

Hell's Hangar

By Donald E. Keyhoe
A Richard Knight Adventure

Dick Knight settled comfortably in his cockpit. Save for some strange, organ-like trills that had sounded from his radio, the flight had been uneventful. But Dick Knight did not know that those weird tones he had heard were the ominous notes of an overture to a drama of death. Nor did he know that just five minutes before, a gaunt Prussian, with feverish eyes on a black clock, had whispered: "Five more minutes! Only five more minutes to wait after all these years!"

CHAPTER 1 DEATH RIDES THE DEWOITINE

IT COULD have been a tomb—that strange, paneled room buried deep in the ground “somewhere east of Luxembourg.” A deathlike hush pervaded it, save for the jerky breathing of the square-headed colonel in one corner.

The other man in that room hardly moved, hardly drew a breath. His pale, gaunt figure might have been a corpse propped stiffly behind the great desk, glassy eyes fixed on the huge wall-clock.

Like a long, bloody dagger, the red second-hand once more traversed the clock's dial. As it reached the sixtieth second point, the eyes of the gaunt German lit with a fanatical glow.

“Five minutes!” he whispered. “Think, Moltke! Only five more minutes, after all these years!”

The color went still farther out of Moltke's fat face, and he stared in fascination at the dagger-like hand.

“Ja, General Hiede. I am thinking! But what if it should go wrong?”

“You white-livered *Dumkopf!*” the general said with contempt. “No one else knows of it—only you and I. Even after I give the signal, word cannot reach *der Fuehrer* or that lummoX of a Goering within anything less than four hours. I have seen to that. And by that time, they can do nothing but—”

He broke off as a muted buzzing came from a spot on an enormous wall map of Europe which hung directly opposite the big desk. A tiny green

light flashed out a swift code signal, then burned with a steady emerald glow. Hiede inhaled sharply, stabbed a look at a Photostat chart which lay before him. His bony finger traced down to the word “Paris,” and across to one of several numbers bracketed with it.

“Von Lehr's signal! We are ready!”

Drops of perspiration stood out on Moltke's square, fat face. He reached toward a phone, took it up in shaking fingers.

“*Herr Kommandant,*” he said hoarsely. He gulped, had to force himself to go on. “It is—it is the time.”

“*Sehr gut!*” an answer crackled from the receiver end of the instrument. There was a brief pause, then something like a muffled explosion sounded over the wire. A roar followed, quickly lessened in volume and died out. Moltke put down the phone.

“*Gott help us!*” he mumbled.

“Stop blubbering, you fool,” Hiede bit out harshly. He stood up, an amazingly tall and skinny figure, his major-general's uniform flapping like the clothes on a scarecrow as he strode across the room. He pressed at the side of a panel, and it moved sidewise, revealing a steel door two feet square fitted with a dial-lock similar to that of a bank vault. His long fingers spun the knob, and the door opened to reveal a compact switchboard with numbered and lettered buttons. He threw in a master switch at the top, then methodically began to press the buttons. As he finished with the last, his feverish eyes briefly rested on a small single-bladed switch at the bottom. It was secured with two separate locks which kept it from being closed.

“Give me the other key,” he snapped at Moltke.

The colonel's jaw sagged.

“But—but you have barely given the stand-by signal!”

“They will have enough time grated Hiede. “I will not follow through until the hour we planned. But I'll take no chances on your suddenly changing your mind.”

MOLTKE took a key from his wallet, dropped it on the desk. The general pocketed it, closed the steel door. By now, colored lights were beginning to flash at several points on the huge map. Hiede checked each one with the Photostat, occasionally referring to a red leather book in which names and numbers were entered with a paragraph after each entry. In ten minutes, all but five of the bulbs on the map were burning steadily.

"The others will come in soon enough," Hiede said, half to himself. He looked at the clock. "Switch on the amplifier and make sure that von Lehr is on the right bearing."

Moltke bent over a box with wires plugged into the wall, and in a moment a series of high-pitched signals became audible. There was something oddly harmonious about them as they blended in a chord, then sounded separately and blended again like the bells of a carillon or the high notes of an organ.

"Beautiful, *nein*?" Hiede said with his hatchet face grimmer than ever. "A pretty little song, eh, Moltke?"

The square headed colonel managed a ghastly smirk. "Very pretty, *Herr* General. But what if someone heard and suspected—"

"For the hundredth time, I tell you it's impossible!" rasped Hiede. "My agents checked every country in the world, and there has been only one other such set built."

"But you told me there was none" Moltke said in dismay.

"That one was destroyed," retorted the scarecrow German. "It was built by the radio engineers of the United States Army for that spy-devil who caused so much trouble in Spain and in the Mediterranean two months ago."

"You mean the one they call 'Q'?" exclaimed Moltke. "*Mein Gott*, if he should find out—"

"What, could he—or any other man—do in three hours? And as I told you, his set was ruined. I have a complete report. It was installed in a special Northrop which was built for stratosphere flight. Also, my agents finally discovered the identity of this *verdammte* Q-agent. His name is Richard Knight, and he poses as a wealthy sportsman pilot. But his money comes from the secret counterespionage fund of the United States, and his companion on his travels is a former Marine Corps pilot named Lawrence Doyle—a fellow who was discharged from that service after being entangled

in a battle with Jap flyers in China. They work with various civil departments of their Government, as well as with the Army and Navy, so you can judge the power they have."

"But this ultra high-frequency set?" insisted Moltke. "It was destroyed when they made a forced landing at Guam after that rocket affair we heard of in Manchukuo. Knight and Doyle left there by Clipper, and my men lost them at Singapore. They are probably back in the United States now."

Moltke exhaled a sigh of relief, sat down, and again watched the lights on the map. Two more had flashed up, one of them at a point marking Le Bourget Airport, just north of Paris. A third, near London, was flashing a brilliant purple when suddenly the sweet harmony from the amplifier was broken by a staccato, rasping signal. Both Germans leaped to their feet.

"Von Lehr!" cried Moltke. "Something must have gone wrong."

"It can't be von Lehr!" snarled the general. "He'd have to switch off his automatic transmitter, and you can still hear the chimes."

For almost a minute, the discord continued. Then there was an interval, following which the mysterious new signal came through again. Hiede clutched the direction-finder knob of the high-frequency receiver, frantically adjusted it until the signal all but drowned out the bell-like tones.

"*Du Lieber Gott!*" he said furiously. "It has twice the volume! Do you realize what will happen?"

Before Moltke could answer, the rasping signal ended and a voice spoke, deep in tone, and with a guarded inflection—*Q to W-A-R... ,Q to W-A-R... If new code, have not received key. Please shift to Code F. Shift to Code F. Go ahead W-A-R.*

Hiede sprang for the phone, his gaunt face livid.

"*Kommandant!*" he rasped. "Order three of the 109's started for emergency flight. I'll be there to give the full instructions in a minute."

"*Herr* General" Moltke said wildly. "I don't understand! Who is W-A-R and what—"

"W-A-R is the United States Army station at Washington," Hiede flung back as he started for the door. His sunken eyes held a maniacal glare. "Those damned agents of mine have been tricked! If that Q-agent isn't found—and that set destroyed in thirty minutes or less—we're lost!"

The door boomed shut behind him.

Moltke, his fat face ashen, continued to stare at the amplifier. But the voice remained silent, and only the sweet harmony of the chimes came to his ears. He shivered as he thought of what that music meant.

THE FOG now seemed to be slightly less thick, for the wing tip lights of the speeding Northrop again showed plainly. Dick Knight looked thoughtfully into the murky gloom ahead, then cut in his gyro-pilot and lifted his long legs from the rudder pedals.

"Try it again," he said over his shoulder.

Larry Doyle bent his chunky figure and switched on the special spy-set which had been built for their use in counter-espionage. After a few seconds a clear, sweet harmony came from the tiny speaker-box in the front cockpit.

"There she is," grunted Doyle. He rubbed his crooked nose with the back of his hand. "Hanged if I can make it out. Brett never said it with music before."

"It's not coming from Washington," said Knight. His eyes, so darkly blue they appeared almost black, rested for a second on the bearing indicator. "Whatever it is, it's coming from the heart of Paris—if my dead reckoning is anywhere near right."

"Where are we?" demanded the ex-Leatherneck.

"Just about over Versailles, I think. The wind may have changed since we swung in from St. Nazaire, but the last bearing I took on the Le Bourget beacon shows we're just about on course."

"I still think we should've pushed through to London," grumbled Doyle. "Here we go to all the trouble of hopping across Spain, with both sides ready to smack us in the klink if we get forced down there, and then a water-jump over the Bay of Biscay. And now you go chasing bells!"

Knight chuckled. "Don't worry, Lothario, that girl up at Croydon will wait another day. And then there's always Paris."

You know I can't talk Frog worth a nickel," retorted Doyle.

"I thought," Knight said with a grin, "that you lovers had a universal language."

"Go sit on a prop," snorted Doyle. "Say, those bells are getting louder."

The taller secret agent leaned over the bearing indicator, then switched off the gyro and took the

controls. Without lowering the special retractable landing-gear, which with a souped-up twin Wasp enabled the Northrop to show a top speed of 365, he nosed the spy-ship downward.

"What's the idea?" said Doyle.

"I'm going to see if we can break through this stuff and find where that chimes signal is coming from."

BLURRED LIGHTS began to show beneath, and the fog masses took on a whitish glow, indicating a city of considerable size below. Knight leveled out at 1500 feet. The mysterious chimes grew steadily louder, and in a moment he switched on his transmitter and held the hand-mike to his lips.

"Q calling in—Q calling in," he said crisply.

"I thought you said it couldn't be for us," cut in Doyle.

"Might be someone from G-2 with a special mission—some fellow using one of those portable sets," Knight said, his thumb on the mike circuit-button. Then, when he had barely switched back to the receiver, a voice spoke with a note of frantic haste—

"W-A-R to Q. Don't send any more. Land at Le Bourget and wait for contact!"

Knight's eyes narrowed, for the voice had a foreign inflection, although the words were English. He threw the sending switch.

"Who's calling? Give your identification number. And who am I to contact at—"

"Dick, look out!" shouted Doyle

Knight sprang up in his seat. A giant Dewoitine airliner was plunging head-on out of the fog!

He gave a desperate jerk at the stick and stood on the left rudder pedal. Thereupon, the Northrop screamed up into a skidding split-turn, wingtip almost scraping the French airliner.

"The crazy fools!" howled Doyle. "Not a single light showing! Let's get out of here!"

Knight stared down into the mists. Against the glow of the city lights below, the Dewoitine was darkly silhouetted. It was turning back toward them, starting into an upward spiral. From its size, Knight knew it must be one of the thirty-passenger jobs used by the Air France Company.

"What the devil do they want now?" yelled Doyle. "Look! They're chasing after us!"

Knight turned on his landing lights, swung the controlling grip so that the beams focused slantingly on the big ship. Faces showed at the windows of the climbing airliner. And a cold chill went over the American when he saw them. There was something horrible about those faces—a queer rigidity, a total lack of expression as though—

“Good Lord!” Doyle burst out. “They’re dead! Even the pilots!”

Knight froze. Yes, the pilots, too, were sitting rigidly in their seats, unmoved by the glare of his lights. But the Dewoitine continued to zoom straight for the Northrop!

CHAPTER II ENTER CAPITAINE ROBARD

WITH a jerk at the stick, Knight pulled up over the Dewoitine, then pivoted into a vertical bank. The big airliner settled into level flight, and he cautiously edged in alongside. The glow from the Northrop’s wing-lights reflected from the fog back into the cabin. He stared across, through the Plexiglas enclosure of his cockpit. The passengers were still sitting there, motionless, their faces oddly waxen.

And then the truth burst upon him. “They’re wax dummies!” he exclaimed.

The Dewoitine swerved abruptly, and he had to kick into a hasty skid to avert collision.

“Maybe they’re dummies,” howled Doyle. “But there’s somebody on board workin’ those controls.”

“I’m going to slide in close again,” clipped Knight. “Watch the cockpit—there might be someone crouched down between those dummy pilots.”

Braced for a quick zoom, he inched the Northrop in beside the big airliner. In tense silence, Doyle and he peered across toward the pilot’s compartment as the two planes swung together. The Dewoitine again was flying level. Knight twisted the light-control grip and pointed the starboard light into the cockpit. There was no sign of a living person—only the two staring wax dummies, in pilots’ uniforms, tied upright in the seats.

Meanwhile the amplifier of the ultra high-frequency set had been silent. But suddenly the music of the chimes again sounded, this time with greatly increased volume.

“I’ve got it” yelled Doyle. “The transmitter’s on board the Dewoitine! Turn your light back in the cabin and— Holy smoke, look at the ship!”

The airliner was yawing violently from right to left. Knight zoomed a hundred feet above it, then for the first time he realized that searchlights were probing the fog. Bright spots showed in half a dozen places where the mists blocked the powerful beams from the ground. The Dewoitine nosed down sharply, leveled out again, and in the same moment something plunged past one of the shifting circles of light.

Knight banked swiftly, and his recessed wing-lights flooded a sleek black ship. The plane whipped out of the glare, but as it did it turned broadside and in amazement Knight saw the swastika emblem of Germany on the tail. It was a Messerschmitt fighter—the famous Bf-109, cream of the Nazi air service, with a reported speed between 335 and 370 miles per hour. But what in Heaven’s name was a German fighter doing over the heart of Paris?

The answer to that came with the speed of lightning. With a furious turn, the Messerschmitt plunged back at the Northrop, and from hidden guns in the cowl two streaks flamed at the circling spy-ship. Knight flung the two-seater into a tight split, almost crashing the Dewoitine. The German pilot dived under the airliner, reversed hastily.

“Kick her around, Dick!” Doyle bellowed. “I’ll blast that devil!”

“Hold it!” Knight said tautly. “We’re likely to start a war!”

He hurled the Northrop into a chandelle, bent on escaping from the German. But almost instantly two more Messerschmitts charged out of the murk, guns blazing. Knight’s jaw hardened, and his fingers shot up to the buttons on the stick.

“You asked for it!” he muttered, and clamped the second button. Sliding flaps whirled open in the cowl, and with a roar two high-speed Browning 30’s went into action. Tracers flung two yellow tracks across the gap and into the metal side of the leading Nazi fighter. The pilot kicked aside, then his gun fire ripped dural from the left wingtip of the Northrop. Doyle’s twin-fifties now clanged up into position from their secret niche in the turtleback, and the two-seater vibrated with their thunderous chant.

The searchlights had gone mad, were dancing wildly in all directions in a vain effort to break through and find the battling ships. Knight saw a swastika-marked wing flit through a blurred glow at one side. He whipped around, crashed out a burst. The radio stub-mast aft of the German's cockpit crumpled under his bullets, and the antenna flipped back over the tail.

For a second, Knight thought the ship would go out of control, but with a frantic jerk the pilot shook off the broken mast and came back. Crimson eyes winked from his wing-roots, as two more guns joined in with the ones on the cowl. The sudden blast ripped half the Plexiglas from above Knight's head and spattered bits of dural into his pit.

He snapped the Northrop down and around in a screeching renversement. Behind him, Doyle pounded out a barrage that drove the nearest pursuer into a frenzied climb. Knight slid his hand up to the master-button at the top of the stick. He had been saving the 50-caliber guns hidden in his wings, but the time for waiting was past. Whatever the reason, those Germans were out to annihilate them at any cost.

Above the thunder of the Wasp came the sharp clatter of Doyle's guns, fired broadside. Knight jerked his head. One of the Messerschmitts had zoomed high above, was diving headlong from the right. Knight whirled the two-seater, thumb hard on the master-button. All four guns burst forth with a grinding roar, and a gaping hole appeared just aft of the fighter's cockpit. As the pilot whirled, horrified, the shattered fuselage broke in two and the forward section went hurtling down into the mists.

KNIGHT zoomed over the tail section as it started fall. The Dewoitine airliner had vanished in the fog, but it reappeared on his left, just as the two remaining Nazis came in furiously for vengeance. A fusillade from the first Messerschmitt raked the Northrop's cowl. Knight ducked with a shout of warning to Doyle, and splintered bits of metal swirled rearward, banging over the riddled enclosure.

The second Nazi fighter charged around the Dewoitine to catch the Northrop in the clear. Doyle spun his twin-fifties and crashed out a long burst. Then just as he fired, Knight ruddered away to avoid collision with the first Messerschmitt, thus

causing the last tracers from Doyle's guns to rake the Dewoitine's cabin.

A blinding flame shot from the windows of the airliner, and it disintegrated with a terrific roar that shook the sky. Hurling back against his head-rest, Knight dazedly clawed at the stick. And the Northrop was on its back, starting to spin, before he recovered control.

He quickly rolled rightside up, stared around in stupefaction. Greenish smoke was spreading in every direction, and below was a hole literally blasted in the fog. He could see the Seine and two of its bridges, and almost directly below was the Quai d'Orsay and a row of Government buildings. A searchlight spotted the Northrop before he could see anything else, so he hurriedly kicked away.

He was climbing blindly when Doyle gave a frantic about. A gigantic structure loomed straight before him, and just in time he whirled the Northrop aside. By the glare of the searchlight he saw a platform with a railing, and suddenly recognized that colossal framework.

It was the Eiffel Tower!

A small but powerful light flicked out from the top platform, and he could dimly see two or three men. Tracers smoked past the right wing as he turned. He thought for a second they came from the tower, then he saw another black Messerschmitt darting in, with the two other fighters behind it. The new leader's ship overshot, and as it whipped into a vertical bank Knight glimpsed a gaunt face, with glaring eyes covered by huge goggles. The enclosure of the Messerschmitt was open, and he saw the pilot make a savage gesture toward the other Germans.

Knight jerked his throttle, and the leader overshot. With a swift touch at the rudder, he swung the Northrop toward the Nazi fighter. The wing-root fifties crashed out a lethal blast, but before he could centre his tracers on the now zooming ship the other Messerschmitt darted in frantically. He hurled the Northrop into a tight chandelle, booting the tail around so that Doyle was in line with the nearest Messerschmitt.

In the same moment, his sights caught the leader's left wing. He thumbed the third stick-button, and the 30's hammered a burst into the aileron of the Nazi ship. Doyle's guns roared simultaneously, and a spout of flame lit up the misty sky and the fading greenish smoke. As Knight

followed the leader into a dive, he flicked a look sidewise and saw one of the fighters tumbling down in flames. The other Messerschmitt was plunging in recklessly, guns blazing, tracers tangling with Doyle's as the husky ex-Leatherneck spun his twin-mount for a death-blow.

Suddenly a bright red rocket streaked between the Northrop and the ship before it. A single-seater with French cockades shot out of the fog and squarely into the glow from light on the Eiffel Tower. The light went out, but not before Knight recognized a Loire Nieuport 46.

As the French ship whipped around, flame belched from both its 20mm. guns. Both Knight and the Nazi leader pulled up hastily, for the cannons were blasting in between them. The other Messerschmitt flung a wild burst at the Loire, then whirled at a signal from the leader.

In another second both Messerschmitts were lost in the fog.

THE PILOT of the Loire now warily eased in parallel with the Northrop and turned on his landing-lights. The glare reflected from the mists partly illuminated both ships, and Knight saw the pilot nod vigorously and point downward. He signaled back in the affirmative and nosed the bullet-scarred Northrop into a parallel glide.

"See if you can pick up the Le Bourget radio-beacon," he said to Doyle through the inter phone. "This chap may know what he's doing. But I'm not following anybody in a blind landing."

Doyle switched to the Le Bourget beacon wavelength, and as the signals came in Knight glanced at the compass. As he had surmised, the Frenchman was heading for the great air terminal.

The Yank agent made a quick check of air-speed and altitude, was about to pull up and work out his own descent problem when the fog thinned enough to give a vague picture of the ground.

Blurred lights sharpened, revealing main arteries leading into Paris, and ahead he glimpsed the boundary markers and beacons of Le Bourget. He was lowering the wheels when without the slightest warning the Loire pilot jerked his throttle and dropped behind them. Instinctively, Knight kicked away—and saved Doyle and himself from instant annihilation.

A shell from the Loire's right-wing cannon smoked within a foot of the cockpit, and as he

opened the Wasp full-out a second shell barely missed the cowl. Doyle's bellow of rage was drowned in the roar of his fifties.

Knight gripped the retracting-gear valve and pulled the Northrop into a thundering Immelmann as the wheels folded into their niches.

The Loire flung to one side as he pitched around after it, and he lifted his fingers from the gun-buttons. Doyle's burst had gone into the Frenchmen's engine, and the single-seater was twisting down with a dead stick.

"The louse!" howled Doyle. "I hope he cracks up and breaks his neck."

"If he does we'll be in a fine jam," retorted Knight. "There'll be no way to get at the truth, and the French will be taking care of our necks with a *guillotine*."

"Holy cow!" cried Doyle. "Then we'd better dig out of here and make for England."

"No, that would only make matters worse. And we'd probably be intercepted, anyway. The best thing to do is tell the French officials the truth before our friend there has a chance to talk."

Lowering the wheels again, Knight dived for the terminal, with a hasty survey preparatory to landing. The Loire was a mile behind, stretching its glide. But when the American swung in at three hundred feet, he swore to himself. A transport was taxiing out to take off, and a red light from the tower peremptorily signaled him to sheer away. He made a tight circle, intent on plunging down the moment the airliner was off the ground. But suddenly the transport stopped. The men in the tower had seen the crippled Loire and were giving it the right-of-way.

Knight kicked into a forward slip, landed cross-wind on the runway which angled across the one with the airliner. But the Loire was already gliding in against the wind, and as he raced in toward the row of buildings he saw the fighter come to a quick stop and the pilot jump out, waving his arms excitedly.

A spotlight from the tower swung toward the Northrop, and a motor car darted out as Knight braked to a halt. He cut off the motor, slid back the enclosure, and jumped down. But before he could say a word he was seized by three airport police, and two others covered Doyle with their pistols.

A second auto now drew up, and the Loire pilot sprang from its running-board. His goggles had

been pushed up, revealing protuberant blue eyes close-set beside a large aquiline nose. He threw a swift glance at Knight and Doyle, wheeled to the senior *agents de police*.

"Take them into one of the private offices before a crowd collects!"

"*Oui*, Major Foix," said the policemen. He scowled at the prisoners. "Get into the car, *espion pig*!"

The machine swiftly conveyed them past a staring crowd of air-travelers and airport attendants, to a side door from which Knight and Doyle were hustled into a deserted office. One of the police switched on a light, pulled down the shades. Knight's attempts at speech were brusquely silenced, and he motioned his infuriated partner to keep still.

In a minute, Major Foix entered, and Knight saw a furtive glance pass between him and the senior *agente de police*, a swarthy, heavy-set officer.

"Have you searched the prisoner, *Monsieur Mireau*?" demanded the major.

"*Oui*, commandant," said Mireau.

"They were both armed. But we found no papers aside from their passports."

"None are needed," said Foix, with a malevolent grin at the two Americans. "I know all about them—they are spies for Germany."

One of the policemen looked uncertainly at Mireau. "Shouldn't we be reporting this to the Prefect, sergeant?"

"*Non*," Foix snapped before Mireau could reply. "It is a matter for Intelligence; and we can afford no publicity just now. Sergeant Mireau, arrange to have that special Dewoitine started—the one with the experimental radio in it. The prisoners will be transferred in it to a more private spot. Also, have their plane refueled at once; I intend to turn it over to our engineers to examine those secret gun-mounts and bomb-racks."

MIREAU saluted and went out. Doyle looked desperately at Knight. "What'd he say?" he asked. "What're they going to do?"

Before Knight could answer, the door to an adjoining room quietly opened.

"*Bon soir, messieurs*," said a voice. "What seems to be the trouble here?"

Foix started perceptibly, then covered his alarm with an oily smile.

"Ah, *Capitaine* Robard! You are just in time. I have caught two spies!"

Knight looked quickly toward the man in the doorway. He was blond and quite tall for a Frenchman. His uniform fitted him smartly, and there was a languid grace about him as he stepped into the room.

"Spies, eh?" He gave Knight and Doyle a cold glance. "Well, we of Intelligence will make short work of them if you can prove your charges."

"I can explain this matter—and tell you something else of interest," Knight said quickly.

But Foix broke in with an oath. "*Nom de Dieu!* I suppose you can explain shooting me down—and dropping a bomb on Paris!"

"So it was these men who caused the explosion?" exclaimed Robard. "We heard a plane had exploded in mid-air."

"No, these swine tried to bomb the city," Foix said hurriedly. "The fuse must have been set wrong. The bomb exploded prematurely in the air. Then they attacked me—"

"Ask the observers on the Eiffel Tower," Knight interrupted as Foix paused for breath. "They saw the entire affair. There were four German Messerschmitt fighters and a Dewoitine 620—"

"He lies!" snarled Foix. "I insist on their removal to safe detention for questioning."

Robard slowly nodded, reached over and picked up the Colt .38 which had been taken from Knight. With a tight little smile he turned and pointed it at Foix.

"I am indebted to you, *Herr* von Lehr. This saves me much trouble."

The color went out of the major's face, and the policemen looked dumbfounded.

"But, *Capitaine* Robard," gasped one of the men. "I don't understand."

But Robard was still smiling.

"It is very simple," he said. "In the name of the Republic, I am arresting the man known as Major Foix for espionage and treason."

CHAPTER III A SINGLE CHANCE!

"THE MAN'S insane!" Foix cried hoarsely. "I command you to arrest him." But without moving his pistol, Robard reached his other hand inside his uniform coat and withdrew a folded paper.

"I have a signed warrant, *Herr* von Lehr—made out three days ago when we finally traced the mysterious F-9 radio calls to the experimental radio you put in that Dewoitine."

"This is an outrage!" von Lehr said, white-lipped. "I am the victim of a Conspiracy."

Robard smiled. "If the workings of French Intelligence are a conspiracy, you are undoubtedly right." He turned to a staring police corporal. "Manacle the prisoner and take him into the next room. The rest of you go with him and see that this wily Allemander does not use any tricks and escape."

Still protesting, von Lehr was led into the adjoining office, his wrists secured with the twisted chains which serve as the French version of handcuffs.

Robard turned back to Knight, who was standing at one side looking at his features keenly. "I see you recognize me, *monsieur*," he said to the American.

Knight matched the Frenchman's smile with one a trifle ironic. "I seem to recall your taking a couple of shots at me in Madrid not long ago."

Robard looked somewhat embarrassed.

"*Oui*, I mistook you and your comrade here for anti-French spies when you were trying to break up the Four Faces group. I hope you do not hold it against me?"

"Not as long as you didn't hit me," said Knight. "And I take it, then, you know who we are?"

"In a vague way," nodded Robard. "I was working with the Loyalists then, and my investigations indicated that you had been sent over by the American Government. Also I heard later of your affair with the Italians in the secret Mediterranean station—so it seems, at the least, that you are engaged in my profession, *n'est ce pas?*"

"*Oui*," said Knight. They had been talking in French, but now he switched to English and introduced Doyle. Without revealing more than was necessary, he explained their presence in Europe, then briefly described the strange events of the evening, beginning with the chimes-signal and ending with von Lehr's treacherous attack.

Robard's whimsical expression slowly faded into one of intense seriousness. "I do not like all this. We have not heard such a signal, so they must have built special sets which this *diable* von Lehr knew, from his radio work with us, that we could not hear.

But the explosion of the Dewoitine—and the wax dummies—are you sure of that?"

"We're plenty sure," interjected Doyle. "That crate came close enough to shave me with a wingtip if I hadn't ducked."

Robard looked amazed, then he smiled lamely.

"I see you have the sense of humor, *Monsieur* Doyle. I wish I could retain mine—but too many grave things are happening. France is surrounded by enemies—German and Italian spies are everywhere—"

"This von Lehr," said Knight. "Can't you drag something out of him? He must be a key agent."

"He is the key agent," Robard said sternly. "I have suspected him for months, and finally I learned how he had been planted in the French Army, nine years ago. We watched him to see how many other spies we could trap before actually arresting him. But he is clever. When he wishes to communicate, he takes to the air, usually at night, or in bad weather. Where he lands, what he does, no one can tell. Perhaps he goes into Germany, or lands at an isolated spot in France. Or he may communicate with another plane in mid-air by signals or his secret radio. But *oui*, we shall make him talk, even if we have to—"

Robard broke off, as there came a timid rap at the door which led to the hall. He opened it, still holding the gun which had covered von Lehr. A white-haired old man in a wheel chair was a few feet away, and a skinny little man in rusty black clothing stood at the door. Both the skinny man and the invalid looked dismayed at the sight of the gun. Robard lowered it with an apologetic smile.

"Pardon, *mon pere*," he said to the man in the chair, "I had forgotten this little toy. What did you wish?"

The skinny man answered, in a high-pitched voice. "Colonel Reposte here, has a letter asking him to come here. It is from—who is it from, *mon colonel?*"

"I have it here," said the man in the chair, feebly. He fumbled in one pocket, then another, finally nodded his white head, as he reached inside his coat,

"Here it is," he quavered. Then with a lightning movement his hand came out with a Luger and he leaped to his feet before Robard could raise the gun he held.

“Don’t move!” he rasped, and with a start Knight saw where his white hair had slipped, exposing a close-cropped head. “Raise your hands, the three of you. A shout for help will bring you a bullet!”

THE WORDS were in guttural, staccato French. As Knight backed into the office with Robard and Doyle, the pseudo-invalid swiftly followed, and the skinny man pulled the wheel-chair inside, then also produced an automatic.

The bright lights revealed the false invalid’s gaunt, fierce countenance, and with new amazement Knight recognized the man who had piloted the fourth Messerschmitt. Robard was staring at the be-wigged intruder as though he saw a ghost.

“General Hiede!” he whispered. “*Sacre Dieu*, you must be mad !”

The German’s lips curled scornfully. “What danger is there—with such fools as you in French Intelligence? Hitler himself could come over here in masquerade, and you would never doubt him.”

Someone came hastily down the hall, and General Hiede stiffened.

“Be ready, Hans!” he muttered.

The skinny man opened the door a little farther, then looked relieved. Sergeant Mireau and another man in police uniform entered hurriedly, came to rigid attention at sight of Hiede. The gaunt German made an impatient gesture.

“This is no time for formality! The two of you go with Hans and straighten out that affair in the next room. Hans, you had better take the outer door, to attract attention for a moment.”

Hans disappeared, and in a moment a confused murmur of voices sounded from the next room. Hans burst in, gun poised, and Knight saw one of von Lehr’s guards jerk frantically at his gun. Hans fired, and the policeman dropped. A brief bedlam followed, then von Lehr appeared, carrying his chain manacles. And Knight noted that there was blood on one end of the set of links.

“Imbecile!” Hiede snarled at Hans, as the skinny spy came in. “Why did you have to shoot?”

“He would have killed me,” whined the little man. He spread his hands in a gesture, and inadvertently brought his pistol within a yard of Knight. The tall agent leaped instantly, but Hans’ gun went spinning before he could get a firm hold. At the same moment Robard lunged at Hiede. The gaunt general jumped aside with amazing swiftness,

cracked the butt of his gun against Robard’s head. As the Frenchman toppled, shouts of alarm sounded in the hall. Hiede whirled to von Lehr, who was now covering Knight.

“Take charge. Blame it on the Americans! Get rid of everyone you can!”

He was now back in his wheel-chair, wig straightened, and Hans was behind the chair, pale, shaking, when the door burst open and an airport official came in, two attendants behind him.

“*Pardieu!*” exclaimed the official, as his eyes fell on the unconscious Robard, and a dead policeman near the doorway in the next room. “What in the name of Heaven has happened?”

Von Lehr had a gun rammed against Knight’s ribs, and Mireau was likewise covering Doyle.

“These two spies tried to break loose—they killed the officer and assaulted *Capitaine* Robard,” von Lehr said savagely.

The official and his attendants broke into a babel of Gallic oaths and exclamations, but von Lehr cut them short.

“Go back and tell everyone it was nothing—only an electric light bulb dropped on the floor. This spy-matter must be kept secret until we can learn all its ramifications.”

The official seemed to notice Hiede and the skinny Hans for the first time. His brows drew together as though he were trying to recall something, but von Lehr gave him no time.

“This is Colonel Reposte, a retired officer of Artillery, who gave Captain Robard a tip leading to the identity of these spies.”

The other man turned to go, looked down at Robard.

“Hadn’t I better send for the doctor, *m’sieu le commandant?*”

“No, it is only a scalp wound—we will take care of him,” von Lehr answered quickly,

THE AIRPORT OFFICIAL and his men went out. Von Lehr waited until their footsteps had died away, then closed the door and wheeled to General Hiede.

“*Lieber Gott, mein General!* You are taking a great risk to—”

“Forget that!” snapped Hiede, springing up from the chair. “We have work to do, if we are to save our plans. We must make off with the Northrop to eliminate the American’s set—also, I have a scheme

for using it later. But we still need another plane. I flew one of the Messerschmitts and was forced to abandon it and take to my parachute, in order to get here in time."

Von Lehr looked dismayed.

"But what if the ship is found? The crash must have attracted attention?"

"I flooded the engine, and made sure it would burn when it struck," Hiede retorted irritably. "And before I jumped, I radioed Hans to be ready with a car at the old field east of Aubervilliers. I had the plan for my invalid act all ready, so I managed to get here in time to offset your stupid blundering."

Von Lehr flushed. "It was not my fault, *herr* General—"

"We will settle that later! Our main problem is to get away at once—and take these prisoners with us."

"I had already planned that—at least to take the Americans. My special Dewoitine has been started—" von Lehr turned inquiringly to Mireau, and the spy-policeman hastily nodded.

"*Gut*," said Hiede curtly. "The rest should be easy. I shall want all three prisoners taken; we can undoubtedly force them to give us details of American and French Intelligence which we can use. And the Plan must be carried on immediately."

Von Lehr lost some of the color he had regained.

"Then it has really been ordered?" he whispered.

"Certainly!" snapped Hiede. "And every lost minute makes the victory less sure. Hans, wheel me out into the hall. Von Lehr, you and one of Mireau's men come along with the *Amerikaners*. Mireau, you and the other one carry Captain Robard. When we get outside, von Lehr, you will order the Northrop started at once. The engine will still be warm, so it should take only a moment. Meantime, tell the airport superintendent you need a pilot to fly the Dewoitine for an Intelligence matter at Versailles, and that the prisoners and myself and Hans are going in that ship. If they insist on an extra guard or two, very well—Hans and I can take care of them once we are in the air, and then also 'relieve' the pilot."

"And I am to fly the Northrop?" asked von Lehr.

"Did you expect a ghost to fly it?" grated Hiede. He glowered at the false major, jerked his head at Hans. The skinny man pushed the chair into the hall, and Knight and Doyle were marched along behind at gun-point, Mireau's two traitorous

policemen brought up the rear, grumbling at Robard's weight.

ON THE FIELD, the Dewoitine was ready, motors idling, when the group arrived. At von Lehr's order, a mechanic quickly started up the Northrop's motor. Hiede was lifted from his chair and between Hans and an airport attendant was carried into the Dewoitine.

Knight watched desperately for a chance to break, but von Lehr and the man guarding Doyle never relaxed for a second, and the increasing crowd of spectators was growing more audibly hostile every instant.

"I'm going to take a chance, Dick," Doyle muttered through set teeth. "Get set!"

"Idiot!" von Lehr cut in before Knight could answer. "You'll be dead before you lift a hand! Move out!"

"I forgot th' dirty louse could speak English," Doyle moaned to Knight. "What I'd give for just one crack—"

"*Espion!*" came a sudden strangled cry. Robard had recovered his senses, shouted the alarm before his captors could stifle him. "Help! Major Foix is a German spy!"

One of the spy-policemen struck him a furious blow, but the damage was already done. Half a dozen mechanics and airport attendants dashed through the milling crowd of air-travelers, and customs guards and officials came darting on their heels. The two men carrying Robard lifted him and threw him headfirst into the Dewoitine. And now Hiede reappeared in the doorway with his automatic leveled.

"*Espion Allemander!*" Knight shouted at the top of his lungs.

Von Lehr had spun half around to face the charging officials. He now whirled back, but Knight caught him with a furious left hook and shoved his gun-hand upward. The gun blasted skyward, and the next instant Knight jerked it from the spy's hand.

Hans was almost at the door to the cabin. He crashed two shots into the crowd, was triggering a third when Knight fired. The skinny little spy fell on his face, a black hole between his eyes.

Von Lehr dived madly for the door of the Dewoitine, Mireau and the false police behind him. Doyle brought down one man with a flying tackle, and Hiede's hasty shot at him drilled the shoulder of

a mechanic close behind. Knight pumped a bullet at the German general, but Hiede sprang back as he leveled the gun and the slug harmlessly pierced the door. Then von Lehr scrambled inside, and before Knight could reach the airliner, it lurched ahead under hurriedly opened throttles. The sudden blast blew him from his feet. He rolled over, came up to find Doyle struggling in the hands of three or four infuriated Frenchmen.

Doyle thudded an uppercut to one man's jaw, sent another somersaulting backward as Knight jumped into the fight. In a split second, the other two men were in full flight, yelling for help. Knight dashed for the idling Northrop with Doyle at his elbow. A pistol spurted flame as he sprang into the cockpit, and two more guns opened fire before Doyle could get aboard. One of the slugs drilled the already bullet-torn cowl, and as he ducked he recognized the gunman as one of the false police. The man had missed the Dewoitine, and was now desperately trying to cover up the truth by attacking the supposed spies. Doyle recognized him in the same moment, snatched a flare-pistol from its socket and pulled the trigger.

A rocket-flare streaked across the intervening space, struck the spy in the chest. Above the drone of the engine, Knight heard the man scream, then the rocket-charge burst with a blinding light. Pawing madly at the flames, the man rolled over on the ground. Knight opened the throttle, sent the Northrop racing away from the mob which was surging toward them.

"We're in a swell fix!" he shouted back at Doyle. "Robard's the only one who knows that man was a spy!"

"They can't get any madder than they were," Doyle howled back. "What could I do—let him stand there and blast us down?"

"I'm not blaming you," Knight answered over his shoulder. "But we've only got a single chance of getting a clear ticket. We must force that Dewoitine down and save Robard so he can explain it all. Be ready with your guns!"

CHAPTER IV TRAPPED

DOYLE levered the twin-fifties up from their niche, and Knight reached toward the retracting-gear valve, lifted the wheels the moment they were

off the ground. The Dewoitine was climbing swiftly into the Northeast. A searchlight speared out, crossed the airliner, then swung to the Northrop. Knight ruddered to the left, zoomed at full gun. Hardly a second later, tracers made pinkish white lines through the space where the two-seater had been. Another searchlight angled up the sky, and he had to whip into a vertical bank to avoid it. The Dewoitine again was spotted by the first light, but no gunfire followed. Knight grimly whirled the Northrop and aligned it with the big ship.

"They won't fire on it, as long as they know Robard is in there," he said into the inter phone. "Watch out for any ships following us—I saw a fast interceptor back there in a military reserve hangar."

"They probably haven't got a pilot," Doyle yelled back. "It hasn't been wheeled out yet."

Tracer lines suddenly probed down the sky from a point near the Dewoitine's tail. Doyle swore like a pirate as Knight rolled out of the burst.

"Guns in the tail! How do they get that way with a passenger ship?"

"Half the airliners in Europe are made for conversion into bombers," said Knight. "Hold your fire—I'm going to see if I can find a blind spot."

He raced above the Dewoitine in a tight climbing turn. But before he had more than started to close in a gun-snout poked through a round opening in the top and another blast barely missed the Northrop.

"I'm going to take a crack at their props!" raged Doyle.

"No—you might set the ship on fire!" Knight stopped him. "We've got to think of Robard."

"In twenty minutes more they'll be over the border into Germany," lamented the ex-Leatherneck. "You know what we'll be then—the men without a country! When Paris kicks about this to London, they'll cover up about how they let us use these British registration letters on this job—and Washington won't save our necks."

"I know that," Knight said, half to himself. He knew that was the lot of spies who get caught or who get into a jam. They could expect no direct help from their government, and they were expected to take what came without a word, even if it meant a firing squad.

"Then what are we going to do?" demanded Doyle. "Are we going to let those bums get away with it?"

"No," Knight said flatly. He changed the propeller pitch, climbed at a steep angle until they were well out of range. By now the searchlights at Le Bourget were far behind, but others between Paris and the German border were flicking their way up the sky, trying to pierce the clouds. Both the Dewoitine and the Northrop were soon above the first layer, and as the lights lost their brilliance Knight warily descended, watching the blurred shape of the airliner as the shifting light-beams illuminated the clouds below it.

"Listen!" Doyle said abruptly. He had switched on the radio, turning to the high-frequency wave they had used before.

Sweet and clear, the mysterious chimes were sounding again. For half a minute they continued, then the harmony was shattered by the grating, unmistakable voice of General Hiede:

"Hold the Second unit! Wait for my orders. M-13, switch off your transmitter and wait for further directions."

"Now what the devil does that mean?" exclaimed Doyle.

Knight had been staring at the bearing-indicator.

"The chimes signal came from somewhere in Paris, or on a line with it. I'm beginning to get a hunch on this business."

"What is it?" grunted Doyle.

"That first Dewoitine must have been guiding on—" Knight broke off, for the high-frequency receiver was again speaking:

"Orders received. Will signal as directed."

THERE followed a low-pitched buzz, lasting about three seconds, then two short ones. After an interval of half a minute, this was repeated.

"That's not from Paris!" Doyle said excitedly.

"No, it's from somewhere on a line north of Longwy, near Luxembourg. That's the nearest German border."

"It must be a radio-beacon to guide that ship in to a field," Doyle said through the inter phone. "The fog's probably thicker near the Meuse, and Hiede figures he can't get in without a beacon."

"There's something queer about it," Knight answered. "Why did he switch to another wavelength to give the order for the beacon? If I've figured that old fox anywhere near right, it's a trap for us."

"Well, we don't have to land," Doyle pointed out. "And with this low ceiling, we can duck into the clouds if the going gets too tough."

"We'll have to risk it, anyway," said Knight. "Keep your eyes open."

"I wasn't counting on going to sleep," Doyle retorted. "Hey, look at the Dewoitine! They're trying to lose us!"

The airliner was now nosing down, turning in a northerly direction. The searchlight spots on the clouds were now few and far apart, and it was with difficulty that Knight managed to keep the big ship in sight.

After a minute or two it turned east again, resuming its first course. Knight dropped the Northrop to within a thousand feet, gradually lessening the distance as the darkness increased. Five minutes, and a dozen light zones showed ahead, as unseen searchlight crews vainly probed at the drifting mists.

"Must be the border, somewhere near Montmedy," Knight said after looking at his map. "I think they're heading just north of Longwy and into the southern part of Luxembourg."

The light spots now fell behind, and he had to close the gap again as the stolen airliner plunged down through the clouds. They had passed, he estimated, the tip of the French area just north of Longwy, and were a few miles into Luxembourg when the beacon signal faded into silence. At the same moment the Dewoitine dived steeply into the gloom.

"Must be the cone of silence on the beacon!" Doyle yelled,

Knight made no answer, but sent the Northrop into a swift plunge after the stolen ship. His hand went to the landing-light switch, then he shook his head. Better to risk over-running the Dewoitine's tail than to expose the Northrop to concerted fire from the airliner and the ground. And if his guess were right, there would be massed guns below.

Re-setting the altimeter after checking the map, he eased the Northrop from its fast glide and banked into a spiral, straining his eyes for the first sight of ground. The radio-beacon was still silent, though he switched to alternate wave-lengths to see if he could pick it up. The mists darkened, and he knew that ground was near. Suddenly, their ship broke through into clear air, and he cast a hasty look on both sides.

He could see nothing of the Dewoitine!

Several kilometers distant, the headlights of a car made two tiny spots in the gloom. Another car passed, going in the opposite direction. With this as an altitude check, Knight came down to a hundred feet of the ground, circling carefully. As his eyes became accustomed to the gloom, he could vaguely see that they had come down in a broad valley, with rolling hills on both sides. He was about to start climbing, to be sure of not hitting a hill in the darkness, when Doyle gave a shout.

"Turn back, Dick! I just saw a light flash, a mile south—I think I saw the Dewoitine taxiing."

Knight whipped the two-seater into a turn, and in a few seconds was circling the Northrop over the area Doyle indicated. His pulses leaped as he made out the shape of the stolen Dewoitine, grey against the darker ground. It had stopped moving, but his anxious survey failed to reveal any buildings or hangars nearby. Bracing himself for a quick maneuver if guns should blast, he flicked the landing-light switch. The tilted beams swept over the Dewoitine, caught a solitary figure running toward the cabin. A swift circle, with the lights sweeping over the flat bosom of the valley, failed to reveal any other sign of life.

"Stand by your guns," he said to Doyle. "I'm going to land."

"Look out for that ridge!" Doyle warned him. Knight swung away, made a wide turn into the wind, lowering the wheels as he prepared for the approach. The Northrop moaned down, engine droning just above idling speed. He tilted the light-beams more steeply to flood the landing area, and in a moment the wheels touched. He pulled the throttle full back, stared ahead with fingers on the gun-buttons. Then a wave of astonishment swept over him.

The Dewoitine had vanished!

"Hell's bells!" howled Doyle. "They beat it while we were landing."

Knight braked the ship to a halt, peered up through the Northrop's riddled Plexiglas enclosure. There was no sign of the airliner above.

"They couldn't have got clear that fast," he muttered. "They'd have had to turn around and taxi for enough room to take off."

ABRUPTLY the implication of his words hit him. He sprang up in the cockpit, bumping his head

against the enclosure. A crawling sensation went up his spine. Something was moving in the darkness, off to the right. He dropped back in the seat, jazzed the motor to turn and spot the area. In the same moment, a dazzling light shot out and blinded him. He kicked away, stood on the brake pedals.

A gun hurled tracers out of that dazzling light. Doyle answered with a crashing barrage from the 50's, and above the din Knight thought he heard a scream. He shielded his eyes, sent the Northrop rolling around until his back was to the light. Guns were clattering from two angles, and Doyle was furiously swinging his twin-mount to blast at both. Above the choked thunder of the Northrop, the roar of another engine came with a booming force. Knight shoved the throttle open, praying his half-blinded eyes would not fail.

The Northrop's controls stiffened, and the two-seater bellowed away and broke into the air with the manifold pressure dangerously over the red mark. Off to the left, a sleek black shape raced into view, as a Messerschmitt fighter strove to head them off. Doyle flung a burst at the German, and the pilot pitched over the stick. The Messerschmitt slued around, went onto its back and burst into flames.

The night was instantly turned into daylight brilliance, as the blazing gasoline leaped skyward. Another Nazi fighter was charging across the smooth carpet of the valley, and with consternation Knight saw five more fighters taxiing swiftly into the wind. Back of them yawned a black maw, where the huge door of an underground hangar had opened in the side of a hill. Lit by the flamer, the Dewoitine was revealed just inside the entrance, with dozens of men running about.

An anti-aircraft battery mounted on a truck came whirling out of the secret hangar, behind it two machine-gun trucks. The truck which held the searchlight was pulling to one side, the crew feverishly trying to keep the Northrop spotted.

One of the Messerschmitts pulled up in a perilous zooming take-off, shot back at the Northrop. Slugs gouged for a second at the side of the two-seater. Knight snapped a quick burst at the Nazi pilot, but the other man was out of range in a flash. He gripped the retracting-gear valve, groaned as it came away in his hand. One of the German's bullets had scored a lucky hit. With its wheels down, the speed of the Northrop would be cut considerably.

Desperately, he hurled the ship around and down at the searchlight. If he could blind the Messerschmitt pilots, there still might be a chance. But a terrific fire from the ground drove him into a hasty chandelle. Doyle's guns roared for a second—then went dead!

"Run for it, Dick!" he shouted. "I'm out of ammo!"

Knight grimly booted the nose around toward the nearest fighter. Its smooth dark sides were almost in line with his wing-root 50's as he pressed the master button. Battered dural and steel and bits of wiring shot from the Messerschmitt's cowl as the burst raked over the top. Knight rammed the stick forward, and the blasting force of his guns hit squarely into the German ship's nose. Literally knocked out of the bearers, the engine went smoking and flaming down the sky, and the fighter whipped into a crazy spin.

With a sudden hope, Knight drove through the space he had opened—then snapped the ship around in a violent turn. A hill had loomed straight before him, too high to zoom across. Tracers from three directions flamed past the wings as he came back. For an instant his taut hand hesitated on the throttle. There was still a chance in a thousand—of plunging straight through, he might by a miracle miss connecting with German bullets. But he slowly pulled the throttle back. It would be practically suicide—and he had no right to doom the man behind him.

With the Messerschmitts swarming around and above, he leveled off and landed—for that was his only alternative. As the ship stopped, he turned and looked at Doyle. A crooked grin was frozen on Doyle's homely face.

"You should have gone ahead, Dick," he said huskily. "It'd be better—that way."

THERE was no chance for answer. At least score of armed Nazi brown-shirts closed in around the ship, with von Lehr in the lead. The spy's jaw was swollen and discolored where Knight had hit him, and the Q-Agent read murder in the man's protruding eyes.

"Get those *schweine* out here!" von Lehr snarled, and a dozen storm-troopers leaped to do his bidding.

As Knight was dragged to the ground, von Lehr stepped up and struck him furiously across the

mouth. Knight lunged at him, but a horde of brown-shirts threw themselves on him and he went down. Kicked and beaten, he was lifted to his feet and carried half-senseless toward the secret hangar. He could dimly hear Doyle cursing the Germans, and the sounds of a scuffle.

But as he was taken into the entrance of the hidden hangar, the shock of his beating began to wear off, and though the pain increased he could think more clearly. In spite of the agony which the jolting of his captors caused him, he tried to take in the details of the secret base.

It was obvious that the cavern was artificial, an excavation made for the purpose of hiding a large air unit. Walls, floor and roof were of concrete, with iron pillars to support the roof truss work. The hangar was divided into three sections, with several huge Junkers 86 bombers on one side, and two rows of Messerschmitts on the other. In the rear were shops and partitioned space for war-time quarters, only part of which seemed to be occupied now. The entire space was lighted by electricity, and he saw that the big balanced door, camouflaged expertly to look like the rest of the hillside, was operated by electric motors.

He kept his eyes slitted, so that his captors would not realize he was conscious, though now and then a jerk brought pain that almost made him groan. Ahead, he saw Robard, guarded by two Nazis, and General Hiede in the midst of a group of officers. Hiede glared toward the approaching brown-shirts.

"I told you not to kill the American" he said savagely.

"He is not dead, *Herr* General," one of the men spoke up in haste. "He was only knocked senseless when he tried to kill Major von Lehr."

"And the other?" demanded Hiede. "*Ach*, I see they have him—and alive. Put this one down and douse him with a bucket of water."

Knight was dumped on the floor. He opened his eyes, knowing further shamming was useless.

"So, you were trying to fool us—hoping for a chance to escape!" fumed Hiede. "Stand up, *Amerikaner* dog!"

Three Nazis gripped Knight and yanked him to a standing position. But for their support he would have fallen. One of the officers, a square-headed colonel with a face as fat as a pig, looked at him in fascination.

"Then this is the Q-Agent—Knight?"

“*Ja*, Moltke,” said Hiede, “this is the great American spy. He does not look so very clever now, *nein?*”

Moltke shook his head, twitched a glance at Doyle, whose crooked nose was bleeding copiously from a blow it had received.

“*Gott*, what an ugly-looking *Hund!*” he exclaimed.

“He will look even uglier,” von Lehr broke in viciously, “when I am through with him—and this over-rated *spion*, Knight, too.”

“There’s no time to waste on that now,” snapped Hiede. “Take them into my office,” he added, with a curt gesture to the senior brown-shirt, “Moltke, have preparations made at once to go on with the orders. Have the Northrop plane refueled and made ready for the London trip. That move is timed for shortly after the Paris action.”

Robard spoke up, white-lipped.

“There will be a special Hell for you, *Herr* Hiede, if you go through with this!”

“You speak like a child,” said the gaunt Nazi, contemptuously. “But you French were ever childish.”

He jerked his head, and the prisoners were hurried into a hall which ended in a paneled room. An enormous wall map of Europe hung directly opposite a large desk, and colored lights were lit at various points. A radio amplifier was plugged into a connection on another wall. Knight saw a red leather book and a Photostat of a chart on the desk on which several numbers and letters were checked in colored crayon.

Robard stared from the map to the Photostat, and the last vestige of blood fled his cheeks, leaving them the color of old parchment.

“You fiend!” he whispered. “Then you were not lying!”

For the first time, Knight heard Hiede laugh. It was like the croak of a vulture.

“So you thought it was a trick, my popinjay Frenchman? You blind fool, by midnight all Europe will be plunged into war!”

CHAPTER V TEST-STAND OF DEATH

FOR a space of ten seconds, there was only the tense breathing of the men in the room. Robard

stood like a statue, eyes riveted on the light-dotted map.

Hiede saw the staring brown-shirts, turned fiercely to the senior man.

“Tie the prisoners hands and leave them here!”

The Nazis hastily obeyed, left the room. Hiede closed the door, looked strangely at von Lehr.

“It is time you knew. But first, are you sure everything is right in Paris—that this affair with the *Amerikaner* will not upset the arrangements?”

“There is no danger of that. No one could trace my agents, and the green light shows they are waiting.”

“Excellent,” grated Hiede. “Then my plan cannot fail.”

“Your plan?” von Lehr said hoarsely. He looked at the gaunt general in horror. “But I thought you said *der Fuehrer*—”

“He waits too long!” Hiede said with a sudden fury. “The *Generalstab* waits—everyone puts off the day, afraid we are not quite ready. And all the time England is arming at twice our rate—with all her resources building against us. And France—never will she be less organized—more ready for the slaughter!”

Von Lehr backed away as though he stood before a madman.

“But, *Gott im Himmel*, when *der Fuehrer* finds out—we will all be shot!”

“Not if we show them the way to victory!” A fanatical glow shone in Hiede’s sunken eyes. “With France blazing before dawn, and England’s capital also in flames, the war will be half-won. Plan Four will be carried out to the smallest detail—every available ship and pilot and our mechanized forces will be thrown into the surprise attack. France will be beaten before noon tomorrow—paralyzed to point of surrender. And London will clamor for a peace-pact when they realize they would stand alone.”

Perspiration ran down von Lehr’s face.

“But even now, Hitler and Goering may know—may be on the way. The Gestapo may be here any second to arrest us—”

“You whimpering coward!” thundered Hiede. “I offer you a chance to gain immortal glory—but you cringe at the slightest risk. Don’t worry about *der Fuehrer* and Goering. There is no chance of their learning in time to stop us. I’ve been waiting months for this opportunity—a time when they’d be

off at some remote spot—and tonight they're at the old chateau in Mecklenburg, holding a secret conference with *Il Duce's* representative from Rome. I've arranged so that their power-line will be cut and the bridge at Ansheim has been blocked by an 'accident' so they can't return that way. As you know, there are no telephones to the chateau—and without power the radio will be useless. There is no way they could learn."

"A plane could fly over—drop a message," mumbled von Lehr.

"But no one will know anything is wrong," insisted Hiede. "I've shifted the emergency signal control to this circuit for eight hours. At Berlin they will think, when the action starts, that this is the explanation of Hitler's sudden disappearance—that he is controlling the attack from here. I have already given the stand-by signal for all our agents in England and France. And all our pilots have been recalled secretly from leave; I saw to that, making next week's maneuvers the excuse.

"Then as soon as the first air phase is started, I'll flash word to all our mechanized units and the *Untersee*-boats. Everything will go like clockwork—air, sea, land, and sabotage in the enemy lines. Once it is started, not even Hitler himself can stop our war machine from going forward."

"You're stark mad!" Robard broke in. "You'll never beat France!"

"*Nein?*" sneered the gaunt German.

"Perhaps this will interest you. In that first Dewoitine was enough arsenic-base gas to spread over an area two kilometers square. Unfortunately, the ship was too high when it exploded for the gas to take effect—it expands rapidly, and it lost its power by the time the diluted mixture settled to the ground. But the next ship will crash as intended, before the gas is released, and everyone along the Quai d'Orsay and a kilometer on both sides of the Seine will be dead or dying in less than fifteen minutes!"

"The defense interceptors and the anti-aircraft will destroy the ship before it can hit Paris," Robard said desperately.

"I think not," said Hiede. "We will use that Dewoitine which von Lehr equipped with one of our special radio-guide sets. Your pilots and gunners will not be sure enough that it is the stolen one. In any event they would be afraid you are still

in it, a prisoner. And with that low ceiling they will not have much time to decide. An automatic transmitter will be switched on in a certain room at the Chamber of Deputies, where I happen to know there is a struggle going on tonight against Daladier's government. The Dewoitine will follow the signal like a homing pigeon, will destroy your Deputies and the War Ministry—and France will be left without leaders at the moment our attack begins!"

"That chimes signal!" Robard said hoarsely. "So this is the answer!"

THE GERMAN replied with a malignant grin. "We have a score of those sets. Some are in Paris, others at vital points such as your defense squadron fields around the city, and your main industrial plants for war material. There are several in London, also. As soon as we receive word that the first one has struck Paris and the panic has begun, we will send the others at one-minute intervals. Meantime, the Northrop plane will be equipped with a control-relay box and then loaded with as much arsenic-gas as it can carry, along with explosive and incendiary bombs as were in the first Dewoitine. That load of hell will be aimed at Number Ten Downing Street, and if I know the English every important man from the Premier to the heads of their Intelligence will be caught there as they await further news from Paris. In short, England, too, will be left without leaders."

"But why wait, *Excellenz*," von Lehr interrupted nervously, "for the Northrop to be equipped when our Junkers are ready?"

"Because we could not get English motors for them," snapped Hiede. "This Northrop was expected at Croydon tonight—Moltke told me he heard this man Knight inform them he was changing his course to go to Paris, so they would not report him lost in the Channel. We will make him flash a message that he has changed his mind, and thus the Northrop will not be questioned when it crosses London. The radio-guided Junkers will follow while London is disrupted by the first shock, and our regular ships will race in according to the schedule, the same as in France."

"If only there is no slip!" von Lehr muttered.

"What could happen?" snorted the general. "Every detail has been figured out, all movements at sea and on land dove-tailed. *Ach*, I have waited

and lived for this moment! Ever since 1918, when those devils ruined the Fatherland, I have waited for vengeance. I was only an *Unter-Leutnant* when they drove us back, and crushed us with their damned Armistice terms—but I knew then it was my mission to avenge Germany. And my hour has come!”

The germ of a wild hope had sprung up in Knight’s mind as he saw the fear in von Lehr’s eyes and the mad gleam in those of Hiede. When the gaunt German flung out the last words, Knight threw a swift, warning look at Robard and then burst into uproarious laughter.

“It worked, *capitaine!*” he shouted. “They swallowed it, the fools!”

Robard, after a split-second stare of amazement, took the cue and joined in Knight’s laughter. Hiede’s jaw dropped, and von Lehr looked at the two men in sudden alarm.

“Silence!” roared Hiede. He gripped Knight’s arm with bony fingers. “What in the *Teufel’s* name is the meaning of your cackling?”

“You and your smart spy!” Knight jeered. “You thought it was an accident that the Northrop was circling around the Eiffel Tower when that Dewoitine came over! You never wondered why Robard happened to be in that next room! The whole thing was planned, my brilliant general.”

Hiede whirled on von Lehr with a snarl.

“If they knew—it was through you!”

“He’s lying” von Lehr cried wildly. “Remember that Robard was astonished when he heard the explanation of the chimes.”

The Frenchman laughed in his face. ‘Blockhead of an *Allemand!* That was to delay you two from warning your spy-ring in Paris before my men could round them up and seize those sets. Weeks ago, *Monsieur* Knight caught your first test-signals and sent us word through American Intelligence. He followed your supposedly secret flights with his Northrop—night after night. Send your hell-ships across! They’ll be guided back here into Germany—against your own cities, by our own ships carrying those chimes-sets!”

THERE was froth on Hiede’s lips, and his eyes blazed like hot coals. “Thick-witted fool!” he screamed at von Lehr. “If this is true, I’ll hang you with my own hands!”

“It can’t be!” von Lehr moaned. “They’re trying to trick you to gain time—I swear I was never followed.”

“We’ll soon know!” snarled Hiede. He jabbed a button on the desk, and Moltke hurried in. “Is the Dewoitine ready?”

“Almost, *Herr General,*” Moltke answered, with a startled look at Hiede’s white face. “What is wrong?”

“Perhaps everything—but we will be ready if they were lying. Start the Dewoitine’s motors—have all the Junkers started and detonators set. Then return here and give the standby signal to all forces!”

Moltke’s fingers were shaking as he picked up the keys Hiede threw on the desk. The general strode to the door, bellowed an order, and returned with two brown-shirts. Then with Hiede and von Lehr following, Knight and the other prisoners were hustled down the hall, through the shop-section of the secret hangar, and finally into an engine testing-room where a Mercedes-Benz motor with a steel propeller stood on the block. Close by was a movable work-stand—a platform erected on rollers so that mechanics could adjust the chain tackle for lifting the motor and moving it out on an overhead track.

In an adjoining space was a pile of oil-cans, several petrol drums, and an opened packing-case. Five or six wax dummies were scattered around the floor, evidently leftovers from the ones which had been used to look like the passengers of the big Dewoitine when it was sent over Paris. Hiede closed the door, pointed at Knight.

“Tie him face up on that work-stand, with his head hanging over the edge.”

An icy chill ran up Knight’s spine as he realized Hiede’s intention. Von Lehr laughed harshly.

“Now you see where that crazy lie brings you, *Herr Q-Agent!*”

“Wait!” Robard said in a choked voice, “General Hiede—you cannot do this horrible thing!”

“You French use the *guillotine*—we have our own methods!” snapped Hiede. He wheeled to one of the brown-shirts as they finished tying Knight to the platform of the work-stand. “*Schnell!* Start the engine!”

A starting-motor growled, and with a sputter the Mercedes-Benz whirled into life. Doyle, unable to follow the conversation because it had been in

French, began a furious struggle to free himself and aid Knight as he realized Hiede's purpose. But von Lehr and a brown-shirt hauled him back, and the thunder of the engine drowned his frenzied voice.

The work-stand jerked, moved forward a foot or so, as Hiede signaled for the remaining storm-trooper to push it. A cold horror raced over Knight. The flashing steel blades were less than a foot from his face. Another foot, and he would be decapitated!

CHAPTER VI SONG OF DOOM

HIEDE made a peremptory gesture, and the brown-shirt held the stand where it was. Pistol in hand, the gaunt German mounted halfway up the steps and bent over Knight, while the trooper-mechanic idled the engine.

"Are you ready to tell the truth?" he rasped.

Knight tried to speak, but his tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth. Hiede shouted a profane command to the trooper, and the stand moved an inch or two closer to the bright disk that meant hideous death. Knight closed his eyes and lay there in a frozen agony, with the suction from the blades pulling at his hair. Hiede shook him savagely until he opened his eyes.

"I give you a last chance!" the general shouted above the roar of the engine. "Answer me or into the blades you go!"

The pound of his fist shook the work-stand. Knight rolled his frantic eyes toward the gun in Hiede's hand, helplessly moved his head in surrender. Hiede's eyes narrowed, and his teeth showed in a wolfish grin.

"*Nein, Herr* Knight, you will not have the chance to seize this pistol. Your intentions are a little too obvious—but I suppose fear makes even such a clever man stupid."

Knight held his breath, hardly daring to hope his prayer would be answered. Hiede motioned to the Nazi who had started the engine.

"Untie his feet first. If you free his hands he will try to get my Luger, and I do not wish to shoot him—yet."

Down below, von Lehr and the other brown-shirt had herded Doyle and Robard into a corner, were holding them at gun-point. Both prisoners still had their hands tied behind them. Knight fought off a sudden faintness which followed the shock of his

near approach to death. The Nazi mechanic clambered up on the steps beside Hiede, crawled on to the platform, and untied the rope which held Knight's feet to the boards.

The secret agent let himself go limp, eyes fixed glassily on Hiede. If only the brown-shirt came forward on the side toward the general

He felt the ropes slacken on his feet. The mechanic twisted around, taking care not to jar the work-stand and move it on its casters. He crawled forward between Knight and Hiede, was unfastening the agent's wrists when the general bellowed something at him, and took a step farther up the ladder to keep Knight covered. The brown-shirt turned around at Hiede's shout, and with a desperate effort Knight jerked his feet up from the boards.

His kick sent the mechanic tumbling over on Hiede, and their combined weight threw the stand sidewise. It slid from under on its casters, whipped sidewise with a crash that threw Knight squarely upon the trooper. He jerked his hands from the already half-loosened rope just as Hiede slammed the trooper aside and lifted his Luger.

Knight's dive and the muffled crash of the gun came as one. He felt the slug sear along his left shoulder, but his hands were now on the gun, tearing it from the general's bony hands before Hiede could fire again.

Then from across the room flame jetted as von Lehr took wild aim and fired.

The bullet from von Lehr's gun smashed against the wall, and Doyle hurtled against him with head lowered like a bull before he could trigger a second shot. The spy fell, breath knocked from his body, and Robard tramped on his outstretched gun-hand. The brown-shirt who had covered the Frenchman had whirled to fire at Doyle. Knight pumped a shot into the man, and he doubled over, dropping his pistol.

The Nazi mechanic dived for the fallen gun. Robard lashed out with a booted foot and kicked him away. Then Knight rammed his gun into Hiede's ribs, drove him back against the wall, then stepped out of reach.

"Stand up!" he shouted at the man Robard had kicked.

DAZED, his bruised face showing the force of the Frenchman's blow, the man obeyed. Doyle was

still on top of von Lehr, trying to get his hands loose before the spy recovered his breath.

"Untie him!" Knight flung at the Nazi mechanic. "Keep on his right side while you're doing it!"

All the fight had gone out of the man. He unfastened Doyle's wrists, then staggered over to Robard, and untied his bonds without even a word from Knight. Hiede cursed him foully, but the grim look on Knight's face kept him from making a move. Doyle snatched up von Lehr's automatic, covered the gasping spy while Robard took the gun the dead German had dropped.

"At least, we die fighting," the Frenchman said tautly.

"We may get out of this yet," Knight answered. He stepped back, keeping Hiede covered, and looked swiftly around the room. "Doyle, you and Robard bring two of those dummies over here. I'll watch these men"

"What's the idea?" said Doyle, when he and the Frenchman had brought over two of the wax figures.

"Take off your coats—put them on the dummies in place of the ones they have. And you, General Hiede—I'll trouble you for your uniform blouse."

"*Schweinhund!*" Hiede spat at him. "I'll burn you alive for this!"

"The blouse!" snapped Knight, with a jab of his gun that brought an oath from the gaunt German. As Hiede furiously unbuttoned the uniform, Knight motioned to the storm-trooper. "That shirt and swastika will come in handy. Take them off!"

The Mercedes-Benz was still idling, its droning thunder echoing through the test-chamber. Knight stood where he could see the door. The sound of the engine had drowned the shots, he knew, but at any moment some of the Nazis might appear. And there was no way of barring the door from the inside.

"All set," Doyle reported, laying down the dummy on which he had put his coat. "Now what?"

"Put on that trooper's shirt and the swastika. Captain Robard, you're almost as tall as Hiede—you take his blouse and his cap, too."

"You fools!" von Lehr snarled from the floor. "You'll never get a hundred feet before you're recognized!"

"So you've recovered your voice?" said Knight. "Suppose you line up here with your friends and keep still."

Von Lehr got to his feet, his face a sickly color, and leaned against the wall. Knight was about to continue his instructions to Doyle and Robard when a light flashed on the wall beside a telephone. Hiede tensed for a leap, but Knight swung his Luger instantly.

"Not so fast, Herr General. Doyle, watch his *Excellenz* while I see what this is."

He lifted the phone, barked a gruff "*Ja?*" in as near an imitation of Hiede's voice as he could achieve, relying on the roar of the motor to hide any discrepancy.

"General Hiede?" came Moltke's anxious query. "The Dewoitine is ready for launching."

"I have made a change in plans," Knight grated. "Start the Northrop and put it first in line and two Messerschmitts behind it."

"But, *Herr General*," expostulated Moltke, "the Dewoitine is up against the door, and one of the Junkers is next. It will take twenty minutes to move.—"

"Open the door, and taxi the Dewoitine outside, then," Knight harshly interrupted. "If you have to move the first Junkers outside, do that also. But I want the Northrop and the two fighters ready in five minutes. Information we just forced from these *verdammte* swine has made a sudden change necessary. We will be there by the time you are ready—and be sure to dim the lights in the hangar when you open the door."

He slammed down the phone, wheeled to Doyle and Robard.

"Here's my plan. You two will go out of here, walking those dummies, as though they're prisoners. With the lights dim, the chances will be ten times better—and most of the men will be up near the entrance. Get as close to the Northrop as you can before you drop the dummies. Let the heads hang forward—the Germans will think the prisoners have been beaten and are about to collapse. Unless you have bad luck, you ought to get near enough to the ship to make the break."

"What about you?" demanded Doyle. "I'll take one of the Messerschmitts—and if either of you gets separated, make for the other fighter. I'll stay here, to be sure our friends don't break out and give the alarm, until you're part way to the Northrop. Don't worry—I've figured out my escape."

DOYLE began another protest, but Knight cut him short. Carrying one of the dummies, Doyle opened the door cautiously. The rumble of motors added itself to that of the Mercedes-Benz, and with quick relief Knight saw that the lights had already been dimmed so that no glow would shine from the second entrance. He kept the three Germans covered until Doyle and Robard had disappeared in the gloom, then herded the prisoners into a corner.

"I'm going to be just outside that door," he said grimly. "I'll stay there until that Northrop starts—and the first man that pokes his head outside will get a bullet in it."

None of the trio answered, but Hiede's gaunt face was purple with fury. Knight swiftly backed to the door, opened it, and stepped outside. There was no lock. He moved to one side, where he could watch the door and also look toward the entrance of the base. He could dimly see the wings of a huge Junkers moving through the entrance, and mechanics and pilots swarming around like wraiths in the gloom. The base was so dark he could not tell one figure from another, even when the exhaust of the motor momentarily flared up in the shadows.

Knight started as the roar from the Mercedes-Benz rose deafeningly in the test-room. He reached out toward the door, then stopped. Revving up that motor might be a desperate hope that some of the Nazis would investigate, but it was unlikely they would think of interfering with Hiede. It was more likely that Hiede and von Lehr expected him to open the door, which would give them a chance to jump him, or knock him out with a barrage of tools from three directions.

The engine was now wide open, shaking the walls of the test-room with its fierce vibration. And still no sign of action near the entrance. Doyle and Robard must be waiting for a chance—perhaps the Northrop was not even started.

Then Knight went rigid. Two men had just appeared around a ship less than a hundred feet away. He could vaguely distinguish a plump figure, and in a second realized the one on the right was Moltke. He sprang back into the shadows, gun lifted.

Without warning, the door and part of the test-room wall burst open with a terrific crash. A drum of fuel suspended in a looped chain sailed out into the hangar on the overhead track. Moltke gave a yell, and the other man hastily switched on a

flashlight. Knight had hurled himself back, the drum missing him by only a foot or so, and now the beam of light fell upon him. At the same moment the roar of the engine broke, and Hiede's voice rose furiously from within the room.

"The prisoners have escaped! Close the main door!"

Moltke had clawed for his gun at the moment Knight was revealed. As his pistol flicked up, Knight blasted a shot at the flashlight, and the colonel's bullet ploughed into the shattered wall. Knight ducked under the still-moving fuel drum and ran between two ships, while the frenzied voice of Hiede rang behind him. He was near the centre-aisle between the fighters and the bombers when a pistol spat flame near the entrance. A commotion instantly arose, and guns began to spurt from two or three directions. Above the tumult, a bell clanged, and lights abruptly went on.

The Northrop was directly in line with the entrance, motor idling, and Knight saw Doyle darting toward the ship.

In front of it, where the fight was centered, Robard was crouched over in the cockpit of a Messerschmitt which blocked the Northrop's way. A huge Nazi leaped at the Frenchman, rifle lifted. Robard flung up his hand, hurled his empty pistol into the man's face. The German fell back, and Robard threw himself down at the controls. The Messerschmitt roared out onto the smooth floor of the valley, amid a flurry of wild shots.

Knight, unobserved by the men at front, reached the side of the Northrop as Doyle halted, looking around desperately. A bellow from the rear brought a dozen Nazis dashing back, as Hiede caught sight of the two Americans. With a whoop of relief, at sight of Knight, Doyle vaulted into the rear pit and Knight made the front one in a frantic leap. He seized the throttle, but as he pushed it ahead his heart leaped into his throat.

The huge door was starting to descend!

Knight rammed the throttle full on, and the propeller blast blew Hiede and their other pursuers back in a heap on the floor. At one side, an automatic rifle stuttered above the roar of the Wasp, but Knight never moved his head. For a fateful second, he thought the door would trap them in a headlong crash. Then the Northrop whirled past underneath, with its prop clearing by inches.

OFF to one side, a remote-control radio set had been wheeled out for dispatching the robot-ships. An officer at the switches had sprung up, was staring wildly at the Northrop and Robard's ship. Knight kicked around into the wind, and in the same moment a machine-gun near the entrance whirled to rake the ship. In his hasty swing of the weapon, the gunner overshot, and the Nazi radioman fell over his set, riddled. The Dewoitine, idling a hundred yards away, instantly began to move. By the time Knight had the two-seater at flying-speed, the death-laden airliner was fifty feet above the trees and climbing into the darkness.

"We've got to stop that ship!" he shouted back at Doyle. "Give it a burst!"

"My guns are empty!" Doyle yelled back. "You'll have—look out, here comes a Messerschmitt!"

Knight jerked his head, saw not one but two of the black fighters dart out of the secret hangar. The door had been lifted again, and in that hasty glance he could see another fighter being pushed out for starting. The first Messerschmitt raced through the glare of light from within, and he recognized the half-clad figure of General Hiede. A black shadow pitched out of the night, and Robard dived steeply at the Nazi general. Ground-guns met him with a fierce defense, and he was driven into a hurried zoom. The fighter behind Hiede pulled up in a tight climb, guns warming in short bursts as it drilled after the Northrop.

Knight groaned as he remembered that the retracting-gear was useless. At their reduced speed, and with rear-guns empty, they would be easy meat for the infuriated Germans. He banked hastily in the hope of escaping into the darkness, but the pilot of the second fighter drove him back with a venomous barrage. Tracers and slugs thudded into the Northrop's left wing. He whipped around as tightly as he could turn, tripped the cowl 30's. The Messerschmitt leaped sidewise out of the blast, and for an instant he saw von Lehr's face through the fighter's cockpit enclosure.

With a swift bank, von Lehr cut inside of Knight's turn. Flame streaked from his four guns. But in the split-second when Knight gave up hope, another blast of flame drilled the sky and Robard dropped on von Lehr like a black-winged hawk. The Frenchman's bullets struck into the side of the

German ship, and like a blazing, giant saw, cut the fuselage in two,

The front half of the ship plunged into the ground, and fire plumed up, hiding the spot where von Lehr's body was burning. Robard made a frantic gesture to Knight, pointing off toward the west where the Dewoitine had disappeared, then whirled back to engage Hiede's ship. Knight shook his head—with the wheels down, they could never hope to overtake the fast-cruising death-ship.

Then a grim inspiration struck him. He switched on the radio, setting it at the wavelength where the chimes signal had been heard. Something electric seemed to fire his blood as he heard the harmony of that ominous signal.

He snatched up the hand-mike, pressed the transmitter switch, and let the microphone dangle out through the shattered enclosure—in the full roar of the motor.

Robard was fighting a losing battle between Hiede and the ground guns, diving at the hangar entrance between each brief lunge at the German. Wide open, at more than three hundred miles an hour, the two black ships plunged toward each other, then overshot, whirling off into the semi-gloom before either pilot could turn.

Another Messerschmitt was now swiftly taxiing out. Knight nosed down, held his ship in a screaming dive until the German was straight in line with his guns. His fingers shifted to the master-button, pressed hard.

Bright lines shot from the Northrop's nose, into the taxiing ship. The black fighter yawed, crashed into the side of the hill, and rolled back in a ball of crumpled metal. Doyle gave a yell of warning as Knight zoomed, and a cold hand seemed to touch the Q-Agent's heart. He had used his last belt on the ship below—and Hiede was plunging in like a madman, with Robard too far away to come to their rescue.

HOPING against hope, Knight reversed, but the Messerschmitt followed through. Hiede's guns blasted. His tracers were curling in for the death-stroke, when out of the night came the bomb-laden Dewoitine, diving head-on at the Northrop.

With a frenzied turn, Hiede whipped around to flee. Knight spun the Northrop in a violent split, dived after the terrified general. Over his shoulder he saw the Dewoitine plunge down on his tail.

Doyle had sprung up in his seat, was staring white-faced at the pilotless liner which was now answering to the Northrop's set as though attracted by a great magnet.

Hiede's mad turn had thrown the Messerschmitt out of control. He caught it, two hundred feet above the valley, with the entrance to the secret hangar almost directly beyond.

Knight shoved the stick forward, took the transmitter switch in his ice-cold fingers. Down roared the Northrop, straight at the hidden base, straight at the zooming Messerschmitt. Hiede flung around, his gaunt face a mask of horror. In that moment, Knight flipped the switch and jerked the stick back to his belt.

One hundred feet from the great door, the Northrop-lured Dewoitine struck. Flame shot up, scorching the side of the hill, and a terrific concussion shook the sky. A vast spout of fire shot out from the hillside, and the black fighter of General Hiede was gone like a moth in the flame.

A minute or two afterward, with Robard cruising close by, Knight stared down from four thousand feet, waiting. Suddenly a titanic eruption split the hillside beneath, as fire reached the massed ships inside and set off their bombs. When it was over, only the flames lived there in hell's hangar.

Knight, abruptly conscious of the throbbing wound in his shoulder, drew a long breath, looked back at Doyle.

"Guess you'd better take over, Lothario," he mumbled through the inter-phone. "Follow Robard—he'll clear things up by radio before we land."

Doyle took the dual controls, his homely face still pale.

"I thought we were goners, Dick," he said.

"So did I," said Knight. Then he realized that the automatic chimes-beacon signal was still sounding in the receiver. He looked down at the amplifier. But for that little box, a Nazi fanatic would have plunged Europe into war. But Fate had doomed Hiede and his madman's scheme. Mars was still hooded, and the peace of Europe was saved for yet a while.

It was an ironic end for the mad-man's scheme. For Hiede had written that music for Death to play—and now he had paid the Piper.

Slowly, Knight reached down for the receiver switch. There was a click, and the music of Death was stilled.