenty feet from his enemy's tail, went up and over the black-crossed wings of the Boche. There was no flame, no smoke, merely careening, tumbling, the falling of the little German scout like a broken leaf on the March winds on a last lonely landing. Pilot hands forever stilled on controls.

**R**ED leaned over the side of his ship and watched his antagonist weaving away through the distant gray of the morning—his first real victory. With the joyous thrill of an evenly-matched, well fought combat he leaped in his seat with excited, pulsing blood and a let-down of pent-up emotions. He slapped his heavy flying gloves together in sheer victorious exultation.

Climbing for altitude, he banked sharply and looked below. He had almost forgotten the photography planes in the tensiety of combat. A west wind was drifting them slowly across into Hunland. The sight was not encouraging as the formation had split into a tumbling free-for-all dog fight.

One tiny Pfalf was pursuing a heavy photography ship earthward as it desperately fought to gain away toward the German interior. A tiny wisp of smoke was seen to flutter from the great bird—another. A blinding flash, dull explosion and the big plane had burst into brilliant flames.

Red groaned at the sight. Two Americans were searing in that flaming red cauldron of death.

"Poor devils!" he gritted.

What was that? He looked horror-struck at Walt's ship as it swerved past a photography plane. He was apparently

headed for a crash, tumbling and falling like a broken leaf. Was good old Walt Farnsworth done in, finished? Red raced into the wild melee. Speeding after one Pfalf which was getting the best of a photography plane he watched Walt from one corner of his eye.

The Boche chasing the nearest ship to Walt's pulled up suddenly and drove after his more hated antagonist: Walt in his fighting Camel. Then Walt's Camel shot back up like an inverted plummet into an Immelmann turn. By a ruse the Hun had been tempted away for an easy kill.

Red sighed a deep satisfied groan of anxiety over his buddy. The odds were now reversed with Walt on top. An old trick, one the Hun had half-expected, but one which he had been unable to follow with the more adroit handling of the Camel. It had been a matter of seconds only. Bullets streamed like red, liquid fire from the noses of both machines.

Then, as the Hun swerved away and upward into a desperate roll, bottom up, a strange sight met Red's eyes: the black form of the Pfalf pilot tumbled from the cockpit and cleared the machine. Over and over it hurtled, grotesquely. Red's heart pounded at the sight. Had the Boche pilot leapt from his seat? It hadn't appeared so. Had his belt snapped loose? Had—? Red dropped into the middle of the dog fight.

A black Pfalf loomed before him, chasing another photography bus. He dove down, up, and over the Pfalf razing him with white tracers and incendiary bullets. The Hun forsook his heavy prey, rushed into a half-roll and came out under Red Atkinson's Camel. The rip of linen and the thud of bullets through woodwork reached Red's ears as pieces of wing linen slattered off into the wind.

"Um-ph!" barked Red, and did a plunging side-slip. Vaguely, thoughts raced through his mind. They had each taken down a Boche. Three had taken

three. That left two. An Archie burst spread with white and detonating roar over his left wing, the ship did a heavy lunge and sank a good fifty feet. He snatched a glance below at his Hun. He was nearing. His altimeter? Three thousand feet. Getting low, too low, too close to Archie.

HE came out to one side of the Boche and hung onto his antagonist's trail like grim death edging closer and closer to him from the horizontal. Side by side they raced along farther and farther into Hunland. Their wings were getting closer, closer, closer . . . A hundred feet, eighty feet. . . .

Red could see the goggled features of his enemy. The fellow appeared to grin. Red laughed. He waved his hand. The other answered with a wave. The War had never seemed so personal to Red before. A queer feeling ran through the youth. They were there to kill each other. The German was probably a good fellow; indications were to his advantage that way. In real life. . . . But this wasn't real life! It was just a great game. Red laughed again, aloud.

"What a game! *What* a game!" grinned Red.

Grimly, he realized that the Hun was in the advantage. He could carry on as long as he wished, headed as they were, deeper into Germany. They were now less than fifty feet apart flying as though they might have been two Americans in formation. Red stole a glance at his comrades and the passing fight to decide his next move.

The skies had cleared of photography planes. They had taken off for their objective. To the westward Red could see Walt Farnsworth's plane faltering along toward home at less than a thousand feet, being besieged with Archies on all sides. Trouble, that was plainly evident, or Walt wouldn't be headed for home. Not Walt. He was not the type to desert one in the midst of a fight.

Suddenly Red's heart clicked, took a flop over, and boomed and pounded like a great jungle drum. Dutch! Could it be? Yes! He was being driven down. An all black Pfalf was riding his tail!

For a second he forgot the Hun at his own side. His whole being ached and throbbed for Dutch. Dutch! Dutch! He was being brought down by the Hun? No, surely it couldn't be! His pal—the unvanquished Dutch, at the mercy of the Hun! Good old Dutch! Cold perspiration stood out on Red's forehead and his hands went clammy over the controls. Must do something, quick!

Red shot a glance at his opponent. Had to clear from that bird in some way. Had to run. He gave a dry sob. Had to get back to Dutch. Would his Hun climb or dive at his first noticeable move? Anyway, Dutch was below, no use wasting time climbing, could dive away, faster anyway. He would try it.

In feverish haste he kicked on right rudder and plunged his stick forward with his motor full on. Into a shrieking, side-slipping dive, careening off into an angular, crazy dive he sped down, down. Down with the speed of a bullet. As he shot under the Pfalf the upper wings of the Camel did not miss the wheels of the Hun's more than a hundred thirty-second of an inch. Both rocked and swayed with the wind currents. Red looked up, anxiously, as the Hun shot over him and to his right like a skyrocket.

In desperate hope, Red waved a friendly farewell. The other waved back with a grin, and continued his course, apparently satisfied in getting free from the losing combat that the Pfalfs had made with the night flying Camels. Red swerved back toward the Allied trenches, taking a last flung glance at his friendly opponent.

"Farewell, Fritz, and may the next Yank get ya," he groaned, as his Boche sped away safely back over Germany. "That won't happen again in my wartime."

Blood pulsing hard, Red stared into the fast brightening sky ahead. As he lowered in altitude the Archies threw their cotton-ball puffs all around him: above, to the rear, under, and in front. To him, these meant nothing. Up ahead some place Dutch was in trouble! Dutch was going down all alone, with no buddies to lend him a hand, the Hun at his back!

HE looked at his wrist watch: ten to seven. Over two hours out! The sun was well above the eastern rim. A chill raced down his spine. His gasoline! He stared apprehensively at the gauge at the same time possessing that queer premonition that something was radically wrong. It showed almost empty.

"Oh, baby," he groaned, "don't let me down, just for a few moments!"

He reached down for the tiny valve leading to his emergency tank—that was good for fifteen minutes, just long enough for him to locate a landing place and get down. He swung his fingers about the aperture for the valve. Gone! Literally gone! Shot to pieces. He cut his motor a trifle to conserve his few remaining drops of fuel. He scanned the country under him. Was over Marcoing. Trains stood deserted on the main lines. Dead men and dead horses lined both sides of the road. For a dull, aching moment war seemed bitter.

Up ahead! He stared and strained his eyes. There! There! Over No Man's Land hurtled the brilliant little robin-egg blue and silver Camel. Down, down, earthward it careened and zigzagged. The all black Pfalf was less than a hundred feet to the rear!

Red was gaining, gaining. . . . His breath came in quick, short gasps. Cold perspiration oozed out in needle points over his whole body. His knees trembled. His fingers shook over his gun triggers. Why was he nervous, he asked himself.

"Dutch—I!" he choked, with parched lips. "Dutch, hold hard! I'll get 'em!"



Three hundred feet, two hundred. Red was drawing close. Still a bit too far in range. He might draw his attention if he fired now. He gripped down on his triggers, quiveringly aiming the nose of his Camel at the Pfalf. Watched the gray tracers stream among the inner-bay wires of the Hun.

The Boche jerked his head back, startled. His course wavered. The three were together now. Only dozens of feet apart, they skimmed along over the ground not fifty feet above it. Over barbed wire entanglements, sear-like guts of trenches, shell holes, towering war shattered walls the three raced. Below them the white, up-turned faces of the Boche stared, spellbound.

Then, with booming crash the pursued Camel plunged into No Man's Land. There was a blinding flash as a terrific explosion blasted from the tiny plane skidding along through flying dust. More like a high explosive shell than airplane did she land.

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### CHAPTER III

#### *Red Rebels*

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**R**ED trembled at the sight. His heart ached. His whole being cried out for revenge. He bit his lips until the blood tasted on his tongue—and dove after his Hun. Not once did he release his fingers from the Bowden controls. Then, silence! His guns had jammed!

Life seemed to flow from his body, from his mind. He worked his trigger fingers until he lifted from his seat with the pressure. He jerked them until his knuckles were torn and bleeding. He had the Hun at his mercy—and he could do nothing! Nothing? To stand up and work on his machine guns at less than a dozen feet from the ground would be folly.

"You!" he barked, like a madman. "Look to it! I'll crash you if I kill myself doing it!"

The Hun seemed to realize that his

antagonist was desperate. He stared back in anxiety. Why didn't the Yank fire at him and have it over with—he had him cold. Were his guns jammed? Frantically, he tried to climb. When he did so the Camel's wheels all but rested on his upper wings. On a vertical bank less than fifty feet from the ground he tried wildly to swerve off at an angle. The Camel was there, right in front of him; just in front. The Hun had never in all his life seen such desperate flying. Why the Yank must be crazy, he assured himself.

The Hun was losing altitude. He couldn't get around to point his machine guns, to drive off the frenzied Yank. Wherever he turned, the dazzling, flashing wings of the Camel were right where he most wanted to go. Just skimming the ground, they drove over the Allied trenches. Red swore breathlessly. If he could only stand up for a second and get a chance to try to clear his guns. . . . Couldn't now, though. Too late. No time!

Trees loomed ahead. Red saw them. Now was the time. Desperate, he plunged. He ran his wheels over the tops of the Pfalf's wings. The Hun reeled and toppled, headon, he crashed into the tall poplars with a detonating roar.

A deep, pent-up sigh of anxiety escaped from dry lips. Red pulled his stick frantically back to clear the trees in his last skyrocketing zoom. Then his engine coughed, spit, and died!

"Leavin' me flat, eh?" he barked, grimly, in recognition of the last of his consumed fuel supply.

With a crash his left wing caught a big poplar branch, folded into sharp crackling like the bursting of twenty taut snare drums, hurtled earthward and came to an earth-rending mud-flinging stop in a shell hole.

A hundred doughboys rushed from their protected trenches, oblivious to the dangers about them to rescue their winged buddy.

To Red there was a queer combina-

tion of careening earth, trees all awry, blue sky, blinding light. Blackness! Light again! Then oblivion. . . .

TWO hours later Red Atkinson awoke in his cot at the squadron, after his luminous trip through the planetary regions. Looking toward the light he saw Dutch curled up on a chair next the window, still in his old flying clothes, greasy and dirty. Bewildered, wondering at the truth of his vision, wondering how long he had been there, he jerked upward. Then he sank back with aching body.

"Hello, old cloud-hopper," greeted his comrade. "The Doc said you'd snap outa your long distance flight in a few minutes, although I doubted him. Get up. Get out of it! You're not hurt—at least you don't show it. What a lucky break *we* got! Man, alive, our guardian angels were sure enough riding in *our* ships."

"Dutch! Well, I'll be turned into a Heinie's daschhound, if it isn't!" Red grinned from ear to ear and raised up on one elbow. "Sweet Madel-oone! How'n seven little red hells did *you* get here?"

"Much the same's you, I reckon, Red. Just plain crashed. You kept Fritz from peppering my tail. Machine caught fire. Explosion went *up*. Little friend Dutch got lifted out, burnt a bit. Streaked it to a Yank trench and, here I am!"

"And yuh don't say!" grinned Red. "Just don't seem right, nor possible, somehow, though." Incredulously he felt all over himself for broken bones or missing parts.

"Yeah! I do say, Red. And Red," Dutch rested his hand on his comrade's shoulder, "yuh didn't have a mite of mercy on poor Fritz, didja? He's in the next room, there, what's left of him," he jerked a stubby thumb. "But he'll pull through, too, they say. He's going down to the first aid station soon's the ambulance gets here—if it ever does."

Dutch looked at Red and laughed aloud at the perplexed way the other seemed to be doubting his presence.

"Red, yuh sure did act most castigatious," he admonished, laughing over the word. "Any bonehead could see that yuh didn't have a machine gun to your name that was working. Why, Red, yuh simply scared that poor Fritz plumb into the ground. Yuh ought to be ashamed, really!"

They both laughed.

"Well, it's all right, now," grunted Red.

"Yeah! Partly. We didn't do so badly, either Red. We brought down four Pfalfs, lost one photography plane from that formation, and that still leaves us three to the good. But the Old Man's plumb loco over our not getting to Ribemont, and Montigny and those parts. Walt just left after a conference with him."

"Yeah? Sore, eh?"

"Sore? He's in a regular broiling froth over it. We're for the 'carpet' all right. The orderly said that a French artillery commander called, too, and said that the French wanted to decorate you for the fight you put up and the Old Man almost went crazy. Said he'd see them in hell first and you in jail second!"

"Huh! Old Man Regulation, himself, isn't he? The old dud. Didn't he recognize our fight as bein' worth something?"

"No! Said we weren't sent out to fight but to get our contact patrol completed and to drop our bombs. Wants to see us right away."

The March wind, from down the French hills, tugged and fought at the casements in its song eternal. In some distant way Red caught its eternal beckoning.

"So! Court martial, eh? That's appreciation!" In distant dreamy stare he gazed through the open windows at the broad green fields of France. "Oh," he groaned, prayerfully, "don't let 'em take us off flying!"

Dutch looked at the other sympathetically and smiled hopefully.

"Well, c'mon, son. Stir your stumps. Need some help?" He assisted the other to his feet, his arm around his waist. "In to the skipper."

"IT'S mutiny, that's what it is. Mutiny in war time! Outrageous mutiny, too!" the skipper of the Black Cats boomed in fiery rage. "And I'll tell you three blithering nincompoops another thing: If I had three *more* pilots in this night flying asylum I'd put the lot of you in clink!"

In hard glare he seared his pilots with his stored-up anger. Flying helmets hanging angularly from heads to shoulders, their goggles pushed hastily above red, rim-circled eyes they waited. Silence prevailed as the breathings of five men wheezed out into the small orderly room.

The sergeant major sitting next the skipper nodded his head slowly in critical and sardonic scorn.

"I suppose," the skipper spat, disgustedly, "that you three young pups think that this war was put on just for your *esp-ec-ial* entertainment—eh?"

The three devoted buddies grinned sheepishly, almost audibly. The skipper leaped to his feet, his face purpling in flaming anger.

"Wipe those smiles off! All of you! You simpering, wet-nosed infants!"

Three heads jerked back. Smiles gave away to grave seriousness as the three realized that their skipper was apparently more riled than usual.

"I'm not so sure that I won't put you all in clink, even yet! A week on bread and water might serve to convince you that we're here to win the war, and not," he ground, "to enjoy it!"

"Yes, sir!" replied the three in chorused unison, their bodies as taut as their fatigue and aches would allow them to be.

"Shut-u-p!" boomed the skipper. Then he lowered himself, in shaking anger, to his chair.

The sergeant major, a veteran of over thirty seasoned army years now sneered at the three in open contempt. During his career he had never seen army regulations broken in any such fashion as "shave-tails," "ninety-day wonders," and other war-made officers of youthful ages relentlessly did. To him, they were pilots and officers too young to be in full possession of what his sensitive complex was agreed to term, "army sense."

And, to the sergeant major, a man devoid of army sense was of just about as much use in the world, civil or army, as was a ring-tailed monkey in the jungle, without any ring-tail. As his unpleasant glare fell over the trio it was not hard to divine that each of them had been relegated to that classification.

"And I told them," the sergeant major cut in, "I told them *spe-cif-i-cally* what to do, sir! Gave them your orders *ver-bat-im*." He halted over the glorioussness of the word. "I told them to bomb the railhead at Fonsomme, to strafe the advancing troops on the Ribemont road, and to scatter the cavalry dispersing from Montigny. Nothing could have been more explicit, sir!" The sergeant major's eyes narrowed to slits as he insultingly emphasized his words.

THE three returned that glare in mutual hatred, and as one, wished that they might have had their sergeant major at that moment down the darkest alley in Paris—alone. The coals of fire were heaping on.

"Yes, yes, I know," acknowledged the skipper. "And what did you three wise birds do? You did not go to Fonsomme. You did not go to Montigny. You did not go down the Ribemont road! No! You headed for Fonsomme, all right, as you should have, *but*, as soon as you were out of sight of the airdrome then what did you do? Eh? Eh? You dropped your bombs, Saint Peter only knows where, and deliberately swung off into an air fight!"

"The Pfalfs were very close, sir—" endeavored Dutch Oberlin—"and we—"

"Shut up, Oberlin!" commanded the skipper. Then he continued, sardonically, "So! The German troops still advance on the Ribemont road. The cavalry continue to demobilize from Montigny, and the railhead at Fonsomme remains swarming with enemy troops and troop trains!"

His fist boomed down onto the rickety table before him.

"In other words, just because you three wise fledglings flying army airplanes know more about the war than your superiors my contact patrols go plumb to the devil, my most vital orders go unheeded! But!" he thundered, "It's going to stop! Get this straight: I don't care whether you bring down four or forty enemy fighting machines when you are sent out to accomplish something else. What's more, you'll never get credit for a single plane you may have brought down this night's patrol," he emphasized the words tauntingly, "or on any other night. For the rest of the month your week-end liberties are cancelled!"

The three were rendered speechless. Viciously the skipper jerked out a desk drawer. Papers and books spilled over the floor. The sergeant major bent to pick them up. From the recovered group the skipper snatched a particular file of documents and read his staff orders.

Taking his time, he kept his victims at attention while he carefully scrutinized the sheets before him. Finally he flipped them back into their original resting place.

"Listen here, you!" he blazed. "At dusk, tonight, not later than seven o'clock you three'll take off for that contact patrol. Further than that, you'll jolly well do the job you should have done last night! The enemy is romping through Montigny like he was on vacation. Our artillery can't reach him and they're making ready for a big show. You're to get in there unnoticed and

break their morale. Get that? Smash 'em up!

"And if you swerve one hair off that course you set out on I'll court martial every last one of you and keep you on bread and water for the rest of the war! One more order: when you complete that mission, you are to come home! Come home! Get that?"

"Yes, sir," in unisoned chorus.

In sorry disgust and miserable despair of the moment, the skipper wagged his head from side to side hopelessly.

"One minute!" he commanded. "From now on, remember this: you're not here to run this war! And get this, too: you're not here to say 'yes, sir' to orders and then, after you get into the air make your own. Army regulations have been created for just such men as you who want to do too much thinking for themselves!"

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## CHAPTER IV

### *All for One*

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HE looked questioningly toward the sergeant major to see if that representative of Uncle Sam's regulations had any additional instructions.

"I would advise," commenced the dour-faced sergeant major, "that you young whipper-snappers get out your little blue book of army regulations and acquire just a working knowledge of 'army sense!' It's most obvious that you have none!" he finished with a satisfying smirk.

The skipper looked back at the three. Then he blurted:

"Outa my sight! Outa my sight! Quick!" he barked. "Before I get mad! Out!"

The three well-squelched youths clumped noisily from the office. The last one banged the door. Perhaps it was because he had red hair.

"Hey! You!" fairly shrieked the skipper. "Come back here!"



Quickly, the three returned. The skipper swung about to the sergeant major. The whites of his eyes rolling excitedly from side to side, he ordered:

"Show them military regulations!"

"Yes, sir! Yes, sir!" the sergeant major jumped to his feet eagerly.

"Ten-shun!" he barked, savagely. "Mark time! Double it! Step on it! Faster! Faster! *F-a-s-t-e-r!*"

The little office fairly rocked on its foundations as the three hopped, first from one foot then to the other.

"One-two, one-two-one-two-one-two, onetwoone-onetwo—" the sergeant major clipped the words off with incredible speed while the three human jumping jacks continued their punishment.

"*Halt!*" shouted the skipper, withstanding the clatter as long as he was able. "Attention! Salute! Again! Again! *Again!* Get outa here! You make me sick to my stomach. And, if you want to get in clink, just bang that door again as you go out—please!" he entreated, caustically.

Silent as mice the three stole out. As they cleared the steps of headquarters their pace increased and continued to increase until when they had reached the edge of the hangars they were in full run. The skipper watched them from the corner of his eye. The sergeant major groaned.

"They need a *month* on bread and water, sir!" he wailed, maliciously, regretting that they had escaped so easily.

The skipper watched his fledglings, as he called them, sink onto the air-drome benches. Then he burst into hilarious laughter.

"Oh-ho-ho-ho-oh-oh! Oh, ho, ho oh-ho, ho! Sure, and maybe they do! But dang it, Barters, you can't kill spirit like theirs. We can't afford to keep those three on the ground a minute—except to sleep!" His laughter increased until he was fairly shaking with abandoned mirth, the tears rolling helplessly down his face. "Barters! Splendid fellows! *Splendid!*" he finished, chuckling.

The sergeant major looked at the

skipper of the Black Cat Squadron in silent, astonished disgust and groaned a deep, painful groan—but very inwardly.

ON the flying field the three held an indignation meeting on the hangar bench.

"You'd think that we were babies," growled Dutch, in thorough abhorrence of the whole lecture. Mutiny! Hm-ph! Any dumbell can follow the regulations. It takes a good man to break 'em once in a while!"

"Yeah!" enjoined Red, heatedly. "You said it. Can you beat that old fogey? 'Wet-nosed infants' he called us!"

"And nincom-poops! Whatever that is!" flared Walt, vehemently.

"And didja get that part about our bringing down the Pfalfs?" queried Dutch, bitterly. "Said we 'may have' just as though he didn't know! Can you beat a bird like that? I ask yuh!"

"The three hopelessly cupped their chins in their palms in utter despair.

"We shouldn'ta done it, though," soliloquized Red, finally, regretfully.

"*We!*" blurted Dutch, reproachfully. "Where do you get that 'we' stuff? Wasn't I leading the formation? And didn't I head for Fonsomme? Didn't you and Walt zoom like monkeys over my wings and wade into a dog fight, leaving me—if I cared to—to sail on, alone? Flying to Fonsomme alone, that's a good one! I suppose I should have, eh? Yes! Bombed the railhead alone—with your bombs, and Walt's; strafed the Ribemont road, and broken up the cavalry at Montigny—all alone! Hmph! That is a good one!" he ended vindictively. "Then let you and Walt get brought down in that dog fight, I suppose! Oh, yeah!"

"Huh!" snapped Walt, "You seemed darned anxious to follow us, I noticed!"

Red burst into hearty laughter, Walt and Dutch followed. Then Red shook his head disgustedly, reviewing in his own mind their scene before the skipper.

"Salute! Salute! Salute!" he jeered.

"Didja hear that big, bonehead skipper?"

"It's not him so much," intercepted Walt. "It's that flat-footed bum of a sergeant major who's causing all the rumpus against us. I know it. He hates our guts, just because we're war time officers and haven't a West Point ring on each finger. According to him you'd think we were monkeys. Where does he get that 'ring-tail' stuff? An' where does he get that double-time stuff—for officers—that's what I'd like to know!"

Dutch laughed jovially.

"Well, we got those Pfalfs, anyway. Four of 'em. The skipper really can't laugh that off. We'll get the credit some way; the French will stand behind us. Those Germans thought they were just plain goin' to eat that photography flight, alive—and would have if we hadn't o' stepped in."

"Yeah," moaned Red, "and what credit do we get? None!"

"Oh, well! Anyway, it was well worth it. You know that," exclaimed Dutch, "but just the same it's—"

"Well! Going to sit here and moon all day?" cut in a rasping voice.

The three looked up, startled. They faced the sergeant major. They jumped to their feet. Couldn't they have a minute's peace?

"Aren't you men on contact patrol at dusk?" the sergeant major demanded of them, curtly.

"Yes," they acknowledged.

"Well, then, better get up to the barracks and get some sleep," and he added caustically, "and you *might* do some work on your machines if you have so much time—to waste!"

The three ambled off to the barracks, vengefully.

THE sun had set across Flander's fields and the *cr-ump, cr-oomp, cr-ump* of big guns had settled down to its evening monotony when the rotary motors of three night flying Camels burst into rhythmic song of power on Luf-

berry Field. A low, leaden haze drifted down the wind from No Man's Land. In it was the acrid smell of powder, thinned poisoned gases and the taint of death filtering through the ghostly gray.

The three youthful combat pilots scanned their instruments and revved up their motors to white heat efficiency: 900 revolutions, 1200, 1350, 1400. The purple flares from the rotary engines spun off radially into the velvet night. The efficient hands of the pilots felt over their bomb levers that held the twelve "H. E." demolition bombs, small but deadly in their condensed powers of destruction. All was in readiness.

Dutch Oberlin, the leader, looked toward his two comrades with loyal, friendly questioning. Red Atkinson from the right wing waved a gloved hand skyward, vigorously, signifying that he was clear to take off. Walt followed suit. Dutch pulled his goggles down, held one finger momentarily skyward as the final signal, looked about to see that the air was clear, then to the mechanic holding the wheel chocks he yelled:

"Cast off!"

Three throttles were simultaneously jammed down to their limits as with a deafening roar, a tornado of flung dust and pebbles and rumbling wheels, the three all-blue Camels lifted their taut wings over Lufberry Field and vanished into the growing night.

The wind in his teeth, Dutch grinned in sheer delight of flying and the thrilling adventures to come. In tight "V" like one great synchronized bird the three flew. Straight on, like a barbed arrow, Dutch held their course for Fonsomme, across the Western Front.

Gaining altitude they passed over the gutted trenches at St. Quentin. The mighty boom of intermittent firing clanged into their ears even through the roar of motors. Red and white pin point flashes issued from groups of nearby lines below—the French troops. Then, No Man's Land lay under them. Spread

out in shell holes here and there little groups of shadows moved against the graying panorama — raiding groups in grim struggle to gain their objectives.

The national roads entering St. Quentin were empty. Overturned lorries and trucks, wagon transports, dead men and horses lined the edges in shadowy mass. Allied shells burst all about them with rapid, flashing detonation. Beyond, over the villages of Marcy and Rouvroy long wisps of yellow-and-black smoke curled sickeningly skyward against the leaden gloom where whole villages lay smoldering in war's ruin.

At five thousand feet, white, cotton-ball puffs of Hun Archie rocked and rolled the three machines and drove their pilots to zig-zag courses until they were practically over Fonsomme. Dutch watched his two comrades proudly, from the corners of each eye, at the same time, with his air sense, seeing straight ahead on his course with now and then a snatch upward, back, downward, and to both sides for any signs of approaching enemy planes.

Visibility was being slowly obscured. To the northward Dutch hungrily watched five Rumplers out on reconnaissance — the Hun never ceased his vigilant survey of Allied activities.

"Huh!" he grunted reproachfully, to himself. "Mustn't even look at those ships, eh? We're on contact pat-rol!" he bit off the words maliciously, thinking back on his orders from the skipper.

As they gained farther and farther behind the German lines activities and massed troops increased along the roads, at least showed up more openly and unprotected. Dutch stuck his head out into the wind and gazed intently below keeping a watchful eye on the rising and falling wings of the two Camels alongside his own driving, whining planes. They were circling Fonsomme. Unusual excitement was in progress there. On a long, spacious road thin, snake-like trains moved blackly, slowly up toward the Front. A bit farther up the trains came to a halting stop under

rows of squatty sheds—the railhead of Fonsomme.

To the north and south, thin, swaying lines of shadows passed out of the squat buildings and filled the roads maintaining a steady procession toward the Hun lines—German troops. At his disbanding center, the Hun's work for the night, of getting his soldiers up to the Lines under the cover of darkness was just commencing.

THE three pilots watched the scene studiously, as one man, picking out the most vulnerable spots. Every point indicated importance and congested activity. They looked to their bomb levers controlling their demolition and shrapnel bombs that hung in red, picturesque glintings from under their fuselages.

Dutch took in his gliding angle with a practiced eye and swung his stick sweepingly from side to side, waving his wings in signal virages to his two comrades. Then, slowly, he jammed the stick of his taut little Camel downward and dove his flight for Fonsomme.

Engines throttled back to an almost silent muffle, sinking with bullet-like speed earthward, the three messengers of war flattened out at less than a thousand feet. With a faint shrilling whistle of wind through straining flying wires the three Camels swerved over their first objective. Clicking their bomb levers, one, two, three, and on up to six releases, the pilots dropped their "eggs" into the midst of the gray-clad throngs.

In livid, red and yellow flashes followed by thunderous roar and cyclonic upheavals of ruin, the eggs flared blindingly into the night. Grim chaos, destruction, shook the air. Great clouds of yellow, black, and green smoke rose slowly, spectre-like across the dim terrain.

In tumbling, abandoned confusion the Boche troops sought cover from the as yet unseen enemy of the skies. Under flat cars, passenger coaches, or flattened

against crumbling walls, anywhere, in fact, the horror-struck Hun fled for safety. Horses snorted off across the countryside in groaning, frothing fear. Officers yelled to their men to maintain order but confusion only reigned the greater with the yelling.

Their eggs set, the three, again and again, dove down over the enemy, scattering the fleeing troops with roaring, clattering machine guns and shrieking, death-screaming speed. The steady popping of rifle fire, with now and then the desperate stutter of an isolated machine gun spat up toward them in helpless defense, almost ludicrous in its effort to locate the speeding wings flashing among the stars.

Dutch scanned the situation. The consternation was sufficient. The entire show had been but a matter of breathless short moments and the ruin was complete and far-reaching in moral disruption.

"There, Heinie!" he growled, viciously, "You won't point those rifles of yours into Allied trenches quite as soon as you had expected to, at least."

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## CHAPTER V

### *Regulations?*

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**I**N flaming buildings, exploding ammunition dumps, chaos, and tumult, the three left the Boche to worry out his shattered morale and clogged disorder, for the night. Pulling his stick back as rifle fire whined about them Dutch sent his flight up into a steep chandelle, cooling their white machine guns and swooping off toward the east and Montigny. They would have to hustle on through the dusk of eventide before thick, impenetrable night closed down over them.

A few minutes later they were racing over Montigny and the Hun's cavalry base. Here, as in Fonsomme, long columns of trains crawled puffingly in and out of the village, the sparks from the

tiny engines grunting redly skyward. Expansive fenced yards revealed hundreds of horses quartered there and being prepared for shipment toward the Front.

Dutch brought his three all-blue Camels down, onward, quietly, until his altimeter registered eight hundred feet. Then, stalling, as pre-arranged, the three jammed on their throttles viciously, and with their motors full on, dove on the sheer vertical with all the roar and terrifying noise they could muster. From utter silence, unseen until the moment of dive, the three held the fascinated gaze of thousands of German troops and horses on the ground under them.

Their engines roaring like cannon fire, their flying wires and struts screaming in fearsome, awe-inspiring warning, the three dove onto the troops and horses filling the roads and pens under them. Up the road, down the road, and across the pens, at less than a hundred feet altitude, the three roared out their song of destruction with bursting bombs and rattling machine gun fire pouring into the midst of the Hun. In galloping, stampeding fear the horses broke through and smashed all barriers, injuring hundreds in their panic to flee the death from above, while the troops ran riot for cover of protection.

Organization planned for weeks by the Boche had been disrupted and thrown into tumult for long days to come. After climbing to higher altitudes the three watched the confusion below. More like a circus on the run than an army marching to war did the cavalry at Montigny appear after the fighting three had lifted their glittering, smoke-smudged noses and sped off toward the Ribemont road.

Passing over Bernot at three thousand feet they sighted a *Drachen*, or observation balloon. As one, their trigger fingers itched for a burst or two at the big sausage. Dutch glowered at the great waggish balloon swaying in the breeze.



"Not a chance! Not a chance!" he scorned. "We're on con-tact patr-ol!" he sliced off the words, contemptuously.

The Hun, however, sighting the three night-flying Camels, had commenced to haul his big balloon earthward. The three laughed grimly at his caution and sped on for Ribemont in bitter regard for their constraint.

"The *Drachen* will likely report us," grinned Dutch, "though, and we might be lucky enough to meet a 'welcome home' party when we hit back over the Hun lines." The expectation of the possibility of an air fight, even, made his blood tingle with delight. This contact patrol business was all right in its way, and night flying was the cream of it all, but in genuine thrills there was nothing that offered the excitement of actual air combat. But certainly they wouldn't get home, now, without battling—not after all the red-hot ant hills they had overturned that night.

**A** BLINDING shell burst directly under the three. Their machines rocked, shook, and fell, like leaves on the autumn wind. Another burst to the left—not quite so close. Archie was getting their range and was out to inflict fatal damage. Dutch then drove into a multitude of rocking chair reels, skids, split-hairs, cartwheels, and whirled off into a long falling leaf, sinking earthward. Red and Walt followed every antic of their leader's in such identical duplication that their weavings and cavortings might have been taken as that of a single maneuvered plane. The red flares, however, became thick and bothersome. Their brightness increased as night advanced.

Montigny! Not far from the flares of the trenches themselves the little village lay in a smoldering mass of ruin. Barely skimming the ground, oblivious to the dangers of machine gun fire under them the three dropped over the trenches and down over the cavalry bases. Their machine guns roared out a clattering, air-splitting death, their lu-

minous bullets streaming over the Boche like a phosphorescent stream from phantom aerial garden hoses. Pouring out red death they zoomed, razed the Hun trenches, side-slipped, chandelled, and zoomed over the frenzied Boche flying in fear to his dugout and shelter.

Suddenly, Dutch's eyes became riveted to a spot on the ground ahead. Lying in an open field before them a tiny Baby Nieuport, gaudily painted, its French cocard easily visible, flared and glowed in reddened recency of its horrible disaster. Dutch zoomed over the crash within a half dozen feet of it. The pilot's seat was a crumpling, blazing inferno.

Dutch felt a hidden danger lurking from above. At less than fifty feet altitude, his flight would be in danger if attacked from above. In seconds, a premonition of impending disaster surged through his system. In a flash, he had yanked his stick back instinctively, jammed it to one side, and had rushed his Camels into a dizzy climbing chandelle. In those same climbing seconds he thrust his head to all angles about him. Then he saw.

Off to the northward but a few hundred yards above them four DH4 reconnaissance ships with American cocards zig-zagged, wove, and dipped through long waving searchlight beams of the Hun, struggling, maneuvering valiantly in their efforts to get on into Germany unnoticed. Above them, three Hun scouts wove in and out among them, their machine gun fire reeling off in brilliant line against the night. After them two allied planes, appearing like French Nieuports similar to the one that lay a charred wreck on the ground, sliced off the sky spaces after the Hun.

**D**UTCH looked below and considered. The Boche infantry that they had just strafed was on the rout. Above him his American comrades in the DH4's were in grave danger. It was safe to assume that all of the three

had sufficient ammunition for a first class combat if they conserved it. Their main goal of activities had been completed. It was a matter of seconds and fleeting ones, for Dutch to decide. The skipper's final words still rang in his ears: "and when you complete that mission, *come home!*"

To enter that combat would be utter disregard of orders. Mutiny! That was what the skipper had labeled it. He had accused them of being mutineers.

Between clenching teeth came the shrill question, "Couldn't any fool follow regulations? It took guts to bust 'em all once in a while." Up there in the heavens was a vital mission of some sort struggling to get into Germany. That it was a mighty vital mission was obvious from the way the Huns feverishly strove to destroy them, from the Baby Nieuport that lay a mangled wreck beneath them. Those DH4's were not battling to get into Germany in the night time for any ordinary mission—not four of them on night patrol. They were not there, the three, to make orders, no, but they *were* there to help insofar as it was physically possible for them to do so, to help carry on a winning war.

Circling in a wide arc, he debated with himself.

"He couldn't take his three home with any self-respect and an air fight staring them in the face! Americans there, his own flesh and blood kin were facing possible death. To the devil with the skipper—to the devil with regulations!" Before he had time to act, two tiny sets of wings flashed past his own, ghostly blue in the starlight.

"Ho-ho-ho!" Dutch laughed. His two arms of the three, Red and Walt, had divined his indecision and on a driving, climbing turn were streaking it up for the fight. Good old Red, and Walt. They would never get away with it with the skipper, but they were off for the fireworks and all the thrills of a wartime crowded into a few short moments.

"Anyway," gritted Dutch, gathering himself for the combat, "it'll be good while it lasts. We're off!"

Suddenly, from nowhere, he looked into the brace of four, red spouting, Hun machine guns. In a trice he took in the situation. He recognized the plane as the new four-bladed Fokker triplane carrying four synchronized Spandau guns firing through the four propeller blades. White tracers streaked past his face and smoked through his center section struts and flying wires. A piece of glass from his windshield stuck into his face and went splintering off into the night. Blood ran down over his eyes and matted on his goggles. He swept a quick hand under his glasses and cleared them.

Unthinkingly, instinctively, he did a half-roll.

"So! A Hun 'Roman Candle,' eh?" he ground, viciously. "Of the few in the heavens we rate three of them here! Fine, Heinie! Fine!" he spat. "Let's go!"

As he came out of his half-roll he noted another pair of "tripes" go past from out the velvet night.

"So! Two more, eh? Likely they're Roman Candles, too. That makes five, now," figured Dutch, maintaining a check on the odds it would be necessary for them to fight. "Wonder how many more!"

ONCE out of his maneuver Dutch saw that he had the advantage of his two Hun opponents, being above and to the side of them. The two Huns split off and doubled back under him for an opening, their only possible hope.

Fearing they would drive toward him from under his seat, Dutch flung his rigid little Camel into a vertical climb and headed for his comrades and the main brood of DH4's that needed his help the most. While the two Fokkers had surprised him, Dutch still held the whip hand of advantage.

The Fokkers, their great Mercedes engines booming out their roar of

power, climbed into the fray; slowly they gained and drove up in front of Dutch's nose to cut him off from protecting the DH4's. Then they drove back in a half-roll to be above. Dutch watched them intently as they drove over on their backs before him against the starlit night. It was a daring, cool-headed stunt to cut off the little Camel. For their venture, however, they ran into the deadshot aim of the veteran Dutch Oberlin. On the second he realized his chance, pressed his Bowden controls in shrewd aim before they were atop him. Twin Lewises spat out their wailing fire with thunderous, vibrating jar on the little Camel.

The Huns flared off. A tiny wisp of smoke trailed after the first. In a few seconds the wisp increased to a thick trail, then it was red, licking flame in the wind. In gyrating, reeling, luminous red, the Fokker scout sped earthward on its last lonely flight the nightly heavens blazing red with the roaring Hun. Dutch zoomed violently up and over the flaming mass to join his comrades streaking after the DH4's.

With the firing Hun long arms of light swept into the night and wove about questing among the stars—the Hun searchlights questing the silver wings of the enemy in a battle of the survival of the fittest. The full blast of a fiery beam struck Dutch fair in its center. Side-slipping a sheer two hundred feet, dashing off on a wild vrille he tried to avert the blinding light but the beam hung on with tenacious, relentless accuracy.

The second Hun, undaunted by the loss of his comrade slid down the beam of light and strove to meet Oberlin but the Camel was in better form and the speedy little Le Rhone rose up in a dizzy climb outdistancing the heavy Mercedes. For the moment success had been a matter of motors; the Camel won and Dutch closed in with his buddies despite triplanes, searchlights and darkness. He shot a glance at his altimeter: thirty-six hundred feet. Above, he could see

the two Nieuports struggling with a Fokker. The Frenchmen had their hands full. Perhaps they were assigned escorts, he doubted it but wondered how they came to be there.

"Must be a vital mission, danged vital mission," gritted Dutch as he licked the blood from off his lips and spat it out into the night, "or there wouldn't be all this commotion over four rambling DH4's."

In a flash of groaning, straining motors, Dutch reached his two comrades, zoomed up, over and past them and took his place in front. In the searchlight beams Red and Walt both waved gloved flying hands to him in the sheer glory of the fight and in recognition of his latest victory. Dutch answered in zestful gesture.

"Craz-ee as loons!" he laughed, into the roar of his droning Le Rhone.

Four Fokkers swept up at them and flattened in front of the three, driving them off in a regular rain of bullets, spattering over empennages, fuselages, engine parts, and wings.

"Wow!" vociferated Red. "Some hot babies, them Roman Candles!" A streak of flaming incendiary bullets bored through the fuselage of Red's Camel. His heart froze as he watched the tiny spurt of flame spread there by his side. Letting his controls go he slapped his gloves over the burning holes. Then spitting on his hands rubbed his damp gloves over the charred linen.

"Madelone, oh, sweet mad-el-one, that was a close shave!" he breathed as he yanked his controls back into position and climbed for the formation once more.

Dutch shuffled his three until he had them close up to his American comrades of the DH4's. Over the main brood of Yanks the guns of all could be brought into play in greater force. As the next rain of bullets splashed over the Camels the three went into a lightning-like split-hair turn. When they straightened one tripe rested on Red's tail. Dutch recognized the imminent

danger, did a quick half turn of a vrille and secured a position over that Fokker's tail. Red, on the other hand was on the tail of a tripe.

When the Fokker straightened he found himself in a strange predicament; behind him was a Camel, ahead of him was a Camel in range but just ahead of the Camel and in the range of his own guns was a brother Fokker so that he dared not fire ahead. Dutch, on the other hand was in the same predicament with Red just ahead and in line of fire despite the fact that he had his Fokker tripe in range. In diagonal line they sped. It was a thrilling second. Dutch climbed a bit, he was not more than sixty feet above the Fokker. Intensely he watched Red's plane, then the Fokker.

He dropped the nose of his Camel. There, was Red beyond range for a certainty? He shot a glance down his bead-and-ring sights as best the night would allow. Yes, he was clear. Diving, he pressed his triggers rigidly down. He could not miss. As his nose dropped his incendiary bullets sprayed over the Hun at less than a fifty foot range and as the Camel's fire-spitting nose plunged past the tail of the tripe there was not room to slip a matchbox in between the two planes. Caught in the backwash of the Fokker's powerful propeller Dutch flopped off in an angular careening side-slip.

But with him, tumbling through the graying gloom, his hands forever stilled on the controls and triggers of his Spandau guns the Hun doubled into his seat and hung on the back of his belt as his ship drove earthward without control.

Urging his motor Dutch gained upward again. As he reached the tumbling trio he was met by an explosive burst of flame shattering off into the night in blinding, searing light like a great aerial skyrocket. Walt, from under a Fokker, fell off and away; he had inflicted a telling incendiary bullet into the fuel tank of a Fokker tripe from underneath, causing it to catch fire.

At the explosion the three and the two DH4's above, rocked and shot upward like bits of paper in a whirlwind. Barely able to avoid the flaming cauldron, all veered off in fleeing haste. The Hun crackled and hissed in red, licking flames and rushed screamingly earthward, his fuel tank burning like a torch in the wind. His accompanying Hun, on the other hand, scurried off upward to make an easier essay with a lumbering DH4.

Dutch snatched a look at his altimeter: six thousand feet. At the far left end of the formation two simultaneous bursts of flame seared into the heavens. Things were happening fast. The Three then splashed in to a scattered, disorganized dog fight. Fokkers, Nieuports, DH4's and Camels struggled in a skyrocketing display of aerial fireworks. In the wild flaring battle lights the dim shadows of a small French Nieuport and a DH4 tumbled through the melee into their grand finale. A low half moon hung in a smoky east. It was pitch black but when the moon got a bit higher visibility would be better. Here and there a few wisps of cirrus cloud flecked the sky.

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## CHAPTER VI

### *Invisible Three*

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TWO Fokker tripes were streaking after a frantically zig-zagging DH. As they dropped into the black void of the night and were lost to view in a cloud Red followed their direction with his eye. When they had dropped from sight into the cloud he dove. Couldn't let the tripes get away with that—not by a skyfull. Coming out in a screaming dive on the under side of the cloud he came up from under and let go a couple of hard bursts at the Hun. The bullets pelted under the Boche's tail and fuselage. Then the two circled in red-hot combat.

Taken utterly by surprise the Hun



was at a disadvantage. Together they looped, rolled, side-slipped, and zig-zagged through the night, their luminous streams of gun fire winding and trailing over each other like great fiery ropes. Red let another burst go, another . . . The Hun, was he hit? He could not tell. At least the Hun was in a terrific dive. Planes did not dive straight away from their opponents in those days for nothing. If it was a trick it was a disastrous policy and had to be cleverly handled. As he watched the Hun Red saw Walt's Camel drive past almost within touching range. Right on down a searchlight beam Walt sped. Strange, thought Red. Taking a sharp look at his fast fleeing Hun Red shot back up to the formation wondering anxiously about Walt.

Above, Dutch Oberlin, alone, circled and wove over the upper wings of the three remaining DH4 ships. In a short span of fiery explosive seconds the air had been cleared. There was not a Hun in sight. But more than that neither could Dutch catch a glimpse of a single night flying Camel. He strained his eyes wildly into the black sea of night about him. Nothing, nothing save the long purple flares of the DH4's Libertys streaking after them and the distant blinking lights of Germany far below.

Suddenly a great bitterness came over him. War! His comrades! Where were they? Had they, too, sped earthward in a long, red, weaving dive of death? A slim finger of light snapped into the sky nearby; around and around it searched. Finally it caught the formation.

"Won't they ever let up?" Dutch asked himself.

What was that? Down in the searchlight's beam an all-blue Camel was turning and climbing skyward.

"Great clouds of glory!" yelled Dutch, gratefully. "There's one o' me buddies, anyway." His face radiated with happiness. "Oh, ho, ho! Heinie! he laughed aloud, in victorious glee.

"Wontcha ever learn not to play with such dangerous toys as airplanes and machine guns?"

The DH4's dove off toward their objective down behind the German hills at Dutch watched with tired, swollen eyes. He did not follow.

"Wherever they're headed for," he soliloquized, "they're near it and don't need our help any longer."

He throttled his engine back and spiralled down through the light fleecy clouds. At four thousand feet he overtook the purple flares of Red's Camel limping up toward him. Dutch swung within a half dozen feet to make sure of the ship. Yes, there was the R12 on Red's ship white against the black cat on the fuselage. But Walt, where was *he*?

Together the two comrades circled the skies seeking their lost mate. Dutch would light a Very light of green from his side, then Red would loose a white one from his side. But Walt was nowhere to be found.

At eight-thirty, heavy-hearted, battle weary, and heartsick over the loss of their comrade Dutch gave up the chase and headed the two of them homeward by the lights of burning parachute flares and the regular bursts of shell from the trenches below. Streaking it over No Man's Land, dodging in and out among the searchlight beams, zig-zagging and slipping about over razing machine gun fire from below and artillery shells from above, the two heavy-hearted pilots pushed their all blue Camels homeward. Both fully realized that a court martial was more than likely awaiting them. The loss of their comrade would only openly serve to expose their flagrant disregard of orders. And so it was that the two youths roared on in their tiny battle planes through the night, their consciences stabbing them over the loss of their one best buddy, and wondered on the outcome of their fates. Little they cared whether they lived or died, whether their planes set them down over No Man's Land or not.

Their one comrade, the remaining vital arm of their trio, their war brother of many a thrilling grip with Dame Death was missing . . .

AT nine o'clock of a brisk March evening of the War, the skipper of the Black Cat Squadron of Night Flying Camels walked the floor of his operations office in nervous, agitated steps. Suddenly the telephone jangled raucously into the night.

"Hello!" he answered, impatiently. "Hello!"

"Hello! This is Captain Babcock of the Twelfth Reconnaissance Group."

"Yes! Yes!"

"I want Captain Bradley Mathews."

"Speaking!"

"We sent four DH4 reconnaissance planes out tonight on a vital mission carrying compressed food to American troops marooned in 'Death Valley.' Position Dc-6y-T2. Four French Nieuports escorted them. The formation was under constant attack by Huns."

"Well, what of it? Is that anything new," blurted the skipper.

"The entire French escort was brought down," continued the other, obstinately.

"All right!"

"One of our DH4's was brought down!"

"Hm-mm!"

"Four Roman Candle Fokker triplanes were brought down. Say! Did you have three night flying Camel scouts out patrolling the Montigny road?"

"Yes! Yes! Yes!" answered the skipper, impatiently. "Where'n the hell are they?"

"They? Where? Why, I don't know, now. Why? Anyway, those three Camels drove the Huns off and enabled the DH4's to get their shipment of food to seven thousand marooned doughboys—the most important aerial mission that the Air Service has undertaken since the commencement of the war. If those boys get back alive they must be decorated, Captain Bradley!"

The skipper swelled in grizzly pride. "Decorated, the devil," he spat, furiously. "Not if I have anything to do with it they won't be decorated. They've got too many already; we won't be able to live with the young pups!"

He banged down the receiver.

ALMOST as one, two sets of Camel wheels rumbled across Lufberry Field as two all-blue ships came to a tired, smoking rest on their last few drops of remaining gasoline. The air-drome floodlights glared out their welcome as the tiny ships taxied across the stubbled field.

Simultaneously a British motor lorry roared into the squadron parking, hesitated a moment while a tall youth, hatless, clothing burned and torn to shreds, face red with powder burns, limpingly staggered to the ground, then the lorry whirled on out onto the main road and was lost to view in the night.

When the lad saw the floodlights on he rushed out onto the flying field as though he was as good as new.

Dutch and Red, tired and bleeding, clothing bullet torn, flopped to the ground from the interiors of their tiny "offices." Incredulously, they stared at a youth before them. What strange apparition was this? Was it a ghost? Could that tattered, haggard form there before them actually be their lost comrade? It was none other! They flung their arms around his shoulders in their delight.

"Skyrockets and Very lights!" yipped Red. "Where's your parachute, mister? Walt! As I'm alive!"

"And I'm a toasted Heinie, if it ain't," joined Dutch, in tingling joy. "Where'n the name o' Saint Luke did you drop from?"

Walt laughed through flame-seared lips.

"A fat Heinie with one o' them Roman Candle playthings sprayed off my rudder and half my tail parts," he explained, sardonically. "All he left was my seat and the wings. Managed

to flop across the lines. You shoulda seen the bus! Caught fire! Total washout!"

"Never mind the bus!" blurted Dutch. "You're here, aren't you!"

Arm in arm, as one united, the three, bloodstained, powder burned and with grim lines of fatigue riven in their faces they strode into the operations office to face the skipper. Court martials, handcuffs, jail, bread and water—come what may, they cared not a whit.

A breathless moment later they stood motionless before a rigid skipper. For a half second he glared at them. The three chilled; their faces blanched white. It dawned on them suddenly: court martial would mean their being taken off flying! Then the grizzled veteran of other wars than theirs burst into uncontrolled laughter.

"Well!" the skipper looked over the blood-smeared and weary pilots gravely. "Well! I see you're still mutineers! But! Listen to me!" he boomed the words out as his fist thumped the table before him. "Listen to me! I'm glad that you had brains enough to break the Army's regulations when the emergency required it!"

HE stuck out a gnarled and burly fist for each to shake. They grabbed the fist eagerly but they were unable to realize whether they were dreaming from the black pit of some shell hole, or whether life was actually a fact there with them. As the skipper bore down on each one with a vise-like grip he added:

"Splendid work, my boys! Splend-id!" His eyes shone brightly as he continued: "You finally did manage to complete one of my contact patrols, didn't you? I'm glad of that. You carried out orders—almost!" He laughed, grimly. "I suppose that this last air fight was simply hung all about you by the destinies of Heaven eh?"

The three, wisely, maintained silence. "And," the skipper went on, "you obeyed orders after your work was done? You did not!" a fiery glint shone

from his eye. Then he smiled paternally. "Well, we all learn with the years," he concluded solemnly. "The war can't always follow the regulations and be successful. In defending the American reconnaissance group as you did, through your own initiative, you assisted to success what was undoubtedly the most vital aircraft mission the war has yet seen."

His jaws set in iron line.

"I have decided to give you credit," he said, "for the four Huns you brought down last night, as well as those you brought down this evening, when their confirmation reaches me!" He hesitated in grave seriousness. "From now on you will each be promoted to the grade of captain."

The faces of happy gratefulness that smiled frankly from the eyes of three youths toward him amply repaid him for any worries or disgruntlements that they had given him in the past.

"Very well!" he concluded. "Carry on, men. Keep up the good record you have started for Black Cat Squadron and just remember one thing: over confidence has killed more flying men than bullets!"

The three stepped out onto Lufberry Field and strode off toward their barracks for their much needed rest.

"Whew!" whistled Red softly. "I feel as though I'd been dropped from twenty thousand feet without a parachute and landed softly on a feather pillow!"

A towering figure, the sergeant major, hastened across the barracks square under the dim yellow path lights. In soldierly, vigorous pace he passed before them. Critically, he looked them over.

"Salute your three future captains of Uncle Samuel's Flying Service!" snapped Walt biting, maliciously, in boyish revenge.

The sergeant major, mouth agasp, scarcely able to believe his ears, yet knowing the words to be truth, gave a snappy, regulation salute. Bringing his hand down with a vicious slap he headed toward the skipper's office.

# High Spy



**By Robert Carter**

*Author of "2-4-1," "The Phantom Flyer," etc.*

A strange challenge dropped from the skies—Mallory winged over the Austrian lines to the fateful rendezvous, where death played no favorites!

**A** BALLILA stood on the line, its prop swishing softly in the morning sun. In the cockpit a tousled head bobbed about. The mechanic was warming up the engine, his black eyes intent on the instruments arrayed before him. Gently he eased the throttle bar back, then full forward. The sturdy biplane trembled and pushed against its chocks as if eager to be off.

It was quiet on the field. The three flights that composed the Fifty-Seventh Pursuit Squadron, American, were out on patrol, somewhere above the Treviso sector. The Ballila stood alone on the line.

The door of the officers' barracks swung open. A lone figure, garbed in flyer's clothing, stepped out into the sunshine. Medium of build, trim-looking in a leather overcoat and polished boots, with an overseas cap jauntily cocked on his head. He

looked toward the idling Ballila, cast an eye on the sun, then strode toward the operations office.

Inside, he faced the lean, tanned officer who sat behind the wooden table; saluted.

"Lieutenant Dudley Mallory, reporting, sir. Solo reconnaissance, with the captain's pleasure."

Captain Blair, squadron commandant, snapped his half-finished cigarette out of the open window.

"Solo reconnaissance, again?" There was a peculiar emphasis on the last word as the captain muttered it.

Mallory flushed, said nothing.

"When was the last one, Lieutenant?"

"The same time; yesterday."

"Get anything?"

Coldly, the flyer replied, "You have my report on the flight, sir."

"Well?"

"My ship is on the line, waiting."



"Take some advice from me, Lieutenant—watch your step."

"Mine?"

For a long minute the two stared at each other, a dull hatred burning in their eyes. It was Mallory who broke the tension. Without a word he saluted, swung about on his heel. Strode through the door to the tarmac.

Out on the line he turned toward the mechanic who was nursing the crate.

"How is she, George?"

"She's in the pink, Lieutenant. Blime me if she ain't. Just listen to 'er." He gunned the Spa engine while Mallory strolled about the ship, idly twanging guys or feeling off struts.

"Sound nice, George. Let me at her."

"Right-o, sir."

MALLORY climbed to the step of the Ballila. He reached inside to release the throttle bar when his ears picked up a strange sound. The fluttering of wings sounded over the idly throbbing engine. He looked about him. Over his right shoulder, just touching the wing of his ship, a carrier pigeon was soaring toward him. Uncertain, it fluttered about for a moment. Then it came to rest on the flyer's shoulder.

The lieutenant reached out. He grasped it and searched its tail feathers, idly wondering where it had dropped from. Surprised, he plucked out a tiny cylinder that was attached to its tail, clipped to one of the feathers. Gently he smoothed it out, slipped off the slip of paper that had been rolled neatly inside the cylinder.

The pigeon stayed on his shoulder. Puzzled, Mallory slipped open the paper, held it up to read it. He blanched, muttered an impatient exclamation—then reread the note.

"N-14-B3 . . . Map 15. For God's sake—come at once!"

There were two initials signed to it—P. L.

That was all—yet Mallory's brain reeled with the import of the message.

A call for help—coming out of nowhere. Straight to his shoulder the pigeon had flown. From where? Mallory could not tell. He looked again at the writing. It stirred vague memories. He had seen that writing somewhere before—it was a feminine hand, too. But where? For minutes Dud Mallory stood there, trying to puzzle the thing out in his own brain. Then the urgency of the message spurred him into action.

He wheeled about, ran to the operations office. This was something for Blair's immediate attention. Excited over the incident, he stumbled through the door, only to stop short before Blair's desk. There was another man there—colonel's eagles on his shoulders. At first Dud fumbled about in his mind, trying to place the man. Then he remembered. Colonel Lansing, recently arrived from Paris to take charge of the Fifth Pursuit Group, of which Fifty-seven was a part.

Dud Mallory saluted, waited for some word from the captain as he watched the older officer stride back and forth over the wooden floor, evidently under some emotional strain. A draft from the open window beside the desk stirred some of the official-looking documents on it; and for a moment he relaxed from rigid attention to save them from being scattered on the floor.

Blair noticed him there, for the first time. "Stand at ease, Lieutenant. I'll talk to you in a moment."

Turning to the colonel, he continued. "I'll follow any suggestion you may offer, Colonel, gladly. But what can we do about it—what possible method can we use in getting your daughter back if Intelligence is not up to the job?"

Dud Mallory almost leaped from his position. Here was a clue! Or was it? Could the colonel be talking about the sender of the message? He waited, while the colonel spoke in short, jerky sentences.

"Out there five days now. No contact with anybody. Every operative in the sector trying to figure it out—nothing doing. Something must be done, Captain Blair!"

"These reports, Colonel," Blair fingered the sheets of paper, lying on his desk. "What about these?"

"Damn the reports! Just see that no one gets hold of them till the DHQ messenger gets here for them. But what about my daughter?"

**S**OMETHING snapped in Dud's brain at that instant. Those initials on the message! P. L., it had been signed! Patricia Lansing—now he remembered where he had seen the writing before. The girl he had met in Paris. Had a father in the service—but Dud had never discovered where. He'd never met him—this must be he!

He burst into the conversation—"Colonel—I say, Colonel—I just got this message by carrier pigeon out there while I was climbing into my ship. That's what I reported back here for. Does this help?"

He handed over the note to the astonished colonel. The old officer scanned the writing avidly—"Why—that's her writing, Lieutenant! That's her writing!"

Blair cocked a suspicious eye at the lieutenant—"Where'd you get it, Mallory?"

"Just picked up the bird a minute ago, Captain. The point is—where's this map? Number 15 it mentions—Let's have a look at it!"

"Yes, yes—by all means! Where is the map, captain?"

"All right, Mallory. I'll take care of this—take it easy."

In a minute Blair produced the

map, and Mallory's eager eyes swept over it anxiously. Criss-crossed with tiny squares—yet it took the flyer a moment to find the pinpoint he desired. There it was—a tiny square, covering no more than a quarter of a mile. Somewhere in that tiny square, miles behind the center of fighting activities, and in Austrian territory, was Patricia Lansing.

The three officers gazed steadily at the map. All eyes were concentrated on that spot which Mallory had pointed out as the place mentioned in the note. Something like thirty-four miles behind the actual reserve lines—in a sector known to be unoccupied by enemy troops. Yet there, according to the message of the pigeon, an operative of the Allied forces was in danger.

Dud looked up. "I'll get over there, sir." His eyes were staring directly into the colonel's. "I'll get over there—and I'll bring your daughter back. *Now!*"

Blair's voice, chill as steel, cut in. "Wait a minute. Just a minute. Where are those reports?"

"What reports?"

"Those reports that were on this table just a minute ago, Lieutenant."

"What—*what?*" The colonel spluttered, helplessly.

"Those reports were on this table just a minute ago," Blair's voice was cold. "Now they're not. They didn't fly away, Mallory."

"What do you mean, Blair?"

"*You* know what I mean, Mallory! You held those reports to keep the draft from blowing them on the floor a moment ago. You knew they were there. Well—they're not now! There's just three of us in here—the Colonel's out, he brought 'em himself. Now what about it, Mallory?"

**T**HE colonel, stunned by the sudden disappearance of the important reports from the Intelligence officers which were to reach Divisional

Headquarters, could say nothing. Of the hatred between these two men, he sensed nothing. Of the struggle between them now, he could see nothing. His mind was reeling from the blow which Fate had dealt him in the last few hours.

"One of us has those reports, Mallory. They're important. Were made at the risk of a dozen lives. *One of us has them!*"

Dud Mallory eased his flying coat open, exposing the tunic and Sam Browne. His thumb was thrust into the belt. There was a long minute of silence while hate-filled eyes glared across the table. Mallory's left hand was still on the map.

"Lieutenant Mallory, you're under arrest! I'll detail a guard for you at once. You will report to your quarters. I'll close this damned field tight until those papers make their appearance. Get me?"

Still the flyer remained motionless. Again the S. C. repeated the order—"You're under arrest, Lieutenant!"

Mallory shot a glance at the colonel, who had slumped into a chair, exhausted.

"Like hell I am!"

There was a flashing motion—an exclamation from the colonel. In the flyer's hand there appeared, as if by magic, a Colt automatic. Its muzzle was held unwaveringly on the squadron commander.

"I don't give a damn about fifty reports, Blair! I'll know where to find 'em when I want them! I'm going out to get that girl—and I'm going now—get me?"

"Insubordination—Damn you, Mallory! Insubordination—treason—I'll have you hanged!"

"Perhaps. But I've got a lot of things to do first, Blair. Don't move! Just keep the way you are—that's it! My ship's on the line, ready to go. It's heading for the girl and it's not coming back without her—get it! And when I come back—we'll

settle this report thing—not before!"

"Damn you, Mallory . . ." Blair lunged forward across the table, throwing the heavy wooden candle holder at the flyer. The automatic swung down in a short arc, landing squarely on the captain's head. Blair slumped forward, still.

Colonel Lansing watched it all as if in a dream. Insubordination—assault—treason, actually. Any one of these crimes meant the wall in time of war—and yet this mad flyer was going over after his daughter. Helpless he stood, facing the cold muzzle of the young officer's automatic. He watched, still, as the man backed out of the room, hurried to the ship that stood idling on the line.

There was going a man who had broken every law of the army—defied every convention that was held doubly dear in time of war. There was going a man who would be marked an outlaw the moment things resumed their normal aspect. The colonel heaved a sigh. There was going, too, the one chance in a million of bringing his daughter back alive. And if this man could do it. . . .

AT TEN thousand feet Dud Mallory flew, hunched low in the cockpit of his Ballila. Straight through to the waving lines that marked the Italian front trenches he sent the roaring ship on. His mind a jumble, Dud was attempting to work out the answer to the problem which confronted itself.

A pigeon had flown to the field of the Fifty-seventh—and he had found it. Ten minutes later the colonel commanding the group had reported his daughter missing—his daughter, one of the operatives of I. D. And then—the reports. Gone from under their eyes while they stood about the wooden table. True, the window had been open—but somehow, Dud Mallory sensed that they had not

disappeared through that window.

It was too much for him.

Of one thing he was certain. Back at Fifty-seven, Blair had recovered and had probably started action in his case. Already the huge, clumsy machinery of General Headquarters would start moving. In a short while he would be an outcast—the whole front would be seeking the pilot of Ballila number 348.

He had promised to bring the colonel's daughter back. How could he reach her in the first place? What could he do after he reached her? Then too, his ship was a single-seater. Nowhere could he land and change it now for a two-seater. There was no hope for Dud Mallory as he swung the Ballila straight ahead over those lines and into the enemy territory—from which there would be no return.

Northward the ship swerved as Dud approached the mouth of the Tisino, seeking the section he had pin-pointed on Map Number 15. It was tacked on his board now, and Dud's eager eyes were watching for the appearance of the marked sector.

He checked with his clock and compass. According to his calculations, he should be directly over the point in the next three or four minutes. No sign of enemy ships in the sector. No sign of any activity anywhere. This was a new sector for the flyer of the Ballila. Five thousand feet below him lay—what?

Dud Mallory, swinging down in a powerless glide, didn't know. Nor did he care.

Mechanically he drew the throttle bar backward. The loud roaring of the engine was hushed. Only the high-pitched whine of the wires as they sliced through the wind came to Mallory as he slipped quietly down the skyway.

He threw up his goggles, looked overside. His keen eye caught something—some movement far below

him. Something that crossed his vision for just the fraction of a second. A brownish smudge, which seemed to have moved along the ground at a terrific pace.

Dud threw his stick back, brought the nose of the ship up a bit, cutting down on the steep dive. Again that smudge of brown, coming into high relief against a background of blue water, appeared to him. And this time Dud recognized that smudge as a pair of wings!

IT was lost to sight again—evidently the plane had landed somewhere in that sector. Mallory's keen eyes searched the ground for some sign of a break in its pattern—some indication of a hidden hangar or landing field. But there was none—the smudge had disappeared completely—like a groundhog that pulled its hole in after it.

Down to five hundred feet he brought the ship, swinging in for a landing in a long, narrow wheat field that had not been cut down for months. No sign of life anywhere, yet this must be the spot where he had seen the brown wings disappear.

The whistling of his wires reached a higher pitch. He gunned the engine—and abruptly the landing wheels bounced against the earth. Another bump—and then the ship stopped. Dud Mallory had finished the first lap.

And now that he was here—?

He climbed out of the pit of the Ballila. His eyes roved about the field as he sought some concealing culvert for his ship. He took a step away from the Ballila. Two. Then suddenly he whirled about as if shot.

From behind him had come a burst of laughter—half mocking. Dud Mallory was staring directly into the cold muzzle of a German Luger, held in the hands of a man in the Italian Air Service uniform.

From behind the gun a leering face



peered into his own. The man was satisfied thoroughly with the job he had done. For a moment cold fury possessed the American flyer. Then he realized the futility of bucking that businesslike automatic. He shrugged.

The other spoke. "You followed me, Lieutenant?"

Mallory remembered that brown smudge that had flitted over the earth below him. Obviously, this man was the pilot of that ship.

"Nope."

"At any rate, we were prepared for you, Lieutenant. You shall be given a complete rest from further activities. Perhaps for a few days. Perhaps for a week." The man's voice was low and pleasant, all suggestion of enmity or hate absent.

"That's interesting."

"A cigaret, perhaps?" The officer offered a package.

"Thanks. Where now?"

"Ahead of me, please. Around the bend there you will find a cottage. You will precede me inside it. It will be your home for a short space of time."

Dud obeyed. He swung around the bend, his eyes casting about in keen anticipation of a break. None met his view. As he came about the turn in the field, a low-roofed house met his gaze.

From behind it, a tall, slender mast rose high into the air. Mallory hadn't noticed that coming down. Funny. But now he recognized it instantly. Wireless. This place must be equipped with up-to-date materials. Probably a spy-center.

Mallory threw open the door—stepped inside.

THE room was barely furnished. A table; three or four chairs and a work bench off to one side comprised the entire room. Mallory's eyes riveted on the work bench. On top of it, amid a maze of bulbs and

wires, lay a sending set. To one side a receiving set. And between them, what appeared to be a loud speaker. From below the floor came the soft, steady hum of a generator.

"Sit down, Lieutenant."

Dud obeyed. The officer lifted a wall phone, spoke into the mouthpiece in jerky sentences. Austrian words flowed into the piece, and Mallory was able to interpret but little of the hasty conversation. The officer returned the receiver to its hook, turned to the flyer.

"You want, I suppose, an explanation, Lieutenant Mallory?"

Dud jumped at the sound of his name. The other smiled. "Yes, I know who you are. As a matter of fact, that note which came from one of your former operatives who was wise enough to choose the proper alternative in her relations with us. . . ."

Mallory jumped to his feet. "You—you mean that one of our—"

"Exactly."

Mallory's pulse leaped wildly. The officer had said "*Her* relations." The operative then, was a woman! Probably—Patricia Lansing!

He listened while the officer continued.

"Your ship will be dismantled and shipped to Treviso, where it will probably be used by our air service. Meanwhile, you will be my guest. Yes, mine and the lady's. Of course, we shall eventually make some other disposition of you. Just now, you will remain here. And I might add, Lieutenant, that you will learn a lot while you are here. So much, in fact, that we cannot possibly permit your leaving this place alive and alone. You understand, I hope?"

Mallory nodded. The pseudo-flyer replaced the pistol in its holster.

"I am Guyer of the Intelligence. You no doubt have heard of me. Make yourself absolutely at home, Lieutenant. Of course, you shall hand

over your revolver. There, that's better."

The speaker on the table hummed with a newer, higher power note. A deep voice barked into the room. It came so loudly, seemed so close, that Mallory, unprepared, stepped backward. The Austrian reached forward, turned a knob slowly, the voice diminished, assumed a conversational tone.

"Guyer—Guyer—" the voice called.

The Austrian reached a slim hand toward the table, lifted a tiny microphone from the maze of instruments. Into it he whispered softly one word.

"Guyer."

As the voice came in over the speaker, clearly audible to Mallory, the flyer was stunned.

"I'll—be—damned!"

"Silence, fool!"

**D**UD MALLORY stood still. How many times he had heard that voice—barking orders, shouting blasphemies! Dud knew it without a doubt. The man on the other end of that wireless instrument was none other than Ronald Blair, commandant of the Fifty-seventh.

The voice was speaking again. Dazedly Mallory listened.

"Divisional checks drive along Treviso sector with five battalions of Alpini, and three divisions of Arditi, the shock troops. Four British and two American squadrons to concentrate and attack over the Livenza River. Feltre and Vittorio the objective. Close."

The man took over the tiny microphone again, spoke softly into it to the waiting speaker at the other end.

"Acknowledge. Three-Forty-Eight has per instructions. Close."

A switch clicked in the stillness. The power note was gone from the speaker. Guyer, amused at the astonishment of the Yank flyer, shrugged his shoulders.

"Short-wave, Lieutenant, can do much. Only one other station in the sector can pick this up—and it is temporarily out of commission. Your operative L6 used this as her base before she turned it over—"

"You lying dog—I'll kill you!" Mallory leaped from his seat, lunged forward at the smiling officer. There was an ominous click as the Luger reappeared in the Austrian's hand. Dud stopped.

"We thought you were dangerous once, Lieutenant. That is why you are here. You are not dangerous any longer. I advise you not to try that again."

Baffled, Mallory stood, hands clenched at his sides.

A step sounded outside. The door swung open. A woman stepped into the room. Tall, fair-haired, beautiful of face. Mallory recognized her at once! Patricia Lansing!

"Oh—"

Suavely, the Austrian bowed. "We have company. I did not have time to apprise you of the fact. May I present the most esteemed Lieutenant Mallory of the Fifty-seventh?"

Proudly, never faltering, the girl stepped close to the astonished Mallory. "This—Lieutenant—is a long-awaited pleasure!"

Bowing low, Mallory did not fail to catch the hidden meaning behind the words. Yet as he looked up, directly into her eyes, they mocked him with their icy calm. This was not the girl he had met in Paris. Yet Dud Mallory knew that he was facing Patricia Lansing.

Thinking hurt him—his mind was reeling with the thoughts that raced each other in his tired brain. Too much had happened in this one day. Dud Mallory was a fighter and a flyer. Diplomatic relations and intelligence systems were far beyond his ken. He resigned himself, and prepared to make the best of the situation.

DINNER was over. Served by strong-looking men in the Austrian uniform, each with a wicked-looking Luger at his hip, Dud Mallory found no opening for his agile mind. Not once had the girl who sat on his left shown a sign of distress. Not once had she intimated by the slightest gesture that she was being held against her desires.

Guyer had seated himself on the other side of Mallory. The meal seemed unreal, a dream, as Mallory sat there between them, listened to their idle talk. No thought of war, of the presence of death, save in the uniforms which both the girl and the officer wore, and his own.

Guyer glanced at his wrist watch, then at the girl.

"It is five days now, is it not?" he asked politely.

Dud thought he saw the girl's face blanch. But the same icy calmness returned almost instantly. She nodded quiet affirmation of the Austrian's remark.

"Time to call your station as you promised, no?"

Again the girl nodded. Throwing her napkin down on the table, she rose, stepped toward the instrument on the bench.

"You know what to relay?"

Her voice steady and clear, she answered. "Indeed, Colonel, I do."

She reached the set. Discarding the radiophone devices, she leaned toward the wireless key which stood beside the receiving set. Practicing, she ticked off a few words in International code while Mallory listened avidly; listened for some message she might mean to convey to him. But the Austrian was listening as intently, though more calmly. He smiled as he noted Mallory's keen concentration.

"You will hear much, Lieutenant—I am sure."

Patricia Lansing threw in her key. Again that humming noise of the

generator reached Dud. His temples pounded madly as he wondered at this new move in the game, waited for the message this girl was about to send. Wondering whom it would reach.

Never once did she look back at him. Her hand clicked steadily on the key as she sent forth her call letters.

"L3—L3—L3—"

They waited, tense, but no answering click came over the silent wire. Mallory glanced at the Austrian, found him staring, tense, at the girl, his hand on the butt of his Luger.

"You said five days." His voice sounded grating and harsh.

"Five days, Colonel," was the calm answer.

"Then they should be waiting, no?"

"They will answer in a moment."

Again she pressed the key, again the call drifted out into the air. They waited a minute, two. Then the answer came over in shrill dots and dashes. "L3—L3—L3—"

With a curt gesture, the key clicked out the question. "Your call?"

"Savoia—Savoia."

"Stand by—"

ALL doubt was gone from Mallory's mind now. An Italian station somewhere had answered the girl's call. Clenching his fists in helpless rage, he listened while the girl calmly clicked off her message.

"Advise all divisions—Treviso drive set—Austro headquarters unaware—Alpini may take over—sector without opposition—air cleared over Livenza—every move as per advices—L6—L6—acknowledge."

The clicking stopped for a moment as Mallory gasped at the knowledge of the message that had been transmitted. Ten minutes before, the Austrian armies had been advised of the drive concentrations. And now

a slim, beautiful girl had sent the message that would mean the destruction of those concentrations.

The clicking of the instrument awoke him from his dazed reverie. Back over the wires came the fateful dots and dashes that advised receipt of the news. Dud's heart stood still. He looked long into the eyes of the girl as she turned from the set. For a fraction of a minute a look of helplessness—a beseeching gesture—shone in them. Then it was gone, replaced by a calm, icy stare that mocked him.

But Dud Mallory caught something else in them, too. A bare glance from her eyes to the set. Hiding his anxiety, he glanced toward it. The key was open—that generator hum was still flowing through the wires. She had left it open for him—!

There followed a moment of anguish as the Austrian came forward, bowed to the girl.

"Well done. Well done, indeed."

He turned to the flyer. "You will remain here, while I escort the lady to her room? Then perhaps we shall have *café noir* and some cigarets, together."

Dud's tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth. He could not speak—just nodded his assent. That power note in the set was low, yet tantalizing. Mallory expected the officer to pick it up any minute. Hopefully he watched as the girl swept past him, murmuring a pleasant "Good night, Lieutenant." She placed her arm on the Austrian's. The pair climbed the narrow wooden stairs.

His brow damp with a cold sweat, Mallory stood rooted to the spot while he waited for the clump of Guyer's boots to fade. A minute—two—then quiet. He rushed to the work bench, threw in the key.

"L 3—L 3—L 3—" he clicked off, not daring to wait for an acknowledgment of his signals. "Rescind

former instructions—rescind former instructions—rescind former instructions."

Hastily he clicked the message off, praying that somewhere off in the distance an Italian station would pick up his set—and the message. Signed it with a fairly flying key: "L 6—L 6—"

THERE was a dull boom—a searing flash of flame. His foot on the last step of the stair, Guyer was standing there, pouring steel into the set, smashing its bulbs. Mallory whirled about, threw himself into that rain of steel—flung himself about the legs of the Austrian in a flying tackle.

They fell to the floor as another shot boomed in the room. The hanging lamp smashed to bits, leaving the place in darkness. Mallory's fists slashed out in the dark as he felt the hot breath of Guyer in his face. There was the crack of bone on bone—and the Austrian slumped to the floor.

His side was warm with flowing blood as Mallory stood up. Then some one pressed behind him. Something was slipped into his hand—something hard and cold. His automatic! There was a whispering in his ear. He tried to clear the fog in his brain that he might get the speaker's words.

"Out the back door—there are three men on the place who'll be here in a minute. I'll flash a light—there's a ship there!"

Instantly the girl was gone. He saw her dark figure slip out through a door, tried to place it in his mind. Then there was another searing flash as an automatic was emptied in his direction, and Mallory slid to the floor, firing at the flashes.

A scream of pain and a muttered curse. Dud eased toward the place where he had seen that dark figure slip out into the open. There was



another dull boom, and Guyer's shout—"I've got you, Mallory—stand up and die!"

The flyer flung another slug toward the sound of the voice—slipped further toward the door. His hands, groping the dark, felt its wooden jamb. He slid to one side of it, prepared for the last effort that would come as the door opened. Somewhere in that room Guyer was creeping.

Another shot came from the darkness—and again Mallory sent a snap shot toward it. Then, with a final heave, he sent the door open, tore across the open space toward where a light had shone for a brief moment.

A volley of slugs followed him whistling close to his ears. One hit him. He stumbled. Desperately he struggled to reach that sheltered spot that seemed so far away. He felt consciousness leaving him, yet groped on. There was another volley from behind it, and with fast-dimming eyesight he saw an answering flash from the bushes. The girl was covering his flight.

Another shot, and another—a high-pitched scream. Then silence from the cottage.

Breathing heavily, worn from the exertion, Mallory reached the point where he had seen the flashes.

"This way—quick!"

He followed the guiding voice of the girl as she led through the thin foliage. There in a clearing stood a biplane. Mallory's eyes could not identify it. He watched while the girl leaped into the front seat, shouted a quick order: "Hop in the back, Dud—fast!"

Gathering his strength, Mallory climbed into the rear cockpit—realizing vaguely that the girl was about to take the ship off. He heard the dull buzzing of the inertia starter, told himself that this must be an Albatross—an Austrian ship! There was a jounce and a rumbling as the

plane rolled along the ground. Then they were in the air.

Everything was lost in a maze of whirling lights, pistol flashes, roaring engine. Curtains for Dud Mallory, while the plucky operative of Intelligence sent a fast-flying plane through the night. . . .

**I**T was hours later that he awoke. Old Sawbones had just finished working on him. He was swathed in bandages. The odor of chloroform hung over the room. Dud identified it as the Squadron Commander's quarters. For long minutes he could not connect with any way in which he might have gotten there. He looked about him, found the old Colonel looking down at him.

"How are you feeling, son?" he asked quietly.

Dud tried to lift a hand. It too was bandaged. He nodded weakly.

"All right, I guess. Feel kind of empty inside, though."

The officer laughed.

"Well, I'll tell you something before you go back to dreamland, young fellow. Blair took the best way out of it. They're taking his body out now. Pat cleaned up on her ruse—" the Colonel was talking fast, for the flyer's eyes were slowly closing as weariness overtook him again—"and you're going to be the S. C. of the old Fifty-Seventh when you're able to get up and around again!"

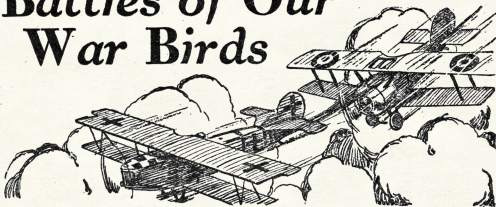
Dud's eyes smiled. "My—message—?"

"Got through O. K.—the radio compass picked up your sending set—it's been demolished."

"And—Pat—does she—remember—Paris—?"

The Colonel laughed again. "Huh. She's been trying for a transfer to the Red Cross ever since they decided to send you to the hospital for a rest! And, my boy—" Dud's eyes were partially closed now—"she always gets what she wants!"

# Battles of Our War Birds



The truth is told!—From the relentless facts, reports that litter the pages of every squadron that flew, have these tales come. Most of their heroes have flown on—have landed at another tarmac, but their glory will live forever!

## Picked off the Trail

By BOB TRAVERS

**V**ICTORY! In the skies it came hard.

When Spad met Fokker high in the clouds, the engagement of the two pilots involved a hundred factors unknown to ground warfare. Not only was individual combat skill needed—but the ability to do things with a tricky little ship and its still trickier engine.

Engine torque—nose or tail heaviness—faulty cylinders—loggy controls. A million and one things the pilots of those wartime crates had to combat besides the skill of their war bird opponent. Yet among the reports filed on pursuit reconnaissances, never does there appear any indication of the difficulty of a victory. Just the simple words which usually are written down in much the same form as the following report turned into his squadron commander by Lieutenant Dudley Hicks, of the 27th, at Bar-le-Duc:

We reached the rendezvous (Pont-a-Mousson) and picked up the flight of Breguets. Flew Northward toward our missions.

Aces—Oct.—8

Sighted Seven enemy aircrafts. Engaged them. I fired two hundred and fifty rounds into a Fokker that was brought off Lieutenant Carlin's tail. The Fokker was last seen spinning out of control.

That is all. Lieutenant Dudley Hicks made no mention of the difficulty of bringing that Fokker off Carlin's tail. Nor did he give any indication in his report of the fact that this Fokker pilot must have been pretty hot on his combat work.

Even Carlin, in his report of the engagement, passes over the downing of the Fokker with the casual statements: "... Busily engaged in clearing a jam from my gun when one enemy aircraft engaged me. Lieutenant Hicks picked him off my tail—fired a number of rounds into the ship. I saw it go down out of control..."

Nevertheless, the two men who wrote those reports and turned them in to the Squadron Commander, had looked long and closely at death on that protection patrol. There is one man today who still tells the story of that patrol wherever he meets his buddies from over there. It was his last patrol—and Bill Collins, every time he speaks of it, calls it his "fini" patrol. For to him, it was the last patrol. He can't fly any more as a result of that flight. But you'll

always find him in the back pit of a plane, thrilling to the joy of flyin' high again—even though someone else must handle the controls.

We found Bill Collins out at Holmes Field, Long Island, recently. He was sitting just inside the roped-off area, watching the more fortunate pilots swing their crates up and down. Little by little we got the story of that patrol which the 27th made on the 16th of October, 1918. And here it is, just as Bill Collins drawled it to us:

**S**EEMS the French Breguets wanted to put on some sort of a big show this particular day. And they wanted protection. At the same time, we were about the only squadron that had its full quota of men and planes on hand. Replacements were not coming up as fast as they might have; men nor machines.

C Flight took the job. Reardon was flight leader. We were flying Nieuports, some of us, and others Spads. Seems they couldn't turn out the Spads fast enough to give us quick deliveries. The Skipper was always yelling for 'em; but they came by ones always.

I had one, and so did Hicks. Carlin was flying a Nieuport, as was Reardon. I and another man, I can't remember his name, he was a newcomer, had a couple of cast-off SE's. We got off the ground in good shape, and hit it for the ceiling right away. The sun was high, visibility was perfect. It was one of those unusual French days when everything just gleams with the sun. We could see a couple of sausages swinging in the air about forty kilometers away.

The rendezvous was Pont-A-Mousson. That was the eastern end of the whole works. We didn't know where the Breguets were heading for. It was our job to pick them up and stay high over them, that was all.

We flew on for about fifteen minutes, with those heavy crates flying below us, ducking Archie now and then. It was the Archie that worried us. It worried

us more than it did the bombing pilots at whom they were aimed. For Archie was a sign that enemy aircraft were in the air—and I knew that would bring the old Jerry jagdstaffels flying our way fast.

The newcomer was trying to get my attention. I slipped over to his crate, brought the SE as close as I dared. He was trying to signal that something was wrong with his engine. I cut my gun, listened. At least three cylinders must have been cutting out on him. I waved him back toward our own lines and down; and with a final gesture, he swung away from the flight.

I nosed over to reach the flight leader and apprise him of the fact that a ship had left the formation. Reardon caught my signals, looked back. I guess he saw the SE slipping off to our own lines, and when I pointed to my engine, he nodded emphatically. He understood.

I came back into the formation now, which assumed something of a diamond shape. I flew rear, while Carlin and Hicks took the right and left of Reardon, and a bit behind. We kept along at this rate, flying pretty nearly three-quarter throttle, for about ten minutes more. We'd left the field at nine fifteen—and it was now about nine-forty.

Hicks saw them first. He waggled his wings, flew up close to Reardon and pointed them out. Seven ships, and they were coming our way like bats out of hell. They weren't noticing us at all, evidently, for they were making those five Breguets below us their targets.

**T**HE bombers kept lumbering along, on full throttle, right straight into Hun territory. It appeared like a foolish maneuver to me at first; until I realized that those bombers were going to be sure to drop their loads some place; and it wasn't going to be in Allied ground. Reardon broke us up with every man on his own. The seven ships proved to be Fokker tripes; and they were coming pretty fast; still ignoring us.

I picked out the third man back as being my meat. He seemed over-anxious for those Breguets, and at the rate he was going, his upper wing surface would be in my sights in a very few minutes. Then I noticed that the bombers were flying lower and lower each minute. Suicide to anyone who knew the rules of war flying. Yet it probably drove us on to tackling those Fokkers twice as viciously as we might. Those Frenchies were showing us that they had absolute faith in our ability to handle the situation—and if it proved otherwise, their lives were forfeit because of their faith.

I found the man I had aimed for in my sights; caught him a few vicious bursts which put him absolutely out of business. And then my own part in the fight ended. The oil pressure was not getting to the guns; either because of a small leak somewhere or due to improper connections. I couldn't fire either gun; I was worthless to the flight. As I realized exactly what it meant to leave three men fighting six; I found that Carlin had gotten himself a ship. That made it five; and I was a little more hopeful. I climbed the SE to a thousand or so feet above the dogfight; resolved to stick out and see if there was anything I might later be able to do for the boys.

I saw a Breguet go down a flamer just as the five bombers unloaded their cargo of eggs. And following it down I glimpsed a Fokker; its fuselage and nose hidden in a sheet of orange flame. That brought it down to four Fokkers—with three of the best men in the squadron tackling them.

Everything was jake, as far as I was concerned. Though I sure did cuss the mechanics that serviced the crate before she went up for keeping me out of it.

**I** CIRCLED about, still looking on. It wasn't long before I realized that Carlin was having some trouble. He had veered away from a Fokker that

looked like it had been his meat for a couple of minutes there, and was working away at his right gun. I could see him pulling the charging handle back, watch his fingers as they tried to clear the breech. And I realized he was as helpless as I was. 'A jam!'

That left only Reardon and Hicks, with four ships to handle. I noticed one of the Breguets was circling about, its observer trying to get in some of the shooting with a brace of Lewises he had mounted in the rear pit. I thanked God for the bravery of some of those men that minute.

Carlin was falling away fast as he concentrated on clearing that jam. I was watching him intently, wondering whether he'd come out of it right when I saw a Fokker dive down on him like a hawk. Just one swoop, that's all it was. And its guns opened up at almost point blank range.

I saw Carlin slip—kick his rudder and go into a spin. That made him a hard target for the Hun to hit. But when Carlin came out of that spin, he was a lot closer to the ground—and the Fokker pilot was right on his tail.

I saw another ship go down; and I wondered, with my heart in my mouth, which of the planes it was. It was a great relief to find that it was a Fokker—and that the odds were pretty low now. Then Hicks came out of it—and swung in a mad dive for the Fokker that was on Carlin's tail.

But the Hun clung like a bulldog to that Nieuport that Carlin was flying. He had cold meat there, and he wasn't going to be shaken from it. Hicks fired a number of bursts into the ship; yet pilot stayed on Carlin's tail.

From where I was sitting in on the party, it seemed that Hicks actually pushed the Fokker out of the way with his nose. He veered that Spad of his so close to the Fokker that there just wasn't any room for the two of them; that was all. I saw Carlin kick his rudder hard and get that Nieuport out from under in a flash. And Hicks was



left to fight it out with the probably enraged pilot who had been forced to let go a beautiful bone.

The two of them stayed at it for a long time, as combats go. I counted as many as twenty bursts, as close as I could judge, from the nose of that Fokker. And Hicks was doing his share of it, too. Carlin was still trying to clear his jam; and Reardon was chasing his Fokker way into Hunland.

The Jerry got in a few close ones on Hicks. I saw the splinters fly from his upper longerons, awfully close to the cockpit cowlings, twice. But Hicks was making a fight of it. A burst caught the Fokker in the motor, and I saw a tiny wisp of smoke curl from under the engine housing.

But the Hun wasn't through. With that tiny curl of smoke, the pilot probably lost his head. He kept his fingers down on the releases and let steel fly all over the sky in an effort to get Hicks. Hicks caught him again and again—and finally I am sure he killed the man with a direct body hit.

The smoke ended; the threat of fire did not materialize. The Fokker went down in a spin—and though none of us

saw it crash into the earth; Artillery Obs reported its demolition a few hours later.

Me? Oh, I got mine coming into the field. Nothing much though. Shells had splintered my landing carriage. It washed out as I landed on it at about seventy miles an hour.

Bill Collins shrugged his shoulders at that point—and said just: "Then it was *finis* for me."

\* \* \* \*

On the records of the 27th, that incident is marked only by the casual statements of the two pilots who fought the combat:

I fired two hundred and fifty rounds into a Fokker that was brought off Lieutenant Carlin's tail. . . . Lieutenant Hicks picked him off my tail. . . . I saw it go down out of control. . . .

But in the memory of the pilot who looked on, helpless, while this was going on—it stands out as a daring saga of courage, matched against skill and superior equipment. It is the story of wills that carry on long after the power to do is gone. It is the flaming epic that the American Warbirds spread across the skies for the world to see!

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## BAGGING THE BAGS

**B**ALLOONS were difficult to get. It was impossible to shoot them down before the advent of the incendiary bullet. But the vigilance of a pilot was piqued to an end even then. Every bag had dozens of machine guns at their base. Their purpose was to harass any plane that came within shooting distance. To make a single dive toward that thing which seemed so easy to get was to have every gun in the vicinity pointed and firing at you.

It was all a gambler's chance. The bag was being hauled down. The men in the basket had jumped. You'd have time for a hundred rounds from two guns, but no more. The first dive seldom got the thing. Two, and sometimes three, were necessary, and the man that lived through, came out whole by the grace of God.

Early in the morning, or at sundown, after a heated day, was the time to go bagging. The bag was full and tight in the morning. It was easy to burn. At sundown, the gas was dry—highly inflammable.

It was at sundown that Frank Luke piled up his fifteen during his short stay on the front.

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## DOOMED.

There was a time on the Western Front when eighty out of every hundred Allied pilots were shot down each month! Men took to air with the clutch of death upon their hearts. What strange force enabled them to continue will forever be shrouded in mystery. But it was no new thing with men of the air.

The Fifty-fifth, famed into eternity, had the ample allowance of three flights before the end. The "Suicide Squadron" it was called. Men fought to become members of those ranks that never showed the same faces twice.

Pilots came and were gone. Even before their names were placed upon the lists of the living, they were dead. Disaster followed them like an evil thing on the wings of hell. Yet they flew and fought.

On November 14, 1918, Berlin was to be bombed. It was the signing of that single paper upon the eleventh of that month that kept it forever undone. The men who ordered that flight knew full well that none would return. The gas supply was not great enough.

Berlin was to be bombed, and the

effect of such a flight upon the people of that great city was enough to warrant the loss of sixty flying men. The pilots who were to go knew they were doomed.

What thing it is that forces men to play with the flying Fates will forever be unknown. Frederick C. Davis has given his explanation in his great story of doomed men, "The Doomed Three." It is a yarn that will linger long in your memory, a yarn with a flying truth.

Herman Petersen comes second in the flight of November *Aces*. He's written another story of high-flying spies on the Western Front. "Marked Wings" is a tale of the men who received neither honor nor glory, but who were as needful to war as bullets.

The third yarn of the issue is "The Fire Flyer," by Robert Carter. It is different from any story that has yet been printed between the covers of *Aces*. . . . And last, is another of those vital, pulsating stories behind the true flights of our own pilots during the great war. . . .

Keep your tails up, kiwis, and keep an eye on the stands for the new flight of *Aces*!

### Sky Trap

Wallace R. Bamber, whose yarn, "The Sky Trap," in this issue, is another of the flying men who write for us. He took many a crate over the Western Front, and what's more, he brought them back. That's more than most of them can say, for graves are dumb. Here's the bit which Bamber has to say about his story:

#### DEAR EDITOR:

The enclosed story, "The Sky Trap," is fictional of course, but there is much of truth in it. The locale and characters are real, as real as life itself. And the Alsace was the play sector of the A.E.F. that is most of the time. Being a highly mountainous country, and heavily forested, it was no place to play at the game of war with a great deal of success. Neither side made any great advances in that sector during the whole fracas over there.

The story I have written is a story that might have been. The lake I have described in my story, Lac De Longeame, actually exists, an emerald body of water set in a mounting of towering peaks. The area above it is a veritable hell-hole for flyers. The warm air from the west is cooled as it slides over the mountain peaks. As it cools it begins to slip down the mountain-sides toward the surface of the lake. Then when it hits the warmer water it rebounds with a bang. And any airplane that slips with it rebounds in the same way.

The lake was never dynamited as I have written, but it could have been with very much the same results depicted if I had had just a little foresight instead of so much hindsight. It wasn't until several years afterward that the idea struck me. Then I wondered why I hadn't thought of it when I was there. If I had pulled such a stunt I could have come home covered with medals and had my name in the papers like Rickenbacker and Luke.

However, I didn't do so bad. I came back, and that is more than Luke can say. I write here that Alsace was a quiet sector. In the main that is true, but occasionally a Jerry circus on the lookout for easy meat would fly over that way, and believe me there would be Hell to pay until they got their belly full and went home again. Colonel Mitchell used to send the air squadrons over there for so-called rest periods; sometimes they turned out to be that, with lots of time for drinking good Alsatian beer and sparkling sabot-footed mountain maidens in between flights, but at other times it was not so. This story of course is based on one of those times when all was not so merry in Alsace.

"Pinky" Weber and "Wild Bill" Donovan are characters I have drafted from life, and

changed the names just slightly so that they won't shoot me if they should chance to read the story, for both of them are still living over here on this side.

WALLACE R. BAMBER.

### THE FLIGHT LEADER

#### DEAR EDITOR:

I have just finished reading the June *Aces*. I have read all the aviation magazines on the market and I think *Aces* has them all beat.

SALVATOR TARANTINO,  
Monterey, Calif.

### ACEITES

#### DEAR SIR:

Just finished "2-4-1" and that was sure a "wow." Give my regards to Carter and tell him that "Aceites" want more such stories.

OWEN G. JOHNSON,  
Stromsburg, Nebraska.

### ACES HIGH

#### DEAR EDITOR:

I have only read two issues of *Aces*, but nevertheless I think they are wonderful! I like the stories written by George Bruce best, but Arthur Burks is a close second.

I think the notes at the end of each story are a great help. I read the "Cloud-Crackers Corner" every time and think it is wonderful.

RICHARD GREEN,  
Cambridge, Mass.

### THE VICTORIA CROSS

Mr. Carl B. Orgilvie, a pilot who flew with the R. F. C. during the great war, sends us the following history of the Victoria Cross, one of the most coveted of all flying awards.

#### DEAR EDITOR:

I had to refer to a couple of books to get the information you wanted about the Victoria Cross, and I'll give it to you as it came to me. You must know that of all the military awards, the Victoria Cross of Great Britain is the most coveted of all decorations. This decoration is worn first before all others, on the left breast, and is the last and greatest of all military honors a grateful nation can bestow upon a valiant person. The reason that this particular medal is rated above all others is due to the bravery and extraordinary courage required in the performance of a valiant deed to win this supreme medal of all medals. The exclusiveness of the Victoria Cross is apparent when one figures that only 670 awards were made during the great World War, and of these, many a fearless, gallant soldier and flyer made the supreme sacrifice in the service of his King and country, little realizing that an appreciative government carve his name in the 185 list of the Immortals.

The Victoria Cross was instituted in 1856 at

the close of the war with Russia by Queen Victoria for the purpose of rewarding acts of conspicuous bravery.

This most coveted of all Great Britain's military decorations is made from the bronze of a Russian cannon captured in 1855 at the siege of Sebastopol during the Crimean War. It is a Maltese cross of bronze, approximately one and a half inches in diameter and with all its distinguished glory as a military award extraordinary, it's intrinsic worth is about fourpence halfpenny.

The center of the bronze cross contains a royal crown surmounted by the British heraldic lion gardant and below, on an escroll, is borne the laconic, but potent words—"For Valor." The reverse side of the cross bears the rank and name of its intrepid recipient. The clasp above is simply decorated with two horizontal branches of laurel—the symbol of Honor, and Victory since the time of Ancient Greece—and has a Roman V appendage, into the orifice of which is inserted the ring by which the cross is suspended. If the recipient served in the Royal Navy, the cross is suspended from a blue ribbon, and if he saw service in the Army, the ribbon is red.

A special annuity, ranging from ten pounds English sterling to fifty pounds per year, also an additional five pounds is granted for every bar added for additional acts of bravery—a bar being attached to the ribbon to signify the Victoria Cross winners would have been entitled to the cross if they had not previously received it. Up to 1913, with 522 awards, no bars had ever been authorized.

That is all I can find out about the Cross for your readers.

C. B. ORGILVIE.

### FLYING TERMS

Here are a few flying terms and their definitions that were heard every place during the war. They were used on all English-speaking fields. However, the Royal Flying Corps used the word "wash" for "slipstream."

#### AERODYNAMICS

The study of dynamics which treats of the motion of solids in relation to the air.

#### AILERON

A hinged or pivoted movable auxiliary surface of an airplane, usually a part of the trailing edge of a wing, and which is used for lateral control.

#### AIR SPEED

The speed of an aircraft in relation to the air. For instance, if your motor is turning over at a speed of 100 miles an hour, and you are heading into a wind which is blowing 40 miles an hour, your airspeed will be 60 miles an hour.

#### GLIDING ANGLE

The gliding angle of an airplane is the acute angle between the most nearly horizontal path along which an airplane can descend in still air when the propeller is giving no thrust. Well, I know just how much

that means to all of us, and so I'll give you the definition which most of we airmen accept on this term. When a plane is said to have a gliding angle of five to one, it means that that ship will travel forward five feet for every foot she will drop while gliding with a dead stick. This particular ship, having a five to one gliding angle, if caught at five thousand feet with a dead stick, will glide 25,000 feet while it is dropping the five thousand to earth.

#### ANGLE OF ATTACK

This and the angle of incidence are one and the same thing. The angles of attack or incidence are the angles at which the air attacks or strikes the main supporting surfaces or airfoils.

#### CAMBER

To make the definition of this as simple as possible, I'll just say that the camber of a wing is the curve of a wing. It is this curve or camber on a wing which decreases or increases its lifting capacity.

#### CEILING

Absolute ceiling of a ship is the maximum height above sea level at which that ship, under normal air conditions will be able to maintain level flight.

#### FLYING SPEED

The minimum speed at which a ship will fly and still be under control.

#### SLIPSTREAM

This term is as widely known as others which I have omitted because of that fact, however, since we've got it listed, I may as well tell you what it's about. The slipstream is the stream of air which is forced back by the whirling propeller, and which enables one to control his ship.

#### STABILITY

This is a much-discussed term. Stability is that property of a body which causes it, when disturbed from its equilibrium or steady motion, to develop forces which tend to restore that body to its original position or motion.

### CARTER FAN

DEAR EDITOR:

I recently became acquainted with *Aces*, and it's some magazine, with its great stories and cover designs. "2-4-1," by Robert A. Carter, surely was a fine tale.

JERALD R. BLANK,  
Allentown, Pa.

### THE DOG FIGHTER

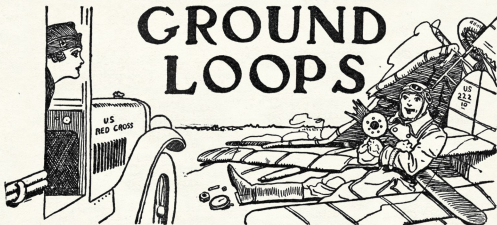
DEAR EDITOR:

Last night I finished the story written by Herbert L. McNary, "The Dog Fighters."

I enjoyed it immensely and I haven't read a story as good yet. That is saying a whole lot.

N. P. MURRAY,  
Faramie, Wyo.





*Here is the chance for our readers to tell each other of their experiences. Come on you war-birds let us hear about that time when you and the Sarge stole the Major's crate and . . . Aces will publish each month the best letter dealing with some humorous or unusual war-air incident. They should be about five hundred words, not longer. Ten dollars will be paid for each one accepted for publication.*

DEAR EDITOR:

I saw your little bit about T—, that flying fool of a Frenchman, in the back of your book someplace, and it brings to my mind the final grandstand play of the most foolhardy of the flying beggars who crossed the lines for the glory of La Belle France.

T— was a member of the Storks. Guynemer had been their commander until he was knocked down. All France had mourned. But the Escadrille went on with Fonck as their guiding light. And it was he who draped the tri-color with glory as the C. O. of that famous squadron.

It was during that period of glory that T— pulled the final play in his reckless Parisian life. He made it on the boulevards of Paris.

T— was one of the greatest of the Aces. Twenty-eight enemy aircraft he had to his credit. It was the custom in those days for the better of the auto manufacturers of Paris to give to the air heroes a car for their personal use while in Paris. T— was given one. You know the stunt—advertising.

It was in the early part of '18 that T— came to Paris on this particular leave. For days the streets of the great

city of France were molested by this daring man of the French Flying Corps and his bright red car. For T— disregarded all of the laws of traffic—all dubious insinuations of the gendarmerie. Yet they would do nothing.

In the end T— seemed to demand the courtesy of the police of Paris. They would shrug their shoulders at his speed, disregard the discomfort to which private cars and taxis were subjected as a result of the mad driving of this reckless demon of the boulevards.

And every one seemed happy for a time.

Until a strange thing happened.

One evening T— was stopped while racing down from Champs Elysee. A new officer had arrested him for disregarding the traffic regulations!

T— took offense. The man whom France had thrice decorated was suddenly subjected to the criticism of a common policeman! Everything within the heart of T— rebelled. The man who was the reckless playboy of the boulevards had been forced to recognize the power of a manniken of the streets.

What went through the mind of T— after that insult will never be known. His Latin spirit rebelled in a manner

that cannot be understood by us, but to the French, and to the flying Frog that told me this, there was every justification for it.

One night shortly afterward, a speeding car passed to the left of the Arc de Triumphe. It was a bright red—and upon each fender was mounted a machine gun!

It was the car of T—.

It passed the Claridges.

Then a strange thing happened.

Two deadly streams of fire poured from the fenders of the bright red car. The boulevard went mad in an effort to escape the fire of this man. T— was riding through for his revenge!

Half an hour later he was successfully stopped. The story never reached the presses. It was never told outside flying circles. T— had chosen a daredevil's method of avenging an insult to his honor.

It was two weeks later that he stood his courtmartial. He was committed to staying at the front for the duration of the war or until death overtook him. In the next month he had piled up seven more victories for France.

Then—over Toul—the Pan of the skies, the playboy of Paris, answered the last call to patrol. . . .

STANLEY ELLIOT.



George Crawford, Pulaski, Ill.

*Q. When was Richthofen shot down? How long was he on the front?*

A. The Baron von Richthofen was shot down between the lines at Amiens on April 21, 1918. His first victory was in the autumn of 1916.

Frank Gleason, Los Angeles, Calif.

*Q. What was the largest bomb used during the war?*

A. The Germans had one that was about twice the length of a man. It weighed over a ton, and it could do more damage

than any single thing used on the front. They were carried over the lines by the Gotha. The crater it made was about twenty feet deep, and sixty feet across.

J. S. Millican, Chicago, Ill.

*Q. Were flying men paid any more than the rest?*

A. Yes. In every army there was a monthly flying bonus. It was called "flying pay," and in some countries it was almost as much as the "base pay."

Herbert L. Anderson, Tulsa, Okla.

*Q. At what age did men enter the flying service during the war?*

A. There were many who had time over the lines who were no older than eighteen. The British were more lax in that than the Americans. It was not unusual to see a pilot with decorations for bravery, whose years seemed obviously less than regulations provided.

Peter Dawson, St. Paul, Minn.

*Q. Was there ever any fighting done at night?*

A. Yes. The R. F. C. had two squadrons on the front that did night fighting. It did not prove very successful.

R. L. Carson, Washington, D. C.

*Q. What was the "Dolphin"?*

A. The Dolphin was a single-seater. It was placed on the front in the latter part of '18. Strange thing, though: it was made for high flying, constructed for altitudes up to 24,000 feet, but at the time of its coming into use there was no need for such a crate. In consequence, they were put on strafing duty, and flown with six guns forward. It was the single plane that had a negative stagger—the bottom plane set forward, the top set back—which was to facilitate its diving capabilities. The pilot's head was above the center section in the top wing. He commanded a fine view, but when the Dolphin turned over, which was often when landing, there was another man added to the lists of glorious dead.

P. Lawson Davis, Toronto, Canada.

*Q. Did any large planes carry smaller planes during the war?*

A. No. But there was an English dirigible that carried a small plane. It was attached to the center of the great craft, and was dropped when the need for it was apparent. The plane so suspended was the Sopwith Pup. Its weight was but little over 500 pounds.

William Dennis, Providence, R. I.

*Q. What is an air pocket?*

A. Air pocket is the romantic name for a simple bump. It is nothing for a pilot to worry his head about. The hot air, rising up from the ground, causes them.

## ONE OF THE BOYS

DEAR EDITOR:

I've been reading your magazine since the first issue came to the stands, and I feel that it is by far the best that I've read in the flying field.

I had my shot at the game, and it was a shot that finished me. I haven't been able to walk yet. That was August, 1918. Many of your yarns bring back sweet memories of that time. Of all your writers I think that Bruce and Davis are the best. Each of them must have done their bit in the game. "The Deacon From Hell," is the best that you have had in a long time. Carter's "2-4-1" was well worthwhile. The idea behind it was much the same as the thing our old C. O. used to stick to: "If you don't get one of them they'll get two of you."

I was on Spads. Had my crack-up in one.

The thing burned up, and what was left was scattered over the landscape of France. There were three of the boys dropped the same day that I got mine. I was the only one who came out alive. But that is all old stuff, now.

Thanks for *Aces*.

J. HARRIS ROSS,  
Memphis, Tenn.

## ONLY ONE

DEAR EDITOR:

There is only one book that I can sit down to and read until I get to the end, and that book is *Aces*. I read your August issue in one sitting. I stopped for dinner, but that was all. "2-4-1," by Robert Carter was great. I hope that he writes more yarns like that for you.

TAD HAWKINS,  
Dallas, Texas.



## STRAIGHT TO THE BULL'S-EYE

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Let's take a look at the line-up for October. There's *Action Stories* with as fine a collection of rapid-fire action adventure yarns as you'll find on any newsstand. Another great Coburn Western novel, "Trigger Feud," leads the spread. You'll like Rusty Corrigan and Nan Benner and Gip, the three true-life characters whose story Coburn tells—and you'll learn to know and hate and fear the Jimson clan of sagebrush killers, who'd sworn never to rest while a Benner still breathed the breath of life. And while the adventure spirit reigns, why not go a-roamin' between the covers of *Frontier*? Maybe the mystic land of white-robed desert raiders and the scarlet demons of France, of lethal cutlass and deadly musket, of white sun and white sand—northern Africa—maybe that land suits your taste. Then you'll like Bob Du Soe's gripping frontier novel, "The Shanghaied Legionnaire."

Dive into *Air Stories* for October and follow mile-high trails of sky adventure. Read "Flying Fish," complete novel by George Bruce—the story of two eagles of the Yank Navy, of grim reprisal against U-boats in the Channel, of battling scouts sky-pointing Navy guns against Hindenburg's horde. . . . Plunge into Papuan jungle with "The Thunder Ship," Herman Petersen's complete air novel which leads the flight in *Wings*. The saga of white-man's magic daring jungle-man's sorcery, of knavery and courage, on dim trails where epears are law. . . . Fred Davis has spun into the tarmac of *Aces* with "The Doomed

Three," who rode through war-reddened skies with the wings of death—an epic of our flying men on the Western front. It is the first of three great novels of our airmen.

*Lariat* pulls its first six-gun in a month with "The Sheriff Killer," by Jay Lucas. It's one of the fastest-firing novels that has come out of the West in a long time; and it is followed by six short shots—and they don't miss! In *Northwest Stories*, T. F. T. West breaks the trail for a string of hard-drivin', hard-ridin' writers of range and snow lands. In the line-up are W. C. Tuttle, Jack Bechdolt, Tom J. Hopkins, A. deHerries Smith, Sewell Peaslee Wright and others.

*Action Novels*, the magazine of boiled-down, pepped-up, novel-length adventure fiction, comes to bat with an all-star line-up of four complete novels. There's a bang-up baseball yarn by Herbert L. McNary, a Western by Walt Coburn, an amazing tale of South-Sea mystery by Nels Leroy Jorgensen and a different sort of adventure yarn by Jack Rohan. And if you like the knockout punch of the prize-ring, the thud of leather against flesh, the thrill of the haymaker—well, *Fight Stories* gives you these on every page. Sunny Jim Coffroth, Hype Igoe, Jimmy DeForest and other noted sports authorities pack them into each issue.

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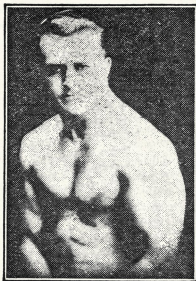
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4016 Lincoln Avenue Dept. 248 Chicago, Illinois

## Travel on "UNCLE SAM'S" Payroll RAILWAY POSTAL CLERKS \$158 to \$225 Month

Mail Coupon Before You Lose It



**Steady Work**  
See Your Country.  
**MEN—BOYS 18 UP**

**No Layoffs**  
Common Education Usually Sufficient  
**Paid Vacations**  
Many Government Jobs Open to Women

**FRANKLIN INSTITUTE**

Dept. A192, Rochester, N. Y.

Sirs: Rush to me without charge copy of 32-page book, "How to get U. S. Government Jobs," list of positions obtainable and full particulars telling how to get them.

Name.....

Address.....



# How can I get into Aviation?



## Walter Hinton

was pilot of the famous NC-4, first plane to fly the Atlantic. He also piloted the first plane from North to South America—and was first aerial explorer of the jungle regions of the upper Amazon. During the War he was one of the crack flying instructors of the U. S. Navy. He is ready to train you—right at home—for big pay and a big future in Aviation.

## FREE BOOK

This FREE Book, "Wings of Opportunity," is your first step to Success. If you are 18 years of age or older, clip the coupon and send for your FREE copy—right now.



## Read this Answer from A World Famous Trans-Atlantic Pilot

**T**O succeed in Aviation—to make BIG MONEY—it is not necessary to be a pilot. For every plane that flies, there's an immediate need for forty trained men to fill important jobs right on the ground. There have to be construction, motor and instrument experts—managers, service foremen, salesmen—and skilled craftsmen of almost every kind. All of these jobs pay big money—all of them are stepping stones to still bigger money. Aviation offers more opportunity for good starting salaries and rapid advancement than any other field. It's the world's fastest-growing industry. And NOW, while there are plenty of places on the "ground floor"—is the time to get into it.

## Get Your "Ground Work" NOW at Home Hinton Will Train You

Walter Hinton, the world-famous Trans-Atlantic pilot will train you QUICKLY—right at home—for a big pay place in Aviation. In a course of instruction which experts pronounce the most remarkable ever produced, he will give you the facts about plane construction, motors, theory of flight, navigation, instruments, and a whole lot more. He gives you the practical knowledge you need to fill ANY job in ANY branch of Commercial Aviation. Furthermore, he helps you get that job—helps you turn his training into actual cash. All over the country, men who are now actively engaged in Aviation owe their start and their success to Hinton. Get the facts QUICK. Find out how he can train and start YOU.

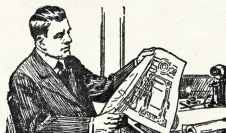
## Aviation Institute of U.S.A. Walter Hinton, Pres.

1115 Connecticut Avenue, Washington D. C.

## Rush back to Washington!

Send at once my FREE copy of your book, "Wings of Opportunity."

Name ..... Age .....  
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Street .....  
City ..... State .....



# Mechanical Engineering

## Learn at Home

**M**ECHANICAL Engineering embraces the design, construction and operation of machines and machine tools. It is a profession which offers almost unlimited opportunities to men who combine natural mechanical ability with technical training.

For this is The Age of Machinery. Almost every convenience, luxury or necessity which we enjoy depends on machinery for its production or adaptability to our needs. Every new invention multiplies the opportunities for competent designers, builders, erecting engineers, etc.

One of the best ways to train yourself to secure a position as a Mechanical Engineer is through the home-study courses of the International Correspondence Schools.

These courses are complete and up-to-date, and especially arranged to meet the needs of the student who studies at home.

They are particularly helpful because they are written by well-known mechanical engineers with years of practical experience, who know the quickest, best way to solve every problem.

Just mark and mail the coupon and we'll gladly send you Free Booklets describing the I. C. S. courses in Mechanical Engineering or any other course in which you are interested.

## INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

Box 4182-B, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the course before which I have marked X in the list below:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Engineering    | <input type="checkbox"/> Toolmaking                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blacksmithing and Forging | <input type="checkbox"/> Patternmaking             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drafting                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Foundrywork               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Drawing        | <input type="checkbox"/> Machine Shop Practice     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Complete Shop Practice    | <input type="checkbox"/> Plumber and Steam Fitter  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architect                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Plumbing Inspector        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architectural Draftsman   | <input type="checkbox"/> Foreman Plumber           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Building Foreman          | <input type="checkbox"/> Heating and Ventilation   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Concrete Builder          | <input type="checkbox"/> Sheet-Metal Worker        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contractor and Builder    | <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Engineer            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Draftsman      | <input type="checkbox"/> Marine Engineer           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Engineer       | <input type="checkbox"/> Refrigeration Engineer    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electrical Engineer       | <input type="checkbox"/> H. R. Positions           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electrical Contractor     | <input type="checkbox"/> Highway Engineer          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electric Wiring           | <input type="checkbox"/> Chemistry                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electric Lighting         | <input type="checkbox"/> Pharmacy                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electric Car Running      | <input type="checkbox"/> Mining Engineer           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Telegraph Engineer        | <input type="checkbox"/> Navigation                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Telephone Work            | <input type="checkbox"/> Iron and Steel Worker     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Engineer            | <input type="checkbox"/> Textile Overseer or Supt. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Surveying and Mapping     | <input type="checkbox"/> Cotton Manufacturing      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bridge Engineer           | <input type="checkbox"/> Woolen Manufacturing      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gas Engine Operating      | <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Automobile Work           | <input type="checkbox"/> Fruit Growing             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Airplane Engines          | <input type="checkbox"/> Poultry Farming           |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Mathematics               |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio                     |

## BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Management   | <input type="checkbox"/> Business Correspondence      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Show Card and Sign Lettering |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Personnel Management  | <input type="checkbox"/> Stenography and Typing       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Management    | <input type="checkbox"/> English                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accounting and        | <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Service                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> C. P. & Coaching      | <input type="checkbox"/> Railway Mail Clerk           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cost Accounting       | <input type="checkbox"/> Mail Carrier                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bookkeeping           | <input type="checkbox"/> Common School Subjects       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spanish               | <input type="checkbox"/> High School Subjects         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> French                | <input type="checkbox"/> Cartooning                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Salesmanship          | <input type="checkbox"/> Illustrating                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Advertising           |   |

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....

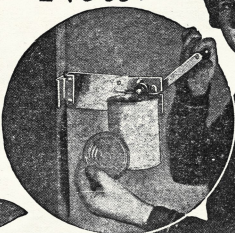
Occupation .....

If you reside in Canada, send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada





# New!



Patented

## Just A Twist Of The Wrist

Banishes Old-Style Can Openers to the Scrap Heap and  
**BRINGS AGENTS \$5 to \$12 IN AN HOUR**

**WOMEN** universally detest the old-style can opener. Yet in every home in the land cans are being opened with it, often several times a day. Imagine how thankfully they welcome this new method—this automatic way of doing their most distasteful job. With the Speedo can opening machine you can just put the can in the machine, turn the handle, and almost instantly the job is done.

### End This Waste and Danger

You undoubtedly know what a nasty, dangerous job it is to open cans with the old-fashioned can opener. You have

to back your way along slowly—ripping a jagged furrow around the edge. Next thing you know, the can opener slips. Good night! You've torn a hole in your finger. As liable as not it will get infected and stay sore a long time. Perhaps even your life will be endangered from blood poisoning!

You may be lucky enough to get the can open without cutting yourself. But there's still the fact to consider that the ragged edge of tin left around the top makes it almost impossible to pour out all of the food. Yet now, all this trouble, waste and danger is ended. No wonder sales-

men everywhere are finding this invention a truly revolutionary money maker!

### A "Million Dollar" Can Opening Machine

The Speedo holds the can—opens it—flips up the lid so you can grab it—and gives you back the can without a drop spilled, without any rough edges to snag your fingers—all in a couple of seconds! It's so easy even a 10-year-old child can do it in perfect safety! No wonder women—and men, too—simply go wild over it! No wonder Speedo salesmen often sell to every house in the block and make up to \$10 an hour.

### Generous Free Test Offer

Frankly, men I realize that the profit possibilities of this proposition as outlined briefly here may seem almost incredible to you. So I've worked out a plan by which you can examine the invention and test its profit without risking one penny.

Get my free test offer while the territory you want is still open—I'll hold it for you while you make the test. I'll send you all the facts about \$75 to \$150 a week. I'll also tell you about another fast selling item that brings you two profits on every call. All you risk is a 2c stamp—so grab your pencil and shoot me the coupon right now.

**CENTRAL STATES MFG. CO., Dept. M-2643**  
4500 Mary Ave., (Est. over 20 years) St. Louis, Mo.

### AGENTS!



**Full Time \$265 in a Week**

"Here is my record for first 30 days with Speedo:  
June 15, 60 Speedos;  
June 20, 84 Speedos;  
June 30, 123 Speedos;  
July 6, 258 Speedos.  
Speedo sells to 9 out of 10 prospects."

M. Orloff, Va.

#### PART TIME

14 Sales in 2 Hours  
J. J. Corwin, Ariz., says: "Send more order books. I sold first 14 orders in 2 hours."

#### SPARE TIME

Big Money Spare Time  
Barb, W. Va., says: "Was only out a few evenings, and got 20 orders."

## \$2,000.00 PRIZES

**Now Being Given in Cash to Agents. Write for Details.**

Central States Mfg. Co.  
4500 Mary Ave., Dept. M-2643  
St. Louis, Mo.

Yes, rush me the facts and details of your **FREE OFFER**.

Name .....

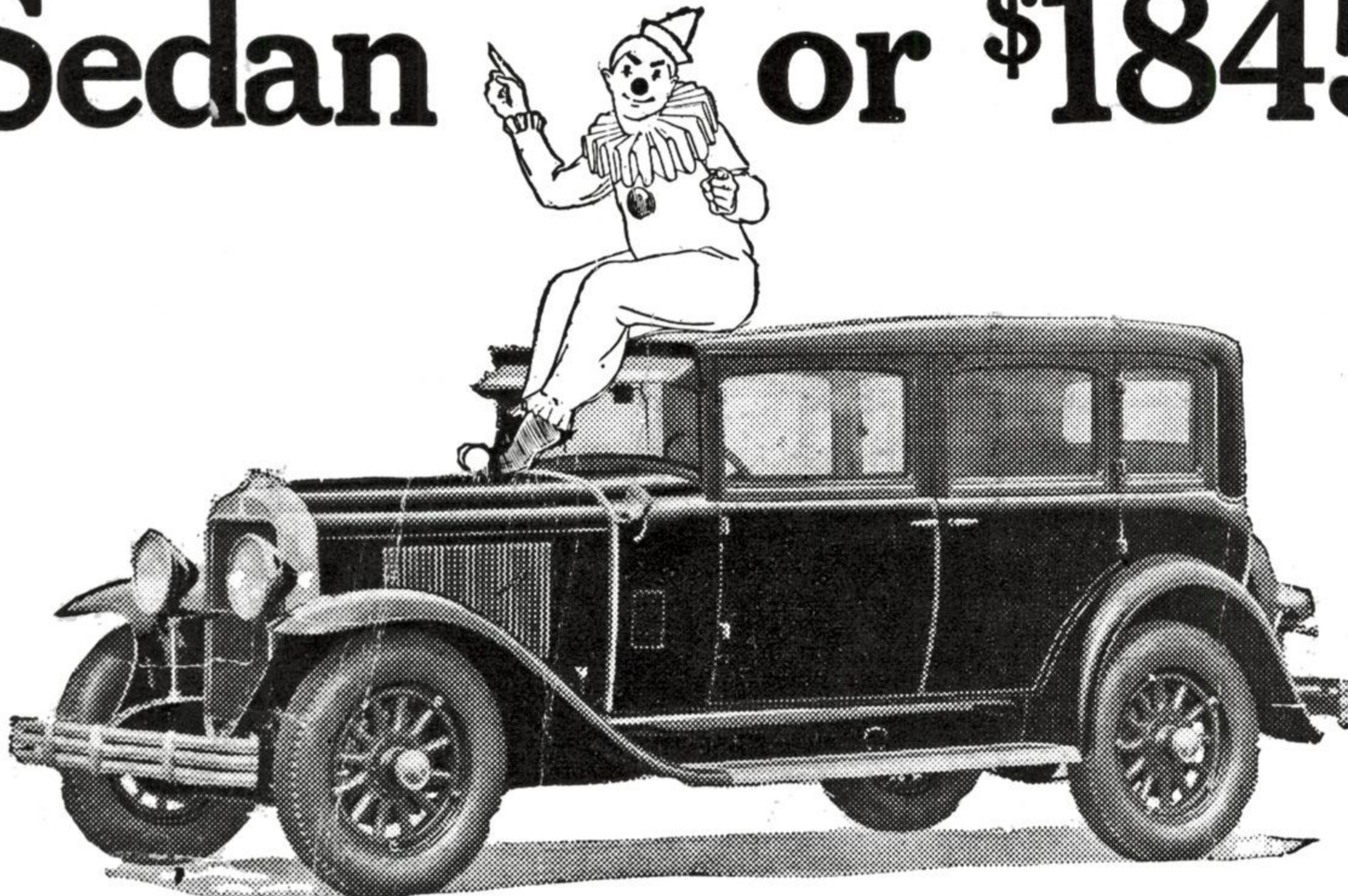
Address .....

City ..... State .....

☐ Check here if interested only in one for your home.



# Who Else Wants to Win a Sedan or \$1845<sup>00</sup>?



## Seven Six-Cylinder Sedans and Other Prizes Given

Puzzle fans, attention. To advertise we are giving a Nash Sedan, an Oldsmobile Sedan, a De Soto Sedan, a Pontiac Sedan, an Essex Sedan, a Whippet Sedan, and a Chevrolet Sedan, all delivered through nearest dealers, not to cost you a cent. We even pay delivery charges—many other prizes, including radios and so forth.

Mrs. D. H. Ziler, Louis J. Link, Margaret Needham, Mrs. M. E. Meadow, Alvin Smith, Charles Francis, Viola Javins, and numerous others won sedans through our last puzzle advertisements. Over 800 prizes awarded in one year through our unique advertising campaigns. Over \$11,000.00 in prizes paid by us in one month. In next few months will award between 300 and 400 prizes through our puzzle advertisements. Here's the new one for you:

### Find the Twin Clowns!

The clowns in the border of this advertisement probably will all look exactly alike to you at first glance. But they are not all alike. Two—only two—are exactly alike. Can you find them? The difference may be in the color or markings in the hat, collar, nose, or top of the head. Find the twins. Look carefully. Be sure you have them—then answer at once. You may be the one who will take up our offer.

### And win Nash Sedan or \$1845.00 Cash

Just think. There are seven sedans and many other prizes, including valuable radios, and so forth, totaling \$7,300.00.\* Duplicate prizes paid in case of ties. Surely you can win one of these wonderful prizes.

**NO MORE PUZZLES TO SOLVE.** No word lists to write or make up—no number puzzles to trace. We do this to advertise and expand our business. No cost or obligation. Nothing to buy now, later or ever.

All who answer correctly can share in prizes or cash awards. Rewards for everyone taking an active part.

### \$500.00 For Promptness

Be prompt. Immediately, without delay, if your answer is correct, I will send you a certificate good for \$500.00 if you are prompt and win first prize, and tell you why and how we make this unique advertising offer of free prizes. Just send the numbers of the twin clowns in a letter or on a post card. That's all. Send no money. All cars and other prizes are free, but be prompt.

\*This offer guaranteed by a million-dollar concern.

**FREE PRIZE JUDGE, 510 N. Dearborn St., Dept. 2, CHICAGO, ILL.**



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12.



Good taste  
will always  
discover

# Camels

