

NOW
10¢



APRIL

DARE-DEVIL ACES



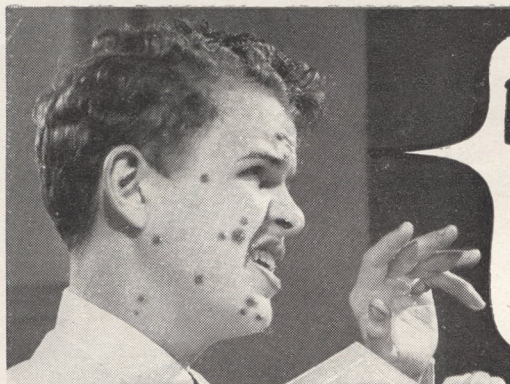
THUNDERBOLT TWINS

by **O. B. MYERS**

HELL'S ASHES

by **ORLANDO RIGONI**

ALSO **ROBERT S. BOWEN, WM. E. POINDEXTER, STEVE FISHER ETC.**



NIX ON PARTIES —with my crop of PIMPLES!

BUT
THERE
IS
HOPE FOR
BILL

DOGGONE IT! I DID WANT TO
GO TO DOT'S BIRTHDAY
PARTY TONIGHT! A
FINE SIGHT I'D BE!



SAY, WHAT'S EATING
YOU? GOING TO
DOT'S PARTY
TONIGHT?

OF COURSE NOT,
DAN. LOOK AT
THESE LIFE-SIZED
PIMPLES AND SEE
WHY!!



NEXT
MORNING

WHY BILL, YOU OLD SILLY! DAN TOLD ME THE REAL
REASON WHY YOU DIDN'T COME TO MY PARTY
LAST NIGHT—AND MOTHER
TOLD ME TO TELL
YOU TO EAT
FLEISCHMANN'S
YEAST!

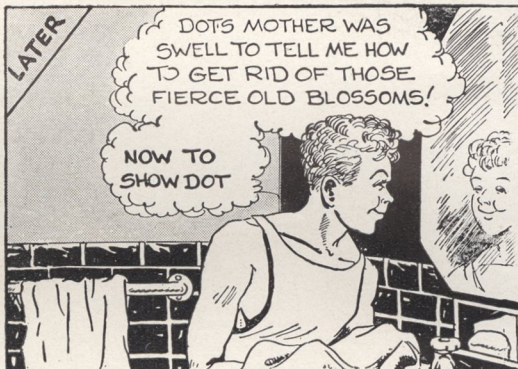
I'LL SOCK DAN!
BUT I GUESS I'D
BETTER
TRY THAT
YEAST



LATER

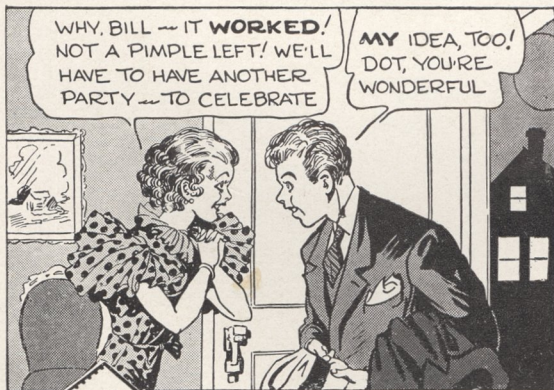
DOT'S MOTHER WAS
SWELL TO TELL ME HOW
TO GET RID OF THOSE
FIERCE OLD BLOSSOMS!

NOW TO
SHOW DOT



WHY, BILL—IT WORKED!
NOT A PIMPLE LEFT! WE'LL
HAVE TO HAVE ANOTHER
PARTY—TO CELEBRATE

MY IDEA, TOO!
DOT, YOU'RE
WONDERFUL



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Don't let Adolescent Pimples kill YOUR dates

DURING THE YEARS following the begin-
ning of adolescence—from about 13 to 25,
or even longer—many young people have to
fight pimples.

Important glands develop and final growth
takes place during this time. This causes dis-
turbances throughout the body. The skin be-
comes oversensitive. Waste poisons in the blood
irritate this sensitive skin. Pimples break out.

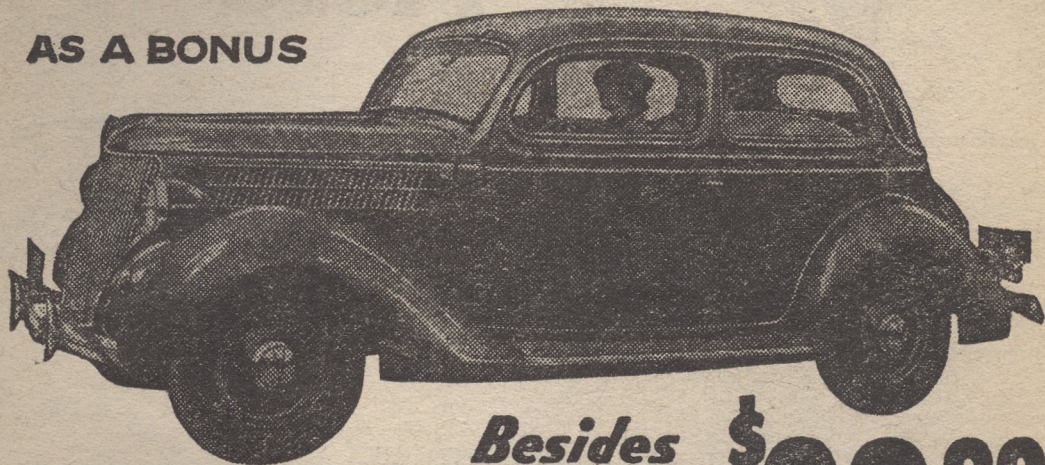
Many doctors prescribe Fleischmann's Yeast
for the correction of these adoles-
cent pimples. It clears the skin
irritants out of your blood. Then
pimples disappear!

Eat Fleischmann's Yeast 3
times a day, before meals—plain,
or in a little water—until your
skin is entirely clear. Start today.

—clears the skin
by clearing skin irritants
out of the blood

I'll Give You **THIS BIG POWERFUL FORD TUDOR SEDAN**

AS A BONUS



**Besides
A WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITY
TO MAKE UP TO**

**\$ 60.00
A WEEK**

Due to our rapid expansion, we are looking for men and women who are reliable and ambitious, to accept a genuine moneymaking opportunity right in their own localities.

If you want to make up to \$60.00 a week, starting at once, I must hear from you immediately. Ford automobiles are given as a bonus to producers. No experience or previous training is required. All that's necessary is that you be trustworthy and willing to follow my simple instructions. You will be placed in full charge in your locality and you can operate right from your own home. You will be engaged in pleasant, healthful, outdoor occupation. You can make many new friends. You immediately will have an opportunity to make enough money not only to pay your bills, but also to enjoy some of the luxuries of life. You can get to be known as a person of importance in your community.

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If you are employed at present, or if for any other reason you cannot devote full time, I can offer you a splendid opportunity to make up to \$27.50 a week just in your spare time. This will not interfere with your present work, yet it can be the means of greatly increasing your weekly income. It's a wonderful chance to make extra money in your idle time.

I Send You Everything

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Ford Sedans Given Producers

If you decide to take up my proposition, just as soon as you show me you mean business I'll give you a brand new Ford Tudor Sedan. I give automobiles as a bonus to producers to enable them to cover larger territories, and also to encourage prompt service to their customers.

Send No Money

Don't send any money—just mail the coupon. All I want is a chance to lay the facts before you so you can decide for yourself. If you want an exceptional opportunity to make up to \$60.00 a week—with the backing of an old, reliable, million-dollar manufacturing company—then fill out and mail the coupon—or a penny postcard—and see how easy it is to get started under my new plan. Remember, there is no long wait or delay before you begin to make money. Your earnings start at once. So don't miss this chance. It doesn't cost any more than a postage stamp to investigate. You have everything to gain by mailing the coupon, so do it today—RIGHT NOW!

Wonderful Success Reported by Others

Just let me know you are interested by returning the coupon below, so I can lay before you bona fide evidence of what others are making. I'll show you how Wilbur Whitcomb of Ohio made \$146.00 in a single week. R. E. Teague, California, cleared \$19.50 in a day. Hans Coordes of Nebraska made \$66.40 in a week. Helen V. Woolmington of Pennsylvania made as high as \$23.00 in a single day. Max Barrett of Washington netted \$62.00 in one week, and he reported that he cleared \$230.00 in a single month. W. J. Way, Kansas, made \$78.15 in a week. These are only a few of the scores of big earning reports which I received from every corner of the nation from persons who accepted this opportunity. And right now, I'm ready to offer you a proposition even better than the one I gave these people!

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ALBERT MILLS

1594 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio

Send me free facts. Tell me how I can start at once making up to \$60 a week and get a new 8-Cylinder Ford Sedan in addition to my regular cash earnings.

Name

Address

(Please Print or Write Plainly)

ALBERT MILLS, Pres., 1594 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio

Every
Story
New

DARE-DEVIL ACES

Every
Story
Complete

VOL. 13

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MAY DARE-DEVIL ACES **Out March 25**

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WELL, your boss thinks of you in terms of so much a week! You are worth this or that to him. How much you are worth depends upon—YOU! You decide the amount chiefly by your ability—by your

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City.....State.....Present Position.....

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New 40 hour week and increasing mails mean many Postal Appointments

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Name.....

Address.....

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in the Morning Rarin' to Go

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THOSE WHO DARED

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Why, why, you have constantly asked—why do these stories move with such ever present drama? Why can there be comedy and at the same time such vivid terror? Why do these stories both thrill and entertain, yet forever weave their spell of imminent disaster?

It has been previously stated that nearly every author writing for DARE-DEVIL ACES is a veteran of the late and little lamented Great War. Sid Bowen, Robert J. Hogan, O. B. Myers, just to mention a few—each of these men has had his whirl at the grim drama of sudden death in the air. Each has held his hands to the trigger trips and tossed a coin for his very life. So we put the question you have been asking, to one of these wartime veterans. He prefers to remain anonymous in this; but we are satisfied that he has answered the question. His story:

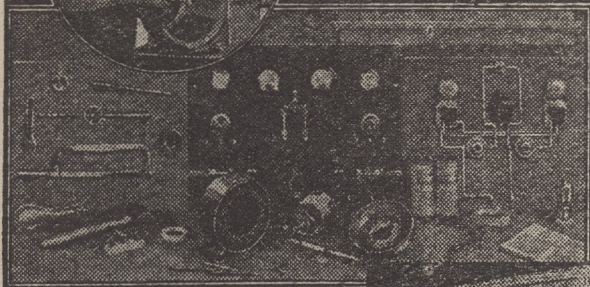
"You've asked me why my stories seem so real? Well, the answer is that I didn't write them. The words that I have put into DARE-DEVIL ACES were written in the blood and mud of Flanders, and in the scarlet skies above—I don't suppose that I shall ever write a word of an air story without recalling some comrade gone to his death; or the shrill, terrifying screech of broken wings, falling with a soldier into the great beyond.

"What makes these stories real, is the fact that I have stood in many an estami-

(Continued on page 6)

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By Practical Shop Methods
in your Spare time
Right in Your Own Home



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TELLS YOU HOW**



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TRIC POWER,
RADIO AND
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TION**

Take advantage of the opportunities awaiting trained men in these and many other branches of Electricity—with Electric Institute practical training. Mail coupon for complete facts about Electric Institute—it may be the turning point in your life.

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Get into a real money-making field. Electricity offers opportunities undreamed of a few years ago—good pay—interesting work—a real future. Now Electric Institute brings—to your very door—practical training necessary for these rich rewards. Keep your present job—no need now to leave home and live in a distant city and pay out heavy expenses. Now you learn Electricity easily, practically—right at home—at a fraction of the cost of going away to school—then you get lifetime employment service after graduation—your money back if you are not entirely satisfied.

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Other symptoms of weak kidneys and irritated bladder are backache, puffy eyes, leg cramps, moist palms, burning or scanty passage.

(Continued from page 4)

net, drinking and laughing with boys who were marked to die! have gone out to die myself. I cannot write of the air without recalling the unqualified guts and daring that permitted men to go aloft and wait for the snarl of Spandau death. I constantly recall the iron nerves that answered steel with steel, and remember, too, the dogged courage of the enemy. Out of the conflict emerged both heroism and friendship, as eternal as the soil for which we fought.

"I do not mean by this that we were unafraid. Why, most of the time I was as scared as hell. And so were all the others. But when loyalty can be pitted against natural fear, and loyalty wins out—then you are dealing with men! We who did fight, have taken away with us too much of the drama of War. War is the universal curse, and you ask me why our stories are real? You wonder why our words beat like the hearts of men?"

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MAGAZINE

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& MANY MORE

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FEB. 10

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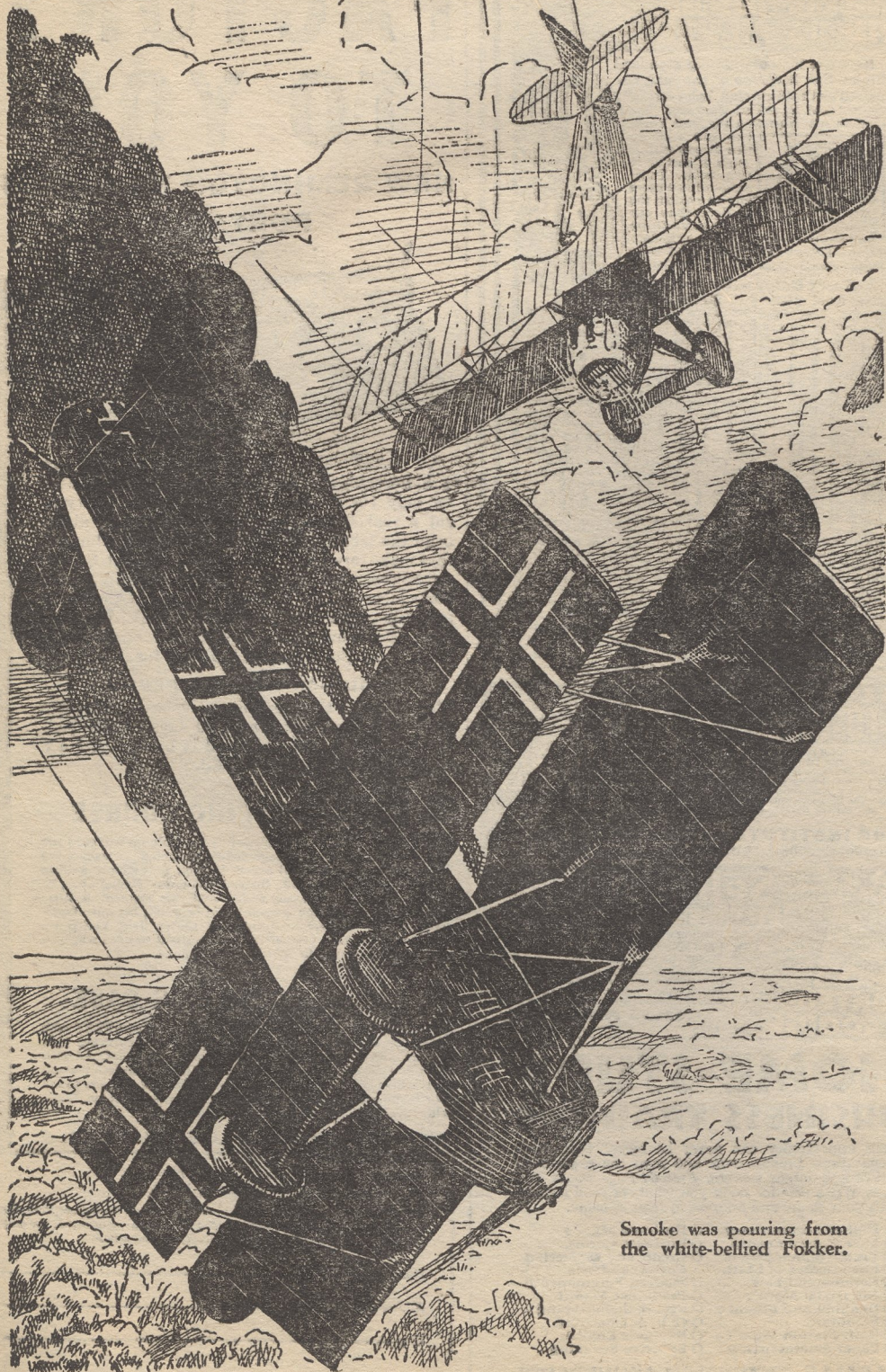
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28x3-00-19	2.25 1.05	35x4	3.55 1.15
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28x3-25-18	2.40 1.15	(High Pressure)	
28x3-25-19	2.60 1.15	Size Tires Tubes	Size Tires Tubes
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28x3-50-19	2.95 1.15	34x7	12.65 4.15
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31x3-50-21	3.25 1.15	Size Tires Tubes	Size Tires Tubes
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28x3-00-19	3.35 1.15	6.50-20	\$5.40 2.45
30x3-00-20	3.45 1.15	7.00-20	\$6.85 3.15
31x3-00-21	3.55 1.15	7.50-20	\$7.60 3.85
28x3-00-18	3.65 1.15	8.00-20	\$8.50 4.55
28x3-00-19	3.75 1.15	ALL OTHER	
30x3-00-20	3.85 1.15	SIZES	
31x3-00-21	3.95 1.15	DEALERS WANTED	

THUNDERBOLT



Smoke was pouring from
the white-bellied Fokker.

TWINS by O.B. MYERS



"You dirty swine! I've been praying for a chance to meet you face to face. You're the man who killed my brother!" These were the words that greeted Clip Macauley and sent him to the squadron of the doomed, the 77th—where Death and Misery walked hand in hand. But Clip had taken it on the chin before and could face his fate with a grin—not knowing he was entering the trap of Hell itself—where many men entered, but few came out!

CLIP MACAULEY swore softly. A drop of rain, falling squarely on the glowing tip of the cigarette in his mouth, had extinguished it neatly. He flipped it away into the dark, and turned toward the field office. His foot slipped on the greasy duck boards, and went off into ankle-deep mud. He teetered awkwardly, regained his balance, then swore again, not so softly. A dull pain throbbed in his shoulder.

Why had he ever come to this sodden sink, anyway; this Godforsaken hole of a jumping-off place? He should have gone straight back to the 95th, where he belonged. The committee at the convalescent hospital, having lost his records,

had ordered him to "Colombey for re-assignment." But he could have disregarded those orders, travelled directly back to his old outfit, and let the C.O. straighten out the mistake. Then he would have dodged this gloomy dump.

He pushed open the door of a frame-and-tarpaper shack and entered a long, low room. A score of desks filled all the floor space except a narrow aisle. Pausing before a bulletin board just inside the door, Clip studied a freshly posted list. After a moment he said, "Ha!" under his breath, and turned toward the first desk.

"My name's up, sergeant. What do I do?"

The sergeant never lifted his head. "See Captain Zugle," he said briskly, motioning toward the rear of the room.

Clip strode down the aisle. On each desk was tacked a cardboard sign, giving the name of the man behind it; he did not find one reading Captain Zugle until he came to the door at the far end. The door was closed. He knocked, but got no reply. He opened it, moved through, and stood at attention.

Behind a desk that was a mountain of papers, sat a square-set, thick-chested officer with close-cropped blond hair. He was bent over his fountain pen, writing busily, and did not look up.

"Captain," said Clip, after a moment, "I'm posted for reassignment; could I get my orders straightened out? I've been at—"

Clip paused abruptly, for the captain had looked up. His broad, placid face, at first only flushed and creased by the strain of overwork, underwent a sudden and terrible change. The eyes narrowed, the lips tensed, and the jaw muscles bulged; he glared at Clip with an expression of the utmost loathing.

"You devil! What do you want here?"

Clip, taken back by the look as much as by the words, began again. "My name is up for reassignment to a squadron. But that's a mistake. The doctors sent me here because they'd lost my papers."

The captain was not listening. Still glowering darkly, he rose slowly behind his desk. His fingers clenched spasmodically.

"You dirty swine!" he growled. "I've been praying for a chance to meet you face to face. You're the man who killed my brother. As good as murdered him. Yes, I heard the story. Two weeks ago, it was. Now—"

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Clip blankly. "I don't know your brother; I never even heard the

name Zugle before. I've been in the hospital at Neufchateau for the last three weeks; before that I was with the 95th. There must be some mistake—"

"Stop lying, you rat!" ordered the captain curtly. He moved out threateningly from in back of the desk, his eyes cold with hatred.

Clip shifted his weight, and his right hand drew back ever so little. He was not accustomed to being called swine and rat. Without knowing what it was all about, he was beginning to get angry. "This guy is nuts," he thought. "But if he insists on going to it, I'd better 'hit him first, and investigate afterward'."

The officer, reaching the center of the room, halted suddenly and stared at Clip's shoulder insignia.

"Why, you—you're a lieutenant!" he exclaimed blankly.

"Right," said Clip. "C. R. Macauley, 1st Lieutenant, formerly of the 95th. And I never did like kiwis, either."

The last remark seemed to pass unnoticed. Captain Zugle leaned forward, and turned his head from side to side to study Clip intently.

"Macauley?" he muttered. "Let's see your identity card."

Without moving his right hand, Clip felt in his pocket with his left. The captain took the card and peered at it eagerly, his eyes shifting back and forth from the photograph to Clip's face. He shook his head from side to side, then suddenly he tittered.

"Macauley—ha! By God, that's good. That's great! Ho, ho!" he roared, rocking with laughter, but laughter that had a sinister ring. He handed the card back to Clip, and stepped to the desk.

"You want to be assigned to a squadron, eh? Sure, I'll fix it."

Sitting down, he seized a blank form and began writing rapidly.

"I've been in the hospital with a wound," began Clip patiently.

"Never mind, never mind," interrupted the man at the desk, waving his free hand impatiently. "I'll fix you fine."

He signed the paper with a flourish and handed it up. Clip glanced at it. It was an order to report for duty to the commanding officer of the 77th Observation Squadron, at Thioncourt.

"But I was with the 95th," protested Clip. "I'm a pursuit pilot, and I want to go back to the 95th again."

"Don't argue with me," snapped the other, still chuckling to himself. "There's your orders; take 'em, and follow 'em."

"If this is so damned funny," grated Clip, "maybe you wouldn't mind telling me what the hell it's all about."

"You'll find out soon enough," grinned the captain unpleasantly. "Get on out of here now. I'm busy."

Clip shrugged, put the order in his pocket, and left the room. He wasn't going to the 77th, or any other observation squadron. But it was plainly no use trying to explain matters to that imbecile of an assignment officer. He would simply take his way up to the 95th, at Rembercourt, and leave it to the major to untangle. What the hell was it that made that captain act so queer, anyway?

He stumbled along slimy duckboards toward the barracks where his musette bag waited, already packed. Feeling for the latch in the darkness, the door opened suddenly in his face and a man hurried out. Clip stepped to one side, out of the way. His foot came down on something soft and yielding that was not mud, and a gasping groan seemed to issue from under the sole of his boot.

"What's that?" he blurted, regaining his balance.

THE man who had just emerged from the barracks leaned over his shoulder

as Clip dropped to one knee and snapped his briquet. They saw a limp figure in a muddy trenchcoat, with a pink face and a shock of bright yellow hair, sprawled slackly in the slushy mud of the ditch.

"What the devil is this kid doing here? Who is he?" asked Clip.

"Search me. He picks a swell spot to sleep it off, don't he?"

The young fellow on the ground groaned again.

"Damn it, he'll freeze if we leave him out here," said Clip. "Here, lend me a hand, and we'll carry him inside."

"You can play nursemaid yourself, if you want to. I'm in a hurry," retorted the other, and vanished into the gloom.

Clip growled a harsh epithet after him, and picked up the sodden form from the ground. He shouldered his way through the door, and picked an empty bunk near his own. No sooner had he deposited his burden than the blond youth became violently sick.

Clip pulled off his own coat, rolled up his sleeves and went to work. He applied the usual remedies, and some of his own as well. He passed an unpleasant half hour, but at the end of that time had his patient sitting up gazing at him weakly.

"You've been in the air service long enough to get to Colombey," growled Clip. "You ought to hold your liquor better than that."

"I—I was scared," mumbled the other. He had the rounded features and clear eyes of a boy, but his jaw was firm and his face wide between the eyes, as it should be in a man of action. "That's why I went there to begin with. I wanted to get drunk."

"Where'd you get it?"

"Flandin's *bistro*, on the second street."

"That dump! I wouldn't be surprised if Flandin slipped a Mickey Finn in your

glass. Did you have any money with you?"

"Not much, about two hundred francs." The fellow on the bunk felt in his pocket, and swore feebly. "It's gone!"

"Sure," grinned Clip. "No wonder you passed out. Come on, put on your clothes, and we'll go get it back."

"Get it back! How can we do that?"

"You'll see," Clip told him.

As soon as the other was dressed, Clip led him down the cobbled thoroughfare to the second corner. Pushing into the crowded *estaminet*, he seized the fat French proprietor and pulled him unceremoniously into a back corner. In his nasal but perfectly intelligible French, Clip explained that he had stopped his friend, Lieutenant Pershing, as he was on his way to report certain facts to the provost marshal. Clip felt, he averred, that Monsieur Flandin should be given an opportunity to make restitution before the M.P.'s boarded up his doors.

"*Lieutenant Pair-shing?*" gaped the startled frog.

"*Mais oui,*" shrugged Clip. "The general's son, *mon vieux.*"

The Frenchman couldn't move fast enough. He produced a wallet from the cupboard behind the bar. It had been found, he explained excitedly, under the table after the lieutenant had gone out. He hoped that the lieutenant had suffered no inconvenience.

Clip took the wallet, opened it, and ran through the notes inside. Coolly he extracted five twenties and tucked them in his own pocket.

"That will teach you a lesson," he remarked blandly, handing the wallet to its owner. "Never let a thief mix your drinks."

They were going through the door before the stupefied proprietor had recovered sufficiently to begin cursing.

"Thanks a lot," grinned the sandy-

haired one, out in the street. "You're welcome to the hundred francs, of course. It isn't the money, so much, as the idea of being rolled for a fool. I'll probably have no use for the francs, anyway. Of course my name isn't Pershing. It's Rhodes. Rocky Rhodes, they call me. I'm an observer."

Clip shook hands gravely, and mentioned his own name. Then the other's remarks made him remember something that had been said earlier.

"By the way, what was it you said about wanting to get plastered?"

When the other man answered, his voice had suddenly gone flat and thin. "I got orders to the Front, this afternoon."

"What the hell!" cried Clip. "Don't look so damned glum. There's nothing unexpected about that, is there?"

"Oh, no, of course not. I knew I was going to the Front. It isn't that. It's the squadron they've sent me to." In a tone of horror and despair he finished, "I'm assigned to the 77th."

"Well, what of it? I've been in pursuit; don't know a thing about these observation outfits. What's the matter with the 77th?"

"What, you never heard of the Black Angels?"

Clip shook his head. The observer explained rapidly. That was Captain Syne's squadron. He had a reputation as a killer. Men didn't last long under his command. The casualties in the 77th were twice as high as in any other unit on the Front. It was a jinxed outfit. Three times lately it had moved to a new field, changed sectors; but the high losses continued. The exact causes were obscure, but it was rumored that the pilots and observers had petitioned G.H.Q. to remove their C.O. G.H.Q., however, had done nothing, and the 77th continued to call on Colombey for replacements, and more replacements. Going up to the Black Angels was just

like going to your own funeral.

Clip tried to buck up the gloomy lad at his side, but unsuccessfully. "Don't believe all you hear, Rocky. The Front is full of wild stories. Most of them are exaggerated. Maybe this Captain Syne has just had a run of hard luck. I don't see how an observation outfit can be so tough. Though of course I'm a pursuit pilot, as I said. I've never even been on a Salmson field, and never expect—"

He stopped abruptly. He had just remembered the order in his own pocket, handed to him by Captain Zugle only an hour before. He, too, was assigned to the 77th. Of course he didn't mean to go there. Or at least he had not intended to, right up to this moment. But now he began to reconsider. This youngster, Rocky, certainly needed a guiding hand. He seemed to have the makings of a he-man, all right. But he was going out to his great test in an extremely bad frame of mind. Instead of being filled with confidence in himself, and in his luck, he was worried stiff; was half licked before he started. Too often had Clip seen green recruits go down to destruction on their first or second flight not to know the signs. He made a sudden decision.

"Come on," he said. "Let's go get our junk together, and hunt up a truck headed for Thioncourt. We ought to be there by dawn."

"We!" Rocky Rhodes stared at him, open-mouthed. "Thioncourt! Do you mean that you—you're going to the 77th, too?"

"Sure," grinned Clip. "Why not? I've got the same orders you have. We'll go find out what this hoodoo squadron is all about. It's probably the bunk. By the way, how are you with a Lewis?"

"Why—I was rated B-8, at Cazaux."

"Say, that's not bad. We'll pair up, and see the war from a Salmson. I'd like to run into that silver-bellied Jerry that

knocked down Ted Sherman, and then put a bullet under my collar bone. Maybe we could give him a taste of hot iron and magnesium. Hey, Rocky?"

THE rookie observer was plainly delighted. He packed both kits in a speechless daze while Clip located a convoy of empty ambulances that was scheduled to roll up the Molagne road that night, and made arrangements with one of the drivers to transport them and their baggage as far as Thioncourt. Like all convoys, however, this one was several hours late in starting, and was held to a snail's pace on the traffic-jammed highways. Thus it was long after daylight when the two flyers, dirty, disheveled, and sleepless, crawled down on the edge of the Thioncourt drome and asked for directions to headquarters.

Clip was occupied in helping the driver haul their bed-rolls out of the back of the ambulance and drag them to a comparatively dry spot by the side of the road. Rocky hailed a passing mechanic and asked a question. The man pointed to a low, black building that stood next to the first hangar, then hurried on about his work.

The ambulance drove away, and the two newcomers stood for a moment surveying their surroundings. It was not a large field, but looked big enough. East and west it had plenty of length, but the width between the row of four hangars on one side and a fringe of tall trees on the other was none too generous. If the wind should be straight out of the north, Clip surmised that it would take a little delicate handling to set down a Salmson, which was a long gliding ship, without rolling unchecked into the front of one of the hangars.

Several planes stood on the tarmac, and a number of figures moved about near them. There was one Salmson in the air,

high over the field. As Clip glanced up he heard the drone of its motor die to a whisper, and saw that it had tipped up into a vertical position. Down it came in a side-slip; down and down and down, until the shrill scream of wind in its wires set Clip's teeth on edge. Not until less than a thousand feet of altitude remained, did the pilot correct his controls, and more than half of that margin of safety was gone before the big two-seater lumbered out into normal flight and soared past over Clip's head. The Salmson began immediately to climb again.

"Wow!" breathed Rocky at his side. "He must have slipped for five thousand feet, at least!"

"A crazy stunt to pull, in a two-seater," growled Clip. "He should leave that sort of business to the Spads."

Moving slowly toward the hangars, Clip happened to glance to his right. On the other side of the road, at a little distance, stood three or four squat shacks which evidently were barracks and mess-hall. From before one of these a little procession was just moving away. First came an artillery caisson drawn by two mules, on which lay two long pine boxes side by side. Then half a dozen officers in double file; then a squad of privates with rifles on their shoulders. Lastly a lone corporal with a bugle slung at his side.

Clip knew well enough what that meant. He opened his mouth to say something, but then perceived that Rocky had not noticed the cortege. Clip decided that it was better to keep quiet. The kid would see plenty of funerals before he was through. No rush.

As they approached the dilapidated shed next to the hangars, the door opened and a sergeant came out. A glance was enough to spot him as an old-time regular. His khaki was laundered to a pale tan, his leggings were of the cavalry

type, with laces up the side; the leather facings shone with polish. Mexican and Philippine campaign ribbons were sewed on his tunic; his collar ornaments glittered.

Clip wore an old trench coat, muddy and wrinkled, and he had just removed his overseas cap to run his fingers through his rumpled hair. The sergeant glanced at him once, casually; then instantly looked again. Then he straightened up, clicked his heels, and snapped into a salute that would have done credit to a parade ground.

Both flyers returned the salute quickly, and Clip said pleasantly, "Good morning, sergeant. This is headquarters, isn't it?"

The three-striper seemed unaccountably taken aback; he stammered, as if unable to reply. "Er—why—I beg your pardon, sir?"

"Well, we're strangers," explained Clip. "But I hope—"

He paused, and waited a moment for a loud roar from overhead to diminish. The plane in the air had side-slipped again; this time it was flattening off hardly a hundred feet above their heads. Before Clip resumed his interrupted sentence, Rocky looked across the road.

"Ah-h!" he said, with a quick intake of breath. "What's that, sergeant? A—a funeral?"

The sergeant seemed to be making an effort to decide what to answer. He glanced at Rocky, then back at Clip, and there was a strange, uncertain expression in his eyes. Then he stiffened, and spoke in the wooden accents of a man reciting facts already well known.

"Lieutenant Morgan and Lieutenant Hess, sir. Killed yesterday afternoon, side-slipping into the field for a landing."

Clip cleared his throat and made an effort to change the subject. "Who the devil is this fellow, upstairs, anyway?"

"Lieutenant Wickham, sir," returned the sergeant, like a man speaking a piece. "Practicing side-slips—by your orders, sir."

"Practicing side-slips in a Salmson!" exclaimed Clip. "Now what is the idea—" He stopped abruptly, to stare in puzzlement at the sergeant. "What was that you said? By my orders?"

The sergeant opened his mouth to reply. Then his gaze shifted over Clip's shoulder, and the words froze on his tongue. If he had acted strangely up to this point, he now betrayed the utmost amazement and consternation. His clean-shaven face became red as a beet, his eyes fairly bulged, his mouth hung open idiotically. Clip, wondering what he saw, turned just as a voice behind him spoke sharply.

"Well, what is this? Old Home Week?"

The man who had come from the direction of the tarmac was of medium height, with unusually square shoulders and slender hips. His complexion was dark, his nose slightly aquiline, and his eyes, set quite close together in his narrow face, were flinty and cold. He was glaring at first at the confused non-com; then his gaze shifted briefly to Rocky, and next came to rest on Clip.

HERE it stayed, while a curious change of expression crept across his features. For a moment he appeared puzzled, then surprised. Then his eyes narrowed, his jaw tightened, and his look became one of alert suspicion and displeasure.

"We're just reporting from Colombey," explained Clip. "We—"

"Who the hell sent you here?" was barked at him.

Clip stared, taken back. He was quite sure he did not know this officer, had never seen him before in his life. And yet there was something indescribably familiar about his face, the set of his jaw,

the wrinkles about his eyes. Where had he seen—*click!* Suddenly Clip saw it. It burst on him in a flash, and all at once he understood the sergeant's inexplicable actions.

The man before him had the double bars of a captain pinned to his overseas cap, and wore a leather coat hanging open, instead of a trench coat. Outside of that, he was an exact duplicate of Clip himself. His face, the shape of his head, the lean, athletic build; everything. They looked enough alike to be twin brothers.

"Well, I'll be damned!" exclaimed Clip.

"So will I," growled the captain. "You're not trying to tell me that you knew nothing about this?"

"Not a thing. I never suspected—who are you, anyway?"

The other man regarded him with cold disbelief for a long moment. Then, "I'm Captain Syne, in command here. Come inside."

In the C.O.'s private office, Clip and Rocky laid their papers on the desk. The captain glanced at these only curtly, then launched into a series of questions directed at Clip. Who was he? Why had he come to the 77th at this particular time? Who had sent him? For what purpose? Three times Clip explained patiently that only by accident had he gone to Colombey for reassignment, and that there it had apparently been nothing more than Captain Zugle's idea of a joke, after recognizing the resemblance, to send him up to the 77th.

"I suppose you think it's a swell joke, too, eh?"

"Not at all. I see nothing to laugh at in this war, anyway. But I don't see why my looking like you is going to make any difference to either of us, one way or another."

"You don't, eh? Well, you may discover otherwise."

Clip shrugged, having no premonition of the fatal misfortune into which this chance resemblance was to thrust him so soon.

Captain Syne continued to stare at him in disbelief. It was evident that the C.O. suspected some ulterior motive behind Clip's coming, that he was suspicious of Clip's story. Once he asked outright if Major Cradley had sent him.

"Who? I never heard of Major Cradley," insisted Clip.

"Let it pass. For the present, anyway. That's your story, and you're going to stick to it, eh? Maybe I could change your tune by taking you out behind the hangars, without gloves. Later, perhaps—"

"Maybe you could try it," retorted Clip hotly, "but it might be your tune that would change."

"Tough, heh?" snarled the captain. "Okay. We'll see how long that lasts. You'll go on duty immediately, this afternoon. Since you've spent a month over the Front with the 95th, you won't need any breaking in. A couple of hours in the air this morning will be enough. You and your observer—what's the name, Rhodes?—will find a ship on the tarmac for you in twenty minutes. Take it up and practice side-slips."

"Side-slips!" blurted Clip. "For God's sake, why side-slips?"

The captain's voice was inflexible as steel. "I had two men killed yesterday afternoon, side-slipping into the field. I don't propose to have any more. Every pilot in this squadron is practicing side-slips today. If you know how to slip a Salmson, which you should, it won't bother you. If you're going to kill yourself doing it, better kill yourself right away and have it over with."

Clip quivered with suppressed rage. It was on the tip of his tongue to protest, to point out that while he had put in time

over the lines, Rocky had not, and deserved therefore a gradual breaking in. But he realized that to offer advice or suggestions to a man like Captain Syne was a waste of breath.

Outside on the tarmac, he and Rocky dug their flying gear out of their baggage and waited while a Salmson was rolled out and warmed up. Clip saw that the observer was pale and even more quiet than usual, but that he climbed into the rear cockpit and examined the guns, tourelle, and equipment with an air of knowing what they were for.

It was three weeks since Clip had flown at all, and he had never been in a Salmson in his life. He therefore was wise enough to take off very gingerly, and to spend nearly half an hour doing flat banks and gentle zooms. By then he had gotten the feel of the ship, and began to put it through its paces. Figure eights, vertical virages, stalls, climbs, and dives; he whipped through them all, one after another. He polished off the exhibition finally with a perpendicular side-slip that ended a hundred feet over the end of the field, and rolled his wheels deftly up to within twenty feet of the hangar doors.

As he slid to the ground, he saw Captain Syne walking over. But if Clip expected to be complimented on his flying he was mistaken.

"I sent you up to do side-slips," said the C.O. flatly. "You did them. Good. Now if I ever see you side-slipping a Salmson like that again, I'll cashier you to Blois before you can blink your eye."

Clip stared in dumb astonishment, but the captain went right on.

"You'll fly a reconnaissance mission at two-thirty. Sector 12-M; you'll find it on the map. Five miles either side of the lines. Altitude between three and ten thousand feet; two hours. That's all."

"But what do we do? What do we reconnoitre?" asked Rocky.

"Haven't you read the general orders for the 77th? They're on the bulletin board in the orderly room. Read them."

FIVE minutes later Clip and his observer stood before a double typewritten sheet posted in the outer room of headquarters, perusing it carefully. It outlined in terse phrases the special duties of the 77th Aero Squadron. Observation was confined solely to the air, and things pertaining to the air. Their purpose was to bring back information concerning the enemy aviation only; ground reconnaissance would be taken care of by other squadrons. They were to report on all aircraft seen; the type, position, actions, time, markings, etc. Also the location and condition of balloons, and the location and characteristics of German aerodromes, if any were observed. In particular they were to watch for and study any new types of planes appearing on the Front.

"Sweet job," murmured Clip. "I suppose if we're five miles in Germany, and see a formation of nine Fokkers above us, we zoom up good and close so we can see their staffel insignia, and report whether the leader has blue eyes or not."

"I see you've got the idea," said the sarcastic voice of Captain Syne, who had just emerged from his office door behind them. "But remember; your duty is to bring back information. If you're shot down, you bring back nothing. So don't get yourselves shot down."

A few moments later the two flyers were on their way across the road to the barracks to locate their bunks. Here Clip suffered another disagreeable episode, similar to two through which he had already passed. As he entered the door of the long, crudely furnished building, he heard a lively hum of conversation. An instant later it stopped short. The dozen or more pilots and observers who were lounging about jumped to their feet as one called

"Ten-shun!" and they all eyed him with silent, resentful stares.

"Look here, you birds," said Clip. "I know what you think, but you're wrong. I'm not Captain Syne. I'm Clip Macauley, just up from Colombey as a replacement. I'm not Syne's brother. I'm no relation to Syne. I never saw him in my life until this morning. And I'm tired already of being taken for him. Just because I happen to look like him isn't my fault. As far as I can tell so far, I'm not the least bit like him in any other way. So forget my face, will you?"

The tension relaxed. Partially, but not completely. Most of the crowd resumed their seats, mumbling some sort of greeting. A tall, lean observer who said his name was Arkwright pointed out a couple of empty bunks, and introduced the newcomers around. But Clip perceived that his welcome was far from friendly, the looks he got uncertain and distrustful. If the C.O. had been difficult to convince that his appearance was only a coincidence, these fellows were even more difficult to put at ease. Clip guessed that they suspected him of being some kind of stool pigeon.

While they unpacked their meagre belongings and hung them on nails in the framework of the bunks and walls, Arkwright left them, and joined a group around a table a short distance away. There were chips and a dirty pack of cards on the table, but they were not playing. They were discussing something that had happened over the lines, the previous afternoon. After a while Arkwright was speaking.

"Bill was a lot lower than I," Clip heard him say. "I could see that silver-bottomed Jerry slipping down out of the northeast, but I was three miles away, and by the time I got straightened out—"

"Wait a minute," broke in Clip, striding over to the group. "Did I hear you

say something about a Jerry in a ship with a silver bottom? Was it a Fokker?"

"Yeah, it was a Fokker," answered Arkwright. "What of it?"

"Why, hell, that must be the bird that shot me down!" Clip explained in a few words that he had been with the 95th, and had been sent to the hospital by a bullet fired from a Fokker with a silver belly. "I'm looking for *that* guy. Where'd you see him?"

"Him!" barked Arkwright, with a mirthless laugh. "It isn't a *him*. It's *them*. Maybe three weeks ago, when you left the Front, there was only one like that. But there's a lot more than one now. And it's only a fool who goes looking for them. They're bad medicine, mister!"

"What do you mean, bad medicine?" queried Clip softly.

Arkwright explained, and his words were charged with awe. There was something uncanny about those silver-bellied ships. Most of them were Fokkers, but a few Halberstadt two-seaters had been reported marked the same way. No one knew whether it meant a staffel insignia or not; and no one knew what gave them their terrible but indisputable superiority. Although they had been growing in numbers over the Front for several weeks now, never had a single one been shot down on Allied soil. Yet in the same time, dozens, perhaps scores, of American ships had gone down before their attacks. They were the curse of this sector. Fully half the casualties of the 77th could be blamed on them.

"Are they just in this sector?" asked Clip.

"I wouldn't know for sure. When we were at Toul, they were across from us. We lost six ships in a week. Then we didn't see them for a few days, and I breathed easier. Then damned if we aren't shifted over here, to Thioncourt, and here

they are opposite us again. Curse the luck! It was one of them got Bill Brosnan, yesterday."

"What makes them tougher than any other Boches?"

"That's just it—nobody knows. It's something more than just good pilots in them. They seem to knock us down almost by magic. A man doesn't seem to have a chance. I saw this Jerry swinging down on Bill, and I opened up in that direction. But the scrap didn't last three seconds, I'll swear! That Fokker dove down close, and zip! Bill's ship was tumbling end over end, and the Boche was zooming away. Bill was all ready, too; I saw his rear gun firing."

"The Jerry must have made a lucky hit at long range, maybe," suggested Clip. "Did you see if he let off a long burst, coming in?"

Arkwright bit his lip, hesitated. "I didn't see the Fokker's guns fire at all," he blurted finally.

Clip snorted. But he noticed that every face in the group was drawn and serious, as if they saw nothing to laugh at.

"**YOU'RE** kidding yourself," he asserted scornfully. "Those silver-bellied ships shoot bullets, just like any others. If you don't believe it, I'll show you the hole in my shoulder. Take it from me, that was a real slug, and no magic about it, either. I think you fellows have just got the jitters over a run of bad luck. You're seeing things; giving those shiny-bottomed Boches credit for a lot they haven't got—Well, I'll be finding out for myself pretty soon, anyway. Flying a patrol at half past two."

"Huh—I wish you luck," croaked Arkwright dolefully.

At ten minutes before five that afternoon, Clip eased Salmson Number 14 past the tree-tops and dropped the wheels neatly in mid-field. As he taxied toward the

hangars, rolling like a dory in a long swell, he drew a long breath and permitted himself a grin of satisfaction. Whipping his tail to a halt with a last blurb of the big radial motor, he cut the switch and pushed up his goggles.

"How you ridin' back there, Rocky?" he demanded.

"On the top of the world," came the prompt reply. "The only thing I can't figure out is why none of those planes came near enough for me to draw a bead on 'em."

"Maybe they heard you scored a B-8 at gunnery school, eh?"

Clip dropped to the ground and lighted a cigarette. He felt greatly reassured. In fact, he had decided that this observation racket was a cinch. For two hours he had wheeled back and forth across a small patch of Front, like a limousine taking a tour around the park. He had seen plenty of planes, many of them German. But not one had shown any inclination to attack. Had he been flying pursuit, it would have been his duty to jump on them. But under his present orders, he was expected only to fly on, and let his observer take notes on their location, type, movements, and so forth. It was just like having a ringside seat at the war, but never getting a sock in the nose.

His careless optimism was slightly jolted, however, a little later. Rocky went into headquarters to write his report in the squadron logbook, and came out holding a slip of paper in his hand.

"Our orders for tomorrow," he explained. "Section 11-M; that's just west of where we were today."

"At this rate, in six months we'll know every foot of the Front by sight," said Clip lightly. "Well, we'll inquire around after mess, and find out who else is covering the same area."

A little questioning that evening, however, brought to light the rather discon-

certing fact that no one was. No two ships, in fact, were assigned to the same region at the same time. Of the total of seventeen available planes in the outfit, at least six were kept in the air constantly. The sector which they faced was divided into six strips; each plane flew over one strip. They were not expected to desert their assigned area except in cases of emergency.

Clip perceived that this arrangement took good care of observing all that was to be seen in the sky during the hours of daylight. But it was not so pleasant for the observers, and their pilots. No pursuit protection was provided. The ships in the neighboring strips might be within sight, but would hardly ever be near enough to be of any help in case of attack by enemy planes.

"Hm-m," he mused, frowning. "Maybe this isn't such a picnic, after all. I begin to see why the casualties have been high in this outfit. You never have to start a scrap. But if Jerry starts one on you, nobody is near enough to lend you a hand. Maybe that explains why the silver bellies have been making a Roman holiday with the 77th."

He was wise enough, however, not to utter these thoughts aloud. Rocky was still a green recruit, and had enough to worry about without getting the idea in his head that he was up against a situation of unusual peril. The observer's morale, at the moment, was high. Best to do everything to keep it that way.

As they waited for the motor to warm, shortly before seven o'clock the next morning, Rocky came over to Clip with the order slip in his hand and a puzzled expression on his face.

"Say, this says, 'Altitude, 1000 feet.' Can that be right?"

Clip took the slip and peered at it.

"A thousand feet? That's pretty low, when you're supposed to be observing

what's in the sky. The archies will raise the devil with us, too. It's probably meant to be ten thousand; the guy who typed it left off a zero. It's initialled by Captain Syne, isn't it? Better run into headquarters and make sure, before we take off."

Rocky disappeared, but in a moment was back again.

"The C.O. isn't on the field, they told me. Gone somewhere."

Clip shrugged. "Well, we'll take a chance and fly at ten thousand. That's where we ought to be, anyway. Or even higher."

Rocky had plenty of entries to make in his notebook that morning. The sky was speckled with planes; and those that he might have missed in his novice's excitement, Clip took care to point out to him. A formation of D-H's straggled out of Germany, with Fokkers buzzing like wasps about their flanks. But the Fokkers dropped off at the lines, when a Spad formation appeared out of the southeast, and the day bombers crossed into Allied air in a tight group. Clip counted five of them; he wondered how many there had been when they started out.

A little later they saw more Fokkers, at some distance, engaged in a dogfight with those same Spads. A flamer trailed a long smudge of scarlet and black down the clear blue sky—whether Yank or German, Clip could not be sure—and the melee broke up when the Fokkers fled. One Spad came and circled near the Salmon for a few moments; Clip waved a hand gaily, but the pursuit pilot departed without replying. Three times, later, he saw German two-seaters down below him. But they did not try to bother him, and Clip didn't bother them, though he had to remind himself forcibly more than once that he was now an observation pilot and not supposed to seek out combat.

He had no sooner landed on the drome and jumped to the ground than Captain

Syne strode toward him, frowning darkly.

"Did you fly at a thousand feet altitude this morning, Macauley, as your orders stated?" asked the C.O. abruptly.

"Why, no, sir," answered Clip immediately, and explained that they had thought there must be some mistake in that figure. "Archie makes it pretty nasty down that low, you know."

"Oh, you don't tell me," sneered the captain sarcastically. "Maybe if Archie bothers you so much, you'd better go back to the hospital for another rest." His tone hardened savagely. "That's where I'll put you if you ever disobey orders again. I sign those slips; the figures on them are correct. See that you carry out your instructions after this, and no such flimsy excuses."

Clip reddened to the ears, and clenched his fists until the nails bit into the flesh. But the captain turned coolly away, and Clip restrained his murderous impulses with an effort.

IT was not until some time later, when he had cooled down, that a question arose in his mind. How the devil had Captain Syne known that he had flown at ten thousand feet, rather than a thousand? Neither he nor Rocky had told anyone their intentions before taking off. And the C.O. hadn't even been on the field at the time to watch them climb away. Of course he might have returned at that very moment, or he might have been watching from nearby. But it struck Clip that the captain was just the sort to have his own petty spies among the enlisted men or the ground officers, who kept him informed as to the actions of his pilots in his absence. Clip spat in disgust. What a lousy way to run a squadron! He thought of Major Butts, at the 95th, who led every important or dangerous mission himself, and whose first question was

always, "Are you all right?" Clip began to wonder if he had made a mistake in accepting so meekly his transfer to observation.

When he and Rocky took off for their next patrol, early in the afternoon, the C.O. was nowhere in sight. But Clip circled quickly to a thousand feet, directly above headquarters, and there levelled off.

"Look at me," he muttered, peering down past his cowl. "Here I am; see me? One thousand feet, count 'em. Satisfied?"

And so steadily did he hold his course that the altimeter needle did not vary one division of the scale during the next half hour. So determined was he, in fact, to carry out that order to the letter, that he missed a few things in the sky about him.

He was startled when he felt a hand rap him on the shoulder. Twisting his head, he saw that Rocky was leaning forward, and pointing. Clip looked east, and saw a dim shape sliding past a cloud. At a thousand feet altitude, everything in the air was above them; this shape was some fifteen hundred feet above their level.

"Halberstadt!" shouted Clip out of the corner of his mouth.

Rocky rapped him again, gestured violently, and yelled something that the wind prevented Clip from hearing. Suddenly Clip woke up. His eye caught a bright, metallic gleam from the under surface of that distant plane, and at the same moment, he saw that it was headed in the general direction of another Salmson, perhaps three miles away.

Without shouting anything more, he jerked the throttle back against the stop and swung the stick into a right-angled turn. The big two-seater reeled eastward, and lifted in a steady climb. Clip tried to think who it was that was assigned to section 12-M this morning. But he was not familiar with the schedules, and knew only a few of his comrades by name. He

could not make a guess at who was in that Salmson ahead of him. But whoever it was, he was in for trouble.

Zooming upward at maximum angle, Clip's gaze swept the vicinity. Ah—there was a Spad. Only one, and some distance behind the Allied lines. It seemed to be circling, waiting. Did it see what was going on? It was impossible to tell. But the Salmson was headed that way. In order to attack, the German plane would have to cut within diving range of the pursuit ship. In which case—

Clip crouched tense in his seat, urging the last ounce of speed out of his ship. Once he glanced round behind him. Rocky, tight-lipped, had unlimbered his Lewis guns and was fingering the spade grip. Clip peered anxiously toward the Spad. It still wheeled idly. Either its pilot did not see, or else he was waiting until the Boche should be too far south to escape.

Meanwhile the Halberstadt was drawing rapidly up on the Yank two-seater. Its silver belly was very plain now, at least to Clip, looking up from below. A strange sense of destiny gripped him. Once a ship with a silver belly had shot him down, had come within inches of killing him. Now he was plunging toward combat with another. Cold sweat beaded his cheek-bones, but he stuck to his course.

Like a delayed fuse which at last burns itself out, the situation sizzled to a climax and exploded. Suddenly everything happened at once. The Halberstadt dipped sharply, and lunged to the attack. The Salmson, ready, swerved. Not away, but toward the enemy, so as to give the observer a square shot at his target. At right angles to each other, the two foes rushed closer and closer together. At the same moment the Spad hurtled into a dive, and Clip levelled off, less than half a mile from the center of the action.

With his eyes fixed on that Salmson,

Clip plainly saw the stream of tracers begin to spout from its rear guns. With the Halberstadt tearing in on the broadside, it seemed as if one of those hissing slugs must find its mark. But in another instant Clip groaned in dismay. The spout of smoking steel had stopped. The observer, after one short burst, had quit firing. Why?

The reason was gruesomely plain. Death rode those slender wings now. The pilot must have been struck dead as if by a bolt from the blue. The Salmson lurched forward and down. Its tail began to describe vicious, uncontrolled sweeps. It hurtled, first left, then right. The nose went down; then the motor, still running wide open, pulled it up again. Down it careened once more in a drunken slip. Like a beast wounded to madness, it lunged and reeled, always downward—

Like an arrow from the zenith came the Spad, screaming toward the spot. But the Halberstadt had wheeled in a half turn, making no attempt to follow its victim down, and was fleeing toward the north. With just a little luck it would escape.

But Clip had the nose of his own Salmson below the horizon now, and was ripping across the German's path. He ground his teeth with fury, with a savage lust for battle. He forgot that he was in a two-seater, that he was now an observation pilot. His fingers settled into place around the grips of his forward guns. His eyes lined up behind the sights on his cowl. His left hand held the throttle, jammed wide.

WITH a fierce, "Take that!" muttered through clenched teeth, he gripped those triggers hard. A staccato hammering rang in his ears, as his Vickers belched a hatful of smoking tracers straight across the course of that hurrying Boche.

Plainly the Jerry was surprised. He

had seen, and taken into account the Spad. But either he had not seen Clip, or else had figured the second Salmson could not get there quick enough to matter. As Clip's scorching volley seared a trail across the sky, the Halberstadt reared and wheeled, as the pilot slammed his stick hard over. It dodged aside, by whirling into a full turn. And the full turn carried it relentlessly back under the guns of the hot-footing Spad.

For several minutes that region of the sky boiled with steel. Five men, each firing two machine guns, were doing their best to riddle each other. Clip and Rocky in the Salmson, both pilot and gunner in the Halberstadt, and the lone eagle in the Spad. The Germans fought desperately to escape, but to no avail. Clip kept always on the north, and every time the silver-bellied ship turned that way, he drove it back again with a savage flail of bullets. Lower and lower raged the struggle, and farther and farther into Allied territory.

The Halberstadt made one last desperate attempt to escape its fate. But Clip met it full on, and at the same instant the Spad dove from above with its guns spitting wildly. The two murderous spouts of stabbing steel met and crossed where wings were affixed to black-crossed fuselage. The riddled cockpit bulged and buckled with the pounding impacts of a hundred death-bearing slugs. The German plane reeled, lurched, and then swooped downward, with the wind shrieking through its sagging wires like the awful wail of a soul lost in hell.

It took Clip a moment to realize that it was over. The fever of battle still raged in his veins; when he drew the back of his hand across his mouth, it came away flecked with a bloody froth, yet he never remembered biting his lips. He looked around anxiously. Rocky was leaning over the side of his tourelle, peering downward,

and his ashen face was working fiercely.

Clip twisted around to follow the direction of that gaze. To his surprise he saw that the other Salmson had crashed almost directly below the spot over which he was now passing. Its crazy swoops had carried some distance behind the lines, and it appeared to have hit the earth at last in a nearly horizontal position. Almost, as if it had tried to land itself. It was on the edge of an open field, with its nose jammed into a fringe of trees, and even from five hundred feet up, Clip could see that the fuselage appeared to be practically intact.

A sudden impulse made him close his throttle and tip into a glide. In a way it was a foolish thing to do, but he had a sudden, ungovernable desire to find out who had been in that ship. Curving low over that field, he looked it over carefully. It appeared safe enough, and fairly level, while the few shell-holes were all near one corner. He soared past, turned, and eased gently down.

His wheels touched, bounced, and rolled. The surface was somewhat rougher than it looked from above, and the plane strained to absorb the brutal jolts and slams. Still rolling rapidly, he ruddered away from a shallow hole—and then saw the rock. It protruded from the chalky soil hardly more than six inches, but its edge was hard and sharp. His left wheel struck it fairly; there was a *blam!* as the tire blew out. The plane lurched, and heeled still more as the left wheel collapsed. It skidded to a stop with the wing-tip scraping the ground.

"Damn!" said Clip, switching off the motor. "Thought I'd make it whole. Well, now we're grounded, let's see what's over there."

With Rocky at his side, he hurried across the field to where the wrecked Salmson lay. From close up, it was plainly in worse shape than it appeared from

above. The motor was telescoped back about three feet, and both wings were torn loose from the center section. There was a battery of three-inch guns in those trees, and a number of artillerymen were moving about the crushed plane.

"They're both dead, if that's what you're after," said an officer to Clip. "We pulled them out; there they lie."

Clip glanced down at the trampled sod. His collar tried to choke him. Arkwright! He'd had a queer sort of a hunch it was Arkwright; he couldn't have told why. Now he saw that the hunch was true. The other man, the observer; Clip thought his name was Hall. He wasn't sure. It was a little hard to tell, even had he known him better.

"They came in here like a bat out of hell," the artillery officer was saying. "Why they should want to land when their motor was going full tilt I don't know. But that's what they seemed to be trying. They didn't land properly at all. The wheels hit once, out in the middle of the field, and then *wham!* Into these trees they smash. *Wow!*"

"The pilot was dead; that's why they came down," said Clip curtly.

"He was dead?" exclaimed the officer. "What killed him, then? He's got no bullet wounds on him."

Clip stared blankly. "No wounds?"

"Well, I didn't examine him closely. But I didn't see any. Come over here, and we'll take a look together."

Clip dropped to his knees on the earth, but let the other do most of the examining. It was soon plain that he was right. The observer's face was bashed in, evidently by being thrown forward against his Scarff mounting when the plane hit. Otherwise he was not scratched. Outside of a slight bruise on the wrist, Arkwright seemed untouched. There was absolutely no sign of a bullet wound anywhere on his body.

HELPING to roll him over, Clip noticed that his limbs, though still warm, were hard and rigid, as if every muscle in his body was tensed. His expression was horribly contorted, as if a spasm of agony, or of deathly fear, had gripped him at the last moment, twisting the sinews of his cheeks into a gruesome mask. Clip had seen dead men before; men killed in a crash. But never one who looked like that.

"You see? Not a bullet scratch anywhere; that's what I told you. He must have been alive until he hit the ground."

Clip shook his head silently. He knew better. A feeling of helpless horror gripped him. What was the meaning of their weird menace? What was this terrible fate that struck men down, unwounded, and sent them crashing to their doom in a plane that was undamaged? What was the secret behind those silver-bellied killers, that had already destroyed so many American flyers and was snuffing out more every day?

A possible explanation occurred to him. A bullet might have severed a control wire, rendering the plane unmanageable. He got up and stepped to the side of the cockpit. Reaching in, he shoved the stick sideways, then backwards and forwards. Rudder, elevator, and ailerons all moved. The wires were slack, but none were parted.

"What does it mean?" he heard Rocky whisper.

Clip shook his head blankly. "I don't know. But I'm going—"

"Hey—here comes another!" cried the officer suddenly.

Startled, Clip raised his eyes. With a swish and a stutter of exhausts a Spad glided past over his head. Without knowing exactly why, he was certain that it was the same Spad. It slid lower, banked around beyond the far edge of the open space, and glided toward the ground. Clip,

thinking that it might possibly be one of his old comrades from the 95th, was looking for a squadron insignia. But he was puzzled to see that the pursuit ship carried no markings whatsoever.

With a deft flick of the rudder, the incoming plane avoided the shell-holes, and settled to a skillful three-point. As it jounced to a halt, Clip and Rocky started toward it. The pilot was worming up out of the cockpit, then sliding to the ground. Clip had a peculiar premonition of trouble, without knowing why. Then the pilot turned and lifted his goggles. It was Captain Syne.

"What!" exclaimed Clip in amazement. "Then that was you—that scrap—the silver-bellied Fokker? . . ."

"Yes," said the captain curtly, without giving any explanation of why he, the C.O. of an observation squadron, was flying around the Front in a Spad. "What are you doing down here, forced landing?"

"No, sir," said Clip. "The other Salmon went down; I wanted to see who it was, and if they were all right. So I landed. It's Arkwright, and his observer; they're both dead. But there's something strange—"

"You landed?" repeated the captain, his face a mask of displeasure. "By whose orders?"

"Why—no orders. I just thought I'd find out—"

"Just curious, eh?" snapped the captain. "Or was it a case of any excuse to get down on the ground? What do you think this war is, a game where they take time out whenever anybody gets hurt? You've got things to learn, Macauley. I don't know how much you could get away with in a pursuit outfit, but in the 77th the pilots are expected to obey orders. You were ordered to patrol a certain sector, and to leave it only in emergency. The scrap was an emergency. But this

isn't. This is just a stall. What's more, it's the second time you've failed to obey orders. That's twice too many. I won't stand for it. Hump yourselves back in that plane, and carry on your mission."

Clip, scowling furiously, actually started across the field before he remembered the smashed wheel. He turned, pointed it out.

"Fool!" grated the captain. "Might have known you'd do something like that. Get back to the field then the best way you can. And you'd better get there fast, too. There's an extra ship in C Hangar; you'll fly the one o'clock mission in that. If you're not there in time, I'll give you some discipline you won't forget. Get going!"

Two minutes later Clip and Rocky, crestfallen and disgusted, slogged down a muddy bank to a road that was no more than a pair of ruts. They questioned an artilleryman about the proper direction to take; he told them that this road ran parallel to the Front, and that they would have to follow it a mile and a half to the east before they came to a main highway carrying southbound traffic, where they might hope to get a lift. They set out with dogged strides.

Some time later, crossing an open plain, they could see the line of the main road ahead. The ditch that paralleled their path was filled with sprawling men; a machine-gun company waiting for dark before moving up. On the right was a large, level field, and in the middle of it a pile of brightly colored junk. A number of soldiers carrying rifles stood in a circle about that heap, and a small group of officers loitered to one side. Clip stopped and asked a question of one of the gunners sitting by the roadside.

"That's the Jerry plane that was shot down half an hour ago."

"Half an hour? Say," blurted Clip, seizing Rocky's arm, "that might be it.

It fell over this way, remember? Yes, look; you can see some of that shiny silver finish. Come on, let's take a look."

"They won't let you nowhere near it," warned the gunner.

But Clip and Rocky jumped the ditch and strode rapidly out across the open. As they neared the center, one of the soldiers standing guard blocked their path, and told them bluntly, "Sorry, sir. No one allowed past this point. Orders."

"But we're the ones who helped to shoot that plane down," protested Clip. "We were in the scrap, half an hour ago, and landed—"

"You'll have to get the lieutenant's permission, sir," insisted the sentry, gesturing with his head without shifting his rifle.

Clip turned; one of the officers had left the group and was already coming toward him. Before Clip could speak, this lieutenant said, "Why, hello, captain! You back here again already? I understood you to say you were sending someone up from Souilly to inspect this ship. We haven't seen anything of the person you mentioned yet, but we're standing guard, as you asked us."

CLIP, startled at first, began to think fast. This kind of thing had happened often enough now so that he was getting used to it. Giving Rocky a dig in the ribs, he said, "That's right, lieutenant. I just wanted to take another look myself, in the meantime."

"Certainly; go right ahead. This man with you? O.K., of course."

The two flyers walked on slowly toward the wrecked Fokker.

"What the devil was he talking about?" asked Rocky blankly.

"Sh-h," cautioned Clip. "He thinks I'm Captain Syne. Don't you see? The C.O. must have landed here, right after the Jerry hit, to take a look at this Fokker.

He arranged to have a guard set over it; then he hopped over and landed again by the Salmson, where we were. He must have been pretty anxious to—say, look at this!"

The German plane had struck nose on, but had not burned. The wings were crumpled, flattened into a shapeless mass against the earth; the motor was embedded in a two-foot pit of its own digging. The fuselage was buckled, folded upon itself so that no part was more than four feet above ground level. What had been the cockpit was a snarl of wires and splinters at the height of Clip's knee. Hopelessly entangled there was a twisted, motionless figure in a black leather flying coat and field-gray breeches. But Clip was looking at the material of the fuselage.

The upper half was covered with the usual close-woven fabric, doped and painted to a dark, greenish black. The under half, which was silver in shade, he had supposed to be painted likewise. But now, examining it, he saw that it was made of sheet metal, unpainted, cleverly cut to shape and wired to the tubular framework. His first thought, that its purpose was protection of the occupants from bullets, he abandoned immediately, for the metal was very thin, hardly more than a heavy foil. He could almost push his finger through it.

"Now what the devil," he muttered. "Fireproof, of course. But what's the use of fireproofing just half of the fuselage, and not the wings? Damned funny—"

"What a queer looking tail-skid," remarked Rocky.

It was flattened like a spade, like most of the German tailskids. But what gave it that fat, bulky appearance was the fact that it was encased in a rubber sheath, or mitten, fully an inch thick.

"Let's take a look in the cockpit."

It was a little difficult to make head

or tail out of that hodge-podge, especially as they did not wish to disturb the horrible looking occupant who obviously was stone dead. But after ten minutes or so, they had noted a number of unusual facts, none of which threw the faintest light on the mystery they were seeking to unlock.

The pilot's seat was slung between the tubular frame members by means of a number of heavy shock absorber cords. The edge of the cockpit all around was protected by a padding or sleeve of rubber. The stick, itself of wood, had a hard rubber handle, and the trigger grips as well as the throttle lever, were fashioned out of the same material. By peering under the cowl, they could just see the rudder bar; its treads where the pilot's feet rested were faced with rubber. The pilot himself wore galoshes, or flying boots with rubber soles, and over his woolen mittens a pair of flexible rubber gloves with deep gauntlets. Outside of these odd points, the plane and its equipment seemed to be just the same as any ordinary Fokker D-VII.

Clip lighted a cigarette and stood there, pondering fruitlessly. Rocky, intensely interested in the plane, kept poking around in the cockpit and under the cowl. Finally Clip gave a start.

"Say, we'd better shake a leg. If we aren't back at the field by one o'clock, the captain promised to be real nasty. We aren't getting anywhere rummaging around this junk heap, anyway." To the young officer he said curtly as they moved away, "Okay, lieutenant. Just keep your guard posted here until further orders, that's right."

On the main road they were lucky enough to hail an ambulance which had no riders on the running boards. This took them to a dressing station, where they managed to talk the medical major out of the use of a motorcycle side-car.

With both of them squeezed into the tub, they jounced for hours over endless miles of crowded, shell-torn roads, to descend at last, stiff and sore, at the aerdrome of the 77th with just ten minutes in which to grab a bite of canned cow and a swallow of bitter coffee before one o'clock.

Clip reported to the head rigger the location of their ship; the sergeant pointed to a plane warming on the tarmac, ready for them. "By the captain's orders," he said. The C.O. himself was nowhere in sight, though Clip thought he saw the adjutant make a note of the time of their arrival, and of their taking off.

The two flyers had had no opportunity to discuss by themselves the experience of the morning, and it was not until a couple of hours later, after a busy but unexciting patrol over Sector 11-M, that they found themselves alone on the edge of the tarmac and began to ask each other the questions that had been rising in their minds.

"What did you make of that Fokker, Rocky?" asked Clip.

"I couldn't make anything of it. All that rubber around the cockpit; it could hardly be to keep the pilot from getting cut up in case he crashed, could it?"

Clip shook his head. "Hardly. And the sheet-steel sheathing of the lower part of the fuselage certainly couldn't be for any purpose like that. It wasn't heavy enough to stop a thrown stone. You saw how it was crumpled up just like paper. But what I would like to know, is why Captain Syne goes flying around the lines in a Spad? There's no Spad on this field. I just asked our rigger, five minutes ago. He must drive over to some other drome nearby, and go up from there."

"Maybe that's his way of checking up on us."

Clip's face hardened. "A hell of an under-handed method, if that's it. No

wonder he gets no loyalty from his men. No, somehow I think there's more behind it than that. You noticed he was mighty keen about picking up information on that silver-bellied Fokker; he landed there in a hurry. But he also seemed pretty anxious to prevent anybody else finding out much about it. Had a guard set, and he shooed us away from Arkwright's ship as if he were afraid we'd learn too much. Maybe he figures there's some important secret mixed up with those German planes, and he wants to be the one to get all the credit for discovering it, if it's discovered at all."

"Poor Arkwright," said Rocky with a shudder. "He certainly went down before he had a chance to fight, even."

"Didn't he, though? There is certainly something weird behind it; he didn't have a scratch on him, remember? You'd think he and the observer had both been paralyzed in mid-air, or—or something. Whatever those silver-bellied ships have got—and yet, Rocky, after we got tangled up with that Fokker, it acted just like any other. I mean, it was tough, and all that; the pilot was pretty good. But if there had been anything superhuman about the ship, one Spad and one Salmson could never have sent it down, could they? Well—" He paused, shaking his head in puzzlement. "I'd certainly like to know what the captain has found out about that particular breed of Boche."

"Why don't you ask him?" suggested Rocky, quizzically.

"Maybe I will," retorted Clip, unsmiling.

AND that evening he did, meeting the C.O. leaving the mess he inquired with a blunt but respectful question.

"Stick to your own job, Macauley," was the cool reply. "As far as you're concerned, a plane with a bottom painted silver is just the same as any other Boche. Observe them when you can, and report

your observations to me. When you have to fight them, fight them. But leave the investigation of technical details to intelligence, and to the engineers, whose duty it is."

It was not so much the words, as the way he said them. He might just as well have told Clip to keep his mouth shut and mind his own business, and go to the devil besides. His hostility gave an edge to his tone that cut off all possibility of further discussion, but as Clip saluted, wheeled, and marched rigidly away, the C.O. gazed after him with a peculiar questioning look in his eyes.

Clip ate sparingly at noon, next day, then lay down on his bunk. Almost at once he went to sleep, and at quarter of three, Rocky had to shake him hard to wake him up. He rose stiffly, with the dull headache and the dark brown taste in his mouth that a nap in the middle of the day always gave him. It wasn't until he had taken off, and the clear air of the upper levels smote him freshly, that he really woke up.

He saw that the single drifting clouds of the morning seemed to have gathered into one huge towering bank in the northwest, with only a few isolated patches elsewhere against the blue. That bulging mass was dark and ominous and lowering, and appeared to be gaining in size every minute. As Clip neared the lines, he cut off his motor for a moment, turned his head, and pointed off his left wing-tip.

"Looks like a thunderstorm!"

If Rocky made any reply, the pilot could not hear what it was. He levelled off again and flew on. But as the time passed, that swelling cloud bank grew and grew. It spread toward the west, then the southwest; then it swelled more and more across the southern horizon, until finally it covered two thirds of the sky.

Suddenly Rocky hammered his shoulder, and yelled in his ear.

"Better go home! Storm coming! Can't see anyway!"

Clip looked at the clock on the instrument board. There was still thirty minutes to go, to five o'clock. Grimly he shook his head.

"Two hour patrol!" he yelled back. "Captain's orders!"

He heard Rocky shout something that sounded like a sulphurous curse, but Clip paid no heed. Doggedly he continued to circle and swing over the well-nigh invisible ground. Damned if he was going to let that stiff-necked captain bawl him out again for disobeying orders.

The rolling clouds now hugged the horizon on all sides, and rose to the zenith in a majestic, threatening pile. Here and there could be seen vicious flashes of lightning, stabbing the murky bulk with their jagged tongues, though the thunder that followed them could not be heard above the roar of the exhausts.

The second time Rocky beat at his shoulder, Clip glanced at his clock. It said two minutes of five. He nodded his head, and leaned on the stick. The big two-seater banked toward the south.

But he was a mile or two behind the German lines, and he found at once that he was flying against a strong headwind, produced by the freakish storm. The Salmson seemed to creep across the lines at hardly ten miles an hour, while the storm center swooped down upon it.

Clip studied the situation hurriedly. To climb above the disturbance was impossible; its peak was already directly over his head. To fly around it was equally impossible, for its extremities encircled the horizon. There was no room left to skim underneath it, for already its bottom rested on the hills. He had only one choice; to plunge through the very middle. He opened his throttle wide, crouched low in the cockpit, and headed due South.

A seething, swirling wall of vapor

swept toward him, shot through with eerie gleams where the lightning flickered and blazed. One moment he was seeing it ahead; the next moment he was swallowed up in a sea of impenetrable fog. The rain hit him with a smash, as if he had passed under an open faucet. He could feel the ship quiver as the drops rattled on its taut surfaces.

THE plane reeled, and the motor raced madly. Through a narrow rift he caught his bearings momentarily, and righted the plunging ship. He glanced at the compass; it was whirling slowly in its gimbals, rendered utterly useless by the electrical storm through which he was passing. He had no way of telling whether he was travelling north, south, east or west through the murk.

The next time he glanced out past his wing-tip, he was stricken cold with apprehension. The rain had ceased as sud-

denly as it had begun. But he was right in the heart of a lightning discharge. The surrounding vapor gleamed and crackled. Bluish wisps of cold fire played and leaped along his flying wires. The whole plane hummed with galvanic energy, and his finger-tips tingled like needles.

Clip sat tense and breathless, waiting for the bolt that should destroy him completely. There was nothing in the world he could do except wait and pray. If the lightning struck, it struck, and he would be dead instantaneously. If not—

It was fully five minutes before the Salmson passed through the heart of that storm and emerged on the other side, and in those five minutes Clip Macauley lived a dozen years. Rain hit him in sudden, driving squalls, then stopped abruptly. Lightning flashed and snapped on all sides, sending chills of horror down his spine with every crack. The thunder crashed



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A GOOD GUIDE



TO GOOD WHISKY

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and roared at his very elbow, deafening him.

At last his eye found a funnel-shaped hole below, and at the bottom of the hole he saw for just an instant, a tiny patch of the earth. Before the rift closed, he had recognized the broken bridge at La Folle, and got a check on his direction, at the same time discovering that he had lost fully five thousand feet of his height. He wheeled ninety degrees to the left, set the stick in a climb, and peered ahead.

A minute later he was rewarded by the sight of a thin patch in the swirling clouds. He darted into it; the vapor thinned, and shortly gave way to a clear sky mottled with wisps and puffs of moisture. Another minute, and he was flying under the clear blue dome of heaven, the seething mass of the storm behind him.

Clip relaxed, drew a breath of relief, and looked over his shoulder. Rocky was sitting up calmly, wiping the drops from his goggles, and grinning unconcernedly. Clip stared in surprise; the kid certainly didn't seem much perturbed over the hair-raising experience.

Another ten minutes and they were approaching the field. Everything on the ground had a clean, washed look; even the roofs of the hangars gleamed pale against the greensward. Two planes stood on the tarmac; more were being rolled out. Clip, glancing at the sock, noted that the wind had shifted; he circled the drone once, and angled into a glide that carried him in across the roofs.

He cleared the middle hangar by thirty feet or so. Then he ducked sharply, to cut short his run cross-field. The downward slant caused his under-carriage to pass directly above one of the other ships standing there, hardly ten feet distant. At a certain instant he felt a slight jolt, as if he had grazed something in mid-air. But there was nothing to graze, and his glide

was not interrupted. He went on, rolled his wheels, and turned to taxi back.

He halted near the dead-line, switched off, and raised his goggles. There was a commotion near one of the other planes. Mechanics were lifting a man out of the cockpit; others ran to help. Cries of astonishment rang out. Clip looked, and saw that the figure being assisted out of the ship was Captain Syne. The C.O. was not unconscious, but seemed dazed and groggy. When his feet were placed on the ground, he managed to stand, swaying dizzily. But then he drew a hand across his face, straightened up, and pushed aside those who held him.

He walked straight across to Clip's plane, his gait a trifle unsteady, but his face as black as night.

"I suppose that's your idea of a joke, Macauley," he grated. "What were you trying to do, kill me? What did you throw?"

Clip stared in amazement. "Throw? I don't know what you're talking about, sir."

"Come, come; don't deny it. You flew right over the plane I was sitting in. You dropped something, that must have hit me on the head. Damned near knocked me out. What was it, a wrench?"

Clip shook his head vigorously. "Not me, captain. I didn't drop anything." He turned to his observer. "Did you, Rocky?"

Rocky answered immediately, "No, sir."

The C.O. snarled unpleasantly. "Afraid to admit it, eh? Going to claim it was an accident, I suppose? Well, we'll find whatever it was, and see if that proves anything." He turned to the mechanics. "Search that plane I was in, and the ground around it, and find what it was that fell on my head."

A dozen men went to their knees, while others peered into every corner of the

cockpits. Clip and Rocky descended to the ground and waited, disturbed but silent. The captain folded his arms and scowled. The search proved fruitless. Nothing was found that could be remotely connected with Clip's ship. The C.O.'s anger increased.

After several minutes a motor sergeant stepped up.

"I beg pardon, captain," he said. "But I don't think they dropped anything on you out of that plane, sir."

"Oh, you in on this, too?" barked the C.O.

"I'm not in on anything," persisted the sergeant. "But I happened to be looking this way just as Lieutenant Macauley's plane glided overhead. I didn't see anything fall, but I saw a flash. A kind of a streak of bluish light, that darted from one plane to the other, and then was gone. Like a lightning flash, sort of, sir."

The captain regarded him incredulously. "Are you trying to tell me that I was struck by lightning? Do you take me for a fool?"

Suddenly Rocky stepped forward. "Why, yes—I see it! It was lightning, or something just like it. We flew home through a thunderstorm. Our ship must have taken on a heavy charge, from those electrical clouds. Your plane, there, was the first thing we came close to afterward; that flash was the discharge. That's what knocked you out."

THE C.O. eyed Rocky darkly for several moments. Then he shrugged. "I never heard of such a thing. Though I suppose it's possible. Enough static to knock a man out? Well—If that's what it was, I shouldn't be surprised if you apes did it purposely. What do you know about electricity, Rhodes? Ever study it?"

"Yes, sir," replied Rocky. "I took electrical engineering in college, and then

worked in the G.E. laboratories at Schenectady."

"Ha!" snorted the captain. "You admit that much, do you?" He glared at Rocky angrily, as if he were figuring out how he could discipline the little observer for being an electrical engineer. Then he barked curtly, "You two had better keep out of thunderstorms after this, and pay more attention to the Boches."

He turned on his heel and walked slowly away toward headquarters. He had not gotten halfway there, however, before Rocky grabbed Clip by the arm and ran after the C.O.

"Captain Syne!" he exclaimed excitedly. "It just struck me! Lightning—static discharge—the silver-bellied ships—"

"What are you talking about now?" demanded the captain.

"Don't you see? Of course I'm not sure. But that might be. The tubular framework, and the metal sheathing on the fuselage, would serve as an electrofoil. And all that rubber around the pilot's cockpit was insulation, of course, to protect him."

"I don't see what connection—" began the C.O.

"Hadn't you noticed," continued Rocky eagerly, "that those German planes always knock down the *first* opponent they meet? With the greatest ease, as soon as they come near; sometimes without apparently firing a shot? In other words, *like lightning?*"

"Are you trying to suggest that the Boches find a thunderstorm, fly through it until their ships are heavily charged, and then destroy our planes by coming close enough to transmit that charge? Nuts!"

"No, no; not exactly. They must have some artificial means of producing the charge, of course. A highly developed Toepler-Holtz machine, perhaps. To induce an electrostatic intensity sufficient—"

Clip listened rather blankly. He knew something about electricity, but not a great deal. This was way over his head. Static charges, multiple dielectrics, voltages in six figures, galvanic induction; he heard Rocky reel off the terms, but they meant little to Clip.

The captain, however, listened with the closest attention, but he was plainly skeptical. When Rocky finished, he said thoughtfully:

"It's a fine theory. But it isn't practical. It can't be. In the first place, no machine has ever been built that would throw a flash that far, sufficient to kill a man, or even to knock a man out. If such a charge could be built up in a plane, it would escape before the plane ever left the ground, by jumping from the wing-tip to the earth. Rubber tires, and an insulated tail-skid, would do no good. Furthermore, how about the pilot himself? Do you mean to say that rubber gloves would protect him from a potential of half a million volts?"

Rocky was crestfallen, unable to reply.

"No, Rhodes, it's too fantastic. It isn't possible. There are too many objections, too many difficulties that could never be overcome. We've got to look for some other explanation." He glanced sideways at Clip, and seemed suddenly to remember who he was talking with. "As for you men, please confine yourselves to your routine duties of observation—as I told you once before—and leave the solution of this problem to me—that is to say, I mean, to those whose job it is."

And with cool finality the C.O. left them standing there.

For the rest of that afternoon, and long into the night, Clip and his observer discussed electrostatic phenomena. Rocky went into detailed explanations; Clip did not understand all of the theory, but he grasped the general idea. The more they talked about it, the more he became con-

vinced that Rocky might be right, in spite of the captain's objections. It was fantastic, yes; but the Boches had produced more than one unbelievable invention in this war. Who would ever have credited the idea of a cannon capable of throwing a shell seventy-five miles, before the Germans proved it with Big Bertha?

The thing that stumped both of them was what to do about it. If the Germans had actually devised some means of charging their planes so that by merely approaching close to an Allied ship, the pilot could be stunned by a static spark, what defense was possible?

"The only way to block the discharge would be to have our own ships charged to approximately the same potential. And how can we do that if we don't know the method they employ?"

"We don't even know the field they come from, do we?"

"No, it's never been reported. Our map shows five aerodromes in back of this sector, but the one used by the silver-bottomed ships has never been spotted. It must be in pretty deep."

"How many American planes have they destroyed, altogether?"

"I don't know. The exact figure is hushed up." He added ominously, "That means it's a lot."

Clip remained sunk in thought for some time. Then he murmured absently, "I wish I'd been one of those chaps in the other Salmson."

"What? What the hell do you mean?"

Clip sat up straight. "Oh, I don't mean I wish I was dead. It struck me that the best way to find out what those silver-bellied ships do is to be in the other plane when they do it. The trouble is, every-one they've sent down is dead—Next to that, a look at their field might tell us something. If their trick is something like you suggest, there would have to be

quite a lot of apparatus around, wouldn't there?"

"Why, yes. The electrical machinery, I should guess, would be pretty bulky. More than you'd see on an ordinary aerodrome. A Toepler-Holtz machine of any great capacity has to be large."

Clip mused in silence for several minutes. Then he looked at Rocky sharply. "What do you say, kid?"

"What do you mean?"

"Let's you and I go looking for that drome, tomorrow morning."

Rocky's eyes widened. "How about orders?"

Clip shrugged. "The way I look at it is this. If we uncover the secret behind those silver-bellied Boche, no one is going to ask us who gave us orders. If we don't, we'll probably be dead, and won't give a damn what the captain has to say. . . . Well?"

"You're the pilot," said Rocky with a crooked grin. "If you should leave our sector and go buzzing around in Germany, I couldn't very well get mad and jump out, could I?"

"Attaboy," said Clip warmly.

After that they talked in low tones for a short time; twenty minutes later they were both fast asleep.

IN the morning they spoke to none of their comrades about their intentions; least of all did they give any hint to the C.O., who merely greeted them curtly as they crossed the tarmac. Clip flew directly out to their assigned area, but then, with a brief glance around to see if an unmarked Spad was in the neighborhood, he began circling deeper and deeper into Germany.

They returned very little wiser than when they had set out. They had found a hitherto unknown field, west of Coural, but it was obviously being used by standard Hanovers. As far as the eye could

see across the plain to the northeast, from a point fifteen miles beyond the lines and twelve thousand feet up, no other dromes were visible.

"Do you suppose it could be in those hills, on the east?"

Clip's eyes narrowed. "Not the kind of country you'd expect to find an aerodrome in. But you can expect the Boches to do the unexpected, in a case like this. We'll see—this afternoon."

At three o'clock, Clip made only a pretense of going to his sector. When he was halfway to the lines he altered his course abruptly, and swung his nose toward the heavily wooded slopes and the narrow, dark valleys north of Landalle; the foothills of the Ardennes.

A better hiding place for an aerodrome could hardly have been imagined. Even from the air it was practically invisible three miles away; a man might very easily have flown directly over it without seeing it, were he not on the alert. So deeply was it set between sheltering hills on all sides; so cleverly were its hangers concealed by overhanging trees; so few were the houses, roads, or other signs of activity in the neighborhood.

A small stream had at some time long past, been blocked by a fall of rock, and had backed up to spread into a little lake that covered the floor of an isolated valley. Into this lake the water had carried, and deposited, silt and stones from the surrounding hillsides for years and years. Recently the dam at the lower end had been broken, either purposely or by a chance shell. The water, draining off, had left a mud floor, which had dried and hardened into a smooth and level expanse, a thousand yards long and nearly six hundred wide. An ideal base for an aerodrome, and in an unsuspected region.

Clip flew over those rugged hills for three quarters of an hour before he discovered it. Then, from fifteen thousand

feet, that tiny bare spot caught his eye. He called Rocky's attention to it; the observer, after peering through his glasses, gestured downward. Clip put the Salmson in a circling glide.

He was not yet down to ten thousand when he saw the plane land. It was only a blurred speck; he had not seen it cross the hills. But he saw that speck appear, moving across the open area, and come to a stop, and knew instantly what it was. His glide steepened immediately.

From two thousand feet the drome was plainly to be recognized. The hangars, of which there were three, were partially set back under the trees that fringed the edges; there were also two long, low buildings that evidently served as quarters for men and officers. Besides the plane that had just landed, five or six others stood near one side of the field. All were Fokkers but one; that was a Halberstadt. But by peering downward at an angle, Clip could see that the under surface of every fuselage wore a bright, metallic sheen. A silver belly!

Dropping until his wheels were close to the ridges, but still a thousand feet above the field itself, he flew straight across the valley. No, not another building could he see. No structure that might house a power plant, a laboratory, the bulky electrical machinery that Rocky had described. Nothing but hangars and barracks.

Wheeling over the hills beyond, he saw on the reverse slope the buildings of an ancient monastery, surrounded by the usual high stone wall. One was so old that it had fallen in ruins; the two others seemed to be in fair condition, although apparently unoccupied. The largest, clinging to the steep mountain side just below the crest, was square in outline, with towers rising from the four corners. Each tower was surmounted by a tall staff, and between the staffs—

His observations were rudely interrupted by Rocky, pounding him on the back of the neck. Clip looked around; the observer was pointing toward the field, where a plane was just taking off, and another was rolling out from the hangars. They were both Fokkers; plainly that neighborhood was shortly going to be uncomfortable.

Clip estimated his position quickly. They had discovered the location of the silver-bellies' drome; or at least, of a drome used by those mysterious ships. But there had not been time to learn much about it. From what they had seen so far, it was just like any other flying field; there was nothing to explain the peculiar and terrible characteristics of those metal-sheathed ships. They must have missed something; perhaps there would be time for one more look.

He wheeled and shot across the valley, with the wind. The Fokker, taking off in the opposite direction, climbed behind him without turning. Clip concentrated his gaze on what was below him. He saw just what he had seen before, and no more. A level field, three canvas hangars, two squatty barracks buildings; some planes, and a number of parked trucks; a lot of moving figures. Nothing else but woods.

Angling away above the eastern ridge, he looked back hurriedly. The Fokker was in the air; it was just crossing the opposite ridge, seeming to clear the towers of the monastery by no more than a few feet. As he looked it turned, likewise toward the south. It was going to be a race for the lines.

But a Salmson could not outrun a Fokker, even when the latter had altitude to make up. For two or three miles Clip managed to keep out of range, by bearing more and more to the eastward. But now the German plane had reached his level, and more, too. It was coming up fast on

his flank as it flattened out to achieve full speed. Its belly glinted bright, shining in the late afternoon sun.

Clip peered anxiously ahead. There were no allied planes in sight. He was too far behind the lines to expect to meet a cruising pursuit patrol. If any other ships were within five miles, they would be German ships. He and Rocky were completely on their own.

He watched over his shoulder as the blunt nose of the Fokker drew nearer and nearer. Two hundred yards, a hundred and fifty—one hundred. Still the Boche pilot held his fire. That very fact made Clip apprehensive. It showed that the Jerry was no nervous rookie, but a seasoned veteran who knew enough to wait for close quarters.

"The best defense is a strong offense," thought Clip.

HE twitched his stick right, then instantly threw it hard left. The Salmson whipped into a bank. The Fokker, fooled into following his first feint, shot past his tail on the right without coming closer than fifty feet. Its guns did not speak. But Rocky was wide awake and ready for his opportunity. His swivelled Lewis guns chattered savagely in the rear cockpit, and a searing stream of tracers poured from their muzzles.

Clip held the bank until Rocky's fire ceased, then quickly reversed his turn. But the Fokker, whirling back, was now between him and the lines. The Salmson had lost the lead in the race, and was now cut off. Furthermore, a second Boche was hastening out of the north.

This last fact forced Clip into a bold maneuver. He could not afford to lose time; a few more fleeting seconds would find him caught between two foes. That meant annihilation. Somehow he must force his way past the nearest, and keep the fight a running one.

He wheeled straight toward the Fokker, which meant that he was pointed south. His left hand pressed the throttle, holding it wide. His right hand, in addition to guiding the stick, contracted around his trigger grips. His forward guns spat venomously.

The Boche refused to turn aside. A black-crossed wing-tip slid across Clip's sights, then a blunt, ugly nose, blurred by the shimmer of a spinning prop. It grew prodigiously in size, as it rushed nearer with the combined speed of the two planes. A hundred yards—fifty yards—twenty! The German, staring a suicide collision in the face, ducked sharply and slid under Clip's wing. Clip careened past above him, and opened his mouth to emit a hoarse cry of satisfaction. In that instant the cry froze in his throat.

In a flash his muscles, his nerves, his senses all seemed turned to stone. It was as if a gigantic, invisible hand came from nowhere and seized him in its grip, a grip so powerful that his very will was paralyzed. He felt no pain; he felt nothing, heard nothing. Only his eyes retained the power to see.

Like a man in a trance he saw the horizon reeling across his center section. His brain, half stunned, told him that he was in a spin. Instinct asserted itself. To stop a spin he must put the controls in neutral. He tried to move. Nothing happened. His rigid muscles did not budge by so much as a fraction of an inch. He tried to look down, to see if the stick was already in neutral. His head would not bow; only by a tremendous effort could he make his eyes roll in their sockets, so that he could glance down into the cockpit.

The stick was very nearly in the middle. The rudder? He could not see it, and his feet were lumps of clay. The silence was unnatural, ghastly, and yet was not quite complete silence. There was a faint hum

in his ears, like the sound on an open telephone wire. Was that the motor? Yes; his eyes swung to the tachometer, which registered 1600 R.P.M.

With every fibre of his being, he strove to close the throttle. His eyes rolled left. His left arm exerted every ounce of power he could command. He saw the lever move a half an inch. That tiny, insignificant success encouraged him. He redoubled his straining. By three more stiff, wooden jerks he got the throttle down against the stop.

The tachometer told him that the motor was idling. The reeling of the horizon had stopped; the plane was not spinning. But through his center section he saw the earth. He was headed downward, and only a little altitude was left. He must pull back on the stick. He heaved and struggled internally; his right arm remained rigid, fingers locked about the grip. The stick did not move a single centimeter.

He transferred his efforts to his left arm. From the throttle lever to the stick was at the most fourteen inches. To force his left hand to take that journey required every ounce of his will power. But at last it reached its goal. The ground loomed closer and closer. His left hand tore frantically at the fingers of his right, unlocked their frozen grip, forced them aside, and seized the stick. As he drew it back, his undercarriage hit the earth.

He did not feel the jolt, nor did he hear any sound. But he saw the horizon drop abruptly as the ship bounded upward. To jockey the controls in his present state was impossible. He waited until the ground rose slowly again; then he drew back a little more on the stick.

He actually did not know that the plane had landed until his eyes told him that motion had ceased. Like a dead man he stared straight ahead, his wooden limbs motionless, only his eyes alive. He told

himself that he was on the earth, alive; yet at the same time felt that it could not be true. His senses were still numb, far away. By instinct a sigh of relief rose within him. But he could not sigh. When he tried, he found that he had not been breathing. His lungs were gasping for air. His cheeks were empurpled; his eyes bulging. He was suffocating in a spell.

By an intense, deliberate effort he drew a full breath; then another. His chest tingled, like a muscle which has been asleep; the sudden racing of his heart—had that stopped, too?—sent the first surge of returning life through his stunned body. Bit by bit his power of movement came back; his senses crept back to normal. His arms twitched; then his legs, his head. He began to feel things; sounds filtered through to his ears. The clicking of the motor—then a strange voice.

That last drove him to action. Stiffly, painfully, he pushed himself up out of his cockpit and looked behind him. No, that had not been Rocky's voice. The observer was crouched against the rim of the rear cockpit, rigid and motionless. His hands were locked on the spade grip of his guns; his face was frozen in a fighting snarl. Plainly he had not moved since the moment of that paralyzing shock.

"Rocky!" mumbled Clip, trying to reach him.

THE other voice spoke again, louder, nearer. Clip glanced over his shoulder. A *feldwebel*, brandishing a Luger, ran across the lumpy ground at the head of a group of ten or fifteen men wearing coal-scuttle helmets and carrying rifles. He shouted in German, which Clip did not understand, but the meaning of his command was obvious.

Clip saw capture staring him in the face. Never a pleasant thought, it was

doubly repulsive at this moment, just when he, and he alone, had possessed himself of invulnerable information. It struck him that if the Salmson had landed without crashing, it might take off again. It was worth attempting anyway. He twisted about, slammed himself down into the cockpit, and jerked the throttle open.

But the Boches were too close when he made the move. Three or four men grabbed each wing-tip, holding the plane against the pull of the prop. The non-com ran up to the cockpit, shoved his revolver against the back of Clip's neck, and yelled a harsh command.

Clip saw that it was hopeless. Another moment, and his brains would be jelly on the windshield. He shrugged angrily, and reached to cut the switch. The roar of the motor died to silence.

The *feldwebel* gestured rudely with his Luger. Clip climbed out and slid to the ground, to point at once toward the observer.

"Take care of that man; he's unconscious."

The German nodded, and spoke to his men. They lifted Rocky out and laid him flat. He did not seem to be wounded, but he did not move. The Boches stood around and stared at him stonily.

"Here, I know what he needs," said Clip, pushing past them.

Kneeling across the unconscious observer's hips, he placed both hands on the lower part of his chest and leaned down with all his weight. Releasing the pressure after a moment, he repeated it slowly, in the manner of giving artificial respiration to revive a drowning person. After a very few moments he was rewarded, Rocky gasped, squirmed feebly, and opened his eyes. Dazed, he stared up at Clip.

"What . . . happened? Where are we . . . now?"

"Shut up," ordered Clip. "We're in Germany, captured. But the ship is okay; we might get a chance yet. Watch your—"

"*Nein, nein!*" growled the *feldwebel*, jerking Clip away by the arm, and adding more in German. His words were Greek to the American, but he guessed that it was forbidden for the prisoners to talk to each other. He drew back, giving Rocky a sharp look of warning.

Clip's hope of a possible break, however, was curtly shattered. The two Americans were separated, searched, and each flanked by a guard. As soon as Rocky could walk, they were marched off without further ado. On a nearby road the business-like sergeant hailed a passing truck. Clip was put on the seat, and Rocky in back; plenty of ready rifles covered each of them. The truck lumbered along, into a village.

The village was small, but contained a prisoners' depot. Behind a stone farmhouse was a barbed-wire enclosure. Here Clip saw a number of American uniforms, and a few French. Several were wounded; all were dirty, dejected, and silent. One infantry lieutenant, with a hand missing, moaned deliriously from time to time.

The *feldwebel* led his captives into the stone building, where he turned them over to an *unter-leutnant* who gave him a signed receipt. They were searched again, with extreme thoroughness; then made to wait without speaking, standing in their stocking feet in a damp passage.

At last they were ushered together into an inner office. This room, which had once been the kitchen, was crowded with cupboards, filing cases, and cabinets; the *Kapitan* who sat behind the one desk was evidently some kind of intelligence officer. He was nearly bald, and what hair he had was clipped close, so that his head was like a smooth ball, disfigured only

by the faint red evidence of an old sabre scar across the very top. He had small bright eyes and a thin-lipped mouth; his face was cool and hard and full of expressions that meant nothing, like an Oriental. In fact, his features had more than a suggestion of the Mongol in them, and his voice was suave and impassive.

"So, aviators!" he greeted them. "Come right in, gentlemen. We won't detain you long. Your names, please?"

"Don't tell him a thing, Rocky," said Clip, aside.

"*Tut tut*," said the *Kapitan*, glancing down at his desk. "Macauley, Charles R., and Rhodes, Evan S. Am I right? Thank you. Now tell me what squadron you are with."

Neither of the Americans uttered a syllable.

"The 77th Observation, flying Salmsons," continued the *Kapitan*. "And I believe the commanding officer of the 77th is called Captain Syne. Correct me if I'm wrong." He smiled at them mirthlessly. "Come, come, lads, don't be stubborn. You see I know all the answers. You must forget that you carried identity cards. Don't you want the Red Cross to notify your families that you're alive? All right now; what sector have you been flying over?"

Rocky said sullenly, "If you know already, why ask us?"

The *Kapitan* shrugged. "You Americans take this war so seriously." He leaned forward and addressed Clip with a confidential air. "What would you say if I offered you a chance to return to your own lines?"

Clip could not repress the gleam in his eyes; he took a step forward. But then he sensed a catch, and fell back.

"Nuts!" he growled.

"Right again," said the *Kapitan* cheerfully.

Paying them no further attention, he

drew some blank forms toward him and commenced to write, raising his eyes to their identity cards to copy the names. He finished the first and handed it to Rocky.

"This will allow you two meals between here and Villingen," he remarked casually. "Don't lose it, or besides missing the meals, your shoes will not be returned to you on arrival."

He commenced writing out another for Clip. Halfway through he paused, his eyes on the photograph attached to the card. He looked up at Clip's face, then back at the card again. Then he rose, came close to Clip, and studied him from several angles.

"Macauley . . . Charles R.," he murmured thoughtfully. "So . . ."

"No; Smith, John A.," said Clip sarcastically.

"How long ago was this photograph taken?" asked the German.

"Twenty years ago, at the age of three months," snapped Clip.

Rocky snickered, but the *Kapitan* remained entirely serious. After another long look at Clip, he went across to a file behind the desk. Holding the identity card in one hand, he began thumbing through folders in a drawer. From time to time he stopped to make comparisons. Five minutes, ten minutes passed in silence. Clip became restless.

Finally the *Kapitan* pulled out a folder containing a number of papers. He looked into it for a moment, then turned and stared hard at Clip. His face was still impassive, but his eyes glittered.

"So-o," he said again, with a peculiar intonation. "You did not think we would know you, *hein*?"

Clip stared back at him in a kind of disgusted annoyance.

"How long have you been calling yourself Macauley?"

Clip gave vent to a snort. "What is

the idea of this little game, anyway? I'm not answering your questions, so you might as well—"

"Listen," interrupted the German. "I will read you something."

HE moved to the desk, opened a drawer, and casually slipped a Luger into a holster at his belt. Then he read aloud in German from the top paper in the folder. After several moments Clip said, "You'll have to put it in English if you expect me to understand it."

"So quickly you have forgotten! Very well, then, if you insist." The *Kapitan* began again at the beginning. "'Captured first near Walbruck, circumstances suspicious. Plane close by, undamaged; claimed to have suffered forced landing. Papers in order; sent first to Molet, then to Garlissen. On July 17th, escaped from Garlissen camp, after severely wounding a sentry. Traced to Mulheim, there lost track of. Three weeks later, just after theft of plans from *Halberstadt* assembly plant, same man picked up in Mulheim. Now wearing uniform of aviation mechanic, 1st class, Bavarian reserves. Denied knowledge of theft, and denied identity, but adjutant and two guards from Garlissen recognized him positively two days later. Sentenced to death on August 11th. That night escaped from cell in Mulheim fortress, and reached outer wall. In hand to hand conflict with sentries, he killed one; a second wounded him in the head with a blow, and he fell from wall into river. Believed to have drowned, but body never recovered."

"This man unquestionably is an American spy. Should be taken on sight, dead or alive. Description as follows: height, 1.82 metres, weight, 77 kilos. Complexion dark, hair black and straight, build slender, nose sharp, eyes dark brown. Would now have scar right side of scalp. Speaks English, German, and probably French.

Name given as Nolan, David; doubtless fictitious. Photograph attached, taken at Garlissen, July 12th.' . . . Well, how does that strike you?"

"Very interesting," replied Clip. "He must have been quite a guy. But what's it all got to do with me?"

"The interesting guy, as you call him, was—you!"

"What!" Clip stiffened in surprise. But the *Kapitan* was holding up a small photograph. Clip looked at it, and his eyes bulged in their sockets. He had never seen a better likeness of himself.

"It is useless to deny it, don't you agree?" purred the *Kapitan*.

"But it—it can't be me!" cried Clip. "I was never in Mulheim in my life. Never on this side of the lines before. There's some mistake. I tell you I don't know—" Suddenly a light broke on him. He *did* know. This was the same case of mistaken identity, cropping up again, of course. "Why, yes; that's not me. That's—"

"Yes?" urged the German quickly, when Clip paused abruptly.

"Nothing," muttered Clip.

"What were you going to say? That's . . . who?"

"I'm not saying a thing," insisted Clip.

The *Kapitan* shrugged. "Have it your own way. I'll just see what some other witnesses have to say."

One by one he called three other officers into the room. All three of them, after looking at the photograph and studying Clip, nodded their heads emphatically. The *Kapitan's* face grew grim.

"Are you satisfied with the identification?" he asked softly. "Whether you are or not, I am. That is the important thing, isn't it?"

"You're wrong, though. You'll find no scar on my scalp."

"Head wounds frequently heal smooth—

ly," shrugged the German. "Of course, if you insist, I will admit the possibility of an error. I have read in story books about cases of remarkable resemblance. But in this case I think it safer to shoot first and speculate on the interesting possibilities later. You see, David Nolan has a dangerous reputation." He gestured with the folder, then glanced at his wrist. "It is, roughly, nine hours to dawn. I hope the time passes quickly, for both your sake and mine. I can promise you that this time there will be no escapes. These French peasants build their wine cellars solidly, and all the guards will be well warned. So spare us the heroics, please."

As he turned to speak to an armed non-com at his elbow, Rocky hissed hoarsely in Clip's ear. "Tell him, Clip—for God's sake—"

Clip shook his head. "There's nothing to tell him, that would do any good. He won't believe anything, now, don't you see? It's too late. . . . So long, Rocky, old kid."

Rocky was white as a sheet. "Oh, my God . . . good-bye, Clip—"

The observer was led stumbling out through the door by which the two had entered. There was a moment's delay; then three soldiers with their hands on Luger butts marched Clip out into a different corridor. He was escorted down a long, crooked flight of steps, and pushed through an iron door, which clanged dismally behind him. In utter blackness he sank to his knees on a damp, earthen floor, and fought desperately to keep control of his jumping nerves.

That night was a thousand years long. Clip's watch had been taken from him, and he had no way of estimating the time. The sentry outside his door was changed frequently, and every time the footsteps neared, and voices grated, he thought his time had come.

He thought of Rocky, and of himself; of the German *Kapitan*, and of Captain Syne. He saw the latter now in a different light, and began to perceive some reason back of his strange actions. If he had once been an intelligence operative, he was still an intelligence operative. That was one branch of the service that a man left only when he died. For Clip to give the Germans his present *nom de guerre* would be the rankest treason; it would expose Syne's identity, but would probably help Clip himself not at all. Whatever he did, he must hold his tongue.

But it was agony to face it. To die for his country was something that Clip could stomach; he had not flown over the Front for months without getting used to the idea. But to stand up to the muzzles of a firing squad, all because of a fantastic mistake; that was truly the grimmest of Fate's ghastly jests. And this waiting, waiting . . . alone . . . in the dark . . . the silence . . .

When the door opened he sprang to his feet readily, eagerly. His lips were moving, whispering. He was praying that it would be over quickly. That was all he asked, now.

HE hardly saw the walls, the flickering lanterns, the stony faced soldiers. The courtyard where they led him was a walled pool of dank gray mist. He stood where they told him to stand, facing a row of vague uniforms leaning on rifles. He counted the figures slowly from one end to the other. Eight. Then he counted them in the opposite direction, moving his lips deliberately. . . . Eight men. . . . Seven bullets.

He shook his head at someone who tendered a bandage.

A voice barked a command. Clip noticed that the voice shook, ever so little. That fact gave him strength. His executioners were nervous. He stood up

a little straighter as the rifles were raised. A strange, soft humming was in his ears.

There was a second command. The voice seemed steadier this time. Clip clenched his fists. Breech bolts made a harsh, metallic clatter in the gloom. The humming in his ears became louder.

Clip raised his eyes to the sky. He could see only a dim, dirty patch above his head. . . . Was that a plane he heard? What did it matter? In a moment he would be dead. . . . No, it was an automobile. As he steadied himself, forced himself to keep from leaning forward against the expected impact of leaden slugs, a car wheeled into a gate at his left and came to a halt with a squeal of brakes.

In Clip's brain, time stood still, while every detail photographed itself on his memory. An officer stepped out of that car. He said something in German. Another officer answered, from the other side of the court. That was the *Kapitan*. They stepped toward each other, saluted stiffly, and drew aside. The *Kapitan* spoke curtly over his shoulder, and the rank of rifles dropped to a position of rest. Clip let the breath out of his lungs, very slowly.

It might have been a minute, or it might have been thirty. Then the *Kapitan* was facing him, smiling inscrutably.

"His Excellency the *Ober-Leutnant* von Holtz has something to say to you," he announced flatly.

Clip looked blankly at the second officer. He was short and slight, with deep-set, burning eyes and a thin, slanting mouth. He spoke in a nasal tone, with an air of careless authority.

"You are the *Amerikanischer* aviator that one of my pilots brought down yesterday afternoon, *ja?*" he said in stilted, precise English. "You may be useful to me, in a certain experiment I wish to make. I understand that you are sen-

tenced to die, anyway, *hein?*" He gestured toward the waiting firing squad. "Come with me, and you will die differently. Up in the air, as an aviator should. *Verstehen?*"

Clip was too dazed to comprehend.

"Come, come," said the *Kapitan*. "He offers you a chance, not to live, but to meet death with greater dignity. A matter of a few hours; it is up to you to choose— Well, do you wish to go with him?"

Clip said, "Yes," without knowing why he said it. He had not the faintest notion what was ahead of him, but anything was better than a firing squad. While there's life there's hope.

Whirling along misty roads in the tonneau of the car with an armed soldier on either side, he listened to the explanations of the officer in the uniform of an *Ober-Leutnant*.

"Your plane, the Salmson, was undamaged. It has been transported to our field, which you were so foolish as to try to inspect from the air yesterday afternoon. You will doubtless be able to fly it again without difficulty, *nicht wahr?*"

Clip pricked up his ears. He was to be given an opportunity to fly his own plane? For what purpose? He inquired cautiously, "Just what do you expect me to do? Are you coming up with me?"

The German laughed harshly. "No—for I wish to come down again alive. I am going up in one of our Fokkers. You and I will then stage a little combat. My object is to test out the latest improvement in my invention, the invention that brought you to earth yesterday, and which has no doubt mystified you and your comrades so much lately."

The arrogant, sneering confidence of the speaker's manner was insufferable. Clip ventured to deflate him a little.

"What do you mean, those silver-bot-

tomed jobs carrying an electrostatic charge? Hell, we know all about them."

"What!" The German recoiled, speechless.

"Sure," asserted Clip boldly. "No mystery about that. We've even got a means of protecting our ships all figured out. Merely a matter of insulation, and counter potential. My Salmson didn't happen to be equipped yet, or I wouldn't be here now."

"*Gott im Himmel!*" blurted the *Ober-Leutnant*. "It is impossible! Insulation? No, you are crazy! You are lying to me!"

Clip shrugged with the greatest air of nonchalance. "Don't believe me, then. It's nothing to me. But when you shortly discover that your silver-bottomed planes are being shot down like flies, remember that I foretold it. Your artificial lightning is already checkmated."

Even as he spoke, Clip asked himself what good this monstrous bluff was going to do anybody. Certainly it could not save him. And whether it would deter the Boches from sending up their silver-bottomed ships was very doubtful. Nevertheless, it pleased him to prick the bubble of this haughty Prussian's conceit.

The *Ober-Leutnant* von Holtz seemed about to foam at the mouth with rage. His sallow face grew purple, his narrow eyes glinted green. With a gloved fist he pounded his knee in a fit of passion.

But then, abruptly, his anger seemed to evaporate. He relaxed, and his features broke into an evil smile.

"Perhaps, yes," he sneered. "But my latest improvement; I had almost forgotten. *That* you know nothing about. Your insulations will do you no good against *that!*"

"Really?" murmured Clip provokingly.

"*Nein!*" The officer glared at him. "I have doubled the potential! I can now increase the voltage by a hundred per

cent. For weeks I have been working on the apparatus in the old monastery. Yesterday I completed the changes. Hereafter my planes will carry twice the electrical power. Formerly the bolt sometimes only stunned, as with you, yesterday. Now it will kill. Kill instantly, every time. There will be no escape, no defense. Two million volts in a single flash—like that! But you shall see, my smart friend. You shall have the honor of being the first victim. You are to be my—how do you say it?—my guinea-pig! If you are alive an hour from now, I will buy you the continent of Europe!"

THE German sat back, chuckling. Clip clenched his jaws to keep his expression from betraying his feelings. What a scurvy trick Fate had played him. He had jumped from the frying pan into the fire. He had eluded the firing squad, only to become the victim of man-made lightning. The devil's choice, indeed!

The car, which had been climbing into the hills, now drew up before the walled court of a rambling stone building on the crest of a ridge. Clip recognized the monastery. The *Ober-Leutnant* descended and went inside. Clip saw that the masts on each of the four corners carried heavy cables slung between them, and that from the cables many short sections of stiff wire stuck up at intervals like the teeth of a gigantic comb. He could hear the high-pitched hum of a dynamo.

The German emerged quickly, and the car drove on, down to the aerodrome in the valley below. Here everything seemed to be prepared. Clip's Salmson stood on the tarmac. At a word from the *Ober-Leutnant*, mechanics started up its motor. A brand new Fokker was rolled out next to it, and likewise started. The German disappeared into a hangar for a few moments, then came out swathed in rubber composition boots, rubber gloves and

helmet, and special goggles containing no metal.

"I will take off first. When my adjutant, here, gives you the signal, you will follow me into the air. After that, you may do as you please. Perhaps you can make it interesting for me. I may even allow you to play for—say, two minutes?"

"Don't hesitate on my account," snapped Clip.

"By the way: should you change your mind about being a guinea-pig, he has orders to shoot you through the head."

"You think of everything, don't you?" retorted Clip, with as much bravado as he could muster.

But it took a heroic effort to maintain his pose. Death, quick and certain, stared him in the face. In addition to that, utter failure. He had learned considerable about the silver-bellied destroyers. But the knowledge was going to perish with him. Tomorrow, next week, next month, allied flyers were going to die by swarms, electrocuted in their cockpits, helpless against those terrific thunderbolts.

Steeling himself against nervous collapse, he saw that the Fokker, with von Holtz at the stick, was taking off. It curved up into the sky, and after a steep zoom darted low over the monastery buildings on the ridge. So low that its steel under-surface grazed the tips of the vertical wires attached to the cables between the masts. That, Clip saw, was the method of acquiring the static charge from the generators. Since it was done after the plane was in the air, the possibility of a flash to the ground was avoided.

An officer with a Luger in his hand prodded Clip toward the Salmson. Like a wooden man Clip climbed into the familiar cockpit. The motor was turning over. He touched the throttle. The exhausts sputtered faster. Mechanically he jerked the lever back. The plane quiv-

ered, began to roll forward. Ten seconds later he was in the air.

With a tug at the stick he lifted it past the oncoming hills, and looked about him. The Fokker was off to his left, circling lazily. For a moment he stared at it in a dreadful fascination, unable to drag his eyes away. . . . Was it coming nearer?

With an oath he pulled himself together. Maybe he was a guinea-pig, but damned if he was going to act like one. Perhaps he was doomed to die, but he could die fighting, at any rate. The least he could do was give that cursed Boche a run for his money. He wasn't dead yet.

He wheeled the Salmson in a sharp turn to the right. This headed him toward the south, where lay the lines. At full throttle he raced away. . . . Twenty miles to allied soil.

The Fokker overhauled him with ridiculous ease. He had not covered two miles before it surged up on his flank. He stared over his shoulder at its oncoming nose. Horrified in spite of himself, he curved away, physically unable to sit there and wait for the blow to fall.

A moment later he found that he was flying due east; the rising sun was in his eyes. He grated his teeth on a curse. The suspense was undermining his grip on himself. He seized the stick, flung it savagely from side to side. The Salmson responded with a series of violent contortions. He ended by going on his back, and falling off in a slip.

When he recovered control, the Fokker was a short distance ahead of him, having overshot his crazy maneuvers. Hope flashed in his brain. He whirled his sights to bear on that black-crossed rudder, and squeezed his triggers. Nothing happened. He stared at his Vickers guns on the cowl. The cartridge belts had been removed.

Rage and despair possessed him. Damn the fiends—they might have allowed him

that last slim chance! But no, he was to be slaughtered like a pig—a guinea-pig.

Clip whirled out of a bank with a hoarse curse on his lips and a madman's gleam in his eye. He was on the point of diving the ship deliberately into the ground and ending it all, when he caught sight of something that jolted him back to sanity. A speck—another plane! He stared hurriedly. Yes, a Spad; a single Spad in the southwest. And it was headed his way, coming fast!

For a moment hope welled up in his breast. But instantly it changed to dismay. If that Spad came near, it was doomed. He foresaw what would happen. Before it could help him, a lightning bolt from the Fokker would send it hurtling down. A second flash was not possible without recharging, but with Clip unable to return the fire, it would be simple for the *Ober-Leutnant* to slay him with his guns, thus chalking up two victories instead of one.

Instantly Clip wheeled and flew northeast. But the Boche had seen the approaching Spad now, too. Instead of pursuing Clip, he waited warily. The Spad came on at full speed. Clip hastily reversed his direction again. He plunged back, straight at the Fokker. He must somehow keep those two apart at all costs, even if it meant his own finish. If he drew the Fokker's sting first, by getting close enough, then at least the Spad would have a fifty-fifty chance with its guns.

BUT the wily Jerry had followed the same line of thought. He kept ahead of Clip, out of reach, and dove to meet the Spad first. The American pursuit ship ducked, then nosed up sharply.

Clip blurted an agonized cry. There was an instantaneous flash, a bluish, sizzling streak of light. The Spad's guns had just commenced to fire; the tracers were in mid-air. The hissing spark fol-

lowed their path, leaping from one bullet to the next as if they had been stepping-stones, and finally to the Spad itself, all in the flick of an eye. A puff of smoke clouded Clip's stare.

He banked sharply, and looked under his wing. The Spad fell awkwardly, tumbling in wide, grotesque swoops. But the smoke; what was that? It was not coming from the allied ship. It was pouring from the cockpit of the Fokker! That very first burst of Vickers slugs must have reached their target in the German gas tank. Even as the flash jumped, the Boche caught fire. Down reeled His Excellency the *Ober-Leutnant* von Holtz, with the flames licking at his eyeballs.

It did not occur to Clip to race for the lines. An impulse stronger than self-preservation drove him to follow that Spad down toward the earth. For he had seen that it carried no squadron insignia on its side, and his hunch was strong.

The dust of the Spad's crash was still hanging in the air when Clip rolled the wheels of his Salmson on the nearest level stretch. Leaving the motor idling, he sprang out and ran. His sixth sense told him that he would see Captain Syne, and he did. But first he got a rude shock. From beneath that shattered cockpit crawled a living man—and the man wore a field-gray German uniform!

Clip looked twice at the face before he was sure.

"Captain! Are you hurt? Can you walk to the Salmson? Hurry!"

"I seem to be all here. Keep your shirt on, Macauley. I don't see any Jerries; we've got a few minutes. Where's Rhodes? I must tell him his idea is a bit off. I decided he was right, and had the 22nd fix this Spad up with insulation. But it didn't seem to work, did it?"

"I'll tell you why," said Clip. "Rocky's idea was correct, only they've doubled the voltage now. Without the insulation, you

would probably have been killed outright instead of merely stunned."

"How do you know that?" demanded the captain.

Swiftly Clip told him what had happened.

"That's why I tried to keep you in a sector on the lines. I was afraid if you ever went down in Germany, you'd be taken for me. But I couldn't explain it to you. We don't disclose our identity without good cause, you know."

Clip, impatient, said, "Shan't we get going, back? That plant of theirs must be bombed out of existence, as soon as possible."

"Hold on. We mustn't miss now. Better use two stones on this one bird, so to speak. I came prepared for a trick on this side of the lines. I'll stay. Now that you've told me where the place is, I'll work my way in somehow, see if I can't blow it up from the inside. Meanwhile, you take the Salmson, and fly straight to Souilly. Ask for Major Cradley, intelligence. Tell him the story. He'll arrange for the bombers. Then if one of us slips, the other turns the trick. Get started, now."

"But—leave you here?" protested Clip. "It doesn't seem—"

"No time for talk. Get going. . . . See you again, Macauley."

The captain stripped off his helmet and goggles, and clapped a German private's fatigue cap on his head. With no more than a brief, smile of farewell, he jogged away toward some woods and vanished.

After that, everything seemed to progress with astonishing ease. It was as if Fate, having tried Clip in the fires of every conceivable adversity, at last decided to be kind. He took off from that lumpy, muddy field without a hitch. Though he was in a plane with no ammunition, he met no enemy ships on his way to the lines. He flew direct to Souilly

drome, and landed. The first officer he met knew where Major Cradley was to be found, and took him there.

The intelligence officer listened to Clip's tale without batting an eye. Within ten minutes he had arranged for twenty D-H day bombers to leave within an hour.

"They'll rendezvous over Corbaye," he said to Clip. "Will you meet them there, and lead, so there will be no mistake?"

"Why, if I—yes, of course. In an hour. . . ."

While his plane was being serviced, Clip had a drink, a bite to eat, and several cigarettes. A little later he was again in the air. He met three V's of D-H's at the appointed spot and led them on.

They were within sight of their objective before a sudden thought struck Clip. What if Captain Syne had already gotten here? What if he were down there now? What if, by a capricious twist of fate, he should be killed by the bombs of his own comrades?

A cold horror gripped Clip at the thought. But it was too late to do anything now. The bombers saw their target, and descended upon it like avenging furies. Big torpedoes, lighter destruction bombs, and machine-gun bullets poured down in a rain of death. In ten minutes that drome was a churned-up wilderness, planes and hangars were in flames, and the monastery buildings were smoking heaps of stones. Small stones. No silver-bellied plane ever took the air again.

THREE weeks later Clip Macauley stood out in the rain while a red-faced general pinned a bit of bronze on his chest and made appropriate remarks. Afterward he put the medal in an inside pocket and went back to the 95th, where he stayed until the armistice.

He accepted orders to Coblenz with the army of occupation, because he wanted to be in a position to check up on

prisoners, and others, coming out of Germany during the next few weeks. Early in December he located Rocky Rhodes through a Red Cross list, and gave the little observer the shock of his life by walking in on him one night. After he had retold the end of the story for the third time, he asked,

"Captain Syne? Ever see him, or hear of him?"

"No. Do you think we ever will?"

Clip said gravely, "I'm looking for him."

And as the years passed, he kept on looking. All over the world he studied hotel registers and questioned acquaintances, without success.

In the fall of 1935 Clip was representing the Chicago Herald in Addis Ababa, cabling Ethiopian war news back to the States. Emerging from a bistro one black night, he fell head over heels over a robed native who squatted in the gutter. Cursing, he picked himself up, as the man rose and started away. For just a moment the light from the window fell on a dusky countenance. Clip gasped.

"Syne!" he blurted. "Captain Syne—wait a minute!"

A sinewy hand seized his arm, drew him into the shadows.

"Sh-h! Don't use that name, you fool! Or any American name. Can't you see I'm under cover? . . . How are you, Macauley?"

"Swell! But what the devil are you doing here, in disguise?"

"Figure it out. There's only one way a man quits the intelligence service, don't you know that? Our government has need of a little inside observation on this so-called war. So here I am."

"Damn it, I want to see you, have a talk. Tomorrow, maybe—"

"I'm leaving tonight for the interior. And we can't talk here now. It's too dangerous. Until some other time, Macauley—good luck!"

"Hold on—wait! I've got something for you. Been carrying it for years." He pulled a bit of bronze from an inside pocket. "Here. They gave it to me. But you're the one ought to have it. Take it."

A lean hand pushed it back at him. "Don't be a fool, Macauley. It's yours; keep it. I couldn't take it, even if I wanted to. It wouldn't go with my costume. But I appreciate your saying that. . . . Listen. Any time you want a job that pays low wages, drags you all over the surface of the globe, risks your life regularly, and even makes you forget what your real name used to be, go look up Major Cradley, in Washington. When you do, give him my regards, will you?"

A shadowy figure melted away in the gloom.

Clip bought a steamer ticket the first thing next morning.

*It's an out and out
Gamble*



WHEN YOU BUY THE *unknown*

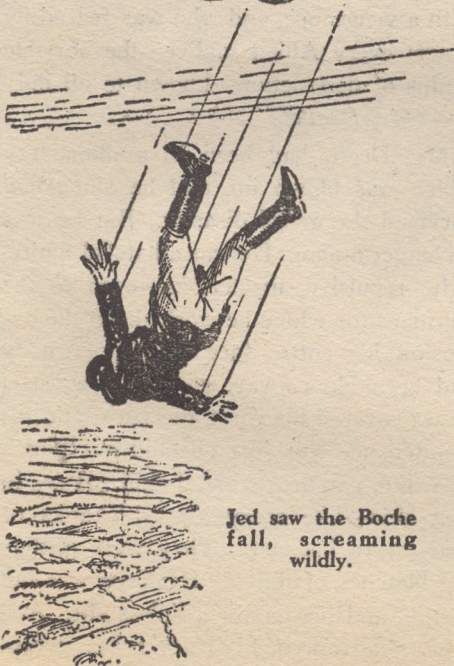
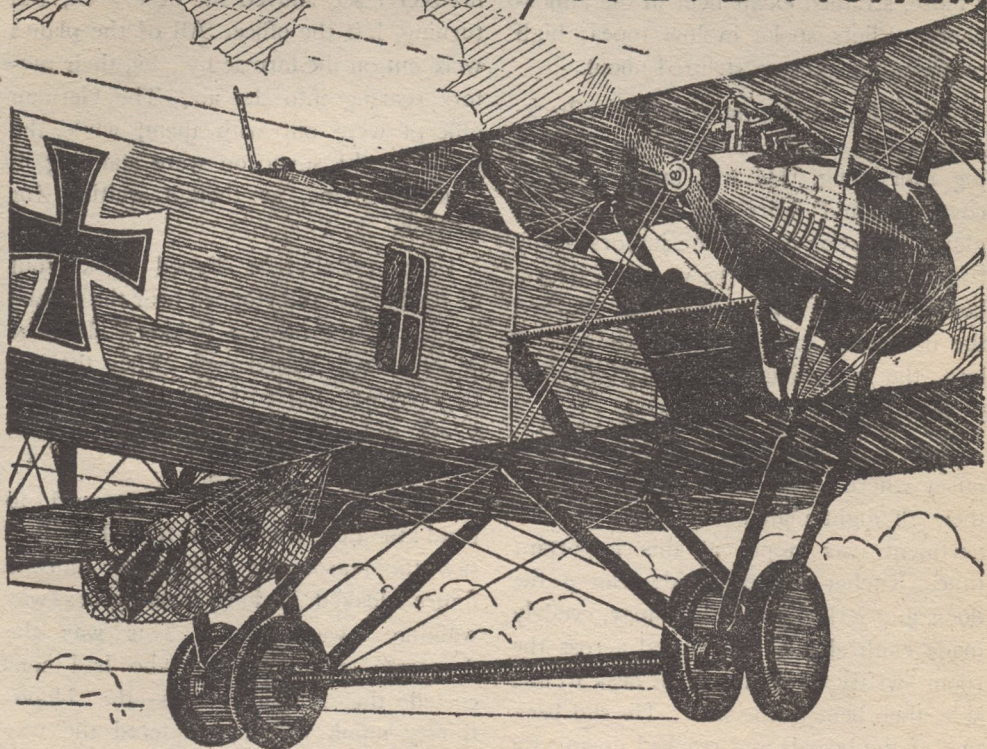
● Why gamble when you buy razor blades? In Probak Jr. you get the product of the world's largest blade maker at the sensational low price of 4 for 10c. This blade romps through tough whiskers without pull or irritation. Try it.

PROBAK JUNIOR



Death Laughs Last

by STEVE FISHER



Jed saw the Boche
fall, screaming
wildly.

Grimly, Captain Babyface thundered his Hisso into the Heavens—knowing full well that high in the clouds lurked the figure of MR. DEATH—the monster from the grave who stole the blood of the living! And now before the Red Gods of War, these two were to fight to the finish—Lead and hate are the weapons they carry, and the loser pays off with his life!

THE German hangar was a large one. Within the vast shed and on the surrounding tarmac there was great activity as the shiny, mirror-like, tin plated Fokkers were wheeled out. The

grease-smeared Boche mechanics milled about, busy getting the ships ready to take off for the experiment flight. There was a tense, strained excitement in the atmosphere. Pilots spoke in low tones; high commanding officers strutted about.

Mechanic Ritcher stayed in the background, his narrowed black eyes observing everything. He was bundled up in coveralls, and wore thick, oil stained gloves. He was one of the juniors in the hangar, and looked to be no more than a boy just out of high school. He watched the new shiny planes as they rolled out into the sunshine—dazzling, glittering pieces of flying machinery.

Next he turned and went into a small office where mechanics often stayed on their all night matches. The small compartment was empty at this important time. Ritcher slipped inside, closed the door, and jerked down the flimsy, crudely made cloth shade. He moved across the room swiftly, shoved a small desk to one side, then bent to the floor. He slid back two of the boards and reached down to a shiny new portable radio set.

His fingers flew as he spun the dials, then he picked up a pair of ear phones and put them on his head. He heard the "come in—we're listening" call of American G.H.Q. The mechanic's hand touched the radio buzzer, then thumb and forefinger moved quickly as he clicked out the Morse code:

EXPERIMENT SQUADRON OF SUN
REFLECTING FOKKERS WHICH I
REPORTED ON IN DETAIL YES-
TERDAY ARE TAKING OFF IMME-
DIATELY PERIOD ADVISE TWO
FLIGHTS NEAREST THESE LINES
BE THOUSAND FEET ABOVE
BOCHE SUN SQUADRON WITH ALL
YANK PILOTS WEARING GREEN
GOGGLES TO OFFSET BLINDING
REFLECTION OF FOKKERS

CAPTAIN JED GARRETT, G-2

Working like lightning then, Babyface Jed Garrett, who for a week had been "Mechanic Ritcher," drew the boards over his secret set, shoved the desk back, and turning, left the office. All of the planes were out on the tarmac by now, their motors roaring into the air. The German officers were out with them, while the pilots of the squadron were standing in a straight line, as though waiting for someone.

Captain Babyface slipped quickly out of the hangar and stopped near the tail assembly of the nearest Fokker. Here, he watched with slitted eyes. They thought they were going to blind the American pilots, did they? A grim smile creased Babyface's thin lips.

Suddenly, the Germans snapped to rigid attention. Across the field, Babyface saw the reason for it. A tall, hideous figure cloaked in long black robes was walking toward them. This was the desperate, cunning man who had concocted the mirror planes—the blood-thirsty monk who had entered the war with a vengeance, and who was feared by almost every Allied soldier—the horrible genius of destruction—known to all only as—"Mr. Death"!

Mr. Death had been in a monastery which was blown up, and he alone had survived the awful disaster. But he was no longer a man. He was a hateful figure, ugly, repulsive, mysterious—even to the Germans for whom he worked. In the explosion his entire face and upper body had been blow away, so that now, steel plates covered his chest and back, and his countenance was just one hideous blotch of white, parched, scarred skin. Holes in that skin—like crazy shaped chunks of coal—were his eyes. They were glittering blotches of things. His nose was but a stub, and his mouth a lipless slit. And now he advanced, his black robes sweeping the ground.

The Boche C.O. snapped to attention and saluted.

"You have a wonderful scheme in these planes, *Herr Death*," he said. There was a trace of fear in his voice; fear in the presence of a figure so ghastly.

"Very elementary," *Death* replied, his words crisp and brittle. "Have you ever flashed a mirror in the eyes of a companion when you were a child? These planes will only be useful until the American swine devise a way of being able to look at them, and fire, without being blinded. However," he continued—his scarred face was without visible emotion, for his muscles were dead and human expression was beyond his power—"the sun squadron should deal much destruction before the Americans recover from the shock of seeing them. Have the flight take off!"

"Yes sir!"

The pilots were told to get into their ships. They turned and started. Babyface Garrett was watching Mr. *Death* carefully—he and *Death* had met before. If *Death* saw him—

Suddenly he was conscious of those horrible, black, blotch-eyes resting on him. It was uncanny how *Death* had spotted him, greasy-faced, and in the mechanic's garb, out of the countless other men on the field. But he did. Babyface saw a Luger slip from the sleeve of *Death's* black robes.

QUICKLY, realizing that he had no chance against the entire hangar force of Germans, Babyface ran for the nearest mirror plane. He knocked the pilot away, then leapt into the roaring ship. He taxied down the tarmac, wild shots following him.

Death broke into a run. His Luger was aimed and shrieking gunfire as Babyface pressed back on the stick. He edged down into the cockpit. Bullets whizzed by his neck, thudded into the dash board.

At last Babyface's Fokker lifted into the air.

He circled, climbing rapidly for altitude, but the other sun planes were lifting into the sky behind him. Six against one! And Babyface had no green goggles to save his eyes from the mirror ships. He was trapped!

Streaking like a comet out of hell, he headed toward the Yank lines as the wind screamed through the silver colored guy wires. The prop buzzed like an electric saw, and steam slipped back from the racing motors. Babyface dared not to look back. He realized only too well that the Boches would be on him like hounds on a hare.

His eyes turned to the carpet below—a carpet of trees, broken ground and shell holes—whirling, whirling away as his bobbing wings sang the song of the air. Babyface Garrett's lips were tight. It was now or never!

He nosed the ship into the clouds. As he did so, the pursuing Fokkers caught him. Spandaus guns cracked like a thousand angry whips. Bullets tore into his wings. Part of his tail assembly was torn away.

He could not escape. He had to fight—a useless fight of six against one. He had to hold them off. Soon the Yank squadrons would be swooping down. How soon, he did not know. One minute, maybe two, maybe five! But he could not hold out five minutes. A mere second was prolonged eternity in an air fight.

He had altitude on the six glittering Fokkers, but they were climbing up after him.

Brrrrt . . . brrrrrt . . . brrrrrt!

Rasping, ugly little tracers cutting through the frail tin of the mirror ship. Canvas blowing in the wind—Higher, Babyface climbed. Then, his teeth gritted tight, and hurling an insane curse of hatred, he bore down.

His ship screamed out a siren wail as he drove down, down, down onto the attacking Fokkers. One ship banked madly to the right to avoid collision. Another turned, nosed down in a half loop. Babyface's ship roared headlong for the third.

Brrrrt . . . brrrrt . . . brrrrrrrrrt!

The Spandaus gun spat steel-jacketed nails of doom into the ships. But Babyface was flying crazily. He could watch for only a moment at a time against the intensified sun cast from the ships. His eyes watered, smarted, burned.

Brrrrrt . . . brrrrrt . . . brrrrt!

He hurled another volley of tracers into that third ship. Suddenly, he shouted with grim delight. The Boche pilot stood up, his mouth running with blood, his eyes glazed and glassy. His gloved hand went up in what was meant to be a salute. But he never finished it. His plane leapt from his control and went screaming toward the earth.

Two more Fokkers rushed in, trapping him in a crossfire. Hemmed in, he turned the Fokker doggedly upward. A roaring Boche ship missed his prop by inches. Babyface filled its belly with tracer lead.

Still cursing and laughing madly, Babyface drove upward. Where were the Yanks? Why weren't they here to aid him?

Brrrrrt . . .

A Fokker chewed greedily into his tail assembly. Babyface rocked the stick hopelessly. He continued trying to climb, but he found himself losing speed. He glanced at the instrument panel. The Fokker followed up after him, the Spandaus gun blurring grimly.

"All right, damn you!" Babyface oathed into the roar of fire. "If I go—two of you go with me!"

Deliberately—all hope of Yank rescue gone—he turned his ship, drove down at the ship that followed. The tip of his wing touched, and was torn off.

Brrrrt . . . brrrrt . . . brrrrt!

Babyface cut a crimson streak across the chest of the Boche pilot, sent it dropping out of the sky. It turned over and over like a broken kite. Babyface turned toward another plane.

At that moment he saw the familiar sight of Spads zooming down from the heavens. Their motors roaring, the American pilots tight in their cockpits, they were coming down to destroy the Fokkers!

The Boches saw this threat of death at the same moment. Almost immediately they jerked their ships about in the wind, began high tailing it for their airdrome, and the protection of their Archies.

Babyface swung in the other direction. He saw two Spads split and start after him. My God! They thought—Grimly, he laughed. The situation was not a new one. It had happened countless times on the lines—Yank mistaking another Yank in an enemy ship. And Babyface had thought he was free!

IT WOULD be impossible for any of the men in the Spads to realize the truth. Babyface was a G-2 man and most of them knew him only by reputation, not by sight. The remaining Fokkers had fled, since the Americans outnumbered them almost four to one.

Babyface simply had to outrace the Spads, which seemed impossible. He could not turn and fire on them. He was sick with apprehension. His wrecked wing was blowing wildly, and the Fokker was losing altitude with every moment that passed.

Looking about again, Babyface suddenly saw a strange sight. A lone black Fokker—metal body—winging with thrice the speed of an ordinary Fokker or Spad—was hurling through space toward Captain Babyface Jed Garrett and the two Spads that were chasing him.

Jed knew the black ship only too well. It was the machine that "Mr. Death" used—the only one like it in the war!

His wings torn, his tail assembly all but wrecked, it would be useless to try and fight Death at this time. It was only a matter of minutes before he would be forced to the ground, and by that time he wanted to be on Yank soil.

Mr. Death's black plane overtook the Spads with ease. Babyface saw the grim, blotch-eyed figure in the black robes, jerk back on his Spandaus guns. The Yank Vickers' returned the fire instantly.

But it was all over in only a moment or so. Death, flying circles around the Spads, ripped them to holes, sent them rocketing down through the sky in flames—ugly yellow coffins of doom!

It was more than Babyface could take. Knowing that there was no hope for him, realizing the monster of the air that he was facing in combating Mr. Death—he wheeled his tattered Fokker about.

He rushed headlong toward the black ship piloted by Death. He saw the grim, white-faced figure begin to jerk back on the handles of his Spandaus guns. Then suddenly, Death's hand went up over his eyes, his ship lurched crazily, went careening upward. His own diabolic invention was blinding him!

Brrrrrt . . . brrrrrt . . . brrrrrt!

Babyface's tracers bit into the metal of Death's ship.

"Killed two of our boys—just like it was nothing at all!" Babyface spat. "You lousy skeleton of a Boche, you—"

In the next instant he saw a blur of black in front of him. Mr. Death sailed his ship just over the top of his wings. Before Jed Garrett could bank his ship out, Death had turned about. His Spandaus shrieked as they hurled lead into the silver Fokker.

Captain Babyface lost control. He turned the stick madly, but his Fokker

was dropping down, down. He reached the bottom of the cockpit. He jerked an emergency cord to the tail assembly—another little thing that Mr. Death had installed in Boche planes. Death's own invention was going to save an American!

With the aid of the emergency cords attached to the tail assembly, Babyface managed to bring the Fokker out of the fall and into a glide. He cut off the motors, coasted down toward a field of gaping holes.

He landed with a thud, the plane turned over. Babyface hurled himself free, and turning, he watched it burst into flames.

He looked up and saw Mr. Death's black Fokker winging back toward Boche-land.

Stars were hung across the sky in glittering abundance as Captain Babyface left the canteen of the American 25th air-drome, and started toward the C. O.'s office. At his heels, following happily, was a huge German police dog.

"Sorry I had to leave you here the last few days," Babyface told the dog laughingly. "But, surer than hell, Click, if I'd taken you with me, they'd have recognized me a lot sooner!"

Click barked. He was delighted that his master had returned. Babyface and Click were almost inseparable. Before the war Jed had operated a flying field of his own, and he and Click had done air stunts that a willing crowd paid well to see. When the war came along, special orders permitted Babyface to bring Click along with him—for the dog was no ordinary police pup. He had almost human faculties for understanding, and knew so many tricks, that he was of invaluable aid to Jed in his ramblings.

Jed Garrett, attached to G-2, was on one important assignment. The orders read simply: "Kill Mr. Death!" But the feat was not to be done quite as easily. Death was a worthy foe—the most feared

man on the lines—he laid traps, worked with unusual brilliance. Jed's job was a grim, responsible one—but he intended getting it done. Although he was 25 years of age, an expert flyer, and a fighter who was like the devil himself, he was one of those men whose faces had not changed since youth. His countenance fooled men—made him look like a sixteen year old. So they had nicknamed him "Babyface," and he and Click were famous in the Allied air forces.

BABYFACE arrived at the C. O.'s office. The adjutant was not present, so he entered and walked back through to the C. O.'s room. The tall, blond haired major was sitting at his desk, a grim look on his face. His blue eyes took Jed in carefully, with almost a trace of pity.

"Sit down, Babyface," he said.

Jed Garrett sat down, and Click, after sniffing about for a moment, lay down at his feet, his beautiful pointed ears whipped back.

"I have news from G. H. Q." the major said. "You reported on a large German ship which intends to fly over soon, under the command of Mr. Death, to send exploding torpedoes down upon as many Yank dromes as possible."

"That's right—they may try it tonight."

"And—"

"Those torpedoes—" Jed Garrett said evenly, his babyish face tense, "they aren't the usual kind. They explode when they hit, and blow everything for yards around, galley west. Death, in his new laboratory behind the German lines, has mixed various kinds of powder and has found a blend that is far worse than anything the Boches have yet used."

The major nodded, frowning. "You know where this new laboratory is—what I mean is, you discovered that while you were over there?"

Babyface nodded.

"Fine—you will give me exact directions. G.H.Q. is going to send two of our best G-2 men over to—"

"Two others," Jed gasped, "but what about *me*?"

The major coughed, reddening a little. "You are to be given a furlough—" he smiled, "—a chance to go to Paris for a couple of weeks."

"What do you mean?" Babyface demanded. "My assignment was to kill Death and—"

"But you have been temporarily relieved," the major said, "you see—"

"Quit beating around the bush."

"Well, Captain Garrett—" the C.O. began, becoming very formal, "it seems that G.H.Q. has learned to respect the threats of Mr. Death. He has succeeded in carrying out so many of them, you know. Frankly, you are too good a man to lose. We feel—and they do, that if you are out of the picture for a few days—"

"Out of the picture? Why?"

The major opened a desk drawer and brought out a letter. "A black plane flew over G.H.Q., escaping the ground guns. This was dropped." He shoved it across the desk. The paper read:

I HAVE SWORN OUT PERSONAL VENGEANCE UPON YOUR MAN CAPTAIN JED GARRETT. IT IS MY INTENTION TO BRING HIS BLOODY CORPSE TO YOU, AND TO DROP IT UPON ONE OF YOUR AIRDROMES. I HAVE NEVER FAILED IN A PERSONAL MISSION AND I SHALL NOT THIS TIME. I WILL NOT REST UNTIL CAPTAIN GARRETT IS DEAD

"MR. DEATH"

"No doubt infuriated that you tricked him in giving us the information about the mirror planes," the major said hurriedly as Babyface read the note. "He is the one Boche genius in this war. Sometimes I doubt that he is human, for he

seems to be a devil brought out of hell to wreak havoc on us."

Babyface Garrett looked up slowly, his face a grim, tight mask. His lips were firm, and his eyes shone with a hard glow. He stared at the major for a moment, then rose to his feet. Folding the note "Mr. Death" had written, he placed it in his tunic.

"Tell G.H.Q., major," he said evenly, "that Captain Garrett has gone to strike first."

The C.O. leapt to his feet. "Why you can't do that, man! It'd be suicide. I advise—"

"Sorry," Babyface snapped in a brittle voice, "I can't take your advice. I am sorry also that G.H.Q. doubts my ability to account for Mr. Death!"

"It isn't that—it isn't like he was an ordinary man. He has hypnotic powers—a plane better than anything we can conceive! He—"

But Jed Garrett strode from the office, with Click following close on his heels.

He rode high. The air was cold, but there was no immediate danger, now that he was alone with the stars. The beating motors were bearing the trim Spad across No Man's Land and behind the German lines. Click was in his special compartment in the cockpit.

Babyface had not wasted any time in starting, for the orders from G.H.Q. which had meant to be kind to him, had filled him with wild fury. It was true that Death was dangerous, almost inhuman, but that was no reason why Jed Garrett should run and hide from him! He felt the note in the pocket of his tunic, and his face flushed hot. He'd show the major—and G.H.Q.—he'd finish the grim assignment to "Kill Mr. Death"—tonight! There would be no time wasted, no usual precautions taken, he was going straight to the lair of the genius of war. It would be a show down!

While behind the lines he had learned the location of the new laboratory where Death invented his murderous weapons, but there had not been time to investigate it, without giving away his identity. He had learned also that Death was chartering a huge bomber from which he would drop his new torpedo shells upon Yank dromes. That too, would have to be stopped, and the torpedo shells with their formula, destroyed!

He checked with compass and chart, and when he was over the place where he knew Death's laboratory was hidden, he cut the Spad's motor. Circling, he made an almost silent landing. The laboratory was on the other side of a clump of trees that hid the Spad from view.

Captain Babyface climbed out of the ship. He was not disguised now. He had been too infuriated when he left, to change his American uniform. Click was released from the ship. The police dog trotted ahead of Jed, his fur bristling, his ears pointed, sharp and alert.

Babyface crept forward. He saw the long, flat building in the distance.

"Click!" he whispered.

The dog came to his side. Together they moved slowly forward. Babyface's spine tingled, his temples throbbed. He felt his skin turn hot, and then go cold. There would be no preliminaries. A light showing from a window indicated that Death was in the laboratory. He allowed no other German soldiers with him. A tall sentry was standing at the door.

BABYFACE strode across the stretch of ground. The guard saw him, called out a challenge. There was a streak of brown, moving forward. The sentry howled with pain as Click sank his teeth into his legs. Babyface rushed the guard, slamming his automatic butt across the man's head.

His heart increased its beat. He turned to the door of the laboratory. Slowly, his hand moved to touch the knob. He found that the door was not locked. He pushed it open, hovering outside, waiting for an attack. None came. Click stood behind his master, growling.

It was now or never. Captain Garrett swung in through the entrance of the door and stared straight across the room. He saw the dim outline of the ghastly figure in long black robes. A gun was leveled on Babyface.

Tac . . . tac tac . . . tac.

Four bullets from Jed Garrett's automatic screamed across the room and thudded through the head of the figure he faced.

No blood came.

Babyface just stared, his eyes wide with terror, his skin crawling. Was Mr. Death human? Or was he a grinning ghost—the devil from hell that the major had spoken about? You could not shoot his chest or back because of the steel plates—but his head—!

Click whined, then barked sharply.

Babyface snapped his remaining shot into the head of the black robed figure. Nothing happened.

Then Click turned and leaped across the room. Babyface spun around; he saw the bony white scar of a face of Mr. Death, saw a blunt instrument whip out and lash across Click's head. Babyface took in the figure at which he had been shooting.

It had been a trap! What he had fired at was a corpse in black robes! A corpse so dead that the blood had clotted and would not run.

When he again stared at Death he saw Click lying helpless at his feet. He saw the grim monk of murder striding toward him, his burning black blotches of eyes

staring through him, his slit of a mouth even, his hairless head hideous beneath the small light on the work bench. A Luger was in Death's right hand.

Babyface's automatic clicked on an empty chamber.

Weird, rasping laughter issued from the throat of Mr. Death. It echoed back from the four walls of the laboratory—chilled Jed Garrett's blood.

"You came—Captain Garrett—just as I planned you would!"

Babyface moved forward.

"Another step, captain, and your brains will be blown from your head!"

The Luger was pointed straight between his eyes. Babyface stared into the hypnotic eyes of the monk. He was repulsed by the blotched white face. He had to kill this man, no matter what the cost. But how?

"I sent that note over, knowing that you had secured the location of my laboratory," Death said in his crisp, dead tones, "and knowing that you would return without taking precautions. Return full of your American rage and walk into my trap. I give your courage credit, my friend; but I meant every word I said in that note!"

There was an appalling silence and doom hung heavy in the atmosphere of the room. Click was rolling over. The dog's head was caked with blood.

"Your scheme was a very clever one," Babyface said evenly. "I came here to kill you. I intend doing that."

Again that horrible, burned-out laughter issued from Mr. Death's throat. He came forward, his black robes sweeping the floor.

"I am the one who is executioner and—"

Babyface leapt forward. His hand slapped down at the Luger and at the same moment it exploded into the wall. Garrett's right fist whipped up into the

bony white face of Death. His left hand clutched the throat of the Boche monk.

Death jerked back with strength that was almost inconceivable. He snarled. Then the Luger sounded again, and this time it creased Jed's head.

Blackness swirled in his mind. His knees caved in. As he sank to the floor he heard the evil laughter of Mr. Death above him.

IT WAS cold, very cold, and there was the sharp sting of the wind, the roaring rush of air, and the throbbing of the heavy motor of a German bomber. These elements combined brought Jed Garrett back to consciousness.

He opened his eyes to stare down, horrified, at the faraway puffs of red. They were flying high over No Man's Land. Babyface was strapped in a netlike bag beneath the bomber. His wrists and ankles were bound. Tied next to him was Click, whining, and each few minutes, howling pitifully.

It was another few moments before Babyface could fully comprehend the diabolic meaning of this situation. The wind ripped at his clothing and screamed in his ears. The bomber was bearing steadily toward the American lines.

Mr. Death was making good his threat to deliver Garrett's body to the Yanks. He intended releasing the strap when they were over an airdrome, so that both Babyface and Click would fall, headlong, and be crushed to death when they hit the top of the hangar, or smashed on the ground!

Foolishly, Jed had stumbled into the careful trap laid by Death; because his Yankee temper had gotten away from him. Now he was in the power of the man he intended to kill! Perhaps G.H.Q. was not so wrong in rating Mr. Death as they did. He was a monster of murder who calculated his movements far in ad-

vance, and knew each step he was going to take. To successfully combat him one could not rush in, blind with rage, and expect to defeat him. Plans more carefully laid had to be used. So far the game had been on the side of the murder monster.

And now he was in the clutches of Death. Only quick, daredevil action could save him. There was no time for plans. No time for anything. In a few more minutes the straps would be released. Babyface and Click would go tumbling through the air.

More than that, Death would continue in this bomber, dropping his dreadly torpedo shells on American dromes. He would wreck the Yank aviation Front—cripple it, smash hundreds of planes, and kill countless Yank pilots asleep in their tents!

There *had* to be a way out—but *where was it?* Time was too short to find the answer!

Babyface wriggled, he squeezed his wrists together and pulled hard to escape his bonds. But the cords were tight. Click howled again, a long blood-chilling howl. Jed kicked his feet; they too were well secured, and the way they were arranged in the flimsy net, he could not possibly reach down to them.

Again he stared at the moving ground a thousand feet below, reeling by like so much film. The barking field guns were like faint echoes, drowned in the roar of the wind and the pounding of the bomber's motor. Minutes—minutes ticking by.

Frantically, Babyface turned, twisted, fought to get his arm free. Tighter and tighter the cords seemed to draw. They were flying over American territory now.

Click whined again, and the sound was lost in the din of screaming wind. The bomber's prop was whirling, the big ship of death was nosing on and on, toward the

inevitable ending for Babyface and his dog.

Three more minutes passed. They were ghastly, endless things, those minutes. In that time, Babyface waged a terrific battle with the cords that bound him, and he felt them weakening, but they would not free him in time. He knew that. And even if he were free, what could he do? The bomber was case-enclosed, a bulky thing. Death and the pilot would both be in it, and possibly a third Boche.

His eyes burning from the sting of the wind, his muscles aching, Babyface kept up his valiant struggle. It all seemed so hopeless though. The reward of war was death, and had he not accounted for himself on the Western Front?

He had, but not sufficiently. He could not die satisfied with himself, for he had been ordered to kill Mr. Death. It would be leaving the earth with a job unfinished.

Closer and closer, the ship drew toward the goal of destruction.

Babyface's aching eyes took in the four strands of cord that held the net to the bottom of the plane. They disappeared up inside the cabin. At the crucial moment they would be cut, and that would be the end. There would be no more of anything then.

His brain throbbing, Babyface suddenly came in possession of an idea. Quickly, his wrists still bound, he reached up, grabbing the net. He hooked it onto the undercarriage of the ship. He hooked the net again and again, in as many places as possible.

Now, when the cords were cut from above, the net would not drop!

There was faint hope in that—hope that Babyface could free himself and somehow get into the cabin of the plane. What would happen once he got there, he did not know. Click howled again. The wind was growing colder and cutting with the sharpness of a knife.

Four more long minutes dragged by. Babyface jerked his wrists free. He looked down and saw that they were traveling over an American drome. Clutching the undercarriage of the plane he looked up. The cords that came from inside the cabin suddenly sagged. They had been cut!

The net remained intact. Death could not look directly down from his position in the cabin. He would not know that Babyface and Click had not fallen! His fingers frozen to the iron of the undercarriage, his blood surging hot within his veins, Babyface clung to his place.

AT THAT moment he saw a little trap door open forward. A small torpedo-like bomb dropped out. Babyface's eyes followed it to the ground. He saw half of the huge, smooth tarmac, blown to bits. Again that little trap door opened. Babyface lunged out, grasped the torpedo bomb in his hand.

The bomber was moving fast, the wind was trying to pull him off. His clothes ripped and tore in the pressure of the air. His hair was blowing wildly, but Babyface Garrett clung with one hand in the net that was protecting himself and Click. With the other, he caught hold of two more torpedo bombs being dropped through the trap door.

He put them in the net, but they were heavy little things and added to the weight. The net, insecurely attached to the undercarriage, was beginning to tear. Presently it would be loose. He had to get rid of the torpedoes!

He looked down, they were passing over a forest now. Babyface dropped one of the torpedoes. He saw trees blown up in the air.

And then, just above his head, a larger trap door opened. The Boches were investigating to see what was wrong with the torpedoes—why they had not landed!

A head and a pair of shoulders looked down through the torpedo outlet. Babyface reached out his arms. He jerked down. The net was tearing, giving. The Boche, taken by surprise, was pulled out of the plane. He somersaulted out, hung in the air, holding to Jed Garrett's neck. Jed worked himself free, let go of the German.

The Boche fell earthward, screaming wildly.

Quickly, his legs still tied, Jed worked himself up into the trap door through which the Boche had come. Click was left in the net which was secure enough to hold the dog's light body.

Sweat bathing his face, wind tearing at him, Babyface Garrett climbed up into the cabin of the bomber.

He saw the pilot ahead in a small compartment by himself. But facing him was Mr. Death, his hideous white face set, a Luger gripped in his right hand.

The moment was a tense one. No words were spoken. The wind screamed below them, and the trap door lay open like a gaping coffin hatch. The little torpedoes were lined up in the plane.

Mr. Death's black robes made him look more somber than he ever had before. His huge black eyes were staring, as though he were insane. His slit of a mouth was twisted down.

"You are hard to kill, my friend," he said.

"Most Yanks are," Babyface replied evenly.

Again there was a silence, this time unbroken. Then Death moved forward, the point of his Luger unwavering, his horrible mask of scars glowing in the dim light of the plane.

"There will be no mistake this time. I will put a bullet in your head, then drop you. I wanted to drop you still alive, but you have made that impossible."

Babyface said nothing. He edged away

from the trap door, toward the side of the plane where the torpedoes were laid.

Death brought the Luger up. His hand was steady. His finger tightened a little on the trigger.

"It will be all over soon," he said. "Goodbye, Yank."

"Goodbye," Babyface said grimly.

And then suddenly he held up one of the torpedoes. Death moved forward, Babyface motioned him back.

"Shoot me," he rasped, "and before I die, this torpedo bomb of yours will be smashed into the floor of the plane. It will explode with all of us!"

DEATH'S slit-mouth moved until it was a straight line. He took Babyface in carefully, saw that the situation was an impossible one.

"Put the Luger down," Jed said evenly.

"That I will not do."

"Then we all die. I am not afraid of death—particularly if it means killing you with me—and smashing these infernal torpedo bombs of yours at the same time!"

Again there was silence, like that of a tomb, a silence made more ghastly by the howling of the wind, and the even throb of the motors. The pilot was watching his course, he was shut off from the compartment Death and Babyface now occupied.

"I believe you will do that," Death said.

"You know I will," Jed snapped.

"There is only one way out—put your Luger down, and order your pilot to land on an American field."

Mr. Death laughed that awful laugh of his, then became very somber.

"Do not speak foolishly," he said. "I may as well blow up with you in this plane as to allow myself to be captured. I would be as useless to Germany imprisoned, as I would be dead. Smash your torpedo down, Captain Garrett. Blow us up, I refuse your orders!"

Now the two arch enemies looked directly into each others eyes. Babyface was grim, resolute. If this meant his finish—well, it also meant the end of Mr. Death. He didn't want to die; there was much to live for; and a smouldering heap of ashes that was once his flesh, cast to the winds over Flanders, was not exactly a happy ending. Even so, Jed Garrett saw his duty clearly.

His eyes remained riveted upon the gruesome, ghastly countenance of his enemy. Death simply stared, striving desperately to effect, if possible, the spell of his hypnotism. Even now, Jed felt his senses reeling beneath the weird, inscrutable glare.

But now Babyface did not hesitate. He began to slam down with the torpedo.

"Wait!"

Jed hesitated, looked up.

Mr. Death threw his Luger to a corner of the plane. He reached a voice tube.

"We are captured. Make a landing or the plane will be blown up." He turned back to Garrett. "Your orders were to stop this plane, to destroy my new invention—the torpedo bombs. Is that right?"

Babyface nodded.

"In that mission," Death said, "you have succeeded. But this is far from the

end. I am working on a new invention, I—"

He turned, drew something bulky from a locker, threw it over his shoulders, and put his arms in it.

"Just a moment," Babyface shouted, "you jump and I'll—"

But it was too late. With the clumsy parachute on his back, Mr. Death stepped through the trap door. Babyface saw the white 'chute spread and float gently toward the ground. In a moment it was swallowed up in the night air.

The bomber was circling to make a landing. Jed Garrett reached down through the opening and dragged Click up into the cabin. The dog shivered still, but wagged his tail. Jed nodded at him grimly.

"Again we lose, old fellow, we've won by capturing the bomber, and we have the torpedoes that murderous monk invented; but we'll have to return again to get Mr. Death!"

Click barked.

The wheels of the Boche plane skidded to a stop. Somehow, their screeching, and the shouts of the Yanks running toward them, sounded to Captain Babyface, strangely like the shrill and ghastly laughter of Mr. Death.



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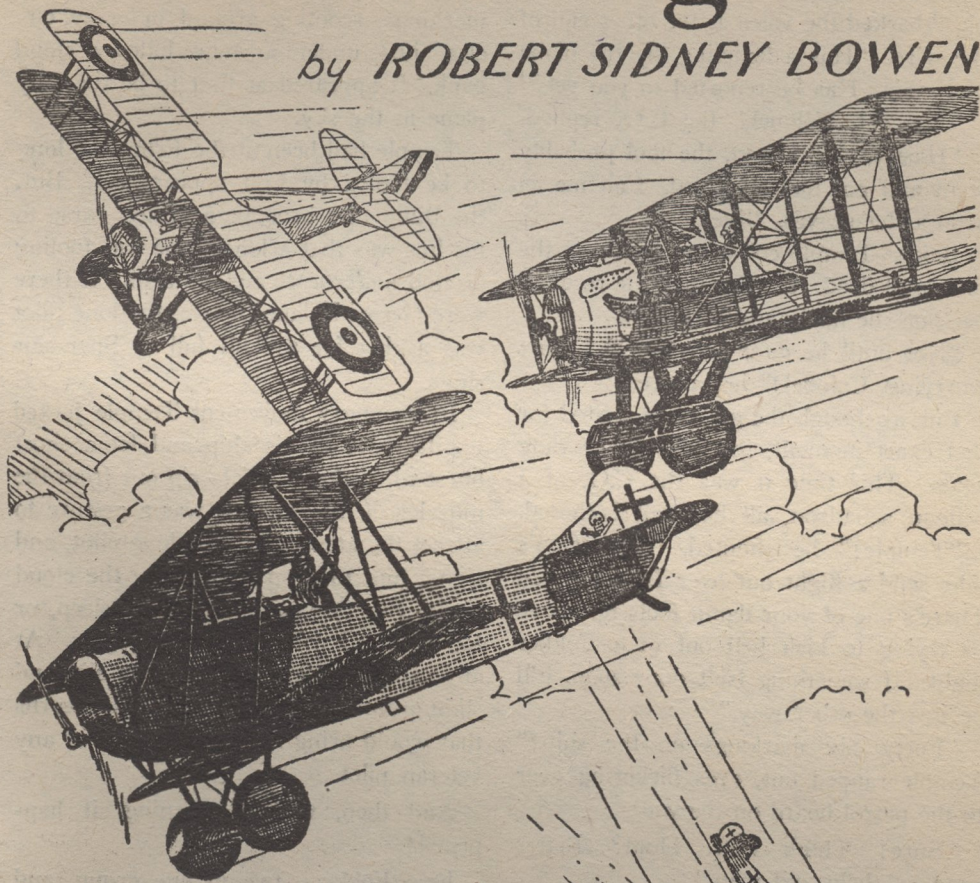
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FIT GEM AND EVER-READY RAZORS

The Sure Thing Ace

by ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN



Here was a guy who knocked down Fokkers like clay pigeons, and when there was no Boche meat in the sky, Kelley arranged his own! Come visit the jail with this hellbent Ace and see the World go 'round. Walls couldn't hold him; and orders were only meant to be broken—by this madman of the sky trails who held every Ace in the deck.

HEAVING a long sigh, Major Temple signed his name to the last of the pile of Wing reports, and shoved the lot to one side.

"There, that's that!" he muttered.

The Baron raised both hands in complete surrender.

"Maybe, if I had a swell looking blonde to help me with this damn detail work, being C.O. of a gang of roughnecks wouldn't be—"

The harsh jangle of the field phone on the desk cut off the last. Scooping it up he grunted his presence into the transmitter.

"Colonel Cairns at Pilots' Pool, Temple!" barked the voice at the other end of the wire. "Has a fledgling, by the name of Kelley. Has he reported to you yet?"

"Not yet, Colonel," the C.O. replied.

"Hasn't, eh? Damn, the fool probably went and got himself killed. Call me as soon as he arrives. 'Bye."

Before Temple could say anything the line went dead. He slammed the receiver back on the hook, and shrugged.

"Not until he *does* arrive, will I start worrying, Colonel!" he grunted.

But, as though the gods had waited for that exact moment, the field phone rang again. This time it was the C.O. of a balloon squadron, all hot and bothered.

"Temple?" he shouted. "For God's sake send a flight out over Issy, pronto! There's one of your damn fools up above us trying to kick hell out of a Fokker flight. If something isn't done soon, it'll be just the other way."

"Forty Six markings on the ship?" Temple rapped out, eyes flickering over to the patrol board on the wall.

"Sure! Think we're blind? Better send out help, old man."

Temple hung up first this time. Rather, he just shoved the phone away from him and bounded out through the squadron office door. The grease-balls, lounging around on the tarmac saw him coming, and recognized the symptoms instantly. The stick of his blue and white Bentley powered Camel was spinning over by the time he had legged into the pit.

Wasting only a minute or so for a "warm-up", he taxied out onto the field, swung around into the wind, and went racing off, hell bent for election. Passing up altitude, he held the ship close to the ground and went streaking northeast toward the shell battered village of Issy, half of which was occupied by Yank troops, and the other half by Germans. One mile east of the village, he spotted

a lone plane with Forty Six Squadron markings, scooting around in crazy circles, just under a huge billowy cloud bank. It appeared at first to be the only plane in the sky.

Temple had been at the Front too long to be fooled by first appearances. But, the thing that brought a grated curse to his lips was that a lone plane was fooling around *underneath* a cloud bank. If there were German planes above, the lone pilot was asking for a skull full of Spandaus slugs.

In an angry movement Temple jerked up the nose of his ship and let a short burst of Vickers bullets rip out from the muzzles of his guns. It was a gesture to attract the attention of the lone pilot, and signal him to drop away from the cloud bank. But this guy was either asleep, or too occupied with his own thoughts. At any rate, the plane continued to slip and slide around in a series of banking turns that would bring tears to the eyes of any veteran pilot.

And then, without warning, it happened!

Five Fokkers, two in one group, and three in the other, came cutting down through the cloud bank at lightning speed. Each blunt nose spewed out twin streams of jetting flame. And Temple groaned aloud as he saw tracer smoke weave a criss-cross pattern about the lone American crate. Yet, strangely enough, the lone Yank did not fall over on wing, and go down at the head of a long trail of oily black smoke. On the contrary, it darted right through the middle of the charging Germans, whirled around in a dime turn, and cut back in at rocket speed.

Vickers guns yammered savagely, and before the next five seconds had become history, one Fokker and pilot went out of the war and the world for keeps!

By that time, Temple was within range.

Kicking viciously on right rudder, he slammed around and fired a smashing burst at the nearest Fokker. Unfortunately he hit nothing vital, but his sudden appearance was quite sufficient. The four remaining Fokker pilots decided to call it a day, and by unspoken mutual agreement, went tearing up into the cloud bank and disappeared from sight.

Climbing to the level of the other American plane, the C.O. swung in close and stared hard across the air space. Neither the ship, nor the helmeted figure in the pit was familiar to him. In fact, the only thing he recognized was the 46th markings on both sides of the fuselage. Flinging up his hand, Temple vigorously signalled for the other to follow him back across No Man's Land. The helmeted head nodded, and for a split second white teeth flashed in a wide grin.

The C.O. didn't bother to return it. Kicking rudder, and belting the stick over, he swung southwest toward the Fort Sixth drome.

"Just another smart lad who couldn't wait to report, eh?" he growled into the roar of his engine. "Well, we'll damn soon pluck your pin feathers!"

Landing first, he taxied up to the line, cut his switch and legged out.

"Tell the pilot of that ship to report to me in the squadron office, at once," he barked at a startled faced mechanic.

WITHOUT waiting for his order to be confirmed, he strode down the tarmac and shoved into his office. Three minutes later the door opened and a lean, hawk eyed youth came inside. In a slipshod manner he clicked his heels and saluted.

"Major Temple?"

"Yes! You're Kelley?"

The youth arched his eyebrows in surprise.

"Why, yes sir," he began. "But how did you—?"

"Never mind!" the C.O. cut him off. "Why the hell didn't you report here sooner?"

"Guess I was too anxious for action, sir," came the slow reply. "Here are my papers, sir."

Temple took them, noted that they included a letter from Colonel Cairns, C.O. of the Pilots' Pool at Beaumont. Letting the fledgling cool his heels he ripped it open, glanced at the typed words.

Dear Temple:

The bearer of this is one, Second Lieutenant Kelley. As far as I'm concerned he is the craziest Indian I've ever had the misfortune to meet. However, he can fly. In fact, he can fly damn well. But, that's the trouble, he seems to regard every flight his last one, and tries to make the most of it. I have no desire to have him die on my hands, and so I am sending him along to you. I wish you the best of luck. With Kelley around, you'll need it!

Regards,

Cairns.

Temple read the note through twice, then slipped it into his desk and squinted at the newcomer.

"So you think you're great stuff, eh?" he grunted. "Why do you want to die so soon?"

"I don't, sir," was the instant answer. "I simply want a lot of action—quickly."

"I don't think we'll win the war by tomorrow!" the C.O. growled. "But, who told you to put Forty Six markings on your ship?"

"No one, sir. I put them on myself. By the way, sir, I'd like you to please confirm that Fokker I shot down. I got one before you arrived, which the balloons will confirm, of course. That's why I put the markings on—just in case I was lucky."

The C.O. just stared at him. Then, sharply,

"What was your other squadron, Kelley?"

"What, sir?"

"You heard me! What squadron did you belong to before you were assigned to this one? You're either a veteran, or just a plain crazy fool!"

The fledgling laughed softly, wiped it off instantly, though, as Temple beetled his brows.

"Then I guess I'm a crazy fool, sir," he said. "For, this is my first visit to the Front. But, what Flight are you assigning me to, sir?"

"None, yet!" the C.O. snapped at him. "I've not even accepted you, yet. Maybe you have your own ideas about the war, Kelley. Maybe, you think you can win it single handed. But, that doesn't count for a damn with me. Understand? This is a front line squadron, not a damn circus. Your first duty will be to learn to obey orders to the letter. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir."

"Alright then!" Temple nodded curtly. "Go arrange with Corporal Lasky for a hutment, and blankets, and so forth. Then report to the armament officer and have your guns checked. Perhaps tomorrow I'll take you over for a look-see patrol. In the meantime, you can thank your lucky stars those Fokker pilots were rotten shots. Hanging right under clouds—my God!"

The fledgling's brows came together in a faint frown, and his keen eyes wandered over to the calendar tacked to the opposite wall. The date was April 6, 1918. Just exactly one year since America's entrance into the war.

"I'd like to make the regular patrols today, sir," he said quietly, switching his eyes back to the C.O.'s face.

"Tomorrow, perhaps!" the C.O. snapped. "You've got a lot to learn, yet. By the way, what was your job in civilian life?"

A slow smile curled the other's lips.

"I was a professional gambler, sir," he said.

Temple grunted.

"Oh, used to taking fool chances, huh?"

"No sir. Just not used to losing, that's all."

"What do you mean by that?" the C.O. snapped.

For a moment the fledgling hesitated. Then he shook his head.

"Nothing, sir, nothing."

"We'll let it pass," Temple growled, and stabbed the air with his forefinger. "But, remember what I said—orders come first in this squadron, and until you've shown you realize that, you're grounded. That's all. Get out!"

A faint glint of defeated anger in his eye, the lean, hawk faced pilot saluted and about faced and went through the squadron office door. For several moments Temple scowled at the door. Then eventually, he sighed.

"Why the hell don't they take some of the wind out of their sails before they send them up here? That bird looks good. Too cocky, that's all. Needs a bit of trimming, so he'll last longer."

A grunt for emphasis, and Temple went outside and over to the mess. After a couple of cognacs, to take the bad taste out of his mouth, he went out to the tarmac to get ready to take B Flight over on its regular noonday patrol. He was in his ship, and warming up the engine when Kelley approached.

"My ship's okay, sir," he said. "I'm ready to go out on patrol anytime."

Temple shook his head, and pointed toward some woods on the far side of the field.

"There's a ground target over there," he said. "Get in some troop straffing target practice. I'll take a look at your score when I get back. If it's good—well, I may change my mind."

Without a word Kelley turned on his heel and walked away. The C.O. stared after him, eyes narrowed. Then he shrugged and resumed his checking of the engine instruments.

FIFTEEN minutes later he was leading B Flight off the field. At five thousand feet he leveled off, signalled a turn and backed east toward the front lines, and the war. Presently, when he roared over No Man's Land, Boche archie gunners began to slam up their usual greeting of belching smoking and screaming archie shell fragments. But, Temple hardly paid any attention. He was still thinking about the replacement, Kelley. Thinking about him and wondering if the former gambler was one of the luckiest pilots who had ever flown over the lines, or just a cockeyed liar. The man's shooting had tabbed him as a veteran, but his flying had had "greenhorn" stamped all over it.

"Two Boches before he even reports to me!" Temple suddenly snorted aloud. "That bird has something up his sleeve! Hell, he just doesn't ring natural!"

A shrug for emphasis and the C.O. dismissed the fledgling from his mind. The patrol was now well behind the German lines and roaring into territory ruled over by the famous German ace, Baron von Steuer, and his Spandaus yammering brood. As past experiences had proven—it was not exactly healthy to take cat-naps while in the patrol area of von Steuer's gang.

However, during the next hour Temple spotted nothing in the skies about him, save numerous cloud banks. It was as though von Steuer's bunch had either gone home on leave, or decided to take the day off, and to hell with it. In perfect V formation the Yank C.O. led his flight some twenty to twenty-five miles behind the lines, but it all was just a waste of

gas, as far as brushing up and action was concerned. Even the ground forces appeared to have gone to sleep. There wasn't a moving lorry detail, or a field battery to be spotted. In short, it was just a routine patrol that had proved a complete washout.

At the end of an hour and a half, Temple gave it up in disgust, signaled his flight and banked around toward home. When he had reached the lines he fired the green very-light washout signal over the side, and watched the others tear down and go through the usual custom of hedge-hopping in follow the leader style back to Forty Six's drome.

Temple, himself, was about to slap down after them when, suddenly, out the corner of his eye he caught sight of German archie puffs dotting the sky toward the north. Instantly he realized that the gunners were signalling the presence of enemy aircraft over German ground. Twisting all the way around in the seat, he stared hard, but was unable to see anything but the puffs. If there were planes there, they formed dots too small to see at the distance.

"Maybe the bums are just practicing," he grunted, and shoved his ship down in a long power dive.

Minutes later he sat down on his home drome, taxied up to the line, and legged out. Pulling off his helmet and goggles he ran an eye down the line of ships, grunted and frowned. Kelley's was not among those present. Turning, he glanced across the field toward the ground target beyond the woods. There was no plane diving on it.

"He took a couple of dives, sir, and then buzzed off out of sight."

Temple whirled at the sound of the corporal mechanic's voice.

"Which way?" he snapped.

The corporal pointed toward the north-east. That was enough for Temple. With

a grating curse he leaped back into the pit of his ship, and signalled to the mechanic. Twenty seconds later he was racing back into the air, flying hell-bent in the general direction of where he had seen the Boche archie bursts. His free fist was pounding savagely against the already wide open propeller, and his face was black with rage.

"If he lives," he snarled, "I'll take him apart piece by piece! Orders be damned, eh? We'll see about *that*!"

Twenty minutes, each one seemingly an hour in length, ticked past before he went charging straight through a cloud bank, and out into clear air. One flash glance about him, and his rage boiled over. About one mile off to his right, and about half that distance behind the German lines, five blunt nosed black and white striped Fokkers were swarming all over a lone American plane. The plane was from Forty Six Squadron, and Temple didn't need more than one look to know that the pilot in the pit was Second Lieutenant Kelley.

The German pilots were trying all the tricks of the trade, and little by little they were closing in on Kelley for a certain cold meat kill. At about that moment, Temple got a clear view of one of the Fokkers as it went cutting through a shaft of sunlight between two clouds. A bitter groan welled up in his throat as he recognized the death skull marking on the fin of the plane. Baron von Steuer, himself, was helping to slice up the reckless fool of a fledgling.

"Pull out! Roll and pull out, you blasted fool!"

Temple bellowed the words unconsciously, and renewed his savage pounding on the throttle. But, like once before, the fledgling seemed perfectly content to mill around with his black and white striped antagonists. In as many seconds, half a dozen opportunities to escape pre-

sented themselves. But Kelley seemed not even to be aware of their existence. In obvious cool deliberation, that wasn't such a big help to his flying, he twisted and turned this way and that, somehow always missing the final death burst that reached out nickel jacketed lead fingers for him.

Only a fool would keep up such tactics, and Kelley appeared to be the fool. For as Temple went thundering across the sky to his assistance, the fledgling stuck doggedly to his routine method of dog-fighting.

Suddenly, however, as though one of the invisible gods of war had hit him over the head with a hammer and awakened him to the realities of the occasion, Kelley's plane shot around in a wing screaming dime turn, tilted its nose and let his twin Vickers blast an unsuspecting German pilot into the place where all dead German pilots go.

So swift, and so unusual had been the attack, that the four other Fokker pilots were thrown out of gear before they knew what was happening. In fact, two of them fell over into crazy power spins in a desperate effort to get clear of the mad eagle's bursts.

A HOWL of wild joy burst from Temple's throat; changed instantly into a roar of complete amazement. In a lightning like follow-through maneuver, Kelley had slammed through a complete roll, finished it with a flashing wing over, and dropped right down on the tail of none other than Baron von Steuer.

"My God—he'll even get von Steuer! He'll—!"

Temple choked off the rest. Perhaps Kelley was a fool, but von Steuer certainly wasn't. Before the fledgling had had time to jab his trigger trips forward, and carve his initials in the back of von Steuer's head, the German had whirled

around in the seat and taken in the situation in a glance. And in that same split second he had shot both hands high over his head in a gesture of complete surrender.

Von Steuer had surrendered to a fledgling? Temple blinked, shook his head in an effort to clear his vision, just in case he was seeing things. But, he wasn't. The picture was true. Three Fokkers were pulling out of power spins and racing hell and gone east, and the fourth Fokker was buzzing west with a Yank Camel sitting very neatly on its tail.

"I'll never believe it, even if it is true!" Temple gasped. "Leaves himself wide open, and then nails two of them? Hell, maybe I'm going nuts!"

Cutting short his wild headlong dash across the skies, Temple throttled and swung around into position alongside Kelley. The replacement's grin was clear this time, and a mile wide. Sight of it, though, didn't help Temple's state of mind. Impulsively, he raised his free hand, bunched it into a fist, and shook it at the fledgling.

"I don't care if he's the Kaiser!" he roared into the thunder of his own engine. "I'm still going to pluck your tail feathers!"

That off his chest, the C.O. contented himself with riding top-cover on Kelley and his prisoner all the way back to the home drome. Their arrival brought out every pilot and mechanic in the place. All eyes were for Baron von Steuer who stood calmly between two armed guards. That is, all eyes save Temple's. His were fastened on Kelley, as he strode forward, and there was smouldering anger in their depths. He grabbed the fledgling by the arm, jerked the thumb of the other hand toward the squadron office.

"Go in there, and wait for me!" he snapped.

The grin faded from Kelley's face.

"My God, sir—!"

"Inside, and wait!" Temple snarled. "Get moving!"

A baffled look on his face, Kelley nodded, and went shuffling down the tarmac toward the squadron office. Once he was on his way, Temple pushed through the crowd about von Steuer, and fixed scornful eyes on the prisoner.

"Welcome to Forty Six, Baron!" he said. "Seems like your unlucky day, doesn't it?"

A faint smile tugged at the corners of the German's thin mouth. He half bowed stiffly from the waist.

"Ja, Herr Major," he said. "Who was the pilot? I should like to congratulate him."

"A fledgling," Temple told him. "Second time over the lines, too. Incidentally, I didn't rate you the type to surrender so easily."

The German frowned, gave a little shake to his head.

"A fledgling?" he echoed thickly. "*Himmel!* No wonder he did everything wrong. We were playing with the fool, and then, *sut*—it is hard to believe. You are not making fun, *hein?*"

"No, that's the truth," Temple told him. "You can speak to him yourself, later. You will be our guest at mess tonight, of course. Afterward, you'll be escorted to a detention camp."

The German bobbed his head.

"Of course," he said. Then with a sly look, "But I shall be a guest who does not drink, *Herr Major*. I know that trick. We try to get our own prisoners drunk and make them talk."

Temple shrugged, turned away.

"Suit yourself, Baron," he grunted.

Then, "Sergeant! Put the prisoner in one of the empty hutments. Place a guard over him. Let him have anything within reason."

Seconds later Temple shouldered into

the squadron office. Kelley, who had been peering eagerly out the one window, whirled around and saluted smartly. The C.O. ignored him, went over to his desk and dropped into the chair. Then, for a long minute, he fixed brittle eyes on the fledgling.

"Kelley," he suddenly barked, "do you play baseball?"

The fledgling stiffened.

"Eh? Why, sure, sir! Why?"

"Then you know that famous story," the C.O. bit off. "The one about the pinch hitter, who was told to bunt, but hit a home run, instead, that won the game?"

"Oh yes, sir. The manager benched him for a month, or something, wasn't it?"

Temple nodded curtly.

"Right! And that's just what I'm doing to you. Benching you, Kelley. You were told to stick close to the field. Instead you went over the lines and brought back the best German ace on this Front. Well, like that ball club manager, I'm benching you. And, by God, you'll stay benched until you learn to obey orders."

The fledgling's face fell.

"I'm sorry, sir," he mumbled. "I—I guess I got lost, and didn't know where I was flying. I'll stick close to the field after this. That's a promise, sir."

The C.O. swore softly.

"Lost hell!" he snapped. "Think I'm a dummy? But, don't worry about sticking close to this field. The bench isn't here!"

Kelley's eyes widened.

"What do you mean?" he managed to get out.

"The bench where you will park, Kelley," Temple told him evenly, "is back at the Pilots' Pool. Right, I'm sending you back there for awhile. I—"

"Dammit, sir, don't you want Boches? Didn't I—?"

"Shut up Kelley! I know what you

did! You disobeyed about every damn order in the book. I'll not have that sort of thing in my squadron. You may be the greatest pilot God ever made, but you'll do as the others do. Twice today, you might have been killed. Lord knows why you weren't. You certainly know how to gamble with your life! But, that's not front line work. We work as a group and *under orders*. Get it? You'll leave for Pilots' Pool tonight—*by car*. That's all!"

KELLEY'S eyes wrinkled at the corners, and his lean tapering fingers bunched into hard fists. For a second he swayed forward on the balls of his feet. Then he relaxed instantly, and straightened up.

"Very good, sir," he said tightly, and started to turn away.

"Just a minute, Kelley," Temple stopped him. Then seriously, "Get hold of yourself, man! Try not to be a fool, and I'll see that you're assigned back here within a week. You can gamble on that for a fact!"

For the second time that day, Kelley's eyes moved over to the wall calendar. When they again returned to Temple's face, they held an eerie glint that could mean most anything.

"A good gambler only bets on sure things," he said quietly.

And with that, he turned on his heel and went outside, leaving Major Temple frowning at the closed door. Eventually, the C.O. shook himself, muttered a curse beneath his breath, and began the task of preparing a report to Wing H.Q. of von Steuer's capture. From that he passed on to some neglected detail work that took up the next hour and a half, or so.

As a matter of fact he only ceased work when he became conscious of the fact that the red sun was sliding down

over the western rim of the world, and long grey shadows were beginning to creep across the squadron office floor. Stretching himself, he lighted a cigarette, leaned back in his chair and spewed smoke toward the ceiling.

Three puffs, and then a wild yell out on the tarmac brought him out of his chair like a shot. In two leaps he reached the door, and jerked it open. Half a dozen mechanics were tearing down the tarmac toward the far end, to where a Forty Six Camel was rolling rapidly out onto the field. In a flash glance, Temple recognized it as one of A Flight ships. However, the figure in the pit was bare headed, and even at the distance he could see the close cropped straw colored hair, and the sharp pointed features of Baron von Steuer.

With a roar of rage, that must have been heard all the way back to Paris, Temple bounded away from the squadron office and bo'ed over to the tarmac, bel-lowing orders to mechanics at the top of his voice. He was still some fifty yards from his own plane, when von Steuer's wheels cleared the ground, and the stolen Camel went careening up into the sunset flooded air. Split seconds later, though, as Temple virtually hurled himself into his pit, a second Camel shot out from the line, and went streaking over the drome in a whirlwind take-off. It was Kelley's ship, and the fledgling was in the pit.

By the time a grease-ball had swung the C.O.'s prop, Kelley was a good five hundred feet off the surface of the field, and closing in on the fleeing von Steuer at comet speed. Taking a chance with the cross-wind, the fledgling had taken off due east. In that way he gained yards on the German, and was now trying to cut in between him and the front lines.

Just what happened in the next half minute, or so, Temple didn't see. He

was too occupied giving his engine a "forced" warm up, and taxiing out onto the field. Once he was in the air and swinging around in a climbing turn toward the east, he snapped his eyes ahead and searched the skies.

In practically the same instant he saw them. Both planes were about three quarters of a mile away, and milling around and around in a deadly dog fight. Von Steuer was striving desperately to get on Kelley's tail. But, the replacement's ship seemed to be the faster of the two. At any rate, whenever the German did get into position, Kelley slid out of harm's way with time to spare. However, he did not seem bent upon shooting von Steuer down. Not a single burst ripped out from either of his guns, though he had half a dozen perfect chances.

The passing up of perfect shots brought savage curses to Temple's lips.

"Your guns, Kelley!" he thundered. "For God's sake, man, use your guns! He'll—!"

He finished the last with a cry of alarm. Von Steuer had ceased dog-fighting, and was striving to tie up Kelley, and then cut away toward the German lines. Three times in a row he succeeded. He caught Kelley flat footed in a bank, faked a cut-in attack, but, instead, reversed the maneuver and streaked away toward the east. Each time however the fledgling caught up with him, and forced him to turn back to the dog-fight. And, on each of the three occasions, Kelley still continued to keep his guns silent.

"Fighting" his engine for more revs and speed, Temple bellowed advice at the top of his lungs. He did more than that, as a matter of fact; he begged, and pleaded, and cursed until he was forced to shut off the words from sheer lung exhaustion. But, it was all to no avail. Kelly was obviously playing his own mysterious game, and playing it right up to the hilt. In card

parlance, he was seemingly giving von Steuer every ace in the deck, and beating him to the trick every time.

To Temple, too far away to join in the scrap, it seemed hours before Kelley finally woke up. In a hair pin turn, the fledgling wheeled around, charged in at the German's right rear, and blasted two long bursts through the tail section. Then changing his direction slowly, Kelley poked a ribbon of bullet holes right up the turtle back of the A Flight Camel. Just short of the cockpit he stopped, ceased fire, then opened up again and bounced some made-in-America bullets off the cowling of the engine.

In one last desperate effort, von Steuer tried to break away for keeps. But Kelley's plane virtually swarmed all over him. And then he gave up. Twice in the same day, the miracle was performed. Von Steuer's hand shot up over his head in a token of complete surrender. Instantly, Kelley cut off his fire, dropped lower on the German's tail, and motioned the man to fly back toward the Forty Sixth drome. Von Steuer nodded his head, and went sliding around toward the west.

STRAINED relief sweeping through him, Temple throttled his own engine, and coasted around in the wake of the other two ships. In follow the leader style they landed some fifteen minutes later. Once again pilots and mechanics swarmed out onto the tarmac. And again, armed guards took charge of von Steuer, and marched him away. The pilots crowded about Kelley, started slapping him on the back. Strangely enough, though, the pilot paid no attention. He walked straight over to Temple, as the C.O. legged out of his ship, and saluted.

"May I speak to you in private, sir?" he asked.

Temple stared at him, nodded, and swung on his heel.

"Come over to the squadron office," he grunted.

Once they were inside, the fledgling pulled a sheet of paper from his pocket. He started to hold it out but checked the movement.

"If you forced down the same man twice, sir, would that be counted as two victories?" he blurted out.

Temple blinked.

"Why—why, yes," he nodded. "It was certainly two separate battles."

"Then will you sign this, sir?" Kelley asked, indicating the paper he held. "It—it's confirmation that I got five enemy ships—became an ace in one day."

The C.O. stared at him, mouth open.

"So that's—? You mean you have been actually trying—?"

"Yes, sir," Kelley nodded, as Temple paused. "One year ago today, the day we entered the war, I made a big bet with a gambling acquaintance that I'd do something big before the end of the year. The flu laid me out for four months of it. Today was my last chance—well, I had to make good. The ace in one day stunt, was about the only thing left. Only Bishop, of the English, and Dave Putnam, of our own Air Service, have nailed five in one day, so far. Guess I'm the third."

Temple shook his head in bewildered disbelief.

"Yeah, you're the third," he grunted. "But, you were damn lucky. If von Steuer hadn't escaped, and you had not been near your ship—"

"I arranged that, sir."

"What?"

"Oh no, not with von Steuer, sir," Kelley said hastily. "You see—well, I had to gamble. You had grounded me. If I could only fix it so von Steuer would escape. I mean not tell him, or the guard—well, anyway, the guard had to obey my

orders as an officer. I told him to go hunt up the hutment sergeant—said I'd stand guard. Well, I opened the door to talk with von Steuer, then acted as though some one had called to me, and foolishly walked away. Von Steuer took his chance, and slipped out. Of course, I had left two planes ticking over on the tarmac. One for him, and one for me. That's the way it was, sir. Naturally, if there's any punishment, it's due me, not the guard."

As Kelley talked, Temple's face grew redder and redder. He was virtually frothing at the mouth by the time the fledgling finished.

"You—you" he stuttered out. "Aided a prisoner to escape? By Heaven I'll have you put against a brick wall for this. I'll—I'll have you crucified for this!"

It was positively maddening for the C.O. to simply sit there and listen to the colossal nerve of this recruit. Never in all his years of military service had Temple observed such complete disregard for discipline. And yet—there was something about this hellbent kid—something that made a fellow laugh at restrictions and regulations. A million thoughts raced through Temple's seething brain; and in spite of his mounting rage, he was compelled to force back the smile that was

fighting for expression. Hastily he bit back that impulse and glared at the recruit. Kelley was struggling for words to right himself. He protested:

"But he didn't escape, sir! I forced him back!"

"That makes no difference!" roared the C.O. "It was only lucky he didn't get away from you. Why—why, you gambling fool. You—you—you—!"

The C.O. stopped for want of suitable adjectives. Kelley shook his head, and looked him straight in the eye.

"Maybe a fool, sir," he said evenly. "But I only gamble on *sure things*! One of von Steuer's spark plug wires was missing. I removed it. That's why I flew rings around him. Also why I didn't shoot him down? He at least rated that much of a break."

The C.O. gaped at him.

"You had removed one of the spark plug wires?" he mumbled. Then with a long sigh, "You'd better stay here at the squadron, Kelley. It's going to take me a week before I get this all straight in my mind. Yeah, a week—no, maybe a month. I may not be sobered up in a week. Come along to the mess and join me, so I'll know where the hell you are, and what you're doing!"



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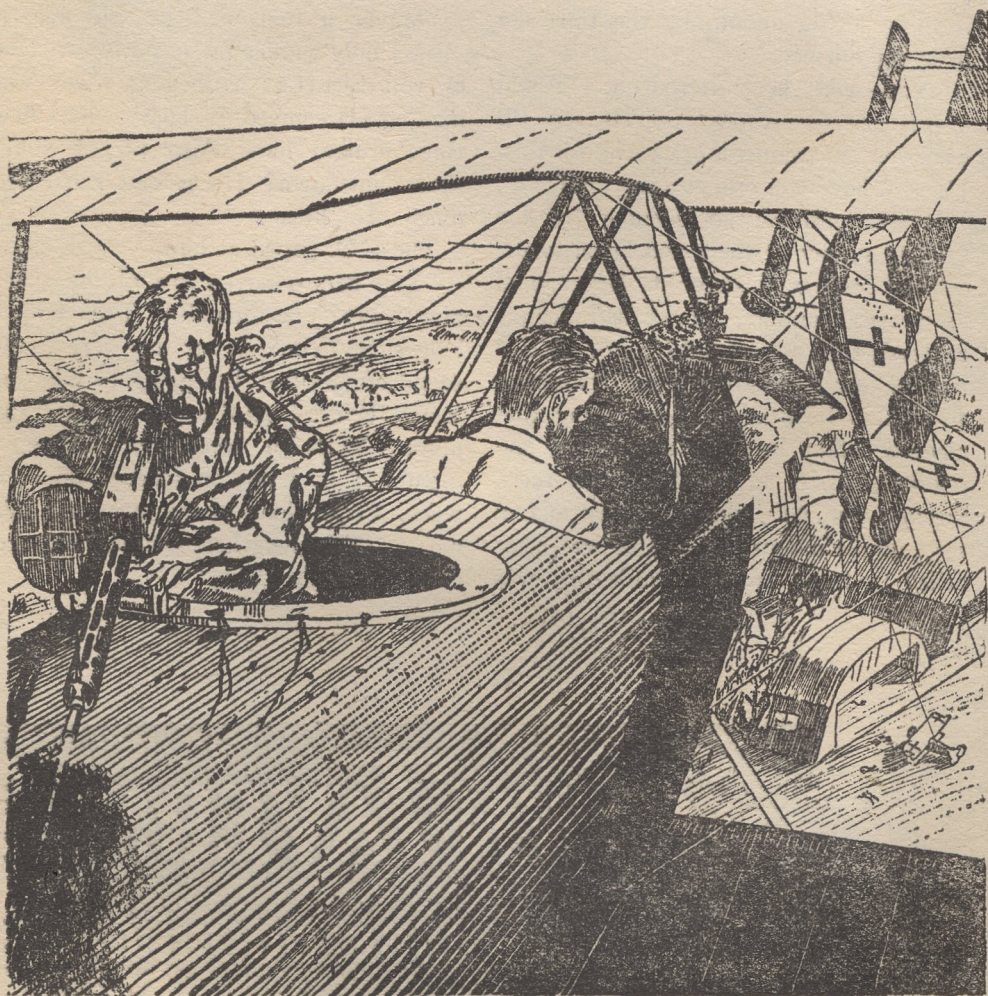
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Hell's Ashes

by ORLANDO RIGONI

*As Creel rode the bloody skies on the wings of Hell, he knew one thing: Death was not for him! Yet all about him spread the doom that ate the lives of his flight mates, that wrote in blood letters a single challenge—
a life must be matched with a life!*



The bloody figure of Moyle was sweeping the sky with Spandaus.

MAJOR GAVIN CREEL sat behind the battered desk at the end of that long, darkened room, like a gray figure of stone pinned against the wall. In the flickering light of the three candles, his face seemed like a chiseled thing of raw granite, unpolished. But the eyes in that face, dark and restless, were like smouldering fires.

Creel stared at the fresh, eager faces of the replacements standing in the room before him. In his big chest was a strange pain. He had seen faces like that before; but where were they now? He closed his eyes wearily and his grim jaw hardened. He knew where they were, they were out in the filthy mud of Flanders, feeding worms!

The 30th Pursuit at Lizy, had run into a streak of bad luck. In the past two weeks, they had lost enough men to form two squadrons. Creel had watched those men come and go, and now, here was a fresh batch. His heart ached as he looked at them.

They were so simple, so patient and so—dumb! Creel could tell them all there was to know about facing that hell in the sky, and yet they would know nothing. It was a thing you had to learn for yourself, a thing that could be taught by experience alone. And then, even the very first lesson might prove to be the last. Creel was getting sick of this wholesale death, he was learning the meaning of the word fear.

Not for himself, hell no! He wasn't afraid for himself—for death couldn't touch him. He had learned that in the past three years of war. He had gone into the thing in search of excitement, joining up with the Canucks. Hadn't he been through the first gas attack at Ypres? Hadn't he crawled from that stinking inferno with eyes popping and tongue swollen; yet with life pounding unimpaired in his huge frame? Hadn't he been through the first

attack of liquid fire—fire that had surged and rolled and singed the very hair of his head and left him fuzzy and half bald and aged beyond his years? Hadn't he joined aviation by a fluke and taken a bomber for the I.A.F. farther into Germany than any man had ever gone?

No, death was not for him. His was a grimmer, harder lot. He was meant to lead other men to their deaths and was meant to always return unscathed. For the past two weeks, he had been doing just that. Five times now, he had come back with every member of his flight killed but himself. Now, there were only three veterans on the 30th, besides himself.

He cleared his thick throat and his words were husky as they came. "I've told you men everything I know about this business, and it won't do you a damned bit of good! You've got to learn for yourselves."

He picked up the hooker of cognac at his elbow and drained it with a prodigious gulp. Then he slammed the glass down hard.

"You've got to learn for yourself," he repeated, glaring at them, "and if you come through the first lesson, you might live to the fourth. Get this straight. Don't worry about getting killed. If the Old Man up yonder hasn't got your name in his hat, all the kaiser's sons can't down you.

"I don't want you to look on me as a bull whipper. I'm flesh and bone just as you are, and I'm not forcing any man to go out and get killed. But you've come here to fight. If you've changed your mind—if you find the thing don't set well on your stomachs, you're free to go back."

A pinkfaced peclot in the front row of recruits grinned like a kid. "We're not afraid, sir, if that's what you mean. We come up here to fight and not to listen to bible ranters. We want one wild fling at

the glory soup, and if we go down—well, a guy can live a long time in ten minutes!"

Creel was a strong man and a hard man, but at those words, he wanted to cry. It was easy to be brave, when danger was a dim mirage in the future. He banged his big fist on the desk.

"Get this straight, you knob-heads! Lay off the hard liquor until you've learned the first lesson. A couple of fingers of wine, maybe, to warm your guts, but not any cognac!"

Back of the new men, stood "Laughing Bill" Moyle, who had formed the 30th pursuit with Creel. With Moyle were the freckled faced George, and the thick, somber Williams. Moyle was looking at the half emptied bottle of cognac at Creel's elbow. His face spread in a wide grin.

"Reckon me an' George an' Williams, will be strollin' over to the village. The gals is a little nervous over there about air raids. We got to show 'em we're on the job to protect 'em."

Creel frowned as the three men went out. He secretly wished he was going with them. Laughing Bill was one guy who could make the war seem like a picnic, and Creel was feeling his liquor anyway.

At the same instant, there was the drone of mighty engines far above the still tarmac of the 30th.

Sergeant "Pee-Wee" Donovan, who had charge of the tool room and the spare parts, piped up, "sounds like raiders, sir."

Donovan was short, bowlegged and scrawny, but he had the heart of a lion, and though he never piloted a plane, he was always on hand when Creel was lecturing a bunch of raw meat. Everybody liked him.

Creel slapped the table as the new men listened nervously to the droning engines. "That's just the night bombers of the 95th I.A.F. at Meux, returning from a

raid. You men go to your bunks. Buddy-up with anybody you want to. Two men to a hut. Good-night!"

Creel stared like a man in a trance as he watched them file out. He wasn't seeing fresh faces, and eager faces, and laughing faces. He was seeing faces twisted in the white fear of death—faces red with blood that spurted and clotted and stopped the wild look of terror in staring eyes.

When he was alone, he shook his head fiercely, picked up the cognac bottle and drained it. Damn the liquor, anyway. It didn't do him much good any more. It made him woozy, and groggy and loose on his pins. But it couldn't wipe the visions from his eyes.

AGAIN he heard the drone of engines.

He cursed and staggered outside. The drome was built on an abandoned farm, and as he started across the farmyard, the drone of the engine became a mad, writhing wail of anguish as the ship dived. He knew that sound, drunk as he was, he knew it. Mercedes!

Creel turned and ran across the closed-in space to the hutments as another diving ship followed the first. Wildly, unsteadily, he staggered across the yard. He came to the dugout cellar and fell in, pulling the door down upon himself. Then he sank to the floor and lay in the darkness listening—listening—listening for the shuddering blast of the bombs.

For a long time he lay there, breathing the damp musty air of that unventilated cellar. Still no shudder of earth told of bombs. He cursed himself for a fool—told himself that the 95 was having fun at his expense, and tried to raise the door. But it wouldn't open. The catch, outside, had locked securely, holding him prisoner.

He pounded fiercely upon the thick boards of the door until his great hands ached with the effort. He crouched back

waiting—waiting—waiting. How long he waited, he didn't know, but eventually, he heard a scratching outside and the door swung open.

Into the opening, fell a dark figure of a man. The man was wheezing, and gasping. It was the bowlegged Pee-wee Donovan! He fell upon the floor of the cellar and his eyes glowed like coals in the dark.

"Major—be—be careful. Th—those two ships crashed! Everything's consumed—everything—"

Creel stiffened and his head cleared as though he was doused with cold water. "What do you mean?" he husked.

"Gas—rain—ashes—" Pee-Wee gasped, then seemed to crumble like sand that is dried in an oven.

Creel knelt swiftly and struck a match. As the light flared up, he jerked back, cursing and sucking his breath in swiftly. What he saw before him was ghastly—terrifying—gruesome!

"Pee-wee! Pee-wee!" he cried hoarsely, but Pee-wee was past answering. The match flickered out.

Creel struck another and bent close to that gray, deathly face. His thick fingers went out like probes and touched that ashen skin. He leaped back, gasping. His fingers tingled strangely, and the spot on Pee-wee's face where his fingers had touched, fell into dry, powdery ashes, like cloth that has been burned but holds its form until touched!

Creel bit his lip and his eyes held like rivets to that face. He struck another match and before his staring eyes, he could see the form of Pee-wee Donovan shrivelling and collapsing into a heap of ashes! He swallowed hard, fisted his eyes to convince himself that it was real until the match burned his fingers and he knew he wasn't dreaming.

He tried to move the fallen form, but it had no substance. It was a pile of ashes arranged in the form of a man.

Now Creel felt a cold hand of terror grasp the skin of his mighty chest. Breathing like an engine that finds the pressure within too much to bear, he stepped over the form.

Outside, the thin moon cast a weird light over the earth. He stumbled across the yard toward the hutments. He had to make sure the new men were all right; had to be sure that they would get their one fling at the glory soup.

He almost collided with Laughing Bill Moyle and the other two men who were returning from the village.

Moyle cried, "What's the matter, major. It smells funny here."

Swiftly Creel barked out what had happened to Donovan. Moyle cursed hotly, for he had loved the little keeper of the tools.

"Raid?" he asked shortly.

"Must have been a raid—Donovan said they crashed—"

"There's some wrecks over there!" Laughing Bill cried, then ran across the yard toward the runway of the field.

"I've got to have a look at the replacements," Creel said dumbly, and went on to the hutments.

It was so still there—so deathly still. Creel felt his flesh crawl with an unnamed fear as he called softly.

No answer.

"Perkins—Jaegers—Smith!"

No answer.

Like a dead man, Creel lit another match and kicked open the door of the first hut. The men were lying on the cots like ants deformed in death on a hot stove. He blinked his eyes and touched the nearest form. It wasn't a man—it was a pile of ashes!

Heart pounding like a great hammer in his chest, Creel legged from the hut. Those men had had their fling at the glory soup! They had died like rats in a hole. Such is the glory of war! A strange,

livid anger drove Creel almost mad.

He didn't go to the other huts. He knew what he would find there. Only the sealed-in cellar had saved Creel, himself. Like a mechanical thing, he legged out to the tarmac where he found Moyle and the other two men, examining the wrecks of the Albatrosses.

"Burned—both of them burned to ashes," Moyle complained bitterly.

"No—not burned—not with fire," Creel husked. "These Boches have sacrificed themselves to bring a strange death here. They were consumed by the same diabolical poison that consumed everything else on this field. All of our men are gone—all of our planes!"

Creel poked about in the ashes of the planes while Moyle held a light. The metal of the planes was intact, but the fabric and wood and flesh were consumed by those ashes. Suddenly Creel let out a little cry. He raised up, holding in his hand a little brass disc.

Moyle held a match close. "An identification tag," Creel said swiftly. Upon the disc they read the numerals, "73rd" and under that the words, "Ludwig Schwieser, Hauptmann", and on the bottom, "Albatross".

Creel said softly, "The 73rd Albatross Squadron is over at Dormans beyond Chateau Thierry. They bring over this death, and it kills them along with the victims!"

Moyle stiffened and cursed. "They can't do a thing like this—damn them! Pee-wee didn't hurt them! They can't get away with this!"

WITH the last screaming words, Moyle ran like a madman back toward the village. Creel cried for him to stop, but he didn't stop. Fearing that Moyle would try something desperate, Creel followed. But Moyle was slim and swift on his feet. Creel wasn't built for speed, and

by the time he reached the village, Moyle had roared away on a borrowed motorcycle.

Creel screamed at the bewildered dispatch rider who had charge of the machine, "Where's he going?"

The sergeant shrugged, "Batty, I guess. Mumbled something about the 95th over at Meux."

Creel whirled and commandeered a mud-spattered Dodge standing before the estaminet. He kicked the engine into thunderous life and wheeled the machine in a mad race over the muddy, rutted roads. How he ever got to Meux he didn't know. He didn't much care, either.

He leaped out and ran across the field just as a plane lifted into the gray light of breaking dawn. At the line before the crashack, he found the mechs cursing and stomping up and down.

"Stop that buzzard! That machine ain't in no shape to fight with!" the chief mech cried.

Creel was stiff and weary, but he leaped for another ship. "I'll stop him—I'll bring him back!"

He shoved the throttle up the brass and felt the idling Gnome scream itself into a frenzy as the hot gas slopped into its cylinders. The Nieuport trembled and beat against the chocks. It tore free, and lifted like paper in a whirlwind.

Creel growled fiercely. He was without his flying suit—without his helmet and goggles. The cold air tore about him like ice, but still he felt hot and angry and almost helpless. Laughing Bill was a fool—a blind, crazy fool. He was committing suicide in a crippled ship just because—

Creel blinked his hot eyes against the icy blast of his prop, and hurled the Nieuport after the little spot upon the horizon to the east. Fiercely, tensely, he nursed the Gnome to its last ounce of power. He looked at his gauges and

stiffened. The gas gauge showed barely a quarter of a tank!

But Creel didn't turn back. He went on grimly, swiftly. Death wasn't for him! If he could turn Moyle, he'd take his chances on getting back, for Moyle was a brother to him.

He glared down, and saw the broken bones of Chateau Thierry sticking up out of the mud like headstones. He could see the black scratch of the trenches and the blot of bare earth that had been blighted by the breath of war.

He gained on Moyle—slowly at first, then swiftly. He was a little higher than Moyle and as he struck the forks in the railroad, he stiffened. Four Fokkers dropped like flame from a cloud onto the lone flyer.

Creel cursed and beat his cowling with his gloved hand. The air struck him like a wall of ice that froze his skin, but his blood pumped swift and hot. What was wrong with Moyle's crate? Guns? Engine? Controls?

Creel hunched his big body down, then hurled his Nieuport upon the attacking Fokkers. Like pain, the wind screamed past his head. He held his eyes to the rings; roared past the red ships and pulled the stick in. Swiftly he lifted—red in his rings—thumbs on the trips!

Rat-tat-tat-tat! Rat-tat-tat-tat!

That red ship became a smudge of smoke. Then brighter red licked back like a tongue and lapped at the terrified pilot in the pit. Creel whirled. The air was like glass—clear and cold. He could see Moyle caught between two Germans, and the converging streams of death were beating at him like a flail.

Moyle seemed to be oblivious of the steel-jacketed death. He flew straight on, like a man drawn with a string. Creel cursed. He knew Moyle, and he knew that the lanky flyer was out to right a wrong; that nothing could stop him.

But there was one thing could stop him, and that thing was *death*. Grimly, Creel hurled his ship across the clear air and cut down on one of the ships that was trying to down Moyle. At the same time, the remaining ship caught Creel in its guns. The Spandau slugs hammered about him like clubs and beat the leather from his crashpad. He waggled fiercely to throw off the aim of the Spandaus. The slugs chattered into his wings, leaving holes and rags and splinters in their wake.

Gulping madly, Creel caught the ship in his rings, and hammered down. One short burst—two! The line of holes near the tail went forward—forward—forward until the slugs battered into the gray back of the German like a wall and whipped it into a froth of blood!

The Fokker went down, spinning. Creel rolled out of the path of the death behind him, and shunting with his wing, managed to clear the other Fokker off Moyle's tail. Then he gunned the Gnome and raced after Moyle.

The two Fokkers stared after this madman, and shook their wings in wonder. But they didn't give chase. A man flying into Germany didn't need to be chased.

When Creel reached Moyle again, they were over Dormans, and Moyle was going down in a mad, steep dive! Creel legged the stick, and whipped the Nieuport in a crazy angle, motioning Moyle back. But Moyle was staring straight ahead of him, fixedly.

A thousand feet from the earth, Moyle began to limber up his guns. Creel watched him closely, and stared at the earth. Then he stiffened. He saw it suddenly, the strange machine near the crateshack, that hurled a finger of liquid a thousand feet into the air!

That liquid came up like a tube of glass and mushroomed into a spray at the top of its climb. It was like a long finger,

probing for them. Creel cursed and drew in his breath suddenly, yelling madly at Moyle, who seemed oblivious to the strange stream.

CREEL batted his big thumbs on the trips and fired a burst across Moyle's left wing to attract his attention. Moyle looked over and saw the liquid. He pulled his stick suddenly to avoid it, and in that moment of necessity, Creel saw what was wrong with that plane.

The rudder hinge on the bottom of the rudder, was loose. The sudden kicking of the bar, had torn it off, and the Nieuport skidded flat, right into the path of the spraying liquid!

Creel sucked in his breath. He saw Moyle look back. There was fear and anger on Moyle's face as the tail of his ship whipped through the edge of the spray and his left wing lifted as the force of the stream struck it.

Creel tensed. He gripped his stick hard and flung his own ship clear. He saw, with unbelieving eyes, Moyle's left wing-tip crumple and blow away like ashes; he saw the controls fall apart; saw gaping holes appear in the covering.

Moyle was going down, and as though they wanted him alive, the Germans waited for him to crash. Creel's tanks were all but empty, yet he couldn't turn back, and leave Moyle in such a hole. He wasn't made like that. For a friend, he would have faced the whole German Army, and the Kaiser's favorite son in the bargain.

Now he screamed down onto Moyle's flapping tail. He saw Moyle fighting with the stick, trying to stop the mad drop of the crippled Nieuport. Creel felt hot and cold and closed his eyes as Moyle banged into the gray earth.

He saw Moyle, flung clear by the shock of the crash, crawling to his feet. Grimly, Creel flattened and thundered upon the group of Germans running out to capture

Moyle. His Vickers shivered and bucked on the cowling. Red tongues of flame shot from their gaping muzzles!

The group of Jerries was driven back, Creel legged the stick and top-ruddered into a mad vertical. As though that ship was part of him—as though it was nothing more than his feet and hands, he set it on the earth close to the wreckage of Moyle's ship.

"Come on, jump over my cowling!" he screamed at his stunned pal. But before the words had struck back from the crate-shack, a man leaped from behind the hangar doors. Creel saw the man, and swung his ship to bear, kicking the tail up and batting the trips.

He had to save Moyle—he had to take him back so they could figure some sane way to beat this strange gas that ate up men as a fire ate up wood. He saw his slugs hammering into the form of the man, but before he fell, the Boche hurled a cylinder of glass at Creel's trembling Nieuport.

The glass struck the cowling and the liquid splattered across the engine mounting. Then Creel saw a strange thing—something that filled him with horror. That whole mounting seemed to change right before his eyes. There was no smoke, only a heavy, dank odor. The struts and braces turned gray and crumpled; the engine fell off as though hacked free with a knife!

They were trapped—caught at last! Creel leaped from his pit and ran over to Moyle. At the same time, a squad of Germans came after them with fixed bayonets. A slim, debonair officer was leading them. He was grinning coldly, like a death's head.

"Welcome, *mein herrs*. You have come at an excellent time to tell us of the success of our raid." Then, turning to one of his men, the officer barked, "Heinrich, shackle him!"

Creel leaped back, clawing for his gun. "Leave me alone!" he shouted.

Moyle was still dazed from his crash, and was mumbling to himself, "They can't get away with it—they can't!"

The officer's eyes narrowed into thin, deadly slits. He said in a brittle voice, "Be careful of your hands, *mein herr*. We wish to question you, but if necessary, we kill you first. If we had wanted to kill you, we could have consumed you with our liquid fire—fire without flame or smoke! Fire that consumes everything combustible. We have made some wonderful experiments with this fire, *mein herr*. We wish to make more. Therefore, we saved you."

Creel was still backing away. "Touch me, and I'll kill you all."

The German smiled in his thin way. "We are not afraid to die, *mein herr*. The 73rd has dedicated itself to death. Two men died last night, but we find from your actions, that their deaths were well rewarded. Two lives is a cheap enough price for the destruction of a drome. We are proud to die for the Fatherland. Think what it means, when we spread our liquor fire over a sleeping city!"

Creel felt hot and helpless and stubborn. He leaped at the German's throat with clawed hands. The German drew back, snarling. "Stop, *schwein*, or we turn the liquid upon you!"

"Yah!" Creel snarled hotly, "it can't harm me—if it could, it would drop from the air and kill you all."

The German looked at him slyly. "You are wrong, *mein herr*. The liquid fire never settles—never rises. It is the weight of air and expands only to atmospheric pressure. That is why we must fly low to spray our death—that is why we must be consumed with mist even as we destroy!"

Moyle had been watching them vague-

ly. Suddenly he seemed to regain his senses. He turned and ran for the two strange machines at the front of the crate-shack. "I'll show them!" he cried. "I'll show them that a Yank can die—"

The Germans turned to pursue him, but the officer held them back. "If he touches those controls without protection, he will be consumed, let him go, Heinrich!"

Creel stiffened. He turned after Moyle, shouting, "Stop, Moyle, for God's sake stop!"

But Moyle wouldn't stop. He stumbled in his haste, and Creel caught him. He tried to fight himself out of Creel's hands. Creel held tight, and because he could do nothing else, he swung his big hand in a short arc that struck Moyle on the chin.

Moyle went down like a dead thing, and as he fell, a Luger barked viciously. Creel waited for the smack of lead, but it didn't come. He saw blood spreading over the front of Moyle's flying suit and he cursed. He turned toward the machines, himself. Better to die fighting—better to take as many of the enemy as possible before he went!

There were two skinny Germans watching over the spray guns. They were encased in heavy armor with iron gloves. Creel lifted his big gun and fired at them, pointblank. The slugs failed to pierce the armor, but the force of the shot sent them sprawling.

Swiftly, then, Creel turned on the machines. He triggered his Colt with deadly precision and sent hot lead crashing into the controls of the machine. The iron monster began to spew forth its stream of liquid death!

Creel could see how it worked. The main part of the stream was water and the chemical was fed into the water from a little cylinder attached to the machine. He triggered his gun again and sent two slugs battering into the swivel mechanism by which the gun was swung. The snout

dropped down level, and the huge machine trembled to the force as the stream of liquid began to whip and lash, like a fire hose that has been yanked from the hands of its keepers.

There was uproar and confusion. The German officer cursed and drove his men forward to capture the machine. But before they could move, the stream struck them all, including the officer and wiped them out.

Creel, breathing hard and fisting his eyes with his big hand, fell to his knees and crawled beneath the lashing stream to Moyle's side. Moyle couldn't get up. Creel straightened and one thought burned in his head, "death wasn't for him—death wasn't for him—death wasn't for him!"

He picked up Moyle gently, ran through the hangar to the rear door, then around to the far side where three two-place Albatrosses were ticking over. He could hear a man screaming.

"Shut off the main valve—shut off the pressure!"

AS he staggered around the building, Creel saw a man leaping into a pit that held a great valve. He lay his burden down swiftly and leaped on the man. One blow from his huge fist sent the man reeling. Then Creel leaped into the hole and kicked the valve open full!

He leaped out with his breath burning in his lungs. Maybe he'd die—maybe that deadly stuff had reached him. He didn't care. Two lives was a cheap enough price to pay for such a victory! He picked up Moyle and staggered on toward the idling Albatrosses.

Then he could see the field again. The huge gun had switched around like a serpent and was hurling the spray at the hutments and office building. He could see men running from the hutments to be knocked down by the strange death. He

could see officers emerging from the operations building, only to go down cursing and screaming orders at men who were helpless to obey!

Creel rippled a curse. The burden of Moyle was dragging him down. He forced himself forward. *Death wasn't for him!* He reached the first ship and shoved Moyle into the rear pit like a bag of meal. He leaped to the control pit and jabbed the Mercedes wide. The mighty engine seemed to throb in defiance of the wild hell that surged across that drome!

As the big machine wheeled forward, another man ran out to stop it, but the wing struck the man and bowled him over. They were free! Creel hunched low. The Albatross surged down the field like a live thing. The line of poplars leaped toward him. Creel bit his lip and drew the stick back. The big ship lurched into the sky and wheeled as he kicked the stick.

Creel felt safe now, and a fierce joy coursed through him. For suddenly he noticed that this Albatross was equipped with the tanks of liquid and the controls for spraying it. All right, he'd go back and destroy that drome—send it into a crumbling hell of ashes like the drome at Lizy!

He whipped the Albatross and hurtled down across the field. But even then, a cold hand seemed to grip his heart. To release that liquid meant that he must die—must die, and take Moyle with him! Well, he'd die if he had to. The trick of sacrifice wasn't for Germans alone!

He flattened low across that field and put his hands to the controls of the tanks. He felt like a man facing his executioner. He had one minute more of life—one minute more of breathing—thinking—hearing—seeing!

He didn't care for himself. He was thinking of Moyle—wounded to the death

in the rear pit. Moyle had come to avenge a wrong—

Creel dared think no more. His big hands grasped the controls grimly. His thick fingers tightened. He pressed fiercely and jerked a look down! He sucked in his breath. Nothing came from the tanks—they were empty!

He didn't know whether to be glad or angry. *Death wasn't for him!* He swung the Albatross up. Far above him, he could see the two Fokkers that had followed them back from the dogfight over the railroad junction!

Creel breathed hard. No getting away from those babies. All right, he'd go up and meet them. Now that the end was so near, he was glad—glad that he could go out in a blaze of glory, with Jerry meat in his rings and the battle lust in his heart!

He circled up—up—up! The red ships came down to meet him. They roared by with a deafening thunder that split the very air into fragments! Before Creel could jerk the clumsy Albatross free, the first of the red ships, caught him in the death stream! They had recognized him instantly without his helmet or his goggles!

He gulped fiercely and started to throw the Albatross into a half loop and a roll to escape that slashing death. But when he was half up in the loop, he remembered Moyle in the rear pit without a belt—helpless. He didn't complete the maneuver. He went up and the Albatross hung from the prop in a whip-stall!

He slid out of the stall on a wingtip, back into the driving slugs of the Spandaus. As he slid down, he caught the other red ship in his rings, and tensed.

If he kept that spot, he might get that other ship, yet he had to think of Moyle—

In that instant of necessity, the Spandau slugs stopped their battering. He could hear the mounted Spandaus in the rear

pit chattering like wild monkeys. He jerked a look back, and cursed wildly!

Moyle was standing up like a drunken man! He was sweeping the sky with those Spandaus! There was blood streaming down his face like a mask and his eyes were burnt holes in that blood mask, yet the hands on the guns were sure, swift! Creel saw that trailing Fokker explode in a sheet of flame.

He jerked back and hunched down. Swiftly, grimly, he triggered the Spandaus on the cowlings. He could see the golden whisps of tracer lace across the air and burrow little holes into the red body of the Fokker in front of him. He pulled the stick back slowly—slowly! The slugs ate their way toward the pit and reached it! The German turned a white face back at this crazy man on his tail. But that face wasn't white—it was red and dripping!

Creel's racing mind throbbed. "*Death wasn't for him!*" And as the thought was born, he could see the bombers of the 95th coming to rescue them, led by George and Williams.

As the bombers swept down, Creel signalled wildly, and led them in that blasting, scourging raid that wiped the drome of the 73rd from the face of Flanders.

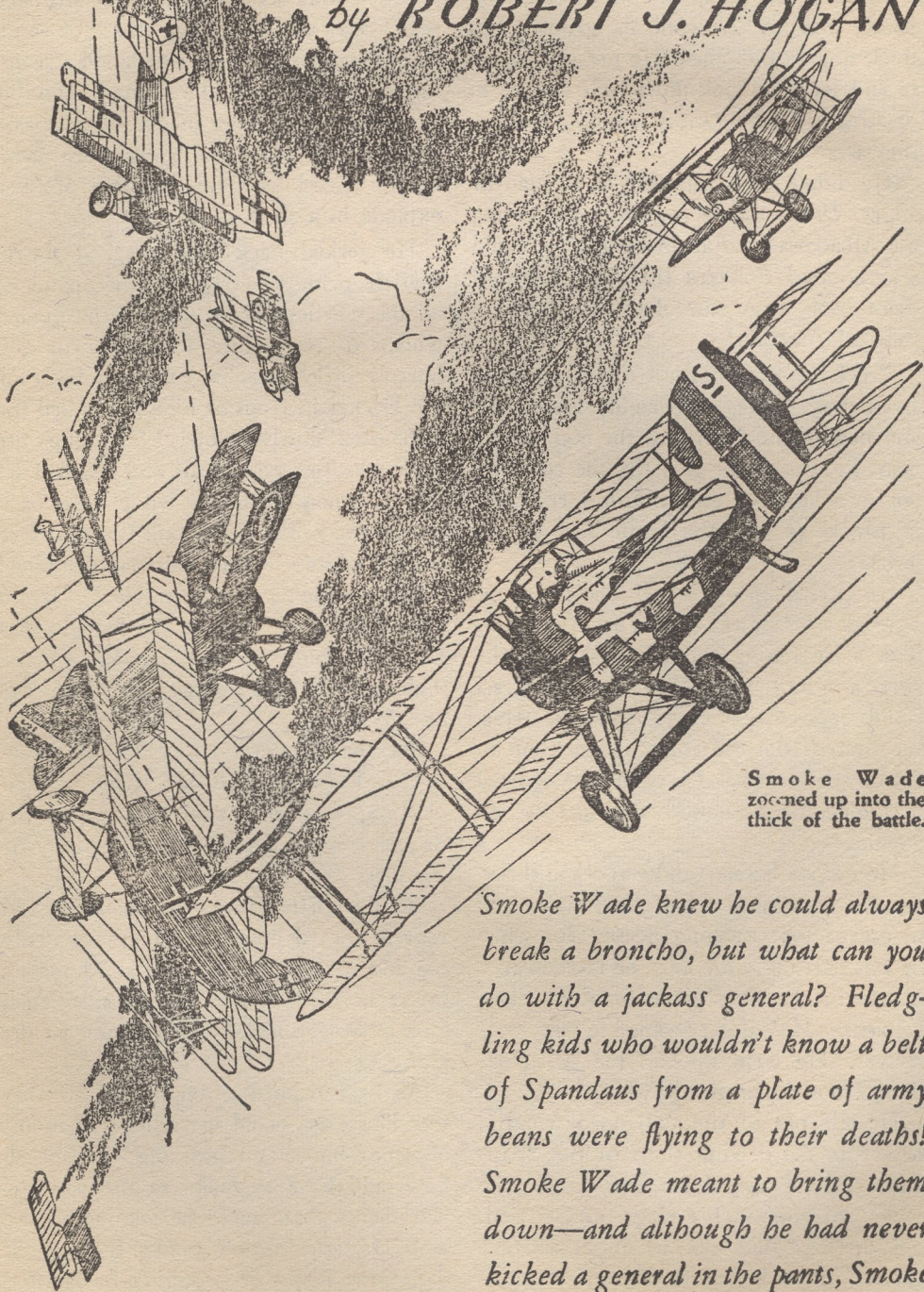
As they lifted from the shambles and roared toward home, Creel felt suddenly old and weary. He shivered and hunched lower in the pit, and jerked a satisfied look at Moyle, bloody but grinning in the rear pit.

As he screamed through that air that was like glass—cold glass, he was mumbling to himself, rehearsing the speech he would have to make to the new replacements that would be coming to the 30th. He sighed deeply, glad at the thought that these new men wouldn't be snuffed out like rats in a hole, but would have at least one fling at the glory soup. A man can live a long time in ten minutes!

THE RODEO BUZZARD

SMOKE WADE YARN BY

by ROBERT J. HOGAN



Smoke Wade zoomed up into the thick of the battle.

Smoke Wade knew he could always break a broncho, but what can you do with a jackass general? Fledgling kids who wouldn't know a belt of Spandaus from a plate of army beans were flying to their deaths! Smoke Wade meant to bring them down—and although he had never kicked a general in the pants, Smoke figured the job would be a pleasure.

SMOKE WADE, lanky Arizona cowboy skipper of the sixty-sixth pursuits, straightened with a shake of his long-faced head.

"Damn them varmints!" he cursed softly to himself. "Here I am supposed to be out trying to see what the Heinies are doing and there just ain't nothing to see. They hain't even sending out their planes any more so's I can take a crack at 'em to fill in the time while I'm watching."

Smoke was circling far back over the lines in his pinto Spad, the flashing pursuit ship that was painted like his favorite broncho, Jake, for which it was named. Now and then he raised his binoculars, trying to detect some activity among the Boches that might possibly tip off their plans. Now, as he raised his glasses to the sky once more and scanned the blue expanse without success, he cursed again.

"If them varmints is pl'anning something, they're sure mighty secretive about it," he said. "I can't make out nuthin' unusual down there this morning."

Minutes passed as he droned on. Four more planes were trailing him, planes from his sixty-sixth pursuit, all trailing in a tightly-knit V formation. The lanky skipper turned his leathery face around to check up on them. One by one they shook their heads. They, too, had not been able to detect anything behind the German lines.

With a disgusted shrug, Smoke turned and signalled back. A moment later, the whole formation had banked over as one plane in a skillful maneuver and headed back for their own lines with Smoke still in the lead.

They were just crossing the lines at an altitude of ten thousand feet when Smoke suddenly jerked upright in his seat. His calm gray eyes had caught something over to the east—a tiny, winged speck in the sky that set Smoke to howling.

"Well, I'll be a long-tailed, horned toad," he ejaculated, "if it ain't a Heinie! He's heading behind our lines, too! Come on, boys! Let's get him."

He spun around and motioned the rest of the pack on. Then he shoved his throttle wide open with the heel of his palm and the pinto Spad shot ahead in hot pursuit, the four other planes trailing close behind. But that Fokker was still a long way off, and even though they flew on and on toward the interior of France, the winged speck didn't grow any larger in size.

"He's travelling full out," Smoke mumbled. "That cuss is figuring on getting some place in a hurry and racing back home before he's caught. I wonder what he's got up his sleeve."

For twenty minutes, they trailed that Fokker D-7 without getting much closer to it. Several times, Smoke raised his glasses to his eyes and studied the plane and the pilot.

"Wonder what he reckons to do back there?" Smoke drawled, lowering his glasses so that they covered the ground ahead of the advancing enemy plane. Then suddenly, the enemy ship came down into the vision of his glasses and was dropping in a long dive straight for a circular area back of the lines.

"Hey, what's that?" Smoke cried. "A German prison camp, hain't it? There's Heinies down there. That hombre is going to drop a note to them or something."

With screaming Hissos, Smoke and his boys went plunging for the enemy crate that was within a thousand feet of the ground. Now it was down to five hundred, heading straight for the prison camp that would be full of Germans. It had almost reached the high barbed wire fences.

Smoke studied the camp through his glasses, saw that there were three strands

of the high barricade, each with a narrow alley between, completely surrounding the prison camp.

Now he saw that the Fokker was zooming upward. For a moment, it had looked as though the German ship were going to crash in the center of the prison area, but the Hun pilot whipped his plane over in a steep chandelle—a climbing turn—and soared up.

Smoke wasn't watching the German now; his eyes were glued through his glasses on an object that had fallen from the enemy plane. He saw men down below scrambling for the object, and then it was lost from his view as they caught it.

"That'll be something to find out," Smoke drawled. "There's some trick being pulled here. The Heinies wouldn't dare drop something like that right here in the middle of the prison camp if there wasn't a special reason for it."

Then Smoke and his pals were hurtling after the Fokker. The enemy ship was trying to head back for his own lines before they could block his way, but Smoke Wade was grinning confidently. The distance between them was vanishing rapidly. Smoke didn't need his glasses now. He had this Boche crate cold.

Suddenly, the German pilot realized he was trapped and couldn't get away without a fight. He began a desperate climb for altitude, then banked back towards the prison camp. Higher and higher he zoomed, but Smoke and his flight were getting closer. Smoke was levelling his gun now, but the range was too long for an accurate shot. He would be ready when the time came.

Tac-tac-tac!

Tac-tac-tac!

Smoke heard a rattle of machine guns from behind him. He spun around and saw Crane cutting loose with a long range

shot that fell wide of the retreating Fokker.

Now the Boche pilot kicked over in a tight bank and came hurtling toward Smoke and his flight, a clever maneuver that made him a difficult target, since he had managed to get his motor in front of him for protection.

The Fokker and the five Spads were racing at each other now head on, and the man who swerved first would be the man who would die. Smoke spun around for an instant, tried to catch the eye of all his pilots and motioned straight ahead. No matter what happened, they must not turn. They must bluff this Boche into making his bank first.

Tac-tac-tac!

Tac-tac-tac!

Vickers guns cut loose savagely. The German pilot swerved slightly, moving his nose so that he could get a side shot at Randall who was flying right tip to Smoke.

SMOKE heard a grunting sound behind him, as though something had exploded, but he didn't have time to turn and see what it was, for now the German pilot was whipping his ship over in a tight barrel roll. He was over on his back now and tipping slightly sidewise.

Smoke's sights were on the cockpit, the engine, the gas tank. He pressed his triggers with a quick flip of his agile hand. White tracers slashed out and scurried into the motor cowlings of the enemy ship. They dittoed their way back into the gasoline tank and the cockpit.

There was another grunting sound much like the one Smoke had heard behind him at first. The Fokker became a ball of smoke and flame and started down straight for the ground.

Now Smoke turned and stared back with a sickly feeling in the pit of his stomach. He knew from that other sound

what he would find. One of his boys had gone down. It was Randall, or what was left of him. A flaming pyre at the bottom of a spiral of smoke heading for hell—Smoke followed him down, saw him crash. He dipped his nose in a final salute to his dead comrade, then zoomed up again and turned south toward the prison camp. He motioned the others back to the field of the sixty-sixth at Ramou. They turned and Smoke droned on.

The cowpoke ace found a field suitable for landing within easy walking distance of the prison camp. He set his pinto Spad down, climbed out and strode toward the inclosure where cheering guards welcomed him.

"That certainly was a swell fight, Smoke," they commended, "and there's one Heinie that will remember that pinto Spad of yours."

Smoke nodded, but he didn't grin.

"What was that thing that he dropped?" he demanded. "Have you found out yet?"

"We'll find out," a sergeant of the guard replied, "as soon as the doctors put it through the sterilizing machine."

Smoke blinked his eyes in perplexity.

"Sterilizing machine?" he demanded.

"I reckon I don't get you. What are you talking about? What's doctors and sterilizers doing in a prison camp for Heinies?"

The sergeant shook his head.

"It ain't a German prison camp any more," he said. "It's a quarantine camp."

"Huh?" Smoke exploded. "It's got all the ear marks of a German prison camp."

"Yes, sir," the sergeant nodded, "but it's got all English-speaking guys inside it. Here comes the lieutenant, he'll tell you about it."

A slim young chap with a first lieutenant's bars on his shoulders came striding up. He glanced from the lanky cowboy to the pinto Spad and back again.

"You're Smoke Wade, aren't you?" he asked. "I'm Lieutenant Granger, in charge of the guard around this quarantine camp. That certainly was a swell fight you put on. What do you suppose that Boche came over here for, anyway?"

"It looked like maybe he had some groceries to deliver or something," Smoke ventured. "You seen him drop something into the camp, didn't you?"

"Yes," said the other, "but that's what we can't figure out. Why would he drop anything in a quarantine camp?"

"Maybe," Smoke said, "he didn't know that it was a quarantine camp. There's another inclosure just about like it a mile and a half southeast of here. I saw it from the air."

The lieutenant nodded.

"That's right," he said. "You see, there were two German prison camps back here about a mile and a half apart. We had an epidemic of scarlet fever break out over in Sevres, so we took all the men who had been subjected to it, and moved them over here until we find out what develops. The German prisoners were all removed to the other camp."

Slowly, a grin curled the thin lips of Smoke Wade.

"I reckon that's pretty good," he chuckled. "Sounds as if this here Heinie didn't know that a change was made."

"Well, how did he know who was in this prison camp anyway?" the lieutenant demanded.

Smoke's grin broadened.

"Maybe you ain't seen as many war and as many funny things happen as I have, Lieutenant," he said, "or you wouldn't be saying that. These Boche hombres have got an uncanny way of finding things out. I reckon they knew that the man they was trying to get this message to was here. How soon will we find out what's in that bundle that was dropped?"

The lieutenant glanced at his watch.

"They're sterilizing it now," he said. "Just about five or six minutes longer and we'll have it. They're going to sterilize it, and then, when it's still hot, they'll toss it over the wires."

Smoke lighted a cigarette and strode toward the front gate of the former prison camp. Several minutes later, a doctor, dressed in white, with rubber gloves on his hands, came to the inside of the gate bearing a small parcel wrapped in a newspaper.

"Catch!" he called.

He tossed the package over to Smoke who caught it with his bare hands, then dropped it almost instantly. It was steaming hot and the newspaper was soggy and pulpy with moisture.

"Holy ringtail lizards!" Smoke exclaimed, "that thing's hot."

He dropped down and began tearing at the paper gingerly, so that the inside mass would cool. He studied the contents curiously. There were two notes folded neatly inside a knitted wool muffler, and in the folds of the muffler there was a tool, a wire cutter with thick rubber handles. Smoke looked puzzled and shook his head.

"I can figure out what a German prisoner would use those wire cutters for," he said. "He'd get himself out of here with those things even if the wires were charged with electricity. But that other thing, that muffler—" Smoke shook his head helplessly—"doggoned if I can figure that out," he said. "But maybe these here notes will tell us something about it."

Carefully, he was unfolding the first piece of paper. There was a message written on it in lead pencil. He stared at the German words and shook his head.

"Damned if I can read that stuff," he said. "Hey, any of you birds able to read German?"

The lieutenant turned and surveyed his guards.

"Here's a Pennsylvania Dutchman," he said, "who might be able to make it out. Come here, Freddy."

A stocky corporal stepped up and Smoke handed him the paper. The corporal followed each word with his finger as he worked out the message. Then, when he had finished interpreting it to himself, he read aloud in English:

UNDER A SPECIAL CAMOUFLAGE WE ARE CONCENTRATING TROOPS ALL ALONG THE AREAS BETWEEN THE MARDEAUX AND THE ALAINE SECTORS. USE THESE WIRE CUTTERS TO HELP YOU ESCAPE. LEARN WHAT YOU CAN OF THE AMERICAN PLANS FOR A COUNTER ATTACK IN THESE AREAS. GET WORD TO US AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. WE ARE HOLDING UP THE BEGINNING OF THE DRIVE IN ORDER TO MASS ALL POSSIBLE ON THE FRONT IN THE AREA MENTIONED. WE WILL HAVE A SERIES OF BALLOONS IN THE AIR CONTINUOUSLY WATCHING THE AMERICAN FORCES. OUR PLAN IS TO BEGIN THE DRIVE AS SOON AS WE SEE THE ENEMY MASSING TROOPS FOR A DEFENSIVE MOVE. BUT IT MAY BE THAT THE ENEMY IS MOVING ITS FORCES UNDER CAMOUFLAGE ALSO. THIS, THEN, WILL BE YOUR WORK TO FIND OUT IF THIS IS TRUE AND TO ADVISE ACCORDINGLY. OF COURSE YOU WILL BURN THIS NOTE AS SOON AS YOU HAVE READ IT.

"Well, I'll be damned!" Smoke exploded. "That's right in my area. I've been watching that territory for days, now, but the enemy didn't seem to be doing nuthin'. And yet, here we've got definite information of their plans. Let's see what this other note says."

Smoke unfolded the second note as he spoke, then passed it to the corporal to be translated. Again the Pennsylvania

Dutchman scanned the German words, while a perplexed frown spread over his face. He read:

MY DEAR SON:

I AM GRIEVED TO LEARN THAT YOU ARE HELD PRISONER IN A FRENCH CAMP BUT IT IS GOOD TO KNOW THAT YOU ARE AT LEAST SAFE. I HAVE KNITTED THIS SCARF TO HELP KEEP YOU WARM IN THE COLD PRISON CAMP. YOUR BROTHER FRITZ SAID HE COULD FLY OVER THE LINES AND DROP IT TO YOU WITHOUT ANY DANGER TO HIMSELF OR TO YOU. MAY GOD PROTECT YOU BOTH AND BRING YOU SAFELY OUT OF THE WAR.

YOUR LOVING MOTHER.

SMOKE'S brow furrowed in a frown as he listened. When the Dutchman had finished, the cowboy ace turned to the lieutenant.

"Tell you what, Granger," he said. "I'm going right back to that area where the trouble is most likely to happen. I'll take this back with me to show to Colonel McGill, then I'll turn it over to General Banks whose division is working in our sector. Is that O. K. with you?"

"Yes," nodded the lieutenant. "I'll turn in my report to that effect. That, of course, is the area that must receive the information first."

Smoke turned quickly and ambled off toward his pinto Spad. He had the two notes, the muffler, and the wire cutter stowed safely away in his pockets.

The Hissu droned as he bounded across the field and then as he moved the stick quickly, his Spad lifted off the ground and climbed a little. At a few hundred feet altitude, Smoke raced toward Ramou. Landing there, he went straight to the office of his commander, Colonel McGill.

"Look here, Colonel!" he cried as he entered the office. "I got the prize pack-

age this morning. I got something here that all of us including General Banks has got to know about pronto."

Colonel McGill frowned a little in perplexity as he glanced at the array that Smoke spread out on his desk.

"You'll have to take it up with someone else," he said, "so far as General Banks is concerned."

Smoke frowned.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "What's happened to General Banks?"

"Oh, nothing has happened," the general hastened to assure him, "but I just received word a half hour ago that General Banks and his division are to be transferred back to a rest camp for a week or two. They've been up here a long time and they deserve a rest."

"Yes," Smoke said, "but who's coming up in his place?"

"A division commanded by a General Jarrett," the colonel told him. "I don't know anything about him, except that we got orders to be ready for inspection at any time today, because he was moving up in General Bank's place."

"Oh, one of those hombres," Smoke said disdainfully. "An inspection hound, eh? Sounds like it's his first trip to the Front."

"I think it is," Colonel McGill nodded. "But what's this you have here?"

Smoke told him briefly what had happened at the quarantine camp.

"You see," he said, "they had me fooled, too, Colonel. I reckoned that it was a German prison camp just as the Boche pilot did. I didn't know that they had moved the prisoners during the night."

"Yes," the colonel frowned, "but why this muffler, the two notes, and the wire cutter? I don't get that part of it."

"Don't you?" Smoke grinned.

"Of course," Colonel McGill said, "the wire cutter was to help this particular

German to escape so that he could carry out the orders in the note. But what about this muffler and the second note?"

Smoke chuckled.

"I reckon, Colonel," he said, "you sound like you was in prime shape to get taken over in a nice bet."

The colonel smiled quizzically.

"Just what do you mean by that?" he asked.

"Well, sort of thick in your head if you don't mind my saying so," Smoke said. "You see, Colonel, this here German plane was supposed to drop a bundle into the prison camp. The Huns knew that the guards would see it and would order the Heinie that picked it up to hand it over. So they stuck in the muffler and the note to satisfy the guards' curiosity. By that time, the Boche would be able to smuggle out the wire cutter and the note with the instructions."

The colonel's eyes brightened as he nodded.

"I'll have to admit that I was rather thick at that, Smoke," he confessed.

"What do you reckon I ought to do with these things?" Smoke asked. "Take them over to General Jarrett, the new divisional commander?"

"Either that or send them over to him," the colonel said. "Maybe you'd better take them so that you can explain more fully how you came by them and what you think it means."

"Yes, sir," Smoke nodded. "Yes, I reckon I'll do that. I'd kind of like to get acquainted with the old boy first hand."

Smoke put in a call to the pilot pool for a new replacement. That done, he went to the general's office. He found General Jarrett the kind of officer that was sure to be hated by everyone except the few he favored. He was a small, dapper man, fairly bursting with a greatly overestimated opinion of himself. After a great deal of trouble, Smoke finally suc-

ceeded in getting through the staff and facing the general with the evidence he carried. The lanky skipper of the sixty-sixth stood up straight and saluted before General Jarrett. Jarrett eyed him with evident annoyance.

"Well, what do you want?" he demanded. "What's so important that you have to see me personally?"

"Well, I reckoned that this is something that you ought to know about," Smoke said, "and I thought I ought to tell you first hand."

The cowboy ace relaxed a little.

"Stand at attention!" General Jarrett snapped, "until I tell you to do otherwise. And haven't you been trained to address officers as 'sir'?"

Smoke winced and gulped.

"Yes sir," he said meekly.

The general seemed partially satisfied with this courtesy.

"All right," he said grudgingly, "go on with your story. But make it short."

Smoke explained about the two notes, the knitted wool muffler, and the wire cutters.

"You see, General," he said, "it looks to me like we're in for a lot of fuss. We've got to bring up a lot of men under cover of darkness to stop that drive, and we've got to keep those balloons down on the other side of the lines so that the enemy can't watch us come up. Otherwise, they'll start their drive immediately. I reckon we've got to put on a counter attack and surprise them before they're ready for it."

The general's face flushed angrily.

"How long have you been in the army?" he demanded.

Smoke stopped to consider.

"Going on two years, sir," he answered.

"Then you should know your position by now," Jarrett cracked back at him. "You should realize that you're only a

captain and as such you take orders from a general, instead of giving them. I'm divisional commander here and I'll do my own thinking about what to do in this case. That's all."

SMOKE snapped up to a salute, did an angry about face and strode out of the office. Cursing softly under his breath, he strode back to the field of the sixty-sixth near Ramou where a plane was just coming in.

A young chap not more than eighteen or nineteen years of age got out of the rebuilt Spad. He was small and blond-haired and had a ready grin. Smoke walked over to meet him.

"You're the replacement?" he asked.

The other nodded.

"Yes, sir," he said.

Smoke held out his hand.

"Smoke Wade's my name," he said.

"We don't go in for captains, lieutenants and sirs here."

The kid grinned.

"That certainly will be a relief after training field," he said. "Seems like this whole army is more interested in teaching you how to salute an officer properly than in showing you how to fly."

"You won't find that up here," Smoke said. "What's your name, son?"

"Don Jarrett," said the lad.

Smoke caught the first name, but the last made no impression upon him.

"You'll make the grade, son," he smiled. "Just do as I tell you and don't try to lick the whole German army single-handed the first day out. We've got a new general commanding a division up here. He's coming over to inspect this outfit directly, and it's my guess that you'd better have everything shipshape if you don't want to catch merry hell."

Smoke turned to Brant, Quinn, Snell, Crane, and the rest of the boys.

"That goes for you hombres, too," he

said. "Clean your teeth, shine your shoes, and part your hair in the middle and the hell with whether you can fly or not. Just be sure you salute this ribbon clerk general like he was God Almighty."

A little before noon a great staff car drove in the gate. From the radiator cap flew a star flag of a divisional commander. Men raced out and stood at attention on the line while Smoke Wade and Colonel McGill walked to meet the car of the general.

General Jarrett stepped out and swagged over. From several cars that had followed his, members of his staff alighted and followed their leader, as though they were afraid to take a breath of their own without his consent.

Smoke and Colonel McGill saluted. The general greeted them curtly, then started pompously down the lines of pilots who stood at attention along the tarmac. General Jarrett glared impersonally at each of them. Then suddenly he stopped in front of the new replacement. His manner changed abruptly. His face grew ashen white.

"When did you arrive here, Lieutenant Jarrett?" he demanded, shifting nervously.

Don Jarrett stood very stiff and straight as he answered, "This morning, sir."

The general eyed him for a moment, and Smoke, who was watching closely, saw him gulp, then pass on. When he had finished his inspection, the general turned to Smoke Wade.

"You are the commander of the sixty-sixth?" he snapped.

"Yes, sir," Smoke nodded.

"Tell Lieutenant Jarrett that I wish to see him at once," the general ordered.

With that, the little general went back to his car and waited. Smoke strode over to the new replacement near the end of the line of pilots.

"The general wants you to report to him at once," he said.

Don Jarrett nodded.

"Yes, sir," he said. "I was afraid of that."

Smoke frowned.

"Relative of yours?" he inquired.

"Just my father," Jarrett said tightly.

Then the young fellow stepped out of the line as Smoke dismissed his pilots and strode to the waiting car. Smoke watched him for some time as he stood talking to his father. Finally, young Jarrett came back and the general drove away.

"I didn't know he was your old man," Smoke said. "Why didn't you tell me? I wouldn't have made those cracks about him to the boys if I had known."

"You were right," Don Jarrett said. "You didn't say anything about him that wasn't true."

Smoke took young Jarrett with him to his office, and when they were inside, he said, "You didn't seem to be any too pleased to see your old man. What's the matter?"

Don Jarrett studied Smoke Wade for a moment. Then he shrugged.

"I guess I might as well tell you the main thing that bothers me," he said. "Dad and I never hit it off very well anyway. He always said I was more like my mother. He's always been pretty strict with me and he didn't want me to go into the air service. He tried to get me a soft job back in Washington where I'd be safe, and he nearly disowned me when he found out I had joined the air service. He's done everything he could to stop me. I'd have been at the Front a long time before, if it hadn't been for him. I've made it finally and I'm going to stay here in spite of him."

Smoke grinned.

"You'll make it," he said. Then his eyes narrowed as he examined the boy more closely. "But there's still something that you haven't mentioned," he ventured. "Am I right?"

Don Jarrett nodded.

"Yes," he said. "That's one thing that troubles me. When I was in Paris awhile ago on leave, I got in with a pretty tough crowd. They persuaded me to sit in on a crap game. You see, they knew my old man was a general and I guess they must have known, too, that he's pretty straight-laced about some things. Before I knew it, I owed the other birds in the game about five thousand francs. I don't know how I'm ever going to pay them. They've been after me constantly and they've threatened to go to my father and collect from him. It isn't that I feel I've done anything particularly wrong, but I feel so damned cheap about being taken in for a sucker."

"How was the game, crooked or straight?" Smoke asked.

The kid shook his head.

"I don't know," he said. "If it was crooked, I was too tight to catch them at it. But that doesn't make any difference now. I'm in this jam and I've got to pay my debts. I'll manage it somehow, but if they go to my father, he'll probably raise particular hell, and wind up disowning me. I don't care so much from dad's standpoint, but it would be pretty tough on mother."

Smoke nodded.

"I reckon I understand," he said, slapping the boy on the shoulder. "I like your spunk, Don, in spite of the way you played the sucker. You'll have to pay your debts, of course, but don't let that worry you. Something will turn up."

Don Jarrett grinned with evident relief.

"Thanks," he said. "It's nice to be able to tell somebody, get it off my chest and know that you don't think I'm a damned fool entirely."

"I know," Smoke smiled. "Go on back and get acquainted with the boys. They'll like you, fellow."

DON JARRETT had no more than left the place when the telephone bell rang, and Smoke Wade was not surprised when he heard the voice of General Jarrett coming over the wire.

"This is General Jarrett," he said. "I want to see you at once."

"Yes," Smoke said. Then he added quickly, "Yes, sir."

Smoke Wade saluted smartly as he faced General Jarrett in the latter's office.

"Captain," the general said, smiling for a moment, although it was apparently an effort, "I have a special commission for you down at the pilot pool at Ortley. They've having a celebration down there this afternoon and a rodeo. They've got some wild horses and some roping contests and I understand you're pretty good at that sort of thing."

"Well," Smoke drawled, "I've done my share of it."

"Well, I wanted you to get down there this afternoon as soon as possible. Do some stunts in the air and then land on the parade ground. I understand everyone has heard of you as a famous ace. You might give the boys down there a little pep talk, too."

Smoke hesitated.

"But what about my boys in the sixty-sixth?" he ventured. "I understand your son's in that outfit, too."

The general frowned for a moment, then nodded.

"Yes," he said. "Don't worry about them. They'll be all right without you."

Smoke went back to the field, climbed into his plane, and did his tricks in the rodeo.

The affair was not over until late in the afternoon. Then Smoke climbed into his Spad and droned back to the field of the sixty-sixth at Ramou. He found a glum bunch of pilots coming out to meet him.

"What's wrong?" Smoke demanded, as

he caught a glimpse of Colonel McGill's serious face.

"Plenty," McGill said. "General Jarrett is impossible. He's ordered this squadron grounded. We're to go back to rest camp tomorrow for an indefinite period."

"You mean me?" Smoke flared.

McGill nodded.

"You and all the rest," he said.

Smoke's face reddened.

"Well, I'll be a ring-tailed what-you-may-call it!" he snorted. "Who's going to do our flying?"

"It's worse than you suspect," McGill said glumly. "I don't seem to have any power left, even though I am wing commander. I've advised General Jarrett against doing this, but that's all I can do. There's a new squadron that's coming into that new field about five miles east of here. They're the eighty-ninth Pursuits and so far as I can learn, there isn't one of them that has been over the lines before. They're going to do our work for us."

"Oh yeah?" Smoke rasped. He strode toward a motor cycle and a side car.

"Where are you going?" McGill cried.

"I'm going over to see that rattlesnake General Jarrett," Smoke barked back.

Then he was in the side car and the driver was rattling the machine off in the direction of divisional headquarters. Smoke's face was purple with rage as he stamped past the offices of the general's staff and slammed into his private office without even waiting to be announced.

"What's the idea?" he demanded, "of grounding my outfit the minute my back's turned?"

"Silence!" Jarrett barked.

"Silence, hell!" Smoke snorted. "You can't get away with this. I'll take it up with the General staff in Paris. You're a damned murderer, trying to send this new squadron over the lines! There isn't

one of them that has ever been across the lines before and you know it."

"Silence!" General Jarrett barked again.

But there was no quieting Smoke Wade. He leaped across the desk and grabbed the general by the front of his uniform coat, jerked him out of his chair and brought up his right fist. Then suddenly, he stopped.

"No," he said, "you cocky little shrimp, I wouldn't hit you. You're too damned small and helpless."

But Smoke's big left arm shook the general as though he were a rat. General Jarrett was calling loudly for help and a moment later, officers of his staff burst into the office and grappled with Smoke.

"Lock him up!" the general panted. "Put him in the guard house. I'll have him shot for this."

The officers of the staff marched Smoke out of his office, and next thing he knew, he was locked securely in the guard house at divisional headquarters.

Night wore on as he trod back and forth in his cell and listened to the talk outside. The drive was coming off at dawn. Troops were being rushed up all that night to the area between the Mar-deaux and the Alaine sectors. That drive would be aided by the green replacement squadron of the eighty-ninth which had had no experience in fighting the Huns. And Smoke knew the reason for this—knew that General Jarrett had selfishly ordered the sixty-sixth to rest so that his son wouldn't be exposed to heavy fighting.

Midnight passed, and still Smoke had not been able to figure out a way to escape. The windows were not barred, but they were too small for Smoke to crawl through. The door, a heavy, wooden affair, was locked securely.

Smoke lay down on the cot to sleep, but he soon awoke seeing horrible visions.

Visions of young Yanks burning and going down in flames as Randall had done. He got up and began striding back and forth once more. Suddenly he noticed that a board was springy beneath his feet. He tried it again and again, saw that it was loose enough at the end so that he could get his fingers into the crack. He began prying, and after a time, the board grew loose enough for him to pull it out.

Soon it would be dawn. The drive would be on and the members of the eighty-ninth would be going to meet their deaths.

With a final squeal of the nails, Smoke wrenched the wide board loose. To his joy, he found that the guard house had been built up on blocks and there was quite a space to the ground below. He slipped quickly through the opening and began crawling forward on his stomach toward the rear of the jail. He came out from under the flooring into the clear morning air. He was free, but would have to hurry, for already the first light of dawn was streaking across the eastern sky. Smoke Wade strode away from the guard house until he had gone about a mile. There he came upon a waiting motor cycle with the rider half asleep in the bath tub.

"Drive to Ramou at once!" Smoke ordered.

THE driver saluted, sprang to his saddle and Smoke climbed into the side car. It was broad daylight when he reached the field of the sixty-sixth at Ramou. There were no ships on the line there, but he had heard ships rumbling over from the other field. The eighty-ninth had gone. The drive would be on right now.

Smoke left the motor cycle in front of Colonel McGill's office and ran in.

"Where's Don Jarrett?" he demanded. "I got an idea, Colonel. I'm going to send him—"

But the Colonel cut him off with a negative shake of his head.

"Jarrett isn't here any more," he said.

"Huh?" Smoke demanded in open-mouthed astonishment. "What do you mean? Where has he gone?"

"Through a friend of his at the pilot pool who was in second command," Colonel McGill told him, "he worked a transfer from the sixty-sixth to the eighty-ninth. I didn't know about it until it had gone through. The boy said he was sore at his father for pulling that lousy stunt of holding the whole squadron back just so he wouldn't get hurt, so he got a transfer to the eighty-ninth and he's going over and get some action anyway."

Smoke grinned.

"The young devil!" he said. "But he won't have a chance with that green outfit. None of them have been—"

"I know," the colonel nodded soberly.

Smoke went out and climbed into the side-car of the motor cycle again. A short time later, the driver pulled up in front of General Jarrett's headquarters office.

"A drive is going on," the staff officer in charge told him. "The general can't be bothered."

"Can't be bothered, hell!" Smoke snapped. "He'll listen to me when he knows what I'm after."

The cowboy barged into the private office.

"Look here," the general barked. "I got—" Then, as he recognized Smoke Wade, he began yelling, "Help! Guards!"

Men rushed into the private office of the divisional commander. But Smoke only grinned calmly at him.

"I suppose you're wondering how I got out of the guardhouse, General," he said. "Well, that won't interest you half as much as some other things I've got to tell you. First, I'm going to give you a chance to make plenty of money. I'm going to make you a bet, and if you're not the

white-livered so-and-so that I think you are, you'll take me up on it."

By now, the guards had hold of Smoke and were shoving him unceremoniously toward the door. "I'll bet you twenty-five francs to five thousand francs, General," Smoke said, "that you not only won't arrest me when I tell you what I know, but you'll want me and the boys of the sixty-sixth to go out and fly to beat hell as quick as we can."

General Jarrett stared at the cowboy for a moment unbelievably. He blinked and opened his eyes again.

"Did you say twenty-five francs to five thousand?" he asked.

"Yes," Smoke said. "If you want to make some easy money, take me up. I've got some information that you're dying to know. We've got to make this bet first, though, or I won't tell you."

The general hesitated.

"It's about your son, Don," Smoke said.

That clinched the argument. The general's face went white and he nodded quickly.

"All right," he said. "It's a bet. What is it—that you've got to tell me about—Don?"

"Simply this," Smoke snapped. "You thought you were going to keep Don out of this drive by grounding the sixty-sixth squadron and sending us back to a rest camp this morning. Well, the boys haven't started yet and you can't get away with it. Don got in a jump ahead of you."

"What do you mean?" the general demanded, leaping to his feet.

"I mean that Don Jarrett, your son," Smoke said, "got a transfer last night to the eighty-ninth squadron, the green outfit that you're sending to hell. Not one of those boys has been over the lines before and their blood will be on your hands. Your son is with them. Now what have you got to say for yourself?"

General Jarrett's face was a ghostly white; he looked as though he were about to faint.

"Yes—yes," he stammered.

Then he waved the guards back.

"Let him go," he ordered. "All of you get out of here except Captain Wade."

When they were alone, the general said, "You say your boys haven't started back to the rest camp?"

Smoke snorted.

"You're damned right they haven't," he said, "and they're ready to fly and help out this eighty-ninth outfit whenever you give the order."

"All right," the general nodded. "Get them in the air. Go. Have my driver take you over in the staff car. Get off as quickly as possible. For God's sake, save my boy! And those men of the eighty-ninth. I haven't slept a wink all night long."

Ten minutes later, Smoke Wade and his boys of the sixty-sixth were tearing into the air in their Spads and heading for war-torn skies. Out front they could see planes zooming and diving, some of them going down in flames. Below they could see the surprise attack of the Yanks. The Americans had successfully moved up during the night and had massed on the Front. Now they were hurling over No Man's Land, driving the surprised Germans back.

Smoke Wade and his boys of the sixty-sixth went tearing down to the fight.

Smoke detected the reconditioned ship of the eighty-ninth that Don Jarrett flew, and tried to wave him back. Still the young fellow paid no heed. The cowboy ace cut in ahead of the others of the eighty-ninth and drove them back a little way, pointed them down to strafe the enemy troops while he and his men engaged more than a dozen Fokkers in air combat.

NOW the tide of battle in the air was changing. Smoke sent a Fokker down from his blazing guns. He whirled on another and then out of the tail of his eye, saw that one of the eighty-ninth boys was in trouble. The nose of his pinto Spad dropped as he plunged down, down with flaming Vickers. The Fokker that was diving on the plane of the eighty-ninth never stopped until it had crashed in mud and slime. Smoke whirled up again to see where Don Jarrett was. He found the kid sending a Fokker down, saw the enemy ship burst into flames. But Jarrett was just beginning to get in trouble then. There were two Fokkers on his tail. Smoke whirled to the rescue. He got a line on the cockpit of one of them, pressed the triggers. His guns bucked and jammed. Smoke cursed savagely.

Brant was trying to tear in at those Fokkers but they were evading him. Jarrett was trying to do everything he could think of to get out of their line of fire.

Smoke Wade whipped out his old six-gun and zoomed up under one of the Fokkers. The pilot glanced at him, saw that he couldn't point his machine guns at him without crashing his ship, knew that he wouldn't do that.

Blam! Blam!

The old six-gun spoke out and the nose of the Fokker dropped sharply. As that enemy ship hurtled downward, the other Fokker ducked away out of range.

Smoke pointed Jarrett toward home and the lad obeyed this time. The fight went on for a little longer. Yanks were sweeping on back, taking the strong positions that the Germans had set up. The enemy planes turned back. Smoke succeeded in clearing his guns while he and the boys of the sixty-sixth went on strafing the enemy lines until the Yanks dug into their new positions far behind the old German Front. Then he turned and

led the boys back to Ramou and their own field.

Young Jarrett was there, waiting for him.

"Gee, Captain," he said, "you sure saved my life."

Smoke grinned.

"That's nothing," he said. "Forget it. Look here, what's coming."

He pointed to General Jarrett's staff car which was just pulling up. The general got out, laid his hand on Smoke's shoulder.

"I was wrong," he said. "Dead wrong. I heard that Don showed himself to be a real soldier. I realize now what a selfish old fool I must have seemed like to you. And seriously, Captain Wade, if you'll shake my hand, I'll be proud to call myself your friend. I can see now that there's a lot of difference between an armchair general, and a man who faces death in the sky. I'm ashamed of myself, and proud of my son."

Smoke grinned again.

"Listen here, General," he said. "If I had a son with the guts that your boy's got, I'd brag about him to the end of my days. Well, I guess we licked the Heinies all right, didn't we? It seems to me there was something about a bet that you and I made, General. I reckon you owe me about five thousand francs."

General Jarrett's face flushed, but he reached in his pocket and drew out a roll of franc notes.

"Yes," he said, "and I'm willing to pay it." He glanced a little sheepishly at his son. Smoke was grinning as he took the roll of money.

"Thanks," he said. "Thanks a heap. And now, most likely, you've got a lot of business to attend to. Don and me have a few things to hash over, too. He's going to get another transfer only this time it's going to be into my outfit and not out of it."

When General Jarrett had left, Smoke handed Don the roll of bills. The boy looked at it in perplexity.

"What's this for?" he demanded.

"That," Smoke chuckled, "is to pay your debts. I reckon everything is going to be all right now."

"But I can't take this," Don protested. "It's your money. Haven't you done enough for me already? First you save my life, then you square things with my old man and now you want to give me a big roll of your own money. It just doesn't make sense."

"No," Smoke said. "You're wrong there. That's your old man's money. You see, I just made a bet with him for you. Your old man's paying your debts after all, only he don't know it."

NEXT
MONTH



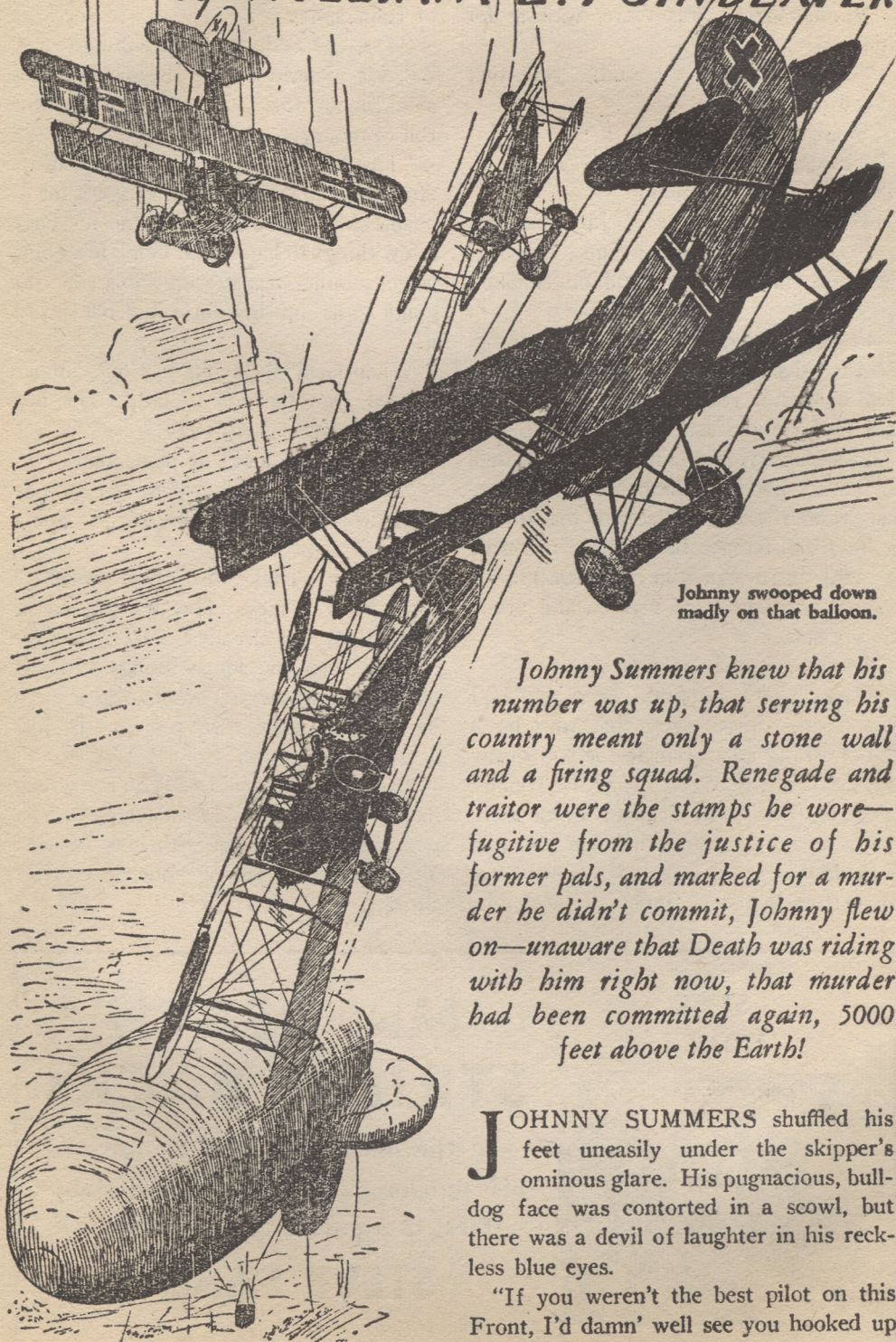
MR. DEATH STRIKES BACK!

—in the most thrilling adventure of his sinister career, as Captain Baby-face, in a pulsating, sky story by

STEVE FISHER

MURDER AT 5000

by WILLIAM E. POINDEXTER



Johnny swooped down madly on that balloon.

Johnny Summers knew that his number was up, that serving his country meant only a stone wall and a firing squad. Renegade and traitor were the stamps he wore—fugitive from the justice of his former pals, and marked for a murder he didn't commit, Johnny flew on—unaware that Death was riding with him right now, that murder had been committed again, 5000 feet above the Earth!

JOHNNY SUMMERS shuffled his feet uneasily under the skipper's ominous glare. His pugnacious, bulldog face was contorted in a scowl, but there was a devil of laughter in his reckless blue eyes.

"If you weren't the best pilot on this Front, I'd damn' well see you hooked up

with a labor battalion," Carter began, stabbing a blunt forefinger at Johnny's bulging chest. "You're a quarrelsome, trouble hunting roughneck, and if you don't quit beating up my pilots, and concentrate on the Jerries, I'm going to kick your pants up around your ears so you can use 'em for a necktie. And brother, I'm the guy that can do it, too! It was bad enough when you licked Blanton and Harris, but when you sock my adjutant, you're letting yourself in for something. I had plenty of trouble squaring that, Johnny."

"I ain't quarrelsome, Jim," Johnny protested earnestly. The youthful skipper snorted and glared at his friend. "But Blanton and Harris have been throwing you down lately, and they needed all they got. As for your adjutant, Halliday, he's a louse if ever there was one. Why doesn't he stick to his desk instead of hanging around the hangars all the time, trying to give me orders—"

"Dry up!" Carter commanded sharply. "Maybe you think I'm kidding just because we've happened to be friends all our lives, but I mean what I say. Now, you're taking the two-seater and going after that balloon over at Bazincourt, and Blanton is going with you. I've got orders from Wing to get that balloon down before our troops start their surprise attack in the morning, so we might as well get her this evening and make sure. Get going."

"That balloon is as good as down right now," Johnny asserted confidently, "but it gives me a pain in the neck to fly with Blanton. I'm liable to murder him before I get back."

Johnny grinned and strode out to the field where the two-seater was warming on the dead-line. Blanton was already crawling into the rear office, and Johnny scowled at him. He didn't like the man, but he had to admit that Blanton was an

expert with those twin Lewis guns, when he was sober enough to handle them.

Johnny took off in his usual reckless, twisting zoom, and a few minutes later, they had crossed the lines at five thousand feet and were heading in the direction of the balloon, when two Fokkers dived abruptly at them from out of the blinding rays of the setting sun. Johnny's freckled face twisted into lines of savage delight at the prospect of a scrap. He pulled his big ship around, and pressed the triggers in a stabbing burst as the two Fokkers thundered past. He missed, then instantly slammed his ship around in a strut-cracking vertical, to give Blanton a shot. He waited for the jarring report of the guns, but when it did not come, he glanced impatiently over his shoulder. Blanton sat there slumped in his seat, eyes staring straight ahead.

"Snap out of it, Blanton," he yelled above the thunder of the motor. "You gone to sleep?"

But Blanton did not move. "Good Lord," Johnny thought in swift disgust, "he's scared stiff. The louse is in a blue funk, or else he's drunk again."

But the Fokkers had come out of their dive and were walking up the wind after him. In snarling rage Johnny met them head-on. Spandau bullets lanced through his wings and off the cowl in whining ricochets. But still the Yank held grimly on, straight into that murderous fire. When he knew he could not miss, he pressed the triggers and one of the German pilots reeled sidewise, bearing the stick with him, and sending his ship into a spin from which she would never recover.

But in the same moment the Vickers jammed, and Johnny swore in helpless rage. He had no time to free the guns now, and once more he glanced over his shoulder. But Blanton had only slumped forward a little more in the seat, as if he

were trying to escape the bullets that tore at the fuselage.

Swearing savagely, Johnny slammed his ship at the other Fokker. It was a bluff, but the German didn't know that. He had seen his partner go reeling down before the American's murderous fire, and he decided that he didn't want any of it himself. He flung his ship over on one wing, and dived out of the fight, while Johnny, grinning in derision, headed back for the home field. There was no use going after a balloon with jammed guns and an observer who was too scared or too drunk to pull a trigger.

Dropping down on the home field, he crawled out, and turned ominously on Blanton just as Jim Carter and the adjutant, Halliday, came towards the plane.

"Climb out of that, you louse," Johnny snarled wrathfully. "I'm gonna lick you again if I spend the rest of my life in the guard-house for it."

He reached out and caught Blanton by the shoulder and the man swayed limply towards him. He started back in sheer horror. He had been threatening a dead man!

"What's the trouble here, Johnny?" Carter demanded. Johnny stared blankly at him. He had never liked Blanton, but the man's death had shocked him.

"He's dead," the pilot muttered. "Guess the Jerries must have put a bullet in him."

"Call the doc, somebody, and get him out of there," Carter commanded sharply.

THEY stood around in a silent circle while the doctor examined the dead man. When the M.O. straightened up, there was a queer expression on his face as he stared at Johnny.

"Blanton," he said slowly, "has been stabbed through the throat!"

"You're crazy!" Johnny burst out, the freckles standing out sharply against his

suddenly white face. "He must have been shot by the Germans I had a scrap with a few minutes ago."

"He was stabbed," the doctor repeated with finality. "Look here. It was done with some long, sharp instrument, scarcely thicker than a needle. It was thrust into his throat right below the chin, and the point emerged just at the base of the skull, killing him instantly."

Johnny was aware that the group of men around him were staring at him with silent hostility. He turned desperately to Carter. The skipper's face was equally drawn and strained, for he had loved Johnny Summers like a brother.

"Come into the office, Summers," he said harshly, and turned on his heel. Seated behind his desk, with the adjutant, Halliday, in a corner of the room, he stared up at Johnny.

"You blamed fool!" he said at last in a tense whisper. "How could you do a thing like that? You might as well have signed a confession and pinned it on his chest, as to kill him that way."

"Jim," Johnny protested bitterly, "I didn't do it. Do you think I'm crazy enough to take a man up in a ship, turn around and stab him, and then bring him back here? Hell, Jim, I didn't like Blanton, and I licked him with my fists, but you know I wouldn't murder him. You've known me long enough to know I'm not a murderer."

"Did you land any place when you were out?" Carter asked.

Johnny shook his head miserably.

"Blanton was all right when you took off," Carter went on. "You were alone with him all the time, and when you bring him down he's been stabbed through the throat. And you expect us to believe that you didn't kill him? Good Lord! And Summers, just before you left this office, you said you were liable to murder him before you got back."

"Yes, I was passing the window and heard you say that, Summers," the adjutant broke in unexpectedly from the corner. Johnny turned tortured eyes upon him.

"You keep out of this or I'll slap you down again," he snarled, and turned back to Carter. "Jim, I know I said that about murdering him, but you know I was only kidding. It didn't mean a thing."

"There's no way out of it," Carter said somberly. "I'll have to put you in the guard-house and hold you for court-martial. Johnny, I'd give ten years of my life to have prevented this thing, but I've got to do my duty. You understand that."

Johnny nodded. "Jim," he said, hope dawning in his haunted eyes, "I had a scrap with a couple of Jerries out there. Maybe they were shooting steel darts or something instead of bullets."

Carter shook his head wearily. "You can't put anything like that over. By the way, you didn't get that balloon, of course? No, you were too busy murdering Blanton to think of a little thing like that. Well, I'll send someone after it in the morning."

Johnny Summers spent the night pacing back and forth in the narrow confines of his cell, striving desperately to figure out how Blanton had been killed. But the whole thing was crazy and impossible. He even began to wonder if he had gone insane and killed Blanton without realizing it. But there had to be some logical explanation, if he could only get his mind to working coherently. Blanton had been all right when they took off. He was sure of that. And remembering how the man had sat slumped in his seat, he must have been dead before the Germans had approached. And they had been alone together five thousand feet in the air, when Blanton was killed. He thought of suicide, but there was no point to Blanton killing himself. Besides, men didn't stab them-

selves in the throat, then pull the instrument out and throw it away.

It was almost dawn when Johnny gave up in defeat. There was no way out, but he decided that he wasn't going to die in disgrace before a firing-squad. His square, fighting jaw jutted determinedly, and there was a hard gleam in his red-rimmed eyes. What better way to die than to get that balloon and wash out fighting? In the gloom of early morning, he heard a ship's motor break out in a stuttering roar, and knew that it was being warmed preparatory to downing the German observation balloon. His heart pounding with excitement, he leaned against the bars of the cell, and called out in a choking voice.

As the armed guard came running up, he staggered against the wall, his hands pressed to his throat.

"Water," he choked. "Get me water, quick!"

The alarmed guard unlocked the door, and hurried to the apparently stricken man. Instantly Johnny straightened and his fist lashed out, catching him on the point of the chin and dropping him in a crumpled heap. Johnny slipped out onto the field. A few mechanics were working about the ship, but in the dim light he was not noticed. Crouching at the corner of the guard-house, he watched while the gunner walked past him towards the plane. Presently the pilot came past, and Johnny reached out a long arm, hooked it about the man's throat, and jerked him backwards. Before he could cry out, Johnny's fist smashed into his face and he sank to the ground.

"Sorry to do this, fella," he muttered, hastily removing the man's helmet and goggles and putting them on, "but I need that ship worse than you do."

He strode boldly towards the plane now, for he knew the men would take him for the other pilot in the dim light. He wanted

to get that ship and take off before the observer got in. He expected to die fighting, and he didn't want to take another man to death with him.

With his head bent down, he climbed hastily into the front office and waved his hand for the chocks to be removed. As they were jerked, he opened the throttle wide, but there was a startled cry behind him and before the ship could gather speed, the observer had caught the cockpit coaming and swung up.

Johnny cast a swift glance over his shoulder. The observer was Harris, the man he had had a fight with a few days previous.

"All right, damn you," Johnny muttered, "you asked for it." And he took off in a thundering zoom, banking so close to the ground that he almost ripped off a wing, and headed for the lines. At six thousand feet the earth still lay shrouded in darkness, but the sun was making a golden glory of the clouds. But there was no beauty in the morning for Johnny Summers.

He was going to die, but he had to down that balloon first. A surprise attack was beginning that morning, and he knew how important it was that there should be no observation. Well, it was some satisfaction to know that he would die cleanly, instead of facing the disgrace of a firing-squad. But he wished that he knew how Blanton had died.

THEY crossed the lines, and German anti-aircraft batteries belched their shells upward, sending out mushrooms of smoke with red cores. Still Johnny ignored them. He found that he was flying his own ship, the one in which Blanton had died the day before.

"It's the finish for both of us, old gal," he muttered, fondling the controls, "but we'll make it a finish those Jerries will remember!"

Presently he saw a black dot—it was the German sausage swaying against the lightening sky. Immediately he gunned for more altitude, hoping that he would be able to come down upon it from above and blast it out of the sky before he was observed. Johnny knew that it was well-guarded by planes and anti-aircraft batteries, that he might not have a second chance. He deliberately turned his head to look over his shoulder, and grinned derisively as Harris recognized him. The man thought he was flying with a murderer, and his eyes almost popped out with consternation and surprise.

Johnny turned back, and the grin faded from his face, leaving it set and cold. He was in position now, and without hesitation he slammed the stick forward, stood on the rudder-bar and went thundering down in a vicious power-dive. He was seen instantly, and the two observers popped out of the basket and went hurtling head over heels until their parachutes cracked out above them.

The Yank was diving straight at the bag, and she was squarely in his sights. As his hand pressed the triggers, the Vickers bucked and pounded on their mounts. But at the same instant, a gust of wind caught the bag, causing it to sway wildly. Johnny knew that he had missed.

Before he could pull up, he had smashed past so close that his trucks almost grazed the side of the balloon. But for a moment, he held to the dive in order to give Harris a shot. He heard the rear guns erupt in a staccato burst, but as if it were a signal, the ground batteries thundered their answer. He dived straight into that hell of bursting shells that sent sizzling hot metal ripping through the wings. A smoking, jagged fragment tore at his shoulder, causing him to stiffen with agony.

He yanked the stick back into his stomach, and the plane responded slowly, shuddering under the terrific strain that

threatened to pull her wings loose and cause them to slam back against the fuselage. But the wild fighting spirit was flaming within him, as he brought the ship up in a punishing zoom and came around in a twisting bank. The balloon was being reeled in swiftly, but there was still a chance to get her.

He saw that three Fokkers were preparing to take off from the field a short distance away, and if he didn't get that balloon within the next few seconds, he would never get her. He brought his ship around and steadied her, giving Harris a chance for a shot. He waited, but there was no sound from the guns behind him. With a queer, numbing sensation of dread, he forced himself to turn and look over his shoulder at the observer.

Harris was huddled down in his seat, and his eyes behind the concealing goggles seemed to be staring accusingly at Johnny. The pilot felt an uncontrollable shudder of horror race through his body. Blanton had looked just like this, and he had brought Blanton back—dead! As well as if he could see it, he knew that Harris had been mysteriously stabbed through the throat. Now for an instant he forgot the deadly peril that faced him, forgot that he had to get that balloon before the three Fokkers came smashing in to send him down to destruction.

Some malignant fate seemed to pursue the men who rode with him, and in that moment of red rage and despair, Johnny wanted to live long enough to find out how those men were killed. But that was impossible. There was no solution, and already he was doomed to die before a firing-squad for the murder of one man.

Then the thunder of Mercedes motors brought him back to the present. He glanced up quickly to find that the three Fokkers had taken the air and were swirling about him in a ring of death. No chance to escape now, even if he wanted

to. But there was still a possibility of getting that sausage. It was not more than a thousand feet above the ground now, and he pushed the stick forward, thundering down madly. But the German ships were closing in on him now. He became the center of a maelstrom of Spandau bullets that slashed at him from everywhere.

He knew that he might get one of the ships, but the other two would get him while he was doing it, and the balloon would escape. So he ignored them, as completely as if they were not there. But the bullets riddled the wings, causing the fabric to peel back, revealing the naked skeleton. They smashed through the fuselage, and hot blasts scorched his face like the evil breath of Death.

He was almost on the balloon now, and he prayed to the red gods of war for ten more seconds of life. His hand flashed out to the triggers, and the guns erupted just as he was on the point of crashing squarely into the balloon. At the same instant, a Spandau bullet tore through the cockpit and struck his foot, knocking it from the rudder-bar. Before he could get control again, the ship had veered crazily, just missing the balloon, and thundering earthward.

Johnny's face was as set and white as it would be in death. Everything had conspired to defeat him. He could imagine the red gods chuckling derisively at him, and for an instant he was tempted to allow the ship to grind herself into the ground and end the whole mess for him at once. But he couldn't do it. As long as there was a flicker of life in his tortured body, he had to go on fighting. He had never learned how to quit.

He yanked back on the stick just in time, and the Germans below him scattered wildly as his trucks raked over with in scant feet of their heads. The battered and riddled ship thundered upward,

wounded but fighting to the last like her pilot. It seemed to Johnny that she was no mere man-made machine, but a live thing allied with him in that grim, unequal struggle against certain death.

HE was coming up directly beneath the balloon now, and he hung the ship by her prop. Again his hand flashed to the triggers. Three Fokkers were thundering in upon him, and the ship vibrated to the pounding of the bullets.

"Let's see you stop me now!" Johnny yelled crazily, as his Vickers bullets blasted upward in twin streams, piercing straight into the vitals of the balloon. The ship slipped backward in a whipping stall, but those bullets had done their work. As Johnny kicked the rudder, causing the ship to heel over, the balloon burst with a thunderous concussion. The sky seemed lighted with the flames of hell, and as the fire reached out, almost engulfing the ship, he felt his face blistered from the terrible heat. The plane was lifted like a leaf in an autumn gale and hurled wing over wing, while struts squealed under the strain. But Johnny didn't care now; his work was done.

Then he saw something else that caused his burned face to split in a grin. One of the Germans had been too close to the bag when it burst, and she was reeling down in a roaring mass of flames. The other two had escaped, however, and were bent upon his destruction. The flaming balloon was coming straight down upon him now, showering out bits of blazing fabric upon his wings, threatening to consume his ship and his life.

Johnny forgot that he wanted to die now, and fought instinctively to get out of the way. If he escaped the fiery thing above him, the two remaining Fokkers were waiting to pounce upon him. But in the moment of his triumph he did not think of that. Loss of blood was rapidly

sapping his strength. But still he fought the stick and rudder, veering out from under the balloon so close to the earth that his trucks raked the ground.

Then he was zooming in the direction of the lines. But the two Fokkers were upon him, and Johnny remembered that he was to die. Well, he had finished his job, and this was as good a way to go as any. But he swore that he would take one of those Fokkers with him if he had to crash her in mid-air.

The Germans were converging upon him from either side, as he yanked his ship around in a vicious bank. But the crate answered heavily to her controls, as though she were as tired as her pilot. Johnny remembered that he was flying with a dead man, and he cast a glance over his shoulder. Harris still sat slumped in his seat, held there by the safety-strap, and as the ship lurched and bucked in that twisting bank, his body was flung sharply back. Johnny sucked in his breath with a sharp gasp.

"Good God!" he muttered, "I wonder if I'm seeing things!"

His eyes were almost popping out of his head and the Fokkers were upon him. But now, instead of the sick desire to die, the will to live flamed through him, giving him renewed strength. He thought he had solved the mystery of those deaths in his rear cockpit, yet he couldn't be sure. He had to live to find out.

Johnny didn't want to fight now. He wanted to escape, for he believed that he had the solution of this whole diabolical plot. But the Germans were thundering close upon him, forcing him to come around again. There was a flaming light in Johnny's sunken, red-rimmed eyes as he met one of the Fokkers head-on. A withering blast of bullets met him squarely, but his own Vickers were bucking viciously on their mounts. Too late the German tried to veer out of the way, but

Death met the pilot as bullets ripped through his helmeted head, and the Fokker screamed her way down to destruction.

Instantly Johnny leaped his ship over and gunned for the lines which were now within sight. The remaining Fokker was after him, but now the pilot was wary. He had seen this madman flying his ridiculed ship and accomplishing the impossible, and he was content not to take chances. He was on Johnny's tail, drawing closer and closer, and slashing at the tail-assembly with short bursts of bullets.

But the lines were just ahead of Johnny now, and beyond them was an open field set in the woods. He could tell, even as they flashed low across the lines, that bullets were creeping up the back of the fuselage towards him. Now he wondered if he were to die just when he wanted most to live. But the clearing was suddenly below him. He dipped in sharply, setting his plane down heavily and rolling to the far edge of the trees, while the Fokker hurtled over and banked back towards the lines.

Johnny was out of the ship instantly, forgetting his wounds, and bending over the body of Harris. As he bared the dead man's throat, he saw where it had been pierced by a needle-like instrument. He pushed the man upright in the seat, and let go his breath in a sobbing sigh. He walked to the prop, a strange, savage light in his eyes.

"Just one more flight, old girl," he muttered to his plane. "Give me all you've got, and we'll make one lousy murderer hard to catch!" The plane responded with a thunderous roar as he hurled the prop over and climbed into the cockpit.

A few minutes later, the big ship came down for a ragged landing on the home field, her wings vibrating dangerously, and loosened wires humming. Johnny climbed to the ground, leaving the Hisso

idling, just as men rushed up to surround him. He saw that the skipper and Halliday were among them.

Johnny's blackened, blood-smeared face twisted into what he believed was a grin as he faced Jim Carter.

"Well, I got that sausage for you, Jim," he said mildly, "and I hope you appreciate it. Just a Boy Scout doing my good deed for the day."

"That's not going to help you any," Carter said hoarsely. "My God, Johnny, why couldn't you have done the decent thing and died out there—saved us the disgrace of standing you before a firing-squad—"

Johnny swayed a little from pain and weakness. "Well," he said, "I thought I'd better bring Harris back—not that the poor devil will care now what happens to him."

CARTER started convulsively as he noticed the observer huddled in his seat. He stepped up and they dragged the man to the ground, baring his throat and staring at the tiny wound. Carter whirled on his heel, and there was an angry, ominous murmur from the group of pilots and mechanics.

"Summers, you're a madman!" Carter gritted. "No one in his senses would kill two men in the same way and expect to get away with it."

"He won't kill another man," a pilot shouted, and there was a surge towards Johnny, but he held up his hands and there was something in his sardonic face that stopped them momentarily.

"Plenty of time to mob me," he drawled, but there was flaring anger within him at these men who had been his friends. At that moment he didn't have a friend in the world, but he forced his stiff lips into a derisive grin.

"I want to try a little experiment," he said, "and I need a man to help me." He

turned to Halliday, the adjutant, who was standing at his elbow. "You'll do, Halliday. Climb into the rear cockpit."

Johnny had him by the arm, forcing him forward, and the man, his face impassive, climbed into the seat and stared at Johnny uncomprehendingly.

"That's fine," Johnny said softly, but suddenly there was something deadly in the silky tones. "Now then, Halliday, lean back in the seat. Press your head hard against the shock-pad. That's not much to do for a guy that's going to face a firing-squad in a few minutes, is it?"

Halliday started to speak, but there was something in Johnny's mocking, jeering tones that stopped him. The watching men saw the color drain slowly from his face. Without warning, the man's fist came up, smashing Johnny between the eyes and sending him reeling to the ground. In the same instant he had leaped over the turtle-back into the front cockpit and batted the throttle wide open.

The startled men scattered, but in one desperate leap Johnny was on the wing, and plunging at the man behind the stick. He caught Halliday about the neck, as the ship came around in a wild ground-loop, tearing off a wing, heeling forward on her nose and throwing both men clear.

Instantly Johnny was on his feet, but

Halliday lay still. "I guess that's all the proof I need," Johnny panted grimly, striding towards the wreck. "Look at this."

They crowded around him as he leaned into the rear cockpit of the plane. He pressed on the shock-pad, and instantly from just below it, a long, shining steel needle shot forth and back again.

"That's how those men died," he said. "I accidentally discovered it when I saw it shoot out a few minutes ago as the ship rocked and flung Harris back against the pad. I guessed that Halliday must have put it there, because he hated me, and for the past few weeks he's been hanging about the hangars. But I didn't have any proof. He knew the jig was up when I asked him to lean back in the seat, and he tried to make his escape. Maybe he did it to get even with me, but I imagine an investigation will show that he's a German spy. Perhaps he was going to put those fiendish things in all the ships."

"Johnny," said Jim Carter solemnly, "I've been a fool, and if it'll give you any pleasure to kick a major in the seat of his O.D. breeches, hop to it!"

"That's what I call a right handsome offer," Johnny grinned, "but I think I'd rather kick Halliday instead. I told you that guy was a louse!"

REMEMBER HASHKNIFE AND SLEEPY?

Who doesn't! And now W. C. Tuttle introduces a great new character of the West in a five-star novelette

"SHOTGUN WORK FOR SHORTY"

Don't miss it—nor "Shark!" a novelette by Capt. J. M. Ellrich; the smashing climax of Gordon Young's "Huroc the Avenger"; and stories by Tom Roan, H. H. Matteson, Commander Ellsberg and others in the big March

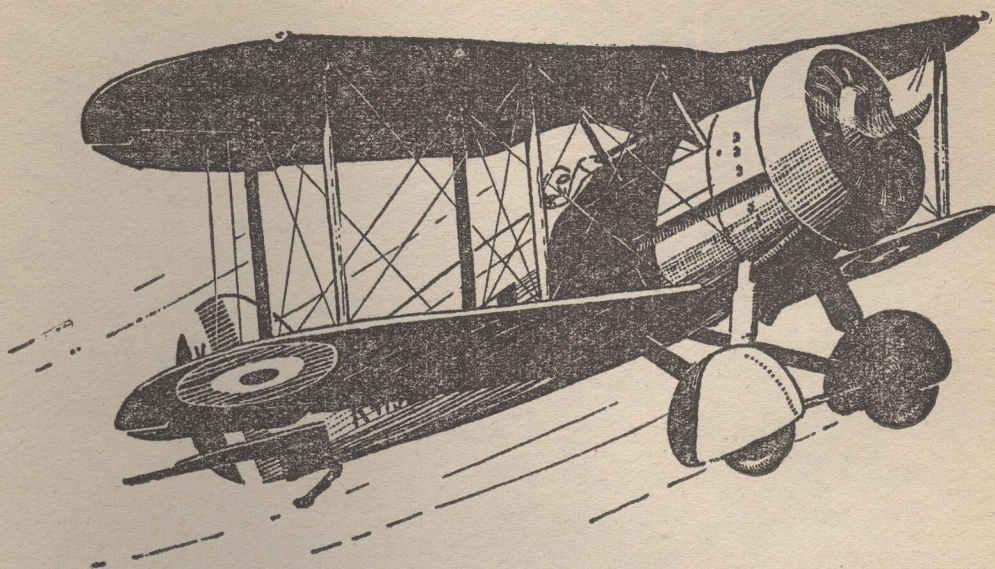


Adventure

15c

Out Feb. 7

STORY BEHIND THE COVER



THE story behind this month's cover concerns the Gloster "Gauntlets"—and their particular job is the protection of a flight of "Heyfords" which has been sent to bomb an enemy drome. On the cover, the Heyfords have been shown at a very low altitude, so that we might also depict their target. But in reality, they would drop their eggs at no less than 10,000 feet. And at that height, would roar over their target at approximately 143 m.p.h., approaching their objective at a service ceiling of 21,000 feet.

For their protection, some ship had to be selected which would fly well over the Heyford's maximum 21,000 feet, and be capable of a good scrap regardless of altitude. There simply couldn't have been a better ship for this job than the Gauntlet,

whose service ceiling is 35,500 feet! That is really going *up*!

At even 15,800 feet the Gauntlet's speed is 230 m.p.h., and at this and higher altitudes, there is nothing with wings that can give it a decent scrap. At lower altitudes, however, the Gauntlet does not do so well, as its "Mercury" V.I.S. engine only delivers full power in the upper regions. But in power dives and fighting aerobatics, the Gauntlet is without a peer.

Note the sturdy arrangement of the wing structure, which places the question of wind rigidity beyond all doubt. In our cover, as may readily be seen, the Gauntlet has dropped down to the carpet to mop up the enemy ground crew with its Vickers, and to drop its four 20-lb. bombs, along with the larger shells being dropped by the Heyfords.

Would you believe it!



UPON a certain date in the year 1918 things were not looking very pleasant for the R.F.C. squadrons opposing the famous Richthofen Circus. Although the great Baron Richthofen was himself dead, the circus that bore his name continued to blast the Allied ships from the sky. To make things worse, the Fokker DVII's had been fitted with new motors, far superior to those of the R.F.C.

The R.F.C., desperate, and anxious to even the odds, decided to stage a sky trap that would wipe the famous circus out of the heavens. All available craft and men were assembled on a particular Front and plans were laid. Upon the next day, the trap was sprung.

Four Camels flew at 10,000 feet, while 2,000 feet above them, and concealed in the clouds, were 15 more Camels flying in two layers. Realizing that the Boches were not fools, they were expected to see this trap and have their own ships flying over the 15 Camels, from where they could dive down on the Allied crates. What they were not expected to know was that high over the 15 Camels, the R.F.C. were flying 15 S.E.5s, and to make doubly sure their plans worked out all

right, 10 Dolphins were flying at an altitude of 18,000. Thus we have 4 Camels at 10,000, 15 Camels at 12,000, 15 S.E.5s at 15,000 and 10 Dolphins at 18,000 feet, all flying, one group on top of another like a flight of stairs.

Suddenly the 4 Camels discovered 4 Fokkers flying at 2,000 feet below them, with 10 more Fokkers higher up. So the Fokkers were springing a trap of their own? Well, here goes! Four Camels dropped down on four Fokkers, and immediately 10 more Fokkers swooped down onto the fight. The 15 Camels then dove into the whirling mass of fire and steel, followed by 5 more Fokkers that seemed to come from nowhere. Now it was really time to spring the trap. Throttles wide open and Vickers slashing out their scorching death, came the 15 S.E.5s. But, good Lord! What was this? Streaking behind the S.E.5s came *twenty*, count 'em, twenty more Fokkers! The Boche were not fools by any means; they had sprung a trap of their own.

Now it was a fight to the finish, and, would you believe it, there were *seventy-three* ships in this one dog fight! This was not counting the Dolphins that failed

to join the fight, since their only practical use was in the higher altitudes.

This was the greatest air battle, in point of numbers, that occurred throughout the war. And so spectacular, so ghastly and

thrilling was the spectacle provided, that the men in the trenches below ceased their fire. Both sides stood by their silent guns, and lifted their heads to the drama of the air.

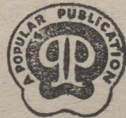
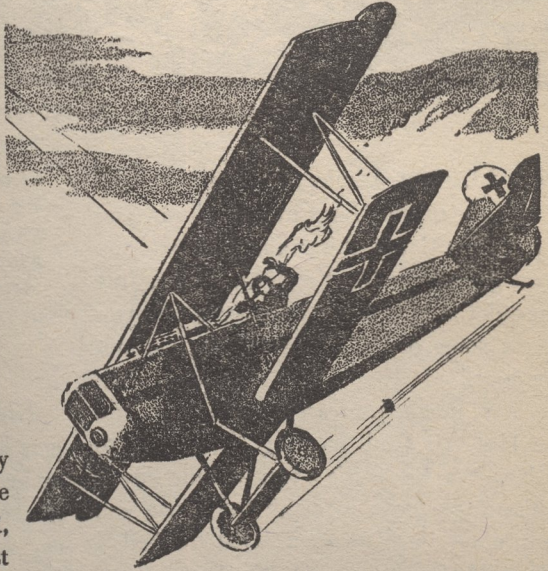
NEXT MONTH—

THE MUSICAL DEATH

By

C. M. MILLER

NCE again Chinese Brady hits the sky lanes in the grim and awful drama of WAR, this time against the strangest menace ever to come out of Boche-land! Caught in the forces of fearsome death—Allied ships were tumbling from the heavens—men and their planes reduced to crumbling heaps before the unseen hand of this unbelievable curse! Follow Chinese Brady as he takes the short end of the odds, and matches his life and his iron nerves against the forces of hell itself!



ALSO

WINGS OF THE GRAVE

A nerve wracking tale of the skies

By

O. B. MYERS

A new

SMOKE WADE YARN

Follow the adventures of the Cowboy Ace as vividly told by

ROBERT J. HOGAN

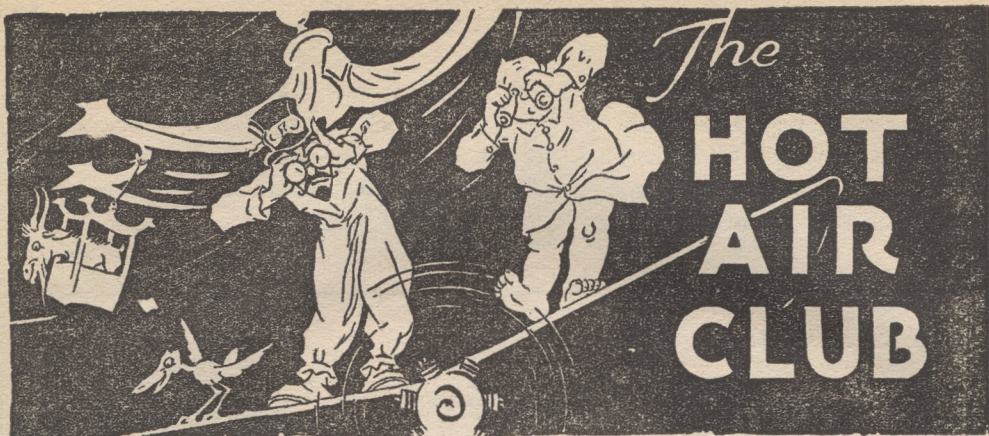
Other thrill packed shorts and features by Robert Sidney Bowen, Frederick Blakeslee, Steve Fisher, etc.

in

May Issue

Out March 25

DARE-DEVIL ACES



The HOT AIR CLUB

Conducted by Nosedive Ginsburg

"ALL right, Louie, move over and let the ground hogs in. You know you can't do a damn thing about it, so stop your growling. That's right, Louie, just lay quiet, and when I need you, you can throw some of these wise guys right out the door."

Okay, mugs, you can come in now, and the Hot Air Club meeting shall come to order. You know it's a funny thing how I tolerate you guys after all the abuse you heap upon me. But then, what the hell, I get paid for this, and it's better than stunting a moth-eaten Jenny at County Fairs.

Thus, my hyenas, we institute another chapter in the brilliant history of THE HOT AIR CLUB, conducted by Ginsburg, the greatest two fisted liar in the history of aviation. All of which brings to mind the current abuse I have on hand. Maybe you'd like to listen to this baboon. Personally, I wouldn't; but I suppose you're not so fussy. He's your old friend Larry McNutt, who imposes his presence on the fair city of Columbus, Ohio—at 93 Lexington Avenue, to be exact. And for his sins, Larry is to receive a buck, in sound American currency with no strings attached. Ah, the bitter injustice of it all! But listen to the guy:

Dear Nosedive:

I am filled with compassion and sorrow and rum at the news of the untimely death

of our dauntless comrades. They were living on borrowed time, and money, it would seem. As for you getting order out of this gang, I have laughed myself to stitches. Here's my contribution to the new contest, and it sounds good (the contest) AHM!

Toodleoo, Larry McNutt

Now before this wind-dizzy Buzzard gets going with his contribution, let me make it clear that Ginsburg *will* have order, even if Louie has to punch each and everyone of you wise guys in the nose. But, returning to Mr. McNutt, we offer his little ditty for your pleasure or pain. Here it is:

STUDENT

I wanted like a bird to fly
Above the cheering throng to soar,
I didn't know airplanes were so sly,
I thought the motor'd always roar.
A second handed plane I bought,
I took it up to buzz around;
The motor stopped, and then I thought
I'd feel much better on the ground.
The tail came off, the wings did too,
The dashboard fell into my lap—
The joystick broke, it snapped in two,
A shocked expression crossed my map.
I landed with a wicked thump,
The gas tank hit me on the head.
The stars sizzed 'round all on the jump,
I was convinced that I was dead.
I've got a piston in my ear,
A cylinder in my backbone—
My stomach's jammed with steering gear,
Dogonnit! someone take me home.

My mind is clogged, I want to cry,
My heart is filled with bitter hate,
The next time that I try to fly,
I'll do it at the Pearly Gate.

Even though it kills me, I have to admit that you did a pretty good job, Larry. And since Ginsburg is a man of his word, you'll find your buck in the mail. Louie! Throw McNutt out of the joint; we won't need him for a while.

And now, just to prove my insanity, I'm gonna award a buck to this month's ACE OF THE SOARING WINDBAG. He is one James (Gorilla) Pearson, from Austin, Texas, and he abuses this department as follows:

Dear Cactus-Puss Ginsburg:

On behalf of my many pals in Austin who read Dare-Devil Aces, I wish to state that we shall continue to do so for many a day. The magazine, and the stories it contains, are swell. But the HOT AIR CLUB. Well, Nosedive, to put it mildly—it *sinks*. Especially since you took charge. What's more, Ginsburg, I'm only one of a million guys out my way who could punch holes in your card-board body-guard, Louie, the Lush. And I want to tell you here and now, that if either of you gorillas ever comes out my way, I'll not only change Louie into a squirming sardine, but I'll run you across the border into Mexico. No, Ginsburg, that would start an international war, and I have nothing against Mexico. So phooey, Ginsburg, and the same to Louie, because I am a very tough guy, you hound.

James (Gorilla) Pearson

Why I award this mug a buck, I really don't know, except that Pearson shows a remarkable talent for insulting this sacred department, and we'll have to let it go at that. But I'll be forever grateful to any sky bug who writes in and tells Gorilla Pearson where to get off at. I'd suggest 10,000 feet.

As most of you groundhogs know, I'm supposed to go on page after page being funny—a very difficult job in case you don't know it. And considering the small

thanks I get from you punks, it all seems so in vain. What's more, Ginsburg is very sad today, and Louie hasn't had his ration of grass. He can't eat—he's sick—he's dying! Fact is I just offered Louie a whole bunch of dandelions, but he turned it down cold. And here, squirts is the reason:

Somewhere around these premises you'll find a sample of fiendish art work. It comes from the poisonous pen of a certain Ralph Graves who abuses the social desirability of Northampton, Massachusetts, that ancient stronghold of culture and flowering cemeteries. As you can readily see, the drawing is lousy, enough to cause Louie to tear the mug limb from limb. And the outrageous liberties taken with my classic profile, have shaken my faith in the human heart. Just look at the gross indignity! Imagine the great Ginsburg assuming such a position. And look at the picture of Louie, the Lush. Why there isn't enough hair on Louie's chest to make a mustache! Frankly, I could draw a better picture myself. And the pity of it all is that this mug Graves wins the monthly award of *five bucks*! Five bucks, mind you—and for *what*?

Well, much as I hate to do it, I'll have to print the original bit of slander that accompanied the ugly portrait. Just hold on Buzzards, the guy's a demon:

Dear Kettle-head Ginsburg:

All my life I've wanted to take a punch at a guy like you, so thanks for the opportunity. Permit me now to speak for the members of the HOT AIR CLUB. I have spoken recently to no less than twenty rabid members in my neighborhood, and after our meeting we were left with a single opinion, which is this: That neither you nor Louie the Lush has ever been further off the ground than the top of a Ferris Wheel; that you are a couple of left-handed fakers trying to intimidate us with your stupid threats. Well, Ginsburg, if it's fight you want, then it's fight you'll get. The drawing that ac-

companies my letter gives you an idea of what we think of you guys. Louie's just a punch-drunk old pug, and you never did any more flying than to stumble on your ugly puss. (You don't know how this hurts, boys.) But anyhow, Ginsburg, we're gonna give you a chance. Maybe you can conduct yourself decently in a magazine that contains such noted air writers as Robert J. Hogan, Sidney Bowen and others; but as far as I can see, you and your punch-drunk stooge are just a couple of broken down

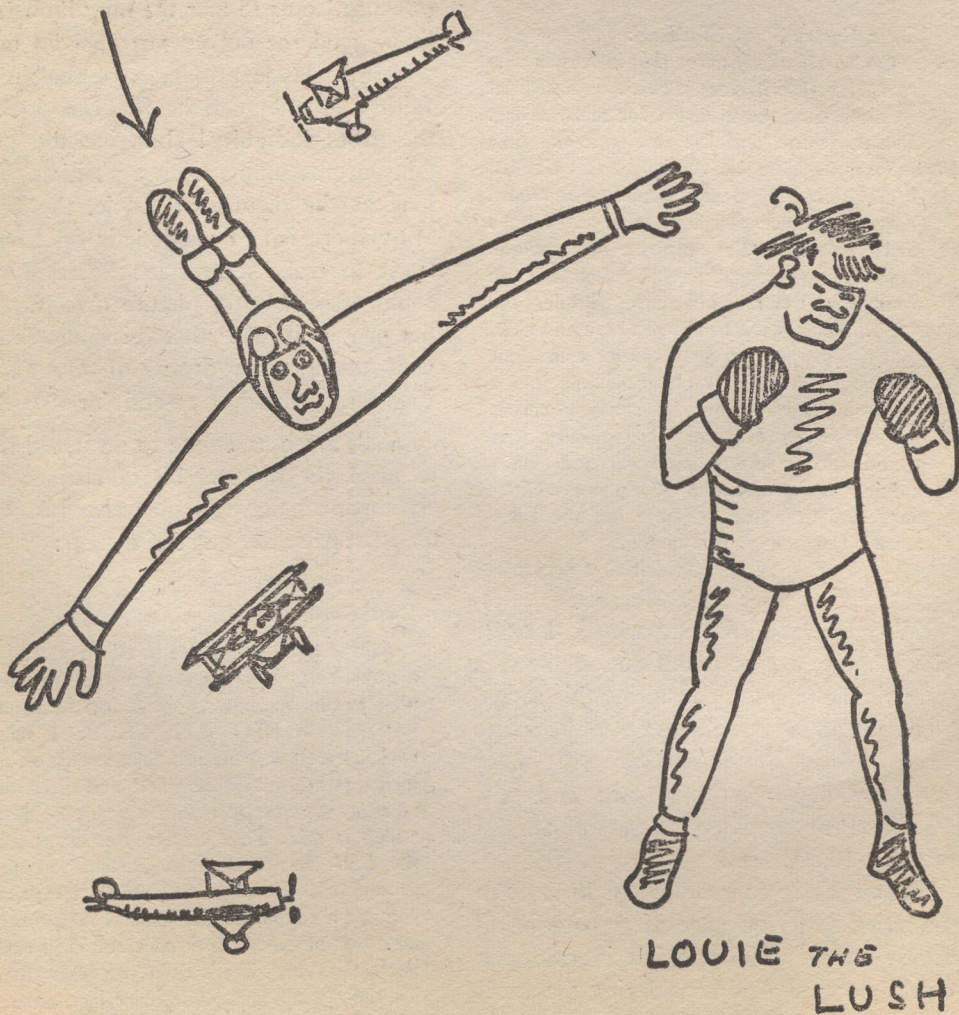
stumble-bums. Wishing you every success in your new ventures, I remain,

Your gentle critic,
Ralph Graves

That comrades, is why I'm feeling lousey. And now, if you'll rise up in arms and proclaim it isn't true, who knows, perhaps, next month's five bucks may go to the guy who shows up this wise mug, Graves.

NOSEDIVE
GINSBURG

RALPH GRAVES



Ginsburg is happy to provide space in which to insert part of a serious and worthwhile bit of poetry from a soldier of Uncle Sam, Mr. Wilbur Radeline at the Hawaiian Medical Depot, Fort Armstrong, Honolulu. Here's a guy who really has something to say. Not a lot of rubbish for you ungrateful sky geese.

A SOLDIER'S SONG

Have you ever eaten dog and considered it dandy?

Or grasshoppers and thought they were some new kind of candy?

Been caught by a storm in the mountains at night?

Had to sleep in a cave with skeletons bleached white?

I have.

Have you ever seen waterfalls upside down,

Or a king's million dollar royal feather gown?

Have you ever seen white men perform Indian rites?

Or watched the Southern Cross sparkle in tropical nights?

I have.

Have you ever been lonely in the midst of a crowd?

Or the receipt of a letter with joy cause you to shout?

Ever longed for a nod or a smile from a friend?

Someone to whom you might even a post-card send?

I have.

Why not sit down and write a letter to this soldier blue,

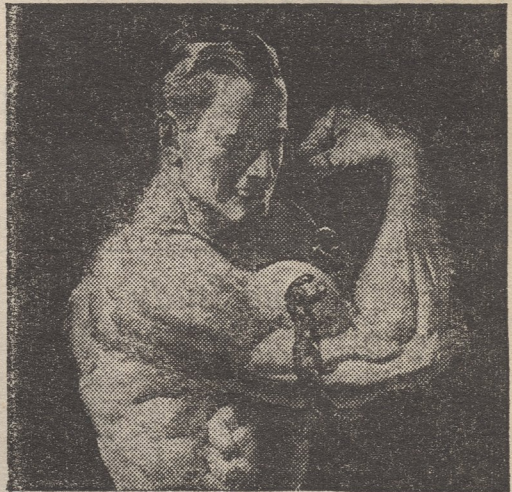
And let him personally tell about these things to you?

He's American, five foot eight, without kith or kin,

Likes to write about the things he's seen and the places he's been.

(Continued on page 111)

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The smallest size automatic, with largest magazine capacity—10 shots. Side safety; proof tested, \$7.95. Vest Pocket 7 Shot Liberty Auto., side safety; proof tested, \$7.95. Holster 60c. Box of Cartridges 65c. Write for catalog of Rifles, Guns, Colts, S. & W. Sinoculars, etc. \$2 Deposit required on C.O.D.'s

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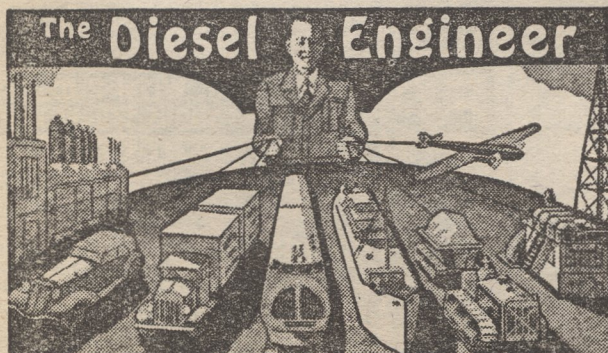
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Get our Free Diesel Booklet and find out what the Diesel field offers you—how quickly you can obtain a complete understanding of Diesel engine principles and operation by spare-time study at home. Asking for information involves no obligation—but it may mark the turning point in your life. Write **TODAY** for full information.

(Continued from page 109)

Anyhow, it gives me pleasure to award him a buck. The other lucky buzzards to win one dollar cash are Mr. Robert Disney of Rochester, Illinois, and Miss Emily Edwards of Seattle, Washington. Emily's a gal who knows what it's all about. What's more you squirts, she has respect for a gent like Ginsberg and a poor, defenseless stooge like Louie.

So wind up your arms for next month, Buzzards, and let the abuse roll in!

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April

Popular Publications,

205 East 42nd Street, New York.

Sign me up quick! I like these stories best:

1.
2.
3.

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City

NOTE TO GROUNDHOGS:

Well, as you can see, good old Ginsburg is still paying off through the greatness of his heart.

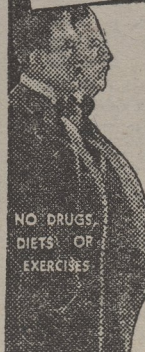
And next month some buzzard is bound to collect five bucks for the best poem, drawing, short story or insult sent in—So fire away!



REDUCED 8 INCHES!
"Please send me a Weil Reducing Belt for a 38 inch waist. The first one I got was a 40—this one should be 8 inches smaller."
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REDUCED 50 POUNDS!
"... This is a belt of great value and I find it helps me to lose weight. It has reduced my weight from 230 to 180 pounds."
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REDUCED 6 INCHES!
"... My waist measure has reduced 6 inches and my weight from 206 to 184 lbs. I feel just without my Weil Reducing Belt."
R. E. Hyman, Berlin, Ohio.



NO DRUGS,
DIETS OR
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Why Don't YOU TEST THE WEIL BELT at our expense!

You will appear many inches smaller at once, and in ten short days your waistline will actually be 3 inches smaller... 3 inches of fat gone or no cost!

MASSAGE-LIKE ACTION DOES IT!

You will be completely comfortable as the massage-like action gently but persistently eliminates fat with every move you make. It supports the sagging muscles of the abdomen and quickly gives an erect, athletic carriage.

Many enthusiastic wearers write us that the Weil Belt not only reduces fat but they are no longer fatigued, and that it greatly increases endurance and vigor! So many hundreds of wearers are delighted with the results obtained from their Weil Health Belts that we know we are conservative when we make you this unqualified agreement:

REDUCE YOUR WAIST 3 INCHES IN 10 DAYS... OR NO COST!

Don't be embarrassed by that "bay window" any longer, for after wearing the Weil Health Belt for a short time, only the admiring comments of your friends will remind you that you once had a bulging waistline.

DON'T WAIT! FAT IS DANGEROUS!

Insurance companies think twice before they insure a fat man... doctors warn against overweight. Why not get that dangerous fat off before it harms your health?

Don't carry around that excess baggage any longer! Mail the coupon NOW!

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THE WEIL COMPANY, Inc., 484 Hill St., New Haven, Conn. Gentlemen: Send me FREE, your illustrated folder describing The Weil Belt and full details of your 10 Day FREE Trial Offer.

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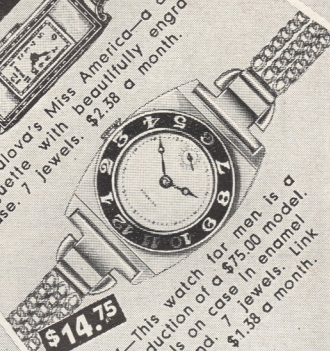
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R-1—Bulova's Miss America—a dainty baguette with beautifully engraved case. 7 jewels. \$24.75 a month.



2126—This watch for men is a reproduction of a \$75.00 model. Numerals on case in enamel background. 7 jewels. Link chain band. \$14.75 a month.



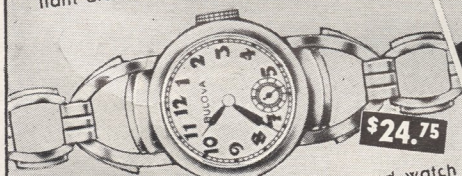
1842—This dainty baguette watch formerly sold for \$29.50. It's set with 2 brilliant diamonds. 7 jewels. \$19.75 a month.



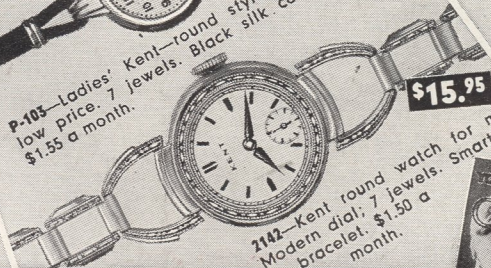
R-4—Ladies' Bulova watch. New round style; 7 jewels. Black silk cord band. \$24.75 a month.



P-103—Ladies' Kent round style at special low price. 7 jewels. Black silk cord band. \$16.50 a month.



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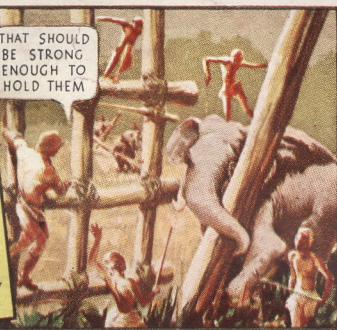
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THAT SHOULD BE STRONG ENOUGH TO HOLD THEM



THE ONE I WANT IS IN THAT HERD

I GO GET BEATERS



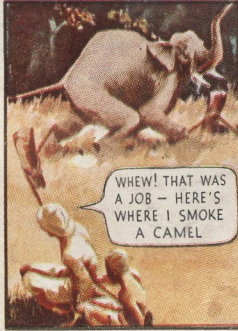


"AT A SIGNAL THE ELEPHANTS ARE STAMPEDED TOWARD THE TRAP"



"THE ENRAGED HERD, MADDENED BY THE NOISE, THUNDERS BLINDLY INTO THE KRAAL —"

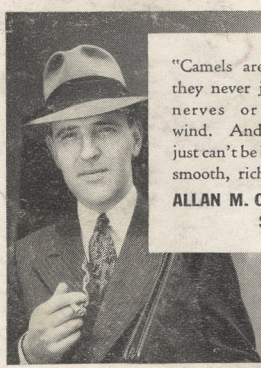
WHEW! THAT WAS A JOB — HERE'S WHERE I SMOKE A CAMEL



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YOU'LL LIKE THEIR MILDNESS TOO!



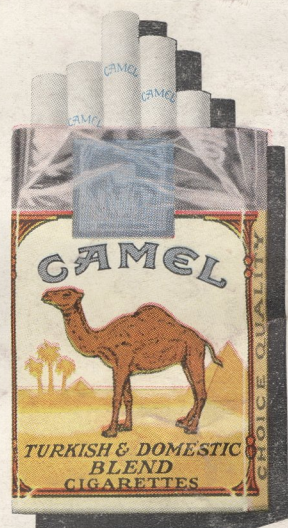
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