

# The Squadron Without a Name

By Donald E. Keyhoe

*Under guard in his hut—on a double charge of treason and murder! He had led two men out on a secret mission and they had not returned—but he had brought straight to his hidden drome a flock of Boche. And that night he was found beside the body of the man who had called him a spy—and the man was dead, shot through the heart! Yet for Larry Brent, one of those twenty loyal hellions the Boche had named Devildogs, there was always a way out—even though it led to the Squadron Without a Name.*

## CHAPTER I THE DEVILDOG SQUADRON

*“From the Halls of Montezuma,  
To the shores of Tripoli—”*

THE famous Marine Corps song came roaring out of the Devildogs’ mess, hurled lustily into the night as “Cyclone Bill” Garrity strode across the muddy drome to the darkened mess hut. Intermixed with the song came an occasional crash of breaking glass. One voice, louder than the rest and horribly off-key, proclaimed that its owner had gone down the cognac trail too often. A frightful discord tortured the night air and then the song suddenly ceased.

There was a violent clamor. Wrangling voices rose in a bedlam that shook the rickety walls. Cyclone Bill heard the sounds of strife mingled with sputtering profanity. Then abruptly the door crashed open. A figure sailed out and came to a jolting stop in sitting position. The door banged and the din waxed more furious than before.

Cyclone Bill stood back in the shadows and waited, a grin on his weather-beaten face. For a moment the hard-boiled C.O. of the 28th had forgotten the gruff dignity he was forced to maintain.

The man on the ground sat and cursed eloquently for several seconds. Then he got to his feet. Slowly and methodically he took off his blouse and rolled up his sleeves. Still cursing, with the earnest manner of one who had serious business to perform, he kicked open the door and went back in.

A second later something hit the side of the hut close to where Cyclone Bill was standing. An already cracked window-pane flew into bits and crashed to the ground. Cyclone Bill ducked and swore.

“Pipe down, yuh ring-tailed hyenas!” bellowed a voice inside the hut. “Yuh’ll have the Old Man over here, bawlin’ the pants off me—”

“Throw him out!” roared another Devildog.

“Like hell yuh will,” came the fog-horn voice. “Come on, A Flight—let’s clean the trash outta this here dump!”

Cyclone Bill stole to the window and gazed in, a glint of amusement in his deep-set eyes. Twenty howling Devildogs were mixed together in a scrambling mass of arms and legs. With a crash the mess table went over. A chair collapsed as three Devildogs lit on it at once, under a sudden onslaught. A struggling figure was being borne doorwards, kicking and cursing at the top of his voice. The C.O. recognized lanky “Hick” Jones, the blouseless individual who had been thrown out before.

THE uproar by now had swelled till it would have drowned a Big Bertha. Cyclone Bill wiped off his grin and summoned his official dignity as he stalked around to the door. Damned young hellions! In another minute they’d have the roof down. Always raising Cain. Not a serious thought in the whole outfit—and anyway, it was a devil of a note that a C.O. had to stand outside and miss a good row. It was all of a year since he had had a good rough-house!

He arrived at the door just in time to see Hick Jones duplicate his previous performance. As the angry Hick skidded to a stop on the seat of his breeches, Cyclone Bill planted himself in front of the prostrate Devildog.

“What in ninety-nine kinds of hell is going on here?” he roared.

Hick’s eyes bulged. He got to his feet hastily. “I—we—they didn’t like th’ way I was singin’,” he stuttered. “So—they—I just left.”

“So I see,” said Garrity grimly. The door banged open again. Three Devildogs appeared, another unfortunate victim in their clutches. Open-mouthed, they stared at the C.O. Then with one motion, the three came to stiff attention. The object of their former efforts bounced off the threshold and did a ground-loop at Cyclone Bill’s feet.

“Well?” demanded the C.O., glaring at the trio.

“Why, er—we was just throwin’ a party, sir,” vouchsafed the one in the middle.

Garrity looked down at the other man. “Well, throw him back in the mess, then. I’ve something to tell you young colts.”

One of the trio faded into the hut swiftly. The furor ceased. There were sounds of hasty adjustment. Garrity swallowed a smile with an effort as he entered. The mess table was right-side-up. Two panting mess-men were disappearing into the pantry with swiftly scooped-up loads of battered tableware. And twenty Devildogs were standing at attention, painfully forced smiles on flushed and guilty faces.

The C.O. looked around slowly. “I’m glad to see so much energy displayed,” he observed drily. “You’ll need it. We’re moving out—tonight!” The Devildogs stared and then looked at one another.

“Sit down,” said Garrity gruffly. “And park that bottle you’ve got behind your back, Chubby. Your arm’ll be sore, and you’ll need it for flying tonight.”

Chubby Dexter turned the color of a boiled lobster. He produced the bottle and set it under the table. “It’s empty,” he offered lamely. “I suspected something like that,” said Cyclone Bill. “Now listen, you bunch of nitwits! We’re pulling a fast one tonight, and I don’t want any mistakes. It’s nine o’clock. By three in the morning we’re to be completely moved to the new base.”

“BUT the hangars and huts—” protested Hick Jones, who was second in command.

“They stay right here,” Garrity snapped. “We’re going to leave a dummy drome, and two or three old crates out in the open to make it look right. But we’re going under camouflage nettings at the radio intercept base, two miles north.”

“You mean Army’s listening station?” said Larry Trent. He was a keen-eyed youngster, with a lean, tanned face. He had led B Flight into and out of more hair-raising scraps with the Boche than even Hick Jones could boast. “I thought they had a squadron from the Second Pursuit Group for running their errands.”

“They did—until something began getting their ships and men.” Garrity’s face was hard. He stood at the head of the table, a big, hard-boiled man, square of jaw and stern of eye. “For the benefit of those who don’t know, G.H.Q. has established a radio listening station up here near Senne, right on the edge of the Foret de Boux. It’s between two and three miles from here. The station is used for catching Boche code messages. They have some code experts there and they try to dope out the Krauts’ next moves.

“Occasionally, some G-2 agent gets hold of a code key, and for a week or so G.H.Q. reads every message the Boche send out, until they get wise and change their code. That happened ten days ago. Army got hold of a brand-new code and learned of an enemy push in time to lay a trap. Whenever they read an important German message, they rush out copies by plane to various headquarters. They’re afraid to relay the dope by our own code for fear the Boche might spot it. That’s why they’ve been keeping planes near Senne.”

Cyclone Bill paused and filled his pipe. The Devildogs waited, all signs of their riotous mirth vanished. Here was serious business.

“Army had two flights of Spads on this work. Now they’ve got five ships left. Nobody knows what happened to ‘em—but they’re gone, the rest of the squadron, I mean. And we’re taking over.”

A discontented mutter ran around the mess.

“No more patrols, then?” said Larry Brent glumly.

“B Flight will continue on patrols temporarily,” said Garrity. “But you’ll be in reserve in case anything happens to the rest.”

Larry grinned. He turned to Hick Jones, who was looking rather sour. "Well, errand boy, we'll be seeing you sometimes," he snickered.

Hick growled a curse under his breath.

"Shut up, you two," ordered the C.O. "Save your breath for this move tonight. It's going to be a bit tricky. No lights on the field, but there's a quarter moon and we can get in. The whole place is camouflaged—canvas hangars, shop and huts are under nettings, and the field is rolled every night to erase wheel tracks. Hick, you take your flight first. Fly to Senne, swing northeast a mile and spot the field I've marked on this map. When you land, taxi straight toward the woods at the south. Captain Lowe will have men to lead you in under the canopies. Lowe is in charge of the radio station."

"If they send any messages from that place, the Boche can get a range on it and spot the field," said Larry Brent thoughtfully.

"The sending set is shielded—directional type," said Garrity. "Besides, it's out in the woods. They operate it by remote control. And they don't send except in emergency. The idea is to listen day and night for German Staff orders."

"Well," muttered Hick Jones, "guess we might as well be movin' along. Come on, gang."

FLIGHT A scattered to its billets to pack their gear for the trucks that were already rumbling across the drome. Garrity turned to Larry Brent.

"I'm leaving you on patrol—you and B Flight. But remember, this—you land on this drome instead of the camouflaged base when you come back from patrols. There'll be a few men here and some gas. If we let Jerry see we've moved out, he'll be hunting for our new base, and they might locate that station. So you'll operate from here until dusk, and then when it's dark enough, you can hop over under the nettings. That way, "even if the Boche do come over and lay any eggs on this field at nights, nobody will get hurt."

Plight B hurried out as Garrity finished his last directions. A feverish activity swept the field. In two hours the buildings had been emptied. Flight A roared off into the gloom. Trucks creaked and groaned as they started for Senne, from which the necessary material was to be carted to the hidden nest so as to eliminate betraying tracks. Cyclone Bill stood and watched the final evacuation. Flight

B was warming up its engines. As they died to idling, he heard a Devildog blare out in a discordant baritone:

*"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!"*

"Close your face, Chubby," yelled Larry Brent. "You're worse than Hick. All set—let's go!"

Garrity watched them with pride as they legged into the pits. Seven hellions—like the rest of the twenty flaming young devils an enraged Boche had named "*Der Teufelhund Staffel*." His outfit! They caused him more trouble and worry than all the Germans, G.H.Q. and snooping Brass Hats put together. Hard drinkers, with no more idea of regulations than the squadron cat. There wasn't one of them he hadn't threatened to court-martial, send to Blois or have shot at sunrise. And not a one he wouldn't have died for. They might be hard drinkers, but they were hard, two-fisted fighters, too. They fought the way he had taught them to fight. Cyclone Bill's eyes gleamed as he watched the last of the roaring Spads disappear into the night. Devildogs! By God, the Boche that thought of that name had hit it right, on the head!

## CHAPTER II OVER THE DUMMY DROME

LIKE a shrieking Fury riding the wind, a bullet-scarred Devildog Spad hurtled down from the northeast sky. In a screeching dive, the riddled fighter dropped clear of the dark storm clouds which the wind had swept in from ravaged Belgium; across the German lines.

Crouched grimly over the stick, Larry Brent plunged straight for the camouflaged drome, the hidden nest of the Devildogs.

There was a gash above Larry's left eye. Blood coursed down his cheek, under his goggles. The salty, disagreeably warm taste of it was in his mouth, but he scarcely realized it. For there was rage and hate in his heart, mingled with a numbing grief. Rage and hate for the Boche that had slaughtered the two Devildogs who had gone out with him late that afternoon, on a special

mission for Lowe, the intercept station commander. And grief at the loss of beloved comrades whose bantering, reckless voices would never again be heard as the Devildogs gathered at mess.

His eyes filmed for an instant. Then a fierce glare shone through the mist that clouded his sight. Those two were gone—but he was left to square accounts! That was why he had been spared—to even the score! He had escaped by a miracle. It had almost seemed that the Boche had been waiting, had known they were on that mission.

His blood-gashed brow drew stiffly in puzzled thought. By Heaven, the Boche had known! It was impossible that chance should have led that German air-mob to that remote spot, where there was no action in the ordinary course of events. He stared unseeingly into space, his face darkening with suspicion and anger.

And that strange insignia on those enemy ships—he had never seen nor heard of it before. A crouching, sinister figure in a black monklike robe. A grinning death's head leering out from the black cowl. And a gleaming scythe held significantly in two fleshless bony hands that protruded from the black robe.

Death poised to strike!

What squadron had that been? Whoever they were, they had fought like fiends. A wild plunge into the storm clouds had saved him after the other two Devildogs had been shot down before a hail of murderous slugs from stabbing Spandaus.

Some new *jagdstaffel*—but no, a new staffel never fought like that. He gritted his teeth and swore bitterly into the slipstream. New or old, the Devildogs would track them down and make them pay!

Immersed in his fierce thoughts, he had forgotten his usual wariness. At any other time his keen eyes would have been flitting around the sky as he lost altitude. But now he dived down blindly.

With a start he awoke to the fact that he was heading for the camouflaged drome instead of the dummy field. It was near dusk, but still light enough for his ship to be seen. He whipped his tattered Spad around toward the old field.

And the very next instant an ominous roar came from the sky at his back! He went cold as

his trained ears recognized the static bellow of German engines.

He flung around. Two giant Siemens-Schuckard bombers and four darting Albatrosses were thundering down on his tail!

COLD dread clutched his heart, but not a fear for his own life. It was a fear that he had led the Boche to the Devildogs' real nest.

A bitter curse tore from his lips. Blind, stupid fool! He had let himself be trailed—and he had forgotten Garrity's last emphatic order.

There was one slim chance that they had not seen the cleverly designed camouflage nettings suspended between the trees beneath. Under those nettings were hangars, the shops and huts of the Devildogs, and the radio intercept station they had been assigned to serve. If the Boche had seen....

Larry Brent hurled his Spad off into a streaking dive for the old drome. For five seconds he held his breath, while he pitched the fighter down toward the "dummy drome. Then he grinned in relief. For the Boche were banking down after him, heading toward the empty buildings and field of the 28th old base.

Spandau steel cut the air about his head. Tracer flicked gray patterns past his wings, above his head, on both sides, but he did not swerve. Those devils must be led away from the hidden nest!

There were ships on the dummy drome. Five of them. Three were lures, old wrecks. The other two were stand-bys from B Flight—his own flight! Larry jerked up in a mad zoom, firing frenziedly at the leading Boche. His Spad ripped through a lane of Spandau fire. Slugs cracked viciously into his wings. The Spad trembled as Larry yanked it up into an Immelmann and cut savagely across at the nearest Albatross.

Two Boche rocketed around to his tail, but he held his groaning ship to its plunge. Two fiery lines leaped from his Vickers, struck up the back of the darting Albatross in front. The pilot whirled—only to hurl his ship into the nearest Siemens-Schuckard. Half the bombers' lower right wing ripped off. Broken struts dangled from a maze of wires. And the Albatross went spinning down with its tail cut off by the impact.

Larry wrenched his Spad onto its tips and dove under the second bomber. The black iron eggs of the mighty crate were slithering down before his

eyes. He flung his Spad up and raked the belly of the huge ship. Back of him, the three remaining scouts closed in murderously.

Abruptly, a pit opened in the bottom of the bomber. A swivel Spandau snapped down and poured a deadly burst straight into Larry's lurching plane. Lead plucked at his helmet, tore through the crash-pad at his side. He kicked out widely and fled from that fierce barrage. The Spad's engine pounded crazily and the smell of hot oil swept back to his nostrils. A lone Devildog pilot was climbing up in the face of the frightful odds above him. Back of the climbing ship the dummy drome lay, havoc of gutted ground and demolished buildings. The crippled bomber had crashed between two hangars and was a blaze of glory. The second was droning back into the clouds.

Two Boche were frantically trying to cut Larry down. He doggedly held the creaking Spad, in the air and threw it between the flashing ships as they bored in for the finish. Vickers guns ate through the side of a scarlet Albatross.

THEN the air was suddenly full of ships—Devildog planes! Cyclone Bill Garrity and the rest of the 28th! Unnoticed, they had swept from under the camouflage nettings two miles away and had hedge-hopped the thick trees to fling themselves into the fight.

The two Albatrosses that remained out of the four that had struck now zoomed fearfully for the clouds. Like hounds after a fox, the Devildogs scorched in vengeful pursuit. In thirty seconds the two Germans lay under the blazing wreckage of their ships, and the fight was over. One Boche ship had escaped—the second Siemans-Schuckard. The other was still smoldering upon the dummy drome.

Larry Brent wearily nursed his limping ship down to the camouflaged nest, for Garrity had already signaled a return to the hidden base. The drome was almost dark now, and Boche eyes could not follow the blurred shapes of the Devildog planes.

The squadron landed, taxied under the nettings. Garrity's Spad roared up, streamers flapping from the struts. The C.O. jumped out, stalked over toward Larry Brent. He had pulled off his helmet and his fiery red hair was standing on end; At that

instant he was a scowling giant, with no trace of gentle feeling or understanding. Larry braced himself, for he knew what was coming.

"Well?" snarled Cyclone Bill. "What in hell have you got to say, Brent?"

"I forgot about not landing here," said Larry in a husky voice. "I—they got Simmons and Lewis, and I—I guess I lost my head."

Garrity stared at him, his face slowly whitening. "Simmons—Lewis," he muttered. "God!" Then, roughly, to hide the emotion in his voice, "What happened?"

Men were crowding around. Grim-faced Devildogs, staring mechanics, men from the radio intercept station. Larry had opened his mouth to speak; then he remembered that sudden flash of suspicion.

"What happened?" the C.O. grated out. "You say they're gone—who got them?"

"I don't know. It was an outfit I never saw before." Larry described the insignia he had seen on the Boche ships. "They jumped us six to one."

Silence. A harsh silence that rubbed Larry's nerves to the raw.

"For God's sake, don't look at me like that!" he rasped, his eyes flaming into Garrity's. "I didn't pull out and leave them. I stuck till—"

"I wasn't thinking anything like that," said Cyclone Bill. His voice was a little hoarse. "I know you stuck, kid. I—I was thinking about—them."

The anger faded from Larry's face. For Garrity suddenly seemed years older. And then abruptly the C.O. turned and walked off alone toward the squadron office tent.

A curt voice cut into the silence that followed the C.O.'s departure.

"A fine trick that was, Trent—heading straight down here with those Boche on your trail."

Larry turned hotly. It was Captain Lowe, from the Army intercept office farther back under the nettings. Lowe's arrogant mouth was curled in a sneer and his half-lidded eyes had an ugly light.

"Just what do you mean by that?" snapped Larry.

"What I said. It was a fine trick. It looks mighty queer to me. You lead two men out on a mission. They don't come back—but you bring home a flock of Boche—"

THAT was as far as he got. There was a crack like the report of a pistol as Larry Brent's fist connected with the sneering captain's jaw. Lowe went over like a felled tree. But in a second he was up, cursing through battered lips. He came at Larry with a rush, but three Devil-dogs seized him and hauled him back.

"Hold on, you!" growled Hick Jones. "We ain't got any special love for guys that sound off like that—but we ain't aimin' to see one of our outfit shot for murder."

"Let him go," snarled Larry. "I'll break his damned neck for him—the skunk!"

"Cool off, kid," advised Hick. "Not sayin' I blame yuh. But seein' he's a kiwi, maybe he don't know much better."

The cursing captain was released. He brushed off his muddy uniform and glared around at the Devildogs.

"Safety in numbers," he sneered. "Next time—"

He paused. Larry Trent had shoved past the men that sought to hold him back. "Next time you make a break like that, I'll beat in your ugly face!" he bit out, and there was cold fury in his usually friendly eyes. "Now get the hell out of here!"

The racket had brought Garrity back to the scene. He stopped Lowe with a quick gesture as the captain turned to leave.

"Now what?" he flung at Larry Brent. "By the eternal living God, I'm getting tired of you and your scraps!"

"No man is going to call me a spy and get away with it," Larry retorted defiantly. "By rights I ought to bust his teeth in—" Garrity turned to Captain Lowe. "Did you make such an insinuation?" he demanded grimly.

Lowe colored. "No—that is, I—well, it seems queer to me the way he led those Boche ships—"

"That's enough!" The C.O. faced him sternly. "Get this, captain—and get it straight. There's no yellow blood in the Devildogs! When you've brought down as many Boche as Lieutenant Brent, you'll know better than to shoot off your mouth like that."

"I apologize," said Lowe sullenly. He turned on his heel and disappeared in the gloom.

"And you," snapped Garrity, whirling on Larry. "See if you can keep from picking a row with him, just to be starting trouble."

Larry stared after him resentfully as the C.O. went back to his tent. "If that sneering jackass had said that to him, he'd have killed him," he muttered to Hick Jones.

"He sure would," agreed Hick. "But don't mind Cyclone Bill tonight—"

"I know," said Larry soberly. His mind went back to the scene of that fatal scrap, and again he saw two riddled Spads go spinning down in flames, funeral biers for two brave Devildogs. And with the grim picture still in his memory, he strode off to his hut to think out the plan that had come vaguely into his brain.

### CHAPTER III ON THE CHARGE OF MURDER

THERE was a ghastly ordeal at mess that night. The two empty chairs were a sorrowful reminder. The meal was eaten in stark silence, in spite of the raw liquor which more than one Devildog had downed to help him forget. Strained faces met Larry's eyes. He seemed to read reproach in more than one glance, as though in some way he could have saved the two men who had not returned.

With an oath, he pushed back his chair and went out. As he passed the end of the table, Lowe looked up and their eyes clashed fiercely. Larry scowled and went out into the night. Moodily, he walked along under the dark nettings that were stretched between the trees, hiding the whole area of the Devildogs' base and the intercept station.

His steps took him toward the gloomy radio shack. Suddenly a man stepped into his path. A flashlight shone briefly in Larry's face.

"What the devil?" he snapped. "Take that light out of my eyes!"

It was a sentry. "Sorry, sir, but Captain Lowe said for us to keep everybody away from the station while he was down at chow. Anything you want, sir?"

"No," said Larry shortly. Then he held out a detaining hand. "Wait a second. How many men does Captain Lowe have working with him—actually in his office, I mean?"

The sentry scratched his head. "Well, there's that Frog lieutenant by name of Delane, and Mr. Starr—he's a civilian code man from G.H.Q., and a second looney named Worden. Worden's mostly down at the generator shack in the woods, but—"

"You mean he does the sending—when any messages go out?"

"I dunno as to that, sir. My guess is Mr. Starr sends 'em from the shack here, by remote control. But you can ask the captain when he gets back. He'll be here most any time now."

"By the way, has Captain Lowe been here very long?" asked Larry.

"Since the station's been built—six months now. Starr came next. Delane and Lieutenant Worden just hit' here a month or so ago."

Larry nodded and started back to the Devildog camp. He was half way there when he heard two men approaching. He recognized Lowe's voice. Not wishing to encounter the man again, and partly from a desire to verify his vague suspicions, Larry stepped off to one side of the trail and waited.

"That was a foolish move you made—calling that young marine a spy," said a strange voice acidly.

"I know it," snapped Lowe. "But I had a reason. I thought it might lead our friend Paul off the track."

"So you picked a man who's got eleven Germans to his credit. A fine brain you've got. Serves you right that he poked you in the jaw."

"All the same," growled Lowe, "I'll even up for that crack he took at me."

The other man stopped short. "Listen to me," he said coldly. "We've enough on our hands now. Forget that fellow Brent—he'd probably kill you next time, anyway."

Back in the shadows, Larry smiled grimly. Then his smile vanished. What had Lowe meant by leading Paul off the track? Who was Paul?

"Now about tonight," the stranger went on quickly. "You will hide in the cabinet and wait. I will be outside, back of the trees. If he comes as I expect, keep quiet till he has finished sending the message. I have shorted the sending circuit, so it will not get across. Sergeant Tilson will be at the generator shack, to take down anything that is sent. That way we will get the code. You understand?"

Lowe seemed to be taking orders from the other. Larry heard an official deference in his voice as he answered. "I understand. But be careful. If you are right, he will be a hard man to trick."

THE two men moved on. Larry Brent stood in the dark, puzzled. Who was Paul? Who were they trying to trap—and why? Were Lowe and this stranger Boche agents—or were they loyal, and planning to trap a spy? Curiosity gripped him. He followed stealthily and hid himself in the shadows a hundred feet from the shack. The sentry had disappeared. No sound came from the shack. The trap—if trap it really was—had been baited.

An hour passed, while Larry shifted restlessly from one foot to another. Then someone moved close to him—so close that he almost jumped. A flitting figure ran on tiptoe to a window and peered in. So quickly did he move that Larry did not even catch a glimpse of the man's face, for instantly the man pulled open the rear door and hurried inside.

Larry crept up to the side of the shack. He could hear sounds of rapid movement, the flutter and crackle of papers. Then a sharp tapping. The tap of a remote control radio key! For several seconds it rapped out in distinguishable letters, then abruptly it ceased. A voice snarled something.

Then—crack! The report of a pistol sounded. There was a gasping cry. Larry Brent raced to the door and flung it open. The room was almost in darkness, but he saw a running figure at the other door. There was a flash of flame, and lead spattered the door-frame back of him. Larry's pistol was already out. He fired twice at the blurred shape vanishing into the night.

Then he tripped and plunged head-long to the floor. From outside he heard another staccato report, but his mind hardly caught the pistol's bark. For he was lying upon a man's body, and his fingers were sticky with warm blood!

He stumbled to his feet and ran to the shaded lantern that had been placed by the sending key. As he whirled the light toward the floor, he gave a cry.

The body was that of Captain Lowe—and he had been shot through the heart!

A deep groan sounded from the door through which the killer had disappeared. A man staggered inside, his face gray with deathly pallor. He was clutching at his side and his hand was crimson. <

"He—he got me," the man whispered brokenly. "Tell—his lips moved soundlessly and he slowly crumpled to the floor.

Larry dropped his gun and ran to the man's side. There was still a faint beat in the heart that had been so nearly punctured by the fleeing, murderer's bullet. But the man was dying. Larry bent over him.

"Who did it? Tell me his name quick!"

EXCITED voices from outside drowned any reply the dying man might have made. Men burst into the shack—sentries from the intercept squad, greaseballs from the Devildogs' camp. Someone seized Larry and covered him with an automatic. The room was in an uproar when Hick Jones appeared, with two or three Devildogs at his heels.

"Good God, kid—why did you do it?" Hick blurted out as he saw Lowe's body.

Larry stared at him stupidly. Then an angry flush came into his cheeks. "I didn't shoot him, you crazy baboon! Get these men quiet—that man on the floor can tell you who did it!"

The room went still. Hick knelt beside the dying man. "It's Starr," he muttered. He shook the inert form. "Get me some water, one of you birds!"

The water was hastily brought. At last Starr's eyes opened. He stared around dazedly. Then a wild gleam came into his glazing eyes and he broke into a sudden babble.

"You killed him. Lowe—I saw you kill Lowe—oh, my God!"

With a scream of agony, he slipped back to the floor.

"Who?" cried Larry Brent. "Who killed Lowe—and you?"

The light of reason had gone out of Starr's eyes. He was almost gone. With a last effort he raised a shaking hand as though to point at someone, and then collapsed and lay motionless.

Larry Brent wiped his perspiring brow and looked around him. Cyclone Bill Garrity had come in, and beside him was an officer in French

uniform. The Frenchman's eyes widened at sight of the two men upon the floor. Then he raised horrified eyes to Larry's white face.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he whispered. "Then it was you they meant!"

"What do you mean?" cut in Garrity harshly. "Be careful, Delane, before you make any accusations!"

"Captain Lowe said they had been suspecting a spy here at the station," Delane said in a low voice. "They were planning a trap—"

"I can explain this, major," said Larry Brent in desperation. "He's right about the trap—I overheard Lowe and someone talking about it. I think it was Starr—he was going to stay outside and watch."

Garrity's gaze dropped to the gun on the floor. He stooped and picked it up.

"It's my gun," said Larry, wretchedly. "And it's been fired—twice, I fired at the man who shot Lowe."

A heavy silence descended on the room. Larry seized Garrity's arm frantically.

"My God, sir—you don't think it's true—that I'm a spy?"

Garrity shook his head. "Not that. I know better than that. But—" his eyes went back to the body of Captain Lowe—"it's going to be hard to explain what you were doing here, after that row you had with—him."

A sentry pushed his way forward.

"I seen the lieutenant up here a while back. He was askin' a lot of questions about who was with the captain in the office—"

"Is this true, Brent?" demanded Garrity sternly.

"Yes—I—you see, I suspected something queer about this place." Larry's voice was broken. "Oh, to hell with all of you!" he rasped suddenly. "You all think I did it! Lock me up—give me a court!"

Garrity turned to Hick Jones, his face hard and grim. "Clear everybody out of here. I want to talk to Brent alone."

"WELL, what do you want?" said Larry sullenly, when they were alone.

"Tell me what happened."

Larry complied. Garrity listened, his eyes never leaving Larry's face. At last he shook his head slowly.

“There isn’t a court-martial board in France that will clear you. The spy charge won’t stand—against your record. But they’ll stick you in front of a firing squad for double-murder.”

“You mean Starr, too?”

“Certainly. They’ll say Starr ran in and caught you, and you shot him to cover up the murder of Lowe.”

Larry was pale, but he faced Garrity with a twisted smile on his lips. “I guess I’m sunk. But if I could think that the Devildogs didn’t believe it—”

“There’s one that believes in you—and he’s going to give you a break,” said Garrity grimly. He lowered his voice and spoke swiftly. Larry Brent started.

“No—I can’t let you,” he protested, but Garrity cut him short.

“Don’t worry—they’ll find nothing to prove on anyone,” said Cyclone Bill. “You do what I say!”

“All right, skipper,” said Larry dully. His jaw was set and hard. “Maybe—someday—I’ll be able to come back.”

Garrity held out his hand. Larry gripped it and they looked at each other for a long interval. Larry guessed what was passing in the mind of Cyclone Bill. His own thoughts went back to a memorable night when Garrity had rescued him from a wrecked ship in No-Man’s-Land, after Grimme’s ghost *jagdstaffel* had shot him down. Garrity had followed him down into No-Man’s-Land, had risked his own life in a storm of German bullets, and had lifted him in those powerful arms to carry him to the Yank trenches a hundred feet away.

“I wish it didn’t have to happen, sir,” Larry said hoarsely. “It’s hell to be—saying goodbye to the Devildogs.”

“Good luck—Larry,” said the C.O. in a low voice. He turned to the door, threw it open.

“Arrest Lieutenant Brent,” he ordered harshly, as Hick Jones stepped forward, “Place him under guard in his hut—on the charge of murder.”

#### CHAPTER IV THE STRIKING DEATH

FIVE Spads of the dawn patrol idled on the line, barely visible in the gloom of early morn. Suddenly, from a spot back under the camouflage nettings, came a livid burst of flame. Shouting

voices rose to a bedlam. Fire-fighters ran toward the blaze. Greaseballs and pilots raced from the line to aid in putting out the fire which had leaped up so strangely beside the engine shop.

The sentry in front of Larry Brent’s hut stood gaping at the scene. He never knew what struck him, when a figure flashed out of the hut and a clenched fist crashed back of his ear. Down he went, an inert heap. Snatching the man’s pistol, Larry dashed for the nearest Spad.

In a second the chocks were pulled. Larry jumped to the pit and slammed the throttle on. Back of him someone yelled a hoarse command. Larry laughed and zoomed up into the murky skies. Thank God for Cyclone Bill! He was free!

But the reaction passed quickly. Free—yes, but for what? Even if he did succeed in reaching a back area far enough from the Front for him to land and escape, he would always be a fugitive. A hunted man—with the brand of murder on his name.

He hunched stolidly over the controls and climbed. Below, there were flashes from spitting exhaust stacks as Devildog ships took off in pursuit. No danger from them now. He was already at two thousand feet and practically invisible in the darkness. It was a gesture that Cyclone Bill had been forced to make—a seemingly hot pursuit. Larry’s heart ached as he stared down and realized that he was looking for the last time on the Devildogs’ nest.

Then he turned toward the Front and throttled the Spad to cruising speed. He would head for Buzancy, then swing south and fly till his tanks went dry. By that time he would be far out of the Zone of Advance.

Ten minutes flitted by, but no sign of Buzancy. Larry cast a worried look at his compass. This was not his own ship. He had no idea of the compass error. He searched the gray clouds for the direction of, the dawn glow, but their impenetrable masses balked him. A light showed off to his right. He turned toward it. That must be Buzancy. If so, he could check his compass error and set a correct course for south.

The light passed under him rapidly. He was flying in a strong wind, that much was certain. But the town was not Buzancy—it was too small.

Now rather worried, he eased down to five thousand feet to find a landmark. Almost at once

the crump of German archie told him that he had made a mistake. Unseen batteries cut loose and shredded the air about him as the gunners strove to bracket his dodging ship.

Larry zoomed and held to a stiff climb. A hole appeared in the clouds above and he shot through it. Still another formation showed several thousand feet above the first. Beyond that, he could undoubtedly find the sun and learn his course.

HE WAS halfway to the top formation when a gray Fokker loomed into sight on his left. Instinctively, Larry whipped around toward it and bent over his gun trips. Then he hesitated. A bitter smile crossed his lips. What right had he to fight now? He was a cast-off, a man without a country.

But the Boche had already seen him. The Fokker snapped about and charged him with surprising speed.

“All right, you asked for it!” Larry growled. He tripped his Vickers and warmed the cold guns carefully.

The Fokker went up on its tips and then skidded around at the Spad’s tail. Larry grinned. This must be some wild amateur who had escaped from training school or lost himself in the clouds. Carelessly, he kicked away from the Fokker’s nose and began to tighten up his turn. The Fokker wobbled after him. Larry banked a little steeper.

Like a flash, the German dropped his clumsy maneuvers. With sudden ferocity, he jerked the Fokker into a screaming vertical turn and sprayed the Spad from flaming Spandau guns.

Larry cursed himself. Amateur! He himself was the greenhorn, if either of them was. To fall for a trick like that!

Angrily, he Immelmanned, then slid around in a raking turn. The Boche evaded him, ducked inside his bank and plastered the left wing with ugly holes, uncomfortably close to Larry’s pit. The two men settled down to a hot fight. For a minute they hurled their screeching ships about the sky; then the Fokker’s tail slowly began to creep up under Larry’s sights. He pressed the trips. His guns gave a staccato roar—and then went dead!

The Boche was on him in a twinkling. A hellish barrage was scorching around Larry’s head and he gave up all hope of clearing the jam in his

guns. With a dizzy split, he cut under the Fokker and dived for the lower clouds, which were now but a thousand feet beneath.

Twisting and zigzagging to evade the withering fire from the Boche’s guns, he reached the gray mists and drew a long breath. And then he went rigid, horrified, for a tongue of fire was licking along the side of his engine, fanned into a greedy flame by the wind!

Almost at once, it was an ugly breeze. Scorching heat swept back into Larry’s face. He hurled the Spad into a slip, away from the flame and dropped out of the cloud. Gas valve shut, throttle and switch full on, he plummeted sideways on moaning wings.

The Fokker was a mile away. As Larry slipped from the cloud, the Boche rounded in a savage *retournement* and came after him. Below, the ground loomed up dimly in the faint morning light. There was no sign of trenches or German supply dumps. Evidently the wind had taken him well back of the Boche lines.

The Fokker circled furiously, pouring in tracers and crackling, red-hot slugs. The Spad was being chopped to pieces. Larry coughed as a cloud of black smoke billowed into his face. If the fire didn’t get him, this damned Boche would!

He kicked top rudder and dropped the wings straight up and down. The Spad plunged like a flaming comet and the wind blowing up through the wings all but tore Larry out of his pit.

Now the fire was out! He had one chance of beating that fierce devil in the Fokker. A vicious reverse of controls, and the Spad slued out of the slip with a mighty groaning of wrenched wings. Larry frenziedly spun the fuel valve open. The engine sputtered and then backfired into dead silence.

The top of a tree swished under the fighter’s landing gear. Larry kicked around into the wind, stalled through a second tree and hit with a crash beside the ruins of an old peasant barn.

Half-stunned, he heard the Fokker roaring overhead. Then the Mercedes engine died away and he heard the whine of wings. The Boche was landing. Coming to finish the job or take him prisoner!

WITH a snarl, Larry dragged out his pistol and clawed his way out of the wreckage. The German

was out of his ship, a Luger in his hand, running clumsily across, the rough field. Larry sprang to his feet. The two guns barked simultaneously. The German lurched backward, spun around and fell on his face.

Larry Brent took off his helmet and stared at the crease which had not existed there a moment before.

"Close," he muttered, and then made his way over to the fallen pilot.

The man was dead. But it was not that which made Larry start back. He had seen dead men—plenty of them in the year he had been in France. But this one was different. Under the left glass of his goggles was a black patch. And under the edge of his helmet, which had been partially dislodged by his fall, showed a silver plate that had been fastened over a wound in the man's skull. His face was scarred and deeply lined. The man was a human wreck.

"A one-eyed pilot," muttered Larry. "Good Lord, the poor devil was all shot to pieces before we started the scrap. Germany must be getting hard up."

He looked across at the Fokker. There was no insignia on the plane, except for the usual black cross of the German Empire.

"Well, at least I've got a ship," he said to himself. "But I'll have a hell of a time landing in France with that baby."

He started toward the plane, then came back and tore open the dead pilot's flying suit. There might be some valuable papers on the man's body. And Garrity's orders—

Hell, he had forgotten for the second that Garrity's orders were over for him. But he went on with his search. He found a single document. It was in German, which he knew well enough to read and speak with moderate ease.

*"To Ober-Leutnant Max von Raussman: You are discharged from the hospital this date. At your request, you will be assigned to the squadron without a name. You will be given a Fokker D-7 for transportation to this base. You will fly to Stenay, then hold a course due east till you find a triangular field bounded by trees on two sides and a small river on the other. This is ten Kilometers from Stenay.*

*"You will land, and await the arrival of an officer to guide you to the base. You will recognize*

*this officer by the insignia on his plane, which is that of a Striking Death in a black robe and cowl, holding a scythe. You will hold this order and the information contained herein, in the strictest confidence."*

The order was signed by a colonel of the Imperial Air Force, and sealed with the German stamp. And attached by clips to the orders was a special memorandum which read:

*"To EVH-11. Bearing the attached orders is Ober-Leutnant Max von Raussman, who is assigned to you for duty. Though crippled by the loss of one eye, and his vocal cords paralyzed so that he is not fit for regular duty, it is believed he will nevertheless make a valuable acquisition to your organization, as he is an experienced pilot. The High Command is pleased to note the gratifying progress in connection with the enemy forces at Senne."*

A scribbled initial was the only signature to this last. Larry read the whole paper again, with quickening breath.

The squadron without a name. And the insignia of that squadron was the Striking Death. His eyes gleamed. Here was the solution to the whole puzzle. The answer to the question of Lowe's death—and Starr's. Somewhere in this strange unknown *jagdstaffel* would be a man who would know the truth.

A mad light came into Larry Brent's eyes. Cutting off the Fokker's engine, he went back and stripped the German pilot's body of flying suit and uniform. Grimly, he rolled the dead pilot close to the wrecked Spad and threw his own clothes across him. Gasoline poured down as he knocked the fuel pipe loose from the tank. He tossed a match into the wreckage and the saturated fabric leaped into flame.

## CHAPTER V DROME OF THE DERELICTS

WHEN Larry Brent climbed into the Fokker five minutes later, there was nothing on his body to prove that he had ever been an Allied pilot. The black patch hung over his left eye, secured by a double elastic that ran around his head and at the back of his neck. True, he had no silver plate in

his skull, but there had been no description of that in the orders. It was a fifty-fifty chance. If there was a pilot at this mysterious staffel who had known the real von Raussmann, he was as good as dead. If not....

He circled the field to get his bearings and then struck off for Stenay. In half an hour the city lay beneath his wings.

“East, ten kilometers,” he said to himself. “A triangular field.”

Five minutes, and he saw the clearing. Then his heart skipped a beat. For as he glided down to land, his gaze rested upon a pure-white Albatross scout—bearing the emblem of the Striking Death! The Fokker rolled to a stop. The man in the Albatross turned an evil, saturnine countenance toward Larry. A hideous saber scar ran diagonally down his face, lifting the edge of his mouth in a perpetual, mocking grin. But the eyes were dark, sinister—like the eyes of a coiled serpent about to strike.

The Fokker’s engine had stopped. In the silence that ensued, Larry climbed out and slowly started toward the other man. Suddenly the snout of a pistol showed over the pit of the Albatross.

“Stand where you are,” the man said in an oddly toneless voice which seemed yet to hold a certain menace. “First, who sent you here?”

Rivulets of perspiration began to course down Larry’s back, until he remembered his role, for he had not expected such immediate inquisition.

He raised his hand and pointed it to his mouth, shaking his head negatively. The other man stared, then cursed.

“Dumb as well as half-blind! The fools—of what use can such a relic be? Do not tell me you are deaf as, well, you staring scarecrow!”

Larry shook his head. He reached in his blouse and fished out his orders. The Albatross pilot reached for them without lowering his gun.

“Von Raussman,” he said half to himself. His manner changed. “I remember—it was you who fought with the great Grimme, until the *verdammte Teufelhund jagdstaffel* ruined the phantom squadron?”

Larry stiffened. *The Teufelhund jagdstaffel*—that was the Devildog Squadron! Then the pilot he was impersonating was one of the phantom pilots who had shot him down that night in No-Man’s-Land!

“And you have come for revenge?” grinned the saturnine Boche. “Well, my friend, you have come in the very nick of time. For that same *Teufelhund* staffel lies hidden in a secret nest across from us. Secret—very secret. For only the Derelicts know—and tonight we blot them out, even as they blotted out your great leader and your comrades. The accursed swine!”

The scar on his face was white and taut against the dark blood that flowed into his face.

“Get back into your plane,” the pilot rasped. “Follow me closely. I am your new commander—Erick von Hauk. I see it is no strange name to you!”

LARRY had started. Von Hauk had been shot down in Allied lines six months past, with a fractured skull and a crushed arm. Supposedly unconscious, he had been left unguarded in a first-aid station—and had disappeared. There had been rumors that German agents had spirited him to some hiding place in France, and other stories that he had tried to escape alone, and had died unrecognized.

Von Hauk raised his right arm. The rays of the early sun shone on a queer metal claw at the end of a steel brace secured to the stump of his arm.

“The cunning of von Hauk still remains for the Fatherland,” he said with a thin, hard smile. “Though he commands a staffel of broken men, like yourself.”

With an imperious gesture, he pointed to his propeller. Larry pulled it through, muttering under his breath as the engine sputtered into life.

“Damn if I ever thought I’d be yanking props for any Kraut,” he reflected as he started his own engine. “And von Hauk of all people!”

The white Albatross skimmed down the field and droned into the sky, the leering death’s-head mocking Larry from under its black cowl as he swung alongside with the Fokker.

“Maybe you’ll get me,” Larry flung at the ugly emblem through set teeth, “but you’ll have a tough run before this Leatherneck goes on the spot.”

Then he remembered the German’s words. The secret nest. Von Hauk knew about it—was planning to wipe it out that very night! He went cold. Involuntarily, he turned as though to cut across the Front. The Devildogs must be warned!

But instantly Von Hauk's grim face flashed toward him, filled with quick suspicion. Larry patted the black patch over his eye and straightened out again beside the Albatross.

Not now. Von Hauk would probably get him before he was halfway to the lines. And there was something else he had to learn.

The deserted farming lands of Belgium over which they had been flying gave way to a barren region of hilly, rock-strewn ground. Suddenly von Hauk nosed down, pointing for Larry to do the same. A drome came into view between two rocky slopes, a long narrow field with hangars and quarters built far back against the overhanging brow of one hill. It was a lonely, forbidding spot, and as Larry landed, he sensed something horrible and desolate about it.

The two planes trundled to a stop. Sullen, unkempt mechanics took over the ships. As the engines died, half a dozen figures in the uniform of German officers shambled out of a hut and stared at Larry Brent. A chill went through him as he saw the shattered remnants of humanity that gazed at him.

Battered faces, gruesome masks instead of features, turned toward him in curiosity to view the latest comer to their midst. One man's right leg was gone, a fantastic contrivance with a hook at the bottom in place of the missing limb. Larry surmised that it was constructed for holding a ship's rudder bar. Two men had lost hands or arms, and steel claws like von Hauk's glittered from their napping sleeves. And at the end stood one whose face was masked to the eyes with gray *papier-mache*. Larry shivered in spite of himself as he guessed at the ruin which lay back of that molded shield.

"For one who is not so pretty himself, you find your new comrades strangely disturbing, my dear von Raussman," came von Hauk's toneless, deadly voice.

The man with the gray face mask shuffled forward, dragging one foot behind him.

"Welcome," he snarled in a rasping voice. Larry felt the bitter sneer behind the words. "Welcome to the Derelict Staffel!"

Larry held out his hand. The other man's eyes blazed and he struck it aside fiercely. With a sudden crazy laugh he turned away.

"A little mad," said von Hauk calmly. "But not too mad to fly—and kill."

LARRY followed him into the cheerless mess hut. Von Hauk introduced the pilots of the *jagdstaffel* curtly. There were fifteen, Larry counted. Fifteen husks of men, broken bodies and minds filled with bitter thoughts and driving hate. Human tigers, filled with a savage lust to kill and maim. If he made one tiny slip, if they dreamed for an instant that he was one of the hated Devildogs, they would tear him to pieces with their bare hands.

Von Hauk stood at the head of the mess table, gazing about at his derelict pilots with a sardonic smile, his metal fingers clenched into curled talons.

"Listen carefully," he told them. "Tonight we destroy the American Devildog lair—crush the heart out of every man in that Satan's crew. It is the time for which we have waited. The message came at dawn. Our agent fears discovery—something has gone wrong. So we must strike at once."

"No longer do we learn their plans, then—through our station here?" demanded the man with the gray face shield.

Von Hauk's face hardened. "It is not for you to question!" he said coldly. "But do not fear. They will establish a new station, and again we will trick them—when these devil-hounds are not there to interfere."

"If they suspect, we had better strike now," muttered the man with the mask.

"And be shot down before we can get back to our own lines?" sneered von Hauk. "No, fool—this way we gain all and lose nothing. At ten tonight our agent in their nest will send us a signal if all is well, if their plans are still unchanged. He dares not use the secret code till that hour. He will signal and make his escape while we are flying to burn the madman Garrity and his swine to death."

Ghoulish grins of anticipation crossed the faces of those derelicts who had faces left to betray their emotion. The man with the gray mask chuckled—a horrible, mirthless laugh.

"That is all," said von Hauk stiffly. "See that your ships are prepared. Then rest—for you will need it. Von Raussmann, you will use the Fokker you flew here. Be ready."

Larry nodded dazedly. One of the broken pilots scowled at him. "Why don't you answer you one-eyed ape?" he demanded.

"Let him alone," snapped von Hauk. "He cannot speak—his vocal cords are dead."

The pilots moved sullenly out of the mess. Larry Brent relaxed from his rigid pose. His nerves were taut as wire. If one of those fiends had thought to question his identity—had looked behind that black patch!

He strode to the window. The wires of radio antenna caught, his glance. Here was the station to which the unknown spy in the Devildog nest had sent that treacherous warning. It was the explanation of the missing Army planes, of certain costly offensives by the Allies which had gone wrong. The Boche were receiving secret messages every night from that intercept station.

But only at certain hours. Larry's eyes narrowed. Except at those hours, a loyal man must be on duty, listening. He straightened and looked quickly about him. It was a hundred-to-one chance that he would lose—but there was that one chance!

WALKING idly, he went out onto the drome. Five minutes later the operator in the radio hut jumped to his feet with a startled cry as a man with a black patch over one eye sprang into the room. The cry died a quick death as the frightened operator saw the gun in the hand of the intruder.

"Call the American station at Senne," Larry Brent ordered menacingly. "And if you try one single trick, I'll kill you!"

The operator went white. "Von Hauk will cut out my heart," he whispered in horror.

"You will not live long enough for that," snapped Larry, "if you waste another second. Call that station!"

The operator touched a switch. A generator whirred. The man's trembling fingers tapped out a signal.

"Listen for their answer," Larry grated out, as he watched through the shack window to see if the hum of the motor had been heard.

"They are answering now," faltered the white-faced Boche.

Larry seized the receivers and clamped them to his head, covering the operator with his pistol while he reached for the sending key. The man

was not lying. The intercept station had answered at once. Swiftly, Larry threw the sending switch and began to rattle the key.

Running feet sounded outside. He heard a hoarse shout, then men began to race toward the hut.

"Bar that door!" he flung at the operator.

"Ernst!" cried von Hauk's now savage voice from out in the entry. "Open that door, before I beat you to a pulp. Stop the generator!"

A bullet ploughed through the door. Wood splintered in the table that held the sending key. Larry pounded the key faster than ever, while the terrified operator crawled abjectly on the floor.

With a crash the door went down under the onslaught of a dozen Germans. Larry was hurled to the floor. The black patch flew from his eye.

"*Spion!*" raged von Hauk. "You lying spawn of filth—*du bist ein Teufel!*" And his metal fist crashed into Larry's face with brutal force.

Despair was written in Larry Brent's eyes. Thirty seconds more and he would have won. But now—"So, you did not succeed," gloated von Hauk. Then his saturnine countenance clouded. "But perhaps you are playing a trick again. Ernst, what did he send?"

The cringing operator came slowly forward. "It was Senne—he made me call it," he said fearfully. "He was telling them how to find this base—"

Black murder shone in the Prussian's glare, but he held himself back, though his lips drew over his teeth in a fierce snarl.

"Quick—how much did he send?" he cried.

"Not enough," faltered the wretched Ernst. "They could never find it—he had only told them of the triangle field near Stenay."

Von Hauk laughed suddenly. "They will fly across to Stenay—and then back to their so very secret field, thinking it some trick of our Intelligence. We might trap them there—but the High Command wishes their nest destroyed, and every man with it. We shall let them go on their wild-goose chase—and let them go back home for a last rest, before they die!"

Then the grin vanished from his scarred features. He turned to Larry Brent and there was an unholy glitter in his eyes.

"But you, my unknown friend, will not have to wait till tonight. I will finish with you now!"

He gave a harsh order. Larry was dragged to the mess room by two burly sentries. The broken pilots of the Derelict *Jagdstaffel* gathered like wolves about to devour their prey, eying him with bitter hate.

IN A moment Larry realized what it meant. Von Hauk was going to hold a mockery of a court-martial. Plain mockery, just to torture him, to drag out the agony of his death. For he was lost. There was no chance for him now.

Perhaps his unfinished message had warned Garrity sufficiently so that he would be on guard. But would he realize that the hidden nest was no longer a secret?

Bitterly, he listened to the farce of his trial. At last von Hauk stood up.

"You have been sentenced to death, as a spy," he said tonelessly. "You came to learn the secret of this staffel—now you will learn how we treat a spy!"

A curt word to the guards, and Larry was led out onto the drome. Von Hauk walked to his white Albatross, an evil grin upon his saturnine face. Larry watched grimly. What fiendish plan had the German adopted for killing him?

The engine of the Albatross roared. The white ship swung down the field and lifted into the wind. The two guards held Larry in the center of the drome, nervously watching the white plane. Suddenly it jerked about. Two scarlet fires winked like satanic eyes from the Prussian's Spandau muzzles.

The two guards broke and ran. Larry Brent stood for a second, rooted in horror. Von Hauk was plunging straight at him. In another moment he would be riddled with searing lead!

In panic; he fled for the side of the drome. The white ship flicked into an instant bank, and tracer streaks flared across his path in an ominous threat of death. Whirling wildly, Larry raced in the opposite direction, away from that torrent of sizzling slugs.

A circle of pounding bullets seemed to surround him. Von Hauk was playing with him—playing as a cat with a mouse! At any second he would tire of his grim sport. Then the end would come in a burning agony as the Spandaus plunged their messengers of death into his body. There was no escape. And with that thought he ceased to

flee. In his final seconds on earth he would not furnish a mad amusement for that grinning, crazy devil in the spinning Albatross. Stoically he folded his arms, raised his eyes and stared at the circling Boche.

The Albatross swept lower. He could see the venomous glare on von Hauk's face as the German thrust his head over the side of the pit. There was hate and baffled rage on that scarred countenance. With an abrupt twist, he rolled the white plane into a zoom. Poised at the top, he turned for the dive that would throw his guns directly on the waiting Devildog.

Then Larry saw him pull up sharply. The engine roared at full speed. A plane was screaming down from the sky—a plane with Allied colors! A mighty hope swelled in Larry's breast. It was a Devildog plane—a Spad from the 28th!

But even as von Hauk whirled to escape from the diving ship, a string of colored lights whisked out across the sky. And a complete uproar swept the Derelict Drome. The Spad landed and raced to the scurrying mass of Germans. A man leaped out shouting in German—a man in the uniform of the French Army! Larry gave a violent curse. Delane!

Delane was the Boche agent. It was Delane who had killed Lowe and Starr. And it had been Delane who had received his half-finished warning! Delane, instead of someone who would warn Garrity. That was why he had come so swiftly to learn the cause of that message.

Von Hauk's Albatross was dropping to the ground. The guards ran out to seize Larry Brent. But before they had taken ten steps, they halted and stared upward in dismay.

A dozen Devildog fighters were pitching down the sky at the Drome of the Derelicts!

## CHAPTER VI BY HIS OWN HAND

THE maimed pilots broke and ran for their ships. The drome was thrown into an instant wave of fear and panic. Larry Brent stood forgotten. For one second he stood there, unable to recover his senses. Then with a fierce shout he lunged for the side of Delane's Spad.

The Boche agent was glaring upward. There was stark fear in his eyes. Larry was upon the

wing before Delane knew what had happened. A gun flashed up in his hand, but Larry's fist was too quick. His bunched knuckles struck a pile-driver blow on the spy's chin. Delane slumped down in the pit.

Three mechanics darted out to the spy's rescue. Larry gripped the German's pistol and fired at the foremost figure. The German fell, and the other two turned and fled. In a second Larry had the unconscious agent on the wing. He vaulted into the seat and rammed open the throttle. Delane rolled to the ground and lay there. The Spad jumped into the air, zoomed a mob of terror-stricken Germans, and split the air in a climb behind von Hauk's white Albatross.

Boche ships were racing across the drome. One pointed its nose up for two hundred feet, only to come crashing back in flames before a Devildog's guns. A flight of Devildog ships droned in for a murderous strafe, and *feldgrau* figures wilted under the chattering Vickers.

A Spad reeled across the sky in front of Larry's ship, a white Albatross upon its tail. Burning the wind, Larry came slashing down on the charging Boche.

Von Hauk whipped off to the left. The faltering Spad slipped down and away. With insane fury, the Boche threw his white fighter back at the man who had cheated him of his prey.

Again, Larry Brent stared down the muzzles of the Prussian's Spandaus, as he had stared back there on the drome where he waited for death. Desperately, he yanked the Spad away from that creeping blast. The Boche was a demon! And he flew with a demon's skill.

What ironic fate to escape those flaming guns down there where he had been unarmed—and then to die when life had been given back to him!

He gripped the stick and hauled it tight for a last bitter effort. A flash of white showed before his guns. He fired them hotly, clenching the trips. A line of bullet holes seemed to weave up the side of the Albatross, through the black-cowled, leering death's-head. Von Hauk whirled madly in his pit. A Luger flipped upward, held in his metal talons. Larry's tracers cut past the Prussian's head. The Vickers' slugs seemed to dart straight through the sleeve beneath that metal hand. The ships were almost together, Vickers spewing their

fateful load beyond the glaring German—and the Luger spurting fire toward the Devildog's heart.

Larry crouched down, hate and fury driving him on. Not if the Luger's next bullet ripped through his body, would he swerve now! Von Hauk had to go down!

THE rudder was hard over, the Spad skidding to a stall, but the Vickers were still hurling their streams of destruction beyond the German's head. With a bitter cry that was half a sob of pure rage, Larry thrust the stick forward and drove the blazing guns almost into the white plane's tail.

The tail-group flew into bits. The white Albatross was falling. Von Hauk had been hurled down into his pit. His face showed for a second, marked with undying ferocity, above the black-cowled figure of Death. With a sudden movement he shoved the pistol against his head and pressed the trigger. The white ship struck with a frightful roar—but von Hauk never knew.

A shadow flashed down beside Larry's Spad. He looked across dazedly. It was Garrity. A look of amazement came into Cyclone Bill's face. Then a tremendous grin spread over his countenance. He raised his hand in a swift joyous gesture. Larry waved back. Did the Bulldogs already know the truth? Had Delane been fleeing to escape capture?

Garrity fired a Very signal across the field, and the Devildogs sheered up to fall in behind him. Back of them lay a scene of terrible destruction, as though a flaming giant hand had swept the Drome of the Derelicts. The ships which had succeeded in taking off were lying in splintered wreckage or in flames. Not a hangar or hut remained intact. And somewhere in the midst of that gruesome field of dead and dying lay a mad German who had lived too long—and who had died by his own hand.

Across the Front droned the Devildog squadron, slipping down to the camouflaged field. Larry Brent saw Garrity land and jump from his ship. The big C.O. of the Devildogs reached the side of Larry's Spad in three quick leaps.

"I'm back," Larry said grimly. "Am I still arrested—or what?"

"You're what!" roared Cyclone Bill. "We're going to throw the hell-dread-fullest binge on this field tonight that you ever saw in your life."

Devildogs were crowding around, grinning—yelling unintelligible words, grabbing at Larry’s hands.

Garrity held up his hand.

“Keep quiet, you birds! I want to get this straight. How in the devil did you get wise to Delane, Larry?”

Larry looked startled. “I didn’t get wise—not till I saw him on that Boche drome.” He swiftly explained what had happened.

“That explains it,” said Cyclone Bill. He grinned. “Lieutenant Worden caught that message of yours, Delane was right there, and when he read what was coming in, he beat it down here and grabbed a ship. Worden tore after him, figuring part of what you’ve just told us.”

“We’ve doped out how Delane pulled the sky trick, also those murders,” cut in a bronzed lieutenant.

“This is Worden,” explained Garrity. “But there’ll be plenty of time for that story later.”

Hick Jones caught Garrity’s eye just then. “Say, are we still under official disfavor?” he drawled.

Garrity blushed.

“I sort of hate to put these birds under hack,” he explained to Larry. “You see, when you took off so unexpectedly this morning, I had to get somebody on your tail—”

There was a ghost of a smile on Larry’s lips. “I understand,” he said.

“Maybe you do—maybe you don’t,” said Cyclone Bill. “I got out there as soon as I could leave that fire by the shop, and I’ll be a Navy deck-swabber if the whole blamed outfit didn’t mutiny on me. Couldn’t get a one of them to go after you.”

“There’s a lot of funny business on this field,” said Hick Jones suspiciously. “What I want to know is, how’d that fire get started this morning—so convenient like?”

Cyclone Bill scratched his chin.

“Maybe it was spontaneous combustion,” he said at last. “Anyhow, that’s the way it’ll go down in the report.”

And the Devildogs went in to start their binge.