

Duel of Dishonor

A Squadron of the Dead Adventure by Frederick C. Painton

No one in the Squadron of the Dead, that strange group made up of the outlaws of ten armies, knew from where Killer Blade came, or why. Yet no one dared question him. For Killer Blade fought with the slashing skill of the French, the dogged courage of the British, the splendid gallantry of the Americans—and no German escaped alive from his guns.

TWO miles and a half below, night clutched jealously at the earth. The wild, wooded crests of the Vosges were gray, but in the valleys it was still black, and to westward stars still pulsed like naked hearts. But up here where the tiny combat Spad droned upward, day had come. The sun, like some burnished copper plate, rested on the edge of the world. It was without warmth; the pilot of the Spad could gaze into its face unscathed. A pale golden glow reflected from his wing, and the bronze of his set, extraordinary face was touched by the feeble rays.

The pilot had not so much a face as a mask. No emotion or expression ever changed the set appearance of it. He flew without goggles or helmet, despite the bitter cold that brought frost rime to the leading edges of his ship. His narrowed gray eyes were grim, alert, impassive. A second regard revealed them terrible in their intensity, and this fixed deadly look contrasted horribly with the gentle, almost whimsical smile that forever crooked his lips upward. But for this contrast, he might have been handsome, for his features were regular—as regular as those of a manikin in a store window.

This pilot flew with only one hand, the left; and the right rested limply, uselessly in his lap. The Bowden triggers to fire his twin blue Vickers mounted to the cowling ahead were arranged to fire both guns simultaneously instead of, as usual, firing each one separately,

Beneath the sheepskin flying coat, carelessly unbuttoned despite the bitter cold, he wore a uniform of jet-black with red pipings. On the right breast a pair of silver wings were stitched, and in their center was a grisly skull. The Spad he flew was also black with scarlet markings, and in a large crimson circle on the fuselage was the sinister skull, resting on a pair of crossed bones, that proclaimed this pilot a member of the Squadron of the Dead.

The pilot's name was Dan Blade—"Killer" Blade to his messmates—and he was climbing into the sun for his twenty-sixth kill.

Who and what he had been was a mystery. Barry Dale, patient leader of the famous squadron, knew that Killer Blade had never belonged to any army. He had not come to the Squadron of the Dead under sentence of death for military crime, as the other squadron members had.

Dale was getting off a dawn high-offensive patrol one morning when a sentry brought the tall man with

the crippled arm and gentle smile into the Operations room. Dale was used to recruits. He got them all the time. From the English and Americans; from the Portuguese and Russians; from the Rumanians and the Belgians; yes, and from Germany and Austria, too. Men already dead in the casualty rolls, and sent to the Squadron of the Dead to expend their lives in any forlorn hope, any wild project that the High Supreme Command saw fit to order.

In a harsh, brittle voice Blade said, "I want to fly against the Germans. No army will take me with this bad arm. They think I cannot fly. They are wrong. I paid my own expenses to learn how to fly. I have done everything in a plane but fly combat, and I can do that. My name is not Dan Blade. What it really is concerns no one but myself and another. I will make you a good man, accept all orders and missions. I ask to be taken into the Squadron of the Dead."

Barry Dale asked where Blade had come from, why he was so anxious to fight Germany.

"That's my business."

"I mean," said Dale patiently, "you are obviously an American. Do you fight for patriotism, for adventure, or—"

The grim look in the eyes faded for a space. When Dan Blade spoke again, his voice was more gentle, as gentle as the eternal whimsical smile that so often contrasted with the hot, savage blaze of his eyes.

"I have my own reason for doing this," he rejoined. "And it will remain my secret. But, Captain Dale, let me say this: I am an American, I will fight for my country. It means something to me—or did, my country."

Barry Dale was a judge of men. That was why he had been transferred from the Foreign Legion to command these madmen who flew always with the sable wings of death brushing their cheeks. There was no reason for not accepting this grim man with the gentle smile.

"Done," said Dale, his patient features lifting in the charming smile that made men die for him.

NOW, the Squadron of the Dead contained all the hellions of ten armies. Men without hope; men courting death; men who loved to kill—men who laughed and fought, drank and cursed, lived hard, died harder and took many a German with them on the last journey to oblivion. But Dan Blade was the finest of them all.

He flew like one possessed. He and a Spad were like a single thing. He was a natural as a fighter, a stalker.

And no German under his guns escaped alive. Men who saw declared he fought with the slashing skill of the French, the dogged courage of the British, the splendid gallantry of the Americans. Only—he always killed.

Pierre Alachalle, as savage a fighter as ever tripped a Vickers, said, "*Par-bleu!* Never was there such a wolf of a man. He follows the Boche down, you perceive, and shoots and shoots. Even when they are in flames, he shoots. He kills them even on the ground. He is more deadly than death."

Men were curious about him, but did not inquire. It was not healthy.

And it was on one of Killer Blade's lone-wolf patrols that he now climbed into the sun for his twenty-sixth kill.

Calm, assured, he never relaxed. He circled there, steadily, ominously, with the sun at his back. He never changed position; only his hot savage eyes searched alertly the hidden corners of the skies. For nearly a full hour he cruised the measured circle of his beat.

Then his eyes, cold with a gray alertness, saw what he had come to find—a pepper grain two thousand feet below, moving against a low-hanging mass of cloud. The sun, well up now, gleamed on an airplane's white and red wings, on the black crosses in a white field that marked this for a German. His mind told him from the silhouette that this was an Albatross two-place machine.

Killer Blade continued his easy bank while his narrowed eyes studied the enemy crate, estimating its speed, making his own calculations. He nosed the Spad up and fired a short burst to clear the guns, warm the oil in the breeches. Suddenly his shoulders hunched. His eyes sparked with a living flame. His foot touched the rudder. His hand thrust the stick out and to the right. He reached over and opened the throttle wide against the peg.

The Spad wheeled, nosed down in a deadly straight line—a vertical power dive of the most dangerous kind. What had seemed to be the silence of the great heights vanished now. The twin-banked Hispano-Suiza howled like a stricken banshee. The struts knifed the air with a wailing scream. The stay-wires shrieked a mad song of speed. The linen of the wings drummed a deep roar. The Spad went down the sky with the flashing speed of a comet.

Standing on his rudder bar, Killer Blade went down the sky so fast that the air seemed sucked from his lungs. The air-speed indicator soon banged against the pin. The altimeter needle sank rapidly. The r.p.m. passed two thousand. The Spad fell headlong.

The German gunner saw the attacking ship, but too late. Blade watched the man swing his parabellums and track the meteor. A few smoke tracers drew gray threads across the sky. Then with a shriek and a roar the Spad was past the Albatross. Blade cruelly horsed the Spad flat. It mashed, the wings bending at the pins, flailing as if to catch and hold the air. Then it did, and with a human howl to its note, climbed in a terrific zoom. The Albatross pilot frantically half-rolled his crate to give his gunner a chance at this deadly thing.

But the gunner was too late again. The steel fingers of Killer Blade tripped the Bowden triggers. The smooth blue Vickers trembled on their mountings. Smoke haze came back to grime Killer Blade's face. Tiny spurts of flame leaped like an adder's red tongue from the snouts of the guns. The yellow tracer flew like golden grains of sand and buried themselves in the Albatross, smashing it with the impact of a great fist.

With no abatement, the Vickers chattered, chuckled, hammered. The clicking empties flew like hailstones from the breeches. The ring sight raked the Albatross' undercarriage from fuselage to tail assembly. A fistful of bullets, tearing through the floor caught the German observer and tore upward to clog his throat with steel. Upward the Spad surged, pulling on her prop. The guns still smashed, although the Albatross had already staggered like a hawk winged in mid-air.

Rac-rac-rac-rac-rac-rac!

Bullets raked the German with steel teeth, smashed into the Mercedes, which exploded, shattered the propeller and jolted the pilot with the hammering velocity of cupro-nickle projectiles.

The Albatross fell down from the sky, a broken, stricken thing. Killer Blade reached the top of the zoom where the Spad's prop clawed at the air, but gained nothing. Just before a whip-stall, he kicked her over. She fell into a half-spin, came out and dived vertically to regain flying speed.

WITH nothing but the hot hate of his eyes to betray victory, the man with the manikin's face followed the falling Albatross, circled it, raking it with sharp, deadly bursts as it came into the pinpoint of his ring sights. The German plane fell helplessly, weaving gently like some aged leaf.

Now, Killer Blade fired no more, but wound around the doomed crate in gentle spirals, down to a thousand feet. They were inside German territory now, and unseen machine-gun bullets tore into the Spad and around it. But Blade kept too close to the falling Albatross, to permit the guns to pound him.

Although he could see the observer lolling awkwardly to the plane's' roll, falling against the safety belt, and could see blood mantling the German pilot ahead, Killer Blade relaxed none of his vigilance.

Five hundred feet, three hundred. He had been about to haul out and up when suddenly the German pilot moved. By some miracle, the smashed Albatross righted itself, and it was instantly to be seen that it could make a landing on the rectangular fields below. It hurried desperately, it seemed, to make the landing.

No change of expression betrayed Blade's surprise at the trick. He merely whipped the Spad around in a pivot turn and hurled it down. He was too late to get in a burst from the air. He raked the ship with fifty slugs as it rested on the ground. He brought up into the wind, sideslipped to kill his forward speed and, despite the fact that it was enemy territory, set the Spad down. It roared to the gin and he taxied close.

Killer Blade leaped out, tugging at the holstered .45 Colt automatic on his hip, and ran to the German plane. He saw that the observer was dead, nearly blown to bits. The German pilot slumped in the cockpit, blood drooling from his mouth, eyes staring without expression at the sky. He was alive, but that was all. He was dying, and by his expression he knew it.

His head rolled slightly as he saw Killer Blade standing quietly there looking at him. He was only a youth, perhaps not yet twenty, but the freshness had gone from his cheeks; death was painting them gray.

"Otto?" muttered the pilot. "He is dead, then?"

In perfect German, Killer Blade said, "He is dead. And you, I am sorry—"

"I know. I die, too. War!" The youth stirred uneasily in pain. "*Mutterchen!* Oh, do not grieve, my *Mutterchen!*"

Killer Blade's face did not change, yet his eyes seemed to soften; the hot look left them. He paid no attention to the little group of soldiers racing across the meadows on the right.

"Tell me, my soldier," he said softly, "do you—did you know the *Hauptmann* Vorst von Stahlen?"

A light came into the boy's dulled eyes. "*Hauptmann* Vorst von Stahlen?" he repeated in a weakening voice. "Saber champion of Europe? *Ja*, I know him. Air Intelligence. He sent my friend, Joachim, to his death. Stahlen is bad—God curse him!"

Blade listened impassively. "Where is he now?"

The life went out of the boy as air goes out of a pricked balloon. "I—do—not know—*Mutterchen!*—" A rattle, a gasp, a slight movement of the arms, and the soul went out of the eyes, the strength out of the body, and life out of the brain.

FOR a space Killer Blade stood there, staring at the child he had killed. Ignoring the closer proximity of the German soldiers rushing toward him, he climbed into the plane stirrup and gently crossed the dead boy's

arms, patted the cooling cheek. The gentle smile never changed on the mask, but the eyes were soft, tender.

"Another to charge against von Stahlen," he murmured. "This time a boy. Sleep on, little fellow, in Valhalla's hall, and may Odin have you in his keeping."

He walked without haste to his plane, whose prop ticked idly, climbed in, belted himself fast. The motor suddenly drummed, with the soldiery less than three hundred yards away. They kept running, firing volleys of rifle fire that tore harmlessly around the plane. Killer Blade taxied straight toward them, got the tail up, and as the Spad got flying speed, he nosed as much as he dared and emptied the remaining slugs in the Vickers' belt into the soldiers. They scattered like nine pins, and many of them slumped, gray piles of drab clothing under horseshoe packs, and coal-scuttle helmets.

Killer Blade's eyes burned brightly. He zoomed in a climbing turn, wound up for altitude, ignoring the AA shells, and headed for the subterranean tarmac that the Squadron of the Dead maintained at Luxeil. He set down three-point there forty minutes later.

He spoke kindly to Jake, his grease-ball, as the mechanics swiftly wheeled the crate behind the camouflage curtain. Then he walked slowly toward the Operations room. Now it was to be seen he had a great powerful body that made the crippled arm all the more pitiful.

Writing awkwardly, with the difficulty of a right-handed man doing a left-handed thing, he made out his combat report, then went to his quarters and got two beautiful rapiers. Of fine Toledo steel, they would bend until the buttons touched the basket hilts. Still without haste, yet wasting no time, he went on to the big recreation room, where the Squadron of the Dead pilots spent those minutes allotted to themselves.

He walked in and said, "Ready, Andre?"

A young Frenchman with a fine handsome face and lovely soft eyes rose from a chair. Andre Ressaud had killed his fiancée in a jealous rage. Now he eagerly sought death, and death perversely passed him by. He nodded carelessly, stripped off his tunic. He approached, took one of the rapiers and whipped the air with it until the blade sung a soft, eager tune.

The hopeless, tragic look left his eyes somewhat. It was as if he were no longer the outcast, Andre Ressaud, but the Lieutenant Andre Ressaud, five times saber champion of all France, the finest fender in the seven brigades of light cavalry.

The other pilots ceased to gamble, to read, to drink, and gathered around to watch this daily performance that never varied, but was always dramatically interesting.

Killer Blade set himself, crouched, raised his steel. "*En garde!*" he called. It was to be seen that while he

handled his blade skillfully, he was a right-handed man learning a left-handed way.

"A *votre service*," called Andre, and crouched, raised his blade.

The steel met, whispered, chuckled, slithered and hissed, rang bell-like against the hilts. Two blades of living fire gleamed like writhing steel snakes there in the underground playroom. Men watched, breath pendant in their throats. . . .

SKIPPER BARRY DALE stared through cigarette smoke at the thick-bodied man in the German lieutenant's uniform who stood so rigidly to attention before Dale's desk. A scar ran from the German's neck up to his right ear. Other than that, he was ruggedly good-looking in a clipped German way. The German bore the scrutiny without abashment. Willie the Ink, the kiwi adjutant, looked up from his work to study this meeting.

Finally Barry Dale said patiently, "The ranks of the Squadron of the Dead are open to all, *Herr Leutnant*. We ask of recruits but two things, loyalty to the squadron and blind obedience to orders. In exchange, we offer you a haven, and the *Legion d'Honneur* and mention in dispatches if you are killed. The Squadron of the Dead is outlawed by the Germans. Those of us who get caught are to be publicly hanged in Berlin. We do not get captured. The casualties are practically a hundred per cent. Your life expectancy in joining this squadron is thirty days. Some live longer, some less. None so far have survived."

The German listened intently. He nodded jerkily. "*Zu befehl, Herr Hauptmann*. The conditions were known to me before I started. I will be shot if I remain in Germany. There is no place else but here for me to go. Besides—" his teeth shone whitely—"I have a little account yet to settle—private, you understand."

Barry Dale reflected for a space, then stood up. "We accept you, *Herr Leutnant*, Punishment for deserting a friend in distress or for betraying the squadron is death."

The German clicked his heels, held out his hand and bowed stiffly from the waist. "Understood."

"Come, then," said Dale pleasantly. "I'll introduce you to your comrades."

At a leisurely pace, the German two paces to the rear, Dale led the way to the playroom. The slither of bright steel greeted him long before he came to the opened door. There was a sharp scuffling of feet, the clang and excited scream of fast-moving blades.

"*Touche*," cried Andre Ressaud,

Dale was in time to see Killer Blade lower his steel. His face bore the whimsical smile, but his eyes were fierce and hot.

"My left will never be the equal to my right," he said.

"Come, friend." Ressaud shrugged. "You improve daily. By the red devils, you forced me fast today, and nearly trapped me with that thrust from *tierce*. Your *riposte* is better. You have been a great swordsman in your time, *monsieur*."

Before Blade could reply, a sharp diversion occurred. Somehow, in some way, a tiny rabbit had found its way into this subterranean hideout. And now, doubtless scared by Dale's feet, he hopped swiftly, affrightedly across the floor, clearly seen under the bright lights used for the fencing.

Pierre Alachalle, the dour Burgundian, laughed harshly, and his Ruby gun whipped, a streak of light into his hand.

"Five hundred francs I hit," he cried.

Some one shouted, "Done!"

The rabbit was twenty-five yards away. It seemed an impossible shot. The Ruby gun flashed a streak of fire; the explosion thundered in the tight space. The small rabbit gave a sudden frenzied bound, came down, struggled frantically to go on, but its back was broken and it could only lie there, pitifully struggling to escape the doom that lay over it.

Murmurs of admiration for such a shot rang through the room, but not from Killer Blade. He stared at the rabbit which lay there, frightened and dying in terrible pain, its heart beating out its life.

"Kill it," growled Blade. "Go kill it. Don't let it suffer like that."

Alachalle sat there. He didn't like Killer Blade—the mystery of him, the aloofness of him, nor his actions. He was filled with wine, and ugly.

"I have shot him, this *lapin*," said he. "He will die soon enough. And what business is it of yours?"

"You're torturing it, making it suffer," cried Blade fiercely. "Kill it, I say."

"I will not," growled Alachalle. "And you will leave it alone to show my shot."

He came to his feet as Blade strode across the room to where the frightened little thing struggled with weakening effort. Alachalle barred Blade's way.

"Stand steady, *mon vieux*," said the Frenchman. "I have had enough of you."

The sword blade fell from Blade's hand. His fist was a white blur, and it struck squarely on the Burundian's chin. Alachalle went backward and down. Blade strode over him, reached the rabbit, held the creature against his leg and with a quick movement of his hand, wrung its neck, and administered the death that was so long in coming.

He straightened, his eyes still on the furry corpse. "Quick death is merciful," he said softly, "and those who would delay it administer needless torture."

Alachalle got to his feet, and the gun rose in his hand. There had been death there, and quickly, save that Barry Dale, who had been a witness of all that had

transpired thrust across the room, knocked up the hand holding the gun.

“Stop it,” he said softly. “You are too quick on the trigger, Alachalle. There are ways of settling disputes without murder.”

Alachalle scowled, and his eyes blazed savagely. Suddenly he relaxed, a cunning smile on his face.

“*Monsieur* Blade and I will settle this some other time—in another way.” He turned abruptly and left the room.

Blade shrugged and went to talk to Andre Ressaud about *pees*. He was still standing, his back to the room, when Dale’s voice spoke to him.

“And this is Dan Blade, Herr Leutnant, another of our group.”

BLADE, used to this introduction of recruits, turned to nod and bow. Halfway he froze. His darting eyes behind the mask of his frozen face blazed with a sudden savage light that seemed living flame. He stared past Dale at the German. His breath came in a great hissing sound.

The German, unaware of this small drama, clicked his heels, bowed, and said, “I am honored, *mein Herr*.”

His voice seemed to break the spell on Killer Blade. The eyes lost none of their hot flame, the face none of its gentle, permanent smile, but his body relaxed.

“I, *Herr Leutnant*, am pleasantly overjoyed to meet you.”

His voice was soft and gentle, and if his words had a double meaning, only Killer Blade himself knew what it was. Dale looked a little puzzled, sensing something here that was strange. Then he shrugged, as if putting it down to his imagination.

“*Herr* Boehm is to be considered one of us,” Dale said, “and will be assigned to A Flight until further notice. As you were.”

Dale left the room. Killer Blade went to the steel rapier he had dropped, picked it up and carried it back to Andre.

“You, *Herr* Boehm,” he said gently, “are perhaps acquainted with the rapier?”

“But little,” rejoined the German warily. “I have used the broadsword at Heidelberg, as all students did, but I am not the master, as I see you and *Monsieur* Ressaud are.”

“Too bad,” said Blade. “We shall have to instruct you.”

That was all, then. Killer Blade presently left the room and the subterranean dugout. He walked far and swiftly, as if to exude this nervous, savage joy, in walking. His smiling mask never changed, but his eyes were sometimes calculating, sometimes fierce, sometimes horrible.

“I’ve got him,” he said aloud once, “I’ve found him, after all these years. But what is he doing here? Take your time, Blade. After five years, a week or a month will make no difference.”

When he returned, he was calm, polite, even effusive, when talking to the burly German, who drank heavily and was inclined to brag about the number of Allied pilots he had crashed. Blade had hitherto roomed by himself. Now, to every one’s surprise, he invited the German to bunk with him.

“I used to know Germany well,” Blade said, “and we can talk much about it and—fencing.”

The German hid his displeasure; obviously he disliked the arrangement; equally obviously he did not feel he could say no. They slept side by side that night. As abruptly, Blade abandoned his lone-wolf patrols. He attached himself to A Flight, and flew number two to Boehm’s number three on the left. Blade never, apparently, wished to leave the German out of his sight.

HE did more than that. A week after the German’s arrival, A Flight patrolled over Vigneulles at twelve thousand feet. It was a bad day, with thickly upholstered clouds two thousand feet deep, and the Germans, who had been wary, indeed, of the Death Squadron, laid their trap behind the clouds and struck.

Killer Blade, flying alertly at his position, saw shadows against the clouds—long, dark shadows, like the sinister shadows of sharks on a shallow bottom. He sensed surprise, overwhelming numbers. The stick came back into his lap. He risked collision and death to zoom upward.

Around him rained twenty Fokkers. The air was criss-crossed with smoke tracer. Brannigan, the Irishman, burst into flames at the first impact. Rodriguez, the Portuguese, received the full brunt of six guns and literally flew into pieces. His body, in the midst of the debris of his ship, fell in two pieces where steel slugs had sawed him in two.

Tatters developed on Killer Blade’s right wing. Bullets sped past his body, scorching but not hitting. He wheeled. Now could be seen the cool sagacity of the man. Unexcited, the only emotion on his perpetually smiling face being the hot flames of his eyes, he tore into his killer’s work. A black tail flashed in front of him. The Spad beneath his hand turned in a skid, banked sharply and his guns smashed suddenly, starkly—and briefly.

Twenty shots, no more. The German in the Fokker coughed out his life against the instrument board, a hole in his back that a dinner plate would not cover. A dozen slugs tore into Blade’s instrument board, and with a single movement of the stick, he faded out from under the burst, dived past a German so close that his

landing wheels nearly hit the pilot's head. He double rolled to escape this trap.

And as he turned for a second time, he saw the German, Boehm, in trouble. The man was diving fast, but not fast enough, and a German was climbing his back with a speedy tripe and pumping his guns in an endless stream of steel. The burst was going wide, but it might correct at any second.

Blade knew what to do now, too. He wheeled in, speared in front of the pursuing tripe. The Fokker had either to pull up or take collision. He pulled up, intent instantly on killing Blade, who had deliberately let himself be trapped.

Now, in the midst of this welter of mad confusion, a great game was played. Killer Blade, sensing his peril, closed his throttle until he had bare flying speed. The Fokker pilot did the same. And here is what happened—

The Fokker, high, paused to wait. He believed the faster running Spad would shoot from under him so that he could tilt and get the tail position for a kill. Blade, below, knowing that to shoot ahead meant death, throttled even more, so that by looking straight up, he could see the Fokker tripe's wheels a hundred feet over his head. Thus, for perhaps twenty seconds, they cruised.

The planes lost more and more speed. Down to cruising speed, with the controls barely sensitive, for one of them to lose control now meant the end. The slightest slip, the falter into a spin, an attempt to turn—their lives hung on avoiding these.

Killer Blade leaned back, watched that black belly up there. His hand was busy at the stick, nursing the plane. Now, indeed, a man had to fly by instinct, catch the slip before it began, forestall the spin. Now was needed the greatest flying skill that a man could be capable of.

Watching those landing wheels up there, Killer Blade knew he was up against more than an experienced pilot. Only an ace would dare this greatest of air maneuvers. Forty seconds! They were clear of the main dogfight now, that rolled and tumbled like a great cartwheel across the sky behind them. The Spad started to slide. Gently, not to over-control, Killer Blade caught it. The Fokker weaved once, then twice, lost fifty feet of altitude, but held clear of trouble. Blade saw the pilot's head appear blackly over the edge, peer down at him. Blade, his face gently smiling, his eyes those of a devil, waved his hand.

The German waved back. Another ten seconds passed. The German was gradually edging to get the wind behind him. Blade stayed directly beneath. The man who lost position now died, and quickly.

THE Spad's tendency to spin with the torque brought fine sweat to Blade's face. He kept telling

himself, "I can't lose now—not with him here. Not when I've got what I've sought for five years."

The suspense was terrific. Twice Blade looked for a way out. There was none. The slightest loss of altitude would give the German a chance to dive. A turn would be as bad, for at such slow speed, with soggy controls, he'd be too long getting under way against the faster turning tripe. He watched the German narrowly. Both were losing altitude by mushing. The Spad handled heavily as old lead; so must the Fokker. Blade's eyes paid tribute to the skill of the German above him.

And then, in a flash, it was over. The German, feeling the tripe give under him, tried deliberately to drop down and run his wheels, through Blade's propeller. Blade saw the maneuver, let the Spad drop. The German came down, lost control and wavered. Even as the wings weaved the first time, Blade's hand left the stick and struck open the throttle. He nosed the Spad down. His instinct was right. The Fokker, once sliding, couldn't be stopped. The German had to pique to keep from spinning, and in piquing, he went down five hundred feet.

He saw Blade's thundering Spad roaring at his tail, and turned to look up his slanting fuselage at the combat ship. He tried to roll, but the tripe had not the speed. He tried to bank, but he was too slow.

Killer Blade tripped his guns. The Vickers rattled, clattered, trembled with the violence of the burst. The German's gray helmet became red where the roof of his head vanished before the hurricane of steel. The Fokker tripe continued on down, now slanting into a straight dive out of which it never came.

Blade pulled up, and gave his dead adversary one glance. His hand came up in the same wave they had exchanged once before—his tribute to a clever pilot who had fought his last fight.

Three minutes later, he was back in the swirl of zooming, diving ships that turned around the sky in a bedlam of confusion. He got no more kills, but twice, in chasing a German, he was driven off by cunning steel that slammed his ship, once destroying his windshield. He looked back the second time, saw a Spad wheel away. He knew that Spad. He nodded. That would be an accounting to settle later.

The dogfight ended as all such fights end, indecisively, when both sides broke off because of lack of ammunition or dangerously empty gas tanks. A Flight, minus four, formed and headed for home.

They arrived at the tarmac, black, bleeding, with bullet-torn fabric fluttering in the breeze of the set-down. Killer Blade got out and wiped the smoke grime and sweat from his permanently smiling face. Without haste he walked to where Alachalle was standing. The big Frenchman turned, scowling.

Blade said, "The next time you try to shoot at me in the air, Alachalle, I'm going to kill you."

The man's dark eyes blazed, "What is that you say? A lie! I—"

"Words are wasted," rejoined Blade. "If you want to kill me, get a gun, and we'll try it at ten paces. Maybe you won't miss then."

He waited; it was a challenge. Alachalle hesitated, shrugged. "You are mad, *monsieur*. I have not tried to harm you. I have no wish to."

Blade nodded. "So that's the way it is. Very well. Keep clear of me, Alachalle. I've given you warning."

He walked away, face gently smiling, eyes narrowed, dark and mysterious. Boehm was examining a dozen bullet-holes through the floor-board, wondering, perhaps, how he had survived.

"A narrow escape, *mein Freund*," said Blade cheerfully.

Boehm turned, scowled. "Yes. You did me a good turn. I am obliged."

That was all. But when he reached his cubicle, Blade laughed silently to himself. A good turn, indeed—keeping alive the man he hated more than any other in the world.

"How could I let another kill him when that is my exclusive privilege in my own way, in my own time?" he muttered. He asked himself, too, what Boehm was doing here, and again counseled caution. He had not yet fathomed the German's scheme.

FOR the moment, however, Killer Blade was forced to forget Boehm and why he was here. That night the Squadron of the Dead was thrown into confusion. Barry Dale routed them out of their bunks at midnight.

"Take only your musette bags and prepare to form in ten minutes," he ordered. "We are riding all night in motor cars."

Riding where? And for what? Blade did not show any emotion. Boehm said, "What can this mean?"

"Why," laughed Blade, "doubtless the High General Staff has some insane idea and wants to throw away a few lives on trying it out."

Boehm's round face was gray. He did not like this, but he got ready. Blade, watching him, made sure of that. They were loaded into Rolls-Royce limousines, and sped down the road with two motorcycle military policemen leading the way, clearing all traffic. They rode at sixty miles an hour, sirens softly whining. Villages flashing past, going west, then southwest, then northwest, but always west.

Barry Dale, in the lead car, was angry, too. "It seems insane, forcing us to leave all our equipment. What can 'Pot-belly' Cartwright be thinking of?"

"He seldom thinks," rejoined Willie the Ink. "The thinking you've got to fear is Sir Henry Wilson's. That

man has a goofy idea a second. He ought to be working for the Germans."

Once, the cars curved around the pink flame of the Front that lit the north horizon. They had passed Paris, Amiens, Armentieres. One stop was made where Barry Dale heard Flemish, and the sharp accent of the south Belgians. Toward eight o'clock they smelled the rank odor of the sea, came into the flats where the British had fought, and wallowed and died the spring before. And here, finally, in Hazebrouek, the ride was over.

Potbelly Cartwright was waiting for Dale, and took him at once into his quarters. The round fat face of the liaison officer between the Squadron of the Dead and the Allied Supreme Command was gloomy. Usually he put a fair face to matters, but he sighed now as he sat down and pushed the cognac bottle midway between him and Dale.

"By God's beard!" he muttered. "You must be tired, lad, so have a snort. Napoleon brandy, as ever was, and we need it." He poured three fingers and jerked it into the back of his throat, belched and wiped his lips. "What's a war without drink?" he asked.

"You have the gravedigger smell," said Dale. "What's it all about?"

Cartwright's slablike cheeks quivered. His small eyes, set like currants in a mass of dough, turned away. He got up and cursed fiercely, then sat down again. "Barry," he said, "I want you to give me two of your men to kill."

BARRY Dale very carefully set down his cognac glass. "You what?" he asked.

"Oh, I put it crazily," grunted Cartwright, "but it amounts to the same thing."

"What are you driving at?"

Cartwright leaned so close that Dale could see the little broken red veins in his cheeks.

"I suppose you know the submarines have been raising hell in the Channel. The U-boats have nearly got England starved out; they've sunk plenty of transports. And the chief cause of this is that the Germans have got a big submarine base at Zeebrugge."

"Yes," said Dale. "In the Bruges canal. I've bombed at it. Hit, too."

"Well, the High Command has got an idea that if they could block off the canal, storm the Mole and sink two ships in the channel, they could prevent the U-boats from getting in for repairs. Tie it up, and stop this sinking game in the Channel."

Dale leaned forward, patient eyes alight. "Damned good idea! Should have done it before. But where does that tie in with your original statement?"

Cartwright nodded grimly. "You'll find out. Well, to get on. The attack will be made by sea and air. The sea attack to block the canal, the air attack to destroy

the drydocks and repair sheds. You'll lead the Handley-Page bombers."

"I saw that coming."

"Wait," said Cartwright. "The High Command is so anxious to make this a success that they are overlooking nothing. And one of the chief obstacles to a night bombing attack is the presence of four *Jagdstaffels* of night flying pursuits that are cracks in the German Air Force. So the High Command wants to get them out of the way."

"How?"

"By letting two pilots be captured by the Germans. The two pilots will carry fake papers regarding a big bombing attack on Mezieres—a spot that the Germans have been nervous about."

Barry Dale gave a start, came to his feet. "You mean that the Supreme Command intends to have two of the Squadron of the Dead pilots—my men—be captured by the Germans?"

"That's the dope," nodded Cartwright miserably. "I tried to argue them out of it—"

"But my God," cried Dale, "my squadron is outlawed. Those two men will be taken to Berlin and publicly hanged in Unter Den Linden."

"I told them that, too," nodded Cartwright, "but Sir Henry Wilson, damn him, said that if two ordinary pilots from a regular squadron fell into German hands with the fake orders, the Germans might suspect the trick. It's been worked before. But if the two captured men would most certainly be killed—if captured—the Germans would certainly fail into the trap."

Dale sank back into his chair. "Good God Almighty!" he breathed. His face was white, pinched, tense, and his eyes were torment. Barry Dale had ordered many men to their death on forlorn hopes. He would order more, for the Squadron of the Dead was expendable. But always, in those other cases, the men had a chance to fight for their lives, perhaps escape that peril until the next. But this—the men would be caught like rats.

"I won't do it," he growled furiously.

Cartwright shrugged. "It's an order, Dale, old fellow," he said gently. "I told them you would refuse. The High Command said if you did every man jack in the Squadron would be sent back to his army to be executed in the regular military manner." He paused. "It's a case of two out of fifty, and the poor devils have got to die, anyway."

"But must they be hanged?" cried Dale. "Die like dogs after what's been promised to them?"

Again Cartwright shrugged. "It's war, lad, and those two lives may save thousands."

Barry Dale got to his feet and walked nervously up and down the room. It seemed to him, then, that the claws of pincers were closing on him, binding him,

forcing him. He could see no way out, for there was none.

He swung on Cartwright. "All right," he said. "If I order this murder, what's to prevent the two men from killing themselves—die by their own hands, rather than be hanged?"

"So long as the orders fall into German hands without arousing suspicion, I don't care how it's done," said Cartwright. He poured himself a snort of liquor with hands that trembled. "I know how you feel, lad. I was a raving maniac after I heard. The order had to come through me. I'll dream about those men at night for longer than I want to. But—" He cursed and downed the fiery cognac, coughed and wiped his mouth.

"They're to go tomorrow afternoon," he added. "The orders are prepared. Here they are. They deal with the establishment of gas caches by spies."

Barry Dale took the two sets of orders. He stared at them as if they were poison. Slowly his head shook back and forth.

"Very good, major," he said formally, "and may God have mercy on our souls." He turned abruptly and left the room.

AN hour later, after the Squadron of the Dead pilots had been billeted, Barry Dale came into the main room of the farmhouse and called. "Attention!"

They turned, all of them, and faced him, on some faces curiosity, on others indifference. Barry Dale let his gaze run over them. Two to die! He knew his own white, haggard face must reveal the desperateness of the situation, yet they did not start or become alarmed. They merely waited.

"Listen, and don't interrupt," he said, and forthwith began in short, crisp sentences to lay the situation before them just as Cartwright had told it to him. He spared no detail, did not evade the point. Two men must die.

"I tried to refuse this duty for us," he concluded, "but was informed that if I did so, all of you would be sent back to the armies you came from, to be dealt with military law. The Squadron of the Dead will be disbanded unless this mission is carried out."

His voice died away on a silence that was not immediately broken. A few feet shuffled; eyes that had stared at him suddenly looked somewhere else. A tension, sharp, terrible, gripped the room and made it vibrate.

Dale said, "I am not going to order any man to this duty, nor am I going to ask for volunteers. But if you are all agreed that the Squadron of the Dead must go on, I suggest a drawing of lots, throwing of the dice—some method of choosing by chance the two men who must be sacrificed for the benefit of the others."

Still no one spoke. Still the electric suspense held them. To the north, through the quiet, rumbled the faint thunder of hot guns like the orchestration to a funeral.

Finally, the Italian, Malatesta, said, "It's not a question of dying, captain, but to stretch rope and dangle at the end of it while birds pick out dead eyes—you ask much, *signor*."

"I ask much for the squadron," said Dale, "but no more than you will give. It is for you to decide."

Dugger Banks said, "Hell's fire, Skipper, don't put it up to us. Ask for volunteers. We'll all stand forward, and you pick the two most likely not to betray us or the Allies."

"Yes, yes," came the chorus, "ask for volunteers."

Slowly Dale shook his head. "No! I know your loyalty to the squadron—and to me. You would place on me the onus of selection. I cannot—will not—could not. It must be by lot."

There were a few mutters and someone said, "Get the cards."

Before Dale could move, the huge-shouldered Boehm stepped forward. "*Herr Hauptmann*," he said, "I demand one place on this mission."

Dale said, "Why?"

The German, his small eyes set deep in his craggy skull, replied, "I told you when I came that I had one mission to perform—for myself. That is true. To that end I deserted my country, became a traitor. I am not happy here, *Herr Hauptmann*, for my mission is uncompleted. I swear by God to fly back to my country, leave this paper, and not betray you. The fact that I am a German, presumably returning after escaping from the enemy, will help make the Intelligence believe the paper. I shall then do that which I hope to do—and kill myself." He smiled. "I have lived too long as it is. I demand the right to go."

Eyes sought his big round face with the cruel mouth and hideous scar. No one spoke for a second or so.

Suddenly Andre Reasaud sprang forward. "And I shall go with him, *Monsieur*. You all know I have not wanted to live. I have sought death many times, and death laughs at me. Now, it cannot, for I have cornered it and forced it to take me."

THROUGH this impassioned harangue Killer Blade had stood silent, watchful, his eyes never leaving Boehm's face. Now, he, too, stepped forward.

"Not Andre, but me," he said. His gaze sought and found Dale's. The mechanical smile had not abated, but the eyes were hot, burning, "You have been good enough, Dale, to say I have done well. If I have, I have asked nothing in return. But now I ask the other half of this mission. Herr Boehm has told the truth of it. Let

him go, for he will convince the Germans. Let me go for reasons that are my own."

Boehm scowled and did not like it, but he could not speak. They all waited. Andre Ressaud protested, and again demanded the mission. The decision was up to Dale. Once again patient Barry Dale, keen student of life, sensed something between Boehm and Blade on which he could not put a finger. But he knew Boehm had spoken well. And as a choice between Ressaud and Blade to watch the German—

"In the interest of military efficiency," he said, "I am choosing *Herr* Boehm. I also accept the offer of Dan Blade. The matter is solved. I want to take this opportunity to thank the Squadron of the Dead. Its loyalty, never in question, is amply proved today. That's all. Dismissed."

Killer Blade watched him go. Only in Blade's eyes could you see the exultation, the savage, terrible glow of joy. He half-lidded his eyes to hide this light as he turned to Boehm and said, "*Mein Herr*, you are a brave man."

"And you," said the German, "are a fool. A man who flies as you fly had long to live. Now you throw away your life."

"A fool and his life, they say, are soon parted."

Blade went out and asked for permission to visit Armentieres. He was gone all day and came back with a long package, tightly wrapped, which he placed in his quarters, under the blanket of his cot.

The Squadron of the Dead temporarily shared the tarmac of the 355th British Pursuit. Here two Spads had been brought from the French 8th, and mechanics spent all night painting them black with scarlet trimmings, putting on the fuselage the dreaded insignia of the tipped skull on the crossed bones.

At noon the next day, Dale summoned Boehm and Killer Blade. Gravely he handed them the set of fake papers, written in a simple code which the Germans could quickly break. He also handed them two automatic pistols as a sort of symbol.

"I give you but two orders, gentlemen," he said. "One is to fly straight towards Mezieres as far as your gasoline will carry you. The other is to so disable your planes when you come down that the Germans will think surely there was an accident. I suggest that you burn them."

He paused, but neither spoke. He went on. "The whole success of the Zeebrugge mission and the drawing away of the night-flying Fokkers depends on making the Germans believe these dispatches. For that I can only depend on you. After you have arranged that they fall into German hands under favorable auspices, I ask nothing more. I—" he paused, and his gaze sought the heavy blue automatics they held—"I would not fall alive in German hands," he ended.

Blade did not speak. Boehm shifted uncomfortably, said, "You are generous, *Herr Hauptmann*."

Dale held out his hand. "Goodbye, gentlemen." His patient mouth twisted, straightened grimly, "And I shall say also good luck."

Outside on the deadline, the two Spads waited. Beyond them Blade saw six enormous Handley-Page bombers that had just come in. Twin-motored goliaths, they made the tiny Spads look like mosquitoes.

"Everything is ready, sir," said the chief mechanic to Dale.

"You can go when ready, gentlemen," Dale said.

Blade walked calmly to the cockpit of the first Spad, hoisted himself awkwardly into it. He was carrying the tightly wrapped narrow package that he had bought in Armentieres. He stowed it securely, strapped himself in.

He looked over at Boehm, sitting in the second Spad. His gentle smile remained the same, but the eyes were on fire. "*Hals und Beinbruch, mein herr*," he called softly.

The German started, stared, then waved and called the reply. Blade cracked the throttle, goosed the Spad out of line and blasted the tail around. He poured the gun to the Hisso and fled down the field. Tail up, ship light, he nosed her up in a fast climbing turn.

Three hundred feet above the field he turned and saw Boehm following. "Five years," he thought, "—and now my chance has come." He headed the Spad northeast toward Mezieres.

BELOW the high-flying Spad, the green denseness of the Argonne forest unrolled as the ship droned steadily northeast. Killer Blade peered over the crash pad, alertly studying every sign below. Off to the right lay St. Mihiel and the Woerve plains. Here the German defense systems were plainly etched, but in the woods below and to the left toward Vienne-le-chateau, they were not so plain. And it was part of Killer Blade's purpose to land where, for a time, the German infantry would not molest him. He intended to have his accounting with Boehm before the final act.

To his right, Boehm's Spad droned steadily, the German also peering through goggles at the terrain below. The Meuse region and the roads flanking it were filled with transports, a few bright flashes marked where heavy artillery was firing, but presently the planes were past the German's last line of trenches, and Mezieres was not so far ahead. Conflans itself was nearly in sight.

Blade looked at his gas gauge. The needle was hovering close to the empty pin. It was a question of minutes now before he would be forced down. He saw off his left wing a series of multi-colored fields marked out checkered fashion at the edge of the forest

above Ciergea. He nodded—just the spot—and turned to signal to Boehm. Boehm was not there.

Some instinct warned Killer Blade. He did not turn and wildly look for the German. He was flying at three-quarter throttle. The Spad had plenty of power. He kicked the rudder, threw over the stick. The Spad rolled sharply. But even so, the burst of gun fire snapped past his head, rippled his wings, blasted out the windshield before him, would have killed him if he had delayed a split-second. He roiled again, zoomed sharply, risking a whip-stall to avoid the dive which would mean his end. The Spad stood the test, and he leveled off, banked sharply. Boehm had thought, apparently, that Blade would dive, for he had nosed his Spad down, and even now was just zooming for a shot at the underside of Blade's fuselage.

For the first time, the set smile on Killer Blade's lips expanded into a grin. It was a great effort, a contortion of frozen muscles. It took a great emotion to produce that grin. But it was there, and his eyes were savagely alight with joy. "So you were tricking Dale and all of us," he muttered. "You intended to betray the truth to the Germans. You were a spy, as I thought. So much the better."

Now that he had revealed his hand, Boehm made desperate efforts to kill Blade. And Blade did absolutely nothing. He merely watched the gas gauge, knowing that its emptiness would eventually force both of them to the ground. Not for a million dollars would he have fired a single slug at Boehm, for fear he might kill him.

Flying with all the skill he knew, he banked and rolled, zoomed and chandelled, fading out from under the burst of gun fire that exploded at him from the desperate Boehm. The man must have fired a hundred shots. Blade's wings frayed; a strut was nearly shot away. Once bullets tore his coat at the shoulder.

Twice Boehm, in his desperation, left himself a square target for a quick dive, but Blade, though his fingers clutched whitely on the stick trigger, resisted the temptation. His face was rigid from the will power he used. And finally, as Boehm was shooting upward like a sky rocket for a long burst, the propeller whorl on his Spad ceased to a blur of white. You could see the club slowly turning. The Spad faltered in its zoom, fell off on one wing and slipped until the ship, nose-heavy, turned over into a shallow glide. Boehm's gasoline was gone.

Killer Blade gave a sharp exclamation. A few seconds later, his own Hisso's steady drone fell away. A few explosions, a stop, three or four more sharp roars, and then the Hisso ceased to fire, and only the wind pressure turned the prop. He fell over easily into a glide to follow the German down.

THEY had four thousand feet to fall dead-stick. Seconds passed with the speed of a turtle. The wind whistled softly in the struts and stay-wires. Blade, now that the moment was at hand, seemed consumed with impatience. His face became red. His eyes were hot, savage. He fought the Spad with consummate skill to hang-back of Boehm long enough to give the German plenty of chance to land first.

He kept muttering, "Just a moment or so now. Just that and then—"

The ground took on depth. Trees rose. The meadows were seen now to be filled with wheat. Boehm was coming into the wind with clever skill, lower and lower. The man was trying to hold his ship back, but the little advantage Blade had obtained, he held, and he wound around in spirals, dipping just enough to keep the ship under control.

At last he saw Boehm wheel and dip. The ground came up under the Spad's wheels. They hit, the tailskid dug in and the ship tore through the wheat, finally to stop. Instantly Blade nosed steeply. The Spad gained speed. The wind in the struts whimpered louder. Down came the Spad, as if to nose-dive into the earth. Boehm was climbing from his ship, not stopping to set it afire. He looked up as Blade's Spad came rushing down with a shriek of wires. He started to run towards the woods.

Blade risked all to land two point on wheels alone. For a space it appeared that his ship would nose over, but he held her magnificently. She raced on her gained speed straight for Boehm. The latter, looking back, saw the ship rushing down upon him. He hurled himself to one side. The Spad went ahead; the tailskid dropped, and after twenty yards or so, it came to a halt. Blade grabbed the package and tucked it under his disabled arm. He took his gun, leaped to the ground and turned to face the German, whose retreat was now cut off.

Boehm was brave. Trapped, he chose to shoot it out. The Colt whipped up, and its sharp crack roared on the quiet air, once, twice, three times, but the running Blade was a bad target. The bullets went over his head.

The fifth and sixth dug the earth at his feet, and Boehm dreaded to fire the seventh and last. He stood there. Blade had not fired a shot.

"Why do you not fire the last shot, Vorst von Stahlen?" Blade asked.

The German's body shook with a convulsive start. His small eyes opened wide. "Why do you call me that?" he cried.

"Because that's your name," rejoined Blade evenly. "*Hauptmann* Vorst Von Stahlen, chief of Air Intelligence for the Ninth German army, assistant to Nicolai himself, and champion of Germany with the *Epee* and the *Yaeger*."

The German looked as if he had seen a ghost. The weight of the heavy gun pulling against muscles paralyzed by surprise caused the muzzle to drop. Blade, his own gun alert, advanced. He apparently ignored the German's weapon.

"How—how do you know all this?" ask von Stahlen.

The savage light in Blade's eyes was shot with yellow flame. "I am Dan Braitte," he rejoined, with a fixed smile.

The stunning impact of his words caused von Stahlen to stagger back a step, his piggish eyes wide.

"Not—not—no, you cannot be Lieutenant Daniel Braitte of the United States fencing team," he cried. "He is dead. I know he is dead."

"He is not dead," said Braitte, watching the now unstrung German and the pistol. "You tried to kill me. You played foul. You sliced my face to ribbons so that no skin was upon it, and no flesh. You struck a foul blow at my shoulder and crippled my arm for life. But I didn't bleed to death as you thought, von Stahlen. I lived. I've waited five years for this, and now it is mine."

With a quick movement he was forward, smashed the Colt pistol from the German's hand. Only this movement that left him disarmed aroused the German peril. He cursed.

Dan Braitte stared at him, thin-eyed, remembering that early morning-sunshine in the glade of the Black Forest where, over a girl, this von Stahlen had challenged him to sabers. Braitte had fought the German in the international matches at Berlin with Rapier and had beaten him. The girl—the only love in Dan Braitte's life—had aroused jealousy. There was the insult, the slap, the exchange of notes, and the duel.

Sabers it was, and Braitte defended himself well. But the German was tricky, furious, a killer at heart. He had cried foul at a blow, and when Braitte's blade dropped to protest, the German had slashed a downright blow that would have cleaved Braitte's skull in two. He dodged in part, but the sharp steel took his face off from his nose down. The German had sprung in hacking, sliced cheeks and jaw flesh, had struck at the shoulder in a blow that had nearly cut Braitte's arm off and left it useless. He would have killed Braitte had not the horrified seconds struck up the blade.

All this Braitte was now remembering—the years of sickness while plastic surgery gave him a fixed manikin face instead of a horror; the necessity, because he was now a cripple, to resign from the United States army; the patient following of von Stahlen, waiting for the proper time. And now he had the man, disarmed, at his mercy.

"I RECOGNIZED you at once," Braithe said. "I knew you were no traitor, deserter. I knew you were a spy. I let you go to find your scheme. I've found it. You've come back to German soil with the secret of the Zeebrugge attack, with information that will enable the Germans to hack the Allies to pieces as you once hacked me."

He laughed in ringing fashion, though his artificial face did not change expression. "But you won't tell them," he said. "No, von Stahlen, you shan't speak."

With a sudden movement he flung the package down, unwrapped it to reveal two finely balanced French cavalry sabers.

"They say my left is not as good as my right, von Stahlen," Braithe said. "We will now find out. I won't let you live, even if you defeat me. But you can, if you are able, have the satisfaction of beating me here and now. Take your weapon."

The German stared at the shining steel. He tried to delay, work for time, hoping that German infantry would come. But Braithe had chosen the spot well.

Braithe said, "Take your weapon, or by God, I'll strike, anyway,"

The German became cunning. He took the weapon warily, saw Braithe throw aside tunic, holster, and the automatic. The automatic held the German's eye. He masked the bright light in his eyes.

"Now, von Stahlen," said Braithe, "we'll take it up where we left it five years ago. *En garde!*"

Von Stahlen's eyes glittered. Here was a left-handed man. The lust to kill gripped him, to kill this man and carry out the mission he had started. He fell into position.

"This time, Braithe," he said, "there are none to stop me. *En garde*, you swine."

The needle-sharp sabers slithered and sang soft sounds as the blades toyed with each other. Now, the difference between rapiers, which stab, and sabers, which also hack, is strength. A man slight of body with a strong wrist may become a rapier champion, because he can thrust and parry with slight movements. But a saber that may hack downward requires strength to stop. Upon this fact, apparently, von Stahlen now depended.

After a few preliminary tricks to feel out Dan Braithe's wrist and skill, he suddenly advanced sideways, raised his weapon and hacked a blow that would have cleaved Braithe's skull. Braithe caught the steel. It slid along his blade, clanged off the hilt, and Braithe, following up, drew blood from von Stahlen's cheek. A slicing stab that exposed the man's back teeth.

Von Stahlen cursed. Braithe laughed. "Many hours have gone into this, von Stahlen," he said, breathing easily, moving with the agility of light. "More than you can count."

"Much good it will avail." But already von Stahlen panted.

"And," Braithe went on, "since infantry are coming behind you, we'll end the affair like this."

If he had been moving quickly before, he became now a flashing embodiment of grace. His blade was a shaft of light that glittered blindingly.

"Taken in *terce*, thus," he cried, "and a thrust in this fashion—after the Italian, Biotti. So!"

In vain von Stahlen tried to parry, stepped backward. Braithe's long body followed the thrust with perfect timing. The saber point, pushing inside the German's guard, reached the man's mouth. A cry of pain was smothered by a strangled, grunting sound. Braithe's eyes blazed with a mad light. He laughed, a sound almost as bad as that which the tongueless von Stahlen was trying to utter. For Braithe's blade, gouging accurately into the man's mouth, and the blade twisting as Braithe turned it, had knocked out teeth, cut cheeks to ribbons and cut off a full three-quarters of the man's tongue and slit the rest at its very base.

"A painful wound, but not a disabling one," said Braithe, holding his blade steady while the other recovered from the terrific shock, "Now you are numbed, no longer feel pain. A little loss of blood, but not enfeebling. So, we go on. *En garde*, you dog!"

TO save his life, von Stahlen lifted his blade, and the desperate struggle was renewed, but fear gleamed in the silent German's eyes, and he fought with the strength of that fear. His blade flew like mad. All of Braithe's skill did not avoid one thrust that struck him in the side just below the arm and drew blood. Von Stahlen made a weird, terrible sound and plunged in to follow up. There he made a mistake, for Braithe was ready. The blades clanged once, twice, three times—a *riposte* brilliantly executed. Then—

"One more for me," yelled Braithe, the blade hacked down.

Again von Stahlen made weird sounds. His left hand, which he had swung forward for balance in delivering what he hoped to be the killing' blow, lay on the ground, and from the stump of the wrist bright arterial blood flowed. He cried out again, dropped his blade, but Braithe struck once again, a slicing blow that he tried to hold back when he saw what had happened. He nearly succeeded. The blade that would have hacked von Stahlen in two struck slantingly on the German's arm, and with lessening force slid down to the man's fingers gripping the hilt. Against the steel hilt, Braithe's blade bit sure and cleanly. Von Stahlen's weapon fell, since there were no fingers save a thumb left to hold it.

Von Stahlen whimpered in his throat. He looked at the bright pumping blood, and slowly collapsed to the ground. Braithe was in a fury.

“And I meant to kill you. First maim you, make you suffer as I had suffered, and then kill you because I couldn’t condemn any one to the crippling for life that I have known.”

He dropped his blade and rushed to von Stahlen. The man’s eyes were closed.

“But you shan’t die,” muttered Braite. “Not yet. You haven’t suffered enough. I saved you once for what I had in mind, and I’ll save you again.”

He ripped off a puttee and made of it a tourniquet that quickly stopped the flow of blood from the severed arm. He bound up as best he could the fingerless stump of the German’s right hand. The flow of blood from the mouth was slow, and not dangerous.

By this time, the sounds of men coming were louder. Braite had to think now of his predicament. He quelled the rage and hate that had engulfed him for minutes. Swiftly he raced to his own plane and secured the flare pistol from the cockpit holster. A quick explosion, and the Spad was a mass of furiously blazing fire. He ran to von Stahlen’s Spad, and one more explosion was followed by a burst of fire. The German infantry were climbing over the stone fence at the far end of the field.

Suddenly Braite remembered who and what he was—a member of the Squadron of the Dead, wearing the uniform, an outlaw to be hanged on capture. He recovered the Colt pistol he had thrown on the ground. There was a bullet for von Stahlen, one for himself. He leveled the gun at the now unconscious German spy.

But wait! Von Stahlen dead, and himself a suicide. What would the Germans think? They might doubt the fake facts in the dispatch. Dan Braite had then to think of the country whose uniform he had worn long ago; to decide between it and the thousands of men depending on this trick, and his own neck in a hemp rope.

Slowly his hand dropped. He flung the gun away. When the Germans arrived, his one hand was over his head in token of surrender.

DAN BRAITE’S next move was entirely unpremeditated. He had never thought to search von Stahlen carefully, so he did not find the documents sewed in the skirt of the tunic. But the German Feldwebel did, and read them carefully. Braite’s first appraisal came when the non-com became polite and obsequious.

“I did not know that you were also of the *Nachrichtendienst*, Herr Kraglich. I will commandeer a car to have you both taken at once to the *Oberkommando*.”

Braite took his cue quickly enough.

Anything to convince the Germans that the dispatches were true.

“Very good, *Feldwebel*,” he said in his perfect German. “As you can see, *Herr Hauptmann* von Stahlen was seriously hurt when thrown from the plane. Let me see the papers so I may report for him.”

No other soldier but a German would have obeyed. But the *Feldwebel*, trained for twenty years to blind obedience to senior rank, never questioned.

Braite skimmed the contents, prepared to destroy anything that might damage the Allied cause. Instantly he saw that von Stahlen had been sent by Nicolai for two purposes: to trap the Squadron of the Dead which was a thorn in the German side; second, to contact a German spy, Erich Kraglich, now in Paris to bring back information as to Foch’s next move. Braite knew that this last accounted for von Stahlen’s reluctance to leave the hidden tarmac, and his dismay at being ordered in the night to the Flanders front. He had failed in this contact with Kraglich.

But there was more to the documents. Besides bringing Kraglich back with him, von Stahlen was to locate five divisions of Allied reserve, indicating that the Germans were planning a surprise attack.

And finally—Braite clinched his teeth on a gasp—von Stahlen was to locate the pool of reserve for the Chemin des Dames front. This told Braite, who once had been a great student of strategy, exactly where the Germans were to attack—on the Chemin des Dames front. And the time was to be in May, almost coinciding with the British attack on Zeebrugge. This was indicated by the brief order: “Locate any reserves that could be moved in ten days time until May 12th into Chemin des Dames. Note condition of Plummer’s Fifth Army, which we believe is badly decimated and in this sector for rest purposes only.”

This as good as told Braite where the attack spearhead would be:—against a shot-up division moved by the British to a quiet sector for rest,

In that instant, Braite forgot his own revenge; he forgot his dilemma. His brain began to scheme how he might, in some way, get this information back across the line. His perpetually smiling face did not change expression. Curtly he handed the documents back to the *Feldwebel*.

“That is sufficient, *Feldwebel*,” he said. “You had better get *Hauptmann* von Stahlen to a hospital. He is dangerously hurt.”

They rode in the car to the *Oberkommando*. An evacuation hospital was near by, and von Stahlen was taken to it, while Braite faced the regimental commander. He lied easily and fluently. Yes, von Stahlen had contacted him. To make the escape, he had been forced to don a Squadron of the Dead uniform. Yes, he knew where the Squadron of the Dead was. He could and would guide a bombing raid there.

The *Oberst* studied the fake dispatch. “And this, *Leutnant Kraglich*, is this authentic?”

Braite played his master stroke. “*Herr Oberst*, I believe it is. *Hauptmann* von Stahlen gave me a copy in case anything happened to him. He told me to guard it with my life. He seemed greatly perturbed.”

The trick worked. Braite’s very hesitancy in assuming any responsibility, his statements as to what von Stahlen had said—von Stahlen a trusted Intelligence officer—made the document carry more weight than otherwise.

“We must talk with him as soon as he is conscious,” the *Oberst* said. “Meanwhile, one of my staff will lend you a uniform, and you will remain here for questioning by the division commander as soon as he arrives.”

Braite went out, and a young lieutenant of staff lent him a uniform. Braite’s eyes were busy. He located a Halberstadt squadron not three kilometers from the evacuation hospital. He strolled out there and studied the situation carefully. Three ships were on the line, idling as the mechanics worked on them. There was no chance now of getting aboard.

He debated shooting his way to one, for he knew that questions were going to be asked about the peculiar nature of Von Stahlen’s wounds, and this might be the last moment of real liberty that he would have. Yet the fake dispatch must be made to stand all questioning, even if his own life had to pay forfeit. Against the information he had learned was the fact that the Bruges canal must be closed. It was worth a pitched battle to the English to block it.

Grimly he turned and walked back to the *Oberkommando*. The division commander had arrived, a *Herr General* von der Goltz. He immediately adjourned to the hospital. Braite took a big breath and followed.

VON STAHLLEN was conscious, but white, very weak, for he had come close to bleeding to death. His small, piggish eyes popped wide at sight of Braite. At another time, Braite could have laughed at the inarticulate rage showing in them.

Braite sped to the bed, patted von Stahlen’s shoulder in comradely fashion.

“My poor Vorst,” he said, “But never fear, old chap, you’ll soon be up and around. And I have given the *Herr General* much important information.”

Von Stahlen’s eyes remained big and black with fury. He tried to move as if he would protest this terrible thing he was witnessing. Mewing sounds came from his throat. The general construed them as something else than they were.

“He cannot talk,” said Braite, “because his tongue was cut when, his face smashed against the instrument board.”

Von Stahlen’s ruined face twitched, and waves of movement went over it.

General von der Goltz pushed ahead and made some attempt to establish communication. Braite steeled himself to wait.

Von Stahlen tried to talk with his eyes. General von der Goltz said, “The poor chap, maimed for his country. I am afraid we will have to depend upon you, *Kraglich*, for this.”

The *Oberst* said, “He can nod his head. Hold up the dispatch. It is most important to verify this.”

General von der Goltz pulled out the fake dispatch. Braite cursed inwardly. He watched von Stahlen. The general said, “My dear von Stahlen, can you verify the truth of this projected bombing raid on Mezieres?”

Von Stahlen violently shook his head. A horrible hollow sound came from his throat so harshly that blood flowed again.

General von der Goltz muttered, “He means it is not so.” He turned to Braite. “What about this?”

Braite’s face remained impassive. “*Herr General*, as I told the *Herr Oberst*, the *Hauptmann* von Stahlen gave me this dispatch, a duplicate of his own, and told me to guard it with my life. I can add but one point to that.”

“And that is?”

“Ask von Stahlen if we did not see six giant Handley-Page bombers on the Squadron of the Dead tarmac as we took off. I swear that we did.”

The general repeated the question. Von Stahlen nodded and again tried to talk. Sweat stood on his forehead. His face grew strained, swollen from his efforts. For the first time, a tinge of pity for the man swept Braite.

“I do not understand,” said General von der Goltz. “If the bombers are there—”

“The Squadron of the Dead tarmac is at Luxueil,” said Braite. “Von Stahlen will verify that.” Von Stahlen nodded again and tried to talk. Braite let the statement stand. If the general chose to tie in the bombers with the Luxueil tarmac, the German would realize the six bombers there could be meant only for Mezieres. General von der Goltz did.

“The facts fit,” he said in a puzzled tone. “Why can he have shaken his head at the original statement? My dear von Stahlen, did you mean this statement is not true?”

Von Stahlen’s head waggled. “Perhaps,” said Braite pityingly, “he is delirious, *Herr General*. He has suffered mutilation and loss of blood. As for me, *Excellent*, I stake my life that the dispatch is true, as far as I know.”

“Perhaps you are right, my dear *Kraglich*. In any case, I shall have the night-flying squadrons moved to a more suitable location to intercept this raid. Meantime, we can try to communicate with poor von

Stahlen later when he is more recovered. Come, Oberst.”

BRAITE went out with them, aware of the fine sweat on his forehead. He heard the bed rustle frantically behind him. In that moment, all his hatred for von Stahlen, cherished over five years of mutilation and pain, vanished. Braite found then that the ashes of his vengeance had cooled. He had seen von Stahlen punished as no soldier had ever before been punished. The man would continue that way for endless years of life.

Braite became again a man freed of hatred, and had only a thought to escape back to the Allied lines with his information about the projected attack on the Chemin des Dames. But it was not to be so easy as that. General von der Goltz asked about his arm. He knew of Kraglich. Kraglich had no crippled arm. Smoothly Braite said it had been injured in the crash. The general asked about his face.

“Disguise, Herr General,” said Braite. “It is injected full of paraffin. Tomorrow I will look like myself.”

“Ah, yes,” said General von der Goltz. “It is very odd, very strange all this.”

But Braite had weathered the crisis for the moment. He knew, however, that tomorrow he must fly. He had been living on borrowed time for hours. He waited until everyone was apparently working with the general on new divisional plans. He started to drift out and to the Halberstadt tarmac.

Suddenly he saw a white-coated orderly running toward the door. He stepped out.

The orderly saluted, panting. “Herr Leutnant, the *Hauptmann* von Stahlen is dying. He is communicating a message. The general is to come at once.”

Braite’s eyes burned hotly, but his face remained impassive. “Very good,” he said. “Run back and do what you can. The general and I will come at once.”

He went inside the door. The German orderly, again obedient to higher authority, turned and trotted back the way he had come. Braite’s eyes swept the room. No one had noticed this interlude. He stepped out the door again and began running along the cobbled road to the hospital.

He raced into von Stahlen’s bedside. A physician was there, and two orderlies, but nothing could be done. Von Stahlen was bleeding to death. Braite saw, and gasped in admiration of the magnificent courage of von Stahlen. The man had ripped the bandages from the stump of his left hand. It bled torrentially, and with the stump he had traced in blood on the white sheet.

“Kraglich spy. Name Braite. Shoot him.”

Von Stahlen lay there, his small eyes wide and glassy, but as they saw Braite, a look of hatred and

triumph came into them. A faint mewling whisper broke from his lips. With his last movement, he gestured to the bloody scrawl he had made. Then he died.

BRAITE looked around to find three men’s eyes turned suspiciously on him. In that second of suspense, he did not lose his head. A decision had to be made instantly. No matter what happened to him, the authenticity of the fake dispatches was gone. Von Stahlen had won the last trick, even as he died. Braite, weighing the matter with a calmness at odds with his peril, saw that even if he remained, braved it out, allowed himself even to be hung, he could not pull the night-flying Fokkers away from Zeebrugge.

Then there remained the task of getting back with warning of the impending attack. His life, useless hitherto to himself, was valuable to the Allies. He made his decision. His left hand hovered close to the holstered Luger at his belt.

“*Herr Hauptmann* von Stahlen must have lost his mind at the end, he said. “But I will, of course, summon the general to get his opinion on this ridiculous statement.”

He began backing toward the door. He was again the grim, efficient killer who had stormed the Western Front, The physician saw the gun, the hand, the odd alert movements of Braite. He knew the truth, but he quailed to make a move. The orderlies stared dumbly.

Braite reached the door. Still the physician had not moved. Braite turned quickly, raced down the steps. A motor bike rested there, but Braite did not know how to operate it, and seconds were precious. He turned into the night, hugged his one good arm to his side and ran toward the Halberstadt airdrome—ran as he had never run before, forcing himself not to race blindly, to become exhausted, forcing himself to pace this run so he could arrive with strength left.

He knew what was going on behind him. The physician had darted out the other door as soon as Braite had vanished, and was running now to the general. Telephones would ring; motor cars filled with soldiers would get under way. The whole German Intelligence would be thrown at him.

He reached the airdrome eight minutes later, breathing hard, but with reserve strength not yet called upon. His eyes flashed over the scene. Two Halberstadts were standing on the line, one with motor warming, while mechanics with Hindenberg lights worked on the ignition system.

Braite wasted no time. He ran to them. “Get to one side,” he rasped.

They turned, stared, and one shouted. Braite deliberately aimed at the first mechanic’s hip and fired. At the close range, the bullet knocked the man flat. The other mechanic screamed, “*Gott! Bitte!*”

Him Braite shot in the shoulder. He ran around the plane, jerked the chocks even as a sentry came storming around the corner of the administration building. Doors flew open, and men in various states of undress poured out. Braite leaped into the cockpit. Carefully, so as not to choke the carburetor and stall the ship, he cracked the throttle. Even with bullets singing around his head, he took his time. The engine revved up. The Mercedes was a slow warmer, but a sturdy motor.

A man grabbed at the tail assembly, and Braite shot him just as the ship began to move. He caught the wind drift from the smoke from a magnesium flare that someone tossed onto the ground. The field blazed now with white hot light.

A bullet struck his right shoulder and nearly tore his crippled arm off. The Halberstadt jerked as he fell against the stick, but he righted it before a wing dusted the ground and got the tail up. Now the noise and turmoil fled to the rear as the ship gained speed. He held her nose down until she tugged to be released. Only then did he ease back the stick and let the ship zoom up the sky in a fast climbing turn.

THE sharp pain from his shoulder died away. It became numb. His head cleared, and he oriented himself on the compass and headed the plane straight south. He fought the faintish feeling that swept him every so often. He knew that he was bleeding hard, but could do nothing to staunch it. The plane climbed steadily, turning up nineteen hundred and droning like a tea kettle.

He held her steady, knowing it was forty miles, at the least, to the front line, knowing that the entire German front was aflame now with news of his escape. He ceased to think, sat steady, giving all his energy to guiding the ship on the compass course.

On the ground below, German telephone centrals flashed the news. The cry sped out, "Alarm! Alarm! Spy escaping in Halberstadt sixty-eight-forty."

Searchlights began to poke the sky with sullen fingers of radiance. Huge tin ears like morning glories turned ceaselessly while a man in the listener's seat strained his ears for the motor drone. Pursuit ships were manned by pilots in pajamas, and with warm motors awaited the order to take off.

They traced Braite. How could they miss? At Eponville they had him definitely marked at three thousand meters, heading south by east, and the Sixteenth *Jagdstaffel* and Berg's circus went up to head him off. Searchlights from fifty AA batteries combed the sky, looking to apply the scissors. Marking his altitude through tin ears and his course, too, the AA guns began to lay a barrage at three thousand.

Braite saw the tiny red eyes winking like a hundred illuminated scarlet roses across the sky ahead of him, saw the searchlights in pairs, weaving like poking skeleton fingers. He was too weak to turn aside. He went into the barrage and the searchlights.

They closed in like excited dogs. The Hal began to weave to the air concussion of exploding shells. As long as he heard, only the "whoof" sound, they were breaking hundreds of yards away. But now suddenly "crack!" The Hal lunged upward, and he felt hot iron smash into his leg above the knee. The Hal turned wildly as the reaction made him kick the rudder. He horsed her back on the course. His mouth was set in a grim line, with the gentle artificial smile still lifting the lips; his eyes stared straight ahead. He fought to stay conscious.

More searchlights—one blinded him, and in a few seconds time another beam crossed the first. He rolled out of one into the other. A third beam came to make X's of light. Now he was in the dreaded scissors, three lights crossing, worked by excited men below who spotted his every move, kept the light on him for the benefit of the black-winged Fokkers climbing swiftly to shoot him down.

He summoned his strength to handle a bucking, stunting ship. He rolled and zoomed, went into a whip-stall. He dived vertically, and managed to shake the lights just as a Fokker stormed on his tail and luminous bullets, like pale ghost eyes, swarmed around him. He had to pull straight now. He was getting too weak to hold controls for anything except straight flight.

He broke away from the searchlight into the darkness. The mad fireflies of tracer slug's followed him, tore into the ship. A tracer bullet hit him in the thigh. He could feel it burn, and bending down, trying to gouge at it, he could smell scorched, cooking flash where the hot slug roasted inside him.

He felt no pain. He was beyond that. He was almost beyond fighting. Yet he came out of a period of shocked insensibility to find his Spandau guns rattling like tornadoes, and saw ahead of him a black object suddenly turn scarlet with flame. The burning Fokker, falling down the sky, located him for the others and for the searchlights. Once again he was blinded by the piercing glow from below.

He could not twist now, nor stunt. He went on. A bullet tore into his back near the wounded, crippled arm. The arm flew up at the impact and fell against the crash pad, the numbed hand hanging outside the cockpit. He could not bring it back in. After the

first piercing pain, numbness came again. He was light-headed, laughing at times, delirious.

Thinking and talking aloud of days gone by when he had been a second lieutenant of U. S. cavalry and with a career ahead of him.

HIS guns roared again, and this time they roared on, spotting him for all to see, for he did not take his fingers from the stick trigger. The Fokker pilot, his brains blown to hell, had long since fallen into the black maw below, but the Hal guns smashed on until a jam tied up the right gun, and the left gun used up the complete belt,

Braite lost track of time, distance. He knew the illuminated dial of the compass, and kept the ship headed south, going on and on. Blinded by searchlights, shot to pieces so that the Hal's right wing had a definite droop to it and the ship was heavy on the stick, he fought with his remaining strength.

"Troop, attention! Bugler, blow the charge!"

He was seeing a cavalry troop with *guidons* flying, storming at full gallop across the Arizona desert, Sabers out, men yelling, horses with bulging eyes and red mouths. Great days when he had been Lieutenant Braite with a career. All the Braites had been soldiers. All had died for their country in uniform. All except this Braite who was dying up here, an outlaw.

Black bats roared out of the darkness, stormed at him with bullets. He cursed them. "Shoot, you fools, and all the good it will do you, I'm going through." The Fokkers loosed endless bullets. One struck him in the back, and he felt it worm into his chest. He pitched forward, banging his face against the instrument board.

More bullets shone like glowworms as they stormed at him. The motor was hit. He heard the sudden scream as slugs tore loose sparkplugs, rocker arms, push rods. Steaming water rose where cylinder jackets cracked. Red-hot oil flew back and burned his face, seared his body. He cut the switch. The plane did not burn, although he could smell raw gas. He nosed down and the Fokkers kept after him. He had not noticed that the searchlights were angling at him from behind.

He only knew that he had played the hand the way the cards had fallen, and he had lost. He had not reached the Front. Or had he? He called supremely on his will, forcing his brain to clear. He disregarded more bullets piling into the stricken plane—more bullets scoring his already bruised and numbed flesh.

He looked over the side. God, he must be getting blind! It was hard to focus, yet by that great will which had made him a killer, he cleared his brain and vision for a brief space. He saw two long lines of lights stretching away to right and left as far as the eye could reach—two lines of lights like the boulevard lights that ornament a grand wide highway.

Only these lights, one after another, blinked out as others blossomed greenly to take their places. Very

lights! The line of lights on this side were German night rockets; the others the Allies.

He jumped to the impact of another slug. His strength seemed running from a dozen crevices. The Hal faltered in the downward glide. Had it gone into a spin, he could never have righted it, but by some miracle, his foot and stick caught the slip, and the Hal continued to rustle downward. Stays were whispering, wings drumming, and a strange ragged sound was made by the bullet-torn fabric as it rattled to the wind.

Bullets came. Black bats wheeled around him frantically to smash him. He went down. Again came a lucid moment when he was aware of himself, of his own nerves, wounds and body. The delirium of the old days left. He was again Killer Blade.

Black earth was coming up. Planes were wheeling, and he heard the rattle of gun fire. Tracer bullets stormed from below as either German or Ally tried to shoot him. The earth was closer. The night rockets reached almost up to him, but he would make it. Land in about the third reserve line, he estimated. Too low for maneuvering, now, and the black Fokkers, having shot him to pieces, drew off, perhaps wondering, like some champion fighter who has knocked a man kicking, how that man succeeds in getting up. Braite stayed up.

He flung over a flare, but never saw it hit, and if it blazed, he never saw that. The ground was lunging at him now. Blindly he guessed, at its location and leveled off, jerked the stick back into his lap. He locked it there with his knees, put his one good arm up over his face and leaned both against the crash pad and shut his eyes. So weary, so hurt, he now trusted his life to luck.

Wham! The wheels struck. Bounced. Another smash. A sensation of turning giddily. Braite leaned there, braced. He felt himself torn, and he spat blood as the safety belt wrenched at his middle. Another sensation of spinning, another crash; then silence and a wounded man hanging limply head downward from a safety belt, water and oil and gas leaking over him.

A VOICE came whispering out of the blackness that held Dan Braite.

"You are dying, my man. Can't you tell us who you are?"

Braite opened his eyes, shut them at the brightness. "Yes," he said, "I am dying, but I won't die until you bring Barry Dale to me. Barry Dale, do you hear, of the Squadron of the Dead? He is at Hazebrouck. Send for him at once."

"There is no time. You will not last long, I am sorry. Tell me."

"I will die, but not until I have seen Dale," Braite said.

He looked around the room, wondered how he had gotten there. He saw an orderly staring at him with an odd look, saw the doctor-major who had been talking to him. He, too, had an odd look.

"You've been hit sixteen times," said the doctor. "There is nothing we can do."

"I am not afraid to die," said Braite. "Send for Dale. Give me whatever is necessary to help me stay alive until he comes."

They gave him something—a prick on the arm that brought cessation from pain, a joyous lassitude, Then came interludes of nothingness, and he heard whispers. "He can't last until night."

His own voice sounded far away as if belonging to someone else. "I can last. The tough die hard, major."

He lay there, the permanent smile lifting pale, ashen lips. He was white as cardboard, drained of blood until only salt water injections enabled his frantic heart to continue to beat. Only digitalis and adrenalin and his own superb will power kept him alive. He never moved, drank a little water. They made many intravenous injections of saline.

"Better tell us. You can't go on. Your pulse is failing."

"I will live," said Dan Braite, "until Barry Dale comes."

The doctors had done all they could. Barry Dale was flying, and would arrive. Yet Braite's pulse failed. There was no blood to nourish the body—nothing but sixteen terrible gun shot wounds, one a tracer bullet wound that was already infected. Yet Dan Braite lived. The doctors swore he couldn't, but he did, hour after hour.

Voices whispered, "It's a miracle. I don't see how—"

And then Dan Braite opened eyes that somehow couldn't see much. Everything seemed dark, as at twilight. He barely made out Barry Dale's patient, pale face bending over him.

"I told them I'd live until you came!" said Dan Braite. "Listen. I have no strength to repeat." He told all that had happened—all that was wrong—and finished with the statement, "The Germans will attack on the Chemin des Dames on May 21st, striking against Plummer's weakened and exhausted Fifth Army. Get that warning out. It will be the same sort of attack as was made on March 21st against the British."

"Yes, yes," said Dale. "I will tell them."

Dan Braite relaxed, and it seemed as if he must die then. His eyes closed. Yet he lived on.

"Dale?" he said.

"Yes, Braite."

"I wrecked the one plan by my revenge. If I have made it up—that loss—through this information, might I ask a favor?"

Barry Dale's mouth trembled. This man who had done more than men could do, asking for a favor!

"Yes, Braite, ask it. Anything within reason."

"My father and grandfather were soldiers, died in uniform. One at Chickamauga, the other at San Juan. Military family. Seems rotten stupid to ask it, but could you bury me in an American uniform with a cavalry saber? I'll rest better."

"Yes," promised Dale. "I'll do that."

"Drop—line to—mother—Sheridan Hotel, New York. Soldier's mother. She'll take it right and—"

A tired heart stopped between two beats. The jaw dropped open; the fingers of the one hand scratched feebly at the sheet, then stopped, relaxed, limp, Dale tightened his mouth, gently closed Braite's eyes.

Barry Dale buried him, with the Squadron of the Dead at attention.

And later, after writing to Braite's mother, Barry Dale and Cartwright sat over brandy and looked at the casualty list. One name stuck out: "Captain Daniel Braite, LD. D.S.C."

"Quite a guy, him," said Cartwright, belching over his drink.

"Yes," said Dale softly, "quite a guy!"