



THE SKY COP

by DONALD E. KEYHOE

An amazing new invention—smashing battles and cold-blooded murder high above New York skyscrapers—take-offs from catapults atop huge city buildings—parachutes coming to earth along the Great White Way. The first story of its kind.

IT WAS nearly midnight when Eddie Nolan, lieutenant of Flight "A", Metropolitan Aerial Police, came out of the subway at Times Square. He paused to draw a breath of cooler air after the heat of the subway.

"A fine way to travel," he muttered to himself, in disgust. His voice had a strong Irish accent.

Though his clear-cut, tanned features were tired, he held himself erect with the unconscious habit of one trained in military service. His well-fitting civilian clothes accentuated his physique—the body of a fighter, with its broad shoulders and trim waist.

He hesitated, eying the massed after-theater crowds as though reluctant to push into the human flood.

He was just starting across Broadway when the unexpected happened.

Above the Great White Way came a vivid flash in the sky, a sheet of leaping flame that sent scores of other heads jerking back to stare as he stared. Someone bumped into him, stopped, gazed up also. Perhaps fifty people about him had seen the streak of fire, surpassing the dazzling electric signs in brilliance. But within two seconds mention of the strange sight had spread, and the crowd for blocks around sensed that something was wrong. As though a magic wand had been waved, the throng shuffled to a stop, while thousands of necks were craned upward in quick excitement.

The blast of fire or flame died out, but in the odd half-hush that followed there came the distinct boom of an explosion—strange, ominous. Instantly a babble of words poured from a thousand throats.

“It’s a bomb!” someone shouted shrilly. A wave of excitement and alarm ran like wildfire over the crowd. Then an uproar, and in a flash the frightened throng became a milling, terrified mob. Like cattle, men and women dashed for the nearest shelter. Subway entrances were choked in a twinkling. Traffic police strove helplessly to stem the rush. Automobiles, taxis, surface cars became hopelessly tangled as unthinking thousands poured across the streets.

Nolan, driven back in the first onslaught, flattened himself against a wall and braced his strong body to withstand the ones who were flung against him. Wise in the way of New Yorkers, he knew the terror would spend itself soon, when nothing happened. And he knew it had been no bomb that had exploded, mile-high above Manhattan’s canyons.

He stared upward as the crowds slowed their wild scramble. Into the zone of light a block away dropped some falling debris. Its appearance caused a renewal of the panic, for a few moments. The usual sounds of Broadway were drowned in the din.

Suddenly Nolan started. His keen blue eyes widened, and not at the bits of fabric and splinters that drifted down behind the heavier objects that had hurtled into the streets. Off to one side, swinging down out of the night, came a figure suspended from a swaying parachute, a figure that hung limply, with a sinister, unescapable significance.

WITH A CHORUS of shrieks, those beneath the descending object pushed away and fled. By this time Nolan was half way through the horde that separated him from the spot where the figure was landing. Twisting, lunging, he forced his hundred and ninety pounds through the mob as fast as he could go. He reached the spot just as the limp body struck with a dull thud, the parachute collapsing like a punctured balloon.

Traffic police and scurrying reserves came flying to his side, driving through the crowd like a wedge.

“What’s all this?” demanded a gruff old sergeant, jerking at Nolan’s sleeve. “Get away there. Let’s have a look.”

“I’m on the force—air police,” said Nolan quickly. He lifted his coat, showing his lieutenant’s badge. “Sergeant, this man’s been shot!”

“Shot?” echoed the sergeant amazedly. “Sure, and if that crash up there wasn’t enough, what the devil—”

“If he’d been in that plane when it blew up,” said Nolan grimly, “there wouldn’t be enough of him left to look at. See here—look at those holes!”

The sergeant and his squad stared at the row of bullet holes that had traced their way in an ugly pattern from the dead man’s right side to his left shoulder.

“Machine-gun bullets,” muttered the gray-haired sergeant in an awed tone. “Good Lord, they’re even bumping ‘em off up there now.”

Nolan’s blue eyes were hard as steel.

“You’re right. Only this wasn’t any ordinary ride he went on. That poor bird was just a pilot; he wasn’t any gangster. He just saw something coming that meant curtains for him, and he jumped. But the dirty rats—whoever they were— followed him down and nailed him. With all the noise down here, nobody’d ever hear the guns.”

The morbid crowd, quick to react, had closed in again. For a few minutes it took every effort of the police squad to hold the mob back. Then a score of patrolmen arrived and the situation was soon under control. The old sergeant turned to Nolan.

“What makes you think he was a pilot?” he demanded. “He might have been a passenger; those goggles and the helmet don’t mean anything.”

Nolan pointed to the dead man’s face. The goggles had been jarred loose in the landing.

"See those white places around his eyes? With the sunburn around the outside? That's from hours of flying in an open cockpit job. Not many passengers fly that much except in cabin ships. And anyway, he's got a Q. B. pin."

"Q B?" said the sergeant.

"Quiet Birdmen," explained Nolan hurriedly, kneeling to look again at the inert form. "It's a famous organization to which only pilots can belong."

"Well, he'll be plenty quiet from now on, poor devil," said the old sergeant, with gruff sympathy. "But he ain't the only one that got it. Some guy got hit on the head with a chunk of iron up in front of the Astor—knocked him cold."

"Yeah—and a woman got cut up pretty bad right across the street," interjected one of the patrolmen. "Lord knows how many others were hit. That blamed stuff went all over hell."

"Get back—here's the ambulance," ordered the sergeant. "Too late, doc," this to the white-coated interne who jumped down and pushed his way through the crowd. "Somebody pumped him full of lead before he hit."

Nolan watched them lift the silent form and place it in the ambulance.

"Say, sergeant, will you notify Captain MacGruder about this?" he said. "He's the follow-up man at Air Headquarters; maybe he can get a trace—"

HE BROKE OFF, shooting a swift look up into the sky. In a moment it was unmistakable—the rapidly increasing drone of an airplane engine, combined with the screech of a propeller whirling at terrific speed.

"Good God—it's going to hit here!" shouted the sergeant. "Get for cover, everybody. Beat it for the walks—inside those stores—"

Nolan seized his arm.

"He's not out of control. I think the damn' fool's trying to show off."

With an ear-splitting shriek of prop and wings a tiny plane hurtled down into Broadway like a bullet.

"I'm going to pop the crazy lunatic," bellowed the sergeant.

Nolan dashed his pistol aside.

"If you hit him he'll crash and kill a hundred peo-

ple," he thundered. "You'd never hit him, probably, but—"

His words were drowned in the roar of the streaking plane. Straight over the terrified crowd, it flashed, then as it seemed just about to dive into the human sea it zoomed up in a mighty climb. In a moment it was but a blur against the half-light above the skyscraper canyons. A second later and it had vanished.

Behind, the unknown pilot left a scene of wildest chaos. Now nothing could stem the tide. For two blocks, as far as Nolan could see, a fighting, fear-mad mob surged wildly, all in a rush for some spot far from there.

"I'm going to try for the Ryan Building on Sixth Avenue," Nolan yelled in the old sergeant's ear, as they made their way to the sidewalk, panting. "We've got a ship on a catapult there. Maybe I can get that bird. Call MacGruder for me and tell him to have the lights on at Roosevelt Field. The Ryan roof isn't fixed for landings yet."

He jammed his hat on tight and plunged into the milling mass, head down, like a football player. By the time he got through the worst of the crowd he had lost his hat, tie and collar, but his face had gained some scratches, and, his coat was torn to shreds. But there was no time to think of that. Into the lobby of the Ryan Building he dashed, flashing his badge to get action from the elevator boy.

On the top floor he raced into a small office. Two men in uniform turned around. They had been staring out of the windows.

"Wind up the ship," gasped Nolan. "I'm going after that guy. Did you see him?"

"See him? Lord—I thought he'd cracked up at Times Square," cried one of the men. "I was all in a sweat. Then when he zoomed up—"

"Never mind, get going," ordered Nolan. He and the two men ran up a short flight of stairs to the roof. It had been cleared of obstacles, except for a 60-foot launching catapult, mounted so that it could be lowered flush with the roof and the opening covered to present a square landing area. Along both sides were arresting-gear pits, but the gear, similar to the type used on aircraft carriers, was not completely hooked up.

NOLAN RAN to the catapult, on which rested a Boeing P-12, the latest model fighter. He vaulted into the cockpit while one of the men seized the prop. The engine sputtered, roared. Nolan warmed up swiftly, peering up into the cloudless sky.

“Goggles!” he shouted at his helpers. He threw a look at the temperature gauge, snapped on the goggles over his bare head, and raised his hand in signal.

He jammed open the throttle, dropped his outstretched hand. The man at the catapult jerked a lever. The Boeing was hurled down the 50-foot track. Nolan’s head snapped back. Below Boeing’s nose swiftly appeared the narrow canyon between the skyscrapers. If his engine failed! Nolan smiled grimly. He would go plunging down there like a meteor.

Off the end of the catapult went the Boeing, shot out at 60 miles an hour. Nolan shoved the stick slightly forward as the lights flashed beneath him. Then, smoothly, he pulled back as the ship gained climbing speed. In a moment he was drilling up at a dizzy angle, his blood tingling through his veins.

He grinned once more. This was living! This was life, the like of which those human dots down there in Broadway never dreamed about. The fastest fighter in the world; two good guns, ready to spurt hot lead at his touch of the trips under his thumb! And somewhere, up there in the dark, a fiend who had already killed one man in cold blood and was probably ready to kill another at the first chance.

His face sobered as he bored up into the night. He was between that devil and the lights, he reflected suddenly. He was silhouetted, a perfect target. Maybe it would be a good idea to duck over to the river, away from the lighted background. He banked around, still climbing.

Suddenly another roar rose above the sound of his engine. He whipped his head around. Piling down from the midnight sky came the ship that had zoomed into the Broadway mob! Even as he kicked out and yanked his stick back for height, two fiery eyes glared at him from the ship’s nose. Slugs thudded through his wings. A fuel gauge burst into fragments. Nolan cursed himself for a fool for falling into the trap, for not realizing that he was cold meat for that maniac until it was too late. He kicked off at the top of his zoom and snapped around to catch the

other’s tail. But the unknown killer was up in an Immelmann, out of range. Nolan followed grimly, his heart leaping as he saw the Boeing gain.

He closed in, tripping his guns. Tracers zipped into the twisting blur before him. The killer looped madly. Nolan tightened up in the maneuver, eyes straining for the ship that flashed into view against the lights, then out again as the sky became its background. It was risky work, for neither man could see the other more than half the time. Nolan pressed in for a quick finish.

BUT JUST AS he rocked the rudder to spray the fleeing man before him, a raking fire from his right crashed into his pit. Dials splintered in his face. The stick shook in his hand as a bullet ricocheted from its edge, not three inches below his fingers. He came about frantically. Another fighter, dropping from the sky, was almost on his tail.

As they whirled around he caught a glimpse of the other ship against the glow of light below. A number stood out on the wing—C-8040—burning itself indelibly into his mind even in that swift passage of time. He had pulled inside the other’s turn, so that the red-hot lead from these new guns passed beyond him. He looked hurriedly for the first plane. To his relief, it was not coming to aid the other. Perhaps he had winged the pilot.

In that brief glance aside, he lost sight of his attacker. He zoomed and twisted hastily, then saw with a sinking in the pit of his stomach that he had charged straight in front of the second ship. A savage burst came snarling from the second attacker’s guns. A splinter flew from one of the Boeing’s struts. Something struck Nolan’s goggles, knocked them upward. The wind caught them with eager fingers and tore them away. For a second, panic overcame the Irish sky-cop. Almost blinded by the sudden rush of tears to his unprotected eyes, he ducked low in the cockpit. The killer was closing in, as though he knew his victim’s helplessness.

In a last desperate effort, Nolan reversed his turn with lightning speed. He slammed the stick back until it thudded against his belt. The Boeing screeched into a wicked turn and for a second he saw the other man full before him. His thumb tightened on the

tripp of his stick. His guns barked. A yell of triumph burst from his lips as he saw the killer's ship fall off.

It slipped wildly, then pulled out. He dived, guns stuttering, to complete the kill. But his fingers slacked away; his guns went silent. Below him he could still see the mass of lights that meant Manhattan. To send the other crashing down might mean death to a score of innocent people. He pulled out, hesitating.

It was almost fatal. The crippled fighter skidded around in a wild turn, guns blazing. Nolan, wiping his eyes, was a second too late. He swerved out, but his engine sputtered and died under a lucky burst. Recklessly, he stood the Boeing on its nose and rocketed down. The other man sent a last fusillade after him, headed away to the south.

Nolan, gazing back for a fleeting second, breathed with relief. He had guessed right. Either the other man thought him wounded, or else his ship was too crippled to follow that vicious dive. But Nolan's relief was short-lived. He eased the Boeing out of the dive at 2,000 feet, looking down with a despairing glance. Below him was nothing but a million lights, with not one landing place. And he did not have enough altitude to glide beyond the city.

A wild idea came to him. He wiped his eyes and peered intently into the blinding glow. If he could pick out the Ryan Building, there was just one chance. Otherwise, Flight "A" would be needing a new lieutenant in just about one minute. Feverishly, he traced out Broadway and Fifth Avenue, then over to Sixth. Suddenly he thought of his rocket pistol. He seized it and fired a red star into the air.

Almost at once lights flashed on in a square pattern at one side. The two men on the roof had caught his signal. He headed away, swung back, and came down in a slow glide. His heart was pounding, but his big fingers were firm on the stick. Part of that arresting gear was stretched across the roof. And the Boeing had the grab-hooks in place.

If the gear were anchored, even though not prepared to give smoothly under a pull to cause deceleration, the Boeing might stop. If it weren't anchored—well, he would go right on over the edge.

A nice prospect! He wouldn't even have time to jump for the roof.

The roof seemed to leap out at him. He dared not

fishtail, for fear he would lose too much speed and hit below the top. His wheels struck with a thud. He bounced, settled again. The opposite side of the roof flashed toward him. He was still racing. Then with a violent jerk the Boeing's hooks caught one of the cross-cables. Nolan's head banged forward and almost wrenched itself loose from his body. The fighter whipped around sidewise and crashed into the catapult, which was still in position. With all the lights of the firmament seeming to rotate before his eyes, Nolan collapsed in the cockpit.

WHEN HE opened his eyes he was on an emergency cot in the office below. Standing around were several officers. He recognized the tall, lean figure of Captain MacGruder. MacGruder's ruddy face was anxious. His tight lips were set grimly under his stiff, military mustache.

"Hello, Mac," said Nolan, struggling to sit up. His head ached painfully, but he achieved the movement. "Gee—I feel like the morning after,"

He managed a grin.

"Take it easy, Eddie," said MacGruder with gruff kindness. "You had a hard knock. That ship stopped in 12 feet, from 55 miles an hour. It's a wonder you didn't get your brains knocked out."

"If I'd had any, I wouldn't have been in that jam," said Nolan ruefully. "I judge from your remarks the arresting-gear wasn't rigged."

"It wasn't," said MacGruder. "You pulled it loose and then smacked the catapult. We'll need repairs all around, but never mind that. Did you get a sight of those birds?"

"One of 'em had a license number C-8040. That's all I saw—except that they were both Hawks."

MacGruder turned to one of his men.

"Call headquarters and look up that number," he directed. "We don't want to lose any time on this. I checked up that pilot they bumped off. He had a license in his pocket, so it was easy. He was Harold Lambert, used to work for Colonial Air Transport. Had a transport license, 1,900 hours time. Good record, too. He quit Colonial Air Transport a while ago; told the gang he had a chance at big money, but wouldn't say what it was. The night manager out there swears the kid was straight, though."

“Not much to go on,” observed Nolan. “Could you learn anything from that wreckage? Or didn’t you get hold of enough to mean anything?”

“Plenty,” said MacGruder, wryly. “Seven people got hit with that junk. It went through a restaurant roof and one automobile top, and we’re still getting kicks. I’m having the pieces collected and brought in.”

“Whatever busted up that ship, I’ll bet it wasn’t just a gas tank letting go,” muttered Nolan. “It sounded more like a bomb.”

“Your imagination is excellent as usual, Eddie,” retorted MacGruder, fingering his close-clipped mustache, “How the devil could you tell the difference that far?”

Nolan was saved the trouble of explanation by the excited entrance of the man who had gone to telephone.

“We found out about that number, captain,” he exclaimed. “C-8040 belongs to John Wainwright, president of the United Radio Industries. It’s listed as a sport ship—but it’s the same model as a Curtiss Hawk.”

MacGruder stared from the man to Nolan, his jaw hanging.

“John Wainwright! Sweet spirits of Hades! What’s he doing mixed up in this mess?”

“Maybe he isn’t,” said Nolan. “Somebody could easily swipe his ship. But it does look funny.”

“You’re sure you got the right number?” demanded MacGruder.

“Positive. And anyway, Curtiss Hawks aren’t so thick that you’d find another one with that close a number.”

“Well, here’s where I tramp lightly,” said the captain. He turned to his subordinate. “Get Bill Stevens out at Roosevelt. Tell him to get over to the United Radio hangar and check up on this ship and any other of that outfit’s planes. They’ve got half a dozen, two or three cabin jobs for carrying the silk hat boys around, and the rest for experiments in radio work. But tell him to keep his mouth shut about the whys and wherefores of this little search.”

He talked a few minutes more with Nolan after the man left. Then a new man came into the room.

“Hello, Mac,” he said to the captain. “Say, I thought you’d like to know. They found some odd-looking

stuff just now, must’ve been out of that plane, Sam Jeffries says it’s part of a radio, but if it is, it’s the funniest looking set I ever lamped.”

Nolan suddenly got to his feet. His face mirrored the strange expression on MacGruder’s face.

“This is getting too hot, Mac,” he declared grimly. “I’m going back to Air H.Q. with you. There’s something mighty queer in this deal.

WHEN THEY reached the Air Headquarters offices they found a new surprise awaiting them.

“A couple of guys have been goin’ wild, wantin’ to see you,” a desk-man told MacGruder. “They’re in your office. I think one of ‘em is cuckoo.”

The two men who turned nervously at the police pilot’s entrance were strange contrasts. One had the gaunt, lean face of an ascetic, and his burning eyes held almost a fanatical look, yet it seemed born of some fear rather than the result of an unbalanced mind. The second man was portly, with pink, fat jowls like the wallets of a wellfed rooster. He was better dressed than the other, and he had a more prosperous air. Yet he, too, was plainly upset about something.

“Captain MacGruder?” said the gaunt man, hesitantly.

MacGruder nodded pleasantly. Nolan swiftly inspected the two men. He saw the portly one’s eyes stray to his bandaged head with a slightly worried expression.

“I’m Peter Verrick,” said the gaunt fellow, in a low, hurried, voice. “This is Mr. Holden—a business associate.”

MacGruder shook hands and introduced Nolan. He indicated chairs.

“It’s about tonight—that trouble I mean,” Verrick said uneasily. “I—I feel so guilty; and yet it was not my fault. I never dreamed anyone could be hurt—”

MacGruder’s eyes popped. Nolan stared, forgetting his pains.

“You mean you know how that happened?” snapped the captain.

Verrick nodded, shrinking back a little. He looked at Holden as if for aid. Holden cleared his throat.

“Maybe I can explain,” he said. “That plane, the one that blew up, was Verrick’s. He had a very im-

portant invention in it. He—that is, we have had so much trouble, so many attempts at robbery, that he was afraid someone might try to force the ship down and rob the pilot. So he gave the pilot—unknown to me—a time-bomb to use in case he was forced down. The idea was to blow up the invention to keep it from falling into the hands of our enemies.”

He stopped, puffing a little after his rapid speech. MacGruder gazed from him to Verrick and then at Nolan.

“Well, of all the crazy ideas,” he sputtered. “Flying an airplane over Broadway with a bomb in it! I’ve a good notion to lock you both up.”

“Wait, please,” begged Verrick, his thin face wrinkled with anxiety. “He was not to fly over the city; they forced him there, trying to get him across into some spot where they could rob him. He lost his head when they fired at him; we saw his face—he was crazed—he had forgotten the city underneath—”

“Hold on! Wait a minute!” roared MacGruder. “What the dickens do you mean—you saw him? You mean you were up there, near enough to—”

“No—no,” interrupted Holden. “You don’t understand; we were watching the screen during the test—the television screen. That was the invention. Mr. Verrick has almost perfected a radio-television apparatus that will revolutionize the radio industry. We were making the last tests, seeing how it would work at night.”

NOLAN CAUGHT MacGruder’s eye and read his thoughts. Radio-television. And the Hawk belonged to United States Industries!

“You think your pilot set off the bomb and then jumped?” MacGruder inquired. “You think maybe that the bomb went off too soon and part of the wreckage killed him?”

Nolan suppressed a start. What was the captain driving at?

But Verrick gave Holden no time to reply. He jumped to his feet with sudden rage.

“No—they murdered him! I do not know how much you learned, but the rumor is that he was shot. I know they killed him to keep him from telling what he saw.”

“Have you any idea who these enemies of yours may be?” asked MacGruder.

Verrick looked at his companion a moment without speaking. Holden rubbed his fat face thoughtfully. It was he who replied.

“We are not sure. Once I saw a representative of a very important radio company spying around the laboratory. From that time on a number of strange things have happened.”

MacGruder seemed to come to a sudden decision.

“This is a serious matter,” he said curtly. “You are both liable for damage suits from people injured tonight—unless you can prove who attacked your pilot. We have a lead; it may prove blind. Keep your information to yourselves until I see you, or Lieutenant Nolan here comes to your laboratory. This will be within twenty-four hours.”

The two men went on out. MacGruder sat down heavily.

“Well, I’ve heard of cases where these big corporations were ready to do almost anything to hold back some important invention, but John Wainwright’s outfit—United Radio Industries—stooping to such cold blooded murder just so that a rival bunch won’t get ahead of them—that’s a hard one to swallow. Wainwright would never O.K. any scheme like that.”

Nolan waited silently, deep in thought.

“Let’s get some sleep,” said MacGruder at last. “In the morning we’ll see what we can run down. It’s a queer mixup; and this television business makes it downright spooky. Imagine those two birds sitting down there and seeing that poor devil’s face just before he got bumped.”

STILL CONSIDERABLY below par in physical condition, Nolan went to MacGruder’s office at 11 o’clock the next morning. The tall captain was visibly worried. He took Nolan into his sanctum at once.

“Eddie, this thing’s got me going. I’d stake every cent I’ve got on John Wainwright, but it looks bad. He was out there at the United Radio hangar last night. And I found that one of those Hawks was in the air, but the hell of it, it wasn’t the one numbered C-8040. They can prove it. Not that they know what it’s about yet. But that isn’t the worst. There was another fellow

with Wainwright, besides a couple of pilots hanging around. Guess who this other guy was?"

Nolan shook his head.

"Blaine—authority on television," snapped MacGruder. "Tie that!"

"What are you going to do?" said Nolan.

"I'm going to fix a trap," said the captain. "Or rather, you are. You skip over to Verrick's laboratory and get him to schedule another test flight; he told me on the phone this morning he's got another set. My hunch is that whoever bumped that bird last night was listening in on the television band Verrick had had assigned him. He knew the ship was up. Then it was easy to go up and pull the trick. Maybe they'll try it again. Only this time, if they do, you're to be on top waiting."

Nolan had a sly access of cheerfulness.

"Great, Chief. You bet I'll take care of 'em if they start anything again."

"I'm banking on it that they will, Nolan. Now beat it; I've got to see a flock of reporters that have got it in their heads some foreign power is trying to scare the Big Town. What a life!"

Nolan found Verrick's laboratory over on Long Island, in an out of the way spot next to a small field. Verrick was conducting a short-range test. Holden took the sky cop into the receiving room, where the animated image of a young man was appearing on what appeared to be a ground glass screen. What was more remarkable, words seemed to issue from the lips of the figure, clear and distinct as though he were in the room.

"See—I can enlarge it to full size," said Verrick eagerly, switching the apparatus toward a huge screen. "And the voice can be amplified to a roar, if you wish. It is all in natural color, you notice."

He went on rapidly. But Nolan interrupted after a moment.

"It is certainly interesting. But we have decided on a plan to find out who is trying to ruin you. We want you to make another trial flight at night. MacGruder says you've got another television-equipped plane. Send one of your men up in it. I shall be hiding up above your field, at 10,000 feet. Have your plane show its lights. If anyone tries to attack it, I'll be ready to dive in."

Verrick at first demurred, but Holden pointed out the safety of the scheme, since the police had taken over the matter. The old inventor at last agreed.

"Next Tuesday night, then," he said. "My television plane will take off at 11 o'clock and fly between here and Roosevelt Field. But be sure you are ready. I cannot sleep already for thinking of what happened to that poor boy the other night."

Nolan nodded.

"I'll be there, ten thousand feet over the field. Don't worry."

He stopped as he saw the suddenly startled look on Holden's fat face.

"What is it?" he demanded.

Holden was hurrying to the door.

"Someone outside that window, I think," he whispered. "It's happened before. Did anyone see you come here?"

Nolan shoved by him and quickly ran outside. A hundred feet away three youths were strolling across the field. They looked harmless enough. One glanced back at the officer, idly.

"Maybe I was wrong," muttered Holden. "But I'd have sworn to it."

STRANGELY, this little incident came back into Nolan's mind on the following Tuesday night. He was circling, high above the field, keeping his lonely vigil. It was nearly eleven. He was straining his eyes to watch for the lights of Verrick's plane when without warning a fighter thundered down onto his tail.

In that first breathless instant, Nolan felt a panic grip him. The scorching bullets of his unknown attacker seemed everywhere—through his wings, crashing above his quickly-ducked head, pounding his tail—yet by a miracle they failed to reach his heart. He kicked out frenziedly, found himself in a roll. He checked it, upside down, dived, and zoomed almost vertically. Something tore into his shoulder, hitting like a hammer, searing hot. His shoulder seemed paralyzed, but he grimly banked around, peering wildly into the night for his foe.

The other pilot had lost him for the moment. Nolan climbed mechanically, darting his head from side to side. Then almost in front of him he saw two flashing wings. He tripped his guns, and the marauder

came round like a cornered rat. He out-zoomed the fighter, yanked loose a parachute flare and whipped over onto the other's tail. The bandit looped. He clung grimly behind, snapping short bursts at every chance. He saw the ship clearly. It was a Hawk.

This bird certainly didn't know he was protection for a television ship that wasn't even in the skies yet. But he wanted the skies clear for his dirty work when he did spot the television ship, and evidently Eddie Nolan's ship wasn't going to put a crimp in any of his plans.

The unknown pilot screwed up into an Immelmann, trying to dart above the drifting flare. Nolan cut sharply across to head him off. For a second he was blinded. Then his heart leaped into his throat. The Hawk, doubling back, was full in his path.

He swerved violently. The Hawk pulled up like a frightened bird. They missed, collision by inches. Nolan's thumb clamped onto his gun-trip. A stream of lead snarled into the half-stalled fighter. It fell off, spun crookedly into the night.

Nolan followed swiftly. His shoulder was numb, and he felt blood oozing beneath his jacket. But he held his P-12 in its dive. He watched the Hawk hit near a highway. He circled low but could find no place to land. He turned and flew parallel till he came to a road he knew. In five minutes he was on the ground at Roosevelt Field. He called the Mineola police and hurried a police car out to the wreck. Then he got a pad and bandage on his shoulder wound, jumped into his P-12, and headed for the hangar of United Radio Industries, two miles away.

HE FOUND the field lit up. He landed, taxied up to the line and climbed out weakly. He had hardly touched ground when another fighter landed behind him. It was a Curtiss Hawk, and its number was C-8040!

"Where's that ship been?" he demanded of the pilot who climbed out. "What's it to you?" began the pilot angrily. Then his expression altered. "Didn't know you, Eddie—why, what's up?"

Nolan gazed at him a second. It was Frank Perry, a pilot he had helped train at Curtiss Field three years before.

"Somebody tried to bump me," Nolan said grimly.

"I got him. But he had a pal last time. And the ship's number was 8040."

"What's that?" broke in a stern voice. Nolan faced around, holding his injured shoulder awkwardly. He recognized John Wainwright, head of the powerful United Radio Industries. "What are you trying to insinuate?"

Nolan eyed the big, well-groomed magnate coolly. Yet he had to admit there was no sign of guilt on the other's clean-cut features.

"Suppose we go inside, where I can sit down," he said. "I've got a slug in my shoulder."

Instantly Wainwright's manner changed. He barked curt orders to the men who had, gathered around. Inside of two minutes Nolan's wound had been cleansed, dressed and he was seated in a comfortable chair in the lounging room. But the Irish sky cop did not forget his mission.

"Mr. Wainwright, there've been two attempts to get hold of a certain television invention that would interest radio people a lot," he said crisply. "Both times, you had ships in the air."

Wainwright's reply was astonishing.

"Invention? Man—don't tell me you know who's back of this television stunt? Well, I'll be damned—" He turned to Frank Perry. "And we were looking all over Long Island for the dope!"

"You've got a lot to explain," said Nolan gruffly. "There's a circumstantial case on you—trying to grab this television set, or bust it up, I don't know which."

Wainwright leaned forward and looked him squarely in the eye.

"Listen. I've got a mediocre television receiver right now. And I've been picking up this stuff for two weeks, day and night, until last Monday. I'd move heaven if I could to get hold of the man back of that set. I'll pay him half a million on the spot, and contract for substantial royalties. I want that outfit!"

Nolan was dazed. Was Wainwright acting? He looked at Frank Perry.

"Straight stuff, Eddie," said Frank. "That's where I came from, trying to locate the ship with the set in it. But I wasn't up Monday. Somebody must be using our numbers to make it look like we're mixed, up in this."

Nolan stood up slowly.

"There's something rotten in Denmark, somewhere," he muttered. "I begin to smell a mouse—"

He halted, stared at Wainwright.

"Could I see you alone?" he asked.

THE RADIO magnate nodded courteously. Nolan went into another room with him. When he came out he had a curious look on his face.

"I'll be on call," said Wainwright. "If your captain wants me in the meantime, I'm at his service."

Nolan flew back to the Police field as fast as he could. When he got there he found MacGruder pacing the floor.

"Did you identify that bird I dropped?" he asked at once.

"No. But there's still a chance. His face wasn't bruised much. Too bad he passed out before we could make him talk."

"Hold on a minute," said Nolan quickly. "How many people know that pilot is dead?"

"The Mineola squad, two internes and a nurse, besides us. Why?"

"I've got a big hunch, that's why. If we can keep it out of the papers— or make it look as though he were still alive and able to talk, I'll bet you fifty bucks against a plugged nickel we'll nail the bird behind this racket by tomorrow noon."

"You're on," snapped MacGruder.

"You'll have to go easy," said Nolan. "Or he'll get wise."

"Leave it to me," grinned MacGruder.

It was exactly ten o'clock next morning when several people gathered at Peter Verrick's laboratory. Besides Verrick and his associate, Holden, there were MacGruder, Nolan, a police inspector named Sloan, and another man Nolan introduced as Henry Jacobs.

"I told them about this wonderful stunt you've got here," Nolan said to Verrick. "They're all friends of mine, on the force."

Verrick laughed nervously.

"I'd be glad to give you a demonstration," he said. "The trouble is, my pilot didn't show up."

"That's all right," said Nolan breezily. "I'll fly the ship."

"But you don't know how to turn on the ship's televisor," said Verrick.

"How about Mr. Holden here?" suggested MacGruder. "Can't he go up with Eddie and handle that?"

Holden hesitated, then nodded with a hint of ill grace. He went out with Nolan to the ship, a cabin plane.

"Don't forget, I'd like to see it work both ways," Nolan told Verrick as they prepared to take off. "After we've sent you something, give us a flash back, will you?"

VERRICK AGREED. Nolan sent the ship up in an easy climb. His face was impassive, but his heart thumped. A lot depended on the next few minutes. He felt a queer thrill go over him, as the portly Holden somewhat resentfully sat down before the set and adjusted the transmitter. The wind-driven dynamo whirred, and Holden leaned toward the transmitter, speaking curtly into it, altering his expression once or twice before the screen which took his image and initiated the process of flashing it to those on the ground.

"That's plenty for them," said Nolan, grinning. "Now tell them to send us something."

Holden complied. Then he switched on the receiving unit. A light appeared on the screen, then died away. A flickering ray separated, and became a room, in which men were grouped. It was the office of Verrick's laboratory. A voice spoke, crisply.

"You realize that this may be used against you, though as State's evidence it will mitigate—"

Holden uttered a hoarse cry. He was staring into the screen. Nolan, twisting sidewise to gaze at him, saw that Holden's dilated eyes were fixed on one figure sitting in the center of the group, who stared, fixedly, at the rest.

"You understand?" It was Mac-Gruder's voice. He spun the chair of the man with the staring eyes around, so that he was partly hidden.

"Yes, I know," muttered a harsh voice in reply. "I don't care; so long as he gets his—"

"No—Oh my God! No!" shrieked Holden suddenly. "Stop!"

"You mean the man who framed all this, who got you to fly that fighter, faked to look like one of

United's?" MacGruder's voice went on.

"Yeah—and a lot more. He was fixing to steal the whole thing from the old bird Verrick—bump him off if he had to, just so he'd get all the gravy on this blamed thing here. He wasn't satisfied with half—"

"What did he pay you to try to kill Nolan?" barked MacGruder. The faces of the rest of the group were white, awestruck. "You admit he told you to bump him off?"

A scream of animal terror filled the plane's cabin, drowning the reply that came from the instrument. Holden sank back, trembling violently.

"You—you devil!" he shrieked at Nolan. "You did this—you've framed me, damn you! Framed me!"

NOLAN SWIFTLY adjusted the stabilizer of his ship. He let go of the stick. Holden, in his fright, hardly seemed to notice.

"Framed!" roared Nolan. "You dirty, murdering scum of the earth, I'll break your rotten neck. So you paid him to kill me?"

The voice from the television set had ceased to sound, and the images on the screen had faded, but Holden, glaring at his accuser, saw none of this.

"Keep away from me!" he shrilled in fear. "I—I didn't mean for him to kill you, only bring you down so you wouldn't—"

"So I wouldn't be able to keep your other pilot from stealing that set?" bellowed Nolan.

"Y-yes," faltered the wretch, cowering away. "But he didn't get you. He didn't—don't kill me."

"You filthy rat, I wouldn't lay my hands on you," snarled Nolan. "The chair'll take care of you."

"Oh, I didn't mean to kill anyone," Holden whimpered, his spirit broken. Then for the first time he noticed that the figures did not show on the screen. His little mean eyes darted to Nolan's face, then back to the board. "What have you done?" he howled.

Nolan snapped a switch. The screen glowed again. MacGruder's crisp voice spoke:

"O.K., Eddie. We got it fine. Enough to burn him half a dozen times, the D.A. says. Come on down."

Holden's voice rose in hysteria:

"You've tricked me, damn you. You switched it so they got what I said, you dirty—" Holden's rage blocked further efforts at speech.

"You'll find your rotten carcass in jail in about one hour," retorted Nolan. He dived for the field. A group of excited men were waiting.

The man Nolan had called Jacobs strode forth. Inspector Sloan followed.

"Take charge of him, Inspector," said Jacobs tersely. "The charge is murder of Harold Lambert, the pilot, manslaughter of that man who was killed by the falling iron, and the others I've listed here on this slip. Nolan, that was smart work. I was afraid he'd see that the pilot who seemed to be doing all the squealing was dead, and guess the trick, but it worked fine."

"Dead!" whispered Holden in sudden horror. "You mean, he never said—"

"The last thing he said was ten hours ago," snapped Jacobs. "But thanks to this remarkable invention you tried to steal, I can guarantee, as District Attorney, that you will find yourself as good as sentenced."

The half-mad wretch was dragged away. Verrick watched him go. His face was filled with despair.

"Now I am lost," he mourned. "He was to back me; I have spent all my money. I cannot go on."

Nolan tapped him on the shoulder. He pointed to a small airplane making a fast landing nearby. It was John Wainwright who emerged from the plane.

"Take a look at that bird and brace up," he advised. "Maybe you don't know it, but he's Santa Claus."