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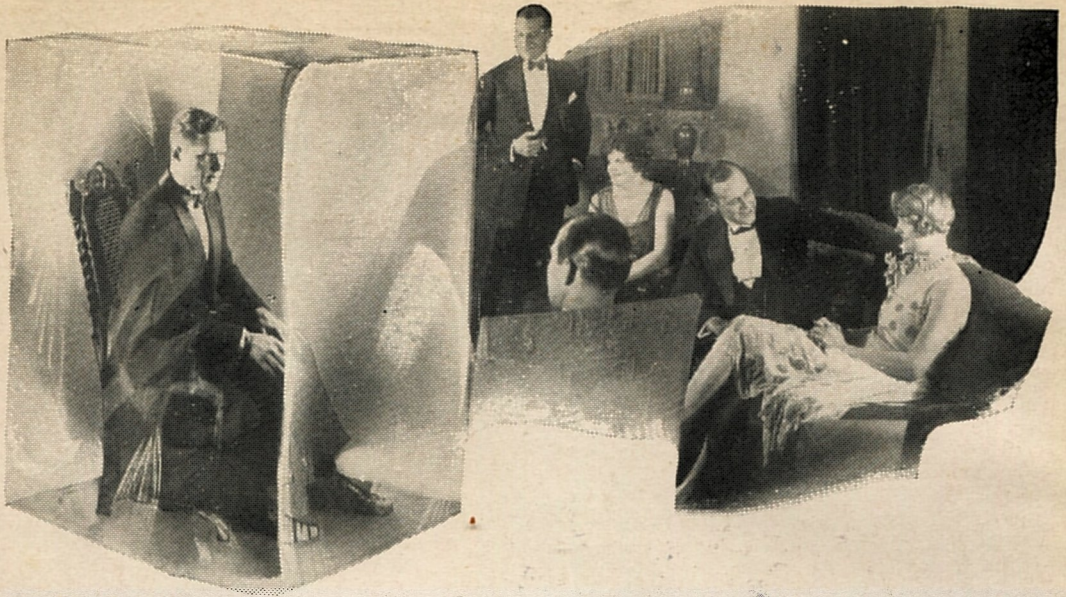
A
JOEL
ROGERS
Novel in
this issue—
Complete!

SALVO for an ACE

**Iron men and
paper ships clash on
the roof of the world**

The new complete war-air
novel by

GEORGE BRUCE



I Turned To Ice When I Tried To Talk

- But Now I Can Sway An Audience of Thousands!

I HAD always been painfully bashful. When trying to carry on even the most commonplace conversation my voice would sound unnatural and my hands and knees would tremble. Often I would listen to an argument among a group and become so keenly interested that I would want to voice my own opinion—yet timidity would keep me silent. I never had the courage to stand up for what I knew to be my rights—I was always afraid of “what people would say,” of ridicule. Since my childhood I had had a secret desire to appear in public—to be active in politics—but my shyness was so great that I turned to ice when I tried to talk—in even the smallest gathering!

My inability to talk was also affecting my business success. I dreaded going in and asking for a raise—I was afraid of any situation that meant using my voice—having to express myself. I didn't know how to present the ideas which I was sure the firm could use. I was just a plodder—a truck horse, capable of doing a lot of heavy work but of no use where brilliant performance was required. Often I would see men who were not half so thorough nor so hard working as I, promoted to positions where they made a brilliant showing—not through hard work, but through their ability to talk cleverly and convincingly—to give the appearance of being efficient and skillful.

local candidate—I who a short time before had turned to ice when I tried to carry on an ordinary conversation!

Soon I had won salary increases, promotion, popularity, power. Today I always have a ready flow of speech at my command. I am able to rise to any occasion, to meet any emergency with just the right words, to approach all types of people with ease and fearlessness. And I accomplished all this by developing the natural power of speech possessed by everyone, but cultivated by so few—by simply spending 20 minutes a day in my own home on this most fascinating subject.

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ACES

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

Vol. III, No. 12

NOVEMBER, 1931

20c a copy; \$2.50 a year

Complete Novel

Salvo for an Ace George Bruce 3

They rode the war skies together—the Thunderbolt and his Shadow. And only the Shadow knew that the Thunderbolt was living a glorious lie for a life that he dared not lose.

Complete Novel

Lost Aces Joel Rogers 45

In the hangar of the Gallows Birds, Anton Glick slapped a general's face. And his Fokker fled to the grave of lost aces to pay the price of treachery.

Complete Novelet

Spy Drome H. P. S. Greene 90

A three-man conspiracy sent Von Blon off the field to disgrace. And he made his last landing on an enemy field with his hands in the air.

Aces Up! Edwin C. Parsons 107

The best-beloved pilot of the Lafayette! Follow the course of his speedy Nieuport, and watch his fight with the black-crossed Albatross and his victory over three!

Planes of Destiny Capt. Robert Dale 113

One of the sky sharks that came out of the north to challenge Yank squadrons all along the Line from Nancy to Chateau-Thierry. The Pfalz Scout.

The Hangar Aces Readers 115

The men who quit their ships and came back to them—in midair.

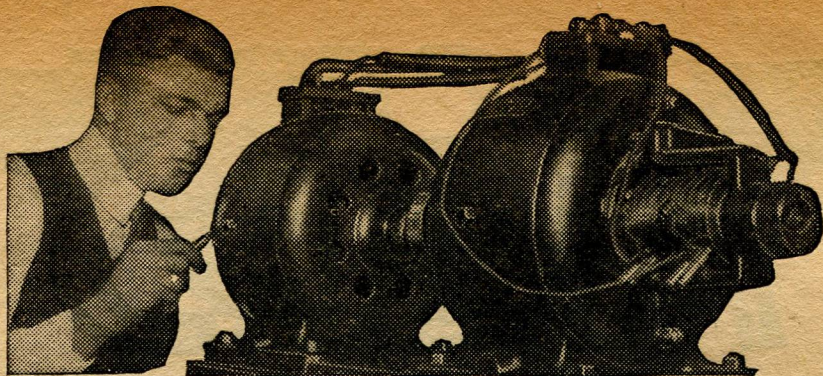
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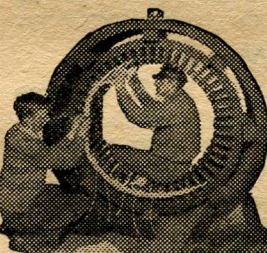
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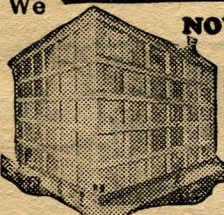
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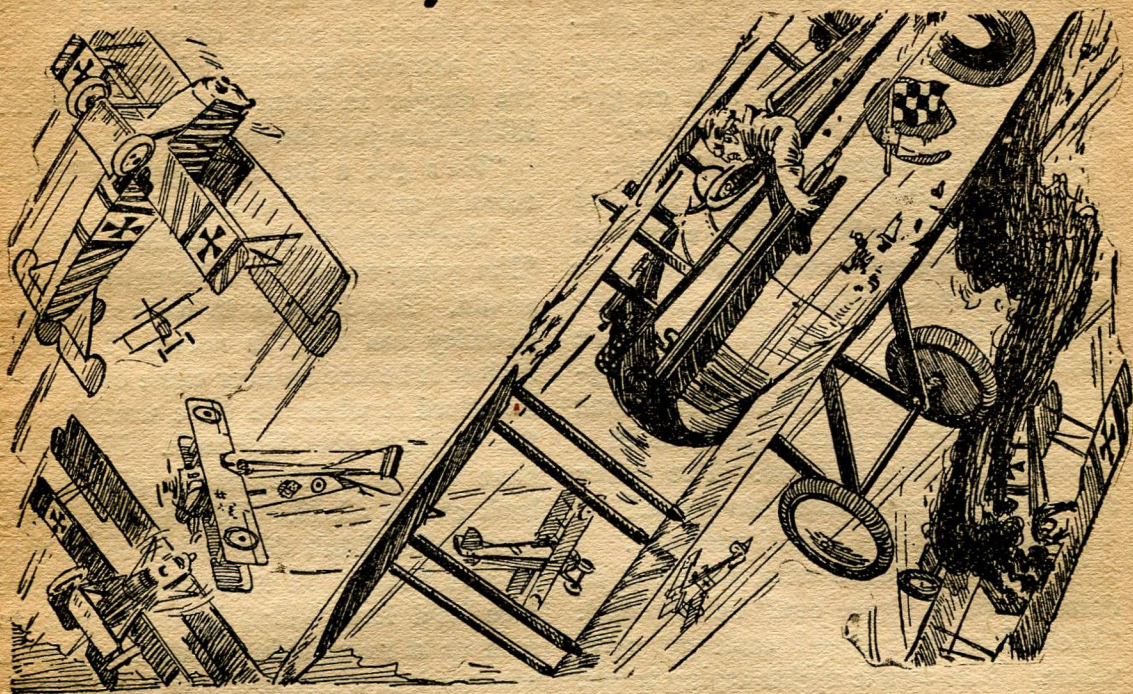
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Salvo for an Ace



By George Bruce

Author of "Sons of Thunder," "Mother of Eagles," etc.

They flew like a thunderbolt and its shadow—two men who dared not die. And only the Shadow knew that the Thunderbolt at the point of the squadron's V was living a glorious lie.

A Complete War Air Novel

WEARINESS gripped the bodies of the two men inside the khaki tent set up twenty miles west of Senlis, northwest of Paris. Nerve tension actuated the jerky movements of their hands and stamped their sudden glances. They were subdued, worried.

One was stretched out upon a G.I. cot, the brown of his O.D. merging with the brown of the blankets covering the cot. A cigarette in his hand sent a thin, coiling ribbon of smoke toward the conical center of the tent. His shirt was open at the neck, exposing a breadth of wind-tanned chest. His blond hair was like a mop of oily waste. Dixie Reese, second in command of the Twenty-sixth Aero Squadron, American Air Service.

His eyes were half closed. Lines of

fatigue gathered about his mouth, and dissolved into the hollows under his cheek bones. He was listening to the other occupant of the tent.

George Burns paced the tent nervously. He seemed unable to rest. His hands gestured. His short, stocky body jerked. Under his bushy eyebrows his ordinarily calculating blue eyes were bloodshot and restive. His flaming red hair was rumpled into an unruly mass which formed a strange contrast to the sun-scorched skin of his cheeks. His voice held a hoarse rasping note—a voice too tired to strike a true pitch. His boots thumped ceaselessly on the wooden flooring.

"I don't get it at all," he was saying angrily. "I can't figure him out. Half

the time I think he's drinking himself to death, and in a way that nobody can catch him at it. Then again I think that maybe he's full of hop. I get the crazy idea—I read it somewhere—that after that crack-up they gave him something to ease the pain, and they kept on giving it to him—and he got a habit—”

Reese made a gesture of contempt.

“Buzz Crowley isn't that sort of man,” he said hotly. “Only a coward would take drugs—a coward too weak to fight his own battles. And he isn't drinking himself to death, either,” he added. “He's too close to us for anything like that. We all have the same amount of privacy as a goldfish in a department store window. I've never seen him lit and neither have you.”

Burns shook his head hopelessly.

“I know it—that's what makes it so damn' hard to figure out,” he admitted. “Well, I give it up—I can't get anywhere. I lie awake nights trying to get it straight in my mind. All I get for not sleeping is a jumble that stews around and puts an edge on me like a razor. I smoke until I'm sick at the stomach, and that only helps to give the nerves hell. I only know one thing. Something is wrong with Buzz—and it's killing him.”

“This game would kill anyone in time,” suggested Reese.

“Yeah! Sure it would,” snapped Burns. “But in a different way. Look at you. You figure that you're a cinch to get bumped off. But is it bothering you?—does it make you look like a ghost? You can laugh it off, can't you? So can I. I know I'm going to get it—tomorrow maybe. But I'm living today—that's what Buzz isn't. He's been dead for months—I hate to admit it, but he's been a different guy since that crack. Sometimes I think he got a crack on the nut and it made him goofy.”

“He's out there, leading the outfit every day, isn't he?” demanded Reese.

Burns threw his hands up in exasperation. “You're asking questions, not answering them,” he told Reese. “Sure,

he's leading the outfit—he's flying like a demon. He's doing too much. In fact he's like a man that knows he has to keep going—or fall down. He's like a guy who is so scared of something behind him that he doesn't give a damn for the danger in front of him. But it's killing him just the same—”

“He's got a lot of responsibilities—running an outfit like this—”

“Responsibilities!” scoffed Burns. “I'm going to say it. I thought I never would. But it looks to me as if Buzz Crowley has lost his nerve. I believe he lost it before he ever came over here. I noticed it when we were warming up the cars for the 1917 race. He didn't have the pep. He wasn't glad to be back at the wheel. He was only there because he didn't dare admit to us that he was licked. If he had gone in that race he'd have killed himself—just as sure as a man taking a dive out of a window into a street. I saw it—I felt it. You did, too.”

“Yeah,” admitted Reese. “I felt it.”

“Well, that's the answer,” nodded Burns. “It puts us in a spot. We know the best guy in the world has gone sour on us. We know that he's going to kill himself—and we can't say a word about it.”

REese shrugged his shoulders. “Why should we say a word about it?” he questioned. “He's doing more than his share on this field. A man's life is his own property. Not even his friends can tell him how to spend it.”

“Remember that day at Kelly?” asked Burns, a hot memory in his eyes. “Remember what happened? Just as if something was trying to make it tough on us as possible. As if some power saying to us: ‘Well, if you guys are so big and tough and brave—prove it!’ Gosh, I'll never get the picture out of my mind—that crate spinning in. The four of us standing there, suitcases in hand—just out of that taxi from town—and the first thing we hear are those sirens screaming around the field—and

Salvo for an Ace

the sound of the wires on those two crates.

"What a reception that was! Looking up over the hangars, and seeing two Jennies smashed together, wings locked, fuselages caved in—burning like hell—falling in big circles toward the center of the field. And then that crazy kid kaydet—tearing himself loose from the wreckage and jumping the last five hundred feet. Like a stuffed dummy—stretched out in the air—arms and legs wriggling—and then smacking into the field so hard that he bounced ten feet. Buzz Crowley was standing there, like a guy paralyzed, staring—and I had one look at his eyes. They haunted me for weeks.

"I still remember how Doc went up to him, and talked to him—and looked at him. That soft, easy voice—and those damned eyes of his—staring at Crowley—and Crowley giving up a long sigh, and walking away.

"And that wasn't enough. Another crack-up the day we were to solo—that Jamison kid. Remember? Walking over to his crate, cocky as hell, big as life—going to solo—and getting the crate off the ground at the end of the field. Nosing over, turning half a dozen flip-flops! I'll never forget the sound of those tanks exploding—and the way the fire gushed up around him. Just blotted him out. There he was—a second before, a grinning, confident kid—" Burns closed his eyes for a second and swallowed hard.

"And Buzz Crowley was the next guy to solo. Walking out to his own crate stiff-legged, white-faced, his eyes like holes burned in a blanket."

"Doc saved him that day, too," murmured Reese. "Doc can snap him right out of it. I remember him walking over to the crate with Buzz, and kind of patting him on the head. And Buzz made a perfect solo. Landed—walked away from the crate—and then nearly passed out when he got back into his tent. Shaking like a leaf. We were pounding him on the back, telling him he was a

pilot, and what a swell solo he had made—and he looked at us as if he didn't remember anything about it."

"Yeah, Doc can do things with him," agreed Burns. "Do things that give me the shudders. Reminds me of a guy I saw once on the stage. He put the eye on people and made 'em do just what he wanted them to do—and when they woke up they didn't remember a thing about it."

"You know what I think?" asked Reese suddenly. He sat up on the edge of his cot. "I think that Doc is using the same kind of force on Buzz. I think if it wasn't for Doc, Buzz would get himself bumped off in the first minute after he took off the ground. I think if it wasn't for Doc, Buzz couldn't fly at all. Doc Wallace is a psychiatrist. That's as much higher than a regular doctor as a sawbones is above some African witch-doctor. Doc Wallace doesn't cure sickness of the body—his business is sickness of the brain and soul.

"To him Buzz Crowley is a case. A case big enough to make him take chances on getting rubbed out in some lousy little brush with e.a. just to try to set Buzz Crowley straight. Look how he stuck to him in the hospital and afterward. Let Doc say he's here because he wants to be his own man. Let him say that he's tired of associating with old geezers who have nanny-goat whiskers and talk a language we don't understand. Let him brag about having a holiday. But as far as I'm concerned he's here because he knows Buzz Crowley needs him—and he knows Buzz Crowley's life is at stake."

"Yeah," grunted Burns. "It looks that way."

"Yeah, and for apes like us, the best thing we can do to give Doc a hand is keep our mouths closed and act as if we've never noticed any change in Buzz. We've got to treat him as we always treated him—"

A dull beating sounded from the field. Reese glanced at his watch.

"Well, this hot-air clinic is postponed,

due to previous appointments," he grinned. "It's exactly eleven ack emma. Outside, on the field, a guy we just had on the pan is stepping into his crate, ready to lead this outfit to 'newer heights of glory,' as Old Colonel Gaston called this game back in Indianapolis. Outside, a guy that we're pitying as sick or sour is about to take the Twenty-sixth Pursuit Squadron on one of those famous 'offensive patrols.' He may be sick or sour, but I'll bet he's making some guys across the lines sicker and sourer—and I'll bet there are birds on this field who get a little sick themselves every time the witching hour of eleven rolls around."

"I'm one of 'em," grinned Burns. He took up his helmet and goggles and followed Reese across the field.

THERE were a dozen Spads warming on the line. Propellers turned lazily in the clear sunshine. Fuselages vibrated in cadence with the pulsing of the motors.

The gray Spads made a grim contrast with the weather-blackened tent hangars which stretched along the north side of the field. They seemed lithe, and dangerous as so many Whitehead torpedos. Black outlines of twin machine-guns under center sections, thrust over the metal cowling in front of the cockpit. Web belts, freighted with gleaming brass-encased slugs, led up from unseen ammunition chests and hung from the breeches of the guns. There were myriad inch-square patches upon the wings and fuselage covering of each ship. Patches which traced the path of death which had passed through these ships on other days.

Mechanics in dirty grease-soaked coveralls were swarming over the ships, making last-minute inspections. Throttles moved up and down, and with the moving the dull beat rose to a cyclonic frenzy, and vicious slipstreams caused ships to lower and raise tails, to tremble and shake; to flatten and tear at the roots of the grass behind the planes.

Reese and Burns glanced about them as they paused beside the cockpit of their own Spads. They were looking at Buzz Crowley's ship at the head of the line. Crowley was standing there, a blank look in his eyes, his hands hanging limply at his sides. A mechanic crawled out of his cockpit with a nod.

"O.K., sir," he announced over the beat of the motor.

Crowley seemed not to hear. He climbed into his cockpit—like a deep-sea diver climbing a ladder onto a wharf.

The lines in George Burns' face were deeper, his eyes more haggard. He glanced once at Dixie Reese, and then climbed into his own cockpit.

Doc Wallace left Crowley's side. He trotted toward his own ship, which stood fourth in line. He waved his hand to Reese and Burns as he passed. They waved back at him. Their eyes continued to follow him.

Then the hand of Buzz Crowley—Captain "Buzz" Crowley, C. O. of the Twenty-sixth—went straight up and fell forward. His motor roared. The tail of his Spad lifted sharply, turned swiftly. The keen nose of his crate faced the open field. Ship after ship followed after him. There was an instant when they bunched for the take-off—and then the gray Spad in the lead spat flame and black smoke. The beat of its motor rose, and it was rushing away—down field—up over the fence and fringe of trees bordering the west end of the field. And after it, in perfect formation, followed the morning offensive patrol.

REESE and Burns were flying at Two and Three. Doc Wallace at Four. Behind them the remainder of the squadron. Young, those eight. Young with the enthusiasms of youth. Calling themselves the most fortunate of men, to be a part of the Twenty-sixth, to be given the honor of following behind Crowley, Reese and Burns. Colonel Gaston had been right that day in Indianapolis when he had said that young

men would follow eagerly after the famous Trojan team. Young men had— young men like these eight who were a part of the morning offensive patrol.

There were ugly shapes of fire-blackened wreckage to the north which had once been Spads marked with the insignia of the Twenty-sixth. Ugly shapes which had once been things of beauty, and had given wings to other young men who had considered death a cheap price to pay for following after Crowley, Reese and Burns.

No one but Doc Wallace knew it, but those fire-blackened masses of wreckage were like whiplash scars on the soul of Buzz Crowley. There were nights when he crouched in a chair in the operations office, and saw them all, saw the manner of their deaths, relived the horror of their going—white-faced, trembling, an inexpressible agony in his eyes. Crouched there, haunted by the ghosts of those boys who had died, until Doc Wallace crossed the tent and spoke to him, touched him.

Then peace, of a sort.

There were times when Buzz Crowley awoke out of a restless sleep, and mumbled strange words. "I'm a murderer—a cheat! I'm cheating them out of life. I'm making them die because they think I'm not afraid to die—because they think I'm a hero—and I'm only a little louse not fit to know them."

And Doc Wallace's voice again—soothing, his eyes compelling.

Mornings, when the squadron was to go on patrol. Mornings with Buzz staring out on the field with horror crowding his eyes. His body limp, his heart racing. Sure that he could never force himself to walk across that green grass, to climb into a ship. Fighting within his soul and brain imaginary battles in which he sat in the midst of a ship rioting flame, with his flesh cooking—and a stream of smoking tracers gnawing at his flesh. Falling out of the sky, squirming and twisting in agony—his mouth gushing blood, the smell of his own burning body in his nostrils—knowing

that he could not face those visions and remain sane.

And then, as always, Doc Wallace—touching him with his hand. Speaking in a voice of command.

"You're going to fly, Buzz! You're going out there to forget everything but that you're leading a squadron. You're going to fight—and win. You understand? Win! You're going to forget that you are afraid—you're going to forget that you may be hurt—shot down. You're going to fight—anything that wants to fight—and you're coming back—safe. Understand?"

The queer light would come into Buzz's eyes. His head would nod in assent. His voice would come from far off. "Yes—I understand." And then he would walk across the field—toward his ship—without seeing anything which went on about him—and he would lead the squadron off the ground.

Every day was like that—every day since he had arrived at the Front, to command an outfit prepared in advance for his leadership.

Twelve ships, rising and falling gently on the unseen billows of limitless spaces. Cruising with droning motors above a rioting earth without hearing any of the tumult caused by the death struggles of maggot humans. Eyes encased in goggles, like the eyes of so many owls, peering to the right and left and overhead. Heads encased in smooth-fitting helmets giving each of them a sinister appearance, accentuated by the nearness of black Vickers.

Blue above them, stretching out in a gently curving arc, dipping down to make the line of earth and heaven which surrounded them on every side. A line which seemed a limit to their progress, yet which retreated alluringly before them no matter in what direction they flew.

Blue with soft masses of fleecy cloud suspended mysteriously in nothingness. Rays of the sun touching the edges of those white clouds, transforming them into rose and old gold, into violent reds

and saffron yellows, escaping rays shooting through the vapor, still stained by the contact, forming the light lines of a great halo. Multicolored and iridescent, twinkling and glittering, the Jewels of Heaven showering down upon these men who passed through space.

Twelve Spads, keen-nosed, humming contentedly, wings rolling lazily, keeping a set formation—a long V-like group of migrating wild waterfowl. Shining disks of light going before them—the only visible mark of spinning propellers. Man mastering the heights, and in his mastery reduced to an infinitesimal atom amid the grandeur of sweep of space. Red, white and blue circles under wings and on rudder. Cabalistic writings on the same rudders. A single word—*Spad*—and then a number. For in space men have no use for names, they may be known only by color and by symbol.

Below the cockpit of each ship of the formation, a red-painted square making vivid contrast with the gray of the fuselage. In the square a painted hand—a clenched fist holding a black and white checkered flag.

That flag was the insignia of the Twenty-sixth Squadron. George Burns had suggested it. It was a throwback to the days of the automobile racetrack. Racing drivers, peering over the tops of shimmering hoods, had no time to see scoreboards, had no knowledge of the number of laps completed. To them, victory and the end of the race was held in such a hand waving a black and white checkered flag before them as they flashed across the finish line. Victory! And so the Twenty-sixth had adopted it enthusiastically for its own.

Victory—as in other days. . . .

CHAPTER II

One, Two, Three

MEMORIAL DAY at Indianapolis! Angry whine of supercharged motors rising and falling, a whine which

came out of the back stretch as a low-voiced moan and lifted higher and higher, until a flashing meteor swept by the long grandstand wrapped in a haze of vision-distorting speed, seemingly propelled through space by a scream of fury which jabbed down into the fibers of a hundred thousand spectators and wound already raw nerves into jerking knots.

Tension had been mounting within those same spectators for two hours. A tension which held them in muscle-wracking positions, leaning forward eagerly, following those meteor-like shapes which hurtled by, heads and eyes turning in unison, until the entire hundred thousand seemed motivated by the same impulse. Nerves ragged, eyes smarting, nostrils stinging with the fumes of gasoline and hot oil, legs numb with the weariness of supporting rigid bodies, throats raw from involuntary shouts which arose every other moment, as wheeled monster after wheeled monster appeared out of the haze for a single instant and then went roaring away too fast for the eye to follow, to leap around the south turn.

It seemed the strain had endured forever—and would never come to an end. Red cars and green cars, black cars and white cars, jumbled and mixed together in a crazy patchwork of sublime speed, jammed together, skidding the turns, sullen wisps of smoke from burning tires rising from the brick of the tracks and adding another peculiar odor to those odors associated with tremendous speed.

But above everything, the raging whine of the motors. That sound could be heard ten miles from the track. It was like a comet, unseen, thrown out of its course, and running amuck directly over the earth.

Thirty-one cars had started that grueling race. Two hours before, they had paraded proudly around the track, following the lead of a pacemaker, keeping in perfect alignment. Thirty-one survivors of the original sixty entrants. Thirty-one knights of the throttle who

had proved to the contest committee that they were fit to engage in this classic duel of high speeds. Parading in the positions they had won by right of nerve and brawn. The sunlight glistening from polished hoods, cars groomed to perfect condition.

Drivers poised in seats, waiting for that first starting lap to be over—waiting for the crashing impact of an aerial bomb which was to send them on the way—which was to cause “heavy feet” to step down upon accelerators—which was to signal the beginning of the greatest test of speed and stamina for car and driver in the world.

The crash came from high above the earth. A great blot of white smoke sprang out against the blue of the sky. The pacemaker scurried for the pits. The growling monotone of the thirty-one motors—growling discontentedly at this snail’s pace of seventy miles per hour—leaped to an eager barking, and they were off!

Five hundred miles away, over a cruel surface of uneven brick, awaited the crown of victory. Thirty-one daredevils, crouched low over steering wheels, off in the mad chase. Thirty-one machines of flesh and blood, risking everything in life for glory. Eyes narrowed, wheels passing wheels with fractions of inches to spare. Flame stabbing from exhaust stacks, tires screaming in mad agony. Racing cars leaping dizzily upward on the high-banked turns, then plunging downward breathlessly to regain the center of the track.

Thirty-one cars. But even before they were started on the grind, three of the thirty-one held a fascination for the hundred thousand onlookers. The Trojan team of Crowley, Reese and Burns. Three beautiful, sleek white mounts, guided by three drivers garbed in white racing coveralls, helmeted by shiny white helmets, on the back of the white coveralls the magic word *Trojans*.

A crew of reckless daredevils, those three white knights who went tearing at space in the white cars. Crowley, Reese

and Burns! Their deeds were classics in the annals of automobile racing. The Trojan team.

Three years before, they had faced this same five-hundred-mile test, piloting the same type of white cars, and had given the nation a new sensation by driving to victory in one-two-three order. Crowley first, Reese second, Burns third. They had given the Trojan car a prestige which had carried it to the peak of retail sales immediately following the race, and which had made it the most popular high-priced car in America. A position it had held throughout the three years which followed, with each year bringing a new luster because of the daring of Crowley, Reese and Burns.

TRACKS throughout the country bid eagerly for the entries of this colorful team. And always—it had become an institution—when the race was done, and the cars had drifted into the pits, the official scorer posted the numbers which told the world that Crowley, Reese and Burns had swept opposition before them.

In that parade about the track, the hundred thousand heads were following those three white cars. A hundred thousand voices were nervous with excitement and enthusiasm. The white cars were numbered in great black numerals. Crowley’s was 1. Reese’s was 2. Burns’ was 3. They had finished that way in the time trials. It was their right to have the first three positions.

And when the race was on, the hundred thousand still followed the destinies of those three cars. Watched them slip through jams with inches to spare. Watched Crowley take his mount high on the turns and then drop down onto the low banks with his motor screaming a ghastly, shattering note which grew unbearable at its highest pitch. Watched Reese following after him—and then Burns.

Straightening away in the stretches, sweeping the turns together—opening a gap between the Trojans and the car in

fourth place. Driving like tireless demons—faces black, white helmets becoming stained with gas and oil smoke—crouching, intent upon the track ahead—three white comets blasting a way toward the goal which was five hundred miles distant and could only be approached by way of a two-and-a-half-mile oval, paved with bricks which telegraphed battering jolts to the bodies of the drivers.

Wrapped in a cloud of dizzy heat eddies punctured by flame, tires screeching, wheels nothing more than oval shapes of spinning light, around and around that elliptical saucer—whipping out of the back stretch with projectile-like velocity—to exist for a single instant before the stands. Nightmares of motion, disappearing into the south turn—riding higher and higher as the speed of the pace increased lap by lap.

Crowley, the little black-haired imp, fighting to clinch his title as the world's champion driver. With two Indianapolis races to his credit, whirling madly to a third. Behind him Reese and Burns, fighting to keep the one-two-three record of the Trojans intact—struggling to blot out the chances of other cars in the race, hanging to Crowley's tail—spreading across the track after the turns, coming down the stretch neck and neck—three furies of speed beyond speed.

Crowley, the leader of the trio, was dark, with piercing black eyes which seemed to glint a challenge to all the world. Reese was tall and blond, with immense shoulders and narrow hips. He had to crowd himself into the tiny driver's seat of his Trojan. He drove with his knees forced into his belly, his head bent low above the wheel. He was a queer type for a speed demon. From the South. Drawling of speech, deliberate of manner. Always smiling. Fifty million Americans could instantly identify his picture in any newspaper by his perpetual grin.

Burns, short, stocky, a flaming red-head. Bushy eyebrows, and a skin which seemed always on the point of

blistering. Calculating blue eyes. Reticent as to speech, a wizard on things mechanical, a temper which burst out of bounds easily, and which returned under control more easily. He was the ideal type of racing driver. He never knew the meaning of the word defeat. He was capable of rising to such dizzy heights of courage as to leave spectators wet with cold perspiration and limp from nervous exhaustion. In the driver's seat he was nothing more than a machine, handling his car with infinite skill, making desperate chances seem matter-of-fact, climbing out of his wagon at the end of a race fresh and untroubled.

Three knights of the track—and between them there was no rivalry, no jealousy. They were a perfect team—they cared not who won so long as a Trojan car was not beaten—and because of that fact they had swept to tremendous heights of popularity and success.

TWO hundred and fifty miles—and the pace steadily increasing. Cars drifting into the pits. Cars which smoked and flamed. Cars with coughing motors, cars with soft tires. Mechanics and pit men changing four tires in thirty seconds, refueling in another thirty seconds. Pit crews geared up to the speed of the cars they served. Cars dragging into pits with vitals banging against the ground—weeping drivers cursing in staccato voices—forced out of the race.

Once there had been a roar of terror from a hundred thousand throats—when Joe Boles, driving a Sunbeam, had blown a tire on the dangerous south turn and had gone rolling over and over to the bottom of the track—with Jack Graves, in a Thunderbolt Special, piling into him with a crash which seemed to shake the steel beams of the stands.

A jumbled, hopeless mass of twisted steel—white-hot metal, piled together. Men running—flames leaping angrily from the tangled cars—two drivers pinned and crushed into seats. And the

field racing by—never looking at the Death which hovered close to each of them. The scream of motors had never faltered for an instant. The men who circled that track were no strangers to Death. The two destroyers were everyday, boon companions.

Two hundred and fifty miles—with the official score showing Crowley, Reese and Burns leading the pack by four laps. Spinning on, never slackening speed, never touching the pits, building up a lead, inch by inch, forcing a faster and still faster pace—until the timer announced that the Trojan team as a whole had driven the last ten laps, the last five laps, and the last lap faster than man had ever traveled before—the stunning speed of 101.2 miles per hour—over rough brick and high-banked turns. A hoarse shout of approval and applause from the hundred thousand—each of them mentally riding with one of the three Trojans. Each of them crouched over a wheel, watching the white lines upon the track which were the boundaries between life and death.

Crowley, Reese and Burns—only Fate could stop them from bringing those white Trojans in again—one-two-three.

And Fate did stop them—

It stopped Crowley.

Reese and Burns went on. Stomachs sick, nerves shaking, but driving—driving. . . .

IT happened in one instant. Fate reached down a scornful hand as if to mock these humans who would be gods. Fate touched that white, glowing thing which Crowley drove. The hand of Fate was unseen—there was merely a patch of oil on that treacherous, high-banked south turn.

A few laps earlier Elkhart, driving a Hawkins Special, had met disaster on that turn. Churning con-rods had refused further strain. Something had snapped—and the con-rods had driven themselves through the crankcase. The motor in the Hawkins had smashed itself into jagged particles and exploded

like a bomb packed with high explosives. There had been a great blot of green and crimson flame from under the bonnet of the Hawkins—and then it was sliding and spinning down the track, spurting flame—Elkhart's head concealed by the inferno blazing from under his feet.

The Hawkins had hit the guard rail at the bottom of the track with a lurching bounce—had overturned. Men were dragging Elkhart out of the cockpit—squirting chemicals upon the fire—struggling to get the hulk of a once beautiful racing car off the track.

And Crowley, followed by Reese and Burns, had thundered past—high overhead—blurs of terrific speed. Throughout the last ten laps Crowley had been riding the banks higher and higher—going up with a surge of motion which brought gasps of dismay from the spectators flirting with the guard rails which fenced in that south turn—brushing them with his wheels—guards which were fifty feet above the level of the ground. Hanging suspended before making that terrible rush and swoop downward. An exhibition of sublime contempt for disaster—exhibition of a grim challenge to drivers pressing the three Trojans.

Reese and Burns whirling after him—coming within five or six feet of his highest turn—diving down the bank in his wake. Fighting to keep first, second and third safe for the Trojan.

Five laps after the Hawkins mishap with the blazing car not yet dragged off the lower track, Crowley whirled into the stretch before the grandstand. A thousand hands held stop watches. Ten thousand throats screamed a mad hymn to withering speed. Voices roared. "New record again!" "Making over a hundred and five for that lap!" The white blurs ripped past the stands, swept into the south turn—

And then, Crowley's car seemed to take wings. It lifted with a wild surge to the right—it shot straight up. There was a rending crash as it struck the

guard rail and the retaining wall—then there was nothing but a jagged hole in the wall. And two other white blurs diving down the track—to carry on for the Trojan.

A sudden silence among the hundred thousand. A silence made ghastly by the wail and moan and scream of the cars on the track. The Trojans swept out of the stretch, hurled themselves into that same south turn—Reese riding where Crowley had disappeared, Burns with his throttle jammed to the floor—past that sinister breach in the wall.

Speeding on. . . .

But on the ground outside the track, a voiceless, nerveless crew were dragging a smashed body from a smashed white car. Gouging away imprisoning steel with powerful crowbars. An ambulance stood waiting. Two white-clad internes were kneeling beside the hot wreckage, working on Crowley before he was free of the wreck.

They took him out—limp and broken, his head dangling, his arms and legs sprawling. Blood smeared his face. His hands still curved into talons—still curved in a grip which three men had forced away from the crumpled steering wheel. They lifted him gently onto a litter.

The siren of the ambulance sounded shrilly—rising as an echo of the motor notes from within the enclosure. They were taking Crowley away from the track.

He opened his eyes for an instant when they lifted him into the ambulance. He seemed trying to speak. His chest heaved and a bloody froth bubbled from his mouth. The ambulance surgeon put his ear close to Crowley's mouth.

"I—hope—Reese didn't get that," he gasped. "I went off—the track—wheels hit pool—oil. Reese'll win—and Burns will follow—him home. Tell them—I said—good luck."

He closed his eyes again, wearily. From the track the moaning of the motors continued—and Death chuckled and looked for a new mount.

Within the enclosure the hundred thousand lapsed into a stunned, shocked silence. The tension of the race seemed suddenly released. There was a dumb horror gripping them, the vision of the white car hurdling the guard rail and crashing through the retaining wall. With Crowley's leap from the track the race was over—the color and the purpose was gone. Here and there in the press men were working frantically over fainting and hysterical women. The mere fact that Reese and Burns still circled the track, faster and faster, was nothing more to the spectators than a grim gesture of contempt for a Death which could utter such a summons to a companion knight, an invitation to issue the same summons to those who still rode.

THERE was one man among those hundred thousand spectators who looked down upon the spectacle of calamity with no expression of dismay upon his face, no light of horror crawling in his eyes. Outwardly he might have been one who took a keen professional interest in the disasters which overtook humans. He had an air of being present merely to study new forms of death at first hand.

He stood on the roof of a grandstand within a railed platform evidently reserved for honored guests of the association. A pair of field glasses dangled from a leather strap about his neck. During the entire race he had seemed aloof, calm, undisturbed by the frenzied enthusiasm of the thousands about him. When he lifted his binoculars to his eyes it was with the air of a scientist observing bacteria under the lenses of a microscope.

He was a strange figure. His clothing was of a foreign cut. His gray Hom-burg hat with its tiny feather thrust in the band certainly had not been found in any hat store in the United States. His face had that mysterious young-old look. It was dark, almost olive tinted. His mouth was a thing of thin, straight

lines, and seemed permanently set in serious concentration.

But he had one point which stood out sharply from his every other feature—his eyes. People who turned to look at him and who were about to turn away after a single glance, chanced upon those eyes, and curiosity turned to a sort of breathless surprise. People usually discovered themselves staring in a type of intense fascination, which caused them to forget that one could move or turn the head away to escape the magnetism engendered by twin points of shining light.

These eyes seemed filled with a lambent flame—a glowing, shifting series of lights, which seemed to change form and pattern with the passing of each instant. Points of glittering brilliancy which bored into the consciousness of the person who looked at them, and seemed to be probing into the caverns of the soul.

The power contained in those eyes was not a figment of the imagination. It was a very real, and very potent thing. It was possessed by a man who had made himself world-famous in the field of psychic research. A man who was familiar with Freud and Kraft-Ebbing, who had known Weininger, and who had occupied a seat within that circle of scientists whose business it was to delve into the hidden soul, exactly as one would look into the bottom of a deep and dark well, with a hand torch.

Outwardly he was merely a young man, who through some strange process of life had grown prematurely aged. There was nothing about his person to express age—the age was associated with the atmosphere which surrounded him. Looking down upon these humans who whirled dizzily about a brick track at tremendous speeds, his attitude seemed that of a parent who watches the play of children with amused indifference.

His interest seemed to be in the reactions of these playing children in the face of disaster. Time after time he

swept his glasses to his eyes and studied the face of a driver who had just escaped death by inches, time after time he permitted the glasses to fall the length of the strap when his study of that particular specimen was finished.

He seemed disappointed. He was disappointed. He was looking for fear—and he did not find it.

A DIGNIFIED, bearded man who stood at his side addressed him respectfully.

“It seems that the popular hero has come to grief, Doctor.”

The young-old man with the glittering eyes gazed at his companion for an instant. “I was watching his face when he went through the wall,” he declared quietly. “He was thinking of nothing but keeping his car on the track—even when the wheels had left the ground and he was plunging to the ground, he was still fighting the wheel, still moved by the desire to continue the race. He was a remarkable example of the fact that the human fears personal defeat far more strongly than it fears death. There are times when the human soul rises to such heights of sacrifice and exaltation that death is hardly important. That was one of the instances.”

He was silent for a moment.

“You know,” he continued, “I envy that man. I would give everything in my life in exchange for everything in his. I would gladly exchange places with him—even on the hospital cot to which he will be taken. I would give him my health in exchange for the fight for life he must make. All my life I have had the urge to do things like that—to get out before the public, to take my place in a racing car like his, or in an airplane, and do things which would make people gasp—make them marvel at my daring and recklessness. I have always wanted to live the thrills that men such as Crowley experience. Why, life, measured in the minutes they live through, would be an endless thing of eons upon eons. How long do you

suppose Crowley lived in that single instant when he crashed out into space, and plunged toward the ground outside the track? An instant—in our time. Yet in terms of living, that instant was a thousand years—longer than an ordinary man has lived. Pile instant like that upon the other such instants Crowley has known—and understand how endless life has been for him.”

The tall, dignified man—certainly a physician from his appearance—laughed in amusement.

“Imagine the sensation!” he chuckled. “Imagine the shocked expression of fellow scientists to discover that the life-motive of Professor Dryer Wallace, possessor of fourteen letters to be written after his name, is nothing more or less than to be a fire-breathing daredevil charging around brick bowls in racing cars—or swooping out of the clouds in an upside-down position. Imagine their astonishment and chagrin—just when they have admitted that America can produce a brain—such a brain as that of Professor Dryer Wallace—to discover that the brain is entirely superficial. Imagine—the young man who forced Fried to throw out and rewrite three chapters of his most famous book. My word, Dryer, I should imagine that you could be a sensation merely by admitting your desire to engage in such pursuits.”

Dryer Wallace smiled ruefully. “Nevertheless, it’s the truth,” he declared seriously. “I’d give my German degrees for one headline—‘Dryer Wallace Pilots Trojan To New Victory.’ It would mean more to me from a personal standpoint than the applause of a lot of cold-blooded soul-readers—”

He sighed.

“Why not go in for auto racing on the side?” suggested the companion. “You have plenty of money. Someone could build you a couple of good cars. You certainly would get all the publicity your heart seems to crave. What about this headline: ‘World-Famous Psychologist Killed at Indianapolis.’

That’s the headline Crowley will get tomorrow—”

“No, he won’t,” declared Wallace. “He isn’t going to die.”

“HE can’t help it,” argued the other. “A man may be a Hercules and yet such a plunge must kill him—”

“But Crowley is not going to die,” declared Wallace seriously. “Don’t ask me how I know—I just know it. You know, I’d like to meet him. I’d like to talk to him.”

The companion shrugged shoulders helplessly.

“You don’t understand,” insisted Wallace. “Perhaps I have the small boy great-hero complex, but all my life I’ve wanted to do things—and all my life I’ve had books handed to me. I’d welcome some kind of social upheaval which would make it impossible for me to ever see a book again—until I wanted to see them. I’d welcome a revolution in my life that would permit me—just for a couple of years—to do the things I have wished to do. To live—as that Trojan team has lived—years crowded into seconds—nerves taut, pulses leaping, depending upon my own nerve and judgment to preserve my life—Swenson, that’s life—our kind of existence isn’t. We study and probe and theorize about living—when the truth is that men like Crowley are the humans who live—”

“The man who wrote the text book on ‘Post Hypnotic Control’ ready to trade his well-merited fame for the sensationalism of a moment—”

“No, for the glory of life that is crowded into that moment—”

“Let’s go,” suggested the companion with a perplexed air. “Sometimes I can’t understand you at all. In any event, the race is over for you. Your fellow demons, Reese and Burns, have opened such a lead, and are driving like such fiends, that the Trojan is assured of a one-two finish, if not a one-two-three finish as before.”

"Look at me," challenged Wallace as if he had not heard. "Look at the insignificance of me. Look at the puny height, the slight weight, the undeveloped muscles, and then you'll understand why I never could crash into a line on the football field, or throw my weight into a struggle with other men. Why in school the coaches laughed at me because I wanted to play football—they called me 'Runt.' I wasn't even big enough to be water boy."

"Look at your brain," snapped the companion. "You have more brains than ten thousand coaches and sport heroes combined. You have contributed to the values of the world in which you live—they have merely proved that when muscle meets muscle someone is injured. The brain is master—"

"Not in the last analysis," argued Wallace. "The brain is master only when the brawn permits. What chance would I have with a savage who was out to kill me—as much chance as your athlete would have with muscles of iron, and a well conditioned body?"

"Poppycock!" grunted the companion.

They left the railed platform on the roof of the stands. Below, the last laps of the race were being run. The drone of the motors was still tearing at space. The official score board showed that Reese and Burns were twelve laps in the lead, and gaining with every moment.

There was a reluctant light in the eyes of young Professor Dryer Wallace.

"No matter what you say—I still would trade with Crowley," he told his companion.

first time since being borne from the track on a litter. There were agonizing spasms of pain pulsing through his body. The spinning sensation in his head seemed to nauseate him to an unbearable degree. He felt that his body had been sucked dry of strength—that only his bones and flesh lay pressed against the soft mattress of the bed.

Fear struck at him.

It was difficult for him to keep his eyes open. The meager light within the room scorched his brain. A sudden fear leaped up within him. He had to remain inert for an instant to understand that it was fear. It seemed that the white walls were closing in on him—compressing—growing smaller and smaller, crowding him—about to crush him to a shapeless pulp. His mouth opened, his bloodless lips drew back over his teeth to expose colorless gums. The muscles of his throat moved as if to cry out.

A quiet, gentle voice spoke to him. A soft voice, but a voice heavy with an authority which took command of Buzz Crowley's glimmering consciousness.

"Don't move," said the voice. "Don't be frightened. There is nothing here to harm you."

A hand touched his forehead. It seemed that the dancing lights eating at his brain were suddenly gone. The spinning stopped—the pain-spasms were lessened.

His eyes moved. They discovered the man who had spoken. During the first minute of discovery Buzz Crowley could only stare at the man's face. He felt a strength building itself within his body—it seemed to come from the person of the man seated at his bedside. A dark face—with two glowing eyes looking down at him. Eyes which were flooded with compassion—and yet possessed of a unique power to command—to command the obedience of Crowley's battered body.

"Who are you?" Crowley managed to gasp after that first meeting of eyes.

The man smiled. His white teeth

CHAPTER III

A Friendship

THE white walls of the hospital room were heavily shaded when Buzz Crowley opened his eyes for the

flashed in the semi-darkness of the room. It was a warm smile, a friendly smile. It brought a feeling of close companionship to Buzz Crowley.

"My name happens to be Dryer Wallace," informed the visitor in the same gentle voice. "I saw you this afternoon—saw your accident. I came here from the track. You see, I am a doctor of sorts. They usually let me have the run of any hospital I visit, and I thought perhaps I could do something for you. They told me you were pretty badly injured—that you need strength to rally. So I came up—to see if I could help."

"Thanks," mumbled Crowley. "I did feel pretty terrible when I woke up—couldn't seem to get things straight. I feel better now. It's funny, but when I saw you sitting there I had the idea that I had known you before—that I had met you—it's funny. Say—how did Reese and Burns do? Did I—get on their nerves?" There was a poignant anxiety in Crowley's voice.

"No—both of them went on and won. Burns finished first this time. They were riding first and second and Reese had to go into the pits to change tires at four hundred and fifty miles—tried to get by without making the change, but the treads were all shot—he had to go in. And that let Burns take first place. Reese drove a beautiful race. The pit crew had him back on the track in forty-five seconds. He lost two laps of his lead, but he went out and got them back—but he couldn't overtake Burns."

"What a driver—Burns!" whispered Crowley. "You know why he doesn't change rubber? It's because he can ride the curves without skidding—and anybody that has to get new tires—can't get Burns. I'm glad he finished that way—I'm glad he took an Indianapolis. He could have won last year—but he hung back, letting me take the show—because he wanted me to set a record. That's the kind of boy Burns is."

"The three of you are pretty close to-

gether, aren't you?" asked Wallace in a queer voice.

"Any time two guys will let another bird win a race like Indianapolis, when they might win, and have the glory, you can call it a swell exhibition of the Damon and Pythias thing. We split our purses three ways—and either of those boys can teach me tricks about race driving. We finish one-two-three—Crowley, Reese, and Burns because it gets the most publicity for the Trojan. We've been working for the car—it's a habit."

"A loyalty," suggested Wallace.

"Yeah, I guess that's it," agreed Buzz wearily.

"Well, you'll be able to race again," predicted Wallace. "You'll be out of here in a month. You'll be back at a wheel in two months—"

He stopped, staring at Crowley's eyes.

A queer, half-crazed light had seeped into Crowley's eyes. His hands were shaking. His dark cheeks were suddenly white. He closed his eyes as if to blot out a terrible vision.

DRYER WALLACE bent low over the bed studying Crowley's face. A sharply indrawn breath hissed through his teeth. Crowley moved restlessly and shook his head weakly.

"It never was like that before," he said thickly. "I never got the horrors before. I've taken it that close, too. But when you said 'You'll be back at the wheel in two months' a kind of a chill went over me—and I seemed to get a picture in my head of that second when I went off the edge of the track—and sat there, stuck in the seat—looking down at the ground I knew I was going to smack. The whole world seemed to stand still—I was just hanging there. I was saying to myself, 'Here's where you get yours—here's where you get yours—' and then I was dropping—and the smack—"

He shuddered. "It's funny—I got weak inside when you mentioned driv-

ing again—kind of afraid.”

“You’d better rest,” suggested Wallace. “You need your strength. I’ll come to see you often—if I may.”

“Will you?” asked Crowley drowsily. “It’s funny. I felt rotten until I saw you sitting there. Felt as if I would die—all my strength gone. I guess maybe you bucked me up—”

His face relaxed. Dryer Wallace’s hand was rubbing gently over his forehead.

“You’ll have a long sleep,” Wallace was saying, as if soothing a child. “You’ll have a long sleep—and when you wake up you’ll be better. I’ll come to see you.”

And Buzz Crowley was asleep.

It happened often after that. Crowley would awaken to find Dryer Wallace sitting at the side of his bed, looking at him with those compelling eyes, speaking to him with that assuring voice. When Crowley was stronger he discovered that the hospital people paid Dryer Wallace a strange deference. Even the resident surgeon-in-chief consulted this young fellow eagerly and respectfully. They seemed to have turned Crowley’s case over to Wallace entirely. It puzzled him.

“But you’ve never given me any pills, or anything,” he told Wallace one day. “You’ve not even worn a white coat or put one of those ear-phones on my chest—”

“Maybe I’m a different kind of doctor,” suggested Wallace. “Anyway, we’re getting results, aren’t we?”

And Crowley had smiled. Somehow he had an overwhelming confidence in this quiet-voiced, old-young man. Perhaps it was because Wallace was his most constant visitor and always seemed to know just what a smashed-up race driver craved while in a hospital. No matter what, the bond between them grew stronger with the passing of each day.

Once Wallace had laughingly admitted that he was ready to trade anything he had in the world for Crowley’s

mastery of auto driving—but Crowley had laughed at the idea.

“You don’t know nothing about it, Doc,” he grunted. “It looks like a great racket from the outside—but it’s a tough grind on the inside. You ride in front one race, and you inhale smoke for the rest of your life. You’re a hero in the morning, and in the afternoon somebody steals your thunder—beats your record—and you’re forgotten.”

“But it’s life,” argued Wallace. “It’s the life I’ve always wanted and couldn’t have—because when I was a kid my folks pushed a book in my hands instead of an air rifle—and I’ve had books ever since.”

“Leave the daredevil stuff to nuts like me and Reese and Burns,” advised Crowley. “You’re better off to go round holding hands with maiden ladies who have that queer feeling.”

“You’re the man I wanted to be—I want to be,” insisted Wallace seriously. “It’s funny, isn’t it? None of us can be satisfied with conditions as they are.”

“Well, it’s a lot easier to be satisfied with sitting in a chair and bringing a guy fruit than it is for the other guy to be satisfied with being in the bed—busted up.”

They laughed. But each of them understood the other.

THERE came a time when Buzz Crowley left the hospital. During his stay Professor Dryer Wallace seemed to forget that any duty existed in the world other than the association with Crowley. He seemed to have forgotten that life flowed serenely by this quiet hospital and that he had a place in the midst of it, and an important place. He ignored cables, entreaties and demands which would have taken him away from Crowley. He answered no letters. He seemed immersed in the problem of the speed demon who had plunged headlong into shuddering disaster.

Crowley’s leave-taking from the hospital was a procession of triumph.

Reese and Burns were there, leading a procession of drivers and mechanics. A motorcycle escort cleared a path for the procession. They went tearing through the streets—the speedometers rising higher and higher as the escort increased its speed. Sirens wailed, horns honked—people along the sidewalks cheered. It was a gala day.

But Dryer Wallace saw none of the celebration. He was watching Crowley's face. The auto in which Crowley and Reese and Burns and himself rode speeded up to keep its place at the front of the line—and Crowley's face had turned a blotchy white. His hands were clinging to the sides of the car. He was grinning—a ghastly grin, as if to conceal the terror within him. Once he turned to meet Wallace's eyes. He started suddenly as if surprised in an unworthy pose.

"It's funny," he said under his breath to Wallace. "I'm as nervous as an old woman. I can't stand anybody else driving. I'm hanging onto the edge of this wagon—just waiting for it to crack up, and I'm shaking in my boots. I don't know what is wrong with me, but whenever I think of a car cracking up, I get the shakes."

He shivered.

"It's quite all right," said Wallace. "Nothing is going to happen."

Crowley's face regained some of its color. He seemed to breathe more easily.

"Thanks," he said gratefully. "It's foolishness to feel the way I do—but I guess I'm not over that bump yet. It'll take time."

Wallace nodded gravely. "Yes," he said. "It will take time."

Time. . . .

That was what the public believed when Crowley's name was omitted from the entry lists of the great speed classics of that year. He needed time. He had been badly injured. He wasn't strong enough to compete as yet—but wait until he came back to the track. He'd give Burns and Reese one sweet time catch-

ing him. He'd burn things up—so fast that it would take three men to tell of his passing by.

But only Dryer Wallace and Buzz Crowley himself knew that the name of Crowley would never again appear on an automobile racing program, and that a white Trojan with the bold black letter *T*, piloted by the same Buzz Crowley, would never again follow a pace-maker around the first lap of a track.

CHAPTER IV

The Starting Bomb

DRYER WALLACE sat lazily on the rail surrounding the Trojan pit that day in April when war was declared. The sky above was a glorious blue, dotted with a lacelike network of white clouds. The great stands surrounding the track were empty. Tier upon tier of seats rose endlessly overhead. A scattering of urchins, probably playing truant from school, skipped guiltily about the pits, watching mechanics laboring over already perfect motors.

The great race was still more than a month away, but the Trojan crew and the crews of several other entries were making preparations.

Buzz Crowley was there, enveloped in a suit of white coveralls with the word *TROJAN* across the back. So were George Burns and Dixie Reese. A spirit of happiness seemed to flow through them. Now and then Dixie Reese would burst out into a few bars of song as he tinkered over his motor, or Burns would lift his red head and grin delightedly toward Crowley.

"Boy, will we take 'em to the cleaners, this year?" Burns had asked half a dozen times. "Hasn't seemed right without you, Buzz. Didn't see any reason why we should go out there and run the field ragged. Didn't seem right pounding out of the turns and not having the back end of your buggy in front

of us as a mark to shoot at. But it'll be different now."

There was an answering smile on Crowley's face. He was sitting in the driver's seat of a new Trojan—a brand-new product of the factory. A wheeled bullet created especially for the Indianapolis track. He was touching the wheel with nervous hands, looking at the instrument board with nervous eyes.

Once or twice Burns glanced at his face curiously. "Say!" he finally blurted. "You don't look so happy. Doesn't it give you a kick to have a new car—and a nice new year to do things?"

Crowley nodded. "Sure," he said in a queer voice. "Only, it seems funny being in the seat again—"

Burns laughed. "Say, I was watching you after Allentown when you came down out of the stands. You were as white as a ghost—and your hands were shaking. I don't blame you. It must have been hell on a race driver to sit in the stands and watch that last brush I had with Elkhart—that last five miles around that board track. I was on fire myself—and then Reese came out of the ruck—to pass Elkhart after me—and we clinched first and second for the gang. That was a race. It sure took a lot out of you. You looked as if you'd driven the whole race for both of us."

Crowley's head was lowered. He seemed watching the dials on the instrument board.

"Yeah," he said in the same queer voice. "It was tough all right. When you went shooting for the top of that track—just after you passed Elkhart—well, my heart was doing loop-the-loops. I sure thought you were gone—" His voice trailed away.

"It's tougher to watch spots like that than to drive 'em," declared Burns. "Now I was only thinking that I had to get past or take a wheel off him—and I had just twenty-five miles to go—so I went by. I remember seeing the guard rail right next to my head—and then the buggy was going down."

"Yeah," grunted Crowley. "I saw it."

THEY looked up. A khaki-colored automobile had driven through the gates, preceded by two escorting police motorcycles. The motorcycles came to a panting halt near the three new racing cars. The policemen waved and grinned. They seemed elated, excited. Two officers rode in the tonneau of the khaki touring car. They stepped to the ground and walked toward the group surrounding the cars. One wore eagles on his shoulders, the other wore a gold oak leaf.

The officer with the eagles introduced himself. "I'm Colonel Gaston, attached to the recruiting service," he said. "I think I am talking to three well known gentlemen—Buzz Crowley, Dixie Reese, and George Burns." He was smiling.

Burns wiped his hands on a bit of waste. "That's us, Colonel," he grinned. "But we're not answering any questions until we see our lawyer."

The Colonel was shaking hands with them. His eyes glanced admiringly at the three new Trojans and at the efficient looking pit.

"You haven't seen the morning papers, have you?" he asked quietly. They shook heads.

"Then you don't know that the Congress of the United States declared war on Germany—at eleven o'clock?"

A wrench dropped from Burns' hand and fell to the concrete apron of the pit with a dull metallic thud.

"War?" he repeated breathlessly. "You mean that we're going to get into the fight with the squareheads?"

"It means that we *are* in it," corrected the Colonel seriously. "We've been at war now"—he glanced at his wrist watch—"for a period of one hour and twenty-five minutes. The entire nation is gearing itself up to meet this emergency. In a few days troops will be moving toward the seaboard for transportation to Europe—we're in it up to our necks."

Crowley had slipped out of his seat. He was one of the group about Colonel Gaston. It seemed that neither of them

could speak. They were staring at the officer's face.

"I have a very special reason in coming here," continued the Colonel. "I wanted to reach you three men immediately. There is a great service you can do your country, and the psychological instant for that service is right now." He paused and looked at them.

"I'll make myself more explicit," he continued. "Crowley, Reese, and Burns! Three names which have excited the admiration of fifty million people. Three names which are bywords for courage, daring, bravery. Three men who are known to every person in this country who reads a newspaper. Thinking of you three men, one thinks of blinding speed, of iron nerves, of splendid bodies, of high adventure, and certain triumph. Thinking of you, one thinks of three white blurs traveling faster than the eye may follow, wrapped in flame and smoke and in the roar of terrifically powerful motors. You understand?"

"Now, we of the Army have a branch of the service which needs men of your caliber. A branch into which the three of you would fit almost without preparation. A branch which will permit you to go faster, further, and higher than ever before. Which will give you greater thrills, greater conquests and greater applause than even the winning of a race before a hundred thousand people could give you. We are asking you to change over your fast automobiles for something which is still faster—"

There was a leaping flame in George Burns' eyes. "Airplanes!" he exploded. "Airplanes—the only things faster than a Trojan car—"

"Airplanes," nodded the Colonel. "We need men like you to build our flying service. Around you we will build a great legion of youth ready to darken the sky with beating wings. Let them have you for an example. Let them follow after you. Let them say: 'Crowley, Reese and Burns have taken to the air'—and we shall have more fine young

men for our service than we can fit with wings."

THE Colonel's cheeks were tinged with red. His hands were gesturing with the earnestness of his convictions. His eyes were snapping. He paused dramatically.

"You said it!" echoed Burns. "Say, I've always had a craze for that flying game anyhow, but I never could seem to get my hands on one of these motorized kites. Back in Nineteen-ten—or maybe it was Eleven—I was out on the Coast and I saw that Frenchman, Paulhan—wasn't that his name?—take one of those things and turn it smack over—yes sir, over in a perfect loop, and right there I told the cockeyed world I wanted a piece of that game. I've been waiting for it to grow up a little—"

"It'll grow now," promised the Colonel enthusiastically. "It'll grow with the entire power of the greatest nation on the face of the earth behind it. Nobody knows where it will be when we finish with it. War in the sky. The return of the battle between individuals. Men looking down from the heights, directing the battles of earth-tied infantry. Meeting each other in single combat—victory to the most skilled, the most iron-nerved, the bravest. Victory such as you have never known in spite of the deeds you have done—"

"Say!" said Burns. "Let's not talk so much. Where do they keep these airplanes?"

Colonel Gaston smiled. "The spirit I expected, gentlemen," he said. "I knew that I could not be mistaken in Crowley, Reese and Burns. I knew we could depend on those three men.

"But I have another mission for you. One of great importance. There is a mass-meeting to be staged at the Orpheum Theatre tonight at eight o'clock. It is to stimulate recruiting in this area. The newspapers will cover it. I want you there tonight. I want to present you to the throng which will attend. I want to point out Crowley, Reese and Burns

—leaving the track before the greatest race of their careers—to circle a greater track and rise to greater glories. I want you to do that for the impetus it will give. Tomorrow, papers all over the country will break that news on the front pages. And by tomorrow night fifty thousand young men will be crowding the recruiting offices begging for a chance to follow you into the air.”

The three grinned.

And so, at eight o'clock on the day which brought the declaration of war, Crowley, Reese and Burns faced a capacity house in the city of Indianapolis. Faced five thousand eager faces, jammed into the aisles, crowded into the lobbies. Thronging the streets outside the theater for a block, eagerly asking what was being said inside.

Colonel Gaston presented them proudly.

“I bring before you three men who need no introduction,” he said. “Three men who have the distinction of being the first to volunteer for the air service. Three men the nation would expect to make that very gesture—”

And he got no farther. The theater erupted sound. Thunderous, ceaseless, booming applause. Feet stomping on the floor in a bedlam of enthusiasm. And Crowley, Reese and Burns stood before that throng, nonplussed by the reception. Embarrassed, self-conscious—with Burns' fixed grin the only sign of emotion.

CROWLEY spoke for them. They looked at this electric, black-headed, quick-moving little figure. They were thinking of a white Trojan flashing into the stretch before the stands—a white streak of movement, gone again quicker than a drawn breath, rocketing up the south turn—

“Sure we're going,” Crowley was saying. “A red-blooded he-man couldn't turn down a chance at this flying game. It's the life—the kind of thing we can do best. It'll be tough—being out of the race this year—but when we come

back we'll be better drivers—and Reese and Burns will be flying with me—”

They noticed that his hands were jerking strangely, and that his eyes were wide and staring, but they put it down to nervousness and tension. When Crowley had finished there was no further need for a demonstration of Indianapolis enthusiasm. The theater rocked with it.

Later, in Crowley's hotel room, Dryer Wallace sat on the edge of Crowley's bed, watching his face. Crowley was sitting before his desk, his head buried in his hands.

“I'm telling you,” he repeated for the tenth time. “I'm nothing but a yellow dog. All the time I was standing up there, with those people looking at me, I knew I was a yellow dog. A voice inside me was laughing and making fun of me. Doc, I was trying to get a bunch of fellows to do something I haven't got the guts to do. No use trying to hide it any more. I knew out there on the track this afternoon that I was finished. I knew it when I climbed behind that beautiful new Trojan and took the wheel in my hands. I went cold—I got the shakes. I was sick. I knew that I had gone yellow—that I'd never drive another race.

“And there were Dixie and George—happy to have me back—and I was a louse for not telling them that I'd never drive again. Too much of a coward to admit that I was licked. I suppose I'd have gone on—until I had to drive or confess—and then I'd have come up with some yarn about being hurt—a liar as well as a yellow-belly.

“It's the same with this flying thing. I'm licked before I start. I'll never be able to fly. That takes guts—and I haven't the guts any more. That crack up took something out of me—”

Wallace's voice was quiet. “You've got to go through with it, Buzz,” he said quietly. “It won't be so hard. I'm going with you.”

Crowley raised his head. “You?” he said incredulously. “You? What busi-

ness have you got to be mixed up in something like this? What about those wizards in Europe that are riding you right now for hiding yourself? What about the Research Society—why, you're too big a man to go fooling around with stuff like this—"

"I'm going," said Wallace flatly. "For once in my life I have a chance to be my own man. For once in my life I've got a chance to throw away books, to forget behaviorism and all the other isms. For once in my life I can laugh at professors and institutions. War puts every man on the same footing. I don't intend missing this chance. I may never get another. And besides—maybe I've found a problem big enough to give me an excuse for going to war to solve it."

"What problem?" grunted Buzz.

"A big problem," assured Dryer Wallace. "One of the strangest I've ever chanced on. A man who is wandering around in a world of bitterness, lost in the jangle of his own complexes. A man who needs a guide back to the fairway of normal life—and his name is Buzz Crowley."

He walked across the room and put his arm about Crowley's shoulders. "Don't worry, Buzz," he said. His eyes were moving circles of light—they were staring straight at Crowley. "Don't worry," he said soothingly. "Leave it all to me—there'll be a new Buzz Crowley—the Buzz Crowley of yesterday plus something added and—we'll find the straight-away again."

Crowley's eyes were half closed. "Gee, Doc," he said drowsily. "I don't know what I'd do without you. You pick me up when I need it the most. There were a couple of times back there when I was just on the verge of kicking off—just dropping in front of an express train or out of an open window—because I knew I couldn't go on. But you make ideas like that seem silly. When you look at me like that—well, I feel like a world beater, and I wonder how I ever cooked up such brainstorm."

He smiled wryly. "Let's go!"

CHAPTER V

Combat

TWELVE ships flying out over the lines—away from any safety contact which friendly ground might give them—deliberately seeking out an enemy—following after Captain Buzz Crowley.

Senlis to the east—black ruins of a once beautiful town. The ruins of arbors and farms, ploughed up by shells, roof trees broken, interiors gutted. A desolate wilderness in which no man lived except at the risk of sudden death.

An ominous, pregnant silence was broken only by the grumbling rumble of heavy guns, the clatter of machine-guns, the ear-splitting crash of grenades. To the east silver ribbons wound lazily between placid banks—with engineers methodically throwing pontoon bridges from shore to shore in half a dozen places. Looking like toiling ants, impossible to distinguish between boats and men. Magnified eyes peering down at them through disfiguring goggles.

Tension grew within them. Eyes were fixed upon Buzz Crowley's ship. Hearts were pumping—pounding against ribs which suddenly seemed stretched to the tightness of a drum head. A feeling of suffocation in lungs, hot flushes between shoulder blades and across the stomach. Eyes were shifting more rapidly, seeking a danger which could be sensed and yet was invisible.

And Crowley's crate rode calmly at the head of the line. Holding its place easily, never veering from a set course, passing over the last strands of barbed wire, nosing within enemy lines. Flying—steadily, evenly—northward.

Each of the twelve knew that sooner or later an enemy would rise to challenge that deliberate progress. Black dots would spring out of the northern horizon, raging furies would come screaming down from heights above—furies which plunged recklessly earth-

ward, throttles wide open, wings groaning under the strain, slotted guns spewing sizzling death. Furies which were painted fantastically; black and white, red and white, green and white, or blue-black with crazy designs drawn upon the surfacing; checkered, scrolled, cubed, smeared—blobs of color against the blue of the sky—blood-red, poisonous green. And all of them armed with death fangs.

Fokker and Hal and Pfalz—buzzing demons which stabbed and slashed, darted and whirled—crazily painted toys in the center of a whirling pool of destruction. Single ships, and ships in groups. In threes and fours, in flights and squadrons.

Ships hurled by men who seemed to fear nothing, who came with eye-searing speed out of the center of space and threw themselves recklessly upon anything which flew marked with the red, white and blue of the Allies. Men who met death with the salute of a gladiator, who fought while flame devoured the frail substance which bore them aloft, who rode wingless, ruined crates to certain destruction and exhibited a supreme contempt for that destruction by keeping guns going so long as a target offered itself, or while glazing eyes retained a glimmering of light. Men who left monuments to themselves in long spirals of black smoke which erupted from the vitals of splintered ships—monuments which were borne aloft on the breezes of heaven, which rose as signal fires—giving notice to the warriors of Valhalla that new heroes were coming to have place around the Long Board.

At Point, Buzz Crowley's Spad seemed to suddenly gather itself. Its wings seemed rigid, it seemed to be scenting something on the breeze.

IT nosed upward slightly, as if to kill speed rather than to gain additional altitude. The lazy drone of the motor was suddenly changed to a low, throaty growl.

Behind his Spad, the pilots of the

Twenty-sixth reached for throttles and eased them back a trifle. They lowered heads to a line with the motor cowlings and stared out over the banks—toward the north—toward that ever-changing line which is the end of earth and the beginning of heaven.

Stared with heat eddies rising before eyes, with sullen goutts of flame from exhaust stacks dancing wickedly before faces. With the round flame of the gun-sight a sudden limitation to all vision. Hands gripping sticks with a new tension. Feet heavy upon rudder bars. Faces suddenly gray and grim. One or two pulled gun trips and fed the first slugs of a belt into the firing chambers of the black guns.

Suddenly Buzz Crowley's hand lifted over his head and swept down, pointing into the northeast.

Heads turned like the heads of mechanical figures. Right wings went down, rudders eased to the right. The twelve ships turned in unison, took up the new course. A more eager, more ominous beating of Hissos now. A throbbing breathlessness which seemed to communicate itself to the ships.

They drew closer together. The disk of light before Crowley's Spad whirled faster and faster. The beat of his motor rose higher and higher.

They nosed down slightly. Increasing speed. Wires grew taut. The humming became a moan. The moan rose, pitch by pitch, until it was an angry wail. The tightly stretched fabric of wings drummed dully. Wires and wings! Together they sounded like a torture scene in a primitive jungle. The throbbing of drums and the moaning wail of the terrified victim. Rush of the slipstream battering against faces. Heads poised—shoulders thrust forward—following the angle of descent.

Faster and faster. Sun glinting on wings, touching the metal of the motor, creating miniature suns in its own likeness. Touching the glass of goggles and giving off blinding rays of scintillating light. Faster and faster. Ear drums

feeling tight—feeling on the point of bursting—

Twelve Spads smashing down from the heights, following after Buzz Crowley.

And then a sudden snatching of breaths among those pilots who followed him. Shapes were swimming up through space.

Shapes which seemed borne aloft on unseen elevators, rising without seeming to move. Shapes which were dots at first, then became hyphens, then became parallel lines; and in a breath developed into winged Fokkers—green and white—marked with stark Maltese Crosses. Shapes which were eagerly flying to meet those twelve ships of the Twenty-sixth.

And Buzz Crowley, never moving an inch from his course, was diving to meet them.

A thousand feet below. The distance diminishing with every revolution of propellers. The formation of the Twenty-sixth changed rapidly. Breaking out of the V, forming into a single line of file, following Crowley.

Performing the maneuver at a hundred and thirty miles an hour, sweeping into line with beautiful precision, they dropped like plummets, one upon the tail of the other. Buzz Crowley first, then Reese, then Burns, then Doc Wallace, and after them, one by one, the remaining eight.

Crowley's ship was standing on end. Angry streamers of smoke whipped back from his exhaust. His Spad was outlined against the sky for a single instant, and then it had struck at the group of Fokkers. Jagged streaks of flame spat from the muzzles of each of the Vickers mounted in front of his face. Snapping white lines of tracer stood out in bold relief against blue sky and green Fokkers for an instant and then dissolved into invisibility.

A pause—an instant—and Reese was going down like a winged comet, following in Crowley's track, motor screaming madly, crashing downward with the full

force of the terrific velocity built out of the long dive. His guns were flaming.

There was a bobbling of wings in the center of the Fokker formation. It was like an eddy upon a pond when a rock has been thrown. An eddy which surrounded the space Crowley's ship had made as it dived through that formation. Reese's Spad was pointed for that same spot.

He seemed leaping through the air. At a hundred feet his gun cut in for one short burst.

A green shape in his path crumpled as if it had plunged headlong into a stone wall. Its wings rose dizzily, the leading edge of the left wing showing a gaping, splintered mass of wreckage close to the fuselage. It hung there for a moment. Severed wires coiled and threshed like so many snakes in a death agony. Then it was spinning—wings threshing, threatening destruction to Fokkers about it. Ships veered out of line.

And above, Burns diving. Falling as Crowley and Reese had done before him. A chattering, moaning, shrieking fury. Guns stabbing in measured blasts. Webbed belts jerking hungrily through gun breeches. Keen nose pointed for the center of confusion within the enemy group. White streak of motion. Wheels and undercarriage seeming to claw at the green and white enemy about him—down he went at insane speed.

And then Doc Wallace. Firing as he came. Spraying the stunned enemy pilots with sustained bursts. Lead whistling and cracking about his ears—and his own lead whistling and crackling about enemy ears.

A ship zoomed to meet him. He fell on it like a trip hammer. It loomed in his sights for the hundredth part of an instant, but his thumb was crushing the trigger. The rivet-hammer staccato of his guns never faltered. A tracer whipped through the center-section struts of the Fokker. It seemed to smash the pilot's face to a bloody pulp. White mass of splinters showered from

struts and cowlings of that cross-marked ship. It staggered—a hot breath of flame swept up from about its motor.

But Doc Wallace had gone on—through the space the four Spads had hammered in the center of the Fokker unit.

ONE after the other those gray Spads fell. Just enough space between them to deliver the full effect of a series of crushing impacts. One deadly gray destroyer after another. Never giving the enemy *jadgstaffel* a chance to set itself for each new smash. Stabbing in insane fury as it fell—

And below, Buzz Crowley whirled his crate in a zoom, converted all the speed he had built up into a lunge upward—slashing at the bellies of the green ships above him. Raking under-fuselages with a succession of deadly bursts.

And after him, Reese. And after Reese, Burns. And after Burns, Wallace. And after Wallace, eight other gray wolves striking with red fangs, falling upon the milling enemy, smashing them this way and that, shock after shock, blow after blow, a withering rain of slugs following hot and fast as each ship pulled out of the dive and went zooming to the attack from below.

And Crowley, fighting like a madman, pulling out of a near stall five hundred feet above those green Fokkers, poised his ship for a second dive.

The metal of his motor and the metal of his guns was smoking. The heat seared his cheeks. His fingers were blistered from contact with gun breeches as he inserted new belts. His eyes were narrow slits through which a glittering light seemed to dart. His face was black with powder and oil stains. His mouth was a thin white line. He pushed the stick against the fire wall.

The Spad fell into a second dive.

Behind him Reese and Burns were imitating the maneuver. Other gray ships were zooming up through space, ripping burst after burst as they came. Fighting to gain the height held by

Crowley's ship, fighting to keep that ceaseless succession of smashes against the enemy line going in regular order.

Crowley's stacks vomited flame. His rudder flirled this way and that as he went diving down—darting movements which brought ship after ship in his sights for an instant—long enough for the deadly Vickers to point hot muzzles and unleash orange and green lightning. Riding through the midst of them, driving them relentlessly. And after him Reese, and after Reese, Burns—

But the green and white Fokkers could stand no more. There was something terrible in the smash of these Spads. There was no way to combat it, no way to break it up. They seemed surrounded by demons riding hurricanes. They were blinded by speed, lashed by hot metal, sickened by smoke which poured from the stricken ships of their own fellows.

A panic seemed to grip them. They broke suddenly. Green and white ships dodged and twisted this way and that, diving, zooming, slipping, spinning. Away from that focal point of destruction. Helmeted heads were drawn under cockpits as if a thickness of linen could fend off the snapping slugs which pursued them. Caring nothing for direction of flight—spreading east and west and north and south—brave men suddenly broken by something they could not understand.

And gray wolves slithered through the heavens, darting down after individual green and white ships—diving after groups of two and three—gray ships marked with the Checkered Flag insignia of the Twenty-sixth. Wild eyes glared from smoke blackened faces. Eyes which saw nothing but a round brass ring—a circle of death for all that seeped into its confines. Hearts which had forgotten to beat, nerves which had forgotten to scream and writhe, lungs which had forgotten to breathe. Death riding the whirlwind.

Crowley, Reese and Burns. Leading the pack to victory.

NINE Spads dropped down upon the tarmac of the Twenty-sixth Squadron. Mechanics hurried out to each ship as it taxied up to the line.

There was no conversation. No congratulations. There were hardly questioning glances at the mask like faces of the pilots who had returned. There were calls for bandages—for antiseptics.

Crowley's ship nosed into the line before One Hangar. He stepped to earth.

He stood for a moment staring at the round black holes which studded the fuselage of his ship, throat working spasmodically, hands were clenched into hard fists. He seemed fighting to stand erect. His eyes passed over the faces of each of the pilots who had returned. He seemed to cringe as they looked at him. There was a smear of blood running down his right cheek. It mixed with the oil and powder fumes and made a nasty mess against his neck.

After a moment he turned abruptly and walked away across the tarmac. He staggered and floundered like a drunken man.

CHAPTER VI

Honors by Proxy

NO one on the field expected that such an honor was to come to Buzz Crowley. It came suddenly, just as everything else in the life of the squadron occurred suddenly.

A dozen motorcycle dispatch riders roared onto the field, engines roaring like miniature airplane motors. They had arrived, special across the road, diverting traffic into the side roads, causing guns and caissons to pull far to the side, waving lumbering lorries out of the path of the big staff car which followed. They were hard-riding devils, and most of them wore varicolored ribbons. They swept onto the field amid a snarling of engines and a flourish of suddenly braked mounts.

They wheeled into a straight line,

bustled the excited mechanics out of the way, dismounted and stood at rigid attention.

One of them—an officer who seemed to be in command of the motorcycle detail, barked an order along the tented street.

"Attention!" he commanded.

A khaki Cadillac turned off the road and onto the field in heavy grace. In the tonneau, four officers were seated. All of them wore stars on their shoulders. In front of the car, fastened to the radiator cap, was a flag bearing the insignia of a general.

The car came to a halt before the orderly room of the Twenty-sixth Squadron. The officers in the tonneau dismounted and returned the salute of the escort. Men were running along the streets of the Twenty-sixth's billet. Men in oil-stained shirts, men without shirts. Pilots who had snatched up helmets and goggles as if to answer a sudden alarm. A mechanic was grinding on the siren mounted on the top of the orderly room.

A fresh-faced, grizzled-headed officer stood beside the car. He was looking about him with a light of interest in his eyes. First at the hangars, then at the quarters and then at the war-worn ships on the line. There was something of intense pride on his face. His close-clipped mustache moved now and then in a silent smile as he caught sight of a man here and there in less than sketchy uniform, scurrying frantically for cover. The junior officers who had accompanied him seemed shocked at the free-and-easy appearance of the field. The General's face twitched more than once as he caught traces of bristling indignation in the eyes of his aides.

Inside the orderly room, Buzz Crowley saw the procession as it turned into the field. His eyes caught the starred flag which heralded the arrival of the Commanding General. His body seemed to lose its strength. His eyes took on a hunted look. He stood staring, unable to move, unable to act.

Doc Wallace had crossed to the window before the staff car had actually gained the field. A whistle of surprise escaped him. He glanced quickly at Crowley.

"Move!" he snapped. "That's the General himself—paying you a visit. Move—get out on the field!"

Crowley was staring at him. His lips were moving.

"I can't," he said after a minute. "I can't. What's he coming here for—why doesn't he let us alone? What's the idea of spying on me?" There was hysteria in his voice.

"You ask the General why he goes places?" laughed Wallace. "How many flying fields do you think he has visited? I'll bet my life this is the first he's ever seen. He's here for a reason. You'll find that out. Come on—out on the field—"

"He has no business coming here," complained Crowley. "He belongs back at Headquarters—he's spying on me—"

WALLACE'S face changed. His eyes were fixed on Buzz. The tenor of his voice changed with the lines of his face. His hands grasped Crowley's shoulders.

"Listen!" he said desperately. "You can't funk this. You can't—you hear? It's an honor and it belongs to the boys as much as to you. You fool, don't you understand that this outfit has been doing things—that it's being talked about? Don't you understand that even the General can condescend to visit three men who were public heroes before they ever heard of the army or airplanes? Don't you see what it means? It's a gesture of thanks—of commendation delivered by the General in person. You have no right to cheat the men of this outfit out of an honor like that."

Crowley's eyes were fixed on Wallace's face in fascination. The emotion of a minute before had died out of his eyes. They were blank now—mirrors reflecting nothing. He nodded dully.

"Can't cheat the boys," he mumbled.

"Big honor—" He was moving about looking for his coat.

"Never mind the dressing," ordered Wallace. "He doesn't expect to find an example of what the young flying man is wearing—he expects to find men doing the best they can to carry out the orders given them. If he wanted you to stage a parade for him he'd have notified you that he was coming. He wants to see the real thing. Leave that shirt the way it is—just tumble out there."

Crowley was moving toward the door. He seemed waiting for Doc Wallace to walk by his side. Suddenly the sunshine was blinding him—he was in the open. Keen eyes were studying his face. A firm hand was pressing his own hand. A voice was speaking to him.

"Captain Crowley!" said the voice. The words were close-clipped, yet there was a kindly quality behind the direct speech. "This is a pleasure I have been promising myself for a long time. However, after yesterday, I could delay this visit no longer."

He paused. "Yesterday," he said meaningly, "I received the report of your last combat—the report of the overwhelming success of the last use of the 'Crowley Crash'—as they are calling it behind the lines.

"I want to offer you my personal congratulations. You and your men have been magnificent. You, Reese and Burns have fulfilled entirely all the hopes we have had for them. You three, especially, have proved to be more than men who have captured the public admiration and applause. You have proven yourselves to be men—and soldiers."

Men were gathering about the group. Reese and Burns had been hurriedly summoned from the hangars. The pilots were bunching about Crowley and Wallace. The mechanics were crowding into the background. There was no thought of military display, formation or ceremony. They were too eager to

hear what the General had to say to Buzz Crowley.

A CURIOUS light had replaced the burning admiration in the General's eyes. He was watching Crowley's face—watching the emotionless expression, the almost disinterested eyes. It seemed difficult for him to say more. He cleared his throat and turned to one of his aides. The aide stepped forward bearing a number of plush boxes.

The General's voice was suddenly husky. "Captain Crowley," he said, "I act for three governments. My own, that of France and that of Belgium.

"I speak to you first in the name of the United States of America, conferring upon you the Distinguished Service Cross."

He opened one of the plush boxes slowly. The sunshine fell upon a bronzed cross. The rays fell upon it greedily, caressing it, causing it to glow with a sparkling brilliancy. His hands moved upward and fixed the cross to Crowley's shirt.

"And likewise, in the name of the French people, I am privileged to confer the *Croix de Guerre*. And in the name of a grateful Belgium, I present the *Croix de Guerre*."

He stood back, looking at the three ribbons and the three crosses hanging from Crowley's shirt. Then his eyes swept over the two behind Crowley. "Gentlemen," he requested courteously, "will you please step forward."

And one by one he pinned the three crosses on each of them.

"Lieutenant Reese, the satisfaction this occasion gives me is increased tenfold by the simple pleasure of shaking your hand and meeting you personally."

Face to face with George Burns he suddenly grinned, and his hand clasp was a trifle more vigorous.

"Lieutenant Burns," he chuckled, "you are exactly as I pictured you. You never will be mistaken for a dove of peace—the mark of Mars is on your face—and on your head."

He paused a long moment before Doc Wallace. A long moment during which he stood in silence.

"Professor Wallace," he said, ignoring Dryer Wallace's military title, "you are the type of man of which America is very proud. You have received other rewards for services which most men cannot understand. Receive these for services which every man can understand and appreciate. For personal bravery has a universal significance."

Then, suddenly he was gone. The last of the decorations had been pinned onto the shirts of rigid young pilots. The motorcycle escort had broken its front of rigid attention. Engines were snarling anew. There was a round of final handclasps.

The starred flag of the Commanding General snapped in the breeze. The escort roared out through the gates. The staff car followed. And the General disappeared as he had appeared.

In the tonneau of that staff car, an aide placed his mouth close to the ear of another aide. "Did you see Crowley?" he asked in a shocked voice.

The second aide nodded. "I did," he snapped. "It was disgraceful, he appeared intoxicated. Almost helpless—"

A crisp voice cut into the conversation. They turned guiltily to find the eyes of the General fixed upon them and a black frown upon his face.

"Men such as we are not fit to comment upon such men as Crowley," he said with a lashing note of sarcasm in his voice. "We talk of war, and know nothing about it. Honors such as Crowley and his squadron have won by right of courage and sacrifice are given to us as matters of international courtesy. Personally I would feel humble before Crowley's record no matter if I knew him to be intoxicated, which he was not."

His finger pointed to a row of ribbons on the tunic of his aide who had criticized Crowley. "You have decorations, have you not, Major?"

The aide nodded.

The Commanding Officer smiled. "Still I notice there are some decorations which even the lowliest private of the line wears proudly—and which you do not have."

The aide's eyes glanced hurriedly at the ribbons on his breast.

"I'm referring to wound stripes, Major," said the General. "You see, they are not matters of international courtesy."

He turned away from them and gave his attention to a map spread out on his knees.

BUZZ CROWLEY sat before his desk in the operations office with lowered head. The three crosses were spread out before him—there was a bitter smile upon his face. His eyes were haggard and his shoulders bowed. His body seemed to sag under the weight of a great burden.

It was pitch black on the field. No sound came from the hangars. The silence seemed thick, depressing. He was picking the crosses up, one by one, looking at them, then placing them back on the top of the desk and picking up the next. Over and over—through long hours—unmoving excepting for this single occupation.

Across the room, Doc Wallace sat in the shadows cast by the shaded oil lamp and watched him. There was an expression of sublime compassion upon Wallace's face. Once or twice he had moved as if to cross the room and to take the decorations away from in front of Crowley, but each time he had settled himself on his cot and went on watching him.

A sudden laugh shattered the silence. Crowley's laugh, thick with contempt, with self-scorn. He whirled in his chair, his eyes blazing, a cruel smile about his mouth. He held up the three crosses.

"Look at 'em, Doc," he demanded. "Aren't they pretty—won't they make a big show when I can get somebody to look at 'em? Captain Crowley, A.E.F.

—hero, pursuit pilot and Commanding Officer of the famous Twenty-sixth Pursuit Squadron. Personally decorated by the General—"

He stared at the crosses held in front of his face. A loathing seeped into his eyes. His hand moved. He tossed the decorations across the room, onto Wallace's cot.

"There you are, Doc," he said thickly. "They belong to you. I don't own any part of them. I just got them for you—by proxy."

A sob rose into his throat. He turned back to the desk and buried his face in his arms.

"I stood out there, listening to him speak," he sobbed. "I heard the words, but I knew he wasn't talking to me. I was expecting him to say, 'Step out of the way, you dirty four-flusher.' I was watching his face to catch his contempt. Every word he uttered was like a hot knife rammed into my heart. How I wanted to earn those words! How I wanted to know that he was saying them to me—but he wasn't, Doc. He was saying them to you. He didn't know it, but I knew it and you knew it.

"So they belong to you, Doc—you've got six now—and you deserve 'em. You're the funny man who stands in back of the Punch and Judy show and pulls the little strings that make the dolls walk and talk and act. I'm your Punch and Judy show. You've been taking a nerveless hulk of flesh and putting your soul into him, and making him act like a man. Some day I'm going to get out in the middle of the field and tell them that—that I'm just a dummy that speaks and acts and flies because you won't let Buzz Crowley be known for the yellow louse he is."

Wallace walked slowly across the room. He seated himself by Crowley's side.

"You're wrong, Buzz," he said seriously. "There was a time when I did have to give you that power—when I had to take your personality away from you—for your own good. Listen, son.

When a surgeon finds a diseased something in a man—he cuts it out. He can't put it back. But with our kind of doctor it's a little different. We can cut out—and we can put back—new clean thoughts—which are the tissues of life.

"The cutting-out process is about finished, Buzz. We've scraped your soul to the bone—we've looked down inside and found what was good and what was bad—and we've been amputating the bad. No man can control his brain—without help. I've been helping you—believe me, in a little while you won't need help."

Wallace's brilliant eyes were fixed on Crowley's lowered head. After a moment Crowley lifted his head and met those eyes. His cheeks were tear-stained, but there was a wild hope in his eyes.

"You mean that, Doc?" he asked. His hands grasped Wallace's wrists. "You mean it?" he repeated with terrible emphasis.

"I mean it—on my honor," promised Wallace. "You'll know it—I'll know it. The day will suddenly arrive when you'll discover that you are not afraid. Perhaps some other emotion will blot out the fear—a light will flash in your soul and you'll know that you are your own man again—the Buzz Crowley of Nineteen-Sixteen."

"If I could believe it, Doc!" groaned Crowley.

"Have I ever been wrong?" questioned Wallace gently.

Crowley shook his head.

"Then you can trust me in this—as you trust me in everything else," assured Wallace. "I'm willing to wager my life that you'll come through."

Crowley's face was ghastly with fatigue and battle which raged within his soul.

"I'm tired, Doc," he whispered. "So tired that it's boring at the back of my head—and I feel the horrors churning around."

Wallace smiled. "Come on, Old Timer," he said soothingly. "I'll put

you to sleep. You'll get a good rest. You'll feel all the tiredness going away from you—slowly at first—and then with a rush. And in the morning you'll be fit again."

His finger tips were touching Buzz Crowley's head. "You understand?" he asked in the same soothing voice. "No dreams, no memories—only rest—like cool water when you're thirsty."

Crowley's head nodded slowly. "I—understand," he said sleepily after a long moment. "Like cool water—when you're thirsty—" And then he was asleep.

Wallace smiled. He lifted Crowley out of the chair and onto his cot. He stood looking down at him for a moment, the compassion glowing in his eyes again. Then he removed Crowley's boots, and covered him with a blanket.

He disappeared into the darkness which masked his own cot.

CHAPTER VII

Escort

THE big ships had been coming in for half an hour. Dropping down out of the heavens onto the field west of Senlis.

Great, bulking things compared to the tiny grace of the Spads. Ships which carried four men and as many machine guns. Ships with sinister bomb racks built into under-fuselages. Daredevil gunners, bombers and pilots swaggering out of cockpits and dropping to the ground to wave airy greetings to the pilots of the Twenty-sixth.

They arrived singly and in groups of two. They seemed to be slipping secretly onto the field as if to divert enemy eyes from the sight of a concentration of bombers flying at the same time.

Gathering for the raid.

As they landed they taxied up to the line and were rushed into tent hangars. The canvas coverings were bulging with them. They were packed in, tail to wing, with scarcely enough space be-

tween to permit the passage of the mechanics who were servicing them.

Mess hall crowded with pilots and half-wings. Operations office housing a grim group of men who pored over maps and made calculations as to time and distance. Laughter and singing, earnest conversation. Bombing pilots meeting the famous Twenty-sixth for the first time. Scanning the faces of these men who followed after Crowley, Reese and Burns. Looking with more than casual interest at the trophies the outfit had won.

Crowley's voice, flat and emotionless, speaking in the operation's office.

"All of you have copies of the rendezvous order?" he asked. There was a chorus of nods.

"I'll read mine," he told them. He cleared his throat.

The Seventy-Seventh and the Seventy-Ninth Day Bombing Squadrons will rendezvous on the ground at the station of the 26th Pursuit Squadron. This concentration will be carried out in such a manner as to keep the operation concealed from the enemy.

Command of this concentration is invested in the Commanding Officer of the 26th Pursuit Squadron. He will take such steps and give such orders as he may consider fitting to insure the success of the mission, and will provide the escort for the attack. Following the performance of the mission the bombing squadrons will disperse and return to their own fields.

They were looking at him with an eager interest. Crowley took up a sealed envelope from his desk.

"The orders are here," he told them as his finger forced a jagged tear in the flap of the envelope. He withdrew a single sheet of paper and read it in silence. After a moment he glanced at the faces around him.

"Well," he said slowly. "It's not so nice." The paper was shaking between his fingers.

The Seventy-Seventh and Seventy-Ninth Day Bombing Squadrons, in conjunction with the 26th Pursuit Squadron, will destroy the bridge head, railroad yards and enemy concentration points at Strelitz.

He paused abruptly. "That's all," he said in a strange voice. He was staring

at the typed words of the order. He placed the paper flat on the top of his desk.

There was an almost soundless whistle from the C.O. of the Seventy-seventh.

"That's all!" he said. "That's all I expected. Strelitz has been a pretty tough nut for us to crack. It's the nerve center for this entire front. I'd like to drop a few eggs there—just to watch the fireworks on the ground. It's the kind of target every bomber likes to shoot at."

"It'll be a night job," said Crowley as if he had not heard. "We wouldn't have a snowball's chance in hell of getting through in the daylight. It'll take every ship we can get into the air to carry enough stuff to make a dent in the place. It'll mean slow speed—the pursuit ships throttled down to stay with the bombers—and it'll probably mean fighting a way back. It's a long way to Strelitz."

There was a sudden silence in the room. They were staring at Crowley's face.

"Hell, we'll make it easily," snorted a bomber.

"We'll make it," agreed Crowley, "but not easy. And we're going tonight," he said as an afterthought.

Two or three voices echoed the word of surprise. "Tonight?" they demanded. "Why, it'll take two days to get ready—"

"Not on this field," promised Crowley. "We do our flying suddenly around here. We're going tonight, because if we don't go tonight we'll never go. We might start, but we'd never get to Strelitz—and we'd certainly never get back."

Half a dozen voices were hurling questions at him.

"You don't understand," he said doggedly. "You can't keep a thing like this quiet. By tomorrow morning they'll be phoning Potsdam and telling the Kaiser that we're going to make an attempt to get Strelitz. We'll have every pursuit outfit on their side of the lines gunning for us. Don't kid yourselves. We get

plenty of information on what they're doing, and they get plenty on us. I'll bet that right now some squarehead is trying to get in touch with the Wilhelmstrasse."

There were white faces and staring eyes.

"That's why we're going tonight," repeated Crowley. "I'll ask you gentlemen to see that your ships are ready to fly on the minute of midnight—mine will be."

They filed from the room in silence.

THERE was feverish activity during the remaining daylight. The big pear-shaped bombs were fixed in the racks beneath the bombing crates. There were mechanics swarming over a multitude of motors. There were machine-gunners examining the breeches of guns, repacking ammunition chests, testing gun racks.

In one corner of One Hangar a bomber was ramming things into a square-faced gin bottle. A grinning mechanic of the Twenty-sixth passed him and stopped for an instant to watch the proceeding. The bomber was filling the bottle with scraps of metal, nails, small nuts—anything that would pass through the throat. He looked up.

"Lo, Greaseball," he saluted. "What's up?"

The mechanic was staring in fascination. "The bottle," he asked. "What's the idea?—there ain't no T.N.T. in that thing?"

"Ever see what happens to a bottle—'specially a gin bottle—when it's dropped from about five thousand feet and smacks something solid?"

The mechanic shook his head.

"Well, it splatters," continued the lecturer, taking up another square bottle and going on with the loading process. "It splatters into tiny little fragments—like eyelashes, and it flies like water—and it cuts through anything it hits—just cuts it to a pulp. The slugs and nuts and bolts and things are a lot worse to take than shrapnel."

"That's an awful thing to toss down on some guy's dome," suggested the mechanic.

"Sure," admitted the manufacturer of glass bombs. "I'm fixing these up special for Strelitz. You see, this is my first time out as a bomber. I've been on the ground up till now. I've got a special reason for going. I never had a crack at a Boche before—and I've been waiting two years."

The mechanic's eyes were glued to the bottle.

"I had a brother—a kid—too young to get in this fuss. Well, he went to work on a pier in Jersey—just a way of doing his bit. And the squareheads blew the pier up. It was loaded with munitions for over here. Lot of guys were killed—blasted to hell. My kid brother was one of them. He never had a chance—just—*bang*—and he was gone. Got a letter after I got over here—telling me about it. So I've just been aching to drop a couple of these gin bottles on their side of the lines. Fact is I've been saving 'em—got the best collection of gin bottles in France. I brought these three along—they're the prize numbers in the collection. They'll get action tonight."

He lowered his head and went on stuffing fragments into a third bottle. The mechanic's face was pale under the grime which covered it. He walked away, glancing over his shoulder now and then as he walked.

THE Spads were on the line. When darkness settled over the field a laboring ground crew rolled the bombers out of the hangars. Then for three hours there was a pregnant hush over the field. Men were seated about the field in the darkness. There were voices in low conversation. There were glowing tips of burning cigarettes materializing out of the darkness here and there.

It was eleven-forty-five when the first motor turned over. A motor of one of the big bombers. It seemed to be a signal. Grunting mechanics, up and down

the line, were straining at props. Motor after motor coughed and wheezed, sucked its cylinders full of raw gas—and then was in motion. Deadly propellers hidden by the darkness.

Shorter and grimmer note of motors in Spads. Whistle and crackle and blast of slipstreams as other mechanics warmed other motors. Life—sudden, compelling, gripping—leaped up out of the blackness on the field.

A group of leather-covered pilots stood about Buzz Crowley. "O.K.," Crowley was saying. "You know your stuff—let's do it." He folded a map and crammed it into the pocket of his flying coat. He glanced at his wrist watch.

"Three minutes," he said tersely. "Get going."

The group melted into the shadows surrounding the ships. It was exactly midnight when Crowley's ship wheeled out of the line and went roaring down the field. After him followed all the ships of the Twenty-sixth and all the ships of the two bombing squadrons.

They mounted into the darkness. They circled interminably, gaining altitude, climbing higher and higher, until minute by minute the combined drone of many motors faded to a whisper to men who still remained upon earth.

Uncanny, unreal flight, this prowling through ink-black heavens. Like riding the blind baggage of a passenger train which has suddenly plunged into the depths of a tunnel, with no ray of light to define the limits of the darkness. Flying with hushed breaths, flying in silence, in secrecy. Forgetting the blaring of the motors in the attempt to sit without movement or to exist without breathing. Shadow shapes lurching through the heights at double express train speed. Flying surrounded by shuddering danger. A lurching sideslip—grinding of wings and fuselage—two shapes falling out of the blackness in horrible embrace. It might happen without warning.

Brains alive with a curious second sense which enabled them to fly, to keep

formation and to follow a course without meeting with disaster. The entire world constricted to a matter of little goutts of flame which punctured the darkness—little stabbing flames of crimson and green which spat from exhaust stacks. Now and then a pale, phosphorescent-like glow of light, seeping from behind a heavy curtain of cloud, touched upon the great wings and immense bulk of one of the bombers and caused a chill of sinister apprehension to crawl along the spines of the pursuit pilots. Great bulks like prehistoric monsters, making absurd attempts to keep pace with the vibrant Spads.

Feeling of tension. Feeling of expectancy. Remembrance of Crowley's warning: "I'll bet right now some squarehead is trying to get in touch with the Wilhelmstrasse." Suppose some squarehead spy *had* given warning of this night attack? Suppose half a dozen Fokker groups were hanging overhead in that thick blackness—hanging there—keen eyes of pilots searching for the bombers—keen noses of killers pointing downward—diving—out of nothingness—to swoop upon those lumbering crates with their heavy bombs?

Hands gripped sticks more tightly. Lungs were starved for air. Eyes searched the void which surrounded ships until they were itching and aching, and seeing nothing. Bodies waited for the shock of that blow, feeling lead slugs ripping through flesh.

On and on, climbing and climbing. Ghastly cold which ate at the marrow of the bones and caused fingers to feel amputated and feet to become nothing more than lumps of ice. Cold which caused teeth to chatter until the chattering was like a rivet gun bearing on the base of the brain.

A HEAD, somehow reminding one of the pictures of Napoleon, mounted upon his white horse, leading the remnant of the Grand Army back from Moscow, flew Buzz Crowley.

For all the attention he gave to his

command he might have been flying alone. He sat unmoving in his cockpit, his right arm resting upon the crash pad, his eyes straight ahead. His face was set into a series of hard lines. The glare from his exhaust played fitfully about his head, giving his eyes queer, glinting lights, turning his lips a curious green—the green of flesh which had been in the water for days. Face like a gargoyle illuminated by ever-changing lighting effects.

There was a map spread on the narrow shelf of his map board. His only movement was to glance at the map from time to time and consult the instruments before him. He flew at the wall of blackness which rose up ahead of his propeller like a man throwing his body against a heavy barrier.

He was thinking. Words which Doc Wallace had spoken: "The day will arrive when you'll discover that you're not afraid—some other emotion will blot out the fear—light up your soul—you'll know you are your own man—"

A voice was mocking him from far back in his brain. "Liar!" it was chattering. "He only said that to make you feel good. You know the truth. You know you'll never be any better than you are now. Think of this—suppose Doc is killed tonight. Suppose something comes crashing down out of this darkness and takes him. Suppose you had to go on flying, alone—up here—at night—knowing that any minute a slug might smack your tanks and set you burning—how about it?"

He shuddered and fought to keep that madly chattering voice out of his brain. There was a terrible thought still further back—just a whisper—just a suggestion of a thought. "Go on, Buzz," it advised—the voice of a ghost speaking out of another world. "Go on, just climb up on the seat—turn loose—and drop. It's not bad—just a rush down through the dark. A last ride—and you'll never feel anything—and it'll be all over. You'll never have to get up in the morning again—you'll never have to fly again.

It'll be all over—and nobody will know what happened."

Buzz Crowley flew through the night—into the darkness—his soul lashed by the horrors stalking through his brain.

But, above all, the one horror persisted—the chattering, monkey voice which mocked him. "What would you do if Doc got bumped—what would you do?"

He groaned, and for an instant his head dropped forward until his chin was resting on his chest. How could he picture a world without Doc Wallace? How could he picture life without Doc Wallace? Wallace *was* life to Buzz Crowley.

He drew a deep breath. It seemed that there were two glowing points of light above the banks of his motor—two glowing points of light which were fastened upon his face. After a moment he understood that he was thinking of Doc's eyes as he had last seen them—and somehow the chattering monkey voice was lulled to rest in his brain. The horrors crept into the distance—there was only the night, the drone of the motors—and the strange memory of Doc Wallace's eyes—his voice speaking from somewhere ahead of the propeller. "It's all right, Old Timer—trust me."

On and on through the silence. On and on the drone of many motors. On and on with the cold gnawing at the soul. Blue-mouthed men with trembling chins clinging desperately to controls. Every remaining sense concentrated on a task which had suddenly grown to gigantic proportions—that of keeping the formation.

PURSUIT ships flying below and above the bombers. Pursuit ships which seemed restive, high-spirited horses forced to adopt the ponderous pace of Percheron draft steeds. Pursuit pilots cursing the slowness of the progress through clicking teeth. Remembering the smell of hot coffee and the blessed restfulness and relaxation of a cigarette. Remembering the bliss

of curling up under woolen blankets, or stretching cramped arms and legs.

Strelitz! Where was Strelitz? They'd flown far enough to have circled the world—they were on a treadmill which revolved under them, and only made it seem that they were going places.

The front cockpit of a bomber. A shape huddled under the windscreen, crouched behind the dim outline of a machine gun. A shape which grasped the neck of a square-faced gin bottle with each hand and peered grimly ahead into the sea of blackness. Unmoving, unfeeling. The new bomber who had been filling bottles with slugs. He was looking for Strelitz.

Reese and Burns, flying side by side behind Crowley.

Doc Wallace cruising at Number Four, his eyes seeming laden with sleep—his face gray with strain and effort—concentrating upon a picture of Buzz Crowley which glowed in his mind—forgetting his own existence.

The other gray Spads like sharks rising from the depths of the sea—visible only during the fleeting moments when that phosphorescent light escaped the pall of clouds above him. Darting in and out amid the unseen mists of those same clouds—moisture running from helmets, from hands, trickling down cheeks, forming trembling bead work upon instrument boards.

On to Strelitz!

Then suddenly there was a new sensation gripping that armada of destruction. It caused them to huddle still more closely together.

It was the knowledge that they had long since passed over enemy territory. It was the certain knowledge that there was no longer anything to be gained by secrecy.

It was evidenced in an increased roar of motors—motors straining, throttles pushed against the forward post. A sensation of the hunted—of the pack which senses the presence of the hunters who kill with flashes of lightning.

The agony of moving toward that still distant goal. An agony which was felt keenly by the pursuit pilots who were forced to curb eager ships. An agony which gnawed at the vitals of the bombing pilots—made them curse dully the futile speeds of the big ships, made them hunch forward in seats as if to urge greater speed by the force of will.

Speed!

They knew that on the ground listening posts had already picked up the sound of their motors. Messages were flashing back and forth across the Front—hurried, frantic messages which became snapping orders in the ears of Fokker units on half a dozen fields. They sent drowsy, sleep-drenched enemy pilots fumbling about ships, which sent them zooming madly up into the darkness, to begin the game of blind man's bluff.

Listeners, seated before batteries of electrical ears, heard the armada passing over head, endeavoring to guess its course and destination.

No secrecy now—nothing but a race—a mad race. The race of the elephant against the tiger—the bombers were the elephants, the Fokkers were the tigers. Tigers with Spandaus for claws and teeth. And the tigers were following the spoor.

Memory of Buzz Crowley's last order. "Remember—if it comes to a fight, the bombers are to go through. If only one bomber is left—it must go through—it must drop its eggs on Strelitz. No turning back before the objective is reached. After that—go as you please."

Nosing down slightly to increase speed. Losing precious altitude to reach the goal sooner. Machine gunners in the bombers huddled within the embrace of gun racks, peering this way and that—nerves leaping at shadows in the darkness—gun muzzles swinging from side to side.

And the gray Spads nosing about the formation, prowling for a scent of the tigers.

CHAPTER VIII

Strelitz

BUZZ CROWLEY lifted his head from his map board to peer over the side of his cockpit. He was searching for a landmark on the far distant earth. The boiling, glowing point of light from the fire box of a locomotive on the tracks leading into Strelitz. The tell-tale glare from a factory stack. Anything which would prove that his navigation was correct. His forefinger rested upon a blue circle on the map. His hand was numb with gripping the stick. He knew that Strelitz was less than twenty miles distant. Speed, plus time, plus direction admitted of no error. His head was thrust far over the right side of the cockpit. It seemed that the darkness danced before his eyes. *Strelitz!* The word thrummed in cadence with the whirring of the propeller. *Strelitz.* It was like a crazy song.

A distant red something penetrated the darkness. The red of a switch light seen from far off. A knife stabbed at his heart. A light—from the ground—a firebox—opened for a single instant while a fireman threw coal.

Crowley nosed the Spad downward at a sharper angle. Behind him the armada followed in dumb obedience.

Sinister shapes slid through the darkness, falling upon an enemy nerve center, bombers grasping releases, gunners gripping gun butts, fingers curved about triggers. Pilots weird goblins fighting to keep ships in line.

No one in that armada knew the exact instant when the hurricane struck from the heavens. They merely felt the force of its passing, saw the streaking flashes of lightning as it passed, heard the scream of its fury.

Out of the blackness above, a sudden roaring, whining, chattering moaning sound. A black plummet flashed over a bomber, passed like a mad wraith before the nose of a Spad, plunged

down into the darkness existing below the armada.

And after it—hurricane after hurricane. Sudden staccato beat of Vickers. Sudden fitful glare of gunfire, illuminating the frenzies leaping out of space. Illuminating great white crosses, illuminating wings and wheels and rudders—illuminating the death which drilled space about the bombers.

Gray Spads whirling this way and that, their ghost wings tinged red by the gun fire. Gray Spads hurling themselves upon the diving Fokkers. Fighters blindfolded, smashing at each other in gurgling rage. Staccato of Span-daus mixed with the staccato of Vickers—all mixed with the bedlam of two-score motors. Death crackling out of nowhere—death which drilled round black holes through taut linen and sent white flurries of splinters flying like miniature fountains.

Gunners, faces contorted, cheeks close to heated guns, following the descent of the black shadows—following them with streaks of vivid flame which stabbed out of the darkness. Lifting gun muzzles to pick a new target and to follow it with the same deadly concentration. Thinking—"Get through. If only one ship is left—get through."

Through—to Strelitz!

Black shapes diving down from overhead, leveling above the bombers, crackle and snap and whine of slugs tearing gaps through bomber wings and fuselage. Men crumpling, held in seats by straps, swaying back and forth like crazy pendulums with each motion of the tortured ships.

From somewhere near the head of the line of bombers an angry spurt of flame. A blast like the explosion of flashlight powder in a darkened room.

For one pulsating, horrible instant the whole heavens was lit by that explosion. An instant picture of wildly mingling ships, of faces twisted in lust to kill, of a melee of red, white and blue circles; of white Maltese crosses; of blood-red Fokker wings, and the

gray bodies of slashing Spads; of the overshadowing bulk of the larger ships, of machine guns spewing and stabbing; ships upside down; ships in vertical banks; ships diving with wings bowed under the strain.

Then the whole sky was painted with that bloody froth. Whirling, spinning, blazing bits of debris, sullen flame from a shapeless fuselage which hung for a moment before beginning a mad plunge through space—long enough to exhibit senseless human shapes sprawled in cockpits—then down, gyrating like a crazy top.

The illumination grew less and less, and the heavens again surrendered to the Stygian blackness.

On—on. Eyes stared in horror, nostrils tingling with the reek of fire, hot oil and powder smoke. Hands shook, souls submerged in horror, hearts fluttering—if only one ship survives, it must get through.

Strelitz below.

BUT it seemed far away. A tiny point of glittering light from the ground—the bursting of the first bomb from the armada. Then a dozen tiny firefly-like lights appearing in clusters—other bombs. Strange fitful red lights from the ground—flames consuming factory buildings. Death and destruction falling in the railroad yards.

A roundhouse, crammed with locomotives in for repairs, dissolved into thin air. Bricks and bits of jagged metal hissed and whined, boilers filled with live steam exploding to add to the horror. Walls of flame leaping up, swallowing stunned working crews.

Munition storage buildings exploding. Shells bursting in the fierce heat, rifle ammunition going up like packs of Fourth of July fireworks. Death and destruction, pouring from the sky.

In the front cockpit of a bomber a black-faced figure in khaki leaned far over the side and lifted his arms. He was screaming jumbled, crazy words in the midst of universal bedlam. "Here,

you scum—take this—and this—and this!"

Objects shiny and glassy fell out of his hands toward the flaming concentration point. He hurled the third far away from him, and sank back in the cockpit, laughing and crying hysterically. An instant later he picked up the butt of his machine gun and lifted the muzzle to follow a diving Fokker. A ripping burst belched from the gun—the Fokker went screaming down.

A huddle of uniformed figures raced to take cover. Raced through streets strewn with wreckage; streets melting with the heat of flames from factory walls on either side. Something fell among them—something that burst with a peculiar sound. There was no explosion—but figures in the group were felled by an unseen and unheard force. Felled—and rolled on the hot cobbles—bloody bubbles leaping from bodies from which the uniforms had been cut as if by so many razors.

Further up the street another of the strange missiles fell. Twenty yards away a stunned sentry threw up his arms and fell face forward to the ground, the same queer bubbles of blood breaking out.

Above, the stricken bomber fell in flames—with the gin-bottle bomb manufacturer in the front cockpit—fell and came spinning toward the center of the flame rising from the town.

Buzz Crowley flew through the inferno like a demon. The glare from the flame below rose higher and higher. He led his command to lower levels to give the bombers positive targets.

Enemy ships streamed about him, guns chattered in his face, splinters flew from the wings of his ship and whirred dangerously close to his head. His hands were gripping stick and throttle. The thumb of the hand holding the controls was clamped down on the stick trigger. Now and then he fed new belts to his gun or worked on a stoppage. Now and then he pulled the trips.

His brain was reeling with the speed of the action and the maneuverings of the Spad. Except for the mounting flame from the earth below he could not tell in what position his ship flew. Life had become a matter of watching for dark shapes which thundered down from the blackness—dark shapes which spat streaks of red—and of riding those shapes until he had a chance to throw a burst into them.

Twice he had hurled his ship forward and downward into the path of destruction—until his guns were so close to enemy fuselages that it seemed the Spad would crush them to bits. So close that the reflection of his Vickers was mirrored in the glossy dope on enemy surfacings. His nostrils seemed to smell scorching linen as he riddled the targets before him. And as he flew his nerves were twitching and jolting.

He glanced at the earth with fascinated eyes.

THE bombers had made a good job of it. Strelitz was a tracery of flame against the void of blackness. Great factories, some of them five stories in height, streamed flame from windows and doors. There were burning trains on the siding, great masses of flame curling upward from dumps and storage buildings. On the tracks, deserted locomotives stood outlined in the glare—the tracks were nothing more than twisted and ruined spider webs.

A rending sound filled his cockpit. A spasm of agony leaped along his nerves. A hot iron seared his finger tips and wrist. His arm felt heated to the point of boiling for an instant—and then went numb. Blood was splattered against his instrument board—it was running over the top of the stick, running down on his knees. His hand seemed to disappear—it was nothing but a liquid mass of red—he could feel a sticky ooze forming under the pit of his right arm.

He twisted in his seat. There was an indistinct blur close to his tail. A blur which had red eyes of fire and breathed

the stench of gelignite. It was descending upon him to devour him—wreckage was piling up behind his head. Thin strips of wood were buckling and splintering—little geysers of white sprayed from his wings. The rudder controls were logy—because the rudder was half-crumpled.

He pulled the nose of the Spad upward in a dizzy zoom—went rocketing into the red-tinged blackness. But the shadow behind him zoomed with him and Spandau slugs were thudding into the Spad. He reversed at the top of the loop, and dived nose first toward the earth. And the shadow still clung to him.

A voice was chattering in his brain. "You're hit—you've got it—you're going to die." A voice which mocked and taunted and screamed. He turned his head for another glance at the attacking shadow.

There was another blur behind him now—a grayish blur which had cut between his tail and the wings of the enemy. A blur which was climbing dizzily, but losing speed with every foot of the lunge upward. A blur which was spouting flame into the face of the Fokker—halting it.

Then the gray blur stalled and the enraged Fokker, cheated of its first prey, fell upon the almost motionless and helpless Spad—hovered over it, smashed at it. Shuddered suddenly, staggered—crashed headlong into the wings of the gray shadow. And both ships fell, a tangle of wires and struts.

The glare from the earth touched upon the cockpit of that gray shadow for a single instant. It etched a face onto Buzz Crowley's brain—the face of Doc Wallace, trapped in a hideous mass of wreckage. A face which seemed all eyes. A face which smiled. And then an arm waving—a leather-clad arm—Doc Wallace's arm. It seemed to say: "S'long Buzz—happy landings." And the welter of wreckage dropped into the blackness below.

After that Buzz Crowley lost actual

consciousness. He was aware, dimly, that flame whirled about his head, and that the slipstream crushed against his face, and that blood dripped down in his lap, and that his right arm was dead from the shoulder to the wrist. It seemed that he could smell the fumes of his own guns, and that he passed an eternity during which he did nothing but feed copper-tipped belt ends into sizzling hot Vickers' breeches.

Into the semi-consciousness a face kept intruding. The face of Doc Wallace. He was remembering things, even as he jammed against the trigger and cursed the loginess of the half-wrecked Spad. Doc Wallace saying that for once he was going to be his own man—was going to live as he wanted to live. Doc Wallace—Professor Dryer Wallace to the world—giving his life to save a patient—giving up the applause of the world to understand the motives which caused men to throw life away with a reckless, grinning gesture—throwing his own life away.

The first actual consciousness he experienced after Doc Wallace's death plunge was a voice speaking over his head. A voice which floated to him. After a moment he knew that it was Burns' voice. He opened his eyes—Burns' face was above him. Burns' face, smeared with oil and blood—tears trickling out of the corners of Burns' eyes. Another face—Dixie Reese—his blonde hair matted and singed, his eyes glittering like the eyes of a puma who had made a kill.

"Handle him easy, Dixie," Burns was saying. "He got it bad through the arm and shoulder. He's bleeding like a damn pig. Say—nobody'll ever know how he got that crate back here."

Then they were carrying him away. Later there were terrible pains in his arm and shoulder—and gleaming instruments and a funny-looking guy hanging over him in a blood-stained apron. A funny-looking guy whom he cursed monotonously and croakingly—cursed because he was biting pieces from the

bottom of his heart. Then he was fighting against going into an ambulance—fighting—tearing the bandages off his arm—throwing himself on the ground. Darkness again.

When next he awoke he was in his own cot on the field. It was daylight—dawn. It was quiet—like the inside of a tomb. Not a sound. He heard a queer noise. He turned his head. The noise came from Dixie Reese. He was looking down at him—tears running in the corners of his mouth.

Burns was across the room, his head on his arms, his arms on the desk—sleeping. He hadn't so much as washed his face. The blood was crusted in the back of his hair and behind his ears.

CHAPTER IX

Crowley Flies Alone

THERE was another long period of semi-consciousness. A period in which he re-lived minutes out of his life. A period filled with a wild kaleidoscope of whirling faces and swiftly changing scenes. But no matter how many faces or how many incidents passed in review before his subconscious mind, the kaleidoscope seemed always to return to one scene and one face.

The scene was the instant when he had crashed through the retaining wall on the south turn at Indianapolis and had hung above eternity for that terrible fraction of a second before his white Trojan had gone plunging to destruction.

The face was the face of Doc Wallace. It came surging up out of the murk masking the stewing pit of horror in the depths of his brain. It always appeared in the same manner—first two brilliant rays of light—like the headlamps of an automobile approaching along a dark road. Coming nearer, the rays of light were more powerful—more brilliant—until they were framed by a shadow outline which grew into a

likeness of Doc's face—and the two brilliant lights were Doc's eyes—holding him—compelling him—commanding him. And when Doc's face receded, the eyes were the last to go.

Stench of raw gas and hot oil and stale blood sickened him. Dizzy motion of a staggering ship, and the shuddering impact of slugs, caused his body to twitch. The sensation as wheels left earth and a swift ship mounted into space was exaggerated a thousandfold by his struggling senses. And through it all the dull, gnawing pain within his right arm and shoulder. A pain which seemed to be eating nearer his heart like a malignant cancer feeding on unspoiled flesh.

Once voices came to him. He fought to open his eyes, to cry out, to tell the voices that he was living, that he could listen, that he understood what was being said, but some strange helplessness gripped him—a helplessness that forced his eyes to remain closed and his hands to be divorced of all motion.

One of the voices was Burns'. The other was Dixie's.

"Well, it would be a good thing if he went out," Burns was saying, in a dull, strangely thick tone. "It would save him the hell of living. Right now he could die—and know nothing about it. He doesn't realize yet that Doc is gone."

Doc—gone?

Dixie's voice taking up the conversation. "Nobody knows what Buzz has been through. We two, maybe—but we don't understand everything. You have to be a guy like Doc Wallace before you get a picture of what takes place in another fellow's heart. Just as sure as hell, Doc Wallace committed suicide to save Buzz. He must have jumped in at the minute when Buzz was taking it on the chin and going down. We've seen Buzz's crate—nobody will ever tell how he managed to fly it back to the field—how it managed to stay in the air. Somehow it gives a guy the shudders—looking at that wreck with the rudder shot to pieces and one aileron hanging by

one fitting. It isn't natural—that crate should have spun in."

"Nothing about Buzz has been natural since that day when he went through the wall," said Burns' voice. "Look at him lying there—his face—his lips curled up—blue—just breathing. I'm wondering if I'm going crazy. I'm wondering why I don't do something foolish—like banging my head against the tent post—but I can't do anything. I can't seem to feel anything—I'm just numb—cold inside—I don't have any feeling."

"That's shock," assured Reese. "A man loses his best friend—he doesn't understand what has happened until later. Your brain can't understand such sudden changes. A man living—talking to you—and then suddenly dead."

"It'd be better if he did die," repeated Burns in the same strange voice. "If he comes back—he'll never fly again."

"I wonder where Doc dropped?" said Reese.

"He took the guy who dropped him along with him," said Burns harshly.

"Somewhere near Strelitz—"

"The dead are lucky—"

"Tough to die on enemy soil—away from your friends—all alone—"

"What's the difference?—the dead don't wear any uniform—"

Then darkness again.

THERE were motors roaring across the field. They seemed to be calling to Buzz Crowley. He sensed returning consciousness—like floating up through opaque waters to the sunshine and fresh air of the surface. He was breathing—great gusts of clean air. The staccato of the motors grew louder and louder. He lifted his head. The effort left him dizzy and weak. His eyes searched the room—it was empty.

Pictures were forming within his brain. Pictures called up by familiar sounds. A ship taxiing to the head of the runway, poising an instant and then rushing downfield to rise with a graceful sweep of wings, another ship and

another—following like geese suspended in the October heavens.

Motors!—they meant something to him—they were like bugle notes summoning the Old Guard into line. His place was with the motors.

He groaned and struggled to rise on one elbow. An exquisite wave of pain stabbed at his heart. He found that his left arm was useless. A confusion of voices thronging his brain. A voice saying: "Better if he dies. If he comes back, he'll never fly again." Voices which were a part of that pit of blackness which had held him. Never fly again? The words grew louder within his head until they were screaming.

Motors—rising off the field—growing faint. Ships boring into the heavens—gray ships with the checkered flag painted on their sides. Ships which were a part of the Twenty-sixth—part of Buzz Crowley.

He fell off the cot with a thud. For an instant he remained still until the fierce throbbing quieted within his body, then he dragged himself across the floor, his breathing sounding hoarse and gasping, one arm dragging after him, until he came to the wall below the window in the operations office which overlooked the field. He dragged himself up by clawing at the sill.

His eyes stared back at him, mirrored by the window pane. He laughed cacklingly. He was a ghost. Bloody-eyed, hollow-cheeked, leaden-hued ghost. He was going to scare the outfit into convulsions.

Things took shape across the field. The hangars. Two ships on the line. Two figures in leather coats ready to climb into the ships.

He tottered toward the door. Something was telling him that he must speak to Dixie and George. It was the most important thing in life. It was a desperate necessity. One word—just enough to tell them that he was all right—that his head was clear—that he could fly. He had to reach them—hold them back until he could speak.

His fingers grasped the door—he hurled it open and went staggering out on the field.

But the two Spads had wheeled and were racing down field. The engine beat rose louder and louder—faster and faster. They were lifting—flying—gone. He screamed at them—words he could not understand—merely meaningless sounds wrenched from his throat. He was weaving a way across the field, pursuing the two ships, his head reeling, his body eaten by flame, his good hand clutching at the air.

He heard another sound. He stopped—came to a dead halt, swaying precariously upon his feet. Shapes were flying overhead, leaping down out of the blank heavens over the field. Shapes painted green and red and black. Shapes with strange designs painted upon fuselage and wings. Shapes which whined in ominous fury and lashed through the air a hundred feet over the hangars. Shapes with staring, livid Maltese Crosses painted upon them—half a dozen or more. Nosing down hungrily, in pursuit of the two gray Spads that Reese and Burns had taken off the field.

Somehow Buzz Crowley was running. Running drunkenly, lurching with every step, his right arm dangling helplessly at his side, but running toward the hangars. He felt arms trying to support him, voices pleading with him, but they seemed to ~~he~~ far distant, unimportant.

"Get me a bus!" he was shrieking. "Get me a bus, you fools! Don't you understand? Dixie and George Burns—that gang is jumping them—"

The master mechanic's voice. "We've been having hell, sir," he was saying, staring at Crowley's face. "They've been paying us back for that Strelitz bombing. We've been mobbed twice—the whole outfit—they've got it in for us."

"Get me a ship," Buzz was moaning. "But you don't understand, sir," the master mechanic was pleading. "Reese and Burns planned this, sir. They sent

the squadron out in advance—they were to follow after—to get high and wait for the Jerries to jump—they had an idea they could break up the little game by taking them by surprise—”

“And they’ve been trapped themselves,” said another voice.

Crowley’s voice was terrible in its intensity. “Get me a ship!”

“But you’re sick, sir,” begged the master-mechanic. “You aren’t fit to fly—you can’t help—”

“Damn you, am I giving orders or asking advice?” snarled Crowley. “You lousy murderer! I’ll have your head for this. They’re killing Burns and Reese while you are arguing. Don’t you understand? I’ll shoot you with my own hands! I’m giving orders!”

A ship was rolling out of the hangars.

CROWLEY’S eyes were glaring hideously. Owl’s eyes, suffused with blood. Someone was boosting him into the cockpit. Someone was turning over the motor.

“It’s cold, sir,” begged the master-mechanic. His hands were stretched toward Crowley.

“The hell with it,” answered Crowley. “It’ll get warm fast where I’m going.”

He waved them away from the front of the ship. He crossed his left hand in front of his body and moved the throttle. He snatched for the stick as the Spad quivered and began rolling. He turned it with skidding wheels and dipping wings. The motor sputtered and coughed once, then settled into a steady rhythm.

The Spad went careening downfield, leaped into the air and plunged over the trees at the west end of the field.

He looked back at the field. It was like one of the visions which had come to him through the waves of darkness. Men—tiny now—standing like statues, staring after him. The black hangars going away with a rush. The earth slipping away.

Suddenly he realized that he had no

sense of time. That he did not even know what day it was—nor what week. He remembered that the master-sergeant had said that the squadron had been going through hell—had spoken of the Strelitz bombing as if it had existed in the past. Evidently the darkness had not been a period of one night—it had been a continuous period of several days.

There was an exultant strength flowing within him. The pain seemed pushed into the background. The sting of the slipstream was like a swift-acting drug. His brain was suddenly razor keen. He was holding the Spad a hundred feet above the earth. It seemed to skip over trees and wires. He discovered trenches, and men looking up at him—men who were waving arms, men who were cheering him on. Men who had opened mouths as if shouting—but he could not hear their voices above the roar of his motor. He was searching the space above him for Reese and Burns. After a moment it was a game. He was riding the steep banks of a track. Burns and Dixie were in the lead. There were a lot of other cars trying to box them in, to force them off the track, to keep him from going to the front. Crazy-looking cars painted all colors—trying to pocket the three white Trojans.

He laughed. Wouldn’t Dixie and George get a kick out of seeing him shooting through the ruck, gunning the old bus around the turns, slipping by the field, smashing into the lead? Wouldn’t he give them the razz when he took them both! Thought they had him out, eh? Just because he had to stop for repairs. Try to keep him out!

Only, his right arm wouldn’t work. It worried him—dangling from his shoulder, bumping against the seat—this one-hand driving wasn’t so hot.

Then he was talking with Doc Wallace. Funny how Doc could ride between the motor banks like that, perched up there, grinning at him, kidding him.

“Look, Doc,” he was saying into the slipstream. “I’m getting a kick out of

this. You were right, Old Timer. You said I'd snap out of it—well, I'm snapped. I'm looking for a lot of squareheads who are tailing Reese and Burns. Couple of wise guys who think they can slip something over on the Trojan outfit. I'll get 'em in a couple of laps and I'm going to run the wheels off 'em—I'll go by 'em so fast they'll think they're anchored to a post."

And Doc Wallace was smiling at him, nodding, his eyes glowing.

Shapes rose up in front of him. Shapes milling all over the sky. Crazy winged shapes. Green wings and red, black and yellow, pink and purple. Flying like idiots—diving and slashing at two gray Spads.

Crowley screamed at his spinning propeller. "Watch me take 'em, Doc! Watch me—new record, Old Timer! This is the bunch I'm telling you about. Trying to ease old Reese and old Burns out of the running. Hang on, boy, Buzz Crowley is going to the Front!"

HIS Spad was going up like a hungry shark after a choice morsel. Going up with an insane motor racking itself to junk. Wings drumming, struts moaning, wires screeching. Staccato snare-drum beats joining in the crazy symphony—drum beats of two Vickers—lean noses thrust up into the motor, red dripping from muzzles. Bucking and jolting; gleaming cartridge cases snaking up from ammunition chests. White tracers darting through space toward crazily painted ships.

The gray Spad cutting a pathway for itself through harried skies. Rushing, bruising, battering, ramping. Hurling itself this way and that—whipping through lanes between enemy crates, veering right and left—blasting with deadly guns. A laughing, shouting, crouching figure crammed in its cockpit. A figure which looked out upon a whirling bit of sky seen through a ring sight—laughing with mouth and face, but peering with narrow eyes which seemed to be filled with a curling, intense flame.

Buzz Crowley shrieked into a laboring prop. "Look Doc—I'm cured! Look at me go—did you see me pass that one?—and they thought they were going to dish Dixie and George! Why, they don't belong on the same track. One side or a wheel off—get out of the way—here come the Trojans!"

He jerked erect in his seat, a look of surprise flashing across his face. For a single instant he had a glimpse of two gray Spads diving to safety.

Burns and Reese.

His left hand swept the stick forward by instinct. His body seemed trembling—seized by convulsions. It was going dead—senseless—down to the hips—down to the knees—down to the feet.

The Spad was diving—he couldn't stop it. The ground was coming up—the way it came up at him in the visions that thronged the darkness.

He was mumbling. "Look, Doc—I got it—I got it. In the back! I'm busted wide open—and I haven't got the horrors. Look—I'm skidding—I'm going off—the track. And I'm not worried—"

The plunging Spad passed a flaming Fokker—a red-winged, black-fuselage shape which was belching flame and heat.

Behind, on the Spad's tail, another Fokker, manned by a white-faced pilot, followed at a distance of fifty feet, Spandaus spitting flame, the hail of slugs cutting Buzz Crowley's ship to bits.

His head wobbled weakly. He was fighting to lift it. His eyes were bright, shining.

"You tell Dixie and George I said we can't do one-two-three—this time," he said calmly. "But I fixed it so they could make it one-two. And it was a swell race—one of the kind you read about—"

A brown wall rose up under the Spad. It struck under full throttle. It crumpled, the tail surfacings grinding into the cockpit. The wreckage bounced a dozen feet, then settled again, to become shapeless—a broken tangle of ribs and

spars and wires, quivering strangely until it lay motionless.

Overhead, a black and orange Fokker zoomed madly and went racing toward the north.

CHAPTER X

Salvo for an Ace

A VOICE was speaking. Lines of infantry were drawn up at the north end of the field of the Twenty-sixth Squadron. They stood at "parade rest."

Between the lines a square opening had been made in the earth. About the opening were breast-high banks of flowers. The sweetness of the flowers, mixed with the smell of fresh-turned earth, became the peculiar perfume of death.

A group of pilots and mechanics stood at the west end of the grave. Pilots and men of the Twenty-sixth.

They made a strange sight. Grease and oil smeared their uniforms made more fantastic by the brilliantly colored ribbons pinned to blouses once o.d.

The voice was uncertain. It paused at times, it trailed away at times—it choked at times.

"How fully he performed the things which America expected of him! The great thing he had to give to America was an example—and he gave it. Men looked upon him and forgot fear, followed after him and forgot danger. Men in his presence remembered nothing but high ideals and exalted courage."

A droning of motors sounded from overhead. Out of the north a series of dots grew larger and larger.

Fokkers!

Gleaming in the sunlight, gliding down, toward the gathering on the field of the Twenty-sixth, lower and lower. And then, when their shadows were rac-

ing over the field—over the grave—a sudden bombardment.

A thick mass of flowers fluttering downward—wreaths falling gracefully—clusters of roses—great banks of sweet peas—falling like a perfumed shower. Dropping gently upon the grave—upon the heads of the firing squad—upon the gold-fringed, silken folds of the flag. Motors, going away—

The voice continuing. "In years to follow men will be glad and proud to say—'I fought with him.' Some day, when there is time for such things, a monument will rise to his name—a proud monument topped with eagles, and inscribed with his deeds.

"But today we can only give him rest where he would choose to rest—near to his own field, where the drone of motors may sound in his ears, and where the voices of his comrades may come to him through his sleep. May his rest be gentle—and his sleep untroubled."

A clump of earth sounded upon a hollow casket. Ropes creaked. A voice issued a command, low, husky.

"Battalion, *Attention!—Ready!—Aim—Fire!*"

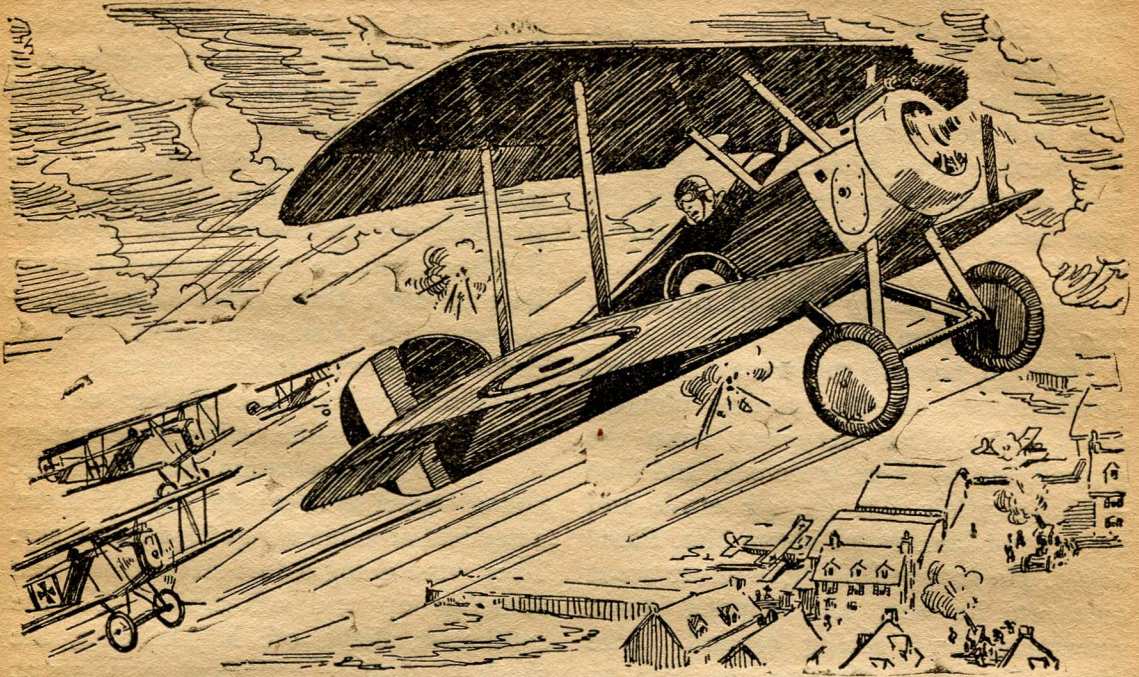
A searing blast of rifle fire. The same commands, repeated, and again the crash of five hundred rifles. And a third time. And then the thud of grounded rifle butts. A vagrant ray of sunshine touched upon the flag; touched the fringe of heavy gold which framed it. Changed the golden eagle upon the top of its staff into an iridescent jewel which seemed to possess life. Caressed the thick silken folds of red and white; warmed the blue field and white stars.

And the voice spoke again: "Greater love than this hath no man—that he give his life for his friend!"

And a whisper like a breeze stirring through the trees, a whisper that was strangely like Doc Wallace's voice, answered.

"Amen!"

Lost Aces



By Joel Rogers

Author of "The Sky-Jammers," "The Spy Squad," etc.

Two aces flew to the edge of the world, one toying with treason, one fighting for life in a circle of death. Two aces, two bullets—and only one plane to break a deadlock of doom.

A Complete War Air Novel

TWO miles above the Ostend Zeppelin sheds the Mary Hen spotted Kenny Blair's little Sopwith darting out of the edges of a drifting cloud mountain—a shimmer of silver wings in the high sunset sky. The Mary Hen pulled off her socks, and she began throwing things.

The 38th L. V. G.'s—Baron Fritz von Nachtigal's King Checker squadron—also saw Kenny Blair breaking from the cloud in the clear crimson evening weather. Air sirens screamed on the German field. Shouting and raving, the Jerry pilots and gunners jumped into their two-seaters. They went streaking across their muddy tarmac, with a roar like eighteen wildcats.

To the east of the King Checker field and the hot slamming guns in Marie Henriette Parc, a patrol of Captain

Anton Glick's dreaded Gallows Birds, Fokkers 44th, spinning down to their home field from a sunset prowl over Dunkirk, suddenly straightened out like a flock of pepper grains blown on a strong wind. They drew together on tight black wings. The Gallows Birds, *die Galgenvögel*, the best fighting Huns in that sky. They came slanting up at Kenny Blair's lone little silver Royal Naval scout from a mile below, like a pack of baying foxhounds up a fiery hillside with the fox in view halloo.

Blair of the 19th Camels! The Zeppelin-strafer.

The Ostend Zeppelin sheds saw the audacious young naval ace, too. But the big gas bags were safely stowed away, and the Mary Hen was talking. The Zeppelin ground crews stood in the shadow of their bombproof hangar en-

trances, placidly puffing on their big porcelain pipes and watching the shrapnel bursts that smoked around the moth-like British scout high up and overhead.

"One of Blair's damned 19th, from Kirchenhafen, down Dunkirk way," they told each other. "Ja. And likely the Yankee devil himself. Fifty thousand gold marks to the man or gun that gets him. And watch them do it now."

Pam! said the big guns of the Mary Hen. *Pam, pam, pam!*

High up, beneath the great cold shadowed masses of the cumulus cloud—cloud that looked fiery hot from the ground, but up there were cold and blue—Kenny Blair felt the air crash and rip around him. *Pam!* above him. *Pam!* below. He snapped his little silver scout over on its ear, and slipped down screaming, half slicing around. The Mary Hen was blasting the sky to shreds where he had been, when, a second later, he leveled out with a snap from his hooking slip, three hundred feet below.

"The hammer landed, but the frog jumped," he jeered, with a breathless laugh.

THE wind riffled his unhelmeted black hair. It winnowed the fringes of his thick black brows into ridges and horns, just above his goggles' rim. For an instant he glanced overside with his broad ruddy shining face, blue-eyed, tight-lipped, and with a watchful mocking smile.

"A thousand berries a crack it's costing them," he estimated. "Or six for five grand. Step up, gents, and take a wild swing to win the big black cigar. Ee-yow! There goes eighteen thousand dollars more of Heinie TNT in smoke."

He rocked his wings tantalizingly, skidded like a clowning skater, and slipped down fast again.

Westward below him there stretched the crinkling, flame-filled sea, with the North Foreland of England hazily shadowed in the red fire of the setting

sun, at the edge of the ocean's dip, fifty miles away. Twenty miles seaward a British monitor was lying, barking sluggishly with its 12-inch guns, like a fat pug-dog squatting on its haunches at a safe distance and defying a kennelful of mastiffs. A pair of British destroyers were on the sea to the north of the barking monitor, tiny as ants, and streaking for the shelter of the big guns. Farther up in the north along the sandy Belgian coast three other destroyers—German 120 mm.-gun ships out of Zeebrugge—were keeling around hard off shore, within the shelter of the Banks. Their white wakes were cutting the water like question marks as the young Camel flyer caught sight of them. They had seen his wings high in the sky. They were doing a fast ships-about, and standing up and off again. To the southwest, down off Middlekerke, the shark shadow of a U-boat, running at periscope depth twenty feet below the surface, hauled down its asparagus like lightning and settled lower into dark waters.

Below him, straight beneath his dancing wings, lay Ostend, ten thousand feet down. Long jetties stretching out into the sea. Golden canals where submarines lay moored, with halyards decked in festoons of flags. A network of streets, parks, railroad terminals, with the red sunset spotting them in little points and pools of fire. The field of the 38th L. V. G.'s, Nachtigal's hard-fighting and dangerous King Checkers, lying to the south of Marie Henriette Parc, with a swarm of the spotted two-seaters skimming off. The field of Captain Glick's 44th Fokkers to the east, with that wedge-shaped formation of fast black ships a mile above the field, and boring up at him like baying hounds.

All this panorama of sea, ground and sky Kenny Blair took in with one quick glance, as he rocked his wings, slipped, and keeled beneath the great blue-shadowed masses of the cloud.

"Not today," he thought. "Bunkered again."

Beneath the trailing edge of his left wing his quick glance had focused on the big mottled Zeppelin sheds, lying like a pair of fat speckled caterpillars two miles below. No Zeps in sight. The big deadly night-cruisers were both safely stowed away, as usual, beneath their armored roofs. It was then he had come for, dodging shadowily in the cloud through twenty miles of Fokker-hounded and Archie-guarded sky.

The Ostend Zeps. The biggest prize a flying man could hope to get.

ONCE, months ago, with the wind and the sky just right, with George Hook, his second in command of the 19th Naval Scouts, acting as decoy to lure away Glick's fierce black Gallows Birds, in the shadowy and deceptive light which falls between the dusk and the night, Kenny Blair had slammed himself at one of those big silvery bags while it lay moored outside its hangar, and burned it up in a sheet of roaring fire. For that, he carried the two and a half stripes of a lieutenant commander on his sleeves now, though he wasn't yet twenty-four, and wore the claret-red ribbon of the Victoria Cross above his navy wings, though he wasn't British born. For that, also, he had got a German price on his head.

After Kitchener and after Admiral Lord Beatty, the name of Yankee Blair the Zeppelin-strafer had long headed the secret list kept by the great German War Intelligence of British officers who must be got. "Must" in red capital letters.

Well, they hadn't got him yet. But he'd not get one of their Zeps again, either. Since that glorious dusk when he went slamming through the Zeppelin fire, the guns of the Mary Hen had been quadrupled—and the big cruisers were kept hangared. While the patrols of black Fokkers never left the sky.

Watching for Kenny Blair. Fifty thousand gold marks to the gun or ship that nailed him.

Pam! Pam, pam, pam!

Shrapnel rising with a shriek and bursting over him. Slamming hot behind his tail. Rocking his wings in high sky with dynamiting bursts.

Pam!

The Mary Hen had found the range again. She was living up to her reputation as the wickedest, keenest ring of A. A. batteries between the Vosges and the North Sea. She had taken off her socks and garters, and she was heaving up the kitchen stove. *Pam! pam!* she slammed her iron hammers at the sunset sky, till it seemed there wasn't a cubic yard of air space within a mile of Kenny Blair's whirling silver Camel that wasn't filled with those smashing black shrapnel bursts.

"Oh, stop throwing those things!" said Kenny. "If that's a nice way to act!"

With a mocking grin he thumbed his nose down.

Wham!

Something slammed behind his tail. He never saw that one. The air seemed burst apart. There was a roaring in his head, a sudden dark red crashing blindness. His dancing ship was hurled over like a leaf in a hurricane. And the bottom of the world seemed to drop away beneath him.

"It's happened now!" he thought.

He'd flirted with the buzz-saw once too often.

CHAPTER II

Crippled Wings

DOWN Kenny Blair went. Down, like a tumble-bug. Spilling with head hanging, and God knew which way. He felt the wind rush on his right cheek and then his left, on his face and the back of his neck, and all the world was black that instant. His skull seemed split apart. He only knew that he was falling.

His whirling eyes focused part way

after an instant of roaring blackness. He wiped his goggles frantically with his sleeve. Jamming his controls from him, he came out in a flat stalling spin, breathless and with a roaring head. Eight thousand feet, the altimeter read. The crimson sun on the far off rim of the sea slowed its crazy spinning, like a dying merry-go-round. He fought to steady his dizzy vision. He shook his head. At least it was still on his shoulders.

"Come again!" he gasped.

Apparently they hadn't hit him, after all, in spite of the blinding headache. That was his first thought. But ribbons of silvery linen were stripping off the little scout's right upper wing, he saw, and there was a hole in the fabric through which a patch of careening cloud was visible. The compass on his instrument board had been smashed by a shrapnel splinter, and half the basswood board was in flinders. Altimeter still functioning, that was all. Tachometer and wind-speed indicator knocked galley west. That hot iron slug must have gone whizzing by his belt.

"Two inches closer," he thought, "and *fini la guerre*—"

A pair of Nachtigal's King Checkers were standing on their tails two thousand feet below, climbing up the sky ladder at him like a couple of screeching tigers up a tree, with a dozen more of the checkered L. V. G.'s following all the way from ground. To his left that formation of black Fokker Gallows Birds was clawing for altitude, five of them, rocketing for the roof in a wedge formation. They had reached his level, if they weren't above him now, in the bottom fringes of the cloud. It was hard to get the bearings of them. The whole sky was spinning crazily.

Pam! pam! over him. *Pam!* right and left. *Wham!* on his tail.

The Mary Hen had bracketed him again.

"You win!" gasped Kenny Blair. "Keep your lousy Zeps, Jerry. Did anybody say I wanted them?"

HIS head was still a muddle. He felt air sick. Wildly he went slicing down two hundred feet, like a whistling knife blade through the shattering crashes. He snapped over, and roared upward in a loop. The hot aerial detonations seemed to be following him a yard behind his tail. Above him the great blue-shadowed cloud rolled on. He tried to reach it with his staggering wings. But it was too high, too far. The five black Fokkers had got above him, certainly. Beneath the fringes of the cloud they came tearing at him. As he fell over on his back in the crest of the loop, they dropped headlong down the sky.

The Mary Hen signed off. His motor screamed in the high thin silence.

The earth and sea above him. The cloud and those five diving fiends below. So it looked like. The Fokkers seemed to be shooting vertically up at him, out of the inverted bowl of the sky and cloud, like a swarm of voracious gars striking at the silver belly of a mackerel from the depths of a clear bottomless sea. He wondered if Captain Glick was leading them—Glick, the great, lame, scar-faced Gallows ace in whose very teeth he had once burned a Zep. Who had sworn to get him at any price.

Well, if it was Glick who was going to get him now, that was no disgrace. Glick, the best and worst and most terrible Hun in all that murderous sky.

Kenny Blair hung by his belt, and the five black Fokkers came at his up-turned wheels two hundred feet a second, while time stood still.

Glick's Gallows Birds.

He saw the white pattee crosses upon their black diving wings. Their famous and fatal battle insignia of a white crow perched on a dead man's skull, and pecking at its eye-sockets. But he would have known them, anyway.

Br-rp-rp-rp-rp! their double Maxims started the coffee-grinder music in that split second.

Needles of fire were shooting through the young Camel ace's skull.

Something had happened to him amidst that Archie crashing—he didn't know what. He wasn't right. With roaring motor, coming down the loop, he hauled his stick against his belt, and half rolled. Again he looped, straight at them, opening up his Vickers hot and blind.

"Come on, you sons of lice!" he heard his voice howl.

SOMETHING filmed across his goggles as he went clawing up. He wiped his lenses desperately with his sleeve, but they were still blind and smeared. He tore them off, shaking his face. Blood was on his dungarees sleeve. His eyebrows were filled with the sticky blinding stuff. It trickled onto his lashes and down in the corners of his eyes. The Mary Hen had creased him, all right. No wonder his head had felt as if it was splitting open. A splinter of the smashed instrument board must have slammed him in the face.

"Eat it!" he gasped.

The sky was full of black dashing wings and hot gun mouths, raining all around. Diving, they split as he came zooming up. His Vickers belt was shaking. The wind cut his naked eyeballs, and he could not see them. Too many of them, and the blind spots were in his eyes.

Br-rp-rp-rp! the Maxims rattled.

On the crest of the loop he did not cut his throttle. He jammed his stick hard away from him, instead. With bellowing club he went S-ing up toward the top of the sky, holding his breath and praying.

A half loop, snapping up into an inverted half. With hanging head and roaring brain.

The only way out, if it would work.

It was a trick he had pulled on Captain Glick of the Gallows Birds and a formation of those black Fokkers once before, when jammed in a desperate spot. If the great Fokker sky-king was leading that murder squad in person now, it would not work again. Glick would be ready and waiting topside

when the silver Sopwith came to the crest of the vertical snake climb. Waiting on banked black wings to pour in the killing fire. No man ever fooled the scar-faced Gallows captain with the same trick twice, and not many once.

So Kenny Blair prayed that Captain Glick was not among those present.

The little scout's spinning motor screamed as on her back, she roared upward in an arc. Centrifugal force pulled the young Camel ace's heels from the cockpit floor. Pulled him outward taut against his webbed safety belt. For an instant the silver ship seemed to stall dead in the air, half on her back, with her nose pointed at an empty corner of eternity, sliding backwards by her tail, and upside down.

Like a bug crawling up the outside of a slick curved bowl, and slipping as it crawled.

IT seemed to the young Camel ace that he hung there forever, on his back in the thin air, with sprawling wings. Yet it was quicker than he could take a breath. The far crimson sunset horizon came swinging up beneath his bow. Up and over the top of the vertical S climb the silver ship pulled herself with choking motor and dragging wings, sprawling out in normal line of flight once more.

Top of the sky.

Above his motor's ragged thunder he heard Maxims in a crashing burst, as he swung up and leveled out, but he could not locate the direction of the rattle—in front, behind, above, below. Was it Captain Glick, the Gallows king? Had the savage, battle-wounded Hun ace been waiting for the completion of that wild, breath-taking evolution—waiting above, sardonic and steady and gaunt-eyed, behind his leveled ring-sights, while the twisting Camel came snaking up to death?

Gasping, Kenny Blair threw his ship over on its ear, winding around a tight invisible air cone.

No, Glick of the Fokkers was not

there. The rattling Maxims came from below him now. He'd twisted up through those hurtling black wings into clear air. The five sable Gallows Birds had been too quick and eager. They had dived on past him, expecting him to complete the loop.

"Catch your rabbit first!" he jeered breathlessly.

On tilted midnight wings, with their white crosses and death insignia gleaming as they banked, they were reforming into their tight battle wedge four hundred feet below him now, and clawing up at him with tracer hail, hot, surprised, and angry. But Kenny Blair wasn't waiting for them, nor for the checkered L. V. G. two-seaters climbing below them, eager to get a share. There was that great blue-shadowed cloud above his head, and it looked sweeter than death and immortal heaven, or anything else the swarming Huns had to offer him. It was all he wanted now.

Lifting his wings to the stalling point, he went climbing for the roof with all he had. Behind him, those black Fokkers as mad as hornets.

"Go on back," he jeered with a pale grin. "Go on back home to mama, and tell her you've chased Kenny Blair of the Nineteenth with your pop-guns."

The billowing cloud came down to meet him softly and swiftly, like a deflated balloon sagging overhead. Breathlessly he pulled up into the cold misty bottom ravels of the cloud, with a tight cool grin but an exhausted heart. The snarling black Fokkers were blotted out below. He climbed. He laid his ship over on its ear, and went boring up.

Gray cloud around him now. The ghosts of fog. And silence. He had lost them.

"By the skin of a hen's teeth, sailor!" he told himself, taking a deep breath of the rain-filled vapor. "And maybe by less than that."

THE keen, tense nervous stimulus which had keyed Kenny Blair up during those desperate few seconds of

escape from the Fokker gang, had gone from him like water now. He was groggy. He wanted to sleep. His swaying head fell forward on the cockpit coaming. With an effort of his will he jerked it up. The terrific Archie salvo which had so nearly smashed him to flinders in the air was still ringing in his ears and brain. If it hadn't been for that, he'd have shown those black rats a fight.

"Low and slow, sailor!" he told himself. "There's something wrong with your dinner."

Compass smashed, and blind in the cloud. His club was chewing the bumpy gray puffs of mist into wriggling shreds. His stubby wings were nodding and rocking. He seemed to be balancing on one spot. Shivering, bucking, swaying. Then motionless again. No sensation of forward speed. Yet he was making knots—somewhere. Deep in the high sky mist, he edged his bow around to where he guessed southwest ought to be, and tried to hold it there, pegging down the hidden coast.

His home field of Kirchenhafen east of Dunkirk was still thirty long air knots away.

The keen wind that was blowing the cloud along plowed into his scalp, and cut across his temples like the slicing of a knife. With a wavering glance he watched the torn right wing above him. The stripped linen was fluttering in the cloud fog, but had ceased peeling further, for the time being anyway. And the blood upon his forehead had coagulated and ceased flowing. He touched his head softly and experimentally with his fingertips. There was a ragged cut across his scalp, just above the line of his thick black hair, four inches or more across and an inch wide. It hurt like white hot needles when he put his fingers to it delicately. He locked his teeth, and explored with care.

White hot needles. . . .

"At least my brains aren't oozing out," he thought. "The old sump pan's not cracked."

Just a scalp wound. No fracture. But what a bump.

The mist rocked, rocked around him. Without a horizon. No bottom, top, nor end. But no Fokkers, either. And for the time being they were not what he craved.

Yet above the cloud and below it there would be swarms of Hun ships prowling, all the way down the coast. They would be out in flocks and squadrons like howling hornets, tearing through the twilight sky from the sea coast to ten miles inland. Forming a living aerial net with their darting wings. Trying to catch Kenny Blair, the Zeppelin-strafer, before he got home.

He'd been hit, they knew it. Now was their chance to get him.

CHAPTER III

Merry-go-round

FIFTEEN thousand feet the black-haired young naval ace's altimeter read. And still there was cloud around and above him. Tentacles of flying mist. Ghosts of tumbled shadow mountains into which his silver ship bored with snarling club.

All through the hollow weaving hills and caverns of the cumulus the late somber twilight of the high latitudes was creeping, with a look of tarnished silver. The cloud darkened imperceptibly. The radium dials of Kenny Blair's altimeter and wrist-watch were beginning to glow with phosphorescent numerals.

Three bells. Half past nine. It had been twenty-five minutes now since he zoomed from the Mary Hen and the snarling black Fokkers above Ostend. That meant he had traveled forty-eight miles in still air. Even with a thirty knot wind blowing against him, he must have made thirty-odd knots down the coast away from the great German naval base, he estimated. Well, he was over the Allied lines now. As far as

Dunkirk, possibly. With an hour's petrol to spare.

He had slipped the front-line bar-rages, and the black-crossed squadrons swarming high and low to trap him. Without being sighted by one of them. A smile crinkled his ruddy face, and his thick-set shoulders sagged in relaxation.

"Home!" he thought. "The best word ever invented by old man Webster."

His muscles felt stiff and lethargic. His head was light as a balloon. He was glad to be out of it. He eased his bow over. With half closed gun he went slicing down through the layers of the cloud, spiraling on bent left wing, watching overside to get his bearings.

Twelve thousand feet. And ten. And eight. The thinning fringes of the bottom cumulus drifted around him. At seven thousand he came slithering down below the rolling billows into clear twilight sky.

The last orange glimmer of the sunset had gone beyond the sea curve, fifty miles away. The shadowy mirage of England over there had vanished, too. Just a lean glimmer of fading silver on the west now. The somber twilight horizons had closed in while he had been creeping through the cloud. There were thick blurred stars sprinkled around the edges of the sky, and low in the west the thinnest hook of a new moon was setting, like a curved platinum wire.

He was out over deep water, off shore. That was the first thing he saw.

Below him the sea was black, with long white wind streaks running athwart the waves and crooked lines of comber spume. If there were any ships below, the surface darkness had swallowed them. Though he himself, he knew, must be visible in the lighter upper sky, to anyone watching.

He swept around half way in his tight throttled spiral. Dunkirk? Hardly. Eastward he saw the flashing of the great German coastal batteries, stretching down past Middlekerke toward the

last corner of Belgium still held by the Allies. All those great Hun cannon, guarding the Hun coast. And the shadow of the big Zeppelin sheds looming on the land horizon in the dusk, and the long jetties of the sheltered U-boat harbor.

He was not home. He was not past the lines, at all. He was a mile or two out off the Ostend docks, precisely. Almost where he had been a half hour ago.

"Flying wing down," he thought, "in a blind circle."

IT was like a nightmare, in which a man runs and runs from some grisly pursuer, yet is not able to move. He'd been swinging in a merry-go-round. Maybe he'd been circling straight above the German naval base all the time, and they'd been listening to him with their detectors.

There were pepper grains of fighting ships heading out at him from shore. Hard below the cloudy roof. They grew large as a load of zinging buckshot in half a second.

"The village fire department on its way," he told himself grimly.

A thousand feet below him, shadowy in the cobweb light, a flight of gull-gray combat seaplanes were climbing up from the dark lower air. Two-seater Taubes. Their Mercedes exhausts shot banners of blue ghostly flame. With their stubby flat-bottomed double pontoons they looked like a swarm of wild geese with wooden shoes. But they were as clumsy as they seemed. They came swarming up at him in a ragged wedge, with tilted wings.

They'd been listening for him. They knew he hadn't crossed the Yser going home. The Jerry hawks were out for him by land and sea. They were hot.

Well, he wasn't going to be a medal on any of their chests, if he could help it. He had his bearings now. No longer blind. He heeled his ship over and peaked away southwest, with the shore line on his left wing, climbing beneath the cloud.

He walked away from the zooming seaplane flock like an express train down the tracks. But the flight of Hun combat ships from shore were another matter. They were as fast as his Sopwith. They were heading over to intercept him. They were as big as bumblebees now. In a moment more, as big as birds. He identified their silhouette in the dove-gray light. Fokker D-7's. Black.

Six or eight of them. Captain Anton Glick's Gallows crows once more. And the great Hun ace doubtless with them this time. It looked like it was their day.

Somewhere on that dusky sea a mile and a half below Kenny Blair a ship's searchlight flashed a spear of light straight up into the cobweb shadows beneath the cloud. It was a signal that unloosed a half dozen more blinding beams immediately from other points on the water. Pale shafts reaching up and stabbing at the clouds about the little fleeing Camel. Hun destroyers out of Zeebrugge. The Archie dynamite burst on his tail.

Pam, pam!

They had him netted in the lights now. All focusing on him. But they were firing from rolling decks. He'd take a chance on running the gauntlet of their .77's. He held his roaring little British scout on a line for Dunkirk far down the dark curved coast. The black D-7's were banking in toward him on smooth wings, in a diamond formation underneath the cloud. It was going to be cats and dogs in seven seconds.

"They must want me. Want me bad," he thought.

No doubt they did. Thirty-one notches on his gun, not counting that priceless Zep he'd burnt. Fifty thousand gold marks for the ship that got him. It was their day.

FIFTY feet above him the heavy tumbling cloud went rolling sideways, spilling away northwestward endlessly, toward Greenland and the ends

of the Atlantic. Like the belly of a great undulating snake, hunching and sprawling and crawling across the sky. Suddenly out of it, a hundred yards ahead of him, a swarm of shadowy wings plunged headlong down.

The cloud had pupped. It was raining bloodhound whelps and hornets.

A hurricane more of Glick's black birds. Their bellies were turned to him as they shot into view before his streaking bow. Diving vertical, one of them half turned like a spinning top, in a nose-down wing-over, and leveled out with flaming motor and Maxim mouths beginning to vibrate.

They were all recovering and Immel-manning at him in the next split second. They had him cut off.

In the lightning flash of time that followed then things happened too quick to see. The dusk beneath the cloud was suddenly full of black-crossed wings hurtling, spinning, and looping from all directions. Fokkers and L. V. G. two-seaters. Taube seaplanes, even, staggering almost at their ceiling in the mile-and-a-half sky. God knew where they all came from. The stocky black-haired Camel ace could not hear their Maxims drumming above his own Vickers racketing crash. With a wild inaudible screech, with shivering gun mouth and snaking belt, he went straight at them like a bat from hell.

Crash or glory.

Wings all around him. Wings over the North Sea. There was one of the checkered L. V. G.'s that flashed above him upside down, in the bottom fringes of the cloud, with its dead pilot hanging by his safety strap with dangling arms, and its gunner shaking the dead man's shoulder with a look of fear and agony frozen on the white flash of his face that passed. A stubby black Fokker stood on its tail like a trained seal beneath the silver Camel and stitched a spotted swath straight down its fuselage as it went overhead like lightning. Splintered floor-boards, a red-hot searing in his leg, and Kenny Blair had

gone by, while the stalling assassin ship sliced tail down below him in the dark air spaces. Another Fokker, spiraling down out of the cloud steep on its ear, stood spread-eagled out on the air and seeming motionless for a flashing instant in front of the Sop's hurtling bow, like a coonskin nailed on a barn door to dry, and Kenny Blair raced his own tracer smoke toward it. Down the line.

Smash it!

He fed the sprawling black ship in the petrol tank, coming headlong at it. Red hot metal and liquid fire. He did not wait to see the sudden flame burst forth. Zooming, he pulled up over on his back in the beginning of an Immelmann, to shake a gun that was chattering on his tail. He was in the thick ragged cloud ceiling before he had completed the half loop.

Thank God for inventing cloud.

It was all over for the moment. He had lost those darting black wings, and the searchlights and the shrapnel. As if a curtain had shot down between them.

Hidden again. Blind again. A lost fish once more in that misty sea.

BUT better lost and blind than being ganged by all the cock-eyed Jerry crates that roosted between Zeebrugge and Armentieres, Kenny Blair told himself. He'd not come out of it again so long as the twilight was still clear enough for any of those Huns of land, sea, and air to spot him, this time. They had declared a holy war on him, and no mistake. It wasn't a game of tag. It was a mad dog hunt.

"I've had enough," he thought.

Home. Southwest. Down the flat sandy curved coast. Thirty knots to Dunkirk. Only a frog's jump. He held his bow on an imagined horizon, and tried to level his wings. Yet he might be circling once more, for all he knew. Circling endlessly.

Engine torque of his screaming rotary pulling him to the right. Was he giving it too much counter-rudder, or

not enough? He had lost the feeling of right and left, of balance, even of up and down. His head was thundering. Time stood still. The darkening fog pockets drifted around him. The walls of the great gray traveling cloud pressed tight and seemingly motionless on all sides for minutes at a time, like the walls of a narrow room. He wiped the mist from his goggles, but immediately they were clouded up again.

Home. Home?

A panic feeling was growing in him. He lifted his nose and climbed, to get above the cloud. To get a glimpse of stars and moon. But at eighteen thousand feet he found the cloud still there. It might reach six miles high.

His right wing fell over while he was still climbing, with a blind swish. He must have been stalling wing-down, without being aware of it. The cloud whirled round him. He felt the thin unseen wind lashing on the side of his face. Spinning tight. He cut his roaring engine, and still the jerking fog went rushing around him. For six thousand feet he went lashing and whipping down through the misty silence, till the spinning stopped and the straight wind blast of a vertical plunge was rushing against his face. He leveled off and opened up his roaring throttle after another thousand feet. But he'd not try to climb again.

Not this evening.

Luckily he still had almost an hour's more petrol. And deep moonless night would be coming soon, when he could break out into the clear without being seen, and get his bearings on the coast. At the worst, if he should still find himself circling in Hunland then, he would know where he was. There would be some holes in the net where he could slip through. They couldn't have the whole front covered with guns and searchlights, come darkness.

"I can't still be doing a merry-go-round," he told himself. "I'm pulling away from them."

But in his heart he doubted.

CHAPTER IV

Drowned Sands

KENNY BLAIR didn't know when his watch stopped. He looked at it, and it said nine-forty. And later when he looked at it, it still said the same. He wound it then, and set it at a guess at ten of ten. But he hadn't the vaguest idea of how much time he had lost. Ten minutes, or forty.

The darkness came. The short, deep, black summer night. And even the cloud through which his silver wings were boring became blotted out and invisible. Again he pushed his bow over, and went down with coughing motor.

He had spiraled down to three thousand feet this time, through successive layers of the night cloud, before he saw starlight glinting duskily on water below. He was still out over the North Sea, then.

The coast lay a mile off his left wing, a dead low shadow rimming the brighter blackness of the water. He did not recognize any landmarks on that low black shore. Was he past the lines? If he had been flying straight southwest for the last thirty or sixty minutes, he must be far down the French littoral by now, past Dunkirk and on his way to Calais, even with the wind against him. Yet there was the possibility that he might have swung around toward the north in his blind flying, and be up beyond Ostend now, with the German naval base and all that long gun-guarded coast still to be repassed on his way back home.

He had better keep out over the sea till he was sure of his position.

The water a half mile below him looked flat and motionless. More like a quiet inland lake than the storm-hounded North Sea. He could glimpse no stars in the sky to give him directions, though there was starshine glinting on the surface through some fissure in the cloud ceiling ahead of him. Still, he didn't need stars or compass. With

that low smudgy shadow of land drifting by on his port wing, he couldn't be going wrong.

It was difficult to make it out at times—that hidden shore. It crept in closer to him, and then swept away, following the margin of its capes and bays, while he kept on a straight line in the night. There was a long four or five minute period when he did not see the coast at all, and waited for it to reappear. But it did not reappear. He changed course when he saw that he had lost it, keeling over on his port wing to pick it up again. There was something comforting in the sight of solid land, even Hunland.

But there was only the dark star-sparkling water beneath him now, in all directions. And rougher and more ragged than it had been. The low curving shore line had disappeared—for better or for worse, for good and all.

It had not been a mirage, certainly. The young naval ace was badly hurt, but he had not been seeing things. The wandering black shore line had been solid and real. Yet now it had dwindled off into some low headland or sand spit, and gone beneath the sea. And that was the end of it.

Deep endless water. The combers rolling.

"Don't let it kid you, sailor," Kenny Blair told himself with a bewildered grin. "The whole coast of Frogland couldn't have sunk away. It must be somewhere."

But had it been the coast of France or Belgium he had been following?

HE caught his first glimpse of the stars in that moment of doubt and anxiety. The black roof of cloud broke in a long triangular shaped fissure ahead of him, showing rolling pillows of cumulus touched to silver by starlight in their core. He saw the well known and unmistakable cup of the Big Dipper swimming into view high in the summer sky in front of him there, with its two pointer stars directed at the Pole.

Dead ahead.

He hadn't been flying south, but north. With the fast storm wind on his tail. For God knew how long. And he was lost over an unknown sea.

He banked around, steep on his ear, laying the pale motionless glimmer of Polaris, the North Star, behind his stubby flippers. No time to lose. But his engine choked and died as he leveled out. A breathless silence. Out of gas. He threw open his emergency tank, and reached down, pumping the hand-plunger furiously. Not a sputter. Still the ringing silence. The lead was choked or else the emergency was empty, too.

It had happened now.

Going down. His club turned over slowly in the night wind pressure. No sound except the humming of wind on wires. The luminous needle of his altimeter slid down like a ghostly finger. The rolling sea below.

"Well, no Heinie will ever collect the reward for my scalp," thought Kenny Blair.

He tried to laugh.

"Glick's black buzzards will be wondering what became of old Blair of the Nineteenth Scouts for the next eight months or more. And still imagining they see the ghost of my Camel buzzing around their Zep sheds when it's a roost for eels and crabs down on the bottom mud. Sorry to disappoint them."

Nothing to be done about it. What's up must come down, when the gas runs dry.

He was riding down a toboggan in the night. The black wrinkled water came rushing up at him. No ship, no floating wreckage, no buoy, nor anything else solid in sight. Nothing but those treacherous and unstable waves. It would be better to go beneath them in a straight dive, he thought coolly, rather than to attempt prolonging the inevitable end for a few seconds or minutes. The little land scout would never keep afloat for more than a brief time of futile struggle and strangling

and despair. Push her nose down and ride her straight in, cowboy. Down to the bottom of the North Sea in one grand and final splash.

Yet the young naval ace's flying instinct would not let him make the unchecked dive. At the last moment he leveled out, rushing ten feet high across the black heaving troughs and the silver crests of the skipper's daughters. With the ragged water slashing at his wheels, he stalled, as if he were landing on a solid tarmac, and not the drowning sea.

Whoosh!

"A perfect three point," he thought. "Here comes a flying fish down to the bottom."

THE silver ship's tail pancaked into the running surge. Her lower wings went wallowing below the sea while she plowed on. Kenny unsnapped his safety belt and half uprose.

The freezing black water was flooding in over the cockpit floor when he felt a jar shiver through the ship. Still plowing forward and settling at the same time, suddenly that torn right wing of hers and her undercarriage had struck some obstruction below the water's surface. She skewed around with a lurch and ripping, sending a great splash around her, and fell over on one side with a buckling wing, her dead stick lifted high.

Kenny, standing on his seat, was half flung out by the abrupt jolt. He went sprawling head foremost, clutching and grabbing to keep from sliding down off the fallen wing. His feet slipped off the trailing edge, and he was in the freezing water to his waist before he could draw himself back on board.

The waves were lapping on all sides of the half sunken little wreck, moved by the strong blowing night wind endlessly. But the ship had stopped moving, and had stopped settling. She was roosted on some hidden rock or sand bar submerged five feet below the tide. Her fuselage astern of the cockpit was buried, and her right wing had disap-

peared. Only her engine head and her portside wing were lifted clear. The waves came slapping at her cockpit coaming. Inside, there was water up to the seat cushion. But the wrecked little fighter did not rock in the waves. She was solidly grounded. There, in the middle of that unknown freezing sea.

Kenny crouched on the seat and shivered. The salt water had got into that wound across his scalp, and there was a dull red hot throbbing in his leg. But he wouldn't have much longer to endure those pains, by the looks of things.

Where was he? If he had been flying a straight course through the cloud for the last hour or more, with the storm wind on his tail, he might be a hundred and eighty knots from Ostend now. Almost to Heligoland, perhaps. He wasn't quite sure about that.

"Too far to swim," he thought grimly.

His watch had been wetted by his half submersion, and had stopped again. This time for good. He had only a vague idea of the hour. But it had been half past eight when he had set out from his home field far down by Dunkirk in the late sunset to raid the big German Z-ships, with two hours good petrol in his tanks. So it must be after half past ten now. Four hours till the breaking of the high early summer dawn.

IF the tide was on the make, he'd never live to see that dawn. A slow drowning lay in store for him, if he didn't freeze first. The swift warm night wind, blowing from the south, seemed made of icicles now, cutting through his wet clothing and shivering limbs to the bone. He watched the scummy surge that laved around his cockpit, trying to estimate whether it wasn't already higher. Inch by inch, that cold tide flooding up. Waiting for it in the empty shivering blackness. Till it should blot out the dead stick of his propeller, lifted high. Till it should come washing over him, while he stood

on tiptoe on the top wing. It would have been better to have gone out at once, than wait for that.

He unloosed the holster flap of his heavy British .455, and felt the butt of the big Webley Navy gun.

"Before I'll wait for the drink to crawl up to my chin—" he said aloud, in a dry voice.

He spun the gun cylinder, rubbing his thumb over the smooth brass cartridge disks.

But the water was slapping up no higher. Not by the fraction of an inch. He watched it with a burning gaze, and knew that it was not rising now. He remembered then that the thin new moon had followed the sun down the west, drawing the tide with it. The high water mark had passed. It would be hours, perhaps eight or ten, before full flood again.

In the meantime, if there was some British patrol ship creeping without lights out on that black sea, he might be able to signal it, perhaps.

He fired his heavy Navy revolver into the air. Counted one hundred slowly, and fired again. The wind carried the crack of the slugs away. Four times he fired the big Webley, with long measured intervals between, until he realized the futility of that. He could hardly hear the repercussions himself against the blowing of the wind that filled the whole outdoors, though there was enough dynamite behind each one of those shots to have killed an elephant. There were two shots left in the Webley when he holstered it again.

He remembered his rocket pistol then, and pulled it out from its clamps above the instrument board, with one star-cartridge in the chamber, and two extra in a waterproof rubber packet. The big paper shells were still dry. He shot one straight at the zenith. His squadron recognition signal. Two blue stars, two yellow, and a red. They flowered high in the cloudy dark above him, and swam down softly, fading out. Again he plugged a shell into the breech, and sent

up the yellow, blue and red cluster. And the third shell then, after he had counted a ten minute interval.

Those last stars came drifting down and winkled out above him. No answering signal from any corner of the water. If there was anyone who had seen those distress rockets, it was not a friend.

CHAPTER V

The Gallows Ace

AT midnight in the officers' hall of the 44th Fokkers, *die Galgenvögel*, the Gallows Birds, east of Marie Henriette Parc in Ostend, a roulette wheel was spinning with a constant whirl. A dozen tense and hard-eyed aces of Captain Glick's great circus were clustered around the big oak table, laying crumpled wads of marks and Belgian francs on the green cloth. A visiting staff brigadier general from the emperor's own headquarters and a pair of young naval intelligence officers who had dropped in from the submarine base were in the company. There was an air of hushed excitement, of terrific tenseness and rapacity, over the little throng of gamblers. The game was running high, and Anton Glick himself, the great Gallows captain, was banking it.

"Thirty-six again," announced Anton Glick in a low dry voice. "Pay on red, even, and the third dozen. Do you want to let it ride?"

He glanced around the table at the taut faces and burning eyes.

"Let it ride," said one or two of them.

The rest nodded. Glick looked at the staff general, who stood pale-eyed across the table from him.

"On the 36 again," the general said. "All of it."

Anton Glick wet his lips.

"All of it," he repeated. "On the 36." They had him hooked. Bad. But

one turn of the black and odd would almost clear him. And the black and odd were bound to turn up now.

"Hit them, double O!" he said.

He gave the little white ball another spin. It whirled, whirled with a dry, clacking sound. The Gallows captain leaned his ponderous shoulders over the table. Above the loose black silk muffler that was wrapped around the lower half of his bearded face, his dark stony eyes watched the spinning ball with unflickering intensity. Praying for the zero or the double zero. Praying for the black, the odd. For any number except 36. It couldn't be the 36 again.

In the breathless silence the little ball whirled, whirled, and dropped. The wheel slowed to a halt. The men around the table straightened up with looks of relaxation, with muttered words and soft relieved sighs. One or two of them sucked on cigarets which had gone dead, breathing deeply.

All except Anton Glick. He stood with bent head, a dazed look in his eyes.

"Thirty-six it is, again," he managed to say in a low voice. "The red, even, and the third dozen again."

He lifted up one fist, and banged it down on the table. For the moment he could not utter another word. His throat was strangling.

IT was the eighth time running that the ball had stopped on the red, since Glick had been making the bank. The fifth time on the even number. The third time in straight succession it had turned up 36. And most of the gamblers around the table had been riding the red and the even right down the line, doubling their bets. It was the third time that that damned visiting staff general, with his smooth tight smile and his beak of a nose and his cold fish eyes, had bet on the 36—starting off with a ten mark note, and letting his winnings lie.

"You pay me on the number, I believe, captain," the staff general said now remindingly.

Pay on the red, the even, the third dozen, and the 36. There was sweat on the great Gallows captain's forehead as he stared at the green betting cloth. Even the stony irises of his deep sunken eyes seemed glazed with sweat. He dared not try to think how much he had lost. More than he could ever pay. Much more than he could ever pay. With an involuntary strangling gesture he tugged loose his black muffler, partially exposing the huge, clabbered, star-shaped scar that covered one whole bearded cheek from jawbone to nose. A French Nieuport explosive bullet had dealt Anton Glick that wound, above Verdun, last year. It had never entirely healed, and it would never heal, the doctors said. Some day it would eat into his brain, and he would die of it. He was not afraid of death—not the great captain of the *Galgenvögel*. But he could not endure a living humiliation and dishonor, such as threatened him now.

"Tough luck, Toni," Horst Stollweg, the gaunt-faced second in command of the Gallows Birds, said softly. "You got hit. For a loop."

The others were watching him with various looks of elation, greed, or sympathy. Anton Glick managed to shrug, with a pretense of indifference. He leaned over the table on his clenched fists, relieving the weight from his lame leg, with his heavy ash walking stick beside him. His ponderous shoulders and heavy limbs felt weary as water. He wanted to sag and collapse over that damned treacherous wheel and the green cloth, loaded on all points with its winning bets. It was only by an effort of will that he kept himself on his feet, and with a stony mask on his face.

He picked up the ball to spin again.

"Let the bets lie?" he suggested.

Three times in a row, that damned number. It couldn't turn up again. One more spin would clear him yet. He looked at the little fish-eyed staff general with desperate hope. But the other shook his head.

"I'm going to drag," the staff brass hat said, rubbing his hands together, with a contented grin. "I've got enough, believe me. Phew! I thought for a moment there I was going to lose. My heart isn't strong enough to stand it. Bet you five pfennigs this time, captain."

The rest of them were shaking their heads, too. They wanted to draw down. Salt away their winnings. They were tense and exhausted with the excitement of the game. They had hit him for enough, they were thinking.

THE Gallows captain drew a small white pad of paper across the table toward him. He wrote out a memorandum for a hundred and sixty marks, tore it off, and passed it to the younger of the two visiting naval intelligence officers standing beside him, who had bet five marks on the even number, and let it lie five times.

"I haven't the cash with me," he explained with a cool pretense of negligence. "Settle next time I see you."

The naval man nodded politely that it was quite all right. Glick wrote out a chit for three hundred marks to Horst Stollweg. One for a hundred and eighty marks to Markheim, the Gallows adjutant, who had been betting on the third dozen. One for sixty-four hundred to little Karl von Kulm, the balloon-buster of the Fokkers, who had put twenty-five marks on the red, and ridden along with it eight times to glory.

"That was a wallop, Toni!" said von Kulm with a brief grin.

"It's all in the game," the Gallows captain managed to reply.

"Well, it hurts me more than it does you, my boy," von Kulm said, folding the chit away in his purse with a dry grin. "I guess I'd better wait till you've brought down Blair the Limey Zepstrafer and collected your fifty thousand gold marks on him, before presenting this for collection?"

Anton Glick did not reply to the little ace's ironic sally. There were other men who would be presenting I. O. U.'s

of his when he'd brought down the Yankee sky-devil. God knew how many of them he had out already. Ten, twelve thousand marks. A year's pay. He was swamped. Sunk. Nevertheless he continued writing out chits with a steady hand. Around the board. It was all he could do to save his face for the time being. At least his name was still good.

That little fish-eyed general from the great staff was waiting like a terrier for a bone. Silent, but trembling with excitement.

"I've got to do some arithmetic on you, general," the Gallows captain said, wetting his lips. "Let's see, how much?"

He hadn't dared to figure that one out.

"Three times on the number, at odds of 36 to one," said the brigadier precisely, looking at a slip of paper in his palm. "My first bet was ten marks, making 360. 360 on the second roll made 12,960. 12,960 on the third roll—that makes 466,560 marks, I believe, captain. A shade less than a half million. And I don't mind saying that I can use it. I'm a poor man, myself."

Nearly a half million, starting with that ten marks! Anton Glick's ears were roaring. It was incredible. It was insane. There wasn't that much money in the world.

Little von Kulm whistled softly.

"I SEE you've figured it out," Glick told the elated staff general in a cracked voice.

"Quite," said the general cheerfully. "I used to be an accountant in civilian life. However, I want you to check my total up."

"I'll take your figures," Glick said indifferently, as though it were a small matter.

Still, the room was swimming around him. He could hardly write.

"Never mind the odd marks," said the little fish-eyed brass hat with a carefree gesture. "Call it an even four hundred and sixty thousand, in round figures."

"By no means, sir," said Glick with a grandiose gesture.

He jotted down a notation of the full amount, scrawled his initials, and passed it to the brass hat with a flourish. The other took the paper, examining it with one eyebrow lifted and a look of disappointment on his weasel face. He pulled out a monocle from his pocket, and examined it again.

"H'm!" he said. "What am I supposed to do with this, Captain Glick?"

"Why, it's a memorandum of your winnings," the Gallows ace said in his dead, dry tones. "As I explained, I don't happen to have the cash with me."

He looked at the pompous little man, lifting his thick eyebrows.

"Naturally not. Not a half million," said the brass hat, in a cool unpleasant voice. "But I'm catching an early train back to headquarters in the morning, and it's possible we shall never meet again, captain. It would be more convenient to me to have your check on account. That's what I thought you were giving me."

His check, thought Anton Glick. God knew he didn't have a pfennig.

"My memorandum is sufficient, general," he said. "Between gentlemen."

"All the same, I can't buy any beans with this," the brass hat began to whine. "It's not legally collectible, if anything should happen. I've won a lot of money, and I'd like to see the color of it. Come, come, what have we been playing for, Captain Glick—marbles or scraps of paper?"

The Gallows captain glared across the table at him—at that tight lean mouth, at that monocle and lifted eyebrow, and those cold fish eyes.

"Are you questioning my honor, general?" he snarled.

The lousy pawnbroker! He'd like to kill him.

"Your honor?" said the brass hat.

"I ask you, are you questioning it?"

"I don't know a thing about it," the staff general said. "All I want is my money."

CHAPTER VI

The Navy Raid

A TENSE, uncomfortable silence had been growing around the table. Horst Stollweg and Markheim of the Fokkers glanced sidewise at each other. Little von Kulm the balloon-buster was whistling "O du lieber Augustin!" softly between his teeth. The two visiting junior officers of naval intelligence appeared heavily embarrassed. They were strangers to the Fokker squadron, casual acquaintances of Horst Stollweg. The younger one of them turned to Stollweg with a tactful manner now, twirling his little gold mustaches and clearing his throat with a cough.

"How are things going in the air, Lieutenant?" he asked conversationally, in a loud, clear voice. "Are you running the Limey's ragged?"

"Are you?" retorted Stollweg.

"You flying buzzards just watch our smoke tomorrow," said the naval man emphatically.

His voice was brisk and penetrating in the silence. His face was fixed in a beaming diplomatic smile. He had the desperate air of a man doing his damndest to keep the conversation going, to gloss over that ugly silence around the table, and avoid a scene. No one else, however, bothered to help him out, and his companion sea dog, a tallish bristly haired man, nudged him.

"Yes, sir," he went on with a loud mechanical laugh, looking around at the hard, tight faces with forced enthusiasm. "Yes, sir, our little old navy's going to give the Limeys a kick in the pants tomorrow. They've got a raid planned on Heligoland Bight, but we've tapped their little code, and we know their schedule to the dot. We're going to—"

"Pipe down, Walther!" his companion sea-dog cut him off, with a growl. "Why don't you send a wireless to the Limey admiralty and tell them

we're laying for them, while you're about it? They'd be glad to get the news."

"Well, it's all in the family, isn't it, Fetter?" said the gold-mustached one, with an apologetic glance around at the Fokker aces. "I was just making conversation."

He subsided into mournful silence. Anton Glick rapped the knuckles of his clenched fists on the table, while the fish-faced brass hat examined the I. O. U. backward and forward, turning it over and upside down, with a cold, tight look which, if it wasn't a sneer, was the best imitation of a sneer that ever adorned a human face. Karl von Kulm whistled thinly. The bristly headed naval officer, Fetter, nudged his talky companion, with a curt nod toward the door, and a meaningful rolling of his eyes. Without a word the two picked up their caps and a schnaps bottle which rested beneath the table, fading out silently into the night.

"If you are questioning my honor, General," said Anton Glick hoarsely, after a long, glaring pause, "I'll be happy to give you my cards and demand satisfaction at once, either with pistols or sabres."

"I'd rather have your check than your cards," the brass hat muttered.

He spread his palms.

"I've gambled, and I've won," he added placatingly. "And all you're giving me to show for it is a scrap of paper that won't buy any beans. You may be a billionaire for all I know, and don't think anything of such chicken feed. All the same, it's a lot of money to me, and I'd appreciate a check."

The dirty little mucker! The pawnbroker! Anton Glick was strangled with rage and helpless humiliation.

THE squadron pilots all began to talk across the table, when Glick didn't reply. Rotten weather. It looked like there'd be a fog by morning. Thank God if there was, it meant no dawn patrol, said von Kulm. Even

Blair's hell-cats from down below Dunkirk wouldn't be out themselves, in pea-soup weather. What did anyone suppose had happened to that damned sneaking Camel assassin of Blair's outfit—probably Blair himself, the Yankee devil—who had slipped away from them at twilight in the cloud? Had he managed to get back home across the lines after all, in spite of all the squadrons out combing the sky to cut him off?

Not likely.

"Lost himself in the drink," said Markheim, the adjutant. "If it was Blair, there's fifty thousand bob none of us will ever earn."

"I'd just as lief not have to try earning it," said Horst Stollweg with a gaunt grin.

They were all talking at once, steadily. And then suddenly they all stopped, not able to think of anything else to say. They had discussed Blair, and the weather, and the war, and politics and the women, for the last several hours, anyway, and there was not another idea in their heads. Karl von Kulm resumed his monotonous ironical whistling. They couldn't ignore the fact that the situation was ugly and unpleasant, involving as it did a stranger to the squadron, and a general from the high command, at that.

"Well, how about it, Captain?" said the fish-eyed little brass hat.

He sighed and made a gesture with his hand when Glick didn't answer him. No doubt he was seeing regretfully, in his mind's eye, his golden marks taking wing like a flight of bees, and go swarming far away.

"I'll write the whole thing off for ten per cent cash," he offered hopefully. "Forty-six thousand. You must be able to spare that much. A big millionaire gambler like you."

His hopeful smile slowly faded at the Gallows captain's shamed and raging silence.

"All right," he said, pessimistically and plaintively. "But how about just one per cent on account, maybe, Cap-

tain? I'm a man of the world. A bird in the hand is my motto. Forty-six hundred cash, and write the rest of it on the ice. *Heiliger Gott*, I thought for a minute there I'd won a half million. But at least I'd like to win something."

He peered at Glick expectantly.

Anton Glick swallowed. He couldn't say anything. He would have jumped if he could have at the offer. But even forty-six hundred was out of his financial capacity at the moment. The brass hat picked up his gloves and stretched them while he waited a moment without reply. He pulled his hooked nose, shaking his head.

"Well," he said, "it looks like I got sucked. If that's the way it is, maybe anyway I can have back the forty-six marks cash money I put into the game. I need it to get home on. So please just just give me my money back, and call it square."

The Gallows captain found his tongue.

"Stop insulting me, you pawnbroking Jew!" he said hoarsely.

"Maybe you haven't got even forty-six marks yet, is that it, Captain?" said the general sadly.

It was the truth. The Gallows ace hadn't. And there is no insult so humiliating as the truth. With an inarticulate bellow, half oath and half screech, Anton Glick snatched up his heavy walking-stick that was leaning against the gambling table beside him, swinging it at the brass hat's head with force and rage.

THE fish-eyed man dodged with a startled yelp. The blow landed against the spike of his steel pickel-haube helmet, knocking it from his head to the floor with a clatter, and just missing braining him.

"Murder!" he screeched. "*Meiner Gott im Himmel!*"

They were all roaring and shouting then. Half a dozen of his flying men grabbed Anton Glick by the arms and waist, bawling at him, as he lunged

across the table to swing again at the dazed brigadier.

"You can send me your cards and name your weapons, you pawnbroker!" he howled.

However, he was being effectually held. He shook his stick, and subsided, growling. Someone handed the brass hat his helmet. He wiped it off and put it on his head again in a bewildered cock-eyed fashion, after feeling his scalp. His face was white as foam.

"*Meiner Gott!*" he said. "He hit me!"

"Like a dog!" said Anton Glick savagely. "Like the Jew you are! And you can name your seconds right now, and accommodate me with your cards—or be forever damned for a coward and a yellow cur. I invoke the code against you!"

He grinned tauntingly and furiously.

The staff general shook his buzzing little head with care. He edged back cautiously well out of range of the murderous scar-faced ace. Against the farther wall he drew himself upright, with the monocle again in his fishy eye, dusting the looped aiguillette cords of a staff aide that glittered on his shoulder. Carefully he folded away the I. O. U. that Glick had given him, and put it away inside his breast, beneath his many ribbons.

"That would be very nice, wouldn't it?" he said with a cold coughing laugh. "You kill me, or I kill you, and the debt is canceled. No, thanks. Do not forget that before I am required to meet you on the field of honor, Captain Glick, you will have to satisfy me, and the emperor, that you yourself are a man of honor, as becomes a German officer. You have invoked the code. Very well. You will oblige me by paying your debt to me to the last mark. Of course, if you do so I shall be most happy to send you my cards, and obtain more honorable satisfaction."

He clicked his heels together, and bowed.

"Very well, very well," said the Gal-

lows captain hoarsely. "If you must hide behind a technicality."

The bedlam had subsided, and so had his red-eyed fury. It was very quiet. He felt heavy and worn-out. Why had he been such a fool? A half million lost on three turns of the wheel! It had made him crazy. Now he would have to satisfy the fantastic and impossible debt for his honor's sake, or be forever blackguarded. And there was no way of paying it.

"Certainly," he said heavily. "Certainly. Do not doubt it. I will satisfy you of my honor. Then you will meet me."

The room was silent, except for the sound of Karl von Kulm's soft, ironic whistling. There was a sneer on the little brass hat's face. He knew that that debt would not be paid. The hard-faced Gallows aces knew it, too. Anton Glick threw back his shoulders with a swagger. He started to say something light and careless to Horst Stollweg and Markheim. But there was nothing to be said. The Fokker aces were looking away from him, down at the table or at their finger-nails. He had invoked the code of honor, and he had been called. He had got himself in an ugly jam. Any disgrace that might come to him would reflect on them, too. And they did not like the thought of it.

The Gallows captain breathed a moment heavily, trying to collect his thoughts. He heeled away in silence. Swinging on his solid ash stick, he went limping to the door, with that ironic tune of von Kulm's sounding after him, and the little staff general glaring with tight lips.

Little von Kulm was whistling, with his eyes rolled up in his head, and the pockets of his riding breeches turned inside out.

"Money's lost, girl is lost,
All is lost, all is lost!
O you sweet Augustin!
All of it's gone!"

Anton Glick closed the door with a slam.

CHAPTER VII

The Price of Honor

OUT in the night, in the soft summer grass, beneath the deep moonless cloudy night, the lamed Gallows ace paused heavily a moment, leaning back against the wall of the building, rubbing his stony eyes with his hand. The whirling of the roulette wheel still flashed before his eyes. Night frogs croaked. The air was heavy with moist heat. Through an open, blanket-shaded window beside him he heard the voice of the brass hat, raised in pitch and shaken with anger.

"Just how good is this fellow Glick anyway, I'd be obliged if some of you would tell me!"

"How good is Toni Glick?" Horst Stollweg rumbled in reply. "Well, *durch Gott*, he's the one and only Captain Glick. The best cock-eyed fighting man in this corner of the air. Even a brass hat cootie from the emperor's dug-out oughtn't to have to ask how good he is."

"I'm not interested in the beggar's professional abilities, nor in your opinion of the staff!" the brass hat retorted with a savage squeal. "That doesn't buy me any beans. What I want to know is, how good is he financially? Is he a millionaire?"

Karl von Klum laughed.

"I'll tell you how it is, General," Anton Glick heard the little balloon-buster explaining soothingly. "We've all got some of Toni's paper. He's in the red, pretty deep. Ever since they put the fifty grand on Kenny Blair, he's been figuring he would get it. Of course, he probably will. The higher they fly, the harder they fall. Toni Glick will get Blair sometime, and collect. When he does, he'll pay up. Anything in reason, I mean. Of course, half a million is just plain crazy. He never meant to gamble that high. He'd never have that much money in fifty

years. Why don't you laugh it off? You can't get milk from a bull, anyway."

"Laugh it off!" said the brass hat with violence. "When the beggar calls me a pawnbroker and tries to brain me! No—he'll pay me to the last pfennig now, or I'll see him broken to the black dog gang, I don't care what sort of a fighting man he is! I'll take this up with the emperor!"

In the warm, moist darkness outside Anton Glick listened to the little viperish brigadier with his teeth bared. The treacherous roulette wheel whirled round and round inside his brain.

36 . . . 36 . . . 36 . . .

The full weight of the catastrophe which he had let himself in for was only now beginning to be felt by him. A half million marks lost! It was fantastic. It was a joke. Ten Kenny Blairs—if there had been ten Blairs—wouldn't give him that much money, ever in this world.

That pawnbroking brass hat. The Gallows captain didn't even know his name. But he was on the emperor's staff. Glick understood the consequences if he didn't pay. Dishonored. Ruined. Stripped of his commission. Sent to dig latrines. Death would be much better. A quick crash or a quick bullet—there was nothing in that for a man to fear or regret. But not humiliation and dishonor. He couldn't meet them.

Involuntarily he felt for a pistol at his side. His big ponderous Mauser 11.5. But he wasn't carrying it, of course. It was in his office.

He wiped his dazed forehead again.

IF only the zero had turned up, or any other number except the unbelievable 36, on that last fatal spin! If only he'd never gambled! If only he'd kept his head and compromised on the promise of some rational amount—some figure that he might have been able to look forward to paying eventually, by hook or crook. If only he hadn't gone Ber-

serker wild and tried to knock the teeth out of the whining miser.

But it was too late now for such regrets.

Anton Glick muttered a moment with bearded lips, grinding his molars softly together. He tightened his thick fist around the ash stick in his hand. If he waited till the little viper came fumbling out into the night, he could knock him senseless with one blow and kick the brains out of him. One heavy crashing slam in the darkness. Bingo! That would wipe off his cold reptile grin and stop his mouth with no more than one last squawk.

But brass hats from the staff were hard to kill, like toads. And they cost a lot when dead. Anton Glick wasn't afraid to die, but he didn't want to do it in front of a firing squad.

He moved on toward his squadron office, limping on his stick, with his heavy shoulders hunched. It had been a black day for him—the blackest day of his life, from start to finish—and ending now at midnight on its most dismal point. Half a million in the red. Shame and dishonor.

"*Wer geht's?*" a challenge came faintly from a remote guard post, down behind the Fokker hangars. "*Halt an!*" a sentry's voice rang harshly nearer by, at the Gallows gates.

Both without reply.

As Anton Glick went limping on with bowed head, a sentry came jogging clumsily but quickly toward him, looming out of the night with staring eyes. He drew to a standstill suddenly as he became aware of the heavy-shouldered Gallows captain approaching in the midnight gloom.

"*Halt an! Wer geht's?*" the fellow barked a breathless challenge, punctuated by the threatening snick of his rifle's safety lock. "*Halt—ach, der Herr Hauptmann!*" he gasped, with a relieved grunt, as he recognized the lame commander.

He clicked his clumsy boots together, and gave a brisk rifle salute.

"Did he come this way, Mr. Captain?" he queried breathlessly.

"Who?" said Anton Glick indifferently.

"The navy subleutnant, sir."

"I think they've both gone," said Glick. "Why?"

But the sentry had started slogging onward, with sweating eyeballs and whistling lungs, with a slap of bayonet and rifle leather like a draft horse's harness.

"*Halt an! Halt an!*" another cry came through the darkness, from beyond the barracks.

The night seemed filled with unseen panting men hurrying frantically, on all sides. With terror, and suspense, and the silence of murderous pursuit. Only Anton Glick was too immersed in his own dark and desperate thoughts to have any interest or curiosity about it all.

The officer-of-the-day, *Leutnant* Krover of D Patrol, came bursting out of the closely curtained headquarters building on the jump, with a pair of guards at his heels, as the Gallows captain reached the entrance of it.

"Pardon, *Herr Hauptmann!*" Krover gasped. "He hasn't got clear away from the field yet, do you think, sir?"

"What are you hunting?" said Glick heavily.

"Navy traitor calls himself Walther," said the O. D. with an incoherent gasp. "Navy's been watching him. Beaned the fellow he was with and tried to get away. He's not armed, but he may be ugly. Better get your gun, sir!"

"I'll get my gun, all right," said Glick heavily.

THE brisk O. D. hurried on, melting into the darkness with his fist on his Luger butt, followed toe-to-heel by the two hard-eyed sentries. Anton Glick had hardly been aware of the interruption. The excitement and the terrific game of war had no meaning for him at the moment. The roulette wheel was still spinning before his eyes, and

he could think only of his own tragedy, of himself disgraced and broken.

Anton Glick, the Fokker ace, drummed out of his Emperor's service.

In his outer communications office the Gallows captain found the elder of the two visiting naval officers—the bristly-headed one called Fetter—slumped in a big lounge chair, with a bottle of three-star *schnaps* clutched between his knees. The naval man's short hair glinted with red lights in the lamp gleam, and there was an ugly cut on his scalp, still oozing thick drops. His face was pale as chalk and sweating all over. He tilted the bottle to his lips and staggered to his feet as Captain Glick entered. He stood swaying at attention, and stumbled like a lost dog after the Gallows captain into the inner squadron office, without invitation.

"*Gott!*" he babbled thickly. "If he gets away, I'll be lucky if they don't crucify me. Didn't know he was wise that he was being watched. They're smart, these Limey spies. Damned near as smart as we are. Two years I've lived and worked with that fair-haired boy, and nobody ever suspected him till last month. Have a drink, Captain?"

He offered the brandy bottle to the brooding Gallows ace with an unsteady circular swoop of his arm, ending the gesture by sweeping it to his own quivering lips before Glick could take it or refuse. He emptied the drink, and threw the brightly labeled bottle crashing into a corner. Swaying from side to side, he leaned over the desk behind which Anton Glick had seated himself, resting unsteadily on his fists. His little red eyes were hazy.

"Supposed to keep eye on him," he said incoherently. "Day and night. Eat and sleep and drink with him. Not giving him chance to communicate, if our suspicions were right. Till we'd checked up on him. But the damned spy must have felt how the wind was blowing. Knew his game was up. Got me—hic! kuk!—got me cock-eyed—hic!—got me cock-eyed drunk. Banged me on the

head, see that? Banged me on the—hic!—head, I'll say he did. If he gets word through—"

The drunken naval intelligence man hiccuped again and banged down his unsteady fist.

"Oh, get out!" said Glick.

"Listen!" the red-head monologued, with a wandering stare. "You heard what Walther yawped, captain. Around the table. When you were trying to figure how you'd stall off on those paper debts. It wasn't any lie. What he said. Tomorrow morning. *This* morning. Sneaking up past the Dutch West Frisians. The whole Limey scouting fleet. With two of their battlecruisers leading the parade, plenty of destroyers, and all the fixings. Out to sweep Heligoland Bight of poor old Freddie Dutchman, and scam away like the—hic! kuk!—devil on wheels. Been planning it for a long time, old John Bull has. Got it timed to the—hic!—dot. Our High Seas Fleet's supposed to be in Kiel. In Kiel. But it's not in Kiel, see? For why? Because we're on to those sons of—hic! kuk! pardon me—guns. We've tapped their little code. We're going to box them up and make clean sweep of them—"

His legs wobbled, he half sprawled across the desk, and his head drooped between his shoulders. He shook it heavily back and forth, then managed to peer at Anton Glick. With a blank wavering look, wiping his face with his hand. "What'd they give to know we're on to them, and waiting? They'd give a million marks, big boy. They'd give fifty millions. Now this Mary Pickford Walther. Little gold mustache and all. Cock-eyed louse. Limey spy. Try to communicate. Save them from the trap. Hic! kuk! Pardon me. I must be drunk—hic!"

His wobbling knees caved under him. He fell down on them with a bump, with his long bony arms sprawled across the desk top and his eyes closing, while the scar-faced Gallows captain set watching him with an impenetrable stare.

A RIFLE cracked. Out in the night. It was followed by a quick slamming fusillade, not a regular volley, echoing in confusion and mingled with men's shouts. There was a scream, and again a rifle cracked. All very quickly. Anton Glick sat motionless and mute, sunk in his black despairing thoughts. He did not turn his head toward the window. Only the convulsive tightening of his fists showed that he had heard.

Opposite to him the sprawling naval officer quivered as if he himself had been plugged. With a dazed look around him, he was getting heavily to his feet.

"What's that?" he muttered.

He was blinking his red-rimmed eyes. He rubbed his hand clumsily across his white sweating face, and straightened his brass-buttoned coat.

"I must have passed out," he said thickly. "What the devil was I shooting off my mouth about before I faded?"

He seemed to be ninety per cent sober now. He was obviously one of the flash brand of drinkers, getting drunk and sobering again on the shot. His sudden inebriation had faded from him with a moment of sleep. He stared at the Gallows captain's sunken eyes searchingly and with anxiety.

"Did I spill anything I shouldn't have?" he said.

"You were hiccuping something," replied Glick with a dull indifferent gesture. "I couldn't make heads or tails of it. I think you were complaining about your hiccups."

"Well, that's all right."

The naval man rubbed his face again, straightening back his shoulders with a relieved sigh.

"*Gott!* I dreamed I heard some shooting," he said.

Leutenant Krover, the officer-of-the-day, was already stumbling into Captain Glick's office then, wiping his sweating face, walking with a dragging tread.

"Captain, I have the duty to report—" he said with a salute.

His lean hard mouth was working. He tapped the Luger at his belt. The fast

sobering naval man, Fetter, stared at him with widening eyes.

"The naval Subleutenant Walther, sir," Krover said. "Wanted for assaulting and attempting to flee from the surveillance of naval Leutnant Fetter here. We ran him down. He had weaseled his way into the wireless room, and was trying to transmit. I had wanted to take him, but someone gave the order to shoot to kill. They all lost their heads, they were all shooting. He was dying when I reached him. However, he confessed in the presence of witnesses that he had taken English pay. In the circumstances, I will take the responsibility."

"Dead?" croaked Fetter. "I wanted him cut off from communicating. Was it necessary to murder him?"

The Gallows O. D. turned with a glare.

"He was my buddy," said Fetter thickly, "once. Two years we worked together. Never suspected till last month. I was the man who first reported him. Of course he was a dirty Limey spy. Still, he wasn't armed. You might have taken him alive. I'd have liked to have said good-bye to him."

"What good would that have done, sailor?" said Leutnant Krover harshly.

Anton Glick stirred his heavy shoulders.

"You will enter all the circumstances in your log, leutnant," he told Krover tonelessly. "Have Herr Fetter attest and sign to the facts. There is no blame attached to you. The deceased was caught endeavoring to communicate with the enemy. Who knows what the British might have been willing to pay him for his services, had he succeeded? Millions of marks. Those shopkeepers over the water are rich and liberal. They'll shovel it out for you if you give them what they want. I've heard it said. All the same, there is nothing lower above hell than a man who is a traitor for money. Herr Fetter, you will indentify the body of your late companion of the naval intelligence, and certify to the fact and

circumstances of his death, to clear our skirts."

The Gallows captain dismissed them both with a bang of his fist. He arose heavily and limped after them to the door, closing it as they went out.

CHAPTER VIII

Dead Hero—Live Traitor?

ANTON GLICK was alone now with his black despairing thoughts. His mind rushed around in circles. The flashing roulette wheel. Half a million marks. 36. Epaulets ripped from his coat. How much is your bond good for, Captain Glick? You will have to satisfy me that you are a man of honor, Captain Glick. 36, 36, 36. Well, this won't buy any beans. Haven't you even got forty-six marks cash money, Captain Glick? A half million in the next two days, or you'll be sent to dig latrines.

Anton Glick pressed the tips of his fingers deep into his black sunken eyeballs. Dishonor and disgrace.

He opened the top drawer of his desk, and took out with slow thick fingers his Mauser automatic in its holster, with attached gun belt. He was a big man, his hand was hard and strong, and he liked a big gun, one with a bite to it, a gun that felt solid in his fist. None of these regulation 9 millimeter Luger pop-guns for him. His Mauser automatic was an 11.5, as big a gun as was ever made in Germany, and when it hit it kept on going. Laying holster and belt on the desk, he drew the big gun out. Cold blue steel, and a kick in it that could smack like a Yankee mule. It was his own gun, too. He'd paid his own money for it. He could do what he liked with it.

"Accident while cleaning gun," he thought with a twisted grin. "It's happened to better men than me, and with a damned sight more reason to keep on living."

The clabbered, puckered scar that was

spread across half his face was now dead white.

He released the gun's cartridge clip and saw that it was filled. Slipping out one of the greased brass slugs with his thumb nail, he weighed it in his palm a moment, jiggling it up and down. It seemed queer that a small lump like that could tear a man's heart out by the roots from his living body, and send him with one slam and flash into eternal oblivion.

He farced the cartridge back into the clip, and jammed the clip home in the gun butt slot again, with a brisk blow of his palm. Slowly and with deliberate care he drew back the oiled carriage, cocking the hammer and pulling a cartridge up into the chamber with the movement of the mechanism.

"This is going to hurt that brass hat pawnbroker more than it will me," he thought coolly.

SUDDENLY he looked up, with lowered brows. His office door had opened. His ancient batman, old Private Klemm, who had served in the army forty years and never been anything but a private and a boot-swipe, was peering in with his wrinkled monkey face.

"Coffee, captain?" old Klemm squeaked.

His eyes were on the gun, though. Small and beady. Somehow it seemed to Anton Glick a shameful thing to be caught by an old half-witted private blowing out his brains.

"I see you're looking at your gun, sir," old Klemm piped, easing the door open wider and shuffling watchfully in.

"It needs cleaning," said Glick briefly.

He holstered the blue steel Mauser again with a casual manner, tossing belt and all to the ancient monkey-faced batman, who caught it expertly.

"Clean it," he said, "and bring it back at once."

"You'll be needing it tonight, sir?"

"I think I may."

"Your honor isn't planning on going

on a hop, sir?" the old batman quavered. "A foggy black night like this?"

"A long hop, perhaps," said Anton Glick.

He sat in silence, with his whirling thoughts, after old Klemm had gone. He thought of battles he had fought. Against the French around Verdun. Against Blair, with whom he had often brushed wings, yet never met in any decisive way. He thought of high wind-blown gallops through the two-mile cloud, charging in and out of snow drifts of white cirrus, at the head of his black Gallows cavalcade. He thought of the world, and empty space, and the immensity of eternity. And there were many fine things in life. It seemed a vile finish to it all that a spinning wooden wheel and a little ball, turning up 36, 36, 36, should damn and blast him out of all of life, sending him down the road to ruin or to death.

Sitting there, as motionless as stone, his dark thoughts were shattered by the roar of the enemy Camel that came rushing across the hangar roofs in the blackness of the midnight. He half started from his seat. It had come with a hurricane roar out of nowhere, that unseen ship, and in the instant the thunder of it was hammering through the sky and drumming across the ground and the hot still silence of the night was shattered and broken like a house of jangling glass.

Hura-hura-hura-hroom!

Enemy ship!

Clerget-powered Camel from below the Yser! One of Blair's hell pups!

Over the hangar roofs.

FORGOTTEN instantly was the great *Galgenvögel* captain's brooding and despair. He was a fighting man again. The enemy in the sky! With a hoarse inarticulate bellow he seized his walking stick, brandishing it aloft, as if with it alone he'd bat back whatever bombs came crashing down.

"Blair!" he shouted, springing up, "Feed him the A. A.'s! Smoke him!"

The Gallows captain was hardly on his feet before the crescendo roar had passed at two miles a minute across the roof above him, and gone fading up the sky on the rush of a steep zoom. No Vickers fire, no bombs. It was not a strafe. Heavily Anton Glick went sprawling toward the door.

Horst Stollweg, his gaunt-faced second in command, met him there, hurrying in with a message in his hand.

"From Blair's gang," Stollweg said briefly, handing the communication to the Gallows captain. "They seem to know where to find us without much trouble. Can you make it out? You read English better than I."

"To hell with the *Schweinhund!*" Glick said. "He gave me a bad minute of the jitters."

He took the message.

From: Lieut. George Hook, RNAS, acting in command Blair's 19th Scouts.

To: Commanding Officer, Fokkers 44th.

1. Information concerning fate of Lieut.-commander Kenneth Blair, Royal Naval Air Service, this squadron, flying SE No. 1411 in mission over lines about 21:00, is respectfully requested.

2. Your reply messenger plane will be honored.

HOOKE, LIEUT.

The Gallows captain crumpled the message up, with a twisted face.

"Inquiring for Blair," he told Stollweg. "I wish I could help him out. I should be honored. Delighted. Nothing could please me more."

"So he didn't get back," said Horst Stollweg softly.

"No," said Glick. "If he'd got back anywhere across the lines, they'd have a report by now. And if he'd landed or crashed behind our lines, we'd know it. Sunk at sea without a trace is the answer."

"Blair gone!" said Stollweg.

"It hardly seems real, does it, even when you say it?" commented Glick.

He straightened his broad powerful shoulders. His face had lightened. There was a grin on his bearded lips, and he hummed a bar of the Dead March.

"Somehow, that makes me feel better, Horst," he said. "I was sunk. Deeper than the bottom of the ocean. But after all, there's a lot of fun in being alive. It occurs to me, now that I think of it, that no matter what you do or what they do to you, there's always some way out of any jam. I'd rather be a live dog than a dead lion, I guess. The luck may have been running against me. But still I'm better off than Blair."

"Blair gone, *durch Gott!*" Stollweg repeated, like a man in a daze.

Glick's batman, old Private Klemm, had returned with his big Mauser and gun belt. Slowly and reluctantly Klemm handed them to the Gallows captain, with a question in his wrinkled anxious eyes. Glick shook his head and laughed.

"Thanks, Klemm," he said. "You saved my life."

He spoke in a jocose tone, but he meant it. Cheerfully and grimly, with the expression of a man who has determined on a course of action after much hesitation and doubt, the Gallows captain strapped the gun belt on.

"I've changed my mind about something," he explained.

In company with Horst Stollweg he walked out into the humid night. The stars were covered with a heat haze now. There was a feel of fog in the air.

"Come on back to the mess hall, Toni," Stollweg urged him excitedly. "The little brass hat has gone. Don't worry too much about him. Maybe some kind-hearted Limey night bomber will drop an egg on his dome before he gets back to headquarters. A hundred kilos of TNT would about fix that baby right. Anyway, whatever he does to you tomorrow, you can always get drunk tonight. Blair's gone! Let's rouse everybody out—have a binge. Wait until I pass the word. Come on, and we'll all pot out till the cock-eyed sun comes up!"

By "potting out" Stollweg meant each

man filling a liter can of brandy, and the last man to finish his would have to sign the bottle-steward's chits for all the drinks. It was a sporting custom of the Fokker mess. But Anton Glick, in his own mind, gave a different twist to the phrase now.

"No, thanks, Horst," he said. "I was about ready to pot out a while ago. But not just yet."

He left the gaunt excited Gallows ace at the door of the officers barracks. Feeling his way heavily through the moist summer darkness, he went on down toward the Fokker hangars, through the ghostly ground fog that was moving across the tarmac. He summoned the sergeant of the night duty gang there, and ordered out his ship, fueled to capacity.

CHAPTER IX

Death in the Fog

OVER the sea the fog was drifting. There were lowering clouds in the late night sky, sagging heavy and motionless above the black fleeing Fokker that was droning steadily northward. And now there was that fog also, which for the hour past had been moving in eerie ribbons over the water below.

Two o'clock, by the Gallows captain's watch. The latter end of the short black summer night. He had been at the stick for an hour and a half, flying straight by compass through the night.

Between the low, heavy roof of rain cloud and the creeping sea fog, the black ship with its skull-and-white-crow battle insignia seemed motionless in the night. Yet it was making knots. A quarter mile off its left wing, the string of low flat islands that lay there were steadily drifting by. A patch of land. An open sea space. And then a ribbon of low black land once more.

The scar-faced captain of the *Galgen-vögel* had passed the Hook of Holland at the Rhine's mouth long ago. Passed

Haarlem and Helder like a wild goose going north. Those long flat islands moving by off his left wing were the Dutch Frisians—Texel and Vlieland and a hundred more. Anton Glick had spent a summer in this neighborhood as a boy. He remembered obscurely its general lie. That water below him was the Zuider Zee. Beyond it, beyond the barrier of the Frisians lying to the westward, was the empty North Sea without an end.

Along almost this same course, though Anton Glick could not have remotely guessed it, a lost and battered Camel had come four hours before, thinking it was heading south, deceived by the low black shadow of those islands there on its left wing.

But Anton Glick had no suspicion nor intimation of that other ship which had flown along this same fatal course. For the first time in many months, he was in the air without the image and dread of the great dangerous Yankee ace from Kirchenhafen being constantly in his thoughts. Without watching every cloud for the silver lightning of Blair's wings. Kenny Blair was lost. And life seemed happier and more carefree because of it. "After all," he thought, "hell's no place for a gentleman, if Blair's checked in there now."

His motor coughed and strangled for an instant. Then took up its full loud beat again, so quickly that only a watchful ear would have noticed that dropped thunder. It was the fourth or fifth time it had happened, since the Gallows captain had been in the air. Some tiny bit of lint or wood splinter was lodged in the petrol strainer, he diagnosed it. No serious trouble. Just enough to make the big, powerful, trustworthy Mercedes give that rasping cough about once every thirty miles or so, like a man with a grain of dust in his wind pipe. It could be cleared out in thirty seconds on the ground.

All the same, he wasn't on the ground. He didn't like that fugitive cough. Nothing to be done about it,

though. Already he was a hundred and fifty knots or better from home, as the black Fokker flies. He must keep on.

THAT old head wound of his was troubling him. He had queer thoughts. In the wisps of fog that crept along the sea he half imagined at times that he saw ships steaming. Swift British ships of war, steaming up in battle line along the black flat islands. Time and again he had that same delusion. But when he looked again, there was nothing.

It was not quite time enough to meet them.

"Half a million marks," he thought speculatively. "That's only twenty-five thousand pounds in their filthy money. Would they pay it? Well, they ought to, and glad of the chance. Herr Fetter said they'd pay millions. And he would know."

The Gallows captain had only the half coherent words that the naval officer Fetter had gabbled in his drunkenness, to guide him in the wild goose flight he was making now. Yet for a man who knew something of strategy, and a great deal of war, as did Anton Glick, those gabbled words, penetrating into his subconsciousness as he sat brooding and half listening, were enough to give a picture of a tremendous sea battle now in process of making.

Racing up past the Dutch West Frisians toward Heligoland Bight, the drunken naval intelligence man had said, the British scouting fleet was scheduled to be coming in its swift raiding dash. Fetter had not named the hour when they were due to reach their objective, it was true, nor the exact point at which the great battleships of von Tirpitz's High Seas fleet were laying their trap to meet the swift light-armored cruisers and cut them off. It was possible Fetter hadn't known those details. All the same, with the amount of information which he had hiccuped, the rest of the picture could be filled in. It would be somewhere this side of Heligoland that

the trap would be sprung for the Limeys. And they must be well on their way there by now.

They would be steaming fast. Keeling up through the black night at better than twenty-seven or twenty-eight knots, over the low black tide. No wallowing dreadnaughts among them, to hold their speed back. All of them greyhounds of the sea—vulnerable, but fast as sharks. They needed speed and surprise to make the raid, and hammer, and get away before the devil got them. They would have the speed, all right. But it was the High Seas fleet that would be giving the surprise.

Ach! the thrill of it.

"It would be a sight to watch and never forget," thought the Gallows captain. "If it should happen. All the big dachshunds pouncing on those rats. Suddenly. Cutting them off from home. No holes for the rats to run to. All of them helpless, running in circles. Smashed, broken. Foundering one by one. And the big guns hammering them like tin cans, till they sank."

It was an exhilarating picture to imagination, for a German. For the moment he forgot that, if he succeeded in the mad and desperate venture which had brought him out over this far off water, the picture would be spoiled.

He ought to be picking up the enemy raiding force presently, traveling four knots to its one. Assuming that it had started from its base at Harwich at nightfall, just after the setting of the thin new moon. Going full speed, hour by hour through the brief black summer night as the tide ebbed, it would be somewhere in this latitude by now, strewn out with smoking funnels and boiling wakes in battle line across the sea.

Not inside the chain of islands, of course. Not in Dutch territorial waters. But out seaward, to the west. It was time for the Gallows ace to head for deeper waters. Watching his luminous compass, he heeled his black ship over to the port, forty degrees by the card.

THE long flat Dutch island that had been on his left wing drifted toward him and came sliding below him now. It wasn't one of the greater Frisians. Two kilometers long by a kilometer or so wide, it was little better than a sandy bunker standing against the steady assaults of the North Sea, one of the hundreds of obscure and nameless isles along that slowly vanishing coast, doomed in the next fifty years or less to be washed out beneath the tide. So far as the Gallows captain saw as he went roaring over it, it was not even inhabited by a solitary fisherman or any of the half savage and wholly murderous little gangs of sea-scavengers who sometimes took refuge from the law on the more remote of the islands, getting their living by salvaging flotsam and robbing the bodies of the drowned. No boats upon the shore. No chimney smoke, no gleam of light from ramshackle huts of driftwood. Fog in the hollows of the sand dunes. Fog creeping along the water's edge, with a hunched furtive look, like an old woman creeping down an alley in the night. The tide was dead low at this hour. The beach was strewn a hundred yards wide with weed and driftwood and jetsam of all kinds.

A dismal graveyard.

Cutting northwest across the sea-bitten little island, the black Fokker skimmed the dunes. On the farther shore there were long white comber ranks, thin and straight as chalk marks, breaking far out in the shallows and crawling endlessly up the shore. That was the North Sea itself ahead of the Gallows captain now—a thousand miles of empty water stretching north to Iceland and the fringes of the Arctic sea.

For the seventh or eighth time, as he headed out over that immense and stormy water, Anton Glick's roaring Mercedes gave its quick ghostly cough, and he cursed it, as if it had been a balky horse.

He shook his control stick savagely.

"Don't try any of those tricks on me!" he shouted aloud above his en-

gine's bellowing. "Whether you like it or don't like it, we're going on!"

Nevertheless, his heart had given a quick cold jerk in his breast, in response to the skipped beat of the big Mercedes, and for a long minute afterwards he felt numb in every limb. This was not the land-locked Zuider bay, with the Dutch shore always in gliding range. He had left land behind him now. Had left the continent and Europe. It was the cold black endless ocean in front of him. And he was not a seaman. He had a morbid and irrational dread of all big waters. He did not allow the sea to terrify him, yet God knows he did not like it. He did not like its smell. He hated its lifelessness and gray monotony, its silence and mystery, and most of all he hated the thought of the strange cold sea-beasts which live in the slime and darkness underneath, and which no living man has ever seen. Anton Glick's feeling toward the ocean was like the fear of ghosts that some brave men can never overcome, or the terror of a forest at night which affects many other men. It was not the same thing at all as a simple fear of death. It was an eerie strangling terror without reason. Glick himself did not understand it. But he knew that if the choice were ever placed before him, he would far rather be burned alive than drowned.

IF he had been able to, he would have climbed two miles into the dark night sky above that lonesome water. The air was his roost. It was never too high and thin. There was something in altitude, in being at the roof of things, which elevated his heart. Yet two hundred meters was the most he could do now. The lowering cloud began entangling him even at that elevation, and he had to edge his wings down fifty feet.

The water below his fleeing black ship was crackled with little wavelets, and occasionally a white-cap threw up its sharp quick crest. Yet it was comparatively a quiet surface. There was only a little wind in movement, just enough

to break up the long tangled ribbons of vapor that were condensing on the waves, and keep them from forming a solid blanket. It was altogether an empty and a ghostly picture. With straining eyes the Gallows captain watched as far as the dark horizons reached for some faintest smoke trail from the British raiding fleet smudging the low cloudy sky, and for the moving track of swift white foam that would mark hard-driven keels racing furiously to their unwarned death.

The impulsive and desperate decision which had suddenly occurred to the *Galgenvögel* ace as he sat brooding in his squadron office, sunk in thoughts of suicide and dishonor, and which had impelled him to hop off on this long lonely flight over a remote and desolate sea, involved a plan as simple in detail as it was bold and desperate. It was to seek out the British fleet as it made north toward Heligoland Bight, and sell it the information that its approach was known, and that a trap had been laid for it.

Knowing the enemy ships' course, it oughtn't to be difficult to pick them up. Once he had located them, he would have to drop into the water in a squash landing two or three hundred meters ahead of the leading ship of the formation, firing a signal rocket as he went down to attract attention. Pancaking into the water was the hard part. He didn't like the thought of it. Still, he could count on keeping afloat safely for eight or ten minutes at the least, after he had pancaked in, and probably much longer, with his now depleted petrol tanks to buoy him up. That would be ample time for one of the Limey ships to lose way and pick him up with a flare-buoy as she came drifting down alongside.

He could count on the Limeys being sure to do their part. They would not pass him by, leaving him there to founder and drown. Not as a humanitarian gesture necessarily, but as an imperative war measure, they would want

to get hold of him. For information. To learn why he was there. Once having been taken aboard one of the enemy cruisers, he would have to rely on whatever cold business ability he had, and on the Limeys' own shrewd sense of values, to bargain with the enemy commanders for a reward.

A half million marks and a free return to Ostend, if he would give them information that would save their damned precious gang of assassin ships from a trap and annihilation.

No less a price, no more.

IT would be worth it to them—and ten thousand times over. If they struck the bargain with him, they would keep it. Damn the Limeys, hide and hoof. But all the same, give the devils their due. They were good business men. They knew how to pay high and liberally for value received.

Half a million gold marks, and his freedom to rejoin his squadron in Belgium after the Limey ships had landed him in England. With the cash to pay off that damned staff general, and save his honor. Well, perhaps it was a queer way to think of saving his honor, Anton Glick admitted to himself somberly. But he would save the public breaking of his sword, anyway, and open disgrace. He would pay the filthy Jew pawnbroker off to the last pfennig, and then slap him with a glove across his dirty face.

"After all," he told himself bitterly, "after all, if there is any treachery in it, the dirty pawnbroker's to blame for making me do it."

Anyway, he was Anton Glick, and that meant something. No other man his equal in the air. He was damned if he wasn't worth as much to the Fatherland as a victory over a handful of Limey cruisers. He would make it all right as soon as he had got back at the head of his *Galgenvögel* flight, by fighting twice as hard, by bringing down four times as many of the flying Tommies as heretofore. And that wouldn't be so hard to do, now that Blair and his

sneaking silver ship were no longer to be dreaded in the sky.

His problem was to find the Limey cruisers now, and strike a bargain with them. Say the worst about the British that could be said, still they always kept their word when once they gave it. Even with traitors and spies.

Gott, what a hellish way to be thinking of himself! Glick of the Gallows Birds, a fighting man, turned Judas!

Still, he was choosing the better course, he tried to persuade himself. Better for Germany. Better for the honor of his squadron. He had been forced into doing it. He had rather be a live dog than a dead lion, as he had told Horst Stollweg.

But his thoughts were queer and confused. That old head wound was bad tonight.

THE emptiness of the waters below him, the eternal treacherous fog creeping on the sea, were beginning to oppress Anton Glick. There was something like a strangling grip not far from his wind-pipe, all the time. He took deep slow breaths of the night wind that rushed past his cowlings like a hurricane, but still that choked and strangling feeling only grew worse. He was making out farther over the water than he had expected would be necessary, zig-zagging in ten mile stretches northwest, then northeast and east. Covering the sea up along the Frisians. Still no sign of any ship. He had counted on picking up the steaming Limey fleet before this. It had seemed a simple job to locate a moving battle squadron composed of a dozen or more ships, if they were anywhere within a hundred miles of him. And it would have been simple, if he had had altitude and daylight. Yet in the darkness of the sea and sky, forced to wing low above the waves, he was beginning to be afraid that he might miss them altogether, even though they should go racing by within as little distance as five miles.

However, the end of the short black

summer night would be coming soon. There was no sign of it yet, to be sure. The eastern horizon was still completely black. But the end of the night was due to break. Not yet, though.

The Gallows captain was fifteen minutes or more out from the Zuider Zee and that desolate little dune-covered barrier island on his erratic course, when a tiny light came up over the sea, miles to the west of him. He sighted it at once. Laying his Fokker over on its ear, he cut toward the approaching ship like a hungry hawk down the sky.

The ship's light winkled, sparkled like a rapid star. It was a searchlight blinker on a foremast, signalling with far off code. Not a merchantman. A merchant ship would not be signalling with lights. Nor was it a German ship of war. None of von Tirpitz's great cautious sea dogs would be ranging this far to the westward, remote from their bases in case of trouble.

"There they come!" thought the Gallows captain. "And like the devil."

Below the horizon curve another searchlight, from another warship, sparkled dimly, following the first. Both ships were making on up the Frisian coast, as nearly as the Fokker ace could estimate their course. Perhaps there were other ships besides those two in the squadron, though they were the only ones whose lights Anton Glick saw.

They were coming on at nearly thirty knots, gleaming far off with masthead and running lights and lights amidships, as well as those shuttering blinkers. All dressed up like Christmas trees. He couldn't miss them. Across the low sky he raced toward them at nearly two knots a minute.

CHAPTER X

Marooned

THE moment and the event that he had planned for were near at hand, the Gallows captain told himself fiercely.

His heart seemed hard and tight in his breast, with excitement and suspense. From a half mile away he could see the dark outline of the leading warship moving on beneath the fog veils, its masts and high-built conning tower, its pitching bow that threw the boiling sea apart in two white ranks of spume, its lighted masts and midships lights shining eerily, and the gray fog ghosts drifting palely across its decks. The second ship a thousand feet behind steamed on in even line.

When first the Fokker ace in the sky had spotted their lights, they must have been seven or ten miles off. But they ate down the seaways, and four times as fast he went toward them across the sky. The leading ship was below him in four minutes.

With half throttled motor Anton Glick droned over, six hundred feet in the black air. Below him he could see the dark forms of men on the cruiser's decks pausing and staring up motionless, half curious, half alarmed, hearing that buzzing in the sky, yet not quite believing their senses.

The shuttering searchlights signed off their chin-chin on both ships. The pale beams moved up at the cloud ceiling. They felt around for the droning Fokker, haphazardly and awkwardly. But Glick knew all the tricks of dodging lights.

The fog wreaths rolled, and the ships kept on their even course through the black sea. The Gallows captain rehearsed again in his mind the act that he had planned to stage—the pancake landing into the sea, the rocket shot for help, the bargain with the British fleet commanders after they had picked him up. Slicing around in a tight boring spiral above those two swift keeling ships, he ran through again every detail as he had planned it, while half a second of time passed.

And he knew that it was entirely possible to do. But he knew now that he would never do it.

He opened up his half throttled en-

gine with a bellow. He pushed his black Fokker's bow straight down. He had the quarterdeck of the leading warship straight in his Maxim ringsight as he went hurtling down at it in a roaring headlong dive.

"*Zum Teufel, Ihr Gott verdamnte Engländer See-raüber!*" he yelled. "Keep on! You're going to get yours plenty! And don't mind me!"

HE knew now that he could never stand on the deck of a British warship—humbly, with bared head, twisting his helmet in his hands like a beggar—offering to sell the Fatherland for a cash price, while all the cold sneering Limey officers looked on at him and called him a dog to his face. No, he could not go through with it, though it was to do that very thing that he had made this long wild goose flight far from home over the northern sea. But it was too much against the grain. He could not stand the shame of it. He had his pride. A man never knows what he will do or be unable to do until he puts himself to the test.

"Go on, you sons of swine!"

He resisted his impulse to open up his Maxims as he shot down. He might have sprayed a few of those black frozen figures on the warship's decks. But on the whole he would have done the tough little fighting ship no harm, and himself no good. It was better not to frighten them. To let them believe that this unseen roaring ship of his was a far-wandering British naval airman from another detachment of their fleet. If he peppered them it would only warn them, and perhaps cause them to turn back from the trap they were running into.

Twenty feet high he rushed across the little cruiser's quarterdeck like a black wind, eating her belching smoke, and snapped over on his ear above the taffrail before any eye aboard her could have seen his battle markings. Shooting down to the sea, he went hurtling like a rocket low up past her beam, with

wheels that skipped the waves.

The fog wreaths rolled. There were bright reflector lights set over the cruiser's rails amidships, gleaming down over her black sides toward the water. And there on the bulge of her midships hull, clear in the light, a huge flag of horizontal stripes was painted, red, white, and blue. The Dutch flag. She was a Dutch warship. With that sister ship of hers behind, no doubt she was the whole cursed Dutch navy. Out on patrol, the both of them, with their lights and their conspicuous neutral markings, guarding the sanctity of their territorial waters.

Men lined her rails, waving their hands across their blind eyes, staring out through the fog at the black-winged shadow that went past them like a bat across the scum and heave of the sea. They shouted comical words that could not be heard. They blew smoke rings from their big peaceful pipes.

A pair of Dutch ships, that was all. And the ace of the *Galgenvögel* had come perilously near to making a fool of himself with them.

HE hauled his bow toward the sky. With an oath at all Dutchmen, Scandinavians, and other such peaceful fish, he zoomed with roaring club. Long seconds after he had streaked away like black lightning headed home, the waddling Dutchman awoke and opened up indignantly with a salvo of two bow guns. Wow-row! she barked. Like a fat sleeping dog, suddenly surprised and alarmed by some bad dream. Heading back shoreward below the cloud, the Gallows captain watched the fat outraged little ship and her tailing consort boil over in their own wakes, and go lumbering out seaward again into the fog, still talking back and forth with their searchlights, stuttering with anger, mad as wet hens. Till their lights went below the sea rim and they had vanished in the west.

A combatant warship, German or enemy, would not be showing any lights,

and certainly would not be talking with blinker code that could be seen ten miles away, Glick realized. They would be harder to locate than that.

And he was through with hunting for the doomed Britishers now. That old wound in his head had ceased to trouble him. Thank God that he was a German officer, and would not be a Judas.

He was far from home. Too far to make it back with the petrol supply still remaining to him. He had come on a wild and useless venture which had blown up, and it was time to change his course. It was solid land he wanted to see beneath his wings again, and nothing else mattered.

"I've been a fool," he thought. "A *verdammte* one."

Fortunately, though he was out of range of the Gallows field back at Ostend, he was in range of Germany itself. Norderney at the mouth of the Ems river, where there was a seaplane station, should be less than fifty miles away. He could hop there in half an hour, and be there by dawn.

He found himself planning ways to explain his wild night flight from the Gallows field. Perhaps he could invent some great heroic story, such as that he had pursued and sunk a British submarine, or something of that sort, which would cause his name to become suddenly famous over Germany, and make the money grubbing brass hat who held his I. O. U. afraid and shamed to bring him up before a court of honor for a Jew's debt. After all, there was always some way out of any jam, as he himself had remarked to Horst Stollweg. Generally there were several ways. The only trouble was, a man didn't think of them at first.

His financial troubles seemed to be growing less with perspective. He realized that he had overrated them. Even though he didn't pay, the worst that the emperor would do to him would be to give a reprimand, he decided. It wasn't worth suiciding to avoid that.

He was heading back toward shore.

The dark night clouds above him were slowly lifting, and in the east ahead he imagined that he saw the faintest pearl gray paling of the dawn. Below him, though the sea fog was closing in.

Again his motor missed. . . .

THE night was still so dark, the surface was so obscured by the gray vapor then, that the Gallows captain might very easily have passed over the shadow of that tiny sunken sand bar without seeing it. It was only because of the thin white curl of foam that was slowly washing up on its windward shore that his attention was attracted to its presence in the sea.

His big sturdy Mercedes had coughed again. No worse than before, perhaps. No differently. Still, he had decided not to risk it further without repairing it, if he could help it. He was looking for a lonely beach on which he could make a quick landing and clean out the choked petrol lead, and get away into the air again before the Dutch coast patrol caught him to intern him. A thousand or twelve hundred feet high beneath the lifting rain cloud, he looked overside and saw the dim white curl of foam breaking on the sea below, and curling back again, beneath the fog.

It was land. Whether the Dutch mainland already, or just another of the outlying Frisians, he wasn't sure. Still, it was the first breaking surf he had seen in half an hour, since striking out from the last island. He cut his throttle. With humming load wires and muttering club he went slicing down, on one wing and then on the other, to see if there was a beach that he could drop to, with a clear get away.

The fog was coming in like a blanket, a hundred feet thick. He had come slicing and slipping down on top of it before he could make out the shadow of the land below, charcoal black against the gleaming blackness of the water.

It was not the mainland. It was not even a real island. Just a long treeless and grassless strip of flat sea-washed

sand bar, not more than fifty feet wide and perhaps six or eight hundred feet long, exposed by the dead low tide, and soon to be covered up again beneath the flood.

Beneath the fog Anton Glick had got only a partial glimpse of the sunken sand bar. But it was not for him, he knew. He opened up his throttle with a slam of his fist, pulling his wings steep back.

"No, thanks!" he thought.

But this time the engine did not respond on the instant. The petrol lead had choked again, and at a fatal moment. Pfui! it coughed. The speed was spilling out of the black Fokker's wings instantly, and she was wobbling at the stalling point; tail down, with tilted wings. Wildly the scar-faced Gallows captain jammed her nose down to pick up flying speed. The crinkling sea and the black tide-swept sand bar were fifty feet below him. They came sweeping up through the fog at him like the side of a house, and his wheels were in the sea before he knew it.

Swish-sh! the water said.

ALL things considered—the suddenness of the motor failure, the fog and darkness, and the stalling position of his ship when it began to pancake—it was a quick and skilful recovery Glick had made. On two wheels he sliced across the waves. His tires splashed into the sea's edge and went rolling up on the hard flat sand, traveling fast, tail high. It was a flashing two-point landing, and he would have made it safely, and perhaps have gotten off again in due course, if his big Mercedes had not opened up again at that moment with a headlong bellow, as quickly as it had died.

It caught with a roar, throttle full open, while the Fokker's tail was high. She was skimming the sand like a sand-piper, with too much speed. She lurched forward on her nose with the first jerk of the club, tilting her tail to the sky. The propeller blade snapped off like a

matchstick, killing her engine with three coughs. Tail up, nose down, the black Fokker bore down on her broken club like an ostrich about to take a somersault. And she came within an inch of doing it. Her wheels left the sand, then settled back again.

The Gallows captain was flung against his belt. The snapping of the mahogany blade had been like the cracking of his own heart. That was all the damage he had taken, but he might as well have been a total wreck.

Marooned on the drowned sand.

The lonely sea around him, the fog wreaths rolling. Through the drifting obscurity there were shadows of men. Captain Glick was springing out heavily onto the sea-bitten sand, that was hard as clay beneath his boots, when he suddenly caught sight of those vague forms in the mist.

He staggered on his lame leg, catching his balance as he came to ground. He saw five or six of those dim ghostly shapes at once, within ten to fifty feet away from him. Men in striped jerseys, tattered coats, sea boots or bare-footed. The Gallows ace had a flashing retrospective impression that these shadowy forms had all been crawling across the sand, engaged in stalking some animal or man, when he swooped down into the midst of them on his humming black wings. They were just arising, as surprised as he was. They had all turned toward him, half crouching, stiff as stone figures. He caught the glimpse of matted bearded cheeks and glaring eyes. There was something odd and stiff in the postures of those motionless stony statues standing in the fog. And immediately Glick realized that most of them were carrying unsheathed clasp knives in their fists, with the blades turned toward him, and that the nearest one of them was lifting a shotgun in his hands.

"ZURUCK!" he croaked. *"Was geht's?"*

He meant to tell them that he was a German officer. That he was Captain

Glick of the Fokkers 44th. But he didn't have time for explanations. And they wouldn't have understood him, nor have cared.

Some one of them screamed an unknown savage word. Anton Glick had hardly had time to see them. He had barely got his feet on ground. The man with the shotgun snapped the weapon to his shoulder and blazed away from ten feet off. A red flash. The echoes roared through the fog. The zinging load of pellets went tearing between the Fokker's wings, and something stung the Gallows ace on the cheek as he dropped.

His lame leg had buckled underneath him before he saw the gun flash. And that had saved his life. He was reaching for his big Mauser automatic as he went down. All those murderous shapes were yelling to each other. His gun was caught in its holster. He jerked it out. Before he could get it cocked and leveled the whole ghostly gang were running like rats. Splashing out into the sea with swift staggering strides. There was some kind of a boat out there, about a hundred feet off. Glick could just make out a bit of its mast and sail in the fog. Screeching like pigs, the splashing shapes faded away through the shallow water, and there was none of them worth taking a shot at.

"Hello?" a voice croaked in English.

Up the sand bar through the fog a man in uniform loomed into view. He came at a staggering zigzag, with his head weaving from side to side. His black hair was matted with blood and sand. His broad face was white. His blue uniform with its brass buttons had been soaked and then partly dried on his body, clinging to him in wrinkled folds. He was wearing the gold wings of the British naval flying service on his breast.

He came weaving toward the burly Gallows captain with his stumbling feet and swaying head, with a big British navy Webley dangling in one lax fist. There was a fixed grin on his lips, like

on the face of a man blind drunk. And it was sure that he did not recognize Glick's uniform nor the black Gallows Fokker ship behind the German ace.

On he staggered.

"Hello, air?" he croaked, with his blind idiotic grin. "I thought maybe you'd find—"

The gold stripes and looped gold cord on his sleeves were those of a British naval commander. He was a prize bird. Anton Glick had never met the great captain of the Nineteenth Naval Scouts face to face before. But he had seen pictures of him, and he had no doubt of this man's identity.

"Blair!" he croaked. "The Zepstrafer!"

CHAPTER XI

Two Bullets

"WHERE the devil is this place?" said Kenny Blair. "The Dutch Frisians, eh? How far from shore?"

"Miles," said Anton Glick. "Maybe ten. Maybe thirty. It is what the Dutchmen call a Halligen, Commander. A sand bar. The sea builds it up yet, and then washes it away again next year. They are all over under these waters. Some of them never showing. Some that show a little at low tide, like this one. Now we are dry for a little while. But when the tide is full, it will be different."

The Gallows ace sat shivering on the hard wet sand, with his arms about his knees, staring at the empty sea while the dawn paled. He had thrown off the big, domelike crash helmet from his head. He buried his face on his knees a moment, and pulled at his hair with both hands, as if he would like to pull it and his head with it away from its roots.

"*Gott im Himmel!*" he said. "To wait hours for it to come in yet, and drown us like rats! I would rather be burning in a hot bonfire."

His English was good. Like most educated Germans, he had studied the language in school. There was only a faint guttural note in his speech.

"It was pretty deep, that's true, almost over my ship, when I splashed into it four or five hours ago," said Kenny Blair. "I thought it was going to swamp me sure, I'll admit. But it was ebbing then, and kept on ebbing. So maybe we'll ride it out again, if some help doesn't come before then."

"No help will come, and we will not ride it out, my friend," said Glick. "It is the slack of the dead low now. It is ready to turn again. And it will flood, and keep on flooding. Higher than it was four or five hours ago when you dropped in. Then it was already past its flood. But six and a quarter hours from now, at half past eight, high tide. The spring tide. Twice as strong. It will be above the tops of our ships, that wreck of yours down there and my good Fokker, and the sea will bury them both together."

"Old man sea makes strange bed-fellows," said Kenny Blair with a pale grin. "You and me, Glick."

"Alone on this last corner of hell with the great Kenny Blair," said the scar-faced Gallows captain with a bitter nod. "Undoubtedly it is a distinction."

"There's no other man than me that you'd rather drown with, is that it?" grinned the Camel ace.

FAR in the east the pearl-gray dawn was taking a tinge of rose. The morning fog was slowly lifting. It stood at ten feet high above the water in a white ceiling, and through its folds the clearing sky shone faintly blue, while storm clouds rolled away. Below the roof of low white vapor the North Sea stretched endlessly flat and glassy. It would be a morning of heat and haze, of water vapor steaming up over a baking sea. A burning, blistering noon, eventually, that would fry crabs upon the sand.

But long before the noon should

come, this little narrow strip of sand would be beneath the tide.

"Too bad you snapped your prop," said Kenny Blair coolly. "It's not a bad take-off here. And one of us might have got away for help then. Well, maybe some Dutchman or Limey will barge along, anyway, and pick us up."

He yawned, and once more felt the row of cigarets which he had laid out beside him to dry, though without much hope. They were still gray and sodden.

"I'd like a smoke," he said. "Then maybe I could think."

The dawn was growing rosy. The white mist steamed over the sea. There was no land in sight for fifteen miles, though the surface of the water was visible now to remote distances. Along the far-off horizons there was a narrow silver shine like the edge of a beveled mirror. Dawn mirage. Once or twice Kenny Blair had thought he saw smokes crawling below the sky rim far in the south, though it was hard to be sure because of the false water shine, and it really made no difference.

Except for the ancient little Dutch sailing vessel lying motionless and with canvas furled on the glassy, windless sea four or five hundred feet off the sand-bar, there was no ship above the horizon. And there was not apt to be any. This corner of the sea with its hidden banks and shallows was not an inviting water, and it was off the lane of traffic into the Zuider Zee. The little boat off shore was all.

IT was a moldy looking craft, black and oozing with pitch, half decked over, about twenty-five feet long, with a heavy, stubby bow, and a single mast carrying a fore-and-aft sail which was now furled. The tip of the mast pierced into the low-lying blanket of white fog that covered the hazy scene. The little boat did nothing. It lay there. Whether it was a yawl, pinnace, ketch, schooner, sloop or catboat, Kenny Blair didn't know. He was a sailor, but a sky sailor. He had had to acquaint himself with all

the details of ships of war and naval matters to qualify for his commission in the flying navy. He knew a British "Tribal" destroyer from a German "Cities" two miles up and ten sea miles away. But his knowledge of small boats and sailing craft was elementary. Even the scar-faced Gallows captain, with his hatred and dread of salt water, had a better fund of knowledge than he had.

There were no men visible on the ugly little Dutch boat. But they were there, all right. The rudder was moved softly over to starboard, and held there. Some unseen hand warped the swinging yard with its furled canvas halfway across the deck. Sly movements. No man in sight.

Motionless and lifeless the black boat lay on the offshore water. But Kenny Blair had the sensation of shrewd, desperate eyes fixed on him from behind the ship's black sides.

"What are they waiting for, Captain?" he said.

"For the tide to come over us," said the Gallows captain grimly. "They'll float over and fish us up then at leisure, like a couple of drowned rats from a tub. I think it's our guns they want particularly. Guns are the hardest thing to get. They've only got one fowling-piece among the gang of them, it looks like. Otherwise they'd have rushed us long ago. So they're willing to wait for the weapons. That's one kind of flotsam that doesn't often fall their way. It's a prize catch."

He shrugged, staring at the sea with his deep sunken eyes. The young Camel ace watched him curiously.

"What do they want the guns for?" Kenny said.

"What does any man want a gun for?" said Glick with a shrug. "To kill each other off in their spare moments, maybe. To murder any ship's small boat crew that might happen to be washed up on their beach, and that might be too many for them to polish off with clubs and rocks."

"Nice fellows," said Kenny.

"Sea-scavengers," said the Gallows captain. "Jail birds and army deserters. Riff-raff from all over the seas. They roost on the outside islands, and live off whatever the sea brings in. There're several gangs of them. They've got a language all their own. The Dutch authorities used to clean them up once in a while, I remember, and bundle them off to jail. But the Dutch have bigger troubles now, I guess. And maybe they've decided it isn't worth while. There are always more of those fellows, however often they're cleaned out."

He spat.

"They'll wait," he added.

"The sons of lice woke me up," said Kenny. "I'd been hanging onto my ship for hours, about frozen to death and half cuckoo. When the tide went out I just plopped down on the sand and lay there. Dead to the world for a couple of hours. I woke up, and this gang of ghouls and grave-robbers were all around me, looting everything they could from the poor old Camel, and ripping open my pockets. One of them had grabbed hold of my left hand and had a knife out. He was going to cut off my finger to get my ring. It's a real ruby, and worth dough. I suppose they thought I was dead, or they'd have run a knife across my throat to begin with, and I'd never have known the difference. I woke up with a jump and a yell, and grabbed my gun. They ran like rats in the fog. I guess they waded back to the boat for that shotgun of theirs, and were starting after me again when you dropped down like a bat."

He whistled softly, thinking of that gruesome moment when he had awakened, with the murderous ghouls around him in the mist. It was as near to an idea of hell as he could think of. And that's where he had thought he was at first. His mind was clearer now.

THE sea-scavengers' black boat was drifting slowly and quietly in some lazy ocean current. It was moving about a yard a minute down along the narrow

sand bar, toward the other end, where six hundred feet away through the mist the wreck of Kenny Blair's silver Camel lay on its broken wing.

"I could swim out and try to get their boat," Kenny reflected. "But of course they'd bat me over the head. And that's all the good it would do!"

"I can't swim," said Glick.

"Do you suppose it would do any good to take a couple of pot shots at their bulwarks?" said the young Camel ace speculatively. "Of course, it's out of decent pistol range. But you might chip some wood up, and maybe wing one of them a ricochet. If we scared them enough with a little loose lead, we might bluff them into hauling in and ferrying us to shore."

"I doubt if it would be very effective, unless you're a better man with a pistol than I am, my friend," said the Gallows ace somberly. "And I'm not bad. However, you might try it, and see what happens."

"I've only got two slugs left in my gun," Kenny apologized. "And if those buzzards did come in, I'd need them. I hate to throw away the last ounce of lead. Give them a couple, yourself."

Anton Glick's bearded lips twisted in a grin. He reached down and pulled out his big Mauser from its holster. Carefully he laid it across his knees, and unlocked the magazine clip, pulling it out. The clip was empty.

"I ordered my batman to clean my gun last night," he said. "I think he must have imagined I was going to suicide. He emptied it, I've found."

Kenny Blair whistled.

"A pair of bullets between the two of us!" he said. "We'll have to save them."

"I trust that you will save one of them for me, my friend," said the Gallows captain quietly. "In four hours. When the water has reached to my chin. When there is no more hope. I will regard it as an act of generosity. I will be your friend through hell. For I am a man who can face death in the sky

coolly and with equanimity, Commander Blair, as I think that I have proved on various occasions. But I cannot face a slow strangling by the damned rotten waters of the filthy sea. There's something inside of me that goes sick at the thought of it."

HIS dull and level voice had grown harsher and more violent as he spoke. His look as he glared at the keen-eyed young Camel ace was wild.

"I cannot face it, Blair!" he repeated, in tones of rising agony, half incoherently. "I ask you, don't let me have to face such a *verdamnte* filthy strangling!"

He was breathing heavily, as if already he felt the cold rising sea clutching at his throat. He seized the young Camel ace by the knee, with a bruising grip of his fist.

"Promise me, my friend!" he said. "Save one for me!"

"Oh, jerk out of it!" said Kenny Blair. "You're not drowned yet, ace."

However, he understood in part and sympathized with the stony-eyed Gallows captain's terror. He himself was afraid of fire, and always had his gun ready in the air, if his ship began to burn. Every man has his terrors.

"Your promise!" said Glick.

"Well, I'll be damned if I'd shoot any man cold-bloodedly in the head, to save him from being drowned," said Kenny irritably. "I figure that whatever way the Big Guy has arranged for anybody to pop off is the way you ought to pop. And not take matters in your own hands. Stick it out to the last. Still, I suppose if my ship was on fire, and nothing else to do—"

He picked up Glick's gun and looked at it.

"The caliber?" he said.

"Eleven-five," said Glick. "Millimeters."

"Eleven-five millimeters," said Kenny with a whistle, doing some quick arithmetic. "Well, that's the same as my old navy Webley .455 within one-thousandth

of an inch. So I guess that your big Mauser ought to be able to digest one of my slugs."

He had extracted one of the cartridges from his revolver. He weighed it in his palm, and passed it to the Gallows ace.

"A fifty-fifty split, old ace," he said with a twisted grin. "It's all I've got to give you. I don't advise you to try bouncing that off your head unless you mean it to hurt. What you do with it is between you and your God."

Anton Glick nodded.

"Not except in case of necessity, Commander," he said drily, as he slipped the slug into his Mauser.

He closed the breech and cocked it.

"Yes," he said. "It fits."

CHAPTER XII

The Scavengers

ON the southern horizon there was that smoke again, beneath the low white mist, far away in the false glimmering water shine that lay along the sea rim. It was not a mirage now. It was the smoke of many ships, moving fast eastward along the Frisians.

"Look at that!" said Kenny. "Don't give up hope. There's some ship bound to turn up yet."

But the Gallows captain shrugged.

"They'll pass too far away," he said. "They'll never see us. They're hugging the islands. They're doing us no good."

"I'm afraid you're right," the young naval ace admitted. "They're sliding by, toward Heligoland. And going like the devil himself was after them."

Crouching on the sand, he looked around the sky, with his keen blue eyes all wrinkled up. In the fading darkness of the west, as the dawn brightened, he saw now another ribbon of smoke trailing along the curved sky rim over there. It was bigger, it was nearer than the smoke ribbon in the south, for the ships in the south were fifteen miles away, but

the ships in the west were not more than six or eight. Slowly along the western sky in the cobweb darkness beneath the white mist roof, that smudgy smoke went walking on the sea like a cat with nineteen tails.

"Warships!" said the Camel ace softly, staring at the smoke in the west. "And plenty of them! I'll eat my shirt if it's not your whole damned High Seas fleet, Glick."

The Gallows ace looked over his shoulder. The ships in the west were hull-up on the sea.

"How can you identify them?"

"Why, the way they're moving, and the smoke they're making! They're all big ships, and they're not Limeys! That's a Hun battle line! The High Seas fleet is out from Kiel, and there's a big fight making up!"

"Those are the German ships?" said the Gallows ace, staring westward with somber eyes.

"You can bet your pants they're krauts, ace!"

"Then that must be the British scouting fleet in the south, in that case," said Glick.

"The British scouting fleet!" said Kenny Blair excitedly. "Steaming along as if they were in their own backyard, with all those big Hun babies prowling! Great jumping Jupiter, if those big ships of yours ever catch sight of them, they'll be cut off and murdered!"

"That's what our ships are out for, Commander," said Anton Glick with a cool grin. "That's the program."

Kenny Blair stared at him.

"YOUR scouting fleet is heading up for a raid on Heligoland Bight, Blair," the Gallows ace explained. "Quick and fast. Hammer and clean the Bight of all small ships, and get away. But they're not going to get away. Our big ships are out of Kiel. They're going to cut you off. They're going to hammer your sweet little Limey raiders with flatirons and big guns, till there's not one ship left of them."

Kenny Blair had sprung to his feet. "So that's what the devils are looking for!" he said. "They're hunting for the scent! In the name of the merciful, isn't there any way of warning those poor little cruisers to turn back before they're all hemmed in?"

Anton Glick grinned and shivered. He was remembering how he had thought of warning those Limey ships, and collecting a reward. He was glad now that he had not done so. Had not been able to do so. It had been a temporary madness in his brain, which had cleared away. He was himself again now, the true German soldier. And he would rather see a victory and die, than no victory at all.

"That's what the big ships are looking for," he said. "Perhaps we will be able to see a tag end or two of the slaughter, Commander Blair. It would be a pleasant play to watch—before our curtain falls."

Kenny Blair had staggered to the edge of the water. The tide had already begun coming in. The little sand bar which had been fifty feet wide at dead low, was now not more than thirty. It would be quickly covered, now that the current had set in. But the young Yankee ace was not aware of the ominous upward creeping of the sea. His eyes were on that smoke trail in the south, moving east toward Heligoland up the Frisian coast.

"The kraut's haven't seen them yet," he muttered to himself. "Can't see them beneath this mist. And still a little too far away. But they know where to hunt for them, and they're spreading out to cut them off. They'll have them cut off, too, in another half hour of steaming. They'll have them in a pair of pincers, between the shore and the deep. Then they'll be able to lay onto them with their big guns from fifteen miles away, and the cruisers won't have a prayer."

The smoke trail in the south heading east. The smoke billows in the west crawling south, and spreading out. In

thirty minutes—well, in forty-five—the German battle line of dreadnaughts would be stretched out in an impassable barrier of steel between the cruisers and their home. As soon as the dawn mist lifted them, the slaughter would be on.

KENNY BLAIR was a naval man, and he had a pride in ships. He had friends in the scouting fleet, too. Boys and men that he had known back home, in Chicago and at Yale. It was a hard thing to watch so helplessly.

Sheer murder. . . .

"Keel around! For God's sake, keel around, you half-witted fools!" he raved, pacing up and down the sand. "Helm over, and race back the way you came! You haven't got a quarter hour to lose. Ten miles more, and you're sunk. The big devils are after you. They're setting a trap for you! Back home! Back home! Scram, you fat-heads!"

He slapped his fists together with a crack in his helpless fury. He kicked the sand and raved. He turned with an oath to the sardonic Gallows ace.

"God!" he said. "I'd give my life for a ship that could fly!"

Anton Glick had arisen, too. He was looking at the creeping tide with dark lights in the depths of his eyes, and a tight grin on his bearded lips.

"We'll both give our lives because we haven't got a ship that flies, Limey," he said quietly. "You and I together, on the last shore of hell. It's queer. I've tried to get you, and you've tried to get me. But here we are together at the last. I don't know who the joke's on. Us, I suppose."

He looked at the smokes in the sky, and then down again at the tide at his feet. He grinned stiffly.

"Perhaps we'll get a bit of music anyway, Limey," he said, "before *that* reaches us."

"Oh, to the devil with you and me, Glick!" said Kenny Blair. "We're nothing in the game. It's those poor ships I'm thinking of. I'd be willing to drown

with a grin, too, if I were in your shoes."

"I'm not going to drown," said Anton Glick fatalistically, tapping the holster at his side.

They had forgotten, both of them, the ugly little pirate boat off shore, in the excitement of watching the tremendous drama that was being prepared by the far-off steaming fleets. The sea-scavengers' black craft had drifted down to the farther end of the sand bar, six hundred feet off, and had edged in toward shore at the same time. It was not more than a hundred and fifty feet out in the water when Kenny Blair swung around and looked at it.

"You're right, ace!" he told the Gallows captain. "We may not drown."

The sudden hope had come to him of getting hold of that black boat. The Gallows captain had also seen it. He had the same thought, too.

BEHIND the partial screen afforded by the wrecked Camel lying up at the far end of the sand bar, the sea-scavengers were evidently attempting a landing. Two or three of them had jumped out waist deep into the sea. They were holding the boat against the slow current and walking it in with desperate haste toward the shore. Kenny Blair did not think at first what they were after. He did not know. He only saw the boat, which was in possible reach now.

"Do you think we could get hold of it, Blair?" the Gallows captain croaked.

"That's what I was thinking."

"Both together, Limey!"

"Grab your gun!"

They started off with a staggering rush down the hard wet sand, the great lame Gallows captain and the wounded Camel ace. It was a ludicrous picture, but it was not ludicrous to them. It was a matter of life and death. To get that boat before the tide came in. They raced hard and pantingly on their toes down the hard sand, between the curling rims of the tide that were coming in at both sides upon the bar. Anton Glick

had forgotten his lameness, and Kenny Blair that wound in his leg which a Gallows ship had given him. Fokker ace and Camel king, sprinting shoulder to shoulder with gasping breath, their guns in their hands. But they could not keep the pace up. In a hundred feet they were stumbling.

The sea-scavengers had seen them start. With a wild, unearthly yell the men in the boat were piling out, following their comrades already in the water in a desperate rush toward shore. They were all screeching and waving knives. With splashing strides they came rushing through the shallows toward the wreck of the silver Camel, whose wheels were now in the tide.

"What are they after?" shouted Glick.

Kenny Blair answered their screeching with a blood-curdling catamountain yell. He waved his arms above his head threateningly as he staggered down the sand. He had drawn ahead of the Gallows ace by a stride or two. He heard Glick's hard panting breath and stumbling tread behind him.

"What are they after?" he shot back over his shoulder. "The gun! My Vickers! I'd forgotten it! I'd forgotten there was anything still good left on the ship! I'd forgotten—"

With the word he stopped dead in his tracks. He wheeled around at Anton Glick, who had also stopped. The thought which had suddenly struck him had likewise occurred to the great lame scar-faced captain of the *Galgenvögel*, by the same process of reasoning. Or perhaps it was that Glick had read his thought by a process of telepathy.

"I'd forgotten—" Kenny gasped as he wheeled around.

And Glick had forgotten, too. But Glick now suddenly had remembered. Perhaps he thought it was a case of Blair's life or his own. At least what he did was an act justified by the laws of war, in the circumstances. As the stocky young Camel ace wheeled around, with his sudden thought and the light shining in his eyes, with the word still

on his lips, Anton Glick raised his heavy Mauser automatic, and fired it point-blank at the wings on Kenny Blair's breast as he had thought of doing once before.

And this time the gun was loaded, with the Webley slug that Kenny Blair had given him.

THE big Mauser knew that it was loaded. The Webley cartridge was a bit too large for its barrel to digest, but it did its best. It went off with a roar that knocked the lame Gallows ace flat on the sand. The oversize cartridge, slamming its crooked way out through the barrel rifling, had thrown the muzzle aside as it went ripping through. It was a wonder the breech end of the gun hadn't blown off. There was a hole in the sand at Kenny Blair's feet in which he could have thrust his fist, and the Mauser was hurled twenty feet away.

Anton Glick sat on the hard wet sand, holding a shattered wrist.

"I'd forgotten," Kenny Blair finished what he had started to say, "that the prop of a Camel might be made to fit on a Fokker with a broken club! And so had you!"

He left the Gallows ace sitting there. Shouting and waving his gun, he went staggering on down the sand bar. The men in the water were hesitating, and one or two of them had turned back to their boat. From fifty feet away, Kenny Blair sent his last shot blasting into the midst of them, and ran on, waving the Webley threateningly, as if it were still loaded to the gills.

They were a cowardly gang of rats. There was one of them who had got winged. A nick on the elbow. He was standing knee deep in the tide and yelling like a stuck pig. His companions had turned at the slamming shot and were fleeing with their splashing strides back toward their boat. They passed the wounded man with howls and yells, pushing him aside and toppling him over in the water. They were scrambling over the boat's gunwales from all sides

in thirty seconds or less than that.

The wounded man arose with gasping splutters, and followed them last of all, still looking back over his shoulder at the bright-eyed young Camel ace who was splashing into the shallows, and still uttering his loud, inhuman bellows. In five minutes more the dingy patched sail was hoisted, and the sea scavengers' boat was crawling away beneath the mist in the grip of an unseen current, with all the human rats aboard it hiding below the bulwarks.

But Kenny Blair was not interested in them nor in their boat now. They could go their own way to hell. He was splashing through the shallow tide toward his submerging Camel.

The propeller of the silver ship was still intact. Wing smashed, and landing gear knocked cock-eyed, but the good red wood blade was still sticking its nose at the sky. Swiftly he got a wrench out from beneath the cockpit cushion, and set to work dismounting the hub locking ring and getting the big club off.

When he went staggering back up the sand bar again, with the club across his shoulder, Anton Glick of the Gallows Birds was still sitting on the sand, holding his broken wrist. The tide had reached to his feet by then, but he did not move.

The propeller fitted.

Snap her over with a roar, boy!

Anton Glick had got to his feet as the black Fokker with its borrowed club opened up and came racing down the hard narrow strip of sand. Staggering, he tried to throw himself into the black ship's course and wreck it, as it came roaring on. His shoulders were swinging, his knees crouched. He was game. A flash of his great body as the black ship came racing down the sand. But his spring had been too short. His lame leg had failed him again. He fell sprawling on his face, and the black wings went roaring over.

God knows what his thoughts were as he lay there—the Gallows captain.

CHAPTER XIII

Sky Signal

STRAIGHT down the length of the beaten sand Kenny Blair held her. Beneath his wing tips on each side the white curling surge rushed by. But his wheels were on the hard dry sand, and they were racing like an engine down a track.

He held her down, while the end of the sand bar came like the day of doom toward him, and the air piled up beneath her straining wings. He was at the end of the narrow bar, his wheels were plowing into the tide, before he lifted her. He laid back on her then, and he gave her that old zoom. She took it with a yell, and up she went.

Up through the thin, pale mist, into clear, rosy dawn sky above the sea. Heading south toward those racing smokes on the rim of the horizon. Down the line, five hundred feet above the mist and sea. Fifteen miles to go, in a ship that was doing a hundred and fifteen. Down the line with yelling Mercedes.

A fleet to be saved from slaughter!

The racing British battle line seemed to leap up above the sky rim. It came toward him sidewise over the curve of the sea—ten, twelve, fourteen mottled ships, racing five hundred feet apart bow to stern in a long wallowing white foam wake up the shore of the West Frisians!

White battle flags flying. Smoke trailing along the mist. Spume flying at the cut-water.

To Heligoland! To hell.

Black Fokker in the sky.

Black Fokker out of nowhere, out of the North Sea, out of the mist and the place where ghosts are born, black Hun battle crate racing like a headless chicken straight at that running battle line! Black Fokker coming out of nowhere, like black lightning down the sky!

Aerial attack! The Huns have spotted

us! The surprise raid's all gone blooey! Keel around! Hard starboard! Head 220! Back like the devil for home.

The battle line was doing a boiling ships-right as Kenny Blair came streaking across the mist. Starboarding hard, like a line of galloping cavalry swinging into platoon front. Still wheeling, still starboarding, with the foam hissing at their wakes, doing a compete ships-about, and bow to stern again, picking up speed and racing off to the west!

Racing off to safety.

They knew what a Hun battle crate in the sky meant. Where there was one, there must be a flock. And where there was a flock, there must be trouble. They knew what that black Fokker meant. At least, they thought they did. It meant a wireless warning broadcast to the shore. It meant the High Seas fleet getting up steam and boiling out from Kiel.

If they had known how near the great High Seas fleet really was to them, some of those fat Limey sea dogs would have sweated more blood than they did.

THEY opened up their three-inch salvos as the black Fokker came streaking up their battle line and diving below the mist. But they had no real A. A.'s. Not in those days. They had only the 3-inch secondary batteries for torpedo defense, and they couldn't throw a shell higher than their nose. Dodging those belching guns was like dodging a flock of puff-balls thrown by a battery of one-armed old maids, to a sky pilot who had tasted the juice of the Mary Hen.

Slam! slam! slam! slam!

Kenny Blair had had just time enough to scrawl a note on a scrap of paper torn from his naval aviator certificate, in the swift flight toward the British squadron. He rolled it up and jammed it into a chamber of his empty Webley, where it could be seen. Streaking low past the flag leader of the racing fleet, he bent the black Fokker over on its ear, and wrapped it around the cruiser's mizzen smokestack. He went shooting

down across her quarterdeck in the billows of her smoke.

Big stern-gun batteries below him. Torpedo tubes glittering with brass. An august British admiral standing frozen on one spot like a hypnotized frog, staring up with mouth agape, while his aides tried to rush him beneath shelter. Rifle men, crouching in the cover of stanchions and gun turrets, firing up with hot Enfields that spat without a sound. All the panorama in a lightning flash. And the black smoke and the white mist rolling.

Kenny dropped the Webley like a bomb. The admiral screamed silently. He fell over on his back on the white deck, and all his brass buttons stared up at the sky. The pistol had dropped in a scupper. The black Fokker went shooting away.

Keeling over, spiraling higher, boring up into the bright red dawn, Kenny Blair looked down and below from a thousand feet. They had picked up the pistol. They were gathered around it. Then they had found the message tucked away. They were reading it. And suddenly all running. Little black spots of men.

Enemy High Seas fleet 20 knots NW by W making S to cut you off! Scram, you poor apes!

BLAIR, 19th Camels.

Well, they were scrambling. Signal flags broke out on the halyards of the flagship. Speed cones dipped, and then went up again. In boiling line a mile and a half long the fourteen ships keeled twenty degrees to port. Bearing in toward the shore. Boiling back southwest along the Frisians so close their keels must have scraped. A line of as scared and frightened rabbits as ever scampered over the bounding deep blue main back for home and mother.

Kenny Blair headed around.

TWENTY miles away there in the northwest, the High Seas fleet was steaming on. Great battleships spread out mile past mile, with brisk destroyers

racing around them like brisk terriers scampering at the heels of cows. The German commanders had not sighted the running Limeys yet, though they had seen the black Fokker in the air, far off and coming on. Two of the convoying German destroyers stopped. They were launching seaplanes over onto the smooth glassy water. Spotting ships, to find the British fleet.

Black Fokker roaring down the sky.

There were four of those seaplanes, altogether. Black and white checkered Taubes. They were cutting the sleek dawn sea with their double pontoons and taking off as Kenny Blair's black Gallows Fokker came toward them down the sky.

Slow and happy clumsy Taubes, clambering up into the dawn. With that fleet black demon coming at them. *Taube*—that's German for a dove. But K. Blair of the 19th Scouts was English for Old Man Death.

Kenny Blair at the twin Maxims of the Gallows Fokker! Blair the Zepstrafer. Blair of the scouts.

He never counted on his record of sky victories those poor clumsy *Taube* seaplanes which he got in that red dawn, above that glassy sea. It was clay-pigeon shooting. They never knew what had happened to them, poor devils. There was one of them, the first one that he got, who lifted his arm and was shouting some grinning word of greeting as the Yankee ace came at him. Perhaps he was a friend of Anton Glick's, and recognized the number of the ship. He was lifting his hand, and then he melted from the sky.

Br-rp-rp-rp-rp-rp!

Double Maxims!

Blair of the Scouts!

Three of them, like ripe plums from a tree. The lightning hit them, and they fell. They didn't know what it was all about. Nor did the thousands of shouting, screaming, panic-stricken German seamen on board the dreadnaughts of that great fleet, who watched the slaughter in the sky.

Black Fokker bringing down innocent little doves, and all their feathers fluttering on the sea.

Kenny got three of them. If he hadn't, they might have spotted the fleeing fleet—not safe yet by any means. The fourth ship had sense enough to take a header for the ocean without waiting for the quitting whistle. It went down like a fireman down a pole, and hit the sea with a great white splash, and got its pilot and gunner out on their pontoons to hide beneath their wings from the demon Fokker in the sky.

Kenny Blair headed eastward into the dawn.

SIX miles away, the sand bar had disappeared. There was only a long thin line where the ocean showed green instead of blue. And in the middle of that green water a little speck of a man was standing.

Kenny dived.

Go down, and drop beside him, and give him something to float on, till a ship came by to pick him up? It would be a noble gesture. But they would be hanging Kenny Blair to a tall tree if they ever caught him, as sure as hell.

Dipping, Kenny passed over the great scar-faced man who was standing there in the water to his waist. Three times he dipped, and zoomed. That was for the German destroyers. They would be following him, investigating what was there. Anton Glick was staring up with his scarred bearded face. As the Fokker passed over for the last time, he lifted his hand stiffly in a salute. It must have been a salute to his lost ship. It could not have been for Kenny.

The destroyers were boiling down. They would pick the Gallows captain up before a quarter hour was done. Kenny hoped they would. He would like to meet Glick again. Wing to wing this time. In the air.

"I liked the way he tried to plug me," thought Kenny "He's not soft, that baby."

Black Fokker racing off southwest after the running Limey fleet, while the fog veils lifted and the sun came up above the world and over the glassy sea. The British cruisers were on their way now. Miles down the sky. Full speed ahead, forced draft, shovel in the coal, boys, and tie back the safety valve! In the northwest the great German ships had spotted them. For hundreds of yards around them the sea was punctured with towering white splashes of the German shots.

But the cruisers were on their way, and standing out to the open sea. They were rated at twenty-seven knots, but there wasn't one of them that wasn't doing twenty-nine. And nothing on the seas could catch them now.

Splash, splash, splash! came the German long range shots. From fifteen miles away. At the far sea's rim. But the big wallowing dreadnaughts were falling behind, and their salvos were missing by a quarter mile. The big splashes stopped in five minutes more, and the German smoke faded down the sea.

Kenny's gas was running low.

He came buzzing down the sky at the running Limey fleet. He wondered if they would pick up a poor foundered Fokker pilot. At least, he was glad to note that they weren't firing their batteries at him as he came roaring down past the long line, with wheels that cut the waves. He raised his hand, and they were all roaring at him. Lifting their caps and throwing them overboard. Dancing and shouting by the lifelines.

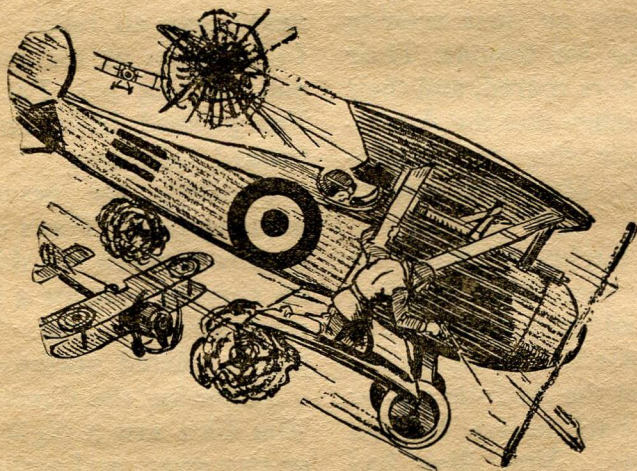
Shouting the name of Kenny Blair.

He thought they might pick him up. Anyway, he would risk it. He dropped ahead of the leading ship, squash into the sea, and the cold water came in his cockpit. He stood up on a wing, and shouted, as the big cruiser came boiling down.

Passing him? No. She was losing way, and dropping out of line. His ship was sinking under him when he picked up the buoy that was heaved over, and felt himself drawn aboard.

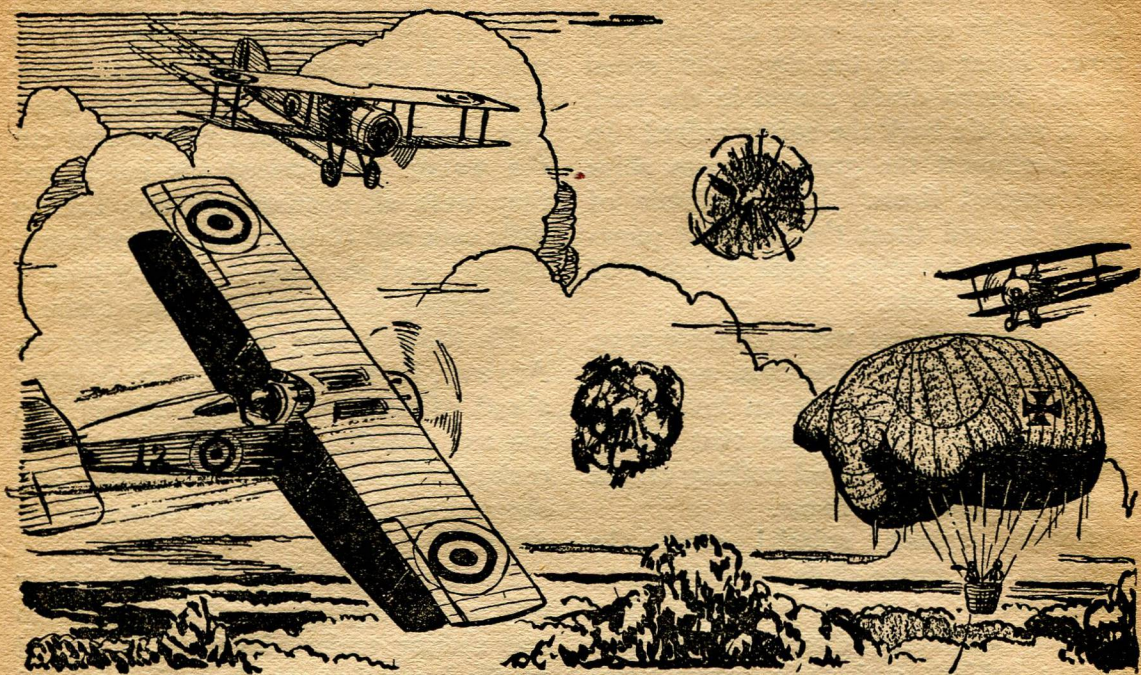
Away from England, on a solid deck. While Anton Glick's black battle crate went down below the sea.

THE END



On the Newsstands every 10 days: AIR STORIES the 1st, WINGS the 10th, ACES the 20th.

Spy Drome



By H. P. S. Greene

Author of "Flying Firebugs"

Cornered by a fat little spy, a conspiring squadron commander and an M. S. E. who rigged the Spad for a crash, what could Von Blon do? His last landing was on a German field, hands in the air.

A Complete War Air Novel

TEN sturdy little Spads swept along the Front on their evening patrol, looking for trouble. Their powerful Hisso motors roared, and their wires sang the challenge that the American markings on their wings mutely proclaimed to all ships bearing the black cross of Germany.

In one of the hindmost Spads sat Lieutenant Hugo Von Blon, tingling with the love of adventure and battle which he had inherited from the ancestor who had crossed the Atlantic almost a century and a half before to join Washington's Army. Von Blon had been with the squadron for a week, and engine trouble had kept him out of every fight since he joined. But now his motor was hitting strong.

It looked as if he would get into the next scrap all right. He grinned joyfully across at his former schoolmate, and lifelong pal, Pat Thompson, and Pat grinned back, and shook his fist toward Germany.

Suddenly the nerves of the Spad pilots tingled. There was no radio connection between the ships, but to keyed-up nervous systems a kind of telepathy often served as well. The leader of the patrol pointed northward, and upward.

Following the direction of his finger, Von Blon saw a flight of planes a mile or two away, and perhaps two thousand feet above them. Germans they must be—they were well inside the German lines, and the enemy anti-aircraft guns weren't shooting at them.

The Americans jerked their throttles wide, and pulled the Spads' noses up as they started after their foes, in spite of the advantage that the Germans had of altitude, and position inside their own lines. Von Blon jiggled around in his seat with joyful anticipation at the prospect of a real combat. But only for a moment.

As he gave her the gun, the motor roared full out for a moment—then something went wrong. It coughed and sputtered. It was missing badly. The needle on the tachometer dropped back below fourteen hundred revolutions a minute.

The other Spads drew rapidly away. Pat Thompson alone hung back for an instant with his friend, then, realizing that there was nothing he could do, he gave his own ship the gun again, and tore away after the others, eager to get into the fight.

Von Blon cursed with rage. Again the jinx was riding with him—keeping him out of the scrap. He jockeyed his throttle, and turned on his other tank. He pounded on the fuselage, and raved into the onrushing air until his hand and his throat were sore. No use—his engine had gone back on him again.

He watched his comrades catch and engage the Germans, who didn't seem eager to fight, but kept withdrawing farther into Germany. From afar Von Blon saw them careen and gyrate in the sky, and he saw four ships go tearing down, one by one, wrapped in the black pall of smoke which served so many flyers for a shroud, without knowing whether the victims were friend or foe.

Sadly, he turned his crippled ship and limped for home, with bitterness in his soul. He arrived at the field at the same time as the rest of the flight, and his heart sank when he saw that there were only eight ships left, including his own. He had a premonition of disaster which proved to be justified when they had all landed, and he found that his friend—the only friend that he had in the squadron, Pat Thompson—was one

of the pilots who had gone down in flames.

Tears of sorrow for his friend, and of anger that luck had kept him from being in the fight where he might have helped him, surged into his eyes, but he fought them back. He swore that he would avenge Pat the next day.

AS he sat at his desk in his office, a one-roomed building among the trees on the edge of the flying field, the face of Major Thompett, the commanding officer of the squadron, was set in cold, inflexible lines. The major had not changed an opinion in twenty years, which was one of the reasons why he still remained a major. He did not stir from his seat as the Spads of his squadron returned from their patrol.

It was part of the major's code to show no undue interest in the flyers under his command, and he sat motionless waiting for the operations officer to come in and make his report. He did not even attempt to count the ships, as they straggled in one by one to land.

"Well?" he demanded, harshly, when the operations officer came in at last, panting a little.

"We had a big fight, sir," the young lieutenant said. "We lost Wilson, and that new kid, Thompson, both in flames. We got two Fokkers before they got away, though, and want confirmations. Von Blon didn't get over," he added.

"Send him to me," ordered Major Trompett. "Tomorrow," he went on, "the dawn patrol will attack and destroy an enemy balloon which will be found near Domcourt. The observations made from this balloon are a source of great damage and annoyance to our Army."

"Very good, sir," the boy replied. He saluted, executed the perfect about-face demanded by Major Trompett, and went out.

The major was still sitting at his desk when Von Blon came in a few minutes later. The commander's lean, lined face was set.

"This is your last chance, Von Blon,"

he said, in hard, cold tones. "You have been with the squadron a week. It is my rule that if a pilot fails to get across the lines and give a good account of himself in that length of time, he is sent back to the depot as an inefficient officer."

"It isn't my fault, sir," cried Von Blon, desperately. "It—"

"In the United States Army, we demand results, not excuses," said Major Trompett, coldly. "Excuses are useless, and I never even listen to them, let alone accept them. You will have your last chance on the early patrol tomorrow. See that you take advantage of it, if you wish to remain with this squadron. That is all."

Von Blon felt crushed under the weight of his troubles as he saluted and left the major's office. The squadron commander's threat to send him back to the depot in disgrace was the last straw.

Many of the officers and men in the squadron seemed to look at him with suspicion and dislike because of his German name, and he was too proud to tell them that the men of his family had been citizens of the United States, and had served honorably in every war the country had fought since its beginning. He was becoming conspicuous because of his repeated failures to get across the lines, although it was no fault of his.

That afternoon he had seen his best friend killed, and had been powerless to help him. Now, he was not only alone and friendless in the squadron, but threatened with the disgrace of being sent away.

He went and sat alone on his folding cot at one end of the barrack which housed the flying lieutenants.

At the other end, the rest of the pilots of the squadron were emptying a bottle. Apparently it was not the first.

"Poor old Bill Wilson gone," said a voice. "There was a bird for you. Been with the outfit from the beginning."

"Yeah, an' look what they send up to take the place of men like that!" said another. "Kids still damp behind the ears, and bozos with German names,

who never get across the lines at all!"

No one paid any attention to Von Blon. He sat consumed by bitter hate, cursing everyone, above all the major who threatened to send him back before he could even avenge his friend, and prove that he had stuff in him as good, if not better, than the rest of them.

But at that very moment the squadron commander was having troubles of his own.

CHAPTER II

The Trap

MAJOR TROMPETT was sitting in his office, his hands gripping the arms of his chair, and his legs drawn under it, like a man at bay, as he stared at a visitor who was standing before him. The major's lean, brown face was drawn, the nostrils of his high-bridged nose were pinched white, and his hard blue eyes glared like those of a man who saw a ghost.

Without waiting for an invitation, the visitor took a chair.

He was a portly little man in the uniform of a French quartermaster lieutenant. His shape was somewhat similar to that of a bowling pin, for his circumference was greatest just below the waist. His short, tightly fitting tunic of horizon blue did not conceal the fact that his paunch sagged between his spread legs, and rested on the front of the seat of his chair. He had a fleshy nose, moist brown eyes, and his face was clean shaved, but he gave an impression of oiliness. His hair was black and slick.

Major Trompett forced himself to speak calmly, but his voice was strident and rough.

"Well," he said, "what can I do for you? I don't believe I've ever met you before."

"Lieutenant Politzkey of the French Army," the caller introduced himself.

"You'll have to excuse my brushness, Lieutenant," said the major, controlling

himself with an effort. "The war, you know. And then I'm sorry to say you reminded me of an unpleasant episode. Pardon me. What can I do for you?"

"No doubt it is of my cousin, Felix Haussmann, that I reminded you," said the French lieutenant, politely. "You had a transaction with him at Monte Carlo, I believe."

"Yes, to be sure," said the American, who by this time had recovered his usual iron self-control. "A regrettable occurrence, but all finished some time ago."

"On the contrary, *Monsieur le Commandant*—just beginning."

"What do you mean?" demanded Major Trompett.

"You may remember signing a certain document?" inquired the French officer, in polite tones, but with an evil smile.

Major Trompett remembered only too well. The happenings of that disastrous evening at the gambling Casino at Monte Carlo flashed before his unseeing eyes like a horrid nightmare.

On a brief leave, he had been intrusted with a squadron mess fund of three thousand dollars, to deposit in a Paris bank, and, arriving in Paris to find the banks closed, he'd carried the money along with him, rather than wait over Sunday and lose his trip to the Riviera.

For eighteen years the major had never gambled, since he had discovered that he was temperamentally hopeless when it came to games of chance. He simply couldn't quit while he had any money left. But the artificially gay and hectic atmosphere of Monte Carlo had been too much for him.

In a baggy suit of civilian clothes which he secured from a waiter who made a business of bootlegging such outfits to Allied officers who were not allowed in the Casino in uniform, he had lost all his own money, and the three thousand dollars of the mess fund besides.

When he came outside into the bright night of the Mediterranean shore, and

realization of what he had done almost unconsciously under the spell of the whirling ivory pellet swept over him, the major was in despair. He knew that he was ruined, his career blighted, his honor gone.

His hand went to his hip, where he had carried a heavy pistol most of the time for so many years, but it came away empty. However, a greasy little fat man who had been following him unobserved saw the gesture, and he knew what it meant—that the American officer was a broken man. It was his cue, and he acted upon it.

He accosted Major Trompett, and, with some little difficulty, persuaded him to accept reimbursement for his losses, claiming that the Casino was so patriotic that it would not allow an Allied officer to ruin himself there. And, naturally enough, he had requested and received a receipt for the money.

"Allow me to show you a photograph of a document bearing your signature," an oily voice was saying. It brought Major Trompett back from his vision of the night at Monte Carlo, the happenings of which had passed through his mind in a few seconds.

As he stared at the paper the man in French uniform was holding in his hand, the iron jaw of the major dropped, and his face turned as sallow as that of a dead man.

"Wha—what's this?" he gasped.

There was the writing of the supposed agent of the Casino:

Received of Felix Haussmann, agent, the sum of twenty thousand francs (fr. 20,000).

And there was his own signature, just as he had written it:

Wilbert Trompett, Major, U.S.A.

But the heading at the top of the receipt was changed. Instead of something in French about an "anonymous society of sea bathers," which was how the major translated the name of the company which ran the Casino—*Societe Anonyme des Bains de Mer*—there was

a reproduction of the German eagle, and words in German—apparently an address in Berlin.

"The thing I signed wasn't like that," the major gasped at last. "Why—the heading's changed. What kind of trick is this?"

"The skill of German chemists is well known," sneered the man in French uniform. "Ink disappears. Words are printed. It is childishly simple."

THE major was half way across his big desk when the unwavering muzzle of a small pistol in the other's hand halted him.

"A natural reaction, but altogether useless, *Monsieur le Commandant*," remarked Politzkey. "As I have stated, this is only a photograph, and the original is safe in a strategic place. I have no fear of you. I only drew my pistol to get time to remind you that killing me would do you no good."

Major Trompett sat back in his chair. He was as cold as a block of ice. A premonition of misfortune had swept over him when he first saw his visitor, but now that the cat was out of the bag, and he knew what he was up against, he met the issue as an officer should, calm and collected, as if he were on the parade ground where he had spent so many years.

"You don't object to my smoking, I hope?" he asked, coldly.

"Not at all," said Politzkey, after a slight pause during which he sized the American up closely. "I see that you are going to take the matter in the right spirit, and acknowledge your debt."

The major opened the middle drawer of his desk. In it were two objects—a long-barreled, forty-five caliber revolver, and a box half full of cigars. After a slight hesitation, he flipped open the box, took out a big, black perfecto, and shut the drawer again.

Politzkey, who had been watching him closely, smiled, and put away his gun.

"Well, you overfed little trench rat, what is it you want?" asked the major,

as he lit his weed, and exhaled a cloud of rank smoke in the other's face.

Politzkey winced, both at the epithet, and the smoke.

"You understand, of course, Major, that you are completely in my power?" he remarked, in nasty tones.

"What tommyrot is that?" Major Trompett asked, harshly. "Because you have a receipt, which you say I signed, made out to some rat named Felix Haussmann, on a piece of paper with some German words on it, what gives you the idea that you have any hold on me?"

Politzkey smiled pityingly, as one might at a stupid child, and explained.

"What do you think would happen to you if the original receipt, with your signature, was to reach your headquarters, with a full explanation—an explanation perhaps a little different from the one which I might admit here just between us two is the true one? A receipt for money which you received from Felix Haussmann, who is now known to the French to have been a German spy, and who has fled from Monte Carlo through Switzerland to Berlin, where he now is? A receipt on stationery bearing the address of the German Intelligence Section?"

"No one would ever believe that I signed such a thing," asserted the major, with more confidence than he felt.

"No? You know as well as I do, that if that paper came into the hands of your superiors, you might very likely be shot, you would probably be tried by court-martial, and you would most certainly be removed from duty and held for investigation."

"And how about you? *You* would most certainly be shot!"

"Don't worry about me," returned the spy, confidently. "Today I am honored as a Polish volunteer in the French Army. Tomorrow I shall be honored and rewarded in Germany for my work here, which is almost done."

"So you are a Pole?" the major asked, curiously.

"Partly, I believe," replied Politzkey, with a greasy grin. "I might add," he went on, "that your case has been gone into with true German thoroughness. If you should be thinking of suicide as a way out, let me remind you of the effect it would have on your wife and daughter, who are so very religious, and on your aged father, who thinks so much of the honor of his family. The disgrace might very well kill all of them."

MAJOR TROMPETT knew that the spy was not exaggerating. His mind was whirling as scheme after scheme presented itself to him, only to be discarded as some flaw fatal to the success of each immediately presented itself. The German agents seemed to have thought of everything when they set their trap.

"Well, what do you want me to do?" the major asked at last, dully, as if he was surrendering to the force of circumstances.

Politzkey cleared his throat importantly.

"The German High Command is well aware that your transportation in the Argonne has broken down," he said, "and that your communications are getting into a mess there. They also know that preparations for a drive against Metz are being made.

"They must have positive information, within a day or two, whether your Argonne attack is going to be pressed, or if it is to be abandoned for the present, and the weight of your Army thrown against Metz. In your position as commanding officer of an aero squadron, you either know that already, or can find out by a little inquiry among friends we know you have on Pershing's staff.

"You must take a plane, fly over and land inside the German lines, and personally give them that information, and any other that they may require. Furthermore, that information must be true. If it proves false in any particular, you

will not only be shot for a spy, but the receipt you signed will be sent to your headquarters, and the story of your betrayal of your country will be widely published—we will see to that.

"On the other hand, if your information is true, you will be treated as an honorable prisoner of war. You have your choice. On the one hand, an easy imprisonment for a few months until Germany conquers, as she must and will. On the other, death—and disgrace for your family, as well as yourself."

"It is impossible," said the major.

Politzkey shrugged.

"Very well," he said, rising. "I regret—"

"You do not understand. It is impossible—not because I refuse, but because I cannot fly."

The major scarcely did himself justice. He could fly, after a fashion, once he got into the air. What he couldn't do was to land.

The man in French uniform was incredulous.

"You wear the wings of a pilot on your tunic," he objected.

"So I do," the major assented. "I passed my flying tests in America on old, slow machines. But my eyesight is not so good, and I cannot fly a Spad. I broke up three trying."

"You mean to say, then, that in your American Army, they place men who cannot fly in immediate command of flyers?"

The major nodded.

"That is so," he said.

The man called Politzkey considered.

"Very well, then," he said, after a pause. "You must send one of your lieutenants."

"But how can I do that?" the squadron commander cried in agonized tones.

"That is your affair," shrugged Politzkey. "Order him, persuade him, bribe him—it is nothing to me. But—you have just three days to make him arrive, or your receipt will be sent to your headquarters. *Adieu, Monsieur le Commandant.*"

He walked backward to the door, and then slipped out through it sideways, with a sinuous, eel-like movement remarkable in one of his bulk.

THE major put aside the idea which had been struggling its way toward the forefront of his mind ever since the spy had declared himself—that of shooting the man down.

Officers do not shoot officers of Allied Armies with impunity. The report of the pistol would be heard, men would come on the run. Choking the spy to death would be little better, even if he could accomplish it in the face of the fellow's pistol. He would have the body on his hands, and the woods around were full of men. It would be next to impossible to get rid of it undetected.

Furthermore, the original receipt was undoubtedly in the hands of a confederate, who would certainly turn in the evidence if Politzkey disappeared. The major could see no way out. But he was determined to get clear some way.

He thought for a long time, sitting motionless. Then an idea flashed across his mind like a rocket across a black sky.

"Von Blon!" he muttered.

He took another cigar out of the box in his desk drawer, and lighted it. By the time it was finished, the office was quite dark. He went to the door, opened it, threw the stub of the cigar outside, and blew a blast on the whistle that he always carried on a chain hitched to his uniform.

In a few moments an orderly came stumbling through the dark woods.

"Light the candles, and blanket the windows," Major Trompett ordered. When the boy had obeyed, the major said:

"Send M.S.E. Deviney here."

"Yes, sir," said the orderly, as he saluted, and left the room.

Five minutes later a man entered. He looked every inch a bowlegged cavalryman. If he lived another fifty years, he would never be able to lose his

horsey look. His face was leathery, and he was black—and low-browed. But since he had followed the major he loved from the Cavalry into the Air Service, everyone had to admit that he had become one of the best mechanics there.

He saluted like a soldier of the Old Army.

"Did you ever question an order, Sergeant?" the major asked.

"No, sor!" exclaimed Deviney, with the same air of pained surprise he might have worn if he had been asked if it was true that he had murdered his aged grandmother for two bits.

"Would you question one—no matter how peculiar it might appear to you?"

"Certainly not, sor!"

"Very well. For excellent reasons, I do not wish Lieutenant Von Blon to get across the lines tomorrow."

"Very good, sor. He will not. Anything else, sor?"

"Don't injure him. That's all, Sergeant."

CHAPTER III

The Wire-Puller

UNABLE to bear the chatter of the other flyers, Von Blon left the barrack and went to the hangars as dusk was falling over the field. A dark suspicion was gnawing into his mind that there was a plot against him, that someone was working to keep him from getting into action. He thought he could trust his two mechanics. If not, he could at least hold them responsible, and prevent anyone else from monkeying with his ship.

As he came to the wide doorway of the canvas hangar, he saw that the last ship was just being trundled inside for the night, and that it was his own.

"Have you got her fixed up, Corporal?" he asked his crew chief. "How's she go?"

"We found the trouble. She revs over eighteen hundred now, Lieutenant,

Couldn't do better. One of the best Hissos ever I see."

"I hope she'll do as well tomorrow," said Von Blon, grimly. "Stay here, Corporal, while I snatch a bite to eat. I'll be back in a few minutes, and I'll see that no one tampers with her from then on." He turned on his heel and strode away.

"What's got into him, Jack?" the corporal asked his partner, the Spad's rigger, in wondering tones.

"I'll bite, Corp," the rigger returned. "Got some kind of a bug. All pilots are nutty, you know that. If they weren't, they wouldn't be pilots."

"Well, I'm just nutty enough to change places with any one of them right now," the corporal proclaimed. "I joined the Army to fly, and now look at me! Well, seein's he told us to stay here, I s'pose we'll have to. Only hope we don't miss out on chow."

"*We!*" screeched the rigger. "Where do you get that *'we'* stuff? You're just nutty enough to be a pilot, all right. He never said nothin' to *me*."

"He *meant* you, just the same, though," answered the corporal, warmly. "*I'm* the mechanic. All *I* got anythin' to do with's the engine. The rest of the ship's yours. I got nothin' to do with *that*."

"What's all this bellyache you recruits are makin'?" came a rough voice. "Never mind howlin' around here, or I'll give you somethin' to howl for."

Both mechanic and rigger knew only too well that the voice could come from only one throat—that of Master Signal Electrician Deviney. And they knew furthermore that they would do well to pay attention to his words.

"Lieutenant Von Blon told us to stay here and watch his ship till he came back, Sarge," announced the corporal.

"Watch it!" exclaimed the M.S.E. "Watch it! What does he think it's goin' to do—run off in the woods and hide behind a tree?"

"I told him I had it revvin' up over eighteen hundred, an' he says he's goin'

to watch her, an' see she stays that way," the corporal replied.

"Revs up over eighteen hundred, does she? That's good—if true," remarked Deviney thoughtfully. "What's the matter with him—is he worryin' because he don't get over the lines—or pretendin' to?"

The corporal, like most of the Air Service mechanics in the A.E.F., was intensely loyal to his pilot.

"Of course he's worryin' because he can't get across," he cried. "He's crazy to fight!"

"Humph!" remarked Deviney, doubtfully. "Maybe so. Well, let's have a look at her. Everybody gone but you birds?"

"Yeah; it's almost time for chow."

The master signal electrician took a powerful flashlight from a pocket in his coveralls, and sent its beam darting over the little Spad.

"She's sure turnin' up, if what you say is true," he muttered. "He ought to be able to go anywhere he wants, as far as his motor goes. But the riggin'—I don't think much of the riggin'. I'll just trim her up a bit."

HE shifted the flashlight to his left hand, and, producing a pair of pliers, he went swiftly over the ship's wires, deftly tightening a turnbuckle here, and loosening one there, whistling softly between his teeth as if he were currying a restive horse.

"But look here, Sarge," the rigger objected weakly. "I thought she was rigged right. She's rigged according to directions."

"Directions, bah!" snorted Deviney. "I can rig a ship by feel better than you can do by directions. Many a ship rigged by directions that wouldn't fly, I fixed her in five minutes."

The rigger was silent, for he knew that the M.S.E. spoke no more than the truth.

"An' there she is," announced Deviney, a moment later, switching off his light, and leaving them in black dark-

ness. "If she won't get across the lines, or anywhere else, with the motor turning up, an' the riggin' right—why, it ain't the ship's fault, that's all, an' you can tell young Mr. Pilot so for me. But if you change her now, an' she won't fly, after all my work, why then I'll have your hide, that's all!"

He faded out of hearing without further words.

"I thought she was rigged right," the rigger persisted, after the M.S.E. had gone. "The Lieutenant, he didn't say nothin' about the riggin'—only the motor."

"Oh, is that so?" inquired the mechanic, nettled by this aspersion on his share of the work. "I suppose you know more about riggin' than M.S.E. Deviney, eh?"

Before the other had time to dig up a suitable answer, Von Blon returned, a roll of blankets under his arm.

"You guarantee she's O.K. now?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, Lieutenant," the corporal said, confidently.

"You boys can run along to chow, then," returned Von Blon. "If she's O.K. now, I'm going to see that no one bothers her. Good-night."

"Good-night, Lieutenant." The two men departed wondering. They had never in their weird careers in France experienced such a manifestation on a pilot's part before.

Von Blon slept little that night. The dirt floor of the hangar was hard and rough, and the place reeked of gasoline. Two sentries met periodically outside, and exchanged rough and ready badinage before they parted again to walk their respective posts.

Von Blon went outside and smoked a cigarette. Clouds were sweeping in from the west, and in a few minutes the sky was overcast.

The pilot shivered as a wave of chill dampness swept across the field, and went inside and rolled up in his blankets under the wing of his ship. After midnight he fell asleep from sheer nervous

exhaustion, but before long the patter of rain on the canvas roof roused him. He dozed off and on uneasily until the dull gray of dawn came creeping into the big tent.

MECHANICS began to arrive, rubbing the sleep from their eyes, and looking at the pilot curiously. When his own two men appeared, Von Blon left them in charge of the ship, with instructions not to leave it unguarded, and took his blankets back to the barrack and made his bed.

Then, after a solitary breakfast in the pilot's mess, the celebrants of the night before taking advantage of the still drizzling rain to continue their recuperation, he wandered back to the hangar.

In the full light of the dull morning, the Spad looked rather lumpy and lopsided.

"Anybody touched her?" Von Blon asked, suspiciously.

"Not since *you* left, and, as far as *we* know, not a soul since M.S.E. Deviney went over the rigging last night," replied the corporal, offended by the nervous pilot's sharp tone.

Von Blon walked up and down, smoking cigarettes, then, feeling the necessity of doing something, he took the cartridge belts out of his two Vickers guns, and went over each cartridge for the fifth time since the ship had been assigned to him, searching for flaws which might cause a stoppage. He reflected bitterly that he had never had occasion yet to fire more than a testing burst. He wondered if he ever would.

The mechanics stared at him, and nudged each other behind his back.

Toward ten o'clock the rain stopped, and the pilots began to appear—to look casually over their ships, and glance doubtfully at the sky. The ceiling of low, dripping clouds barely cleared the tops of the trees, and occasionally gusts of fog would separate themselves from the clouds and dance across the field. There could be no flying yet, but the sky seemed to be getting lighter.

At noon the clouds broke, and the sun shot through to the steaming ground.

The Spads were rolled out to the line, and mechanics whirled their props. The motors roared.

The pilots hurried out to the ships, dragging their flying clothes. As the operations officer appeared at a trot, coming from the major's office, they began to shuffle into their suits.

"The balloon at Domcourt," the operations officer panted as he came up. "Got to get it!"

The first Spad started taxiing out, and four minutes later the squadron was taking off the field.

At first, Von Blon, from sheer nervous resolve, clutched his stick so hard that his knuckles ached. Soon he was clutching it for another reason.

The left side of the ship was growing heavier and heavier under the stresses of the air—rushing by and around the curving surfaces of the wings at a hundred and twenty miles an hour. The pilot had to exert his strength to hold his stick to the right, and keep his left wing up.

He saw little of the ground or the surrounding sky, and scarcely knew where he was. All his faculties were occupied by his efforts to keep the ship flying with the rest, and watch for the flight leader's signals.

After what seemed an interminable period of struggling to Von Blon, the left arm of the leader of the patrol shot up, then down—pointing. He shoved his ship into a howling, forty-five degree dive, and the others piqued with him.

All except Von Blon.

He had only a glimpse of the sausage-shaped quarry before his lopsided ship went into a lurching spin.

THE rest of the squadron charged down into the sinister black bursts of the high explosive anti-aircraft, the phosphorescent strings of flaming onions and the fast, heavily armed Fokkers which came up to meet them.

But Von Blon saw nothing of that. If he hadn't been a good pilot, his troubles would have been over then and there. The Spad spun like a corkscrew—straight toward the ground.

There are those who maintain that all the good pilots are dead. Many good pilots have died, to be sure, but it seems more logical to take the position that only good—or supremely lucky—pilots remain alive for any great length of time. And Lady Luck has limits beyond which she may not be forced.

Luckily Von Blon had plenty of altitude, and he went through a number of strange and unorthodox maneuvers, including flying on his back, before he had his ship level again. Then he headed back in the direction of the field.

As he did so, fighting with all his might to keep the Spad on a gingerly uneven keel, he wondered if it wouldn't have been better for him if he'd spun into the ground.

He'd failed again! He'd be sent back to the depot—a washout pilot! But he had all of a healthy young man's distaste for death.

He'd fight them all!

He'd tell Major Trompett to his face that his crates weren't fit to fly. He'd demand one more chance, and get it, too. His conscience, at least, was clear.

He found the field, and fought his way down to a safe landing. Then he taxied to the hangars.

As he climbed out and looked at the Spad, he wondered how it had ever flown at all. It had a resemblance to the corkscrew it flew like, with wings twisted up and down.

His angry eyes rested on M.S.E. Deviney, who was standing by, and he could have sworn that there was a mocking light in the chief mechanic's glance.

"Did you rig this ship, Sergeant?" he asked, harshly.

The other mechanics, who were waiting on the field, and betting as to which pilot would return, and which would not, pricked up their ears. Excitement promised. An argument between a lieutenant

and a master signal electrician with the reputation and experience of Deviney.

"Yes, sor, I rigged the ship, but afterwards, the Lieutenant spent the night alone in the hangar with her," replied the M.S.E., meaningly.

The old mechanic's standing was so high that it could hardly have been assailed by any flying lieutenant in the Army, let alone an unsuccessful newcomer like Von Blon.

The pilot looked around at the circle of faces. Some were derisive, some pitying, some skeptical. With a feeling that there was a huge conspiracy against him, the flyer turned silently away.

An orderly approached, saluting so carelessly that it appeared as though he were merely waving his hand.

"Sir, Lieutenant Von Blon will report to the Commanding Officer."

CHAPTER IV

Mission

"SO you didn't get over the lines today," remarked Major Trompett, with an icy glare.

"No, I didn't," retorted Von Blon, his self control breaking. "And, what's more, I defy any man to get anywhere with that crate you gave me to fly. She's rigged all wrong. She spun. Give me something that'll fly, for once, and I'll show you what I can do!"

"Ah, yes," said the major coldly. "I've heard that from washouts before. I'm sorry, but you don't seem to me to be very valuable as a fighting pilot on this Front!"

Von Blon growled angrily, and it seemed as if he might strike his commanding officer. But the major cut him off sharply.

"I have a very dangerous, important mission for someone," he said. "Perhaps, if you had the nerve, you might be the man for it."

Von Blon stared in surprise, scarcely believing his ears.

"We can judge only by results in the Army," the major went on. "I have a special mission for a pilot. The other pilots in this squadron have proved themselves efficient as fighters. You have not. It is only logical, if you have the guts to accept it, and carry it through, to give this job to you.

"I warn you right now that it will be hard. For a time, perhaps until the end of the War, if you live that long, you may be branded a traitor to your country. But you will, in reality, be doing your country a supreme service. You will enjoy a privilege which in this particular instance may be granted to only one man.

"On the other hand, on the record you have made here, I am justified in sending you back to the depot to be reclassified as something other than a fighting pilot. Which do you choose?"

Von Blon's eager patriotism carried him directly into the trap the major had laid.

"In spite of my German name, my forefathers served with Washington and Grant," he said. "Call on me for anything—anything at all."

The major unbent from his habitual rigid, unbending dignity for a moment.

"My ancestors were with Washington and Lee," he said. "I take it, then, that you accept?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good. You will report here immediately after dinner. I will coach you on a false report of our plans and movements which you, posing as a deserter, will give to the German Intelligence, after you have landed voluntarily in the enemy lines. I give you fair warning. If the Germans find out that you deliberately gave them false information, you will probably be shot. You will have to keep your mouth shut, whatever happens, as to the purpose of your mission, very likely until the war is over. Do you still agree?"

"Yes, Major."

"Very well, then. Be here at seven o'clock," commanded Major Trompett.

THE remains of the squadron came limping in, with four more ships missing in action, and with the report that they had failed to get the balloon. It was a vital observation point for the Germans, and they were protecting it with all the resources at their command, including two flights of about ten Fokkers each.

The squadron had had a bitter, bloody, blazing fight to hold their own, a fight in which one more competent pilot might have made all the difference. And one pilot, Von Blon, had spun out of the battle before it began. But Von Blon hardly noticed the black looks which the surviving pilots gave him. He believed implicitly what the major had told him, and he was exalted at the thought that he had been chosen for a specially difficult and exacting mission.

Hour after hour, that night, the major drilled Von Blon on the information that he was to give to the intelligence officers of the enemy, making him memorize the facts and figures which he gave him orally from closely written notes, until he could repeat every word verbatim.

"But—that's true!" Von Blon objected once. "Lots of the things you've told me to tell them are true."

The major looked at him with pitying contempt.

"Of course they're true," he said. "They are details which the Germans could not possibly help knowing. If you were to contradict such perfectly obvious facts as these, the enemy would know that you were lying, and then you would never be able to deceive him about the big, important things."

Von Blon made no further objections.

At two o'clock in the morning, Major Trompett tore his penciled notes into tiny pieces, and fed them to the glowing coals in the small tin stove.

"You'll do, my boy," he said, in approving tones. "Now I'll give you your final instructions, and then you can try to get a little rest."

He went to the door and looked out,

studying the weather, then shut the door again, and walked over to the large map which was hanging on the wall.

"If the weather remains as it is now in the morning," he said, "with low clouds just above the tree tops, you will take off, and hop hedges, crossing the lines here"—pointing to a spot on the map—"and landing on the field which houses the Fokkers protecting the Domcourt balloon which this squadron unsuccessfully attacked this afternoon. I hardly suppose it is necessary to tell you to make no hostile demonstration of any kind against the Germans. You must study your map carefully before taking off, so that you are familiar with every peculiarity of the terrain, because, flying low, you will have no chance to pore over a map during the flight.

"If it should dawn clear, we shall have to make other plans, which will, on the whole, be even more dangerous.

"But let me impress upon you that the hardest part of your mission is this. Never forget that if *anybody*—even your closest friend—should suspect that you are not what you purport to be, a voluntary deserter, you will not only stand an excellent chance of being shot, but it will nullify the entire effect of your enterprise. I will see that your record is cleared, however, and cleared with honor, at the first possible moment, which will, at the latest, be the end of the war. Good-bye, and good luck."

He held out his hand. As he took it, Von Blon looked into his commander's eyes, and what it was that he saw lurking there.

CHAPTER V

To the Enemy

THERE was bustle and activity early the next morning at the nest of German war birds near Domcourt, not far from the lines, in spite of the fact that heavy, foggy clouds hung close to the ground.

The attendants of the enormous rubber pig of an observation balloon were scurrying around it, preparing it for its trip aloft as soon as the weather broke.

Mechanics were grooming a flight of graceful Fokker pursuit planes to readiness to take the air to protect it. Artillerymen were oiling and polishing two big anti-aircraft guns, whose ugly snouts were thrust menacingly toward the dull sky. At various points around the field, mounted on tripods, were objects which were obviously machine guns, still covered with canvas to protect their delicate mechanism from the moisture which impregnated the air.

Two figures in disheveled khaki stood apart from all the rest of the men on the field except a dumpy, grayclad soldier with a rifle, who seemed to be guarding them. They were evidently captured members of the British Royal Air Force.

One of them, both of whose bandaged arms were in slings, and whose weakness and pallor denoted a recent loss of a large part of his blood, could have been nothing but a young Englishman of the better class.

The other, a freckled, pug-nosed man with a bulldog jaw, with dried blood streaking his face and tunic from a head bound up where a bullet had creased it, spoke to his comrade with an accent commonly associated with Sir Harry Lauder.

"Eh, laddie, and how much longer will they keep us here in this chill place, with never a drink to warm our bones?"

"Couldn't say, Sandy," replied the Englishman in a weak voice. "Not too long, I hope."

Suddenly he stiffened, and whispered.

"Listen! A ship! Sounds like a Spad—Yank, or Froggie, maybe, coming after that brute of a balloon. Nerve, eh?" He looked around, careful to reveal no trace of his excitement.

The Germans, working under the guttural, shouted orders of their non-commissioned officers, had not yet heard the sound. The prisoners' guard stood still,

with no sign of intelligence in his piggy eyes. He was either deaf or stupid.

Nearer and nearer the drone of the motor came. At a startled shout, the Germans froze for an instant.

Then some sprang to the covered machine guns, and strained to get them free and into action. Others whirled the propellers of the Fokkers. The noses of the big, gray cannon wavered, then began to lower.

But they were too late.

A SPAD hurtled out of the mist. Even as it appeared, the roar of the motor cut out, and the ship angled sharply down to a landing. No one could have mistaken the pilot's purpose, and the Germans held their fire.

The Spad hit the ground on three points, and rolled to a stop. As it did so, the pilot sprang out, and stood with upraised hands. A moment later, under the rifles of a squad of German soldiers, he was led away.

It was an hour later before he was shepherded back to the field, and placed under guard with the two Britishers. By that time, the clouds were breaking away.

The big winch which controlled the balloon was turning slowly, as it paid out its cable, and the rubber pig tentatively felt its way upward, "for to admire, and for to see."

The Britishers regarded their new companion with hard, suspicious glares. They saw a healthy young man in the choke-collared blouse which distinguished the American uniform.

"Didn't you come down here in full control, with motor going?" asked the Englishman. In spite of its weakness, his voice held a steely tone.

The American gulped painfully. He knew what was coming. But he also knew what he had to do.

"Yes, I did," he stammered.

"Swine!" remarked the Englishman.

The Scotchman was more loquacious.

He applied to the American a number of epithets.

As he finished, his red-haired hand shot out with the speed of an ant-eater's tongue, and grasped the American's wrist. He held it firmly while he read the name which was engraved on a small, silver disk which was chained there.

"Von Blon, eh?" he said. "One of your damned Jerry-Americans, eh? If I live, I'll see you shot for that!"

When his hand was released, Von Blon turned silently away. Not only was there nothing he could say, but he couldn't even blame those two gallant men, whose wounds eloquently proclaimed the fight that *they* had put up before they were brought down. No wonder, after seeing his voluntary, ignominious landing on an enemy field, that they despised him.

The clouds were breaking away. Directly overhead, the sky was blue and bright. The big observation balloon was going up, to be on the job with its observers of American movements, the moment they could see.

Already it was almost a thousand feet from the ground, but there were still clouds between it and the American line.

The ground men leaped to hysterical action, as another plane came diving out of those clouds. The engine working the cable which controlled the big bag of hydrogen reversed the drum, and the steel rope came rattling in. But it was far too slow. The attacking Spad was tearing toward the balloon at frightful speed.

Two streams of glowing, phosphorescent bullets were coming from the airplane's nose, and sinking into the black body of the gas bag. But it was still damp from the fog, and did not ignite easily.

The German guns on the ground roared as they hurled volleys of lead at the attacker. Some fragments floating away from the diving ship showed that it had been hit, but it came on, and its streams of tracers never ceased. The American *cocardes* on its wings could be plainly seen from the ground, where

the Fokker pilots were jazzing their ships to take off and avenge, if they couldn't protect, the gas bag intrusted to their care.

"I say!" muttered the Englishman, as the little raider, daring certain death, kept on its way. Already it was almost too late for the Spad's pilot to turn aside when the balloon burst into sudden flames.

But the American didn't even make an effort to turn. The brave little ship hurled itself onward, and disappeared with a crash of exploding gasoline into the mass of thick, black smoke, and dull, red flame.

The three prisoners looked at each other, aghast.

"Well," the Scotty remarked, after a pause, during which he spat carefully on the ground, "that takes part of the bad taste out of my mouth."

With a look of hate and contempt at Von Blon, he remarked, "I see there's Yanks—and Yanks!"

CHAPTER VI

The Test

VON BLON'S lot was a hard one from the very start of his mission.

When he swept out of the cloud above the German flying field, his struggle with himself began. In one swoop he might have destroyed the balloon which had defied his entire squadron the day before, and returned in triumph and honor to his home field. That is, he might if he had not been bound by his agreement with Major Trompett. But, as it was, he had to cut his motor and land, and he marched away to face *Herr Oberst* Schlegel, of the German Intelligence.

The German colonel was, in appearance, very much like an angry Muscovy drake.

His face was corrugated, and astoundingly red. His eyes were very small, and very pale blue, and his brush of

hair, which extended along the top of his head between two red, bald spaces, was of such a shade that it was hard to say whether it was gray or ashy blond.

His speech heightened his resemblance to the redheaded bird, for his voice hissed and crackled when he spoke.

"Z-z-z-o-o-o-o!" he said to Von Blon. "Oo are you, and why haf you come here —vot?"

Von Blon swallowed, and nerved himself to his repulsive task. He couldn't back out at that stage of the game, revolting as the whole business was to him. He looked around nervously.

"It must be in confidence, upon your honor as a German officer. No one must hear what I have to tell you."

Schlegel stared at the prisoner keenly. He must have been satisfied with what he saw, for he uttered a harsh syllable, and made a brusque gesture, and the guards who had been standing behind Von Blon turned on their heels and went out.

The prisoner began his carefully rehearsed tale.

"Sir, I am a German-American, named Von Blon. The other pilots in my squadron hated me, because of my German blood. I was treated unfairly, and thought of deserting. My commanding officer, Major Trompett, must have guessed my intention, for he called me to his office. He told me that if I was sick of the American Army, and wanted to desert, to go ahead, and he'd give me some really valuable information to take with me."

"Z-z-z-o-o-o!" the *Oberst* Schlegel breathed hoarsely to himself. "He hass done it then!" Aloud, he made a cunning attempt to trap the prisoner, if he were not in reality the traitor he purported to be.

"Of course you understand your Major Trompett's part in this affair? We hold evidence of his dealings with a German agent which would cause him to be executed, if it fell into the hands of American headquarters. It is on

condition that we suppress this evidence that he is sending you to betray the plans of the American hogs. You know that?"

With a supreme effort, Von Blon held every nerve and muscle steady. The German's statement was a frightful shock to the prisoner, because it might be true. There were certain features of the affair which had never been clear to the flying lieutenant. However, he resolved to keep his faith with Major Trompett, trust him, and go through.

"I didn't understand all that," he said, with hardly a pause. "But his purpose and motives are nothing to me." But from that time, a horrid fear that Trompett might really be a traitor, and he his tool, was always with the pilot.

The German Intelligence Officer was almost satisfied, as he put the prisoner to one more test.

"Speak, then," snarled Schlegel, rising out of his chair with a frightful scowl. "But understand this. If what you tell me is false, you will be shot! I, Schlegel, will see to it personally!"

Eagerly, Von Blon told him a story which he hoped was largely a tissue of ingenious lies. And, in reward for his daring, he was plunged into a veritable hell.

IN the prison camp, after the Britishers had told their tale about his voluntary surrender, only one man ever spoke to him, and that man only once. It was Dizzy Smith, who had known him at school.

"Come on, Von!" his one-time friend said, with real anxiety in his voice. "Come clean, now. Tell me the truth. I've always believed you were a white man. Tell me you didn't actually land on that German field full out, and spill your guts on purpose to the Boche Intelligence."

Von Blon's burden was almost more than he could bear, but he managed to choke out the words which damned him.

"But that's just what I did do, Dizzy."

None of the Allied prisoners ever spoke to him again.

He walked among them like a ghost. There was talk about giving him a coat of tar and feathers, but some difficulty was experienced in getting hold of the tar, and before anything was done, the German authorities removed him to solitary confinement for safekeeping. But even his warders treated him with undisguised contempt.

In his lonely cell Von Blon brooded, and hoped that he would not go insane. He prayed for the war to end, so that he might be vindicated in the eyes of men.

Yet, all the time, terrible doubt was eating into his mind. Had the major been on the square? Would he really clear him, or had the whole affair been a dirty plot from the beginning? The business of his Spad's being rigged so that it spun out of the fight had never been explained. Was the major a rotten traitor, after all? If so—but his tortured brain shrank from such contemplation.

And then the words of the German colonel would ring in his brain.

"Speak, then. But understand this. If what you tell me is false, you will be shot! I, Schlegel, will see to it personally!"

Von Blon's life was hell on earth.

He didn't notice how conditions were changing. In his dismal solitude, he didn't see that the prisoners were more restless, and given to bursts of riotous enthusiasm, or that the guards were losing the last vestiges of their former arrogance.

He was surprised when *Vize Feldwebel* Frickart, who had direct charge of the prisoners, came one evening and told him that he must come and report to the *Oberst* Schlegel at once.

The German colonel's face was so red that it seemed to exude sparks, and his tiny eyes were bloodshot and congested.

"Z-z-z-o-o-o! You lied to me! I staked my career, and the fate of the Imperial German Army, on the false-

hoods you told me, and I lost. You thought you were clever. Perhaps you were, but your cleverness will not save you now. Take him out and shoot him!" he snorted in German to Frickart.

THE man stepped forward hesitantly, but one of the soldiers shoved him aside, stepped up, and spoke insolently.

"No. The Republic has been declared. There will be no more shooting."

Schlegel grabbed at the pistol on his hip, but he was too slow. Von Blon did something of which he had dreamed ever since he first saw the German colonel weeks before. He leaped forward and crashed his fist against the red jaw, and the Intelligence officer collapsed.

The other Germans did not attempt to interfere, but stood jabbering excitedly among themselves.

That same night the prisoners began to leave, and no one hindered them.

Most of them went in groups, but Von Blon made the long trek to the French town of Nancy alone. His mind was in torment all the way. What did they believe of him back at the squadron?

When he came into Nancy, he was still in doubt as to what he should do next. He did not remain in that condition long.

As he was passing a captain of American Military Police, a harsh voice with a strong Scotch burr said:

"Arrest that man, Captain. I know him for a deserter and a spy. I saw him land in a good ship with full motor on a German aerodrome. I want to testify against him. And I have another witness who will testify, as soon as he is able to get here. He hasn't recovered from his wounds.

"Damn you!" the Scotchman shouted, shaking his fist in Von Blon's face, "I told you I'd get you, and I have. Followed you all the way from Karlsruhe, I did. Ah for one good poke at you now—"

The American M.P.'s took Von Blon

away, and locked him up, in spite of his protests.

"I demand to be sent to my commanding officer, Major Trompett," he cried.

"Perhaps you may be," returned the M.P. captain with cold and threatening significance. "I happen to know that Major Trompett is dead!"

Von Blon's heart went out of him.

HE was sent to Tours under arrest. After three days of mental agony, he was surprised when he was taken before a general, and he was astounded when the general shook his hand warmly, and slapped him on the back.

"I've been on the lookout for you, Von Blon," the great man said. "I want to congratulate you personally."

"Then—then—you don't think I'm a yellow spy?" gulped Von Blon

"Of course not, my boy," the general laughed. "If the word hadn't been overworked, I'd call you a hero—more of a hero than if you'd become a fighting ace. Major Trompett sent me a letter explaining everything that morning before he got himself killed bringing down that balloon at Domcourt."

"Did I really do any good?" Von Blon asked gently. "That German Intelligence colonel seemed to think so."

"Your work was splendid!" exclaimed the general. "I believe that your report was the final factor which enabled us to deceive the enemy and make him believe that we were going to abandon our Argonne drive and attack Metz. They removed certain troops, leaving various portions of the Argonne defended only by the difficulties of the terrain, and by machine-gun nests. I have no doubt that

your report to the Germans helped to save thousands of American lives.

"Furthermore, Major Trompett recommended that your work be given the greatest possible publicity, and that you be awarded the D.S.C. I shall take pleasure in following his recommendations in both respects."

"The German colonel said something about Major Trompett's having had dealings with German agents. Was that true, General?" asked Von Blon, hesitantly. "It worried me a lot."

The general frowned. Then he spoke slowly.

"You have proved that you can keep your mouth shut, and you have earned the right to know. The major had committed an indiscretion which served to put him in a bad light. The German spy, who was masquerading as a French officer, and threatening him, was caught and executed by us—rather summarily, I fear. However, the circumstances played directly into our hands, and everything turned out for the best. Major Trompett is dead, and we shall let him be remembered as the gallant officer who was killed while bringing down the Domcourt balloon."

Von Blon was still dazed by his unexpected salvation as he made his way out to the street. The general's remarks about Major Trompett and the balloon flashed back across his mind, and with them, the scene the morning he had surrendered—the diving Spad, which was enveloped in the flaming gas bag which it had destroyed.

"So that was the Major," he thought. "Well, he found a way to fly without having to land!"

THE END

On the Newsstands every 10 days: AIR STORIES the 1st, WINGS the 10th, ACES the 20th,



ACES presents each month in this department the story of a war ace. Here you will read the story of your war-bird idol. American, French, British and Italian aces will be brought to you, with some of the life history and war activities of these heroes of the air.

Victor Chapman

By EDWIN C. PARSONS

WAITING until the five Nieuports of the regular morning patrol of the *Escadrille Americaine* had finished their two-hour tour of duty, five of the black-crossed German planes confidently crossed the lines into French territory. Two Aviatiks and three Fokkers.

Boldly they went about their work of observation and photography, with a feeling of security from interruption. Unhindered and undismayed by the growling menace of the white French archie puffs bursting below them, they circled about at will.

Suddenly a single black dot appeared above them, forging steadily in their direction. A lone Nieuport who banked warily over their heads, keeping a close watch. Secure in their preponderance of numbers, the Huns paid him little attention. It seemed like sheer suicide for a lone eagle to even consider attacking such a formidable armada.

The demands of his work carried one of the Aviatiks a little apart from his escort, directly under the circling Nieu-

port. Like a swoop of an eagle, the Nieuport dived. The Lewis gun on the top wing blazed a message of death. The dismayed Hun, warned by the bullets that etched a line of charred holes in his wings, attempted to run; to slide under the protecting wings of the Fokkers.

Too late.

The keen-eyed pilot of the Nieuport clamped a steady nerveless finger on the gun trip. Forty-seven leaden messengers, a full *rouleau*, found their mark.

The Aviatik whirled crazily, shuddered like a stricken animal. With the hand of a dead man at the stick and a white-faced passenger coughing blood, it plunged to earth in long moaning swoops.

The amazed Fokker pilots immediately got into action. As the Nieuport dived on the Aviatik, they dived on him. Maxims and Spandaus beat a deadly tattoo. One of the Fokkers was painted in the flashing personal insignia of the famous Captain Boelke.

The Nieuport pilot was a marvelous flyer but he couldn't shake loose the deadly killer on his tail. Holding his stick between his knees, he frantically hurried to change the *rouleau* of the

Lewis gun on the top wing. Without it he was helpless; at the mercy of the black-crossed plane whom he knew would show him no mercy.

Bullet after bullet crashed around his head and into the instrument panel. Miraculously he escaped death time after time by a fraction of an inch. The fabric of his wings and fuselage began to look like a sieve.

Before he could get the *rouleau* clamped into place came the fatal bullet. It practically severed the metal aileron control on the right side, a foot from his head. Then it ricocheted and cut through his leather helmet, leaving a deep gash four inches long across his scalp.

Half out of control the Nieuport started to spin. Blood streamed into the pilot's eyes. He wiped it away as best he could with the back of his gloved hands, but the steady stream continued, almost blinding him. The Fokker was following him down, but the erratic course of the Nieuport made him a difficult target and the pursuer's bullets went wide.

The youngster realized that his only chance to avert a fatal crash was to regain instantly, control of his faltering ship. Calmly, he grabbed hold of the severed ends of the aileron control and held them together with one hand while he piloted with the other. Performing a series of acrobatic tricks with his crippled ship, the daring pilot succeeded in evading his pursuer, who, seemingly satisfied that he had sent the Nieuport to a fatal crash, ground up to rejoin his comrades.

Bleeding badly and still holding the ends of his broken commands, the American landed at the little field at Froids. There he found some friends among the pilots of a French squadron. His wound was dressed and he ate lunch. The mechanics wired together the ends of the aileron control and later in the afternoon, he flew the ship back to the *Escadrille's* field, by way of the lines.

He thought nothing of it; only smiled

and considered it an interesting event. The other boys wanted him to go to a hospital, or to Paris for a short rest, but he refused. Next morning, he was in the air again, hot on the trail of the enemy.

Such was the spirit of the American volunteers. And above all, in that amazing band of immortal heroes, stands out the figure of the man, who having attacked five Boche single handed and having his ship practically shot away beneath him, considered it, in all sincerity, merely, "an interesting event."

MOST of the American youngsters who enlisted in the French army, first in the Foreign Legion and afterward in aviation, did it from a spirit of pure adventure; a desire to experience new thrills, despite the hardships and the dangers they knew must be in store for them.

There were one or two notable exceptions. Men who enlisted from a real desire to be of service, to give unselfishly of themselves for what they considered to be a righteous cause, actuated only by the most sublime motives, even though it was for an adopted country.

Such men were certain to stand out above their fellows. Living, they radiated idealism and unselfishness; dead, their memories were a shining example to the faltering spirits of weaker brothers during those war-torn years, when killing and being killed stripped the thin veneer of civilization from the living bodies and metamorphosed them strangely into the gibbering replicas of their savage forebears. They were beloved beyond all human comprehension.

Such a man was Victor Chapman, *Legionnaire* and best-beloved pilot of the *Escadrille Americaine*, the early name of the *Lafayette Escadrille*.

Chapman was a big man in every way, physically as well as mentally. A man who didn't know the meaning of the word "fear." A man who never asked for the best of anything; who would attack five Germans single-handed

as quickly as he would one, a man who did more flying than all the rest of his comrades in the *Escadrille* put together.

A man whose artistic soul could see beauty in everything—in shell-torn earth—in ruined villages—in a sea of clouds—in the stark skeletons of fire-blackened forests. With that sense of beauty was the God-given ability to see only the good points of his fellow men.

Almost six feet tall, his finely shaped head crowned by an unruly thatch of thick black hair, deep-set sparkling eyes beneath bushy eyebrows, a generous mouth and white teeth flashing a constant friendly smile. There was a deep tone to his heart-warming voice, sincerity in every syllable that he uttered. A deep love for France was uppermost in him, with an unbreakable determination to do more than his share against the enemy.

Victor Chapman was the great-great grandson of John Jay, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence; his father, John Jay Chapman, the essayist and poet, has been called one of the finest writers of the English language in the United States.

Victor graduated from Harvard in 1913 and was a student at the Beaux Arts in Paris when the war broke out. With Bill Thaw, Jimmy Bach, Kiffen Rockwell and many other Americans who later distinguished themselves in aviation, he immediately enlisted in the Foreign Legion as a second-class soldier. He served in the trenches for just a year.

Mud, filth, gore, hardships meant nothing to him. There was an inner

flame that burned at white heat. Strange birds of every nationality were his constant companions and he was a friend to all. For over one hundred consecutive days he was in the front-line trenches as *aide-chargé* for a machine gun. He was slightly wounded once and half of his squadron were either killed or seriously hurt.

He was always doing something for somebody. They tell of a machine gunner of his squadron who came to him one day saying with a long face:

"I'm sick. The doctor has ordered me to drink milk for two weeks and there isn't any. They're going to send me to the rear and it breaks my heart."

"Don't worry," Victor replied. "I'll fix it."

That evening after "*la soupe*" Chapman disappeared. Several hours later, his section saw him returning, dragging a cow along behind him.

"I bought her so that you could have your milk," he told

the sick machine gunner. Now you can stay here with us."



Sergeant-Pilot Victor Chapman.

DESPITE his arduous services in the trenches, he didn't feel that he was doing enough for France. With the shells from gigantic guns exploding all around, taking pot shots at an occasional Hun seemed so futile. He wanted to get into some branch of the service where he could be brought into closer contact with the enemy; where individual efforts would count to a greater extent.

An opportunity came for him to transfer to aviation. Rumors had been

afloat for some time of the formation of a squadron of American volunteer aviators. Fostered by Norman Prince, it was about to become a reality. Victor got his Captain's endorsement for a transfer.

But the French were slow in arranging for the *Escadrille*. In the meantime, he was sent to *Escadrille* V.B. 108 as a machine gunner and bomber. This was a squadron of long-distance day and night bombing planes. On August 25, 1915, he made his first raid and incidentally his first flight, as *bombardier*. The big Voisons penetrated the German lines as far as Dillingen. Their objective was the railroad lines.

Sighting bombs in those early days was largely a matter of guesswork. Victor got the thrill of his life, to which was added a sense of great relief, at seeing the tremendous aerial torpedos that he launched hit squarely in the center of the railroad yards, creating enormous havoc, instead of hitting among the civilian houses which surrounded the railhead.

Coming back, the Voisons were attacked by a big enemy defensive patrol, but they presented an almost impregnable defense. Victor's ship was in the center of the formation and he never got a chance to fire on any of the attackers. They succeeded in setting fire to one of the Voisons, but lost four of their number and, disheartened, withdrew from the attack. It was his first sight of an aerial combat and made him all the more eager to get into action.

After thirty days as a passenger in the big Voisons, he was sent to the flying school at Avord. There on January 9, 1916, he was breveted *pilote aviateur*, taking his instructions on the old Maurice Farman, affectionately termed by the French "*cage-a-poule*" — chicken coup.

It had so many wires holding it together that the mechanics used to say that the only way to check up was to put a sparrow inside. If the bird got away, then there were some wires miss-

ing and they'd try to trace them down.

The American *Escadrille* was still in the process of formation, so with Kiffen Rockwell, Victor was sent to fly Voisons in the Paris air guard. There he stayed until the *Escadrille* became a reality and joined them at Luxeuil in the Vosges Mountains in April.

It was some time before they got their full equipment and Chapman chafed at the bit. As soon as they had ships, Victor got into the air and stayed there. He was a rampaging terror. He'd make a two-hour patrol, come back, gas up and off again, alone or with anyone he could induce to go with him. The first out in the morning, the last to come in at night. Meals grabbed on the fly and very little sleep. He didn't seem to know the meaning of the word "fatigue." The Captain and the other pilots tried to get him to calm down a little, but he wasn't having any. He gave every bit that was in him.

Shortly afterward, the *Escadrille* moved to Verdun. There the boys got some real action. On May 24, Victor, flying alone, found three Aviatiks digging their way into the French lines just north of the Fort de Douaumont. With his customary audacity, he plunged in to the attack.

He succeeded in crippling one quickly. Broken-winged, it fluttered down out of control into the enemy lines.

In the meantime, the two others caught him in a cross fire.

Bullets flew at him from all angles. His motor was hit in a dozen places, but still kept running. His flying clothes gave little jumps from time to time as the flying lead passed through the slack. One bullet creased his arm, but he wasn't even aware of the wound until he returned.

His gun jammed and he made a perfect target for his attackers as he was forced to stand up in the cockpit to disengage it. Despite the odds, he out-flew the two Huns and drove them back into their lines, following them nearly to the ground. He had to let them go

only when his fuel gauge showed that he was nearly out of gas.

Triumphantly, he returned to the field to have his arm dressed, service up and go right out again. Meanwhile, excited reports from artillery and infantry observers poured in, witnesses of his bravery in attacking the three Huns single handed and driving them to earth. Checking up their reports with his very modest one, the truth came out and resulted in his first citation, giving him the *Croix de Guerre* with palm.

Chapman, Victor, Corporal Pilot of the Escadrille 124.

American citizen voluntarily engaged for the duration of the war. A pilot remarkable for his audacity in dashing in to attack enemy planes, no matter their number and no matter what altitude. The 24th of May alone attacked three German planes; fought a marvelous combat in the course of which he had his clothes pierced by several bullets and was wounded in the arm.

TO Chapman it was a game and he played it like a true sportsman. The plaudits of the crowd meant nothing. A graphic paragraph from a letter to his father on June 1 shows the way he felt about his extraordinary feats.

This morning we all started off at three, and, not having made concise enough arrangements, got separated in the morning mist. I found Prince, however, and we went to Douaumont where we found two German reglage machines unprotected and fell upon them.

A skirmish, a spitting of guns, and we drew away. It had been badly executed, that maneuver.

But ho! Another Boche heading for Verdun. Taking the direction stick between my knees I tussled and fought with the *mitrailleuse* and finally charged the *rouleau*, all the while eyeing my Boche and moving across Vaux towards Etain. I had no altitude with which to overtake him, but a little more speed. So I got behind his tail and spat till he dived into his own territory.

Having lost Norman, I made a tour to the Argonne and on the way back saw another fat Boche. No protection machine in sight. I swooped, swerved to the right, to the left, almost lost, but then came up under his lee keel by the stern. (It's the one position they cannot shoot from.) I seemed a dory alongside a schooner. I pulled up my nose to let him have it. *Crr-Crr-Crr*—a cartridge jammed in the barrel. He jumped like a frog and fled down to his grounds.

Later in the morning, I made another stroll along the lines. Met a flock of Nieuports and saw across the way a squad of white-winged L. V. G. How like a game of Prisoner's Base it all is! I scurry out in company and they run away. They come into my territory and I, being alone, take to my heels. They did come after me once, too! Faster they are than I, but I had height so they could but leer up at me with their dead white wings and black crosses like sharks, and they returned to their own domain.

Victor was wounded in the head on June 17, when his commands were severed, but refused to stop flying for even a day. Wearing a white bandage instead of a helmet, he continued to range the lines.

On June 18, Clyde Balsley, another member of the *Escadrille*, was grievously wounded. Struck in the hip by a dum-dum bullet, which mushroomed as it hit the bone, Clyde by a great display of bravery managed to land his ship inside the French lines. He was taken to the hospital at Vatlincourt.

Victor, with his sympathetic nature, was a constant visitor. He flew over to see Balsley at least once, sometimes twice a day. He learned that champagne or oranges would hasten the youngster's recovery. He made arrangements for the champagne and swore that Balsley should have oranges if he had to fly to Paris to get them.

He found the oranges and on the morning of June 23 put a bag of them in his ship to take to Clyde. They never arrived.

Just as he was leaving for the hospital, Captain Thenault, Lufbery and Prince started out on patrol. Victor planned to follow them for a while, then take his gift to Balsley. The three flyers spotted two L.V.G.s almost as soon as they got to the lines.

The captain attacked, followed by Prince and Luf. It turned out to be a sort of trap. Three Fokkers sitting overhead dove on the American formation. They were badly outnumbered and forced to run for safety. Chapman, some way behind, saw their trouble and plunged in to help them. The other

three never knew he was there and succeeded in making their way to the French lines unharmed. The odds were five to one against Victor, but he never hesitated for a second. He plunged into their midst.

The whole pack turned on him and caught him in a vicious circle from which there was no escape. A deadly cross fire raked his ship from all sides. Without ever pulling out from his first dive, his ship dashed toward the ground full motor. It went to pieces in the air before it hit.

The storm of bullets had cut several of the flying wires and Chapman himself received a ball through the head. As he slumped forward, he fell on the stick. The tiny Nieuport roared uncontrolled for the torn-up carpet, straight as an arrow. Weakened by the missing wires, the sturdy little ship was unable to stand the air pressure of that screaming dive and collapsed.

But Victor died as he had lived. A glorious death, "*face a l'ennemi*," for a great cause and to save a friend.

THE formation returned to the air-drome, unaware of the tragedy, believing that Chapman was at the hospital with Balsley. A Farman pilot, who had seen the fight from afar, telephoned that evening that when the three Nieuports were attacked, a fourth had plunged into the fray and gone to a glorious end. It was a week before the full truth was known and caused ineffable sadness in the *Escadrille*. Chapman received a wonderful posthumous citation.

Chapman, Victor, *Sergent Pilot* of the *Escadrille* 124.

A pursuit pilot who was a model of audacity, of energy and of spirit and forced the admiration of his comrades in the *Escadrille*. Seriously wounded in the head, June 17, he asked not to interrupt his service. Several days later, he threw himself forward to attack several enemy aeroplanes and found a glorious death in the course of the struggle.

Through a curious coincidence, Chapman was buried in the German lines under the name of Clyde Balsley and

remained lost for four years. The pilots carried no orders or identification of any sort, but Victor was carrying a letter from Chouteau Johnson addressed to "Clyde Balsley, American Aviator, Vatlincourt Hospital," when he fell to his death. No one was ever able to find Victor's grave or any trace of his body. It was a great mystery.

Then in 1921, Frederick Zinn, an old comrade of Victor's in the Legion, who had been given a majority in the American Army, was sent to Germany as head of the American Mission for locating the graves of American aviators fallen in enemy territory.

After a long search, he came across a grave near the mouldering wreckage of a Nieuport. On the weatherbeaten cross, almost obliterated by time and the elements, he deciphered the name of Clyde Balsley, together with the date, June 23, 1916.

The mystery was solved. It was the last resting place of Victor Chapman. His body now occupies coffin number one in the crypt of the beautiful Lafayette Memorial at Villeneuve l'Etang near Paris.

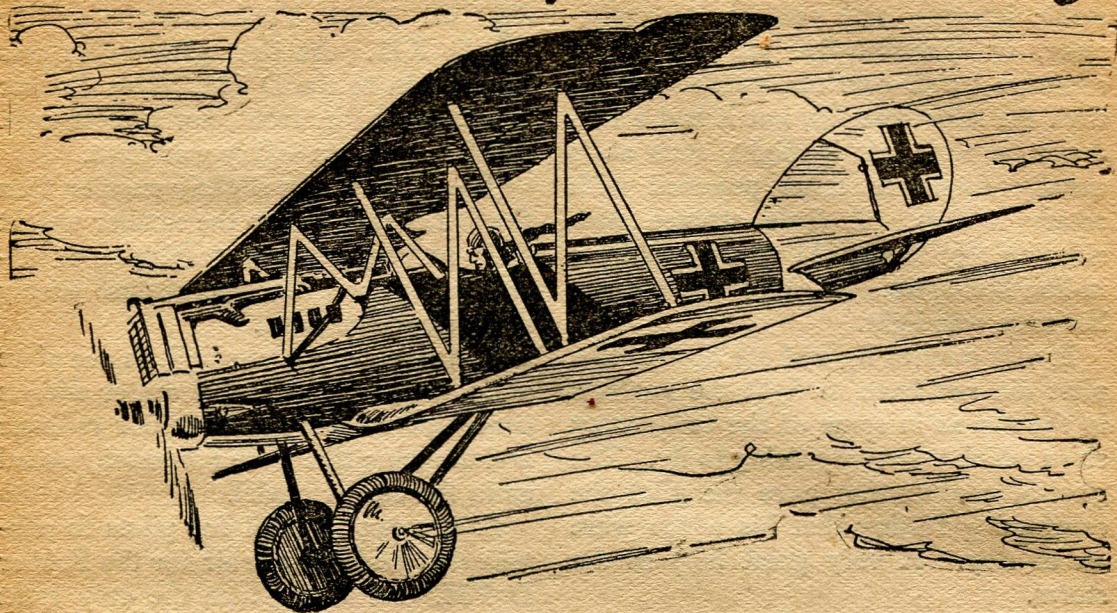
The Germans, through Major Zinn, returned to Chapman's father all that Victor had on his person, including five hundred francs in money and the fatal letter.

It is a wonderful memory of a brave man that Victor Chapman left behind him. Kiffen Rockwell, his best friend and closest confidant at the Front, who was so soon to meet his own tragic death at the guns of the enemy flyers, wrote to Victor's parents—

"He died the more glorious death and at the most glorious time of life to die, especially for him with his ideals. I have never once regretted it for him, as I know that he was willing and satisfied to give his life that way if it was necessary and that he had no fear of death and there is nothing to fear in death. You must not feel sorry, but must feel proud and happy."

Could there be a finer tribute?

Planes of Destiny



This craft was flying high, wide and handsome when the Armistice rolled down the curtain. It's the Pfalz D X11.

No. 16 The Pfalz

By
Captain Robert Dale

“WHILE flying at twelve thousand feet over Fleurville I was attacked by enemy aircraft of new design. Believe this plane to be a new type Pfalz.” Many an Allied pilot's combat report read like that.

For some reason or other every strange ship bearing the black cross of Germany that was spotted over the lines was, “believed to be a new type of Pfalz.”

As a matter of fact the Pfalz works did turn out almost every type of scout ship, from a monoplane not unlike the Fokker—except that it mounted two forward guns—to a triplane that was a compromise in design between the Fokker type and the experimental three

winged Sopwith. Unlike most of the Pfalz ships, this type was powered with a rotary motor.

The Pfalz scout that most war pilots remember as being the most common was the D 111, a sweet little streamlined ship with a cigar-shaped fuselage. To carry the streamline effect right back from the spinner cap the radiator was placed in the top wing center section. It had a snout like a racing grayhound.

This type was powered with a Mercedes one-sixty horse engine and carried two Spandau machine guns mounted on the cowlings and synchronized to fire through the prop.

While the absolute ceiling for this ship was estimated at 17,000 feet, it was generally conceded that her actual ceiling was about 15,000. Her top speed at that height was ninety-three miles an hour. But at ten thousand feet she could hold a speed of one hundred and three miles an hour in level flight.

Her rate of climb was one hundred and ten feet a minute and she could hold this almost to her service ceiling. The

D 111 carried twenty-one and a half gallons of gas in her tanks; about two and a half flying hours.

This ship was generally known to be stable laterally and unstable longitudinally, or directionally. It was fairly sensitive to all controls, much more so than the Albatross D5, but it had a tendency to turn left in flight, such as is usually found in ships powered with rotary motors. A little strange considering that the D 111 was pulled by a in-line Mercedes. Maybe it was because her nose was light.

It was easy to fly and set down. The pilot did not have to fight the controls in the air, as in some of the early scout ships which were very tiring to fly. The general construction gave the pilot the comforting feeling that his wings were on to stay. A very great help in the storm.

Due to the arrangement of the cockpit and the disposition of the wings, the pilot's view was excellent in all directions, except, of course, in a downward glide, where the top plane would interfere to some extent.

The wings and wing bracings were like the Nieuport scout. The top plane was in one piece and had no dihedral. The lower wing had a considerably smaller area and a one per cent dihedral angle. In flying position the leading edge of the upper wing had about a fifteen-inch stagger in front of the lower wing. Ailerons were fitted to the upper wings only and both upper and lower wings had the characteristic wash out at the tips.

The span of the D 111 was thirty feet, ten and a half inches; length over all,

twenty-three feet. The interplane struts were running V type with an outward spread in silhouette.

THE latest Pfalz scout was the D X11. At first glance this was no relation to the D 111. The radiator was mounted in front, automobile type. A Mercedes one-eighty was used.

The D X11 was slightly smaller than the D 111 and, due to the smaller weight ratio per horsepower developed, a better performer. But the general sturdy design was the same.

The upper plane was built in one piece as in the D 111, but the center section contained neither gas tank nor radiator and the wing tips were not heavily raked as in the earlier model.

It was not unusual for pilots to mistake this model in the air for the Fokker D VII. At first glance the only great difference was in the tail. The Fokker could always be distinguished by its comma-like rudder while the Pfalz rudder conformed to the sweep of the vertical fin.

The gravity tank on the D X11 was under the dashboard, while the main tank was situated under the pilot's feet.

Pfalz ships were built by the Pfalz Flugzeugwerke, at Speyer on the Rhine. It was founded by the Everbusch brothers. Both of the brothers were pilots.

One of them insisted upon flying his own ships at the Front and observing their performance under actual combat conditions. He was killed in action and the High Command ordered the remaining brother to stay on the Rhine and build planes. There were plenty of youths in Germany to fly them.



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THE Original Airman leaned back in his chair. (He won that title when he went to France with the original British Expeditionary Force in August, 1914. Being an enlisted man who spent all his time on the ground, his official designation in the Army was "Airman.")

"You remember the efficiency of the R.A.F. in 'Eighteen," he said. "You'd have laughed if you could have looked back to things when we rushed across the Channel in 'Fourteen.

"The Royal Flying Corps that went over with Sir John French consisted of Headquarters, Squadrons Two, Three, Four and Five, and the Aircraft Park. Detailed arrangements had been made for the moving of each unit, by number, from Boulogne, where we fell off the boat, to what was vaguely termed the Front.

"Headquarters got over and on its way to line up with the French Army. No trouble. But when the Aircraft Park landed—!

"It was the night of August eighteenth we got to Boulogne. In the morning we landed. The landing officer says,

'What unit is this?' Our O. C. says, 'Aircraft Park, R.F.C.' The landing officer says, 'Where do you go?' Our O.C. says, irritated, 'You're supposed to know, old chap.'

"Well, that landing officer snatched up his papers and looked through them. Then he turned back to the first page and looked again. Then he rushed to the telegraph office and sent a wire to G.H.Q.: 'An unnumbered unit without aeroplanes which calls itself an Aircraft Park has arrived. What are we to do with it?'

The original Airman grinned reminiscently.

"And you should have seen the transports. A lot of motorcars and vans collected at Regent's Park in London a few days before the war. Blimey! Talk about the advertising on the radio—why, that war advertised a lot of things for no charge.

"During the retreat from Mons, when the pilots of Five Squadron were flying back for more bombs and ammunition, they'd look anxiously for their ammo-bomb lorry. But they didn't have to look hard. They might be up very high, but

the former owners of the lorry, proprietors of a well-known sauce, had done their bit.

"The pilots always heaved a sigh of relief when they saw that scarlet van, with the gold-lettered legend on the side—*The World's Appetiser*."

They Score

DEAR EDITOR:

I have been reading your magazines for years. I want to congratulate you on the excellent stories you put out for I've never found a punk yarn yet in your magazine.

And here's hoping that you keep up the good work. I also want to congratulate George Bruce and Joel Rogers for their novels in the June issue.

PHILIP "FLASH" JOHNSON.

The First to Fly

Great Britain had few serviceable machines in the August of 1914, but, by a tremendous effort eighty-two were scraped together and sent over to France. They were a strangely-mixed lot and included most of the types the British Army had been experimenting with for quite a long time. There were 80 h.p. Farman biplanes, and an assortment of Royal Aircraft products, Caudron and Short biplanes, and Blériot, Nieuport and Deperdussin monoplanes, together with several "orphan" machines.

Most of the machines went West in the very early days, but not before they had given invaluable service to the sorely-pressed Allied armies. A pilot of the British Royal Flying Corps took news to General Sir. H. Smith-Dorrien, who had taken over part of the line with his advanced Division, that he was faced by three German Army Corps, with strong reserves, instead of the three German Divisions he had been given to understand were opposing him. When other scouting airplanes had confirmed this news, the disposition of the British Forces was changed, and the wonderful retreat from Mons, which is commonly said to have saved the whole of the Allied armies in France, was begun in time only because of the news brought by planes.

The spares needed for the mixed lot of British aircraft were enough to daunt the heart of the most hardened army store-keeper, but a lot of work in booking, indenting and checking was saved by the simple fact that none existed. The machines themselves were slow and out-matched by the German aircraft, but, fortunately, the enemy was engaged further south in his scheme of crushing the life out of France—and so the British aircraft managed, in some miraculous manner, to outlive the storm until reinforcements were sent.

The German flying grounds were absolutely unique, and superior in 1914 to some of the Allied dromes three years later. Lighting systems had been so carefully studied, and the penetrating powers of various lights, colors and lenses considered that, before the war, night-flying and landing was a part of the German army pilot's regular instructional course. Towers and light-houses had been erected up and down the country, thick sheets of glass, illuminated from beneath were set in the landing grounds, and the pilot was supplied with information as to the direction of the wind, his position above the aerodrome and other useful knowledge by means of painted rings.

Twenty-one illuminated aircraft stations were in existence in Germany before the war. That at Bernkastel-Kues gave a flash of 250,000 candle-power, while the light near Dresden gave the same; the one near Neustadt in Hanover was one of 300,000 candle-power.

Behind "Spy Drome"

These lines from H. P. S. Greene lend additional interest to the tribulations of Von Blon, and provide fresh proof that strange things happened while the war was raging in the air. Two heroes figure in the incidents described by the author of "Spy Drome" in this issue.

A Boston bird, Gardiner Fiske, attached to the First Bombardment Group, A.E.F., at Maulan, just south of Verdun, fell out of a ship a few thousand feet up. Well, he grabbed the stabilizer as it went past and climbed back up the fuselage and into the cockpit again.

Tell you another? All right. This one's about an observer with a British squadron—Number Twenty of the Royal Flying Corps. The observer was Captain J. H. Hedley, who at the close of the war had a score of twelve enemy planes and a balloon.

Twenty had arrived in France with Fees on January 23, 1916. Two years later, when the squadron was flying Bristol Fighters, Hedley pulled this same stunt of leaving his ship and coming back again. It happened one day in January, 1918.

The Bristol was flying over the lines way up, with more than eighteen thousand altitude. A black-crossed ship appeared ahead. Hedley, in the rear pit, swung his gun in an attempt to get the E.A. into his line of fire.

Now in the British service observers had begun without safety belts. And of course they had no parachutes. The observer was in the habit of tapping the pilot on the back of his head, thus signifying that the plane should dive.

The German was behind and above, diving zigzag wide open and gaining. His machine guns were sputtering bullets. Hedley was standing up facing back with his machine gun belching fire right back at his opponent. The German suddenly zoomed right down on the Englishman and then pulled almost straight up, evidently preparing to loop and take another dive on them.

When the German took his last zoom and pulled up, Hedley tried to follow him with his machine guns and in so doing leaned his head back so far that he accidentally bumped the pilot's head. To the pilot this was a sign to dive straight down and then level off again, and so the pilot pushed the stick all the way forward and started a terrific dive.

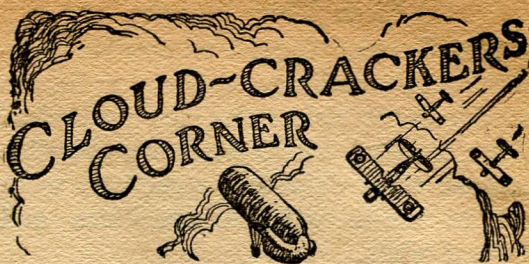
Hedley was not expecting any such maneuver, and when the plane snapped down in its dive, it threw him completely out of the plane, into the air.

Well, he fell in direct line with the falling plane and when the plane leveled off after its dive, he hit astraddle the fuselage of the plane close to the tail!

The pilot did not know that his observer had even fallen out. When he felt the jolt on the tail of the plane he looked around, and to his amazement saw his observer facing backwards on the tail. The pilot had no idea how he ever got in that position.

Neither did Hedley. He told his squadron mates that when he was thrown out his helmet slipped over his eyes and he couldn't see anything. Suddenly he realized that he was straddling something.

You can find proof of the story in the British records of the Twentieth: "Lt. Makepeace, M.C., reports Capt. J. H. Hedley accidentally thrown into air, afterwards alighted on tail same machine and rescued."



E. A. Swan, New York City.

Q. Did the French use a plane known as a Sopwith for observation? If so, what was she powered with and what speed could she attain?

A. The Sopwiths were British planes, built by the Sopwith Aviation Co., Ltd., at Kingston-on-Thames, England. But just as a number of British squadrons used Spads, the French used British ships. Best known among the Sopwiths were the Pup and the Camel, both single-seaters. The Dolphin, the Snipe and the Salamander were also single-seaters, as was the Cuckoo, a torpedo-carrier. The Sopwith Hippo was a two-seater, powered with a 200 horsepower Clerget engine, but this plane saw very little action, and no figures are available on its speed.

Jack Perry, New Orleans, La.

Q. To settle an argument and bet, will you kindly answer the following questions: Do twin Vickers fire through the propeller? Are prop-synchronized guns the same as twin Vickers?

A. By the time double guns were in general use on airplanes, synchronizing of fire had been developed, so that virtually all "twin Vickers" fired through the propeller. Twin Lewises—two Lewis machine guns—were used where there was no need to synchronize fire, as in rear cockpits by the observers, it being impossible to synchronize the fire of the Lewis with the prop. The term prop-synchronized doesn't necessarily apply to Vickers guns; as for instance, the German prop-synchronized guns were Spandaus.

William R. Howard, Nortonville, Kans.

Q. How could I get the names of American airmen who flew and fought in the war and their records? Also the record of the Lafayette Escadrille, names of pilots and their records?

A. No single volume gives this information. You will find in each issue of *Aces* the story of an ace, as in this issue, Victor Chapman of the Lafayette.

Louise Caldwell, Irwin, Pa.

Q. How old was James B. McCudden? In what year of the war was he killed?

A. He was born in 1895, and was killed in 1918.

How They Fought

The German fought to numbers, orders and the military text-books; he ran no avoidable risks; and the individual pilots avoided battle whenever possible because their definite instructions were not to waste valuable machines and trained pilots.

The French airmen went about seeking whom they might devour. They raked and harassed and annoyed the enemy in the air and on the ground; they threw bombs at him—missing for the most part, but upsetting German nerves quite a lot—and worried his air-planes with the quick-firing 75mm. guns, and took photographs of him, and shot his pilots in the air with rifles. Altogether the Germans had a very thin time, and although they had superiority in the air they had not supremacy, and so they could not keep news of their movements and concentrations from the French observers. When they threatened any part of the line the French commanders were able to scurry up reinforcements in time to parry the threatened attack.

Germany had well over six hundred airplanes, mostly two-seaters, when war was declared. These were standardized throughout, and the factories behind the line were turning out numbers of similar craft to make good losses and increase the German superiority. Each machine was fitted with bomb-dropping gear and cameras. The Hun also possessed a few fast single-seated scouts which could be used as occasion demanded. But where the German scored most was in his method, his training and his organization.

What the Allied machines lacked in equipment their pilots made up in sheer impudence and daring. They were at a big disadvantage in any case and so, argued the airmen, they might just as well cause as much trouble as possible. They took up rifles and hand grenades and automatic pistols; they bought accessories and extra fittings, often enough at their own expense, from

the private manufacturers, and they achieved what came to be called the "Christmas Tree" planes.

Already at a disadvantage in speed and climbing powers, and harassed by the superiority of the enemy anti-aircraft guns, which made matters worse, the extra weight of the fittings slowed the machines and made every flight, especially over the lines, a sheer gamble with death. The German pilots did not like the individual air duels; it was not in the text-books; but the French and British "had to go through it" in any case, and they made a point of taking as many Boches with them as could possibly be managed. It was the period when, as Sir John French put it in a famous report: "Our airmen had established a personal ascendancy over the enemy."

"Code of Sky Birds"

Just a few lines from one of your most devoted readers. I read every war aces magazine I can get hold of, also all others. I just finished George Bruce's "Code of Sky Birds" and I am here to say it is the *most interesting* war story I have ever read, and I have read them for the past seven or more years.

No fooling, I mean it. He certainly knows his stuff, and I don't mean maybe. I hope he keeps up the good work.

GEORGE R. FITZWATER,
Oakland, Calif.

The Fokker Monoplane

The Fokker monoplane was effective for a while. The very first Fokker was a "gas-pipe" machine, a name sufficiently explanatory, and was offered to several European Governments who, perhaps in the hope of saving the inventor's feelings, did not see their way to acquire any rights. The later Fokker to be used by the Germans was a compromise machine having a lot of the French "Morane" in its build. The engine was a German version of the Gnôme incorporating several improvements. A fixed machine-gun, firing through the propeller, was mounted and, because the machine was fast and a good climber, it played havoc with the

slower Allied craft until a reply was evolved.

Synchronization of machine-gun and engine had not then been perfected and the tips of the propellers were armored with metal plates which deflected toward the ground those bullets which failed to clear the blades.

The favorite Fokker game was to climb to a great height and swoop unexpectedly on the slow, low-flying Allied aircraft. So serious were the Fokker raids and so deadly their attacks that their victims could go up only in twos and threes, the duty of the odd machine being to look out for the death-dealing Fokker and to engage and detain it while the observation craft streaked for home. These tactics imposed a great strain on the Allied commanders, who were already handicapped by an insufficiency of planes. It was not until the British B.E.2C. arrived in France in any quantity that much progress could be made.

But the Fokker was not really a good machine; it was faster than any the Allies then possessed, that was all. The British found the De Haviland and some of the later Fighting Experimental (F.E.) machines, and the day of the Fokker of the early type was over. New biplanes of the same make made their appearance and were favorite machines with the crack German pilots; otherwise they were no better than several types flown by the Allies.

The Albatross biplanes were much used by the Central Powers for war purposes, and a number of improved designs was put out. Captain Baron von Richthofen's famous "traveling circus," manned entirely by selected star pilots, used this make of machine. At first this maker produced comparatively slow craft with ample and comfortable accommodation, to the military specification, but very trustworthy and of good weight-carrying powers. Later, however, some very fast small machines, very similar to an English design which was always about three months ahead of

the Germans, made its appearance and did a lot of damage until better Allied machines came through in something like adequate quantity.

The Aviatik biplanes did well, and the Halberstadt fighting scout, a fast, cleanly-designed machine, using a powerful engine, came into prominence during the third year. The L.V.G. machines (built by the Luft Verkehrs Gesellschaft) were hefty products distinguished more by their all-round usefulness than by any grace of line; a clever Swiss engineer was chiefly responsible for their production.

The big Gotha bombing machines were built after a big English machine had fallen into German hands, by the Gotha Waggonfabrik people, who had a small and fast single-seated scout which was a good specimen of its class.

So had the race been from the beginning. Superiority, not supremacy, has ebbed and flowed from one side to the other, and many excellent chances were lost on both sides. Jealousies, department muddling, poor official designs, ineffective production methods all added to the tale of delay and loss. But in spite of all the plane steadily improved both in performance and trustworthiness.

The Germans began the war with standardized aircraft more remarkable for their general all-round reliability and complete detailed equipment than for any power of maneuver, speed or climb. The Allies began with numbers of machines, some fast, some slow, some poor, some good, but without any definite scheme either of working or production.

Bruce and Rogers

DEAR C. O.:

Hurrah for *Aces*. I have been reading your magazine for three years and it is the best yet. George Bruce is the best writer of air stories I have found. Tell him to write some more stories like "Mother of Eagles" and "Red Skies." "Spad 13" was a good story too. Tell him to keep up the good work.

Joel Rogers can write some good stories. "The Ace Traitor" is a good example.

RALPH W. GIESCH,
Dallas, Tex.

STRAIGHT TO



THE BULL'S-EYE

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32x4 1/2	3.20	1.45	30x5.00	2.95	1.35
33x4 1/2	3.20	1.45	30x5.00	2.95	1.35
34x4 1/2	3.45	1.45	28x5.25	2.95	1.35
30x5	3.60	1.75	31x5.25	3.10	1.35
32x5	3.60	1.75	30x5.77	3.20	1.40
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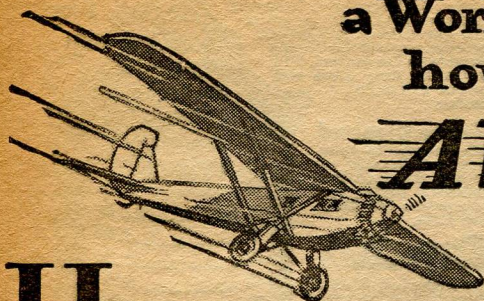
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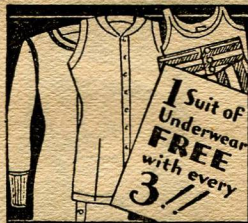
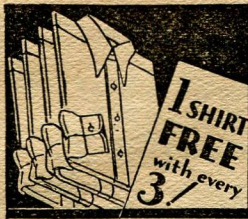
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In about ten years Radio has grown from a \$2,000,000 to a \$1,000,000,000 industry. Over 300,000 jobs have been created. Hundreds more are being opened every year by its continued growth. Many men and young men with the right training—the kind of training I give you—are stepping into Radio at two and three times their former salaries.

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Broadcasting stations use engineers, operators, station managers and pay \$1,200 to \$5,000 a year. Manufacturers continually need testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, service men, buyers, for jobs paying up to \$7,500 a year. Shipping companies use hundreds of Radio operators, give them world-wide travel with board and lodging free and a salary of \$80 to \$150 a month. Dealers and jobbers employ service men, salesmen, buyers, managers, and pay \$30 to \$100 a week. There are many other opportunities too.

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The day you enroll with me I'll show you how to do 10 jobs, common in most every neighborhood, for spare time money. Throughout your course I send you information on servicing popular makes of sets; I give you the plans and ideas that are making \$200 to \$1,000 for hundreds of N. R. I. students in their spare time while studying. My course is famous as the course that pays for itself.

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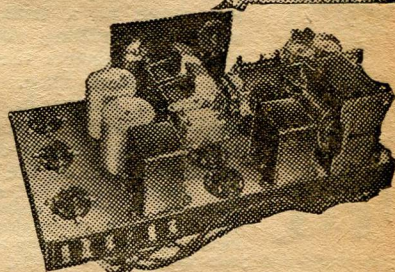
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I will give you my new 8 OUTFITS of RADIO PARTS for practical Home Experiments

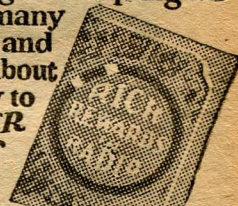
You can build over 100 circuits with these outfits. You build and experiment with the circuits used in Crosley, Atwater-Kent, Eveready, Majestic, Zenith, and other popular sets. You learn how these sets work, why they work, how to make them work. This makes learning at home easy, fascinating, practical.

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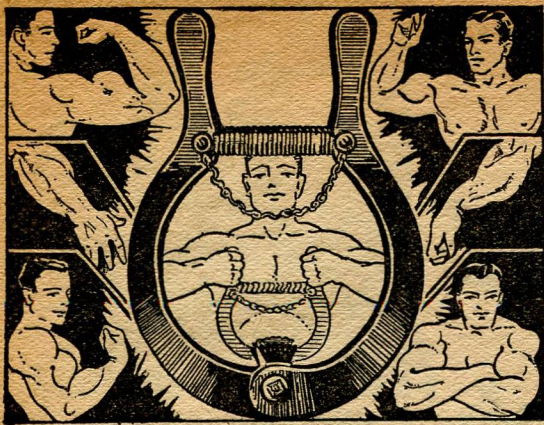
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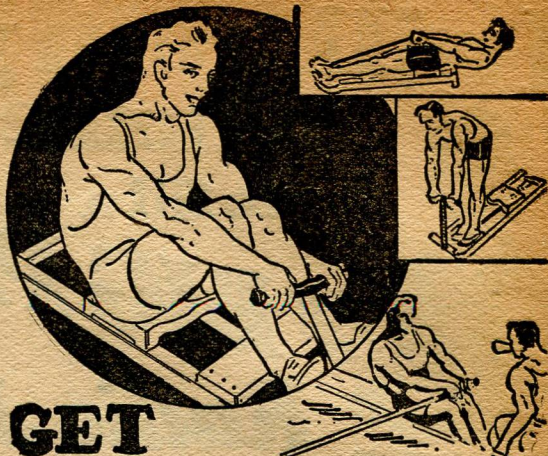
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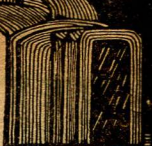
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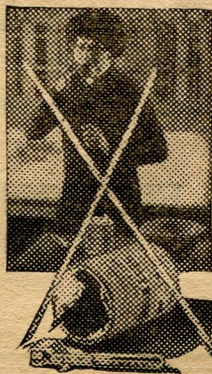
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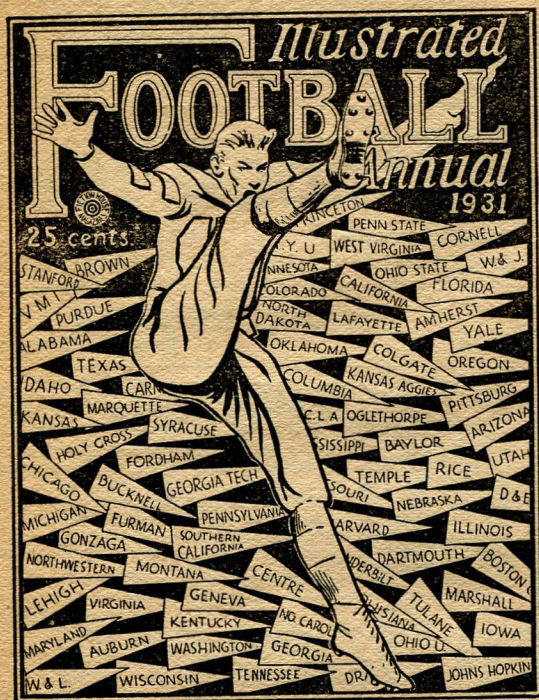


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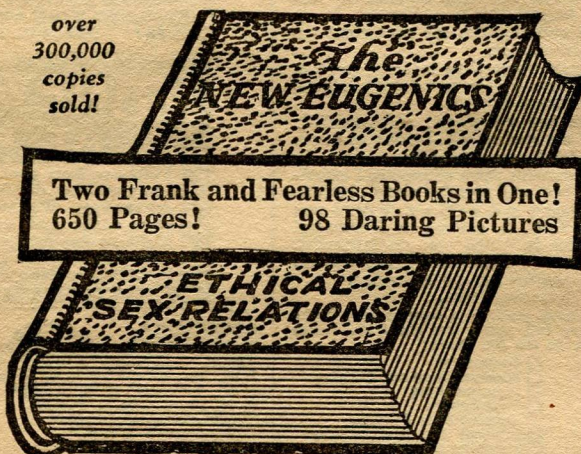
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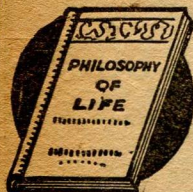
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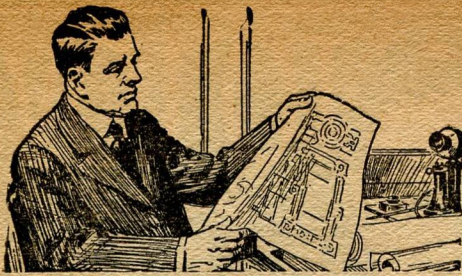
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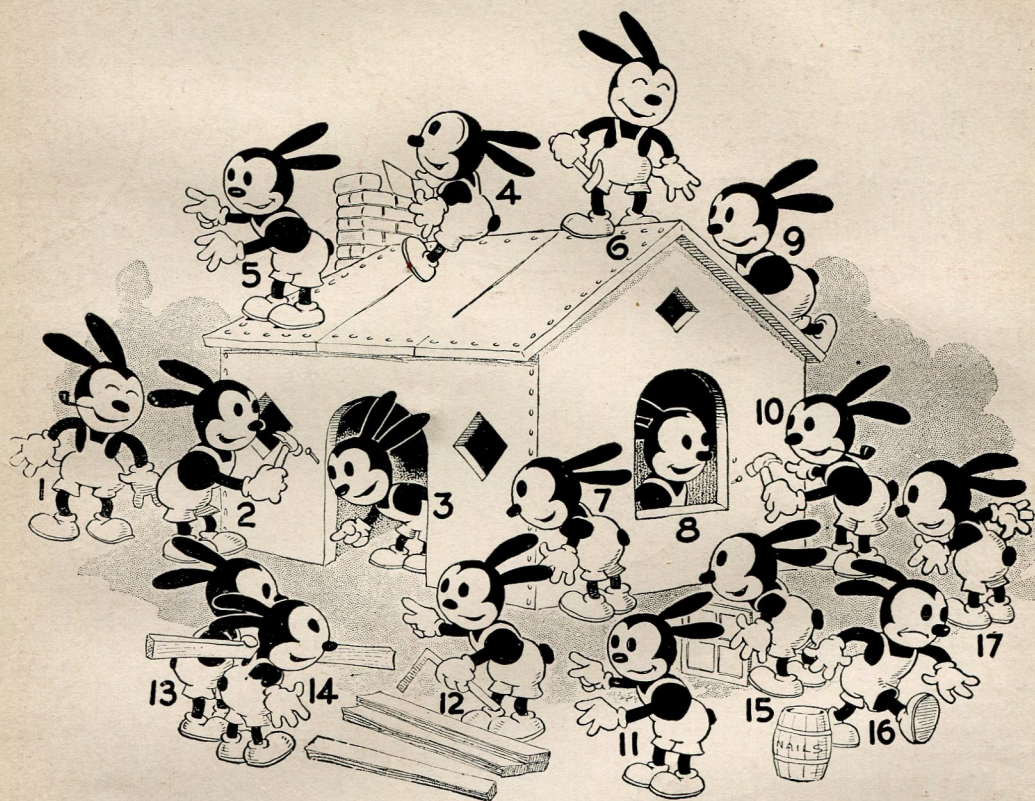
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