



OCTOBER

15¢

BATTLE BIRDS



THE CATACOMB ACE

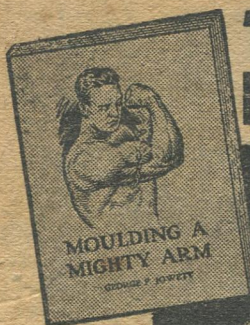
by STEWART M. EMERY



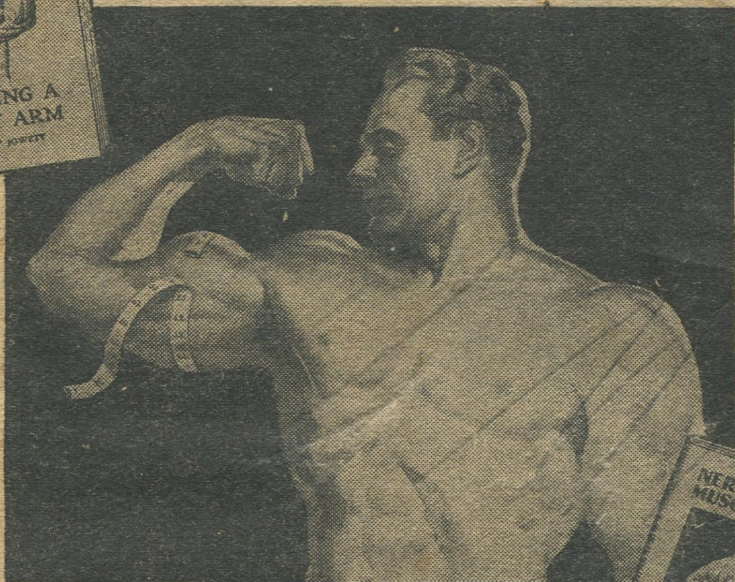
THE GOTHIA GHOST

by ROBERT J. HOGAN

by R. SIDNEY BOWEN, O. B. MYERS, HAROLD F. CRUICKSHANK



THIS BOOK Will give you an Arm of Might and a 16 inch Bicep!



Send for...

"MOULDING A MIGHTY ARM"

A Complete Course for Only 25c

GET AN ARM of might with the power and grip to obey your physical desires. In a very short time you can build your arm from a scrawny piece of skin and bone to one of huge muscular size. I don't mean just a 16-inch bicep but a 15-inch forearm and a powerful 8-inch wrist!

I Guarantee That This Specially Prepared Course will Build Every Muscle in Your Arm

I know it will... for it has been scientifically worked out for that purpose. You can develop a pair of triceps shaped like a horseshoe, and just as strong, and a pair of biceps that will show their double head formation. The sinewy cables between the biceps and elbow will be deep and thick with wire cable ligaments. In that arm of yours, the forearm will belly with bulk, and the great supinator lifting muscle you can make into a column of power, while your wrist will grow alive and writhe with cordy sinew. All this you can get for 25 cents... send for this course today and you, too can have a he-man's arm built to be as beautiful, brawny and magnificent as the village blacksmith's.

You can't make a mistake. The guaranty of the strongest armed man in the world stands behind this course. I give you all the secrets of strength illustrated and explained as you like them. You, too, can get an unbreakable grip of steel and a Herculean arm. Mail your order now while you can still get this course at my introductory price of only 25c.

I will not limit you to the arm. I can develop any part or all of your body. Try any one of my courses listed in the coupon at 25c. Or, try all six of them for only \$1.00.

MAIL YOUR ORDER NOW and you will receive a Free Copy of "NERVES OF STEEL, MUSCLES LIKE IRON."

It describes Geo. F. Jowett's rise from a puny boy to be one of the world's strongest athletes with a chest measurement of 49 inches and an 18 inch bicep! It explains why he is called "Champion of Champions"... and there is a "thrill" in every page.

It is a priceless book to the strength fan and muscle builder. Full of pictures of marvelous bodied men who tell you decisively how you can build symmetry and strength the equal of their own. Reach out... Grasp This Special Offer.

DON'T DELAY... MAIL TODAY!

JOWETT INSTITUTE OF PHYSICAL CULTURE
Dept. 109Xb 422 Poplar St., Scranton, Pa.

George F. Jowett: Your proposition looks good to me. Send, by return mail, prepaid, the courses checked below for which I am enclosing \$_____

- ☐ Moulding a Mighty Arm, 25c
- ☐ Moulding a Mighty Back, 25c
- ☐ Moulding a Mighty Grip, 25c
- ☐ Moulding a Mighty Chest, 25c
- ☐ Moulding Mighty Legs, 25c
- ☐ Strong Man Stunt Made Easy 25c
- ☐ All 6 Books for \$1.00.

Name _____ Age _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

*All
stories
new*

BATTLE BIRDS

*All
stories
complete*

Vol. 3

Contents for October, 1933

No. 3

Ride Wings of Death with

THE CATACOMB ACE.....Steuart M. Emery 8

Two Yanks pierce a dead man's hideout to fight the crimson wings of a horror menace.

Follow the trail of

CUTTHROAT BUZZARDS.....R. Sidney Bowen 51

A sky ring of fire that killed every living thing in its path—what was this new Boche terror?

Warm your Spads on

THE NINTH MIDNIGHT.....O. B. Myers 67

One by one Boche ships left that secret drome—and never returned. What was their strange mission?

Watch out for

THE GOTHA GHOST.....Robert J. Hogan 80

There are more ways than one of laying a Boche ghost—and Smoke Wade knows 'em all!

Sign up with the

GAS HOUSE PEELOTS.....James Perley Hughes 93

The C. O. thought that tennis champs couldn't fight—but he was due for a couple of surprises!

Give a cheer for

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The Sky Devil's Brood slash down a hell sky road to rescue a Yank convoy from a death spot.

The C. O. asks—

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That out of sixty-one Zeppelins built in four years more than two-thirds were destroyed?

Say Howdy at

THE BATTLE BIRDS CLUB.....The Skipper 117

Open your ear flaps, buzzards, and learn how to become eligible for a silver membership pin.

Knock down a prize with

DIPPY SHIPS.....Contest Pilot 120

Ten swell air prizes for the peelots who figure out correct answers to this dizzy contest.

Build a model

GERMAN HANNOVER.....Frederick Blakeslee 122

Full details plans on building a model of this famous German observation ship.

Now drop in at

THE BULL FLIGHT CLUB.....Eugene A. Clancy 123

Where the Battle Birds Squadron comes to disorder every month. Join our cash prize contest!

COVER—Hannover and Breguet.....painted by Frederick Blakeslee

Buy November BATTLE BIRDS

On all newsstands October 10th

This company has enthusiastically subscribed to the National Industrial Recovery Act and has signed the President's blanket code.

Published every month by American Fiction Magazines, Inc., 2256 Grove Street, Chicago, Illinois. Editorial and executive offices 205 East Forty-second Street, New York City. Harry Steeger, President and Secretary. Harold S. Goldsmith, Vice President and Treasurer. Entered as second-class matter November 29, 1932, at the post office at Chicago, Ill., under the act of March 3, 1879. Title registration pending at U. S. Patent Office. Copyrighted 1933 by American Fiction Magazines, Inc. Single copy price 10c. Yearly subscriptions in U. S. A. \$1.00. For advertising rates address Sam J. Perry, 205 E. 42nd St., New York, N. Y. When submitting manuscripts, kindly enclose sufficient postage for their return if found unavailable. The publishers cannot accept responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts, although care will be exercised in handling them. Printed in U. S. A.



J. E. Smith, Pres., Nat'l. Radio Institute, the man who has directed the Home Study training of more men for the Radio Industry than any other man in America.

BE A RADIO EXPERT

Many Make

\$75 a Week

\$40 \$60

I'll Train You at Home in Your Spare Time
for **RADIO • TELEVISION • TALKING MOVIES**



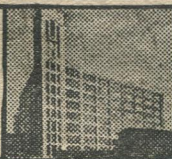
Set Servicing

Spare-time set servicing pays many. N. E. I. men \$8, \$10, \$15 a week extra. Full-time men make as much as \$40, \$60, \$75 a week.



Broadcasting Stations

Employ managers, engineers, operators, installation and maintenance men for jobs paying up to \$5,000 a year.



Radio Factories

Employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen, for jobs paying up to \$7,500 a year.

Aircraft Radio

Radio is making flying safer. Radio operators employed through Civil Service Commission earn \$1,620 to \$2,800 a year.

If you are dissatisfied with your present job; if you are struggling along in a rut with little or no prospect of anything better than a shiny pay envelope—clip the coupon NOW. Get my big FREE book on the opportunities in Radio. Read how quickly you can learn at home in your spare time to be a Radio Expert—what good jobs my graduates have been getting—real jobs with real futures.

Radio Experts Make \$40, \$60, \$75 a Week

In about ten years the Radio Industry has grown from a few million dollars to hundreds of millions annually. Over 300,000 jobs have been created by this growth, and thousands more will be created by its continued development. Many men and young men with the right training—the kind of training I give you in the N. E. I. Course—have stepped into Radio at two and three times their former salaries.

Real Opportunities Ahead in Radio for Trained Men

It's hard to find a field with more opportunity awaiting the trained man. Why, in 1932—the worst year of the depression—the Radio Industry sold \$200,000,000 worth of sets and parts! Manufacturers alone employed nearly 100,000 people! About 300,000 people worked in the industry. In 1932, broadcasting had a most profitable year. It's a gigantic business, even in the worst business years! And look what's ahead! Millions of sets becoming obsolete annually. 17,000,000 sets in operation that need servicing from time to time! Over 500 great broadcasting stations furnishing entertainment and news to 100,000,000 people. These figures are so big that they are hard to grasp! Yet they are all true! Here is a new industry that has grown quickly into a commercial giant. No wonder great business leaders predict a brilliant future for this great and growing business.

Talking Movies

An invention made possible by Radio. Employs many well-trained Radio men for jobs paying \$75 to \$200 a week.

SPECIAL Radio Equipment for Broad Practical Experience Given Without Extra Charge



My Course is not all theory. I'll show you how to use my special Radio equipment for conducting experiments and building circuits which illustrate important principles used in such well-known sets as Westinghouse, General Electric, Philco, R. C. A., Victor, Majestic, and others. You work out with your own hands many of the things you read in our lesson books. This 50-50 method of training makes learning at home easy, interesting, fascinating, intensely practical. You can use N.E.I. equipment in your service work for extra money.

Get Into This Field With a Future

There's a opportunity for you in Radio. It's a future is certain. Television, short wave, police Radio, automobile Radio, midjet sets, talking movies, public address systems, aircraft Radio—in every branch, developments and improvements are taking place. Here is a real future for thousands and thousands of men who really know Radio. Get the training that opens the road to responsibility, good pay, and success! Send the coupon now and get full particulars on how easy and interesting I make learning at home. Read the letters from graduates who are today earning good money in this fascinating industry.

Many Make \$5, \$10, \$15 a Week Extra in Spare Time Almost at Once

My book also tells how many of my students made \$5, \$10, and \$15 a week extra servicing sets in spare time, soon after they enrolled. I give you plans and ideas that have made good spare-time money—\$200 to \$1,000 a year—for hundreds of fellows. My course is famous as "the one that pays for itself."

Money Back If Not Satisfied

I am so sure that N. E. I. can train you at home satisfactorily that I will agree in writing to refund every penny of your tuition if you are not satisfied with my Lessons and Instruction Service upon completion. You'll get a copy of this Agreement with my book.

64-page Book FREE

Get your copy today. It's free to any ambitious fellow over 15 years old. It tells you about Radio's spare-time and full-time job opportunities; it tells you all about my Course; what others who have taken it are doing and making. Find out what Radio offers YOU without the slightest obligation. MAIL THE COUPON NOW.

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute
Dept. 3KK7, Washington, D.C.



THIS COUPON IS GOOD for
One FREE COPY OF MY BOOK

mail it
Now

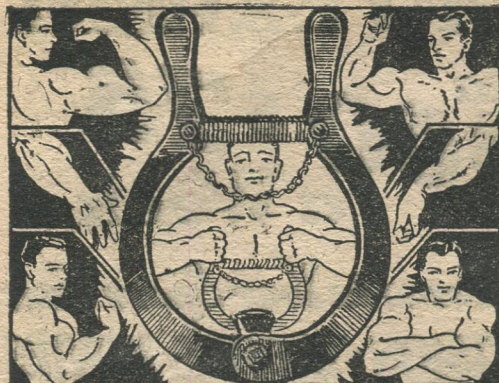
J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute, Dept. 3KK7
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send your free book about spare-time and full-time Radio opportunities and how I can train for them at home in my spare time. (Please print plainly.)

Name _____ Age _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____



**4 INCHES OF MUSCLE
PUT ON YOUR ARMS!**
... or we will refund your money!

The German Iron Shoe Muscle Builder...

is accepted as the greatest exerciser made to build giantlike arms, wide powerful shoulders, brawny back and tremendous chest. John Filepone added 5 inches to his arms, E. Peters 1 inch on each bicep the first week!

You Can Have Strength and a Physique the Equal of the

strongest professional athlete. You can become the center of attraction wherever you go. The question for you to decide is that you are going to have muscles that not only look good but are good. You have to get the steel sinews. The Iron Shoe will give you them in a super-state that cannot be equalled by any other apparatus or system. Some pupils report having put four inches on their biceps and got an increased shoulder spread of six inches.

SPECIAL FREE OFFER

The Iron Man's Famous 60-day illustrated Picture course of exercise instruction, and the Strength Resistor is included FREE! The greatest body building offer ever presented. Follow the choice of champions and get that grip of steel. Ring in now on our special offer for the lowest priced and biggest result getting exerciser under the sun. Send for free illustrated information. No obligation.

SEND COUPON TODAY!

American Athletic Appliance Company,
4324 Paul Street, Dept. DG10, Philadelphia, Pa.

Gentlemen: Without obligation and without cost, send particulars about your Iron Shoe Strength Builder and Special Offer.

Name

Address

NEW LOW PRICES on GOODRICH Firestone GOOD YEAR U.S., FISK and OTHERS

And we defy anyone to excel our quality. Every standard brand tire reconstructed by our superior, modern method is positively guaranteed to give full 12 months' service under severest road conditions. This guarantee is backed by the entire financial resources of an old, reliable company. Here are today's lowest tire prices.

BALLOON TIRES			CORD TIRES		
Size	Rim	Price	Size	Rim	Price
28x4-40-21	21.0	\$0.85	30x3-36	36.0	\$0.65
28x4-50-20	20.0	0.85	30x3-36	36.0	0.76
28x4-50-21	21.0	0.85	31x4-36	36.0	0.85
28x4-75-19	19.0	0.96	32x4-36	36.0	0.85
28x4-75-20	20.0	0.96	32x4-36	36.0	0.85
30x5-00-19	19.0	1.05	34x4-36	36.0	1.15
30x5-00-20	20.0	1.05	34x4-36	36.0	1.15
32x5-25-13	13.0	1.10	38x4-36	36.0	1.15
32x5-25-19	19.0	1.15	38x4-36	36.0	1.15
32x5-25-20	20.0	1.15	38x4-36	36.0	1.15
32x5-25-21	21.0	1.15	38x4-36	36.0	1.15
32x5-50-18	18.0	1.15	38x4-36	36.0	1.15
32x5-50-19	19.0	1.15	38x4-36	36.0	1.15
32x5-50-20	20.0	1.15	38x4-36	36.0	1.15
32x5-50-21	21.0	1.15	38x4-36	36.0	1.15
32x6-00-20	20.0	1.25	38x4-36	36.0	1.15
32x6-00-21	21.0	1.25	38x4-36	36.0	1.15
32x6-00-20	20.0	1.36	38x4-36	36.0	1.15

All Tubes Guaranteed Brand New

SEND ONLY \$1.00 DEPOSIT on each tire ordered. We ship balance C. O. D. 5 per cent discount for full cash with order. Any tire failing to give 12 months' service replaced at half price.

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1840 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

12 MONTHS WRITTEN BOND GIVEN WITH EVERY TIRE

FREE "SILVERLITE" Flashlight Lantern
With Order for 2 Tires Complete, with "Eccentric" batteries and bulbs. Household and automobile necessity. Gives 500 foot light beam. Portable handle. **DON'T DELAY - ORDER TODAY.**

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Don't Take Drastic Drugs

You have nine million tiny tubes or filters in your Kidneys which may be endangered by using drastic, irritating drugs. Be careful. If poorly functioning Kidneys or Bladder make you suffer from Getting Up Nights, Leg Pains, Nervousness, Stiffness, Burning, Smarting, Acidity, Neuralgia or Rheumatic Pains, Lumbago or Loss of Vitality, don't waste a minute. Try the Doctor's prescription called Cystex (pronounced Siss-tex). Formula in every package. Starts work in 15 minutes. Soothes and tones raw, irritated tissues. It is helping millions of sufferers and is guaranteed to fix you up to your satisfaction or money back on return of empty package. Cystex is only 75c at all druggists.

LONESOME?

Let me arrange a romantic correspondence for you. Find yourself a sweetheart thru America's foremost select social correspondence club. A friendship letter society for lonely ladies and gentlemen. Members everywhere; CONFIDENTIAL introductions by letter; efficient, dignified and continuous service. I have made thousands of lonely people happy—why not you? Write for FREE sent particulars. **EVAN MOORE BOX 908 JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA**

NEW STUFF! WINNIE WINKLE!

For men only. Boss and Bubbles, Fannie Hill, Only a Boy, Harold Teen and Liliums, Farmer's Daughter, Papa and Mama, The French Stenographer, The Vampire, The End of Helen, What Tommy Saw Under the Parlor Door, Twelve Gay Love Letters (Read Two Ways), Gay Life in Paris, also 50 Bare and Daring French-type pictures (Kind Men Like). Also 50 Montmartre-type pictures of beautiful girls in thrilling, snappy, artistic poses with their fellows. We fill orders the same day we receive them. All for only \$1.00. Send cash, stamps or money order.

IMPERIAL NOVELTY CO.
175 Fifth Avenue, NEW YORK CITY

OPPORTUNITIES *are many* for the Radio Trained Man

Don't spend your life slaving away in some dull, hopeless job! Don't be satisfied to work for a mere \$20 or \$30 a week. Let me show you how to get your start in Radio—the fastest-growing, biggest money-making game on earth.

JOBS LEADING to SALARIES of \$50 a Week and Up

Prepare for jobs as Designer, Inspector and Tester—as Radio Salesman and in Service and Installation Work—as Operator or Manager of a Broadcasting Station—as Wireless Operator on a Ship or Airplane, or in Talking Picture or Sound Work—HUNDREDS of OPPORTUNITIES for a real future in Radio!

TEN WEEKS of SHOP TRAINING **Pay Your Tuition After Graduation**

We don't teach by book study. We train you on a great outlay of Radio, Television and Sound equipment—on scores of modern Radio Receivers, huge Broadcasting equipment, the very latest and newest Television apparatus, Talking Picture and Sound Reproduction equipment, Code Practice equipment, etc. You don't need advanced education or previous experience. We give you—RIGHT HERE IN THE COYNE SHOPS—the actual practice and experience you'll need for your start in this great field. And because we cut out all useless theory and only give that which is necessary you get a practical training in 10 weeks.

TELEVISION *and* TALKING PICTURES

And Television is already here! Soon there'll be a demand for THOUSANDS of TELEVISION EXPERTS! The man who learns Television now can have a great future in this great new field. Get in on the ground-floor of this amazing new Radio development! Come to COYNE and learn Television on the very latest, newest Television equipment. Talking Picture and Public Address Systems offer opportunities to the Trained Radio Man. Here is a great new Radio field just beginning to grow! Prepare NOW for these wonderful opportunities! Learn Radio Sound Work at COYNE on actual Talking Picture and Sound Reproduction equipment.

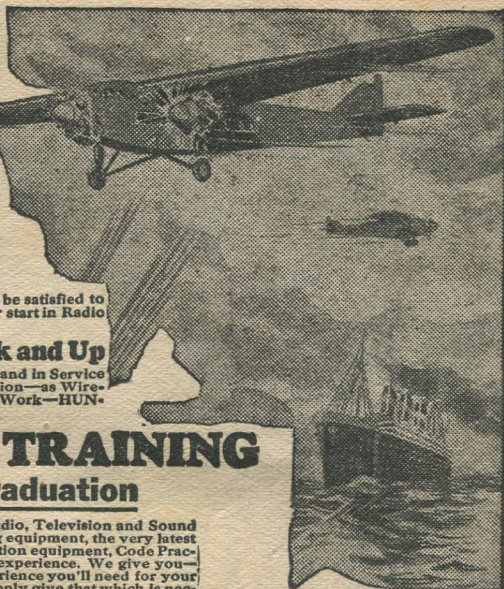
PAY for YOUR TRAINING **After You Graduate**

I am making an offer that no other school has dared to do. I'll take you here in my shops and give you this training and you pay your tuition after you have graduated. Two months after you complete my course you make your first payment and then you have ten months to complete your payments. There are no strings to this offer. I know a lot of honest fellows haven't got a lot of money these days, but still want to prepare themselves for a real job so they won't have to worry about hard times or lay offs.

I've got enough confidence in these fellows and in my training to give them the training they need and pay me back after they have their training. If you who read this advertisement are really interested in your future here is the chance of a lifetime. Mail the coupon today and I'll give you all the facts.

ALL PRACTICAL WORK **At COYNE in Chicago**

ALL ACTUAL, PRACTICAL WORK. You build radio sets, install and service them. You actually operate great Broadcasting equipment. You construct Television Receiving Sets and actually transmit your own Television programs over



our modern Television equipment. You work on real Talking Picture machines and Sound equipment. You learn Wireless Operating on actual Code Practice apparatus. We don't waste time on useless theory. We give you the practical training you'll need—in 10 short, pleasant weeks.

MANY EARN WHILE LEARNING

You get Free Employment Service for Life. And don't let lack of money stop you. Many of our students make all or a good part of their living expenses while going to school and if you should need this help just write to me. Coyne is 33 years old! Coyne Training is tested—proven beyond all doubt. You can find out everything absolutely free. Just mail coupon for my big free book!

H. C. Lewis, Pres. RADIO DIVISION Founded 1899
COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
500 S. Paulina Street, Dept. 73-4K, Chicago, Ill.

Mail Coupon Today for All the Facts

H. C. LEWIS, President
Radio Division, Coyne Electrical School
500 S. Paulina St., Dept. 73-4K, Chicago, Ill.

Dear Mr. Lewis:

Send me your Big Free Radio Book, and all details of your Special Offer, including your "Pay After Graduate" offer.

Name

Address

Town.....State.....

DO YOU WANT

\$3500.00

... Why?

I WILL PAY \$250.00

JUST FOR THE WINNING ANSWER

Have you all the things you want in life—a motor car—a beautiful home—fine clothes—money for a vacation or enjoyable trips—to start a business for yourself—to give yourself or someone a higher education—or for a safe investment for a rainy day or old age?

Do You Want \$3,500.00 . . . Why?
It's a lot of money, in fact it's a

FORTUNE. This very minute it will suggest much to you. You could do a lot with \$3,500.00. Why do YOU want it?

I will pay \$250.00 Cash for the best reasons for wanting that much money. That's a plain, simple offer. There is nothing to buy or sell to win the \$250.00. Nothing else to do at all. I merely want the best reasons for wanting \$3,500.00.

20 Simple Words WIN \$250.00

Nothing More For You To Do! It Costs You Nothing To Win!

There is no way you can lose anything. There's nothing to buy or sell to win this \$250.00 Prize. It will be given for the best answer to this question in the opinion of the

Judges. The answer that is in your mind right now may be the winning one! Simply tell me: "Do You Want \$3,500.00 . . . Why?"

Just Sending Your Answer Qualifies You for the Opportunity to

WIN \$3,500.00 CASH

First Grand Prize in Big \$6,000.00 Prize Distribution—to be announced

Just think—you may actually win this fortune of \$3,500.00 All Cash. Sending an answer immediately qualifies you for the opportunity to win \$3,500.00 First Grand Prize in my big \$6,000.00 Cash Distribution. 225 Grand Prizes! Everybody taking an active part will be rewarded! Before I give this money to the First Prize Winner, I would like to know how wisely this money will be spent. That's why I want you to tell me if you want \$3,500.00 and why. You may be the one to win it—besides \$250.00 for sending the winning answer.

Use Coupon—Mail in Envelope or Paste on 1c Postal

\$250.00 PRIZE COUPON

TOM WOOD,

H-O Bldg., Dept. HB-809-K, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Yes, I want \$3,500.00 and here are my reasons: (write your answer plainly on here, in 20 words or less)—

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Any Simple Reason May Win

No matter who you are or where you live, if you are over 16 years of age and live in the U. S. A. outside Cincinnati, Ohio, you may win \$250.00. A glance at the question will quickly suggest some good reasons for wanting \$3,500.00. Sending an answer will also qualify you for the opportunity to win \$3,500.00 in our Final \$6,000.00 Prize Distribution.

\$100 Extra for Promptness

I will pay an Extra \$100.00 Cash just for promptness or a total of \$350.00 if the winning answer is mailed on the coupon within 3 days after reading this announcement. So write your answer and Rush it today — QUICK.

The Rules are Simple

Only one answer accepted from a family. Neatness, style of handwriting will not be considered. Judges will consider answer only for practical value of the idea. Duplicate prizes in case of ties. Answers must be postmarked not later than December 31, 1933. \$250.00 will be paid for the best answer to "DO YOU WANT \$3,500.00 . . . WHY?"—and \$100.00 Extra if mailed within 3 days.

TOM WOOD, Mgr., H-O Bldg., Dept. HB-809-K, Cincinnati, O.

\$75 a Week for Dobbins!

My graduate, R. N. Dobbins, got a job immediately after finishing my course. Now he's earning \$75 a week as Chief Instructor at a big Aviation School in New York!

Get on AVIATION'S PAYROLL!

Let Me Show You How to EARN \$60 to \$100 a Week and UP in AVIATION!

My up-to-date home study Course gives you the ground work you need to get and keep a real job in this fascinating, fast growing industry. Scores of my graduates, who didn't know a thing about Aviation a few months ago, are holding down fine jobs right now—in the air and on the ground. Over forty different types of jobs to choose from, once you have this necessary training. Get the facts about my practical training, free Employment Service, and Money-Back Agreement NOW!

I Teach You QUICKLY— at Home in Your Spare Time

You don't need to give up your present job—don't need to leave home, to get your training in Aviation. I've made it easy for you. I've put my own fifteen years of experience—backed by over 400,000 miles of flying—five years of instructing in the Navy—all into my thorough, quickly mastered home study Course.

No Previous Experience Needed

You don't even need a high school education—don't have to know anything about planes or engines to learn the ground work of Aviation with my Course. Everything is clearly explained—illustrated by hundreds of pictures, drawings and charts—made as simple and easy as possible. You get all the information you need to pass the Government's written examinations for Mechanic's or Pilot's Licenses, in a few short months. If you want to learn to fly, I can save you many times the cost of my Course on your flying time at good airports all over the country.

FREE

Airplane Ride!

Right now I'm making an offer of a free airplane ride to all of my students. Write me at once and I'll send you complete information. Act now—to get in on this fine offer—while it is still open!



Walter Hinton

First to fly the Atlantic; first to fly to South America; first to explore the upper regions of the Amazon by plane. Flying Instructor in Navy for five years. Now giving ambitious men practical ground work training in Aviation at home. If you are 18 or over, mail the coupon below for your copy of his big new FREE Book today.

I'll Help You Get a JOB, Too!

My nation-wide Employment Department is at your service—the minute you are qualified to accept a job in Aviation. We are constantly in touch with scores of airports, plane factories, etc., that want trained men. Free Book tells all about how I help my graduates get the kind of jobs they want! Mail the coupon now.



Mail for my big FREE BOOK on AVIATION NOW!

Walter Hinton, President, 842-G
Aviation Institute of U. S. A., Inc.
1115 Connecticut Avenue, Washington, D. C.

Please send me a Free copy of your book, "Wings of Opportunity," telling all about my opportunities in Aviation, how you will train me at home and help me get a job.

Name
(Print clearly)

Address Age
(Must be 18 or over)

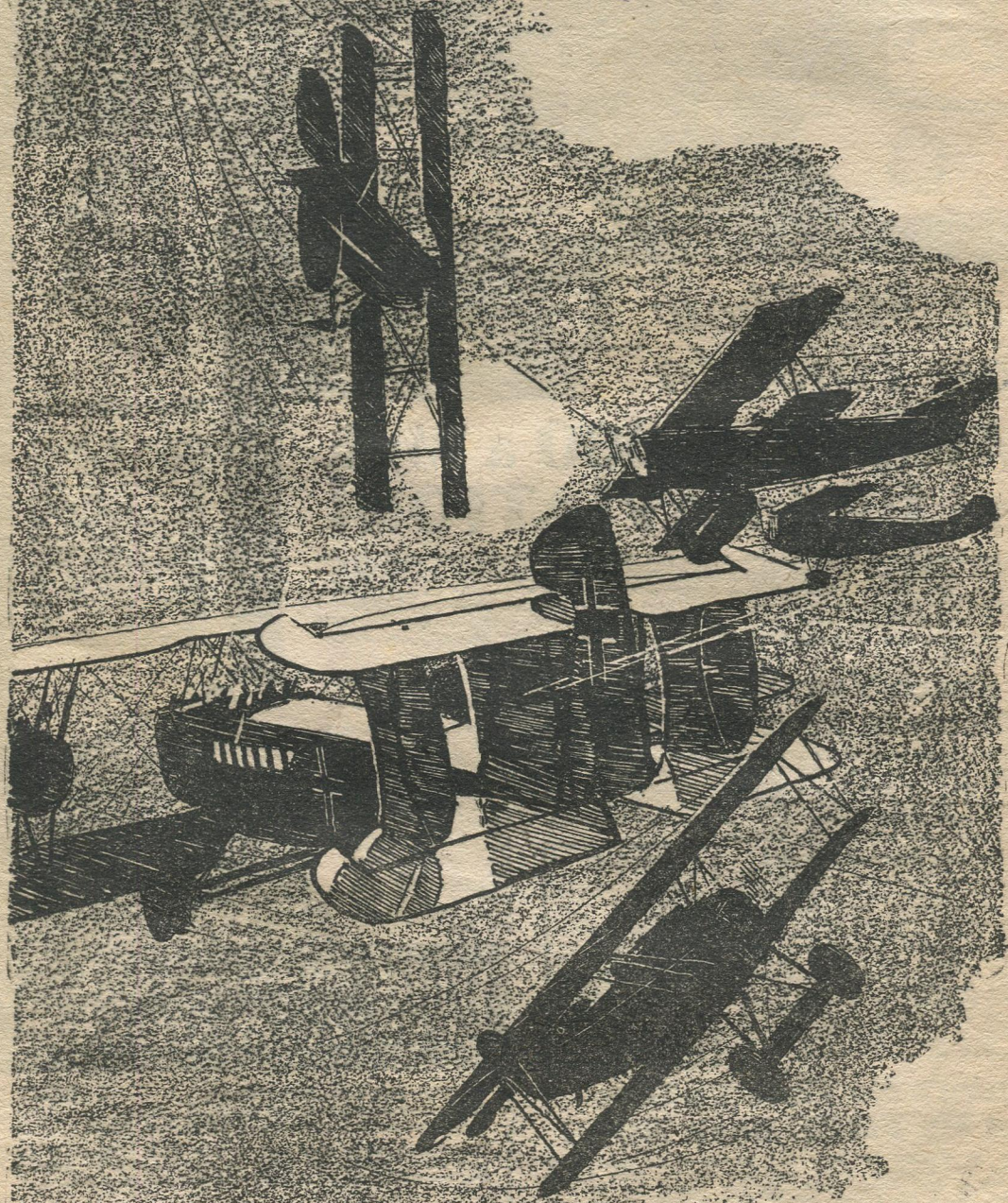
City State

There's No Time To Lose— Get My FREE Book NOW!

Aviation is growing by leaps and bounds—while many other industries are slumping. Don't wait and let the other fellows get ahead of you. Think about your own future. Let me prepare you for a job paying \$60 to \$100 a week or more—in Aviation. Get the FACTS. Mail the handy coupon on the right today—right now—while you're thinking about it. I'll send you my big new FREE Book—packed with interesting facts about your opportunities in Aviation. Do it NOW.

WALTER HINTON, Pres.
Aviation Institute of U.S.A., Inc.
1115 Connecticut Ave. Washington, D.C.

The Catacomb



FREDERICK
BLAKETTES

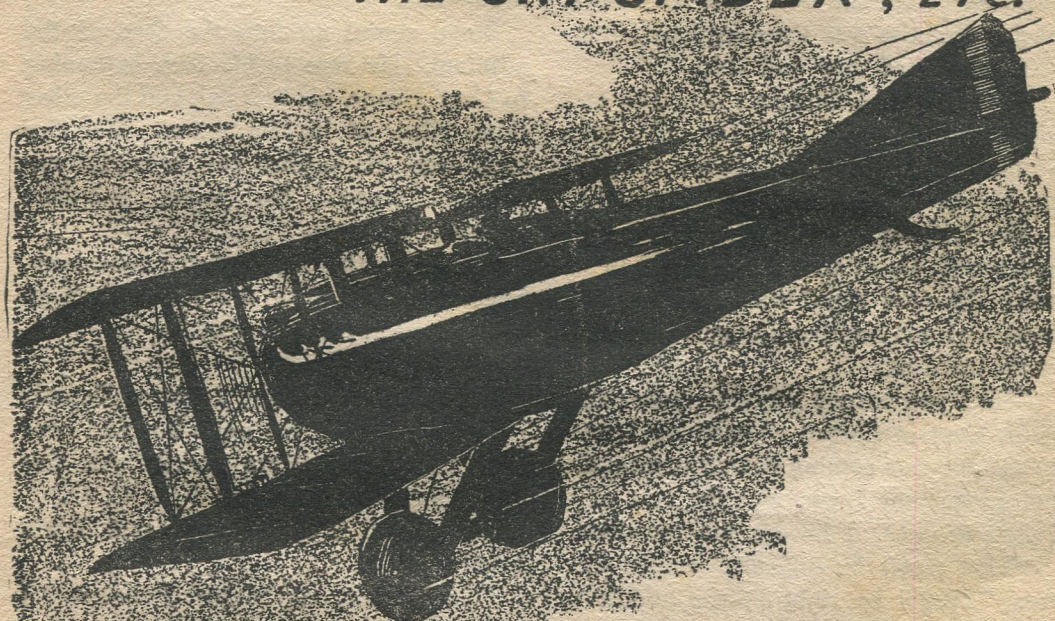
Ace



STEUART M. EMERY

AUTHOR OF

"THE SKY SPIDER", ETC.



Steve dived his Spad madly on that titanic plane.

"Paris in twenty-four hours!" This had been the boast of a dying Boche flyer. And now as those two Yanks stood in that midnight cemetery, they knew the boast was true; knew they were the only ones who could warn the Allies in time—but they were helpless prisoners, snared in the ghastly sky trap of Boche-land's most sinister bid for Victory!

CHAPTER ONE

Suicide Mission

"WHAT'S that? Brigadier General Sutton calling the 47th? ... Yes, sir."

The C. O.'s face went alert with interest and he clamped the receiver of the

telephone more closely to his ear. His adjutant, sitting on the other side of the bare little headquarters shack, rose to his feet and went to the door. Shouting and song drifted across the darkened tarmac from the mess building, next to headquarters, rising in a prolonged crescendo.

"Sentry," rapped the adjutant to the

soldier who stood on guard outside. "Jump into that mess hut and tell the outfit to pipe down. The brigadier is calling. The major can't hear himself think."

The soldier grinned and darted off. The adjutant closed the door and came back. Major Prentiss was listening hard, interjecting a word now and then.

"Yes, General Sutton . . . My best flight will go out . . . Fifty miles back of the lines, what? . . . Damn the risk, sir, they'll take off at eleven . . . Right."

The instrument went back on its hook and the C. O. of the 47th relaxed in his seat. His eyes flared with decision. The fingers of one lean hand tapped reflectively on the desk.

"Glad you turned off that racket next door, Captain Carter. Something blasted important was coming over the wire. Get me Lieutenant Irwin and the rest of C Flight at once. I have a job for them."

"That won't be difficult," smiled Carter. "They'll be right in the middle of the pay-day binge now. In just one minute, sir."

He strode out of the shack and crossed the few yards to the dilapidated, tin-roofed mess hut. Inside he heard a gay, reckless voice lifted in exultation.

"Come on, you eight! Eight's my point! I feel lucky tonight! Whoopee!"

The door gave under the adjutant's pressure and he stepped into the low-raftered building. Under the glare of an oil lamp a ring of pilots crowded about a blanket that was heaped high with francs. Other flyers thronged at the zinc bar, lifting glasses of cognac. The 47th held high revelry in between battles.

Down on his knees before the paper-littered blanket Steve Irwin clicked the dice in his hand and exhorted them cheerfully.

"Eight, I said, for four passes in a row. Oh boy, will all that coin look good in Paris!"

He drew back his hand for the roll that would mean the winning or losing of two hundred francs. A firm touch fell on his shoulder and a familiar voice spoke.

"Sorry, lieutenant, but all that will have to wait. The major wants C Flight on the double."

Steve stared up into the face of the adjutant. He rose to his feet, beckoning to Cary Sloane, his best pal, and the other three pilots of his formation. The dice went into his pocket and a rueful expression crossed his young, weather-browned features.

"I'll throw that eight when I come back, boys. Here's hoping the bones don't go cold on me in the meantime."

THEN he turned and followed Captain Carter out of the mess hut and over into the headquarters shack. All five flyers lined up and saluted the C. O.

"C Flight is here, sir," said Irwin briefly.

"Good," bit out Major Prentiss. "I have a job for you and it isn't an easy one by a long shot. It's a quick dash tonight away inside Germany and out again." He paused and grimace set his jaw. "That is, if you can get out. The brigadier has called for my best flight and I'm handing the mission to you. Get that?"

"Yes, sir," returned Steve.

His fibres tingled with anticipation and instinctively he touched the pocket that held the dice. Here was a real adventure, a gamble beside which shooting craps meant nothing.

"Thanks for the chance."

"You may not be thanking me by midnight." The C. O.'s tones became deep and serious. "This is the proposition. Brigade has just been informed by G. H. Q. Intelligence that they have received word of some kind of council of high-ranking German officers to be held in the Château Decroy tonight. The dope

on it seems to be pretty sketchy, but it's enough to take a chance on. That council must be harassed, broken up, driven out of the place. It's a chance to wash out some important Boche leaders in a single crack. They've tried bombing our headquarters and staff meetings plenty of times and now we're going to pay them back in their own coin. Don't worry, this is no affair of dropping explosive eggs on an enemy who can't fight back. That council will be protected by hell's own anti-aircraft force and no doubt by a big air guard as well. Your mission is to take your five Spads with all the bombs you can carry, dash over the lines and through whatever defenses confront you, and slam the blazes out of the Château Decroy."

"I see, major," said Steve.

Into his mind flashed the recollection of blasting explosions and a torn drome, of nights when death rained down out of the sky on the tarmac. The 47th pursuit had been raided and strafed often enough. It would be good to carry the war into Boche territory.

"If you break up that council without doing any further damage it will mean something," went on Major Prentiss. "You know what the war situation is like. The Boches have put on two tremendous drives, one of which almost took them to the walls of Paris. They will stage another soon, or lose the offensive. It may be that tonight's council at the Château Decroy will discuss it. If we could get hold of any of their documents it would be a godsend, but of course anything like that is out of the question. G. H. Q. realizes that the raid will be a touch-and-go affair and so is ordering only one flight on it. We can't afford to lose a whole squadron. Five men might get through while twenty-five never could without terrific losses."

The major rose and strode to the wall.

"Here's the map. I'll show you the

location of the château. In half an hour you start. Are you all set?"

"All set, sir." Steve grinned recklessly as his fingers tightened on a pair of cubes in his pocket. "Except for one thing. Could I step outside for a moment? I'll be back immediately."

"Yes," said the C. O. curiously. "But make it snappy."

"Right!"

Irwin hurried through the door, ran the few steps to the mess shack and burst into it. In his hand he held the dice. His fellow pilots still clustered about the blanket with the piles of francs on it.

"Here again, Steve?" hailed someone.

Interested faces looked at him as he knelt down and drew back his hand.

"Just trying a hunch," grinned Irwin. "I said I'd be back to shoot the eight. Read 'em and weep!"

Spinning whitely over the covering the dice came to rest on the edge of the banknotes.

"Five and a three," gurgled a pilot. "You big stiff, Steve, you made your point! What are you going to do with all that filthy lucre?"

Irwin scooped up the mass of bills, and strode to the zinc-covered bar. With a slap the whole double handful of francs hit the counter.

"Fill 'em up, boys!" he exclaimed jubilantly. "The outfit's drinks are on me as long as this lasts. I'm going where I won't need any money tonight."

A moment later he stood before the C. O. whose pencil was tracing a course on the headquarters wall map. "I'm back, sir," he said quietly. "I just wanted to see if my luck is in tonight. It is."

CHAPTER TWO

Council of War

ROARING, the great black staff motor tore along the road, headed at a tremendous velocity for the south. In front

of it, with Mausers slung over their shoulders, rocketed an escort of Boche motorcycle soldiers and fifty yards to the rear of the car trailed more hard-faced riders. The headlights of the racing machine bored a yellow path through the dark.

The dim illumination of the bulb set in the roof of the sedan revealed two broad-shouldered officers, the breasts of their tunics covered with decorations. Their spiked helmets crowded down over massive brows and their eyes gleamed sternly. One of them lifted the speaking tube and growled gutturally into it.

"Faster, driver."

"*Ja, Excellenz*," muttered the soldier-chauffeur, cringing, and the motor leaped into even higher speed.

"We shall be there shortly," went on the speaker to his companion. "And then, General Trimper, my friend, you shall hear all."

"You have hinted at much already, General von der Kull," came the rasping answer. "All Germany has faith in you as the great Battle Chieftain and the commander of the *Vaterland's* hosts. Is it true that this secret stroke will win the war?"

"It is as true as that we sit here speeding to the Château Decroy where the other corps commanders await us. You do not know Major von Ramm, our soldier-scientist. He has the ingenuity and the audacity of a devil. The brain of an inventor is linked to the ruthlessness of a true German warrior. For six months now he has been making his preparations, risking his life every hour of the day and night. No, the Allies have not discovered him nor have they an inkling of the terrific blow that he is arranging. The entire affair, huge as it is, has been carried on in the utmost secrecy. If a word of it got out beforehand it would mean the destruction of an entire German army. But that is sufficient for the moment, my

friend. You shall have the full information with the rest of your colleagues at the council which we are rapidly approaching."

The car whirled abruptly from the main highway and began to roll across a broad plain. It reached the base of a slight slope and raced up it on a winding highway. Von der Kull, the Battle Chieftain, gestured toward the ground beside the route. The noses of anti-aircraft cannon jutted from pits and the shapes of soldiers moved around them in the moonlight.

"The entire château is guarded by artillery and machine-gun nests. Beyond the building is the hangar of a full squadron of Fokkers that has been sent here for an air guard. Even if we meet secretly fifty miles behind the Front it is well to take every precaution."

A grim laugh broke from him and his powerful chest heaved.

"Our lives are far too precious to the *Vaterland* for any risk to be taken. Not a cursed Allied flyer could ever get through the cordon that lies about the Château Decroy. And here we are."

The staff motor braked to a halt in front of a huge château that loomed before it. In rambling magnificence the building bulked on the crest of the slope. Lights flashed here and there on the plain where a hangar showed and the hum of engines rose.

An officer ran down the steps of the terrace and flung open the door of the sedan, clicking his heels together and saluting with junker stiffness.

"Your *Excellencies* are pleased to descend?"

THE motorcycle soldiers had dismounted and formed in a double rank with their Mausers at present arms and their eyes staring woodenly to the front. Without even a glance at them von der Kull,

the Battle Chieftain, strode up the terrace and through the front door of the château. Across the wide tapestry-hung hall he stalked and down a corridor where the aide flung open a door.

Four generals sat in the room that he entered and every one of them rose to his feet on his arrival. Von der Kull surveyed them with an expression of stern authority.

"We are all gathered here at last, gentlemen. You have been summoned for this conference from many different points of the battlefield. In a word I can give you my news."

He stepped to the mahogany table that stood in the center of the chamber and, stripping off his cloak, helmet and gloves, flung them down on the shining surface. His hand went to the spiked and waxed moustaches that rode his upper lip and twirled them conqueringly.

"It is this. The war is as good as won. Victory is close to the banners of the *Vaterland!*"

A murmur of incredulous triumph ran around the room. Savage joy burned in the faces of the generals. There was the hush of anticipation. It was broken by the far drone of an airplane motor that grew louder with the passing of every second.

"Restrain your curiosity, my colleagues, for just a few minutes more until the landing of that plane. *Kapitan Vorkel!*" The aide darted forward. "Meet Major von Ramm, whom you hear landing next to the house in a Spad, and escort him here at once." He sent a glance at the jeweled watch on his wrist. "Excellent! The major is arriving at the exact scheduled time."

Moving around the table he seated himself in a broad-armed chair, drew a cigar case from the breast of his tunic and selected a weed. His powerful jaws

clamped on it and he puffed a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling.

"Make yourselves easy, gentlemen. We have not long to wait."

The minutes passed and quick footsteps sounded in the hall outside. The door opened and the aide called out, "Major von Ramm!"

Into the chamber strode a lean figure in French flyer's kit. Hot, blazing eyes stared from a deathly pale face and the mouth of the newcomer was clamped like a steel trap. The whole expression of his seamed features was one of utter mercilessness. He did not even salute the Battle Chieftain, but swept straight to the table and with a wrench tore off his helmet. A brush of clipped red hair covered his head.

"You arrive on the instant, as usual," said von der Kull throatily. "I myself only reached the château a moment since."

"I never fail in any arrangement." The voice of von Ramm sounded, incredibly harsh and rasping. "In my Spad I had no trouble whatsoever crossing the lines. Your gunners caught my signal and let me land unopposed by the terrace. No, General von der Kull, I do not fail. All is well with the Army in Paris."

"The Army in Paris!"

The words were echoed amazedly by the generals. Only the Battle Chieftain smiled, comprehending the mystery that lay behind the phrase.

"That is what I said," croaked von Ramm. "I am prepared now to lay before you the tremendous plan with whose details General von der Kull and I alone are familiar. The scheme is mine—all mine—but he has given me the means and the men to carry it out. The great Morsky transport planes are ready, general?"

"Fifty of them," boomed the Battle Chieftain. "Each capable of carrying a hundred men. They fly at such altitudes

that no scout ship can reach them. They are at your service, major."

"Then in forty-eight hours Paris is ours."

Muttering exclamations, the generals glanced at each other. Then every face was turned to the ruthless-eyed von Ramm who stood by the Battle Chieftain. He drew from his kit a folded paper and held it up.

"Here are the combat orders for the Army in Paris, the host of soldiers that will burst upon the doomed capital in a resistless tide. The whole city will be in flames within two hours of its eruption." A terrible laugh burst from his thin lips. "I—von Ramm, the scientist, pledge you that upon my reputation. Everything has been conducted with such quietness that the city goes about its business, utterly unaware of the menace that lies in wait, ready to break loose at my command. At this council the last details will be arranged. Generals, your armies are massed and ready at the Front?"

"They are," said von der Kull. "The dispositions of the forces on the line have been made. They will strike six hours after the Army in Paris, at whatever point the French withdraw their troops from, to rush them to the wreck of the city. Caught between two fires and with their beloved capital lost the French will be out of the war. After that, there will be no hope for the *verdammt* Americans and the British, trapped in a foreign country. *Der Tag!*"

THE shout rang to the ceiling.

"The plan!" burst out General Trimper, purple with excitement. "What is the plan? And what is the Army of Paris?"

Von Ramm raised his hand amid a pregnant silence. Then he stiffened and turned his head toward the window.

"The siren!" gasped General Trimper. "It is an alarm!"

A howling blast cut through the moonlit night outside and the roar of an anti-aircraft gun followed it instantly. Shouts and cries drifted into the room. Abruptly the door was flung open and a pale-faced officer darted in.

"A raid, *Excellencies!*" he gasped. "American Spads are overhead!"

As he spoke a thunderous roar crashed on the terrace and a huge segment of the château wall blew in. Stone and glass swept across the council table in a hurricane. Veils of choking smoke poured in. Again a terrific explosion burst out, directly above. The ceiling began to crack ominously. Blast came after blast and a red glow penetrated the chamber as the rafters fell at its end.

"Gott! They have set fire to château!" screamed Trimper. The purple tinge had left his heavy face and pallor spread across it. "Escape! Escape!"

In thunderous detonations the bombs burst while a chaos of artillery and machine gun fire erupted in the night. General von der Kull stared out through the broken wall, his fists clenched at his sides. A waving mass of flame rose on the flatland at the foot of the slope and tiny figures scurried wildly here and there in its light.

"The hangar has been hit!" he grated. "The planes of the air guard are done for! Not more than seven or eight of them can get up. *Kapitan Vorke!*"

The aide who had been standing close to the Battle Chieftain throughout sprang to attention.

"Telephone to the nearest staffel to turn out. There is one hardly thirty miles away. Those madmen must be blown out of the sky! *Teufel*, to think that they have dared to attack this council! Some *verdammt* secret service man has got wind of it. But no one, no one, will ever find

out what it is about. Von Ramm, look out!"

The Battle Chieftain's eyes fairly started from his head. The entire ceiling was crumbling, sagging slowly downward. With a ghastly, thunderous crash it fell and dust and smoke filled the room.

CHAPTER THREE

"Verdammt Yankee!"

"GIVE it to 'em, boys!" shouted Steve Irwin and he stood his Spad almost on its nose, driving hellbent for the blaze of fire that streaked up at him from a ground machine gun nest.

For mad minutes he had been flying through a cyclone of metal, dropping bomb after bomb that went straight to its target on the roof of the Château Decroy. The dash into Germany was over and now the red riot of battle raged. With silent motors the five Spads had slid down from the heights and pounced on the enemy.

Tracers whipped past his wings in a lethal stream but he held his course. His hand closed on the stick triggers and burst after burst of slugs lanced out.

He saw the Maxim crew collapse over their piece and yanked back on the stick, whirling around in a savage bank. Two black-crossed ships scudded at him with their Spandaus spitting crimson in the moonlight. Below and to the flank the hangar, crashed by one of Cary Sloane's eggs, was blazing from end to end.

But there were Fokkers left, plenty of them, to avenge the havoc that the Yanks were dealing.

"Smash the house!" he screamed while he darted and zigzagged out of the vicious Boche fire.

The plan of the attack was understood by every member of C Flight. It did not need his voice to tell any of them what to do. Irwin caught the cockpit of the

nearest Boche in his ring-sight and plunged his tracer home. The Boche plane reeled, went over on one wing and plummeted for the carpet. He split-aired madly and threw sparkling bullets into the fuselage of the second Fokker. Then he was up and over its tail, sending death sweeping along the camelback. The pilot fell forward across his controls and the doomed craft dropped.

"Come on, Yanks!" shrieked Steve. "Get the château and the brass hats! Wash out that council of war!"

His Spad whipped in a circle and came out, streaking over the burning building. Once more his hand sought the bomb lever and a projectile arrowed downward and burst with a roar amid the flames. The building seemed to shudder and cave in at the center.

Shouting in triumph he charged for the flash of an anti-aircraft cannon and let go another bomb from above it. In an orange blast it broke and the gun went mute.

"The château is *fini*!" he yelled, looking back at the blazing building. "Now to smash the Fokkers!"

Out from the door of the château poured figures that stumbled for two or three motors drawn up at the terrace steps. They piled in and the cars rushed off along the drive. More men plunged out in a disorderly stream that broke up and scattered in every direction. The Boches were leaving the doomed building in droves.

Savagely metal slashed into the fuselage of Steve's ship and he flung his glance upward just in time to dodge the assault of a Fokker that stormed down on him. All over the sky Spads and black-crossed crates wove and fired.

Ship after ship spun through the lower heights in a blazing torch that burst when it hit the ground. C Flight was shooting what was left of the Boche air guard

into fragments. A Spad roared past Irwin and he glimpsed Cary Sloane's grinning face.

Cary waved and dove, smashing an anti-aircraft cannon's crew to bits. Steve's fingers were numb from gripping his triggers. He shot on—steadily, fiercely. Then a geyser of orange erupted from his quarry and the Boche went down.

Irwin brushed his hand incredulously across his face. Not a black-crossed wing remained aloft and the ground below, near the ruined hangar, was deserted of all but a few scurrying forms.

"By God!" he gasped. "We've cleaned out everything but the machine gun nests! Head for home, boys!"

There came a coughing gasp and he started. Brokenly his engine began to miss and the little Spad dropped for a hundred feet, wobbling frightfully. He wrenched its nose up and in that instant the motor conked out. He rode a helpless, riddled crate that was wavering downward for the carpet. Cary Sloane's ship swept up close to him and he waved the signal—

"Engine shot away! Am landing!"

DESPERATELY his eyes roved over the ground below and in the glare from the burning château he saw something that sent a surge of hope through him—a lone plane parked close to the terrace. He leaned forward and pointed to it. From his cockpit Sloane nodded and gestured:

"Go ahead!"

Mauling at the controls Steve checked the wobbling drop of his crate and got it into a gradual glide while he took a lightning estimate of the situation.

"The brass hats made off in those motors," he murmured. "The rest of the Boches have beat it and the air guard is almost destroyed. Cary and the boys will hold off what's left of the m. g. nests and

ground soldiers. I ought to make it if this bus holds up!"

Again the Spad nosed down and plunged. In a last frantic effort Steve brought it up and then earth met ship in a shattering crash hardly fifty yards from the château. Dazed and reeling, he pried himself from the wreckage and stared about him.

"Good Yord!" he gasped as he took in the parked crate by the terrace. "It's a Spad! How in hell did it get here?"

Through a gap in the château wall he could see a ruined room with a table in its center. On the table rested a pair of spiked helmets, discarded by their owners in flight. The chamber was piled high with wreckage and flames licked out from the windows of the story above.

"That's where the brass hats were sitting," he panted. "Those are their helmets they left behind."

Into his mind flashed recollection of words that Major Prentiss had spoken. A wild purpose leaped into his brain and his eyes flared.

"They may have left other things—memoranda or documents. The C. O. said anything like that would be priceless. Have I got time?"

His gaze went to the flaming upper stories of the structure. It would be minutes yet before the fire reached the first floor. The clatter of Vickers and Maxims filled the night. The Spads of C formation, led by Cary, were rocketing over the plain, shooting it out with the remaining anti-aircraft guns.

"The boys are keeping them busy," he grated. "They'll cover my tail if any Boches come after me. Here goes!"

He began to run for the terrace. Up it he scrambled and dove through the gap in the wall, bringing up short inside the room. Practically its entire ceiling had fallen and debris lay in piles on the floor. Overhead in the next story the

flames raged and crackled and the air was fearfully hot.

Steve gasped and wiped the sweat from his face, moving for the wreckage-strewn table on which the helmets lay. Then he whirled abruptly and stared in surprise at the strange figure that rose from a pile of debris close at hand. It was tattered, white with dust and its eyes glared terribly from its seamed face. A French flyer's kit clothed the lean form.

"An ally!" exclaimed Steve incredulously. "How did you get here, comrade?"

He had picked up one of the helmets and clutched it in his hand, turning it over. The voice of the stranger spoke, threaded with hatred and his hand flicked to his waist.

"Drop that, *verdammte* Yankee!"

The crash of a Luger resounded in the room and the stranger leaped forward as he shot. The helmet spun out of Steve's grasp and hit the floor, a hole driven in it. His own hand went down for his automatic, but he knew it would be too late.

He dodged as the second bullet ploughed through the folds of his cover-all at the shoulder and jumped for his assailant. His fingers closed on the other's pistol wrist and wrenched.

"*Teufel!*" screamed the stranger as their bodies met with a vicious shock. The Luger fell from him. "You swine! No, you did not get me with your bombs though the ceiling fell."

Breast to breast they strained and Steve read murder in his opponent's eyes. This man in the French kit was a Boche, an enemy who had tried to shoot him down unawares. He fought for his life while the Château Decroy burned above his head.

Hot embers began to rain down on them and Steve's lungs, choked and compressed, felt like bursting. He had no time to figure out anything, he only knew

that he struggled with a tremendously powerful Boche and that death would be the fate of the loser.

For an instant he broke out of the grip of the German and swung his right fist in an uppercut. The Boche dodged and smashed him squarely between the eyes. Half-blinded and numbed, Steve closed and together they reeled about the floor.

The drone of motors driven at mad speed came into the chamber and a hell of machine gun fire erupted over the plain outside.

"Ah!" screamed the Boche. "The Fokker reinforcements! Now all you cursed Yankees are doomed!"

OVER the German's shoulder Steve saw, through the gap in the wall, a cloud of enemy ships scouring the sky. Spandaus raved and clamored. With a terrific wrench he broke free from the Boche's grip and his hand thrusting against his opponent's chest clutched a paper that projected from his tunic and came away, tearing.

He leaped back behind the table and reached for his gun. The Colt stuck for a second and would not come out. The Boche whirled as he glimpsed the gesture and tore for the broken wall. With a bound he was through it and racing along the terrace.

Panting, Steve jumped in pursuit and burst out into the moonlight. He was too late. The Boche was just disappearing around the corner of the château and it would be useless to pursue.

"He's heading for the cover of one of the machine-gun nests," he blurted. "No chance of getting him now."

He looked up into the moonlit heights where desperate combat raged and turned to race for the parked Spad. Ten Fokkers at least were shooting it out with the four planes of C Flight. In a single motion he

set the cockpit gear and sprang for the propeller, twisting it.

"I'm coming, boys!" he gasped. "Stick it out!"

Again and again he pulled on the blade. An eternity, it seemed, elapsed before the engine roared and he sprang for the controls. For an instant he gazed at the torn fragment of paper that still remained in his hand and then thrust it into his coverall.

The Spad swept forward and tore over the turf. On it stormed and lifted just as a burst of bullets ripped at it from the flank where a Maxim nest still held out.

Steve's teeth clenched and the red frenzy of battle rioted in his fibres. Five hundred feet above him darted Cary Sloane's crate, firing desperately at a pair of Fokkers that boxed it in. Here and there the other Spads of C Flight streaked and shot, trading tracer with twice their number of foes.

"Smash 'em!" screamed Steve and jammed on his triggers.

Into the belly of the nearest Fokker sliced a stream of lead and the Boche ship reeled. Steve pounded on, his plane rushing upward. With a wrench he swept aside almost under the wheels of the German. Turning over on its side the Fokker fell for the carpet.

A blaze of flame broke out in front of Steve's rushing crate. A Spad and a Boche, locked inextricably in collision, were plunging from the heights. Whirling, diving, zooming. Steve hurled his crate about the sky while his guns raved without ceasing. He flew and fought in savage rage.

Lead slashed at him from all sides, driving through his winds and fuselage. Dimly he was aware that broken ships were dropping and that the Spandau fire fell off. Again and again he saw Cary driving his lead into Fokkers. He gasped and turned around. For a moment he rode, unhindered, above the main dog fight. Two

Spads slammed tracer remorselessly into a pair of Boches.

"God!" breathed Steve. "We've knocked down eight of them! Now for the last!"

He stood his plane on its nose and scaled down, firing. His slugs poured into a helmeted head and the Boche collapsed in his seat. The other Fokker, torn by a fierce scissors fire, seemed to come apart in the sky and went earthward in fragments. Steve swung up alongside the survivors of C Flight and waved his hand in a gesture of command.

"Head for home! Get altitude!" He could not tell how many Boche staffels had received the alarm. Zooming upward, he leveled off at eight thousand feet and jammed on the power. His eyes searched the heights, looking for the blur of wings that would mean deadly menace, while his Spad ate up the miles.

Long since the glare of the burning château had vanished in the distance. The Spads rushed on in a clear, moonlit arch. Relaxation swept over Steve and he felt incredibly weary. Through terrific strain and peril he and his team-mates had performed their mission. Now they were speeding back to the drome to report.

"We sure busted up that brass hat council," he told himself. Then his eyes shadowed. "But it cost us two damned good men. Well, that's the *guerre*. If you don't wash out today you do tomorrow. The boys took plenty of Boches with them."

CHAPTER FOUR

Mystery Ace

THE blaze of the trenches appeared below and passed out to the rear. Steve dropped three thousand feet, going down in a long, gradual glide and picked up the landmarks he knew.

Presently the outline of the home field

showed up and he descended in an easy pique. The floodlight flicked on, sending a path of yellow across the surface of the drome. He altered his course to meet it, cut the motor and slid the rest of the way down. In a long taxi the Spad rolled up the field into the eye of the light and came to a halt.

Figures emerged from the shadows and advanced to the plane. Major Prentiss, the C. O. and the adjutant were meeting the returning ships. Steve pried himself out of the cockpit and stood erect.

A second Spad wobbled up a few yards away and stopped with a tearing sound. One wing dropped completely off and Cary Sloane's voice called out in a cheerful wonder.

"The old bus hung together just long enough, didn't she? I've been feeling her cracking up under me for the last half hour."

The third plane landed and its pilot got out. He stumbled, clutched for a wing and slowly slid to the ground. Steve turned from the advancing C. O. and ran swiftly to the flyer.

"Ambulance!" he shouted. "Ambulance and the M. O.!"

He knelt down by his teammate whose coverall was splotted at the shoulder with a heavy stain.

"Horton!" he called.

The pilot's eyes opened and he grinned weakly.

"I stopped—a few," he gasped. "But it doesn't—hurt much."

The eyes closed and Horton's face went white. He had lapsed into unconsciousness, game to the core. Steve straightened up and faced the C. O. whose features set in grave seriousness.

"Is this all of C Flight that is left, Irwin?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," returned Steve. He choked a little and then steadied his voice. "Peters and Marvin are gone. I don't know

yet how the rest of us got through, but we did the job. We blew the Château Decroy to hell and I don't know how many Fokkers."

The ambulance came tearing up and stopped. A stretcher was ripped from its interior and the form of Horton placed on it. The squadron's medical officer called out.

"He'll come to, O. K., in a little while. But he'll be out of the war for weeks."

The stretcher with its burden swung into its rack and the ambulance moved swiftly away.

"Come with me," said the C. O. brusquely. "I'm taking you two direct to brigade headquarters. Some further information on that council you raided has turned up and the general wants an instant report. He's sent one of the staff cars down to wait for you. Here we are."

He motioned toward the powerful motor that was drawn up on the tarmac only a few yards away.

A moment later Steve and Sloane were on its cushions with the C. O. and it was speeding for the road. With a lurch the motor rushed onto the smooth highway and increased its pace.

"You can give me a brief outline on the way," said Major Prentiss. "Save the details until we reach brigade's château. I don't know what we're running into there, but I gather that Chaumont is in it up to the neck."

Quietly Steve spoke and before he had finished the car swerved from the highway, passed between stone gate pillars and roared up a drive to a huge, rambling building.

"Get out," interrupted the major. "And make it fast."

The alighted and passed through the big front door of the château, crossed the hall and ascended the stairs. With the air of one who knew the premises perfectly Prentiss led the way down a corridor and

knocked on a door. It was opened immediately by a flawlessly-groomed captain and they stepped in.

"Here are Lieutenants Irwin and Sloane, sir," announced the C. O. "They alone returned unhurt from the raid."

Brigadier General Sutton stared keenly at the two flyers. He stood in front of an ornamental fireplace with his hands clasped behind his back and his head thrust forward in an attitude of concentration. In an armchair a few feet away sat a tall officer with the carriage of authority.

"Colonel Fiske of G. H. Q. Intelligence has just arrived by plane," said the brigadier. "He has brought very important last-minute news concerning the conference in the Château Decroy. Will you explain, colonel?"

THE G. H. Q. officer rose from the chair and placed himself beside the general. He spoke in a deep, strong voice.

"Almost immediately after Chaumont ordered the raid on the Château Decroy by a flight from his brigade a second Secret Service message came in, badly delayed. It gave the names of the German leaders who were to take part in the council. Nothing could be more startling or more significant. No less than five Corps Commanders were on the list, summoned to meet General von der Kull, the great Battle Chieftain of the *Vaterland*. Wherever von der Kull can be found there is certain to be a drive against the Allies. This council, the secret agent's message said, was to discuss a great new victory drive on the part of the Germans. I have no intention of giving you the identity of our agent. It is sufficient to say that he has managed to get himself onto von der Kull's staff within the last week and his information can be taken as absolutely correct. If he could only have been present at the council!" His tone changed abruptly. "Your flight raided the château.

Did you destroy any of the council?"

"No, sir," said Steve levelly. "The generals all escaped. We burned out the building and its hangar and disrupted the conference."

As rapidly as possible he summarized the results of the attack and at the end the G. H. Q. colonel nodded.

"You have done better than any of us expected, lieutenant. You could not possibly realize who was in that château. Chaumont had no idea that the Battle Chieftain and his leaders would all be there or we would have sent over two, three, ten bombing squadrons, if necessary to blow that devil off the map. Without her greatest fighting man Germany would be stunned. And now he and his aides will hold the council somewhere else and we may never know, until it is too late, what menace they will spring on us. There is no clue, none of any kind to their plan."

Instinctively Steve's hand went into his coverall and felt for a crumpled piece of paper that had been thrust in there and temporarily forgotten.

"I've brought back something, Colonel Fiske," he said. "My engine was shot out, and I had to land on the château lawn. And then—"

Amazement, mingled with sudden hope, dawned on the faces of Brigadier General Sutton and Fiske as Steve sketched rapidly the struggle in the shattered, burning building.

"In the fight I got away with this. I've only had a glance at it. But it contains some lines of typewriting."

"Give it to me," barked Fiske, holding out his hand.

His lips twitched with suppressed excitement. He almost snatched away the fragment of paper and he and the brigadier bent their heads over it. A muttered exclamation of surprise fell from the G. H. Q. Officer.

"Look!" he broke out. "Look at the name in the corner—Luitpold von Ramm!"

"And who is von Ramm, colonel?" asked the brigadier.

"Germany's man of mystery and one of the most dangerous Boches in the *Vaterland*! If he and von der Kull are working together there will be all hell to pay." A tense frown rutted his forehead. "What's this?" he went on as though to himself. "The fragment is entitled 'Battle Orders for the Army in Paris.' And then—nothing. The paper is torn off directly below."

He fell silent while the shadow deepened in his eyes. Presently he spoke, oblivious to the others in the room.

"Chaumont must be warned at once and the French general headquarters. Some terrific menace lies back of this sheet of paper. Tell me." He whirled on Irwin. "What did this German you fought with and from whom you took this paper look like?"

Steve thought hard, summoning up a recollection of a murderous face with blazing hot eyes.

"Red-haired," he said. "I could make that out under the dust from the debris that covered him. See feet tall at least. Fierce black eyes and a seamed face."

The colonel struck the fragment of paper with his fist.

"**YOU** fought with von Ramm himself!" he bit out. "That was the fiend in person! Your description answers to his as if it had been provided to us by our agents. Von Ramm is the scientist who has perfected any number of diabolical engines of war for the Boches. He is their master mind of invention. For six months we have been unable to locate him anywhere in Germany. You say that he was in the Château Decroy in a French flyer's kit?"

"Yes," replied Steve. "And I got away in a French Spad parked next to the building. He must have flown over the lines in it to meet von der Kull at the council."

"That is exactly what he did!" exploded Colonel Fiske. "It means just one thing—that von Ramm is operating in disguise in Allied terrain!" Once more his glance swept to the torn sheet of paper. "'Battle Orders for the Army in Paris,'" he quoted. "Good heavens, what does that mean? Is von Ramm himself working in disguise in the capital, the very heart of the French nation? If that is the case the Allies are in frightful danger."

The paper crumpled in his hand as involuntarily he clenched his fist. With a few quick, nervous strides he crossed the room to the window and stood there looking out, his back turned to the strained group in the room. When he turned tremendous anxiety was written on his face.

"We must discover what von der Kull, the Battle Chieftain, and von Ramm are up to," he said harshly. "I feel certain that the outcome of the war depends upon it. We must locate von Ramm who, I take it, is in Paris acting as a secret agent. The Yank who sent us his description is off our roster at Intelligence. The Germans caught him. And in all our secret corps, or anywhere else in the A. E. F. for that matter there is no one who has been or can identify him. It is a frightful situation."

A little thrill ran through Steve Irwin's frame as the colonel paused. He stepped forward.

"I can identify von Ramm, sir," he said. "You have forgotten me. Why shouldn't I go on his trail?" His jaws tightened and hot hatred rose in him. "I've had one fight already with that particular Boche. I'd rather like to meet him again. It's pretty probable, isn't it, that he'll turn up once more in Paris after his visit to von Kull? If he's still masquerading as

an Allied flyer he's bound to appear in the air forces' favorite haunts. Of course, it's taking a wild chance."

"It will be like looking for a needle in a haystack," interrupted Colonel Fiske. "But anything is better than doing nothing. Yes, Lieutenant Irwin, I think it is the only thing that can be done. Scour Paris, spend all day and half the night looking for that face—and if you find it you'll know what to do."

"I will, sir." Steve moved back and felt a nudge against his ribs.

Cary Sloane stood next to him, winking cheerfully, and Irwin nodded.

"I would like to take Lieutenant Sloane with me, sir," he added. "Two men would be better than one in an affair like this."

"Take him," said Brigadier General Sutton gruffly. "Get some rest before you go. I'll send your travel orders down to the squadron. Indefinite detached service I suppose, colonel?"

Colonel Fiske had drawn a cigar from the case in his breast pocket and it was clamped firmly between his teeth. His eyes flickered with an odd light.

"Yes," he said. "Detach Lieutenants Irwin and Sloane indefinitely for Intelligence service. Looking for von Ramm in Paris won't be such a safe job. It's quite likely that you'll never see them back again."

CHAPTER FIVE

Night Monster

STEVE IRWIN lifted his tin cup of coffee, laced with cognac, and smiled cheerfully at Sloane. "Down these and let's go!" he remarked. "The crates are ready and so are we. So long, boys!"

"Pretty soft for you guys," rose a voice from among the crowd of pilots gathered at the mess shack bar. "Couple of weeks leave in gay Paree, what?"

"Give the 47th's regards to the boulevards and the mademoiselles!" shouted someone else. "Paint the cabarets red for us, Steve!"

"Right," answered Steve.

His cup hit the zinc counter, empty, and he turned for the door. An odd, reckless expression came to his face.

The whole outfit thought that he and Cary were going on a leave binge in Paris, the paradise of the air service, and he meant to let them think so. One didn't exactly mention the fact when assigned to Intelligence work. There would be no mademoiselles or champagne for them, only a tireless, relentless search for one of the most dangerous men in all Germany. Where the trail might lead time alone would tell.

He thrust open the door and stepped out onto the moonlit tarmac with Cary at his side. He felt his fibres tingling with life and anticipation.

A full day's sleep had made a new man of him after the battle and strain of the night before and the hours' long conference at Brigade Headquarters. The shapes of two Spads stood on the deadline and Major Prentiss waited near them.

"All ready to take off, sir," said Steve, striding up. "Any further orders from Brigade?"

"None," rapped the C. O. "You've got all you need. I don't have to tell you what it will mean if you can find von Ramm. G. H. Q. seems to have the wind up for fair over this business and so have we all." He held out his hand, his face a mask of seriousness. "Get going, Irwin, and good luck."

Steve swung into his cockpit and a mechanic stepped to the propeller. The motor of his Spad was idling and the blade caught almost at once.

"Contact!" cried Steve. "Yank those chocks!"

The blocks came away and he fingered

the throttle. Through the moonlight raced a figure, straight for Major Prentiss and over the humming of his motor Steve caught the adjutant's excited voice.

"The Front reports a Gotha coming over, sir! It's away up but they can just make it out. It's headed to pass within five miles of us."

"What's that?" barked the C. O.

He stiffened on the instant—alert, keen. His hand went into his tunic and ripped out his whistle. The blast cut across the tarmac.

"Into the mess shack, captain, and turn out the squadron! We might be able to knock down that bomber before it does any damage. It must be headed for Paris or the rear munitions depots." Then he took a pace forward. Close to Steve's wing. "You men take off just the same. This isn't any job for you. You've got another one."

Steve nodded and his grip on the controls relaxed a little. He had felt the surge of combat sweeping up in him for an instant, but he realized that the C. O. was right. They had something beside a Gotha to attend to.

"O. K.," he called and opened the throttle.

The Spad jumped and rolled off down the smooth turf with red sparks shooting from its exhaust pipes. In a final backward glance he saw the door of the mess hut erupting a mass of pilots and the mechanics trundling planes out of the hangar. The 47th would be in the air in a matter of minutes, primed for battle.

"And we won't be with them," he muttered grimly. "It's likely enough that we'll never be with them again."

Beside the ceaseless searching of the Allied flyers' rendezvous in Paris on the track of von Ramm there would be Boche spy nests to enter, places of peril marked down on G. H. Q.'s list where more than one Yank agent had disappeared. Colonel

Fiske in the detailed council that had followed their assignment had told many things.

The swift little Spad long since had lifted from the ground and now droned steadily on its way to Paris through the silvered arch. Steve cut down his speed and let the crate push on at half its velocity. Alongside him rode Cary, lolling in his cockpit, and grinning as usual.

The miles drifted out behind their rudders as the ships carried them forward. Already Steve estimated they must be half way to Le Bourget, the landing field outside the capital.

HE gunned up a bit and the plane increased its pace, sliding upward in a long zoom for altitude.

"It won't be long now," he murmured. "Paris can't be more than twenty-five miles away. And then it's us for terra firma and no more scrapping in the air."

At eight thousand feet he leveled off and glanced behind him to see if Cary had come up. The moon rode high in a night of white brilliance and the visibility was perfect for night flying. Far to the north the guns would still be flaming remorselessly at the Front. And his own outfit even now might be back in the mess hut, revelling over the downing of the Gotha. "Maybe and maybe not," he told himself.

"Those big bombers are blasted hard to locate at night."

Abruptly he shook himself and stared back and up into the heights. A dim blur swept across the stars and beneath it, to the rear, flew a tiny wedge of five dots.

"God!" he grated. "What is it? It's coming on hell-bent!"

Mechanically he swung around and waited for the oncoming shape. It grew clearer, more distinct with every second. Winged and monstrous it cut through the silver arch, eating up space. In another

moment it would pass over his head. The dots took form and he recognized them.

"Spads! It's an Allied ship they're escorting! Gosh, it's the biggest thing I ever saw!"

The huge plane soared on and passed three thousand feet above him. Excitement rioted in Steve's veins.

"A few more like that and we can blow Berlin to pieces!" he breathed. "Cary, come along!"

Wrenching the stick back he sent his Spad flying upward for the tail of the air monster. Never in his whole air career had he seen a ship like this. "I want a look at that thing close by to be sure I'm not dreaming," he murmured. "What a yarn to tell the boys when we get back—if we ever do."

He was forcing his crate to its utmost speed to catch up with the passing giant of the air. Now he had flattened out and was roaring up closer and closer to it.

The guarding Spads had fallen behind and rode in a V to the rear of its rudder. Again Steve gave his bus the gun and thundered forward. The great craft bored steadily on, pointing for Paris. Then Steve's gaze focussed on the rearmost Spads of the wedge. He was scudding not thirty yards behind them. A helmeted head swerved around and he saw the pilot's face staring at him.

Even at that distance he made out a sudden twitching of the flyer's mouth. Then the pilot signaled to his companion riding on the opposite flank of the V. In a whirl of roaring speed the two ships went up and over in an Immelmann.

"What's the idea?" Steve asked himself as he switched around in his seat. "What do they want to get behind us for?"

Coming out of their reversal the Spads thundered squarely on the tails of Steve and Sloane. Madly Irwin jammed on his rudder and hurled his crate out of the way just in time. The Vickers of the

Spad behind him were blazing flame and deadly lead ripped into his camelback as he plunged aside. The pilot's face, limned between his flaring guns, was set in berserk hatred.

"Boches!" shrieked Steve. "They're trying to get us! The whole damned escort and that big crate are German!"

On hummed the giant plane and the other three Spads. In the moonlit heights Steve battled desperately while the flotilla passed along. He went into a spin, fought his way out of it with tracer whipping past his head and charged upward for his treacherous opponent. The Boche leaped aside and Steve's slugs slashed through empty air.

Cursing, Steve jammed on the rudder and drove for his darting enemy. A blast of fire tore into his fuselage from the flank where the second Boche hovered. Then Cary's Spad scaled upward and its guns hit viciously into the firing German.

"Good scout!" shouted Steve. "Pound him, Cary!" Sloane, too, he realized, had gone into a spin when the unexpected attack had broken and now he was thundering up from below to join the combat. "Two to two!" snarled Steve. "By God, we'll get 'em!"

HIS quickfirers raved unceasingly. The Boche he shot at veered and went for the carpet in a terrific power dive. Steve tilted his Spad on its nose, gave it full gun and roared down on the trail. In front of him streaked the German and the dim earth leaped up to meet them.

"He's got to level off," breathed Steve. "And when he does—"

In that instant the German's ship flattened out and Steve's blast plunged full into its cockpit. A rush of flame burst out and Steve pulled his stick hard back while his Spad shuddered from rudder to prop with the strain. Then he was riding, smoothly, easily, at a thousand feet above

the earth watching his antagonist smash into the ground, blazing. His eyes went to the heights and he zoomed.

"Coming!" he shouted.

Far up there, zigzagging in the moonlight, were Cary and the other German. Tiny spits of fire broke from their darting ships. Hanging his crate on its propeller and leaning forward with taut nerves, Steve tore for the fight.

Up, up, up he scaled and then his guns lanced out. Cary struck with his metal in the same instant and Steve whipped aside. The riddled Boche went plunging down past his wings, turning over and over.

"That does for them," grated Steve, swinging his ship up on a level with Sloane.

He paused for a moment, panting while his gaze traveled searchingly to the south.

"Where is it?" he breathed. "Where's that giant plane?" His arm went up in curt signal and he flung the Spad through the arch, thrusting on the last iota of power. Wild thoughts seethed through his brain. "It wasn't a Gotha the infantry reported coming over the Front," he reasoned. "It was that air monster, so high up it couldn't be clearly made out. It slipped past our outfit. Where is it headed for? Paris?"

Agonizedly he peered through the night with desperation in his heart. He was pursuing a phantom in miles of space. He had no idea if he could ever pick up its trail again. The silvered heights stretched empty before him. His fingers groped in the flap of his cockpit and pulled out a pair of night glasses. Bringing them up he stared through them, sweeping the sky to left and right.

"Ah!" he muttered. Miles away to the east and above him glided the familiar blur. "There it is! And it's slowed its speed. Let's go, Cary!"

The fleet little Spads roared along at

a mad pace. Again and again Steve lifted the glasses and gazed through them.

"We're gaining," he panted. "We're overhauling it. And then what?" A savage sensation rose in him, bringing a red mist before his eyes. He knew what he meant to do, no matter what it cost.

"Attack!"

The great blur grew nearer and its outlines became distinct. The three scout ships that were left of the escort still accompanied it, flying beneath its belly. Steve zoomed for five hundred feet and gathered himself for the coming assault.

"Nobody on board that ship saw the fight and neither did the rest of the Boches in the Spads," he murmured. "We'll be on them before they know it and that's our only chance."

Two tiny crates were about to plunge in savage onset upon a giant of the skies and its guard. Steve leveled off and tore madly for the titanic plane that soared along at a slightly lower level. Then he shoved the stick forward and went screaming for its tail.

His tracer lashed violently in twin streams that took the monster squarely. An answering ripple of fire broke out from the rear of the wings of the great ship. Machine gun nests were there, lashing in deadly tumult at the two Spads that pounced out of the heights. White, cruel faces gleamed behind them.

In a maelstrom of bullets Steve sheered off, dove and plunged his streams of slugs in from the side. It was like shooting at a moving train. Through windows in the tremendous fuselage he glimpsed crowds of men. Then the windows opened and they too spat fire from guns mounted in them.

From beneath the giant ship rose the three guardian Spads, sweeping to the combat. Steve rolled away and his quick-firers took the first Boche that scaled up. True to the target his tracer struck and

the German dropped like a dead leaf through midair. With a thunderous roar Cary charged down beside him, whirled and blew the next Spad into fragments.

"That's the stuff!" screamed Steve. "Wipe out the escort and then crash the big crate!"

HIS bullets ripped out in a sparkling torrent and the last Boche scout dodged. Yelling hoarsely while lead slashed his wings and fuselage from the giant's fire, Steve pitched his plane forward to trap the German scout between himself and the side of the titanic crate. The Boche pilot paled, whipped into a roll and Steve's tracer struck home.

In a wild split-air the German crashed full into the fuselage of the monster ship and its gas tank exploded. A geyser of hot flame rushed up, shredding off the fabric, and spread along the side of the air giant.

"Shoot, Cary, shoot!" shrieked Steve. "We've got the big bus!"

Heedless of the terrific gunfire that streaked at him from the nests of the flying dreanaught he focussed his Vickers on the cockpit of the giant plane where its pilots sat and gripped his triggers until his hand went numb.

One after the other the pilots collapsed at the controls and the great ship shuddered, put its nose down and began to sink.

"One more burst!" screamed Steve. Only an empty clicking came from his guns as he pressed the triggers.

"Lord!" he groaned. "They didn't give me a full ammo supply back at the field."

In a frenzied zoom he pulled away and Cary followed him, pounding at the breech of a jammed quickfirer. Then an exultant shout broke from Steve. The air monster was dropping now, faster and faster. No other pilot had taken the place of those who had been put out of action. The flames from the wrecked Spad were rush-

ing relentlessly through the fabric of the giant.

Blazing, eaten by fire, it was falling out of control. Like a tremendous torch it dropped slowly through space with men rushing frantically about inside it. Figures began to fall out of it where the flames burned through its flooring.

Steve spiraled slowly down, keeping well above the doomed and fiery wreck. Its guns were not yet silenced and still shot venomously upward. Then gradually the sky monster turned over on its back and went rushing, spinning, for the earth in a terrible plume of flame and smoke.

There was a gigantic blast of fire and burning fragments flew upward as the giant struck ground.

"Down and land," signaled Steve and put his Spad for the carpet. He could hardly believe as yet that the dreadnaught had been destroyed.

Drifting rapidly to earth, he pointed his crate for the wreck and its undercarriage wheels struck the smooth turf of a meadow. In a long taxi he approached the flames and leaped out when the Spad stopped. Bodies lay scattered here and there on the flatland.

"There must have been at least a hundred and fifty Boches in that ship," he muttered, stepping toward the ruin. "And they weren't on a bombing raid. There was no blast of explosives when the ship hit. The whole thing is a ghastly mystery."

HE moved quickly over the ground, staring down at the figures that littered it. Cary had landed and come up to him and they stared wonderingly at each other. The moonlight flooded down on the scene, revealing it in all its wartime grimness. Not far off the flames of the huge airship were dying down.

Steve's eyebrows lifted in utter incredulity as his hand went out, pointing to

the casualties. The bodies that stretched on the earth were clad in every variety of uniform—those of French, British and American soldiers. Some of them wore the coarse garb of French peasants.

"What's the answer?" he exclaimed. "Is this a huge detachment of spies being carried across the lines? Whatever they are they're *fini*."

A muffled groan came from close at hand and he started. On the grass a figure moved painfully. It was that of a man dressed as a Yank flyer. Steve advanced and stood looking down at him. It was obvious that he was mortally hurt.

"*Verdammt* Americans!" came the broken, ragged muttering from the man's lips. "You may have smashed us, but the others still will come. *Hoch* the Army in Paris!"

"What's that?" said Steve sharply, bending down over the injured man. "What do you mean?"

"You cursed Yankees will find out!" An edge of red foam appeared on the Boche's mouth. His eyes glared hatred. "In twenty-four, forty-eight hours we shall have Paris, you fools! Even now—even now—"

He tried to raise himself and fell back. His head struck the turf with a dull thud and Steve straightened up.

"Washed out," he said curtly. "He was just on the point of bragging the truth. Now we may never know what he meant to say."

For a long time he stood looking down at the German and thinking hard. Presently he spoke.

"Go through three or four of the Boches around here, Cary. See if they have any papers or anything like that on them that might give us a clue to what it's all about. This Army in Paris business is no myth. It's the second time we've run into it."

He himself moved about and shortly

came up to Cary. They both were empty-handed. "Blast it!" muttered Steve.

"There isn't an order or a document on any of these disguised Boches. 'We're just as much in the dark as ever.'"

Abruptly he started and flung his gaze upward while the low drone of powerful motors drifted down to his ears. Off to the northeast in the heights there rode once more a great blur. It came closer, humming through the moonlight.

"Another tremendous ship!" breathed Steve. He seized Cary by the arm and pointed to it. His eyes flared with excitement.

"Look! There behind it! A second ship and a third! Good Lord, it's an entire flight!"

In a long line the giant craft rode through the night. One by one others appeared until a full seven monsters came into view, winging steadily for their unknown destination. A cloud of scout planes attended them. Steve's voice was hoarse from anxiety and his grip closed even tighter on Sloane's arm.

"Our Spads are *fini* as fighting machines, Cary. My ammo is gone and your guns are jammed. We could never hope to break in on that line and live. But we can follow them from the rear and spot where they're going. Come on!"

CHAPTER SIX

Army in Paris

HE turned and ran over the turf for his parked bus. Then he was yanking at the propeller and it caught. Swinging into the cockpit he opened the throttle and rolled over the flatland.

The Spad rose and he took it along in a gradual glide, flying low above the moonlit countryside and pointing to come out well in the rear of the droning armada.

"They can't see us if we keep between them and the ground," he told himself.

"Hello! They're changing course!"

The line of giant ships veered suddenly and now was steering sharply to the west. Steve put on more power and went up another five hundred feet. Then he leveled off with Cary crowding up next to his wing and matched his speed with that of the fleet he trailed. They soared on a full two miles ahead of him, but clearly visible. Away in the distance the thin lances of searchlights suddenly sliced up into the night, wavering over the heights.

"That's Paris," he reasoned. "But we aren't heading for there. Those Boche ships are giving the city a wide berth. And they're going down!" There was no longer any doubt of it. The leading air monster was sliding for the earth and the others were following it. A broad belt of woods stretched in the foreground and the Boches piqued for the far side of it. One by one the tremendous planes dropped gracefully out of the sky.

"We don't dare trail them in" thought Steve. He signaled quickly to Cary and caught his return gesture. "It's us for this side of the woods. They'll cover us all the way through."

Blipping his motor, he slid for the carpet and in a few moments more the Spad taxied over the ground into the shadows of the trees. Cary swept up and got out of his crate.

"What's next?" he asked with his old grin.

"We're going on and find out all we can about that damned Boche armada," said Steve. His mouth tightened. "Do you realize that the Germans are landing pretty close to a thousand troops on the other side of these woods?"

Sloane whistled and his face grew serious. Then they moved into the trees and began to advance with quick steps. There was no underbrush to hinder their passage and it was not long before they stood

behind a big trunk, peering out onto a wide expanse of lawn. A huge château bulked at its far end.

"God!" breathed Steve. "Look at them! The place is alive with Boches!"

A tremendous mass of figures occupied the middle of the lawn. More and more men were joining them, dropping out of the great planes. The low humming of engines throbbed in the night. One after the other the emptied monsters of the air rolled along the smooth turf and lifted.

They zoomed steeply upward into the heights and the sound of their motors faded out as they headed into the north and vanished. Steve's eyes narrowed and his frame went tense. He realized that he had stumbled on a gigantic Boche secret.

"But what is it?" he muttered. "What's the answer? It's connected somehow with von Ramm, that's certain. The Boche back yonder gasped out something about the Army in Paris."

Staring intently, he studied the crowd on the lawn. Every variety of Allied uniform was represented among them. Slowly inspiration grew in his mind and he quivered with reckless anticipation.

"Cary, we're going into that gang!" he breathed. There are a score of them at least in Yank flyers' kit. Get the idea?"

"I sure do," came back Sloane. "Either we pass among 'em or we don't. I'm with you, Steve. Our German ought to stand up."

They crept along on the edge of the woods for a short distance and then Steve stepped out boldly onto the lawn. In a swift glance he noted that the fleet of Spads which had escorted the giant ships still remained behind. The scout planes were drawn up in an orderly rank and their pilots were busy about them.

"Painting something on them," he told himself.

"An identifying insignia."

All around men were moving up to join the main gathering and loud voices were shouting orders.

"*Mach schnell!* There is no time to waste!"

STEVE settled his goggles more firmly over his face, pulled up the collar of his flying coat and thrust his way into the edge of the press. The Boches were forming into a column and harshing the order rose: "*Vorwaerts!*" in a long parade they started for the château. Two figures appeared at the top of the terrace where they stood waiting for the column to arrive.

"Halt!" came the command. "Form double rank!"

With a few brisk maneuvers the throng of Boches drew up before the steps. In the moonlight Steve saw a fierce, seamed face not fifteen yards away from him. Instinctively he gasped and nudged Cary.

"Von Ramm himself! I'd know him again anywhere! By God, we've struck it right!"

Von Ramm stepped forward and behind him the door opened, sending a glow of light out onto the terrace. Steve could see now that he was dressed once more in the uniform of a French flying officer. The heavily-set man at his side wore the garb of an American infantry colonel.

"Listen to me," crackled von Ramm. "Ask no questions for they will not be answered. Only a few of you know yet why you have been brought to this place, the very heart of our enemies' territory, wearing our enemies' uniforms. In the proper time you will all be told. I can promise you this, however—that within twenty-four hours you will be the masters of Paris!"

He paused and a low murmur of exultation ran along the formation. It was like the growling of wild beasts. Faces flamed savagely and eyes glinted.

Steve's glance went along the row of flyers in which he stood. Hard, efficient features, stony jaws and gleaming eyes met his gaze. The Boche pilots were fighting men all and he sensed that he was looking on the pick of the Imperial Flying Corps. Like the other Germans they wore Allied kits.

"Pilots!" Von Ramm's voice sounded, sinister and strong. "You know you have been selected for a difficult and dangerous duty. You know that from your own staffels you have been detached and brought into what is called the Paris Attack Formation. It will be your task to strafe the city from the air while our good German infantry swarm over its streets. There will be Allied planes to meet in combat and shoot down, strategic points to be bombed and annihilated. You are all men of courage and intelligence and therefore already you have been advised of your roles.

"You will remain here on this field until the signal is given you to take the air and descend on the capital. Other ships will join you before the dawn, flying back with the great Morsky transport planes on their second trip. And I have news for you, wonderful news!"

His hand went up, stilling the throaty mutter of exultation that ran along the rows of flyers. "In our attack on Paris we shall be led by the greatest fighting man in the whole Vaterland, the commander whose banner victory has always followed. Gentlemen, I give you General von der Kull, the Battle Chieftain!"

Out of the lighted door of the château strode a dominant, swaggering figure. A spiked helmet rode the newcomer's head and from head to toe he was clad in the uniform of his German rank. There was nothing of disguise, no attempt to hide his identity.

"*Hoch!*" rang the cry along the pilots' formation. A cheer broke out that could

not be subdued. "*Hoch!*" The Battle Chieftain!"

"Yes, pilots!" Von der Kull's deep voice boomed out as an awed silence fell. "You are about to enter on the greatest attack of the war. That is why I changed my plans at the last moment and came here in person to take charge of the assault. Instead of striking on the Front of the Allies I shall strike in their rear, leaving the drive on the lines in the hands of others."

For an instant he ceased speaking and the sound of motors became audible. Steve turned his head and stared in utter surprise down the lawn. On the drive the dim bulk of a string of camions showed, rolling swiftly for the château.

In a seemingly endless stream the trucks moved along. Bayonets glinted in them and he made out the figures of men in the poile blue. The camion train stopped and von der Kull veered on his heel and shouted in a crisp order back into the château. Out of its door moved a parade of men, four abreast.

"Good Lord!" gasped Steve to Cary. "That building must be full of Boches from the cellar to the roof! See that crowd in prisoner-of-war uniforms!"

MINUTE after minute passed and still the files of Boches in blue denim with big white letters—"P. G."—painted on their backs marched out of the building and over to the trucks. In swarms they clattered up into the machines until they bulged with figures.

"You see now only one of the many ways in which we are introducing an army into Paris!" rasped von der Kull. "Those are good Germans, dressed like poilus and presumably guarding them. Start the trucks! Troops, I shall see you shortly!"

Horried Steve watched the long train of motors as they chugged off down the drive and passed out of sight. The in-

genuity of the scheme was diabolical. Hundreds, thousands, of Boches were employed on various workmen's jobs in Paris, clad in their distinctive prisoners' uniforms. No one would question another detachment of them, passing through the streets of the city under the escort of men in poilu blue. They could move freely to their unknown destination without a hand being raised to stop them. He sent a glance at Cary and saw that his face also had gone strained.

"The Boches are shoving an army into the capital under cover," he whispered. "But where in blazes can they keep it once it's in there?"

Cary shook his head in dismal despair. With the passing of every minute it became even more clear that an operation of tremendous magnitude was in the making. Every move, every detail seemed to have been worked out to perfection by the enemy.

"That is all for the moment, flyers." It was von Ramm addressing the formation again. "Return to your ships and finish the insignia on them. In half an hour General von der Kull and myself will start for Paris. I shall want four of you to accompany us as escort. There will be peril, deadly peril, every moment of the way. Who will volunteer?"

Surging, the front rank of pilots broke up and men darted forward to the foot of the steps.

"I volunteer!"

"And I."

"And I!"

The shouts rose clearly. At hazard von Ramm thrust his finger in the direction of four of the pilots.

"I take you men" he said. "Await my orders at your planes on the lawn. Formation, dismiss!"

Von der Kull, the Battle Chieftain, turned and his brawny figure passed through the door into the château. Von

Ramm wheeled and followed him and the heavy portal clanged shut. Steve moved through the crowd of flyers, every nerve strained. His gaze was focused on a pair of nearby figures.

"Cary" he whispered. "Don't let those two volunteers out of your sight."

"Why?" husked Sloane. "What's up?"

"They're picked for the escort of von Ramm and the Battle Chieftain. That means they'll go with them straight to the headquarters of the Army in Paris." His face hardened in a grim, fierce expression. "That is—their planes will fly there, but they won't. We're going to be in those crates instead of them, Cary!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

Graveyard Tarmac

NERVOUSLY Steve Irwin plucked the half-consumed cigarette from his mouth, dropped it to the ground and crushed out its burning stub. For an endless time, it seemed, he and Cary had been waiting close to the woods while the pilots of von Ramm's Paris Attack Formation worked on their ships.

Broad bands of black were being painted on the top wings and underfuselages. The flyers of the Spads could recognize each other in battle at a glance. Hardly twenty yards away were the pair of Boche pilots that had been picked for the escort and whom he had marked down. He let his hand fall into his pocket and his fingers gripped the butt of his Colt.

"Here they come!" breathed Cary.

He pointed to the distant château. Light gleamed from its open door and they could make out a pair of figures descending the steps. Almost at once a two-seater appeared, rolled into the center of the lawn. The pilots began to leave their work and move toward it. Only the two volunteers remained at their ships.

"Ground crew!" shouted one of them.

"Come here! Run our planes out and make them ready!"

From across the lawn a group of soldiers straggled forward.

"Now!" husked Steve. He moved farther back until the shadows of the trees almost hid him.

"Grab me around the waist and struggle! Put up a bluff! Help, comrades, help!" he called in a low, penetrating voice. "I have caught a spy!"

The Boches turned, caught sight of the two figures locked in combat and raced toward them instinctively. They loomed over Steve and Sloane, their Lugers drawn. Reeling, Steve thrust Cary into the edge of the woods.

"Break!" he whispered. "And hit!"

As their forms parted Steve's Colt went out in a savage stroke, striking on bone with a thud. A second muffled sound rose. The Boches went down in limp heaps.

"Work fast!" gasped Steve, seizing his German by the heels. In an instant both the Boches were hidden behind tree trunks and Steve and Cary stepped out onto the lawn. The ground soldiers still at a distance could have seen nothing.

"*Achtung!*" rasped Steve. "Get those planes moving!"

At a trot the soldiers advanced, reached the ships and seized them by the wings. They trundled rapidly across the grass while Steve and Cary marched behind. Steve's brain raced with exultant thoughts. The desperate ruse they had evolved so far was meeting with success.

Knocked out in the fraction of a second the Boche owners of the planes, lay senseless in the woods and they had replaced them.

"Stop!" said Steve sharply and the ground men released their grip on the planes.

They stood some thirty yards away from von Ramm. General von der Kull was climbing into the rear of the two-

seater and von Ramm swung to the front cockpit and the controls. His savage face, twisted in triumph.

"Follow me, escort! Remember that you guard the Battle Chieftain of the *Vaterland*!"

The engine of his craft roared into life and it started off along the turf. Two Spads tore after it.

"Jump!" whispered Steve to Cary as Boches seized their propellers.

He leaped into the cockpit and fingered at the gear. The motor caught and he sent the Spad streaking away in a fast taxi. Yanking back on the stick, he went up in a wide spiral, scaling for the blurs overhead. Behind him climbed Cary.

THROUGH the moonlight the formation scudded. Increasing wonder filled Steve. They were not headed for Le Bourget, the landing field outside the city. Already they were sweeping in over the outskirts of the capital. Beneath them lay Paris, the very core of France, a miles-wide blur of buildings where only ghostly blue-hooded arcs illumined the streets.

"The Bois de Boulogne?" he muttered. "Are we going to land there where the air defense squadrons are based? Lord, here come some of them now!"

Sliding through the night a wedge of planes appeared. They were rushing from an angle to cut off von Ramm's formation. In the same instant the wavering beams of one of the rooftop searchlights swerved and caught the two-seater full. Steve went rigid. If the French flyers opened fire —

Von Ramm's hand went up and out in a peculiar signal. Behind him in the passenger's nest General von der Kull, the Battle Chieftain, sat like a stone image, big and menacing. A flying helmet covered his head and a dark, indistinguishable cloak was around his body. Under the

cloak, Steve, knew, was the full uniform of a German general, but it was invisible.

In the glare of the searchlight that sped from plane to plane the Battle Chieftain flew on. The French Spads riding for the moment, almost wing to wing with von Ramm's flight sheered away and droned off above the roofs.

"Von Ramm is as crafty as the devil himself," murmured Steve. "He knows the defense squadron's recognition signal. That's what he gave those Spads and they've left."

Abruptly the searchlight flicked off and von Ramm's ship began to slide lower. Down and still farther down it dropped and the silver ribbon of the Seine, shining in the moonlight, passed under its wings.

"He's landing," thought Steve. "But where? There's nothing but the roofs of Paris beneath us."

Like ghosts the formation slipped down until mansards and gables became visible. Von Ramm still glided, but now his motor was silent. Steve blipped his own, leaning forward in a wave of anxiety. He caught the outline of an open space and the splotches of trees. They were not five hundred feet above the ground. Then von Ramm wagged his wings and put the nose of his ship for a grayish streak.

"A road!" gasped Steve. "We're going to come down on it!"

The formation switched on the instant into a line, one plane after another following the track of the leader. Steve gripped his controls and with all the air skill he possessed dropped his Spad. He felt its undergear hit a solid surface and then it was rolling smoothly along.

A cold and ghastly chill crept over him as it stopped. Palely the moonlight flooded a scene of eeriness. All around him as far as the eye could see stood rows of stones and monuments. His skin crawled.

"Good God!" he muttered. "We've landed in a cemetery!"

Slowly he got out of the plane and stood by its wing. Dark shapes, hundreds and hundreds of them, moved along the smooth roadway toward the planes. They seemed to crawl relentlessly down upon him. Faces gleamed whitely in a long procession.

With a tremendous effort he fought down the panic that rose in him and his vision cleared. He was looking on the parade of Boches in prisoner of war garb that had left the château by truck over an hour before. Their feet crunched on the roadway in measured, slow cadence as they passed him by and went on.

A light flashed for an instant down the drive, coming from an open stone door. The head of the procession went steadily on and disappeared in the aperture. Like a snake the rest of the Boche column trailed on and they too vanished.

"They've gone into a tomb!" husked Steve. "It's swallowed them up!"

The light no longer shone in the doorway. Slowly the illumination of the moon faded as dark clouds rolled across its face and an icy breeze seemed to drift through the countless ranks of monuments.

"We are here," rose von Ramm's voice, chuckling horribly. "Can you imagine a quieter entrance to our rendezvous, general?" Steve quivered and moved silently forward, keeping the wings of the ships between himself and the Boche leader. "Pilots take off and fly back to the château!" came the command. "General, may I ask you to come this way?"

Von Ramm's figure showed up, stalking for the open tomb. The motors of the other two German flyers' planes turned over and they began to roll along the driveway. They lifted and went up into the night.

"Steady," whispered Steve. He had

reached Cary and they crouched behind his Spad. "Wait until those two disappear."

His finger pointed toward von Ramm and von der Kull, who were just passing into the tomb. Its door closed. With pulses pounding Steve stayed at the ship until he felt he could bear the suspense no longer.

"Come on," he husked and went along the drive. He stood in front of the heavy portal of the tomb reaching for its handle. The massive door swung open as he wrenched and they stepped inside. The place was bare.

"They went down yonder," muttered Cary, indicating the black maw of a stone stair. "Cripes, this is enough to hand anybody the creeps! I'd give a month's flying pay for a decent shot of cognac."

STEVE swung the door to behind them and reached into his pocket for matches. The first light flared and he held it out, moving for the stairs. They were short, a flight of hardly more than ten steps. He and Cary stood in a small chamber cut, apparently, out of the solid rock. It too was utterly empty. His glance swept around the walls as the match went out. His fingers trembled as he struck another and lifted it.

"Ah!" he breathed.

A section of the wall before him jutted out, making a dark line. In a step he reached it and ran his hand over the stone.

"It's a door, Cary. The Boches went through it. Give it a yank."

Scrabbling with their finger tips they drew on the stone section. Suddenly it swung wide open as though on greased hinges. "Look!" breathed Steve. "Lanterns and flashlights right beside us!"

On a long stand just within the entrance stood an array of lighting apparatus. Reaching out he took up a heavy

electric torch and sent its ray streaming along the corridor that stretched in front of him. Dust coated its floor, but that dust had been trampled down and beaten by the passage of numberless feet.

"The Boche force came through this door and along this corridor," he said. "The lights were there to guide them. God, there must be thousands of Germans here under Paris!" He went cold at the thought while his brain raced. "Perhaps we've got enough dope now to report to Intelligence. We can be there in fifteen minutes and turn out every Allied soldier in the city."

Behind him sounded a soft thud and he started. The torch played over a solid wall. All signs of the door by which they had entered were gone. Cary jumped forward and began to press against the stone. He moved here and there fumbling without result. A long minute passed and when he turned his face was taut.

"We're shut in, Steve! This door moves by some kind of spring or lever I can't locate. It'd take dynamite to open it."

"That answers our question for us," returned Steve grimly. "We've got to go forward after von Ramm and the Boches. And how in blazes will we ever find them in this underground nest? It'll be like looking for the old needle in the haystack."

He flung the light of the torch ahead of him and began to move along the passage. It broadened and its roof lifted. Perhaps fifty yards in front it turned sharply at an angle.

"Go easy," counselled Steve. "We don't know what's beyond that corner."

In that instant he paused. Hoarse shouts sounded, distant and muffled. The crash of shots boomed along the underground way.

"Quick!" rasped Steve. "Draw your gun and follow me!"

CHAPTER EIGHT

Drome of the Dead

SWIFTLY he raced toward the bend and rounded it. The passage had widened and he stared down a seemingly endless corridor, in the ceiling of which lights glowed dimly.

A figure tore along the floor, running the way a man runs for his life, and behind it stumbled half a dozen men in field gray. They lifted their rifles and a volley of shots crashed along the corridor, ricocheting from ceiling and walls. Instinctively Steve flattened himself against the wall. The racing figure was almost upon him and he glimpsed a white, strained face.

Again shots cracked and the man reeled, cannoned against the wall and fell flat. He rolled over onto his back, groaning. The oncoming Boches were not thirty yards away.

"Bluff it out!" whispered Steve. "They can't tell who we are."

Quietly he stepped forward and stood above the prostrate man who was dressed in civilian clothes.

"Soldiers, what has happened?" he barked in harsh German.

The Boches halted in front of him. Then one of them moved forward, gripping his rifle with the bayonet turned down. He poised it above the wounded man.

"It is a French spy, *leutenant!* He was trying to escape when he was found out. I shall finish him here and now!"

The steel blade rose, ready to descend and spear its victim.

"No!" rasped Steve fiercely.

His hand reached out and seized the rifle, wrenching it to one side. The action was instinctive. Sullen eyes glared at him and for the moment he feared that he had overstepped himself by his defense of the agent. Then another voice rose. A broad-

shouldered major was striding along the passage, breathing heavily.

"You have him? Good! I could never have overtaken him myself." Thrusting himself past the soldiers the major confronted Steve. "And who are you?" he barked.

"Flyers detached to join von Ramm's force here in Paris," came back Steve.

"I see," grunted the major. He thrust at the man on the floor with his foot. "Pick up this swine and bring him along. He shall be taken to Major von Ramm for judgement. Pah!" His boot struck into the groaning victim's ribs. "You double-dealer! I have been watching you for a long time. And ten minutes ago I discovered your game."

Callously he turned his back and marched down the passage in the direction from which he had come. Steve nudged Cary and went rapidly after him.

"He's ordered the spy to be brought to von Ramm," he breathed. "That's where we want to go. And if a chance comes to help that poor devil—"

"We'll take it," agreed Sloane in a low voice.

Behind him the Boches had lifted the wounded man and were bearing him along. Steve moved up alongside the striding major and took the cold stare of his eyes without flinching.

"We have just arrived, my comrade and myself," he said. "As newcomers I hope you will pardon our lack of knowledge of this place. You have been here long, major?"

The Boche smiled thinly.

"For months, pilot. I have seen our original small force grow into an army, efficient, well-officered and dangerous. You have come in good time. At any hour now we strike!" His huge fist rose, clenched and gesturing at the ceiling of the passage. "Gott," what a shock to Paris when the solid earth opens and gives forth

a German host! I am a major of engineers, Heinrich Gruber, and I know whereof I speak. Has not most of the construction work been in my hands? But there"—he checked himself. "It is not good for a young flyer to hear too much until the proper moment comes. It is for us higher-ups to keep our knowledge to ourselves."

PUFFING out his cheeks, he strode along without another word. Beneath the boastful exterior of the engineer officer Steve sensed genuine ability. The man might be a braggart and cruel by nature but he would be more than able at his job.

They were stepping into a large round chamber, hewn out of the rock. Its sides were lined with the arches of vaults. Gruber's hand went out in a broad gesture.

"The bones, the skeletons have been removed from most of them. The crypts house our soldiers waiting for *der Tag!* Look yonder!"

Steve halted and stared at the nearest arch while horror chilled his veins. No need to tell him what those piles of grayish objects were. Something round and eyeless toppled from one of the stacks and thudded on the floor, rolling toward him.

"Ha, ha, a dead man heard me!" roared Gruber. "His skull has come to my feet in proof of my words. What do you think of the ancient Catacombs of Paris, pilot?"

Shuddering from head to foot Steve clenched his fists and fought frantically to master the panic that threatened to sweep over him. He realized where he was now—in the miles-long, historical burial ground that stretched beneath the streets of Paris.

In it lay the bones of centuries. A groan from behind made him wheel around. The Boche soldiers stood there, holding up the wounded spy. On his

pallid features a terrible fear was written.

"He will not last much longer, I fear, major," rasped one of the escort.

"He will last long enough," grated the engineer. "Von Ramm's headquarters are hardly a minute's march from here, *Vorwaerts!*"

Swinging his broad shoulders he strode across the chamber of crypts and entered a passage that branched off from it. A moment or so later he stopped in front of a doorway across which hung a thick canvas curtain.

Roughly he thrust it aside and went through with the others on his heels. Steve motioned swiftly to Cary and they stepped back against the wall on either side of the entrance. He blinked in astonishment as his eyes took in the scene before him.

It was a perfect reproduction of a division headquarters operations office. A huge map covered most of the opposite wall and field desks with staff officers at them half-filled the chamber. At a broad table lounged von Ramm, his flying helmet in front of him and his brush of red hair flaming under the brilliant electric lights that were strung across the ceiling. Immovable and domineering as ever General von der Kull sat beside him.

"**I** BRING a spy," boomed Gruber. He signalled to the escort to lead the wounded man forward under the lights. "It is Borgen whom you must know, one of our agents here in Paris. He is attempting to sell us out to the French. I came upon him searching among my papers and he fled. But my men followed him and brought him down."

An expression of horrible fear crept into the spy's face and he cringed. His guilt was graven on his features. A scream of terror burst from him.

"So?" snarled von Ramm. There was no pity in his voice, only a note of doom.

"Yes, I know you, Borgen. You would try to work for both sides, would you, and expose the Army in Paris to the Allies at the last minute? You swine! Our secret would be worth millions to the French. And you thought you would betray us!"

"Mercy!" bubbled the spy with foam edging his lips. "It is all a mistake! Mercy!"

"I have no mercy on traitors," grated von Ramm. "Or on enemy spies. You agree with me, General?" Von der Kull nodded his head, his face impassive. The wounded man shrieked again and a hand was clapped roughly over his mouth. A dark stain ran down his clothes. Von Ramm's eyes narrowed. "He is mortally wounded, I think. But I do not intend him to die of his injuries. I have another end for him—one that should drive him mad with terror. General von der Kull, I shall show you my Death Flame in active operation. You will see proved on the body of this traitor how the streets of Paris will be swept clear of all who oppose us. Into the laboratory!"

Von Ramm rose and strode for a curtained door at the far end of the chamber. Steve gestured to Cary and their hands came away from the automatics that they clutched in their pockets. The spy was to be executed but they were no longer under any impulse to save him. He was a double dealer, a German trying to betray his countrymen for money.

In the next room von Ramm's voice sounded, giving orders. The traitor, groaning frightfully, was dragged through the door. Steve felt a chill run through him and then, steadying himself went towards the entrance to the laboratory. Thrusting aside the curtain he passed within and halted by the wall. His eyes roved over a vast, illuminated chamber filled with tanks, retorts and apparatus of strange kinds.

"Bring a stone coffin and set it upright!" snarled von Ramm. "Tie the accursed traitor inside it!"

Soldiers dragged a casket from a crypt niche and tilted it far down the chamber. In a moment more the spy was bound and thrust into it, the ropes passed around him holding him erect. Von Ramm raised his hand and an odd-looking piece of machinery was wheeled up to him. It had the appearance of a projector fitted with a hose and mounted on a stand.

"My Death Flame apparatus," he gloated. "In portable form it will be carried on the backs of the regiments of the Army in Paris. It is a flame thrower but of a new and marvelous design. It ejects its chemicals as though they were cannon shots and their cloud explodes in fire that rolls forward at terrific speed. Nothing can stand against it. Wait until I set it for this short range."

He fingered at the side of the apparatus, adjusting something. The eyes of the doomed spy bulged from his head with horror and his writhing lips framed words that emerged in a ragged mumble.

"Watch!" screamed von Ramm and turned a button.

A round, misty cloud leaped from the hose of the projector and rushed through the air. It struck the coffin and a blast of terrific flame roared up. The fiery cloud swept on and struck against the wall where it dissolved in tiny, licking tongues. Steve gasped and felt himself staggering. A cold sweat broke out on his forehead.

"God!" panted Cary beside him. "Did you see that? It's horrible!"

Von Ramm's tones rose, cold and exultant. "You will observe, General von der Kull, that there is nothing left of the traitor yonder but cinders and charred bones. The stone coffin itself has been cracked apart by the force of my Death Flame. And that was only a very mild discharge. Figure what it really can do

turned with full force against the ranks of our enemies."

STEVE gazed in panic at the blackened relic that was all that remained in the coffin. The spy had been blasted into extinction, his body consumed in a split second. He realized that he had looked upon a demonstration of the deadliest weapon yet invented in the war. Von Ramm, the Boche soldier-scientist, had the mind of a demon. His cackling laughter even now dinned in Steve's ears.

"Ha, ha, ha, von der Kull, my old friend, I am rejoiced that you have come to Paris in person! With your own eyes you will see the devastation that will be wrought. And now—"

He pivoted on his heel and walked past Steve without even a glance at him. Straight through the door he strode and up to the great map on the wall.

"Look!" he shouted triumphantly. "The map of Paris! You see where the red crosses are marked close together on the famous Champs Elysees? That is where the blasts will be set off, making the gaps through which our good German army will erupt, armed with my Death Flame apparatus. In an hour the capital will be in our hands. And while red ruin rushes through the streets our planes will shower death from the air! You would see my sub-terranean armada?"

The fire of a madman gleamed in his eyes as his voice soared in malignant triumph.

"Follow me! It is time I escorted you through the workings of the Catacombs."

Von Ramm swept down the room and out through the curtained door, beckoning to several of his staff officers. They rose from their desks and crowded after him.

"It's our chance," whispered Steve to Cary. "He won't notice us in this mob. If he does—"

The sentence went unfinished. Von

Ramm and von der Kull were striding along the passage. It broadened and doors appeared behind which lights shone.

Von Ramm pointed through a portal. Crowding close, Steve peered inside. An operator sat at a table in a small, lighted vault. Its sides still were piled high with human bones and a faint musty odor exuded from them.

"It is thus that we can be in instant touch with the *Vaterland*," rasped von Ramm. "Any orders you care to give to the troops at the Front will be transmitted at once."

"I shall have orders to give as you know," rumbled the Battle Chieftain. "The French line will be shattered by our armies the moment they withdraw their reserves to rush to the aid of Paris."

"Let us go on," returned von Ramm. "The time is growing short."

CHAPTER NINE

Pocket Planes

WITH a dazed sensation Steve moved among the group. Minute by minute there was being exposed before him the tremendous magnitude of the peril that threatened Paris. The city already lay at the mercy of the hidden Boche army. His mouth felt dry and he quivered all over. Von Ramm was stalking at a steady pace and far ahead, down the corridor, Steve could see the glow of a broad illumination.

Almost before he realized it they had emerged from the passage into a great circular space. Above towered the roof and in front, perhaps fifty yards away, gaped the mouth of a terrific pit. Smooth stone surrounded it, forming a perfect circle.

"It's like a huge well," he told himself, amazed. "We're standing on the rim."

"The central pit of the Catacombs," said von Ramm harshly. "We have en-

larged and improved it for our purposes. At its bottom is the assembling spot for our army. And here on its sides—"

His hand went out waving. Steve grew rigid, staring at an array of tiny planes ranked against the wall. They were half the size of ordinary ships but perfect in their proportions and carrying regulation Spandaus.

"The new 'Pocket Planes' of Germany!" exulted von Ramm. "Brought here in sections and set up. When the army is loosed this subterranean fleet will take the air and strike while our ships drive in from the château."

"They are magnificent," agreed von der Kull. His gaze went upward to the roof of the great pit. "But how will you get them out of the Catacombs?"

Von Ramm pointed to the arch.

"Through there where you are looking, general. That roof is mined. When the blasts go off it will collapse and leave a huge hole. The debris will fall into the pit which by that time will be clear of soldiers and the Pocket Planes will take off and rush into the clear air through the hole."

"Marvelous!" exclaimed the Battle Chieftain. "Where is the switch located?"

"Yonder on the opposite side of the pit, where you see the guard, close to them is the gear that will blast open the roof." Steve's gaze crossed the gigantic hole and he made out a group of armed Boches next to some kind of apparatus. "It is watched, of course, night and day. A single upward thrust on the lever and the explosives will go off."

"And you are sure that the air fleet can get out?" The Battle Chieftain's brow clouded suddenly. "There does not seem to be much room for a take-off."

"There is plenty," flashed von Ramm. "The Pocket Planes can operate in very small space. They will be rolled out from the wall and circle the pit on its rim until

their engines are fully under way. Then a quick spiral and they will be through the hole into the open. Would you like a demonstration of their ability to fly underground? Mechanics!"

Soldiers in overalls leaped to attention by the ranked planes.

"Roll out a pair of ships at once and get their motors going!"

Instantly the mechanics seized hold of the wings of two of the miniature crates and trundled them into the clear, only a few yards from von Ramm. Steve found himself gazing in utter astonishment at the perfect little ships. Their engines, although diminutive, began to hum with real power under the hands of the workers. In a moment, it seemed, they were throbbing with life. He turned and met the full stare of von Ramm's cold eyes, which were traveling over the group.

"Ha, you are a flyer and so is your companion! Get into those planes and give them a test. Show General von der Kull that I have not been mistaken. Taxi along the edge of the pit until the power is full on and then take the air under the roof."

"*Ja, Excellenz*," muttered Steve, saluting stiffly.

He kept his hand half over his face, touching the front of his flying helmet, and brought it away just as he whirled to make for the planes. In a few steps he had crossed to the waiting ship. Cary walked beside him and he reached out and took him by the arm. Into his mind a wild and desperate plan had flashed.

"Listen, Cary," he whispered. "Take off with me and follow my lead. It means our finish, but Paris will be saved. We're going to strafe that guard at the switch over yonder, blow them to pieces and yank the lever. This damn roof will crash and all Paris will rush to the scene. The Boche army will be trapped before it can get going. See?"

"Right," said Cary. His face grew taut and then he shrugged his shoulders. "So long, old scout."

STEVE lifted himself into the cockpit of the pocket plane with his pulses pounding. He and Cary were done for, but Paris would be warned in time. His teeth came together and his jaw set in stark purpose.

"We can do it," he muttered. "Here goes." A few yards away stood von Ramm, his features savagely joyful. The engine of the little ship roared with power and Steve fingered at the throttle. "Contact!" he shouted. The mechanic leaped to the side and the pocket plane began to roll.

"*Gott!*" rose the shriek from von Ramm. His face writhed with passion. "That cry was in English! I recognize you now! You are the cursed Yankee I fought with at the Château Decroy. Shoot, soldiers, shoot! Bring them down!"

A Luger leaped into his hand and its blast tore out as the miniature crate jumped away and scudded along the smooth stone. Cary streaked almost wing to wing with Steve as his plane rushed into a taxi. Steve stared grimly ahead of him while his brain rioted. In an instant of excitement he had made a ghastly slip by shouting in English.

"It's too late now to curse about it," he breathed. "There never was a hope of our getting out of this anyhow."

From the rear echoed a medley of shouts and orders. All around the edges of the vast pit soldiers began to appear.

Steve pressed on the rudder bar and the pocket plane veered perfectly, racing in a long loop. Shots ripped at him and sliced into the fuselage. Nearer and nearer came the switch and the guard set over it.

The tiny planes were rounding the pit and whizzing along on the side opposite to von Ramm. Gently Steve drew back

on the stick and the undercarriage wheels of the rushing crate lifted a trifle, bumped and settled back again on the stone.

"Not enough power," he grated. "It'll take a minute yet."

His grip closed on the stick triggers. Before him the guard flung up their rifles and a volley of lead smashed in his face. A machine gun set by the wall erupted flame. Past his head and shoulders cracked a mass of slugs. His fingers tightened and two screaming bursts of bullets drove from the Spandaus and hit full among the Boches.

They leaped aside, yelling in panic, leaving half a dozen forms writhing on the floor. Then the tiny ships were past and roaring along toward a wall of Germans that blocked the rim of the pit clear across its width.

"Take it!" snarled Steve. "Hand it to them, Cary!"

In red volleys the Spandaus raged and hurled their metal full into the living barrier. The Boches fell in windrows as the two planes thundered for them. Steve had a vision of glaring eyes and brutal faces while his machine guns flung death in front of his speeding ship. Then in a wild, thundering rush he was through, with limp forms collapsing almost under his wings.

"Now!" he panted and once more pulled the stick back.

The little plane lifted and streaked clear of the stone. In a quick bank he flung it out over the pit and looked down. His eyes narrowed with astonishment. He was gazing into the depths of the tremendous hole.

Its sides were filled with galleries and crypts, descending in tier on tier from the rim to the bottom where masses of soldiers ran to and fro. Scaffolding and stairs ran up the sides of the gulf. The blinding glare of a searchlight shot up

from below and bathed his ship in livid orange.

The clatter of Maxims sounded and streams of lead whipped upward. With a wrench he hurled his ship out of the lethal blast and banked again. Cary was riding above him, his Spandaus belching fire. The whole vast chamber was alive with running, shooting Boches.

"That's the stuff!" yelled Steve as Cary zigzagged skillfully. "Keep dodging and it'll be hell's own time before they hit us! These planes are small as sparrows."

He waved his hand in encouragement. As it dropped it brushed against something hard in the cockpit pocket. An instant later he was groping inside and drawing out a small, round object.

"Hand grenade!" he exulted. "Of course these pocket planes would carry some kind of bombs! Half a dozen at least in this bus! With my compliments, Heinies!"

GRIPPING the pin between his teeth, he yanked it out and flung the projectile overside. Far down in the gulf a burst of flame rose up and a machine gun went suddenly mute. Still the searchlight sprayed its beam from the bottom of the pit and volleys cracked past Steve's ship.

"We're shining marks with that thing on," he grated. "Nothing to do but shoot it out!" He stood the tiny crate on its nose and dove straight down the lane of light. Out from his Spandaus plunged twin streaks of tracer and glass crashed in chaos. The light went out abruptly as he leveled off and banked, rushing around in the abyss. "Von Ramm was right!" he gasped. "These pocket planes can fly in no space at all."

The walls with their tiers of crypts rushed past him. Hardly a hundred feet beneath his wings hundreds of Germans in all varieties of uniforms scattered in panic, seeking shelter from the fury of the

two tiny ships. Steve whirled and threw his bus onto one wing, driving around the walls.

Again he flung a grenade overside and watched it explode in red ruin. Up past the side of the abyss he scaled. The scaffolds and stairs teemed with Germans and their rifle fire blazed at him from only yards away. Madly he hurled his crate out of the leaden streams and let bomb after bomb go.

Roaring they burst among the scaffolds and timbers, and men went downward in a ghastly confusion.

"Up!" he shouted. "Up, Cary!"

The little pocket plane zoomed, hanging on its propeller, and thundered for the dome. In an instant it burst out of the gulf and leveled off. From the stone rim other miniature winged shapes rushed for him.

Along the edge of the pit swept a dozen of von Ramm's tiny fighting craft, scaling straight for the Yanks. Steve split-aired wildly and pounded home with his Spandaus. The nearest Boche ship turned over on its back and plunged for the base of the gulf.

Once more the quick-firers raved and a second German burst into flame in mid-air.

Cary scudded in from the flank and knocked a taxiing plane over the edge of the pit. The berserk fury of battle held Steve in its grip. He yelled in savage rage and kept his guns going, watching their slugs pound into the cockpits and fuselages of Boche after Boche.

In a flashing second they streaked past the array of pocket planes that still were parked by the wall and his hand swept out with the last grenade. It exploded in an uprush of flame and fire roared along the line of ships.

Then he was charging out over the gulf careening frenziedly among the mass of enemy crates. Framed between the muz-

zles of spitting Spandaus he glimpsed the contorted face of von Ramm. The Boche leader had taken the air with his men in person.

Lead slashed into Steve's crate from the guns of his bitterest foe at terrifically short range. He came up and over in desperate speed and launched his own fire at von Ramm. The German ripped aside out of range. The whole space beneath the dome of the great chamber seemed filled with rushing wings. Torrents of lead were tearing Steve's ship to ribbons. For an instant Cary rode side by side with him, his own wings a mass of tatters.

"Get von Ramm!" shrieked Steve.

He knew now that it was only a matter of minutes before they would be brought down. Their riddled planes could hardly keep going. Frantically he launched his crate at the circle of Boches that hemmed them round. His Spandaus clattered viciously, pumping lead at top speed.

The planes in front of him parted and two of them went into hopeless spins as his slugs struck them full. He flung a glance to the rear, feeling the rush of bullets past his head. Von Ramm hung on his tail with his guns lashing up the camelback of Steve's crate.

"God!" gasped Steve. "I'm cold turkey!"

His stick went forward and the ship dove for the gulf. Nearer and nearer rushed the walls covered with their scaffolding. A horrible crackling sound rose and he looked to the side. One wing, torn to pieces, was buckling and still the venomous pattern of von Ramm's bullets ploughed up the fuselage toward his back.

In a wild whirl Cary turned to hurl his fire at von Ramm and in that blinding instant his torn crate reeled into Steve's. Locked together and splitting into fragments the two ships dropped. With a last desperate gesture Steve cut the power

and pointed his ship for the wall. There came a terrific crash as the two ships plunged into the barrier of scaffolding, hung for a second and fell. Steve gasped and raised his head, incredulous.

"Cary!" he shouted. "Jump out, quick!"

THE two planes hung on the edge of a platform, high above the bottom of the gulf. They were poised within a few scanty feet of the rim with the dizzying drop below. Somehow Steve wrenched himself out of the cockpit and reached a hand to Cary, yanking him from the debris onto the solid wood. Before them gaped the mouth of a crypt.

"Get the guns off the crates!" he panted. "We're still alive! They haven't washed us out yet!"

Together they tore at the mountings and came away, each clutching a quick firer. Steve's glance ran up and down the wall in an instant survey of the situation. Germans were climbing toward them up the steps from below and from above the tracer of Boche ships still poured in, ricocheting off the stone.

Beneath his feet he felt the wooden platform swaying and cracking. One of the stanchions had been torn almost in half by the force of the planes' crash.

"Hold off those Boches!" he snarled. "I'm going to bring this whole damn thing down!"

Cary's quickfirer crashed in rapid bursts and the Germans reeled back down the steps. Turning the muzzle of his own gun on the weakened post Steve jammed on the trigger. A solid stream of lead tore through the wood. "Into the crypt!" he yelled just in time.

Ripped to splinters by his fire the stanchion cracked wide open and sagged. The next moment it collapsed, dragging the platform with it and the wreck of the planes and boards rained into the pit.

Steve drew in his breath, crouching back in the depths of the niche. Huge piles of skulls and human bones half blocked the entrance. Beyond it he could see von Ramm's pilots sweeping to and fro in the gulf with jets of flame springing from the noses of their crates. Lead thudded against the rock wall outside and whistled into the niche.

"We're safe from any attack by the stairs," he said grimly. "They're gone. Here we are away up in the wall of the pit, trapped for good. All we can do is make them pay plenty for getting us."

He rested his Spandaus on the breastwork of the grisly relics and loosened its fire. A tiny plane that was rushing past the crypt flopped drunkenly and went crashing down to ruin. Cary's gun sent out a savage burst that knocked a second Boche pilot helpless in his cockpit. Down from the upper air hurtled a wild winged shape that flung slugs viciously into the improvised fort. It banked almost off the wall and rushed away, circling.

"That was von Ramm!" rasped Steve. "He'll never stop until he does us in."

A clenched fist rose over the rim of von Ramm's cockpit and shook in hatred. Then the Boche signaled in a wide gesture and the scaffolding on the far side of the pit suddenly brimmed with men. Scores of rifles focussed their fire in volleys on the niche.

"Gosh!" gasped Steve and flung himself to the stone.

The breastwork of bones crumbled above him as the leaden fury struck it. Rolling to the side he got his gun braced on the floor and sighted over it. In red tumult it raved, traversing the opposite scaffolding from end to end.

Figures tumbled helter-skelter off the platforms and whirled over in the air as they plunged to destruction.

A thundering wedge of planes rushed for the niche and their guns plunged a

hail of fire into the rock. Flattened on the floor Steve shot back.

The crash of quick-firers was deafening. Then the air of the gulf was clear. Two ships were rocketing downward, smashed, and the others were circling high in the dome. For an instant an absolute silence fell and von Ramm's voice rang out.

Steve could see him standing on the rim of the pit, far off to the side and shouting violently to someone at the base of the abyss. The Boche leader had landed to direct the fight from the ground.

"No, no, you fool!" he was shrieking. "Not with that big apparatus! It will blow the whole wall down!"

A sudden chill rang through Steve's frame and he inched himself forward until he could peer over the brink of the crypt. Major Gruber, the engineer, stood in the center of the pit's floor with a dozen men around him. They had run out a strange-looking tank on wheels and were pointing a nozzle that projected from it straight toward the crypt.

"One of the Death Flame projectors!" gasped Steve. "Cripes, if they turn it loose on us we'll burn to a crisp like that traitor!"

"Stand back, Gruber!" von Ramm kept yelling. "Leave that for the attack on the city! We dare not use it in here!"

With a snarl Gruber motioned to his men and they moved back from the tank. It rested there, a sinister object of menace. Von Ramm was still screaming orders and gesturing, but Steve could not make out what he was saying.

The swift thunder of motors began again and soldiers commenced to run forward at the bottom of the pit holding their arms out behind them. Slowly Steve edged his machine gun over the edge of the crypt and leveled it full on the tank.

"If I can drill that with redhot tracer

we'll all go to blazes together," he snarled.

Up from the soldiers below showered a score or more of small objects.

"Bombs!" panted Steve. He heard one of them whistle past his head and thud in the crypt behind him.

"We're done for!" He jammed on the trigger of his machine gun and it clicked uselessly. "Jammed!"

Only a few yards away rose an odd, dull explosion and a surge of hope swept over him.

"The bomb missed!"

Then came Cary's strangled voice as something clutched at Steve's throat and closed his lungs.

"Gas, Steve, it's gas!"

CHAPTER TEN

Catacomb Ace

WEAKLY Steve opened his eyes, feeling a pang of agony run through him. His shoulders had just been struck a heavy blow and his chest heaved constrictedly. He was rising upward, tied by a rope that had been passed under his arms.

The face of the rock wall was only inches from him and in another second he brushed hard against it. His glance went upward and he groaned in despair. Brutal German faces stared at him over the rim of the gulf. They were hauling him toward them.

The gas had done its work only too well. It had knocked him out cold and the Boches had lowered men to bring up the unconscious bodies of the two Yanks. He could see Cary being dragged up the side of the pit by a second rope.

"Well, they got us," he muttered. "There isn't a chance now."

Tough hands reached out and grabbed him as he was pulled to the top. They dragged him over the cliff edge and

hustled him to his feet. In the grip of two brawny Germans his figure sagged while he fought to recover his breath.

"So you do not like our gas, *hein?*" mocked a savage voice. "*Teufel*, but it is twenty minutes since you had your taste of it! Come to, Yankee swine!"

A hand struck Steve violently in the face and he fought down a wave of rage. There was a bayonet resting against his ribs and if he made an effort to reach his tormenter it would go through him. Up onto the rock came Cary and his fetters also were flung loose. He dropped and lay on the stone with his chest rising and falling and his breath coming ster-torously.

"He got the worst dose of it," reasoned Steve. "The bomb must have exploded right next to him."

Someone hurled a canteen full of water into Cary's face and his eyes opened.

"Lift him up," came the order. "Bring the *verdamm't* flyers to von Ramm."

For an instant Cary was beside Steve. "Steady," he whispered.

"Keep your head and think fast. It's all that'll get us out of this jam."

He caught Cary's answering nod and then they were being hustled roughly along. They came to the passage close to the park of planes and moved through it. The door of the wireless room was passed and Steve glimpsed the operator crouching over his set and working it fast.

"Here we are," gruffly declared a Boche and the Yanks were thrust into the brilliantly-lighted headquarters room.

General von der Kull sat beside the desk and von Ramm stood at his side. The place teemed with activity. Written orders passed from hand to hand and officers darted in and out. Von Ramm's features blazed with triumph as he whirled and pointed to the map on the wall.

"The time could not be better chosen,

general. In one hour—at dawn—we strike! The main blast will erupt next the Arc de Triomphe and the others within half a mile of it. Our troops will charge down the boulevard, loosed on unsuspecting Paris with the force of a cyclone. The aircraft are ready to co-operate now. They have received their orders. And when Paris is ours General Trimper's army will strike at the Front and blow their way through!"

His gaze lifted and took in Steve and Cary. His lips writhed back in a diabolical grin.

"You thought to worm your way in here and penetrate the secret of the German Army in Paris?" he snarled. "That means death to you two now."

He swept a sheaf of papers from the table and thrust them at a staff officer.

"Go, get these orders distributed!" His voice rose on a note of croaking menace. His forefinger shot out, directed at Steve. "I told you before that I recognized you and that we have a long score to settle. General, this is one of the cursed Yankees who bombed our council of war at the Château Decroy not so long ago and threatened the lives of the greatest leaders of all Germany. He landed and we fought together."

"What?" barked the Battle Chieftain. His powerful face glared an appalling hatred. "He was in the flight of mad-men?"

A STRANGE coolness settled over Steve. There was nothing further, he sensed, for Cary or himself to lose. Their doom already could be seen in the vicious eyes of von Ramm.

"We were both in that flight," he said levelly. "As a matter of fact, I led it. And one of your prize giant transport planes is ashes somewhere out yonder because my partner and I knocked it down

last night and washed out everybody in it."

"*Gott!*" burst the roar from the Battle Chieftain.

The veins on his temple swelled and his big hands clenched. He stared vengefully at the two Yanks.

"You have done that beside your mad career in the Catacombs? I did not wait to see you taken and neither did von Ramm, once the gas was hurled into your crypt. There was word from the Front over the wireless that called us both here and made me give the order to launch the drive at once. You—you—"

A paroxysm of terrific rage made his face go purple. The greatest fighting man of the *Vaterland* hovered on the verge of an overwhelming fit of passion. His eyes went blood-shot and his fist pounded the table.

"Von Ramm! take them and do with them what you will! Shoot them here and now!"

Von Ramm's hand went slowly to his belt and came up holding the blue steel of a Luger. The muzzle rose and covered Steve's heart. Instinctively he braced himself for the deadly blow of the bullet.

"No," said von Ramm, smiling triumphantly. "A quick shot would be far too good for you. You have pried into our innermost secrets. No doubt you recall the fate that was meted out to the traitor, Borgen? That same fate shall be yours. You will be removed from this world by the blazing impact of my Death Flame just as our army starts its attack on Paris. Major Gruber!" The engineer officer stepped forward from his position near the door. "Lead these damnable Americans away and lock them up!"

Boches closed in again about the two Yanks and shoved them through the door into the corridor. Gruber stared at them venomously as he put himself at the head of the group. "Perhaps you fooled us

for a while," he rasped. "Now you are going to pay for it. You will never get out of the place I am going to put you in."

Swinging his shoulders boastfully he stalked off down the passage. It was not long before they stopped in front of a heavy wooden door with an iron grille set in it. Gruber thrust it open and laughed hoarsely.

"Another crypt, Yankees! Your bones soon will lie with those that you see here!"

A rough shove sent Steve headlong into the chamber. Cary came reeling in along with him and the door clashed shut. A lantern had been laid inside and by its dim and flickering illumination their prison, piled high with bones and moldering relics was revealed in all its grimness. For an instant Gruber's face showed in the grille.

"The door is barred and there is an armed sentry in front of it," he snarled.

"He has orders to put a bullet into you if you try to get out. Think of that if you have any mad ideas of escape."

His face vanished and his mocking laughter faded out with the sound of his retreating footsteps. Steve fumbled in his pocket and drew out a crumpled package of cigarettes.

"Smoke?" he said. "It's about all we can do, it seems. This place is a tomb, all right."

For a few minutes they smoked in silence and then Steve picked up the lantern and moved slowly about the floor. He shuddered a little as its rays fell on the grayish-white remains and the fragments of skeletons that littered the crypt in heaps. Torn, tattered clothing, long since gone to decay, lay here and there. Not a sign appeared of a break in the solid walls. The lantern glinted on something that projected from a mass of relics and mechanically he bent down and

tugged at it. His hand came away holding a rusty, ancient cavalry saber.

"Buried with some long dead soldier of France," he muttered. "The Catacombs must be full of old arms like these, all useless." His fingers ran along the blade and suddenly his eyes lighted up. The steel, ancient as it was, held its sharpness. It was as keen as the day it had come from the makers. "Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "It's a real weapon!"

SWIFTLY he hid it behind his back as the features of the sentry appeared in the grille. The Boche grinned evilly and withdrew. Steve crossed the crypt and motioned to Cary to join him, out of view of the aperture in the door.

"Look what I've found" he said quietly. "When they come in to get us I'm going to use it and use it fast. There may be a chance for us, after all. In the meantime we might as well sit down and wait. It won't be long."

The tramp of marching men filled the corridor outside. The noise waxed and waned. Some tremendous body of troops had just passed their prison. Steve sat with his back against the wall, clutching the saber while his brain raced with thought. The entire diabolical plan of von Ramm was clear now in his mind. From what he had heard and what he could piece out by his own experience the entire details of the subterranean attack on Paris were at hand. An entire army, brought in in disguise, crouched under the streets of the city. When the blast at the Arc de Triomphe went off they would be loosed, armed with the most devilish invention of the war—the Death Flame. The instant the French withdrew their reserves from the Front to succor the city another German host would strike the gap. There was no hope, no hope whatever, for Paris and the Allied cause.

His fingers tightened on the hilt of the rusty old sword.

"After all," he groaned. "What can I do with this?"

Abruptly he stiffened as a familiar voice sounded at the grille. He rose to his feet, setting the saber against the stone, and confronted the aperture. There was a clanking, rolling sound outside. But it was the tones of von Ramm, whose malignant face showed, to which he gave attention.

"I leave you now to lead the attack on Paris," gloated the Boche. "Major Gruber will attend to you, Yankee, with the small portable Death Flame apparatus."

His face disappeared from the grille. Steve shuddered and turned to Cary. There was no hope now of cutting their way out of the crypt with their one weapon. The door was not even going to be opened. "Caught like rats in a trap," he grated. Beyond the door movement sounded and he heard Gruber uttering orders. He reached out and took up the saber, clutching it hopelessly. A minute passed and another. Then suddenly through the grille thrust the hose of the Death Flame apparatus, hanging down beside the wood.

"You are done for now, Yankees!" shouted Gruber savagely. "Men, turn on the chemicals!"

"Done for?" rasped Steve. A sudden wild thought rushed into his brain as his glance took in the dangling hose. "No, by God!"

The saber came up just as a sinister hissing sounded in the corridor. The steel drove down, striking with terrific force at the hose where it crossed the bottom of the grille. The tube broke apart, severed clean by the blow and one end of it fell into the crypt.

The other, joined to the apparatus, dropped back into the passage. A blinding flash of light erupted and the door burst

inward driven by a gigantic force. Horrible screams rang out.

"Quick!" panted Steve. He was crouching against the wall, untouched by the falling door. "The damned thing has backfired on the Boches!"

In a bound he was through the entrance and facing a ghastly sight. Four Germans writhed on the floor of the passage, the clothes seared from their bodies. A cloud of fire rolled along the corridor from the hose of the machine that had been whirled around when its charge hit the door and rebounded. Gruber stood a few yards away, his eyes staring from his head in horror. "Curse you!" he screamed. "What have you done?"

His hand came up and a Luger crashed, the slug passing within an inch of Steve's head. A mad fury rioted in Steve's veins as he leaped forward and cut. The keen steel of the saber met bone and Gruber went down, sprawled on the floor. Steve whirled with his jaw set.

"Grab that apparatus!" he cried. "We need it with us!" Cary seized the handle of the portable machine and shoved against it. It ran easily along. "This way!" rasped Steve. "We're going for the pit where those pocket planes are parked." Reaching down he swept up Gruber's pistol and went swiftly along the corridor. His nerves were keyed to terrific tenseness and his eyes flared. "Two of us against the whole damned German army," he muttered. "But look what we've got—one of their own infernal machines!"

Suddenly he stopped and pointed to a doorway that he recognized.

"The wireless room, Cary! You know that stuff, don't you?"

"I took a course in it for airplane communication," husked Cary. "I can send, O. K."

"Then come along!" Steve ran for the door, flung aside the curtain and dashed

in. The Boche operator looked up, went pale and started to rise from his seat. Then he crumpled and sagged from the chair. The flat of the saber had taken him full on the side of the head. "He's out!" grated Steve. "Get to that set and broadcast the warning to Paris! The Boches will break out at the Arc de Triomphe. Turn out all Allied troops and the air defense squadrons. The Eiffel Tower ought to catch the message. I'll guard the door!"

"Right!" shouted Cary and sprang for the operator's seat.

STEVE slipped back through the entrance and crouched at the Death Flame machine. He was just in time. Far down the passage a column of Boche showed, coming forward at a measured marching pace. Steve gripped the half length of tube and aimed it for them. His hand crept to the gear that set off the charge.

"It's just like pointing a fire hose," he panted. "Here's where those Boche stop in their tracks."

He pressed the plunger and a stream of vapor erupted and drove for the oncoming column. In a red roar the mist exploded and rushed on sweeping the passage from wall to wall with flame. It struck the Boches with terrific power and rolled on. Steve shuddered looked at the horrible wreckage that strewn the passage. The entire German column had collapsed into a mass of limp seared figures. From behind him he heard the noise of the wireless. It went on and on and then stopped. Cary darted out of the room.

"I've broadcast the alarm" he said. "Good Lord what's happened?"

"I gave von Ramm's troops some of his flame," rasped Steve. "Nothing in the world can stand up against it. If it is loosed in Paris—"

He broke off and turned the machine

around. Then he was pushing it along the passage with Cary lending a hand. Behind them screams and groans resounded. It would only be a minute or so before the alarm would be out. Suddenly they came to the end of the corridor and emerged on the broad rim of rock. Like the muttering of surf heavy waves of sound drifted up and met the dome.

"Look!" Steve panted. "The pocket planes are unguarded. Run this thing to the edge of the pit!"

The Death Flame apparatus rolled forward until it reached the rim. Steve stared down on an appalling sight. An army of Germans gathered on the bottom, marching out of passages until they formed a solid mass in the center.

"Get two of those planes up here," he husked. "Start their motors. We're moving out fast!"

Without a question Cary darted away. Steve crouched behind the machine, his brain rioting while his hand went to the firing gear. The end of the hose pointed at the wall of rock opposite, high above the heads of the German host. He could see the stalwart figure of General von der Krull standing on a platform in the center of the pit floor.

"Soldiers!" he boomed. "Already the advance guard is on the way! They are exploding the blasts that will turn them loose on the streets of Paris! *Vorwaerts!*"

With a thunderous cheer the subterranean army answered his words. In columns they began to move toward the corridors.

"God!" gasped Steve. "Can I stop them?"

He yanked the firing gear wide and a cloud of vapor streamed for the wall of stone. It burst in mid-air and a river of flame struck the rock. Gaping, cracked, shattered, the wall opened and tons of rock slithered down.

"Quick!" came Cary's voice from the rear. "I've got the crates! Here comes von Ramm!"

Steve whirled and leaped for the cockpit of the tiny ship that Sloane had rolled to within a few yards of him. He was at the controls in an instant and the engine was running. Out of a passage nearby plunged von Ramm, screaming, with more than a score of pilots at his heels.

"*Teufel*, the cursed Americans have escaped!"

Pistols cracked and a maelstrom of lead went past Steve. He fired once, twice, three times with the captured Luger, shooting over his shoulder. A pair of pilots fell but the rest came storming forward, straight for the tail of the plane. Steve opened the throttle and in a rush the tiny craft went over the smooth rock. His hand fumbled in the flap and a wild light dawned in his eyes. Once more he had hold of a hand grenade. Behind him taxied Cary at top speed. Hardly a hundred yards ahead he glimpsed the guards at the mine switch. Their rifles were up and they waited for the racing planes, warned by von Ramm's shouts.

"Von Ramm said the switch yanked upward," he snarled. "We'll find out if it does!" For a mad instant he gripped the control stick with his knees and sent his free hand to his triggers. Vicious blasts burst from his Spandaus as the first volley of the guard lashed across the space that separated them from the storming ship. The rifle fire ceased and the Boches flung themselves to the floor to escape the quick-firers' bursts. "My chance!" gasped Steve and pulled the grenade pin.

WHIRLING, it went out from the side of the ship and landed next to the wall. There came a terrific blast and the tiny plane reeled drunkenly from side to side, righted itself and tore ahead.

A heavy detonation sounded and another. He flung his speeding plane in close to the wall and Cary followed him. Down from the dome in sliding ruin plunged hundreds of tons of stones and soil. Buildings rushed through the great gap in debris. Gray sky showed and clean air blew through.

"God!" breathed Steve. "My hunch was right! I've blown the way clear! Up, Cary, up!"

He drew back on the stick and the ship lifted in a whirling bank that took it out over the pit. Then he pointed its nose for the gap in the roof.

Under the avalanche of debris that had dropped from the shattered dome the host of Germans had almost completely disappeared. A huge section of the rock wall had collapsed where the Death Flame struck, burying masses of men beneath it. With a lurch the plane shot out into clear air, rocketing above the roofs of the city.

Steve gasped and swerved it around while he scanned the scene for landmarks. In an instant he had them and was tearing for the Arc de Triomphe at a wild velocity. Dawn was breaking.

Ahead of him appeared the arch spanning the Champs Elysées. Even as he shouted a black burst blossomed in the pavement. The blast had been fired and in another second the advance guard of the German army would erupt.

He sent the plane streaking downward. A wide hole gaped in the boulevard and figures were crowding up out of it. More blasts went off a quarter of a mile away and more Germans crawled out of the ground. Straight for his target tore Steve and his guns spat flame. Then his hand shot to the cockpit flap and a grenade spun down and smashed into the Boches. They reeled and scattered along the pavement in ragged groups.

Steve whirled up and around and his

eyes widened in exultation. Down from the skies slid winged shapes—Nieuports and Spads—their gunfire slashing into the panic-stricken Germans. Off to the west a wedge of ships appeared.

"The Boche ships from the château!" he shouted. "But the whole Paris air guard is out! Cary's wireless went through! God, what a battle is starting!"

Once more his quick-firers crackled and spread ruin in the Boches on the boulevard. In the distance steel glinted and he saw the hues of olive drab and poilu blue. Regiments of Yanks and French were headed at the double for the arch.

The entire garrison of Paris was out, armed and racing for the conflict. Gunfire rioted in the skies and everywhere planes darted and shot. The black-banded Spads were surrounded, crashing earthward in flames as the air squadrons of the capital pounced on them remorselessly. Steve's guns clattered as he leveled off and scudded along. A black-banded ship dropped before his fire. His eyes went along the trail over which he had come. Far away he made out the hole above the Catacombs pit. Half a dozen tiny ships were zooming out of it.

In a wild wave he signaled to Cary, who rode fifty yards away, and to a flight of French Nieuports. Then he shoved on full power and rocketed for the pit. In an instant, it seemed, he was staring across space at a miniature crate in which a familiar figure crouched.

Von Ramm's face, white with fury, looked like the mask of some fiend. His quick-firers blazed and slugs ripped by Steve's head. He banked as Steve jammed on his Spandaus and reeled out of the path of their lead. Steve wrenched around, but von Ramm was away, streaking madly for safety.

"Good God!" he shouted. "He's going to get off!" Desperately he pressed the triggers and his bullets ploughed into the

camelback. Von Ramm was diving down, shooting straight for the gap of the pit. "If he gets in there and lands we'll never catch him!" panted Steve. "There are scores of secret exits from the Catacombs."

His motor coughed and von Ramm gained fifty yards in a flash. He was hovering over the gap, preparing to spiral into it while Steve cursed in savage despair. And then, rolling upward out of the ground, came a fog of vapor that shrouded von Ramm's tiny plane from sight. With a yell of horror Steve zoomed just as the blast came and the whole sky went red. A terrific ball of flame soared upward into the heights and where it had passed there was no sign of a plane or a human being. A few charred fragments fell into the opening of the Catacombs pit.

"The Boches had Death Flame machines down there," he murmured. "One

of them has just gone off in the wreckage. And it hit von Ramm full. What's left of him has dropped into the abyss. He's gone to join von der Kull and the rest of the subterranean army that was trapped in the pit. The German attack on Paris is fini. Their whole army is through."

He scaled upward and looked over the city. Here and there a Boche ship battled hopelessly against the Allied Spads; on the boulevard by the Arc de Triomphe the huddled remnants of the German van were standing with their hands in the air. Yank and French bayonets would find the rest of the survivors in the Catacombs.

Suddenly he felt infinitely tired and relaxed. A weary grin spread over his face as he waved to Cary to follow him down toward the green expanse of the Bois de Boulogne where the air defense landing field stretched.

"The Catacombs was no sight-seeing trip," he smiled. "Maybe the Café de la Paix will go better."

NEXT MONTH

Ride hell's sky range with

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in

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"Bam! Before he could make a definite decision, another volley of planes catapulted from a dozen slitted holes in that camouflaged forest. They were Fokkers this time. And at the head of the flight flew von Stolz in his crimson ship. Smoke's fist shot up. The signal for attack. The nose of his pinto Spad dropped and brace wires screamed with the racing wind..."

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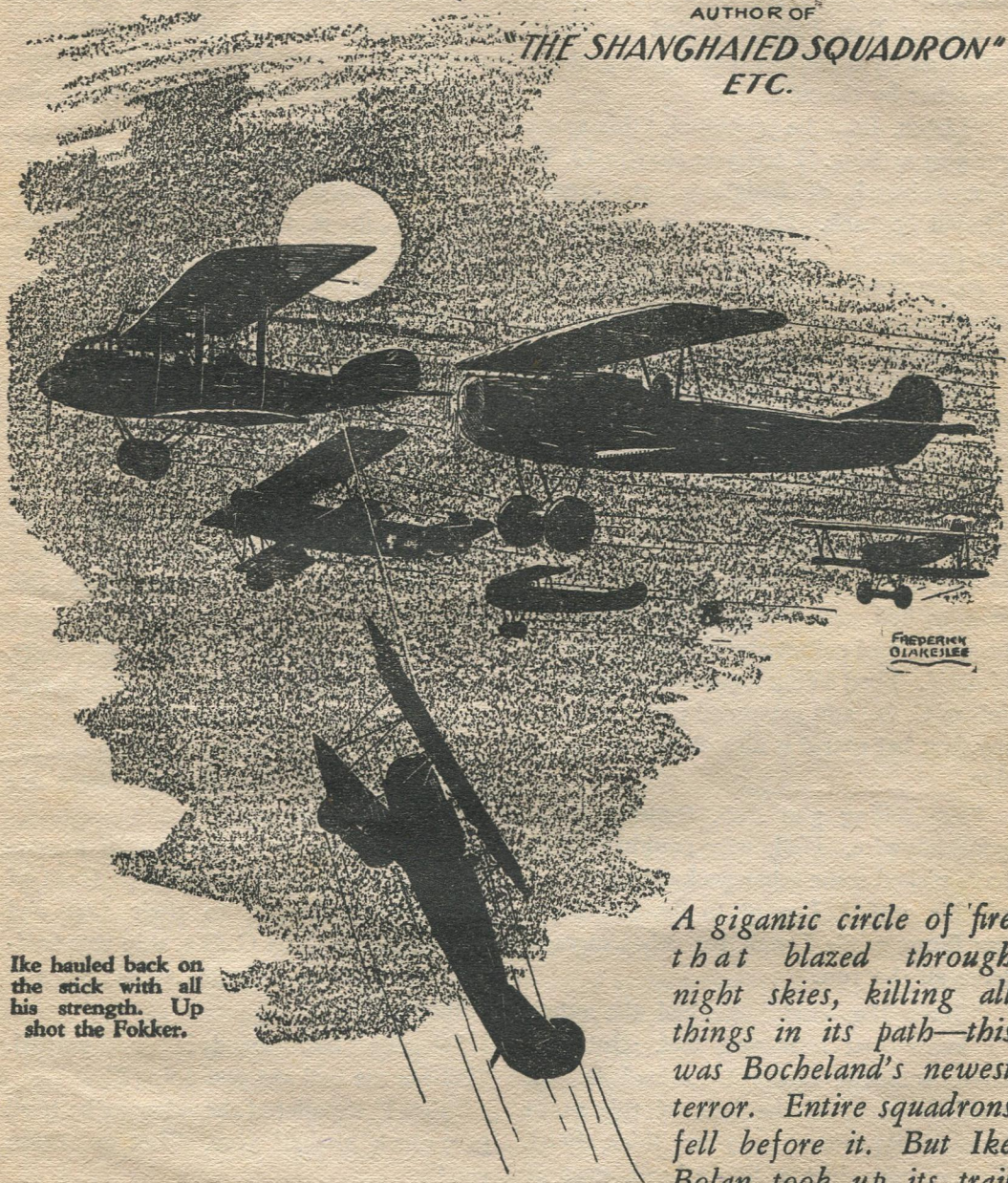
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Cutthroat Buzzards

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AUTHOR OF

"THE SHANGHAIED SQUADRON"
ETC.



Ike hauled back on the stick with all his strength. Up shot the Fokker.

A gigantic circle of fire that blazed through night skies, killing all things in its path—this was Bochelands's newest terror. Entire squadrons fell before it. But Ike Bolan took up its trail

alone—against orders—determined to square a dead man's account on suicide wings!

IKE BOLAN paced slowly up and down the night-shadowed tarmac of the 25th pursuits. At the end of every ten steps or so he paused, glared at

the star-flecked sky, grunted some unintelligible remark and started forward again.

At his side, patiently keeping step, walked "Pop" Pringle, the squadron ad-

jutant. For almost half an hour now, the pair had been pounding ground in moody silence.

Finally Pop Pringle pulled up short, swore softly under his breath and grabbed the other by the arm.

"Listen, Ike," he protested, "this won't get you a thing. I tell you they're O. K. Not a bunch of fledglings, you know. They'll be back. Hell, you're giving me the jimjams."

Bolan didn't answer for a moment. He stood ramrod-stiff, steel-blue eyes fixed steadfastly to the east.

"It would be just my luck to have something go haywire," he muttered after awhile, as though talking to himself. "Yeah! There's been a jinx on my tail for a week now. First, my guns jammed just as I was about to set up a six-Boches in one day record. Then poor old Farmer said 'to hell with Wing orders,' went out on patrol and collected a wooden cross for himself. Then Wing handed me Farmer's job as C. O., and grounded me. And now my first bat patrol is almost an hour overdue.

"I'm telling you Pop, something has gone haywire. Hell, why couldn't Wing have picked some other sucker to be C. O. of this outfit? I want to fly, not warm my fanny while I wait for other guys to have all the fun."

"Sure, Ike, sure," soothed the other. "I know just how you feel. But man alive, someone has got to lead in this man's war. And the lads of this outfit love every bone in your thick head. Farmer was just a figure-head, even if he was a swell guy. Come on, let's have a snifter while we wait. You've had your fun—a year with the French, and a year with us. Now let some of the other lads have a crack at the Jerries."

Without waiting for Bolan to comment, Pop took him by the arm and started to lead him toward the mess. Halfway there

they suddenly stopped dead in their tracks, and stared open-mouthed toward the east.

Where a moment ago there had been a star-dotted canopy of night, there was now a vision that seemed to momentarily paralyze them both with an eerie premonition of mystic danger.

A gigantic circle of sparkling orbs of blue-white fire was moving across the heavens, in a northwesterly direction. Each orb of fire appeared to radiate out countless smaller orbs until the circle had become a solid disc of sparkling flame.

Without warning the sparkling light fused out. There remained nothing but a blanket of darkness, blotched here and there with tiny ribbons of yellowish red that slithered earthward.

It was Bolan who first found his tongue. His voice was husky, strained.

"Did you see what I saw, Pop? Did you—"

He suddenly cut himself off short, moaned like a wounded animal, and started racing toward the end hangar.

"Sergeant!" he bellowed. "Get out my ship! Sergeant! Damn you, where are you? Get out my ship!"

The non-com and a handful of grease-balls, who had been lounging in front of the hangars, leaped to their feet and ducked inside. The C. O.'s ship was half-way out when Pringle raced up and grabbed him.

"Steady lad, steady!" he panted. "Where the hell are you going?"

"East!" thundered the other as he tried to wrench himself free. "Let go, damn you!"

But Pop clung to him.

"Don't be a dope!" he snapped. "What's the big idea?"

"Didn't you see it, didn't you see it?" screamed the C. O. "I mean those last bits of flame going down. They were ships in flames, that's what they were! And something tells me they were our

ships. I'm going over to find out. Dammit, Pop, let go or, I'll swing on you. Let go, I tell you. All right, then take it!"

Jerking back his right arm Ike Bolan started a crushing blow toward the older man's jaw. But it never landed. At that moment there came from out of the skies the shrill whine of wires rushing through the wind. The C. O. relaxed instantly, dropped his clenched fist and whirled.

"Landing flares!" he roared.

HE COULD have saved himself that much breath. Grease-balls were already swarming onto the small patch of rain-soaked ground that constituted the drome.

Seconds later twin rows of flame sputtered into yellow silhouettes against the black background. Overhead the shrill singing of wires eased down the scale, and presently those on the ground saw the blurred shadow of a Camel sliding down toward the ground between the two rows of oil pots.

No one needed a second look. They all instantly recognized the Indian head marking of 25 squadron. As one man they raced out onto the field. Bolan reached the ship first, leaped up on the step and shouted at the goggled and helmeted figure.

"Carter! Carter! What the hell happened? Where are the others?"

Trembling hands pushed the goggles up on the fur piece. A white face, out of which burned sunken eyes, was turned toward Ike. Lips moved, as though their owner were reciting a lesson.

"I—don't—know—skipper! The others—are—dead—Flames—"

The voice trailed off. Bolan grabbed the pilot, shook him savagely.

"Snap out of it!" he roared. "Come on, get hold of yourself. What happened?"

"Wait a minute, Ike! Here, Carter, take a good one!"

As he spoke the words, Pop Pringle pulled Bolan down off the step and handed Carter a cognac bottle. The man grabbed it, put it to his lips and spilled a third of the liquid down his flying jacket, and another third down his throat. A fit of coughing shook him like a leaf in a gale of wind, but eventually he shook his head for the last time, and wiped the back of his flying glove across his mouth.

"Thanks, Pop," he got out. "God, did I need that!"

"All right, Carter!" cut in Bolan. "What happened? For God's sake, man, let's have it!"

"Like I said, skipper," the other replied. "I don't know. We hadn't met a thing, and were heading back. Then suddenly a ring of sort of flickering dots appeared in front of us. Seemed to blaze up and go out, and blaze up again—You know, like someone shutting an electric light bulb off and on real fast so that the filament glows—"

"We saw it!" broke in Bolan. "Go on, what happened?"

The tone of the C. O.'s voice seemed to unnerve the other. He started shaking, and his face twitched.

"I tell you I don't know!" he screamed.

Ike placed a steel-fingered hand on his shoulder.

"Sorry, lad," he soothed. "Didn't mean it that way. Just try hard, lad—try hard to remember."

A born leader of men, the C. O.'s action had the desired result. Carter immediately stopped shaking, and a loyal grin came to his thin lips.

"I tried to lead the flight above the ring—but it seemed to widen out, grow bigger. The next thing I knew I was sort of flying into a disc of sparks. Then everything went black. Guess—guess maybe I fainted, or something. Anyway, I woke up spinning hell for leather down. Just managed to pull it out of some woods.

The sky was dark then—but I could see that the others had crashed in flames. It got me—and I came back here. I ran away didn't I? I cleared out without making sure! Oh—oh—"

Pringle and the cognac bottle prevented a complete collapse. Checking further questions, Bolan got up on the step and gently lifted the sobbing man out of the seat. With the adjutant's help he carried him to his hutment and put him in the bunk. A final shot of cognac and the pilot fell into a moaning sleep.

"Poor devil," grunted Ike as he and Pop went outside. "He's been through more than he could take. What could it have been? What *could* it have been?"

For once the adjutant had no reply. The eerie sense of impending danger that had formally gripped Bolan, now held him in its clammy grasp. Together they walked unspeaking toward the mess.

BY NOW the whole squadron was awake, and as Ike and Pop shouldered into the mess the six pilots that made up the day patrol fixed sleep-drugged, yet questioning eyes upon them.

Without saying a word Bolan went over to the zinc-topped bar, motioned to the orderly to serve drinks all around, then calmly faced the silent group.

"I can't answer your question, gang," he said in level tones. "B Flight ran into a disc of fire, and Carter was the only one to get back, I—"

"Disc of fire?" echoed a red-head. "What the hell?"

"You tell me!" Bolan snapped at him. "But that's what it seemed to be. Pop saw it—so did I. And that's what Carter said it looked like. What—where—or how the hell, no one knows. There's only this fact—five of the gang died tonight—flames! It's up to the rest of us to carry on. We're going to find out what

dirty hand is behind this. And when we do—"

The C. O. paused stared hard at each and every face. What he saw made the blood dance through his veins. He saw bewilderment, bafflement, and frowning perplexity. But he saw no fear—no nervous twitching of fingers and features. No gulping or lowering of eyes. Every one of them gave him look for look, and he read the unspoken words. The whole damn world might blow up, but what was left of 25th squadron, would still carry on. That's what they'd come to France to do, and that's why they were staying.

Bolan nodded, forced a grin to his lips.

"Thanks, buzzards," he said quietly. "Now let's have a snort all around. There's nothing more to say, because we don't know any of the answers."

With a motion to the others to follow suit, Ike Bolan caught up a drink from the tray in the orderly's hand, and downed it in a gulp. A brooding silence settled over the room. No one spoke. What was there to say? Each man had his own thoughts, but whatever they were he told them to no one else. It was as though all were waiting for something to happen—something they expected, yet knew not what it would be.

And it did happen at the end of the fourth drink.

The mess door burst open and a wild-eyed non-com dashed into the room. The man didn't stop to salute. He couldn't have if he'd wanted to. He was half mad with puzzled fear.

"It's coming skipper!" he cried. "Coming here!—I—you—we—"

Bolan shot out his hand and smacked the palm against the man's cheek.

"Cut it!" he rapped out. "Get hold of yourself!"

The non-com flushed, made a mighty effort to curb his jangled nerves.

"It's coming, skipper!" he babbled.

"That circle of lights! I seen it—"

They didn't wait to hear the rest. In one mad charge they went through the mess door and raced out onto the tarmac. Spellbound, they skidded to a halt, eyes to the east.

There, against the dark background, was a ring of sparkling orbs of fire. At times it took on a lopsided shape; at others elliptical. Yet all the time it came closer and closer, swiftly, silently.

And then, when it appeared to be at the very border of the field, the top half of the circle curved over and stretched out westward until the entire field was rimmed by the sparkling orbs.

Rooted to the spot, not a man of 25 moved a muscle. It was as though they had all been turned to stone. His brain racing madly with a thousand and one wild crazy thoughts, Ike Bolan stared dully at the weird spectacle in the sky.

A voice, it was Pop's called out to his left.

"It's coming down! Look out—look out—"

The rest was lost as a high-keyed hum cut into the silence of the night. Seconds later, showers of blue-white sparks spewed out from each orb to completely cover the section of sky directly above the field.

In a flash, night was turned into brilliant day. For one fleeting second Ike had the impression that the sun itself was swooping down upon him. And then he lost all sense of anything.

His whole being went numb as a gigantic conglomeration of colored lights flashed and flickered before his eyes. The roar of a thousand volcanos rumbled inside his head. He no longer could see anything or feel anything. Sound alone made impressions upon his spinning brain.

The wild-high keyed hum, as though a gigantic dynamo had gone haywire and was shaking itself to atoms by the very

force of its unleashed inertia. And through all that came the screams of human lungs—hoarse blood-chilling cries that only excruciating pain can wring from the lips of man.

It was that sixth sense, which science has not as yet defined, that told Bolan he was falling. Yet he was powerless to help himself. A terrible unseen force had reduced steel muscles to so much jelly. And that unseen force played with what was left. It shook him as a dog might shake a rat. It seemed to toss him off into eternity, only to drag him back. It slammed him down, leaped on him, then hurled him away. Yet he felt no pain. He felt nothing, for his brain had long since ceased to keep pace with the mad world of things going on about him. Lights, sounds, darkness—repeated again and again—on and on—over and over. There was no end.

DULLY Bolan felt the stinging pain in his left arm. A cloud of utter darkness rolled aside and a dull grayish white spotted with blurred objects weaved about in front of him. Slowly everything became fixed and human faces made themselves known to him.

There was something about one of them that seemed to click in registration upon the mirror of his brain. And then like the sun coming out from behind angry thunderhead he got hold of himself completely.

He was propped up in a chair in his own hutment. And in front of him, eyes wide with puzzled anxiety, were four men. One he recognized, now—Colonel Landis, C. O. of 25's Wing. The other three constituted a medical corps major, a staff captain, and a French peasant.

Bolan stared at them a moment—heard his own voice.

"Where are the others?" he mumbled thickly. "Anybody hurt?"

Colonel Landis flashed a quick look at

the others, pulled up a chair and sat down, eyes on Ike.

"Take it easy, Bolan," he said kindly. "How do you feel? Any pain?"

It was only then that the pilot realized that he felt no pain whatsoever. In fact he felt perfectly well, save for the sensation that he'd been run through a meat grinder. Strength was the only thing that was missing. He just felt weak, that was it. But even as realization came, strength began to flow back into his body.

"I'm all right, sir," he got out. "Feel O. K. But the others? . . . where are they? And why are you here, sir? Dammit, won't someone of you say anything?"

The Wing commander put up a silencing hand.

"Hold it, Bolan!" he clipped out. "The others—are dead! Everyone of them—mechanics, pilots—everybody . . . !"

Bolan started to his feet.

"Dead?" he echoed wildly.

"Yes, dead," was the quiet reply. "We found them all on the tarmac. You were there, too—but you were the only man who's throat had not been sliced from ear to ear. Now, I want you to do some talking. Tell me everything you remember that happened last Wednesday night."

The last two words virtually crashed through Ike's brain.

"Last Wednesday night?" he gasped. "You mean that—"

"This is Friday afternoon," cut in the colonel. "Now answer me. Tell me everything that you can remember. It's important."

In short, clipped sentences Bolan told of the events that had happened from the time he first saw the ring of sparkling orbs with Pop Pringle, until it appeared the second time and surrounded his field.

"Carter wasn't able to say what it was," he finished up. "And neither am I. It all seems like a blasted dream. I don't know

where to begin thinking. But, colonel, you say—you say you found every throat cut?"

"Yes," was the blunt reply, "from ear to ear. A million men saw that ring of lights, Bolan. And no one this side of the German lines can explain. I received a report something had happened here at the field, and I came right down. So did everyone else. The place was untouched save for the officers and men. And they, with the exception of you, were dead. Frankly, I was hoping that you could give us some information to work on. Your life was spared on purpose by some German devil."

"Huh?" choked out the pilot.

For answer the colonel handed him a folded slip of paper.

"This was pinned on your tunic," he said.

Bolan gaped down at the pencil scrawled words.

We have spared you so that you will live
to remember September 23.

The Fireflies.

THE pilot could only read the words and numerals over and over again. His brain refused to work at all.

"You were with a French squadron then, Bolan," came the colonel's words to his ears. "What happened on that day?"

Ike was about to shake his head when suddenly memory rushed back and revived the events of a sky battle he had almost forgotten. He started speaking his thoughts aloud.

"Hell yes, I remember that day. We were in front of Soissons—yeah, the French Ninety-Eighth. About noon we caught von Haulb's whole outfit west of our balloon line. We caught them cold. Nailed fifteen out of the twenty in the air. They didn't have a chance. We gave 'em a damn good taste of what they'd been doing to our balloon boys. Hell yes,

I remember cutting von Haulb's all-black ship out of the group. Shot the dirty rat to ribbons, but didn't kill him. He spun out of it, and crashed—but I saw him walk away from it. But hell, von Haulb was sent to the Russian Front after that. We never heard of him again, after cleaning out his brood. Can that devil have done this thing?"

No one answered the shouted question for a moment.

"It would seem that way," spoke up Colonel Landis. "This gentleman here in peasant garb, happens to be one of our best G-2 operators in Germany. Naturally G. H. Q. contacted him at once. He can tell you the situation in his own words."

Ike glanced at the flat features of the peasant.

"There is not much to tell," began the man. "For weeks the sector known as 7-2-4, back of the German dump at Issy, has been out of bounds to all ranks. No one can get within two miles of the place. I tried twice and almost got shot for my efforts. But whatever is going on in that sector has something to do with flying. By using powerful glasses I have been able to spot planes above it. They never go very high and they fly only near dusk. But they are always flying in a ring formation—sometimes vertical, sometimes horizontal. Now you have answered one of the questions. This von Haulb is undoubtedly the man in charge. We'll have to work from there."

"And work damn fast!" snapped Landis. "If we lose another squadron the same way, God knows what effect it will have upon morale. As it is, we haven't enough replacements at Pau to reman both squadrons."

"Both squadrons?" cried Ike.

The colonel nodded.

"Seventy-eight observation, met a similar fate last night," he said. "Fifteen pilots, three squadron officers, and twenty

mechanics were killed. And killed the same way. Gad, I never dreamed that a German could be that way. They're not even Germans—they're human devils, that's what they are!"

With a slightly self-satisfied nod the colonel turned to the staff officer.

"Tell the general that I've arranged for every unit under my command to be ready to move instantly if they sight this thing headed their way tonight. Until we can combat it, there is no need of taking useless risks. It would just mean more lives lost. And, oh yes, be sure to tell the general that I'll be at his headquarters at nine sharp tonight, for that conference. Captain Bolan will accompany me. That's all. You gentlemen may go now. I wish to have a few words with Captain Bolan alone."

SALUTING smartly the three others left the room. As the door closed upon them, the colonel turned to Ike and smiled almost paternally.

"Don't let this thing get you, Bolan," he said quietly. "I know just how you must feel—but there's still a war to be won. Every member of G-2 will be put on the job of clearing up this hellish mystery. And in the meantime, we've got to carry on like the soldiers that we are. Fortunately, you came through a horrible experience without a scratch. Of course you're a little weak, but the medico assured me that that phase would soon pass. We'd all give a lot to learn just what happened to you. The medico described it as a type of paralytic coma. He's been giving you cardiac injections since yesterday."

The senior officer paused, gestured with his hand to indicate that medical explanations were unimportant now.

"You heard me say that you would accompany me to G. H. Q. this evening," he continued. "Better report to me at

Wing first. You can spend what time is left collecting your personal gear. Naturally this field is being abandoned. The planes have already been ferried to Pau. Only yours remains. A Wing mechanic is here to help you. After you take off he'll take your stuff to Pau by tender."

"To Pau, sir?" echoed Ike, as his heart began to thump. "I don't understand."

The colonel flashed him an annoyed look.

"Naturally we have got to get another squadron out here, to replace the two we've lost," he snapped. "I'm placing you in charge of that squadron. They are not ready yet, so you'll have to spend a couple of weeks at Pau whipping them into the best shape you can."

"But hell, sir," blurted out the pilot, before he could check the words. "I belong here at the Front. I—"

"You belong where I order you to go!" barked Colonel Landis. "And I'm ordering you to Pau. Oh, I sympathize with your feelings, all right, Captain Bolan. But this job of tracking down this von Haulb, if he be the one, is a job for G-2 alone."

With a sharp nod the colonel stood up.

"Eight-thirty tonight at Wing, captain," he said.

Ike saluted, but his face got hard and his eyes glittered. The senior officer could not help but read his thoughts. He stared fixedly at the rangy pilot, brows furrowed.

"A word of caution, captain," he said in steely tones. "My orders are to be obeyed. If they are not, it will mean general courtmartial with full charges. And remember this—nations are fighting this war, not just a few individuals. There is no time for the exploitation of self-made heroes!"

With that, the colonel walked out the hutment door. For a long time Ike sat rigid, staring unseeing at the opposite wall. Then he raised blazing eyes upward.

"Duty, hell!" he grated. "My duty is to the gang. I'll square up, or join them!"

AT EIGHT sharp that evening, Ike Bolan nodded to the Wing greaseball at the chocks. The man yanked them clear and Ike eased the throttle forward. The Camel quivered, bucked, then streaked out across the darkening field.

Pulling the wheels clear Bolan stuck the nose up, turned in the seat and stared down at the murky square of France that had been his home for the past six months. Though his lips were curled back in a savage grimace, his heart was heavy.

For hours he had been waging the battle of his life with himself. Army training told him to obey orders. But something else in him, something that he could not give a name, had kept screaming over and over again—"To hell with orders! You belong to the gang! They have died, and they are counting on you to even up. This is your job. Von Haulb, your old enemy, has flung you the challenge. It's up to you!"

Hour after hour, until his brain was ready to burst. But in the end the fighting side of him won. To hell with the colonel's orders! His job was to smoke out von Haulb. Smoke out that human devil and blast him to hell forever.

Tapping rudder a bit, Ike eased the ship toward the northeast. Darkness had now enveloped that section of the earth completely. But that did not bother him. In fact, he wanted darkness. Only in the dead of night could he carry out the snap plan that had come to him. It really wasn't even a plan—just grim determination to do something.

The sector back of the German dump at Issy was as familiar to him as the palms of his hands. Perhaps G-2 men couldn't get close, but by God he would! For once he was going to get an enemy airman on the ground. How, he didn't know. He'd

take care of that part once he got within reach of von Haulb. If necessary, he'd rip the life out of that Boche with his bare hands.

A born eagle's yearning for sky battle possessed him as his Camel clawed its way through the night. But with an effort he forced himself not to think of that. Against von Haulb and his horrible, mysterious weapon, he wouldn't stand a chance. Vivid memory of that terrible flashing of colored light, and that great unseen body crushing force was more than enough to confirm truth. No, the eagle must get his enemy on the ground this time.

Brushing all thoughts from his mind Ike hunched forward and concentrated on weaving his ship through the barrage of German searchlights that began to stencil the night skies. It was child's play for a skyman of his experience, and presently he was deep in Germany with the beams futilely "waving" the air far behind him.

Taking one last look at his instruments, he snapped off the cowl lamp, and eased back the throttle. Though below him was pitch darkness, he knew that about a mile ahead lay the Issy sector. And a bit to the east of that point was a river.

At one spot that river changed its course sharply. And in the loop of that bend was a billiard-table field. And there he would find his answers.

Foot by foot he eased the Camel downward, fighting every faint hum of the flying wires. Eternities dragged past and then through the gloom below he faintly made out the thin looping band of blurred gray that marked the river.

Now for the final bit—now to ease down in a feather landing.

Five hundred feet—four hundred feet—three hundred—

Suddenly Ike went cold all over. His heart seemed to stop beating, and his mouth to go bone dry. He was not alone

in the air! He could see nothing, yet he knew something was there. Instinct screamed out to him that it was so. But where—where—and what?

And then it happened!

A high-keyed hum, and as though by magic, a ring of sparkling fire formed itself vertically about him. The light blinded him and a million hot needles seemed to pierce his body. He knew his hand was on the stick, yet he could not feel it.

Thoughts and senses became all jumbled up together. And then like the snapping of a twig, earth and sky seemed to crash together. No thunderous roar. Just a faint snap that seemed to be in the very middle of his brain, yet a thousand miles away. After that—deadly silence.

SLOWLY Ike opened his eyes. He had the feeling of one who has awakened from a sound, restful slumber. His brain was crystal clear, and the blood surged through his body. In front of him was a blank board wall. He turned his head and gasped.

He was at one end of a large room, in the center of which was a heavy oak table. But it was not that which made him gasp. Seated about the table were ten figures. Eight of them wore the shaded gray of the Imperial German Air Service.

The other two, and incidentally the two nearest him, were clad in heavy, elaborately embroidered garments. Beneath shaggy caps, faintly slanted eyes bored into Ike's. A flat forehead gave the eyes a leering look. And a thin nose, heavy lips, and a blotchy yellowish skin added to the whole an expression of unleashed savagery.

One look and Ike knew that the hideous pair before him were throwbacks from distant Tatar tribes. The others were plain, ordinary Germans. But a queer sensation rippled through him as he

caught the expression on each face—an expression of stark terror. As though at any second the brain behind the face would refuse to hold up any longer.

For a moment the tableau remained unchanged, and then the taller of the two savage looking ones, stood up and came over to Ike with panther tread. He stopped two feet away, placed arms akimbo, hands on hips, and drew back his lips over stained jagged teeth in what was supposed to be a smile. Then came the voice, even toned and obviously cultured.

"I bid you welcome, Captain Bolan. I have been expecting a visit from you, though not exactly in the way you made it. We sighted you, of course, the moment you crossed our lines. And you are very lucky. Had I not recognized your plane you would have been destroyed. As it was, I simply stunned you sufficiently to make you land. Of course you crashed. But your altitude was low and your speed not great, so you were not injured."

Ike said nothing. Faintly he wondered where von Haulb might be. Never having met the famous German ace face to face he did not know what he looked like.

As the other spoke again, Ike's question was answered. But it left him completely dumbfounded.

"Permit me, captain, to introduce myself. In days gone by, when we met neither of us troubled about that. I am Major von Haulb."

The man's lips twitched smirkingly as he read the amazement in Ike's face.

"A name you would not associate with my looks, *hein?*" he chuckled. "Quite right, captain. There is no association. Von Haulb has been my adopted name for years. Let us say that a Mongol name, that goes back to Tatar kings, is too difficult for Occidentals to conjure with. At any rate, it has served my purpose best to become a von Haulb. And so, captain,

as von Haulb I bid you welcome. For a long time I have wished to meet you this way—on the ground. I am assuming that you received my note. Did it awaken memories?"

The slanted eyes became mere cracks, out of which gleamed coals of fire. The Yank fixed him with a defiant look.

"It did, von Haulb," he cracked out. "Made me remember a job I didn't finish."

The Mongol laughed raspingly. Then suddenly it became hissing sounds.

"I have never had to refresh my memory of that day, swine!" he snarled. "The one black day of my illustrious career. You and your swine comrades shot us from the skies—cut us to pieces with your superior numbers. You—"

"You're a damn liar!" roared Ike. "We spotted you rats' five ships. Why—"

Ike choked off the rest as the Luger, that appeared like a flash of light in von Haulb's hand, whipped him cruelly across the cheek.

"Silence, swine! You will speak only when I address you. You wiped us from the sky that day, and I have not forgotten that it was you in particular who forced me down. You may be interested to know that only two of us lived to tell the story. I was one. The other sits there at the table.

"We have never been separated in anything since boyhood days, Shah Kahn and I. He has been a servant, and a brother. We went on living. Yes, we went on living, planning, waiting for the time when we could make you suffer a thousand times more than we did that day, two years ago. And, Captain Bolan, that time is now at hand!"

The man fairly screamed the last words. The nostrils of his nose quivered, and a little thread of spittle drooled over the rim of his lower protruding lip. Silently, Ike steeled himself.

He was not facing a man. This von Haulb, as he called himself, was simply a vicious barbarian who had acquired a veneer of civilization. In his veins ran the blood of ancient savages—a people who maimed and slaughtered, and who valued human life as the least of all things in the world. The inner instincts of a tiger and a cobra combined together and moulded into human form—no more, no less.

FOR a second the Yank took his eyes off the horribly twisted face and glanced at the others in the room. The expression on Shah Khan's face matched that of his master's. But the others were as waxen images of terror. As though held by some supernatural force, they sat unwinking, glazed watery eyes clamped on von Haulb's every move.

When the tall Mongol spoke again he proved that he had read Bolan's thoughts correctly.

"You wonder about them, *hein?*" he sneered. "Do you see the fear in their faces? Of course you do. That is fear of me, Captain Bolan. Fear, that I may change my mind at any minute and use one, or all of them, to further my experiments. There were twelve of them at one time. Three the worms have devoured. And the fourth you may perhaps see, presently. An interesting group, don't you think? Yes, my new Fireflies are far different from the old ones.

"This is their only home. For you see captain, each one of those eight men is an outcast from his own people. Each one has been tried and convicted of a crime that society never forgives or forgets. Instead of sending them to the penal colony in German East Africa, the German High Command has given them to me. Given them to me body and soul, to do with as I wish. There is no escape, not even death until my last triumph has been

achieved. And that will be when I become the supreme power behind the governing forces of the entire world. And the only man who shall share that power with me will be Shah Khan. He alone deserves that honor!"

The Mongol paused, turned and smiled at his ugly servant. Shah Khan's jagged teeth showed in a worshiping grimace of gratitude. Ike felt as though he was sitting on the very lip of a seething volcano, yet he held a good old U. S. A. poker expression.

It must have riled the Mongol, for he bent over close, his hideous features not a foot from the Yank's own face.

"I have been in your country many times, Captain Bolan," he hissed. "And there they call a man who talks much, a windbag. But I am not that, though many words leave these lips of mine. It pleases me to talk. I have slaved as no man ever slaved before. For me there has been no rest, day or night. And now I shall drink deep of the cup of victory and enjoy every tiny crystal drop. For I, the man they know as Major von Haulb, have at last been able to harness the most destructive force in the air or on the ground. Not only have I harnessed it, I have learned how to create it myself. And that force, my cursed friend, is lightning! Yes, lightning—that great weapon of the god's that can shatter man's work asunder in the millionth part of a second.

"Man has developed great electro generating stations, hydro-electro plants, and similar other power producing units. But only I can take power out of the sky and make it do my bidding. And only I can produce lightning on a safe and worthwhile scale.

"Six years ago I came to Germany. My ideas were in their infancy then. They laughed at me, but gave me a laboratory. There I slaved, and slaved, and slaved. Failure after failure came to me. Then

Germany went to war. I was forced to do my part. For exterior purposes I had become a German. For my work in the air I was promised the opportunity to experiment on a large scale. And—and the very day your cursed bullets found their mark in my plane was the day I left the Front. Humiliation, disgrace, such as I have never known was mine and Khan's that day. But we forced ourselves to keep face. Forced ourselves because we knew that some day, some day the great triumph would be ours. And that day has arrived. My major experiments are completed. They have proved a success. With these swine criminals Germany has handed over to my charge I can paralyze every living thing within a ten mile radius. Three times I have done it. First when I met your swine flight in the air. Second when I electrically radiated your own field and left the sign of my forefathers in the necks of the dogs we found when we landed. And the third time, the very next night."

The Mongol paused abruptly, beat his clenched fists against his chest.

"And the secret is mine!" he shouted. "Mine and Khan's. With these others forming the radiating ring, each plane equipped with an alternating terminal disc and conductor, Shah Khan and I can paralyze anything within the area of the ring, and extending out from it for a distance of one hundred feet. Thus we can trap planes in the air, or glide down to a hundred foot altitude and blanket the area of ground beneath the ring.

"It does not kill. Ah no, it does worse than that—it renders man totally helpless. Have you ever seen a man who has been struck by lightning, and lived? He is but a babe for days. He remains in a coma, every ounce of strength sapped from him. That is what Shah Khan and I can do. But it is only the beginning. At present we can only produce a fraction of the

original power. Later, however, when I have perfected better equipment, Shah Khan and I shall be able to radiate our electro force at maximum strength. And then, my swine friend, then the whole world will be at our mercy!"

THE Mongol drew himself up and thrust out his chest until it looked as though his heavy silken garments would split apart. Then without a single word or sign he turned and walked over to the table. German words rattled off his lips. Not understanding the language, Ike Bolan made no attempt to listen. As a matter of fact he was too steeped in his own thoughts to bother. And those thoughts were thoughts of black despair.

Without telling him the fine details, von Haulb had nevertheless given the Yank a conclusive word picture of his new and horrible weapon. Not for an instant did Ike doubt the truth of it all.

Though he was not an electrical engineer, he knew that creating lightning was not outside the limits of modern science. As a matter of fact, before the war he had once seen it done on a small scale at a demonstration in the G. E. laboratories at Schenectady. Ever since the days of Benjamin Franklin the scientific world had been trying to harness that terrific force that came out of the skies, and put it to the use of mankind. And now this devil Mongol had at last succeeded in doing it. But to him it meant only personal power—a power he could use to destroy every living thing that confronted him.

With a suppressed shudder the Yank thought of his horrible experience. That disc of sparkling orbs had in reality been miniature streaks of lightning leaping across the gap formed by the ring of insulated terminal ships. And that great unseen force that had shaken him into insensibility had been high voltage—strong

enough to stun and paralyze, yet lacking the amperage to kill instantly.

Fighting inwardly to keep control of his nerves, Ike sat as a man of stone, staring steadfastly at the floor. His brain raced madly in a frantic effort to evolve some kind of an end to this new and terrible menace that had come to a world of war. But it was all to no avail, and simply left him mentally exhausted and heart sore.

Only one tiny hope was his. It was evident that von Haulb did not intend to kill him immediately, else he would not have allowed him to glide to a crash landing. He would have paralyzed him and shot him to earth in flames, or else have resorted to his inborn savagery and sliced his throat, as he had sliced the throats of the gang.

The sneering voice of the Mongol jerked Ike back from the border of berserk and reckless action. The man stood before him, holding a pair of goggles fitted with dull blue lenses.

"It is time for us all to get started, captain," he said. "Please proceed me through that door."

It was only then that Ike realized that he and the Mongol were alone in the room. The others had disappeared. For a second he hesitated, weighing his chances of a quick lunge and a grab for the thin corded throat before him.

A Luger came up to within six inches of his heart, and settled the thing for him. With a shrug he turned, walked over to the door and shoved it open. Von Haulb stuck close to his heels.

THE drome outside was faintly lighted by triple rows of oil pot flares. And set out in a gigantic circle were nine planes. Eight of them were Fokker pursuit ships. But the ninth was an Albatros two-seater.

Von Haulb marched him over toward

it, and as they drew close Ike saw the other Mongol, Shah Khan, seated in a partially hooded rear cockpit. The general outline of the ship was quite familiar, but several queer looking attachments instantly caught the Yank's eye.

Along the left side of the fuselage, the side facing the ring, was a network of heavy steel wire, intersected at regular intervals by groups of six-inch carbon rods that stuck outward, fan-shaped. And at the base of each group of carbon rods was a concaved disc made up of half-inch coils, so closely placed that the whole thing looked like one solid concaved disc.

Glancing at the other ships, Ike saw that each fuselage was fitted with a series of concaved discs; each disc having one large carbon rod.

A chuckle by his side caused him to turn. Von Haulb was watching him with smirking satisfaction.

"You are interested, *hein?*" he hissed. "It is too bad that I have neither the time, nor the desire to explain it all to you. But I tell you this. My plane, the Albatros is the key. From there Shah Khan and I control everything. That is one reason why these swine do my bidding. They cannot get away from me in the air, *even*. A movement of my hand and they too will be stunned. Yes, they would have to destroy me first. Many times have I seen them looking across at me, trying to summon the courage to cut in and fire their guns. But they never do. They know what would happen if they were the fraction of a second too late. They have seen what I did to three of the fools that tried it."

The man gestured, laughed, and then bent burning eyes on Ike.

"And now, captain, listen close. Over there by the middle hangar is another Fokker. It is all warmed up. Get into it and follow us off. The mechanic in charge understands. Wear these goggles,

and fly close to my right wing-tips. In case you do not know, every plane is fitted with an exhaust silencer—another one of my achievements, by the way. Naturally there are no guns on the ship you will fly. You are coming with us simply as a guest. Being outside the ring, nothing will happen to you—unless you cause me to make things happen. And as an additional caution, Shah Khan's guns will be trained on you every second of the time.

"In honor of your visit we will do something of major importance. But remember to keep these goggles handy. Tonight I am not going to announce my approach. I will not turn on the radiating voltage until we have reached our objective. By watching me you will know when to use the goggles. You will see a tiny blue light in my cockpit. That will give you five seconds in which to adjust your goggles. Here they are. Be sure not to lose them, or you will be unable to enjoy our little demonstration."

The Yank didn't make a move for the goggles. He simply fixed the Mongol with steely eyes.

"You skunk devil!" he grated. "If you think I'm going to join you on your hellish mission, you're crazy as a loon."

Inwardly, Ike braced himself for the Mongol's berserk wrath. But the man simply shrugged, smiled, and raised his Luger an inch or two.

"As you wish, captain," he said. "Please come with me."

Dumbfounded, Ike let von Haulb herd him over to a small building. As they entered, the Mongol snapped a switch. Ike gasped and recoiled a step or two. Against the opposite wall was what was once the figure of a man. He was naked and strung by his wrists to a beam so that only his toes touched the floor. About his torso were half a dozen coils of wire.

"Watch, Captain Bolan!"

As von Haulb hissed the words he touched a rheostat. Instantly the coils about the man glowed red, and tiny wisps of smoke curled upward. The body twitched, and Ike heard a faint moan. The Mongol closed the rheostat, and gestured.

"Your choice, captain," he said in a harsh voice. "I have waited long to make you suffer. For the present, shall it be mental or physical suffering? Come! Make your choice."

The Yank's heart pounded against his ribs, not with fear. No, with a wild desire to stake everything on reckless action. But a tiny thread of sanity held him in check. He was helpless, absolutely helpless at the moment. Once he was strung up, like the poor devil there, all would be lost.

"All right, you devil!" he gritted. "You win—this time!"

"And every time from now on!" the other snarled. "Now, move, dog."

HHEAD down, blood boiling through his veins, the Yank went outside and over to where a revving Fokker rested. As he climbed into the cockpit he noted that a Luger in the hand of an evil-looking German was trained dead on him. Without giving the man the satisfaction of a hard look he glanced at the gunless gun mountings and sighed.

A nod and a grease-ball pulled the chocks clear. As he did, Ike made as if to reach for the throttle, grabbed the switch instead and snapped it off. The engine died with a cough, and the prop became horizontal. Ike's heart leaped wildly as he peered forward, but the smile he turned to the scowling greaseballs was one of meek apology.

Ten seconds later they had the prop spinning over again.

By now the ring of ships had started to slide off the field. Shoving open the throttle, Ike eased the stick back and fol-

lowed in their wake. At three hundred feet he swung in close to von Haulb's right wings. The Albatross was flying right-center of the ring. As the Yank dropped into position the Mongol nodded slightly and then devoted all of his attention to keeping formation position. But that fact did not bring joy to Ike's heart. He knew that in the hooded rear cockpit was Shah Khan, ready with waiting guns.

A sky veteran himself, the Yank could not help but marvel at his enemies as the strange cavalcade slid forward through the night. Never had he seen such perfect formation flying. Not one of the nine ships even weaved so much as a foot out of position. The whole seemed more like a solid ring, than one made up of nine separate parts. Fear of the Mongol's wrath might have played a small part, but Ike knew beyond doubt that the eight Germans were men born to the joystick.

Another thrill that came to him was the functioning of the exhaust silencers. Several times he moved his hand unconsciously to the throttle, only to remember that the Mercedes in the nose was turning over maximum revs, and that he was not gliding with engine off. The only sound was but the faint swish of the prop, and the low hum of the wires in the wind. Another one of that Mongol's achievements, eh? What trick of fate was it, that put the brain of a genius in a devil's body?

And then, suddenly, the Yank banished savage speculation from his mind. They were now directly over No-Man's-Land, and the ring was veering slightly toward the southwest. Von Haulb had said—"Tonight we will do something of major importance!" What could be of more importance than the destruction of a whole American squadron! Something of major importance?

The words seemed to thunder through

his head, as Ike held position close to the Albatross' wings. Something of major importance—something of major importance—

Suddenly the Yank's heart stood still. He had taken a snap glance over the side to get direction from the blurred panorama below. That one glance had been enough. He knew now! That Mongol devil was headed, not for an American squadron—but *straight for American G. H. Q.*

Realization of the awful truth made Ike go weak all over for the moment. It was crazy—ridiculous—Wipe out G. H. Q? Pershing and Harbord, and all the rest of them? The very brains of the Yank forces in France? Such things just didn't happen.

But they were about to happen!

Ike Bolan's brain fairly shrieked the words. Face grim, hand holding the stick in a grip of steel, he hunched forward and glued his eyes to von Haulb's cockpit. The tiny blue light, and then a period of five seconds. Five seconds—an infinitesimal part of a life time! Yet upon those five seconds would rest his fate, the fate of nations—yes, even the fate of the entire world!

The blue light—the blue light! Supposing he didn't see it? Supposing he—

There it was!

As a faint blue tint arced up from von Haulb's cockpit, Ike Bolan breathed a fierce prayer and slammed the stick hard over to the left. In the same fraction of a second he stood up on the rudder bar.

The Fokker bucked, then the wings caught and the plane streaked over and down with the speed of a meteor gone berserk. Above the shriek of the prop wash in his ears Ike heard the savage snarl of Spandaus guns. Something white-hot cut across his right temple, but he hardly felt it.

He hauled back on the stick with all of

his strength. Up shot the Fokker, its blunt nose headed dead on for the tail assembly of the Albatros. One second—two seconds—and then the heavens exploded.

Blazing lights, crackling streaks of jagged flame, all enveloped in a thunderous roar that seemed to drive the sides of Ike's head together. He could see nothing but a white glare all about him. In the mad plunge the special goggles had been whipped from his head by the wind. He flew now only by instinct. And instinct told him that the Fokker's prop was clawing into something that gave before it.

His trembling hand caught hold of the throttle, pulled it back. He felt the ship falling. It spun over on wing, and flung him cruelly against the cockpit rim. Then over it went on its back to hang him, senseless, on the safety belt.

AND then out of darkness came light. He could see things, real objects. A chair, a table—and men in white suits. No, not all of them. One wore a uniform—and American uniform. Colonel Landis!

Dully, Ike let his eyes rove. He was in a base hospital. A Yank one, too. Huh, his legs were in casts, and one arm in splints—his right one. And a whole pillow seemed to be tied about his head. Yeah, Landis was leaning forward.

"Just be quiet, captain," came the words. "You crashed in some woods. But you'll soon be fit. No, don't try to talk. You've been raving for four days now. Told us everything."

"But von Haulb—von Haulb?"

"Dead," said the colonel. "And that other devil with him. The ship crashed and burst into flames. A squadron of our own bats caught the others before they could reach the German lines. Got them all."

"Poor devils," breathed Ike. "They're probably glad, wherever they are."

"Probably," nodded the colonel, "from what you said about them in your delirium. But if you must talk, tell me this one thing. What about a prop? You raved over and over again about a prop. What prop? What did a prop have to do with it?"

"Everything!" replied Ike fiercely. "At least everything as far as my life was concerned. The Fokker von Haulb gave me, was equipped with one of those new German all-metal props. If it had been the regular laminated wood one it would have snapped and I'd have snarled up my wings in his tail section. But the metal prop cut things clear in time, so that my wings didn't catch on any wreckage."

The colonel nodded and said nothing. And it was then that memory rushed back to Ike. He steeled himself and looked the senior officer square in the eye.

"Well, sir?" he asked defiantly, "do I get court-martialled here or when I can stand up?"

The other did not change expression, but his words lacked their usual steel edge.

"Even a colonel can change his mind, captain," he said. "Punishing you now would be only satisfying my own pride. So we'll let it go like that. Just you get well fast. And by the way, is there any favor I can do for you?"

The Yank grinned as he spoke.

"Yes sir," he said. "Pick other chaps to be C. O's., and just let me go on Boche-hunting. That's the only thing I'm really any good at."

Colonel Landis smiled faintly.

"I disagree with you, captain. But if that's the only way I can get discipline out of you, then very well. I give you my promise."

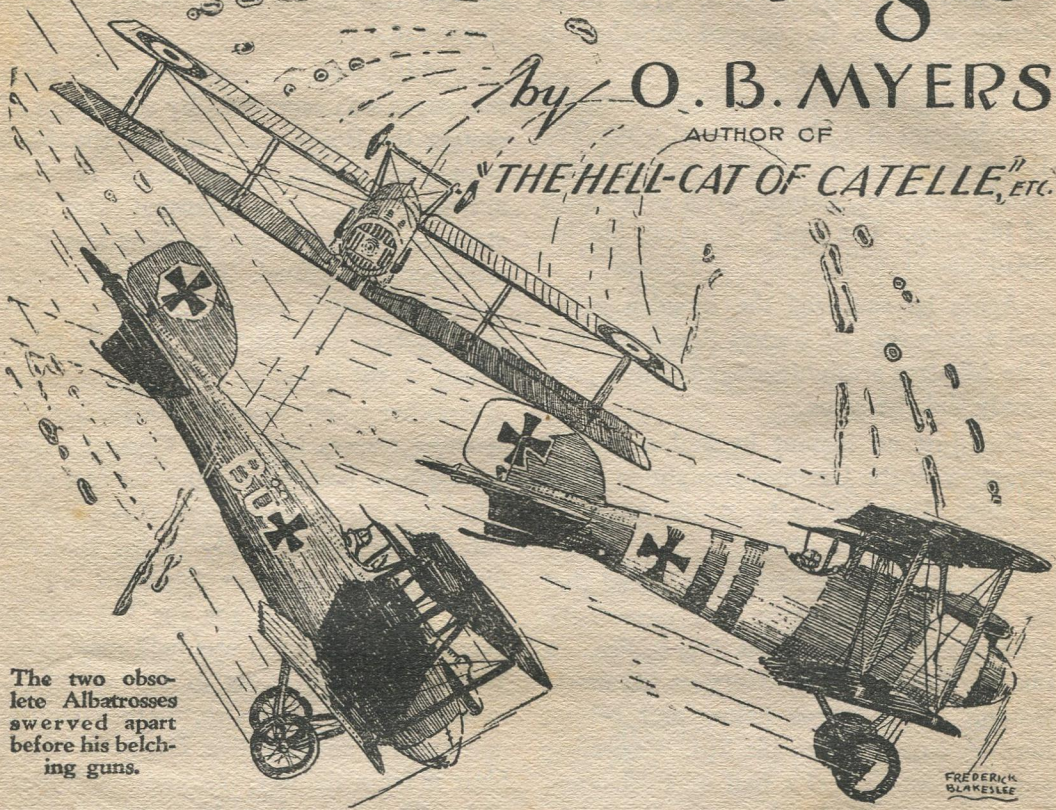
Ike Bolan didn't thank the colonel. He was asleep before the words got off his tongue.

The Ninth Midnight

by O. B. MYERS

AUTHOR OF

"THE HELL-CAT OF CATELLE," ETC.



The two obsolete Albatrosses swerved apart before his belching guns.

One by one those obsolete ships took off from that hidden German drome—and surrendered inside Allied lines. Why? Who were the pilots? What was the secret of the "ninth midnight"? Sandy McKnight tried to find out—and hurled his wings straight into a sky maze of mystery and death!

SANDY McKNIGHT, his eyes popping with surprise, hauled his Spad into a steep wing-over and stared down past his wing-tip.

An Albatros! Looked like one of the old 1916 models, with a 170-horse Mercedes set into its steam-lined nose. Why, he hadn't seen one of those old crates in nearly a year. Were the Jerries, then, really so short of new Pfalz and Fokkers that they had to fall back on these obsolete busses for patrol duty?

All alone it was, too, ploughing along miles behind the Allied lines at its top

speed of not more than a hundred and twenty, bold as brass. Why, his Spad could fly rings around that ship at half throttle. It would not be a combat, at all. More like shooting lions in a cage. Sandy grunted.

But war was no place for squeamishness. If a man was fool enough to fly across the lines in a baby carriage, he could expect no mercy on that account.

A long, careful look above convinced Sandy that this was no decoy, luring him into a trap. There was not another plane in sight. He thumbed his throttle open,

pushed his nose down, and let his fingers curl about the trigger grips. With thundering exhausts he plunged for the tail of the lone Albatros.

His first burst flicked ribbons from the rounded end of a black-crossed wing. The Boche immediately whirled into a bank. Sandy followed, gaining with every turn of his prop. The bank tightened, but his Spad was crawling closer and closer.

Again he squeezed the Bowden grips, and a fiery trail of tracers flayed the sky. The Albatros straightened out with a jerk. Sandy did the same.

For just an instant he had a perfect target, with the German straight in front of him. But before he could seize the opportunity it was gone.

So great was his margin of speed that he had actually caught and passed the other plane before he had time to fire. In one headlong rush he overshot his mark, leaving the Albatros below and behind him. A curse rose to his lips. Expecting any moment to feel a hail of steel pouring into his belly, he threw his Spad into an Immelmann.

But no German bullets pierced his cockpit. The Boche, like himself, had missed the split second of opportunity. Grimly Sandy resolved that he would never get another. He set himself coolly, determined to make no more slips. There was no need to extend himself. All he had to do was to play it safe, and he couldn't lose.

The Albatros had taken a short dive, and was now leveling out. Sandy swooped to cut it off. The Boche twisted back upon his turn, and Sandy's brief burst whizzed past his rudder. The turn tightened, but as Sandy's Spad corkscrewed closer and closer, and his hammering guns breathed hot upon the trail of their prey, the Albatros again flipped out straight. Sandy, however, was not one to be fooled twice by the same trick. He curved out steadily,

and a long blast from his Vickers drove the German into a dive. Sandy plunged in pursuit.

A third and a fourth time the same maneuver was repeated. By diving out of danger the Boche was avoiding the death stroke, but always at the cost of precious altitude. At four thousand feet the struggle had commenced. Now less than a thousand remained. These tactics would not suffice much longer. Soon the dodging Albatros must turn and face the issue, which meant the end.

Another spiral, another plunge. Sandy's slashing tracers forced the German's dive to lengthen. Barely two hundred feet were left when the black-crossed ship swooped out into a bank. Sandy pulled back on his stick, and his face hardened into a mask. The moment for the kill was at hand. That Albatros was cold meat now. When he forced it out of its last spiral, in another second or two, there would be no room for another dive. His guns would blast it from the sky. Escape was impossible. The Jerry must know that as well as he did.

The Albatros, banking desperately, felt his tracers tearing at its fuselage. It writhed out of its turn like a tortured animal. With trigger hand poised and ready, Sandy leaped for its tail. The German nosed down. Sandy followed. The ground rushed up. His hand faltered. Suddenly a cry of relief burst from his lips.

The Jerry was landing! Choosing to be driven down intact, rather than to crash in flames. Thank God for that. Many a foe had Sandy killed in combat above the clouds. But murder was not to his taste.

With a last burst by way of warning, he pulled up and over, and came about in a wide circle. Beneath his wing-tip he saw the Albatros redress above a sloping hillside, with dead motor. As he watched it stalled, sank, and touched.

But in his desperate need for haste the German pilot had chosen the worst direction. He was now rolling down grade at a distorted angle. A wing-tip struck a stone. In an instant the ship reeled, cartwheeled, and crashed in a heap.

With swift precision Sandy side-slipped, landed his Spad neatly uphill, and left it idling there. By the time he had jumped to the ground the German pilot had crawled from the wreck. Sandy stared at him curiously. He was tall, well-built, with a close-cropped blonde moustache and alert blue eyes. At the moment he acted somewhat dazed, no doubt from the crash, and blood trickled from a gash in his arm.

"Are you hurt?" asked Sandy immediately.

"It's nothing," shrugged the Boche, and grinned in a manner almost friendly. "The war, it is fin'sh."

"That's right," agreed Sandy. "For you it is."

IT TOOK but a minute to search both the pilot and the cockpit, where Sandy possessed himself of a Luger and certain papers. Then he found a concealed artillery P. C., just over the brow of the hill, where there was a phone.

Eager to report his victory, he called the drome of the 90th Spads. But Major Gable, his C. O., had been called to Wing for a conference with the colonel—which gave Sandy an idea. He returned with a squad of soldiers, saw that a guard was posted over the smashed Albatros until such time as it could be given a thorough examination, and started his phlegmatic prisoner on the way to the rear under armed escort.

Then he mounted his Spad, took off, and flew, not for home, but direct to Souilly.

He found the office of air headquarters without difficulty. Yes, he was informed,

Major Gable was in with Colonel Cross. In a few moments he was admitted to the tiny room where behind a littered desk sat the grizzled head of all American air activities. Sandy described his exploit briefly, and produced the Jerry's papers.

"I let him keep his watch, and a packet of concentrated food. He said a lot of them carried that emergency ration, having heard stories about slim menus in the French prison camps. But he didn't seem particularly sad at the prospect. In fact—it didn't strike me till later—but while I was phoning, he was alone in that field for several minutes, and my Spad stood there with motor running. Of course he was wounded, slightly, and a bit dazed, perhaps. But I know that under the same circumstances I would have taken a chance and made a break for it. But this Jerry apparently never moved."

"Made no attempt to escape, you say?" asked the colonel sharply.

"No, sir. Seemed almost glad that his fighting days were over, in fact. And if they're making their pilots fly those old Albatrosses, I can't say that I blame him much, either."

"Perhaps," muttered the colonel thoughtfully. "Or perhaps there is some other reason." He glanced significantly at Major Gable. "You see? Another example of just what we had started to discuss. As I was pointing out to you, our records show under normal circumstances a German plane brought down intact about once or twice a week, at the most. Yet in the past three days there have been no less than nine cases of what you might call voluntary surrender, scattered all along the Front. In every instance the defeated Boche was flying an old-type Albatros, and all but one lived to be captured. Nine times since the first of the month. This makes the tenth."

There was a moment of puzzled silence; then Major Gable leaned forward in his chair.

"You mean, sir, that you think something's queer?"

"Queer?" The colonel was almost fretful. "How do I know? I have learned from long experience to regard every act of every German with suspicion. But what is there here to be suspicious of? I can't even decide whether I ought to be alarmed or not. German flyers suddenly start allowing themselves to be brought down easily. What does that prove? Nothing. My first thought was a new trick to get their secret agents across the lines. But that's absurd. Intelligence agents will be no good to them in prison camps, which is where these pilots all go. No; if there's anything behind it, I can't see what it is."

"Maybe," suggested Major Gable, "it's as McKnight said; a protest by the flyers against being forced to fly obsolete planes."

The colonel grunted.

"We know from our Intelligence that they have enough Fokkers in reserve to equip every squadron on the Front, if they wanted. Why do they drag out those old crates at all?"

The major had no answer for this. Colonel Cross reached for the papers which Sandy had taken from the German captive, to study them.

"Hm-m, Otto Kleifaust—*Unter-Leutnant*, Staffel 909. Seems to be all in order. Let me see, Staffel 909—never heard of that outfit before, I'm sure." He glanced up quickly at Sandy. "Look here, McKnight. Either this business means nothing at all, or else it's the deepest kind of mystery. It's up to us to find out, and you can help. The major here will relieve you from regular duty for a while. Make every effort to find out what field this Staffel 909 is flying their Albatrosses from, and discover all you can about that field from the air. Anything out of the ordinary report to me at once. Maybe we

can uncover some clue to what these bloodless victories mean."

"Yes, sir. I'll start at once, this afternoon."

AT a nod from the colonel Sandy saluted and left the room. Two minutes later he was taking off, to fly first to his home field, where he spent a quarter of an hour on the ground filling tanks and replenishing cartridge belts. Then, although it was already late afternoon, he again spiralled upward, and climbed straight for the lines.

His altimeter said ten thousand before he leveled off at a point two miles inside the German Front. Here he throttled to cruising speed, and while seeming to drift aimlessly back and forth began to use his eyes.

For two purposes; first, to protect himself from surprise attack, and second, to catch sight of any and all Albatrosses which might appear. At this hour patrols would be returning to their nests. It seemed a simple matter to spy one and follow it home. But as the sun sank behind the western horizon he muttered in disappointment. Not a single Albatros had he seen.

Soon after dawn on the following morning he was back again in the same neighborhood. But it was an hour before he sighted an Albatros, and then it was headed toward the lines. He watched it cross, far to the east, and then lost it in the ground haze. Before it returned his tanks were running dry, forcing him to abandon his post.

He had been out scarcely ten minutes on his second patrol when he again spied a lone Albatros. This one was nearing the Front from the north. He swung in the direction from which it had come, and tried to spot the drome it must have risen from. But there were three within a few miles of each other. He could not be certain.

Without dropping low he wheeled, deciding to trail the plane itself. But this proved a fruitless chase. Mile after mile he followed, watching from a distance. The lone German flew northwest, neither crossing the lines nor leaving them, until Sandy had to turn back with a curse, lest he run entirely out of gas beyond reach of a friendly drome.

On his third attempt, close to noon, he definitely located the field. An Albatros rose under his very eyes. Even from twelve thousand feet he recognized that torpedo-shaped fuselage. He did not give pursuit, but circled up there, high against the clouds, for nearly an hour before he swung away to fly swiftly homeward.

"It's just east of Melancaux," he told Colonel Cross over the telephone. "Off in a little valley by itself, a mile or so from the village. One hangar, and only one other building. Not much going on. Three ships took off while I watched. Separately, one at a time. Flew toward the lines. No planes came in to land at all."

"You mean to tell me," exclaimed the colonel, "that they fly off one by one to get shot down deliberately, and none ever come back?"

"I couldn't swear that they were shot down, sir. I just didn't happen to see any land while I was there."

"Well, try to find out more about that drome, will you? Come down low if you have to, look in the hangar, see if you can read the numbers on the trucks, count the planes, see if they're all Albatrosses. Any bit of information may help, you know."

"Yes, sir. I'll be starting again in five minutes."

Rubbing the tired feeling from his eyes, Sandy pulled his Spad off the ground and headed back over the familiar trail. Personally, he wasn't quite sure whether he was wasting time, or was on the heels of a baffling mystery. He couldn't see much to get excited about in a few obsolete crates being brought down intact. On the

other hand it was certainly strange the way those ships left that drome one at a time instead of in the usual group patrols. And never yet had he seen one return to land. Perhaps this time he would find out why.

He obeyed instructions to the letter. At three hundred feet he swooped suddenly straight across that small and isolated tarmac. In front of the lone hangar he counted four Albatrosses and one Fokker, but the drawn flaps prevented him from seeing what was inside. There was but a single truck in sight, and on it he could find neither lettering nor numbers.

A score or more of tiny figures ran helter-skelter at his approach, but all he could be sure of was that they wore German uniforms. He zoomed away, banked around, and crossed from the other side. Nothing else to be seen.

Winging his way leisurely to the east, he wondered if he had better cross the lines and report. No, he decided. He hadn't enough dope yet to be of any help. Better wait a few minutes, and make another inspection.

He circled a bleak hill three times, then turned once more back toward the German drome, flying just under a thousand feet.

As soon as it came in sight he started. There were but two Albatrosses on the tarmac now, where there had been four. Had the Boches jerked the other two inside as quick as that? Hardly, for the hangar flaps were still closed. Now he saw that one of the remaining pair was just beginning to move, rolling forward to take off. The meaning hit him, and he lifted his eyes to peer upward just as the first Spandaus coughed from behind his flank.

AT FIRST he snorted derisively. An Albatros—why, his Spad could fly rings around an Albatros at half throttle. But there were two of them on him at

once; they were shortly joined by a third, and they attacked with savage recklessness. Tracers seemed to be pouring at him from all sides at once; the hammer of guns was loud and continuous.

He wheeled, zoomed, and plunged, as fast as his hand could move the stick. But he could not get the upper hand. He dared not follow one foe into a dive, lest the others claw him from behind. There was always at least one above him, caging him in relentlessly.

He wisely began to make a defensive battle of it, running a short distance toward the lines, turning to slash out a burst or two, then running again. He drove one Albatros into a spin with a blast which crumpled its rudder. But the other two hounded him more viciously than before. Their bullets splattered about his ears whenever he held a straight course.

Only two, he thought. "I'll get both of them!" Holding his nose down for a long moment to gain speed, he suddenly pulled around in a wing-over. The two Albatrosses swerved apart before his belching guns, but in the next instant he saw something that chilled the blood in his veins with dismay. A Fokker!

Before he could catch his breath the tracers were stabbing his wings. A frantic twist saved him, but only for a moment. The jaws of the trap were closing. From above the Fokker showered him with steel. From either side the Albatrosses hemmed him in. Instead of an exciting combat, he was suddenly engaged in a mad struggle for his life.

Alone, he might have had an equal chance against that Fokker. But the two others loaded the scales against him. Their presence was just enough to handicap his efforts, to prevent him from maneuvering freely.

In desperation he took the only possible course. If he could shoot those Alba-

trosses from the sky, one at a time, the single Fokker he would not fear. With a lightning turn he plunged for the tail of the nearest. It dove. Sandy followed, guns blazing. Two seconds—three—

His tracers found the gas tank. *Pouf!* In one gigantic flash of flame and smoke that Albatros disappeared. His hand yanked the stick. But a fraction of a second too late. The pilot of that Fokker was as lightning fast as he.

A blast of steel ripped the Spad from behind. A vicious jerk tore the stick from his fingers. His nose went down instead of up. He got hold of the stick again, to find to his horror that it was well-nigh useless. Elevators shot away. At terrific speed he careened downward, with bullets still pursuing him.

His left hand slammed the throttle shut. His dive changed slowly into an upward swoop. But the ground, a rough and rocky hillside, loomed up before him. Another burst from the rear. His left wing quivered. An attempt to turn meant a spin, from which he would never come out. With cold hands he held the battered ship steady.

Down he rocked, slipping and sliding. A ravine, a rocky crag, a wooded slope confronted him. The devil's choice. He ruddered right. German steel hummed about his ears. Another moment now, and it would all be over. *Crash!*

The universe exploded in his face, then spun about him. He could feel, but could not see. A blank curtain hung before his eyes. He thrust at it frantically with his hands. Panic seized him; the panic of suddenly going blind.

He screamed. Then suddenly remembered his goggles. Tore them from his head—and could see once more. The unbreakable glass, shattered into a thousand cracks, made the curtain.

Abruptly his struggles ceased. Half buried in a tangle of wreckage, he was

peering upward. There, a hundred feet above his head, circled a Fokker—the one which had brought him down.

Instinct held him motionless. That Boche was watching. If he saw no movement, he would believe his enemy dead. Sandy ground his teeth.

"I'll live to get you yet, you devil!" he swore.

The Fokker banked, toward the north. As it tipped up, Sandy got one good look at its side. A number, or possibly an insignia, had been painted over thinly, so that a trace of it still showed through. That much Sandy saw, and then the Fokker vanished beyond the hill.

Cursing feebly, he crawled stiffly from his shattered cockpit, to find his limbs intact. He was on an isolated, deserted slope, among the half-grown trees which had broken his fall. Probably the complete absence of an open landing space was all that had kept that Fokker pilot from coming down to make sure of his fate. But there might soon be searchers on foot, and Sandy's first thought was to avoid capture.

He struck off through the forest, and covered nearly a mile before he found a grove of tall pines. High up in the branches of one of these he hid, to remain safe but uncomfortable until darkness fell.

THESE hours gave him plenty of chance to think. What had he discovered? Mighty little. There were Albattrosses on that field, and at least one Fokker. That was the extent of his knowledge. Its very scantiness made him dissatisfied, suspicious, and anxious to learn more.

His natural desire was to get back across the lines where he belonged. But he had been sent out to do something, and his stubborn nature revolted at the thought of returning without doing it. To

investigate the activities of that strange drome from the ground ought to be more productive of results than merely gazing at it from the air.

How, later, to communicate what he learned to the other side of the lines; that problem would have to be solved when he came to it. At least, in his present situation, he had everything to gain and nothing to lose. As the sun set he clambered to the ground.

The distance was hardly more than three or four miles, but he was in strange country with no compass, and clouds hid the stars. He walked fully twenty miles that night, without reaching what he sought. Three times he came within a foot of capture, by blundering into bivouacs in the dark. Each time he crawled backward, silent as a cat, and circled the danger spot.

Dawn found him still wandering, but with the first streak of light he climbed the tallest tree he could find. A moment later he uttered a whoop of joy. He was on the ridge between Melancaux and the field, a half mile from his objective.

At top speed he pressed on to the edge of the woods. But there he halted. Figures were moving among the buildings. To show himself in daylight would be unsafe. The most he could do would be to watch. When night came again he might know more.

Crouched behind a bush, the day seemed endless. What he saw only confirmed what he already knew, and deepened his sense of puzzled suspicion. One Fokker, with half-obliterated insignia, was kept standing on the tarmac but never flew. The rest of the ships were Albattrosses. These took off, always one at a time, an hour or more apart. And though no less than eight departed, not one ever returned!

That they were crossing the lines to allow themselves to be driven down in

Allied territory he was now firmly convinced. And that behind this strategem there was some sinister object he felt equally sure. But what? It was impossible to guess.

The external features of the drome were odd, but told him nothing. Only one hangar, hardly more than a score of mechanics. One long, low building which housed men and officers alike. One tall, impressive *Kapitan*, plainly the commandant. Pilots who arrived in groups of two or three, by automobile, with no baggage, and flew away never to come back. A mystery!

Darkness fell at last. He crept from his hiding place. On hands and knees he neared the low barracks, from whose windows shone a feeble light. Under the first he halted. It was open. The murmur of voices reached him. Slowly he drew himself up, until he could peep inside.

This was apparently the enlisted men's quarters. They sat or reclined around on crude bunks, reading, writing letters, talking. Sandy cursed his meager knowledge of German. He understood a few words, but not enough to catch the drift of a whole sentence.

For half an hour he watched and listened. Seeing nothing which carried any meaning, and hearing but one phrase repeated more than once in the talk.

Cautiously he drew away, and moved toward another open window near the other end. Here, too, were men lolling on bunks, and talking. But these were officers, and among them the lean, iron-faced *Kapitan*.

This last spoke at length, very seriously, and Sandy strained his ears to follow the meaning. But still the only words he could recognize were the same he had heard repeated in the other end of the building. A simple phrase, over and over.

"The ninth midnight—the ninth, midnight."

It was not until the fourth or fifth time that its meaning carried home to him. "The ninth, midnight." Why, that must mean midnight of the ninth of the month. For that date and hour the climax of this strategy was set, whatever that climax was. At least that was something.

Let's see. It had been the fourth when he brought down that Albatros and first talked to the colonel. Yesterday, the fifth, he was shot down himself. Today was the sixth. Only three days left; if the Allies were to be warned, they must be warned soon. But of what?

Dropping from the window, he crept toward the hangar. There were no sentries about. In a few minutes he was inside. An hour's hunting about in the dark gave him no information except that he was in a hangar containing a dozen Albatrosses and one Fokker. To drag one outside, start it, and escape might be possible, though difficult. But only by remaining could he hope to discover the core of the mystery.

Hesitating it suddenly struck him that these Albatrosses were slated to come down on Allied soil, whether he flew one of them or not. Might not one of them serve as carrier of his information, such as it was so far?

In a few moments he had pulled pencil and paper from his pocket, and scrawled a note.

To Colonel Cross—urgent. These planes all landing Allied territory according some plan. Stroke of some kind set for midnight, August 9th. Don't know what yet. More when possible.

McKnight, 90th Spads.

The paper he folded, and after some thought slid it down behind the seat cushion. A pilot never lifted that cushion. But if the plane were searched, it would be found.

Then he retired to his bush, and slept. The first thing in the morning he was

rewarded by seeing Albatros No. 26, the one holding his note, rolled out and started. In a few minutes it took off, and he permitted himself a grin of triumph as it vanished toward the south.

But twenty minutes later he was cursing in dismay. The Albatros had reappeared, pursued by French Nieuports. While he watched its frantic struggles it was trapped. A mile short of the drome went down in flames, carrying his hopes with it. He groaned in despair.

After a day of unbearable suspense, he repeated the same trick the following night. Only this time he wrote two notes, placing them in two separate planes, and would have written more but for the lack of more paper.

This was the seventh. He decided that whether his attempt appeared to succeed or not, he would on the next night try to escape himself, even if he learned no more.

FROM behind his bush he saw Albatros No. 18 rolled out with the first light of dawn. That left, he remembered, only four ships inside. The motor was warmed; a pilot walked toward the cockpit, with the *Kapitan* at his side, speaking last earnest instructions. If he could only hear and understand those words!

In another moment the helmeted figure was in the cockpit, and the plane took off. Sandy watched it with a prayer on his lips. It climbed up the valley, turned toward the lines, its exhausts drumming steadily.

Then suddenly it was no longer climbing. It flattened out, and reversed its direction. The drone of its motor became a choking cough. In a long glide it reached for the field, spitting black smoke. Sandy cursed, but refused to give up hope. Motor trouble was forcing it to return, but motor trouble could be cured. The same ship would undoubtedly be making a fresh start in a short time. And

besides, there was still another Albatros in the hangar with a note in it.

The sputtering plane landed, and rolled to a stop. Mechanics ran up, followed by the commandant himself. The pilot jumped down, gesturing. But Sandy, his eyes on the tall figure of the German *Kapitan*, suddenly turned cold with horror. For some evil chance prompted that Boche to slide his hand down behind the seat cushion, and it came out holding a slip of white paper.

Cursing desperately in his hiding place, Sandy now saw an example of the swift, brutal force of German efficiency. The *Kapitan* read the note, but apparently mentioned its contents to no one else. He turned and walked quickly to his quarters. Through the open window Sandy caught a glimpse of him speaking into a telephone.

Twenty minutes passed. Then up the road rolled six trucks, five of them crowded with a company of infantry, armed to the teeth. The *Kapitan* took command at once. Every man on the field, mechanics and officers alike, were herded into a group under guard.

The three soldiers who had happened to handle that particular plane, together with the unfortunate pilot who had flown it for a brief two minutes, were marched off separately behind the hangar.

From that direction came shortly the crash of a rifle volley, followed by a second, a third, and a fourth. The four suspected traitors were dead, executed without a trial.

In the meantime the newcomers were busy loading the trucks. Tools, provisions, equipment, kit-bags. Everything movable was being carried out and thrown on. Plainly this drome was being abandoned, once and for all, its purpose having been accomplished.

The last three Albatrosses were rolled out, together with the Fokker. Two of the old ships the *Kapitan* deliberately

crippled, by firing his Luger into the magneto. The other one, and the Fokker, were prepared for flight.

Sandy bestirred himself. The Boches were moving out, bag and baggage. In a short time there would be nothing here but an empty field. Which meant that his chances of getting to the bottom of this enigma, as well as his hope of escape, were going glimmering. If he was going to do anything about it, now was the time.

He rose, and keeping just out of sight under the trees, trotted along the edge of the field. He neared the barracks, which by now had been completely emptied of its contents.

Keeping the building itself between him and observation, he crossed the open and peered in a window. Deserted, empty. With a tug he drew himself up, and dropped inside.

The floor was littered with odds and ends. Alertly he searched for papers, anything which might give him a clue. Nothing but rubbish. But what was that in the corner? Turning quickly, he reeled and almost fell. A terrible weakness assailed him; he remembered that he had eaten nothing for almost three days.

He advanced a few steps, and uttered an exclamation. Food! A little pile of packets, such as his captured pilot had carried. Concentrated emergency rations.

With hunger uppermost in his mind, he kicked aside a rat which was gnawing at the pile, and seized one of the packages. It was wrapped in oiled paper, unmarked, and tied with stout cord. His fingers tore at the coverings, hurled them aside. In his hand lay an oblong loaf, pressed hard and shiny, yellow in color, and having a faintly sweet odor. Halfway to his mouth, his hand halted, and began to shake.

The rat! Instead of running, it had moved only a few feet away at his kick. There it had crouched, staring up at him

beadily. Now, as he watched, it rolled on its back, gave a convulsive wretch, and died!

Horror gripped him. He stared with distended eyes at the cake in his hand, then hurled it from him. Poison! And he had nearly eaten it! Poison, under the guise of concentrated food—what did that mean? Did each and every Albatros pilot carry one of these packets across the lines? And for whom were they intended? A vision of terrible possibilities rose before him. He leaped for the door. But then paused.

He was determined now to risk the utmost to get across the lines with a warning. But to rush out in the face of all those rifles would be worse than foolhardy. He must use strategy. He was in American uniform, which gave him away at first glance. If only he could find a cloak, a German slicker. An idea came to him. The dead men!

He left by the window, as he had come. By peering around the rear corner, he could see four sprawled figures by the near end of the hangar. At that moment two loaded trucks, with soldiers clinging to their sides, moved off down the road. The others were all in front of the hangar, finishing loading. On his belly like a snake he crossed the fifty feet of open.

The first body was that of an officer, the pilot. He lay on his back, in a bloody puddle. Sandy with an effort overcame his revulsion, and ripped open the buttons of the tunic. The man sighed.

FROZEN with horror, Sandy saw those dead eyes open, to stare at him glassily. Before he could move, or utter a sound, a look of life came into that face; the lips moved. Was he dreaming, or had that corpse spoken in English? He leaned close, holding his breath.

"B—seventeen," whispered the prostrate figure. "American?"

"Yes, yes," hissed Sandy, conquering his amazement. "I'm an American. A pilot. What is it? Who are you?"

"Intelligence," murmured the man on the ground. He paused. Three bullets had pierced his chest; he was on the brink of death. He gathered his last shred of strength. "Go back—warn them. Ninth midnight—prison camps—France—break—attack rear—hurry."

His words died in a hiss, as a bloody froth choked his lips. His eyes glazed, his skin went the color of ashes. He was dead.

Sandy crouched, his brain in a whirl. Now, at last, he understood. A simultaneous break for freedom in all the prison camps in France. A half million or more Boche captives, scantily guarded, rising together at the stroke of midnight to take their captors by surprise—captors already decimated by poison in their food.

The seizure of arms, the march of a desperate army toward the Front, cutting their path through a helpless civilian population. Horrible!

With trembling fingers he tore the German tunic from the stiffening figure of the dead spy. That and the field-gray breeches he pulled on hastily over his own. He still wore his helmet, luckily very similar in looks to one of German manufacture. With a last gesture of respect, he moved away from the grave of a hero.

At the front corner of the hangar he paused to reconnoiter. On the tarmac stood two planes, the Fokker and the Albatross, with motors running. Between them waited a short, stocky figure—no doubt the adjutant, who was to fly the older ship away, while his *Kapitan* used the Fokker. This last was standing just before the hangar door, where men were climbing aboard the last truck.

With tense muscles Sandy stepped out onto the open field. If he ran he would

attract immediate notice. If he walked the time of exposure would be longer. He chose to walk. Without turning his head he made straight for the nearest plane. The pilot, standing there, was looking down, grinding a cigarette under his heel. Half the distance was covered, when a cry rang out from behind him.

Instantly Sandy sprang into a run. Once seen, there was no point in trickery. The man ahead looked up, and saw him coming. His face turned white as a sheet. Sandy remembered that he wore the bloody clothes of a man who had just been executed. That German probably thought that he was seeing a ghost. With a strangled shriek he turned and fled.

With one leap Sandy made the cockpit, just as a rattle of rifle-fire broke out behind him. It was the Albatros he was in, but it was too late to think of changing now.

Bullets were pecking at the center section before his eyes. Over his shoulder he saw men running closer. He found the throttle and jerked it open. The plane began to move. In another moment the well-warmed Mercedes was lifting him into the air.

He was considering which would be the best point to cross the lines in an enemy plane, when his head turned to look back. He saw that the commandant, being one of the first to run forward, had jumped into his Fokker, and was already taking off in pursuit.

Sandy's hand tightened on the stick, and his jaw clenched grimly. A Fokker could catch an Albatros with ease; there was at least twenty miles difference in their speeds. The *Kapitan* must have guessed, from what had already occurred, that whoever sat in that Albatros knew the secret of the *coup* slated for the ninth, midnight, and that it must not escape. Sandy saw that the most desperate struggle of his career was ahead of him.

He had less than a minute to lay his plans. To even approach the lines was impossible. He made no attempt to fly south, but spent that minute getting every inch of altitude possible. Strangely, he felt no fear, though knowing that he faced a battle to the death.

He told himself that his advantage lay in knowing what the other plane could do. He had fought against Fokkers many times. Whereas that Boche, he was quite sure, had never fought against an Albatros. On that slight detail might hang victory—or death.

COOPLY he waited until the German sent the first burst up to brush his wing-tip. Then he leveled out for a moment, but before the next burst smoked across the sky, he zoomed. A maneuver hopeless before it started, any novice could have told him. For a Fokker could outzoom any ship on the front.

But Sandy had his plan, and part of that plan was to let the Fokker get above him. Sure enough, in one gigantic upward leap the Fokker reached his level.

Sandy pulled easily around, and as the *Kapitan* charged for his tail, zoomed again. The German must have chuckled in triumph. For now the Fokker rose like a bird, and before its zoom was finished had easily a hundred feet the better of it. The Albatros seemed doomed to go down without firing a shot. But Sandy grew cooler by the second.

He started a spiral, completed one swift turn. Then, with the Fokker lunging near, he slipped into a dive. Down he went, with the other in hot pursuit. But now the Albatros could hold its own. Its diving speed was the equal of any. When his wires were shrieking an eerie song, Sandy eased up, began a turn, and tightened it into a spiral.

The Fokker followed like his shadow, and its guns spat viciously. Round and round they wheeled, the Fokker gaining

with every turn. Its bullets starting flicking rents in his upper wing-tip before he dove again.

Twice more he repeated the same maneuvers. In every spiral the Fokker nearly caught him with its superior turning ability. Only by resorting to the dive did he save himself. And he could not keep this up much longer, for his altitude was vanishing into thin air.

Down went his nose, until he was looking straight into the forbidding ground. It loomed dangerously close, and rushed closer with every turn of his prop. Down came the Fokker after him, its guns bayoning on his heels. Two hundred, four hundred, six hundred feet evaporated under that headlong plunge. Another moment he waited, then back came his stick. Groaning in every strut, the Albatros answered. Careening drunkenly, he was whirling into a spiral.

Like an avenging fury the Fokker dogged his fleeing tail. Nearer and nearer leered those hungry muzzles. Sandy knew that this was his last spiral. The German knew it, too. There was not room above the trees for another dive.

Until the last possible moment he clung to his bank; until the guns of the Fokker were singeing his very rudder with their hot breath. Then, with tight lips but steady hand, he yanked out straight.

For a moment the universe seemed to stop. The sun froze, and time ceased to exist. For perhaps two seconds, which to Sandy seemed an eternity, he was cold meat, a perfect target, in slow and straight-line flight.

But the German in the Fokker, taken by surprise, missed his opportunity, just as Sandy himself had missed the same, once before. Before he could aim and fire, the greater speed of the Fokker had carried it up to and beyond the stalling Albatros.

Sandy glanced up. The Fokker was

ahead and just above him. This was his opportunity.

Up came his nose, and for the first time the guns of the Albatros spoke. *Rack-a-rack-a-rack-a-rack*. The greenish tracers spewed forth in a steady stream. The solid bullets tore ugly gaps in the black fabric of the Fokker. It leaped aside, as its pilot jerked desperately at the stick. But too late. Sandy's first and only burst reached its mark.

Where had been a half-painted-out insignia was suddenly a great gash in the canvas. This widened, to vomit a tongue of living flame. And then a blazing pyre crashed into the tree-tops below.

"I lived to get you—as I said I would," muttered Sandy.

The way to the lines was clear as he banked around.

The machine guns encircling Souilly field began to bark when the Albatros appeared overhead. But a quick sideslip put him on the ground and rolling. Sandy vaulted over the side before the plane came to a halt.

He found himself facing a ring of rifle muzzles; behind them astonished but hos-

tile faces. He ripped open his outer tunic, to expose the khaki, and hoarsely demanded Colonel Cross. But a threatening muzzle remained against the small of his back all the way into the colonel's office. The colonel almost fell over backward.

Sandy gasped out his amazing story. At the mention of B-17, all of the colonel's doubt vanished. He began to issue orders, crisp and concise. Three aides sat down at three different telephones, and the wires started to hum.

To every prison camp in France the news went forth. Eat no food prepared by the prisoners. Double guards immediately. All troops within ten miles on alert tomorrow night.

The colonel turned to Sandy.

"You have saved us from a terrible disaster," he said, wiping his brow. "Any reward you wish is yours for the asking. Simply name it."

Sandy stared out of eyes that did not seem to see.

"I'd like—" he began. He cleared his throat with a dry cough, and with an effort produced the words. "I'd like—something to eat—"

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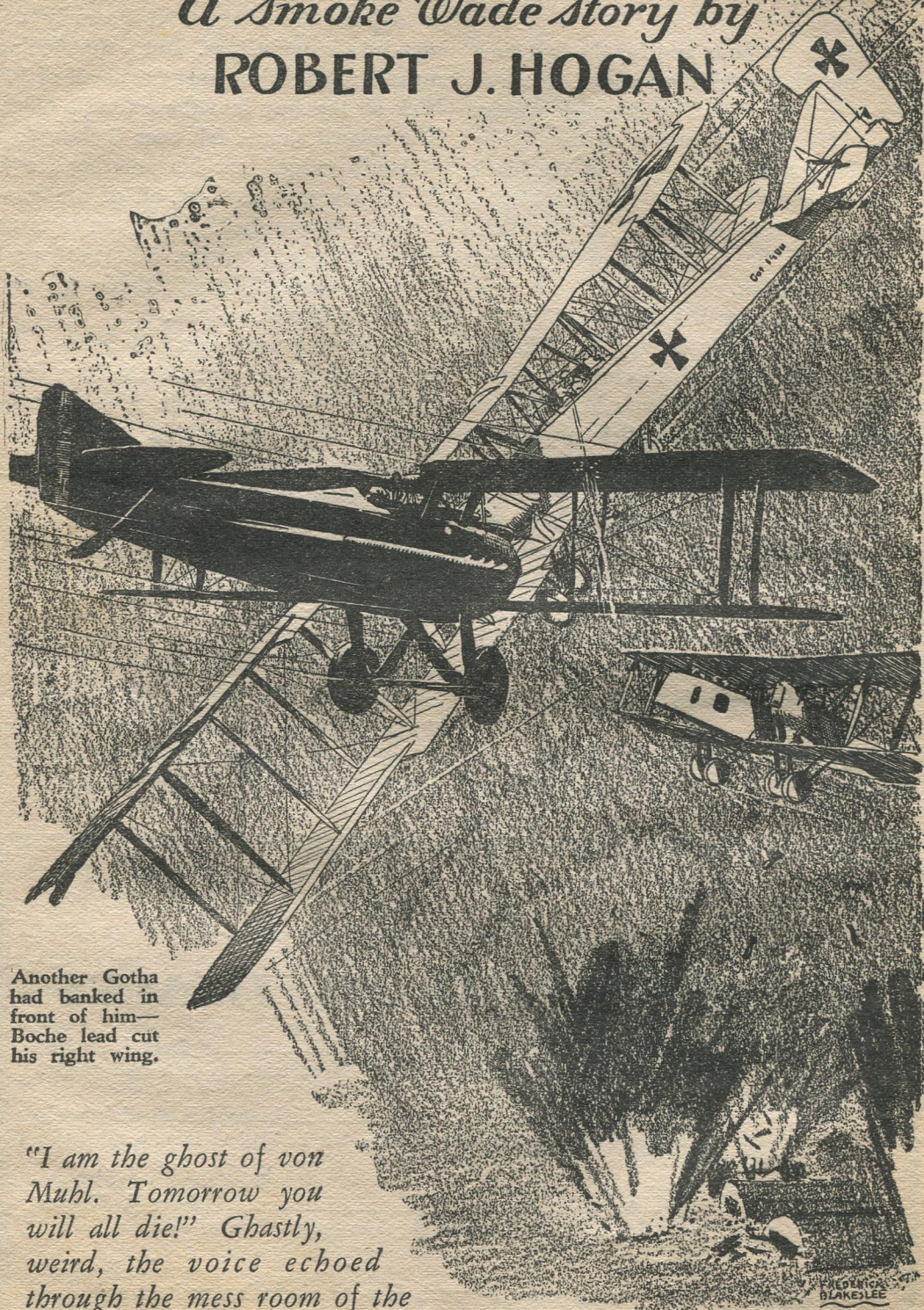
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The GOTH A GHOST

A Smoke Wade Story by

ROBERT J. HOGAN



Another Gotha
had banked in
front of him—
Boche lead cut
his right wing.

"I am the ghost of von Muhl. Tomorrow you will all die!" Ghastly, weird, the voice echoed through the mess room of the 66th. But there are more ways than one of laying a specter—and Smoke Wade and his new buddy knew 'em all!

WHEN Smoke Wade caught sight for the first time of that intermittent white flash far below, he was squinting through his powerful glasses from an altitude of ten thousand feet above Germany.

His lanky form straightened in the seat abruptly with interest. The leather of his face wrinkled in a puzzled expression.

"What the hell, Jake?" he asked his pinto Spad. "Sure looks like some poor hombre is tryin' to send us a signal from Heinie land. Yep, sure does."

Instantly he lowered his glasses from his eyes and stared about the blue of the sky for other ships.

"Nope," he concluded. "Thought maybe somebody was signalin' to somebody else up here, but there ain't a soul in the sky but me. Wonder where von Stolz and his brood is this evenin'. Don't reckon they'd be turnin' in fer the night this early. Why, the sun ain't hardly down far enough to call it evenin', hardly."

While he talked to himself, he moved the controls. The pinto Spad moved instantly. Dove with power full on for an open field two miles down, well back of the lines.

As he came nearer he saw the flashes of white more clearly. They had only been tiny white specks when they had first attracted his attention. Now the lanky Arizona cowboy skipper of the 66th saw that they were signals in code.

S.O.S. S.O.S. NEWS! NEWS!

"Holy tail-waggin' rattle snakes," Smoke said. "Reckon that's some spy of ourn—or else I'm a ring-horned toad."

The pinto Spad screamed. The Hisso was going crazy in the dive. Down, down. Down to five thousand, four thousand. The dots and dashes continued to come. Smoke could see now that a man dressed in a German uniform was flattening and placing on edge again, intermittently, a

square panel of white. Perhaps a frame with cloth over. Perhaps a white piece of card-board.

The man was staring up, waving frantically. Pointing to the south. Smoke turned. Gaspd. Swore. A cloud of dust marked the flight of a racing car, headed for the field where the lone man stood.

Smoke jerked the controls. He sent the pinto Spad thundering toward the car just as it lurched to a stop near the field. Two men leaped from the car. Then Vickers guns chanted death. Smoke was staring across his sights, holding down the trigger. Three men about to leap from the auto sprawled over the side and lay still.

Smoke banked, sighted and pressed again. One of the two Boches who had jumped was still in the open. He crumpled in a strange, limp somersault. The other had gained the shelter of a hedge alongside the road.

Smoke sent a hail of steel into that hedge from above. He saw the man leap out, clutch his throat and fall. But when he shifted his eyes to the man who had been signaling with the panels, he knew he had gotten that last German a spit second too late.

The signaler was down on his knees. He was holding one hand toward Smoke. Struggling to get up. He staggered there, slumped again.

Smoke kicked over, stuck the pinto Spad into a wild slip and romped down. Wheels touched. The ship rolled. Smoke was out instantly. He raced headlong to the still figure. Knelt down.

Blood oozed from a wound in the chest. The man was gasping for breath. Smoke lifted his head a little.

"Good Lord," he said. "You—you ain't F-17?"

A light of recognition came into the dulling eyes of the spy. The head nodded slightly.

"Yes—Smoke. Listen. Saw your pinto Spad."

Smoke half lifted F-17 from the ground. The man shook his head.

"It's—all over. Let me talk. Listen."

Smoke relaxed. Bent down closer.

"They're — bombing — your field—to-night. Von Muhl and—bombers. Von Stolz's cousin."

A convulsion shook F-17 as he lay there in Smoke's arms. Blood gushed from his chest, from his lips now. The eyes glazed, cleared again. The lips moved.

"A—trick. Watch—for—"

F-17 made a valiant effort to continue at the last. To finish his word of warning. But death marked him with its black, bony finger before he was through.

SMOKE seized F-17 in his arms and ran to the pinto Spad. Once this famous spy and Smoke had turned a trick against the Germans together. F-17 was dead. He'd be returned to his own side of the lines.

While Smoke ran he pleaded with the dead man. Perhaps he wasn't dead. Half crazily Smoke tried to make himself realize it wasn't true. F-17 had been such a swell guy. What was it he was going to say and couldn't finish?

Another car was racing toward the field as Smoke crammed into the cockpit with the body of F-17 on his lap. The Hisso barked. Guns cracked along the edge of the road. Smoke ducked, yanked the pinto Spad into the air and turned south.

The body of F-17 was growing cold when the pinto Spad settled to a gentle landing at the field of the 66th near Ramou.

Tenderly, as a father would carry a child, Smoke bore the limp form to the hospital. It took a medical officer but

a few minutes to pronounce the final verdict.

"Dead!" he said.

Smoke nodded solemnly.

"Reckoned so," he said. "Wanted to be sure."

He turned and walked toward Colonel McGill's office as one in a daze. The grayed old war dog looked up—frowned as Smoke appeared before him.

"Good Lord, Smoke, you look as if you'd seen a ghost."

"Reckon I do," he said. "Remember that spy they called F-17? I worked with him on a little deal across the lines. We worked together. Swell fella, he was. Just picked him up over in Heinie land—dead. Said von Muhl, von Stolz's cousin, is comin' over with his bombers tonight to blow hell out of us here at the field. He said somethin' else I couldn't get rightly clear and he died before he could finish tellin' me. Somethin' about a trick to watch out fer. Reckon he knowed what it was—if he only could a lived a half minute longer."

Colonel McGill's face whitened slightly.

"Good Lord, Smoke. Bombing this field tonight! You're sure he said it was von Muhl's bombers? He's the cleverest bomb *Jadgstaffel* commander on the German side of the lines."

"Certain of it, I reckon," Smoke nodded. "What you propose to do about it, colonel?"

McGill tapped his desk for a moment.

"To tell the truth, I was just about to ask you the same question. What would you do?"

Smoke shrugged.

"Ain't really only one thing to do I reckon. Order every ship into the air and every man off the field. Thet's the usual thing, I reckon, when a field knows there's bombers comin' over to give 'em hell."

McGill nodded.

"I suppose you're right." He cursed and rapped his fist hard on the table. "It galls the very devil out of me to have these Jerries come over and scare us stiff so that we have to leave our field without even a guard."

"Reckon it does me too," Smoke admitted. "But with bombers comin' over to blow us off the face of the map, it don't matter much whether there's anything to guard or not. Not after they get through, if they do any kind of a job." Smoke grinned for the first time.

"Course maybe they won't, but yuh never can tell. It won't be like every pilot on the field was goin' to crawl off in a corner and die. Reckon when we get the word from the listenin' post at the Front that the bombers is comin', we'll be takin' the air. I'll lay anybody a hundred franc note against a plug nickel thet although this von Muhl and his egg layers place some of their nest decorators, they won't all go home and tell the folks it was a swell picnic. Me and the boys'll be up there when they come, and there'll be plenty of hell poppin'."

McGill looked relieved.

"That's the way I like to hear you talk, Smoke," he said. "You looked pretty well licked when you came in here a few minutes ago. I'll issue the order at once. Every enlisted man will leave the field an hour after dark. Only a few mechanics will remain, as many as necessary. They will leave as soon as you and your ships take off. Is every man in condition to fly, Smoke?"

"Reckon so," came the answer. "Heard Brant say he had a toothache this noon, but I don't guess thet'll keep him from doin' his stuff as usual. Likely he's either got it pulled or plugged by this time."

A HUSH fell over the evening mess as Smoke entered. Already the news had spread. McGill had ordered everyone

to leave the field one hour after dark, with the exception of a few mechanics. Rumor had it that all ships would be ready to take off at a moment's notice. What did it mean?

Smoke told them.

"And remember this," he advised. "F-17 said there was a trick of some kind comin'. But he didn't say what it was. Every one of you hombres be ready to take off. Ships'll be kept warm until we get word from the listenin' post at the Front that the bombers are comin' over. Then we go up and do our stuff, *sabbe?*"

Heads nodded. Pilots shifted uneasily. Smoke swept them with his keen eyes. He sensed the atmosphere of tenseness about the place. Men didn't eat as well as they had before he had spoken. When he had entered there had been mystery in the air; now, at mention of a Boche trick, there was something akin to fear.

Smoke's brain throbbed for sudden inspiration. He caught Brant's eye, made a sign for him to come over.

"How's the toothache?" he asked.

Brant grinned for answer. Showed a hole in the lower jaw at the right with a mass of clotted blood.

"O. K., Smoke," he said.

"The boys look kind of jittery," Smoke went on in a lowered voice. "You and Quinn and Snell are O. K. and the older men; but what's struck the replacements? They've been up here long enough to keep their feelings to themselves, it seems."

Brant nodded.

"Sure," he agreed. "I guess Carter has got them steamed up again. He's a strange sort of a bird. Good enough guy and all that. Older than most of the rest."

Smoke's eyes narrowed. He jerked his head to Brant and moved toward a table at the end of the room.

"Come on over and eat with me," he said.

Brant followed. When they were out of hearing of the others Smoke spoke again.

"What do you know about this hombre, Carter? Used to be on the vaudeville stage or something, didn't he?"

Brant nodded.

"Sleight of hand artist. Magician. Damn clever, too. He's got a lot of stories about black magic and spirits and that stuff. I don't think he means any harm. Sort of heavy on the practical joking side."

"Sure," said Smoke. He rose half out of his seat and stared about the mess. He sat down again and turned to Brant.

"Carter's over in the other end of the room next to Quinn," he said. "Go over and tell him I want to see him, will yuh?"

Brant left. A moment later he came back with Carter.

Carter was perhaps twenty-five or thirty; older than the usual run of replacements that came up from Issoudon. He had dark, penetrating eyes, a mouth that curled up slightly at the corners as though he were about to smile any moment, and quick, alert hands with long, tapering fingers.

"Hello, Carter," Smoke nodded. "Sit down."

Carter sat down. He looked puzzled.

"Hear you're a magician," Smoke ventured. "What's this practical joking I hear you been playin' on the boys, gettin' 'em all worked up sort of about black magic and this and that?"

Carter's upturned lips broke into a smile.

"Oh, that," he said. "I've just been kidding. Truthfully, I don't know any more about this black magic stuff than you do. But some of these kids seem so damned innocent I couldn't resist the temptation of giving them a thrill. I didn't mean to do any harm."

"No, but yuh are, Carter," Smoke ventured. "Some of these boys are only kids,

as you say. That's all the more reason why they shouldn't be kidded. Their imaginations are too alive, I reckon. They can't control their feelin' like you and me. I noticed things tightened up tonight when I mentioned a trick that probably was coming.

"Here's what I want you to do right now, Carter. The boys are close to the jitters. You're goin' to put on a show. Make it funny. Forget the mysterious and weird stuff. Make them forget it. Put on a magic act that'll make 'em laugh. Make me the goat if you want to. Reckon that'll be funnier yet."

Carter eyed Smoke suspiciously for an instant.

"Sure you wouldn't get sore, captain?" he asked.

Smoke laughed.

"Reckon you don't know me very well yet, Carter. Try it and see."

"O. K." Carter hissed. "Here goes."

AS Carter spoke, he burst into a roar of rippling laughter.

Pilots, old and new, jerked their heads around. Carter was getting to his feet. He stepped to the seat of his chair, grasped Smoke by the shoulder and helped him stand up.

"Listen, you birds," Carter sang out with another ripple of laughter, "I just found out something about our commanding officer while I was sitting here talking to him. Boy, has he had you guys fooled plenty!"

A hush came over the mess. Every eye was on Smoke and Carter. Smoke's face had a puzzled expression—part of it was genuine.

"I just found out some things about Smoke Wade, gang, that you never dreamed of," Carter laughed on. "Listen. *Shhhh*. Any of you birds ever think Smoke was a lady's man? No, neither did I. And from what he says, the only

time he leaves the field is to go hunting Heinies. Right?"

Here and there a grin spread over a still white face.

"Then watch closely," said Carter. "Because I'm going to show you how I know that Smoke Wade doesn't go hunting Heinies—not the male kind anyway—when he leaves here."

He turned to blank-faced Smoke.

"Hate to show you up like this, captain," he chuckled, "but this is too good to keep. That bulge in your right coat pocket. Look, everybody."

Carter's hand moved toward it. Smoke made a motion as if to stop him, but purposely too slow. Carter's hand beat his. And before the staring eyes of the pilots of the 66th pursuit squadron, Carter drew out something long and thin and black.

A pair of small, black silk stockings.

Smoke pretended to snatch them away, but Carter succeeded in holding them up triumphantly for everyone to see.

Quinn threw back his head and laughed. Snell chuckled. Laughter went the rounds. The spell of tension was broken.

"Listen," pleaded Carter, "I'm not half through. Wait. Hold everything. Don't laugh. This is serious. Look. Smoke's got something in his inside pocket. Boy, does he think a lot of this dame of his? And she must think a lot of him because she's given him a swell muffler to keep his neck warm. Look."

Like lightning Carter's deft fingers darted into the inside pocket. Flashed out again. He held up something pink and made of silk. Smoke ducked but not in time. Carter managed to hold up a pair of tiny silk panties for a glimpse to every eye. Then quickly he slipped them around Smoke's long, leathery neck. He jerked them away again. The pilots roared.

"Wait a minute," he shouted, "I made a grave mistake. This isn't a muffler, not for the neck anyway." He turned on Smoke in well-affected disgust. "Captain," he said, "I'm surprised. Astonished, in fact."

He had to shout to make himself heard. A replacement laughed so hard he fell out of his chair. Smoke's face was beginning to turn a color that more nearly matched the pink panties.

"Look at these silk pants," he yelled. "Not big enough to cover the tail end of a jack rabbit. Why, Captain. Wait, let me look again. I'm liable to find some hair ribbons before I get through. A big he-guy like you robbing the cradle. What's her name, Smoke?"

Carter's voice stopped. Every eye was on Smoke Wade. The color was rising higher in his thin cheeks. Then from the direction of the front door of the mess came a female voice, high, shrill.

"Oh, there you are, Smoke, you great big gorgeous man, you!"

Eyes turned swiftly toward the door. It was closed. No one was there. Carter was shaking with laughter he could hardly speak as he turned to Smoke.

"Let's see if we can find some hair ribbons," he yelled.

This time Smoke beat him to it. His face was crimson. He ducked under the extended arms and dove through the back door of the mess. He could still hear the pilots' laughter coming through the open doorway.

He stopped and wiped his forehead.

"Phew!" he whistled. "I told that guy Carter he could make me the goat. Reckon he made me a whole herd of goats in a swell razzberry patch." He broke off in a chuckle as he heard the roars still coming from the mess. "Reckon, too, that turned the trick. Bet there ain't a single replacement in there that ain't forgot about any trick bein' played tonight."

Later Carter came to him with a worried expression.

"I hope, captain," he said, "you aren't sore about tonight."

Smoke chuckled.

"Sore?" he said. "What do yuh take me fer? I told yuh to do it, didn't I? But I don't mind tellin' yuh I never got so fussed in my life. If there'd been a knot hole an inch bigger'n the biggest one in the floor, I'd a crawled through it, and don't yuh think I wouldn't. What I want to know is where in hell you got them silk things in such a hurry? I know damn well they wasn't on me."

Carter colored slightly.

"Just luck," he smiled. "I got them for a little French girl down in Ramou. Was going to take 'em to her tonight if this bombing business hadn't come up. Just happened to have them in my pocket."

Smoke grinned.

"And I suppose that was her that yelled through the door at the right time?"

Carter shook his head.

"Don't make me blush," he said. "You've heard of ventriloquism, of course."

Smoke nodded.

"Of course. Mighty clever. Well, it done the trick. I ain't heard anybody mention this bombin' raid since."

Brant and Quinn and Snell, the three flight leaders, came into Smoke's office at that moment. Brant grinned at Carter, shot a sidelong glance at Smoke.

"Get those hair ribbons yet, Carter?" he asked.

"How would you birds all like to go to hell?" boomed Smoke. "I don't suppose I'll ever hear the last of this."

Carter left with a grin frozen on his face.

"You shouldn't," Snell laughed. "That was a damn clever trick. The gang is still laughing their heads off about it. Of

course they realize it's a put-up job, but they've forgotten any fear that they might have had. They're new men."

"I reckon," said Smoke, "thet's about the swellest thing I could hear. Now, here's the dope for tonight. Every plane loaded with flares and all the ammunition they'll hold. Have the boys ready to take off at a minute's notice. We'll take off in a wide formation so's we can see each other by exhaust stack flame. I'm waitin' now for the first call from the Front listening posts. I'll let yuh know when anything turns up. We got to be high above the field when they come over. That'll be all fer now."

They left. For a long time Smoke sat alone in his darkened office. Any minute that telephone bell might jangle.

HOURS—one, two, three—moved on. Getting toward midnight. He was tense, listening more alertly now. The bombers should be coming over. He tried to figure what trick might be working against them. What could take place in a bombing raid that would be a clever trick? Nothing! Anything!

Brrrring! Smoke leaped for the phone.

"Smoke Wade talkin' . . . Yeah . . . Comin', eh . . . Thanks."

That was all. Smoke pulled on his flying suit, ran for the door and down the tarmac. Pilots waited by their warmed ships in the darkness. Smoke bellowed ahead of him.

"Start the engines, you buzzards. Pink underwear and all."

If tension had developed since mess it broke again then.

"Contact!"

As the word left pilots' lips, barked to the waiting mechanics at the props, there was a laugh in them. Motors roared. Ships thundered down the field for a formation take-off in the dark. Danger-

ous, yet, but less dangerous than to have everyone flying about, free lance.

Smoke took his position at point. Flame spat from his exhaust stacks. The Hisso screamed. Other Hissos joined in the bedlam of sound. The whole squadron, in formation, wobbled across the field and took the air.

Higher and higher they climbed. The night was clear. At ten thousand feet altitude Smoke leveled his pinto Spad and circled in a great arc.

He checked his watch. About five more minutes and the bombers should be over. He'd wait until the first bomb was dropped. That would tell for sure they were here. The 66th must be high above them to pounce down.

Blam! The first bomb, a trial shot, split the night with tongues of flame. In the light, Smoke could make out the bombers clearly. Five great Gothas in all. Cumbersome vehicles of war. Cumbersome, but capable of carrying hundreds of pounds of compressed death beneath their wings.

Instantly, Smoke's hand dove into the cockpit and came out with a flare. It burst and drifted down. Other flares broke the darkness as pilots behind followed their leader's example. Then Smoke tipped the nose of the pinto Spad over and hurled down on full power.

Down, down. Vickers guns rattled in warming bursts. Spandau guns chattered defiantly in return from the front and back gunner's cockpits of the giant bombers. They were obviously taken by surprise, these five bombers. But they were going to fight it out.

Spads leaped and plunged and zoomed under blind spots. Smoke sent one Fokker down in a mass of flames. It was a horrible, impressive sight, the great machine turning and flopping like a mortally wounded beast out of the prehistoric age.

More flares burst above as the last flight, hanging overhead, now came snarling down to the battle.

Blam! Blam! Blam!

Bombs burst in and around the field. One hangar leaped high in the air and caved down, a heap of wreckage. The Gotha at point swerved and plunged east suddenly. Smoke banked and roared after it. But another Gotha banked in front of him; the gunner of the rear cockpit sent Spandau steel into the right wing of the pinto Spad.

Smoke changed his course. He hunched over, glared through his sights, pressed the trigger. Vickers bucked and ranted. Thin white lines of tracer smoke slashed through into the pilot's cockpit.

The Boche crumpled. The reserve pilot took control, righted the Gotha. The nose gunner was firing at him now.

Another burst of flaming lead left the muzzles of the Vickers guns on the stocky nose of the pinto Spad. The front Boche gunner slumped from sight. The reserve pilot dropped over the wheel. The Gotha started down in a power dive.

Another Gotha was going down to the east. The flares were growing dimmer. Smoke searched the sky for the Gotha which had been at point. He found it. It was running for home.

Instantly, he pounced upon it, chased it out of the rim of the lighted flares. His guns bucked again and again in short bursts. The Gotha turned over like a lazy buzzard, slow and deliberate, then plunged and crashed two minutes later.

Smoke whirled his pinto Spad and searched the dimming sky. In a minute it would be dark once more. He saw the other Gotha, a mere shadow, far to the north. He turned toward it, pushed on the gun—but another Spad was already on its tail.

The Spad dove, tried to come up under the Gotha's blind spot. Suddenly a

tongue of flame shot out from the side of the Yank ship. Smoke held his breath. Who was it?

He couldn't tell at that distance. The plane was falling, falling. The Gotha was running for home. It was out in the dark, alone now. Not much chance of getting it. Anyway, Smoke wasn't so much interested in bagging it as he was in watching one of his boys in trouble.

"Slip her!" he shouted. "Slip her!"

But already the pilot was doing his best. Flames spurted from the engine. The Spad was sliding, blowing the flames away from the fuselage. Smoke romped down beside the disabled Spad.

Then it was that he saw the pilot. Carter was at the stick. Silk stockings and pink panties flashed before Smoke's face in vision. Carter, the boy, the man who had put over the stunt to make them laugh. Carter going down in flames.

Instantly, Smoke jerked the controls. His pinto Spad shot down to land. Wheels touched and rolled. Carter was coming down in a terrific sideslip. Flames continued to blast from the side of the motor.

SMOKE leaped from his cockpit. Stood ready, waiting, tense. It seemed Carter would crash in that slip. Then in the last split second, he kicked straight. Flames seemed to cover his cockpit. No, it was only one side of the cockpit. Carter was sticking his head out of the other side so that he could see. Wheels touched. The tail bounced.

A form catapulted from the cockpit as the plane touched the field. The ship made a half ground loop, stopped and crackled as it burned.

Smoke was running for the crumpled form. It didn't move. He reached Carter's side, turned him over. A gasp came from the injured man's lips. The gasp increased to a cough that seemed to come from the bottom of Carter's shoes. He

sat up. Coughed more. Smoke helped him to his feet.

"O. K.?" Smoke asked in concern. "Reckon that was the swellest show I ever seen."

Carter gasped for breath. He staggered a little, but he could stand alone.

"Phew!" he said. "Thought for a minute Renée wasn't going to get her pants and socks after all. I didn't dare breathe when the flames came at me out of the slip—done a couple of fire tricks on the stage. Know how to handle it. But I lit wrong when I jumped. Knocked what breath I had left out of me."

Carter turned and stared into the north blackness. About them other planes were landing in the light of more flares.

"Damn! Gotha got away," he said. "Got my engine or tank or something."

Suddenly, Smoke came up with a start. He had glanced past Carter to see a figure running to the middle of the field, toward a still form lying on the ground.

"Hey, what the hell?" he barked.

Instantly, he was running toward that bundle of something in the center of the field. By the light of the burning Gotha at the far side, and Carter's burning Spad, he could see quite plainly. And likewise the man who was running from the row of hangars could see him.

The man turned abruptly. Smoke eyed him. He yelled.

"Hey, what goes on?"

His sixgun was out in a flash and blammed across the tarmac. But he took particular pains not to hit the running figure. Perhaps it was one of his own pilots who had just landed. They were coming in all over the field now, taxiing to the deadline. But the man looked more like a mechanic. What was a mechanic doing at the field? They had been ordered to leave as soon as the squadron was in the air. They should have been gone more than a half hour now.

Before Smoke was sure enough to take accurate aim with his sixgun, the man had rounded a hangar corner and was out of sight. Smoke cursed. Kept on going toward the heap in the center of the field.

He reached it, gasped. Something queer here. A bloody face looked up at him. Eyes stared. Dead eyes that could not see. The corpse was dressed in the uniform of a high-ranking *Offizier* of the Imperial Air Force, Bombers branch.

Smoke shuddered as he felt over the body. Probably wasn't an unbroken bone in the whole mass of bloody flesh. From a breast pocket he drew a slip of paper. Written upon it in both French and English were the words:

"Kindly notify my country that the Baron von Muhl is dead."

Smoke searched the uniform, but there were no other signs of identification. He stared up into the sky. The man had either fallen out of one of those bombers or jumped. And this was von Muhl? Smoke frowned. Something queer about it all. Why should a man jump or fall out of one of those bombers? He couldn't figure out an excuse.

At first when he had sighted the body he had jumped at the conclusion that the Boche had been thrown from one of the bombers when it crashed. But that was impossible. There wasn't a wrecked bomber nearer than a hundred yards.

Quinn came running up now from between the hangars.

"Smoke," he panted. "Guess who you shot down in that lead Gotha?"

"Huh?" said Smoke. "Don't tell me it's von Muhl, von Stolz's cousin!"

Quinn nodded.

"But how did you know?"

"I didn't. Read this." He handed him the note.

Other pilots gathered about them quickly. Quinn looked dazed.

"That's funny," he said. "I just came from the crashed lead Gotha. One of the pilots in the cockpit wore the identification tag of von Muhl."

Carter had come up silently. He laughed.

"Two von Muhls in the same night," he chirped. "That's hot."

Smoke nodded.

"Hot, but not so funny," he said. Then his lips closed and he stalked toward his office, which had been spared from destruction.

As he arrived at the door a motorcycle dispatch rider sputtered up, saluted and handed him a long envelope.

He took it, nodded a good-night to the rider and entered his office. There he lit the light and tore open the letter.

Special orders from GENERAL HEAD-QUARTERS—

The 66th pursuit squadron is ordered to take off at dawn and fly above the Camai sector. Keep all enemy air craft from crossing our lines. Our ground movements must not be seen by the enemy.

SMOKE got up. He reached deep in his foot locker, brought out two bottles of cognac and walked out on the tarmac. His voice rose and floated across the field, which was dotted in three places with holes made by bursting bombs.

"Attention, you buzzards. Report at mess pronto."

Men of the 66th followed Smoke into the mess building. The bombs had done little damage to the field. The aim of the enemy had been thrown off by the surprise attack. Two hangars were down and several acres beyond the tarmac were blown up, but aside from that there was little to hinder regular operations.

Smoke placed the two bottles on the table. Glasses were filled, clinked. He

grinned, held up his orders and read from them. Quickly, when he had finished, he glanced about the faces to see how the news had been taken.

"After we leave here," Smoke said, "we'll turn in for a wink, I reckon."

Snell laughed.

"And somebody better stay with you, Smoke, to see that you get yours."

Pilots laughed easily. Smoke laughed with them. Good sign. Tough assignment tomorrow. Von Stolz would be out to avenge the death of his cousin without doubt. There would be plenty of action.

Men drank and talked and ate crackers. Carter came in after Smoke had given the orders. He sat beside Smoke who repeated the orders for the dawn patrol. Carter nodded solemnly. It seemed he had suddenly forgotten how to laugh. He leaned close to Smoke.

"Maybe I'm crazy," he said, "but I've just got a hunch. I think it would be best to send these birds to bed right now. Break them up."

The words had hardly left his lips before a dim, moaning sound resounded through the mess. It seemed to come at once from nowhere and everywhere. It grew in volume. Men ceased their talking, grew tense.

The sound began to waver, took shape, spoke words. Words in a stilted German dialect.

"I—I—I—I ammm the Gho—o—st of von Muhl. My death will be—e—e avenged. Tomorrow you will—I all—I die!"

Smoke turned in astonishment, he stared blankly at Carter next to him. Carter was motionless. Again the weird voice repeated the warning; Smoke watched his companion without moving an eyelash.

When the voice came the third time, he rose in half-crazed fury. Snatching Carter by the shoulders, he shook him.

The ghostly voice never wavered, never changed from that dull monotone.

"For God's sake, captain," Carter pleaded. "I haven't anything to do with it. That's straight. What do you take me for?"

Baffled, Smoke let him go. Nodded slowly. Stared at the table in front of him. The voice died away.

Smoke looked up quickly, searched the faces of his pilots. White faces before him. The thing they had just heard seemed so ghastly, so unreal and yet so real. Everyone had heard that strange voice. The voice that came from nowhere, but that filled the room, seemed to echo against the floor and the ceiling and the four walls.

In desperation, Smoke glanced at his watch. It was a few minutes past one. He got to his feet, forced a laugh.

"Carter here is carryin' his jokes a mite too far," he snapped. "Him and me'll have a little session after you go turn in. Dismissed. Report at four tomorrow morning for breakfast before patrol. That's all."

Carter got up, white-faced, tried to speak. Smoke pushed him down roughly, clapped a great hand over his mouth.

MEN filed out. They glanced suspiciously at Carter and Smoke knew that he hadn't convinced them of the older man's responsibility for the weird voice.

The last pilot left. Smoke called after him.

"Close the door, Brant!"

The door bumped shut. Smoke turned to Carter, but the other spoke first.

"For heaven's sake, Smoke, I didn't—"

"Sure. Reckon I know thet," Smoke cut in. "But I was the goat a while back, and now I thought you wouldn't mind."

"You mean you kept me here on purpose?"

"Sure did. I know you didn't do it, Carter. Certain of it. But what I want to know is, where it comes from and who did it. Besides, I had to have somebody to blame it on. Now my boys ain't sure whether you did or not. The uncertainty'll help 'em to sleep a heap better. What do you know?"

"Not much," Carter admitted. "Only this. Remember the bird who was running out into the field when we first landed and then beat it when he saw you making for that hunk of flesh that is supposed to be the body of von Muhl?"

Smoke nodded.

"I followed him after you quit shooting. As near as I could tell he went into the repair hangar. I just hung around then, not wanting to let him know I was on his trail."

"And you reckon he's got somethin' to do with it?"

"I'm sure of it, but I want to let it work out. I think I know where he's located. I can get him anytime I want him now. You see, I know now what he's up to."

"Sure, I do too, now," Smoke said. "This first guy we found with the note on him isn't von Muhl at all. He's likely some German what was killed in the last few hours, dressed in von Muhl's uniform and dumped on our field. They figured to pull a real scare by whatever this voice thing is. But they didn't figure on the real von Muhl bein' brought down, I reckon."

Smoke's gun hand reached down for his sixgun.

"Yuh say yuh know where to get this hombre, Carter," he said. "All right. Let's go."

Carter shook his head.

"Not yet," he said. "Listen. In my business I know something about showmanship and human nature. If this thing stands, it won't be so good, even if we

prove to the guys it isn't a ghost. But if we can shift it into a joke and make it a laugh before we go up tomorrow morning, we'll win. Will you leave that up to me?"

Smoke paused for a long time in thought. His hand relaxed on the sixgun butt. He nodded.

"Reckon you're right, Carter," he said. "You sure pulled me out of one tough hole. I'll give yuh another chance."

TWO hours of tossing on his bunk. Smoke got up and hurried to the tarmac and across it to the mess. Pilots came in after him. Hollow-eyed pilots with dark rings beneath that told of sleepless torture. Smoke forced a laugh.

"You birds didn't dream about any of them ghosts Carter was kiddin' yuh with, did yuh?"

He laughed again, tried to get the spirit over. It fell as flat as a rotten tomato in a mud hole. Carter gave him the wink—smiled.

"I think our turn is coming," he said.

Cold, damp mist drifted in through the open door. Someone shivered audibly. Another and another. Smoke slammed the door. Men hardly touched their food; they sucked nervously at cigarettes.

Suddenly the room was filled with that moaning sound. It grew and grew; then above it, sounded the voice—hollow and monotonous in tone.

"I—I—I am —m—m the gho—ost of von Muhl. My—y death will be—e—avenged. This morning you will—I all—I die."

Faces turned white. Eyes stared at Carter. He was bending down, holding his head in his hands. The place grew deathly still. And in the stillness another voice, still deeper than the first, floated into the room.

"You—u—u are not von Muhl! You—u—u are an imposter. I—I—I—I

am—m von Muhl's ghooost. I am going to kill these men, not you. *Heraus mit!*"

Someone snickered. Smoke gasped, got the cue and broke out into a roaring laugh. The first voice came again. Men stopped to listen, broke off in laughter again. Then came the second voice, denying the genuine von Muhl had just spoken.

Men of the 66th left the mess laughing. They hurried to their planes as dawn broke. Smoke called them together at the deadline.

"We got von Stolz's cousin last night," he said. "Now we go after von Stolz."

Spads roared into the air. Carter alone circled the field before falling into formation. Over the repair hangar, he turned and deliberately thundered down.

His Vickers guns spat flame directly into the loft of the building. Back and forth he swung, raking the entire side. Then he pulled out just before his Spad crashed into the hangar and joined the formation.

Smoke stared at Carter as he came up. Carter grinned, held his fist out with thumb down. They droned on in the graying dawn.

Mists hung heavily over the Front for a solid hour. Above was clear sky and the rising sun lighting the top of the cloud. Gradually the mist cleared. A flight of fifteen Fokkers stormed up from the north, a crimson ship at point. That would be von Stolz.

Smoke signaled at once for the attack. His squadron had the advantage of higher altitude. They romped down, guns chattering in a warming burst. The cowboy leader turned in his seat and surveyed his men. Grins of confidence came back to him. He returned that show of feeling with the same token, pushed on.

Spads and Fokkers came nearer and

nearer to grips. The Fokker flight wavered. Von Stolz at point seemed undecided. Smoke pressed his triggers for another short burst to warm his guns.

Almost within range now. Von Stolz wavered again. He turned east. His Fokkers followed him. Vickers steel flashed out at long range from the guns of the charging Spads. Two, three Fokkers dropped from the tail of the big fleeing flight and hurled down.

Later, when the patrol was finished and they were returning to the field of the 66th, Carter slammed down in a hurry and ran to the repair hangar.

Smoke circled, came down and climbed out just as Carter was returning.

"I—killed him," Carter said. "Must have been a German in the guise of a mechanic. That bombing raid last night with no guards gave him a chance to set up his apparatus. A sort of high-powered telephone outfit with a wire underground from the repair hangar to a speaker on the floor of the mess. All the apparatus is in place yet." Carter looked worried. "It doesn't seem just right to shoot guys in your own hangar somehow. Hope I don't get in a jam for it."

Smoke chuckled.

"Jam, hell," he said. "Not unless it's strawberry," his grin broadened—"or maybe razzberry. But more likely it'll be medals for you, Carter. That was the slickest piece of ventriloquism I ever did hear this mornin' at mess. How in the devil did yuh figure out thet speel?"

Carter grinned a little then.

"That was fairly simple," he said. "I studied on it all the rest of the night. And finally I figured that there wouldn't be anything much funnier than a couple of competing ghosts fighting to see who was going to do the scaring."

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Gas House Peelots

by JAMES PERLEY HUGHES

AUTHOR OF

"THE K. O. PEELOT," ETC.



As its nose dropped, the Pfalz sent a stream of lead into the Spad's cubby.

"You may be a champ at tennis," the C. O. snarled. "But hitting balls ain't going to help win this War." And Big Jim only smiled. Thought 'he couldn't fight, eh? O. K.—he'd show 'em that when it came to sky hitting a tennis champion could knock down a better score than the whole Gas House gang any day!

THE sharp impact of a tennis ball, smashed in a lightning return, sounded from back of the canvas hangars. Captain Butch Bronson, acting squadron commander, beetled his heavy brows and spat derisively.

"Thirty love," a voice boomed from the improvised court.

Captain Butch swore luridly and beckoned Mike Scanlon, the greasiest monkey in the lubrication gang.

"Is that Little Lord Fauntleroy from

Park Avenue playing ping pong back there or am I hearing voices?" he asked.

Mike grinned. He knew the feeling the skipper had for tennis and its players and his watery eyes winked.

"Lieutenant Farleigh and one of them Limey pilots is having a round of roodles or something like that, sir," he answered.

"Tell Mr. Farleigh I want to see him." The skipper stamped back into the executive offices.

Big Jim Farleigh laid aside his racket in answer to Bronson's summons. As he turned toward the headquarters building, Mike Scanlon saw his lips tighten and his hairy fingers mould themselves into a fist.

Mike hoped he would be present when Bronson and Farleigh finally had it out. It would be a fight worth seeing. Fate and a personnel officer of small acumen had dumped a tennis champion into the hardest boiled formation in the American flying forces and almost anything was likely to happen.

Most of the pilots in Bronson's organization put in their spare time sleeping, drinking or playing poker. Farleigh played tennis. It kept him in condition for one thing. Besides, he liked the game.

Big Jim was an example of the new school of tennis champions. Tall, powerful and active, he was of a type which could excel in any sport. A heavyweight would have difficulty in disposing of him.

Butch Bronson, however, knew nothing of this. He recognized only two games, boxing and baseball. All others were episcene, fit only for women and weaklings. To Butch, tennis was anathema, an insult to hairy-chested manhood. He had been outraged when Jim Farleigh joined the squadron; but the construction of a makeshift tennis court back of the hangars had proved the ultimate straw.

"Listen here, Fauntleroy," Bronson rasped, when Farleigh stood before him,

"Whacha trying to do—make this outfit look like a canteen workers' recreational field or a training camp for Y workers?"

The tennis player stiffened. He was as tall as Bronson, as wide of shoulder and as full of fight. His dark eyes looked into the captain's, trading defiance for dislike.

"I suppose you're cracking at that tennis game I was playing with Captain Cobb of the R. F. C.," he said.

"You're quick to understand," Butch answered, "so won't be having any trouble in getting what I mean. Tennis is all washed up as far as this outfit is concerned. *Compray?*"

"You're skipper," Farleigh replied, "but I'd like to know your reason."

Captain Bronson arose that he might lean across the desk, his prognathous jaw out-thrust.

"All right, Fauntleroy," he barked, "I'll tell you. Tennis is a sister game and I'm not going to have a bunch of hard-fighting pilots turned into a sewing circle. This is a war we're in, not a tennis tournament. Tennis is a game that may make women strong, but it makes men weak. It's—"

"I suppose it's made me weak," Big Jim leaned forward to trade glare for glare.

"You're a tennis champion, ain't you?"

"Yes, but—"

"'Nuff said," Butch spat and resumed his seat.

A flush darkened Jim Farleigh's face and he moved closer to his commanding officer to speak in lowered tones. Butch Bronson stared up at him as he continued, his own ponderous fists clenching.

"And get this, you big roughneck," Farleigh finished, "I'll show you how much of a sister a tennis champ is by beating you at any game you name. Nothing barred—land, sea or air."

"Oh yeah?" Butch sneered.

"Oh yeah. Name your poison."

Butch Bronson swarmed out of his

chair. His fists looked like twin Virginia hams. Butch had done things in the ring before he joined the army and he wanted to do things now. His impulse was to clout the tennis player on the jaw and then summon the stretcher bearers. But he remembered that he was acting squadron commander and had some dignity to sustain. For a moment he eyed Jim Farleigh wrathfully. Then he spoke.

"O. K., Champ," he said, "I think I told you there happens to be a war going on around here. Crash me some Boches instead of rubber balls. If you get more than I do, that's a point for you. Show me something with a machine gun instead of a catgut paddle. I ain't hide-bound, but I've got to be shown."

"I've shown a lot of tougher men than you," Farleigh answered.

He saluted stiffly and turned to leave the orderly room. Butch Bronson remained standing. He looked out the window to see Mike Scanlon crossing the field and he beckoned him in.

"Keep your watery brown eyes on that Park Avenue baby, Mike," he commanded. "He's acting hostile."

"O. K., boss. I've been watching him already. He's putting a new synchronizer on that bus of his'n. One of them Nelson dew-dads. Garros ain't high hat enough for him, I guess."

"What's the big idea?"

"I dunno. Just to be different, I s'pose."

"Well—keep watching. I've got a hunch."

BUT during the following week, Butch Bronson needed no greaseball's aid in keeping track of Jim Farleigh. The whole Front watched him. Butch knew within twenty-four hours that he had a battle on his hands in spite of the fact he had two victories to his credit. The Boches also sensed that a new American ace was budding on the other side of the lines—an

ace, who dazzled their pilots with his darting flight and displayed an accuracy with his machine guns, which brought him two crashes that received the O. K. of the Front line observation posts.

"Thirty—all," Jim said to Butch Bronson, when he returned from his second successful encounter.

"Whacha mean—thirty—all? I don't compray that language."

"It's tennis for 'even Stephen'," Farleigh told him, "You had two points when we started. Love—thirty. Now we're square. Keep your eyes open from today on."

"I shall."

Not only Butch Bronson, the members of the squadron, but the experts along the Western front kept their eyes open and fixed on Jim Farleigh. His fleet-winged Spad raced from one end of the battle line to the other. Gifted with sight that had been trained to judge the speed of swiftly moving objects, he gauged the maneuvers of his enemies with uncanny skill.

Stung by the man's success, Butch took to the air and gained credit for a Fokker shot down in a dogfight; but that very afternoon Jim Farleigh accounted for his third plane.

"Deuce," he said to Butch that evening.

"You'll say something stronger than that when you see this." The skipper held up a sheet of paper. "Even the Krauts are laughing at you. They dropped this message on the field this morning. Kurt von Horst, *rittmeister* of the Dragons, gives us the razzberry about having a tennis champion in the outfit."

"Kurt von Horst?" a grin brightened Farleigh's sober face, "Why, I've played against him in the Internationals. As a volleyer von Horst is a wonder. No back court for him. He stands up to the net and smokes you out."

"That's what he wants to do to you."

Bronson glanced at the message again, "He challenges you to—to what he calls a match."

"Gee, that's swell. I'll be glad to—"

"Maybe you will, but I won't," Captain Butch broke in. "You may have forgotten it, but there's a war going on around here and they don't shake hands and say 'Whoops, my dear,' when the game is over. They bury the guy that's beat."

"You're going to follow orders, Faunterleroy," Bronson barked. "Whether it is the polite thing in tennis or not."

Jim Farleigh made no answer. He knew that military law and regulations were all on Bronson's side. Butch had set out to make a fool of him, but the events of the past week had turned his dislike into something closer to jealousy. Farleigh's success in the air had also changed the attitude of his comrades. Even men like Mike Scanlon were beginning to speak of him with admiration. The effect had been to harden Bronson's rule.

"What are your orders, sir?" Jim asked.

"No more solo flights," the skipper commanded. "This outfit has regular chores to do and its business is not producing prima donnas or squash court champs. *Compray?*"

"I *compray* a lot," Jim Farleigh answered.

Bronson's eyes narrowed as they fixed on the other's grave face.

"And what's more," he finished, "No messages to your friend *Herr Rittmeister* von Horst unless you want to go to bat for trifficking with the enemy."

"You're the boss, skipper, but what I said still stands."

Jim Farleigh left the squadron office to inspect his ship in the canvas hangars. He spent the rest of the day going over it. Next he began making changes with the approval of some engineer experts he had known in civil life. A new carbureter was installed, stepping up the motor. Then

a four-bladed prop from a captured Sieman-Schuckard bomber was installed and tested thoroughly. The Nelson synchronized guns fired even faster after this change was made.

Mike Scanlon watched these operations with interest. Then he made his report to Captain Bronson.

"What's the big idea?" his chief wanted to know.

"He says he can take that boat right up to the net, sir," the man answered.

"Meaning which?"

"You can search me, sir."

"Then go and find out."

Scanlon hurried away, but was back a moment later with something more important than the information he had been sent to obtain. He bore a tin message cylinder in his hand, a cylinder bearing the streamers of the German Imperial Flying Corps.

"Just fell back of the hangars," he told Butch Bronson.

The skipper opened the container. His eyes narrowed as he read the paper within.

"Get my bus out and warm it," he commanded, "No Park Avenue baby is going to put over anything on me."

FIFTEEN minutes later, Butch Bronson took to the air. He left Jim Farleigh tinkering with his Spad, hoping off for short flights and then descending to make adjustments.

Butch Bronson's heavy brows knotted as he buzzed toward the lines. Although an engineering college had put a professional glaze upon his pugnacious soul, he was still a member of the Gas House gang at heart. To have a nimble-footed tennis champ defy him caused him to see red. Now he had a chance to put the man where he belonged.

He scanned the skies when he reached the place where the Meuse cut through

both German and Allied lines. A hard smile twisted his lips when he saw a trio of Pfalz scouts cross from Bocheland, one separating from the rest and coursing toward him. He snapped fresh cartridges into his loading blocks and nosed in the direction of the oncoming Boches.

"Damned dancing masters. They make me sick," he muttered.

He crouched low in his cubby and glanced through his ring-sight. The Pfalz was in the circle, growing swiftly. Butch grasped his gun trips and waited, his face hardening.

The two ships were nearing each other at tremendous speed. The outline of the Pfalz swelled rapidly and Bronson's hold on his trip tightened. At last he unleashed his guns. A clatter and flames spat out. The Pfalz dodged and went into a wing slip.

Butch spun and charged the Boche with a savagery that was echoed in the roar of his motor. Once more the German dodged, sliding out of Bronson's way with the skill of a boxer. Butch glanced at the plane. Upon its fuselage was the colorful painting of a dragon, while its streamers marked it as the ship of a squadron commander.

"Fauntleroy's tennis-playing enemy," Butch growled. "Here's where I show him the difference between a racket swinger and a lad who swings his fists."

Bronson noted that the other Pfalz scouts were keeping their distance, cruising off to one side while he battled with Kurt von Horst. He lunged at the Boche, tripping his guns. Again the German slid to one side and then came around with a burst which threatened to tear the Spad to rags. Butch bellowed profanely and tore in, his eyes held on the dancing Pfalz, which darted, first one way and then another.

In his college days, when he practiced the manly art of modified murder, Butch

Bronson had tangled with dancing masters like this. He knew a way to deal with pirouetting palookas. Wait until they came in close and then sock them was a good old prescripton which had won more than one battle.

But as he buzzed in a circle, awaiting a fresh offensive, Bronson saw the German leader signaling. The man raised his arm aloft and then struck at an imaginary object. This meant nothing to Butch. He shook his head, signifying his lack of understanding.

Next the Pfalz came toward him, diving down until it flew almost tip to tip with the Spad. Von Horst raised his field glasses, holding them on Bronson's face.

"You'll know me the next time you see me without being introduced," Butch mumbled. "That is, if you—"

His mutterings came to sudden end. A signal from the Boche leader and the two Pfalz, which had been cruising to one side, came down with a blast of fire that made the Spad the center of a spider web of flying lead. A moment before, Bronson had been fighting a duel. Now he was being ganged.

He fought back grimly, realizing he had flown into a trap. He had come out with the idea of crashing Kurt von Horst and then returning to jeer at Big Jim Farleigh. Now, he sensed, the chances of his return were slight. Butch made no effort to escape. He would either defeat the trio or take it on the chin. He had been ganged before and had come out of it the only man left on his feet. With a little luck, he might repeat.

"Win, lose or draw, I'm going to show these racket wielders what a he-man looks like," he grumbled.

The Boche drew closer, flinging whipping streams around him until the Spad seemed to be weaving its way through a leaden haze. The pressure tightened and, in spite of his efforts, he felt the K. O.

blow was not far away. He fought back, his heavy jaw clamped tight, but the Boches pommeled him unmercifully. The Spad was staggering like a boxer half out on his feet.

"Won't be long now," Butch muttered.

Then he caught a glimpse of a little ship shooting toward him at scorching speed. A faint smile broadened his tightly held lips as he recognized the outline of a Spad. Help was on the wing.

One of the three Pfalz detached itself from the *mêlée* and swung off to meet the newcomer.

The Spad met the challenge with a burst that crumpled the German as though it had been struck by a five-nine shell.

Butch cheered and tripped his own guns. Then an oath smoked out and his smile contracted.

The Spad was attacking the second Pfalz, boring in with a fury that caused the Boche pilot to dodge desperately. Butch Bronson got a close up view of both ship and pilot. The crate had a four bladed prop, he could tell by the shield-like appearance of those rapidly spinning arms.

The little ship was leaping through the air at a speed that made his own bus seem sluggish. He stared at the robust figure in the cockpit. The man at the stick was Big Jim Farleigh.

"Gosh, I'd rather be dead than have that bird save me," Butch swore.

HIS next words were inarticulate detonations of purplish profanity. The tennis champion was holding up one finger, indicating his lead in their race for honors. Bronson could almost hear him shout that silly phrase of the courts—"vantage server."

Butch whirled and struck at the nearest of the Boche. He was one plane behind and two Germans remained in air. He would crash one and pile up the other.

That would put Fauntleroy in his proper place.

He glanced to one side. Farleigh was engaging Kurt von Horst. Fresh fury raged through Bronson's boiling thoughts. He had intercepted the German's offer of a rendezvous in order to keep Farleigh from fighting the *rittmeister*. Now they were at grips in spite of his intervention.

"I'll get this other bird first."

Jettisoning all caution from his cockpit, he bored in. The Boche was game and traded Spandau for Vickers. The two ships roared at each other like charging bulls, each bellowing its defiance.

Streaks of lead broke around Butch Bronson, but he held his eyes to the ring sight, nursing the stick while his cowl guns jabbered. The Pfalz filled the circle now. He kept the spinning prop at the cross wires. He held grimly, stiffening as he awaited the sting of hostile bullets.

Then he saw the Pfalz stagger. The nose dropped and the wings half turned. Bronson roared on. A feeling of elation swept through him. He had sunk the Boche and was even with Jim Farleigh.

He swung around, nosing to where von Horst and Farleigh were engaged in a swiftly moving battle. He followed their movements. They were unlike anything he had seen in the air before. The men fought more like fencers than pilots. They dodged and twisted, advanced and retired. Neither tried the good, old tactics of riding the other's tail and putting in the K. O. blow from behind.

"Tennis, I guess," Butch mumbled. "Well, it makes that Kraut cold meat for me. He tried to gang me and I don't owe him anything but a clout in the jaw."

Bronson gunned his Spad until he was within striking distance. He saw Jim Farleigh making frantic signals, waving him to one side, but he paid no attention. Farleigh was demanding that Kurt von Horst be left to him. Fat chance! Butch

was in the air to spill Boche and the sooner he did it, the better he'd feel. Beside—why give Fauntleroy a chance to pass him! They were even again.

He maneuvered into a position which suited him and then plunged at von Horst's rapidly maneuvering crate. The German was giving his entire attention to Farleigh and was fruit salad for a shot from behind. Bronson got the Pfalz in the ring of his sights. He was too far away for a shot, but his hand tightened on the trip.

Now! But as his guns clattered, he choked them, swearing like a mule skinner. Jim Farleigh had swept down, shooting between Butch and von Horst. The fool had spoiled the shot intentionally.

"What I'll do to him will be a plenty," Bronson promised himself. "Damn traitor."

Butch swung up into a renversement, then sideslipped to avoid a devastating burst. He glanced off to the right to see Jim Farleigh cruising, making no effort to take part in the combat. Butch smiled bleakly. He had the chance now for which he had been looking. He would mop up the *rittmaster*, scoring his fifth victory and enter the magic circle of American aces.

"Takes a he-man to play this war game," he gravely informed himself. "These forty-love boys haven't any business in it."

Kurt von Horst was attacking again, but Butch returned to his tactics of the ring. He waited for the German to come to him. Then he would swing on him with a drag that would cut the Pfalz to ribbons. Von Horst darted in, but when Bronson tripped his haymaker, the Boche was no longer there. Instead, he had dipped and come up with a squall of lead that rocked the Spad from nose to fin.

Butch tried to dodge, but the German ringed him, like a cooper circling a barrel.

The air was gray with lead and plenty of it was barging into Bronson's crate.

"Say, are you going to let this clay court pal of your's give me the works?" Butch bellowed at Jim Farleigh.

Jim apparently failed to see the signal.

VON HORST struck again, all but smothering Bronson with his fire. The Spad rocked. One of the ailerons had been damaged and the tail controls were only partially effective. The little ship grew sluggish, its movements badly timed. Meantime the German dancing master was lashing it unmercifully.

"Hey! look what this bird is—"

Butch turned to see Jim Farleigh streaking toward him as though he had been shot from a howitzer. The four-bladed prop gave him speed to waste. His guns flamed, giving out a buzzing note that told of twice the rate of fire possible with the Garros synchronizer.

Another crashing drag from the German. Butch could feel his own craft settling. The worst had happened. The old boat was going into a *panne* and the tennis tickler from Park Avenue was making life possible. It was hard to take. A gurgle and the engine died. Butch glanced at the ground, hummocked with marmite pits. He would have to use care in landing or even Farleigh's intervention would be of small use.

At last he got the crippled crate down, washing out a wing when he landed. He tumbled into a shell crater and stared up into the sky. Jim Farleigh and the German *rittmaster* had resumed their struggle. Butch Bronson's heavy features hardened as he gauged the battle. He had never seen such a duel of speed and daring.

Grudging admiration came as he continued to watch. The four-bladed Spad was a leaping, darting thing that seemed to defy all laws of aerial maneuver.

Von Horst was equipped with a Pfalz

of speed and flexibility. The two were fighting with an élan that presented a spectacle that held Bronson's fascinated gaze.

"They're like a couple of feather-weights," he told himself. "If that's tennis, it can't be such a rotten game."

Bronson's eyes narrowed while they followed the movements of those swiftly maneuvering wings. He sensed he was seeing two champions struggling for a title. They were topnotchers in any game, he reflected, as he noted the dizzy spins and screaming dives which ended with deadly blasts of fire.

Butch found himself rooting in spite of his firm dislike for the tennis player.

"Give him the K. O., big boy," he belatedly, as the Spad flashed in to fire short, stinging drags. "Right on the button. He's—"

A yell of warning. Kurt von Horst had swung up, as though to loop, but cut his gun when halfway up. The Pfalz stalled and fell away. As its nose dropped, a crisp clatter sent a pencil lancing into Farleigh's cubby.

Butch saw the man reel in his seat. For a moment he held his breath, wondering if Big Jim had stopped that killing punch. His eyes widened when he saw the Spad roll over. Then a howl of delight came from his half-opened mouth.

Farleigh's cowl blazed as the stammering Vickers poured out a stream that started at the Boche prop and ended in the cockpit. The German craft staggered, but Farleigh moved in, his fire unchecked.

Kurt von Horst was weaving drunkenly. He raised his hand to his helmet, saluting a victor whose shots were killing him. Then he fell forward, dead.

A flash of flame swept over the mortally wounded Pfalz. The nose turned down and it rocketed to earth. A crash, an explosion and the tale was done.

"Gosh—and that puts him ahead of me again," Butch Bronson got to his feet.

"Damn it, it makes him an ace. Gee, to have a Park Avenue tennis shark the only ace in the outfit!"

All the old outrage, that had burned within, flamed up once more. For the moment he had admired Jim Farleigh. But now—he would still have to show him that the king of the Gas House gang was a man with hair on his chest and that college training was only an after-glaze.

He looked up to see the Spad slide for a landing near his own washed out crate. Two minutes later, Farleigh was in the shell hole. He grinned when their glances met.

"Point-set on you, skipper," he said, resuming what was to Butch Bronson the childish chatter of the tennis court.

A flare of rage swept through the squadron leader. This was more than any man could stand. His fist doubled and crashed at the smiling face. It landed on nothingness and the next instant something struck Butch on the jaw with a force that sent him sprawling.

"And that is point, set, match," Jim Farleigh said.

Bronson got to his feet. He rubbed his jaw thoughtfully. He was not licked. Physically, he was not even badly jarred, but psychically Buck was shaken to the toe tips.

"Where did you pick up a punch like that?" he demanded. "Not on Park Avenue."

"Who ever said anything about Park Avenue?" Farleigh barked back in high disdain. "I come from Park Street. I never saw a game of tennis until I went to Fordham, but on Park Street—"

"I never heard of it," Butch mumbled. "Park Street—in New York City?"

"Sure. It's just off the Bowery, runs into Mott from—"

The baffled expression faded from Butch Bronson's face and in its place came a grin of understanding.

"Mitt me, cul," he said.

The Hell Busters

Another Red Eagle Yarn by
HAROLD F. CRUICKSHANK



That American convoy was on the spot. U-boats encircled it—Boche bombers thundered overhead—guns snarled. Yet into this steel-lashed inferno five seaplanes dove. The Red Eagle's Brood were thrusting their talons into Boche blood, were going to bust this devil's trap wide open—or ride to hell with it!

Like a flame-tipped arrow, the Red Eagle dived on that submarine.

CAPTAIN TED BLAIR, the intrepid Yank Red Eagle skipper, limped down to the shoreline at the south Devon coast. He had been some time in England. A leg wound in his last famous scrap with one of Germany's most nefarious flyers had not healed so quickly. Ted ached to get back to France, back to his Brood, back to action. But he liked this Devon coast village. He liked the quaint old people—seadogs all, or the sons or grandsons of men who went down to the sea in ships.

Blair was coming along smartly now. There was talk of permitting his release from the hospital in a few days. He had pronounced himself as fit more than weeks ago. Hell! He was, in his own mind, as fit as most men who flew the sky trail. His mind was clear; his muscles were like iron rolls. His left leg pained him at times yet. But he had told the surgeons that he had suffered more when a kid with "growing pains."

But, unknown to Ted, there was a deeper influence than just his leg wound holding him in England. British War Office had long since begun to recognize the merit and accomplishments of this famous Yank who had more than once been placed at the disposal of the British and French command. British headquarters were watching this gutty sky leader down at Devon hospital. Had Ted not already refused, he could have attended an investiture at Buckingham Palace, where the King would have been glad to place an order round his neck, and shake his hand.

But Blair was not fond of accepting recommendations, decorations and honors. He wanted to be left with his Brood, that gutty gang of hard-egg scrappers. The Red Eagle had no love for the wholesale butchery of warfare, but as it was his business to become a part of the mad scheme in the interests of his country,

and fellow men, he had become a killer along with the rest.

Right at the moment, a pair of doe-like eyes watched Blair's every movement, as he walked on over the rocks to a jagged cliffside where he liked to sit and smoke in an old smuggler's cave. It had been one of Blair's dreams, as a youngster in the States, to come back to the home of his buccaneer ancestors, and visit the caves from which they embarked at high tide on their nefarious missions to the Indies, or other foreign shores.

Ted was not conscious of those watching eyes. Nor was he conscious of the lone boatman who lazily plied a set of oars about half a mile out to sea. It was the roar of a seaplane motor which brought him out of a pleasant reverie.

He shot to the mouth of the cave as a Navy seaplane swooped down over the lone boat. The plane was signaling the boatman to put into shore. Immediately the Red Eagle's heart began to pound with anticipation.

"These days, you can find excitement in the quietest spot imaginable," he ruminated. "I wonder what that sea buzzard suspects."

"Good morning, sir!" a soft voice sounded behind him.

"Oh, good morning. You kind of startled me, Miss. Didn't know there was anybody within a mile of me." The Red Eagle actually blushed as he found himself looking into perhaps the most beautiful pair of dark eyes he had ever seen.

"Sorry, Captain Blair," came that low contralto voice again. "I—"

"You evidently know who I am, marm," Ted jerked.

"Why, yes. Who doesn't? You're pretty well-known in the district. An old retired captain told me last night that you are even related to a grand-uncle of his—an old buccaneer of the Spanish main. I, of course knew you, from my hospital

experience. You see, I'm a special at Number 7."

"Oh! Funny I've never run across you before," Ted said. "By the way, it looks like a little excitement out to sea, eh? That sky bus is toting in a boatman. Pretty thorough, that naval branch of the air service, eh?"

For a moment there was no answer. The girl's beautiful eyes were now slitted almost shut, and her pretty mouth was distorted in a wry sort of quirk.

Suddenly her brows elevated sharply and her face cloaked in a pretty smile.

"So sorry," she murmured. "What was it you said? I was busy watching that poor boatman out there."

"I said the British Naval Air Service was mighty efficient—right on their toes, on the job," Ted returned.

"Oh, yes, aren't they? But perhaps a little too officious. The lives of these poor fisher folk are not so very rosy. Some plane, or destroyer, is right on their heels all the time. I think it's a bit overdone, this idea of suspicion right along, don't you?"

"H'mm. I suppose it can be overdone, marm."

Ted was non-committal. He had detected a caustic tone of voice as the girl spoke of the Navy Service. In fact, she didn't seem very pleased that the sea plane was herding the lone boatman inshore.

"Tell me, when are you returning to your squadron, Captain Blair?" she suddenly asked. "Aren't you longing to get back into action?"

Blair looked up through his slitted eyes, a thin smile toying with the corners of his mouth. This little lady was after information, eh!

"Reckon I'll be leaving before the end of the week, marm. It's likely you saw my release from the hospital. It came in last night," he lied. "Yeah, I had to hound

them for it, though. Of course, I shan't be back in action for a while. Can't stroke the rudder bar properly yet—not for a month at least. Leg get's mighty stiff when I sit still for any length of time. And legs are what you need plenty of zip in, when you're engaged with a Boche fighter, Miss. You—"

Blair turned. He had been talking with his face turned partly out to sea. His brows shot up. The beautiful girl had vanished.

"Well, I'll be the cockeyed son of a goose's uncle," he mumbled. "So you were a special at Number 7, huh? Like hell you were. A special, all right, lady. A special spy!"

His lips snapped shut tight over the last word, and with a stiff shrug he moved on to meet the boatman and plane party.

AN hour later, Ted Blair sat at the table of a little bar parlor in the village, opposite one of England's most famous sea buzzards. Just the kind of a buzzard that the Red Eagle liked. There was no monocle in this sea bird's eye. Commander "Fitz" Fitzhugh was all to the good. It was he who had swooped down on the lone boatman Blair had been watching.

"So you're Blair, the great Red Eagle! George! I never expected to meet you. Always hoped to, but figured you'd wash yourself out before I got the chance."

Fitzhugh leaned across the table and spread a large hand out over one of Blair's.

"It's an honor to have a beer with a man of your record, skipper," he continued.

A thin smile toyed with Blair's mouth. His eyes were focused on two lines of medal ribbons which graced Fitz's tunic.

"Baloney, commander," he snapped. "That is—well, appreciate your remarks very much but—hell! I'm mighty proud

to be having a beer with you. Heard a lot about you. It was you who dashed to our rescue when we met Ivanovich the Terrible over the Channel. Well, what about that fisherman you herded ashore?"

Fitzhugh's brows lowered and his face clouded in a deep frown.

"How'd you like to stay over a while and lend a hand here on the coast, skipper?" he suddenly jerked.

Ted Blair laughed, and shook his head.

"Not for lots, brother. No. My place is up at the head of the Brood flight. You've heard of ol' Mother Carey and her chicks? Well, that's how I feel towards my gang of hell-busters."

Fitzhugh smiled.

"You Yanks are a funny lot," he chuckled. "Damned if you'd get one of our gang to admit what you said just now. Of course, actually, we feel the same. I suppose I'm a bit daffy over my crew of sea bombers. But I couldn't let 'em know it. They'd be badgering hell out of me for leaves, passes, furloughs. Well, here's what: That boatman you saw is a bird we've had our eye on for some time. A Boche who bought a little poultry affair inshore some two years before the war. Count von Litzer, at home in the Fatherland. Here, just plain Mr. Lister, Breeder of White Orpingtons and that sort of thing. You had the pleasure of meeting and talking to his very charming niece—known better to us, as Adrienne X, a woman who could give Mata Hari hearts and trumps and take the full thirteen tricks from her."

Ted Blair started, and scraped back his chair.

"Good heaven! Adrienne X! You don't mean to tell me! What a damn cuckoo I was to let her slip away. Why, Fitzhugh, I could have nabbed her for you just as easy as—"

A low laugh cut in on Blair's remarks. Fitzhugh drained his glass. His eyes

were twinkling merrily at Blair's discomfort.

"It's all right, ol' boy. Don't worry about her. Right at the moment we have nothing on her. She's better at large. One of these dark nights, Madame Adrienne is going to lead us right into the big shot. Blair, we want your help. Perhaps you've had a grouch against the surgeons at Number 7. You've felt they were holding you back from France. You're right. They have been stalling, on orders from both your own headquarters and ours."

Ted slammed down his glass and jerked himself to his feet.

"So that's it," he bellowed. "Then by God, they can sign my release tonight. Why, holy Moses! My Brood might have been wiped out, an' me loafing round these damn caves, picking seashells, an' telling fairy stories to a flock of off-duty nurses. Thanks for the information, brother. I'll be getting back now."

"Sit down! Have another beer. You've got us all wrong, Blair. Sit down, man, and try some of the pale ale here. It's the best in England. I've got a yarn for you. One that'll knock your eye out, as you Yanks say."

BLAIR resumed his seat and lit a cigarette. Fitzhugh was leaning well over the table now, his thin lips drawn and taut, his eyes like gleaming coals of fire.

"I'm thinking you'll be with us when you've heard, Blair," he said, in a husky tone of voice. "Our big shot has to do with an expected big convoy of American troops due in a couple of days at Plymouth harbor. The Boche command is out to get 'em. That boatman you saw us nab, was at the head of a plot to plug up Plymouth harbor, and so force the convoy back into the open roads, where the U Boats could pepper hell out of them. You know how badly those troops

are needed forward, Blair. They have got to be landed. French ports are too well marked. We must land at Plymouth."

Ted Blair could feel the hot blood rushing through his body with mill-stream force now. He had formed a vivid mental picture of that convoy. Torpedo action! Men wallowing helplessly in the trough of the open ocean— Then he came back to his present surroundings.

"But, what can I do—alone—with a half-busted leg?" the Eagle skipper jerked. "What good would a Spad be in action miles out to sea?"

"You mean you'll stay and help, Blair?" the other asked, with some showing of excitement.

"Hell, I'd be sorry to think that convoy got bust into because I'd refused to lend a hand, Fitzhugh. But—"

"Great! By jove! I'll get in touch with War Office at once. Blair, you can send a wire to that Eagle Brood of hell-twisters of yours any time you want. We didn't expect you to work this alone. Tomorrow night, there'll be a car at the hospital to transport you to Plymouth. From there, you'll board a destroyer and take a swing round the harbor, and out to sea—just to give you the lay of the sea, as it were. We'll want you to spot sneaking U's in and around the harbor. See me at Plymouth for a full line on things. The Boches are out to smash up this convoy. We've got to stop 'em. Here's to their damnation and our success!"

Two big-fisted sky fighters raised their glasses and in silence drank the grim toast. Fitzhugh then held out his hand and gripped Ted's hard.

"You're fond of hell-bent action, Blair. You'll get it—plenty. Keep your eyes peeled. Watch the movements of everybody—"

Both men were so engrossed, they had failed to observe a thick-set form leave the bar counter, a form clad in the smock

of a local farm hand. It might have been better for Blair had he glimpsed the masked leer on that yokel's face as he slid out.

DUSK! Almost forty-eight hours had sped by since Ted Blair had thrown in his lot with Naval Secret Service. He had been well occupied. Another bogus fisherman had been picked up on a tip from him. Now his feet were rammed against the rudder bar of a trim D. H. sea bus as he slit sky out of Plymouth harbor.

At his suggestion, the American convoy was being held in the Atlantic roads for another day. He had run on to something sinister—something concrete in the Boche plans to block the harbor. Tonight, he was flying solo in one of the fastest, best equipped ships he had ever flown.

He gulped in the salt breeze. It was good to be skyside again—skyside, when one knew that adventure lay ahead. And his British Allies had done things well. Five of a new type of seaplane, direct from the testing waters, had been placed at the disposal of the Brood. Ted had wired for his gang to fly their Spads across from France. They would join him at dawn.

What pleased him more than anything was that British headquarters had issued orders that the new planes were to be painted with the flaring insignia of the Red Eagle. The artist had done an excellent job; and as Ted cut above the sea, the two eagles on the fuselage seemed amazingly real.

Ted got above a fog bank and gunned out about twenty miles to the south, before kicking around and sweeping up toward the Irish coast.

Not a light could be seen. Nothing save that endless main of blackgreen water. But the Eagle skipper knew that somewhere beneath those waves lay the

sea devils of Satan—those sleek, sinister U-boats.

Coming back from the direction of the Irish coast, Blair was about to turn his prop toward the old cliffs at the base of which he had spent so much of his convalescence. A sudden flash of light arrested him, however. He shut his eyes tightly, then jerked them open, and trained them to south'ard—trained them in low above the glum ocean surface.

With the stick between his knees, he picked out a trawler, then another, off to starboard. They were exchanging signals. Nothing unusual this, for there were always mine sweepers and mine layers in action in these waters.

For a moment he debated with himself as to whether he should dive and exchange the signals of the night. He was about to do so, when out of the gloomy waters a head broke—a periscope head, and then a conning tower. Still he hesitated, for it was possible that this undersea craft was American or British.

Through his powerful glasses he caught the movement of a boat being lowered over the port beam of number 1 trawler. His heart began to thump madly. Had he stumbled on to something worth while? Or was this just a usual occurrence? It suddenly dawned on him that he had never heard of an exchange of visitors between trawlers and subs. All business was carried on through the medium of signals. But here was a boat drawing over to the squat beam of a submarine touching—

He gasped. Leaving the boat and climbing up the side of the sub was a girl—Adrianne X, making her get-a-way! There was no doubt of this in Blair's mind. The woman spy's work was done on British shores. She was going back to German headquarters for further orders.

For a long moment Ted wondered just

what line of action he should take. A host of thoughts swirled through his mind. But he decided on a plan of waiting—waiting and watching. His fingers reached out to the toggle trips close by. He was well equipped with bombs. This job tonight what ever form it should take, was his. The responsibility for the safeguarding of the harbor was his. Fitzhugh had given him a free hand, and an open sea.

AN HOUR crept slowly by, with Blair cruising idly back and forth. The suspense was deadly. His body lay in a cold clammy sweat, as he checked closely the movement of those bogus trawlers. Now they had veered off toward the open Irish sea, where they stood by.

It was close to midnight. Blair's whole frame seemed shriveled with cold. His teeth chattered and in vain he sought to flex his limbs and excite better circulation. It seemed that the whole earth and its rolling seas had lapsed into a somnoient coma. Blair felt his chin droop into a drowse. He shook himself and growled out an oath.

Suddenly, dead ahead, a savage beam of light struck the sky main. Another and another!

"Sky raid! By God!"

In a flash the warm blood commenced to pound again through the Red Eagle's veins. Raid! He could hear the anti-aircraft guns yammering now, from land and coastal stations. Savage orange-red bursts splashed the sky, like raw red sores breaking out on a dark body.

He shot a glance back at the trawlers. They were signaling again. In a quick flash of thought, Blair saw through the idea. The Boche sky command were co-operating with their naval service. An air raid was in progress over Plymouth—a ruse to draw attention inshore. The trawlers were cutting swiftly through the wa-

ter now, bound for the neck of the harbor.

It must be said that the British service was not to be blamed for leaving the harbor roads open tonight. It was part of their plan, in order that the Boche marauders, whatever form they took, might be trapped.

Blair felt his responsibility keenly though. Should he slip up on the job, the consequences would be terrible!

Partly screened by a thin film of the inevitable fog bank, which whipped like a host of wraiths about the inshore area, he felt secure up skyside. He wondered what the trawlers had in store. What form would their attack on the defenses at the harbor neck take!

It was when he saw them split out and diverge from the center of the channel that he found answer to the persistent mental query. They were putting on full power, and by the way their bows responded to the engines, he knew that these were no ordinary trawlers. He hadn't noticed before those long wedge-like bows, almost like the ramming bows of the destroyer.

Suddenly, from the stern of the starboard ship a light blinked. Ted swung round in the pit. He gasped. Three U-boats had broken water at his back. His throat became suddenly parched.

"I've got it," he croaked. "By God! I can see it now. Their plan is for the trawlers to ram the sub nets and clear away, so that those U's can run in and blow up the docks. This is no one man job! But here I come, you sons of Satan! Ya-ah!"

He jammed the throttle lever all the way in. His head and shoulders weaved back and forth, back and forth, and his feet fidgeted on the rudder bar. Suddenly his body grew rigid. Through slitted eyes he got the starboard trawler in his sights. He was right for the wind, and now he

switched the stick to his left hand and shot his right hand to the toggle trips.

Like a monster, screaming eagle he swooped down—down in his terrible dive of death.

"One!" he spat the count through his set teeth as he pulled.

Karrumph! Two horrible detonations blasted the ocean's quiet. . . . Blair snarled an oath. One of his bombs had missed clean. But out of the smoke below he saw the trawler stagger like a cur dog crawling along with a broken back.

A hit! He had scored a smart hit amidships. But with all the guts in the world the German crew were sticking at their stations. They were forcing the trawler on—on with its underwater grapnels, to the nets.

Blair kicked around and again gunned on down. Again he jerked his toggle trips, and again two screaming bombs cut sky. This time, the effect was horrible. The trawler staggered, shimmied, then hoisted her stern clear of the water. Slowly she ran her ramming nose down—down—

The Red Eagle licked his lips and kicked around. There was still a big job left for him. The ship off his port rim had gained an advantage, and was ripping water toward the nets.

At his back, a half mile out to sea, the U-boat commanders exchanged signals. *Lieber Gott!* Madame Adrienne X and her uncle, had failed them after all. It was reported to them that the man they feared, the *Americaner* Eagle was unfit for service. He had confided so to Adrienne.

Blair gasped as three charges of shrapnel thundered almost directly above him. Something hard and flat and heavy struck him between the shoulder blades. For a split second he was rocked forward, losing control. He straightened, took a long, deep breath.

"Piece of shell casing," he breathed. "Close enough, by George! Had that been a pellet, I'd have gone clean out. Ya-ah!"

He snarled bitterly, defiantly.

"Come on and get it, you hell-binders."

THE Red Eagle was beginning to throb with the glory of action—sheer, red-blooded action that he had missed for weeks. He felt like a sea eagle who has ruled in majesty above the black ocean water until some usurper had come in to oust him. The whole situation fired him with desire. That searing desire to make a swift clean-up of the enemy beneath him.

The trawler was gaining rapidly as, forced out by the withering shrapnel fire, Ted had had to veer off his course.

But now the Yank's fingers tensed on the throttle lever. He was back in position. He jammed the lever forward and again his right hand leaped to the toggle trips. Now his breath came in short, hard-won gasps. Would those sub archies find him! Had he a chance to turn the tide! Would that trawler beat him to the nets!

Stormed at by this mental flood of thought matter, he fought himself hard to hold strictly to his one definite line of action. He was running the gauntlet of hell, he knew; for the accuracy of that submarine gun fire was deadly. He could not zigzag or rock his bus. He was into the wind, roaring on down for the death stroke.

Suddenly a sheet of flame seemed to leap up at him from the deck of the trawler. A battery of Maxims had opened fire. Ted winced and groaned in a low tone as a slug slit the skin along the calf of the leg which had kept him down for several weeks. But he shook off the clutching arms of nausea. By God! This was no time to weaken. Death at his

stern, death for'ard, leaping, tearing up at him, he put his D. H. down into a steeper dive—the famous death dive of the Red Eagle.

With a snarl he jerked on the trips. Again he pulled.

At the for'ard peak of the trawler a young Boche officer was bellowing orders to the crew at the special grapnel equipment. The trawler was cutting water at nearly thirty knots, when the heavens and all their planets seemed to crash down into her vitals.

With volcanic violence, two bombs spewed their H. E. up in a terrific upheaval of wreckage, both human and inanimate. Ted Blair zoomed. Now he was free to dodge those archie bursts. He was free for another sinister purpose too. He set his lips in a grim smile as he zigzagged into the clearway, to suddenly turn and rip down above the stern of a sub.

"Crash Dive!"

The command was thundered below from the conning towers of the three subs. But the command came too late to save one ship. Blair was in like a mad plummeting eagle. Two remaining bombs bugled through the night sky. One sheered off, a glancing blow over the rounded starboard beam of the sub. But with deafening violence, the other crashed into the conning tower.

A second sub had cut water out to sea, rather than dive. Evidently her commander sensed that the sea eagle above them was out of bombs. Now an archie cracked, and Ted felt a part of his fabric tear out. He snarled an oath, and looped. Then like a flame-tipped arrow he struck.

Twin Vickers responded to his touch on trigger trips. He was sweeping the deck. A gun crew scattered, leaping to the conning tower, where a tall form lay draped across the rim. Like rats swarming to cover, the crew shot below. The

hatch of the tower was closed, and the *untersee* craft crash dived.

The Red Eagle turned. The sub he had bombed lay rolling on her port beam, a sluggish sea monster writhing in the death agony.

"Well, I reckon I can't tow you mugs in," Blair grinned. "So long, Jerries. Too bad you had to stick your noses into hell fire like you did—"

He broke off short. He had forgotten, during his terrific period of action, the air raid over Plymouth. Now he caught the flash of engine exhausts. A flight of planes was bearing down on him. With a snarl he kicked around and shot his D. H. up in a chandelle.

Once in altitude, he ruddered around and set himself above the controls like some jungle beast at bay, his lips bared, his heart pumping hot fighting blood through his bulging veins.

"Come on in an' get me, blast you," he bellowed.

His fingers slipped up to the trigger trips. He was ready—ready for instant action. But his hand came down with a sudden jerk. He blinked as he spotted a flash lamp in action.

"R. E. . . . R. E. . . . R. E. . . ." It was his own code call coming over. His own letter call, R. E.

"Martin . . . calling . . . sir . . . Martin. . . ."

A low, half-hysterical note broke from Blair's throat. Here was his Brood. By God! They had come in from the fight over Plymouth. Obviously they had received word to join their skipper out to sea.

Bleeding, stiff and sore, the Red Eagle shook himself and let out a whoop of sheer delight. He flashed back an acknowledgment of Sam Martin's signal and roared forward to loop his trim craft ahead of the Brood flight.

Ted Blair was happier than he had

been for many weeks. Lord! To be back at the head of the old gang again was worth a King's ransom. And then—the big action had only just commenced.

Though their effort to smash up the harbor in the Plymouth roads was shot, it was a safe bet that the Germans would not relax in their efforts to cut down the convoy of American troops now nearing Britain. Ted Blair was going to take another hand in the game.

THE cold gray Atlantic dawn pressed sulkily through the fog banks. The seas had settled now to a steady swell, and venturesome doughboys, perhaps a little pinched and drawn in features, but otherwise as fit as band steel, were trotting up the companionways.

In a few hours they would reach the English coast. Adventure! Throughout the past two days, the convoy had loitered, rolling and tossing in the bosom of the broad Atlantic. It had been necessary to lose a day and a night—veering off the plotted course—for Naval authorities had been severe with their warnings.

To these young doughs, many of whom had not been out of their local counties until transported to training camps, travel was new. What they saw surpassed the thrills obtained in a study of history and geography at school or college. The Atlantic, jokingly referred to as "The Pond," was found to be a monstrous sea, a mountainous desert of seemingly uncontrollable water.

Escort cruisers and the transports themselves seemed to assume no greater proportions than a mere canoe, as they heaved and pitched in the thunderous mountains of water. And this went on for days and nights, with that ever ominous threat lurking—U-Boats!

"Was I an Admiral, ah'd get me a job as a Pullman porter right plenty soon," said a tall colored dough, as he

clung to the rail, watching the ships in the lead bob and rise.

"An' was ah uh Pullman po'tah, ah'd stay plenty tight right to them sleepah cahs, big boy," returned an equally dark companion. "Hot dawg! Is they land any mo' someplace, or is they ain't? Mebbe this heah Ingran' we's haided fo's done washed away. Boy! if'n ah once get these heah dawgs on dry lan' agin, they plants theyselves firm, an' stays put. Wassat?"

A sudden mad splash of light had cut in on the colored men's discussion. A reverberating roar thundered into the silence of the Atlantic dawn. A lookout bellowed from the crow's nest. From his bridge the captain gave a curt command into the engine room tubing.

At once the transport slewed round on her port beam, and engines began to throb. Top sergeants rapped orders to the lounging doughs. Men were ordered to cover. Aft, at the stern rail, a crew of navy gobs stood by at a quick-firer gun, whose tarp had been pulled clear. She was cleared for action and loaded. Her breech block clanged shut over a shell.

Out to sea, through the almost impenetrable fog, a cruiser was unloading her big guns in a rolling drum fire of action. From the gloom, out of the inky black ambush of the Atlantic's lower regions, a flotilla of German super U-boats had come.

One transport had been hit twice immediately abaft the engine room. Fortunately she carried mostly big guns, and very few men. Now she wallowed in the trough. Her few passengers were being lowered overside, en route to another ship.

The ships' crews darted here and there, each move marked with precision, though. Grim faces marked their concern, but there was an ever-ready quip or jest for the anxious soldiers who stood by at life-

boat stations. The Atlantic was now a roaring hell. Another ship was hit. Transports were under full steam, cutting water on zigzag tacks, some escorted by fast destroyers who ripped and tore through the parting fogs like water rats—sleek, tight little sea devils, who spotted everything and investigated with a volley of rapid fire.

Two hours out of Plymouth! It was a tough break for the convoy to be caught like this.

The veteran seamen felt the situation keenly. Up to now, no American lives had been lost in transport across the Atlantic. By God! This had become something to record in history. But it seemed that now Fate had shifted its alliance to the Germans.

Two long white wakes cut the water. A transport skipper thundered into the tube. Engines throbbed almost at bursting point and the liner heeled hard-a-starboard, almost like a tacking yacht.

H-h-h-s-s-s-s! A sizzling torpedo hissed by. A miss! A husky cheer broke from the throats of the doughboys on boat station duty. By the seventeen gods of war! That grizzled old skipper on the bridge was a real he-man.

But, even with the old skipper's efficiency, the U-boat menace was becoming increasingly alarming. Literally, the convoy was on the spot. In spite of the thunder of defending guns and the tear and rip of destroyers in action, those sleek undersea craft were closing in for the climatic stroke. Death stared forty thousand doughs in the face. Death—and a burial beneath the clammy vitals of the turbulent Atlantic.

A FEW miles out from the neck of Plymouth Harbor, the Red Eagle led his gutty Brood swiftly over the rolling water.

Suddenly a periscope struck up. Like

a covey of murderous eagles, the Brood dived.

Blair spat a snarl through his teeth as he forced his D. H. screaming into the wind. He jerked his number 1 toggle trip and a horrible gout of water erupted skyward at the detonation of the bomb.

As he circled above the bubbling waters, a grim smile toyed with Ted's set face. There was a greasy smear of oil on that water. At once he had seen through the U-boat's ruse. The craft was an utter sacrifice ship, sent to draw the Brood away from the harbor mouth, away from the Atlantic roads. And to a certain degree it had accomplished its purpose.

Now the Eagle skipper kicked around hard. His prop was to the open sea. He shot his glasses to his eyes and swept the gloom ahead. A low gasp escaped him. By God! There were ships in action out in the roads. The convoy was being hotly attacked!

Blair wirelessly his news to all immediate naval stations and to headquarters Plymouth Harbor. He next signaled to Lieutenant Monty Rider, of the Brood, to stand by the harbor mouth. He knew that, strictly speaking, he was going outside the boundary of his orders, but—hell! There were forty thousand of his buddies on the spot.

He jammed home his throttle lever and together with three of his hell-busting brood, he ripped sky for the scene of action.

A THREE-POUNDER gun blazed madly from the deck of an American transport. Never in all history had such superb skill in navigation been released. Blacks crews, in the engine rooms, sweated in the stifling vitals of their respective ships. Chiefs and assistant engineers tore in and helped feed the hungry fireboxes themselves.

On the ship which bore the Alabamas Franceward, the same two colored men

held whispered conversation as they stood by their boat station. To the amusement of a gutty young British naval lieutenant, they milled over their chances of escape.

"Was we to git hitted, brothah," said one, "ah'd hol' mah nose an' take it clean down to dat Davey Jones place. Ah ain't achin' none to git aboa'd none uh them U-boats. Man, they jus' natc'ly boil yuh in oil."

"An' was yuh to close dat big mouf, mebbe I could git mah Adam's apple afloat agin," growled the other. "Lookit—Dat white streak—She's bearin' down this-a-way!"

In the next second, a horrible jar rocked the transport over on her port beam. The torpedo had struck amidships. Almost at once, a destroyer appeared, seeming to leap clean through the waves. A depth charge dropped over her stern, and then—a mountain of erupting water gouted skyward.

No panic was evident. Sailors began to dart here and there, passings words of encouragement to the eagerly questioning doughs. This ship rolled on—on—staggering along as best she could.

So far she was holding up her head. Her skipper was rapping orders to the chief engineer below. His face was grave and drawn, but he stood to, his first officer at his side, determined to carry on.

Suddenly a shout from the lookout brought the skipper round with a jerk. A sub had broken water astern. Her swivel gun for'ard was being drawn to bear on the crippled transport. At once the old sea dog on the bridge thundered a command to the gun crew astern.

The quick-firer leaped to action.

Bra-n-ng! Ka-arararamm! Shells began to scream out to sea.

Now every destroyer was hotly engaged. The crippled transport was seemingly doomed to defend herself; and this she did most valiantly, her single gun rip-

ping shell after shell at the skirmishing sub off her stern.

The sub was preparing to crash dive. On top, she was less of a menace, for the transports gunners could see her and harass her. In fact, one of their well-placed shots had torn away her forward gun mounting. Below, she was a terrible threat, and her squat shape was rapidly disappearing.

A sudden shrill yell sounded from a boat deck on the starboard side, aft. One of the colored doughs was pointing sky-side.

"L-lookit, 'Manuel," he called to his buddy. "Is ah seein' angels, or is ah ain't, or is ah gone crazy? Lookit!"

OUT of the drab sky, like a covey of hell-bent plummets, the Red Eagle and his gallant Brood dived. Bugling defiantly, Ted Blair's ship roared down.

"Ugh!" Blair grunted as he jerked his number one toggle.

He zoomed as the bomb struck water, then dived again, and cut loose another sky egg.

Now the Brood members cut out at a signal from their chief. Each pilot became a scout, ripping sky in low, searching out the grim undersea members of death's reapers. On every hand, those sleek pig boats lurked, waiting for an opportunity to strike.

Ted Blair was quick to note this policy of waiting on the part of the sub commanders. It savored of the ominous. He was glad that he had signaled to naval stations for aid. For he was certain that a greater threat yet menaced the convoy.

His premonition was suddenly realized when, from out of the south east, a dull blurr struck the clearing sky. Planes! Fast Boche pursuit bombers rigged with the latest in Mercedes engines.

In a flash, the Red Eagle swooped

down over the mastheads of the cruiser and began to flash his warning to the convoy commander.

"Would suggest drawing in of convoy to close formation," he signaled. "It is our only chance to help you from sky. Have destroyers circle entire transport formation. We will engage Fokkers sky-side. Have signaled aid from naval stations."

At once, from the signal station of the cruiser, messages began to reach the transport skippers. The convoy was drawing in to close formation. Actually the Red Eagle was in complete command now—herding his charges in to the smallest compass possible.

Below, the half dozen destroyers picked up their cues and like sea monsters demented, began a systematic, swift patrol of the area round the transport ships.

"H'mmm. . . ." Blair heaved a deep sigh of relief as he watched the efficient way in which the several big ships were drawn in.

Now he waved to his buddies. They cut out, spreading in a fanlike spray. At a signal they dived, converging on a sub which sought to steal in through the destroyer barricade.

Kar-r-rumph! The detonation of four bombs simultaneously was enough to rock the heavy ships on their keels. Doughboys at boat stations leaned well overside, eager to catch the effect of this mad, concerted burst. Suddenly a loud cheer split the sky. The Red Eagle Brood had made another hit.

Now Blair pulled his D. H. ships about. The Fokkers were screaming in for a swift, decisive attack, outnumbering Blair's ships by three.

But the Red Eagle was never more determined. He gunned up hard at the low ceiling his head weaving from side to side, his every nerve fibre tensed. He

knew he must strike with swift precision. Should one of those ships cut through, a transport was doomed.

WHEN the leader of the Jerry sky flotilla saw the American convoy draw in to close formation, he chuckled deeply. This was the factor he had hoped for—the chance to strike one concerted, thunderous blow at the bulk of the ships. *Gott!* It was a chance in a million!

As he signaled to his flight members to hug close formation, the leader hunched himself above the control stick. It was at this point that a hurricane of flaming Vickers snarled down on the Jerry Staffel from out of the fastness of those drear Atlantic dawn clouds.

Pr-r-r-rpp-p-p! Ted Blair's guns were burring in a long drawn burst. A Fokker pilot gasped. He clutched madly at his shoulder, releasing his hold on the stick. His ship was in a mad screaming dive!

"Ya-ah!"

Ted Blair hissed his yell. He had again tasted battle. But in a flash he became the set, serious sky demon again. The Boche leader had broken out his flight. They numbered six now, to Blair's four.

As Blair feared, the Boche formation split wide open. The signal had been received for single, individual bombing attack.

Blair kicked his sea bus around and zoomed for the belly of a diving ship. His Vickers slashed sky. In turn, a brace of Spandaus cut loose at him. The Jerry leader suddenly veered off in a slicing skid which almost cost Blair a wing-tip. Two Spandau slugs had ripped through the Yank skipper's left forearm. Blood was again flowing free in the pit.

But until his last drop oozed out, Blair was going to put up the scrap of his life. His three buddies were diving hell-bent

for the kill now. Blair himself jammed home his throttle. If he could only take this leader, this cool, efficient killer, there was a chance that the back of the fight might be broken.

Ted Blair was swiftly losing blood. His enemy was fast approaching the crippled transport, logging sluggishly along in the rear of the convoy, lying to port with a heavy list. This ship was the Boche's first target. By the gods! It seemed as if he had gotten on for the shot too. Blair snarled as he saw his quarry prepare to dive and unload.

Like something unleashed from the face of a flaming sun planet, Blair, the Red Eagle, streaked down in his amazing dive. When but a hundred meters separated him from the Boche ship, he sheared off into a skid. He came out in a tight flat turn, and his Vickers thundered.

The Boche pulled his toggles, but his load slopped into the empty maw of the sea. He had missed. Now his left shoulder drooped. He had been hit three times through the back of the shoulder blade. A snarl of rage escaped him. He had failed. But if he must go to his death—*lieber Gott!* He would go fighting.

He looped his Fokker and the two sky leaders met prop to prop. They exchanged a smart burst of fire. Blair's scalp was creased. Now the test had come! Which was the master of control—both control of nerve and control of stick and rudder?

The fact that no other pilot in the war could dive a ship as the Red Eagle could, saved Blair. He tripped his Vickers almost at the instant of impact then his stick shot forward.

Almost vertically on his prop hub he screamed down. Then like a flash he was back into the zoom—into the loop. And his Vickers chattered their death dirge.

The Boche leader looked back, his face

torn and bloody. He shook his one good fist in the teeth of the Red Eagle, then slumped forward over the stick—out.

Blair kicked sharply around and throttled in. But there was blinding red mist before his vision. His whole frame trembled. He was cold, clammy, and apparently lifeless.

THE sudden thunder of an anti-aircraft shell brought him out of the near swoon. A black shrapnel broke off his starboard spread. Now, the Boche subs were throwing themselves into the fight. They realized that their one hope—the Fokkers—had failed. And in a frantic effort to succeed, they broke water and commenced to harass the Red Eagle Brood.

Ted Blair groaned inwardly. He hadn't hoped to stem this whole tide of marauders alone. He had hoped for Navy support from Britain's shores. Things looked black for the convoy.

But Ted had a bomb left aboard. His boys were holding the other Fokkers tightly out to sea, battling with all their grim determination.

Ted Blair screamed down over the back of a topside sub. His Vickers blasted, as he swept her deck. She attempted to crash dive. Ted looped and smacked home his last bomb. Then a black void seemed to swoop down and enfold him.

He was unconscious of the wild hurricane of cheering which broke from the transports; nor could he hear the thunder of heavy guns out of the east. He had slammed in in a hard pancake—his floats smashing to atoms as they struck water.

Eager hands were lifting him from his water-logged pit. But Blair never felt them.

Under full steam, a fast flotilla of an American sea squadron was rushing up,

firing as they came—destroyers, and a cruiser of the latest type. The convoy ships blared greeting from their sirens.

Perhaps it was these resonant wails which waked the gutty Red Eagle from his semi-coma. He stared vacantly for a moment. A group of grinning faces hovered over him—two of which were black.

"Was ah not such a dang fool, brothah, ah'd have gotten me intuh th' airplane service. Dems guts what this heah white skipper's got."

"Yeah," grunted the dark friend. "An' was yuh all to have the guts o' this head captain, them river boats yuh all calls dawgs 'd never play out."

A thin smile played with the corners of the Red Eagle's mouth. It was good to again hear the soft drawl of those Southerners. And to see all those thousands of white doughboys crowding the rails.

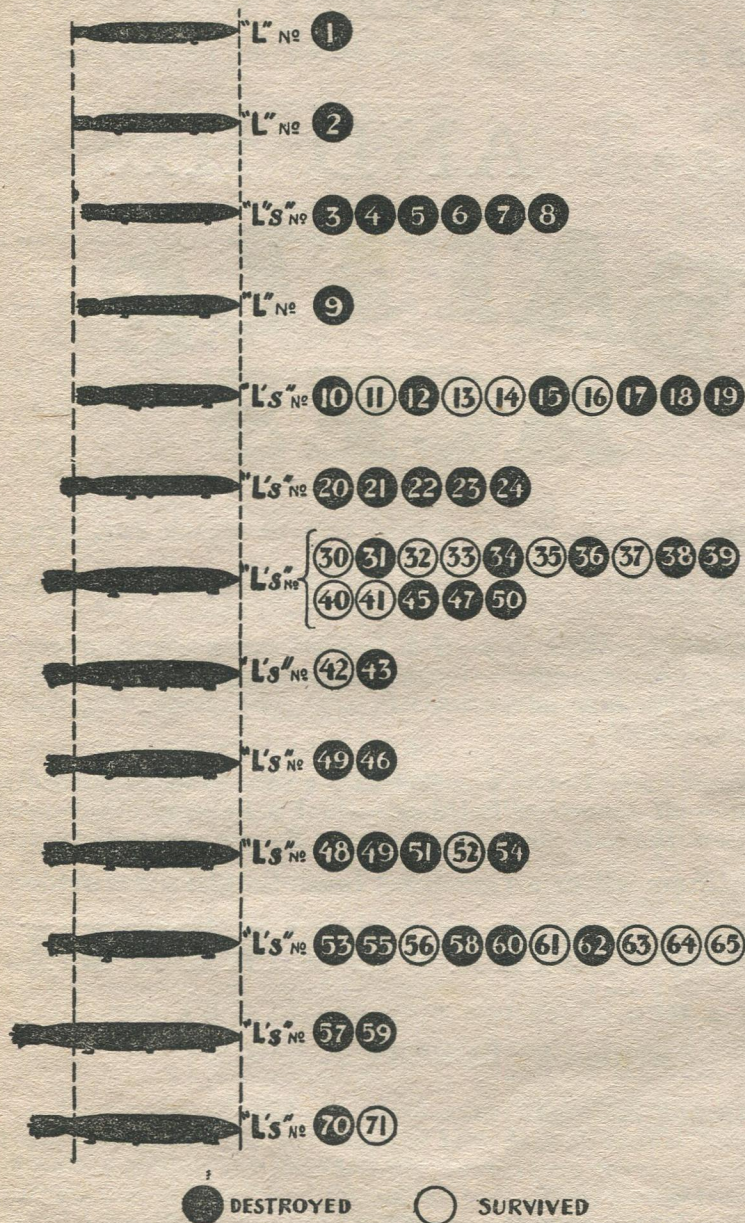
"Reckon I'm all the way back home," he breathed. "Welcome to the war, gang. Ya-a-ah! Go take 'em. . . Give 'em hell, boys. We'll be right above you, topside, ready to lend a hand any time! . . . Luck, doughs! You—"

With a grin, the Red Eagle slipped back. The burly skipper of the transport stooped and lifted the heavy body into his arms.

"Way for a real man, boys," he jerked. "And you'll find him skyside later, just as he said. He's the Yank Red Eagle—the best that ever climbed aboard a sky ship. Without his help we'd have been feeding the shrimps."

The convoy moved on—on, and steamed into Plymouth harbor, where a regimental band played a welcome that wrung a thunderous burst of cheering from the doughs. The tune was: "Under the Double Eagle!"

DID YOU KNOW-



ZEPPELINS BUILT FROM 1912 TO 1918 BY GERMANY AND THEIR COMPARATIVE SIZE

that Germany built sixty-two Zeppelins from 1912 to 1918? They were numbered with the letter "L" prefixed; thus "L" became synonymous with Zeppelin and stands for Luftschiffe, meaning light-ship? that everyone has heard of the damage done by Zeppelins, but that few know what happened to the "L's"?

that according to the records the L1 and L2 were destroyed by accident before the war; the L's 5, 15, 19 and 43 were destroyed by Allied gunfire in the North Sea; L's 21, 22, 31, 34, 48, 53 and 70 over England; L's 39 and 44 over France and 23 at Jutland?

that the L's 6, 9, 17, 18, 24, 46, 47, 51 and 58 were accidentally destroyed by fire; L's 10 and 59 were destroyed by lightning; L's 3, 4, 7, 8, 12, 20, 36, 38, 45, 49, 55 and 62 were forced down and destroyed in storms, fog, etc.; L's 54 and 60 were destroyed in raids by British planes; L57 was wrecked entering her hangar and no one knows what happened to the L50, which disappeared during a raid and was never seen or heard of again?

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BATTLE BIRDS CLUB



"HIGH SKIES!" you swaggering bunch of devil-may-care young sky devils come on in, and park your chutes and chassis for our regular club get together!

Bless my rudder bar if the old gang isn't growing by leaps and bounds. Seems as if we'll have to hold the next meeting on the tarmac or else rip out a few of these walls and let you birds park on the floor.

First of all, you buzzards can lend a hand and a mighty good one, to a club member of yours. There's a member missing and his pal wants you men to look for him. The missing chap is Leonard Groszewski, age 18 years, about 5 feet 4 inches tall and weighing 115 lbs; he has blue eyes and blond hair. He naturally is crazy about aviation and would likely be parking about an airport. His home is in Nanticoke, Pa. where his mother is reported very ill. This chap left home about June 17th and unless has been heard from since I received the letter from his pal, Joe Garrick, telling of his disappearance, he is still among the missing. Any of you men who think you have seen or know where this member is please communicate at once with Joseph Garrick Jr., 383 East Grove St., Nanticoke, Pa. When last seen Leonard was wearing a brown sweater, blue serge pants, black shoes and a light gray cap. Watch for fellows wearing this combination and answering to the above description.

(To Leonard, if you happen to be reading this! Nothing could be more cruel than to leave home and fail to let your mother and friends know where you are

or how you are! If you have any respect for those at home get in touch with them at once no matter where you are living or in what circumstances. Nothing can hurt your mother more than the thought that possibly you have lost the respect that a MAN has for the one to whom he means most—his Mother!)

Seems to me that quite a few of you buzzards are wearing the official Battle Birds Pin! Mighty glad to see so many have proven they're on their toes when it comes to knowing their planes and air! Let's see, last month we asked you to name the main parts of a plane and their uses. That should have been easy. Just to check up, here they are:

First; the fuselage, to which all other parts of the plane are attached and in which the pilot sits. 2nd: the wings, or wing, attached to the fuselage, that in passing through the air hold the plane up. 3rd: the motor or motors that turn the propellers. 4th: the propellers—which give the plane forward speed when not gliding and enable the wings to supply lift. 5th: the rudder and fin assembly, that direct the plane right and left. 6th: the elevator and stabilizer assembly that direct the plane up and down. 7th: the ailerons that, with the rudder, bank the plane for turning, and alone, roll the plane from side to side. 8th: the landing gear that enable the plane to leave and alight upon either water or the ground. 9th: the controls, that enable the pilot to move the rudder, elevators, and ailerons. 10th: the instruments, that enable the pilot to intelligently use the controls.

There you are, men! The ten main

parts of a plane and their uses in simple language. Some of you sent in letters listing every intricate part of an airplane from the smallest cotter pin to the biggest part. That was great, but not necessary to obtain the pin.

All those who really want the official sterling silver pin must prove their right to wear it by answering one of the questions that appear in this club department every month. Send in twenty-five cents to cover the cost of manufacturing and mailing, along with your answer to the question. And if the answer is satisfactory, I will at once shoot you the pin.

If there should be a slight delay, don't worry. It's just that we haven't been able to get to your letter quite as soon as both you and I would like to.

Here's the question for this month. Those of you who would like to be able to wear the official Battle Birds pin can become eligible by answering it.

WHAT WOULD BE THE FIRST THING TO DO, AND WHY, IF YOUR MOTOR QUIT JUST AFTER TAKING OFF?

Answer this in as brief form as you can and send it in with your twenty-five cents. Address the letter to "The Skipper" Battle Birds Magazine, 205 East 42nd St., New York City and on the outside of the envelope write "Question answer."

Here's another list of members to write to when you reach your home dromes.

"HIGH SKIES!" to you men and happy landings!

"The Skipper"

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BATTLE BIRDS, 205 E. 42nd St., N. Y. C.

October

Name (Print).....

Address.....

State (or country)..... Age.....

Hobbies.....

- (A) I have a pilot's license..... ☐
 (B) I know how to fly a ship..... ☐
 (C) I have been up in a plane..... ☐
 (D) I have never been up in a plane..... ☐
 (E) I am interested in building model planes..... ☐
- (Check by cross your class)

I would particularly like to read about this phase of aviation in the club pages.....

Respectfully submitted.....

Signature.

Date.....

(This coupon or a facsimile may be used)

DIPPY SHIPS

Contest Number II
Conducted by the Contest Editor

WELL, bless my tailskid, if it isn't the old gang of trophy chasers right back on the carpet raring to smack one of my crazy yarns in the middle with a burst of tracer.

Well, let's get down to business for a change. Here's another of these marvelous yarns and pictures to illustrate it. They say there are a few mistakes in the yarn and the picture, but I couldn't find any so I've appealed to you. Read the story on the next page and take several good looks at the illustration. Then make out the longest list you can, explaining each mistake. Address the list to

Contest Pilot,

Battle Birds Magazine,
205 East 42nd Street,
New York City.

Be sure to put a number 10 on the envelope.

First prize will be awarded to the chap who sends in the longest authentic list.

And now, gang, here's a man's size chunk of luck for the next first-prize winners! Instead of the trophy that we have been handing out we've located something that any airman would give a right eye and part of a left arm for! We've stumbled on a few copies of Janes' **ALL THE WORLD'S AIRCRAFT** for 1919! Did you ever see one? No! And no wonder for this book is now out of print and practically impossible to obtain even in England where it was published. It contains over 500 pages of actual photographs and all statistics of every German and Allied aircraft in existence at the close of the war! Of course these books are now nearly 15 years old but they are in practically perfect condition. Their age and the wonderful photographs and statistics which they contain make them invaluable to all airmen. We could only locate a few, but these will be given out as a very special first prize to the winners of the next few contests. Some guys pay \$35 dollars

for these books—all you have to do is win the contest!

Here's the chap who grabbed off last month's trophy:

Freddie F. Fluegel—Route No. 1, Box 59, Lohman, Missouri.

Stand up, and let's get a good look at a trophy winner in the flesh.

To the next six men who send in the next best lists we'll shoot off what we call SURprises. We have searched the market for something really new, and believe we have the most ace-high second prizes ever offered in a similar contest! Here're the six buzzards that grabbed them off last month:

Maynard Briggs—204 Baker Ave., Lodi, Ohio.

Clarence Moffat—248 South Western Ave., Los Angeles, California.

Richard O. Dingley—4140 Indiana Ave., Fort Wayne, Indiana.

William Smeekens—212 E. Milwaukee St., Detroit, Michigan.

Elwin Timbers—1528½ Lee St., Charleston, West Virginia.

James Martin—218 Hecla St., Laurium, Michigan.

As if seven prizes weren't enough, we give three more to the three next men to send in the best lists of mistakes. To this trio we'll shoot subscriptions to old *Battle Birds* itself. Here're the chaps:

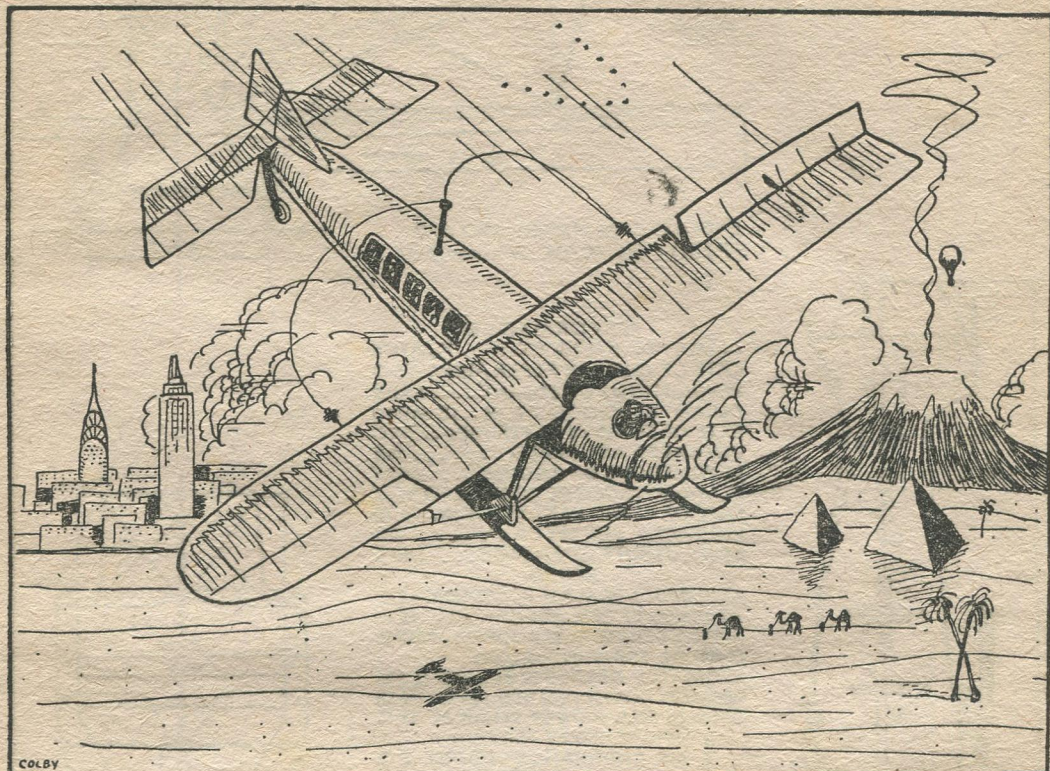
Frank Bidwell, Jr.—1035 Fulton St., Palo Alto, California.

A. P. Gall—651 George St., Lilly, Pennsylvania.

Martin Newman—1238 Elder Ave., Bronx, New York.

Let's have *your* answer to this month's contest and we'll get the judges right to work on 'em. The longest and best lists win! This contest closes when the November issue of *Battle Birds* appears on the stands so let's get going pronto on this list.

Can You Find All the Mistakes in This Picture?



To be frank, J. Wellington Blah was in one hell of a mess! Any one who tries to cross the Atlantic in a motorless glider deserves to be, but nevertheless we've got to get him out of it or the yarn will quit right here.

Far out over the ocean just north of Bermuda our hero—oh, yeah?—desperately tried to gain altitude. But lower and lower his little motorless plane sank inch by inch, foot by foot, toward the hungry waves below. He tried everything to lighten the load, from dropping hints to dropping his English accent; but even this failed.

Back in the rear seat of his single place trimotored motorless soaring dirigible, he could see his dear old mother wrapped up in a blanket of fog dreaming of her only son who was far out over the Pacific in his little ship roaring along thru the clear sunny fog bound for Iceland. With a tear in his eye, K. Hemington Blugh turned once more to his controls.

Still he sank, lower and lower, toward the water. He consulted his altimeter and found to his horror that he was but three and nine-sixteenth inches above the water.

Suddenly an idea struck him full in the face. But fortunately his goggles were shatterproof and so no damage was done. Grasping the idea, he rushed back along the narrow catwalk to the store room in the rear of the left wing where

spare motor parts were kept.

After rummaging for sometime he produced a long box and staggered with it back to the nose of the tiny glider.

He hastily unfastened the cover and drew forth an outboard motor complete with mainsail and mailbox. Inverting the motor and reversing it he clamped it to the nose of the little ship with several pieces of rope and old bits of wire that his assistant handed him from time to time.

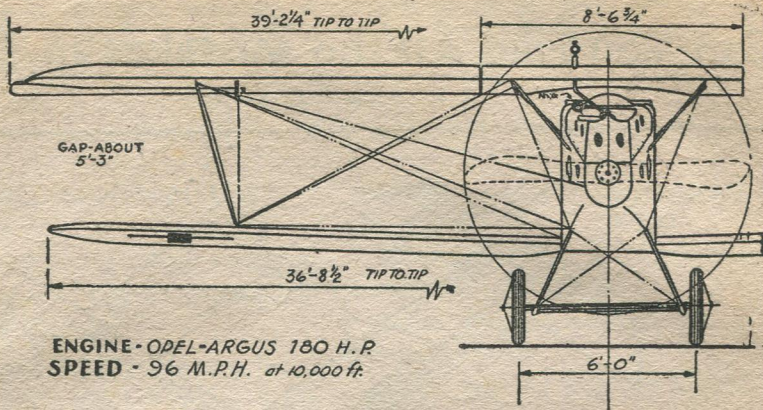
After securely fastening the outboard motor in the correct position he stopped his engine, drew off several quarts of gasoline and filled the little tank of the outboard motor.

The little propeller bit into the air and once more the glider began to rise, climbing in huge circles toward the sun which poured down upon him through the dense fog below.

With a sigh of relief, Captain J. Blahington Well settled back in his seat and once more took over the controls. "That was a close shave," he remarked to no one in particular. Imagine his surprise when a voice from the rear cockpit answered, "It certainly was. You had me worried for a while!"

General Sniffs whirled about and stared back into the dark cabin of the ship. It was his Father in the rear cockpit. He had forgotten all about it being Father's day—and he without a carnation!

MODEL No 11

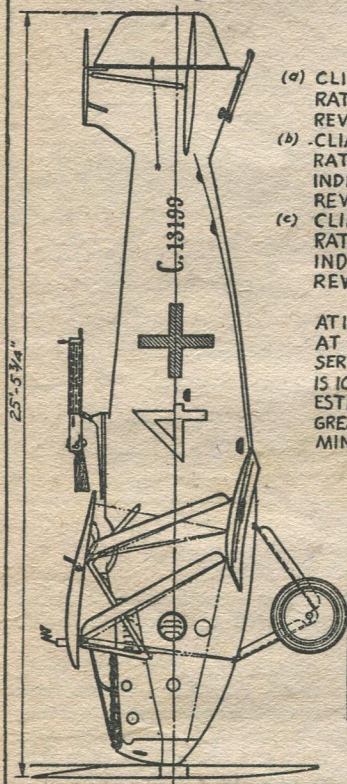
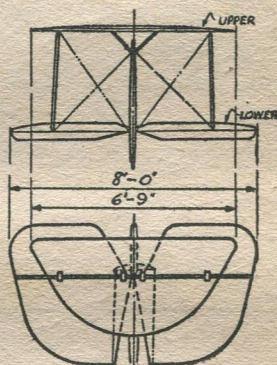


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REVOLUTIONS OF ENGINE ... 1,445

SPEED

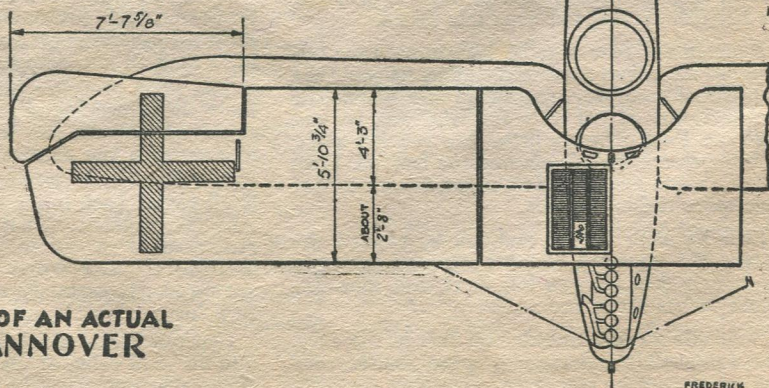
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DETAIL PLANS OF AN ACTUAL
GERMAN HANNOVER

1918

FREDERICK
BLAKESLEE



Conducted by
EUGENE A. CLANCY

ATENTION, smelts! Tonight's meeting of this lousy kiwi outfit is so important that I ran all the way up here from Mike's Place, and consequently you will understand that if I sway a little on this platform it is due entirely to mental dizziness and ambilegular strain.

Also, I've been in a tight conference all day with Colonel Houseboat, that distinguished international diplomat who keeps this outfit in touch with the dirty plans of certain foreign governments that are itching to catch Uncle Sam off guard and get him into trouble. Only last night Colonel Houseboat received a phone call from Washington saying that the war department, which is keenly interested in this outfit, expects the BATTLE BIRDS and DARE-DEVIL ACES squadrons to be ready to jump into fighting crates at a moment's notice.

As you know, I'm recommending my own famous fighting plane so that I can lead this outfit to victory with the same dash and phosphorescent altitude I displayed in the Turkish campaign. Which reminds me that running up here has disturbed one of the dozen wounds I received while knocking down Turkish planes, and it causes a peculiar swelling of the tonsils, so if anybody has a small flask of tonsil

reducer— Thanks, lieutenant, I shall mention your name to Colonel Houseboat, and to my other close and influential friends who were in our tight conference today, Abdul Benny Smid, the former ex-Sultan of Morocco, Clarence Hip Lee, the well-known Chinese diplomat, and Isaac O'Connor, the great Swedish ace who navigates the colonel's famous secret plane.

But I was going to speak of my own fighting plane, and for the benefit of the pink-livered new mugs I see flapping their monkey ears in the back of the hall, I shall repeat that this hell-busting mag has its own prize contest, whereby we are offering every month five prizes of one dollar each for the five best and funniest sketches of what you think this plane of mine looks like. As some fifty million half-pints know by this time, I have to keep this plane in a secret hangar down in Spanish Honduras to prevent foreign governments stealing the design, which is entirely original with me.

The hangar is on a banana oil plantation which I own. Certain enemies of mine claim that I have no such plane, or that if I have, it is some flying garbage scow with toy balloons and paddle wheels. It is to refute these dirty enemies right in the snuzzle that I'm having you draw pictures of the plane.

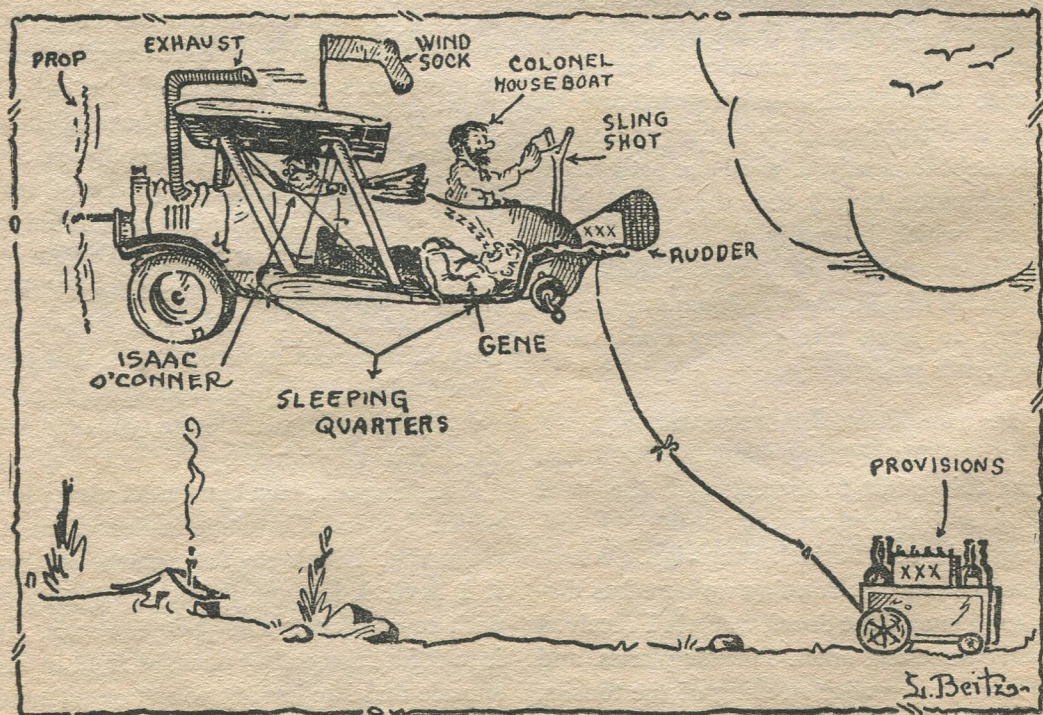
As a matter of fact, I've just returned from a trip to Spanish Honduras in Colonel Houseboat's secret plane. We all went down to inspect the reconditioning which is being done. As usual, we had a little trouble with Abdul Benny Smid, who tried to insert his famous thin-bladed knife between the ribs of a Spiggoty bartender who served him a glass of banana oil instead of a hot tamale giggler. The Honduras government threatened to cable Washington, but Colonel Houseboat shrewdly satisfied the bartender by pinning on his coat the Order of the Green Snake, one of the colonel's secret and powerful international organizations, and also writing his personal check for ten thousand pesos drawn on a Chinese bank in Allentown, Pa. Clarence Hip Lee indorsed this check with official Chinese red ink—

But I see that you Mongolian smelts will die of pop-eyed blood-pressure if I don't announce this month's winners in our cock-eyed prize contest. Here are the names of the winning hyenas:

Lester U. Beitz, 93 Strathmore Ave., Buffalo, N. Y.; David Ash, 8022 St. Lawrence Ave., Chicago, Ill.; Howard Tustin, 1919 E. 30th Street, Baltimore, Md.; William Anthes, 605 Vermont Ave., Daytona Beach, Fla.; Irving Wait, Jr., 4252 Sanbourn Ave., Lynwood, Calif.

I can't say Lester's sketch is quite accurate, because as everybody knows, I seldom fly in a horizontal position. In the Turkish campaign, when the very sight of me, all blazing and terrific in this plane, made General Romboid Mustapha Hadj tear off his beard and jump into the Bosphorus, I frequently sat utterly perpendicular for sixteen hours.

Those of you who read Turkish will find glowing accounts of my exploits in back numbers of the Turkish Daily Harem. The fresh little blond jane who sorts your sketches can give you the address of Joe Bismouth, a Turkish rug merchant, who has these back numbers for sale. Colonel Houseboat is just completing a book devoted to my Turkish flying, and he will send you a copy free on receipt of two dollars and ten coupons. But just



Lester Beitz's smeltonian idea

use your imagination—and be sure to put your name and address on the back of your sketch. You don't have to be an artist—just do the best you can.

As I have told you, I'm getting so many hundreds of these sketches that it is getting mighty hard to pick the five winners, most of your sketches being good enough to win. So if you didn't win this month, try again! The gang is getting more fun out of this Mongolian contest than out of a lot of solemn garbage we might give you. Remember that we are very particular about who joins this Bull-Flight Club, and the Hot Air Club of your dizzy companion mag, DARE-DEVIL ACES. We don't want any pink-livered banana splits reading these mags—

Which reminds me that the work now being done on my plane is costing me so much money that I need five hundred extra coupons at once. You half-pints must help me get them. I don't advocate rough stuff, of course, but a good way is to round up a likely looking bunch of mugs, place them against a wall, and threaten to shoot them before and after sunrise if they don't sign a coupon and send it in to me.

But I'm feeling slightly dizzy again in the neighborhood of the left tonsil, so I guess I'll let some of you half-pints yodel. Here is what that scorpion Beitz says:

93 Strathmore Ave.,
Buffalo, New York.

Dear Case of Halitosis—Here's your fetid-smelling coupon and a picture of your lousy-laden airplane. Send me a buck, you tongue-tied deaf mute, or I'll invade your frozen mug with my fists. Send me a picture of a Spad if you can't succeed in stealing me a buck. Enroll me as a member in your club or I'll recommend your mag to your best pal. Make it snappy too, you dopey-looking smelt and give my regards to the blond jane.

Lester U. Beitz.

Listen here, Lester, I've sent you a buck—but Colonel Houseboat's secret police

will visit you unexpectedly and Buffalo will give a sigh of relief, for you will be completely and absolutely dead! And says the Ashcan:

8022 St. Lawrence Ave.,
Chicago, Ill.

Dear #\$\$*×\$+\$—Here is your dirty moth-bitten coupon and also my idea of your famous plane. You better send me a buck, you lousy, cross-eyed, bow-legged, sawed-off, pigeon-toed, knock-kneed pole-cat, or I'll bribe Abdul Benny Smid to stab you with his thin-bladed knife. Send me a picture of a Pfalz D.-3 and an S. E.-5.

David Ash.

P. S.—I'm only 12, but can handle a pair of Vickers better than you.

The same goes for you, Dave. You will be staked out for buzzards to peck at your liver! Speaking of pictures, though—I have several of myself left, copies of the one Greta Garbo keeps on her dresser, showing me in my uniform of a captain in the famous Scotch Mulligan Guards, with bagpipes. The cost is only five dollars to you. And here is a smelt from Oklahoma:

146 Hillcrest Dr.,
Bartlesville, Okla.

Howdy, you half-brained, supposed-to-be flyer.

(I bet you never saw an airplane in as much as you have lived of your life.)

Getting down to brass tacks, I've decided to try and join up with this half-witted club and send in a bunch of these slips of paper which you call coupons.

May you die happy.

Sarkis Arutunoff.

P. S.—I'm thirteen year old and have more sense than the *whole* pile of you mugs.

N. B.—(Note Bene) I'm sending a picture of his Hon. Col. Houseboat's supposed-to-be "crate."

I showed your letter to Colonel Houseboat, Sarkis, and he wants to know if you aren't the same Sarkis who used to make the royal suspenders for the late Czar of Russia? If this is so, Sarkis—would you make some new horizontal flying sus-

penders for me, so I can spend the coupons on my plane? Let me know. I'll transfer your sketch to the DARE-DEVIL ACES contest. Now listen to this pink-eyed giraffe:

414 Clarion Road,
Johnsonburg, Pa.

Dear Hammerhead—I'm joining this bar-room flight of yours, and I don't wish you any bad luck but I hope some stray dog bites you, but as one dog likes another, it probably would not bite you.

Yours Battle Birdly,

Alex Kidd.

P. S.—If I don't win a buck, look out! You lousy coupon hooker.

I showed your letter to Mike, Alex, and he says you must be the low-life infant ape who has been snatching his free lunch.

But I must hurry back to Mike's Place. Colonel Houseboat and the rest of us are waiting for a trans-Atlantic phone call from Lord Cussmore concerning a very secret diplomatic matter. We may have to fly to London tonight in order that the colonel can give his advice to the British government. Meantime, I'm almost forgetting the big news about our next number. The feature story will be still another BATTLE BIRDS knockout entitled "The Secret Squadron" and it is by Robert J. Hogan. That ought to hold you! And don't you lowlife halfpints forget what I said about coupons! See you next month.

The Bull-Flight Club,
BATTLE BIRDS Magazine,
205 East 42nd Street,
New York, N. Y.

October

Sign me up quick! I like these stories best:

1.
2.
3.
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