

Devildog Breed

By Donald E. Keyhoe

Here they are again—that bunch of flying, fighting Devildogs—Lucky Lane and the Three Lunatics, Cyclone Bill Garrity, and the rest of the mad Marines. And fighting against them is a silent, unseen menace—a strange, black shadow that shrouds whole formations in its sable cloak of death, and sends them reeling down—to doom.

CHAPTER I BANSHEE WINGS

NIGHT had settled over the turbulent Devildog nest as Lucky Lane reached the door of headquarters. He paused on the duck-boards, lit a cigarette. Then, with his overseas cap perched at an impudent angle above one ear, he calmly kicked open the door and entered.

Hick Jones, the lanky second-in-command, turned a thin, leathery face from his battered desk.

“Ever strike yuh there’s a knob on that there door?” he drawled.

Lucky grinned. “You’re getting worse than the old war horse since you got those captain’s bars,” he retorted.

A chair grated within the C.O.’s sanctum; then “Cyclone” Garrity’s two hundred and twenty pounds of human dynamite loomed in the doorway.

“So it’s old war horse now!” he roared.

Lucky cast an accusing look at Hick Jones. The Texan languidly shifted a plug of tobacco to his other cheek.

“Can’t expect *me* t’ warn yuh. Anyways, you birds ought t’ have more respect for the major.”

“Respect?” thundered Garrity, “Why, you bow-legged beanpole, you’re the worst one in this pack.”

The major’s wrath being thus diverted, Lucky seized the opportunity for a quick change of subject.

“You want to see me, sir?” he inquired with a blissful smile.

“Not while I’m in my right mind,” said Cyclone Bill bitterly, “But unfortunately I couldn’t get out of it. G.H.Q. just called up and asked how many pilots I had who could speak German. I told him two—you and Sparks. Brent’s in the hospital, the lazy dog-robber—” He stopped, glared at Hick Jones. “What are you grunting about?”

“Just thinkin’ a man’s got t’ have a ton o’ lead in his carcass afore he can even lay down in this here outfit.”

“Judging by your general comatose condition,” thundered Garrity, “you’ve got the full load right now.”

He looked back at Lucky Lane.

“You and Sparks stand by. There’ll be an Intelligence officer here to see you tonight.”

“What’s up?” asked Lucky.

“How do I know what the fatheads have in their skulls?” growled Cyclone Bill. He watched Lucky depart, turned to Hick

Jones with an altered expression. "It won't be any picnic, that's sure. That Brass Hat sounded plenty upset."

Deep in his grim eyes there was a worried expression, but as Hick Jones eyed him quizzically, he scowled and went into his sanctum.

Out on the drome, Lucky was making rapidly toward the mess, devoid of any particular worry about a possible mission. As he entered the dilapidated structure, a discordant burst of song swelled out:

If the Army and the Navy ever gaze on Heaven's scenes,

They will find the Marines have landed, and scoffed up all the beans.

Lucky grinned, made his way toward the bar where the musically inclined trio of Lunatics had clustered—Pug Flanagan, giant son of Erin; Mack Tuttle, veteran Leatherneck with an undertaker's mournful face and a spell-binder's vocabulary; and dapper Benny Sparks, a bright-eyed bundle of wire nerves.

They were the original Three Lunatics. They had been transferred hastily from one outfit to another until they reached the Mad Marines. There, under the capable guiding hand of Lucky Lane, they had remained to become an added thorn in the side of Cyclone Bill, and Lucky Lane, by popular vote, had become the fourth Lunatic.

AS Lucky appeared, Pug Flanagan swung around and saw him. His huge red face lit up; then he opened a cavernous mouth to emit a greeting that shook the windows.

"Ah, me b'y! I perceive ye are smilin'. Thin th' Ould Man is lettin' us off aisy."

"Pipe down," said Lucky, "he's not wise to our zooming that Staff car."

"That's a break," exclaimed Benny Sparks. "I figured we'd be grounded, anyway. And Mack here was all set for the firing squad."

Mack Tuttle mournfully fingered the lone spear of hair which graced his prematurely bald crown.

"Benjamin, there is a most lamentable lack of veracity in your statements. I must confess the exigencies of our predicament created a certain uneasiness within me, but at no time did I contemplate such Spartan measures."

"Nuts," said Benny. "Let's have a drink."

"The suggestion is not without merit," Mack said with a faint lessening of his usual gloom. He turned, a stocky, ludicrous figure of a man, and tapped gently upon the zinc bar.

"Ahem, Pierre, would you be so kind—"

Pug Flanagan banged down a mighty, hamlike hand upon the metal surface. "Cognac!" he bellowed. "Three Star, and lave off gaping."

Pierre came forward uneasily. "*Oui, m'sieu*, but—but who is going to pay this time?"

"Shades of me forefathers! Is it hintin' ye are that a Flanagan's name is not good, ye miserable scut?"

Pierre cringed. "*Non, non!* But the mess officer, he tells me no money, no cognac—"

"A fine kittle av fish!" Pug looked to right and left, at Benny Sparks and Tuttle. "What is the condition av the Lunatics' exchequer?"

"There are a few francs left," said Mack Tuttle cautiously, "but between now and the time we receive our miserable stipend—"

“Fork over the money, you walking dictionary,” snapped Benny, “or we’ll get another treasurer.”

Mack Tuttle produced some franc notes. Pug Flanagan took the bottle of Three Star, filled four brandy glasses. As the others were downing the first drink, he started upon his third.

“Be careful, Patrick,” advised Mack Tuttle gloomily. “Remember what happened the last time you became inebriated.”

“A Flanagan is niver drunk,” said Pug. “He may be mildly filled with the joy av living—”

He stopped, as from the night sky there sounded the faint rumble of heavy motors. The other Devildogs in the mess broke off conversation and listened.

“Handley-Pages,” said Lucky, after a moment. “It’s okay. Just the I.A.F. gang going over to lay a few eggs on the Krauts.”

Pug poured himself another drink, cocked his massive head to one side as the drome of the bombers grew louder.

“Hearin’ thim babies, I mind the toime whin I was flyin’ the Channel patrol—”

“All by yourself, I suppose,” snapped Benny Sparks. “Anybody’d think you heaved that house boat around all alone.”

“I was about to say, ye flippet, in the company av me honorable crew—”

“Crew, hell! I did the flying, Mack did the navigating, and you pounded your ear in the bow cockpit six hours a day.”

Pug drew himself up in vast dignity. “Have ye forgotten,” he thundered, “it was I who shot down th’ Zeppelin on the night—”

“Here,” said Lucky Lane hastily, “have another drink.”

Diverted from his favorite story, Pug put down his fifth brandy, gazed ceilingward.

“The British lads haven’t the foine touch av a Flanagan with their twin motors. Listen to thim now. None av the sweet song that I used to bring out av the ould Liberties.”

“Listen!” said Lucky sharply. “They’ve run into a fight.”

Barely audible above the roaring Rolls engines, there came a thin tac-tac-tac of machine guns. Devildogs leaped up from all parts of the mess, but the Four Lunatics were the first to get to the door.

IT was dark, and the huge Handley-Pages could not be seen, but the thunder of two score engines filled the night with a swelling din. The bombers were hardly higher than three thousand feet, Lucky Lane estimated. Evidently they had just begun to gain altitude with their heavy loads.

Tac-tac-tac-tac! Again came the faint, staccato pound of machine guns above the bellowing motors. A flare lit up above the Handley-Pages, silhouetting the big ships for a moment. The bombers were holding their formation, but Lucky could see three or four of the escort Camels darting about the sky.

“I don’t see any Krauts,” exclaimed Benny Sparks.

Lucky turned; then, as Mack Tuttle gave a sudden grunt behind him, he looked up again quickly. He started.

The flare was still burning, but a great dark shadow was falling over the British ships. As he stared, the flare waned to a feeble light. Somewhere, a Devildog swore, for now that queer black shadow was shrouding the whole formation.

Then, as though a great sable cloak had been thrown over both ships and flare, the sky went pitchy black.

“Holy Mither!” Pug boomed hoarsely. “I’ve gone blind. The liquor’s got me eyes!”

“No, something’s happened up there!” cried Benny Sparks. “It looked—”

He broke off, staring blankly into the heavens. In a split second, the roaring Rolls engines had gone dead.

“Now it’s me ears,” groaned Pug,

“Keep still!” whispered Lucky. He gazed up tensely, like the rest.

For a moment a stark, weird silence filled the sky. Lucky felt a cold perspiration break out upon his body. The thing was uncanny. It was as though the ships had been wiped out of the heavens—

Then he heard a faint moaning sound. For an instant he thought it was from the wings of the unseen planes. It rose in an eerie, whistling wail that sent a shiver down his spine. Higher and higher, till his fingernails dug into his clenched hands—and then, again, stark silence!

“Why don’t we hear the ships?” Benny said hoarsely.

Before Lucky could answer, a searchlight stabbed up from an archie battery not far from the field. As the great finger of light wavered about the zenith, Lucky gave a choked cry. The entire formation had been mysteriously stricken.

The bombers were reeling off, starting to fall—with not a sound from their wings! One huge ship stalled, fell into a slow, ponderous spin. Another nosed down, began to dive. Two monsters locked wings, came together—without a sound!

Then, as though a spell had been lifted, there came a rush of sound from the stricken ships. It grew swiftly into a howl

of wind tearing over fast-plunging wings, till the air was filled with a mad and deafening screech.

DOWN they plunged, like a flock of giant Furies. The two which had collided were now in flames, spinning down in one fiery mass. Suddenly their bombs exploded, and the whirling inferno was scattered in every direction.

“And that’s what’s going to happen if one of them hits here,” yelled Benny Sparks.

By now, searchlights were springing up from a dozen points. Cyclone Bill Garrity had dashed out of the headquarters shack, Hick Jones at his heels. The raid siren was shrieking furiously.

“Get everybody out of those end barracks,” Garrity bawled. “That first ship’s going to hit there.”

Ack emmas fled from the threatened spot. The fire squad hastily formed, ready for action, but the plunging Handley Page veered off in a cross-current of wind near the earth. With a crash that shook the ground, it struck two hundred yards away. A great blast of flame belched out, and there came a stunning roar,

“God pity the poor divils that was in her,” croaked Flanagan. He gripped Lucky’s arm with his mighty fingers. “Look, there’s two more of thim crashed together.”

“Something got the pilots,” Lucky said hoarsely. “All those ships out of control.”

“Whatever it was, we’ll never know now,” Mack Tuttle muttered somberly.

Another bomber struck, went up in a pillar of fire. For almost a minute the sky was filled with the glare of crashing ships. A Camel wobbled down and buried its nose in the ground at the edge of the

CHAPTER II SHADOW OP DEATH

drome. By the sinister light, Lucky saw two more crash to earth in a thicket beyond the field. Then a dreadful calm descended, broken only by the crackle of flames from the nearest bomber wreck,

“Detail two squads to search for those Camels,” came Garrity’s voice, husky with unwonted emotion. As Hick Jones turned to assemble the squads, he swung onto the running-board of the crash truck, which was starting for the third Camel.

Suddenly a Devildog jabbed a finger excitedly into the sky.

“There comes another one!”

Out of the shadows came a fourth Camel, wings swaying. A shout went up from the crowd of greaseballs, for the ship seemed headed straight into their midst. They scattered wildly. The Camel slued over the headquarters hutment, dipped on one wing. Ribs and spars cracked viciously as the wing tip dug into the ground. The nose dropped, and the ship came to a grinding stop in a cloud of dust.

Lucky Lane was the first to reach the pit of the half-wrecked plane. For a second he thought the pilot was dead. There was an ugly cut near the man’s temple, and his face under the trickling blood was ghastly. But as Lucky unfastened his belt, he stirred, and his eyes fluttered open in a look of panic. He stared dazedly an instant, then gave a frenzied yell.

“No, no!” he shrieked. “Don’t take me! My God, I’m not ready to die!”

Lucky touched his arm soothingly. “It’s all right—you’re safe now.”

The wild eyes twitched toward him, unseeingly.

“It’s Death!” the pilot cried in a trembling voice. “He’s got the others—he’s coming after me!”

BACK of Lucky, the staring Devil-dogs gave way for Cyclone Garrity. The big Marine major gave Lucky a significant nod. “Shock,” he said in an undertone. “Let’s get him out of there and to the dispensary.” As Lucky and Cyclone Bill reached in for him, the pilot shrank back.

“We’re not going to hurt you,” said Garrity, forcing some brandy down the pilot’s throat. The man gagged, but swallowed the fiery liquor. After a moment the dazed look in his eyes was lessened, but their sick terror grew. He stared at his wrecked ship, back to Garrity’s rugged face.

“How did I get here?” he said huskily.

“You just cracked up here, a minute ago. You came down out of control—”

The pilot stiffened. “Then it’s true! It wasn’t a dream—”

“Take it easy, son,” said Garrity. “Just tell me what happened up there.”

“It was Death! He killed them all!”

“We saw the ships fall. But what happened to them?”

The sick eyes clung to Garrity’s broad face. “The shadow—didn’t you see it?” he whispered.

“No,” said the major. “How could there be a shadow when it was already dark?”

Lucky turned, spoke in a low tone. “It was there, all right. We all saw it come down over the ships.”

“Yes, yes!” whispered the pilot, his eyes suddenly glassy again. “You saw it, but I felt it—the shadow of Death!”

The tortured face jerked toward Garrity.

“You fool, I tell you Death’s flying up there tonight! I saw him fly over them—and they died. Died, when his shadow

touched them. Then it came toward me. . . I could feel the cold wind. . . it was Death breathing. . . and I felt the shadow.” His voice sank to an almost inaudible pitch. “I wasn’t ready to die. . . I prayed. Then I saw—oh, God! There wasn’t any face—just horrible blackness, and not a sound. God help me—it’s there now, coming after me—”

The pilot leaped up, screaming, then collapsed in the cockpit and lay limp. An awe-stricken silence held the assembled men for a moment. Garrity lifted the unconscious man in his powerful arms.

“Go on over to that Camel wreck,” he told Lucky. “Then come back and report to me at the dispensary.”

Lucky swung onto the crash truck. Pug Flanagan lifted his massive bulk to the other running board as the car started. One of the Devildog motorcycle side-cars was already at the side of the crashed Camel when they reached it. Benny Sparks and Mack Tuttle became visible by the light of a working lantern.

“Didn’t think there was much chance he was alive,” said Benny, “but we dashed over here while you were at that other wreck,”

“Then the pilot’s dead?” asked Lucky.

“Yes. Queer thing, though. He isn’t bruised, to speak of. Must have been internal injuries.”

Lucky took the lantern and held it close to the dead man’s face, where Mack Tuttle and Benny had laid the body on the ground. The eyes were open in a look of dread.

“Blood on his lips,” he muttered. “You’re probably right, Benny.” But his gaze was on those open, terrified eyes.

“What do you think brought those ships down?” asked Mack Tuttle.

“I don’t know, but the pilot of that other Camel is clear crazy.” Lucky told Mack and Benny of the frightened man’s ravings.

“So he said Death was flying up there,” Benny said grimly. “Well, I guess he was right.”

“Yes, but the way he said it, it sounded as though he actually saw a black figure of some kind.”

“Did you see that dark shadow close over those ships?” Benny asked in a low tone.

“You don’t mean you actually believe—”

“I don’t know,” the wiry little Devildog said slowly. “I’ve seen some queer things since this war started. Down at Baccarat they still swear there was a bloody cross in the sky, last Christmas Eve.”

“I’ve heard that tale before,” said Lucky. “The chances are everybody was drunk.”

Pug Flanagan looked up into the darkness. “I’m still hearin’ that wailin’ sound,” he said. “I think I’ll just be goin’ back to the mess. A bit av something for me nerves—”

“You stay here with Mack, and see that the body is taken in,” directed Lucky. He motioned to Benny Sparks. “Cyclone Bill told me to bring you in with me.”

“I haven’t done anything,” began Benny, as they started for the row of huts and shops.

“That was a stall. He told me to tell you something,” Lucky explained about the word from G.H.Q.

“That means dirty work again,” said the dapper Lunatic glumly. “I was a fool ever to let the Brass Hats find out I knew Kraut lingo.”

“I can remember two or three times when it would’ve been bad if we hadn’t known it,” returned Lucky.

“Judas Priest!” exclaimed Benny, “Somebody must be in a heck of a hurry.”

A LONG official car had roared in from the highway and grated to a stop in front of headquarters, tires squealing. A man jumped out almost before the machine had stopped, and hurried inside. He was out again almost at once, an orderly scurrying along to keep up with his hasty strides. Lucky caught a glimpse of the man’s profile as he swung on by. The features were sharp, keen-cut, under the low visor of the man’s Army cap.

“Dollars to doughnuts, there’s your Intelligence officer,” growled Benny when the newcomer was out of hearing.

“He’s making for the dispensary. We’ll soon find out, for the old war horse said to come back there and report.”

“He didn’t tell me,” snapped Benny, “I’m going back and get a drink, while I’m still a free man.”

Lucky seized his arm. “No, you don’t. I’m not going to be miserable alone.”

“Fine pal you are,” complained the little Devildog.

Still grumbling, he went into the flight surgeon’s office with Lucky. Garrity and the hawk-faced officer were just emerging from the first-aid room.

“He was out of his head, obviously,” Cyclone Bill was saying.

The other man shook his head slowly. “I don’t know, major. It’s exactly the same story two other men have told—” He stopped short as he saw the two Devildog pilots.

“These are the men you wanted to see,” grunted Garrity. “That innocent-looking

bird is Lieutenant Lane, and the Beau Brummel with him is Lieutenant Sparks. Either one alone is bad enough. If you put ‘em together, it’s your own business, and I wash my hands of it.”

Shrewd gray eyes appraised the two pilots for a swift moment. “You’ve both been on Intelligence missions before, I understand?” the man asked.

“Yes, sir,” said Lucky, and Benny Sparks nodded.

“I’m Major Steele, from G-2.” Again the gray eyes probed their faces. “Whether or not you agree to take this mission, you will regard what I say as highly confidential.” He did not wait for an answer, but quickly turned and closed the door to the first-aid room. “Major Garrity, you had better hear this, too. It concerns that frightful affair which you just witnessed.”

Garrity started. “But that just happened, and Chaumont phoned more than an hour ago that you were coming.”

“This is not the first time. I was starting to tell you when these two men came in. Last night that same weird shadow was seen to hover over two Allied squadrons—and every man in those squadrons is dead.”

“Good Lord!” said the Devildog leader.

“Three of the men did not die at once after crashing,” the G-2 major went on crisply. “One shrieked in his delirium just as that poor chap in the next room did a moment ago. The other two told the same story. A black shadow from nowhere coming down over the ships and then—death.”

“Did the engines on those other ships stop, sir?” Lucky asked.

Steele’s gray eyes flitted back to his face.

“There was a strange silence— apparently more than just the engines’ stopping,” he answered, slowly. “At least, that is the report we have.”

Lucky nodded. “That’s what happened tonight, sir.” He described the way the uncanny silence had descended.

“I MUST hurry,” Steele said, when Lucky had finished. “I have two other fields to visit before midnight.” He measured Lucky, eyed Benny Sparks for a second. “You both speak German without an accent, and you both have worn Boche uniforms in dangerous missions. This one will perhaps be more perilous than any. We don’t know what this damnable thing is, but G-2 does not believe in a personal Death striking like that. Germany knows the answer to that sinister shadow. We’ve got to find it before it’s too late.”

He paused, looked at his watch.

“By midnight, a dozen German-speaking pilots, each one an ace, will meet at a place not far from here, prepared to go over the lines. I shall be there to outline the plan of action. This is not an order, but I am asking for volunteers to help strike out this menace.”

Lucky looked sidewise at Benny Sparks, to find Benny eyeing him. “If you’re damn fool enough,” Benny began, then reddened. “Beg pardon, sir—”

“Don’t mind me,” grinned the major. “I take it you two will go, then?”

“Guess you can count us in,” said Lucky.

Steele motioned toward the door. “Come along to my car. I’ll give you instructions as we go, to save time.”

“You mean we won’t need ships?” said Lucky, surprised.

“Boche ships. I’ll drive you to the meeting place.”

They went out into the gloom. As they started toward the headquarters shack, Hick Jones appeared.

“Yuh won’t get much outa them Camel pilots,” he said laconically to Cyclone Bill.

“The crash killed them?” asked Steele crisply.

The Texan peered at him through the shadows.

“It’s okay,” snapped Garrity. “This is the major from Intelligence.”

“Just wanted t’ make shore,” drawled Hick. “Fact is, one ship wasn’t hardly busted up none, but the pilot was deader’n a skinned steer.”

“You’ll take care of the bodies, major?” Steele said to Garrity.

“What’s left of them,” said Garrity gruffly. “Won’t be any use looking in those bomber wrecks, I’m afraid.”

Steele nodded, turned to the two Devildog pilots. But before he had said more than two words, there sounded the fierce putt-putt of a motorcycle, and a machine raced in from the sentry post at the highway.

As the driver braked it to a halt, the occupant of the side-car hurriedly dismounted and started for the door of Garrity’s sanctum.

“More trouble, I suppose,” grunted Cyclone Bill. He started toward the shack. As he did, the man on the duck-boards opened the door to go in. Garrity stiffened.

“What the hell is this?” he roared.

Lucky Lane followed his startled glance; then his jaw sagged. The man revealed in the office light was a second Major Steele!

At Garrity’s abrupt challenge, the man in the door spun about.

"I'm from G-2," he snapped. "I want to see the commanding officer—at once!"

THE man beside Lucky Lane swore under his breath. Then with a lightning movement he sprang for his twin. A gun gleamed in the light from the door.

"Get up your hands!" he rasped.

The newcomer jumped back from the light. At the same instant there came a swift movement from the motorcycle driver. A pistol gripped in one fist, he leaped toward Major Steele.

"Halt or I'll shoot!" he barked.

With a roar like an angry bull, Cyclone Garrity charged. Simultaneously, the door banged shut and left the tarmac in darkness. A gun spurted crimson, and someone swore savagely. A fierce scuffling followed, and there came the clatter of metal on wood. Lucky Lane sprang toward a fallen gun. Someone plunged against him, knocked him off balance.

A booted foot lashed out and landed near his solar plexus. Gasping for breath, Lucky managed to tackle the owner of the foot. A solid body crashed to the ground.

"Damn yore ornery hide!" bawled Hick Jones.

"Look out, you idiot!" gasped Lucky,

"Oh, it's you," growled the Texan, loosening his hold. "Why don't yuh wear a bell—"

"I've got the lousy Kraut!" came Cyclone Bill's stentorian accents. "Make a light, somebody!"

Hick Jones struck a match; then an orderly ran to the door and pulled it open, shedding a yellow rectangle upon the scene. Cyclone Garrity was revealed astride an angry figure.

"Where's the other one?" demanded Lucky. "The driver was—"

"You halfwit!" gasped the man under Garrity. "I'm Steele. You're letting that spy get away."

"Yeah?" said Garrity. "Try again. I grabbed you the second I saw—"

Swish! From far up the line a rocket sizzled into the sky.

"What's that?" thundered Garrity. "Get after that bird, Hick."

"Let me up, you fathead!" snarled the man on the duckboards. "You're caving in my ribs."

Garrity arose dubiously, yanked his captive erect, without relaxing his tight grip.

"I'm taking no chances. Maybe you're the right one—maybe you're not."

"All right, but grab those others!" grated his prisoner.

Men were already swarming toward the line. Suddenly there was a mocking laugh from the direction of the gate.

"Good-bye, *Schweine!* Next time I shall have better luck,"

Gears crashed, and a car tore for the road.

"Blast his hide, that's my car!" shouted the man in Garrity's grasp.

Lucky Lane whirled toward a motorcycle which stood a few yards away. But before he could kick the starter, there came a swiftly increasing howl of wings. He spun around, saw another rocket go up, this time out in the middle of the field. By the flare, as the rocket burst, he saw an Albatross two-seater dive for a landing.

"Come on," he flung at Benny Sparks.

"But the spy got away in that car," gasped Benny, racing after him.

"That was the driver. It was a trick to get attention away from this Boche."

“Step on it!” bawled a voice some yards ahead. A rickety truck bounced across the line and started for the center of the field. Then three or four torch-pots sputtered into an orange glow as ack emmas hurriedly lit the waste.

The Albatross was taxiing hastily to where a lone figure stood. Lucky stopped short.

“He’s going to make it!” Without another word, he wheeled toward the first hangar. Excited greaseballs swiftly rushed out a Spad, whirled the prop as he jumped for the switch. As the motor caught, he heard the roar of the Boche ship’s engine opened full for a quick take-off. He jazzed the throttle, warming the cold engine madly.

Nearby, Benny Sparks was fuming around a Spad which had tangled wings with another in the dark hangar. Lucky whipped the throttle open. Listened to the roar of the Hispano, idled it with a bang.

“Jerk ‘em!” he yelled at the mechanics.

“You’ll break your neck, sir. That cold engine—”

“Yank ‘em, I said!”

The ack emmas sprang right and left. Lucky sent the Spad thundering for the field. A searchlight went on, by the engineering hut, slashed frantically through the sky. He saw the Albatross skid out of the beam, heard the ground guns hammer furiously as the light flicked again. Then the Spad lifted clear and he bent over the stick.

CHAPTER III THE DROME OF SILENCE

STRAIGHT down the drome at twenty feet, ears strained for the note of his half-warmed engine. Lucky drove the howling

Spad. Once it missed, then caught again with a roar. The trees at the other end loomed out. He pulled up, suddenly whipped into a corkscrew chandelle.

The Albatross had pitched back to escape the light, was climbing steeply. Lucky tripped his guns, warmed them with two quick bursts. Eyes riveted to his sights, he charged in toward the blurred shape of the Boche two-seater. The Albatross banked suddenly, and he knew he had been seen. Red streaks lanced from the cowl. He flung out of the tracers, rolled back toward the blind angle underneath. The nose of the other ship went up sharply, kicked off at a right angle. For a second Lucky was under the rear-pit guns. Two scarlet eyes blazed out of the shadows, stabbed their venom into the Spad’s right wing. Lucky drilled wildly below the zooming ship, cut back for one fleeting burst. The Vickers chattered at his touch, spat red-hot slugs up into the Boche ship’s belly.

The Albatross slued as though crippled, caught itself and reversed on grinding wings. Lucky backsticked in a dizzy split and stayed under the blind-spot. Again, hot steel scorched from the smoking Vickers up at the two-seater’s middle.

Suddenly the searchlight from the field leaped up and crossed his pit. Blinded for a second, Lucky let the ship hurtle on, one hand up in front of his eyes. The light shifted, and he flung a quick look upward. But the Albatross was not there.

Without even stopping to spot it, he banked hastily. The swift action saved his life. Two cherry-red streams flashed past the pit as he whirled. He ducked, stood the Spad on its wing tips. A gray shadow danced in front of him for a second; then the Albatross Immelmanned. Guns

spouting, he followed through. Taut fingers closed on the trips, and the ravenous belts thrashed eagerly through the Vickers.

The blurred shape before him darted madly from side to side. He closed in, guns stabbing for a kill. It was plain the rear pit held a dead or helpless man. There had been no fire.

Br-r-r-r-t-t-t-t-t! Straight into his prop beat a vicious torrent of slugs. Sparkling tracer cut through his wings; then the prop blew up with a roar. The Hispano revved into a crazy scream. He cut the switch, nosed into a dive.

As the Spad plunged he had a brief glimpse of the pivoting two-seater. A figure was dimly visible, leaning back from the front pit, gripping the rear-mount guns.

Lucky swore. The rear-pit man was out, all right. But that nervy devil in front had snatched time for a brief burst with the back-office guns, while he handled the fleeing ship.

"You blamed fool," Lucky fumed at himself. If he hadn't taken that chance, if he'd stuck to the blind spot, he would have nailed the ship.

Then he managed a crooked grin. He was lucky to be alive. Funny how that name seemed to carry him through. Some time he might get a surprise.

He pulled up at two hundred feet, grazed the middle hangar, and plumped down to a landing. The Spad trundled in toward the line, stopped. He cocked an ear upward, heard the faint drone of the receding Albatross. Then a swarm of Devildogs surrounded him.

"It's proud av ye I am, me b'y," boomed the familiar voice of Pug Flanagan. "If I

could only have gotten a ship before the Ould Man—"

"Before the Old Man what?" snapped the Devildog chief, shouldering his way through the crowd.

"Ahem," said Pug. "Before the honorable C.O. decided against the matter on the grounds—"

"Tight or sober, I said you were grounded for a week," growled Garrity. He turned to Lucky Lane. "Well, I see you've been working your guardian angel overtime again."

Lucky surveyed his wrecked propeller and the bullet-torn ship. "I'm afraid it'll need a little fixing up, at that, sir," he said.

"Get out of there and come into headquarters," rapped Garrity. "You, too—where's that half-pint Sparks gone?"

"I think he went to the mess," a Devildog volunteered. "He was cussin' mad over that ship he couldn't get out, and when he get's cussin' mad—"

"You don't have to tell me," rasped Garrity. "Flanagan, go bring that crazy devil to headquarters—sober! And see to it you don't stop for anything, either."

"Indade, it'll be a pleasure, sir," boomed Pug.

Garrity stalked off with Lucky at his elbow.

AS they entered the major's sanctum, a somewhat disheveled figure turned from a map on the wall. Lucky's eyes fell on the keen-cut features of Major Steele, just at the moment slightly embellished by a black eye. Then he noted a puffy spot near Cyclone Bill's left optic. He started to smile, but changed his mind.

"I see he got away," said the Intelligence major, with a tart look at Garrity.

“Yes,” said Cyclone Bill with equal asperity. “But you can’t blame it on Lieutenant Lane. He put on a hell of a scrap—”

“I wasn’t thinking of him,” said Steele gruffly.

“How in Hades was I to know?” demanded Garrity. “You yourself admitted he was made up just like you.”

“Well, it’s over now,” said Steele. He felt his eyes gingerly. “Next time I come on this drome, I’ll wear a suit of armor.”

“You’re not the only one that got marked,” growled Garrity. “That Heinie almost busted my jaw. I’d like—” he stopped, his eyes on Steele’s right hand, which bore signs of recent use. “Hmm,” he said thoughtfully.

“Guess we’d better get on with this thing,” said Steele with sudden haste, “Where’s Lieutenant Sparks?”

“He’ll be here in a jiffy,” said Lucky Lane.

“We may as well meet him and save time.” Steele picked up his cap. “Thanks for the loan of your car, major.”

“See that I get it back,” growled Garrity. “The last time I let a Brass Hat have anything—”

“I’ll remember it,” said Steele. “I’ve got something to remember it by.”

They gazed at each other a second, then slowly grinned. Steele followed Lucky out to the walk. After a few seconds, Benny appeared.

“Where’s Flanagan?” thundered Cyclone Bill from the door.

“Why—uh—he was feeling a bit faint, sir,” stuttered Benny.

“He’ll be more than faint when I get through with him.” Garrity started fiercely for the mess, “When I give an order—”

“Plenty of action on this field,” observed Steele, looking after the major’s retreating back. “All right, let’s be going.”

They climbed into Garrity’s Buick, the pride of the big Devildog’s heart. The G-2 major took the wheel, and after a brief halt at the sentry post, drove down the highway.

“That was some fight you made,” he said to Lucky. “You’d have had them if it hadn’t been for those fools with the searchlight.”

“I got too anxious,” said Lucky. He described how the Boche in the front pit had tricked him. “But the devil had guts, at that.”

“Oh, he has nerve, all right,” muttered Steele. “It took nerve, making that play tonight. I should have been on guard, for we had a report that he was in this sector.”

“Then you know who he is?” exclaimed Lucky.

“Unless I’m badly mistaken, he’s Franz von Korlin, one of the most dangerous men in German Intelligence—and just as clever. Von Korlin is the only one I know who has the brains and ability to pull a masquerade like that.”

“He certainly slipped up, hitting the drome the same time you were there,” commented Benny Sparks.

“That was no fault in his plan,” said Steele crisply. He took a turn with a racing skid that would have made Garrity groan for his prized car. “I intended seeing you two men earlier, but changed my plans. Von Korlin knew my schedule perfectly—and I’ll look into that when I get back to Chaumont,” he added grimly. “It’s the second time there’s been a leak like that.”

HE slowed the car as the dim headlights showed a hairpin turn, jammed down the gas again as the machine swung.

“I still don’t see what he was after,” stated Lucky.

“He was after you two. I called back to the other dromes I’d visited, as soon as that two-fisted major of yours decided I wasn’t a Boche. And I found that this spy had been following right on my heels, pretending to have made a sudden change in plans.

He countermanded my orders in each case and told the pilots to go to the 71st Pursuit field. He’d have done the same thing for you two.”

“What would that get him?” demanded Benny Sparks.

“I don’t know, but you can bet he wasn’t going to hold an old ladies’ tea there. I think he’d have shown up, once he got those German-speaking pilots together, and given them flying orders that would have led straight into a trap, somewhere in Germany.”

“Then he knew this mission was coming,” muttered Lucky. “That leak at G-2 must be bad.”

“He’d have guessed that much, anyway,” said Steele. He looked around at the two Devildogs. “You two realize you’re going to be in Germany—technically spies—inside of a few hours?” he asked.

“Sure,” said Lucky. “But what’s the use of worrying about it now? I’d get such cold feet I couldn’t kick a rudder bar.”

“Listen to Horatio Alger,” jeered Benny. “I can hear your knees knocking together clear back here.”

Lucky ignored this loftily. “You said von Korlin would know about this mission, sir,” he said to Steele.

The major’s sharp features sobered. “Naturally, the Boche would expect us to send over spies in a hurry, after what’s happened. They know we’ve lost most of our little air unit at G-2, so we’d have to turn to men like you. This was a cold-blooded scheme to blot all such pilots out at once, to prevent our getting any further.”

“I see. But this bird von Korlin must have timed it to the second, the way that Albatross showed up.”

“Right. That ship was probably hovering well above every field he visited, ready to pick him up if things went wrong. And the driver of the motorcycle was no dumb Hun, either. He pulled that stunt as though it had been practiced.”

Lucky fell silent. In spite of his earlier manner, he had no illusions about what they were doing. The Germans would be looking for Allied agents, scrutinizing every pilot who seemed the least suspicious. Some of the men who went over on this mission would not return.

The major put on the brakes abruptly. “Here’s the turn to the 71st. We’ll have to stop here and collect four pilots that I didn’t catch in time when I called back. It’s only a short run from the 71st to where we’ve hidden the Boche ships, anyway.”

In a few seconds they were halted by sentries at a crossroad. Steele identified himself, drove on through a winding lane bordered with poplars. Suddenly the drone of engines sounded from ahead. It increased to a steady roar as they drew nearer the field.

“That’s odd,” said Steele. “Sounds like the whole squadron warming up—but this isn’t a bat outfit.”

“Must be an emergency order,” hazarded Benny from the rear. “They’ve

got flares out, so they must be going places, all right.”

They had come to a little rise, and the end of the drome was visible through the trees. Half a dozen flares were flickering in the faint breeze. Back of them planes were discernible, drawn up on the line with propellers whirling. Men were dashing about, and in a moment Lucky Lane spied trucks moving along in the shadows back of the flares.

“Hell’s bells, they’re moving out!” he exclaimed.

Steele stopped abruptly, stared out around the spattered windshield.

“You’re right. Here comes a lorry. Now what the devil—”

The lorry rolled toward them, slowed so the two cars could pass on the narrow road. A sergeant hopped from the seat beside the truck driver, ran toward the major.

“Better not go in there,” he said hastily. “We just got orders to abandon the field.”

“What’s the matter?” demanded Steele, tensely.

The sergeant looked at the major’s gold leaves.

“Dunno, sir. But the C.O. said to haul out and never mind the equipment—”

“Get on there!” bawled a voice from behind the lorry. A horn blasted raucously. The sergeant dashed back to the truck, and it rumbled away. Behind it came a battered flivver, containing several officers. Steele climbed out of the Buick and hailed the other car. It stopped, and the major was almost at the driver’s side when he abruptly halted and stared toward the field.

As Lucky saw his taut face in the dim glow of the headlights, he looked hastily toward the line. A little knot of mechanics was running wildly about, and he saw one man point frantically into the sky.

Suddenly there came a moaning wail, barely audible above the roar of the idling motors. Two or three of the ships sprang out from the line, engines blasting.

Something, hardly more than a black blur, moved in the sky high above the drome. Then swiftly the light of the flares began to fade. Lucky froze. A weird darkness was descending, like a great dark shadow. . .

“My God!” he whispered.

One of the taxiing ships had lifted as though for a frenzied take-off. Ten feet in the air it slowed, plunged back to earth. It struck on the nose—but there was no sound of a crash.

With startling swiftness, every sound from that drome had died out. For a few seconds more, Lucky could see the figures of men staggering away from the line, falling to the ground; ships moving without a sound, then faltering to a stop.

Then came a swift, heavy blackness, as though simultaneously all of the flares had been blotted out. An eerie, whistling sound filled the air. Lucky felt a coldness sweep over him. A cold wind blew past him, sucking at his breath.

CHAPTER IV HAUNTED PILOTS

AT the edge of the drome, hardly two hundred feet away, a tottering figure appeared in the dim headlights of the Buick. He staggered toward them. His lips were moving wildly, but no sound came. Lucky pushed open the door at his side, tried to climb out. His body was suddenly weak. He stumbled, went to his knees by the running board.

“I can’t get my breath,” came a hoarse cry behind him. He hardly recognized Benny’s voice, in that thin whisper.

The tottering figure before the car’s lights took another step forward. Then, like a puppet suddenly released from its strings, he sagged face down on the ground.

The whistling moan faded out, and the coldness left the air. Lucky drew a long breath into his starved lungs, felt cold perspiration drip from his brow.

The shadow seemed thinner, like the darkness of ordinary night.

Lucky tensed. There seemed to be something moving in the blackness above, like a blurred ebony shape—yet not a shape. It was more like a moving shadow—a shadow that moaned.

Somewhere, a man screamed. The sound struck into Lucky like a knife. He twitched around, saw it was the wretch who had fallen before the Buick’s lights. He was writhing, shrieking at the top of his voice. Lucky forced his numbed legs to move. He reached the man, bent over him quickly.

“I’m dying,” burst from the stricken man’s lips. There was blood on them, Lucky saw. “It’s got me. . . I’m done for.”

Someone else knelt beside Lucky. He looked up, saw Major Steele. The G-2 man’s face was gray, and it had a haunted expression.

“Any sign of a wound on him?” he asked in a low voice.

“No, sir—except his lips.”

The man on the ground ceased to scream. Lucky looked back, saw that he had fainted. Steele put one ear to the man’s breast.

“Heart sounds bad,” he muttered. “But I think he’ll pull through.”

By this time the men from the flivver had gathered around, Steele singled out a frightened-looking captain.

“Leave one of your men to take care of this chap, then bring the rest in your car.”

“Wh-what are you going to do?” stammered the captain. His fat face was drenched with sweat, and his eyes were bulging.

“We’re going back to that field, of course,” snapped the G-2 major.

“But—but that’s madness,” whispered the captain. “We’ll all be killed. Look—there isn’t a soul moving!”

He pointed an unsteady hand toward the line, which was just barely visible in the diffused glow from the Buick’s lights. Steele went across and switched on the bright lights.

A GRUESOME scene lay revealed. Strewn around like so many bundles of straw were the bodies of the mechanics who had been near the ships. A pilot hung halfway out of his cockpit, arms dangling. The three ships which had started to take off had stopped, one partly crashed, the other two silent like all the others.

Not a sound came from the drome. The flares had been extinguished, and under the car’s headlights the corpse-strewn tarmac looked like a battlefield.

“See?” said the fat captain, hoarsely. “They’re dead, every last one of them.”

“Maybe so,” said Major Steele. “But whatever got them seems to have gone.” He paused, “Why were you ordered to abandon the field?”

“The C.O. got a rush order, straight from the Chief of Air Service. Something had wiped out another squadron twenty minutes ago, near Bar-le-Duc. It must have been this same thing.”

“Where’s the C.O. now?”

“Back there,” whispered the captain.

Steele measured him coldly. “I won’t order anybody to go with me,” he said, “but nobody leaves this spot till I get back!”

“I don’t have to take any order from you,” began the other man.

“Think again. I’m from G.H.Q., and if you pull out of here, you’ll be in Blois by tomorrow night.”

Steele strode toward the car. Lucky Lane and Benny Sparks had climbed in as a matter of course. One of the group from the flivver pulled open the rear door and joined them.

“I’ll go along—if a kiwi will do,” he said gruffly. There was a look of contempt on his homely, raw-boned features as he looked back at the others.

“Thank God there are still a few men in the Army,” grunted Steele. He started the car, looked over his shoulder. “You were on duty with the 71st?”

“Engineer officer—name’s Brown,” said the other man. “Second lieutenant,” he added as an afterthought.

“I asked because I was expecting to find four pilots here—two from the 36th and two from the 310th Aero Observation.”

“You’ll find them,” said Brown. “They were getting ready to take off with the others. The C.O. pushed them into service to take four of our extra Spads.”

“Poor devils,” Steele said. He was looking out toward the ships which had started to take off. As they reached the makeshift road which ran in front of the barracks and hangars, he stopped the car.

“Spread out and see if you can find anyone alive,” he said in a low voice.

THE two Devildogs went along the line, separated near the middle. Lucky climbed up on the step of the nearest Spad. The pilot had fallen sidewise, his head against one arm as though he were sleeping. But as Lucky scratched a match and cupped it to light the pit he saw a look of dread on the man’s pallid face. He bent closer, narrowed his eyes.

Again he saw a crimson foam upon partly open lips. It was the third time that evening.

He hurriedly inspected the other ships on his allotted half of the line. All the pilots were dead, and in every case there was blood on the victim’s lips. Two or three were bleeding at the nostrils.

He heard Steele’s voice and went back to the first barracks, which contained the headquarters offices. Benny and Lieutenant Brown arrived at the same time. The report was the same from all. No one was alive.

“I was afraid it would be that,” said Steele soberly.

“I saw something a bit odd,” said Brown, hesitantly. “I guess it’s silly to mention it—”

“Never mind that. Out with it.”

Brown reached inside his leather coat pocket and brought out a small round object. Lucky stared, and Major Steele gave a snort.

“An apple! This is no time for jokes,”

“I’m not joking. Do you see anything unusual about that apple, sir?”

“No,” snapped Steele. “It’s just an ordinary ripe apple.”

“That’s it,” said Brown slowly. “It was all shrunk up and withered—before this thing happened tonight.”

“What are you talking about?” said Steele impatiently.

"I had some apples in my cubicle," the homely lieutenant explained in a solemn tone. "Tonight I noticed they'd got stale and were withered up. I was going to throw 'em out. Just now I was in there—and this is one."

"Imagination," said Steele tersely. "We've no time to waste on apples. I've got to get in touch with G.H.Q. at once."

He turned quickly and opened a door in the middle of the barracks-administration hutment. Brown turned to Lucky Lane as they followed Steele inside.

"I don't imagine things," he said doggedly.

The major was striding ahead, lighting his way with matches.

"I've got a flashlight here," said Brown. "If you wait a second—hold on, that's the wrong way, sir!"

A strained note had come into his voice. Steele halted abruptly, staring ahead of him. As Lucky reached the turn, he saw the reason.

In a small alcove stood an ordinary Army coffin, supported by wooden horses. Candles had been burning at the head, but, like the flares on the drome, they had gone out. Even by the weak light of Steele's match, Lucky could see the face of the man who lay there. He shivered. He had seen dead men before, but there was something strangely repellent about that face.

In a moment he realized what it was. It did not look dead. The cheeks had a queer look of health. . .

"Good Lord!" whispered Brown. He backed away, suddenly ashen.

"What is it?" said Steele. His voice, too, had a tense note.

"Larsen's face," said Brown huskily. "It's—it's the way it used to be—before he died."

"What?" said Steele. "I don't understand—"

"Larsen died of pneumonia. It took him in a hurry, and they didn't dare get him to a hospital." Brown's dazed eyes were still on the dead man's face. "He was to be buried tomorrow. But his face—it wasn't like that"

"What do you mean?"

"He'd suffered. It was all pinched!—thin—" With an unintelligible exclamation, Brown turned and stumbled up the corridor.

MAJOR STEELE gave a last look at the coffin, motioned the two Devildogs to follow as he hurried after Brown.

"Wait," he called after the engineer officer.

Brown slowed near the entrance to the commanding officer's room, turned and jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

"There's the office," he said harshly. "I'll be outside."

Steele searched the man's homely face for a second. "You weren't afraid to come on this drome. Why the sudden change?"

Brown stared at him.

"Wasn't that enough?" he whispered, his eyes going toward the alcove where the coffin now lay hidden in the dark. "You thought I was crazy about those apples." His voice thickened. "They were withered, dead-looking. So was Larsen's face. Now they're fresh—and his face looks like he's alive! I'm scared, and I'm going to get out of here!"

There was something about his terrible earnestness that went through Lucky Lane and turned him cold. Even Steele had no

answer. Brown stumbled out into the night. Benny Sparks met Lucky's gaze, and for once there was no bantering gleam in the little Devildog's eyes.

"Come into the office," Steele said grimly. He lit another match, found a lamp and touched the flame to the wick. As he replaced the glass chimney, he glanced up at Lucky. "Odd," he muttered. "That chimney is still warm. It must have been burning right up to the minute when—it happened."

Lucky's eyes riveted on those of Steele.

"Major, what do you think killed these men?"

"I only wish I knew," said Steele slowly. A curious look crossed his sharp features. "Like Brown, I'm beginning to be a little—afraid."

He picked up the phone before Lucky could say any more. The first two connections he plugged did not answer, but the third brought quick response.

"Brigade?" said Steele. "Give me General Myers, and step on it."

Almost at once the general answered in a voice which was audible throughout the room.

"Seventy-first? Why in the name of Lucifer haven't you cleared out?"

"One moment, sir," Steele said curtly. "I have bad news. Practically the entire squadron has been destroyed—"

"My God!" moaned the general. "Another one!" There was a pause; then he spoke again, but in a low voice so that Lucky did not hear.

"This is Major Steele," said the G-2 officer. He explained what had happened. There was another pause, during which Lucky saw Steele's eyes widen. Then the major slowly nodded.

"Yes, sir. I'm going there now. But we'd better not discuss that on the phone. I'm afraid of leaks."

A few seconds later he put down the phone. His gray eyes held a sickened look as he faced the two Devil-dogs.

"It's striking up and down the Front," he told them hurriedly. "Two more squadrons—one of ours and a French *chasse* outfit. Another pilot crashed, screaming that Death was flying. The story's gone like wildfire through the whole sector."

"The black shadow?" said Benny-Sparks tensely.

"Yes, and they're calling it the Shadow of Death." Steele stood up. "It's almost midnight. We'll have to be going. I want this Boche ship group over the lines before dawn, so it will seem to be a German dawn patrol till you get in the back areas and separate. And there are uniforms, forged credentials, and other things to attend to."

He led the way out to the car. The two Devildogs followed, but Lucky Lane walked mechanically, unseeing. One thought kept pounding through his brain—what horrible thing was this which struck the living down and made the face of a dead man appear alive again?

CHAPTER V DEATH USES SPANDAUS

STEADILY, the eight Boche ships droned up from the hidden G-2 field. Lucky Lane, flying at point, hunched down in the Fokker pit and glanced at his instruments. The German names on the radiolite dials seemed to mock him, reminding him of the part he played.

A spy! It was an ugly word. Then his eyes narrowed grimly. Uglier still was that

erie black shadow which had spread its sinister death up and down the Front. Against that gruesome threat, any means was justified.

No searchlights poked up at them as they climbed. Major Steele had taken care of that, flashing word to batteries along their course.

A minute later he peered down into the gloom, searching for a grayer spot on the rights—the Devildog field. Almost unconsciously, he let the Fokker’s nose swing a few degrees to pass above the drome. It might be the last time. . .

He started, for suddenly lights had flashed down on the Devildog field. Instinctively, he nosed down, then jerked back the stick with a growl. No matter what it was, he couldn’t go down now. Tonight he wasn’t a Devildog. He was a spy.

A flare blazed up as he gazed down at the drome. He wiped his oil-smearred goggles, stared down intently. A ship was taking off hastily, then another, right on the tail of the first. More flares winked. The two ships darted past the torches, disappeared in the darkness. And then abruptly the flares were put out.

Lucky Lane swore to himself and settled back in his pit. The Devildog drome must be swarming with Boche spies tonight. That business had all the appearance of a hasty getaway.

The Boche ships reached ten thousand feet. Lucky leveled out. They were nearing the Front, and there was no sense in freezing by going for ceiling. He watched the broken red scar of the lines sweep under his wings. Star-shells shot up and burst under the formation. The ships spread out, followed Lucky’s zigzag routine.

The Front fell behind, and a hint of gray crept into the dark blue. The other ships had crept in close again. Lucky counted the minutes. It would not be long before each man would be on his own, stringing up and down the Boche lines.

T-t-t-t-t! T-t-t-t-t! Two quick, fierce bursts ripped from guns somewhere behind Lucky, and tracers chopped past him into space. He pulled up savagely, thinking the shots came from one of the German ships he was leading. Then his jaw dropped.

Two Spads were charging in recklessly, Vickers blazing. And in the graying light he caught the blur of Marine insignia! The two ships which had taken off had followed the formation. The pilots thought they were Boche!

THE spy-ships had whipped out wildly at first sign of attack. One whirled with Spandaus aflame.

“Hold it, you fool!” shrieked Lucky, as though the pilot could hear. He hurdled the pivoting Fokker, blanked off its fire with a crazy dive past its guns. One of the Spads leaped in. Lucky rolled hastily out of the stabbing tracers, kicked in close to the ship.

A massive figure loomed up in the pit of the Spad, hair whipping in the wind. Then a big round face, little more than a whitish blur, jerked in Lucky’s direction.

“Pug!” howled Lucky.

The Spad pin-wheeled, and a load of Vickers slugs gouged through the Fokker’s wing. Lucky flung the Boche ship into a screeching Immelman, led the Irishman away from the rest of his flock. The other Spad zoomed, let loose a long burst. The tracers wavered into space, snaked back and neatly drilled the tip of Pug Flanagan’s

rudder. The giant Irishman jumped up in his pit and shook a menacing fist.

Lucky groaned. The damned fool hadn't even fastened his belt! He must be tight. And nobody else but Mack Tuttle could be in that other Spad, wobbling around the sky.

He banked dizzily and plunged back toward the Front. If he could lure those two idiots away from the rest, get them started in full chase, he could lose them and then turn back.

As he whirled, Pug's guns hammered again. Lucky pitched frantically into a chandelle, darted off in a half-roll at the top. Pug was bad enough sober, but under the magic spell of cognac he was a fighting fool. Abruptly, the crackling tracers from behind ceased to lance past Lucky's wings. He twisted around in the pit, started as a parachute flare lit up half a mile away. One of the spy-pilots had cut it loose, was diving madly to one side as though. . .

"God!" whispered Lucky, in horror.

A shadow was coming over that drifting flare. Against it something moved, and the shadow deepened. One of the spy-ships went up on its tail, stalled and slowly spun. Then the light of the flare was blotted out as though by a spectral hand.

Hardly knowing what he did, Lucky whirled the roaring Fokker. With a furious climb, he sent it above that now dark spot where the flare had shone. Back of him, one of the Spad's guns rattled for a moment. He did not swerve. He had seen—something. Something moving above that blur of darkness.

Through the gray of first dawn he saw it scudding along—a black and sinister thing that looked like a ship, yet not like a ship. For the wings and the tail were shapeless.

He seemed to be looking through them. The whole thing was a blur.

But it flew! He forced back the mounting panic within him, clamped down on the Spandau trips. The twin-guns snarled, and he saw the ruddy streaks flit toward that hurtling blur.

Into that flitting darkness the tracers probed—and ended! Lucky gave a wild shout. It was solid! The thing was a ship, after all. Recklessly he closed in, a madness in his veins.

The blurred shape suddenly turned. With incredible speed, it swept in toward the hurtling Fokker. Lucky kicked away from the other ship's nose. For an instant they flew almost side by side. With bulging eyes, Lucky stared at the misshapen wing. Dark as pitch, it seemed to be made of matted black fungi that streamed in the wind. It was like something raised from the sea, to which great masses of seaweed clung with a greedy hold.

Even from the rim of the pit there streamed that matted black mass. It moved—and became part of the shroud of a black figure seated there!

Lucky's hand turned to ice on the stick. The figure had turned, revealing a dead-black cowl.

But there was no face within it! Only a horrible blackness, a ghastly dark emptiness!

WITH a broken cry, Lucky hurled the Fokker away from that apparition. But the blurred shape moved behind him, raced in on those hideous wings. Something seemed to snap in Lucky's mind.

He was trapped! But before it got him, he would crash that horrible monster.

The Fokker screamed, came about in a frenzied twist. The black shape lurched, sheered up in panicky haste. Through the fading gloom, Lucky saw a black arm upraised in a savage gesture. Then the ship of that faceless creature whipped about and guns blazed through the propeller!

Lucky Lane's amazement was almost his finish. Death—using Spandau guns!

He awoke in a split second before the slugs crashed home. Lead spattered over his instruments, ripped the crash-pad before him. He rolled in wild haste, felt the Fokker shake as the fusillade raked off through the wing.

The black ship churned on through behind him. Lucky snapped about in a vertical bank, unleashed his Spandaus again. A murderous blast sprayed into the matted black mass which streamed from the death-ship's wing. The cowed figure crouched low. Lucky flicked his controls, and the pounding burst dropped to the turtleback, edged forward toward the pit.

The black ship swerved, but he clung to its tail like a leech. The tracers were almost in the pit. He stiffened, and the coldness came back around his heart. His bullets had hit at the back of the pit—but that shrouded figure flew on!

A sudden madness flamed into Lucky's brain. He locked down the trips, and bent the full fiery hell of his guns on that crouching figure. The Spandaus ran red-hot, but he kept them snarling. That damned thing had to die! It must be human.

Through the gloom he saw it quiver, saw the black cowl twitch and crumple. A gasping cry of relief came to his lips—and froze there. For the black ship was wheeling swiftly, and its guns were flaming again!

Panic surged through his brain as he saw that headless figure. They were right. That thing was Death.

Wings howled suddenly from his right. A Spad charged in, and the crisp hard rattle of Vickers cut through the screech of the ships. The black ship flung to one side, and another Spad appeared, swaying in crookedly, one gun spitting erratically.

Pug and Mack Tuttle, back in the fight! It was like a dash of cold water to Lucky Lane. His seething brain cleared. Together, they could down that. . .

Crack! The compass bowl fractured before his eyes, broke into a hundred pieces. He swore. Pug was firing at him!

AS he lurched out of range, he saw the black ship drive at Mack Tuttle. He groaned as the guns of that headless figure chopped close to Mack's bald crown. Splinters flew from the Spad's center struts. The chunky Devildog pulled up for an Immelmann. There was a roar, and his whirling prop went to pieces under a burst. The crippled Spad nosed down.

Like two fiends, Lucky and Pug tore in at the ebony ship. For a second the sinister figure fought back. Then with a frantic renversement it plunged away in the shadows. Mercedes roaring, Lucky went after it. One last spurt blazed from Pug Flanagan's Vickers; then the Irishman dived after Mack.

One of the Fokker's guns had jammed. Lucky snatched at the charging handle, but the Spandau was jammed hard and fast. He held up his fire on the other, trying to close the gap on the fleeing ship. The mystery plane was hurtling for the ground, almost lost in the gloom. Lucky wiped hot oil from his goggles, grimly followed his quarry.

It was darker close to the earth. The creature was trying to shake him off. He saw it pull up at two hundred feet, bank sharply off to the south. Engine wide open, he bored after it. The shapeless black wings loomed closer. He felt for his trips. The left gun shook, and the fuzzy red streak from its snout plucked at the black ship's tail. Something tore free from that shapeless, streaming mass. He fired again, and more of the matted stuff whirled loose and flew into space.

The tail controls of a normal ship were partially revealed. Lucky's jaw tightened. Then it was some damned masquerade.

A red flare swished up from the pit of the mystery ship. Lucky jerked the stick, and his panting Spandau raked that uplifted arm. The black arms writhed for an instant. Then the ebony plane dived madly to the left, toward the heart of a gloomy forest.

Skimming almost in the top of the trees, it raced toward a spot in the center. Lucky pulled up, stared ahead through the graying dawn. There was a clearing, irregular in shape, in the middle of that forest. He could just make it out. It must be the base for that death-ship, for it was the only available landing place in sight. If he could make sure, get back with word to a bombing squadron. . .

Then he groaned at a sudden discovery. Mack Tuttle was gliding toward that lone clearing, and Pug was landing behind him. If it was really a German base, they would be captured—unless he could save them, could hold off the Boche while Mack swung onto one wing of Pug's Spad.

He banked toward the two gliding Spads. Suddenly Mack turned, pitched the crippled plane toward the opposite side of the clearing. A burst ripped from Pug

Flanagan's guns; then the Irishman charged after his comrade Lunatic. Lucky zoomed above the trees and strained his eyes to see down into the field. One glance confirmed his fears.

Lights were flickering, down in the deep shadows by the edge of the clearing. He could vaguely see a car move out, speed toward the spot where Mack was landing. More lights went on, one a shielded fan of yellow that illuminated part of the clearing. As Lucky dived toward the Spads, he saw the black mystery ship sweep down toward the lighted area. Suddenly one wing dropped, and the black ship started to spin. The wing came up again; then abruptly the plane slipped into the ground.

A score of figures dashed into the fan of light and ran toward the wreck, but Lucky had no time to look further. Mack's ship was on the ground, ground-looping to a hasty stop. As he dipped toward the spot, Pug brought his Spad down a hundred yards from Mack. The big Irishman was out on the step before the ship stopped moving. His long legs leaped over the ground to the side of Mack's plane, where the chunky Lunatic was wobbling to the ground.

At one sweep, the giant Irishman dragged Mack from the pit and set him on the ground. But before he had hauled his befuddled companion more than twenty feet, there came the quick spurt of Lugers. The German car was bearing down swiftly, pistols barking from the hands of men on the running board.

Lucky kicked the Fokker's nose past the tail of Mack's Spad and tripped his remaining Spandau. There was a single brief burst, and the thrashing belt ran out. With an oath, Lucky let go the trips and dived. The Fokker rocked in an up-draft at

the edge of the clearing. He kicked into the sudden slip, pulled up sharply, but the damage had been done. The maneuver, intended to halt the approaching car with a threat of head-on collision, had sent the ship into Pug's path. The Irishman jumped back as the Fokker howled down over his head. In that moment a squad of Germans erupted from the car.

For a second Pug and Mack Tuttle vanished in a scramble of charging Boche. Then a *feldgrau* figure went staggering back, and another pitched to the ground. A gun-butt flashed up—and the Luger whisked to the earth thirty feet away, as a mighty fist connected with its owner's jaw. Then a second car dashed up, and the two Devildogs disappeared under an avalanche of Germans.

CHAPTER VI SECRET OF THE SPECTRE

SICK at heart, Lucky Lane climbed up and aimlessly circled for a minute. Pug and Mack captured—probably dead—and Benny. Good Heaven, Benny had been under that deadly black shadow. He had been with those other poor Yanks.

A grim, steely light came into Lucky's usually audacious blue eyes. He was the only one left of that crazy quartet—but they would be avenged.

He looked down, and a startled look crossed his oil-smearred face. The Boche soldiers were dragging two figures toward those cars. Pug and Mack were still alive!

At the same instant, an inspiration whirled into Lucky's mind. Impulsively, he pulled back the throttle, sent the bullet-torn Fokker toward the fan of light near the wreck. If that pilot was unconscious, his scheme might work.

He skimmed above the mass of black wreckage. The Germans had the pilot out on the ground—a weird figure seemingly devoid of a head. He did not move. Lucky dropped one wing and slipped into the wind. As he landed, a squad of Germans ran toward his ship. He tensed as he saw their Mausers, then forced back his apprehension.

"*Was wollen Sie?*" barked an *Unterleutnant* at the head of the group. Fishy eyes stared over his half-raised Luger.

"I want ammunition for the guns," snapped Lucky in perfect German. "Is that too much after chasing those *Schweine* down?"

The *Unterleutnant's* manner moderated slightly.

"It is *verboten* to land here, but—" he turned toward a tall, thin captain who was quickly approaching, spoke in an undertone. The captain motioned Lucky from the plane. Lucky calmly cut off his engine and climbed out.

"What is your name? Where are you from?" the thin Boche shot at him.

"*Leutnant Rorsch, Hauptmann*" Lucky answered, clicking his heels and saluting with a true Prussian bend of the waist. "I am from the 184th *Jagdstaffel*, en route to Metz. I need ammunition, and one of my guns has jammed badly, from firing at those two *Teufelhunde*."

"*Teufelhunde!*" exclaimed the captain, startled. "You mean those two are from the Devildog squadron?"

"*Ja, Herr Hauptmann.* I caught a glimpse of their insignia on the one I was attacking."

"They must have been the two spies," muttered the captain to himself. "But no, they would not have flown their own

ships—” He checked himself, beckoned to Lucky. “Come with me. I will have your gun repaired and the belts filled, but you will have to wait here. All arrivals at this base must be double-checked.”

Lucky fell in step beside him as he started toward the huts.

“You have orders for a mission to Metz?” the Boche said abruptly.

“Yes, captain.” Lucky reached inside his German flying coat.

“Wait a moment.” The *Hauptmann* angled toward the spot where a couple of Germans were lifting the mystery ship’s pilot onto a stretcher. Lucky followed, nerves tingling.

“He is badly wounded, *Herr Hauptmann*,” one of the men said as the captain approached. “Both his legs are broken, and his head is cut deeply.”

“He must have been hurt before the crash, at least enough to make him lose control,” said the captain curtly. He reached down and pulled away the tangle of black cloth which partly covered the unconscious man. A stolid face showed in the light. An ugly gash had been cut along the brow, and blood was soaking through the temporary bandage which had been placed there.

But it was not on the man’s face that Lucky’s eyes rested in fascination. Beside the pilot’s head was a black leather helmet which had obviously just been taken off by the first-aid men. Secured on top of this ordinary helmet was a crumpled black mass of some light-weight metal. A bullet-scarred metal cowl had been partly torn off at the top of the battered shell. Suddenly Lucky realized that the crumpled mass had stood up in an oval-shaped shell, like a black, cowled head.

His bullets had gone through that false head on top of the pilot’s helmet, had pounded it almost to pieces. But why hadn’t they touched the man so close underneath?

In a moment he saw the answer. The rear of the death-ship’s cockpit had been built up high and armored, as was the rest of the pit. Only that hollow, cowled shell protruded above the rear crash-pad. Here at last was the explanation of the faceless figure which had masqueraded as Death. Seen from the front, the dead-black part of the shell below the cowl would seem starkly empty space.

Hooked to the lower edges of the heavy leather helmet were a dozen sets of long black fringes made to stream out in the wind. Longer fringes, badly matted, now drooped from wings and flippers, and even the spreader bar. It was these which had created that shapeless effect, made the ship seem a formless black blur.

THE thin *Hauptmann* lifted the tangled black cape which had hooked below the helmet fringes. Without emotion, he felt over the inert body.

“I thought so,” he said gruffly. “He was shot. Look down here.”

One of the Germans bent over. “In the arm,” he said, with a puzzled note.

“He should have kept his arm inside the armored pit,” grunted the *Hauptmann*. He stood up. “Take him inside. I only wanted to find what caused him to crash.”

As the men lifted the stretcher, something fell to the ground. Lucky glanced at it quickly. The thing was an ordinary type of oxygen mask such as both Germans and Allies had tried out for altitude flying. The only difference was that this one was painted black, so that it

would not show in the cape opening where the pilot's face came.

Lucky's eyes narrowed thoughtfully. An oxygen helmet—and yet that ship certainly had not been operating at any heights. Could those deaths be caused by some kind of gas? He shook his head slowly. Gas would have lingered on the 71st drome. Steele and the rest of them would have been killed.

"You seem puzzled," came the *Hauptmann's* curt voice. Lucky gazed up to find the German's restless eyes probing his face. He made a lightning decision. Surely that secret would have been well guarded.

"I am, *Herr Hauptmann*," he admitted frankly. "That ship was most peculiar, and that contraption on the pilot's head—"

The German chuckled drily. "It is a little mystery which the Allies would give a great deal to understand. You will probably know the answer within a week or so. Meantime, you will have to stay here."

"But my orders, sir—"

"I will take care of that" The captain scowled toward a spot under the trees, and Lucky saw a dozen Germans milling near one of the cars. "Donnervetter! Does it take twelve to handle one of them?"

Suddenly a terrific voice rose above the Germans' clamor.

"Ye puny divils! Shure, an' if ye'll throw down, your guns, I'll take on the lot av ye!"

"The impudent swine!" muttered the *Hauptmann*. He looked at Lucky, but the Devildog was staring blankly at the struggling Irishman. "You do not understand English, then?" he queried.

"I had two years' study of it up to the war," Lucky said, frowning. "But I do not understand that dialect—"

"Some form of Irish colloquialism," grunted the other. "He has some wild idea he could fight all twelve of them, bare-handed."

"It might be amusing to let him try," said Lucky, one eye on a big plane which had just become visible under a twig-covered camouflage screen. If by some miracle they could get that ship started. . .

"You have strange ideas of amusement," the captain said grimly. He stalked toward the two captives and their guards. "Get those two ruffians into the cellar at the old stone house," he snapped. "Knock that loudmouthed fool on the head if you have to."

"I already did, *mein Herr*," panted a wild-eyed *Unteroffizier*. "His skull must be made of iron."

"Spake a white man's language, ye scuts!" roared Flanagan. "Whatever it is ye're callin' me, the same to ye, an' double it!"

He made a lunge, and three or four Germans surged back against the car, where Mack Tuttle swayed in the hands of two stalwart guards. Mack blinked at them with owlsh gravity.

"If ish jus' the shame t' you," he pronounced with dignity, "I'd appre-sh'ate it mosh conshider'bly if you wouldn't consentrate on m' pedal exsh'tremities."

The *Hauptmann's* mouth fell open.

"Why, the stupid pigs are drunk!" He stood with lip curling as another knot of guards arrived and finally subdued the bellowing Irishman. "Take them away," he ordered. "When they sober up, I'll wager they'll not be so cheerful."

THE captives were hauled toward a low, rambling stone structure which stood in a little grove of trees two hundred feet away.

The *Hauptmann* turned toward a little log shack not far from where the big plane stood.

“Switch off that landing-light,” he ordered a man who stood by the door. “The Allies will be trying to find the base, if they have any inkling—” He wheeled and flung a look into the slowly lightening sky. “Quick—there is a plane now—an Hispano motor.”

The light flashed out. As Lucky stood by the German, the even flow of the Hispano broke into a series of sharp bursts. The *Hauptmann* gave an exclamation.

“Von Korlin!” he whispered, then gave a swift glance aside toward Lucky to see if he had heard. By an effort, Lucky made his face immobile. The captain waited till the signal had been repeated, then gave an order. The fan of light went on, and a Spad slid down to an expert landing. As the pilot cut off the engine and approached, Lucky braced himself. The man couldn’t know him, for he had been invisible during that brief moment when the light from the door at headquarters had fallen on the spy. But von Korlin might suspect.

Von Korlin was striding straight toward the stone house. The *Hauptmann* stepped forward and stopped him. The spy peered at him through the shadows.

“Graubel?” he said quickly. “I was looking for you.” Then he gazed past the captain at Lucky. The Devildog went rigid in spite of himself. Von Korlin still wore the make-up of Major Steele.

“Who is this?” rapped the spy.

“The pilot of that Fokker out there. He just shot down one of the *Teufelhund*

cutthroats and helped us capture him and another who landed to save him.”

“Tell me of this,” said von Korlin swiftly.

The captain complied. The spy was silent a moment, then gestured toward the stone house.

“Come along with us, *Leutnant*. It has suddenly occurred to me that you can be of use.”

Lucky obeyed, his heart thumping. Here might be the key to that sinister death—a chance to ruin the Germans’ schemes.

He took another side look at the big ship which stood under the nets. It was a modified Gotha, with unusually large wings and a cabin for several passengers instead of the usual bomber hull. Yet it had bomb-racks, smaller than those usually found on a Gotha, and peculiar in design. He had only a glimpse before they were at the door to the house. Two stolid-faced sentries saluted, and one swung the door open. Lucky paused as von Korlin halted beside one of the sentries.

“Go ahead,” the spy said to the *Hauptman* and Lucky. “I want to make sure we are not interrupted by that fat fool Schwartz.”

“He is sleeping,” grunted the *Hauptmann*. He stalked inside with Lucky at his heels, led the way to a small room on the right. It was fitted sketchily as an office, with desks, telephone, a few wall maps, and some chairs. Lucky gazed around with assumed carelessness. The house was evidently quite old, yet there were electric lights. Somewhere he heard a Diesel engine rumbling.

AS there came a step in the passage, he turned quickly, his right hand held as near as he dared to his German pistol. But von

Korlin strode in and past him without even a glance.

“Where have you put Otto’s prisoner?” he demanded.

“In the cellar.”

The spy faced Lucky Lane. “Come here, *Leutnant*. Let me see your orders.”

Lucky took a step toward him, one hand starting inside his coat for the paper. Then he stopped in his tracks, staring at the other man’s face. There was a queer smile on von Korlin’s lips—and his right eye was blacked as Steele’s had been!

For a second, Lucky’s head swam. Major Steele—posing as von Korlin! Was he losing his mind? Then suddenly a horrible suspicion struck into his brain. That smile—it was no warning to play his role. There was pure malice, mockery in those eyes.

With a stifled oath, Lucky snatched down at his holster. Instantly, boots scuffed on the floor behind him. The Luger was jerked from his holster and his arms were pinioned behind his back.

“Good work, men,” said the spy. “No, you needn’t bother to search him. I happen to know he hasn’t any other weapons.” He smiled at Lucky, “Frankly, Lane, I did not expect to see you again. I’m rather curious to know how you escaped.”

“Good God!” said Lucky hoarsely. “Then it was you—all the time!”

“Not exactly,” said von Korlin, coolly. “Only after the little mix-up there at the door of your headquarters. I managed to pick up the threads while you were up merrily chasing the real Steele and my pilot.”

“Then Garrity was right,” whispered Lucky. “And you fooled him!”

“Thanks to your G-2 major and the man already planted on your field,” said the

spy. “But I shall not forget this battered face. Your friend Garrity will be very sorry for that.” Suddenly his crisp, easy voice changed. “How did you escape that trap?” he demanded harshly.

A light of murderous fury blazed into Lucky’s blue eyes.

“You bloody butcher!” he rasped. “Getting us together so that we could be wiped out by that damned black death—”

“Ah, then it did get the others. That was all I wanted to know.” Von Korlin turned lazily to the *Hauptmann*, who had stood open-mouthed the whole time. “Doubtless you are boiling with curiosity, Graubel. It is a funny story—”

With a savage leap, Lucky tore himself loose from the men who held him, His fist smashed into von Korlin’s face, and the Prussian reeled back to the desk.

Then something hit with stunning force against Lucky’s head. He heard a vast roaring, felt himself falling. Then the whirling lights in his brain died out.

CHAPTER VII VACUUM IN THE SKY

“I’D like to lay me mitts on the dirty Kraut what hit him,” came Pug Flanagan’s voice, as from a long way off.

Lucky groaned, weakly tried to lift a hand to his aching head,

“I’m all right,” whispered Lucky feebly. He struggled to sit up.

“Don’t attempt too much at first,” came Mack Tuttle’s mournful accents out of the gloom that filled the cellar. “I had much the same symptoms upon reviving—”

“Ye numbskull,” growled Pug, “the lad wasn’t drunk. Some blatherskite Hun tried to croak him.”

A match sputtered, and a face bent over Lucky. He started, made a convulsive attempt to clutch at the man's arm.

"You rat!" he groaned. "Pug, Mack—that devil's in here—"

The bruised face that looked like von Korlin's twisted into a crooked smile.

"It's all right, lieutenant. I'm not von Korlin. I'm just a dumb Brass Hat, it seems."

The suspicion still lit Lucky's eyes. He drew himself up against the cold stones at his back, saw Pug and Mack staring at him from right and left of the other man.

"He's all right, me b'y," boomed Pug. "He was in here whin the filthy Krauts threw us in—by main force and not in a fair foight," he added.

"Then you—you're really Major Steele," Lucky muttered, searching the other's face.

"Unfortunately, yes," said Steele grimly. "If it will help convince you, I can relate word for word our conversation before von Korlin arrived." He did so, and Lucky slowly nodded.

"I don't get it yet," said Lucky. "You must be the one they called 'Otto's prisoner,' but how did you—"

"Fall for the trick?" finished Steele. "It's quite simple to explain. When I saw von Korlin, I jumped at him. His driver tried to kill me and I ducked. Somebody tripped me and I rolled away from the fight. Then I heard someone running toward the line, and I thought it was von Korlin or his driver. There was obviously another Boche spy in that field, and he signaled that plane. When I'd gone about a hundred feet, I saw the rocket shoot up, then heard the plane dive. I saw it was a planned emergency getaway, and I ran out to intercept von Korlin, but he wasn't there.

"I was about to pot the pilot when the ship stopped, but your men began shooting from a truck that was dashing out. I jumped for the rear pit, thinking I might fool the pilot and trick him into leading me to the answer to this Death business. He yelled something just as I piled in. It must have been a code-signal, for when I didn't answer, he started to drill me. I knocked the gun up, but the butt hit my forehead. That was that. He must have socked me two or three times after he took off, to make sure I was out. When I came to, I was in here."

Lucky looked at him dazedly through the shadows.

"Then you were in there, conked out, while I was shooting hell out of the ship!"

"What?" exclaimed Steele.

Lucky explained. Steele drew a long breath.

"My good star must have been on the job."

"Shure, an' it wint on a spree since thin," said Pug. "Unless ye loike this rat-hole."

"It's better than being dead," said Steele. He leaned forward and gazed at Lucky. "What happened after I left?"

"Plenty." Lucky's voice was glum. "You needn't feel bad. We swallowed it clear up to the pole." He described how von Korlin had tricked them, even pretending to investigate the weird death which had struck the 71st, and finally posing as the G-2 officer at the Intelligence field.

"That clinches it," said Steele. "That devil's been posing as me for some time. It explains some queer things that have happened. If I hadn't changed my routine tonight, his plan would have worked perfectly."

“That’s what he said,” said Lucky. “All the time he was talking about ‘von Korlin,’ he was sitting there, laughing up his sleeve.”

“He intended you to die, or he’d never have mentioned that name,” said Steele.

“I know that. But I can’t understand how he came so close to getting us into that black death shadow at the 71st.”

“He must not have known it was going to strike there,” Steele answered thoughtfully. “He probably-wanted to find how well their damnable scheme was working.”

“It’s worked, all right,” Lucky said in a bitter voice. “They’ve destroyed two more squadrons, at least—if he told the truth about what General Myers reported. The Air Service is evacuating fields all over the sector, and the Front’s in a panic.”

“Somebody will stumble onto the truth,” said Steele savagely. “Maybe some of those other pilots will have better luck than you—”

“They’re dead,” Lucky said stonily. In a dull voice he explained how they had been trapped. The two Devildogs groaned as he named Benny Sparks. There was a brief, stricken hush.

“Poor little divil,” muttered the Irishman.

“YOU have no idea what that death shadow is?” asked Steele, after a long pause.

Lucky shook his head. “That black ship was tricked up and I think the engine was muffled. As for the rest, it’s got me stumped.”

“It couldn’t be any kind of ray, or you’d have seen machinery in that wreck. And it would take a big ship, anyway.”

“There’s a big plane right on this base. I was trying to figure out—”

“Quiet,” whispered Steele. “Somebody’s coming.”

There was a sound of heavy boots ringing on stones, and a light showed through the keyhole of the massive wine-cellar door. Then the door opened cautiously, and a squad of Germans appeared. A flashlight spotted the prisoners, rested on Lucky,

“Come here,” growled a surly Teutonic voice. “And you on the right, too. You others get back, if you don’t want some Luger lead.”

Pug had lurched forward, Mack near him, but half a dozen pistols bristled hastily. Lucky and Major Steele were hustled into the passage outside, and the door swiftly barred again. With guns at their backs, they were driven along to where a flight of stone steps led upward at an intersection with another dim corridor. Lucky started up the stairs, but the surly Boche in charge halted him.

“Not that way, *Dumkopf*. Turn left.”

The flashlight pointed down the other passage, to the door of another room. One of the Germans opened it, and the two captives were shoved inside.

The room was moderately lighted by electricity. It was wide and long, evidently a large storage room at some time in the past. As the two prisoners were brought in, two men turned from a spot near the center of the room, where they had been standing before a thick glass partition. Lucky recognized von Koriin. The other man was in civilian clothes of a somber hue. He was of medium height, solidly built, and he appeared to be not more than forty, but his hair was almost silver and his stern face prematurely lined and careworn.

“Ah, our guests have arrived,” von Koriin said. He glanced at Major Steele. “You don’t seem to appreciate the honor of having such a good understudy, major.”

Steele did not answer. The tired-looking civilian inspected the captives without interest.

“Get on with it, *mein Herr*,” he said wearily. “I have other things to do tonight.”

Lucky started. Tonight? Then it was already evening. He had been unconscious many hours.

“*Ja, Excellenz*. I will waste no time,” He gazed, back at Steele, “Don’t think, major,” the spy said curtly, “that I am keeping on this make-up because I like it. Unfortunately, it is semi-permanent—unlike greasepaint—and I cannot put it on and off so easily.”

“I am not interested,” snapped Steele.

“*Stille!*” grated the spy. “You are here to listen till I say otherwise. I have another reason. If you do not agree to what I am going to suggest, I will go back and play the role myself, in your G-2.”

“They’ll nab you,” growled the G-2 major.

“They will have to be smarter than your men at 10-G-Base. I have studied this masquerade for some time, *mein Freund*.”

“What do you want?” demanded Steele.

“You are going to witness a certain demonstration,” said the spy silkily. His eyes flicked to Lucky. “And you, swine, will play a very important part in that demonstration.” He fingered an ugly bruise on his face. “I told you that your damned chief would pay for this other mark. You will even your score here and now.”

HE pointed to the glass partition, which rose from floor to ceiling. Lucky saw that

it formed a chamber taking in more than three-fifths of the long room. The walls, floor and ceiling had been treated with some substance that made them seem absolutely solid expanses. A battery of bright electric lights was suspended near the ceiling of the chamber. Along the rear wall was a laboratory table on which rested a curious maze of copper tubing, running from two huge tanks through a heating unit to a vat of some kind at the other end. A faint purplish smoke curled up from this vat, and heat waves danced above it.

On another table running down the right-hand wall were twenty-five or thirty odd-looking containers of copper. It occurred suddenly to Lucky that they were like round mines laid by naval trawlers, with longer detonator projections. Near these objects was an equal number of what looked like huge parachute flares, four times the usual size.

A grotesque figure was bending over a miniature container shaped like the copper ones—a replica on such a small scale that it was no larger than a golf ball. With infinite care he attached it to a string that ran to a small pulley in the ceiling. As he pulled the string, securing it to a small lever in the glass wall, Lucky had a full glimpse of what had at first seemed an enormous head. The man was wearing a helmet like that of a diver, though somewhat smaller. A tube ran from a cylinder on his chest up into the helmet. His body, from head to foot, was encased in a bulging, cumbersome suit that rippled in and out as he walked.

As Lucky stared at this, von Korlin grinned.

“Perhaps not a thing of beauty, but you will wish you had that suit when you are in there, my dear lieutenant.”

Though his meaning was not clear, there was something in his tone that made Lucky shiver. The silver-haired civilian winced as he met Lucky's gaze.

"Why is this necessary?" he said in a low tone to von Korlin. "An animal would do as well—I was instructed only to have full proof before I approve the sum this robber Schwartz demands. The High Command seems almost satisfied, so I came here prepared to sign the contract." The civilian stopped, with a sudden look at the man in the glassed-in chamber.

Von Korlin smiled amusedly. "Don't worry about him. Even forgetting that helmet, you could shout and he wouldn't hear."

"Deaf?" said the other.

"No—the vacuum. Naturally, the crystals cannot be formed if there is air in the place. They have to be made in a total vacuum and put in the containers the same way." Von Korlin switched his eyes to Steele. "His Excellency's time is valuable. I will not mince words. This man Schwartz you see in there has discovered one of the few missing elements in the spectrum. It is terrifically volatile, and it possesses the property of absorbing a tremendous amount of oxygen before reaching a point of balance. The proportion is somewhere around ten thousand to one, when fully exposed to the atmosphere."

Steele's face turned ashen. Von Korlin nodded.

"I see you begin to understand." He glanced at Lucky. "I suppose it still does not penetrate your thick head?" he snapped.

Lucky hardly heard him. There was a stunned, horrified expression on his face. Blood on their lips. . . caught in a vacuum! Why hadn't he thought of it? But such a

thing was so utterly unknown—a vacuum in the sky.

"MY task is going to be easy," said von Korlin sardonically. "It is a good thing your brain was not working so well back at the 71st. When that fool brought out the apple, I was afraid you or that smart-Aleck Sparks would see through it. Any high-school physics student in Germany would know that a withered apple placed in a vacuum receiver fills out again under the reduced air pressure. If we had stayed there a few minutes longer, you would have seen that apple wither again. It also caused that unnatural appearance of the dead man's face. But I see you comprehend."

"Why are you telling us this?" said Steele huskily.

"Because you are going to send a message in your U-code, which G-2 will know is authentic, saying you are a prisoner, and that you have seen a demonstration of a terrible instrument. You will arrange a telephone conversation through lines connected at a certain spot in No-Man's-Land. You will talk, under our supervision, with your stupid Brass Hats and tell them enough to convince them they are helpless."

"As if they'd pay any attention!" stormed Steele.

"There is a big plane outside," said von Korlin coldly, "It can carry a huge supply of these containers, any one of which will burst when it touches ground and hurl those volatile crystals over a wide area. And one will wipe out a whole drome, as you perhaps learned from this *Teufelhund* pig here." The spy paused. "Tonight the big ship will do on a larger scale what the little one did last night. Also, another of these ships will be kept ready to use on

any Allied raiding formation that might come our way.

“When tonight’s main event takes place, you will be in telephonic communication with Chaumont. You will warn them one minute before it happens, wait till they get the report, then dictate our terms.”

“Go to the devil!” rasped Steele.

Von Korlin scowled, turned to the right side of the glass partition, where a double air lock had been built in the heavy plate glass. He threw a small switch near the door, and the electric lights inside the chamber flickered. The man with the helmet turned, nodded ponderously. He closed a massive lid on the smoking vat, spun some valves connected with the copper coils. Then, entering the air lock, he moved a rheostat control. The rumble of a Diesel motor-pump unit, somewhere in the basement, died out quickly.

The man took off his helmet, opened the outer door and came into the open room. A coarse, oily face was revealed as the helmet lifted. Greedy little eyes shifted across the men in the room, rested upon the careworn civilian.

“*Ach*, you have come to sign the papers, *Excellenz?*”

“When I am satisfied your claims are correct,” said the gray-haired man coldly. “It is a heavy sum to pay, *Herr* Schwartz. A patriotic man would donate his discovery to the Fatherland.”

Schwartz smiled craftily. “The Fatherland would seize it if I had not protected myself. Fortunately, no one but myself knows where this Element ‘Z’ lies in the spectrum, let alone the process of extracting the powder crystals for use.”

SCHWARTZ climbed out of his heavy suit, which had deflated as he turned off the pressure from the cylinder on his chest.

“You understand the principle involved, *Excellenz?*” he asked.

“The stuff kills them by suffocation, I’ve been told,” said the other shortly.

Schwartz nodded. “It almost killed me when I accidentally formed some of the crystals in an experiment. They soak up oxygen at a colossal rate. A handful placed in open air will instantly draw all the oxygen for a hundred feet around. A man near the crystals will die instantly, while others in the affected area will die within a few seconds, unless they are very near the edge. Even then, they will probably be invalids for life, for the suddenly reduced oxygen content and corresponding vacuum will expand their internal organs, which are used to normal air pressure.”

The civilian’s tired face shadowed. “A frightful thing,” he muttered.

“*Ach*, but Germany will be supreme with this weapon in her hands. And it is almost a painless death, except for a moment when they try to catch their breath.”

“I have been instructed to make sure of your claim that it will work over a wide area,” said the civilian curtly. “One thing seems in doubt. Why doesn’t the oxygen from the rest of the air rush in and revive the victims?”

“Because this element combines too swiftly, *Herr* Baron. When one of those containers strikes the ground and bursts, the oxygen is consumed so speedily that for an instant there is a dead space surrounding the spot. Even with that tiny container hanging by the string in there, a sphere two hundred feet in diameter would be exhausted. That is why sounds cease, all

open lights go out, and blood rushes to the victims' mouths and sometimes their nostrils.

"The larger the charge, the longer time it takes for oxygen to be sucked in from the surrounding atmosphere to restore the normal balance. As the air rushes in, there is a whistling sound till the vacuum is filled. But in that time everyone but those at the edge of the space will be dead. Nothing that needs oxygen can continue. Airplane engines will stop. That is what gave *Herr* von Korlin the idea for his 'Death' plane scheme."

The baron looked grimly at the spy. "From the reports, it has created a panic," he remarked. "I suppose you should be congratulated."

Von Korlin grinned. "It has worked splendidly, *Excellenz*. It was almost made to order—the moaning sound as the chilled air rushes in, the fading out of the lights when the oxygen is exhausted, the blackish smoke which is formed while the crystals are being consumed. I added a few bizarre touches, and—*Himmel!* The Allies go wild, seeing Death's shadow spread over them and destroy their airmen."

"Very pretty," said the baron wearily. He made a curt gesture. "*Herr* Schwartz, get your demonstration over. I want to get far away from this spot."

SCHWARTZ looked toward Lucky Lane and Steele. An uneasy expression crossed his oily face as his greedy little eyes twitched toward von Korlin.

"You have the approval order this time?" he said in a low tone.

Von Korlin gave him a savage look, but the baron broke in before he could speak.

"What's this?"

"A mere formality, *Excellenz*," said von Korlin hastily. "An order of execution for this spy. He was caught in German uniform—"

"Where is the order?" snapped the baron.

"A courier is bringing it from Third Staff Headquarters, but we need not wait. It is only a technicality. We held a trial this afternoon, and found the spy guilty."

"Liar!" snarled Major Steele. "He's been unconscious all day—after you tricked him into coming over here in Boche uniform."

The baron turned stern eyes on von Korlin. "Let me see the copy of the court-martial proceedings."

"I—they were sent to Third Staff," said the spy sullenly.

"I shall communicate with that Headquarters," rapped the baron coldly. "If this situation has been misrepresented, you will regret it."

He walked out of the room. Von Korlin turned raging eyes on Steele.

"If this deal fails, you'll die a worse death than those others!"

"So you're in with this greasy rat to gouge your government," said Steele contemptuously.

"Keep still!" snarled the spy. He seemed to be thinking feverishly. Suddenly he whirled, to the door. "Keep these men well covered!" he snapped at the Boche guards. Then he dashed into the passage. Lucky heard an exclamation from someone outside.

"I'll be back. Wait in there," von Korlin said hastily. In a moment Graubel came into the room. He eyed the prisoners, looked on at Schwartz. "What's the matter?" he demanded.

“Nothing,” growled the chemist. “The demonstration was interrupted for a while.”

“It is too late now,” the Hauptmann said quickly. “I just received commands from the *General-Leutnant* to advance the hour of tonight’s attack.”

“But this will take only a few minutes.”

“Settle it with von Korlin,” said Graubel sourly. “I am not in charge.”

Half a minute later, the spy came back into the room, breathless.

“It is fixed,” he said to Schwartz. “He won’t learn anything.” Then he wheeled to Graubel. “See that the wireless is out of commission temporarily, if he should—”

“There’s no time for any foolishness,” said the *Hauptmann* hurriedly.

“Tonight’s raid has been moved up three hours. We’ll have to take off in thirty minutes.”

“But the plan was set for—”

“Order of High Command,” said Graubel. “They’re convinced, after final reports on last night’s work. They want to see results at once, on a huge scale. We’re to get the squadrons that were missed when they changed bases, these headquarters I’ve marked—” he held out a map—“these troop concentrations—everything we can hit of importance.”

“Then we’ve won,” broke in Schwartz eagerly.

“That fool hasn’t signed the contract yet,” grated von Korlin. “I’ll tell him—”

“Here he comes,” whispered Schwartz.

THE spy met the gray-haired baron at the door. The baron looked at him sharply.

“The telephone went dead just as I got the Third Staff. It is very peculiar—”

“Your pardon, *Excellenz*, but we have to let the test go. Orders have come,” the spy

explained swiftly, adding, “You are to go in the cabin of the big plane, to witness the action. It is air-tight, with oxygen apparatus, so there is no danger.”

“Who received these orders?” demanded the baron.

“I did, *Herr Excellenz*,” said Graubel. “And we must get ready at once.”

“I want to check the order,” growled the baron. “I have not forgotten this other matter, *Herr von Korlin*. If this order does not specify me, I shall not make the flight. The demonstration will probably be sufficient for your purpose,” he added dryly.

Von Korlin scowled after him, motioned to Graubel.

“Let him go. This other will do the trick. Have the big Gotha ready, with full load of ‘Z’ containers in the racks. I will be there in a few minutes. “We were ordered to send the other black Fokker to escort the Gotha,” said Graubel nervously. “And since Wellmann crashed this morning, it means that one of us must go.”

Von Korlin shot a look across the room, to where one of the cowl-and-helmet devices lay on a shelf with a black cape. He grinned.

“You carry out the raid details with the Gotha. I will play Death tonight, if any ships try to attack you.”

As Graubel disappeared, von Korlin wheeled to the German guards.

“Take that blue-eyed *Hund* into the chamber and fasten him with the leg-irons to that ring in the floor.”

Two guards shoved Lucky forward. He fought desperately, but two more men leaped in and ended his struggle. Von Korlin laughed.

“A private performance, Schwartz. Get ready to play executioner—”

“Wait,” cut in Steele hoarsely. “If I agree to phone as you wanted, warn Chaumont—”

“Too late, *mein Freund*, unless you go further.” Von Korlin’s words faded out as Lucky was hurled into the chamber and down to his knees. In spite of his renewed struggles, the heavy leg-iron was clamped around his right ankle, chaining him to the floor. The guards hurried out, and the air-lock doors closed.

Outside, Steele was pleading with the spy. Lucky could see their lips move, but the glass wall shut out the sound. Schwartz advanced toward the lever which, through an air-tight socket, connected with the tiny “Z” charge dangling above Lucky’s head. There was a smile on his oily face.

Lucky saw von Korlin picking up the black cowl-helmet from the shelf, preparing to depart as soon as the gruesome killing was over. Steele was still desperately begging something, but von Korlin shook his head. He was turning toward Schwartz when someone appeared at the door. The spy started as it opened, gave an uneasy look toward Lucky. Then his alarm faded as he saw it was only an *Unterleutnant*. Through dazed eyes, Lucky recognized the Boche who had first met him when he landed. There was another figure behind him, uniform grimy and oil-stained. As he saw the goggles shoved up on the man’s dirty face, Lucky thought for a moment that he was a pilot; then he saw the dispatch case slung by straps over the man’s shoulder. The motorcycle courier with the order for his execution, he thought grimly.

Lucky jumped. Von Korlin had suddenly leaped back, snatching at his hip. In the same instant a gun flashed in the right hand of the courier. Von Korlin’s

hands shot into the air and he backed away frantically. The courier jumped after him, trying to put the spy between him and the startled guards. Lucky gave a yell of amazement as he saw the man’s face clearly.

It was Benny Sparks!

CHAPTER VIII DEVILDOG DEATH

SUDDENLY one of the guards plunged with lifted Luger. Benny fired. Lucky heard the muffled roar and the scream that followed. Another German leaped, and Benny shot him down fiercely. Then the snout of a Luger flipped around past Major Steele’s shoulder. Using the G-2 man as a shield, the German behind him fired. Benny jerked spasmodically, caught at his upper right arm. With an effort, he tried to raise his gun again.

The man behind Steele flicked his Luger down for a second shot. With a tigerish fury, the G-2 major whirled. The pistol flew from the German’s fingers, and the guard went down in a heap. With his pistol clutched in his fist, von Korlin leaped and whipped the gun down at the major.

As the spy sprang, the *Unterleutnant* made a wild dive for Benny. The two collided, rolled to the floor. Benny gripped his gun with both hands and ripped a shot into the *Leutnant*. The man sagged, lifted his pistol in a last grim attempt to fire. Major Steele knocked the man’s aim aside, tripped over a fallen Boche. For a second there was a wild scramble; then the terrified Schwartz darted for the door and cut off Lucky’s view.

As the chemist reached the entry, half a dozen frightened Germans dashed in. The chemist was shoved aside. Guns poised,

the new arrivals swiftly took charge. Lucky groaned as he saw Benny floored with a brutal kick. Above the muffled clamor, he heard von Korlin's infuriated accents.

"Throw him in there with that other *Schwein!*"

Two men dragged Benny to the air lock, opened it and pushed him into the chamber. His face was swollen, and there was a cut above one eye, but he was still unsubdued. As the two Germans turned to close the door he sprang up after them. One of the guards jerked at his gun, poked it into Benny's stomach. Cursing, the little Devildog gave back. Then the heavy glass doors closed.

"The damned—" Benny stopped, jaw hanging, as he saw Lucky. "For the luvva Pete! Lucky!"

Lucky forced a ghastly smile. "I'm afraid my luck's run out, fella. Yours, too."

"We aren't in any prison camp yet. When they take us out of here—" Benny's words slowed, and he looked around with growing alarm. "What is this, anyway?"

"Our finish—when they drop that gadget up there at the ceiling. It's filled with the stuff that killed all those others."

Benny's eyes filled with horror. "I had one taste of that," he gasped. "We've got to get out of here!" He bent over Lucky's leg-iron fastening. "Locked!"

"Don't worry. It won't be long now." Lucky stared out toward the other part of the long room. Schwartz and five German soldiers were grouped about the spy, who seemed to be giving some order. Another Boche was bending over the men on the floor, evidently to see if any were still alive. As he came to the *Unterleutnant*, he turned and beckoned to one of the other guards. The officer was carried out.

The spy looked at the clock on the wall and said something to a thickset, hook-nosed *Korporal*. The non-com glanced uneasily at his comrades, then took a grip on his gun and led them out into the passage. Schwartz pointed toward Lucky and Benny Sparks. A malevolent look crossed von Korlin's features. He nodded and strode toward the lever on the glass wall

"Here we go, fella," Lucky said huskily.

Benny Sparks gave a wild look around and dashed for one of the mine-like containers.

"Maybe this'll bust that glass!"

"No, that's the same stuff! You'll only—" Lucky stopped, his eyes glassy. "Look!" he whispered.

Schwartz had turned a pasty yellow, and his hands were in the air. Behind him, a bruised face glared over a gun.

"Steele!" cried Lucky. "It's the major—he's fooled them. Von Korlin's the one on the floor!"

The airlock opened, and Schwartz stumbled inside, moaning.

"Shut up!" rasped the G-2 major. "Unlock that leg-iron. I saw them give you the key."

Schwartz obeyed with shaking hands. Steele reached inside his blouse and pulled out a second pistol. He thrust it into Benny Sparks' hands.

"Get out by the door," he told the gaping Devildog. "We'll be with you in a second."

The leg-iron fell from Lucky's ankle. As Schwartz straightened, teeth chattering with fear, the G-2 major swung savagely. There was a crack as his fist thudded into the chemist's jaw, and Schwartz went down as though pole-axed.

“Come on,” said Steele hurriedly. “They’ll be back here in a minute.”

“Who?” said Lucky.

“Those Heinies, with Flanagan and Tuttle. I said I was going to give them the works with you two.”

The blood seemed suddenly released in Lucky’s veins.

“What a break,” he whispered. “You thought fast.”

“I was afraid I hadn’t knocked von Korlin out,” muttered Steele. “I saw the chance to change places during that scuffle on the floor. That *Leutnant* got it, but I drilled him—”

“They took him upstairs. If he should revive—”

“I know. We’ve got to work fast. Our only chance is to mob these guards and break for it.”

“Wait,” said Lucky tensely. “Why not keep on as von Korlin?”

“Herding four prisoners upstairs? No, it won’t work.”

“Benny and I can rip off these officer blouses and take those fatigue caps.” Lucky jabbed one hand toward the dead guards on the floor. “With them over our eyes—”

“Right,” said Steele. “Go to it.”

Lucky was already half out of his *feldgrau* blouse. A shirt of the same color, not unlike the working shirt of an enlisted man, lay underneath. He snatched up one of the dead men’s caps, pulled it over his eyes. Benny was doing the same. As they ran back toward the entry, Lucky grinned at the wiry little Devildog.

“I thought it was curtains for you, Benny, when that black shadow hit.”

“I was on the edge, coming after you. It almost got me. I passed out, cracked up in the woods. Came to and worked over near

here after I heard ships. Thought I’d try to steal one. Tonight I spotted a motorcycle courier, got him stopped, and slugged him. Figured that once I was on the field, there’d be a ship—”

The dull thunder of motors sounded from up on the base. Lucky swore.

“If Graubel takes off, there goes our getaway.”

“The Gotha?” exclaimed Steele. “What good would it do? You men are pursuit pilots.”

“Huh?” said Lucky. “Hell, Marines are trained on everything from Jennies to H-16’s.”

Steele stepped toward the door, peered out.

“Something’s wrong. It wouldn’t take them that long. Good Lord! Maybe they’ve seen through it and gone to get help.”

Lucky started as though stung. “I’m going to let Pug and Mack loose!” He darted through the entry, but Steele clutched at his arm.

“You haven’t any gun. Stay here and keep watch on those stairs.” He and Benny ran toward the turn in the passage which led back to the improvised dungeon.

Lucky waited, nerves on edge. Seconds passed, seeming an age. The motors above rumbled louder, died to a drone of idling. He tiptoed toward the foot of the stone steps, where the passage turned. There was no sign of the Lunatics or Steele, but as he stared into the gloom, he thought the dungeon door swung partly open. He jumped back, waiting to see who it would be. Suddenly he felt some one move, back of him. He whirled, gave a stifled cry.

He was staring into the black-cowled death’s-head!

Paralyzed for a second, he stood there, gaze riveted on the eyes that glared

through the goggles of the oxygen mask below. Then he sprang for the man's throat. Instantly a hand flashed up, holding one of the tiny "Z" containers.

"Get back!" came the hoarse muffled voice of von Korlin. "Farther yet. Now—up the stairs!"

Fuming, helpless, Lucky backed to the base of the stairs. Von Korlin, recovering his senses, shamming until he was unguarded—then seizing on a more powerful weapon than a hundred guns, while he himself was safe with that mask.

"Turn around," grated the muffled voice. "Get up there before—"

"Holy Mither!" howled a mighty voice from down the dim passage. "Th' black devil's got two heads!"

Von Korlin started, whipped the "Z" container around. As he moved. Lucky flung himself at that uplifted arm. One clutching hand closed frenziedly on the tiny grenade.

"Pug!" cried Lucky. "Grab him, for Heaven's sake!"

With a bellow, the Irishman charged. Von Korlin tore himself free as he saw the huge Devildog. Lucky fell, and his fingers let go the grenade. It rolled off into a dark corner.

Shouting wildly, the spy fled up the stairs, Pug at his heels. Lucky jumped to his feet as Steele and the other two Devildogs rushed up. A German cap was pulled awry on Mack Tuttle's head, and he wore a *feldgrau* blouse with flapping sleeves. He was a comic figure—but his face held murder.

As they reached the top of the steps, there came the bark of a pistol, then a roar in Flanagan's voice. An *Unteroffizier* went backward over a table, smoking Luger ripped from his hand by the Irishman's

mighty fingers. Von Korlin was vanishing through the doorway. Mack Tuttle pitched two shots after him, but the spy was lost in the dark. Pug suddenly sprang toward one corner, where a figure had moved.

"Out av there, Fritz, or I'll bash in th' thick skull av ye!"

There was a thud, and a German fell.

"Come on!" shouted Steele. "Von Korlin will spread the alarm." He plunged through the door, turned to the left.

"The other way," yelled Lucky. He ran outside. "Follow me."

"*Teufelhunde!*" a wild cry arose at the edge of the camouflage nets. A group of Germans whirled from where they stood beside the big Gotha. Lucky saw von Korlin racing toward a Maxim emplacement, shouting as he ran. Lucky jumped toward Pug who had two Lugers.

"Give me one of those guns." He pumped three shots toward the running figure. Von Korlin leaped to one side, gave up his dash for the Maxim.

A man appeared in the door of the Gotha cabin. He bawled a hoarse command, and the fan-light threw its yellow spread across the edge of the clearing. Both Yanks and Germans were abruptly revealed in the glare. A cursing *Feldwebel* snatched at his hip. Benny Sparks dropped him with a single shot. Three Boche mechanics raced for the Maxim. Pug Flanagan cut off one of them, knocked him clear off his feet. Mack Tuttle stood firing deliberately at the others. One dropped in his tracks. The other wag almost at the gun. Mack took calm aim, drilled him through the head.

Then the five Yanks were in the midst of the Germans. Steele and Mack Tuttle fought their way to the cabin door. Lucky Lane whirled as Benny Sparks gave a

sharp cry. He dragged the stricken Devildog to the cabin entry.

“Only a nick—got my leg,” gasped Benny.

Lucky boosted him inside, flung a shout at Pug. The big Irishman was flailing into the terrified Germans, laying them low with pile-driver fists. A big Boche suddenly lunged from under the Gotha. Lucky shot him down, seized Pug’s arm.

“Get into the ship!” he yelled.

As he himself wheeled for the cabin, a Maxim two hundred feet away burst into a vicious pounding. A German screamed. Bullets pelted the open cabin door. Lucky dived inside, heard slugs thud against the Gotha.

“Bullet-proof!” he exclaimed. Fate was on their side tonight. He ran up toward the pilot’s pit.

“So, ye yellow-livered scut!” thundered Pug from behind him. There was a crash, and a clatter of broken glass. Lucky’s eyes popped. The Irishman hurled a squawling Boche halfway through one of the windows.

“Get in, you idiot!” shouted Steele, as Lucky went on to the controls.

“Shure, an’ I am in,” bellowed Pug. “Give her the gun!”

Lucky flung a hasty look back, saw Mack Tuttle and Steele hauling at the Irishman, who was still in the door, firing a last shot. He shoved the throttles open. As the ship lurched forward, another Maxim spray thudded across the glass bay in the Gotha’s nose. Then the big ship thundered out for a take-off. Lucky gripped the wheel, brought the tail up from the ground. The wheels rumbled, lifted into the air. Suddenly a dark object sprang out from the shadow back of the fan-shaped light.

The death-ship—and von Korlin!

Lucky’s heart went cold. One swift zoom above them. . . an aerial Z-charge dropped. . . and *finis*! For with that broken window, the cabin was air-tight no longer.

A fierce desperation surged through him. Some way—there must be some way. Then he groaned. Not machine-gun fire, for the death-ship was armored. Not their Z-containers, for even if he knew how to drop them, von Korlin wore an oxygen mask and was safe.

The black ship was off the ground. In a moment the nose would flash up.

A wild light came into the Devildog pilot’s eyes. Down plunged the nose of the Gotha, straight for the lifting black blur. It was their only chance. Crash it down!

The death-ship zoomed, then frantically whipped to one side, as the spy saw the diving Gotha. Lucky twisted the wheel, booted the heavy rudder. Engines roaring, on the edge of a power spin, the mighty ship corkscrewed down at the Boche.

The death-ship seemed to leap upward. He could see von Korlin whirl in the pit, see the grim blackness under that cowl. The spy dived madly, almost to the tops of the trees. Straight on his tail hurled the Gotha. There came a second when it seemed the huge ship would hurtle straight into the ground.

Then the wheel came back in Lucky’s rigid hands.

The tail of von Korlin’s ship slid back and under the Gotha. The spy twisted around frenziedly, one hand flung before his eyes. Then—crash! The Gotha’s huge landing-gear smashed into the ship below. Lucky braced himself and pulled with all his might.

The big plane shook, settled toward the tree-tops. Then, slowly, the swaying wings lifted and it soared up into the night.

At two thousand feet, Lucky banked and looked down. He started. A great dark shadow was spreading over the base, from the spot where the black ship had fallen.

He shivered. They would find only dead on that base. Even Schwartz, down in the open glass chamber, must now be dead like the rest.

Someone moved at his elbow. He looked around, saw Pug Flanagan's face. The Irishman stared down at the ground, wagged his huge head.

"The saints be praised," he said hoarsely. "Ye did noble, though for a moment there I was thinkin' ye'd lost your sineses."

"How's Benny?" said Lucky Lane.

"The lad is foine," said Pug. "I gave him a wee drop av somethin' the domned Krauts didn't find on me, an' but maybe ye'd stand a bit yourself."

Lucky managed a shaky grin. "Not now," he said. "I've got to dope out landing this crate with maybe a wheel half off."

Pug gave a vast sigh of relief. "Thin I'll just finish it meself. The whole thing's been a bit av a strain on me nerves."