

10¢ **OSKY** **FIGHTERS**



DEC.

ORDERS FOR AN ACE

By

GEORGE BRUCE

SOFT THUNDER

By

FREDERICK PAINTON

Also

**BOWEN
JAMES
OTHERS**



51 MILES ON A GALLON OF GAS WINS ECONOMY CONTEST

49 MILES Takes 2nd Place

Winning Cars Equipped With **WHIRLWIND GAS SAVERS**

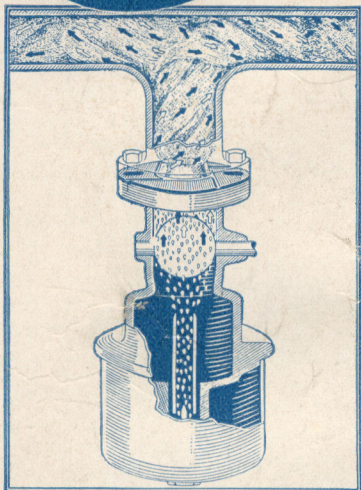
Automobile owners who have been worrying about gasoline expense will be interested in an amazing test recently conducted by a Texas Motor Car Company. Twenty-three cars were entered in a mileage economy test, the winning car running 51 miles on a gallon of gas; the second car 49 miles on a gallon. When the official records of this test were published it was discovered the two winning cars were both equipped with Whirlwind gas savers.

"Peak" Contest Mileages

The amazing results obtained in this mileage contest are naturally greater than those obtained in ordinary driving. Careful throttling, most economical speeds—no traffic hold-ups—and no waste of power thru quick stops, help to bring about these "peak" mileages.

A Test On Your Car

More power, faster pick-up, less carbon, quick starting, and increased mileage is what users say in telling of their experience with the Whirlwind. Every motorist owes it to himself to test the Whirlwind to prove the results on his own car.



How The Whirlwind Saves Gas

The principle of the Whirlwind is to slightly compress the partly vaporized gasoline as it passes thru the raised venturi. Extra air enters from four air inlets at such a tangent as to pick up the gasoline and whirl it into action. The turbulence created picks up the unvaporized particles, breaking them into a well vaporized power and cutting gasoline waste and carbon formation.

Fits All Cars

In just a few minutes the Whirlwind can be installed on any make of car, truck or tractor. It's actually less work than changing your oil or putting water in the battery. No drilling, tapping or changes of any kind necessary. It is guaranteed to work perfectly on any make of car, truck or tractor, large or small, new model or old model. The more you drive the more you save.

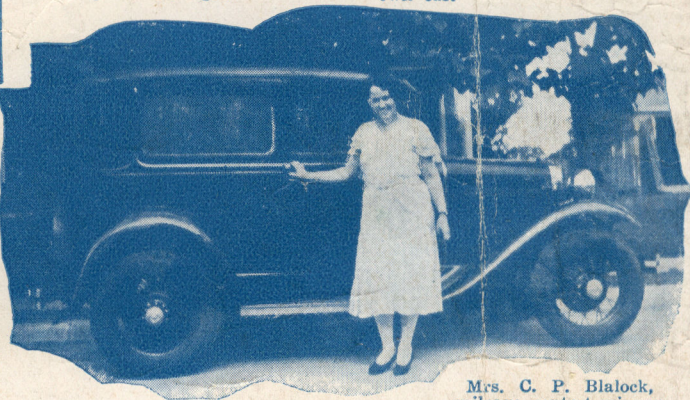
Salesmen and Distributors Wanted To Make Up To \$100.00 A Week and More

Whirlwind men are making big profits supplying this fast-selling device that car owners cannot afford to be without. Good territory is still open. Free sample offer to workers. Full particulars sent on request. Just check the coupon.

WHIRLWIND MFG. COMPANY

Dept. 906-A, Station C

Milwaukee, Wis.



Mrs. C. P. Blalock,
mileage contest winner

GUARANTEE

No matter what kind of a car you have or how big a gas eater it is the Whirlwind will save you money. While we do not claim to produce 49 to 51 miles on your car, we do guarantee that the Whirlwind will save its cost within 30 days or the trial will cost you nothing. We invite you to test it at our risk. You are to be the sole judge.

FREE OFFER COUPON

WHIRLWIND MANUFACTURING CO.,
Dept. 906-A, Station C, Milwaukee, Wis.

Gentlemen: You may send me full particulars of your Whirlwind Carbureting device and tell me how I can get one Free. This does not obligate me in any way whatever.

Name
Address
City
County State
☐ Check here if you are interested in full or part time salesmen position.

OPPORTUNITIES

are many

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

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

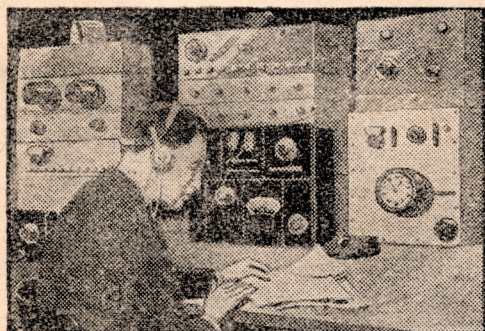
Ten Weeks of Shop Training At Coyne in Chicago

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

TELEVISION *and* TALKING PICTURES

And Television is already here! Soon there'll be a demand for THOUSANDS of TELEVISION EXPERTS! The man who learns Television now can have a great future in this great new field. Get in on the ground-floor of this amazing new Radio development! Come to COYNE and learn Television on the very latest, newest Television equipment.

Talking Picture and Public Address Systems offer opportunities to the Trained Radio Man. Here is a great new Radio field just beginning to grow! Prepare NOW for these wonderful opportunities! Learn Radio Sound Work at COYNE on actual TALKING PICTURE and SOUND REPRODUCTION equipment.



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You get Free Employment Service for Life. And don't let lack of money stop you. Many of our students make all or a good part of their living expenses while going to school and if you should need this help just write to me. Coyne is 32 years old! Coyne Training is tested—proven beyond all doubt. You can find out everything absolutely free. Just mail coupon for my Big Free Book.

H. C. LEWIS, Pres. RADIO DIVISION Founded 1899
COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
500 S. Paulina St., Dept. 92-3K, Chicago, Ill.

All Practical Work at Coyne

ALL ACTUAL, PRACTICAL WORK. You build radio sets, install and service them. You actually operate great Broadcasting equipment. You construct Television Receiving Sets and actually transmit your own Television programs over our modern Television equipment. You work on real Talking Picture machines and Sound equipment. You learn Wireless Operating on actual Code Practice apparatus. We don't waste time on useless theory. We give you the practical training you'll need—in 10 short, pleasant weeks.

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H. C. LEWIS, President
Radio Division, Coyne Electrical School
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Dear Mr. Lewis:

Send me your Big Free Radio Book, and all details of your Special Offer.

Name

Address

City.....State.....

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Complete Home Gym in One Outfit..

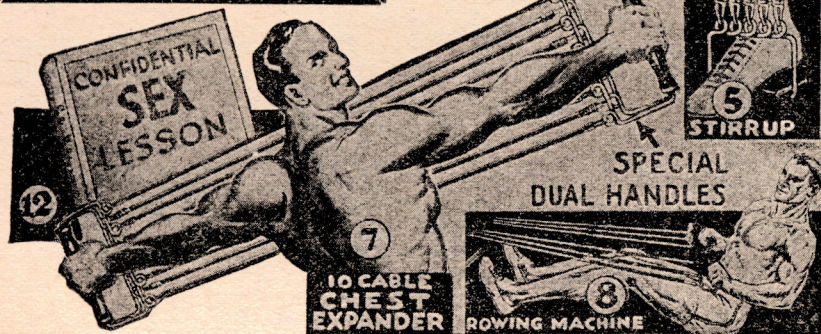
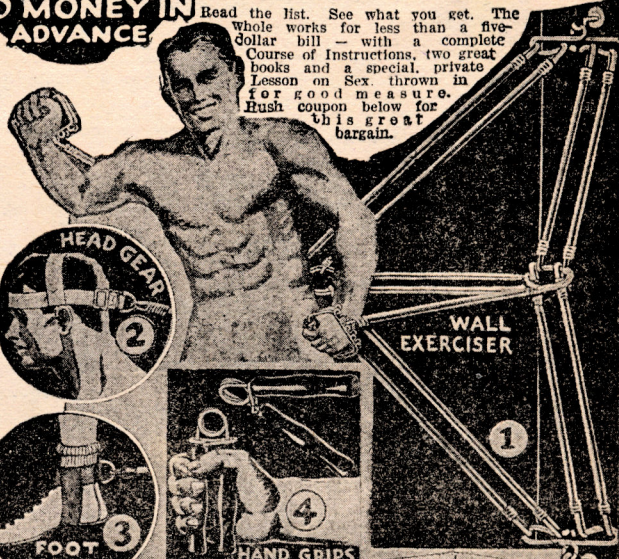
HERE'S WHAT YOU GET

- 1—Complete set of Wall-Exerciser-Attachments—a wonderful muscle-builder for arms, back, chest and stomach.
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- 3—Adjustable Foot Gear for building muscular legs.
- 4—Two High-Tension Scissor Grips for strengthening hands, wrists and forearms.
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- 6—Twelve Weeks' scientific Muscle-Building Course, a complete and progressive system of home training that will rebuild your body from head to foot.
- 7—Ten-Cable Progressive Chest Expander (300 lbs. resistance). A few minutes a day with this will give you a mighty chest, powerful arms and legs.
- 8—Complete Rowing Machine Attachments, giving you all the wonderful body-building benefits of rowing.
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- 10—Book on Jiu Jitsu, the famous art that makes you master of any man you meet.
- 11—Professional Skip Rope, develops speed and wind.
- 12—Special Confidential Lesson for MEN, tells you frankly and clearly the things you ought to know.

ALL FOR
\$4.95
NO MONEY IN
ADVANCE

Man—look at these pictures! Here's everything you need to develop EVERY muscle in your body—all in one great 12-in-1 Outfit. Just spend a few minutes a day with the Snappy Wall Exerciser, the big Chest Expander, the zippy Rowing Machine and the other great muscle builders included — and **WATCH THOSE MUSCLES GROW!**

Read the list. See what you get. The whole works for less than a five-dollar bill — with a complete Course of Instructions, two great books and a special, private Lesson on Sex thrown in for good measure. Rush coupon below for this great bargain.



Michael McFadden, Dept. F-12,
55 East 11th Street, New York, N. Y.

Dear Mike: Shoot me the works C. O. D. I'll pay \$4.95 plus actual postage. My money back if I am not satisfied and return outfit immediately. NOTE: If you prefer, enclose \$4.98 and I pay postage. Same Money Back Guarantee.)

Name

Address

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

Outside U. S. A. Send Cash With Order

RUSH
COUPON for Sensational BARGAIN!

Money needed. Just write name and address in coupon **AT ONCE**. Pay Postman only \$4.95 plus actual postage on delivery. (Or send \$4.98 and I pay postage.) Simply return outfit immediately if not wanted. Money-back guarantee. Rush coupon. This offer may never be repeated.

MICHAEL MCFADDEN

Dept. F-12

55 East 11th St.

New York, N. Y.

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MAKES 1 TO 4 CLEAR CARBON COPIES

with original in ink. Unequalled for salesmen's orders, office billing and all manifold uses. No amount of pressure or style of writing can bend or distort the 14 kt. solid gold point and feed.



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The ease of writing with an inkograph makes the answering of correspondence a pleasure instead of a task. Stands more rough usage for boy or girl at school.



UNPRECEDENTED SALE Less Than Half Price

Regular
\$2 and \$2.50
Values

of the world famous

INKOGRAPH
PENCIL POINTED FOUNTAIN PEN

Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.—Pat. Nos. 1524963 & 1824249

Reduced
to
ONLY **\$1.00**

FREE TEN DAYS TRIAL

A rare opportunity to purchase this well-known pencil pointed fountain pen at a fraction of its value. Hundreds of thousands of Inkographs have been sold all over the world at \$2.00 to \$5.00.

Note the point—different from an ordinary fountain pen—but capable of doing everything *possible* and many things *impossible* with any fountain pen.

It writes as easily and smoothly as a soft lead pencil—just as if the 14kt. solid gold point was greased.

COLORS—Onyx, Tan and Brown—Black and Marine Green Bronze—Black and White—Jade Green and White—Black and Gold Bronze—Plain Black

Even if you own a fountain pen, at this amazingly low price, it will pay you to add an Inkograph.

Your choice of five of the newest colors of unbreakable Piroxalin, the same high grade material used in \$7.00 and \$8.75 fountain pens, which we formerly sold only in our \$5.00 Inkographs.

Give the Inkograph any test you desire—if it is not the most satisfactory pen for all around service you have ever used—return it within ten days and have your money refunded.



WRITES ON ANY QUALITY OF PAPER

—tag, or label, even wrapping paper, as smoothly as if point were greased. Perfect for rapid lettering.

ON SALE AT LEADING DEALERS

If your dealer cannot supply you, select color desired, fill out coupon and order will be filled direct.

INKOGRAPH COMPANY, Inc.

World's Largest Manufacturers of Pencil Pointed Pens

210 Hudson Street, New York, U. S. A.

Inkograph Co., Inc., 210 Hudson St., N. Y.

22

Send me Inkograph Color.....
I will pay postman \$1.00 plus C. O. D. and mailing charges with the understanding that if not perfectly satisfactory I may return it within 10 days and have \$1.00 refunded. NOTE—if remittance accompanies order, forwarding charges are prepaid. Send remittance with orders for delivery outside of U. S.

COLOR
Name
Street
City State.....

Please mention SKY FIGHTERS when answering advertisements.

SKY FIGHTERS

DECEMBER

Vol. I No. VI

1932

CONTENTS

Orders for An Ace—Complete Novel

By George Bruce 8

They asked for an ace—those Brass Hats—
And they got a man. They got a man who
wasn't afraid to tell them that "someone
had blundered"—a man who wasn't afraid
to stick to his flying brothers through the
thick of it.

Double Death—Complete Novelette

By W. E. Barrett 57

Strange death burned the Italian War skies
and a mad squadron flew the Alps with
stark, grim, faces in the cockpits.

Library of War Planes..... 72

A department of pictures and plans of
actual war ships.

Into the Blue.....*By Hugh James* 74

The true story of Albert Rhys-Davies—the
ace who kept rabbits.

1893—Verse.....*By Ballado Johnson* 78

How the War Crates Flew

By R. Sidney Bowen 79

Where the reader meets ships and pilots
who made war history.

Ten Air Questions..... 83

Test your knowledge—and your friends!

Soft Thunder—Complete Novel

By Frederick C. Painton 84

He was just a kid who played tennis to
those two hard-boiled soldiers—but there
was stuff in his make-up that kept him bat-
tling in the flaming skies.

George Bruce Says..... 115

The readers' and writers' department.

Win Your Wings—A Contest..... 119

Ride with the Aces—if you know how—for
cash prizes.

The Dog-Fight of Ace McFee—Verse

By Ballado Johnson 124

Introducing Next Month's Issue..... 126

The Cover—

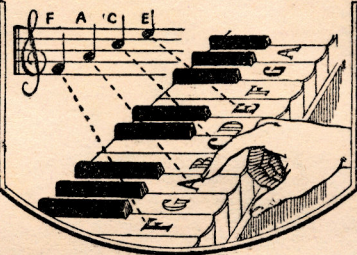
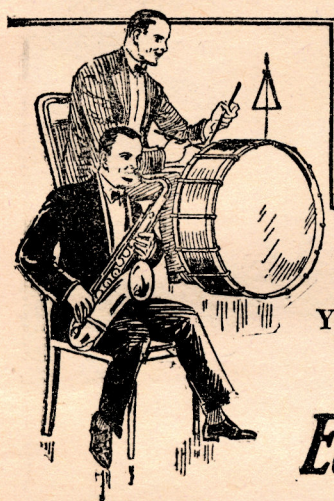
By

E. M. Frandzen

The Allied pilot
in the foreground
is being attacked
by a pair of Fok-
ker D. VII Scouts.
The S.E.-5 which
is in the fore-
ground is armed
with a Lewis gun
and the pilot is
attempting to re-
load the gun by
changing t h e
drum before the
D. VII gets to him.
Another S.E.-5 is
driving upward to
protect its mate,
the Vickers gun
which fired, in
this case, through
the propeller hub,
spitting lead at
the diving D. VII.
It's a hot spot for
the S.E.-5 pilot!

SKY FIGHTERS is published monthly by WM. L. MAYER & CO., Inc., at 122 East 42d Street, New York, N. Y.
William L. Mayer, President and Treasurer; Edna K. Mayer, Secretary. Entered as second-class matter May 20,
1932, at the post office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Subscription price per year: \$1.20 in the
United States; single copies ten cents in the United States. Manuscripts will be handled with care, but this magazine
assumes no responsibility for their safety. Advertising Manager: Sam J. Perry.

Half a Million People have learned music this easy way



You, too, Can Learn to Play
Your Favorite Instrument
Without a Teacher

Easy as A-B-C

YES, over half a million delighted men and women all over the world have learned music this quick, easy way.

Half a million—what a gigantic orchestra they would make! Some are playing on the stage, others in orchestras, and many thousands are daily enjoying the pleasure and popularity of being able to play some instrument.

Surely this is convincing proof of the success of the *new, modern method* perfected by the U. S. School of Music! And what these people have done, **YOU**, too, can do!

Many of this half million didn't know one note from another—others had never touched an instrument—yet in half the usual time they learned to play their favorite instrument. Best of all, they found learning music *amazingly* easy. No monotonous hours of exercises—no tedious scales—no expensive teachers. This simplified method made learning music as easy as A-B-C!

It is like a fascinating game. From the very start you are playing *real* tunes, perfectly, by *note*. You simply can't go wrong, for every step, from beginning to end, is right before your eyes in print and picture. First you are *told* how to do

a thing, then a picture *shows* you how, then you do it yourself and *hear* it. And almost before you know it, you are playing your favorite pieces—jazz, ballads, classics. No private teacher could make it clearer. Little theory—plenty of accomplishment. That's why students of the U. S. School of Music get ahead twice as fast—*three times as fast* as those who study old-fashioned plodding methods.

What Instrument For You?

Piano	Piccolo
Organ	Hawaiian
Violin	Steel
Clarinet	Guitar
Flute	Drums and
Harp	Traps
Coronet	Mandolin
'Cello	Sight Singing
Guitar	Trombone
Ukulele	Accordion
Saxophone	Piano
Banjo (Plectrum 5-String or Tenor)	
Voice and Speech Culture	
Harmony and Composition	
Automatic Finger Control	
Italian and German	
Accordion	
Juniors' Piano Course	

You don't need any special "talent." Many of the half-million who have already become accomplished players never dreamed they possessed musical ability. They only wanted to play some instrument—just like you—and they found they could quickly learn how this easy way. Just a little of your spare time each day is needed—and you enjoy every minute of it. The cost is surprisingly low—averaging only a few cents a day—and the price is the same for whatever instrument you choose. And remember, you are studying right in your own home—without paying big fees to private teachers.

Don't miss any more good times! Learn now to play your favorite instrument and surprise all your friends. Change from a wallflower to the center of attraction. Music is the best thing to offer at a party—musicians are invited everywhere. Enjoy the popularity you have been missing. Get your share of the musician's pleasure and profit! Start now!

Free Booklet and Demonstration Lesson

If you are in earnest about wanting to join the crowd of entertainers and be a "big hit" at any party—if you really *do* want to play your favorite instrument, to become a performer whose services will be in demand—fill out and mail the convenient coupon asking for our Free Booklet and Free Demonstration Lesson. These explain our wonderful method fully and show you how easily and quickly you can learn to play at little expense. This booklet will also tell you about the amazing new *Automatic Finger Control*. Instruments are supplied when needed—cash or credit. U. S. School of Music, 38312 Brunswick Bldg., New York City. Thirty-fourth year (Established 1898).

U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC
38312 Brunswick Bldg., New York City.

Please send me your free book, "How You Can Master Music Lessons in Your Own Home," with inspiring message by Dr. Frank Crane, Free Demonstration Lesson, and particulars of your easy payment plans. I am interested in the following course:

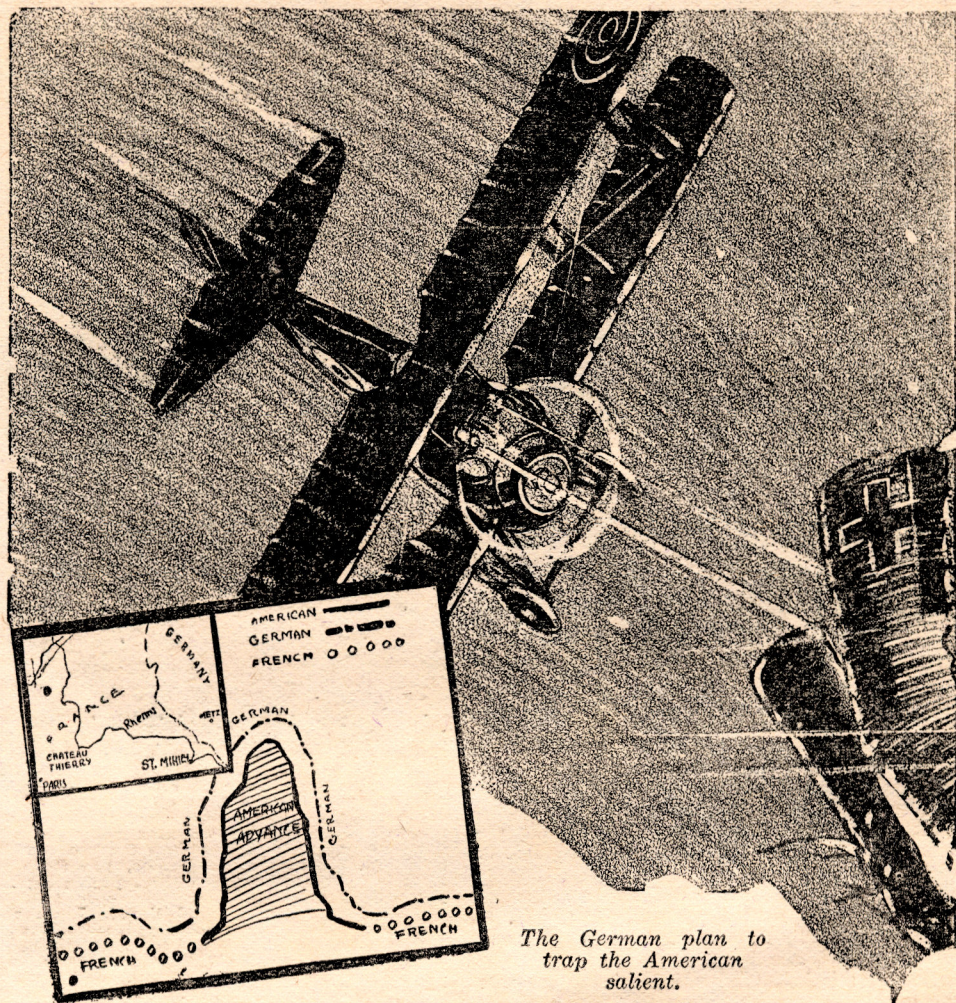
Have You

Instrument?

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....



The German plan to trap the American salient.

Orders for an Ace

An Air-War Novel

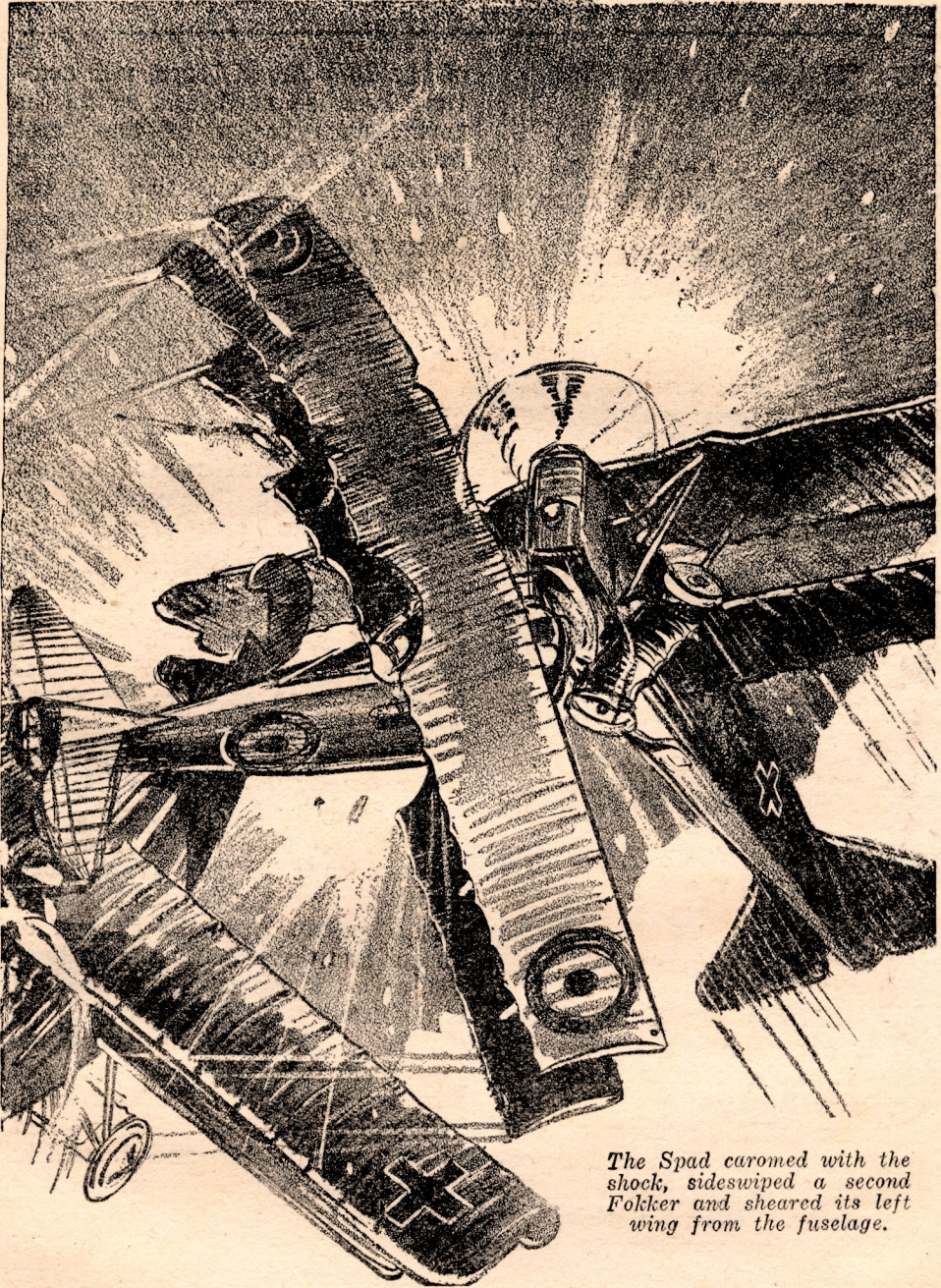
By George Bruce

LORD, GOD OF HOSTS, BE
WITH US YET,
LEST WE FORGET, LEST
WE FORGET!

*The screaming hail of flying death;
The poison gas choking breath;*

*The droning whine of missile's flight;
The ghost gray shadows of the
night—*

*Spitting flame!
The huddled figures breathing stench
That had been flesh; the winding
trench*



The Spad caromed with the shock, sideswiped a second Fokker and sheared its left wing from the fuselage.

*Through sterile fields that once were
green;
The pregnant hush, the glinting
sheen
Of bayonets!*

*The rotting earth between the hates
Of men, who knew not when the
Fates
Would point them out and bid them
give*

*A life, "that all might truly live
Untrammelled—free!"*

*The grinding roar and acrid clouds
Of smoke, from batteries wearing
 shrouds
To hide them from the avid eye
Of foemen eagles, soaring high—
Destruction bent!*

*The savage cries of men who fought,
Who, locked in grim embrace, gave
 thought
To nothing save the present fight—
Remembering not the tearful plight—
Of mothers!*

*A boyish face, a twisted form,
The deep red badge of courage warm
Upon his breast—the gasping
 prayer—
A smile! The mem'ry he is there—
In Thy Name!*

**"LORD, GOD OF HOSTS, BE WITH
US YET,
LEST WE FORGET, LEST WE
FORGET!"**

ORDER NUMBER 232

THE objective of the Army, when assuming the offensive, is to break through the enemy's front between the Aisne and the Ourcq, pressing forward continually in the direction of Fere-en-Tardenois in cooperation with the Sixth Army. Ultimate objectives will be fixed in accordance with results achieved.

"The forces employed along the attacking front consist of four army corps, each comprising three of four divisions. The 1st and 2nd Divisions, A.E.F., are to form part of the 20th Army Corps. The latter, synchronizing its operations with those

of the 30th Army Corps, will overrun, from the north and south, the northeastern border of the Foret de Retz, taking Chaudon and Vierzy. Their ultimate objective is the plains to the northeast of Hartennes, to gain a firm hold south of the Ravin of Crise.

Signed: MANGIN.

Countersigned: HELLE,
Chief of Staff.

THAT was the way it was ordered on paper. Order Number 232, from the Allied High Command to the Allied Armies operating in the Aisne-Marne Triangle. It was signed and countersigned by French generals who had been given the power of life and death over two million men. But under the surface of its being an order to the Allied Armies, the generals who signed it and the men who received it knew it for exactly what it was intended to be, an order from French officers to American soldiers.

An order to the 20th Army Corps, which was made up of the flower of the American Army in France, to go out and make the heroic gesture. An order which could be received only in one way, and that the way of the gladiator of ancient Rome who walked across the arena which was to be the theatre of his death and, facing the Imperial box, lifted his weapon in salute and shouted in hoarse voice, "Hail Caesar, we who are about to die, salute thee!"

Chaudon! The Foret de Retz! Viezry! Hartennes! Crise. Names written upon the military records of France in letters of blood. Blood of hundreds of thousands of men who had thrown themselves upon enemy positions throughout the years of the war and had left blood and bones to enrich the soil over

which they fought. Blood to warm the red glow of vintage wines.

The Aisne-Marne Triangle! The point of the dagger thrust toward the heart of France, and France, writhing upon the poinard, wrenching at it with convulsed hands, fought only to have it driven deeper into her heart.

France, who built up mounds of dead, her own dead, before the implacable trenches designed by enemy engineers. Mounds of the dead, men who died with the chattering laughter of Maxims shattering eardrums, who fell to the earth, bodies jerking and twitching as lead slugs churned flesh to a bloody froth, and high explosive bursts from unseen guns, ripped them to shreds.

AND when a carpet of corpses covered the approaches to the Aisne-Marne Triangle, the French High Command shook its head ominously, shrugged its shoulders resignedly and reluctantly came to believe that no power on earth could loosen the grip of the enemy upon the salient.

They continued to believe that for more than a year, until the Americans came to France, until Pershing lifted his eyebrow in astonishment over the General Staff map and asked the innocent question, "So you have not as yet wiped out the St. Mihiel and the Aisne-Marne salients?"

It was at this point that the officers of the French High Command glanced at one another, fingered mustaches, smiled behind discreet palms at the naïveté of the bull-headed American commander, and then as a challenge to the "egoism of Pershing," issued General Order Number 232.

When it was written, the High

Command settled back to await the spectacle of the Americans making fools of themselves. A spectacle that was to be a sweet revenge for Pershing's adamant attitude on the question of breaking the American Expeditionary Forces into small units to be placed under the direct command of French officers. The French dreamed of filling emaciated French divisions and army corps with strapping infantrymen recruited in the United States. The French High Command had visions of French generals directing American troops against the enemy, of the Tri-color marching to victory, carried by the sons of Michigan, Pennsylvania and California. It dreamed of an entire American army, with the status of a Legion des Etrangers—a Foreign Legion formed to serve France.

Oh, yes, there would be Americans in command of American troops under this French plan—minor commanders—just as the black troops of France were permitted to have black men in non-commissioned posts, but with the commissioned ranks filled entirely by white Frenchmen. All of the important posts in the American Foreign Legion were to be held by French officers. French officers were to have the sole right to decide when and where Americans were to die. It was all worked out on paper long before Pershing arrived in France.

THE plans of the French High Command were unfolded to Pershing immediately after he had arrived in Paris, and immediately after some highly emotional colonel had made the dramatic utterance: "Lafayette, we are here!" And Pershing listened, a scowl upon his face, his hands clenched into fists, his eyes blazing and invited the

French High Command to go to hell.

The American Army will fight as the American Army, under its own officers, and in direct command of its own operations, or not at all," was the way Pershing expressed himself.

There was a very nasty scene between Pershing and high French officials. The French went so far as to petition Woodrow Wilson to remove Pershing from the command of the A.E.F. and to replace him with someone who would be more in sympathy with French ambitions. Fortunately for American troops, Wilson refused the demand. And Pershing remained commanding officer of the A.E.F.

So the High Command prepared the rope with which Pershing was to hang himself. It uttered Order Number 232.

THE 201st Pursuit Squadron landed upon a grassy field west of the Ourcq at three in the afternoon of July 15th, 1918. It arrived to the accompaniment of gunfire, so close that the earth trembled and the white-hot heat from gun muzzles seemed to scorch cheeks and to cause hot flushes to pass over the bodies of the men who formed the unit. The pilots climbed stiffly out of the tight seats of gray Spads marked with the device of the American Air, and walked about over the spongy surface of the field. There was a queer, constrained silence among them. With the exception of the dozen ships which had dropped down onto the field from out of a blue sky, the place was deserted. There was an expanse of emptiness bounded by the horizons to the south, east and west, and by the irregular outline of a thickly-wooded space to the north.

On the maps the thickly-wooded space was marked: "Foret de Retz."

There were grim markings upon this green field. Here and there the grass was scorched and burned and the earth churned up and trampled upon. Deep ruts marked the movements of iron-shod wheels. Mounds of empty shell cases were piled up like cairns erected in the midst of desolation to proclaim the fact that other men had visited the place. Shell cases still smelling acridly of burned high explosives. They were new and bright. They might have been ejected from the breeches of four-point sevens but a few moments before.

Flies swarmed thickly. They seemed excited and made fierce by a queer sickening stench hanging over the place. After the first few moments on the field the 201st understood the origin of the stench. There were hastily contrived, shallow graves behind the former gun positions. Graves, scooped out openings in the earth, in which the bodies of horses and men had been placed and covered over with a thin layer of earth.

RUST-BROWN stains on the grass and earth. Stains where the guns and caissons must have been placed. Blood stains. Hours before men had died upon this field. Had been struck by a snarling avalanche of destruction which had plunged down upon them.

The atmosphere was electric. It caused a queer, itching, nervousness to grow up within the pilots of the 201st.

Behind the screen of the trees in the north the guns shattered the universe with wave upon wave of concussion and crackling thunder.

From further north other unseen guns were answering. Red-cored

explosions among the trees gave testimony to the accuracy of those answering guns.

And the pilots of the 201st, alone with the gray ships, stood about and listened. In each of them the same thought was churning. Someone had blundered. Someone had made a mistake. Someone had ordered the 201st into a insanely dangerous position. Some field clerk perhaps, typing an order had misread a name—no matter what, someone had blundered.

THE afternoon shadows lengthened. The sun made a swift descent into the west. The restlessness among the pilots increased. Anxious eyes scanned the stretch of road visible from the field. A torn up, rutted track over the surface of the earth. A track over which transport and artillery struggled and cursed. The guns and the lorries passed the edge of the field like an unending army of slave-wraiths on review. They were haggard with fatigue. The hands of the men were like the claws of animals. Their faces were pinched and cadaverous looking. They were reeling with fatigue.

The wheels of the guns and the wheels of the lorries thudded and strained to move them again. Horses with nostrils expanded like blood-red mushrooms, strained, with chests heaving brokenly, with glazed eyes.

While hoarse-voiced men grunted and cursed. Some sobbed in sheer exhaustion and desperation.

On and on, a foot at a time. Every rut a victory. Every mile costing years of human and animal life. On and on, the slow moving procession of the slave-wraiths passing in review. The twilight giving them weird, grotesque shapes; until they

were great shadows with gleaming eyes and clutching hands.

The north horizon became red-rimmed. Streaks of flame gutted the night. The staccato of machine-guns floated on the hot breeze.

Somewhere in the midst of the slave-wraiths choking the road were the trucks of the 201st. The trucks contained all of the food, quarters, hangars, supplies of the outfit. The trucks had gone forward twenty-four hours before the ships had flown away from the pool.

Hunger ate into the restlessness of the pilots.

The darkness engulfed them, separated them from the universe. They squatted about on the grass of the field. The smell of filth, decay and ozone hung about them. In the red flecked darkness the Spads were like poised birds of ill omen, ready to launch themselves into chaos.

FROM a carefully chosen observation point a French general of division, his mind busy with his memoirs to be written after the war, was making notes. He wrote with reluctant admiration: "The U. S. 1st Division got into place; some batteries of the 155's arrived two hours before the moment of attack. These men, officers as well as privates, had lived through terrible weeks at Cantigny. Sanitary conditions were unspeakable. There were lines of forest to penetrate as well as muddy roads. There was a plague of flies by day and a dearth of trucks at all times. Only the amazing mobility of the Americans made this movement possible.

"There was a confusion of orders throughout these preliminary marches which must have had fatal consequences but for American alertness. The men got the 'forward' idea. Even when we French paused

in bewilderment the Americans were streaming on. I could not help admiring the fortitude of the Americans in submitting to privations to which, in their own country, they had been wholly unaccustomed. In the United States the humblest people enjoy every sanitary convenience. The theatre of operations was now so crowded that the filth alone was a plague. How the Americans contrived to keep themselves as clean and in as good condition as they did I cannot imagine.

"General Magin was overwhelmed by the spectacle of suffering and strain to which the Americans were subjected."

THE man who made the notes was French General Magin's Chief of Staff.

North of the Foret de Retz and on a line between Villers-Cotterets and Soissons, three German captive balloons strained at cables. In the gondolas of the sausages, trained observers were watching the development of the American attack. From time to time they spoke excitedly into the mouthpiece of telephone instruments and dropped marked maps to the ground. They were watching the steady advance of the American regular divisions and the 42nd Division, A.E.F. The olive drab uniformed Americans were pushing through the woods in the face of deadly machine-gun fire from German nests. They walked into the faces of the machine-gunners, contemptuous of the loss of life and tossed grenades into the enemy emplacements.

But there was a fatal flaw in the attack. To the right and left of the advancing Americans the French supporting elements in the attack were slow in getting into position, and slower yet in throwing them-

selves upon the grimly contested enemy positions.

As a result, the Americans were far in advance. They were developing a salient in their own line of advance—a belly which ballooned toward the German positions, and which left both attacking flanks without support.

On the ground, behind the German line, a group of generals, eyes glowing, watched the line of battle as it changed upon the maps, and read the reports which arrived in constant stream from the front lines. Now and then a command was given.

"Have von Kock make a slow withdrawal before the Americans. It is to be a semblance of a slow retreat as if under pressure. Tell him to keep his command well in hand and be ready to strike instantly. He is to draw the Americans after him—as far as possible—"

THERE was excitement among the decorated and gorgeously uniformed officers of the German command. There was a tenseness and an expectancy along the German front. The gray lion had sensed a blunder upon the part of the stalkers and the gray lion was setting itself, eyes gleaming, body twitching, for a death lunge.

In the early dawn the pilots of the 201st aroused themselves from fitful slumber. They awoke to discover stiff arms and legs and chilled bodies. They were soaked with the heavy dew of the dawn. They were ravenous. They had been without food for twenty-four hours. The wings of the Spads dripped moisture. The field was sodden. The heavy mist hung like a ghostly shroud over the earth. The first light of the sun tinged it with an iridescent rosiness.

And through the mists the phan-

tom army of slave-wraiths still passed in review along the road. They might have been the same wraiths who clogged the road twelve hours before, condemned to struggle forever along the road bordering the field. Through the high grass and stunted trees on each side of the road, the infantry, seemingly marching in sleep, passed like shadows.

FROM the north the rocking, shocking bedlam of the guns continued unabated.

The day broke sodden with sultry heat. A thick gray mist hung over the face of the sky. Behind it the sun blistered the moisture and transformed it into a condensed vapor which clung to flesh and uniforms in clammy tenacity. Sweat poured from unwashed bodies. Sweat soaked through the serge and olive drab of uniforms. The odor of their own bodies filled the nostrils of the men. Any movement brought new deluges of perspiration.

Along the road, the slave-wraiths—like numbed, semi-conscious hulks of flesh—toiled and plodded, blinded by the sweat which rolled down over faces from under the felt padded confines of torturing tin helmets. They stared toward the gray Spads standing in the center of the field. There was a curious glassiness in the stare. Officers, mud encrusted and raw throated, gasped meaningless orders at the struggling men. Orders which the men ignored completely or never heard. The motors in the stalled lorries bellowed frantically. Transmissions and radiators smoked and smelled of hot metal and steam. Tires and wheels screeched and moaned. Cascades of earth flew from under the wheels as ruts were dug deeper and deeper. Horses fell dead in the traces of gun

carriages. Men took the places of the horses. Men fell by the roadside, stretched out stiffly, stared at the heavens, chest heaving brokenly, bodies shrunken, mouths sucking air.

In the middle of the morning the men of the 201st forgot to be hungry. Forgot the torture of woolen and serge rubbing sweat bathed bodies. Forgot the agony of tunics which were more maddening than hair shirts. Forgot feet that were like senseless clods of dead flesh within the confines of cordovan boots. A sudden silence seemed to fall over the transport upon the road. Sudden blanketing out of every sound. A sudden choking of throats by an unseen hand which reached out of nothingness and seemed to grip windpipes with cruel fingers.

A LINE of slave-wraiths was coming back from the front. Two by two with a space between them, like animated hyphens. They were black-faced. So black that they had the appearance of wearing black masks with holes cut in the material through which peered red-rimmed eyes. They plodded along mechanically. It was not until they were abreast of the field that the men of the 201st discovered the cause of the strange procession. Then the hyphens between the pairs of men became litters. Heavily laden litters, slung from the shoulders of the bearers by leather straps. Litters, jumping, swaying, jerking with each step taken by the bearers. Litters covered and uncovered, and upon each litter, a twisted body and a gray face—or no face at all, merely a mummy wrapping of dirty bandages.

The mysterious smell of blood charged the atmosphere.

The unseen hand gripping throats tightened.

Sounds came from the litters. Sounds which made the men of the 201st turn heads away—only to turn them back toward the procession of hyphens. The litters held a curious fascination.

The procession grew out of the line of the horizon, it came on, unbroken, moving slowly, until it stretched from horizon to horizon.

ONE of the litter bearers spoke. His voice seemed ripped from his chest.

"Many wounded?" he snarled. Christ, the woods is lousy with 'em. Can't take a step unless you trip over some guy. Only taking out the guys that has a chance. No use picking up some bird with his guts hanging out—no use walking ten miles to have the guy die on a litter. Have to walk 'em in, the god-dam ambulances are stuck to hell and gone down the road—nobody knows where—nobody knows where the field hospitals are—nobody cares—no time to put up hospitals—just a case of every man for himself, and to hell with the guys that get hit. Ran across some company out of the 42nd up there in the woods. One corporal going around in a dizzy daze in command of the company, or what's left of it—seven men, three of them wounded but crazy mad—seven men left out of two hundred. Walked right smack into an enfilade of Squarehead machine-guns. Walked right across an open space—in a hurry to get to Berlin. The whole company is piled up in one heap—what the hell—"

On and on, climbing over one horizon, descending another. The litters swaying, the voices babbling, the putty like faces of the wounded turned up to the heavens.

The pilots of the 201st stood about. It was a different war than they had imagined or dreamed. They had dreamed of a war in which flying men charged up off the earth like knights of old, and before the admiring eyes of a million men, waged conflict in the upper air. They had dreamed of the red, white and blue marked ships of America falling like trip-hammers upon the cross-marked ships of Imperial Germany; driving them in rout from the heavens. They had dreamed of leading the crushing vanguard of victory in an irresistible sweep toward eternal glory and the liberation of a dozen nations from under the cruel dominance of steel-fisted war lords.

Minds were filled with idealized pictures of poor France and ravished Belgium, reeling under the blows of the oppressors, and fighting desperately for honor and bare existence. France—la Belle France—all the posters likened la Belle France to a sad-faced, sad-eyed, beautiful, voluptuous woman with a liberty cap upon her head, baring her very revealing breasts to the sword point of a gorilla-like creature which was Germany.

And Belgium—another glorious drawn example of feminine pulchritude, forced into the brothel of German conquest.

THOSE young brains belonging to the pilots of the 201st were filled with pictures of themselves rescuing fair damsels such as the posters portrayed; of having the fair damsels faint with gratitude and relief—but somehow the picture had become distorted, awry.

The artists who labored so mightily had neglected to paint in the likeness of the horses dying in the traces—of round, enormously distended horse bellies framed by stiff

legs upthrust toward the mist-drenched sky; of glassy-eyed men dropping to the side of the road; of the procession of litters stretching from horizon to horizon.

OF course the youngsters of the 201st knew that men were wounded, and sometimes killed in making war. But the wounds were different. The picture was of a heroic figure, blood streaming from his wounds, breathing defiance and scorn toward the enemy who had wounded him, standing upright, careless of his hurts, with the figures of la Belle France and la Belle Belgium behind him protected by his might. And then, still glorious, with the tender hands of la Belle France and la Belle Belgium bandaging his hurts—with the young hero scarcely tolerating the attention and scoffing at the wounds, no matter how serious. Wounds, a beautiful scar perhaps, which cut across a cheek, or marked a forehead, so that when the warrior returned home the children in the street would pause, and in bated breath would whisper among themselves—"He's a soldier—see his wound—I'll bet he was a hero—"

A scar; some mark, to wear on the flesh like a decoration. That was the nature of a wound in the picture framed in the minds of these youngsters of the 201st.

But the litters brought a different picture. There were chests bubbling and wheezing. There were faces—obliterated. There were bellies—legs—arms—eyes.

And thousands of them. And the memory of the raw voice of the litter bearer. "The woods is lousy with 'em—can't take a step unless you trip over one—only taking the guys that has a chance—"

The youngsters of the 201st

turned away and gathered about the Spads. They had the strange feeling of futility—of having nothing to do, of being lost amid two million men—and the hunger became a hot cancer and gnawed at the bottoms of their bellies and set up a queer heartburn under their lungs.

In the north, the guns increased the tempo of destruction. The wet, boiling atmosphere was surcharged with ozone. It mixed with the smell of blood, filth, rotting flesh, upturned earth, and burning powder. Mingled with those odors was the sweat of their own bodies, the gas and oil of their own ships and the leather of helmets and flying coats.

A PFLATZ two-seater penetrated the south fringe of the Forêt de Retz and hung like a kite at an altitude of four thousand feet. The black encased head of the pilot was thrust far out over the edge of the fuselage. Below him swirled the thin tendrils of the mists. The glass of his goggles glinted as the sun touched them. The combination of goggles and black helmet gave his face a hard, devilish look. The slip stream beating against his mouth caused the muscles to set themselves into hard lines. He beat upon the outside of the fuselage with his hand to attract the attention of his observer and gunner in the rear seat. He pointed downward into the mists with a directing forefinger.

The observer studied the earth guided by the pointing finger. After a moment his mouth pursed itself as if whistling silently. There was a curious glow in his eyes as he lifted his head and glanced at the face of his pilot. Then he grinned. The lips moved from in front of his white teeth.

Far below, in the center of a grassy plain, the crew of the Pfaltz

had discovered a huddled group of gray Spads. They were strangely alone. No tent hangers bordered the edge of the clearing. No sign of occupation excepting the presence of the ships.

Together the pilot and observer studied the terrain under them, calculated the number of troops thronging the roadway which curved and twisted over the edge of the south horizon. They watched the procession of litter bearers out of the Foret de Retz, and the toiling, crawling, snail-like procession of transport toward the Front. Then both pairs of eyes went back to the gray Spads.

THE pilot pulled back on the throttle.

"Americans!" he howled over the thud of the idling motor and the shrilling of flat wires.

"Ja!" agreed the observer.

"Crazy!" snorted the pilot. "What foolishness puts them there—where are their hangars? Why are they there? What does it mean?"

The observer grinned. "It looks like optimism or suicide!" he called over the cowling separating him from the front cockpit.

A moaning sound rose out of the space behind them. They glanced upward in unison. They discovered the silhouette of a Nieuport diving upon them. The pilot shrugged his shoulders and pushed the throttle forward. The observer set his shoulders in the center of his gun rack and lifted the ugly muzzle of the weapon to command the diving ship.

It was all very business-like. Hardly more than a matter of routine.

The pilot carried the Pfaltz in a steep slip to the right. The Nieuport was forced to bank, checking

its speed to keep the two-seater in its sights. The observer tensed his right hand. The rivet hammer banging of the gun sounded over the crackle of the motor. The gun muzzle jerked and vomited lightning flashes of red. White streaks of tracer smoke flitted across the blue; stabbed at the nose of the Nieuport.

The French ship dove more steeply. Its twin Vickers were cut in for an instant. The air about the heads of the two men in the Pfaltz was filled with the sound of viciously snapping whiplashes; with the scream of flying lead slugs. The eyes of the observer narrowed. He pulled the muzzle of the gun down a fraction of an inch and touched the trigger a second time. A short burst of five or six slugs ripped through the center section of the Nieuport. It made an attempt to dive below the tail of the Pfaltz.

THE gun in the rear seat of the Pfaltz followed it through every foot of the dive. It snarled a third time. A tracer disappeared into the blur of the Nieuport's propeller.

The French ship buckled in the center—exploded. There was a gush of flame, a blot of black smoke against the gray-blue of the skies. A wing detached itself from the inferno and floated dizzily in space, gyrating wildly.

The observer in the Pfaltz glanced curiously at his gun. He was counting. Three bursts. Twenty-one rounds. He glanced over the rudder of the Pfaltz at the billowing cloud of red flame and black smoke descending into the mists over the earth.

It was all very business like. He ducked his head under the cowling of the cockpit and lighted a cigarette.

Forty minutes later, in the opera-

tions office of a 'drome north of Soissons the observer was inditing a report to be forwarded through channels to staff. He wrote:

"Observation over the Foret de Retz, eastward to the Ourcq, established the fact that American penetration in this sector is progressing rapidly over an area of twelve to fifteen kilos. The center of the American advance had reached a point approximately three kilos deep east of Villers-Cotterets, spreading out in the form of a spade to the right and left. Careful observation fixed the fact that the flanks of the advancing American troops are unprotected. The first wave of the attacking divisions are encountering stiff resistance on the part of our fixed machine-gun posts. Observations concerning the evacuation of the enemy wounded offers proof of exceptionally heavy casualties being suffered by the Americans. The resisting units of General von Koch's division are inflicting great damage and are escaping practically unharmed in the slow withdrawal movements before the American pressure. The enemy is following eagerly into the positions evacuated by General von Koch's troops and the penetration at this point is much deeper than elsewhere along the line.

THE roads south of the Foret de Retz and leading to the front are hopelessly choked with enemy transport. The Americans are finding it almost impossible to bring up artillery to aid in the advance, due to conditions of the roads and of the terrain over which the action is being fought. The same condition is seen affecting transports laden with supplies for the front lines. There is practically no artillery concentration behind the actual waves

of the attacking force. The Allied artillery in action is practically eliminated from consequence as a unit in the advance.

"An American pursuit unit, composed of Spads, was observed in an open field close behind the Foret de Retz, and in dangerous proximity to the combat area. This group had arrived within the last twelve hours, and as yet is without supplies and helpless to operate. From observation, believe that unit could be destroyed by light bombing group.

"Over Longpoint attacked by Nieuport scout. In the action following the Nieuport fell in flames after twenty-one rounds had been fired by the observer. The wreck fell into the Foret de Retz, close to our own lines.

"BLOCKER, Observer,
"116th Jagdstaffel."

A STAFF aide took up the forwarded report of "Blocker, Observer, 116th Jagdstaffel." He compared it with reports made from the gondolas of three captive balloons hanging over the front. He grunted in evident satisfaction. He picked up his telephone and held three conversations. The first was with his chief. "The Americans were marching into the trap. Von Koch was fooling them nicely. A few more hours. Beg pardon? Oh, certainly; the orders had been given to the reserve divisions to move the lines to the right and left of the American advance and to stand under arms for orders. Certainly, the commander of divisions were fully informed concerning the flanking attacks to be thrust against the Americans. By the way, a chap by the name of Blocker, Observer, 116th Jagdstaffel, should have the Iron Cross, first-class—especially meritorious work—than you—I'll see to it—

make the proper recommendations—good night!”

The second conversation was with the officer holding down a field telephone in the face of the American advance. There was difficulty with this conversation. Now and then a machine-gun sounded through the transmitter, or shell-fire blotted out complete sentences. “Hold on longer, make the withdrawals more slowly, show more resistance. The artillery is standing by to enter the game upon orders. Those damned Yankees will be nicely surprised when the area of advance is suddenly buried under drum fire. They wouldn’t expect that—”

The third conversation was with the commanding officer of the 11th Pursuit Jagdstaffel of His Imperial Majesty’s Air Service. “Report shows that an American group has taken up a position directly south of the combat area behind the Foret de Retz. New development. Totally unprepared for attack or defense according to careful observation. Might run down there and bid them welcome, eh?” The staff aide laughed immoderately as he replaced the telephone upon its stand. He rubbed his hands together.

THINGS were going splendidly. Tomorrow, perhaps—tomorrow with gray pinchers grabbing and cutting off the Americans who so proudly charged forward toward destruction. Pinchers which would wrench a gap in the Allied lines—a gap through which a dozen German divisions might pour—a gap which might be the beginning of the road to Paris—to peace and victory—the culmination of the “Friedenssturm” which had opened so disastrously. Perhaps the reverses of Chateau-Thierry might be hurled back against the Americans. It would be

a sweet revenge. It would be good for German morale, as good as a major victory. It would teach German troops that Americans were not invincible.

Throughout the night the need for water and food grew unbearable in the sector of the American advance. There were choked throats and swollen tongues and rasping breaths. Tepid, nasty water, contained in canteens, had long since been consumed. The need of rest was stamped on the faces of the troops as they crouched in the thickets or crawled on stomachs through the undergrowth. They were living in the midst of some terrible delirium. It was silly, the idea of dying of thirst—but they were dying of thirst. It was ridiculous, the thought of starving to death—men in the army did not starve to death—but they were shaking and trembling with weakness caused by lack of food.

AND about them, on every side, the earth was littered with the wounded, and the cry for water was a constant moan—as constant as the death rattle in parched throats. About them, on every side, was the stabbing cacophony of machine-gun fire, and slugs whined and hummed among them, thocked into living flesh, or cut the twigs and leaves away from the bushes pressing against their faces.

Black night, with sulphurous clouds of smoke rising out of the maws of hell—red smoke and red flame. It brought crazy memories of political torchlight processions back home, moving through the darkened streets of a prairie town.

Ranks thinned out, little clusters of men now, where there had been platoons and companies. Men forgetting to keep extended order, in

the desire to huddle together for the comfort of mere physical contact.

Men cursing out of thick throats. Men clutching the stocks of rifles. Men dragging machine-guns after them. No ammunition for the machine-guns. Men fingering empty Mills bomb belts. Men upending canteens to lick with leather-like tongues at the few drops of moisture which clung to the mouths of the tin bottles.

Men who were stumbling and threshing through a lost world. Who felt themselves transported into an ether existence, completely cut off from everything else which lived or had being.

Shambling on through the woods. Blood suffused eyes peering blindly in the darkness. Hands which had stiffened into talons gripping weapons.

The trucks which belonged to the 201st Squadron extricated themselves from the hopeless tangle of transport which thronged the road past the field, at eleven o'clock in the morning of the third day of the squadron's occupancy of the field behind the Foret de Retz. The four-wheel drive lorries fought a desperate way out of the ruts and turned into the field. The drivers and the members of the ground crew manning the trucks were in a pitiful state of exhaustion. Some of them, stiff looking and gaunt-faced, were sleeping upon the seats, bodies loling about with the motion of the trucks, in instant danger of falling to the ground and of being crushed under the viciously spinning wheels.

THERE were snatches of talk as men lowered themselves wearily to the ground, and stared about them with half-conscious eyes. A sergeant was cursing rabidly and

making jerking motions with his hands toward the road.

"Two lousy, rotten days in the center of that goddam mess," he croaked. "Forty-eight mortal, insane hours lost in the middle of that hell hole. Why, them guys out there don't even know where they're going. They don't even care. They just keep moving. Not even the officers know where they are or what's taking place. They just go running in circles trying to find their men. Half of them spend their time giving commands to outfits they never heard of, and the doughboys don't even give them a tumble. If the officers are lost, where in hell are the men? Eight hours making two miles of road—pulling guns out of the mud, pulling trucks out of the ditches—why there's a hundred trucks strung along the line that have been out of gas for a whole day—and a bunch of crazy doughboys pushing the damned things along the road.

BACK there, about ten kilo's, there is an open field—looks about a mile square and it's piled full of wounded men. Sure—they're bringing them there—not an ambulance or a hospital in sight. Just bringing the litters in and putting them on the ground—hundreds of them, thousands of them—Jeez, you can hear the place a mile before you get to it."

The sergeant stopped suddenly and listened. For the first time he was conscious of the nearness of the gun fire. A queer, questioning light filled his eyes. He stood still for a moment, listening, then his voice changed.

"Say," he said. "This isn't any picnic either, is it? From the sound of them Squarehead guns, it listens to me that they could boost

them up a little and shoot the hell out of this joint. Say—they aren't very far away—this is a hell of a place for a flying outfit—those guys back there must have thought we were the artillery." He stiffened suddenly.

He looked up to see Brick Owen standing in front of him. Owen's eyes were hard looking, glinting. Owen's body was rigid and his hands clenched. There was a red stubble of beard covering Owen's chin. His big chest was bulging out of the front of his unbuttoned coat.

Brick Owen was a major. He commanded the 201st.

"Well, what is this?" he demanded harshly. "A Cook's tour? All you need is a megaphone and a rubber neck. Those trucks were due here two days ago."

"But, Major," begged the sergeant.

"Major hell!" barked Owen. "Get those wagons unloaded, and get 'em unloaded in a hurry. There are men here who haven't had a mouthful in two days and nights. Snap into it, or, by God, I'll nail those stripes of yours on a fence post."

THE sergeant blinked his eyes and studied Owen's face. "Yes, sir," he said, after a moment. "Yes, sir."

More men dropped into sight out of the truck beds. They stood about, hands dangling, shoulders sagging, stiff legged. They listened to the caustic voice of the sergeant and moved to the business of unloading the trucks like men laboring in sleep.

On the north side of the field the brown tent hangars spilled out of the trucks and took form as raw hands pulled upon ropes and set poles. On the south side of the

field the tents which were to serve the officers and men as quarters took the form of a street. Drums of fuel went rolling down skids onto the field, were stacked end on end, and a tent erected over them.

The labor went on, under the hot sun. Brittle muscles strained and toiled. Bodies, poisoned with fatigue, drove stacks; hauled on ropes, lifted enormous burdens.

At three o'clock the grassy, open space which had been a gun-emplacement short hours before, was transformed into a flying field. Smoke oozed from the kitchen. The smell of coffee and food mingled with the other odors. Men moved about with more assurance. A world had been created. Their own world.

The Spads were moved under the shelter of the brown tent hangars. The benches were set up in the repair hangar. Cots and kits had been moved into quarters. The trucks were parked behind the hangars. The men had thrown themselves upon the ground.

ONLY Brick Owen refused to rest, refused to relax. He prowled about the field, a frown of worry creasing his forehead. He had the appearance of a fighter upon the defensive, of expecting sudden attack from an unseen scource. He awakened half a dozen men and sent them to mounting machine-guns at points about the hangars.

Each time a shift in the wind swelled the clamor of the guns to a fierce crescendo, the frown grew blacker and the lines about his mouth harder.

Better than anyone else in the outfit, Brick Owen knew that someone had blundered and that the 201st had no business upon this field behind the Foret de Retz.

There were no illusions of grandeur left in Brick Owen. He was a veteran of three years of air combat. He knew the nature of war. He had gone to bed and had arisen with war throughout 1195 days and nights.

He was not popular in the American service. He had a supreme contempt for floorwalkers and ribbon clerks, who, through the fortunes of war, found themselves in command over troops. He had a more withering contempt for the political wire-pullers who black-jacked cow-faced congressmen into forcing appointments through the War Department. Political wire-pullers who came to France in fancy uniforms and wearing spurs, and were incapable of understanding their own ignorance.

HE was not the type to mask his contempt. Brick Owen was a fighter. His whole life had been a bitter battle.

He had been with the French throughout three years of the war. During that time the French Government had exhausted its list of honors on Brick Owen. There is a warm spot in the heart of every Frenchman for the soldier of fortune, for the hard-hitting, devil-may-care adventurer who lives by the sword and dies by the sword. Much of the history of France has been written by such adventurers. And Brick Owen was the beau-ideal of the soldier of fortune. Also, he appeared at a time when the hysteria connected with everything American swept over France like a tornado. When France, being driven into her own grave, came to understand that her very existence depended upon the intervention of the United States of America in the conflict which was destroying her.

Not that Brick Owen needed hysteria to build his reputation. He built that in the crowded seat of a Nieuport, behind the threshing impetus of a Clerget, with his body slippery with castor oil, and his nose seared by powder fumes. He built his own stature and erected his fame with ugly snouted machine-guns for tools and fast flying enemy aircraft for incentive.

Just the sight of Brick Owen, with his red hair touselled upon the top of his head, his face smeared with exhaust fumes, oil and powder smoke, his tunic open at the throat to give his great throat and the corded muscles of his neck unhampered play, dropping over the side of his ship, to go striding over the expanse of a flying field, brought a thrill of admiration. He was the spirit of eternal combat materialized. He was a man, the kind of a man fellow fighters could greet as a brother.

During his service with the French he destroyed twenty-eight enemy aircraft.

Then certain officers of the United States decided that Brick Owen belonged with his "own kind." They persuaded him to transfer from the French and to accept an American command. It was not until after his transfer that he came in contact with the glorified floorwalkers and embattled ribbon clerks.

IT WAS not until five days after his transfer that he understood the nature of his command; that he was introduced to the material out of which his command was to be formed. They gave him transportation to Issoudon and orders creating the 201st Pursuit Squadron. He found his command on Field Nine. He shook hands with them. He cursed in his heart.

He found himself face to face with a new phase of the war. A phase he could not quite understand. During the 1195 days of his service previous to his transfer to American jurisdiction, his comrades and flying mates had been grizzled, hard-fisted, lantern-jawed men, who went about like ragamuffins, and who had a supreme contempt for anything that savored of authority. Not that they did not obey orders, they did, to the letter, and they threw their lives away obeying orders, but they obeyed them indirectly. There was no dressed-up puppet to supervise and superintend their every movement, to shepherd them about through the skies. For the most part they flew and fought when and where they pleased, and the Air Ministry of France and the officers who comprised the Ministry were very glad to permit them to fly their way in peace, or rather in war. They had a way of flying with a nonchalance and an unstudied efficiency that proved deadly to the ambitions of the enemy.

For the most part they were "non-commissioned officers," corporals and sergeants and even privates who had come up from the infantry and the artillery because they possessed more daring and more individualism than the ground branches of the service demanded. They were men who wanted the universe for a battleground, rather than a narrow sector of muddy earth. They were drawn together by that unseen magnet which always pulls like unto like, and by the fierce inward urge for action and personal combat.

FOR uniform they wore whatever they fancied. Boots or sandals, long trousers or shorts. Some even went English and wore shorts. There were times when they flew

out with no garb other than a pair of grease-smeared overalls. Looking at them one found it impossible to tell the officers from the privates, the heroes from the mechanics. They were bearded and mustached because it was too much trouble to shave. They consumed immense quantities of alcohol and bad tobacco. They went about with foul smelling pipes stuck in their faces, and their hands thrust in their pockets. When they received a general who came to congratulate them on some superlative exploit they stood about and stared at him curiously, without so much as taking the trouble to bid him welcome—and the general grinned and liked it.

AND they were fighters! No fanfare, no waving of the colors, no tinsel or gold braid, no pomp and circumstance, merely a collection of wild-looking, unwashed semi-lunatics, who climbed into Nieuports and wrote a new page into the annals of war upon the heavens which stretched over France and Belgium. Among them were officers and commanders of the Legion of Honor, Companions of the Order of Leopold, Knights of the Garter and of the Golden Fleece. Between them there were enough decorations to stage a scene at court. About them there were enough stories to keep readers breathless for a century.

But romance and glory! There was none of that. Not connected with them. Romance and glory belonged in the war novels. They were too busy giving the world material for stories to bother about romance and glory. They were fighting because they loved it. Because they were all men like Brick Owen.

But these "men" Brick Owen had been called upon to command! He shook hands with them, one by one

and listened as an adjutant called their names formally and made the presentations formally. Echoes of the names rang in his head an hour after he had gone to his own quarters on the field. Grove. Willis. Hartman. Cooley. Lowe. Jonas.

The names had a queer sound after the names he had known in the French service.

HE had arrived at the field dressed in his new uniform. It was like a torturing corset after the free and easy fit of his old French tunic. The high collar of stiff o. d. cloth had worn the flesh of his neck raw and gave him a feeling of suffocation. In the heat his body sweltered and streams of perspiration coursed down his spine. His feet were swollen and blistered from the hard-as-iron boots prescribed by American regulations for flying officers. He felt foolish, like a dressed-up tailor's dummy.

He lost that feeling after his first ten minutes among the American pilots. His first impression was that they were the finest collection of dressed-up nincompoops he had ever beheld. A wave of sarcasm curled up in his soul as he looked them over. Form-fitting tunics which were glued to Greek-god torsos. Ridiculously cut riding trousers tapered nicely and fitting into the tops of cordovan boots boasting a glaze like plate glass. Wings upon the tunics polished until they were blinding. Faces looking out at him from under the visors of fatigue caps from which the wire had been pulled to ape the slouch of the Limey headgear. Sam Browne belts to finish off the gorgeous exhibition of what the well-dressed young pilot shall wear.

The curl of sarcasm grew crisper with each instant.

Until he watched their faces and read the eagerness in their eyes and understood something of the intensity lurking behind the mask of youthfulness. For it was a mask of youthfulness they all wore. They might have been products of the same mould. They might have been borne of the same mother, excepting for slight differences in coloring, stature and breadth. They stood about after saluting him with exaggerated precision, waiting for him to speak. They gave the impression that none of them dared to speak before he was spoken to by a superior. They gave the impression of laboring under a terrific inferiority complex which they fiercely resented and were willing to die to disapprove.

He found that he had nothing to say to them. His mind was rioting with a thousand questions. He was angry that he was expected to say something. He was angry that they stared at him with such frank curiosity, as they might have stared at some strange, ferocious beast suddenly released from a zoo and permitted to roam at will over the earth on promise of good behavior. He felt futile, cheated. He was not a kindergarten instructor. He was not a curio.

LATER he learned that his reputation had reached the field in advance of his coming and that the men who were to make up the 201st had been informed of the great honor in store for them in being chosen to follow after the great hero—Brick Owen.

He spent his first night at Issoudon checking over the service records the same adjutant placed before him. He read name after name, looked at picture after picture, read the same military history on

each "service record." Five hours, six hours, seven hours solo flying time—left the United States for France—arrived at Issoudon for advanced training.

"Advanced training!" He smiled sourly. He had witnessed some of that during the afternoon. School-boys herding Spads and Nieuports around the field, learning the very fundamentals of flying. Learning how to keep a ship in the air and how to make a landing without breaking their necks. And he was taking a bunch of such advanced students to the front—in a matter of hours—almost minutes. His mind was suddenly filled with pictures of black and blue and gray ships marked with Iron Crosses. His ears were filled with the droning sound of B. M. W.'s and of the clatter of Spandaus. There were ugly pictures of French crates standing on their heads, spilling down out of the heavens leaving trails of black smoke behind them—crates riddled with Spandau slugs. Crates flown by men who were experienced in the business of war flying, who were willing to pit courage and experience and ships against courage and experience and better ships.

And then the group picture of his new command flashed into his mind, and he experienced a sick feeling, a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach.

HIS command was delivered to him the next afternoon by the same adjutant. The adjutant wore a particularly fatuous smile as he handed Owen the sheaf of papers which represented the material and official being of the Squadron. He gestured largely toward the group standing about the dozen Spads.

"There you are, Major Owen," said the adjutant, in the manner of

an automobile salesman exhibiting the glowing creation just purchased by a prospect. "You'll go a long way before you find a bunch of men as fit and able as the 201st Pursuit Squadron. The very pick of the field. Each one of them singled out for the honor of belonging to an outfit which we know is going to make a name for itself. Rarin' to go, every mother's son of them, and aching for a crack at the Boche. I only wish it was my privilege to fly off this field with you, to have a part in the great and glorious work you are about to do—"

THE scowl had settled on Owen's face. He gave the adjutant a withering look that choked the oration dead in the adjutant's throat.

"Are those ships ready to fly?" he asked with a wave of the hand toward the Spads standing on the line.

"Checked out less than half an hour ago," assured the adjutant. "Guaranteed all wool and a yard wide. Fit as a fiddle and the best flying equipment that has ever gone to the front from this field. All you have to do is to say the word."

Owen permitted his calloused hand to be pumped in a frenzy of farewell. His eyes swept over the mob of pilots and mechanics gathered about the ships, looking at the chosen dozen who were the 201st Squadron with envious eyes. He watched his own men, strutting a little, struggling to appear unconcerned, to appear soldierly and warlike. They were making a desperate attempt to act as if flying away to the front was an every day occurrence in their lives. They climbed into the cockpits with a bustle and there was a snap in the way they waved the blocks from under the

wheels and turned heads waiting for Owen's signal.

There was a strange foreboding in Owen's soul as he looked to the right and left at the studied brilliance of the freshly painted ships and the leather helmets of his men.

In the first place, he was not fooled by paint and new coverings. He knew the Spads for what they were—rebuilt jobs—unctuously passed over to the beloved American Allies, and charged for at full price. The French were shrewd business men, even in the face of national extinction.

HE was not fooled by paint and linen anymore than he was fooled by the flowery speeches of the glorified floorwalkers who went into fits of enthusiasm when bidding farewell to an outfit going to the front, but who somehow managed to always fill the cushy jobs within walking distance of a good hotel, or the Crillon Bar. Paris was full of them. He had fought a way through hundreds of them during the past ten days. They had pumped his hand until it was numb, had bought him drinks and had slobbered drunken affection over him. The Champs Elysees and the Boulevard des Italiens was filled with them. They were God's gift to the man-starved women of Paris.

The glorified floorwalkers, and the organization secretaries, who were too proud or too full of salvation and the brotherhood of man to fight, and yet who rigged themselves out to look as nearly like officers as possible, in order to hide the fact that they were carrying tracts and chocolate bars instead of rifles and hand grenades. They were God's gift to the mininettes and the night clubs.

Since Chateau Thierry they were unbearable.

Flying toward the Foret de Retz, flying into the mouth of hell, in the middle of a rebuilt crate, at the head of a group of untried kids who were going on a picnic. Kids who were filled to the retching point with the poison fed them by four-minute-men and patriotic spellbinders operating four thousand miles behind the front. Kids who were transformed from school boys to warriors by the simple process of putting them in uniform and marching them behind brass bands. Kids who were expected to prove their superiority over highly trained expert fighters reared in an atmosphere of intense national pride and with the business of making war included as an essential part of education. Men who were brave to the point of suicide, who feared nothing below, above, or on the earth; who had gone through four years of combat and still were unafraid, willing to face the world with proud eyes and to invite the world to go to hell. Men who were in full possession of all the victory the war had produced. Men whose comrades had crushed half of Europe; comrades who had fallen upon Italian incompetents across the Alps, who had scattered the Balkan riff-raff into the fastnesses of the Balkan mountains and who had beaten Russia, a nation boasting of ten million trained soldiers, to its knees and into the whirlpool of social suicide and revolution.

MEN, who had looked down from the skies and watched the gray-green wave of German infantry break against the walls of Paris on four occasions. A wave which had ebbed only in the face of natural obstacles over which it had no control.

Brick Owen could place a proper valuation upon such men. He had fought against them throughout 1195 days. Each of those days had begun and ended in the shadow of death. But the youngsters who followed after him? They had a different picture! They were schooled to believe that Immelmann and Richtofen and Udet and other of the enemy great were merely baby-killers and well-poisoners, and that the mere sight of an American uniform would send them howling and running for cover.

THE Prussian Guard which had stormed Fort Douamont with the bayonet was made up of poltroons and women butchers. The four-minute men and George Creel had told that over and over to the boys who followed after Owen. Day after day the newspapers in the States had repeated the same poison. Poison distilled to make school boys into fierce soldiers. And the poison coursed through their veins. Brick Owen could detect the symptoms in their faces.

He had watched them as a French instructor had lectured to them. An ex-pursuit pilot who dragged his twisted body about the field with the aid of a crutch, and who had no arm to fill the left sleeve of his tunic. A fighter who could not divorce himself from the fight; whose eyes still glowed with the fierce light of the warrior, in spite of the spasms of pain which crossed his face, and in spite of the wreck of his body.

"You cannot do things in this manner," he told them quietly. "War is not a holiday. It is a grim contest. In it you are like a fighter who enters a ring with an opponent, knowing in advance that only one of you will leave the ring. Con-

sider such a contest! Consider how foolish you would be to enter the ring for such a fight—a fight to the death—without first knowing how strong was your opponent—without advance understanding of his tricks and technique and the knowledge of how to defeat his attempts to take your life. Consider how foolish it would be for you to enter the ring blindfolded or with your hands tied behind your back, to face a man stronger, more experienced and as courageous as yourself. It would be suicide. Well, you are going into such a fight. Forget what you have learned! Forget everything, excepting that you must have experience, all your strength and courage, and as much information about your enemy as possible."

But the eyes of the youngsters were wandering away from the patient instructor who had given his body and his blood to his country. The youngsters were bored to death. It was written on their faces.

The four-minute men had been better lecturers.

Flying along, thinking of them. Looking back over the stablizer to see that they were keeping in place. Pictures of their faces rising up out of the whirling blur of the propeller. Faces dancing crazily on the horizon.

THE scowl on Brick Owen's face had grown blacker during every kilometer of the way to the front. And then—the field, and it's location. He took a single look at his surroundings after he had landed. For the first time in his life he had a sensation of panic. He had circled the field from the air, certain that he had arrived over the base given to the squadron. As he circled he could see waves of infantry crawling through the woods, could see

the flare from enemy gun muzzles, could see the rapid streaks of flame from the mouths of shell craters. In spite of his certainty as to his location, he studied his maps again before landing. There must be a mistake—but the maps were unchanged, and the orders named this field.

He took the squadron down into the field. And as he took them he realized that the life of the outfit was entirely dependent upon the strength of that line of troops going forward in the Forêt de Retz. He knew that every enemy light bombing outfit that passed over the field would swoop down upon it with whoops of joy. That every hour would be a struggle to maintain a foothold on this expanse of grass seared by the flame from the snouts of four point sevens.

During the third afternoon on the field, when the trucks had arrived and the hangars had been erected he sent a sergeant back to division headquarters with a message. The sergeant was drooping with fatigue. His eyes were black-ringed and reddened. His voice was hoarse. During that same afternoon the sergeant had performed the work of half a dozen men and in addition had driven the ground crew to the dropping point. He made no protest as he took the message for delivery in spite of the fact that he knew it meant walking weary miles.

OWEN sent the sergeant because there was no communication with his superiors.

In the message he wrote: "Position of this organization untenable and highly dangerous. Imperative that base be moved out of the zone of combat if this command is to function efficiently. Every minute of

delay in changing base places the 201st Squadron in unnecessary jeopardy. In my opinion the lives of the members of this command and the equipment of the organization faces grave risks through error in transmission of orders.—OWEN, Major, Commanding 201st Pursuit Squadron, A. E. F."

THE sergeant returned at one in the morning. He leaned heavily against the center pole of Brick Owen's quarters as he reported back from his mission. He was empty handed. He stood, staring at Owen, with dazed eyes. He was plastered with mud, and his face was streaked with sweat and grime.

"Well?" asked Owens. "Where's your answer?"

"No answer," croaked the sergeant.

Owen bounced off his chair before his field desk. The desk was littered with maps. He was still dressed, still the fighter on the defensive.

"What?" he snapped at the sergeant. "What do you mean, no answer?"

"Didn't give me an answer," droned the sergeant, his voice and face stupid with exhaustion. He just read what you wrote and looked at me. Then he laughed, kind of nasty like. Then he said: 'You go back and tell Major Owen that this headquarters is quite aware of his nearness to the enemy. Major Owen has perhaps forgotten the fact that he is now serving in the American Army, and that the American Army, as a matter of course, believes in establishing close contact with the enemy. In fact, the American Army believes that the only way to win a war is to fight. You may tell Major Owen that the purpose in sending him to the front was to

engage in hostilities with enemy aircraft. It may be a different procedure from that employed by the French under whom he previously served, and shocking to his more conservative leanings, but we are not interested in the pleasantries of war. We are interested in beating the enemy.

IF it will ease the major's mind to any degree, you may say that it is necessary to foresee events and to anticipate them. We have anticipated events in basing his squadron at its present location. For his information, if the fact has escaped him, you may call his attention to the fact that American divisions are now engaged in the business of mopping up the Foret de Retz, and that within a few hours his squadron will be far enough behind the line of combat to satisfy even a Major Owen. We are sorry to cause the major mental anguish over the safety of himself and his command, but after all we are fighting a war—'

The arteries in Brick Owen's temples were distended. His face became a grayish purple. His eyes were blazing. A pencil in his hand snapped and the jagged ends gashed his thumb. The corded muscles of his neck were straining against the flesh.

The sergeant took a step backward. He stared at Owen's face.

"Very well, sergeant," Owen said after a moment. He made a terrific effort to control his voice, to keep the devil raging within him from becoming master. But there was a terrible intensity in his voice. He took a bottle out of the desk and handed it to the sergeant.

"Here you are," he offered. "You need a shot of this. You look as if you'd been drawn through a knot

hole. I'm not thanking you for that little trip. What the hell good is thanks. But I know how much it took out of you and I won't forget it. Come on, wrap your fist around that bottle and you'll feel better."

The sergeant drank thirstily. The liquor gurgled as it ran down his throat. He wiped his mouth on his sleeve as he put the bottle back on the top of the desk. "Thanks a lot," he said. "Say, I'd have given a month's pay for a crack at that guy's jaw. He made me sore. He was so goddam high and mighty—with his lousy spurs and his trick hat. He talked to me as if I was something he pulled out of a manure pile in front of a French billet. I know the difference between a non-com and a lieutenant colonel, but it isn't that much difference. And besides, he had a nasty sneer in his voice. But he didn't fool me any—I've been in this man's army long enough to know the difference between an officer and a dressed-up four-flusher. What the hell does he care about this outfit. His job is to talk important and look big."

"You're discussing a superior officer," reminded Owen. "Your job is to keep your mouth shut and obey orders. That's my job, too—I've learned my lesson. That's the last billet doux from the commanding officer of the 201st Squadron to Divisional Headquarters."

THE sergeant studied Owen's face for a moment. "Yes, sir," he said slowly. "Yes, sir. I'm sorry, but that—mug—I mean, lieutenant colonel, burned me up." He turned about on unsteady feet. The liquor had done little to relieve the exhaustion.

"Good-night, sergeant," called Owen. "Don't bother about details in the morning. Sleep until you're

rested—you're off duty for twenty-four hours."

The tired voice drifted back to him from out of the night. "Yes, sir," it answered. "Thanks a lot; I'm kind of all in."

Brick Owen whirled. His fist drew back. It crashed against the center pole of the tent with a sickening thud. The tent shivered and seemed on the verge of collapse. Brick Owen's voice whistled between his teeth. "That dirty, murdering rat," he hissed. "The lousy, no-good kid killer."

The blood ran from the split flesh over his knuckles. He threw himself down in his chair and stared at the papers on his desk. After a moment he swept them onto the floor. He sprang to his feet and strode out into the night. He paced back and forth in the darkness covering the field.

THE red stain of gunfire was soaked into the blackness of the northern horizon.

A single word took the lives of most of the men of the 201st Squadron. A staccato, explosive word, expelled from the mouth of a German field marshal. And as it was uttered it took the lives of thousands of other men. It was a word that struck with the ferocity and deadliness of lightning.

The word was "NOW!" It was uttered by a stern-faced man in a field gray uniform who hung over great maps of the Aisne-Marne front spread on a table for his benefit. The map was marked with a multitude of vari-colored pins. The pins represented German positions and Allied positions.

With the word a score of officers swept field telephones from their places. A score of voices repeated the order.

"Now!" It was barked from one end of the German front to the other. Men crouching in shell holes heard it and thrilled to its challenge. Men huddled about field guns, concealed by clever camouflaging and natural cover, heard it and leaped to caissons and gun trails at the electric spark of that command. Guns, hundreds of them, hidden against this moment, waiting for this moment, tense, ready, went into action.

Commanders of infantry units heard the word and glanced at watches. They spoke low-voiced commands to subalterns, and gray-clad soldiers climbed up out of underground dugouts, gripped grenades and bayoneted rifles, threw themselves over the parapets of trenches, walked southward into the night.

A gray-green host, merging with the dawn colors of the forests, sweeping in a wide semi-circle, executing a swift, flawless counter-flanking attack.

Back of the front lines the commanders of reserve divisions heard the command and poured their fighting forces into the lines.

It was the spring of the lion.

The blow fell upon the American infantry in the Forêt de Retz with stunning force. The American infantry was used up. The men were shambling shadows who stumbled forward because to stop was to ask for death. The men had little idea of position or place. They had no vision of isolation nor the fact that they were cut off from all aid or succor on either flank.

THE world suddenly vomited flame and the stench of high explosives. The space about them was combed with a deadly precise drum fire. The ground under their feet bil-

lowed and writhed. Showers of stones and splintered wood smashed them to earth. Flame spouted about them, concussion deafened and blinded them. Yawning cavities opened in the earth at their feet.

They came to a stop. They remained motionless in the midst of the cataclysm. There was nothing else to do. Forward, to the rear, where they stood—hopeless—death hemmed them in. Death cut them down. Death blasted them into nothingness.

Then they saw the gray-green shadows coming through the woods. Shadows which seemed enormous in the half-light of the dawn. Shadows armed with glinting bayonets. Shadows which came on without a sound—walking forward steadily, mercilessly, coal bucket helmets upon their heads, giving them the appearance of so many robots made of steel. Shadows walking behind the drum fire from a thousand guns, mopping up as they advanced.

THE Americans in the Foret de Retz threw themselves upon the ground and lifted rifles, or else, with hoarse shouts out of raw throats threw themselves upon that unflinching line of bayonets, or into the hell of shell fire.

To the right and left, other gray shadows closed the ends of the semicircle, completed the encircling flanking movement, opening a gap in the Allied lines. And a stream of reserve divisions, pouring through the opening, spread out—infiltrated, rolled up the broken flanks in every direction. A million gray shadows poured into the Allied defensive territory through the small end of a funnel.

German artillery, moving up with unbelievable speed, followed the shock troops, inundated the Allied

secondary lines with a holocaust of gas and high explosives.

A French division broke under the pressure—colonial troops, unable to withstand the horror of artillery pounding. They broke, suddenly leaping out of positions, racing toward the rear. The panic spread like wild fire. The front was crumbling like a rotten dyke before the assault of a heavy sea.

IN THE Foret de Retz the gray-green shadows stalked over the remnant of the American attacking wave, passed on over ground littered with the dead of three days of vicious fighting. Stalked on and on, the pace becoming faster and faster, the velocity of the attack gaining new speed as the resistance lessened.

Far in the rear, the field marshal who had turned loose the gray tidal wave, sat silent and tense at his desk, listening to the reports which came to him over a hundred telephones handled by his aides. When he heard that the resistance was crushed in the Foret de Retz, and of the breaking of the French colonials, he permitted himself a thin smile. After which he went to bed.

The 201st Squardon flew for the first time on the morning the enemy launched his counter attack through the Foret de Retz. The pilots of the outfit walked out upon the field in the gray light of the dawn. It had not been necessary to awaken them for the mission. If any of them had slept through the hours before the launching of the counter attack, the ferocity of the enemy gun fire had acted as an alarm clock. They crossed the field, nervously tugging at helmets and goggles as they walked silent, subdued, and the earth trembled under their feet.

The Spads were on the line in front of the hangars. Coverall-clad mechanics were swarming about the ships. The beat of idling motors sounded over the field like the coughing of tortured beasts.

A figure stepped out of the gloom in front of Brick Owen.

"Good morning, sir," it said respectfully.

Owen found himself peering into the face of his ranking sergeant.

"I thought I told you to stay in bed?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir," grinned the sergeant, "but I figured that it was only right to be out here—the first time the outfit flies — really flies, sir — I couldn't sleep anyway."

"What's your name, sergeant?" asked Owen.

"Higgins, sir," came the grinned answer.

Owen studied his face for a moment. He saw blue eyes and an out-thrust chin. He saw stalwart shoulders and ham-like fists. He wondered why he had not noticed those things before.

"You're a good soldier, sergeant," informed Major Owen.

"Yes, sir," admitted Higgins. "A damned good soldier."

THERE was a silence for a moment while Owen wiped the glass of his goggles.

"They're sure raising hell up there," commented Higgins. "There are a hell of a lot of guns shooting up there this morning that weren't shooting last night—and they aren't our guns, either."

Owen continued to wipe his goggles in silence.

"They're a damned sight closer than they were last night, too," continued Sergeant Higgins, conversa-

tionally. "From the sound of things it's plenty hot in those woods."

Owen's hand reached out and the fingers gripped into Higgins' shoulder. "I've heard sounds like those before," he told Higgins in a low voice. "They always mean trouble. Trouble for us. Listen, sergeant, anything can happen to this field within the next few hours. I tried to tell that to another fellow who might have done something about it. Now I'm telling it to you. We have a bunch of men on this field who don't know anything about the way the Squareheads run a war. One noise is just the same as another to them. I'm responsible for the lives and well-being of those men, pilots and ground crew. I'm not God, I can't stop a German counter attack, but I can try to get ready for it.

"I'm taking twelve birds out to fly who have never looked down on a war front before and I'm leaving behind fifty or sixty men who have never been part of a war front before. None of them would believe that we may not come back from this little hop. None of 'em understand that we may not even have a field to come back too. Those boys who are going to fly with me are all busy in their minds writing letters to the folks back home telling all about the glory and excitement of war flying. A lot of them are never going to write those letters, Higgins. I know the signs.

THIS is your job while I'm gone. I want you to have this outfit in readiness to move within ten seconds. I want things set so that if we have to get out all we have to do is to load the junk on the trucks and high-tail it. I have a hunch that we're going to get out—that

we're going to be thrown out—understand?"

"Yes, sir," answered Higgins gravely. "I've had that hunch, too—somebody made a mistake—sending us here, sir—we don't belong here—and I don't know a damned thing about tactics—I'm only a sergeant."

YOU'LL have a chance to learn a lot about tactics within the next twelve hours," assured Owen bitterly. "You'll have a first-hand chance to see what happens when a nation springs to arms over night, and sends a lot of lame ducks overseas to command troops that have been in uniform ninety days. God knows I'm an American and my people before me were Americans, but I've been so sick of Americans for the last two months that I could crawl into a hole and die. We're over here to march straight to Berlin, sergeant. Yes, sir, right over the heads of soldiers that have beaten the world through four years of the worst war the world has even seen. And we're going to march over them with an army that has to borrow its guns, rifles, ammunition, airplanes and shells from other nations. And we borrow them from the very nations who have been hearing for the past twenty years about America springing to arms over night—that and the fact that America is too proud to fight. We're going to march over them with an army made up of graduates from St. Luke's Boys' Brigade and the National Guard—sure, walk right on to Berlin; slap hell out of the Kaiser. Haven't you heard any of the songs the doughboy bands play? And the shame of it is that they have the whole country sold on the idea. They have a picture that this war is like Teddy Roosevelt and the

Rough Riders, and the boys in blue charging up the side of El Caney in Cuba. Only the boys in blue never had to face machine-gun nests with Maxims tossing six hundred shots a minute at them, and field guns that can hit a dime a distance of eight miles—nor gas that can wipe out a regiment in ten seconds.

"Hell is going to pop when the citizen-soldier's get wise to the hokey that's been handed them.

"You have this field ready for evacuation, understand—no matter if Black Jack Pershing himself comes along and tries to stop you—understand?"

"I'll be ready to move, Major," promised Higgins.

They listened a moment, their faces lit by the flashes of gun-fire out of the north. Then Owen climbed into his seat and looked up and down the line of ships.

"Pull the blocks," he ordered.

THE slip stream of his motor ripped at the grass of the field, blew the dew of the dawn from wings in a wet spray. On each side of him exhaust stacks spat red, and gray Spads wheeled to follow after him. He led them to the head of the field and turned to face the wind. He waited until they were all in position. Then he lifted his hand, and poured the gun to his Hisso.

The gray ships thundered down field, lifted, gathered themselves and went roaring off into the first light of day. They made specter shapes against the black blob of the Forêt de Retz.

They had time to get two thousand feet of altitude and to reach a position between the center of the vast wooded space below them and a point on the map bordering the northern edge of the forest; a point

marked Longpoint, before the host of Fokkers supporting the enemy ground attack swamped them. The Fokkers were hanging close to the ground, barely clearing the topmost branches of the trees. They were spread over the entire sector. The blue-black coloring of their fuselages merged with the dark background of the trees, so that they seemed to materialize out of nothing. But the white crosses painted on wings and fuselages were outlines in sharp relief.

When the 201st saw them the Fokkers were hotly engaged in striking at points of resistance in the path of the German attacking waves. They dived recklessly into the depths of the forest, machine-gunning unseen objectives, and zoomed up from among the branches of the trees, to hang for an instant over the spot and then to repeat the diving tactics. The sound of their Spandaus rose like a chattering discord over the throbbing and rolling of gun-fire and the crash of exploding projectiles. They were in the midst of a double danger, from the troops they attacked and from the barrage of their own shells which screamed and whined through the space in which they flew.

NEITHER Brick Owen nor any of the survivors of that first five minutes of combat knew how many Fokkers were engaged in the business of strafing the Allied infantry and artillery. They were a host of ships, thronging over the woods—a waving, swishing, soaring multitude of wings moving at terrific speed.

And then they sighted the gray Spads of the 201st. They nosed upward in groups like hornets sensing the presence of a common enemy and swarming to the attack.

There was but one course left to

the 201st. Escape was impossible. The Fokkers were below the Spads. The gray ships were cut off from the earth. The one course was to attack, to go diving at the blue-black destroyers to smash at them, to kill fast and so furiously; to stun the enemy pilots with the recklessness and viciousness of the attack.

Owen pushed the stick against the fire-wall. His Spad nosed over sharply, picked up speed, became a plunging streak of gray light. He glanced over his tail. He saw that his kid pilots were following after him, but the effectiveness of the Spad formation was broken, the close V sagged wide. Here and there a gray ship was threshing wings to escape another gray ship.

THE beat of the Hisso became a scream. The slip stream smashed against faces. The flat wires cut into rushing air and moaned under the strain. The wings drummed. The Spads seemed to flatten out with the velocity.

Owen's ship smashed into the swarm of Fokkers. Its gray nose, swerving this way and that, stabbed at them. The red flare of his guns was reflected against the shining disc formed by his propeller. The staccato banging of his Vickers sounded above the rocketing of motors. A Fokker crumpled fifty feet in front of him; seemed to break into jagged fragments at the center section. It gushed flame and fell whirling while the wheels of the Spad flashed through the core of flame as Owen hurled himself at another blue-black shape.

A dozen men like Brick Owen, hanging closely together, fighting like demons, and with a background of three years of war flying experience behind them, might have had a chance with the Fokkers. As it

was, during that first minute, Owen, as the spearhead of the attack, smashed a way through the black-winged enemy, caused them to recoil, to give him space for his gray wings; caused them to flinch for an instant before the viciousness of his dive.

But Brick Owen was not a dozen men, he was one man in one ship. The Fokkers closed in on his tail, fell upon the ships which followed after him, hemmed them in, harried them, rode them through the heavens, broke them into scattered units. Perhaps those enemy pilots sensed the inexperience of the 201st. They became arrogant in the manner of attack. They flew close to gray fuselages and drove short bursts through linen and wood at point-blank range.

A dozen times Owen carried his ship up out of the trees and struck at the bellies of the cross-marked Fokkers above him. In four of those dozen times his tracers and slugs cut an enemy to ribbons and sent a black plummet crashing into the tops of the trees. Two of them burned with the savage abandon of an erupting volcano, and set portions of the forest afire. The dense, acrid smoke billowed up into the combat area. Dull, angry flame ate at the underbrush, to add to the horrors stalking over the earth.

THE Spads were swallowed up in hosts of the enemy ships about them. They were like gray shadows in the midst of a black hurricane.

Not that they accepted destruction without a struggle. They fought, as well as they knew how. They threw themselves desperately into the faces of the Fokkers, inviting disaster through collisions, but the Fokkers who were the objects of at-

tack slipped easily out of the way of the blindly charging gray ships, while other Fokkers, slashing at tail or fuselage or wings, went on with the deliberate business of extermination.

Once one of the youngsters flying in a gray ship struck a note of exalted glory. Four cross-marked wolves were tearing at the vitals of a single Spad. The pilot of that Spad thrashed about madly to escape the death that screamed and snapped and whined about his head. Snatches of splinters and fabric flew from his wings. He was in the center of a murderous cross-fire. The youngster who struck the note of glory came diving from above. He threw himself upon the four ships attacking the one Spad. His Vickers flamed with a quick succession of short bursts. He forgot to fly, forgot everything but that one of his fellows was ringed around with certain death. The diving Spad slipped and skidded, rolled its tail, churned about wildly, but the twin Vickers chattered viciously.

A BURST from the Spad gashed the tanks of a Fokker. Flame spouted high above the black wings and bathed the face and head of the pilot. There was an instant filled with a welter of flashing wings as ships swerved and banked to escape the flame hanging in the midst of space. The Spad smashed into the center of the mass. There was a rending, splintering sound as the Spad crashed blindly into a black fuselage. Broken fragments of wings dangled at the ends of wires and fittings. The Spad caromed with the shock, sideswiped a second Fokker and sheared its left wing from the fuselage, and fell, hopelessly jammed, into the center of two wrecked ships.

The Spad it had attempted to rescue flew falteringly about over the descending wreckage for a long moment, and then sagged into a spin. A leather covered arm hung over the cockpit and swayed inertly with the motion of the ship. The four of them struck almost at the same instant and in the same spot, tearing a jagged opening in the interlaced branches of the trees as they crashed. Spirals of flame ate at the wreckage; danced crazily; roared furiously; blotted out white crosses and red, white and blue circles.

Owen had a glimpse of the earth as his Spad stood upon one wing and wheeled to throw itself upon a new enemy. He saw tiny figures in gray-green advancing through the woods. They moved forward like machines. He saw the exploding shells from German guns breaking like an avalanche of molten metal over the American rear.

HE was in the center of a group of Fokkers. He could not tell how many of the 201st were still flying. He could not pick the Spads from the Fokkers. There were too many Fokkers. He knew that half of the ships of the 201st were on the ground. He wiped a smear of blood from his face with a sweep of his hand. A severed flying wire snapped about his head. Now and then the slip stream wound it about his head like a whiplash and the wire cut the flesh of his cheek. There were black dots drilled through the sides of the cockpit. A burst had smashed through the sides of the cockpit and the slugs had passed over his knees and had cut the covering of the left side to ribbons as they went through. Splinters from a riddled cross member flew up into his face. His head was filled with

a roaring, buzzing riot of sound.

He drove his Spad at a Fokker that was trying to block him from the south. The branches of the trees flashed under his wheels with insane speed. He eased back on the stick and cut in his gun. He saw a tracer stab through the middle of the Fokker's fuselage. The Fokker faltered, dropped a wing. He ducked under it, brushing the leaves with his wheels. He hugged the earth to prevent attack from below.

THROUGH the roaring in his brain came the whining sound of diving motors. He lifted his head for an instant. He saw a tight formation of Camels diving out of the heavens. They bore English markings. There was a choking sensation in his throat. The Fokkers were swarming to face this new attack. The sharp-like Camels were almost wing to wing. They screamed down into the center of the Fokkers. The new sound of Vickers and the quicker, sharper sound of Lewis' broke over the fury of hit motors. The Camels cut a pathway through the Fokkers, and, turning to the left and right, pounced upon the broken flanks of the Fokker group. They rolled the black ships up before them.

Out of the melee came two Spads. They followed after the Camels. Brick Owen made a hoarse sound in his throat; and plunged into the midst of the Fokkers. The snapping, ugly sound of slugs filled the air about his head. A red-hot something struck him in the back of the neck and jarred his spine. There were two Fokkers riding his tail, combing his Spad with burst after burst. He shook them off as he hurtled a spinning Fokker and threw the gray ship into the center

of half a dozen enemy Fokkers about to attack the Camels. He broke the enemy group apart. His gun muzzles seemed pressed against the side of one black fuselage. He saw the face of the enemy pilot. It was set in a grimace of surprise. A tracer disappeared into the leather covered body. There was a faint curl of smoke under the leather coat. Then the pilot was tearing at his chest with his hands—tearing at the leather of the coat, while his ship lowered its nose and dived down among the trees.

The Fokkers gave ground toward the north. A squadron of Nieuports on patrol had been drawn toward the battle. They came down out of the heights like winged creatures descending a long stair. They cut into the action to the right of the Camels. Between them they forced the Fokkers to draw off and to await for reinforcements.

Owen saw the trickle of blood running down over his chest. His eyes refused to focus. He was looking for his Spads. He saw the two remaining gray shapes swimming in a blue sea. He lifted his hand and signaled them. The movement sent a wave of pain down the middle of his back. He turned his Spad toward the south. He sensed that the gray ships were following after him. The world was a red smeared blot of formless putty. He pawed at his eyes with the grime smeared back of his hand. He found that he was rubbing against goggles. He threw the goggles over the side of the ship.

INSTINCT brought him back to the field behind the Foret de Retz. He eased the Spad down for a landing. As he pulled back on the throttle the left bank of the motor cut out. The exhaust stack

spat angry flame. He discovered that the motor cowl in front of his face was reduced to metal splinters and that the wreck of one magnet was skewed about its stand. He cut the switch.

The wheels of the gray ship touched the ground. The left wheel dragged and bit at the earth. The undercarriage collapsed. The Spad half rolled onto its back out of a ground loop. It fell with a thud and the splintering sound of a crushed tail section.

OWEN climbed out from under the wreckage. He discovered that the wheel and the left side of the undercarriage had been gnawed through by Spandau slugs. He took a stumbling step forward. He felt a hand clutch at his elbow. Through a thick haze before his eyes he made out the face of Higgins. Higgins' mouth was open, his face gray.

"That ain't all?" he was saying. The voice came to Owen from a great distance. He followed Higgins' stare. He saw two gray shapes landing—fluttering to earth. He nodded his head.

"That's all," he said thickly. He heard Higgins' voice again.

"My God," Higgins was saying over and over. "My God—my God."

The ground underfoot swayed and shuddered. A red vacuum swallowed them, hurled them about, smashed them to earth, seemed to split the flesh off their bodies. The pungent odor of high explosives strangled them, ate at the membranes of their eyes. Owen felt himself being dragged to his feet. He saw Higgins' hands were covered with blood. Somehow he understood that it was his own blood—from his neck—from that dead spot that was sucking the life from his brain.

Something hard struck against his teeth. Higgins' voice came to him again. "Get a load of this, Major," Higgins was begging. "Come on—take a big drink—you need it." The fiery liquor cut a raw pathway down Owen's throat and into his stomach. Some of the haze before his eyes cleared away.

THE field was leaping and staggering under a succession of terrific concussions. Flying clods of earth and stone showered about them. Gushes of flame sprouted from the green grass and left smoking black craters.

Owen heard his voice screaming over the din. "Get moving," he was shrieking. "Get moving—this is it—I knew it."

"We're all ready, sir," said Higgins' voice. "I heard it coming. I kept listening to those guns—and I saw what was coming out of those woods, and choking up that road. I've had everything loaded on the trucks but the tents. To hell with them, they can stand there until hell freezes—I got everything that's worth anything. The trucks are ready to pull out when you say the word. Only—it won't do any good to pull out—they couldn't even get on the road—look at that."

The road! A stage over which men and animals and machines fought and struggled. A stage choked with gray-faced men, with single guns, with crazed horses, with litter bearers and half squads of infantry all thrown together without meaning or form. Men who were lost, separated, maddened, dying. Struggling over that torn-up rutted ribbon, clinging to it when they might have found escape by taking to the sides of the road—but it was panic—in panic neither men nor animals think.

And then the curtain of enemy shell fire dropped upon the road. Blotted it out under a curling red sea of flame. Shells exploding a dozen feet over the earth—shells unloosening, whistling, screaming, crackling deluges of shrapnel. Shells freighted with gelignite, blasting great gaps in the frantic horde, shells laden with gas—thudding to earth, hissing softly, with the unloosed tendrils of phosgene floating daintily close to the ground.

One of the gray Spads which had returned with Brick Owen leaped a dozen feet into the air and fell back upon the field—matchwood. It fell in a shower of wreckage over an area of two hundred yards.

MEN were running about on the field, throwing themselves on their faces. Taking cover from the bursting shells, or committing deliberate suicide by wandering about dazedly.

The trucks of the 201st made one desperate effort to get clear of the field. They bogged down in the soft going. They were abandoned.

The drum-fire lifted, crossed the road, swept further toward the Allied rear.

Higgins' voice was screaming in Owen's ear. "Look!"

A gray-green line of enemy infantry broke out of the trees five hundred yards from the field. They came on at a trot. They seemed spread over the entire earth. They advanced over the smoking ruin their guns had made of the earth.

Owen found himself with the butt of a Lewis gun against his shoulder. In front of the sights was a bobbing line of targets in coal bucket helmets. He heard the dry, stabbing bark of another Lewis close to him. Out of the corner of his eye

he saw that Higgins was shooting with deadly precision and that figures were tumbling out of the gray-green lines converging upon the field. There was a chew of tobacco in Higgins' cheek. The pin on the top of his gun spun like a top. The gun was mounted upon a fence post.

Owen elevated the muzzle of his own gun a trifle. He caught the brass belt buckles of the enemy infantry on the top of the sight. He squeezed the trigger. The Lewis spat flame. He traversed slowly left to right. He cut a blank space in the attacking ranks. Rifles crackled, bullets whined and cracked about him. He saw a group of four riflemen trying to pick him off. He turned the gun on them. The four bodies made a mound, with arms and legs thrust crazily out of the mound.

The attacking wave took cover and the advance halted for an instant. A squad of picked men armed with grenades were sneaking forward, crawling on their bellies, hugging the ground. He pressed the muzzle of the Lewis. Grass and sod kicked up in the faces of the bombers. They thrashed about on the ground. One of them got up and ran forward at a lumbering trot, holding his potato masher above his head. The Lewis spat viciously and tore open the front of the bomber's queer tunic. The grenades exploded in his hand as he fell.

THE barrage returned. It combed the field. He felt hands gripping his arm again, dragging him away from the post and from the gun. Without seeing his face he knew that the hands belonged to Higgins. Higgins' voice was bawling in his ears.

"Come on, you goddam fool."

Owen laughed through the smear

of blood and soot covering his face. "Hell, you're not leaving?" he croaked. "Stick around—it's just getting good."

Then they were crawling in the bushes alongside the road with the barrage smashing and blasting at them. It was necessary to grip at the bushes and saplings along the road. The concussion seemed intent upon rending them apart, of hammering them to a pulp. Time after time they were buried underneath showers of earth. Clods flew in their faces with the force of hard smashes to the jaw. A rock hit Higgins in the center of the face. He fell senseless. Owen turned him on his back to look down on blood streaming from the sergeant's nose and mouth. The nose was mashed against his face. His eyes were swelling and growing black. A breath gurgled down his throat and his body shivered. He spat out a mouthful of blood and sat erect.

Owen put an arm around him and they crawled on.

THE wave of enemy infantry was coming on rapidly. The transports and guns on the road made a last frantic effort to escape. A couple of machine-guns traversed four hundred yards of the road. Men and horses went down together, kicking, trampled, crushed.

Owen and Higgins managed to break into a lumbering trot. Over their shoulder they saw everything on the road taken prisoner. Squads of the enemy fell out of the ranks and stood guard over the loot and the prisoners.

The shells were falling three hundred yards south of the road. An American battery went into action in the midst of the inferno. It fired three rounds, battery fire, then it was uprooted, flung to the winds,

destroyed. A single caisson stood unharmed in the center of the slaughter. Wounded men crawled on their bellies, dragging their legs after them.

Owen ducked across the road and cut over the fields. Together he and Higgins followed after the enemy barrage until the barrage came to a sudden halt over the first of the Allied trenches—the trenches out of which American troops had poured days before to make the magnificent gesture. They crawled through a field trembling under the impact of shell fire, through burning grass and the stench of gelignite.

A hundred yards from the line of trenches, Owen paused and drew Higgins down on the ground beside him. He listened intently. He raised his head. There could be no mistake. He heard the sound—a voice calling his name—it came to him between the crashing of shells and the whine and scream of fragments.

“Major!” called the voice. “Owen—Major Owen—Higgins.”

A figure in tattered uniform crawled toward them. A once brave tunic was ripped to shreds but there was enough of it left to exhibit the silver wings of the American air. A black face with split lips and glaring eyes stared at Owen. A black face with a swollen tongue licking at ash-dry lips. Scratched and bleeding hands. One sleeve of tunic and shirt was torn away exhibiting the bare flesh of a shoulder. There was a nasty gash in the flesh. It bled. It had been bleeding for a long time. The blood was thick and dried in places.

“I’M Lowe!” croaked the voice. “Jim Lowe, of your outfit, Second Lieutenant Lowe, 201st Pursuit Squadron, reporting to Major

Owen—” There was a note of hysteria, of madness in the voice. The words were like cackles. “I tried to keep up with you,” he blubbered. “I saw you—fighting the whole goddam German army back there with two machine-guns. I was trying to get my bus off the field. Shell came along and blew it to hell, and me in it. Then I got hit in the shoulder with a slug—while I was trying to get across the field—to where you two were handling those Lewis’—but the barrage cut me off. I had to stay there—flat on my face, fifty yards away from those lousy Square-heads, until it lifted—and by that time you were gone. I been following you—almost caught you—when Higgins got hit—”

He put his face down into the ploughed up ground and a sobbing breath seared his lungs. “God! It’s awful,” he moaned after a moment. “Somehow—it’s can’t be true—I’m having the same kind of dreams I used to have—when I first went into training and used to wake up in the night, grabbing at the blankets, after dreaming that I was in a burning ship with a tracer in my stomach. I’m waiting to wake up now—to get up and find it’s daylight—and hear the motors, and the first sergeant’s whistle.”

“YOU can’t wake up out of this, Old Timer,” said Higgins. The blood trickled from the edges of his mouth.

“They’re gone—all of them,” continued the youngster. “Even the mechanics—maybe some got away—but I saw a lot of ’em, back there on the field, cut down by the drum fire—some of them were grabbed by the Heinies. I’m the only pilot left. Jonas tried to get to his ship, too—but he never made it.”

Owen’s arms reached about the

boy's shoulders. "You're not living in dreams right now," he said almost harshly. "And you're not trying to save anybody's life but your own. You've got a couple of hundred yards to go before you can pile over the top of a trench and pray to your God that somebody is still holding that trench. You've got one chance—you better pull yourself together and start crawling."

"I'm not going soft," barked the boy. "I'm not a quitter, only—"

"You didn't expect anything like this," finished Owen.

"No—nothing like this," said the thick mouth and the glaring eyes. "But I'm not afraid, goddam it—I'm not afraid—I watched you guys handle those guns. Something inside me kept saying: 'they're men—if they sell out they're going to get a good price—if you could get over there you could do the same thing—you could stand up and shoot hell out of a whole army—that's why I wanted to get to where you were—I wasn't afraid.'"

Owen turned his head away. He saw that Higgins' bloody face was working. Something in the boy's voice was tearing at his heart.

"Come on, big boy, start crawling," he said roughly.

Flat on their bellies they sneaked a way across the field. After twenty minutes they fell over the top of a trench, to find a bayonet stuck at their throats and a gun muzzle behind the bayonet. They found American uniforms in the trench. Brick Owen uttered a single word as he stared up at the face behind the bayonet.

"Water!"

A LONG the road, where the shell-gutted remains of Allied transport was piled ten feet high, a bit of white paper was crushed in the

mud and blood. It fluttered weakly as a breeze touched it and urged it to mount and fly. But the mud held it fast. It was a curious bit of paper to be in such condition. It said:

"Officers, non-commissioned officers, and soldiers of the Third United States Army Corps.

"Shoulder to shoulder with your French comrades, you have thrown yourselves into the counter-offensive which began on July 18th.

"You rushed to this battle as to a party!

"Your splendid attack has routed the enemy. Your indomitable tenacity prevented the enemy from using their fresh divisions in counter thrusts.

"You have proved yourselves worthy sons of your great country, thereby gaining the admiration of your brothers-in-arms.

"Not less than 91 cannon, 7,200 prisoners, enormous booty and 10 kilometres of conquered ground. That is your own share in the trophies of this victory.

"Moreover, you have come to fully realize your superiority over the barbarous enemy of all mankind, against whom the children of liberty are fighting.

"For you, to attack, means to vanquish the enemy!"

"American comrades, I am indeed grateful to you for the blood you so generously shed on the soil of my country. I am proud to have had you under my command during these days of battle and to have fought together with you for the deliverance of the world.

MANGIN.

Countersigned, HELLE,
Chief of Staff."

NEAR to the bit of paper on which was printed General Mangin's so generous outburst, his a little too premature celebration of victory, a dead hand thrust itself out from under the splintered body of a lorry. Above the hand was a sleeve, of American olive drab.

"Comrade," Mangin's hand was too valuable to be pinned under the wrecked body of a lorry. Com-

rade Mangin needed his hands for the purpose of saluting superior officers, pinning medals on soldierly chests, and for the writing of such beautiful bits of military literature.

Comrade Mangin had not attended the "party" to which the American troops had rushed!

"The American officer (as well as soldier) often loses sight of the precautions necessary to avoid useless losses. The attacking units are not scattered enough. Evidently, they are still lacking in experience. The necessary liaison practice has not been acquired. The communications system is not thoroughly carried out. Its absence is the inevitable consequence of an insufficient organized liaison. It must be said here that telephone communications were extremely difficult; that their frequent interruption, combined with the blocking of the roads, made the transmission of certain reports very slow and difficult, and even altogether impossible.

"Certain units of the 6th Marines received no food supply during two days of battle. As the water resources of the region were deficient, the 6th Marines were not supplied with water during forty-eight hours.

"This simple quotation shows the necessity for troops to be well instructed something which cannot be done without sufficient time. In the furnace of battle there is no facility for explanations; the chief must know his job thoroughly and be understood and followed by his soldiers upon the merest sign."

—From a General Staff report of General Degoutte, Commanding General of the Sixth Army.

BUT polite old General Degoutte who so beautifully deplored the "inexperience of American troops" in his report of His High Command, and who reduced it all to "simple statement" concerning the fact that elements in the American attack were unfed for days and without water for days, had no knowledge of the fact that the Americans in command were vastly experienced in

something which could be used as a cover for inexperience. That something was buck passing.

The passing of the buck was going on while the German divisions were forcing a crossing of the Marne, and before the dead of the debacle could be buried by anything but enemy gun fire. It was going on while a kid second lieutenant was standing in the midst of the "retreat," pistol in hand, firing calmly and coolly in the faces of the stampeding troops who would not obey his treble orders to turn and face the enemy. It was going on while Brick Owen, Sergeant Higgins and Second Lieutenant Jim Lowe were crawling under the curtain of death and tumbling headlong into an American trench.

The Olympians who hid themselves in the confines of Headquarters, were preparing thunderbolts of wrath to be launched at the heads of men who had nothing to do with the war but to face the enemy and his machine-gun nests, his deadly artillery, his poison gas and his hand grenades, and to face them with parched throats, starving bellies and empty rifles.

THE three survivors of the 201st came face to face with an Olympian when Brick Owen succeeded in locating Headquarters. The three of them were bandaged, reeling with fatigue, and weak from hunger. It was like Brick Owen that he remembered that he was a soldier before he remembered that he was a man. It was like him, when swaying on his feet, he sought an opportunity to find new weapons and to ache for a return bout with the enemy. If it had not been for Higgins, he would have ignored his wounds, would have gone to Headquarters with his face blackened,

his hands raw and his half-clad body smeared with dried blood. Higgins had forced him to stay at a dressing station and to have the wound in his neck probed and bandaged. The surgeon who did the job marked him "hospital" as a matter of course, and seemed insulted when Owen laughed at him and walked away.

Then they found the Olympian.

Coming face to face with him, Higgins grabbed Owen's arm. "That's him," he warned in a hoarse whisper. "That's the guy I delivered your message to—and who sent back word to go to hell. That's him!"

Owen's body stiffened as he walked forward. He came face to face with the lieutenant colonel. "Major Owen of the 201st Pursuit Squadron reporting, and asking for orders," he said stiffly.

The lieutenant colonel's eyes traveled slowly over Owen's body. It was quite evident that the lieutenant colonel had not suffered greatly at the hands of the enemy. His whipcord riding trousers were meticulously creased, and his cordovan boots were glossy with polish. His form-fitting tunic was carefully brushed, and the shining wings over the left breast pocket were untarnished. He was a very military-looking figure, this Olympian. He looked at Owen in the manner of God surveying an earthworm.

STRANGE place to be asking for orders, don't you think?" he asked Owen with a trace of a snarl in his voice. "Usually an officer in command of a combat unit telephones his request for orders—from the zone of combat. But I see you here—admitting your incompetence and worse."

The veins in Owen's neck started a slow throbbing.

I DON'T quite understand, sir," he said in a jerky voice. "I'm Major Owen of the 201st Pursuit Squadron, or what was the 201st Pursuit Squadron, and you're looking at what remains of my outfit. We stayed at our base until the enemy took it with the bayonet, behind a drum barrage. If you'll go back there you'll find that they didn't take it so easily. We didn't have much chance from the beginning—but they paid plenty for that field and those Spads."

"Quite heroic, eh?" sneered the Olympian. "Fortunate that the commanding officer of the unit should be one of the three survivors. Not quite in keeping with the best traditions of the service, is it? Or perhaps you don't believe in the old customs which call for the captain to go down with his ship?"

Owen took a step forward. His red shot eyes were glaring and his hands were clenched. "Don't make the mistake of questioning my conduct," he growled. "I'm telling you in straight language that I never did have much use for a dressed-up dummy in a position of authority—a position that makes it easy for him to be a murderer, for the sake of shielding his own ignorance and protecting his own self-assumed dignity. I'm not asking for conversation from you, I'm asking for action. You're not fit to pass judgment on the conduct of any man—not as long as you have that crease in your pants, and that wax on your mustache."

I sent you word back here that it was suicide to keep my squadron at the base to which it was assigned. No sane superior officer would order a squadron into such a

spot. You sent me back word that I didn't understand the American method of fighting, and that my service with the French had made me soft. Well, let me tell you something, Mister. Soft or not, it was service, while you were still fighting the war through the dispatches your newspapers printed about what was going on over here. There are a couple of thousand soldiers out there in the Foret de Retz and behind it, who died to express your ideas of American methods, your ideas and the ideas of other fat-heads like you."

THE Olympian smiled bleakly, but the knuckles of his hand holding his riding crop were white. "It is my experience that a man always covers the lack of personal courage, brains and general incompetence with attacks upon his superiors," he informed Owen in a nasty voice. "I'm not surprised that you do the same. After all, you are in an extremely nasty position. Let me see, you face incompetence, disobedience of orders, cowardice in the face of the enemy—and several other smaller charges. You'll have to talk fast to shake them off. You'll have to explain how your "great experience" permitted you to make a gross error in establishing your base where you did. And you'll have to explain your flagrant disobedience of orders in remaining at that very dangerous base after you received direct orders to move your squadron to the base originally contained in your orders."

"I'll what?" barked Owen. His lips were purple, his face drained gray.

"It seems that your service with the French has robbed you of an elementary understanding of English," remarked the Olympian. "I'm quite sure you understand fully—if

not, a guilty conscience should prompt you, or translate for you—"

We'll see if anything in your experience can explain this," said Owen. His right fist swung a distance of six inches. The bunched knuckles thudded against the jaw of the lieutenant colonel. He went down, his body inert, his eyes glassy. He sprawled on the floor, his hand still gripping the riding crop.

Higgins swung Owen about. "Come on," he said with a hard sob in his voice. "Come on. He played you for a sucker. He wanted you to do something like that. He wasn't expecting a burst on the jaw, though. Don't you get it? He's trying to pass the buck to you. He's probably got it all fixed to make you the goat for everything that happened to the outfit. Come on, you haven't got a chance, get going, lam out of here."

Owen snatched at Higgins' hands. "I'm not running away from anything," he growled. "Nobody can tell me that I'm a liar and a coward."

"You smashed him on the jaw," warned Higgins. "In time of war that means death—hitting a superior officer. He's got you now—you haven't got a chance."

YOU get out," ordered Owen quietly. "This is my business. You didn't hit him. Neither did you, Lowe. You two get under cover—stay out of sight until this is settled. I don't want either of you mixed up in this business."

"Not much," glared Higgins.

"I'm still boss here," reminded Owen. "You're taking my orders. I'm ordering you to get out of here—and stay out—understand?"

Second Lieutenant Lowe was staring down at the inert form of the

lieutenant colonel. His face was ghastly. His body shaking.

The Olympian stirred and his legs jerked. Owen's fist banged against Higgins' chest. "Move," he ordered.

Higgins backed out of the doorway of the frame building, pulling Lowe after him.

The two of them disappeared in the midst of the troops filling the street.

Owen seated himself on the edge of the table and fumbled in his pocket for a cigarette. He drew out a crushed and frayed cylinder which still contained a few shreds of blood wet tobacco. He found a match and inhaled deeply. His eyes were fixed on the face of the Olympian. They were bitter, and filled with writhing contempt.

THE court-martial made a pretense of listening gravely to the witness on the stand. The room was stuffy. It smelled of tar roofing and of pine sap which oozed from the walls built of rough planking. The sun beat fiercely against the roof and made a furnace of the improvised court room. Here and there an officer slipped a nervous finger around the collar of his tunic or squirmed in his chair at the flesh torturing contact of woolen cloth. But for the most part they sat immobile, watching with intent eyes whatever witness was appearing before them.

The intent watching gave them an air of extreme dignity, an atmosphere of being a supreme court of the high gods called to perform judgment upon a mortal. They were all Olympians, none of them ranked below colonel. The chief of the court was a major general.

Lieutenant Colonel Malcolm Ellsworth St. Claire was upon the witness stand. His voice filled the

room. He was busy with the creation of an attitude of paternal impartiality. He was the greatly wronged, yet benevolent and sad superior.

I DESIRE to impress the court with the fact that I have no personal animus in this case, and that I have not preferred the charges being heard by this court through any sense of personal injury or revenge. I regret exceedingly that a man with such a past record should find himself on trial before his superiors for such a shocking violation of the military code. I feel, that if I did not bring these charges, disobedience of orders, and other military crimes would be encouraged through such reluctance."

The counsel for the prisoner interrupted with a dry question. "You will admit, Colonel, that Major Owen did knock you down with a punch on the jaw, after an argument, will you not?"

"Certainly. A very unexpected blow against which I had no time to defend myself, and which I, of course, could not anticipate."

"That swelling on the right side of your jaw is where the major struck you, is it not?"

The lieutenant colonel touched the bruise with careful fingers. "It is," he answered shortly.

"But of course, you would feel no personal animus against the major, merely because he happened to knock you out with a punch?" There was a mocking disbelief in the counsel's voice.

"None at all," lied the colonel in the grand manner. "The personal does not enter into this in any way."

"Please proceed," mocked the counsel for the defense.

The witness cleared his throat. "I never met Major Owen personally, until the unfortunate interview of a few days past," he told the court. "Still, I have heard of his reputation as an officer and as a combat pilot. Certainly his service with the French seems to have been highly meritorious if we are correctly informed. Hence, when he received orders to proceed with his newly organized squadron to a base at Coigne—approximately twenty-two kilometers south and east of Villers-Cotterets, I depended upon his experience to carry out his orders perfectly.

"Imagine my surprise, and then indignation, to have a runner come from him, to me at headquarters with a protest against occupying this station, and to learn, to my surprise and alarm, that Major Owen had made an error in carrying out his assignments and had mistakenly landed and consolidated a position of extreme danger on the south edge of the Foret de Retz, where his organization was in minute danger from enemy air attack, and so close to the actual combat area that no sane man would have remained in such surroundings for a minute.

I IMMEDIATELY sent Major Owen written orders to abandon this dangerous position and to establish himself upon the location to which he had been ordered. The order went back by the same runner. From what we may gather of following events, Major Owen deliberately disobeyed my order to evacuate his position, with the result that he lost his entire command and equipment. I can understand why a man with the record of Major Owen should dislike to admit having made a mistake or a blunder, but I cannot understand why, an

officer should deliberately disobey an order, when his disobedience amounts to the murder of his command.

"The enemy, as we know, executed a vigorous counter attack through the Foret de Retz, and caught Major Owen's 201st Squadron flat-footed. The fact that the major was covering himself with glory by leading his squadron out into the face of impossible odds, does not in anyway detract from the serious nature of his offense, nor does it bring back to life the men who so foolishly followed him to their deaths."

THERE was the harsh sound of a breath drawn through set teeth. The counsel for the defense put his hand on Brick Owen's arm and whispered to him. Then he stood on his feet.

"You are positive that the original orders given Major Owen called for the establishment of the 201st's field at this place—this Coigne?" he asked quietly.

"Certainly, I gave the order myself."

"You are also certain that you sent direct orders by runner to Major Owen, directing him to abandon the field on which he had landed, and to take up the original position at Coigne?"

"Certainly, I wrote the order myself."

"You swear to these things, not only on oath, but on your honor as an officer and a gentleman?"

The lieutenant colonel drew himself up in a huff. "Am I to understand that my truthfulness is being attacked?"

"You are to understand that," stated the counsel for the defense.

"I have produced the copies of the orders which passed between

myself and Major Owen," said the lieutenant colonel, angrily. "They should be accepted as full proof of my testimony."

"Such alleged copies of orders could be produced by the dozen on typewriters, days after they were supposed to have been issued. The orders in themselves are proof of nothing. They are merely bits of paper with words written upon them. You have not established in your testimony the fact that these very orders were issued to Major Owen at the time you state."

"Perhaps the major can disprove them," smiled the Olympian.

IT is not necessary," snapped the counsel. "It is necessary to prove that such orders were given him, and by you. For that we have your sworn statement and your assurance on your honor as an officer and a gentleman that you speak the truth."

"That should be sufficient."

"Not to try charges such as these against a man like Owen. To me it looks very much like a buck passing contest with a punch on the jaw as the sole actual testimony against the accused. It is very easy for a superior officer to hide behind a punch on the jaw. Especially when he is in grave danger of having his own glaring faults exposed and his unfitness for command exhibited."

The major general rapped on the table. "Counsel will not engage in personalities with the witness," said the chief of the court.

"I am only trying to show that in a contest between a man of proven record, such as Major Owen, and a man with an unproven record, such as the witness, the weight should be on the side of the man who has proven his worth, and whose worth has been recognized

and applauded by half a dozen nations. If Brick Owen was to tell me, after more than three years of war flying experience on this front, that he was on a certain field because he was ordered to be there, I'd believe him, and all the testimony of so-called superiors could be dumped in the waste basket."

COUNSEL will confine himself to the testimony and to the procedure of a court-martial," ordered the major general.

"But doesn't the court see things in the proper light?" pleaded the counsel. "We have a single witness who testifies that he sent certain orders to the commanding officer of a pursuit squadron. The commanding officer of that organization tells him flatly that he lies. If a mistake has been made it is to the interest of the superior officer to cover it up. We have no witnesses to disprove the testimony of the superior. The witnesses who might tell a different story are dead—and they died gloriously—murdered as the witness has said, through someone's blunder.

"It would be very easy for such a superior, who knew nothing of the actual appearance or condition of the front, to slip up in ordering a certain squadron to a certain place. Maps do not always show areas of grave danger. And when a superior who, in spite of the fact that he wears wings, has never flown a minute in actual combat, has never seen the front, and has no experience whatsoever in conditions affecting the front, attempts to pin charges of incompetence and disobedience upon an officer who has an international reputation for having done all of those things—well, to me—any court would be justified in throwing out charges brought by

such a superior and in censuring him severely.

If a mistake was made, Brick Owen did not make it. A man is being tried here who should at this moment be recommended for the Congressional Medal. Yet, he's being tried, because he punched a man on the jaw who called him a coward and a fool. Called him those things at a minute when he was dragging himself out of days and nights of hell, when he was half crazed by the sight of his men dying without a chance to live."

"If Major Owen desires to take the stand the court will be glad to hear him," stated the major general.

The counsel for the defense looked at Owen.

Owen hurred himself out of his chair and walked to the witness stand. The bandages were still about his neck. His rags of uniform were still hanging to his body. He stood erect and faced them. He looked at his superior, the Olympian, and his lips curled in contempt.

He took the oath. His voice was hoarse, it seemed torn from his chest.

I HAVE nothing to say, gentlemen," he told them. "If the officer states that I was ordered to a place called Coigne, he lies. I was ordered to the place I held until the enemy walked over the field, and until his field guns blasted it into powder. When I had no more ships I tried to hold it with Lewis guns. If the officer states that he sent me written orders to abandon my position, he lies. He sent a verbal message back with Sergeant Higgins of my command, who went to him with my plea to be moved from a position of suicide. He told Sergeant Higgins that my service with the French had made me soft, and that I knew

nothing of American methods. He made Sergeant Higgins a grand speech for my benefit on the winning of the war, at a moment when American soldiers were mowed down in heaps by enemy machine-guns and when the enemy, fully appreciating the stupidity of the American position, had already made his plans to annihilate the remnants of those troops.

IF the officer questions my courage or the courage of my men, or my ability as a squadron commander, I can only give him in return, utter contempt. I have never had a great deal of respect for floorwalkers and ribbon clerks who find themselves in uniforms and in command over soldiers, merely because a country has the misfortune to be at war. The lieutenant colonel is a liar, on his oath, and on his word as an officer and a gentleman. He has made one true statement. I did try to knock his teeth down his throat. And I'd do the same to any man who tried to load me down with his own ignorance and mistakes, or who made a public statement concerning my courage or the courage of men who are dead, and cannot defend themselves.

"It makes no difference to me, how this court disposes of this case. Before this time I have always been proud of being American. During the time I served with the army of another nation it was a consolation to me. Since joining 'my own kind,' as the officer puts it who induced me to transfer from the French to the American services, it has been a curse to me. I have nothing to ask from you gentlemen, as I have no apologies or explanations."

He strode back to his chair without so much as asking permission.

He was removed, while the court considered his punishment.

An hour later he was marched back into the court room. The Olympians were convened. The major general cleared his throat. He seemed embarrassed, ill at ease.

The sentence of the court," he began without preamble. "On the charge of incompetence to command; not guilty. On the charge of disobedience of orders; not proved." He glanced at the lieutenant colonel, who scowled. "On the charge of striking a superior officer in violation of the Articles of War, and in time of war, the court, taking into consideration the defendant's admittedly outstanding service as an Allied officer, but helpless because of his admitting the charge, sentences him to dishonorable discharge from the Army of the United States, to be stripped of his markings of rank and service, and to be transported back to the United States, and to be confined in the United States Penitentiary at Leavenworth, Kansas, for a period of ten years. This sentence to be submitted to the Commanding General of the American Expeditionary Force for his approval. Pending the approval of sentence, the defendant is to be given in charge to the provost general and imprisoned, under guard."

He paused abruptly, wiped his face and sat down. He did not look at Owen.

There was a hoarse shout of laughter. It came from the prisoner.

THEY marched him out of the room between two military policemen.

Through the windows of his prison, Major Owen could see the American infantry passing through the street on the way to the front. Hour after hour the shuffling tramp

of thousands of nail-studded boots sounded on the cobblestones. In between the regiments and brigades on the march were artillery units. The horses and men were in pitiable condition. The horses were tortured masses of skin and bones. Their flanks heaved with the labor of breathing.

A few hours before General Summerall had written the French High Command. "You know the condition of my horses. I cannot assure you that I will have all of my guns in position at the hour for the opening of the attack, but I will guarantee to have them there within a few hours after the opening of the battle." So the horses were trying to make good for General Summerall. They died in the traces, they dragged themselves forward harnessed to their heavy burdens. They arrived when General Summerall promised they would arrive.

It is too bad that there are not military honors and decorations for horses. They were heroic beyond human comprehension.

AT TIMES the droning of airplane motors filled the heavens above the prison, and looking upward, Owen could see gray wings marked with the American insignia darting toward the front. After they had passed over; after they were merely an indistinct drone out of the north, he turned away from the window, seated himself on the edge of his cot, and buried his face in his hand, while his fingers gripped at the still, uncombed shocks of his hair. Sat there, with his soul sick, and his brain aflame. Sat there, with visions of prison cells, of barred windows, of convict gray dancing before his eyes. Words came back to him—ten years in the United

States Penitentiary at Leavenworth.

To still the madness in his brain he paced up and down the length of the room and beat on the walls with his fist.

Outside the little house in which he was held prisoner, two military policemen walked a constant post. Now and then they stopped at the window and spoke to him. He sensed the fact that they were troubled and that the duty was distasteful. They tried to give him sympathy and encouragement. A dozen times one or the other would stop, offer him a cigarette, and repeat the same words.

DON'T you worry none, Major. They can't make a raw deal like that stick. Listen, when them papers get to Pershing he'll raise hell and toss 'em out of the window. You'll be out of the can and back in the air as quick as a messenger can get through. Think nothing of it. A lot of good boys has been tossed in the can—why I did thirty days back in the States for A.W.O.L., and all I wanted to do was to say good-by to the folks before we came over here. I was gone thirty-six hours. It cost me thirty days and two-thirds pay, but it was worth it. Besides, that guy had it coming. There are a lot of guys, buck privates and non-coms, that would have given a month's pay to see that wise guy get a bust on the jaw. He's a washout."

But they were guards just the same. The ugly looking Colts rested against their hips. They were soldiers. They were obeying orders. They might be sympathetic, but if Brick Owen attempted to crawl out of that window, those Colts would go into action. Brick Owen knew it better than anyone in the world.

Three nights and three days passed.

Nights that were as long as eternity. Days that were never ending. Broken only by the friendly interest of the M.P.'s and the visits of the K.P. who brought him his meals. Three days filled with the thudding of marching feet, the banging and rattling of iron-shod wheels over the cobblestones, and the blare of aircraft motors from overhead.

Three days and nights, during which the guns out of the north took up a more vicious and deeper chorus. Three days during which his guards paused at the window to fling him a snatch of news.

"Messengers just came through with the news that the Squareheads have been dumped back across the Marne. The boys held 'em right in their tracks. But they couldn't do anything for the gang trapped on the other side of the river. Guy riding dispatches is a friend of mine. He told me that we were building bridges and that we're crossing the river this afternoon. Says the river is lousy with dead bodies floating on the water—Squarehead bodies cut down with our machine-guns. He says that hell will be nothing alongside of what our guys who are going to cross the river are going to get."

OR ELSE: "The 2nd Division is driving 'em back around Villers-Cotterets—that's where you came from ain't it? Yes, sir; them regular army guys got their second winds, and they're giving 'em hell up there, took back everything we lost last week, and the artillery is knocking hell out of the Jerry guns. They're saying that they don't intend to stop until they get to Soissons—"

There was a phrase Owen could hear from the marching infantry a dozen times an hour. It came from the mouths of officers. It crackled

like a whip from corporals and sergeants. It was echoed by haggard-looking doughboys. The lorry drivers used it when they were stalled among the troops. It had an eager, grim, dangerous sound. Two words—the spirit of the American troops—"Let's go!"

"Let's go! Let's go!" It began marching with ponderous rhythm through Owen's brain. The tramping feet drove the words against his consciousness with the force of a sledge-hammer driving a stake in hard earth.

LET'S GO!" It haunted him, tortured him. It caused him to clench his hands until the fingers bit deeply into the calloused palms. It caused him to turn away from the windows, so that he could no longer watch the troops pouring by, and to put his hands over his ears to shut out the sound of gunfire and the droning of motors.

There were times when he wondered if he was sane. If all that had taken place within the past days, all that was taking place was not an interlude of insanity, if it were not delirium. He wondered if he would not awaken, to find the terrible fever that burned his brain gone; to find himself in the cold, wet dawn upon a flying field with the gray outline of a dozen Spads huddled on the line, motors coughing and wires humming, ready to lead a patrol over the lines. Ready to lead it with those same words coming from his mouth—"let's go—"

And in the midst of the delirium the haunting spectre of prison rose up before him and waved bony, grisly arms, leered at him, "To be stripped of his rank—" That meant to have the button cut off his uniform, to be publicly disgraced, demeaned before his fellow soldiers.

He laughed loudly and hoarsely as he looked down at the rags covering his body. Blood encrusted tatters of his shirt. The mud-stained, shapelessness of his trousers. The crumpled, scarred leather of his boots. Christ, they wouldn't have much "stripping to do," the Square-heads had taken care of that.

His head spun drunkenly. He felt for the edge of his cot with his hands. The wound in his neck burned like a white-hot iron into his brain. The wounded shoulder was stiff and filled with a liquid heat that went pumping over his body.

HE knew it was night again because darkness blotted out the shape of his room. The guns boomed on and on. The cadence of marching feet beat like a heavy surf.

He rolled over on his face on the cot to escape a voice that was calling to him. It was Higgins' voice. He knew it. But it was a part of the madness, part of the fire that seared the base of his brain. The voice was calling him in a whisper, calling his name.

"Major—Owen—hey—Major."

He sat up on his cot, his hands gripping the wooden framework. He stared into the darkness. There was a terrible urge prompting him to plunge his body across the room, to crash his head against the wall to stop the pain, to end the madness. His eyes were staring at the window. His breathing stopped for a moment. The head of a soldier was outlined at the window. The outline was calling his name—over and over—patiently, softly.

"Major—Owen—hey—Major."

And the voice belonged to Higgins. It was not a part of the madness.

He felt for the floor with his feet

and lurched toward the window. Dimly he was wondering how Higgins could be outside calling to him. There were guards out there—no one was permitted to visit him. A hand gripped his wrist out of the darkness.

"It's me," a voice was saying, a voice frantic with haste. "Listen, we're going to get you out of here. Maybe you've been thinking that I'm a louse—not showing up—but I've been trying to fix things. You wouldn't let us stick with you—back there—before the trial, but you can't stop us now. It's all fixed—you're coming out this window. You're going to lam out of here. You ain't going to no penitentiary in no States. Listen, it's fixed. I got a buck private's uniform and a suit of civilian clothes. You'll change clothes when I get you out of there. I got a set of orders I bought off a guy that was going on leave. You can get to Paris. You can lose yourself for a couple of days, and then you can drift—over the border, into Switzerland—anywhere you like—but you'll be out of here—"

OWEN heard his voice. It was a scoffing croak. "You're crazy," he told Higgins. "Beat it, before they throw you in the can along with me. You can report to somebody and be returned to duty. You're clear—you can't do me any good. You'll have one of those M.P.'s on your neck. Listen, sergeant, I appreciate—everything—but don't you see—you can't fight the whole damned army. You haven't got a chance."

"I thought you were a fighter!" Higgins voice was shaking with scorn. "You—Brick Owen—standing there telling me that he'd rather take a rotten rap lying down than

make a stab to play out his own game. Sure there's a guard out here—" he turned his head.

"Hey—soldier—" he called.

The shadow of a M.P. came in front of the window. He stood with his eyes fixed on Owen's face.

"Well, there's your guard," said Higgins. "He's a white man. He's going to help us. He's willing to take a chance to help another white man. I'm going to clonk him on the head with a pistol butt just before you climb out of the window. I'm going to knock him colder than hell so there won't be any come-back as far as he's concerned. We talked it over—this afternoon before he went on post. It's his idea—"

SURE it's my idea," growled the M.P. "It'd be the idea of any guy that saw a dirty lousy deal being put over on somebody that hasn't got a chance. I'm a soldier, but if somebody sneaks up behind me and smacks me on the head with a gun-butt I can be knocked out the same as anybody else."

Owen listened to the beating of his own heart. It roared in his ears. The desire for freedom was rising hot in his belly. He looked at Higgins' face. "It's crazy," he said. "It hasn't got a chance."

Overhead an intense staccato filled the universe. The sound swooped like a descending fury. Screaming voice mingled with the sound, and then the crashing of dropping bombs. Splashes of red cut into the blackness of the night. The whining frenzy of pursuit planes cut into the duller and slower sound of bombers.

Higgins' voice leaped with alarm. "Gotha's!" he screamed in Owen's face. "Gotha's and light bombers—a million of 'em—and they're hitting right on the house tops."

The prison, hit, rocked and shifted on its foundations. An avalanche of falling bricks tumbled into the street. Voices, hundreds of voices screeched—voices of doughboys—marching toward the front, caught in the midst of the bombing.

Owen's hands gripped the frame of the window. "Stand back," he told Higgins. "I'm coming out." He forced his body through the window. The M.P. stood motionless for a moment, then he turned to Higgins.

"O.K., soldier, do your stuff," he growled.

HIGGINS drew his Colt from its holster. "I'm going to hit you a good smack," he said. "I don't want you to get in no trouble—"

The dull thud of gun-butt against skull. The M.P. sagged at the knees and fell forward on his face. Higgins bent over him for an instant. "He's O.K.," he said matter-of-factly. His buddy will find him in a minute. He stepped across the street—on purpose—and besides they'll have the bombing as an alibi—"

A third shadow joined them. Owen's body tensed, his hands clenched.

"Lowe," whispered Higgins. "He's been with me, every minute. Good boy, that kid, has enough guts for ten men."

In the darkness Second Lieutenant Lowe's hand gripped Brick Owen's. They spoke no word. They flattened themselves against the walls of the houses. Fountains of red flame gushed up about them. They saw a corner of the headquarters building leap into the air, descend in splinters. There were ugly, twisted shapes lying in the streets.

They reached the outskirts of the town just as the bombers wheeled

and turned back toward the north. The Fokkers in escort machine-gunned the streets. They went on through the darkness in silence.

Other ships cut through the night overhead. Higgins listened.

"Our gang," he said shortly. "On the tails of those goddam bombers. They've got 'em against a head wind on the way back. It sounds as if they were burning things up."

CHATTERING machine-gun fire drifted down out of the black heights. Now and then a gray shadow passed in front of a star, or a gray wing reflected the flame which swept the town.

Owen's eyes were staring, he stumbled as he walked along. His head was lifted toward the skies. He breathed in snatches.

"Two-seaters," he mumbled once. "I can tell the Vickers from the Lewis. They're swinging this way, the Squareheads can't get anywhere trying to fight against that wind—it's drifting them south."

They came to an abrupt halt. A sighing, whistling sound broke over their heads. A motor was gunned once. An exhaust spat orange-green flame. A gray shape flattened in the darkness, hovered over the open space. Touched its wheels with a metallic thump. It balanced on its wheels for an instant before the tail dropped and the skid dug into the earth. Then it rolled to a stop. Its motor still churned at idling speed.

The three of them stood staring at it. Suddenly Owen broke into a headlong run.

There was a moan from the pilot's cockpit. They saw in the darkness that the ship was a Salmon. The fuselage around the rear seat was drilled through and through with a multitude of black dots. A

shapeless something hung in the center of the gun rack. A shapeless something with a twisted neck and a white face, masked by goggles. The something was the observer. He was riddled with Spandau slugs.

A groan came from the pilot's seat. They saw a huddled figure bent over the stick. The figure was mouthing words. "Made it," he said gaspingly. "Made it—got her down." The figure shuddered and jerked. After a moment it became still. The back of the figure was wet with blood. The flying coat was marked with three of the black dots that pierced the observer's cockpit.

THEN they were lifting the two men out of the cockpits. Owen's face was white and strained. He lifted the pilot in his arms and placed him on the grass beside the Salmson. When he stood erect his chest and arms were smeared with blood.

He made a choking sound in his throat.

"They're both gone," said Higgins. "That guy had plenty of guts—making a landing in the dark—shot to hell—" He lifted his head quickly and his mouth snapped shut. Owen was crawling into the pilot's seat of the Salmson. His eyes were hard and narrowed. His jaw was outthrust, the muscles of his cheeks bulging. He settled into the seat.

"Well, so long," croaked his voice.

Higgins foot was fumbling for the step to the rear seat. "Hey—you goddam fool—" he yelled. "Get out—you can't fly this thing—you'll break your crazy neck—"

"You're talking to an ex-officer, sergeant," came back Owen's voice. "I can fly anything that has wings—and this is a Salmson."

The droning fury seeped down upon their heads from the fight raging above.

Owen's eyes gleamed strangely. He laughed aloud.

"Go ahead," grinned Higgins. "I've always wanted to fill in the back seat of one of these chariots. I never did know much about flying, but, boy, can I massage the atmosphere with one of these Lewis'."

"You're a goddam fool, Higgins," remarked Owen gruffly.

"Yes, sir," stammered Higgins.

They looked down at the white face of Lowe. "You're not—going—leaving me here—like this?" There was a thickness and a tremor in the boy's voice.

SURE, only one ship," reminded Owen. He reached over the edge of the cockpit and his arm fell about Lowe's shoulders. He hugged him for an instant, the bear hug of a man with joy in his heart. "Sure, right here on the ground, leaving you flat," he repeated. "You'll go noseing back there to headquarters and report yourself present. You'll be sent up with a new squadron—new ships, new men, new chance—everything. Well, Brick Owen, he only has once chance—this one, and he's going to make the best of it."

"But Higgins—you're taking him."

Owen glanced at Higgins.

The sergeant grinned from the center of his rack. He was fumbling at the Lewis pan with his fingers.

"Sure—I'm going with him," he told Lowe.

The fury raging through the black heavens increased with every moment. A red torch fluttered out of the unseen depths of the sky and lit the world with its tumbling fall. The reflection bathed their faces.

There were tear furrows on Second Lieutenant Lowe's cheeks.

"I don't understand it," he said miserably. "You going back—like this—after the deal you got—I'd think you'd hate everything that had an American marking. I'd think you'd go and join a Squarehead outfit—or something like that—but to do what you're doing—knowing that when you come back—you're going back to prison—"

"Yeah, it's funny as hell," growled Owen. "I don't figure it out myself, unless maybe it's the fact that you and me and Higgins here make up the United States, and not a couple of fatheads dressed up like tin soldiers on a Christmas tree. Somehow, it doesn't seem to matter much what the fatheads do—we manage to wangle through, somehow—you see what I mean? They put me in the can—but I'm out here—with a ship—and I'm going to fly—that's what I mean—you and me and Higgins—somehow we're kind of brothers—we go places."

"Yeah!" snapped Higgins "Blood brothers—"

Owen lifted his hand. "S'long," he said.

Higgins swung his gun to point over the Salmson's tail. "S'long," he echoed.

Lowe waved his hand. He heard Owen's voice.

"Let's go!" it said.

The motor in the Salmson roared. The slip stream beat at Lowe's face, covered him with grass and dirt. The gray ship slithered through the night, picked up speed, lifted over a tumbled-down fence, climbed—up and up—

He stood there for a moment, until there was only the drone of the motor, rising eagerly to join the intermingled drones of the motors higher overhead. Then he turned. He stumbled as he faced toward the town and walked slowly away from the field. He stumbled because his eyes were closed. The wetness on his cheeks seeped out of the corners of the closed eyes.

The staccato of Vickers and Spandaus stabbed out of darkness. Now and then the sound was varied by the dry barking of a Lewis.

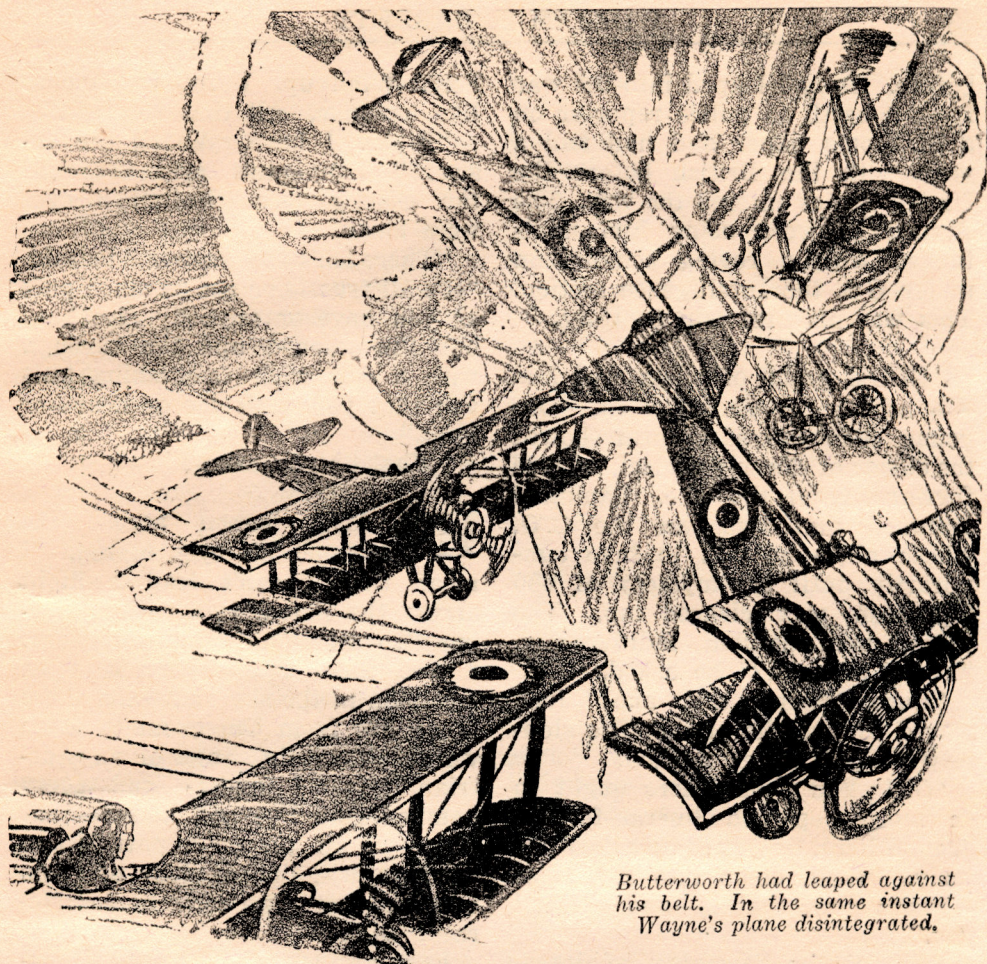
NEXT MONTH

GEORGE BRUCE

writes

Another thrilling yarn of the war in the air. Next month you can read about a real human being who flew through hell—a character that will live forever in your memory. Don't miss the January issue of

SKY FIGHTERS



Butterworth had leaped against his belt. In the same instant Wayne's plane disintegrated.

Double Death

By William E. Barrett

Here is a smashing complete novelette of strange wings over the Italian front. Ships were being blown to shambles and none knew why. Until Jack Lannigan came.

THE TINY American drome north of Istranso on the Italian front gleamed in the sunlight beneath Jack Lannigan's S.E.-5. Lannigan looked at it with

interest. If reports were true, there was grim tragedy on that shining drome; tragedy and mystery. Lannigan had had his share of both since the war got under way—and

before. He had leaped into the war from a berth as police reporter on a St. Louis paper and had had a year with the British before the United States entered the war. The Americans were using him unattached with a roving commission under G-2, the Intelligence section. This was his first trip to Italy.

A GLUM group of pilots eyed him soberly as he rolled in. One young chap whose uniform showed the effects of slovenly neglect, stepped forward from the line. Lannigan assumed that this was the C. O. whose place he was to take temporarily until the mystery of 690 Squadron was cleared up. The young man saluted indifferently. "You, Lannigan?" he asked.

"Sure. Where's the wake?" Jack waved toward the pilots. The sloppily attired officer flushed.

"Oh! You think there ought to be more pep and hurrah-forever around here, do you?" he asked bitterly. "Well, come into my office—yours now, that is—and I'll tell you."

Without the formality of introducing Lannigan to the other pilots, the deposed C. O. turned on his heel. "Incidentally," he said over his shoulder, "my name is Holland."

In the semi-gloom of the stone house, that served Captain Holland for quarters, the two men faced each other across a table. Holland filled a tumbler out of a black bottle and pushed the bottle across the table. It was an English whiskey of proven potency and Lannigan raised his eyebrows. Men who drank such liquor out of tumblers were entitled to respect—and sympathy. Holland tossed his drink, grimaced and waved his hand.

"You've probably had reports," he said thickly. "Rotten morale

here. Wind up. Dying in bunches like bananas. All that twaddle."

"Right. I have. What's the answer?" Lannigan's eyes searched the other's face. Holland's eyes were bleak.

"There isn't any answer," he said. "It's all true. I've got as much guts as you have or anybody else has; but I'm washed up. I'm through with a war where something kills you that you can't see or hear—or fight."

"What do you mean?"

HOLLAND leaned across the table and his eyes blazed. "I mean that I can't lead a flight across the patrol line without losing two men and sometimes four. I lose them when there isn't an Austrian in the sky and when there is no fire from the ground; when we aren't within range of an Austrian gun. I know—and every damned man I've got, knows—that when we go out on a patrol, two of them will die, or four of them will die, before we come home. Morale? Hell!"

Lannigan stared. It sounded hysterical to him. "Why two or four?" he asked. "Why not three or five?"

"You tell me." Holland snarled the reply. "I just know that it never is three or five. I've lost sixteen men, Lannigan, since I've been here and the Austrians never got one of the sixteen. Something got them; something that we weren't fighting. Now it's your job. You lead them out to the killing. After you've lost your sixteen—if you don't take part in a double funeral before then, maybe you'll be more sane than I am. If you are, then I'll buy you a drink. You'll need it."

"But, man, there must be an explanation. What happens to the

men?" Lannigan's brow was furrowed. Holland laughed shortly.

"They go down, my friend," he said. "They go down. When they go down, they crash and spatter all over these god-blasted Alps. Lead 'em out and watch 'em."

Gulping another half tumbler of fiery liquor, the deposed commander lurched to his feet. "You'll find records, vital statistics and the whole blurry shooting match here," he said wildly. "Help yourself. You're welcome to all of it; all of it, my friend. I'm through."

HE banged out of the room and Lannigan stared after him. Slowly, he lighted a cigarette. "Hummmm," he murmured thoughtfully. "There is more to this than meets the eye. Well, we shall see what we shall see."

For five minutes he sat there quietly and smoked. Graham, his chief at G-2, had not exaggerated the situation here in Italy a bit. When pilots stand around listlessly and watch a strange ship land on their drome without showing either interest or excitement and when a commanding officer talks as Holland talked, then morale is a forgotten word. No wonder reports had come through that this squadron was inefficient and that it was disgracing the U. S. A. S. in the sight of the Allies. No wonder at all. Still?

Sixteen men lost in five weeks and none of them charged off to Austrian guns

Jack Lannigan got up and strode across the room to the map on the wall. He studied the patrol line, noted the landmarks and then went out. His S.E. had already been serviced and he ordered it out on the line

"Holland says I'll lose at least

two men if I take a flight out, eh?" he said softly, "Well, I can't lose two if I go alone. We'll look around."

AN hour later he regretted the fact that he had gone without a more careful check-up of his bus or that he hadn't taken one of the squadron Camels. He had crossed the Piave and was flying over some of the wildest country on earth when his engine sputtered and gasped. A glance at his pressure guage showed him that his pressure was practically nil. He grabbed the hand pump and pumped hard while his eyes strained over-side.

Below him spread the Alps; snowy peaks, rocky valleys, terrible gorges and precipices. There was death in the very look of that jagged terrain, death for any pilot unfortunate enough to be forced down. Not a level spot showed and the sky was empty save for the one struggling ship.

Suddenly an eye winked somewhere below. Lannigan pushed his goggles back. He could place neither the location nor the character of the eye. He merely knew that something had flashed off to his right; something that was not part of the regular scenery. "There it is again," he muttered, "but what in blazes is it?"

He had seen something that time and there was no doubt about it, but he did not know what he had seen. He had an impression of sun glinting off a monstrous goggle or of a great, evil eye winking; yet he was sure that it was not the sun reflected off a large glass or a body of water. He banked hard over. He was curious but not as curious as he was alarmed. He was dead-sticked. He had to go down. He

could no longer see the eye nor anything which suggested it, but his heart leaped wildly as he saw something else. Almost miraculously, a flat table spread beneath him; a plateau atop a mountain that appeared to be sliced off where the others were conical.

"You could fly over that for years and never see it because of the shadow of the rest if you didn't happen to get at the right angle. And I'd never have gotten in that angle if it wasn't for that eye, or goggle or whatever it was."

Jack was nursing his ship down now in a steep glide. It was going to be tough setting down on that table. It was a short run and a good part of it seemed to be cultivated. There was a rocky slope, too. He levelled off, whipped the stick over, slipped her and came almost to the ground with his wing tip before he righted the bus and squashed down. As he swung over the side, he saw a slim youth in brown overalls and a heavy sweater who was regarding him out of wide eyes. He waved good naturedly but the boy seemed to shrink away.

"Who are you?" he said, "and what do you want here?"

THE boy spoke in clipped, precise Italian in a manner that conveyed that the tongue was natural to him, but that betrayed, at the same time, a terrific sense of fear or embarrassment as though speaking to strangers was a new and frightening experience. Lannigan, who had learned to speak Italian after a fashion while serving as a reporter on a New York newspaper, smiled.

"Name's Jack Lannigan," he said. "I've had a bit of trouble and had to set down here. Fix it in a jiffy now. What's your name and how

is it that you are living up here?"

The youth was staring at the ship. He backed slowly away, then suddenly he took to his heels. Lannigan looked after him with a puzzled frown. "Figure that out?" he said slowly.

For a second he stood and stared at the little pathway through the trees down which the boy had vanished. No house was visible nor was there anything on this quiet mountain top that remotely suggested the eye that had guided the flyer down. Lannigan shrugged.

"It might be worth a fellow's while to poke around up here," he murmured, "if he didn't have anything else to do. Me, I've got to get this bus going and get on the job before it gets dark."

IT TOOK a half hour to get the engine singing sweetly once more and as Jack Lannigan stepped back and wiped his hands, the mountain top mystery intruded once more upon him. A twig snapped at the edge of the clearing and the flyer whirled. What he saw caused him to recoil with a muttered exclamation.

There was a man standing there with his head forward more in the attitude of one sniffing than of one staring; an old man whose long white hair hung loosely over his shoulders and whose face was hideously scarred. It was the face that fascinated Lannigan. He had never seen a face like it; not even among the knife-hacked denizens of Dago Hill. It was not merely scarred; it was slashed and furrowed and gouged. Chunks of skin and flesh seemed to be gathered in bulges as though the thing that had inflicted these wounds had not only cut but squeezed and twisted. It was unlike anything human. Not

even the gargoyles of the many old European cathedrals that Lannigan had seen had faces as hideous.

"Now what in God's name could have done that?" Instinctively Lannigan's news-trained mind leaped backward for a story. Before he could take a step toward the old man, however, the youth that he had first seen came rushing madly down the path. Paying no attention to the flyer, the boy gripped the old man's arm and jabbered in swift staccato syllables that rattled out so fast and at such a low pitch that Lannigan could not follow. The old man crouched and his deformed face became more hideous as his crooked mouth curled back over toothless gums. The youth gripped him tightly and half pushed him up the path; darting a look of intense dislike toward the flyer. Lannigan scratched his head.

"What's it all about?" he murmured. "I'd give a farm in Kansas, if I had one, to find out."

FOR a moment he contemplated following the two up the path, then he threw a look at the sun and shook his head. "Some other time," he said regretfully. "These mountains would be tough once it got dark—and it will get dark fast once it starts or I don't know mountain country."

Stepping around his ship, he kicked the rocks away from the wheels and vaulted into the cockpit. The engine was already turning over from the test and the S.E.-5 was a sensitive little pet. He had moved fast once he moved the rocks. Feeding her full gun, he roared across the short field and thanked the gods that he had an S.E. above all ships. It was one of the few that would take off from this spot. As a jagged line of rocks loomed before him,

he pulled the stick back and the Hiss roared. The prop went heavenward and the S.E. climbed straight up like a sky-rocket.

"Zooming fool!" he chuckled contently. "Like to see a Camel get out of that. Us, we're coming back."

At a thousand feet, he circled the queer flat mountain top, but he had no reward for his pains. He could see neither human, nor habitation, nor winking eye. A half mile to the left and he could not even see the field from which he had taken off. The shadows of higher peaks fell on the lopped off mountain and hid it from view.

THE Piave River flows through a flat country that is cut up into tiny hedge-bordered fields and slashed by a multitude of ditches. Montebelluno Hill dominated the Italian side of the river below the British drome at Istrana. The American Squadron 690 nestled into a back-ground of trees some twelve miles above the British drome. Lannigan set his wheels on the drome just as the sun was going down. There was no one about but the mechanics and that was another evidence of the squadron's state of mind.

Without waiting to strip off his flying togs, Lannigan routed out the adjutant, picked a list of names at random from the squadron roll and handed it to him. "Post that!" he said curtly. "I'm leading those four men on the dawn show. See that they all know about it."

He retired then to his own quarters. He was not in a mood to talk with such a dispirited crowd as this. There was a lot on his mind. Smoking quietly he reviewed the day. The strange scene of the flat mountain top, the scarred man and the winking eye; these things kept revolving in his mind and

challenging him even to the exclusion of the strange fact that two airmen would die at a time—but that one never went down, nor three nor five.

"I wonder," he said slowly, "if there could be a connection between that eye or whatever it was and the losses of this squadron? Possible, but? Those two on the mountain were Italian, not Austrian, and it's hardly likely that the Austrians would leave a plane-killing apparatus in such hands if they had such an apparatus. And if they have, why keep it in such an unimportant spot? Why not bring it to France and clean up with it—or shift it down the line where the British have been raising hell with them?"

The further he went with the problem, the more impossible the whole thing seemed and finally he stood up and flipped his cigarette away impatiently. "I'll never get anything done like this," he said. "I'll have to see the thing in action—if the whole affair isn't imagination."

HE stopped as there came a hesitant rap on his door. "Come in," he said. A slim, scared youth opened the door and stood framed in the opening.

"Lieutenant—Second Lieutenant, that is—Wayne, sir. I—I'd like to speak with you."

"Sure. Never mind the formality. Come in and sit down." Lannigan's keen eyes had detected the nervousness, the fear which approached close to stark terror, in the man's eyes.

Wayne sat down, made three attempts to light a cigarette and finally accepted a light from Lannigan.

"It's about this patrol tomorrow, sir, he said jerkily. "I can't do it. You've got me down, but I can't fly. I can't. I've been hoping ever since they said you were coming that maybe you'd be able to do something, but—"

"You don't want to risk your neck helping me. Is that it?"

WAYNE flushed. "No. That is, I don't think so. I've been out three time when IT got buddies of mine. I'm all shot. I can't—"

"I know. You said it before. But can you tell me, Wayne, why I should let you off and send some other fellow out? I didn't pick on you. It was chance. You or me or someone else; we can't tell what is going to happen to us, but we're soldiers."

Wayne choked. "But, Captain, there's my mother. I just got a letter." He fumbled in his pocket as though he were about to produce the letter, then changed his mind under Lannigan's hard stare. He spread his hands despairingly. "And there's a girl in London, I can't— If it was just a fair break but it isn't."

"Most of us have mothers, Wayne, and most of us have girls in England. Sorry as all hell, but you'll fly, son. You'd never be any good now if you got out of this; never face anything unpleasant in your life again. Bad habit to get into; dogging it. Go along now and get your sleep and take it grinning tomorrow. Chances are nothing will happen."

Wayne stumbled to his feet. His eyes were haunted. "Something always happens," he said desperately. "I can't. I'm not physically fit to fly. I'll report sick. I—"

"You'll get in a cockpit if I have to put you there myself—and you'll

fly." Lannigan's voice was grim; then it softened. "But snap out of it, kid. If your number is up, you'll get it even if you stay in bed—and if it isn't up, you can fall out of your bus and find a ton of feathers under you."

The pilot shifted for a moment and his bleak eyes stared across the table at Lannigan. Then, with a short laugh that bordered on hysteria, he wheeled and rushed from the room. Lannigan looked after him thoughtfully and then took a striding turn of the room.

"Pretty rum go, that," he said. "Kid's all washed out. I'll give him leave after tomorrow, but he'd never fly again if I gave it to him now."

With a weary grunt he threw himself on his bunk. After a while he slept and a queer procession of scarred faces and winking eyes, shattered ships and pleading voices disturbed his slumbers.

THE little Camels panted on the line at dawn. Lannigan looked his pilots over. There was no chaff, no horse-play. They looked like men going to a funeral. For the most part they were grim, but Wayne was like a man about to be executed. His cheeks were hollow and his eyes bagged from a sleepless night. Lannigan was tempted to order him to quarters; then the man came over to him, shakily.

"Captain, can't I—"

Lannigan's jaw hardened. "No, Old Man," he said. "The best tonic for you is action. I'll keep an eye on you. Just fly and forget the rest"

His voice was gentle and Wayne turned away with a despairing gesture. Lannigan swung his lean length into the cockpit. He goosed the throttle and the little Camel

shot away. He went down the field like a streak and flipped it off. He went over the trees in a stiff zoom, touched the rudder and let the powerful rotary engine pull him over into a skidding right turn that would have given the ground crew heart failure in France. Like a flashing dragon fly in the pale sun of a new day, he climbed above the drome in a tight series of turns that a thousand men would have sworn could not be done—in a Camel.

IT was his gesture; a way of bucking the morale of men sunk in lethargy. But it didn't work. These men, trembling in the fear of the unknown, were not to be snapped out of it by daring of the normal sort. They were slow in following him and he had to wait for them at the rendezvous; 1,500 feet above the drome.

One by one he watched them drop into formation in the little mirror under his dash. Wayne was flying behind him, paired with a hard-faced youth named Butterworth. Two grim youngsters named Goalby and Train rode the tips of the V. Lannigan felt a sense of relief in the fact that Wayne was not on the tip. That was the logical danger spot and he was conscious of a feeling of personal responsibility for Wayne. After all, a mother who writes letters regularly and a girl in London make a man hang to life.

"Maybe I'd be as scared as he is if I knew more about this thing that knocks men off two at a time," he said shortly. "I don't know."

The Camel, never a stable ship at best, was making hard going of it over this mountainous country. It took a lot of piloting and Lannigan longed for his S.E. Then he saw the Austrians.

There was a long, rakish looking two-seater off to his left, a second two-seater beyond that and a cluster of five Albatrosses flying high. The Camels were between the escort and the escorted and Lannigan felt a premonitory tingle in his nerves. There would be time for a good flight to get down there and slaughter those two-seaters and then come around for a good scrap with the scouts. But, would this dispirited gang get away with it.

HE shrugged. There was nothing to do but try at any rate. His hand went up and fanned out a signal. He caught the stiffening of his men in the mirror under his windshield; then the Camels were away like flashing lances of light down the sky.

The two-seaters saw them coming and Lannigan saw the gunners leaping to the rear guns. Then he opened his sight cover and got the rear cockpit of a two-seater in his guns.

A tiny ship flashed past him, curved under the two-seater, bounced against an invisible cushion beneath the Austrian and came up spitting flame. Even as the Austrian pilot wobbled to throw Lannigan's sights off, that flashing meteor beneath him closed to the kill. Crimson streaks framed the mouth of the Vickers and the two-seater reeled groggily. Like a tiger, the Camel tore in, the pilot holding his tricky ship at the stalling point for another burst.

With a low hiss, the two-seater heeled over. A puff of flame leaped out from between the front and rear cockpit; then it was gone in a pillar of greasy smoke.

Lannigan hurdled the blazing wreckage and brought his Camel around. He was a bit chagrined

that one of his men had beaten him to a kill, but he was pleased, too, to find that there was fire and vitality in this gang even if they did act dead; then he saw the pilot who had made the kill. He whistled softly.

It was the chap named Wayne.

The other Austrian two-seater was also plunging down the sky; the victim of a three man gang effort. There was not, however, any time to celebrate victories. The avenging Albatrosses were coming like the wind.

Light danced on the black crosses and the tricolor cockades as scout whirled to scout above the dawn reddened Alps. Lannigan did a quick climbing turn and came head-on into one of the Albatrosses. His guns spat fire but his aim was a little hurried and he missed. The Austrian dived under him and Lannigan half-rolled. Dropping out of his roll upside down, Lannigan pressed the trips again.

BLACK crosses loomed in his sights and he had a flash of an agonized pilot, who twisted in the cockpit as he realized that his race was run. Then the wings came off the Austrian scout and it shrieked down the sky to oblivion.

Even as Lannigan turned, however, there was a hammering thud that splintered his dash and nicked a corner out of the mirror under his windshield. He did a fast half-roll and the Austrian rolled with him. The Spandaus sang again and death blistered the wings and the tail surfaces of the Camel. Then, like the Angel of Death, another Camel ripped across the sky and tracers bit into the Albatross cockpit. Like a shot pigeon, the Albatross leaped, pointed its prop momentarily toward Heaven and then

plunged to a battering finish against the rocky sides of the Alps.

Lannigan had a glimpse of the goggled face in the Camel as the two ships passed. He recognized the hard features of Butterworth. Another member of the depressed squadron had proved himself a fighting fool.

Kicking back into the conflict, Lannigan was in time to see a pretty series of vertical eights as the once terrified Wayne chased tails with the Austrain leader. It was a pretty fight and the kid was holding his own, but there was no time for individual duels. Lannigan goosed the throttle and almost had his head snapped from his shoulders as the Camel leaped across the sky. With unerring skill, he cut in on the arc of the Austrian's lower loop. Crosses flashed momentarily in the sights and he pressed the trips. The Austrian leaped convulsively and died.

THEN, for the first time, Lannigan had a chance to size up the results of the conflict. He gave a low whistle of surprise. There was not an Austrian left in the sky—and he had every one of his Camels.

"Seven down," he murmured. "Good Lord! And they told me that this was a dud squadron."

He sized the men up as they dropped into place behind him. There was none of the stunting that usually followed decisive victories, no waving between cockpits, no hand shaking above heads. The men seemed as grim as when they started; stolid, sober—waiting.

The mood of these men brought something like a chill to Lannigan's stiff spine. They had proved their hardness, their courage, their ability to cope with odds; and brave men have the right to fear. If men like

these were fearful, then there was something in these skies that could not be laughed off. If a fighting demon like Wayne was reduced to the status of a cringing, sobbing wreck—then any man might be.

They were turning toward home now and the sky was blue and clear. Not an enemy ship was in sight and there was no fierce groundfire to be observed as there was in France. It was almost monotonous. Jack yawned and looked at the cracked mirror.

"The Hun that did that sure got his load of hard luck," he said lightly, "and it serves—"

He stopped in mid sentence; the words frozen in horror. Butterworth, hardest looking pilot in the flight, had leaped against his belt like a condemned murderer against the straps of the electric chair. In the same instant, Wayne's plane disintegrated. It seemed to blow up from the inside and come apart. Lannigan spun around in the cockpit. He had a flash of blanched faces beneath the goggles in the surviving ships and of two ships that plunged downward to a shattering finale against the rocky chasm below.

SO sudden was it and so horrifying, that Lannigan felt frozen in the cockpit. His breath came out with a sobbing catch in it. His eyes swept the sky above and beneath his tiny flight. There was not another ship in the air. Beneath him was the rocky gorges and steep precipices, the wild tumbled, terrifying Alps against which two airmen were battered as their ships were reduced to kindling in a flash. There was not a puff of smoke nor a flash of flame to mark the spot from which the doom had lashed out.

Once more the unseen terror had struck and Lannigan had been as

powerless as Holland had been. Nor did he have any more idea than Holland why two men had gone—not one, nor three, nor five.

Goalby and Train, the two survivors, were no longer holding formation. They had spread out wide in the sky and Lannigan nodded his head. They had probably been out before and feared the jinx of teaming when the hidden horror was on the hunt. He waved a signal for "washout" and headed home with a swift dive toward the distant Piave.

"I'd like to prowl around here for a looksee," he growled, "but Holland says that sometimes he has lost four men. I'll do my prowling alone."

He came in over the trees and set down fast. Goalby and Train were right behind him. Goalby, short and thickest, threw his helmet on the ground and walked away from it. His face was very white.

"Lannigan," he said and it was noticeable that he omitted the "Captain"—"I'm through. I've seen six men go and I haven't seen yet the thing that got 'em. When the Austrians have something I can't see; something that kills like THAT does, I'm giving them the war. I quit."

"Lannigan," he said and it was "I know how you feel," he said. "The Austrians HAVE got something. But take your time about quitting. We'll find out about this—"

HE turned toward his quarters, conscious of the fact that he had made a vague speech. He didn't know what he intended to find out nor how he was going to find out anything. He felt dazed, bewildered. The memory of that flat mountain top and the scarred man came back to him once more, but it was hard to connect a mere youngster and a feeble, scarred wreck with so deadly

an instrument of destruction as that which took men out of the air in pairs.

"I'll go look anyway." He flipped his cigarette away and called the M. S. to him. "Get my S.E. ready in a hurry," he said. "I'm going out."

IT was peaceful on the Piave. The fighting had been desultory for some time and neither side, Italian nor Austrian, seemed prepared for any great expenditure of effort. Only in the air was the war unrelenting. The Austrians, soundly beaten by the British Royal Air Force since the introduction of the Bristol Fighter, had shifted their strength to the section patrolled by the Americans. The sky was heavily patrolled when Lannigan crossed the lines alone. He was disconcerted.

"Boy! They don't need their man-killer now," he said. "They ought to be able to mop up by weight of numbers."

He was anxious to get over the section where he had lost his men a short hour before, but it was not going to be easy. He had a flight stalking him and, although they were a safe distance away yet, they might be troublesome before he got home. High above the Alps was another flight; a large one. He cut across, with a wary eye on these high cruisers, in the general direction of the flat-topped mountain on which he had found temporary sanctuary only yesterday. Suddenly, something swooped out of nowhere and lead whistled past his ears.

Instinctively shrinking in the cockpit, Lannigan trusted to a zoom to get out of danger. He had a ship little known on this front and an airman who didn't know the S.E. would be fooled by its terrific rocket quality. Moreover, the thing was not the

hottest ship in the world to roll in. Too much dihedral.

THE Austrian's tracers bit through the tail surfaces of the S.E. as Lannigan went almost straight up. Then the American flipped over and dropped. His Vickers sputtered and lead whanged into the flat snout of the Albatross. Lannigan saw that he had only one foe to mix with. The fellow had evidently taken a chance of sneaking down on him while he was watching the big formation. Well, he'd guessed right and Lannigan had been careless, but now!

Lannigan was on top of him, his guns battering and hammering broadside into the whale-shaped fuselage of the Albatross. The Austrian threw up his hand as though to protect his face from a blow and then lunged forward. A spiral of flame curled back from the engine and became, in a split second, a roaring holocaust. But, even as his foe fell, Lannigan could feel the swift rush of the avengers. He threw a startled glance upward.

In tight formation, a flight of at least seven Albatrosses was diving down upon him.

There was no time to get away. They had him foul anyway he turned. Lannigan had a split second to appreciate the terrible irony of it. He had come to Italy to find out the reason for the extraordinary deaths visited upon American airmen—and he was booked through for the months ordinary of all sky deaths without ever finding the answer.

It was folly to dive away, but it was folly to do anything else. Lannigan dove. He saw the Austrians in his cracked mirror. Diving death! Then, his heart gave a mad leap against his ribs. His eyes widened.

As though a sword had slashed

downward from the hand of some great unseen giant, some doom fell on the Austrian airmen. Two ships lunged madly and one of them fell apart. The other, reeling crazily, as though a dead hand were at the controls, crashed into a third ship and the fragments fell in scattered confusion down the sky.

HEAVY Warchalowski engines roared as startled pilots pulled up from their careening dive. Lannigan, taking the reprieve offered him by this strange intervention, levelled himself and struck out for the lines. He threw a glance over his shoulder to see the Austrian flight reforming. Then, even as he looked back, two more Austrians went down. Lannigan's face paled and he roared for the Piave.

"Pairs!" he muttered. "Always in pairs. And IT kills Austrians, too. What in blazes?"

He was still mulling over the problem, a little shaken by his experience, when he landed on his own drome once more; but there was a quiet set to his lips and an eager light in his eyes to show that he more than half guessed the answer to the strange riddle of the Alps. Holland, very drunk as was the privilege of a man relieved of his command, was on the drome. He waved to Lannigan, his lips curling.

"Well, you've seen it," he said hoarsely, "Do you believe now that the Austrians have something or—"

"The Austrians haven't got a thing that we haven't got," Lannigan said softly. "Not a thing."

He walked around his bus, indicated the bullet holes to the mechanics for patching and then went to sleep for two hours in his quarters.

At three in the afternoon, Lannigan took off once more alone,

At three-thirty, he spiralled down over the levelled mountain top. He was not dead-sticked this time and he could look the place over carefully. He found that he had to hover almost over the trees to do it. Slanting light and massed shadow had given this place a natural camouflage that the masters of the art in France might well envy. He strained over the side and saw a slender figure run from a flat, shed-like building to a little hut near-by. He circled and looked the building over carefully.

At the far end there was a tall turret-like spire. From the top of this, there projected a round tubular object on the order of a light field piece. Lannigan whistled.

"The trail is hot," he said softly. "We land."

He banked around and side slipped over the trees, running his wheels on the short landing field as gently as though he had been landed with a long cable. He swung out of the cockpit and, as he did, some instinct warned him of danger and he ducked. A shot whistled over his head and plunked dully into the S.E.

Lannigan flung himself flat and wiggled away from the ship toward the trees. Four more shots followed in quick succession, but as he suspected, they were above and beyond him. The marksman was firing from high ground and Lannigan was safely within his angle of fire.

WITH his automatic in his hand, the American slid through the trees and moved steadily toward the spot from whence the shots had come. It was upgrade going and he was cautious. The firing had ceased and he did not know where the marksmen might be. He suspected that it was the youth who had fired but he was not forgetting that there

were at least two men on this mountain top. He circled the clearing and then, in the shadow of the shed-like building, his foot touched something soft and he sprang back. For a moment he stood tense, then he dropped to one knee and dropped his automatic back into his holster. The thing that he had stumbled over was a dead body. He turned it over and his lips tightened.

HE was looking into the horribly distorted face of an Austrian airman. The man's throat had been cut from ear to ear.

"So there are Austrians here." Lannigan frowned at this overturn of his theory. The finding of this man in Austrian uniform near the spot from which, he suspected, the hidden death had struck, opened up a new field of conjecture. He reached out and picked up the Austrian's revolver; noting that one shot had been fired from it.

"I wonder now—"

He started to straighten up and something tapped him on the back. He half turned as a claw-like hand closed on his uniform; then something emitted a maniacal shriek of rage and leaped at him.

As he went down, Lannigan had a flash of hideously scarred features; furrowed, gouged and bunched folds of skin. The man was clawing at him and kicking at him with a mad man's strength and Lannigan fought fiercely to break the hold of a skinny arm that had fastened across his throat. The face slipped from his vision as the man swung behind him with the tightening of that grip, but not before Lannigan discovered another startling thing.

The man who had leaped on him was blind.

Thrashing wildly about, Lannigan succeeded in breaking that hold that was shutting off his wind. He could hear the wheezy panting of his opponent, but there was no diminishing of the man's terrible strength. Young and athletic though he was, Lannigan found it impossible to shake the man off and rise to his feet. He lost the Austrian's gun in breaking the throat grip. It made no difference. He felt that he wouldn't need it if he could get the man off his back or twist around to where he could use his fists. The man was clawing, gouging, tearing—

THEN a voice shouted beyond the trees and the creature on Lannigan's back gave vent to another of his weird, unearthly screeches. Running feet sounded and the young boy that Lannigan had first seen came running down the path. He was not a shy, embarrassed youth now; he was a wild, snarling thing as mad as the blind man. He was brandishing a long knife and spitting Italian with machine-gun speed. Lannigan heaved and partially broke the madman's hold. As he struggled to regain his feet, however, the man's fingers locked in his hair and strong, ropy legs curled about his waist. His jaw set, Lannigan rose and lifted the weight with him. The blind man laughed shrilly and tugged with a demon's strength on Lannigan's hair. The American's head snapped back.

The youth leaped across the clearing and raised the long knife.

A horrible vision of the Austrian's distorted face, his cut throat and the pooled blood on the ground came before Lannigan's eyes. He leaped backward and crashed to the ground.

The blind man screamed wildly and his voice broke on the high note as his body smashed against the

ground with Lannigan's hurled weight against it. Lannigan felt the grip on his hair relax and the legs loosen their hold. He twisted sideways and left bunches of his hair in the gnarled fingers as the young man leaped.

The gleaming blade swept past Lannigan in a glittering arc and Lannigan came up on his feet. His right fist lashed out like a pile driver and the young man turned in time to get the full benefit of it. He fell forward on his face without a sound.

Spent though he was and dripping blood from a dozen gouged places, Lannigan made short work of trussing up his two enemies. The old man was conscious but moaning and all but breathless. The American trussed him first. The young man opened his eyes as Lannigan completed his job of tying the blind man, took one look around and bounded to his feet. Lannigan was after him like a shot.

Over any distance it would have been an unequal race, since Lannigan was wearing boots and the slender youth was barefooted, but the young man made a mistake. He stopped at the edge of the clearing and lifted a rifle that he had standing against a tree. He had no time to use it. Lannigan hit him in a flying tackle and the rifle flew off into the bushes.

THERE was no fierce fight about this. The youngster was not the fighter the old man was. Lannigan battered him into submission in two very rough minutes and trussed him up without effort. Then he stood back and took his automatic out of its holster.

"I'm going to get a little truth out of you," he said, "or you are going to die very quick."

He spoke in Italian so that the youth would be sure to understand. "You, two, have been bringing down airplanes with some kind of a device that you have in the shack yonder. Right?"

DEFIANT eyes looked into his. Even when his finger tightened on the trigger, the other remained tight-lipped. It was obvious without any long argument that this chap would not talk under the gun; yet he was obviously weaker than the old man, who, Lannigan was convinced, could never be made to answer anything. But, when a man refuses to talk under the threat of death, what will make him talk?"

Suddenly Lannigan remembered the Austrian back there with his throat cut. This fierce little brute had done that, and men the whole world over are afraid of their own medicine. He walked slowly across the clearing and retrieved the knife. As he approached the youth with it, he knew that he had won. The wide stare of fright told him that, but he left nothing to chance. He pulled the youth's head back by the hair.

"You talk or I'll give you what you gave the fellow back there," he said grimly. "Now, tell me why and how you have been destroying airplanes."

The youth was very white. "My father, he hates them because they fly," he said slowly. Lannigan stared. He remembered the scarred face, the cavities where eyes had been.

"Because," he asked, "he was scarred and torn like that by birds?"

The youth shivered. "Eagles," he said bitterly. "Eagles, things that fly. He was a professor. I would have been a professor. Now he is nothing and I am nothing because of eagles. They caught him in the

mountains. He was climbing, at the end of a rope. They nearly tore him to pieces."

"But what has that got to do with your killing us?"

The youth snarled and for the moment he was as mad as his father. Lannigan saw that the solitude and disappointment and the unnatural life here in high altitude had unbalanced the boy's mind. "My father is great," he said. "A great man. He can destroy anything that flies; anything—"

His voice rose to a shriek. Lannigan shook his head. "No, he can't," he said. "He can't destroy eagles—*because eagles do not fly side by side.*"

THE boy stared and in the stare Lannigan read the baffled disappointment that the youth had shared with his father; the disappointment that had probably helped to drive the two of them mad. Lannigan leaned forward.

"I don't know what you've got in there," he said, "but I'm willing to bet that it's something like a giant X-ray. You have to have something in back of the thing that you aim at in order to destroy and, once you have that, you destroy both the object and the backing. Right?"

The youth was still staring and in his eyes, Lannigan saw that he had guessed right. His heart gave a wild leap. He could see what this meant to the Allied cause. He had scarcely dared to hope that his wild hypothesis had been correct; that the brain of man had evolved such a terrible instrument. Not even with evidence before him had he been able to believe. Now he knew that he had been right.

An X-ray works on the principle of hurling at incredible velocities, minute particles which pass through

a body and impinge upon a plate. A monster X-ray doing that and destroying the object could make a war too terrible to endure and bring it to a swift conclusion. It was in his hands and he was suddenly possessed of a wild eagerness to get away; to bring men back and occupy this mountain top.

The boy was babbling now. His long pent-up longing for speech seemed to break a dam. Incredible things passed his lips, tales of scientists who had helped build this monster X-ray and then died so that they might not take it back with them away from the mountain top where a mad man still pondered on ways to kill eagles.

Lannigan wasn't paying attention. With a hasty promise to return, he turned down the path. Then he stopped abruptly. The body of the Austrian lay in the brush. He had forgotten the Austrian. He turned back.

"Where did he come from?" he challenged fiercely.

The youth waved aloft. "From up there. Like you did. They surprised us."

"They?" Lannigan's face blanched. If there were more than one, it meant that one had escaped since there was no ship in evidence. He was running now to his own plane. It would be a tragedy to let that death dealing invention fall into Austrian hands. It mustn't be.

FRANTICALLY he threw the prop over and as the engine caught he hurled himself into the cockpit and roared down the short runway. With one wing scraping he went over the trees and zoomed for the clouds. Clear of the valley of shadow, he threw a look aloft and his heart fell. He had lost.

The Austrians were coming in force. There were at least twenty of

them and they were strung out in single file; a fact that betrayed their knowledge of what they were going up against. Even if the two on the mountain top had been free, they could not have fought these eagles which refused to fly side by side. And the great secret of the war; the secret that meant victory was going to Austria. There were too many ships for one plane to attack and Lannigan would have to watch them helplessly.

He gritted his teeth and his free hand knotted in a fist. Even as he vowed to hurl his ship into an unequal fight before permitting that, he saw an incredible sight.

THE Austrians were bombing the mountain top.

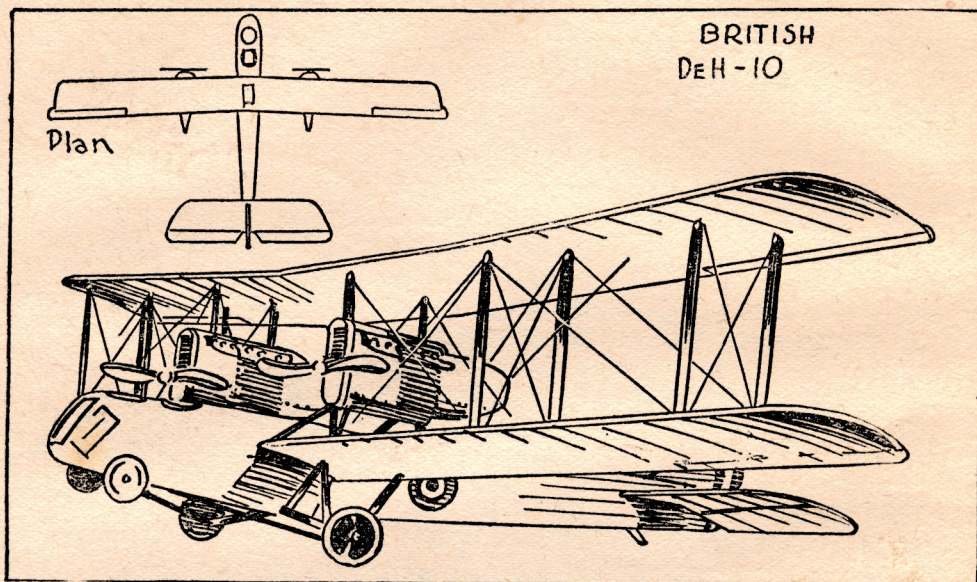
Great pillars of flame shot skyward and dark blobs went down as the ships circled above the doomed castle of the man inventor. Lannigan circled off to the right and stared incredulously.

"They are mad and just as single track as the Dutchmen," he said. "All they can think about is destruction. Maybe I'm not glad of that. If either the Allies or the Huns had what that old man built to kill eagles, it would make this war too blamed horrible. Good riddance to it."

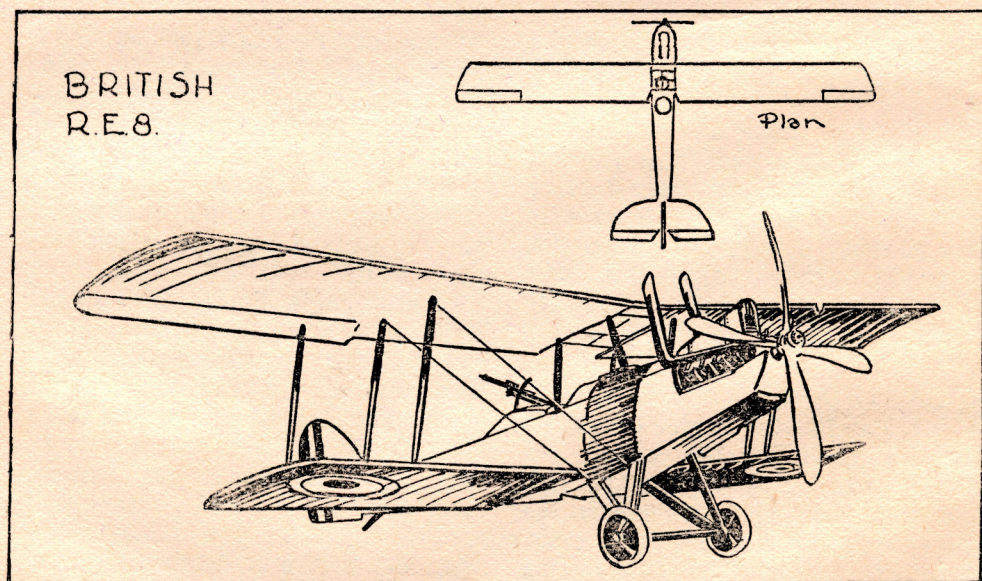
Like an eagle himself, he hovered high while the shadow of death that had hung over the Americans in Italy was slowly blotted from the earth. For a moment he was sorry for the two helpless men beneath that shower of death, but then he thought of Wayne and Butterworth and the rest. They had been helpless, too, before a death that they could not see. He bowed his head.

"It's the last double death," he said softly, "and a fitting end to the pair that dealt it out."

LIBRARY OF



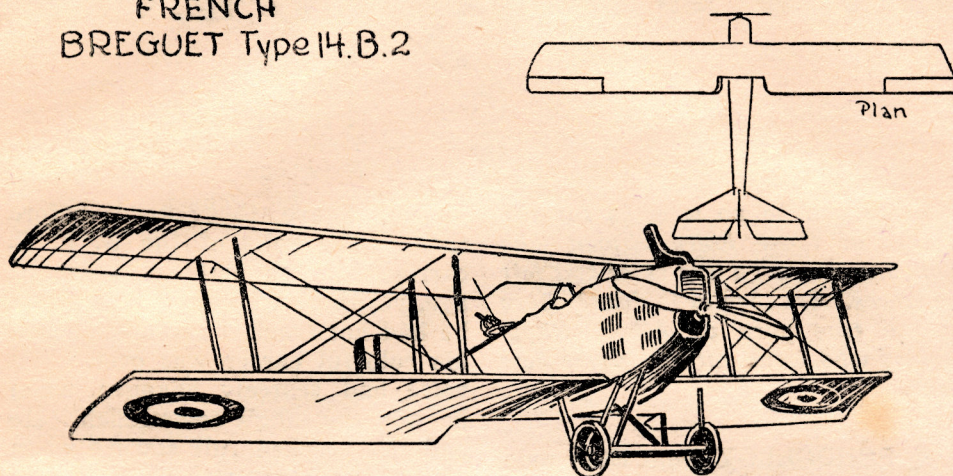
DeHaviland DeH-10 "Airco". 2 Rolls Royce motors; 400 h.p. each Designed for high-speed, day bomber toward the end of 1917. The DeH-3 was essentially the same as the DeH-10. The DeH-3 was a pusher, the DeH-10 a tractor. Speed $117\frac{1}{2}$ m.p.h. It was used successfully till the end of the war.



R. E. 8:—Manufactured by Royal Aircraft Establishment. 130 h.p. R. A. F. engine. Used extensively during war as an artillery observation machine and also as a night bomber. Unusually heavy engine. The letters R. E. indicates "Reconnaissance Experimental."

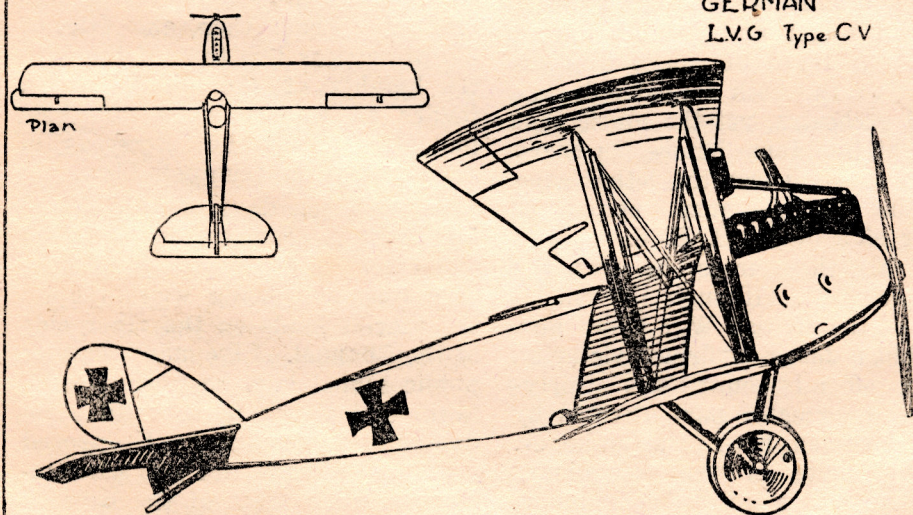
WAR PLANES

FRENCH
BREGUET Type 14.B.2



Breguet 14 B. 2:—Motor 300 h.p. Renault. Day bomber. It's ceiling was 5,750 meters. Under carriage has three pairs of struts made of aluminum. Equipped with dual control. (Rear control in observers.) Cockpit can be removed. Had capacity of 16 small bombs.

GERMAN
L.V.G Type CV



L. V. G. Type C. V. (Luft Verkehrs Gesellschaft.) 230 h.p. Benz motor. Armament: 1 Parabellum gun in rear; 1 fixed Spandau in front. Made by biggest manufacturer of war planes in Germany. Used extensively as artillery observation machine.

INTO THE BLUE



By
HUGH JAMES

There can be no wreaths for the graves of those brave airmen who went into the high war skies and left no traces. Are they even dead? Here is the true yarn of Albert Rhys-Davies who went out and never flew back.

A SCHOOLBOY from Eton rode into the blue and the pink-eyed rabbits he had left behind died of loneliness.

Such was the simple end of Albert Rhys-Davies, youngest hero of the air and a super-ace before a razor had touched his cheek. A slender, dark-eyed little chap from the mountains of Wales, who sang like an angel and fought like a devil. A lover of music and director of the 56th Squadron's talented orchestra, yet the music that brought him fame before his beard began to grow was the lethal song of the machine-guns bolted to either side of his S. E. 5.

Of all the heroes, he was the least heroic. Although the official lists of the British War Office give him but a dozen confirmed victories, his unofficial count was thirty-seven, the greater part attested by other birdmen, his rivals for honor. Yet, in spite of this sanguinary saga, he was a quiet, bashful boy, brown-eyed and diffident. Generals, who came to the 56th's Airdrome to decorate Rhys-Davies, stared with amazement at the slender, almost

girlish, figure that stood before them. The rolls of the R. F. C. carried him as eighteen years of age, yet those who knew best swore he had not reached seventeen when his colorful career was over. His voice had scarcely changed when he won the king's commission. He had not reached full stature when his darting plane was swallowed in a cloud and earth saw Rhys-Davies no more.

His entry into the British army was made when he was fifteen, in spite of a proud boast of greater maturity. He took to the air like a bird from its nest and was on the front before his sixteenth year was reached. From then, the tale of his prowess is like that of the gentle knights of the Middle Ages, tender as women when off their panoplied steeds, but Berserks in armor when the trumpets blew.

The crimson days of 1915 found him in Eton. His studies were drab and colorless compared to the history that was being written upon the scarlet fields on the other side of the Channel. Like many another public school boy, he pushed aside Latin and Greek to take up aerodynamics and gunnery. He proved a prodigy at each and won his commission when most of the boys of his age were still devoting their waking hours to cricket, tennis and golf. These he left at Eton, but he carried with him his love for music

and a strange motley of pets—rabbits, canary birds, kittens and puppies. He built a small house in the rear of his barracks in which to house them. Like Ball, his famous contemporary, he grew flowers and had a garden in which he planted spinach and lettuce for his white, pink-eyed rabbits. While the roistering blades of the 56th Squadron were singing their wanton songs in near-by estaminets, Rhys-Davies was attending to his pets or improvising on the piano in the squadron mess hall.

GIFTED with a tenor voice of unusual quality, the youngster was frequently called upon to appear at the musical evenings staged by the squadron. He organized its orchestra and conducted it, preparing programs, that made it one of the most popular musical combinations on the front. Peaceful, quiet and diffident upon the ground, he shrank from contact with the rougher elements of the R. F. C.

But in the air, a transformation was performed, a metamorphosis that made this slender boy with his almost feminine face a raging, merciless demon that pursued relentlessly, crushing down his enemies with a savage fury that sent them tumbling to their doom. Of the hundred or more aerial battles Rhys-Davies fought, more than eighty per cent were within German territory. Small wonder that he had difficulty in getting official confirmations, for the British required that ground observation be added to the pilot's claim for credit.

"What difference does it make?" the boy often asked, when comrades urged him to press his claims. "We're fighting to crash Boche, not pile up a score. Besides—I haven't time. My white rabbits have mul-

tiplied some more and I've got to build a new hutch for them. If they keep it up, I'll have to have a barn."

"Why not rabbit stew?" a friend inquired.

"Not with my rabbits," the youngster answered. "I couldn't bear to kill them—or have them killed."

Yet that very morning he had fought one of the leading German aviators for full a half an hour, pursued him across the lines into the Boche hinterland, lashing him with leaden knouts and then ripping him methodically to pieces within sight of his own airdrome.

He had been gripped with the killer instinct that did not relax until he had seen the victim of his guns go down, flaming as he fell.

A LEGENDARY hero, he seems, when viewed across the canyon of years. He belonged to the age of chivalry, rather than the machine era when men fought on steeds of steel. The stories of his prowess would fill a volume, but the outstanding combat was his victory in a duel with one of German's most famous aces, Werner Voss Crefeld, better known to history as Werner Voss. In that combat, Rhys-Davies rose to the heights, attaining a fame that still holds. His adversary was officially credited with forty-nine victories and was one of the most feared pilots in the German ranks. Unlike the famous Richtoffen, Voss depended upon his own skill and daring and did not hunt with a pack at his command, a swarm of willing aids who would herd his victim into position before he put in the killing shot.

The meeting was over the blood-drenched area on the Flanders front where German and Briton

had met so often. The date was September 24, 1917. The air was filled with planes. Rhys-Davies was riding with his squadron on guard duty with some photographic planes. They had not yet crossed into German territory when a formation of Albatrosses appeared, seeking to fend off the camera carrying planes. Battle followed, a dog-fight in which spinning planes struggled for the mastery. Then came a new German formation, a formation headed by a Fokker triplane, whose body was painted with black and white squares, arranged like a checker board. Its wings were red. The plane was as famous as Baron von Richtoffen's all scarlet ship.

Rhys-Davies was the first to see and recognize the new comer. He broke off his fight with the Albatross with which he had been engaged and gunned through the air at famous speed to meet the celebrated Voss. Spandaus spat as he neared. The German was answering his challenge. Thus began a duel that is still talked of whenever veterans of the air meet. Both pilots sensed they were taking part in a championship battle. Gradually the feeling was transferred to the other planes in the vicinity. They drew off as the two continued to fight, Briton and German circling as S. E. 5 and triplane lunged and retreated, spun and dove.

By common consent, neither side interfered. Each pilot knew that the best man in his formation was fighting a rival champion and they watched the combat with ever-widening eyes. Although pitted against a man who had been a veteran when he was still in Eton, Rhys-Davies attacked with a fury that caused the German super-ace to side-slip and dodge. Next they were

whirling in a mad circle, each attempting to get on the other's tail. The triplane had the advantage in climbing, but the S. E. 5 developed the greater speed when they leveled off. In and out, up and down, they maneuvered with all the speed their bellowing engines could develop.

Once more they circled and Rhys-Davies lagged just a trifle. For a moment it looked as though Voss would get the coveted position on his tail. Then the cockard marked British plane suddenly faltered. A yell came from the pilots on both sides. The cry swelled as the British saw the tail whang around and before Werner Voss could side-slip out of line, a crash of Vickers shots ripped into the checkered body. The S. E. 5 was lunging at him, its guns ablaze. Caught in that galling fire, the German shoved his stick forward. In another moment he was racing for the carpet. After him surged a boy who had been playing with his pink-eyed rabbits only an hour or so before.

Down, down, down they roared. Voss dared not pull up, but the lad from Eton hung on ready to follow his adversary to the grass tops. His guns were still jabbering, spitting out savage bursts that barged into the wildly dodging triplane. Werner Voss used every trick his years in the air had taught him, but could not shake the raging demon that hung upon his tail. Bullets whipped into his cockpit and he reeled in his seat, the Fokker flying with strange gyrations. Still the youthful fury lashed him without mercy. Flames sprang out from the side of the German cockpit, flames that told of a soldier doomed. Still the leaden hail rained down. The Fokker was spinning now, a stricken thing in the death throes, but the Berserk fury of Rhys-Davies' attack was

undiminished. A crash, a spurt of flame and the triplane was blasted to bits. Only then did the S. E. 5 zoom up to join the others of the 56th Squadron. The Albatrosses turned homeward, weighed with gloom. They had seen an ace, second only to Richtoffen, slain in a duel with a youngster who looked hardly more than a child. The news of Voss's death was a blow to German pride.

AT the airdrome of the 56th Squadron, preparations for a binge were made as soon as the S. E. 5 landed. It would be a celebration worth having. Werner Voss, the scourge of the skies, had at last met death, but Rhys-Davies refused to be a hero after his trucks touched ground. Besides, he was expecting fresh additions to his rabbit families and had some more hutches to build.

"And if you don't mind, sir," he told his commanding officer, "I'd like to have a pass for town."

"Going on one of those private and personal sprees?" the major asked with a grin.

"No, sir, I—I want to get a couple of artificial bones at the pet store. My puppies are cutting their teeth, sir."

Fresh honors were awarded him, more crosses from his own and allied governments. Every effort to make him a conventional hero failed utterly. He refused to be anything but a Eton school boy, playing his game in the air instead of upon the cricket or football field. A visit home and he returned to the front more quiet and self-effacing than ever. He played new pieces upon the piano, from music he had bought while in Blighty. He taught the squadron quartet new songs. The rabbit families were larger than

before and he shipped some home, refusing to add to the cook's menu at the cost of his pets.

Not yet seventeen, he was looked up to by the bravest of the brave. His smooth, almost girlish face, seemed out of place among the burly men who were his companions, but in the air he was more ferocious than ever. More Boche fell before his flaming guns. He penetrated deeper into enemy hinterland, hunting the Fokkers and Pfalz, attacking them almost before their wheels had left their airdrome. His solo hunts increased in depth and duration. Following his victory over Werner Voss, Rhys-Davies was a privileged character, coming and going when he pleased, except when required to fly with the formation.

A MONTH passed after his victory over Voss. The rabbits thrived and the puppies had cut their teeth. A day came when he went on a hunt deep into the heart of Hunland. He fed his pets before his departure and then told his commander of his plans. The S. E. 5 took to the air and he waved farewell to his companions as he circled to gain height. Then he nosed for the lines. A formation of Camels, escorting camera planes into the German back area, saw him circling over the airdrome of a German *jadgstaffel*, wheeling as he waited for the enemy to take off. Next, they saw a trio of Fokkers mounting as though to give him battle. Lazy clouds dotted the sky, but the black plume of Archie shells added to its mottled appearance. The Germans mounted higher. A streak shot down to meet them, a stream that flamed as it tore through the air. One of the Huns nosed down, its wings spinning as the pilot fought to regain control. Still the

little ship continued its screaming dive. The other Boche dodged frantically. Black blobs of Archie broke on every side. A cloud drifted into the zone of battle, a cloud that screened both Briton and German. Anxious eyes were held upon the scene. The British formation swung around and started in the direction of the fight. Its pilots had recognized Rhys-Davies plane and rushed to aid him, but as their planes clove the upper air, the obscuring cloud drifted on its way, leaving a blank space where there had been a darting airplane, firing as it descended. No wreckage had fallen from that cloud, no plane came from out of it, but in the brief interval he had been lost from sight, the school boy from Eton had ridden into the blue. Like Oedipus of ancient lore, he had been snatched up to heaven from

the sight of man. The British cruised, but found no trace of him. Ships descended, but found no wreck upon the ground. The camera planes took photographs, but the enlarged prints gave no indication that a plane had fallen in all that area.

Meantime Squadron 56 waited anxiously for news of its boyish hero. The days came and went, but not a word was received. The pink-eyed rabbits sickened and died. He never came back, nor was word ever received telling of the fate that befell him. A conquerer of heroes before he had reached seventeen, a battle-tried veteran when only down was on his cheek, Rhys-Davies was one of the war's most spectacular figures, while the mystery of his going adds further glamor to his brief but brilliant biography.

1893

Now, Brother, get me right,
A fighting Spad in flight
Was as pretty a sight as you ever want
to see.

But I'd rather see a guy,
If he really wants to fly,
In Nieuport No. Eighteen Ninety-Three.

Now, there's as good a ship
As ever made a trip
From Kankakee to westward of New
York.

I admit her wings was weak
And her handlin', so to speak,
Was a little bit affected by the torque.

Now, I ain't got much to say
For a Monosoupapé
Which was what flew old Eighteen Ninety-Three.
The cylinders turned round,

With a kinda crack-up sound,
An' the ignition liked to get out on a
spree.

When the motor had a spell,
And went A. W. O. L.
Old Eighteen Ninety-Three was real hay-
wire.

Why, it was hardly rare
Enough to give a guy a scare
When Eighteen Ninety-Three would
catch on fire.

I guess you wonder why
I recommend to fly
A crate which should be put upon the
shelf.

Well, you see, her mounted guns
Had a credit of nine Huns,
And I flew old Eighteen Ninety-Three
myself.

—BALLADO JOHNSON.

HOW THE WAR CRATES FLEW



Editor's Note: We feel that this magazine has been exceedingly fortunate in securing R. Sidney Bowen to conduct a technical department each month. It is Mr. Bowen's idea to tell us the underlying principles and facts concerning expressions and ideas of air-war terminology. Each month he will enlarge upon some particular statement in the stories of this magazine. Mr. Bowen is qualified for this work, not only because he was a war pilot of the Royal Air Force, but also because he has been the editor of one of the foremost technical journals of aviation.

Konking Engines

ALRIGHT, YOU FLEDGLINGS, sit up and pay attention! Huh? What am I sore about? Well, I'm not exactly sore, just a little bit nettled, if you get what I mean. Its this way. A flat-spinning fledgling out Arkansas way (I won't mention his name) has sent me a letter that calls for a fight in any country. Yup, its little short of an insult to all us wonderful war pilots.

He says in part:

I have been reading air magazines for a long time, and although I enjoy the stories, particularly Air Fighters yarns, there is one thing that gives me a pain in the neck. Why, does the hero always have his engine go blooey just when he's all set to knock some Fokker out of the sky?

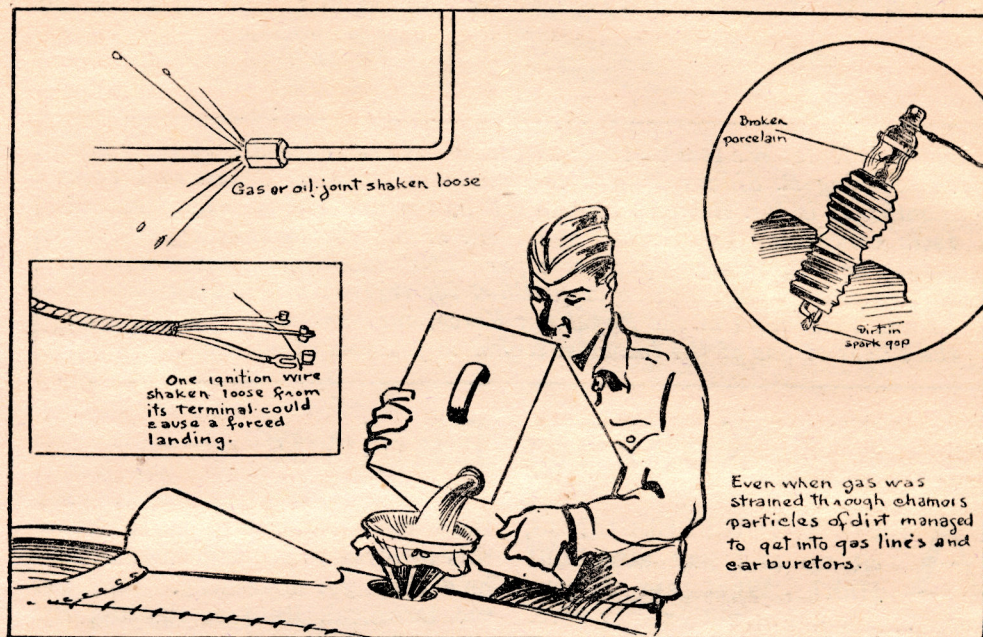
Did you war pilots ever inspect your engines, or were you just too darn lazy? In other words, there were too many forced landings in the World War to suit me. I'll bet I'd have kept the old crate going, if I had been over there!

Now I ask you, is that conceit, or is that conceit? However, in view of the fact that some of you other babes-in-wings have hinted at

the same thing, I'm going to devote this meeting to konked engines, and how they got that way. If I get too technical, its just too bad for you. So button back your ears!

Before I start, though, I'll stick in a word about forced landings in general. No pilot ever asked or prayed for one! And we've all had them. Right from me, the greatest, down to you, the poorest. A few years ago the papers were full of news about H. M. Prince of Wales falling off his horse. People began to get the idea that the Prince did not know how to ride, which was certainly the wrong idea. Mr. Will Rogers cleared that point up when he asked, "What's the Prince going to do when his horse stumbles and falls, stay up there?" Well, that also goes for pilots with konked engines. What are they going to do? Walk around on the clouds while the ship glides down?

But to get real serious. Many forced landings during the late war were due to carelessness on the part of the pilot. But an equal number were just tough luck. We'll pass over the carelessness



part and just deal with the tough luck. In short, what were the things that made the old power plant give up?

All the answers to that would fill up this whole magazine a couple of times. So we'll just deal with the major causes. Like in an automobile engine there are three important things in an airplane engine. The oiling system, the carburation system and the ignition system. All three are absolutely indispensable to the proper functioning of the engine, and the failure of any one of them will cause the other two to fold up.

Take the carburation system. The gas used during the war was usually the best that could be turned out. It was high test, AA, No. 1, etc. *But*, the facilities for storing it at the squadron, often were not of the best. Careful as the pilot and mechanics might be, a few drops of water sometimes got into the gas tank. Eventually those drops of

water got into the carburetor. Water being heavier than gas, they collected around the base of the needle valve and prevented gas from being sucked through into the cylinder head. Naturally, the engine stopped because it was gas starved.

Sometimes those drops of water didn't get as far as the carburetor. They got stuck in a bend in the feed line—a bend that went upwards. The result was that the carburetor was blocked off from gas.

IN EITHER case, the line and the carburetor had to be blown free of water before the engine would hit on all six, or twelve. Now I'll admit that sometimes the suction of your engine was great enough to suck the water clear, but lots of times it wasn't. So you'd have to land and clear out the line on the ground.

And another thing. Air engines during the war, were comparatively

speaking, mighty delicate pieces of machinery. Just let a few specks of dirt get in with the gas (all gas was strained into the tank as a precaution against that) and sure as the Lord made little apples, those specks of dirt would find their way into the carburetor and gum up the works. Most times they'd get under the needle valve seat, and keep it open, with the result that the carburetor would flood, and your engine would be gassed to death.

And one more thing about gas and carburetors. Vibration from violent maneuvering, to get the heck away from that Hun, would shake loose some of the feed line joints. The next thing you knew the raw gas would be spilling out into God's open spaces, instead of into the carburetor. And I'm not even saying a word about a Spandau bullet nicking a feed line, or puncturing your gas tank.

Now, take the oiling system. Most air engines during the war were oiled by what was known as the splash system. Your engine of today is oiled by force feed, or a combination of splash and force feed. In the war engines the big end bearing of the piston slapped down into a sump full of oil and splashed oil all over the place. Oil reached the parts missed by the splash by working its way by centrifugal force through hollowed out channels. Of course, with force feed, you have an oil pump working off the cam shaft, that pumps oil to all necessary parts of the engine. However, with the war engines the oiling system was often put on the blink just the way the gas system was. In other words, some dirt would lodge itself in one of those hollowed out channels, block off an important bearing, and cause said bearing to burn out, due

to lack of lubrication. And it did not have to be actual dirt either. A little gob of crusted grease would do the trick. True, engine failure, due to the failing of the oiling system was not particularly common. At least not in my experience. However, it *did* happen. And nine times out of ten, all the care in the world would not have prevented it.

There's one thing you fledglings sometimes forget. That is, that the war crates were built and flown eighteen to twenty years ago. In other words, the ships you toot around today, have incorporated in them almost twenty years of aeronautical progress.

Now don't get me wrong. As I said at another meeting, I'm not trying to give you the impression that we war pilots were supermen, etc. I'm just trying to bring to light a few of the things we bucked up against when you fledglings were doing flat spins in your cribs.

AND NOW for some words about the ignition system. Believe it or not, eighty per cent of the troubles that happen to your automobile are due to the ignition. If you doubt that, ask the first automotive ignition specialist you meet. The same thing held true with air engines. In your car you have battery ignition. In the war crates you had magneto ignition. Of course you have to interrupt me, and ask why? Well, a battery is additional weight for one thing. And for another, there was no ignition battery during the war that could stand being tipped upside down without the electrolyte (liquid content of a wet battery) spilling out.

Yes, I know, I know! There were dry batteries to be sure, and

planes that had wireless sending sets used them. *But*, you cannot recharge a dry cell. And that would call for new batteries darn near every patrol. And *that* would be too expensive for any government, even though said government had decided not to pay their war debts!

NOW I could get so technical that you'd go ground looping, but I'll spare you, and just deal with ignition troubles in general. The first, and a very common one—spark plugs quitting. In most cases it was due to the plugs getting carboned up. The gas used in war crates was, as I have told you, very high test. In other words, it ignited, and how! Now, if the rings in the piston are not so good, and the oil ring fails to wipe the cylinder walls clear of all excess oil on the downward stroke, that oil is going to be burned when the vaporized gas is ignited. The result, of course, is carbon that collects on the spark plug points. Presently the gap between the points is closed up with carbon and the plug stops firing. Of course one plug going out does not necessarily mean a forced landing. But it means a loss of maximum power and a ragged engine. I once had the actual experience of getting back home with three plugs quitting on me. But that was in a rotary engine, and the inertia of the revolving cylinders aided by the six other firing plugs (a 9-cylinder Bentley engine) enabled me to make the grade, thank goodness! However, in a stationary engine, more than one plug quitting means that you'll have a forced landing, nine times out of ten.

Of course the major part of an ignition system is made up of

wires. Each wire, naturally has a definite purpose, else it wouldn't be used. Therefore, if any one of them gets loose, it stands to reason that something is going to happen. And something does. Any spark plug wires that shake loose and hit against the engine block instantly short circuit the cylinder for which they were intended. And let the engine ground wire work loose and the whole system goes on the blink. Now, when I say ground wire, I don't mean a wire leading to the ground, terra-firma in other words. All ignition systems have a definite course of travel for that invisible thing called electricity. In your car it starts from the battery and goes right through your engine and back to the battery again. The path of return is called the "Ground." In other words it has got to get back where it started. The part of it that is spent is made up for by the generator. To be more definite, the current starts from the battery, is maintained by the generator which also shoots it back to recharge the battery again. In the airplane engine of the war days, the magneto functioned as the battery, and generator combined. It still does in a lot of today's ships. If wet batteries are used they are used mostly for lighting in the cabin, etc. After all, a battery is added weight, and a magneto gives a hotter spark, so naturally, everything is in favor of magneto ignition in airplane engines, instead of battery ignition.

Now, of course, one could say that constant inspection of your engine and its various parts would go a long way toward preventing any of the faults of which I have been talking, coming to pass. And to a certain extent, that is true. And it is also true that we inspect-

ed our ships before each patrol until we were blue in the face. But in those days all the little kinks had not been ironed out of engines, and their construction was not of the best, so things did happen. I don't mean to say that we had forced landings every time we took off. Far from it. But we did have plenty. Some of us, more than our share, perhaps. But we never prayed for them, and we did everything possible to prevent them. However, Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither was a perfect aero engine. Our experiences during the war were ground work for engineers to work upon. So the next time your

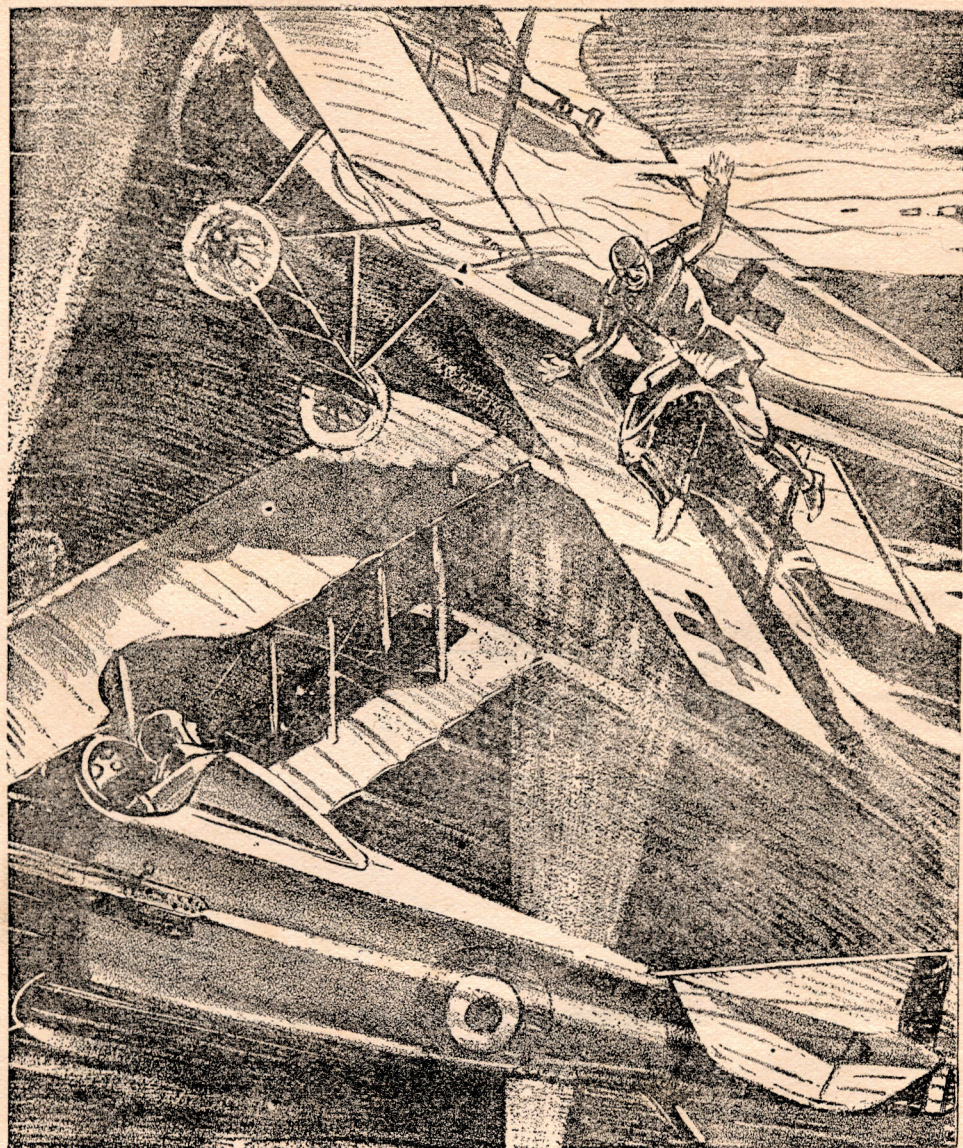
hero gets a konked engine just as he's going to blast that Fokker apart, just bear in mind that he hasn't got a 1932 aero engine up there in the nose. Either that, or else the author forces the poor bird down so that he can be taken prisoner and later escapes with valuable information swiped right off the Kaiser's desktop.

But anyway, keep on writing in your questions fledglings, because, after all, I don't get really and truly nettled when you take cracks at us broken-down eagles who used to make three-point landings . . . upside down! Cheese it! . . . The C. O. of this magazine!

TRY THESE AIR QUESTIONS

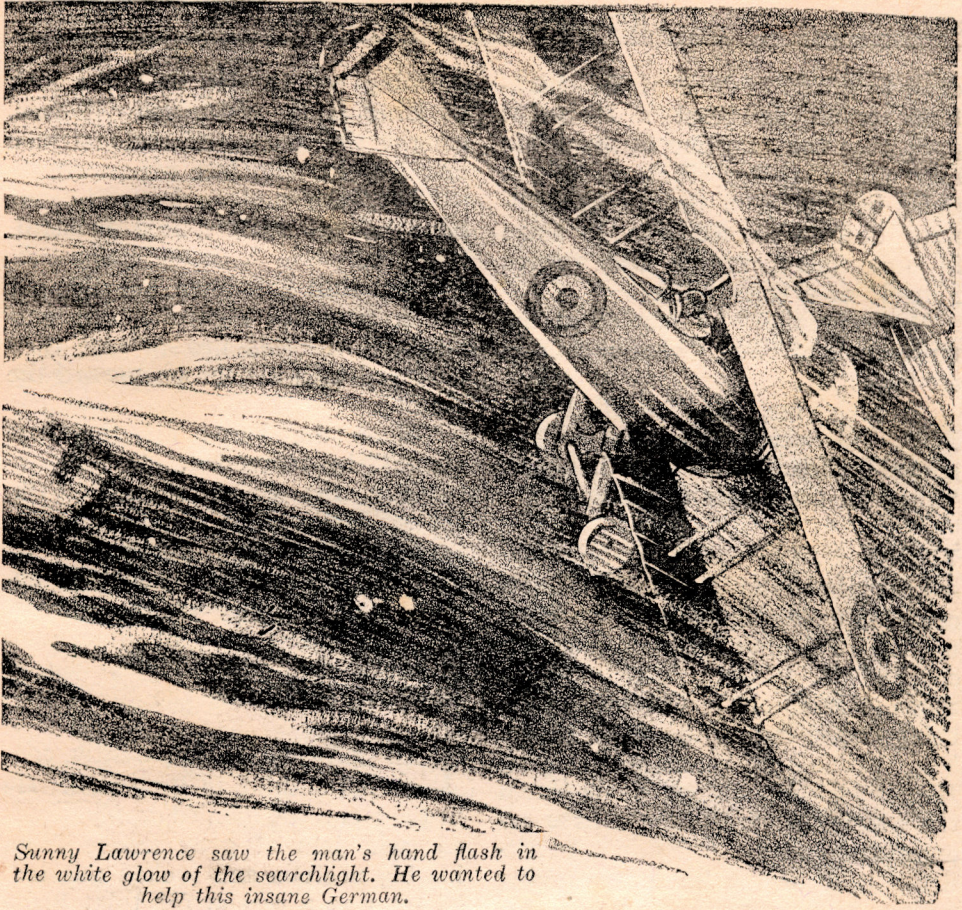
on yourself or your friends. If you remember what you've read in this issue, you'll be able to answer them.

1. What common German pursuit crate had balanced ailerons?
2. For what was an R. E. 8 used? What does R. E. abbreviate?
3. What is a splash system?
4. Who was Voss?
5. What power plant did a D. H. 10 use?
6. What metal is used in great quantity in Zeps?
7. Describe the loading of a Lewis gun.
8. What often went wrong with the carburation of war ships?
9. Was Chateau Thierry east or west of Metz?
10. Identify: (a) Pfaltz; (b) Parabellum; (c) Sump; (d) Renault; (e) L. V. G.



Soft Thunder

By Frederick C. Painton



Sunny Lawrence saw the man's hand flash in the white glow of the searchlight. He wanted to help this insane German.

It was a grim game they played—they stuck to the rules and played like sports, but they knew that the loser would find flying death. And then into their game kited a kid who seemed soft—but there is lightning with even soft thunder.

CAPTAIN BING HALL, commanding the Sixth American Pursuit Squadron, came back from Souilly at ten o'clock. He was no sight for the gods. His heavy-jawed face, that somehow resembled a battleship's prow, had two days' growth of dark whiskers; his olive drab uniform hung wrinkled and dirty on his six feet of tremendous body. His gray eyes were bloodshot; his

mouth tasted as if a couple of birds had nested there for years; his brain was shaky and irritable; and his stomach felt as if it held a three-alarm fire; it was burning up. Two days of rain and mist had prevented patrol flying, and Bing Hall had gone on one hell of a bender. He was just sobering up and ready to pick a fight with angels.

He climbed out of the bathtub side-car of the motorcycle when it

drew to a halt in front of the operations room; and cast a bloodshot gaze over the familiar tarmac. He saw many things that were not there before. And these extraordinary objects caused him to stare in amazement, frown and relieve himself of a thick curse.

"For crysake!" he snarled at the motorcycle driver, "what's coming off here?"

"Search me, sir," replied the man. He waved his hand in the general direction of the hangars. "They all come this morning."

BING HALL considered the unusual activity. On the dead-line a couple of orange Spads were warming up. Down behind the repair shop a couple of Vickers machine-guns made a mad clatter as they were being tested out on the short range. The whine of reamers reboring Hispano-Suiza motors came from the overhaul shop. Like a bass orchestration came the dull kettle-drum beat of the hot guns baying twenty kilometers to the north. All this was as it should be.

But those men out there in olive drab uniforms, with red brassards on their left arm, bearing the white "C", were not part of the picture. Neither were the motion picture cameras on tripods, nor the slickly dressed men who were undoubtedly newspaper correspondents. They all stood around expectantly, staring on occasion at the southeast sky. The Sixth Pursuit was the second American combat squadron on the Western Front, but even so, as Bing Hall now reflected, there was no necessity for this bunch of reporters and cameramen.

"We'll see about this," he muttered, and turned into the operations room. Willy the Grin, the kiwi adjutant, sat there, making out the

morning report. He took one look at Bing Hall's yellowish-red face, caught the aroma of stale cognac and his cherubic face expanded.

"Boy," he muttered, "you must have had yourself a real snootful, Skipper."

Bing Hall sat down heavily, got out a crumpled cigarette, straightened it with his fingers and then gestured with his thumb toward the tarmac.

"What the hell's all the fuss about?" he demanded.

Willy the Grin laughed. "Oh, that. Well, we're receiving reinforcements today, Skipper dear. The Sixth Pursuit is about to acquire the famous, the marvelous, the outstanding hero of America—in short—Sunny Lawrence, idol of Newport, is joining the Sixth."

THE information apparently conveyed nothing to Bing Hall. He lit the cigarette, inhaled deeply, blasted twin jets of gray smoke from his big nostrils and looked puzzled. There was a reason for this: Since he had run away to Mexico at the age of seventeen and become an expert machine-gunner in Madero's revolutionaries, Bing Hall had spent little if any time in the United States. As soon as one war was finished, he and Bart Morrel went looking for another, and usually found it. They had commanded machine-guns with Huerta, flew antiquated Wright reconnaissance planes in Honduras and later did work with the Bulgarians against the Turks. Wherever they could get fifty dollars gold a day, in a swell war, there you would find them.

Hence, the social foibles of the United States—of which Sunny Lawrence was one—were something of which Bing knew nothing. Soldiers of fortune know war and bat-

tles and strategy, they know how to hold their liquor, fight to the last man for a friend, understand how to endure hardship, fatigue, fix a Maxim machine-gun, and how to hit a tin can six times running with a six-gun before the said can hits the ground.

But phenomena like Sunny Lawrence were beyond their ken.

SO now, ready to be angry but so far puzzled, Bing Hall stared at his adjutant and said: "Who and what is Sunny Lawrence—a ration?"

Willy the Grin flung up his hands in mock horror. "My Gawd, man!" he cried, "where is your education. Sunny Lawrence, Skipper dear, is the amateur tennis champion of the world. He is society's pet darling. He is the girls' dream of the ideal husband, the flashing meteor from Newport who can smite a tennis ball harder than any one can return it. One of Yale's best-looking men, the most popular member of his class, the one chosen as the most likely to achieve success."

He stood up and made a mock bow. "That, Captain Hall, is Sunny Lawrence whose first name, I believe, is John—or better yet, Johnny."

Captain Bing Hall listened. He spat reflectively and then said: "Nuts! Is this a war or a pink tea? Send him to hell back. I don't want him in this squadron."

Again Willy the Grin smiled and shook his head. "Nothing doing. Here's a memorandum from Corps, transmitted from Chaumont, likely from Black Jack Pershing himself. It seems, Captain darling, that back in them United States the government is trying to make this war popular. It is endeavoring to get the young college bloods and ath-

letes into the Air Service. Somebody—probably a publicity guy—got the bright idea that athletes make the best combat flyers. So here comes Sunny Lawrence, trained at Kelly Field and Issoudun, and your orders are to let the movies and the reporters make a lot of publicity about him. Presently, after he has shot down a nasty Boche, he will go back to the United States and lecture in colleges to get smashing football stars to kick the Heinies for a goal. Meantime, he is attached here, and here he'll stay."

The curse which Captain Hall then emitted was blistering and smoking with sulphur. He leaped to his feet and the floorboards creaked beneath his tremendous muscled body.

"What the hell," he cried, "do they think I'm running here—a nursing school for brats that ain't dry behind the ears? Think I'm going to put a puling kid like that in a hard-boiled outfit and lose what good flyers I got? No, and again, no! I won't have it. I——"

THE sight of a tall, lean figure coming through the sunshiny entrance of the operations room stopped what further he had intended to say. The new arrival was six feet two inches tall, which is to say, he was an inch taller than Captain Bing Hall. His shoulders were so broad that he seemed built like a triangle. His face was bronzed like Hall's, with deep-sunk clear eyes, and those lines of character that come with danger and adventure had riven themselves deep on his face. He had crisp dark-brown hair and a casually alert appearance. He was Bart Morrel and he was a flying fool with one weakness—women.

He came in silently, sat on the edge of a table and regarded Hall.

"By God, you look like you drunk up all the likker in la Belle France," he offered.

"If I'd known what they were reaming me for here," replied Hall bitterly, "I'd stayed drunk. Lissen, Bart, they're sending me a puling brat by the name of Sunny Lawrence."

BART, who was Captain Bing Hall's chum and partner in several wars, showed no great interest, nor did he get unduly excited when Hall, punctuating his narrative with picturesque oaths, proceeded to elucidate.

"Keep your shirt on," he advised. "In a big guerre like this one, you got to expect amateurs. There aren't enough professionals in this war to keep it going." He paused, then: "Listen, I'm in love at last, Bing. She's marvelous."

Bing Hall sighed noisily. "Willy, fetch me that cognac bottle. I need strength. Sunny Lawrence is coming here, and now this big pin-head goes and falls in love for the seventieth time. Six bits to a Dijon franc she's a blonde."

"Sure," assented Bart Morrel amiably. "I have a weakness for blondes. But this time it's taking, Bing—I'm gonna marry her. She's a Y. W. C. A. girl down at Souilly and what it takes to make a knockout, she's got in clusters. Her eyes—blue like the heavens—her lips red like cherries—her figure, boy, she's all curves. Her name's Anita Selfridge, and we're going to get married next month."

Slowly Bing Hall tipped the bottle to his lips; the amber contents began to gurgle, and continued gurgling while Willy the Grin watched in growing fascination. He was

panting for breath just watching, waiting for Bing Hall to pause to draw breath. The contents had vanished one-fourth before Bing Hall took away the bottle, snorted, breathed heavily and then belched.

"Listen, Willy," he said thickly. "Down in the spig countries this guy was in love oftener than they had revolutions—and that was once a week. He loved a Georgian when we was in Turkey, a Hungarian when we was in Bulgaria, and a Greek when we fought for Polepodides. Every time he fell in love it was pure hell for me, as well as him. If I had my guts with me—what I got are burning up—I'd send in my resignation and join the navy and find some peace."

"Wait'll you see her," Bart Morrel took no offense. "She——"

Through the comparative quiet cut the steady high-pitched drone of a wide-gunned Hisso engine. It was circling high, the thin thrum whining as the ship circled in the wind. Even as they paused to listen, the sound abruptly ceased, and a moment or so later came the shrill of brace wires cleaving the air.

"Sunny Lawrence has come," said Willy the Grin.

Captain Bing Hall turned to the desk and picked up the Corps memorandum. He read it through and found it told him no more than Willy the Grin had said. Hall's teeth clicked and a hard light came into his eyes.

CAPTAIN BING HALL'S squadron was the best organized on the Western Front. He was hard on his pilots and his greaseballs, but he was hard on himself, too. The men liked him because they knew he was just. They believed he was duty-struck, but you can't pick a

fight with a man for that. They knew that, given his duty to do, Bing Hall would do it despite hell and high water. The man who failed, be it his most beloved friend, Bart Morrel, received the full brunt of Bing Hall's wrath. He was, in short, the ideal military leader.

HE thrust the order on the spike. "That guy'll soldier here or I'll fan his tail to Blois," he muttered. "Let's go out and look over America's spoiled darling."

As they reached the grassy tarmac, a black and red Spad was just shooting up-wind for a neat three-point landing. It rolled a bit, taxied a little bit more, and came to a stop. From the cockpit a tall, lean youngster stepped out. He was instantly swamped by cameramen and reporters.

"Take off the helmet, Sunny," one shouted.

"Hold that pose, one leg in the pit, Sunny," cried a movie man.

The cameras began to click, the shutters of the Graflexes clacked; reporters made notes and a confusion of sound swept the tarmac.

It was the strangest sight on the Western Front, indeed.

The youngster removed his helmet, and a weary, disillusioned expression crossed his young, handsome features. He had wavy blond hair that swept back from a high forehead, a straight nose, wide hazel eyes, and his full, sensitive lips twisted wistfully. His strong stubborn chin jutted a trifle. Sunny Lawrence didn't like this publicity fandango and made no pretense of hiding his dislike.

Yet as Captain Bing Hall spat disgustedly at the sight, and Bart Morrel stared interestedly, Sunny Lawrence went through his little act; posed in the Spad, over the

Vickers, examining the tail surfaces. He gave interviews, approved certain quotations thought up by ambitious newspapermen. He played his part because the American War Department in sending him here had asked him to do just that. But he didn't like it—not one bit.

And presently, when a lull came in this publicity activity, he walked over to where Captain Bing Hall stood.

Thus fate brought together the three chief actors in the drama—Sunny Lawrence, Bart Morrel and Bing Hall—and raised the curtain on the play.

Sunny Lawrence's eyes espied the twin silver bars on Bing's shoulders. He came to a smart salute, heels clicking.

"Lieutenant John Lawrence reporting for duty, sir," he said.

His voice was low, pleasantly vibrant, but its personable effect was lost on Captain Bing Hall.

"Heard about you," he snapped succinctly. "Corp memo! O. K. with me to have them snap your mug and take down what hot air you want to let out. But while you're in this squadron, you're a flyer. You'll do three patrols a day, and more if we want it, and you won't bellyache or I'll ship you to hell out of here. You'll get a square deal as long as you give one. You'll obey orders and play ball. And God help you if you don't."

HE paused abruptly, ignoring Sunny Lawrence's suddenly flushed face.

"This is First Lieutenant Bart Morrel. He commands B-Flight. You'll take your joy-hops with him and fly number three in his outfit. That's all."

Whereupon, Captain Bing Hall turned abruptly on his heel and

vanished into the operations room to consult his cognac bottle.

IT is quite likely that Sunny Lawrence might have let off a lot of steam at this ungracious speech. But whatever hot retort hovered on his tongue was forgotten at the mention of Bart Morrel's name. Sunny Lawrence gave a little start, stepped forward, peered into Morrel's face. An expression of awe and worship filled his eyes.

"You're the great Bart Morrel?" he spoke it as a question, but conviction underlay the words.

Morrel, busily engaged in manufacturing a cigarette of rice paper and sack tobacco looked up in surprise.

"Sure. I'm Bart Morrel," he spoke kindly.

"Bart Morrel!" repeated Lawrence, awe-struck. "The famous soldier of fortune. Good Lord, I've read about you, heard about you. You were at Yale, too, and we've followed your career. That time in Bulgaria when you rescued that girl from the Turk harem!" he paused dreamily. "Shot seven men. Flew away with her in your plane. Gee, that was real romance."

Lawrence was twenty-one then, and Morrel was twenty-six. But hero-worship had raised between them a barrier greater than years. It was obvious to anyone who cared to look that Lawrence was adoring a hero. He gazed upon Morrel as if the latter were a god.

Bart Morrel laughed, puzzled. "Yeah, I remember that. Blond girl. Georgian, and a peach. She——"

"And Frederick Palmer, the famous war correspondent, described how you wiped out a whole battery of Turks that would have defeated the Bulgars," cut in Sunny Lawrence eagerly. He stepped forward

and boyishly held out his hand. "I'm proud to meet you. I'm tickled pink you're my C. O. I hope—" this shyly—"I won't let you down."

"Good enough, kid," said Morrel indulgently. "What's all this grandstand act you do?"

Lawrence flushed. "Oh, that! The United States has gone publicity-crazy. I don't like it, but I have to do it. They say it'll help win the war."

Morrel smiled and patted Lawrence's shoulder. "I'll help you all I can. You'll need it because Bing don't like that grandstand play. You can bunk in with me if you like."

Lawrence's eyes glowed. "Thanks," he said simply.

"O. K.," laughed Bart, turning away. "We Yale men have to stick together. And by the way, don't pay too much attention to Bing's growling. He's a square-shooter." He strode away whistling.

Lawrence stared after him, cheeks flushed, eyes shining. "Boy, what luck!" he muttered, "to be his bunk."

He frowned suddenly as his dreadful problem oppressed him once more and he walked slowly toward the line of galvanized iron huts where he would live.

Before he had gone ten yards, a stentorian bellow came from the operations room. Captain Bing Hall stood in the doorway.

"Everybody on the dead-line in ten minutes, in full flying kit," he yelled. "A circus of krauts are jazzing our balloon lines."

He espied Lawrence, frowned, and added: "You might as well get a bellyfull of this war here and now. You go, too."

Fate had plucked the strings and the puppets began acting the first scene of the tragedy.

CHAPTER II

DOG FIGHT AND FEAR

WHAT a turmoil assailed the Sixth's tarmac then! The newspapermen and photographers that had started for their cars, returned in frantic haste. To them it did not matter that Bing Hall, seven times victor in high combat, was going up, or that Bart Morrel, nine times a sky conqueror, was going out to strafe some Fokkers; nor were they interested in the other twelve members of the squadron, all of whom had at least three victories. As one man they raced to record for posterity, Sunny Lawrence stepping into his cockpit for his first combat patrol.

Those movie men were experts in the art of faking; they got close-ups of Sunny Lawrence, grim-lipped, stern-eyed, sitting in his cockpit behind his twin Vickers and these movies, captioned, "Famous Tennis Star, Sunny Lawrence, Shoots Down First Enemy Aircraft," would later thrill the United States. For their benefit, Sunny crawled all over his ship. He did everything but examine the tail-skid while the cranks turned.

"Issue a statement, Sunny," yelled a reporter. "Tell us what you intend to do." The said reporter had once covered sports and he likely had the idea Sunny Lawrence was a prize-fighter about to enter the ring.

The other pilots stood around, aghast at this, and Bing Hall was boiling with rage. Lawrence looked helplessly around, his eyes met Hall's and were downcast. He started to refuse and then remembered his promise to the War Department.

"Say," he muttered, "say that I said I'd bring home the bacon."

Now, indeed, the pilots and Bing Hall stared in furious anger. A new pilot in a combat squadron is about as useful for his first three patrols as a flock of feathers to a frog. No matter what his previous training; no matter how well he flies; no matter how clever he is with machine-guns; he is useless in the sky until he gets air sense. Records like Von Richtofen's are built up of shooting down rookie pilots who fly out over No Man's Land and because they are sky-blind, are easy targets for the past masters who know how to achieve surprise. To these men, listening and knowing that Sunny Lawrence would be lucky to get back alive, for him to talk about victory and bacon was rank bragging; worse, damned insolence. And that was bad, for a rookie pilot has to depend on the old hands to save his neck when a Boche is screwing slugs at it.

"Ah, God!" muttered Bing Hall. "Cut out that crap, and get into your pit. I ought to——"

"Leave the kid alone," cut in Bart Morrel. "He can't help it because they want that stuff. Give him a chance."

"I'll give him a chance," snapped Hall. "Pits, men. Rendezvous three thousand, tight formation, no break till I give the signal."

FACE burning, Sunny Lawrence strapped himself in, tested his controls, looked to his blue-black Vickers with bright ribbons of brass cartridges in their teeth. He felt Morrel's hand. "Never mind, Lawrence," he heard. "You're jake with me."

A quick handclasp and suddenly Lawrence saw the flashing signal of Hall's. Mechanically he gunned out of line, goosed the Spad into

the wind and poured the gun to the Hisso.

His tail came up, the Hisso blatted, gradually increased her revs to a smashing roar. The Spad carried him down the field, leaving behind the rank stink of castor oil, the swirl of grass bits. He took off in a climbing turn, avoiding Morrel's wash, and then banked tightly around and around in tight spirals for altitude.

ALL this he did because he was essentially a good flyer. But his mind was already occupied with the problem which had haunted him since he had first heard the rumble of the red hot guns of war. Again the question tormented him: how was he going to perform out there in the grim game where death came to the loser? Probably every rookie flyer who took his first joy-hop over the lines thought the same thing; but Lawrence, like them, took the problem as particularly his own. Flying wing to fuselage with Bart Morrel, he tried to visualize what would happen when he saw his first enemy crate. How would he feel when steel bullets came singing the song of death in his ears? And into his mind crept that dreadful thought that always came to him: what would he do if bullets ruined his tennis arm or blinded him so he could never see the lovely world again?

Droning along fourteen thousand feet in the air, he suddenly knew he loved tennis passionately. The game was his very heart and soul. He had made up his mind that, after winning the next internationals, he would turn professional and make it a life career. Nothing else interested him. He lived only for the ringing thud of tennis ball on racket, for the smashing impact of

his ground stroke that would send a ball flying like a white flash down the side line for a placement. He had often thought that without tennis, life would not be worth living for him. To lose that—he shuddered—and looked over at Bart Morrel. The soldier of fortune saw the sun glint on Lawrence's glasses and waved a cheery arm of encouragement. At the signal, Lawrence suddenly felt peace. He waved back; he shouted, "I'll show you, Bart. I'll play ball."

And then, suddenly, the Fokkers came. The sky rained planes.

Out of nowhere streaks of flaming fire shot across his eyes; the sky seemed filled with a hellish roar. Red and green and white planes turned and dove and zoomed and screamed around him like mad bats. Bewildered, Lawrence saw that of a sudden Bart Morrel's Spad was gone, vanished into clear blue sky.

A crate leap-frogged him and he could count the spokes in the slowly turning wheels of the landing gear above his head. A wildly gyrating ship went down past him, wheeling so swiftly, so terrifically that the wings came off and the fuselage shot like a javelin toward the checkered carpet two miles below.

THE air screamed with stunting engines, howling bullets. Ships streaked out of nowhere. The world had gone mad and Sunny Lawrence sat there, paralyzed, hand to stick, wondering what to do.

He could make out no insignia; these howling planes were merely streaks of different colors. A plane screamed at him, sheered down when Sunny Lawrence had shut his eyes, expecting collision, chaos and death.

To the observers on the ground below, the dog fight was a tightly massed ball of airplanes, a mile high, a mile wide, and as ships dove shrieking down in attack and then spiraled madly upward to get up to a point of vantage, the ball seemed to roll like a gigantic cart-wheel across the sky. And in the center of this ball of planes, Sunny Lawrence, fingers on Bowdoin stick trigger, moved wildly about looking for something to shoot at. Poor lad! Inexperience made him helpless.

Br-r-r-r-r-r-r-whack!

His instrument board became a mass of ruins. Another ripping crash of sound and a V strut splintered. A row of steel slugs stitched a series of holes in the fabric of his trailing edge and the wind caught hold of the jagged cloth and enlarged the rents.

He looked back, seeing there, slightly below him, shooting up at him, a green plane that had little red eyes in the center that blinked rapidly. He could see the sun reflect on the kraut's goggles, see lips skinned back from white teeth in oil-darkened features.

Br-r-r-r-r-rup!

INVISIBLE fingers plucked at his shoulders. He zoomed, twisted in a half roll. This was death, tapping with bony fingers at his shoulder. This was no game like tennis, like football; this was real death, malevolent, terrible. That man back there was not playing any game, he was not filled with romance, the spirit of high adventure. He wanted to kill Sunny Lawrence and laugh at the smashed corpse on the ground.

Sunny Lawrence dove. Unknowingly he dropped on the tail of a Fokker that was shooting its way down in a vertical dive on the tail

of a Spad that was making two hundred miles an hour. Another ship cut in. Behind it came a German. Sunny Lawrence saw streaks of white flame leave the Fokker, smash into the Spad. The Spad suddenly had a big tail of smoke, then it had flames around it. Sunny Lawrence sat, stricken by what he saw. He was dropping like a projectile, stupidly watching an American burn to death. He realized that he was as helpless to aid the doomed Yank as if this were a movie he was watching.

AS with other eyes he saw the Yank try to slip the ship, and when that failed to keep the mass of orange flame from filling the cockpit, the Yank unfastened his belt, stood up, got a foot on the crashpad and then, in what seemed a leisurely manner, thrust himself out into space.

"Oh, God!" the words bubbled from Sunny Lawrence's mouth. "No! No!"

He saw the black body go hurtling head over heels, then it sort of straightened out and began to turn. Arms outthrust, legs outthrust, it fell through space like a man crucified. And thus it shot down the sky until its shape melted into the browns and greens of the earth and it could be seen no more.

The man was dead by now. A few seconds of falling, falling faster than this roaring ship that carried Sunny downward. A few seconds of wild thought that would come to any man falling two miles. Seconds of thought when the man knew he was doomed, going to die in one terrific smash. Going to strike the earth at two hundred miles an hour and be twisted and pounded into no recognizable form.

DEATH! What did that man think of as he chose to fall two miles rather than burn to death. What fear, agony, horror, gripped him as he stepped over the side and dropped on to that flat carpet way, way down there?

Sunny Lawrence screamed, and hauled back on the stick. He nearly shed his wings. But the ship came out of the dive. He climbed back up to the mass of fighting planes because he knew nothing else to do. On the way, a Fokker came gliding down at an easy angle. Sunny avoided it by feet. He saw a man in the cockpit, sitting bolt-upright. The goggles were smashed, there was a hole where the throat should be, a trickle of crimson. A dead man riding to earth in his coffin.

A hoarse, vibrant yell left Sunny Lawrence's lips and he went mad. His crate flung around the sky, like a straw in the grasp of a whirlwind. His Vickers smashed out at green objects, yellow objects. Bullets plucked at his right arm and then came no more. He held his Bowdain stick trips until the leaping cartridge belt, like a slithering snake, leaped into the hungry maw of the breeches, like a mad thing.

His was the helpless fighting fury of the ignorant fighters against the trained boxer. And his mad swoops, his wilder zooms, his wing-under tight banks only served to attract to him a tight-lipped German, seeking a kill.

In the space of a moment, a checkered Fokker came screaming up from below, leveled off just below Lawrence's tail to avoid the back-wash, but aiming upward with red-mouthed Spandaus.

The slugs came like the first fury of a storm. They ripped into the tail assembly, they marched up the back of the fuselage, they clicked

off the engine, off the Vickers; they shredded Lawrence's coat. It was only the miracle of his own inexperience that saved him. A hundred bullets whipped his Spad in ten seconds.

They pattered like the bony fingers of death plucking at his shoulder. He was going to die; he was going to have to jump out and smash to bits on that brown and green carpet swimming in the mist down below. He was going to stop breathing, stop feeling, hearing, knowing. Death!

He shrank down, helpless; and then, as if hypnotized, turned to look into the streaking tracers that shredded the air around him.

He saw the nose of the Fokker shift slightly, as the Spandaus chuckled. And then, as he looked into their grim muzzles, he saw a streaking fury drop down on the German, coming like the breath of a hurricane. A Spad! It smashed at the Fokker, whipped it with bullets even as the German had whipped Lawrence. It struck, that Spad, like the mailed fist of a giant, and pounded the German down the sky. The Fokker wings broke off at the tips, and it went into a flat spin.

LAWRENCE, watching, mouth open, breath arrested, saw Bart Morrel's insignia on the Spad. Bart had come to his aid when the others wouldn't. Morrel had saved his life, let him breathe, and feel, and know the glory of the world. Lawrence fought down his emotion and charged blindly into the fight once more.

He never knew the fight was over until of a sudden there was nothing to shoot at. Planes vanished in mid-air and he was totally lost until an orange Spad wheeled in beside him and the black knobbed pilot ges-

tured with a hand. Bart Morrel, guiding him home. Blindly Sunny Lawrence followed, followed right down to the ground and mechanically landed a bouncing, restless Spad that promptly smashed into the crate ahead of him and sawed off the tail assembly and wrecked the fuselage.

He got out, numbly, to find Bing Hall standing there, cursing him in red-eyed rage.

"By God," he cried. "You nearly shot me down. You see Carstairs in a hole and fly away and desert him. You run around the sky like a crazy idiot, then you land and smash up my crate. You ought to fly for the Germans."

Sunny Lawrence merely stared at him. Slowly he felt himself over, saw the shredded leather of his flying jacket at the right shoulder. Death and mutilation had been that close. He looked up again to see Bart Morrel standing beside him. "Lay off the kid, Bing," Morrel cried angrily. "You shouldn't have flung him into a dog-fight like that—first time out. Come on, kid, we'll have a hooker of cognac and you'll feel better."

At that second Sunny Lawrence would have died for Bart Morrel. And destiny grinned and prepared the scene for the second act.

CHAPTER III

A GIRL AND COMPLICATIONS

IT WAS a week later that Captain Bing Hall stopped Sunny Lawrence as he was going out to the Dodge touring car to be transported to town.

"Now, listen here," Hall said flatly. "This excuse of air-sickness for not flying don't go with me any longer. Most times when fellows

figure up excuses and alibis day after day, we consider them yellow. You say you ain't yellow. So show it tomorrow morning when you're marked up for the dawn patrol."

Sunny Lawrence looked haggard. The pink cheeks had gone, and his flesh was gray-colored. His eyes were deep-sunk and had circles under them. He looked ten years older.

BUT he merely said, "Very good, sir," and climbed into the car.

Sunny Lawrence was not, however, the only one to get bawled out. As the big body of Bart Morrel came striding out of the darkness, Bing Hall hailed him.

"What's it tonight, that dame?" he demanded.

"Sure," replied Morrel. "Why not? I told you I'm nuts about her."

"Well, lay off," snapped Hall. "I love you like a brother, Bart, but if you get me into trouble with any more of your blondes, by God, I'll beat your head off."

"Says you," responded Morrel, amiably. "You've tried it before and that busted nose of yours is a good souvenir of what happened."

He shouldered past Hall and whistling a gay tune climbed into the tonneau. He grinned when he made out Sunny Lawrence. "That guy has duty on the brain."

Lawrence said nothing for quite a while as the Dodge tore through the night toward Souilly. Finally Bart Morrel said, "What's eating you, lad?"

After a moment or so, Sunny Lawrence said, "Bart, I'm just no good."

There was a desperate quality to his tone; a heart-breaking pathos in his expression. Bart Morrel was essentially a good-hearted fellow—

Bing Hall called him generous and dumb. He remembered now, things he had heard and paid no attention to before. The jibes of the other pilots, "How's the tennis champion?" "How's thirty love, or don't you love thirty?" "The skin you love to touch." "How the girls will thrill when they see Sunny shooting down nasty Germans."

He patted Lawrence's arm. "Shoot, kid," he said gently. "I have my troubles myself, what with one thing and another."

"It's about m-me," faltered Sunny Lawrence. "Ever since that first patrol. Oh, God, Bart. I'd give anything in the world to be like you—unafraid."

"You mean you're afraid out there when Jerry lead starts snapping?"

Sunny Lawrence took a long time in answering. "No, not that. I'm not afraid the way you mean. A slug through the head—that's the glorious adventure of high combat. It doesn't bother me. Even a flamer—and I hate fire—I can go that in spite of what I've seen. Or a crack-up that leaves my brains plastered on the instrument board."

HE paused. Then: "That's death. Quick—finish—the end. I'm not afraid of that, Bart. What gets me is the possibility that I'll get a fistful of slugs through my right arm—or maybe both arms—and be crippled for life. I love tennis," he cried passionately. "I cringe at the thought of going through life a cripple, never to hear or feel again the thud of a tennis ball against the taut gut. Why—why—I'd rather be dead, Bart, a thousand times."

He faltered again, wiped the palms of his hands. "I think about that when I'm up there—

dreading mutilation. I think of myself blinded—like Galvin was last week. A bullet side-swiping his eyes—putting them out. Never to see God's earth again. Never to see the glorious sunshine—just doomed to sit, or have someone take you by the hand and lead you across the blackness of time until death mercifully ends all that you are."

HIS voice was tense, low. "That's what I'm afraid of, Bart, the loss of my arms, the loss of my eyes, the loss of tennis. God, if I could just down it—ah, well, I suppose it's yellow."

Bart Morrel listened to the impassioned statement. "Why don't you go back to the States, kid? You've seen the big show. You can tell those college boys what it's all about. That's a job that needs doing and then, why, you won't have anything to worry you."

"No!" the word exploded like a pistol shot. "Not that, Bart. By God, I've come among men over here. I've been a kid. But I'm not one now. I've met you."

He flung back his head. "I'm not a quitter. I'll stick it—and like it. Only—only, I need help—to sort of down that feeling."

"I get you, kid," cut in Bart Morrel kindly. He fell silent for a moment and then went on: "As for getting certain kinds of fright, kid, why that's nothing. This hooey about heroism and bravery is all right, but I've seen plenty of wars, and all kinds of soldiers and I never saw a man yet who wasn't afraid unless he was plain nuts. We're all afraid—way down inside us. We all get wind up. When I get a hunch not to fly, God himself don't get me into a pit. The thing is, kid, never let it get you down. The right kind of a soldier

is the one who has fear and conquers it."

Again he paused to manufacture a cigarette. "Why, listen, kid, armies are made up of men governed by intelligent fear. If everybody was wild, reckless, brave, they'd charge into a machine-gun and be stiffed plenty quick. A man takes cover against artillery shells, machine-gun fire, enemy rifles, because why? Because he's afraid of death and wants to kill the other guy and stay alive himself."

He lit the cigarette, saffron glow playing over lean features.

"Take my own case when I'm on lone patrol. I hide in the sun and drop down on some fool kraut like a ton of bricks. Why? So I can shoot him and he can't shoot me. That's intelligent fear."

He slapped Sunny Lawrence's shoulder. "I like you. Tomorrow we'll do a patrol together." He broke off and said, "Now, let me tell you about my girl, Anita. You'll see her tonight."

HE told Lawrence plenty about her during the ride, but even so, Anita Selfridge gave Lawrence a shock when he met her at the Cafe de la Paix. Pale yellow hair, pale yellow eyebrows, bright blue eyes and a face as beautifully chiseled as a statue—and so cold. She had a tall, rounded figure that was voluptuously curved. She moved sinuously, she became deliberately provocative. She knew she was attractive to men, and let you know it.

Sunny Lawrence took one look and spotted her type. She used men, but never loved them.

"Ah," he sighed to himself as he saw Bart Morrel go eagerly to her, "Bing Hall is right; Bart's a sucker

for women. She's playing him for a fool."

She wore the light blue uniform of the American Y. W. C. A., and the little mannish hat, and to eyes less experienced with women than Sunny's, she was a magnificent woman. At the introduction, she gave Lawrence a cold quick look, as calculating as a miser's. Lawrence murmured a few polite words and noticed one important thing about her. She was nervous, ill-at-ease over something.

SHE had a sort of hunted air that puzzled Lawrence.

"Your friend is a handsome young man," she murmured, showing white teeth through red lips. "But I've got something important to say to you, Bart dear."

Behind her someone slammed the door to the cafe, and she gave a convulsive start and turned a terrified look in that direction. As Sunny Lawrence politely withdrew, he had the sense that she was frightened to death over something.

"Gold-digger!" he muttered, and ordered a drink.

Others of the Sixth's pilots came in, but they pointedly ignored Sunny Lawrence, so he drank by himself, and, having nothing else to do, watched Morrel and the girl, Anita Selfridge. As the evening wore on, Lawrence saw that she was giving Bart a great deal to drink. First champagne, then cognac, and then whiskey and sodas. Lawrence was furious. "Deliberately getting him drunk," he thought, for Morrel didn't usually mix his drinks that way and was only obliging her.

Lawrence wanted to tell Bart what a fool the girl was making of him. But he dared not, for he had sense enough to know that friend-

ship ceases when you criticize another man's selection in women.

"A fool for girls," sighed Lawrence, yet the knowledge did not lessen his hero worship of Morrel.

IT must have been close to midnight, while Bart Morrel was bleary-eyed and quite drunk, that Lawrence got a shock. He saw the girl begin talking swiftly to Bart Morrel. Pleading with him, passionately, touching his arms, caressing his face with her hands, pleading with a grim terror that Lawrence could not help but see.

Lawrence saw Bart Morrel's face go pale; he grabbed the girl's arm, dragged her close. He shook his head vehemently, and the girl only pled the more.

And then, on a sudden, too quickly in fact, Morrel paid the score and staggered out the door, the girl pressing close behind him.

Sunny Lawrence had a hunch, paid his own bill and followed. "The girl's in a jam and she's asking Bart to do something he doesn't want to do," he thought. And blind loyalty to the only man who had befriended him, caused him to stick close on their trail.

Sunny Lawrence reached the door in time to see them enter the Dodge touring car. Morrel gave the chauffeur a ten franc note and the lad went on to another *estaminet* to drink it up. Morrel took the driver's seat, the girl beside him. A moment later the Dodge burst into life and turned and sped up the Via Sacre road toward the Sixth's tarmac at Fueillton.

Now, Sunny Lawrence was sure that something was amiss. He hastened up the one street, and because Souilly was the magnet for all Yank soldiers who could get a twenty-four hour pass, he found a

soldier with a side-car. Fifty francs commanded a ride to the Sixth's airdrome. But fast as the motorcycle was, it never overhauled the Dodge.

Thirty minutes later, the motorcycle came to a halt before the operations office. It was dark. Lawrence swung across the tarmac to the galvanized iron huts where the pilots slept. Bart Morrel was not in the cubicle which they shared. He went along the rest of the cubicles; they were all dark. Only the enlisted men's quarters showed a light.

Thoroughly worried now, he scouted across toward the billowing canvas hangars whose sides flapped like pistol reports in the night wind. Before he reached the deadline, a Hisso eight-cylinder motor began to blast. He saw the cherry flashes from the exhaust stacks, saw a brief flicker of an electric torch.

"What in the name of God!" cried Sunny Lawrence, and broke into a run.

The cold motor was warming fast. By the time he reached the cockpit, it was purring prettily. He made out the big form of Bart Morrel, by the left wing.

To Sunny Lawrence's utter amazement, the man was lashing Anita Selfridge fast to the inter-wing spars.

"My God, Bart, what are you doing?" he cried.

THE girl turned. "You fool, go away," she cried.

Bart Morrel snarled a curse. "What the hell are you doing here? Beat it away before—" he didn't finish, but leaped instead into the cockpit.

Sunny Lawrence did not know what Bart Morrel intended, but he

knew instinctively that this was wrong—wrong!

"No," he yelled. "No, Bart, you mustn't. Not that. Don't make a fool of yourself over a cold blonde. It—"

He reached up in the darkness and caught hold of Bart Morrel's left elbow. Lights flashed in the enlisted men's quarters; a sergeant's voice yelled for the sentry.

Bart Morrel leaped down. "Get away, you lousy rat," he yelled. "I know what I'm doing. She—"

"Please, Bart, my God—"

Bart Morrel swung a rapid right hook, a terrific blow that started behind him and finished flush on Sunny Lawrence's jaw. The youth catapulted backward as if pole-axed. A second later the Hisso motor roared, as Bart Morrel goosed it out of line, swung into the wind. Slowly it revved up, the ship trundled, got up speed and fled down the field like a ghost. The cherry spit of the exhaust stacks flickered up the sky in a climbing turn and the ship headed north toward the German lines.

CHAPTER IV

FOR BART MORREL'S SAKE

SUNNY LAWRENCE leaped to his feet. He was stunned, not so much by the blow—though his head rang like a Chinese gong—as by the incredible fact that Bart Morrel, soldier of fortune, hero, adventurer, was aiding a woman to escape. Yet in that moment when the sentries and sergeant of the guard came running, Sunny Lawrence's first thought was how he could protect Morrel. No one must know. If the girl was a spy—as Lawrence suspected—they'd shoot Morrel for aiding her.

The single fact to be covered at

the moment was the take-off of a plane at midnight. By the time the sergeant of the guard was saluting him, Sunny Lawrence had made up his mind.

"A girl," he gasped. "She stole a plane. Quick—get my Spad out. I can catch her."

The sergeant hesitated a moment, then he realized that this youngster was an officer. He gave a yell. The master mechanic responded, orders were barked and Sunny Lawrence's Spad was trundled from the hangar to the line. It's motor choked and coughed and started raggedly. Sunny leaped into the cockpit.

"If Captain Hall comes, tell him I'm chasing a spy," he yelled. "Pull the chocks."

"But the motor ain't warmed," protested the master mechanic.

"The hell!" screamed Sunny. "Pull those chocks."

He revved up the ship. She responded slowly, got her nose into the wind. A night take-off with a cold motor meant instant death if it conked out on the up-climb. Yet he risked it. And by some miracle the Hisso picked up enough to get him off the ground. He heard the branches of the top trees scrape his under-carriage as the flailing prop sought to give him altitude. Then he was clear, and at three-quarter throttle, so as not to choke the motor, he hedge-hopped north on the trail of the flashing exhausts of Bart Morrel.

HE HAD no clear idea of what to do now. The act was one of impulse seeking only to cover Bart Morrel by pretending to chase a female spy who had stolen a plane. Now, as the black ground swept back under his wings, he realized that Bart Morrel would be easy

prey for any night-flying Fokker. A girl lashed to the wing would put the Spad off balance, render useless any aerial acrobatics. Presently, when the Hiss warmed up and the blast from the exhausts was a clear cherry red, he gained on Morrel by the minute. Within twelve minutes by his wrist watch he was hovering above and behind Bart Morrel's tail.

THE barbed wire of the front lay underneath.

Their exhaust clatter was heard. Searchlights bit through the darkness with radiant swords to sweep the heavens for them. Ugly red eyes smashed out of the blackness as shrapnel and high explosives tore the air around them. They were bumped around like a small ship in a terrific gale. But both Spads hung on and presently the night pyrotechnics stopped. Blackness lay ahead, above and below. But Sunny Lawrence knew that grim-faced men at field telephones had shouted the alarm to the rear. German *jagdstaeffels* were being aroused from sleep. Tin ears were harkening to the sound of Spad drone. The Germans would come looking for them. Then hell would pop.

Lawrence followed Bart Morrel in a bank to the northeast. The altitude was no more than twelve hundred feet. Suddenly Morrel's Spad piqued over and began a shallow dive toward the ground. A flaming spark streaked down from the ship, struck the ground and burst into a fearful white glow. A magnesium flare to aid Bart Morrel in landing.

Sunny Lawrence groaned, realizing how powerless he was to prevent this traitor's act.

Morrel made a circle around the

white radiance that lighted a field below. Sunny Lawrence held his altitude. Now, he suddenly lost track of the Spad entirely, and did not see it again until, like a black bat, it suddenly drifted into the white light, blotted it from view for a moment and then landed.

Sunny Lawrence turned the field in tight banks. His anxious eyes cut the night for sight of enemy aircraft. Presently he gave a groan. Spitting fire was climbing the sky out of the northwest. Fokkers! Their retreat would be cut off.

At the same moment he saw Morrel's Spad shoot up from earth, bank sharply and cut straight to the south. With a thrust of the throttle Sunny went in pursuit.

The Fokkers came. Worse, by some freak of luck Bart Morrel took an old air trail over the front, one frequently used by night bombing squadrons. And so, without warning, the blackness was suddenly cut by seven swords of radiance that shot upward like white fangs of death. Seven searchlights, their beams crossing like scissors.

SUNNY LAWRENCE was suddenly blinded by a brilliant white light that was more dazzling than sun rays. He tried to loop, he chandelled upward, made a *renversement*, tried every trick to throw the searchlights off the target. But he discovered then what many pilots already knew, that the "scissors" grip of searchlights was not to be shaken. If he escaped one beam, the other moved along and picked him up.

There, high in the heavens, caught like two flies skewered on white-hot pins, the two Spads were trapped.

And then the Fokkers came. One, two, three, four, five—eight of

them, their wings threshing the air, their Mercedes motors howling in rage, their Spandaus red-lipped already at long range burst.

The butchers—come to complete the kill.

There is nothing so deadly, so horrible, so nerve-racking as night combat. The flaming searchlights blind the eyes so that the enemy attacks unseen. The whirling crates howling along at two hundred miles an hour come head-on and collide before the danger is sensed. It is a mad, savage melee and death rattles through the air.

A RAKING flash of white tracer slugs ripped across Sunny Lawrence's center section. He turned, eyes blinded by the searchlight glare. He saw little spitting red eyes, saw slanting tracer fire like long streams of golden rain. They flew around him like a myriad of fireflies gone insane.

He nosed over, pulled up with a sucking gasp as he nearly dove on top of a ship just wheeling to the right. Looking up the searchlight radiance, he saw a kaleidoscope of planes and colors, visible for an instant, then swallowed by blackness.

He knew then that he and Bart Morrel didn't have a chance under God's blue sky to live. Death or mutilation lay here. And a strange doubt gripped him. Who was Bart Morrel that he should risk his neck here for him? Why should he endanger his tennis arm, his eyes, for a man who was a fool?

Fleeting visions crossed his brain as he chandelled up to avoid a raking blast of tracer fire. A picture of himself, one empty sleeve pinned across his chest, sitting on the sidelines watching men bat a tennis ball back and forth. Another vision: himself led by another man,

crossing a street, hearing the din of traffic but not seeing it, hearing a pretty girl's voice but not seeing her. Walking through eternal night, darker, more hopeless than even this in which he so confusedly circled.

Death, yes, he could understand that. But the other. He groaned and shrank.

And then of a sudden, a black hawk of a Fokker lunged at him, sat astride his tail and began to pump cupro-nickle steel at fifty yards. A terrific blast. It rained around Sunny Lawrence like incandescent hailstones. Wings shredded before the blast, pieces of strut flew like white arrows. The center section had a groove up it. Slugs ricocheted with blue flashes. A slug cut the elastic of his goggles and they dropped and his eyes filled with wind tears.

Nothing could live through that hail, yet the instinct to live mounted high in Sunny Lawrence. He wheeled and wriggled and chandelled and looped. His Spad acted for all the world like a small dragon fly impinned on mounting card, making the last feeble attempt to escape his doom. He succeeded for seconds at a time in throwing the grim Boche off the target—his own head—but he could not throw him off his tail.

IT WAS the end. Madly he fired a burst at a black bat that cut in front of him, momentarily illuminated by the merciless searchlights. Across the sky they roared—a doomed Spad and a raging Fokker—lit by the fires of hell from below. The Spad began to sag, her wings were loosened as brace wires parted with pistol-like reports.

The end! This was death. And death it should be. No mutilation,

no blindness for Lawrence. He jazzed the Spad up on her nose. The human-like howl of the straining motor rose with a roar. Up he went, over on his back, half-rolled out and found the German shooting jagged flashes of lightning at him from beneath.

"Get me then," screamed Sunny. "Here. Here."

Madly he pounded his breast. And the tracer fire curving across the night was converging on him.

BUT as the slugs marched with military precision up the fuselage, a streak of fire came out of the east. A hard-driven Spad flying on the wings of hell tore at the Boche and lightning spat from the muzzles of the Vickers. The German, concentrated on killing Lawrence, never knew what hit him. There was a brief spit of blue sparks as the burst of steel bounced off the Mercedes. Rocker arms, spark-plugs flew. A cylinder quit, then two, and the dropping tracer stream found the catch pan, loaded with oil. There was a brief burst of flame, the sky was illuminated yellowly. The doomed German nosed the flaming Fokker toward the ground in the last fruitless race against the fate of being burned alive.

Sunny Lawrence watched this in an unspeakable awe. That was Bart Morrel. Bart had seen that Sunny Lawrence had followed and now had saved his life. The second time!

A strange madness seized Sunny Lawrence then, a worshiping madness that sent him hurtling like a thunderbolt into the confused press of German ships. He shot his way through to get alongside Bart Morrel, easily seen in the flailing bayonets of light that shot

up from the earth. Forgotten now was thought of mutilation, loss of arm, blindness; forgotten everything but the need of saving the man who had saved him. The blackness helped Lawrence and Morrel then, as they curved and zoomed and shot streaking tracer fire through the night. The German's numbers blocked their own game. Bart Morrel and Sunny Lawrence had but to shoot at every ship in sight, while the Germans, fearful of colliding or shooting down a comrade, had to make sure before opening fire.

The night wind was out of the north; the fight was drifting south. The very fates were working to aid these two. A few minutes more and they could pique down and make a forced landing on their own side of the wire.

Sunny Lawrence fought like a madman, flashed across the sky like a blazing meteor. A black bat before his ringsights. Let him have it.

Rac-rac rac rac rac!

The Fokker sheered off. Another Boche took its place. Thoughts raced through Lawrence's brain. Where's he going? Banking sharply. Rake him from engine to tail assembly.

Rac-rac-rac-rac!

THE Vickers became red hot, they trembled on their boltings, they chattered like malicious imps of death, and the fiery tracer flew like sparks off the devil's anvil. A great glory flooded Sunny Lawrence, the exaltation of combat, the fiery joy of knowing that death held no fear, that here was the most magnificent thing for which man was created, the fight to the death with another man, equally cunning, equally skillful.

Around and around the Hissos tore in mad scream; the Mercedes roared bell-like in defiance. Up and then down like a flash, riding your rudder bar, pumping slugs at a man whose contorted face looked back in the ghastly searchlight glare, expecting the death you're pumping at him.

Rac-rac-rac-rac-rac!

Time ceased to be; eternity was upon them. The sword-like flashes of the searchlights were fires from the opened doors of hell. The black bats flying there were wanted—down there. Let them have it.

Yank strafe! *Rac-rac-rac-rac-rac-rac!*

AND then, suddenly, as Sunny Lawrence was tearing along under and behind the tail of a panic-stricken kraut, death settled on him from above. He sensed hot light greater than the dazzling glow from the searchlights below. He looked up—and shrank down in his cockpit. A Fokker was there—on fire—and it was settling, traveling down upon him. Ten feet above his head it hung, going in the same direction. He could almost reach up and touch the wheels. He yelled in fear. The ship would fall on him, set him on fire, crush him in his cockpit, send him reeling to earth in a flaming pyre.

Madly Lawrence yanked at his controls. Down the ship settled. A contorted face showed over the cockpit edge, a face without goggles, a man whose face was writhing in the agony of burns. Around that face flames swept back from a burning bonfire of a motor. It was like a face of the devil's son peering out of the flame-riven door of hell itself. For a second, Sunny Lawrence saw it, saw the man hoist a leg up, over the cockpit, a leg

coming out of orange flame. Then Sunny understood. A man, mad with fright, fearing the death jump to earth, was deliberately settling the plane here to try and jump to Sunny's plane.

Even as this realization came, the man jumped from eight feet. Sunny Lawrence heard the man's body thud against his fuselage. He saw the man's hands flash out in the white glow of the icy searchlights. The German clasped tightly, he sought to throw his legs over and sprawl flat on the fuselage. The Spad yielded before the weight, the tail went down, the nose up, the ship began to side-slip—then snapped into a spin. With a roar of mad flame bursting from the gas tank, the Fokker shot down past them, barely clearing the gyrating Spad.

Frantically, Sunny Lawrence cut his motor, neutralled the controls. Then he looked back, a mad idea of helping this insane German to safety engulfing him.

But he was helpless. The hard, jerky spin of the unbalanced Spad completed the doom of the German. His hands slipped, his legs lost their power to grip.

"Ach, Christo!" he screamed. "Helfen mich. Gott—Gott—"

HIS hands let go, his wildly clutching legs slipped off the smooth fuselage. He plunged downward into the sheath of white glory that was the searchlight. It revealed him for seconds, turning over and over and then plunging headforemost, hands outstretched like a swimmer making a swan dive. And then the night swallowed him and death covered him with a black cloak.

The Spad, relieved of this burden, came out of the spin on the

third turn and Sunny Lawrence, white-faced, eyes wide in horror, poured the gun to her.

"Dear God!" he breathed, and bit his lip until the blood spurted.

As out of a trance he turned to the insane dog-fight. But he found the air empty. The black bats were no longer there. He looked wildly around for Bart Morrel.

And Bart Morrel had vanished.

As Sunny Lawrence wheeled on, two red-eyed explosions tore the air. German anti-aircraft shells! Then the Fokkers must have gone!

"Bart!" screamed Sunny Lawrence. "Bart! Where are you?"

The mad howl of his Hiss mock-ed the words, tore them from his lips, stifled them before they were uttered.

Bart was down! Killed! Sunny Lawrence cursed savagely, nosed his ship down the blinding streamer of radiance from the searchlight and in a power dive that left him riding his rudder bar, held to the ship by his safety belt, he screamed earthward.

"You lice!" he yelled. "You dirty murderous swine!"

STRAIGHT at the searchlight he tore and his guns began to mutter, to chuckle, to rattle, to roar!

Rac-rac-rac-rac!

He howled down the blinding glare, firing at the little round circle of brilliance that was on the ground. But he had forgotten that he carried only two hundred and fifty rounds of ammunition and had used most of this in the night fight. On the thirtieth slug the trigger-pin fell emptily, the ejector mechanism clicked, the Vickers became silent. Two long streamers of empty cartridge belt floated out from the ribs of the Spad.

The searchlight mocked him, held

him, until with a mad yell, he banked off and blindly coursed southward.

He found his tarmac only because the master mechanic had set out two flares and two men with searchlights marked the wind direction and the edge of the field. Somehow, he never remembered how, Sunny Lawrence set down the crate.

He climbed down, lurching drunkenly. "Bart!" he muttered. "Bart—" and collapsed in a dead faint.

CHAPTER V

DOOMED TO DIE

LIEUTENANT SUNNY LAWRENCE came to his senses to find himself choking and gagging on raw cognac. He was stretched out on a table, he dimly perceived, in the operations room and there were other men there besides Willy the Grin and grim Captain Bing Hall. For a moment the youth was speechless, his brain awl with the mad pictures of the night fight. He could hear muttering, whispering, and presently Bing Hall forced another hooker of raw cognac between his teeth.

"Snap out of it," Bing Hall ordered. "There are men here to question you."

The words acted like an electric shock on Sunny Lawrence. Question him. Ah, then these would be Intelligence men and they would want to know how Anita Selfridge had made her getaway. They'd ask questions, find out about Bart Morrel. He was fully alert now, but he needed time to think, and to get it he lay with eyes closed. He instantly saw what must be done—cover up Bart Morrel. The man

was dead, dead gloriously fighting. If he told these Intelligence operatives the truth then they would blast a dead man's reputation, condemn him as a traitor because he was a fool over women. His mind clicked at terrific speed now. And so, presently, when Bing Hall threw another drink into him he sat up.

FOUR pairs of eyes regarded him curiously: Willy the Grin's, Bing Hall's, and two lean, hatchet-faced officers from G-2-D.

One of these now stepped forward. "Fully recovered, Lieutenant?" he asked sympathetically.

"I'm all right," muttered Sunny Lawrence.

"Good. Time is the essence of this matter, Lieutenant. We've got the testimony of the sergeant of the guard, the master mechanic. They say they heard a plane take off and that you rushed up a moment later, demanded a plane, and said a spy had escaped."

"That's right," replied Sunny Lawrence. "That's the way it happened."

The Intelligence man stared at him thinly, eyes suspicious. "Let that go then, and tell us what happened before. How did you know a spy had escaped?"

"Her name is Anita Selfridge," muttered Sunny Lawrence. "She was in the Cafe de la Paix tonight. She looked nervous, distraught. She had a long talk with Bart Morrel. She asked him to do something, and he refused. They had quite a fight, and she called him names. I wasn't close enough to hear, but—" he paused, shrugged—"they don't like me around this outfit, and I had nothing else to do but watch Bart. He lost his temper, and went out. When I had first come into the Cafe de la Paix, Bart had introduced me

to the girl. She came over after Bart left and began to make a fuss over me. She wanted a lot to drink, she said, a binge. I bought her drinks, and she wasn't drinking them, but wanted me to drink. She was deliberately trying to get me drunk. I was suspicious right away, because I didn't like her much from the start. I didn't do much drinking, but I pretended that I did. And finally she asked me to take her for a night hop. I told her we didn't have two-seaters, only Spad pursuit ships. She asked a lot of questions about them, how long it took to warm them up, how we guarded them at night, was night flying difficult and what the length of our field was—" he broke off and asked, "give me another shot of cognac."

BING HALL, watching him closely, gave him a drink. Then he resumed.

"She wanted me to take her out and show her the field. She said she was crazy about me, and when I mentioned Bart Morrel she said he was just a sap. I pretended to pass out. She went outside. She was nervous, I tell you, half-crazy from fear. The next thing I heard was the motor of our Dodge. I ran outside, and she was gone. She must have driven like hell because I ran up the street, got hold of a man with a side-car, a chap out of the Fourteenth Engineers, and he drove me to the tarmac. I got here too late to stop her. But I took off and tried to catch her. I failed. She made the other side. I ran into a flock of Jerries on the way back and they shot hell out of me. And so, that's all I know."

Bing Hall was a study then. His face was flat, grim, but his eyes were blazing. However, he

said nothing, even when the two Intelligence men began to take Sunny Lawrence over the story, either seeking for flaws in it, or else trying to elicit more information. But Sunny Lawrence knew nothing more, he said, and stuck to the story in its essentials.

Finally one said: "But what became of Bart Morrel? He was in love with this spy—she's Elsa Shragmuller, and a damned dangerous spy."

Sunny Lawrence shrugged. "I haven't seen him since he went out."

When his nerves were jumping and he had repeated his story until he thought he would go mad, he finally cried: "For God's sake, that's all I know. I'm dead for sleep. Can't you come back tomorrow? You can't do anything tonight. I tell you I saw her land in German territory, in a field beyond Seichprey."

HE shut his eyes, pretended extreme exhaustion. And presently they went away, promising to come back on the morrow. When they had been gone five minutes Sunny Lawrence sat up to go to his own quarters.

"Wait a minute," said Bing Hall, strangely calm, raising a hand. "Just a minute. You beat it back to bed, Willy. I want to talk to Lawrence alone."

The cherubic adjutant took his departure. Bing Hall saw the door closed, knew they could not be overheard. Slowly he walked toward Sunny Lawrence until he stood almost chest to chest, immense, formidable, hard. Without warning his right hand flashed up and the palm exploded across Sunny Lawrence's face with a report like a pistol shot. Lawrence

staggered before the blow, nearly fell.

"It's all right to lie to them," said Bing Hall loweringly. "Keep them out of it—we'll wash our own dirty linen. But now, you little swine, you tell me what happened. Why did Bart Morrel—"

SUNNY LAWRENCE was swept by a blind rage. "You dirty skunk," he yelled, and sprang forward and swung a terrific punch at Bing Hall's chest. It struck with a thump, but the big man never even took a step backward. His hands reached out, grabbed Sunny Lawrence and despite the youth's struggles, held him helpless.

His face like granite, his voice low, tense, he repeated: "When you get through with the horse-collar, tell me the truth. The truth, do you hear, or, by God, I'll beat your head off."

His gray eyes seemed to have fire in them, his face was red and lowering with suppressed rage. For a frantic instant Sunny Lawrence had thought of telling the truth, for were not Bing Hall and Bart Morrel pals of years' standing? Each had saved the life of the other more times than could be counted. Side by side they had soldiered around the world. But something, a tocsin of alarm, warned Sunny Lawrence that Bing Hall was merciless. No, he could not tell.

"You heard the story," he yelled, trying to wrest loose. "That's the way it was. Let go of me!"

Bing Hall suddenly struck him a savage blow in the face. "The truth, you miserable whelp!" he cried. "That girl never came up here, took a crate and beat it. It's all right for those lousy Intelligence guys to believe that. But not me. I want to know who helped

her get away. It was Morrel, wasn't it? Bart? Answer me."

"No! No!" Sunny Lawrence was blinded by tears of impotent fury. "It wasn't he. He never helped her. He wasn't around. If you want to know, it was me who helped her. I was crazy about her. Still am! They were going to shoot her. And I helped her get a crate and then flew after her to pretend pursuit and protect myself."

He saw the disbelieving stare of Bing Hall's eyes.

"What difference did it make?" he raved on, still feebly trying to tear loose from the terrific grip. "She was through. She was caught. She's on her own side of the lines. She dare not come back. She can't hurt anybody now. She's washed up—finished."

A SILENCE fell then, and they stood like two bronze statues. Unblinking, Bing Hall stared into the wide eyes before him. Their gaze held and clashed for what seemed centuries.

"Are you—are you doing this to protect Bart Morrell?" muttered Bing Hall. "You've always been crazy about him. It looks like one of his dumb tricks. You look as if you had more sense about women. Are you protecting—"

"No, I tell you. That's the truth. Bart wouldn't do it, and I wanted her, and I did it. You can ask Bart when he comes back."

On a sudden Bing Hall gave Sunny Lawrence a push that sent him spinning across the room to bring up with a crash against the wall.

"I guess maybe that's the truth," he said strangely. "No man would confess such a swinish, idiotic thing on himself unless it was the truth."

Sunny Lawrence's fists doubled

so tightly that the nails bit half-moons in his palms. He said: "And I suppose you're going to call in those Intelligence men and turn me over and get me shot?"

Bing Hall's huge arms folded across his chest. "No," he said slowly, "we wash our own dirty linen in this outfit. No use bringing disgrace on the squadron. And probably you got a family that wouldn't want it known the son was such a damn fool. No, I got better ways of handling it than that!"

"And what is that?"

"You go to your quarters," ordered Bing Hall, slowly. "Don't try to beat it away because I'll be watching. You're going to die, you dirty little rat. But you'll get a chance to die like a man."

"What are you going to do?" cried Sunny Lawrence.

"You'll find out at dawn," suddenly Bing Hall seemed to grow in stature, his arms reached out. "Get to your quarters," he muttered thickly, "before I lose control of myself and kill you myself. Go, do you hear?" he roared.

Sunny Lawrence went out the door and through the darkness to his and Bart Morrel's little cubicle. Behind him, steps thudding, came the remorseless Bing Hall. Lawrence went into his bunk, and the door lock grated behind him. Then the steps retreated and Sunny Lawrence was a prisoner. He sat down on the edge of his bunk, knees apart, elbows on them, and hands cupping his face in his palms.

A SWARM of thoughts came to taunt him. His brain called him a fool. He was putting himself in this situation to protect a dead man. He was never going to play tennis again, hear the gallery applaud a splendid return, a hard "get", a

beautifully played set. He was done, washed up!

But the other part of his brain replied: "He saved your life. He pulled you out of sure death. You owe it to him."

And according to Sunny Lawrence's code, that was enough. You played the game, sportsmanlike and hard, but you never let a pal down, you never quit worshipping the god of your youth. Tennis, life, career—you laid them all on the altar in defense.

"They'll never know," he muttered aloud. "Never."

And thereupon he lay himself down upon the cot and waited for the dawn and death.

CHAPTER VI

MILE-HIGH COMBAT

DAWN! GRAY DIRTY light creeping out of an eastern night, fighting darkness, driving it before the oncoming sun. A moaning wind that howled mournfully across the tarmac, cold, and miserable.

The door to Sunny Lawrence's cubicle opened. He had been in the sleep of exhaustion, but at the slight sounds of the key grating in the lock he leaped to his feet. Gray face in a gray light, bright eyes blazing with determination.

Huge and formidable Bing Hall loomed in the doorway. His eyes fastened thoughtfully on Sunny Lawrence. In them was a strange, weird expression that Lawrence had never seen there before. He seemed weary, pale.

"Get up, come on," he said, not unkindly.

Without comment Sunny Lawrence got into his shoes, puttees and buckled on his Sam Browne belt. He

reached for his leather helmet and goggles, his flying coat, for he foresaw the sort of death that Bing Hall had planned for him.

"Never mind those," said Bing Hall. "You won't need them—now."

Sunny Lawrence stifled the surprise the retort had engendered, and silently followed the big captain out onto the tarmac. The clatter of a machine-gun being tested at the range struck sharply on the ear, vying with the explosions of cold Hissos being warmed up on the dead-line. Mechanics were swarming over four ships, two of whose motors were slowly idling. Silently Captain Bing Hall led the way to the operations room. He thrust open the door, stepped aside for Sunny Lawrence to enter.

The latter did so, wondering what form Hall's punishment would take.

The door closed behind him, he looked around, stopped as if shot and staggered back.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "Bart! Bart Morrel!"

Seated there, coolly smoking a hand-made cigarette, sat the man he thought lying dead in a crushed cockpit out in No Man's Land. Bart Morrel's face was a little pale, but he smiled as he saw Sunny Lawrence's astonishment.

SURE, kid," he replied composedly. "It's me." He grinned. "Quite a scrap last night, huh?"

Sunny Lawrence swung, peered into Bing Hall's silent, stern face. One look told him that Bing Hall knew the truth. The latter pushed Sunny Lawrence gently to a chair. "I know what happened, lad," he said softly. "You're just a damn fool—but I sort of like damn fools like you." He sighed. "I was pretty rough on you, lad, but when a man

comes to an outfit surrounded by all the tinsel you were wearing, it's pretty hard to judge what kind of a man he is. I know now—and here's my hand on it."

Slowly, unbelievably, Sunny Lawrence took the hand, felt the gorilla-like squeeze of it.

"I thought you were dead," he muttered to Bart Morrel.

"Shot away my prop," replied Morrel. "Made a forced landing in No Man's Land just ahead of our wire. Hit a shell-hole and smashed the crate to hell and gone. You did a good job, kid. I knew it was you following when I circled up after landing Anita." He smiled shyly. "That was damn fine of you—after I punched you down."

He glanced at his wrist watch. "Well," he flung down the cigarette, stamped on it, "it's getting late. Bing, better get this over with."

HE CAME over to Sunny Lawrence and held out his hand. "You're aces with me, lad. You'll come out all right. Good luck—and so long."

He moved toward the door. A sudden spasm of terror seized Sunny Lawrence. What were these men doing? Why this odd, strained situation? What was going to happen?

He seized Bart Morrel's arm. "Where are you going," he cried. "You don't go on patrol until after chow."

Bart Morrel laughed shortly. "I don't need any chow."

"What does he mean?" cried Lawrence, turning to Bing Hall.

Thin-eyed flat-mouthed Bing Hall stared back at him. "Bart's going out on lone patrol—and he isn't coming back," he said in a monotone.

Sunny Lawrence staggered, his

face drained pale. "You mean—you mean, he's going out and—and die?"

Slowly Bing Hall nodded. "That spy woman knew a lot about our first line outfits. The Jerries raided last night—or rather a couple of hours ago and wiped out three companies of the Seventh Infantry. Caught them flat. Bart Morrel's to blame for that. He's paying the price."

REALIZATION came to Sunny Lawrence. The death that Bing Hall had condemned him to was now being inflicted on Bart Morrel. He darted forward, seized Bing Hall's sleeve. "But you can't," he cried. "You can't do that. Bart Morrel's your pal. He saved your life that time in the Balkans. He's been your chum for years. You can't let him go like that."

Not ungently Bing Hall removed the restraining hand. His face was grim, but his eyes had the hurt look Sunny had seen there from the first.

"Sure he's my pal," he replied in the odd strained voice. "We've bunked together and swapped lice for years. I love him like a brother. Aside from being a fool over women, he's the squarest, finest guy I've ever known. But he played the hand once too often. Good American lads died last night on account of him. He's got to pay for that."

Tears flooded into Sunny Lawrence's eyes. "You damned swine!" he yelled. "Haven't you got any sense of decency? Have you got the cold-blooded guts to send your pal out to his death? The man who saved your life?"

Bing Hall's grasp tightened and he jerked Sunny Lawrence to him. His face was terrible to behold. "You—ah, God!" he muttered. "Do

you think it's nice for me to be here and know he's got to go out there and die? Don't you think I can feel? Worse than you ever thought of feeling. I love him, do you hear? And I'm sending him out there because he and I play the game on the justice of right. Whether he's my friend or not, he let that girl get away—helped her to get away—and good men are being shoveled underground as a result. He's got to pay."

"No—" Sunny Lawrence stopped, a terrible fear eating at his stomach. From the dead-line came the roar of a jazzed Hisso. It was goosing out of line, blasting the tail into the wind. Bart Morrel was going—going on the death patrol.

"Bart!" he yelled, and raced from the room. Bing Hall ran after him. They came to the ship just as Bart Morrel was about to open the throttle for the take-off. Sunny Lawrence sprang onto the lower wing, grabbed Bart's shoulder.

"To hell with him," he yelled above the idling Hisso. "He can't make you do this, Bart. Don't do it. After all—"

BART MORREL pushed up his goggles. His face was still pale, but his eyes smiled.

"Forget it, kid," he said. "Bing and I have our own standards. He can't make me do this—but I do it. A lot of good guys are pushing daisies—"

"But you were drunk, crazy," cut in Sunny Lawrence.

"Drunk or crazy doesn't matter. I got them killed. I couldn't go on myself. Bing understands. So will you some time." He twisted in his seat as Bing Hall came up on the other side. He held out his hand.

"So long, Bing, I'll see you in hell."

Bing Hall took the hand, squeezed it, mouth twitching. "So long Bart, take a lot of company with you."

The blast of the prop stream tore Sunny Lawrence from his grip. The Spad trundled down the field, gathered speed, its tail came up, it streaked across the tarmac and lifted prettily in a climbing turn, leveled off over the pond and began to spiral for altitude.

For a moment Sunny Lawrence stood stunned by what had happened. Then on a sudden he turned and raced to the dead-line. "Twist that one up," he yelled. "I'm going after him. He can't—"

He stopped speaking and leaped into the cockpit. The motor was already warm. At the word "contact" the greaseball gave the prop a twist and the motor caught. In an instant Sunny Lawrence had blasted out of line.

Vaguely he saw Bing Hall rushing at him, cursing, yelling. Then the Spad had gathered power, was shooting down the field like a projectile. Sunny Lawrence took her off in a sweeping zoom, leveled off at two hundred and raced the ship upward in tight spirals. Watching the doomed Spad of Bart Morrel ahead, he never saw Bing Hall take-off in a Spad and start in swift pursuit.

CHAPTER VII

THE ACE FROM HELL

FOURTEEN thousand feet up! Rosy-tinted clouds to the northeast. A world below struggling against the cloak of darkness. High in the heavens three orange Spads glistening like dragonflies in the glory of the new sun. Below, a thunderous roar, smoke, a million men like moles of the

earth seeking to kill each other; high above, a man seeking in the clean heavens the death he had chosen for himself.

Anti-aircraft shells bursting like black roses. Sausage balloons dragging at their cables like chained elephants and swaying as uneasily. And out of the northeast a circus of twelve German Fokkers droned south.

On they came, those Fokkers, three skimming along at eight thousand feet; three more riding at ten thousand, alert to pounce upon the Yanks who thought these lower layer ships were white meat. And at fourteen thousand feet six more ready to plunge downward and surprise the unwary. The usual Boche trick!

SUNNY LAWRENCE saw none of them. His eyes were only for the Spad he was pursuing. He never realized German aircraft were near until he saw Bart Morrel's Spad bank like a swinging falcon and plunge in a vertical dive on the second layer of Germans. Magnificent, that dive, winging down out of the sun. The Germans never knew what hit them. One moment they flew steadily in echelon formation, the next a hurtling meteor leaped upon them, scattered them, sent one reeling down out of control, a dead pilot at the stick, sent another screaming in mad fear back the way he had come.

And then hell blew asunder. As Bart Morrel chandelled upward to strike the surviving Germans, the sky rained Fokkers. Out of the sun they came, Spandaus hot, keen eyes behind the ring-sights. Fabric thundered, brace wires screamed, motors howled. Hun-strafe!

A hoarse yell left Sunny Lawrence's lips. He wheeled to strike

into the center of this writhing mass of ships. In an instant he saw the Boche trick. One went vertically down the sky with Bart Morrel riding its tail like grim death.

As if this were the signal, one Fokker—a triplane—slid in on Bart Morrel's right. Another wheeled in on the left. Almost by magic a third howled down, curved in madly and rode Bart Morrel's tail. Spandaus spat curving lines of gray smoke as the tracers bit into the Yank's tail assembly.

"A box!" groaned Sunny Lawrence. "They got him—got him."

It was true. The four ships made an irregular square as they screamed down the sky. The leading Fokker went on, luring Bart Morrel after him. The two ships on either side prevented Morrel from curving away from the Nemesis that rode his tail. He was caught in a box.

Sunny Lawrence's Spad groaned as he flung it into a vertical plunge so steep that he stood erect on his rudder bar, and his body strained at the safety belt that held him to this diving projectile. Like a mad ghost he lashed at the tripe. The man never knew what hit him. One fleeting second he had to look back and see what roaring devil this was that smashed at him with cupronickle slugs. Then a ten-shot burst caught him in the middle of the back and spewed his heart out against the instrument board. He died between two breaths.

SUNNY LAWRENCE banked so sharply that the Spad's wings seemed to lay back like the ears of a dog. He was angling in toward Bart Morrel's pursuer.

He pressed the Bowdoin stick trips. The Vickers trembled on their boltings, smoke haze came back to blacken Sunny Lawrence's face.

The spitting flashes came from the muzzles like the red tongues of a mighty snake.

Rac-rac-rac-rac-rac!

The sweeping burst caught the Fokker at the tail assembly. In military precision the slugs marched up the fuselage, stitching the holes of death. The German, in an insane frenzy of fear, flung his Fokker up in a zoom. But wings were never meant to stand such a strain. The lower left wing folded back against the side of the fuselage, hung there a brief interval, and was torn loose by the fierce presence of the wind. The Fokker reeled like a struck bird and fluttered down the sky.

THAT was the last coherent memory Sunny Lawrence had. The next instant the Fokkers swarmed up the sky, they smashed downward in power dives. They coalesced in a tight ball that held Bart Morrel and Sunny Lawrence in the center as Indians circling on horseback trapped the old-time covered wagon.

Then they proceeded coolly to shoot these incredible Yanks out of their crates. The air grew bright with tracer stream; ears numbed to the howl of the roar of straining motors; the sky shrieked to the wire scream, trembled to the ghastly chuckle of red-hot Spandaus.

Into this turning mass of bright wings Bing Hall tore, cursing Sunny Lawrence's damn foolishness. It was almost like three men standing back to back fighting off the attack of three times their number.

Aces from Hell! Men down below, watching that magnificent attack, screamed in suspense, prayed in fear, howled in pride. Turn and twist, leap-frog and shoot. Zoom and roll! Bank and dive.

Sunny Lawrence saw nothing.

His eyes were to the ring-sights of his guns. There's one that rolled. White cross. Let him have it.

Racka-racka-racka!

A white-faced German, mouth black and open in fear. He's gone! Another came slashing in. Turn away, damn you, or take it! The German came racing into the white tracer stream. Slugs bounced off his motor, slit his wings, down he plunged and came slanting up from beneath. Steel bullets came raining through Sunny Lawrence's floorboards. A terrific grooving pain in his left leg. Iron went home that time. But the leg still could work the rudder bar.

Down plunged a German, leaving a mile-long train of black smoke in his wake. Another was pressing Bart Morrel close, shooting the tail assembly to shreds. Sunny Lawrence pounced at him. The tail surfaces seemed to leap into his ring-sights. Outward smashed the bullets from his Vickers like giant needles. They flew like a fistful of death into the fuselage. The German turned his head, started to twist away.

ACROSS his face the bright tracers screamed, struck home. Splotches of blood flew that the German's prop blast caught and sent hurtling back to spatter on Sunny Lawrence, so close was he to the Fokker's tail. The man screamed, but the sound went unheard. His hands covered his face. The ship, unguided, whirled out and smashed into another Fokker that had no time to leap-frog. The two, inextricably welded together, dropped down the sky.

Less than ten seconds later Sunny Lawrence found himself trapped. A German came racing up from behind, dropped down a bit

until he saw below Lawrence's back wash, and made his Spandaus to speak.

He was within thirty yards; point blank range.

Wham!

A fifteen-shot burst reduced Lawrence's right Vickers to junk.

Br-r-r-r-r-r-rup!

Another burst, into the tail surfaces this time. The right rudder control was shot away. The Spad began to slip.

Death! Too late for Sunny Lawrence to do anything now. He tried. The left rudder control wire went. He couldn't turn now. He tried to zoom, and an elevator wire went with a pistol-like report. Helpless! The German knew it, crept closer. Guns vomited smoke and red flame. Tracer stream like coiling gray snakes!

Sunny Lawrence turned. He could look at this death unafraid. The German pointed the nose of his Fokker. The tracer stream moved to the right, crept closer. Closer. Fraying the trailing edge now, picking at the center section, shooting over Sunny Lawrence's head.

A LITTLE adjustment now, and the stream of flying fire would move lower, smash the life out of Sunny Lawrence, send him reeling down the sky.

But the range correction never came. Out of the east like a cyclone came a wildly gyrating Spad. It was shot to pieces. It had no tail control, and was maneuvering on its ailerons alone. It was Bart Morrel, body out by slugs, a tracer bullet burning like fire in his stomach, his Spad ready to fall apart.

He was hardly conscious, and quite mad with the pain and

knowledge of death. And that phosphorous bullet in his stomach burned and burned.

He saw Sunny Lawrence's white face looking back expectantly for the final burst. He saw the German touching his stick to correct his range. He saw that he could never dive into the German in time to prevent that death burst from striking home.

Somehow Bart Morrel's hands found his safety belt, below which the tracer slug in his guts burned through to his backbone. The safety belt fell off. The side-slipping Spad hurtled at the German. Three yards away. The German's tracer stream was creeping along the whaleback of the Spad. Tearing into Sunny Lawrence's right arm, ripping through his shoulder muscles.

"Good kid!" muttered Bart Morrel.

He reared up, abandoned his Spad. Headforemost he dove out of the seat. His sprawling body hurtled through space. Down it fell squarely into the path of the German Fokker. The propeller hit it with a sickening smash. The wooden blades went to pieces even as the body itself did. The unleashed motor screamed madly for a second and exploded, throwing cylinders and parts to the four winds. A valve stem came hurtling back and pierced through the German pilot's chest like an arrow and let the life out of him so swiftly his soul was confused.

AND with Bart Morrel's mangled body somehow held to the battered nose of the Fokker, the doomed crate went into a flat spin and wiggled and curved down the sky until it melted into the greens and browns of the carpet a mile below.

Sunny Lawrence had seen that stupendous feat of self-sacrifice. He had been looking back when the hurtling body shot down in front of the Fokker.

"No! No, Bart, not that!" he screamed, and then he realized that it was too late. Morrel had met the death he had played with for so many years. The Germans, panic stricken, awed by such tactics and shaken by their losses, veered off and flew into the protection of a cloud bank.

SUNNY LAWRENCE nosed down by cutting his Hiss, and following the doomed Fokker with its dead burden.

"Bart!" he muttered. "Oh, God, Bart, move, show me you're not—"

But the twisted body, so awkwardly arranged on the nose of the Fokker, never moved, nor did anything in the ship move until the Fokker smashed its nose into the ground. There came a bright flash of fire, volumes of smoke and a great bonfire that blazed for minutes. It was the last Sunny Lawrence ever saw of Bart Morrel.

Back on the tarmac where he piled up his crippled Spad in one crash of broken wings, greaseballs lifted his wounded body from the cockpit. Bing Hall sent him to Evacuation Hospital Four at Souilly. Here he lay for days in a delirium, calling for Bart Morrel, the man he had worshiped above all.

It was all of a month later that Bing Hall came to see him. He was convalescent then. Bing Hall silently shook hands. "Feeling better?"

"Yes," Sunny Lawrence's face looked ten years older; in his eyes was a look that would never leave them.

"Newspapermen and camera guys outside, want to talk to you, get your story," said Bing.

"To hell with them," replied Lawrence.

"There's a transfer for you to the states, too."

Sunny Lawrence stiffened, sat up, held out his hand. "No," he cried passionately. "Not that. I couldn't—they don't know what it's all about. Let me stay, Bing, stay here."

HE SAW the look of suffering in Bing Hall's eyes, the look that would never leave, the look that told Bing Hall had seen the end of the man he had loved above most.

"If I went back it would be letting Bart down," whispered Sunny Lawrence. "Let me stay, Bing, with you."

Bing Hall's hand gently closed around Sunny Lawrence's thin one.

"Sure you can stay, kid," he muttered softly. "You can have B Flight. You're all wool and a yard wide, kid. I'd like to have you stay—and bunk"—he hesitated—"and bunk with me if you'd want to."

"I'd like that," said Sunny Lawrence wistfully.

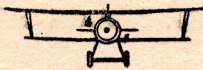
NEXT MONTH

SOME DIE HIGH

Another fast-moving sky novel

by

FREDERICK C. PAINTON



GEORGE BRUCE SAYS

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This is George Bruce's department. We allow him space to say what he pleases as we believe he is the finest mind in aviation. But we do not always agree to agree with all Mr. Bruce's opinions. But this is his space and we refuse to alter his copy in the slightest.*

IN ORDER to write this month's "colymn" your boy friend has to dig himself out of an avalanche of letters which have descended upon him during the past weeks, and to hang onto the ring ropes with his head spinning from writing answers to the said letters. You boys must have felt in the letterwriting mood during October, or maybe it was just the zip and pep of fall weather bouncing around inside of you all, but no matter what, you sure gave your boy friend a hell of a job. I've answered letters from everywhere in the world, I think, with the exception of Borneo. I'm thinking that the reason I haven't had a letter from Borneo is because SKY FIGHTERS hasn't penetrated that far as yet, but I still have hopes.

It's a big job, but I like it. I like the spirit and the friendliness that is exhibited in the letters and I like it just as much when I get hell as when somebody hands out a pat on the back.

And I'm still in there, swinging with both fists to make good the promise that I'd answer every letter that was addressed to me personally. That still goes.

You remember last month we had a serious discussion started in this space. We introduced ourselves to a

question which is being asked in a lot more places than in this column. The question was: "What is the United States going to do about National Defense, and how do you fellows feel about it?" We asked ourselves questions and answered them. Well, the letters are pouring in on that discussion. I'm going through them now. I can see that we touched a vital point of interest in every one of you, and that's important. Just so long as you fellows are awake to the fact that we are doing very little about National Defense, and that the little we are doing is being hamstrung by professional pacifists and organizations which are in existence for the purpose of preventing Uncle Sam from keeping his muscles and body in shape for a scrap, the organizations in question have little chance of putting one across on us. It's when you go to sleep on the job, as we did before the World War, that the situation becomes dangerous.

It's plenty dangerous right now. That's why we've started this discussion.

IT'S particularly dangerous because the country is being flooded with propaganda for the League of Nations and other peace loving bodies; because the country hears over and over the news having to do with disarmament conferences and peace treaties; because we are being told that war has been outlawed as "National Policy," and that from now on we all will live together in a pleasant community made up of the whole world and that wars and

rumors of wars have ceased to exist, due to the functioning of these pollyanna organizations and the League of Nations and related silly societies.

Oh, yeah?

As we mentioned last month, at the height of all this peace talk, there are wars now being fought in at least forty nations on the face of the globe. Last week war was being waged in twenty-eight nations in South America alone. The old War God, Mars himself, looks down upon the earth with a sarcastic smile twisting his ugly mug and gives all the peace societies the horse laugh. Old Mars has been around for a long time, and he shows no signs of passing out of the picture at this writing. In fact, he's stronger today than ever before. Every nation in Europe is on the verge of war or revolution. War is peering through the windows of every government building in the world. And yet, like a bunch of jackasses, we still prate about brotherly love and peace.

Brotherly love and peace are swell . . . but the only way to get them is to let the brothers know that the first bad move from them is going to get said brothers a swift sock in the snoot . . . and in being able to back it up. After that you can have all the peace you want. But not until then.

WE are told that the United States is in no danger of going to war or of being attacked by anyone. Oh, yeah? Perhaps our missionaries for the love of peace can tell us why the Government of the United States has kept the Atlantic as well as the Pacific Battle Fleets in Pacific waters for the past eighteen months? Why have we mobilized our entire Navy on our western ocean? They'll tell you that it costs less to

keep it there. I tell you its because we might be in a war with Japan tomorrow morning, if Japan could get the jump she's looking for and decides to strike first.

No chance of the United States fighting? Well, well! European nations owe us something like fifteen billion dollars, which is less than twenty percent of the principle and interest advanced by the United States to finance the Great War, in which we had no concern. We have canceled so much of that debt that practically nothing remains but this fifteen billions. In spite of our generosity, and in spite of the fact that in the end we had to jump in and win the war for the Allies, the said Allies, led by La Belle France, are dodging and wiggling in an attempt to welsh on a honorable debt, advanced at a time when the very national existence of the Allied nations depended upon our assistance.

We aren't going to be paid that money, unless we force the debtor nations to keep their pledged words. There is no such thing as honesty or honor among nations. History proves that. The only nation in the world's history that ever got a break from a fellow nation, was a nation strong enough to demand honesty and to enforce honest dealings.

Suppose that England and France and other debtor nations should flatly refuse to pay us another dollar? That puts the play up to us, does it not? Either we take it lying down, swallow the insult, and we Americans pay off for the four years of hell that swept over Europe, or else we fight to collect it. There are no other alternatives.

At the present moment we'd have to take it lying down. We haven't anything to fight with—nothing to

compare with the weapons that would be used against us.

At this minute, we'd have to prepare for two years before we could put up an interesting argument with Japan, to say nothing of a League of Nations, tearing at the throat of the United States. During that two years we'd lose the Philippines, probably all of our Pacific bases, and would be in grave danger of attack upon our west coast. The reason is—the Japs are READY, we are not.

Do you suppose there would be any sense in squawking to the League of Nations in the event that we were attacked by Japan? China squawked, did she not? And what happened? Nothing.

As we before stated: The Chinese 19th Route Army stopped the Japs. Not the League of Nations. And if we got into a war with three or four European powers, or even one, would the League come through for Uncle Sam? That's a laugh. The League is an organization made up of representatives of some thirty nations, all of whom are not only jealous of us, but which, under the surface, hate the guts of America and Americans. That's putting it bluntly. But facts are facts and bluntness is the only manner of stating facts.

It isn't enough to face a situation like that. We must have our own people playing the game of the nations who have most to win from a defenseless Uncle Sam. Not only civilians, but high officials in our Army and Navy. They all are playing the dangerous game of stripping your Uncle of his fighting togs. For instance, there was a positive knock-down-and-drag-out struggle in the Navy Department between two factions of admirals, over the question as to whether the

cruisers authorized under the Naval Limitations Treaty should carry eight-inch guns or six-inch guns. The eight-inch gun admirals admitted that the type cruiser they recommended was practically helpless, that the eight-inch gun cruiser carried so little armor that they could be pierced with a pop gun. They admitted that no one had built any eight-inch gun cruisers, and therefore no one knew if they were worth a damn. Even on paper they weren't worth a damn. But the eight-inch men had more political pull than the six-inch men.

As a result, we put down a new type of eight-inch gun cruiser known as the "Salt Lake City" class. The name being taken from the name of the first of the new cruisers to be launched. If you read your newspapers you know what happened. We discovered, after they were launched, that the new cruisers which England, France, Italy and Japan had so kindly permitted us to build for our own defense, weren't worth a damn and never would be worth a damn. They were even defectively constructed, and every one launched has had to be dry-docked for the purpose of building into them new stern posts. The stern posts cracked while the ships were being gently paddled around. It rendered them helpless without firing a shot. What do you suppose would have happened if they had gone into action in that condition. Not from the enemies' guns . . . but from their own guns . . . if just sailing around a little put them in the drydock.

The upshot was that the entire Salt Lake City class was abandoned and naval architects went to work on "new designs." The little money we did appropriate for defense was squandered by a lot of dumb-bells with political pull, and so far as we

are concerned, we are left holding the bag, for Japan and England built GOOD CRUISERS, and have them READY. Ours are in blue prints.

We admit that we need airplanes for national defense. Yet we cannot get a decent appropriation to build sufficient modern aircraft to make a decent showing. But we can spend fifteen million dollars on three dirigibles like the Los Angeles, the Shenandoah and the Akron, knowing in advance that lighter than air ships have no fighting possibilities at all, can be shot down by a single pursuit plane costing thirty thousand dollars or less, and that the history of the dirigible in time of war is pitiful and ridiculous. Yet we built three of these at a cost equal to the outfitting of a couple of dozen attack squadrons, and we don't get the attack squadrons.

It is an interesting coincidence that the dirigibles are built of aluminum, and that two-thirds of the cost is for that material, and that one of the high officials of the Government at the time the Navy let the contracts IS very much interested in aluminum.

It is probably just chance. But! Every flying man or expert on flying, or admiral or general knows that a dirigible is just so much baloney from the standpoint of naval or army operations in time of war. We proved that in 1914-18. It's truer now than it was then.

So you see, we have other things to think about than the foreign angle in our national defense. We have people here in the United States whose mission in life is to keep us from having adequate protection, and then, when we overcome those also, we have the influence to fight those who spent millions of American defense money for useless, impossible eight-inch gun cruisers which could

not steam around a little without injury to themselves, not considering that they were built for battle; and the influence which spent millions on worthless dirigibles when we have such a crying need for actual fighting aircraft.

Think those things over, will you?

We would like to acknowledge letters received this month in this department which will be answered by George Bruce personally.

Many letters other than these listed have been received during the past few weeks, but because of George Bruce's limited time he will not be able to answer them until next month. Here they are:

Andrew R. McDermott
Athens, N. Y.
Louis Nebb
Brooklyn, N. Y.
Moe Greenspar
Bronx, N. Y.
Nathan Marion, Jr.
Butler, N. J.
Sam Weber
Weehawken, N. J.
C. Kinzie
St. Albans, L. I.
Francis Neville
Providence, R. I.
"Lefty" Nelson
Chicago, Ill.
Erle K. Routledge
Battle Creek, Mich.
Patsy Vacchio
Westbury, N. Y.
Robert M. Lundgren
Beaver, Pa.
Bill Fisher
Des Moines, Ia.
Harvey Macnen
Waverly, Mass.
M. Muhlenbeck
Washington, D. C.
Charles Lynch
Birmingham, Ala.
William Keeler
Binghamton, N. Y.
I. Francis Stride
Frederick, Maryland
Harold Kamps
Buffalo, N. Y.
H. O. Seymoure
Roosevelt Field

WIN YOUR WINGS

A CONTEST

NUMBER VI

ATENTION SQUADRON! And close attention this time! Here is the final hurdle you Sky Fighters have to hop to "Win Your Wings." It's the last problem and the toughest, but right here is where the real aces will step out front.

Why?

Brains!

You've had combat, balloon busting, bombing and flight problems, but this is a ground problem. And ground problems require brains. The chap who first worked it out during the War did it by giving his brain cells some stiff exercise.

The S. C. expects heavy casualties, but if one of you wins through, the Brass Hats will be completely satisfied.

PROBLEM NUMBER VI

When the War began, night flying was practically non-existent, except for the zepps and some of the heavier bombers, and on moonlight nights. A plane could take off all right in the darkness, but the problem was to get it down on the ground again. Flood lights, altimeters and the other aids to night flying we have today were either in a rudimentary state or did not exist at all. If a ship took off in complete darkness it either had to wait for daylight or take a chance on smashing its undercarriage, or

crumpling a wing, or sticking its nose in the ground, or worse. Petrol flares were tried—buckets of lighted petrol—but they were both expensive and dangerous. Searchlights had a tendency to blind a flyer with their glare; a searchlight on a ship would be too liable to reveal its position to an enemy; and a lighted landing field made a perfect target for a hostile plane, as ships are practically invisible in the night. The Allies had a taste of this latter at Salonika when they sent out a squadron to bomb the Turko-German positions. As the ships arrived over the lines a German drome was suddenly flooded with light and the Allied squadron took advantage of the unexpected illumination to drop some eggs there that practically wiped out the hangars. But when they returned to their own drome they found it had been similarly bombed by a German squadron. Each field, hearing the sound of motors, had thought its own ships were coming in and flared up.

So the problem was to perfect a simple, easily transportable device which would allow a pilot to land in the darkness, on land or water, with a reasonable expectancy of doing it in safety; in other words, to make blind flying possible without instruments. And there was a chap who figured out just such a device. He was not a commissioned flyer, but he was an aviation enthusiast aware of aviation's problems. His device was

simplicity itself. The man knew geometry and he was a crack shot with a rifle, and from his knowledge of these two things he perfected his device.

There you have it. The final problem of this "Win Your Wings Contest." What was this simple device the man figured out? Dust off the old brain cells and hop to it!

Here are the rules again in case you've forgotten.

Rules of "Win Your Wings Contest"

1. This contest is open to anyone, anywhere, except employees of Wm. L. Mayer & Co., Inc., publishers of this magazine, its authors, and members of their families.

2. Describe in not more than 500 words what you think the flyer did to solve the problem that confronted him or get himself out of the predicament in which he found himself. If you can identify the flyer, the types of planes involved and the approximate date of the incident so much the better. (You need only identify the subject of Problem VI and describe how he solved the problem.)

3. There will be six of these incidents published monthly in SKY FIGHTERS. The most nearly correct solution of each incident judged on the basis of accuracy, completeness and clarity will be awarded first prize of \$5.00. There will also be twenty prizes of \$1.00 awarded to good solutions over a period of six issues. The person whose solutions of the six problems shall be judged to score the highest percentage will be awarded the GRAND PRIZE of \$100.00. There will also be distributed as prizes the original drawings of the stories in this magazine done in black and white. If you desire

any particular illustration mention it in your letter.

4. The judges will be the editors of this magazine, and by entering this contest you agree to accept their decisions as final.

5. Send as many solutions as you wish by first-class mail. Print your name and address plainly on each, and send to Win Your Wings Contest, c/o Wm. L. Mayer & Co., 122 East 42nd Street, New York City.

6. All solutions of this month's contest must be received on or before December 1, 1932. Every effort will be made to announce the winners of each month's contest in the second succeeding issue of this magazine, and the GRAND PRIZE the second month following the conclusion of the six monthly contests. Prize winners of this month's contest, together with the correct solution and as many of the prize-winning solutions as space permits, will be published in the February issue of this magazine.

And now—gather round! Here is the correct solution of Problem Number IV.

The observer, Second Lieutenant T. B. Dodwell, threw a leg over the coaming of the rear cockpit, climbed along the wing past the pilot and stretched out along the cowling in front. This shift of weight changed the ship's balance enough to almost equalize the loss of lift, and permitted the pilot to bring the plane under partial control and head for home. As they approached the tarmac, Lieutenant Dodwell returned to his cockpit in order to permit the ship's nose to rise so that it could be landed. The pilot brought it down in safety and Lieutenant Dodwell was credited with one of the outstanding exploits of British airmen for July, 1918.

THE winner of the first prize of \$5.00 for Problem No. 4 is Ike L. Kibbe, 1105 San Jacinto Street, Austin, Texas. Congratulations, Ike.

\$1.00 prizes will be distributed to Jack Haertel, 936 Harper Avenue, Hollywood, California; Dwight Pelkin, 420 Doty Street, Green Bay, Wisconsin.

Prizes of drawings go to: Robert L. Meade, Jr.; 1406 Avenue K, Galveston, Texas; Carl W. Goode, Panhandle, Texas; Owen Gallagher, 891 N. Taylor Street, Philadelphia, Pa.; Lester Swanson, 201 Lake Street, Ironwood, Michigan; Sam Weber, 224 Oak Street, Weehawken, N. J.

The following names which are given honorable mention are still eligible for the GRAND \$100.00 PRIZE.

Stanley Drzyzgna
Burlington Flats
Bill Hewitt
Rosindale, Mass.
Angelo Dudas
New York City
Leo T. Briggs
Staten Island, N. Y.
Franklin Stock
New York City
Alfred De Ciurcio
Providence, R. I.
Ervin Wigman
Detroit, Mich.
A. Levy
New York City
Philip S. Thompson
Philadelphia, Pa.
Douglas Bryan
Jersey City, N. J.
D. Avid Sullivan
Boston, Mass.
Lloyd Farrs
Portland, Ore.
Edw. Touzet
New Orleans, La.

TO THE EDITORS OF SKY FIGHTERS

I like these:

1.
2.
3.
4.

These were duds:

1.
2.

You ought to do this

.....

Your reader

Name

Address

TELL US WHAT YOU WANT

SOME ANSWERS TO READERS

Editor's Note: We receive so many letters addressed to the editor of this magazine in which readers ask particularly interesting questions, that we feel it will be of interest to everyone to read these questions and answers. We shall not have room for this department every month, but every three or four months we will collect questions and set about answering them. We cannot reply to every question sent in. A great many of them are answered by Mr. George Bruce personally, and the rest will be answered by the editor of this magazine.

Question: Please tell me something about a Nieuport "Night Hawk."
ARTHUR CRANSTON,
Miami, Fla.

Answer: The "Night Hawk" was a single-seat pursuit ship, built at the end of the War in England, but which never saw action at the front. It was a trim fighting ship, very similar to the British S. E. 4, and also somewhat similar to the S. E. 5. It was a very fast climbing ship, being a tractor biplane with a span of twenty-eight feet and an overall length of eighteen and a half feet.

Question: Who shot Boelcke down?
JACK RINGER,
Seattle, Wash.

Answer: It is said by air history that Boelcke was not downed by bullets. He was crashed during a scrap by one of his own men hitting him and ripping off a wing.

Question: **HENRY JAMES,**
Portland, Oreg.

Answer: There was no S. E. 52 to the best of our knowledge. There was an S. E. 5 and an S. E. 5A, both of which were flown in the War and were very similar ships.

Question: What were "tin ears"?
MARIO GULISSFIE,
Hollywood, Calif.

Answer: The so-called "tin ears" were mechanical devices invented by the English and used for the spotting of Zeps coming across the Channel to raid London. The principle of the tin ear was merely a sensitized receiver for sound waves and the motors of the Zeps could be heard much farther with them than with the naked ear. It is also a very interesting fact that the tin ears were operated by blind men, who supposedly had a keener sense of hearing than men with all senses.

Question: Tell me the story of Alan McLeod.

J. J. THOMAS,
Lexington, Ky.

Answer: That one is a big order, but we can give you the salient facts of the life of this sky fighter. He was born in Manitoba, Canada, in 1899. He joined the R. F. C. as soon as he was of age and managed to get to France, even though he was younger than the rules allowed. He flew through most of the War in an Armstrong-Whitworth bomber, and was known for his ability to attack with an old bomber as if it were a pursuit ship. Toward the end of the War McLeod was awarded the Victoria Cross.

Question: What was the best fighting two-seater in the War?

ALFRED LEHMAN,
Cincinnati, Ohio.

Answer: It was generally conceded that the Bristol fighter was the best two-place combat ship, although the French Salmson had many admirers.

Question: What is the Lufbery Circle?

SAM HELLMAN,
Fleetwood, Ind.

Answer: The Lufbery Circle is a maneuver which was little used because of its difficulties. This maneuver was credited to the great Allied ace Lufbery, and was really not a circle at all, but a twisting dive followed by a twisting zoom which gave the pilot making this maneuver a chance for a kill either on the dive or the zoom. This maneuver was effective in either air combat or ground strafe.

Question: LARRY INGRIM,
Lansing, Mich.

Answer: Ernst Udet's address is 14 Hoehenvollernstrasse, Berlin, Germany.

Question: Tell me something about the Taube.

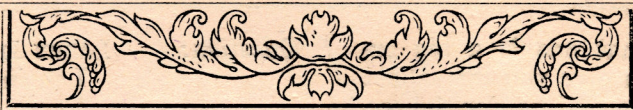
Answer: The meaning of the word Taube is dove, and it is an apt description of this German ship. The ship was built and used in the early part of the War and was not a really satisfactory craft, although for the time they were not considered unduly bad. The wings were shaped very similar to those of a bird, and had no movable ailerons.

Question: What is a "trailing edge"? Was there any Cantilever bracing used in the War?

GEORGE RUSSE,
Paterson, N. J.

Answer: A trailing edge is merely the rear edge of any airfoil. It is said that some of the Fokkers used in the War had Cantilever bracing. It is said that the wings of the D. 7 were braced so that they would stand up without extension wire bracings. It is also said that when the D. 7 came out it had no wire between the wings, but the pilots of these ships did not feel safe without the wires, so they were added, not because they were necessary, but merely as a psychological aid to the German pilots.





The Dog-Fight of Ace McFee

NOW Ace McFee of brave Flight C had always scanned the skies,
As he gunned his Spad with all she had he'd almost pop his eyes.
He was looking for something, they didn't know what, but each C pilot
guessed

A special Hun, some son-of-a-gun who sent a buddy West.
The C Flight Spads were winging home and the thundering Hissos roared,
The boys couldn't find the slippery Boche, they were getting a little bored,
When out of the cumulous clouds above, dove a squadron of black-crossed
ships
And they spit hot lead through their whirling props as the German's
gripped the trips.

THEN Ace McFee took a quick look-see as a Fokker dove on his tail,
Glanced over his cowl and then with a howl he prayed that his guns
wouldn't fail,

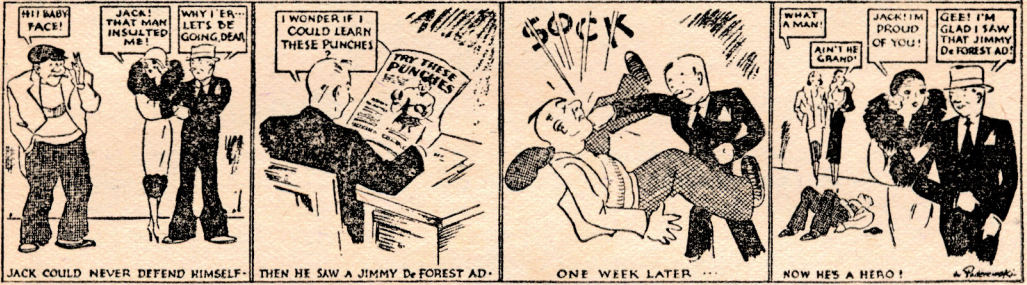
For there was the Hun, the son-of-a-gun, that Ace McFee had sought,
And Ace McFee of brave Flight C cursed bitterly as he fought.
The Spad nosed up, like a lonesome pup her wires shrieked and sang.
And she hit the top and hung on her prop but the Ace just let her hang,
For he didn't care about how or where as long as he got his Kraut,
Then down he came a-spitting flame from his chattering Vickers' snout.
The Fokker fell far like a shooting star and it left a flaming track.
Then Ace waved home toward the C Flight drome and the squadron started
back.

They landed safe from their sky-high strafe, a daredevil company,
And as one man they all began to cheer for Ace McFee.

"BE quiet, boys, can all the noise," cried Ace, "and I'll tell you more.
The Hun today that crossed my way was the guy I've been looking for.
'Twas back in Nineteen-hundred and twelve that I lived in Kalamazoo
I had a wife and on my life I'd have sworn that she was true,
But Otto Von Maltz was playing me false with Amelia, my espoused,
The seventh command with them was banned and how those two caroused!
Till one fine day they ran away to Berlin where Otto dwelt,
I can't orate my bitter fate or tell you how I felt!"
The Ace's eyes were filled with tears and his voice held a mournful crack.
"Why, boys, it's rich, the sun of a Hun, he sent my Amelia back."

—Ballado Johnson.



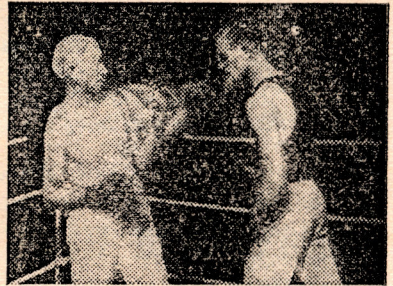


Try These Punches

Everyone a Knock-out! It's EASY to knock 'em cold when you know how to put over the scientific punches of champions.



WHAM! Down goes your opponent like a ton of bricks! No wild swinging, no rough-and-tumble scrapping—just one clean blow, properly delivered, and the fight is over! Never mind how big they come, brute strength hasn't a chance against these deadly knock-out punches. It's EASY to put them over. Let Jimmy De Forest, world's greatest fight trainer, show you how to land the scientific, killing blows used by Dempsey, Fitzsimmons, Joe Gans, Benny Leonard and other great champions. Just follow these clear, easy directions, and the biggest opponent won't even be able to touch you. You simply feint him into an opening, and then, **SOCK!!!**—you put over the deadly knock-out—your opponent is out! You cannot tell when you may be called upon to protect your girl friend or defend yourself. Don't let them call you "yellow." In just a few minutes at home you can master these championship punches and you're a match for any man you meet!



Composite "Motion Picture" Photographs like this illustrate every punch and defense. Every move made clear. Also diagrams and charts showing footwork, exercises, etc.

Jimmy De Forest Reveals Knock-out Secrets of Champions

Here's What You Get !!

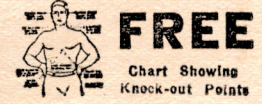
Detailed Instructions on Scientific Punches—How to Clench Fists—Developing the Arms, the Wind — Stance — Footwork — Co-ordinating Arm and Leg Movements — How to Get the Power behind the Knock-Out—Bandaging Hands — How to Deliver Left Jab, Straight Left, Left Hook, Straight Right, Right Hook, Solar Plexus Blow—Secret of Effective Hooking — How Dempsey developed Left — How Joe Gans developed Right—Developing Leg, Back, Stomach Muscles—How to avoid "Telegraphing" — Workouts, Roadwork, Diet and 100 other priceless secrets of champions. 29 Illustrations.

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STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of Sky Fighters, published monthly at New York, N. Y., for Oct. 1, 1932.

State of New York } ss.
County of New York }

Before me, a notary public, in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Wm. L. Mayer, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the publisher of Sky Fighters, 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, Wm. L. Mayer, 122 East 42nd Street, N. Y. C.; editor, Wm. L. Mayer, 122 East 42nd Street, N. Y. C.; managing editor, Wm. L. Mayer, 122 East 42nd Street, N. Y. C.; business managers, none.

2. That the owner is Wm. L. Mayer & Co., Inc., 122 East 42nd Street, N. Y. C.; Edna K. Mayer, 70 East 96th Street, N. Y. C.; Wm. L. Mayer, 70 East 96th Street, N. Y. C.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent 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 fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the 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.

Wm. L. MAYER.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 5th day of October, 1932.

J. WEIR NOLAN, Notary Public.

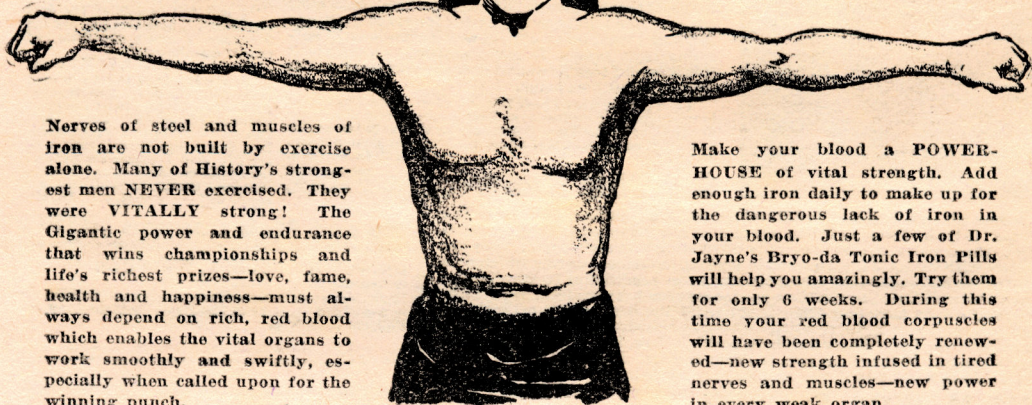
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Vitality



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To prove the efficacy of Kotalko, for hair and scalp invigoration, use coupon or write for Proof Box.

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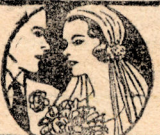
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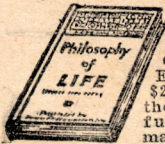


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