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BUD - YOU'LL HAVE TO GET RID OF THOSE HICKIES - IF YOU WANT TO CUT ANY ICE WITH MARY-

THEN BUD GETS A TIP

SAY MA-ISNT I CAN DO ABOUT THESE?

BUD I HEARD FLEISCHMANN'S YEAST IS FINE TO CLEAR UP PIMPLES. YOU JUST EAT 3 CAKES EVERY DAY



NEXT DAY

MOTHER SAID YOU'RE TO PROMISE TO EAT 3 OF THESE EVERY DAY - ONE OR TWOS NOT ENOUGH

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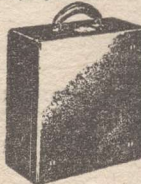
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VOL. 16

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Out of the Gale Came Cries of Men



Fishermen Blown to Sea in Sinking Boat Saved as Mate Checks Strange Light

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Warren S. Brown"



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graved on it!

ZERO-ZERO

TOO often in recent months the re-
ports have come in, from ice-bound
hills and the lonely countryside,
from dense and snow-capped woods, sec-
ond-handed reports for the most part, re-
layed by rural telephones—all telling the
story of Death. Great commercial liners,
supposedly safe from weather hazards,
supposedly impregnable to any known dis-
aster, had crashed. And in their crash-
ing, had taken a toll of life.

Let us for a moment consider the fac-
tors that brought about these tragedies.
Was something wrong with a motor? The
reports seem to say quite definitely "No!"
Can engines and wings be depended upon
for the necessary mileage to accomplish
trans-continental flying? The rigid tests
that modern ships have been put to, would
seem to indicate that they can.

The radio beam is not without fault, we
know. A pilot can get off the beam, the
same as a motorist can lose his way along
the road. What is the greatest single fac-
tor that brings about these troubles?—
what is the greatest of all obstacles to
safe and certain air transport? Flyers are
unanimous in saying it is the weather,
which as yet, no man has learned to
control.

But what of the human element? Is it
not true that pilots have gone aloft with
a cargo of human life, and been warned
of approaching weather problems, and
then, realizing that the odds were with
them, have gallantly, without thought of
personal safety, reached their desired des-
tination without mishap? Certainly they
have.

They did not care for their personal
safety. They felt that their own lives were
at their own disposal. But what of the
lives of others?

Merely because a pilot is skillful, and
is not afraid of breaking his neck, he is
not fully qualified to handle the controls
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test pilots, and the man of courage who

(Continued on Page 6)

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(Continued from Page 4)

takes his ship aloft and flies upside-down, gets ice on his wings deliberately, then roars full-throttle for the earth, just to see how tough the crate he is flying happens to be. This is just fine, if the pilot happens to be flying, *alone!*

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But, of course, the picture is not so black as it may appear. In times like this we are apt to forget the millions and millions of miles safely flown. We are prone to forget the pilots and the air companies who accept their full responsibilities, and the fact that there are mighty few accidents, comparatively speaking.

Statistics recently compiled have shown quite conclusively, that for every fatal air accident, there have been ten million miles safely flown. We wonder if the automobile manufacturers can produce a record so satisfactory? We wonder if this does not prove Aviation even safer than walking!

We have gained much in the years gone by, merely by keeping the faith. You are safer today taking a plane than you are in taking a motor bus. Our only hope is that the future will make it even *safer*. This can best be accomplished by attracting to the cause of aviation the best and the ablest of youth.

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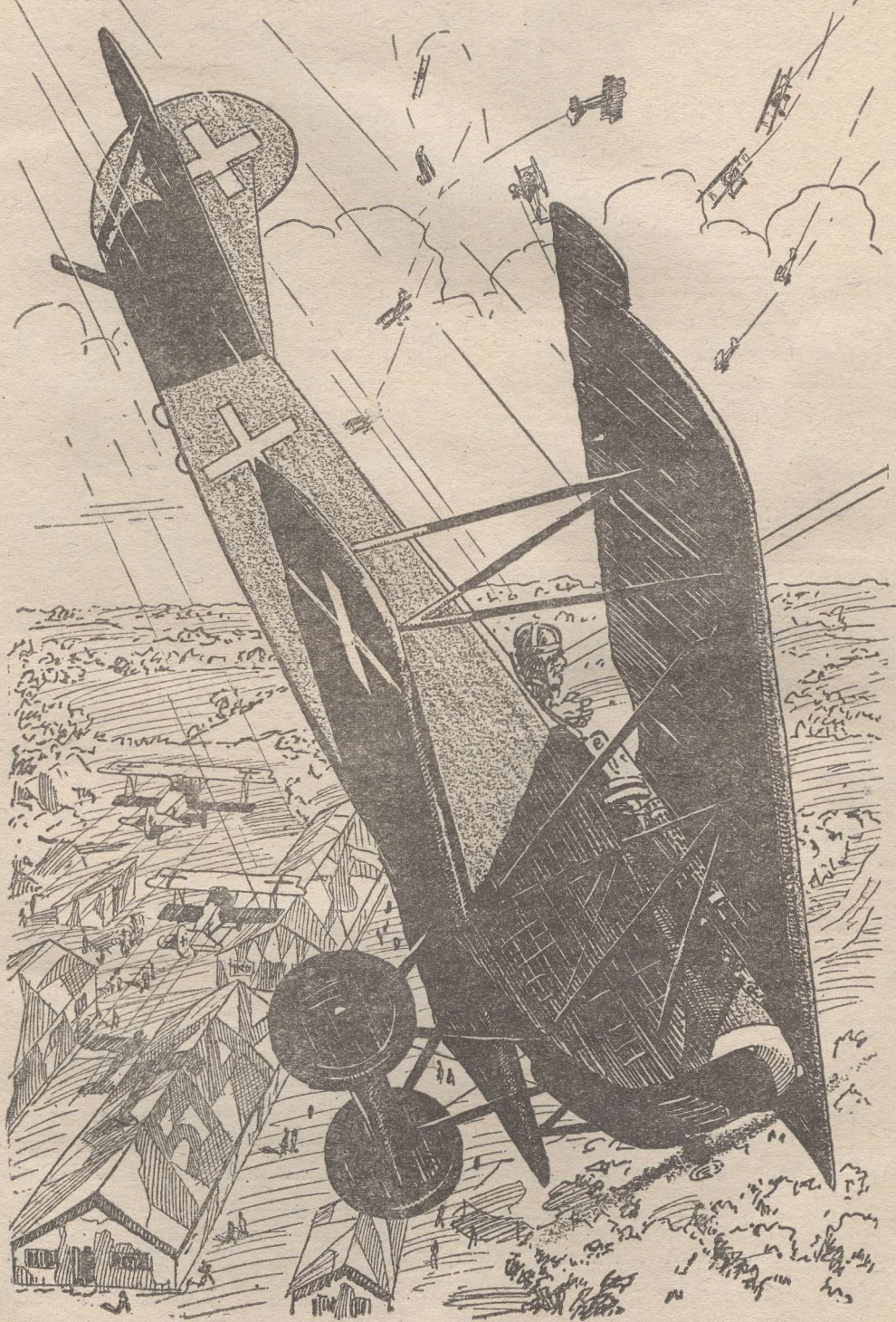
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Death Paints the



Skies



Fingers of Death reached down
to claim a life.

by WILLIAM O'SULLIVAN

The eyes of Jim Clancy had looked into guns before, as well as into the souls of gangland's fiercest killers. It was no surprise to him that treachery haunted the Front, or that Death, grim and relentless lay waiting in hidden corners. But in the sky or on the ground, Jim Clancy was a cop—so that the Murder and the Mystery that followed were just another job!

CHAPTER ONE

Bomb Blizzard

JAMES JOSEPH CLANCY, Pilot, First-Lieutenant and newest rookie on the tarmac of the Yank Eighty-Eighth Pursuit Squadron, stirred uneasily in his seat at the mess shack.

Big, dark and tanned was James Clancy, with eyes as blue as a mill pond, and a mop of sturdy, straight black hair.

Not at all a nervous type. Yet, for all this, Jim Clancy was distinctly uneasy as he sat at supper.

For one thing, it was the tenseness—the tautness of nerves, the hair-trigger tempers—that he had found in his mates at Eighty-Eight, on the Marne Front, when he had arrived from 'Pool' three days previous.

For another—well, Jim Clancy had always been an honest man; but coinci-

dental with his arrival at the home diggings of Major Sanford Lawton's famous air unit, he had permitted a false impression to prevail about him.

Not that Jim Clancy had lied to anyone. Rather, he had silently permitted Lieutenant Smithers, the squadron adjutant, to misinterpret his words. On the occasion of Clancy's arrival at the field, when Smithers, taking his 'pedigree,' had asked:

"Occupation in civilian life?"

Clancy had answered, "The law business."

"Oh," Smithers had answered, writing the information down. "You were a lawyer."

To a certain extent, Clancy's answer had been truthful: he *was* in the 'law' business; a policeman is certainly concerned with the law, and Jim Clancy had certainly been a policeman, as any copper and many a violator of the law could testify.

"Big Jim" Clancy, they had called him, when he was a member of New York's 'Finest,'—the Department's crack shot and a smart, two-fisted lad who had worked his way from patrolman to Detective, First Grade, in five glory-studded years.

But when, in the Spring of '17, Uncle Sam had declared himself Free, White and a Son-of-a-gun, Big Jim Clancy had swapped his shield for a pair of silver wings. Spurred by his inborn Celtic love of adventure, the only son of the Widow Clancy had decided that fighting Huns in the air was better than fighting Crime on the ground.

And it was this very training as a copper that now added to his uneasiness. For there was Trouble in the air at Eighty-Eight—with a capital 'T'. It vibrated as strongly in Clancy's sensitive fibres as the current in an electric wire. It was in the men's staring eyes. It was in their

grim faces, their tight mouths, their watchful manner.

Clancy stirred uneasily now, as he drank his coffee. Cautiously, he put out a 'feeler' to the man on his left—to Jerry Rattery, one of his flight mates.

"The boys act like they got a perpetual hangover," Clancy said. "I wonder if they're always like this—jumpy, and—crabby, sort of?"

Rattery puffed on a cigarette, his cool gray eyes sizing up Clancy. "Front Line fever," he said, after a minute. "Tight; tense. Like the spring of a watch, when it's over-wound." He paused. "You'll get it, too."

"Will I, now?" Big Jim Clancy said mildly. His eyes doubted it.

'Hash' Cowan, listening at Clancy's right, said:

"It's the air raids. That's what it is, the air raids. You been here only three days, haven't you Clancy? And been out on only one flight? Well, just stick around, Big Boy. We've had *eight* straffings this month. Two-a-week average!"

Rattery appeared annoyed. Big Jim Clancy nodded. "I saw the bullet marks on the hangar ramps," he said. "Those and the small bomb holes."

Rattery said again, "Front Line fever. Fighting pitch, that's all."

Hash Cowan ignored him; he might not even have spoken. "This is the third outfit I've been with, Clancy. Two French *escadrilles*, and now this one. I tell you, it's the raids. That—and the mystery!"

The way Cowan said the word 'mystery' made Jim Clancy look at him curiously. "What mystery?"

Cowan leaned toward him earnestly. "The mystery of why we *get* all these raids," he said, seriously. "I've been up here a long time, kid; since 1915. And I tell you it isn't air warfare. Why, the last time we got three of them, right over this

'drome. The time before, we downed two; and before that, three. And yet they keep coming. *Why?*"

Clancy blinked. "To wipe out the mob, I suppose," he said.

"Then why don't they send over big bombers at night, instead of pursuit ships by day? That's the way to wipe out a target—with big bombers. But these guys just dive down and raise merry hell for about ten minutes, then—*bing!*—they're gone! Until next time!"

Clancy finished his coffee and wiped his mouth with his hand. He considered what he had heard while he fired a cigarette. His mind clicked into the thing like gears meshing.

"What else is around here?" he asked.

"Nothing," Cowan answered. "Just the town of Mourville, population, five hundred,—when everybody is home; a pretty good estaminet, where you can get good brandy at too high a price, served up by the proprietor's daughter—the gal who took second to the cow in the last beauty contest. That's all there is around here—excepting the new Yank camouflage school."

"Camouflage school?" Clancy echoed. "Is that what those buildings are over to the east? Is that where they learn to paint disguises for things?"

"That's what," Cowan said, getting to his feet. "See you later."

Clancy said to Rattery, "Maybe the Boche have some interest in that?"

The other man growled deep in his throat and ground out his cigarette.

"Listen," he said, rising and looking down at Big Jim. "You're up here to scrap the Boche who show up. So why worry about *why* they come? That's the Huns' business, isn't it?"

Clancy couldn't help but grin. "Got a

bit of the fever yourself, haven't you, Rattery?"

The man stood and stared back at Clancy for a long minute. Then he very quietly said:

"I've always noticed that people who mind their business live longest, Clancy. Think it over!"

And he was gone.

'Trouble' was as strong to Jim Clancy's nostrils as a fresh scent to a bloodhound. The very air seemed alive with it. After a minute he shook his head and rose from the table.

"Damned if Rattery's words didn't sound almost like a threat," he muttered as he went out.

Near the door, a tall, slender, blond pilot whom Clancy hadn't met, as yet, nudged him. "Don't let Rattery get under your skin," he said.

TWICE during the night, Clancy was awakened by the rumble of heavy wheels. The second time, he slipped into his pants, boots and a sweater and walked out into the starry night. No one was in sight; not even the sentry on post there.

He made his way to the road that ran past the place. Men were walking stolidly in the grass alongside the road and heavy trucks and lorries rolled slowly along—headed east.

Clancy drew nearer and peered. Yanks! He made out a form standing just beyond the wire fence that enclosed Eighty-Eight's domain. The man wore a brassard on his arm, with the letters 'M. P.' standing out in white.

"Military Police," Clancy muttered. He stopped at the fence.

"Doughboys going up?" he asked.

The military copper peered at him. "Naw," he answered. "I can't sleep, so I'm havin' a little review for myself."



Clancy grinned. "Spoken like a true cop," he said. "I used to be one myself, in New York."

"Yeah? Then you ought to know better than to ask questions!"

Big Jim shrugged and walked slowly back toward his barracks. But he stopped short. He was sure he had seen a figure slip around the corner of the building near him. He stared, puzzled.

"Halt! Who's there?" a voice challenged from his left.

The sentry on post walked up, his gun held at ready.

"Friend," Big Jim said. Then: "Lieutenant Clancy, sentry. I heard the noise and came out to see what it was all about."

He hesitated and was going to speak to the man about the shadow he had seen at the other corner. But he changed his mind. "Maybe I only imagined it," he thought, little realizing how he would regret it later.

Clancy hit the deck next morning at the batman's first call. He dressed hurriedly, determined to ask Captain Alcothe, his flight commander, if he couldn't go out with the dawn patrol.

He slipped into his monkey suit, grinning at the still recumbent forms of Hale and Perkins, the two men with whom he shared the big barracks. Promptly with the orderly's call, they had turned over in their bunks with drill-like precision, and both were sound asleep again.

'The Barn,' Perkins called their sleeping quarters, because of its size. The remainder of the pilots and ground officers who made up the commissioned personnel of Eighty-Eight were quartered in the two buildings to the west, two to a room.

The stars were fading in the sky when Clancy walked toward the mess shack. There was a low *thrumming* sound from the hangar line, where the ships were warming. Big Jim Clancy could see the cherry-red streaks that marked the ex-

hausts of the still-invisible Spads. He breathed deep of the tangy Spring air.

Only a handful of men were having breakfast when Clancy sat down. Rattery; 'Jap' Scoville, the ranking ace of the outfit; the irrepressible Hash Cowan; Major Sanford Lawton, the grizzled commander of the Eighty-Eighth Pursuit; and the pilot who had spoken to Clancy the previous evening.

There was room for him between this man and Cowan. Clancy waved to the mess attendant and climbed over the bench.

"Swell morning, isn't it?" he addressed the tall, blond pilot.

The man rose without a word, took his coffee cup in one hand and his half-consumed plate of toast and jam in the other, and went to another table.

Big Jim Clancy's mouth and eyes were wide with astonishment. "Well, I'll be—"

Hash Cowan rocked in silent mirth, his mouth being full of his favorite dish—hash. When he had swallowed, he said to Clancy in a dramatically heavy voice:

"Front Line fever, my boy! Front Line fever! Dykes has caught it!"

Clancy looked at Rattery, who sat across from them. But for once Rattery wasn't to be baited by Cowan. His eyes were serious. "Yes; Dykes gets it occasionally, too."

Captain Alcothe came in and took his place near Major Lawton. When Clancy had finished, he walked over.

"'Morning, Major," he said.

"'Morning, Captain."

Then, "Sir? May I speak with you?"

"Shoot," Alcothe said, his eyes keenly on Clancy's.

"May I go out with the dawn patrol to-day?" Clancy asked.

Alcothe's eyes flickered. Major Lawton said to his coffee, "Thank God I've got two men who aren't suffering from the jitters!"

"Thank you, sir," Alcothe said.

Major Lawton sucked noisily at his coffee. "I mean Cowan, not you," he said.

Alcothe might not have heard him, for all the effect it had on him.

"Clancy," he said, "I told you before, that when I'm ready for—"

His words trickled to a halt and his eyes narrowed slightly. Clancy saw the pupils of the man's eyes contract, and marked it for some kind of fear.

A bench behind him scraped the floor as someone stood up. In the hush that had fallen over the room, Clancy could hear Major Lawton's heavy breathing. Then he heard something else.

From far away, there was a low moaning wail! It might have been the wind moaning in the trees. But there was no wind, there were no trees—

Just as the sound seemed to die, it writhed alive once more,—this time stronger. Louder it came, and everybody in the mess shack came to their feet.

From near at hand a bell clanged furiously, setting up a fearful din.

"An alerte!" Captain Alcothe shouted, jumping for the door. "Everybody out!"

Voices were calling outside, and feet pounded along the road.

Clancy was right behind Alcothe and running beside him as they raced for the tarmac. "Okay for me to take a ship?" he panted, as he ran.

"Get a ship if you can," Alcothe said. "The boys are pouring out of the barracks!"

Big Jim Clancy slipped his feet into high and was first of the crowd to the line. A Bugle Sergeant stood near a hangar, blowing what sounded to Clancy like a riot call.

Clancy grinned, remembering what Cowan had said the day before.

"That guy," Cowan had said of the bugler, "even makes Mess Call sound lousy!"

Clancy rushed one ship, a Spad with a red snout, and clambered into the pit.

"Hey!" a mechanic shouted, "this is Lieutenant Dykes's ship. You can't take this bus!"

"I don't give a damn if it's Pershing's," Clancy said. "Pull those chocks before I pin your ears back, you—*Good Lord!*"

Clancy was staring at the small, sharp-nosed man in the blue denim coverall who had spoken to him. And the little man was staring back with frightened eyes.

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"Snipe Schmidt!" Clancy marveled. "So *this* is where you got when I was after you! In the Army!"

"Cheez!" the small man breathed. "Big Jim Clancy! Lissen—"

"Chop it short," Clancy snapped. "Get those chocks clear of my wheels, you Heinie chiseler. And be here when I get back, Snipe—I have a few things I want to say to you!"

He couldn't hear the mechanic's tight-lipped, "Maybe you won't get back."

For Big Jim Clancy was gunning his Hisso-powered bus off the tarmac in a full-throated roar.

HE held the Spad's nose low until he was at the border of the field; then, with a full-armed yank on the stick he stood the speedy fighting plane on her rudder as he reached for the sky.

At 1,500, he leveled out and looked below. Three more ships were high tailing on their take-offs. Alcothe was already in the air. Big Jim Clancy banked around and lined up in back and to the right of his leader. Alcothe pointed with his right hand.

Several miles to the right, Clancy could make out a swarm of planes as they scudded low, seemingly in the very treetops. Alcothe ripped out a burst of machine gun fire. Clancy warmed his gun the same way, but guessed that his captain was firing more in signal to the others of Eighty-Eight.

Alcothe signalled a left turn, and Clancy swept around with him. Back over the field they raced. Seven other ships lined up with them. Five more, Clancy saw, were gunning across the dun colored ground below.

The raiders were close, now. Clancy could make out the white crosses on the dark gray fuselages and rudders of the ships.

Now the rest of 'A' Flight were in line,

fourteen ships in all. Alcothe fired a signal burst, held his right hand aloft, then plunged it forward in the same move that his ship made.

Down they swept toward that oncoming winged horde, motors wide open and the wind screaming through their wires. Clancy's heart *tunked* with the thrill of the thing. He braced his feet on the rudder bar to hold himself more firmly in his seat. His thumb caressed the stick-trigger of his Vickers, and his goggled eyes keened with the light of battle.

Suddenly, the swarm of Hun ships seemed to explode upward like some strange rocket, ships blossoming to the right and to the left, and others going straight up. Alcothe pointed with his right hand, and in the next instant opened his guns in the challenging burst against the invaders.

Clancy looked to the right, and saw three of the raiders split from the main body and race down in a dive again. He pulled clear of the formation, sure in his mind that Alcothe was signalling for some of his men to go after them.

Down near a group of garishly decorated buildings, the three ships whipped into a bank. One ship pulled straight up, while the other two raced the length of the small settlement and raked it with a withering machine gun fire. Then they zoomed up and raced the length of the place in a straight line; Immelmanned around and raced back again.

Clancy recognized the place as being the camouflage school of which Hash Cowan had spoken. But he wasn't in any mood to think about that at the moment. Both his thoughts and his sights were trained on the Fokker. He jammed down his thumb.

Rat-tat-tat-tat.

The Fokker pilot screwed around in a climbing turn. He shot his hand in the

air over his head and came toward Clancy. Big Jim blinked.

"If this is some of that 'Knights of the Air' business," he grunted, "he'd better save it for some other time!"

But prompted by some inner urge to abide by all the rules and customs of the air, Clancy held his own hand aloft for a split minute, then dived in to attack anew.

His gun hammered and he watched his tracers streak close to the other ship—eat along the wing—and search into the pilot's pit like the gray fingers of death. The fingers found their mark.

The Fokker nosed up slowly until it stood on its tail-skid; then, with a sickening lurch, it fell off on the right wing and whipped into the first turn of a tail spin.

Clancy watched with fascinated eyes, wondering that his first victory had been so simply accomplished.

But he swept on toward the other two planes. As he did, two other Yank ships cut into the picture, one diving almost vertically from above, while the other came in on a straight line from below. The higher ship started to rake one of the German buses but had to pull up. The lower Spad had crossed into his line of fire.

Clancy dived in, smashing his gun trip down again. He held it while he corrected his aim with the rudder. When his tracers ate near to one of the two racing German planes, he pulled up short.

A ship of the Eighty-Eighth was getting into his sights. With a curse of exasperation, Clancy did a renversement, slipping over on his back. He stuck the ship into a dive and came out with his gun blazing again.

Another Yank ship joined him in this attack, raking the Boche bus from the

opposite direction. Then the Hun's mate and the third Yank entered the tangle.

The Boche that Clancy was concentrating on nosed down, as if to get out of the line of fire. But suddenly, the crate dived still more steeply—and more steeply yet. It struck the ground below in a full power dive, and a cloud of splinters and dust and metal fountained up in a horrible geyser.

Clancy swallowed hard when he saw the burst of orange flame that gushed up.

He whipped around and saw the surviving Hun streaking back toward the Lines. A lone Yank gave futile chase to the speedy invader. Puzzled, Clancy's eyes swept the surrounding territory above and below. In the distance, he could make out the rear-guard engagement which the retreating body of Huns was making as it back-tracked away from Eighty-Eight.

Clancy's eyes sought the ground again. And then he saw it.

There, in the trees to the west of the camouflage school, rested the third Spad—pillowed, in some freakish way, in the high poplars. Clancy looked quickly about the nearby terrain and saw a spot on which he might, by some good piloting, get his bus down. He realized that the Yank pilot in that ship might be wounded, might be gasping out his life this very minute.

Clancy tugged the throttle back and nosed down. "I wonder who in hell it is," he muttered, as he yanked the Spad into landing position. "I didn't have time to look at either of them close enough to tell."

He could see a car and two trucks speeding along from the camouflage school, toward the spot where the wrecked Spad hung in the tree tops. A



motorcycle with side-car jolted along in front of them.

"God, what an outfit!" Clancy thought, as he slid in to a fast landing. "Another raid! They're like flies! But—*Why?*"

CHAPTER TWO

Vickers Doom

CLANCY snapped out of the pit of his Spad almost before it had stopped rolling. The trucks and the side-car were already at the scene when he loped up. Some enlisted men saluted and made way for him.

Clancy looked and saw two men who had shinnied up into the tree. The wrecked Spad hung near them, a broken kite. A French officer walked up, said to Big Jim in surprisingly good English:

"My men have wizz zem a rope. Ze *peelot*, he will be lowered to us."

Big Jim looked at him, surprised at the 'my men.' The Frenchman seemed to sense his question.

"Me, I am Captain Daumier, of ze camouflage school," he explained. "I am w'at you call ze instructor."

Clancy nodded, and his eyes sought the tree tops again. One of the men tested the crate's solidity by rocking it with a foot while he clung to a branch. Apparently satisfied that it was secure, he straddled the fuselage and busied himself with his rope.

In a minute, he was climbing higher in the tree, his buddy with him. Together the two tugged, and slowly the overalled figure of the pilot was hauled clear of the cockpit. Clancy bit his lip when he saw the head that drooped forward, and the lifeless dance of the arms and legs of the man.

Captain Daumier and Clancy eased the man to the ground when his form was within reach.

The Frenchman whipped the goggles from the man's eyes—eyes that were wide and staring, gray and cold as a cheerless dawn.

"Rattery!" Big Jim exclaimed.

He stared at the grease-stained front of the pilot's monkey-suit, then felt something sticky on his left hand, which was behind the man. He swung Rattery's body.

"Good God!" he said.

Across the back of the man's flying suit, from one shoulder to the other, was a ragged line where machine bullets had eaten their way. Big Jim knew now why that head drooped so slackly. The man's neck and back had been broken.

"Ze fortunes of war," Captain Daumier said, making a grave salute to the lifeless corpse. "We shall go back wizz ze body to ze school. From zere, we can telephone to ze—interested parties."

Big Jim was puzzled at the man's 'interested parties'; but he dismissed it as a peculiarity of the Frenchman's speech. Silently, he walked with the captain, the enlisted men bringing the body on a stretcher.

A Medical Officer met them when they came into the clearing. The party halted while the man made a swift examination, shrugging his shoulders in a gesture of futility.

Captain Daumier turned to Clancy. "You will come wizz me to my office, no? A guard, he will watch ze plane for you."

Without waiting for an answer, Daumier detailed a man to the duty. Then he turned to Big Jim, with a slight smile.

"It is ze custom for you *peelots* to view ze bodies and ze wrecks you bring down, yes?"

Clancy frowned, his eyes on the camouflage instructor. "Oh, the Fokker!" he said, remembering the Hun ship. "Well—all right."

He climbed onto the front seat of one

of the trucks, with the Frenchman beside him. The body of Rattery was put in the back. The cortege got under way toward the school.

There was a sizable crowd about the wreck of the Fokker. Several hundred yards away, another silent group stood looking at the charred debris of another. When Big Jim came up, doughboys and Yank officers from the school looked at him with respectful curiosity.

Clancy stepped close to the gray-clad figure that was stretched out near the Fokker, face toward the sky. He grimaced wryly when he saw that face, though. His bullets had smashed into it squarely. He turned away and walked along beside the wreckage.

Mutely, he viewed the tangle of wires and linen and struts. The ship lay on its side, and the wings had twisted grotesquely out of place when the crate screwed into the ground. He stared into the cockpit curiously.

The instrument panel was splintered where Big Jim's bullets had eaten their way into the pit. The control stick was split squarely in the middle. On the floor, the leather cushion lay. Clancy saw something sticking out from under the edge of it—a thin, red band of some sort.

He leaned over and pushed the cushion aside. It was the strap of the man's goggles. The things had been severed at the nose-bridge as if by the blow of a chisel.

Clancy picked them up and stared at them for a minute.

"A souvenir of my first," he muttered, and stuck the things into a hip pocket.

He turned and saw a man looking at him intently. It was the Bugler-Sergeant from the field. After a moment, the man saluted.

"Some of the boys here from the field?" Clancy asked.

The sergeant's eyes were steady on

Clancy for a moment. Then: "Yes, sir," he said. "Major Lawton and—"

"Clancy!" a voice hailed. "Lieutenant Clancy!"

Big Jim looked. It was Lawton. He walked over and saluted.

"Yes, sir?"

"Go back to the field in a car," his commander told him. "Lieutenant Scoville will pilot your ship back. Meredith," Lawton continued, "you go along with Clancy."

Big Jim's perplexity was plainly written on his face, but Lawton didn't appear to notice. 'Jap' Scoville came close and said: "Nice work, Clancy. Two in one morning isn't bad going for a beginner."

"I think Rattery got the other one," Big Jim told him.

"Clancy," Lawton called again, after a moment's consultation with the Frenchman, Captain Daumier. "Who was in that third ship of Eighty-Eight's?"

Big Jim shook his head. "I don't know, sir," he said. "I didn't even know that—Rattery was along; until they let him down from that tree."

Captain Daumier turned slightly away. Major Lawton concluded: "All right, Clancy. When you get to the field, report to Lieutenant Smithers; and wait until I come back."

In the truck, Big Jim puzzled over his orders. "Maybe he thinks I'm nervous, after the fight," he decided, wondering about Scoville's taking his ship back.

Suddenly, Clancy had that peculiar sensation of being watched. He twisted his head quickly and caught Sergeant Meredith in the act of turning his eyes away from him.

"Cripes," Clancy muttered. "If this outfit isn't goofy, it'll do until a goofy one comes along!"

CLANCY had waited for nearly a half-hour in Smithers' office, during which time the adjutant had plied him with

questions. Now, the man looked up from some papers.

"So Rattery's gone," he pondered, musingly. "Well, well! He was a queer duck, Clancy; I never could make him out. So is that roommate of his, Dykes—Carter Dykes. You know him?"

"I took his ship," Clancy said.

Smithers made a face of mock horror. "Not Dykes's pet little red-nosed Spad?" he said. He laughed. "Dykes is a sculptor, or something. Temperamental, you know. Says he can't fly a ship unless it has a red band around the radiator. He's a good pilot, though, and a scrapper."

Clancy didn't have time to answer. Footsteps sounded outside, and the door swung in to admit Major Lawton and another Major—a Staff officer. The man was a stranger to Clancy, and, apparently, to Smithers, also.

Clancy got to his feet and saluted. He had been puzzled by Lawton's manner at the camouflage school, but now it had changed.

"Clancy," Lawton boomed, his face wreathed in smiles, "Major Darrow heard of your exploit this morning and came all the way back with me to meet you." He turned to his companion. "This is the man, Darrow."

Clancy saluted, then stepped forward to shake the proffered hand. The strange officer gripped Clancy's hand tightly and looked him over with cool, steady, blue eyes.

"I'm very, *very* glad to meet you—Clancy," he said, slowly.

"Thank you, sir," Clancy said. "It was just good luck that I had, to-day."

The man Darrow smiled tightly. "I doubt it," he said, almost casually. But his eyes met Lawton's for a second. Then:

"I want to know you better, Clancy; I think you're going places."

Smithers stared at Clancy with new interest. Big Jim, embarrassed, shuffled his feet uncomfortably. Lawton broke the silence.

"Smithers," he said. "I want you to put Clancy in a room in the regular quarters. If you haven't room, why, *make* room for him!"

The adjutant considered. "Put him in with Dykes," he suggested. "You know—Rattery's old bunk?"

There was a moment's silence. Clancy wondered if he had seen Darrow nod imperceptibly. But Lawton had spoken. "Do it," he said, instantly. "Put him in with

Dykes. Well, that's all, Clancy!"

Big Jim saluted again, and left the room happily. Outside, he paused, wondering if he were to take Rattery's place in 'A' Flight, as well. He retraced his steps to the door but paused, deciding to wait until the strange officer had left before he asked Major Lawton.

He couldn't help but hear Smithers say: "How about Clancy? Am I to give him credit for one ship, or for two?"

Big Jim's mouth slacked with astonishment at the answer that came.

"Give him credit for *three*," Major Lawton said, steadily.

"Three?" Smithers echoed. "But how three? There were only the two Fokkers."

The man Darrow spoke. "And the Spad," he said.

"*What?*" Smithers gasped. "The—Spad?"

"That's right," Major Lawton clipped. "Jerry Rattery was killed by a couple of dozen Vickers' slugs."

"Good God!" Smithers said in a weak voice. "Was it—was it an accident?"



"No, it wasn't an accident," Major Darrow's voice came. "Rattery was in the Intelligence Service, Smithers. One of our best counter-spy men. We've known for some time that information was going from here to the Huns—information concerning the big Yank 'push' that's coming soon.

"So we dropped Rattery into the slot here to get the Boche spy."

Smithers said, "And you think it's—Clancy? But he's brand new here!"

Major Lawton answered. "We're still trying to find out who was in that other Spad—the third ship," he said. "Fourteen went up, but only thirteen admit being in the air. So, until we find out who the other man is, Clancy is elected. But—not a word to anyone, Smithers!"

Darrow said, "The funny part of it is, the other Spad brought down a Fokker. We *know* that Rattery didn't—*because Rattery's ammo-belt was loaded with dummies. He never fired a shot!*"

For a moment, Big Jim Clancy hesitated, his weight thrown forward on the ball of his feet and his fists clenched into rocklike knots.

"So I'm elected, am I?" he muttered, his eyes ablaze.

But the next moment, his logical brain cautioned him: "If you give them an idea that *you* know—they'll jug you instantly. They're just turning you loose to watch you."

He relaxed, his mind seizing on the only sensible answer.

"I'll have to dig myself out of this pit," he knew. "It's up to me to find that fourteenth man—to find who put those Vickers slugs into Jerry Rattery's back!"

CHAPTER THREE

Boomerang Evidence

ON the third night in his new quarters, Clancy sat on his bunk, thinking. For the past two days, he had taken his place regularly in 'A' Flight's formations and patrols.

And for the past two days, he had made shrewdly veiled inquiry to learn, if he could, of the fourteenth man in the air on that fateful morning.

It came to him suddenly, as he sat alone in his room, that there might have been an entirely different angle to the thing if he had told the sentry, that other night, of what he thought he had seen.

"There's certainly something pretty foggy around here," Clancy knew. "If Darrow says he *knows* information is coming from here, he must be damn positive."

More than once, recalling that scene above the camouflage school, Clancy tried to fathom out what there was about it that struck a false note. In his mind's eye he could see the Fokkers racing low

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over the buildings—the Spad diving with its gun wide open, and the other one sliding in and blocking him.

Again he shook his head, perplexed.

"That must have been Rattery, the one who slid in between the Hun and—and the mystery pilot," he muttered. "Yet, if the other guy was the guilty one, why did he try to shoot the Boche. And if Rattery was a counter-espionage man, why did he try to block off the Hun's attacker?"

He shook his head. "There's something funny about that picture that I ought to get, but I don't," he said, aloud.

After a minute, he got to his feet and reached for his cap. "I guess I'll make a little call on my old friend Snipe Schmidt," he decided.

He walked toward the enlisted men's quarters, not missing the shadowy wraith that detached itself from a position in the gloom some twenty yards away.

"Imagine *me* being shadowed," he laughed mirthlessly. "Me—Big Jim Clancy!" A little further along, he added, "I'll have to tell Major Darrow how shadowing should be done, if I ever get out of this mess! The old Intelligence Corps isn't so hot, after all."

He stopped at an open window of the enlisted men's barracks and asked a man to send Private Schmidt out. In another moment, Snipe was standing before him.

"Let's take a little walk, Snipe," he said to the man. "I told you the other day there was something I had to say to you."

"Listen, Clancy," the small man whined pleadingly, "you had me all wrong, back there in New York. I mean, on that last job my bunch pulled."

"I know it," Clancy told him, mildly. "I said I was looking for you, didn't I? Well, your old mob told me you had reformed, and I wanted to let you know you were okay. But instead of standing your ground, you ran for it."

Snipe Schmidt said miserably, "An' me answerin' bugles fer t'ree years now,—just to keep clear of you!"

Clancy grinned as they walked slowly down the road. "Well, I did a patriotic act, anyway. They tell me you're a good mechanic. But I didn't come out here to talk about that, Snipe. Now, get your ears open and keep that trap of yours shut. Listen to me carefully, and answer only what I ask you. Get it?"

"Shoot," the ex-gangster said, his eyes cocked on Big Jim.

Remember the other morning when I grabbed Dykes's ship?" Big Jim asked him. "Did you see all the men who went up—or all those who came back?"

Snipe shook his head. "Naw," he said. "Too much excitement. I saw Alcothe, an' you, an' Hale, an' Perkins, an' Rattery, an—"

Clancy said, "Hold it." He thought for a minute. "Can you say for sure who *didn't* go up? Maybe we'll get at it that way."

Snipe said, "Scoville didn't. He nosed over, tryin' to get off. An' Dykes didn't. He come runnin' up right behind you to get his bus, but you was pullin' away in it. He cussed like hell, an' I told him to take the one next you—on the right. But he said, 'Th' hell with it,' an' walked off away."

He thought a minute. "An' I didn't see Cowan anyplace."

Clancy nodded. "Dykes has a hunch that red-nosed ships are the only ones he can fly. He tells me he learned in a red-nosed bus, and doesn't feel safe in any other kind. But that's funny about Cowan. He was at the Mess Hall with me that morning."

Snipe shrugged, "You got me." But his eyes were curious. "What you tryin' to figure out, Clancy?" he asked.

"They gave me credit for a ship I didn't bring down," Big Jim said, easily.

"I just wanted to see that the right guy got it chalked up on *his* score. Well—"

He stopped and seemed about to leave the mechanic. But he had another question. "As I remember, you're a German, aren't you, Snipe?"

"Yeah?" the little man flared. "I'm as American as you are! I was born in Alsace-Lorraine — me old man was a Kraut, but me mother was French! An' I was brung to America when I was two years old. I suppose you figure from that I'm a German Army veteran, huh?"

Clancy suppressed his grin at Snipe's anger. "Well, you wouldn't be the first Alsatian that felt his German blood stronger than his French," he said.

Snipe sneered elaborately. "Then go after that Frog Captain over at the camouflage school," he said. "He's an Alsatian, too; only his old man was French. I asked him, when I heard him speakin' German to a pilot we captured."

Clancy quieted the start this gave him and said carelessly. "Aw, forget it. I was only kidding you."

He escorted his shadow back to his barracks.

"So Captain Daumier is an Alsatian, is he?" he mused. "And unless I'm a cock-eyed liar, he's the boy that set Lawton to thinking I was a wrong guy!" As he went in, he said, "But why the hell didn't Hash Cowan go up with the rest of the bunch? Or did he, and no one saw him!"

Carter Dykes was in the room when Clancy got back. He was sitting at the small table he had built into the wall, and forming a figure from putty with a slender-hafted, sharp tool.

Big Jim nodded to him. Dykes looked up at him, his face in the shadows of the special, intense light he had fastened for his work bench.

"It must be nice to have a hobby like that," Big Jim said, yawning and stretching out on his cot.

Dykes's eyes narrowed as he smiled.

"Hobby?" he echoed softly. "I used to fancy myself as something of a sculptor before the war. In the spring of '14, I took the Gold Medal in an exhibition at London."

Clancy grunted. "Excuse me, Professor," he said.

He undressed and was in bed early. Dykes was still working when he dropped off to sleep.

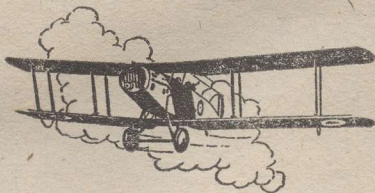
BIG JIM didn't know how much later it was that he awoke. He lay immobile for a minute, his eyes shut, trying to figure what sense of danger was warning him not to move.

After a while, he opened his eyes cautiously. He thought, at first, that the room was dark; then he saw the shadows cast by the closely shaded light in the corner of the room.

Dykes still sat there, working at his table. His back was to Clancy, but Big Jim could see him dip a brush, draw a few strokes, then dip it again. Clancy was about to shut his eyes again when something drew them to the window at the foot of his cot.

For a fleeting instant, Big Jim could have sworn he saw a face there, peering in at him. It was just a white blur against the dark night—but a familiar blur—and then it was gone. Dykes suddenly stood to his feet, pushing back his small bench. He walked to the window and pressed his face close against it. Then his head turned slowly toward Clancy.

Big Jim shut his eyes and tried not to laugh. He didn't want to, but he almost did laugh aloud; for he thought he recog-



nized the familiar silhouette of his 'shadow,' and evidently the snooper had disturbed Dykes at his work.

After a few minutes, he heard Dykes sit down again.

The next thing he heard was the bugle blowing *reveille*. As he got up, Clancy meditated that he had never heard a more sour rendering of the day's first bugle call.

Although Big Jim wasn't on till the afternoon flight, he had a piece of business he wanted to attend to.

"There's something phoney about the way those Boche planes hiked right over to the camouflage school," Clancy thought. "It's certain that they didn't *land* and pick up anything, either there or here; and they were too busy *here* to get any semaphore work from the ground. But maybe"—his mind clicked—"by God! That's what it was!

"Two Huns just flew around, while the third stood guard over them. And the two that flew around were probably getting signals, in some way, and taking the information back to Hunland! But it must be damned important if they were willing to toss all those ships and men away?"

His jaws were clamped in a tight vise when he started for the mess shack. But he stopped long enough to call Carter Dykes.

"Come on, sculptor," he said. "You've got some clouds to dust off this morning."

He ate a hurried breakfast, then set out on foot for the camouflage school. Major Lawton passed him as he went out, and Clancy had to give him a grudging salute. But he collected one from the Bugler-Sergeant as he hit for the gate, so that made him all even.

A mile down the road, he looked about him.

"What, no shadow?" he said. "Cripes, maybe I'd be able to use him, if this

French Captain is as phoney as I think he is."

At the school, he was challenged by the sentry.

"Just want to look around," he explained. "Do I need a pass, or something?"

The private saluted him respectfully, then grinned. "Ask 'em at headquarters," he said. "It's that small building with the flagpole in front of it."

Big Jim Clancy stared vacantly at the multi-colored sheds of the place and shook his head. "What flagpole?" he asked. "Where?"

The sentry said, "We're pretty good at making things look like what they ain't. Just walk on ahead and you'll see it!"

A hundred yards further along, Clancy stopped amazed.

A slender spire suddenly became apparent. Its base was the color of the grass around it, its center-section blended with the buildings immediately behind it, and its top was a sky blue.

"Pretty neat," Clancy approved. "No wonder I couldn't see it!"

Inside the building, he addressed the corporal on duty:

"My name is Clancy," he said. "I'm from Eighty-Eight Squadron. I wondered if I could look around and—"

A voice interrupted. "Can I assist ze Lieutenant?"

Big Jim turned slowly. Captain Daurmier stood behind him, his brown eyes unfriendly and watchful.

"I just wanted to have a look around," Clancy explained. "I'm not on duty right now, so I—"

"It is forbidden," the man told him, coldly.

Big Jim's ire got the better of him. "So is transmitting information to the enemy forbidden," he said harshly.

He saw a peculiar light glow in the man's eyes, and the next moment he was

sorry he had spoken. With a curt salute, he left the building.

But on the way out, he paused to admire once more the artistry of the men who made camouflages—the painted devices of all colors and schemes which served to make things look like what they were not—from the air.

Across the side of one shed there was painted a false landscape, blending beautifully with the trees beyond it. It's roof was a mass of green that Clancy knew looked like foliage from above. Everywhere, a riot of color greeted his eye—reds, blues, greens, yellows.

He slipped, suddenly, and looked down to see that his foot had gone down on a smear of paint, evidently sloshed over from an open bucket. He had some of the sticky stuff on his hand.

He reached into his hip pocket to bring out a handkerchief. With it came his 'rabbit's foot'—the red-strapped goggles which he had taken from the Fokker as a souvenir.

He shoved the glasses back in his pocket, wiped his hands dry, and went on his way.

He was half-way back to the field when the siren raised its eerie scream. A raid!

Clancy stood frozen in his tracks, wondering if he should make a break for the field or go back toward the camouflage school, to see if anything suspicious happened there.

"Duty comes first," he decided, and started toward the field on the run. He slowed down again when the siren died away, a puzzled look on his face.

"Now, what the hell do you call that?" he wondered.

From beyond the bend in the road, Clancy heard the sound of a motor. He thought at first that it was a plane; then realized it was an automobile traveling at high speed.

Acting purely on impulse, he looked

about for a place of concealment. Big Jim Clancy always obeyed his 'hunches,' and now he had a hunch that he should hide and see who was in that car.

"A siren—then a speeding automobile," Clancy added up the two facts. "Maybe—"

A few feet ahead of him was a small bridge over a culvert—a deep, dry ditch. Big Jim Clancy eased to the right of the road and dropped out of sight. He could hear the louder roar of the car now.

Cautiously, he stuck his head above the bank. He saw a large car coming down the road at a terrific pace—an olive-drab colored, closed car. He drew back and watched intently.

TO his amazement, the automobile didn't seem to have a driver as it came across the small bridge with a *br-o-ommm* that vibrated in Big Jim's ears and sent a cloud of dust down through the dirt-packed boards of the cross-over.

He swung with its passing, his eyes intent on it. Now that the car had passed, he could see a man sitting in the driving seat—could see, that is, a man's head. He was starting up the bank to resume his walk to the field when something under the bridge, and on the other side, caught his eye.

He looked and saw a tan shoe and part of a roll puttee.

He made his way over slowly, his eyes watching the roll puttee grow into a pair of olive drab pants, which, in turn, were succeeded by a jacket. The chevrons of a sergeant-bugler were visible on the left arm.

Then Clancy saw the face, the sightless, greenish-blue eyes that stared back at him.

"Meredith!" he exclaimed.

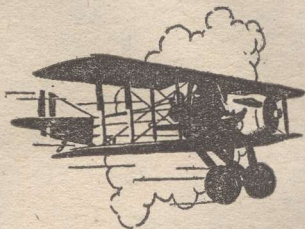
He lifted the head carefully, holding it by the hair, and looked for a wound. He

could find none. Puzzled, he turned the man over.

A dark stain was spread across the left breast of the man's jacket.

Swiftly, Clancy unbuttoned the blouse and stared with widening eyes at what he saw there. An ugly tear gaped in the man's shirt under the stain. Big Jim ripped the man's shirt and his undershirt.

"Shot through the heart at close range," Clancy saw. "And through his shirt and undershirt—but *not* through his jacket, which was buttoned over the wound!"



Once again, Big Jim Clancy was staring at a familiar acquaintance—murder!

He squatted on his haunches and thought carefully. "Nope; I'm damned sure the body wasn't here when I ducked under the other side. So—"

His brain clicked out a fact. "The car! No wonder I couldn't see the driver of the car. When he came over the bridge—" he paused. "When he came over the bridge, he was leaning over in his seat, getting the door open and easing the body out!"

His trained mind, working like a moving-picture projector, reeled off the series of pictures that his brain retained of the man Meredith.

"A lousy bugler, so he was probably a 'plant' of some sort. But what sort? Lawton sent him back in the truck with me, that time; and Lawton doesn't trust me, so he must trust him!"

He stared at the dead face for a moment, then murmured: "Meredith, Old Timer—I got a sneaking hunch that you're another Intelligence 'slot' man, like Jerry Rattery was—and that you got yours for knowing too much, or getting too close to *something*!"

His eyes narrowed slightly. "And if I'm right," he continued, "then your mur-

der puts me in a worse hole than ever."

A thought flashed into his head. "Could Meredith have been my shadow?" he wondered.

Clancy stood and looked about him for the man's hat. It was not in sight. He walked back and looked at the soles of his shoes. "Might be some dust on them; maybe he did walk here, after all."

But what he saw on the soles of those shoes made him squat down again and scrape at them. Peculiar streaks—blue and red and yellow and green streaks—

on those soles.

"Paint!" Big Jim Clancy exclaimed.

His thoughts leaped back to the camouflage school—to the paint he had got on his own shoes while just walking about there.

"So the camouflage school was interesting to Meredith, too," he decided. "And to Rattery."

He recalled Jerry Rattery's words at the Mess hall that night—"I've always noticed that people who mind their business live longest!" And Clancy had been talking about the camouflage school at the time.

Big Jim nodded slowly, but his eyes clouded when he considered the body at his feet.

"Did the guy that engineered this killing pull a terrible boner in buttoning that jacket over the wound? Or did he *have* to button it over and get panicked into dumping him before he was ready?"

He considered this point for some time, then shrugged. "It's anybody's guess," he said. "But mine is,—the guy that was smart enough to take Rattery and Meredith over isn't hammer-head enough to botch a job like this—not unless he intends to come back!"

Clancy pondered. "And if he *does*

come back, when his panic passes, and he finds that *someone else* is in on his secret—and he doesn't know who it is—he is liable to be stampeded into a false move that will give the whole show away!"

Clancy went through the dead man's pockets swiftly. He found a half-smoked packet of French cigarettes, a wick-and-flint lighter, a handkerchief,—plain white, with the initials *J. M.* marked in indelible ink—a small wad of French paper money, and some coins.

"Nothing interesting there," Clancy decided. Then his eyes fell on the bulge at the man's leg, behind the knee. He felt the spot, wondered at the hard object that was there. His fingers unwrapped the top of the puttee enough for him to get at the cause of the bulge.

"Goggles!" he exclaimed. He saw the red strap on them, and wondered at the darkness of the lenses.

"Damned if they're not ringers for the ones I took out of that Hun's pit. Excepting that these have dark lenses. Must be sun-goggles, or something like that."

He wondered what Meredith was doing with them, knowing that the man was not a pilot. But this he knew.

"If Meredith hid these things in his pants' leg, they must have meant *something!*"

He thought he heard the sound of a motor, and peered up and down the road. But there was nothing in sight.

He pulled his Colt's .45 from his right hip pocket and jammed the goggles where the gun had been. Swiftly, he threw off the safety catch and stooped over Meredith's body.

With his left hand, he held the jacket flap back, and from close range he fired a single slug through the stain in the cloth and into the ground. He set the gun on the ground and re-buttoned the jacket, turning the corpse over as he had found it.

"Wait till our murdering friend sees *that*," Big Jim thought, as he reached for his .45.

But he wasn't to pick it up.

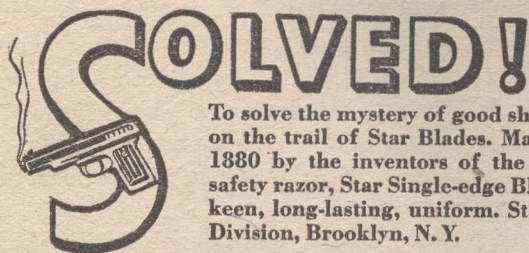
"Drop that gun!" a voice barked from behind. "Keep your hands clear—rise slowly—reach for the sky! That's it! Now, just turn around and walk *slowly* over this way!"

With his brain in a whirl, Clancy turned slowly, expecting to face Meredith's murderer.

But he saw Major Lawton, Major Darrow—the Intelligence Officer—Captain Daumier, of the Camouflage School, and a strange M. P. officer and a sergeant of the same service. It was the sergeant who held a heavy service automatic trained on him.

"You murdering dog!" Lawton snarled at him. "If it weren't for Regulations and these men here, I'd kill you on the spot!"

"Clancy," Major Darrow cut in, his



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eyes beady but his voice steady. "Clancy, you are under arrest for the murder of Jackson Meredith, ex-Secret Service man and a Captain in the U. S. Army Military Intelligence Service.

"Take him, men!"

CHAPTER FOUR

A Friendly Enemy

AS the big car drove back to the tarmac of Eighty-Eight, Clancy was wedged in the rear seat between the two Military Policemen. In front were Lawton and Darrow, with the latter at the wheel of the Cadillac. Captain Daumier had gone back to his command on foot, after Meredith's body had been removed by two more Intelligence Service men.

"Major Darrow," Clancy began, "may I tell you something?"

"All right, Petoskey," Darrow said without turning his head.

The sergeant on Clancy's right struck him a smashing blow on the right side of his face. Big Jim shook away the fog and sat silent a minute. Then:

"Well, can I ask you a question, then?"

"All right, Petoskey," Darrow said, in the same bored tone.

Another right-hand smash caught Clancy, this time full on the mouth. Big Jim wiped away the blood with the back of his hand. He shook his head. "Like old times," he muttered. "Only I'm on the receiving end, this time!"

At the field, Clancy was thrust into the small barracks that at one time had been his living quarters. Hale and Perkins had been evacuated for the purpose, there being no jail within twenty miles.

"Since all the trouble has been up here, we'll hold the inquiry here," Darrow told Lawton. "Probably execute him here, too."

Lawton said, "God, what a disgrace this is to my command!"

"Well, keep it quiet for a while yet," Darrow said. "I am sure Clancy is an accomplice—there's another man in this, some place, Lawton."

Clancy made one more desperate try. "Major Darrow," he said. "Won't you just let me say *one* thing?"

The sergeant made another move, but Darrow motioned to him.

"Let's hear it."

Clancy said, "It's just this: Meredith was thrown from a car that was speeding toward the camouflage school. I was hiding under that bridge when the car came along. I found the body, and decided to give the murderer something to think about,—if he came back."

Darrow's eyes were flinty. "Why were you hiding, and what do you mean by 'if some one came back'?"

Briefly, Clancy told him the story of his finding Meredith. Lawton and Darrow stared at one another, then smiled tightly.

"And why were you hiding?"

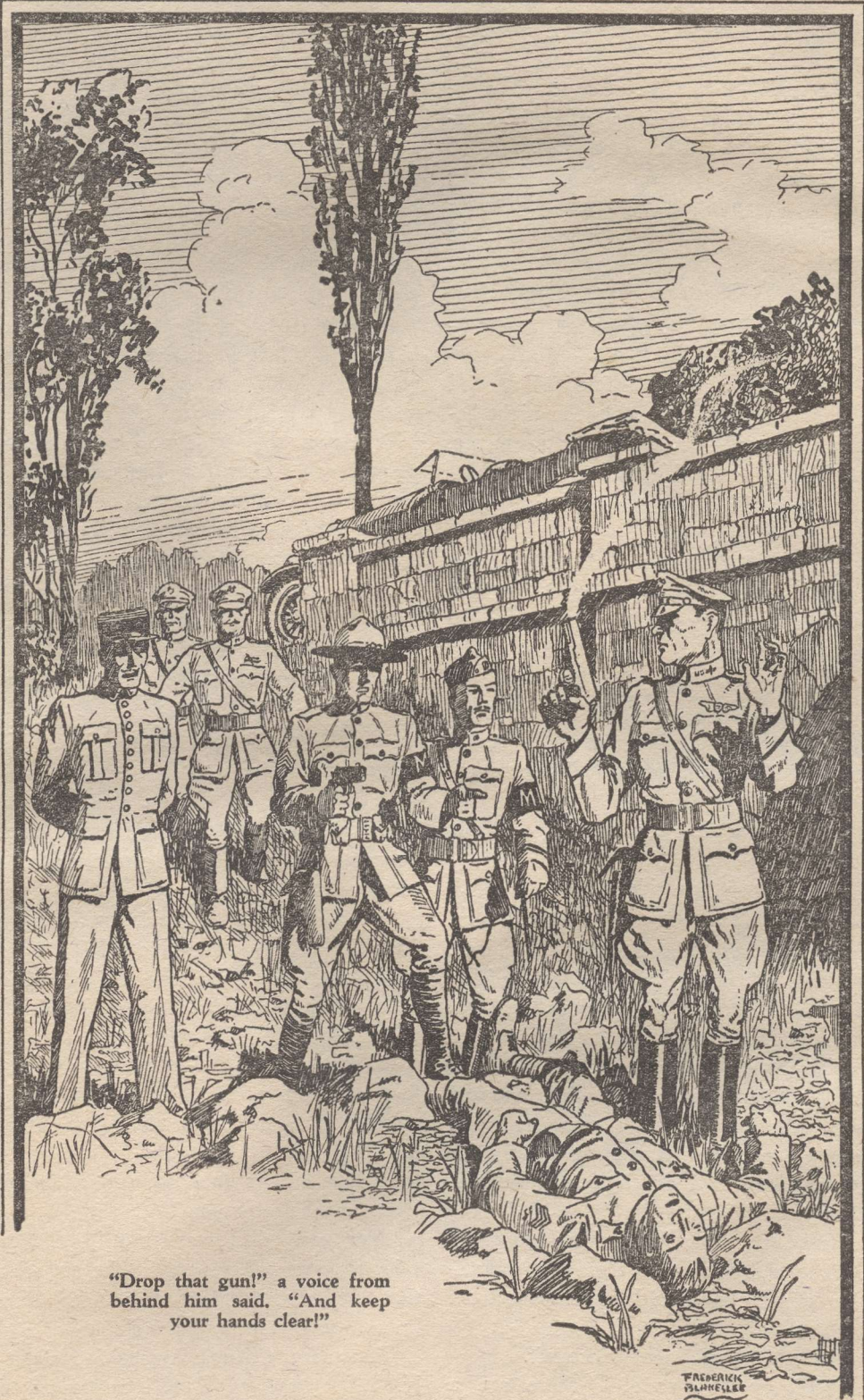
"I don't know," Clancy answered honestly. "It was just a hunch I had at the time. Frankly, I overheard you and Major Lawton talking about me and—Rattrey—the other day. I realized I was in a bad fix, and I was trying to work out of it."

Darrow smiled mirthlessly. "Well, keep trying to work out of it! On your own admission, you were prying into my business. Now, do you want to hear what we have on you?"

"Let it come," Clancy rapped, his eyes hard. "I've seen some dumb flatfeet in my day, but the Army takes the cake on this one. I tell you, you've got the wrong man!"

Darrow's eyes glittered, but he controlled his temper. "All right, Clancy, just tick these off—

"First—You had a run in with Rattrey in mess hall, the night before he was killed.



"Drop that gun!" a voice from
behind him said, "And keep
your hands clear!"

Never mind how I know—the point is, you did.

“Second—You were seen to exchange some sort of hand signal with the Germans, over the camouflage school.

“Third—a Spad shot down Rattrey; you say it was the other one, but you are the man who hustled over to Rattrey’s wreck.

“Fourth—You have been overanxious to get on flying duty since you got here. Why? To assist the enemy!

“Fifth—you were snooping around watching troop movements the night before that raid—*Yank* troop movements, getting set for the big push!

“Sixth—You were -snooping around the camouflage school.

“Seventh—Oh, hell, Clancy; didn’t we catch you red-handed over Meredith’s body, with your forty-five out, right after we heard a shot?”

Clancy persisted. “What about the car? Who drove a car from this field today, about the time”—he paused—“about the time that siren went off!” he remembered.

“Where were you then?” Darrow snapped at him.

“Just the other side of the bridge,” Clancy said. “On the way back here.”

Darrow stared a moment in silence. Then: “Clancy, what’s the use of all this? Meredith *did* drive from the field, on the way over to the camou—well, never mind where. And you met him on the road, got him to give you a lift, knocked him out, drove the car to where we found it in the woods, and retraced your steps—and killed Meredith! That’s the picture!”

And Clancy was forced to admit it was a black one. “It’ll take a greater ‘mouth-piece’ than ever lived to spring me from this,” he knew.

But he had only one chance left.

“Major,” he pleaded, “there are a

couple of men I want to talk to, and then maybe I can clear myself and help you get your man. How about it?”

Darrow considered the proposition for a moment, then drew Major Lawton to one side. Clancy could guess that he was saying:

“Let him talk to any men he wants! We’ll keep an eye on them, and maybe we’ll get the other fellow that’s in this.”

At any rate, Darrow turned back to him. “That’ll be all right. Let the sergeant here know whom you want to see, and we’ll send them along.”

But when they had gone, a feeling of despair came over Big Jim. He stared out the window at the sentry who patrolled the front of the small building, and knew that there were others.

It was hopeless—but Clancy was going to try, to the last breath in his body, to get out of this mess.

He said to the Military Police sergeant:

“Find out if Lieutenant Cowan is around, will you?”

THE Sergeant stayed close to them when Hash Cowan came into the room.

“Hi, Clancy,” Hash said, trying to be jovial. “Tough going, old lad. What happened—did Meredith blow one too many of his sour notes? Or did he sound reveille too early?”

Clancy frowned. “Listen, Cowan, I’m fighting for my life. How about giving me a break and being serious for a minute?”

Hash Cowan’s face sobered. “Sorry. What can I do for you?”

“You can tell me the truth,” Clancy said, simply. “Were you in the air after that *alerte* the other morning? You know, when Rattrey got killed?”

Clancy saw Cowan’s eyes flicker slightly. “Must you know that?” the man asked

him softly. "Is it—life or death to you to know it?"

"I think it is," Clancy answered him steadily.

Cowan was silent. Then, "All right, Clancy—I wasn't. I funk'd it. Those *alertes*—with their damned sirens and gongs — well, they just do something to me. I've heard so many of them, I guess. Another man took my ship, but—"

"But what?"

"I gave my word of honor I wouldn't tell who it was," Cowan said, simply. "This other man said he was on secret duty, and didn't want it known that he went up. Frankly, Clancy—I've got to believe him. After all, old man, you're not exactly—er—without suspicion, you know."

Clancy grimaced, but he had to admit the truth of the thing. "Where were you during the raid, will you tell me that?" he asked.

Cowan considered. "I was sitting in this other fellow's room," he said finally. "I amused myself by painting a picture of the *estaminet* proprietor's daughter—as I wished she looked. For his recompense in taking my place, I left him the picture, autographed with my name. I'm not a bad artist, you know."

A gong seemed to ring somewhere in Clancy's brain, and he looked up sharply. But the flash, or whatever it was, was gone the next minute.

"Thanks, Cowan," he said. "I guess that's all you can do."

"Sorry, but it is," Hash Cowan said. "Well—good luck!"

"And that man, whoever he is, is the *Fourteenth Man*!" Clancy knew.

He sat deep in thought for several hours before he stirred. But the longer he puzzled, the worse the picture looked. An orderly brought a simple dinner on a

tray. Clancy looked at it and took off the coffee.

"I can't eat," he said. "Can you bring me a good, big pot of coffee? No use in my trying to sleep to-night—I have to *think*!"

At about ten o'clock he looked up suddenly. "Sergeant," he said, "I want to talk with Private Snipe Schmidt, a mechanic."

"Okay," the man said, and relayed the message. In ten minutes, the diminutive ex-crook padded into the big room.

"Hello, Clancy," he said. He tried hard not to grin. "Gee—I'm not tryin' to be funny, but it *is* a twist, ain't it—you in the clink?"

Big Jim smiled and said, "Yeah. Now listen, Snipe—I've done you a couple of good turns in the old days, haven't I?"

Snipe grinned. "That time some other gang knocked off the engraving plant I was workin' in, casin' it, you got me off. An' this last time, when I jumped into the Army."

"All right," Big Jim said. "And now, Snipe, you're going to pay me back!"

"Shoot," the little man said.

"First, tell me this: are you *sure* Dykes didn't go up, or Cowan? Or that Jap Scoville didn't get another ship?"

Snipe scratched his head. "Scoville didn't go up," he said. "He went off to headquarters, an' I seen him later wit' Lawton."

"Check," Clancy said.

"Cowan—I didn't see at all." He paused. "Hey! Come to think of it, a ship took off from pretty well up the line—away off from us. But I didn't see who that was. I remember now,—I looked and wondered if maybe it was a 'B' Flight man."

"Oh, my God," Clancy groaned. "Now 'B' Flight is in it! Go on."



"An' you took Dykes ship yourself, remember? I told him, 'Take this one'—meanin' Rattrey's Spad—but he says, 'To hell with it.'"

Big Jim shook his head. "Just as well he didn't," remembering that Rattrey's gun had been spiked.

"Now, listen to this, Snipe—I want you to go through every room of every pilot in this place—every one, get it? What I want you to look for is a painting of a girl—probably with a few clothes on, but certainly a swell looker. It will be signed by Hash Cowan. Now, just make out you're after the Van Astor jewels, and do your stuff."

Snipe scratched his head again. "Cheez, Clancy, I think you're off your trolley! Here you sit wit' a murder charge hangin' over you, an' all you're worried about is some dame's picture."

Big Jim grabbed the man by one of his pipelike arms. "Finding that picture will save my life, Snipe," he said, seriously. "Now, will you just do what I ask you, and not question it?"

Snipe grinned. "Okay, Clancy. But it's the first time a copper ever invited me to do second-story work!"

CHAPTER FIVE

Camouflaged Killers

CLANCY awoke with a start. He didn't know where he was for a minute, then he saw the Military Police sergeant nodding in his chair.

Big Jim sat up on his bunk. He was still fully dressed. It was dark outside; four o'clock, his wrist watch said.

He remembered, when he looked through the window into the dark, that there was something on his mind that connected with the word 'glass'.

"The goggles!"

He started to pull the ones out of his left hip pocket, but remembered that they

were broken—his good luck charm! He smiled bitterly. From his right hip pocket he took those which he had found on Meredith.

He stared at them curiously, turning them in his hand. Again he noticed the dark lenses. He held the things to his eyes and wondered if the light had suddenly been turned off. He took them away, but the lights were still on.

"How the hell can anyone see through these things?" he wondered. "They blot out everything."

He looked around the room and saw a garishly painted calendar that had been tacked to the wall—more for the beauty of the girl illustrated than for any concern for the date, Clancy knew.

He held the goggles to his eyes, looking toward the calendar. He was taking them off when something arrested him.

"What the hell?" he muttered, moving closer to the picture.

He raised the goggles again, stared at the picture through them.

"That's funny," he muttered. "Everything fades out except the blue of her sash and her eyes."

He took them down again, his brain struggling with the oddity. He turned, saw the blue brassard on the M. P.'s arm. He raised the things to his eyes once more. Everything about the man—his uniform, his gun, his hat even, faded from Clancy's goggled eyes—

Only the blue brassard was visible.

A bell rang in his brain. Big Jim had had a friend in the engraving business, and had heard something about—what was it—?

"What do they call those things they use to bring out only one color at a time?" he wondered. "Is it—*separating* glasses? But what the hell are separating glasses doing in goggles?"

He shrugged, and was putting the things back in his pocket when a new

train of thought rumbled into his mind.

"A Boche pilot with separating glasses, flying over the camouflage school—and able to see only one color—blue!"

Clancy's eyes widened. "Great God!" he breathed. "Maybe, in some way, the spy is getting messages on those camouflages—in blue! And the Huns blast their way in just to get a reading on them!"

The enormity of the thing robbed him of the power of speech or movement for a moment. "The entire American attack could be blasted to bits that way."

The door at the far end of the room—near where the Military Police sergeant was dozing in his chair—was swinging slowly open on silent hinges.

Clancy found his feet instantly and tiptoed toward the door, then stopped short, puzzled. A voice was calling to him in a whisper. "Clancy!" he heard the hoarse whisper. "Clancy—here's your chance to make a get-away!"

Clancy wondered for a minute if it was Snipe Schmidt—Snipe, who probably valued a 'get-away' more than anything else in his life. But he changed his mind when he saw the officer's braid on the sleeve of the arm that reached through the door, toward the sleeping guard.

And then he saw the clubbed Colt's .45 that the man gripped in his hand. Before he could move another step or even cry out, that hand rose and fell with a sickening smash.

The copper fell forward, knocked cold.

"Come on!" the voice whispered, still from behind the door. "You haven't a minute to lose!"

The thought of those camouflaged sheds, with their probable messages, came back to Clancy with an overpowering rush. "I've got to take this chance," he muttered, sliding nearer the door.

As he reached out his hand for the knob, the light in the hall went out. It was dark as night there. Clancy pulled the portal open.

"Come on!" the voice whispered. "They'll get you if—"

Clancy stepped out into the dark hallway and something struck him a stunning blow on the left side of his head. Big Jim stumbled to his right, tried to catch himself—and then slumped to the floor, semi-unconscious.

He felt a hand fumbling in his hip pocket, but was powerless to stop it; from far away, he heard a door close. Then—darkness.

Snipe Schmidt was bending over him. "Clancy! Hey, Clancy! Come on, ya big mug, what happened?"

With Snipe's help, Big Jim got to his feet, his head splitting with pain. He stared dumbly at Schmidt a moment, then asked thickly:

"Was that you who socked me?"

"Me?" Snipe echoed. "Say, lissen, Clancy—I may be a crook, but I ain't no

So much more

ENJOYMENT

- WHEN YOU

SAY-PABST

cop-fighter! I got too much sense for that. What happened? The two sentries are gone from outside. And where's your guard?"

Clancy held his hand to his forehead a moment, then said:

"The guard was knocked out. I remember now—it was an officer! In some way, he got to the sentries, too."

Snipe shook his head. "Well, it looks like you're in a jam for fair. They'll never believe your story." He paused, then said, "And lissen, Clancy—what's the idea of kiddin' me on that picture?"

Big Jim felt the strength and the sense of life flow back into his brain and body.

"Hold it!" he said. "That man—he went after my goggles as soon as he had me down." He felt his left hip pocket. It was empty! A light leaped into his eyes.

"He got the wrong goggles!" he breathed. He pulled the dark-lensed pair from his right hip pocket. "I still have a chance, Snipe!"

"But, Clancy," Snipe persisted, "what was the idea of kiddin' me about *where* I'd find that picture? You told me, 'Every room,' so after I did my high-class stuff in all the others an' couldn't find it—I ha' only one place left to look."

Clancy took the square of pencilled lines and colored-in face and legs of a pretty girl. In the lower left-hand corner, it was inscribed: *By Hash Cowan.*

"This is it," he said. "This marks the Fourteenth Man, Snipe! Where did you get it—whose room?"

Snipe grinned and winked slyly. "You wouldn't kid me, would you, Clancy?"

"What?"

Clancy thought a split second; then: "It was—the room was—empty?"

Snipe nodded, and the next second was jerked nearly off his feet when Clancy grabbed his arm and ran for the door. "He's probably on his way to the hangars now," he shouted. "He was up here,

knocking me out and looking for the goggles, while you were going through—*our room!*"

Together, they raced for the tarmac. Clancy's mind clicked off a series of logical pictures.

—"Don't let Rattrey get under your skin"—The man who wouldn't fly Rattrey's ship, because he *knew*—The man who flew only a red-nosed Spad, and who exchanged reassuring hand-signals with the Boche—The man who blasted the Huns he worked for, rather than take a chance that the goggles would fall into hands that would *know*—The man who roomed with Rattrey at the time he was killed—The man who was *painting*—not sculpturing—when Meredith pressed his face to the window—the Fourteenth Man was—

Clancy yelled, "It fits! You found the picture in my room, Snipe? *Carter Dykes is our man!*"

From the hangar at the far right came the muffled bark of a motor.

THEY raced the last few feet to 'A' Flight's hangar in silence. But as they wrestled the doors back, Clancy snapped:

"Get this, Snipe—when I take off, you slam right over to Major Lawton's and tell him to get the whole damned squadron up! Mind you, not just one flight, but the whole shooting match!"

"Tell him I've gone after Dykes—and that the Boche point of interest is the camouflage school. Tell him to lead the squadron over the school to stand off any possible raid—because if the Huns get there, it may mean 'curtains' to the entire American Army!"

He jumped for the pit of a Spad whose propeller was kissing the door. In a second, he had the choke pulled out.

"Spin her once or twice, Snipe!"

The little man whipped the propeller

over and sucked a charge of gasoline into the carburetor. "Con-tact," he shouted.

"Con-tact!"

But in that split second he had heard the full throated roar of the ship in that other hangar—the get-away ship.

The Hiss kicked over, bucked, and then picked it up with a bellow that brought it out of the hangar fast. Snipe Schmidt ducked under the wing and raced madly on his errand to Major Lawton.

Clancy stood on his rudder-bar to head the ship for her take-off. The night was graying into dawn as he jammed the stick forward. Out of the tail of his eye, he could see a red streak paralleling his own, several hundred feet to the right. He knew it for the short-stemmed exhausts of that other Spad.

Big Jim hauled his speedy fighter off the ground, and after a short climb, he banked hard and nosed in a line diagonally ahead of the other.

Rat-tat-tat-tat!

Clancy saw the other whirl in a desperate skidding turn and come at him across the space between the ships. But Big Jim had thrown lead with too many tough gangsters to take any backwash now. It wasn't in his make-up.

He smashed his own trip down again, and held it, even when a hot poker seared his shoulder and another smashed the hand that was on the stick. Steadily, Big Jim changed hands and came on.

Rat-tat-tat-tat!

Dykes' ship wavered, then nosed down in a fast dive. Clancy whipped into a steep wing-over and was in time to see Dykes fight the crate into a flatter glide. He saw the bus touch its wheels to the ground—bounce—touch again then slue to the right in a mean ground-loop. It buckled over the left wheel, stood on its nose, and slowly eased down on its back.

Carter Dykes went down just as the sun inched up over the horizon.

Clancy whipped his Spad around and raced toward the hangars. All hell had broken loose at Eighty-Eight. Men were running out on the field toward the wreck that was Dykes' Spad; others hauled ships from the hangars and lined them up speedily, men were running from the barracks, pulling on helmets and goggles.

By dint of a lot of squirming and a painful moment when he held the stick with his right wrist, Big Jim got the dark-lensed goggles out of his right hip pocket with his left hand. He slipped the things on, and for a moment he thought he was in entire darkness.

But after a brief interval he could make out vaguely, the landscape below.

As he zoomed up to the painted buildings, his eyes focused on an object that appeared to be a spike painted in heavy outline, on one of them. He stared—and it became a bayonet!

Cleverly interwoven with the other colors on the shed, it could be seen only by the use of the color separating goggles.

Clancy raised the goggles and gasped when he saw that bayonet had disappeared, for it blended in with the other colors on the roof. He slipped the goggles back over his eyes again. Something else caught his eyes—

"What the hell!" he muttered, staring. "Are those—*numbers!*" He whipped his bus around and raced back again. "Hundred-and-Seven; Two-Hundred-sixty-five; One-Hundred-Seventy-seven!" he read.

He frowned, then his face cleared. "Infantry designations," he guessed. "Good God! They even have the regiments marked!"

He was turning away when another outline, on the building beyond, caught



his eye. He shouted. "A cannon! Artillery, and the artillery regimental numerals!"

Clancy whipped his Spad toward the field. He had seen enough! The thing to do now was to get the squadron to stand guard over those fateful signs and numerals while the camouflages were torn down and destroyed.

He felt a wave of weakness coming over him, and wondered if he could make it.

And then he saw it—that swarm of Yank fighting planes that stormed up from the tarmac of Eighty-Eight and swept along. Clancy saw that they were cutting slightly to his left, as if drawing a bead on something.

He stared over his shoulder. Far to the east he could see a swarm of planes rising over the tree-tops. He started to turn, to fall in with his mates, but realized the futility of it. Anyway, Eighty-Eight appeared to be twice the strength of the attackers.

CLANCY eased the ship down on the tarmac and brought it to a stop near his hangar. Snipe Schmidt rushed out, with a dozen men at his heels, to help him down.

Major Darrow was among them. The Intelligence officer walked up and stared keenly at Clancy. "Hurt badly?" he asked.

Big Jim shook his head. "I'm all right," he said. "A little weak, that's all. Where's Dykes?"

Major Darrow pointed to an ambulance that stood on the hangar road. "He's dying; no use roughing him up with a run to a hospital. He's beyond help."

Big Jim Clancy nodded. "He didn't—he—?"

Darrow said, "He talked a bit, when we got him out of the wreck. Made a full confession. He was a German, raised in America. His right name was 'D-y-s-c-h-e-s-s'. He was painting the devices, in miniatures, and passing them along to a confederate at the camouflage school, who transferred them to the already painted sheds. Pretty neat trick."

Big Jim gave Darrow the goggles. "Here are the 'readers,' " Major. Why don't you call the school and tell 'em to get the stuff down?"

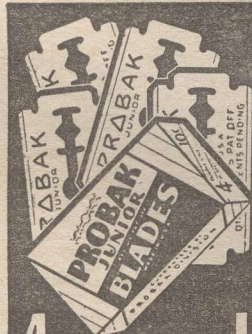
"It's been done," Darrow said. He paused, then added, "And the last thing Dykes—or Dyschess—said, was: 'It's that damned flatfoot that messed things up.' " He was looking queerly at Clancy.

"The Intelligence Service can use a man like you."

"Yeah?" Big Jim grunted, as he leaned on Snipe's shoulder and started for the ambulance. "And the Intelligence Service can get on without me, too!

"I'm not a copper, Major—I'm a pilot!"

THE END



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by ROBERT J. HOGAN

*The Vulture is the bird of Death—
and Von Zeit flew from Hell itself
on the bloody wings of madness!
He left his grisly calling card on the
field of the Ninety Sixth—and
"Clipper" Dean accepted the dare
—and signed his name in Steel!*

"CLIPPER" DEAN, acting C. O. of the 96th Yank Pursuits, picked up the three cards scaled his way and compared them with the two he already held in his hand. The new cards didn't help a bit. Nevertheless he chuckled aloud.

"At last we collect!" he said. "Come on, you suckers, who wants to pay twenty francs to see what I have?"

There was nothing but silence from the four other players seated about the mess lounge table. Clipper scowled and unconsciously balled one fist. The silence wasn't because the others had nothing that rated meeting his bluff. On the contrary, it was because not one of them was even looking at his cards. As a matter of fact, the fourteen wind bronzed and war scarred pilots in the room were merely staring into space.

Clipper deepened his scowl and tossed his cards on the table.

"Snap out of it, fellows!" he said sharply. "Stafford would be the last one to want us to moan around like this. Hell, he may be perfectly okay. But, if he's gone west—we've still got a war to win."

A big brick-top across the table, Lieutenant Parker on the official records, but "Red" to his pals, cursed softly and

The German raised his hands in surrender.

snubbed out a half smoked cigarette with a savage gesture.

"Clipper!" he growled. "Any other brood but von Zeit's! That dirty skunk! If he got Stafford alive—I!"

Parker seemed unable to finish. He clamped his teeth shut and glared at the table top. Clipper Dean made no comment. There really wasn't any he could make.

Two days ago a new German squadron had moved up in front of Ninety Six. That is, a new squadron as far as most of the pilots were concerned. But it wasn't new to Dean and Parker, and several other veterans. Since his first appearance on the French Front in '16, Baron Hermann von Zeit had proved himself a man without a heart. Rather, he had proved himself to be nothing more than a two legged animal who lived only to create indescribable suffering and hideous death.

In no time at all he became despised and loathed by the majority of the Imperial German Air Service. But there were a number who acclaimed his deadly deeds, and among those were certain officials high up in German G.H.Q. And so von Zeit was given a free hand to wage his own type of war, and wage it he did.

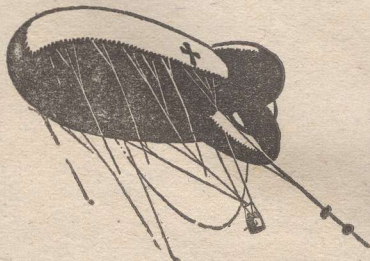
'No prisoners,' was his motto. Kill them, regardless. And the more ingenious the method of inflicting death the greater the impression created upon the enemy.

The trail of death von Zeit and his brood left behind was beyond description. And two days ago the trail had reached the sector that the Ninety Sixth patrolled. Having met von Zeit before, and having been fortunate to come out all even, Clipper had warned the younger pilots to stick with the formation, and under no circum-

stances fall into any trap von Zeit might set.

For five patrols nothing had happened. But the sixth, the one completed not three hours ago, had been different. A two month fledgling,—a young lad named Stafford who bid fair to become a first rate pilot, had unconsciously allowed himself to be cut out of the patrol formation

by three of von Zeit's pilots. Before the rest of the gang could wheel and race to the kid's rescue, von Zeit and a few more of his crowd had piled down and forced Stafford over onto the German side. There they had beat him down to earth.



Not beaten him down in flames to his death—that wouldn't have been so bad! But the Germans had forced him to land, and had taken him prisoner.

And the possible fate of young Stafford was the sole burning question in the mind of every Ninety Sixth pilot.

"Perhaps von Zeit has changed his methods," Clipper finally grunted. "I heard a rumor that the German high command was clamping down on his treatment of prisoners. They were afraid we might retaliate. So snap out of it, fellows! We can only wait. If he's sent to a prison camp the Red Cross will get word through to us. In the meantime—"

Dean didn't finish. At that moment there came a sound that every man in the room recognized instantly. It was the low throbbing beat of Mercedes powered, night bombing Gotha. In a flash everyone was on his feet and racing toward the door. Clipper reached it first, smashed it open and tore out into the blackened night. He opened his mouth to roar to the ground pit and searchlight crews, but snapped it shut when he saw the mechanics rushing for their posts.

Pulling up short, he clenched his fists helplessly and peered agate-eyed up toward the ink shadowed skies. A man less calm would have gone hell bent for his ship, but Clipper knew that before the greaseballs could haul it out and get the engine warm, the Gotha could fly to Paris and back. As a matter of fact, that was probably where the bomber was headed. Paris was about sixty five miles due west of the Ninety Sixth field, and this wasn't the first time that the big ships had passed over on their way to the French capital.

"There's just one up there," Clipper heard Red Parker grunt. "Does the sap think he can get away with it solo? The Paris anti-aircraft boys will smack his wings off."

"Yeah," Clipper nodded. "He—, what the hell, he's cut his engine! By God, he's gliding down this way! Look out, everybody! Stand ready to take to the bomb shelters! Sergeant, what the hell's the matter with those searchlights?"

AS THOUGH the last had been some sort of a signal, the two searchlights mounted at opposite corners of the field burst into being and sent their long shafts of brilliance probing aloft. In a matter of seconds, the light at the right "caught" the gliding Gotha and ringed it completely. At that instant the ground pit gunners started yammering hissing slugs at the crate. But the pilot of the German plane was smart. He leveled off, just out of machine gun range, and went coasting lazily across the field.

Suddenly, those on the ground saw a bulky object drop from the belly of the plane. Another second, and billowing folds of parachute silk pulled out from the "barrel" container fitted to the Gotha and caught in the wind.

"Look!" someone shouted. "There's a

man hanging to those shroud lines! He's going to land right on the field!"

The words were a waste of breath. Everyone had his eyes fixed on the limp figure swaying and twisting in the air at the end of the lines. And what was perhaps even more important, everyone saw that the dangling figure wore the uniform of the Yank Air Service.

Dully realizing that the Gotha's engines had been revved up, and that the plane was winging swiftly away into the darkness, Clipper stared at the man dangling from the parachute, and tiny fingers of ice coiled about his heart. He joined the others who were rushing out to where the parachute jumper would land. The searchlights had been pulled off the Gotha and were now shooting horizontal beams across the field.

Face grim, eyes like orbs of granite, Clipper put on a burst of speed and reached the jumper just as he touched ground, and collapsed in a limp heap.

"Stand back!" Dean roared. "And hold everything!"

Catching the parachute silk and "slipping it" before the ground wind had a chance to drag the jumper across the field, Clipper gently rolled the figure over and peered down into the white, death-frozen face of young Stafford! In the middle of the youth's forehead was a tiny blue hole that told everything. Impulsively, though, Clipper pulled open the tunic at the chest. He started to feel for the heart and stopped the movement with a low moan. Thoughts spinning crazily in his head, he looked at the chest. It was smeared with semi-congealed blood, but the two letters branded into the flesh stood out strongly against the light skin. The letters were "VZ".

"VZ! Von Zeit! By God, he branded Stafford! He branded him and then shot him. It's his warning to us—to the next man he catches! I'll—I'll—I!"

The words babbled out incoherently from Red Parker's trembling lips. His eyes were glazed, and in their depths was the stark look of a man on the brink of going completely to pieces,—the look of a man who has seen death just once too often.

Straightening up, Clipper whirled, streaked out his right hand and smashed the palm against Parker's cheek.

"Hold it, Red!" he barked. "Hold it, man!"

The big redhead stood stock still. Crimson flooded the spot where Clipper's hand had struck. He growled in his throat, took one menacing step forward, and then suddenly blinked and relaxed.

"Sorry, Clipper," he mumbled. "But it got me for a minute. The kid was my friend. Knew him back home,—knew his whole family. God, it's awful!"

"It's hell!" Clipper said through clenched teeth. "But falling apart won't help. In a way, I guess it's my fault. I wasn't on that patrol. If I had been, maybe they wouldn't have cut him out. Anyway, I'm taking it as personal. Stafford's the last man von Zeit and his rats get from Ninety Six—unless they get me. Red, you're taking over in my place."

"Huh? Listen, Clipper, you—"

"Shut up, and obey orders!" Dean snapped. "And that goes for all of you. Only one plane is flying tomorrow,—mine! I know a way I can bring von Zeit out into the open. Anyway, I'm going to try it."

"Don't be a dope!" Parker shouted. "I don't care if you are my C.O., I'm not going to let you stick your face into a basket of Spandau slugs. Not alone, anyway. Me,—I'm in on everything you do. That's final!"

Clipper smiled thinly, walked closer to the redhead and placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Not a chance, old man," he said quiet-

ly. "My way has got to be solo. It's a trick I heard about when I was with the French. I'm going to stick a can of oil rags near the end of the exhaust by my pit. When I slip into a dive and don't open the compensator throttle, the flames will touch off the rags just enough to make them smoke. I can always pull the can off and toss it away."

"A can of oil rags?" Red Parker echoed dumbfoundedly. "What the hell's the idea of that?"

"Close your trap a minute and I'll explain," Clipper grunted. "It's well known to even the Germans that we've been having trouble with the Viper-Hisso engines in the new S.E.5's. They heat up too much. Well, there you are. I'll find von Zeit, and touch off the can of rags. He'll fall for it like two ton of brick. An easy cold meet kill for him—so *he'll* think. He'll figure I'm on fire and come after me alone, don't worry. And then—"

The acting C. O. stopped and stared down at the dead pilot.

"And then maybe *I'll* do a little branding," he said softly.

"You're crazy, Clipper!" Parker shouted. "Supposing it doesn't work?"

Dean looked up at the night shrouded skies to the east.

"If it doesn't," he said in a flat voice, "then it will be your turn, Red. But I'm taking my turn first."

THE cold grey light of dawn had driven night into oblivion down over the western lip of the world as Clipper Dean made a final check of his plane and nodded shortly at the two mechanics holding the chock ropes. Without a word they yanked them away and scurried out from in front of the S.E.'s. wings as Clipper goosed the engine and rolled out onto the field. Taxiing around into the wind, he took a last snap glance at everything and then rammed the throttle wide open.

As he arced up and around toward the west, he didn't once twist in the seat and glance down back at the field. He knew that the entire squadron stood in front of the mess watching him wing eastward toward his hoped-for meeting with von Zeit. When he saw them again, it would be when he was flying westward, or else it would be at that place where all dead pilots meet.

Therefore he kept his eyes fixed steadfastly on the eastern horizon, and silently urged his plane onward. That he would meet von Zeit he had not the slightest doubt. The point was to sight the German and his brood first. If he did that he could take his time touching off the can of oil rags fitted to the fluted mouth of the right bank exhaust and draw the German out of formation at will.

However, the best laid plans of mice and war pilots often go haywire. And they did in the case of Clipper Dean. Plowing through a sluggish cloud bank about half a mile on the Yank side of No Man's Land, he suddenly came out into the open less than a hundred yards from a seven plane Fokker formation prop clawing the air straight toward him. One flash glance at the bright yellow snout of the lead plane, and the streamers of the same color that weaved back through the jet black fuselage to the rudder post, told him instantly that his meeting with von Zeit had arrived.

Not only arrived,—it had come and gone! Instantly, the air shivered with the yammer of Spandaus guns and unseen messengers of death zipped through the S.E.'s fabric and whined past Clipper's ears. Caught off guard for a second, he cursed savagely and started to wheel over and down in a wing screaming half roll. But in the next instant he laughed harshly, kicked the rudder so that the plane skidded crazily to the side, then dipped

the nose and kept his hand from the compensator throttle.

"This is even better!" he shouted above the roar of the engine. "I can make it look like the real thing,—make the bums think they've nailed me!"

Without the compensator throttle open to blow out the cylinders when the plane was in the dive, semi-exploded gas streaked out through the exhaust flutes in ribbons of flame. And in a matter of seconds the heat had touched off the oil rags in the can fastened over the flutes. Ducking low in the pit, Clipper grinned at the billowy smoke that spewed upward and held the plane in its dive for a full one thousand feet.

Then he rammed open the compensator throttle, hauled the stick back and sent the plane screaming heavenward in the first half of a gigantic loop. Completely fooled by the smoke, von Zeit pulled his yellow snouted plane out from the formation and zoomed upward, both guns blazing. Holding the S. E. on its back, Clipper looked down and grimly waited for the German to swing up into range. At the same time he tapped the rudder bar this way and that to create the impression of a fear crazed pilot striving to get his plane into a position where side-wash would drive the smoke and flames away from the cockpit.

Suddenly, without warning it happened. The intense heat had half melted the wires that held the can of rags to the exhaust flutes. They let go and the whole business went tumbling downward, leaving the S.E. clearly silhouetted against the blue sky above.

Desperately, Clipper kicked the ship over and down and went tearing hell bent after von Zeit. But the German had seen through the trick just in time. And he wasn't having anything to do with a pilot who really could scrap; who wasn't helpless in a flaming ship. Like a streak of

lightning that's been kicked in the pants, von Zeit went tearing back to the safety of his formation. And the members of that formation came tearing across the sky to his rescue.

Cheated out of his chance to even up for young Stafford, Clipper Dean hurled his plane blindly after the fleeing von Zeit.

If only the can of oil rags had held on for a few more seconds he would have drawn the German up within range. But it hadn't, and now von Zeit had a lead that



was much too great for the S.E. Nevertheless, Clipper kept on flying, and in so doing he plowed smack into a ring of death. Too late he realized that the Germans had swung into line formation and that the left and right flanks had circled about him. And then with his plane in the center, the sole target for every German pilot, the Fokkers wheeled in at him and showered down Spandaus slugs.

"Not yet you haven't!" Clipper howled and wheeled into a lightning split-arc. "I'll out-fly any dozen of you, any day in the week."

Words,—crazy, reckless words that spilled from his lips as he savagely spun this way and that seeking a loophole through the curtain of death. And in his heart he knew they were just that. He'd had his chance, and he'd lost. The Grim Reaper was reaching out blood dripping fingers to gather him in. True, he might take a brace of Fokker pilots along with him. But his number was up. Yeah! It was up to Red and the boys now. He hadn't even reached first base.

With the cold realization that death was his only hope firmly fixed in his brain, he tossed the last ounce of caution over the side and concentrated upon nothing but the carrying with him, to Hell or elsewhere, as many as he could.

In as many minutes his score was two. Neither, however, was von Zeit. The German killer was taking no chances. Once his brood had formed the trap, he had pulled out into the clear to circle about until the helpless victim had been "doctored" up for the final kill. The sight of the yellow snouted plane, through the red film that blurred his eyes, fired Clipper to berserk attempts to break through the ring of Fokkers and get just one crack at von Zeit.

But he might just as well have tried to dive through the earth and come out in China. Von Zeit's vultures had been well trained. They showered the S. E. with slugs. They pecked at the wings, at the fuselage, at the tail. Each burst weakening the plane just a wee bit more, until finally it would fall apart in mid-air and dump out its doomed pilot. Then, and then only, von Zeit would charge in and riddle the wind whipped body as it tumbled end over end to the earth.

Realizing full well that would be his kind of a finish, Clipper summoned every last ounce of fighting skill for one final desperate effort to break through. But as he charged straight at an all green Fokker, his Vickers spewing out flame and bullets, the guns went silent, and the firing pin of each clicked against the breech block of an empty firing chamber. Both belts had fed through the feed blocks to the very last bullets.

A glance was all Clipper needed. He relaxed, forced a grin to his strained lips and looked up at the circling Fokkers.

"It is your day!" he grated. "Make the most of it. There'll be others.

ABSOLUTELY devoid of this thing called fear, he slumped back in the seat and grimly waited for the shower of

burning spears of pain that would pierce his body. But none came. As though at some silent signal the Fokkers stopped shooting and went roaring about in their unending circle trap. For a second Clipper gaped at them wide eyed, and then he saw von Zeit's yellow snouted Fokker slide in along side his right wings. The German had flung his left hand over the side and was pointing toward the German side of the lines.

"So you can go to work on me, butcher?" Clipper shouted. "The hell you will! I'll ram you—right here and *now!*"

As he spoke the words he wheeled his ship around on a wingtip. Little good that did. Von Zeit had been flying in war skies for too many months. He knew all the tricks. And what was even more important, he was always on the alert for them. As a result, he zoomed up into the clear before Clipper could come out of his bank. Then down he came and slapped a warning burst across in front of the Yank's nose, and once more pointed at the ground.

For a full second Clipper hesitated, but it was just long enough for a bit of rock hard common sense to filter into his inflamed brain and cool it off a bit. To disobey the German's orders meant certain death there in the sky. To obey it meant death on the ground—terrible, torturing death. Von Zeit, knowing who he was, recognizing him as an old enemy, would find no greater delight than that of prolonging the agony to the last faint flicker of passing life. But, *also*, to obey the order would postpone death for a short time at least. And while there was still life left in his body—

He didn't finish the thought. He reached out and pulled back the throttle and stuck the nose down in a long slanting glide toward von Zeit's vulture nest a few miles in back of the German sec-

ondary line of defense. Twice he overestimated the glide and was forced to goose the idling engine and pull up the nose a hair. But finally, he settled down on the German's field and let the plane roll to a stop. Keeping both hands down below the cockpit rim he snaked out his service automatic and wedged it down into his field boot. The butt stuck out an inch or so but he partially covered it by pulling some of the slack of his breeches down over it. A poor chance, of course, but he was in no position to make any choice. He'd have to keep his hands in view as he climbed out. But once he was on the ground, and von Zeit was advancing toward him—

"You will get out, *Amerikaner* swine! And be careful!"

Clipper jerked his head around and stared down the muzzle of a Mauser held in the hands of a bull-necked German non-com who had come up on him from behind. Another example of von Zeit's sense of caution! As Clipper slowly climbed down from the plane he dully wondered if the man made some lesser light taste every bit of food placed before him at mess.

In the next moment the thought was shaken from his body as the non-com smashed him in the back with the muzzle of the Mauser and sent him spinning forward on his face. Red rage exploding within him, he rolled over and started to get up, only to be smashed flat again. A second German bent over him, smiled wolfishly and then tore the service automatic from its place of concealment in his field boot. In that instant Clipper's hopes dropped to a new low.

"Fool swine!" the German growled. "You think we didn't expect tricks? *Dummkopf*, you are not the first who has tried that simple one. Get on your feet, and march! *Herr* Baron is waiting."

Body aching in a hundred different

places, Clipper struggled to his feet and suffered the two to send him reeling drunkenly toward the group of pilots waiting on the tarmac. They spread out fan shape as Clipper was given one last final shove into their midst. Too damn mad to give way to weakness, Clipper forced himself to remain on his feet and stared flint eyed at the conglomeration of twisted, grotesque features that served as Baron von Zeit's face.

The German was in his seventh heaven of animal glory and a thread of spittle actually dribbled from one corner of his gash-like mouth as he leered at the Yank.

"Greetings, my dog friend," the man said from between stained teeth. "It has been many months, *ja?* It was indeed good fortune for me when my staffel was ordered to this sector. I have constantly thought of you since the days when you fought with the French swine. What is your American saying? All good things come to him, who waits, *ja?*"

Clipper said nothing. He was gauging his chances of jumping the killer and throttling him to death before other hands could tear them apart. Perhaps von Zeit read that thought in his eyes. At any rate the man stepped back two quick paces, and whipped a snub nosed Luger from its belt holster.

"Yes, that is so," he nodded. "And today I have stopped waiting. You see, dog, I knew that we would meet soon. That is why I dropped you that little present last night. It was, shall we say, a bit of an inducement to make you take the risk. *Ach* yes, I knew that you would wish to play the hero; would wish to avenge alone. That is why we went out on patrol sooner than usual this morning. We expected you. And—and here you are, my prisoner."

The man stopped and broke into a laugh that sounded like two slabs of frosted glass being rubbed together.

"You realize, of course, why I would not permit you to be killed in the air?" he asked when his laughter died away.

"I do," Clipper spoke for the first time. "You always were too yellow for a man to man scrap. You let others do the tough job and then turn it over to you when everything's safe. By the way, is that why you painted your ship like that? Because you're a yellow rat?"

AS THE Yank spoke the last, he set himself for the charge he expected; waited for it with savage defiance. But it didn't come. Von Zeit laughed again, muttered something in his own tongue that Clipper didn't get. The others did, however, for they too burst into harsh laughter. And in the midst of the laughter von Zeit suddenly took two panther strides forward. Too late Clipper flung out his hands. The muzzle of the Luger raked down the side of his face, tore open the flesh of his cheek, and spilled blood. And as he went back a step the Luger slashed down again, caught him flush on the temple and send him groggily to his knees.

"Your remarks are very, very funny,—my swine dog!" the words cut into Clipper's pain-frozen brain. "Now you will listen to mine. Perhaps they will be equally funny. You know my code,—all of you swine do. I take no prisoners. That is, not for long. You will be no exception. No, I shall not keep you a prisoner for long. Before noon you shall be returned to your comrades. Of course, they may have difficulty in recognizing you at first. But what do they expect? Pull him to his feet! The dog may pay more attention if he stands."

Rough hands grabbed hold of Clipper and fairly pulled his arms from their sockets as he was dragged up onto his feet. A blur of faces swam before his eyes he swayed unsteadily on his feet.

"Your little trick of making me think your plane was in flames was almost successful. But not quite. Whatever you had attached to the end of your exhaust fell off. I suppose it was oil soaked rags that smoked from the heat. It doesn't matter. But it gives me a very satisfying idea. *Ja, ja!* Your comrades must know of that trick, so I think they would be very much interested in learning how it all turned out. You are going to tell them. No, you are going to *show* them. You are listening, yes?"

Clipper made no comment.

"Yes, I believe you are listening," the German's voice droned on. "You will show them. Your face will show them. Imagine, if you can; you saw what those exhaust flames did to those oil soaked clothes, or whatever you used? Imagine *what they will do to your face!*"

Clipper's heart skipped a beat. And, as though in expectation of what was to come, his whole face from the point of the jaw to the hair line burned with intense pain. And then, suddenly, something exploded inside his head and the world all about him turned a blood red.

"You dirty—!"

The last faded out in the fury of his charge at von Zeit. The Luger cracked in his face, and a finger of lead tore at the side of his neck. But it is doubtful if ten thousand barking Lugers could have checked his rush. He felt himself smash into a yielding form, felt his fingers curl and lock about a leathery neck. With the infuriated strength of ten men he tightened his grip, and as his weight bore the other to the ground he smashed the head against hard soil, again and again.

And then out of the whirlpool of his own fury he became conscious of screaming voices, the bark of Lugers, and the savage chatter of a machine gun. He

raised his head and stared dumbfounded at the scene about him. The group that had been by his side a moment ago had scattered like rabbits, each pilot racing toward a Fokker in the line in front of the hangars.

Throwing back his head, he looked up, blinked and shouted aloud. A single plane, like a metal hornet gone berserk, was twisting and turning about over the tarmac and spraying smoking death from twin guns. The plane was an S. E. from Ninety Sixth Squadron. And on either side of the fuselage it bore the personal markings of Big Red Parker. Parker! Good old Red *had* disobeyed orders. He must have seen what happened, and followed the Germans back.

A choking sob of joy bursting from his lips, Clipper leaped to his feet. He took a flash glance back at the German he had throttled and started to dash out toward his own plane which was still in the center of the field. But that single glance pulled him up short and tore a rasping oath from his lips. The dead man on the ground was the bull necked non-com,—not von Zeit. Somehow, somehow, the German had dodged his charge and let the non-com take the full force of the attack.

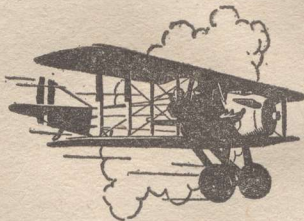
Spinning around front again, Clipper fixed blazing eyes at the row of Fokkers. Three of them were already racing across the field, and the second one—the one in the middle—was von Zeit's plane. Aloft, Red Parker was blazing away with both guns, but it was a human impossibility for one man to smash down a dozen or more planes trying to take off at the same time.

Too far away from his own S.E. to waste the time, Clipper ripped the non-com's Luger from limp fingers and raced toward the nearest Fokker, one of three still left on the ground. In full stride he jerked up the gun and pulled the trigger

twice. The pilot, in the act of legging into the pit, never knew what hit him. The bullet's force knocked him clear across the turtle back of the fuselage and spilled him flat on the ground on the other side.

Not realizing what had happened, or perhaps too eager to get aloft and trap another victim for their merciless *Kommandant*, the two remaining Fokker pilots sent their planes streaking out onto the field. They had hardly cleared when Clipper reached the last Fokker and hurled himself bodily into the pit. The crack of rifles and unseen wasps twanging by his head told him that the mechanics had seen him and were trying to shoot him before he could get going. But he didn't waste time looking around to verify that fact.

Instead, he crouched low in the cockpit snapped up the ignition switch and twisted the booster magneto handle furiously. Three split seconds, seemingly each a year in length, ticked by. And then the Mercedes caught and roared into life. Nursing the engine, Clipper rocked it over the chocks and trundled out onto the field. Mauser bullets made a pattern of holes in the top center section. And a few others twanged off the engine cowlings as the Fokker picked up speed.



as soon as a couple of Fokkers had zoomed clear?

Impulsively Dean shook his head, cursed in his teeth.

"No!" he grated aloud. "Red wouldn't quit just because they came up after him. He *knows* I was there. He—"

He cut off the rest with a wild laugh as the real truth came to him. Red Parker *was* running away in front of the Fokkers. But hell, he was doing it for a definite purpose. That purpose? Simply that the redhead *must* have seen him make a break for the last Fokker, and so he'd lit out for home to draw the Germans away and thus

make sure of his C.O.'s escape.

"Nice work, Red—and thanks," Clipper muttered aloud. "But I'm not through with them yet. I haven't finished the job."

Sacrificing altitude for speed, he went hedge-hopping toward the lines. About half a mile from them he had reached a position directly under the Fokkers. Nosing up a bit, he climbed steadily toward the lead plane with its all-yellow nose. In no time he was at the tail end of the pursuit formation. And then, little by little, he went higher and flew straight toward the lead plane. If any of the Germans looked up they saw only the belly of a Fokker. They couldn't see who was in the pit. And that was exactly the way Clipper wanted things to be.

BREATH clamped in his lungs, body braced, Clipper held the plane steady as long as he dared, and then hauled back on the stick. The wings "gripped" and the plane arced upward. As it zoomed, the Yank looked up and ahead. A startled gasp raced from his lips. Red Parker's plane was a blurred dot to the west and becoming smaller with each passing split second. The thought cut through Clipper's brain like a knife. Red Parker was running away? He had lit out for home just

Presently he was within diving range of the yellow nosed Fokker that was flanked on either side by two other planes. Taking a second out to check the Span-
daus on his stolen plane, he then tilted the nose and went down hell bent. His first burst passed over the nose of von Zeit's plane, purposely. But the second, when the startled face of the German twisted up toward him, chewed through the tail section.

Von Zeit must have seen his face, for instantly the yellow nosed Fokker went down in a screaming dive.

The German tried frantically to cork-screw out into the clear, and to stay there until his brood could once more come to his rescue. But Clipper dogged him with the grimness of death itself and drilled his plane from prop to tail skid. Suddenly, the German half rose from his seat and lifted both hands in a token of fearful surrender. In that instant, memory of young Stafford flashed across Clipper's brain.

"A page from your book, von Zeit!" he shouted. "This time I'm not taking prisoners!"

As he spoke the last, he slammed in broadside at the Fokker, worked the stick and rudder this way and that, and fired his *right gun only* as he did so. Like a bird nailed in mid flight, the yellow nosed Fokker flopped over crazily on one wing. Then it righted itself and went into a shallow power dive. Clipper saw von Zeit slump forward against the stick; even saw the red gush down from under the man's helmet.

Calmly, coolly, he followed the plane down, waiting to see it crash on the American side of the lines. But it didn't crash. Weird and unreal in life, Baron von Zeit was that way in death. As though his stiffening fingers were still able to

move the stick, the Fokker leveled off slightly and finally mushroomed down into some shell shattered trees. Like a tired bird it slid off the branches and fluttered the rest of the way to the ground, right side up.

Cutting his own throttle, Clipper set his own ship down on a nearby level patch of ground and trotted over to make sure. It wasn't necessary. Von Zeit would never fly again.

"Told you I should have gone along with you!"

Clipper turned to stare into the oil spattered face of Parker. The redhead's plane was over close to his own.

Clipper grinned. "If it hadn't been for you I wouldn't be here. Next time I *will* take you along."

Parker however wasn't listening. His eyes were sticking out a mile and were glued to von Zeit's plane.

"Good God!" he gasped softly. "Those bullets holes—in the fabric right at the pit! They form the letter 'S'! You mean—you did that on purpose?"

Clipper Dean stared dully at the ragged shaped letter S his last burst had punched in the side of the Fokker's fuselage, and nodded.

"'S' for 'Stafford'," he murmured. "Figured that was a good brand for him to take to hell."

THE END

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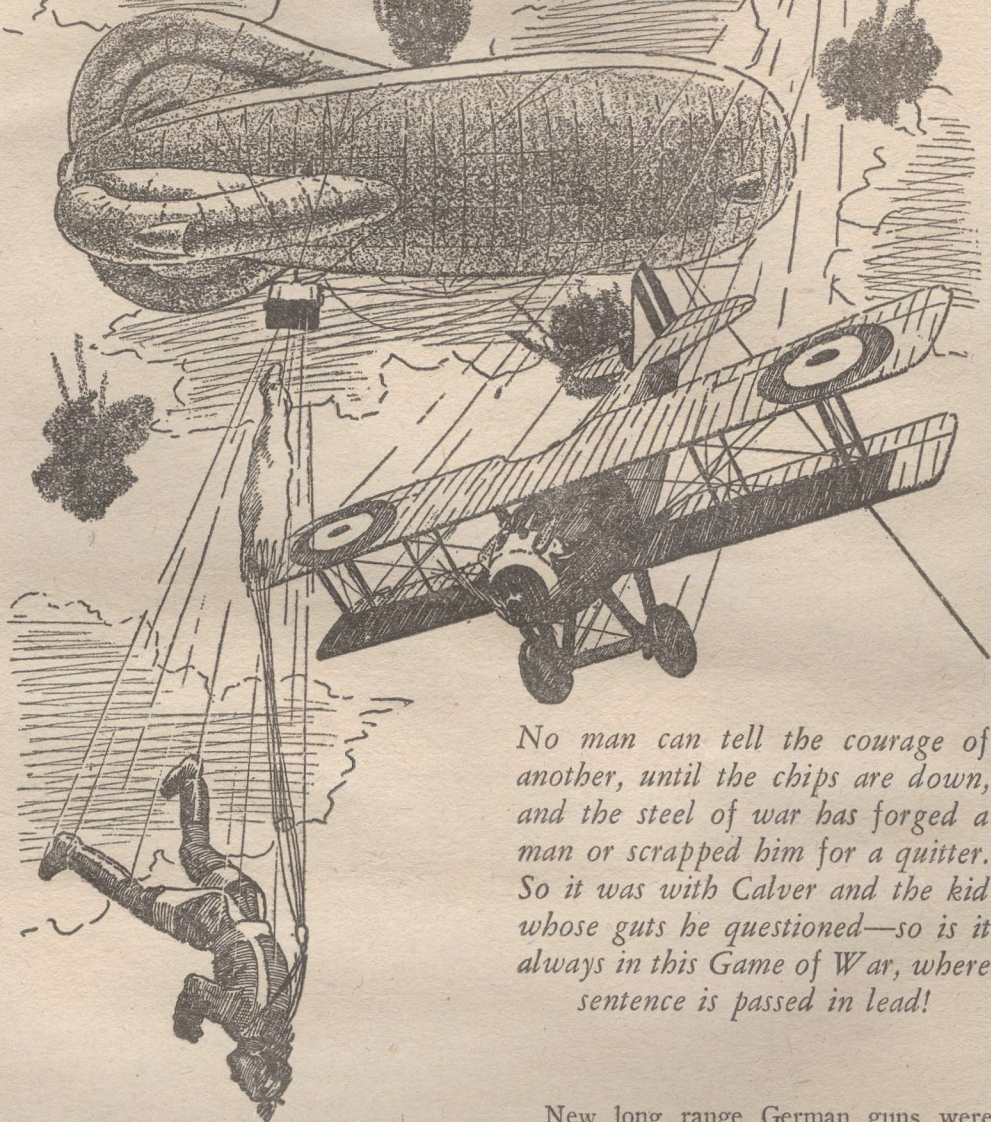
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YELLO-BOLE



The Sky is the Limit

by HAROLD F. CRUICKSHANK



No man can tell the courage of another, until the chips are down, and the steel of war has forged a man or scrapped him for a quitter. So it was with Calver and the kid whose guts he questioned—so is it always in this Game of War, where sentence is passed in lead!

Calver cursed as he saw the figure head for the earth.

IT WAS imperative for that Kite balloon to remain skyside. Upon the reports of its observer depended the safety and success of the Allied Infantry Service.

New long range German guns were being rushed into action beyond the Canal du Sere, to belch bloody destruction into the Allied source of supplies. Besides, the German Air Command had massed every available plane on this Front. And for that reason, Allied pilots found it impossible to break down the sky barrier, or get in any effective observation work.

It was strictly up to the Balloon Service, now.

No one knew this better than Captain Bruce Calver, of American 26th Pursuit Squadron. Three of his A Flight pilots had rushed forward with him at a hurry-up call. For upwards of thirty minutes Bruce and his trio, three of the best pilots he had ever commanded, had battled a superior force of German craft.

Not one of Calver's pilots had showed up after the engagement. And from the looks of things, three game Yankee kids had finally folded their wings.

They had fought the stiffest battle of their careers, in order that that swaying sausage balloon might remain skyside. And they had won—at a terrific cost.

But now, as Calver limped homeward, with scarcely enough gas left to carry him to his tarmac, he jerked his weary form erect. The Germans had opened up on the balloon area with extraordinarily long range pieces—trying to blast the big bag from the sky.

A grim smile crossed Calver's face. It was true, that an odd German shell might crack in close, but the chances of making anything like a dead hit were mighty slim.

His hand tensed at the stick as he caught the splash of a tremendous shrapnel burst on the port quarter. But he shrugged. While that black burst had seemed close, he felt that it must have been a considerable distance away. He zoomed his ship, so that he might streak in close and wave encouragement to that lone form in the basket. He hoped fervently that the young officer—whoever he was—would not get panicky. That balloon was in a wonderful position to do some effective observation work.

But Calver's hopes were suddenly knocked dizzy. A dark form was leaping overside, bailing out. By God! That young lieutenant couldn't stick it out—

couldn't take it when the going was tough!

"You yellow little rat!" Bruce swore, his voice trembling in a half sob. He was thinking of the past hour's work, when three of his best men had gone down defending this balloon; and now this panicky youngster was cutting away from the wallowing sausage. His action would be costly to the Allies, for not always was visibility and opportunity as good as this, today. Heaven knew what might happen to the American infantry up at the pivot position near the canal. . . .

Calver shoved down on his stick as the white silk of the parachute puffed out. He screamed down past the dangling figure. He roared a barrage of curses, shaking his fist at that pale faced quitter. But his yells were flung back in his face by the slipstream.

He was shaking with rage and other emotions when he slammed his bullet-riddled Spad down on his field. At once he inquired for his Flight members, but not one of them had returned.

Calver's hands balled into hard fists. What a war this had developed into! Today you enjoyed the society of men whom you liked, admired—the best fellows in the world; tomorrow they were gone—snuffed out. They had gone out fighting gloriously for a cause; and then, suddenly, you glimpsed a yellow quitter cut out when there seemed no immediate danger at hand.

Calver was in a murderous mood as he strode to his hut. He locked the door behind him. He wanted to be alone, to think—alone with the memory of those three buddies who had paid the price.

Battle-weary and worn through long, forced extra action, Calver's head began at last to nod. He slumped slowly into the forgetfulness of sleep. But that sleep was broken some hours later by a loud knocking on his door.

THE SKIPPER stretched himself and moved indifferently to open the door, ready to barge into his disturber.

"Major General Baxter to see you, sir," rapped a voice.

Bruce Calver recoiled. A visit from "Hell-Fire" Baxter, chief of Brigade Flying Service, might mean a lot right now—a lot of *grief*. At least it meant that the old war dog had something special up his sleeve.

"Come in, sir," Calver clipped. He was just in the right mood for the reception of any brass hat. And as acting commander of the squadron he intended to speak his mind, if necessary.

The general slumped to a chair. *Slumped!* It amazed Calver. Usually, this old firebrand stood up on his feet, and bellowed away. But tonight, he seemed speechless. Calver had never seen him like this before.

"Something wrong, sir?" he asked.

The old warhorse jerked up his head and swung stiffly on Calver.

"Wrong? Yes, Calver—everything's wrong. The Huns have smashed through the canal zone—the very worst thing that could have happened. Here we were co-operating with French and British—a chance to show the true mettle of the American spirit and organization. And we failed. Not because our soldiers were inferior, but because a trap was sprung—a trap that one of our balloons could have found this afternoon, had her pilot the courage to remain skyside!"

Calver started forward. So that kid *had* blown the works!

"A bit of bad luck that, sir," he snapped. "I suppose as a result that it's hard to find more excuses for the failure of the Balloon and Flying Services. Is that so, sir?"

"Excuses?" Old "Hell-Fire" jerked

himself to his feet. "I never make excuses, Calver. There are no alibis to offer. But we have failed the frontline troops. You and I have done hitches with infantry. You and I know what a helping hand means to those gutty boys up in the forward ditches—up in the mud, blood and corruption. There is no excuse. But—"

Baxter subsided to his chair again, obviously shaken.

"A spot of cognac, sir?" Calver asked.

"No thanks. Listen, Calver.

I'm particularly concerned with that young balloon lieutenant's action this afternoon. He had a golden opportunity to save our frontline troops from that trap, but he failed. He *quit*, by God!"

"Yes, sir, I know. I'm sorry you have to remind me of the incident. I lost three men protecting that balloon; and then that yellow little rat cut out. He—"

"H'mmm—yes, of course, captain," the general cut in. "But there's something worse than that to it all. I—well, I'm sorry to say that that observer was my nephew—Lieutenant Ted Baxter!"

"What! Gosh—I'm sorry, sir. Sorry I spoke as I did, but—"

"Silence! You didn't make your criticism severe enough, Calver. Ted's action was inexcusable. A battalion of our best storm troops has been cut off—lost, you might say. We can't reach them. They are surrounded in that section of badlands beyond the canal. Ted Baxter's responsible. And everyone is now clamoring for his hide—"

The general broke off to blow vigorously on his nose, while Calver shifted uneasily in his seat.

"Yes, sir, go on," he clipped.

"I must do something, Calver," the senior officer resumed. "Not for my own sake, of course, nor for Ted's, but for



the sake of his father—my only brother. He has been an invalid for years. He lives only to read of Ted's success out here; and blast it, he's made a mess of infantry, flying, and now the balloon work. But I wondered, Calver if you—well, damn it, I can't help but think that somewhere in that kid, there's guts—stuff! He's a Baxter, and an American."

Bruce Calver felt that the general must be right: If Ted Baxter was of this old veteran war-dog's blood, then there must be something in him. But what was the general angling for?

"What would you like, sir?" Bruce asked.

"Well, Calver, if they cashier Ted, as they threaten to, I'll have to go out, too. But there is a way. Ted has had both infantry and airplane service; not that he amounted to a thing in either service. I've tactfully had him transferred from this branch to that—always hoping. Now we must have a showdown and I'm calling on you to help. You have a record with all types of men. And you know how to make a man, or break him."

"God!—do you suggest that Baxter come here, to me, sir?" Bruce flamed.

There was a long moment's silence, then the general nodded.

"It's entirely up to you, captain. I want that battalion of lost infantry found, rescued. It's Ted Baxter's job—and yours, if you'll undertake it. Strictly up to you, though."

"Right!" Calver stretched himself to his full height and took a turn about the room.

"I'll take him on, sir—on one condition: he'll either fight by the standards of those three A Flight pilots who gave their lives or he won't come back! Is that understood? Is it satisfactory to you, sir."

General Baxter rose to his feet. His

thin lips were drawn in a thin line, his eyes were cold steel beneath his bushy brows.

"It is, Calver, and thanks. It would be better for Ted to die in action than to remain a craven quitter. But—Calver, I can't quite believe he's yellow. There must be something. See if you can put a finger on it, will you?"

Bruce Calver poured out a couple of stiff drinks. The General was ready for the cognac now. They drank together in silence, then Baxter gripped the skipper's hand firmly.

"I'm obliged to you, captain," he said. "Use your own discretion. Good night!"

His own discretion! Bruce Calver paced his floor for upwards of an hour, trying to piece together the whirl of thoughts that fogged his brain. How, if Ted Baxter were really a quitter, could Bruce do anything with him? Baxter might become a deadly menace to Calver's newly organized Flight. There was only one other veteran pilot left to A Flight.

The skipper's brows were knitted. Ted Baxter had cost the frontline troops the loss of a battalion.

Calver's mind was made up. He would take Baxter out alone—out in search of that lost unit; and unless they found those trapped men, they would not come back.

The rangy Texan bulged his chest. He would make or break Ted Baxter for once and for all; but he wouldn't ask Baxter, or any man, to go where he wouldn't go himself. Meanwhile, the adjutant could take command of the 26th.

LIEUTENANT Ted Baxter showed up at the Squadron office the following afternoon. Bruce Calver was waiting for him. The skipper started at the knock on

his door, calling out a blunt, "Come in!"

"Lieutenant Baxter, sir. Reporting for duty!"

Calver had expected a sort of a swash-buckling young devil-may-care. Instead, here before him was a slender youth, pale of face, who walked with one shoulder down. To Calver it looked as if the kid was licked already. Even so, the skipper displayed no pity.

"Yes, lieutenant," he clipped. "Sit down."

"Thank you, sir." Baxter slumped gratefully into a chair. His lips twisted as though he suffered some physical pain.

"Well, we might as well get down to business at once," the skipper jerked. Bruce was using that old iron tone of voice for which he was well known at 26 Squadron.

"You are going to be given another chance, Baxter," he clipped. "I don't want to refer to your—mistake of yesterday too much. But I do want to advise you that from now on, you're attached directly to me. Either you make good, or—well, you don't come back. Is that clear?"

"I should think so, sir. Yes—quite. But you referred to a mistake I made yesterday. Just what was that mistake?"

"What was that—uh. . . Hell's bells!—don't you know? Are you forcing me to go into detail? Wasn't a battalion of infantry lost, and an attack gummed up because you—you quit cold? Hasn't anyone else mentioned this to you?"

"Yes indeed. I've heard nothing else. In fact, I haven't found much opportunity to say a word myself—" A strange smile toyed with the corners of Baxter's mouth.

"Have you anything to say? Do you want to say something in your own defense?" Calver blurted. "What is there to say? I was right on hand and *saw* you quit!"

There followed a long, tense moment of silence. Then Baxter pushed himself to his feet.

"Of course, sir, if you were there and are convinced you know, then there is nothing for me to say. When do I begin my flying duties?"

"At four o'clock, lieutenant. You'll fly a Spad, with me. We're going to hunt up that lost battalion of infantry. Okay—be on the deadline at four."

Baxter saluted and moved out. Calver watched that slender form, with its odd and drooping left shoulder. There was something about the kid which puzzled him. He hadn't squirmed under verbal fire; nor had he appeared at all arrogant. But Calver dismissed the matter with a shrug. Hell! He was too occupied with the final plans for action to worry about anything else.

Later, as Captain Calver herded Lieutenant Baxter eastward, a mad riot of mushroom bursts splashed the sky.

The skipper touched in a notch of throttle as a murderous German burst almost shut Baxter's ship from view. It seemed that the youngster's Spad couldn't very well have missed some damage. But Bruce saw the Spad slide out from under a pall of smoke, apparently none the worse.

Calver began to breathe more freely. One thing he had to admire in Baxter, was his skill at the controls. This kid could fly. But in the back of Bruce's mind there was that everlasting question: "Just how long can he stick it—take it?"

They were now streaking above the terrible shambles of recent artillery bombardment, where infantrymen took the bulk of the wrath of the war gods.

A day or so ago a thick screen of untouched evergreen trees had fringed the canal zone. Today, those woods were the graveyard of wretched skeleton shapes

whose gaunt limbs reached with broken, jagged points to the sky as though in fervent prayer. But it was hell instead of heaven that seemed to give the answer.

Calver winced as he watched. There were men below in that mad inferno. Breathing men!—fighting men!—clutched by inhuman pain. And these, Calver thought, were the poor wretched devils who had placed their faith in the air service!

At the thought of that lost battalion somewhere below, Calver snarled an oath and shot a glance up forward, to where Baxter rode the sky ahead of him. He glimpsed the slim form of the lieutenant with its drooping left shoulder crouched above the stick.

Then, with a suddenness that was startling, Calver realized that he could no longer see Ted Baxter's ship. The German gunners had been feeding smoke shells into the breeches of their guns, and now the sky was choked with a heavy pall of phosphorous smoke.

Something like a half sob broke from Calver's throat. Hell! This smoke had to come—just the thing that Baxter needed. It would give him a chance to cut out. Had he quit already, the yellow dog? He was nowhere in sight!

Calver pulled his stick back to his stomach and zoomed to clear the choking smoke fumes. But the smoke rode high. Calver had lost all sense of direction.

And so it went for the next twenty minutes. He was flying blind, scudding here and there, looking for ports of pure atmosphere in which to breathe. He searched in those few clear pockets for the lieutenant's ship, but the sky was empty.

The skipper touched in his throttle and roared to eastward, still hoping that he could find Baxter, but dusk rode down the sky to add its drab shades to the already smoke-dusted heavens.

Below, with the coming of evening, a newer, more murderous bombardment had opened up. Calver winced at the sky-quaking thunder of a thousand guns. His hand quivered on the control stick, as he crouched like someone whose soul had been wrenched out by hellish disappointment.

There was nothing left but to kick about and streak back to his tarmac.

Back at the drome, the skipper's first thought and query was of Baxter. But the lieutenant had not returned. No word had come in on him.

Calver strode slowly to the office hut, where he snatched at a telephone receiver. His job now was not an enviable one: He must phone General Baxter and report Ted's disappearance. They could only hope, Calver and the General, that the kid's ship had been washed up—that he had met an honorable death in action.

DEEP IN the badlands of a swampy area, a young infantry captain collected a handful of bombers and bayonet-men about him—all that was left of a full battalion of American doughboys. In a momentary lull in the storm the captain listened to the groans of his wounded men. Throughout the dark watches of a merciless night, this handful of men had fought unflinchingly at Captain Denman's side. Denman had refused to surrender. There would be no surrender, while these gutty, fighting fools declared against it. Denman was the only officer left.

"Stand by to make a last stand, gang," he called. "Strengthen up that barricade at the sunken road all you can. I believe the attack will come from the front next time, just before dawn—" He turned to a corporal, the only officer left.

"How many bombs left, corporal?" he asked.

"Two cases, sir. Hardly enough. But we've still got the bayonets."

"Right! Don't waste any ammunition, men. . . ." His voice almost broke. He was thinking of his wounded men—hoping that he could get them to safety.

Then a man leaped suddenly into the boggy emplacement.

"They're comin' across, sir! Lookit, the sky's clearin'. Dawn's comin', and with it, the attack. Shall we open the machine gun now, sir?"

Denman himself was wounded. His left arm was strapped to his side, but he wasn't quitting. He was going to take over that gun post himself.

Jaded men came alert. They rallied. Hell! How could they act otherwise, with their wounded skipper now crawling out to that Lewis gun position? The corporal crisped an order at the bombers; and when Corporal Dan Nolan barked, men found new life.

Crr-r-ang-g! Phre-e-e-e. . . ! A German bomb blasted the local quiet. It was the baying of a lone hound which quickly set all the dogs of war into full chorus. In a moment mad pandemonium had again broken loose.

Denman seized a bomb. Leaping from his post, he jerked the pin with his teeth and let fly at a party of crouching German bombers. The bomb crashed with a deafening scream, a scream that blended with the wailing of wounded men. But the enemy had lives to spare. Supports were already trotting up. They charged. Denman turned and unsnapped a bayonet from a fallen rifle. He couldn't hold a rifle, and attack, with only one hand. But the bayonet—He snarled as he lunged. He was fighting toe-to-toe with a burly Prussian, stabbing, slashing, when suddenly, before Nolan could reach his side, he was dropped by a rifle butt stroke.



Corporal Nolan found himself in supreme command. He bellowed to his men. He cursed them, pleaded, encouraged and threatened. He was fighting like a fiend, while his blood dripped away from a gash above the temple.

It was the sudden chatter of a new machine gun which snapped Nolan back to full sensibility. Germans in front of him were dropping in their tracks, or scattering to cover. Then, out of the battle smoke above, came a demon on wings, which had just narrowly missed the jagged tips of those battered trees.

A Bristol plane zoomed up over the lost battalion remnant, to kick around and open a terrible fire once more on the German attackers.

Corporal Nolan croaked a husky cheer. But he suddenly gasped in amazement. That ship was coming down on the sunken road. By God! It was landing! Nolan waved to a handful of men, who leaped in as the ship's tires settled on the surface of the road.

A pale-faced young pilot leaned out over the front cockpit rim, as Nolan staggered up. The flyer's left shoulder hung down below the rim, and his mouth was twisted into a grimace of pain.

"Who's your officer in command?" he asked.

"There ain't no officer, sir," Nolan gulped. "I'm in command—all that's left. Thanks for comin', sir. You saved us for the time bein'—but—Gees! You brought some supplies, huh?"

"Yes—food, ammunition. And you'll find bomb cases strapped to the lower wings. Better hustle and get them unloaded."

A battery of German whizzbangs began to thresh the zone with shrapnel. The young pilot eased himself overside. He

seemed in no hurry to get away again. Nolan worked like a galley slave.

Lieutenant Ted Baxter winced. Why go back? Why go back to the society of those men who had called him yellow? Hell! Here was a spot into which he could fit. This corporal needed him. To hell with headquarters. To hell with everybody in the flying and balloon services. Baxter *wasn't* going back.

His lips curled in a bitter grin. He had guns aboard the Bristol. Men would be set to work to dismantle them and remount them aground in some fashion. Baxter had plenty of ammunition for them.

Now he took over command, laboring desperately with his one sound arm.

They had scarcely got the Bristol unloaded when the Germans launched another attack. But the Yank infantry remnant had found new heart. They'd had a bite of grub, a sip or two of water; they had plenty of ammunition for the time being. And they had an officer standing by to command, to lead.

Ted Baxter had flung himself at the breeches of his twin Lewis guns which Nolan had skilfully blocked up on old logs. Nolan was taking a handful of bombers to defend the rear.

Baxter faced a thousand deaths as he pressed the trips of his guns. Blood streamed down his face. He could taste it, but he smiled fiercely, bitterly. He was strangely happy.

BACK AT 26 Squadron, Bruce Calver was ready to climb to the stirrup of his Spad when an orderly trotted up with advice that the skipper was wanted on the phone.

The voice at the other end of the wire was bitter. But so was Calver. But that voice was riding him.

"Where the hell have you been all

night, Calver? Been trying to get you. It's about young Lieutenant Baxter. He too tried to communicate with you. He located the lost unit last night. Came here and commandeered a Bristol. Taking supplies east. Wants support. Shut up!—let me finish. Here, I'll give you the location he give me."

Bruce Calver shook from head to foot as he scribbled down the location Major Harrigan of 119 Squadron gave him. Something must have been wrong with the telephone wiring at 26 Squadron. Baxter had tried to get him! Baxter had gone out alone, with supplies—alone! And they were calling *that* youngster yellow!

"Okay, major," Bruce snapped. "I'll take all my squadron. They're standing by—thanks a lot."

Calver shook with mingled emotions as he strode out to the ships.

"Damn his hide!" he breathed. "Why didn't he fly back with his report, instead of trying to play this game out alone? He simply couldn't do the job right, even when he discovered that lost unit. No wonder he's never gotten anyplace where men can respect him!"

But Calver's mood quickly changed. Hell! At least Baxter was rushing forward with supplies.

The full squadron, all save three ships of A Flight, hit skyward and Calver led them to a rendezvous with 119 Squadron.

BACK AT THE boggy emplacement, with the remnant of the lost battalion, Lieutenant Ted Baxter hoped for a swift end. They had fought until there seemed no longer any life in their jaded limbs. Wounded men screamed for aid. The shambles had become an inferno, and ammunition was giving out. Surrounded as they were, the handful of men remaining had little or no chance. But they had

chosen to die fighting. No more than forty men remained.

Baxter reeled dizzily. In his weakened state he would have welcomed the mercy of unconsciousness. He gratefully accepted a sip of water from his ammunition passer.

"Thanks, buddy," he croaked. "Keep your chin up and keep scrapping. I've scribbled a report on you. It's in the pocket of my coat. When they find us, they'll find that paper. Your folks'll be mighty proud—" He broke off, spitting blood.

Baxter tried to force a chuckle, but he reeled out, only to be caught by his helper who lowered him gently to the soggy clay.

THROUGH a film of red, it was Bruce Calver who first glimpsed that wrecked Bristol below. Something seemed to snap in his brain. He signaled to Major Harrigan to carry on. Calver was going down on that shambles. Hell! Baxter was somewhere in the thick of that madness—fighting a hopeless fight.

German gunners leaped back from the breeches of their guns as lead deluged down from the sky. More than two score of sky guns were cutting swaths in the German ranks as Bruce Calver eased his Spad down to a pancake landing at the tail of the battered Bristol.

Bruce didn't have to be told what Baxter had done. Even before he unbelted himself and dashed to that smoking emplacement, he visualized the last action of the young balloon officer, the man whose name had rung bitterly from the lips of scores of officers and men in the past thirty-six hours.

Now Calver was in. He was lifting Ted Baxter's shoulders from the clay. Holding the lolling head in the crook of one arm, he fished out a pocket flask of cognac. He unscrewed the cap with his

teeth and poured a small quantity between Baxter's lips.

The lieutenant gurgled. In a moment or so his eyelids fluttered, then opened in a wide stare. He did not recognize Calver for a long moment.

A mad splash of black shrapnel drenched the swamp zone. It seemed to pull Baxter together, so that he recognized the hard, strained face of Captain Calver.

A shout went up from the rear. It came from Nolan who staggered up with news that the German rear guards had cracked under pressure and had surrendered to the shattered American battalion.

But Calver was concerned only with the welfare of the wounded lieutenant who was now struggling to sit up.

"Quiet, Baxter," he clipped. "Let me see where you're hit most seriously."

He gasped suddenly, as he cut away Baxter's coat. There on the left upper arm and shoulder were old bandages.

Calver ripped away the coat sleeve.

"Baxter—what's—this mean?" he asked. "When did *this* happen?"

"Oh it really doesn't matter, skipper," breathed the other. "Let it pass—"

The kid was grinning into Calver's face. But the skipper insisted on knowing, as the light of understanding dawned on him.

"Well, if you must know, skipper, it came from a piece of shell casing, as the Huns bombarded my balloon. That same shell burst cut my telephone connection with the ground crew—just when I had spotted the position of those German super-heavies. I tried to get location to the ground crew, but it wouldn't work. Then—" he drew in a long breath and exhaled slowly before going on— "Then, I thought I'd better bail out and give them the news myself—"

"Yes, yes. Go on, damn it. What happened?" Calver blurted.

"They wouldn't listen, skipper. They branded me some sort of a yellow rat. Claimed I'd quit—damn their souls!"

"Oh!"

Calver winced as a screaming shell passed overhead. All conversation was cut off as the German artillery laid a damnable barrage down on the swamp zone. Then it lifted. Calver cursed himself.

So Baxter had been hit riding that balloon basket! He had hung on till the last—had chanced his life bailing out with his information, but the ground men had already branded him a *quitter*!

"I was mad, skipper," Baxter breathed. "Inwardly I consigned everyone to hell. I got a medical sergeant to patch me up, and bribed him to silence—that's all. At that, I guess things could have been worse, eh?"

"No," Calver gulped. "They couldn't have been worse for you, buddy. But I can try to square things some. Any plans, once they release you from hospital?"

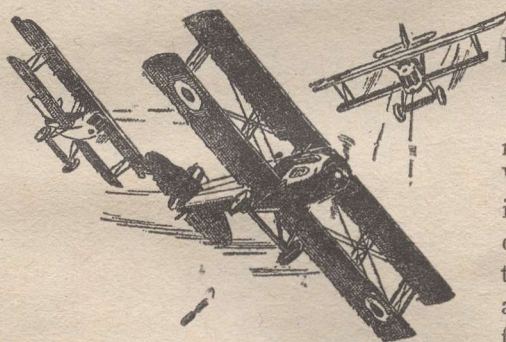
"Plans—me? Hell, I'm not giving orders. That's up to you. I'm attached to you, skipper."

"Okay. Then here's your next operation order, Baxter: You're duly assigned to the position of Flight Leader, A Flight, 26th Pursuit Squadron. Maybe that'll help square you a little, kid."

"Great, skipper—I was hoping you'd keep me on. Shake?"

Bruce Calver ground the kid's good hand in his own. Unbidden tears had dimmed his vision somewhat, but he blamed it on the acrid fumes of battle smoke. Hell! Wasn't there plenty of smoke everywhere?

THE END



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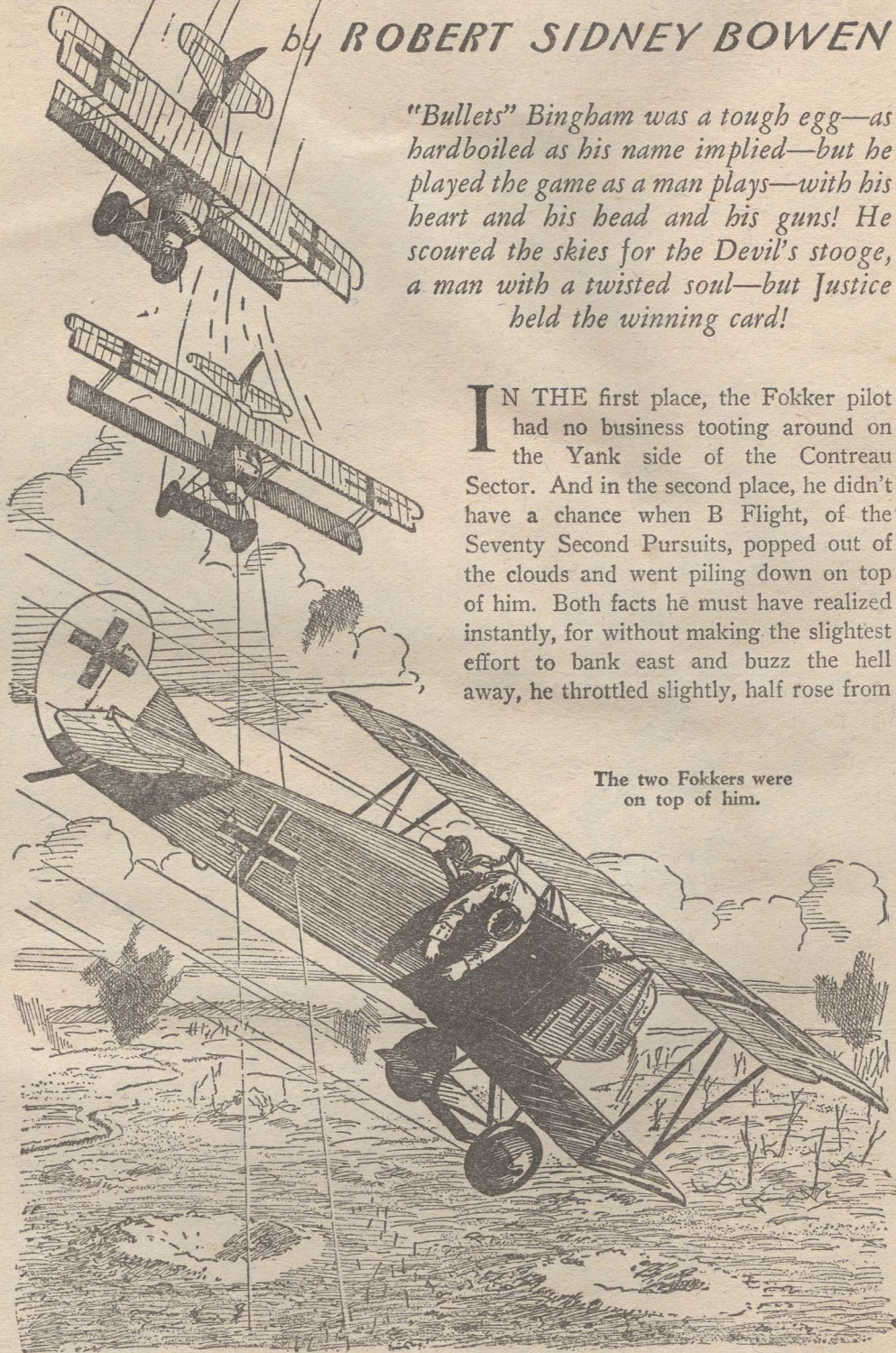
Scrambled Aces

by ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN

"Bullets" Bingham was a tough egg—as hardboiled as his name implied—but he played the game as a man plays—with his heart and his head and his guns! He scoured the skies for the Devil's stooge, a man with a twisted soul—but Justice held the winning card!

IN THE first place, the Fokker pilot had no business tooting around on the Yank side of the Contreau Sector. And in the second place, he didn't have a chance when B Flight, of the Seventy Second Pursuits, popped out of the clouds and went piling down on top of him. Both facts he must have realized instantly, for without making the slightest effort to bank east and buzz the hell away, he throttled slightly, half rose from

The two Fokkers were on top of him.



the seat and raised his hands over his head in a gesture of complete and definite surrender.

Hunched forward in the seat, steel grey eyes squinted to the ring sight, "Bullets" Bingham, veteran leader of B Flight, grunted aloud and let his thumbs slide away from the trigger trips.

"No like, eh?" he murmured. "Don't blame you a bit, dope."

Automatically alert for any trick the German pilot might try, he slid down to a position to the left rear of the Fokker, and let a short burst rip harmlessly past and lose itself in thin air. It jerked the German's head around instantly. Sticking one hand over the side, Bullets pointed in the general direction of Seventy Two's field and nodded to the other to get going.

The Fokker pilot was the personification of obedience. He banked slowly around to the direction indicated, straightened out and flew steadily forward with no more show of fear or chagrin than if he were making a joy hop over Berlin. Strung out in top-cover position, Bullets and the six other members of the Yank patrol dogged the Fokker rev for rev and herded it back to the field, and down to an easy landing.

No sooner had the mechanics dashed out and grabbed the Fokker's wings than Bullets whipped down to a fast fish-tail landing, taxied up to the line and legged out. In a dozen or so ground eating strides he reached the side of the Fokker. The pilot was in the act of climbing nonchalantly to the ground; careful, of course, to keep both hands in full view.

Once he had both feet on the ground he pulled off his helmet and goggles, clicked his heels smartly and bowed stiffly from the waist.

"Permit me to thank you, *Herr Captain*," he said in a voice that sounded like oil being poured down a drain. "I

had hoped that you would arrive and do just as you did. It would not have been so good had I landed behind your lines alone."

Bullets Bingham stared at the slightly egg shaped head, the eyes that were set too close together, the slightly off-center nose, and the thin lips that were more of a blueish grey than natural blood red. They all added up to fill him with a sense of cold repugnance.

"Maybe you know what you're talking about," he said flatly. "I don't. What's your name? What's your staffel? You look new around here to me."

The German smiled and nodded.

"That is true," he said. "I have been in this part of the Front but four days. Four days too many. My name is *Herr Hauptmann* Luddner. My staffel is the Thirty First. Ah, you are surprised I tell you these things? *Himmel*, were it not for the love of the *Vaterland* that really is in my heart I would tell you much more. However, I thank you again for not shooting me down, but, instead, permitting me to land as your prisoner. And now I look forward to the prison camp where I will be sent."

Bullets made no comment for the moment. He could only stand there and stare at the German who was obviously tickled to death that he had been taken prisoner. Yet as he kept staring at him the germ of distant memory began to slowly percolate in his brain. It was nothing but an elusive thought which he was utterly unable to pin down on anything tangible. Nothing but the strong belief that there was something distinctly familiar about L u d d n e r—something, dammit, he should be able to spot right off the bat.

He shrugged away the tantalizing thought, and nodded toward the mess.

"Well, you're our prisoner, and that's

fact," he grunted. "Come over to the mess and have a drink. It's a custom we hold with all pilots we capture alive."

The German fairly beamed.

"So I have heard," he said. "It is indeed the courtesy of true gentlemen. I thank you."

Walking with the step of a man who has suddenly been released from iron and steel bonds, Luddner followed Bullets and the others over to the mess and inside. Leading the way to the bar, Bullets ordered drinks all around then stared at the German some more.

"You're glad to be a prisoner," he suddenly snapped out. "Why?"

The German chuckled, but only with his eyes. He turned slightly and peered out through the mess window toward the shadows of coming nightfall that were sweeping swiftly up from the east.

"I am with gentlemen," he said suddenly, a note of bitterness creeping into his voice. "And so I will tell you, as briefly as I can. Ah, my heart's thanks. I salute you all."

The German spoke the last as Bullets handed him his drink. There was a moment or two of silence as the eight men in the room drank. Then Luddner put his empty glass on the zinc topped bar, and smiled sadly.

"There was a girl," he began. "I loved her very much. Every leave I spent at the home of her parents. I have no relatives of my own, you see."

The man stopped suddenly and his close set eyes seemed to literally bore into Bullets'.

"We were to be married when the war was over," he went on, almost savagely. "Then one day—it was a month ago—I introduced the young lady to my superior

officer. Yes, of course you can guess. He fell in love with her, too. And she—? I do not know. I only know that my superior officer, his name would not help my story, was very influential at G. H. Q. I was suddenly transferred from one staffel to another. All my mail was censored. I did not receive any answers to my letters to the young lady. And a leave that was due me was cancelled indefinitely. And then—"

THE German stopped the second time, closed talon like fingers about his empty glass and squeezed with the strength of ten men. The glass seemed to melt in his grasp. Slivers cut through the skin, and drew drops of blood. He did not seem to notice.

"And then last night I met my former *Kommandant*, my superior officer," he continued. "He was very drunk. He saw me and told me many things. Things I

will not repeat to you gentlemen. But they set fire to my brain. Everything worthwhile in my life was consumed by the flames. I did not realize what I had done until after it was all over—then it was too late. I had killed him, killed him with my two hands. We had been alone at the time, on the road between my staffel and a small *estaminet*. I dragged him into the bushes and went back to the staffel. But in Germany you cannot kill a superior officer and escape! Our military police are no fools. Perhaps they found something of mine I dropped, perhaps it was only to question me that I was summoned to Sector H. Q. not two hours ago. I do not know, but I could guess. So I flew over your lines. I would die for Germany, but not for killing that swine. Never! That, gentlemen, is all."



Silence settled over the room. The story left Bullets unmoved, somehow, yet he couldn't think of anything to say. He glanced at the others, saw the conglomeration of mixed emotions stamped on their faces, and shrugged.

"Well, let's have another drink, anyway," he grunted.

"*Herr Hauptmann*, one small favor, please," the German suddenly spoke up.

"Okay," Bullets nodded. "What?"

Luttner pulled a fistfull of French francs from his pocket and dropped them on the bar.

"Permit me to pay for one toast," he said. "It is a German custom granted all condemned men. A bottle of your best, orderly. And join us, too. Gentlemen, your glasses on the bar, if you will."

At a nod from Bullets, the orderly put a bottle of cognac on the bar, pulled the cork. Luttner took it, held it in his two hands and studied the label intently. What he read appeared to satisfy him for he nodded, and began to fill each glass.

He had just filled the fourth glass when a field orderly came into the mess and addressed Bullets.

"Major Hicks is on the phone in the squadron office, sir," he announced.

Bullets grunted, and followed the orderly out the door. He knew what Seventy Two's C. O. wanted to tell him. Sure, Hicks was due back tonight from a four day leave in Paris. He'd missed the troop train, purposely, of course. And he was now calling up to say that he'd be there in the morning.

That proved to be the truth five seconds later, when Bullets reached the phone.

"Okay, sir," he said with a chuckle. "I'll cover up if the Wing colonel should pop down. But you're not fooling this old grey beard any. Have a swell time."

"Thanks, Bullets," said the voice at the other end. "I'll do the same for you when it's your turn. 'Bye."

Bullets hung up, shoved the instrument away and went outside. Night had settled down for keeps, and the field was a murky blanket spotted here and there with lights in the hangars, hutments, and the mess. For no reason at all he peered toward the dull reddish glow in the sky to the east, cursed the war under his breath and walked quickly over to the mess.

The moment he stepped inside he pulled up to an abrupt halt, a gasp of startled amazement whistling through his teeth. The bar orderly was slumped face down across the bar. The six pilots of B Flight were stretched out grotesquely on the floor, chalky faces stiffened rigid from intense pain. Luttner was nowhere to be seen.

For a split second Bullets stared pop-eyed at the scene, then he whirled outside and jerked his service automatic from its holster. He drilled four quick shots into the air, then bellowed at the top of his lungs as the echo of the shots died away.

"Doc! *Doc Voorhees!* Come here on the run! To the mess!"

Pilots piled out of hutments and mechanics piled out of hangars. And the squadron doctor came dashing up from the hospital hut at the far end of the tarmac. Bullets barred the door to all save him, grabbed him by the arm and yanked him inside.

"They've been doped by a louse we forced down" he snapped. "He's gone. Get to work on them, *pronto.*"

The words were a waste of breath. The squadron medico was already on his knees by the nearest pilot on the floor. He pried open the man's mouth and forced up the eyelids. Then he moved to the next and did the same thing. After examining the third man he suddenly leaped to the bar where a three quarters empty bottle of cognac stood. Splashing some of its contents on his fingertips he put it to

his tongue, made a face and turned from the bar.

"Doped, hell!" he grated in an awed voice. "Poisoned. Arsenic! Enough to do away with a regiment, let alone these seven men. They couldn't have lasted ten seconds!"

Words stuck in Bullet's throat. He looked glassy eyed at the bottle on the bar; at the two full glasses still untouched. A cold shiver pricked the back of his neck. But for the Major's phone call he would have downed one of those drinks. At that instant memory clicked in his brain. He saw Luttner picking up the bottle and staring at the label. It was then, as the man held the bottle in his two hands, ostensibly reading the label, that he had slipped the deadly stuff into the liquid inside.

"The louse! The low down, dirty louse!"

The words fairly spewed out from Bullets' lips as he stood there trembling with cold rage. Then he started to turn and go outside and start a search for Luttner; to spread the alarm. But Doc Voorhees' voice stopped him in his tracks, turned him around.

"Hey, Bullets, come here! He scrawled something on the bar."

Bingham leaped over and peered agate eyed down at the words scrawled in soft pencil on the zinc. They sent memory whirling backward through time at top speed.

Captain Bingham:

Too bad you could not join them. Perhaps it is best this way. My story was a lie. My reason for coming was my brother, Count von Steubler. Remember? You killed him when you were with the English swine. I saw him die. I never forgot. This is only the beginning of my revenge.

Hermann von Steubler.

"COUNT von Steubler!" Bullets choked out. "Of course! That was

it! His face reminded me of von Steubler. Hell, why didn't it come to me then? The Count's brother! Brother of a blood-thirsty murderer, if there ever was one. He's a damn sight worse, though. The Count used Spandaus slugs, even if he did use them on poor devils with jammed guns, or lads floating down from fired balloons. God, when I get him—!"

He stopped and held his breath. From somewhere high up in the night sky came the sound of a throbbing Mercedes. It was moving swiftly eastward. Bullets relaxed slowly, looked helplessly at the medico and nodded.

"That's him," he grunted. "He had all the details worked out. Had another ship hidden near here. He could start it easily by using the booster magneto. Gone, yes—but, by God, I'll smoke him out if it's the last thing I do in this blasted war!"

"Here, hold it, Bullets, you—!"

Doc Voorhees' words fell on deaf ears. Bullets savagely brushed the arm aside and barged blindly out into the night. Fists jammed in his pockets, head down, he plowed through the crowd of pilots and mechanics, ignored every question hurled at him, and continued blindly onward down the tarmac to the far side of the field.

It was not until the east was flooded with the first light of a new day that he finally returned to the mess. Like a man engulfed by a clammy, hideous nightmare he had walked on and on, not knowing wither he went, and not caring. Brain stunned by the horror of it all, he returned with no more plan of action than he had had when he started out.

Face haggard and drawn, a cold sweat covering his body, he shouldered into the mess. In a dull, abstract sort of way he realized that the death stiffened bodies of his comrades had been removed. Then a hand took hold of his arm; a voice spoke in his ear.

"Where the hell have you been Bullets? I called up again to say I was getting a ride out. They told me what had happened. I went to the Vendom field and borrowed a ship. Here, get hold of yourself, man!"

Bullets turned his head and stared into the brittle, blue eyes of Major Hicks. He clenched his fist, shook his head savagely.

"Been out walking!" he growled in his throat. "Don't know where. Just around, I guess. I—"

The pilot suddenly stopped. His eyes flew open wide, and he smashed a rock hard fist into the palm of the other hand. Then he took hold of the C. O.'s arm and hurried him out of the mess and over to the Squadron Office.

"Here, what the hell?" the Major finally was able to gasp out. "What's wrong?"

Bullets shoved the phone in front of him.

"Got an idea," he grated. "You can help. You've got to. Get Wing on the wire. Report everything. And tell them that *I shot myself an hour ago*. Yeah, committed suicide because I took the blame for what happened. And tell Wing to *wireless that news to G. H. Q.* Tell them you think the phone wires are down, and that you want them to wireless it. They will if you demand it."

"Certainly they will!" the C. O. nodded. "But, Good God, man, are you crazy? What's the idea of—?"

"Plenty!" Bullets cut in harshly. "The Germans pick up every message that we send by wireless. Just as we pick up every message they send that way. That's what I want them to do. In an hour, every damn squadron in the German Air Service will know that I plugged myself. And von Steubler will be one of them!"

Major Hicks shrugged, snorted aloud.

"All right," he said. "Suppose von Steubler is one of them? What will that add up to?"

"Just this!" Bullets clipped and leaned over the desk. "Thinking I'm dead may make him hold off on any more trick revenge ideas he may have up his sleeve. But at any rate, he won't expect me to come calling on him. Not the way I'm going to."

"Eh? Calling on him? How?"

Bullets' lips twitched in a grim smile. The first in hours.

"Not the way you guess," he said. "He's with Thirty One, of course. But I'm not going to buzz over to his field and egg him up for a scrap. Not a chance. I've got a better idea. I'm going right down and *get* the louse. I'll explain later. First, get Wing on the wire. For God's sake, how do you suppose I feel with the blood of those seven lads on my conscience? *Get Wing on the wire!*"

The C. O. hesitated, then cursed softly and reached for the phone.

THE second dawn since von Steubler's death visit to Seventy-Two Squadron was coming up fast over the eastern edge of the world as Bullets Bingham pushed the throttle forward and sent his plane ripping across the small deserted patch of ground some twenty-eight miles south of his own field. The plane he flew was a German Fokker, a plane captured intact weeks ago. Its original markings, however, had been removed. Bullet had done that during the night. In their place he had painted the insignia of a German H. Q. Staff courier.

Pulling the plane clear, he flew due east toward No Man's Land, eyes skinned for any Allied planes that might swoop down to attack. Luck was with him, though, and he went scooting over into enemy territory in safety. Continuing

eastward for several miles, he presently banked north and flew in the general direction of Staffel Thirty One's field. One hand holding the stick steady, the other clenched into a fist and resting on his lap, he peered down grim-eyed at the movements of German ground troops below. Suddenly a hard laugh slipped off his lips.

"And to think that I didn't like the idea, when Dad sent me to school in Germany for two years," he grunted. "But thank God I did go. I'm going to need that knowledge of the lingo this day—and how!"

With a nod for emphasis, he raised his head and peered intently at the heavens. In the distance he could see a few dots moving westward. It was an early patrol of Fokkers going out for a look-see. Tapping rudder a bit, he moved over and put a strip of fleecy cloud layer between himself and the Fokkers. A few minutes later he veered toward the north again.

And then, suddenly, as he skirted a lone thunderhead and came out into thin air, he saw the field of Staffel Thirty One low down on the distant horizon. Throttling, he held the stick between his knees, so that he could have the use of both hands. With one he smeared a gob of engine grease to one side of his face. With the other he took a razor blade and made an ugly scratch along the other side of his jaw. Then he tossed the little tin of grease and the razor blade over the side, took a look at himself in the small dash mirror and smiled grimly. With the grease smears and the bloody scratch on his face he might be most anybody—until it was cleaned off. As a finishing touch he wiped off some of the dripping blood on the back of his hand and smeared it across the front of the old German flying suit he wore. Then he took hold of the stick and throttle again.



"Now we'll see what we'll see!" he grated savagely.

With the words popping from his lips, he made the plane "stagger" slightly, and choked the engine so that it missed on a couple of cylinders and the exhaust belched gobs of sooty smoke. And all the time he went weaving down toward

Thirty One's field. As he drew closer and closer he could see mechanics running out of the hangars. He gave them but a glance and stared intently at the tarmac. A gulp of

relief welled up in his throat. The line of Fokkers on the line told him that no patrols had left as yet. In short, von Steubler was on the ground.

"Sleeping the sleep of the cursed, damn his hide!" he grated and eased back the throttle.

Flying like a man having difficulty in getting down, he headed the plane toward the side of the field farthest away from the hangars. As he did so he slipped his service automatic from out of the flying suit pocket and stuck it down between his right leg and the side of the bucket seat. And then he leveled off, settled the last few feet and let the plane run along the ground to a full stop.

Slumping over against the side of the cockpit he squinted up under his brows at a non-com field orderly running toward him. The man came up puffing like a winded bull and stopped. Bullets raised his head and the non-com's jaw dropped.

"Himmel, you are wounded!" he gasped in coarse German. "Here, let me help you to the ground."

Bullets' withering tone stopped the German cold.

"You fool! And let me bleed to death? Three French swine have riddled me. Get your *Kommandant* here at once. He is

von Steubler, yes? I have come to the right field?"

The non-com bobbed his head up and down.

"Ja ja, Herr Baron von Steubler is the *Kommandant*," he said. "You have come to the right field. But your face—it is covered with blood. You are wounded, and I—"

"Get your *Kommandant*!" Bullets hissed at them. "Don't stand there, dog, and watch me die. Your *Kommandant*, at once! I have a special dispatch for him, alone. It is from General von Krutz. Hurry, you fat pig!"

The non-com gulped, saluted smartly, and went hurrying over toward the field office. Bullets watched him retreat across the field, heart ice cold, blood throbbing at his temples. Success or failure depended upon the outcome of the next few minutes. Would von Steubler come back alone? Would he wonder who the hell General von Krutz was—realize he'd never heard the name and become suspicious? Would he send the field ambulance out to bring in the supposedly wounded courier?

Questions! Hundreds of them, all unanswerable, flashed across Bullets mind. For one crazy instant a sense of panic gripped him. He was a fool to try and carry out his dizzy plan. It was full of holes. Much better the other way. Much better to patrol the skies until he some day met von Steubler aloft. Dammit, no! That day might never come. Besides, slugs were too good for rats of his ilk. He should—.

Bullets cut off the rest and reached for the gun wedged down by his leg. Von Steubler had come out of the field office and was running toward him across the field. He could plainly see the features of the cruel, misshapen face even at the distance. But it was not sight of that face that made him reach for the auto-

matic. It was the fact that the non-com and a tall junior officer were trailing along at von Steubler's heels.

"Make it good, and make it fast, boy!" Bullets gritted to himself. "It's your only chance!"

Faking partial collapse from wounds and loss of blood, Bullets slumped against the side of the cockpit and waited the last few, year-long seconds it took the German to reach the side of the plane. The man's eyes were brittle with wonder and amazement. Not a speck of pity flickered in them as they bored into Bullets' blood smeared face.

"You have a dispatch for me?" von Steubler demanded harshly. "Hand it over quickly. What command is General Krutz's?"

"The Étapes sector," Bullets said and made a face as he twisted his position. "Here, Herr Baron—it is in my case."

VON STEUBLER stepped forward and reached out a hand. At that exact instant Bullets became a whirling tornado of action. With his left he grasped von Steubler's outstretched hand and jerked him savagely up against the side of the fuselage. With the other he raised the gun and slapped it down hard on the man's head. Von Steubler went limp as a dishrag, and would have slumped to the ground had not Bullets held his arm pinned in a crooked position over the rim of the cockpit.

In what was really a continuance of the same general motion, Bullets swung the gun muzzle toward the non-com and the junior officer who skidded to an open mouthed halt.

"About face and run like hell before I drill you!" he barked.

The junior officer accepted his words and spun around and raced off in a cloud of dust. The non-com, however, was dumb, or else he thought it was a chance

to become a hero. At any rate he dived for his gun and started to bring it up. That's all he did, just started. Bullets' gun cracked, a hole appeared square in the center of the non-com's forehead, and he fell over backwards stiff as a board.

Knowing that the one shot had been plenty, Bullets didn't give the man a second glance. Hanging tight to the unconscious von Steubler's wrist, he half rose in the pit, jammed the gun in his pocket and then reached down with that hand and grabbed the skirt of the German's tunic. With a mighty heave he hoisted von Steubler upward and slung him face down over the cowl just in front of the windshield.

Dropping back onto the seat, Bullets kicked rudder and rammed the Fokker's throttle wide open. The Mercedes took it without a single kickback, and the plane swung dizzily around on one wheel and roared forward. For one hellish instant, though, the whirling motion of the plane almost tore Bullets' hand free from his grip on von Steubler and nearly sent the German sliding off onto the ground. Face white from the effort, the Yank managed to keep his hold and guide the plane forward.

At that moment, however, as he snapped his head around and looked toward the hangars, his heart came up and stuck in his throat. When he had landed he had failed to notice the props of two Fokkers ticking over. He saw them now. In fact, he saw the planes moving out from the line to come after him. With his extra load he couldn't possibly hope to outfly them on the level. They would catch up in no time, "box" him, and then at will place a couple of bursts where they would do the most good and force him to land with a dead engine, or at least a parted aileron.

"But you've got to do it first!" he

roared defiantly, and hauled his overloaded plane into the air.

Wasting no more power than was needed to gain him twenty to thirty feet of altitude, he booted the plane around in a shallow turn and headed due west toward the American lines. Like vultures on the tear, the two other Fokkers cleared the ground and came after him hell bent. A glance over his shoulder froze the blood in his veins. No more than three hundred yards separated his elevators from the spinning props of the other two planes. And with each passing second his lead was being cut down by three times that many yards.

Desperately he turned his gaze front and stared upward, hoping to spot a cloud bank hanging low—one that he could reach before the pursuing Fokkers could reach him. But Lady Luck laughed in his face. The nearest cloud bank was a good seven thousand feet above him, and a half a mile or more to the south. He couldn't hope to reach it in a month of Sundays.

"So far, so good, Bullets!" he grated aloud. "And now you're out of luck. They'll box and force you down without half trying. Dump the rat over-board and call it a day!"

For a fleeting second he was tempted to do just that. What the hell, so long as a louse dies what damn difference does it make *how*?

But even as the thought came to him he brushed it savagely from his brain. No! He'd started out with one idea in mind. And he was going to see it through, hell and high water, notwithstanding. Memory of his pals stretched out lifeless on the mess floor arose up to strengthen his grim determination. He stared bleak eyed at the limp wind-whipped form of von Steubler sprawled across the cowl.

"You didn't finish the toast, rat!" he said between clenched teeth. "But don't worry—you're going to! That's why I'm

taking you back. That's why I didn't plug you when I could have. That's why I don't dump you over the side, now! Nix! I've even got the bottle with me—what you left. You're going to finish the toast, von Steubler. A toast to hell!"

As he spoke the words Bullets pressed an elbow against the three quarters empty bottle of poisoned cognac he had stuffed into his flying coat pocket. A hard glint seeped into his eyes, and his stiff lips twitched into a half snarl. In a flash, though, the mood passed away, left him cold and trembling. He shook his head.

"No!" he choked. "Thought I could—but I can't. I must have been nuts. I *was* nuts. No! Damn your lousy soul, von Steubler, I can't do it *that* way. You're going back to where you were headed in the first place. Back to a prison camp, damn you!"

Blind rage at his own weakness for not carrying through his original idea stung Bullets to the core. But that made no difference. Something inside of him refused to let it make any difference. Even the memory of how his pals had died left him cold to his own plan—a plan to drag von Steubler back from Germany and force him to finish the cognac he'd spiked with death. An hour ago he thought,—dreamed, of nothing else. Now, however, the insane idea was dead ashes in his brain. Dammit to hell, he was a Yank wasn't he? And Yanks don't—

The last was never finished. The yammer of Spandaus guns in his ears, and the smoky flicker of tracers zipping past his wingtips cut off all thoughts. He jerked his head around and gritted his teeth. The two Fokkers were practically on top of him, and were boring down for close-in bursts that would not set his ship aflame, but would disable it enough to make him land. A simple thing to do. He'd done it enough times himself to realize that. You didn't *have* to flame a

ship. And the Fokker pilots didn't dare to. Their C. O. was within range of their guns. If they got one, they got the other.

"Damn right!" Bullets echoed the thought aloud. "Smack me, and you smack him. But you're not—"

The engine sputtered, spewed black smoke out of the exhausts, and Bullets' heart skipped a beat. Then suddenly it began to pump furiously. He had covered more ground than he realized. Less than a hundred yards ahead was No Man's Land. Straight down were swarms of wide eyed German soldiers, staring up at the queer war drama being enacted above them. Less than a hundred yards, just about eighty, to be exact. And the Mercedes was hitting on only half a dozen cylinders or so. Could he make it? Could he out-zigzag the sniping Fokkers and make No Man's Land? If he could, Yank doughboys would come to his rescue. Hell, if they didn't he could at least run the rest of the way to his own lines.

HE DIDN'T bother answering the question. Savage determination, like a fierce white flame, burned in his brain. As one of the Fokker pilots swung in close to "clip" his elevators and make him drop the twenty to thirty feet to the ground, he jammed on opposite rudder for all he was worth and slammed the stick over. The Fokker lurched that way, then lurched back again as he quickly reversed on the controls. The tagging Fokker pilot was caught flat footed and his shots ripped harmlessly into the ground, sending a handful of German troops scattering wildly for their lives.

Ten dozen yards, ten dozen precious yards, Bullets gained on the maneuver. But his luck had less than a second or so to live. The second Fokker slammed down from above, both guns blazing, and Bullets felt his entire tail section shake

and shiver as the plane staggered to the side. A curse on his lips, he hauled it around and shoved it down in a blind dive toward the ground. Then, in the last split second, he pulled the nose up and shot straight forward, the wheels of the plane barely missing the parapet of the first line trench.

When it came down it had half twisted over on one wing. The wing snubbed instantly upon contact, and the fuselage spun like a top. A giant's fist crashed into Bullets' jaw, and another chopped down on the back of his neck. Then hundreds of hands grabbed hold of him and flung him roughly off into space. The next thing he realized, he was sprawled face down on slimy, mucky ground. Right in front of him was a sea of flame.

He blinked at it dully for a second, and then truth filtered into his whirling brain. He had been thrown clear of the crash. It was there in front of him, a blazing heap of twisted wreckage. Suddenly a cry burst from his lips and he scrambled to his hands and knees and plunged toward the blaze. Pinned under one crumpled wing, the flames eating swiftly toward him, was von Steubler.

In the next few seconds, Bullets forgot who von Steubler was and what the man had done. And he forgot the savage hatred that had twisted his own heart. He only knew that a helpless man was pinned in the path of those flames. Only when he had dragged the screaming German clear did sense and reasoning return to him. Von Steubler was babbling like a mad man. Fearful recognition burned in his eyes.

"My chest, it is on fire. My mouth, it is burning! *Mein Gott*—water, *water*! Something for my mouth. I—"

Bullets, staggering up onto his feet, was hardly conscious that the man had stopped. And he was less conscious of

his movements. Too late he realized what they were. Von Steubler saw the neck of the bottle sticking from his coat pocket. Half crazed, he grabbed it and jerked the cork with his teeth. Bullets twisted around, kicked at the bottle.

"Don't! Stop, you fool, that's—I"

His other foot slipped on the slimy ground. Desperately he tried to reach the bottle von Steubler had raised to his lips, but the fall checked him and he fell flat on his face. Choking, gasping he struggled up to his knees. Struggled up and froze with horror.

Von Steubler had drained the bottle and it had fallen from his fingers. His ugly face was twisted with excruciating pain, and the fingers of both hands were clutched to his throat. A gurgling scream escaped his lips. For a split second his eyes, glassed with utter fear, met Bullets'. In spite of himself Bullets nodded,—and then there was no longer any fear in von Steubler's eyes. They became glazed as the hand of Death brushed across them. Without a single sound, the German fell over on his side and lay still.

"Hey you, Fritz! Up with your hands!"

Bullets turned his head to stare at the mud splattered Yank infantry lieutenant, and the three doughboys at his heels.

"Nuts!" he grunted. "I'm a Yank—Yank Air Service, you dope."

"Huh? Say, what the hell? Who's the other guy? Yank, too?"

Bullets looked at the dead German and shook his head.

"Nope," he muttered wearily. "Just a rat, who needed a drink—of rat poison! That's all."

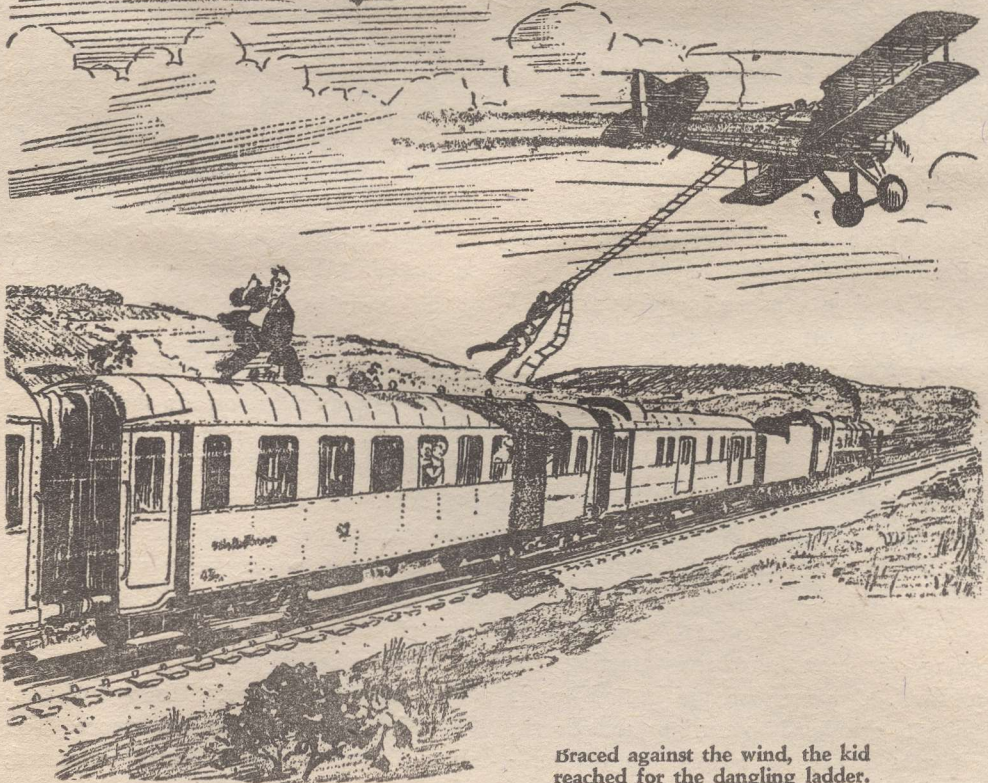
"A drink of—? Corporal! Gimme a hand here. We'll take this guy back to the Captain. Maybe he can figure things out. He used to be the superintendent of a nut house."

General Nuisance

by WILLIAM HARTLEY

Molloy and McNamara liked it best where the Spandaus spat their hate—where a challenge rode in a blood-red sky, and a man could find a fight. But all good things must come to an end, as these two guys found out. There is trouble ahead and plenty of grief for these punch-drunk clowns of the sky!

THE five Spads hit the field in quick succession and rolled up to the line. Five pilots legged from the pits and headed for the *estaminet* with the precision and single-mindedness of a well trained chorus. McNamara and Molloy, as befitted their thirsts and their capacities, headed the group and were well



Braced against the wind, the kid reached for the dangling ladder.

established at the bar, drinks in hand, when the rest of the flight arrived on the scene.

"If they were all like that," Molloy said, "it would be a shame to take the money. A few more quiet patrols, McNamara, and we'll take you up front, where the *men* play. You ought to be getting the swing of the thing about now, sonny."

McNamara almost choked on his drink. He set the glass on the bar and turned.

"Molloy—you're a nice young man and you've got a fine set of teeth. One more gag like that and you'll be wearing them on your watch chain."

Molloy grinned. "Now, now, Tommy! Is that the way to talk to a man who's trying to help you along?" He lit a cigaret. "Seriously, though, I wonder where Berndorf was this morning. It's the first time in a week that we haven't seen him."

"Like any honest workman," McNamara told him, "the guy probably took a day off. You weren't so anxious to tangle with him the last time he breezed around."

McNamara had difficulty restraining his laughter when Molloy whirled to face him.

"What do you mean, you big clown?" Molloy was furious. "That guy won't come within a mile of my ship! I dusted him off once, over near Baslieux, and he was lucky to get away with a whole hide—the bum!"

The door swung open and Purcell, the desk lieutenant, came into the room. He nodded to the assemblage and ordered a drink.

"Gentlemen," he said. "The 24th is going to have company—starting tomorrow. A very distinguished visitor is going to clamber into our laps, and I want all you gents to behave yourselves—everybody in bed by ten-thirty; shave

every morning—and, above all *no profanity!*"

Molloy looked at McNamara and grimaced, then turned back to Purcell. "Just what the hell are you talking about?"

Purcell displayed a screwy grin. "Beginning tomorrow, my fine fellows, Lieutenant Richard Hallowell Hawkins starts an extended stay with the 24th Pursuit Squadron. However, should the name mean nothing to you—ask yourself, one and all, if you have ever heard of Brigadier General James J. Hawkins."

Molloy said, "Sure, he's Divisional Commander at Wing."

Purcell pointed to him. "Mr. Molloy wins the cotton beer barrel. Lieutenant Hawkins is related to the General by marriage. He happens to be the General's son."

Disgust was evident on the faces of the entire group.

"This happened to me once before," Deegan, farther down the bar, said. "It was up at the 62nd, and we had a hell of a time. Moran, the brat's name was. He thought the sun rose and set on his own little back. I had to get out."

"Maybe the kid's all right," someone suggested. "We haven't seen him yet."

"You're right," McNamara told him. "We haven't seen him, and I'm not too anxious. The kid's got two strikes on him before he puts a bat on his shoulder. Of all the stuffed shirts that I've ever had anything to do with, his old man takes the cake. He had me juggled for three days, a couple of months ago,—just because I touched my wheels on the top of a car. I didn't know *he* was in the damned thing!"

"That makes it just one more time you didn't know something," Molloy told him. "Practically an everyday occurrence. You should keep yourself better informed, Mac."

Purcell interrupted the indignant McNamara. "And another thing;—Hawkins isn't the only new man. 'Wild Eddie' Breadon is coming up, too. He practically makes up for the other guy. No matter how bad Hawkins is, Breadon will tip the scales in our favor."

"Yeah," Molloy mused. "I hear he's quite a boy—knocked down a few planes, didn't he?"

"Fifteen," McNamara told him. "Just two less than you. And I hear that he really goes out and *gets* them. There's nothing *phoney* about it."

Molloy waved his hand in a beneficent gesture. "The guy is probably pretty fair. He's a lot like you, Mac, I guess. He's learnin' fast."

The dawn flight came back minus one plane the next morning. Molloy whistled when he turned and saw the line of holes in his fuselage, just back of the pit.

McNamara strode up to the plane.

"You oughta whistle. I never saw anything quite so close. Where the hell do you get all the luck, Mike?"

Molloy snarled. "Well, I got the guy, didn't I? What more do you want?"

"Personally, I'd stay on the ground if I were you."

WALKING to the mess shack together, they heard a loud voice. "Yeah, I've heard of them," it said. *Molloy and McNamara!* I've also heard of the Bobsey Twins and the Rover Boys. They sound too good to be true. Probably been picking setups—cold meat in old crates."

They saw the speaker, sitting in a chair with his legs on a table. He was big and he was broad and he looked like a tough customer. They stood in the doorway and listened to what he had to say.

"Me, I don't believe in that stuff. Let

somebody else take care of those observation kites that go about ten miles an hour. I shot at dummies long enough at a training field, and now I want the real thing. I like to find myself up there with a guy who can fly and take care of himself. I don't mind spillin' a little blood, but I like to do it the hard way."

He tilted his chair at a more precarious angle and continued. "From what I hear, they ought to put Molloy and McNamara in a balloon outfit—they're both so full of hot air."

McNamara and Molloy, in the doorway, looked at each other significantly. Molloy dug a coin from his pocket, flipped it in the air and caught it on the back of his hand. McNamara said, "Tails," softly, and frowned when Molloy revealed it. It was "Heads."

Tossing his helmet and gloves on a chair, Molloy walked over to the group listening to the newcomer. He said, "Hello, fellows," and as he passed the chair that the big man was sitting in, he hooked his foot under one of the rear legs and kicked. The chair and the man fell to the floor with a crash.

Molloy turned, a solicitous expression on his face, and exclaimed, "Say, that's too bad! I'm sorry that happened."

The fellow looked up at him suspiciously, and Molloy walked behind him and lifted his shoulders from the floor. He raised him halfway, then dropped him again. He made a clucking sound with his tongue, then roared with the rest of the group as the fellow rose to his feet.

Molloy held up a hand admonishingly. "Don't tell me," he said, then covered his eyes with his hand for a moment. He lowered the hand and whispered, "I'll bet you're Breadon!"

"You're damn right, I'm Breadon," was the answer. "Wild Ed—"



Molloy snapped his fingers. "Now I've got it! I couldn't think what it was they called you. 'Big Mouth' Breadon!"

Breadon took a step forward and Molloy advanced to meet him. He poked a finger into the newcomer's chest.

"Listen, you load of wind! My name is Molloy, see? I was standing in the doorway while you were shooting your mouth off—and I didn't like it! You talk big and you look big—"

His openhanded slap sounded through the room.

"Now, put up or shut up!"

Breadon grinned and swung from his heels. Molloy stepped inside and chopped down a short right hand, then pushed Breadon away. Breadon came in low and hooked a left to Molloy's head that slammed him against the wall. He followed fast and crossed a right that opened Molloy's cheek, then hooked the left to the body.

Molloy slid out of the way and smashed with the right again as Breadon turned. The big man hit the floor, but he was up again in a moment, moving forward.

They were powerful men, and each thudding blow sounded like a grapefruit hitting a brick wall. Molloy backed into a chair once, and fell, hastened on his way by the impetus of a right hand that shook his teeth. He came up fast and caught Breadon with a full right hand smash as the man came boring in. Breadon dropped to his knees. He was just a bit slower getting up, this time, and as he regained his feet, a big grin on his battered face, a cold voice spoke from the door.

"What's going on here?"

The group in the room turned to stare at Major Bowers, the C. O. Molloy spoke first.

"It was nothing at all, sir. Breadon and I were getting a bit of exercise."

Bowers took a look at the slightly altered features of both men and remarked

dryly, "It would be just too bad if someone started a real fight!" He became serious. "I don't want any more of this. We have enough trouble on our hands without looking for it among ourselves."

He turned to the young fellow at his side, who had been watching the proceedings with a wide grin.

"This is one of the replacements—Lieutenant Hawkins." He was only partly successful in hiding a smile. "I presume that it's unnecessary to introduce the other. Breadon seems to have made himself at home. I want to see McNamara and Molloy in my office immediately."

He turned and left the building.

Breadon wiped his face with a handkerchief, then turned to Molloy.

"So you're Molloy?"

Mike nodded. "And you're Breadon."

They both smiled suddenly and extended their hands.

"One of the most forceful introductions I've had in a long while," Molloy said. "I'm glad it isn't the usual thing."

He turned to McNamara. "Mac, meet Eddie Breadon. Breadon, this is Tommy McNamara."

McNamara smiled, "I haven't seen Molloy hit the floor so hard since I dropped him myself. We flipped a coin and Mike won. I'm not sorry."

"We oughta get along," Breadon said.

Molloy grabbed McNamara by the arm. "Speaking of getting along—we have to see the Old Man. I'll get hell for the brawl, but I wonder what he wants with you."

"Probably wants to know why I let you get your head punched." McNamara turned to Breadon. "I lead a hell of a life. I'm nurse to this madman. See you later."

BOWERS waved each of them to a chair and shook his head as he gazed at the mouse under Molloy's eye.

"It would be nice if you could keep out of trouble for five minutes, Mike. But then I suppose you wouldn't be happy."

He looked from one to the other.

"I suppose you know who this Hawkins kid is?"

They both nodded, somewhat sadly, and Molloy said, "Yeah, we heard the sad story. How long is he goin' to be here?"

"As long as he lasts," Bowers replied. He studied some papers on his desk. "The kid had a good record at training school, and there's no reason why he shouldn't make a fine pilot. But the fact that he's General Hawkins' son does make a difference—to me. You both know what a bearcat the old man is, and I don't want him down here on my neck. What I mean is this: I want you two to watch the kid for a few days. See that he keeps out of trouble and doesn't get hurt. Ride herd on him until he gets the feel of things—until he knows what it's all about. Then, he's on his own."

He ground his cigarette in an ashtray.

"If anything happened to him, while he's brand new, there'd be held to pay—and I'd have to do the paying. Do me a favor and keep your eye on him."

He smiled at Molloy. "I mean your good one, Mike."

McNamara and Molloy stood and saluted, "O. K., sir."

They were about to leave when Bowers stopped them.

"Just a minute. I meant to tell you that Breadon, Hawkins, Deegan and yourselves will make up the afternoon flight. That's all."

They walked from the office to the Nissen they shared, and Molloy growled, "Hell's bells and gingerbread! Things have come to a hell of a pass when we have to play guardian angel to the General's son! Everything happens to me."

"What are you beefing about?" McNamara wanted to know. "This won't be the first time you've taken care of some green kid. Where's the rub?"

"You'll find out where the rub is, if anything happens to that golden haired boy," Molloy told him. "We'll be jacked out of this man's army so fast that it won't even be comical. The General's kid is not just any kid. This is strictly a 'Handle With Care' job, and I don't like to work with glass."

A few hours later, when they turned out for the patrol, they talked with young Hawkins for the first time.

"I'm certainly glad to meet you fellows," he said. "I've heard an awful lot about you."

"You mean you've heard a lot about me, don't you?" Molloy asked. "The way I've been getting this lunkhead out of one jam after another? I didn't know that anyone outside his immediate family had heard of McNamara."

"Pay no attention to him," McNamara instructed. "It's a sin that they let him off the ground. He oughta be flyin' model planes."

Hawkins grinned, then he sobered and said, "I hope I won't get in your way, skyside."

"Don't worry, you won't" McNamara said. "You just keep your eyes open, and if we run into any trouble, you get right on home, understand?"

"OK," the kid answered, and climbed into the pit.

Breadon waved to them as he legged into the Spad and a moment later the flight took the air, Deegan flying at point, Hawkins and Breadon in the middle, with Molloy and McNamara at the tails.

Molloy watched the kid as he took the ship off the ground, and half of his worries blew away with the slipstream. This fledgling could fly, and no mistake! Some men are born with music in their

fingers,—some with an unquenchable desire and talent to paint—and some men are born with wings in their soul. Young Hawkins was one of the latter. His hand was as delicate and as light on that stick as a master's hand on the violin.

They were flying at five thousand when they hit the lines, and they cruised down towards Buzancy. Halfway home, Molloy saw the six small shapes heading at them from the south. He slipped the binoculars from the side of the pit and glued them to his eyes.

"Berndorf, sure as hell," he swore. "Why couldn't he leave us alone this time."

He fired a warning burst from the Vickers, and when Hawkins turned, he pointed to the oncoming flight of Fokkers, then motioned the kid homeward.

Hawkins looked at the German ships, then turned deliberately, and with great grace thumbed his nose at Molloy.

The big pilot swore beautifully for a moment, then grinned.

"The kid's got what it takes," he grinned. "He sees there are six of them and he won't take the powder."

The two flights met about a mile behind the German lines, and no time was wasted in preliminaries. The Spads had a slight edge in altitude, and they dove to the attack as one ship.

Molloy saw Deegan overshoot the Boche flight leader, then come back over in a strut-straining zoom. Hawkins picked the man in back of Berndorf and riddled the tail assembly with his first burst, then he went wide and came back for more.

McNamara had scored a hit with his first volley, and one Fokker went screaming down the sky with a wing pinned back over the pit.

The tail Fokker on Molloy's side came up under him like a sky-rocket and he could feel the Spad jerk as the hot steel

ripped at the tail. He booted the bar and shoved the stick to the wall and went down like a falling star. He came out at the bottom of the well and turned to see what had happened to the kid.

Hawkins was calmly riding the tail of a frantic Boche, and even as Molloy watched, the stream of tracers fought their way into the Fokker's pit and the crate fell off aimlessly on one wing.

He smiled in satisfaction and approval, then slammed the stick back against his knee as a line of holes appeared in his upper left wing. The diving Fokker missed him by scant feet, and he booted after it. The German pilot tried to come out of the dive to his left, but Molloy followed him as carefully and relentlessly as a hawk follows a sparrow. The black motor coaming swam into his sights, and he slammed in a burst that nailed the pilot to the pit.

Molloy turned and surveyed the sky in time to see Deegan dive past, a mass of flames, and McNamara climbing to meet the responsible Fokker.

He looked for the kid, and an oath seared his lips. Three thousand feet below was a Spad, angling off in a flat glide and heading *north* instead of south. He knew instantly what had happened.

A slug in the Hisso and a dead prop, and a confused kid heading in the wrong direction!

HE DOVE the Spad frantically, but he knew that it was no use. He was still a half mile away when the ship landed, perfectly, and well into German territory. He thought for a moment of landing and packing the kid in on a wing, but that idea was driven from his mind almost instantly by the immediate appearance of a squad of grey-uniformed figures who dashed for the crippled plane. Molloy was close enough to see the kid start, as if amazed, then dig into his pocket, strike

a match, and hold it to the dope-soaked fabric. In ten seconds the Spad was a roaring mass of flames.

Molloy didn't dare cut loose with his guns for fear of hitting the kid, but as he wheeled away he saw Hawkins wave a long farewell.

Molloy climbed back to the melee high above, just in time to watch Breadon turn on his back and bring down one of the two remaining Fokkers. The other lit out for home with McNamara in futile pursuit. Five minutes later, the three of them were headed for the field of the 24th.



Bowers was waiting for them as they hit the tarmac, and the expression of alarm on his face was instantly apparent. He reached the ships at a run.

"Where the hell is Hawkins?" he demanded.

The three flyers looked at each other and Molloy spoke first.

"He's down—in Germany. But he's not hurt," he hastened to assure Bowers. "I watched him land, he was perfectly okay. It just means that he won't get in any more trouble."

"Why the hell didn't you keep an eye on him?" Bowers snarled. "That was the least you could do."

Molloy colored. "That kid doesn't need anyone to mother him. He can fly like a bat out of hell. Besides, there was a guy named Molloy up there that I was pretty interested in. I had my troubles." He lit a cigaret and asked sarcastically, "I don't suppose it would interest you to learn that Deegan went down, too? Not the way Hawkins did, all in one piece and waving a happy good-bye—but burned to a cinder before he hit the ground."

Bowers colored. "I'm sorry, Mike. I don't know what I was thinking about. Deegan's gone too, eh? That's a damn shame. He was a good man in a plane

and a hell of a fine fellow. I'm sorry to lose him."

The four men walked to the C. O.'s shack and slumped in the office. Bowers found a bottle in a desk drawer and shoved it to the flyers.

"Well, we can't do anything about it, now, but it's too bad this had to happen. Old Man Hawkins will tear the roof off the joint. As soon as this report reaches Wing, he'll be up here in record time. But what the hell—this is no tea party! We've lost other kids and they haven't said a word. To hell with Old Man Hawkins!"

That wasn't quite the attitude taken by General Hawkins, about two hours later. He roared up to the field in a big car, going all out, and made his way instantly into Bowers' office. He was there for about ten minutes, before Purcell came over to the mess shack. He pointed to Molloy, McNamara and Breadon.

"The Old Man wants to see you—and pronto! It's a civil war, practically."

The three looked at each other and hitched up their belts. McNamara said, "Here goes nothing," and they walked together to the office.

Bowers was sitting at his desk, face pale and lips tight. Pacing the floor, his visage an apoplectic purple, General Hawkins whirled at the entrance of the three men. They stood at attention and saluted.

Bowers addressed them. "Gentlemen, the general wants to know the particulars of the flight which lost Captain Deegan and Lieutenant Hawkins."

The three looked at each other and Breadon and McNamara nodded to Molloy. He cleared his throat and told the story briefly and concisely as the general glared at him from beneath great, bushy brows.

"That's about all there is to it, sir,"

he finished. "Lieutenant Hawkins waved to me as I flew over him. He was apparently unhurt."

"Apparently unhurt!" the general scoffed bitterly. "All that's wrong is that he's about four miles behind the German lines!" He turned to Bowers and gave further expression to his anger. "I like the way you're running things here, Bowers! You send a green man out to hook up with Berndorf and his crowd, and make a bunch of halfwits responsible for his safety."

He made another furious circuit of the office. "McNamara, Molloy and Breadon—the three clowns of the Air Force! And you send my son up with such men!"

He picked his hat off the desk.

"You'll hear more about this, Bowers!"

Then he was gone.

Breadon swore. "Of all the loud-mouthed, lousy—" he stopped and looked at Bowers. The C. O. didn't say anything, but sat staring out the door.

"Well," he said finally. "There you are. You only heard the half of it. He blasted me from here to hell and back again before you came in. I'm inefficient, sloppy, careless, and a butcher!"

He got up, walked to the front of the desk and sat on the edge.

"But this is only the beginning. Wait until the storm hits! He can do everything but turn us out of the Service. We're eight miles up the creek, boys, and there isn't a paddle in the crowd. The whole outfit is going to feel this, you mark

my words! I don't know just what he'll do, but it'll be plenty. It wouldn't surprise me at all if a few of us were transferred, and if they took me back to some quiet spot to wind red tape."

And he was right.

The 24th was ordered to fly double patrols. The 24th was to cancel all leaves and no new applications would be considered. The 24th was to bring down a couple of balloons, over near Laon. The 24th was to do this, that and anything else that the general could think of.

Everything was regulation and Bowers and his outfit had no legitimate complaint.

"It's a wonder," Breadon remarked, "that he hasn't got us flying night patrol."

McNAMARA and Molloy and Breadon were the only members of the crew who didn't show the strain to any marked degree.

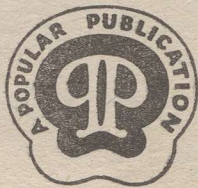
Breadon had two planes and a balloon to his credit, in four days, while McNamara and Molloy had each accounted for four ships.

Bowers summoned them to his office on the fifth day after Hawkins' visit. One look at his face told them a sad story.

"Well, here it is," he waved to a bunch of papers on the desk. "We've all got our moving papers. McNamara goes over to the 22nd, a crowd that hasn't seen a Fokker in six months. Molloy is the latest member of the 203rd *Observation Squadron*. And Breadon, ah, yes—Breadon! Breadon, have you ever been up in a

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balloon? You'll like it, I'm sure." His voice became harsh. "You'd better like it, for you've been transferred to the Balloon Corps."

His tone became cold and biting. "And do you know where I'm going? Back to Issoudon—as flying instructor! That's about all there is to say. This man's war is practically over, as far as we're concerned."

He arose from his desk. "What the hell, we can't do anything about it! Come on, I'll buy you a drink."

They repaired to the *estaminet*, surrounded by a bristling cloud of the most artistic profanity heard in years.

Bowers interrupted them to say, "Oh, yes. I was talking with Bronson of the 47th. One of his men escaped, yesterday, from the same prison camp in which young Hawkins is situated. He said that he was talking to the kid and that there's nothing wrong with him."

The other three perked up their ears at this bit of information and discussed the various angles. McNamara suddenly asked, "What's this bird's name? The one who lammed out of the camp."

"Fellow by the name of Jennings," Bowers told him. "Why?"

"I don't know. Thought it might be worth while to take a run down to see him."

Bowers frowned. "None of your crazy stunts, Mac. We have enough trouble the way it is."

Molloy said, "When do we go into hiding with these other outfits? When are the transfers effective?"

"The day after tomorrow," Bowers replied.

"Do you think," Breadon asked softly, "that if anything unusual happened—say the kid came home again—escaped—?"

Bowers smiled. "The Old Man would let you use his car to go from your Nissen to the mess shack! All the gifts that one

mortal man may bestow on another would be yours!" He stopped and a look of alarm crossed his features. "Hey! Where are you three going?"

But they were already out the door and into the squadron car, Breadon at the wheel.

"Do you know the way?" Molloy asked him.

"Sure. It's only about fifteen miles down the line. We can be there in half an hour."

They were, and when they asked for Jennings they were directed to the mess shack. They found him there, and McNamara discovered that he had flown in the same outfit with the man, eight months before. Greetings were exchanged, and they got down to the business at hand.

"The skipper told us that you flew the coop, yesterday, from some Heinie pen."

"Yeah," Jennings smiled. "I dug under a fence and found myself some woman's clothes and walked all the way. I saw young Hawkins while I was there. He told me that he was teamed up with you guys, for about ten minutes."

"That's right," McNamara told him. "But it's a long story. Where is this place?"

"It's a joint called Blagny, over near Montmedy. Quite a town."

"Is the prison in the town?"

"Yeah, it's right in the middle of the place. It's only a temporary affair, though. They keep you there for awhile, then ship you back along the line."

He looked at the anxious, intent faces of the group, and the truth dawned on him.

"Say—you're not going to try to grab this guy, are you?"

"Well—" Breadon started. Jennings interrupted him.

"It won't do you any good to go over there. You wouldn't last five minutes, in the first place. More important, they're

taking Hawkins back to the officers' camp, at Birkenfeld, tomorrow. He and two other guys."

Molloy was puzzled. "Birkenfeld is way the hell back, isn't it?"

"It sure is," Breadon said. "We'll never get our hands on him, there."

"How do they take him back?" McNamara asked. "Have they got a railroad in the joint?"

"Certainly they have a railroad," Jennings replied. "That Blagny is no one horse town."

Molloy pressed forward eagerly. "How often do the trains run? Do you know which one they're shipping him on."

Jennings pursed his lips. "Let's see, now. They cut out the 10:56 because some of the boys were getting to the office too late. Then they decided to shut down on the 6:23, in the evening, because there was no smoker on it." He spat scornfully. "What are you guys trying to do, kid me? 'How often do the trains run?' Hell, I said it was more than a haystack and a barn, but I didn't tell you it was Paris! Sure, they have trains—*one!* It leaves Blagny at 6:30 in the evening for the back areas, then makes the return trip in the morning. Hawkins and the other officers will be on that train, tomorrow night."

They thanked him hurriedly and went out to the car again. They took their time getting back to the 24th and on the way they tried to rig up some sort of a work-in plan. Breadon said that there was nothing they could do about it, except to blow up the train, then land and take a chance on picking the kid up.

"I suppose they'd all sit around and shout, 'Happy landings!'" Molloy asked. "What a fine chance you'd have of landing a plane and taking off again, even if you were lucky enough to grab the kid."

"We could disguise ourselves as Ger-

man pilots, fly over there, board the train and then strongarm the guards," McNamara suggested.

"My, what big muscles you have!" Molloy told him. "Disguise ourselves—hell! That Irish pan of yours would be a dead giveaway—and we'd need an interpreter!"

He was silent for a moment, then snapped his fingers and swore excitedly.

"I've got it—I've got it! It's not as simple as walking up the street, but it might work, if we're careful. Listen to this!"

They listened, intently, and when he had finished speaking they nodded their heads solemnly in approval. McNamara said, "It sounds good to me, but who's going to do the hobo act?"

"You're the logical one," Molloy told him, "but we'll draw straws. I thing I'd rather like that job myself."

They stopped the car while Molloy broke three matches into various lengths. Then they each chose one. Molloy grinned as he drew the short stick.

"Lucky as hell, that's me. Always get the job I want."

McNamara and Breadon shook their heads in evident disappointment.

"Don't forget to be there on time," Molloy cautioned them, "or we might just as well forget about the whole thing. It might be embarrassing to me if you happened to be late."

LATE that night, Molloy clung to the wing of McNamara's Spad and wondered if he hadn't been a little rash in suggesting this screwy idea. They were high over the Front and heading for a field outside of Blagny that they both knew well. Another five minutes of flight brought them into the vicinity of the location they were seeking, and McNamara killed the Hisso and sent the plane into

a long, flat glide. From a thousand feet they spotted the field, and Molloy heard McNamara's gleeful voice.

"How do you like it, eh? I don't have to see where I'm going, Mike—just tell me the spot and I'll get you there with no trouble and no lost motion."

"Yeah," Molloy told him. "You're just peachy. I hope the hell you can find your way home."

McNamara set the idling plane down on the soft green meadow, and Molloy swung the tail about for the takeoff.

"Get out of here in a hurry," he whispered to McNamara. "And *don't* forget about tomorrow!"

"What's going on tomorrow?" McNamara grinned at him. "Havin' a birthday, or something?"

Molloy smiled in spite of himself. "Go on, get goin'."

He ran into the woods at the side of the field as the Hissro roared out in full power and the Spad began to roll down the turf. He watched the exhaust as it lifted into the air, then hid himself deeper in the heavy undergrowth.

He found a windfall, close beside a stream, and there he spent the night, huddled in the unfamiliar civilian clothes with which he had supplied himself for the occasion.

The dawn awakened him, and he fished a sandwich from his pocket, after washing in the brook, and munched it meditatively. It was going to be a long day, sitting here by himself, and if McNamara and Breadon were late, that night, it would be just too bad.

He smoked a cigaret, then curled up for a bit of sleep.

He awoke again at four o'clock and glanced at his watch. Then he climbed

the nearest tall tree, and making sure of his position, he set out leisurely for the close-by town of Blagny.

As he walked, he gazed down at himself speculatively and was satisfied. The civilian suit was old and worn, and the night in the forest hadn't done anything to improve its appearance. He had no desire to make himself conspicuous in Blagny—and a well-dressed man in Blagny would be as much of a curiosity as a circus.

He plodded into the town, a small but bustling hamlet, and lost himself in the mottled throngs that crowded the streets. The walks were filled with soldiers and civilians, and Molloy knew that he was almost as safe as if he were back on the field of the 24th. No one paid the least attention to him.

The roads were packed with lorries and lines of marching men going up to the Front, and in the orderly confusion, no one paid any heed to the bent, poorly dressed man who made his slow way toward the other end of town.

Molloy had flown over Blagny many times, and he knew exactly the place he was seeking. Outside of the town was a water tank, at which he now knew the trains stopped to fill their boilers. That was where he was going. He planned to walk up the track for about half a mile beyond the tank, and there wait for the evening train. His plans, and they included McNamara and Breadon, were well formed. He knew that their successful execution depended almost entirely upon the timing, and that was in the hands of McNamara. He held little fear for their completion.

He finally reached the spot he had been seeking, and sat down to rest. No one in



the town had suspected him, and he had learned much that would be of value to Intelligence when he returned to Allied soil.

He was nervous, as a man will be before he undertakes a thrilling venture, and the time seemed to pass very slowly. He had glanced at his watch countless times before he heard the whistle of the train as it prepared to leave the station at Blagny. He rose to his feet and assumed a position behind some convenient foliage.

He watched the three car train stop at the tank for a few moments, and then it came down the track towards him, gradually picking up speed. He crouched in the bushes as the first car swept past, and he scanned the occupants in the windows at his side. His heart fell as he failed to perceive young Hawkins. What if he were not on this train? What if the authorities had decided to hold him in Blagny for a few days?

The second car passed him, and in one of the front compartments he glimpsed the profile of the man he was seeking. He ran to the track, crouching, and swung himself to the long steps that traversed the length of the car. And there he hung.

He was sure of himself, now, and felt in his pockets for the two automatics which were such important factors of his plan. Suddenly, from the southeast, he heard the sound for which he had been waiting, the peculiar moaning sound of distant planes. He looked in the direction from which the sound came, and far down on the horizon he sighted them. The time had come for action!

He crept along the narrow platform to the door of the compartment occupied by young Hawkins, and keeping well out of sight, swung it quickly open.

He pulled the two automatics from the pockets of his nondescript jacket and leaped through the door.

There were six men in the compartment—Young Hawkins, two other American prisoners, and three German guards. One of these latter snapped to his feet and reached for a gun at Malloy's entrance, but the automatic in Mike's right hand blasted instantly, and the man slumped to the floor, a large part of his head unaccounted for.

Molloy motioned threateningly to the other two Huns and said, "Sit tight, my friends, and reach for the ceiling—get me?"

It was evident that the two men understood not a word of what he said, but understood perfectly what the two gleaming automatics meant. They acted accordingly.

"Take their guns away from them and toss the things out the window. Hurry!" Molloy snapped to young Hawkins.

His orders were obeyed quickly, then Molloy walked over and clipped each of the guards on the head.

"Sorry, gentlemen," he said. "But you'll all feel better in the morning."

He spoke to the other two Americans.

"I won't be able to do much for you boys, but there's the door. Help yourselves. Hawkins, you stay with me."

HE GAVE the youngster one of the guns, and together they left the compartment the way Molloy had entered, and crouching on the steps that ran the length of the train, they made their way to the end of the car. There was a ladder leading to the roof, and Molloy indicated to Hawkins that he was to climb it.

As they swung themselves to the top of the swaying train, the roar of plane motors was louder, much louder. Molloy looked up, and saw the two Spads swooping down upon them.

Even as he watched, a rope ladder dropped from each plane and hung swinging in the slipstream. He shouted to Haw-

kins, "It'll be tough going, kid, but we can make it! You take the first one!"

Hawkins was pale, Malloy noticed, but he nodded determinedly.

They were braced against the breeze that threatened to blast them from the train as the first Spad swept close to the roof. The ladder of rope dangled grotesquely and whipped about. Just as the plane was almost past, Hawkins made a grab at the ladder and swung off into space. He wrapped his feet in the rungs and waved back to Molloy.

It was Molloy's turn, now, and as he gauged the distance between himself and the second means of escape, a head raised itself over the side of the car. Molloy shot from the hip and heard, above the roar of the plane and the panting of the locomotive, a hoarse scream, as the head fell backward out of sight.

He threw the gun into the wind and grabbed for the ladder. It was in perfect

position, and it couldn't have been more convenient if it had been leaning against a wall and he had walked up to it. He knew who was flying *this* ship!

He grasped the rope and sought the rest of it with his feet, then clambered laboriously upward. He climbed the landing gear, and reaching for a wire brace, pulled himself up on a wing. He saw that the planes had reversed their course and were now heading back for the 24th's drome.

He grinned at the goggled face of McNamara, and crawling close to the pit, he yelled,

"You were on time, for once in your life!"

"Yeah," was the muffled answer. "We have to take Hawkins home!"

"Right!" Molloy yelled. "The good old general's son!"

"You mean," came to him faintly, "the good old general's nuisance!"

THE END

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT



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This April-May Issue will appear on all newsstands February 26. It will sell at ten cents per copy, and we hope you will like it.

FOKKER FATE

By
DARRELL
JORDAN

Jigger Jenkins was proud to have captured von Molke, the greatest prize in the war. And it swelled his chest like a toy balloon with a just and pardonable pride. But wars are won by the use of your head, as well as a dash of nerve. He had a lot to learn.



The German never knew
what hit him.

WITH a loud yawn that compared favorably with the drone of his engine, "Jigger" Jenkins stuck his Camel down into the billowy mass of clouds and coasted earthward.

"And that's that!" he mumbled aloud. "Two hours is enough time to spend looking for action, particularly after that binge last night. Boy, oh boy, can these Frogs manufacture fire-water!"

With a nod for emphasis, that, incidentally, didn't help his throbbing head any, he throttled slightly and eased the

nose up a hair as he came sliding out of the clouds into clear air. Poking the stick over, he banked around toward the American lines and headed home.

It was at that moment the gods of war seemingly decided that Jigger hadn't done anything to earn his active-service flying pay. As a result they changed the course of a lone Fokker pilot who was winging eastward. And as a result of *that*, said Fokker pilot suddenly slipped down out of the clouds less than a hundred yards in front of Jigger's whirling prop.

After two hours of fruitless patrolling, the Yank was at first inclined to disbelieve his eyesight. The sudden yammer of Spandaus guns, and two ribbons of jetting flame heading his way, changed all that a few split seconds later. In fact, a neat row of bullet holes appearing in the top center section served as definite proof. With a startled howl he slammed over and down in a wing-screaming half roll, hauled the ship up out of it and tore in at the Fokker from a blind angle. His burst missed its mark by less than that.

He didn't get a second chance. With the fury of a vulture gone plumb berserk, the Fokker pilot started to chew up every cubic foot of air in that section of sky. A dozen times Jigger cut in for a cold-meat broadside only to see the German do the unexpected and snake out into the clear.

"Stand still, you tramp!" he howled. "How the hell can I—?"

He cut the rest short as a new sound came to his ears. It was the chatter of Vickers guns, not his own. Forgetting the Fokker for a split second he threw back his head and glanced upward. A snorting grunt slid off his lips as he spotted the Eighty Fourth Camel, with eagle head insignia on the fuselage, ripping downward, both guns blazing. The pilot of the plane was not only top Hunter of Eighty Four, but his best pal in

France. Lieutenant George Higgins, he was on the official records, but to the gang he was just plain "Sleepy" Higgins. A misnomer, if there ever was one, considering the lad's Fokker record. However, at first glance his slow, painstaking efforts to do anything suggested a man performing in his sleep, and so "Sleepy" he had been dubbed, and "Sleepy" he had remained.

And there he was hurtling down out of nowhere—hurtling, yet seemingly taking his time about closing in for the kill. Kicking his own Camel around on wing-tip, Jigger raised one hand and waved it vigorously.

"Lay off, Sleepy!" he shouted. "This lad is my meat! Don't go messing up the works, you mug!"

Whether or not the roar of his engine drowned out his voice, the other pilot ignored him anyway, and kept right on "loafing" down. The Fokker pilot, having realized that two instead of one were after him, was doing his damndest to corkscrew out of the way and get back to his home drome, hell bent. In an attempt to do that, he pulled the same cutting-into-the-clear trick he had been executing with success on Jigger. It was simply to fake a full roll, cut out to the right when the Fokker was upside down, and slam into a two turn power spin, and then zoom up off to the opposite side.

As Jigger saw him start to do it for the umpteenth time, he cursed aloud. He, himself, wasn't close enough to check the maneuver. He'd lost valuable ground gaping up at Sleepy. And the way Sleepy was drifting lazily downward it looked as though the German would be able to fly to Berlin and back before Sleepy could get in close enough. Yes, it looked that way, but such things are mighty deceiving in an air scrap. Added to that, Sleepy Higgins hadn't become top Hun man of

Eighty Four with his belly up to the mess lounge bar.

And so, when it appeared that the Fokker was sure to rip out into the clear and away, Sleepy suddenly slapped his ship into a dime split-arc, let the nose drop and tore through an angle full-roll. He came out of it just as the German started his zoom. Three seconds later and it was all over. The Fokker pilot probably didn't know what hit him. Sleepy's burst zipped straight down into the cockpit and slammed the German up against the instrument board. The Fokker continued its zoom for perhaps a hundred feet, or so, then fell over into a power spin that ended up in a cloud of dust and a sheet of flame on the ground.

WITH a "damned-if-I-can-believe-it" shake of his head, Jigger pulled up out of his own dive and leveled off toward Eighty Four's drome. Throttling slightly he looked back and waited for the other to climb up into formation position.

"Luck, just blind luck!" he grunted. "If I only had some of it I'd wear out a couple of adding machines keeping track of the crates I belted down."

That and similar thoughts running through his brain, he led the way back to the home drome and slid down to an easy landing. Legging out at the line he shuffled over to Sleepy's plane. The top-Hun man had not as yet climbed out. He was giving his guns and ammo belts a careful inspection. Jigger watched him for a moment and gave a grunt of disgust.

"Yeah, me too!" he growled. "I'm wondering how you did it, myself. Boy, is it going to be tough when *your* luck runs out!"

Placid brown eyes slid around his way, and thin lips stretched back in what might be termed a paternal grin. Then with slow, deliberate movements Sleepy Higgins lifted his scare-crow figure out of the pit and dropped to the ground.

"There you go again, Jigger!" the drawling voice reproached. "You call it luck. It ain't, son. How many times must I tell you that in this man's war you gotta always be prepared for the unexpected?"

"Nuts!"

"Maybe, son, but it still goes. I watched you flub-dub with that bird for a couple of minutes. He was putting it over you like a tent 'cause you didn't bother to try to out-guess him. And so every unexpected maneuver he pulled left you fanning thin air."

"And more nuts, you big tramp!" Jigger growled.

"It's gospel, Jigger," the other grinned, and jerked a thumb toward Jenkins' plane. "Take right now, for example. Your guns need loading after all the sky you tore up missing that Fokker. But do you tend to that first? Nope, you come over to jaw with me. Supposing the Major came rushing out with orders for us to go high-balling out after some balloon straffing Fokkers? See? You just won't savvy how important it is to be prepared for the unexpected. Right?"

"What big words you use, Grandma!" Jigger snarled. "Cut it! Come on, let's hoist a few. Yeah, a toast to that dame, Lady Luck, who's continually making a play for you."

With a sigh Sleepy followed him into the mess lounge, named his poison, and downed it in one gulp. Shoving it across the zink bar for a refill he stared at Jigger with an expression of friendly impatience.

"No fooling, Jigger," he said, "I'm not trying to preach. If you'd only stop figuring everything as all cut and dried you'd be sitting on the top of the heap in no time. And you've gotta stop it, see? Hear the latest?"

Jigger gurgled into his drink.

"Sure! They're making you Chief of Air Ser—"

"Von Molke's Squadron has come up

in front of us. Moved in last night."

Jigger straightened up at that, and his eyes grew bright. From the Channel to the Alps the name, von Molke, was one that made any Allied pilot think twice. Baron von Richthofen had been good, but von Molke was a past master in the art of slapping pilot and plane right out of the sky.

"*Von Molke?*" Jigger echoed excitedly. "Now, there is something to go after!"

"Right!" Sleepy nodded and waved a lazy finger under Jigger's nose. "And if there's any Fokker lad who can pull the unexpected, von Molke is it. Watch your step, Sunshine! Von Molke and his brood won't let you flub-dub around the way you did today. They'll just up and carve their initials in that thick skull of yours, unless you take my tip and snap out of your cut and dried methods of air scrapping."

Jigger's reply was to order another drink and playfully thumb his nose at his pal. Right then and there the subject was dropped and the more serious problem of cognac was taken under consideration.

Two hours, and several drinks later, Jigger got around to the idea of checking his guns and ship after the air scrap. That done with, he sat for a few minutes in the cockpit staring meditatively toward the eastern heavens. With each passing minute a dizzy plan slowly took more and more definite form in his brain. Presently, he impulsively smacked his clenched fist against the side of the cockpit.

"Damned if I won't!" he grunted. "Be prepared for the unexpected? You betcha! I'll just take me over to von Molke's field, egg the bum upstairs and slap him down before he can get underway. Maybe *that* will make Sleepy put his damn preaching in moth balls."

Resolution and action became one for Jigger. Five minutes later, his engine all warmed up, he taxied out into the wind,

belted the throttle forward and took off. At five thousand he leveled off, banked around and set the nose on a bee-line course toward von Molke's drome. As he winged eastward a grin of eager expectancy tugged at the corners of his mouth. Von Molke wouldn't expect "callers" this soon. It would be the perfect chance. And what a horse laugh he'd have on old fix-this and fix-that Sleepy. Yeah, for once some other guy in Eighty Four was going to cut himself a big slice of luck.

True, the amount of cognac consumed went far toward encouraging Jigger's idea. But it was no suicide plan he had selected. Prepared or unprepared, Jigger Jenkins could cross props with the best of them. And that included von Molke, too. No, he stood a fifty-fifty chance of making good. And had it not been for one of those million and one crazy twists of war he might possibly have made good his intentions right smack over von Molke's field in full view of the famous ace's yes-men.

But a crazy twist of war prevented all that. Less than half a mile from his own field Jigger suddenly jerked up straight in the seat and swore excitedly. Off his left wings, about two thousand feet below him, and flying hell bent toward the west, was a blue and gold striped Fokker. No pilot in all France would have to take more than one look at those familiar markings to recognize von Molke's plane.

HOWEVER, Jigger took two looks because it just didn't seem to be true. But it was! Fate, luck, or something had decreed that von Molke would select the same time to take a quick look-see over the American lines for his own satisfaction. Anyway, there he was. And there was Jigger Jenkins up above him.

With a whoop that must have been heard clear back to Paris, Jigger whipped

over and down in a power dive that made his wings virtually groan in protest. Like a streak of light he shot downward onto the tail of the blue and gold Fokker. Five hundred feet from it he saw the helmeted figure in the pit suddenly snap his head around. Instantly the Fokker cut off to the side, doubled back on its tracks and whirled into a full roll.

Jigger grinned and piled down closer. If that was the best the great von Molke could do, it would be a cinch. And right over Eighty Four's drome, too. Hot diggity!

"Come on, guy, make it interesting!"

Bellowing the words at the top of his voice, Jigger slammed in real close and jabbed the trigger trips forward. His bullets nicked the whiskers of the German, if he was wearing whiskers, but failed to smack any vital points. With the speed of light the German hauled his gay colored Fokker up in a gigantic loop, and then let the plane fall off the top. Altitude was all that saved Jigger from flopping into a tough position. But greater altitude he had, and so he simply pulled his own nose up, and then sliced over and down on one wing.

With most of his speed gone as the result of his desperate, but losing maneuver, von Molke was trapped cold. Jiggers tracer's bit through the Fokker's wings and crept steadily toward the cockpit. The German tried everything in the bag, and a few he undoubtedly thought up on the spur of the moment, but it just wasn't his day.

In fact, Jigger was on the point of slamming home a burst that would finish up in the German's head when he cursed in surprise and jerked his thumbs from the trigger trips. Von Molke was nobody's fool. Death is too damn final, and so the German ace had raised both hands above his head in a gesture of complete surrender.

"Well I'll be a—!" Jigger roared "Not only do I outscrap the guy, but I take him prisoner. Cut yourself a slice of this, Sleepy old pal, old pal! Try and tell me how it should be done, huh? Boy, are you buying the drinks for a long time to come!"

Practically beside himself with wild elation Jigger herded the gold and blue Fokker down onto Eighty Four's field, and right up to the line where every pilot and mechanic stood watching pop-eyed. Grinning from ear to ear, the Yank leaped out and ran over to the Fokker. Careful to keep both hands in full view, von Molke slowly climbed to the ground. Clicking his heels he snapped a hand to his helmet.

"I salute you!" he said in perfect English. "It is too bad I developed engine trouble at the wrong time."

Jigger relieved the German of his holstered Luger and motioned toward the mess.

"A bum alibi," he grinned, "but we'll let it go. Come on and have a drink with us. Later I'll take your crate up just to see for myself. Engine trouble, nuts!"

The German's small, pale blue eyes glowed with a light that could be inner anger or something else. Jigger, however, was too happy to bother about interpreting the look. Taking the German by the arm he lead the way into the mess, roared the mess orderly into action as he shouldered through the door. A few minutes later, as he held his glass up in a victor's salute to the vanquished German, he suddenly realized that Sleepy Higgins was not among those present. Realization sent a strange emotion rippling through him. In this, his greatest hour of triumph, was his pal ignoring him in a dizzy fit of jealousy? It seemed unbelievable, yet Sleepy wasn't there to join the victory toast. And he'd been on the tarmac with the others.

A sort of empty feeling in his stomach,

Jigger lowered his glass and looked slowly about just to make sure that Sleepy wasn't there. At that moment, however, the mess door opened and the pilot in question came inside. With a whoop of joy, Jigger rushed up to him, pulled him over to where von Molke stood granite faced and expressionless, an untouched glass of cognac in his hand.

"Here he is, Sleepy!" Jigger cried. "The lad you were worrying about my not out-guessing. Kinda wasted your breath that time, hey, pal, old pal?"

Sleepy grinned, nodded.

"Pick up the marbles, son," he said. "Maybe I was wrong, or maybe you got wise to yourself. Anyway, where's my drink?"

"Take mine, kid, take mine!" Jigger cried and held it out.

In doing so, he reached across in front of von Molke. What happened in the next split second no one in the room exactly saw. There was simply a quick twisting of bodies, a heavy thud, and there stood von Molke, his back to the wall and Jigger's service automatic in his hand. Stark hatred burned in the eyes the German flashed at Jigger, stretched out bewildered, flat on his back on the floor.

"Your comrades will join you on the floor, *Herr Leutnant!* I will shoot the first man who disobeys!"

"Damn him, I'll—!"

Sleepy's foot kicking Jigger's ankle stopped him.

"You'll do nothing, Jigger!" he grated. "It's von Molke's party, now. There are other days coming."

"He speaks the truth!" came the German's harsh voice. "It is now *my* party. Not one that I like, but it cannot be helped. So I am leaving. You can, of course, try to stop me. In fact, you might eventually kill me. I am only one, and you are many. But, *more* than one of you

will die with me. If you think it worth the risk, then very well."

It was a straight from the shoulder dare, but not a man made a single move toward his automatic. Sleepy Higgins' drawling voice decided for them.

"On your bellies, gang!" he said. "No Hun is worth that many of us. On your bellies!"

As one man they all got down, each careful to keep both hands out in front of him. Instantly, von Molke edged toward the door, a faint smirk twitching at his thick lips.

"There is one of you with sense, at least," he said. "*Ja*, there are other days coming, as he says. But they shall be different, very different. Now, gentlemen, stay right where you are. Right where you—"

VON MOLKE didn't bother finishing.

In a whirlwind of speed, he jerked the mess door open and went racing through out of sight. Instantly, Jigger scrambled to his feet, tore the Luger from his tunic pocket into which he had dropped it, and dashed for the door. As he reached it he saw von Molke vault into the Fokker pit less than fifty yards away. Its prop was ticking over, and pop-eyed mechanics were cowering backward in the face of the German's gun.

A savage curse on his lips, Jigger jerked up the Luger and started to take aim. A fist arced down on his wrist and knocked the Luger to the floor. At the same time Sleepy Higgins' voice barked in his ear.

"You might hit a mechanic! Just watch!"

Words failed Jigger. Speechless, trembling with rage, he saw the Fokker lunge forward, saw the tail come up, and the gold and blue plane go streaking across the small drome. In almost no time it was three quarters of the way across. But,

strangely enough, the wheels did not leave the ground. Through angry eyes Jigger saw the figure in the pit desperately pulling the stick back. And then suddenly the whirling prop started to slow down, and the plane went veering sharply to the left.

It was too late, though, and the forward speed of the Fokker was too great. Added to that were the shell scraggled trees that lined the far side of the drome. The Fokker slammed into them wing first. Impact swerved the nose around. The propeller flew apart in a shower of splinters as it rammed straight into a tree trunk. In the next second the gold and blue plane ripped itself apart and piled up in a heap between two tree trunks.

"A couple of busted legs at least, if it isn't his neck."

"He couldn't pull it clear!" Jigger mumbled. "What the—? That Mercedes was doing full revs!"

Sleepy widened his grin, reached out and patted Jigger on the shoulder.

"Correct, son" he said. "But it wasn't his engine. I wanted to make sure."

"You wanted to make sure?" Jigger finally gulped out. "What—?"

"The unexpected, Jigger!" Sleepy stopped him. "You just never will learn, will you? Hell, by saying you were going to take his ship up, and leaving the prop ticking over, you practically invited the guy to make an escape break. I just figured that he might try it, so I simply took the necessary precautions against anything he might try."

"You took—" Jigger began, and stopped.

"Exactly!" Sleepy grinned. "While you were dishing out victory cognac in the mess I unfastened the *top elevator wires on the Fokker*. Catch on, fathead? If he *did* get to his ship and start to take off he'd be out of luck. He could get the tail up but he wouldn't be able to lift the *nose*! And—well, take a look out there, son."

Jigger didn't bother to look. He shuffled over to the mess bar and splashed four fingers of cognac into a glass.

"If only this cock-eyed war lasts long enough!" he growled. "Maybe I *will* learn! Come over here, you long drink of water, and order your blasted reward!"

THE END

VULTURES OF THE WHITE DEATH

As told by G-8 to
ROBERT J. HOGAN

Mr. Hogan has taken a chapter from the life of G-8, the Master Spy, and woven it into as thrilling a story of wartime skies as has ever found its way into print.

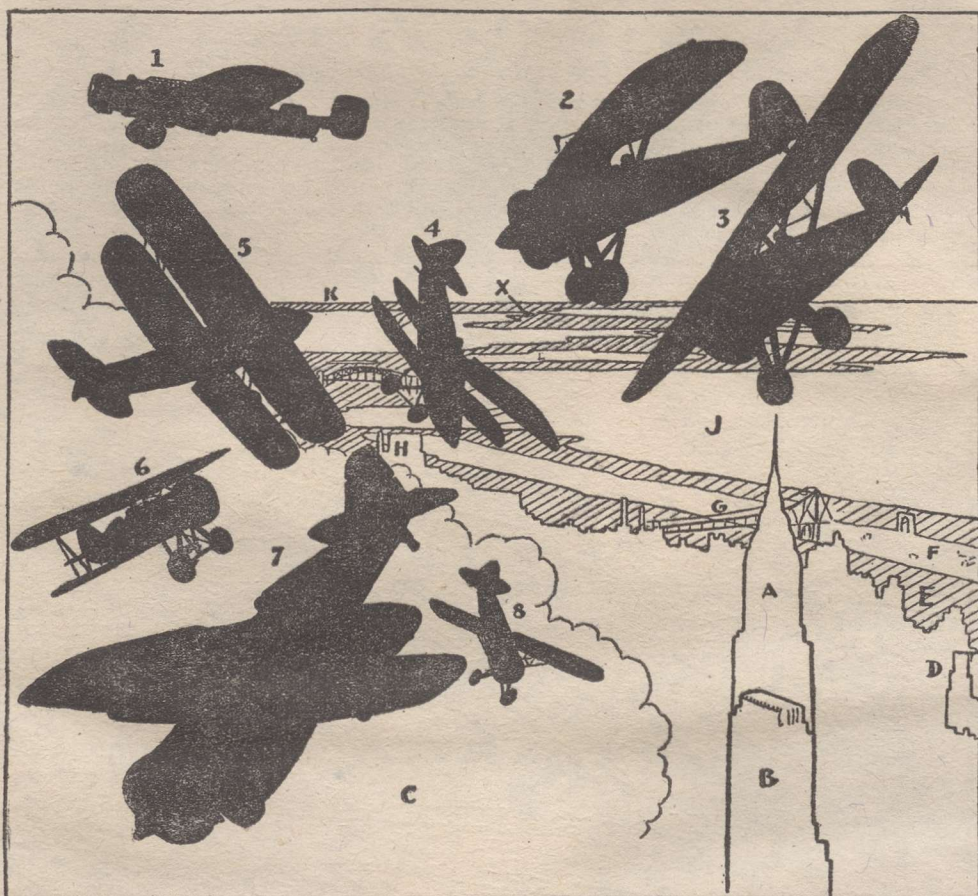
The White Death!—it came like the snow, and covered all the earth. It took its horrible toll of life and it cast up Death's challenge to the Master Spy. It is a novel of daring, of high courage and thrilling flight. It is the best yarn ever to come from the pen of Robert J. Hogan. Also thrilling short stories in this banner April Issue of



On Sale Now at Ten Cents
a Copy!

**G-8 and His
BATTLE
ACES**

Story Behind the Cover



WELL, guys—when I brought in this month's cover for Dare-Devil, the editors began to climb out the windows, slide down drain pipes and phone for the Army and Navy. Why? For a very good reason: we are bombing New York City.

Of course, I don't think that day will ever arrive, and the fact that I have Japanese ships opposing the Americans who are allied with the British, really means nothing at all. We simply want to look at these rather interesting planes, and thought it would be fun to give them an unusual setting. I have marked off these crates on the sketch above, so that you may check them with the cover.

Numbers 2, 3 and 8, as you probably know, are the Japanese Nakajima single-seater Army fighters. These high-wing braced monoplanes are powered by 450 h.p. Nakajima "Jupiter" radial air-cooled engines, which give them a speed of 198 m.p.h.

Plane number 1, is the Kawasaki long-distance bomber, type 93. This is moved along by two Kawasaki B.M.W. engines, at a rate of 220 m.p.h. Its ceiling is 16,400 feet.

Numbers 4 and 5 are British Hawkers, with which you are all well acquainted. I guess I just like those crates, because I can't paint a cover without sticking one or two along the skyline.

Number 6 is the Boeing P-12E single-seat fighter, with a speed of 189 m.p.h., while number 7 is the Curtiss "Hawk" BF2C-1 single-seat fighter which can do at least 209 m.p.h.

But perhaps those of you who have never been to New York would like to learn a thing or two concerning the big town. Of course, you must recognize the Chrysler Building (A), which is at 42nd street and Lexington Avenue. (B), represents the famous Lincoln Building, while (C), pity the poor tenants, is the Chanin Building, which has lost its roof in our cover scene. However, the one detail that bothers the editorial staff of Popular Publications most, is the building designated by (D). This is where the guys have to work, and they don't like the idea a little bit. In fact, since they are friends of mine, I think I'll call off this particular war.

As for the rest of New York, as shown on the cover, just take a look around:

(Continued on Page 88)

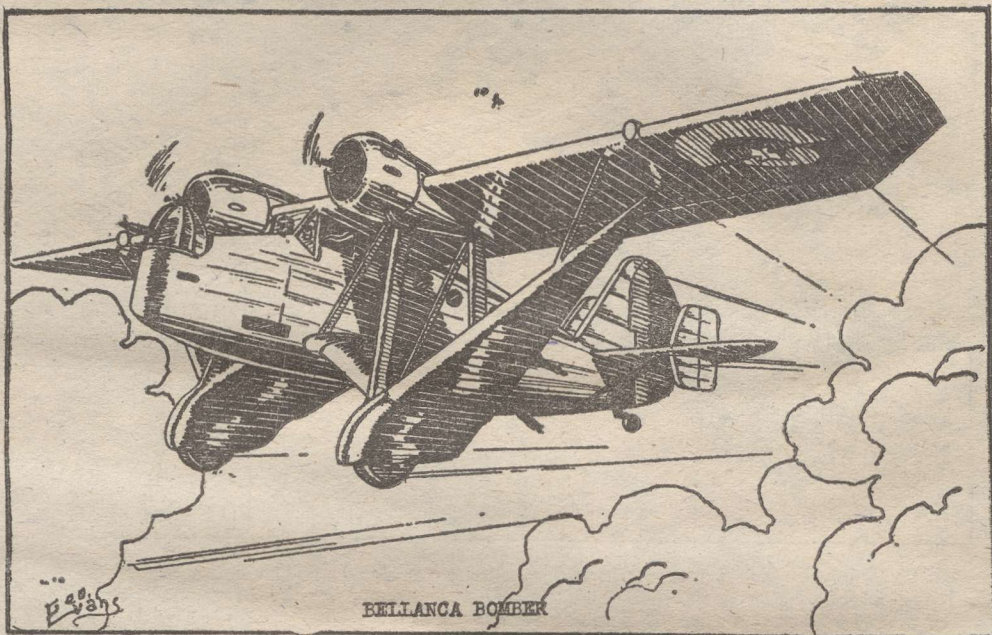
Story Behind the Cover

(Continued from Page 87)

Just back of the Chrysler Tower is the Queensboro Bridge, (G), or rather, what the Japs have left of it. The world-famous Cornell Medical Center is at (H). The letter (J) represents the great Borough of Queens. (F), happens to be Welfare Island, where we used to have one of our better jails. (X), depicts City Island, which is part of the Bronx, and at the city limits, while (K) represents Long Island Sound. After that come the ocean, and the next stop is Spain. Just what this has to do with airplanes, I don't know. I simply thought you might be interested in New York. See you all next month. . . . Fred Blakeslee. . .

SKY SECRETS

By
GEORGE EVANS



THE "Bellanca Bomber" is a development of the Bellanca "Airbus", and its uses are many and varied. It can be used as a troop transport, ambulance plane or photo ship. In a pinch it can be transformed to a pursuit plane.

It is powered by two Wright "Cyclone" 1820-F-3 engines, rated at 715 h.p. at 7000 feet. They are mounted in the leading edge of her high monoplane wing, and they use two-bladed propellers.

The wing itself is built of plywood ribs, set close together on two spars. They are fabric covered, and can be folded to allow the big crate to be stored in a comparatively small space. The wing stubs are aluminum covered and contain two 90 gallon gas tanks, besides the two 60 gallon tanks in the motor nacelles.

The fuselage is constructed of steel tubing and covered with fabric. The fore gunner has a glass-enclosed cockpit, and so has the pilot. The rear gunner and bomber are stationed back of the cockpit, and the post is fitted with windows in the top, bottom and sides, so that the plane has no blind spot.

Inside the unusually large cockpit is a removable gas tank with a capacity of two hundred gallons, and a belly tank below the cabin carries 180 gallons. The job, with this fuel capacity has a range of 1,500 miles, with a normal load.

The auxiliary rudders allow easy control when the ship is running on only one engine.

The specifications are as follows:

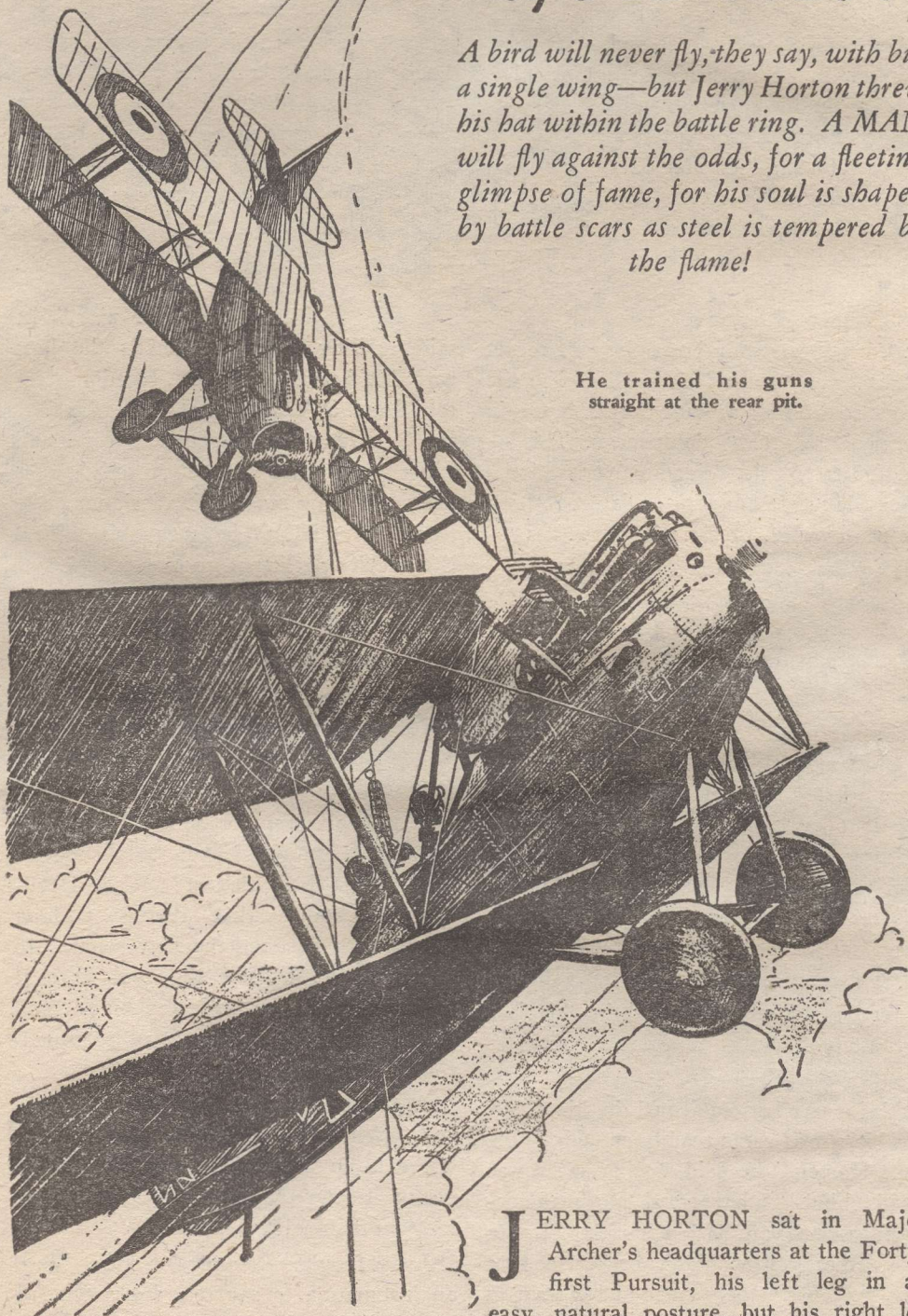
Span	76 feet
Overall Length	45 feet, 2 inches
Gross Weight	17,749 pounds
High Speed	175 m.p.h. (at 7,000 feet)
Cruising Speed	165 m.p.h. (at 12,000 feet)

BLOOD *for* GLORY

by JOE GREGG

A bird will never fly, they say, with but a single wing—but Jerry Horton threw his hat within the battle ring. A MAN will fly against the odds, for a fleeting glimpse of fame, for his soul is shaped by battle scars as steel is tempered by the flame!

He trained his guns
straight at the rear pit.



JERRY HORTON sat in Major Archer's headquarters at the Forty-first Pursuit, his left leg in an easy, natural posture, but his right leg

strangely straight and twisted awkwardly to one side.

The commandant of Forty-one, a heavy, straight-backed man whose hard-bitten, square-jawed face and flinty gray eyes exhibited no trace of compromise, read again the memo from Air Service Headquarters which Horton had handed him a minute before.

Archer dropped the paper on his desk and cleared his throat.

"Captain Horton," he said, his eyes steady but a tinge of regret in his voice, "I'm an old soldier. I'm not given to beating around the bush, or in saying things that I don't mean. This"—he indicated the Headquarters Memo with a blunt forefinger—"this proposition is out of order. It can't be done!"

Jerry Horton's blue eyes were as mild as the clear spring skies, but there was a trace of gloom in his voice. "You mean—you can't see your way clear to taking me on here at Forty-one?"

Archer nodded, his square face grave. "I'm afraid that's it. Of course, I appreciate what a splendid thing it would be for us to have your name on our roster of fighting pilots—Jerry Horton, the American athlete who organized the famous Liberty Squadron in 1915, and the only living member of that great outfit. Great thing for my boys, and all that. But—"

Jerry's blue eyes flickered, but his face was stony. "But—" he invited Archer to go on.

Major Archer squirmed in his chair, but his words came readily enough. "Oh, hell, Horton," he said, facing what was in his mind. "I have read and heard enough about you and your exploits to know that you wouldn't be satisfied to just sit around the tarmac and chin with the boys. You'd want to fly; you'd want

to get a ship and get up there, the way you did in the old days. And—"

Jerry pursued the man's words like a bird dog on a scent. "And—?"

Archer thumped his fist on his desk in determination. "And," he barged ahead with it, "I never yet saw a one-legged pilot. I'll be damned if I'm going to be a party to your—your *murder!*"

Jerry's face relaxed its tenseness, his eyes lighted a bit. "Thanks, Major," he said, smiling slightly. "That's the best way I've heard it put yet. Headquarters called me a 'cripple,'—at first. Until I put on a stunt and target show for them. After that—well, they sort of thought that maybe my request for assignment to Forty-one mightn't be such a bad idea. But they're putting it up to you."

Archer's eyes widened slightly. "Oh! So you asked to be sent to us, eh? That's—flattering; thank you, Horton. It occurred to me that you had been sent in answer to our request for better pilots. That's why I was so—" The major's face reddened slightly, and he fell silent.

Jerry took it up for him. "That's why you were annoyed when a one-legged pilot reported, is that it? Well, Headquarters knows that there's nothing wrong with the men they are sending to you. Not until *after* they get here, I mean. You are getting every bit as good men as they are getting at other squadrons."

Archer's face was suffused with anger. "What do you mean by that remark, 'there is nothing wrong with the men I get until *after* they get here'? Just what are you insinuating, Horton?"

Jerry fought to suppress a grin. "Is it an insinuation to say that Forty-one, of late, has the worst record of any Yank



squadron on the Front? Good Lord, Major! There isn't a *peelot* in the service who doesn't know that. Yes, and talk about it, too!"

Archer seemed to be having difficulty controlling himself. He was all but sneering when he said, "So the former great American ace has turned out to be a critic of active fighters? Really, Horton—a disabled hero is one thing, but a discontented, carping, trouble-finding expilot is quite another. I think I've heard all you have to say."

Jerry's face grayed, and the pupils of his eyes became mere pin-points of light.

"No, Major!" he said, his voice harsh. "You haven't heard *quite* all I have to say. I want to make you a proposition: Either you put me—Jerry Horton, the cripple!—on your roster as a pilot, or before one month has passed, you'll be the biggest fool on the Front and a disgrace to your uniform."

Archer heaved to his feet, his face livid and his knuckles bunched into fists.

"Remember your rank, Horton!" he thundered. "I can't deal with you as I would with a *man*! But I can have you court-martialed for disrespect to your superiors!"

Jerry's eyes seemed to gauge the extent of the man's temper. "You won't be my superior very long, Major," he told him, "unless your bunch bucks up and stops these Huns that are across the way from you."

Archer stood rooted in his tracks and stared speechlessly at Jerry for two full minutes. Then, his fists relaxed and he sank into his chair again, his eyes clouded with concern.

"Horton," he said, a different quality now in his voice, a quality of infinite pity, "Horton, I think you've gone mad. I'm afraid that the injuries you received in

your duel with Baron von Elling have distorted your mind. God, man—you'd be better off dead! You'd have been luckier if you had met the same fate you meted out to Von Elling!

"Just sit there a few minutes, old man; take it easy. Suppose we have a shot of *cognac* and a little chat? Then—then we'll forget all this trouble we've had? How about it?"

Jerry Horton grinned broadly, not at all the picture of a lunatic. "I'll take that drink now, Major," he told the man. "I *would* be crazy if I turned that offer down."

Major Archer stared a moment, then pulled open a drawer in the table and fished out a bottle of brandy that had already been well sampled. He produced two glasses, and poured them half-full.

"To you, Horton," the major said, raising his glass.

"**T**O—Otto von Elling!" Jerry Horton said, downing his own drink. He smacked his lips appreciatively and set the glass down. "And now, Major, will you give me just two minutes to talk to you? Just two minutes, in which I promise not to insult you again? You see, I had to get your attention some way."

Archer's eyes kindled with a glow as if warmed by some inner fire. He held up a restraining hand and seized the bottle again.

"Hold it, Horton!" he commanded. "Hold it! We'll have another one apiece. 'A bird can't fly on one wing,' you know." He flushed and looked apologetically at Jerry's twisted leg, at the shining right boot that he knew incased a wooden limb that was hard and lifeless as a dead propellor. When Jerry's glass had been stoked again, Archer repeated:

"To you, Horton!"

And again, Jerry answered: "To Baron Otto von Elling!"

Archer frowned, his eyes intent on Jerry. He corked and put away the bottle, dropped the glasses into the drawer, then asked,

"Didn't your old crowd have a superstition against drinking to dead men? Or is that something new?"

Jerry smiled slightly. "Indeed, no! We always had a rule that went something like that. Just once—the day a man was killed—we would drink to him; smash the glasses from which we had drunk. But—never more than once. And now, Major, I'd like to ask you a question, and have a brief talk with you. How about it?"

Archer's eyes studied Jerry's serious face for a long moment before he shrugged his massive shoulders and said, "Shoot!"

"You've been having plenty of trouble lately, haven't you?" Jerry resumed, as he fired a cigarette and took a long drag on it. "The records show more replacements for Forty-one than for any other two squadrons on the Front. Yet, the information at Headquarters is that you are opposed by the same outfit that you made such a good showing against for three months past."

Archer snorted mirthlessly. "Hell, man!" he protested. "The men that I once had with this outfit are gone. That's the answer."

"I wonder," Jerry mused, his eyes far away. "After all, the good men had to go *some* way, didn't they? Those boys had good records right along. Then, suddenly, the photographic details they had been protecting so well started to—disappear. And your guard ships with them. Your front line patrols began to come home with holes in the formations. Your balloon guards started to get shot down—and the balloons with them. Bombing

raids from this sector into the Hun territory started coming to grief. *Why?*"

Major Archer's eyes were suddenly heavy with care, and lines of worry etched deep furrows around his mouth and his eyes. He shook his head.

"Everything that you say is true, Horton," he said. "Don't think I haven't spent many weary hours searching for some solution. But all I can think is that, for some reason, the Huns across the way from us have toughened up while our boys have softened."

Jerry gestured disagreement. "Pilots don't go that way, Major," he said. "They don't all of a sudden go haywire. If anything, they get better—just as these Huns, for some reason, get better every day. I wonder, Major, if you ever heard the story of the rise and fall of the Liberty Squadron?"

Major Archer eyed Jerry speculatively. "The rise and fall of the Liberty Squadron?" he echoed. "Why, you just took on more than you could handle, I guess. The same as we are doing here at Forty-one."

Jerry smiled tightly. "For more than a year," he told Archer, "we ran up scores that would knock you dizzy. Then, suddenly—something happened. Our boys started to lose more than the usual number of battles. Then, things got so we couldn't even hold our own. Bit by bit, the mob dwindled until there were only three of us old timers left. And it all tied up with one thing. That's all—just one thing."

Archer was sitting forward on his chair, his eyes probing Jerry's.

"And that one thing?" he asked.

"Our downfall started at the time of the appearance of a new, black Fokker in the *Wolfhead* Staffel's line-up," Jerry recounted. "We didn't attach any importance to it at first; just that we would

talk it over when we got back to the drome. We'd discuss that hard-flying, straight shooting, tall figure that squatted behind the Spandaus in that black Fokker. It got so that we went after him especially, each one of us hoping to have the luck to down him—the *honor* of downing him. He was easy to spot. He always wore a streamer of vari-colored ribbons that flew back from the top of his helmet. And *always*, as he went into the attack, he would raise his left hand high over his head in a sort of salute."

Archer's eyes had widened slightly as he listened to Jerry. At one point, he seemed about to interrupt him. Jerry stopped.

"Was there—something, Major?" he asked, his eyes keen.

Archer shook his head, "No," he said. "I was just startled, for a moment, when you mentioned that ribbon-on-the-helmet stuff. But the left hand salute—"

"You have a man in the bunch against you that wears that sort of headdress?" Jerry asked quickly.

"I'll say we have," Archer said grimly. "And he's one tough baby! But we don't get any left-hand salute from him. Only hard, hot, tough lead, and plenty of it! We don't even know who he is, though. But we'll get him yet!"

"I'm glad you're so sure of it," Jerry said. "My man got me . . . in that last duel I had. Baron Otto von Elling!" His voice was musing, his eyes dreamy. "The hardest-fighting Hun I ever saw, and the spark-plug of his attack mob. Von Elling came—and we went! That man could take a mob of washed-up keeweels and make them into the toughest circus on the Western Front, Major!"

"Well," Archer said, "you got him for keeps, even if he did bring you down and muss you up some. That ought to be some satisfaction. But this man who have across from us—"

"Wait a minute," Jerry said. "You say I got von Elling? Sure, I shot him down. And the reports are that he was killed. But don't forget, Major, the reports in Germany were that *I* was killed! So—?"

Major Archer's eyes narrowed. "Are you suggesting that von Elling is still alive?" he asked. "That's impossible, man! We would have heard of it."

"Would you have heard of it?" Jerry asked him, sitting forward. "And just how? Would they drop you a note and tell you so? Did anyone drop the Huns a note telling them that *I* was still alive?"

Major Archer sat silent in his chair, but his eyes begged Jerry to go on.

"I had a good reason for asking to be assigned here, Major," he said. "You have suddenly had a spark-plug develop in the attack against your men—just as I had, back in the old days. It wiped my mob out, and by God, it will wipe yours out if you don't get that man! By the way, Major—you know the ancient law of the Medes and the Persians?"

Archer nodded, his eyes on Jerry's. "An eye for an eye . . . and a tooth for a tooth," he quoted.

"Right," Jerry said. "Von Elling wiped my mob out and cost me my right leg! *I* want to wipe out that mob across the way from you! And there is just one way to do it. *Get that man with the ribbons!*"

Archer sat silent, but his eyes were impressed. Jerry continued.

"A few minutes ago, Major," he said, "you asked me if it were my habit to drink to dead men. I told you, no! But I haven't forgotten Otto von Elling. I have a score to settle with him, and I don't have to wait until I'm dead to do it. You can give me my chance!

"Major Archer," he finished solemnly, "Baron von Elling still lives!"

JERRY zoomed his paint-new Spad off the tarmac of the Forty-first and

drilled upward in a fast climb. At two thousand, he leveled off and dropped the nose of his ship to gather speed. He eased level again and barrel-rolled lazily along one boundary of the field.

He came out of the last one on his back and shoved the stick forward, climbing out in an outside loop. His eyes dropped to the tarmac below, found the cloud of men watching from the hangar line.

"I wonder how they like that, from a cripple?" he grinned into the slip stream. He climbed steadily but slowly, waiting for the remainder of the afternoon patrol to climb up.

His mind went back to the expression on Archer's face when he, Jerry, had asked that insignia of the famed but now obsolete Liberty Squadron be painted onto his ship.

"Not show-off stuff," Jerry had laughed, when Archer's eyebrows went up slightly. "I have a reason, you can bet on that!"

And so it was done. And on the sides of the fuselage were painted the tri-colored circles inside which the Statue of Liberty raised a fist; but instead of a torch, it was a plane, poised in a threatening gesture, which the figure of Columbia held in her hand—the insignia that was enshrined in the hearts of the American and French people, and its use forbidden to any pilot who had not been a member of that famed unit.

In another five minutes, the patrol had formed and was tooling along to the east and slanting up toward the Front. Jerry took up a position on the outside and to the left of the 'V' formation, his eyes on Monkton, the flight leader.

"This mob certainly has the jitters for fair," Jerry muttered, remembering the tired eyes and haggard faces of the men

of Forty-one. "It reminds me of the last days of our own old outfit."

About two miles inside their own lines, and at twelve thousand feet, the Spad formation swung east and patrolled down to *Montreuil*, then back-tracked and headed west. Some fifteen minutes later, Jerry spotted a distant speck ahead. He squinted, and was able to make out two other specks riding high above. To the right of those two higher specks in the sky was a heavy cloud formation, high and still in the smooth air. Jerry looked over to Monkton's plane.

To his surprise, the flight leader rode along for a minute or so, then signalled a reversal of their course. Jerry frowned. He knew that they had not yet completed the westward leg of their patrol. So why—?

He looked back at the two higher specks, saw them edge down a bit, as if in anticipation of something. His heart *tunked* when he realized that this was no trio of the Forty-first. He fired a warning burst from one of his Vickers and when Monkton looked, pointed back at those other ships.

But Monkton merely shook his head. Jerry frowned and bit his lip.

"What the hell is this?" he muttered, nosing down and pulling abreast of Monkton's ship. "Those are Boche sure as hell!"

The leader of Forty-one's afternoon patrol looked back through goggled-eyes at Jerry's inquiring glance; then shook his head slowly, again.

Jerry made his mind up quick as a flash. He had come merely to find something out for his own satisfaction—and he intended to do it! After all, he was not really a part of the flight, but merely



along by courtesy of Major Archer. He could go where he wished.

With a quick, parting salute to Monkton, Jerry whipped the nose of his crate into a fast turn and drilled back toward that slowly patrolling bus some miles away. As he sped onward, he looked back and saw his late companions wheel slowly and almost reluctantly in a wide turn.

Four minutes later, Jerry was able to mark the bus as a Rumpler, a Hun ship that was probably on photographic duty. He estimated that he was some three thousand feet above the plane when it broke and headed for the Lines. A snap glance at the two guardian ships showed them to be some three thousand feet higher.

Jerry whipped his Spad into a fast right turn—toward the Lines also—then set it in a dive. When he had collected a world of speed, he rammed the stick to the left.

The move brought him back in line with the Rumpler. He looked and saw that the two ships higher up had been fooled by his feint-maneuver. They were coming now, but Jerry guessed they would be seconds too late.

Grimly, he held his dive as the Rumpler pulled up and tried to turn back. In another minute, he was in on it like a cat pouncing on a mouse. First, he trained his nose straight at that rear pit where the gunner-photographer had swung his gun and was preparing for the attack.

Rat-tat-tat, Jerry's guns hammered. He watched coolly and saw his tracers eat fifty yards wide of their mark. As the Hun gunner opened up, Jerry nosed farther down, then zoomed wickedly up under the exposed belly of the enemy ship.

His guns chattered again and he held the zoom until his prop was nearly into

the other ship. He snapped his fingers from the gun-trips when he saw the other plane zoom wildly, then careen over on one side and start in a slow spin.

Quick as thought, Jerry ripped away in a fast turn and started to climb for it. His eyes were on the two ships that had started diving down. Fokkers, he saw; both with bodies blood red, but one of them with a solid black rudder, black ailerons, and a black snout. They were coming for him.

Jerry hesitated for a moment, as the two ships came in. Then, he seemed to be starting to the right. But, as the Fokkers veered over after him, he snapped to the left and shot just under the wheels of one of them. Up and up, he climbed, and turned into his lines. He knew that the thwarted Huns would zoom back and to the left.

Instinct prompted him to look overhead again, and he drew his breath in sharply at what he saw. The clouds were disgorging a dozen or more ships—ships that Jerry knew would be Fokkers. He looked to the left and saw the flight of the Forty-first turning—*away!*

With a muffled curse, Jerry knew that he was alone with a full flight of hornet-mad Fokkers. He knew also that his one hope of salvation was—*speed*.

He rammed the stick straight down and stood on the rudder bar as he whistled the crate earthward in a terrific power dive. *Rat-tat-tat-tat*—he heard as he went. He ducked down and looked.

The two Fokkers that he had eluded were trying to range on him. But his speed was carrying him ahead of them. But even as he looked, he saw something that brought a yelp of joy from his lips and a new gleam into his eyes.

For in one of those ships was a tall figure whose helmet sported a crest of brightly colored ribbons; and that ship

was the one with the black rudder and ailerons and snout.

Grimly, Jerry dug his throttle hard against the check-stop and rode even harder against the forward shoved stick. He hoped that the threat of the reluctant-to-mix-it patrol of the Forty-first would arrest the pursuit of these Huns.

That, he hoped—but one thing he knew. . .

If that man with the ribbons were not von Elling, it was his twin brother!

JERRY listened to Major Archer's words with a graying face and furious eyes. Not once during the bawling out that greeted his return from downing the Hun photographic ship had Jerry so much as looked at the sulky flight leader, Monkton. When Archer had concluded, Jerry asked:

"Now, just let me get this straight: I'm being called down because I knocked over a ship that was photographing our lines. Is that it?"

Archer waved his protests aside. "Not that, Horton; hardly that. What I am saying is, when you go out on a flight with any of my men, I do not want you to take it into your head to involve them in any undue danger."

Jerry looked his contempt. "God help us if that's the way we fight. God help the Infantry, and the Artillery, and all the rest of the poor slobs who rely on us for protection!"

Archer's eyes blazed. "That'll be all of that I'll take from you! Monkton told us he suspected a Boche trap behind that cloud. That's why he circled away. But you had to hop in and have a try at it."

"You bet I hopped in and had a try at it!" Jerry blazed at him. "I know that's what I'm here for—to drive photographic ships away. I wasn't brought up trying to figure if the chances were all my way before I went ahead with my duty. With

me, the duty comes first—I'll take my chances second."

Archer blinked and licked his lips. "And this business of 'von Elling is still alive,' Horton," he added. "That's a bit thick. But one way or the other, if you've appointed yourself a ghost fighter—go ahead and fight your ghosts! But don't try to get my men mopped up in the trying!"

Jerry shook his head despairingly, and his heart sank. The Forty-first was licked—*licked*, and was liking it. But his mind went back to the days of the Liberty Squadron. He recalled again the jumpiness of the men's nerves, their tired faces, their haggard, weary eyes. He recalled the reluctance with which they tackled enemy patrols, and the desperation with which they threw themselves at the enemy, once they had made contact. He nodded comprehension.

For several moments he stood in thought, with Archer's last words ringing in his ears—"Go ahead and fight your own ghosts, Horton." If only he could fight them—fight *him*, Otto von Elling—just one more time! If only he could drive this scourge of the Hun skies from the Western Front!

His eyes narrowed suddenly, but he stood looking down at his boot tips for another long minute. When he looked up, his face was grave and his eyes quiet.

"Okay, Major," he said, briefly. "Will you gas and oil my bus? And have the armorer check me in a full supply of ammo?"

Archer's face showed his relief. "I'm glad you're seeing it my way, Horton," he said. "You've done your bit in this man's war. Now, why not just pack back to Paris and spend the rest of it enjoying yourself?"

Jerry looked at him in silence for a minute, then nodded. "I'll be on my way just as soon as you can fix up my bus."

He turned, then paused to add, "But don't be surprised if you see me again sometime!"

When he zoomed off the drome fifteen minutes later, however, it was toward the Front that he slanted the nose of his bus—and not toward Paris. And in the pocket of his uniform coat he carried a message container, inside which rested a note reading:

Baron Otto von Elling:

Greetings from an old enemy! I think we have a score to settle. Are you man enough to meet me in single combat? If so, I'll be waiting at ten thousand feet. If not—bring your whole gang with you.

Gerald Horton,

ex-Commander Liberty Squadron.

He grinned as he shinnied the Spad up over the ten thousand foot mark and nosed over the Lines. "That'll rile the old devil!" he murmured. "Bring your whole gang with you!"

A few miles across the Front, he eased off line as Archie puffs bloomed near him. He gazed around him in search of enemy ships which might have seen the telltales; but he drilled steadily in the direction of the spot where the opposing Hun tarmac was thought to be.

After fifteen minutes, he pulled up sharply and made a complete circle, his eyes keened on every point of the compass. Some instinct had warned him of danger. But he could see nothing. He bore steadily onward again.

His sharp eyes detected something familiar on the ground, far below him. He banked over, his goggled face studying the earth minutely.

A clearing—dun-colored ground, as if the grass had been worn away by constant wear of something—maybe wheels! And there, to the right, a group of camouflaged sheds and long buildings!

"There she is!" he exclaimed, and reached for the throttle. But his hand was never to yank it back.

Rat-tat-tat, came startlingly to his ears—from behind!

He whipped his bus in a fast turn, his eyes raised. Two Fokkers were bearing down on him from above—their tracers cutting a swathe in the air near him.

In a flash, Jerry whipped the long, white streamer from his pocket, the truce-sign which he had brought with him for just this purpose. He waved it frantically over his head at the on-charging ships.

"They can't ignore *this*," he knew.

Nor was he mistaken. The two Fokkers held their fire, but they came close and ranged alongside him. One man was short, with a large head and a face that was mean even behind his goggles. The other man, in that ship that had something familiar about it—

"Great God!" Jerry breathed. "It's—*it's von Elling himself!*"

They flew together for several minutes, those two—ignoring the third ship; eyes glued on one another, faces unsmiling, wings all but touching. At length, Jerry lifted his hand in a wave of recognition, clenched his fist, and fired a challenging burst from his guns!

Slowly, the face of that other, of that tall German in the black-tipped red Fokker, relaxed; first into a thin smile, then to a full-lipped smile—and finally to a broad, tooth-revealing grin. Jerry lifted his goggles and placed them on his forehead and grinned back!

"I'm almost glad to see you again, you old sucker!" he laughed at the face that laughed back at him. "I guess you recognize my markings."

And again he raised his fist in challenge, firing another short burst. Slowly, the Hun nodded, his grin dying. He shoved his right hand into the air, fist

clenched. Jerry saw the nose of the Fokker bob slightly, as if in salute.

"Where's the old left-handed challenge?" he wondered, as he watched Baron Otto von Elling signal that other Fokker to hold off. "I wonder if it would give him a laugh to know that I've got a written challenge to him in my pocket?" he mused, as he pulled away to one side.

VON ELLING was apparently busy getting himself set for the duel. He watched the man whip his limber ship into a series of fast turns and zooms; listened to the bursts of warming fire that the man essayed. And then he stiffened despite himself when the Hun turned to meet him.

Up came Jerry's hand in the final signal of readiness, and they both dipped the noses of their crates in the time-honored salute. Then—

Jerry whipped his bus to the side just in time to avoid the fast-slamming, turning burst of fire from the man's guns. He saw the tracers dip their ghostly fingers into his upper right wing and ruddered out of it fast.

"Still there with the old rush," he muttered, as he pivoted on one wing and lined the Boche up in his sights.

His guns chattered and he saw his lead eat into the Hun's fuselage just behind the pit. The Fokker dived out of it, but Jerry stuck with him. *Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat.*

A strut leaped into a trail of fast flying splinters in the wake of the Fokker. But the wily von Elling slipped out of the path of Jerry's lead and smashed back into the attack.

Almost as fast as a ray of light, the Hun had pivoted on his tail-skid and was hammering a death dose at the Spad. Jerry cursed as he saw the strap of his motor cowlings burst under the impact of the spray and he ruddered wildly to get

clear. The *thud-thud* of the bullets into the Hiss came clear to him over the roar of the motor.

Grimly, he waved to the side, but von Elling's bullets hung on just as grimly. In desperation, Jerry reversed his tactics and whipped back his stick to charge the man head-on. He jammed down the stick triggers.

Vickers hammered back at Spandaus, as Spad and Fokker bored straight at one another. Then a queer, whistling silence came from Jerry's motor.

"Conked!" he shouted into the slipstream. "Oh, God! The show's up now!"

But determinedly he held his finger-trips down, hammering lead at the fast charging Hun. Von Elling zoomed and yawed to the right, suddenly. His ship cleared Jerry's by a matter of feet.

"I'll have to get down before he does!" Jerry knew grimly. "I can't expect any get-away because my motor's dead." He slammed the stick forward and started a mad race to the ground. But below, he saw a horde of ships on the way up from the drome.

"Coming up for the show!" Jerry thought, bitterly. He looked back to see if von Elling had got on his trail again—and *gasped at what he saw.*

There, above and to the right, was von Elling's own plane in a full spin—and over the side of the cockpit, his face down against the coaming, lay von Elling's head.

"I must have got him, too, in that last burst!" Jerry exulted. But his heart leaped a moment later when he thought of the fate that would be meted out to him by these Huns, if their leader crashed to his death in this fall.

Desperately, he increased his dive angle as he neared the climbing ships. "It's my



only chance," he knew. "To reach the ground and take a chance on their not killing me there!"

He hung to it, and in a moment was flashing past the main body of ships. Several started in pursuit, but Jerry hung to his course. At three thousand, he leveled out gradually and stole a look back. He was startled to see that there was no spinning ship in sight. As he flattened out still further, he could make out one ship, in those which were coming down, that was . . . wobbly.

He stared. It was a black-tipped Fokker, and it staggered perilously in its flat glide. Jerry looked away when a ground machine gun chattered below him. He located it, slipped steeply away and ruddered back out of it near the ground. He set the Spad down neatly and rolled to a stop.

Already, some men were running madly out toward him. Jerry knew that he didn't have much time to waste. Quickly but calmly, he climbed down and struck a match, firing the bus in a half dozen places. Then, with the crate a veritable torch, he walked toward the men.

"*Finis la guerre*," he murmured disconsolately. "Good-by war!"

FIVE MINUTES later, Jerry Horton stood a prisoner of the ground men, over near the largest of the four hangars, and watched the group of pilots who walked slowly toward them. His Spad was still a mass of flames, which a few men were striving vainly to put out.

Jerry marked instantly the tall, erect, blond pilot who walked in the center forefront of the approaching men; but he noticed something strange. He stared. The left sleeve of the man's tunic was . . .

"Empty!" Jerry exclaimed. "Well, what do you know—he lost his arm! But what in hell is wrong with his right hand?"

He stared at the scarf which was draped over the tall German's right hand, then he detected the red splotches of blood that showed on the wrapping.

Jerry's captors made way for the man, leaving the Yank captain to face his old foe. Several of the other pilots walked near to Jerry, their faces angry. But a curt, guttural command from the tall man made them stop.

Jerry saluted his enemy. "Baron Otto van Elling, I believe?" he said, politely. "I think we have met before? I am Captain Horton!"

The Hun had come to a halt two paces from Jerry. "*Gott in himmel!*" he breathed. "So-o! Ve haff met again, *nein?*" The man moved the stump of arm that remained above his elbow. "*Yah, mein* Captain; well should I remember you!"

Jerry shrugged apologetically and said, "Tough luck, Baron. But that's the way it goes. You had me laid up for more than a year, though. I am glad, anyway, to see that you're not dead. What happened to your hand?"

The Hun's blue eyes remained coldly on Jerry a moment, appraisingly. Then he spoke again, slowly: "Vunce again, *mein* Captain, you haff left me with a souvenir. Der pain, it vas bad a moment. But—it iss nodding." His eyes traveled over Jerry's frame keenly, as if looking for some compensating injuries.

Jerry read his thoughts, and was about to tell him of his wooden leg. But he compromised. "My right leg is pretty stiff," he said, almost carelessly. "Outside of that I'm not in bad shape."

The Baron stared at him another long minute, then broke into a slow smile that broadened again into that grin Jerry had seen in the air.

"*Ach!*" the man said, his voice genial. "It iss too bad you are a prisoner, Cap-

tain. But"—he shrugged expressively—"ve vill haff goot times talking ofer der old fights *mit der Liberty Staffel, nein?* Efery veek, Captain, I shall giff myself der honor uf calling on you, *und* ve vill have *der schnapps und* a shmoke togedder, *nein?* You see, Captain—I, too, am out uf *der war!*"

The man peeled the scarf off his right hand. Jerry bit his lip when he saw the jagged rips and bloody lumps of flesh where the man's fingers had been. Broken bones were there, too, he knew.

Again he saluted the Baron. "My compliments to you, Baron," he said, sincerity in his voice and eyes. "You had plenty of guts to fight with that one arm! No man can ever say that you didn't serve Germany to the hilt!"

Baron von Elling bowed and smiled. "Der iss a vord I like—*guts!*" he said. His eyes took in the group around him. "Dese men, dey are frightened liddle boys. Almost beat dem, I must, to make dem fight der way we used in der olden days."

Jerry's eyes lighted with the realization that Baron von Elling was out of the war for keeps. Fly and fight one armed he could, and did. But with his only hand out of commission and useless to jam the thumb trips of his gun down, he was out for good. But the Forty-first didn't know it, and would probably keep on in their jittery way, ducking the enemy and slopping up the assignment work. Definitely, the Forty-first needed bucking up, and it was up to Jerry to do it in some way.

The Baron interrupted his thoughts. "You will join me in a bit of brandy, no? At my quarters? Der doctor iss coming to make der dressing. Und ve vill bring an-odder man to do der pouring!"

Jerry fell in step with the man, admiring his courage but grinning at the 'other man to pour the drinks.' A guard for him, of course. Oh, well—

WITH the Baron acting the part of the host in his well-appointed room, Jerry occupied his hands with the brandy but his brain was working on another scheme. He had seen the careful scrutiny which the third man—a lieutenant—subjected him to from time to time.

The doctor arrived, cleaned and bandaged and splinted the Baron's hand after a regretful shake of his head, and left. The three had several more drinks. At length, Jerry said in an unsteady voice: "I'm goin' to escape, Baron old kid! What do you know about that?"

The Baron shook his head sadly. "You are drunk, *mein* friend. But if you try to escape—ve must shoot! Dot iss der vay of it, no?"

"No," Jerry told him, his tongue thick. "No, that's no way—*unless* you just shoot me in the leg. Huh? That all right?"

Baron von Elling smiled. "Yah. Dot's all right," he said. "In der leg, ve shoot!" His eyes seemed overly bright and his hand unsteady. Jerry suppressed a grin with difficulty.

"Yeah, the leg," he repeated. "The right leg. Huh?"

The Baron considered a long moment. Then, gravely, "Der right leg!" He spoke to his companion who nodded gravely, took another drink, and pointed at Jerry's right leg, answering the Baron in German. The Baron nodded.

After one more drink, Jerry stood unsteadily to his feet and said:

"Thanks, an' goo'by! I'm goin'! But remember—only in the right leg!"



He made a sudden leap for the door, his heart in his mouth and a prayer on his lips. But before he had even got the portal open, the Baron's companion, sitting in his chair, very accurately put four consecutive bullets from his gun into Jerry's shining boot.

The boom of the thing roared in the small room. Jerry fell to the floor, groaning, and calling: "The doctor! Get the doctor!"

He heard the Baron snap a guttural command, felt the man step carefully over him as he crossed through to the hall.

The Baron said clearly but drunkenly: "Damn' fool, you! Now look at you!"

Jerry got swiftly to his feet and pushed the door shut, turning the key in the lock. "Yep, now look at me," he said, cheerfully.

He stepped quickly to the side of the thunderstruck Baron and wrapped the discarded scarf around his mouth in an effective gag. Then, working swiftly, he tied the man securely to his chair with a belt which he took from the bureau top.

A long, swanky German Army coat hung from a hook. Jerry eased into this, and set a dress hat on his head at a rakish angle.

A hundred yards or so away, two Fokkers were warming on the line. Jerry marched straight toward them, but he was unhurried. He knew that the Baron's plight would be discovered at any moment and haste would mean his undoing, if he aroused suspicion.

Casually, he reached into the pit of the nearest Fokker and snapped off the switch. Then, with a mechanic eyeing him curiously from the hangar door, he swung up and into the pit of the second ship. He heard a voice call out to him, but he just ducked down in the pit and snapped the throttle open with a steady hand.

The speedy Boche pursuit ship fled over

the distant boundary of the field.

Forty-one Squadron was out in full force on the line, the motors of the ships turning over. Major Archer stood near his ship, his eyes on Jerry Horton, who stood with the aid of a crutch. In the Yank ace's hand was a wickedly torn boot from the top of which protruded a wooden butt.

Jerry said, "Damn this thing! Imagine it going at a time like this! But I guess I was lucky it held out as long as it did, with that lead in it."

Archer nodded, his eyes bright and his face grim. "Lucky for us, Horton! After what you have told me, I know we're going to knock those Huns loose in one crack. Yes, and then raid their drome!"

Jerry grinned. "Sounds perfect to me," he said. "As long as I've lost my Spad, Major, maybe you want to ship me home to Paris by car?"

Archer stared a moment. Then: "You remember where that cognac of mine is, Horton? You do? Well, go take a tug of it. *But*—if either you *or* the bottle is gone when I get back, you'll be court-martialed!"

"Thanks," Jerry said. He stuck the booted wooden leg out. "Do me a favor, will you, Major? After you mop those Huns up—and *you will*—just drop this at von Elling's drome for me. I've got a note stuck in the top of it, for him. You remember that ancient law we were talking about—'An eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth'?"

"Well, Baron von Elling and I have a new one: 'An arm for a leg!' I want to send him this to console him a bit!"

He stood and watched the full strength of the squadron roar off the field; then, he turned and hobbled slowly toward headquarters.

"Well, what the hell!" he said. "Nothing to do until I can get a new leg!"



Conducted by Nosedive Ginsburg

EENTER, my gentle and popeyed sky hens, and do not laugh aloud at Louie, the Lush. I realize he looks silly in his red tie and Buster Brown collar, but Louie really thinks he looks the nuts. There is a reason for his present appearance, which I shall hasten to explain. This is Louie's Confirmation Day, and, as his poor, unfortunate guardian, Ginsburg has sought to do the proper thing.

The Confirmation ceremony was duly performed by the local sheriff, who on behalf of the citizenry, confirmed for once and for all that The Lush is an out-an-out bum. No ordinary bum, mind you pals, but a Confirmed Bum, with a diploma, about which the sheriff's good wife tied a bit of pink ribbon. Of course, Louie can't read what it says on the diploma, and it is just as well that he can't—else he'd tear down the wall of the Hangar and where would we be this cold, wintry afternoon? Out on the bleak and barren countryside, sky bugs, looking for our scattered arms and legs.

It is on days such as this that I can realize how much Louie means to me. These days of reward and celebration when he calls me "Mother Ginsburg" and it is a happier world to live in. I have given up hope that he will keep the starch in his Buster Brown collar, however, since his noble head is at present deep in the oatbin, and will doubtless be

there for days. One half ton of the finest oats, plus all the rusty bolts we could find around the Hangar have gone to make up Louie's Confirmation Feast. The noise that you hear is not the thunder of a whirling prop, it is only the grinding of Louie's molars. Also, let me add that the first hyena to talk out of turn goes head over heels into the oat pit, and when Louie is busy stuffing himself, he doesn't care what he swallows—even Piedra would be all right, with a liberal adornment of salt.

But I can see already that the raging blizzard outside holds no fury like the storm about to break within the Hangar. You remember Lawrence McNutt, my beautiful, bouncing bums, do you not? I'll admit it sounds like a phoney handle, purposely designed to meet the requirements of the Hot Air Club, but such is not the case. Mr. Lawrence McNutt is a bonifide resident of Columbus, Ohio, whose poetry has startled the sky geese before. He lives at 93 Lexington Avenue, and to date, has not been thrown into the city jail. But where he will eventually wind up, my friends, depends upon what he says. However, it is as a poet that we must consider Lawrence, and as a poet the guy is terrific, although his wise cracks in the past indicate that Member McNutt cares but little for the Ginsburg Curse.

Anyhow, here goes the poetry:

THE FLIGHT OF HIRAM BLIP

The big day came at Cleveland,
And our hero, Hiram Blip,
Was entered in the races,
In his brand-new-home-made ship.

Its motor was made of parts he'd swiped
From his pappy's model-T,
Its body was made from this and that
Of Haberdashery — (haberdashery means
ties, socks, etc., mugs!)

He tied this all together with
Some brand new baling wire,
And a neater ship you've never seen,—
'Cept that Hiram couldn't fly 'er.

He'd bought a book called "How to Fly,"
He'd got it for a song,
He'd read instructions from the thing,
As he would fly along.

He warmed the motor with its help,
And going down the page,
He yanked the stick, and reading on,
He checked the petrol gauge.

He flipped the fins and ailerons,
And had a lot of fun,
His motor blasted out a song—
Right at the starter's gun.

He sent her roaring down the field,
And in the book he read—
"Now just ease back upon the stick."
He zoomed up overhead.

"Now push the gadget on your left."
The motor took the gas,
And Hiram, from the stands below,
Was seen each ship to pass.

Mister Blip, elated, slapped his thigh,
And yelled in prideful glee,
"This book, it sure 'nuff knows its stuff,
Nobody kin pass me!"

And Hiram was smiling happily,
As above the field he cruised,
And acting as it told him to,
His helpful book perused.

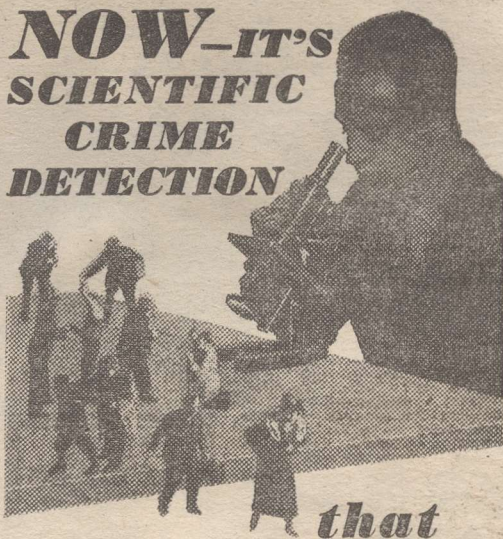
But, though Hiram Blip led all the field,
He never won the race.
His ship was smashed to pieces,
But not from the furious pace.

It seems, I'm told, by those who know,
All fellows old and sage,
That our poor hero, Hiram Blip,
Alas—had lost the page!

Blessings on ye, McNutt!—and there is
not in your poem a single insult to Gins-
burg. What the hell's the matter, are you
slipping? It doesn't seem exactly like
home, Lawrence, my lad—without some
scorching abuse from the genius of the

(Continued on Page 104)

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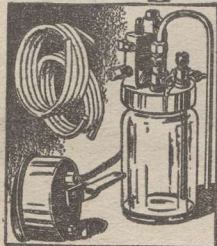
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Dare-Devil Aces

(Continued from Page 103)

month. Moreover, the Ginsburg Curse is growing rusty, for want of a proper victim. Still, I suppose we must judge you by your poetry, and pay off accordingly. So it is, merry members, that Mr. McNutt walks off with the five potatoes, which, you will all agree, he well deserves. And if you don't agree, what is there you can do about it? Whose five bucks is it, anyhow? Pass out quietly, McNutt—we shall do you no harm.

But now, with a roar that shakes the earth, and almost disturbs Louie the Lush at the oatbin, come the shouting, rejoicing squadrons of Joe Hawkins—descending upon the Hangar, confident that their hero, (Hawkins, the punk!) will bring sorrow to Commander Ginsburg. But maybe we had better let him speak his piece before we harpoon him, pals. (Pardon me while I loosen up my bulging biceps.)

Of course, Hawkins needs no introduction to you giggling baboons. It is your applause that has encouraged him and made a travesty of the dignity of my meetings—Hawkins, who lives in my native New York, and disgraces the town with his lunatic antics! And since we are specializing in poetry at this meeting, we may as well listen to Hawkins and be done with it. He writes:

Dear Nosedive, friend, comrade, defender of the weak, and Fearless Eagle of the Open Skies: (you know, maybe this Hawkins is all right, after all! But he continues:)

For you, Ginsy, now that I have already spiked your gentle heart until it bleeds like a punctured tank, I am about to drop into your lap, or perhaps upon your skull, such poetry as has never before filtered through the Hangar. Long nights have I labored to place this peace offering before you; hoping to atone for the wrong I have done you; hoping to bring a single smile across your sad and mangled features. (Easy Hawkins!)

Anyhow, Ginsburg, take a look:

(Continued on Page 106)

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(Continued from Page 104)

Oh, Ginsburg from your lofty perch,
Great ruler of the sky,
I lack the boldness to besmirch,
Such a noble, daring guy.

I only wish to tell you,
Old pal, that I really think,
The authorities should compel you
To stay on the ground—you stink!

All of which goes to show you maniacs what comes of trusting a squirt like Hawkins. I've been double-crossed, humiliated and compelled to take out the Curse again. You win a buck, Hawkins, but I wonder just how you're going to spend it. Louie!—have a mouthful of Hawkins. You'll find him mixed up with the oats and bolts, quite ready for consumption.

I guess I just don't like poets, friends. No trick is too foul for them; no device for gaining your friendship, then knifing you in your trusting hide, is too treacherous for them to try.

Let us be on with the meeting, so that I can get the hell out of here. The thing a guy must do for a living are sometimes beyond the limits of any man—even such a self-sacrificing, uncomplaining stooge as your commander. We shall now look over the assorted nonsense we have on hand, then give away the four remaining bucks.

One of them goes to a clever young squirt known as Howard Nelson. Member Nelson, too, has brought me sorrow before. He's a Bronx Boy, living at 3029 Briggs Avenue, and made his first appearance about one year ago. I had hoped that he would bale out before he gave me any more trouble, but here he is back again.

This time, friend Nelson had done us a portrait—such an excellent one that he gets one of the four clams. It was an expertly accomplished sketch of Max Immelmann, the flying German Lieutenant to whose name and talents we are indebted for the aerobatic trick, the *immemann*. However, Member Nelson is such a lunkhead that he did the portrait in pencil, and pencil portraits, my fine peli-

(Continued on Page 108)

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cans, will not reproduce in this or any other magazine. Thus do we lose a fine illustration while Nelson collects his buck. Next time, squirt, try and do it in ink!

Looking through the assorted nonsense that clutters the Hangar, I am amazed at the lack of talent we have around here. After all, when I have to give dough to Hawkins and Nelson and guys like that, things *must* be tough. To hell with it! I'll talk about the weather.

Sitting here, scratching you sky flies out of my hair, I can see the blinding swirls of falling snow, keeping pace with my falling hair. It reminds me of the remarkable flights I used to make in my youth, when I had better things to do than listen to you monkeys.

There was a time when the gales sweeping the North Atlantic had filled the darkened air with so much ice that the Lush mistook it for a frosted chocolate. It was the third week in December and we had the mail aboard. It was a postcard from Louie to Santa Claus and it had to be delivered. Naturally we were off the beam, since we have been off the beam since childhood, but our radio apparatus kept telling us the way.

The booming but gentle voice of St. Nicholas kept coming to us, repeating over and over, "Get the hell out of here, you bums! I have trouble enough!"

The atmosphere grew even thicker as we circled in for a landing, what with toy engines and baseball bats for little boys filling the air, and all of Santa's happy workers, dressed in their pretty red pants, and the joyous jumping up and down of the Lush. Then came St. Nicholas, himself, welcoming me with his jolly laughter, which went, "Ginsburg, keep your hands in your pockets; this stuff is for self-respecting citizens!" I tell you it was just fine. But there I go again, squirts,

(Continued on Page 110)

False Teeth



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(Continued from Page 108)

telling you the secrets of the trade. I may as well stop here, since I'm running out of breath, and I can see that these columns are pretty nearly filled. I know the department is lousy this month, but whoever said I was a comedian? Ginsburg is first, last and always—an airman! A Hot Airman perhaps, but nevertheless a noble lad who tries to do his best.

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One of them goes to Frederick G. Lambert of London, Toronto for his excellent drawing of the Hindenburg, which, like Howard Nelson's masterpiece, was unfortunately done in pencil. When will you hyenas learn? Mr. Carl Chastain, of 36 Seminole, McAlester, Oklahoma, had done a most insulting portrait of your commander. He is skillfully insulting, however, and gets one slice of the long green. Member Russell Beilfuss, of 2444 Winona Street, Chicago, Illinois, gets the last buck, friends. And I shall get the hell out of here, just as rapidly as I possibly can. Take a bite of these guys, Louie, though I doubt that you'll digest them. And until next month, so long!

Nosedive

THE HOT AIR CLUB

April

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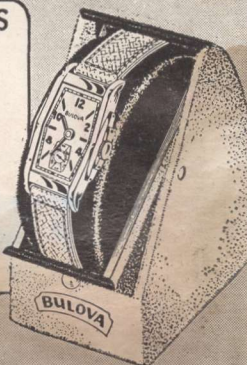
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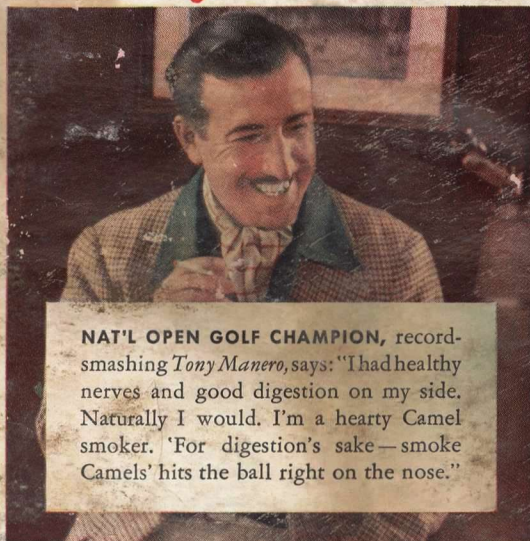
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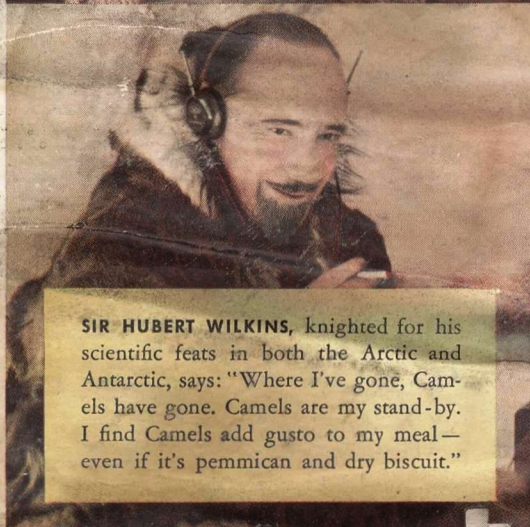
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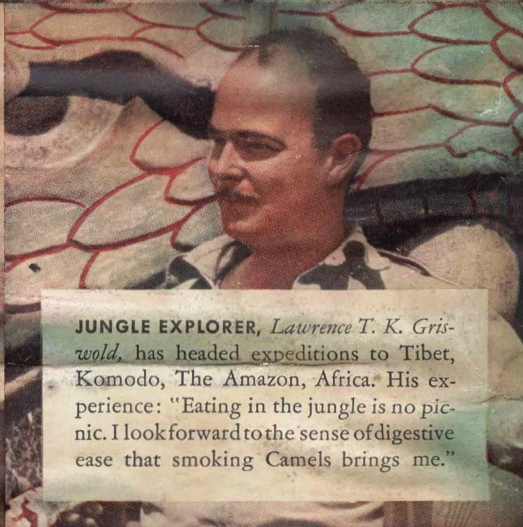
NAT'L OPEN GOLF CHAMPION, record-smashing *Tony Manero*, says: "I had healthy nerves and good digestion on my side. Naturally I would. I'm a hearty Camel smoker. 'For digestion's sake—smoke Camels' hits the ball right on the nose."



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