

Don't Shoot

By Robert J. Hogan

Sammy Stein joined the grease-monkey squad to be safe; but after the first bombing raid, he struck a bargain with the C.O. and hocked his safety for his life, collecting a net profit of Spandau lead and glory.

THE sergeant mec of Hangar Ten spread his feet wide apart, placed two big, grease-stained hands on his hips and grinned at the wiry little figure before him.

"So you're the new mec," he chuckled, as he took in the small, stocky figure. There was something laughable about that face with its big nose, and the curly black hair almost hidden under a hat that came down to the ears.

"Dat's right, sergeant," grinned the new mec. "Oy, but ain't you a good guesser? You should maybe be a fortune teller. Vit me for your manager we should clean it up, hey?"

"What's your name, fella?"

"Sammy Stein. If you been ever to New York City you should know I got it a lot of relatives dere. On store fronts you should see de name Stein in big gold letters on top de doors. I'm tellink you, I got it plenty of relatives. My old man, he's a big business man in—"

"Oh, French," chuckled the sergeant.

Sammy lost his grin. "Say, you ain't such a good guesser like I thought. De managing deal is off. I should go broke wid a punk fortune teller like you. It ain't French, it's Irish, I'm tellink you."

The sergeant laughed. He shifted his gaze from the new mec to a two-seater Salmson that ticked over on the line, warming. From there his eyes caught sight of a figure nearing them.

"Bull" Needham, pilot of the Salmson, grinned and answered the two salutes that greeted him. Bull glanced at Sammy, then at the sergeant questioningly. His eyes twinkled with mirth.

"New mec?" he asked.

The sergeant grinned and nodded. He knew what was coming.

"You know, fella," said Bull to Sammy, "every mechanic has to take a ride in the air before he's allowed to work on ships at this field."

Sammy's swarthy face whitened.

"Lieutenant, I'm tellink you, sir. You shouldn't kid a poor fella. Riding in de air is vun tink I could get along vidout, better than most anytink I could tink of. I ask you, why did I enlist in de mechanics? Listen. I decided it vould maybe be safer dan any place else. Now I'm takink a ride before I go ahead. Yi-yi. Vell, if it must, it must," he shrugged.

"There's a helmet and a pair of goggles in the hangar if you want them," volunteered Bull, trying hard not to laugh out loud.

Sammy clutched his hat with both hands, pulled it hard so that it came down over his ears and shook his head.

"I vouldn't be interested, lieutenant. Am I goink to be killed, I could do it just as vell in de hat as de goggles and helmet. Maybe better."

He hesitated for a moment, as though trying to summon his courage.

"Listen, lieutenant. Maybe you vould do a couple of tricks in de air. Den ven I write home I could tell de old man vat a devil in de air I'm, hey? Just a couple of little easy ones vot vouldn't hurt noddink."

If Sammy had been a mind reader he would have known that Bull Needham had had that planned long before he suggested the flight. And they vouldn't be just a couple of slow, easy ones, either.

Sammy climbed into the back cockpit of the observation plane. Then Bull, from the front seat, battered the gun wide, kicked round into the wind and they roared down the field.

Bull climbed to a couple of thousand and glanced back over his shoulder. Sammy wasn't in sight at all. He shoved the stick forward and yanked it back, still staring at that empty cockpit. The top of a hat came just over the edge of the cockpit and disappeared again as Sammy left the seat. Bull grinned and nodded with satisfaction. Sammy was there all right.

He yanked over and began a series of wild stunts. He rolled, looped, whipstalled and, in fact, did every-thing he could think of, which was plenty. Now and then he glanced back at the cockpit behind, but except for a jounce in the air now and then, he could not see Sammy at all.

A HALF hour passed. A half hour of constant stunting. Bull was having the time of his life. He laughed aloud to think of the condition Sammy would be in when he landed. Fit to be tied, sure. Then Bull suddenly realized that he didn't feel so much like stunting as he had at the beginning. His stomach hadn't been doing so well lately and the bumps in the rough air, coupled with the constant gyrating of the old Salmson, were not helping any.

His hand reached for the gun and he began to spiral down to land. Then, for the first time, he began to feel sorry for Sammy there in the rear cockpit. The poor kid was doubtless like a marble statue and turning inside out. He twisted round to take a squint behind, but still Sammy was deep down in the cockpit as before and the rear seat looked empty. With the throttling of the motor the top of the hat appeared. Then Sammy's face peered cautiously over the windshield. It wasn't white, but retained the same swarthy complexion that was natural to it. He was grinning.

Bull twisted back front. He knew his own face was white. He could tell from the feeling of his stomach, without looking in a mirror. He brought the ship down to the field, rolled and taxied to the deadline as quickly as possible.

The sergeant met the ship, grinning broadly. Then his expression suddenly changed as he took in the white face of the pilot and the grinning face of the new mec.

"How'd you like it?" he asked Sammy, still bewildered. Sammy was climbing down without the least difficulty.

"It vas svell," he enthused, "vonderful. But why you didn't do more stuntink?" The last was directed toward Bull. Bull just let his lower jaw drop and watched him as he strutted down the tarmac.

"Cripes," gulped Bull, "never saw a guy like him. He was just sitting there in the cockpit, looking at the floor, and didn't have the slightest idea I was stunting. And did I throw her around? You saw me, sergeant. I got scared myself a couple of times. I'm sick as a horse now and that guy comes down and wants to know why I didn't do some tricks with him. That guy should be a pilot, with the stomach he's got."

His hand clapped over his mouth suddenly. "Got to get somethin' off my chest—or somewhere," he blurped, racing for the hangar.

The field at Menecourt had been doing more than its share of damage in that sector of late. In fact, the personnel of the field had been so successful at keeping Jerry out of the sky that at that very moment the brass hats who ran the show on the other side were making desperate plans to wipe the entire field from the map of the war-torn, whirling sphere.

Sammy was hot in a crap game that evening when the first sign of a bombing raid came to them. There was the throbbing drone of many motors, high above the field. Their exhausts barked in wavering crescendo as they blared out defiantly above.

Men ran from the cover of their quarters, being careful to turn out lights and close blanketed doors.

Bam! The first bomb blasted far to the other end of the field. The burst illuminated the entire field for a split second; then all was darkness again.

"Oi, oi-oi," yelled Sammy. "And I inlisted in de mechanics to be safe. Yi-yi. And so dark you couldn't see vas it de Germans doink it or maybe some French makink a mistake."

"Come on, let's get inside," advised the sergeant at his elbow.

Another voice came out of the darkness. It was Lieutenant Needham.

"That you, Stein?" he asked, groping about. There was a hint of laughter in his voice.

"Dis is me all right," sputtered Sammy. "Who de hell should you be?"

"I'm your pilot," Bull laughed, in the darkness. "So you came into the mechanical branch of the air for safety. Well, how does this—"

Bam! Bam! Boooooom! A series of bombs burst in and cut him off short. The earth trembled under them as they flattened to the ground. Again the flash of the explosions illuminated the field for an instant. Then darkness again with the hum of enemy motors overhead and the spatter of blasted earth as it came pelting down once more.

"Yi-yi," wailed Sammy. He was stumbling along for the barracks nearby. "I comink here for safety. Vat a foolish guy I'm. Lieutenant, I'm tellink you, tomorrow mornink I'm puttink in for a transfer. Would you geeve me a help? I couldn't stand it dis business. I'm noivous, I'm tellink you."

Bam! Bam! Bull grinned and ran on by the side of Sammy. Not that there was any place in particular that they would be safer than the tarmac, but he had suddenly thought of an idea. Sammy had made a monkey out of him. Now, good naturedly, he was working out a plan to get back at him. If he could work the stunt he had in mind, it would pay for his chagrin in the air that afternoon. He chuckled.

SAMMY crashed slam-bang into the side of the barracks in the darkness. He staggered back and felt Bull's hand drawing him toward the door, pushing him inside. The noise of bursting bombs grew deafening. The field was sure catching hell this time. "Tell you what I'll do, Stein," grinned Bull when they were inside. "Just to show you I'm a good guy I'll help you get a transfer as soon as the sun comes up. You want to get in something back of the lines, eh? All right. You come over to me about six in the morning and I'll have the papers all made up. All you'll have to do will be to sign them and I'll send them in to the proper authorities." Sammy turned a truly grateful face to him.

"Honest?" he begged, as though he were dreaming. "You vouldn't fool a guy, vould you, lieutenant? If you vould maybe get me transferred to sometink vere I could do fightink back of de lines. Maybe makink me a quartermaster, hey? Oi, vat I vouldn't do for a guy like you, lieutenant."

Bull looked wise. "That's all right, Stein," he grinned. "But of course I can't do much for you.

You know it's hard to get a fella transferred from one branch to another, but for special reasons they sometimes go through." And Bull knew what special reasons he was going to make on that application for transfer."

"Reasons you're lookink for, lieutenant?" cried Sammy eagerly. "Oi, if only I had now mine fadder's lawyer, Finkelstein. Can he figure out reasons for doink sometink? He's a vonder, I'm tellink you."

As Bull had promised, he had the application for Sammy's transfer ready bright and early the following morning. The raid was over. It had inflicted heavy damage on the field and some of the buildings, but nothing had been damaged that could not be repaired.

Sammy was highly excited when he reported to Bull to sign the papers. And for once in his life, doubtless the first time, he became unbusinesslike enough to sign something that he had not read. He went about his duties that morning with a light step and a feeling that before long he would certainly be out of the hell of war and safely wrestling with supplies far in the interior.

Shortly after noon mess he received orders from Colonel Morgan to report to his office at once. Sammy was fairly bursting with joy at the news. His cherished hopes would be realized now. The transfer was going to be granted at once, if not sooner. He reached the colonel's office, still puffing from his long run.

"I'm already goink any place you vant me to," he exploded eagerly, as soon as he had time to burst into the office and snap up a smart salute.

Colonel Morgan scrutinized him closely. A shadow crossed his face. For some reason, all did not look right to him. He knew Bull Needham and his reputation as a practical joker. Something looked funny. He was determined to ferret it out.

"You signed this application for transfer, Stein?" he inquired.

"Am I foolish, colonel, vid a chance like dat?" he inquired. "I don't look foolish, do I, sir? Yes, sir, I signed it de transfer and I'm vondering how soon could I get started. It should take me maybe ten minutes packink and I'll be ready."

"Very well, then," the colonel couldn't help but smile. "I'll see what I can do. You'll hear from this later."

On his way out Sammy bumped into Bull entering the outer office.

“Lieutenant,” he cried, “how could I tank you enough for doink this?”

A friend? Yi-yi, more like a brodder you are to me.”

Bull didn’t look quite so cheerful at the moment. He simply nodded and strode past into his commandant’s office.

“Lieutenant,” snapped Colonel Morgan, “I’ve had enough of your practical joking. Now I’m going to teach you a lesson. You made out this transfer, did you not?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And this fellow Stein didn’t see what branch he was requesting a transfer to, did he? You took particular pains to see that he didn’t, eh?”

Bull hesitated, then nodded sheepishly.

“I’ve investigated this matter. I find that Stein wants to get a transfer back of the lines because he’s afraid up here. I’ve also heard of your flight with him and I must confess he’s good, to stand a rolling such as you gave him. Stein hasn’t the slightest idea that he signed a request for a transfer to air as a pilot. He doesn’t know even yet. I’ve thought the matter over and I’m convinced, in spite of his fear now, that he would make a good observer. You need one, don’t you, lieutenant?”

Bull winced. “I expected another observer up from the school in a day or so, sir,” he admitted.

“Very well then,” barked the colonel. “I’ll countermand that order and request a raise to corporal for Stein. You’ll train him for your observer and carry him through yourself. Perhaps that will be a lesson to you. We’re having quite an easy time of it here now, for a time at least, or I wouldn’t feel that I could spend the time to do this. Stein will be your observer from now on, then.”

Bull swayed a little from the shock,

“Yes, sir.”

“And since you took it upon yourself to play this little joke and request a transfer for Stein into the air as a pilot, which you know would be next to impossible under the circumstances, I’m ordering you to teach him to fly your observation ship.”

“Yes, sir,” came from Bull, almost in a whisper. He saluted and somehow made the door.

SAMMY was in a panic when he received the official orders of his transfer. He was not only stuck at the Front, but ordered to the air and would learn to fly. Bull followed orders and began his instructions. He was to be his observer then. Nothing to do but make the best of it and do as good a job as he could.

Sammy, reluctant, mulish, and scared stiff of what lay ahead, but not of the present, was put through private instructions in observation, gunnery, mapping and the like. Then came the actual practice.

“For cripes’ sake, watch out now,” ordered Bull on their first day of gunnery practice. “When I fly over that field with the mud puddles in it, take a bead on a certain mud hole, just as soon as the wing clears. Follow it around with your Lewis guns until you come almost to the tail group of the plane. Then cease firing. Don’t want to shoot off the tail.”

Sammy, standing in the rear cockpit of the Salmson, surrounded by the gun turret, nodded stubbornly. They roared into the air, climbed a few hundred feet and Bull swung over the range. He motioned down to Sammy and pointed to the many silvery spots of stagnant water below. Sammy nodded, whirled his guns, pointed toward one of the puddles as it came out under the wing, and let go with a vibrating burst.

Tac-tac-tac! The guns barked wildly. He clutched the butts in his thin hands to keep them from jumping as the guns barked. Suddenly he noted to his delight that the water in the pool was sparkling like little diamonds down there below. He was making hits. He held the triggers down and let ‘em rave.

Tac-tac-tac! They stuttered on. Steadily he moved the guns round to follow as the plane skimmed over the field. Back, back they traveled. He became so elated at his success that he forgot all about Bull’s orders. He was hitting his mark. That was all that seemed to matter.

Tac-tac-tac! Back moved his guns. Suddenly the stabilizer flashed before his guns and still he did not release that pressure on the triggers. The plane lurched. The stabilizer disappeared from before his eyes as though by magic. Then, for the first time, he realized what had happened.

His hand was pounding on the cowling between the two cockpits.

“Lieutenant, lieutenant,” he shouted at the top of his voice. The Salmson was rocking and weaving, as Bull fought to control it with half the tail group shot away. “Lieutenant, geeve it a look. I shot it de stabilizer off. Oi-oi.”

The engine had been cut just as he began to shout his warning. Bull turned around and his face was crimson with anger.

“Hey, you damn fool,” he cried, “don’t you suppose I know it? What do you think I’m up here for, anyway? Just a hunk of meat to help balance the ship?”

Bull had a light control over the pitching motion of the Salmson. He struggled frantically to hold it on level keel. Lower and lower they glided as he fought to hold up the nose with what little use he still had over that portion of the stabilizer that was not yet shot away. The controls had almost been jammed, too, as the half of the stabilizer let go and swept out into the void. He could move the stick only an inch or so backward and forward.

“Oi-oi,” wailed Sammy. “I told you I shouldn’t be flyink. I told you. I should be on the ground and back behind, dat’s vere. Yi-yi. You’ll find out ven you break it de neck, maybe mine too.”

Down over the field they glided. The air was rough close to the ground. The Salmson pitched and rocked unevenly. Bull wanted to hurl back words at his observer. But he was kept too busy at the moment. He felt the wheels touch. For an instant it seemed that the plane was going to make a good landing, in spite of the shattered tail group. Then a puff of wind came. The tail lifted dangerously. He fought to bring it down again, yanked with all his might to get that stick back in his lap; but the controls were hopelessly jammed.

Slowly, the nose fell still farther. He reached up and cut the switch, just before the great blade struck into the ground. There was a resounding crash, a crumpling of wood, wire and steel, and the Salmson flopped over on its back and stopped.

“Yi-yi,” cried Sammy, “vot a damage! And not a cent’s vort of insurance, I’m bettink you. Yi-yi. I should maybe get de transfer now, hey?”

SAMMY sprawled out of the rear cockpit, helping Bull to get out from under the mass of

crumpled wing over his cockpit. There was danger from fire. Bull stood up and glared at him. Then suddenly he had to laugh. Sammy wasn’t as frightened as he had expected.

“Let’s see you hold out your hands,” he demanded.

Sammy held them out, but they were shaking unnaturally. They didn’t move fast enough for a genuine tremble.

“Hey, hold ‘em still,” barked Bull. “You’re a wise little guy, Stein, but I saw your hands a second ago and they weren’t trembling. Hold ‘em still.”

Stein looked a little sheepish and grinned. His hands suddenly became perfectly still as he held them out.

“You ain’t so dumb yourself, lieutenant,” he ventured. “But listen, I shouldn’t be stayink in de air, a noivous guy like me.”

“Nervous, hell,” Bull chuckled. “Why fella, after a crash like this, ninety per cent of the pilots would be shaking for a while. Don’t kid yourself, Stein. You’re not going to get out of this branch. You can shoot. I saw that this morning. You can’t kid me, fella. You’re going to stay right here with me. But don’t try any more tricks like this one again. I believe you shot off the tail on purpose, trying to get transferred.”

“Lieutenant,” moaned Sammy, “how could you say sometink like dat about me? I should do dat on purpose? Don’t be a *schlamiel*.”

Bull grinned and slapped him a whack on the back that made his teeth rattle.

“You’re not a bad scout, Stein,” he laughed. “Only trouble with you is you’ve made up your mind you’re yellow. Why, I’ll bet you’d darn near kill yourself just to get sent back behind the lines. Forget it, kid, and we’ll be out giving Heinie hell before long.”

Bull had begun to like the little fellow. True, the jokes had all been on him since he and Sammy had met, but then Bull, unlike most practical jokers, had a sense of humor and was a good loser, when he had to be.

Sammy Stein grumbled much. He took his rotten luck hard. But day by day he became more and more skilled in the art of an observer. Not only in that did he show signs of skill, but Bull had given him lessons in the handling of the Salmson. He was landing and taking off on all

their flights now. He seemed, strangely enough, to take to flying like a cat to catnip; and while he talked constantly of how scared he would be if any-thing happened, still he never showed any actual signs of fear in an emergency. He was, in fact, ready to solo and far past that stage, but Bull still had misgivings of turning him loose with the plane. One crash on purpose was enough. Besides, he liked the kid and didn't want to see him hurt just because he had a foolish idea that he should be in some other less dangerous branch.

They were going out regularly on missions of bomb dropping and general observation. Sammy could click off his wireless by the key at his right hand, as calmly as though he were sitting home in the parlor. But still he insisted on getting transferred.

THE old Salmson had encountered little or no trouble from the enemy planes. Always there was a large convoy of Spads with them, and they served to either scare or drive away the E.A.s from that sector. Then, one day, came a surprise. It came so suddenly that Bull did not realize their trouble until it was nearly over for them. They were returning from a bombing raid. Sammy had become so efficient at dropping bombs that now and then one or two other bombers were sent out with them to follow his accurate lead in the laying of the eggs. A flight of seven Spads convoyed them, flying a short distance above and behind.

Abruptly, without warning, a flight of nine Fokkers darted out of a cloud bank just above and hurtled down at them. And in that instant Bull noted with panic that each plane had a red nose and the Fokker at point was painted red all over.

"Cripes," he muttered to himself, as he stuck the nose of the old Salmson for the lines and raced for home. He whirled in his seat and pointed to the flight. Sammy was gesticulating wildly. He, too, had seen it and was trying to tell his pilot about it.

He whirled to his guns as the Fokker flight tore in close. Vickers and Spandaus rattled wildly. The seven Spads above them fought furiously to protect their lumbering charge. Bull pulled out from under and tore homeward. A Spad went hurtling down out of control, while the pilot, half out of the cockpit, clutched at his blood-smear-

throat. One Fokker, two, darted downward—both flamers.

Then out of the wild tangle tore a Fokker, straight for the lumbering Salmson as it crossed the lines and raced for home. Bull saw Sammy duck low in the rear cockpit, felt the Salmson shudder as the twin Lewis guns spoke their hate in sharp staccato. Yellow tracer smoke tore past the fuselage of the two-seater. Flaming steel ripped through the wings and left little tell-tale spots where death had lurked.

In a backward glance Bull saw the prop of the Fokker fly into bits. The Lewis steel had cut into the blade and maimed it for life. They no longer had a Fokker on their tail. He raced on toward the south.

BULL landed short, taxied hastily to the deadline and rushed to the office of Colonel Morgan. He had important news, bad news.

"Yes, sir," he reported. "It was *Hauptmann* Herman Stein and his circus. I'm certain of it, colonel. Apparently he's been switched to this sector to stop us. And from what I saw, he's as good as he's reputed to be."

Colonel Morgan looked grave. "That's bad," he admitted. "Up to now we've had things about our own way here in these sectors. We'll have to put out more ships in the next convoys. Make sure, lieutenant. Yes, Stein is a bad man."

Bull had left Sammy highly elated at his first victory. Now when he returned from the colonel's office the little observer was the picture of desperation.

"It wouldn't be no use," he wailed. "Listen. I got it a letter from de old man just now. I wrote and told him I vas flyink. And vat do you tink? It's gettink so maybe I don't mind dis fightink in de air. Den comes it a letter from de old man, and vat? He's tells me I'm maybe killink mine own cousin. Yi-yi. A foist cousin, lieutenant. Now I got to get transferred to sometink else. Could I kill mine own cousin? Not Sammy Stein. I'm goink right now to de colonel and tell him."

Bull tried to stop him, to get him to explain more. But there was no stopping Sammy. He was off on a wild run for the colonel's office.

"Colonel Morgan." He snapped up a weak salute. "Listen, sir, I'm seek. Oi, de news I'm

gettink dis mornink, just when I get it a ship for the foist time!”

Colonel Morgan misunderstood his concern. “I congratulate you, Stein,” he said sincerely. “But stay with it, corporal. You’ll get used to those things. Not pleasant to send another fellow down, I’ll admit, but perhaps you didn’t kill this German.”

“Oi,” cried Sammy, “if dat vas all, I would be happy. But I got it a letter from de old man just now, and vat does he say? Listen, colonel”—the colonel tried to keep his face straight—“me, I vas born in Goimany. Den, ven de old man and mine modder comes over to my country, I was a kid, see. In Goimany I had it a cousin. Hermie, he vas. Hermie Stein, mine cousin. He vas bigger dan me, but fightink it was all de time between us. I vas maybe nine ven ve come to de United States. Anyvay, small enough to go ridink on street cars for nottink. But vat he done to me den, it shouldn’t made no difference. Now, mine fadder, he’s tellink me I should vatch out and not kill mine own cousin. It says in the papers he’s a great fighter in de air.”

Colonel Morgan shook his head sadly. “This is war, you know, Stein.”

“Var, is it?” cried Sammy. “But no var don’t make it right I should kill Hermie Stein, mine own cousin. And dis mornink I’m shootink at him and his flight, ain’t it? Sure. Colonel, oi, I’m seek. I got to have it a transfer.”

Colonel Morgan tapped his desk for a moment while he thought. He wasn’t so much concerned with Sammy’s plea as he was with a certain mission that he had just received word of. A bombing expedition of great importance.

“Stein,” Colonel Morgan began, “You’ve been after a transfer for a long time. I’d hate to see you go, because you’ve made good. But I’ll make you a proposition.”

Sammy brightened. “A proposition, maybe I should be interested, colonel.”

“I’ve just received word from headquarters that a certain dump must be destroyed,” the colonel continued evenly. “If you’ll go out with Lieutenant Needham and get this dump, Stein, I promise you I’ll see what I can do about a transfer. I won’t guarantee that I can get it for you, but I’ll do my best.”

“Oi, colonel,” wailed Sammy, “I thought maybe it should be a good proposition. I should go out again and maybe shoot down mine own cousin!”

“I wouldn’t be too worried about shooting down this fellow, Stein,” advised the colonel with the trace of a smile. “If I were you, I’d be more concerned about his shooting me down. But then, you’ll doubtless get along all right. Is it a bargain? I’m very anxious to get this dump.”

Sammy hesitated. “For a business proposition de price is too high, colonel,” he ventured. “But I got to get it a transfer some way. I’ll take it, sir.”

“Good,” smiled the colonel. “You’ll start in two hours or as much sooner as you and Needham can eat lunch and have the ship ready. I’ll send along two flights of Spads on this trip to make sure. This German ace, Stein, is a bad man.”

The combination of one old Salmson, Bull Needham and Sammy Stein had been smearing the German Front in that sector with well placed destruction. And at that very moment *Hauptmann* Herman Stein, great enemy ace, was receiving instructions that every member of his flight was to concentrate on getting that old Salmson which was to blame for all the damage.

SAMMY did not feel like eating that noon. He found a piece of chalk and busied himself with certain lettering on each side of the old Salmson. When Bull returned from mess he stared hard at the writing on the side of the old crate. His lips twisted in a grin as he spelled out the words. The letters were not arranged with the skill of the sign-painter, but nevertheless they were plenty large and easily legible.

**DON’T SHOOT, HERMIE.
THIS IS YOUR COUSIN SAMMY.**

There it was. A plea to an enemy relative, if ever one was made.

“What’s the idea?” chuckled Bull. He was going to say more. But he decided not to. No use discouraging Sammy in his serious work.

“Geeve it a look, lieutenant,” explained Sammy. “Hermie’ll see it and he wouldn’t shoot his own relation. Ve’ll get it de dump and den I get it my transfer,” he added confidently.

Ten minutes later the heavily loaded Salmson droned out of the field. It climbed sluggishly, for it had a full complement of bombs hanging in their racks below the wings. Just above roared a flight of seven Spads and some distance above them droned another flight of seven.

Bull guided the sluggish crate in a gentle climb toward the lines. The earth below looked torn and wasted. Great shell holes gaped up at them with their stinking, oil-smearred waters shimmering the different colors of the rainbow. Then on over the enemy territory.

Wires hummed with the news as they roared back into enemy territory. German pilots set their beer down on the table with a clatter and rushed to their ships. That devilish bomber was on its way toward their most important dump. It must be knocked from the skies at any cost.

Bull checked his maps. They were nearing their goal. Then, for the first time, he saw it, just a speck in the distance. He turned and pointed it out to Sammy. And Sammy, in turn, pointed to the east, where a flight of nine Fokkers, red-nosed and flying swiftly, were tearing at them from far off.

Bull saw Sammy lean far over the side, the wind ripping at him, and nod with satisfaction as he saw that the chalk marks had not been blown from the side of the ship. He grinned to himself as he thought of the futility of Sammy's plan. It was laughable to think that the great Herman Stein would allow this ship to go free, simply because it had that printed on the side. He made a guess at their distance from the dump and the distance of the Fokkers from them. The Jerry flight was heading straight for the dump. They were apparently trying desperately to head them off. Bull guessed that they would make it in the Salmson before the Jerries could reach the point.

He stuck the nose of the Salmson down a little. They could afford to lose altitude now to gain speed. Sammy could drop his bombs from right down on top of the dump, if necessary. The fourteen Spads above dropped their noses also and lunged on.

Down, down they tore. It was going to be close. The Fokkers were making wonderful time as they howled along. Nearer and nearer the two great flights came to the dump. Bull grinned with satisfaction. He was going to make it.

Down over the dump they roared. The old Salmson shuddered from the racing speed as they dove. He felt the bomber lurch as, one after another, Sammy laid the destructive eggs.

They burst in the center of the lines of buildings that covered the supplies. *Bruuuuum!* The sheds went up like so much kindling. The Salmson shot upward from the force of the violent explosions. Bull, his work finished, yanked over steeply and started the return trip.

Like angry hawks the Fokkers screeched in. They cleverly swung round the upper flight, tore through the second and hurtled down at the Salmson. The air about the bomber was split with staccato notes of a death dirge, the whining of wind through the ships and the screaming of motors.

Bam! The one Spad flight from above came snarling down on the Fokkers. Ships whirled and darted about them. Guns rattled. And in the bedlam that followed the old Salmson shuddered constantly, as the drumming of Spandau steel beat a deadly tattoo.

Bull was twisting and turning desperately as he raced for home. The flight higher up had not come in yet. Ships whirled and darted downward, some out of control, some flaming. Fokkers and Spads they were. Allied and German.

An all-red Fokker dove past. Bull saw the pilot squint at the lettering on the side of the ship. Then his lips curled in a grin and he waved. Sammy was like a wild man in the rear cockpit. One moment he was pouring flaming steel at some Jerry crate. The next he was waving excitedly to the pilot of the red ship and pointing to the lettering on the side. In spite of their tight squeeze, Bull couldn't help laughing. But he knew, only too well, the meaning of that wave from *Hauptmann* Herman Stein. He had spotted them for his kill. It was his usual last salute.

Like a howling demon the red Fokker dove. Then, suddenly, the Fokker yanked out of its dive and came screaming up in a zooming climb, straight for the blind spot under the Salmson, while Sammy leaned out over the edge of the cockpit and shouted at the top of his voice, pointing and gesturing to the chalked letters on the side of the ship.

BULL heard the rattle of Spandaus from beneath him; saw yellow tracers fluff past, close. He ducked under the cockpit instinctively as he fought desperately to yank the Salmson out of range.

Crash! It sounded to him like the dropping of a case of beer bottles into a bathtub. He felt a sudden pain in his forehead. The spurting blood blinded him and he couldn't see a thing for the trickle of red over his eyes.

He struggled wildly to clear the blood from his sight. But, as fast as he wiped it off, more came. The Salmson was pitching dizzily. Then it righted itself and seemed to be flying level once more. He felt the movement of the stick between his legs. Sammy must be flying the crate. The last thing he remembered seeing, as he went blind, was the lines below. They would cross anyway.

Again the great German ace tore in at the Salmson. Then, for some reason, he became curious. He pulled close to the side of the ship and carefully read the message over again. Sammy was flying with one hand and pointing wildly toward the letters with his other. They were far back behind their own lines now.

Out of the north, part of the top flight thundered in pursuit of the red demon of the enemy. But they were not close as yet. Sammy could see their own field now. Far to the south. He gestured wildly to the ace.

Suddenly the ace twisted round in his seat, saw the flights of Spads cutting off his retreat and whirled in anger. He pulled over in a sharp vertical and raved down on the Salmson. His guns belched hate and death. Yellow tracers fluffed about the cockpit where Sammy hunched.

"Oi," he cried, "killink his own flesh and blood! I'll show him vunce."

Then he suddenly recalled the other plane he had brought down, probably without harm to the pilot. They were near enough to his own field for one to make an easy forced landing.

Sammy peered an instant over his sights. He had that whirling prop directly in the center of the ring and the red Fokker was tearing straight on. He pressed angrily. The ship shuddered from the recoil. Yellow tracers fluffed through the side of his own cockpit, slamming in close. Then the prop stopped with a jerk and stood still. He hadn't hit it, but had plugged a vital point in the motor.

Instantly he yanked up and over. The Fokker, helpless now, was nosing down for the ground.

Men strung out, running across the field as the Fokker came down. The great ace, Herman Stein, stepped quickly from the cockpit, and before anyone could reach his red Fokker it was blazing. Sammy had landed and was helping Bull out of the ship. He was still blinded and very weak from loss of blood.

Sammy was racing now toward the great German prisoner. He stopped a few feet from him and stared.

"Vat's de idea of tryink to shoot down an own cousin? Tell me," he demanded.

Hauptmann Herman Stein stared at him for a moment. Then he smiled.

"There seems to be some mistake," he said in English. "Evidently you take me for a cousin of yours. I'm flattered. But sorry of the mistake.

"It seems strange in Germany, but neither my father nor mother had any brothers or sisters," Herman Stein explained. "So of course I could not have a first cousin. There are many Herman Steins in Germany. Perhaps that explains it."

"Den you ain't mine cousin?" demanded Sammy. "You ain't Hermie, mine cousin? I should knowed Hermie was better lookink dan you. He looked more like me," he grinned. "Oi, vot a lot of trouble I vasted on you."

Later in the day Sammy met the colonel. Colonel Morgan smiled at him genially; he had heard the whole story.

"Very fine work, corporal," he greeted.

"Dank you, colonel, sir," grinned Sammy.

"And now about that transfer," the colonel went on in mock seriousness. "I believe I can get it through for you, if you want it."

"Listen, colonel," grinned Sammy. "I told you before it vas a bum business proposition. Now I know it. De deal's off. I'm tellink you confidential, I vouldn't be interested."