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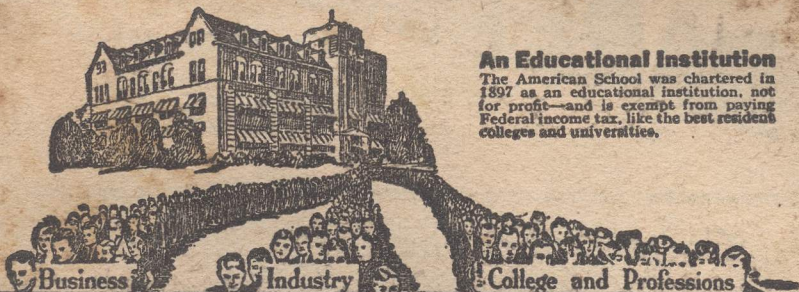
A RED FALCON NOVEL

MURDER WALKS THE WINGS

by **ROBERT J. HOGAN**

by **LEO VINCENT**

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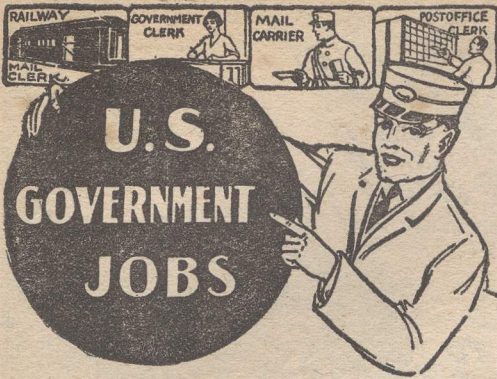


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THEY REST

THE great mountain peaks that thrust like giant fingers into our Western sky are less lonely these days than they once were. They have the company of corpses now,—broken, twisted, sometimes charred upon the mountainside. They are black against the white snow and they are dead. Beside them, like broken matches, lay great ships, once alive and with their wings spread stubbornly against the wind. These ships are dead. Dead as the men who flew them.

There are many reasons, but we still ask "Why?" Over and over again we must ask it. We know the mechanical answers. We know that the motor has not yet been built that is as resourceful as the elements, that has as many moods as the elements and a ready answer for their anger. We know that the men who fly aircraft are not above making mistakes; we know that their nerves can sometimes fail; that their eyes can sometimes be deceived.

But still we ask, "Why?"

We know the mountains. They have been there through more ages than there are planes in the clouds. They are constant there, fixed.

Why then is a mountain peak that rises ten thousand feet above the earth supposed to be flown over at eleven or twelve thousand feet?

What is the matter with fifteen thousand feet, with the added margin of safety that such an altitude would necessarily bring?

Instruments are apt to be faulty; men can fly off their charted course. A pilot may believe that the mountains before him rise but ten thousand feet, then crash in his ignorance against one that reaches twelve thousand feet into the clouds. Why not fly so that no matter where great ships are flown they shall be above the high hills that destroy them? Why not sacrifice minutes and hours for lives? The mountains care little for the company of the dead.

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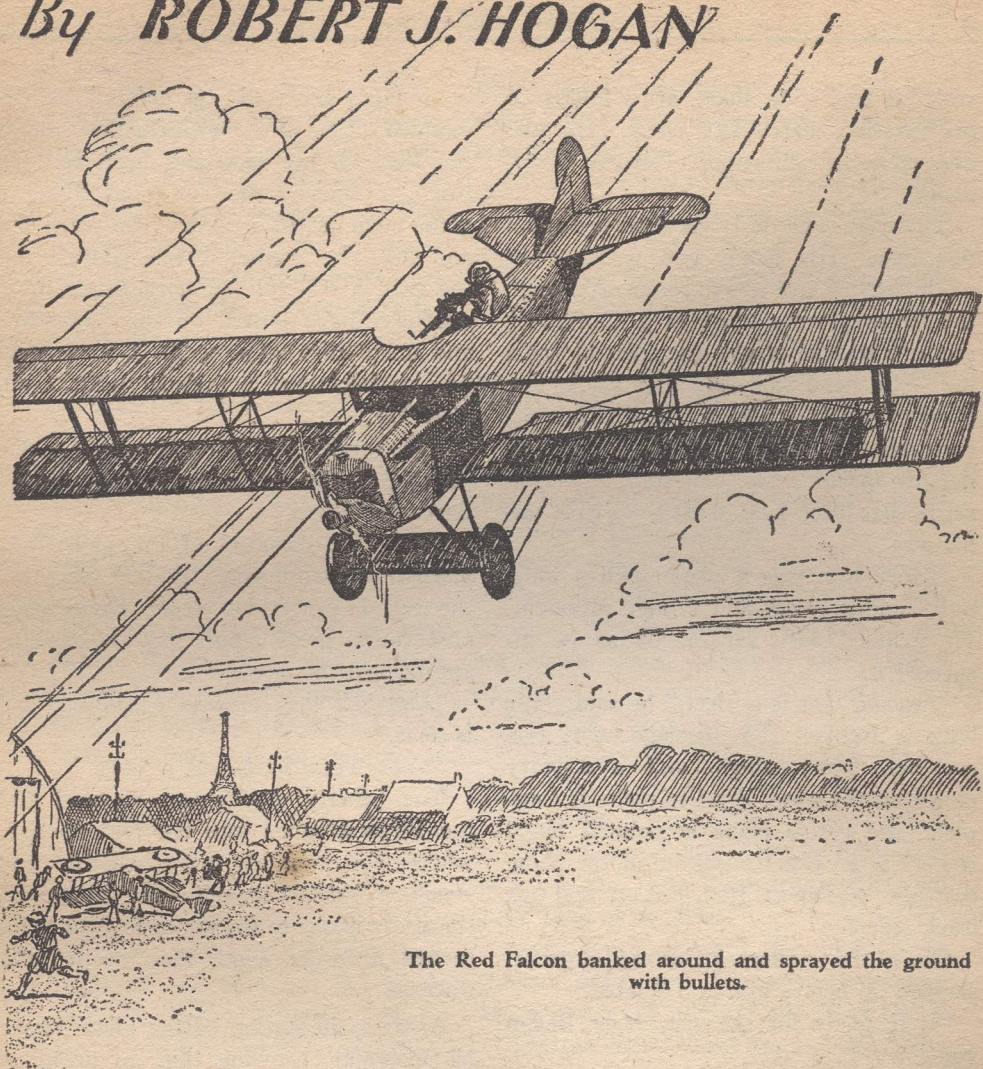
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Flight of the Vultures

A Red Falcon Novel



By **ROBERT J. HOGAN**



The Red Falcon banked around and sprayed the ground with bullets.

Down from the hills the Red Falcon flies again in the service of the country that has disowned him! There is a challenge where he lifts his wings, and the earth below is stained with the blackened blood of murder! What is the mission that has called the Falcon back? What horrors live along the road that leads to blood and glory?

CHAPTER ONE

Murder in Black

DEEP in the Hunsruck mountains, well back of the German lines, certain operations were moving to completion with the greatest of secrecy. At the side of a long, narrow valley,

hemmed in by rugged hills, the opening of a great cave yawned. The mouth of the cave was partially hidden by trees and brush.

Men worked in that cave, German craftsmen who had been hired by the great beast of a man who was overseeing them now. He towered well over six feet, with broad and muscular shoulders. He stood

with his feet wide apart, arms folded on his massive, barrel-like chest. He was dressed in the uniform of a German *hauptmann*.

There was one thing very strange about this man. His hands and wrists were white, but his face was different. Although the features were those of a Caucasian, the skin was jet black—the color of India ink. His head was bald and black, too, except for a few tufts of blond hair at the back which stuck out grotesquely from under his *offizier's* cap. His cold, blue eyes, set in that black face, seemed horribly unnatural.

Before him was a plane with a long, ugly-looking snout and a huge propellor. He grinned with satisfaction as he inspected it.

"*Jawohl*, that is perfect," he said. "We have a Fokker D-7 fuselage with two cockpits, Spad wings, *und* a Liberty motor on the nose. *Und* to make it complete, the entire plane is painted blood red. It is an exact duplicate of the plane that the *verdammnt* Red Falcon and his black aide fly."

One of the workers, a German sergeant, stepped up before him and saluted.

"It is ready for the test, *Herr* Baron—"

The black-faced Hun cut him off.

"Stop!" he barked. "Have I not told you that my identity must not be known? To you and everyone else I am the Black Baron. *Das ist alles!*"

The sergeant clicked his heels again.

"*Bitte, Herr* Baron," said, "I am sorry. I forgot for the moment."

"See that it does not happen again," the baron snapped. "You say the plane is ready for the test?"

"*Jawohl*," the sergeant nodded. A look of concern crossed his face. "Are you sure you can fly this plane, *Herr* Baron?" he asked.

The Black Baron's lips curled in a hard smile.

"Have I not told you before," he demanded, "that in the accident that caused the skin on my face and head to turn black, I learned the secret of flying a plane such as this? Wheel the plane out and start the engine. While you are doing that, I will call the corporal of those guards I have posted on the mountains and make sure all is well. The German government must not know what I am planning."

The baron turned to the field phone fastened to the wall of the cave and gave the crank a turn.

When the corporal of the guard answered, the baron said, "We are ready for the test. Is everything clear? Do all your observation posts report that no one has approached this area?"

"*Jawohl*," the corporal answered, "all is clear."

"*Gut!* Then I take off at once."

The Liberty engine was warmed and the baron climbed into the rear cockpit, where the controls were placed, and strapped himself in the seat. He taxied the tricky plane to the far end of the field, turned into the wind, then opened the throttle.

At first, the course of the plane was a bit irregular, showing that an unskilled hand guided the stick. The baron quickly straightened out the crate, and the next moment he was thundering into the air. He climbed quickly to the altitude of the hills that surrounded the valley and began his turn.

The crimson plane skidded and slipped a little. It was losing altitude, but again he straightened it and swung it around. He made several circles over the valley, each one more perfectly executed than the last. Satisfied, he brought the duplicate of the Red Falcon's plane down to a rough but safe landing. His chest billowed out proudly as he stepped to the ground, and the sergeant and the others who had worked on the ship came run-

ning out to offer their congratulations.

"Ach, it was nothing," the Black Baron said arrogantly. "I told you I would master the trick of flying it, *und* now"—he broke off into a rasping cackle—"the Red Falcon is about to do things that he never dreamed of. Before forty-eight hours have passed, I shall have the *verdammte* Allies ready to ask for an armistice—*und* the Red Falcon will receive the blame for the atrocities which will cause their surrender. If he is captured, he will be drawn and quartered! *Und*"—he chuckled softly to himself in anticipation—"that will please me greatly."

His blue eyes riveted upon the sergeant.

"Get me that first report of the two Allied sectors which have been stricken with my new black gas," he ordered.

The sergeant brought the report, and the Black Baron read it in the light of the setting sun.

"*Gut*," he said. "Only two small areas have been attacked *und* thousands of men have been rushed to the hospital." He laughed coarsely. "Their gas masks would not protect them. It is lucky that the German government decided to use *that* much of my plan. Tomorrow at dawn I begin putting the rest of my plan into operation—without their knowledge. *Und* the Red Falcon and his aide will be held responsible for it."

CHAPTER TWO

Parade to Hell

A STRANGE ship went screaming through the late afternoon skies. The wings were from a Spad, the fuselage from a Fokker D-7, but it had two cockpits instead of one. A giant Liberty motor hurled the crate along at a faster clip than any other plane had ever flown up to that time. It bore no identification marks—no concentric circles, no crosses—yet that

plane, painted a brilliant blood-red, was more widely known over the Front than any other fighting ship.

It was the plane of Barry Rand, the Red Falcon, who sat at the controls in the front cockpit.

His giant black Sengalese aide, Sika, loomed high in the rear cockpit, surrounded by the Scarff mounting of his Lewis guns. His eyes followed the Red Falcon's gesture as Rand pointed downward, and then were glued to a strange sight over the Yank lines. A black cloud hung low over those trenches and hugged the ground like a blanket.

Sika's voice boomed to his master through the tube that connected the two cockpits, "Master, that is second time we see black cloud hanging over Allied trenches."

The Red Falcon nodded.

"Yes," he said, "I wonder what it's all about. Makes me think of the way black smoke from the mills hangs over Pittsburgh on a damp day. Let's go down and have a look. There's something going on there back of the lines."

Barry Rand dropped the nose of the crimson crate and they went screaming down to a point south of the black cloud.

"Master, look!" Sika cried. "See many ambulances!"

The Red Falcon nodded.

"Yes," he said, "I'm looking at them. Hey, do you suppose that black cloud is some new kind of gas the Heinies are trying out on the Yanks?"

"Yes, Master," Sika said sorrowfully, "and it seems very deadly. See many soldiers being carried on stretchers and being taken away in ambulances."

Barry Rand droned back along the road the ambulances were taking. Far, far ahead he located a hospital, a great rambling shack that had been thrown up quickly for emergency cases. It was easy to tell that it was a hospital because of the huge red cross painted on the roof.

"That not look so good to Sika," the big black ventured.

"I'll say it doesn't," Barry Rand said. "I'd like to figure out something we could do about it, but at the moment I'm getting hungry. What do you say we go back and dig up some grub?"

"Yes, Master," the black agreed.

The Red Falcon pondered the mystery of the low, black cloud as he droned back to the field on the flat top of Saar Mountain, high in the Vosges, their secret hiding place. He flew along the hidden canyon, then, at the end, hopped up quickly and made a landing on the mountaintop.

While Sika prepared dinner, Barry Rand stood on the edge of the mountain rimrock and studied the Front through his binoculars.

The two ate hungrily, and just as they finished, the far-off drone of a plane reached their ears. They hurried outside. The sun was setting in the flaming western sky, and the two figures stood there, partially shielded by the overhanging trees, and watched the plane as it soared above. Its motor stuttered alarmingly.

Barry Rand, the smaller of the two, lacked only a fraction of an inch of being six feet in height. He had strong features, keen eyes, and a jaw that was firm and determined.

An American flyer who had been framed in the past by his own pals, he had escaped a firing squad to hide out in the rugged mountains and fight his own aerial war against war.

Towering above Rand was Sika, his giant black aide. A great Sengalese chieftain who had led his tribe to fight for the French, wounds had caused Sika to wander to the mountains, and there Barry Rand had saved his life. Sika was as keen and alert now as in his wildest days in Africa.

The two were listening to the irregular motor of the plane.

"If you ask me," the Red Falcon ventured, "I'd say that pilot is trying to send us a message by using his throttle like a wireless key."

The giant black nodded.

"Yes, Master," he agreed. "He try to send message all right. That plane not in trouble. But Sika not get what he try to say."

"Neither can I," Barry admitted. "The whole thing is pretty well jumbled up. If he'd stop and start over again, maybe we could make something out of it."

Sika pointed.

"Look, Master," he said, "that ship make turn now. It going to circle farther away."

"Yes," the Red Falcon nodded, "and the engine is running evenly now. He's stopped signalling. Maybe we can catch him if he stops farther on. I could signal him with a reflector, but I'd prefer that he didn't know exactly where we're located."

When the Allied plane had reached a point about two miles farther on, it began circling again and the regular roar of the motor was broken up once more.

The Red Falcon tensed to catch the message. Fainter now, they could hear the motor stutter and stammer again. After a long time, the irregularity of the motor ceased, and the Red Falcon nodded.

"It's a message for us, all right," he said. "He called us at first. I got the letters that spelled 'Red Falcon'."

"Sika hear that, too," the giant black nodded. "Sika catch something about come to Paris, but he get no more."

"Yes," Rand said, "I got that much myself, then it jumbled up. Maybe—"

He watched the plane move away almost out of sight, then he shook his head.

"No," he said, "that's the last chance we'll have to get it. Wait a minute—I've got an idea!"

WITH that, the Red Falcon started for the little cabin at the edge of the great flat mountaintop, the only home that he and Sika had. He stepped over to a table along the back wall, turned the switch that connected the storage battery with his wireless set, and began jabbing at the key. Over and over again he repeated the call:

Red Falcon calling Allied G.H.Q. Red Falcon calling Allied G.H.Q.

When he had repeated it five times, he switched over to the receiving end of the set and clamped the earphones on his head. A moment later he heard the faint hum of a wireless signal:

G.H.Q. calling Red Falcon. G.H.Q. calling Red Falcon. Go ahead.

Rand began his message:

Plane has been flying over us for some time, trying to get in touch with us. Have not been able to catch message. What's wanted?

The answer came presently:

The high commander of the American forces wishes to convey this message to you. "Several attempts have been made to persuade you to come back, receive a commission and work with us, but you have refused. However, on several occasions you have helped us immeasurably in winning certain victories over the enemy. At my suggestion, the congress of the United States has voted to award you and your aide the Congressional Medal of Honor.

"Will you give us the opportunity to bestow this medal upon you? A special regimental parade will be held for you at noon tomorrow in Paris. Your presence is most earnestly desired. You have nothing to fear, for you will receive your full pardons at the same time."

The message ended with the name of the high Yank commander.

Barry Rand had been taking down the

message in pencil. He grinned a little as he handed the paper to Sika, then he began jabbing away at the sending key again.

He asked:

Is that all? We thought maybe you had something important for us to look into. What about that black gas the Huns are using?

There was a pause of considerable length, then the answer came back.

We haven't been able to figure out what this gas is. Our gas masks don't seem to protect us against it. Every hospital is jammed to the doors with victims of this gas. It's becoming serious.

Rand pounded the key and asked if anyone had died from it.

The operator replied.

I don't think so. At least we haven't received any reports of it here at G.H.Q.

There was a momentary pause, then the operator finished with a final question.

Shall I tell the general you'll be down at noon tomorrow to receive the Congressional medal?

The Red Falcon took only a second to make up his mind. He jabbed his reply on the key.

Yes. And have the full report of this black gas there, will you? Maybe there will be something we can do.

He turned off the wireless set and swung around to Sika.

"Well, big boy," he said, "it looks like we're due to be honored."

The black's expression portrayed suspicion.

"Yes, Master," he said dubiously, "if it is not trick to catch us."

The Red Falcon shook his head and grinned.

"Don't worry," he said. "The skipper of the Yank forces is no double-crosser." He pointed to the message Sika held. "That's a personal invitation from him. How's it feel to be granted the highest award the United States Government can give?"

The giant black showed his big white teeth in a grin.

"Sika feel very proud," he said, swelling out his massive chest. "We each get medal, Master?"

"We get one apiece or we don't take any," the Red Falcon said. "But I don't like that black gas business."

"It pretty bad, Master?" Sika said.

"Damned bad," Barry nodded. "But the funny part of it is, nobody seems to have died of it, as far as the operator knew. They've got the hospitals full in that area, though. Well, we'll find out more about it tomorrow when we get to Paris."

They slept long and late that night. The following morning, they rose, dressed in their best uniforms, started their crimson crate and took the air. They ranged along the Front for some hundred miles before they turned in toward Paris.

Barry Rand was checking as he went over the areas where the black clouds had been seen the evening before. Suddenly, there was a cry from Sika.

"Master! Master! Sika see explosion!"

The Red Falcon whirled around to follow the direction of the great black's index finger, but as he did so, he said a bit caustically, "You see an explosion? I've seen about a thousand of them since we started out this morning."

"Yes, Master, but this explosion far back of lines—out of gun range! See, way over there."

He was pointing ahead and slightly to the right.

"There on the horizon, Master," he

said. "Something has just blown up."

Rand's trained eyes were flashing over the horizon. Suddenly they riveted, not on the point that Sika was designating, but on a moving object—a tiny speck—that swept along, heading north. Instantly he snatched his binoculars from their case beside him and raised them to his eyes.

"What the—" he exploded. But he didn't finish. "Hey, Sika!" he called. "Take a look at that thing! It looks like a red ship, about the same color as ours. It's flying back into Germany."

Sika looked.

"Master," he cried, "maybe that ship the one that drop bomb to cause explosion."

The Red Falcon swung the nose of his crimson crate in pursuit of the other plane and they hurled on, oblivious to the passing of time. Precious minutes passed by, and Sika was the first to break the verbal silence.

"Master!" he cried. "That plane seem to run away from us!"

"That's what I was thinking," the Red Falcon shot back. "Outside of our own crate, that's the fastest thing I've seen on the Front."

They were sweeping on into Germany and the other plane, still a mere speck, was flying low. Suddenly, they lost it in a low range of mountains.

The Red Falcon carried his pursuit a little farther, then gave up the chase and started back.

"There's something funny about that," he said. "Maybe we'll find out what's happened when we get to Paris."

Sika was shaking his head.

"Maybe," he admitted, "but Sika have feeling that what we find out when we get to Paris will be no good for us."

Rand laughed.

"Boy, your superstitions are getting you down again," he said. "What's the matter, did the moon rise on the wrong side of the sky last night?"

"Sika not know," the giant black persisted. "Just have feeling."

On to Paris they roared and landed at Le Bourget field. Mechanics were expecting them, promised to have the ship refueled and the guns loaded with ammunition.

A special staff car was there, waiting to take them to the parade grounds in Paris. The Red Falcon and Sika sat back luxuriously in the deep cushions.

"Well," Rand grinned, "how do you like being a hero, big boy?"

Sika smiled, but he still looked worried.

"Sika not feel very comfortable," he admitted. "Afraid something going to happen."

"Forget it," the Red Falcon advised.

But the giant black's premonition seemed to be right. As the car turned into the parade grounds, men were lined up, rank upon rank. Rand first noticed something strange when got out of the car. Those men in regimental parade should have presented arms, but they didn't. They carried rifles with fixed bayonets, and as the car stopped, the command to take aim was shouted from one officer to another. The big car drove away immediately and Barry Rand and Sika found themselves in the center of the field with several hundred rifles pointed at them.

CHAPTER THREE

The Falcon's Wings

A COLONEL approached them with drawn automatic and said, "The general wishes me to tell you that he has never been more disgusted in his life. He himself recommended Congressional medals for you both. Congress passed upon the request and the medals are waiting for you. But even on your way here, you must put on a horrible exhibition of cruelty. You were the cause of thousands of deaths this morning! Deaths of helpless

people, wounded men who couldn't—"

Barry Rand's voice, low and calm but as sharp as a steel rapier, cut in. "Wait a minute, you double-crossing brass hat! What are you trying to pull here?"

"Master," the giant black whispered, "Sika have feeling this not so good. We fight?"

Rand shook his head.

"Not unless you want to commit suicide, big boy," he said. "You wouldn't have a chance. Let me handle this."

He jerked his head and riveted his cold, blue eyes full upon the colonel.

"Now," he snapped, "suppose you go into detail about this business of murdering helpless people, so that we'll know what you're talking about?"

The colonel squared his shoulders and cleared his throat importantly.

"That makes matters even worse!" he snapped. "You aren't satisfied with blowing up half a dozen hospitals—jammed to the windows with patients as a result of this black gas! Now you have the brazen nerve to deny an act that every soldier in those areas witnessed with his own eyes. We've received more than fifty reports that *you* are responsible for this massacre."

"Master," Sika said, "that explosion we see on way here must be hospital being blown up."

The Red Falcon turned.

"Yes," he said, "apparently. And you remember the plane that I spotted going north? It looked though it had left the place where the explosion occurred! It was as fast as our plane, and it was painted the same color."

He spun around again to face the colonel.

"I don't suppose, Colonel," he snapped, "that there would be any use trying to tell you that we suspect someone else of impersonating us."

"I'm not here to argue the matter," the colonel barked, "but to place you under arrest."

"Master," Sika whispered, "we fight?"

Barry Rand shook his head.

"You haven't got a chance, big boy," he said, "and besides, we're not fighting Yanks. Colonel, may we be taken to the general's office? It was he who guaranteed us protection if we came here."

"The general," the colonel said arrogantly, "is a busy man. He can not waste time hearing excuses." He turned to a squad of tough-looking Yanks close by. "Take them away, men!" he ordered.

Barry Rand was speaking again.

"Listen, Colonel," he said, "for the love of heaven, listen to sense! We saw something this morning that's damned important. There has been another plane developed that is just like ours. I don't know how or by whom. Someone plans to blow up the hospitals and throw the blame on us. We've got the only ship that can compare with that other plane, and so far as I know, I'm the only one who can fly it."

The colonel smiled sarcastically.

"If what you're saying is true, you should be glad to be placed in confinement. If we hold you prisoner and these bombings of hospitals are continued by this red plane—which you say is not yours but resembles it—we'll know definitely that you're not guilty."

Rand's teeth clinched.

"With a brain like yours, Colonel, you should be a buck private," he cracked. "Haven't I already told you that we've got the only plane that can compete with this other crate? It's faster than anything on the Front. From the looks of it, it's an exact duplicate of ours. Do you think we'll be glad to stay in prison and permit other hospitals to be blown up, just to prove our innocence? Why, damn it, that's murdering your own men, and yet you—"

"Silence!" the colonel roared. Then, to the corporal of the guard, he ordered, "Take them away!"

At bayonet points they were marched

across the parade grounds to a waiting truck, and taken from there to a prison in the center of Paris. The door clanged shut on them and was locked. Rand and his black aide faced each other.

"Master," Sika said, shaking his head sorrowfully, "you not listen to me. Sika warn you. Sika say—"

"Yeah, I know," Barry cut in, "but I'm glad it happened this way."

"You glad, Master?" Sika exclaimed. "But now we in jail! What we do? That other plane blow up more hospitals! It—"

"Sure," the Red Falcon nodded. "Don't say what you've got in mind. I know what it is. They'll probably shoot me, along about tomorrow morning. I'm not worrying about that so much; I'm thinking about those poor suckers who have been gassed; and those hospitals full of patients; and—"

He broke off and stood there silently by the door of their cell.

"Sika try to pull apart the bars in door, Master," the black aide offered.

"No," Rand said, "it wouldn't do any good. We'd have to go down this corridor and out the front way. They've got guards posted there."

He waited there by the door. An hour passed and a prison guard brought them a tray of food.

At the other end of the cell was a long, narrow, barred window. Sika had eaten nothing, and while Barry ate, he stood looking out onto the narrow, dark alley below.

THE Red Falcon watched him as he stood there, powerful body tensed as though he were going to undertake some great feat of strength. Barry Rand had often admired that black giant body before, and he realized that here, before him, was the strongest man he had ever seen in his life.

Sika bent down slowly and placed his hands on the iron bars. Barry could see those muscles of steel, even under the

uniform, flex and move as he put them to the test. The Red Falcon watched the bars, but he couldn't see that they moved. Sika only exerted his strength for a moment, then stopped. Turning, he said:

"Master, Sika think he can bend bars. I bring now?"

The Red Falcon doubted the opinion of the black, but it was a marvelous sight to see Sika test his strength. He nodded.

"Sure. Let's see you try."

Barry didn't offer to help then. He was more intent on watching—the audience in a show.

Sika bent over, this time in full earnest, and clutched the two center bars with his huge hands. His back hunched and he began to pull, both arms working together like a well trained team of horses.

Barry Rand straightened suddenly. Those bars were moving! He leaped to his feet and touched Sika on the arm.

"Okay," he hissed. "That's enough. Get away from the bars. Someone's coming."

Sika obeyed instantly and waited, for the guard was coming down the hall for the tray of dirty dishes. He vanished again, a few minutes later, leaving them alone.

The giant black grinned at his Master.

"You not think Sika strong enough to move bars!" he charged.

The Red Falcon grinned back at him and nodded.

"You're a good guesser, big boy," he admitted. "I didn't think you'd be able to move them, but you did. Now let's try it together."

They bent their iron muscles to the bars, and the iron gave a little more. Dark sweat stood out on the forehead of Sika. They stopped for a rest. The bars were separating, but in pulling them apart, the top and bottom of each bar was binding as it twisted. This would necessitate literally tearing them from their sockets before they had made a hole large enough through which to escape.

Again they bent down, took hold of the bars and strained. Rand was pulling for all he was worth, but strong as he was, he knew that he was very little help to his giant aide. The bars spread wider, and they stopped again for rest and to listen. The Red Falcon's heart was pounding at the base of his skull from the terrific strain.

"We finish this time, Master," Sika said.

Rand nodded. "I hope so, big boy," he admitted. He was panting, while Sika seemed to be entirely undisturbed.

For the third time they bent to the task, and now Barry Rand was pulling so hard that it seemed something within him must snap. Sika was making a rumbling noise deep down in his throat as he worked—and the bars came wide apart.

The Red Falcon snatched the two blankets from the cot and tied them to-



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gether. Then Rand gave a short nod.

"We can make it now."

"You go first, Master," Sika said, stepping back.

The Red Falcon crawled through the opening they had made and slipped down the improvised blanket rope. The moment he touched the alley paving, Sika landed beside him. They took a moment to get their bearings, then they slipped to the rear of the alley. There it connected with another passage coming from the rear street.

A few moments later Rand and Sika reached that street, and the Red Falcon stopped.

"Listen, Sika," he said, "you're as black as coal and as big as a house. You'll stand out like a sore thumb on any Paris street. Look." He pointed across the street at a cab. "Walk over there to that cab, get in, and have the driver take you up to the north end of Le Bourget field. Hide in the bushes up there. I'll get our plane going as quickly as possible and I'll pick you up at that end."

Sika nodded.

"Yes, Master," he said. "Sika go now. Wait for you there."

Barry Rand watched Sika make his way across the street, saw him safely in his cab, saw the taxi drive away. Then, when a full minute had passed, the Red Falcon stepped out on the sidewalk and sauntered along until he had gone perhaps two blocks. There he found another cab. Climbing in, he ordered the driver to take him to Le Bourget field. He pulled his cap well over his eyes and walked from the taxi down the tarmac with a swift, confident step.

Barry Rand paused at the end hangar of Le Bourget. There, inside that apartment adjoining the hangar, were the only American officers he could trust. The chief of that trio was known only as G-8. He was the Master Spy of the Allied forces and top flying man as well.

The two assistants of this master flying

spy were also aces in their own right. And what made the Red Falcon admire them was the fact that they took a man at his face value and were not influenced by stupid rumors and opinions. There would be no danger of exposure if he approached G-8 and his Battle Aces for a little help. He could trust them.

The answer to Barry Rand's knock was immediate. The door swung open and G-8, not unlike the Red Falcon himself in build, stood in the doorway. A light of recognition flashed across The Master Spy's face.

"Come in, Rand," he said warmly, then quickly closed the door when the Red Falcon had entered.

Nippy Weston, the little terrier ace who took everything with a smile, looked up from the book he was reading. His face cracked in a grin of welcome.

"Hello, Rand! What are you doing here?"

Big Bull Martin, G-8's other assistant, moved his powerful frame from the davenport and exploded:

"Holy Herring! I thought you were supposed to be in prison? We heard—"

"You big ox!" Nippy snorted. "It's about time you learn that the rumors you hear about Barry Rand are silly—unless they're good rumors."

Rand laughed as they came up to shake his hand.

"Nippy is certainly right," G-8 affirmed. "But we *did* hear that you and Sika had been arrested for the hospital bombing. It sounded mighty crazy to me. In fact, I was thinking of going down and looking into the thing. It doesn't sound like you, Rand."

The Red Falcon's face clouded for an instant.

"Hells bells!" he said. "You don't think we'd pull a stunt like that, do you, G-8?"

The Master Spy shook his head.

"No," he said, "I certainly don't. But you'll have to admit that the evidence is

against you—especially since we know of no other pilot who could fly a duplicate of your ship with any degree of safety. What do you know about it?"

"NOT much more than you do," Rand confessed. "We were on our way to Paris this morning when Sika spotted an explosion, well back of the lines. I imagine it was one of the hospitals being bombed. Shortly after that, I saw a familiar-looking plane heading for the rear of the German lines. It looked like an exact duplicate of my ship, red paint and all. We took after it, but we couldn't gain on it at all."

"That seems to prove," G-8 nodded, "that some German ace has succeeded in copying your plane and has learned to fly it."

"You believe me, then?" the Red Falcon asked.

"Certainly, I believe you," G-8 told him. "If there's anything we can do to help you, just let us know."

"I'd like to solve this thing myself," Rand confessed, "but there are a couple of things you *could* do. I know you fellows are pretty good at make-up. Could you change my face just a little, so I won't look like myself? And you might fake up an order for me to fly our Red Falcon plane back to Issoudon? I don't want to be compelled to hurt any of these good mechanics in order to get away."

The Master Spy agreed.

"Sure," he said. He pointed to a chair. "Just sit down in this chair and lay your head back." He raised his voice and called, "Battle, can you come in here for a moment?"

The English manservant, who cooked for the Battle Aces and was also master of make-up, entered from the kitchen.

"We want to change this pilot's face so that he won't be recognized," G-8 said.

"Yes, sir," Battle beamed. "At once, sir."

He went to the wardrobe closet and came out with a big make-up kit.

Nippy Weston, the terrier ace, grinned. "In five minutes," he predicted, "Battle will have disguised you so that your own mother wouldn't know you."

While Battle worked, G-8 talked to Rand.

"You know," he said, "it was a dirty shame to have this thing happen just as you were about to get the Congressional Medal of Honor."

The Red Falcon shrugged.

"That doesn't matter much to us. The whole thing was a brass-hat affair, and it didn't mean much to us. As things stand now, I wouldn't trust an officer in the Allied army any farther than I could throw an elephant with a sling shot."

"I'm an Allied officer," G-8 smiled.

Rand grinned.

"You don't count," he said. "You're different."

"I think I rather helped to engineer that Congressional medal for you," G-8 said. "I was hoping it would get you down out of the mountains so you could fight with us. You'd have more resources at your command."

"It wouldn't do any good," the Red Falcon told him. "I guess we're outlaws for the rest of our lives—or at least for the rest of the war. If I did come back, everything would go along swell for a few days, but then there would be a little flurry of suspicion and I'd have every Allied officer down on my neck—that is, except you and Nippy and Bull. And we can't fight Heinies while we're in jail."

Finished with his work, Battle stepped back. The Red Falcon got up and scrutinized himself in the mirror.

"Boy," he said, patting Battle on the back, "you sure can work wonders. Almost makes me feel as though this mirror is lying. Well, I've got to be shoving off. Sika is waiting for me up at the end of the field. How about that order?"

G-8 stepped to the library table and drew out an order blank. He filled it out quickly, signed a colonel's name, and handed it to the Red Falcon.

"I think that will get you by all right," he said. He opened the door into the storage end of the hangar. "Good luck, Rand! And if you need any more help, just shout."

The Red Falcon thanked him, then strode down the tarmac toward his plane. Mechanics stepped up as he neared it, and he handed the sergeant in charge the order.

"Start the motor at once," he commanded. "I've got to get going for Issoudon."

After one glance at the order, the sergeant obeyed instantly. The motor was started and Rand taxied down to the north end of the field as though he were preparing to take off. He kicked the ship around, and as he did so, Sika came out from the bushes. The giant black lunged for the plane and climbed into the rear cockpit. Suddenly, he stared at the Red Falcon.

"Who are you?" he demanded, seeing the strange face.

"It's me, Sika," Rand laughed. "We've got to get going. Look!"

He pointed down the field to where official cars had come tearing in. Men poured from them as Barry Rand batted the throttle open wide and sent the Red Falcon plane charging down the field past the group.

"They've discovered our escape," Rand barked through the tube, "and they've come to guard our plane. This is going to be funny."

Guns began barking as the Yank guards took aim and fired.

"Not so funny if we get shot down," Sika boomed.

Bullets thudded into the crimson crate as it left the ground. Down the field a ground machine gun began stuttering, and

soon two others chattered out as the Red Falcon climbed desperately.

"Master!" Sika yelled. "I stop them with my machine gun!"

"No!" Rand barked back. "We'll have to take our own chances."

His voice was almost drowned out by the drumming of machine gun slugs into the wing beside him.

CHAPTER FOUR

Satan's Side-Kick

BARRY Rand leveled off the crimson crate and thrashed the stick about in a frantic attempt to duck that deadly fire. He saw G-8 and Nippy and Bull running from their quarters to try to stop the shooting. Flashing out of range at the far end of the field, the Red Falcon turned deliberately and came charging back. His four nose guns, the two Vickers above the Liberty engine and the Spandaus, one on each wing, began blazing furiously. He spattered a line of slugs along the hard surface of that tarmac, not five feet from the machine gunners.

G-8 and his Battle Aces had ducked back between the hangars, apparently suspecting that this was coming.

"Come on, you buzzards!" Rand yelled. "Stand up and take some of your own medicine! You came closer to me than I'm coming to you!"

He roared out with laughter as he saw some of the ground officers and men run to get out of his way.

"You're quick enough to lay the blame on anybody, you dirty kiwis," he yelled, "but you can't take it yourselves! Go on, run for cover, you rats! That goes for everybody but G-8 and his gang!"

The Red Falcon zoomed up at the north end of the field and headed for the lines. They were silent for a few minutes as they hurtled on, then Sika spoke, through the tube.

"Master," he said, "I know it is you. Sika tell from voice. But face is all changed. You not look like *you* any more."

The Red Falcon chuckled.

"G-8 had my face altered so that I wouldn't be recognized," he said. "He gave me a little bottle of stuff that will remove the make-up when we get through with this job."

"G-8, he believe you?" the big black wanted to know.

"Sure," Rand nodded. "There's one guy who has some sense. There aren't many of them in this man's war, if you ask me. Most of them seem to be looking for a chance to cop the credit for my capture. I wish we'd been able to leave that colonel locked up in our cell, after we got out."

He had reached ten thousand feet and was leveling there.

"What we do now, Master?" Sika asked.

"We're going to hang upstairs here until we see that other red ship come over and blow up another hospital."

"Then we fight, Master?"

The Red Falcon hesitated.

"Maybe," he ventured. "I'd like to make sure, though, of what their lousy scheme is. If there's only one Heinie who has learned the trick of flying that crate, our job will be easy. But if they've got a whole squadron of them, it'll be something else again."

"Then Sika fight?" the big black beamed.

"You'll probably have a chance for plenty fighting before we get through with this," the Red Falcon promised.

They ranged back and forth over the Front for more than an hour. Mid-afternoon came and passed and still they droned on. Suddenly, Sika began pounding that part of the fuselage which separated the two cockpits.

"Master, Master!" he called. "Look! Airplane over there! Look like red plane

that blew up all the hospitals."

The Master Spy snatched up his binoculars and stared at the far-off object.

"That's it!" he cracked. "That's the ship we're after. And this time, big boy, we can get him if we want him!"

They had sighted that other crimson crate well back of the lines. It was a mere speck down on the horizon and was heading south.

"They go to bomb another hospital now," Sika called.

The Red Falcon dropped his nose and pushed on the throttle for more speed. Down, down they tore to intercept the killers. But they hadn't gone far when Rand pulled up again sharply and began to climb, changing his course at the same time.

"Master!" Sika yelled. "There go hospital!"

The flash of an explosion appeared just under the counterfeit red ship. A great frame building reared up, and portions of the structure and of the murdered occupants flew high in the sky. The crimson crate made a quick turn and headed back for the German lines.

"Why, that dirty, lowdown murdering skunk!" Rand snapped.

He sat hunched over in his front cockpit, trembling with rage. He wanted to go down and smear that other red plane with his four nose guns.

"Master, Master we shoot him down!" Sika yelled. "We dive on him!"

But the Red Falcon climbed higher and shook his head.

"**N**O, SIKA," he said, trying to keep his voice calm. "There's nothing I'd rather do than kill that rat, but we've got to see this thing through. I'm going to trail this bird back to where he's going—and we're going to land where he does. If the German government is behind this damnable series of murders, they're going to pay an awful price for the work they've

done!" His eyes were cold slits.

He turned toward the north, climbing higher and higher so that his position wouldn't be noticed. Now and then he took advantage of a thin bank of clouds that might hide him.

The other red ship was streaking along far below them. It had already crossed the lines and was making for the Hunsruck mountains, deep in Germany.

Barry Rand followed on and called through the tube, "This is the same course he was taking this morning, when we lost him. I've got an idea that this is the only plane like ours, and there's only one German pilot who can fly it. I'm dying to get my hands on that guy!"

They saw him drop down suddenly into a hidden valley, just across the mountains from Birkengeld. Rand lowered the nose of his crate and went screaming down for that same field. He had lost half his altitude by the time the other plane had landed. As he tore on down for the valley, he saw men running out to help with the other plane that had just come in.

Turning his nose guns loose on them, Rand sent three of the ground crew kicking.

Sika let out a yell, "Master, that man not white—he black! Look, he has black face!"

The Red Falcon could see the huge pilot climbing out of the cockpit, and now he noticed that fellow's face was black. He held his fire as the man made a run for the cave.

"Get your Lewis guns ready, Sika," Rand ordered. "We're going to land right in front of that cave. Keep the entrance covered with your guns. Don't shoot that big black buzzard! I want to take care of him myself, but you handle the rest of them."

"You trust me, Master," Sika grinned.

Down went the Red Falcon plane, and Rand cut his gun just as he came over the end of the valley. He brought his

ship in with an expert side-slip, then kicked straight so that wheels and skid touched a little distance from the entrance to the cave. It rolled to a stop directly in front of the cave.

Not a man showed in the entrance. The other red plane was standing alone, just where it had landed near the middle of the field.

Rand had no automatic, but that wasn't stopping him. He leaped from the cockpit, as his crimson crate stopped rolling, and strode off to the side of that cave entrance so that Sika would have a clear shot with his Lewis guns.

The Red Falcon approached the entrance from the side.

"Come on out, you black-faced buzzard!" he called. "Come out, you murdering maniac! You're twice as big as I am, but I'll lick you with my bare fists."

Back in the cave a shot rang out. Sika crouched behind his guns and cut loose with a short burst. There was a cry of pain from the interior of the cave.

"O. K.," Barry Rand challenged. "You've had a taste of it, and if you want any more, start shooting again!"

For the moment the valley seemed peaceful and the echoes of the firing died away in the hills. Rand advanced nearer to the mouth of the cave and suddenly the giant Black Baron appeared, bearing a white flag.

"What is it that you want?" he demanded, standing in the entrance.

"You, you mad dog!" the Red Falcon snapped, striding toward him.

He got no farther, for the clamor of a machine gun from the opposite side of the valley cut him off. He saw the Black Baron drop to the ground, but Rand knew instinctively that he was not wounded but had dropped to get out of the line of fire. The Red Falcon whirled to stare at his ship and at Sika. He heard a groan from the black man and saw him slump below the level of the cockpit, his hands falling

from the Lewis guns. Suddenly, from either side of the cave opening, Germans appeared with guns leveled at the Red Falcon. The Black Baron was getting up.

Barry Rand stood there like a statue, unarmed and helpless.

CHAPTER FIVE

Fool's Flight

THE great black baron advanced toward him, accompanied by guards with drawn guns. For once in his life, the Red Falcon seemed defeated. He stared at that rear cockpit of his plane, hoping and praying for some move from Sika that would tell him his black aide was still alive.

"You are not so clever as you thought, *mein freund*," the Black Baron challenged in fair English. "You admit now, of course, that you are my prisoner."

"I admit nothing," Rand snapped, "until I know about Sika."

The baron laughed harshly.

"Do you think for a moment that your black aide is still alive?" he rasped.

Barry Rand realized that nothing would be gained by appearing defiant.

"Listen," he said, "if you will have your

men lift Sika out of the rear cockpit of my plane and find out whether he is dead or not, I will submit peaceably. If you do not, I will fight you, you dirty murderer, until one of us is dead."

The Black Baron studied the statement for a moment, then he nodded to one group of his men.

"Go and lift the black man out of the cockpit and see if he is dead," he ordered. "It will save us some small trouble with this fool."

Rand waited tensely while the men moved toward the ship. Unable to restrain himself, he followed them, saw them lift Sika's limp form from the cockpit and stretch him out on the ground. Blood was oozing from a deep wound in his head, and his left side was soaked with blood from a wound somewhere in his side or shoulder.

The great black moved as they carried him out and uttered a low groan.

"He is still alive," the Black Baron said. "You have given your word to surrender, now that we have done as you wished."

Barry Rand nodded slowly. He felt like a new man, now that he was positive that Sika still lived.

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"O. K.," he said. "What do you want me to do?"

The Black Baron lifted the Luger from his holster and pointed it at the Red Falcon.

"You will come inside the cave *und* I will tell you," he said.

"All right," Rand nodded calmly. "Let's go."

He walked inside the cave ahead of the baron. When they were well back they reached a desk, and the baron ordered him to halt. He pointed to a stool a few feet from the desk.

"Sit down," he ordered.

Rand obeyed, and the baron sat at the desk chair.

"You do not remember me?" he asked.

The Red Falcon shook his head.

"No," he said, "but I suppose you're some bird I shot down, at one time or another, and this is your way of getting revenge."

"That is not exactly true," the baron contradicted. "Some time ago, the design of your plane was copied. We have it in the files of the German Air Service. We can build any number of them whenever we wish. But, as you know, there is a certain trick to flying your plane. I was attempting to fly the first model which was made, and I crashed into an ammunition truck. I was injured both by the crash itself and the explosion that followed. But it was the explosion that turned my face and head black. Doctors tell me that unless white skin from some other part of my body is grafted on, my face will always be this way. However, in that explosion, I learned the secret of the black gas. I made certain experiments, *und* I found that this gas, although it would penetrate the gas masks now in use, was not deadly. Instead, it made the victims very ill so that they had to be taken to hospitals."

Rand turned his head for a moment and watched the baron's guards carry Sika, still unconscious, far into the interior of

the cave. The giant moaned softly.

"I suggested to the German government," the baron continued, "that we test the gas on two enemy sectors. I knew they would never permit me to blow up the hospitals, after thousands of patients had been crowded into them, but I had a plan of my own for that. So"—he shrugged his great shoulders—"it was up to me to make it a success. Here in this secret valley—which is part of my ancestral estate—I had another plane constructed like yours. *Und* this time I was able to fly it!"

Barry Rand nodded savagely. His eyes were on the Luger which the baron had laid on the desk. If he could snatch that up before the baron could reach it, he might have a chance. Anger flamed within him and made his blood run hot.

"And you, you murdering skunk," he barked, "went out and blew up those hospitals!"

The baron grinned twistedly.

"Of course," he chuckled. "And not only that, but I knew that they would place the blame on you."

Barry Rand made a sudden lunge for him, his fists doubled to strike. The giant black baron half leaped from his chair. Instinctively, he prepared to give battle with his fists, then remembered the Luger on the desk. A split second before Barry Rand could reach it, the baron clutched the gun and swung the muzzle up to meet the Red Falcon's advance. Rand froze there, three feet from the baron.

"Now," the baron chuckled, "if you will go back and sit down, I will tell you the rest of my plan. From now on, this gun will remain pointed at you." He raised his voice to call to his mechanics and helpers, "Men, start up the Red Falcon's own plane and fill the racks with bombs. We leave at once—and the Red Falcon himself will pilot me on another mission of hospital blasting!"

Barry Rand spun about and glared at the mechanics.

"If you start that plane, you die!" he challenged.

The baron cackled derisively.

"That is funny," he taunted. "Very funny. *Und* if you move, *Herr* Red Falcon, you will die."

"O. K.! Go ahead and shoot," Rand challenged. "I can only die once."

At that instant, Barry Rand was in earnest; he was ready to die. Then his thoughts flashed to Sika, who would be lost without him. And there were those hospitals jammed with patients. If he, Rand, died, there was no telling how far this thing would go. It might even mean a German victory. As long as he lived, there was a chance that he might break up this devilish scheme.

The baron shrugged and nodded.

"Very well," he said. "I give you a little longer to make up your mind. I count to five. If, before I finish, you tell me that you will fly your plane, I will not kill you."

The Red Falcon nodded.

"O. K.," he said, "I'll fly you. Get my ship ready."

The baron laughed triumphantly.

"Very good," he said. "I thought you would agree with me. Come; we go to the plane. You walk ahead of me."

The crew had run to the plane and started the engine before Rand and the baron reached it. They wouldn't have to wait for it to warm. Bombs were being hurriedly rushed into the racks.

Barry climbed into the front cockpit. He turned to see the Black Baron up behind him in Sika's place. The Luger in his hand was trained on the base of the Red Falcon's skull.

"Remember, there are controls back here also," the baron reminded him, "and I can fly this plane. We will have no tricks, or I will blow your head off!"

Rand settled in his seat and fastened his belt. A feeling of revulsion came over him as he taxied the plane down to the far end

of the field. Then he headed into the wind, gaining speed and rising.

"We head for Dormiere," the baron ordered through the tube. "You will see the hospital there. It is a large building, with probably two or three thousand patients in it by now. I drop the whole load of bombs on it as you fly over."

The Red Falcon said nothing. He climbed to a thousand feet and sent his crimson crate hurling on.

For minutes he had been holding to his course without wavering. Unobtrusively, he began unscrewing the heavy control stick from its socket. He glanced to the right, saw out of the corner of his eye that the baron was still sitting straight in the rear cockpit, with the gun trained on him.

THE stick was loose in its socket, almost out. He gave it another turn that loosened it completely, and then he moved quicker than he had ever moved before in his life. Without giving the slightest warning, he kicked the rudder to the right, sent the ship yawing in that direction, and brought up the stick like a baseball bat over his head and down behind him with all the force he could muster. At the same instant, he jerked his head to the side.

The Luger exploded in his ear, and the little windshield in front of him blasted into a thousand pieces.

Rand experienced a feeling of great satisfaction as the other end of the clubbed stick connected with the baron's skull and sank in deeply. The Red Falcon ducked farther to the side, to make sure that no more shots were coming, then he whirled around and stared behind him.

The baron had dropped his Luger and his great body was slumped over the edge of the cockpit, blood gushing from his head where it had been crushed in.

Rand reared up out of his seat and reached over into the rear cockpit to unfasten the baron's safety belt. He turned

back again, fastened his own belt around him, screwed the stick in its socket and pulled back on it.

The Red Falcon zoomed up in a half loop and hung there. Without the slightest qualm of conscience he turned to watch the body of the Black Baron pitch limply out of the cockpit and fall flopping like a rag doll toward the earth a quarter of a mile below.

The Red Falcon half rolled out of the top of that loop and pushed on the throttle for all the speed he could get, heading back toward the valley in the Hunsruck Mountains.

Minutes sped by all too slowly, then Rand was tearing down into that valley.

Barry sent his plane around in a tight vertical and brought it down to a quick landing. He snatched up one of the Lewis guns, and with that held in his hand, charged the cave.

Suddenly he heard a wild commotion and a familiar yell: "Ki-hu-yi!" It was the battle cry of Sika. One of the German guards came flying through the air, arms and legs flopping, as Sika flung him against the stone wall of the cave. The cries of other guards rang out and echoed through the great vaulted interior.

Rand didn't dare shoot for fear of hitting his black aide. There were three

guards left, trying to club him with their guns.

One of Sika's arms was hanging limp and the blood was drying on his head wound. But he was doing plenty of damage with his other arm.

"Ki-hu-yi!"

That cry mingled with the crash of skull against skull. Then Sika came charging toward the Red Falcon.

"We fight, Master!" he yelled.

"We *did* fight," Rand smiled, helping his black aide to stand up. "But I'm afraid it's all over now. Come on, we're getting out of here."

With Sika resting quietly in the rear cockpit, the Red Falcon lifted the crimson plane into the wind and sent it droning toward the Vosges mountains.

"But, Master," Sika ventured, "the Allies they not know that we do not blow up hospitals!"

There was a hard ring in Barry Rand's laugh.

"What do we care whether they know it or not?" he challenged. "We know it and G-8 knows it, and that's all I care about."

Then he lay back his head and gave full voice to his favorite jazz song. The Red Falcon was once more returning victorious to his aerie to the tune of the "Dark Town Strutters' Ball."

THE END

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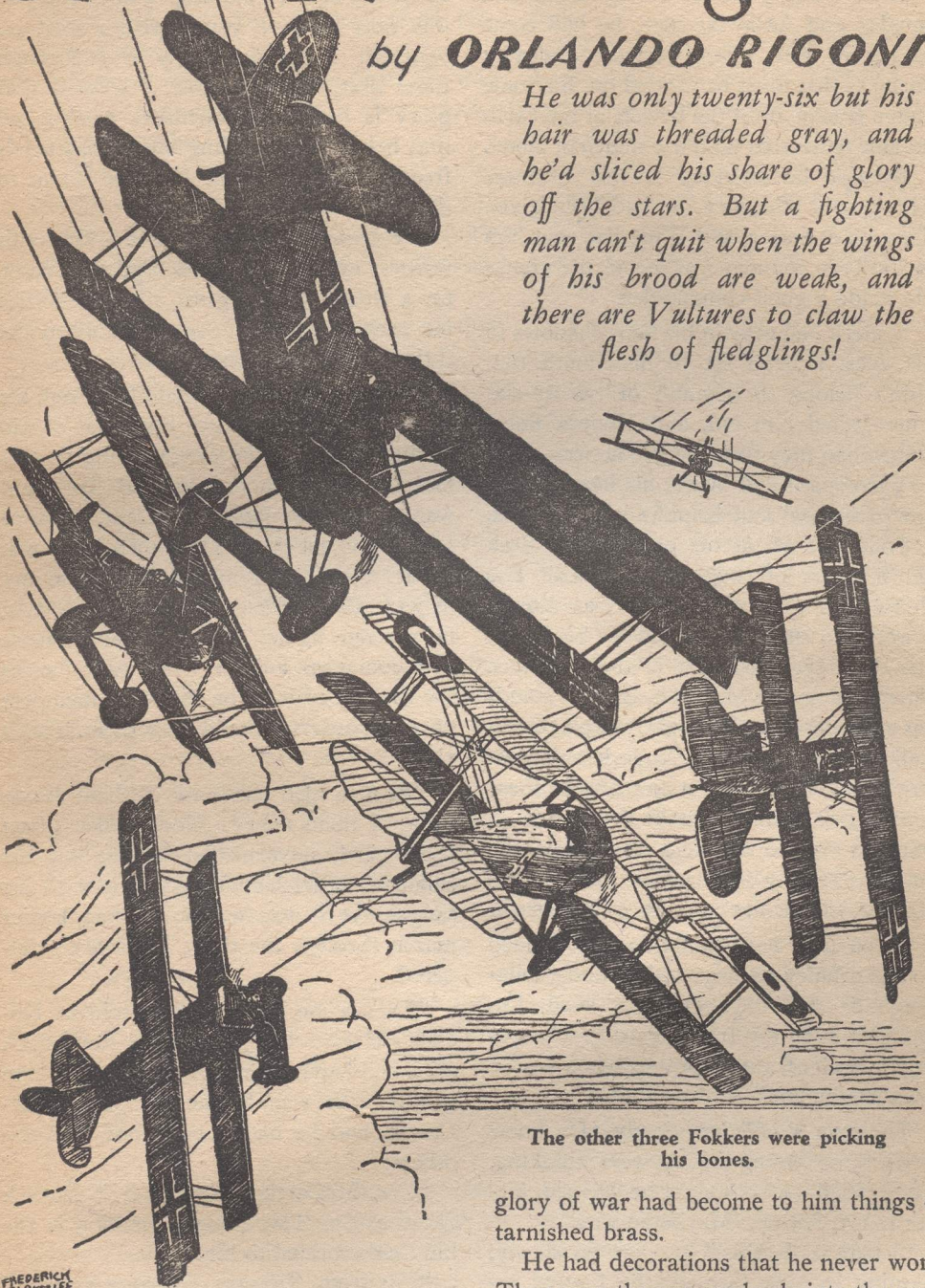
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Old Man Wings

by **ORLANDO RIGONI**

He was only twenty-six but his hair was threaded gray, and he'd sliced his share of glory off the stars. But a fighting man can't quit when the wings of his brood are weak, and there are Vultures to claw the flesh of fledglings!



FREDERICK
B. PRESLEE

THEY called him "Old Man Wings" but he was only twenty-six. Major Allen Nodeck didn't resent the name. He had reached the point where he didn't resent anything. The honor and the

The other three Fokkers were picking his bones.

glory of war had become to him things of tarnished brass.

He had decorations that he never wore. They were thrown carelessly into the same drawer that held his shaving tools. He got victories that he never reported because he considered the credit for killing a man an empty honor—a questionable glory.

After three years of seeing death and squalor and futile sacrifice, he had come to regard war as a business—a deadly business that must be carried on, for some vague reason, until the bowels of the earth became nauseated with the stench of blood.

Because he attended to that business with a cold efficiency, he had been given the rank of major, and Wing had sent him to Vailly in command of the 43rd Pursuit. He made a good commander.

Nodeck had gray in his hair, shadows in his eyes, a grim set to his mouth that didn't belong to a youth of twenty-six. They called him old, and Nodeck knew better than they just how old he was—just how calloused and brittle his heart was—how dismayed and helpless was his soul.

Today he sat at his packing-box desk like a figure of rough-hewed rock. His blouse was open at the throat as though it were too small to contain his big body. His dark eyes, deep-set in their sockets, glared out at the six replacements standing stiffly against the unpainted pineboard wall of the doghouse. Nodeck was past sentiment. He had seen so many of these young lives snuffed out in the vortex of war that six more or less made little difference. He lay his hamlike hands upon the desk before him and cleared his throat.

"You men have had this war handed you as a fancy package of hell and jubilation," he told them gruffly. "Well, I'm going to strip the trappings off—I'm going to swab off the sloppy ballyhoo you've been lapping up."

The men shuffled restlessly. He knew what these young bucks were thinking. They pitied him—thought he was old, disillusioned, fed-up. Maybe he was.

"I hate to do this," he went on slowly, seeming to look through the line of recruits. "I'd like to believe that glory was a shining star of achievement—that honor was a white scroll of sacrifice. But it isn't. I thought it was, once. You think it is now. In due time, you'll think differ-

ently, if you live that long. I'm telling you this now to give you a year's start on yourself. I blundered my way through those first, blind months. I learned that glory is brass that tarnishes easily, and that honor is a winding sheet that needs frequent airing. Then I settled down to the real business of fighting."

Lieutenant Carline, a blond kid with reckless eyes, broke in swiftly, "We came for a chance at this great adventure with our eyes open, sir. We're not afraid to die, if that's what you mean."

"Not afraid to die?" Nodeck barked, his face coloring. "Of course you're not afraid to die! Dying is the easiest thing in this man's war. It takes guts to live—and watch the *other fellow* tally out. You've got to live, get that? Dead men don't win a war. I want no grandstanding from any of you—there will be no personal patrols, no revenge fights. We'll do our business as it comes up, and we won't take chances for the fun of it. The flight commanders have my orders. You'll obey them. That's all."

The men filed out, some of them grave, some of them angry. Nodeck had given them hard, unvarnished words, but his calloused heart hadn't kept tune with his tongue. As he watched those strong bodies march through the door, his heart shuddered.

"Excuse me, sir," a voice said at Nodeck's elbow. He glanced up, startled. A slim, red-haired youth was staring at him grimly. He was Lieutenant Hugh McCarran and he hadn't gone out with the others.

"Yes, McCarran, what is it?" Nodeck asked softly. There was something in the kid that appealed to him.

"I'm from Kansas, sir, same as you," McCarran said slowly.

Nodeck nodded. "I know. Your brother, Fred, was in my squadron two months or more ago."

McCarran's mouth tightened. "He—he

was killed. Killed by von Schlieker, the Black Ace, just after he'd formed his circus of parrots."

Nodeck said with a little heat, "It was partly Fred's fault. He was always looking for trouble."

"That's not true," McCarran said flatly. "I heard how he died. He crashed on our side of the lines, and the Black Ace murdered him while he lay on the ground, stunned."

Nodeck's eyes drew close. "And all that adds up to what?"

"I don't like your orders, major. I wormed my way into your command because I wanted to get von Schlieker. I want permission for one personal patrol a day," the kid insisted.

Nodeck pounded the desk. "You can't have it! I know more about this fighting game than you. How many hours solo have you had?"

"About forty," McCarran said proudly.

Nodeck snorted, "Forty hours against the Black Ace's probable thousand. All you'd get for your trouble, kid, would be a white cross beside Fred. I'm having you assigned to my patrol. You'll go out when I do, and not before. Is that clear?"

McCarran saluted stiffly. There was a hard, shiny look to his blue eyes. "Is that all, sir?"

"Yes. Get out."

Nodeck smiled a little as the kid went out. He had spunk—just like his brother. He'd make a great air fighter if he didn't try to whip the whole German army by himself.

AN hour later, Nodeck lit a cigarette and pulled on his flying suit. He always led the noon patrol himself. He legged grimly to the line and eyed the group of Spads on the apron. He breathed a curse. One of those ships was missing. He collared Sergeant Winters, big and raw-boned, with an eternal quid of tobacco in his wide mouth.

"Where's number six?" snapped Nodeck.

"That red-headed rooky asked me for it, sir, and I told him no. I guess he don't savvy American. As soon as I got my back turned, he jazzed her off the chocks. Ain't come back yet." Winters spat accurately at the wheels of a dismantled Nieuport.

"Why didn't you stop him?" Nodeck snapped. "He hadn't any business going out on his own."

"I ain't a wetnurse, sir," Winters said swiftly. "If the Geehawk wants to get his wings knocked down, it's not my business."

The men were straggling up for the noon patrol, and now they swarmed over the ships. Nodeck legged into his Spad and hunkered down. His shoulders filled the little office of the crate from side to side. He jabbed the throttle and the Hisso roared into life. He glared down the line and signalled his chocks out.

The Spad bit down the field. He bellied the stick and kicked the ship into the air. Circling grimly, he waited for the flight to form, then set off toward Craonne. He had three of the replacements in the flight, and he usually took the new men to Berry-au-Bac. Von Schlieker, the Black Ace, usually hung around Craonne, and he was a bad one to mix with on a baptism flight. He grew fat on baby meat.

But Nodeck was thinking of McCarran. He could see the kid's slim, freckled face with the shock of red hair. If McCarran was looking for the Black Ace. . . .

Nodeck stiffened. Far ahead he could see five ships lashing and zooming in a death dance. He jabbed the throttle wide and signalled the flight behind him. As he thundered up to the dogfight, his fears were realized.

McCarran was caught by von Schlieker and three other black Fokkers. The kid was stubbornly trying to get a shot at the Black Ace, and in the meantime the other three Fokkers were picking his bones.

The major hurled his Spad into the fracas. He split the four ships apart, and verticalled back to jump von Schlieker. But at the same instant, the rest of the Parrot Circus dived out of a cloud and the sky burst into one mad froth of chattering hell. Nodeck cursed as Spandau lead raked his pit. He rolled out and spun flat, going away from the fight.

The Spandau lead followed him. He kicked the bar, and curled back with Vickers dancing a jig on the mounts. He cut one Fokker down with a riddled aileron. He saw a Spad burst into flame and plummet for the earth. There was a white face in the flames—a face filled with terror.

Nodeck rumbled a curse. He'd teach McCarran a lesson when he got him back to Vailly—he'd hammer discipline into his red head. He was so busy looking for McCarran that he didn't notice the trap forming about him.

A wall of slugs battered into his pit and leather flicked off the cowling and hit him in the face. He batted his eyes clear and tried to roll out, but Fokkers hemmed him in on every side.

For one, tense instant, Nodeck sat in the hail of death. He saw his panel burst into junk—felt slugs biting into the padding at his very back. He knew that he was near to death, and he waited tensely for it to strike.

But it didn't strike. The Spandau hail stopped abruptly, and Nodeck shot a tense look back, and all he could see was the sheet of flame exploding from the Mercedes. The flames obstructed Nodeck's view of the man who had shot the Fokker down and saved him.

He zoomed into a half-loop, then kicked over and slid into clear air and tried to see who had come to his rescue. But at the same instant he saw McCarran, caught in a death-trap. He gunned the Hissio fiercely. He had to save McCarran. He kicked the Spad into a swift *villie*. Nodeck felt a shudder of terror, for he saw

that he couldn't reach McCarran in time to save him. He could see McCarran's Spad jumping and wobbling in the stream of Spandau death that bleared from the twin snouts at his back.

It was Bill Chance who saved McCarran. Nodeck was mad and glad at the same time. He signalled the flight out of the mixup, and personally herded McCarran back with the rest. There was a little too much hell in that spot of sky for the new men, and he didn't want them killed.

When they reached Vailly, Nodeck was the last one down. He hung back to cover the rookies' tails. He fishtailed in to the line, and while he kicked off his suit, Winters grinned at him.

"The kid came back, major. You can't blame him for wanting to get the Black Ace after what happened to his brother."

"I don't blame him for wanting to get him," Nodeck said fiercely. "I'd like to get von Schlieker myself. I blame him for being a damfool enough to try and go out there alone and get him. Give the Parrots an even break and they'll hold their own. Give them odds of four to one, and they'll make sport of the killing. I'll hammer some sense into that redhead if I have to use a club."

Nodeck legged to the canteen. He stood for a minute in the doorway, glaring at the men lining the bar. He remembered the kid who had gone down flaming, and his blood boiled. McCarran had caused that.

He legged to the bar. McCarran was lifting a glass of cognac to his thin lips, but Nodeck swiped the glass away and spun McCarran around.

"I see you don't believe in orders, lieutenant! You went off on a crazy hunt and I was damfool enough to try and save you. A man was killed in that fight—a new man—a young man with dreams, ambitions, desires as good as your own. You killed him with your disregard of orders!"

"That's a lie, sir," McCarran said stiffly.

"I didn't ask to be saved. I'd have got von Schlieker if you hadn't butted in."

"You'd have got a hand full of slugs in your guts," Nodeck ground out.

"I didn't come here to have you ride me, sir. I came here to fight," the kid glared.

Nodeck stripped off his blouse and tossed it aside. "All right, McCarran, I'll give you a chance to fight. I'll knock some discipline into you, by God, or I'll know the reason why!"

Nodeck dragged McCarran from the bar. There were regulations to deal with such a case as this, but Nodeck had his own regulations. A grounded man, or a man in the brig, wasn't any good to anybody. His was a shorter, surer way to find out what a man was made of.

McCarran struck at him, anger flaring in his freckled face. Nodeck sidestepped the blow. He looked clumsy, but somehow he kept out of the way of those hard fists. He lashed in, caught McCarran on the shoulder and spun him around.

The kid caught himself and hurtled forward. Nodeck met the charge—side-stepped and swung up with his big fist. The blow caught McCarran on the button and hurled him to the floor. But the kid didn't stay down. He came up with his mouth running red.

Nodeck was surprised at the kid's stubbornness. He didn't want the thing to go too far. Now he found himself with a handful of dynamite he couldn't let go of. McCarran was wobbling, weaving, still dazed from that awful blow.

Nodeck tried to push the kid back. McCarran tore himself free and hurled his punches wildly. The hard knuckles caught Nodeck on the mouth and drew blood. With a snarl of rage the major struck again and again! This time, McCarran didn't get up.

There was a deadly silence in the room. Nodeck glared at the tight faces that were staring at him. He brushed his hands

lightly, and said in a curt, hurried voice, "One of you men saved my life up there today. I was a prize package for the Kraut pie, and one of you put yourself in a bad spot to pull me out. I'd like to thank the man personally. Who was it?"

The silence seemed to thicken. Nodeck repeated the question, "Who was it?"

Carlne put his glass on the bar, and it made a thumping sound in the silence. He motioned at the still form of McCarran on the floor. "It was him, sir."

Nodeck felt a stifling heat swarm over him until his flesh prickled. He could feel the flush redden his face. He stared at McCarran and uttered one small word.

"Oh." The word had a flat, futile sound.

Nodeck turned on his heel and legged from the room. He had certainly made a picture of himself that time. He had certainly taken a queer way to show his gratitude. He squared his shoulders and told himself grimly that McCarran had gotten what he deserved. It was a lesson that would prove valuable. The kid had to learn sometime.

But the incident troubled Nodeck more than he cared to admit. He found that there were still some things—even in a war—that could stir up hidden wells of sentiment in the hardest of men. He meant to make sure that McCarran didn't disobey orders again, and gave Winters strict instructions to see that the redhead didn't get a ship except for the noon patrol.

AND the next day, as Major Nodeck legged grimly to the line, he found McCarran inspecting the belts on his Vickers. He wanted to square himself with the kid for what had happened the day before. It was hard to find the words to begin.

"Good morning, lieutenant," he said gruffly.

McCarran didn't turn his head. He didn't answer. A wave of resentment swept over Nodeck. All right, let McCarran

ran sulk if he wanted to, just so he stuck to the proper time for flying. Nodeck legged into his own ship, and gunned the Hisso fiercely.

He throttled back and jerked a look along the line. He saw McCarran's red head sticking up in the cockpit of his Spad. He grinned savagely to himself and signalled the chocks out.

He literally hurled the Spad up. The earth slid away from him, and with it vanished the puny quarrels of men. He was in the air, now, where he belonged. He didn't go looking for the Parrot Circus. He headed south across Braisne and cut across the lines with the ruins of Rheims visible far to the south.

Below him, the trenches were a vicious scar across the earth—a scar into which millions of men crawled like termites into a rotten tree. Glory called them there, honor held them, and duty beat them into horrible remnants of flesh that stank and rotted upon the bloody earth.

He heard the whine of diving ships and jerked a look up. Five Rolands screamed down, with the Goebel engines spewing flame from the roaring stacks. Nodeck laid the stick over against his knee, kicked the bar, and screamed into a vertical. Here was something the rookies might have a chance at!

He started to signal to the rest, then he stiffened. McCarran was missing from the flight!

Nodeck cursed. He had no time to worry about the redhead now. The Rolands hurled through, flattened, zoomed. Nodeck skidded flat and glared through the rings. He caught dirty-gray in his sights and hammered the trips!

His slugs hatcheted a hole in the pit of the Roland, and the German in the gray crate jerked and quivered. He let go of the stick and grabbed at his throat with his gloved hands. Then the Roland spilled over and the man fell out.

There had been a time when such a

sight had terrified Nodeck. Now, he got not even a measure of satisfaction out of the victory. It was just something to be done. Why, he didn't know. But it had to be done.

He saw the rookies blundering in. Carline was caught flatfooted by a Roland and sat dazed in his pit, forgetting even that he had a control stick in his hand. Nodeck hurled his ship across and cut the man free.

Nodeck was worrying about McCarran and got caught in the converging streams of Spandau tracer from a pair of gray ships. He brushed at the slugs that spun about him, like a man might strike at a fly. He wasn't excited. He had pulled out of such a trap a thousand times.

You legged the stick, held your legs stiff and let the Spad roll, losing altitude. You flattened, kicked the bar and spun back at right angles.

That's just what Nodeck did, and he was under one of the Rolands. He hammered a burst into the gray guts over him, and all at once the Goebel vomited a smear of flame. The flame reached back hungrily across the fragile craft.

There was a scream from the terrified Heinie in the pit. He bolted up out of his seat, forgot the controls and slid along the turtleback of the fuselage, seeking to escape the burning hell that roared toward him.

The Roland spilled over, rolled lazily, shot down with a screaming man clinging to her tail—a screaming man who could feel the tongues of hell lapping at his flesh!

The Rolands had enough of Nodeck's brand of fighting. They pulled out, and Nodeck wearily rounded up the 43rd and signalled them home. They had had enough war for one flight.

HE fishtailed in for a landing on the short field at Vailly, legged from the pit and caught Winters at the line.

"Have you seen young McCarran?"

"Hell, major, I ain't his personal flunky. No, I ain't seen him since he pulled out with you," Winters said impatiently, mulling his quid across his mouth.

"He broke formation somewhere and headed out on his own," Nodeck said slowly. "I guess I'll have to kill von Schlieker myself to get that fool kid to obey orders."

"It might be a good idea," Winters agreed.

Carline came trudging up from his ship. "Thanks, major, for batting down the Kraut that had me. McCarran headed north just before we crossed Braisne, sir. There wasn't any way to let you know about it."

Nodeck glared at Winters. "When the damn fool comes in, send him to my office. He hasn't caught on to the idea that I'm boss around here."

With that, Nodeck went back to his office to wait. He slumped wearily in his chair. He felt old—ages old. He had just killed two men, and the fact didn't thrill him, nor haunt him, yet here he was, stewing about one redheaded maverick from Kansas!

He cursed softly, and got out his personal bottle of rye. He wiped the neck of the bottle and took a long pull.

He waited a long time, but McCarran didn't come. He called Winters, but Winters wasn't very sympathetic. He kept telling himself that the kid was all right,

then taking another pull from the bottle.

The sun went down, and still no sign of the kid. Nodeck caught himself writing the kid's name on a slip of paper and drawing a line through it. He crumpled the paper in his big hand and hurled it away.

Then McCarran came—came like a ghost out of the dusk. He stepped quietly into the room and saluted stiffly. There was a gleam of triumph in his blue eyes. Nodeck felt a flood of relief at sight of the kid.

"Well, what have you got to say for yourself?" he asked tensely.

"I got a victory, sir," McCarran said swiftly.

Nodeck failed to catch the eager pride in the lad's voice. "Then what happened?" he barked, masking his satisfaction at the kid's return with gruff words.

"I was forced down behind Craonne."

"You didn't get von Schlieker, did you?" Nodeck asked flatly.

"No, but I will, sir. Give me time—"

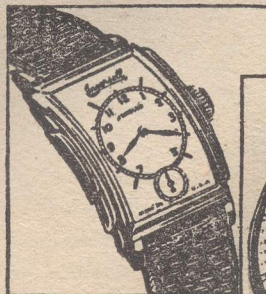
"You won't—you'll never get him, savvy? You won't get him, because you won't be flying from now on. I'm grounding you flatter than a pancake! While you're swabbing grease, it'll give you time to figure out who's boss in this outfit."

Nodeck failed to notice the whiteness of McCarran's face in the dim light.

McCarran stiffened. His words came out swift and hot. "You can't ground me—you can't! I know why you don't want me to get the Black Ace. You want to get him

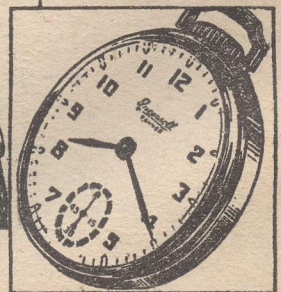
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yourself. You haven't got enough glory to satisfy your vanity. You won't let the pilots of the 43rd go out alone because you don't want them to get any recognition. You want to keep all the big shots for yourself! Winters told me about the crack you made. . . ."

"That's a lie!" Nodeck roared. He kicked his chair back and leaped around the desk. He had an overpowering impulse to strike McCarran. He didn't know why—maybe because of the tense hours of waiting he had just been through, maybe because he was afraid the kid would have himself killed with his screwy ideas.

Nodeck's arm lashed out, but the blow never landed. Something seemed to reach out and stop his crashing fist. He was staring at McCarran, saw the pallor of his face, noticed the bloodstain growing wider and wider upon the breast of his tunic.

Nodeck's voice was soft, a little tremulous. "You—you've been hit, McCarran!"

McCarran was clutching the door, trying desperately to hold himself erect.

"I'm all right, sir. I'll bet you a hundred francs I'll get von Schlieker before you do," he said evenly.

"Never mind that," Nodeck rasped. He reached out swiftly and caught McCarran as he fell.

Nodeck called two of the men and got McCarran to the infirmary. All the way back to his office, he kept muttering to himself, "I almost hit him! I almost hit him!"

DELIBERATELY, Nodeck set himself the task of getting the Black Ace. He knew that was the only way to save McCarran. If anyone had asked him why he wanted to save the kid, he wouldn't have known the answer. Maybe it was because McCarran came from Kansas. . . .

Nodeck flew early and late. He became gruff and hard to live with. One time he

had a brush with the Black Ace and he came off second best because his guns had jammed. Another time he had flushed the Parrots when his tanks were nearly empty of petrol, and after one swift skirmish he had been forced to run out.

Each time he came closer to killing the Black Ace. The third time, he forced von Schlieker down with a riddled empennage, and flew home with a Spandau slug furrow along his ribs. He bandaged his ribs up with adhesive, took a pull on his bottle, and told himself that next time he'd do just a little better.

Life, for him, had a purpose, now—a grim purpose. He wanted to kill von Schlieker as he never wanted anything else. For three days he didn't see the German. He heard of him—heard how he had caught a flight of weanlings who were out on baptism, and butchered them. He heard how von Schlieker and his Parrots strafed a field hospital in revenge for the death of one of his pilots.

And during that time, McCarran was mending fast. He was young, full of vitality, and the puncture in his chest healed quickly. One morning Nodeck looked up from his desk and saw McCarran standing stiffly before him. A little pale, the kid was, but carried himself with the old confidence.

"I wish to report that I'm through with that pill factory, sir. I'm ready to fly."

Nodeck's jaw bulged. "Report to the toolshed and Winters will put you to work. What I said about you not flying still goes."

McCarran's pale face flushed red. "I'll not swab grease—I know what you're figuring. I've heard what you've been doing these past two weeks. You've been trying to get von Schlieker yourself. You can't get him, because he belongs to me! I can get him—I can get him. . . ."

"Shut up!" Nodeck roared. "Get down to the toolshed before I forget you're a cripple!"

McCarran turned without saluting. His mouth was a grim slit in white marble. Nodeck watched him through the dirty window. He saw him report to Winters. Saw him, later, in greasy dungarees, draining a Hisso.

Nodeck grinned fiercely and tried to work on the routine reports spread out before him on his desk. The drone of ships taking off and landing, the roar of a Gnome on the testing block, all buzzed in his head like hornets, and he couldn't work.

Wearily, he got up and drew on his flying togs. He snapped the face band with a savage jab of his thumb, batted his helmet down and dragged on his gloves. then he legged to the line. McCarran wouldn't like this, watching him go out for the Black Ace, but it would teach the kid that it wasn't a one-man war.

But McCarran wasn't at the line to meet him. There was some excitement at No. 1 hangar. A mechanic was pointing at a ship zooming from the far end of the field.

Nodeck ran over and spun Winters around. "Where's McCarran?"

Winters was cussing and mulling his quid fiercely. "There he goes, the damn fool! He's in his dungarees, no helmet—and the Nieuport he's taken isn't any more fit to fly than McCarran is!"

Nodeck felt a throb of fear. "What's wrong with the ship?"

"Leaky pressure line to the syncro gear. Them guns is apt to stop jumpin' anytime. They might even blow the prop off the hub bolts."

Nodeck waited to hear no more. After what he'd been through, he wasn't going to lose McCarran. He legged into his own Spad, jabbed the throttle up the brass and walked the Spad free. He cut up swiftly, goading the Hisso to the last ounce of power.

He passed Craonne, and the speck he was chasing grew larger, nearer. He thundered across the trenches over the broken

country toward Laon. The Nieuport was still a half a mile ahead of him. Then it happened!

Out of a puff cloud, three black ships dropped like crows. A fourth trailed them down. Nodeck cursed and pounded the cowling to get more out of the already screaming Spad. He saw the four ships gang the kid, and there was one horrible moment of swift action.

McCarran lived through that first onslaught. Then Nodeck roared into the fight and blasted a wall of slugs through the nearest black ship. The ship pulled out, trailing ribbons of cloth, but still able to fly.

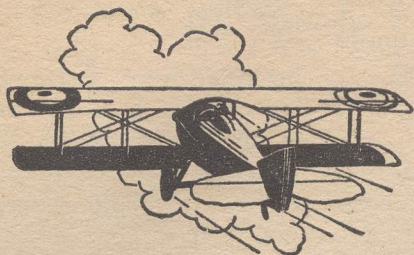
Nodeck slammed back. He could see von Schlieker grinning at him like a death's head. He spun close to McCarran and motioned him home—tried to tell him that the Nieuport was crippled, but the kid couldn't understand. He had his chance to end the nightmare of his brother's death, and he meant to ride it to whatever end the Fates decreed.

In his anxiety to get the kid out of danger, Nodeck grew careless. He was suddenly conscious of the Spandau slugs hammering about him. He could see them knife through his wing, hear them plop into his crashpad.

He rolled wildly, came out flat, and found two more of the Fokkers waiting to finish him off. He was grimly conscious of the spot he was in. Von Schlieker meant to kill him first, and then finish the kid at his leisure.

Nodeck didn't want to die. He tried to break out of the streams of death. If only the Fokker on his left would fall behind! He jerked a look back, then stiffened.

McCarran had a chance to make a try for von Schlieker, but McCarran was passing up that chance to save Nodeck! He was barging in, his freckled face set into a grim mask, his red hair blowing back in the awful wind—his greasy dungarees flattened tight against his lean chest.



The kid rode through hell to knock that left hand Fokker down. As he cut through the streams of tracer, the Nieuport seemed to lurch and stagger. Then he was hurling lead into the Fokker. The Fokker burst into flame and Nodeck rolled free. He breathed a sigh of relief, waved at McCarran in a token of thanks.

But McCarran didn't see that gesture. He had whipped around and was riding for another shot at von Schlieker! The other two Fokkers whirled in to save the boss parrot, but McCarran never wavered. He never noticed the other two ships. He was hurtling down on von Schlieker, and his Vickers cut loose in a wild song of death.

Nodeck cursed. In rolling out of his own trap, he had sloughed out of position. He gunned the Hisso madly to go help the kid in the showdown. The two Fokkers were hurling a deadly stream of steel-jacketed death upon McCarran, and the Nieuport was trembling in that awful blast.

Nodeck saw the fabric split and ribbon on the wings. He saw the cowling streak black with oil, saw the crashpad shear off in junks and whip back in the slipstream. Still the kid stuck to von Schlieker.

Things happened fast, then. Nodeck roared in and cut one of the Fokkers down, and at the same instant, he saw von Schlieker go into a spin. It looked exactly as though the boss parrot was hit—as though he was going into the last mad ride of death.

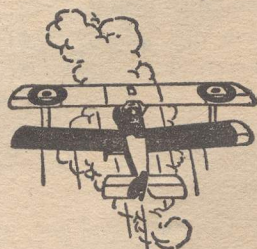
And as von Schlieker spun wing over wing, McCarran's Vickers jittered, battered out a slow burst, and died as the leaky pressure line gave way. The remaining Fokker hurled a last desperate burst into the Nieuport. The rudder was cut free of the hinges, the flappers were knifed full of holes, almost useless.

Then McCarran started down, because there wasn't any place else to go. Nodeck saw the kid fighting the stick desperately to hold some semblance of control. Down—down the Nieuport went, spinning faster and faster. McCarran pulled it out of the spin and headed for the earth in a swift dive.

As the kid screamed past von Schlieker, the wily German flattened the Fokker. He hadn't been hit at all. He lashed in upon the kid's tail, intent on having the lurid satisfaction of killing the cold meat.

Nodeck rumbled a curse deep in his thick chest. He thrust the stick against the panel and sent the Spad down in a screaming dive. He had to stop von Schlieker from killing McCarran! What matter if the remaining Fokker did come after him! What matter if death rode his tail, just so he lived long enough to finish off the Black Ace.

Down—down—down! Wind screaming—struts jumping—wings rattling on the hinges. His eyes held to the rings like rivets, and suddenly Nodeck caught black in his sights. He held his fire. His eyes crept closer and closer to the pit of the



Fokker. The gray back of von Schlieker stood upon the cross-wires! The Hun was too busy hurling lead into the cold turkey to look back.

Nodeck's first blast beat into that gray back. Von Schlieker looked back then, but it was too late. His face was white—his eyes wide with horror! Nodeck's big fist closed again, and that white face was turned to red—spurting red. Clutching madly at his throat, von Schlieker slid against the panel!

Nodeck didn't stop his dive. He saw McCarran pancake into a small clearing—saw the Nieuport fold over him. He watched von Schlieker hammer into the earth fifty yards from the kid, and he felt a fierce satisfaction. At last he had killed the Black Ace! McCarran wouldn't be barging off on his solos anymore! The kid was safe!

Nodeck roared across the clearing, headed in the wind. He set down easily and rolled near the wrecked Nieuport. He jerked one look up, and saw the remaining Fokker coming down in a cautious flat glide.

Nodeck leaped out and ran to the Nieuport. Upon the tip of his tongue were words of triumph—he couldn't resist this one chance to brag to the kid who had been making a fool of him. He couldn't wait to tell McCarran that he had killed von Schlieker.

McCarran was crawling from the wreckage as Nodeck ran up. His face was alight with eager pride. He was pointing a shaky finger at the huddled wreck of the Black Ace.

"I did it! I did it just as I said I would!" he blurted out joyfully.

The remaining Fokker zoomed low across the field, read the finish of the fight with one swift glance, then waved a salute to the victors before heading home with the news of von Schlieker's death.

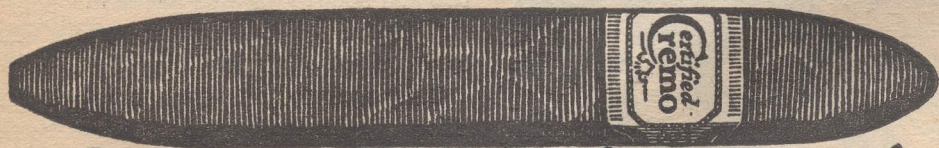
McCarran pointed at the retreating ship. "There's the Fokker that followed me down. Von Schlieker was dead when he went into that spin, when my guns stopped pumping!"

Nodeck swallowed hard. He felt the thrill and excitement drain from his thick body. He nodded slowly, in a strained voice, he said, "Yes, you got him. You made him pay for killing your brother. This ought to be worth a Croix. . . ."

"I'll be a good dog from now on, Major," McCarran said happily, rubbing a bloodsmear from his cheek. "Let's go home, I'll ride your wing."

Old man Wings legged wearily into the Spad. Hell, let the kid have the satisfaction. After all, war was a business. Glory was brass, and honor was a winding sheet. Grimly he jabbed the throttle, lifted the Spad clear and headed for Vailly.

THE END



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Pigeons and Eagles

by WILLIAM HARTLEY

McNamara dove and
the German was right
on his tail!

Sammy Randall was punched in the nose and given a patch of sky to die in! War can be like that—war can break your heart, then pour salt in the open wound. But sometimes the biggest hearts are in the chests of little men; sometimes the weakest fledglings will sprout the widest wings!

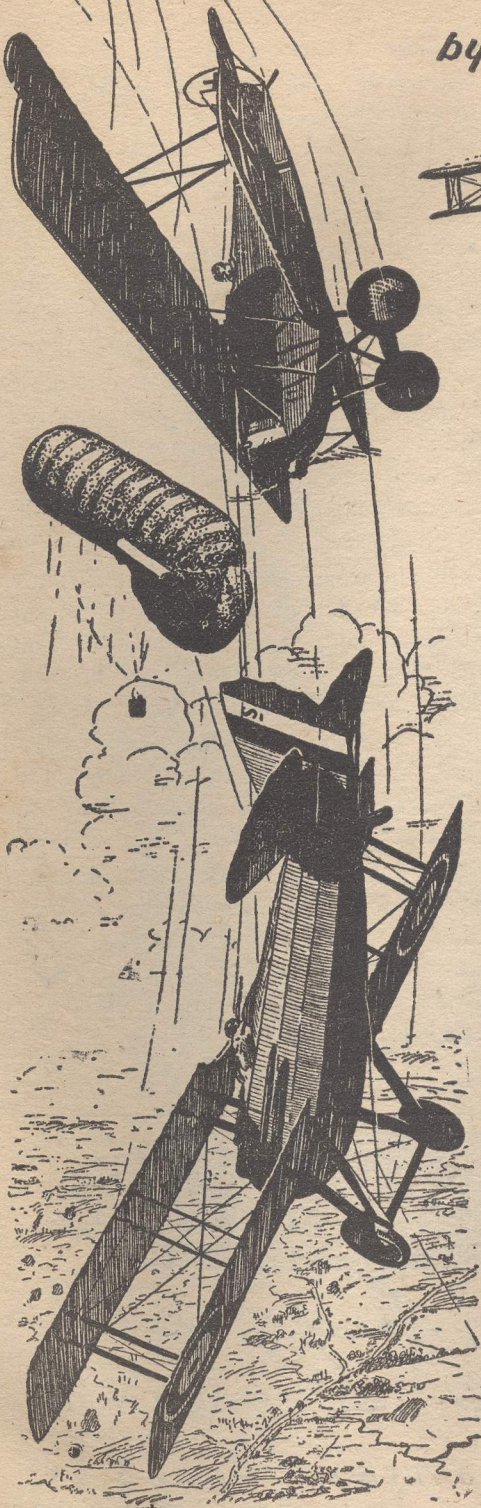
IT WAS raining the night that Sammy Randall arrived at the 24th. And that was why the *estaminet* was so crowded and why Sammy met everyone so quickly. No one knew him when he stepped into the noisy crowded room; in fact, it is doubtful that anyone saw him enter the place. But they all saw Sammy leave, and by then they all knew him.

Molloy, McNamara and Breadon were holding up one end of the bar, talking of the day's flights and hoping that the rain would hold out and cancel the next day's flying. Molloy suddenly nudged the other two and nodded towards the door.

"They're sending up kite pilots," he said. "Look what just drifted in."

They looked, and it was only with an effort that they resisted the impulse to laugh. They didn't know Sammy Randall then, didn't even know his name, but they held the threatening laughter in their chests and watched him approach the bar. Later they would be thankful that they had kept their mirth in check.

The man they were looking at was small.



He couldn't have been more than the five foot three required by the regulations, and there were many souls who doubted that his measurements had been taken by a strict examiner. His uniform was spotless and pressed, and fitted him like a glove. His features were small and regular, except for his chin. The jutting jaw betokened a heart and a pride that crowded the small chest of the man, and the eyes were filled with challenge.

He walked over to the bar as they watched him, and he found a small unoccupied space between McNamara and Wharton, leader of 'C' Flight. His head just topped the high bar, it seemed, but his voice was the largest thing about him.

"Hey, Johnnie," he called to the bartender, "how about a little service down here."

The bartender was at the other end of the wood, and hearing the voice, he looked down the bar in the direction from which it had come. Wharton turned too, and saw the man for the first time. He looked down from his towering height, then burst into raucous laughter.

Molloy scowled, and said in a low voice, "That big punk ought to keep his mouth shut. The little guy wasn't bothering him."

The little guy wasn't bothering the bartender either, it seemed. He had glanced down that way, but the little man was hidden by Wharton's bulk. Thinking that he was being kidded, the bartender turned to his duties again.

Once more the voice rang out. It was deep and resonant, and it rose above the noise of the place. This time the bartender heard, and when he came down, the small man ordered whiskey. The barman set it before him, with a glass, and the little chap filled it to the brim. Wharton was still laughing, and most of the men in the room had stopped what they were doing and had turned to see the cause of his laughter and the source of the strange, big voice.

The newcomer raised his glass solemnly—then threw the contents squarely into Wharton's face.

"Laugh that off, you big tramp," he said. And as Wharton, roaring with anger, mopped at his eyes, the little man swung from the floor and drove a right hand against the big pilot's chin.

The blow staggered Wharton, but it was not enough to floor him. He reeled back a few paces, then started forward, a curse on his lips and his big hands doubled. He stuck out a long left hand, but the little pilot was under it and driving blows into his body before anyone in the room had time to move.

Wharton shoved him away, a contemptuous smile on his face, and dropped a right hand that cannoned off the small one's forehead. He went down like a poled steer, but he was on his knees in a moment, trying to shake the fog out of his brain and get to his feet. Wharton stood above him, waiting.

Molloy stepped forward, then, and interposed his huge frame between the men.

"Cut it out, Wharton," he said. "The guy's about half your size. Lay off."

Wharton snarled and gestured Molloy aside.

"Get out of the way, kibitzer. He asked for it—and he's going to get it."

Molloy smiled, but his eyes were cold.

"I never did like you, Wharton," he said, "and if you don't leave this kid alone, I'm going to have an opportunity to do something I've often thought of."

The little man had risen now, and he tried to shove out from in back of Molloy. The big Irishman pushed him back and said to Wharton, "Go on about your business, Wharton. You had your one lousy shot at the guy."

"And suppose I don't go?" Wharton asked.

"You'll go, or you'll get your head hammered off."

Wharton stepped forward, his mouth

tight, and hooked his left for Molloy's head. But Mike went halfway to meet him, and his right hand thudded into Wharton's jaw with a dull *splat!* The man dropped as if he'd been shot.

Molloy turned to the small flyer and said, "Don't mind that guy. He's strictly a foul ball that has to be straightened out once in awhile. Come over and have a drink."

The little fellow said, "Okay, I don't mind if I do. That's what I had in mind when big mouth here—" he gestured to Wharton—"started the fireworks. Thanks for the support."

Molloy slapped him on the back. "Forget it, kid. You weren't doing bad for yourself when I happened along. I just wanted an excuse to hit the guy."

The newcomer looked up and there was a grateful light in his eyes for the words which spared him any embarrassment. He knew he was going to like this man.

Molloy pulled him over to where McNamara and Breadon leaned against the bar.

"I want you to meet a few friends of mine," he said. "They don't like Wharton any better than you or I do. This is Tommy McNamara and this gent is Eddie Breadon. They're both whacky as hell, but their antics are amusing, most of the time. My name is Molloy."

"My name is Randall," the little fellow said. "Sammy Randall. I've heard a hell of a lot about you guys. I'm damn glad to meet you." He looked at Molloy and smiled. "You're a very handy chum to have around, Molloy. I went a bit out of my class on that gent. Another two minutes and he would have pasted me through the wall."

The three big flyers smiled at the frank admission, and the little man smiled with them. "But what the hell," he said, "I got one good shot at him, anyway. A guy has got to keep his hand in, if he wants to keep in shape." Then he rubbed his chin. "But that tomato can hit."

They took their drinks from the bar and went over to a corner table. Wharton had been brought to and had left the *estaminet*. The rest of the men in the room were looking over at the table where the four flyers sat. There was respect in their glances, a full measure of admiration for this terrier who would unhesitatingly swing on a mastiff.

"I just got up from Issoudon," Randall told the three big flyers. "I had a lot of trouble down there too. Everyone seems to think that because a guy isn't as tall as he might be, he's got no business in this racket. I had a tough job getting them to pass me in the physical, and I almost had to beg them before they taught me how to fly." Then he rubbed his chin reflectively. "And there were about a million guys who had to learn that they couldn't kid me." He smiled and said, "I learned that a couple of them *could*."

"How come they sent you up here?" Breadon asked. "This is a tough spot, and we don't usually get green replacements. They always send up a man from some other sector—a guy who has some combat experience."

Randall looked at them, and the challenging light was in his eyes again. "Well," he said, "I'm an exception. I can fly like hell."

The bold statement was not a boast. Randall was merely speaking facts. A question had been asked of him and he had supplied the answer. And the three men knew this to be so. The kid didn't mince words, as they had seen in his encounter with Wharton. Whatever the consequences of his action might be, he just came right out and said what he thought. He could fly like hell, and he had said so.

Breadon smiled and said, "I know one fault you haven't got, kid—you're not the least bit bashful, are you?"

"No, why the hell should I be?" Randall answered.

AND the next day they saw that he had no reason at all to hide his light under a bushel. He flew in 'A' flight with Molloy, McNamara and Breadon. Major Bowers, C.O. of the outfit, always gave a fledgling a break, on his first few flights, and sent him up with the three men who were considered the best in the Allied Air.

But they soon discovered that he needed no particular attention from them. He took the Spad off the ground, when the flight started, with all the assurance and easy grace of a veteran pilot. He flew formation faultlessly, and when they spotted a flight of five Fokkers and dove to the attack, Randall handled himself as if this were an old story, instead of his first encounter in the air.

And he bagged a ship for himself, too.

All hands found themselves with plenty of trouble in their laps, but McNamara looked over to see how the kid was making out, and what he witnessed confirmed his already-formed opinion of Randall. He watched the little fellow herd a Fokker out of the German flight, maneuver the gent into position perfectly, then send the ship down with one well-directed burst. The kid had what it took.

They all came back from that one, ripped and torn, but with all the ships keeping air under their wings. They set down on the tarmac and climbed from the pits.

"That was a nice bit of work, Sammy," McNamara said. "You suckered that guy beautifully."

"Yeah," Randall told him, "the guy was a bum. He shouldn't have been in the air at all."

McNamara stared at him. Didn't this kid know that they had been fooling with Ritter's crowd, one of the best outfits in the German Air? Didn't he know that every pilot in the 71st *Staffel* was a tried and battle-scarred veteran? Apparently he didn't, and if he had, McNamara knew that it would have made no difference in

his actions up there. He told him who he'd been playing with, and Randall shrugged.

"The guy might have been up here for a long time, but he didn't learn a hell of a lot, did he?"

McNamara shrugged and gave it up, and when he told Molloy and Breadon the story that evening, Molloy said,

"What the hell, the kid's good and he doesn't see any sense in hiding the fact. He just does the best he can, which seems to be damn good, and lets everyone else take care of himself."

Randall flew with Molloy, McNamara and Breadon for another week, then Ritter and his crew got Belder, in 'C' Flight. Wharton wanted another man, and he asked for Randall.

Major Bowers came to McNamara.

"Wharton is short of a man and wants Randall. Do you think the kid is able to hold his own in fast company, without having you gents keep an eye on him?"

"The guy can fly like a pigeon," McNamara told him, "and he must have a little Buffalo Bill blood in his veins, the way he shoots. Sure, he's all set to go. Why does Wharton want him, particularly?"

"I don't know," Bowers said, "unless it's because he's heard that Randall is good."

"Maybe," McNamara said, but he had another slant on the affair. He knew the man's reputation. Wharton was a good flyer, but Wharton was cautious to an almost questionable degree. His flight seldom got into a jam, because Wharton seldom let them. He weighed the odds carefully, and if the scales tilted the wrong way, even by so much as a hair, Wharton said, "Nothing doing!" in very emphatic terms.

His record was good. He didn't lose many men, and he somehow managed to keep his sector pretty well patrolled. A Hun flight sneaked through now and then, if there were a lot of planes, but Wharton

was lucky in that none of the flights which he missed did much damage. He'd been called on the carpet once or twice for his lack of aggressiveness, and reprimanded, but the fact that he always brought his patrol back whole and undamaged carried quite a bit of weight at Wing.

Randall flew with him for a week before he said anything. The relations between the two men were strained, of course, because of the incident in the *estimanet*, and they never spoke to each other directly. Wharton gave his orders to the entire flight at once, and Randall never questioned them. He simply flew as he was told to fly, and patrol after uneventful patrol passed under the new wings of his Spad.

Then one day the lid flew off the boiling, quiet-looking kettle. Molloy, McNamara and Breadon had been expecting it for some time, and they weren't surprised when it hapened.

'C' FLIGHT came in, one afternoon, and they noticed that while the rest of the ships were unmarked, Randall's crate looked as if the moths had been at it. The wings and fuselage were filled with holes, and a small part of the tail section was missing.

Wharton was the first to hit the ground, and he strode over to Randall's Spad and started to lay it on.

"What the hell do you think you're doing up there—putting on a show for the boys? I signalled you to stay away from that ship, didn't I?"

"What was I going to do, sit there and watch the gent take lovely pictures of the whole sector?" Randall was just as sore as Wharton. "I've been flying with you for more than a week, and the most exciting thing I've done is barrel-roll. The hell with that stuff!"

McNamara grinned, and he turned to Molloy and said, "It seems that Sammy upset Mr. Wharton somehow. Wonder

just what all the trouble could be?"

"I have a pretty good idea. Let's go over to Operations and see what it's all about." He turned to Breadon. "Come on, Eddie. Let's look into this thing."

The three of them trooped after the flight, as the returning pilots went in to make their reports, and they entered the Operations shack on Randall's heels. They didn't speak to the little flyer, for they knew, from Wharton's attitude, that he was going to raise some sort of a mess.

Major Bowers was behind his desk, and as the men came in to make out the routine report, he merely grunted and went back to his work, paying no attention to them. But Wharton stepped before his desk and Bowers looked up.

"Something wrong, Wharton?"

"I want to put Lieutenant Randall on report for deliberately failing to obey my signals, while on patrol. Disregarding my orders, he left the flight and attacked an enemy ship while on the other side of the lines."

Bowers looked at Randall, who had advanced to the desk at the mention of his name, and said, "What's this all about, Lieutenant?"

Randall nodded at Wharton. "The captain seems to have told the whole story, sir. And since he's so kind as to introduce the subject, perhaps he'll give me confirmation on a Rumpler two-seater—shot down in flames, ten miles east of Blanchette."

Bowers was puzzled. "What the hell is going on here? Wharton, you want Randall put on report for failure to obey orders. And Randall wants you to confirm him on a Rumpler. It sounds damn silly to me."

Wharton's face was flushed and angry, and he said, "We were returning from our patrol, east of Blanchette, when we spotted the Rumpler, down below us, at about five thousand. Randall broke from his place in formation, came up beside me and

pointed at it. I saw that it was protected by five Fokkers, and deemed it wisest to let the ship go. It was already on the German side of the lines. I signalled Randall to get back into formation and disregard the German plane, but he shook his head and dived on the ship."

"What have you to say, Randall?" Bowers wanted to know.

"The plane was a photographic ship, sir, and was coming back after having taken pictures on our side of the lines. I thought it important that it be downed." Then, as an afterthought, "I haven't been in a scrap in weeks."

"Did you see the Fokkers flying above it?" Bowers asked.

"Yes sir. But there were only five of them. And there were five of us. It was an even deal."

Wharton spoke hurriedly. "In view of the fact that the ship was over the lines, and there were German flying fields in the near vicinity, I thought it best to let the thing go. There was too much risk to our own ships involved."

Bowers shook his head. "I don't think we'll take any disciplinary action in this case, Wharton. It's over and done with and no one was hurt." He turned to Randall, and there was the ghost of a smile in his eyes. "You'd better be more careful in the future, Lieutenant. Don't let this happen again. Wharton is leading this flight, and the orders he gives are to be obeyed. That's all."

Wharton and Randall left the shack together, and Molloy, McNamara and Breadon followed soon after. It was easy to see that Wharton was smarting from the unspoken rebuke dealt to him by Bowers, and he turned to the smaller pilot when they got out of range of the shack.

"Listen, punk," he said, "when you're up there with me, you'll do as I tell you, get it? No more of this lone eagle stuff, or you'll find yourself on the carpet for fair. I won't fool next time. I'll press

matters all the way, my little friend."

Randall just stood there and looked at him, and the three flyers watched from a discreet distance. They could hear his words plainly.

"Wharton," he said, "the only reason you didn't go down after that ship was because you were scared. Nobody else on this field would ask for more than an even break, but that isn't enough for you. You want the cards stacked all the way through the deck. You could have gotten that ship this afternoon—and a couple of Fokkers besides—but you didn't even try. I got the guy, and the Fokkers didn't get me. They didn't even see us in the sky."

Wharton nearly choked on his rage.

"Why, you lucky little bum!" he said. "You made a tramp out of me in Bowers' office, and now you start to feed me a lot of lip out here. I ought to punch your head off."

Molloy, McNamara and Breadon walked closer, and McNamara said, "You ought to know by now, Wharton, that you'll get in a lot of trouble, anytime you try it."

Wharton growled and walked away. Randall grinned and said, "You gents form a nice background. I'll be getting real tough with that guy, if you keep encouraging me."

"Give us the lowdown on the ball game this afternoon," Breadon said. "What happened?"

"Just what I told the Major. We were grousing along very peaceful, then I spotted the Rumpler. There were a couple of Fokkers up top, but none of the Jerries even saw us. I gave Wharton the high sign, but he said nothing doing. So I took a chance myself. They gave me a going over, but I managed to get away."

"The gent doesn't look for trouble," McNamara said. "He usually manages to keep his nose clean, while he's in the air."

"He's got me down," Randall admitted.

"For two weeks I've been following the guy's tail around, and no action do I get. He just won't have anything to do with Jerry unless the whole affair is going to be handed to him on a platter. I come up here expecting to go to town, but I might just as well go to bed."

While they were all on the ground, Molloy, McNamara and Breadon were always accompanied by Randall. The little guy fitted naturally into their scheme of things. They recognized a kindred soul, a gent who'd rather fight than eat, who gave no thought to the consequences of his actions, as far as he himself was concerned. They liked him.

Randall tried to get out of Wharton's flight, but Bowers told him:

"You'd better stay where you are, Randall. You'll be out of trouble for awhile, anyway."

Randall held to the line for two weeks more. He complained bitterly to Molloy, McNamara and Breadon of Wharton's tactics in the air.

"You'd think that guy was herding sheep," he said. "I'll never know what to do if we get into a brawl."

ONE day, just before 'C' Flight was to go out, Bowers strode over from the Operations shack, a bit of paper in his hand. He spoke to Wharton, who was standing in the middle of his men.

"Just got a dispatch from Wing. There's a balloon over near Renaud that's spotting for a battery of guns. They're doing a hell of a lot of damage, and Wing wants the bag down, at all costs. It's heavily protected by Archie, and Ritter's crowd are hanging around like flies. You'd better get the thing, Wharton, or they'll throw the crowd of us into the Navy."

Wharton didn't say anything, but his lips tightened and his face paled. Randall looked at him jubilantly, as if to say, "Well, here it is. We've actually got to go out and do some scrapping, whether

you like it or whether you don't, bum."

They took off, Wharton in the lead and Randall flying rear guard. Renaud was some thirty miles to the west, and they hiked up to ten thousand and started to burn the air. When they got within five miles of the bag, they saw the Fokkers circling the spot like gulls around the body of a whale.

Randall grinned in anticipation of the fireworks, and he watched Wharton shift nervously in his pit. And then the bottom fell out of the whole thing.

The big Hisso in Sammy's Spad began to act up. It stuttered suddenly, and gobs of black smoke poured from the exhaust. He jizzed the throttle, but it merely seemed to make matters worse. He began to lose altitude at an alarming rate, then he glanced up and saw that Wharton had noticed his plight. He waved the flight leader on, told him with his gesture to go ahead and finish the job. But Wharton shook his head, and Sammy thought he could see a relieved smile on the man's face.

Wharton waggled his wings, and the entire flight dropped down to Randall's level. He worked furiously with the motor, but it didn't do him a bit of good. He cursed luridly and headed the limping crate back for the field of the 24th. There was nothing else he could do.

The flight came into the field before they were expected, and a group of pilots stuck their heads out of the *estimanet* door to see what was wrong. When the ships set down, Sammy's plane was a couple of hundred yards behind the others, but hitting faultlessly now. There was a group to meet them.

Wharton was the first one out of the pit, and Bowers came out to the line.

"It certainly didn't take you long, Wharton," he said. "Did you bring the bag down?"

Wharton smiled. "No, sir. Lieutenant Randall developed motor trouble—or

seemed to—when we got about five miles from Renaud. I thought it safer to come back. But his motor seems to be all right now," he added.

Bowers looked at Randall, and Sammy said:

"The carburetor must have fouled on me. It acted up for awhile, but it's okay now."

The C. O. turned to Wharton. "Why didn't you go on and do the job anyway? You had your orders."

"That bag is too well protected," Wharton said. "Even if Randall didn't have trouble with his plane, I doubt whether it would have been advisable to go on. The place is swarming with Fokkers, sir. But we might have tried it if Randall hadn't had his 'accident.'"

Randall was burning. Wharton was placing the whole thing on his shoulders, blaming him for the failure of the patrol to accomplish its mission. And adding an unmistakable inference.

Bowers turned away impatiently. "Wing will have my ears for this. It seems funny, Randall, that all your trouble should be righted once you leave Renaud."

Wharton smiled and started to walk to his Nissan. But Bowers wasn't finished.

"You're relieved of command of 'C' Flight, Wharton. This sort of thing has happened too often. You should have let Randall come home, if he was in trouble, and finished the job yourself." Then he was gone.

Randall walked up to Wharton and said, "Why, you big bag of wind, Wharton! You certainly turned your pockets inside out on *that* one! For two cents I'd punch you right in the nose."

Wharton was furious. The loss of the flight leadership had enraged him and Randall's words did nothing to assuage the damage. He hit Randall without the least bit of warning. It was a full, swinging blow, and Randall smashed into a hangar wall and hit the ground.

Molloy picked Randall up, and McNamara was at Wharton's side in a flash.

"What mistakes you make, bum!" he said, and his right hand jolted sickeningly into Wharton's face. Even as the man was falling, he hooked the left to the jaw, and Wharton fell in a heap.

McNamara steadied Randall as the four men walked to the *estaminet*, and they lined up at the bar and no one spoke. Finally, Randall said:

"I'd better get myself another league. That guy has my number. I'm always being taken out for a pinch hitter."

"I'm the only one who hasn't had a crack at him," Breadon mused, "but I have a funny feeling that it won't be long now."

Randall told them about the flight—of his trouble with the Hiss and Wharton's ready decision to let the whole thing drop.

"It's a tough spot, eh?" Molloy asked.

"Sure it's tough," Randall said, "but what the hell difference does that make? The bag can be brought down. It will be a lot of trouble, and someone will probably get hurt. But this isn't croquet."

McNamara was silent for a moment, then he looked at the rest of them.

"Are you guys thinking the same thing that I am?" he asked.

Breadon smiled. "Yeah, but I thought it would take awhile before it clicked with you."

Molloy merely nodded and asked, "When do we start?"

"What's the matter with right now?" McNamara asked. "We've got a lot of nothing to do, and all afternoon to do it in."

Randall was puzzled. "What the hell are you guys talking about?"

"We're getting up a card game," Breadon said, "but you can't play. You lost all your chips in the last one. Besides, you're too small."

Randall grinned then, his face lighting up.

"You mean—" he started, "you're going over to—"

"You catch on fast, kid. Yeah, we're going to give that bag a try, and see if we can't do the job that Mr. Wharton flopped on. We'll get a little action, anyway, and that's something we haven't had for a couple of days. Ritter can always be depended on to put up a show."

"Boy! This is going to be fun!" Randall said. "I've been itching to get a shot at something besides a bottle, since that time I flew with you guys."

Molloy sobered suddenly. "Nothing doing, Sammy. You just stay at home and wait for us. We won't be long."

"What the hell do you mean?" Randall stormed. "This is the juiciest thing I've bitten into yet, and you say I can't have any. Nuts to that!"

McNamara backed up Molloy. "It's no soap, kid. We don't want to drag you along and maybe get you hurt. We can do the job better if you're not along."

Randall raged and swore but they shook their heads, and finally he desisted in his pleas. They sat there and made their plans, and Sammy was an invaluable aid. He had been on the scene a few hours before, and he knew the setup well.

They walked out to the hangar and colared Sergeant Tim Murphy, the head mechanic. He smiled when he saw them approaching, and said,

"Say, I checked over Randall's engine, and there was dirt in the gas line. I cleaned it up."

"Yeah," Molloy told him, "we know all that. But we've got something else on the fire. How long will it take you to get our ships ready. We've got a little job to do."

"Just a few minutes," Murphy said, "They're all set to go for the evening patrol, anyway."

"Well, start to warm them, but keep your mouth shut. The Major wouldn't mind our going on this trip, but he might insist that we take a lot of company along.

And we want to pull this job ourselves."

Murphy motioned to Randall, "Is the Lieutenant going along?"

"No, just the three of us," McNamara told him. "He's going to stay home and take care of things."

Murphy nodded, and the four men walked across the field.

"Tim will have those things ready in a few minutes," Molloy said, "so let's get going."

They hurried into their flying clothes, as Sammy watched disconsolately, then hustled over to the hangar again. As they were halfway across the tarmac, they heard the roar of the three powerful engines and knew that in a minute or two the crates would be warm enough to take the air.

The ships were being walked out of the hangar as they came along, and each man took his place in his own plane. They revved the motors up for a moment, then, with a wave to Randall, they swept down the field, McNamara in the lead.

THEY had almost reached Renaud when McNamara threw a look over his shoulder. He saw that Molloy and Breadon were right on his tail, and he was about to turn again when he suddenly sat up straight and started to swear. There was another ship following them.

"That damn fool kid!" he roared. "He couldn't leave well enough alone. What the hell will we do with him now?"

But he throttled down and let Randall catch them, and when the kid drew alongside, a big grin on his face, McNamara waved him back. There could be no mistaking his gesture, but Randall merely looked over and thumbed his nose.

McNamara repeated the command, but Randall took the stick between his knees and made insulting use of both hands. McNamara grinned, then, and said to himself:

"What the hell, he'll probably come in

damn handy. It'll be a dirty shame if anything happens to him, but none of us live forever." And he straightened out and gave his Hiss the gun. He saw the others wave their welcomes to Randall, then he gave his attention to the bag before him.

They were about three miles from the cow, and even at that distance McNamara could see that it was going to be no May party. The glint of sun on wings, high over the sausage, gave notice of the fact that the bag wasn't unprotected. McNamara knew that Ritter's Fokkers were sitting up there, and they weren't out just for the airing.

He looked at the other ships beside him and pointed above. Holloy and Breadon nodded that they had seen, and Randall's face broke into a big grin. They were all set to go, and they put into execution the plan they had agreed upon.

McNamara was to head straight for the bag, and Molloy and Breadon were to hike for more altitude. When McNamara was well on his way and had been spotted by the Fokkers, the other two were to make their bid. McNamara knew that his chances of avoiding Ritter's fire were good, and he also knew that the other two stood an excellent chance of doing a job on the bag, once the Fokkers had been pulled out of position. The only unanswered question was "What would Randall do?"

He had heard their plans and added bits of helpful information. Would he get up above, with Molloy and Breadon? Would he add his strength to that of the two ships which had been designated to hit the balloon? McNamara wished he would, for that would be the safest course. Down here below, with six ships diving at you, was no place for a rookie. McNamara was sure that he could take care of himself, but he shook his head when he thought of the possible action that Randall might take.

But now he signalled to Molloy and

Breadon to hike up where they belonged, and he eyed Randall to see what he would do. The kid was undecided. His Spad started to rise with the other two, then he changed his mind. Molloy and Breadon put their planes in a climb, and McNamara dropped to two thousand. And Randall came right along with him.

McNamara cursed savagely. This was a hell of a note! It was a lousy job no matter how you looked at it, but the odds against this kid were stacked to the ceiling. He made one effort to wave Randall back, but he got the same answer as he had been given before. He shrugged his shoulders and concentrated on the job before him.

He was within a mile of the bag, now, and he knew that Ritter had not spotted him against the motley background of the ripped, torn earth. If the guy sighted Molloy and Breadon before seeing him—

McNamara deliberately ripped a long burst through his guns, and he got the desired results. The ground crew spotted him, and the Archie started to blossom around the two ships. McNamara looked aloft and watched Ritter start his dive. The six Fokkers had a long way to come, and he held his course for the bag. Randall was right at his tail, and throwing a glance over his shoulder, McNamara saw that the kid had seen the six diving ships. If he only followed McNamara's actions and held out until the last possible moment everything would work out beautifully. But if he cracked, and started to get away before Molloy and Breadon gained the position they sought, the whole scheme was in the ash heap.

They were only a half mile from the the bag, and the Fokkers were about two thousand feet overhead and coming fast, when McNamara realized that the game was up. The Fokkers had seen Molloy and Breadon, and the German flight was splitting. Ritter and two of the ships continued downward, but the other three

whipped out of their dive and raced to cut off the two higher Spads.

The jig was up, but McNamara grinned. What the hell, they were right down to business, now. He was glad Randall had come along. Their little plan was shot to hell, but they still had a grand chance of doing the job right. Randall was the element that almost balanced the scales. With him, the Spads were at only a slight disadvantage.

McNamara turned and pointed to the bag, and Sammy nodded. He understood that the play was off and that it was every man for himself. And then the three diving Fokkers started to go to work. There was the spiteful chatter of Spandaus, and a row of holes nicked the tip of McNamara's top wing.

He kicked rudder and shoved the stick to the side and went around and under the diving planes. He knew they couldn't pull out quick enough to follow him, and he was pleased when he saw Randall follow his move.

He headed for the bag again as they left the ships behind them, zooming out of their plunge. He gazed aloft and saw that Molloy and Breadon were engaged with the rest of the flight, and he knew that he and Randall had the better chance of getting the bag. The Fokkers were on them again, however, and he had to forget about the sausage for the time being.

HE WHIPPED over in an Immelmann and stuttered a burst through Ritter's tail group. The pennants streaming from the ship's struts marked it as that of the Staffel leader, and McNamara smiled as he remembered the other occasion on which he had met the man. They had both limped out of a dogfight with conked motors, and the wave they had given each other betokened the fact that both men were satisfied with the outcome. But they couldn't wind up in a draw *this* time.

Ritter pulled his plane out of the way,

and McNamara followed him. But he had to pull aside in a moment, for another of the German planes had fastened on his tail, and the lead pounded into the fuselage in back of him.

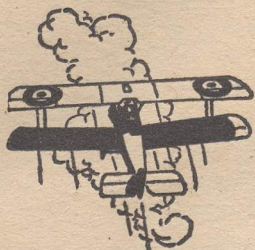
He looked about the sky for Randall, and saw that the kid was not far away, hammering at the third German crate. His bursts were coming closer and closer to the pit as the Hun pilot frantically attempted to escape them. Then McNamara once more gave his attention to Ritter.

The Staffel leader roared in from the side, and McNamara turned to meet him. He had a chance for a short burst before the Fokker broke away and upward in a wild zoom. McNamara followed him like a leech, holding his thumb on the stick trigger. The line of tracer kept creeping closer and closer to the helmeted form in the pit. Then suddenly it stopped.

McNamara cursed and banged at the jammed trips, but it was no go. He pulled out to the side, and was just in time to see Randall blow the third Hun to pieces with a burst through the tank. Then Ritter came back at him.

McNamara dove for the ground, and the German was right on his tail. The second plane was higher and to the left, but he wasn't worried about that, now. It took all his skill to keep out of Ritter's way, and he knew that it couldn't last much longer. The lead pounded into the padding behind him, and he whipped over in a split-arc just in time to avoid having his head hammered off his shoulders.

The German was on him again in a moment, though, and then McNamara was aware of another plane entering the battle. It was Randall, and he was coming in at Ritter from the side, as the German dove on McNamara. It didn't last long. The German was caught flat-footed. The Vickers bored straight for the bucket seat of the Fokker, and the plane went up on one wing, then dove for the ground, Ritter swaying like a dummy in the pit.



McNamara's shout of joy was smothered in his throat as he spotted the second Fokker. The plane was directly above Randall, and coming like a bat out of hell. The pilot held his fire until he was at point range, and then it was all over.

McNamara waved to Randall just as the first bunch of lead arrived in the pit, and he could see the kid jerk erect in the seat. There was a surprised expression on his face, and he slowly turned his head to look at the Fokker. The German plane rocketed past him and started to zoom, and Randall just lifted the nose of his ship and hit the trips. A line of lead speared the German pilot clean. The Boche crate fell, twisting over and over.

McNamara knew that Randall had been hit, but he didn't know how badly until he swung near the other ship. Randall's head was on his chest, and one hand was inside his flying suit. He lifted his head slowly as McNamara neared him, then he took his hand from his breast and waved weakly. The hand was a bright and shining red.

The dogfight had carried them to a point almost directly over the balloon, and the frantic ground crew was working furiously at the winch. High above, and to the east, Molloy and Breadon had downed one of the three planes, and were working systematically on the other two. About two miles to the north, McNamara spotted six Fokkers rising off a field that he had noticed. It wouldn't be long now,

he knew, and he signalled to Randall to turn and run for it.

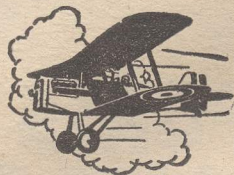
But the kid slowly shook his head. There was no more running left in him. He had hit the last marker, and there was now a cold bony hand holding his own. He had made his last roaring take-off and was soon to make his last landing. He had torn the helmet from his head and the goggles from his eyes.

Across the space that separated them, McNamara could see the kid's face, tightened and pale, and he read the story that was written there. It wasn't a nice story, and he swore deep in his throat as it came to him. He wanted to turn his eyes away, but he couldn't.

And then Randall waved to him again, even more weakly this time. He just waved once, and there was a funny, half-scared smile on his face, as if he didn't know just where he was going. But McNamara saw in a moment that the kid knew exactly where he was going.

Randall's Spad tipped up on its nose and started down. There was no aimless fluttering and indirection in the dive. The kid had a definite objective, and he headed straight for it. It was the balloon, and McNamara saw that he wasn't going to miss it.

Mac tried to avert his eyes at what was happening, but the scene held him spellbound. Out of the corner of his eye, almost unconsciously he saw that Molloy and Breadon had finished off one of the



Fokkers—that the other one was racing for home. They had started down to his level, and they too were witnesses of what happened. But all his attention was centered on Randall.

The kid was down to a thousand, now, and going like a bat out of hell. The crew had the bag almost down to the ground, but they'd never make it. Randall started his Vickers at five hundred feet, and he followed the stream of tracer as it lanced towards the sausage. McNamara could see the lead start to hit, and he shouted "No! No!" in a hoarse, futile voice. The kid plunged straight into the bag, and there was a *woof* and a great cloud of smoke. And that was all, except the blazing embers that fell to the ground.

McNamara waved to Malloy and Breadon, and the three ships started home.

LONG shadows were beginning to creep out on the field when they got back to the 24th, and there was a group of pilots waiting for them out on the field. The three ships landed close together, and McNamara, Molloy and Breadon were surrounded as they came out of the

seats slowly and laboriously. Major Bowers was the first to speak.

"We just got the news from our own balloons," he said. "You bagged the cow, eh? Damn nice work!" The three men were silent and he asked;

"Wasn't there another ship that went out with you? I thought someone said there were four?"

Wharton spoke out of the group.

"Yeah, I saw Randall take off, a minute after they left the ground." He pushed his way through the group, and there was a sneer on his battered face as he asked the three silent men;

"Where's little Loudmouth? Did he lose his nerve and develop 'engine trouble' again? That guy—"

Breadon hit him while his mouth was open, and there was the sound of breaking teeth and splitting flesh. Wharton lay on the ground and the group was silent as McNamara said;

"Randall won't be back, Skipper. Sammy decided that he'd—stay."

No one said a word as the three men broke through the group slowly and walked away together.

THE END



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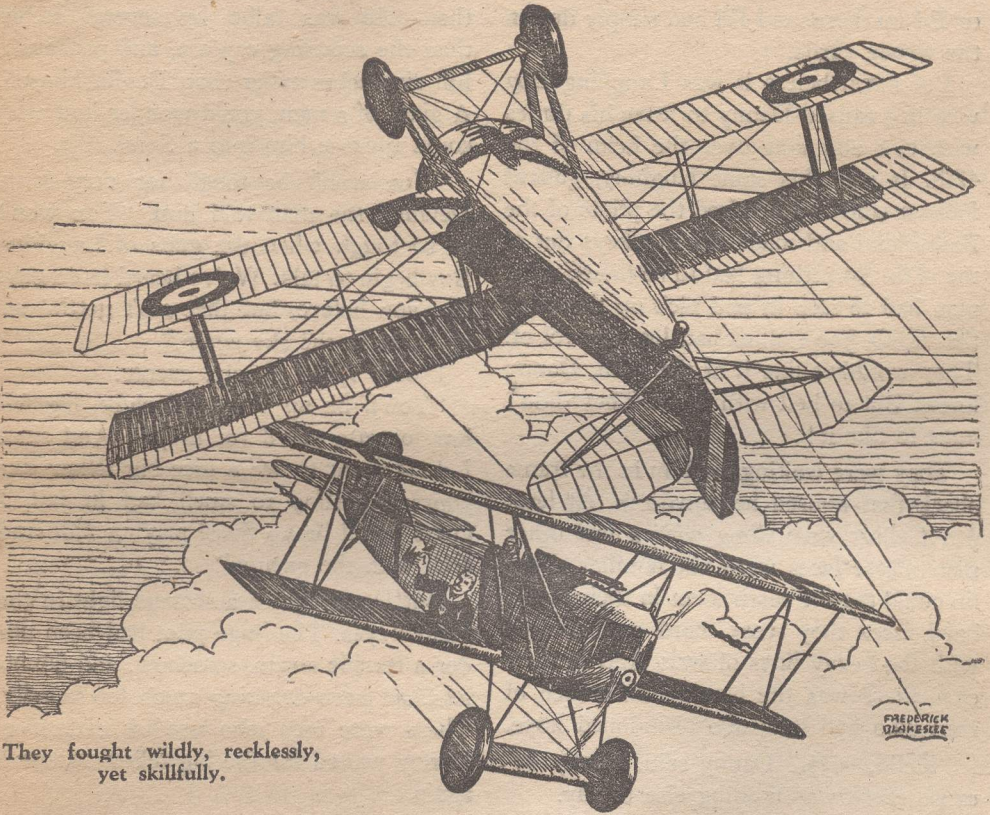
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Murder Walks the Wings

By LEO VINCENT



They fought wildly, recklessly,
yet skillfully.

DANNY DEVLIN, Yank trouble shooter, sometimes known as the "Ace of Spads," slipped his crate in over the trees that bordered the field of the 47th Pursuits and settled down evenly. He legged out of the pit and tightened his belt another notch. Trouble-shooter! Dammit, he thought, there's always trouble. There's a sky full of trouble over your head; there's trouble all over the earth. But for good, concentrated, two-fisted trouble, the 47th would do as well as any.

Danny was just a little bit sick and tired of fighting, but a soldier cannot pick his own jobs; he does what he's told and maybe he lives and just as likely he dies. Danny thought swiftly of Ed Corsey who had died but one day before; died up there in a patch of blue sky before the blazing guns of "Laughing Boy." But there's nothing much you can do about such

Here are the guns of Laughing Boy and the spirit of the sky, in a story of courage and crime and blood that you are about to read. What price will men pay for vengeance? What price will they pay for greed? And what of the murder that was blacker than the night?—the murder that warped the souls of the 47th!

things. You can sit down and cry your heart out when you lose a swell pal like Ed, or you can go out and sit behind your guns until you forget or get yourself killed. And "Laughing Boy"? Danny wondered just what the hell there was to laugh about. He didn't feel very bitter towards the flaxen-haired, smiling hero of the German Air, Laughing Boy from all

accounts fought fairly; was a gentleman and a fighting man. It was to be himself or Ed up there, and Ed had simply drawn the wrong cards.

But nevertheless it was Laughing Boy who had caused Danny to leave his duties with G-2 and take over the helm of the 47th. It was this same laughing, gallant foeman who had inspired the pilots of the Fatherland and made sky monkeys out of the 47th. Something had to be done; some man had to step in and pick up the reins that C. O. Joe Collins had lost control of. They wouldn't like it at the 47th, Danny knew. But to hell with them. They didn't *have* to like it!

They were waiting for him in the frame shack that housed headquarters. At least Joe Collins was, along with a few other men whose faces were not familiar. Devlin could see the resentment in their faces; hard faces they were, hard and creased with the heavy lines of war. And in their eyes there was the blank indifference of men who had long ago abandoned hope.

"Hello, boys," Danny said, mostly because there was nothing else to say.

Collins was the first of the men to speak.

"So G-2 decided to put its long nose into this, eh, Devlin? And they thought they would start by sending over their favorite teacher. Well, listen, Devlin—they may replace me here as commander, but we just aren't going to play school!"

Devlin regarded Collins for a long moment.

"I know you don't like me, Captain," Danny said. "And I'm not hypocrite enough to pretend that I'm very fond of you. We've had one or two clashes before, you and I—but if you'll refresh your memory you'll recall that you were always the gentleman behind the eight ball."

"Still tough, aren't you, Devlin?" Collins sneered.

Danny smiled slowly. "I suppose I'm tough enough to do my job," he said

slowly. "A bit tougher than you, Collins."

The man standing beside Collins spoke then. He was taller by several inches than the scowling captain, and perhaps a full six inches taller than Devlin himself. A giant of a man, you'd wonder how they could squeeze him into a Spad.

"You won't be tough for very long, Devlin," the man told him. "You won't be so tough when the guns of Laughing Boy begin to talk. We've heard from guys like you before, but that ain't gettin' *me* up there in the sky again."

Danny spoke slowly, evenly.

"You'll be up there, all right, big fellow, or else you'll rot in jail. And since I don't want to see a nice big fellow like yourself getting to smell bad in jail, I guess you'll be up there playing hide and seek with the enemy."

But Danny noted a strange light in the giant's eyes. The huge pilot had been under a terrific strain, somehow, and doubtless had been drinking much too heavily. These were men who needed leadership. Danny waited for the big fellow to speak again.

"Yeah," he heard. "Well, you an' Laughin' Boy and the whole damned army can go to hell as far as I'm concerned. I know you guys—damn right I know you. You're like the exhaust on a Spad, mister—full of loud noises and plenty of wind."

Danny stepped closer to the giant.

"What's your name, musclebound?"

"Lieutenant Keller," the man answered sourly. "Big Jim Keller to my friends, but don't count yourself among them."

"Well, Keller, be prepared to take off in twenty minutes for a meeting with Laughing Boy."

The big man drew closer, the sneer spreading across his face.

"All right, mister wise guy—an' what if I don't? What if I should knock some of those stripes off you, just for the exercise."

Danny smiled tightly. He knew the answer; there was nothing else to do.

"In that case," he said, "you'll get some more of this!"

His left arm curled swiftly in an arc and exploded against the jaw of the giant. Keller stood staring for a second, then gave forth a bellow of inhuman rage. He came at Danny with his great fists flailing, but found that they hit little besides the air.

Devlin moved in closer to the brute of a man, stuffing his face with straight left hand punches. One of Keller's wild swings glanced off his head, and Danny wondered swiftly what would happen if this big brute should connect squarely. Again the giant came at him, swinging his right like a gate. Danny stepped inside of the wild swing and buried his left arm wrist-deep in the other man's stomach. As Keller doubled over like a jack-knife, Danny crossed two solid punches to the jaw. Keller hit the floor like a big bag of beans and lay still.

Danny faced the others.

"This guy will be all right in a few minutes, after which he's going upstairs to visit Laughing Boy."

By this time, drawn swiftly by the excitement within the office, a dozen pilots and mechanics of the 47th were crowding the doorway. "Laughing Boy!" the word flashed from mouth to mouth, as though there were some black magic in the name itself that set men to babbling like uncertain women. Danny turned on them.

"Yeah, Laughing Boy!" he told them. "What the hell do you think the guy is, a magician? You've got to go up and meet those buzzards with the same kind of guts and bullets that they use. There's nothing wrong with Laughing Boy; the trouble is with you guys. At least he goes up in the sky and takes his chances; at least he's a credit to the wings he wears on his chest!" Danny shifted his glance

to Collins. "You're grounded, mister; you've been selling these men here a lot of nonsense. If you haven't the nerve to sit behind your guns, why don't you say so?"

Collins said nothing. He simply drew a hand across his wet and foamy mouth and transmitted through his eyes more hatred than Danny had ever seen before. And by this time, big Jim Keller was climbing to unsteady legs. The trace of a grin played across his mouth. "Okay, Captain," he said slowly, "I'm flyin'." Then he added, while his grin broadened, "What the hell's the idea of carrying your Vickers in your fists?"

WHILE five Spads and three Camels were being prepared for flight, Danny decided to make a personal call. The sergeant-mechanic directed him to the stone jail some quarter of a mile from the hangar, where the 47th was playing host to *Hauptman* Willy Kranz. Danny, as a G-2 man, had heard much of Kranz as a ruthless and sinister sky fighter, so much so that his curiosity compelled this visit.

The guard house, set close beside the training field, was quite a walk, and during that time, Danny learned as much as he could about the 47th's affairs from the mechanic-sergeant. He learned, at least, that the squadron was practically shot to hell and decaying; that Collins hadn't given a damn about the honor of the outfit and that it had virtually thrown up the sponge to Laughing Boy and his mad but merry circus.

Regarding *Hauptman* Willy Kranz, Danny knew instinctively that under any circumstances he would despise and distrust this man. This, however did not interfere with his greeting the German courteously.

"I'm Captain Devlin," Danny introduced himself, "and have taken charge of this squadron." The man's tiny eyes glit-

tered with fire as Danny added, "I trust you'll be comfortable and well taken care of as long as you are here."

Kranz forced a smile.

"Why is it, *Herr* Captain, that Captain Collins is not in charge?"

"Official reasons," Danny said. "Sorry I can't discuss them with you."

"Is it possible," the other asked, "that your High Command does not like the actions of the Laughing Boy?"

Danny shrugged.

"I guess it's no secret that Laughing Boy is just about our biggest trouble at the moment. I understand he's a great fighter and even a finer gentleman, *Herr* Kranz. And I'm sure you must be mighty proud of him."

Whatever trace of a smile had been on the German's face disappeared with Devlin's last remark. He saw Kranz straighten, his countenance darken.

"Laughing Boy is a complete young fool," the Boche said with heat. "Laughing Boy—Laughing Boy! *Ach!* It is all I hear!"

"I should think any good German would be mighty proud of the lad," Danny said.

"*Ja! ja,*" Kranz mumbled. "But let us say no more."

Danny studied the man for a moment, then asked, "How is it, *Hauptman*, that our men captured you so easily?"

Kranz straightened, his mouth in a hard line.

"It would not be easy to capture me at any time, Captain. It is simply that I was forced down in this territory with motor difficulties. That is all!"

Danny was amused. "Yeah? And why is it that you've been kept here for a whole week, when you should have been sent to some prison camp?"

"That is not my affair, *Herr* Captain," Kranz answered, and the lights still appeared like little fires in his piggy eyes.

TEN minutes later, Danny and seven men of the 47th hit the skies for patrol duty and winged towards the east. It had been many long months since Danny had sat behind hot Vickers guns, and he wondered fleetingly if his hand would be as quick and certain as it once had been. G-2 missions had taken him out of regular patrol duties; and it was only an assignment such as this that put him back behind the guns. In spite of his hatred for war and unnecessary bloodshed, Devlin was at home in the sky. And he could not deny, though he tried to always, that he loved the thrill of battle. Laughing Boy would be out here! Perhaps they would see how good the kid really was.

But an hour of patrolling brought no sign of enemy craft, and Danny turned his flight towards home. It was while they were approaching their own field that he first saw the specks in the sky—a flight of Fokkers winging low over the drome of the 47th, obviously for a surprise attack. Devlin waggled his wings and fired a warning burst. His hand punched the throttle wide open and the *Hisso* roared its eager response. On he flew at the head of the 'V', his blood racing fast with the surge and thrill of impending battle; his keen eyes searching constantly for the gay streamers of the famous Laughing Boy.

Into the hell of whirling Fokkers and Spads he bore, his Vickers ripping a fiery path through the cluttered sky. Then he saw it—the lone white helmet in the pit of the black and shiney Fokker, which, like the other Boche craft, bore the insignia of a laughing youth with a stein of beer raised high in his fist.

This was Laughing Boy—the valiant sky-eating Boche whose praises men sang and whose guns men feared. Danny flew straight to the attack, his pulse beating as swiftly as the wind; his heart turning rapidly as the whirling prop.

The young Hun seemed to sense the

challenge that rode with the roaring Spad. At least, he raised a hand in gay salute, then gunned up through five hundred feet of sky. Danny rose too, and suddenly the guns about these men were still, as though a stage was being set for one of the battles that skymen had been waiting for—the final, positive show-down between Laughing Boy and the Yank they called the "Ace of Spads."

For several tense and anxious moments they circled, until that swift, electric instant when Laughing Boy dropped through the sky like a stone and rocketed swiftly, daringly, beneath the belly of the Spad. But Danny was ready; he rolled gracefully to the right as the young Hun rose, then banked away and rolled over on his back. Laughing Boy was above him now, and Danny's Vickers stitched their bloody path along the belly of the Fokker. None of his slugs was marked with Death, though, and Laughing Boy was able to drop, nose down, through a thousand feet of empty sky. Like a comet Danny pursued, his Hisso roaring full out in a dive that threatened to tear away his wings. But he knew that his Spad could outdive anything that flew; he knew that Laughing Boy must be the first to pull aloft, and that then he could finish him with his guns.

Danny thought he had the German lad; he could see the head and shoulders of the enemy pilot in his sights. His fingers tightened on the trips, but something seemed to hold his hand. Danny did not like to kill; not when the other man was as game and gallant as this German kid appeared to be. Then he cursed himself for a fool. It was that lapse of action that permitted Laughing Boy to evade his hot guns. Now the Boche boy was climbing up to the ceiling, Spandaus hissing once to clear the way for vengeance. Like a hawk he banked about to face the fight, and the two ships roared head on at each other. Below lay the drome of the 47th.

Danny thought swiftly as the two planes roared together. The Boche was no more than one hundred and fifty yards away. He was coming hell for leather, believing that Danny would be the first to break. Well, Danny would break all right. But for a reason! His brain still functioned beneath his helmet. He had learned long ago that more men died through lack of wits than from the force of bullets. Danny dropped suddenly, just at the moment when Laughing Boy would expect him to break. But he misjudged it slightly. The Spad trembled violently as the wheels of the Fokker brushed his upper wings. Danny could hear the rip of the Spad's wing fabric. But a moment later, thundering up an empty piece of sky, Danny knew that his Spad, while injured, was still sky-worthy.

The other planes circling lazily in the air, their pilots watching with anxious eyes this thrilling drama of War, witnessed a wild, reckless and yet amazingly skillful exhibition of fighting and flying. Great beads of sweat stood out on Danny's forehead, and his heart pounded fiercely with the excitement of the battle. Laughing Boy faltered in a sloppy bank, and Danny swooped like a Falcon onto his tail. His guns spoke once, again. Laughing Boy wrenched the Fokker out of its straight course. Danny got a clear shot at the side of the ship. His Vickers hissed like angry hornets and hot lead poured into the motor. The Mercedes faltered, the Fokker seemed to hang in the air. Danny fired several bursts, and one of them shattered the prop of the Boche crate.

The German plane rocked in the sky, its wings wobbling drunkenly from the wounds to the heart of the plane. Danny was glad. This was the way he preferred to take this kid; without blood, without the unnecessary waste of life.

Laughing Boy turned about in his cockpit and managed a smile that was framed

in regret. Danny waved back and pointed down. With a shrug, the Boche slipped his crate in over the end hangar and settled smoothly to earth. Settling down, Danny could see the Boche planes winging away in the distance, as though they knew their gallant leader could not be brought back right now; and perhaps because they no longer knew what to do, now that the kid who had led and inspired them had fallen with folded wings.

Danny stepped quickly out of the pit, anxious to see the most famous and beloved Boche airman along the Front. But even as his feet touched the ground, hot flames whipped out from the Fokker. Danny grinned. Of course, the kid had fired the ship. And the Yank mechanics and fliers were too dumfounded, gaping at the sight of this famous Boche bird come at last to earth, to have sense enough to cover him before he could destroy his plane.

But now Danny was standing before this kid. Laughing Boy removed his helmet, and the sun touched his blonde hair with fingers of gold. He could be no more than nineteen or twenty years old. His mouth was fine and sensitive, almost girl-like. His eyes were a clear, innocent blue. His smile, when turned slowly on, was as gracious as the warm sun itself. When he spoke, it was in clear English, with only a trace of accent that seemed to make it musical. He reached out a hand.

"You are the Captain Devlin," he said pleasantly. "I recognize you now from pictures we have managed to get of you. It is a pleasure to meet so fine a foe; and I am grateful to you for having spared my life when you might have so very easily taken it away."

"Forget it, kid," Danny said. "I'm glad you came down all in one piece; I'd really rather have it this way."

Laughing Boy sighed heavily, and his shoulders sank. "I am your prisoner, Captain. And there is nothing I can do."

Danny felt sorry for the kid. "What the hell," he said then, "we can at least have a drink."

A heavy voice broke in on them then, the loud, grating voice of Captain Collins.

"Is it necessary that the commanding officer of this squadron drink with a damned Hun killer?" he wanted to know.

Danny held the man in a steady gaze. "If you mean Laughing Boy here, Captain Collins—I might give him my permission to punch you in the nose! I don't think you're man enough to shine the boots of this '*damned Hun killer!*'"

Laughing Boy had paled slightly, and a frown of puzzlement had crossed his face. "Is that my reputation, Captain?" he wanted to know.

"No, kid," Danny assured him. "That's only your reputation with sour-puss here. He thinks you're a nine-winged murder case. That's only because you've scared the pants off him and some of his sky chickens so that they can't see straight anymore."

"I call that an abominable insult!" Collins stormed.

"I call you a bag of wind," Danny corrected his fellow-officer. Then, ignoring the sweating and storming Collins, he turned to Laughing Boy. "Hey, listen, guy" he wanted to know "what the hell's your right name. This "Laughing Boy" stuff is all right, but I have to call you something."

The young German smiled.

"My good friends have always called me Hugo," he said. "Would that be enough, Captain?"

"Fine, Hugo; my good friends know me as Danny."

TOGETHER they had several drinks, and they talked of things that interested them both. Laughing Boy spoke of his years in school before the war; of great Germans he had met and known in

the war, of his family and a hundred other things. Danny spoke of American colleges; of the beginning of Aviation, of American baseball and anything that would take this nice kid's mind from the sad fact of his capture. A warm friendship grew between the two men, as friendship will always grow between men of a kindred stamp, without regard to race or personal prejudice. Danny introduced the German Ace to several of the friendlier fellows around the drome, then showed Laughing Boy to what would be his temporary quarters.

"We have a jail here, Hugo, but it smells bad. We've got your old friend Kranz locked up there."

Laughing Boy smiled significantly. "It is just as well! *Herr Kranz* has little love for me, I know."

Thus the young Boche was placed in comfortable quarters adjoining the last hangar, nearly a mile from the brick jail that housed his glowering countryman.

Several hours later, after mess had been cleared, the stars of night came out to smile, in spite of the bloody rage and hate and madness that lived upon the war-torn earth. Danny walked alone, smoking, and deep in thought. He was making his plans for the immediate future. Captain Collins, he had decided, must leave. He might have disciplined the man for his insults, but Danny didn't care to use his rank that way. Men might say what they wanted to say, and Danny would answer either with his lips or his fists. He had no desire to impose his superior rank between himself and other men.

Walking past the end hangar, Danny could hear soft, lilting music, and the strains of some pretty German melody. Turning, he could see in the light that still burned in his small room, the head of Laughing Boy. Danny listened for a few moments, then decided he would drop in and talk with the kid.

Removing the heavy bar that bolted

the big door, Danny stepped inside.

"I am glad you came, Captain Danny," Laughing Boy smiled. "It is good that we can talk, *hein?*"

"Sure thing, Hugo," Danny said. "But if you don't mind, we'd better kill that light. You know, against regulations. We have a lot of planes in this end hangar, and if your pals should come over on a little bombing tour, this light wouldn't hurt their aim any."

The light was extinguished, and for five minutes or so they sat smoking and talking in the half-light furnished by the moon. Suddenly a shot broke out. It was a deafening explosion, almost in Danny's ear, bursting in on the still night with shocking force. It took Danny a moment to realize what had happened. He could see the shadowy figure of Laughing Boy grow stiff, then collapse to the floor.

"What in God's name—!" Danny began, then he saw a shadow flash by the barred, glassless window. Instinctively he whipped out his Colt automatic and fired through the window. The stink of burnt powder invaded his nostrils, and for a moment he was stunned, refused to believe what had happened. He turned on the light then, and his worst fears were realized. Laughing Boy lay with his blue eyes staring sightless into the great open skies of Death. Blood ran in a steady stream from his temple where the bullet had entered. Murder! Murder as black as the night itself—that stunk to heaven with its treachery and cowardice. Then the door burst open, and Danny whirled, gun in hand, eyes alert for any menace that might appear from the dark outside. His trigger finger relaxed when he saw it was Captain Collins.

Collins just stood there for a time, regarding the lifeless body of Laughing Boy that lay in its pool of blood. Then Collins raised his eyes to Danny Devlin, and to the hot gun he held in his fist.

"Put up your gun, Devlin," he sneered.

"One murder should be enough for you tonight." He paused. "You weren't satisfied to have the German Ace as your prisoner, were you? You had to blow out his brains, so you would be known as the greatest flier in the war! Well, Devlin, in this man's army we call the killing of a helpless enemy officer plain *murder!*"

Danny had not been listening very closely, so occupied was he with the mystery of Laughing Boy's death, and so stunned with the coldness, the lack of necessity for the murder. But when Collins' words had sunk in, he arose. He slipped his Colt into its holster, then punched Collins squarely on the chin. The loud-mouthed officer crashed into a corner, just as other pilots and mechanics of the 47th burst into the room.

"Grab that man!" Collins bellowed, "He's a murderer!"

Danny would have hit Collins again, except that strong hands held him back, and someone snatched away his gun.

Big Jim Keller stood examining the gun, with its one shell missing—the shell that Danny had fired through the window, out into God only knew where. Then Keller examined the crumpled form and bloody head of Laughing Boy.

"This man was killed by a Colt .45," the big man said flatly. Then, "And I do not hesitate to say that it was fired by Captain Devlin."

"You know better than that, you fool," Danny clipped.

"I know only what I see," Keller answered him with scorn. "And you know, Devlin, I really had begun to think you were a square guy and a sport. Of all the lousy, stinkin' tricks I ever saw—"

"But, my God!" Danny protested. "None of you men dares believe that I would murder this swell German kid in cold blood—"

But as quickly, Danny caught hold of his emotions. "You'll excuse me, gentlemen, but you can all go to hell."

"We'll all go to hell!" someone shouted. "We'll all go to hell when the Huns hear that Laughing Boy was wantonly murdered! I'd hate to be in your shoes, Devlin. May God have mercy on your rotten soul!"

It was at that moment that Joe Johnson, one of the fledglings from the training school down the line, burst into the small room, shouting, "Kranz has escaped—Willy Kranz is gone!" The breathless youth was followed by several ground men and guards from the distant training hangars, located next to the jail that had held Kranz. But their voices stilled and their eyes grew wide as they beheld the dead body of "Laughing Boy."

Danny gave them no opportunity to express their wonderment. "Is there any trace of how Kranz escaped?" he wanted to know. "Where in hell were the guards?"

"We didn't think, Captain, that there *could* be any escape—" one of them began, but Danny silenced him swiftly.

"Did he grab a ship?" Danny demanded. "And if he did hop one, which plane was it? Are all you guys punch-drunk?"

The confusion of these men was appalling, Danny thought, and he knew that shifty Joe Collins was to blame for their lack of disciplined training. "Check up on all escape possibilities back at the training field and let me know at once," Devlin directed them. No plane had left the training field, the astonished guards declared.

Collins harsh voice interrupted, "Don't listen to this man! If you do, you are taking your orders from a murderer. Keller is calling Wing, now, and we'll have to await a proper investigation."

"Investigation, hell—you flat-headed fool!" Danny stormed. "While you're standing there shouting off your big mouth, a dangerous enemy pilot has escaped from the training field. Are you crazy—are you all madmen?"

But nobody moved. The men in the room turned cold, disdainful eyes on Danny, as men will look at another man who has suddenly become a murderous rat in their eyes. Danny was aware now of a gun muzzle being pressed into his back, and Keller telling him, "Just behave yourself, Captain Devlin, and we'll let Wing take care of this."

"Wing, nothing!" A wide-eyed fledgling yelled. "Murder him now! He's a disgrace to our flag. Laughing Boy was an enemy, sure—but as swell a buzzard as ever stunted a Fokker!"

Then from outside came the full roar of a Hisso, thundering across the tarmac. Several of the men started. Danny's voice cracked out, "That must be Kranz—how in hell could—"

But Collins intervened at that moment. "That isn't Kranz," the man said flatly. "It might be better for you if it was, Devlin. That happens to be Lieutenant Jackson, flying to Wing on my orders. Major Bering will be here shortly, and your little game will be at an end!" Blood still trickled across Collins' chin where Danny had smashed him with his fist, and Danny wished fervently that he might hit the sneering officer again.

HE TURNED to the men who crowded the room. "All right, you guys—you weak-livered pack of bums. I'll take my chances with Wing, but I'll break the dirty neck of any man who sets a hand on me, understand? I have no gun, but I dare any one of you to come at me."

The challenge was not accepted; the men in that room could read the black determination that lay in Devlin's eyes. Then he walked out into the night, puffing nervously at the cigarette he jammed into his mouth. A large figure loomed next to him, and Danny turned to find himself facing Big Jim Keller. "Just keepin' an eye on you, sweetheart," the big fellow explained sarcastically, then added,

"Merely a precaution you know—we wouldn't expect you to start any trouble. Not while I have this, at any rate."

Danny looked down and saw, even in the broken light, the gleaming barrel of an automatic. "Okay, boy scout," he told Keller. "I'll let you tag along. But don't get funny or you're apt to be hurt."

Keller muttered something in response, but Danny wasn't listening. His keen eye, long practised in Intelligence work, searched the ground about him; while a faint hope kept insisting that he might be able to find the bullet he had fired through the barred windows of the room where Laughing Boy was murdered. His searching flashlight revealed nothing, however.

Then they walked into the small private hangar where Danny had stored his Spad the night before, and the Spad had been left for Danny's use in the dawn patrol of the following day. But now the Spad was gone. "What the hell happened?" he asked aloud, but Keller supplied the answer. "Jackson must have grabbed your Spad and flown to Wing," he said.

It sounded reasonable enough, and Danny was about to leave the hangar, when he decided to give things another glance. His searchlight probed in a golden arc about the place, then settled on a pair of boots that stuck out of some crumpled canvas that lay in a corner. His curiosity aroused, Devlin moved swiftly to the place and removed the canvas. Together, he and Keller exploded the single word, "Jackson!"

Danny leaned down and examined the body. Jackson was dead, with a hole in his chest that a man could put his fist through. He had been murdered at close range, by a Colt that was placed right against his chest. Keller, dumbfounded, was about to shout an alarm, but Danny silenced him swiftly. "Shut up, you fool!" he snapped at the man. "Use your thick skull and listen to me, Keller. I don't

believe you're in on this murder business, but I think you're willing to agree with me that the man who murdered Jackson could have done the same thing to Laughing Boy. And remember, there was only one shot fired from my Colt. Do you believe me, fellow?"

Keller's face was screwed into a frown. He looked long at Danny and said, "Damn it, I don't know why, but I'm willing to take a chance on you."

Devlin reached over and shook the big man's hand gratefully. "Thanks," he said. "Now help me hide this body. It's as important as hell that Jackson isn't found here. Let them think the guy crashed some place while going to Wing."

"But what in God's name—" the big fellow began.

"Never mind," Danny cut him short. "Either you believe me or you don't. All I'm asking is that you keep your mouth shut until I tell you it's all right to talk."

Keller grudgingly agreed to this, and together they placed the body of Jackson beneath some boards that they loosened from the hangar floor. They placed canvas over the body, then replaced the boards. It was hard work in the pitch black night, but they remained silent and undetected. Twenty minutes later they left the hangar.

Keller, who was supposed to guard Danny, was persuaded now to let Danny hop a plane. Big Jim believed in him. That, at least, was a comfort.

One hour before dawn, Danny lifted a Spad from the tarmac of the 47th and flew straight as an arrow in the direction of Laughing Boy's old drome. It was this same fabled staffel that Kranz had once been connected with, and most likely, the one place he was pretty sure to flee to after escape. Danny realized, of course, that if he was detected or brought to earth by any of this staffel that his only reward would be Death. Instinctively, however, he felt that the answer to this

murderous treachery might lay with Kranz. It was only a hunch, but the only thing he had to go by. And if he should die? There are things less kind than Death—living, for example, with the stain of murder on your name, and the scorn of your comrades haunting your every hour.

Danny's brain worked feverishly while he flew, ideas forming with the miles, his purpose and his hatred for the murderer of Laughing Boy growing with the beat of his prop. The Spad was a skyworthy ship that cleaved the air at much better than a hundred. It was better, at any rate, than the slightly damaged crate he had set down the day before. Danny headed for a woods which lay some three miles from the German drome. Light was just breaking in brilliant streaks across the eastern sky as he flew over the woods. Set in the center, like a bald spot on a man's head, was a clearing of rough, brush-stumped ground. He cut the switch and rolled her in, landing hard, and nearly tearing off the undercarriage with the shock of his swift, necessarily uneven descent.

He was careful to taxi the crate into some heavy brush, and conceal it well enough so that it would not be seen from the air. Then, tense and expectant, all his senses alert for any threatening sounds, Danny made his way on foot towards the Boche drome. By now, the mystery had already unraveled itself in his brain.

He moved swiftly through the woods, and as daylight spread across the earth, Danny found himself flat on his stomach, no more than 200 yards from one of the German hangars. Danny had a hunch; and it grew stronger with the passing seconds. He was well concealed, with the tall grass reaching three full feet over his flattened body. And he could see through the strands of tall grass without himself being seen. For the moment,

Danny felt safe and fairly secure.

SOON mechanics appeared on the tarmac, and the bustling activity revealed that an attack was being planned. Danny crawled further up on his stomach, closer to those laboring figures. Then he heard a rustling in the grass. The sound of sober, bitter voices. He could see the curls of smoke rising from cigarettes, the flash of black, shiny boots. He knew in a moment from the conversation in German, that these were two officers, walking through the field while their planes were being warmed.

"It shall not be forgotten by the men of this staffel, not for so long as any of us live, that Laughing Boy was murdered by the dog Devlin!" one voice asserted strongly.

Then came the other, answering.

"Ja, freund, not for so long as one of Hugo's comrades shall live. It is the mercy of God that brings *Hauptman* Kranz back with the name of his murderer."

Kranz! The word stuck in Danny's brain like a knife. This was the clue, the break of events he had prayed for. Kranz knew that Danny was being held accountable for Laughing Boy's death! But *how* could he know? How could he have escaped, perhaps even before the shot was fired, and still know that Devlin was being accused? Danny had expected that the Boche would learn eventually, but it would come through secret sources and not so directly, or so swiftly from Kranz himself.

Danny tried to press closer to the ground so that his presence would not be known by the German *leitnants*. He could not move away, for any sound of movement would betray his hiding place. The two men had stopped no more than a yard away from him. If they took one step closer—Danny waited, breathless. Then a foot collided with his shoulder. A German voice cried out, "*Was ist?*"

and hands were dragging him erect. A Luger was jammed into his side, and Danny was looking into the faces of his captors. Except for their expressions of surprise, and their severe commands for him to march before them, the Germans gave no sign that they knew who he was. That would come later, however.

The drome was a beehive of activity as they led Danny before Staffel Headquarters, and announced that they had captured a spy. But one look inside of the room told Danny that this was the end for him. There was a gray-haired and dignified looking officer seated at a large desk, and standing next to him was no less a person than the *Hauptman* Willy Kranz, himself!

"*Gott in himmel!*" Kranz shouted. "It is the murderer, Devlin, delivered to us. See, *mein herrs*, it is the man who murdered your fellow officer!"

The gray-haired commander had risen from his seat, and stood rigid as a man of stone. "Devlin?" he said slowly, then in German, "Is this the man?"

"It is the man, *Herr Oberst*—I have seen and talked with the dog myself!"

The *oberst* stepped closer, and addressed a *leitnant* who promptly handed him a Luger. The *oberst* held the gun in his hand, addressed Danny in an even tone. The officer was controlling himself with an effort, but his hate was in his voice.

"Yesterday, Captain Devlin, you murdered our comrade Hugo—a young, light-haired boy known by both friend and foe as the Laughing One—and respected as well by friend and foe. You killed that boy when there was no reason for your killing him, Captain Devlin—when he might well have been taken care of in a prison where he could fight your country no longer."

The *oberst* tightened his finger on the Luger, turned his gaze upon his men, then back to Danny again.

"You did not even kill our Laughing

Boy out beneath the sky at dawn, but shot him like a rat in a dark place, when he could not see and thought he was a friend! *Hein*—did you not?"

Danny forced a grin as he answered the *oberst*.

"I assure you that I would not come to this drome if I had murdered Laughing Boy. And I must tell you, too, that he had become my friend."

"*Ja*, it is well to say that now, Captain Devlin," the *oberst* broke in. "Now that you have been trapped and are faced with your crime. I want to put this Luger to your head, and blow out your brains, *Herr Kapitan*. But I shall at least give you the dignity of a firing squad, which you do not deserve."

Danny's mind was whirling towards the solution of this mess; a solution that must come swiftly, or else he would be rotting in a grave of dirt.

"How are you so sure of what you say?" he asked the *oberst*.

"I am sure because my countryman has escaped from your murder drome, and heard even your own men speak of the baseness of your crime."

Danny was being prodded through the door with the barrel of the Luger. He turned, however, in spite of the pressure, and asked the *oberst*, directly, "Would you be soo good as to tell me, before I die, *Herr Oberst*—how is was that *Hauptman* Kranz managed his escape?"

"Do not be such a fool, *Herr Kapitan*," the general frowned severely. "*Hauptman* Kranz managed to escape in one of your planes. Otherwise he could not be here at this moment."

Danny thought for a moment, then asked again, "Look here, guy—I mean, *Herr Oberst*—you're about to drill holes in me like a doughnut—an'—"

"*Was ist?*" the Boche commander could not quite understand.

Danny went on again.

"I mean this," he explained. "Would

it be too much to grant a dying man a look at the plane *Herr* Kranz escaped in? That's all I'm asking, remember—just one little look at that plane."

The *oberst* was a reasonable man; curious, too, at the strange request. Danny studied his face closely, prayed that his request would not be denied. A ray of hope had broken through his clouds of despair. There might be a chance—there might be—!

"I do not see that it can make any difference," the *oberst* said, slowly. He gave swift orders to several of his men who moved towards one of the hangars. The German commander kept cold eyes on Danny, however, and did not try to disguise the scorn he felt for this man whom he believed to have murdered Laughing Boy.

A moment later, a Spad came rolling across the field, its Hisso snorting angrily in the early morning air. "We have been testing the ship," the *oberst* stated. A gleam grew in the officer's eyes. "*Ja*, and I believe we have use for it, too! Perhaps it will take aloft the dead body of the man who murdered our Hugo, *hein?* Perhaps the *Amerikaners* who could permit such a crime will be impressed with your body falling to earth from one of their own ships. *Ja*, *Herr Kapitan*—that should be very inspiring to them!"

BUT Danny wasn't paying too much attention to the *oberst*. He knew, of course, what the words meant. He knew that the Wings of Death were beating for him, and that this was probably the last hour of his life. But his brain kept whirling to get at the bottom of this thing, and his eyes were riveted fast upon the Spad that they were bringing across the apron. And as it came closer, his blood raced madly, and his hopes soared to the sky above them. A bit of wing fabric fluttered loose in the breeze. He thought swiftly of the wheels of Laughing Boy's

Fokker that had touched the wings of his Spad the day before. He looked closer at the plane. "My Spad!" he shouted, so loud, so violently that his captors came and put strong hands upon him, fearing, perhaps, that he had lost his mind.

Devlin quickly composed himself, however, turned to meet the mocking eyes of Kranz. Swift fires appeared in the German's eyes, but they died quickly. He said to the *oberst*, "I suggest that we waste no more time with this American pig."

A murmur of anger swept through the crowd of pilots surrounding them, and Danny knew that he would have to act quickly. He addressed the *oberst*.

"Would it surprise you, *Herr Oberst*, if I told you that *Hauptman* Kranz was the murderer of Laughing Boy?"

Kranz rushed forward with fists clenched, curses running from white lips. But there must have been something in Danny's eyes that halted him. The *oberst* said, however, "Captain Devlin, your crime is exceeded only by your insulting brazenness. Enough of this!"

The pilots surged forward again, but Danny said, "Wait!" He cast his eyes along the group of young men assembled there. They were not unlike the kids who flew the colors of the Allies. He addressed one blond, erect figure.

"*Herr Leutnant*," he asked. "Were you in the battle yesterday when I fought Laughing Boy?"

The youngster nodded. "*Jawhol*," he said, but his eyes and his voice were bitter.

"Do you recall," Danny asked again, "the time when Laughing Boy's wheels ripped the fabric from the upper wings of my Spad?"

There was a surprised murmur in the crowd. The young *leutnant* nodded again. "Ja, the Laughing One would rather have died than surrendered. You were fortunate, *Amerikaner*, to have escaped."

"Thanks," Danny said, then continued,

asking directly, pointedly, loudly and dramatically, "And *leutnant*, was this not the Spad I was flying? Look well, *Herr Leutnant*. Look well and let your conscience speak!"

The young German stared with open mouth. Finally he said, "*Jawhol*, that is the Spad."

Kranz moved forward. He asked, too anxiously it seemed, "But what difference can that make, *Herr Oberst*?"

The *oberst* was plainly puzzled. He shrugged, "*Aber*, I do not know. Perhaps the *Amerikaner* should tell us more. I do not understand."

Danny grinned triumphantly, watching the fear grow in Kranz' face. "You will know, Obie, old boy; you will know!" He spoke to the pilots again as a group.

"Which of you men has ever been held a prisoner at the 47th American Drome?" he asked.

A short, thin fellow spoke up. "I had the good fortune to be released in an exchange of prisoners three weeks ago," he said in distinct English.

Kranz interrupted. "This Yankee pig is merely wasting your good time, *Herr Oberst*," he said.

"Shut up!" Danny snapped viciously.

"We shall permit the American to finish," the *oberst* said calmly.

Danny's attention returned to the short thin man he had been talking to. "Is it not true, *Herr Leutnant*?" he asked—"is it not true that at the 47th, the prison is quite distant from the drome?"

The German nodded his assent.

"Now, then," Danny went on, "if *Herr Oberst* will drop a message onto the American drome, it will be verified that your *Hauptman* Kranz was in that prison and that Laughing Boy was kept in pleasant quarters right near the main barracks, a full three-quarters of a mile away." He could see Kranz' face twitching nervously. Maybe Danny had guessed correctly. "Furthermore," Danny con-



tinued, "they will tell you at the 47th that my Spad, which you see here, was stored next to Laughing Boy's hutment!"

There was a hushed silence. Kranz started to speak, but the *oberst* silenced him. "Kranz hated Laughing Boy for the honors he had received," Danny shouted accusingly. "And Captain Collins of the 47th hated me for other reasons. Kranz was permitted to escape from the prison by Captain Collins! He murdered Laughing Boy and stole my Spad! It was arranged by Collins to make me look like the murderer. If you do not believe me, gentlemen, an investigation of all the facts will support my words! It is the only way that Kranz could have escaped. No other plane left the field!"

The silence remained unbroken. Danny knew that self-respecting Germans had never wasted any love on Kranz.

Now eyes were turned suspiciously upon the German. His face was purple; there was fear in his eyes—fear that haunted and would not let him go.

"It is a lie! A lie!" he shouted in high-pitched German.

"Why, then, must you be so frightened, *Herr Hauptman?*" the *oberst* asked softly, but meaningly.

Kranz' nerve cracked with the words. Two Lugers appeared in his trembling hands. "Stay back! Stay back!" he shouted, then raced madly towards a warming Fokker, his Lugers kicking up dust along the tarmac so that he would not be pursued. The Germans standing about were too shocked by the dramatic turn of events to offer resistance, not for

several seconds, anyhow. And by that time, Kranz was in the Fokker that was already warmed for the morning flight.

Danny Devlin, however, had acted swiftly. No sooner had the Fokker lifted its wheels, then Danny was in the cockpit of his own Spad, the *Hisso* roaring out defiantly. The Germans might easily have stopped him, but Danny saw something in the *oberst's* eyes that said more clearly than words, "Good luck to you, boy!"

Then Danny was nosing towards the sky, his fist belting the throttle for every ounce of speed attainable, and another hand fast on the gun trips. Across a ten mile patch of sky they flew, the hunter and the hunted. At five thousand feet Danny fired the first burst from his Vickers. Kranz, robbed of his courage, was also robbed of his skill. Danny virtually flew him out of the sky, until he was riding the tail of the Boche. Kranz' eyes looked back, wild and crazy with fear. He hammered madly at his guns, then threw his arms in the air as Danny's Vickers took their bloody toll. Over the roar of the laboring motors, Willy Kranz' shriek of fear pierced the sky. Flames came back over the cowling. Then the scream of falling wings, and Willy Kranz riding down to Death.

Danny spat over the side of the Spad to get the taste of murder out of his mouth. Then he punched the throttle, headed back towards the 47th.

No sooner had his wheels touched the ground then he was out on the tarmac. Major Bering was there from Wing, red-faced and worried. "What's been going on here, Devlin?" he wanted to know. "What the hell is this I hear about the murder of Laughing Boy?"

Captain Collins, standing by, said, "Devlin can give you all the particulars, sir; he just happens to be the murderer."

Danny walked straight up to Collins, punched him squarely in the face. Collins

hit the ground, blood gushing forth from his mouth.

"The party's over, Collins," Danny told the prostrate officer. "Willy Kranz has confessed. You planned the murder together, but you didn't have the brains to plan it right."

Collins scrambled to his feet. "I'll have you shot for this, Devlin, you lying—"

Danny hit him again, and somehow, Major Bering didn't interfere.

Danny turned to big Jim Keller who was grinning there beside him. "I guess you can produce Jackson's body now, Jim, from under the floorboards of the hangar."

A roar sounded overhead, and eyes turning upwards beheld a Fokker flying low, and a message streamer falling to the earth. Major Bering picked it up, glanced swiftly at the message. He read aloud:

"Be it known that the German Air Force hereby absolves Captain Devlin from the murder of our beloved Laughing Boy, and that we are grateful to him for the punishment dealt to the actual murderer. We remain willing to cooperate in any way to guarantee justice in a matter that is outside of the regular routines of war."

It was signed, *Hans Lockner, Imperial German Air Force.*

IT WAS another dawn, and the guns were silent on their mounts as American and German craft dipped their wings over a heap of earth upon which had been laid a cross.

Danny's eyes were a little wet as they turned from the grave of "Laughing Boy," and his wreath of flowers dropped slowly to the earth.

War, at times, has its better moments.

THE END

NEXT MONTH—

THE HORNETS FROM HELL

By William Hartley

Here is a story by one of Aviation's leading authors that speeds with the dramatic Wings of War. Who were the Hornets From Hell and what was the bloody mission they served?

And In the Same Issue

DESIGN FOR DEATH

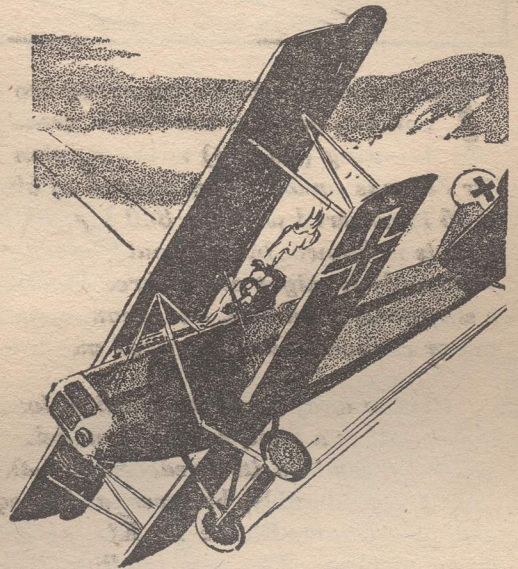
By Leo Vincent

Another novel of Hell above the clouds; a gathering of Fighting Men and the Call of the Airways! Danny Devlin, the Ace of Spads, back behind the Vickers guns with his heart and courage matching the red flames of the Battle Front.

ALSO

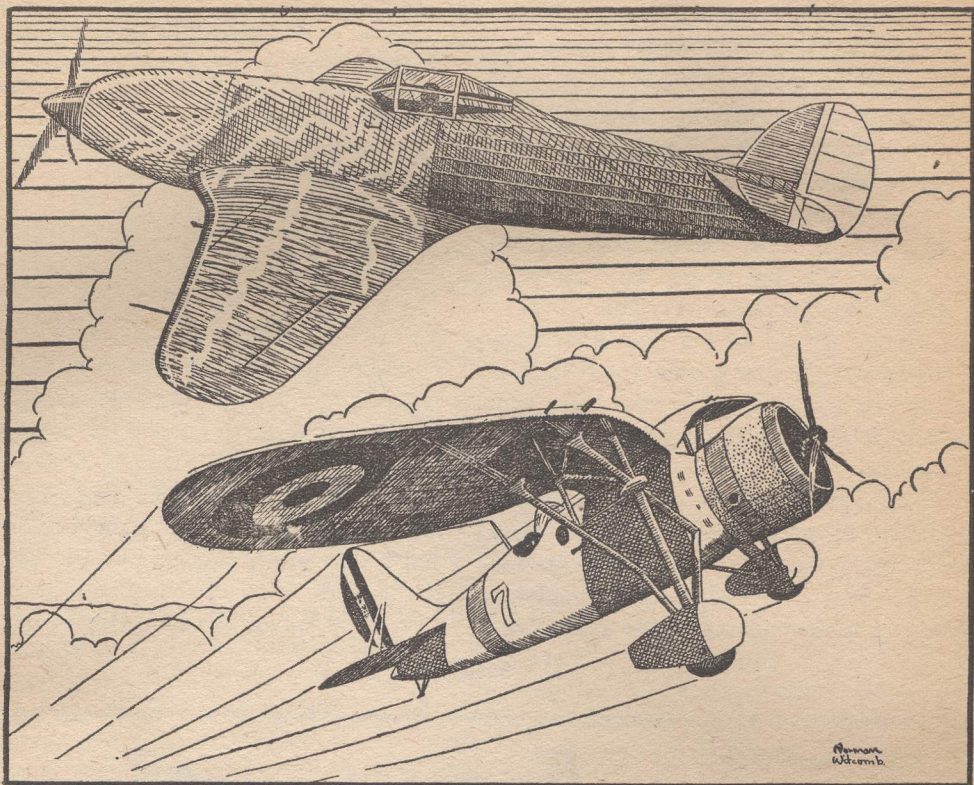
Stories and features by your favorites—including Robert S. Bowen, Hal White, O. B. Myers, Darrell Jordan and others in our greatest issue!

February Issue On Sale
December 17



DARE-DEVIL ACES

CHASERS AND



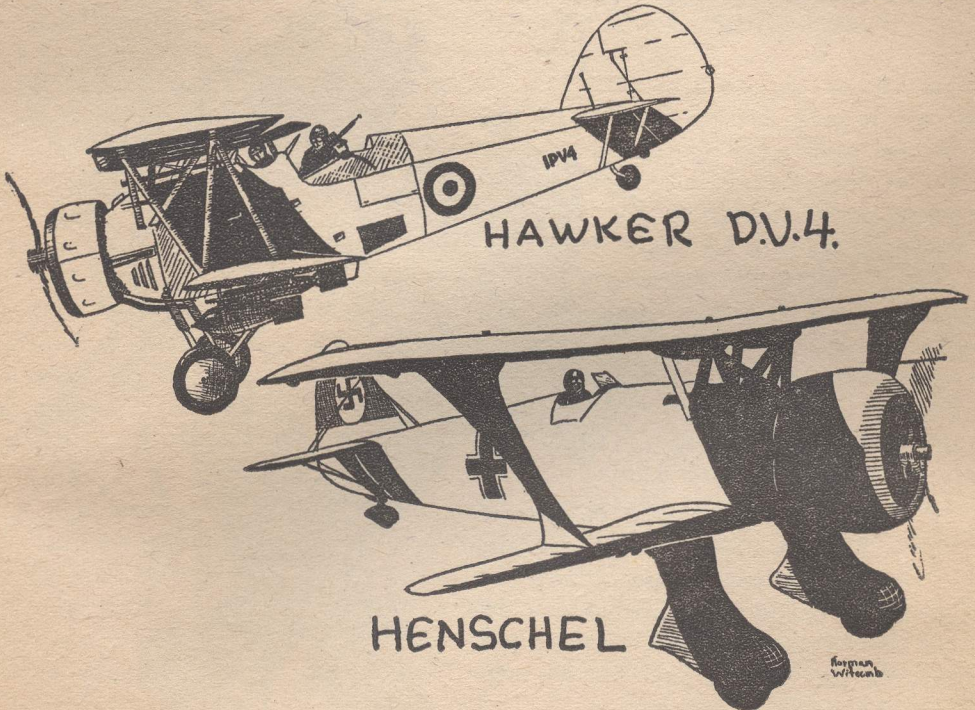
THE two chasers shown above are interesting in the fact that they are contemporaries, but differ greatly in design. The cleanly designed low-wing (on top) is the Belgian Renard R 36. Though the Belgian Air Force is small, it is composed of aircraft of decidedly high quality. The R 36 is powered with the 860 h.p. Hispano-Suiza moteur-canon. Performance is unknown, but it should be able to hit 'way up in the two hundreds—possibly it might make three hundred. This plane, though designed as a single-seater pursuit, has accommodations for a rear-gunner. Besides the motor cannon, it has two fixed machine guns in the wings.

Getting away from the classical low-winger, we find ourselves with just the opposite; a high, gull-wing model. This is the Loire-Nieuport 46 C1. It greatly resembles its predecessors—the Polish P.Z.L. series. It has advanced considerably, however, and is equipped with all the novelties. The motor, a Gnome-Rhone 14 Kfs, of 880 h.p., pulls it along at over 250 miles an hour. The now familiar French habit of cannons has not been overlooked. The Loire-Nieuport carries two cannons of 20 m/m and two machine-guns. They are placed in the wings. The radio mast is just behind the pilot's cockpit in the approved American fashion. It will be noticed that the plane still sports an open cockpit. The pilot sits low, however, and can look back by a mirror arrangement.

DIVE-BOMBING

By NORMAN WITCOMB

DIVE-BOMBING! The most dangerous of all military tactics. A dive in which the plane itself is the bomb until the target is near enough to unload. This practise first originated in America and finally gained recognition in European Air Arms. Today, nearly all recognized Air forces practise it. Shown below are two of the latest foreign dive-bombers. One a product of the famed Hawker firm, the other a Henschel, used in the German Air Force. Both are splendid machines and are expressively built for dive-bombing. The British machine is the P.V.4 (private venture) which was built by the Hawker firm as a two-seat day bomber, specially constructed and designed to stand the tremendous stress encountered in dive-bombing. It is powered by a Bristol "Pegasus" and although the performance is unknown, it is reported to hit over 200 m.p.h. The German craft is built for the German Air Service by the Henschel works which supply much of the material for the Air Force. The dive-bomber itself is of clean design and is powered by a large radial motor which in all instances is probably a B.M.W. Hornet. This plane is supposed to be able to stand an absolute vertical dive with the motor full out and then be pulled out at any time without danger. However, we wouldn't like to prove this claim ourselves as the joy of life is still strong within us. You may be somewhat struck by the resemblance of this plane to our own Laird racer of a few years ago. All in all however, it has the appearance of a fine performer even if it doesn't carry as heavy a load as its British contemporary.



HAWKER D.V.4.

HENSCHEL

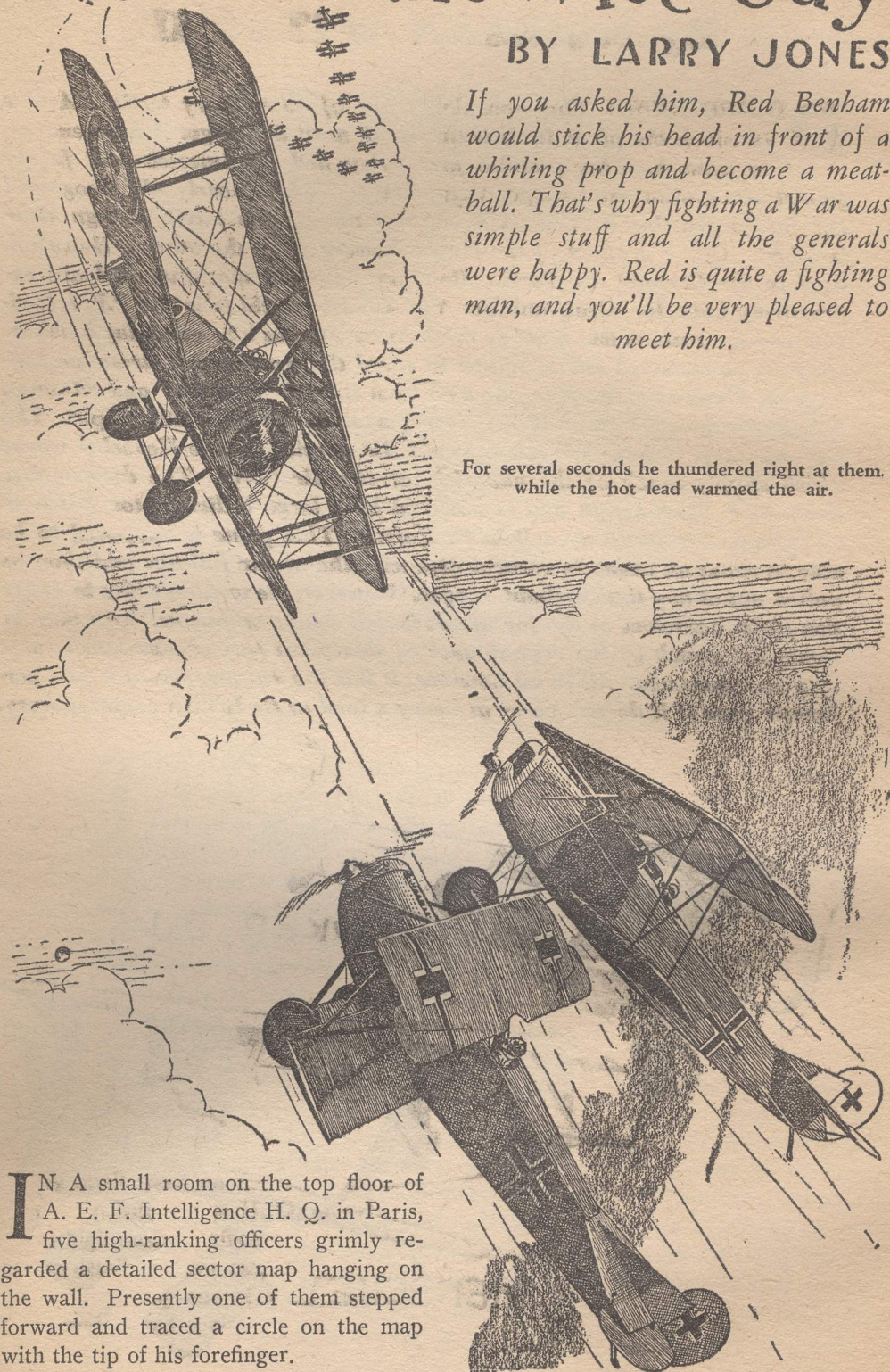
Norman
Witcomb

Patrol of the Wise Guy

BY LARRY JONES

If you asked him, Red Benham would stick his head in front of a whirling prop and become a meatball. That's why fighting a War was simple stuff and all the generals were happy. Red is quite a fighting man, and you'll be very pleased to meet him.

For several seconds he thundered right at them while the hot lead warmed the air.



IN A small room on the top floor of A. E. F. Intelligence H. Q. in Paris, five high-ranking officers grimly regarded a detailed sector map hanging on the wall. Presently one of them stepped forward and traced a circle on the map with the tip of his forefinger.

"Schurmann's somewhere in that area, gentlemen," he said. "That much we know for a certainty. I suggest we concentrate every available man on that area and comb it from one end to the other. Schurmann's got to be caught. That devil's costing us God knows how many lives."

"Not to mention supplies and ammunition, General," one of the other officers grunted. "But I doubt if combing that area will get us much. Schurmann's too clever a spy to be caught that easily. We'll get him as the result of a well laid trap, or else he'll just fall into our hands accidentally."

"And if he does," spoke up a third through clenched teeth, "we'll probably find him made up to look like Pershing, himself. Among other things, the man's a past master in the art of disguise. That's how he managed to get the plans for that Issy attack last month. He posed as a Seventh Infantry captain and walked right into Harrison's headquarters and made off with them."

"What he's done, he's done!" the general cut in sharply. "The point is, we've got to stop him. Got to catch him once and for all. We've got to catch him, and at the same time cut off his system, whatever it is, of communicating with the German forces."

The General paused, waited for the others to nod.

"Those are our orders from General Staff," he said a moment later. "It's up to us. Now, I have a plan worked out here that concerns posting our agents in the area. I'll read it to you, and then we'll discuss suggestions for improvement, if any."

The senior officer drew a sheet of paper from his pocket, gave a tug at his overtight collar, and started reading.

At precisely that same moment, a lone Yank pursuit plane was coasting about in the cloud-dotted skies above the German line, some hundred and thirty-five miles

away. In the cockpit sat five feet ten inches of red hair, freckles and concentrated dynamite that went off any place, any time, and often without cause. Had the war not come along about the time "Red" Benham reached voting age, he would probably have become a tightrope walker, or something else that required a lot of nerve and a tendency towards insanity. Instead, though, he went to France and became a great pilot to his pals, and a perpetual headache to his superiors.

Truth of the matter is, had it not been for Major Trasker, his C.O., who covered up for most of his crazy, wild stunts and utter lack of knowledge as to the word discipline, he would have come close to being shot against a wall on more than one occasion. However, he didn't, and the fact that he was about the sweetest combat pilot to pull on a helmet saved him a lot of lesser penalties. In short, he was a sharp thorn in the side of Wing and G.H.Q., but to his brother pilots he was all aces; a swell guy who just went screwy now and then. And who the hell wouldn't, after all the hours he'd put in over the German lines?

Be that as it may, at the moment Red was perfectly normal. True, it was due to the fact that he had nothing but millions of cubic feet of air and clouds to pick on. That, and the fact that he was testing out a new engine the greaseballs had put in his ship the evening before.

Glancing up from his umpteenth checking of the oil gauge reading, he suddenly stiffened in the seat and peered down between two scraggly clouds off his right wings. Some two thousand feet below him, a lone German Rumpler two seater was striving to sneak from cloud to cloud in the general direction of the American lines.

As Red peered at it, a shaft of light from the sun, low down toward the western horizon, bounced off the glossy wings of the craft and brought out the three

jet black bands on grey in bold relief.

"You again, huh?" he muttered, and reached for the loading handles of his twin Vickers. "That's three times I've spotted you in the last two days. This time, sweetheart, we'll give a look."

In a motion that was so smooth it seemed no motion at all, Benham wheeled his Camel over and down into a screaming power dive. But even as he started over, the Rumpler banked around and went scooting back toward the east. Piling down like ten ton of brick, Red jabbed the trigger trips and ripped out a short challenge burst from his guns.

"Come on, mix it up!" he shouted. "What the hell did you enlist for?"

The Rumpler pilot wasn't having any. He kept right on tearing nose down in the general direction of Berlin and points beyond. With altitude and the faster ship to his advantage, Benham started to overhaul the Rumpler like the Twentieth Century catching up on a local. In another few seconds he would have been close enough to open fire, but for one very important item—the new engine in his ship. For no reason at all it suddenly developed a bad case of missing cylinders, and to prove it, belched smoke out from under the cowling.

Grunting a curse, Benham pulled out of his wild dive, eased back the throttle, and floated around toward the American lines. Some forty-five minutes later he limped down to a landing on his home drome, the 65th Pursuits, and taxied up to the hangar line. A grinning greaseball ran out to meet him.

"How'd she go, sir?" he called out as Benham legged to the ground.

Red regarded him soberly for a moment. Then he pulled his service automatic from its holster and handed it to the mechanic butt first.

"Go around in back of B Hangar," he said softly, "put the end of this thing against your right temple, crook your

forefinger around this piece of metal, here, and then pull hard. When I hear the report, I'll know there's a vacancy for a *real* engine man in this squadron. Now, get the hell out of my sight!"

Turning on his heel, Benham walked away from the flabbergasted mechanic and went over to the squadron office. He shouldered inside and said,

"Say, what the hell kind of engines are we—?"

BENHAM'S mouth stayed open after the words stopped coming out. Instead of the familiar bushy-haired, moon-faced figure of Major Trasker seated behind the desk, there was a black-eyed, pink-cheeked vision of what the well dressed officer should wear. Impulsively, Benham looked behind the door he held open, gave a short shake of his head and started to turn.

"My error," he grunted. "I've landed on the wrong dome."

"No you haven't, Lieutenant Benham!" the sharp voice cracked at him from behind the desk. "Come back in here, and shut the door. I've been waiting for you. I want to talk to you."

Red closed the door, took another look at the black eyes and pink cheeks, and liked them less than before.

"To begin with," their owner said, "I'm Major Wilson, acting C.O. of this squadron. And—"

"Where's Major Trasker?" Benham cut in bluntly.

"Assigned to special duty at Pau Headquarters," was the reply. "He'll be gone for a week or more. He didn't leave more than half an hour ago. The point is, that Wing Colonel Cullen has appointed me acting commanding officer until Major Trasker returns."

Red shrugged, grinned good naturedly. "Okay with me, Major," he said. "Glad to have you with us."

The other's black eyes tightened at the

corners. And his mouth set primly.

"I'm not so sure that you will be," he said. "Your reputation is well known to me, Benham, so I'm giving you fair warning. The damn fool things you do may go with Major Trasker, but they won't go with me, understand? I was in the Regular Army when you were in short pants, and I know the value of discipline in time of war. I intend to have it—to the letter—while I'm here. To start with, I understand that you've just returned from a solo patrol. In future all patrols will consist of three planes at least. It's damn foolishness, running the risk of losing trained pilots one at a time, no matter how skilled they may be."

"Maybe there's logic in that," Benham smiled. "But you have to fly solo in this sector, else the Fokkers won't come close. We've got a sissy outfit opposite us, you see, and—"

"You heard what I said, Lieutenant Benham!" the new major stopped him. "At least three flight patrols at all times, until further orders. That's all. You can go now, but remember what I said. You give me cause, Benham, and I'll crack down as only a Regular Army officer knows how."

The pilot hesitated, turned and went outside without even thinking to salute, much less actually doing it. Sucking in air, he expelled it slowly.

"A Regular Army officer!" he murmured slowly. "Huh! I think cognac might remove the taste."

He had finished his second cognac when Jake Dolan, his closest pal in Sixty-Five, bellied up to the zinc-topped bar at his side.

"Have you seen *it*, Red?"

"Yeah," Benham grunted. "West Point, Class of '13—the rest of the time learning to balance a tea cup in the War Department at Washington and an uncle who's a Senator. That's my guess."

"I couldn't say," Dolan replied. "But

you came damn close on the uncle idea. Guess what? His uncle is Colonel Cullen. Yeah, no fooling. I tangled with Wilson at Pau before I came to the Front. Cullen was C.O. there, you know. That's when I found out. Watch your step, kid! The pair of them will be gunning for you. Know what I mean?"

Benham grinned into his drink.

"I can guess," he said. "Trasker didn't mind my going haywire, so long as I got Huns. But these two. . ."

"Yeah," Dolan cut in. "These two!"

"Oh, maybe I can be the fair-haired boy for a week or so," Red said. "I wouldn't want to do anything to reflect on Major Trasker."

"Not much, you wouldn't!" Dolan grinned. "You're just naturally nuts! But I'm wondering if the Major *is* coming back. It would be like Cullen to pull strings and stick his—"

The eerie wail of the alarm siren cut off the rest of Dolan's remark. Dropping their unfinished drinks, the two pilots spun around and dashed outside. Other members of the outfit hurried from hutments and hangars. Major Wilson, standing in the doorway of the office, waited until they were all grouped in front of him.

"There's still plenty of daylight left, gentlemen," he said, "so the entire squadron will take off in fifteen minutes. I'll lead, of course. We'll penetrate the German lines and then circle back toward the north."

"Circle south, Major," Benham spoke up, "and we may run into some Fokkers. A new staffel moved in, day before yesterday, and—"

"The object of the patrol is not mainly to meet enemy aircraft, Lieutenant!" the Acting C.O. cut in sharply. "It'll be a display of squadron strength. And decidedly necessary after all the solo work that this outfit has been doing. To your planes, gentlemen."

FIFTEEN minutes later, sixteen Camels roared off Sixty-Five's field and climbed up to five thousand feet. There they formed a huge V with the C.O.'s plane at the point, and started eastward toward the slowly gathering dusk. Flying Number Two on the right, Red Benham handled his controls automatically and cast an appraising eye at his commanding officer's plane.

"Well, the guy can fly," he grunted. "So that's something. Now if only he can fight, I'll forgive him everything else."

As though the Gods of War had heard Benham's words, three Fokkers suddenly came ripping out of a cloud bank less than half a mile away and some five hundred feet below. It was second nature for Red to spot them instantly, then he switched his gaze to the Major's plane. The C.O. was sailing blissfully eastward, as though on aerial parade. Goosing his engine, Red slid up alongside, caught Wilson's eye, and pointed. The C.O. squinted, nodded, then started to lead the formation in a wide circle to get behind a cloud bank.

The maneuver was one of those that always look fine on paper. If you can steal up on the enemy unnoticed, half the fight is already won. The trouble is, however, that three Fokker pilots, unless they are blind, will seldom fail to notice a mess of sixteen Camels ganging up on them. And the three Fokker pilots Red had spotted weren't even close to being blind. As one man they started to wheel back for the protection of the clouds they'd just left.

Red hesitated a split second, then, when Wilson continued his circling tactics, he whipped his ship over and down out of the formation and burned the air to cut off the retreating Fokkers. Too late they saw the short cut he took. Swinging in close to each other, they turned his way, pulled their noses up, and started spewing jetting streams of flame from their Spandau guns.

Hunched down behind his windshield,

Red grinned, tapped rudder a bit, then pressed his own trips. The Fokker on the right seemed suddenly to run into a brick wall. It staggered sidewise in mid-air, then slowly fell apart and went earthward in a shower of smoking pieces. Ripping off to the side to get clear of the concentrated fire of the other two, Benham pulled up and over in a cartwheel. Then he cut back in like a streak of light, the nose of his ship pointed directly between the two Fokkers.

For split seconds he thundered straight toward them, every muscle braced for the impact he knew damn well would never come. The two Germans stuck as long as they dared, then they split away, one arching to the left, the other to the right. A chuckle in his teeth, Benham rolled to the right and came out smack bang on the tail of the poor devil who had cut off in that direction. The German twisted around in the pit, stared for a frozen second into certain death, then stopped it with his face.

A short deadly burst, and Benham pulled up and over in a tight loop. He didn't even wait to see his second victim start down.

He had lined up Fokkers in his sights too often not to know when he had hit and when he had missed. There was still one Fokker left, and a crazy pilot though he was Benham was also a damn thorough one.

However, the third Fokker was not for him. As he twisted out at the top of the loop and prepared to dive down, he glanced ahead. At that exact moment, wings flashed in a thread of red sunlight almost a mile away. One snap glance and Benham saw the lines of a Rumpler and the three black bands that circled the grey wings. The German plane was streaking southward, just under the bottom of a cloud layer.

"That mug!" Red grunted, and checked the start of his dive.

Glancing back up over his shoulder, he saw Dolan's plane thundering down in a terrific power dive. The rest of the squadron was a good three hundred yards behind. Snapping his eyes downward, Red saw that the last Fokker was still some distance from the clouds; that he could never make it before Dolan reached him.

"Take him, kid," Red grunted, and wheeled his ship south. "There's a guy I want to speak to."

Nosing down slightly to get extra speed, he went tearing hell bent after the Rumppler that had been playing cloud tag with him for the last few days. But half an hour later he gave up the ghost in disgust when the Rumppler plowed into a cloud bank a mile thick and didn't show its wings again. When that happened, he still hadn't come up close enough to start shooting. For a few moments he hung around the cloud bank, just in case, but eventually banked west for home.

When he landed the other ships were already on the line. His greaseball greeted him with the usual grin.

"Okay now, sir? I fixed her up. Say, the Major's looking for you, sir. He's in the squadron office. I guess he's kind of mad. I heard him cussing some."

"To the first part of all you said—yes," Benham nodded. "And to the second part—thanks, and I suppose he is."

The greaseball hadn't exaggerated in the slightest. Major Wilson's eyes practically crackled sparks as Benham came in through the squadron office door.

"You're grounded, Lieutenant!" he barked.

Red blinked.

"Grounded?" he echoed. Then tight-lipped, "For getting two Fokkers that would have skipped back to safety?"

"For downright refusal to obey your commanding officer!" Major Wilson howled. "I was leading that patrol, not you! I gave the signal for the maneuver to be made, and you—crazy fool that you

are—cut away from the rest and started the attack on your own."

"And got two of them!" Red said bluntly. "If I'd followed you around to that cloud bank, those three Fokker pilots would be eating in Germany right now. Our formation was too big to try any stunt like that."

Wilson's eyes were agate, and there was a white spot in each cheek.

"You think so?" he echoed softly.

"And what was the idea of making no attempt to get the third Fokker? A noble gesture on a great ace's part, I suppose? The rest of us could share the third one?"

The pulse in Benham's neck throbbed. One thing he detested almost as much as high-ranking officers was reference to his greatness. It was something close friends never mentioned in his presence—a thing strangers never mentioned twice. A screwy angle in his make-up, but a part of him. In short, he hated heroes and never considered himself one.

"No," he said coldly. "I spotted a Rumppler which I've seen close to our lines several times in the last few days. I chased after it, but didn't get close."

"Too bad," Wilson said tartly. "That would have been one more victory for you to dream about until Colonel Cullen has made a decision in your case. Oh yes, it's going straight to the Colonel, Benham. I gave you your warning. I don't do that sort of thing twice. You're grounded and under open arrest, charged with disobedience of orders in time of war. If you don't thing that's a serious charge, read up on your Rules and Regulations. That's all. Now, get out of here."

Benham stood his ground, his jaw squared.

"That's pretty thin, Wilson," he said evenly. "Just why have you been out to get me from the start? Tell me that."

"All right, I will!" the other snapped. "Because you're all that's unwanted and disgraceful in an officer of the United

States Army, Benham. You think that war is a great lark and that you can do any darn thing you please—just because you happen to be a crack combat pilot. Well, that doesn't go with me, or with a lot of others who are making the army their life's work. You just want to become a hero and bask in your own glory. The real object of the war doesn't mean a damn to you."

"And when did *you* arrive at the Front?" Benham asked.

"Today. What about it?"

"Plenty!" Benham grated. "I've been here fourteen months, so I *know* what war is. Sure, I do crazy things. I've done them all my life. But I've got only one objective in this war, Wilson. That's to try and kill every blasted German who gets in my sight. And so long as I do, that's all that matters with me"

"But not with me, Benham, while I'm your commanding officer. Get to your hutment. Colonel Cullen will be here in the morning to hear the charges."

A red film before his eyes, Benham went outside. He started toward the mess and almost bowled over Dolan.

"EASY, Red," Dolan said, and gripped his arm. "I heard most of it. It's the guy's training, you know. Why didn't you let him miss those Fokkers? That would have shown him plain enough that he was nuts to try and circle round by way of Berlin."

"Yeah, I guess so," Benham nodded. "But hell, you know how it is! I just saw Fokkers. I've cut out of formations that Trasker was leading, lots of times. Hell—"

"Sure," Dolan cut in, "because Trasker's one of the two guys in France who understands that doing things different is natural with you. I'm the other guy. We can understand how you can fight like hell one minute, and do some crazy, dopey thing the next. But Wilson—and

Cullen's kind—they just don't get it, see? They're not built that way. It doesn't get you a thing to go against them."

"It got me grounded," Benham said grimly. "Cullen will be down in the morning."

Dolan led the way into the mess and poured two drinks before he spoke.

"And that's got me worried," he said frowning. "You know damn well that Cullen's been after your scalp, ever since that time you straffed the Wing Office and damn near took the roof off. He couldn't prove it was you, but he knows damn well it *was* you."

"Too bad I didn't go through the roof and make a three point in his lap," Red grated.

"Yeah, sure," Dolan waved it aside. "But the point is, while Trasker was here to cover up for you, Cullen couldn't get his hooks into you. But now, with Trasker away and that West Point squirt in charge, and Cullen his uncle. . . . Hell, it's got me worried, kid! Technically, you did disobey orders. And with that to go on, Cullen will shoot the works. All the way right up to Pershing, if he has to."

Benham finished his drink, poured another.

"Maybe I should go out and cut my throat!" he growled. "Or better, cut Wilson's. Unwanted and disgraceful, huh? He can go take a half roll for himself!"

Dolan appeared not to hear. He stood staring fixedly at the back of the bar.

"There's just a chance that we can beat him to the punch," he said, as though talking to himself. "Yeah, a chance. Listen, you saw him signal for us to break formation and make the attack, see?"

"I what?" Benham echoed. "The hell I did! What are you talking about?"

"Sense, fathead! Close that trap of yours and listen. The gang will back me up. We'll say that we all thought that Wilson signalled to break formation and

go down. See? That won't give Wilson a leg to stand on. Yeah, that should crimp it for him. And if you'll just watch your step until Trasker comes—"

Dolan stopped as Benham shook his head.

"Now what?" he growled.

"No soap," Benham said. "I'm not going to drag you birds into the thing. And besides, I told Wilson what I thought of his dizzy maneuver. That's admitting I did break away on my own."

"Nuts!" was Dolan's comment. "The hell with what you admitted to him. It's what you tell Cullen that'll—"

"No soap again," Benham cut him off. "I do things some people think are crazy, maybe. But I wouldn't lie to a guy, even an overstuffed louse like Cullen, to get out of a mess. No, kid, I've got to figure some other way. There must be one."

"You might go stay in Berlin for awhile," Dolan snarled. "At least until Trasker gets back. I wonder why he went to Pau, anyway? Wilson blew in, and off he went."

Benham paid no attention. He was toying with his drink, making a design of wet rings on the bar top. Suddenly he straightened up and snapped his fingers.

"I got it!" he cried. "That captured Fokker down at the old field by the *estaminet*. I can do it with that."

"Do what?" Dolan demanded. "Talk sense!"

"Listen! When Cullen comes down here he usually arrives about ten o'clock. That means he leaves Wing, by car, about eight. And at eight tomorrow Wilson will be taking the early patrol over. See?"

"So far," Dolan grunted.

"Well, that's the point," Benham grinned. "He's put me under open arrest, but the *estaminet* is within bounds, and so is that old field. Well, I'll pop down there in the morning, crank up that Fokker and take her off. Cullen, as you know, would run a mile if he saw a Fokker. I'll

scare hell out of him and send him racing back to Wing. That will stall him off for tomorrow, at least. I'll land and get back here before Wilson returns. Then we'll have the rest of the day to think up something else. Time's about the only thing I need."

Dolan's mouth twitched.

"My God, you *are* crazy!" he snorted. "Of all the damn fool ideas! Supposing you *don't* scare Cullen, and he comes on through, and later finds out you were after him with a Fokker? Hells bells, do you want to get shot?"

"Cullen won't come through," Benham said. "I'll stop him, don't worry. Just so long as I can get time, I'll figure out some way. Who knows, if I scare Cullen back tomorrow, maybe Wilson will have a forced landing in Germany before Cullen tries it again."

Dolan sighed, pushed his glass away, grasped Benham's hand and shook it solemnly.

"So long, pal," he said. "I'll write your folks, and try to break it easy. My God, what a dope!"

DESPITE his closest friend's comments, which continued far into the night, Red was seated in the Fokker pit, with its prop ticking over, at exactly five minutes of eight the next morning. Ten minutes later he opened up the throttle, taxied out onto the small deserted field and took off. Far off his right wings, and fast losing itself in the dazzling glow of the early sun, was Sixty-Five squadron led by Major Wilson. Red grinned faintly, then concentrated on getting altitude.

Just under the clouds at seven thousand he leveled off, throttled a bit and flew steadily northwest, his eyes glued to the winding main road that led toward Wing Headquarters. After a little over fifteen minutes of flying, he suddenly leaned forward and peered hard at the road. Little clouds of dust, caused by a car moving

at high speed, were sweeping along the road toward the southeast.

On impulse, Benham rammed the stick forward, dropped the nose, and went roaring down for a closer look. It was a good three-quarters of an hour before he expected to spot the Colonel's car, but as he dropped a full three thousand feet at the speed of a falling meteor, he saw the colored staff pennant fastened to the front mudguards.

"His nibs! Damned if it isn't!"

The words burst from Benham's lips, and holding the Fokker in its wing howling dive, he reached up and jerked back the loading handle of the single Spandau mounted on the cowling. Then, tapping rudder until his aim was well to the right of the speeding car below, he pressed the trigger trip and sent a long burst chattering downward.

"About face, Cullen!" he shouted. "About face and scat for home!"

Fully expecting to see the car skid to a halt and then spin around and go racing back toward the protection of some woods through which it had passed, Benham's face tightened as the car actually picked up speed and went hurtling forward. By now it was less than five hundred feet under his spinning prop. Jabbing the trigger trip again, he kicked up dust some fifty yards in front of the car, but the driver didn't so much as look up. On the contrary, the OD clad figure hunched over the wheel and hammered along.

"Too damned scared to stop!" Benham grunted. "So here goes. Watch your whiskers, Cullen!"

Whipping the Fokker up on wing tip, Benham sliced straight down, then flattened out and shot directly across the path of the racing car, his wingtips almost brushing the radiator front. For a split second he caught a glimpse of the familiar colonel's insignia on the shoulder straps of the officer hunched over the wheel, and then he didn't see it again. He shot the

Fokker out ahead of the car and then cut back down, straight for the driver's seat.

In the last split second allowed, he hauled the stick back and started the plane rocketing heavenward. But as he did so he felt the plane shake slightly, and a cold chill gripped his heart. He had misjudged by a hair's breadth, and a wheel or part of the axle had cracked against the car. Leveling off his power zoom, he stuck his head over the side and looked down. A shout of alarm burst from his lips. Like something gone crazy, the car was shooting off the road at a sharp angle. The man at the wheel tried frantically to steer the speeding car clear of some shell-shattered tree stumps, but the wheels failed to grip in the soft earth.

Heart in his throat, beads of sweat forming on his forehead, Benham watched as the car plowed into the tree stumps. It seemed as though invisible hands grasped it and hurled it end over end, off to the right. It struck upside down and slid forward a dozen yards or more before it finally came to a complete stop. Sooty gray smoke started coiling up from the engine.

At that exact moment, as Benham sat there in the Fokker too frozen with horror to move a muscle, the air about him suddenly trembled with the savage yammer of Spandaus fire. It jerked him out of his trance, and he turned his head to stare wide-eyed at a Rumpler with three black bands about its grey wings. The plane was streaking down at him with guns blazing. For a split second he stared straight at death, then instinct snapped him into whirlwind motion.

That a Rumpler had attacked a Fokker didn't even enter his spinning brain. He knew only that a Rumpler was attacking *him*; that death was reaching out for him. And in a blind fury of emotions, he hurled his plane around and up, and jabbed the single trigger trip forward. His burst plowed smack against the nose of the

two seater, forcing its pilot to veer off to the right and expose its broadside. A second later it cut back again, but in that same second Benham shot out of his zoom and bored straight in under the Rumpler's belly. He raked the ship with hot lead from prop to tail skid. Then he had streaked out from under.

No third attack was necessary. Like some huge wounded bird, the Rumpler keeled over slowly on one wing. There it seemed to hover motionless for a long minute. Then smoke and flame burst out from its blunt snout, a wing came off, and the rest started spinning downward. As it fell, Benham saw that the observer's cockpit was empty, but that fact didn't impress itself upon his brain. No sooner had the plane started dropping than he turned his gaze back to the road below. It was then that he saw another car parked at the edge of the road, and saw its occupants running over across the field to the overturned car.

He cursed himself roundly, fumbled for the throttle and glided down and landed on a level strip of ground some four hundred yards away from the wrecked car. Like a man forcing himself to the electric chair, he legged out and ran over to the wreck. Two officers were pulling a limp figure out from under the car as he reached the spot. He took one look at the blood and dirt-smeared face of Colonel Cullen, and clenched his fists hard. It was all he could do to keep from shouting at the top of his voice. But suddenly one of the group turned, saw him, and cried out his name. The next thing he knew, Major Trasker, Sixty-Five's own C. O., had him by the hand and was working it up and down like a pump handle.

"Knew damn well you were in that Fokker, as soon as I saw you start that wild straffing!" the C. O. cried. "Thank God you were joy-hopping that Fokker and saw us chasing him!"

"Chasing Colonel Cullen?" Benham heard himself ask aloud.

"That's not Cullen!" Trasker told him. "That's Adolf Schurmann, the greatest spy Germany ever had! Cullen's at Wing."

"Maybe I'm crazy," Red muttered. "You say that Cullen's at Wing?"

The C. O. grinned, nodded.

"Here's the story, briefly. I was called to Pau to confer on an air blockade, to try and cut off German spy communications. Intelligence has been hunting Schurmann for months, but couldn't get their hands on him. I rode back to Wing with these men here, to talk over the plan with Cullen. We arrived just in time to find that someone impersonating Cullen had gone into Wing H. Q., while he was out, and collected every damn bit of sector data he had. A soldier had seen the Colonel's car head this way. We took up the chase by our car, while Cullen notified the squadrons by phone to cut off all German aircraft crossing our lines. But one had slipped over to pick him up—that Rumpler you got. When we saw your Fokker, we thought *that* was his ship. But there was something funny about the way it was being handled. Then I saw the markings and realized it was the one we'd captured. So I signalled to you—and thank God you got my signal."

The C. O. suddenly stopped short, and peered hard into Benham's eyes.

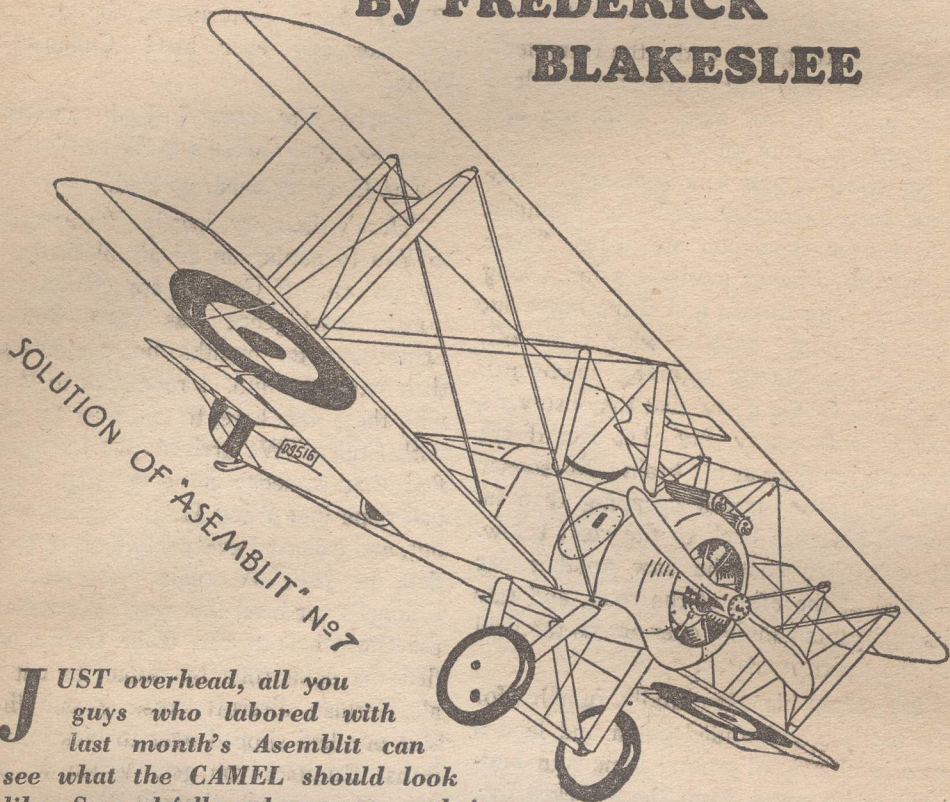
"Or did you?" he grunted. "Just what the devil were you doing, joy-hopping that Fokker?"

"Well, I guess it's a long story, sir," Benham said slowly.

"Tell it to me later," the C. O. cut in. "I think I can guess, knowing you. But one of these days, Benham. . . Aw, hell, why talk about it? If you hadn't done *something* crazy, Schurmann would be in Germany by now."

ASEMBLIT

By FREDERICK
BLAKESLEE



SOLUTION OF "ASEMBLIT" No. 7

JUST overhead, all you guys who labored with last month's Asemblit can see what the CAMEL should look like. Several fellows have sent me their assembled ships and proven that they could do a good job. So the rest of you who don't know a fuselage from the C.O.'s hat—why just keep on working—you can't miss!

Now, when you turn to pages 90 and 91, you shall bump into Asemblit No. 8. This is the Nieuport 17 you've been shouting for, and I hope it works out the way you want it to.

The idea, of course, for the benefit of the newcomers, is to pick up the pieces one by one, using a pencil and tracing paper. After you copy one chunk of aircraft and have it on your tracing paper, just cast your eagle eye about until you strike what should go next to it. And so on, and so on. Why should I make it any easier?

Oh yeah—I promised some of the fans that I would stick a pilot in this Asemblit. You'll see his head sticking out somewhere, and I hope you don't mistake it for one of the landing wheels. If you want to color the Nieuport, paint the undersides of the wings cream and the rest of the plane a deep yellow. The insignia is a red circle, and the inside of the circle should be a solid blue. Next month we'll try a Rumpler. Now turn to pages 90 and 91, and so long till the next time. . . .

The DEAD FLY ON

by ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN



Biff connected squarely with his right.

Biff Miller didn't like the idea of prison walls about him. It's bad for a guy's complexion and fifteen years is a very long time. And besides, he had a bit of work to do—had to wash his hands of another man's blood and blast a vulture from the sky. He hadn't forgotten a pal in the grave, and that's why the Dead Fly On!

SILENCE like that of the tomb settled over the room as Wing Colonel Braddock, presiding officer of the drum-head court martial, raised his eyes from the slips of paper on the table before him and sternly regarded the tall, wind-bronzed pilot.

"Captain Miller, it is the opinion of this court that you are guilty of conspiring with the enemy in time of war. As a result of your action, your commanding officer, Major Rollins, was killed. And a brother officer, Lieutenant Smith, was captured and taken prisoner. In view of

your past record as a pilot of the 69th Pursuit Squadron, we have given every possible consideration to your defense. However, it has consisted only of flat denials of the charges, and nothing else. Have you anything further to say before sentence is passed?"

"Biff" Miller stiffened inwardly. He bored the Colonel with his steel grey eyes, then looked at each of the other four ranking officers in turn.

"Only this," he said in a flat, tight voice that concealed the blind rage seething within him. "Major Rollins was the best friend I ever had. If convicting me of his death—on the evidence that has been presented—is an example of military justice, then God help the United States Army so long as any of you five is connected with it! That's all I have to say."

Colonel Braddock's watery blue eyes flashed and his fat face flushed a beet red. He half rose from his chair, thought better of it and reseated himself again.

"Captain Miller, it is the decision of this court that you be stripped of all rank, and transported to the Federal prison at Leavenworth to serve fifteen years at hard labor. Let me add that were it not for the leniency of this court the sentence would have been—the firing squad. Sergeant, take the prisoner away!"

His whole being suddenly gone numb and lifeless, Miller offered no resistance as the sad-faced sergeant led him out of Wing Headquarters and across the hundred yards of open ground to the stone jail. Once inside, he stumbled blindly across the floor of the cell and sank wearily down on the hard Army cot. The sergeant hesitated before he closed the door.

"That was a raw deal they gave you, Skipper," he muttered. "I've served three tricks in this man's army, but I ain't never seen a raw deal like this one. Anything I can get you, Skipper? You'll be here awhile before they send you to Brest."

Biff forced his stiff lips into a half grin. "Thanks, Sergeant," he said. "No, there's nothing I want."

The non-com shrugged, started to close the door, but held it open as a chunky-set man in plain OD, with no insignia on his uniform save a red and blue band on his left arm, pushed past and entered the cell.

"Okay," he said to the frowning sergeant. "The Colonel said I could visit Miller. Leave us alone for a spell, will you?"

Biff looked at the man and recognized him as Blake, the United Press war correspondent assigned to that sector. Blake had visited Sixty-Nine several times, and had sat through the three days of his court martial. Biff nodded absently.

"Make yourself to home, Blake," he grunted. "I suppose you want a story from the condemned man, eh?"

The war correspondent perched himself on the edge of the cot.

"I'll say I do," he nodded. "This thing smells to high heaven! I know damn well you aren't guilty! I know the friendship you had for Rollins. But why the hell did you give that crazy story—about those phone calls? I mean, the one you received, and the one Hartney, your adjutant said he received. It doesn't make sense. What really did happen? The Colonel's a louse, and I want to help you, Miller. No fooling, I'll put the truth in every sheet in the U. S."

"You got the truth at the trial," Biff said tonelessly. "The whole squadron had gone out on patrol except the Major, Smith and myself. The Major wasn't supposed to fly patrols anyway. Smith, a newcomer, was on the sick list. And I was having a new engine stuck in my ship. An hour later, I got a call on the mess phone. It was, so I thought, from an old pal of mine—a guy I had known at Kelley Field. He was at Issy, and wanted to see me."

"You were alone in the mess when that call came through?" Blake cut in.

"Yes," Biff nodded. "At least, I'm quite sure I was. I borrowed one of the squadron cars and drove up to Issy. I couldn't find my pal, and at the Issy officers' club they said that no one of his name had been there. I figured he'd got his places mixed up, so I went back to the squadron. It was then I learned that the Tenth Balloons had put through an S. O. S. call for help against a couple of Fokkers shooting hell out of their bags. I wasn't there, so the Major and Smith had gone out to drive them off. You know what happened. They ran into half of Baron von Taub's gang. The Major was blasted down on our side, and Smith was driven down a prisoner on the German side. It was a trap, no doubt about that. There's been a five thousand marks reward on the Major's head for months. They know he was worth two full squadrons to us. And—"

Biff paused, ground one clenched fist into the palm of the other hand.

"And that nitwit excuse for a soldier, Braddock, thinks I sold out my best friend!" he grated. "Hell, I know that louse had been hoping I'd take one wrong step, ever since a couple of months ago, when I proved that his idea to straffe that ammo dump was cockeyed. He got an awful ribbing from G. H. Q. when I proved it was nothing but a dummy dump, a decoy, and that we'd lose good men if we went near it. Damn near lost his Wing command. But, my God—to get his revenge this way!"

"Yeah," Blake nodded sympathetically. "Lousy. But those phone calls, Biff? I can't—"

"Neither can I!" Miller cut in savagely. "I thought it was my old friend, but it came out at the court martial that he had been killed over a month before. And checking with Tenth Balloons brought to light the fact that they'd never made any

such call to Hartney, the adjutant. That's the hell of it. I can't prove anything about either call, so of course it looks as though I faked the one from my friend, then drove off some place and called Hartney back—knowing damn well that Rollins and Smith would fly into a trap I'd arranged with the Germans. My God! There's just one thing, though, that I *don't* get! If it *was* the work of a spy—"

"What?" Blake asked eagerly.

BIFF stared at the opposite wall, absently pulled a Spandaus bullet from his pocket and toyed with it. For months, in fact since the day of his first scrap with a Fokker, the slightly flattened bullet had been his lucky charm. It had snaked past his head and lodged itself in the wood of the right rear center section strut. Had he not moved his head a trifle, the bullet would have lodged in his brain. After landing from the successful scrap, he had dug the bullet from the strut and kept it as a lucky charm.

"The Major," he said, snapping a finger nail against the bullet, "could scrap two squadrons of Huns, and make them all look silly. But eye witnesses of that fight said he got it after the first couple of seconds. It was either a lucky burst, or— or something else."

"What do you mean—something else?" Blake demanded.

Biff looked at the bullet, tossed it from one hand to the other.

"Let it go," he muttered. "I may never find out. But thanks for your sympathy, Blake."

The war correspondent scowled and gave him a long hard look.

"There's something working in that head of yours, Biff," he said sharply. "I know you well enough to spot the signs. Open up. I'm your friend, and I'll do any damn thing you want to help."

Biff shook his head, pocketed the lucky bullet.

"Thanks," he grinned. "Maybe you're right. You can help me by just forgetting you think there's anything up my sleeve. See you again, I hope."

Blake sighed, got to his feet.

"Okay, fellow, have it your way. But I wish you a lot of luck. Wouldn't I love to tell the folks back home what a louse they have for a Wing Colonel over here! By the way, I forgot to tell you—you can appeal the decision of a drum-head court martial and get a *general* court martial, if you can show cause for the appeal."

"Yeah, I know," Biff nodded. "Maybe I won't even have to show cause. It's just a hope—a damn slim one. So long, Blake."

After Blake had left, Biff fell to pacing restlessly up and down the length of his cell. His brain was clicking over at lightning speed, and the tiny spark of hope that had first flickered in his breast kindled itself into a raging flame. Over and over he took his lucky charm bullet from his pocket, regarded it bleak-eyed, then squeezed it tight in his fist.

"One chance in a million," he would mutter before dropping the bullet back into his pocket. "One chance, but it *might* click."

For three long hours Miller planned and re-planned. Then came dusk and the sergeant with his evening chow.

"Brought you some cigarettes, Skipper," the non-com said as he put the tray on the small table. "Didn't see you with any. Think of anything else you want? Hell, I'd sure like to see you get out of this jam. It's a raw deal. Me, I'd damn well like to tell that band-box colonel a thing or two."

Biff grinned, but there was an ache in his heart. He hated to do what he was about to, but it was the only way. Perhaps, if he ever came back. . .

"I know you would, Sergeant," he said. "But who the hell is that, out the window there?"

"Huh?" the non-com grunted and turned toward the window. Biff Miller steeled himself, let his right shoulder drop slightly, and brought up his clenched fist with every ounce of his one hundred and eighty-five pounds behind the blow. The sergeant took it on the button, blinked stupidly, then gave a sort of tired sigh and folded to the floor. The pilot stared at him a moment.

"That makes me a louse, Sarge," he grunted between his clenched teeth, "but I had to do it."

Bending over the unconscious man, Biff took the service gun from its holster and slipped it into his pocket. In the other pocket he stuffed some bread and slices of bully beef from the tray of chow. Then, sliding over to the door, he eased it open a crack, peered into the gloom for a second, then slipped out and bolted the door. Hugging the front of the jail, he strained his ears for sounds close by. The entire Wing was blanketed in silence, however.

Three minutes later he was over by the motor park. A motorcycle and side car caught his eye. It belonged to some dispatch rider, but the man was nowhere to be seen. Bracing himself, Biff darted out from his hiding place, forked the saddle and stamped down on the starting pedal. The cycle roared up like a machine-gun. In one swift movement Biff rammied in the clutch lever, fed gas with a twist of the handlebar grip, and went rocketing out onto the road. If there was any hue and cry behind him it was completely lost in the chattering roar of the cycle's engine.

The instant he was out of sight of Wing he cut off the main road and took a shell-pocked trail that lead southeast. Five miles farther on he turned again onto another road that led due east. This road was well traveled by motored gun units, as well as troops on foot. Half a dozen times he was challenged, but he only slowed up enough to shout garbled words

about, "Special courier from Brigade!" and kept on going.

Eventually, when the gun fire at the Front was clearly reflected against the dusk sky, he turned off again. This time he turned left into a shell-pitted field that skirted some woods. At the end of the field he was forced to stop the motorcycle and cut the engine. From the toolkit clamped to the frame he took out pliers and wrenches, then hastily removed the headlight and its small carbide tank from the machine. With this stuck under his arm, he started trudging through the woods.

Half an hour later he came upon a small clearing. Stopping dead, he peered ahead at the shadowy heap of wreckage a few yards in front of him. His eyes were hard and cold, but there was a choking lump in his throat. He was staring at all that remained of Major Rollins' plane after von Taub's vultures had got it.

Shaking off the wave of bitterness and heartache that swept momentarily over him, Biff lighted the carbide lamp, moved forward and set the lamp on the ground so that its beam played full on the wreck. Then, with his face set grimly, he began a minute inspection of the wreckage, piece by piece. Five times he came across bullets sunk in the wood struts. Each time, using the pliers he had brought along, he chewed off bits of the wood until he could lift out the mashed bullet. Then, taking his lucky charm from his pocket, he compared the two bullets close to the light.

For two solid hours he inspected piece after piece, not once finding what he hoped would be there. If he failed, his wild prison break would be all to no avail. With that added crime charged against him, he wouldn't stand a hope in hell of appealing the decision of the drum-head court martial. What was more important, failure to find what he hunted for would blast to the four winds a faint suspicion that had been mounting in his

brain ever since he had first learned of the death of Major Rollins and the capture of the fledgling, Smith.

"There's *got* to be one!" he grated savagely. "The Major was too damned good. There's just *got* to be one!"

As the last words left his lips he suddenly stiffened, caught his breath in a stifled gasp. He was inspecting the cone-shaped headrest on the turtle back of the fuselage. The leather padding was ripped—the tell-tale slash made by a bullet plowing into it. Using his fingers and the pliers, Biff feverishly tore the heavy padding and the wood framework apart. Deep inside its point, headed straight toward the shattered cockpit, was a sixth bullet.

His hands trembled as he pried it loose, then placed it beside the lucky charm bullet in the palm of his hand. For a long minute he stared at them both, then slowly he doubled his fingers into a rock-hard fist and stood up.

"I knew it, I knew it!" he muttered. "God, poor Rollins didn't stand a chance!"

At that instant there came the thumping of footsteps off to his left and a voice called out sharply.

"You! Stand where you are!"

FOR a split second Biff hesitated. He realized that the carbide light had been seen by a passing squad of infantry, and that its officer was advancing at gun point to investigate. Whether his escape had been broadcast he didn't know. But he did know that he wasn't going to let anything break up his plans, now that he'd got *this* far. Hardly seeming to stir, yet moving with the speed of light, he kicked out with his right foot. The toe of his boot caught the carbide lamp squarely, lifted it from the ground and sent it arcing through the air, plunging the spot where he stood into inky darkness. But he didn't stand there long. Spinning, he

ducked low and raced off in the opposite direction. A single shot rang out and the bullet twanged into the trees to his left and went whining off into the comparative silence of the night. When there was a good half mile between himself and the wrecked plane, he slowed up to regain his wind. As he did, he debated the idea of circling back to the motorcycle but finally decided against it. In the hours to follow he'd take risks aplenty, and there was no use in exposing himself to some infantry patrol.

His decision made, he sat down and rested for almost an hour. At the end of that time he got to his feet and studied the stars through the shattered tree branches for a moment. When he got his bearings, he struck off cross-country, due north.

It was well after midnight when he finally skirted some low, rolling hills and came out upon a scene that was both familiar and saddening. He was standing on the very edge of Sixty-Nine's drome. Lights were shining in several of the buildings, and though in the darkness only blurred outlines were visible, he knew each structure well. This was the armament hut, that one the mess; that was the squadron office, and those the B Flight hutments. Fists clenched, he stared at the lights and the buildings, mentally picturing what was going on behind each wall. In a dull, abstract sort of way he realized how an escaped convict must feel when, from his hiding place, he gazes hungrily through the darkness of night at the glowing lights of his home town or village. So close, yet really so far removed from him.

"Cut it, sap, you haven't got all night!"

Biff's half-whispered words jerked him out of his trance. Keeping well to the side, he slowly skirted the edge of the field and made his way to the hangar tarmac. There were several planes lined up, ready for flight as soon as light came,

but Biff was not interested in any of American design. Weeks before, a Fokker pilot had been forced down on the field. The pilot had subsequently gone his way to prison camp, but the Sixty-Ninth gang had kept his plane; partly for souvenir reasons, and partly for damn logical ones. They had kept it to practice with, and learn just what could be expected of a Fokker when in the hands of a good pilot.

Right now, though, that captured Fokker represented far more than a practice machine to Biff Miller. It was the difference between prison and freedom; the difference between disgrace and blanket exoneration.

As luck would have it, the plane was no more than a dozen yards or so from that end of the tarmac where he stood. Crouching in the darkness until the hangar sentry was far down at the other end, Biff slid forward and around to the nose of the ship. Two full twists of the prop put it on compression. Five seconds later he was in the pit and bent double out of sight while the sentry retraced his steps to that end of the tarmac, then faced about and went trudging back again.

Snapping on the ignition, Biff eased the throttle open halfway then grasped the handle of the booster magneto starter. Five times he twirled the starter handle, breath clamped in his lungs. On the sixth twirl, however, the Mercedes caught and started up with a night-shattering roar. Knowing full well that the sentry was pounding back along the tarmac, though he couldn't hear footsteps in the thunder of the Mercedes, Biff waited ten precious seconds, then rammèd the throttle wide open and "rocked" the straining plane over the chocks. He heard a muffled challenge behind him, then he was racing out across the dark field.

Nursing the engine every foot of the way, he finally lifted the plane clear and soared upward toward the stars. Bank-

ing around east, he glanced sadly down at his own field, at the figures of pilots and mechanics tumbling out onto the tarmac.

"Wouldn't you drop dead if you knew who it was!" he muttered. "See you soon, gang—I hope."

With that, he turned forward and went streaking through the night skies toward the Front. When he reached the American archie gun line, the batteries started groping blindly for him, and death burst in red, white and yellow puffs in the dark about him. Once he was over the German lines, however, his throbbing Mercedes was his passport, so to speak.

Moving the throttle back to the three-quarter mark, Biff flew some twenty miles into German-held ground, checking his course with familiar land marks that were visible despite the darkness of night. A novice, perhaps, would have become completely lost, but too often in the daylight, and at night, had Biff flown over that sector to lose his way on *this* flight.

At the end of twenty miles, he slowly circled around toward the north and flew in that direction for some ten miles. For the next fifteen minutes he climbed steadily until the altimeter needle quivered at the ten thousand foot mark on the lighted dial. Then he cut both the ignition and the throttle and stuck the nose down in a long, flat glide.

Though not a trace of emotion showed on his face, could anybody have seen it, the back of his neck crawled and his heart pounded rhythmically against his ribs. He would have given much to be in the pit of his own Camel instead of in the Fokker. But he had selected the Fokker for a reason—a damn good one, too. A Mercedes can be started by spinning the booster magneto, but the Bentley of a Camel must have its prop swung by a second person. Being only one man, he couldn't have started one of the Camels before the guard would have been on his

neck. It had been a devil's choice.

However, the idea of attempting a blind landing at night in the Fokker didn't appeal to him in the slightest. And every foot of altitude he lost in his long, soundless glide added just one more goose pimple to the back of his neck. As a matter of fact, when he was able to see clearly the lights of Baron von Taub's drome ahead and to the left, every foot of altitude lost added a year to his age.

The last five hundred feet were as five hundred miles, but somehow he glided down, found the level strip of ground he'd seen more than once while out on patrol, and set the Fokker down with hardly more than a couple of bounces. When the plane rolled to a stop, he relaxed in the seat, expelled the clamped air from his lungs, and made no attempt to wipe the beads of sweat from his forehead.

EVENTUALLY, though, he legged out of the ship. He squinted through the darkness at the lights of von Taub's field, well over three-quarters of a mile away, then started walking toward them. When but a hundred yards from the field, he got down on all fours, slipped his gun from his pocket, and crawled the rest of the way. Once he was hugging the canvas side of a hangar, he stopped his progress and took stock of his surroundings. He was next to the last one of three hangars in line. Behind the hangars, and to the left of where he crouched, were the mess, office, and living quarters of the staffel. Unlike the one long hutment of Yank and British dromes, each of von Taub's officers had a little shack of his own. Peering at them, Biff wondered which one housed von Taub, himself.

A few seconds later he stopped wondering. The low voice of a man in song came to him from ahead. Almost at the same time, he saw the blurred silhouette of a German mechanic shuffling toward him. His heart leaped at the sight. Lady

Luck was once again dealing them off the top of the deck to him.

Pressing back, he waited until the German was abreast and not three feet away. Then, with the speed of a pouncing panther, Miller leaped forward and rammed the muzzle of his gun hard against the mechanic's back.

"One sound and you die!" he hissed in German. "Turn right, walk over to those woods!"

The German's big frame stiffened, then started to quiver, but not a sound came from his lips. A prod of the gun from Biff, and the man turned right and marched away from the field toward the woods, some seventy yards distant. When they reached that point, Biff forced the man to lay on his stomach and link his hands behind his back. Biff frisked him for a gun but found none. Holding his own gun against the man's temple, he bent his head close.

"Talk only in a whisper," he warned. "Shout, and you'll get a bullet in your thick skull. Understand?"

"*Ja, Ja!*" the man breathed, and trembled all the more. "What is it you want? I am but a poor mechanic, who—"

"Quiet, and listen!" Biff hissed. "A week ago von Taub and some of his pilots forced an American plane to land on this side. It was the day the famous American ace, Major Rollins, was shot down. What happened to that American pilot who was forced down? Did von Taub bring him here?"

"*Ja, Ja, but—*"

"He's here, now?" Biff asked and held his breath.

The German didn't reply. Biff tapped him with the muzzle of his gun and repeated the question.

"*Ja,*" came the halting answer. "He is here, yet. This very minute he is with *Herr* Baron. I saw them talking, just now, as I passed by. Do not shoot, for God's sake! That is the truth. There,

it is that third hut along the line."

The German risked Biff's gun and moved his hand long enough to point. Biff took a flash glance, then switched his eyes back to the man. For perhaps five full seconds he didn't dare trust himself to speak. Blind, madman's rage engulfed him. He wanted nothing than to kill, and to go on killing. Finally, though, he got his rage under control.

"Thanks," he said softly. "If we meet after the war, I'll make up for this, but right now—"

Biff didn't finish. He snapped his gun upward, then brought it down hard on the German's skull. The man didn't utter a sound. He seemed to tighten up, then relaxed and went limp as a rag. Rolling him over, Biff stripped off his field grey uniform and pulled it on over his own OD. Getting to his feet, he stared hard toward the lighted window of the third hut. A cold gleam entered his eyes and the fingers gripping the butt of his gun went white at the knuckles.

"Last act, fellow," he breathed softly. "Get going."

Shoving the gun in the pocket of his "borrowed" tunic but keeping his hand on it, he walked boldly over toward the hut row. He shuffled past a sentry, his heart in his mouth, and finally reached the third hut. A quick look through the window steeled his eyes and set his heart to pounding against his ribs. Ten seconds later he turned the corner of the hut and moved slowly toward the door. Halting, he cast a slow look about, saw no one within fifty yards, then shot in through the door and closed it behind him.

Von Taub's black eyes glared at him and crackled. The German ace started to rise from his chair, then he saw the gun in Biff's hand. His jaw dropped and he sat down sharply. The face of the other German officer, seated at von Taub's side, turned all colors of the rainbow and finished up a dead white.

Biff Miller's voice was low, yet with the ring of steel behind each word.

"Well, Smith—or whatever your name is on this side of the lines—you didn't expect the visit, did you?"

"You—Miller!" choked the man. "My God!"

"Yeah, me!" Biff nodded, and waved his gun slightly toward von Taub. "On your belly, von Taub, and crawl over here! When I get you for keeps it will be in the air. But you're in the way, now, and I'm in a hurry. Crawl over here, or maybe I *will* let you have a slug."

The German ace froze, and Miller saw that he had some guts in his system. He smiled coldly.

"You're a fool, Captain Miller," he said in perfect English. "There are two hundred men on this field, any one of whom would like nothing better than to kill an American swine."

"Maybe," Biff said, "but they won't have their *Kommandant* around to pin a medal on them for doing it. Start crawling my way! You, Smith, keep your hands where I can see them. You dirty skunk! Killing's too good for you! But I'd do it—and now—only you happen to be Exhibit A to me . . . for awhile. *Easy*, von Taub! I said, crawl!"

THE German ace had dropped to the floor as ordered, but he had dropped to a crouching position and was getting set to dive for Biff's legs. The Yank's voice halted him, however. He started crawling slowly. Biff moved forward a step himself, gripped his gun tight and set himself to whip it down on the German's head once he was close enough. A sudden urge to kill the man swept through him, but he forced it to the side. He'd get von Taub in the air some day, not on the ground when the German was defenseless.

And then, suddenly, Lady Luck stopped smiling at Biff Miller. In fact, she turned

her back on him and walked away.

The door flew open and a hoarse voice cried,

"*Herr Baron!*"

There was more, but Biff didn't hear it clearly. The opening door crashed against his back and pitched him forward. Savagely he tried to save himself, but momentum shoved him against the crouched von Taub. He spilled over the German, hit the floor hard, and rolled over. By some bit of magic he had succeeded in hanging onto his gun, but little good that did him. As he tried to bring it up, von Taub lashed out with his fist, hit Biff's gun wrist, and sent the gun flying. Twisting back, Biff started to lurch to his feet and dive for the gun, still sliding across the floor. Too late he saw Smith's booted foot streaking up. The toe of the boot caught him on the side of the head, and the whole world blew up in a roar of sound and colored lights.

When he again opened his eyes, he found himself still in Von Taub's hut. The difference, however, was that the German ace held the gun, and its muzzle was pointed unwaveringly at Biff, seated in a chair. Smith was at von Taub's side, and as Biff opened his eyes the man's lips slid back in a cruel smile.

"Things assume a different complexion, eh, Miller?" he laughed. "But how did you figure that I was responsible for the little accident that happened to your very famous Major Rollins? We, of course, received a full report of your court martial. You offered no defense other than denying the charges. If you suspected me, why didn't you say so then?"

"Maybe I didn't, *then*," Biff said. "But I should have—should have realized that the Major was more than a match for any dozen of you rats. So you *did* make those phone calls?"

Smith chuckled.

"Naturally," he said. "And from the armament hut, *right on the edge of the*

field! The calls went through Corps Exchange, over fifteen miles away, yet when you and Hartney answered you were less than two hundred yards from me."

Biff nodded.

"And knowing that my engine wouldn't be ready and that I'd have to miss that patrol, you went sick," he said. "You dirty rat, Smith! I've got a lot of admiration for spies. Most of them take chances. But not your kind!"

Smith's eyes glittered.

"Your opinion doesn't bother me, Miller," he said. "Whatever I do, I do for Germany. I don't take chances? It was not so simple to get into your Air Service and become a fledgling assigned to your squadron, so that I could wait my chance to rid us of Major Rollins. Nor will it be simple to return, as though I had escaped from Germany, and go on playing my part as a cursed *Amerikammer* until the chance comes for me to do something else for Germany."

Biff's heart seemed to stop in his chest at the man's words. Smith could return to the American lines, and not one member of the squadron would dream that he was other than he represented himself to be. Hell, no! They'd throw a binge in honor of his escape and toast to the echo the very man who had sent their C. O. to his doom. God knew how many other poor devils Smith might lead to their deaths! Not wholesale murder. No, Smith, the spy, was too clever for that. His system was to cut down a man here, another there—until suddenly the Air Service would wake up to the fact that most of their greatest air fighters were gone.

The Yank's blood boiled inside of him and he coiled his muscles, then relaxed as the shrill note of the field phone cut the tension in the room. Von Taub answered, but didn't take his eyes or his gun off Biff. The German grunted twice, then hung up. He smiled coldly at Biff.

"It may give you some satisfaction, Captain Miller," he said quietly, "to know that you had us worried for a time. But no longer. I have received word that your own countrymen are hunting you. In fact, the order is to shoot you if you refuse to surrender. That, of course, means that no one knows where you are. And no one knowing that means that no one but you has guessed the truth. And so, Herr Gortz, it will be perfectly safe for you to return to the American squadron as we planned."

The last was spoken to Smith, although von Taub didn't even glance at the man. He kept his eyes on Biff.

"We Germans can return a courtesy, too, Captain," he said. "I mean by that, you could have killed me a few minutes ago, but didn't. I could kill you now, but I won't. Neither will I knock you unconscious, as you intended to do to me—unless you force me to. No, I shall spare your life, too. You will spend the rest of the war in one of our prison camps. If you try to escape . . . well, that will be your affair. What the prison camp guards do I cannot control, nor would I attempt to. Stand up, Captain, and march before me. I'll do you the honor of escorting you to your temporary quarters, which will serve until you are taken to the prison camp. Stand up!"

Biff sat in his chair like a man finally brought face to face with complete and final defeat. His whole body sagged, and his arms hung limp and lifeless at his sides. Presently he sucked air into his lungs and gave von Taub a defiant look.

"You win," he muttered, and got to his feet.

BUT as he stood up he crooked his right fingers slightly and they hooked under one of the side rungs of the chair. From that point on he tossed caution to the four winds and moved like lightning on greased skids. Swaying to one side,

he yanked the chair out from under him and hurled it at von Taub with all his might. The German squeezed the trigger of his gun and tried to duck at the same time and the bullet plowed into the wood of the chair. A split second later, the chair hit the single lamp on the desk and carried it back against the screaming von Taub.

But all that time Biff was not idle. Side stepping like a cat, he leaped forward, his feet leaving the ground and his entire body traveling like a projectile through the air. Clear over one corner of the desk he went, to crash into the startled Smith. The flying chair sent von Taub and the lamp smashing to the floor and plunged the room into darkness.

The force of his dive into Smith carried them both back against the wall. Clutching hold of the man, Biff fought for his balance with one hand and brought his other fist up in a crushing blow that caught Smith under the chin. The man gurgled weirdly, then started to slide to the floor.

By then von Taub was thrashing about in the darkness, screaming unintelligible orders at the top of his voice. Still clutching the limp Smith with one hand, Biff hauled him across the dark room to the door. There he waited for a split second. The door flew open and feet pounded inside—and Biff rammed out his own leg and kicked. His booted foot crashed against shin bone and a man screamed with pain and fell headlong in the darkness. Another, following close, went sprawling to add to the confusion.

Hauling Smith like a sack of wheat, Biff plowed out through the open door. Half a dozen blurred figures were rushing toward him and he cupped a hand to his lips.

"The hangars!" he shrilled in German. "Stop him! He is making for the hangars!"

Like racing horses coming upon some

insurmountable obstruction, the blurred figured sheered to the right and went rushing toward the hangar line. The instant they were gone, Biff slung Smith up on his shoulder and cut off toward the woods in the opposite direction. By the time he'd reached the trees, his whole body was on fire and his legs felt ready to buckle beneath him. But his brain refused to allow the body to give in. He kept plunging on and on, stumbling every few steps under the weight he carried, but somehow managing to keep on his feet.

It seemed like a century before he finally reeled out onto the flat strip where he had landed his Fokker. Dawn was already blossoming in the east, and the sounds of shouting and shooting behind him told him that his trick had been discovered and the Germans were after him in hot pursuit.

Staggering the last few steps to the plane, he flung the semi-conscious Smith across the cowling in front of the cockpit, then raced around front and swung the prop onto compression. Ten seconds later the engine caught as he spun the booster magneto handle. The motor roared into life, and at that exact instant, grey-green clad figures charged out onto the field. Lugers cracked. A metal bee stung him in the left shoulder and it went numb for the moment. Teeth clenched, he rammed open the throttle and shoved the stick forward, then forced his left arm up and worked his hand under Smith's tunic belt.

The firing behind him continued, but the sound was almost drowned out by the thunder of the Mercedes as the Fokker virtually leaped forward. The trees bordering the far end of the field rushed toward Biff at express train speed and loomed up before his spinning prop. To the very last split second he held the Fokker's wheels on the ground. Then he hauled back on the stick, braced himself,

and breathed a fast, fervent prayer.

Once the ship staggered as the landing gear brushed through the tips of the top-most branches. It seemed as though it were going to whirl over on one wing, but its zooming speed carried it on through and into clear air.

Not wasting a second more than necessary for altitude, Biff leveled off, banked west in the pale light, and shot a quick glance back over his shoulder. Three planes were already racing across von Taub's field in a wild take-off. Biff turned front, grinned tightly.

"Not bad for a Hun, von Taub," he grunted. "But this rat is going back into his trap."

Forty minutes later, with the nearest of the pursuing Germans still a good mile behind, Biff roared down onto Wing field and taxied tail up to the line. Grease-balls skidded to a halt and stared dumfounded as Biff egged out and hauled the moaning Smith down off the cowling. As though they were seeing a ghost, the mechanics faded back as Biff hauled his prisoner by his tunic collar across the tarmac and in through the door of the Wing colonel's office. Both the Colonel and Blake jumped a foot as Biff barged in and flung his charge down at the colonel's feet.

"Miller!" Braddock roared after the first shock. "What the devil are—?"

"Shut up!" Biff barked. "Here's a

bit of testimony you didn't hear at the trial. You'll hear it now!"

Grabbing Smith, Biff yanked him to his feet. Holding him at arm's length, he coolly rasped the knuckles of his fist back and forth across the spy's face until the man howled with pain.

"Now—*talk!*" Biff grated. "Tell the Colonel your story, or I'll keep this up all day—and love it!"

The spy stiffened and closed his lips tight. Biff raised his fist and moved it back for another swipe. Smith cringed.

"*Gott—no!*" he choked. "I will talk!"

The information pouring from his lips, he told of dropping word to von Taub, while on patrol, of his plan. He told of making the phone call to get Biff out of the way, and of his call to the Adjutant. And he told of how von Taub's brood was waiting behind the clouds; of how he, Smith, had shot his own C. O. as Rollins zoomed to meet the German attack. When he had finished he seemed to wilt like a seared leaf. Nothing disturbed the silence of the room, then Biff made a sobbing sound in his throat.

"And this is for Rollins!" he choked.

Swinging the spy around, Biff let go of him and then hit him a terrific smash in the face. The man's feet left the floor as he went backwards and hit the desk. He flew across it and plowed into Colonel Braddock and the two of them went down in a heap. Without a backward glance,



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Biff turned on his heel and went outside. As soon as he hit the air his strength seemed to leave him. His wounded shoulder burned as though it was on fire. Weak, heartsick with the thought that nothing he could ever do would bring back Major Rollins, he leaned against the side of the Wing office and relaxed wearily. Blake came out and found him there.

"Boy, how the Colonel went down!" he chuckled. "That's what I call nailing a guy by remote control. Will this make a story for the folks back home to read! Braddock's through, now. But, Biff—how the hell did you figure it was Smith who got the Major?"

"It had to be," Biff muttered, and pulled the two bullets from his pocket. "I knew that he was too good for even a lucky burst to get him. That left Smith, a fledgling who'd just joined us. Rollins' crash would tell me for sure—or I hoped it would. It did. I dug this bullet out of his headrest. See, it isn't like this lucky

one I've carried for months. No, the souvenir is a Spandau bullet. The one that I dug out is a *Vickers* bullet! I knew damn well, then, that Smith had shot the C. O. in the back."

"Well, I'll be damned!"

Biff looked up and saw the guardroom sergeant standing at his elbow. The non-com's face was lighted up like an Xmas tree. Biff swallowed.

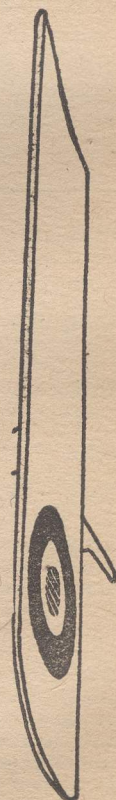
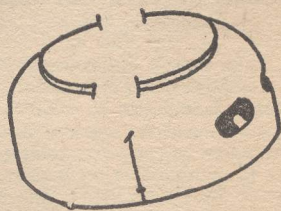
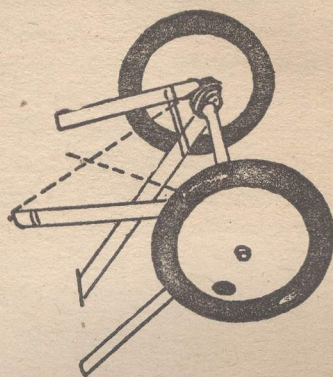
"I'm sorry, Sergeant," he said. "I guess I owe you more than just an apology, but—"

"Sorry?" the non-com grinned, and pulled a tooth from his pocket. "You knocked this clean out with that wallop, Skipper. Yeah, and I guess maybe I sort of helped you after all, didn't I? Sure, and I lost this fang doing it. Boy, after sort of helping you to do what you did, I wouldn't swap this tooth for the Congressional Medal. *Sorry?* Hell, if you could write that small I'd ask you to autograph it, no fooling!"

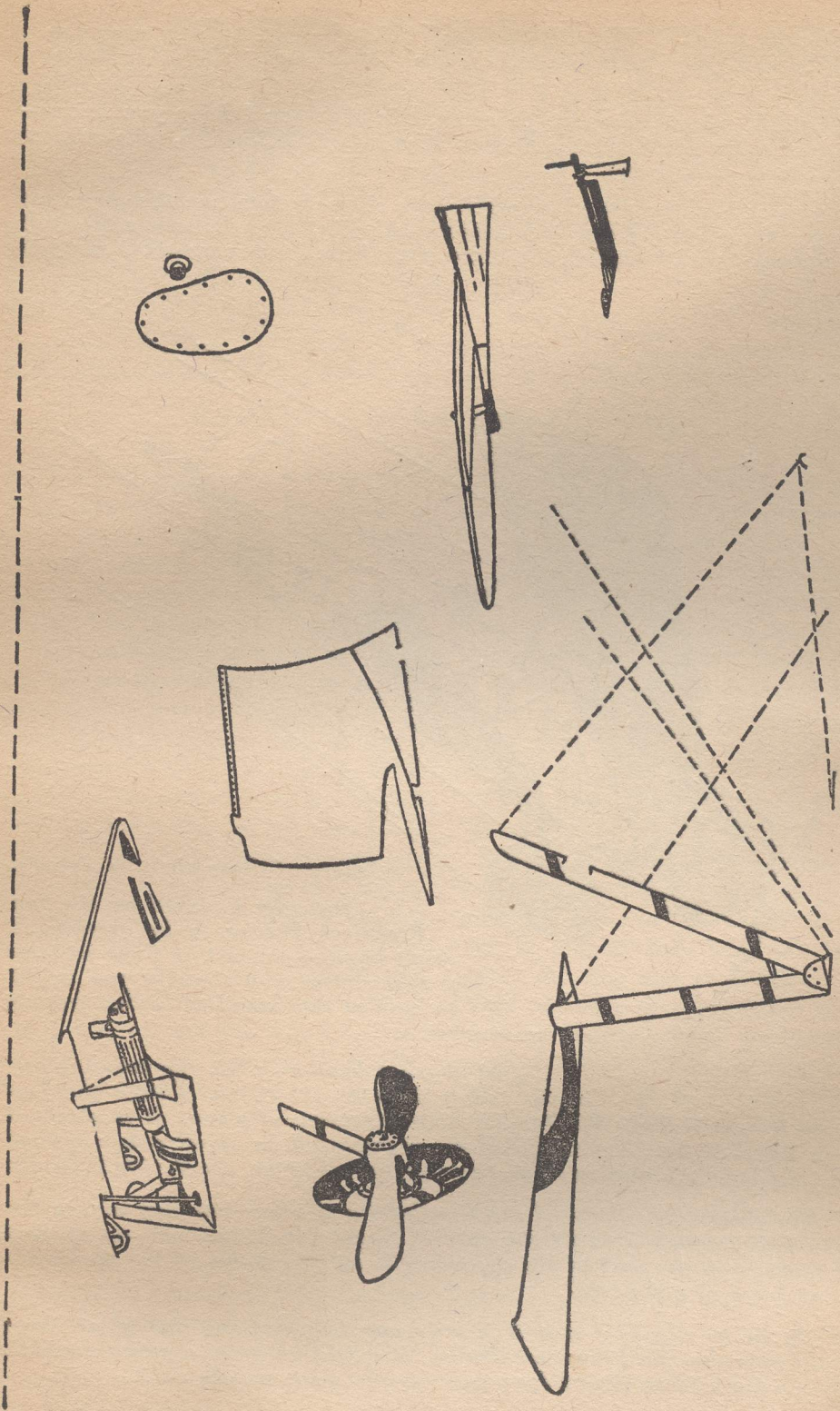
THE END

Statement of ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Act of Congress of March 3, 1933, of *Dare-Devil Aces*, published monthly at Chicago, Illinois, for October 1, 1937. State of New York, county of New York, ss. Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Harold S. Goldsmith, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the *Dare-Devil Aces* and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Popular Publications, Inc., 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. Editor, Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. Managing Editor, none. Business Manager, Harold S. Goldsmith, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. 2. That the owner is: Popular Publications, Inc., 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y., Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y., Harold S. Goldsmith, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: none. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner, and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest, direct or indirect, in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. Harold S. Goldsmith, Business Manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 11th day of October, 1937. Eva M. Walker, Notary Public, New York County Clerk's No. 288, Register's No. 8W329. (My commission expires March 30, 1938.) [Seal]—Form 3526—Ed. 1933.

"ASEMBLIT" N°8



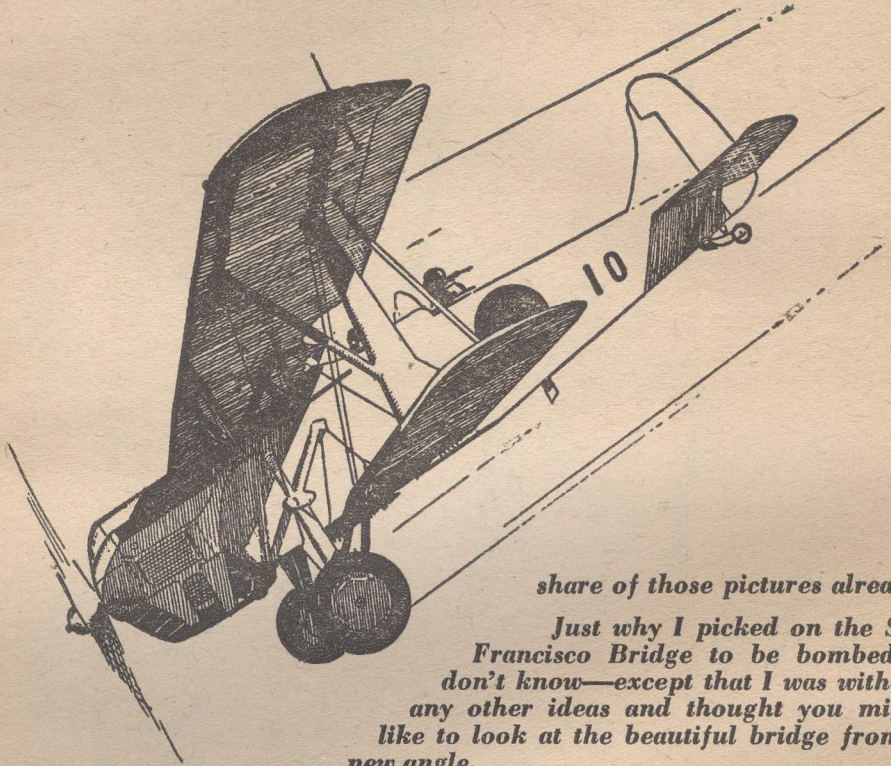
A N°8



Story Behind the Cover

WELL, friends, here we go again, this time—as I hope you know—over the San Francisco Bridge. If you don't believe me, take another look at the cover.

Even as I am writing these words, the ships depicted on the cover are blasting the cities of China into a shambled ruin. I might have staged my cover scene over Shanghai, but I guess we have seen more than our full



share of those pictures already.

Just why I picked on the San Francisco Bridge to be bombed, I don't know—except that I was without any other ideas and thought you might like to look at the beautiful bridge from a new angle.

Just above, I have a sketch representing one of the yellow ships on the cover. This is the Japanese Kawasaki Type 93 Bomber-Reconnaissance Biplane. It is powered by a 600/700 h.p. Kawasaki-B.M.W. engine, and its speed hangs around 160 m.p.h. The opposing ships, as you very well know, are Boeing P-26 A's.

The destructive force of the Kawasaki and other late day planes has been well demonstrated by the current tragedy in China, and no amount of courage on the part of the defenders is able to make up for the devastating force of a sky-raid.

Let us be thankful that it is only our imaginations that place these crates over the San Francisco Bridge. It would be quite a mess, wouldn't it? We don't mean the bridge; we mean the poor people on it.

But don't lose any sleep over it, pals. The Kawasakis are too busy at the moment to bother us. And we also have an idea that if they did—they wouldn't have such a picnic! Best regards to you . . . Fred Blakeslee.



Conducted by Nosedive Ginsburg

NO DOUBT all you squirts are overcome with joy at the return of your Commander to the Hangar, and are bouncing up and down like pigeons with ants. Well, friends, I had a pleasant trip, and just why I must return to this bellowing madhouse is a case I'll take up with the authorities of the nearest asylum for the care of the hollow hats.

But it was a pleasant trip. I have a friend named Danny the Dog, so called because he was once a barker at a County Fair I worked in the long ago when Ginsburg the chute-jumper was as famous as Henry Ford the puddle-jumper. That, by the way, is the reason for Henry wearing his pants so high.

Anyhow, Danny the Dog has an old Curtiss Robin that has done more flying than Lindbergh and the Angel Gabriel, and like the Angel Gabriel, Danny the Dog has quite a horn, which he seldom blows but merely wipes on his sleeve.

So when your commander walked out of the hangar, with his other pair of pants and his lunch all wrapped in his vacation valise, Danny the Dog wrinkles his long snout and says, "I smell a rat."

Immediately I knocked Danny the Dog flat on his back, but I could see in his eyes that I had made a mistake. I shouldn't be so damn sensitive! He was only referring to Joe Hawkins who had stowed away in the fuselage. After I smote Joe once across the ears with the ball bat and

had given him to Louie the Lush to gnaw on, Danny the Dog and your Commander were off for high adventure.

Your Commander, ever watchful of his duty and the furtherance of human happiness, slept peacefully while Danny the Dog winged the Robin over the flat lands of Mexico. I was gently awakened when Danny said soothingly, "Get the grease out of your eyes, you gorilla; we have spotted the enemy."

"You are mistaken, friend," I said. "They have spotted us."

And indeed they must have, for already a variety of strictly Mexican objects, such as *tamales*, and whatever the hell else they raise in Mexico, were hurtling towards Danny the Dog and your Commander. When one ripe bit of vegetable landed flush and juicily among the Ginsburg features, I knew for certain that *Senor* Lefty Gomez of the New York Yankees had returned to his homeland.

Danny the Dog wrenched the Robin into a steep spiral, and Ginsburg fastened his eyes on the small shack with barred windows that happened to be the village jail. In that little clink, I knew, was no less a character than my old man, Commodore Ginsburg who had only tried to befriend the poor peasants, then got molasses in his beard for all his honest labor.

The Commodore had been arrested because he had brought great peace to the

Mexican Jumping Bean. What the old boy thought was this: How the hell could the starving Mexicans eat if the beans kept jumping all the time? Therefore he had mixed a measure of sleeping powder with each acre of soil and the result was that the Mexican Jumping Beans had no more vitality than door knobs. It seems that the Mexicans didn't want to eat the damn things after all, and their first action was to throw the Commodore into the hatch.

When the Robin nosed out of its dive, your Commander let loose a light Cooper bomb which put something of a crease in the jail house and parted the warden's hair. The resulting fire caught onto my old man's beard, but the molasses already there kept the flames from spreading.

Ginsburg, the chute-jumper, jumped, but stopped in mid-air. A stout rope ran from my back to the undercarriage and kept me well suspended. My old man, the Commodore, although he is 87 years old his next birthday, leaped sixteen feet into the air to grab my boots. The boots came off and the Commodore landed back in the fire. The fire touched him eagerly in the trousers and the Commodore made another leap, this time reaching an altitude of twenty-five feet and grabbing your Commander by the corns.

Danny, the Dog, with the aid of a hand-crank, brought us swiftly over the cowl, and all of a sudden, louder than the roar of the Robin's laboring motor, were the cheers of the populace.

"Why does the enemy cheer," I asked the old man.

"They are happy to be rid of your venerable father," the Commodore said sadly. "They claim that I stunk up the jail."

Strange things have come to pass in the absence of Ginsburg—long sinister hands have reached for power with a bloody greed.

Perhaps the blackest and most ambitious treachery has been committed in the fair

community of Brooklyn, New York, under the command of a mad monkey by the name of James A. Cook, known as the C. O. of THE BLACK BATS.

These squirts, like the Aeronca Aces and other vicious organizations, have their own stationery; state commanders, propaganda machine, and something wrong with their heads. Their promises and threats might easily fill all of the Navy's balloons with Hot Air, and it is remarkable that I have been patient for so long.

My worthy assistants at the hangar tell me that the Bats have taken to the telephone, and have blasted the ears of my good men from the safety of a distant booth. There are such weird characters as Cook, himself, a dozen more crackpots known as Eagles and Chickens and Roosters and what not, plus a prize pelican known as the Human Dictionary.

The Human Dictionary just holds his breath when he picks up the phone and lets out a list of language that would tax the throat of a giraffe. He is a very strange character, this Human Dictionary, and I shall have the Lush bite a hole in him just to see what comes out.

But perhaps I should not be too harsh with the BLACK BATS. They have challenged the Aeronca Aces to an exchange of insults; have brought great abuse on the head of Dirty Dusty Dowst; displayed great interest in the great Joe Hawkins, and even taken a slam at the Lush. This shall probably lead to a general war and the eventual extermination of all the broken struts now blocking the doors of the Hangar. Therefore, to C. O. Cook, I must award a buck for distinguished service and malicious madness.

We shall now proceed towards the talent. We hear again from Michigan's most precious pigeon, Member Robert S. Day of 326 Hobart Street, S. E. in the city of Grand Rapids. Member Day drew those pretty pictures you've been looking at on the hangar wall, and not being satis-

fied to profit as an artist, Mr. Day pens the following nonsense:

Dear Stupid:

Close your ears to the senseless squallings of such muddled infant brains as Piedra, Dowst, Madison etc., and rest your greedy orbs (eyes to you, dope) on the artistically splendid drawing which I have labored on especially for my pal, Joe Hawkins. There is a man after my own heart. Anyway, is the drawing not lovely, magnificent, beautiful?

What's that? I win this month's five bucks? Well, thanks, Ginsburg, that sure 's swell of you.

See you in Sing Sing,
Robert S. Day

No Robert, you soaring sardine, you do not win the five! You win only the wrath of Ginsburg and the dollar I am forced to pay you for the very pretty Navy

planes. Too bad they weren't lousy, in which case we might have slugged you once or twice with a monkey wrench and saved our good money.

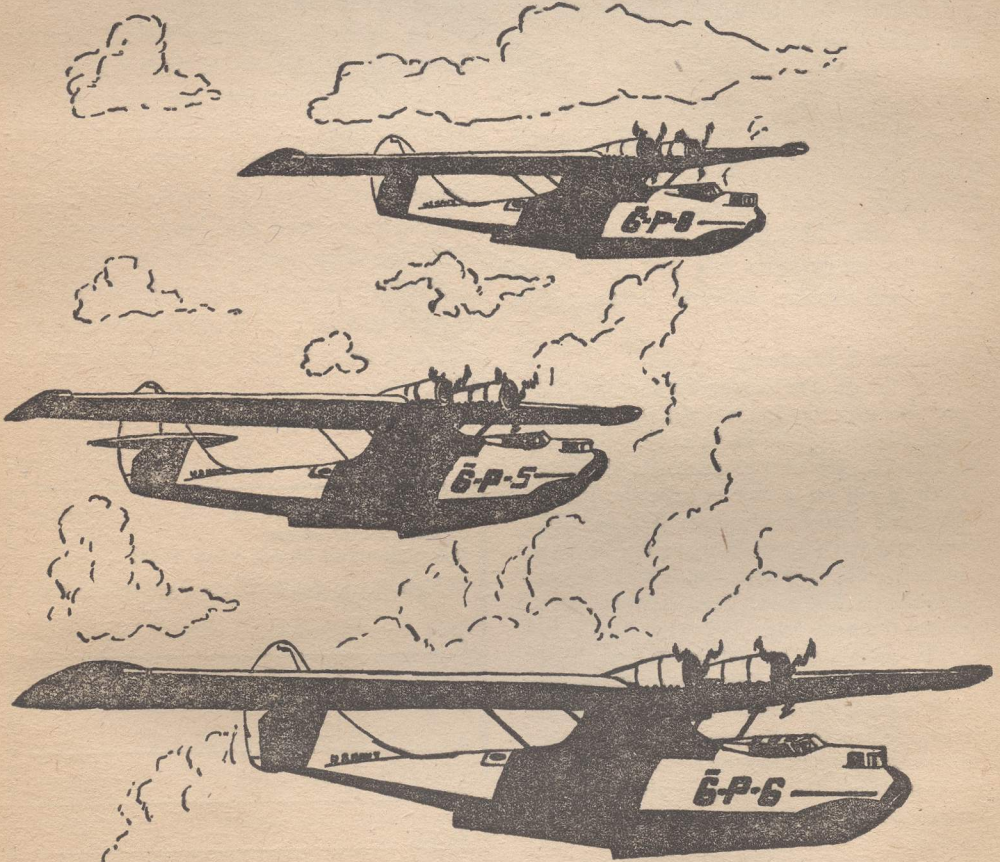
Next comes the poetic offering of Member Anthony Lenac who is concealed from the police at 820 First Street, Ottawa, Ill. It goes like this:

GOODBY GINSBURG

Ginsburg makes a lot of noise
And tries to frighten all the boys;
But underneath his flea-bit vest,
A little bird has built her nest.

Don't blame the bird, it doesn't know
That Ginsburg's heart has sunk so low;
It thinks its nest is built on wood,
Though Ginsburg's head is just as good.

A shadow falls across the sky,
But it's only the Lush that passes by;



U. S. NAVY CONSOLIDATED PB4Y-1'S

R.S. DAY

Just one more of that dirty crew
That cuffs and curses me and you.
Take my advice, you mangy gawkins,
 (Please, what is a gawkin?)
Get rid of Boyd and that sissy, Hawkins.
Poke Louie's nose; kick Piedra out;
Don't let those pansies hang about.

Just be like me, my little men,
Strong and healthy and hating them—
Piedra, Hawkins—that crummy bunch,
Who ruin these pages every month.

Well, friends, far be it from your Commander to compliment a Ground Hog like Lenac and say that his poetry is good. It isn't so good and it isn't so bad. It just goes to show you what a pack of slobs we have writing into the Hangar. Your Commander must award Member Lenac the first prize of five solid silver dollars for the outrageous drivel printed above, and frankly, I would rather be in the oat bag with Louie.

Next, dear members, we have a worthy rival for Hophead Madison in the person of a broken strut who calls himself "Deuces" Hartley. Deuces is a native of Fitchburg, Mass. at 347 Lunenburg Street. Mr. Hartley is an unemployed butterfly-chaser who fell out of a tree. The result of the accident follows. He writes:

Greetings O Ginsburg,

Say, Ginsie, I'm looking for the guy that put the edge on Louie's appetite. Why? Well I'll tell you the whole story.

The Hartley airport needed a draining ditch, so we ran a race to raise the funds. 40 planes roared around the field for 100 laps. The sun was so bright and the shadows so heavy that they wore out a ditch 6 feet deep and ten feet wide. This, of course, gave us our drainage free.

The subsoil of our airport is very hard and full of stones. This slowed down the shadows so much that the planes landed two hours before the shadows completed their rounds and crawled wearily under the planes.

You should see those poor shadows, all ragged and torn. One or two are split right across.

Now we have a contract for one of these flood control jobs, and are looking for some

crackpot to show us how to put metal edges on the shadows.

Deuces Hartley.

Maybe I'm crazy, dear members, but I think Deuces is a very funny guy, and because of that I must award him a buck with which he may buy a new shadow that can chase him around until it gets as dizzy as himself.

The last two bucks are hereby cast to the following members for distinguished nonsense and very loud noise:

Mr. Walter "Ace" Brammer of 333 Lenox Avenue, Bridgeport, Conn. can make more commotion by opening his face than the Army and Navy can by opening up their guns. He wins one dollar for his long and clever letter to your invincible Commander and everlasting friend, Ginsburg.

The other buck must befall Member George F. McIntosh of Jacman, Maine. George draws pictures, but they are very indecent, and hardly fit to adorn a department of this high type. Take the dollar, George, but hang your head. No, George—leave your head and hang yourself.

By the way, pals; whatever happened to Piedra? Haven't heard from the guy in quite a while. Will guarantee a forty-five cent reward for his capture, dead or alive.

See all you maniacs next month,
Nosedive.

THE HOT AIR CLUB January
Popular Publications,
205 East 42nd Street, New York.

Sign me up quick! I like these stories best:

1.

2.

3.

Name

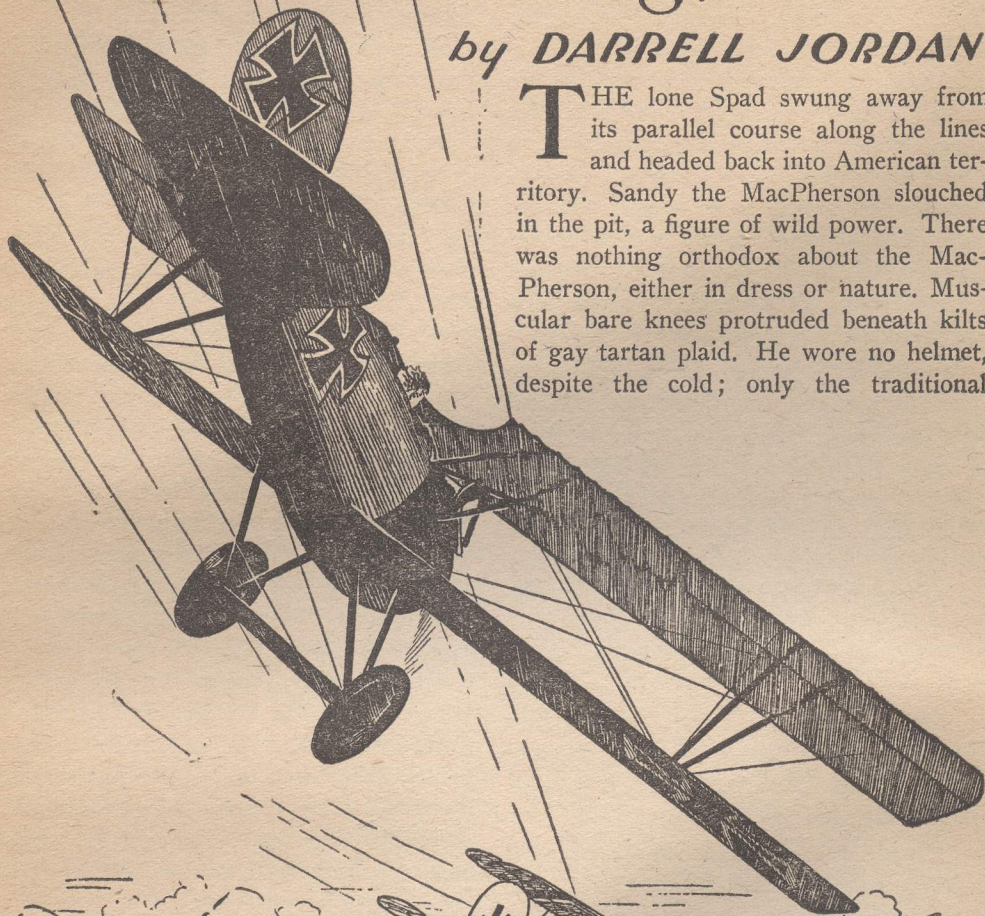
Street

City

Good Morning, Satan

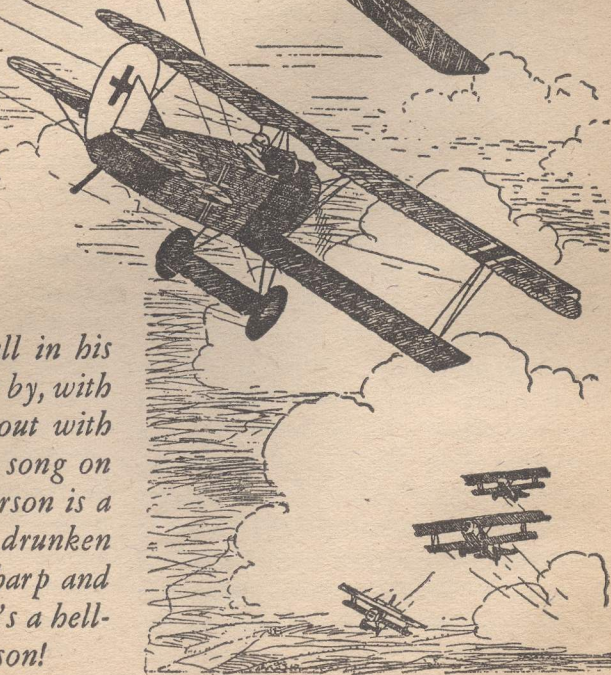
by DARRELL JORDAN

THE lone Spad swung away from its parallel course along the lines and headed back into American territory. Sandy the MacPherson slouched in the pit, a figure of wild power. There was nothing orthodox about the MacPherson, either in dress or nature. Muscular bare knees protruded beneath kilts of gay tartan plaid. He wore no helmet, despite the cold; only the traditional



Sandy's guns spoke their words of vengeance.

The Devil himself will pull in his tail when McPherson passes by, with his yellow hair stretching out with the wind and a wild battle song on his lips. For Sandy McPherson is a screwy guy, as wild as a drunken eagle. But his claws are sharp and his guns shoot straight. He's a helluva guy—this McPherson!



checked Highland cap, held firmly in place by a leather thong. Only his short leather flying jacket was regulation.

A smile of pure content rested on his broad, rough-hewn Scottish features. The hunting had been good that morning; a Fokker had gone down. Sandy, only representative of the MacPhersons in the 6th Pursuit, raised his bull voice in a wild clan ballad. If only he had his bagpipes along—losh, man, there was the only sweet music; the song of the pipes.

Something scratched faintly behind the MacPherson and Sandy stiffened. He cut the roar of the Hisso down to a soft moan. Plainly then, he heard a muffled squall. Slowly Sandy's eyes swiveled to gaze behind him. The Highland song broke off abruptly; the grin faded from his face. A torrent of burring Scottish oaths rumbled from his throat.

"You again! Ye jitterin' critter o' ill-omen!"

Back of the pit from where it had crawled, a giant black cat clung precariously to the fuselage. Again it yowled plaintively, and again Sandy swore.

"Satan, ye misgotten black divil, I'll cure ye of your likin' for flyin' if it's th' last thing I do!"

Sandy whipped the Spad into a tight loop, then to make sure, he rolled the ship viciously. He looked back and scowled. Satan was still there, all four feet sunk desperately into the fabric of the fuselage. The MacPherson jinx was still working. Sandy hated black cats above anything else, and Satan in particular. Twice before the cat had stolen rides in Sandy's ship. Again Sandy looped and a grin of satisfaction swept his face as a despairing yowl faded away below the ship. He looked down, zoomed frantically as he saw he had dropped almost to the ground. There came a brief splash of water as the unlucky Satan's plunge was checked by the muddy expanse of the Courtielle River.

"That'll settle yon black berkie!" Sandy muttered with elation.

Even though Sandy felt that one of his problems was at last solved, his thoughts swept to the second and greater one. He thought of von Donner, the German some called the Mad Major. Others called him "The Man Who Couldn't Be Killed." It was true that the Mad Major had miraculously survived death so far. That was why MacPherson felt a cold finger of dread steal up his superstitious spine. Jack Pierce of the 17th had accounted for one member of the Mad Major's staffel, and Sandy himself had downed another.

"And so th' beastie swears to wipe out both squadrons," Sandy mused. "Foosh, mon!" He shook his big shoulders savagely. "Ye're thinkin' like a pur sooperstitious Irishman! Donner can do naught to th' 6th an' 17th; the MacPhersons will flourish forever!"

Still, knowing Donner's warped talents for vengeance as he did, Sandy swung toward the 17th. He'd look in on the boys before flying back to the 6th, just to ease his mind. Ten minutes later he sent the Spad slanting down through the early morning sunshine to roll his wheels upon the 17th's grassy tarmac.

MacPherson clambered down from the pit and swaggered over to a chief mechanic, his tartan kilts swishing about his bare knees.

"It's th' mad MacPherson!" the chief sergeant muttered under his breath, instinctively ducking.

"Aweel, I thought to find the lot of ye kickin' yer last," Sandy rumbled, "since I ken th' Mad Major's swore to aneelhilate ye."

"The Mad Major's dead," the sergeant said swiftly. "Last night he come buzzin' around here, an' young Jack Pierce went up an' pinned his ears back. Yep, von Donner was shot down in flames. He burned to a crisp in his ship!"

"What?" the MacPherson roared.

"Ye're sure of that, mon? Ye ken he's th' mon who claims he can't be killed!"

The mech shrugged. "Pierce was sure it was von Donner, an' he sure burned. Say, if ye're going up to the messhall find out what's keepin' those buzzards, will you, Lieutenant? The Major's keen on havin' patrols take off on time. Our dawn flight of three crates ain't come back yet, an' the gang hasn't come out of the messhall yet. I sent a monkey up to remind 'em of the time, an' *he* ain't come back, either!"

"Th' MacPherson will take a look," Sandy promised. "'Tis likely the laddies have a wee bit of hangovers this mornin', if von Donner is dead!"

He crossed the field toward the mess building, humming a Highland battle song under his breath. With both Satan and von Donner dead the MacPherson was at peace with the world. Then, abruptly, Sandy stopped short. The mess building door was open, and across the threshold lay the body of a man. Sandy lurched into a run, a nameless dread threatening to strangle him.

He reached the door and stood petrified, peering into the interior of the big room.

"Fer th' love of Holy Loch Larnin!" breathed MacPherson.

The boys of the 17th would be late for this morning patrol—late forever. Sandy MacPherson's horrified gaze took them all in—Jack Pierce, Standish, Murphy and the rest. Fourteen pilots of the 17th had flown their last patrols—they were dead!

JACK PIERCE stood frozen against the bar, a cognac glass clutched in a death grip in his hand. His face was purplish, swollen. The others in that shambles remained in the positions in which death had claimed them, their features twisted into grimaces of agony. Death had been swift, unexpected.

Horror laid hold of the big Scot's heart,

and for a moment the shout of alarm choked in his throat. Then it came booming forth—the battle cry of the MacPhersons. Men came from the hangars, from all over the field. The squadron adjutant came loping from the Operations Office. Sandy extended a pointing arm, and the men froze behind him, sheer horror momentarily rendering them speechless.

Cautiously they entered the room, stepping over the body of the mech at the threshold. The M.O. examined first one, then another of the swollen corpses. In one corner lay the Squadron Commander, the day's flight orders gripped in his lifeless hand.

"They were all in here for their breakfasts and mornin' drinks," Sandy muttered. Despite the warmth pouring from the sheet iron stove in the center of the room the big Scot shivered. "An' somethin' struck the pair lads doon without warnin'! What was it, Doc?"

The M.O. shook his head. "If von Donner is really dead, it couldn't have been his work. Something—"

MacPherson's burring voice thundered through silence. "I'll believe that divil's dead when I see him burn with my own eyes! Mark my words, this is the work of th' Mad Major! He said he'd wipe out th' 17th an' the 6th! If he's dead, he sure took a lot of souls to hell with him!"

"I don't see—" the chief sergeant whispered. "The boys came in here an hour ago; I saw 'em myself. No one else could have got in without my seein' them. How could they have been killed? No planes . . . if it's gas, I ask you—how?"

The MacPherson barged savagely toward the door. He slammed into the Spad, sent the little fighter clawing into the cold morning sky. Cold dread held his heart in a vise-grip. If the same thing had been pulled at the 6th—

But the drome of the 6th Pursuit squadron bustled with customary life as MacPherson slammed in for the landing. He

left the ship on the line, headed for his Nissen without word to anyone. Five minutes later, weird, shrill music swelled across the field. Pilots looked at each other with startled faces.

"There's hell to pay for something," one grunted. "The MacPherson's at it with those damned bagpipes again!"

"And playing that devilish tune he always plays when there's death in the air," another pointed out.

As if drawn by a common magnet the men on the field drifted into the long mess room. Even Captain Johnson, the S.C., came in and waited. In a moment, Sandy MacPherson entered, the pipes in his arms, the music of death wailing like a banshee in his wake. The C.O. made a nervous gesture.

"For God's sake, MacPherson, stop that caterwauling and tell us what's up!"

The pipes wailed into silence, and then the MacPherson told them of the tragedy at the 17th. "Von Donner's work, ye can lay to that!" he cried. "An' we're next on th' berkie's list! By now the 17th's field is swarmin' with G-2 men—an' they'll learn nothin'. Where a MacPherson fails, no others succeed! And we're next, don't forget that!"

The others listened, faces gray. They knew MacPherson. When the Scot was worried, it was high time for all others to hunt shelter.

"Noo that I've disposed of that divilish cat, I can devote my great talents to von Donner, if he ain't dead!" MacPherson summed up.

In answer came a scratching at the door, followed by a plaintive meow. Sandy's face went ashen as someone opened the door. Satan, the cat, stalked in, bedraggled and footsore, but unmistakably alive. The cat ambled across the room, sat down before MacPherson and fixed him with a bitterly accusing eye. The Scot's bare knees shook.

"Ye black yowlin'demon, I dropped ye

a hoondred feet intee the river and ye're still alive! Ye're a devil! Ye and th' Mad Major are a pair, and no good will come to either o' ye!"

All that day, while G-2 experts shook baffled heads over the 17th's mystery, the MacPherson stalked the field, bagpipes under his arm. The skirling, high-pitched jumble of music rubbed nerves raw, but no one cared to cross the big Scot. Sandy could think with the moaning wail of the pipes in his ears, but his thoughts did him no good now. The tragedy was still a mystery as far as he was concerned when dusk closed over the Front.

Satan stalked at his heels, oblivious to MacPherson's lurid curses and futile kicks.

"If ye're huntin' another plane ride, ye're fooled!" Sandy blurted. "The next time I take ye up ye'll wind up in hell!"

Just as the rim of the sun sank beneath the horizon an orderly came running upon the field.

"Lone German ship just crossed the lines, heading this way!" he yelled. "Fokker bearing the Mad Major's personal insignia!"

"I knew th' divil wasn't dead!" MacPherson roared. "A Spad, an' make it fast! Von Donner is my meat!"

Five minutes later he was spiraling up into the cold afternoon air. At three thousand feet he leveled off, began cruising in wide circles, his eyes riveted on the sky towards the lines.

There was not long to wait. Suddenly the MacPherson's keen gaze picked up a speeding dot hurtling toward him. Grimly he swung to intercept it. The dot swiftly grew larger, until he could see a Maltese crossed Fokker. MacPherson zoomed in, his guns chattering a warning burst. The Hun turned willingly enough, darted savagely at the Scot. MacPherson caught a fair glimpse of the man at the controls and his face grew mottled with fury. It was von Donner, no doubt about

that! Bellowing the battle cry of his clan, the MacPherson flung himself into the fray.

The Fokker zoomed, and the Spad rushed in pursuit, Vickers throbbing. The burst fell short as the Mad Major suddenly whipped into a roll. MacPherson looped, came twisting down, the Spad's blunt nose searching for the target. *Tac-tac-tac!* Lead ripped past MacPherson's ears, smashed viciously through the instrument panel.

"Funny business, hey?" Sandy roared. He kicked the Spad in a skidding bank, and for a split-second the Fokker's angular belly was in his sights. The belts shuttled through the breeches, tracer hailed through the Fokker's fuselage. But the black crossed ship climbed faster, whipped over to come rushing down. MacPherson rolled aside, taking the burst through his tail surfaces. He banked vertically, snapping brief bursts through the Vickers.

Caught in a savage merry-go-round of death, the two ships wheeled and spun. Spandaus jittered defiantly in answer to the Vickers' bark.

Slowly, but with berserk certainty, the Scot forced the Mad Major lower and lower. Burst after burst pounded through the Fokker, and only the Hun's masterly flying kept the hail of lead from the cockpit.

Suddenly a great roar of triumph burst from MacPherson's throat. Von Donner's ship was keeling into a spin. Not only that, but a ribbon of scarlet flame was gnawing at one wing tip!

THE Fokker made another turn in the spin, then managed to level out. But the flames grew and spread swiftly as the Mad Major sideslipped down. MacPherson watched and waited. Even though this was von Donner, he couldn't bring himself to fire into that burning ship. The flames licked swiftly toward the pit as von Donner slanted into a small field near

the 6th's drome. The Fokker struck hard, bounced, then ground-looped wildly on one wingtip. The blazing crate came to a staggering halt as MacPherson swept over it, grimly ready to pin the Mad Major down with lead the moment he should leap from the pit.

But the huge figure didn't leave the pit! The Scot saw von Donner struggle wildly, apparently pinned in the wreckage. As the Spad circled and came back, the struggles were feebler, until the Mad Major's huge body slumped down into the roaring hell of the flames. Despite himself MacPherson shuddered. What a way to die! Yet he resolved that this time there would be no slip-up.

The field was too small for him to land, with the Fokker's wreckage blocking the way. MacPherson slanted down to the 6th's field, grabbed a car and drove wildly across country to the still smouldering Fokker. A squad of doughboys was already there as Sandy jammed on the brakes. The Scot stood a long moment staring into the embers of the fire, gazing at the charred, bony thing in the pit.

"Aweel, von Donner me laddie, if ye crawl oot of this ye're a wonder!" the MacPherson muttered. He drove slowly back to the field.

For hours that night the MacPherson's sleep was tormented by nightmares of von Donner's flaming end, with visions of black Satan turning into the Mad Major and of the pilots of the 6th dying as had the others. He was rudely awakened from those nightmares by a shadowy figure bending over his cot. MacPherson started to rear upright . . . then something wet and stifling clamped over his nose. His senses faded away in a dark blur.

He had a vague impression of being dragged, half carried, into the trees which grew near the back of his Nissen. Perhaps a half mile further on his captor halted abruptly, conversed in low voiced German with a second dark figure. Then

the chloroform fumes again did their work, and the MacPherson's last sensation was of swift flight through the night sky, with a motor bellowing deafeningly beside his ear.

When full consciousness came back to him, Sandy MacPherson found himself leaning against a cold stone wall. As his aching eyes became accustomed to the dim light of a flaring lamp, he realized that he was in a small, square room, with his hands securely bound behind him. An alert German soldier stood beside the heavy door, bayoneted Mauser on guard. A figure showed through the bars of the door, spoke a curt command. The guard produced a key, unlocked the door and the second man entered.

As the newcomer stepped into the circle of light cast by the lamp the MacPherson gasped in stunned amazement. Von Donner! The Mad Major, alive and uninjured!

The huge German, fully as big as MacPherson, stepped closer, a guttural laugh rasping in his throat. The lamp light picked out clearly enough the pitiless cast of features, the heavy, brutal jaw, the greenish eyes and leonine mass of blonde hair.

"So, my crazy Scotchman, you are surprised that von Donner still lives?" the German laughed again, and in the sound was something infinitely more threatening than any amount of raving and cursing.

"You thought I burned to a crisp in my plane! You fool, don't you realize that I set fire to my ship purposely, knowing that I had time enough to land? Simple enough to leave a skeleton in the pit to fool you Yankees!"

"I'd have suspected that, if I hadn't seen you still in the plane when th' flames finished the job," MacPherson said coolly. "But I still can't ken ye're purpose."

"Two very good reasons," von Donner said savagely. "First, I've established a

reputation for bearing a charmed life. Your pilots already fear me because they think I'm the man who can't be killed! Second, my apparent death left me free and unhunted to arrange a little surprise for your squadron, similar to what happened to the 17th! Even if you were free to return to your squadron, you could not possibly stave off the fate that the dawn will bring them! Soon after dawn your *verdammnt* 6th Squadron will be taught their lesson. But for you I have planned something more satisfactory. I went to considerable risk and trouble to kidnap you from your quarters and bring you back here. As soon as it is light you will be placed in a ship and allowed to take off. I will follow, first having had certain adjustments made to your motor which will slow it down enough to make your escape impossible. Then we will fight you and I, and I think I will win, for your guns shall be loaded with blanks!"

"Tis a verra nice, murderous scheme," MacPherson snorted. "Weel I onderstand thot no dirrty Hun could stand up to a MacPherson in fair fight!"

Von Donner casually slapped MacPherson's face, once, twice, three times; and laughed at the same time. "Insults are cheap, *mein kilted freund!* You can amuse yourself until morning by thinking about what is going to happen to your friends!"

As he left the room, the Mad Major turned to the sentry. "Stay in here with him, and if he gives any trouble put a bullet through an arm or leg. But he must be alive at dawn!"

The guard nodded, carefully re-locked the door, fastened his gaze warily on the Scot. A dozen wild thoughts were coursing through the MacPherson brain. How had the Mad Major survived those flames? The thing seemed impossible, for Sandy was positive that von Donner had still been in the pit when the fire had rolled over it. No human being could stand that unless—but there were some

substances that were impervious to heat! Suppose von Donner had been wearing an asbestos suit! MacPherson nodded excitedly, sure that he had the solution. Such a suit would have protected the German until he had an opportunity to slip from the pit and substitute the skeleton. That, then, was the explanation of the Mad Major's charmed life!

Obviously, a plane had crossed the lines later by prearrangement, landed nearby, and picked up von Donner and his helpless prisoner. MacPherson began a mighty straining against his bonds. Unless he could get back to the 6th in time—

He felt that in time the ropes would yield to the constant assault. But even then there was an alert, armed guard between him and the door.

HE PAUSED a moment, noticing the small window beside his head. By twisting into a painful position he could look across a small expanse of grass to a lighted building perhaps fifty yards distant. A figure crossed the window MacPherson was watching, and he recognized the bulky form of the Mad Major. The German was bent over a bench littered with test tubes, bottles and jars of chemicals. Suddenly MacPherson stiffened into incredulous attention.

A sinuous black shape had suddenly appeared at one of the windows lining the bench at which the Mad Major worked. The cat poised there a moment, then leaped lightly to the bench. Von Donner glanced up, saw the cat, struck out at it peevishly. The cat leaped backward so suddenly that several of the jars were toppled over. The cat squalled dismally, then leaped for the door, pursued by the Mad Major's savage kick.

MacPherson cursed, went back to his painful straining at the ropes. Faint light would appear in the east in less than two hours; in that time he had to free himself, somehow the seemingly impossible

task of over-powering the guard, and carry the warning back to the 6th.

A sudden sound behind him made the Scot turn. Perched on the window sill was the sleek black form of Satan!

"*Thot was the black divil in von Donner's quarters,*" MacPherson thought swiftly. "*The gillie had to have his ride, an' followed von Donner an' me, stowed away in the plane. Aweel, ye black-hearted imp o' hell, this is one ride thot'll be yere last!*"

Satan, forgiving soul, rubbed archly against MacPherson's cheek, then dropped lightly to the floor. The guard failed to note the new visitor until Satan began sniffing the man's feet curiously. Then the German glanced down, saw the cat, and spluttered a string of guttural oaths. He lashed out with a heavy boot, catching Satan a glancing blow that knocked him into the corner. Then, with more courage than wisdom, the sentry bent to pick the cat up, with the intention of throwing him out the door.

Perhaps Satan sensed the Hun's hatred of black cats, perhaps it was this crowning act of indignity that aroused his ire.

At any rate, as the guard's hand came within reach, Satan suddenly launched himself upon it, a clawing, spitting, demon of fury. The Hun drew back his hand with a savage curse, staring stupidly at long, parallel scratches from which the blood began to flow freely.

"*Good fer ye, ye black-hearted wretch!*" the MacPherson applauded eagerly. "*Go git him, ye green-eyed divil! Though it looks like this is yer last battle!*"

The sentry, past his first startled anger, started to lift his heavy gun butt. Then, abruptly, he froze in his tracks. A sharp gasp of awe came from the bulging-eyed MacPherson. The German sagged, his hands released the Mauser. An expression of sheer horror crossed the Hun's heavy face. His hands shot to his throat, clutched it while faint croaking noises is-

sued from his mouth. Then, to the prisoner's utter amaze, the guard slid to the floor with a thud.

MacPherson, his wild Highland heart full of sudden hope, strained fiercely on the ropes, felt them give and loosen. Satan sniffed curiously at the inert guard, then came inquiringly over to MacPherson. At the same moment the weakened cords gave way and MacPherson was free!

The Scot stared at the German, saw that the soldier was undoubtedly dead. "Thot domned cat!" he muttered in awe. "He must have got his claws in poison when he tipped over the stuff on von Donner's work bench!"

Yielding to a sudden impulse born of wild hope, the MacPherson reached gingerly for Satan. . . .

A few minutes later MacPherson had located the key on the guard's body, unlocked the door and stepped outside. His heart sank as he flung a glance down the field. Not a chance in a hundred of stealing a ship; the hangars were padlocked shut, and alert guards patrolled before them. Impossible too, to hope to re-cross the lines before dawn on foot. Then he

remembered the Mad Major's plan for the morning, and a grim smile crossed the Scot's hard face. At dawn he'd be handed a plane!

MacPherson stepped behind his late prison. While it would be suicide to attempt to approach the hangars, there was nothing to prevent his doing a bit of prowling on the other side of the buildings.

A half hour later, after twice narrowly escaping detection, he was back inside his prison cell. His next move was to drag the guard to a sitting position and restore the key to his pocket. After considerable maneuvering he managed to drape the rope convincingly about his hands.

Gray light was flooding the tarmac before he finished. He had barely completed his arrangements when he saw the burly figure of von Donner loom outside. The Mad Major roared angrily at the dead guard, and failing to get an answer, disappeared. He was back a few moments later with a second key, unlocked the door and entered. He swore hoarsely as his practiced eyes discovered the soldier's death.

(Continued on page 106)

The Buzzard Battalion

Last month in these pages we inaugurated the Buzzard Battalion, a tribute to Aviation—to those heroes of the past and present and to those flyers of the future who have yet to try their wings. The response has been so strong that we know there are still many of you who would wish to enroll.

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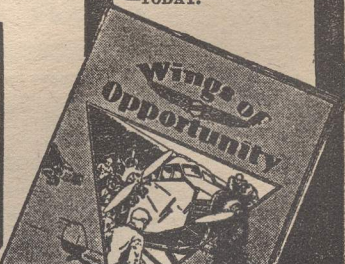
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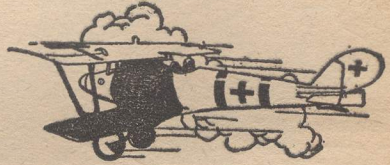
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(Continued from page 104)

All the while MacPherson had been pretending to strain furiously at his ropes. Just as the German wheeled on him, Luger leveled, the Scot let the ropes fall.

"By Gott, it seems I arrived just in time!" von Donner snarled. "What happened to the guards?"

MacPherson, realizing that it meant life or death to him now to make the Hun believe he had just broken the ropes, gave a truthful account of the sentry's death. The Mad Major examined the scratches on the man's hands, then nodded.

"Ja, that is the only explanation. It doesn't matter; he was only a common soldier. What does matter is the fact that you are still my prisoner, and that I shall be able to go ahead with the sport I have planned. On your feet, *schwein!*"

Prodded by the Major's ready automatic, MacPherson plodded across the field to the hangars. An old Albatross was already, and beside it stood von Donner's Fokker. Further down the line other ships were receiving last minute adjustments.

"Blank ammo or not," MacPherson said loudly, "a true clansman is a better mon than a slinkin' Hun, ony day o' th' week!"

"Our men in the trenches call you Scotchmen the 'Ladies from Hell,'" the Major retorted venomously. "I shall have the satisfaction of sending one of you to hell, at least! And just to make your last moments memorable, I shall show you the simple means I used to seal the doom of your squadron mates!"

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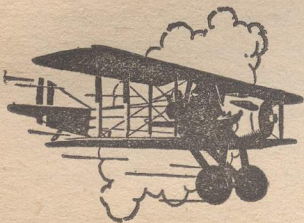
From his pocket von Donner pulled several pieces of black substance resembling fragments of stove coal.

"You see?" the Major asked. "Just this, nothing more. As to what this is and how it was used, I will leave it to your last few minutes of life to figure out. And now, Yankee, you are free to escape—if you can!"

With the words the Mad Major stepped into his own ship, and MacPherson slammed the Albatross' throttle open. The little single-seater zoomed off the field into the cold gray mist of nearing dawn. Behind came von Donner, hungry for the kill.

GINGERLY the big Highlander tested the controls. Except for the fact that the motor had been tampered with until the ship was not capable of top speed, he could find nothing wrong. Steadily the two ships climbed until von Donner flung up one hand in ironic signal, then whirled to attack. MacPherson smiled grimly at the belts of blanks in the Spandaus.

"What a bonnie surprise ye're goin' tae get, ye murderin' Boche!" he growled. Sandy MacPherson reached inside his coat, and drew forth the two belts of loaded Spandau cartridges he had stolen from a storeroom two hours earlier. With a few deft movements he released the blank belts and inserted the loaded ones. Then, with a wild Highland war song roaring from his lips, the MacPherson whirled on the foe.



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The Mad Major came zooming in, his brutal features twisted in killer's lust as he crouched behind his guns. The German fired, deliberately avoiding the pit with his first burst.

"So ye want to play!" MacPherson rumbled. "Aweel, th' MacPherson clan is na' in a playful mood this morning!"

MacPherson believed in giving even a rat a chance for his life, so now he touched the trips and sent a gust of lead slamming through the Fokker's wing. He saw von Donner stare at the ragged gashes in the fabric, then turn a white face around. Frantically the Hun fired a signal flare overside. MacPherson swore fervently as he saw a half dozen Fokkers sweep forward across the field below.

Eyes narrowed to slits, MacPherson slammed his ancient ship around and down. The Hun wheeled desperately, his guns weaving a smoky web of death across the gray sky. The ships below came winging upward in great spirals as the Scot closed in.

Again and again the guns on the cowl-ling leaped and throbbed. The Mad Major, turning and twisting with the cornered ferocity of a rat, fought with panicky desperation. But under MacPherson's inspired touch the old Albatross obeyed his will like a spirited thoroughbred. Then, all in a split-second, the kilted battler saw the chance he had awaited. He spun the Albatross like a flash, the Spandaus roared out.

Good Morning, Satan

A snaky stream of tracer slashed the sky, transfixed von Donner in his seat. The Hun half rose, clenched fists jerking at the pitiless heavens. Then he slumped down, his body still jerking under the impact of the steel-jacketed slugs that the Scot continued to pour in.

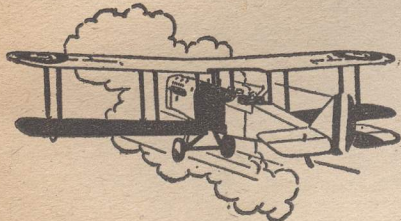
"I'm takin' nae chances o' yer playin' dead this time!" Mac yelled. Then he watched grimly as the Fokker went spinning down. "Try yer asbestos suit in hell, Major! I misdoot an' it'll do ye much good!"

With that last grim jest on his lips MacPherson whirled to face the charging phalanx of climbing Huns. No chance to run for it in this out-dated ship—the wild clan yell came pealing from his throat as he crouched behind his guns with their pitifully scant remnant of ammo.

Waiting, then, stoically for the finish, an ear-numbing roar swept down upon the MacPherson from above. Calmly he looked up, saw fifteen ships of the 6th Squadron helling down from the cloud bank overhead!

"Long shall th' MacPhersons flourish!" bellowed Sandy, ruddering aside out of the way.

That fight was brief and bloody. Surprised and dismayed, the Mad Major's staffel ships were beaten down into the ground. A few escaped . . . most of them ended in flaming ruin on their own field. A half hour later, just as the first rim of



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Dare-Devil Aces

the sun peered over the horizon, thirteen Spads and a lone Albatross landed back at the 6th.

Those black objects von Donner had shown him—MacPherson's brain raced furiously. They looked like coal—coal . . . the stove in the mess room. . . A sudden thought struck the big Highlander. He raced toward the building with Captain Johnson and the others following wonderingly. The mess orderly had kindled a fire with scraps of wood and was about to dump a bucket of coal in the stove when MacPherson's bellowing voice stopped him.

"Coal . . . coal," the MacPherson muttered, diving for the coal scuttle. He began fishing chunks of the black fuel out on the floor while the officers of the 6th watched in bewilderment. Suddenly the Scot uttered a cry of triumph. He straightened, holding out to the squadron M.O. several pieces of the same substance von Donner had shown him.

"Can ye tell us what this is, Doc?" he demanded.

The M.O. glanced at the stuff idly. "Why, coal—" Abruptly he hesitated. The stuff had broken in his hands, disclosing a white inner surface. Suddenly, after feeling and examining the black-coated object, the M.O. dropped it hastily.

"My God! That stuff's mercuric cyanide! It's a solid that, under heat, gives off cyanogen gas; odorless, colorless, and the most deadly known! One whiff will kill a man instantly!"

MacPherson nodded. "After escaping

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Good Morning, Satan

from his burned plane, the Mad Major had only to sneak up here after dark and drop a few pieces of that stuff he'd colored black into the coal scuttle outside the kitchen door. After that mercuric cyanide got well heated in the stove, it'd give out enough deadly fumes to kill every man in the room! Ay, that's what happened to the boys o' th' 17th. By th' time they died, von Donner had been picked up and was back in Germany!"

He glanced down as something rubbed against his leg. Satan, stained and travel-worn, stared back unblinkingly.

"Yeah," Captain Johnson grinned, "Satan showed up here with that message you tied around his neck. That's why we showed up in time to save your neck from those Fokkers. I think you've misjudged Satan, MacPherson!"

"Ay, an' I have," the Scot muttered. "Come hither, ye puir misoonderstood laddie. A MacPherson never fergits."

"Laddie?" laughed Johnson. "Satan has just presented us with four little imps. It happened out in your Spad!"

"Verra weel," said the MacPherson. "Come along, lassie, 'til I fetch my bagpipes. Then we'll give th' kittens some real, grrrand Highland music!"

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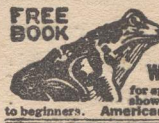
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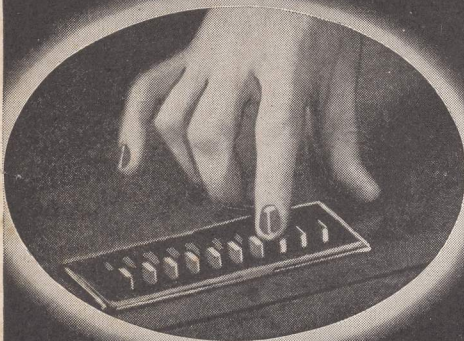
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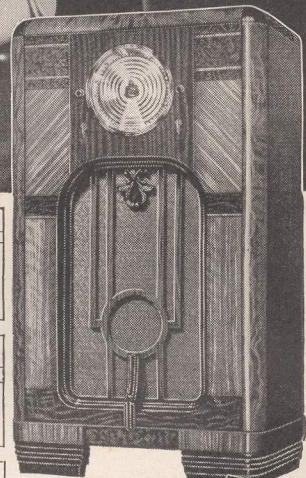
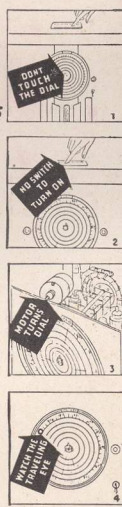
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