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January, 1936

COMPLETE BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL	
CAPTAIN OF DEATH	Owen Atkinson 10
<i>Out of Nowhere Came a Mysterious Red Spad to Shatter the Air With Doom! Follow a Fighting Hellion!</i>	
COMPLETE NOVELETTE	
HELL-BENT HAGGERTY	George Bruce 48
<i>A Blustering Bully Faces a Grim Test of His Manhood in the Flaming Skies Above No Man's Land!</i>	
ZOOMING WAR-AIR STORIES	
FLUNKEY'S FLIGHT	Kenneth L. Sinclair 68
<i>Silver Radley's Sudden Chance to Show His Mettle!</i>	
MILLION DOLLAR ACE	Darrell Jordan 79
<i>Disliked by His Squadron—but a Real Scrapper!</i>	
WINGED COMET	Hugh James 92
<i>An Exciting True Story of Buddies in the Blue</i>	
THE STUNTSTER	Arthur J. Burks 98
<i>Lieut. Fabin Plunges Single-handed at Enemy Hangars!</i>	
SKY BUCKAROO	John Scott Douglas 108
<i>From Arizona to War-Torn Skies, a Feud Rages On!</i>	
SPECIAL FLYING FEATURES	
A PERSONAL MESSAGE	Louis Bleriot 6
<i>One of Aviation's Foremost Leaders Addresses You</i>	
THE SHIPS ON THE COVER	Eugene M. Frandzen 47
<i>The Rumpler C1 and the Sopwith 1½ Strutter</i>	
FAMOUS SKY FIGHTERS	Illustrations 66
<i>Lieut. Charles Lenoir, Lt. Col. Harold E. Hartney and Others</i>	
DICTIONARY OF AIR TERMS	French and German 73
<i>Our Interesting, Helpful Vocabulary Feature</i>	
SCRAMBLED SHIPS	A Test of Knowledge 74
<i>Can You Unscramble 'em? Try it!</i>	
LEARN TO FLY	Lieut. Jay D. Blaufox 76
<i>Another Practical Lesson on Engines</i>	
SKY NAVIGATOR'S MAZE	A Brain-Teaser 89
<i>Try this—and Don't Look at the Solution First!</i>	
LIBRARY OF WAR PLANES	Illustrations 90
<i>Designs and Text Describing World-Famous Battle Crates</i>	
MY MOST THRILLING FIGHT	Lieut. Joseph Wehner 107
<i>Breath-Taking Adventures in Stalking the Drachen</i>	
TARMAC TALK	Eddie McCrae 120
<i>Where Readers and the Editor Meet. Question Corner, Page 118</i>	

Published monthly by BEVERLY HOUSE, INC., 22 W. 48th Street, New York, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President. Entire contents copyrighted, 1935, by Beverly House, Inc. Subscriptions yearly, \$1.20; single copies, 10c; foreign and Canadian postage extra. Entered as second-class matter August 14, 1933, at the post office at New York, N. Y., under Act of March 3, 1879.

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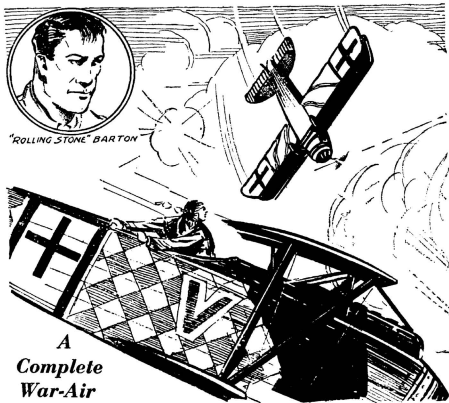
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He heard the muffled thunder

CAPTAIN of

CHAPTER I

Tough Job Ahead

JUST at dawn, a red Spad came boring out of the south, circled once over the drome of the French Stork Squadron, then slanted down to an effortless landing, rolled lightly across the tarmac

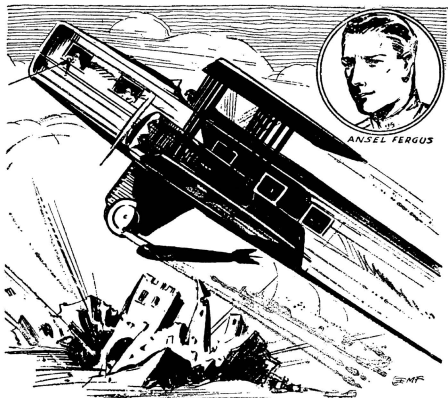
and stopped in front of the Operations Office.

A tall, lean, loose-jointed man unfolded himself out of the cockpit, dropped to the ground and unsmilingly returned the salute of the little crowd of French officers who had come to meet him.

"Telephone!" he barked. "Got to

Two Brave Airmen Join a Death-Defying

Spad to Shatter the Air With Doom!



as giant torpedoes exploded in the hell below

DEATH

By
OWEN ATKINSON
*Author of "Death Rides the Sky,"
"The Sky Devil," etc.*

use your telephone. In a hurry. Consider it a great favor."

The Frenchmen stared at the newcomer in amazement. Captain Ansel Fergus was well aware of the impression his first appearance made.

He was not a pretty sight and he was accustomed to having men stare

at his war-battered features with wonder and awe. A Turkish knife had ripped his face from eye to chin and left him a perpetual, malevolent wink. An Austrian bullet had puckered one corner of his thin-lipped mouth, giving him a weird, mechanical smile which never left his face. His eyebrows were red

Officer in a Hazardous Secret Flight!

and bushy, his chin blunted and determined.

Captain Fergus knew he was no beauty but had long ago quit caring.

A little Frenchman, spluttering comic English, stepped forward and extended the courtesies of the drome. Fergus thanked him gruffly and followed the man into the office. He seized the telephone there and put through a hurried call to an American squadron, the 25th Pursuit, whose drome lay in the mouth of the salient of the Yank line which extended toward Mont Dumoy. Presently, an American voice answered.

"Shut up!" barked Fergus. "Special orders from Wing. New man reporting for duty this morning, name of Captain Ansel Fergus. On special mission. Do not give him orders. Have mechanics ready to service and refuel his ship. Have two of your best pilots ready to accompany him on mission. That's all!"

A SPLUTTERING voice came over the wire. Fergus grinned, slammed the receiver back on the hook. He was in a hurry and didn't have time for red tape. When he wanted something done he handled the job himself.

He thanked the puzzled Frenchman, climbed into the red Spad and was off. Half an hour later he was coasting down out of the clouds over Mont Dumoy. A quick inspection of the ground below located the 25th's drome where, after his brusque telephone call, he would certainly be expected.

He knew that the 25th was a new squadron but he hoped they had at least two men who knew how to fly and fight and who would be of some service to him in his coming ordeal.

Mechanically, Fergus flipped the stick forward and started down, his

attention focused on the field below. His red Spad bumped and a faint shudder vibrated through the wings.

Fergus saw the windshield in front of his face wash away in a cone of tracer. His head snapped around and he found himself staring at three lean, black Fokkers swooping down on him from behind.

Fergus cursed under his breath and yanked the stick back into his belly. "Fools!" he raged. "Why don't they leave me alone? The last thing I'm looking for is a fight."

But fight he must. So he stood the Spad on its tail, went up in a screaming loop and caught one of the Fokkers as it shot past. The Boche stood his plane on its nose and spun to avoid the blast of fire which streamed from the Spad's Vickers. Fergus saw that the other two Fokkers were closing in on him, one on each side, in a nut-cracker attack.

The tricky tactics of the Boche were no novelty to Captain Fergus. He'd ridden the skies over many fronts; his red plane was known from the Mediterranean to the North Sea.

Very deftly he jammed the stick into the forward right-hand corner, tramped hard on the rudder and went spinning down in a wild, twisting turn which gave the impression that Boche slugs had already smashed his controls.

One of the Fokkers leaped into the lead and came thundering down to finish the job. It flattened out stiffly as the pilot maneuvered to deliver the finishing jolt of lead.

For an instant it hung there, motor drumming dully. Then smoke gushed from twin gun muzzles and a skein of tracer spurted out to hose over the red Spad. The Spad quivered—and suddenly righted itself.

It spun on one wing, and as it turned, the Vickers on its nose came

to life with a shattering roar. The blast of cupro-nickel slugs raked along the Fokker's fuselage from tail to prop. The Boche pilot, caught off-guard, hung over the cockpit stupidly, his arm waving over his head as if to fend off that death-dealing cone of fire which came crawling down the canvasback behind him. Then, his body leaped and fell back and was gone.

A curl of yellow smoke appeared under the hood of the Fokker. It went over swiftly, the wings spinning around and around.

Fergus didn't wait around to see what would happen next. He whipped away from the falling Fokker and went charging upward, Hisso screeching. One of the Boche pilots tried to turn and as his plane cocked over the guns on the snout of the red plane belched smoke again. Short, clattering bursts drilled into the Fokker as it hung in mid-air.

Then the Spad had shot past and was swooping on the third enemy ship. The Boche came down to meet him and the two planes dove at each other, guns rattling furiously.

Long streamers of fabric ripped away from the Fokker's wing. The Boche pilot knew that he was hit for he flung his ship into a desperate dive and started down with the tatters of defeat streaming behind him. Fergus turned lazily to search the skies for the remaining enemy. But that gentleman had had enough. He had turned tail and was heading for the nearest cloud.

The red Spad floated about for a moment as if the pilot were waiting there, challenging the enemy to fight. But no other Fokkers appeared. Fergus s'd his ship around and came floating down toward the 25th's drome.

He came down in a long tearing dive, the Hisso bucking and sput-

tering. He slid in over the hangars, wheeled sharply, flattened out and came down to hit and run lightly across the tarmac. The plane dribbled to a stop.

Fergus vaulted out. He pulled off his helmet, lighted a cigarette and came strolling across to the front of the mess shack where the pilots of the 25th waited.

He stopped, flipped away the cigarette and said harshly, "Who's in charge here? I'm Captain Fergus. Reporting for duty. This is the 25th, isn't it? Speak up, somebody."

Major Galvin stumbled forward and held out his hand. "I'm the C. O. Just had a telephone call about you, Captain. That was a fine show you just put on."

CAPTAIN FERGUS glared, then thrust out a thin hand. "Wish the damn Boche would leave me alone," he grumbled. "Wasn't looking for a fight. Jumped me as I was about to land. Trouble with this war, there's too many crazy young idiots looking for danger."

The major cleared his throat noisily.

"Yes, yes, yes, of course," he stammered. "We are just about to break-fast, Captain. Join us?"

"Coffee," barked Fergus, "with rum. Have my plane fueled and serviced. Got to take off in half an hour. Asked for two men to go with me. Two good men. There's something brewing over behind Mont Dumoy."

"Kind of sudden," complained Major Galvin, "but I think we can fix you up. Barton and Cain will go with you. Be good experience for them."

"Like to talk to 'em," rasped Fergus. "Got a room we can use? Send coffee in there. Got to move fast. Time is precious."

"Why, sure," agreed the major. "You can use the office. I'll send

them right in, also a mess orderly. This way, Captain."

Five minutes later Captain Fergus sat behind the major's desk, sipping a steaming cup of coffee heavily spiked with rum. Opposite him lounged Lieutenants "Rolling Stone" Barton and Ted Cain.

Barton was a thick-set young man with a flat nose and mild, brown eyes. His skin was tanned to the color of saddle leather and he had an easy, drawling manner about him that belied his reputation. It was said that Barton had fought in more wars than any man in the squadron. He was known from Callao to the banana republics as one of the toughest and straightest shooting soldiers of fortune that ever followed the game of war.

Ted Cain was tall and athletic and smiling. The war, to him, was just another game. He had been a famous polo player and the golf champion of three states, and he now flew and fought with the same easy-going sportsmanship that had made him so popular before he donned a uniform.

Fergus studied the two young men before him with obvious disapproval.

"Tough job ahead," he growled, fumbling for a cigarette. "Need men with nerve. Got to know how to fly, to fight. Dangerous piece of business we're going to do. Got any families, friends, sweethearts? Better write 'em a letter. Better make wills."

"Sounds sort of final," drawled Barton. "Well, Ted and me have been out together before and we always manage to get home."

"What I crave," added Cain, "is action. We're all sick of this daily patrol stuff."

The captain's lips curled in a ghastly smile. "Young cubs," he said gruffly but not unkindly. "Want action, do you? When you go out

with me the chances are a hundred to one you won't fly back."

CHAPTER II

A Rumpier Lands



WHEN Captain Fergus had gone to check over his red Spad, Barton and Cain looked at each other and grinned.

"Anyway," said Barton, "he's direct and to the point. Takes himself pretty seriously. But he didn't get those scars plying tiddle-winks. Nor marbles."

"A tough customer, all right," agreed Cain. "Acts more like a Limey than a Yank. Once knew a chap like him who played polo for the British. Not much to say, but a stout fellow to have along in a pinch."

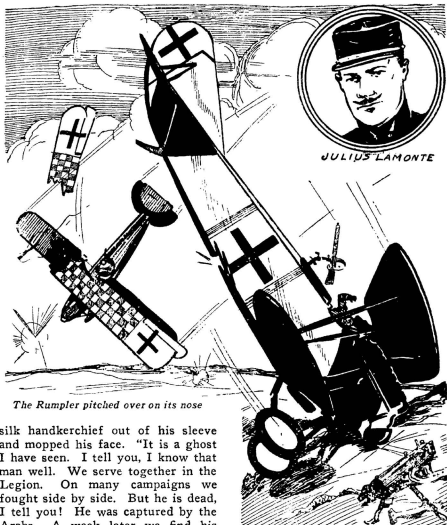
The door of the Operations Office opened softly and Lieutenant Julius Lamonte, the French *liaison* officer attached to the squadron, eased his dapper little person into the room. His eyes were black and sparkling, his skin the color of old parchment; a wispy little mustache darkened his upper lip. He always smelled faintly of lilac toilet water and was not particularly popular around the drome.

A good man, everybody admitted, an expert pilot, but not the pal you would choose to take with you on a binge in town. At present he seemed agitated about something. His eyes glittered more brightly than usual and his little mustache bristled with excitement.

"That man," he sputtered. "He just come from here. You know heem? What name he calls himself?"

"That's Captain Fergus," Barton told him. "Just got in this morning."

"*Mon Dieu!*" Lamonte pulled a



The Rumpler pitched over on its nose

silk handkerchief out of his sleeve and mopped his face. "It is a ghost I have seen. I tell you, I know that man well. We serve together in the Legion. On many campaigns we fought side by side. But he is dead, I tell you! He was captured by the Arabs. A week later we find his body staked out in the sun on the desert. Not much is left, but we identify him. Now, he appears under the name of Fergus. But it is impossible! I am sober. My eyes do not deceive me. Still, I tell you this man is dead!"

"He acted plenty alive when he was here," said Cain, with a chuckle.

"But I know," insisted the Frenchman, "he is the same flyer who served with the French for over a year. His reputation is discussed

everywhere. He is a savage, you understand. He stops at nothing. He smashes planes, he disobeys orders. He shoots down every Boche in the sky. This is excellent, of course, but he also causes much trouble with the French squadron. Young men he invites to fly with him—these pilots do not return. Time and again, he flies off on some mission and always he comes back alone with a story of how his wingmates

are shot down or captured. Soon it becomes a scandal. The French are afraid to fly with him. We decide to get rid of him, so he is transferred to the Americans. And now he arrives here. Soon he will be asking for two good flyers to go on a trip with him."

Barton and Cain exchanged puzzled glances. "You've guessed it right off," said Barton. "Me and Ted have already been selected."

The Frenchman stared at them as if he were already gazing at a couple of corpses. "My friends, my friends," he gasped, "you are the unlucky ones. But this cannot be! I, Lieutenant Julius Lamonte, must prevent it! I will talk with the major. He must know of this man's terrible reputation. He is possessed of a devil, I tell you. He wishes to die but no Boche bullet will cut him down. It is said that he hunts one man, a pilot for the Boche, and that he has promised to strangle this man."

While Lamonte had been talking the door behind him had swung open. Captain Fergus now stood there, smiling his weird smile and listening to the little Frenchman's wild words.

"So I'm a devil, am I?" His voice slashed through the room.

The color drained out of Lamonte's face. He backed across the room until he collided with the desk. "It is the same voice!" he gurgled. "The same manner of speaking!" He pulled himself together with an effort. One hand went up to caress his little mustache in a gesture of bravado. "Enough of this joking, my friend," he managed to stammer. "I understand everything now. You managed to escape from the Arabs. It was not your body we found. Come, confess it. You may be sure I will report you to the authorities."

"Go ahead and report," said Fergus coldly. "And be laughed at for your trouble. Don't know what you are talking about. No time to waste in idle chatter. Come, gentlemen, our ships are ready."

Fergus turned and strode away toward the hangars. Lamonte made frantic gestures for the two Americans to remain behind. "Do not go with him," he wailed. "Delay the flight. Pretend there is motor trouble. Anything, anything, but do not fly with that madman!"

He sprang to the telephone and snatched the receiver frantically from the hook. "I will stop this needless waste of good men!" he cried. "I will report Fergus as a deserter from the Legion—"

Lamonte listened for a moment, then dropped the receiver back on the hook. "The line is dead," he said in a choked voice.

"Report to the major what's happened," snapped Barton. "I'm beginning to think that everybody around here is half nuts. We've got orders to fly with Fergus and we obey them. Come on, Ted, I'm not afraid of this cloud-busting ghost. If he leads us into a trap he'll find he's got a couple of pretty tough *hombres* to handle."

Captain Fergus ducked under the wing of the red Spad and came to meet them. "A word before we take off," he began in his rasping voice. "I'm in command and you must obey without question. My first order is that you are not to shoot at anything until I've given the signal by firing my own guns. If the Boche attack we will try and run away. Our job is nothing so simple as a little dog-fight in the air. Understand me, now, you must not shoot under any circumstances until you see my own guns in action."

"But suppose—" began Cain. Fergus cut him short with a vigorous wave of his hand.

"We suppose nothing. We obey. Pits, gentlemen!"

The three Spads took the air with a mellow thunder of sound. Fergus led the way up a steep laboring climb. At five thousand, he leveled off and swung the nose of his ship toward the German lines. Barton and Cain hovered at his wing tips, alert and ready for danger.

They scanned the skies on all sides for enemy ships. Veterans, these, and not to be caught by any of the usual Boche tricks. The ground dropped away and disappeared. They were flying between two vast platforms of clouds. Below was a woolly sea of greasy grey puffballs. Above, a high wind streaked the ceiling with long, trembling streamers of fog. Seemingly motionless, suspended in time and space, the three planes droned on and on, down the endless alleyway of the sky.

And then, what Fergus had been expecting happened with startling suddenness. The cloud layer overhead was ripped apart and through the hole dived a glittering Pfalz scout. Behind it came others, a whole staircase of Boche planes, one above the other, dropping down swiftly. Eight, nine, ten of them—engines booming, wings flashing in the veiled light of the high altitude.

Down they came like a pack of wolves, each eager to be the first to reach the red Spad and smash it out of the skies. Fergus let them come until the first threads of tracer were whipping about his head. Then he stood the Spad on its tail and started up.

Barton and Cain followed him, and the three blunt little fighters went boring up toward the ceiling with tortured motors howling. It seemed to Fergus that his Spad would tear itself to pieces in the air. It could climb no higher. Any second now it would whip over backward into

a vicious stall and fall back among the swarming Boche scouts below.

Then cold, wet fog closed in about him. Thankfully, he jammed the stick over. Not a shot had been fired from either of the three Spads. They had run away from a fight, turned tail and fled.

But the three Yanks were not to escape so easily. The layer of clouds into which they had plunged gave way suddenly and they came flashing out into the bright sun. Blinded at first by the glare about them, Fergus flew along a course parallel to the cloud bank. Then he swerved suddenly and the guns on the nose of his Spad began to chatter.

A gust of slugs came from nowhere and rattled savagely along the motor cowling. Five, six, seven black Fokkers came slanting down out of the sun with guns spitting.

Fergus turned his head and saw a spinning prop whirling down above him. His guns were in violent action now. The prop dissolved in a flash of light and a Fokker, thrown over on one wing by the torque of the splintered stub, received the full impact of the second burst. The plane fell into a dive, dropped into the cloud bank below and was gone, blotted out as if it had never existed.

TURNING to locate Cain and Barton, Fergus saw that they were engaged in a frantic game of tail-chasing with Fokkers which swarmed about them, looping and diving with guns chattering madly. Fergus hurled his ship into the thick of the fight, saw Barton blast one of the enemy ships into splinters, leap-frog the wreck and come down on another of the foe who was just maneuvering into position. This man died without knowing who had killed him.

Fergus' arm went up in a crisp

signal. Barton and Cain obediently fell into position behind him. And then the fog closed in about them again and they went drifting down a long, blind chute through the clouds, leaving the roar of the battle faint and far behind them. Again Fergus had run away from a fight. The red Spad was, obviously, known to every member of the Imperial Flying Corps. And, for some reason, every German pilot was desperately determined to bring it down.

PRESENTLY the fog thinned again and the dome of Mont Du-moy could be seen under the trucks. Fergus studied it for signs of troop activity but could see nothing. The shell-pitted slopes were desolate. A few ragged tree stumps showed that there had once been a great forest here, long since bombarded out of existence. Then his roving eyes spotted something else.

Coming up from behind the dome was a blunt-nosed, stubby-winged Rumpler two-seater. It climbed in slow spirals, apparently in no hurry and unafraid of the Spads which were diving down to intercept its flight.

Fergus swung in his seat and studied the actions of his two companions. He had told them not to fire unless he delivered the first shot, but he knew how impetuous these youngsters were and what easy game the cruising Rumpler would appear to be. And it was of vital importance that the Rumpler be unmolested.

Sure enough, Cain warmed his guns with a brisk burst, slipped out of formation and went howling down to shoot the Rumpler out of the sky.

"You fool," grated Fergus, and jammed the stick forward. He sent the red plane down after Cain and so swift was his dive that he over-

took the slower Spad, whipped over the pilot's head and came down between Cain and the slow-moving Rumpler. Savagely, Fergus motioned for Cain to pull off. The younger man, thinking that Fergus wanted to make the kill himself, obediently flattened out and soared away.

Fergus saw that the Rumpler had turned and was roaring away toward German territory. The Boche two-seater skimmed the top of the mountain with motor thundering. With a smile of satisfaction, Fergus cut his Spad to half-throttle and went after it.

The tall captain had been following the game of war for many years. He had risked his life so many times that life or death meant little to him. That was why he had become



of such vast importance to the Intelligence Corps of the Allied Armies.

In the past he had been through hell—and had survived. The future held no terrors for him. But, at times, he felt a sincere regret for the courageous young men associated with him. Their lives were, in Fergus' philosophy, expendable. He had long ago learned that the death of a few individuals was a very unimportant event when compared to the massacre of great armies due to the failure of the Allied Intelligence men. But he had come to like Barton and Cain, and he hated to think what the immediate future had in store for them. Even if they survived what was to come, they would never be the same again.

The Rumpler was well over the lines now and seemed to be running away at top speed. Fergus was forced to cut his throttle still more

in order to allow the two-seater to make good its escape.

He wondered what Barton and Cain were thinking. They must be convinced by this time that their leader was, actually, a madman.

A low bank of clouds lay just ahead. The Rumpler dived into the foggy curtain and Fergus heard the motor cut out. The Rumpler was going to land. Good. He turned and beckoned Cain and Barton to follow him down.

He could almost read the minds of his wingmates as they hesitated about obeying such an apparently insane order. Fergus cut his own gun and scanned the forest below for the opening he knew to be in the neighborhood.

A green sea of trees appeared under the wheels. Right ahead was the Rumpler, just skimming the treetops. It ducked suddenly and slid out of view. Fergus tilted the red Spad down and followed. The wheels touched, bumped once and ran easily along the ground. The Rumpler had already stopped and Fergus leaped from his own cockpit and hurried to meet the pilot.

Barton and Cain came down behind him and landed. He saw them bounce out of their pits, pistols in hands. They didn't know what was going on but they were ready for trouble.

As they came up, Fergus spoke to them in his peculiar rasping voice.

"Put away the guns, gentlemen. We are here to meet a friend." The Boche pilot tugged at the heavy leather helmet. It came away, disclosing a mass of blond hair. Fergus bowed slightly and introduced them.

"Gentlemen," he said proudly, "this is Miss Hilda Storm, commonly known as the Swedish Songbird and also called, in the service for which we both risk our lives, X-29."

CHAPTER III

The Swedish Songbird



HILDA STORM was a regular Viking's daughter of a woman, tall and deep-bosomed and queenly. Even in the clumsy flying suit she wore she held herself proudly, a merry light dancing in her clear blue eyes.

"You are surprised?" she smiled at Barton and Cain. "I'm afraid the Captain did not warn you of what to expect. He does not talk enough, this strange man. We, who obey his orders, do not know half the time what they mean. But we obey. He has taught us to do that."

"You were flying that plane by yourself?" asked Cain.

"It was necessary to learn," said the girl quietly. "In my work one must be able to move quickly from one place to another."

"I heard you sing once in New York," said Barton in an awed voice. "It was marvelous. We wondered what had happened to you during the war. There was a rumor that you were killed in an air raid in Belgium."

"I still sing," the girl explained. "For German troops. They, too, like my voice. I go around to the camps and dromes and entertain."

Captain Fergus grinned mirthlessly. "Fortunately for us," he said quickly, "she can travel about without suspicion. But now for more important things. Tell me, Hilda, did you find it?"

"I think so, but I'm not sure." The girl became serious at once. "They have taken over an old chateau and have concentrated their engineers and mechanics there. I have never been able to get near the place but, from what I have heard, it is the new motor on which they are working."

"What kind of motor?" demanded Fergus.

The girl gazed off into space and answered slowly. "A motor so powerful that it is said it can fly a plane without wings. A motor so small that one man can lift it."

Barton and Cain listened eagerly. They were beginning to get the idea now. The beautiful singer was an agent operating behind the enemy lines. The two Yanks realized suddenly that the singer and Fergus were playing the most dangerous game of the war, with death as the stakes. Flying was childishly safe compared with it. They studied the singer and the tall raw-boned captain with new respect.

THE girl hurried on: "The motor must be destroyed. I do not have to explain what it would mean to Allied flyers if such an engine were perfected and installed in German planes. Our own men would have no chance.

"But, Ansel, I am afraid. They are beginning to suspect me. They follow me wherever I go. It was only by the greatest of luck that I was able to get away this morning. And, even then, I had to take a regular pilot with me." She motioned toward the rear cockpit of the Rumpier.

Fergus strolled over and looked in. Crumpled down on the floor was the body of a German pilot.

"I hit him with a wrench," the girl cried out. "He is not dead. It was necessary."

"Of course," rasped Fergus. "What is one man's life compared to the lives of thousands? Now, what is your plan, Hilda? You must have formed some idea."

"The chateau where the experimental work is being done is near the little town of Brisney. The place is closely guarded, even patrolled by air to prevent enemy planes from

taking pictures. A Major Weidenheim is in charge of the chateau. He is a flyer and will test the motor when it is finished. You must—"

She stopped suddenly and stared at Captain Fergus. A startling change had come over that lanky man of iron. His face was putty grey and his eyes were slits through which blazed a fierce and savage hatred.

"Weidenheim!" he repeated in a hoarse whisper. "For years I have hunted him. And now he is in charge of the very place which must be destroyed."

"I understand." The girl put her hand on his arm and gazed up at him pityingly. "It was Major Weidenheim who held you prisoner when you were captured by the Turks. It was he who ordered the horrible torture to which you were subjected. But these things must be forgotten. There is more important work than revenge."

Captain Fergus shook his head as if to drive away a terrible picture. "Yes, the motor," he agreed. "We must destroy the plant and every one connected with it."

"There is only one chance to get anywhere near the place and that is by air," the girl went on quietly. "You must take my plane, fly as close to Brisney as you dare, then pretend to have motor trouble and land. From then on you must look out for yourself. At night you may be able to crawl close to the chateau."

"Good," barked Fergus. "You take a Spad and fly across the lines. Go to Paris and stay there until you hear from me. You have done magnificent work, Hilda, but you must rest now before your nerves crack."

She nodded slowly. "Very well," she agreed.

Fergus spun on Barton. "And you," he said gruffly, "must fly my red Spad. It is known to every

Boche pilot. You, Cain, will accompany your friend. I will take off immediately and fly directly to Brisney. In five minutes you follow. Once we have landed you will join me and we will proceed to the chateau. You know where Brisney is located?"

Barton and Cain nodded. "Seen it on the map," added Cain. "But what worries me is how are we going to get away?"

Fergus' eyes were cold. "That," he growled, "is of small importance. If we destroy the motor, no sacrifice can be too great. I warned you this morning what to expect."

"Let's get going," said Barton gruffly. "We're game to take a chance if you are."

Fergus unceremoniously dumped the unconscious Boche pilot out of the rear cockpit. He turned and shook hands with Hilda Storm.

"Take off at once," he ordered. "Good luck!"

HE threw himself up into the cockpit and reached for the controls. The motor roared. He spun the Rumpler around as if he were thoroughly familiar with the enemy ship, sent it thundering down the field, shot up over the trees.

As he lifted the Rumpler through the fog, he wondered whether Cain and Barton would follow. Of Hilda's obedience there was no doubt. For a long time they had worked together. She had proved herself to be a magnificent actress and one of the cleverest and most able agents in the Allied service.

At one time there had been a dream in Fergus' mind that, after the war, he and Hilda could go to some quiet countryside and live out the remainder of their lives together. But such thoughts he brushed from his mind. The war was not over and a grim mission lay ahead, a mission which would need

every particle of his energy and concentration.

Then the fog thinned and he found himself flying over a quiet French countryside. He steadied the Rumpler, kept it droning along as if he were some Boche observer returning home from a trip over the lines. But Fergus had forgotten one thing.

Hilda had told him that she had been suspected, was being followed by the Germans. The plane she had flown that morning had a number, was easily identified. When it had not returned according to schedule the Germans had sent other ships to find it. And the sight of the Rumpler being flown by a lone man was enough to excite the curiosity and suspicion of the pursuing planes.

Fergus saw three lean, grey Albatrosses swooping down from above but paid little attention to them. So swiftly had events moved that morning that he had no idea that the enemy was already in pursuit.

One of the Albatrosses dived and flashed past so close that Fergus could see the white face of the pilot peering over the cowling. The Boche held up his hand in a quick signal of some kind and Fergus waved an answer. Suddenly, he realized the danger of his position.

The Germans were not fools, as he knew very well. They were an extremely clever people and could figure out such situations as this with very little difficulty. Some instinct of experience warned Fergus of what was to happen next. He had returned the wrong signal!

There was a crash of Spandaus and the howl of motors suddenly opened wide. A gust of slugs slashed down at him and he skidded the Rumpler into a wild turn. Right ahead of him were the three neat grey Albatrosses. On the horizon two Fokkers were coming with great

speed. Swiveling in his seat, Barton saw a flight of Pfalz scouts were trying eagerly to catch up with him.

No chance to run now. He had to fight. The Albatrosses lunged in, guns spitting flame. Fergus tapped the stick and sent the Rumpler skidding down the skies. A Boche came down, swooped beneath his wheels and tried for a deadly belly-shot but Fergus cocked the Rumpler on one wing, spun savagely to meet the enemy head-on.

Both sets of guns raved for an instant, then the Albatross flipped over on its back, staggered helplessly and started down. Right ahead of him Fergus saw the other ship spinning toward the carpet in flames.

The Fokkers were still out of range, the Pfalz scouts had not yet arrived. Fergus goosed the throttle wide and headed deeper into German territory. A glance at his map told him that he was not far from Brisney. And then, far below and moving sedately along over the tree-tops he spotted a Hannover two-seater.

A HASTY glance assured Fergus he had outdistanced the Pfalz fight. The raiding Fokkers were also left far behind. Fergus didn't want any enemy interference while he and the Boche put on their show. He knew that it would be a real fight.

The Boche two-seater was climbing now, coming up to get plenty of air room. Fergus kicked right rudder and swooped on it, guns blazing. He could see his tracer fanning the air below the enemy's cockpit. He fired another burst as he came up under the Boche ship, then slid away on one wing. He could see the grey walls of a massive building half hidden in the forest below. Fergus had spotted the chateau.

As he shot past the Hannover, he

saw the hooded head of the pilot bent low over the controls. He flashed underneath the two-seater, fired a quick burst and came looping up on the other side. Then he heard guns in action, saw streamers of tracer lashing out toward him. Slugs were pounding into his plane with vicious intent.

He heard the wail of a bullet as it bounced off the motor. Then the stick went dead in his hands and he felt the ship shudder and sag into a spinning dive. He looked back and saw that the Hannover had been caught in his last burst. It, too, was falling with one wing smashed and trailing behind it in ribbons.

The green forest rushed up at Fergus as he fought the controls in a hopeless effort to right the Rumpler before the final crash. With the rudder he threw the ship on its side, kicked it out of the spin and into a steep vertical bank. Before he could level off he was down and felt the wheels snubbed by the greenery below. The Rumpler pitched over on its nose, hesitated for a second, then slowly rolled over and crashed to the ground.

Instinct had caused Fergus to trip his belt as he hit and the impact of the fall tossed him clear of the wreck. He landed heavily and lay half stunned against a rotten log. The sound of voices snapped him back to reality and his hand fumbled for the pistol at his side.

A Boche patrol was hurrying through the woods. The fight had been seen, of course, and infantry were now on their way to locate the wreck. Fergus began to crawl on hands and knees. He didn't know the direction and he didn't care. His only idea was to get as far away from the Rumpler as possible.

The German voices fell away behind him and Fergus decided it was safe to stand. He leaped to his feet and began to run. He ran blindly,

crashing through underbrush, falling over logs, falling into ditches. A crackling sound brought him to an abrupt stop.

Somewhere right ahead of him a fire blazed in the underbrush. He advanced more cautiously, gun cocked and ready. The noise of the fire grew louder. Greasy, yellow smoke boiled up out of the brush; smoke, he realized, which would be seen for miles around and which would attract every patrol in the district. He topped a little hill and saw before him the wreck of a plane burning fiercely. It had been black and there had been white crosses painted on the wings.

The Hannover two-seater!

A swift examination disclosed nothing. It was impossible to tell what had happened to the pilot. As he turned away, another figure burst from the edge of the woods. Cain! His gun was lifted, ready to fire, and his uniform was torn to shreds by the brush from which he had charged.

"You all right? I saw the smoke—thought it was Barton—hurried to pull him out of the wreck. We were trying to follow you when a flight of Pfalzes jumped us. When they saw that red plane of yours the Boche pilots went crazy. Barton and I didn't have a chance. They got me first and then they knocked him down somewhere in this woods."

"We haven't got time to hunt for him now," barked Fergus. "The enemy saw us come down. Patrols will be searching the forest."

"But—Barton," protested Cain. "He may be wounded, dead. We can't leave him like this!"

"We've got to," growled Fergus. "The Boche will be here any second. We don't know, for sure, that Barton is dead. We've got to carry on anyway. I located the chateau just before that Hannover pilot drilled me. We'll find some place

to hide. Lay low there until it gets dark then have a try for the chateau and the new Boche motor."

Cain shrugged. "Might as well," he agreed. "Our goose is cooked anyway. Its the firing squad if we're caught."

CHAPTER IV

The Chateau



ENTLEMEN, you are correct," said a pleasant voice behind them. "Your goose is most certainly cooked."

Fergus and Cain stopped. Just at the edge of the forest stood a young man in a field grey uniform. He wore a leather coat and a leather helmet dangled from his left hand. In his right hand he held a large, blue Luger. He was smiling pleasantly and seemed very much amused about the entire situation.

"I'm very glad," he went on in a mild, conversational voice, "that you two gentlemen were not hurt. And you, especially, Captain Fergus." He chuckled at the blank expression on Fergus' face. "Of course, we recognized you," he added. "When you crashed, I landed and came to find you. Now I'm sure you gentlemen are upset from your recent adventure. What we all need is a drink. I know where we can get one. The chateau. Major Weidenheim keeps an excellent stock of English whiskey on hand. Turn around and walk straight ahead. Better drop those guns first. Remember, please, that I am behind you. Don't force me to use my gun. By the way, permit me to introduce myself. I am *Hauptmann* Gregor von Grass."

Fergus and Cain allowed their pistols to fall. They turned slowly and started through the woods. A German patrol came out of the underbrush. The men stood staring openmouthed at von Grass and his two

prisoners. The young German spoke to them and they all leaped to attention and saluted stiffly. The sergeant said something in a deep, guttural voice and von Grass laughed and dismissed them.

"Jolly fellows," he explained in English to the two Americans. "They ask permission to execute you on the spot. I believe they receive a bonus for every man they kill. And, really, you'd be surprised at the number of Allied agents who've been prowling about here lately."

"What's the attraction?" asked Fergus gruffly.

"You know very well that we've perfected a new motor," von Grass answered readily. "Quite a stunt. I fancy the Allies will be a little surprised when we first take the air with it."

THEY came out of the woods, crossed a road and followed a lane along the edge of a pasture. Fergus could see the chateau now. Its low, grey bulk loomed over the trees just ahead. The lane ended and they came to a wall of masonry.

"Gate's on the other side," von Grass explained. "Quite a historical place, this old chateau. It was built by one of the Louis for a court favorite who, afterwards, got mixed up in a revolution and—"

The voice broke off suddenly. Fergus whirled and saw what had interrupted the conversation of von Grass. A scarecrow of a man had leaned out from behind a corner of the wall and was staggering forward, an American .45 pistol gripped in his right hand.

"Barton!" Cain gasped. "The poor guy is shell-shocked."

Von Grass lifted the Luger and fired. The shot boomed out with a thundering sound but already Fergus was in motion. His long, lean body shot forward in a slanting dive. His arms, like wire rope,

wrapped themselves around von Grass' knees. The German went down as if slugged and Fergus rolled on top of him.

Cain came to life with a start and hurled himself on top of the struggling men. He pinned von Grass' legs to the ground while Fergus wrenched the big pistol from the German's hand and, all in one swift motion, brought the heavy barrel down across von Grass' head. The Boche officer flopped limply in the dust.

"This way," muttered Barton, motioning vaguely toward the wall of the chateau. "Door!"

Fergus moved with the savage grace of a panther. He scooped von Grass up from the ground and dragged him forward. Barton fumbled with the catch, flung open a narrow door, disclosing a black hole beyond.

Fergus didn't even hesitate. He lunged through, dragging the unconscious man with him. Cain and Barton came panting after him. Cain shut the door and dropped the bar in place. And just in time. Outside, a German patrol went trotting past.

They could hear the quick, urgent voice of the sergeant in charge. The shot had been heard. The guards were surrounding the chateau.

Fergus found himself in a narrow room of what must have been a tool house. Light filtered dimly through a dusty window. He tossed von Grass into a corner and turned to face his companions. Barton leaned wearily against the wall, his left arm dangling from the shoulder.

"You hurt?" demanded Fergus. "Let's have a look."

While he ripped away the sleeve from Barton's arm the younger man explained. "The red Spad. When the Boche saw it they came after me and they never let up until they'd shot me down. Got hit in

the arm. Couldn't handle the controls."

Working swiftly and with considerable skill, Fergus removed the fabric and disclosed a small, blue hole in the fleshy part of Barton's upper arm. Fergus ripped the sleeve of Barton's shirt for bandages and bound the arm tightly.

"Can't understand why you flew a red plane," protested Barton. "All the Boche recognized it. I didn't have a chance."

"You're lucky to be alive," Fergus told him. "Few men who fly my red plane ever lived to tell about it."

Barton glanced up quickly. "So that's it? That's why you have it painted bright red. Then you send some dummy to fly it while you go off on a secret mission?"

"Exactly," said Fergus coldly.

"Lamonte said you always took along a couple of decoys on your trips and that they seldom came back. Now we've found out what happens to them."

"**L**IFE is cheap," snapped Fergus. "My work is important."

Von Grass groaned and sat up. Fergus handed Cain the Luger and motioned for him to keep the German covered. Von Grass tenderly massaged the lump on his head and groaned again. "Really," he said. "It wasn't necessary to be quite that rough. I'll have a headache for the next two weeks."

"Shut up," snapped Fergus. To Cain he said, "If he makes any noise lay him out."

Von Grass subsided against the wall.

"What do we do next?" Barton asked Fergus. "How far is it to the chateau? What chance have we got of getting through? You may have brought us along as decoys but you'll find that Cain and I can play this game as well as you."

"You haven't got a chance," said von Grass from the floor. "Gentlemen, your plans and plots are absurd. You have a couple of pistols between you but there are a thousand armed men around the chateau. You can't escape and you'll never get anywhere near the machine shop. If you're sensible you'll all surrender to me. At least, you won't fall into Major Weidenheim's hands."

"If it wasn't for the noise," said Fergus coldly, "I'd put a bullet through your head. Tie him up. Stuff something in his mouth."

Using the remains of the shirt, Cain tied von Grass' hands and feet.

"Come over here," Fergus ordered Cain when the job was finished. "Take a look out of this window. You can see the chateau through the trees. Also a couple of sentries. Apparently, the place is ringed with guards. We'll have to wait until dark before we move out of this place. If we're caught it will mean Major Weidenheim and a sure and painful death."

The roar of an airplane motor came drumming through the walls of the tool house. Cain ran to the window, cleaned a small section with his thumb and peered out.

"There's a field out there," he gasped. "Inside the walls. They must be testing planes." He became excited. "We'll steal one. It'll have a new motor in it. We'll fly it back across the lines so our own experts can study it."

Fergus joined him by the window. "Small chance," he growled. "We've got to figure on destroying the machine shops first. After that we can think about escaping. Hilda said that the new motor had not yet been completed. This field is probably used by the squadron which patrols the district."

"Anyway, it means we've got a chance," added Barton.

"Something's going on on the

field," announced Cain from the window. "They're rolling the planes into camouflaged hangars. Looks like they're closing up for the night."

"Storm coming," guessed Fergus. "Listen."

From a great distance sounded the mellow rumble of guns. They could hear the wind rushing through the trees in the chateau park.

"Thunder," said Fergus. "Couldn't be better for us."

Then it began to rain. Softly at first, the water washing gently against the roof of the tool house. The thunder came nearer and the sky was split with jagged lines of lightning. A patrol, headed for shelter, galloped by on the road outside. Fergus spoke quietly to Barton and Cain.

"It'll be dark in a few hours," he said. "But we better take the chance that fate sends our way. We will try to keep together but if we get lost we must carry on alone. Find the machine shop. There must be storage tanks of fuel about. Set fire to them. The shops and the motor must be destroyed."

"You don't value life very highly," cut in Cain. "I'll play along with you, but how about Barton? He's wounded. We'd better leave him behind—to guard von Grass."

Fergus studied the young flyer through cold, expressionless eyes. "Better with us," he growled. "We may need him. The prisoner can't escape."

Barton lurched forward. "Count me in," he snarled. "I've still got one good arm. What are we waiting for? Let's go!"

Fergus slid open the window and peered out. The rain had changed to a thick, woolly fog. Thunder still boomed overhead. Twenty yards away he could see a sentry, a coat huddled about his shoulders. Fergus slid through the window and crouched outside. Cain followed.

Barton crawled clumsily through the opening and almost fell. The three men huddled at the base of the wall, watching the sentry as he marched up and down in the fog.

"Wait here," ordered Fergus. He slid away into the fog like a grey ghost. The sentry turned and Fergus froze in his tracks. The German stared stupidly, half raised his rifle, shook his head. The fog played tricks on a man's imagination. He turned and took a step forward.

A grey shape rose up from the ground. The sentry gave a gurgling cry which was instantly shut off by steel fingers about his throat. The rifle thudded to the ground and there was a sound of a heavy blow, of metal crunching against bone. The sentry toppled and went down.

Through the fog came Fergus dragging a heavy grey uniform coat. He flung it about Barton's shoulder, buttoned it so that the sleeve made a sling for the wounded arm.

Barton protested feebly. "Boche uniform. If they catch me now—"

"Makes no difference," rasped Fergus. "They'll shoot us anyway. Quiet, now. Follow me."

CHAPTER V

A Stealthy Invasion



FERGUS led the way swiftly and silently. They passed through a thick grove of underbrush and came to the edge of the flying field.

Just ahead, a grey wall loomed through the fog. Fergus headed for it, his eyes searching the blank face of the building.

"Must be a door," he muttered. "Got to find it. Ah, just as I thought!"

He had rounded a corner and discovered a slanting wooden door built into the base of the wall, probably

the entrance to an old wine cellar. The door was ancient and studded with iron but when Fergus grasped the handles and pulled, it opened with a faint creaking noise. Barton and Cain came up behind him and he spoke to them in a low, flat voice.

"Looks too easy. Might be a trap. Guns ready? Cain, you shut the door behind us."

A steady heave swung the door back. Steps led down into the ground. Fergus went first, his gun waist-high and resting against his side. Faint fingers of light showed a long way ahead. One of Fergus' shoulders collided with a rough stone wall. The door shut softly and presently he could hear Barton and Cain moving behind him.

"Steady," he warned. "Follow the wall."

The wall led toward the light. Water dripped coldly from the ceiling. Their feet sloshed mud underfoot. They were in the cellar of the chateau, without a doubt. Somewhere in the building above them a motor came to life, roared for a few seconds, spluttered, coughed, and went dead. A vague mutter of voices could be heard.

The wall turned suddenly and Fergus found himself at the end of a passageway. Twenty yards ahead there was a great vaulted cellar lighted by dim, yellow electric bulbs. Across one end there was drawn up a platoon of German infantry. They stood at ease, talking together, laughing and exchanging jokes.

At the far end of the cellar, two men and a woman stood against the wall. From their clothes, they were French peasants, farmers of the district around the chateau. But Fergus knew better. Two of them he recognized—the man and woman. They were a couple from Alsace who had served the French long and courageously behind the Boche lines.

The other victim, Fergus guessed, was equally important.

His first impulse was to fire into the packed mass of the Boche platoon, create a disturbance, and in the ensuing excitement attempt to rescue the doomed trio. But such an act would be madness on his part.

These three had come to the chateau on the same mission as himself. They had failed and must die. But Fergus could avenge their death, could make certain that they had not died in vain.

Barton, standing behind him, gasped in amazement.

"Good God! Spies! A firing squad!"

BEFORE Fergus answered, a door in the far wall of the chamber opened and an officer appeared. He glanced indifferently at the three against the wall, spoke to the platoon which immediately fell into line and came to attention. Another crisp order and twenty rifles leaped shoulder-high. A barked command. A roar of sound. The cellar was filled with smoke and the crash of heavy slugs against stone.

Fergus sagged back into the shadow and waited. He could see, now, the three crumpled forms on the ground. The woman lay on her back, her face dotted with small, blue holes. The wall against which they had stood was chipped and splattered with metal. This was not the first execution which had taken place in the vaulted cellar.

"Might have been us," said Cain in a choked voice.

"Stop moving around, Barton," warned Fergus. "Quiet, I tell you."

"I'm not moving," Barton's voice answered hoarsely. "There's something crawling along in the passage behind me."

Fergus' nerves leaped and crinkled. His feet seemed made of lead. So tense was his body that he could

hardly breathe. He had been worrying about that open door. They had got into the chateau entirely too easily. This explained it. The Boche had been waiting for them, had followed them down the passageway.

Fergus swung around until his back was against the wall. He lifted his pistol, waited, listened. Something was moving along the tunnel, all right. He could hear the crunch of heavy boots in the mud. The footsteps came nearer.

Fergus saw a shadow move. Then, light from the vaulted cellar brought into detail a massive figure.

The man seemed to tower almost to the ceiling. He was dressed in grease-stained overalls and he carried on his back a great, heavy wooden box bound with steel straps. He moved slowly, head bowed, planting his broad boots wide apart to balance the load. He came to the cellar, looked up for an instant to see where he was, turned slowly and crossed to the opposite side. There was a door there and the Boche gave it a violent kick.

It swung inward and during the instant the giant passed through, Fergus could see beyond into a brightly lighted room. The machine shop!

HE got a glimpse of spinning wheels and whirling, glittering points of light. Great lathes were at work there; the room was crowded with machinery and men, all in violent motion. A steady, humming noise came through the door as if a great hive of bees had been released. The door swung shut, a latch clicked sharply.

Fergus found that he had been gripping his gun so hard that his right hand was numb. His face was wet with sweat and his legs felt limp. Beside him Cain expelled a harsh breath and said in a thick whisper:

"Thought they had us then. My stomach fell clear into my boots."

"Quiet, now," warned Fergus. "At least we know where the machine shop is. If we'd only brought a couple of grenades."

"Or a pair of Cooper bombs," added Cain. "They'd do the trick, all right."

"I've had about enough of this," said Barton suddenly. "Another twenty minutes in the dark and I'll start shooting. Let's do something, not stand around on one foot and wait for the Boche to catch us."

"There are fuel tanks in that room." Fergus paid no attention to Barton. "I got a glimpse of them when the door opened. That's our only chance: fire. We've got to work our way around to the other side of the cellar and try and set off the tanks."

"And blow ourselves to hell in the process," added Cain. "But lead on, Captain."

Fergus crawled out to the end of the passageway and peered into the cellar. The firing squad was gone. Three bodies lay against the wall as a mute reminder of the penalty of failure. Fergus turned and spoke softly over his shoulder.

"Got to take a chance. Follow me!"

Making sure that Barton and Cain were right behind him, he headed across the cellar with long strides. The three of them went past the bodies, swung to the left and dived into another black hole. They followed this along, feeling the walls.

The passage turned sharply to the right and Fergus grunted with satisfaction. They must be near the machine shop now. He put his ear against the cold wall and listened. Very faintly he could hear the noise of the spinning machinery. He moved on another twenty feet, listened again and this time the sound was louder. His fumbling hands en-

countered damp wood. He pushed against it, felt it give.

"Here," he called to Cain, "put your shoulder against this. Seems to be a door."

Cain fumbled his way forward in the dark, added his weight to that of Fergus'. Something creaked. The wood moved slowly. A crack of light blazed into the tunnel. Fergus put his eye to the crack and peered through.

"Good God!" he gasped.

CAIN and Barton crowded to the tiny opening—and found themselves again peering into the brilliantly lighted shop. The opening which they had found led to a balcony which ran along one end of the great two-storied cellar. It was like looking down into a vast inferno of sound and light.

"A balcony seat in hell," growled Barton.

"The tanks," said Fergus and pushed the door still wider open. At the other end of the shop and resting on metal platforms were two great steel tanks. One was painted bright red, the other yellow. Pipelines led down to the testing benches below where rows of motors stood side by side, each running at high speed. The motors had caused the steady humming noise which they had heard from the passageway.

"Look at the ceiling," said Cain. "They've got this room lined with steel. No shell could ever penetrate here. Aerial bombs wouldn't even jar the place."

Fergus had wiggled forward until he could see the edge of the balcony. He lay quietly and studied every detail of the scene below. Presently, he slid back to join his companions.

"Pipes run along the end of the balcony," he announced. "Either of you men got a cigarette lighter?"

"I have," said Cain and produced a brass French *briquet* from which dangled a long felt wick. This was the kind of lighter commonly used along the front as, once the wick was ignited by the flint, it would not go out in either wind or rain.

"Good!" Fergus took the lighter and jerked out the wick. "This will be our fuse. Wait here. I'll crawl down and see what can be done."

Keeping close to the wall he moved cautiously on hands and knees down the balcony. Running along the wall were two pipes. They lay in a wooden trough which was filled with greasy waste. Fergus guessed that they led to some point outside the chateau where the fuel could be delivered in trucks.

For a moment he studied the situation, then grunted and reached for the felt wick. This he tucked into the oily waste about the pipes, snapped a spark with the flint, blew on the end of the wick softly until it had become a glowing coal.

He backed away, studied the tiny spark of fire for an instant, chuckled grimly to himself, turned and crawled to where Barton and Cain waited.

"What happened?" demanded Cain. "What did you find?"

Fergus explained about the oily waste packed about the pipes and how he had used the felt wick as a fuse. "It'll take at least an hour for that felt to burn," he went on. "When it reaches the waste that will catch fire and run along the packing to the tanks. And then—"

"And then I want to be five miles away from this joint," announced Cain grimly. "The machine shop has no windows, is practically air-tight. When those tanks go it'll toss this chateau into the air like a tin can. Let's get out of here—and fast."

Back in the dark passageway with the door wedged shut behind them the three Yanks hesitated. The

chances were small that they could go back the way they'd come. Such luck as they already enjoyed does not hold forever. Fergus thought it best to find another opening by following the tunnel around the chateau.

Barton and Cain agreed and the three began to grope their way forward again. The floor seemed to slant upward and presently they came to another large room. It was dark but they could tell that they were in a chamber of considerable size by feeling the walls.

"Here's a door," announced Cain. "Seems like it ought to be in the outside wall of the chateau. It's a chance. What shall we do?"

"See if it's locked," ordered Fergus. "Try not to make any noise."

"It's open and—" That was as far as Cain got. The door leaped under his hand. Lights flashed on overhead. Through the door came four Boche soldiers. They had evidently been on guard just outside the door, had heard voices and swarmed in to investigate. As von Grass had said, there was a bonus for the capture or death of any Ally caught about the chateau and these soldiers were eager for the prize money.

HENE shouted joyfully, hurled himself at Fergus. He had a rifle in his hand tipped with a wicked bayonet and with this he lunged savagely.

The Luger appeared magically in Fergus' hand. His body uncoiled, he sidestepped and the bayonet slid through his uniform over the right leg. The Luger bellowed, the big Boche gave a grunt and grabbed his belly with both hands.

The first rush had carried Barton back against the wall where he balanced himself with his shoulders, lifted his gun and fired pointblank into the white, strained face of a

charging infantryman. The man stumbled and started down. As he fell he flung his rifle ahead of him and the heavy butt smashed into Barton's shoulder with nerve-wracking pain.

Cain stood face to face with the Boche and fought for his life. He had forgotten the gun in his hand and was using it as a club, battering away with deadly intent while the German struggled to bury a trench knife in Cain's chest.

The two tripped and went down, and so closely were they interlocked that Fergus dared not shoot. Besides, the tall captain had troubles of his own.

An enemy had leaped out of the darkness and lashed out wildly with the barrel of his rifle. The blow caught Fergus on the hip and spun him around. His Luger boomed again and a man went down but, before he could fire at the next adversary, the cellar swarmed with Boche. They appeared from all directions and flung themselves viciously into the fight, rifles swinging like clubs.

Fergus saw a steel butt driving down on him, tried to dodge, felt the blow jar against his skull. He went down with three of the enemy on top of him. Cain, ringed about with bayonets, stood beside Barton. The wounded man's face was ashen. His pistol had dropped from his hand.

A soldier struck Cain's arm with a paralyzing blow, knocking the gun out of his grip. Shouts of triumph echoed in the stone-walled room.

Rough hands picked up Fergus and dragged him along the tunnel. Barton and Cain were forced to follow at the point of bayonets. As they staggered along wearily, Cain said, out of the corner of his mouth.

"Hope that wick hasn't gone out. These thugs deserve what's coming to them."

"We'll probably be here, too," groaned Barton. "Did they get Fergus? Is he dead?"

"Stunned, I think," Cain answered. "You can't kill a man as tough as that."

CHAPTER VI

While the Fuse Burned



WHEN Fergus regained consciousness, he was lying on a hard bench in a brightly lighted room. Cain and Barton sat beside him. Three guards stood by the door watching them.

Fergus shook his head and sat up. "Ugh," he grunted. "How long have I been out?"

Cain knew what Fergus was thinking. The burning fuse in the cellar.

"Not more than ten minutes," he answered. "They dragged us up here and left us. Guess we're waiting to interview that major friend of yours."

There was a window back of the bench and Fergus looked out. It was dark now but he could make out, very vaguely, the outlines of the hangars below. They had been carried up into the chateau, he judged. Well, it would soon be over now. He knew what Major Weidenheim would do—and that in very short order. And then he thought of the fuse burning down below and a terrible smile twisted his battered face.

"How do you feel?" asked Cain. "You don't look any too good. We saw you go down but we couldn't help you."

Fergus realized that his body was a mass of bruises. One arm had been twisted in the fight and he had been kicked and battered about the head and shoulders.

"I'm all right," he told his companions. "How's Barton's arm?"

"I can stand it," said Barton grimly. "Anyway, I've got a hunch it won't hurt long."

All three had seen the execution in the cellar, had noted with what indifference the Germans had snuffed out three lives. What chance did they have against such a system?

"What time is it?" asked Fergus.

Cain pulled out a cheap nickel watch. "Good God!" he gasped. "It's just five. An eternity has passed and it's just five in the afternoon."

Fergus calculated in his mind. "We have until about 5:40," he announced. "Well, a lot can happen in that time. Look out for the major. He will fool you at first, try and get you to talk. Tell him anything you can think of, except the truth. Stall for time. I want to be here when it happens. There'll be some satisfaction in that."

There was a clatter of boots in the hallway. The guards leaped to one side and snapped to attention. The door opened and a young man came in.

He was a junior officer of some kind. His uniform was clean and neat and very military. Over his left pocket he wore the black and white ribbon of the Iron Cross. He studied the prisoners curiously then motioned them to follow him.

"The major will talk with you," he said in stilted English. "Come."

Fergus stumbled to his feet and stretched his aching muscles. The three Americans exchanged looks. Silently they followed the young officer down the hallway and into a large, oak-paneled room which had once been the library of the chateau. The room was dimly lighted. A cheerful fire burned on a broad hearth. There was an atmosphere of comfort and ease in the room, far removed from war. At a desk beside the fireplace a man sat writing.

"Sit down, sit down," he called. "Be with you in a moment." His voice was mild, even friendly, but the sound made Fergus jump. The last time he had heard that voice it had given a certain order to Turkish soldiers. An order which had sent Fergus on a temporary visit to hell. He controlled himself with an effort, stilled his twitching nerves and sank into the nearest chair. He could see now that they were not alone with the major.

Shadowy forms stood along the wall. Armed guards ready to shoot at a nod from their commander.

Major Weidenheim signed his name with a flourish, blotted it, got up from the desk and came around to stand in front of the fire. He was a heavy-set man with a barrel-like chest and absurd little legs, much too short for him. His face was broad and heavy-jowled, his eyes set deep in rolls of fat. His manner was deceptively mild. He stood with his back to the fire, warming his hands while he studied the three prisoners.

SUDDENLY he stepped forward and stared hard at Fergus. A gasp escaped him but in an instant he had gained his composure.

"So we meet again, Captain?" he said quietly. "I confess your presence here startled me. I never expected to see you again."

"I expected to see you," said Fergus, "but not under these circumstances. I understood you had taken up flying, so I joined the Air Corps myself."

"Giving up your Intelligence work, I suppose?" sneered the major. "But you can't expect me to believe that. And especially after we found you wandering around in our cellar. Oh, yes, we leave the door open so you fellows can get in quite easily. But you can't get out!"

Barton shifted his wounded arm

to a more comfortable position and stared dully at the major. Fergus' long fingers clenched and unclenched while his mind raced furiously. The major was up to his usual tricks of playing the cat and mouse game with his prisoners.

Fergus wondered what chance he would have if he took a long dive across the room, hit the major in the belly and knocked him backwards into the fire. The taste of fire would serve the fat little Boche right, Fergus told himself. Fire had played no small part in the torture the Turks had employed.

Almost as if he had read Fergus' mind the major moved away from the hearth and leaned on his desk.

"I should like to ask a few questions, gentlemen," he said. "Let me warn you before I begin that you are covered from all sides of the room. We can have no violence here. Captain Fergus, I have always been curious to know how you got away from my men down in the South. It can make no difference to you now, so you might tell me."

Fergus shrugged. "Why not?" he said readily. "Your adjutant was in love with a Turkish girl, the daughter of an inn-keeper near the prison. I had done a favor for her father. Your adjutant let slip where I was being held. The inn-keeper and the girl arranged the rest of it."

The major drew in his breath sharply. "Von Boetz," he gasped. "So? I suspected something of the kind at the time. He now has a very fine berth on the general staff. What a surprise it will be when this information reaches headquarters."

Fergus' weird smile flickered across his face. Von Boetz had known nothing about the escape but he would have a hard time talking his way out of this mess. But anything to cause trouble, that was Fergus' idea.

"These two men with you," barked the major. "What are their names, their rank and their units?"

"Lieutenants Barton and Cain," Fergus answered. "Twenty-fifth Pursuit Squadron, A.F.C. They had nothing to do with this affair. They crashed behind the lines and I ran into them accidentally. They should be sent to a camp as prisoners of war."

Major Weidenheim laughed dryly. "Don't be childish," he chided. "The three of you came here for a purpose. You failed, you were captured. You should take what is coming to you like officers and gentlemen without whimpering or trying to beg off. Barton and Cain will be given a quick trip to eternity.

"But *you*, my friend, must stay behind until you are willing to talk. I must have from you the name of every agent on this side of the line. You will give me this information before we are through with you."

Cain looked at his watch and held up two fingers to Fergus. The captain read the signal to mean that twenty minutes were left before the fuse in the cellar reached the oily waste. He nodded that he had understood. To his surprise, both Cain and Barton were remarkably calm and self-possessed.

IT was one thing for soldiers in battle to charge the enemy, to lunge forward in the face of death and attempt to fight a way into a trench. But to sit quietly here in the fire-lit room and know that beneath them a felt fuse glowed steadily in the dark, to know that when the fire reached those great tanks of fuel, life would be blotted out in a smear of flame— That took courage.

The major ambled on conversationally. "Yes, Captain Fergus, you may think that my brave Turkish jailors knew a few unpleasant tricks to make men confess but you do

not know what I have in store for you here. They are the very latest devices, I assure you. Drops of acid eating their way into your flesh, electrical currents which burn the scalp from your head without dulling the brain. All very scientific, my new inventions, and very, very effective."

Fergus turned on the major savagely. "You can't frighten me!" he barked. "You've tried it before. You dirty little swine! That filthy mind of yours can think of nothing but torture."

The major smiled and shook his head. "I ignore your insults. You cannot make me lose my temper and shoot you. I am saving you for something else. You are much too important to be allowed to die so easily. As your friends—it is no longer necessary for them to remain. But if they wish to write letters they may do so. I will give them twenty minutes in which to say farewell to the world."

"No letters," growled Barton. "We will stay here with the captain—until the last."

"But the captain will be engaged," said Weidenheim with a chuckle. "His experiments in science begin at once. I am a busy man and have no more time to bother with you." He turned and spoke to one of the guards.

The guard started for the door and was about to open it when it swung suddenly wide and a figure lurched into the room.

"Major Weidenheim?" a familiar voice cried anxiously. "Where are they, where are they?"

It was von Grass. Rags of the shirt with which he had been bound still hung from his wrists. When he saw Fergus and the two flyers ranged along the wall he cried out thankfully.

"Then I'm not too late! Good!"

"What's all this?" snarled the

major. "These men are my prisoners. Two will be executed at once; the other—"

Von Grass burst into crackling German. Fergus caught occasional sentences from the harsh flow of words.

"The High Command—special orders from above—wanted for questioning—my instructions are to take them to the general."

The major raged and fumed. He protested violently. He beat on the desk with his pudgy fists and shouted obscenities at von Grass. The younger officer stood firm. He was a member of the German Intelligence and must carry out his orders. Captain Fergus, especially, was wanted. A car must be provided. They must leave at once.

Cain looked at his watch and his face became more strained and chalk-like than ever. He waved a hand at Fergus. The time was up! Any second now they might expect the blast of doom. In his mind, Fergus could see the wick smoldering against the oily waste, could see the waste suddenly ignite in a flash of flame.

Fergus was tempted to have a try at the major. What difference did it make now? What did it matter if he were riddled with slugs from the guns of the silent guards? He might reach the major, might get his fingers around that flabby throat, might have time to batter the ugly head against the desk. Some warning instinct stopped him.

The fuse in the cellar might have gone out. He was still alive and an attempt on the major's life would be nothing but suicide. He must wait. Tense himself, get ready. In that split second after the explosion there still might be time for him to cross the room.

Nothing happened. Von Grass and Weidenheim continued to argue fiercely. The major was not to be

cheated out of his revenge. Von Grass was insistent. Fergus saw that Barton sat with closed eyes, his good hand gripping the wrist of his wounded arm to ease the pain. Cain stared off into space.

And still nothing happened. Cain fumbled for his watch with nervous fingers. He looked at it again to make sure of the time. Then his shoulders sagged. Something had gone wrong down below on that dark balcony. Cain was not to have the instant of glory to which he had steeled himself. Instead, he and Barton were to be blotted out by the drab bullets of a hardened firing squad.

Von Grass and the major had ended their argument. The younger man had won. He came, smiling, across the room.

"Come with me, gentlemen," he ordered. "We leave at once for Headquarters. The major has been kind enough to give us transportation. On your feet, all of you. There is no time to spare."

CHAPTER VII

Fräulein Hilda Returns



HERE was no doubt in Fergus' mind but that the fuse still burned down below. The felt used in cigarette lighters had never been known to go out until the spark was smothered by lack of air. And there was plenty of air in the great machine shop below.

What had happened, Fergus decided, was that the felt had burned down into the waste where it smoldered slowly. After all, oily waste was not gun powder to ignite in a flash. It might be minutes, an hour, before flames finally broke out. And once that occurred, the explosion would follow almost immediately.

Barton staggered to his feet with the assistance of Cain. Both men started eagerly toward the door. A moment before they had thought that death was very near. Now fate had given them a new roll of the dice.

"I will not forget this!" spluttered Major Weidenheim. "You have interfered in my affairs once too often, *Hauptmann* von Grass. I have some influence with the authorities. When the general hears what you have done you will find yourself in an uncomfortable position."

"You're too blood-thirsty, Major," chided von Grass. "And, apparently you have forgotten that the *Herr* General Hartz, who commands this sector, is my uncle. So I do not expect there will be any trouble from Headquarters. In fact, he—"

Von Grass broke off, stood with his mouth hanging open, staring at a figure which had come through the open door. The major leaned across his desk and gazed with bulging eyes. Barton and Cain looked up questioningly. Fergus turned—and his heart almost stopped.

Poised in the doorway, a long military cape draping her tall figure, her head bare, the great mass of her golden hair gleaming in the firelight, stood Hilda Storm. An electric silence hung in the room.

Von Grass gave a joyful cry and ran forward, both hands extended.

"*Fräulein* Hilda! What are you doing here? I thought you had gone back to Berlin for a rest—and now I find you at work again."

HOW did you get into the chateau?" demanded Major Weidenheim in a surly voice. "The guards are supposed to admit nobody without a special pass."

Ignoring the prisoners as if they did not exist, the girl swept into the room and gaily shook hands with von Grass. To the major she said with a laugh: "But I *did* have

a pass, my dear Major. General Hartz gave it to me himself. Have you forgotten that I am to sing for your men tonight? It is to be a gala occasion. The officers from all over the sector are coming to my concert."

Major Weidenheim spluttered impotently. He had heard of this famous singer and even recalled that he had been instructed that morning that the ballroom of the chateau was to be used for a concert. He snorted with disgust at the idea.

"I recall the order," Weidenheim admitted gruffly. "The orderly will show you to a room where you can wait."

"Have you seen General Hartz? Where is he?" von Grass cut in eagerly. "I was on my way to his headquarters. My business with him is very important. There are prisoners to be questioned."

Hilda turned as if seeing the three Yanks for the first time. Her eyebrows went up and she sniffed disdainfully. "Are these the prisoners? How filthy they are! Americans, I imagine. I understand they are a very dirty race."

"Enemy agents who should be shot at once," growled Weidenheim. "They would have been eliminated by this time if the *Hauptmann* here had not butted in."

"But the general? I must find him," von Grass insisted.

"He is coming here," cried the girl. "Didn't I tell you? He wishes to hear me sing. Such a dear, kind old man. It will be a delight to entertain him."

So great was the shock of seeing Hilda in the chateau that Fergus could only stare at her in amazement. And then his mind cleared and pieces of the puzzle began to click into place. Hilda had not gone to Paris as he had ordered. She had returned to German territory, arranged with the general for the

concert in the chateau. The reason was obvious.

She had sent Fergus and the two flyers on an extremely dangerous mission and had now come to find out what had happened to them and to give them any assistance possible. All sheer madness, of course. But Hilda Storm was that kind of woman.

And Fergus couldn't so much as warn her of the impending catastrophe. Even to admit that he knew her would mean not only his own immediate execution but the death of the girl. He must stand there, helpless, his heart pounding, and say nothing. Hilda, he knew, was far too clever to give the game away. And she must have formed a plan of some kind. A plan of rescue.

At the news that the general was coming to the chateau, Major Weidenheim's expression underwent a sudden change. "Then the prisoners must stay here," he said smoothly. "The general can interview them and then they will be turned over to me."

VON GRASS nodded agreement. "Yes, that is the best plan," he admitted. "I would suggest that you take excellent care of them, Major. They are much more important than you think."

"They shall have the best room in the chateau," said the major with a slow smile. He spoke to one of the guards who came forward, saluted and received his instructions. Von Grass turned to Fergus.

"Go with this man," he instructed. "I will send for you when the general is ready to talk to you."

The guard led the way. Fergus followed on heavy feet with Cain and the wounded Barton clumping along behind. As they passed through the door Fergus heard von Grass talking to Hilda. "We must make a tour of inspection of the

chateau. It has a very romantic history."

The room which Major Weidenheim had assigned the prisoners was in an old tower. The windows were very narrow and covered with bars. There was no furniture. Looking out of one of the slotted windows, Fergus saw that it was several hundred feet to the ground. Not much chance of escaping from this place. The guard closed the door and locked it and the Americans could hear the noise of his heavy boots as he went down the winding stairs.

There was one advantage to the tower room which the major had overlooked. Prisoners there were sure of absolute privacy and could talk freely without fear of being overheard.

Barton slumped down against the wall, keeping a tight grip on his wounded arm. Cain began to pace up and down restlessly. Fergus leaned in a window staring out into the night, his mind a whirl of confusing thoughts. Cain's voice broke the tense silence with a harsh, rasping sound.

"That girl tricked us! She's not an Allied agent. She sent word to the fat little Boche that we were coming, arranged for our capture."

"Don't be a fool!" snapped Fergus. "I've known her for years. She came here to help us, but just how I do not understand. But she does not know the danger—that fuse in the cellar."

Cain laughed grimly. "You still worrying about that? It's gone out long ago. Just another one of our failures."

"I can't stand much more of this," groaned Barton. "I'd resigned myself to being shot and now we're still alive and have to go through the whole thing again. I can't stand it, I tell you!"

"If we only had a chance," cried Cain wrathfully. "If we could make

a break for it, go down fighting. But to face that squad in the cellar—"

There was a faint scratching sound at the door. The lock clicked and it swung slowly open. Hilda Storm stood on the threshold. An iron key was gripped in her hand. She had eyes for no one but Fergus.

"Ansel," she cried, and started across the room. Fergus leaped to meet her, seized both her hands. There was no time for sentimental greeting.

"Hilda, you must leave at once." His voice was cold, harsh. "There's a fuse burning in the cellar. It may explode the fuel tanks at any time. Make excuses. But get away from here as fast as you can!"

"But you and these two men," protested the girl. "I was afraid you might be caught. I came here to do what I could to help you. I persuaded von Grass to let me talk to you, to try and get information from you. I can stay only a few seconds, but must tell you that a way of escape has been arranged for you. I went to the drome of the 25th. Lieutenant Lamonte worked with me on a case long ago. He believed my story. He is bringing a bombing plane to the field on the Brisney-Fontenac road, two kilos north of the chateau. He will wait there until midnight for you."

"All we've got to do is jump out of a window and run down and find the Frog," sneered Cain. "Sounds easy."

"Keep out of this," rasped Fergus. "You don't know what you're saying."

"I must go," said Hilda hurriedly. "Already Major Weidenheim is suspicious of me."

"Promise you will leave at once," begged Fergus. "You are too valuable to us to be caught here in the explosion."

"While you are here, I remain,"

the girl gazed up at Fergus' battered face worshipfully. "You will find a way of escape. I am sure of it." She turned, darted through the door, closed it and locked it behind her.

"What a woman!" muttered Fergus to himself. He went to the window and looked out again. The fact that Lamonte was bringing a bomber with the hope of picking them up was a very comforting thought. If they could only escape from the chateau—

Cain crossed to where Fergus stood and dropped a friendly hand on his shoulder. "I'm sorry, old man," he apologized. "The girl is all right. It's a case of nerves, I guess. Barton and I are not accustomed to this kind of work. We are not made out of steel like you."

"Look down there," Fergus pointed through the window. "Visitors arriving for the concert. Every high-ranking officer in the sector will be inside the chateau in a few minutes. If the explosion does occur it will wipe out the brains of an army corps."

"AND three Yanks and a pretty girl," added Cain. "Well what the hell, we'll take plenty of company with us when we go. And what a surprise it will be to that fat swine of a major when the chateau blows up in his face."

"Listen!" barked Fergus. "Somebody's coming. We'll make our break now. If there are no more than three guards we'll tackle them. With a few rifles we could defend this tower against a brigade." He spun on Barton. "You got any fight left in you?" he demanded.

The wounded man staggered to his feet. "Still got one good arm," he muttered. "Anything is better than sitting around waiting for death."

"Cain, take the other side of the

door," said Fergus. "I'll open it, and if there are not too many of them, I'll grab the first one and drag him into the room. You slug him. Aim for the jaw and be sure you knock him cold. Toss his rifle to me. Move fast and think fast. It must all happen in the interval between seconds."

"Right," answered Cain. "Key's in the lock. Here they come."

THE three Yanks sprang to their places. The lock clattered and the door was kicked open. Fergus saw that the neat orderly who had first taken them to the major stood in the doorway. Behind him were three men. The orderly was not armed but the three guards bristled with rifles and bayonets and side arms. The orderly spoke in his precise English.

"Come, the general is waiting."

Fergus hesitated. If he grabbed the little orderly he would gain nothing and the guards would most certainly shoot him. The orderly blocked the doorway. He would have to be removed before Fergus could get anywhere near the men with the guns.

Barton let out a hollow groan and staggered forward. His eyes were bloodshot, his hair stood on end. As he lunged forward, Fergus barked at the orderly. "Look out for that man, he's shell-shocked."

Barton got the idea, let out a wild shriek and came stumbling forward. The orderly leaped through the door to get out of the way. At the same time, Fergus dived at the nearest guard, hooked steel fingers into the front of his blouse and jerked him forward. The man tried to catch himself and Fergus snatched the heavy rifle from his hand just as Cain's fist came whizzing out of the darkness of the other side of the door and caught the guard on the hinge of the jaw. Then, Barton

flung himself on another of the armed Boche and what followed was a mad whirl of fighting figures and a thud of blows.

Fergus swung the rifle savagely. It came down across a hood helmet with stunning force. The man reeled back and Fergus ran the bayonet through his body.

Cain grappled a guard, pinning his arms to his sides so that he couldn't swing his rifle on Fergus. The neat little orderly began to yell but Barton tripped the man as he ran toward the stair and dropped him with a smashing blow. He fell on top of him, grabbed a handful of hair, banged the man's head against the stone wall until he lay still.

"Get a gun," ordered Fergus. "That fool's yell will bring a swarm of Boche here in an instant. We'll run for it!"

Fergus led the way down the stairs, the bloody bayonet advanced and ready to plunge into the first man who tried to stop him. Cain provided himself with a rifle while Barton gripped a heavy pistol in his good hand.

Below them they could hear sounds of men running, the clump of heavy hob-nailed boots along the stone passageway. A door appeared in front of them. Fergus tried it. Locked. He swung the gun butt over his head and brought it down on the steel latch. The lock splintered with a crash and the door swung open.

He leaped through into a hallway. It was brightly lighted but deserted.

"Move fast," he snapped over his shoulder to Barton and Cain. "We'll find the girl first."

"You're crazy," gasped Cain. "She will hear that we've escaped, and she looks like one girl who can take care of herself. Head for the nearest exit."

A crowd of grey-clad figures appeared at the lower end of the hallway. Boche officers assembled for the concert. Fergus swung his rifle to his shoulder and emptied it into the mass of grey. Screams and shouts filled the hall. Pistols barked and lead spattered off the stone walls. Barton's heavy gun boomed thunderously and a plump colonel bounced into the air and came down in a heap of grey cloth.

Cain had not been idle. He had found a door at the lower end of the hallway and had flung it open. "This way," he cried; "this way!"

Fergus snapped the last shell into the magazine, took careful aim and fired.

"Back, back!" he called to Barton. The two of them ran through the door after Cain, slammed it behind them. Almost immediately the Germans began to pound on the other side.

They found themselves in a long, narrow room empty of furniture. Opposite the door there was a window. No other exit. Fergus leaped to the window and peered out.

He found himself gazing, not at the park outside the chateau, as he had expected, but into another room. This room was brightly lighted and so high was the ceiling that the lights could not penetrate to the upper corners. A group of German officers sat about a table at one end of the room. Before them, erect and unafraid, stood Hilda Storm.

Her face was pale and her hands were clenched at her sides. A grey-haired old man was questioning her. From the insignia on his collar, Fergus knew him to be the general. He barked a question in German and Hilda answered. There was a long pause, then the general sighed and reached for a paper in front of him.

He studied it for a moment, then signed it and tossed it across the table to Major Weidenheim. He

looked up at the girl then said in crisp German:

"You are guilty, *Fräulein*. You must pay the penalty. You will be executed tomorrow morning at dawn."

CHAPTER VIII

A Fighting Chance



CAIN plucked Fergus' sleeve, half turning him around.

"The door!" he cried. "They are smashing through the door. They will be on top of us in a second. Do we fight

or give up?"

"Only one answer to that one," growled Barton. "As long as Fergus is running this show, we fight. It's better than a firing squad, anyway. If we only had a few shots left. Guess I went sort of crazy back there when I saw all those Boche uniforms."

"They've got Hilda," Fergus' voice was dry, emotionless. "I was afraid that would happen. Run a bayonet under this window. We'll try and open it. It's the only way out. When we go we'll take Hilda with us."

Cain didn't argue. He'd come to know the captain well enough to realize the futility of wasting words. Instead, he slipped the red-stained point of his bayonet under the frame of the window and heaved.

The window buckled in the middle, the glass broke with a crackling sound and showered down into the room beyond. Fergus leaped through, swung for an instant by one hand and dropped to the floor below. He came down beside Hilda, lifted his heavy rifle and leveled it at the general's expansive medal-covered chest.

"Don't move," he spat out in German, "or I'll kill you! Call off

your men. Have them line up facing the wall."

Fergus saw that Major Weidenheim was there and von Grass and several tall, arrogant Prussians in spotless uniform. Very high ranking officers, he judged. For an instant nothing happened. The Boche sat in frozen attitudes. One man was half out of his chair. Major Weidenheim had reached for his pistol and his hand still gripped the butt in the holster. The general looked at the bloody bayonet not two inches from his chest, then he looked at Fergus. He shrugged.

He was an old campaigner and had been close to death many a time—but never so close as this. He was no fool and he wanted to live.

"Gentlemen, obey!" he said quietly. "I do not know how this madman came here, but we'd better do as he says."

Cain dropped from the window and turned to help Barton. Gently he eased the wounded man to the floor and the two of them came over and stood behind Fergus. They made a terrifying picture to this crowd of German officers who spent their time in clean quarters many miles behind the front.

One by one, the Germans stood up and moved toward the wall. Fergus kept his eyes fixed on the general. He'd heard of General Hartz before and knew that he was a man of considerable bravery. He could afford to take no chances.

Suddenly, Hilda screamed and lunged against Fergus' back. As he stumbled forward a pistol crashed under the table. Weidenheim had managed to twist the holster up until it pointed at Fergus. Then he had fired, hoping to break the captain's leg.

As Fergus' rifle wavered and went down, General Hartz came up out of his chair with a bull-like roar. At the same time, Cain lunged across

the table and drove his bayonet at Weidenheim. The blade missed but the heavy muzzle of the rifle caught the major in the shoulder. There was a sound of breaking bone. Weidenheim grunted and slid under the table.

The general had gone over backward and was now beyond reach of Fergus' bayonet. The three Yanks had no more bullets. The Boche suddenly realized this and came surging back to the attack. Pistols popped wrathfully. In the room above, the door gave way with a crash and heads appeared at the shattered window.

"Follow me," said a voice behind Fergus. "There is only one chance."

Hilda ran lightly across the room and seemed to disappear into the stone wall. One instant she was moving through the shadows and the next she was gone.

"Cain—Barton!" barked Fergus. "After her!"

A BOCHE officer thrust a Mauser into Fergus' face and pulled the trigger. The captain smashed it out of the way with a sweep of his rifle. The officer leaped back, flapping a broken arm and screaming with pain. There were so many generals, so much rank in the room that the younger officers hesitated about using their guns. It would never do to shoot at a prisoner and hit your own colonel. General Hartz belted orders but nobody paid any attention to him.

Pushing Barton in front of him, Fergus headed for the place where Hilda had disappeared. He saw now there was a dark opening there, the entrance to a passageway. From somewhere near at hand a gun boomed. Fergus heard the dull thud of the bullet as it hit a human body. Barton stumbled, almost fell, and Fergus caught him about the shoulders and urged him on. They had

gained the passageway now and could see Hilda crouched in the dark waiting for them.

"Hurry, hurry," she urged. Cain appeared, attempted to relieve Fergus of his burden. "He's hit," Fergus explained harshly. "Easy with him."

Barton suddenly gave a wild laugh and jerked his battered body erect. "They got me," he said. "Through the lungs. They got me but they haven't stopped me. Look at this!" He held a gun in his hand. He had snatched it from Major Weidenheim when that gentleman had gone under the table. "Back me up against the wall," ordered Barton. "I'm good for another ten minutes. Nobody will get past this corner while I'm here. Take the girl and go. I'll see that you're not followed."

"No, no!" protested Cain hotly.

Now, Captain Fergus had looked on death in many forms and knew the signs when he saw them. He'd heard that slug hit and knew that Barton had received a mortal wound. In another few minutes the man would be dead. There was no possible hope of him leaving the chateau alive. Fergus didn't stop to explain.

"Barton stays," he said. "If he can hold them back for a few seconds it might save us."

"I won't permit—" began Cain, but Fergus' icy voice stopped him. "You will do as I say. Go with the girl. Now!"

To Barton he said briefly: "Good-by, old man. Hold 'em as long as you can."

So great had been the confusion in the other room that the Germans did not know, as yet, what had happened to the prisoners. They had seen the woman disappear into a blank wall and the ragged and bloodstained Yanks follow. There'd been a second's delay before the younger officers came to investigate. They appeared now, three of them.

"Go on," said Barton. "This is the end for me and I know it. Good luck."

He stood with his back against the wall, his good arm braced against the cold stone. Steadily he lifted the pistol and sent a shot crashing down the narrow passage.

"That'll hold them," he chuckled. "I've got seven more left."

The last time Fergus ever saw Barton he was standing there against the wall, firing slowly and steadily into the advancing enemy. At least, Barton had had his wish. No firing squad had blotted him out.

WHEN Fergus joined Hilda, she looked over his shoulder and spoke sharply. "Where's the other man? Where's Barton? You're not going to leave him behind?"

"Barton picked his own job," Fergus explained in a thick voice. "He was a man. Know where this passage leads? You said you could guide us out of the chateau."

"I think so," the girl confessed. "Von Grass brought me through here this afternoon when he took me on a tour of inspection. There's a little room at the end of the passage. A room where the engineers and designers work. I saw a lot of blueprints and plans."

"How did you get caught?" demanded Fergus.

"I was on my way back here to get those plans," the girl said quietly. "There were guards in the next room. They came in and found me copying the design of the motor. After that, there was nothing I could say."

"Barton's still going," said Cain dully. "You can hear his gun. Nobody's passed him yet. If he has to die, let's make it worth his while."

They had been moving swiftly along the passage. It turned abruptly and they found themselves facing an open door. The room beyond was

bright with lights. A sentry stood just inside the door. Beyond that could be seen a long drawing table on the top of which was pinned flat folds of paper. This paper was covered with minute designs.

Plans of the motor! Fergus got a good grip on his rifle. Hilda stepped in front of him.

"Let me try," she demanded in a hoarse whisper. "Keep close behind me. When the sentry turns, I'll hold his rifle. Knock him out but don't kill him."

Fergus nodded in agreement. Hilda glided forward noiselessly.

The sentry turned, let out a yell and made a grab for the girl. Not a half an hour ago he had been one of the guards who had caught this woman in the act of copying the plans of the motor.

UP came his heavy gun, swept down toward Hilda's golden head. She tried to side-step and fend off the blow with her arms. She slipped and fell, and as she went down looked up to see the heavy steel butt of the rifle smashing down to strike between her eyes. And then there was blurred movement around her. Fergus was there, a tall, battered, bloody man who lunged at the guard with all the ferocity of a wild animal.

Metal clashed against metal. The sentry tried to change the direction of his attack. Fergus knocked his right arm away, battered it down with smashing blows, slammed the man against the wall and slugged him. The guard slumped.

Cain had been at the door to prevent interference. He now closed it and bolted it in place. The girl ran across and inspected the drawings on the table.

"Anything important?" asked Fergus. "We can't waste much time here."

Hilda looked up and frowned.

"They've cheated us," she announced in a voice that trembled. "They've removed the most important designs."

"All quiet outside." Cain jerked his thumb toward the passage they had just left. "That means the end of Barton."

Fergus inspected the room then turned to the girl. "Any way out of this place?" he demanded.

Slowly she shook her head. "Only the way we came," she answered. "I am—afraid they've got us."

"No they haven't," snarled Fergus. "There's always a chance. There is a window, anyway. If we have time we might break through and work our way out over the roof."

Cain had not been idle. He had been dragging heavy furniture and piling it against the door. Tables, chairs, filing cabinet, anything. "Get busy on the windows," he cried.

Fergus crossed the room swiftly, flung open the casement and looked out. The window was twenty feet from the roof below. Not an impossible jump. His spirits rose immediately.

"We've still got—" he began, but before he could finish a rifle cracked and the slug splashed against the wall beside Fergus' head. He leaped back and slammed the casement. "Sentry outside," he growled. "Got the window covered."

Somebody pounded on the barricaded door. "Captain Fergus? Captain Fergus?" The voice of von Grass filtered through the heavy paneling. "Be sensible and open the door!"

"No, no," cried the girl. "They will be merciless. We'll be turned over to Major Weidenheim. Never surrender."

"Come and get us!" Fergus scoffed at the voice on the other side of the door.

There was a short silence, then von Grass called again. "You are

very stupid, Captain. One grenade tossed through the window of that room would end this argument forever."

"Let me talk to him," begged Hilda. "There is just one chance and we must take it. We must bargain with them."

Hilda had already run across to the door and was calling to von Grass.

"Captain! All our lives are in danger. We have planted a time fuse under the chateau. It is hidden so you cannot find it. The chateau is filled with important officers. The machine shop and the new motors are here."

"You're lying!" came von Grass' answer. "You're up to your tricks again—"

"No, no," begged the girl. "What I say is true. We are afraid for ourselves. Promise us a chance to cross the lines and we will tell you where the time fuse is."

"If I thought you were telling the truth—" von Grass' voice had a doubtful ring. "I will report to the major," he added.

"Hurry, hurry!" called the girl with fear in her voice. "The time fuse has almost gone. There may be only a few minutes left."

Footsteps sounded outside followed by the harsh voice of Major Weidenheim. Brief and muttered conversation followed as von Grass explained the situation. Then the major laughed harshly.

"An old trick," he snarled. "Send a man around on the roof with the grenades. At once!"

"I guess that fixes us," said Cain wearily. "I never thought we'd get out of here anyway."

"To the window," ordered Fergus. "We've got to try and block those grenades. If one explodes inside this room—"

Hilda slumped down in a chair and buried her face in her hands.

When she had faced the court-martial she had been proud and apparently fearless. Now, her courage seemed to be broken.

"It's my fault," she sobbed. "I was the one who sent you here."

Outside a rifle cracked and glass showered into the room. Again a slug smashed through the window. The Boche were deliberately breaking the glass and, at the same time, preventing the prisoners from getting near the window.

"A GRENADE will come next," guessed Fergus. "No regrets. We've done the best we could."

"Listen!" said Cain. "A plane!"

Through the night came the dull roar of twin motors. They were not German motors, but French. Fergus and Cain were both sure of this. They had been flying long enough to recognize the peculiar rise and fall of Boche engines.

"Lamonte," guessed the girl. "He's come over to pick us up—just as he promised."

"If we could only signal him!" growled Fergus. "He must be loaded with bombs. He won't dare use them as long as he thinks we're inside the chateau. If we could only get word to him some way, somehow, so that he could use his bombs—after we're gone!"

There was a terrific explosion outside the window. A grenade burst there in a flash of orange flame. Steel splinters wailed into the room, thudded against the furniture and the walls. The Boche, not wishing to give the Yanks a chance to toss the grenade back through the window, had held them until the last second. The first had burst outside, the next would very probably come through the window before it exploded.

Hilda held out her hand to Fergus. "Good-by, Ansel. Knowing you has made life worth while. I

could not have come this far without your friendship."

Fergus gazed at her for an instant then whirled on Cain.

"Help me!" he barked. "Throw this furniture away from the door. We can't stay here and be slaughtered. We're going out!"

"They'll be waiting," warned Cain. "But it's worth—"

The rest of the sentence was blotted out by the crash of another grenade. This one had missed the window by only a few inches and the hot blast of the explosion filled the room with suffocating fumes. Fergus paused in his work to sniff questioningly.

"Gas!" he snarled. "They're using gas grenades on us. They're not trying to hit the window, but to fill the room with fumes and render us unconscious. That trick is typical of Weidenheim."

Another grenade splashed outside the window and again the gas came pouring into the room. The girl began to cough. Fergus cursed and tore at the barricade in front of the door.

"We can make it," he snarled. "Get that door open and we'll be on top of them before they know it!"

Cain's eyes blazed with new hope. He and Fergus seized the last table and flung it out of the way.

"Now!" cried Fergus, and reached for the door.

As his hand fell on the latch the floor under his feet lifted and quivered. Deep down in the bowels of the chateau began a mighty thunder, a vast roaring sound which seemed to expand until it filled all the world. The stone walls of the room leaped, and mortar dust showered down. The door bulged, hung trembling on its hinges for an instant and was blown in with the blast of air from outside.

Fergus flung himself to one side and in front of the girl to protect

her. A great light seemed to spring up out of the cellar of the chateau. It grew brighter and brighter, carrying everything in front of it. Fergus felt himself falling. Black smoke rolled about his head and dimly he could see the form of Hilda stumbling toward him. Then the picture was blotted out.

CHAPTER IX

Bombs of Doom



NSEL FERGUS was the first to regain consciousness. Smoke still eddied about his head and, somewhere in the very near neighborhood a roaring fire raged in the ruins. He sat up, tried to breathe. "Hilda!"

He began a swift search of the room. The girl lay wedged under the wreck of the table. He dragged her clear and called to her fearfully.

"Hilda, wake up. Are you hurt? Speak to me, Hilda!"

Cain came crawling across the floor, dragging a broken leg.

"My God!" he groaned. "The top of the world must have blown off!"

Hilda stirred and came to life, staggered to her feet. She caught Fergus' arm for support, steadied herself and tried to smile.

"Listen," said Cain grimly from the floor. "You two get the hell out of here—now!"

A flickering light danced in the wrecked room. It came nearer, burned with a fierce crackling sound. Hilda and Fergus exchanged looks. Silently they took their places, one on each side of the wounded man, put their arms around his shoulders, moved slowly toward the open door.

Painfully they dragged themselves across the debris. In the passage they found what remained of von Grass and Major Weidenheim. The

two bodies lay side by side, faces pillowed on crossed arms as if the men had thrown themselves down and tried to cover their heads to protect themselves from that awful blast of death. Fergus studied the remains of his old enemy for a moment, shook his head and stumbled on. All hatred had been seared out of his mind now. The death of Weidenheim seemed to matter very little.

Cain gritted his teeth and groaned.

"You're fools for trying to save me," he growled. "Dump me in a corner somewhere and run for it."

Fergus and Hilda paid no attention to him. They were in the hall now and had come to a turn. Before them lay the room where Hilda had faced the general and been sentenced to death. There was no longer a room there. Only a great, gaping hole, the sides of which were plastered with bits of grey cloth and blobs of red. Hilda shuddered and turned away. Fergus found some steps. They went down and came out into a courtyard.

"Somebody coming," grunted Fergus. "Steady!" They shrank back against the wall. A man ran into the courtyard. His head was a blackened mass from which appeared red, lidless eyes. He whimpered like a tortured animal. His hands were lumps of fire-scarred flesh. He trotted across the courtyard, whimpering and stumbling, went through an archway and was gone.

The fire blazed higher and higher. The explosion had thrown a rain of oil over the park and the landing field, for trees and hangars and even the ground itself seemed to spurt flame. Men ran crazily about in a futile attempt to put out the spreading fire. Nobody paid any attention to the three weird, blackened figures which came stumbling toward the wall about the chateau. The pacing sentries were gone, had joined those

mad figures who danced about in the firelight.

They stopped to rest and Cain clumsily pulled the watch from his pocket.

"I thought so," he grumbled. "We are fools. It's almost twelve. Lamonte won't be waiting for us. When he saw the chateau blow up he probably ran for it. If he didn't, he's an idiot."

"You don't know Lamonte," protested the girl. "He'll wait until the last second."

IN they stumbled through the dark. Fergus and Cain had lost all track of place or time but the girl seemed to know where she was going. They went through a gate in the wall and followed a dark road for a while. They went past a deserted village, and once it was necessary for them to leave the road and hide in a thicket while a column of troops trotted swiftly by in the dark.

After what seemed an endless drag down a long, dark lane, the girl stopped to point to a field which lay just ahead.

"This is the place," she muttered.

Fergus studied the field, then shook his head. "You're right, Cain. He's gone. Might have known our luck couldn't hold."

Hilda urged them forward. "We must make sure," she panted. "Look, is that a shadow over against the trees? It is!" Her voice rose shrilly. "The bomber!" She took a step forward and cried out faintly, and went down.

Fergus heard himself yelling, saw men running from the shadowy bomber. After that, everything was a blur.

Fergus remembered insisting that Hilda be carried to the plane first and that Lamonte and Major Galvin be very careful with Cain on account of his leg. He recalled walk-

ing to the plane, crawling wearily into the cabin and dropping to the floor. The next thing he knew they were in the air, soaring up out of the dark into brightly lighted skies; skies which flamed with the reflection of the roaring inferno below.

MAJOR GALVIN, in a pilot's seat, turned and said over his shoulder: "We've got a few bombs. We might as well finish the job."

Fergus felt the lift and jar of the bomber as the steel eggs were released, heard the muffled thunder as the giant torpedoes burst in the hell of fire below.

Then he heard another sound—the beat of engines and the high-pitched crackle of machine-guns. He dragged himself to the gunner's seat and reached for the grips of the twin Vickers. He had expected something like this. Boche planes would be in the air. The bomber was not to escape without a fight.

A black shape came diving out of the heights and he ripped a burst into it as it shot past and saw fire spurt from the motor cowling as his slugs took effect. Another black-crossed ship appeared and he fired at that until it was out of range. Others came.

Steadily Fergus worked his guns, driving off the attacking forces, battering down the enemy ships as they dived at the fleeing bomber.

And then Galvin was pounding him on the back and shouting in his ear. "They're gone!" Galvin cried. "Here comes our own bunch. The boys of the 25th. They got worried about us and came over to escort us home."

Fifteen minutes later the bomber came down over the drome of the 25th and landed. Fergus and Hilda were able to walk across to the Operations Office, but Cain had to be carried. Cain still thought he was dreaming.

"We didn't get away. I don't believe it. I'll wake up in a minute and Weidenheim will be ordering out a firing squad."

The flight surgeon appeared, thrust the tip of a needle into Cain's arm and the muttering voice quieted.

In the Operations Office sandwiches and coffee and rum were waiting. New life came back to Hilda's wan face.

"We must go away for a rest," she told Fergus. "They've got to let you have a long rest now. It will soon be spring in Paris. Spring, with the chestnut trees in bloom."

Next Month's Novel: BLACK FLIGHT, by GEORGE BRUCE

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a gamble*



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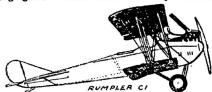
PROBAK JUNIOR

The Ships on the Cover

By EUGENE M. FRANDZEN

THE British Sopwith 1½ Strutter was one of those ships that rated so high early in the war that all the Allied governments were scrambling to get them for their own air forces. T.O.M. Sopwith began making planes that did things back in 1912. His seaplane scout won the Schneider Cup at Monoca. His "Bat boat" was so good that the Germans bought them before the war.

The amphibian "bat boat" had wheels which could be raised or lowered long before the days of modern retractable landing gear. Then came the Sop Tabloid



which so revolutionized airplane design in 1913 that it became the grandpa of all fighting scout machines of the war. All the best features of former Sopwith models had been incorporated in the Tabloid.

In 1915 the Sop 1½ Strutters came out with the goods. They carried a synchronized gun firing through the propeller. The gun and the plane were a Sopwith team as the Sopwith Aviation Co. developed the synchronization gear which made the teamwork possible. The 1½ Strutter was a two-seater, although they manufactured a single seat version later.

The name 1½ Strutter came from the peculiar bracing job. The top wing was in two parts joined to a center section. To support these, short struts ran from the top of the fuselage at an angle to quite a distance out on the top wing.

Another Two-Seater

The Rumpler C1 was a two-seater also. It wasn't much of an original idea in design as it was so directly related to the old Taube which the Rumpler Co. had manufactured under license from its originator, the Austrian Etrich. The C1 had the backswept fish-like tail of the Taube monoplanes. An exposed radiator hung in the breezes at the center part of the leading edge of the top wing.

One day back in 1916 these two-seaters, the Sop and the Rumpler got in a scrap. That is where we find them on the cover.

Two Rumplers have ganged up on the Sop, which wouldn't place the 1½ Strutter in such a bad position as it was a much superior ship and welcomed a chance to show off to the challenging Germans. The Britishers were cocky and allowed the German observer to get in a burst.

The pilot of the land 1½ Strutter suddenly groaned in an agonized breath. The observer busy swinging his Lewis on the German ship couldn't hear the startled cry from the front pit. The ship lurched and nearly threw the amazed runner from his cockpit. He turned his head. "What the—" he shouted and was suddenly silent. The pilot was bent over the instrument panel. With no dual controls the ship seemed doomed. There was only one thing to do.

"Hold Her Steady!"

The observer shouted "Hold her steady!" He swung out of his pit and muscled slowly up over the turtleback and grabbed a center section strut as the ship shuddered from the enemy's fire. It rocked and swayed dangerously. Holding onto the fuselage the observer got on the left wing

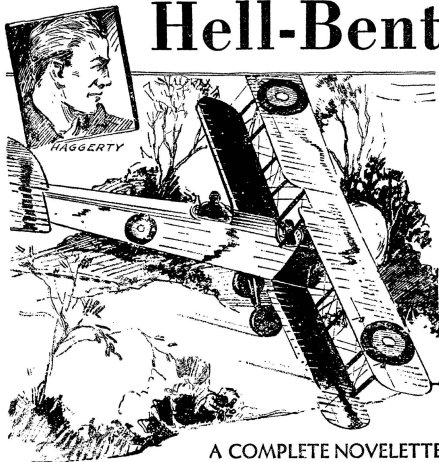


and inched his way to his comrade's side. German bullets had put both the plucky pilot's arms out of commission. He was trying to fly the plane with his legs and feet alone. His face was chalk-like, his teeth clamped tight in pain. The observer grabbed the stick and pulled up the nose. Then, as the Rumplers came in for the kill, their guns churning a drizzle of slugs into the Allied ship, he shoved the stick against the firewall. The Sop nosed over.

As the gap widened between the diving Sop and the surprised German pilots, the British anti-aircraft gunners on the ground below who had been waiting for just such a break smacked upward a curtain of screaming steel. The Rumplers' pilots quickly turned back across their own lines.

The 1½ Strutter pulled drunkenly out of her dive, wobbled and did a bellyflop in an abandoned potato patch behind the lines. It took two to land her, a pilot and a backseat driver who said little but did much.

Hell-Bent



A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

CHAPTER I

Answer to a Pilot's Prayers

HAGGERTY had a bad reputation. There were men along the front who winced at the mere mention of his name. There were squadron commanders who had been in authority at various times over Haggerty who cursed feelingly at the memory.

No squadron commander had ever had Haggerty for very long. He was the kind of guy no one could en-

sure for long. Hence he had a checkered service pattern. He had been shifted about from outfit to outfit along the front. One man stood him as long as possible, and then begged for relief, and the next man got him. He was passed along the lines with celerity.

Probably Haggerty would have known every trial board in the A. E. F. if it had not been for the fact that he was a fighter. In war times superior officers will stand a lot from a man who can go out and

A Blustering Bully Faces a Grim Test

Haggerty



MARTIN

By **GEORGE
BRUCE**

Author of
"Limpy," "Squadron of the
Damned," etc.



As the Ger-
mans jumped
for cover, the
D H roared in

OF A FIGHTING DEMON!

drag in victories, and Haggerty had a way of doing that.

He was not nice to look at, this Haggerty. He was big and freckled, with hands like hams and a head like a bullet. He had a fist-flattened nose, and a thin white scar that ran from the middle of his left cheek, over the center of his mouth and trailed down over his chin on the right side. The pucker of the scar gave his mouth a permanently sardonic cast—like a perpetual grin of contempt, of devilishness.

He had hard, hazel-grey eyes. He looked at a man and the man was guilty of a little icy flutter over his body. When Haggerty looked at a man in anger, he was ferocious. His voice was a booming, rasping bellow, and his body swaggered and swanked.

He knew he was good. He had no objection to telling the whole world, in loud tones, just how good Hell-Bent Haggerty really was.

"Gimme the whole damned Square-head Air Service, one ship at a time, one pilot at a time, and I'll whip

of His Manhood in Flaming Skies!

'em without landing—except for gas and oil. I've seen 'em, almost all. I can out-game 'em, out-fight 'em and out-bluff 'em. They're my meat—I love 'em—the dogs!"

Which is a gentle idea of Haggerty's estimate of the enemy and his own qualifications. In fact, after a while he took in more territory and decided that he could take 'em three at a time "just to make it more interesting."

Haggerty had a lot of decorations—and he laughed at them. He never wore them. He never wore a complete uniform. Often he went out to fly with a leather coat pulled over his pyjamas. He never wore a tunic. He wore his shirt open at the neck, exposing the great root of his neck and the swelling shoulders. He chewed tobacco, spat wherever he happened to be, and drank prodigiously without ever getting drunk. He flew some of his greatest combats after a whole night of bottle emptying.

He was a perverse devil. If he didn't like an order, he didn't carry it out, no matter how important it might be. Then, he'd go out on his own and do the damndest things, like running a one-man reconnaissance on a town two hundred miles out of his sector, merely because he heard that the Limeys had tried the job and failed. Or he'd run a one-man strafe on an enemy field, loading down the cockpit with hand grenades and filling his belts with incendiaries.

He burned the field of the 4th German *Jagdstaffel* when he was a member of the proud 103rd Pursuit Squadron, and the commanding officer of that squadron never forgave him. For wherever the outfit went after that, it was marked, and its base knew no peace; for the enemy air declared open war on the 103rd, and night after night, day after day, carried out reprisals. Of course, Hag-

gerty was gone from the 103rd before the reprisals started hitting on both banks, but the enemy Air couldn't know that, nor that the strafe of the 4th *Jagdstaffel's* field was a one-man job, carried out and planned by Hell-Bent Haggerty.

One either hated Haggerty or loved him. He was that kind of a character—and nobody in the A. E. F. ever admitted to having an affection for him. Commanding officers gave him decorations with fingers crossed, hoping that Haggerty would not break up the formation with a sarcastic wise crack during the ceremony. He had the whole blasted A. E. F. buffaloed. He didn't give a hang for any man in authority, from Pershing down. It was a one-man war as far as Haggerty was concerned, with no holds barred. He feared neither the devil, disaster nor death.

YOU can't discipline a man who has the devil in his eyes, who laughs at your authority and to all intents and purposes invites you to send him to Leavenworth on a dozen charges for a general court. And then, after he laughs at you, gets you a decoration as a squadron commander, by pulling something that reflects to the glory of the whole air service.

One merely got rid of Haggerty to save one's sanity.

Lieutenant-Colonel Gaynor got rid of him. Gaynor commanded the 9th Pursuit. He button-holed Captain Phil Martin, who was temporarily in command of the 20th Observation Squadron, at a Headquarters pow-wow one day.

"Look, Martin," said the lieutenant-colonel. "I have a man in my outfit that would be a natural for you. He's the kind of a pilot who would make a great name for himself in Observation Aviation. A very hell on wheels. Just the kind of a man to

fly one of those D Hs of yours. He's honestly too good for a pursuit pilot. It's all too easy for him. He should be put on assignment where his experience, daring and fighting qualities could be used to the uttermost."

"Who is this superman?" asked Martin.

"Lieutenant Haggerty—a Lieutenant Michael Haggerty—and the finest—"

Martin's eyes looked stricken.

"You don't mean—Hell-Bent Haggerty?" he asked weakly.

"Yes—matter-of-fact, I do," said the lieutenant-colonel with a severe look. "And as I was saying, the finest pilot I've ever known—"

"My God!" moaned Captain Martin. "Has it finally got to me?"

"I don't understand, sir," said the colonel. "You're being extremely obtuse—"

"I suppose I had to get it finally, but I'd hoped the blamed war would be over before he got around to me."

The colonel suddenly grinned. Captain Martin grinned too—a very sickly grin. But captains do not refuse to do favors for colonels who are Wing Commanders, if the captains want to be good little majors or to taste the joys of preference and promotion. And Captain Martin was in line to be a major—was doing a major's job—and he knew that even a hint from the colonel was as good as a direct order.

So, he went back to Mobre, and requisitioned the services of Hell-Bent Haggerty for the 20th Observation Squadron. He signed the papers with a heavy heart. And the transfer was made so quickly that Haggerty was on the 20th's field almost before the orderly had time to make a return trip from Wing Headquarters.

"I'm Haggerty," announced the newcomer curtly as he stood before

Captain Martin's desk. He looked Martin up and down and from side to side as if making up his mind what kind of an animal his new commanding officer was to be. "You sent for me? What d'ya want?"

"I'm sorry, Haggerty, to have to requisition you away from a pursuit outfit—away from Colonel Gaynor—but I've got problems. I thought a man like you could give me a hand. I've got a lot to learn about this business—and I know you're an old-timer over here—"

Haggerty said: "Hell, don't feel sorry taking me away from that walrus-faced, moose-jawed, thirty-second-degree four-flusher who wears the silver leaves on his shoulders. I'm damned glad to get away from the sight of his silly-looking mug. He's a washout in capital letters. If he knows a tail skid from a cabane strut, I'll drink a pint of Japalac without a gurgle. He knows we're making the world safe for the Democrats—and that's all he does know about the business."

MMARTIN'S face was red-tinged, and he was strangling to keep from whooping, but he managed a straight face.

"Well, I'm glad to know you have no qualms about serving for a while with a two-seater outfit. Most men don't like to be transferred out of pursuit flying. They think it's a comedown—"

"An airplane is an airplane to me. I figure I can do as much with a two-seater as I can with a one-seater. The odds don't bother me none. If you get close enough to 'em, and hit 'em enough times, you'll knock down the guy you're after, and that's all that worries me. Most of the single-seater pilots I see need the added speed and climb to get the devil-home when a Jerry bounces on a tail. Me—hell, gimme a barn door

that'll take off and I'll worry about the speed and climb."

"That's swell," said Martin. Hell, he thought. It's a cinch to get along with men, when you know how to handle them. Humor this Haggerty guy, give him his head, let him go barging wherever he wanted to barge, give him an open assignment to make it official—and Haggerty would take care of himself.

"Who do you want murdered?" asked Haggerty with his crooked grin.

"Haggerty!" said Martin severely. "The thing I need most is one man in this outfit that I don't have to worry about. A man who can go out and do things, cover the whole front on his own responsibility, without a direct order from me every time he turns over a prop. I need a man with *sabe*, get it, who knows his way around and knows the answers to all the questions. I need a guy who can look down on an enemy position, memorize it and then come home and draw the map—and be right. I need a man who can go out on an assignment, and stay with it, even if he has to fight to keep his crate over the spot. Is that too much to ask?"

"Hell, no!" boomed Haggerty. "But who the devil told you about me? Say—that's me all over!"

"That's what I thought!" smiled Martin as if in vindication. "That's all I want to know. You go out of here, pick yourself any billet that's vacant, and fly where and when you want to. I'll take care of the routine stuff—but I don't want to be bothered with you. Got that straight? Okay, then."

"Say!" yelled Haggerty enthusiastically. "Santa Claus must have brought you! Why, I been looking for a guy like you to team up with for years. You're the answer to a pilot's prayers. Listen, Skipper, you watch my smoke. This is where the

20th OBS gets famous. Why, we're going to make them pursuit outfits ashamed of themselves. If I don't get five squareheads in the first month with this outfit, I'll kiss your hand on the front steps of city hall. That's me."

"You can go across the field and pick out any one of the ships that are not assigned," said Martin. "You take care of yourself, Haggerty—I'm depending on you to do that."

"Yes, *sir!*" boomed Haggerty. "And how!" And he swaggered out of Operations, his chin up like an Irish King, a grin on his scar-twisted mouth and the light of eagles in his eyes.

"A cinch when you know men!" breathed Martin to himself. "Why, that big, swaggering, brow-beating gorilla—I'll have him eating out of my hand." There was a smile on his face as he turned to his work.

CHAPTER II

Cock-of-the-Walk



UT Captain Martin did not know his Hell-Bent Haggerty.

Staff Sergeant Garrity discovered Haggerty almost immediately. Garrity was also Irish, and the nature of his temper was reflected in the red of his hair and the jutting of his jaw. He saw Haggerty coming across the field, toward the hangars, and from two hundred yards he discovered that he disliked the newcomer completely.

"Well, well, Sergeant," boomed Haggerty from a range of fifty yards. "Show some life now. The skipper and I have decided that from now on things are going to be different around here. I'm Haggerty. Hell-Bent Haggerty—maybe you've heard of me?"

Haggerty stood with his legs spread wide and his hands on his

hips, his head cocked to one side, regarding the staff sergeant up and down, and with a look of pained displeasure on his face.

"Trot me out three or four crates till I look 'em over—that is, if you've got anything inside those side show tents fit to fly. But I'll fix that. From now on, things are going to be different. I'll have this outfit jumping six feet high every time I open my mouth."

Garrity, the master mechanic, stood in the same attitude, aping Haggerty's actions.

"Haggerty?" he asked slowly, his face screwed up as if in the throes of memory. "Haggerty? Seems I did hear the name once. Back in Ireland, it was. They hung a guy by the name of Haggerty for stealing sheep. That was before you were born, of course, but I misdoubt if it could be anybody else but your father. Come to think of it, you bear the man a great resemblance. And did the *captain* tell you that my name is Garrity—and that I'm no messenger boy? Did he happen to mention that—"

"Oh, it's going to be like that, is it?" said Haggerty almost sorrowfully. He shook his head in a puzzled manner. "You know," he continued, "all I've done since coming into this so-called American Air is to lick staff sergeants who didn't know their betters—and how to stay in their places. Yes, sir, the last six master mechanics I've run into—I had to lick."

"If you forgot for a minute that you're supposed to wear bars on those shoulders—which you don't—and if you could bring yourself to forget for a minute that you're supposed to be an officer and a gentleman—which you're not—I have an idea that your luck with sergeant mechanics would be changin'—and damned quick," Garrity rumbled.

"Garrity, you said the name was,

eh?" asked Haggerty softly. He pulled his half unbuttoned shirt over his head and spat on his hands. "And might I be asking—why, with a name like that and the map of Ireland on your face, you aren't with the rest of your gang, stabbin' England in the back and playing puss-in-the-corner with the squareheads?"

"I wouldn't be after lickin' an officer in such a public place," suggested Garrity. "Shall it be behind the hangar?"

"Make it easy on yourself—what the devil do I want to walk around there for, to push your ugly-looking face in the dirt? Here is as good as any—"

And Garrity, with a rumbling roar in his chest, charged, his hands doubled into hams, his eyes blazing, his jaw protruding and his legs driving. His arms and fists swung like flails, and Haggerty, an unholy grin on his twisted face, side-stepped, and permitted Garrity to plunge on three or four steps, before he could check the rush.

"Tut, tut, now, me man!" he said reprovingly. "That may be good form at a Donnybrook, but in fighting Hell-Bent Haggerty it's like committin' suicide. I could have popped you with the greatest of ease."

"Well, be poppin' then!" growled Garrity. And he charged again. Head down, spurning the sod with his heavy feet, his fists swinging, he came on.

BUT Haggerty did not sidestep. He stepped to the right, a feint, and then stepped forward, fast. His right hand came up from somewhere around his right knee. There was the thud of fist against jaw. Garrity stopped as if pole-axed. He stood for a minute, his eyes staring. Then he collapsed slowly, his knees buckling under him, his hands clutching at Haggerty's knees to hold him up.

"What was that you said about an

officer and a gentleman?" asked Haggerty sweetly. "For a fighter, you do too much leadin' with your jaw—"

Garrity got gamely to his feet.

"It's a mighty wallop you do be havin'," he mumbled through the blood running down his mouth and chin, "but it's meself that can lick any Haggerty that was ever born. Guard yourself, man!"

And Haggerty grinned all over his face, took a deep breath, pushed out his left hand and jabbed Garrity's head straight, lifted the chin. He said:

"Well, good-by for a minute, Sergeant Garrity. Me and the skipper have things of importance to attend to—" and the right hand whistled as it drove straight from the shoulder. It bounced wickedly off the side of Garrity's chin for a bull's-eye with a resounding thwack.

GARRITY'S head snapped back, and his body inclined to a ninety-degree angle with his heels dragging from the force of that smack. Then he fell on his shoulders and remained very still, his arms outthrown, his mouth wide open.

Haggerty looked at the broken skin over his knuckles.

"Like a mule!" he said to himself. "Just like a mule—a head and jaw like a bit of granite, which makes a man bust his hands wide open. Before the war ends I'm going to ruin myself knocking these mules for loops—"

He looked around. He found a dozen men standing, agape, staring at him and then at Garrity. And from the look on their faces he understood that Garrity had been a very tough egg indeed on the field of the 20th OBS and had been the cock-of-the-walk. He whirled on them, and stood facing them, his jaw stuck out, and his hands hanging at his sides.

"Maybe you heard of me?" he de-

manded of them collectively. "I'm Hell-Bent Haggerty. The sergeant there didn't seem to remember me. I was saying to him that me and the skipper had ideas about how this funny-looking outfit should be run. Now—while I've got my shirt off—is there anybody else I can accommodate?"

There was a long silence.

At the end Haggerty said:

"Now, you guys, run out all the unassigned ships in those hangars and put 'em on the line. Try to get the motors turning over. I want to pick me out a ship from this collection of flying junk. And remember, in case anybody asks you—Hell-Bent Haggerty has arrived on the field."

So they ran out the DH 4s, and he looked them over and made insulting remarks, which were without foundation. For the ships were fairly new and as well conditioned as any ships could be under front-line basing conditions. After a while he picked himself a crate.

"Now, just so we understand things," he told the hangar crew. "I don't like anybody monkeying with my ship. I don't want anything done to it, ever, without seeing me first. Who's the gun mechanic here?"

"I am," said a little fat boy. There was very little enthusiasm in the declaration.

"Listen, son," said Haggerty. "I'm used to having the shells that go into my belts calipered before they go in—see? I'm used to having them polished after every time I fly. Nice and bright, smooth, so that they look like the brass work on an admiral's barge. I have 'em calipered for size, so that there won't be any oversized jackets to jam my guns—that's what I'm used to, see?"

"My neck is valuable. I've had to kill a couple of gun mechanics because they got a little careless. I just want to point out to you that if I ever have a shell stick in a gun

breach, or I don't find those cartridge cases polished, I'm going to be very hard to get along with—understand?"

"Yes, sir." The gun mechanic's voice was just audible.

"Very well then. I will now put me shirt back on. But I can take it off, just as fast." He glared at them.

There was no suggestion that he leave it off. They remembered Garrity getting back to his feet after five minutes, a dazed look in his eyes, a big blue lump the size of an egg under his jaw and his mouth bashed in. They wanted no part of Hell-Bent Haggerty.

But anyone can imagine what a prime favorite Haggerty became on the instant with the men of the 20th. And how popular he was on the field.

CHAPTER III

Half-Wing Gunner



CAPTAIN MARTIN sitting at his field desk, looked up. He held a sheaf of papers in his hands, a set of service records.

"Lieutenant Haggerty," he said formally and with a smile, "meet Lieutenant Gerald Cochrane."

Haggerty's eyes passed over the new youngster casually and appraisingly.

"How ya?" he said. He didn't offer to shake hands.

"Cochrane here has just come down from the pool, assigned as an observer," explained Martin. "He has a beautiful record. I'm glad to get him. I've been trying to settle in my mind who to assign to you as your back seat man. Somehow, the men here on the field already have assignments I can't change, or didn't seem to fit. So Cochrane comes down and solves the problem. I'm giving

him to you, Haggerty—take good care of him."

Haggerty's mouth moved around the corners. He looked straight at Cochrane. He saw a slight, pale-faced youth, with a slender young body, and meticulously correct uniform, blue eyes, straw colored hair, and a sensitive mouth.

"Cochrane?" he repeated half to himself. "Seems to me I've heard the name—somewhere." His eyes dropped to the left breast pocket of Cochrane's uniform. "So they busted you out, eh?" he said with a growl in his voice. "You couldn't take it?"

The boy's face flamed. His eyes narrowed. The sensitive mouth set itself into hard lines. He looked contemptuously at Haggerty.

"What the devil are you talking about, Haggerty?" demanded Martin hotly.

"Get a load of that tunic," invited Haggerty. "Look where he's wearing that lousy half-wing! Well, you can see, by the change of color on the cloth, that once there was a whole wing there—the wings of a pilot—and they're gone, and they saved his face by giving him a half wing—and now he's here. What the devil! This is no place for guys who move from the front seat to the back. There's always a reason for that. I know what the reason is." He touched the tip of his forefinger to the discoloration on Cochrane's tunic.

Cochrane's hand snapped out. There was the smack of the hand against the flesh of Haggerty's hand.

"Keep your damned hands to yourself!" The words hissed out of the boy's mouth.

"You keep your mouth shut, Haggerty," commanded Martin. "I said that Cochrane is assigned to you. That finishes the matter and I won't have an officer insulted in my presence—"

"You?" Haggerty's laugh was gratifying. "Listen, all you have to do is

sit here on a big chair and tell other guys what to do and where to go. They'll make you a major pretty soon, and you'll do more sitting and heavy thinking. Me—I got to do the flying. I got to look after my own neck. And take it from me, Mr. Martin, when I go, I'm going to have a guy in the back seat who hasn't been busted for losing his nerve. I want somebody back there who hasn't been broken before the squareheads get a crack at him. Where I go takes nerve—"

It seemed that Cochrane's face was suddenly all eyes. Large, blue, glittering eyes, and that his mouth was an almost imperceptible white line. He stepped forward. His body half crouched. He looked half the size of Haggerty.

Martin's voice leaped out of his chest.

"Cochrane, stow it! No trouble, understand? By God, I will not have fighting in my outfit between my officers. How dare you pull that stuff in front of me?"

Cochrane's hands dropped to his sides. He said: "I'm sorry, sir, only—"

"Yeah," smirked Haggerty. "Only—I get it—"

Cochrane ignored Haggerty entirely.

"I thought you looked at my service record, sir," he told Martin. "It's written on there that I've been a pursuit pilot and was transferred to observation. What Haggerty had guessed is the truth. I did get busted for losing my nerve. I tried to tell them that I was over that—but they cut my wings in half. They let me stay in the air because—well, damn it, because I'm the best machine-gunner in the air service.

"I came over here with a boy I knew from a kid. I watched him burn. I was right alongside of him when he got it. It got on my nerves. I lost a ship—two ships—and ran out

of a fight. Maybe I can't fly—but I can sure as hell shoot."

"You don't have to tell me anything," said Martin quietly. "I know men."

"I'll be seein' you," said Haggerty carelessly. He sauntered out of the tent.

THE next morning his ship was warming on the line. He was scheduled to make his first flight for the 20th. The skipper had a long talk with him.

"I want you to scout that railroad line running northwest from here. Look it over carefully. We've had a devil of a time getting in there. I'd like to have pictures of the whole line as far as you can run it down, without killing yourself. I have an idea they're fixing it up to run railroad guns up into this neck of the woods, and I'd like to have the dope to stop that if they make the try."

"I'll get pictures so good you'll be able to pick out the warts on the conductor's nose," grinned Haggerty. "Just turn me loose."

"Okay," smiled Martin. "You're turned loose."

And Haggerty strutted across the field.

At the side of the ship he stopped short. He looked up at the rear seat. He saw a figure swathed in a flying coat stowing the gear belonging to the back seat in place, and getting ready to squirm down into place.

"Hey, what the devil—oh, it's you!" Haggerty's voice was suddenly like vitriol. "I thought I told you where you rated with me. I thought the skipper told me I had an observer."

Cochrane's white face looked down at him.

"You have," he said quietly. "I'm the guy. If you figure you can get this bus off the ground, suppose you climb in that front seat and show us just how good you are."

"Get down out of there!" ordered Haggerty ominously. "Get out before I snatch you down on the ground."

"If I get down, it'll only be to smack you in the middle of that thing you call a face," said Cochrane.

Haggerty's big hands reached up. He plucked Cochrane bodily out of the cockpit, thrust him down on the ground.

"Little boys shouldn't play around with airplanes," he said.

There was the sudden spat of a fist against his face. A gout of blood spurted from his nose. Before he could duck, a left and a right smacked against his jaw. A fist smashed him in the stomach, doubled him over, and a hook caught him under the chin.

The gang was running out of the hangars. They were breathlessly strained. The sight of a half pint kid socking hell out of the mighty Hell-Bent Haggerty!

Then Haggerty's big fist swung through a short arc. There was the sickening thud of that fist against Cochrane's body, and the kid went down—sick—writhing on the ground.

The gang looked at Haggerty's face. His eyes were blazing and his flesh was mottled with rage. The blood streamed from his nose. There was a bruise forming under an eye. They saw Cochrane's hand pushing his body up from the ground. Coming up groggily, and doggedly. Getting to feet, standing an instant, his eyes looking at Haggerty's face, then putting his head down and going in, his fists swinging.

HE hit Haggerty twice. He punched fast, like a machine-gun, that kid. And then Haggerty clipped him again, and he went down a second time—to his hands and knees, with his head hanging.

His body quivered. He got up,

more slowly. He took a big breath. He was grinning a funny, queer grin. His hands were down low, in punching position. He feinted Haggerty into swinging with his left, ducked under the punch, clipped Hell-Bent on the chin with his own left, hooked a right to the other side.

And Haggerty knocked him down again.

"Why don't you quit this foolishness!" bellowed Haggerty. "What the devil do you want—want me to kill you? You ain't got a chance—you don't hit hard enough. This time I'll knock your head off."

Cochrane was coming to his feet. Climbing up—first on his knees and then balancing precariously, but he was coming.

"I'm flying in the back seat of that ship," he said thickly. "You may as well discover that now. You can go on punching. I'll be getting up as long as I can move—and as soon as I can move again, you'll have it to do all over. You're not so tough after all, Haggerty. Hell, you've had four smacks at me and I'm not out. You must be getting soft."

"Well, I'm a —" remarked Haggerty, looking at the kid and then looking at the gang. "The little monkey is tough."

"And any time I don't like the lip you hand out, we'll begin all over again. I can get up—until you wear yourself out or bust your hands. And when you do—I'll kick hell out of you—" Cochrane reached dizzily for the side of the DH. He crawled into the back seat. He looked down at Haggerty.

"Well," he said through his white mouth. "Do we fly—or do we go on from where we were?"

"Aw, bunk!" growled Haggerty. But he climbed into the front seat. There was a little twisted grin on his face as he stuck his head under the crash pad to look at the turn-buckles on the rudder control.

CHAPTER IV

Morning Sortie

ONCE the railroad line had run north and south through Mobre, and had carried the commerce and passengers of three or four nations. Now there was a definite break in the tracks north of Mobre. It was like a broken spine, with the litter of chipped and fractured bones marking the location of the front. South of that fracture the French moved troops and munitions over the tracks. North of the line the Germans did the same. They used the same rolling stock which in peace time had been coordinated for the good of mankind. Now the little fussy puffing locomotives and the ridiculous-looking goods vans were busily engaged in the business of mutual murder.

And the enemy was particularly vicious in his protection of his half of the right of way. Those steel tracks, running over the contours of the earth, were the nerve ganglia which kept alive his troops in the Mobre sector and made war possible. Down that line came field guns, moving in a hurry from place to place, and thousands and thousands of grey-green-clad troops. Came food, shells, gas, horses, equipment, ammunition.

No, the enemy was not anxious to have pictures taken of his half of the Mobre railroad.

And Hell-Bent Haggerty tooted his DH lazily over the tracks. He looked down at the tree-lined right of way, and at the rolling fields over which troops moved in the open, and he talked to Cochrane in the back seat through the Gosport.

"Listen, you crazy little, bantam-sized, half-winged ex-pilot," he said into the mouthpiece. "If you've got your two eyes open, start working that camera. It's no picnic coming

up here. I want shots of all that ground down there, and we're looking for a railroad battery if you know what a railroad battery looks like. Try to forget that you weren't good enough for flying and got busted, and try your hand at having the squareheads watch the birdies—"

He was grinning a little as he said it.

Cochrane's voice lashed back at him.

"For a guy who is supposed to know how to fly, you're a mess!" he declared. "I could fly this crate with my eyes shut better than you do it when you're trying to be impressive. Not only did you skid the last two turns, but you've got the motor revving two hundred r.p.m.s. too fast for cruising speed. You're a washout to me. You couldn't fly a box kite in my outfit."

"Ah-ha!" boomed Haggerty. "Now that you're over your natural fears and can find your tongue—that's all I'll be wantin' to know. Hold your hat going through the tunnels. I'm goin' down so close that not even you could miss a picture."

He swept the big DH down nose first, kept the motor turning at cruising speed as it dived. The wings moaned and the wires screeched and the big DH shuddered over its length with the dizzy speed.

It swept over the tracks at a height of three or four hundred feet. Followed the bands of steel into the north. Laughed off the threat of enemy resistance, flew through a storm of rifle and hastily contrived machine-gun fire, and ate up the miles.

Hell-Bent Haggerty flew her, and Gerald Cochrane in the back seat watched her go and made notes on his map of what he observed. Now and then he took a picture of something interesting.

They stumbled on the railroad batteries with the suddenness of a jerky

breath. There they were, just around a turn and masked by the trees on either side of the right of way. A whole train to one gun, and six guns lined in a row. Long snouted naval rifles capable of throwing a shell twenty-three or four miles, and hitting with terrific impact at that distance.

"There they are!" yelled Haggerty. "My God—if I only had a decent weapon. Hold your hat and make the pictures!"

THEN he drove the DH at the railroad guns. It was like a gnat attacking a rhinoceros. Haggerty, merely over the devil of it, flew over the lined-up trains and machine-gunned the cars and armored flats. The gun crews threw themselves under the cars or behind the steel breastworks.

In the midst of the dive and zoom over the tracks, Haggerty said into the Gosport:

"Gerald! That's a devil of a name for a man in a business like this. Gerald Cochrane—sure, it's an insult to a good Irish name. It's like naming a boy Percival Mulcahy. Gerald—"

Something smacked Haggerty on the top of his helmet. He turned around to find Cochrane half out of his seat and the joy stick for the duals in the rear seat in his hand. The DH flattened wildly, almost bounced on top of a gun carriage.

"Don't be making fun of my name, you ugly-mugged baboon!" shrieked Cochrane into the Gosport. "I'll knock your brains out—"

And Haggerty turned his head, looked over the banks of the motor, and his scarred mouth grinned wider.

They turned, after two or three minutes of the insane sport of machine-gunning fifteen-inch guns. They went up in a wild zoom with the motor opened wide; a sweeping chandelle which carried them up a

thousand feet and had Cochrane in the back seat half suspended, head down.

And at the end of the chandelle they were jumped by an echelon of Albatrosses.

"You wouldn't know that they've had a four-alarm fire turned in ever since we crossed the lines, would you?" asked Cochrane with withering sarcasm. "You didn't expect to see these guys. Maybe you figured the whole German army would know that Hell-Bent Haggerty was flying this DH and none of 'em would dare to come up. Well, you're supposed to be good—let's see you do your stuff!"

"Get ready with your end!" roared Haggerty. "My end is just achin' for a crack at them babies!"

AND then the Albatrosses came swooping down. They fell like a red rain. The sky was split with the scream of BMWs and filled with the staccato lightning of machine-gun fire.

Haggerty said: "We've got to run for it—get closer to our side—no chance here—"

And a very cold voice said in his ear phones:

"You pull out of this, Mr. Hell-Bent Haggerty, and so help me God I'll put a slug out of one of these Lewis guns right through the back of your skull. You had something to say back there in Operations about guys with nerve—and that it took nerve to go where you flew. Well, let's see just how much nerve you have. There's seven of them and one of us. I'm going to stay and fight it out—so are you. You fly the front end—this end is all okay."

"Well, I *am* a monkey!" muttered Hell-Bent into the Gosport—to himself, as he thought. But Cochrane's cold voice snapped back:

"I'm not interested in your family tree!"

And Cochrane, half kneeling on his

seat, swung his twin mounted gun rack around, picked up a red streak in the ring-sight, pulled down on it, depressed the noses of the Lewis guns a deliberate fraction more and cut them in. The red blast of flame snaked back over the fuselage of the DH. It was like a licking, blinding flash of flame. The flame seemed to strike the diving Albatross in the center of the nose.

The Albatross seemed to run into a stone wall and to shatter itself. From a lithe, dangerous, lightning-fast fury, it suddenly became a broken thing of wire and linen, floating with sickening pulsations in air too light to support it. It fluttered, fell faster and faster, was plunging earthward. The pilot, with stricken face, fixed his eyes on the DH as if unable to understand the nature of this disaster which had overtaken his once proud ship.

Cochrane threw his gun rack around like a skeet shooter. He handled it like a man in a duck blind with an automatic shotgun picking his targets on the wing. The gun moved this way and that. Cochrane's blue eyes were coldly intent upon his work. The muzzles of the twin Lewises spat short bursts of flame and crackling slugs.

And Haggerty, half crouching in his seat, roaring like a crazy man out of the sheer ecstasy of battle, forgot that he was flying a lumbering two-seater DH and took the play away from the Albatrosses. He went on the attack. He kicked the DH around the sky as he might have kicked a Camel. He dived after red targets; he went up after them, pulling the DH recklessly in the climbs, twisting its wings. And when he glanced back over the tail of the ship, he flirited the tail into position to give Cochrane clean shots at anything hovering over them.

After two or three minutes of the mêlée, the Albatrosses were bewil-

dered. They could understand a group of Albatrosses shooting hell out of a lone DH two-seater, but they could not understand the process in reverse. They drew off. This was not according to plan, or to what was known about the conduct of two-seaters. This two-seater would not run. It required careful consideration. The squareheads were like that.

As they drew off, to reform, to consider the matter, Haggerty with a joyful whoop wolfed after them, smacked into them, sent them scurrying.

His voice chattered into the Gosport for Cochrane's benefit.

"Listen, you half-mad, murderous little spalpeen, I know when a hand is played out. We've been luckier than a dealer handin' himself a blackjack on his last buck. We're going home now—and to hell what you think. We can just make it from here, before those red devils make plans to really fix us. Hold your hat."

He carried the DH up dizzily until he had three thousand feet of altitude, and the Albatrosses hung off warily, looking for a new trick, until it was too late. With a three thousand foot start, the nose down and the motor wide open, Haggerty sent the DH south, roaring hell bent, with the ground streaming under him.

AND Cochrane, in the back seat, amused himself by taking pictures and watching the Albatrosses, which had grown bloodthirsty at the sight of the fleeing DH, and were after it like the bloodhounds chasing Eliza across the ice. Now and then Cochrane left his camera trigger and set up his gun rack. He never wasted a shot. When those twin Lewis guns flickered and flamed, something got hit.

They went in over the lines, down

so low that Haggerty had to hedge-hop the trees. The Albatrosses followed them all the way to the field. They machine-gunned the DH as it slipped into a landing and ran over the field.

On the line Haggerty listened to the receding droning of the Albatross motors, and wiped his forehead with his arms. His scarred mouth grinned.

"As pleasant a little shindy as I've seen in many a day," he said, half to himself. He turned in his seat.

"But I'm still thinking tha. Gerald is a hell of a name to tack onto a Cochrane, and don't get superior ideas in your head. You're still a busted pilot with only a half wing between himself and the ground. Hell, if it hadn't been for my own superlative flying and general all around ability out there, we'd have been two dead men. And by the way, what was that remark you made about puttin' slugs from Lewis guns in the back of me head?"

He lifted Cochrane out of the seat and stood him on the ground.

Cochrane stepped inside the big arms, put his head down, smacked Haggerty in the stomach with a left hook and threw a sizzling uppercut from the heels that snapped Haggerty's head back.

"Why, you yellow louse," spat Cochrane. "If I hadn't made you stay, you'd have run out of that scrap with your tail between your legs. Hell-Bent Haggerty. A hell of a fine name for a louse."

"I'm tired busting me hands on your lily white jaw!" growled Haggerty. "There must be other ways." He closed his arms around Cochrane, lifted him bodily off the ground. Squeezed him like a bear, until Cochrane's ribs cracked and the breath was driven out of his lungs.

"Sure and I could break a little zany like you in two with no trouble at all!" nodded Haggerty. He

walked across the field, carrying Cochrane as he might have carried a baby, holding him tightly, so that Cochrane could not squirm back on the ground.

"What's this?" demanded the skipper.

"I'm just keeping the little hellion from committin' suicide," said Haggerty innocently. "It's gettin' to be a habit with him. Every time I sit him on the ground or open my mouth to him in civil conversation, he hits me in me face—and I'm a peace loving man by nature. I don't want to murder the little devil."

The outfit had a great kick out of the pictures Cochrane took of the railroad batteries. A whole bombing wing had a greater kick that night. The bombing wing, guided by Cochrane's map annotations, flew out, and dropped down over the six railroad guns brought to the front by the enemy at great cost and secrecy, and bombed the daylights out of the whole works. They even bombed the daylights out of ten miles of track in either direction, just for practise and because they didn't want to fly home with the unreleased eggs.

CHAPTER V

The Heart of a Bully



HELL of a team! Cochrane and Haggerty. An ounce of dynamite, that was Cochrane; and a bragging, selfish, bruising, loud-mouthed, pig-headed six footer, that was Haggerty. They flew out day after day. They fought like pit bulldogs through a picket fence. They smoked up any room with the sulphurous qualities of remarks concerning each other.

And yet, in the air, they were invincible. They were the perfect OBS team and Skipper Martin, who had become a major after the railroad

gun episode, thanked his gods for the luck of the Irish that had brought him Cochrane and Haggerty.

The men of the outfit loved Cochrane and hated Haggerty's guts. They didn't know why, they just did. They whooped every time Cochrane, his hundred and fifty pound body tense and his mouth compressed tightly, decided to take a punch at Haggerty. And then they whooped at the spectacle of the big, brawny Haggerty, grabbing at Cochrane's arms and legs, squeezing him into submission.

Cochrane certainly made good his boast. When he told Haggerty that every time Hell-Bent made a crack he didn't like he was going to get a paste on the lug, he meant just that. Only—there wasn't anybody else in the 20th who was anxious to paste Haggerty for the privilege of avenging an insult. Guys like Cochrane were very few and extremely far between.

Then, suddenly—but wait—

THERE was no drama, no glory, no heat of battle. There was just suddenly a coughing motor, like something with a fishbone in its windpipe. The coughing started behind the enemy lines while the two of them were flying a routine OBS assignment. Coughing, strangling, jerking prop.

Haggerty cursed feelingly into the Gosport.

"The gasoline they give guys to fly with at the front ought to be forced down the throats of the S.O.S. in pint doses. Lousy with water. Hell, I can tell by the nature of that skip that the wells are full of water. Furthermore, I'm going to murder my mechanic when I get back—just to teach him that when I tell him to chamois all the gasoline that goes into the tanks of this crate, I don't mean every other Thursday—"

"It sounds bad," Cochrane said

through the Gosport. "It'll cut any second."

They sat in silence and watched the ground drift under them. The enemy ground troops, sensing a ship in trouble, gliding, opened with rifle fire, even Luger fire, and turned the noses of Maxims up in the air, combing the DH as it went over.

Haggerty nursed the motor. Coaxed it. He was still a couple of hundred yards from the enemy side of the front when the motor stuttered for the last time, gasped horribly and quit. He choked it, pumped air into the tanks, wobbled the throttle, but the motor stayed dead. There was only the soft sighing of wind through the wires and the little creaking noises of the struts moving in the fittings.

"Well, hold your hat," he said to Cochrane. "There's only one place to go—down, out there in the wire. Listen. I've got one chance to cut back and land inside their lines. There's a field right over the left wing—perfect. If we hit in that wire, we'll wash out—but we'll be out in front of their trenches."

"Keep going," said Cochrane tersely. "The devil with the wire. We've got a chance if we go down there. We've got no chance if we land inside their lines. Who the devil wants to finish this business in a stockade?"

And that queer, twisted grin moved Haggerty's mouth. His eyes narrowed, he coaxed every inch of glide out of the big ship. Coaxed it until it settled, mushed, fought to spin—and then he outsmarted it, bullied it out of spinning. But there was only so much glide in those wings—and it had to come to an end, and there were machine-guns and rifle slugs ripping through the two-seater, and Cochrane, his eyes flaming, was behind his twin Lewis guns, blazing away at the gunners in the German trenches. His slugs kicked up spurts

of mud and dirt in the faces of the enemy ground troops. Then the DH settled into the wire.

There was a jolting, ripping, grinding sound as the ship destroyed itself, fell, enmeshed in the cruel, rusted, barbed barrier into which it dropped. It broke through half a dozen strands, pulled down half a dozen rotted posts, and then a strand caught under the wreckage of the landing gear—and the DH went over on its nose, flopping heavily, carrying the two men with it.

Cochrane shrieked: "Quick, climb out, you dim witted lump. Get away from it—it's the only chance—"

He half dragged Haggerty out of the pilot's seat, lying flat on the ground as he worked. Then he rolled over on his back and struck a match. He touched it to a fluttering ribbon of doped linen. The little fire ran up the fuse, became a big fire as it touched the wing, and became hell roaring flame and heat as it licked over what was left of the ship.

Face down, they crawled away from the flame. Face down, they slid down the sides of a shell crater.

"If they think we burned after the crash, they won't come out to look for us. We're in a cinch here. When it gets dark we can crawl into our own lines—"

He looked at Haggerty. Haggerty's face was white and drawn.

"What the hell is the matter with you?" he lashed at Haggerty. "Sick at the belly?" Then he saw a dull stream of blood running out of the fabric of Haggerty's trousers. The trousers were blood-soaked. And blood was running from the side of Haggerty's shirt.

"One of those machine-gunning lice in that trench got lucky and made a direct hit on me," said Haggerty with an attempt at a grin. "Ever try landing in barbed wire with one arm and one leg? It's a hell of a gamble."

But Cochrane was working on Haggerty's wounds. He had his own tunic off, was ripping his shirt to shreds. He made a tourniquet for the leg and put on enough pressure to turn Haggerty's face green; but the bleeding from the leg stopped.

The wound in the side was different. It was ugly, deep. It bled stubbornly, slowly. Now and then a little bloody froth formed on Haggerty's mouth and he wiped it off with the back of his hand and stared at it, almost foolishly, as if he could not quite understand how it came to be there.

COCHRANE made a compress for the wound in Haggerty's side. He knew that the slug had clipped the corner of Haggerty's lung. That was why Haggerty's mouth made little red bubbles when he breathed.

They lay there through ten terrible hours, tortured by thirst, with the hot sun beating down on them. Haggerty lay half propped up against the side of the crater, his eyes wide open, his mouth grim, saying nothing. But a crust of slime and dried blood formed around his mouth, and the flesh split with the dryness and fever which burned high in his eyes.

"Stay with it, kid," comforted Cochrane. "You're a big, tough, rough guy, remember. You've told that to everybody in the world."

"Sure!" croaked Haggerty horribly. "We'll make it, easy!" But his eyes were searching Cochrane's young, torture-lined face as if seeing it for the first time.

"You got a home, kid?" he asked.

"Hell, yes!" nodded Cochrane. "I live in a town outside of Boston—"

"Guys like you always have homes," sighed Haggerty. "Me, I ain't got no more home than a jack rabbit."

"Keep your trap closed!" threatened Cochrane. "It just makes the thirst worse."

But Haggerty's eyes continued to fix themselves on Cochrane's face.

"You got a lot of nerve for a kid," he said reluctantly. "I like the way you've been handling that back seat. You're hell on wheels with a pair of Lewis guns—I'll say that."

"You're going soft, Haggerty," grinned Cochrane. "Want me to hold your hand?"

"Bunk," croaked Haggerty. "Don't be so damned tough."

The shadows fell. The front quieted. After a while a little chill wind stirred. There was a moaning from a dying voice somewhere near. They listened to it. It cut through them.

"A couple of hours more—that's all," whispered Cochrane tautly. "In a couple of hours we can make a break for it. Just before they send out their patrols—I know the time."

"How the devil do you expect me to do any movin' around?" asked Haggerty. "I can't move my arm without starting to bleed like a stuck pig."

"I'm going to carry you, you big lug," declared Cochrane.

Haggerty's laugh was horrible in its dryness and crackle.

"You carry—me?" he choked. "That will be a sight, won't it?"

"You're damned right!"

"Listen kid, let's stop kidding ourselves," Haggerty's voice said out of the darkness. "You know we haven't got a chance the way things are. You can't lug me through the wire, even if you wanted too. You'd make noise. You'd get us both machine-gunned. Then—the way things are—I couldn't make it. I been feeling the strength run out of my body all day. I feel all sucked out inside. And I'd bleed to death before I could go a hundred yards."

"Forget it—you're goin'," said Cochrane.

"Look now, kid, you go on in, by yourself. You know where this spot

is. You won't have no trouble in sending a litter crew back for me—and they can take me in lyin' down—"

"You know as well as I do that is so much horse collar. If I leave you, you know you're going to stay left. No litter crews come out this far, not right under those damn Maxims. Hell, we're less than two hundred yards from the German first line. There may be a listening post within twenty-five feet of here, or a machine-gun nest."

SILENCE, and the jagged darkness broken now and then by a flare, or the chattering of a machine-gun, or the red flash of artillery firing in battery.

Haggerty's voice, like splintering slivers, came again in the darkness.

"Kid—be reasonable, will you? You got to go now to make it. Any minute a wire patrol may stumble in this hole, and then—what the devil was the use of cracking up in the wire if that happens? You can't take me in—we both know that. Why, once a sawbones said to me—he was drunk—'Haggerty, remember, if you ever get hit in the lung, don't you let any dog move you. If someone comes along and wants to move you—you blow their heads off with a gun before you let 'em touch you. You got a chance as long as you lie quiet without being moved—but the minute they move you and disturb that blood clot, you'll die as sure as hell—"

"You'll die anyhow, you stubborn mule," mumbled Cochrane. "You gotta get in from here to have a snowball's chance—"

"You can't make it, not with me. It ain't fair to you, kid—hell, I might die the minute after you drag me in. You go on without me—no hard feelings, kid. Hell, I think you're swell. I take back every crack I made about getting busted out for'

losing your nerve. You got nerve to burn. Come on—get on your way, will you? I hear sounds out there—they're comin'—a wire party."

"I don't go a damn step without you," said Cochrane. There was a little sobbing break in his voice. He moved over closer to Haggerty in the darkness. "You're just a big false alarm. I know you. You figure to give me a break—let me save my own hide, by sacrificing your life. Nothing doing. We played it together this far—we'll play it the rest of the way."

"You got a home—and people—that love you. You got to think of them—"

"If I crawled out of here and left you—like this—I'd never be able to look 'em in the face again."

"Suppose I was croaked. Suppose I was dead, lyin' here on the ground—you'd go, wouldn't you?"

"You're not dead!" snarled Cochrane. "You're a hell of a long way from being dead."

"Yeah—but you'd go—wouldn't you—"

"I'd have to go then, I suppose—but why the devil argue? I stay here, until you're fit to be moved—and then I'm going to move you."

"Hard-headed guys like you are sure hard to take," wheezed Haggerty. "You're plumb desperatin'—that's what you are—a damned mule—"

There was another long silence. Cochrane could hear the rasp of breath through Haggerty's dry, swollen mouth and the gurgle in his chest as he breathed. Thirst was torturing him—he shuddered as he thought of what Haggerty must be suffering—not a drop of water—not even that green scum in the bottom of the shell hole was liquid. It was dried by the sun and crawling with maggots.

Haggerty said: "Okay, if you want to play it that way. I'll try to make

you save your fool neck. I know the two of us haven't got a chance—but—look, kid. Crawl up to the top of this hole and take a good look around, will you? I keep hearing those noises—a wiring party work-in'. No use walking out of here right into the arms of a mob of Heinies. Listen—and then—if it looks all right—"

"Okay," said Cochrane. He slid on his stomach to the top of the shell hole. He listened with all his ears and his heart and his soul. It was very quiet. A star shell went up, lighting the scene with a white glow. He turned to tell Haggerty that the coast was clear. He stopped, his throat closed, his arms rigid.

HE saw Haggerty looking toward him, that twisted grin moving the scar across Haggerty's face. And Haggerty's arm was coming up like a lead weight—his hand clutching his Colt automatic!

"You hard-headed boob—" said Haggerty's mouth. "They sure missed by a mile when they gave you that name of Gerald. Go on in, kid—you'll get through."

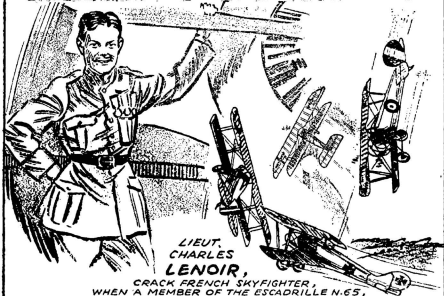
The muzzle of the Colt touched his temple. There was a shocking explosion and a smear of red light in the white light of the star shell—and Hell-Bent Haggerty slumped down, his head doubling over on his knees. The twisted smile still marked his face.

He was dead when Cochrane slid down to the bottom of the crater.

And through two torturous hours, Cochrane fought his way blindly through clutching, gouging barbed wire until his body was wet with his own blood, and the clothes were ripped from his back. He sobbed over every foot he crawled, and his face was wet with his own tears.

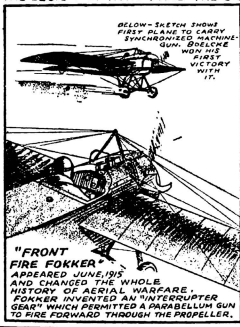
He was still sobbing when he fell, half conscious, over the parapet of an American trench.

Famous SKY FIGHTERS



**LIEUT.
CHARLES
LENOIR,**

CRACK FRENCH SKYFIGHTER,
WHEN A MEMBER OF THE ESCADRILLE N.65,
WAS WOUNDED 7 TIMES IN AERIAL COMBAT AND TOOK PART IN
MANY BOMBARDMENTS OVER THE ENEMY LINES. FOR HIS FEARLESS
FIGHTING LIEUT. LENOIR RECEIVED MANY DECORATIONS INCLUDING
THE LEGION OF HONOR AND THE CROIX DE GUERRE.



BELOW—SKETCH SHOWS
FIRST PLANE TO CARRY
SYNCHRONIZED MACHINE-
GUN. BOELCKE
WON HIS
FIRST
VICTORY
WITH
IT.

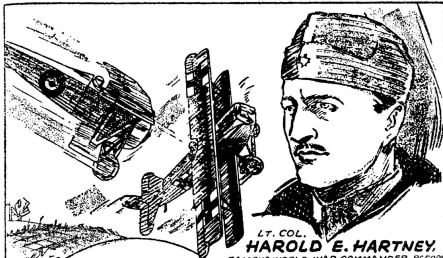
**"FRONT
FIRE FOKKER"**

APPEARED JUNE, 1915
AND CHANGED THE WHOLE
HISTORY OF AERIAL WARFARE.
FOKKER INVENTED AN "INTERRUPTER
GEAR" WHICH PERMITTED A PARABELLUM GUN
TO FIRE FORWARD THROUGH THE PROPELLER.



**CAPT.
ALBERT
HEURTEAUX,**

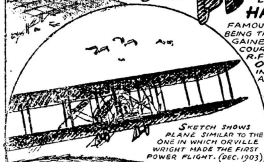
NOTED
FRENCH ACE WHO ONCE BROUGHT
DOWN A PLANE WITH ONE BULLET,
HAD THE HABIT OF TAUNTING HIS
ENEMIES. HE WOULD POLITELY
BOW AND WAVE GREETINGS TO
THEM, CAUSING THEM TO GROW
FURIOUS AND EXPOSE THEMSELVES
TO HIS SUPERIOR MARKSMANSHIP.



**LT. COL.
HAROLD E. HARTNEY,**

FAMOUS WORLD WAR COMMANDER, BEFORE BEING TRANSFERRED TO THE A.E.F., HAD GAINED NOTABLE FAME FOR HIS DARING COURAGE AS A SKYFIGHTER WITH THE R.F.C. WHICH HE HAD JOINED IN 1915. ONCE ON A LONE FLIGHT HARTNEY, IN A SMALL PURSUIT PLANE, ATTACKED AND BROUGHT DOWN A GOTHA.

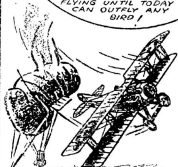
COL. HARTNEY'S COOL-HEADED COURAGE WON MANY DECORATIONS INCLUDING THE D.S.C. AND LEGION OF HONOR DURING HIS COMMAND OF THE FIRST PURSUIT GROUP.



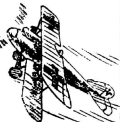
SKETCH SHOWS PLANE SIMILAR TO THE ONE IN WHICH ORVILLE WRIGHT MADE THE FIRST POWER FLIGHT. (DEC. 1903)

**DURING THE PAST THIRTY YEARS
MAN HAS LEARNED TO FLY
FARTHER AND FASTER THAN
BIRDS SINCE THEIR CREATION!**

STARTING IN 1903 MAN HAS
ADVANCED HIS KNOWLEDGE OF
FLYING UNTIL TODAY HE
CAN OUTFLY ANY
BIRD!



**FRANK LUKE, "BALLOON
BUSTER,"** WAS THE ONLY AMERICAN
WAR FLYER TO WIN THE
CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR.
IT WAS AWARDED POSTHUMOUSLY.



**LOTHAR
VON RICHTHOFEN,**

BROTHER OF THE
FAMOUS GERMAN
ACE MANFRED,
WAS LESS WELL-
KNOWN THAN
THE "RED KNIGHT"
BUT NEVERTHE-
LESS WAS ONE OF
GERMANY'S
GREAT AIRMEN.

LOTHAR WAS
KILLED IN 1924
WHILE FLYING
A COMMERCIAL
SHIP FROM
POTSDAM
TO HAMBURG.



Flunkey's Flight



RADLEY



Wildly he dragged the inert body of Parlin to safety

Silver Radley, Pigeon-Holed by Life to Shine Only in Reflected Glory, Suddenly Smacks Up Against a Chance to Show His Mettle!

By **KENNETH L. SINCLAIR**

Author of "Lobo Lawman," "Greenalinger's Daughter," etc.

THE impact of the collision hurled Silver Radley against the Lewis guns; and, dazed, he slumped down into the pit. But the whole awful picture was etched

clearly in his mind—the blunt prop spinner of the Albatross boring in between the wingtips of the D.H., the heavy prop slashing away the D.H.'s wings with magical swiftness,

kicking out a shower of splintered wood and torn fabric.

The groaning of tortured spars and struts as the black-crossed crate, carried on by the momentum of its suicidal rush, melted into one crumpled mass with the D.H. Then the abrupt, terrible instant of dead silence as the mass poised, ready for the plunge—

When Radley struggled to his feet again, the wreckage was lurching into an erratic flat spin. Frank Parlin's shoulders were jerking and heaving in the forward office—Frank was fighting the controls, gunning the motor in a desperate attempt to get the wreckage under partial control. Trust Frank for that; he had the stuff, and the flash besides, that it takes to make a man a top-ranker.

On that question, Sliver Radley was an authority. All his life he had watched—from the sidelines—the carcasses of famous men. Usually as valet, and now as Frank Parlin's gunner. Vaguely, he wondered just how a guy felt after doing something that won for him the respect and admiration of his fellow men.

Well, a chap whom life had pigeonholed in the position of flunkey would never learn, first-hand, the answer to that one.

The Boche who had rammed the D.H. had paid for his folly with his life. All the same, he had accomplished what he sought—he had made sure that Parlin would never zoom into the low clouds and carry back across the lines a warning of the flaming trap that had been set for the 24th.

The trap was a neat one, too. The Kraut airmen were greatly outnumbered in this sector; American observation and bombing ships flew when and where they pleased behind the German lines. Some observer, yesterday afternoon, had spotted signs of activity in a narrow gorge. The gorge made a right-angle turn

—and in the wall of the canyon, at the turn, the Germans were digging a shaft that led straight into the hill. Feverishly they were bringing up boxes and kegs, and stowing them into the shaft.

Their purpose had seemed plain enough. Tonight, American infantry troops were launching an attack that was supposed to drive through this gorge. The Germans had gotten wind of the attack, then; and, knowing that their lines would probably be smashed, they planned to mine the gorge, and trust the resulting slide to wipe out a regiment.

IT was too late, now, for H.Q. to call off the attack. But by some strange quirk of fate, it seemed, the Jerries had dug their tunnel in such a way that a ship, flying down one arm of the gorge, could shoot right into it.

G.H.Q. jumped at the opportunity that was offered, and ordered the ships of the 24th to make a series of attacks with incendiary ammo which would detonate the explosives before the infantry attack was launched.

Frank Parlin, as star pilot of the 24th, was picked to lead off the attack. Conditions were ideal—low clouds enabled the American pilots to make quick dives into the gorge, line their sights on the tunnel opening, and let go with Vickers guns. Parlin did just that—and only the over-eagerness of the Krauts, plus Parlin's lightning nerve, had saved the pilot and Radley from being burned alive.

For as the D.H. had dropped into the gorge, great jets of flame spurted from *Flammenwerfers* hidden in the cliffs on either side!

A trap! The tunnel was a fake. What the Boche wanted was to wipe out the 24th, so that their own air observers would have a chance to accomplish something.

Parlin had zoomed for the clouds—but the Krauts had provided for even that eventuality. The Albatross plummeted out of the murk. When Radley's guns and Parlin's flying had seemed about to pull the D.H. out of the spot, the German went berserk and rammed them.

THE wreckage of the two ships, still locked together, still spinning, struck in a clump of trees at the bottom of the gorge. Parlin had, of course, cut the motor of the D.H.—and the wailing sound of the wires melted abruptly into a horrible crunching and splintering as the ships broke apart. Radley, thrown clear of the wreckage, landed face-down in some grass, and lay stunned.

When he came fully alert again, he found himself tearing wildly into the wreckage, dragging the inert body of Frank Parlin to safety, then darting back to pump the Pyrene at a wisp of smoke that rose lazily from the wreckage.

Just why he did that, Radley didn't know, at the moment—but he heard the sound of another D.H. overhead; and it was not until later that he realized that right then a ghost of an idea had popped into his brain.

After licking the incipient fire, Radley battered his way through the brush to reach a nearby clearing. Looking up, he saw that the ship diving down into the gorge was the second ship of the line-up—the one in which Major Bradley Whitten rode the rear pit. Whitten was as good as a dead man, now—

No! The D.H. swerved, side-slipped, and its motor thunder died to a whisper. Whitten's pilot had seen the crashed ships below, had seen Radley standing in the meadow, and was coming down to a landing!

The ship rolled to a stop near Radley. Whitten jumped from the rear pit and stalked toward the little gunner, glowering and iron-jawed.

"Well, Radley?"

Swiftly, Sliver told the story.

"Frank's over there," he finished.

The C.O. turned on his heel, then swung back, eyes formidable under shaggy brows. For an instant he glared at the gunner, as if resenting the fact that Radley's usually servile attitude was missing. Then, rapping out a command for the pilot of the D.H. to keep the motor ticking, the C.O. stalked toward Parlin's inert body.

Parlin seemed still to be unconscious. Yet he had moved a foot or two from the place where Radley had left him; the pressed-down grass revealed that fact, and also revealed some sharp rocks on which the pilot had lain. For just an instant Radley was sure one of the big pilot's eyelids flickered. But—

"That's strange; seems nothing wrong with him," Whitten snapped. "Blow on the head, perhaps. We'll put him into my ship. As I landed I saw a squad of Boche coming this way—they've got some sort of camouflaged canvas, probably to cover the wreckage so the next victims won't see it. We can climb into those clouds, get back across the lines."

The C.O. was not speaking to Radley. He was thinking aloud. Radley, to him, was merely a part of the scenery, a machine that would go into action when the proper commands were given.

"But, sir," Radley objected, "the other ships are all in the air by now, heading this way. They'll dive into this gorge—"

"Can't help that. We can't circle in the air to warn them, because of the clouds and E.A. Haven't any Very lights with me, anyhow. Too bad, of course, but—"

Something snapped inside Sliver Radley. Some bond of restraint, built up by years of servility, was broken at last.

"We're not doin' it!" he yelled. "We're not walkin' out on the rest of the boys! Those flame-jets reach clear across the gorge. One by one the ships'll drop into this place, line up to shoot into the tunnel, an' be burned. Don't you understand, they won't have a chance! The Krauts have got this thing figured to a razor edge. We'll set that wreckage afire, anyway, to warn—"

"You'll observe your proper respect and civility when addressing superiors!" Whitten boomed. "We haven't a moment to lose in getting out of here—those Boche troops are coming on the double. I am ranking officer; if there were a ghost of a chance of warning the rest of the pilots of their danger, I'd do so. But there isn't a chance. No use firing that wreckage—the troops would cover the wreckage with that camouflaged canvas—"

"Superior, are you?" Radley barked, his whole body shaking with the recoil of the words. "Well, listen to this: I've got an idea, and I'm trying it! I—"

Whitten's face was quivering with rage as he reached into his flying suit for his side-arm. The weapon was half in view when Radley's fist connected with the C.O.'s lantern jaw. The major groaned softly as he went down—and he lay very still, beside Parlin.

Once again Radley was sure that Frank Parlin moved a little. But maybe it was only a flunkey's imagination. Anyway, there was no time to spare, if Radley's scheme were to be worked. Moments held the value of days now.

DARTING to the wreckage, he found that the removable crash-proof reserve tank of the D.H. was still intact. Tearing at the lacings with fingers that were suddenly covered with blood, Radley removed the tank; and, with it under his arm,

went loping awkwardly to Whitten's D.H.

"Get out of that pit!" he yelled to the pilot. "Take these Lewis guns from the rear office—use 'em to hold off the Kraut troops till I land to pick you all up! Get moving!"

Something that was crisply savage in the little gunner's manner brought instant obedience from the pilot. In a very short time Sliver Radley was crouching in the forward pit, lifting the thundering D.H. into a zoom. Parlin had given the gunner quite a bit of dual, on the sly. Enough for Radley to have gone solo long ago, had regulations permitted.

He banked over viciously; and, with the Vickers guns on the motor cowl hammering and jerking against their mounts, he made one savage, swooping dive on the squad of field-grey troops who were racing toward the meadow. Whitten's pilot, Radley saw, had taken up a position near the unconscious C.O. and Frank Parlin, and was readying the Lewis guns that had been taken from the rear pit of his ship.

Okay, then. Radley zoomed once more, and headed down the gorge, straight into the flame-trap that the Krauts had so cleverly established.

The walls of the gorge, although steep, were heavily timbered in most places. The *Flammenwerfers* were so well concealed and camouflaged that they could not be seen except when in action; and, since the Boche operators of the trap would be careful not to spring it too soon again, the next time would mean *finis* for whoever got caught.

Radley, however, remembered just about where those flame throwers were located. Most of them, anyway. There were about a dozen, six on each side of the gorge. One was hidden in that rock promontory—

He decided on that one; and, sitting tense and eager in the pit of the D.H., he waited.

But not for long. The ship thundered right into the trap; and sudden flame spurts from all of the *Flammenwerfers*, turning the gorge into a lacework of crimson death.

Radley had been right. He had remembered just how those jets of flame reached out, and now he had maneuvered to put the D.H. into a spot which they missed. The Krauts did not seem able to turn and aim these flame-throwers—probably their great size and power accounted for that. They had counted on the number of the jets and the surprise of the set-up to do the trick.

Yanking wildly at the stick, Radley zoomed the D.H. over one of the jets. The heat struck his face like a physical blow; and, even over the roar of his motor, he heard the rumble of the chemical-fed inferno.

Now he had reached the position he sought. He was almost directly over the flame-thrower that had been established on the rock promontory. But, banking, he swooped lower and lower. He had to get close—so close that he couldn't miss. Throttling back the motor, he yanked the nose of the D.H. far above the stalling position.

For a moment the big ship seemed to hang motionless in the air. And in that moment Sliver Radley rose half out of the pit, taking from his side the reserve tank which he had removed from the wrecked D.H. A flip of his thumb opened the petcock. Gasoline spurts forth. Radley held his breath, aimed carefully, and hurled the tank straight for the jet of flame.

He couldn't miss. The distance was only about twenty feet; and the D.H. was completely stalled, almost motionless, poised for a plunge.

The petrol-spurting tank went end-over-end, into the jet of flame. For an instant it seemed engulfed, lost, and Radley's throat went taut. Then, however, the heavy tank burst, hurl-

ing a shower of burning gasoline that plummeted down into the forest below.

The Germans had been very careful to arrange their flame-throwers so their flame would burn entirely in the air, and would not set fire to the trees. But when that burning petrol scattered over an acre or two of forest, starting hundreds of fires—well, the Jerries stood mighty little chance of controlling the spread of *that* fire.

Already Sliver had opened the throttle wide. Somehow he yanked the floundering D.H. out of a threatened spin, somehow he dodged and turned and avoided the flame-jets. With treetops whipping against the landing gear, he thundered back toward the meadow, banked, throttled down, and landed.

Frank Parlin was at the side of the D.H. when the crate stopped rolling. The big pilot was grinning, chuckling as he hopped onto one lower wing and stuck his hand into the front pit.

"Shake, flyer!"

"I thought you were knocked out," Radley said.

"**M**E? Hell, no! Listen, Sliver—for a long time I've been watching you. You've got the stuff, if you only knew it. Well, so: sometimes it takes a big jolt to make a man break his shell and step out. I figured this was that jolt, so I played dead—always keeping one eye partly open, my lad.

"Whitten sure scared me, though—I was afraid he'd fly into that trap before you figured out a way to warn him. But—say, next time I stage an act, don't lay me down on sharp rocks. You half killed me—"

"But what will Whitten—"

"He'll be okay. He's still out. Time he wakes up, he'll be in his own op shack—if we have to konk him again to keep him asleep until then. I'll have sent in a full report

of what you did here today; how this forest fire you started in a hundred places at once will warn off the rest of the boys, fix it so they can't fly down into the trap.

"I'll lay you odds Whitten didn't even see your fist when you socked him. We'll tell him a Kraut sneaked up behind him. And his pilot is an okay guy; he'll keep mum.

"Sliver, I'm damned sorry to lose the best gunner in the sector—and damned glad to see you move up.

When you come back to the outfit as pilot of your own ship, they'll probably make you patrol leader. That's what they do to heroes—I suppose you know that."

Radley fidgeted. But a quirk of humor brushed aside his embarrassment.

"A flunkey's flight, huh? Well, I'll make my flight the best one in the outfit—except maybe yours. Let's load Whitten and his pilot into this crate, and get goin'."

DICTIONARY OF AIR TERMS

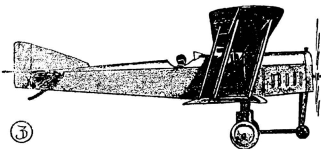
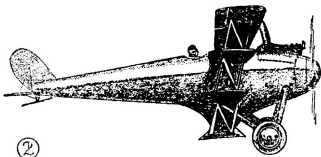
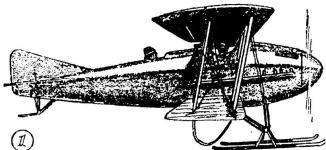
French and German Words

ENGLISH	FRENCH	GERMAN
J ACKET (cylinder).....	Chemise de cylindre.....	Zylinderwandung
Journal bearing.....	Palier porteur, palier a roulement lisse.....	Traglager, Gleitlager....
Journal, crankpin.....	Tourillon	Laufzapfen, Weilzapfen.
Joy stick.....	Manche a balai.....	Steuernuppel
K EEL.....	Quille (Carene).....	Kiel
Keel corridor (airship).....	Couloir de quille.....	Hecklaufgang
Keel girder (airship)...	Poutre de quille.....	Hecktrager
Key, cotter pin.....	Clavette	Vorsteckkeil, Vorstecker
Key way.....	Rainure de clavette.....	Keilnut
Kick starter.....	Demarreur a pedale.....	Trettanlasser
Kiln dried wood.....	Bois seche au four.....	Darrholz
Kinetic energy.....	Force vive.....	Bewekungsenergie
King post (aileron)....	Guignol d'aileron.....	Querruderhebel
Kite	Cerf volant	Drachen
Kiteballoon	Ballon allonge saucisse..	Drachenballoon
Knife edge.....	Tranchant	Schneide
K.P.M. (kilometers per hour)	Kilometres par heure...	Kilometre pro Stunde...

MORE DEFINITIONS NEXT MONTH'

Try to Unscramble

Can You Do It? It's a Real

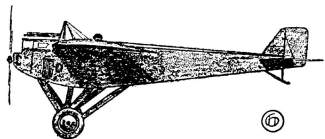
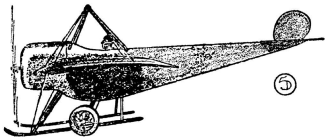
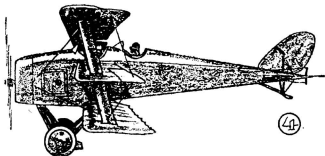


Above are pictures of six planes used in World War combat. Here are their names—but in the wrong order, with the letters scrambled:

- | | |
|----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. EGAS TANREIR | 4. SEESNMI-SHCATRKUC |
| 2. NREINAGWO BPAENLI | 5. HISDSEW IRTANELP |
| 3. NGOLA QARPAENLUDU | 6. GBRADARNII ELPNARTI |

These Six Sky Ships

Test of Your Aviation Knowledge



COLBY

Examine closely the planes pictured above.
Then: First unscramble the names of the planes—second, list the planes in the proper order.
Write your list below before referring to the answer on page 119:

- | | |
|---------|---------|
| 1. | 4. |
| 2. | 5. |
| 3. | 6. |

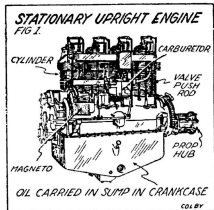
Learn to Fly

A Complete Course in Flying

By LIEUT. JAY D. BLAUFox

MORE ABOUT ENGINES

HERE we are, together again. And I hope the New Year will be kind to you, and give you all the things you'd like to have. By the way, this is the only place I can thank all you birds who are so thoughtful as to send me Christmas and New Years Greetings. It is swell of you and I'm going to keep them right in a special scrap book and look at them when I'm old and gefoozled and remember the swellest bunch of students I ever had.



And am I looking forward to a mess of photographs of my graduating class when that eventful day arrives? I'll say I am! So any of you fledglings who want to let me know what you look like, shoot along a snapshot for preservation in my personal archives.

Let's Go Into a Huddle

Well—let's go into a huddle! Cluster close and we'll go on from where we left off when we heard Santa's sleigh bells approach. The last thing I told you about was where you would be likely to find trouble brewing on the engine. I told you too that this lesson would be on the first of one of five types I want to tell you about. We're going to begin with the STATIONARY UPRIGHT ENGINE.

The reason I'm beginning with this type first is that it is typical of the first of those

successfully developed in upright motors for airplanes. I don't mean to say that this motor I'm talking about now was the first developed, but one very much like it.

Four Cylinder Type

The four cylinder type is the simplest of the uprights and lends itself to a more lucid explanation. Take a look at the sketch on the wall showing the "straight-in-line" motor. (Fig. 1.) This is a light airplane motor, small but powerful, delivering 90 horsepower. It's a Wright Gypsy Moth. Looks like a regular Lizzie-pusher, doesn't it? Notice the fins on the cylinders.

You'll always find these on one that is air-cooled. And that's what this little feller is. What are the fins for? Why, to radiate the heat from the cylinders and help keep them from over-heating. This motor is a simple affair and easy to get at in case of trouble.

Two Magnetos

Even this little engine has two magnetos to supply it ignition. I'll tell you about the magneto later when I go into detail about it. The engine carries enough oil in its sump for fifteen flying hours, without the need of an auxiliary oil tank.

That's the sump in the bottom of the crankcase.

In this particular motor the crankcase is made of aluminum alloy and is cast in three sections—upper, lower and rear. The rear section holds the accessories such as the carburetor and the two magnetos I mentioned a moment ago. The crankshaft is of a four throw type—take a look at the sketch (Fig. 2) and you'll see what I mean by "four-throw"—is carried in five babbitt bearings—babbitt is a lead and antimony alloy—and is made from a single piece of forged alloy steel.

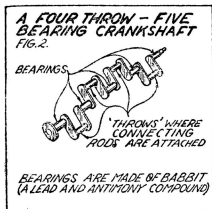
Connecting Rod

By the way, here is a connecting rod I fished from the shop. Here you are young lady, you take a look at it.

After you're through with it, show it to the other girls, then turn it over to the boys in the class. You know, it's just as important for you girls who are following

this course to know what goes into making an engine as well as the boys.

That is, if you want to be good pilots and join the other fine women pilots in the "Ninety-Niners." What are the Ninety-Niners? It's the women flyers organization



and many of the world's finest women pilots are among its members. What was that crack, feller? Would you be eligible? Ho-ho! Anything for a laugh, eh? Well—let's skip that and go on with the lesson.

Now that connecting rod you are holding is made of forged duralumin with the big end bearing made of bronze-backed babbitt. The piston or wrist pin runs right into the small end of the rod and holds the piston head.

Cylinder Heads Detachable

The cylinders are cast from molten iron, and each has enough shoulder at its base to allow it to be recessed deeply into the crankcase. Take a look at Fig. 3 and you'll notice that the cylinder heads are detachable. These are made of aluminum alloy for lightness. The heaviest individual part on the engine is the cylinder itself.

Each of the cylinder heads provides two portholes, one for the intake valve, the other for the exhaust valve. To further modernize the small motor, spark plug coolers are inserted into the cylinder heads. Into these coolers fit the spark plugs. The pistons you're looking at are made of aluminum alloy.

These are slipper-type pistons with the piston pin full-floating, in both the small end of the piston rod and the piston boss.

Duralumin

Remember I talked of a camshaft in the last lesson? Small cams are attached to it. These are the gadgets which I told you actuate the push rods and open the intake and exhaust valves at specific time intervals.

These push rods (See Fig. 4) are made of duralumin. By the way, did I tell you what duralumin was? No? Well, it's an alloy of

aluminum and other metals, which, after being subjected to a heat treatment, has the ordinary strength of steel with one-third its weight.

This metal is used in many parts of all the types of aircraft. The word duralumin is so long, and so many of us are in such a hurry to go no place in particular that we sometimes haven't the time to say the whole word and have cut it down to "dural" for short.

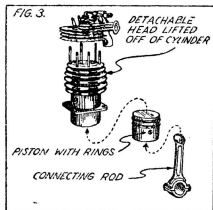
But to get back to the engine and its parts; the valves are made of steel; the rocker arms are of forged steel with bronze bushings. Helical springs also of steel are fitted concentrically around the valve stems. And of course, the conventional carburetor and magneto equipment is carried on the engine, but as I mentioned previously, I'll take those up separately and in detail later.

Weight Kept Down

I wondered if you've noticed while I was describing the various parts that wherever weight could be eliminated and maximum strength of the part retained, that such weight was kept down. Weight happens to play a very important part in aircraft—especially in its engines.

In motors of good design the least amount of weight per horsepower is striven for. This is considered the height of engine design efficiency. The weight of the little motor I've just described is 285 pounds.

This is called the "dry weight." What is meant by dry weight? Well, the best way to explain that is to tell you that a motor



has two weights—wet and dry. The wet weight of a motor, in the case of a water-cooled motor, includes the weight of the motor itself, the radiator, the water jacket, the water, the water pump, and the water pipe lines; all these combined make up the "wet weight" of the power plant that is ready to run.

The dry weight of this same motor is considered without these accessories. In

the case of an air-cooled motor, the weight is always "dry" since there is no necessity for the radiator, pump, water jackets and water and pipe lines. Do you catch on? Simple, isn't it?

The Gypsy Moth Engine

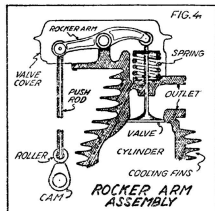
In the Wright Gypsy Moth engine, the dry weight per horsepower then is approximately 3.15 pounds. This is considered a lot of weight for a single horsepower unit to lift—but stationary upright motors are always the heaviest per horsepower of all the types made anyway.

Now for an interesting motor—the upside down or the INVERTED type. Not that the Gypsy Moth wasn't interesting, but here is a motor that makes your ears perk up—and wandering minds to wonder. It does seem funny that an airplane will fly with its motor upside down—but it will.

And what is more, it has many advantages over the right-side-up motor!

It does look queer to see that crankshaft on top of the motor instead of on the bottom—the cylinders hanging down under the crankshaft instead of sticking their heads above it, but it has been found to work out splendidly and that's all that's required of it.

The Cirrus Hi-Drive Inverted Type is typical of all such motors. Now I won't go into the details of the mechanical construction of this motor for the materials



used in it are similar to that used in the normal upright but with slightly different characteristics, of course, to allow for the cylinders being inverted.

How the Engine Gets Oil

What's on your mind over there? You want to know how the engine gets oil if its upside down—the oil spills onto the pistons you say. Well—I'll say this for you, you certainly have been listening. Well—let me ease your mind on that point. It has no oil in the crankcase. The inverted motor is the "dry sump" type. It carries its oil in a separate tank outside the motor and

does not, as in the instance of the upright motor we've just talked about, get its lubrication from oil in the bottom of the crankcase or sump.

The oil is fed to the bearings and other power-transmitting parts by pressure, or forced feed from this tank, and the oil is sprayed on to the moving parts in quantities sufficient to keep it well lubricated at all times.

This motor also has four cylinders; as a matter of fact, turn the diagram of the Inverted Motor upside down and it will closely resemble the Gypsy Moth. This motor is air-cooled. It develops 95 horsepower at 2,100 r.p.m., and weighs 272 pounds, dry weight, or approximately 3 pounds per horsepower. This is slightly better in pounds per horsepower than the Gypsy.

I said that an inverted motor had certain advantages over an upright motor. Here they are. One of the principal advantages of the Inverted Motor is that it offers less head resistance and lends greater flexibility to streamlining since it offers less frontal area. This is due, to some extent to its being of the straight-in-line type.

Low Center of Gravity

One of the outstanding features of this type of motor is its low center of gravity; a reason why this motor is so popular on airplanes of the low wing type. Because of this extremely low center of gravity, the possibility of the plane's "nosing over" is reduced to an absolute minimum, in a short stop on landing. Brakes may be applied suddenly without this danger. If you tried to stop an airplane short with the regular upright motor where the center of gravity is much higher, you'd find your plane on its back in short order, and yourself sprawled among the other daisies.

Since the cylinders are so low, they are more accessible in case of repairs to spark plugs and other accessories. If you're a private pilot and own your own ship, you'll be pleased with this motor for where repairs are necessary, the simple design and the convenient location of adjustments help to save hours of service time. Yes, sir, by and large, the inverted motor has many things to recommend its use; particularly for light planes.

The Fuel Feed

I haven't forgotten to tell you about the fuel feed. Here it is. The carburetor is of the down draft type. It is attached about 12 inches below the crankshaft instead of about 11 inches above it as in the upright motor. This is a gain of nearly two feet of pipe line travel for gravity feed. See what that means? Gas reaches the engine in less time and that results in more accurate feeding.

Do you like the Inverted Motor? I thought you would. The next motor is just as interesting. It'll be the Vee type—but I guess you've had enough until next time!

Million Dollar ACE

*Captain Ballard Wasn't
Liked by His Squadron
Mates—but Up there
in the Blue, He Was
a Born Leader!*

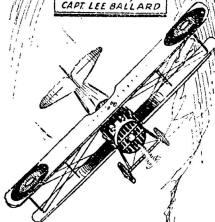
By
DARRELL JORDAN

*Author of "The Scarlet Albatross,"
"The Purple Devils," etc.*

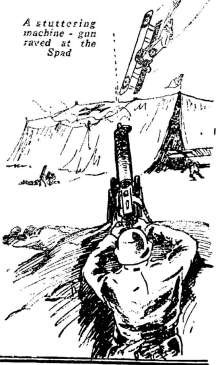
CAPTAIN LEE BALLARD, grim face stained by spatters of oil and the greasy film of cordite gases, stared with straining eyes into the welter of the dog-fight. Shadowy shapes flitted past, shapes bearing the concentric circles of the Allies; and others, more numerous, flashing the ominous black crosses of Imperial Germany.

The combined turmoil of full-throttled Hispanos and Mercedes stabbed through with the hammering of crimson-tipped guns, held his senses imprisoned in a crashing cacophony of sound. Streams of tracer slashed through the cold, thin air, weaving their deadly patterns in a vast cobweb of death.

In that crazed jumble of screaming ships it seemed no man could live. Yet men were living, were crouching behind blurred ring-sights, were slicing in and out of the



*A stuttering
machine-gun
raved at the
Spad*



tangle, fighting with cold, deliberate skill.

"B" Flight, 22nd American Aero Squadron, had locked wings with a powerful Pfalz outfit on their return from dawn patrol.

A blurred vision darted past Ballard's prop, and he caught a flash of black crosses. *Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat*. The twin Vickers vibrated to the short, savage tune, coughing a leaden hail into the flickering shadow before them.

THE Pfalz lunged awkwardly, like a bird struck in flight; the graceful nose dipped still more and it screamed earthward to certain oblivion. Ballard caught one fleeting glimpse of a limp figure draped over the Pfalz's stick—then the vision was gone and the Spad was curvetting up to seek another antagonist.

Lead pattered on the Spad's wings, swerved toward the cockpit. Glass splintered as bullets tore their way hungrily through the instrument panel. Ballard rolled, swiftly, sliding away as he presented the thin edges of his wings to the enemy.

Again the Spandaus spat, then a Pfalz, twisting away from the hawk-like pursuit of a Spad, lurched between them. Ballard wiped the cold sweat from his face, risked a glance around.

The dog-fight had split up now into a series of tumbling combats over a great area of sky. Far to the east, a grotesque thing of wood and fabric wrapped in a glowing mantle of crimson flame flopped dismally downward. Its markings were indistinguishable, but a Spad was following it watchfully.

A screaming whine close at hand heralded the fast approach of another ship. It flashed past in level flight, but Ballard shuddered as he saw the glassy eyes of the pilot. There was a small black hole in the forehead, and other dashes of scar-

let on the breast of the Sidcot suit. That was Tommy Atwood, who had borrowed a hundred francs that morning against a promised Paris leave.

Then Ballard saw two Pfalzes boring in at him, twin ribbons of tracer spewing from the Spandaus. The Spad whirled to face them.

For a moment the churning bitterness that filled Ballard's mind was replaced with the hot joy of conflict. As the Pfalz closed in warily, expertly striving to catch the Spad in a cross-fire, Ballard flipped the ship upon its back, dove, rolled level again, and screamed up beneath the nearest enemy.

For a moment the Spad was raked by a hail of death from the Boche flight leader; then it was through the gauntlet, stabbing short, murderous bursts into the tail assembly of the other Pfalz. A control wire snapped. For a moment the Pfalz's rudder wagged futilely as the Hun wrenched at the bar.

Collision was a split second away as Ballard leveled out. *Tac-tat-tat-tat!* Linen leaped crazily from the Spad's upper wings as Ballard continued on over in an Immelmann. But the Boche with the crippled tail assembly was wabbling anxiously toward home. Ballard, with nine confirmed victories, felt capable of handling this lone flight leader.

Another confused moment found the two single-seaters roaring in a ghastly game of ring-around-the-rosy. A game in which a slip meant death. The Yank knew instantly that this Boche was a foeman worthy of his best efforts.

Again and again Ballard feinted in an attempt to gain an opening. But the German commander was as wily, and his turns were beautiful; not an inch of altitude did he lose. A few yards gain to either pilot meant the chance to send lead hailing into the other's cockpit.

Ballard tensed as the Spad cut through a vertical bank. He suddenly jerked the throttle shut. The Spad dropped like a stone, rolled as the Yank gunned the Hisso, curved up and over in a tight loop in the opposite direction. As he came screaming down Ballard knew the Hun was momentarily bewildered. And that moment was enough.

The twin Vickers coughed out the last rounds in the belts, straight into the cockpit of the Pfalz. The German straightened slowly to his feet, turning a dark, convulsed face backward. He sagged half overside; the Pfalz kicked into a spin.

Ballard looked away wearily, banked toward the circling group of Spads that seemed to wait contemptuously.

"Another victory to chalk up; another chance for Major Garth to spout my praises while the rest sneer!"

IT was not so easy to forget this last Boche, for a fleeting glimpse of the crossed-saber device on the fuselage had told Ballard who his victim had been.

"Kurt von Torgen, flight leader in the *Staffel* of his brother, the great Lothar!" Ballard mumbled. "Lothar von Torgen, one of Germany's best; and I've just killed his brother! Hell would be safer for me than this sector from now on."

He knew that now he was a marked man. The crippled Pfalz which had escaped would report him, report the insignia of his Spad. And von Torgen, thirty Englishmen and Frenchmen and Yanks chalked up after his name, would move heaven and earth to avenge his brother. The thought was like a cold wind on the spine of Ballard.

He flung the grim prophesy aside, and his thin lips twisted in sardonic mirth as he thought of the situation back at Le Crecy, where the 22nd's

Headquarters were. It was a unique situation.

Lee Ballard had come to the 22nd under a heavy handicap. He was a rich man's son, the son of a millionaire. And Squadron Commander Garth, nursing political ambitions behind his small, furtive eyes, had seen what he considered a golden opportunity to ingratiate himself with the mighty.

With the cramped vision of the small and mean-minded, Major Garth fawned upon Ballard, heaped fulsome praise upon him, pointed him out to the other flyers as a paragon of skill, courage, and brains.

In vain Ballard had tried to change the S. C.'s attitude. Ballard had earned his acedon in as hellish and blood-crazed sky battles as any pilot had encountered. But Garth's extravagant praise and fawning boot-licking had earned for both of them the contemptuous hatred of the squadron.

The others were blind to the fact that Garth's attitude was as repugnant to Ballard as to themselves. They saw him only as a glorified officer's pet; and a slow, bitter hatred for the pompous Garth seethed in Ballard's mind. Garth, the man who had no right to his command, the man who had pulled political strings, who wasn't even a combat flyer!

The depleted Spad patrol glided down, and rolled their trucks upon the 22nd's tarmac. Ballard clambered from the cockpit, wiping the greasy film from his face with a weary gesture.

"Take her, Sergeant," he told the hangar non-com who trotted forward. "Give her a good checking; she's been thrown around a bit. I'll come in and help in a few minutes."

"Right, sir!"

Sergeant Hanks rubbed a loving hand over the Spad's sleek fuselage. He liked Ballard; all the groundmen

did. He was one of them, a skilled mechanic not above groveling in the oil and dust of the hangar floor when there was a tough job to be done. All of which helped explain Ballard's success. His ship was always in the finest condition, thanks to that respect from the lowly greaseballs. Mechs can make or break a pilot.

"Ready to go in and get your daily applause?" sneered Jim Bradley, the flight commander, as Ballard swung toward the Operations office.

The red surged into Ballard's face as he faced Bradley. "I've mauled hell out of you once, Bradley," he jerked. "Maybe I'd better do it again."

"Why don't you get your old man to buy you a little squadron all your own?" the dark-visaged commander spat back. "You've got the necessary influence. Garth would prefer charges against all of us if you said the word!"

Ballard's fist balled; his shoulder tensed—then he relaxed. What good would it do? He'd whipped Bradley before, and Belden, Graham, Whiting—all of them. But he hadn't knocked that contempt from their minds. That wasn't the way.

MAJOR JOHN GARTH leaped to his feet as Ballard and Bradley entered the office. The S. C. had one of those twisted mouths that can jerk into a sneer or fawning smile as occasion demands. His cold, calculating eyes swept eagerly over the two pilots' faces.

"What's your report?" he demanded, his gaze centering on Ballard.

"Ask Bradley; he leads the patrols," Ballard said coldly.

"The million dollar ace is too modest to tell you himself he downed a couple Boche," the flight leader grated. "We tangled with a ten-ship Pfalz patrol over the lines north of

Centrecourt. I got one; so did Belden and Ames. We lost Canty and Blaine, and Whitney is badly hit. That's all!"

Garth beamed at Ballard.

"So you scored two more victories, eh? Let's see, that makes you eleven, doesn't it? Captain, you're going to be a second McCudden, mark my words!"

He ignored the flight leader's mention of the two casualties. Pilots were cheap; ordinary pilots. Wasn't Issoudun turning them out by the hundreds? But pilots worth a cool million; pilots whose fathers were captains of industry and cabinet members—they had to be cultivated.

"Bradley," Garth said patronizingly, "if you know what's good for you, you'll watch Ballard in the air. See how he handles his ship, notice his methods of combat. He's a wonder, and you all should learn from him. Eh, Captain?"

"Bunk!" Ballard snarled. Bradley left the office with livid face.

"Major, for God's sake, will you cut this ballyhoo?" Ballard began. "I'm hated enough around here now!"

"You're too modest, Captain," Garth soothed. "You're an ace, twice over. These other so-called pilots are simply jealous, that's all. Why shouldn't I give praise where it's due?"

Ballard flung up his hands in disgust. The S. C. shoved a box of cigars forward. The lean captain refused curtly, turned toward the door.

"Just a moment," Garth barked. "This patrol you scrapped with were part of von Torgen's *Staffel*, weren't they?"

"They were black-and-red Pfalzes, probably von Torgen's," Ballard replied. As no one else had noted the identity of the flight leader he had downed, Ballard decided to say nothing about it. Bradley and the rest

would only accuse him of being a glory-seeker.

"Now is the time to strafe von Torgen's drome," decided Garth eagerly. "We'll go over this afternoon, while they're still demoralized from their losses this morning. We'll mop them up!"

"Did we say 'we'?" Ballard asked pointedly. A faint tinge of red showed under Garth's sallow skin, and a flicker of venom darted into the furtive eyes. Then his bland manner was back.

"I was speaking figuratively, of course, Captain. As commanding officer my place is, of course, in my office. We'll have to pull the strafe in time to get back before five o'clock. G. H. Q. is moving up a heavy troop train from Valour, and they're taking no chances of a Jerry Gotha or Rumpler sliding over to drop a few eggs. We're to fly escort for that train."

"Your idea of strafing von Torgen's drome is all wet," Ballard growled bluntly. "That von isn't so easily 'demoralized' as you seem to think. Better give it up."

Garth shook his head with the sudden stubbornness that small-minded men so often mistake for will-power.

"You really must bear a charmed life, Captain! Eleven victories! The Huns give you a wide berth, I'll bet!"

"Rats! I'm just another *Amerikaner* to them!"

Ballard stamped out before he gave in to the temptation to smash that smug, shifty face into a pulp. For an hour he wandered aimlessly up and down cramped quarters of his Nissen. The sudden blare of a Hisso brought him to the door. When he reached the hangars the roar had receded to a distant drone. There was a speck disappearing in the north.

"Who was it?" Ballard demanded. Sergeant Graham flung a worried

glance over his shoulder. "It was Garth— I mean Major Garth, sir. He's taken off for the lines in your ship!"

A sizzling curse ripped from Ballard's throat.

"The crazy, egotistical fool! He thinks in *my* ship no Boche will tackle him. He thinks he can strut around over the lines, get in some flying time without danger, to make it look good on his record. And he's never really been in a combat in his life!"

Bradley sauntered up, a sardonic smile twisting his lips.

"So your press-agent has borrowed your glory-bus for a little joy-ride," he grinned. "So what?"

"It's suicide!" Ballard snarled. "Every Hun in the sector will be laying for that Spad today! Bradley, I killed von Torgen's brother this morning!"

FOR a moment he hesitated. It would serve Garth right. But that would be murder! Garth was a sloppy, incompetent pilot. He had never flown in combat.

"Sergeant!" Ballard roared. "Warm up a ship!"

The hangar chief hesitated. "'B' Flight ships are being checked over. 'A' is out and 'C' takes off in ten minutes. What ship, Captain?"

"Give me the C.O.'s own job," Ballard said, "and make it snappy!"

The major's own Spad was rolled forth and the Hisso twisted into life. Ballard grunted as he listened. It was sloppy, that motor. Garth flew but seldom, and then only on pleasure jaunts behind the Yank lines. The mechs hated him, and slighted their work on his ship. Garth did not know enough to be aware of the fact that his ship was in rotten condition.

But Ballard took the Spad off a few moments later, his heart choking him as the pounding Hisso threat-

ened to conk over the line of poplars that bordered the field. The controls were slack, sloppy, and flying wires were too loose. The rev counter balked fully three hundred revolutions before it should. But Ballard flew the thing wide open, screamed toward the front.

He'd catch Garth, scare him senseless in the air, and when he had him on the ground, superior officer or not, there would be a reckoning.

The lines swam toward Ballard lazily as he cursed the logy ship. Far to the north, beyond Pierrette, was von Torgen's *Staffel* Headquarters—and von Torgen, who must be thirsting for Yank blood today.

Surely Garth hadn't the nerve to cross the lines! Ballard couldn't know that a black-and-red Pfalz had retreated craftily before Garth, causing a surge of heady recklessness in the S.C., leading him on and on. Garth's belief in the immunity of the khaki Spad was amazing, as amazing as his ignorance and colossal egotism.

Ballard caught sight of Garth a few minutes later, just before the five Pfalzes came storming down.

As the distant Spad swam into his range of vision, Ballard batted the throttle with an angry fist. A brisk tail wind had sprung up. It shoved the Spad along at increased speed.

Garth was swinging in vainglorious circles as Ballard closed in. The S.C.'s turns were sloppy; he skidded half the time. And then—von Torgen's crack flight came helling down, with the Boche ace himself at point.

THEY struck Garth utterly unaware, smothering him for a moment in a vast web of tracer smoke. The Pfalz climbed, poised again like a mailed fist. Ballard was close enough now to see the white, fear-crazed face of Garth as he realized his plight. Garth whipped the Spad into impossible maneuvers, evolutions that, by their very maddened

panic frustrated the Boche for a moment. He seemed to have forgotten his guns. The Pfalz poised, started down.

At the same second, Ballard bored in, Vickers screeching venomously. He was lucky with the first burst, hitting a black-crossed ship squarely in the fuel tank. That Pfalz broke in two, went raining down in fragments. And Ballard was in the thick of the tangle, whipping the wobbly Spad into impossible positions, spitting tracer in a dozen directions.

Garth was a menace to them all. He seemed completely mad as he lurched crazily about like a mouse seeking escape from a club. He swept past Ballard once, and he was shrieking insanely.

But even so, he inadvertently caused a double tragedy. A Pfalz spun suddenly one side to get clear of Garth's blind way, at exactly the right moment to lock wings with another. A gas line snapped, flooding hot motors, and a roaring sheet of flame wrapped the hideously tangled ships.

The odds were even then, and the two Spads seemed destined to escape. But as they turned, more Huns had closed in from the rear and they were trapped. Ballard lunged back into the *mêlée* with berserk abandon, and even then Garth seemed to regain some measure of sanity and to trip his triggers.

They were already doomed, and Ballard knew it. He sensed that the red-and-black ships were less concerned with him, except defensively. But they ripped and tore at the Spad of Garth like demons possessed. Again and again they smashed down on him. Through the murk of exhaust flames and tracer Ballard saw great strips of fabric ripped from the Spad's wings, revealing the bare ribs.

One strut hung by a matchstick fragment, and the fuselage was a

pulpy mass of tattered linen and wood. Yet, magically, Garth appeared uninjured.

Ballard realized, then, von Torgen's game. He was forcing the two Yanks down! He wanted them alive! A glance below revealed an amazing fact. They had drifted well back behind the German lines. That stiff tail wind—Ballard remembered now.

He redoubled his efforts to hew a way through that vicious circle. But he was no superman—and only a superman could have won free. Out-numbered, heavily handicapped by a sluggish ship that had become almost unmanageable, he nevertheless managed to stab another Pfalz to the vitals before a flat, smooth field loomed below, and the outstretched arm of von Torgen signaled them down imperatively.

Garth seemed to leap at the chance with pitiful hope. He smashed his riddled ship down with frantic haste, falling it in a heap at the end though he himself was jerked from the wreckage almost unscathed.

Von Torgen had leaped immediately from his streamered ship and strode off toward his office. Ballard rolled in, an empty Vickers belt flopping from the guns like a signal of defeat.

ALL was confusion. Rough hands propelled Garth and Ballard toward the sheet-iron building into which von Torgen had disappeared. The next moment they were inside, facing von Torgen across a littered desk. The German's helmet lay on the floor by his chair, and the grime of battle still discolored his face. A heavy Luger reposed on the scarred mahogany before him.

The moment his eyes fell on the Prussian ace's face, Ballard had him catalogued. Von Torgen was all steel and iron. Indomitable, ruthless determination was depicted by the heavy out-thrust chin; the hard grey

eyes shouted it. And Ballard thought: whatever von Torgen says, he will not be bluffing. His kind doesn't bluff.

"So!" von Torgen said softly. "I have here the man who killed my brother this morning. We have a score to settle, Major, you and I."

"What do you mean?" Garth's face was loose, fear creeping into it.

"You are the man," von Torgen snarled. "The insignia and number of your ship was recognized; there can be no doubt. I shall, of course, give you a chance. In ten minutes we will go up, you and I, and only one of us will return. My pilots will be on hand to see that you do not escape."

It took a moment for the truth to filter into Garth's twisted brain. But when it did, his face turned ashen, contorted in sudden terror.

"You can't do that!" he shrilled. "It wasn't me; I didn't shoot your brother! It was Ballard, here. I borrowed his ship this afternoon, that's all! He's your man, I swear it!"

Von Torgen's lip lifted slightly; he said nothing. Then Ballard heard his own voice, harsh and unnatural.

"He's right. I'm your man, *Hauptmann*. The major was flying my ship just now. It was I shot Kurt von Torgen."

The *Staffel* leader bowed coldly, a reluctant gleam of admiration appearing for a moment in the icy grey eyes.

"A gallant effort, Captain, to save your officer from vengeance. But I can hardly believe your story. In a few so short minutes, Major, you, too, will have an opportunity to know how it feels to have flame spring up before your eyes, creep back on you, roast the flesh from your bones!"

His voice had risen to a shout. Garth stumbled back, an arm instinctively flung before his face.

"This is a frame-up, cold-blooded

murder! I tell you I am innocent of von Torgen's death; I'm not even a combat flyer!"

The German leaned forward, a speculative gleam sparkling from his eyes.

"There is one chance, Yankee *Schwein*. If you could tell me something I want to know, I *might* turn you over to the prison camp authorities instead. If you told me the time the troop train leaves Valour, I might reconsider—"

Ballard roared out: "Damn you, keep your mouth shut!"

But his furious command did not halt the babble from Garth. Beside himself with terror Garth screamed: "Five o'clock!"

"You dirty, doublecrossing skunk!"

Ballard lunged at Garth, sent him reeling with a heavy blow to the mouth. Two guards seized the infuriated Yank, flung him back. Garth scrambled to his feet, blood dripping from his smashed lips. Pure venom danced in his eyes as he turned them on Ballard. Gone was all pretense, all fawning.

"What if I did tell?" he shrieked. "What good will it do von Torgen? He won't dare take bombers over; the train will be guarded!"

"To give you something to think about, *Schwein*," von Torgen rasped, "you have helped us greatly. One of our agents has the high bridge you know as Bridge 99 mined with hundreds of pounds of high-explosives. He is only awaiting the right train. Now, thanks to your treachery, he will know that the train crossing shortly after five o'clock is the one carrying the troops. And when the train is well out on the trestle, a plunger will go down, and—"

Von Torgen snapped an order to a soldier, scribbled something on a piece of paper.

"Have this sent in code to Z-45, at once!"

Ballard's head was a seething tu-

mult of horror. In his mind he could already visualize the terrible thing that Garth had brought upon the doughboys, could see those packed boxcars rise and dissolve into bloody fragments when the fatal Bridge 99 was reached.

SIMULTANEOUSLY a high-pitched droning road became audible. Ballard realized that it had been increasing for the past few seconds, but had gone unheeded by the tense little group in the office. The drone became a thunderous roar. Excited cries shrilled from outside, men pounded past the office. A *Leutnant* thrust his head in the door, yelled: "Yankee strafe!"

There came the shrill scream of diving ships, then the staccato crackle of Vickers. Maxims barked back, and the first demolition bomb struck, not twenty feet from the *Kommandant's* shack. The windows flew in, dirt and splinters rained down from the sagging ceiling.

The bombs came then in a steady ripping, blasting rain. Von Torgen ran out, cursing gutturally. They heard his bellowed orders on the tarmac. Two soldier sidled closer to the Yanks, Lugers ready. *Boooooom!* A thunderous crash overhead.

The ceiling came down, and one heavy beam crushed a guard's head like a ripe melon. The other stared at him in horror, dazed. Ballard sprang in, his fist shooting for the Hun's jaw. The man dropped like a pole-axed steer.

"Come on!" Ballard ripped out. "The gang is strafing hell out of the drome—the one useful order you ever gave! It's a chance—"

On the tarmac all was confusion, uproar and bedlam. The Spads were lancing down in pairs, Vickers chattering like mad. Little puffs of dust danced their macaber course across the field; great yawning holes marked the bomb's hits. A hangar

sagged wearily, and a Pfalz stood on its nose while red flame trickled up from the imbedded motor.

But here and there a Mercedes crackled into life as mechs twisted the sticks for grey-faced pilots. A stuttering Maxim in one of the pits raved triumphantly, and a Spad crashed headlong into the earth. Another cocarded ship spat a handful of slugs into the gun pit and the Maxim choked into silence.

The whole picture flashed before the Yanks' eyes as they plunged forward. There was, for the moment, too much noise and dust and death for anyone to notice them. Garth leaped into the pit of his Spad, the ship that Ballard had flown that day.

"Pull her through!" he screeched. "You can catch a wing!"

Ballard grabbed the stick, twisted the Hisso over expertly. And that second he felt Death's claws graze him. For the prop swung into a glittering arc, failing to draw Ballard into its vortex by a miracle. Garth had already switched on! As Ballard floundered, the Spad leaped ahead, a wing tip sending the Yank reeling. As his final act of treachery Garth was leaving him, saving himself!

The strafing Spads had pulled for home, now, and Garth's ship wobbled into the air and arrowed after them. There were no Huns near enough to dispute his getaway.

Bitterness gripped Ballard.

It had to be Garth who escaped!

But there was still a chance. Ballard glared through the dust and smoke at a red-winged Albatross scout that stood a few yards away. Perhaps some pilot from another *Staffel* had flown it there, and taken cover during the strafe. Ballard's eyes fastened on two twenty-pound bombs hanging from the bomb rack beneath the wings. And something clicked in his mind.

He started forward, running. The hubbub had partially subsided now;

a Boche saw him. A hoarse yell of warning split the air as Ballard redoubled his speed. Luger and Mauser bullets snapped by his head. He heard the bull voice of von Torgen roaring frantically, then he was fumbling in the Albatross' cockpit.

He lurched around to the prop. A bullet seared across his back, burning like vitriol. If the Mercedes didn't catch on the first swing—if it wasn't warm—He jerked the club through. It hesitated, flailed the air like mad.

BALLARD leaped on the wing, shoved the throttle full on, flung himself into the office. The Albatross screeched across the tarmac and into the air in a vicious cloud of lead. Ballard climbed a bit, then sent the red scout hurtling toward Valour. A sudden thought had decided him. Garth would never think to warn that train, never dare admit he had given the time of its leaving.

Ballard glared at his wrist-watch. Almost five now. Behind him Pfalz scouts sprang into the air like angry hornets.

Yank Archie grunted their fleecy puffs into the heavens like mad as the late afternoon sun glinted on Albatross and pursuing Pfalzes. The American knew that von Torgen wouldn't turn back at the lines; there was too much at stake. But the Albatross held its short lead, even increased it a bit.

Ballard's mind pictured the railroad north of Valour. A few hundred yards from the bridge the track emerged from a tunnel. And somewhere near that trestle lurked a Hun, hand ready on the plunger to send Yank lives to oblivion.

Lines and towns and war-gutted terrain flowed under the Albatross' gleaming wings. A spidery structure loomed up, came closer.

Bridge 99!

There was something else, too. A

plume of black smoke from a snaky object approaching the southern end of the tunnel. Ballard flung the stolen ship into a whistling dive, flashing out scant yards above the laboring locomotive. He signaled wildly. The train only increased its speed. The American groaned; of course that engineer wasn't going to heed the crazy waves of a Boche pilot!

There was something else hurtling down out of the southern sky. Five brown specks, specks that rapidly grew larger, became cocarded Spads!

Ballard groaned, whipping the Albatross around. The train roared into the tunnel. In a few seconds it would emerge, thunder out on that deadly trestle— There was one desperate chance left, and as he gave the thought an instant's consideration Ballard knew that if he took it he would be signing his own death warrant.

His face hardened. The Albatross flung itself skyward, then came shrieking down, straight for the trestle. And the first Vickers' rain pattered ominously on the red ship's wings. A veritable hail of leaden death enveloped the Albatross as Ballard held it steady. Bullets pinged from the Mercedes, ripped ragged gashes in the fabric. Blood trickled from the mad Yank's head, dripped over his face.

He brushed it away impatiently. Blood—that couldn't stop him now.

Then the split-second came. He jerked the bomb release, felt the ship shudder. He dared a glance down. Twin explosions roared upward, then a mighty thunder lifted the trestle bodily and flung it into the sky. The Albatross leaped wildly, tossed like a feather in the concussion, then was sucked down. He fought it with rudder and stick. That glance had told him several things. The troop train, just emerging from the tunnel mouth—screech-

ing to a halt, reversing hurriedly into the sanctity of the tunnel.

Then Spads and Pfalz scouts and Ballard's Albatross merged into one seething, hellish mass. With a fierce gush of exhilaration he flung himself into the fight with berserk abandon. *Tac-atac-atac-tac!*

Spandaus spurted flame and smoke into the pit of a screaming Pfalz. It reeled away. A second burst almost cut a Boche in twain. They were all shooting at him, but Ballard no longer cared. He saw only black crosses and the ring-sight between the black Spandaus. Ballard was thinking only one thing. To hell with Bradley and the rest. Let Garth come on with his lying charges. It was to be his last fight.

BALLARD never knew when the second flight of Spads roared in. For a second he had watched a Pfalz spiral down to death before his gun, and he knew the erect saluting figure in the cockpit was von Torgen.

But he didn't know that, as the mangled flights fell apart, the three Spads gallantly surrounded the Albatross and led it down to a landing in the 22nd's drome.

He was half conscious when he made that landing, but the bottle of cognac that was held to his mouth drove the bloody mist away. Ballard told part of his story to Bradley, who listened for once without the sneer. Garth's treachery Ballard kept to himself. Then Bradley was speaking, a new note in his voice.

"I was in the patrol that strafed von Torgen's drome. We'd just got home when one of the Yank wireless stations picked up a message and passed it on to us. Von Torgen's adjutant was sending it to Z-45, and he didn't have time to code it. The message said a Yank prisoner had escaped in a red Albatross, might try to prevent the blowing up of the

troop train. We knew it must be you, hopped off and managed to keep 'A' Flight, which was escorting the train, from shooting you completely to pieces."

Bradley hesitated, coughed awkwardly.

"You know, Lee, we've been thinking. A guy who'd do what you did—well—"

He thrust out a hesitant hand and Ballard seized it. "But Garth—"

Ballard leaned back. A vast feeling of peace flooded his weary mind. Somewhere he had heard the expression, "poetic justice." This must be it. Garth, who had worshiped money and influence, had died in flames, but not a blaze of glory. While he, Ballard, the despised, had come into his own.

"I'd give a million dollars," he said peacefully, "for a chance to sleep a week!"

SKY NAVIGATOR'S MAZE

Can You Solve This Puzzle? Try It!



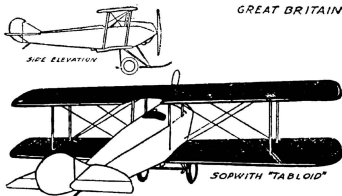
GREETINGS! Come right in and park the chassis anywhere you can locate a spot for it. Here's a brand new and simply amazing brainteaser for you. This simple little masterpiece represents a pilot lost in the rain and clouds over his airport. He comes up from the lower left hand corner and tries to get to his hangar in the center of the area below him. How does he do it?

Just start him in the opening in the "clouds" in front of him and then make a left or right turn. From then on it's up to you to get him into the hangar out of the rain.

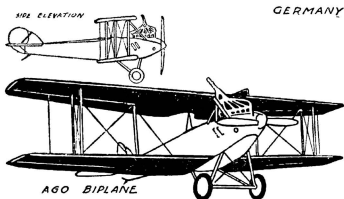
If you get lost worse than he did, you better turn to page 119 for the correct route to the center of the mess, but first of all take the stick for a while and let's see how good a navigator you turned out to be.

LIBRARY OF

GREAT BRITAIN



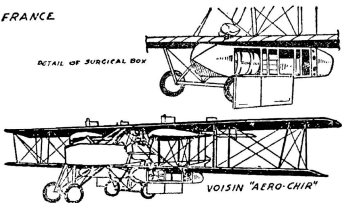
The Sopwith "Tabloid" was a biplane scout which the British Sopwith Co. brought out prior to the War. It did noble service in proving that biplanes could be faster climbers and speedier than monoplanes on which designers had concentrated until then, so this plane revolutionized the airplane industry. It had simple lines, single bay of struts and an absence of complicated features ahead of other ships of its time. The undercarriage was of the skid type. The Gnome engine was 80 h.p. and it made a top speed of 95 m.p.h. It carried a 3½ hours fuel supply. Dimensions: Span, 24 ft.; length, 20 ft.



The Ago biplane of 1917 was a two-seater. This firm was a branch of the Otto Co. of Germany from which it derived its name Ago (Aerowerke Gustav Otto). This plane was quite different in its strut arrangement. It had a pair of end struts on each side connected by wires to a single intermediate strut. The plane was not used in large numbers at the front doubtless due to the poor visibility for the pilot, where the exhaust pipes of the engine extended so high above the fuselage and an inclined strut in front joined to the leading edge of the wing. Dimensions: Span: 39 ft. 3 in.; length, 26 ft. 6 in.

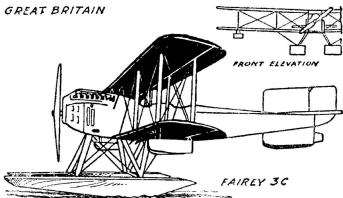
WAR PLANES

FRANCE



The Voisin "Aero-Chir" was a flying ambulance much used by the French. This machine, made by the oldest airplane manufacturers in the world, was a pusher with a long nacelle protruding in front of the wings and supported by an extra undercarriage. It carried a box under each lower wing. These boxes had hinged sides which opened to give access to the fittings of complete surgical equipment to care for emergency cases when it would have been impossible to transport the wounded to field hospitals without medical attention. The engine was a 400 h.p. Liberty.

GREAT BRITAIN



The Fairey Type 3 C seaplane was a British craft manufactured by the Fairey Aviation Co., Ltd. It differed from their earlier machines slightly and had more power, but the wings and chassis were interchangeable with the Type 3 B. The wings were of equal span with two bays of struts on either side. The engine, a 375 h.p. Rolls-Royce "Eagle" gave a speed of 97 knots. This reconnaissance patrol plane could cruise for six hours and could climb to 10,000 feet in about 17 minutes. Dimensions: Span: 46 ft. 2 in.; length, 36 ft.; height, 13 ft.

Winged Comet

*As Lieutenant-Colonel William Barker Rode Through
Flaming Skies with Vickers Spewing Lead, the
Friendship of His Buddies Spurred Him On!*

By HUGH JAMES

Author of "Days of Death," "Against Odds," etc.



FRIENDSHIPS in the blue made a super-ace of Lieut.-Colonel William George Barker, V. C., but his buddies went to their death or to prison, while he remained in air, ending his career as a fighting man in one of the most sensational achievements in the history of aerial warfare.

Like Bishop, Barker—also a Canadian—started his career as a cavalryman. Fixation of the lines in France spelled *finis* for cavalry, and Barker turned to the air. First as an observer, then as a pilot, he finally demonstrated the remarkable skill that made him a winged comet—a super-ace.

At the same time friendships began that were cemented by battle in the air. The first of Barker's comrades was one of the strangest characters on the Western front—Mahmet Ali, a native prince of India, who had left Oxford to join the British Flying Corps.

A Hindu Prince

Mahmet wore the turban of his native rank even when flying above the German hinterland. In its center was an emerald worth a fortune. Barker and the prince became close friends, but the emerald worried the Canadian. The story of Mahmet's practise of

wearing it at all times had seeped across the lines. Huns were showing an inclination to concentrate on the Indian.

"Leave that thing behind," Barker kept telling his friend. "It'll be the death of you."

"But, Captain," the Hindu always argued, "it is a tradition in my family to wear it in battle. My ancestors always wore it. It is a talisman of victory. That is why it is still in our possession."

A Talisman of Victory

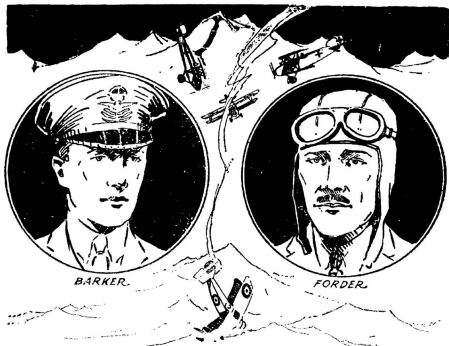
Oriental mysticism had no part in the Canadian's make-up. His was a practical nature. He knew the Huns had learned of the fabulous emerald and their greed for loot would lead them to try every trick they knew to shoot the prince down.

Several flights were made in which the Germans tried to cut the Hindu from the British formation. Barker fought desperately to protect his friend, but he knew the attacks would continue if the prince persisted in wearing the jewel. As flight commander, he ordered Mahmet to leave the gem behind.

"And see that word gets out that you'll not wear it after this," he instructed. "The Boche are bound to hear about it."

Mahmet Ali saluted.

"You are my friend and my cap-



Two Famous Friends of the War Skies

tain," he answered. "I shall do as you say, but it will be my death."

"Rot! Those Huns want that rock more than your life."

A Victim of Loot-Hunters

The next day the flight took to the air and Mahmet, instead of wearing his turban and flashing emerald, appeared with the conventional helmet upon his head.

During the morning patrol they encountered a formation of Albatross two-seaters. Battle followed.

Although he no longer wore his turban, the Huns quickly identified the dark-faced prince. Before William Barker realized it, the prince was surrounded. Spandaus and Maxims poured streams of lead into his crate.

Barker dove, fighting savagely. A sense of responsibility made him fight like a maniac. Through his mind raced the thought there might be something in the story of the great emerald that had protected the prince's ancestors in days gone by. Mahmet had been surrounded before and had fought his way clear. Now the Canadian could see that he was doomed.

Guilt surged through him and he raged into the enemy ranks, his guns spitting streams of lead.

Kismet

But Mahmet Ali's name was written upon the scrolls of those who perish in battle. In spite of Barker's most desperate efforts, the Huns pressed down. The gallant prince

A TRUE STORY of the WORLD WAR

struggled to hold his stick in place, but fell forward against it. In another moment his plane was tumbling to its doom.

With the Hindu down, the Germans streaked for the ground. Each pilot wanted to get possession of the fabulous emerald.

With the combat over and the prince slain, Barker led his flight back to the landing field. Gloom held his face as he clambered from his cockpit. He had ordered his friend to go aloft without his talisman and now the prince was dead. For a time the strange mysticism of the East haunted him. He tried to throw it off, but could not. The emerald remained to be passed to Mahmet's heirs, but the smiling, dark-skinned prince was no longer a member of the squadron.

A Champion

The incident turned William Barker from an ordinary fighter into an ace whose name will long be green in Canada's military history. Instead of being a cool, methodical fighter, Barker became a raging sky-champion. This was demonstrated with a sensational finale at the close of his career.

He was made commander of the 66th Squadron—a fighting leader instead of a desk hero. He led his pilots into the air and fought at the point of the V-formation.

Late in 1917 a young pilot joined the formation, Lieut. E. G. Forder. He was new to the air and the presence of such a blazing star as Barker turned him into a hero-worshiper.

The squadron leader noted the youngster and liked him. He took pains to teach him the tricks of battle maneuver and found a willing and clever pupil. Friendship developed.

Early in Forder's service with the squadron, the 66th met the famous Tangeos in a battle that threatened to end Barker's career. Udet, the

famous German ace, was leading the Germans and he quickly marked Barker's flashing plane. A signal to three of his first flight companions and Udet hurled his Pfalz at the Canadian.

At the same time, the other Huns attacked from above, below and from the rear.

Never had Barker faced a more dangerous situation. The Germans cut him off from the rest of his formation and began a systematic campaign.

Youthful Edward Forder saw his chief's danger. The youngster had yet to win his first victory, while Barker had passed thirty at that time. But the cub could see his chief was hard-pressed. Whirling out of the scrum, Forder hurled his ship directly at the nearest Hun. The man dodged out of the way and the ring around Barker was broken.

Blind to his own danger, Forder shot forward, narrowly missing a crack-up with Udet. Then he encountered the German second in command, who was coming down on Barker's tail. The Boche's Spandau were blazing and their bullets were ripping into the Canadian's ship. Forder unleashed his guns. He held the trip down and he steered straight for the German.

He thought nothing of his own danger. His Vickers guns kept chattering. Closer, still closer. In another moment they would collide.

Fledgling and Veteran

Then suddenly the enemy fell away. One wing buckled and flames ran along the fuselage. Forder looked around to see the Germans were no longer attacking Barker. They were reforming and making ready to draw away from the scene of battle. Udet no longer sought the Canadian ace's life. He was satisfied to escape with his own.

"Thanks a lot," Barker told the

cup, when they were on the ground once more.

"Thanks—for what?"

"Saving my life—that's all,"—with a grin.

From that day on, fledgling and veteran were close friends.

Above the Alps

The Italian debacle at Corporetto sent British and French troops rushing to the Piave. Among the British units was the 66th Squadron with Barker at its head.

December found them fighting over the snow-covered Alps, meeting the pick of Austria's air forces. Among the pilots of the dual monarchy was Linke-Crawford, second among the Austrian aces. He flew a black and white checkerboard ship not unlike that made famous by Werner Voss upon the Western front.

Barker's formation and the famous Austrian's squadron were dog-fighting over Mount Tomba. It was a struggle in which the Canadian ace was forced to accept battle with twice his own numbers. *Mêlée* followed, a dog-fight that saw planes drop from the maelstrom of fighting, roaring combatants to crack up on the snow-covered fields below.

Once more Barker was selected by a German leader as adversary. Linke-Crawford, however, was not prepared for the quick side attack when he and three other Austrians struck at the Canadian ace.

A Savage Attack

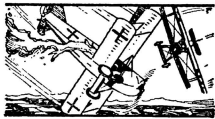
He lunged forward only to find himself being flanked by a savagely fighting little ship whose pilot was utterly without fear.

He signaled to his followers. Instead of attacking Barker, the quartet swung and roared down on Forder, every gun aflame. The youngster fought back, but the battle was over before he realized it. Barker swarmed to his aid, but the Camel

beneath Forder was a stricken thing before the ace arrived. The engine was killed with a blast of fire, the gas tank ripped apart, its gasoline swarming out in a silvery spray that would have caught afire had not the motor been stopped.

Forder looked down. A snowy field was in sight and he dropped the Camel's nose. The war was over as far as he was concerned. He went down for a dead stick landing and was soon a prisoner.

Once more William Barker returned to his airdrome. He had crashed two Austrians, but that did not make up for the loss of his com-



The enemy crate fell away

rade. He waited for notice from the Red Cross announcing Forder's safe landing.

An Opportunity

It came within a few days and in it was a letter from the young pilot telling him that he had been crashed by the famous Linke-Crawford, who knew Barker's fame.

The Canadian grasped the opportunity. He wrote a letter demanding that the best Austrian aces meet him in combat. Brunowski, Linke-Crawford, von Fiala and Havratil were challenged. He not only defied them to meet him and his men, but announced an attack upon the Austrian airdrome three days hence. The day came and he took to the air. With him were Captain P. C. Carpenter, a victor in fifteen aerial combats, and Captain K. B. Montgomery, a winner in twelve.

As they roared toward the Aus-

trian airdrome, they found the enemy awaiting them. At their head was Linke-Crawford in his checkerboard marked plane. It was an opportunity for which Barker had long looked forward.

Opposed to him was the most daring fighter the Austrian aerial forces had produced. A dandy, a dancing man, a chocolate soldier in Vienna, the pilot was a savage in the air. Probably the most colorful of all the enemy aces, Linke-Crawford was eager for battle as the Canadian.

The two champions saluted each other and then began to fight. Their followers drew off and watched the battle, neither firing a shot for the time.

Battle Royal

Swift and terrible was that struggle. Neither man had the slightest trace of fear. Both were anxious to show their comrades that they were superior. The two planes rushed at each other with guns aflame. Both had crowded their engines to the limit. Streams of lead poured from their cowls. Fighting at a tempo that threatened to set the sky afire, they wove and twisted, dove and zoomed, death riding the wing-tip of first one plane then the other.

Never had the skies above the Alps seen such a battle. The most valiant efforts of Baracca, Scaroni, Brunowski and von Fiala were merely stunting exhibitions compared to this struggle. Both were pilots of the very highest order. Both were skilled marksmen and utterly unafraid.

The contest was short, but filled with sensational fighting. The Austrian first carried the battle to his adversary, who dodged and twisted, trying to get a line on Linke-Crawford's skill. Meantime his Camel was spotted with bullets. Then he turned and counter-attacked. The Viennese dancing man was no coward. He met

the Camel's rushes and only spun and retreated in hope of making a quick turn and coming down on the Canadian's tail.

Swift End

Barker watched this maneuver several times. He slid away, but on each occasion he was just a trifle slower. Finally Linke-Crawford was full on his rear, pouring in blast after blast. The Canadian waited until the shots were breaking about him. He nosed down into a power dive. The Austrian was on his tail like a hawk.

Suddenly the Camel's stick went back and the nose roared up into a loop. Before Linke-Crawford could pull out, he found the Canadian on his tail and a burst of bullets crashing into his cockpit.

The end came so swiftly that the pilots on both sides were astounded. One moment they had seen Major Barker diving for his life. The next found them staring at Linke-Crawford's tumbling plane, falling to its doom. The Austrian ace was already dead. He had been riddled when he believed himself a victor.

Spring found the Italians holding their own, but in Flanders and Picardy, the Germans were crushing both French and British armies. The 66th Squadron was hurriedly summoned to the Western front. There it entered a series of combats that added to its prestige and brought the fame of William Barker to that small circle of super-aces whose names are known wherever birdmen fly.

June 23rd, 1918, saw him achieve his fiftieth victory. With its confirmation came orders to quit the front and return to England. Britain had inaugurated a policy of saving its greatest heroes.

Barker heard the orders with a wry smile. The morning came for his departure. He asked for a final flight.

Permission was granted. He climbed and raced toward the lines. To him the war would soon be over. He had been ordered to executive duty. The thrill of battle would soon be taken from him. He remembered those friends he had had, whom the Hun had sent down to flaming death. This was his last chance to avenge them.

Last Chance

Scraping the ceiling he coursed toward German territory. Ahead of him appeared a veritable cloud of German machines. At least fifty!

Barker did not hesitate a second. It was his last chance at the Hun and there were plenty of them. With engine roaring he dropped into the center of that mass of enemies.

His machine-guns blazed. One enemy was falling by the time he had leveled off. Another limped away on damaged wings. Then the Boche turned on him. Bullets came from a dozen directions. His Camel was lashed from nose to tail, but it kept on fighting. A second Hun went down in flames.

Signals from the German armada commander sent three score black-crossed ships in maneuvers that would spell Barker's doom, but still he fought on. Bullets struck him as well as his ship. but the fighting Canadian was not to be denied.

A third Hun fell riddled, torn to bits by his savage Vickers fire. but the concentrated Boche attack was ripping his Camel to pieces. Another

bullet crashed into his body, but he fought on and on.

One Against Fifty

They were over Allied territory now and he would tumble among his own people when the end came. That was all Barker cared about.

The Camel's engine had stopped its rhythmic beat. The end was not far off. He put the nose down to gain headway. A full Boche squadron was below him. He might kill another German before death claimed him.

He dove into the midst of an Albatross formation.

Once more his Vickers blasted out. The fourth Boche staggered and then burst into flames. The rest were milling about him, lashing him with their fire. On the ground, thousands watched the battle of one man against fifty. More bursts from the Spandaus and the Camel lurched, then fell. The wings began to turn in the death spin.

The earth was reaching up to grasp him. He was bleeding from a half a dozen wounds, but he kept control. Down, down, down. Then a crash. The fight was over.

Barker lived, but fought no more. War could not kill him and he had magnificently avenged his buddies in the blue. It remained for peace to write *finis* to his glorious career. A minor accident on a Canadian flying field, a fall from a low altitude ended the history of one of the world's most illustrious fighters.

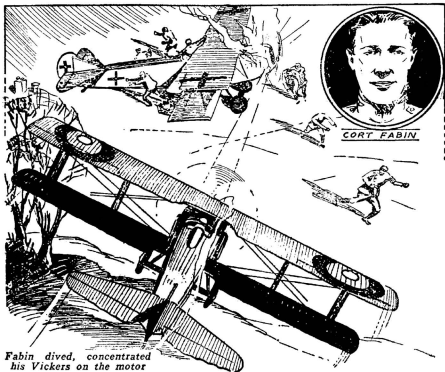
Next Month : A Complete Novelette of Smashing Action!

MUSTANGS CAN FLY

By the author of STARS MUST FALL

FREDERICK C. PAINTON

The Stuntster



Fabin dived, concentrated his Vickers on the motor

Lieutenant Fabin was the Laugh of the Squadron—Until Wing Called for a Ground Attack and Sent Him Plunging Singlehanded at the Enemy Hangars!

By **ARTHUR J. BURKS**

Author of "Clancy Goes Up," "The Ace From Hell," etc.

LIEUTENANT CORT FABIN, gentleman! He couldn't fly. How he ever got into the Air Service was a mystery. And an even greater mystery reposed in the fact that he had been passed through Issoudun and had got to the front. The mystery was that he hadn't crashed himself out. He had no real sense of balance. He couldn't fly in

formation if his life depended on it.

But there was one thing about him: he hadn't an ounce of fear in him, and there wasn't anything he wouldn't tackle.

"Listen, Cort," said Captain Marlin, that second morning in the Forest de San Roche. "You're a nice boy and everybody likes you. You've come up here as a replacement and

I have to use you. But get this: if any of my men get killed, I'd prefer that they get it in battles with the Germans—not from their own men. By which I mean this: when things get going tough, when planes are all scrambled up, and wing-tips are almost rubbing, and bullets are coming from every direction—dive! Dive, understand? And keep diving until you're sure you're in the clear. Then pick off the Germans who slip out for one reason or another. But, in any case, keep away from us. I have the heebie-jeebies, just watching you!"

Cort Fabin grinned. He had the widest grin on the Western front. His eyes danced. He'd never let them know, he was resolved, how such words cut into him. Flying was a nightmare, not because he was afraid to fly, but because he was afraid he would never learn how.

"Okay, skipper," he said. "I'll do as you say."

HE was remembering that, as the Germans slanted up out of the trees, coming up like flushed birds to battle with the Third Pursuit group. Veterans, most of those Germans.

Right now, Fabin's face was grim. His big mouth was a set line. His eyes blazed. If only he could fly like the others. He was a deadly shot with his Vickers. His judgment of distance was excellent, and his balance should have been—but wasn't.

"I just want to get in a few good wallops," he thought.

Then the two groups were joined in battle, seven Spads against seven Fokkers, as evenly as one could reasonably hope for. The Germans came in with their Spandaus raging. They were answered by the clattering defiance of Vickers, behind which sat men determined on making every bullet count.

Just as battle was joined, Marlin

looked across at Fabin. Fabin nodded, and the iron went deeper into his soul. They didn't think he could fly, which made it practically unanimous.

"But I'll get it down, or die doing it!" he swore.

Then, the shock and crash of meeting. Pencils of smoke and flame across the sky. Benzes and Hissos roaring full out. Wings pointed at the sky and the ground. Spinning wheels. Smoke kicked back by the slipstream. The smell of burning oil and raw gasoline. The odor of sweat, of straining, nervous bodies. The wind across the abyss of the sky-amphitheater.

Bullets snapped past Cort's ears like hornets, and to Cort the sound was the music of the high gods. This was meat and drink in his mouth, perfume in his nostrils; yet he was somehow cut off from the fullest enjoyment of it because he lacked a sense of balance.

Ahead of him speared a smashing Fokker, blazing with hot guns at Captain Marlin himself. Fabin's hands darted to his trips. His Vickers were almost ready to spill death across the skies when he saw that if he had fired he would have torn the back of Marlin to ribbons.

He swerved to get back upon the German, smashed at him with a savage, stuttering burst. He missed, but the bullets were close enough to make the German duck out, fearing a second burst, and Marlin got away.

As Marlin did so, he looked back, saw Fabin, motioned him out of the fight.

Fabin, obeying, dived, dived with his motor full out, disappointment in his heart.

The next second a blazing Fokker spun past him, roaring, its motor full out, the head of its pilot jerking on the cockpit coaming. Behind it dived Marlin, who had turned on his enemy and counted coup. He pulled out of

his dive, waved at Fabin to follow.

Fabin answered the wave, followed on the tail of the falling, spinning German. He didn't use his guns. There was no need—unless by some miracle the German came alive again, survived the crash. But he didn't. The Fokker went in, straight down, and the motor must have been driven ten feet into the ground.

Fabin swooped low, looking down at the wreckage. The gas-tanks let go and the sky turned crazy for a moment, throwing Fabin all over the place. Blindly he fought to right his crate, to keep her out of the trees. He didn't stop to think. He merely worked stick and rudder-bar—and to his utter amazement found he had leveled off at something like two thousand feet altitude. He could not have done it better had he thought it all out.

The crash of the German scarcely effected him. That sort of thing might happen to any of them. Fabin looked up.

"So," he said to himself, "I have to pick off the cripples, eh? Well, at least I can do that."

He slanted away, reaching for the summits of the skies. His Hisso roared. His wings wobbled, until he forgot to think of them, when his hands and feet automatically did what they were supposed to do—carrying out the tenets of aerial instruction he had received from Mather Field and Kelly to Issoudun.

Yet he didn't realize what he had learned.

He climbed to a thousand feet above the battle, poised there, watching like a hawk. He mustn't get into the thick of battle. He mustn't ever do that.

And then, perhaps for a breathing space, a German dodged out of the fight, rolling down the sky, as though he thought someone were riding his tail with twin Vickers crashing. Fabin forgot everything, save to put

his nose down, grab the stick with his knees, shove thumbs against trips, and dive.

He dived with all power on. The wind played a mad song through his struts and braces. His flying wires whined and hummed. His wings were a slatting combination of sounding boards. His eye was studying the ring-sight, trying to keep that German in sight. Down and down, faster and faster.

His Vickers began to chatter. The German looked all around, when Fabin knew that his first burst had crashed into the top of the turtle-back, within a foot of the pilot. The German then spotted Fabin, and started into a swift series of acrobatics to throw him off balance, to keep him from getting set to aim.

FABIN forgot his crate, himself, tried to guess what the German was going to do next. Would he roll to the right or to the left—slip to the right—or left?

"He'll go *there*, for five francs," said Fabin to himself, and held on the imaginary spot he had marked in midair. He let his Vickers go, full tilt, spilling their cargoes of hot lead through the blurred arc of the propeller. The German, true to Fabin's guess, rolled directly into the stream of bullets. The German jumped, jerked in his pit, died.

Fabin, to prove to himself that it hadn't been an accident, shifted his aim to cover the Hisso, fed a long burst through his Vickers. The Fokker burst into flame, all at once, as though it had been steeped in gasoline.

Then it was gone, roaring, flopping down the sky like a bird without wings.

Fabin grinned. His grin was hard, savage, satisfied.

But still he didn't know how it had happened. He had by now dived past the main maelstrom of fighting

crates. Germans had seen the fall of their comrade. So had the Americans. Two Fokkers down, one Spad gone. Fabin couldn't make out who had fallen, but there was one Spad missing. He saw it burning, far below.

Now he pulled his nose up, frantically, savagely, to study the ball of spinning death and destruction aloft, where Americans and Germans seemed to have redoubled their efforts with the fall of some of their comrades. Was he mistaken, or was the battle assuming strange shapes? It was out of shape, like a bellows that has been too tightly patched and shows it when filled with air.

He couldn't fly formation, he told himself, but in formless flying—

He almost stood on his tail in his eagerness to test out his sudden suspicion. His knees still gripped the stick. His hands hovered over his trips. His motor was beginning to feel the pull for which it had never been intended. And then—

By chance or design, a German slid out of the battle above. Perhaps he was maneuvering for position, perhaps seeking a breathing space. But whatever the reason for his shifting, and changing the shape of the battle aloft, his broad belly came into view, and Fabin got a sight of it in his ring-sight—just in time to trip his guns before the nose of his Spad spilled over to the right.

He saw his tracers go into that broad belly, and knew that the invisible hot lead which followed went almost into the same place. Then he saw the head and shoulders of the German, looking over the cockpit coaming at him—as though peering down to see what sort of thunderbolt had struck him from below.

But his face was red with blood, and blood mingled with the slipstream, as the German died thus, peering down. His Fokker ducked and dived straight into the middle

of the battle. Fabin, his nose down, fought for flying speed, seeing yet other chances.

Another German. Fabin wasn't close to any American or to any German. His wings had plenty of sky-room. It didn't matter where they went—so he let them go, and let his Vickers spill their hosings of hot lead. Fabin's lips moved. His eyes were bright.

"Three, by Jove!" he said. "Even Marlin hasn't done as well."

The third Fokker went flashing down. Fabin was deadly, by himself, fighting where form did not count.

ALOFT the formation of Germans and Americans was falling swiftly apart. The Germans were trying wildly to get home, taking advantage of the wild disorder created by one of their own in his death throes. The Americans, ahead for the day, were just as willing. They split apart.

The Americans swooped down as Fabin leveled off. His nose was toward his own tarmac, for which he was thankful, because it was always a task to turn when he gave it any thought.

They came down beside him, to fly him home—and he noticed that they kept their distance, all save Captain Marlin, who dared to come in close and grin at him.

Marlin, it seemed, was pleased. But at what? Fabin hadn't been worth a cuss in the dog-fight; yet he had accounted for three of the enemy. It had been without danger to himself. The others had risked their lives. He hadn't, apparently, risked anything. Yet he had accomplished more.

"B" Flight landed at the home tarmac of the Third, and the surviving pilots gathered around Fabin, grinning. Marlin slapped him on the back.

"If there's anything this outfit

needs, it's comedy relief," Marlin said. "Don't tell me you really meant to bust those three Germans down as you did."

"Exactly like that," said Fabin shortly.

"Like what?"

And then they all laughed, for when he tried to tell them he floundered and fumbled for words. His face got red. He was as uncertain, when they pinned him down, as he was at the stick when people were watching.

He gave it up, walked away. He knew he had done a good job, but they laughed.

Marlin looked after him thoughtfully.

"We shouldn't have done that, fellows," he said. "It'll make him self-conscious."

THEY didn't understand Fabin. He didn't understand himself. But he kept remembering things he had done when he hadn't self-consciously thought, going into a sideslip: "I have to handle my stick exactly so, my rudder-bar exactly like this." And when he thought so, the crate never did, exactly, what he wished it to do. If only he could yank and jerk his Spad around the sky like the others did!

He whistled softly to himself—and luck broke for him. For that night at the supper table, Major Loring came in, his face grave.

"We've got a tough one tomorrow. Such assignments are always tough. An advance is planned directly opposite Stefan's *Staffel*, across from us, and Wing doesn't want German pilots observing their activities. Know what that means? That we've got to keep Stefan on the ground. In other words, it will be a ground strafe without equal. We've got to get over early, and keep those buzzards grounded. If we fail, if one or two get off, we're finished. Our failure

may mean the loss of quite too many lives to think about without having nightmares—"

Fabin's heart jumped. He had an idea. Now fate was playing into his hands, giving him his chance.

He was afraid to say anything about it, however, for his wingmates had a habit of nervous laughter, especially where he was concerned.

But he drew Marlin aside, while the rest of "B" Flight was talking over their part into tomorrow's dawn ground strafe.

"Look, skipper," he said seriously. "I've got a favor to ask tomorrow, because I've an idea. Don't ask me to tell it, for you know how I am when I try to talk—"

"Or fly," interrupted Marlin gloomily. "What we'll do with you tomorrow, the Lord only knows!"

"That's just it," said Fabin eagerly. "I've got an idea. It won't interfere with anything you chaps do—unless you get in my way—"

"We get in your way! Our biggest job is to keep out of it, see? Never worry about us cramping your style, Fabin! We'll stay clear."

"Thanks. One other thing. I want to be the first down to the German field. Don't follow me for thirty seconds."

"If you want to be the first to get killed," said Marlin grimly, "why should I stop you? It will be simple, too, for 'B' Flight leads the first attack. 'A' and 'C' Flights hang overhead to catch anyone who manages to get off. It'll be a lucky thing for us if you *do* get killed before we start mixing it close to the ground. I wish I knew, just as a matter of curiosity, though, what you had up your sleeve."

"Just this, skipper, though it'll sound like a puzzle: I've been trying to fly a Spad. Tomorrow I'll simply try to fly myself."

Marlin looked to be puzzled, but shrugged.

"It's your neck, Cort," he said. "But don't forget to take your airplane along with you! You might need it!"

MORNING. Twenty-one Spads, three flights from the Third Pursuit Squadron, were in readiness for the take-off, which would be at minute intervals between flights. There would be rendezvous at seven thousand, then a smashing plunge into German-held skies, with just one object in view: to keep Stefan's *Staffel* grounded.

Fabin's face was grim. He wasn't smiling this morning. If he failed, the flights hovering above "B" Flight would have work to do, and might not be able to do it before the rising Germans got a few bullets into the backs of "B" Flight. He couldn't take chances, yet that was exactly what he planned. Marlin drew his flight aside, all save Fabin, and, glancing wonderingly at Fabin, spoke to them briefly.

"Fabin leads the dive. Give him thirty seconds."

They frowned their wonderment, but orders were orders.

The first seven crates took the air with a roar, rendezvousing at seven thousand, throttled down to await the gathering of the winged armada. "A" Flight came swiftly up behind them. Then "C" Flight, and the twenty-one crates, motors full out, crashed toward the lines, on time to the split second. Every element of a command—including planes—had to work in unison. They were part of a big plan without knowing any of the rest of it.

Twenty-one crates hummed across the lines, wings rising and falling, dipping, as Archie flowers bloomed in the skies all about them. Fabin looked straight ahead, refusing to think of his wingmates. As far as he could do so, he relaxed. He would need all his nerve, all his nerves, in

what he planned. He hadn't told Marlin that he carried twice as much ammo as the others.

Then, the German drome came in sight. Scores of men in grey, warned of the swift approach of the winged armada, were racing across the field to the hangars. The Germans would be rolling by the time the twenty-one crates were overhead.

Fabin gauged time and distance, looked at Marlin to see Marlin watching him. Fabin nodded. Marlin nodded back. Instantly Fabin put his nose down, gave his Spad every bit of juice she would take, and the formation shot skyward above him as though catapulted upward from some mighty engine of propulsion.

Free of his wingmates, Fabin settled down to the task he had planned for himself. He held the stick with his knees. His eyes studied the ring-sights.

The racing lines of grey were directly under his nose. His guns must be almost on them. But he would be able to tell by the dirt his bullets knocked from the field. He let his Vickers go. Dirt kicked up ahead of the running Germans. They flung themselves flat, waiting for his spray of lead to pass over them—whereupon he did a crazy thing. He went down and touched his wheels to the field. He bounced fifty feet in the air, shoving his nose down as he did so.

The bounce had taken most of his flying speed, and for a moment he held his breath lest he be unable to catch his crate again before she crashed.

But he caught her. Her nose slammed down. He saw the lines of grey on the ground and let his Vickers go.

Then he looked ahead. A hangar loomed. Before it were half a dozen men in grey, frantically trying to unfasten a lock. They were looking

back at him, hurrying, and their own speed made them fumble.

Fabin aimed directly at them, despite the fact that the nose of his crate was within a hundred feet of the hangar—a crash into which would mean his end, the total destruction of his Spad.

His Vickers screamed. For a split second he saw those six men through his ring-sight—against the background of the high hangar.

He yawed from right to left, making sure that his bullets had a chance at them all. Two men fell face forward and did not move. One man slumped against the door of the hangar, sliding slowly down.

One man was facing Fabin, his arms flung wide on the door, as though he had been crucified there—and this one bent at the middle, his knees refusing duty. He sat down heavily, his arms slumping into the dirt, his head falling forward on his chest.

The last man got the door open, as the last bullets of Fabin's burst went into his back.

Just before bringing his nose up, Fabin sped a burst through the open door of the hangar, on the certain chance that there would be a Fokker, Albatross or Aviatik just inside the door, ready to be trundled out.

Then he stood on his tail, almost jumped his crate bodily over the hangar. He fully expected his wheels to hit, but somehow they skimmed the roof of the hangar, missing it by hairbreadths. He sighed with relief. He had tested the wings of his fancy and they had not let him down. He didn't think, now, that they would.

His luck was in. He would ride it until it threw him.

He gave a shout into the slipstream—a shout of sheer exuberation.

He stood on his tail, slid off on his left wing, under which yawned the narrow space between two han-

gars. He looked into that space, allowed his crate to slant into it, because its nose was within mere yards of the open field beyond. When he had sliced through that space, out over the drome, he leveled off, and his wheels were almost touching the ground.

He found himself diving straight into the faces of more Germans who were trying to reach the hangars. He nosed down, in spite of his lack of altitude, and his Vickers chattered shrilly. Some Germans had to fling themselves flat to keep from being beheaded by his knifing wings. He looked over the side at them as he brought his stick back into his belly.

HIS Spad nosed up, and he was kicking her around again. He thought of himself as a falcon, able to turn in any direction in his own length. Thinking thus, he automatically made his Spad do things he would never have thought it could do—things he couldn't have planned deliberately. He banked on a dime, slanted down, leveled off—and his Vickers were in line with the backs of the running Germans.

He yawed right and left, hosing them steadily.

And this time Fabin slid past the hangar, left wing down, right wing up, slightly above the roof of the hangar, his wheels all but touching the open door—his eyes seeking other victims.

He leveled off. Two hangars down, a Fokker was being frantically trundled out. He nosed down as he saw it, dived at it with shrieking protest of struts and braces. He concentrated on the motor. The prop was already spinning.

Flames burst from the Fokker. Men raced away from it, hands over their faces. Fabin let the fleeing men taste the heat of his lead, even as his eyes sought the headquarters building.

He flashed past an interval between hangars and almost lost his life as a machine-gun on the ground cut loose—as though the gunners had been waiting for him to do just this. The bullets ripped into his camelback like hail. Then he was past!

"They'll get some of our other men," he decided. He glanced to the right. Now he had altitude enough, even with his right wing down, to lift over that third hangar.

He did so, dropped his right wing again, and slid slantwise, his wheels almost touching, down the roof of the hangar, preparing to dip his nose for a brief burst when the machine-gun came into view.

They heard his roaring dive, looked toward him, tried to swing the gun, to bring it to bear on his whirling prop. If that prop failed, even in the minutest response to his hand on the throttle, he would be smashed to bits. But it didn't. And they didn't get that gun around.

IT hung there, useless, muzzle pointing crazily at the sky, spinning until the last of the crew, whirling on rubber heels, dropped atop the gun and stilled it—and spilled his blood over the grim mechanism of the breach.

Fabin banked to the left, leveled off, banked again, back over the hangar, for a dive straight at the doors of the headquarters building.

He looked at those doors. There were three officers on the steps. They dragged out their Lugers and began firing as they saw the approach of doom. They might as well have blasted away at mosquitoes.

"Prussians, eh?" thought Fabin. "Too proud to run, or maybe you're paralyzed!"

Whatever they were, they soon were nothing at all, save bundles of cloth and leather on the steps of their own headquarters. One of them, Fabin guessed, was Stefan him-

self—for one was an exceedingly large man, and Stefan was well fed.

He swooped over the buildings. And for the first time he looked at his wingmates.

They were swooping down on the field. Fabin waved at Marlin as though to say:

"Take over for a moment!"

Maybe Marlin saw; maybe he did not. He didn't wave, but his men dived in. Bullets from half a dozen Vickers slanted into the roofs of hangars as three crates began at one end of the field and slid across the tops of the building, blasting away with their leaden hail.

They were roaring across the field. "A" Flight came down behind them. "A" Flight had not been told of Fabin's request.

"B" Flight went on over, leaving smoke and death and destruction in its wake. Then came "A" Flight. Fire burst from several hangars as incendiary bullets got in their efficient work. Flames licked skyward from a dozen points of the field.

Fabin didn't even look around to see if there were enemies in the sky, for further aloft was "C" Flight, lazily circling, and "C" Flight would have been busy if so much as one crate had lifted off the German field. Fabin grinned.

"B" Flight was over, coming back in a wide half circle to their left. "A" Flight was over, too, circling back the other way. They would come in side by side, thirteen planes of them, blasting away at everything in sight.

But while they came, Fabin had his opportunity.

He slipped down to the left, probing at the roof and walls of the headquarters building.

He saw bullets smash from roof and walls. He flashed over, looking back, to see a soldier in grey just falling out of the door, measuring his length on the threshold.

He laughed, swept on across the field, Vickers flaming.

He didn't sweep back. He went on across the tops of trees, to keep in the clear.

And then—

"C" Flight came down to join in the strafe, and by the time a tumbling maelstrom of planes, high and low over the field, had finished its work, the hangars of the place were, almost without exception, in blazing ruins.

It had been a good job.

Marlin thought so. Froter, skipper of "A" Flight, the senior flying officer present, thought so too. He signaled to Marlin, who signaled to his flyers. It was the signal for the triumphant return to the tarmac of the 3rd Pursuit.

THE planes, none missing, started back under full power, leaving havoc behind and below them. Fabin, seriously believing that his wingmates would prefer it, kept his distance, well to the south, but paralleling the flight of his buddies home.

He reached there, circled until the last crate had gone down, landed, been trundled to the deadline for servicing.

Then Fabin set down. He got out of his pit. He hadn't been touched by so much as a splinter. His face was grave. Because Marlin's face

was grave. Marlin looked as though he had a complaint to make. Fabin wondered what in the devil it could be now, for he felt he had done a good job.

You could always head off Marlin's complaints, though, by speaking first, and Fabin jumped at the chance before Marlin could speak.

"I was just thinking, sir," he said, "that I could have done much better, flown a lot closer—"

He hesitated, choked. They'd think he was feeling his own importance. His face got red. He couldn't, for a moment, go on.

"You could have shaved those hangars closer, Fabin," prompted Marlin, "if—"

"If I hadn't had any wheels!" exploded Fabin, determined to say his say.

He meant it in all seriousness.

He couldn't, for the life of him, see what there was to laugh about; though it seemed to strike all of his wingmates that there was something funny.

"Hell!" he said, turning on his heel and starting for his hutment.

After his door had slammed Marlin became serious.

"I know now, gents," he said, "who does all the ground-strafting after this from the Italian Front to Ostend!"

They laughed. Then they grinned, as though they also knew!

Sensational Thrills!

ZOOMING SKY BATTLE
IN

BLACK FLIGHT

A COMPLETE WAR-AIR NOVEL

By GEORGE BRUCE



—in Next
Month's Issue

My Most Thrilling Sky Fight

Actual true accounts of thrilling moments in the lives of famous
War Aces told by the Aces themselves
Collected by ACE WILLIAMS

STALKING THE DRACHEN

by Lieutenant Joseph Wehner
(American Air Service)

Foreword:

Lieutenant Frank Luke was the most daring sky fighter in the American Air Service. But it is hard to say whether he would have established the record he did without the aid of Joe Wehner, his constant and steadfast companion and buddy in the 27th Squadron. He was Luke's alter ego.

When war was declared by the United States, Joe Wehner hitch-hiked his way from Boston, Massachusetts, to Kelly Field, Texas, to join the flying service. Wehner was finally dropped from his squadron when it left Kelly for overseas because he was suspected of being a German spy. He managed, however, to get reinstated at the point of embarkation. His fellow officers, however, never ceased to look upon him with suspicion. That is, all except Luke. Luke stood up for Wehner and this made him an outcast in the 27th, until he began to compile his haunting and meteoric record. Flying with Luke on those record-making flights was Joe Wehner, and Luke himself admitted after Wehner was killed in action, that if it hadn't been for Joe Wehner, who served at his protection when he went *Drachen* hunting, he doubted if he would have been able to down the number of *Drachens* credited to him.

Wehner shot down three enemy planes, while flying this rear guard duty for Luke. As a protection flyer, there was none better in the American Air Service than Joe Wehner.

From one of Wehner's letters to a boyhood friend in Boston, the following account is taken.



Lieut. Joseph Wehner,
American Flyer

FRANK and I have developed a specialty. We are sausage hunters. Sausages, you know, are anchored observation balloons. The *Boche* call them *Drachens*. One day when I was flying rear guard for Luke, he shot down two of them within two minutes.

In addition to the *Drachens* he got two *Boche* planes, and I was lucky enough to down one myself. In one swift, hectic fight, we accounted for five *Boche*, and we were outnumbered three to one. But Luke never takes account of odds.

We went out just at twilight, saw two Hun *Drachens* straining against their cables and weaving in the wind near Vicux. Frank held up his arm and signaled me that he was going down to get them, one after the other. I saw a patrol of *Boche* Fokkers further back across the lines, so I began to climb for ceiling as Frank started down toward the balloons. I aimed to get between him and the Fokkers to keep them off his tail when he started firing at the balloons.

Frank got the first *Drachen* before I could get between him and the *Boche*. He split-aired through the enfilade of machine-gun and anti-aircraft fire, and made a bee line for the second *Drachen* less than a kilometer distant. He scooted along at terrific speed not more than a hundred feet off the ground. But the Fokkers having height streaked even faster for him. There was a full *Staffel* of them. I piqued to head them off. The *Staffel* separated then into three flights. One went to my right,

the other to my left and the center flight came at me hell for leather.

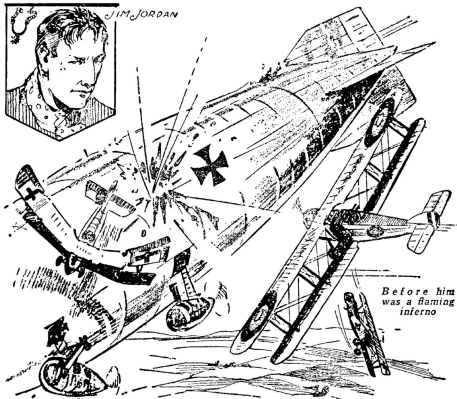
I picked the first Fokker and gave him the works. My aim was true. It wobbled for an instant. Then the pilot slumped down in the pit, and the Fokker slid off in a spin. I was watching it fall when a clatter of leaden hail rattled through my upper wing tank. The gas began pouring out in a blinding spray. Then black smoke enveloped me. For an instant I thought my Spad was aflame. The fumes were choking. But the smoke instantly cleared, and I realized it was the smoke of the second *Drachen* which I had winged through. Luke had made swift work of that sausage and was going round and round now with a *Boche*, while two more were darting in on him from different angles above.

I went down for the *Boche* on Frank's tail, and we went at it hot and heavy. The whole sky seemed to be a kaleidoscopic whirl of diving, zooming, shooting black-crossed planes. Then one of the black-crossed ships burst into flame. Luke had ridden it almost to earth, firing with both guns. Zooming up when it crashed, he made for another Hun's blind belly, and brought it down before the pilot knew what had happened.

The wind had drifted us across our own lines now, and the *Boche* *Staffel* leader called it enough, I guess, for all of a sudden they beat it for their own lines. Frank chased them until he ran out of ammo, and I coursed along on top of him. But we got in no more ticks.

Next Month: MAJOR ANDREW McKEEVER

Sky Buckaroo



From the Plains of Arizona to the War-Torn Skies of France Went this Feud Between the Cyclone Kid and the Sheriff Who Trailed Him

By **JOHN SCOTT DOUGLAS**

Author of "Charmed Crates," "Bill, the Conqueror," etc.

THREE minutes to live! Second Lieutenant Jim Jordan sighed deeply. Even with the grinning specter of death before him, the tang of life still surged through his youthful veins. But only death awaited him. Five Fokkers stood between his DeHavi-

land and the Allied lines. His gauge, moreover, showed him that his petrol was low. Yes, his number was being called.

Jim watched the V-shaped flight, however, with a strange feeling of detachment. His were the pale blue eyes of a dreamer as he swept the

heavens for the last time before hurling himself into combat.

A fleecy sea of cumulus clouds hid the war-gashed earth. Overhead the inverted bowl of light blue was like—the sky above Arizona.

Arizona! There Jim had been known as "The Cyclone Kid." He had been as wild as his freedom-loving silver stallion. He had turned Silver free in the mountains when the call to war had sounded. Somewhere back in those purpled mountains, Silver waited. But the great stallion's wild rides were over. For the Cyclone Kid's colorful career could not extend beyond three minutes.

Five Fokkers between himself and the Allied lines.

Only one regret touched Jim. A girl waited for him in the States. No ordinary girl, Spring Weston! She too loved freedom and the open skies and spirited horses. Only one promise had she exacted as she promised to wait for him. The Cyclone Kid must take no more life; there must be no more fleeing from posses and sheriff, no more brawls, no more gun-fighting.

But the Cyclone Kid had known for months that he would never see Spring Weston or Silver or his beloved mountains again. He had known on the day Ben Mattson had been transferred to the 57th Pursuit Squadron.

It was one of life's strange, ironic jests, finding Ben Mattson here. As sheriff, he had made his chief object in life the capture and hanging of the Cyclone Kid. And he had come to the 57th to find his quarry already an ace.

"I won't give you away," Mattson had grimly promised. "But if you live, I'll take you back to stretch hemp."

That was Ben Mattson! Duty was duty, and the Kid's splendid record was no extenuation of the past. A

brave but stubborn man-hunter, Mattson, who would soon be cheated of vengeance by the Boche!

LIKE a shadow passing over a mountain, a change passed over Jim Jordan. Dreaminess left his light-blue eyes; they became cold blue chinks. His lean, bronzed face hardened into brown stone. The cheerful curve of his mouth vanished as his lips compressed into a white line.

For a fleeting moment, Jim thought he was again fighting for his freedom. His knees tightened on his joy stick as though on the supple body of Silver, his stallion. Automatically he reached for his big Colts. But there were no tied-back holsters, no Colts—the illusion died.

A wintry smile quirked Jim's lips as he eased forward on his stick. He would die—but he would die fighting. A cold fury possessed him as he roared down to meet the charge. Arizonians who had known Jim Jordan would have recognized the signs. It was the icy-nerved Cyclone Kid "on the prod."

He struck like a cyclone. Blindly reckless in his moments of madness. Deadly!

Spandaus suddenly blinked red eyes. Streams of death whistled and whined about the D.H. Steel-jacketed lead sewed a neat line of holes along one wing tip. Jim was scarcely aware he was side-slipping out of those funnels of flame, or that he reached for the stick-trigger of his prop-synchronized Vickers.

The foremost Fokker was momentarily outlined against the hair-line of his ring-sight. Jim laughed soundlessly as he squeezed the trigger. Twin flames streaked from his clattering Vickers.

The iridescent arc on the nose of the foremost Fokker vanished with a cannonlike explosion. Grating and grinding horribly as the released

motor strove to tear itself to pieces, the Fokker's nose dropped. Jim's movements were as swift as a panther's. Kicking right, then left, rudder, he raked the Fokker with a cross-fire.

A wisp of smoke curled up from the engine nacelle, instantly to be pierced with jets of crimson. Flames spread over the heavily doped fabric of the Fokker, wrapping it in a fiery shroud. Wailing a swan-song of death, the Boche crate twisted and turned, out of control.

Bickering guns drowned it out. The four remaining Fokkers had separated. Boring in, two from each side, they had Jim wedged between their cross-fire. Screaming lead riddled the Yank ship.

A specter of death directed that hellish orchestration. It was an orchestra in which machine-guns served as drums. Snapping rigging wires provided the cymbals. High-pitched, howling motors produced the base viols. Droning props were its stringed instruments. And the orchestra pit was bathed in a blood-red light before Jim's narrowed eyes.

Recklessly negligent of a burst in his blind-spot, he piqued the nose of his crate sharply. A burst of lead slashed through the floorboards as he thrust the stick forward.

Slashing down, wing to the earth, wing to the sky above, Jim touched his gun. He saw the ugly, scarred face of the German pilot through the red mists of his fury. A Prussian duelist? Well, here was his chance!

The subdued bellow of the D.H. rose to a screech as Jim plummeted toward the other's cockpit. Red streamed from the blunt nose of the Yank ship. Two straight, crimson threads connected the nose of the D.H. with the cockpit of the Fokker for an instant.

And then the D.H. had sliced past, directly in front of the nose of

the ship it had attacked. But there were no snorting guns to dispute its passage—the guns of the Fokker were stilled. Forever. The German duelist had slumped forward over his stick, forcing the nose down. In a moment it went into a spin, corkscrewing earthward.

Below the three remaining planes, Jim brought the D.H. out of its dive. Strained fabric shuddered, braces creaked.

Altitude, however, now belonged to the Germans. And altitude was the deciding factor! Death had halted, baton poised above Jim's head. And now that hellish orchestra was going into a crescendo!

Jim saw the three Fokkers coming—diving. The outcome was in no doubt. Again he laughed—softly, soundlessly. They were sure of him, certain they could blot him from the skies. Was it not possible he could take one more of them with him? A chance—a slim chance!

Lead swirled about him. His instrument board was shattered. Frayed wings flapped loosely like the wings of some prehistoric flying reptile.

Jim thrust the stick forward sharply. The nose dipped. The crate executed a series of flip-flops, finally going into a falling leaf. Heart chilling with apprehension, he eased the quivering bus out.

In a moment, it was climbing. Somewhere in the cloud bank were three diving Fokkers. Jim's eyes were hard and grim behind their owl-like goggles. In this gigantic game of hide-and-seek with death, he might have a chance to tag another plane before he was sent down in flames.

HIS luck, however, had played thin. A rattling gun sounded behind him, and lead splashed through a tilted wing tip. A Boche rode his tail. What followed would be a routine job of killing.

Still Jim determined to play his losing hand to the grim end. Instead of diving, he zoomed. The strained motor coughed, sputtered, went dead. For a moment the D.H. seemed to pause in space, while bullets screamed about it, seeking a vital spot.

And then it backslipped, went into a tail-spin. Now, surely, the wings would be sheared off. Pulses throbbing, Jim let the crate drop away, out of those streams of death, down through the misty clouds. Earth appeared below. Ground criss-crossed with lines of trenches, pock-marked with shell holes, scarred with the instruments of war.

Jim pushed forward on his stick, a feeling of futility chilling his heart. In a moment the wings would buckle, snap off. His body tensed. But, miraculously, the D.H. came out, shuddering in every fiber.

White puffs—Archie fire—blossomed around him as he climbed again. A strange exultation buoyed him up. His luck had played thin, but he was riding it to the end.

The Fokkers materialized out of the clouds. Spitting guns flamed in his face as he zoomed. Hot waves blew back into his face. The throb of the motor deepened with the upward pull.

Straight into the funnels of flame from one diving Fokker, Jim climbed. His lean, powerful hand trembled as he gripped the trigger, squeezed it. The streams were low. He jerked backward on his stick until the D.H. was on the verge of a stall.

Suddenly the object of his fire broke into flames. A cross-fire shattered the prop. The Fokker roared down, trailing a stream of swirling sparks. And Jim's face crisped from the inferno heat as it passed him. Then, abruptly, he started. Another plane plunged earthward—a Fokker. The remaining Fokker streaked

east, a lone D.H. in pursuit. Only two men flew in that bumpy fashion, as though they were riding broncos. Mattson and himself!

"Saved me for the noose!" Jim formed with white lips. "Blast his soul!"

HE flew back, fury burning in his heart. After he had limped in, Ben Mattson rolled onto the tarmac behind him. The big man was out of his crate almost as fast as Jim. As if by mutual desire, they rushed at each other. Mattson's bulldog face was triumphant.

"You'll live to hang yet!" he growled.

Jim's facial muscles twitched with anger.

"Will you forget you're trailing me? This is France, not Arizona."

"I'm keeping you in sight," Mattson said doggedly. "Never saw the outlaw yet who didn't have a yellow streak a yard wide. I'm seeing that you don't drop onto German territory to let them take you prisoner."

"If you see me go yellow, shoot me," Jim snarled.

"That's what I aim to do," Mattson nodded gravely. "If I don't get the chance to do that I'll turn you over to military authorities for deportation. Convicts aren't wanted in the army, Jordan."

Jim's lips twisted. "No? I'm no convict, Mattson. Can't you get that through your thick head?"

The former sheriff's big fists clenched. "You will be, if I tell what I know. When the war's over."

Jim saw two greaseballs approaching. If Mattson said more, he was finished! Cashiered out of the army. And after that—a noose!

"Mattson," Jim muttered desperately, "that's all over. I've promised a girl back there that I'm through with the wild life."

"You bet you're through!" Mattson grated. "The law—"

The greaseballs were almost with-in hearing. Jim gave Mattson no chance to finish. His left shot out, catching the big fellow flush on the chin.

Surprised, the erstwhile sheriff staggered backward. There had been whipcorded muscles behind that blow. The next one, starting low, would have felled him.

Mattson caught in on Jim's elbow, however, swinging wildly with his left.

Jim seemed to be a winged thing as he darted backward. His life had depended on the superb fitness of his muscles, on his speed. Mattson outweighed him nearly forty pounds, and was powerfully built, but he couldn't match the other's unbelievable speed.

Jim ducked under a right. His flying fist thudded over Mattson's heart. His next two steaming blows seemed almost simultaneous, so quickly did they land. A left to the jaw—a right to the heart—and Mattson was gasping for breath. Jim's eyes narrowed to pale blue flames as he leaped in to finish up his larger antagonist.

A shout from the direction of the barracks halted him.

"Separate those men!" It was the commanding officer, Major Rutgers.

Greaseballs pinioned their arms. Again the C. O.'s voice:

"Jordan! Mattson! Report to my office!"

Rather shamefaced, the two West-erners did so. The iron-jawed, Napoleonic looking little major glared at them. This, Jim thought, inwardly wincing, was the end. The truth would come out.

"What does this mean, Mattson?"

The big man shifted uneasily. "It's a personal grudge of long standing," he muttered. "I'd rather not—" His voice died.

Jim's heart stood still. Was Mattson keeping his word? A begrudg-

ing admiration for his enemy swept over him.

The C. O. deliberated. "Anything likely to interfere with duty?"

"No, sir," Mattson promptly answered.

"Very well." The C. O. frowned. "But I've seen you two on the verge of mixing it before this. Next time, I'm going to the bottom of it. Jordan, what happened to your D.H.?"

Jim gave his report. A pale gleam came into the C. O.'s eyes.

"Baron Malke will smart. Four of his planes shot down in one morning. Excellent! But we'll have to watch for retaliation. Malke won't forget this soon." The major rubbed his hands together.

When the two flyers had left the little office, Jim said curtly:

"Thanks, Mattson."

The ex-sheriff's face darkened. "Don't thank me! I gave my word I wouldn't give you away as long as you didn't show the white feather. I keep my word; but the first time I see you funk—"

LA TE that afternoon a black-crossed plane dropped out of the clouds. Men ducked for cover, or rushed to man the Archies. White puffs broke above the field as the anti-aircraft guns got into action. And still the Fokker roared down. Suddenly it leveled out, and a tiny parachute dropped away. The pilot of the Fokker waved, climbed, and was swallowed in the clouds.

Jim rushed across the field, reaching the chute first. A note tied to a monkey-wrench! He read it to the men crowding around him:

Four of our comrades fell today. At dawn tomorrow ten of our best flyers go out to avenge their deaths. We will expect ten of the best flyers of the 57th to meet them.

Baron Eric Malke.

"We'll meet them," cried Chucky Reynolds.

A score of others shouted agreement.

Jim's eyes gleamed. "I hope the C. O. won't say thumbs down!"

Major Rutgers gave the matter weighty consideration. What would Headquarters say if his men fell into a trap? Baron Malke was a brave man, but also rumored to be treacherous.

But there was another angle. Ten unmolested German planes could do considerable damage — especially when their errand was one of revenge. It was this loop-hole which finally salved the C. O.'s conscience. He granted permission—with strings tied to it.

"Ten of you can go," he consented. "But if Malke has more than ten planes, streak for home. It may be a trick. Those are orders!"

The flights drew for the privilege of representing the 57th. Flight leaders Spud Malloy and Brad Hinkley drew the short tickets. And Jim Jordan and Ben Mattson were in Hinkley's flight.

BEFORE dawn, ten busses tuned up on the deadline. Ten men would fly east. To death or victory. Treachery or fair play?

Jim's eyes were bright, lighted by an inner fire. No hint of anxiety was visible in his face. But he had been probing all night for the answer to a question.

What was Malke planning? Jim seemed to remember something which had a bearing on this duel. Yet how could anything in his wild past have any connection with Malke's plans? Inconceivable!

"A" Flight, under Malloy's command, rolled down the field first, climbing in the chill air. A signal from their flight leader, Hinkley, and the second flight taxied east. Several moments later the D.H.s wobbled in space, climbing.

Up they went, soon swallowed in

a sea of clouds. They buzzed eastward. Presently, a faint glow filled the east. Dawn.

Jim glanced upward at the V-flight of planes, Malloy's five fighters, covering them from above. And suddenly from the point of the V there came a flash of light—a Very signal.

Attack!

Hinkley's flare answered Malloy's. He piqued the nose of his crate. Up! Jim's eyes swept the eastern sky. He saw the attacking force, then a long V, ten Fokkers!

Even as they appeared, the big flight separated into three—three planes climbing, three diving, four holding an even keel. Malke had not tricked them; he had sent only the ten planes.

But the memory which Jim could not quite bring to the surface started to irritate him again like an empty tooth socket.

No time to recall it now. The three planes of the lower flight dived toward them, while the three planes of the upper flight zoomed toward Malloy. The center flight of four Fokkers, Jim guessed, would fly on, execute Immelmann turns, and come roaring down for the D.H.s' tails. Malke's foresight doomed the lower Yank flight!

Bullets splattered Jim's wings. He climbed into a hailstorm of lead. Chucky Reynolds, to his left, threw up his hands and slid out of sight in his cockpit. Jim saw slightly red. His impulse was to engage the end Fokker. He restrained the impulse, holding with the flight.

The four of them held together through that withering fire, their guns streaking flame and lead. A Fokker slid down, and started to side-slid. Jim ruddered left into the position Chucky Reynolds had occupied. His fire and Hinkley's converged on the leader of the lower German flight. The Fokker flamed, crackling horribly.

The remaining member of the flight drew up sharply. Four Yank planes almost stood on their tails in response to Hinkley's signal. Eight streams of lead battered in the Fokker's floorboards. Smoke curled away, and the plane dropped precipitately.

Three Fokkers tagged! And then the second German flight struck!

A white-hot iron pressed to his head was Jim's warning. His wings were peppered with holes as he fought back the waves of dizziness. Blood ran down his cheek.

Hinkley knew when a formation became dangerous. Now with four black-crossed planes on their tails, it meant destruction. He signaled them to separate.

Jim pushed his stick forward sharply, intent upon giving himself a few moments leeway until his head cleared. One Boche had anticipated the maneuver. Jim found himself the center of a storm of screaming lead.

White-lipped, grim-eyed, he leveled out abruptly. That unexpected maneuver caught the pursuing German unawares. Either he had to crash into the D.H. or dive more sharply. Pulling out above Jim would have reversed their positions, and the Boche didn't choose to do that.

As the Fokker roared past, Jim pulled backward sharply on his stick. He didn't climb far. Executing a perfect Immelmann, he reversed his former direction. His wings hummed as he shot downward—straight toward the Fokker, now leveling out of its dive.

Guns hammering, motor shrilling, Jim held to his mad plunge. Wind shrieked through rigging wires as he hurled downward. The slipstream cooled his throbbing head, enabling him to pick out the Fokker in his ring-sight.

Suddenly his target was outlined

against the hair-line. Death and destruction belched from the Vickers, licking hungry red tongues over the Fokker as it started to zoom. Momentarily it was climbing—and then it wasn't. Prop clawing at the sky, tail to the earth below, it seemed to freeze. Then it slid backward, slowly at first but swiftly gaining speed.

A dead pilot at the controls, the Fokker tumbled through the clouds, twisting, turning, out of control. Its wings finally buckled, flying off into space like the wings of a moth which has approached too close to a flame.

JIM drew a sharp breath. Wiping blood from his goggles with a shaking hand, he stared upward. The Yanks gave a good account of themselves. Including Jim, five D.H.s held the sky against four Fokkers.

That memory which had probed at Jim's mind all day suddenly came clearly into his mind. A posse had once engaged him in battle, firing from behind boulders strewn before a cabin in which he'd taken refuge. The battle, however, had been a ruse. Other men had crept up from the rear to shoot him from behind. He would have died had it not been for a warning whicker from his stallion, Silver.

It came to Jim with stunning shock that there were many points of similarity between that clash and this one. Malke had not, however, had more planes in reserve. Something bigger was at stake. But *what?*

Jim gauged the chances of the four remaining Yanks fighting off the four German pilots. Their chances seemed good.

Reassured, he swung swiftly westward. Apprehension tore at his heart as he buzzed along. Major Rutgers had arranged to have other planes warmed up on the deadline in the event of treachery. Malke, however, would have anticipated

that. There was something unseen, sinister, about this, just as the attack of the posse had been a ruse to shoot him in the back that time in Arizona. Mattson, at least, had not been behind that, for he fought in the open. But Malke was seldom one to take chances without a reason.

Then, Jim distinguished a strange, throbbing motor beat. His first impression was a conked motor. No; his plane was okay. The truth washed over him with chilling force.

He knew that sound! Malke's treachery became apparent.

He heard the motors of a Zeppelin!

While Malke engaged them in a duel, a Zeppelin had flown above them! It planned to drop bombs on their drome during their absence! Cloud strata would hide it until it dived to lay the drome in ashes. And the sound of bickering guns and howling motors would drown out the sound of its engines.

Jim piqued the nose of the D.H. sharply upward. A white-hot fury burned in his heart. If humanly possible, he would make Malke regret his treachery.

Emerging from the last layer of clouds, he saw the great grey bag of destruction. A small Zeppelin—but it carried sufficient bombs to create terrific havoc. Not only to the 57th, but to other dromes as well.

Only three planes protected it; but the Yank would not have hesitated had there been a hundred. A wild plan possessed him. He had one advantage: he had not yet been seen. He climbed for altitude.

Leveling out at about fifteen thousand feet, he sped along, feeding the D.H. full gun. But at that moment one of the Pfalzes guarding the big bag observed him, wagged wings to warn the other planes, and started upward.

Jim forced a twisted smile. Cut him off? Not if he could help it! He continued buzzing westward, refusing the invitation to fight. Engage Pfalzes when there was bigger game? Not much!

He stared down at the great grey sausage, then drew a deep breath. He shoved his stick forward. The nose dipped. In an instant wind seemed to be tearing his nostrils apart.

THE three Pfalzes cut in, desperately, trying to intercept him.

Jim saw one straight before his guns. He squeezed the trigger and red streaked out. Blind luck directed his burst. The Pfalz staggered, then back-slipped in sickening fashion.

The two remaining Pfalzes angled in, their guns flaming. Steel-jacketed lead whistled about the D.H. Sharp spats told Jim that it raked his wings. But he didn't hesitate.

Instead, he gave the D.H. a little more gun. A blizzardlike wind shrieked through the rigging. The plane vibrated, trembled in every fiber.

Jim tripped his guns again. Tracer lashed out at the grey blob spreading below him. The two Pfalzes eased off in their zooms, trying to get between him and his target. Trying to offer a barrier into which he would crash.

In a span of moments, his chance would be gone. He would have to draw out of the dive—or crash one of the Pfalzes. Cold beads of perspiration broke out on Jim's body. After having so nearly succeeded.

The two streams continued flowing from his gun.

Suddenly there was a blinding flash of light. Jim's ear-drums seemed to burst. Before him he saw a flaming inferno. His plane had been thrown upward, out of its dive, by a gigantic wave of air. He was

amazed still to find pressure on his controls.

The Pfalzes, much closer to the Zeppelin, had been torn to pieces. They fell toward the raging inferno—all that was left of the big bag after the tracer had crashed into the gas tank and exploded the highly inflammable gas.

The Zeppelin listed drunkenly, sinking toward earth. Unbearable heat! Jim zoomed swiftly. Blood gushed from his nose due to the suction of the air following the explosion. His ears throbbed with pain.

Fighting waves of dizziness, he streaked for the 57th. Not many miles away, the Zeppelin had plunged into a field. Its cargo of bombs had exploded harmlessly in the air. Clouds and landscape were crimson as the huge juggernaut burned and crackled.

AT the drome Jim made his report to Major Rutgers. Pilots and greaseballs, forgetful of discipline, acted as though they were delirious, beating Jim on the back. Even the C. O. almost forgot to be military.

"You young tramp—I—ah—I mean, Lieutenant, a report of this is going forward to Headquarters immediately, with my recommendation that you are long past due for a promotion."

The landing of four battle-scarred planes interrupted the C. O. at that point. Ben Mattson leaped out, and rushed forward.

"Major Rutgers," he exploded. "I wish to prefer charges against Lieutenant Jordan. He deserted the squadron—"

The color drained from Jim's face.

"Mattson, let me explain—"

The major's eyes were bright as he smiled at Jim.

"Lieutenant Jordan saved the drome from being bombed by that Zeppelin burning over there. Alone, he at-

tacked it! True, he deserted his comrades under fire, but the circumstances amply warrant what he did. Anything else, Mattson?"

The ex-sheriff gulped. "No, sir, nothing of importance." He smiled. "Reckon Jim and I have some things to talk over."

"Okay," said Jim in relief.

Ben Mattson led the way to his bunk, and Jim followed, greatly mystified. Leaning over, the ex-sheriff removed a scrawled roll of paper from his *musette* bag.

"Jordan," he said slowly, "reckon I'm an old, pig-headed fool. I was so sure you'd leave us in the lurch sometime that—" His voice choked up, and suddenly he smiled. "Do you know why you were wanted for the noose? For killing Hy Righter, Cal Proctor, Owen Callen and several others. But you're a bluffer, Jim Jordan. You never murdered none o' them *hombres*."

Jim sprang to his feet, his eyes blazing. "You're a damn—"

"Steady, boy," said Mattson softly. "Ain't no use pertectin' that polecat any longer. Ever heerd of Gill O'Crary?"

Jim drew a sharp breath. "Never!"

"You're a liar," Mattson grinned.

"His real name was Billy Weston, and he was brother of the gal you're planning to get spliced with. This here's a confession he signed after we shot him."

Jim went limp. "Billy's dead?"

Mattson nodded. "And before he died, he writ this confession of what he'd done. I called in two of my deputies to witness it, and they done so, but they didn't know what it was all about. Billy admitted he'd killed Righter, Proctor, Callen and them others you're accused of killing.

"You followed in his tracks, making folks think you was the *hombre* what done the murdering and stole

(Concluded on page 118)

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(Concluded from page 116)

cattle and so on. And you done it on account of Billy's being the brother of Spring, the gal you was so soft on. You didn't want her brother strung up. She must have guessed the truth or she wouldn't have consented to marry a man that all Arizona thought was a killer.

"I figured Billy was just giving me this yarn on account of him cashing in his chips, anyhow—but the shoe was on the other foot. It was you who was perfecting him. I know now that this confession was on the up-and-up. And it's yours now, Jim—it clears your name!"

Jim's hand trembled as he took the scrawled roll of paper, and hastily he rubbed his eyes. Mattson held out a big hand. Jim hesitated, swallowing a lump in his throat. Then he gripped the ex-sheriff's hand firmly. Their eyes locked, and both men smiled.

"Friends?" Jim asked softly.

"You bet!" Mattson replied emphatically.

"I couldn't think of a better *hom-bre* to have on my side," Jim said.



Q. I've heard that the British never called a successful air fighter an ace. Is that true?

J. Ross, Portland, Ore.

A. The British did not officially recognize any flyer as an ace.

Q. Who was called the "Eagle of the Aegean?"

Harold Frankl, Pittsfield, Mass.

A. Von Eschwege.

Q. What was the Russian war-plane insignia?

E. L. Furner, Tampa, Fla.

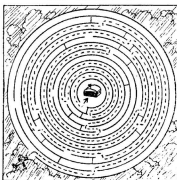
A. Horizontal stripe—white above blue, red at base.

MAIL BUDDIES

Here are some more members of AIR-MEN OF AMERICA—all air fans. From month to month we'll list others. The figures in the parentheses are the ages of the members.

- Lester Schwartz (16), 795 Gerard Ave., New York.
 Ed Purda (15), R. 2, Box 131, Postland, Tenn.
 W. Hudson (18), 120 Bannerman Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba, Can.
 Helen Johnson (40), P. O. Box 643, Asbury Pk., N. J.
 Sid Lawrie (17), 36 Arthur St., Leith, Scotland.
 Jerry Lathrop (14), 1 Suffolk Ct., Oceanside, L. I., N. Y.
 Richard Otto (12), 605 Woodbine Ave., Rochester, N. Y.
 L. Sherman (11), 1833 Main St., Hillsboro, Ore.
 Jas. Ritchie (15), Sunnycrest, East Lebanon, Maine.
 Bob Duncan (19), 492 N. Liberty, Wash. City, Mo.
 Jerome Epstein (16), 153 Brunswick St., Roxbury, Mass.
 John Neff (20), 708 Rencher, Clovis, New Mexico.
 Geo. Martin (15), 113-35 210th St., Bellaire, L. I.
 Donald Tricel (17), Fire Station, Hollywood, Fla.
 Ed. Wilson (12), 40 Wyoming Ave., Ardmore, Pa.
 Richard Rice (14), 88 Bancroft St., Portland, Maine.
 Wm. Haie (11), 294 1/2 Mulberry St., Newark, N. J.
 Geo. King (16), R. F. D. No. 2, Mt. Morris, Mich.
 Frank Anderson (30), Meredith, N. H.
 Tony Chipas (15), 10717 Indiana Ave., Chicago, Ill.
 V. Stradotto (17), Route 1, Box 185, Littleton, Colo.
 Clifford Parcell (14), 4107 Wayne, Kansas City, Mo.
 Walter Thomas (18), Greensboro, Ind., Box 63.
 Kenton Scott (12), Box 303, Scottsdale, Ariz.
 Max Sears (16), 6885 Temple Ave., Long Beach, Calif.
 J. Kalinowski (24), 1747 Wabansia Ave., Chicago, Ill.
 Archie Rhinocert (15), Rt. 1, Box 87, Gridley, Calif.
 Fred Berczin (14), 733 Virginia St., Gary, Ind.
 Fred Martin, Jr. (11), Rt. 2, Box 327, Patatuma, Calif.
 Moses Missirie (17), Cacahumilpa 18, Mexico City, D. F.
 Pat Wernher (17), 9 Helensica Ave., N. W. 11, London, Eng.
 Amancio Paraz (21), Fil. VII. No. 136, Egn Oahu, Hawaii.

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE ON PAGE 89



CORRECT ANSWERS TO "SCRAMBLED SHIPS"

(See Pages 74-75)

- | | |
|----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Norwegian Biplane | 4. Swedish Triplane |
| 2. Naglo Quadruplane | 5. Garbardini Triplane |
| 3. Sage Trainer | 6. Siemens-Schuckert |



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HELLO, all you buzzards, cloud-busters, kiwis and ack emmas! Here we are together again just as Father Time is turning over a new page and 1936 begins. Last year brought countless developments in aviation—new tech-



nical achievements, broken speed and distance records, exciting air meets the world over.

Be ready for another whirlwind aviation year!

1935 saw plenty of action! It winds up with our aerial transport doing better than ever—with Uncle Sam in possession of the world's best bomber, the Boeing 299—with appropriations for military aircraft larger than they have ever been in history and America zooming ahead at a rapid rate to the rightful place it should occupy among the world's powers as **THE** leader in aviation.

1936 Will Tell

Yes sir, the aviation year was swell—and the future outlook is still better. All the legislation passed, all the plans made in 1935, will be visibly tangible in the results that 1936 will show.

This is the time to keep a sharp lookout—to be informed on every phase of air activity!

And more than that, this is the time to work harder than ever in spreading your opinions on the ne-

cessity for National Air Defense. The temporary victories we have won will soon be obliterated if every man jack of us doesn't fight to keep these victories! When success is in sight it's the worst time to rest content—that's just when we should renew our efforts!

Rickenbacker's Predictions

For the last century prophets have been predicting the course of future wars. Many of their statements are exaggerated—but when **OUR OWN EDDIE RICKENBACKER**, American ace supreme, has something to say, it's worth listening to!

That's why I'm passing on to you Captain Eddie's picture of certain developments that he feels sure are coming.

War will be fought in the air and the issues decided right there in the



blue, says Eddie—and we all know that. But he goes on to visualize the following:

1. Giant lenses will be taken to great altitudes and focussed on the sun's rays so that cities will burn up.
2. Planes will fire cannon from the air.
3. Whole armies will be moved by huge air transports.
4. Airplanes will pick up tanks and drop them over enemy lines without landing.

(Continued on page 122)



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(Continued from page 120)

The possibility of such developments is something to consider seriously. Nobody understands air problems better than Eddie Rickenbacker—and when he told members of the Federal Aviation Commission about the above ideas, his statements had the effect of a bombshell.

So you see the giant task that lies before Uncle Sam—we must be prepared to meet emergencies of every sort that the future may bring! We must be FIRST in discovering and adapting these large-scale, fearsome methods of war—not to use them, but to understand them and to know how to defend ourselves against them.

Every individual in America can help—by intelligently forwarding the progress of our Aviation Corps through their co-operation and understanding of current problems. In democratic America, where officials



are elected by secret ballot, to do our bidding instead of to rule us, we can all have a part in seeing that men of the right mettle are handed the controls in piloting the Ship of State.

Airplane Jottings

Some news from here and there:

Lieut. Col. W. A. Bishop, V.C., who shot down 72 planes while serving with the Canadians in the World War, is a pilot again! After 12 years on the ground, he's made a solo flight from Montreal to his home at Muskoka, Ont. Which all goes to show that once you learn how to fly, you don't forget how.

To avoid collision of landing planes and speeding automobiles, the Hoover airport at Washington has installed a "stop-and-go" signal system—the first of its kind used for this purpose.

Despite the many statements that the life of an airplane is an exceedingly short one, the Department of Commerce reports that 169 civilian planes built in 1926 or before are in service and going strong.

Flight Over the Sahara

The first aerial crossing of the Sahara Desert by Italian pilots from Oran, Algeria, to Timbukto, in French Sudan, has been accomplished by Eugene G. Minetti and Count Leonardo Bonzi in a standard Fairchild three-place cabin monoplane powered with the American Warner Super Scarab air-cooled engine of 145 horse power. More than 1,600 miles covered, which gives Mr. Camel, formerly regarded as the only Ship

(Continued on page 124)

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(Continued from page 123)
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Our Letter Box

Readers, your letters are great! Keep sending 'em along—and remember that in addition to telling me what you think of the novels and stories in SKY FIGHTERS, I want your own personal opinion on aviation problems of current interest.

All the way from South Australia comes this interesting note from A. H. G. Matthews, 23 Brandford St., Solomantown, Pt. Pirie:

Look out, fellows! Here I come—throttle through the gate! Clear the tarmac,

and could one of you grease monkeys stop chewing your fingernails down there and run over to deliver this message?

Ah no! It's not a challenge from Von Heller, or Richthofen, just a friendly message from an "Aussie" pilot. Congratulations to the editor and all who help to slap this fine magazine together—SKY FIGHTERS is the best of 'em all!

It's with deep regret that we Aussies received the sad news of the loss in America, recently, of those two great men—Will Rogers and Wiley Post—who I understand meant so much to American aviation in general.

I'm a member of the Aero Club of South Australia and would gladly open up my hangars to any mail buddies who would care to write to me, especially AIRMEN OF AMERICA. I like them and I'd like to "put it there" with every one. Being an Aussie, I do not expect to be able to join.

Well, fellows, I guess I had better be getting home again, pull away those chocks. Hope 2. C. U. B. 4 long. Yours till airplanes grow on bushes!

Matthews, we're sending you a membership card *pronto*, with our compliments! Whaddya mean, you can't join because you're an Aussie! AIRMEN OF AMERICA is a worldwide organization and we have members in many far away places. If you are interested in aviation—join, even though you live in Hong Kong or the Fiji Islands. Let's stretch hands

(Continued on page 126)

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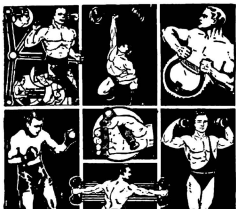
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(Continued from page 125)

across the seas for greater aviation progress!

Now—to get closer home—here's a note from a new reader, William Nehez, of 9403 Yeakel Ave., Cleveland, Ohio:

One night when I had nothing to do, I sent my brother out to get me "something to read." He came back with SKY FIGHTERS.

Believe me, that was a lucky break. The magazine is full of interesting material.

I feel sorry that I didn't read SKY FIGHTERS sooner for I believe the previous lessons in LEARN TO FLY, by Lieut. Jay D. Blaufox, would surely have helped me in my Aeronautics Specializing Course that I am taking at East Technical High School in Cleveland.

Among your stories, THE SOFT EAGLE and COCARDES OF COURAGE had real stuff in them—true pictures of the front. I hope that you will publish three-view layout plans of war planes soon.

Charles Klesnick, of 5001 McBride Ave., Cleveland, Ohio, same town as Nehez lives in, is sure an Oppenheim fan. Just see what he has to say about Ralph:

Time after time, I have read a novel or story of unusual interest written by Ralph Oppenheim. Try to get him to write some more "Three Mosquito" stories, they were the greatest yarns that ever crashed a newsstand.

Tell him to write some more stories like THE ROCKET ACE, THE FLYING LOCOMOTIVE, etc., because they're swell and I know loads of readers are extremely fond of his stuff.

O.K.—we'll get Oppenheim busy for you!

John C. Knowlton, Medford, Ore., joins the modern story controversy as follows:

If you're going to put a modern story in this magazine, go to it, gold-rain ye. I ain't hollerin' a bit but I want to point out that there's a great deal of modern junk around but real war-air stories such as we find in SKY FIGHTERS are hard to get hold of.

Lots of fellows agree with you, Knowlton—but more and more readers are asking for an occasional modern story, and therefore SKY FIGHTERS intends to publish just a few of them in the near future. Watch for them. And the war-air

(Concluded on page 128)

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(Concluded from page 126)
material will not be crowded out—don't fear. We'll offer the modern story as a dessert to top off a bang-up war-air fiction feast.

Here's a fine letter, containing an interesting sidelight on history, from Ed Allatt of 1201 Post St., Alameda, Cal.:

I agree with Eric Edge (letter in October issue) in liking the true stories by Hugh James. Must also thank Mr. Edge for refreshing my memory, as I had intended writing you respecting the eulogy of Captain Ball by Mr. James, and had forgotten.

I knew Captain Ball over there. At the Savvy Drome, behind Arras, I was with the 51st Div. (Ladies from hell, the Jerries dubbed us.)

The Captain was friendly with the Mayor of Aubigny (1 mile from Savvy) and it was a favorite trick of his to drop messages in small chutes on the Mayor's lawn, flying so low that his undercarriage would swish through the treetops.

I was fortunate enough to see a fine tribute paid to Captain Ball by the Germans. The morning after he was brought down at Lille, a German plane came over at about 3000 feet altitude—unusually low for that sector in daylight—and he kept coming lower while we watched the "archies" throwing everything but the guns at him.

I would estimate that at least 2000 shells were fired.

Eventually, at about 300 feet elevation over the Savvy Drome, the Jerry dropped a wreath!

Thanks for the swell yarn about Capt. Ball, Allatt—and please drop into our tarmac again.

A special big batch of letters next month—and, say, fellows, that February issue will be a wow!

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And that's not all. Another favorite—FREDERICK C. PAINTON—will be here with a complete novelette—MUSTANGS CAN FLY—which is the kind of a yarn worth writing home about! Then—stories by Joe Archibald, Ralph Oppenheim and others! I'll be seeing you, too—

Eddie McCrae.

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