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WINGS

DEDICATED TO AMERICAN FLYING MEN WHO HAVE CARRIED THE STARS AND STRIPES TO THE SKY

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1937

J. W. GLENISTER, Publisher — T. T. SCOTT, Secretary and General Manager — MALCOLM REISS, Editor

DOOM CRATES . . . . . **George Bruce** 3

A War-Air Novel

Pilots without hope were the men who flew the sky-coffins of the unlucky "13th." The evil gods of war jinxed their Vickers, and Death itself rode their tails.

WINGS FOR THE BRAVE . . . **Andrew A. Caffrey** 40

Novelet of War in the Clouds

Together they zoomed to meet the war-mad charge of the Hun falcons. They were blood brothers—yet one wore the wings of a hero, the other the sinister bar of cowardice.

RENEGADE ACE . . . . . **T. W. Ford** 66

A Crimean Front Novel

Clemington the Limey, Daklo the giant Lett, "Skid" Upton, Yank . . . the White Squadron of despair. But before last taps sang out they swore they'd blast the traitor from the red-starred skies.

THE SUICIDE SQUADRON . . . . **Tom O'Neill** 108

A Complete Spy Novelet

Dread fingers downed the pilots of the Suicide Squadron while the hope of nations sank in Spandau-ripped agony. Then came Kiwi Terrill to stunt with winged treachery above, and siren snares below.

Story Heads by D. H. Moneypenny

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DOOM CRATES

By GEORGE BRUCE

Pilots without hope were the men who flew the sky-coffins of the "13th," for they knew that the evil gods of the sky jinxed their Vickers, and Death itself rode their tails!

A War-Air Novel

A FLYING Spad with the Black Ace of Spades beneath the pilot's cockpit ducked in behind a high moving bank of clouds and seemed to remain motionless for a long moment. The Black Ace of Spades, outlined in white, gave a rather spectral touch to the gray bulk of the ship, and then, as if to heighten the effect, there

was a blood red "13" painted in the heart of the Black Ace of Spades.

To a flying man that Ace of Spades and that number thirteen so boldly displayed to the spaces above the earth would have brought a shudder of apprehension; for flying men, especially pursuit pilots, are more superstitious than New England housewives, and everyone knows that the Ace of Spades is the "death card" and that the figure thirteen is the death number. No pilot would be content to serve in an outfit having a roster of thirteen pilots. No man, telling fortunes, could look down upon the ominous black markings of the Ace of Spades without sensing the coming of the "Man with the Swinging Scythe," and here they both were, combined into a single insignia, drawn in sharp outlines upon the side of the gray Spad that flew furtively behind the cloud bank like some spectre of the high places, prowling upon a ghastly mission.

A helmeted head and goggled eyes peered over the Spad's cockpit. Below, the lower stratas of the cloud formation swirled about at the command of the wind, forming into little whirlpools and eddies, racing back and forth through the blue of the depths below like dancing shadows, catching up the beams of pure sunlight and transforming drops of moisture into iridescent jewels, glowing and living.

Farther below so far down as to be enveloped in the earth shadow, was a brown splotch of color like a smudge against the blue of heaven—that brown splotch was the earth. It was twelve thousand feet of space below the gray belly of the Spad; twelve thousand feet to where moiling, toiling men burrowed into the soft earth, threw glinting shells into the breeches of guns, breathed flame and smoke, raved, cursed, screamed, moaned, and died; twelve thousand feet down to where a gray hoard and a khaki horde faced the other over a narrow strip of writhing ground, and held hot rifles between grimy paws, listened to the screaming torrent of death that rushed over them, flattened exhausted bodies against the poor protection of dissolving trench walls and awaited the final summons from the trumpet of the war god.

Twelve thousand feet down litter bearers skulked through the tangled mass of wires which separated the living from the dead on either side of the lines, and rolled blasted, battered men upon a strip of canvas stretched between two poles and carried them away, some with red tags tied through tunic button holes, some with yellow tags, some with blue tags. Back, behind the lines the surgeons, gaunt cheeked and dead eyed, studied the tags. The red tags they gave little attention, the blue tags went on the table, the yellow tags went still farther back.

WAR rode over the land, and the steel shod feet of the horse of Mars fell alike upon the khaki and upon the gray, and the sparks from the plunging hooves of the steed fell over the earth, lighting new fires and consuming new lands.

War that reached up into the blue of heaven as if to mock at the God who ruled the universe. As if to laugh at the sun and moon and the pure serene beauty of the stars. War that reached down into the depths of the sea, where man-creatures had never penetrated, and struck with terrific force at the lives of other man-creatures who rode the crest of that same sea. War that burrowed deep into the bowels of the earth like moles building a city, and took refuge behind shadows, and threw flame and gas fumes and high explosives out of the greedy barrels of field guns.

Rocking, trembling, crawling, rushing, creeping men-creatures, caught up in the wild conflagration lit by the sparks from the War Lord's steed, and daring to barter flesh and blood for the right to believe as they desired to believe.

The goggled eyes of the pilot of the cruising Spad looked down upon those things. They passed before him like a phantom stage setting revolving upon a cylinder. The white beads of moisture from the cloud-substance rolled over his helmet and smeared his goggles. Above him a brilliant rainbow marked the edge of the mist blanket in which he had taken refuge.

The Spad went around in a lazy bank as he moved the stick and rudder to the right. His eyes were still fixed upon a spot below his left wing. Behind the goggles blue eyes were gleaming strangely. A fighting mouth was drawn out into a

straight line. The tips of his nostrils were distended like the nostrils of a thoroughbred at the barrier. The Spad cut a way through the heavy mist. The black Hisso in its nose was throttled down to a murmur. The slipstream, caressing the wet cheeks of the pilot was nothing more than a gentle zephyr. The struts and wires seemed to be humming a chorus of contentment.

The rolling banks of mist caressed the Black Ace of Spades and the ominous red "13" on the side of the craft. They caressed the black encased head of the pilot. They seized at the lazily spinning prop as if playfully attempting to stay its course. They rolled back over the vertical fin and flippers. They hid the narrow edge of the rudder; but the pilot was not thinking of the playfulness of the mist banks.

The pilot's eyes were fixed upon three little dots that swarmed toward him from the north horizon. Three little dots that hung together like a flight of wild geese, and grew larger and larger with the passing of each instant.

A white, strained look was about his mouth. The blue eyes were snapping. His hand moved cautiously toward the round knob of the throttle as the hand of a stalking hunter moves toward the trigger of his rifle when the game is within easy range. He touched the throttle with rapidly drumming fingers for an instant. He stirred his feet in the cockpit and stamped them impatiently upon the duck-board flooring as if to warm them into a sense of feeling.

THE three dots were larger now. They were coming on at a fast clip. They took form. Wings grew out from them. Three wings to each ship. The pilot drew breath sharply. Albatross—three of them in formation. Fighting ships, given only to fighting pilots.

He nosed the Spad down slightly and cleared the Hisso with a sharp burst from the throttle. He shook the web belts leading up to the breeches of the Vickers guns before him and studied the face of his altimeter. He dropped down to the lowest level of the cloud bank. The Spad seemed to quiver with impatience.

The Albatrosses below were queer looking things. Nightmares in a blue sky. The first was painted with heavy black and white squares. The second was blood red, with white stripings. The third was a violent green with black striping along the camel back. They were coming on steadily, holding a course at ten thousand feet over Allied territory.

They were directly under him now.

He swung the Spad about in a vertical bank, nosing down sharply, and slipping rapidly without power. Then as they passed beyond him he threw the gun to the Spad with a flip of his wrist and crouched low over his gun sights.

The Hisso snapped to life as if stung with a giant whip. The short stacks spat flame and smoke. The prop screamed as it cut through the air. Down out of the cloud bank dropped the Black Ace of Spades on the side of the gray ship. Down with struts moaning with the effort, with wires singing a song of pure joy, with wing surfacing humming a deep bass in accompaniment. The slipstream became a raging torrent of wind beating against the head of the pilot. It ripped into the open cockpit and swirled about his leather-coated shoulders. It tore at the dispatch case compartment behind him and rattled the little door angrily.

Faster and faster in the passing of an instant. Wheels below seemed outstretched talons of a fiercely swooping eagle. Down and down, wilder diapason from struts and wires, snarling flame from exhaust stacks, leaping flame in the blue eyes of the pilot. White hand upon the gun trips of the Vickers. A gray streak plunging out of the empty heavens, nose pressing hard for the multi-colored tri-planes below. The universe seemed to suddenly pause in its course, and to watch with bated breath the crashing plunge of the rocketing Spad.

CLOSE upon the tails of the three enemy planes. The black and white Maltese crosses stood out in bold relief upon the rudder and fuselage of the Jerry crates. They still held together in close formation. The noise of the Spad's descent had not as yet penetrated through the noise of the three Mercedes motors roaring about them. The face of the Spad's pilot was grim and set. His thumb

was hard against the gun trips and his eyes never wavered from the tail of the nearest enemy. Another instant and a red hot stream of death would pour from the muzzles of those grim black Vickers mounted above the motor. Another instant and a red splatter of acrid-smelling flame would stab at the three ships before the black bulk of the insane Hisso.

The thumb pressed more eagerly. The nose of the Spad was a hundred yards behind the tail of the nearest of the planes. The Vickers bucked and jumped crazily. The slipstream swept away the white mist of smoke from before their muzzles and the smell of burning powder came back to the nostrils of the tense pilot in the cockpit of the Spad.

A stream of tracers that counted the messengers of death leaped across the narrow space separating the ship, burned a white trail across the blue of the sky. Between each tracer twenty steel slugs screamed and snapped and crackled. The tracers were disappearing into the wings and fuselage of the plane.

The Jerry crate rocked about crazily for a moment, its wings wavering as if from a sudden agony. The nose leaped up and then down. The ailerons flapped loosely, and the right wing became a thing of tattered linen and skeleton woodwork. It sagged heavily upon one side. It whirled about dizzily in ever-tightening circles. The Jerry pilot was waving his two hands over his head. His face was distorted, the mouth wide open, screaming a warning to his fellows.

The two remaining planes went about in a tight bank just as the hurtling Spad leaped in upon the tail of the second of the three. The black and white squares of this newest victim stood out sharply in the gun sights of the Vickers. The grim smile upon the face of the Spad's pilot grew more broad. He knew that this second ship would never escape the hungry gun bearing down upon it. He knew that when he squeezed the gun trips before him that a black and white marked Albatross tri-plane would fly the skies no more.

It would be a sweet victory. The pilot of the Spad had been waiting and waiting for this moment; waiting ever since Red Dawson had gone down fighting these same three ships. Poor Red with a set of jammed guns and his tail section shot away, making a fight of it, working like a demon to clear his useless guns, kicking a rudder bar that was attached to no rudder, and then riding his burning crate into the ground.

A HOT splatter of oil seared the cheeks of the pilot of the Spad. His head jerked up from over his gun sights and he glanced sharply at his oil pressure gauge. There was a new whiteness in his cheeks and he saw the hand of the gauge dropping swiftly down toward the zero point.

The slipstream was smearing oil over his goggles and face and shoulders. It ran down over the backs of his hands. The floor of the cockpit was slippery with it. It smoked and burned wherever it touched flesh. It was hot out of the motor. He clenched his teeth to keep from screaming aloud with the agony of the boiling stuff running over his flesh.

He pawed at his goggles to wipe the mess out of his vision. The tri-planes were facing him now. They were sweeping down. Spandaus snapping at him, tracers whipping through his wings. He snatched back the throttle with the motion of his hand. Something had snapped in the midst of that mad plunge downward. An oil line—the crank case—something that took the life blood of the motor and smeared it hot and still pulsing over the face of the pilot—and the planes were on top of him, one above him and one below. The oil pressure gauge stood at zero.

There was death before him in the presence of the white hot Hisso. There was death upon speeding wings above him and below him where the Spandaus of the tri-planes probed for his life. There was death far down there—on the earth, for a crippled ship and a crippled pilot—but he knew that he would never experience the death that lurked twelve thousand feet down. He would be dead long before that. He would be dead just as soon as it took one of the tri-planes to line up the cockpit of the Spad and then rip a burst through the frail linen and wood—and into the flesh and bone of Bill Gans.

So this was the way Red Dawson had gone out? Fighting the jinx, wrestling

with jammed guns, while the enemy he had attacked circled back to drop him without effort. The old jinx. The jinx that seemed a part and parcel of the lives of the Thirteenth Squadron. The unseen and unknown something that always sprang out of the void above the earth to tear hard-earned victories out of the hands of the Black Ace marked ships and to mock the labors of the thirteen men of the Squadron.

Jammed guns today, splintered struts yesterday, broken oil line tomorrow, never a test of strength against strength. Never a contest of fighting guts against fighting guts, of skill against skill, of nerve against nerve. Only a moment of leaping attack, and then the sickening sensation of control cables carried away, of gasping motor, of useless guns, and a ship with the Ace of Spades fluttering down in hopeless and helpless agony with a raging pack of the enemy riding its tail.

The two planes were leaping in with deadly intent. A burst from a Spandau crashed through the cockpit and the whisper of death was in Bill Gan's ears. The snapping crackle of steel ripping through linen, probing through longerons, thudding through metal. Dead stick prop before him. Pools of oil in his lap and on the floor. Par-boiled face feeling raw and puffy. Lips muttering strange words. Hands moving the controls, throwing the gliding ship back and forth on an uncertain course to confuse the aim of the tri-planes closing in on him. Burst of steel and tracers through the camel back. Sharp puffs of vapor from the solid bulk of the motor as Jerry bullets found the banks of the Hisso. Jagged and ripped motor cowling. Nose of the Spad straight down, increasing speed of the gliding dive. Prop still dead stick, tri-planes on his tail, one on each side, looking for a chance to put in the fatal burst.

It had to come soon.

He could feel his spine crawling. Waiting for the shock of gutting slugs through flesh. Perspiration dripped from under the front of his helmet. Helplessly, hopelessly, he was still fighting. It was a code with Bill Gans and the other pilots of the Thirteenth. They forgot to be afraid, forgot to quail in the face of danger; they merely fought on and on, until the lights went out and limp hands dropped away from the controls.

A MATTER of seconds. They had to make a fair hit now. They couldn't miss. They were swooping down on him under throttled motors matching their downward rush with the speed of the Spad. He looked back over his shoulder. The black and white painted enemy was the nearer. He could see the head of the Jerry pilot bending forward over his gun sights. He threw the Spad over on one wing in a sharp slip and held it there until it seemed that he would fold the wing back around the fuselage.

Again the crackling snap of death in his ears. Glass flew around him. His instrument board dissolved into a mass of splintered wood. A gush of gasoline seeped from a round puncture in the side of the tank and spurted out to mix with the oil on the floor of the cockpit. His entire body was tense—waiting for the second burst—and death.

He seemed conscious of a longer time than usual with no activity on the part of the enemy. He glanced back over his shoulder for a second time. His heart leaped into his mouth. His breath seemed suddenly strangled.

A wild scream came up in his throat but could not force a way past his teeth. His eyes were staring over his vertical fin. He saw a wolf-gray Spad flying with tremendous speed, heeled over on one wing, going about in a straight-up bank, Vickers flaming red, motor shooting red fire from exhaust stacks, the black and white plane banking away from it, and chips and shreds flying from the crazily painted fuselage of the enemy. There was a Black Ace of Spades under the pilot's cockpit of this gray Spad. A Black Ace of Spades with a red "13" superimposed. It darted in and out like a beam of light through shadows. It followed the madly flying Albatross with grim intent. Its guns were never still. It hammered burst after burst into the Jerry crate.

With leaping pulses, Bill Gans pulled his crippled Spad out of the slip and threw it around on line with the fight above him. His hands went to the guntrips and then dropped away.

Tears of chagrin formed in his bloodshot eyes. His lips were trembling. For an instant he had forgotten that he could not fight, he could only watch. He caught a glimpse of the third of the tri-planes bearing down upon him. He put the nose of the Spad straight down and fled the spot, rocking his wings violently from left to right.

He saw a curl of smoke from the black and white Albatross. Abruptly the pursuing Spad swung off its tail and came screaming down to where the third of the enemy was after easy game. The three ships were bunched as they fell. Away to the north, the black and white Albatross was spinning down in crazy circles, red fuselage, engulfing the pilot's cockpit, blotting out all of the ship excepting the flippers.

There was a new sound of hammering guns behind Bill Gans' falling crate. Again he looked over his shoulder. The gray Spad that had saved him was burning up the air around the last of the enemy ships. There was a short fight and a vicious one. The Jerry could fly. He matched his attacker gun for gun through a full five minutes of combat. Then he drew off slightly, as if studying the mettle of this latest foe. He banked away to the north and stood waiting as if for a new attack. It did not come. The second Spad slipped away sharply and took position beside its crippled fellow.

Bill Gans' hands were trembling on the stick. He felt weak and sick. His face burned like ten thousand devils. He watched the last of the enemy become a dot on the horizon. Then the home field sprang up from the hazy outline of the ground and he banked around for a landing into the wind. His stomach was sick with the odor of oil and gas. His eyes were blurring. He hurled his goggles over the side and fought to control his shattered nerves. The second Spad dropped down at his side like a mother eagle watching the first flight of her fledgling.

Gans came in over the tops of the tent hangars. He couldn't tell how close he was to the canvas. His eyes were fixed on the green grass of the field and the other ships of the Squadron standing on line. He felt the shock of wheels touching earth. He felt a heavy bounce as the Spad hit the tarmac. He was cursing himself. Making a kaydet landing. The right wing went down with a swoop. His heart hammered furiously as he hurled the stick to the left and kicked rudder. The Spad recovered before the second bounce, hit on two wheels, the tail skid came to earth and kicked up the sod. The Spad rolled forward and came to a halt.

A GROUP of pilots and mechanics, sensing a new tragedy in the history of the Thirteenth, raced across the field. Two of them carried hand fire-extinguishers. They reached the side of the ship and lifted Bill Gans out upon the ground. He was limp. His eyes were half closed. His cheeks were raw and blistered. He was slippery with oil. He was mumbling something in an undertone.

"Lost the oil," he was saying over and over. "Lost the oil all at once. Motor went haywire. Nearly got me as I glided down."

A group of excited mechanics ripped the motor cowling from the front of the Spad and peered into the oil-reeking depths of the motor. There was little comment made. They merely stood looking on at a new evidence of the jinx haunting the Thirteenth.

A circular rent showed in the crank-case of the motor. Where the drain plug fitted a flaw had occurred in the casting. Under the strain of Gans' dive the flaw had cracked and the drain plug had dropped out. They picked the drain plug from out of the splash pan. The flawed bit of crank-case was still tight about the plug.

An inch of metal, a tiny flaw—a man's life in the balance. The Thirteenth had been fighting things like that for months. They feared them more than they feared the enemy. An oversized shell in a machine-gun belt meant a jammed gun and a dead man. A crack in a strut, carefully covered over with varnish, meant a fluttering wing and a death spin. A defective fitting and a crazily flapping rudder meant riding an insane crate into the hard surface of the earth. Months of it until the pilots and mechanics of the Thirteenth dreaded the sight of a ship. Hours and hours of checking and rechecking for flaws in the ships of the outfit, and still

men died for nothing and the jinx waxed merry

Superstitious in the beginning, the pilots and mechanics carried secret charms against the ill-luck pursuing them.

They feared to look at the full moon. They mobbed any one who dared to light a third cigarette with a single match. They threw salt over their left shoulders at the mess table. They watched every action, every happening, ready to translate it into an omen of good or bad luck. Their prophecies were always right. The Squadron hadn't known a lucky day since Zack Hunt had come spinning down through a dog fight with a pair of jammed ailerons and had side-swiped a Jerry crate with his prop, shearing away the Jerry's tail section.

All of them knew the source of the trouble, but none of them would admit it. They knew that it had genesis in the numerical designation of the Squadron. They knew that as long as they boasted the number "13" and the Black Ace of Spades as an insignia that luck would never come to them. But they were also stubborn. They would not have exchanged that Squadron number for any other, and they guarded their right to the Black Ace of Spades as an insignia with the ferocity and jealousy of a mother lion protecting her cubs.

No gang of men could be lucky flying under the number Thirteen and with a Black Ace of Spades as a talisman—but with grim-set jaws and hard eyes they dared any one to prove it.

They made way upon the field as a thrice-gunned motor carried to them the landing signal of the second Spad. It came down with a rush, touched dainty wheels, came to a rolling stop, taxied about and took its place in the line.

A pilot stepped out of the second crate and pulled his worn helmet off his tousled head. He glanced about at the group.

"Where's Gans?" he asked shortly. Several of them nodded heads toward two men who were half carrying the pilot of the first Spad into his quarters tent. The second pilot stared after them for an instant before he spoke again.

"Hurt badly?" he asked.

"Burned," answered Bing Sumner laconically. "Got the oil in his face and lap. Looks pretty raw. Flaw in the crankcase casting."

The second pilot tossed his helmet into his seat with a gesture of despair. Then he walked away across the field in the direction they had taken Bill Gans.

II

JOHNNY GRIMES was strumming on the piano in one end of the mess shack. The piano was the Thirteenth Squadron's prize possession. Where it came from no one knew, unless it might be Johnny Grimes and Larry Sheldon. The rest of the outfit merely remembered that the two last named had departed late one evening with a Quad truck and had arrived early in the morning with a real Pleyel piano. After that life hadn't seemed so bad.

Johnny could do things to a piano. Once Zack Hunt had accused him of living in Tin Pan Alley before he took up flying as a shorter course to eventual suicide and Johnny hadn't denied it. Certainly the boy could sit there in the middle of a babble of voices, completely lost in the chords he whipped from the ivory keys of the old instrument, and every now and then he'd turn to the group with a half smile on his face and command attention.

"Listen to this," he always began, and then he would play them something new, words and music complete, something that touched all of them, something that belonged to the Thirteenth Squadron alone.

At times like that a hush would fall over the room. The haze of cigarette smoke would mount upward toward the ceiling unnoticed as Johnny's wizard-like fingers drew strange harmonies from the piano. Other times he played rollicking, pulse-stirring jazz—it all depended upon the state of mind of the Squadron.

That piano and those fingers had lifted tons of gloom that had settled upon the hearts of the pilots of the Thirteenth from time to time. That piano had been the cement that had bound them together without loss of morale in the face of abject discouragement.

There was the time when Pete Thompson had dropped down out of a dog fight, his rudder half shot away, his fuselage riddled, a sticky ooze running from his

neck, his motor conking out on him as he went down. It had been a vicious dog fight. They had jumped a Jerry outfit way up in the sun, back of the Allied lines. Man after man of the Thirteenth went down—seven in all, and only two of them had gone down before the guns of the enemy. All the rest were out due to some part of their flying equipment failing them.

Thompson had been in the brunt of the conflict. Twice he rode enemy crates off the tail of some crippled brother of the Thirteenth and had received the venom of the enemy for his protection. Then a burst from some Spandau had played hell with his own empennage and he felt the Spad trembling like a beaten dog and when his feet moved the rudder bar, the wreckage of his rudder dragged sluggishly against his controls.

He went down out of there. Down from twelve thousand feet. Three of the enemy fleet on his tail, with only Major Bates, Old Eagle Eye, fighting to save him from certain death. Time after time Bates drove the enemy off Pete's tail. Time after time the superbly flown ship of the Thirteenth's commander interposed itself between Thompson and the attack of the enemy. Bleeding, stunned, trembling, out in his seat from loss of blood, Thompson mushed his crate into the manure pile before a Frog farmhouse. When they got to him he was fast in his belt, unconscious, slowly bleeding to death.

A week at the base and he returned to duty—and when he came back to the outfit he listened to the saga of his exploit and the whole Squadron listened with him as Johnny Grimes created it out of the piano and sang it in his baritone voice. It became a classic of the Air. Men sang it from Verdun to the Channel and grinned as they sang it.

NEVER a binge without the song that Johnny composed for Pete. The Frogs knew it, the Canucks knew it and the Limeys knew it. It's a safe bet that the Jerries also knew it. They knew about everything else that had to do with the Allied Air. The Thirteenth sang it with great gusto. Somehow it seemed to ease up tautened nerves, to give them something to laugh about. They sang it now as Johnny Grimes played it:

1

When hell breaks loose
And you're far from home
With a rudder half shot away.
When you long for a clip in that empty gun
And some gas to prolong your stay.
Just pull in your neck and brace your knees;
There's no use to go slopping about
That pile of manure at that Frog front door
Is the way to an easy "out."

Refrain

Oh, why did I roam with these mangy fools
So far o'er the Jerry lines?
Oh, why did I try shooting other lads
With this haywire wreck of mine?
I know that I'm through, so I'll say adieu;
It's a hell of a way to die,
But I'll dive down straight with this lousy crate;
I'm only 12,000 feet high.

2

So he held his Spad
In a whistling glide
12,000 feet to the ground,
And he saw the stack 'round the Frog's pet shack
Come leaping up with a bound.
And he eased the stick way back in his lap,
And he sat in the haywire wreck,
And what he thought was an angel's wreath
Was the garbage pile about his neck.

It went to the tune of *She's the Sweetheart of Sigma Chi* or maybe that song went to the tune of Johnny Grimes' ditty, but anyway, it made Pete Thompson famous. They finished the last line with a whoop and assaulted Pete Thompson *en masse* to pound him on the shoulders.

Over in the corner, sitting close to a bandaged Bill Gans, Major Bates regarded his boys with a half-smile and a far-off look in his eyes. They belonged to him, these lads. They seemed flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone. He loved each of them with a love that few men can understand.

Major Bates was the commanding officer of the Thirteenth. Actually, he was a father to them all, for "Old Eagle Eye," as Bates was known, was aged. That is, he was aged according to the laws of the air. Bates was all of thirty-two. He had silver streaks in his hair. There were lines about his eyes and mouth. Thirty-two in the air is like eighty-two on the ground—considering that the oldest of his "boys" was twenty-three and looked upon him as a patriarch.

There was a white scar running along one side of Major Bates' jaw. A slug from a Maxim had ripped through the linen about his cockpit and tagged him playfully along the chin, leaving a mark

that he would carry to the grave. There were other marks on Bates' body.

Once a Fokker outfit had hemmed him in a tight circle of death and Bates had fought his way out with a steel sliver in his belly and a jagged bit of wood from a shattered longeron buried deep in his chest.

He had smashed his way through that Jerry death trap, the tail of his Spad smoldering and smoking, the linen flapping behind him, skeleton framework of his ship peeping through the gutted surfacing. A major, but a flying major. A commanding officer who believed his place to be at the point of his outfit.

DAY after day some pilot of the Thirteenth owed a new lease on life to Major Bates, just as Bill Gans owed such a debt. To the men of the Thirteenth, Bates was not merely a man. He was the perfect flyer, the God of the upper spaces, and they paid him a reverence that was rendered to none other. He was their schoolmaster.

If they were able to fly ships that seemed to fall apart in the air, it was Bates who had taught them to do it. If they were considered the hardest flying, hardest fighting bunch of pilots in the Allied Air, it was because Bates had taught them some of the wizardry of his own mastery over controls and guns.

Most of them had come up to the Thirteenth from the replacement pools. Eager for a shot at the Jerries, feeling that after Kelly and the training period behind the lines they knew all that could be known about combat flying, only to find that the school of the pursuit pilot did not begin until he was face to face with a half dozen of the enemy of 12,000 feet with only his own nerve, his control over his ship, and a cool brain to preserve his life.

One by one they learned that this Major Bates was the greatest flyer they had ever known. One by one they learned to look upon him as some one to whom they could go with heartaches and worries, with hurts and troubles. And he listened to them, gave wise counsel and held them together. Without Bates there would have been no Thirteenth Squadron. He was the Black Ace of Spades with the red "13" painted through it.

Citations came to the Thirteenth. Citations and decorations for valor. But no cross hung from the breast of Major Bates' tunic and no mention was made of his name in Orders of the Day. His men knew that he needed no Crosses of War to advertise his bravery and his valor. His War Cross was buried deep in the hearts of the boys who flew after him into battle.

Only a superman could have held an outfit like the Thirteenth together and held them to sanity. Bates was just that, a superman and a superflyer. He was talking to Bill Gans. Somehow the sound of the major's voice seemed to ease the agony of scalded flesh beneath the bandages that covered Gans' face and hands.

"How could you help loving a gang like that?" Bates was asking with that far-away look in his eyes. "How could anyone say that defeat is possible to an outfit like this? Look at the breaks that have gone against them. Look what they've been through. Look at the steady eyes and the fighting jaws. Billy, no nation on earth can beat another nation that can produce men like my boys. It just isn't on the cards. Understand. I take nothing away from the Germans. They produce men, and brave men, and fighting men. They produce men aflame with the love of country and eager to sacrifice lives to prove that love. They train men so thoroughly as to be beyond our comprehension—and yet there is something in these boys of mine that the Jerries can't produce. Perhaps it is the fact that my boys represent a new nation with racing blood, forcing a way to a certain destiny. Perhaps it is because the might of Germany has run its course—but even though they are matched, man for man, nerve for nerve, brain for brain—still we will win out in the long run, for Destiny the Destiny that belongs to us, will not be denied."

GANS was studying the major's face curiously. "Sounds like a philosophy lecture," he smiled.

"It is," assured the major. "Look at that boy playing that piano. I happen to know that before he took up flying he was making more than a thousand a month. He didn't have to come. He's here. Why? Destiny. Look at Pete Thompson over

there. His father is a Congressman. Pete could have had any old job in the service. Instead he used his father's 'pull' to get him a commission in the Air. The most dangerous service of all, where the life of a pursuit pilot is computed at seven minutes from the second he sets foot in France to the second in which he dies. Used his father's 'pull' to lose his life. Nearly lost it once. Did it break him down? Look at him and see for yourself."

Gans nodded. "I know it," he said softly. "I knew Reddy Dawson's folks, too, Reddy had the world by the tail, born with a silver spoon in his mouth. He's dead. He'll never be able to spend the ten million bucks his grandmother left to him."

"I had a talk with Reddy, once," half-whispered the major. "It was just before he—just before he left here—you know." The major's voice was a trifle husky. "He was telling me about himself. Told me how he used to get up in the morning with a yarn. Told me how he was thrown out of school for raising hell. Told me about playing polo just for the thrill of the danger connected with it. Just a boy, snowed under by a lot of money, trying to be natural, and the world wouldn't let him.

"Then he came over here. For the first time in his life he was happy. That last day, before he took off he sat in my tent and looked up at me with those blue eyes of his, and his red hair curling all over his head. 'Major,' he said to me, 'I just wanted to tell you that you've shown me a few things about life—and what life is. I just wanted to tell you that if I get bumped off tomorrow I'll have no regrets, and I'll be as happy as I've ever been in my life. Somehow things look differently to me now. I don't know how to say it, but being over here, with you and the boys has taught me something I never knew. I wish I had known about it years ago.'

"It made me smile. Reddy was all of twenty years old and talking as if his entire life had been mis-spent. And then he went out of here and jumped off—and you know how he went out. It's tough losing boys like that—fellows that give you a peep inside—down to the very soul—"

There was a strange huskiness in the major's voice. Gans put a bandaged paw on his arm.

"All of us are kind of like that," he mused. "Back home they'd laugh at us—as if we were kids or something—and tell us that we didn't know the meaning of the word grief or worry. Over here they don't laugh at us. Somehow, just being in the Air seems to double a fellow's years. It seems that I have been living always. It seems that I'm so old that every day I'm expecting to die. You know what I mean. It seems that I can't live much longer. Every night when I go to bed something whispers to me—'well, Old Timer, you'll be washed up in the morning.' It's funny, too. It doesn't frighten me. It doesn't make me nervous, it just kind of whispers to me. I've often wondered if the other boys in the outfit felt those things."

Bates nodded. "They all do," he assured Gans. "That's what makes them honest to God men. A man has arrived at the place when he can call himself a man, when he can laugh at death, when he can hear death whispering to him, when he can consider that his life is merely a drop in the bucket compared to what the losing of his life will accomplish. When a man can forget fatigue and remember that he's a soldier. When he can forget pain and remember duty. When he can forget death and remember that generations behind him will live because of his sacrifice, why Bill, he's just about as near to being a man as a male human can ever get. If there is a God that watches over the deeds of fighting men and can read down deep in their hearts, there will be a special corner in heaven for the boys that I've known—the boys that have made up the Thirteenth. There may be other Squadrons and good ones, but they've never had the breaks we've had, and they've never produced a better bunch of clean-hearted fighters."

THE gang was singing again. Johnny Grimes was touching the piano keys softly, almost reverently. Clustered about the table the men of the Thirteenth were singing the Squadron song. They were singing it as if unconscious of the fact that they were singing. Almost doggerel verse until the men of the Thirteenth sang

it, and then it became a hymn of devotion to an ideal. Bass and tenor and baritone blended in perfect harmony. Eyes were looking out into the purple night where high-flung stars looked down upon these blood cousins of the Thirteenth who sought the ground with the shadows of night.

Perhaps men who had once worn the numerals "13" on tunic collars looked down from behind those stars, and perhaps in that place reserved for fighting men who had fought the good fight and had gone down in a flame funeral pyre of glory they hummed the song along with the men who sat in the Thirteenth's mess hall.

"There's Jimmy and John
Dick, Larry and Fred,
Zack Hunt, Bing Sumner and Ted,
Bill Gans and Pete Thompson,
Brick Daley and Cy—
And the Ace of the Squadron,
Old Brooks—'Eagle Eye.'"

L'Envoi

This is our roster
The whole gang complete,
A Hell bending outfit
Unknown to defeat,
And we wing through the skies
That are bloody and gray
All hoping and wishing
We'll all see the day
When the damn fuss is through,
And the last prop is spun
With never a Jerry
Way up in the sun,
Ready to send us
Tied up in a crate
Back to the Earth
That we all damn well hate;
And we cuss and we moan,
And we all vent our spleen—
But never an outfit
Like Squadron Thirteen.

When the last note drifted away into space there was a silence over the room. No one but the major seemed to notice that silence. Perhaps they were thinking of things past and things to come. Perhaps they were visioning flame-lit skies of the morrow, with red and yellow and green enemy crates closing in with spitting Spandaus and roaring motors. Perhaps they were wondering who would not be present tomorrow night—who would go next. There was a trace of moisture in the eyes of Major Bates as he glanced around that table.

There was a sudden shout from the foot of the table. A figure leaped upward, one hand clutching a wine glass.

"Snap into it!" he shouted. "Snap out of it. Show some life. Get up on your hind feet and drink to the best damn Squadron in any old man's army!"

They poured wine into empty glasses and scrambled up. They were looking toward Brick Daley who had proposed the toast.

"To the best damn Squadron, the best damn men, and the lousiest airplanes in the world. To the Squadron that never had a break. To the gang of men that are fools enough to take '13' as a Squadron number and then go the jinx one better by making the Squadron insignia a Black Ace of Spades. To the original outfit of hoodos—and who are proud of it. Drink her down gang—bottoms up—Old Thirteen—God Bless Her!"

He lifted his arm, drained the glass with a single gulp and hurled the glass to the floor at his feet. After him they all did the same.

The major sipped his glass thoughtfully and held another to Bill Gans' mouth. Gans couldn't manage a thin-stemmed glass with his bandaged hands.

"I told you," whispered Bates. "You can't beat a gang like that." There were tears on his face. "Every time they do that," he whispered, "it reminds me of a painting I once saw. Four gladiators in the ring of the Coliseum saluting Caesar with drawn swords. In five minutes they knew all of them would be dead, yet there they stood, proud as punch, swords lifted high—and under the bottom of the picture were the words *'Hail Caesar, we who are about to die salute thee'!"*

Bill Gans nodded. "It does kind of get to you—like," he whispered hoarsely.

They went to bed after that. Dawn comes early to men who look upon each dawn as being a last sight of the sun. Men of twenty!

III

IT was Dick Jones' trick that morning. He came out of his quarters tent just before the red ball of the rising sun peeped over the eastern horizon. He glanced aloft at the weather and frowned thoughtfully. It wasn't often that Dick frowned.

He was the silent one of the thirteen pilots who sported the Black Ace of Spades.

Gray clouds were gathering on the northern horizon. That meant wind and cold. It meant low rolling cloud banks and low visibility. It meant darting in and out behind mist banks with never a chance to see an enemy until the enemy was face to face. It meant hanging low over the ground, within machine-gun distance, or high over the earth and above the rolling clouds, without having a sight of the earth, and dropping down at the end of the trick to crash through the middle of an outfit going over from one side or the other.

The Hisso in his crate was warming nicely. It had a reassuring sound as he rubbed the sleepiness out of his eyes and took a thick sandwich and a cup of coffee from the hands of the mess cook. He munched in silence, watching the ground crew working on his crate. Few pilots were about. He could count but three. All of them were assigned to missions that would take them off the field an hour after he left. They waved at him as he walked over to his Spad and squeezed down into the narrow cockpit.

"Good hunting!" called Zack Hunt. "Look out for the boogey man!"

Jones nodded and waved his hand. He jazzed the throttle for a long moment. The tachometer responded well. The water was O. K. Oil pressure at eighty. He nodded for the blocks to be pulled. When the wheels were free he lifted the Spad's tail on the slipstream and blasted the ship around into the wind. He tightened his belt a notch and glanced over the banks of his motor.

A mechanic waved him an all-clear signal. He thrust the throttle forward and pushed the stick up against the instrument board. The tail blasted off the ground. The Spad was rolling. It was skimming the earth. It lifted over the wires at the far end of the field with five hundred feet to spare.

Jones banked the ship around the field as if studying conditions before diving into the muck before him. Ahead, the lines were blotted out by a rolling bank of gray mist. At a thousand feet tendrils of mist were being caught up by the slipstream to disappear for a second, only to form into new shapes behind the rudder. A thousand feet visibility. He nosed upward. The low flying cloud bank swallowed the Spad and hit it from watching eyes on the home field. A white wall of blindness about him. The prop had disappeared. Only the vaguest shadow of the motor banks remained to tell him that a motor was up there in the nose of his ship. The roar of the motor sounded with a subdued beat as if heard from far off.

Up and up, in the midst of something that belonged neither to earth nor to heaven. Up like a lost soul groping for the light, knowing that somewhere above the sun must be shining and that blue heavens existed.

Up, watching the altimeter with anxious eyes, nerves strained until they trembled with the effort of keeping the ship flying on a level keel. He remembered stories of men being upside down in the middle of a cloud bank, of ships flying straight into the earth under full throttle, pilots unconscious of danger. No guide now to keep wings in line and nose down. No friendly horizon to watch as a balancer. Up to five thousand feet, and the white wall of mist still drifted all about him. Streams of moisture ran down his cheeks and off his helmet and goggles. Little trickles of water formed in the creases of his leather coat. The fuselage was beaded with diamonds. The slipstream hurled the heavy mist back in his face until the soft drops seemed to be formed of hard hailstones. He ducked his head beneath the crash pad to escape the punishment for an instant.

A sudden flood of sunlight entered the cockpit. He glanced upward eagerly and blinked his eyes rapidly. A magnificent sun was shining at seven thousand feet. He was in a new world. A clean, brilliant, warm, new world—alone, with only the softly droning motor in front of him to break the stillness. The drone of the motor and the whisper of soft wind through the wires.

ONLY the sun kept him company, touching the drops of moisture upon the gray side of the Spad and transforming them into rubies and emeralds, sapphires and diamonds. Touching the grim Ace of Spades with soft fingers, and the head of the pilot as if in benediction. Per-

haps the heavens were trying to show Dick Jones the beauty that had been hidden from him until this moment. Perhaps they were preparing him for what was to come.

He flew along, lost in the beauty of his surroundings—until a red something thrust its way through the topmost layer of clouds five hundred yards in front of him—and was followed by another red shape, and another, in quick succession, and Dick Jones found that War and Death had invaded his paradise above the earth.

The Fokkers seemed as surprised as Jones. They were at a disadvantage for an instant. They burst through the mist facing into the sun. Certainly they were blinded for an instant. Long enough to permit Dick Jones to throw full throttle to his lazily cruising Spad and to shake his webbed belts free to feed into the breeches of the twin guns before him.

The Spad leaped forward with the speed of light. The dainty jewels of an instant before were ruthlessly brushed aside by the sweep of the slipstream. The roar of an angry motor shattered the peace of the high places. The Black Ace of Spades seemed to quiver with impatience as the surfacing on which it was painted trembled in the blast of the propeller.

The ripping, snarling challenge of twin Vickers was added to the sudden inferno. The first of the Fokkers was directly in Jones' gun sights. He squeezed the trips, his blue eyes gleaming with a cold light. He saw his burst going home. Tracer after tracer burying itself into the nose of the Fokker.

He knew that the pilot had hardly recovered from his surprise before the steel was cutting about his head and the leaping, spitting, snarling Spad was on top of him. As Jones hurled the last half a burst at the leading enemy ship, and as he hurdled it with a pull back on the Spad's stick, he saw the muzzles of the Spandaus in the nose of the Fokker go suddenly crimson, and tracers flew through the air below his landing carriage.

He went over in a tight Immelmann, almost as soon as he had cleared the first ship. He knew that speed would be his salvation. No Spad could be expected to fight three Fokkers. He must strike and strike hard before the Jerry pilots had their bearings.

He swooped down on the first ship again, pressing the nose of the Spad down at an acute angle, until it seemed that he must crash it in full flight. He knew that the Vickers were blasting the top wing of the enemy ship. He could see splinters flying from shattered ribs. He knew that steel was penetrating those frail wings in full flight and was going through and through the Jerry. The gas tanks were directly below the path of the death stream. The white wall of mist loomed before him. He was diving into it nose first at terrific speed. He kicked rudder sharply, banking around even as the clouds swallowed him up. Like a diver going off a spring board, he turned in the white mass and went toward the surface, still under full throttle. A glance straight up showed him one of the enemy. He was directly below this Jerry. He pulled the nose of the Spad straight up until it was hanging on the prop. His hand flashed to the gun trips. The Vickers bucked and jumped. The staccato beat of gunfire again filled the heavens. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the first ship he had attacked falling slowly in a wide circle, down and down, until it was concealed by the rolling billows below.

THE second of the enemy made a desperate attempt to escape the upward rush of the enraged Spad. It slipped sharply to the right. Its belly was a ragged mass of splintered wood and wire. Linen hung in patches where the Vickers had cut strange patterns. The Spad slipped with the Fokker, at the same angle with the same speed, and the Vickers were never silent.

There was a snapping and crackling about Dick Jones' head. He looked back for an instant over his right shoulder. The third Fokker was coming down on his tail. He could see the little orange and green circles of flame on either side of the motor cowling that marked two machine guns in action. Two Spandaus, probing for the life blood of a wraith-like Spad. He hung tenaciously to the tail of the ship in front of him.

The breeches of his twin guns were too hot to touch. A burst or two and they would jam. He eased up on the trips and went over on his back, spinning on his

ailerons to level the Spad back into flying position. The maneuver brought him on line with the ship on his tail. He climbed rapidly, before the third pilot could diagnose the move, to get above him, and to keep away from the clouds below. The second ship came about in a bank. It was flying parallel with the third Fokker. They were attempting to get on either side of him, to head him in one direction, and then to finish him before he could escape the trap. It was a favorite maneuver with the enemy pilots.

Dick Jones had been in traps like that before. He went down abruptly, diving for the cloud formation, as if to disappear into the mist. Ten feet above it he threw hard right aileron to the ship, kicked the rudder all the way over and rolled out of the path of the pursuers. He was again on the tail of the second of the enemy crates.

He pressed his thumb against the gun trips. The Vickers answered with jagged tongues of flame through the prop. He smashed a burst full through the middle of the Fokker's fuselage. It leaped upward wildly, sagging in the center. Wires went lax and the right wing section drooped sharply. One of the Mercedes motors went out of action as the pilot of the second ship cut the gun abruptly to take pressure off the ruined wing. He was gliding down—he went through the mist.

And then the Spad leaped at the throat of the third enemy. The blue eyes of Dick Jones were snapping. His hand was steady, he could think sanely. He was getting back for days and days of heartache. Days when it seemed that all the devils in hell, earth and air had mocked at him and taunted as he struggled against the jinx that played with the Thirteenth. Two of the enemy had felt the blight of the Ace of Spades. The third was there, alone now, the odds were even up—it would be man to man, gun to gun, ship to ship. He leaped in toward the prop of the last of the Jerries. It seemed that he must crash the Fokker.

He wanted to get close. So close that the Fokker would feel the heat of the flame that would leap from the muzzles of the Vickers as his thumb bade them strike. He held his fire, waiting for the instant when his brain would tell him that the enemy could not escape. The Jerry was showing plenty of guts. He was flying to meet the Spad. His Spandaus were in action. Tracers zoomed through the air, now and then a burst cut through a wing panel or snapped alongside of the Spad's fuselage, but the blue eyes of Dick Jones gave no sign. His hand was ready upon the trips, his eyes fixed upon the Fokker's cockpit.

A CONVULSIVE movement of his hand. The moment. The moment when nothing can escape the death that drips from spiteful guns. His thumb pressed hard on the gun trips. The Vickers coughed once. They bucked once. Then they were still. It was too late to do anything about it.

The Fokker was on top of him as he had been on top of the Fokker. Steel cut through his cockpit. He felt a dull pain in his right side and, his left arm was suddenly without feeling. Jammed guns! Jammed guns at the moment of victory. Cloud shrouded earth. Raging enemy. Even in that moment of death Dick Jones was cool.

He grasped the stick with his right hand and threw the Spad over on its back. The Fokker whirled over him and banked down for the death stroke. The clouds were very close now. Hardly five hundred feet down.

Dick could feel the pulsing of the wound in his right side. It seemed through his ribs—deep in his body. There was a warm something seeping down into his lap. His heart seemed laboring. His eyes were blurring even as he tried to hold the Spad level. He could hear the fresh clatter of Spandaus behind him as the Fokker lined his tail again. The motor cowling was reduced to a battered heap of perforated tin. The Hisso was coughing and spluttering. He let it go under full throttle.

Dimly he could hear men singing. He smiled. It was funny. Pete Thompson and the garbage pile. The words ran over and over in his head. They sounded like a dirge.

And what he thought was an angels' wreath
Was the garbage pile about his neck.

He laughed insanely. It hurt him terribly. His stomach seemed afire. Suddenly

the knowledge came to him. "Dick Jones —you're going out. You're through. You'll never make it down." Somehow the thought didn't terrify him. He remembered when he was a boy that he had been to a funeral. He had looked down on the dead face of a young girl. Death had seemed terrible in that moment. So still, so white—so much the end of things. But then, there had been the sun this morning over the clouds—as if to show Dick Jones that the heaven of a pilot was always a thing of beauty, set with sparkling jewels. He hoped that Reddy Dawson and the other boys had seen that sight before they went out.

New songs went through his brain.

There's Jimmy and John,
Dick, Larry and Fred—

Dick wouldn't be there the next time they sang that song. There was a queer taste in his mouth. It seemed hours before he could see the cloud bank below him. He could hear Zack Hunt's voice—"To the Squadron that never had a break. To the gang of men that are fools enough to take Thirteen as a Squadron number and a Black Ace of Spades as an insignia."

He took his right hand away from the stick and reached over the side of his cockpit. His arm seemed to weigh a ton. He could feel the painted likeness of the Ace of Spades on the side, and his numbing fingers traced the figure "13" in the center of the insignia. He smiled to himself. Even if he was dying, he was proud of that Ace of Spades—proud of that Thirteen.

Hard to think. Hard to breathe. It took a terrific effort to bring his arm back inside the cockpit and to grasp the stick again. Dimly he was aware of the crackling hail of death around him. The right wing seemed to boil and froth for an instant as the Fokker behind him got in a beautiful burst. Splintered ribs grinned out at him from the ruined wing.

He glanced back. He could see a vague red shape behind him. It seemed staggering about to his reeling eyes. "Squadron that never got a break—" he was mumbling to himself. .

He pulled back hard on his stick.

There was a wild upward surge of the dying Spad. There was a wild upward surge in the heart of a dying pilot. There was a splintering crash as the sharp nose of the Spad buried itself in the belly of the Fokker. The enemy ship hung there for a minute, its motor beating a frenzy like the wings of a fly that has been caught in the web of a spider. With the crash a smile again came over the face of Dick Jones.

"Three!" he counted happily. Then he was mumbling again. "The Squadron that never got a break—"

Above him. Transfixed on the spinner cap of the Spad, a Jerry pilot hung over the edge of his cockpit. His face was set in a crazy grin. His sightless eyes were gazing down at the white face of Dick Jones. They fell that way. Down through the clouds. Locked in fixed embrace. Whirling slowly. Down to the brown earth where men had never known the glories of the high heavens. Neither of them knew when the earth took back to its bosom two knights of the blue who had once been enemies. The shuddering impact entwined enemy with friend, and friend with enemy, until no man could look upon that pile of debris and tell which had been enemy and which had been friend.

There was little singing that night in the mess hall of the Thirteenth Squadron. They did not give Dick up until an Albatross, flying with the speed of the wind, swooped low over the Thirteenth's tarmac and dropped a little package. The package contained a note—and Dick's watch and a photograph of a girl. The photograph was ruined. It was soaked through and through with Dick Jones' life blood.

The note in German said: *We have no other identity of the owner of these than the fact that he was a very gallant enemy.*

Major Bates sent the watch and photograph home to Dick's mother.

IV

IT'S a lot easier to put a halo of romance around the head of an enemy than it is to put the same halo around the head of a friend with whom one flies every day. It's a lot easier to imagine heroic doings of a Richthofen or a Balcke or a von Immelmann than it is to associate such great-

ness with an unassuming, quiet chap wearing the colorless olive drab of the Air Service of one's own country.

The Jerries had Richthofen and Immelmann. They had the great Balcke. But the Thirteenth Squadron had Major Bates. And as Balcke taught the fledgling who later became the feared Richthofen Flying Circus to fly, so did Bates teach the fledglings of the Thirteenth to fly. And with all of his greatness, his mastery of air fighting, his knowledge of ships and men and motors, Balcke knew no more about flying and fighting than did this same Major Bates who wept tears of grief when a Spad marked with a Black Ace of Spades tumbled from the heavens and a vacant chair resulted at the mess table of the Thirteenth Squadron.

One by one the men came up to him, eager and willing, but ignorant of all they were about to face, and in his kindly manner, and through his personal example, Bates made pilots out of them, combat pilots and pursuit pilots and watched over them with eyes that were never still until they were fit to hold their own with the best that the enemy might send against them.

Of course, the Thirteenth appreciated Bates. Of course, they loved him, and certainly they would have died for him, still, he did not have the heroic background that was commonly associated with the great names on the enemy side.

Rumor and report, romance and the folk lore of the air had not yet marked him out as one of those Gods worshiped alike by enemy and friend. He was still Major Bates, the Commander of the Thirteenth, garbed in khaki, daily flying with his outfit to whatever might be in store for him above the shell torn earth of Northern France. It is hard to make a personal fetish of a man with whom one eats and sleeps and fights, even if that man holds the lives of every man of a Squadron in the palm of his hand.

The Thirteenth did not include Major Bates with the immortals until he went staggering down within the enemy lines, surrounded by the men he had loved, all of them fighting madly to save him, all of them sobbing tears of grief and watching him with eyes wide with horror. To the Thirteenth it seemed that Major Bates was just one of those men whom nothing could ever harm.

The Thirteenth never believed that the pilot lived who could outfly the major or outshoot him. They were correct in that belief. They never believed that the well founded jinx which had sent other men of the Thirteenth down to earth could reach out its slimy hands and drop Major Bates. It just didn't seem possible—and yet they lost him. Before the eyes of all of them they watched him go down. Saw the cloud of dust that rose from the impact of his Spad with the earth. Saw the frail wings of the gray wolf crumple in sudden agony. Saw the dull flame and clouds of smoke leap from the wreckage ten miles within Jerry territory.

It was another case of Major Bates giving protection to one of the Thirteenth. He had offered himself as a target to save the hide of Jimmy Dowles.

It was just one of those things, but to the Thirteenth it was the final crushing blow upon all of the bad breaks the Squadron had been getting since its formation. It did not smack them to earth to remain quivering and dispirited. It aroused them to a mad pitch of insane rage and blood lust. It left them with clenched fists and blazing eyes and molten blood racing madly through weary bodies.

It caused them to watch the heavens night and day for the sight of an enemy craft. It sent them screaming off the ground at the sight of a cross-marked ship, with guns flaming red and dripping with the venom of vengeance. Vengeance for the best loved of them all. Vengeance for the man who had been a father, a leader, a consolation. The enemy became symbolical of the jinx which had been dogging them. It was a relief to have something to fight—something that was real and not a vague, flitting shadow within the breast.

THE Squadron was as a unit covering the flight of three photographic crates. Always a grief to a pursuit squadron, this mission was all the more dangerous because it happened to be over a sector that was alive with activity and troop movements on the ground. Both sides were planning big things around Houmartin.

Photographic ships flew in packs to prove "shots" for the making of mosaics for

the general staff to study. The sky to the north was lousy with Jerry crates. They insisted upon making their own pictures and in preventing the Allied Air from getting theirs. Squadron after squadron of Albatross, Fokker, Pfaltz and Halberstadters came up from the enemy side of the lines. Some of them escorting lumbering two seater camera ships, others cruising about looking for easy prey of like kind from the Allied side.

For two days the heavens had rained fragments of destroyed ships, friend and enemy. For two days the men in the trenches below were treated to a spectacle the eyes of men had never before beheld. Slashing, crashing battle squadrons wheeling high above in death grips, flaming guns and roaring motors, hour after hour, Teuton against Anglo-Saxon disputing the supremacy of the skies. And then, when the Thirteenth had been blessing itself because it had been kept on its regular schedule of pursuit work, the order came which sent the Squadron milling into the mess above.

Three camera ships, cruising back and forth slowly over the enemy lines. Meat for roving battle planes. Meat for anything that bore guns and could fly, and the Thirteenth was to throttle down and play nursemaid to the picture takers until further orders. The Jerries had been knocking the camera ships down too frequently. G.H.Q. was not getting the pictures it wanted, and the Thirteenth was to be a buffer — to run interference so G.H.Q. could see what the front around Houmartin looked like from the air.

They took off in formation. Thirteen ships and thirteen pilots. Loaded to the camel back with ammo and fuel. They picked up the camera crates south of Houmartin and began the trek that would take them north over the enemy lines. They put the slower flying observation ships in the center of the V, nice and safe, where no pot shooting Fokker could get in a burst, and in a compact mass the outfit headed for the objective.

Over to the northeast there was a general dog fight. The pilots of the Thirteenth watched it with eager eyes. It looked like a gang of Sops having it out with a bunch of Pfaltzes. Ships were careening from all angles, diving down into the general mess, zooming back up to roll and return to the attack. There were casualties even as they looked. A Sop went circling down with a haze of smoke around its middle. Another followed after it, its humped back looking broken and twisted. The hands of the Thirteenth Squadron tightened on collective sticks. It wasn't nice to see white men taking a licking like that, but Major Bates never turned his head—he went on toward the area they were to photograph. Minute after minute they flew over the objective in lazy circles. They were at least ten miles within the enemy lines. They expected anything. The pilots of the camera crates were signaling that they were getting the shots they wanted. They continued to study the inside of the Jerry lines. The dog fight behind them had broken up as if through mutual consent. The Sops were going home and hightailing it on the wind. The Pfaltzes were heading into the north more leisurely as if satisfied with a good day's work. Then the jamming started for the Thirteenth.

A FAST flying Fokker formation of fifteen ships, moving forward in a straight line, zoomed up from the earth at the bellies of the Spads of the Thirteenth. There wasn't anything alarming in that. The Thirteenth had often fought greater odds. They spread out of the V in which they had been flying in order to leave a clear path of retreat for the photographic ships and to meet the enemy head on.

The first of the pilots of the camera crates waved that they were finished and Major Bates waved him home. The slow moving two seaters banked around in the wind and turned tail to the Fokkers.

There was a flash of lightning speed from the right of the Fokker line. Three of the enemy detached themselves from the "on-line" formation and attempted to turn the left flank of the Thirteenth, so as to get at the fleeing camera ships.

Major Bates was over there in an instant. Pete Thompson and Bill Gans were holding that left flank. They gave not an inch.

They met the flare of Spandau fire with the flame of Vickers defiance and they held to their course until the three flank-

ing ships were forced to roll out of the way to escape collision. As the first of them rolled, the major was on his neck like a terrier shaking a rat. Down, down close to the cockpit, motor turning over like a frenzied thing, cams throwing bursts from the guns in continuous streams of fire—it took a single second to get the first blood for the Thirteenth. No man could handle a ship with Major Bates. The Jerry was riddled through and through in that first second of fighting.

The major pulled back sharply on his stick and took his Spad off the Fokker's neck with a rushing climb. He went around in a tight wing-over and dived for the second—but Bill Gans had him. Bill Gans with his hands still bandaged and his face raw from boiling oil. His thumb was on the gun trips. His Vickers were on line with the heart side of the Fokker flanker. His first burst ripped through the left longeron and cross members. Control wires flapped dizzily from the enemy crate. Gans pressed it. He was remembering broken oil lines, jammed guns, Dick Jones—all of the misery the outfit had known. He was going to hit hard and fast before the jinx had a chance to get in its fine hand.

The Pfaltzes Squadron had changed its mind about going home. Seeing the Fokkers and the Thirteenth having it out the Pfaltzes changed course and decided to enter into the fighting. They came down into the fuss from an altitude of a thousand feet higher than the Spads. They came down two at a time flying side by side, rolling away to the right and left as they smeared gray fuselages with burst after burst. The air seemed thick with screaming motors, madly beating guns, shrilling wires, and a mass of ships.

Everywhere wood and linen and racing motors cut off all chances of maneuvering. The three flanking ships were out of it. The photographic crates had opened up too big a lead to be headed off before arriving within the safety of Allied lines. Snapping lead from Spandaus ripped through gray linen, and ricocheting, continued on through ships which also mounted Spandaus.

The Thirteenth was bunched together, excepting for Bill Gans, the major and Pete Thompson who were riding the flank. They were slightly below the rest of the pack. They had a breathing spell for an instant after cleaning out the three flanking Fokkers. They banked around, flying each on the tail of the other, studying the closely milling pack above, debating where to strike in to do the most damage. They watched the major. He was holding his Spad under easy control keeping up his flying speed while circling in an almost vertical bank. They knew that so long as they maintained this formation none of the enemy might settle on the tail of either of the three. Then there might be an instant when a fast flying ship could strike a decisive blow.

OVERHEAD the Pfaltzes were still diving down and rolling to the right and to the left. Little by little the major gained altitude. The enemy crates were having a hard time breaking through the solid front of the Squadron. The Pfaltzes seemed intent upon breaking that compact formation by diving attacks at terrific speed, hurling burst after burst into the gray ships.

A bunch of them came down together. Major Bates seemed to time the speed of the diving group. He waited until the last instant. Then he pulled straight back on the stick and sent his Spad soaring upward, his guns flaming sudden death, to meet the charging Pfaltzes, just as they reached the blind spot of the roll. Sensing the play before it was made, Gans and Thompson repeated the maneuver. The three of them stood there, hanging on churning props, Vickers spewing destruction into the diving mass of Pfaltzes.

The hail of death from the six Vickers in the three Spads swept over the first of the Pfaltzes like the blade of a scythe through a field of fresh wheat. The first two of them seemed to catch the blow squarely in the face. They recoiled, trembling and shaken—and before they could recover or slip out of the way, the ships behind them, coming down under full gun and in a straight dive, the vision of the pilots obscured by the ships in front, crashed madly into the riddled two with a sickening splintering of wood and smashing of fuselages. There was a mad carnage of flesh, motors and ships.

Two more piled into the terrible mess,

unable to escape quickly enough by leaping over or under the four crushed crates.

Six of them in one compact, horrible, smashed lump falling down through the ship strewn heavens. Gasoline explosions flashed like the play of vicious lightning. Rolling billows of black smoke from burning oil covered the scene like wavering crepe. The wolf-like gray shapes of the three ravening Spads leaped up over the falling wreckage and plunged into the midst of the bewildered and terror stricken Pfaltzes.

In the van darted the ship of Major Bates. The Black Ace of Spades seemed to be glowing with an unearthly fire. The "13" set in its heart seemed etched in flowing blood.

After him leaped the Spads of Pete Thompson and Bill Gans. Gans holding the stick in hands that were burned to the bone—gripping it tight and not feeling the agony of the charred flesh. His lips were moving—saying words he could not understand. He was crouched low in the cockpit of the embattled Spad, his thumb pressed hard on the gun trips. His feet swaying the quick acting crate with gentle rudder pressure. Back and forth swerved the nose of his crate and a spray of death smashed into the maddened mass of enemy crates.

They got two more before they turned from the carnage and swept down upon the Fokkers. Eight Pfaltzes had felt the fangs of the gray wolves. One of them remained. He was fleeing the spot in a frenzy of jumping nerves and tortured brain. The horror of that terrible instant when the three Spads had nosed upward was too much. It was more than any man could stand—who has seen friends ground to atoms before his eyes.

The Thirteenth had suffered.

The Fokkers had taken toll.

Two red, white and blue marked ships were on their way down. One was burning. The air about the dog fight was still hot with the breath of death consuming it. Who it was none could tell in the moment. The other, out of control and fighting a left spin was Cy Young—he was making a game scrap to pull out—they couldn't see him any more—they were too busy. Twelve Fokkers to finish. Twelve Fokkers and eleven Spads. Milling about, looking for a chance to bury red-dripping fangs into enemy throats—and then the crowning misfortune befell the Thirteenth Squadron!

MAJOR BATES, riding in the thick of the fight, close pressed by Bill Gans and Pete Thompson, suddenly faltered in his headlong speed. A wing drooped alarmingly. The speeding Spad lunged over to one side as if in a delirium of pain. There was tattered linen flapping from the left side of the fuselage. The Black Ace of Spades was reduced to rags. They could see the major trying to engineer his crate down out of the general mêlée to discover the trouble, but that right wing drooped lower and lower, and then, before their eyes, the major's Spad fell into a power spin. They saw the prop suddenly lose the reflection of the sun and settle into idling speed as he fought to take pressure off the spin. Then they saw the cause of the spin. The left control cables were dangling uselessly. The rudder was flapping back and forth. Only aileron action remained to the controls within the major's Spad. He was fighting to check the spin with ailerons alone.

The Thirteenth went down out with him. In that instant every man in the outfit forgot himself, forgot the grave danger, forgot the raging battle. They swallowed hearts and felt the fierce leap of a fear spasm through chests. Instinctively, they dropped down to protect him.

Time and again the hungry Fokkers swooped down, and each time gnashing fangs of the gray wolves of the Thirteenth drove them back in confusion. They were fighting demons, those boys the major had taught to fly. They were no longer fighting on heart and nerve. They were fighting upon a great grief—a grief so great that it seemed to all of them that none of them could live if the major went out. They were transformed into slashing animals who fought to save the one thing they loved above all on earth.

At the side of the major's crippled crate, Bill Gans and Pete Thompson glided down with him. They watched that crazily gyrating crate with eyes that refused to register the possibility of the major's going out. They knew that he would pull out of that spin and come zooming back.

He was not a man—he was a God—nothing that flew could beat Major Bates—and yet as they watched they knew they were watching the death throes of that Spad. Mechanically, and yet in blind fury they held off the plunging attacks of the Fokkers.

No ship was going to get through to the major. No hand was going to help him on the way out. They were choking back sobs, the ground was coming up; bad enough on clean American ground—there behind the lines—but Jerry ground—rotten Jerry ground with never a marker to tell the world how the Thirteenth had loved old Eagle Eye—how the Thirteenth had believed that he would never die. Eyes smarting with salt tears they followed him down like carriages in a funeral train. They saw him fighting with those ailerons to check the speed and to level the Spad out. The ground—a thousand feet—rushing up like a giant curtain. Batteries with smoke puffs around them—zig-zag support trenches laid out in regular patterns.

The major was waving his arm. He was waving to them to go back—or maybe it was farewell. Go back? Not these boys who were cursing helplessly, and turning every five seconds to spit defiance and hate into the face of the blood lusting Fokkers behind. Down and down—the strange funeral procession.

THE Spad was coming out of the spin. It shuddered as the wings came up and the ailerons took hold. It trembled like a palsied hand writing little remembered words. The nose came up slowly—but it was a losing battle. The earth was down there—three hundred feet. Already Pete Thompson and Bill Gans were forced to pull up to escape the trees. There was a sickening crash as the major's crate went in on the right wing and the nose of the fuselage. Not fast, but fast enough to crush the life out of a man in the cockpit. The right wing folded up into a shapeless mass of twisted and splintered wood. The nose of the fuselage ground into the earth. The tail went high—hung for an instant and then flopped all the way over. Two bent and twisted landing wheels grinned up at the shocked men of the Thirteenth. The Fokkers were buzzing down again. Pressing the advantage of having the Spads close to the ground and almost impossible to maneuver.

The Thirteenth didn't intend to maneuver. It had to express the grief of the major's fall in some manner or go insane as they sat strapped in tight cockpits. As one man they whipped the Spads around on a wing and struck at the nearest of the enemy.

There may have been more deadly fights than that which ensued, but no men ever fought in more deadly intent or in more strange fervor. Men cursing with eyes streaming tears. Men with blue eyes and youthful cheeks, gripping controls until knuckles stood out white and glaring. Men crouched over the little round gun sights between red hot guns. Pursuing, driving, running down every enemy shape that loomed before Spad noses. They forgot they were over German territory. They forgot that motors were boiling and ammunition was running low. They forgot wounds and misery—they were expressing grief.

They crashed into the twelve remaining Fokkers like meteors from the reaches above and they slashed and harried and ripped until blood-shot eyes looked out on heavens that were suddenly emptied of enemy ships. Seven of them had gone down to rest beside the Spad of Major Bates. Five of them had escaped the inferno of destruction unleashed by the maddened gray shapes, and had gone winging over the horizon to the north.

Only then did the Thirteenth—the remainder of the unlucky Thirteenth, go home.

Battle scarred, pilots dripping blood, or slumping down in seats. Ships riddled after the tornado of steel that had probed through them, motors gasping a last effort, longerons shattered—the Thirteenth going home, heads bowed in grief, hearts heavy with dread—dread of a field and a homecoming without the man who made the Thirteenth possible. Dread of the future without his counsel. They dropped the shattered crates that held them down upon the home tarmac. They barely spoke. They could find no words. They seemed to desire to be left alone—to think—of the pile of wreckage in a Jerry field that held the form of Major Bates.

V

BILL GANS ripped the grimy bandages from his burned hands and hurled them to the floor with a gesture of disgust. He catapulted out of his chair and paced the floor like a caged beast. His eyes roved over the mess hall where the pilots of the Thirteenth Squadron were gathered together for the first time in twelve hours. They were eating nothing. They were doing nothing. They were too heartsick to even drink. His eyes were glaring as he studied them individually.

Pete Thompson in his chair, his head buried between his hands, his unseeing eyes staring out of the window.

Zack Hunt beating soundless time on the wooden top of the table with a soup spoon, staring in like manner.

Bing Sumner fingering a greasy pack of playing cards. Putting one card after another down on the table in absolute precision, only to take them up again and begin over, a meaningless game with no object. Johnny Grimes, seated at the piano stool, his fingers touching the white keys of the Pleyel with never a sound coming from the piano.

All of them trying to imagine a continuance of life without the major, all of them heartsick over the loss of Cy and Ted Gleason in the same fight. They knew now which two of them had gone swirling down to death in that mad hour of battling. Cy and Ted had not come home. It meant that they were sitting in the wreckage of a shattered crate, somewhere out there—or—they couldn't think of the other alternative. Eight of them left out of Thirteen. Of the eight only three of them were fit to carry on at full strength. Bandages wrapped about heads and necks. Blood-stained tunics. Haggard eyes.

With a sudden motion of his arm Bill Gans snatched a wine glass off the table and hurled it to the floor with a splintering crash.

"Hey!" he bellowed at them. "You might think this was a lousy wake the way you guys are acting. You might think that we were a bunch of mangy curs ready to lie down in the dirt and roll over after some hound has given us a lacing. Snap out of it you bunch of walking advertisements for an undertaker. You sit here and moan until it gives a guy the creeps. You think we can give the boys a big hand by shedding tears at a time like this? You think we can get even for Cy and Ted by pulling the weeping sister act? You think the—the—the major would want us to act like this if he could be here?" Even Bill's voice broke as he mentioned the major.

"Why you look to me as if you're all ready to fold up and quit. You look as if you were that little yellow bellied pup rolling around in the dirt after taking a lacing from a Jerry hound. What the hell? Aren't you guys tired of waiting for the breaks? Aren't you guys tired of moaning about tough luck? I am! I'm damn sick of it. This is the last time you'll ever hear me mentioning tough luck. I'm through with it. Get me? Through with it!"

HIS eyes were glaring at them. His hands were clenched until the knuckles stood out in wild relief. His muscles seemed coiled and ready to spring at some invisible something. He was trembling in the grip of his emotions. They watched him, white faced and silent. Their eyes followed him as he paced back and forth, stamping on the floor in an uncontrollable fury. His accusing finger swept over them all as he continued.

"You give me a pain in the neck!" he snapped. "You guys that call yourselves a hard boiled bunch of fighting pilots. You go out and run into trouble and you come home and brag about the tough luck you've had. Most of us have been so damn lucky that we didn't lose our necks that we forget about the good luck in remembering the bad. Other guys in other squadrons go out and have the things happen to them that happens to us every day—and they never come back—we come back—and moan about the 'breaks.' We've been in the habit of doing that, so everything that don't hit us right—everything that is not clear sailing for this gang, is blamed on the breaks.

"Hell, gang, the breaks belong to the guy that makes them. Here's one pilot who is going out to force the breaks from now on. From this second on I'm going to be the damndest, hottest, hell-raisingest Spad flyer that ever hedge hopped over

this front. I'm going to smack every Jerry that I meet square in the mug. I'm going out looking for Jerries. I'm going to forget that motors and hard luck and rules and regulations exist. If I want to go over the lines after fresh meat I'm going. If I get bumped off going—well—I'll have the fun of going out in a riot and I won't regret it. No bad break is going to put me down. The thing that'll put me down is a few Spandau slugs in places where I can't spit 'em out.

"I'm not going to moan about the major. He went out a game guy and we all did what we could to keep him from getting it. We'd be a disgrace to him if we didn't carry on the way he'd want us to if he were here. I'm going looking for Jerries to pay for him. There aren't enough of them flying crates to make good for the major—but I'll get what I can—'til they get me.

"I'm going out of here now—as soon as they can get my crate ready and I'm heading north. Understand—north! I'm going looking for Jerries. I'm going to find them if I have to shoot 'em up on their own dromes. I'm going to keep going—looking for Jerries—until they stop me. Luck doesn't mean anything now—good or bad to me. I'm out to pay for the major—in the same kind of money. I'll bust the heart of every Hisso in this outfit trying. I'll pull the wings off every crate on this field—but I'll fly and the next stop is hell."

The Thirteenth leaped out of chairs with a wild, animal-like cry. They screamed like demented creatures. Bloodshot eyes were aflame with the battle lust. Over at the piano, Johnny Grimes hit the keys a triumphant crash and broke into the song of the Thirteenth. They sang it with tears streaming down care worn cheeks. They raised clenched fists to heaven in defiance. Bill Gans was pouring cognac into glasses. He filled Thirteen glasses—one at each place. He stood up on a chair and raised his glass.

"To our friends—the enemy—" he offered a grim toast. "May they never know what war is until we carry it to them!" They gulped the toast. Glasses crashed to the floor—excepting the five which would never be emptied. They streamed out of the door behind the dynamic Gans. They forgot heartaches. They forgot weariness. Clenched hands were avid for the feel of worn sticks and the knob of the throttle. Anxious mechanics watched them coming as if watching a procession from an insane asylum. They vaulted into cockpits forgetting helmets and goggles or snatching them up from seats and pulling them down over ears deadened by incessant motor noise.

A MECHANIC stepped up to Bill Gans. He stared at the pilot's raw hands and raw face. He wet his lips and spoke.

"She's not hitting right, sir," he said nervously. "She acts a little nervous once in a while. You better wait until I can comb that bug out of her."

Gans swept him aside with a thrust of his arm. "To hell with her," he snapped. "No more coddling motors for this gang. We're going—as is, and she'll hit. Understand—she'll hit—from now on. Get out in front and give me a crank."

The greaseball snapped to the propeller.

"Off?" he called.

"Off," sounded the voice of Bill Gans from the cockpit.

"Choke?" asked the mechanic.

"Choke," answered Gans.

The prop swung through thrice. The cylinders drew in a great breath of vapor from the carburetor. The prop swung to horizontal. The mechanic dug a heel in the ground and reached for the shining blade with his fingers. He balanced his body carefully and glanced back along the fuselage.

"Contact!" he snapped in a strangely exultant voice.

"Contact!" answered the pilot in the same tone.

The mechanic's back straightened and doubled. His powerful arms swept the prop beyond the first point. The Hisso barked sharply and hit. The grass alongside the fuselage bent in the blast and the vertical fin trembled.

For a full minute Bill Gans played with the throttle as motor after motor leaped into life along the line. There was no question as to who was the new commander of the Thirteenth. It took no order from Headquarters to provide them with a leader. Every eye was intent upon Bill Gans. G.H.Q. might give them a ranker

—but from then on, Bill Gans would order their comings and goings. He nodded for the blocks to be pulled from beneath his wheels. He glanced behind him at the other ships of the outfit. They were quivering to go. He blasted the tail of his Spad off the ground with a lunge forward of the throttle, and then he was off—and after him followed the Thirteenth.

It was poor flying weather. Rain clouds, low-flying cumulus, rolling up billow on billow. Wet, chill wind out of the east, blowing moisture in from the Channel. Visibility less than five hundred feet. Blotto for any flying but the kind of flying the Thirteenth was about to do. Skimming the earth, hopping the higher rows of trees, motor beat muffled by the thick, low-flying clouds, eyes strained to follow the lead of Bill Gans' ship, the Thirteenth flew in tight formation, less than fifty feet, fuselage to fuselage.

IT was crazy flying under ordinary circumstances, but plenty safe in the present state of mind of the Squadron. It seemed to them as they threw the Spads about like playthings that nothing could ever again harm them. They felt soaring souls leaping ahead of the embattled Spads clearing a path for the ships. They felt the strength of giants and the confidence of gods. Gaunt-faced, mud-smeared, huddled figures stared up at them out of the muck of the trenches as they went over. Some faces covered with gas masks, some without protection against the gray, fog-like mist that seeped over from the enemy side of the wire to choke and strangle life. It caused a shudder to race up and down the spines of the Thirteenth's pilots.

Human burrowing in the mud. Sloshing about on the earth like maggots blindly wallowing around in filth.

Even with the low ceiling and gray skies it was a paradise up where the Thirteenth leaped through space as compared to the life of the doughboy in the trenches. Then a glimpse of rusted and tangled wires strung up on crazy posts and tree limbs, interlaced and interwoven, man's effort to snarl the advance of other men.

Mazes through the wire, craftily planned by both sides, through which their own men might squirm without having to dare the challenge of the steel web. Inert figures in gray and khaki hanging on the wire like so many scarecrows—the back wash of war's travail. Vacant-eyed and staring, limp-armed and unfeeling. Draped there on the wire or curled at the foot of some post. Face down and face up, sprawled arms, some with black faces—the dead of night patrols. Gray and khaki they were, these, stark and stiff—joined in death, huddled as if for warmth from the cold contact with the ground.

Then the concrete positions of the enemy. Staccato beat of startled ground machine guns, pointed upward in a flurry of activity as the ghost-like procession of gray ships leaped at them out of the mists, vaulted trench parapets with slipstreams beating into Teuton faces and Hisso shrieking mad defiance. Snap and crackle of steel missiles through wing surfacing as a spray of wildly fired bursts found a momentary target and then away—out of sight—buried in the ominous storm clouds. Eight gray ships riding like shrilling wraiths of the storm—like specters of a nightmare, leaping at the throat of the sleeper, only to pass with a rush of wings and a ribald laugh.

The Second German line. More concrete trenches, more upturned machine guns, more startled scurrying of infantry in the trenches. Lower ceiling, down to four hundred feet. Spads flying a hundred feet over the enemy earth. Noses down, tachometers reading like telephone numbers, Fahrenheits mounting and mounting. Pilots uncaring, hearts pounding, pulses leaping, nerves taut, eyes unblinking, souls screaming a wild, pagan lust for battle. On and on, a magnificent gesture of contempt for an efficient and hard-hitting enemy.

Eight ships, cutting through the heart of enemy territory like a sharp sword, led by a man whose hands, because of the absence of protecting skin, stuck to the control stick as he handled his Spad. Vickers peering over the cowls of the crates, squat and black, threat filled and eager. Olive drab web belts bearing a burden of messengers of death—tracers and steel leading up to the breeches of those guns out of the ammunition compartments. Goggled and ungoggled. Helmeted and unhelmeted, the Thirteenth rode like mad Valkyries of the storm awaiting the word

of the leader to bury rending fangs into an enemy target.

On and on flew Gans, holding his position at point. When they had been over the enemy lines for twenty minutes, his Spad suddenly swerved to the right. A vertical bank at full speed. Headed east by north now. Running parallel with the trench lines—and then—after three minutes of flying an enemy drome sprang into view. Masked at first by the mist of the hangars, bulked larger and larger with the passing of each second until they stood out in bold relief. Ships on the line. Lithe D 7 Fokkers, a few Albatrosses, a flight of Hals, two or three two-seaters—squatting down there on the line—awaiting flying weather before taking off.

A DIZZY plunge downward for a scant hundred feet and the Vickers in front of Bill Gans' face were snarling spitefully and the red glare of gunfire cut the mist before the nose of his crate. He smashed a beautiful burst toward the ground. A burst that cut into the huddle of enemy crates and whipped the ground about them into a white froth of agony. Then he pulled up, just a little, saving all of his speed, banked around in another dizzy vertical and returned to the attack.

In precise formation the Thirteenth followed his play. Ship after ship nosed down slightly, skimmed over the field, ripped home a destructive burst, nosed up, banked over the field, and went back for a new run at the ground targets.

Gray-clad figures struggled madly to protect the ships—to run them into hangars before utter destruction overtook them, and as fast as the gray-clad figures darted out on the field the stuttering guns of the Thirteenth stretched them out on the ground, riddled hulks, and the merry hell of destruction continued. Wild witches danced under the low, ominous ceiling. Splatterings of rain beating back into the pilots' faces by the slipstream. Cutting like wind-driven hailstones—but they never took eyes from the objective.

The rioting gray Spad of Bill Gans went in low over a wooden building and his guns spat viciously at the target. A dull glare of flame rose from the structure as he leaped over it and smashed a new burst into the proud Fokkers standing on line. A gasoline dump, hundreds of barrels. Terrific concussions of the exploding stuff. Steel barrels ripped and torn, hurled high into the air. Blazing tendrils of burning gasoline snaking a way toward hangars and ships, flood of liquid fire running over the closely cropped grass of the drome. Wooden buildings smoldering for an instant and then igniting with a roar as the sea of flame engulfed them. Wheels of the enemy crates up to the hubs in the blazing stuff. Wings swelling to enormous proportions and then bursting into hot flame.

Chaos, destruction, disaster, swept down upon that Jerry field as lightning strikes from a clear sky. Three minutes before all had been serene. In the three minutes following, twenty ships had been consumed, quarters were aflame, death snapped and crackled through the air.

The living huddled with the dead of enraged motors and the shriek of vibrating wires as the Thirteenth danced in that mad orgy of destruction.

Then, when it was finished, when the great hangars were sending tongues of flame higher than the level at which the Spads were flying, when the ships on the line were engulfed in an inferno of flame, the leader of the Spad flight snapped rudder and stick far over and in an instant the wraithlike gray demons were swallowed up by the low-flying clouds. Even the motor beat seemed to end with a sight of them. The heavens were clear. Only the angry crackle of flame sounded from the Jerry field. That and the moaning of the wounded.

The Thirteenth, flying at the same dizzy pace, and in the same tight formation, sprang out of the clouds over its home tarmac and came in for a landing like eagles dropping from the heights. Breathless mechanics counted them as they landed. One —two—three—four—five—six — seven — and eight! A wild whoop of joy. A surging mass of oil-smeared men thronging about cockpits. Grinning pilots leaping to the ground to snatch ready cigarettes from welcoming hands. A smiling, sobbing, shouting assault on the mess hall. A swiftly passed bottle. A single drink.

A grim toast from the mouth of Bill Gans. "The new Thirteenth, gang," he offered. "The craziest, hottest, wildest flying collection of antiques in the air."

And so, the Thirteenth forgot the "breaks" and carried the war to the enemy. Like flashing meteors they rode out of the night skies and down upon some new enemy concentration or flying field. Through masking clouds they flew together until the objective was below them and then down upon the surprised enemy like ravening wolves. In three days they were the talk of the front. The wild flying devils who carried the Ace of Spades and boasted the number "13."

And yet, even victory and the crash of battle could not eliminate the heartache at the loss of Major Bates. They smothered the grief and carried on—but the loss was too recent—and the belief of the Thirteenth in the impossibility of downing the wizard commander was too strong.

His passing had been too abrupt. It was as if he was away from them only a little while and would return—gone on a visit—somewhere—but they knew that men who go down inside the enemy wire with crates folded up around them never return.

VI

MAJOR BATES, riding his splintered crate into the ground glanced back for a moment at the pilots of the Thirteenth drawn closely about him and protecting his last earthly glide against interference by the avid enemy. For an instant his eyes were wet with tears. The ground was coming up with a sickening rush.

He fought with his flapping controls as a man suddenly blinded fights for vision. He knew he was facing his last instant on earth. The knowledge did not paralyze him as it might have paralyzed one of lesser moral courage. It caused him to fight harder. Fight to save himself for the boys who were flying like demons to keep the pursuit wasps of the enemy from finishing him before he could meet with the onrushing earth.

A flash of hope went through him as he straightened the staggering Spad for an instant. He glanced toward the ground and knew that last minute gesture to be hopeless. He could never right the Spad in the space that remained before him even if the controls were intact. He swept his goggles from off his eyes with a single motion of his arm and threw them over the side of the ship. He braced his feet hard against the firewall and ducked his head beneath the crash pad. His belt was tight about the middle. The major never flew with a lax belt. There was no need to adjust it this time to meet the coming shock. He felt the shuddering impact as the right wing smashed into the ground and crumpled up like a ruined accordion. The jagged splinter of a wing beam snapped through the linen covering of the cockpit and crashed by his face a scant inch from his eyes. Then the nose—the heavy Hisso, the prop and spinner cap dug into the earth. Longerons splintered about him. Cross members, released from under pressure of tightly drawn wires, snapped apart with a vicious whirr. Linen crumpled. Senses swooned with the shock of the crash.

Bates' face smashed against the flat side of the firewall. His nose seemed driven through veneering separating the forward wall of the cockpit from the gas tank. Oil squirted. Hot oil that smoked and sizzled as it trickled over hot exhaust pipes. He could smell raw gasoline. A stream of it flooded the cockpit. He was battling to hold his reeling senses together.

A voice was beating upon his brain. It was singing to him over and over: "Get out of the wreckage! Get out of the wreckage. You fool—pull yourself together. It's going to burn! It's going to burn—you'll be roasted."

Numb fingers struggled to free the release buckle on his safety belt. The fuselage had somersaulted after the impact and he was hanging head down in the seat. The ground was a foot below his head. He heard the first dull crackling of flame and the first acrid puff of smoke trickled into his nostrils. It seemed to revive him. He tore at the belt buckle madly. The heat of the blaze was on his neck. Dripping gasoline was running over his clothing. Another instant!

IN the midst of the hell that encompassed him he heard the zooming roar of the Squadron's motors as the ships went back up to settle things with the Jerry Squadron. He knew that he was alone. Alone in enemy territory. Alone in a wreck, no knowledge as to the extent of his injuries and fire raging about him.

The belt came free with a jerk. He fell out of the seat and landed upon his head and neck. There was a foot of clear space beneath the wreck. He squirmed through with his shoulders. Above the flames he could hear voices. Voices speaking guttural German. They seemed to be far off—coming up to the scene of the crack-up on the run. They were probably out to rescue their own man from the fate that had overtaken him. He could see the Jerry crate about three hundred yards away. It was burning fiercely. He held his breath and rolled over and over until he was twenty-five feet from his own wash out.

A terrific concussion shook the earth. He glanced back over his shoulder and a splintered bit of wood smote him in the face. The gas tank had blown up. The gray Spad was no more than a shapeless mass of fire with flying embers sweeping over the ground. The fuselage was burning fiercely. He could see the Black Ace of Spades bellying out with the heat and the red "13" stood out with unearthly clearness. Then the entire ship melted into a flat pile of burning wood and linen.

He continued to roll. It cost him untold agony. His neck felt broken. His arms were limp—as if asleep. He could think of nothing but escape from the enemy troops coming up to the relief of the Jerry pilot. He knew they would search his own wreck—what was left of it.

The Spad was such a complete washout—the flames had consumed everything—it might be that they would consider him burned to death in the ship. He had a chance to escape them. He might have a chance to win his way back to his own lines. It was a wild, vague hope. He continued to roll. He found a shell crater and slid down the slimy sides. There was a ghastly welcome for him there.

A figure in khaki and three figures in gray occupied the crater. They had been engaged in a struggle to the death. A glinting automatic in the hands of the figure in khaki bore mute testimony to the instrument which had dealt death to the figures in gray. He took the pistol from the hand of the dead comrade and slipped the magazine. There were four shells left in the clip and one in the gun. He turned the soldier over. He had been a lieutenant of infantry. There were two extra clips in the web belt about his waist. The clips were full. Major Bates thrust the pistol inside his own holster.

The dead men evidently had been there for more than two days. A violent American counter attack had pierced the enemy lines in two places on the day preceding. Several American outfits had torn a way through the third line of enemy defences only to find themselves cut off and surrounded—defeated by the very headlong rush of the advance. This officer evidently belonged to one of those infantry outfits which had taken part in the attack. The enemy dead were two privates and an Ober-Lieutenant of infantry.

For half an hour the man who had been "Eagle Eye" to the American Air crouched in the shell hole and studied the face of that dead German lieutenant. Bit by bit a plan was evolving itself in the flier's brain. A plan that offered a hope—a slim hope—but a hope.

AT last, with reluctant fingers he searched the stained uniform of the enemy officer. He gave an exclamation of satisfaction as his fingers found papers within the breast pocket of the dead man's uniform. He read them thoroughly. The identification papers of a lieutenant of infantry with his photograph pasted inside the cardboard covers. Personal letters from home. The major knew German thoroughly. He did not read the letters. Somehow it seemed a sacrilege. He merely transferred them to his own pockets.

Another hour, plans moiling about in his brain. Then, quite methodically, he stripped the dead German lieutenant and possessed himself of his uniform from helmet to boots. He donned them, slowly, one by one, his face reflecting the agony each motion cost him. Then he placed the identification inside the gray uniform on his own person, strapped the officer's side arms about him and awaited the coming of night.

From a first aid packet he took bandages and attended to his own hurts. He smiled to himself and fashioned a sling for his arm and hand. He slipped his arm through the bandage. He clutched the American automatic in his right hand. Painstakingly he wound layer after layer

of bandage about it until the arm and hand looked to be in a rigid splint. To the world he looked to be a badly wounded German lieutenant of infantry. His face was blackened and smeared. He needed no make-up there. The steel helmet shaded his face and covered his black hair. Night fell after hours of waiting. He crawled out of his hole and made his way cautiously toward the German rear.

He had a fair idea of the topography of the country over which he must walk. He had flown above it many times and his eyes had missed nothing. He knew that the occupied town of Merly was ten kilos to the northeast. He found a road after hours of stumbling through the pitch blackness, avoiding all signs of life from the support trenches. He ripped a sleeve of the borrowed uniform getting through a barbed wire fence and out onto the hard-packed road.

It was a matter of life or death now. If he was apprehended while wearing the dead officer's uniform it would mean certain death. He was too weary and too hurt to make the ten kilos on foot. He stumbled along the hard surfaced road, resting frequently.

After half an hour a flaring headlight down the road announced the coming of some vehicle. He stopped and listened. Heavy motor beats. Grind of gears. Trucks, he told himself. Trucks going back over the road to Merly after having been up to the front lines. He planted himself in the middle of the road and waved his free left arm. His heart was beating at a terrific clip. His breathing seemed to burn his lungs. The first of the trucks slowed down and then came to a stop half a dozen feet away from him. A guttural voice barked a question at him. He walked into the full glare of the headlights and answered.

There was a cry of alarm from the front seat of the truck. A gray uniformed figure leaped to the ground and trotted up to the major. The soldier saluted smartly and then supported the swaying figure before him.

"Pardon, Excellency," apologized the truck driver. "At first we could not see you well. You are hurt!"

Major Bates nodded his head. "Put me in the truck," he said in his best imitation of a Prussian officer, "and take me to Merly, if you are going that way."

"We go that way, Excellency," assured the driver. "We shall see that you get to the hospital at once."

A PANIC settled in the Major's heart. If they took him to the hospital and the surgeons had a chance to look him over they would find that the sling and the bandaged hand were faked. It would never do.

"I cannot be bothered with my own hurts," he snapped. "They are nothing. I have more important business. You will deliver me to the Headquarters at Merly."

The driver stiffened and saluted again. "As Your Excellency orders," he said submissively, "but the Herr Ober-Lieutenant seems in urgent need of attention."

"That will come in time," answered the Major gruffly. "We are wasting time. Put me in the truck."

The Saxon driver handled him like a baby. He lifted the major off the ground in his powerful arms and carried him to the rear of the truck. He made a bed of his own blankets and rolled his tunic up for a pillow.

"It will not be long, Excellency," he assured the Major. "We shall be in Merly in half an hour." He went around to the front of the truck and meshed gears. The rumbling lorry bounced and jostled along the road. Behind them followed the remainder of the truck train.

True to promise, they raised the lights of Merly within the half hour. They bounced in over the cobblestoned streets, the truck body smashing against the pain racked flesh of the major with maddening regularity. Sentries paced the streets. The first truck cut out of line and turned into a wider street than that through which they had been passing. It came to a halt at last. The Saxon driver vaulted into the body of the truck and spoke.

"We are arrived, Excellency," he stated. "We are in front of Headquarters."

"Very good," answered the masquerading Ober-Lieutenant. "Help me to descend."

Again he was caught up in the powerful arms of the driver and lifted down to the street. A sentry in front of the Headquarters saluted with his rifle and stared

curiously at the bedraggled appearance of the officer before him.

The Major snapped a question at him and he froze to attention.

"The Herr General," demanded the major. "Is he within?"

The truck driver was climbing back on his seat. His ear was turned toward the pavement. He heard the answer of the sentry.

"No, Excellency. He sleeps at his rooms in the hotel. Only the Herr Adjutant is within."

The bedraggled officer stamped his foot impatiently. "I bear dispatches for the Commanding General," he informed the sentry. "You will show me where to find him."

The sentry stared at him curiously. It was strange that this officer was unacquainted with the quarters of the General. Major Bates read the question in the sentry's eyes and interpreted it correctly. "Quick, fool, can't you see that I am wounded and from another sector?"

"First street to the right, Excellency," informed the sentry without hesitation. "It is then two streets removed. It is the old hotel of the Seven Windows. But, His Excellency, General von Steiner, will not like to be disturbed."

"My orders will be sufficient to keep him awake forever," muttered the Ober-Lieutenant, as if half to himself.

THE sentry looked on him with new respect. "Shall I accompany you, sir?" he questioned anxiously. "I can call for the officer of the guard to send me a relief."

"Don't mind," snapped Bates. "I'll find the place well enough." He whirled on his heel as the sentry saluted anew and limped down the street. In the distance the truck was rumbling away toward the rear.

He found the Hotel of the Seven Windows easily enough. Sentries paced outside. Sentries paced in the corridors. He could not tell what he was letting himself in for. He seemed to be getting in deeper and deeper every moment. Still he must be where he would be least suspected, and the closer he got to the Commanding General the least he could be suspected.

In the lobby of the hotel, now occupied entirely by German officers, he snapped a curt question at the sentry on duty.

"The General?" he demanded.

"He sleeps," informed the sentry impassively.

"Pig head!" barked Bates. "Did I ask for his health? I asked for his location. Answer me."

The sentry stammered. "His suite begins with the room numbered 421, Excellency," he said. "But he is asleep, and none dare awaken him."

"I dare," muttered Bates in the same half tone he had employed with the sentry outside of the Headquarters office. He turned to the stairs and mounted stiffly.

His brain was rioting. Was he making a mistake? Should he break now and run for it before it became too late? Trapped in a building he would have no chance if discovered and unmasked. He tramped up the stairs as he pondered over the matter.

It was too late now The sentry below was watching him as he climbed the stairs. He could never go back down without carrying out his mission now that he had declared that he carried information of sufficient importance to awaken the enemy commander.

The fourth landing. Quiet as the grave. A dozing figure on guard before one door in the corridor. The Major tiptoed up the next flight of stairs to the fifth floor. He tried door knobs softly. All the rooms seemed to be locked. Door after door, down the long corridor. At last one door swung open under his hand. His hand closed upon the butt of the service automatic concealed in the bandages. He dropped to his knees and slipped into the room. He remained motionless for a long minute. He could hear no sound. His eyes were becoming accustomed to the darkness. He stretched an exploring hand out before his face and encountered only emptiness.

After fifteen minutes he found himself to be in an empty room. A storeroom evidently. A storeroom where servants kept spare mops and pails.

A flood of weariness swept over him. He fought to keep awake. His eyeballs seemed on fire. Little by little his head dropped. Only after a terrific battle did he rouse himself to consciousness—and then, with the suddenness of the wind

blowing out a candle flame he was asleep. The great gulf of fatigue washed up over him—it was irresistible. His head sagged and he sat with his back against the door.

VII

SUNLIGHT was streaming through the grimy front windows of the room when Major Bates next opened his eyes.

He awakened with a start, his nerves leaping into action with a suddenness that brought a shock to his system. He straightened out his cramped legs and groaned aloud. They seemed to weigh tons. Every muscle screamed a protest as his body stirred. The pain went up through his torso into his shoulders. The full extent of the crash landing on his battered body was demonstrating itself. His tongue was parched, he seemed to be gripped by a raging fever. He could hear a mumble of voices from somewhere near. It sounded strange to his ears—more so because he was thinking in English.

After a moment his brain told him that the voices were speaking German, and with the knowledge the brain automatically started to translate the conversation.

He did not know whether to expect a search to be made for him or not. After a moment's thought he decided that no search would be made. No German soldier would question an officer or convey information without being asked for it directly.

The sentry at the door, seeing him climb the stairs toward the suite of General Sneider, would bother himself no more on the appearance of the bedraggled Ober-Lieutenant. So long as he remained within his little storeroom and could withstand the tortures of thirst and the pangs of hunger he would be safe—unless some striker appeared in search of a fresh mop or pail. In that event—his hand closed over the butt of the automatic concealed in the bandages about his right arm and hand.

The voices in the next room droned on incessantly. The Major placed his ear against the partition wall to hear them better. They seemed to be two officers arguing over a point in tactics. Suddenly the Major was keenly alert. A phrase came to him. A phrase having to do with the air and with airplanes. He listened with bated breath. A prickling sensation passed over his body. He pressed his ear more tightly against the wall.

"Of course it can be done," argued the first voice hotly. "I have no right to be an officer of Aviation if I cannot plan things such as this. Already I have tested the plan; it works without a hitch. The information we are after is of sufficient importance to take risks. You tell me that it will be difficult to signal a plane from the ground and have it land on a certain marked spot. Listen, von Heinieke, we are doing much more difficult things in everyday flying. Our pilots can land planes where a motor truck would find it difficult to maneuver. This is 1918—and war—we are flying under war conditions. You must divorce your mind from the picture of flying as it was five years ago or even six months ago. We have ships that can do anything now.

"For three days I have been testing this plan before I presented it to General Sniedder. It has worked perfectly under all conditions. I have taken the premise that we desire sending an agent inside the Allied lines, and that after he is there for some hours we decide to bring him back. Very well. I assign a two-seater to the task with a pilot who has proved his fitness for such a mission. A pilot who knows every foot of this front. He flies over the lines hour after hour, landing only to refuel—or upon a signal. The signals are simple but ample. We take a five-foot square of cloth. We take a smaller oblong of the same cloth. The square has four corners. By placing the oblong at an angle over any one of the four corners we have a set message flashed to the pilot as he flies above the spot. You follow me? For instance. The square of white cloth is spread out upon the ground. The corners are set so that one corner points north, another east, another west and the last south. Now, if we place the oblong of cloth over the north corner of the square it will convey the following message to the pilot: 'Nothing to report. All progressing favorably. Await next report.'

"If the oblong is over the east corner of the square it means: 'Will have important information within the next few hours; keep a sharp watch on this location.' If the oblong covers the west cor-

ner of the square it will tell the pilot of the two-seater: 'Have no further use for you at present; report back here in the morning.' But if the oblong is placed across the south side of the square it will mean: 'Grave danger; land here immediately to pick me up.' Whenever the pilot sees that signal, from our side of the lines or from his own, he will at once land on the spot and pick up the agent. You see? It is possible."

"But why should he land on our side of the lines in response to the signal? The agent could not be in grave danger from our side of the lines." The voice of the second officer contained a hint of laughter.

"You forget, von Heinieke," remonstrated the flying officer, "that this affair is secret, even from our own people. If the mission is to have any value it must be accomplished without the faintest breath of suspicion that it is being done. Also, we are not fools. We give these Allied troops some credit. If you had fought them in the air as we have fought them you would discover that they are brave men, capable of anything, quick thinkers, and daring to the point of suicide. Why should we think that a type of espionage such as I have outlined should be original with us? How can we say that at this very second their own agents are not within our own lines, exactly as we plan to send agents within their lines? We have men inside their lines who have been active for two years—and are still undetected. Are we fools to say that they have none within our own lines?"

"Bah! You give me the creeps," laughed the second officer. "Have we no secret agents keeping them out? You make me feel that there may be ears on the other side of this wall, listening to us talk."

THE prickling sensation coursed up and down the Major's back anew. There was a long silence from the other side of the wall. He could hear the two enemy officers pacing the floor restlessly. Then the flying officer spoke again.

"You may be right," he said ominously. "I am one who believes anything may happen in wartime. In spite of the superiority of our troops and our methods the enemy are not entirely dumb beasts. It is just as certain that they have agents within our lines as it is that we have agents within theirs. To believe otherwise would be to blind ourselves to a grave danger. Hence, to be absolutely sure that no enemy agent within our own lines can betray the mission on which we send this plane and this officer, we are keeping it a secret from everyone excepting the pilot, the agent, the General, yourself and myself."

"Oh, then the General knows about it, eh?" asked the first officer.

"He does," assured the second. "I outlined the plan to him. He approved of it without hesitation. He leaves the details to me. I have perfected them. At seven tomorrow morning the agent will be in the forest northeast of town. A faint wagon trail runs into a fair-sized clearing that is free of trees—large enough to permit a ship to land and take off. The ship will be cruising above. The signal to land will be spread out on the ground. The pilot will land and pick up his passenger. He will put him down inside the Allied lines, south of Seuilly. For weeks we have searched the spaces behind the enemy lines for such a place. We found it finally. It is made to order for our plans. It will mean that our agent can go from here, dressed in an American uniform, armed with credentials taken from captured American officers. It will mean that he can walk about boldly, talk to American troops, watch troop concentrations, count artillery opposed to us, and then, when he desires, he merely spreads his little square of silk cloth on the ground, places the oblong so that it spells the desired message, the pilot comes in for him—and he is carried back to our lines."

"He can do that about twice," advised the first officer. "After that they will investigate a ship marked with our insignia, flying over their lines."

"Am I crazy?" protested the flying officer. "Would I send a German ship with a German insignia on such a mission? Hardly; we shall send a Farman two-seater, marked with red, white and blue circles. We have painted the Farman black and white, black stripes around a white fuselage. Our pilots will have orders to leave such a two-seater strictly alone. There will be no danger. It could land on an enemy field if it so desired—as a ship which was from another sector—land-

ing for information or fuel. No, von Heinieke, we have every angle covered. This mission will succeed and we shall have the information vital to us."

There was a tone of admiration in the voice of the first officer.

"You deserve credit, my flying Uhlan," said the voice. "It is well prepared and well executed. You tell me that already your pilot has landed in response to signals, and that there has been no mistake?"

"Not a single mistake. He merely knows that when he sees those signals from the ground, in certain places, he is to do exactly as the message orders him."

"The clearing in the woods is northeast of here. Is it protected?"

"Why should it be?" challenged the flying officer. "It is far within our lines. No one goes there. To patrol it with troops would be to call attention to the fact that something unusual is connected with the place. No, let it be as it is; it is safer."

THERE was the sound of a hand slapping upon a back, and then the voice of the first officer sounded in hearty congratulations. "Good," said the voice. "The Herr General will do much for you if you can get him the information he desires. It may mean Pour le Merite. Tomorrow morning you put it to work, eh? Tomorrow morning at seven your agent will be in the woods, the plane will take him up and bear him inside the Yankee lines. When will he return?"

"He probably will return the same afternoon," answered the flying officer. "Then he will go again the next morning. On his second trip he may stay a few days—it all depends. But tomorrow he will return. We desire information on that gun position that has been bothering us for the past two weeks."

"You'll get it," predicted the first officer. "Anyway, let us have breakfast."

The Major heard the door in the next room slam shut. It seemed that his taut nerves collapsed entirely. Perspiration broke out on his forehead. His lips were dry, cracking. He was moiling the conversation he had heard over and over in his brain. It flamed with possibilities. If he could be at that clearing—if he could find it. He forced his pain-wracked body from off the floor, and walked unsteadily toward the door to the storeroom leading out into the hallway. He pulled it open an inch and was about to peep out, when his brain told him that he must be bold or nothing, so he pulled the door open with a jerk and stepped boldly out into the hallway.

There was no one in sight. He hesitated a moment, then he moved swiftly to the door of the next room. The knob turned in his hand. He pushed the door inward; it gave easily. He entered the room. It was empty.

He closed the door after him and stood looking about him. A desk was in one corner, a desk littered with papers and maps. He leaped across the room and examined them thoroughly. His heart gave a great leap. The very map he prayed would be there was the first thing his eyes rested upon.

It was an ordnance map of the territory in and about Merly. There was a blue pencil marking upon a square which according to the map was covered by forest. There was no explanation for the blue pencil marking, but the Major needed no explanation. He studied the map carefully, photographing it upon his brain. He knew that he did not dare to appropriate the map for his own guidance. The loss of the map would be noticed immediately. He had to memorize the location of the clearing. Years of training made it easy. When he ceased to study the map he had a clear-cut picture of the territory in his head. About five miles from Merly, north by east, running off the main road, entered by the wagon truck the flying officer had mentioned in his conversation. He turned from the table and retraced his steps.

Once more he held his breath and threw open the door with a bold sweep of his arm. There was a servant just about to go down the steps at the other end of the corridor. He glanced casually at the torn uniform of the Major and continued on his way. An icy hand lifted from the Major's heart. He breathed a great sigh of relief.

An instant later he was back in his storeroom. The door closed behind him. He threw himself upon the floor. It seemed that he could not await the coming of night.

ALL day long footsteps sounded in the hall outside the door to his place of concealment. Each time he felt that he was discovered and that a striker would enter for a pail or a mop, but always the footsteps went on down the hall. He was ravenous and the inside of his mouth felt raw and bleeding. He needed food and water badly. He fought the pangs of his stomach and tried to forget his thirst.

After an eternity of suffering, the long shadows crept into the room, the street outside grew quiet with the lull of the twilight. Lights threw yellow gleams through unwashed windows.

It was night.

He moved to the window and thrust it open a bare inch for a breath of fresh air. He was quivering wtih excitement—but his arms and legs felt weak and his stomach sick. The moon came up in a great silver disc. He discovered that the fire-escape passed outside the window of the storeroom.

It was an omen.

He would dare the descent by the fire-escape. He could not force himself to go through the ordeal of passing the sentries in the lobby. He knew that with his stomach turning over for food and his lips parched with thirst he could never force himself to employ the tone or demeanor of a Prussian officer.

The fire-escape seemed a boon from a beneficent heaven. And then it became merely an avenue to blacker despair. At ten o'clock, just as he was ready to trust his fortunes to the open window and the iron stairway strung along the side of the building, a troop of Uhlans rode into the street beside the hotel, dismounted, and seemed to compose themselves for a protracted stay. They threw saddles off onto the ground, stacked rifles, stacked lances, lit cigarettes, spread themselves over the sidewalks and house steps.

An escort for some important officer. A mounted troop ordered on guard for some special occasion. No matter what they represented they blocked the only avenue of escape left open to the masquerading Ober-Lieutenant. His heart sank with his spirits. He beat upon the floor with his grimy hands in a frenzy of impatience. He cursed all and sundry Uhlans, generals, officers, down to the lowest private in the rear ranks of the enemy army. But impatience or not, he could not attempt that fire-escape while the Uhlans held down the street.

His heart told him that if he attempted to leave the building as he had entered it that he would fail and be stopped. He had walked in, disappeared off the face of the earth for an entire day and that would be hard to explain if explanations were in order—and then at seven in the morning—the vision of a two-seater settling down to land on a clearing in the forest passed before his eyes.

For an hour he crouched next to the window. The Uhlans remained. He stared at the iron fire-escape. Suddenly his hands clenched. It was close to midnight. The hotel housing the officers of General Sneider's staff was quiet as the grave. A fire-escape. It conjured up pictures of fire! What did men do when they were awakened from a sound sleep by the sound of a clanging fire alarm and the smell of smoke. They raced for the street. His brain was asking questions and answering them. He knew that no matter how brave men might be, that the human instinct and the animal instinct when brought face to face with fire while inside an enclosure is to rush out into the open air.

HE snapped to his feet and pulled the cloth tops off a dozen mops and piled the dry cotton stuff in the center of the floor. There was a pile of straw bed ticks, stuffed and ready to be placed on the beds of servants in one corner of the room.

He pulled two of them down from the pile, ripped them open, spread the straw on top of the cotton mop tops and threw the ticking over the top of the entire pile of combustibles. He knew that there would be much smoke and much flame when he touched that pile off. He was smiling grimly to himself. He remembered that on the wall, outside of the storeroom, was a little red box—a fire alarm. He could remember the words written over the top of it. *For use in case of fire only.*

He took a match from the pocket of the dead Ober-Lieutenant's uniform and with absolute deliberation struck it and applied the tiny flame to the mass of com-

bustibles. He stepped back and stood with his shoulders against the door leading out into the corridor. He watched the mass of straw and cloth burn with a bright and sudden intensity. Clouds of white smoke went up from the straw. The room became filled with the choking stuff. He waited, his nose and eyes streaming tears, his lungs choking for breath. He waited until the flames were leaping up toward the ceiling. A window cracked. He heard a hoarse shout from the street outside. There was enough smoke in the room to fill the corridor once he opened the door. He felt his head swaying in dizzy circles. He threw the door wide open, leaped out into the hall, broke the glass in front of the fire alarm box, and pulled down the little lever inside with a jerk of his finger. Then he dashed for the stairway leading to the floors below. He crouched there for an instant.

He screamed aloud at the top of his voice. "Fire! Fire! Fire!" With the echo of his shouting the brazen clamor of many gongs ringing on all floors shattered the silence of the sleeping hotel. He could hear hoarse shouts of excitement from the street without.

Doors were dashed open. Half-clad officers, wild eyed, sleep still holding them fast thronged into the corridors and fought to get down the steps. Then, with a prayer for the success of his ruse, the Major stepped out from behind the stairway, and struggled with them. Down the steps struggled the frightened mob of officers. They trampled over a squad of Uhlans racing up the stairs. They all fell to the bottom in a wild, disordered heap. Smoke was seeping through the corridors. It was billowing out the window of the store house into the side street. The crush dashed through the hotel entrance and scattered.

The Major found himself in the street, treading upon the cobblestones. He heard a bugler sounding fire call madly. He heard shrieking sirens telling of grave danger. He did not look back. He eased himself into the shadows and slipped through the empty streets. He was outside of Merly, on the road leading toward the northeast. He was counting his steps carefully, measuring his distances. He found the wagon track leading into the clearing in the forest. So far so good.

Fifteen minutes later he found the clearing. He concealed himself at the edge of the space. In the moonlight the clearing seemed to measure about three hundred yards by three hundred yards. Once it had been the private park of a big estate. The Major drew branches about him and crouched low. He remained that way all night. His brain struggled with fatigue, and the agony of many hurts, but this time the brain was triumphant, the Major did not sleep.

VIII

DAWN was as long in coming as had been the wait for darkness on the night before. The Major prayed that the fire of the night before would not be attributed to anything but a natural working. He could not figure how the fire might be interpreted as a threat against the safety of the mission he had heard discussed while crouching in the storeroom.

Still, he feared that something might interfere with the coming of the agent to the trysting place with the two-seater. It was such a wild hope. He ripped the bandages from off his right hand and stretched the fingers. He thrust the squat service automatic inside his belt. After another eternity the golden ball of the sun peeped over the eastern horizon. He glanced at his wrist watch. An hour! It seemed a century. He studied the heavens with a practiced eye. Good flying weather today. Alta strata floating far up in the delicate blue of the upper spaces. He chewed on leaves to satisfy his thirst. The result was a bitter taste and a green froth on his lips.

Then he stiffened to instant attention. His ear caught the sound of footsteps on twigs and leaves. He crouched lower in his place of concealment. He caught sight of a khaki uniformed figure coming up the path to the clearing. The figure was puffing on a cigarette. He seemed to be in no particular hurry. The Major glanced at his watch again. Fifteen minutes to seven. The agent was early.

He entered the clearing and glanced about and then up at the heavens. He walked to the center of the clearing and took a small roll of very thin white silk from his tunic pocket. The Major thrilled

within himself. As the agent shook the silk out it resolved itself into a white square. The man placed it upon the ground with meticulous care. Then he took another bit of silk from another pocket. He shook it out into the form of an oblong. With a look at the sun, he placed the oblong at an angle across the south corner of the square.

The Major's pulses were leaping. There was no mistake about this. It was the signal to land. His muscles were tense. The agent then walked to the edge of the clearing, not fifty feet from the Major's hiding place, and seating himself upon the grass, lighted another cigarette.

There was a slight rustle of leaves. The Major, creeping like a red Indian, crawled forward through the fringe of trees until he was directly in back of the unsuspecting figure in khaki. The Colt automatic was in his hand. He pointed it at the broad back of the man before him and his finger tensed upon the trigger, but he shook his head, as if unwilling to kill him in cold blood. A small twig crackled loudly under his foot. The agent whirled in alarm and his hand flashed to the holster at his side—but too late, the Major had catapulted through the air as if released from a coiled spring. His right hand, holding the Colt by the butt flashed upward and descended. There was the chug of metal upon skull. The agent crashed to the ground without a sound and remained limp.

WORKING savagely the Major stripped him of his clothing. He tore the field gray uniform off his own person and slipped into the khaki trousers of the agent. The shirt next. The cordovan puttees over the field shoes. The tunic. The webbed belt. He heard the drone of a motor overhead. A plane was circling over the clearing. It was two thousand feet up, coming down in a sweeping spiral.

He dragged the still unconscious agent into the shadows of the trees and covered him over with the bedraggled uniform he had discarded. The plane was coming in, lower and lower. With a fierce thrill of joy the Major recognized it as the black and white two-seater. He seated himself at the edge of the clearing, close to where the agent lay breathing heavily, and struggled to compose his nerves, while waiting for the pilot to slip in over the trees.

It was a sweet piece of flying. Done as nicely as the Major could have wished. The black and white ship, throttled to a whisper, glided at almost stalling speed, settled over the top branches, nosed down sharply, slipped right and left and touched wheels to the ground with less than fifty feet of roll.

The Major climbed to his feet as nonchalantly as possible and tossed away his cigarette. He glanced at his watch as he waved to the pilot.

"Good," he called, "you are on time."

The pilot smiled and nodded. He looked like a nice boy—young, but with the look of eagles in his eyes. The Major crawled into the rear seat. There were no controls there. His heart sank. He glanced at the pilot and pretended to busy himself adjusting the safety belt. Really his hand was clutching the butt of the Colt. Yet, no matter how great the necessity, he could not bring himself to kill this unsuspecting, boyish pilot. He looked up suddenly and smiled.

"My signals," he called to him. "My signals. The white cloth there on the ground. I am forgetting them. Please get them for me. It is awkward for me to climb in and out of this seat."

The pilot glanced toward the white square and oblong on the ground and nodded. Smilingly he vaulted out of the front seat and trotted across the field. As his feet touched the ground, and the instant his back was turned, the Major sprang out of his own seat, scrambled across the camel back into the front seat and settled himself at the controls. He pushed the stick against the instrument board. He heard a hoarse shout behind him and glanced back over his shoulder. The pilot was crouching on the ground in the act of picking up the white square and gazing at the black-and-white two-seater with horrified eyes.

Then the Major poured the gun to the crate. The tail blasted off the ground. The wheels rolled. It was going to be nip and tuck. He blessed the pilot for having headed into the wind as all good pilots should. He felt the lift as he eased back on the stick. He held the nose of the crate

down until it seemed that the trees were going to smack him in the face and then he cleared them with a wild zoom and groaning motor. Several round holes zipped into the right wing. He glanced down to find the pilot standing in the center of the clearing, firing furiously at the fleeing plane with a Luger automatic. There was a smile on the Major's face. He waved his hand and headed due south, the motor taking a full gas load, and the ground spinning beneath him at a two-mile-a-minute rate.

Free and in flight when for a while he had believed that he would never fly again. The reaction set in. Tears streamed from his eyes. He seemed suddenly weak—as if he could not hold the stick or keep pressure on the rudder. Dry, wracking sobs choked him. The front leaped up below him. Lines of concrete trenches. He was over them, flying like a demon — or like a homing pigeon. Barbed wire. Torn and rotting land. No Man's Land. His heart was opening up under the sun and the beat of the slipstream. He could see the green fields of Allied territory before him. Home! Home and the boys!

IX

THERE was a new sound from over his head. He glanced up quickly. Long association with that sound brought warning of a swarming flight of enemy ships. His hand was tight upon the stick. He knew that no alarm could have been given in the short time since his escape. He was in the midst of an enemy formation coming back from a dawn mission.

They were a group of Avatiks above him, fast-flying, hard-shooting pursuit planes, durable as iron and as hard to down as flying pigeons. Instinctively his hand moved to the gun trips. Then he heard a voice speaking far back in his consciousness. A German voice, snapping, eager, enthusiastic sentences. "Every pilot on our side will have orders to leave a black-and-white two-seater alone," the voice was saying, and the memory of the conversation heard through the walls of the storeroom came back to him with a rush. He smiled a wry smile to himself, and his hand upon the stick relaxed. He continued to fly south, watching the Avatiks narrowly. They continued to dive down upon him. Two of them were close on his tail.

He saw the leader of the Jerry formation waggle his wings sharply as if in warning to the two nearest pilots of the group. They merely flashed by him, flying at a terrific pace. One of them peered over the top of his cockpit at the masquerading pilot of the black-and-white two-seater and waved his hand in a cheery greeting. The Major waved back and pointed in the direction of his flight. The pilot of the Avatik nodded shortly as if he understood perfectly, shook hands with himself, his arms raised over his head, and passed on.

Suddenly, the Avatik veered sharply and went on down with a rush of propeller wash as the Jerry pilot poured full throttle to the Benz motor in the nose of the Avatik. The Major watched its course with wondering eyes. Then he saw the Spandaus before the face of the first enemy pilot flame red, and at the same instant all of the Avatiks in the group put noses down sharply and went down with a rush.

The Major leaned far out of his cockpit so that he might see the space below him and the cause for the sudden activity on the part of the enemy. His heart stopped beating. He stared with wide eyes. Under his wings half a dozen gray shapes were zooming up to the attack. They were flying like rough-riding demons, motors turning up every r.p.m possible, noses slanted upward, guns vomiting red flashes of death. It was not so much the sight of the coming fight that caused the Major to stare. It was the sight of the insignia upon the sides of the gray Spads. Bold, black Aces of Spades, with a blood-red "13" superimposed upon the grim insignia.

The Thirteenth! The Major's own boys were face to face with superior odds. Six of them opposed to nine Avatiks. He ripped the rudder to the right with a jerk of his foot and moved the stick forward and to the right. The two-seater went screaming down in a dizzy spiral.

He fed two belts to the guns in front of him. He blessed the fact that they were good and true Vickers and not the German Spandaus. He needed all of his knowledge of friendly machine guns at this moment. The tails of the entire enemy group were turned toward him. He picked

out two of them in his gun sights and rode in on them with the tachometer mounting with every foot of drop.

THE black-and-white marked rudders of the two Avatiks he had picked out were directly below him. Coolly, he pushed the nose of the two-seater down slightly and reached for the gun trips. At fifty feet he ripped home his first burst. It smashed through the after fuselage of the unsuspecting enemy like a thunderbolt. Wires flew and streamed out into the air. The vertical fin collapsed into a crumpled heap. The hard-flying Avatik sheered off, going over on one wing, turning almost a complete somersault as the enemy pilot struggled to hold it with shattered controlling surfaces. With a wild leap, the major was over his first victim and his stuttering guns were turned upon the second.

In an instant the entire fabric of the ship was in flames. The prop, pushing the fine spray of raw gasoline on the slipstream, saturated the Avatik with flame in a tenth of a second. It went down in a wild swoop, flame from wings and fuselage staining the blue of the heavens. Down and down—the Major turned his face away.

A third Avatik was coming in on his tail. There was no longer any hesitancy an the part of the enemy pilots in attacking a black-and-white two-seater. They had watched this supposedly harmless ship down two of their fellows in the twinkling of an eye. They were raging at the trick played upon them. Splinters flew about the Major's face as he twisted with the slow two-seater to escape the rain of death bearing down upon him from behind. He knew that he could not outfly an Avatik with a two-seater. The ship was out of balance because of the empty rear cockpit. It took all of his skill to keep it in perfect control as he flew it in narrowing circles.

He saw the leading edge of a right wing strut vibrate and then fray out as a steel slug snapped a bit of the wood. He threw the two-seater over in a tight roll, and the enemy leaped over him. From somewhere beneath him a gray Spad leaped into the attack. A gray Spad that flew up with the speed of light and struck with the ferocity of tiger's talons. Its nose was close to the heart side of the Avatik.

The Major was screaming aloud. He knew that ship. The number on its tail proclaimed the fact that it was being flown by Bill Gans. Gans had leaped in and taken the Avatik off the tail of the two-seater. The Major turned, his eyes gleaming strangely. He searched the sky about him for new worlds to conquer. He saw another number on another Spad. Over there Pete Thompson was battling with two of the enemy.

The Major leaned on the controls. He had altitude on the three ships battling before him. He went down with a wild rush. He picked the closest of the two ships and cut in the Vickers. Tracers cut patterns through the wings of the Avatik. Tracers went a smoking way through linen and wood. And aileron flapped · uselessly. Thompson's Spad lunged about like a charging bull. It leaped upward for the throat of the crippled Avatik. There was a single burst from Thompson's guns as he flashed beneath the belly of the enemy. One burst was enough. It cut upward, through the motor base, through the gas tanks, through the cockpit, and the mortally hit Avatik spun down with an agonized pilot fighting to save it.

TOGETHER they headed for the second of the crates that had attacked Thompson. The Jerry pilot seemed to have eyes only for the black-and-white two-seater. He held off for a long moment. It was easy to see that he was nervous and hesitant. The odds were now in favor of the Thirteenth with the black-and-white two-seater battling for them.

The Avatiks drew together in a close formation, flying about in a fast circle, keeping a single-file formation, prop to tail. The Jerry commander was wild with alarm. He had lost three ships. He had positive orders not to attack a black-and-white two-seater, and yet he had watched that same two-seater send two of his men down, and cripple a third so that it was easy pickings for a pursuit ship.

Three ships lost, advantage lost, the black-and-white two-seater still flying—and with the Spads. He waggled his wings sharply and the formation headed back toward the north. The raging flight commander was going to discover things before trusting himself to another trap.

The Thirteenth permitted them to go.

Gas was getting low. Pilots were weary with three hours of flying that morning. Bill Gans banked around for the home field and the Thirteenth followed after him. He waved his hand to the pilot of the black-and-white two-seater as he flew by and each of the pilots in the Thirteenth did the same thing. Once in a blue moon a two-seater elected to fight it out with an enemy pursuit job. Once in a blue moon a two-seater was lucky and knocked one down—but never had they watched a two-seater win a victory over three enemy pursuit jobs. They were filled with admiration and respect—almost awe.

They landed in formation on the home tarmac. Bill Gans was lighting a cigarette and crawling out of his leather coat. He was silent until Pete Thompson sauntered up, followed by the remainder of the pilots who had been on the flight.

"That guy could sure throw that two-seater around," he mused aloud.

Thompson took a long pull on his fag. "I'll say he could throw it around. I'd like to meet that bird. He pulled me out of a bad hole."

Gans nodded. "Kind of reminded me of the Major," he said with a glance at the clouds above him.

"Me, too," answered Pete in a strange voice. "I'd sure like to meet that bird. I'd like to buy him a drink. He's the hottest flying two-seater pilot I've ever had the pleasure of watching. He belongs in pursuit."

There was a shout from the end of the field. A mechanic was pointing upward. The pilots glanced toward the end of the field. They all shouted together. A black-and-white two-seater was leveling off over the trees at the far end of the field and coming in for a landing. The pilot slipped the big crate skillfully and put its wheels on the ground without a semblance of a bounce.

"Looks like you'll have a chance to buy that drink, Pete," smiled Gans. "Here comes the guy himself."

THE strange pilot walked toward them. He limped a little as if stiff and sore. He still had his goggles pulled low over his eyes. He wore no flying coat. Merely a khaki tunic and trousers and boots. He saluted them with a wave of his hand. The mysterious black-and-white ship was being wheeled on the line.

Pete Thompson was the first to greet the stranger. "Brother," he said solemnly, "I want to tell you thanks for that stunt, and to say that when better two-seaters are built you'll fly 'em. That was one sweet exhibition, and considering it was staged largely for the saving of my neck, I want to say that I was in position to appreciate it."

"Thanks," answered the strange pilot casually, and then, with a careless motion of his arm he swept his helmet and goggles from off his head and face.

They stood there for a minute staring. Faces frozen. Pete Thompson's eyeballs were staring from his head. He made a strange sound in his throat, and for the first time in his life he fainted dead away. Sank into a limp heap on the ground.

Bill Gans was first to speak. He felt strong arms about his shoulders. He felt himself being squeezed in a bear hug. He was able to gasp one word.

"Major!"

"Sure, 'Major,'" answered the strange pilot."Home to see that nothing happens to the Kindergarten. Let's have a drink!"

So they dragged Pete Thompson along with them into the mess hall. The celebration lasted through the day and through the night. Once Bill Gans' voice sounded through the windows.

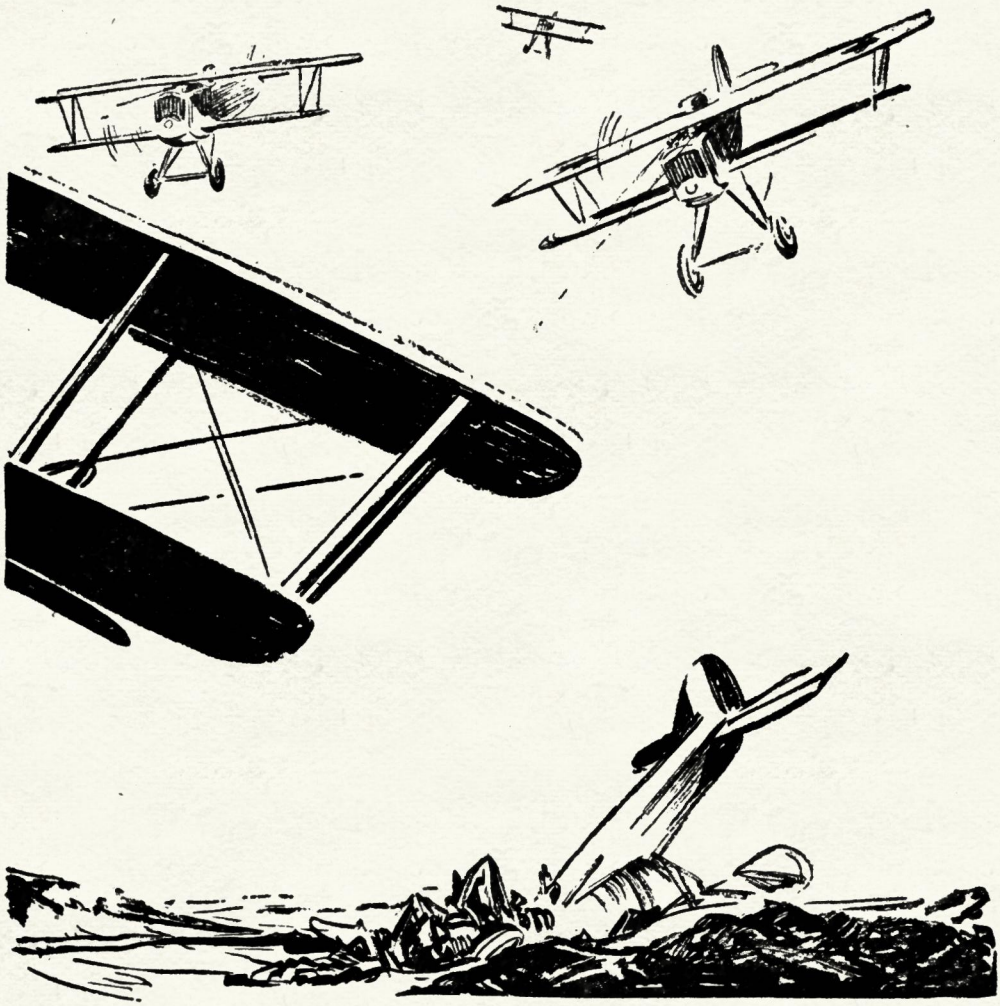
"Luck!" he chortled in a wild voice. "Luck? Why, we wallow in luck. We swim in it. Yeah, boy! Let's have another to the luck of the Thirteenth."

Other voices were singing. No longer would Pete Thompson be the goat of Johnny Grimes' little ditty. The singers were pointing at the Major. They were singing in loud and raucous voices. They wanted the cockeyed universe to hear that song and remember it. They pounded the Major on the back, and called upon all and sundry persons to stop and listen while they repeated the singing.

It echoed down the road, by the hangars of the Thirteenth. The world stopped to listen. To any but flying men it was hard to understand, for the last two lines of the song went like this:

And what he thought was an angel's wreath
Was the garbage pile about his neck!

A Novel of War in the Clouds



WINGS FOR THE BRAVE

By ANDREW A. CAFFREY

Together they faced the threat of Spandau lead. Together they zoomed to meet the war-mad charge of the Hun falcons. They were blood brothers—yet one wore the wings of a hero, and the other the sinister bar of cowardice.

A HIGH-FLYING speck in the clear French sky droned out of the northwest. The speck was coming from toward the city of Tours. Tours was Air Service's headquarters. Minutes later, the droning speck grew larger, took on the well-known silhouette of the trim Nieuport-28, and stopped droning—it howled! And how a Nieuport-28's *monosoupape* 160 h.p. rotary could howl! Yes, that pursuit ship's single-valve whirling-spray motor was powerfully loud.

It could yell, bellow, screech and noise-up the whole sky. You'd think all the power on earth was cooped up in that little raw-gas-eating hot pot. And sure enough, that *monosoupape* Gnome power unit did stand for action—action with the *act* foremost. It was action with the top torn off. Wild, wild action!—an' how!

Down out of that northwest sky, on a long dive, the howling crate pointed its flashing, sun-splashing propeller end right at Field 8, Issoudun. Across the wheat farms, beyond the road and trees just north of Field 8, the Nieuport cut its way. It was now ten feet above the wheat. Its howl sounded like all the buzz saws on earth turned loose—turned loose in the same cluster of hardwood knots. And scores of Field 8 men—officers, cadets and enlisted stiffs—stopped to stare and wonder who this might be. As yet, Nieuport-28's were new to the field.

At the last possible second of flying grace, just when the roadside trees seemed about to gather in another nut pilot, the oncoming bird pulled back and zoomed.

That bellowing crate shot straight up for 500 vertical feet, hung on its propeller for interminable seconds, sunk and wheeled slowly onto its back, and the watchers on the ground looked right into an inverted cockpit, while the visiting pilot looked directly down at them. After that—still wheels up—the Nieuport flew the length of Field 8's twelve hangars, dropped its nose, rolled back to an even keel, and landed out of the maneuver.

Field 8's new commanding officer—Major Medcraft—had arrived.

THE advent of Major Medcraft had broken just about every flying rule Field 8 ever boasted. But flying rules, like Army Orders, are things made to be broken if you can get away with it. However, a new commanding officer should be the last man to set a bad example for those who were to be under him. Majors as a rule didn't do such things, but Major Medcraft wasn't the usual major. Not by a long shot! Not so's you could notice it!

He came to the American Air Service from the English R.F.C., this man Medcraft. He was a Yank, all right, but had decided to go to war long before his native country made up its mind.

War's hard, but war's red-blooded. Major Medcraft was both of those things too: hard and red-blooded. He was his own man and didn't take seconds from anybody. You'd've liked Medcraft for a C.O.

The major had the English idea about aerial warfare; and that was *some* idea! Our English cousins had a different slant on the flying thing, different from either the French or Yanks. The French, contrary to all ideas of dare-deviltry, would never take a chance. They knew that the war was on—right on their very necks, too—but they'd take all the time in the world about the making of a pilot.

You know, give the would-be student about fifty trips around the field before they'd even let him put his hand on the stick. Then after forty or fifty additional hours, they maybe let him land. That was the French of it: slow and not so sure.

But the English, the gang with whom Major Medcraft had trained—and fought—were something else again. The English knew that war, like tides and love, waits for no man. Also, the English knew that a boy was just about as good after ten hours in the air as he'd ever be. That is, his flying heart was as good. And if he was still cocky at the end of ten air hours, then nothing could stop him. Turn him loose!

Have the monitor step out of that front pit and give the yangyang a chance to spread his wings. And if said yangyang fledgling could then fly, all well and good. But if he broke his neck, not so good! Still and all, far better than having him running up expenses through the weeks and months. Oh, the R.F.C. was a hard-boiled school, but it made pilots. It made aviating birds who plucked their ships off the ground at the first bounce, turned on the zoom, and flew like eagles. Major Medcraft was one.

Our American system was a sort of mean between the slow method of the French and the rapid-fire way of the English. Some thought that our way was a mean way, in that it involved too many hundred miles of red tape and not enough of red blood. It was a crime for an ambitious Yank flyer to crash a ship; and a benzene board always put the kid on the carpet after such doing. Why, it took guts to crash ships; that is, to crash them and still want to fly. But ours was a new service, and our brass hats didn't know any too much about flying warfare—or man power, either.

II

YES, you'd have liked to serve under Major Medcraft. He brought new things to Field 8. New ideas, and a new

atmosphere. He hopped things up, called a spade a spade, and cut out all the old well-known blah. And, my gosh! before Medcraft came, Field 8 had plenty of the old blah. You know—mechanics standing calls, cadets taking calisthenics, and the whole command doing infantry drill for so many hours a week. All that has nothing to do with air, and the new C.O. knew it. And he stopped it too.

"This," Major Medcraft said, "is a flying field. Let us fly."

That had better and quicker results than if the major had said: "Let us pray." The gang flew, and how! Those whose job it was to enforce flying rules were worked to death. The cadets flew the same old ships five periods a day; and each session was for an hour and a half. Soon the old culls were falling apart, but still they flew. Then, after three flyers were killed in two days, Flying Office called a halt.

"What," Major Medcraft asked, "is the matter? How come that there are no birds a-birding overhead? I don't like such quiet."

"Sir," the engineering officer made answer, "there isn't a ship on this field fit to fly. We'll have to overhaul the whole darned works. Every mechanic on the post is busy at it now."

"Oh," the major mused. "Well, lieutenant, will you please drop in at headquarters and tell the adjutant to write out two-day passes for every student on this reservation. And tell the adjutant to tell every man to get off this post and take himself into town. And, lieutenant, tell the adjutant to tell the men that if they're short of jack, I'm not. I'll be in my quarters, and receiving."

"Yes, sir. Yes, sir," the lieutenant said. And he went.

Yeh, you'd like to soldier under Major Medcraft. Who ever saw a major that was willing to put out before? Nobody!

WELL, the new C.O. was such a white guy that the gang began to take advantage of him. They'll do that every time. Not all of the gang, but some. But, at Field 8, everybody, it seemed, took it for granted that there were no more flying rules. They were even looping and spinning Nieuport-23's. That's as foolish as riding in the undertaker's black wagon when you don't have to. A Nieuport-23—it was a two-seater training wreck—was only held together by luck; and when your luck ran out, you did too. The "23" was worse than bad news from home.

Perhaps the worst offender with the "23" was one of the testers, a Lieutenant Fred Fish. The enlisted men called him "Flying" Fish. This nickname was to distinguish him from his own blood brother, Ed, who was engineering officer at Field 8. And this Ed Fish was called "Mechanical" Fish for the simple reason that his duties were along mechanical lines. Both Fishes flew; but the Mechanical Fish was not so keen about air work.

Some of the enlisted men would tell you that Mechanical Fish was yellow. Well, that was the way with the grease-balls: if a flyer wasn't flying all the time, he wasn't game. Yellow! Yeh, that's easy to yell when you don't have to fly small, fast crates yourself. Sure, you can call the other man yellow when you know that you'll never have to face a tight, out-of-control minute yourself.

ED "MECHANICAL" FISH was not yellow. But, to a certain extent, he had had his "wind up" a bit. That had happened over at Field 5 when Mechanical Fish was a student. He had been slipping a Nieuport-27; and that tricky little job had slipped too vertical and flopped over on its back—when only a few hundred feet off the ground. Yellow! You get a Nieuport-27 in such a position and see who's yellow. Yeh, hang there head down in your straps, watch the ground shifting and drifting up, and see who's wishing that he was safe at home and his brother was here. Yellow?—that word's out!

Anyway, Mechanical Fish wasn't flying much at present. Headquarters figured that the boy best be given a chance to lay off and forget. This engineering job at 8 was the thing he needed. He could be with the ships, fly them now and then, and, at the same time, try not to remember that Nieuport-27 on its back. Try not to recall that last awful minute when—taking the old lion by the tail—he had decided to land that small pursuit job on its back. And he did just that thing—put it down in a cloud of dust. The crashing wreck did a half dozen turns, and Ed Fish came out whole. Yel-

low? Let's see a yellow guy make such a decision.

But to get back to Flying Fish, there was a bird to draw to! This guy had no more idea of personal safety than a bird who would yell: Who won the war? at an M.P.'s convention. To see him fly you'd guess that Flying Fish's life wasn't worth a plugged dime. You know, zooming low-powered ships on the take-off; rolling his under-carriage wheels on the hangar roofs; flying between the twin spires of French churches; jazzing along under road-covering trees; landing out of loops; and what have you? Anything, everything, and all the wrong things of flying. But the man was good.

Flying Fish was alone in his class. Six feet tall, and plenty wide, he fit very tightly in the small cockpits of pursuit ships. But by fitting so tightly, he became a part of the ship. And what he told a ship to do, that ship did. He was doing outside spins every day. Also he was trying outside loops long before anybody ever pulled one. Of course, with the power then available, outside loops were out of the question. However, the outside spins were the things to which Major Medcraft objected. He called Flying Fish onto the carpet.

Flying Fish wasn't at all loud or cocky when on the ground; good airmen never are. So Flying Fish came to Major Medcraft's carpet in fear, and almost trembling.

"Lieutenant," the major barked, "what the devil do you mean—trying to fly outside loops with a Nieuport-27? Speak up, man, what do you mean?"

"Well, sir," Flying Fish said, "I—"

"I guessed as much," the major cut in. "Truth of the matter is, you don't know why you've been trying it, do you?"

"Yes, sir," Flying Fish shot back. "Because I want to."

"Well," the major agreed, "that's reason enough." The C.O. and Flying Fish were alone in the office; and the major seemed to lower his voice a bit, so those in the next office could not hear.

"Now, lieutenant," he said, "you should know better than to try outside loops with so little power. But take this Nieuport-28 of mine—maybe it could make the grade."

Flying Fish's ears actually stood up—and bent forward.

"Yes, sir," he breathed.

"So," the major went on, "I'll have the ship sent to test today, and you can fly it from the test line. There's something wrong with it and it's up to you to put it right. I've always had an idea that the outside stunt could be done. You seem to have the same idea. Anyway, we'll see what we'll see. That's all, lieutenant."

Flying Fish was working in the test department. He went back to that hangar with a song in his heart. He'd always wanted to fly the Old Man's "28" and now the chance was at hand.

III

FOR two or three days after that, far off in the sky where he could not be seen from the field, Flying Fish worked at his outside looping with varying degrees of falling and diving success. It isn't on record that anything ever came of all that work, but the possession of the Nieuport-28 brought about something else, and this something else was more important in the long run.

At the time of all this Field 8 activity, the Nieuport-28 was the type of pursuit ship that our first front-line outfits were using on the front. The "28," among other advantages, could maneuver. It had the speed, lots of speed for that period; and its ceiling was nearly as high as any ship in the air. Its "blind spots" were few, and not at all bad. It had the finest balance of any ship ever built. Hardly ever did you find one that was very nose-heavy or tail-heavy. Also, that howling 160-hp. *monosoupape* rotary motor—air cooled and light—gave the ship a high efficiency. The Nieuport-28, in short, was a ship to make you sit up and think.

Mechanical Fish, while Flying Fish was outside-looping, did some new-fangled and useful thinking. After one of Flying Fish's landings, the mechanical brother took the thing up with his flying relation.

"I wonder," Mechanical Fish said, "why this Nieuport-28 couldn't be made to carry two men. That is, make a two-place fighter out of it. If you had a gunner in the rear pit, you'd have the world stopped. All the other two-place fighters are clumsy. This little crock, with a gunner, could fly both observation and pursuit. What do you think—would it carry the extra man?"

Both Fish brothers went into thought. They were never much for talk unless there was something to talk about. A fine trait. After thinking for a long time, Mechanical Fish said:

"I know, with this non-lifting stabilizer, the weight of a gunner might make the plane darned tail-heavy, but why couldn't the pilot and gunner sit back to back?"—in this way the mechanical one would keep the double load bunched.

"Maybe they could," Flying Fish agreed without showing any great amount of excitement, which was his way. "Anyhow, there's just one way to see how much she'll carry—ride an extra man on the thing. I think she'll navigate O.K."

"You mean sand-bag the ship?" Mechanical asked.

"Sand-bag nothing," Flying said. "That's too slow. Why can't you ride in the camera compartment, eh?"

Some of these Nieuport-28's had a camera compartment located just to the rear of the pilot's cockpit. This camera was established very close to the pilot so that the weight of the large box would ride fairly close to the ship's center of gravity. Just behind the pilot's shoulders, a trap-door opening gave access to this deep compartment. Flying Fish now threw back this cover and suggested: "Why can't you stand in there, hold to my shoulders, and take a ride?"

"That's jake with me," Mechanical Fish was quick enough to agree—this man who was called yellow, remember—as he climbed aboard. "Let's go. It's getting late."

Flying Fish called to Test-line Sergeant Hallback for another start on the motor. Hallback and one of his crew came out, stopped to take a look, and ask: "What'n heck is coming off here?"

"Oh," Mechanical Fish smiled, "I'm just going to take a turn of the field to see if this job will carry two men. Give us a start on the motor, sergeant."

"This '28' job," the sergeant said before starting, "will carry half a dozen men, lieutenant. Take my word for it. And, if you should ask me, I'd say that you don't need to go breaking your neck to prove it."

"Hallback," Mechanical Fish laughed, "I know what's eating you—you'd like to take this ride, eh?"

"Well," Sergeant Hallback answered, splitting the difference, "that would be only right, for a high-class lieutenant shouldn't take such long chances. Now, I'm about the same size and weight as you are, lieutenant, and why not let me go?"

"Tie that if you can!" Mechanical said to his brother. Then to Hallback—"Come on, give us that start. You don't ride."

THE motor howled again. Flying Fish taxied afield, turned into the wind, and hit the "28" with full gun. The trim little ship took the air as though it had nobody aboard. And its climb was fast. As far as you could see from the ground, the added poundage was no handicap at all. What was more, it cruised level at half speed; that is, put-put-putting along on its selector mag.

"And to think," Sergeant Hallback's right-hand man remarked, "that the mechanical guy would ride like this! That yellow bird flirting with death, can you beat it?"

"Yellow bird?" Hallback questioned as he watched the cruising "28" "get away from here, recruit, or I'll shove them words down your throat. What do you know about man-color?"

"Eh?" the right-hand man backed down. "Well, they say as how this engineering guy is yellow, don't they, serg'?"

"Sap, what they say is, and what *is*, is two different things, see?" the test-line sergeant told his underling. . . .

"Now lookee there!" the sergeant snapped, and pointed at the Nieuport-28, which was now plenty high. "Watch! That nut of a Flying Fish is going to pull some of his fast stuff, or I'll buy you a new dicer. Uh-huh, I told you so—there he loops. And a second. And more and more!"

With the Mechanical Fish sitting his high-flown mount, his brother had looped three snappy ones in a row. When the Flying Fish looped, he looped so tightly that a man could not have fallen away from the ship had he tried to do so. A loop rightly flown will always—through centrifugal force—have a tendency to throw a plane's riders off the circle, that is right through the floor boards. And because of this force, you're glued to your seat—and Flying Fish flew loops that were loops. Loops that

were perfect things and flown every tight foot of the way.

Nevertheless, just to give his mechanical brother a good time for his money, the Flying Fish now went into another loop. But this time, merely to be different, he reached the top of the climb, then shoved his stick full-ahead, and kept the howling "28" flat on its back. Sergeant Hallback and his right-hand guesser stood there with their mouths wide open and watched the Mechanical Fish dangle out of the camera box, feet clear of the ship, and at arm's length. Then when the sergeant could find words, still watching, he yelled: "Yellow! You said yellow! Lookee! Lookee! Get back to that hangar, sap, and eat grease till I tell you to stop. Yellow? If that's yellow, then you're not a liar, and the Y is giving away chocolate at every stop. Out of my sight, fillilloo bird!"

After a short distance of that aerial acrobatics, the Flying Fish pulled back his stick and swished down to a right-side-up position again. Then with no more worlds to conquer he landed.

The brothers seemed mighty well satisfied with the wild flight. Their talk ran toward big things for Nieuport-28's; and when the day's work ended they went toward quarters still talking of the possibilities of such a two-place fighter.

Far into the night, with others of the commissioned men interested they talked the thing over. "But," the Mechanical Fish finally asked, "would she still be a good ship, still carry the load, if we had the weight of a Scarff gun-ring and two Lewis guns to boot?"

"Only one way to find out," Flying Fish answered, "and that's to carry the weight. In the morning—don't say anything about it—we'll fly with two men."

IV

NEXT morning it was raining. The clouds were just about on the ground. Because of this low visibility, combat instruction was out of the question. Flying Office washed out all flying, except test-line hops, till such time as the weather should show signs of improvement. Of course, the field's mechanical work went right ahead; and groups of waiting students stood about the hangars to wait and watch. Down at the test hangar, the Fish boys were getting the Nieuport-28 ready to do its stuff. Mechanical Fish called Sergeant Hallback to one side.

"Sergeant," he asked, "if I ride on one lower wing of this '28' will you ride on the other?"

Sergeant Hallback liked the air, and he'd always wanted to fly. Yes, sir, the sergeant had always wanted to fly in the worst way. And this looked like his chance—to fly in the worst way. But the sergeant liked life; and he knew that this was one way, maybe, of getting rid of life. But, on the other hand, the sergeant recalled that this man asking him was the man they called yellow. "And," figured Sergeant Hallback, "if I'm not game enough to ride, and a so-called yellow guy is, what will the gang think?"

"Just once around the field, sergeant," Mechanical Fish added. "What say?"

"Sure," the non-com agreed. "If you don't care for your neck, lieutenant, then why should I prize mine, eh? Let's go—let's go before I remember a date that I should be keeping at the bug-house."

The Flying Fish was in his cockpit. Mechanics were blocking the Nieuport's wheels and getting set to start the yelling 160.

All along the line, from hangar to hangar, word had leaked out and Field 8's wandering and wondering population had quit their jobs to light a smoke and stroll up to test. In no time at all, and before the Fishes could get under way, a goodly gang of watchers were on hand to give advice, make dizzy suggestions, and attest that the three greatest nuts in all the world were about to do their stuff. Then the motor cracked into action and the time had arrived.

Mechanical Fish took his place on the left lower wing. On any rotary-motored job the left side of the ship gets an awful smearing of castor oil. This smearing isn't just a matter of drop-by-drop anointing—but a shower. When Mechanical Fish chose that dirty, slippery seat—and knew that he was taking the dirt—something in the sergeant bowed low to a game man. The sergeant went round to the other side and took his seat on the lower right wing.

When you speak of a Nieuport-28's lower wing, you are not talking of anything

very large. The overall length of that ship's upper panels—from wingtip to wingtip—was only twenty-seven feet. So the wingtip-to-wingtip spread of the lower wings was not more than twenty-five or twenty-six feet. That's some small plane. And either one of its lower, narrow wings was hardly larger than the old family divan.

When Mechanical Fish and Sergeant Hallback took their seats, they were sitting on about six inches of leading edge. The rear set of flying wires prevented them from sitting deeper. The front pair of flying wires, of a Nieuport-28, as you'll recall, were far afront, and came in where the front strut of the landing gear meets the motor cowling.

As they sat there, holding to a center-section strut with one hand, their knees within eighteen inches of the flashing, idling propeller—just a forward swing of the feet, and there'd be no feet. A nice seat! For partial support, however, they could place a right or left foot on the axle.

Sergeant Hallback's right-hand man had just pulled the wheel-chocks, and was about to assert himself and order the whole A.E.F. away from the wings, when Second Lieutenant Tony Barso came through the crowd. "What," Tony asked of the right-hand man, "is happening here?"

"Ya ain't blind, are you, lieutenant?" the right-hand man asked. "The two Fishes and my sergeant are going to take a ride."

Tony took a good look, swung on his heel, and was gone.

THIS Tony boy was a fine example of what happens when they make a bum officer out of what might have been a good K.P. He had been a "previous service" enlisted man; then the strange ways of war's emergencies had tossed a commission into Tony Barso's lap. Tony was a non-flyer, and non-everything else. But he did work mighty hard seeing to it that the enlisted men didn't get into trouble. Nice guy, you know. Nice guy living or dead, but far nicer dead. Too bad you couldn't catch him off the post, and in the dark.

Tony was, no doubt, his own idea of what Bonaparte might have been. Tony was small like the Petit Corporal, too. Maybe he looked like what Napoleon looked like when Nap looked his worst. He was the sort of a jaybird that would crowd the C.O.'s honest dog robber out of a shoe-shining job. He had only one friend at Field 8, and that's why he talked to himself.

When Tony ducked back through the gang, Hallback's right-hand greaseball knew what to expect. The right-hand man moved in behind the turning propeller to yell in his sergeant's right ear.

"Ya better make it fast," the right-hand man said. "That Sicilian rock scorpion of a Barso has gone crying to the major. He took a look and started for headquarters. Better make it fast."

The sergeant leaned back and relayed that bad news to the Flying Fish. "You men set?" the latter asked. "Then hold on."

Opening his throttle wide and lifting his tail, the Flying Fish had that "28" bouncing away from the dead-line in short order. The take-off space was wet and heavy. The wheels traced long gashes across the mud. The triple weight held the plane on the ground for a long time, very long, but just before the last few hundred feet of available space had been used up, the yelling craft began to show the watchers some sky under its wheels. And the three men were in flight.

Because of the low sky, a few hundred feet of altitude was as high as Flying Fish could hope to go. Now and then his ship scudded through the low black drapery of hanging clouds, and was lost for short spells. As much as he wanted to go higher, and maybe do things, the wild goof could not raise that nasty ceiling.

French farmers and French townsfolk stood and stared when that crazy apparition floated past overhead. From either wing a dizzy-minded Yank waved down. But the French in that neighborhood had long since learned to expect anything, and everything, of Field 8's personnel. One more little stunt such as this was only part of the day's surprises for them. As long as the Yanks remained high or even low in the air, the French were very well satisfied.

Flying Fish, after his course had taken him well away from the home field, banked steeply right and left—just to see how well his brother and the sergeant could hold on. When the enlisted man's side was low, the pilot took care that it should not become too

steep a bank; but when his own brother was riding the lowest point, well Flying Fish did his best, or worst.

At times Mechanical Fish was hanging from the center-section struts with both legs dangling between the upper and lower wing panels. It is more than likely that these Fish boys, when much younger, had been in the habit of attaching tin cans to cats' tails, and so forth. At any rate, they never missed a chance, while at 8, to prove that they'd never grow up. Not if they could help it.

After some twenty minutes of this air work, Flying Fish came back to Field 8, and shot a good, fast landing. And rolled up to the dead-line.

V

FLYING FISH killed his motor, slid to the ground, and walked around front to meet the other two voyagers. They were stretching their cramped legs, and trying to get some of the castor oil out of their eyes. They appeared badly wind-blown, or worse.

"We seem to be alone," Flying Fish remarked.

"Eh?" his brother questioned. For the first time he recalled that they had had an audience upon taking off. "Yeh, our public seems to have walked out on us. What do you suppose caused that?"

"Anyway," Sergeant Hallback put in, "the enlisted man's friend is with us: here comes Lieutenant Barso. And the sweet little lieutenant is full of business, I'd say. Call out the guard!"

Tony Barso, very much loaded with business, strutted toward them. "The major," Tony said, "would like to see you officers in his office, right away." Then, still charged with business, Tony wheeled and was gone.

For a minute the three watched Tony as he took his way back toward headquarters. And the three—none of them was tongue-tied—said short, snappy things about that same Tony boy. Aw, what they said was awful! And each, to himself, made a promise; and the war, if these were to have their way, was going to be hard on one little guy who looked like Napoleon and smelled like a goat.

Mechanical Fish was the first to talk. "Looks as though we're in bad again. Standing on the C.O.'s mat isn't what I'm best at. For a fact, I'm no good at that sport at all. No, sir!"

"Well," Flying Fish emphasized, "you're engineering man on this field, and you're also in charge of test, so what you do should be all right. This was very necessary work, Ed."

"Will you stand up on both hind legs and tell the major that?" Mechanical Fish asked. "Eh will you?"

"Now look here, Ed," Flying Fish backed down, "isn't that your job? You know, I've been on the C.O.'s carpet before. Fact is, I've been on so many commanding officers' carpets that they all call me Broom. . . . Sure, it's up to you to talk. Let's go and get the thing over with. This way, gents."

"Now let's see," Mechanical Fish mused. He turned to Sergeant Hallback. "Did Lieutenant Barso say that the major wanted to see *you men* or *you officers?* Which was it, sergeant?"

"He said, you officers," the sergeant answered.

"Well," Mechanical Fish told the non-com, "that lets you out. . . . Go back to your work, sergeant. . . . Come on, Fred, till we see what's going to happen to you. I told you that you shouldn't have induced the sergeant and me to go up."

The puzzled devilfishes went down the line to Field 8's headquarters. Arriving there, perhaps just to let the thing sink in, Major Medcraft made them cool their heels in his outer office for half an hour. During that time, Tony Barso came and went half a dozen times. He seemed to be carrying the worries of the whole A.E.F. on his slight shoulders. It was a big busy day for the small guy. Once, as Tony passed, Mechanical Fish reached out and stopped Flying Fish just the second before that big guy could hang a size 11 shoe on Tony's pants.

"None of that!" Mechanical Fish warned. "As it is, maybe you'll get life for this. M'gosh, man, it's a serious thing—making two boys go into the air against their wills. I only hope that I can do something for you. Just for the folks at home, Fred. I'd hate to have them know what you've been pulling here at 8."

Then the major called them into the

office, *to get the office.* "Close that door behind you, men," the major told them. Mechanical Fish did that and the three were alone.

"NOW," asked Major Medcraft, "about this flight—whose idea was it?"

"Mine," two Fishes said in the same breath.

"Hold everything!" the C.O. snapped. "No two men could have the same big thought at the same time. Now one is to blame, and the other merely played second fiddle. Who thought of it?"

"Sir, I did," both brothers answered.

"We're getting nowhere fast," Major Medcraft smiled.

"Now look here, men," Major Medcraft said in a low voice. "You boys know that this stunt can't go unquestioned. First question: how did the ship fly with three?"

"Fine, sir," Flying Fish answered. "Very jake, sir."

"Will it cruise with any reserve power when so loaded?" the C.O. wanted to know. "Or is that weight the weight that's likely to break the old camel's back?"

"It was cruising at 1250 revs, sir," Flying Fish stated, "and that gives it plenty of reserve."

"Great little ship!" Major Medcraft enthused. "Fine little job. . . . But again, men: you know that I, as commanding officer of this field, cannot sanction any such outlawry. And I do not palliate the seriousness of such high-handed action on your part. But, I say *but,* but it is darned good fun and if I'd have thought of this stunt first you two men wouldn't be here to answer for it now. That's all, men. Get back to your work. And in the future, use a little discretion. Be sure Lieutenant Barso isn't looking. The lieutenant, you know, is on my tail all the time. He's going to prove that Sherman was right."

Field 8's job was to turn out pursuit pilots, and it did, too. If a man reached 8, he was good. Good all over! If he wasn't good the other fields, before 8, weeded him out. But if the weeded out ones were still keen for flying, yet not keen enough for pursuit, then they might be sent to observation or bombing. Bigger and slower ships, you know. Ships that called for the same old bravery, but could dispense with some of the daredeviltry and personal pep. But to be at Field 8, with a pursuit career on the front just ahead of you, was the class of Air Service.

As a rule, a Field 8 student was inclined to be cocky. And when he met the two-seater gang from the other Issoudun fields, in town, he was likely to spread his stuff. But an order came to 8 one day from Tours that was bound to knock the wind out of many brave Yank sails. And that order sent up such a wail that Major Medcraft had to take a hand.

This nasty order from Air Service's headquarters had ricochetted and hit a gang of good and willing pursuit men at Field 8. Among those hit was the Mechanical Fish himself. And all men picked to fulfill the demand of that order ganged at Field 8's headquarters to yell and demand a reason for this disgrace. The order from Tours called for ten pilots to leave 8 that same evening. The ten men were to be transferred to observation, sent right up to Orly and onto the front.

AMONG the ten out-of-luck belligerents to storm that headquarters and ask why they were being taken from pursuit were, besides Mechanical Fish, such men as "Bo-Peep" Shaw, "Swan" Davis, "Three-Ball" Linsky, and half a dozen other boys that were later to ride wings of victory, glory, and—death.

"There's no justice to a deal like this," Bo-Peep Shaw told the gang. "I'm a *chasse* guy and I'm going to fly *chasse.*"

"Me—I'd sooner fly the garbage detail, on a five-ton truck," Three-Ball Linsky said, "than go to observation. This is the rawest deal at the end of more than a year of very raw deals."

"Aw, keep your shirts tucked in," Mechanical Fish advised. "You men wanted to go to war. Well here's the war, and now you're crabbing. If we're brave, here's the chance to show what we've got. Take it from me, it's the bravest of the brave that ride in two-seaters.

"Two-seaters—meat for every Hun in the sky. Two-seaters—bait for the high-flying pursuit sportsmen. Hired, fed and fired, all before you even leave the ground! Come on, let's cut the gab and stand in line

for our traveling orders." Brave talk, this. Brave talk from a guy called yellow.

At that point in the inside war, Major Medcraft came from his inner office. "What's all this Bolsheviki noise?" he asked. "Where do you men get the idea that this is a hand-made, hand-picked war? Do you think the gang in the trenches have a choice of who'll go over the top? Do you suppose gun crews fight in the mud only when there's no inter-outfit fighting in town?

"Now you men snap out of it! Nobody's discriminating against you. Headquarters asked for ten men. You ten were all set to shove ahead. It's your turn. That you can't fly *chasse* is unfortunate, and I sympathize with every last man among you.

"Now, observation isn't class, it's work. But you can make it class. That's up to each man. If you were going out to fly pursuit, you'd be going out to cover other observation men. Well, your own kind will cover you. You'll never be alone up there. Not that you're afraid. I know you're not. And I can understand your objection. A pursuit man is a pursuit man, and . . . What is it, lieutenant? Do you want to see me?" Flying Fish stood on the threshold.

"Yes, sir," the big pilot answered. "If you're not too busy, sir."

"What will it be, lieutenant?" Major Medcraft asked.

"Well, sir, if it could be arranged, I'd like to request a place on this outgoing list. . . . Maybe some one of these men would give me his place."

"Request washed out, lieutenant," the major answered. "As I was just telling these men, this war isn't a personally conducted pleasure tour, lieutenant. It's a matter of roster and ration, always. . . . And you of all men, lieutenant!"—and the C.O. paced the floor and smiled. "Why if you ever got a two-place ship on the front, you'd be carrying whole squads of enlisted men on over-the-lines jazz parties."

Flying Fish followed the major to a far corner of the office. When they were alone, somewhat, he said, lowly: "It's because of my kid brother, sir. I'd like to be along with him. You see, sir, I promised the mater that I'd take care of him."

Major Medcraft smiled. "Gosh, lieutenant," he said, "you sure do have a funny idea of watching over the brother. . . . Want me to take his name off the outgoing list?"

"No, sir!" Flying Fish bit off. "No, sir. We Fishes stand in line and move according to roster. And when it's our turn to go, we go. And when it comes our turn to die, we'll die. No man will ever go up front in place of a Fish. . . . You'll notice, sir, that my brother hasn't been crabbing."

"I know it, lieutenant," the C.O. said. He put an arm across the great width of flying shoulders. "But you see, I can't take any man out of this list. If I did half a dozen others would object. A few of these men, lieutenant, are afraid. The others don't want observation. As it is, it must stand; and they all go. You, however, stay. We need you here at Field 8."

"Thanks," Flying Fish said; "but I'm going to miss the kid. We've always managed to stick together, sir."

VI

WITH the Mechanical Fish gone out of his life, Flying Fish just didn't seem to care for anything. He had never placed any great value on his life, and now he seemed bound to throw it away entirely. He was in the air all the time. Flying of course took his thoughts off other matters. He even went over to other fields, far removed from 8, and broke their flying rules too.

"Maybe if I can get in bad," he told his closest friends, "they'll send me up to the front just to be rid of me. You know what Black Jack said when that Alabama outfit got full of grog and took an English town apart. He said: "If these men want to fight so bad, we'll give them a chance. Send them right into the worst trench on the front."

"That," Flying Fish told his friends, "is what they might do with me."

But instead of doing that to him Major Medcraft seemed to get an added thrill out of everything the big tester pulled. And, during those days, Flying Fish was of little use as a test pilot. He'd never fly a ship level, long enough, to know how it flew. If it was wing-low, tail-heavy or nose-heavy, you could not prove it by Fish. He just about flew the wings off every crate he handled, and that was all.

Sergeant Hallback put it nicely: "The

Flying Fish," he told his test-hangar crew, "ain't got sense enough to pour liquid out of a boot with the directions written on the heel. That guy's awful. Gosh, I wouldn't go off the ground with him, not for a farm."

"All depends," the right-hand greaseball added, "where the farm is. But I like the big stiff; he never cracks tail-skids."

Just to be ornery, on two or three occasions Flying Fish brought wing passengers all the way back from Main Field, a matter of some seven or eight kilometers. The whole aviation center talked about such doings but the C.O. never gave any outward attention to the thing. Maybe he knew, and perhaps he didn't care. And it is likely that he knew just what the big fellow was trying to work out; getting himself out of that center. The Old Man's utter neglect bothered Flying Fish more than a little, too.

Likes attract likes, however, and the Flying Fish and his C.O. were being drawn closer and closer together. The commanding officer, when he found time to fly, always picked upon the tester as a combat adversary. And how those two great pilots would go round and round. Close work? —so close that, from the ground, you'd expect collision every minute. Each, in a short time, knew everything about the other's flying. A mighty friendship was growing there. But, day after day, Fish would ask the C.O. for traveling orders.

"Now you keep your shirt on, lieutenant," Major Medcraft would say. "This war has a long way to go, and we'll all have enough of that front. Fish, you know I've been up there. I know what it is. I'm not trying to crowd the issue, for my part. I thank the Lord all the time for letting me stay here in the S.O.S. for the time being. Making pilots, lieutenant, is more important than being up there piloting for glory."

"Glory, sir?" Flying Fish would question. "That's not my idea. Glory means nothing to me. It's the kid, sir. I never hear from him. Hardly ever, at any rate."

"Well," Major Medcraft would always remind the big fellow, "your brother's name hasn't been in Orders yet, so he's still in the game. That boy can take care of his neck. What help could you be? How would you chaperon him, lieutenant?"

"Oh, I don't know," Flying Fish would be forced to admit, "but I should be there. I'd feel better. At times, you know, a fellow gets strange chances to do strange things, sir. The kid and I have been through thick and thin together. It hasn't been an easy life for us. We know hard going. We know the upgrade. Wish I was there."

"MARK time, soldier," Major Medcraft would say. "Mark time, boy. Today is one day, and tomorrow is likely to be something else again. We can't force headquarters. When they want you, they'll call. And when they want you, they'll want you bad. Maybe."

"Here's hoping that it's soon," Flying Fish would say. "I'll go nuts if I don't get action pretty soon."

"How about taking a few days off, lieutenant, and going into town?"

"That won't do at all, sir. It doesn't make any difference where my hide is, my heart's up front."

"Well, she's sure tough," the C.O. was quick to agree. "But I've seen men like you before, and you'll work out your own salvation. However, lieutenant, go slow with your wild stuff. A dead brother will be of no use to your brother, you know. I've been watching you of late. Oh, don't think that I miss this nut stuff. But you're your own man, and you have to use your own head. Go slow."

"But I've got to have something to give a boost, sir. Nevertheless, I want to go on living. What's more, I appreciate your friendship. I'll give less trouble. But get me out of here, get me out! Kick me out of the center. Make them send me up to the front. Tell Tours that I'm no good here, for I'm not, sir."

A few weeks of loneliness had gone by for Flying Fish. And you'd wonder how even a brother could be lonesome in such a place, at such a time. Plenty of flying. More Nieuport-28's now. Reports from the American front about which to talk. Action up there. This boy going up to acedom; and that lad going down in glory. Big major operations. Men and more men needed. And still one big, game Yank remained down in the dumps and blue.

All that action on the front, though, was bound to bring great changes; and great changes usually affected every cog in the

wheel of war. One day, another order came into Major Medcraft's office. The major gave a cheer that could be heard all over the post. Then he sent for Flying Fish. And he sent for others, too.

FLYING FISH was in the air when Major Medcraft's orderly came to the test hangar and asked Hallback for the whereabouts of the big pilot.

"See that?" Hallback questioned. At the same time he pointed at a ship just above the trees to the east. Just above those trees, a plane—Nieuport-27—was barrel rolling "out of line of flight." "There's your man," the sergeant said. "Where did you think you'd find him—over in the Y swapping boarding-school scandal with the sweet secretary?"

When Flying Fish had landed the headquarters orderly told him—"Major Medcraft wants you to report to him, sir. Right away."

"Me?" Fish questioned. He appeared troubled. "What have I done now?" he wondered. "Long time since I stood on that carpet."

A few minutes later Flying Fish booted his way into the C.O.'s inner sanctum, and reported in very-military form. The C.O. was alone. He acknowledged the subordinate's courtesy, but betrayed no signs of his recent joy and cheering. You'd wonder if the major'd had a change of heart and no longer cared to tell Fish the recently received order that had seemed so good.

"Lieutenant Fish," Major Medcraft asked, without looking up from his work, "can you stand a great jolt?"

SOMETHING within Flying Fish turned cold. This was it at last. The thing that any fellow with a kid brother on the front must expect. News that came back only when it was bad news. Flying Fish, as big and husky as he was, tried hard to swallow something that came into his throat. He weaved on his pins, turned livid, and said, "I can take anything, sir. Take it standing, sir." And for another few seconds he tried to fight away that tight feeling that comes around a man's ears, the feeling that comes when a man wishes that he were a woman so's he could bust right out crying. "Did they get the kid, sir?" he finally asked.

"Get the kid! Major Medcraft exclaimed. "Why, no. I merely called you here to say we're going up to the front. You and I and a few others. I knew that it would be a shock to you."

"When?" was all Flying Fish could say. "Soon, sir?"

"We'll be on our way tonight. I'm to take over the Hun Hunter squadron in the Toul Sector. It's pursuit, flying '28's.' Last night, in town, I met Captain Ted Poor—do you know him?—and he is just back from that area. He says the Hun Hunter flys high-protection for the 10th Observation, your brother's outfit, quite a good bit. That's what you've prayed for, boy, eh?"

"And the kid, and his gang," Flying Fish asked, "did the captain know anything about them?"

"Yeh, Poor knows them all. Your brother's going big. He even got a Hun kill with his observation job. They're flying the big Breguets. Ever see one of them? Big crates, and good too. A six-foot man, standing on the ground, can just peek into the rear pit. And a short sport standing in that aft gun pit can just look over the side. They've got an extra incidence pulled into the lower wings through the use of rubber cords. You never saw such an arrangement. The fuselage is all metal pipes, and the tail surfaces, alone, are almost as big as one of these '28's'. Tell you what, they're ships.

"Captain Poor also says that the Bo-Peep Shaw and Three-Ball Linsky, the Irish boy, are going strong. But Swan Davis and two others of our ten have made their rendezvous with death. You're going to have a great reunion up there, lieutenant.

"But the big kill is on. That's why they're sending so deep into the S.O.S. to dig us up. This is a hurry-up call, and I'm to bring along what men I consider fit. All the students with a combat *lâche* to their credit at quitting time tonight will go north with us. Moreover, and this is big news, Second Lieutenant Tony Barso rides along also."

"Barso?" Flying Fish asked. "Barso going to the front! But why, sir? Why take Barso! What for?"

"For comedy relief, lieutenant," the major laughed. "Fish, do you realize that

I am one of the few majors in the A.E.F. who can boast a second-lieutenant dog robber? Why, I wouldn't be without Lieutenant Barso. He keeps me to my duty. He'll win the war yet.

"Now go out and wind up your work. Turn in your stuff at supply. Kiss the Y man good-by, and get set to shove off. I'm all hopped up myself and a-rarin' to go, to get back on the front. And I don't know why. I should know better, lieutenant."

VII

AN hour later, full of new life and singing, Flying Fish popped into the Y hut to return a few books. The only enlisted man in the place was a squadron goldbrick named Feranti. Private Feranti was busy with the construction of a letter. Yes, sir, the private was corresponding—so help me Hanna!

At the exact minute of Flying Fish's advent, Private Feranti was stuck. He was sitting there chewing the end of his pen. Plain to see, the man of letters was either in want of a word or a thought. Maybe both. When the big pilot came in, the private got a thought, and spoke up:

"Hey, lieutenant," he asked, "how do you spell poiculatin'?"

"Poi-culatin'?" Flying Fish repeated. "Oh—you mean *percolating,* private. Is that it?"

"Yeh," Private Feranti agreed, "that's the woid, that's it—*poi-culatin'*. How is it spelled?"

"Percolating?" Fish again repeated. "Just how do you want to use that word?"

"Well, it's this way, lieutenant," Private Feranti went on to explain. "There used to be a greaseball here on the field name Hasty, and he wasn't, that is—hasty. The kid—he was a buddy of mine—was slow and easy-going. Well he jumped the outfit and reported-in on the front just to get away from this little second-looey wop, Barso. I'm a wop myself, lieutenant; but I'm a good wop. Anyway, I'm dropping young Hasty a line. He's up there with the Hun Hunter squadron. I want to tell Hasty that there's a new rumor poiculatin' through camp this morning that Barso is going up front with the Old Man. Maybe the kid will meet Barso, see?"

For the rest of that busy day, after getting the very important news, Second Lieutenant Tony Barso, the man who maybe looked like Nap and acted like a nut, pushed around Field 8 with more dog than ever before. And the Little Corpuscle—as the medical officer called him—sure spread his stuff. By noon the whole personnel knew that they were to be rid of the small guy, and General Joy was in command. The other outgoing men got little attention.

Tony had his foot-locker packed and blanket-roll tied up and ready by noon. During noon mess somebody stole both.

Just after that discovery, Tony went to Aerial Supply to turn in his equipment and get clearance. The supply clerk found the name of Tony Barso serving hostage for no fewer than ten fur-lined flying suits—sold in town; seven fine wool sweaters—sold in town; sixteen pair of rubber boots—sold to the French in town; twenty pairs of goggles and six helmets—missing; and a few other articles.

Maybe Tony would be able to argue out of that bill, but it would take a long time. Strange part of it was, Tony had no use for flying gear and he never went to town. He didn't dare.

During the afternoon more things happened to the little guy than you could imagine. Remember, too, that a fieldful of troops can imagine more deviltry than the average person could ever imagine. Imagination was their strong suite. But, anyhow, when the evening meal came, and officers' mess was gay with the spirits of those who were departing, and loud with the good wishes of those doomed to remain, one of the K.P.'s came in and placed a special Italian salad before Tony—and the the salad was over-charged with sweetened, seasoned castor oil. Lots of it too.

The tabloid officer was glad when the Issoudun-bound truck swung out of transportation hangar and came down to officers' quarters for the outgoing group. Besides Major Medcraft, Flying Fish and Barso, there were five fresh and cocky, newly commissioned airnuts. These five, like Flying Fish, were of the breed that moves on to the next objective with a hoot and a holla. Tony still had a few personal belongings done up in small rolls. The five wild ones, after they'd loaded their own rolls, undertook to help Tony—not that they were wanted, however—and on and

off the truck, they tossed and booted his impediments. To save the day, Major Medcraft finally came out of headquarters, climbed up front with the driver, and said, "Let's roll."

Along the road into Issoudun, from Field 8, somebody—the goldbrick Feranti, no doubt—had placarded trees, posts and sidewalls. Such signs as the following met the troubled gaze of the little one:

> By-by Pint-Size! Ta-Ta Tony! Barso the Bum! Gone But Not Forgotten—You Rock Scorpion!

The major tried not to see all this scenery. But Flying Fish and the five cuckoo ex-cadets made sure that Tony missed no part of this well-planned farewell. They cheered at each new sign. Barso knew that he was in bad company so he said nothing.

"I'D say," one of the wild five ventured, "that the drinks are on Tony. And I'll bet he sets them up when we get into Paris."

"I'll fade that bet," Flying Fish gambled. "Tony wouldn't bet on a low tide with the water running out. Would you Tony? You won't set 'em up in Paris, will you?"

"Paris!" Tony Barso snapped. "I'm only thinking of getting into Issoudun!" That's the way with a castor-oil salad—it puts one's mind only as far ahead as the very next stop.

After getting into Issoudun, the railroad point for all the fields in that neck of the woods, the group had half an hour to kill before train time. Major Medcraft told the other seven to go places but be at the station on time. Tony, half lost in town, trailed after Flying Fish and the wild five. They went down to Mother's Place. Twice while in Mother's Place, Barso was reached out for and yanked from the bar into dark rooms where he was royally pasted. You know, there were always a certain number of guardline-jumpers drinking in town.

Each time the little one was "taken" Flying Fish managed to retake him—but not too soon, and not before a goodly bit of damage had been done. During one of the mêlées, one of the crazy five managed to reach into Barso's inner pocket and steal his traveling orders. Also, he took other credentials. Then, in some way, Barso found himself out on the half-deserted street.

A nasty M.P. happened along—not that there was any other kind of M.P. Tony turned to this bird for protection. The nasty one turned to the little one and said, "You're full of booze, eh?"

"I've just had one drink," Tony answered.

"And your uniform's all messed up. Ya've been fighting, eh? I'm going to take you down to headquarters. Come along."

At M.P. headquarters Tony Barso couldn't prove that he had any right in town. When he reached into his pocket for the travel orders, they were not there. The M.P.'s, having heard the cry before, didn't believe that Tony'd been robbed. They tossed the little guy into durance vile, put him on the inside looking out, as it were. And Tony yelled that this was all wrong because he was a front-line fighter—a warrior. And all that. You bet!

Ten minutes before train time, getting wind of the fact that his high-class striker was in the coop, Major Medcraft went down to M.P. headquarters and talked them into turning the small portion loose. Tony was a chastened character; and he chased right along after the major back to the railroad.

Then they took their train, north through Orleans and sleeping Etampes to Paris. First thing in the morning, before Tony could fall into any more M.P. hands, the group took another train east out of Paris for Orly. Orly and ships and the hop to the front.

Two days later, when Major Medcraft led his six other Nieuport-28's east out of Orly, he took them up, out and over as a ready-for-fight unit. Second Lieutenant Tony Barso, in charge of a truck load of luggage, had gone forward the night before.

Not one of Medcraft's followers had ever seen anything of war; but it would have been hard to find half a dozen pilots more anxious to learn. And as usual, they went out, every man of them, with a holla. Orly thought that a cavalry charge was about to be staged. Major Medcraft, of course, had no intention of leading this green mob into combat; but he was not the man to take seven ships through 200 kilo-

meters of near-hostile sky without being fully prepared and all set for surprise. Orly, at first couldn't see why he needed loaded guns. But he held up the take-off for more than half a day till every last Vickers was ready to do its stuff. Then he waved Orly good-by. The flight of seven had taken off together, zoomed on the get-away, and came down over Orly to jazz the whole works once before turning east. Then seven small spots droned off into the sky.

With that flight following the Marne onward to Toul, Major Medcraft was back in his element. Medcraft, the man with more than thirty enemy ships to his credit; and maybe half as many more that weren't.

Major Medcraft had known aerial warfare when his only defense and offense was in the ordinary infantry piece carried by his observer. How rapidly air warfare had developed! Major Medcraft marveled at it now as he went eagerly forward in charge of that flight of fourteen machine guns. A battery that could be moved at the rate of 130 miles per hour. Yes, this was advancement. Progress. An awful harbinger to the future of mankind. This war to end war must succeed or mankind would end man.

VIII

THE day was clear. Not a cloud flecked the high blue sky. Major Medcraft took his men to altitude, better to conserve the efficiency of those 160 h.p., hot-running rotaries. At a high altitude, their chance of keeping cool was better. Once winning the desired ceiling, the flight switched onto their selectors—that magneto device which served to cut out a certain number of cylinders for a certain number of revolutions. Put-put-putting, like single-cylinder motorboats, they plied the high void, swept back in their wild-goose V, and went on and on.

Evening was purpling the world below before their new field had been reached. The first hour of flight had passed, and all seven motors were in A-1 condition. Medcraft smiled; he was bringing his flight through. And any flight of seven "28's" that could get through without some motor trouble, was a lucky flight. Maybe—the major thought—this is going to be a lucky outfit. And he added, to himself: "Let's hope so! You couldn't have too much flying luck on the front."

The flight's destination had been almost reached when Major Medcraft noticed a mess of small, milling spots off where he knew the front lines must be. The gas of his ships was good enough for a little detour, so he turned out of his course, bore off to the east and flew onward to where all that activity filled the evening sky. After five minutes of flight, the new Yanks awoke to the fact that they were enjoying grandstand seats at one of the greatest dog fights ever staged.

Medcraft felt an old sensation. Each of his six men knew a new thrill. The leader felt a mortal fear that these wild monkeys might break formation and bolt his leadership. Then, coming closer yet, the leader in him realized that maybe this was their fight, too. A fight for him anyway.

The silhouettes of those battling ships were all very familiar to Medcraft. Those silhouettes showed him that the Allied pilots were not only out-numbered, but being out-battled. Two Allied planes were going down in flames, at the same time, as he watched.

Major Medcraft looked across the short spaces to his tightly flying men, and those faces—oil-smeared Yank muggs—seemed to say: What's holding us? Let's go!

Major Medcraft gave them the wag, and the seven ships went down that long aerial slide—for they were far higher than the dog fight—that was going to lead to victory or death. Seven wailing 160's wailed a little louder. The major tried a burst from his guns. Tracers proved that they were O. K. Each of the others did the same thing. The unit was fit. And the unit was willing. And the seven-ship unit was in it with a bang, and just in the nick of time.

The nearest enemy ship to the oncoming wedge had just finished off a Nieuport-28, and that Allied craft—with its Yank or French pilot—was spinning into the purple gloom. Major Medcraft signaled that he would take on this Hun. That signal meant hardly anything to his followers, and twelve Vickers, over and above the major's brace, blazed away. They nearly got their own leader with cross-fire, but in short order that hog-wild crew burned that lone, badly surprised German out of the sky.

On the zoom, with his gang still following, and each man pretty well in his original place, Major Medcraft emptied a burst into the wheeling belly of a second enemy ship. This second ship cut for home. And in short order, that grim dog fight came to an end. Medcraft was glad to see such a quick scattering, for minutes more would surely have taken one or more of his greenhorns.

That was the most spectacular debut ever seen on the front. Six Yanks, and eleven French ships, had been in that mill. About an equal number of enemy craft had been on hand. Both sides had been hit hard, and to the fresh victors went the credit. On the last few pints of gasoline they now sideslipped into the new drome.

It was quite dark, and all hands were more than willing to call it a day. Major Medcraft was elated. What a way to break men in on the front! My gosh! they were all veterans before they'd fully arrived! It was enough to make a C. O. turn back flips. Thank the good Lord!

WHILE the new men were meeting the old, even before the ships had been trundled to shelter, a private picked Flying Fish as a pretty-friendly looking looey and came up to say: "Say, lieutenant, my name's Hasty. A buddy of mine back at Field 8 sent me a note saying that Lieutenant Barso would come in with you men, how about it—where is he?"

Flying Fish stared. "*I* should ask you that, private," he said. "Hasn't Lieutenant Barso arrived with our junk?"

"No. I wouldn't be here if he had," Private Hasty drawled. "That guy and me don't get along, and if he's going to be here at this post, I'm going to take me over the hill. I don't like that jaybird, lieutenant . . . What's your name, lieutenant?"

"Fish," the big pilot laughed. "Kind of a wet name, what?"

"Not so wet," the private decided. "There's another pilot named Fish with the 10th Ob squadron, over the other side of town. And he's a good guy, too. I've worked on his ship twice when he's shot forced landings here with motor bugs. But, after all, I guess you're the only Fish left after this afternoon."

Flying Fish leaned a little closer. "That other Fish is my young brother," he told Private Hasty. "What do you mean—after this afternoon? Something happen?"

"Yeh," the private told Flying Fish. "Our gang were covering some of those Breguets up north of Verdun, somewheres. The Jerries knocked down your brother and another ship. I don't mean they were knocked west, but they were sent down nearly out of control. The other ship crashed and burned. They say both men burned with it. Your brother's job made a safe landing across the Meuse from a jerk called Brabant. It's in between the river and the railroad, wheels up, on its back. That spot is under the guns from both sides of the lines. Hill 344 fired on the Breguet once, then stopped. Our gang think that maybe the Huns expect to salvage the ship if they can ever manage to get in there.

"Hill 304 could lay in on it too, but they haven't. Guess that's because the Frogs in Bourrus Woods are all set to slaughter anybody that tries to take the ship. Those Frogs in Bourrus sent word to our P.C. that they saw your brother and his observer get clear of the ship and take to the high grass. Maybe they'll get back to the lines, it's been done before." The private stopped talking, then asked again, "How about this Barso, is he going to swing much lead here?"

"Forget Barso," Flying Fish told the boy. "And don't go *over the hill*. How come you know so much about the lay of the land back toward Germany?"

"Why," the private admitted, "one day a couple of boys and me went A.W.O. Loose and got through the French lines as far as Fort Bois-Bourrus, up in the woods. The Frogs let us take a look at the lay up ahead. Tell you what, that's all forts up there."

"I'll see you again, private," Flying Fish promised, and went to find Major Medcraft.

Sure enough, Tony Barso and the truck were missing. A wire back to Orly brought no news except that the truck driver with Tony was a new man to the area. More wires and calls to nearby P.C.'s, M.P. stations, and Divisional Healquarters furnished nothing more. The truck and Tony had not been seen, at no time, no place.

"This," Major Medcraft declared, "is

one complete deep mystery. But it wouldn't be difficult to misplace Barso."

THERE was a lot of talk and excitement among the Yank air outfits in the Toul Sector that night. Having men knocked down was one thing, and bad enough, no kidding! But this thing of having the Mechanical Fish and his observer—Lieutenant Ned Britt—down in No Man's Land was another matter. After dinner that evening, forgetting Tony Barso with little effort, Major Medcraft drove Flying Fish over to the 10th Observation's drome. The gang was scheming and dreaming, and opinion as to the Mechanical Fish's possible action was divided.

"They'll come back through the grass tonight," someone said. "Fish and Britt are on their way now."

"Not a chance!" Three-Ball Linsky told the gang. "Fish always said he'd never quit a ship that he couldn't burn, and that he'd never burn a ship that could possibly fly again. Well, that crock of his is on its back, that's all, and the prop isn't even cracked. I jazzed down within two hundred feet of his position on my way back. I wanted to get a look at Bo-Peep's pile."

"Bo-Peep Shaw?" Flying Fish asked. "Was he in the burned ship?"

"Yeh," Three-Ball said. "When your brother started down with motor trouble, and two Jerries on his tail, Bo-Peep tried to cover him. But the two Jerries pulled up, zoomed, ganged Bo-Peep, and hung it on him. He was on fire in the air. His ship piled up about a kilometer north of your brother's."

"And you saw my brother?" Fish asked.

"He gave me a wave from a ditch, the ditch that had tripped his ship onto its back. Britt waved too. They waved both hands so I'd say they're all right. But they'll stick till long after the M.P. forces begin to pick decent guys to wear their armband, and that will be a long time. I know that mechanical-nut brother of yours better than you do, Fish, and he'll do his darnedest to get that Breguet back on its wheels. As long as the Huns didn't lay anything on it this afternoon, he knows that they want it. On the other hand, we know that no ground troops will try to get near the thing. That's been the most outlawed bit of No Man's Land for the past month.

"It's under more guns than you could shake a stick at. I was hit three times with machine-gun fire, within four kilometers, when I went down for a look-see. Boy, that's hot! If you were up there now, you'd think they were pulling a Fourth-of-July celebration, I'll bet. Chances are, the sky's full of flares tonight. It isn't every day that Jerry gets a chance to take a Breguet."

"And they're not going to take this one, either!" one of the gang barked. "The whole trouble is, neither Fish nor Britt smoke. As a result, they have no matches with them. If they had, there'd have been a burned Breguet long ago. I always said that non-smoking guys were a menace to democracy and humanity. Now, in my air service, every jaybird who goes aloft will have to carry matches, a can of gasoline, and a small bale of excelsior."

"But for why? might I ask," Three-Ball put in. "We don't carry the insurance on these ships. Ah, gee-vault! that we should worry what happens to them, otherwise."

"If they're not reported somewhere along the front by morning," Major Medcraft decided, "we'll all go out and take a look. Something might be done, who knows? Any suggestions?"

"Might ask the infantry to send a raiding party over in the dark," somebody suggested.

"And we might not!" a chorus objected. "This is our own problem, and we'll work it out in our own way. Just give us the first sign of morning, the first bit of visibility, and see what happens."

"That's he-talk!" Major Medcraft agreed. "Let's all go to our trundle beds and sleep on this thing. . . . But you, big boy," he said, turning to Flying Fish—"you won't sleep. Eh?"

"I'll be waiting for that sunrise, sir," was all the big pilot said.

IX

THERE was no sunrise next morning. That is to say, the Toul Sector had no sun. During the small hours of the morning, still sitting on the end of his bunk, and smoking cigs, end to end, Flying Fish had seen the white, clammy fog creep into the low places. He had watched it bank heav-

ier and heavier, climb higher into the roadside trees, and blank the world. When reveille came, the field was a dripping, cold whited sepulcher—the burial place of Flying Fish's night-long hopes. Down in the mouth, the big pilot went to breakfast.

"Don't," Major Medcraft advised him, while they were at mess, "take off in this fog, lieutenant. I know that you're ripe for anything. You'll have to sit tight, boy. Keep a stiff upper lip, now. This heavy stuff should burn off within a few hours. It nearly always does. Anyway, it's to your brother's advantage. In such heavy going, he can't be seen from either Hill 344 or anywhere else along that line. We'll get busy as soon as things lift."

Shortly after breakfast, Major Medcraft received word that a truck, supposed to be Tony's, had been reported at two points along the leading-in road on the night of his passing from sight. Not that the major was caring much about Barso's whereabouts, but the whole gang wanted their belongings. In other words, they missed the truck, not Tony.

The truck had stopped at midnight to requisition gas and oil at a Yank motor park near Bar-le-Duc. The guard on post near the garage where the gas and oil was put out remembered that the little dark looey on the seat with the driver had asked if they were on the right road into Toul. And the guard also remembered that the little dark guy acted like a pouter pigeon, and looked like something that had recently been sifted through a fine sieve.

"The truck was an Air Service Fiat ¾-ton," the guard also recalled, and reported. "The exhaust smelled funny, then, because it was an Air Service bus, I tumbled to what they were burning. I said, 'Castor oil, eh?' to the driver. And the little dark looey barks: 'Mind your own business, guard!' Now I ask you—what was eating that little guy?"

Another report had come in from an M.-P. cross roads control. The man on duty at 3 a.m. claimed that the Fiat had asked for directions. There was a heavy fog in that part of the sector—off the Toul road near Commercy—and the M.P. had tried to put the truck right. "But," he said, "you couldn't see a mitt held a yard from your face, so maybe those babies went wrong. Yeh, I can remember the bird who did the talking. He was a petit shavey, dark, except around the gills, where he was pea-green. Yeh, the Fiat was burning castor oil. . . . No, I didn't say anything about that. Why should I? I wouldn't want anybody to mention a piece of fat pork on a string if I was as sick as that little dark guy looked. Mention castor oil? Not a chance!—it would have made that guy toss his cakes."

"Well," Major Medcraft decided, after these two reports came in, "our boy was sure going some place. I wonder where."

BY eight o'clock that morning, the fog had cleared a bit, and rain was falling. Beyond the tops of the trees there was little in the line of visibility. Flying Fish paced a hangar floor, kicked stones, and watched the eastern sky. Now and then, very often, he studied his watch, cussed a bit, and kicked more stones.

Major Medcraft came out to pace with him. "Too heavy," he said. "We'll have to wait. But it's all fifty-fifty, and nothing's moving this morning. Nothing to be seen. Nothing to shoot on. She's all very quiet, eh?" During the night, the front had been quiet.

But for about twenty minutes, between 8:30 and nine o'clock, somewhere, the guns off toward Ft. Bois-Bourrus, Hill 304, Hill 344, and Douaumont, opened fire. Major Medcraft stopped to listen. "Light guns," he said. "Must be anti-aircraft guns. I wonder if anybody can be in the air. Maybe, there's just a chance, there's better visibility over toward the observation drome."

Ten minutes after that a Breguet came in through the treetops, slopped down to a splashing landing, and Three-Ball piled out of the front pit. He was full of pep: had something to tell.

"I was just over to take a look," he said. "Did you men hear all that noise? Well, that Breguet won't have to be burned now —Hill 344 blew it to hell and gone outa that field.

"I was just in time," Three-Ball carried on. "Your brother"—he was now talking to Flying Fish—"was just about set for a take-off. They had the ship off its back, and were trying to pull the motor through when 344 let go."

"Had the ship on his wheels?" Major

Medcraft questioned. "Why, lieutenant, two men couldn't turn a Breguet off its back."

"But there're four of them in there. I counted four. I couldn't recognize the other two, but they look like Yanks. When 344 opened up on them, they all cut and run for the ditch again. Then, when Archie opened up on me, and I turned back, the French in Bourrus Woods began to rake the valley north of the ditch with shrapnel, because a squad or two of Hun infantry was trying to cross the clearing and take our boys.

"Men, that was hot! You heard it, eh? You should have seen it. It was no time or place for a boy like me to sell out, so I came right in here. Well, I better push for home. . . . Are you people going to try anything, major?"

"We'll give you boys a call when we decide," Major Medcraft promised. "Something's got to be done, too. And soon. Is the sky any better back toward 344 and that clearing?"

"It's low, and raining a bit," Three-Ball said, "but I got through, and my gosh! I'm not so good, sir. As the whole cock-eyed world knows. And there's lots of Archie doing business back in there, sir. And east of the boys, about five kilometers, there's a Hun pursuit squadron on alert, too. They cover that balloon line back there. I got away before they could put a ship in the air, but you'll have to count them in on anything we try."

"All right, we will," Major Medcraft mused. "Maybe we'll send out invitations to them."

"Wish I had my sample case here," Three-Ball enthused. "Sir, I used to handle the finest line of printing you ever saw.

"But I've got to be going. See you later. Keep smiling, Fish's Brother."

X

"FOUR men to be gotten out." Major Medcraft said to Flying Fish after Three-Ball Linsky's Breguet had taken off; "and we'll never accomplish the job by staying on the ground and walking around in circles. If one pilot can get through, another can."

"I'd like to go up and take a look," Flying Fish told his C.O. "Maybe if we could get a peek at that terrain some idea of what can be done might be determined. We can't stall much longer, sir, or one of those ground parties will reach the kid and his mates. That means, our four will draw side-arms and shoot it out with the Germans. Which in turn means that our four will be done in. I know the kid. Know him better than anybody else. He'll never be taken. We've talked that over a lot, you know. We've even looked ahead to situations like this. All Yank airmen have, I suppose.

"Have I your permission, sir? May I go? Just a quick hop down over that clearing, and home. I'll promise not to pull anything fast. This, I realize, is no time for monkey business."

"No time for monkey business, is right," Major Medcraft was quick to agree. "We've done enough monkey ducking as it is.

"Come, Fish, let's get two ships on the line. I'll hop along with you. We'll see what's to be seen. I want a peek at that bit of clearing too. Maybe you and I have the same idea. I'm back at Field 8 again, and I guess you are too. They say the railroad goes through there, and that the river is close at hand. That means there must be a certain amount of level land in spots. I think I know just about where they are. Two years ago I was in this sector working on artillery spotting."

Within five minutes, two 160 h.p. *monosoupape* motors were barking on the line. Two Nieuport-28's throbbed to the power as though anxious to be off, and officers and mechanics willingly serviced the start. The Hun Hunter outfit knew *esprit de corps.*

Major Medcraft and Flying Fish filled their small pits and listened, during a brief warming spell, to the crack of those rotaries. Then they waved the mechanics an O.K., and the chocks were pulled. Through the mud, the keen small birds taxied till they'd reached the field's higher green take-off runway. Each pilot opened his throttle, gathered speed, pulled off the ground, *chandelled*—as though this were a lark—and came back over the watchers, half on their backs. Pretty work! Pretty, but always more or less suicidal with that type of ship—or any other craft, for that matter. But with that *chandelle* job off their hands, the two wild men cut for the front.

The clouds took them with a bang. Their motors yelled back from the gloom, grew fainter, and were gone.

Going ahead, they passed Yank outfit after Yank outfit, gun positions, laying-in groups, and then more olive-drab troops. Finally that ended and a more up-turned world lay below them. Here was the place that belonged to nobody—No Man's Land. Rightly named! The guy who called it that said the war's first large-sized mouthful. No kiddin'! Nobody would want it were they to get an aerial view of the thing. As the apt kid—old John Buck Private—put it: Fight for this country? Gosh, they should hand the whole darned works to the kaiser, then 'pologize.

THERE were times when these two pilots, in order that they might hang together, almost lapped wings. So heavy was the going, and so close to the ground, that they hedge-hopped high spots and tree-tops. Zoomed them at the last second, like darned good horsemen in a steeplechase, and carried on and on. On toward a stretch of country that was sure to meet them with lead, and a plenty of it too. Major Medcraft knew they'd meet Archie soon.

That anti-aircraft action came when they least expected it. Of a sudden, Flying Fish witnessed a strange sensation on his stick control. A quick glance to right and left showed him nothing. But looking aft, he discovered that half of his left elevator had been carried away. That was anti-aircraft.

The one time in ten thousand times, that anti-aircraft fire might score a hit. But it was a miss that was as good as a mile, in that it had not holed him or some more important part of his ship. Flying Fish smiled a crazy Yank smile and hoped for more, and maybe closer, things like that. Nothing so meaningless as a misplaced anti-aircraft slug could bother him now. He was on his way toward the kid brother, going up to get a look at a flying problem.

Major Medcraft, eyes always on the ground so close below, with humping along right up against Flying Fish's left wing's tip. Close, always close, almost lapping wings, those minutes and quick kilometers went by. More anti-aircraft shots reached out for them. Again and again, more often now as they went deeper, they were peppered by machine-gun fire from the ground. Activities over which they swept in their wild, almost blind flight, proved that an alerte had gone along the German front. This, for these two, was a day of days. A flight of flights. A thing close to their flying hearts.

Along over Melancourt, and east of The Dead Man Woods their course took its way. North of Bethincourt, across the flat low country, and north till they found the Meuse somewhere beyond Forges Bois. Then right down in the river bed and west again toward Brabant. Through a hail of hellish gun fire there, and on and on to the spot found by Three-Ball Linsky, and so well placed by that game flyer. Hedge-hopping out of the river bed, they now gave way toward the north and stared intently into the fog and clouds ahead. They found the pile that had been Bo-Peep's Breguet.

It was cold, just a charred mess of twisted pipes. A few kilometers more of endless dodging, and a second pile—this one still smoking—showed them what they wanted to see. They cut down the last few hundred yards. Right along the railroad. Took in the whole lay of the land, and passed above four men who waved from a ditch. At the same tight second, glancing back for a last view of the terrain, they found what they hadn't seen before, but might have expected—a flight of enemy craft.

Another few minutes of running fight, and they were behind the French guns on Bourrus Woods. Then they saw the enemy ships wheel lowly back into the Meuse basin, give up the chase, and turn for home.

The Yanks had satisfied themselves. Instead of winging directly for their own own drome, Major Medcraft led Flying Fish onward to the observation outfit's field. They shot in over the roadside trees, slipped to a fish-tailed landing, and taxied up to the line.

Now was the time to plan the rescue. And they all planned. The Breguet gang were anxious to co-operate—ripe for anything.

PERHAPS there was nothing in war quite as thrilling as the planning, and the execution, of an air raid of almost any description. Red-blooded man rises to this. It's the time and place wherein he puts

everything on the ball. And such a raid, as this was to be, surpassed all other pieces of heroic action. This was a thing beyond ordinary duty. A chunk of life that a flyer need not cut off unless he so wished. And they all wished, quickly and out loud.

"We have that enemy pursuit outfit to contend with," Major Medcraft reminded them, not that the observation men need be told this. They'd suffered heavily at the hands of those quick and willing enemies. For weeks, objectives in that sector had remained almost unchanged. Pounding, pounding, pounding, the contending army corps of both sides had fought to hold.

But big pushes and stellar offensives had been out of the question. Because of this, these men had come to know their terrain, and know it all too well. "And those men on the alerte, will be just that—on the alert for us. As things stand, the four men—and Lieutenant Linsky is right about the number—are quite safe. The ditch is deep enough to protect them from air attack. Were it not, they'd be done in long before this.

"Now here's my plan: You Breguet men could never put a ship down in that piece of river bottom. The ground is soaked, soft, and deep in weeds. But Lieutenant Fish and I can put our Nieuport-28's down on the railroad right of way. The railroad ties, for a few hundred yards, handy to the four men, do not stand above the ground. We can take off from there too. I got a good view of it."

"But, major," an observation outfit captain asked, "have you forgotten that a Nieuport-28 is a one-place ship?"

"Ah, captain," Major Medcraft laughed, "you haven't been paying attention." All the others in the group leaned a bit closer. "We Field 8 boys know how to make a three-place ship out of any plane upon which there is room for the brave to hang."

"Well, Major Medcraft," the captain laughed, "you'll have to show me. But, and I'm open to conviction, I won't be surprised if you do surprise me. Anything can happen in this service, sir."

"Anything," the major agreed. "But to get back to my plan. Now I would suggest that we use nothing but good football tactics. We'll use every pursuit and observation plane in these two squadrons. The more ships, the better will be our chance.

"Lieutenant Fish and I will presently hop back to our field. We'll see how many Nieuports are in commission. There'll be more than ten, I'm sure. How many Breguets have you men?"

"Six ready to hop," the operations officer answered.

"Then look," Major Medcraft continued. "What say if we send those six up along the Meuse with our Nieuports just overhead in the usual V? Lieutenant Fish and I will fly the rear positions in that V. When the flight gets over the clearing, Lieutenant Fish and I will drop down to the railroad. The flight goes right ahead and takes on the German alerte group. We two can then pick our four Yanks off the ground. If the enemy pilots tumble to what's happening it will be up to our Nieuport men to double back and give us a chance for a get-away. How does it sound?"

"As good as done," they all agreed.

"Then we'll be on our way home," the major said. "You boys make ready and in no time at all our Nieuports will be under way. It's going to be lots of fun. Wait till you see this three-man stunt we're going to pull off. The lieutenant here has done it before, broke all of Field 8's rules by doing it too."

XI

ADDED to the six men Major Medcraft had led up from Orly the day before, were to be five more Nieuports belonging to the old hands. Twelve pursuit jobs in all, not a bad fighting unit in itself, you'll agree. These, bunched with and covering the six observation Breguets, would make a formidable flight, sweeping north along the battle-torn Meuse waterway. It would be a business-like unit worthy of the German alerte bound to sound out.

Quickly now, the dozen Nieuports were serviced, guns taken care of, and everything made ready. Noon was close at hand. A lazy, light rain was falling. The sky was as slow as ever; and close formation work was to be very hard. Major Medcraft knew what that meant. New men, even in a good sky, are none too sure in close, tight, fast formation. But on such

a day as this, well it was just next door to suicide. But this had to be done. No time now to talk and warn and suggest. Each man must be told what to do; and it was up to each game Yank to do as told. Medcraft had few misgivings. These boys had proven their worth last evening. The man-color of each was all that it should be. The C.O. was set, keen for the start.

"You'll follow Lieutenant Price," he told his men. "If either Lieutenant Fish or I should come a cropper, the nearest man among you will replace the one of us that fails. We're going to do our best—the lieutenant and I—to carry this ball; but it will be up to you boys to furnish all the interference. On your toes!"

"Signals!" they called. "At 'em, major!"

Twelve men took to their ships. On-the-job mechanics passed the shoulder straps of the four-way French safety harnesses across twelve backs. And twelve *monosoupape* rotaries took the throw, yelled loud on the start, throttled while chocks were being yanked, then strung out in a long single file and followed Lieutenant Price on the take-off.

Onward to the observation field, the fast twelve swept, noising-up the sky, and cutting down the short few kilometers in a matter of minutes. Arriving, they circled and waited for the Breguet pilots to take the air. One by one, the big ships lumbered off the ground, made their slower climb, and fell into a second formation at 200 feet. Eastward the winged armada took its thundering way. The eighteen planes tossed, rolled and swelled with the bad, near-the-ground air conditions, and plugged ahead. Each pilot was hard on the job. Each held his place. Order and discipline handled all eighteen sets of controls. Set faces of set men frowned to a set direction, and the comparative safety of their own territory soon passed.

FAR ahead, under the canopy of black sky, they could now see the German alerte planes getting into the air. One by one, those ships were coming up, falling into fighting formation, and growing larger. The Yank fifteen were nearing the ditch. Four men were still in that ditch. They waved in a frantic effort to attract the attention of these Yank pilots. The Yanks dipped and waved back.

As the flight swept past, Major Medcraft and Flying Fish slipped off the high points of the V. Side-slipping, fish-tailing, trying to kill their forward speed, the two men shot down and ahead to the railroad. The men on the ground, quickly guessing that this was being done for them, quitted the ditch, scrambled to the higher roadbed, and were set to grab the wings of these landing ships.

Machine guns across the Meuse raked the railroad. Guns high on Hill 344, to the east, showered their H-E shells all over the flat lowland. Ground troops were beginning to ford the river.

A few kilometers ahead, the flight of thirteen were by then engaging the German alerte men; and the sky was awhirl with milling, lead-vomiting craft. Already, two ships were afire.

Major Medcraft's wheels hit the ties. He bounced—shot his power to the ship again—settled. Mechanical Fish and another man grabbed his wings. Fifty yards to the rear, Flying Fish plopped flat in a three-point set-down. His tail skid kicked dirt, the other two men lay into the wings, and the Nieuport came to a stop. Both pilots had throttled low. The four men, two to each ship, crowded alongside to talk with the pilots. And Flying Fish found himself looking into the face of Second Lieutenant Tony Barso. The second man was Tony's truck driver. The three-way surprise was great.

"Climb aboard the lower wings," Flying Fish yelled. "One man to each lower. That's it. Right in close to the fuselage. Hold tight to the center-section struts. . . . How'd you get here, Barso?"

"We got lost!" Tony yelled back. He was now aboard Flying Fish's left lower. "Got lost that night, took the wrong road, then, looking around in the morning, we found your brother and Britt."

"All set?" Flying Fish now yelled. "Hold tight, and say the best lot of quick prayers you can think of. Let's go!"

Ahead of them, pointed for that skyful of wild action, Major Medcraft was getting under way. Flying Fish could see his mechanical brother sitting on the major's left lower, sitting as though on a sofa at home, face to the rear, and waving. Britt sat a like mount; seemed to be talking to the major on the take-off.

Tony and the truck driver were flat on their tummies, and Flying Fish, in spite of the hellish job of getting under way, found himself laughing: these two men were holding on with all that the good Lord had ever given them. If they were praying at all, it was for more hands—to be delivered right here and now. You bet!

Through a hundred yards of bumping and hopping, through what seemed like an age, the two ships had moved before lifting from the railroad. Throughout that hundred yards, machine gun fire had raked them from beyond the river. Infantry men could be seen running with them, and 344 was getting nearer and nearer to the proper range. The ships, both of them, had been hit time and again. Major Medcraft's windshield had been shattered before he could get his tail up, and that's close! Another slug had bounced off his right Vickers, and ricocheted through the upper left above the Mechanical Fish's head. "Set 'em up in the other alley!" that bird had yelled above all the racket. "Major, them's close, eh, what?"

"Them's too close," Medcraft had found time to agree, "so let's hump!"

In taking off the two heavily loaded Nieuports were forced to fly straight ahead and nearly into the melee out front. By then there were only a few of Major Medcraft's Nieuports still in the air. Three German pursuit planes had gone down too. Two of the vanquished crafts were burning on the ground as the major and Flying Fish swept forward. Later, they were to know that one of the first to get it was Lieutenant Price. Two of the latter's followers, however, had been forced down through motor trouble, not enemy gun fire. Just as the two rescue ships came up off the railroad, they saw a Breguet spin into the ground, and Britt, on Medcraft's right lower, yelled: "Ship No. 7—Three-Ball's boat!"

XII

FOUR Nieuport-28's and three Breguets were still in the fight when Major Medcraft and Flying Fish had raised enough slow-coming altitude to start their turn and get a chance to make some sort of count. The Nieuports had covered the Breguets well, or else those three big ships would long since have been numbered among the "lost in action." Medcraft, Flying Fish, and their four passengers, got a thrill that they were never to forget as they turned flatly and at the same time watched the rear-seat men of the Breguets sling Lewis guns. No gun stoppages there—all *tatatat-tat-tatatating!*

Two Nieuports, covering the rescue ships, were now above Medcraft and Flying Fish. They fell back to take on the attack. The other two Nieuports, with the Breguets, were coming right along and pulling west also. One of the ambitious Huns went out of this new brush in short order. He was out of control after one of the Nieuports shagged his tail, and falling past one of the Breguets, the rear-seat man added to the job and set the Hun afire. Still, four enemy pilots who knew no quitting carried on. Hogwild, they were a credit to their Imperial Germany. An Imperial Germany, that was still going strong at that time. Yet, no longer so strong in this dog fight.

The Nieuports redoubled their fight on the Huns. Quickly, a Fokker went down out of control, stretched its glide with a few Yanks shagging close on his tail, and piled up in the Meuse. The two Yanks came back into the fight. The other two Nieuports were having more than they could handle, in trying to keep the last three enemy pilots away from the Breguet outfit's big try.

Flying Fish and Major Medcraft, thinking as one, had flown not-so-flat turns and swung back toward the doings.

Major Medcraft picked a Hun off the outer edge of the dog fight, and that Hun burned, burned till he jumped from his ship and took the drop that was to end in eternity. Game Hun!

FLYING FISH, with an enemy plane coming head on—at some three hundred yards—tried a burst from his guns. At first, the tracers sprayed the sky ahead. Then the guns quit, and the big pilot had a double stoppage on hand. He banked away from the oncoming enemy, clamped his stick between his knees, and cussed a bit, for he realized that he would not be able to clear that jam, carry his triple load, and fly that pursuit job, just above the ground, all at the same time. A man with more than two hands was needed.

Then Flying Fish saw Second Lieutenant Tony Barso start to a standing position on that lower left wing. Tony was uncertain about his stand, but sure of his purpose. Right away, with a mighty sickening thud, Tony's legs shot through the panel's linen and dropped the badly frightened little guy hip-deep through the wing.

But Tony grabbed for everything—Flying Fish flew a tight bank around the fight, left wing high—and soon the small one was holding to wires and center-section struts and working on those guns. It has been before mentioned that Tony Barso had been a "previous service" man. He knew guns, all kinds of guns, and the way he cleared that double stoppage was a caution. His hands were skinned raw and bleeding. Flying Fish saw the small half-pint tear just about every last finger nail off both hands before the job was complete. Then Tony, still with his face against the left gun, was yelling: "Give 'er a try, Fish! Get him! Get him!" And at that same second Flying Fish pressed his Bowden triggers and got a Hun dead-ahead. Side-slipping, the Hun went away in flame.

Tony Barso cheered. And the frightened-stiff truck driver on the right lower wing cheered too. And Flying Fish thought that this was a mighty fine break of luck.

When Flying Fish took another look at his sky, only three other Nieuports were mixing it with two remaining Germans. One of those Nieuports was Major Medcraft's, and the dog fight had been forced away from the Breguets and the road.

Flying Fish shot a glance down at the road. A Breguet was just setting its wheels on the hard surface in a wheel-landing. It has hopping along tail-high and prop just turning. At either side of the whitish line of highway, a man stood. As the Breguet rolled between these two, each reached for a front outer strut, and in a flash the job was done. The Breguet pilot blasted full power to his ship, held her down for another fifty yards, then zoomed. He kept to his direction. His two flying mates, still in the push, fell in one at either side, and they hi-balled west.

Landing at the observation drome, they all tried to laugh and act as though, maybe, they could forget. But it had been too costly a raid for that; and they'd left too many good men behind them. However, and this was the most singular thing about the whole operation, they'd left no man who knew he was being deserted. For those who went down, and were not recovered, were gone beyond all human aid.

"My hat's off to you, Barso," was one of the first things Flying Fish found time to say. "You got me out of a tight place, Tony, and the drinks will be on me just as soon as we can reach drinks. Which won't be very long. We deserve a nasty session, eh?"

XIII

THAT same evening, back now at the Hun Hunter field, Tony Barso came into Major Medcraft's quarters with a long face.

"Man, you shouldn't have such a long map," the C.O. said.

"Look here, sir," the small shavey said. "I left that truck in No Man's Land. I've been kidded before, and I'll be kidded again—for this."

"Not much!" Major Medcraft bit off. "Who'll kid you after what you did for big Fish. You're in solid here, lieutenant."

"No, sir, it doesn't work that way," Tony told his C.O. "Their love for me will wear off. I know, sir. I'm over twenty-one.

"Now this is what I want to do, sir: I want to go in there tonight and bring that truck back. You know, besides your personal goods, that truck had a lot of magnetos, other motor parts, and six Vickers guns for this post supply."

"It had?" Major Medcraft crescendoed. "I didn't know anything about that shipment of stuff."

"With your permission, I'll go in tonight and try to bring it out, sir. We camouflaged the truck in a clump of woods as soon as we realized that the jig was up. We knew it was up when we stopped passing American M.P.'s on the highway. Then when we got in between the places where sky shells were breaking, that Orly driver said, 'Lieutenant, we're here, and I don't know where *here* is. Let's hole up and wait till daybreak.' Then, looking around with the first sign of morning we came upon Fish and Britt. Lucky, eh?"

"Lucky is right," the major agreed. "And now you want to go back, is that it? Liked it so well, what?"

"No," Tony said, "but I can't stand the kidding which is sure to follow. You don't know these birds as I do, sir."

"O'yez, o'yez, I do!" Major Medcraft laughed. "But maybe I'll let you try for the truck, lieutenant. It is only right that we should do all in our power to recover government property.

"However, can you handle it alone? Can you drive a bus?"

"No," Tony said. "But there's a private on this field who will be willing to go with me. Fact is, sir, it was this private who suggested the try. Hasty's the private's name. He's an old enlisted friend of mine, knew him back at Field 8, Issoudun, sir.

"This Hasty seems to know every foot of the country ahead. He says that he's been A.W.O.L. in that piece of woods, further advanced than the most advanced long-range shell. And I believe it too. Some of these enlisted men do strange things, sir. At any rate, I'm satisfied that Private Hasty knows just where we quit the truck."

"All right," the C.O. agreed. "And I'll say nothing to anybody. I was going to take it up with Divisional Headquarters, but you got in there without them once—and that's more than they can do—so you should be able to do it again. The night looks right. It's going to rain. Go when you're ready. Be sure that each of you is armed. Take something to eat, but nothing to drink, unless water. Look me up again before you two shove off. That's all, lieutenant."

AT midnight that same night, France was setting a new world's record for bad weather. Rains, driven by a hellish wind, slanted flat and wet-down everything.

Second Lieutenant Barso and Private Hasty, shouldering regulation packs, and carrying infantry pieces, told the C.O. good-bye and went into the night. The blackness took them, and as far as the active A.E.F. was concerned, nobody ever saw or heard of these two Yanks again. Now, all this has nothing to do with the story except that the gang laughed at Barso when Barso was a thing to laugh at. Fair enough!—for he had been an awful thing. Fair enough too, to tell of this bit that brought the small portion to par, and far above par, in he-man bravery. Tony Barso saw what he thought was duty, and went.

Three months after the armistice, in the Place de Tourney, down in Bordeaux, a file of Allied soldiers stood under the balmy southern sky to be doubly kissed and decorated. Private Feranti—the Field 8 Boy who wanted to spell that hard poi-culating woid—stood on the curb, better than half shot with raw red liquor, and took in the doings. And you could have sure knocked Private Feranti's eyes out with a stick, so far did they extend, when the private saw Second Lieutenant Barso and Private Hasty in that line of kissable braves. Private Hasty, none other! Feranti's old sidekick. What do you know about that! Who won the war!

After the kissing ceremony, the privates held a reunion. Such reunions were always awful things, and the less said, the better, but the front-line private did tell Feranti all about what had detained him and Barso so long.

"Ya see, Feranti, we got back to the truck all jake," he said. "But in the dark, when we pulled out of the woods, we both agreed on the direction, and the direction was wrong. We would have driven into Berlin if the gas hadn't run out. Anyway, they took us, but only after Tony had burned the whole works. Great guy, that little wop."

"And you've been in a prison pen ever since?" Feranti asked. "Was it as tough as they say?"

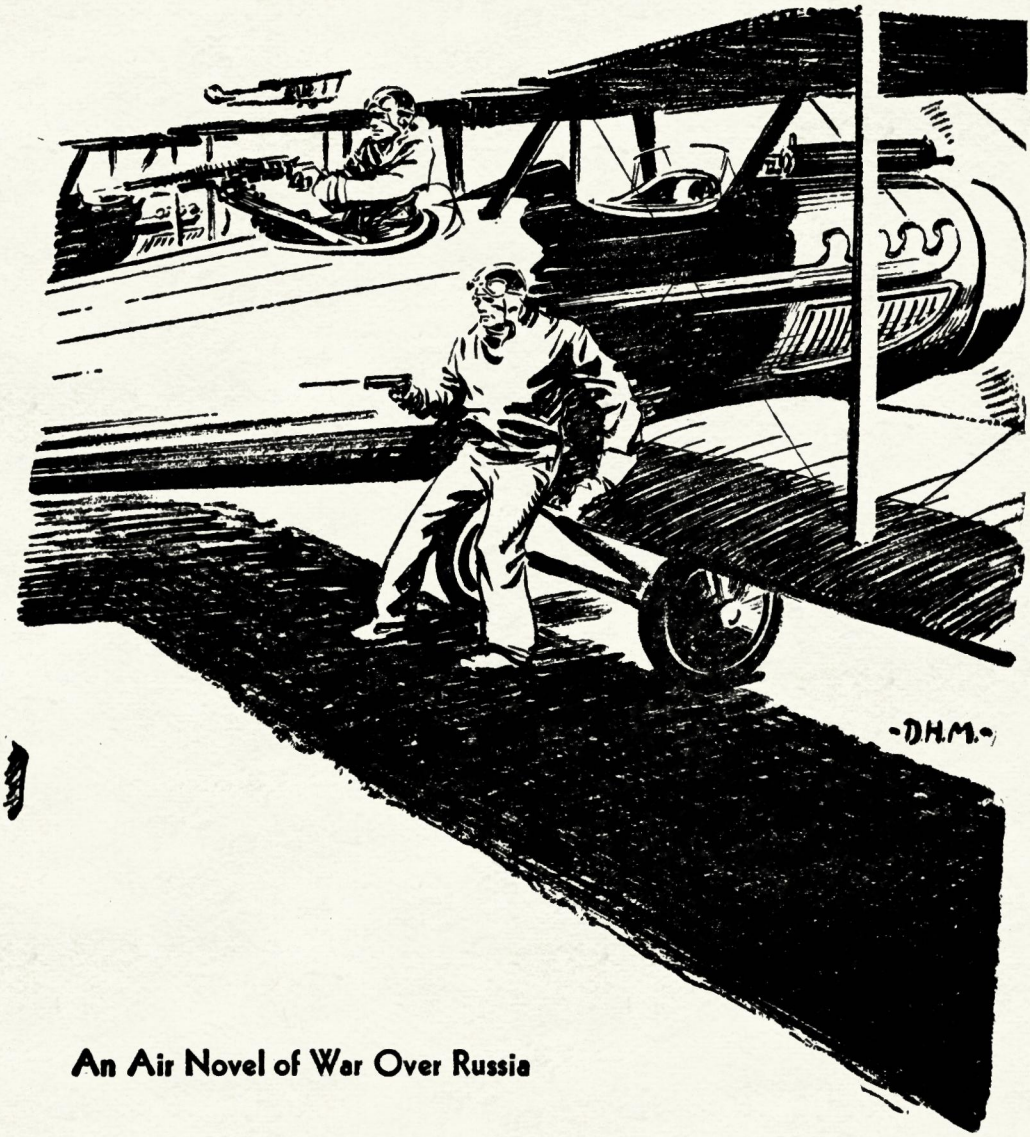
"Worse," the private said. "During the winter, Feranti, the suffering was intense. You can't imagine it. Intense!"

"In tents is right," Feranti agreed. "That's the way the suffering was on Long Island, at Mitchel Field, during the first winter. All in tents. And to think that those boneheaded brass hats in the Army coulda put us guys in a dozen good hotels just by commonering them."

"*Commandeering* them," Hasty corrected.

"Yeh, that's the woid," Private Feranti agreed. "Grab the bloody places. Let's have a drink, Hasty."

The armorer's spanner lifted like a semaphore arm. Then mutiny seethed across the tarmac of the harried White Squadron.



An Air Novel of War Over Russia

RENEGADE ACE

By T. W. FORD

Lastrov the Pole, bludgeon of the air, Clemingdon the Limey, man of ice, Daklo the giant Lett, Captain Skid Upton, American—the White Squadron of the Crimea, legion of despair. But before last taps sang over them they swore that they'd blast Kamku the Deathless from the red-starred skies.

HE never wanted to see anybody he knew again. With the exception of one man, that was. And he would only need to see him once. Just once!

Hands stuck in the pockets of his combination, cigarette drooping from thin lips, he lounged against the Spad wing just beyond the prop slash. He was the seventh man in the line drawn up on the Crimean tarmac. He wore the set, haunting smile peculiar to that breed who have overstayed doom furlough.

Down that line limped Major Nicolai Potemko, ant-like C.O. of the one and only White Squadron. He surveyed the motley collection of men and ships along that line. There were half a score of each. With his one eye, he counted them. Yes, just ten left; ten strained-faced figures beside sputtering motors. And less than two hours back, when they had taken off, there had been sixteen of them.

Potemko knew the answer; it was no mystery. Kamku, top ace and flying leader of the red-starred squadrons of the Bolos! He was the answer.

Kamku the mystery! How many times had not pilots of the White Squadron sent down that ship of the mailed fist, flaming, washed out, moaning in mortal spin! How many times had they not seen it crash! True, it always landed behind the Bolo lines. But more than once it had been the Fokker of the mailed fist, Kamku's personal insignia, unmistakably! Yet always, when next the Red flights and the White Squadron met upstairs, Kamku was there, winging behind the sign of the mailed knuckles. It was mystifying! It was more than that —it was morale-breaking. Potemko shook his head. Somebody must kill that Kamku, kill him in the air. . . .

Kamku! And instinctively, as always when he thought of the Bolo ace, Potemko's one eye shifted down the line from man to man for the one who might put an end to the Bolo leader's sky career. Who?

Along assemblies freshly scarred with tracer slashes, along striped fuselages and checkered noses newly pockmarked with lead, along past sagging struts and dangling load wires, past Camels and Spads and an ancient Nieuport 27 and a pair of Bristol fighters, he looked. All of them salvaged from Europe's scrap-heap as were the men who piloted them!

Potemko's single eye with its steely beam flitted along these latter. He saw them with their blood-shot eyes and motor-deafened ears and tracer-flayed nerves. Out of the war cauldron of the Western Front they had come, broken, outcasts, pariahs, discards of humanity, recruits to a doomed squadron.

There was Lastrov the Pole with his precious black beard, a veritable bludgeon in the skies. But no, Potemko meditated, Kamku welcomed bludgeoners, fencing them with rapier-like flicks to disaster. Next to the Pole was Papa Garrierre, the Frenchman, debonair and doubtless a little crazy. Potemko mentally shook his head again. Some day that poor one would leave his wings behind him upstairs and Kamku would snap his fingers. The C.O. rested his single eye on Clemingdon the Limey, a man of ice. But, no, Kamku himself was ice.

Next, there was Daklo the giant Lett, whose very shoulders always seemed about to split the cockpit into which he cramped himself. Major Potemko closed his eye quickly. Already the big Lett staggered from his cot for the dawn patrol with three wounds. On past him, a pair of sallow Russians, one of them a Romanoff prince. Potemko did not like to look at them either. For all their clumsy valor, they were not for this world long.

Then Nicolai Potemko's one eye stopped. Through pale lips, he murmured a brief prayer to his patron saint, Andrew. Perhaps. . . . He was looking at the seventh man in that line. Perhaps. . . .

Perhaps this one could stop Kamku, the Bolo top ace. Major Nicolai Potemko, one-eyed and limping commander of the White Squadron of the Crimea, was regarding Captain William Upton, American.

HE stamped out his black Russky cigarette. He rubbed his one eye to see clearer. The American leaned against the left wing of his Peugeot-Bleriot Spad, smoking, helmet dragged off for air, revealing the sleekness of his close-cropped blond head.

Potemko screwed his rimless monocle, relic of the days of the Romanoff rule, into his eye. Even despite the American's shapeless, oil-stained combination, one could see the outlines of the whip-like form beneath. Like that were the *borzoi* wolfhounds of the old days who used to overtake the wolves of the steppes to lay open their throats with one razor-fanged slash!

It was in Paris he had picked up this American. In an Apache cafe deep in the Montmartre, Nicolai Potemko had seen him, glassy-eyed, lips bitterly twisted, brooding over absinthe. The one-eyed Russian had watched, wondering whether it was plain wine, or a woman, or the war that had so scarred the lean American's

soul. The appearance of a *Surete agente* with a flock of *gendarmes* and a nod toward the American had temporarily terminated Potemko's reflections.

He had taken a hand suddenly. A signal, carefully prearranged with the proprietor, and the lights had gone out. When they were lit again, a baffled *Surete* man stared at an empty cafe while Nicolai Potemko and the American he had rescued, Captain Upton, strode swiftly across the Seine by way of the Alexander Bridge.

As he limped closer to the line, Potemko realized he never did learn just what had shipwrecked the life of the American. He knew but three things of him. Once, in his sleep, he had heard this Captain Upton babel a broken bit of something about a "court martial." Garrierre, the Frenchman, had added his second bit of information. Garrierre had known the American in France. More than that he would not say, except that he had been termed *"M'sieur le Skid,"* for that was the way he flew: one big skid across the face of the heavens. The third thing Nicolai Potemko knew for himself. It was this: If the dead come back, this Captain Upton was one of them.

He knew that by the cold, smiling way the American looked out of his eyes. And knew it too by the careless, death-jeering manner in which the American rode his wings. But that was all. One does not ask too many questions of recruits of the doomed.

Potemko winced. Yes, this puny little handful of Russian Royalists making their last stand on the Crimea were doomed. Only too true! But still, if Kamku could be stopped, the day of doom might be postponed a while. And the American, that Captain "Skid" Upton, might be the one to stop Kamku. Yet—yet, he seemed not to care about Kamku, or anything; seemed to be waiting with reckless eyes for the end, for the death, for anything that would blot out the scar on his life.

Major Potemko drew himself up sternly. Enough of this sentimental musing! Sufficient of the childish day-dreaming! His lone and depleted squadron had just returned from another of those death dances with the shock-troop flights of Kamku, the Bolo circus. And he must send them off again. Yes, again!

"Officiers!" his crackling voice snapped out as he addressed that motley array of staring wrecks of men in the customary French. "A communique from H. Q. At one-forty-five, *mes amis,* a bombing flight is reported to have left Aleshki. . . ." His piercing black eye fell back to the flimsy he held.

It was not easy to face those poor devils who had taken one strafing from the red-starred winged hounds of the Bolos. Nor was it pleasant to see the gaps in the line-up, gaps that had not been there this dawn, gaps of the ghosts who rode invisible wings of death. His voice chopped hurriedly into the hush that hung over the camouflaged tarmac behind the Isthmus of Perekop.

"Mes amis, we are the ones to be honored by a visit on the part of the bombers. . . ."

The Crimean tarmac was still hushed, aside from the muttered throbbing of Hissos and Le Rhones. Then a laugh, brittle and cold as glass, snapped the hush. Potemko's head jerked. It was that American, Captain "Skid" Upton!

The C.O. folded up the official flimsy with nervous fingers. "Baron Wrangel begs me to inform you that should this squadron of ours be wiped out, the Crimean campaign is terminated!" His black boot-heels clicked. "No man is *commanded* to take the air!"

As the words whipped from his stiff lips, that tarmac of the White Squadron seemed to have become frozen, as a tableau. There were the ten patched crates. There were the ten men, features rutted with lines of tension. Props spun slowly under idling engines. One man moved, an orderly, who passed along doling cups of *vodka* from a bucket.

Potemko himself seemed like a statue in his black boots, trim white cavalry breeches and dark blue tunic with the insignia of the double-headed eagle of the late czar on his breast. Captain "Skid" Upton watched him an instant, then tossed his tin mug at the orderly and lit himself a fresh butt from the stub of the first. A thin, mirthless grin played around his severe mouth.

The smoke curled up before his thin features. He shrugged beneath his combination and glanced down at the other similarly garbed figures beside him. Going upstairs

again, were they? And they thought it was war they played back on the Picardy-Vosges line! That had been little more than babe's play compared to this—this desperate, doomed climbing up to the ceiling and trying to halt Kamku and his circus—this stand with a handful of ashcans and some madmen—this pitiful bunch of Royalists under Wrangel dyeing the Crimean soil with their blood!

He shrugged again. It was what he wanted—action and searing dogfights and death maybe—anything to wipe out his past. He laughed again, that Captain Skid Upton. The bitter rattle of his voice served as a shock to the rest of that doomed outfit. Like men out of trances, they snapped to it.

"No man is commanded to take the air!" Those had been the C.O.'s words. No command was needed. Captain Upton was the first to jam his form into the compact pit of his Peugeot-Bleriot Spad. She roared, revving up the prop until it was a blur under the gun he poured to her. And all along that line, those nine others were scaling the sides of cockpits, jamming down goggles, settling necks firmly against crash-pads.

"Sons of a saint!" Potemko whispered hoarsely. "And I have heard men prate of heroes!" His hands convulsed at his sides. If he were but going up with them!

Upton cut his gun and beckoned at a mecho. He screamed at the wooden-faced dolt to ask if the tanks were filled. The mecho nodded, eyes shifting to the squat figure of the squadron armorer who stood dangling a spanner. Something mysterious in the position of the latter drew Skid Upton's glance to him like a magnet.

The Crimean tarmac trembled with that frenzied pulse of life that denotes a take-off. Exhaust stacks spat a staccato roar intermingled with comet-like tails of red flame. A cutting whistle tore through the roar. The armorer's spanner lifted like a semaphore arm.

Then mutiny seethed across the tarmac of the harried White Squadron.

IT broke with the wildness of a wind sweeping across the steppes of Siberia. That spanner of the armorer's was a signal. Forty-odd mechos, greaseballs and water boys, peasant-bred all, answered it and Bolo gold that had bought their fealty. Forty strong they rushed the ten manned crates of the White Squadron!

Skid Upton thrust a clawed hand inside his combination and jerked at the automatic holstered in his Sam Browne. It was hard and cold in the palm of his hand. The face of a traitor, leaping at his Spad with a chock, screwed in a spasm of pain before it sank. Upton vaguely realized a red thread streamed from the muzzle of his black gun. It was all like a fantastic nightmare.

He shot a glance down the line. A figure crashed a petrol can upon the sleek helmet of Raoul Garrierre. The Frenchman slumped from sight in his cockpit. Three men blotted out the limping figure of Potemko, the gallant C.O. Down by one of the Bristols, Clemingdon, the cool Limey, moved boredly. With unruffled composure, he shot two mechos with red arm-bands who sought to bar his way.

Upton twisted and brought down his gun barrel across the face of a hulking giant who sought to lift him bodily from the pit. His weapon hurled a crimson bolt again as another advanced on his prop with a club. Boiling with anger at the treachery of it, he saw a wave of figures in red arm-bands and grease-sodden overalls tossing around the planes.

One huge black-bearded figure rose out of the moil, standing in his pit, slashing a space clear around him, Lastrov, the Pole, and flight leader of the White Squadron of the Crimea. He caught Upton's glance. Eyes blazing, he jerked a finger toward the sky. Into the air: the signal was evident.

Upton slipped back into his pit. He jerked open his gun, temples pounding as the 180 Hisso responded with a blare from exhaust stacks like a stream of water in a tin pan. A flat-faced Ukrainian of the mecho force leaped upon the stirrup. Upton met him with five knuckles of good old-fashioned Yank fist. The way was open momentarily.

He flashed a glance through the V notch of his upper wing panel directly above his eyes. Out of the north, scarcely perceptible, dark dots stained the horizon like flies on a landscape. Kamku was coming!

Kicking right and left rudder to jump her off the chocks, Upton bucketed down

the tarmac with the slipstream flailing his leathery, lean cheeks. His stick moved toward his stomach. The bus flicked off the tarmac as light as a moth and screamed ceilingward in a twisting chandello at a mile-a-minute pace.

The Yank pilot peered earthward through thick-lensed goggles. Across the sere flatness of the landing T, ship after ship darted in a race against havoc, weaving and taxiing desperately to get up. All but one! That was the little blue bus of Garrierre, the Frog.

Upton put the Spad at a forty-five degree angle for the gray dome of sky over the Crimea. His eyes studied the north. Kamku's flight, fortunately handicapped by the bombers they convoyed, were more than black dots now. Red-starred wing panels flaunted their bold Bolo insignia in brief flashes.

He checked his tach. Five thousand now! The stick crept farther back into his lap as the Hisso labored faithfully on both banks. He spat out his cigarette. His touch was cool and steady at the controls. Soon they would mesh with the numerically overwhelming Bolo flight and—*kaput!* They were nothing but fodder from the Red Fokkers. Yet he and his breed could expect no better fate.

He had the ceiling patrol. Riding high over the rest of the flight, he would flame down into the mêlée when the dogfight broke. His thin, contemptuous smile rattled into the slipstream for the third time that day as he pictured a power plunge in that battle-rent contraption that might once have been recognized as a Spad.

Two miles up, shivering under his combination and tunic, he beat his hands together an instant and flattened out. Over the left side of the V formation that Lastrov as flight leader led, he rode. The sun poked sullenly through the leaden heaven in the west, glinting over the oily wash of the Black Sea as if the great god Mars had hung up the red ball of battle.

To the right and almost directly below lay the narrow strip, quiescent and blank from that height, that was the Siwash Sea. Beyond it the Arabat Peninsula kicked a murky leg of land along the horizon. The Crimea itself stretched below, a tiny projection from the vastness of the Ukraine, with the black thread of the Salgir winding south and the purple lip of the Yaila Mountains on the skyline at his back.

On the Crimea, a puny force of thirty thousand doomed, officers of the former czar, loyal Cossacks and a handful of the savage Tekhintsi, made their final stand. They were the White Army of Wrangel, pitted against a Bolo horde of half a million. Backs to the sea, the Whites had entrenched themselves across the narrow neck of the Perekop Isthmus. Underdogs all—and he, Upton, was one of them!

He realized he was studying the panorama below as would a convict on the way to the gallows. He screwed his eyes forward through the black butts of the twin Vickers at the Bolo flight. They had become distinct units: a trio of Rumplers on the ceiling—a pair of wobbling yellow Gothas—and a quartet of red-nosed Fokkers below. Undiverging they winged confidently for their objective.

Below his prop arc, he made out Lastrov streaking with his gaunt band at his back.

Old Man Mars' timekeeper struck the warning gong. Upton's usually guarded memory slipped a notch then. Fokker fodder, he would probably go west—soon. But before he went out, he would have liked to meet one man. He would have liked to come face to face with that *Kriegsrichtenant* agent who had made a traitor of him on a certain tarmac back of Fismes. That was the one man he ever wanted to see again—for one he would need to see but once!

B-r-r-r—his Vickers crackled out a warm-up burst like the tearing of rough cloth. Well, he was going to meet Kamku now. A lot of good men met him but once. Kamku had a way of introducing himself with a Spandau handshake . . .

II

UPTON'S mouth was still acrid with the last taste of the Turk tobacco of his cigaret. He saw the last flicker from the Vickers snouts in their test burst for perhaps the final time. With a bit of gas-soaked waste, he daubed his goggles.

Nosing down, he right-ruddered and zoomed into a wingover that turned him westward and into the sun. The success of his detail above the flight depended upon him getting into the eye of that sun, the

blindspot of the Bolos. Straight into the red disc he drove with full gun.

Eight against nine! That wouldn't be so bad. Perhaps the Red flight might even be turned back before they unloaded their eggs. He whipped the ship into an Immelmann that would have done credit to the creator. The wallowing Gothas were a sickly sallow in the eerie light. The blast of the revved-up prop whipped his cheeks.

Out of Lastrov's echelon, a gray streak darted at the belly of one of the bombers. Red-nosed Fokker hornets swarmed onto the audacious assailant. The whole outfit meshed in death dance with the red-starred crates. Swift, lethal fuselages bearing the double-headed eagle of Russia bored in like gray sharks. The Yank tensed in his pit. Now!

Right out of the sun he lunged. They had not spotted him. In the rear pit of one of the Rumplers, he distinguished an observer hunched over a Spandau-mounted scarf. Upton swirled down upon him. Then, his hand froze on the stick an instant. It had been too easy. Out of the north, a second Bolo flight arrowed. Six of them! The odds had risen; fifteen to eight with death the bookmaker. The Fokker fodder was ripe for the reaper.

Slipstream whistled shrilly through a bullet hole in the Yank's isinglass windshield. Shuddering the tiny Spad dipped vertically. Wing bolts groaned. The mêlée seethed upward, a vortex of crates like the ball pawns of roulette wheel amuck.

Down into the havoc pattern, striped with the filmy laceword of tracers, Upton went.

Under a quick-stabbed right rudder, the Spad jerked aside slightly in its rocketing earthward plunge. Upton felt rather than saw the cartridge belts leaping like frenzied caterpillars through the Vickers breeches. Twin flame tips nozzled from the mouths at the first Rumpler.

It was just for an instant. When it was over, the Rumpler bumped with a dead pilot jamming the controls. The observer turned from his strafing of occasional White ships below. He met death over his shoulder. Hanging on its tail a split second, the big two-seater of the Bolo flight moaned in the fatal spin.

With his boot, Skid Upton right-rudder. The doughty little Peugeot-Bleriot Spad switched in the other direction, hanging on a wing tip. Broadside in his ring sights, he had the second Rumpler trapped. Hands on the Bowden controls, he checked the path of the tracers. The ammo belts were loaded with a pair of them, alternating with three steel-nose. Along the side of the second two-seater, the Vickers sewed a jagged seam. The acrid odor of tracers cut his nostrils as the observer sensed the danger and replied to it.

Stick in his lap, he nosed the trembling Spad into a tight loop. Out of it, he dived again. Over a shoulder, he saw the gunner of the second Rumpler swinging his armament along the scarf mounted on the nacelle. Stick back again, Upton leveled, rolled once to throw himself out of the gunner's alignment and shot with devastating speed upon the two-seater's tail.

Once again the Spad's Vickers licked red tongues across the gray void of sky. With upflung hands, the Bolo observer reeled back from his weapons. Abruptly the Red pilot shoved the high-ceiling plane upward. Cutting his gun and nursing the stick backward gently, Upton put the Spad in a delicate whip-stall. Very coolly, he gave it to the red-starred two-seater in the belly.

It was over. A red flicker trailing down the Rumpler fuselage told the tale. It reared into a tidal wave of flame in a few seconds. Upton whipped his bus around quickly. It hurt something inside him to see a ship go down.

Once again he dived. As he did so, his tail assembly rattled to the feared *flac-flac* that announced a rear attack. Over the roar of the Hisso intruded the *raum-raum-raum* of the unsynchronized Mercedes of the third Rumpler. The glass of instrument board dials crashed. The controls twitched as the Rumpler Spandaus chewed on his tail.

Dimly with a back glance he was aware of the Rumpler over him, an orange moth, white-winged, red-starred Bolo emblem swimming against the sky like racing comets. But there was no time for that one now. He must take his chances and dive. Such were orders.

ACROSS the dampened Vickers belts, downward, hell itself frothed in the dogfight below. Fuselages with the crest of the czar flashed among flaming-hued

Bolo crates. It was all a moil of writhing wings and the pale snakes of tracer trails and machine-gun tips flickering with an unholy glow.

To one side, the Gothas stood off like a pair of ungainly lummoxes, bomb racks plain, re-inforced struts evident and dubious peelots peering over their wheels in the double forward pit.

Upton rode into it.

He didn't expect to come out of it except in the arms of whatever angels concern themselves with the souls of swearing, binging, outlawed war birds. He didn't care particularly. Men of his breed don't. Fate has struck them too bitter a foul blow for them to worry about anything else in the old woman's repertoire.

Almost carelessly, he was in it. A Bolo in a Fokker D-7 attached himself to the Yank's tail. A sword of m.g. lead beat at his motor hoods. Out of a ninety-degree bank, he tried to *chandelle* and met another pair of Fokkers waiting for just that. The Crimea sky was alive with them. He had no sensations, no feeling of danger or death impending. He unleashed the Vickers hoses once at a clumsy Bolo peelot, and put him out of his misery. Gone was the old savage fever for fight. Upton was left sodden and cold by the absence of the will to live. He cared not whether he died; it must come some day.

Three of the crimson square-head buses converged on one wobbling gray crate that the Yank saw was Clemingdon in trouble. Up from the rear of the Bolo attackers, a fury tore, Lastrov to the rescue. Skid Upton's neck fastened against the crash pad as he rocketed to the flight leader's aid.

Then Fate, the cold-deck champion of them all, slapped the last card onto the table and raked in the bets. And the White Squadron of the Crimea was on the short end of those bets. It was over.

True, Lastrov, the flight leader, hurled into the Spandau teeth of the trio of Bolo Fokkers. And he got one. Skid Upton chewed up the controls of another with his Vickers. But they were engulfed in a stabbing swarm of Bolo ships that eddied around them. A red fuselage arrowed up from below. Upton got one look at him as he jerked his feet from the floorboards that were splintering. Just below the cockpit rim of the zooming bus was a black mailed fist against the red canvas. Kamku; that was his sign!

The Yank looked for Lastrov. In a blur of tracers and red wings, he saw him screaming for the ceiling, a comet tail of fire from his empennage, the streamers of the flight leader from his helmet already licked away by the tongue of flame.

Kaput!

That was the last word for all of them. The writing was on the wall. Kamku's hand had written it. With a short, cold laugh, the Yank nosed up abruptly, cut the gun and right-ruddered. The Spad bus fell away in a spin. Upton was slung from side to side as it whipped in a fierce, tight circle, tail shooting around and around. Three of the Bolo hawks were tracking him down, seeking to get him with a fatal burst. He felt cold and disillusioned about the whole thing. Something was stripping away his wing linen in jagged gashes.

The Bolo bus with the mailed fist, Kamku's, crossed his sights an instant. Setting the rudder against the spin, Skid Upton worked the stick forward and leftward. The Spad answered with a straining of bullet-weakened struts and hung in a powerless stall. Kamku rocketed past. Skid's fingers came away from the Bowdens. Kamku's crate veered sharply. He was hit!

That was something anyway. Wheeling in a figure eight, the Bolo chief glared at his white opponent as he waved his cohorts in. Skid Upton looked at the skies he had patrolled. Once more, before they gave him the works! For they had a look on him now!

The Yank's eyes widened behind his cracked goggles as he looked upward. High overhead a flaming Sop paused, upside down as its pilot sought to evade the fire. It was Lastrov, the flight leader's bus. Even as the Yank watched, it tipped down like the hull of a doomed ship slipping into the sea. It tipped down and its engine roared afresh, exhaust stacks piercing the flames with their carbon breath. Lastrov came down, flaming, hurtling, red threads darting from his Lewises. Right into the heart of the one-sided dogfight, he struck, tail of red like a beacon from hell, smoke spraying from the motor hoods like funeral plumes.

Astounded, Skid saw him make the sign

of the Cross. Then he was on one of the Gothas. His running gear crashed it atop the forward cockpit. There was an instant of hesitation. The Sop came on, the Gotha with a dead crew slewing in its wake. A Fokker twisted desperately to escape Lastrov's truckless fuselage. To Skid, the giant Pole's laugh seemed to rattle a moment above it all.

Then the flaming Sop took the Bolo bus right across the engine hoods, shattering its prop. Interlocked, they plunged. Another Bolo crate went into a wing-slip to get out of their path. The red tail of the Sop flared in a blue sheet; its tanks had gone up. The third Bolo hung in a stall in their wake, flaming, too. It was as if Lastrov had reached from the grave to strike this last blow.

Upton's banking Spad bumped so that he was shaken forward in the pit. It suddenly darkened as if the light had been blotted out by a giant hand. Skid bent his helmeted head back against the crashpad again. Lastrov had struck his greatest blow after dying. The Gotha he had crashed, sifting down with its load of high explosive eggs, had collided with another of the clumsy Bolo pilots.

The ceiling was splotched with a black blot of heavy smoke out of which bits of yellow Gotha fuselage and chunks of red Fokker parts burst. Ships flung over on wing tips under the concussion. In the close swirl, Fokker pilots slumped with bits of shell and shrapnel in their bodies. Havoc cleared a broad, bloody wake across the Crimean skies.

The tide of battle was turned, almost miraculously.

Upton realized it dazedly. They had been granted another death reprieve. He shot a glance around. Off to the left and over him, Kamku's bus with the mailed fist insignia hung. The Red leader had stripped off his goggles and was gazing stricken-eyed at the ruins of his flight. In that instant, his pallid profile was silhouetted starkly against the pall of the explosion.

Skid Upton gaped, breathless, frozen.

Kamku banked to face north, and with a wave of his long arm, signaled the remnants of his battered flight to follow. The dance of disaster was over. He raced into the north.

BUT Captain Skid Upton of the White Squadron of the Crimea saw none of that. At the moment, he was back upon a certain tarmac behind Fismes on the Western Front. The Escadrille was dallying over the mess-table, candles cutting grotesque patterns on the wine goblets. Somebody was tinkling out the latest Paree cabaret hit on the tuneless piano when the C. O. rose and frowned at his wrist watch.

"Gentlemen," he brushed his blond mustache nervously and coughed, "we have an unwelcome visitor in this outfit—namely a spy. . . ."

A chill fell over the mess-room. The piano tinkled off on a flat note in the middle of a chorus. It was oppressively still until a trembling childish, "Here, sir!" squeaked out. At the end of the long mess-table, the imperturbable "Mad" McGinty had his hand lifted with an expression of mock embarrassment like a little boy asking the teacher to leave the room.

The C. O. pushed back a smile and narrowed his gray eyes. "Seriously, gentlemen! Won't try to bluff you. We don't know who it is. . . . Although Intelligence is certain of it!" He said some more things about the honor of the squadron and firing squads and all flights being grounded until the culprit was identified.

"But I have my own plan for solving this enigma. You men will go to your rooms at once. All lights will be turned off for thirty minutes. There will be a bus on the line, motor tuned up and idling. The Boche in this outfit can get out if he wants to. I give you my word of honor that there will be no attempt to interfere with the take-off of that ship. Dis-smissed!"

The unquestionable McGinty leaned down the table toward Skid. "Hey, kid," in a whisper loud enough to be heard half a kilo, "pay me back that five before yuh leave!"

And Slansky, the Russian, lean as a lance, parried the shot for Skid with a: "Eh, *M'sieur* McGinty, I will take care of the little redhead at the *estaminet* when you are gone. Ha-ha!"

With a false joviality over the soberness, the Escadrille trooped out to their cubicle barracks. The lights had been out barely ten minutes, and Skid Upton was lounging on his cot, when he realized there was another man in the tiny room with him. Then

an automatic poked him under the ribs.

"Outside!" a command ordered him in a muffled whisper.

Astounded, not sensing the game, he rose and walked down the barracks corridor with the ghostly figure treading noiselessly behind him and the blunt nose of the gun boring his back. A sheen of moonlight dyed the field in a faint glow. Skid turned. He was confronted by the sneering, pointed face of Slansky, mocking him over the automatic.

He started to speak. Slansky dented his tunic with the gun and pointed at the lone Spad with idling prop down before the hangars. Skid gasped, then swallowed, mouth hardening until the lips were knife edges along his teeth. Slansky's game was evident. Guilty, he wanted somebody else to take the fall for him and draw suspicion.

The automatic drove Upton toward the ship. He approached it with steady steps. The Russian double-crosser, obviously the *Kriegrichtenant* agent to whom the C. O. had referred, was a bit short-sighted. It was almost with a grin that Upton hopped into the pit of the Spad. Slansky's weapon still menaced him. He felt like laughing in the lousy spy's face.

All he had to do was taxi down the field, hop into the air and bank right around and land. Then it ought to be a simple matter to expose Slansky. His own returning would clear himself of any guilt. He threw a mocking kiss at the Sphinx-faced Russky as he bucketed off from the line. The hand of the temperature indicator read "180" on his instrument board as he put the nose up steeply.

At a hundred meters, he banked. There was nothing in the night but the trail of crimson sparks from his stacks and the faint outline of the field below. Then, his engine hoods rattled as if both banks had kicked the pistons through the cylinder heads. Instinctively, he throttled the Hisso. Machine guns clattered from the left. He looked there.

Two red eyes winked at him. An invisible knife, hot and searing, buried itself deep in his shoulder. The fire wall on the right resounded under another rafale of fire. His grin changed to bewilderment as he realized two foes were streaming them into him in the dark.

The field lights below blinked on, the staff evidently alarmed by the sound of a scrap right over them. One of the big searches of the A. A. unit swept up at him. He was blinded by it an instant. Another gray Spad whipped into its path and at him. Behind its Vickers, Skid saw the red mug of McGinty, awe-struck as he recognized him, then turning to a black fury under the impression his buddy had been a Heinie spy all the time in the course of their friendship.

Oh, Intelligence had baited its trap well. Those bloodhounds weren't letting any Boche agent walk out scot-free. They had evidently stationed McGinty and this other Spad pilot up here to nail the Heinie as he took off.

Blindly, Skid threw up an arm to halt the Vickers hail that McGinty, bitter with the hate of a deluded friend, crashed at him. Then that second one signaled his presence in the rear with a stream of lead that tap-tapped up Skid's Camel back, then higher until he flopped over the stick with a bullet sear across his head.

After that it was a nightmare of a crash, a hospital, a court-martial, then an escape when a careless corporal of the guard passed him a smoke with his gun hand. All through it had leered the sly face of Slansky; all through it, hate for him strengthened the trapped Yank.

Then he had been rescued from that Apache joint by the Russky, Potemko, and slipped out of France to serve the White cause on the Crimea. He looked around him like a man coming out of a trance, realizing he was swirling in a wide bank over the Crimea.

His helmeted head jerked to the north. Kamku and his handful of beaten peelots were fast becoming little fishtails against the leaden sky. Captain Skid Upton spat overside and locked his teeth with a click. The Hisso roared a cacaphony of thunder through its stacks as he poured the gun to her. The double headed eagles of the Czar on his fuselage became blurred things of unleashed fury leaping at the northern horizon.

Skid Upton was once again the tensed, prowling sky rider who had smeared his fame against the skies of the Western Front. He was wondering how many rounds he had left in the belts. For Captain Skid Upton, hot-eyed, was on the hunt.

And the prey this time was Kamku of the mailed fist.

For in that one glimpse he had of him, just before the battle broke up, Upton had recognized in Kamku the double-crossing *Kriegsrichtenant* agent of Fismes — Slansky!

III

THE quartet of fleeing Fokkers were merely colorless specks like pin-points on a map ahead. And ahead of them would be Kamku himself in the lead, Skid knew. As the battle-burned Spad took up the stern chase, the Yank of the White Squadron realized it wasn't going to be any cinch to overhaul them. Not those Mercedes-engined Fokkers purchased from the Boche!

He could imagine the iron-faced, crescent-eyed Kamku hunched over his controls, brooding on a fresh assault as he winged tarmac-ward. He would hardly expect pursuit now. And he probably wouldn't be forcing the D-7 at full gun. As for the four others, Skid was confident that he could bluff the clumsy Bolo peelots out of the scrap soon enough.

In a long slant, Upton nosed the Spad lower. If they should scan their wake, they'd be more likely to overlook him if he were near the ground. Attackers usually dropped out of the clouds, not skimmed the terrain. Aided by a rising tail wind, the White Squadron crate increased its burning pace. Below, a smother of white crosses that was a war cemetery covered the south side of a slope. The Crimea lay under a brooding, gathering gray light like a somber cloak. The sullen sun had retreated into the west.

Once again his thoughts leaped the intervening space and days and he was back on that Escadrille tarmac again. Strange no one had ever suspected the silent, slender Slansky back there. At night he would sit like some Mongol image over a chessboard, showing his teeth in a fleeting flash as he check-mated some move of the C. O.'s. And sometimes he could be persuaded to bring out his native balalaika and strum some gipsy chant. He was the real McCoy in the way of a Russky, all right, Skid decided. That was what probably made him valuable to the Boche.

He glanced overside again. A few hundred meters below his spreader bar, crawling things crept along ribbons of white roads. Spidery network of trenches shot by. Thousands of thin black lines that were the mesh of barbed-wire stood out clearly. After them came a brown waste of shell-pocked mud. Now another line of trenchwork, with pill boxes and barricaded revetements and reserve fortifications, stood out. Those were the Bolo lines. White pilots had passed them before. A few, damn few, came back. The Red flights of Kamku had a way of discouraging round-trip flights.

Back of a wood, a company of Cossacks were dismounted. But there was no time for ground strafing now.

The Yank screwed his eyes on the crates of Kamku and his colleagues. They were closer, undoubtedly. He was creeping up on him. He flung another look at the blur of earth beneath him. Bolo divisions were moving up. Lines of camions squirmed across the country-side. More cavalry. . . .

Working calmly, he inserted a fresh belt of Vickers lead in the breeches of his guns. Jerking off a glove, he tested them. They were properly dampened. Eagerly, his wind-whipped eyes fastened again on the red tail of Kamku's ship. Another mile or two and he would be on him. Then Lastrov would be avenged.

The Spad rocketed ahead with the aid of the gale-like tail wind. Suddenly, it bumped! Then it pancaked sickeningly, with dead controls, as if the air had been driven from beneath it. The Yank cocked an ear for motor trouble. But the sturdy 180 Hisso was turning up perfectly. Skid Upton was dumfounded.

The crate yawled again sickeningly. It hurled upward, as if one of those G. I. cans creasing the air beneath it had exploded. Struts groaned as the left wing hooked for the ceiling. Skid's eardrums rang as if there had been a terrific concussion. His head jerked around.

"What the hell!" he mumbled.

Then he realized! A dozen black smudges stained the gray atmosphere around him. All around, too! A healthy "damn" escaped the Yank's tight-drawn lips. It was anti-aircraft stuff. The fabric of one wing was abruptly punctured with little spots that were shrapnel. The black smudges told him they were German

A. A.'s cutting loose at him from below.

He kicked the right rudder desperately. Flying low, he had walked blindly into the trap. The Bolos must have just brought the archies up. They hadn't used them before. The crash pad cracked him in the neck as the tail shot up. They were too damn close for comfort. Those time fuses could raise hell with a man when they got him right.

He jammed back on the stick. The Spad's nose reached for the ceiling. But it wasn't going to be as easy as that. Skid Upton suddenly came to the bitter conclusion that the Bolos had more than Boche archies at their command. They had a Boche gunnery officer running them. For Skid Upton and his little Peugeot-Bleriot Spad was cleanly bracketed!

A series of bursts threw a black barrier on the left. Another duplicated it on the right. Just ahead of the spinning blur of his prop, a set blocked his progress. Under his tail another one let go. Skid was trapped.

He knew the only thing to do and he did it.

THE stick came back into his stomach as he cut the gun. The Spad turned half into a loop, hung there a moment. More altitude would be his doom. Once he got to the point where the converging firing angles met, there would be no more Spad. Then he poured it to her again as her prop swung earthward.

Down he plummeted. If he could drop faster than they could correct the angle of fire, he had a chance. He cussed himself for a damn fool for flying so low. The slipstream roared in his ears. His isinglass windshield seemed to billow back at him along its seam. The crate gathered speed like a hawk in the power dive.

For an instant, he was freed of the menace of the lethal black puffs. He could make out a ring of gun mouths on the ground, figures darting from points of a circle. Then the whole ship rattled under a hail of ground m. g. strafing.

Skid Upton set his teeth, felt the Bowden controls under his fingers, and plunged right for his tormentors. The earth reared up at him. He could distinguish the groups of machine gunners riding hell out of their weapons. Their two pin-points of red death winked sharply from the Spad's nose.

Men crumpled, strewing the earth. An officer dashed into view. Skid kicked his rudder a few inches. The officer went down. One more burst and he would have to flatten out. He had wiped out half the gun crews. They wouldn't be so ambitious the next time a White pilot came over, anyway.

His staring eyes laughed. Then they turned to icy slivers. He stiffened, as if listening. There was an unmistakable tat-tatting along his fuselage. Chips leaped from his floorboards. An unseen drill had gone to work on his motor hoods. The Yank twisted his head. A few hundred yards over, a second anti-aircraft outfit had bought chips in the game.

Skid Upton felt like a clay pigeon as his Spad winged earthward. Then his fingers left the gun trips and he brought the stick back slowly. For an instant, it seemed as if the wings would buckle. The whole craft shivered under the strain. Wires whistled warning.

Then she was flat once more and shooting northward like a crazy comet. Skid Upton breathed normally again. It was a wonder the bullet-torn ship held together. He laughed shortly above the motor roar. Then his narrowed eyes swept the horizon line for Kamku.

They had been less than half a mile away before he went into the archie fray. And they had been bearing toward the east, flying along in sight of the oily waters of the Sea of Azov. But they were nowhere to be seen now.

Skid Upton indulged in some more high-powered swearing as he sought more altitude. At five thousand, he banked around in slow spirals, scanning the skyways with practiced eye. But the red ships of Kamku and his two henchmen were gone.

"Bet the skunks saw me and ran for it," Skid bit off bitterly.

He knew that Aleshki lay somewhere to the west. But the visibility was bad and he couldn't spot it. At last, he headed straight into the east, and with the waters of the Azov as a guide, he flew, searching the ground for anything that might resemble a tarmac.

He studied the map case lashed to his knee. There were no Bolo *staffel* fields marked on it, save for the bombing squad-

ron stationed at Aleshki. Thirty minutes passed, Skid turned into the north, determined to hunt out the crafty Kamku and nail his scalp. The blood pounded in his temples. He burned with the fever of war and the hunger to kill. Back in his mind lay the memory of the mutiny at the home hangars, that back-stabbing Bolo stratagem to put them out of the air. Somebody was going to pay plenty for that, that and the night he had been cast in a traitor's role on the Escadrille tarmac.

But finally, Skid was forced to admit the Bolos had camouflaged their tarmac too thoroughly. Grimly he banked the Spad around, put the Dnieper River on his right and prepared to run the gauntlet of archies for home.

The blood rushed to his cheeks from something more than slipstream as he nosed southward. He felt the Hisso engine straining. He cast a look over the side at a clump of wood just below. He was scarcely moving. Skid Upton was bucking a gale of a headwind that had been on his tail and driven him deep into Bolo territory over the Ukraine.

He fed more gun to her, nursing the tired engine as he put her nose up. Perhaps if he hit ceiling. . . .

Then Skid Upton, Yank adventurer, learned that there was going to be no perhaps about it. For the tiny Spad hung in a whipstall. The Hisso coughed twice. He tried to nurse her up again. There was a sputter, a half-hearted snort of the exhaust, and silence gripped the Yank's cockpit. Skid Upton knew the signs. The Spad was out of gas.

Tail down, breasting the fierce gale, he hung motionless an instant. In that instant, he remembered that when he had taken off he had cried to the traitorous greaseball to learn if the tanks had been refilled. And the mecho had nodded a lie through the roar of the revved up Hisso.

Skid Upton started to say some things about the ancestors of said mecho. The dead controls rattled in his grim grip. The ship went into a sickening tailspin, weaving around and around as if seized by a whirlpool. The Yank was shuttled around the pit.

He spat once. Then he snapped back his goggles and unhooked his safety belt. The gale howled. The Dnieper was erased by the lowering blackness. His visibility was limited to a few yards.

"Here's hopin' old Lastrov is prayin' plenty for me—where he is now," he muttered to keep up his courage.

The sound of his voice was strident in the black silence. The prop floated idly. He could barely make out the noses of his twin Vickers. The silence roared in his ears, unaccustomed to it. Looked as if Kamku took the last pot. A landing in the night on unknown terrain. . . .

Deep pit darkness rushed at him as if he were catapulting down a chute. The engineless Spad slipped crazily on a wingtip. Something swished at a lower wing panel, gripping it an instant. A tree, Skid sensed. The gale caught him a moment.

Savagely he fought at the controls. For an instant, he held her, nose down. She gathered momentum in a short dive. Then the Yank kicked his rudder fiercely. Her nose swung around hesitantly—into the wind. He brought the stick back.

"One damfool peelot due for a washout!"

She pancaked slowly. It came with a crash, the old terra firma. The stub of cigaret in Skid's teeth was snapped off. The tail bounced with a rending crack, slamming Skid into the breeches of the Vickers. She bounced again, keeled to the left as her undercarriage went, groundlooped, dug her prop into the mud and went over.

Skid had a vague recollection of hurtling from a vertical cockpit and rolling over and over as a wing swiped by his nose. When he finally stopped, it was to sit up dazedly and wipe chunks of clay from his eyes. Gingerly he picked himself up. Something sticky clung to his fingers when he touched the back of his head. One leg ached like sin when he tried to hobble. He felt for his automatic and cigarets. They were both there.

He stumbled toward the crate. She lay flat on her back, mashed trucks pawing at the black heavens, empennage resembling an accordion. He knew he ought to destroy it. But there was no gas left anyway. And the flare of the fire against the sky might bring capture.

A good bed and a cup of steaming java—well, a hay pile and a shot of Russky *vodka* would do. Stripping the map case from

his leg, he tore it up. He stumbled across the furrows of the muddy cabbage field.

The moon pushed a stingy corner past the edge of a cloud bank in the south. The earth took on a pale radiance. Just ahead, the clatter of hoofs pounded. Skid Upton dropped behind a straggly stone wall. His automatic was in his palm when he cocked an eye over the top.

The horseman was approaching from the left. The black gleam of a rifle barrel slung over his back reflected the moonlight. His long cloak whipped back against his legs. His bandoliers glistened. Under an astrakhan shako, his eyes were yellow slivers in the night. His soft *oporki* creaked with the swing of the stirrups. He trotted on, a few feet from the crouched Yank.

And just before he passed, Skid Upton made out the red star insignia of all good one hundred per cent Bolos on his tunic. As the Cossack vanished, the Yank realized clearly for the first time that he was behind Bolo lines.

Kamku, the former Slansky, seemed to have a faculty for getting him in hot water.

AT that very instant, Kamku was seated behind a desk in the commandant's tent of a Bolo squadron field. His Mongol eyes flicked around scornfully. He played nervously with a short quirt.

"Get that!" he snapped at his adjutant. "Inform brigade. Get a wire through to H.Q. Tell them to have the Cossacks scour the Ukraine. That White dog landed in our S.O.S. some place. The A.A.'s would have reported it if he had recrossed our lines. The devil was chasing me!"

He gulped a slug of *vodka* and spat. "Order out the firing squad. Those three with me—I signaled them to turn back and get him. The cowards wouldn't. If my guns hadn't jammed— Anyway, tell the sergeant to have them dig their own graves before he fires. Does the captain know I'll want six ships on the line at dawn? And—you lout—some more *vodka*. I think you swig half of it yourself when I'm out fighting. That's all!"

"*Arrasho!* All right!" the adjutant mumbled sullenly with a casual salute, thinking his own thoughts of a commander who would chase a commissioned officer after his *vodka* bellywash.

Ivan the orderly drew off Kamku's boots carefully. "The major is angered about that White airman?" he inquired with a foolish smile.

"*Eto vierno,* you half-wit. That's true. I met him once before. Upton is the name, if my memory still serves me. I want to get him before he gets me. . . ."

IV

AFTER the trotting Cossack was well down the road, Upton slipped over the low stone fence and found his boots on a cobbled road. The Cossack had unintentionally warned him. Where one of that breed was, there would be sure to be a whole *sotnia* of his hardriding, keen-fighting brothers. Skid thought of some more things to say to that lying mecho if he saw him again.

Here he was, miles behind the Bolo lines, deep in the Ukraine, lost, washed out. Well enough he knew that the Reds with the aid of the Cossacks of the Don had organized the vast southern province of Russia into a huge warcamp. His chances of slipping back across the Perekop Isthmus were—well, he didn't want to think about them. Instead, he flipped a coin and bent his head close to inspect it. Heads to the left. . . .

Heads it was. He turned left and plodded down the road. Unhooking his combination, he pushed it back to have free arm play to get at that Colt in his Sam Browne. Shading a lighted cigaret in his curled hand, he progressed as stealthily as feasible. A good war bird could do one hell of a lot of ground-flying on a butt and a gat.

He shivered a little in the night. Russian nights turned chill at a moment's notice. Then he shivered again and it wasn't the climate. He was just recalling one night when Lastrov stipped off his clothes in the mess-shack to get a bath. There had been a regular lacework of welts down the Pole's broad back. When questioned, he had grinned crookedly and said something about the treatment the Bolos had for a man who was tongue-tied. The Cossacks don't carry their *nagaikas* for nothing.

A long, low-lying building loomed out of the night. Upton fell into a crouch and palmed his gun in one swift, silent motion. Some of those Reds were going to

earn six feet of earth before they got the third degree to him. He slipped ahead in the dirt of a shallow ditch. His eyes strained to make out the nature of the big shack. Hopefully his nostrils waited for the scent of castor oil that would denote a hangar. Then he decided it was a Bolo barracks.

In a wide detour, he approached it from the rear, creeping through the grass. One side of his face was smeared with dried blood. One arm hung stiffly along the seam of his combination. His whole frame sagged with weariness. And right now, he was wishing he had the old "Mad" McGinty of Fismes at his side. The boisterous, scrappy Mick who was his buddy.

There was no sound. Keeping to the heavy shadows, he approached the back of the building. A shuttered window frowned at him like a sightless eye. He probed cautiously at the shutters. They were iron, and securely fastened.

Backing off, the Yank war hawk worked around to the side, then reconnoitered from the front. He saw what looked like a door. Cramped and chilled, he straightened and strode toward it. From his back came a hoarse Russian challenge. From the front, a single knifing streak of red flame lanced at him.

Skid Upton felt an awful clap on the side of his head. The sullen black building seemed to leer up at him. From all around, hidden rifles spattered the night with yellow-red gashes. His own automatic wavered in front of him. Then his legs turned to water and Skid Upton folded up in a deep sleep.

Skid's last impression was that somebody had opened the back door of hell around him. The whole night simply had erupted fire and flame. Then he was sinking in a heavy sleep. Dimly he was aware of men tugging at his body, picking him up, carrying him somewhere.

Ten minutes later a fire was flickering in his eyes and a black-bearded figure bent over him, strapping a crude bandage around his head. He sat up dizzily. Half a dozen swart-faced men peered at him intently.

Clumsily he opened his combination to get a smoke. There was a cry of surprise and rage from one of the men. The bearded guard jerked up the rifle he leaned upon, blunt bayonet glinting savagely in the firelight.

"A White!" he ejaculated in Russian. *"Doloi!* Down with him!"

THE man working on Skid Upton's scalp wound stepped away. He forced down the bayonet of the other. His deep-set eyes fastened on Skid's neck. The Yank realized the insignia on the collar of his tunic was revealed. The leader stepped toward him, reached out with a claw-like hand and ripped the combination from his shoulders.

Lean, swaying, wind-bitten, the Yank war hawk faced them, a trim, tense figure whose fingers jerked down to find his holster empty. The leader growled:

"Eto vierno! True. That's right. A Wrangel dog!"

Skid Upton's teeth bared as he comprehended the oaths and obscenities hurled at him by the Red Guards. He guessed he had stumbled on a Bolo post in the S.O.S. The white tunics of the men were adorned with red stars. The leader wore one in his hat.

The latter thrust himself forward again, swarthy, unshaven visage with pendulous lips close to the Yank's sharp-hewn countenance. *"Teesche!* Not so noisy!" he cried to his compatriots. "You—" he jutted a stubby thumb at Skid "—what are you doing here? How did you come? What is it—"

Skid Upton held up a hand to stop the torrent of questions hurled at him. Reaching over, he snapped a match on the bayonet of the astounded guard. "What am I doin'?" he replied after a deep, satisfying puff. "Buddy, I'm pickin' daisies! What are you going to do about it?"

The ring of Red Guards pressed closer menacingly. Upton sneered at them. The leader bit off a guttural command and two towering brutes grabbed the Yank's arm. He was forcibly escorted down the road. Glancing back, he saw that the barracks-like building was again silent and buried in blackness.

They strode along rapidly for five minutes. The Red Guards muttered among themselves. Some remark brought a booming laugh from them and they regarded the Yank prisoner with satisfaction. They turned in abruptly at a wide gate, passed

an *isba* with a single light glowing and responded to the challenge of an unseen sentry.

A column of *telegues,* light carts, were drawn up at the right of the pathway. When they rounded a turn through the trees, the lights of a country estate blazed at them. Two sentries blocked their way with crossed bayonets. The leader stepped forward into the light and whispered something.

As he conversed he unwound his *nagaika* from his shoulder and flicked it suggestively as he drew himself up in his broad *sharovari,* leather boots, long tunic and astrakhan cap, a narrow, wolf-like figure. There was a throaty burst of laughter from the sentries, an amused glance at the captive Yank and a muttered *"Arrasho"*—all right.

Skid was jerked up the low steps and hurried into a long hall. A few minutes later he sat on a stool in an empty room with a glaring lamp swung over his head. A heavy door gave off from the other end of it. Weak and strained, the Yank listened an instant, shot a glance around, and stole to the second door.

He left it to return with the stool gripped in his fist. Tensing himself, he ripped the door open, stool lifted high. Then, the stool slowly lowered and he took a step backward. For, on the other side of the portal a little, beady-eyed man stood, stood with a Mauser carelessly perched in one hand.

He stepped into the room like a cat. Baffled, the Yank retreated step by step before the black muzzle. The Red Guards crowded around him from the other end of the room. Somebody jerked the stool from him. The glass-eyed man with the gun motioned him onto it.

Talking through his teeth, he hissed questions at the Yank with perplexing rapidity. *"Familia"* and *"tchin"* were two of the words the Yank caught; name and rank. More followed, demands as to the condition of the Wrangel forces, the position of certain regiments, threats . . .

The glaring lamp beat down on Skid's throbbing head. The blunt knife ends of the Bolo rifles edged toward him. Stolid, thick-skinned faces ringed him in. Then the Cossack officer took a hand. His long, wicked *nagaika* swished and curled in a far corner of the bare room as he smiled icily at Skid Upton.

"Perhaps, comrade, a little taste of the lash and the *vopros,* questions, will be easier to answer. *Nyet?* No?"

Stepping away, he drew back his lash suggestively. Skid steeled himself. The automatic of the beady-eyed one pressed closer. The five Red Guards waited with anticipant eyes, hungering. The *nagaika* hissed softly, then bit with the sting of a snake's fangs. The Cossack laughed softly.

Skid Upton trembled with agony and fury as the whip wound with piercing embrace across his legs. His lips went white. The blood fled from his head. The Red Guards swore thickly, disappointed that no cry had come from the White officer.

The little man with the gun spoke again through his teeth. "We will take him," he hissed, "to M. Ginti—the Commissar. Yes-s."

THERE was a grunt of assent from the Bolo guards. The one with the heavy brows leaped forward. "Let us cut off his hands—as we did to that last Wrangel dog we captured. Ah—he was funny. The bloody stumps of his arms waving around. . . ." He broke off to laugh long and heartily at the memory of it. "And the cigaret, it stuck to his lips, burning. And he could not take it away. Ha! I could smell the scorched flesh. Ha, ha-ha."

Skid Upton paled. Somehow, he could see the picture of that Wrangel officer . . . and those bloody stumps of arms, and the Bolo swine rolling with merriment. Something burst inside Skid Upton's brain. Everything ran red before his eyes. That Yankee war bird had reached the end of his endurance. Nerves, flayed and thin-strung by weeks of slashing dogfights, went haywire. But one thing he could remember. The slogan of the White Squadron!

The slogan they used to solemnly avow in the *isba* that was their mess-room back in the Crimea. The slogan to which every man of them pledged himself after they had drunk their nightly toast of *"Bozhi Tsaria Khrani,"* God save the Czar. Lastrov had risen from death to strike for it.

The slogan—"In death, there is honor!"

Skid Upton would go out fighting for it now rather than be maimed and hacked by those Red dogs. His eyes narrowed. Square-knuckled fists knotted at his sides. The guard with the heavy brows reeled still with laughter.

"And the blood—the blood . . ." he kept repeating. He swung against the beady-eyed man with the automatic. His companions chuckled with him.

Skid struck. The stiff arm with the flesh wound flailed out, felling him of the beady eyes. Snatching down. Skid had his stool. It crashed into the bewildered Bolos. One man thrust his rifle forward to get his bayonet into play. Skid swooped under it and kicked. The Bolo sank, gripping his guts.

The Yank's eyes fastened on the door. He leaped for it, wrenched it open and dashed through as a hail of rifle lead splintered it. Along, brightly lit corridor ran to the rear of the mansion. Reeling with fatigue, Skid Upton rushed along it. At the end, he flung open another door, expecting to find himself outside.

The pursuing Bolo guards were hard at his heels. He catapulted through the second doorway—then halted abruptly. It was yet another room, dimly illuminated. There was a big, old-fashioned desk. Behind it, a red-faced man in a gold-trimmed, crimson officer's *bashliki* lolled. A young girl started with fright from his lap.

For an instant, Skid Upton felt like laughing. Then a slug bit the woodwork near his shoulder. He leaped forward. The man behind the desk rose swiftly as the woman fled. And one of his giant paws snatched up an ugly black revolver.

"What the—" he started, then broke into a string of pungent Russian oaths.

A few inches from the ugly weapon, Upton swayed. Shoving aside a stone jug of *vodka,* the red-faced giant was scrutinizing him closely. Upton had that uneasy feeling of having met this huge Red commissar somewhere before. A stark white scar running upward across the cheek from the left corner of the mouth gave him a ribald air. His eyes seemed to be getting hotter as he studied Upton.

The Red Guards raced in, jabbering, waving bayonets, crowding around the Yank as the beady-eyed man sought to explain.

"Commissar Ginti," he hissed obsequiously with his alibi, "this Wrangel pig—"

"Do volno! Shut up!" the commissar exploded. "Is my important business to be interrupted because you stupid swine can't guard one single prisoner? Thirty thousand of them on the Crimea—and you can't handle one, blockheads!" His Russian had an unmistakably foreign accent. "Some things will have to be reported to the Tcheka at Petrograd!"

The beady-eyed one blanced. The rest of the Red Guards shuffled uncomfortably.

The commissar pointed at the door. They filed out, stolid and subdued. The Cossack officer alone halted at the door for a parting word.

"Remember, Comrade Commissar, the Wrangel dog attempted to aid the prisoners to escape!"

"Out! I'll take care of him. See that every one of those guards is given double sentry duty tonight, *polkovna!"* Striding over, he closed the door with a slam after the Cossack colonel. Leaning against his desk and dangling his villainous Mauser, he surveyed the Yank once again.

"Kamku wants you!" he snapped at last in Russian.

Upton started, then thrust out his jaw. "Not half as bad as I want him!"

Commissar Ginti grunted. He seemed to be struggling against an outburst. With a crash, his Mauser landed in a far corner and he leaped up, brushing off his fatigue cap. "An' another old friend uh yours is lookin' for yuh, too!" It was ripped out savagely, in English.

Upton stared a moment. A gasp, half of surprise, half of relief, escaped his lips. He was facing Mad McGinty of Fismes fame. In the Russky garb and with the new scar beside his mouth, the Yank war bird had failed to recognize him.

"McGinty!" he cried, reeling, grinning.

"Yuh dirty, little double-crossing spy!" McGinty's face blackened with fury.

One of his massive arms catapulted out, stiff as a bludgeon. Skid Upton sat down against the wall, blood trickling from his mashed lips.

V

THE room reeled in a mad dance and Mad McGinty swam in the center of it like a hazy ogre as Captain Skid Upton

sat against the wall. The left side of his face felt absolutely dead from McGinty's blow. Some of his teeth rattled as he moved his jaw stiffly. The Irishman always could sock; some of the toughest M. P.'s that ever raided a Frog *estaminet* could testify to that.

Gradually the room settled down and Upton could see clearly. McGinty, now known as M. Ginti or Comrade Commissar, was advancing on him again. Skid got his hands against the wall and pushed himself erect. He spat some blood and spoke.

"One sweet way to greet an old buddy, Mad!"

"An old buddy?" McGinty raged. "A dirty little double-crossing Heinie spy, yuh mean!"

Upton lifted a hand feebly to ward him off. "Wait a minute, Mad! Wait a minute! You don't know the whole story—yet . . ."

"All I need tuh know!" McGinty's arm shot out again.

The battered Upton staggered along the wall under the impact of it. Then he bent as if falling, and flashed up with Mad McGinty's discarded Mauser in his fist.

"Now, you lop-eared, bog-trotting Mick!" he croaked, "one more crack from you and you'll be holding a lily! Even if I had been a Kraut spy, I never did anything to—"

"No?" Mad McGinty raged, creeping closer. "Never did nothin' tuh me, hey? Say, skunk, afterward I didn't mind it so much that yuh turned out tuh be a Jerry. That was yer business an' yuh can't blame a man for playin' the game for his own side. But why the hell yuh wanted tuh get me in front uh a firin' squad—"

"You in front of a firing squad?" Upton gasped.

"Yeah, don't play dumb! They found them papers in your room. An' the lousy things named me as your aide in that spy game. Upton—er whatever your name is!"

The Mauser in Upton's hand sagged. "You mean—"

"I mean that they grabbed me an' had me slated for the back-to-the-wall act because you, you lousy double-crosser, framed me in the papers yuh left behind! Now—"

Skid Upton stood up very straight and faced this Mad McGinty who had once been his best friend, who had flown wing to wing with him on the Picard-Vosges front, who had shot him out of the air that night he was marked as a spy.

"You think, Mad McGinty," he said evenly, "that I was a Boche Intelligence agent and deliberately planned to have you killed? Okay, Mad!" The Mauser skidded across the top of the commissar's desk. "There's your chance to square things. Get it over with quickly!"

Mad McGinty ran a huge hand through his tousled red mop of hair. His eyes stared, trying to penetrate to the truth. His crimson *bashliki* rose and fell on his heaving chest. Hesitantly, his hand moved out and gripped the gun.

"Yuh mean—yuh know—I'll kill yuh," he half asked, half threatened.

The cold, sharp laugh came from Upton. "If I believed that of you—Mad—I'd kill you quick enough!"

McGinty's mouth twitched at the ends, then hardened into a stiff line. The Mauser leaped up, dwarfed by his big knuckles. Its dark bore was like a black eye of menace on Upton. Feet separated him from the bullet outlet. McGinty wore a scowl above it.

The breathing of both hissed sharply in the stillness of the room.

Mad McGinty's scowl broke. The Mauser dropped to the floor. He leaped forward. And with a sort of sobby "What the hell!" he had his arms around Upton and was shaking the stuffing out of him. "If I wasn't such a thick-skulled ape, I'd uh known there was a monkey up a tree some place!"

Upton was pushing his face around good-humoredly. "Talk about finding ice water in hades! Baby!"

A FEW minutes later, Upton was bent industriously over a bowl of *shtchi,* the cabbage soup of the Russky, and a pile of black bread. Between gulps, he related the yarn of that fateful night back at Fismes when he had been forced into the spy trap. Puffing at one of the White war bird's Turk cigarettes, Mad McGinty listened.

"Slansky, eh?" he said at last. "Who'd uh thought he was a Boche baby?" He poured out two healthy slugs of *vodka* from the jar on his desk. "Yuh know, he come

tuh me that night when we was leaving the mess and suggested sneakin' out a couple uh crates an' hopping on the tail uh this Heinie baby when he tried to get away. We dragged a couple out uh the hangar at the far end an' turned 'em up when one uh the camions went slamming down the back road. A few minutes later, Slansky, the lousy bum, comes a-hoppin'. I never thought it was you an' I wouldn't uh buhlieved it later if they hadn't dug out them papers uh yers mentionin' me. Slansky, the louse, must uh planted them." Mad's belligerent jaw jutted with the thought of Slansky. "Anyhow, I jumps the coop as they come for me an' hit for ol' Paree. Fell in with a Bolshi mob there an' they sneaked me through Germany an' intuh this. So here I am, Commissar M. Ginti, a rip-snortin' Bolo bum. They even changes my name—"

There was an impatient tread in the corridor.

McGinty's voice fell to a hoarse whisper. "Here, cock an eye at this!" He pushed an official memo in front of Upton.

The latter shook his head. "I can speak it in a way, but I can't read the Russky lingo yet. What's the dope?"

McGinty glanced at the door behind Skid, moved his Mauser closer and explained. "She's a wire from H.Q. Got another like her from the Kommandant of the Don. Lissen! Here's the dope. There's a reward of fifty thousand roubles offered for you. Dead or alive, kid. 'Pilot of White Squadron'—'reported to have crossed the Red lines'—'last seen headed in direction of Militopol'—they sure want yuh bad, Skid."

"Who?"

McGinty whistled softly. "The toughest son in the Red mob—Ataman Kamku of the Red Squadrons of the Union of the Soviet States of Russia!"

Upton was half out of his chair. "Don't yuh know who he is, Mad?"

McGinty took another deep puff on his butt. "Yuh know this *mashkova*—the poor guy's tobacco uh this country—is worse than rotten. Sure I know who this Kamku bird is. Plenty. Every man here does, too. He's tough. He's plenty hell on wings. He's in soft with the big muckymucks at Nomber 2 Gorokhovaya Street in Petrograd. Them's the Red H.Q. In plain English, Skid, he's hell-on-wheels itself."

"You ever seen Kamku, Mad?"

McGinty shook his red head. "Nope, an' I don't crave tuh either."

"Kamku, Mad McGinty, flew with us in France—at Fismes. Kamku is our old friend—Slansky!"

"Kamku's Slansky?"

"Yeah. . . . And Russia isn't big enough for the both of us. That's why I'm here—to square things with that baby. Russia isn't big enough to hold the two of us. . . ."

Mad McGinty nodded meditatively. "You're right. It ain't. That's why I'm pullin' stakes quick! I never figured Kamku—was—Slansky. . . ."

Upton leaned forward. "I never knew you were short on guts, Mad!"

Mad grinned crookedly. "Yuh don't know Ataman Kamku. . . . You'd better get out—too! Don't see how I can myself—yet!"

In silence they had another drink of the potent, colorless *vodka* and lit up fresh smokes. McGinty pushed a map from the mess of his official papers into the center of the desk, between them. His thick thumb began making quick traceries.

"Git a load uh this, Skid. See, here? This is the province uh Taurida where yuh are now. Down there by the Azov is Militopol. Over there tuh the west is the Dnieper an' Aleshki. Yuh see what a distance yuh got between yuh an' yer lines at Perekop? Aside from runnin' the stray Cossacks an' Red Guards. . . . An' this country is lousy with 'em. This here's a two-bit railway. But every hand-car an' up on her has two-three Bolo guards tuh every payin' passenger. Aside from that, it's easy, Skid."

Upton licked his lips, but said nothing.

Mad read the signs. "Stubborn as a doggone mule, huh? Lissen some more. Old boy Kamku has put fifty thousand roubles on your pelt. Every *isnochtchik* an' every *maradior,* hackdriver an' bandit 'tween here an' Archangel is goin' tuh give his gat a cleanin' tuh collect that head money. Now yuh walked right intuh trouble. Yer accused uh aidin' prisoners tuh escape. Than which there is nothin' greater in the way uh a crime in the eyes uh these Red butcher boys. So—"

"What prisoners?"

"The mutts in the barracks! About a thousand uh them, what's left uh the Iron Legion uh Siberia. An' what blood-drinkin', lead-eatin' scrappers those gents are. Phew! They stuck up for the old Czar so the Bolos slapped the cuffs on 'em an' herded 'em in here tuh work the coal mines. The Don Cossacks are bossin' 'em. Anyway, them fightin' fools wouldn't come out of their barracks this mornin' for the pick-an'-shovel detail so we got tuh lay seize tuh 'em.

"Well, baby, it was their barracks yuh was sneakin' up on when one uh them potted yuh. My boys dragged yuh out. It made 'em sore, savin' a White officer. An' yer charged with tryin' tuh aid an' abet escape uh prisoners. A bird does that only once in this country!"

Upton pushed his chair back. "What I said about Kamku still goes!"

Mad said: "Well—"

He broke quickly into a jargon of vituperative Russky. Skid got a kick in the shins beneath the table. Mad's voice was nasty now. He fairly glared across the table.

"Comrade Ginti!" a heavy voice from behind Skid Upton challenged severely. "You will have many things to explain to the Kommandant of the Don!"

SKID swung around. The door had been opened. On its threshold towered a bear-like figure who seemed to cramp himself as he took a ponderous stride forward, a man who made the huge Irishman seem like a pigmy. As he entered, he swung open a gigantic fur coat, revealing a set of loaded bandoleers, and a pair of huge revolvers, as well as his black beard.

Spike McGinty leaped to salute. His astrakhan cap was jammed low over his bushy brows and once again he was the red-faced commissar of the local *stanitsa.* "I am always ready to explain the execution of my duty!" he snapped.

The mammoth Russian dropped a pair of fur gloves on the table, wiped the frost off his jet black beard and half jerked one of the revolvers from his belt. "I have been listening well, Commissar," he thundered in Russian. "If one of your duties is aiding the escape of a prisoner—"

Skid Upton guessed the lay of the land. This towering newcomer was one of McGinty's superiors and had overheard their conversation. Looked as if Mad McGinty was in bad. . . . Soundlessly, the war hawk of the White Army slid around behind the bear-like man, who seemed ready to crush McGinty with one blow.

Right behind Skid was a niche in the heavy wall with an *icon.* Skid's fist jerked back for the statue. It would make a damn good weapon across the head of the Russky bear.

Then he froze. For just beyond the door, the Cossack *polkovna* waited, a thin sneer on his lips, a gun half seen against the folds of his long cloak. The game was up.

McGinty thought different. Eyes bloodshot from the *vodka,* he sauntered close to the mammoth Russian, spat out his cigaret and seized the man by the lapel of his huge coat.

"Get this, *matchik!* No oversize bum like yuh is tellin' me what I am! Git that? If yer ears were 'bout two inches longer, yuh'd make a sweet jackass. 'Cause yuh got the bray now." The Irishman's pugnacious jaw thrust into the face of the bewildered Russian. "An' I don't give a couple uh whoops an' a damn if yu want tuh report me tuh the Kommandant of the Don. 'Cause I'm goin' tuh mention yer name for a blundering fool!"

The Russian jerked away, dropping his red hands to the guns in his belt. *"Teesche!* Silence!"

But the Irish Commissar never gave the big fellow a chance to get started. "Son of a saint! Here I am about to trick this White dog into revealing valuable information and you rush in," he thundered in Russky. "By the sacred beard of St. Andrew himself—"

The Russian was taken aback by Mad's cocksure belligerency. The green slits of eyes in the raw flesh of his flat face watched the Commissar like a cat. "Pardon, Comrade Commissar. But if I have interfered with your chances of getting information—" he leaned across the desk—"you will shoot him, this White dog. *Nyet,* no? The firing squad, eh?"

"The firing squad?" Mad's laugh roared to the rafters of the big room. A flicker of hope rose in Upton's breast. "The firing squad? No, comrade—I will shoot him myself!"

The mammoth Russian bowed. "Comrade, my apologies. My hot blood and love of the Red flag—"

"Say no more, brother," Mad tossed at him good-naturedly. "Come, you!" He gestured the White Squadron war bird forward.

It looked like the last taps. Walled in by a Red guard squad, Upton was hustled out into a cobbled courtyard on which the big Russian's boots clumped impressively. Mad was chuckling as if it were all one hell of a big joke.

"Always room for one more in the ditch, eh, comrades? Come along now, my fine Wrangel captain! We have the biggest coffin yuh ever saw!"

They trooped toward the back of the stable yard, with the harsh laughs of the Cossack colonel and the giant Russky after him. Upton made out the whiteness of a wall that had once been part of this country estate. A ditch gaped before the wall, paralleling it. A stomach-turning stench assailed his nostrils. His lips went white. If it had been upstairs, with Spandaus tacking the nails into his coffin—

McGINTY brought the party up with a vicious *mujik* imprecation. "Blockheads! Sons of uncountable swine!" he bellowed into the wooden faces of the Red Guards squad. "Where are the torches? Since when is it that we hold the funeral services in the dark? Torches! All of you! Get them!" They broke before the lashing tongue and the brandishing Mauser.

Stunned, Skid Upton was hoisted bodily by the collar of his tunic. Mad's hands propelled him forward and through the half-seen door of the cavernous barn. Together, they landed in a pile of rotting hay.

"Get your carcass out uh that flying rig, baby!" Mad hissed, watching the door with uplifted Mauser. Then he flashed around and pawed an excavation in the hay like a hound.

As Skid slipped out of his combination, Mad rose with a vague form. As it passed the White Squadron captain, it felt clammy. McGinty stepped out into the yard with it propped beside him.

"Lay low," he hissed back.

The Red Guards came trotting up with the torches, their wavering flames tonguing the black shadows of the barnyard eerie.

"The White swine has fainted!" McGinty chuckled drunkenly. "Here, I'll carry him."

Peering out from beneath a shield of fetid hay, Skid Upton saw the crimson flares playing on the white-washed wall. The ditch yawned up at it, black and ugly. Against the wall, a white-faced figure was sagging, head lolling, in Skid's baggy combination.

Across the ditch, Mad McGinty swayed slightly, Mauser jutting before him. "Watch this, comrades," his *vodka*-blurred voice called. "Pray, dog of a Wrangelist! Pray that you had died under the Red flag! He is weak, the coward. *Posor!* Shame!"

Bewildered, Skid Upton watched with puzzled eyes. Was Mad killing another in his stead? Was— With a shrill, drunken cry of glee, McGinty's automatic stabbed the night in a drumming thunder.

Five times the Irish commissar jammed back the trigger. Lead slammed into the figure against the wall. Then, it mercifully crumpled and toppled into the ditch.

A delighted boom of laughter burst from the big Russky behind. "Bottoms up, eh, Comrade Ginti."

McGinty turned unsteadily and they all trooped back into the big country house that had once been the glorious mansion of one of the Czar's favorites. The torchlight ebbed from the yard like a reluctant tide. Laughing voices came dimly from the house.

With a sigh, Skid Upton slumped back into the hay. His head reeled from fatigue and the battering he had taken. The pulse of his feverish blood drummed in his ears. The hay was soft and warm and easing to his wracked body. His eyelids dropped. A few seconds later, he was dead to the menace of the Bolo brigands, asleep.

Kamku stalked through his dreams, pushing sodden figures into a ditch that bubbled red.

VI

THE icy chill of the Russian night was like shafts of steel in his bones. Dimly, Upton was aware that somebody was prodding him gently. Befuddled by his slumber, he sat up stiffly and gouged the sleep from his heavy eyes.

Dawn patrol, eh? Up once more to dice with death against Kamku and his red-starred *staffel,* eh? "Tell that lancejack," he mumbled, "that my m.g.'s have been jamming too damn' frequent of late. And orderly, wrastle me another drink—a stiff one!"

"Orderly, hell!" It was Mad McGinty.

Upton was wide awake with a jerk. He grabbed Mad's hand. "That's one big one I owe you, Mad. I figured it was my last nose dive under full gun. But—say, who was the poor devil you shot in my place?"

McGinty moved his red mug away quickly with a wince. "Well, that big buzzard was suspicious. So I had tuh make some kind uh a play. The gent I plugged —he was a stiff . . . I know it sounds nasty. But yuh don't know these butchers. The Bolos croaked him two days ago. I allus keep one in the hay here. Drag 'em out uh the trench at night. My turn'll come some day—an' I want a substitute handy. Sounds rough. But, baby, yuh don't know what I'm up against. He passed, in your outfit and in the dark, for you. Have a drink on it. She's cold!" He swung up the *vodka* jug.

"The big buzzard," he hurried on, "is one uh the Okhrana, the old Czar's secret service mob. A sneaky-heeled skunk working for the Soviet now. He checks up on the local bosses like me. And the lousy flatfoot has ordered me to lead a charge on that barracks of the Iron Legion crew at dawn. Hope yuh like the wake!" He had Skid's hand and was gripping it hard and quickly. "Now yuh dust while I try tuh hold 'em off the trail for a while. So-long an'—"

"The Iron Legions—from Siberia," Upton pondered as he failed to stir. "You got my butts, Mad. The Iron Legions—say, they're the babies the Russians stuck in the Carpathian passes to stop the Austros when everybody else failed? Sure!"

"Think it over when yuh get back to the Crimea, Skid. Now, hurry—"

"Cut the gun! I got an idea!"

"Yuh should uh got her before yuh come —an' then stayed out. Blood's the only thing that goes in this slaughter-house."

"Into a whipstall, McGinty! This is a hot one out of the hangar. Listen, cockeyed! You say those Iron Legion gents are hell for scrapping. And they must be plenty sore at this bunch of skunks for taming them. Listen some more. There's about a thousand of them! Yes?"

"Yep," McGinty agreed. "Got a Mongolian strain in 'em which is almost as good as Irish. Blood drinkers. Why rub it intuh me?"

"McGinty," Skid whispered slowly, "suppose that outfit of blood-drinkers was to be turned loose behind the Bolo lines on the Perekop?"

McGinty sat very still, brows creased in thought. Finally he replied: "Then—I want tuh be back in Archangel—'cause that's the farthest place away from Perekop. But after tuhmorra mornin'—I won't care 'cause I'll be lookin' fer a cool spot in hell tuh plant my broadside. I've led a dirty life, buddy. What with the dames an' the licker—"

"Pipe down, McGinty!" Skid seized his arm fiercely. "You ain't six foot under—yet. Listen!" Hoarsely the Yank pilot began whispering in Spike McGinty's ear. His husky voice became shrill with excitement. That old devil-born grin creased his wind-whipped face as he went on. His whole frame tensed, vibrating with the hint of battle again.

"—there yuh are, McGinty. An' this Bolo mob'll think they got a back-draught of hell when it hits 'em!"

Spike McGinty stared very solemnly at the White eagle of the Crimea. "Goofy!" he said softly, teeth chattering in the cold of the Russian night. "Plain out an' out goofy. Yer mad, kid." He raised the jug.

"Remember, Mad, you're still kicking!"

McGinty choked halfway in his drink. "Say, yuh stuck-up peelot, no Irishman ever needs proddin' fer a scrap! We McGintys'd come outa our coffins—but they'd murder us!"

But Skid Upton wasn't listening to McGinty then! His eyes were fastened on the wide door of the barn, dimly lit by the filtrating moonlight. Spike's words about "coffins" were almost an omen.

For the white sheen of moonlight was stained by a shadow, a shadow huge and hulking in its menace.

SKID'S shrill cry of warning strangled in his throat. The shadow became a reality, a fierce, threatening reality in the

form of the mammoth Russian. Faintly gleaming, his Cossack sword swished through the blackness, wielded by one of his mighty arms.

McGinty's back was to it. Skid ripped the *vodka* jug from his hands. Using it like a foil, he lunged to break the sweep of that Cossack blade. The mightily wielded sword crashed against it, accompanied by a thunderous Russky oath. Hand ringing from the shock, Skid Upton dove and grappled for the Russian's knees. His lean arms clamped them, snapping them together.

It felt as if a barrage of G. I. cans had landed when the Russian giant toppled. In the turmoil, there was the muffled explosion of a gun. Fighting out from under, the Yank heard Mad grunting and spitting imprecations. In the thick darkness the Irish commissar and the Bolo brute locked with the sword between them. Upton leaped in, driving a kick at the blade. It spun into the hay.

The Russian leaped free, casting off Mad McGinty as if he were a rag doll. Balancing himself, Upton let go with a heavy hook to the Russian's mouth. It landed. The Russian stood like a man on paralyzed legs. Upton's arm ached as if he had slammed a stone wall.

"Give the mutt the works!" Mad blurted as he charged.

Upton cocked his other hand as the Russky fumbled for his second gun. A smear of blood dripped from his hand where the first shot had nailed him as he tried to kill the Irishman. With a dull thud, something crowned the giant, ramming his fur cap over his eyes.

Upton's left catapulted home. The man shivered like a huge tree under the ax. One of Mad's deep grunts told that he was laboring. Another slam landed on the Russky's skull. He sank, crumpling in the hay. Mad staggered forward, dangling one heavy boot.

Upton was busy licking his bruised knuckles. "That bird's got a jaw like an Aussie M. P."

Mad grinned as he drew on the boot. "Hell, he wasn't no scrapper. Yuh an' me could uh tamed him easy if we had two other guys. But—"

Upton looked at him.

"—well, when that bird comes around, this is goin' tuh be one plumb unhealthy country for me!" He stood up. "No, when he wakes up, he ain't goin' tuh warble love songs. I'm either goin' tuh be A.W.O.L. or K. in A. But they'd run me down fast in this country."

"How about that Iron Legion bunch, Mad?"

Mad McGinty looked into the night. "A counter-revolt," he said at last. "We got exactly half the chance uh the well-known snowball—but I'm with yuh, Skid! The Iron Legion!"

Their hands met. "And Kamku!" Upton added hotly.

VII

SWIFTLY the two hurried back into the big, sprawling country mansion and slipped silently into the office of M. Ginti, Commissar. Mad passed the White pilot an automatic with three clips of cartridges. He armed himself with another. Wry-faced, they dragged on a pair of malodorous sheepskins.

Mad McGinty met Upton's glance and grinned crookedly, the white scar up from his mouth giving him a clownish look. His face sobered suddenly. He tightened his belt with a snap. Then he was leading the way from the silent house, curtly acknowledging the salute of the muffled sentry in front. Upton trailed him, masked beneath a fur cap and a ragged sheepskin coat that came to his ears.

Along the road, their steps ringing clearly, the bitter wind soughed through the fir trees. Around a bend, the fire of the guard post peeped at them. Dim figures crouched around the blaze on their heels. Mad McGinty's shoulders hunched determinedly. Upton jerked the sheepskin collar closer about his face to assure his disguise.

AS the half-frozen guards pushed to their rag-wrapped feet, McGinty swaggered into their midst. With a big, friendly smile, he addressed them familiarly.

"Tovaristchi, I have the plan to save bloodshed—yours and mine. With the dawn, comrades, we are to attack. And you see the faint streak in the east now . . . *Nyet?* It will not be pleasant to storm that

barracks, *malchiks.* They have but few guns . . . still, the Iron Legion. . . . Many of us will die. . . ."

The Red Guards hunched deeper in their cloaks as he paused dramatically. Sullen glances regarded the dawn tingling the eastern horizon. McGinty, Commissar M. Ginti, puffed out his chest impressively, and continued in his heavy Russky.

"*Tovaristchi,* for your sake, I will talk to those in the barracks. Perhaps a peace can be made. *Tchort znayet!* The devil knows! Corporal, command the men not to fire on us. And get me a white flag, too. You two," he indicated a couple of swarthy worthies, "get a couple of machine guns and follow me!"

The corporal of the guard grinned like a simple child. "The Comrade Commissar is good. He thinks of the soldiers." Then he despatched several men to steal around the ring that besieged the gloomy barracks to warn them to hold their fire.

McGinty, with Upton close at his side, waited a few minutes. The Irishman took up the makeshift truce pennant, constructed of an old shirt. "Follow!" he commanded the pair with the m.g.'s. They hesitated fearfully a moment. "I'll see that nothing'll happen to you!" he assured them.

Brazenly, in the fast waning night, they strode forward, passing the lines of the Red Guards as the sullen, squat outlines of the huge barracks loomed up. Bolo lips on either side of them gleefully muttered:

"*Mir bondit! Mir bondit!* Peace is coming!"

Then McGinty's bellowing voice rang out in the night. "Hey, you, in the barracks!" And he waved his white flag energetically, "With me, Skid?" he called in English.

There was a guarded reply from the gloomy front of the building in a dialect Skid could barely understand. McGinty explained their mission in rapid Russian. They wanted to parley. The same thick voice bade them come forward. Grimly, the Red Guards lagging in the rear, they did.

When they were ten yards away, a door opened cautiously and a half-seen figure commanded them to put their hands over their head. McGinty paws shot up as he replied:

"I'll come in!" He called to Skid: "So long, kid. Do yer stuff!"

BUT Skid Upton was already doing it. He had switched around to the rear of the fearful pair of Red Guards with the two machine guns. His own fingers were locked around the stock of his automatic under his coat. Then he waited, listening to vague movements from the Bolo lines and the rumble of McGinty's deep voice within the door.

Minutes passed tensely. The war eagle of the Crimea knew what McGinty was telling them. He was making them the proposition of getting out, of striking back at their Bolo captors, then of getting to the Isthmus of Perekop in the Crimea and breaking through to join the royalist army of Wrangel

Shivering, Skid Upton lost hope. A mere thousand men to break out of this Cossack *stanitsa,* crash the S.O.S. sector of the Bolo army and thrust through the trenches at Perekop! Would they even consider it?

The iron barracks door creaked open. McGinty slipped out of it. "They're afraid of a trap," he explained hurriedly. "But if they see the insignia of the White Army on your tunic—that double-headed eagle—it'll convince 'em. Make it fast, baby. We're on borrowed time now."

But Upton had already reached the iron portal of the Ukraine barracks. It rasped open a few inches to permit him to enter. A hairy arm thrust a candle close to him. The Yank saw a mass of flat, Asiatic, half-yellow countenances turned on him.

All were silent as he threw open the sheepskin. The shoulder straps of the Czar and the two-headed eagle of Royal Russia were revealed. The hush broke in a muffled chorus of grunts. Heads craned. Slitted slivers of slanted eyes fastened on the eagles hypnotically.

From mouth to mouth, a whispered command ran. Ranks formed out of the mob miraculously. Teeth flashed with impatience. Bodies pressed down the stairs. A leader snuffed the candle, bringing a crude knife from the faded yellow blouse as he did so. He touched Upton and murmured something in a heavy tone.

Flinging the heavy door wide, Upton leaped out. "Okay, Mad!"

Mad McGinty moved like a flash. The astonished pair of Red Guards with the m.g.'s quaking in their boots anyway,

looked into his automatic. The latter jerked suggestively. The guns hit the frozen ground with a clatter as they dashed for the safety of their own lines. Out onto the flat ground before the miners' barracks flooded the horde of Siberian Cossacks. In the first wan flush of dawn, they fell into ranks. Their Bolo captors had been unable to shake their iron discipline when they shipped them to the mines. Squads and companies formed as of old with a curt precision.

Grimly McGinty showed them the machine guns the Red Guards had brought up. A captain took command, assigning six men to each. Like clockwork, in a few seconds they were set up, a man at the leg of each tripod, another manipulating the feed belt, a fifth at the triggers. The last one quickly ascertained the firing angle with a practiced eye and set the gun. The Iron Legion of Siberia was ready!

Back against the wall of the barracks, the rest were drawn up in orderly ranks, a few with rifles, others with cudgels torn from their cots, with sharpened shovels, pick handles, everything they could press into service as a weapon.

McGinty shot a look at Skid, then cupped his hands to his lips. *"Tovarish!"* he bellowed toward the Bolos. "The Iron Legion—" The snarl of a machine gun flickering from the Bolo lines blanked the rest of the words. "Had tuh give the poor dogs a chance, Skid!"

A shrill wavering cry broke from the ring of the Red Guards. Other guns joined in, picking toward the barracks. The lines of the Iron Legion men never stirred. An officer barked a low, guttural command. Their two m.g.'s burst into lethal chatter, snapping, spitting. That, too, was wiped away by a low rumble, deep-throated, fierce —the battle cry of the Iron Legion as they swayed forward from the wall.

Pin points of flame winked from the ranks. The first tide of dawn flushed into the valley. It was a strange sight, those files of yellow-cast, slant-eyed warriors facing the Bolo ring, two machine guns slashing forth eerie streaks that bore death! McGinty leaped forward, brandishing his automatic.

Clipped, cold commands came from the leader of the Siberian Cossacks, the Iron Legionnaires. A great dark wave rolled out, a wave of Mongols, the greatest fighting race the world ever knew, men who had served in the ruthless solitude of Siberia, low-browed, cobra-jawed, steel-eyed, they swung forward.

FOR a few seconds, guns spat at them from the Bolo ranks. Gaps opened in their line. But nothing impeded them. They went on, half crouched, as if unknowing and unseeing. Then they clashed. Shovels and cudgels hacked at the Red Guards, Iron-faced figures stalked into them, killing even as they died.

It was all over. Skid saw it first as he flung along at the big McGinty's shoulder. The Red Guards had never been up against such devils as those Mongols. Breaking, fleeing, they burst into full rout down the road to the *stanitsa.* After them, the Siberian devils deployed, mechanically cutting off little groups and efficiently eradicating them. Then, over the spat of gun-fire, a long, quavering whistle sirened!

"Holy Hell! The train!" McGinty cried. He began bawling frenziedly at the officers of the Iron Legionnaires.

Order rose miraculously out of the moil of battle. Squat, slant-eyed figures wheeled from their pursuit of the Red Guards and fell into platoons along the road, gray in the rising dawn. Fifty per cent of them bore guns now, taken from the Bolo dead. Some of them had even stripped the great cloaks from their fallen foes.

Sharp, calm commands went down the line. The column of a thousand broke into a double trot for the station down the valley. There was no lagging, no falling out, no turning to the aid of the fallen, wounded comrades. They were men of iron.

"Our chips are in the game," McGinty grunted as he toiled along, to Skid.

"We bought aces, mister," the Crimean ace returned as he looked back on those thousand fighters.

The road wound by the entrance to the mine shafts, gaping gloomy from the sides of stubby hills. A ramshackle tool shed lay a few yards from the tracks. There was a crash, as it was broken open and one wall caved in. Men streamed out of it armed with fresh tools.

Then the lights of the *stanitsa* station gleamed weakly through the half light. Skid Upton and McGinty were in the van

when they reached it. A Red Guard lolled against a pole on the platform, spitting sunflower seeds, rifle yards away against the building. Skid noticed the greasy lock of hair laying over his forehead, under his fur cap, a sign of the Bolos. Then it was gone —because the head was, and the decapitated body still lolled negligently against the platform pillar.

McGinty led the way around the platform. The train was there, little engine puffing frostily on the sharp air. Dozens of flat cars were hooked behind it. The front line of the Iron tide peered through the mist.

Men were sprawled over those flat cars, sullen-faced soldiers, evoking but little curiosity at the supposed conscripts to be taken on here. McGinty thrust up a sword he had picked up at the barracks.

"Gangway for the Iron Legion! *Pazhal'st', tovaristchi!*"

A rifle cracked from behind Skid Upton. Shovels and crowbars flailed a path forward. Taken off guard, completely surprised, the figures on the flat cars stumbled erect, held for a moment, then began tumbling off the other side. The tide of the Iron Legion swept the cars clean before them.

Together, Skid and McGinty dropped off the platform and hurried to the steaming engine at the head of the train. The engineer had dropped out of his cab, the fireman skulking behind him. A snipe-faced runt, he rubbed the stubble of his beard and stared impudently at the huge Irish commissar.

"Nyet! Nyet! No! Something is wrong here. I will not move the train. Where are the orders from the commissar or—"

"Right here!" Skid flung at him in Russian. And he jabbed his automatic in the man's belly. "You're going to move that train—and remember, she's clear board all the way through. All the way!"

The engineer tried to draw away from the gun. Hesitantly, he started to protest. Skid rammed the stubby gun snout in harder. "Take your choice, baby! A load of lead or a load of steam!"

"The hell with it!" McGinty put in with feigned impatience. "We'll carve their lousy guts out—as we did to the telegraph operator." He drew back his hacked Cossack sword.

"Tovaristchi!" the squat engineer begged. "But I was not certain. I did not know." He tore off his cap with the red cockade. "Did I not serve in the Turkestan Rifles under Kussloff? Did I not—"

"Get that train moving!" Skid warned him.

McGinty helped him up the steps with a boot. "An' fast—er you'll be servin' in hell under McGinty!"

After they had assigned a couple of guards to the engine cab, Skid and McGinty ran back along the track. Three stubs of telegraph poles gaped raw in the morning light. The men of the Iron Legion knew their business. A few strokes of the axes taken from the tool shed of the mine and they had made certain no warning would be sent ahead along their route.

The flat cars were now crowded with the thousand men, sprawled, quiet like steel awaiting the fire that is to test it. Their troop sergeant, one Igor, saluted them.

"We are ready, officers! *Bozhi Tsaria Khrani!* God save the Czar!"

There was a shrill blast from the locomotive whistle as they clambered on. The wheels ground, clawing for traction, on the dew-dampened tracks. Couplers rammed and clanked. The rim of the *stanitsa* station began to slip backward. The Bolos they had ousted gaped after them out of the receding mist, nothing loath to forego the doubtful pleasure of assaulting Wrangel's barbed-wire labyrinth that guarded the neck of Perekop.

Rounding a curve, the train screamed against the rusted rails. The tall poplars of the Cossack *stanitsa* loomed like wax stilts propping up the gray sky. The *stanitsa* itself was glimpsed momentarily. Then the white smoke of the engine began to dribble down the valley like a pennant. And under it, a thousand grim-faced men rode to battle.

The train whistle screamed again to greet the rising sun. Upton jumped spasmodically. It sounded like the *alerte* singing out on the old Crimean tarmac. He looked into the distance moodily. He was making his escape from this Red trap now. Perhaps he would get back to some Crimean tarmac of the Whites and hear the *alerte* again.

But whether he did or not, he would meet that one man, Kamku . . . . somehow.

VIII

IT was a strange cargo the swaying clattering single-line railway carried. Dark, yellow-faced men. Short, thick bodies encased in grime-stained garments. The khaki field caps of the late czar's army jutting here and there. The tall lambskin busbies looted from the Red Guards who had stolen them from the Don Cossacks they had subjected. Gray and white blouses tucked below belts. Blue trousers jammed inside heavy boots. The familiar "3 line" rifles stacked about. Shovels, crowbars and Cossack swords. Figures with faces steeled by the rigors of Siberian prison posts. A motley crew with which to blast the might of a Red army!

Under the Ukraine skies, it must have seemed a scrawny column of flatcars snaking across the province of the Don to fence with the mighty Bolo force. And the great-thewed gods of war must have guffawed deep in their barrel chest at the two Yanks who led it.

To the tuneless clank of wheels, the hours crept by. Slowly the *versts* lessened toward Aleshki. They dragged past a station, tense behind the mock role of solid conscripts being shoved to the front while a straggling company of replacements stared at them. The little engine toiled out of the valley with many a stentorian puff and pushed across a wide plain.

The sun appeared, taking the sharp chill from the air. White *hatas,* peasant cottages, with thatched and iron roofs, slipped by. Other bleak and barren stations became mere dots on the horizon along the track in their wake. The Siberian Cossacks dined on hunks of *vobla* and then smoked the vile *makhorka mujik* tobacco which rivaled the cinder-smoke of the engine.

Upton, gaunt and pale, was roused from a fitful slumber by something that broke into the sing-song rumble of the clacking car wheels. It swept on the thick air like a solemn pendulum, swaying, falling and rising like the wash of a tide. Upton's roving glance traveled down the line of jolting cars. The wooden lips of the Cossacks were moving, slowly, like machines laboring. It was a song, but such a song as the White war bird had never heard.

It had all the flatness of the steppes, of the Siberian icebound wakes. It was harsh and tuneless like the scrape of iron on iron. The dialect was beyond his comprehension, except in spots. Then he found himself humming it, body rocking to its hypnotic rhythm, blood racing to its anvil tempo with those thousand Mongols.

It was the ballad of the Cossacks of Siberia, of the Iron Legion, a red-eyed Mad McGinty told him. The last line rang out, shouted, a challenge, a defi to the world and to the rascals of the Red flag:

"Cossacks! To the fore!"

It halted as suddenly as it began. The rataplan of the train wheels rumbled undisturbed by its moody refrain. There was no apparent change in the slant-eyed men who had sung it. They still squatted tailor-fashion with a sphinx-like patience or lay stretched on folded cloaks, smoking, staring with the peculiar intensity of men tasting a freedom they've forgotten how to enjoy.

McGinty tapped Upton's shoulder. "We'll be there soon. See through the trees? That's a rest camp. Look at the horses. Must be cavalry." The train jerked around a sudden curve and the big Irish commissar almost lost his balance.

For several miles, the tracks paralleled a highway. Bolo camions toiled along it. Columns of troops, a machine-gun company and a long line of badly battered ambulances slipped behind the troop train. Once, a three-ship flight of red-starred Bolo crates hove over the horizon and swooped over the train. Upton watched them, wondering if one of them might be the man he hunted, Kamku, one-time Slansky along the Western front.

"If I only had a crate now! Any old bus would do! But something with wings. . . ."

McGinty slapped him on the back. "We may all have wings damn soon, kiwi. The kind uh wings that don't stop till they take yuh to the pearly gates!"

The troop sergeant cried out. He was pointing down the tracks, over the low roof of the engine cab. "Name of a saint!"

ALREADY the brakes screeched complainingly as the troop train jolted almost to a full stop. For, less than a hundred yards down the track, revealed as they straightened from the last curve, was a depot in the Bolo S.O.S. zone. And

blocking the single track in front of the low railroad shed was another train of flats bearing tarpaulined artillery. There was no passing that. The figures of Red inspectors and officers crowded the platform.

Mad was stunned for a moment. The troop sergeant merely stared, awaiting orders, any orders, for they would be carried out. Upton, trained to rise to a crisis in a split second in the war-torn skyways, met the emergency.

"Tovarish!" he bawled at the two men standing guard over the engineer in his cab, "tell him to take her in, straight in!"

Straganov, the Iron Legion leader with the yellow shirt and gleaming bald head, came running up the second flat. He and Mad McGinty and Upton put their heads close a moment. Straganov nodded with a flash of teeth finally and darted back to spread the order among his men.

The train picked up some momentum for a moment. Eyes locked on the depot platform, the lean Upton and the brawny Mad McGinty waited. Once, the Crimean ace twisted to throw a glance down the length of the train. The Siberian Cossacks, late prisoners in the mines of the Don, lay sprawled and disinterested, the typical Red soldier facing trench duty, to all outward appearances.

But from under caps, over arms, slant Mongol eyes also watched that platform. And every man's weapon just happened to be close to the body. They were ready!

Skid Upton realized he had made no move to unholster his automatic. In the air, he would have clawed at gun trips. The swaying cars grated against the lower end of the long depot. A handful of Bolo staff officers turned indolently to cast a contemptuous glance at the new arrivals. A few guards leaned on their rifles and stared. Ahead, the artillery train blocked the tracks.

McGinty grunted. Skid found himself shrieking: "Contact! Contact!" He never knew why. Little red tongue licking from his gun, he was on the platform. Men turned to stare, then sank in his path. McGinty with Straganov was at his side, cutting a swathe.

From the flat cars, an iron wave engulfed the station. Everything went down before them. Rifles snarled red streaks as they came in. Steel bayonets ran crimson. The clump of officers melted. The Iron Men of Siberia swept on.

With a thin shatter through the gunfire, the windows of the telegraph office were stove in. Skid turned toward them, breaking skulls with the automatic barrel as he waded. McGinty was inside, pounding the transmitter to a steel pulp.

In grim ranks, the Siberian Cossacks cleaned off the platform. A company tackled the artillery on the other train. In a few seconds, every gun had been dumped into the shallow ravine on the other side of the track. The engineer lay head down, hanging from the ladder of his cab.

At the other side of the platform, Skid Upton halted. His stomach turned and his blood revolted at this spectacle of slaughter. His foot slipped in something squashy. It was the body of a fallen Bolo. His lips curled from his teeth in a miasma of sickness. Then he remembered Lastrov the Pole, and those traitor mechos trying to ground them ere they took off. Jamming in a fresh clip, he emptied the weapon at a group frenziedly striving to introduce a machine gun into the fray. That particular m.g. never spoke again.

He was abruptly aware of a long line of camions drawn up back of the station. Around them, the men of the Iron Legion ran down fleeing Reds, dipping their bayonets deep in flesh in toll of those months in the mines of the Don.

Flinging around, Skid shrieked for McGinty. At last, the big Irishman rolled up.

"Those trucks—we can use them!"

McGinty saw at once. Bellowing, he bawled commands at the Iron Men until Straganov, wiping a damp sword on his cloak, took command. Clambering, hoisting, dragging, the Siberian Cossacks piled into them. Dragging the under-sized Yank war bird, McGinty leaped into the driver's seat of the camion in the van. He hammered his automatic across the scalp of the bewildered chauffeur who started to protest.

The gear slipped in with a crash. Up the steep ascent leading to the military highway, the truck leaped. Clinging to the bouncing seat beside the big Irishman, Upton glanced back, gun prepared to stop pursuit. A score of other camions were winding after them. Men clung to them,

jammed inside, clutching the tailboards, rammed beside the drivers, squeezing on the fenders, astride the motor hoods. The Iron Legion was riding to battle.

A giant Irishman and a slender sky rider in the van!

Straight into the heart of Red territory!

Into the bailiwick of Ataman Kamku!

IX

AS they swung onto the main road with a shriek of skidding rubber, Upton spotted a motorcycle rounding the curve ahead. An incident forgotten in the heat of the combat at the station came back to him. That cycle rider, doubtless a dispatch carrier attached to Red H. Q., had been on the depot platform. Now, he was racing ahead to spread the warning.

It was an ugly presentment. To the rumble of the roaring Bolo camion, he pictured the reception that would be prepared for them. Red Cossack cavalry swooping on them in defiles . . . blockaded roads . . . platoons of Red Guards disputing their passing with leveled rifles . . . the whole Bolo S. O. S. massing their forces against the puny band He explained it to Mad McGinty.

Mad scowled a little and inched the throttle a notch wider. On two wheels, they swung southward and toward the neck of the Perekop where Red rifles bristled at the labyrinth of barbed wire the Whites had reared. At the rate they were traveling, it would be a matter of an hour or two, a few more *versts*—and that desperate dash through the Red lines for safety.

And yet, as he rode toward it, Skid Upton wondered. His eyes hardened as they stared straight over the high dashboard of the Bolo truck. He had come for Kamku—the former Slansky of Fismes ill-fame. Upton was the breed of man who didn't like to return until he had gotten his man. They used to say that of him on the Vosges-Picard air line.

Kamku loomed like a tool of the Fates in his mind's eye now. Kamku was responsible indirectly for his being on the Crimea. Kamku had drawn him over the Perekop lines until he crashed in the Taurida. Kamku had made him what he was today, a broken, doomed war bird, riding the skies on battered wings.

With the steady pound of the motor and the whip of dirt under the hard-rubber wheels, the Bolo camion pushed itself and its cargo farther toward the trenches of the Reds. Somebody had carved his initials just below the oil gauge on the wooden instrument board. Upton noticed it with an absent-minded eye as he slumped in thought.

Back in France, he had been a gay and honored *avion du chasse,* with the *Medal Militaire* and a tri-palmed *Croix de Guerre* to his credit. Then he had ridden into that spy trap and been adjudged guilty by a formal tribunal. His wings had been stripped from him, along with his decorations. Despite his record, his action in apparently attempting escape that night together with the papers found in his barracks cubicle had clinched the case against him.

Then, the Crimea! Flying with the outlawed men of the Western Front, as motley a collection of nationalities and men as ever went upstairs. Fodder for the Fokkers, they had been. They had climbed into the skies day after day until hardly a handful were left. They had been like men A. W. O. L. from Fate. He, Upton, had been spared a little longer than the rest of them, spared to recognize Kamku as his old foe Slansky, in the throes of a dogfight. And spared for what? He wondered.

For Captain William Upton of the White Squadron was a very different man from the careless, cynical-eyed pilot who had sparred indifferently day after day with the Red flights. Now, he was the man of war again, the killer on the prowl, reborn with a new object in his doomed career. He wanted to get at the man who had put him here, a disgraced war bird, namely—Ataman Kamku, top ace and chief of the Bolo squadrons. He wanted to live, now.

As the truck piloted by Mad McGinty rolled closer and closer to the neck of land known as the Perekop, Skid Upton realized his chances were lessening of getting at Kamku. He was no fool; he wanted to live. But once back on the Crimea, there might never be a chance of taking the air again. Here, behind the Bolo lines, he could make his play if he could only locate Kamku's tarmac.

His thoughts were interrupted by a fierce

chorus of shouts. Down the road about a hundred yards, a *sotnia* of Cossacks blocked the way. The alarm was out.

Mad McGinty's red face hardened over the wheel. The camion leaped ahead under full throttle, engine storming and backfiring under the strain. Bumping and swaying, the two Yanks in the lead truck speeded straight at the horsemen.

THE Cossack column swung into action themselves. Deploying in two parallel lines, they raced at the line of camions loaded with the Iron Legion. Upton felt McGinty's hand on his neck and was shoved below the instrument board. Poking from the side of it, he unleashed a steel stream from the Mauser.

Abruptly the engine roar was wiped out by the rattle of rifles. The camion lurched perilously. Upton saw a line of horses with men in blue pants shoot by on his side. The instrument board over him crackled. He fed them all the Mauser had. The truck leaped past them.

Upton sat up. McGinty was humming a doleful tune, big hands shooting around the wheel as he maneuvered it around a sharp curve. Smoking weapon still clutched, Upton stared rearward. They were all through. But the camions were lighter now. The *sotnia* of Cossacks had collected a toll in men.

The cavalcade sped on toward the war front. Roaring, they thundered past an emergency dressing station in the shadow of a bluff, stretcher bearers gaping after them. Over the piston slap of the truck motor, the heavy rumble of artillery fire sounded. The shrieks of the G. I. cans reached them faintly. Upton could see the picture: the Red artillery pounding away at the White lines who had no ordnance themselves to retaliate; starved, weary men crouched back of the miles of barbed wire, dogged, waiting only for the first Red wave that would try to cross that pinched No Man's Land. That was Baron Peter Wrangel's White Army making its final stand.

As they topped a short rise, a clump of Red soldiers appeared. They were in the hollow below, apparently waiting. Upton had his reloaded Mauser up and ready. The Reds looked like doltish beasts, ploughing around slowly in their heavy boots, gray blouses tucked under broad black belts. At that distance, they had an eerie look. Then Upton realized. They were wearing gas masks.

As they bumped down the brief declivity, the atmosphere dimmed with a faint haze. A slug ricocheted off the motor hood with a spanging cry. Upton found himself growing dizzy and nauseated. He threw a glance at Mad. The big Irish commissar was clenching the wheel with veins ribbed up like cords on his hands. His mouth was locked and his nostrils were pinched and white as he sought to hold his breath.

Senses reeling, he prepared to jam back the Mauser's trigger. But there was nothing to shoot at. The gas was thickening fast. And the Red soldiers had wisely taken to the brush and tall grass waving in the breeze from the Azov along the road.

An oath snarled from Mad. With a lurch, one forward wheel of the rocketing truck hit the ditch. A line of Bolo riflemen leaped from cover and fled in precipitate rout to escape being crushed by the camion. In McGinty's grip, the truck slewed around, streaked back across the road and hit the other ditch. Brakes screamed strident protest as the big Mick put the truck in a side slide. Red-starred uniforms rose from the grass and fled. The ambush was routed.

McGinty's head hunched down below the dash as he held the truck locked on a straight course with one powerful arm. Upton followed his suit. The truck dashed up the opposite grade. Fortunately, the Bolos had not laid their gas screen well. In a few seconds, fresh pure air eddied around the floorboards. Upton sucked it gratefully into his burning throat and sat up. The air was no longer obscured by the haze.

Upton laughed with relief. "We're going to get through, Mad!"

McGinty shook his head dolefully. "I know this Bolo mob. Yuh ain't seen nothin' yet, kid. What the—"

They were bearing down on a crossroad. And coming at right angles, a cloud of dust swiftly approached the crossing. The two Yanks peered. A hundred yards ahead of them, it swung onto the dirt highway they were following and proceeded ahead of them. It was a Bolo staff car, an old German Benz with a pair of huge red stars on either tonneau door. The helmeted

heads of three figures lolled in the back.

It was evident that they were unaware of the little army of the Iron Legion that was fighting its way through their back-lines.

"We're goin' tuh follow them," McGinty exclaimed.

The words were hardly out of his mouth when a commotion occurred down the road ahead of the staff bus. Half a dozen men had leaped out in front of it and were waving their arms and shouting excitedly. The two Yanks heard the siren whistle of the staff car warn them out of the way.

McGinty whistled low. They were scarcely thirty yards behind the red-starred Benz then.

ONE of the officers in it rose, resplendent in a scarlet tunic and fur cap, and waved the Red infantrymen out of his path. But they still blocked the road, jumping about and gesticulating frenziedly. Upton saw the Bolo staff officer's automatic gleam. Yellow spouted from it. One of the louts blocking the path of his car stumbled and did not get up. The rest drew back. With a puff of black smoke from its exhaust stack, the staff car picked up momentum and proceeded.

At least, for a short space. Then it vanished in a vomiting pall of thick, black smoke that gutted the landscape. Like a volcano in action, it hurled skyward, Bolo staff car and all. McGinty and Upton shielded their heads with their arms as a rain of debris and iron and dirt fell over their truck. As the black explosion fell away, a gaping crater appeared in the road and there was no sign of the staff bus.

"Tank mines they'd laid for us!" Mad explained curtly.

Upton was about to reply when he was almost shot out of the seat. The racing camion had made a sharp right-angled turn. They left the road with a bump over its ditch. And Mad was leaning out the side, commanding the rest to follow them with fierce waves of his arm.

"They'll be more—uh them mines!" he explained succinctly.

The camion staggered, ploughing deep with its wheels, through the brownish rubble of an abandoned beet field. The rest of the column with the Siberian Cossack chauffeurs wound after them like a worm writhing in anguish. Upton wiped the sweat from his brow. If it hadn't been for that staff car with its dogmatic officer. . . .

They were bucketing across country. It would be perilous to venture back to that road for a few *versts* anyway. Mad sawed at the emergency brake as they bumped down a steep hillside. Before them, a cart track squirmed through a strip of woodland of conifers. For an instant, there was no token of war on their horizon. It was as if they had suddenly left the theater of strife to wander over a quiescent countryside. The dull boom of the guns was similar to a symphony orchestra tuning up instruments melodiously in some distant pit. Upton had just lit a fresh cigaret and crossed his knees to relax under the tarpaulin hood of the driver's cab of the truck. A faint shadow dropped across their windshield. The pilot of the White Squadron stuck his head out the side. Then he gasped.

A batlike moth hovered across the face of the sun. Its wings were red-starred; its belly orange tinted; and at its nose, a gleaming sliver cast a silver blur before it. As he watched, it dropped down rapidly, flattened over the woodland and vanished at a gentle slant behind it. From the north, another of its species came. Two more dove on its tail. They too, all three of them, settled out of sight just behind the frieze of trees. Planes! Bolo planes!

The two Yanks exchanged glances. Mad spat. "When them crates get our number . . . Well, thank God they ain't wise yet." He started to screw the wheel of the truck around.

Upton caught his arm. "When they land they'll get word and come after us, anyway!"

"What do yuh want me tuh do about it? Put wings on this land buggy?"

"We'll go get them first! And—Kamku might be there!"

"The hell with him!" Mad started to screw the wheel around again. "I don't want tuh mix with that baby for anything!"

"They'll get us anyway!" Upton's eyes were stony slivers.

Mad spat again. "Okay!"

Upton glanced back to check up on the rest of the cavalcade. Halfway down the hill they had just come, one of the stolen camions had overturned. But already a small tide of the brown stocky Iron Cossacks

swarmed around it and were setting it back on its four wheels. Mad put his Mauser on his lap and sent the puffing truck right down the narrow cart track that split the woods.

They slipped along in the damp coolness of the conifers. The cart track wriggled sharp angles twice. Then Mad wisely throttled his motor until the big truck moved ahead on its own momentum. The tree line stopped with startling suddenness.

The brakes squeaked slightly as Mad put his pedals down to the floorboards.

Upton was silent and pale with anticipation. For they rested on the edge of a carefully camouflaged tarmac. Half a dozen ships with still lazily swaying props were on the line. A handful of the ground crew ran out to meet another as it dropped down into the wind. Tent hangars were at one end, brown backs bellying into the trees of the woodland strip. The reek of castor oil and burning gas stung their nostrils. A big slovenly Red Guard rested on his rusted bayonet a hundred yards to the right, evidently one of the ground patrol, picking his teeth for lack of something better to do.

One bus, a red Fokker D-7, stood a little apart from the rest. Upton's breath whistled against the splintered windshield as he leaned forward. His fingers became pinched bone tentacles around the butt end of the Mauser. He said nothing, couldn't have if he wished to. For the insignia on the fuselage side of the lone ship stood out clear and unmistakable, grimly flashing in the gleam of the sun.

It was the black mailed fist that was the sign of Kamku!

X

UPTON understood now how he had overlooked this drome of Kamku's when he winged over it. With the tent hangars almost buried in the tree fringe, no barracks in sight, and the ships in their kennels for the night, from the sky that tarmac would be just another of the abandoned fields with which the Ukraine was dotted. The captain's eyes narrowed as he spotted the machine guns mounted on posts at regular intervals back of the line in the true Boche manner.

Straganov, the yellow-shirted commander of the Siberian Cossacks, appeared at the running board to learn what was planned. McGinty told him shortly. He wheeled and with a shrill whistle through his blunt teeth called to his men. Fortunately it was swallowed in the diapason of a Mercedes responding to full gun against the chocks on the line.

"But the machine guns—" Upton started to protest in his crude Russky.

Straganov shrugged as a tide of slant-eyed stocky men began to group around him. It was typical of the manner in which be and his Siberian steeled band fought. The opposition meant nothing. The objective was the one point to be considered.

"Tchort znayet!" he shrugged, shaking the bandoliers taken from a Red Guard. "The devil knows!" He scratched the glistening sallow dome of his head with a smile. Behind him, his men were grouping rapidly, careful to remain within the screen of the trees, peering out at the planes.

But the best fighters in the world flatten before a couple of well directed machine guns. Upton knew that. The little yellow Mongols would probably succeed in taking the tarmac—but at what toll! He went into conference with Mad and the Siberian leader. McGinty nodded as he explained his plan. The Cossack chief merely shrugged as before.

Shortly, with McGinty at the wheel in his brilliant crimson *bashliki* and one lock of his hair carefully plastered in true Bolo manner down the front of his forehead, the perfect commissar, with Upton apparently rocking half asleep beside him, the first camion trundled itself out upon the tarmac. They were the perfect picture of a couple of Reds come with a fresh load of supplies.

A few greaseballs cast them a casual glance as they busied themselves around the crates just out of the air. A lieutenant strolling toward the C. O.'s tent paused to study them and then checked his wristwatch. The Red Guard of the ground patrol called to them to halt and lifted his rifle clumsily, but stepped aside with a wave of his hand when he spotted McGinty as a commissar. Commissars had ways of making trouble for people who got in their way.

Upton had his automatic half up his sleeve and masked by his hands. He rocked and swayed sleepily and peered through

drooping eyelids. A strolling trio of pilots blocked their way and Mad had to lean out and shout *"Pazhal'st' tovarish!* Way, comrades!" at them. Ten yards from the line, the big Irishman slammed home the brakes, digging ruts that brought a scream of rage from a flight officer.

It had hardly risen in his throat when Upton was out of the camion. Hitting the ground, he leaped toward the first of the post-mounted m.g.'s. One of the Bolo war birds sensed trouble and threw himself in his path. Upton's Mauser barrel caught him with a thud that smacked of finality.

Mad McGinty was out on the other side. "Call me that, will yuh!" he bawled at the flight officer as he translated the string of Russky oaths and returned them. One of his crimson-sleeved arms swung and the officer crumpled.

Upton was at the first mounted gun. He wheeled it on its scarf to cover the line of mechos and pilots who rushed him. They stopped simultaneously and suddenly. Upton's fingers quivered over the trigger release of the Spandau. Mad's automatic spat once before be reached the mate of Upton's gun. Then he cupped his hands, faced the shield of woodland, and bawled.

As his great voice rang over the field, a wave of brown, short figures swept out from the woods. Strangely armed, lugubriously garbed, they flooded across the tarmac. The Red Guard of the ground patrol went under before them. A couple of mechos too stupid to surrender tasted their steel. One peelot was swallowed threshing in their ranks as he emptied a gun.

Around the red-wing crates they swarmed, a thousand more or less of them. Straganov was in the van, whipping a Cossack cavalry saber around. It was over like a clap of thunder. Every ship, every man stood under the guard of a swarm of the Siberians, the Iron Legionnaires.

McGinty felt like laughing, it was so easy once they had control of the machine guns. He looked toward the other one. Skid Upton had vanished.

TURNING on his heel, he saw the captain of the Crimea disappearing into the tent at the end of the hangar line, an adjutant reeling back in his wake and clutching his jaw.

Skid Upton had made a beeline for the tent quarters because there he would find Ataman Kamku—if he was on the field.

Kamku was. Upton found him.

It was like that. He elbowed a hanging tent flap aside and stepped into its semi-darkness. There was a long table with a Ukraine map, a pair of observer's binoculars and a black flying helmet with a pair of goggles attached to the chin strap. Back of the table, a figure sprawled in a field chair, pallid, features fine hewn, V-faced. Kamku! The former Slansky!

The riding crop in his fist dropped weakly over the back of his half-witted orderly who was about to draw off his boots. His other hand on the table drew weakly back from the Mauser dropped there carelessly. His colorless eyes rose slowly from the weapon in Upton's fist to Upton's face. There was no doubt about it, he recognized him. But he had control of himself in a flash as he rose, icy, contained, smirking thinly.

"Ah-h, I always remarked that the firing squads of the French were second in efficiency to the Germans."

His eyes locked Upton's with a hypnotic grip. Gibbering and chuckling with loose tongue lolling over his lips, the vacant-eyed orderly sneaked toward the tent flap. Upton paid no attention to the poor wretch. Outside he heard a raucous cheer from the Siberians.

"Haven't forgotten me, eh, Slansky! And I haven't forgotten you!" The gun was rigid in his grip.

Kamku, the former Slansky, bowed smiling. *"Eto vierno!* That's true! Well," he played with his riding crop easily, "I could offer you a very nice commission here. We need men and—"

"I'm going to give you one sweet commission in hell!"

"Ha!" Kamku laughed shortly and abruptly. "You forget, Comrade, this is my tarmac. One cry from me—"

"Take a look at my men outside!" Upton flung back.

Kamku stood on tiptoe to peer over the Yank's shoulder. His hand strayed toward the automatic atop the map on the table. Upton watched that hand. That was his error.

He heard a choked yelp behind him. The blade of a knife shot over his shoulder.

And he turned to find the orderly, not so half-witted now, choking in the grip of one of Mad McGinty's massive paws. Mad shook him to the floor, kicked the dagger from his hand, and swaggered in, dragging the flight officer who had cursed him. The latter pulled himself together, brushed his breeches with the red stripe of the Cossacks and attempted to salute his C. O., Kamku, shakily. The latter turned on him, snarling, teeth bared, upbraiding him mercilessly with a string of foul Russky imprecations.

Upton jabbed his Mauser at the Ataman of the Bolo air fleet and stopped his mouth. "Save the wind. You're going to need it. You and me—we're going up in a couple of crates and settle this thing once and for all!"

Kamku smiled like a death's-head, baring too-white teeth. "You have noticed, *malchik,* that I always win!"

Mad McGinty spat and kicked aside the table with one swipe of his boot. He towered over the lance-like Kamku, resplendent in the double-breasted gray, red-starred uniform of an Ataman of the Red Squadrons.

"Yuh two-bit bum, yuh damn near made a murderer out uh me, Slansky. Now—"

Kamku who had once been Slansky the *Kriegsrichtenant* agent picked up a Russky cigaret and laughed between his teeth. "I will see that you are remembered to the *Tcheka* for this, Comrade!" He seemed to be looking between the threatening McGinty and the cold Upton.

The Crimean captain and the erstwhile *stanitsa* commissar turned guardedly. A pair of guns jabbed each of them under the ribs.

A giant Russky, very like a lumbering bear, dark-faced, a couple of bloody bruises across his scalp, stood behind those guns. It was the Okhrana agent who had almost exposed McGinty back at the mansion by the mines. His green slits of eyes glinted over the gleaming bandoliers under his flowing fur coat. His jet black beard was rusted with dried blood. His regard for Mad was venomous.

The two automatics jammed the Yanks deeper in the ribs. His big head nodded curtly toward their useless weapons. They fell to the table. Captain Upton, puzzled, raging and baffled, swung to study the tarmac. The Okhrana agent laughed deep in his beard.

"Nyet! No, it was not for nothing that I once trailed a foe of the throne to the salt mines of Siberia. I know them—those Iron Cossacks. Ha. . . . Look you! By the unholy soul of Taras Boulba himself, it is good!" He jerked a gun jauntily toward the tarmac.

Kamku chuckled hissingly.

ON the Red landing-T, the Siberians were withdrawn, lined up in serried ranks against the vacant hangars. It was as if a brown tide had ebbed. Gray-tuniced Bolo pilots were slipping into their crates. Mechos were pushing over the clubs to suck in the gas of the Mercedes. The red tri-winged Fokkers stood free, unguarded now by Straganov and his men.

"Pravilno! That's right. It was easy," the Okhrana agent went on bragging arrogantly. "See!" He pushed open his fur coat wider. On his tunic hung a gold-rimmed medallion bearing a picture of the czar on a background of a blue Greek Cross. "I was there when we raided Tsarskoie Selo palace. The Czarina herself was wearing this. I show it to them," he gestured toward the ranks of Siberians, "and I speak their dialect. A mistake, this, I say. Go back, I tell them. See, I show them, this picture. The Czar!"

He tossed up his black beard and laughed heartily. "Great fighters, those Siberians. But not with the heads!"

He fell to laughing again, but his pair of heavy guns never stirred the fraction of an inch from the two Yanks. "Yes, that Straganov remembers me from Siberia. Me, who served the Czar in the Okhrana! Could I be the Bolo traitor? Ah no, *nyet* —ha-ha-ha!"

A Mercedes roared into life with a sobby drumming from its flame-spitting exhaust stacks. Another—and another joined it, hosing up the dust of the Ukraine tarmac as props whipped over in a steady blur. Kamku's squadron was preparing to take off.

Kamku himself spoke, voice knifing through the Mercedes diapason, dots of eyes like cold holes in the sheet whiteness of his face. He picked up his helmet and goggles. "My men will get some much-needed practice in ground-strafing—now,

malchiks! I will join them. Watch you well—for it will be interesting!"

He slipped quickly from the tent and to the planes sputtering on the line. Upton went cold. Kamku's idea was obvious. His red-winged killers would climb into the skies, bank and swoop upon the unsuspecting, misled Siberians drawn up before the hangars.

Mad McGinty turned on the Okhrana agent, snarling. "God in heaven, Comrades!" he burst in Russky. "That'll be plain murder!"

The huge Okhrana man smiled like a butcher. "You should know better, Comrade Commissar! Much better. Nothing done in the name of the Soviet can be wrong. It was born in blood, the blood of the cursed royalists in Petrograd and Moscow. And if more blood is needed to be spilled—" He shrugged expressively. "It is time you thought of your own lives—"

The rest of the words were ripped from his mouth in the blast of a taxiing Fokker that bucketed past the opening of the C. O. tent. An arm waved from it in stern greeting. On its fuselage side a mailed fist, black against the Fokker crimson, identified it. It was Kamku about to follow his flight upstairs. Kamku swinging past an instant to gloat.

The tent whirled in a smother of brown, choking dust. Kamku had switched his bus in a left turn with skidding tail. The blast from his prop, driven on by the pressure of the exhaust stacks rolled back in a blinding cloud. The Okhrana agent coughed heavily and his guns jumped loosely a moment.

The dust cloud lessened and thinned as Kamku's bus wheeled and snorted into the wind for the take-off. Bumping over the rough terrain, it gathered speed slowly as the peelot goosed his motor in spasmodic jerks. Like a typhoon plume, the dust eddied in his wake.

A figure launched through that brownish screen. Blinking his eyes and spitting, the Okhrana giant whirled around in the tent. Then he realized.

One of the cursed prisoners was gone.

He leaped to the flap and insanely emptied one of the automatics at the half-seen figure darting after Kamku's bus. A chair splintered over his head and he sank down. McGinty stepped over his body.

THE pilot of the plane of the mailed fist leaned forward to peer at his tach. Already the rest of the flight were *chandelling* into formation to wait for him. The tach read 1,500 r.p.m. He leaned back, settling against the crashpad. There was an unaccustomed bump there. Mechanically his stick came back as he sought to press down the bump in the leather. Then he stiffened. That bump was a human hand.

He knew because another body was already jammed beside his shoulder, the black bore of a Mauser eyeing his goggles. The man at the controls of the bus with the emblem of the mailed fist looked into the drawn face of Captain Skid Upton, Crimean war bird of the White Squadron of Wrangel.

"You always win, eh, Kamku!" Upton spat into the slipstream. "Down on the floorboards!" he screamed, cuddling the weapon under the other's jaw.

The Bolo pilot slipped down beside the stick, somehow looking like a kicked dog through his thick-lensed goggles. Upton slid behind the controls. He leveled the Fokker out of its steep climb. Flipping through a wing-over, he grinned grimly. The Fokker answered perfectly with power to spare. It was far different from fighting one of those battered, canvas-flapping ducks of the White Squadron to the ceiling. He sniffed the slipstream, grinned at the blur of the prop on the square nose, eyed the lethal-looking Spandaus and warmed them in a test burst. Every nerve in his body was on the *qui vive*.

Under his blond hair whipped by the prop slash, his eyes narrowed on the Fokker red-starred flight. Something must be done about them. They were probably not aware of all that had occurred on the tarmac. All they knew was that they had been sent into the air after those damned Cossacks had been called off them. Upton was above them now, banking slowly.

His eye caught a glimpse of a thick-barreled Very pistol tucked in one of the fuselage pockets. Dropping toward the flight, the streamers of a leader flailing from his rudder, he jerked out the gun, mumbled a prayer and pulled the trigger. Vari-colored balls floated in a cascade from the red ship. He saw the Fokker pilots below watching him.

Leaning over, he jerked his arm westward toward Aleshki where the bombers lay. If—There was no if! It worked. Kamku's imperious conduct toward the four pilots who had disobeyed his orders the day before over the Perekop when the White war bird had pursued them had left a lasting impression. Evidently the Red Ataman wished them to fly to Aleshki for another of those cursed convoy patrols. The red echelon streamed into the west.

Upton felt like laughing from sheer weariness and strain. It had been so easy. Kamku's icy but butcherous temper had in this case been the undoing of his own squadron. Upton tucked back the Very and looked down at him. He reeled from a crashing blow in the face.

The Bolo chief had peered over the cockpit rim and seen the stratagem. Maddened, risking his life rather than the ruin of his squadron, he had struck. The stick slipped from the grip of Upton's knees and the Fokker stood on its tail and nosed the ceiling.

Spitting blood and half stunned, he saw the black nose of a gun coming from inside the Bolo's tunic. His own left hand gripped the weapon on the seat beside him. There was a blasting crash, echoed once, and the cockpit swirled in the acrid smoke. Upton felt a slug whistle past his cheek. The other slumped back, red stain rimmed with a black powder burn in the center of his double-breasted tunic. The waxy sallowness of death fell like a slowly donned mask over his pallid, sharp-hewn countenance.

Upton sat stiff like one faced with unbelievable facts. In the twitch of a trigger he had wiped out the man who had damned him, against whom he had launched on the vengeance hunt that was almost his undoing. A feeble laugh of feverish relief crackled from his bruised lips.

He banked back over the Red tarmac. The rest of Kamku's flight were mere dots in the westward. Below, a cavalcade of camions was winding out of the woodland beside the landing-T and turning like a brown worm toward the Perekop. Mad McGinty was carrying on.

And Kamku was out of the picture.

One tiny crimson bus crouched before the deserted hangars.

Upton sent the D-7 over it and in a long slant down close to the trail of camions.

As the burr of his Mercedes died across the heavens, a figure crept cautiously from one of the tent hangars, eyed with contempt the prone form of the Okhrana agent felled by Mad McGinty and lifted a petrol can.

XI

IN the bus with the insignia of Kamku, the black mailed fist, Captain Skid Upton raced across the Ukraine skies. Once he lowered his eyes to study the death-stiffened figure crumpled on his floorboards. The thought to toss him overboard entered his mind once but was quickly rejected. There was something cold-blooded about that, even to an enemy.

Below the cavalcade of trucks wound frontward. Upton could imagine the red-mugged Mad behind the wheel of the first one, leading the Iron Cossacks and shooting a glance upward to where that red bug with his buddy hovered. Upton himself surged with confidence. A thousand men moved along below, a thousand fierce fighters whose equal all Russia could not produce. A few more *versts,* a desperate wedge knifing through the Bolo lines with his Spandaus cutting a lane for it, and they would be back in the Crimea.

Crouching behind the shield of the red-nosed plane, he lit a cigarette, banked around in a wide circle to allow the trucks to catch up, then studied the front with a keen eye. It seemed altogether too peaceful, too calm for war and butchery, and the raid of a thousand doomed men in the heart of enemy territory.

To the southeast, the Sea of Azov lay quietly. The Dnieper was on the west. And over the tree tops, he could make out the hazy outlines of the Crimea. There Wrangel with the loyalists of the white, blue and red of Czarist Russia were making their last stand. A yellow sear spat from the earth behind the next bend in the road.

Skid Upton knew what that was. A Bolo battery going into action! It was masked, like Kamku's hangars, in the woods. Ready to warn the men below, he flattened out and dropped. But McGinty had seen. Leaning from the seat of the truck, he was wigwagging furiously with one arm. The camion leaped ahead. The Iron Men were

ready and waiting to strike another blow.

Skid fed the gun to the Fokker tripe. Rapidly he put her nose up and aimed for the ceiling. At half a mile, he pulled her out of it and winged straight for the Bolo battery. Circling over the gash in the trees where it lay, he made out groups of four dots each, evenly spaced. And there were four groups. That meant four batteries.

He held the tripe in a slow bank as he sought to make out whether the dots were white with black centers. That would mean A. A.'s. But they weren't. It was a Bolo artillery unit of four batteries and sixteen guns that was busy pounding the White trenches.

Wire screamed and the slipstream was a long shrill as Skid put her down in a power dive. Over on the road, little vague things had come to a halt—the trucks. McGinty with Straganov and his Iron Legion would be deploying through those woods now. . . .

Smiling stiffly, he felt for the unfamiliar triggers of the Spandau, snapped a few more bursts out of them. The batteries reared up at him. In a blur, he could make out tiny figures darting around on duty intent, unaware of the Bolo crate with the Yank pilot.

He held her in the power dive. The wings trembled. Then he cut both guns loose at once. Men flattened, toppling at their posts, fleeing to the screen of trees only to meet the Iron Legion.

The ground loomed dangerously near. Skid kicked the rudder. The Fokker snapped to the left. Again those strange Spandaus mouthed red. Another battery was *hors de combat*. He jerked her out of it as McGinty led the Siberian Cossack horde in. In slow spirals, he banked around, observing the shambles below. The unsuspecting battery never had a chance. No more G.I. cans roared from it.

Digging inside his tunic, the Yank war bird dug out a slip of paper and a stub of pencil. Holding it on his knee, he scribbled rapidly. After that, he wrapped the message around a clip of cartridges, dropped the crate in an easy dive until he saw the white blanks of their faces staring up, and tossed it overside.

He brought the plane around in a slow plit-S and glided even lower. A figure retrieved his missile. He saw the man bearing it to McGinty, who stood apart as he held the Fokker just over the tree tops. Satisfied, Skid put her in a climb, scouring the countryside for their next victims.

McGinty would understand. His message had been to pull out the key of the firing mechanism of those guns, feed a shell and pull the lanyard. That would wreck them, put them evermore beyond the stage of pounding hell out of the Wrangel lines.

A few minutes later, he noticed the trucks had taken up their journey again. They rumbled down the road, a long low-lying cloud of dust in their wake. In a shallow valley, they streamed across a bridge and toiled up the opposite slope. Circling over them, Skid Upton reconnoitered beyond the slope.

A little Cossack *stanitsa* lay beyond its crest. Dropping rapidly, Skid peered over his fuselage rim. There was some unusual activity below. Barely clearing the tops of the outlying *isbas*, he took it in. Then his Mercedes roared anew. A machine-gun outfit was ambuscading itself along the street of the *stanitsa*.

WORD must have gotten through of the Iron Legionnaires. Skid realized there was but one way he could signal McGinty. That was by attacking. Past the village, he banked and put his nose down, working the stick forward. Some hot hedgehopping was done.

On the ground, in the streets, the Red soldiers paid him little attention on account of the Bolo markings on his wing panels. Roaring, he poured the gun to her as he shot straight for the single street. At a hundred yards, his twin Spandaus snapped. Little things that were men flopped or fled in full rout, deserting their guns.

Straight down the broad, flat street, Skid Upton winged. Hedgehopping! Yanking his stick back, then forward! Cutting the dependable Spandaus in spasmodic, deadly bursts. Booming over rooftops to dive precipitously down again. Laughing silently behind his goggles, the Yank war bird spread havoc through the *stanitsa*.

The first truck, driven by McGinty, topped the valley bank. Skid roared right at it, right-ruddering once to take a crack at a group cowering behind a garden wall. Bringing his stick into his stomach, he zoomed almost off the radiator of McGin-

ty's truck. An Irish fist brandished at him as he banked on a wing-tip.

The string of camions tore headlong into the Cossack hamlet, flat-faced men bent behind the sideboards of the truck, rifles ready. McGinty led the roving marauders. A few m.g.'s spat at them from windows and corners. But the score of trucks thundered through while a raging, happy sky hawk cavorted over them, hewing down clumps of men with two Spandaus that seemed inhuman.

The *stanitsa* was behind them, a smoking, bleeding wreck. Skid leveled the Fokker out and sped past McGinty and his followers. He appreciated now what he had been up against with his old Spad, battling against these Fokkers that could climb like cats.

Two strips interlaced ahead, a crossroad. A squadron of Red cavalry was drawn up across it. Skid Upton wiped his wheels off on the stumps of a deserted cabbage field, fed her all the gun she had and arrowed into them. Again Spandaus sang their bloody song. In his wake, a column of death-dealing trucks thundered. When they passed, a few threshing horses were the sole remnants of the Bolo riders.

The trucks drove straight on for the Perekop Isthmus. They were in the war zone now. A rest camp was left buried in their dust. The lone Fokker hovered close over them. It was the last mad dash of this intrepid spearhead, with the whole Bolo S.O.S. in a turmoil in their wake.

A Bolo M.P. post blocked their path. Skid could make out strings of white lines strewing the ground from it. They were telephone lines, his observation assignments on the Western Front had taught him. Closer, he saw that a tree had been felled, blocking the road. Little figures darted around the low house.

Skid sent the tripe down at them. Could McGinty stop the onrush of those trucks in time? Shooting over the post, he flailed it with the Spandaus. He stared backward along his fuselage as he passed.

McGinty made no attempt to halt. The truck driver swung to the left, hit the ditch and bounced crushingly over the M.P. post without cutting the throttle. The other trucks streamed after him.

Nothing was going to halt those Cossacks of Iron this day. The post was a flattened wreck in their destructive wake.

In a hammerhead stall, Skid brought his Fokker up. Below, little thin lines in the brown mud were trenches. Beyond them, tiny dots that were men inundated through the barbed-wire mesh-work before the Wrangel lines. An attack was in progress.

Wildly he tried to gain McGinty's attention. The trucks came to a skidding halt beside a crumbling communication trench. The Siberian Cossacks piled out. Surprised heads peered out of the trench-line of the support troops, the second reserve. Cheering at the sight of re-enforcements, figures with the red cockade in their field caps leaped on the firing step.

Their joy was short-lived. Cold bayonet steel in the hands of almost a thousand men of the old Iron Legion stabbed at them. A wild Irishman jumped down amongst them, cleared a space with a revolver, then seized an auto-rifle. From the leaden skies, a red-nosed plane dove. From its nose, through the shining disc of its prop, pin points of red lead poured.

Releasing the triggers, Skid rammed his stick back. The Fokker stood on its tail. Feeding the gun to her, he leveled, eased the stick down again and slanted earthward. The mighty Mercedes sang a wild, drumming song to the tune of crackling m.g.'s. Dead men blocked the trench. McGinty and his Iron Men waded into them, probed in dugouts, hurled death and destruction before them.

Skid Upton's running gear barely cleared the parapet time and again as he hopped along that third trench. The Spandaus burned hotly. His teeth were bared in a battling grin. One terrible blow he was striking at the Bolos before he shuffled off on his last long take-off. For the Yank knew his chances of coming through were thin. Damned thin!

McGINTY leaped atop the trenchwork, clutching the auto-rifle. His booming voice hurled commands. The yellow-faced Straganov rose beside him. Like ants, Siberian Cossacks climbed out of the trench that ran deep in Bolo blood. They reorganized their ranks.

Then they swept on as Skid put the Fokker around, screamed up in a sharp *chandelle* and rejoined them. McGinty led a mad charge on the second line of trenches.

At the very brink of them, they paused.

The trenches were empty.

With a roar, waving at Skid overhead, the Irishman led the way toward the front line. Slant-eyed, steel-faced Mongols followed, silent, grim, killers to the core.

But again they were given a reprieve. For the front line trench too was deserted.

Skid circled wildly overhead, vainly trying to show them. He had been first.

The Reds had attacked in two waves, leaving the third or reserve line behind. As he banked with screaming motor, the Yank war bird took in the whole awful scene of carnage spread across the narrow isthmus between the Black Sea in the west and the Azov in the east.

A terrific barrage was being laid down. Behind it, at this one salient where McGinty and his men hesitated, a battering assault had been launched on Wrangel's thin line behind the mesh of barbed-wire. Under the barrage, behind a wave of gas, with a company of *flamenwerfers,* flame-throwers, leading them, the Red shock divisions were trying to break through.

Skid groaned as he took in the spectacle. The White Army was without gas masks of any kind. Thus far, the Bolos had not introduced this weapon of modern warfare into their attack. But now, under cover of it and with their flame-throwers, they were slashing a swath through the barbed wire that barred their path to the undermanned White trenches.

The stick of the bloody nosed Fokker went all the way back. The crate nosed up sharply. Viciously the Yank kicked right rudder. In a wild spin, the plane fell, swinging around in a close circle, falling earthward. He let her spin until he was almost on McGinty and his Siberian Cossack cohorts. Setting the rudder against the spin, he jammed the stick into the forward left corner. The Fokker came out of it. Bringing the stick back, he held her in a whipstall.

Leaning far over the fuselage side, he waved at McGinty, pointing forward all the time. Would they ever see? Would they ever realize that this was the one chance of breaking through to the White lines? Or were the men of the Iron Legion wavering on the brink of death?

"Holy hell! Have they got anchors in their pants!" Skid grunted as he labored to make them understand. Pouring the gun to her, he climbed. Then his heart pounded. For McGinty and his Iron Men had crossed the front line trench and were stalking across the No Man's Land of the Crimea!

McGinty, too, had seen. Satisfied, Skid put her in a tight figure eight, straightened out toward the White lines and felt the Fokker shudder under him as he gunned the motor to the limit. The Fokker launched ahead, Mercedes drumming madly.

In a few brief seconds, he shot down upon the backs of those Bolo waves that flooded against the Wrangel trenches. The hoses of the flame-throwers slashed the brown earth with long streamers of black and red fire. Grunting curses, Skid Upton flung down on them.

Windrows of men melted before the red nose of that Yank-manned Fokker. Figures by the score slumped in the maze of wire. For Skid Upton's twin Spandaus were hacking at the Red lines with twin streaks of death that flamed from their nozzles. One wide deadly swath he cut, striking above the chatter of machine guns, an avenging fury dropping from the heavens.

Flame-throwers fell with the bodies of their bearers, slashing the awful streams from their unleashed nozzles into the ranks of their own troops. Whole companies were disrupted. Squads vanished. In their stead, mounds of dead rose. Then the Yank was drawing back on the stick regretfully. Over the Wrangel hard-pressed lines he screamed.

In a vertical bank, with wing bolts protesting, he whirled the tripe. Back again he slanted on his drive of doom. Through the thin haze of yellow-green gas above the beleaguered Wrangel trenches he shot. Out of it and straight into the faces of the Bolo hosts. The twin Spandaus chanted their death hymn in their teeth. A mad, red fury broke up their battalions, cut down their line of *flamenwerfers,* depleted their ranks by hundreds.

Skid grabbed the stick and pulled it into his stomach just in time. For, through the wire mesh, behind the Bolos, McGinty and his thousand Iron Men charged. With the unleashed fury of months of captivity and shame, they struck. Half armed, far

outnumbered, they fell upon the rear of the attacking Bolos.

Skid kicked the Fokker into a wingover, flattened her out and prepared to strike once again. A few bullet holes spattered his wings. But the Mercedes was revving them up perfectly and his Spandaus still had feed left. He lanced down, crouched in the cockpit. Kicking right rudder, he jerked it in a screaming bank to streak along parallel to the Bolo wave. His nose went down. Spandaus licked hungrily, red ribbons running through the prop whir.

The flame-thrower on the back of a stumbling corpse gushed skyward and licked his tail assembly a perilous instant. He wiggled away from it, dropping again, eyes slitted against the sun. A machine of lethal concentration, his head jutted between the Boche m.g.'s. Now—

A shadow flickered over Skid Upton's fuselage.

FOR a split second, it hung on his gloved hand. He froze. That could mean only one thing.

Another crate!

And a crate coming out of the sun, the attacking angle! A swift glance showed him nothing. There was the hum of lead and sudden tiny holes along his motor hoods. He rammed the stick forward.

A red-streaked fuselage whipped past him. In the blur of it, its lead still rattling around him, he made out a chalk visage above the red wall of the fuselage. It was unhelmeted, without goggles. Captain Skid Upton stared at a ghost. Kamku!

The Bolo ace's plane rushed away, one of Kamku's black-gloved fists lifted aloft in his sign.

Upton's blood was icy and the sweat dripped over his eyebrows. His temples were pounding as if thunder lay trapped behind them, yet his limbs sagged as if his heart had stopped! A specter was riding the skies.

He had come back, cold, deliberate, ready, come to kill. And kill he would. Skid could see it lettered across the sodden-gray sky as he zoomed sharply. Just below and to the right, Kamku climbed, biding his time. Kamku the Assassin; well he merited that title. No heroics about him. Only the set, deliberate plan of the killer! He had come to collect! He would collect!

Glancing down, he saw Kamku laugh across the sky, laugh coldly. Kamku knew, knew who he was—the brazen White ace who had chased him and landed behind the Bolo lines.

SKID sat like an automatom behind the Fokker controls. His mind was a blank. His heart had stopped beating. A chill breath of something that might have been the grave eddied around him. He was doomed. Doomed to crumple unfeeling in a spinning cockpit that would scatter his flesh across half an acre when it hit. Doomed to lie charred, a skeleton, in a flaming crate that would be his coffin. Doomed to hear the Spandau slugs *tat-tat-ting,* feeling for his life!

Kamku . . . death . . . Kamku . . . death . . . Kamku . . . death. . . . It ran like a murdered man's litany through his mind. Kamku . . . death!

One thing alone seared through the awful diapason of disaster. One thing. "In death, there is honor!" The slogan of the White Squadron!

It reared at him out of the clouds. In death there is honor! It shot at him from his bullet-bitten instrument board. In death—honor! It rode in the blur of the spinning prop. Death—honor! It exploded in Skid Upton himself. Death—honor—Kamku!

As if he came out of a trance, the Yank hawk tensed at the controls. His red-rimmed eyes glinted along the Spandau snouts. Die he must. Against Kamku, it *was* written in the books. But die with honor, he would. That *would* be written in the books when he had gone out!

Kamku the Assassin was treated to a strange sight. Out of the sky above, a man he chased now twisted, turned from flight in a mad loop, and raced at him, spitting and snarling from Spandaus. Mercedes wide, pouring the gun to her, Skid swung down. The trim Fokker of the Bolo ace swam before him, came through the red haze that blurred his eyes. And he struck at it with all the savagery of a doomed man.

Kamku fell into a whipstall. Over him, the Yank turned his dive into a loop, pulled a wingover at the bottom of it, and drove prop to prop at Kamku. The crate of the

Bolo leaped forward, switching. Skid held back the triggers. Vaguely he was aware of tracers flitting by, of steel-nosed bullets snapping around him. But he didn't care about those any more. Honor!

Straight at the Red ace he winged. Slit-eyed, he sought to shatter that other prop. He sensed Kamku would resort to another whipstall. The Yank's crate flipped over. Gun silenced, he was diving into another loop. Then he flattened, banked with a scream of wires and flailed at the Bolo's belly.

Kamku came down in a sideslip, confident, assured. Then a chill went through him. For—he saw—the mad White peelot was trying to crash him! There was no doubt of it. For Skid Upton was. Straight for the slipping Bolo Fokker he tore. If he could reach the terrible Kamku before he got it, he *was* going to crash him.

Kamku dodged and climbed in a *chandelle*. Streaking past his tail, Skid flattened, upside down, and drove his nose at the Red terror again. The synchronized Spandaus mouthed. The Yank plunged in. Kamku flung into a split-S, fired a burst, dove, and screamed past the hurling Yank, downward.

Lips ripped back from his teeth, mad-eyed, Skid put his nose down in a full-powered dive after Kamku. Motors screaming, the two plunged. The battlefield reared up at them. Kamku scuttled to the north, still diving. Skid catapulted straight.

The Bolo ace considered quitting. He did not fight madmen. Coldly, he gazed across the space intervening. Anyway, that Wrangel idiot could not get him now. No man would attempt to wrench a crate out of that power plunge. But—Skid Upton did.

The threat of shredded wings meant nothing to him now. As little as Spandau slugs. He was slated to join Lastrov in that place where flyers go. So he ripped back the stick firmly, rocketing with a moaning sough of wings, struts and wire. At terrific speed, he leaped out upon Kamku.

Turning, the Bolo ace saw and started for the ceiling. Rushing in, Skid tilted his elevator a few inches. He had Kamku blocked. In a blinding instant he turned his twin guns loose. Kamku's crate shivered under the tentacles of the Yank's Spandaus.

Kamku lurched, hit. Grimly he put his Fokker into a barrel roll. The Yank tore on his rudder, plastering the tail assembly with lead. Kamku went down. Skid cut under him before he could zoom out of it. His trigger fingers cut a pattern along the belly of the Bolo crate.

Kamku's nose squared off almost to the hospital corner. Skid twisted, flung in a bank and rushed at him again. One of his guns was silenced, out of commission. He didn't bother to cut loose the second. For he was going to crash Kamku now—

Kamku decided he wasn't. Face chalky under his helmet, the Bolo *staffel* leader went into his last dive to escape this madman. Skid aped him. Together, fifty yards distant, two Fokkers hurled earthward.

BELOW, in the center of No Man's Land, a piece of history was occurring never before known in the annals of warfare. McGinty, leading his intrepid Iron Legion, had crashed upon the rear of the sky-strafed Bolo assault wave, completely surprising them.

Seared by their own *flamenwerfers,* their ranks gutted by that White devil, Skid Upton, the Bolos wavered. McGinty struck.

What might have been retreat became a carnage. Bawling "What the hell!" "What the hell!" McGinty had led the way with a wicked auto-rifle. The thousand men of Straganov had waded after him. Death had not deterred them. They knew but one thing—fight!

A mere thousand of them, with a wild Irishman in the van, cut into the Bolos. The last thousand of the Iron Legions of Siberia made their fight. As Skid Upton rocketed down from the heavens with Kamku, McGinty reeled with a hundred Iron Legionnaires at his back, while the shaken survivors of a great Red wave skulked back to their trenches.

All heads were turned skyward. From behind the Wrangel earthworks, a thin, sparse line of men climbed to stare. McGinty gaped upward, intermixing a mumble of prayers with oaths. As the two ships plunged under full gun, there was a terrific moaning screech of wires. A

long shrieking *rhaum-m-m-m* preceded them.

A guttural cry lifted from those troops as Skid Upton crossed in like a fencer. His lone Spandau spat. Dots appeared in Kamku's wing. His motor hoods were punctured. As a last desperate stratagem, he resorted to a hopeless loop.

Skid Upton caught him halfway in it, just as he zoomed, barely twenty yards from the ground. Because he believed he was doomed to wash out, the Yank struck as Kamku believed no man would ever strike. The Yank's Spandau chattered silent, empty. Hurling, pouring the gun, he crossed over Kamku's prop. His stick jerked forward. Skid Upton's running gear crashed Kamku's propeller, smashing it to smithereens. And the Yank leaned back in his cockpit and laughed!

Kamku dropped tail down. He slipped over on a wing-tip. A few yards up, he pancaked into the barbed-wire, ground-looped and crashed. His left wing had scarcely ceased folding up when he was out, Mauser snapping up.

Skid shot groundward. Almost carelessly, he yanked her nose up. His Mercedes coughed as he got it into a bank. Then he sagged over weakly as the ship sheered downward. The bare fuselage hit with a terrific *crump-p!*

Reeling dazedly, Upton stumbled out of the wrecked fuselage. Through a haze, he made out the black stump of a Mauser bearing at him. Catching at the fuselage for support, he whirled and grabbed for his own weapon. It was gone.

Kamku took another step, unsteady, toward him. The Red top ace's teeth were bared in a livid grimace, gloating. His thin, pallid features were shadowed with black. He was severely injured. Upton waited, half paralyzed as if he were facing a slow-swaying cobra. For Kamku's weapon lurched in his grip and the Bolo Ataman's head lolled slowly on his shoulders.

The click of the safety release being snapped off came clearly.

"I always win, *malchik!*" It was Kamku's voice, scarcely a whisper, in Russian.

Once again it seemed as if Fate the gambler had dealt Upton his last card. Vaguely he heard something stirring back of him in his crashed empennage. A figure in the gray tunic of the Red pilots reeled in front of him. It was the one Upton had shot over the tarmac just before he dispersed the Red flight.

More dead than alive, the wounded man, not even aware of Upton, aware of but one thing — Kamku — saluted feebly. "Brother—"

Kamku's weapon dropped as if it had been struck down.

A White rifleman cocked his "3 line" weapon on the trench parapet and jerked the trigger. Kamku fell like a pole.

The figure before Upton gasped, stretched out a dazed hand, took a step and folded up with a crash.

Mad McGinty leaped across a heap of debris toward the puzzled Upton. But in the stillness, Captain Skid Upton was bending down and carefully lifting the goggles and helmet from the head of the one he had shot in the Fokker.

HE drew back—startled. A face the image of Kamku's stared at him in death.

Slowly understanding dawned on the White ace. The one he had killed in the plane over the Red tarmac was Kamku's aide and his double as far as features went. Then he recalled that gasped cry of "brother" a second ago. This one at his feet was the brother of the great Bolo top ace, Kamku. And unknown to anyone else, he had flown Kamku's ship, behind Kamku's insignia, day after day.

It was a clever stratagem. The Bolo leader had been a marked man in the air. At last the mystery of his invulnerability was explained. Those times when White pilots had sent the ship of the mailed fist down, Kamku himself had never been in it. Always another, a decoy for himself, went down with his ship. Upton was stunned with the cold-bloodedness of it. But it was clever, diabolically clever.

At last he had tasted vengeance on the man who had damned his life. The greatest menace the White Squadron had was dead. Upton walked around his body slowly as he slipped into the Wrangel trench, Mad McGinty at his side.

THE SUICIDE SQUADRON

By TOM O'NEILL

Dread fingers pointed to the pilots of the Suicide Squadron, ticking them off one by one, while the hope of nations sank in Spandau-ripped agony. Then came Kiwi Terrill to stunt with winged treachery above, and siren snares below!

A Complete Spy Novelet

IT was night and there was a gentle rain. In the distance continuously muttered the grumbling thunder of guns.

There was no talk in the lamp-lighted messroom. Curtains were drawn tightly over the windows. The men—there were twelve at table—ate mechanically, some wearily, as if the food was all tasteless stuff, mere fodder necessary to sustain life in war-sick bodies. One officer—captain's bars were on his shoulders—wore a bandage band about his head and looped like

a chin strap under his jaw. It held in place thick gauze pads against each side of his face. With painful concentration he was sipping thin soup from the point of a teaspoon. Once he winced and growled, "Blast it!" and scowled blackly; then he went on sipping the soup.

The seat at the head of the long table was vacant. A second vacancy was near the foot of the board. Occasionally the eyes of an eater, for the most part held down intent upon the business of the meal, lifted quickly to glance furtively sidewise toward the second vacant chair, then drop again their gaze to a silent study of their owner's plate.

There was a door beyond the head of the table. It jerked open abruptly and Major Loudon popped into the mess-room. A jack-in-a-box-like entrance, done as if major and door had been sprung by the touching of a button. He was thick-set, slightly bald, sharp of eyes that took in the room with a single glance as he halted just within the door. Behind him stood a tall, blond lieutenant, slim and smart in a uniform without a stain of service.

"Gentlemen," Major Loudon said crisply, "this is Lieutenant Bert Terrill."

The twelve men at the table looked up from their plates. Some of them nodded briefly. No one spoke save the captain with the bandaged jaw, who said, "Oh, hell!" so that it sounded almost like a sob, and he threw down on the table the teaspoon from which he had been sipping soup.

Major Loudon indicated with a jerk of his slightly bald head the vacant chair near the foot of the table.

"You will take Lieutenant Hastings' place, Terrill. Hastings went on—on furlough this afternoon."

The major took his own seat at the head of the table. Terrill moved down the room toward the empty chair at the other end. He sat down and a waiter in khaki at once began to serve him dinner.

This was the famous Suicide Squadron. For months he had heard of the outfit, and now he was one of them. And it was no ghastly war-dream, this moment; it was real. The Suicide Squadron! He sat rather stiff in his chair. This squadron was the hardest hit, the hardest hitting bunch of flyers in the whole American Air Service. No man was assigned unless he made application for duty with it. Once in there was no way out—save West. Never was there respite from the work of grim-winged war. It was fittingly named, the Suicide Squadron; when a man grew too war-weary to carry on, when nerves snapped under the constant strain, that man went on furlough. Terrill knew what that meant. Lieutenant Hastings had gone on furlough that afternoon; the way of his going had been West. Probably, Terrill thought, in flames. Many went that way. And now he sat in Hastings' place at the table. Hastings furlough was unending.

The captain with the bandaged jaw shoved back in his seat and lighted a cigaret. Terrill glanced up quickly at the scratch of the match.

"Just come over?" the captain asked thickly.

Terrill nodded. "Yes, sir."

"Save the sirs for the cock of the roost." The captain stabbed the lighted end of his cigaret at Major Loudon at the head of the table. "Where'd you train?"

"Kelly Field."

THAT was all. No more questions were asked. The mess had listened. One by one, as the men finished eating, they lighted cigarets, shoved back and quit the table to promptly leave the room. When all but five or six had gone, Major Loudon spoke crisply—

"McKeg, you take Terrill in tow. He'll be number three in the captain's section. Patrol off at dawn, you know, so turn in early."

A lieutenant across the table from Terrill said, "Yes, sir." A moment later the major sprang up from his chair and hurriedly left the room.

Terrill looked across at the lieutenant the major had addressed as McKeg. He was no more than a boy, not yet twenty, Terrill was sure, but the fatigue lines from his nose to the corners of his mouth were deeply etched, and almost cavernous were his hazel eyes, so deeply sunken in dark-rimmed sockets were they. His hair was black, closely clipped; his skin quite pale. He sat drooped forward in his chair, an arm resting on the table, a cigaret held between slim, twitching fingers.

McKeg smiled faintly. "When you've finished," he said, "I'll show you to our

quarters. You'll bunk with me—Hastings' bunk. I—I've packed his things."

"Lieutenant Hastings? He is the one who went on furlough?"

McKeg's jaw muscles bulged and relaxed. His nostrils had widened.

"Yes," he said. "He went just before sundown. We were coming in—two sections—from late patrol." Between his slim fingers McKeg had rolled his cigaret to shreds. He went on after a moment—"Our section is out again at dawn. My brother is captain—Captain Glover McKeg. I'm Henry."

Terrill drank his coffee. "I've finished." They both stood up, and he followed McKeg from the messroom out into the raining night.

II

IT was near to dawn when Bert Terrill again woke. The lamp was lighted and McKeg was bent over him, shaking him by a shoulder.

"Rouse out, Terrill!" he was saying huskily. "Rouse out! Just time for a bite, some coffee and a cigaret before we take off. We're off just as soon as it's light enough."

Terrill was instantly wide-awake. The Suicide Squadron! That was the first thought that came into his mind. It was near to dawn—he glanced at his watch—and McKeg had reminded him that they were scheduled to take off on patrol duty at dawn. Dawn patrol! With a section of the Suicide Squadron!

Together they went out into the chill darkness of the unborn day. Drifting mist was heavy, so much so that blots of even nearby buildings of the aerodrome were obscured. It was quiet; the gentle rain had stopped; and the distant mutter of guns was still. They made their way toward the mess hall. Terrill had appetite for no more than a cup of strong coffee. Then he went out again into the drifting mist of the chill morning.

Ahead of him, as he made toward the hangars, a cigaret made a ruddy glow in the fog.

"You, Terrill?" The thick voice was Guffy's, he of the bandaged jaw.

Terrill said, "Yes," and walked toward the point of fire that made an arc as the captain with a hand moved the cigaret from his mouth.

"I'll show you the way to the hangars," the captain offered. "You'll soon be used to mornings like this. It'll take a couple of days. Even then you'll have to go by sound. There—" A motor coughed. "They've got the ships out ready to warm them up. In this fog you've got to be careful not to walk into a prop. Might get your face mussed up a little. Like me. Then no one would recognize you."

Terrill asked quietly, "Do you recognize me, Captain?"

Guffy did not answer immediately. When he did so, he dropped his voice to a husky whisper.

"Yes, Colonel. What man of the Intelligence wouldn't? You may not know me. I was sent from Paris a month ago."

"And in that month you have discovered?"

"I think," Guffy answered, "that Major Loudon has assigned you to the proper section."

They were close to the hangars and Captain Guffy guided Terrill around behind the line of ships the motors of which had been cut to idling. Shadowy men with flashlights were hurrying about through the drifting mist, busy with making ready the planes. A breeze was springing up.

Guffy sniffed of the wind. "That'll drive the fog. It'll be thinned out by sun-up." The indistinct figure of a man loomed up before them. "That looks like your captain." Guffy called out—"Hey, McKeg! Here's your right guard! Where are your ships?"

"In line there—in front." Captain McKeg's voice was snappish. He turned abruptly on his heels and seemed to leap through the fog at Guffy and Terrill.

"Name's Terrill?" he snapped, and he leaned forward to peer into Terrill's face, blinding Terrill with the unexpected brilliancy of an electric torch turned full against his eyes. "Your first actual patrol?"

"Yes, sir," Terrill said.

"Familiar with formation flying?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right. You're number three." He spoke like a man with a chill. "Keep watch to the right and keep an eye on me. Watch my signals. Stick with the V and don't be going off on your own. If we get

into a jam, pick your man and keep your nose aimed at him, not your tail. If you get hit, head for home as fast as you can."

Captain McKeg stamped impatiently. "Where's Henry?" he demanded and muttered irritably. "The fog's thinning and it's getting light. It's time to go. Come on, Terrill!" He sprang away toward the line of ships.

"On edge." Guffy's hand tightened on Terrill's elbow. "Good luck!" he wished huskily. "Remember you're new yet. This is your first day. Take it easy.

"And keep an eye on McKeg."

III

IT happened just as Terrill looked down overside at Henry. The lieutenant abruptly stood his ship on its nose and dived vertically through a rift in the cloudbank. The very abruptness of the maneuver so captured Terrill's entire attention that unconsciously he pulled the control stick toward the side over which he leaned. Instantly the plane was in a vertical left bank. Terrill kicked on bottom rudder to hold the nose down and avoid a possible stall and in the newness of the ship to him he kicked it on too hard. He found himself diving down full throttle after Henry.

A thousand-foot plunge through a hole in smoky space. The rift in the cloudbank was a nightmare abyss. Terrill shot down like a roaring meteor. And then tumbling planes were all about him. Below the clouds it was dull gray morning and against his face was the sting of rain. He struck down his goggles, wiped them with the back of a gloved hand as he leveled out.

From dead ahead a plane came hurtling at him. It zoomed suddenly straight up. As Terrill flashed by below it he saw that black Maltese crosses marked its under wings. A Jerry! Terrill took a quick glance about. There were three of them. Far down below Henry was mixing it with two.

Terrill pivoted on his right wing. The Jerry who had zoomed over him was twisting down.

Then a meteor fell. It came down sizzling, blowing red-hot breaths of fire and trailing flaming exhaust gas in its wake. The Boche plane on Terrill's tail went off to the right in a violent skid that ended in a bank and flop over that spilled out the pilot, who fell twisting oddly, all grotesquely outflung arms and legs. And Terrill watched the falling man, wondering dully how he had got free of his belt; and he thought it probable that the strap had been shot away.

He cut throttle and pulled the ship out of its dive. Wings were thundering alongside his on the right. That startled him, until he saw that the pilot, with goggles pushed up, was Henry. Henry had been the meteor and had shot the Boche off Terrill's tail. That made two for Henry, Terrill recalled. Two for one! Certainly Henry had avenged Hastings; he had satisfied the honor of the squadron. Now they could go home.

He yelled at Henry—

"Let's go home!"

Maybe Henry heard it. He seemed to, and certainly Terrill had yelled loud enough. The effort had hurt his throat. Henry banked suddenly right and turned and went zooming up like a rocket.

Terrill jammed open the throttle and followed the lead.

Just under the gray clouds two planes were circling, banked to the vertical, directly opposite each other, whirling like two toys on a string. One of the ships was Captain McKeg's; the other was a checkered red and white nose Fokker triplane.

Henry was climbing fast toward the two, with Terrill tight on his tail. Gone was Terrill's dullness, his weariness and the weakness that had held him. Keenly alert he was now, damning the rain that splintered against his eyes and stung and blinded him; and as near sightless as he was he caught a glimpse of Captain McKeg's vertically banked ship, the captain's helmeted head and goggle-masked face. The captain had an arm thrust overside the cockpit and was making a signal, a sign that Terrill did not understand.

THE Fokker broke out of the circle, waggled his wings—derisively, Terrill thought, and was piqued—and zoomed for the clouds. A swirling of vapors closing in behind it marked where it had gone.

Captain McKeg had fallen into a sideslip and was making frantic signals to the other two ships. Terrill saw them and this time he understood them, reading them

as commands recalling Henry and him to formation. He glanced at Henry, ahead of him and climbing steeply. Either Henry had not observed the captain's signals or he was ignoring them. He shot his ship into the cloudbank where the swirling mist marked the triplane's passing. Terrill roared in after him.

In less than a minute Terrill had lost all trace of Henry's ship. The cloud mists were so dense that he could not see at all beyond the nose of his ship. His wing tips were indistinct in outline. Nothing now he had by which to judge the balance of his craft, nothing but his own sense of equilibrium. That is a sense not to be entirely trusted, not for long, for it grows weary in time; and Terrill held his little ship to its maximum angle of climb and thundered up through the clouds and out into the clear, bright morning above them.

He leveled then, circled and began looking for Henry. There was not a sign of the young lieutenant's ship. Terrill cut his motor a moment to listen. The high song of the wind that he rode with his wings was the only sound he could hear. He listened long, even loosening the ear flaps of his helmet; and his craft drifted and lost speed, then warned with a trembling that it hung on the verge of a stall.

He cut in the motor again, nosed down a trifle to recover some of the flying speed he had lost; and he held to a wide circle above the clouds. Here was clean sun veiled by neither rain nor mist and filling with a blaze of splendor this high place, and he played in the glory of the light, dived down and zoomed and pivoted about, while the shadow of his wings raced with him, sporting on the billowed sea of fog below.

And then, from that sea, sprang a ship, thunderous-lived, tri-planed, checkered red and white of nose. The Fokker. The pilot was looking back at the clouds from which he had come.

Terrill dived. He had not a cartridge for his guns. Nor did he think of that. He thought only that here was a foeman of the air, and he dived upon him, throttle jammed wide open.

Terrill's shadow first touched the German. The Fokker pilot's reaction to the touch was instantaneous. Even before he could turn his head to look to see what it was that made the shadow, he had thrown the triplane's left wings down and was slipping vertically back into the clouds.

After him plunged Terrill. He knew that his thunderbolt-like attack was a shock to the German, caught in an unguarded moment.

"Waggle your wings now, blast you!" Terrill yelled, his the derision this time; and he yelled again and crashed down with the full intention of ramming that Fokker pilot over the rim of West to glory.

Somehow he missed the triplane, somehow the Fokker slipped away from him in the clouds. Terrill crashed down and through and was again in gray morning and rain. He leveled and banked to turn in a wide circle. He looked for Henry. He could see the lieutenant's ship nowhere; evidently Henry was still in the clouds. The only ship in sight was that piloted by Captain McKeg. It came racing up to pull alongside Terrill's ship while the captain signaled a return to the drome.

Terrill pointed up at the clouds. Henry was up there somewhere. What about Henry? The captain dismissed Henry with a gesture. It was a complete dismissal. Henry had got himself into it, let him get himself out of it! To blue blazes with Henry! The captain swung his ship and headed for home.

When the captain showed him his tail, Terrill stared after him and was uncertain in his amazement. He glanced up at the clouds, then all about him and again after the homeward-streaking captain. Amazement became a sort of stupor, almost that, and uncertainty grew. He held his ship to the circle. He had seen Henry go into the clouds and he had not seeen him come out. Should he wait for Henry, disobeying the captain's signaled command to head for home? Henry was in the clouds. Also, a Jerry was there, a Jerry with a red and white checkered nose Fokker triplane. Suppose the Fokker came down on him? What then? He had not a single cartridge for his guns. Suppose he waited for Henry and Henry never came down?

Terrill did not know the way to the drome alone.

He looked after the fast-dwindling mark of the captain's plane. And he held to his circling. He could not continue forever circling in the rain; his gas supply was

going fast. He would make just one more circle, he decided, then he would head in the direction Captain McKeg had gone.

He started on another circle. He was half around when very close to him a ship spun down from the clouds. It drew swirling vapor after it a space and at once Terrill did not know it for friend or foe, so he nosed down on it and gunned his motor all he could. Then he saw it was Henry and he veered off while Henry recovered from the spin.

Then, without any preliminary warning of sight or sound, Captain McKeg's ship appeared from out of the rain. It zoomed up over them, banked steeply and came about sharply, when it pulled in ahead and dropped down to take the lead. The captain signaled for V in echelon.

Terrill glanced at Henry. Henry waved him to take his place on the right and drop down to the lowest step. At the same time Henry pulled up to the left. Because of the rain and the poor visibility the three ships drew close together; and Captain McKeg led the way to the drome, and down.

Captain McKeg was out of his cockpit the moment his plane had stopped after it had landed and taxied a short distance across the muddy field. He splashed through the wet to Terrill's ship where Terrill sat in his seat trying with cold, clumsy fingers to loosen his belt.

"For Henry's sake," Captain McKeg snarled, close black eyes hot with deadly fire, "I'm willing to overlook the fact that you two deliberately disobeyed my very explicit commands and exposed the patrol to unnecessary danger. It will be just as well for you if you have nothing at all to say about it!"

Terrill answered quietly, "There is nothing I care to say, Captain," and for some time he sat in his pit and stared toward the hangars to which the captain strode, off through the rain. He wondered. Which McKeg was it Guffy had meant for him to watch, the captain or Henry?

LIEUTENANT HENRY McKEG, who had landed his ship last of the three, came over to Terrill's side.

"What did he say to you?" he wanted to know. His goggles were pushed up and his hazel eyes were anxious.

"The captain?" Terrill shrugged a shoulder slightly. "Bawled me out because we went off on our own after that Jerry—exposed the squadron to unnecessary danger."

Henry loosened the strap of his helmet and seemed to be relieved.

"Forget it!" he counseled, and he said apologetically, "It's his nerves, you know. Glover's pretty snappish after a patrol that's had a fight. Our section has had some hard raps. We did pull a fool stunt today and, naturally, it put Glover on his ear. It was my fault!"

He stood by while Terrill climbed out of his pit. "How are you feeling?"

Until that moment Terrill had not thought of himself, nor of his physical being; but now that the lieutenant's question focused his mind upon himself, the weakness, which he had felt in the air, returned to him and was overwhelming. He was seized with a violent trembling and his knees gave beneath him so he might have sagged to the ground had not Henry quickly seized him by an arm and braced him. He broke out with a cold sweat that chilled him and set his teeth to chattering.

Henry knew what it was. "Reaction!" he declared it to be. "We all experience it. I was actually sick yesterday when I got down. War in the air is bad medicine for the nerves—in this squadron especially."

With a great effort Terrill straightened up. "W-We—r-rem-m-ber-ed—H-Hastings!" he managed through clicking teeth.

"Righto!" The cavernous-eyed lieutenant kept his hold of Terrill's arm. "Let's go in and chalk up our scores. Then we'll get a shot of coffee."

STRONG hot coffee was always on tap at the mess hall. They went to the kitchen and the cook served them. When they each had drunk a mugful of the black brew, they went out again into the rain to slosh to their quarters where they discarded their wet flying suits. Henry at once flung himself upon his cot and drew a blanket over him. Almost instantly he was in a deathlike sleep.

Terrill stood and looked down at him.

"Poor kid!" he thought. "Two patrols, one of them costing a friend! A sleepless night between! No wonder the name of

this outfit—the unlucky Suicide Squadron!"

Terrill lay down on his cot. He was spent, yet he was tingling and possessed with an uneasiness that denied him rest. For minutes he tossed about on the narrow bed, tried to will himself to sleep; but it was useless, and he got up, put on a slicker and went out. He sought the hangars where the ground crew was busy with the ships.

It was there that Guffy found him wandering restlessly about. The captain with the bandaged jaws took Terrill by an arm and led him out into the rain.

"There'll be no more patrol duty today," the captain said. "And if there was, the old man wouldn't let you go out. For a fledgling you seem to be pretty well feathered out and quite hot on the wing. You weren't supposed to clean up the whole German air force on your first trick, you know."

"It was more or less of an accident," Terrill said.

"Yeah? Well, those certainly are the kind of accidents to have if you are going to have any." Guffy lighted a cigaret. "How many Jerries in that flight?"

"Four," Terrill told him. "One of them got away—a Fokker triplane."

Guffy stopped up short.

"A Fokker triplane? It didn't happen to have a checkered red and white nose, did it?"

"Yes, it did."

"The McKegs," Guffy said, "will go to the village tonight."

Terrill frowned at the captain. "Will you tell me what our meeting up with a checkered red and white nose Fokker triplane has to do with the McKegs going to the village tonight?"

"No, I won't," Guffy refused. "I can't. I wish I could tell you. I wish somebody would tell me. I've been trying to figure it out for two-three weeks."

"But you think—"

"I think it's part of the black gamble, that's what I think," Guffy growled, and he dropped his cigaret to the ground and heeled it into the mud.

IV

THE rain had stopped but the clouds hung heavy and low and it was intensely dark. The road was deep with mud. The squadron had at its command a G. M. C. truck and a motorcycle with sidecar. The truck, Terrill knew, would start presently for the village, carrying those officers and men who would seek pleasure that night. He could wait for the truck or he could take the motorcycle; but his plans for the night called for no man to travel with him. He set out on foot and waded through the mud.

The distance to the village was about three kilometers. He had been over the way but once previously, the evening before, when he had walked to the field to report to Major Loudon for duty with the squadron; yet he was certain of himself. An occasional flash of his torch helped him to find footing in the mud; and when he had put the drome a distance behind him he quit the road to jump a ditch full of water and take to the fields.

To the north artillery was awake along the front with a low thundering of guns. Terrill gave it but momentary attention as he went along. He listened more for another sound — the churning wallow through the mud of the truck from the field. The motor, he knew, would be running without lights; and when he heard it coming, he stretched on the ground in wet grass until it passed.

The truck was empty, parked near the *estaminet,* when Terrill reached the village. The muddy street was dark and deserted of any military life; it was quiet. A detachment of artillery had been stationed here, but they had moved on a few days before; tonight there was not a uniform in the *estaminet* save those worn by the men from the aerodrome who had come in with the truck.

Terrill continued on along the street and through the quiet village. The road ran on muddily into the west and the night. Beyond the last of the straggling grouped buildings he halted. A dog was roused somewhere and barking furiously, until presently its cry died away to an occasional sharp yap, as if between its latrations it listened for the lost sound that had waked it to alarm.

AND Terrill listened. At first his ears were attuned to nothing more than the low distant thunder of guns to the

north, where was the front, and the near intermittent sharp barking of the dog; but shortly these sounds were lost to his consciousness, and distinctly he made out the suck of feet lifted from the mud of the road as through the darkness a walker approached where he stood.

He listened closely, even shutting his eyes, though in the darkness he could see nothing with them open. To the rhythm of the sound he listened, and he smiled; for the walker did not plod steadily ahead. *Suck-suck—suck-suck!* A step and a half, quick and slow. The walker in the night and mud was lame.

Terrill found a cigaret and boldly lighted it, shielding the match between his cupped hands so that the light was reflected against his face, which he turned in the direction of the one who came toward him.

"Colonel!"

Terrill dropped the match. It hissed against the wet of the ground. He said—

"All right, Amati."

The lame one came closer to Terrill. He was a bunched blot in the darkness, shorter, thicker than Terrill, who was slender, tall and straight; and he was pleasant-faced if hawked of nose and sharp of quick, wise eyes, as Terrill observed again—he had observed it times before—by the ruddy glow of his cigaret when he drew long upon it and held its fired end close above Amati's upturned face.

"A black night, Colonel," the man said in a soft voice that was as soothing as a low-sung song. "A black night for black deeds. If this mud was wet with blood it would be warmer to walk in." He turned his head and cocked an ear to the north, where heavy guns were rumbling along a sector of the front. "Blood is wetting the mud up there, Colonel!"

Terrill said rather sharply, "Enough of that, Amati! What luck tonight?"

"Poor luck, sir. Such is always my lot. But then I am but a poor twisted thing who thinks twisted thoughts. Perhaps I deserve no better than I get." He lighted a cigaret and blew the first smoke against its lighted end. "The truck arrived at the village a full half-hour before you did. Beside the sergeant who drove, there were six men. Four were officers, and there was another sergeant and a private."

"Captain Guffy was one of the officers?"

"Yes, Colonel. He is now at the *estaminet* with two of the others, a Lieutenant Dick and a Lieutenant McKeg. Guffy supplied the names, sir. I had a moment with him alone. He and Lieutenant Dick are sipping *vin rouge* and playing two-handed pinochle for ten francs a point. Lieutenant McKeg is drinking cognac like so much water, and with as much apparent effect, and making love to Jeanne, the girl of the *estaminet*. Her father's name is Gacon. Henri, I think. I am not sure of that."

"What about the other men?" Terrill wanted to know.

"The sergeants and the private are shooting craps with a marine who has lost his company and is in no hurry to find it. The other officer—" Amati sucked his cigaret. "He was a captain, *mon* Colonel. Guffy gave him the same name as he gave the lieutenant who is drinking cognac at the *estaminet*—McKeg. He had but a moment to talk with me. Perhaps in his haste he made a mistake, repeated himself unintentionally."

"There are two McKegs," Terrill said. "The captain and the lieutenant are brothers."

"Ah! Then Guffy made no mistake." Amati blew the ash from the cigaret. "Captain McKeg took himself for a walk."

Terrill exclaimed sharply. "A walk! Which way?"

"This way, Colonel." Amati's cigaret indicated the road that ran away muddily into the west and the night. "A wet night for a stroll."

"Where would he go that way?" Terrill frowned. It was more a question in his mind that he spoke than a question put directly to Amati.

Amati spun his cigaret to a pool of muddy water.

"Perhaps he goes to visit at the chateau," he suggested.

"There is a chateau?"

"Yes, Colonel. About a kilometer from here. I would have followed the captain had not Guffy told me to wait for you." He said again, "It's a wet night for a stroll!"

"Yes," Terrill agreed. "It would be much pleasanter inside than it is outside. What is there to hinder us from visiting at the chateau?"

Amati chuckled. "Nothing at all, Colo-

nel. We should be able to find at least one window unlocked."

Together they walked west along the muddy road.

V

A HIGH pile of a building, and trees, many trees and shrubs, all blended in confusion together with the night—such was Bert Terrill's impression of the chateau. Two long windows, Gothic in the point of arch, gave to the darkness twin fingers of light from dim illumination within a room; beacons to any abroad in the night on the busines of black secrecy.

Terrill came to a halt, and beside him stood Amati, a hunched blot in the murk. He stood quietly, so quietly that Terrill, as close as he was to the twisted man, could hear not a sound of a breath. Then, abruptly, Amati was gone. There was an uncanniness about the going that chilled Terrill and made him snap his teeth together—the hunched bloc of the man melted in with the broad blot of the night and vanished. A shadow merged with other shadows and was nothing that an eye could measure or an ear detect.

Terrill did not quit his spot. He knew Amati's ways, for he had used the twisted one before; and he waited, not without impatience, not without a great effort of will, to endure inactively the tide of minutes that broke against him and threatened with each slow wave of time to bear him down. But he knew Amati, his ways, and waited his return.

Then Amati stood again beside him. Terrill had been watching, listening, straining his eyes to search the darkness, alert of ears for small sounds in the night; but he saw nothing nor heard nothing—and again Amati stood beside him.

"This way, Colonel," the man whispered, and he touched Terrill on an arm and guided him in and out among trees and shrubs and swiftly toward the chateau; dark beyond the two dimly lighted Gothic windows. "Softly! Softly!" he breathed.

A stone-paved, stone-railed terrace banked against the east side of the building. There were stone steps, and Amati mounted quickly, Terrill at his side. The lighted windows were to the left of them now. Facing them, opening on to the terrace, was a line of French windows, twelve of them, dividing into groups of four the groups separted by machicolated columns of stone so laid as to be alternately projected and recessed. The windows of the second story were casement arrangements.

The columns between the groups of French windows offered good hand- and foot-hold and Amati, with the agility of a monkey, climbed to the casements. Terrill more cautiously followed him. The casements were closed, but Amati slipped a long knife from under his cloak and with the blade cunningly applied force to a lock that clicked sharply and let a window swing out and open.

LIKE Terrill, Amati carried with him an electric torch. He had it out now, the disk of blue light darting this way and that about the room. It was a bedroom, one much unused, the furnishings draped with sheeting as protection against the accumulation of dust. There were several doors. Amati selected the one directly opposite the window by which they had entered the room, and he crossed quickly to it and tried the lock.

The door was unbolted. The twisted man swung it open, first snapping off his torch light.

"Softly!" he hissed. "Softly!"

They were in a long, wide corridor that extended the length of the house. To the rear was the stairway that led to the lower floor, and faint light came up from below, unsteady light as if from candle flames made to waver by the stirring of a breath of air.

Amati went to the head of the stairs, paused there a moment while he peered down to the great hall below. Then he started down, leaving his shadow huge and grotesque and wavering, stretching to the ceiling of the wall behind him. It was incredible, Terrill thought, how quickly the misformed man could move, and how soundlessly; how abruptly he could become motionless and, with the shapelessness of his being in its unlikeness to a man form, mingle with the shapelessness of his surroundings, as revealed in a half light, and so be lost to an eye.

"Like a spider, that man," Terrill thought.

The wavering shadow vanished from the wall. Amati was down. Terrill

gained the head of the stairs. Amati was nowhere in sight. Terrill started down, moving slowly and with great caution against making undue sound. He was thankful the stairs were thickly carpeted to muffle the tread, light as it was, of his well-shod feet. He looked about for Amati but the hunched man was not in sight.

Terrill slipped his pistol from its holster and descended to the hall.

The stone floor of the hall was thickly laid with rugs. On the left, almost directly opposite the center of the long table, a wide doorway opened from the vast room. The opening was hung with heavy curtains drawn together except at the middle, where was the merest of slits between them. Through this slit came light to mark a yellow slash upon the floor.

Terrill moved quickly away from the foot of the stairs and the region of the brightest light of the candelabrum and he sought the shadows of the left side of the room and crept along the wall toward the curtained doorway. He could hear the murmur of voices. His eyes were busy, searching out the far murky reaches of the immense room. He sought Amati but could not locate the uncanny man, yet his was the sense that Amati was not so very far away.

Foot by foot along the wall Terrill crept to the curtained doorway. The murmur of voices grew more distinct and he could make out that one voice was a woman's. She was speaking in French—

"Don't be nervous, *mon cher.*" She laughed easily, as if she had not a care in the world. "The night is young and you are with me. How much pleasure do you want? Have I not offered you the night?"

Her answer was the clink of glass against bottle.

She went on—"The roads are muddy and our friend has no wings like you. He must come by motor and on foot. He has many kilometers to travel. True, he may not come tonight; but we must wait for him. The hour is not yet ten."

"Ten—ten! Always ten!" The man's voice was snappish with the brittleness of overtaut nerves. "Do you realize I am supposed to be back at the field before midnight?" It was Captain McKeg.

The woman laughed again. "Pouf! Back at the field before midnight—I realize no such thing! I realize, *mon ami,* that you will wait here, as usual, until the hour of ten has struck. Otherwise—"

"Say it! Say it again!" McKeg snarled at her. "You've said it enough times before—that I'll be shot down on my next patrol if I fail to play my part. Have I ever failed to play it?"

"And you've always been paid for the playing, paid well. Don't be a fool. Germany will win this war; there is no question of it. We know that the British and the French are on the verge of exhaustion. Russia is busy spilling her own blood. America has men, but they are untrained and can accomplish nothing. Germany will win; but win or lose, we are made, you and I. Don't be a fool."

"It's my nerves, Marcie," he said then. "You don't seem to realize that I'm under pretty constant strain—"

"Aren't we all?" she demanded impatiently. "Who gambles the most, you or I or any one of our friends? Do you think that the Baron is under no strain? He protects you when you patrol on wing. Can you protect him?"

Gently Terrill opened wider the slit between the curtains and looked into the room. The angle of his vision was a narrow one. He could see a corner of a table with McKeg standing by it pouring liquor into a glass. The woman he could not see.

More gently he widened the slit, for he was curious to look upon the woman's face. But he did not look. A cold ring of steel pressed hard against the back of his neck, just above the collar edge of his coat, and fingers of steel closed about his right wrist, the hand in which he held his gun.

That grip of steel turned him slowly and the cold ring of metal pressing against his neck moved to his ear, then to his chin. He was faced about to confront an officer in French uniform who was grim of mouth and narrow eyed. The ring of steel was the muzzle of an automatic pistol which the fellow now held hard against Terrill's jaw.

VI

TERRILL swallowed. It was quite involuntary. So intent had he been upon the talk between Captain McKeg and the

woman in the room behind the curtain that he had not heard this man, who wore the French uniform, come up behind him. And he had had warning enough that somebody might come, by ten o'clock or before; he had been warned by the talk he had heard, and he had heard the clock chime the hour. His interest in McKeg and the woman had been greater than his caution. Now he was caught.

There was little he could do to help himself. Really there was nothing he could do. The muzzle pressed hard against his jaw and there was death in the Frenchman's narrowed eyes. True enough, Terrill had a pistol in his own right hand; but the wrist of that hand was in the Frenchman's steely grip, the arm held down. The gun was of no use. It would take great and sudden effort to force it up; and the gun jammed against Terrill's chin was at full cock. A touch of the Frenchman's ready finger on the trigger would bring to an abrupt end any struggle Terrill might make.

The officer nodded again. And as he did so there poised behind his head a hand. In the hand a knife, long and thin of blade, that caught and glinted with the candlelight of the vast, dimly lighted room.

The twitch of an eyelid would measure more time than that hand poised knife. The blade streaked down. Terrill heard the rip as the point pierced cloth and flesh and the soft thud of hilt of full steel sent home. The Frenchman's eyes widened and his gasped breath gurgled in his throat. Then his knees sagged and he started to pitch forward.

Amati's, that hand and knife. Terrill knew it. He snatched at the Frenchman's gun and caught it, and he caught his own pistol from the other hand. Then he put out an arm to hold the man from falling forward.

But there was no need for that. Amati had slipped an arm about the man and had let him down, face forward, on his knees. The twisted one whipped his cloak from his shoulders and flung it about the limp officer, and he took the body up in his arms with the ease that he would have taken up a child and with the burden he darted for the stairs and up.

Terrill sped after him, a full cocked gun in both of his hands. With each step that he mounted he glanced back and down at the curtained door; but no one came through, and he gained the upper corridor close behind Amati and close, again, behind the hunched man he turned into the bedroom and shut the door.

"Lock it!" Amati's command cut through the darkness. Terrill threw the bolt. "Light!"

Terrill got out his torch and clicked on the light. Amati laid the body face down on the floor, throwing his cloak under it. The hilt of the knife protruded from beneath the left shoulder blade. Amati did not touch it.

"It was necessary, Colonel," he whispered.

Terrill's jaws were tight together. He said nothing; Amati had saved his life.

The hunched man dropped on his knees beside the body of the French officer and with quick, sure hands went through the pockets of the man's uniform. He seemed to know for what he searched and presently he brought into the disk of light from Terrill's torch a packet which, though it was bulky with its contents, was no larger than an ordinary number ten envelope. It was triple sealed with seals of black wax.

Amati handed the envelope to Terrill.

"This is it, Colonel," he said.

SAVE the three black seals there was no mark of any kind on the packet. Terrill turned it several times in his hands before he put it safe in a pocket.

Amati smiled. "Did you see the woman, Colonel, from where you stood?"

"No, I couldn't see her. I was trying to when that Frenchman jabbed his pistol against the back of my neck. My imagination may have been working overtime, but I had the feeling that I could have identified her could I have managed just a glimpse of her face. There was something about her voice—"

Amati laughed a low, amused laugh.

"There was something about her voice once before, Colonel—so I seem to remember. There can be something about a voice when it is a dark night and the place a lonely street in Paris and a frightened woman has lost her way. There can be something about a voice then, eh, Colonel? Especially if the owner of it is not

hard to look at." He clucked quietly.

"Marcie Labrouste!" Terrill swore under his breath, then grinned sheepishly. "Now when the devil and where did you hear of that?" he demanded of Amati.

Amati chuckled.

"Am I not of the Intelligence, Colonel?"

He was and he knew the tale of Terrill's first week in Paris when Terrill one night had been most gallant to a beautiful woman in great distress he had met up with on a lonely street. He had found a taxi for her finally, and he had come to his senses in a dive at dawn, groggy and sick and robbed of some important papers. His money and his personal valuables had not been touched and in his wallet, when he had looked, had been a folded note penciled in English—"You were so gallant, Colonel dear! I should dearly love to meet you again." It was signed, "Marcie Labrouste."

AMATI leaned down and tapped a finger on the floor. "What better night to meet her again, Colonel," he laughed. "If it's revenge you want for that old trick she played on you—the French will pay you ounce for ounce her weight in gold. They'll accept delivery dead or alive."

Terrill shook his head. "We'll deliver her, Amati, but not tonight. Marcie Labrouste is not the big prize, in spite of the price on her head. And Captain McKeg is only small fry. We can take them from the pool and we've made no catch. I'm after bigger fish than they."

"For instance?" Amati screwed up a questioning eye.

Terrill for a moment studied the wise face of his twisted helper. Then—"Baron Oscar von Krug," he said simply enough.

Amati pursed his lips to whistle softly, so softly as to be almost a silent note. Finally he declared—

"You've grown ambitious, my Colonel, since that night in Paris when Marcie Labrouste taught you a trick of the trade! Baron Oscar von Krug—truly said that you fish for big ones! Why not cast your line for the Kaiser himself? He would bite sooner than the baron."

"The baron is a more gamey catch."

"The harder to land!" Amati squatted on the floor and lighted a cigaret. "Do you mean to tell me that you know where the baron is?"

Terrill nodded. "When I followed you into this house tonight I had no idea of where the baron might be found. Now I know—from what I heard downstairs. If I had had more than two empty guns I would have caught the baron this morning. And the irony of it would have been that I would not have known that I had downed him."

"What? He flies?"

"He flies," Terrill said. "He flies a checkered red and white nose Fokker triplane. Our patrol met him this morning and I surprised him in the air. But, as I said, my guns were empty and he got away."

Terrill flashed the light about the room. Against a wall was a table covered, as was everything else, with a sheet, and the sheet was held to a tented point by some object on the table. Terrill lifted the cloth, then dropped it to the floor. The object on the table that had peaked the dust cover was a candlestick. It held six candles.

Terrill had a box of safety matches in a pocket and he lighted two of the candles. Then he laid on the table the packet with the three black seals.

"Your knife, Amati!"

Amati drew his knife and offered the hilt to Terrill who took it gingerly with a grimace and a slight shiver of repugnance that he could not steel against. Horrible thought that the point of the blade had hardly cooled from the warmth found in the heart of a man! And the thrice sealed packet was what that man had carried. With Amati's knife Terrill lifted the black seals.

Carefully he took out the contents of the packet, unfolded the many sheets of closely typewritten paper. Each sheet was completely covered, on both sides; the detailed report of spies, of observers who knew well their part and who had been carefully drilled to record each and every observation, to put it on paper to be thoughtfully studied by those who had need of the information.

Until near to midnight Terrill read, much of the time with pent up breath. In his time with the Intelligence he had read the report of many a spy, but never before had his eyes seen such records as were these. The work of one spy they were not; they were too involved for that; they

were the work of several. And those several had left no stone unturned.

VII

IT was Berg and Harlow the following morning, flying high above the formation, who first sighted the enemy, a circus consisting of some twenty ships. Berg dived down and gave the warning and then went zooming up again as Major Loudon swung to battle and the squadron, keeping perfect formation, turned as one ship with him.

The squadron was somewhat higher than the circus and went down full throttle. Major Loudon drove his point into a whirlwind of scattering ships. The section split three ways and instantly three dog fights were on.

Three Jerries crashed down upon Terrill. He roared straight at one, his guns hammering. The Jerry soared gracefully, but quite out of control, and smashed into one of the planes pile-driving on Terrill from above. Both ships shed wings and other parts they no longer needed and one gas tank burst with an eruption of crimson flame. The second pile driver went into a violent skid. Harlow, diving in from above the mix-up, shot the pilot from his seat.

Terrill kicked and banked around at the remaining triplane. Before he could make it, McKeg twisted in on the quarter and smoked a tracer through the gas tank. The Jerry tried to beat out the fire by slipping for the ground.

McKeg pulled up and over and half rolled. He leaned overside and thumbed his nose at Terrill. Then he pointed down. Harlow was coming back and he was also pointing. Terrill banked around. Captain Grace's ship was spinning down and Henry was in a tight spiral after the Jerry who had made the kill. In file McKeg and Terrill and Harlow dived to Henry's assistance. But Henry needed no such thing. He hurled his little craft at the Fokker and burned the triplane through and through. And to be sure of his score he followed it down to within two hundred feet of the ground.

Captain McKeg and Harlow were streaking off toward where a tumbling ship was holding off two Jerries. Henry had come up and had found a tag mate in another. Terrill looked around for trouble. He found it suddenly in a skipping motor.

He glanced at his altimeter. Less than a thousand feet. Air speed? A bullet had ruined the meter. Oil pressure? The gauge was there but the pressure was not. The column of the thermometer was climbing toward the top of the tube.

"I'm out!" Terrill glanced about again. The way was clear the moment and he headed for home.

He was slightly less than a mile from the drome and about a thousand feet high when his engine quit. He nosed down for a long glide in. The wind on his tail helped him along. He landed with it, dead stick, and let the riddled craft roll as it would across the field. From the hangars the ground crew rushed out as a man to meet and surround him.

Terrill unbuckled his belt and climbed from his seat. The men drew close about him, hungry-eyed for news of the flight.

"WE bumped into a circus," he told them. "About twenty ships. We dived into them and took them on—anywhere from one to a half dozen apiece. Once I was holding out against four. The scrap was pretty fast and furious for a few minutes. Besides trying to knock a Jerry it kept a fellow extremely busy ducking his own ships. It was a bad *melee.*"

"Anybody out, sir?" asked a sergeant.

Terrill nodded. "I counted seven squadron ships in the air, including myself, when I had to head for home. I think there were ten Germans."

A hush fell upon the men. Seven ships up. That meant seven ships down. And now with Terrill back at the field there would be only six of the squadron left in the fight. Six against ten. That promised a wash-up of the squadron.

"Road! Out of th' road!" went up the cry. "Ship's comin'! An' boy! She's comin' on hot!"

The ship was roaring into the field down wind, throttle wide open, wheels of the landing gear barely clearing the ground. Then the wheels touched, bounced, touched again and held contact, and with tail still up the craft went streaking toward the hangars.

"Cap'n Guffy," some one of the men shouted recognition.

It was Guffy. The captain cut his engine and kicked around into the wind before he let his tail down. The ship was still rolling fast when men of the ground crew caught it by the wings and brought it to a stop.

Terrill ran up. Guffy was as ghastly pale as death itself and his face was working with spasms of excruciating pain.

"Got one—in the middle!" he gasped as Terrill ran alongside. "Went off inside." His face screwed up against the cruelness of the torture. "Help me out, Terrill. I want to—to kick off on the ground."

Willing hands helped Terrill to undo the belt and lift the sorely wounded Guffy out of his pit and lay him on the ground.

"I'm the last—of my section," he managed with great effort. "Major Loudon—and his three—are down. Grace—Hopkins—Knight—young Berg—all gone!"

He was convulsed a moment with the agony of his passing.

Terrill knelt down and held an ear close to the gasping mouth.

"Terrill—must get—McKeg. Line of duty. But—do it—easy. Promise. Easy, Terrill. Let's have no—no black blot—on the honor of—of—of this squadron. Promise."

"I'll promise you that," Terrill gave his answer readily, and thickly; a lump was growing in his throat. "No blot on the honor of the squadron, old timer. I promise—to keep that honor clean."

"Ah!" Guffy sighed, and writhed. "Ah—thanks—Terrill! A-ah—Colonel—ah-a-a-ahh. . . ."

Terrill stood up and beckoned a sergeant to him.

"Help me carry the captain to his cot." Another sergeant he directed—"Gas and oil the captain's ship. Give it a quick once-over. Look to the water, to the guns, to the ammunition. I'm going back!"

VIII

THE cook brought a hot lunch and Terrill ate standing. It was a great relief to be on his feet. The men were busy with his ship, taking it without a word having been said about it that he was going off again immediately. As they worked, Terrill observed, they from time to time paused to scan the dome of the sky; on the watch for other homing wings, he believed, until the sergeant said—

"A Jerry went over just a few minutes before you came in."

"A Jerry?"

"Yes, sir. It was a Fokker—a triplane."

"Alone?"

"Yes, sir; he was alone. He circled over three times and then came down rather low. We thought he was going to strafe us and we all found us holes to crawl into."

"Did he shoot?"

"No, sir. He just seemed to be looking the drome over. When he pulled up after the look, he took off in the direction of the village."

Toward the village! Toward the chateau? Terrill felt his heart leap with violent excitement. He could hardly control his voice when he demanded of the sergeant—

"Did you get a good look at him? Did he come low enough? Would you know that plane again if you should see it?"

"Yes, sir; I'd know it. I got a glass on him when he was down low over us. I was watching to see if he'd cut loose his guns. That triplane had a checkered red and white nose."

The baron! No mistake about that. Terrill jumped for his ship.

"Swing that stick! Snappy now! I've been hunting half way to Germany for that Jerry. I never thought of looking around near home!"

The S. E. 5's engine responded promptly to the swing of the stick; the ship had been down from the last flight not long enough for the motor to go cold. It warmed quickly, and Terrill rushed it across the field to zoom away and bank and turn to head toward the village and, beyond, the chateau.

He climbed for altitude and a wide horizon. If the baron was winging over any near part of France, Terrill intended to find him.

"And when I do find him—" He tripped his guns and fired a burst of four or five shots through them. Working pretty. Terrill went up to fifteen thousand feet.

Within the hour he spotted the baron flying at about twelve thousand feet

and making a wide circle of which the chateau was about the center. Terrill had his back to the sun at the time and he was sure that the baron had not seen him. He maneuvered for a position that would let him dive at the baron from behind but bring him up ahead and below the triplane —a surprise attack and a striking at the baron's blind spot.

Terrill stood the little plane on end. He did not cut the gun for fear of chilling the engine, and with the pull of the prop the dive became a terrific plunge. He had timed the stunt and judged his distance nicely, and he shot down ahead of the surprised baron, when he turned and pulled up.

As he had expected, the baron verged off in an attempt to get sight of Terrill now zooming for the Fokker's blind spot. The verge Terrill followed easily, and he let go with his guns. Every fifteenth shot was a tracer. One smoked into the triplane forward and another went in aft the pilot pit. As the German craft rushed past overhead, Terrill went on his back to follow it as long as he could keep his guns trained on it. Then he half rolled right side up, and he was behind the baron and slightly lower.

Terrill raised his nose a little and streaked a tracer past the right of the baron's fuselage. He touched left rudder a little and tried with another burst in which a tracer did not show. Now, Terrill hazarded the guess, the baron would either Immelmann or go into a circle.

But the baron did neither. He washed around perfectly flat.

That trick quite surprised Terrill and he had to yank up into a zoom to avoid ramming the baron, for the wash around checked up the Fokker as effectively as if the baron had put on the brakes. The zoom gave the baron a shot at Terrill's bottom and he took it but did no more damage than that of a few extra holes tucked into the little plane.

Terrill pivoted high. The baron dipped and turned low. Then the two machines squared at each other, Terrill diving, the baron zooming.

TERRILL had a slight advantage in that his diving ship was more responsive to controls than the baron's zooming one; he had gathered speed while the baron was losing it. Each plane had the range of the other and each pilot had the protection of his engine in front of him. The ships passed very close together, Terrill taking the risk of hopping the triplane, and the baron let the Fokker fall off in a vertical slip to the right. Terrill half rolled and dived under to recover.

The maneuver put Terrill behind and toward the baron. Promptly the baron went into a tight circle and Terrill went in after him. Of the two ships the triplane was the speedier and, circling, the Fokker began to climb. That was not so good and Terrill abruptly reversed out of the circle, went rushing off a space to make a turn.

As he turned, he glanced quickly about to locate the baron—above, on both sides, below. The baron was nowhere in sight. A tracer tore through the windshield in front of Terrill's face. He jerked his head around. Baron von Krug was tight on his tail.

Terrill pulled stick against him and followed by tipping it to the right. He kicked on right rudder. The little ship shot up into a half loop, quarter rolling before it made the top, pivoting about and slipping down at the same time. In effect the stunt was somewhat of an Immelmann, but a tricky one in that a pivot turn and slip was added.

For some seconds the baron was uncertain just what the stunt was or which way Terrill would head when he came out of it. In his uncertainty, which is deadly in the air, he crabbed a zoom and stalled. And then Terrill, swooping down out of the slip, stung into him.

JUST exactly what happened even Terrill did not know. He saw the triplane fall off and nose down into a spin. The baron pulled out of the spin but seemed to make no effort to pull up the nose of his ship; and he went down in a long spiraling glide to the ground. At first Terrill was suspicious of it; but he got in tight on the baron's tail and stayed there, following down in the spiral.

Then he guessed, and correctly, that the baron was hit, hard enough that he was quite unequal to further battle; he was putting down his ship while he had the wits to do it and so save himself the finish of a crash. He was making for a mowed level field and he was still alive enough to ob-

serve the wind. He spiraled into it, eased off his throttle and went down. Terrill followed suit.

The baron put the Fokker on fairly at the middle of the field. Terrill elected to land to the right of the triplane and bring to a full stop before he was quite abreast of the baron. He put three points against the ground before he observed a grass-grown ditch cutting obliquely into the meadow. There was no chance to gun the motor and hop the ditch. One wheel dropped down into it, and the S. E. 5 flipped her tail to the sky and stood on her nose.

Terrill's belt held him, enough that he had some difficulty getting it loose; and while he worked at it there came, simultaneously with the report of a gun, the crashing through the cockpit of a bullet. Hung head half down as he was, Terrill looked toward the Fokker. The baron was out of his pit, standing on the ground beside his ship. He had a pistol in his right hand and was in the very act of taking deliberate aim at Terrill.

Just then Terrill's belt came loose and he pitched from the pit to the ground. He landed half on a shoulder, half on his back, and rolled. He heard the second report of the baron's gun but no sound of the impact of the bullet.

Rolling over and scrambling to his feet, Terrill tugged to free his pistol from its holster. He had to strip off a glove before he could manage the snap of the holster flap and then he had to pump the mechanism of the gun because he was not sure that he had carried it with a cartridge loaded in the chamber. The baron's third shot yowed viciously past Terrill's head.

The ships were about a hundred feet apart. Terrill threw down on the baron and without taking any deliberate aim let crash a shot. The baron ducked his head. He dropped his pistol and shot from the body. He missed.

THEN, weaving from side to side, Terrill advanced, neither slowly nor yet rapidly. He was not a pistol shot. Nor, it was quite evident, was the baron. The baron, except for the one shot he fired from the body, attempted to use sights and aim each time. Terrill more simply pointed his gun somewhat in the general direction of the baron and pulled the trigger. The baron took aim at Terrill's head, and he did manage to put a few quite close; Terrill just shot at the baron, in that direction, and with his fourth shot he scored.

Baron von Krug dropped his gun. He did not pitch to the ground, he did not crumple. He slid down, quite gently, to a sitting position, balancing a second as if trying to keep his seat, then tipped over sideways, tried to straighten out and then lay still.

Terrill walked up and stood over the fallen man. There was still light in the baron's eyes, but it was fast dimming and as Terrill looked down it died out.

"Like watching the darkening windows of a room where candles are being snuffed." Terrill drew a deep breath. He set the safety catch on his pistol and slipped the gun into its holster. Then he knelt beside the baron to open the baron's flying suit and systematically go through the dead man's pockets.

In one pocket he found a small black leather bound book. Terrill thumbed through the pages quickly. There were many notes penned in a fine German script. These Terrill passed over; important as they might be, they were necessarily for a later reading. The last few pages held what interested him more—twelve names and addresses. He scanned the list. Three names stood out—Marcie Labrouste, Captain Glover McKeg, Captain Louis Berard.

Twelve names on the list. Baron Oscar von Krug's chosen few. With the exception of Marcie Labrouste, the names were of men, army officers or officials of the government of France.

Terrill pocketed the book. With a quick look around to get his direction, he started across the field for the road. It was not the road of the chateau but it did lead to the village. He found the village occupied by an infantry company of U. S. regulars, and the colonel commanding the regiment had established headquarters there. Already telephone and telegraph communication with other headquarters had been put in operation.

At once Terrill sought out the commanding officer to whom he identified himself, not as an airman but as an officer of the Intelligence.

"It is important, sir," Terrill informed

the colonel of infantry, "that I dispatch a code message to Intelligence headquarters at once. Will you put your wires at my service?"

"Certainly."

Terrill at once wrote out his message and put it in code. In it he included eleven names and addresses. The name he omitted was that of Captain McKeg. He reported the death of Captain Louis Berard.

The time was now mid-afternoon. It was past sundown when an orderly sought out Terrill and handed him a message from the Intelligence headquarters. It was from one of Terrill's brother officers and it was not at all military—

Good work. General round-up will be complete by midnight. Four collared so soon. French officer proceeding to you from Trilport to arrest Marcie Labrouste. Understand firing squad already selected for her execution.

Terrill crushed the message into a pocket. A firing squad for Marcie Labrouste. It was barbarous. But this was war, he remembered, and war was pure barbarity let loose. For a woman it was no game to gamble with for any stake; and Marcie Labrouste had gambled—the black gamble of espionage. She had gambled and lost and now she must pay the price of that loss —before a firing squad.

He went to the colonel of the regiment. "A French officer," he explained, "is on his way here from Trilport to arrest a spy, a woman, living in the chateau about a kilometer out on the road running west from here. I am going to the chateau now. When the officer arrives, direct him where to find me."

Depressed in spirit, weary both physically and mentally, Terrill waded the mud of the road to the chateau. And as he drew near the high pile of stone two dimly lighted Gothic windows became his guide. He made a slow way through the trees and shrubs of the grounds to the stone-paved terrace, and he climbed to the casements of the second floor, where he found a window open.

Amati was in the room.

"What news, Colonel?"

Terrill said dully, "A French officer is on his way from Trilport to arrest Marcie Labrouste."

"You reported her here?"

"Yes. I got the baron this afternoon. In one of his pockets I found his book with the names of his co-workers. I reported the names to headquarters with the exception of Captain McKeg. They'll be rounded up by midnight."

"Why not Captain McKeg, Colonel?"

"He may be dead by this time. The last I knew there were but four of us left of the squadron. McKeg and Henry and Lieutenant Harlow were still on patrol. Harlow was wounded."

"And if Captain McKeg is not dead, Colonel?"

"Then I'll take care of him myself, Amati. I don't know how. I'll do it some way—some way that will spare the roll of the squadron the blot of dishonor."

Amati rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "You put down the baron, Colonel. What about his ship? Was it damaged?"

"No, not at all. The baron was wounded, but he made a perfect landing."

"Could you fly the plane?"

"The baron's plane? Why, yes, I could fly it. Why?"

"Meet McKeg as an enemy in the air—for the honor of the squadron."

IX

TERRILL swung down low over the drome. It was breaking day, light enough for him to see that two ships were in line on the ground below. And it was dark enough to reveal here and there tiny points of fire. They were shooting at him, he knew.

He pulled up. One of the ships was racing over the ground, exhaust pipe flaming. It leaped away and came up zooming. The second ship took off. Both climbed in fast spirals.

Terrill went higher. It was growing lighter in the east; morning would first be in the clouds. He went up to ten thousand feet and began swinging in wide circles while below him the two ships climbed. The captain and Henry he knew they were; he recognized the ships and he knew the pilots by the way the ships were flown. Henry was coming up the faster, literally lifting the little plane by its stick. It was

Henry who had taken off from the field first.

With stick forward and using some left rudder Terrill twisted the triplane down to avoid Henry and pull up on a level with the captain. He knew as he dived that Henry was plunging down after him, but he did not glance back nor check his course. He pulled almost alongside the captain. The captain skidded around to face him and let go his guns.

Terrill slipped down and turned slightly toward McKeg, pulling up his nose and ripping a burst at the S. E. 5. McKeg avoided it easily by flipping his tail and diving off to a side. Then Terrill had to pull up fast and over, for Henry from behind him and put a burst so close to his head that Terrill actually heard the bullets crackle.

Quarter rolling and pivoting with nose down, Terrill dived again for the captain. Henry was off to the left coming about in a steep bank. The captain went into a fast climbing turn. Terrill pulled up and around and went after McKeg. He tripped his guns twice and knew by a tracer that the second burst went into the S. E. 5. The captain tipped over into a fast circle

Terrill knifed out of the circle, leveled and zoomed. Henry dived below the captain who for a moment held to his circle.

The stunt put McKeg squarely under Terrill and abruptly he pulled straight up until he hung on his prop. In that position he reached for the triplane and put two tracers through the left wings.

Terrill banked his wings out of the way, then finished with a quarter roll that inverted him. He dived down and under and riddled the captain through the bottom just as the S. E. 5 fell off to the right to avoid a whip stall. Terrill followed the fall and quartering in on the left sent a burst full through the cockpit. The biplane rolled slowly over a complete roll, went nose down and began to spin.

Henry was up again. He got in behind Terrill and let his guns go like twin riveting hammers.

Terrill slipped right. Henry slipped after him. Terrill slipped left. And Henry stayed with him. Terrill went into a circle with Henry tight after him. He outclimbed Henry before Henry could flatten to train his guns, and then he went up and over, to quarter roll and pivot and slip in his tricky Immelmann.

Tricky as Terrill's maneuver was Henry matched it. He flattened and hurled his little plane up and out sidewise, almost as if he cartwheeled on his tail. And as he hung on his prop Terrill crossed over him and Henry raked the Fokker from nose to tail.

THE Fokker's engine stopped dead. Instantly Terrill jammed the control forward and dived almost vertically. Henry whip stalled, kept his nose down after the wicked whip and thundered down after the triplane. He put in burst after burst, and then his guns jammed.

Looking back Terrill saw that Henry was working frantically with his guns to free the jam. Terrill went straight down, took all the speed gravity would give him, and not until he was within two hundred feet of the ground did he pull out of the dive. There was a field directly below. He S'd down into it, fish-tailed to kill some of his terrific speed and then set the Fokker on. The plane rolled to a stop just touching a tree.

Henry came on just seconds behind the triplane. He did not wait for his ship to stop. He tore loose his belt and leaping to the ground ran toward the checkered nose German craft. He had out his pistol and as he ran he fired wildly at Terrill. One bullet crashed through the side of the cockpit and tore into Terrill's right thigh.

Terrill shoved up his goggles and pulled off his helmet. Henry's automatic was empty and he was jamming in a second clip. He was close to the Fokker now, pumping

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his gun to load it. Then he looked up.

He stopped dead.

"You!" he gaped. "Terrill!"

Terrill nodded. Henry's gun dropped from his hand and thudded to the ground.

"But—but that ship?" He pointed a trembling finger at the Fokker in which Terrill sat.

"Baron von Krug's ship, Henry. I got the baron—late yesterday afternoon."

"I—I thought he got you." Henry was trembling violently. "The boys at the field said he flew over—the baron. They said you went after him. And—and you didn't come back."

"I couldn't come back, Henry," Terrill said quietly. "I had business—official business—to tend to last night. You see, Henry," he explained as easily as he could, "I'm not really an airman. I've been flying a bit under false colors. I belong with the Intelligence."

Henry nodded heavily. "I know. You didn't come back last night—I looked through your trunk. I found your notes."

Terrill breathed his relief. "Then you knew about—"

"About Glover? Yes," Henry said. "I knew. I've known for some time. That's why I was so crazy to get the baron."

He came close to the Fokker now. Tears were streaming from his eyes.

"I was going to get the baron, Terrill. And then—and then I was going to knock Glover down—out of the air. I was going to do it—for the honor of the squadron."

He choked. "And you've done it all—for Glover—for me—for the squadron. There isn't any more squadron—just you and I—"

"Help me out, Henry," Terrill stopped the boy. And he lied—"Glover got me through the leg. I suppose we'll have to look up a sawbones. Then we're going back to the drome."

"To the drome?" Henry blinked at him.

"Sure! We're the squadron now, Henry. Orders are to carry on."

"But you're a colonel—of the Intelligence—"

"I am not, Henry. I'm a fighting shavetail of the Suicide Squadron. Now you help me limp to town."

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACTS OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AND MARCH 3, 1933, OF WINGS, PUBLISHED QUARTERLY AT NEW YORK, N. Y., FOR OCTOBER 1, 1936.

State of New York, County of New York, ss. Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared T. T. Scott, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of Wings, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Wings Publishing Company, Incorporated, 461 Eighth Avenue, New York City; Editor, Malcolm Reiss, 461 Eighth Avenue, New York City; Managing Editor, None; Business Manager, T. T. Scott, 461 Eighth Avenue, New York City.

2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member, must be given.) Wings Publishing Company, Incorporated, 461 Eighth Avenue, New York City; J. W. Glenister, 461 Eighth Avenue, New York City.

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Sworn to and subscribed before me this 5th day of October, 1936.

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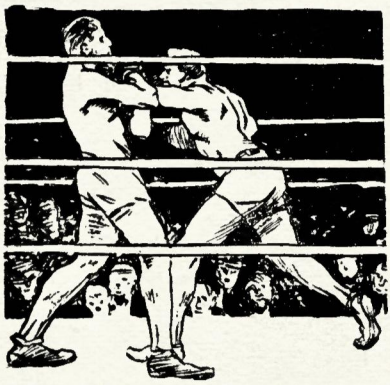

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28x5.50-18	3.35	1.15
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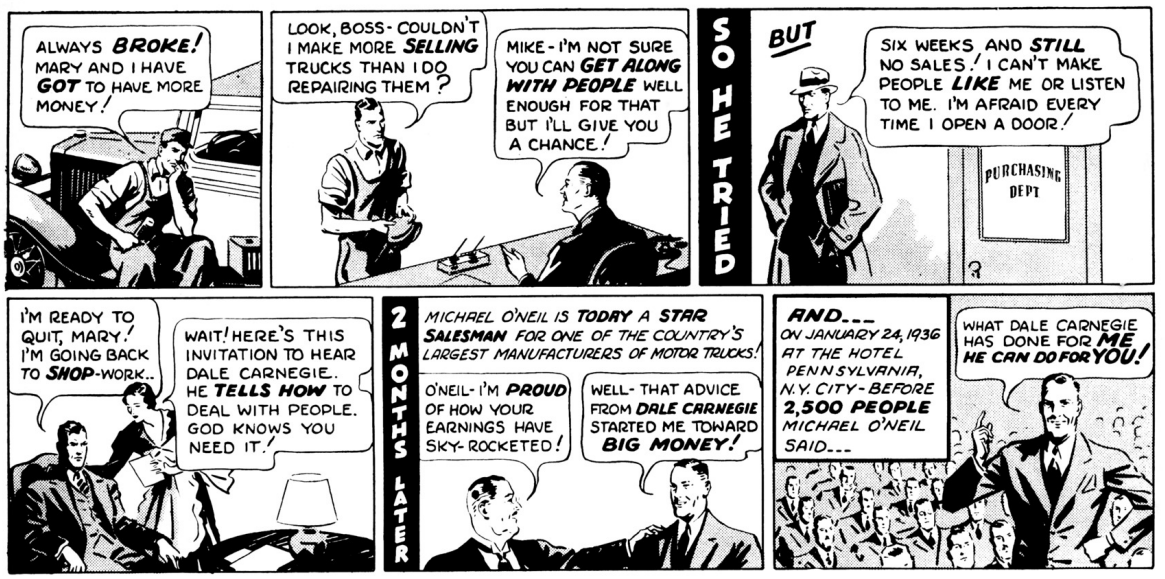
THE AMAZING CASE OF MICHAEL O'NEIL

WHO LEARNED HOW TO WIN FRIENDS AND INFLUENCE PEOPLE!



(The story shown above actually happened! And the remarkable book described below, "How to Win Friends and Influence People," is the best-selling work of non-fiction today—over 225,000 copies bought since publication, over 25,000 copies per week rushing from the presses!)

MICHAEL O'NEIL'S problem was that of **thousands—getting along with people.** He is just one example of what Dale Carnegie's help has meant to thousands in **every** line of work!

How to Win Friends and Influence People

Getting along with others is the most important thing in life. John D. Rockefeller, Sr., said: **"The ability to deal with people is as purchasable a commodity as sugar or coffee. And I will PAY MORE for that ability than for any other under the sun."**

Chicago University and United Y.M.C.A. Schools made a survey to find the interests of typical men and women. The survey took two years, cost $25,000. It revealed that their first interest is health—their second, **how to understand and get along with people.** How to make people **like** you! How to **win others** to your way of thinking!

People NEED HELP with this problem. And now, out of 25 years' personal experience, has come an amazing book—practical, yet simple. Its methods really **work,** because it has been produced by the one man perhaps better fitted to write it than anyone else—Dale Carnegie. This new book, **"How to Win Friends and Influence People",** is **the only book of its kind in existence!**

What to Do—How to Do It

As you can see by the chapter headings above, this book tells you exactly how to meet and solve the problems that worry you most.

Do others sometimes "bristle" toward you? Are you self-conscious?—frequently awkward, embarrassed; lacking a personality that appeals to people? Does asking for a raise or looking for a better job frighten you? Do you sometimes give new acquaintances a poor first impression? Do men and women whose friendship you would prize fail to take an interest in you?

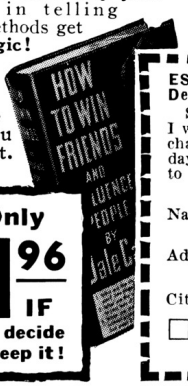
Let this great book help **you!** Letters pour in telling how its easy methods get results like **magic! First** look at this book without obligation. **Then** decide whether you want to own **it.**

DALE CARNEGIE

During the last 25 years, Dale Carnegie has trained more than 17,000 people in how to get along with others. Below are just two of hundreds of letters received:

"Have been a Service Station attendant 6 years. I am interested in getting a better job with the Company. My work is getting new customers, holding the old. A man couldn't learn in a lifetime what this book teaches in one reading!"—W. D., Janestown, N. Dakota.

"Rule 3 got me out of the doghouse with my supervisor the morning after I bought the book!"—P. F. S., Spokane, Wash.



Only $1.96 IF you decide to keep it!

THIS IS A BIG BOOK OF THIRTY-SEVEN CHAPTERS, INCLUDING:

- Six Ways to Make People Like You Instantly
- How to Become a Good Conversationalist
- A Simple Way to Make a Good First Impression
- How to Interest People
- Twelve Ways to Win People to Your Way of Thinking
- How to Avoid Making Enemies
- How to Get Cooperation
- The Movies Do It. Radio Does It. Why Don't You Do It?
- How to Criticize—and Not Be Hated for It
- Making People Do What You Want
- Letters That Produced Magic Results

SEND NO MONEY

Try Dealing THIS WAY with People —for Just FIVE Days!

When you get your copy, simply **read** it: there are no "exercises" to practice. Then try for five days Dale Carnegie's simple methods. Judge for yourself how easily whatever you do, say, or write can win the friendship of others—get them to **like** you, **agree** with you, **do** the things you want them to do.

Send no money. You may pay for this book when delivered—with the definite understanding that its price will be refunded if you wish it. If this book does what we claim, it will mean more **than ANY book you have ever read.** If it doesn't, do not keep it. Mail coupon at once. ESSANDESS BOOKS, Dept. C-356, 386 Fourth Ave., New York.

ESSANDESS BOOKS,
Dept. C-356, 386 Fourth Ave., N. Y. C.

Send **How to Win Friends and Influence People.** I will pay postman only $1.96 plus few cents postage charges. It is understood that I may read it for 5 days and return it for refund if it does not live up to the claims made.

Name.....

Address.....

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

☐ Check here if you prefer to enclose $1.96 WITH this coupon; in that case WE will pay postage. Same refund privilege applies, of course.

CHARLES ATLAS
Holder of the title "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man" won in open competition in the only national and international contest held during the past 15 years.

"Bunk!" —says CHARLES ATLAS

"I'll Prove *in the first 7 days* YOU can have a Body like Mine!"

No other Physical Instructor in the World has ever DARED to make the offer he makes in this announcement!

DON'T get the idea that it takes a lot of time and hard work for you to get smashing strength and powerful muscular development! And don't fool yourself into thinking that you need dumbbells, stretchers or any other such contraptions.

Both of these ideas are all bunk—and I have PROVED . All I need is **7 days** to prove what I can do for you! And I don't need any apparatus either. In fact, I have no sympathy with apparatus at all—don't believe in it. It is artificial—and it may strain your heart or other vital organs for life.

NATURAL Methods Are All I Need

On this page you will see an actual photo of how I look today. This picture has not been changed in any way. No muscles have been "painted on." This photograph is the camera's honest proof of what I have done for MY body. I myself am ready to prove what my secret of **Dynamic Tension** can do for yours!

To look at me now you wouldn't recognize me as the same man I used to be. Then I was a physical wreck, a 97-pound weakling—flat-chested, spindly legs, arms like pipe stems.

I was worried—and I had a right to be. I decided to study myself, to do something about my body. Then I made a discovery. I found a new way to build myself up. A way that was simple, natural, quick and sure! **"Dynamic Tension"** is what I called it. I put this secret to work. And in a short time I had the kind of body you see here—the body which has twice won the title of "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

This Secret Has Helped Thousands

Thousands of other fellows now know this secret, too—and know from their own personal experience what **Dynamic Tension** has done for them. When they turned to me for advice, they were just as frail and puny as I once was. Now they are life-sized examples of what a man **can** and **ought** to be—with mighty energy, tireless endurance, and muscles that stand out like bridge-cables all over their bodies.

I have written an interesting booklet filled with pictures, which tells my story—and theirs. I would like to send you a copy of it entirely free.

Let Me Send You My FREE BOOK

I'd like you to know what **Dynamic Tension** has done for me—what it has done for others—and what it can do for you! This little coupon will bring you my free book which tells all about it. There is no cost or obligation of any kind—and no one will call upon you.

I just want to put into your hands proof that I can do for you what I have done for so many thousands of others: give you broad, powerful shoulders, biceps that bulge with smashing strength, a chest which stands out solid and muscular, and an evenly-developed body that will make others look like dwarfs next to you.

Will you gamble a stamp to win a body like mine? Then mail this coupon TODAY. CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 150V, 115 E. 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.

CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 150V,
115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.

I want the proof that your system of *Dynamic Tension* will make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Name .....
(Please print or write plainly)

Address .....

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

FREE BOOK

Gamble a stamp today. Mail coupon for free copy of my new book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." It shows you from actual photos how I have developed my pupils to my own perfectly balanced proportions. Where shall I send your copy? Write your name and address plainly on the coupon. Mail it today to me personally.

THIS STERLING SILVER CUP BEING GIVEN AWAY

This valuable cup stands about 14 inches high on a black mahogany base.

I will award it to my pupil who makes the most improvement in his development within the next three months.