

# THE ADVENTURES OF *The* **THREE** **MOSQUITOES**™

## PASSENGERS OF DEATH

by RALPH OPPENHEIM

*Up in the air headed Kirby's Bristol, bound on that ticklish job of reconnoitering with an Intelligence man in the rear cockpit. Straight for enemy territory they streaked. And little did Kirby know that his two companions of that invincible trio, the Three Mosquitoes, were following madly behind to warn him of— Would they make it? There was something queer about that Intelligence man.*

**C**APTAIN KIRBY, leader of the Three Mosquitoes, glanced impatiently at his wrist watch. He was standing beside a shining Bristol two-seater, which squatted on the tarmac in front of the camouflaged hangars. Mechanics swarmed around the ship, revving up its engine, attending to the last details in preparing it for flight. Kirby's two comrades, "Shorty" Carn and the lanky Travis, were there, too, looking just a trifle worried.

"Eight-ten!" Kirby was saying furiously. "That guy Brown or whatever his name is gives me a pain. If I'm supposed to take him for a ride in Hunland without running into any Jerry planes, why the hell doesn't he come early?"

"They're all alike—these special men," Shorty Carn stated, as he puffed thoughtfully on his inseparable briar pipe. "Just because they're sent up from G.H.Q. they think they can keep banker's hours. Hell!" he sighed. "I wish the C.O. would quit assigning you to these crazy jobs. You're a pursuit pilot, and you ought

to be flying with us now. Instead they stick you on reconnoissance."

"Well," Kirby responded, not without pride, "they need a good man for this show. We're going pretty far across the lines, I understand."

"That's what bothers me," Travis, the oldest and wisest of the trio, drawled. "Going way over the lines—and no escort. If they'd let us fly with you in our Spads—"

"It's the same old story," Kirby explained. "One plane might get through without being spotted, but three surely couldn't. But if—" He broke off suddenly, and his eyes gazed across the field. Carn and Travis looked. Two men were approaching. One was their C.O. The other was dressed in flying togs.

"It's about time!" Kirby sighed.

The two men came up, and the C.O. returned the Three Mosquitoes' salutes.

"This is Captain Brown," the grizzled old colonel told them. "The observer sent up to look over the Front. Captain Brown," he turned, "this is Captain

Kirby, who will pilot you over, and these other gentlemen are Lieutenants Carn and Travis.”

Captain Brown nodded, smiling. He was a tall and powerful looking fellow, and though his face was all but concealed by a big flying helmet—for such men always had an air of secrecy about them—one could see it was a courageous and determined face, bronzed by exposure to the weather, and furrowed by deep lines. The eyes were a cold, steely gray—almost cruel looking.

“The Three Mosquitoes,” he said, not without admiration. “I’ve heard enough about you, gentlemen, and it’s a privilege to meet you. And it’s even more of a privilege to fly with one of you.” As he spoke he was shaking hands with the trio. And there was something just a trifle hasty about his manner, as if he were secretly burning with nervous impatience. He shifted a bit, but the smile was still on his face. Kirby was about to say a few words, but the other man had already started speaking again. “Well,” he was saying quickly, “what say we get right up in the air? I’m late, and we want to avoid enemy aircraft.”

“O.K. with me,” Kirby replied cheerfully. “The bus is all ready. Just hop in the rear, grab those earphones, and tell me where to go.”

“Good!” The observer started for the cockpit, then suddenly remembered the C.O. He saluted. “I’ll be off, sir. Thanks for your kind assistance.”

“Good luck!” the C.O. returned. “Hope you pick up the information you want.”

“Oh, I will!” Brown promised, and there was something extremely convincing about his tone. Eagerly, he swung into the rear cockpit, started to fasten himself in and pull down his goggles. Kirby, meanwhile, had climbed into the forward cockpit, and was testing the controls. He opened the throttle wider, and the Bristol’s powerful engine rose to a deafening roar. Carn and Travis tried to shout above it to their comrade.

“Be good!” Shorty was saying.

“And look out for Jerry planes!” Travis added. “Remember you’re not flying a scout!”

“Don’t worry!” Kirby assured them. “These Bristols can fly and so can I!” He picked up the speaking tube, shouted into the mouthpiece: “All set?”

“Let’s go!” came the reply.

As always, Kirby waved to the mechanics, and they jerked the chocks from in front of the Bristol’s wheels. With a roar the plane moved forward, bounded out across the field. Quickly she picked up speed, and

her tail began to lift. Kirby got her off with his usual thoughtless ease, and climbed her grace-fully towards the clear, sunny sky. On the tarmac his comrades, the C.O., and a few mechanics watched the big silver ship soaring higher and higher, its wings glinting in the sun.

Two thousand feet of altitude, and the observer was shouting through the earphones: “Head straight east, captain.”

“O.K.,” Kirby replied. He kicked right rudder, swung the stick over. The Bristol swerved beautifully, straightened its nose, and headed towards the east—and Germany.

And as they roared on their way, Kirby asked himself just what it was he didn’t like about this man Brown. Certainly there seemed to be nothing wrong with the observer: on the contrary, he appeared to be a fine, clean-cut chap. Yet, from the very start, Kirby had felt a strange antipathy towards him, and though he told himself it was unreasonable, he could not cast it aside. After all, he mused, a man with eyes like that—He broke off with a faint laugh. Ridiculous!

But he wouldn’t have laughed if he had been down on the field right now, the field he had just left a few minutes ago. Indeed, if he could have witnessed the tense drama that was taking place on airdrome, he would have seen that he had more than good reason for disliking the man who sat in the cockpit right behind him.

Even as the Bristol was fading into a tiny distant speck, to be swallowed up by the blue, the men on the tarmac were startled by a strange sight.

Onto the field a man came staggering, a man in tattered underclothes, bloody and disheveled. He seemed scarcely able to walk: he swayed and lurched, fought frantically to keep from toppling. The men on the tarmac—Carn, Travis, the C.O., and several others—rushed to him hastily. The two Mosquitoes were first to reach him. They gripped his arms, supported him. He was shouting now, half-delirious, his eyes bulging, his face distorted with horrible pain.

“Get him!” he screamed. “Get that dirty skunk! He headed this way—I saw—” He gasped, choking for breath. Carn and Travis felt him relaxing in their arms. Meanwhile, someone called the squadron’s doctor, who pushed his way through the ever-increasing crowd of pilots and mechanics.

“Lay him down on the ground!” the doc commanded tersely. “The man’s dying!”

GENTLY, the two Mosquitoes lifted the figure and placed him on the trodden grass. The others stood, silent, tense. The doctor bent over the prostrate figure, whose lips were moving, though they did not articulate. An ominous hush seemed to have fallen over the big drome, a stillness broken only by the harsh, staccato bark of airplane engines and the distant rumble of big guns.

At last the doctor looked up. Slowly he shook his head.

“Shot through the lungs!” he muttered. “No hope.”

He put a flask to the man’s lips. The drink seemed to put a spark of life back into the fellow, gave him temporary strength. Again his voice rose piercingly.

“Hurry up and get him!” he pleaded, as though that were his only wish now. “Don’t let him escape! He killed me—the dog! Get him!”

The men listened with bewildered puzzlement, not knowing what to make of it. Only Carn and Travis seemed to sense the true significance of the situation. The faces of the two Mosquitoes were drawn and pale.

The C.O. meanwhile, had been looking on in silence, trying to piece his confused thoughts together. Now, suddenly, he became the hard, commanding officer, the leader of men. Quickly, he was taking the problem in hand. He leaned over the dying man, spoke softly, kindly: “My dear fellow, try to be calm,” he urged, as if he were talking to a child. “If there’s something you want us to do, you must tell us about it clearly and to the point. Now, who are you?”

The speech had its effect. The man did calm down a bit, and now his voice was just a moan. Painfully he rolled over, looked up at the C.O.

“I’m Brown—Captain Brown, of Intelligence.”

The words fell like a thunderbolt. The C.O. stiffened, stood rigid, his face pale. Carn also stood frozen with horror. But not Travis. The wisest of the Mosquitoes acted at once, thought coolly and clearly. He turned to the mechanics, shouted at them: “Our planes—get them ready at once! We’re taking off! Hurry!”

The mechanics rushed off, glad to be able to do something. The C.O., still dazed, was shaking his head incredulously.

“I can’t understand it!” he muttered.

“Why, that fellow had all the proper papers and credentials. He—”

“Took them from me,” gasped the real Captain Brown. “Took my flying togs!” With tremendous effort he propped himself up a bit on an elbow, and looked

at the C.O. with eyes that were terrible to see. His voice, harsh with pain and emotion, seemed literally to hammer out the words.

“That man,” he said, “is—one of the most dangerous spies—German Intelligence. Bremmer—you’ve heard of him.”

They had heard of him—heard many tales about his daring exploits, his hairbreadth escapes. And at the mention of by name Carn and Travis winced. Kirby, their comrade, was piloting Bremmer across the lines, flying in blissful ignorance of the fact that the man who sat right behind him was a spy and a murderer!

Captain Brown was talking again now. Though the light was fast fading from his eyes, he was fighting with all his soul to cling to life long enough to tell his story. Slowly, in halting, stilted sentences, broken by fits of coughing, he explained just what had happened.

It was a simple enough story, yet packed with breathless drama and intrigue. It seemed that Bremmer, having obtained momentous information regarding the position of Allied troops, plans, etc., had made several efforts to escape to Germany, only to find every path blocked. Flying back seemed the only logical way, but he could not fly a plane and it would be next to impossible, anyway, to steal one because of the extreme vigilance which now prevailed on Allied airdromes.

But the clever spy bided his time, waiting for his opportunity. And the opportunity came when Brown was ordered to go up to 44’s drome and fly over the lines as an observer to check up the German positions. Bremmer had it in for Brown anyway, for the latter, himself no amateur as a spy, had been responsible for putting the Allied authorities on the German’s trail. How pleased Bremmer must have been, then, when he saw this wonderful means of killing two birds with one stone!

On this fateful morning, Brown had taken a staff car as far as Dubonne, the town where the drome was located. The distance between the town proper and the aviation camp was short, but in order to get to the field an auto would have to take a painfully round-about route. Invariably, persons coming to the drome would walk from the town to save time. This Brown had done, taking a little path which led through some woods.

He had dispatched his chauffeur, and started his walk. The path had been lonely, and as Brown went on he suddenly had a strange, uncanny sense that he was being followed. He looked behind him, but saw

nothing, though it seemed to him that the bushes on the side of the path rustled a bit. He laughed at his fears, but nevertheless he drew his automatic and kept it in hand. He did not have much farther to go. Already he could hear the sound of airplane engines from the field. He quickened his pace.

*Crack!*

The shrill report shattered the stillness of the little woods. Something whined past Brown's face, unhealthily close. The Intelligence man, Colt in hand, wheeled around sharply.

"And there he was!" As the dying man reached the climax of his grim tale, he seemed to forget momentarily his pain and anguish. The words flowed from him with sudden, lucid swiftness. His voice rose excitedly: "Bremmer—standing like a demon in the middle of the path, a leer on his face, and murder in his eyes. He has a big long-barreled Luger. It's trained on me. And when I turned, he sneered at me: 'Glad you turned around, swine!' Those were his very words. 'Now I don't have to shoot you in the back!'"

"I swore and fired—blindly. But I was too slow. The dog had the drop on me. I see his gun blazing—once, twice. I am hit. It hurts—damnably. I can't breathe, and I choke. I try to fire my gun, but I fall to the ground. He keeps firing, filling me with lead. Everything is going black. I know it's curtains. He comes over, and kicks me to see if I'm alive. He drags me off the path to hide me in the bushes, and I feel him stripping my flying togs. I realize then what he's up to. He had found out about my mission, and had cleverly waited in Dubonne to follow me. He knew no one would hear the sound of the shots, because of the roar of airplanes close by. He would escape—get in the plane in my place and work some trick when he got into German skies. He figures that by the time they find my body he will be safely on his way.

"The last thing I remember, before I went out, is seeing him, through a kind of fog, walking off towards this drome. He thought I was dead then, and so did I. But after a while I came to, and I realized I must stop him. Not only will he get back with priceless information, but he will take one of our best pilots with him. I don't know how I ever got here, but I did." He paused, drawing in his breath sharply. His strength was gone now, entirely poured out in the rush of words. His body was quivering, and a strange rattling sound rose in his throat.

For several seconds no one spoke or moved. The strange story had left them awed, dumfounded. It

was almost impossible to believe that a man, after just committing murder, could calmly come to the drome and not betray himself in the least. The only sign at all that Bremmer had given was his nervous impatience to hurry off—something which any observer might have felt.

The Story, despite all its involved details, had only been a matter of minutes in the telling. But during the whole period. Carn and Travis had been shifting with furious impatience, knowing that every second was bringing their comrade and his deadly passenger closer and closer to the German lines. The two men could hardly wait for their ships to be warmed. And the more they heard from Brown, the more they realized how perilous Kirby's predicament was. A man who could murder in such cold blood would stop at nothing. Kirby's life was not worth much just now!

The rattle in Brown's throat was increasing. Once more, with his last atom of strength, the dying man propped himself up a bit: "God!" It was like a fervent prayer, that last cry of his: "I hope it's not too late!"

"It's not!" Travis assured him, with gripping firmness. "We're going out and stop that Jerry—bring him back, and Kirby, too. You can count on that!"

Something in the Mosquitoe's tone must have convinced Brown. Still thinking more of his duty than himself, the valiant captain smiled with satisfaction.

"Good!" He seemed to resign himself willingly. He mumbled a few more words, but no one could hear them. The doctor bent over him once more. He looked up, and he did not have to tell the men. They knew.

Again there was a silence—in respect to the dead. But not for long. The war had to go on in its inexorable way, and in a flash the whole scene changed. The men stirred themselves suddenly to savage action. Everyone was shouting, giving orders and taking them. Every pilot wanted to go up and help stop the spy.

The C.O.'s rasping voice made itself heard above the rest! "It would be useless for all of you to go!" he shouted. "If Bremmer sees a whole squadron after him, he'll take desperate measures—perhaps murder Kirby and let the plane crash in the hope that he himself won't be killed. No—two planes will be enough—ought to be able to overtake him. That will also insure less risk of meeting Fokkers. Carn and Travis—get up into the air right away! You two know how to signal to Kirby, and you might be able to get him to turn back. Be careful! Don't, at any cost, let that spy get him into Germany!"

But Carn and Travis didn't even wait for the

completion of the speech. In one move, they were leaping for the tarmac and their ships, the two, trim little Spads whose propellers were now whirling.

THE Bristol droned on eastward, at five thousand feet now, just skimming below the sea of fluffy white clouds, Kirby, flying always according in the directions of the man behind him, saw that they were fast approaching the Front. A few minutes more, and they would reach the lines.

"See if you can't put on a bit more speed, captain," the familiar voice sounded through Kirby's earphones—the voice which had come to jar on him strangely. "We must get across fast."

Kirby could have said something about straining a Bristol's engine, or remarked that they were flying damned fast as it was, but he didn't. Instead he grunted into the tube, saying as before: "O.K."

And he pulled the throttle out to the last notch. The Bristol, its engine thundering and throbbing as if it must tear the whole ship to pieces, picked up protestingly. It hurtled forward, rocking and swaying, its propeller churning the air furiously.

The Front now! They were sweeping over the Allied trenches, and the smoking, pock-marked battlefield swam below them. And now Kirby's nerves began in tense, and he became thoroughly alert. His eyes were glued to the eastern sky, straining to pick out any tiny specks which could grow so swiftly into Fokkers.

"We gotta watch for Jerries now!" he yelled through the tube. "Hope you can handle that gun back there in case of trouble."

The man in the rear glanced at the flanking machine gun which was mounted on the rim of his cockpit. He reached out, seized it, and swung it back and forth a couple of times. For a while he continued to play with it. Then he replied through the tube: "Haven't had much experience with machine guns. But," there was a faint touch of acrid mirth in his tone, "I'm not a bad marksman."

His hand left the machine gun, then, and reached beneath his tunic. He drew forth a shining black Luger—a Luger with an unusually long barrel. This he fondled almost lovingly. Then, with a slight smile, he placed the revolver on his lap and kept it there—ready.

Now the German trenches were looming into view—a maze of neat, zig-zag cuts. The Bristol rushed on, was coming over them. A few seconds more, and they would be in Germany!

Kirby was still keeping his eyes on the Eastern sky.

But the man in the rear cockpit wasn't looking that way at all. Instead, he was constantly jerking his head around to look behind them, towards the west. And as he glanced back there now, he suddenly stiffened, his eyes narrowing, and his fingers closing more tightly around his Luger.

Coming straight this way, advancing in the wake of the Bristol with furious speed, were two little ships. They were Spads. And because the swift scouts could fly much faster than two-seaters, they were gaining on the Bristol with amazing rapidity. Closer and closer they came, until they stood out in every detail—trim, flashing ships which shimmered in the bright sunlight.

Only such a cool-headed, ingenious person as the man who sat in that rear cockpit could have thought fast enough to cope with such a situation. Swiftly, the spy was glancing about, taking stock. As yet, Kirby, intent on watching for Huns and on his flying, did not see those two Spads. The German lines lay right ahead. But at the rate the Spads were gaining, it looked as if they must surely catch up to the Bristol before it could cross those lines.

And so Bremmer—the clever and crafty Bremmer—seized the speaking tube and shouted with a frantic excitement which did not sound at all affected: "Enemy planes, captain—I just saw a formation up in the sun. Look! Way ahead—just below those clouds!"

Kirby started. And then, naturally, the Mosquito jerked his head around to look at the observer, and see where he was pointing. It was a tense moment. The spy kept his Luger ready. If Kirby saw those two Spads

Kirby didn't see them. There were two reasons. The first was that the spy had hastily straightened up in the cockpit, so that he could obstruct Kirby's view of the sky immediately to their rear. The second was that the Mosquito was watching Bremmer's arm, which was pointing upwards and ahead.

Kirby looked up there. The sun which blazed through the gaps in the clouds blinded him. He blinked and put a thumb to his eye. He saw nothing.

"Can't pick out any Jerries up there," he said, through the tube.

"But I saw them—I'd swear to it," Bremmer shouted, with increasing alarm. "They're after us! We can't afford to get into a scrap now! Better shoot right up into those clouds, and hide in them until they lose us. Hurry!"

A feeling of irritation came over Kirby. He was sure there were no Fokkers up there. That was the trouble

with these non-flying fellows. Always imagining they saw Jerries, and getting finicky. His dislike of the man he thought to be Captain Brown increased. He longed to tell the observer to go to hell. But his orders were to obey Brown to the letter. So, again, he grunted out the inevitable: "O.K."

Swearing under his breath, he pulled back the joy stick and shot upwards in a long, roaring zoom. The spy sat tense, gripping the cockpit cowl with one hand and his Luger with the other. The two Spads were so close behind now that if Kirby only turned again he must see them. But he didn't turn. His eyes were on the fluffy mass of clouds above. The Bristol was climbing straight towards them.

The great banks of white loomed closer and closer, until, with a roar, the Bristol was going right into them. The mist closed around the ship, cold and damp, penetrating the men's flying togs and wetting them to the skin. Visibility was blotted out: Kirby could not even see the dashboard in front of him. It seemed almost as if he was separated from his plane, and was just in a great void. But the sound of the Bristol's engine was deafening, as engines always are when a plane passes through clouds.

The familiar voice coming through the speaking tube made Kirby start strangely. It was almost uncann hearing a man talk up here, indeed, the voice seemed to come out of nowhere.

"We're still climbing, captain. Can you level off and circle a few times still keeping in the clouds?"

"That's a pretty tall order," Kirby replied, for the first time speaking in a grumbling tone. "It's hard to keep your sense of direction here."

"Try it, please. We can't take any chances."

"O.K."

The Mosquito pulled back on the stick until he felt that they were on level keel again. Then he banked vertically, got altitude and repeated.

MEANWHILE, the two pursuing Spads had swept right below the cloud, and the two pilots who sat in their cockpits were scanning the white mists with anguished haste. Carn and Travis had seen the Bristol zoom into the fluffy bank. Now, when their comrade's plane failed to reappear, the two Mosquitoes also zoomed upwards. They did not enter the cloud, for fear of colliding with Kirby, but they shot up through a gap and came out above. Frantically, like crazed doves, they circled, watching, waiting. Still they saw no Bristol.

Then Travis, always wise and thoughtful, waved a hasty series of signals to Carn. He was telling Shorty that the best plan was to separate: Travis would remain above the cloud, and Carn would go down beneath it. In that way they were sure to catch the Bristol when it came out.

Carn did not waste any time. With a wave of his arm, he plunged downward, down through the gap again. Below the cloud he resumed his circling.

And there they all were—three planes circling one above another; Travis above the clouds, Carn beneath them, and Kirby and the spy inside of them, unseen to the others and unable to see them.

Minutes passed, and Kirby was getting more and more enraged at his observer. He could conceal his impatience no longer: "Say, we're not going to keep this up all day, are we?" he inquired through the tube.

"I guess we've waited long enough," came the reply. "Most likely the Germans have gone above this cloud to wait for us to come through. What say we shoot out below again—fool 'em. They'll miss us then."

Kirby, anxious to get out of the impenetrable mist, was almost ready to agree. His hand was on the stick, about to push it forward. And below the cloud, Carn was waiting.

But Kirby did not go down. The expert pilot in him simply refused to accept the ridiculous plan of the man in the rear cockpit. Nor could he resist showing his contemptuous superiority towards the non-flyer: "I'm afraid that's not such a good idea," he spoke into, the tube, with cutting sarcasm. "If there are Fokkers, they'll have sense enough to split up and stay below and above the clouds. They know we're coming out, and they'll wait for us."

The earphones were silent for a long moment. And Kirby knew he had triumphed at last. The other man was perplexed, worried. And Kirby's triumph rose even higher as the observer said, in a tone surprisingly meek: "Well, what do you suggest, captain? Shall we go on, keeping in the clouds?"

"Hardly." Kirby dismissed the suggestion with a snort. "The Jerries must have seen where we were headed before, and if we don't show up soon they'll expect that we're still flying east, and follow." He gave a short laugh. "You have to know the tricks, captain, if you want to slip away. It's not really so hard. Shall I show you how we can throw off any Fokkers that are hanging around here?"

"Yes, yes!" the other responded, as eagerly as a child. "By all means!"

Still glowing with triumph, Kirby ruddered over. He had been striving all this time to keep his sense of direction, and he was satisfied now that he was turning south, which would take them off their original course on a right-angle. Still remaining in the soggy mists, the Bristol roared on.

Carn and Travis continued their circling for a while. Then Carn, despairing, shot back up through the clouds and swung in beside the plane of his comrade. The two men signalled one another, trying to work out a course of action. The strain of it all was beginning to tell on them. Their goggled faces were pale and haggard. It was tantalizing—the way that Bristol had literally slipped right out of their hands just as they were sure they had it. Yet the fact that they had been so close to it strengthened their determination. They would find that ship before it was too late, before Bremmer could carry out whatever machinations he had in mind.

Finally, the two Mosquitoes decided to split up once more, and Carn again went below the cloud. Slowly, though they could not see each other, the two flew on parallel lines towards the East. Kirby had been right. The pursuers had naturally assumed that the Bristol, still hiding in the clouds, was going on towards Germany.

But, in reality, Kirby was moving further and further away from those Spads. The Bristol was speeding on, churning its way through the clouds. At times it suddenly grew lighter, and Kirby knew they were coming to a gap in those banks. He steered accordingly, managed to stay in the thick mist.

Finally the Mosquito picked up the speaking tube again and shouted: "Figure we've gone about two miles off our course, and the Fokkers you saw must be way in Germany—out of sight. We can come out now."

The other's tone was relieved: "Good! Let's go below the clouds, and shoot across the lines now. This territory will do for my work anyway—we don't have to go back."

Kirby pushed the stick forward, and they descended. The mists thinned, and again it was growing lighter. Slowly the air cleared, and the cloud-wisps were, dispersed by the Bristol's propeller. The spy again sat tense, ready.

Then, to Kirby's blessed relief, they were out in the sunny blue once more, skirting the lower ridges of the clouds. And to Bremmer's blessed relief, there were no other planes in sight.

The Front still spread below them—German

trenches. Kirby swung their nose to the East again, and proceeded to cross the lines.

In Germany now! And Archie, the wary watchdog, commenced barking at them. Anti-aircraft shells blotched the translucent sky around the Bristol, sprouting out like black mushrooms. But the firing was not close enough to worry Kirby, who mechanically assumed the zigzag course which pilots use to throw off the range of the gunners below. The man in the rear cockpit, however, was worried. He stiffened at each burst, and his goggled face paled just a little. But the firing did not last long. Presently they passed the batteries stationed along the Front, and found themselves in the clear sky once more.

"Getting your stuff?" Kirby suddenly inquired through the tube.

"Not yet," came the reply. "We have to go a bit further. Hope we don't see any more Fokkers."

The Bristol winged on eastward. Again Kirby watched for specks ahead. Again the German in the rear kept glancing behind him, kept that Luger ready. Further and further into enemy territory they penetrated. And presently Kirby began to wonder just how far they were going. That vague feeling of uneasiness he had felt from the very start increased. He could not help expressing his thoughts.

"Gosh," he exclaimed, "we're getting pretty deep into Germany. Makes you feel queer to go way in like this. You feel almost that you'll never get back."

Bremmer moved the Luger just a bit.

"Funny," the spy spoke with hidden sarcasm, "but I sort of feel the same way." Then he added, reassuringly. "But we don't have to go much farther now. I'm checking up on the troop movements down there."

Kirby glanced down at the ground. There *were* troops down there all right. As far as the eye could see, the landscape was swarming with Boche—Boche on the roads, in encampments, building bridges across rivers, etc. They were certainly in the midst of the enemy!

And now, though Kirby did not look around at his observer, the Mosquito could sense that the man in the back was shifting around furiously, moving about in the cockpit.

"Nervous?" he inquired, through the tube.

"Yes—to tell the truth," Bremmer replied. "I don't like this business of reconnoitering at all."

But it was not, by any means, nervousness that was causing him to move around. It was something else. From his tunic the spy had just drawn another instrument. It was one of those combination scout-

knives, equipped with several handy tools. And the spy, knife in hand, was extremely active, was working with lightning dexterity. For though he could not fly a plane, he knew his aeronautics and mechanics.

Twenty-five miles across the lines. Kirby had all he could do to restrain the impulse to simply turn and head for home. This was getting damned peculiar. And that mysterious Brown jumping around like a frightened rabbit! The whole thing was beginning to prey on Kirby's nerves. Furiously, the Mosquito jerked his head around to see what in hell the man was doing.

But Bremmer was quick—quicker than the eye could see. And all the Mosquito saw was a man shifting about nervously, gripping the edge of his cockpit, looking furtively around him.

"Funny," Kirby stated through the tube. "You weren't so nervous before, captain."

"It's this being way over in Germany, I guess," the other replied.

"Well, if you hurry and get your dope, we can turn back and—"

He got no further. For at that moment, without any warning, taking Kirby completely unawares, the thing happened.

The Bristol's engine heaved a great, gasping cough. It sputtered and choked, struggling vainly for life. Then, with a hissing sigh, it conked out!

AT ONCE, Kirby, through sheer instinct, was struggling like a madman with the controls, trying to keep the Bristol from falling into a spin. The plane, robbed of its power, was lurching and side-slipping with ever-increasing violence. The Mosquito cursed hoarsely. His eyes were searching the instrument board, trying to read the trouble. Vaguely, above the shrill of the wind through the wires, he heard the voice of the man behind him. Bremmer was not using the speaking tube now—for, with the motor shut off, it was unnecessary. But the observer was shouting at the top of his lungs, with obvious panic:

"What's the matter? What's happened? God—!" Kirby jerked his head around. He saw the other man, still shifting about nervously. No actor could have played the part better than the spy. He seemed absolutely frozen with terror.

"No more gas!" Kirby shouted at him. The Mosquito shook his head. "Can't understand it! Emergency tanks were full a minute ago. Must be leak in feed-line! If—"

He broke off, as the Bristol see-sawed drunkenly,

started to nose over. Again he struggled to keep it in the air. And all the while the man in the rear was yelling frantically, in an almost pleading tone: "What are you going to do?" he clutched at Kirby's shoulder. "How'll We ever get out of this? For God's sake, try to get back to the line!"

A grim laugh tore from Kirby's throat.

"Get back to the lines!" he echoed, still able to retain his sense of humor. "Swell chance! Twenty-five miles—and no prop!"

Nevertheless, he was mechanically guiding the powerless ship around towards the west. Though he knew there was absolutely no hope of reaching Allied territory, he was determined to get as near to it as he could. He kicked his rudder, shoved the stick way over. The plane reduced to a mere glider, lost an ominous amount of altitude on the turn. But Kirby got it around, and let it go into a mild glide-dive. It required all his skill to keep that nose up, to keep the Bristol from plunging headlong or falling off into sideslips.

Down they went rushing on a hill of space with the wind shrilling through the wires, tearing at them with unrelenting fury. Bremmer continued shouting out his frenzied pleas, urging Kirby to get back to the lines. But Kirby was silent now, and his lips were drawn into a tight little line. There was something damned peculiar, he was thinking, about this business. He couldn't understand this sudden lack of gas.

Only a thousand feet above the ground now, rushing down hell-bent. The Bristol lurched and swayed, its struts and fabric straining in shrill protest. The rush of wind was all but tearing off Kirby's helmet. He glanced down at the earth which came rushing swiftly towards them. God, the roads and valleys down there were just jammed with Boche! It looked like their goose was cooked.

And then came a new peril. On the ground machine guns and pom-poms suddenly opened up on the descending plane. Bullets came whizzing past, unhealthily close. A line of perforations appeared as if by magic in the wing surface above Kirby's head. And the familiar tick-tick of shots tearing through the fabric fuselage rose ominously. Bremmer, now really frightened again, had less difficulty in acting the part of a terror-stricken observer.

"God, they'll get us!" he screamed. "They'll plug us like rats!"

Kirby did not bother to reply. He had too much to worry about as it was. The ground seemed to be right under them, coming up with terrific speed, as if to

give them a sharp slap. And everywhere below were those gray-clad figures—firing with anything they had, waiting for the crippled bird to fall into their hands. The bullets kept whizzing about the gliding Bristol. It was incredible, Kirby thought, that they hadn't been hit. But they could not hold out.

Then, suddenly, the Mosquito's hopes rose. Close ahead, he saw a small patch of trees. It was right beside a road. And the road, thank God, was deserted. If they could find some place to land in those trees, perhaps they could sneak off undetected and escape to the lines.

But could they get to the trees? Kirby employed every last atom of his skill in his effort to keep the Bristol in the air. He fought as he had never fought before, and against an overwhelming foe—gravity. They were only some thirty feet above the ground now, skimming right over the heads of the Boche, tearing through a maelstrom of lead, which was ripping up their plane mercilessly.

"What are you doing?" Bremmer cried out, with frantic anxiety.

"Got to land!" Kirby took the time to explain. He gestured with his free arm. "Over there—those trees. No Jerries there!"

Bremmer looked. And if Kirby had kept watching the observer, he would have seen the man's face cloud darkly. The spy forgot all his fears in his grim determination to carry out his daring plan. His eyes narrowed once more, and the hand which held the Luger moved upward. He made as if to point the revolver at the broad back which protruded from the cockpit before him. Then, changing his mind, he put the gun back in his lap once more. "Why not the road?" he asked, trying to reason with Kirby. "Land there. It's empty."

Again Kirby laughed grimly.

"Land on a road! Not on your life! It may be empty now—but where there's a road, there's bound to be men! Better to risk a crash landing in those trees!" Bremmer's face was getting more and more wolflike, and a dangerous gleam was in his goggled eyes. But then, as if resolved to use peaceful tactics as long as he was in the air—for, after all, he could not fly—he shrugged resignedly.

"All right! But, for God's sake, don't get us captured!"

The patch of trees was looming below and in front of them. And Kirby gritted his teeth, and continued to fight for altitude. Must keep that nose up. He was exhausted, and his face was covered with sweat despite

the rush of wind. Must keep that nose up! The tree-tops were swinging towards them—a blurred greenish wall that would mean certain death, if he plunged into them. God—must keep that nose up!

Here they were now—those trees! The Mosquito drew in his breath sharply, and his heart pounded. Swish! With a rush the green tree tops were sweeping below them. The branches, fatal shoals to the airplane, were right under them, and the Bristol was sinking, sinking, sinking. Even now it seemed that its undercarriage was actually in the foliage, though in reality it was still a few feet above. Kirby knew that if he didn't find a clearing at once he would have to pancake—try to settle in those trees without a fatal crash.

And then, ironically enough, it was Bremmer who suddenly seized Kirby's shoulder, pointed and shouted: "Over there—a wheatfield! You can land!"

With frantic haste, Kirby glanced there. A wave of relief swept him—though, regardless of what he saw, his plight remained extremely desperate. Sure enough there was a clearing. It lay ahead of them, a bit to the left. It was unpleasantly close to the road, but it was shielded from the highway by a line of trees and brush.

"Good for you, captain!" the Mosquito shouted over his shoulder, for the first time feeling a slight tinge of friendship for the man. And the sight of that haven—if a field twenty miles in Hunland could be called a haven—gave him new strength. How he did it he never knew, but somehow he made that Bristol respond, made the plane hold up while he nosed it over gently to the left and headed for that spot.

There was no time to bother about getting into the wind. The field was pretty small for a cross-wind landing, but Kirby must chance it. Easing his stick forward at last, he glided towards the wheat. Down they went, with Kirby judging his distance carefully, scanning that patch of earth. It was anything but an ideal landing place: the wheat was high, and the ground uneven. But it was better than those trees! And it was certainly deserted: no gray-clad figures about.

The Bristol, like a tired bird grateful to come to a resting place, swept down gracefully. Its wheels whisked down the stalks of wheat, settled. *Bump!* *B-rump!* The ship was bounding across the field. It rolled a few yards, slowed down, came to a stop.

In one move, Kirby got his safetybelt unfastened and tore off goggles and helmet. He turned around to look at his observer.

And he looked right into the black muzzle of a Luger automatic!

THE Mosquito stiffened, his face blank with momentary amazement, his eyes looking askance at the man who was supposed to be his comrade. Bremmer, who had also removed his helmet and goggles, was smiling—smiling that same, venomous smile that Brown had seen previously.

For a second, neither moved or spoke. The silence was deadly, weird. They were alone on a deserted field.

Then, suddenly, the reckless fighter in Kirby, the crazy dare-devil who refused to take any man's bluff, came to the surface. His hand darted downwards, towards his tunic.

"Don't move!" The command, spoken in a tone of steel, froze the Mosquito, told him at once that his antagonist would gladly shoot him if he made any resistance at all. As yet he couldn't quite understand what it was all about, but he realized that he was dealing with a fiend, a fiend to whom murder in cold blood meant nothing.

"Climb out of your plane, and let me see your hands always!" Bremmer ordered him. "Hurry, or I shoot to kill. I have no time for nonsense."

Kirby, gritting his teeth in futile rage, obeyed. He climbed out, got his footing in the wheat.

"Now," said Bremmer, icily, "throw your hands above your head." Slowly, Kirby put up his hands. "Good!" The spy sprang from the Bristol, came up to the Mosquito. Swiftly, with a deftness that could only be acquired from experience, he searched his victim. He took Kirby's roll-map, his Colt, and several other odds and ends. And Kirby could only stand helpless, glaring at the other man. It was hell, when he was physically so strong and powerful, to just stand there and do as he was bade.

All the time the Mosquito had not spoken a word. Now, for the first time he seemed to find his voice. It rose hoarsely, and sounded strangely unnatural to him.

"What the hell's the idea?" he asked, and at the same time realized the ridiculousness of the question.

The contemptuous smile returned to the spy's lips.

"The captain should use his head," Bremmer sneered. "Yes—like he used it back in those clouds and had the kindness to throw off those two Spads." The blood drained from the Mosquito's face. Then his fists clenched so tightly that they almost cut into his palms, and he had all he could do to restrain the mad impulse to throw himself upon his captor—Luger or no Luger. For, now, in a flash, he grasped the whole upshot of the business, from beginning to end. Now he realized why Bremmer had been shifting about in that cockpit.

And though he restrained himself from acting, he could not hold his tongue. The hot torrent of words poured from him: "You're a dirty, lousy spy!" he burst out, with wild fury. "You punctured our feed-line and let the gas escape. After getting me away into Germany!" His voice rose shrilly, as if his own words had spurred him to greater rage. "Damn your dirty yellow soul, you—"

"That will be just about enough," the other man warned, with a significant flourish of his Luger. "And I'd kill you now, only I should prefer, if it proves convenient, to turn the leader of the Three Mosquitoes in alive. Of course, if I can't, no matter, but it will mean another notch to the record of Friedrich von Bremmer!"

Kirby stared. He, too, had heard that name before. And the thought that he had been the agent to return the spy to his native ground filled him with despair. God, he must do something! He must act before any other Germans came!

"I had hoped that you would land among my comrades," Bremmer was saying now, in the same sneering tone. "But this will suffice—it merely means a few minutes' delay. The road which runs beside this field will soon prove your theory that where there's a road there are bound to be men. I know the road very well. This very morning—indeed, any moment now, there will be troops moving up in trucks. And you and I shall be waiting for them on the road." He gave a slight cough. "Now," he ordered, "you will march in front of me, through those trees and out onto the road. Proceed!"

Dumbly Kirby turned, started to shuffle through the wheat. The spy was right at his back, letting him feel the touch of the Luger from time to time. They walked away from the squatting Bristol, came to the line of trees.

"Straight ahead!" Bremmer commanded, and added with faint amusement. "I notice you don't say 'O.K.' now, captain!"

Kirby remained silent. His face was wreathed in a black scowl, and his eyes roved about furtively, looking in vain for one loophole, one tiniest chance to turn the tables. God, if only the German wasn't so keen, so watchful! Never once did Bremmer relax his vigilance: never once did he lower that revolver. Even as they had to thresh their way through the heavy brush that lined the road, the spy kept right behind Kirby, prodded him along.

Then they were on the road. At once Kirby glanced

anxiously in both directions. It was impossible to see very far, for the road curved sharply around the patch of trees in which the plane had landed. The wheatfield and the plane were just discernible through the brush and trees.

“And now,” Bremmer said, “you may stand at ease. But, keep in mind that if you make one false move, I’ll pull this trigger.”

Thus began one of the most nerve-racking waits Kirby had ever experienced. The Mosquito stood, shoulders bowed, hands hanging limply at his sides. He had decided that it was best to appear absolutely resigned, so as to put Bremmer at ease. Then, perhaps, the spy would relax his relentless wariness for a second, and Kirby could seize his opportunity.

But as they continued to wait, this idea seemed more and more impossible, and Kirby’s hopes began to ebb, Bremmer appeared absolutely tireless. Nothing escaped the spy’s keen eyes, which went from Kirby down to the curve in the road ahead.

Minutes dragged by, and the strain became more and more unbearable. Kirby shifted about—a trapped animal. The spy took short paces, always keeping him covered. Both men were silent now, waiting, watching that curve in the road. Some time, perhaps any minute, trucks bearing German soldiers would appear there. And Kirby could have sobbed at his sheer helplessness, his inability to do anything about it. Never before had he felt so utterly miserable. He cursed himself for a fool and a jackass. Why had he been so thick? He should have realized as soon as that engine conked out that the man behind him must be a spy. He had disliked him, distrusted him as it was. Why, if only he had used his head—

He came out of his musings with a nervous start. Bremmer had also stiffened, and was peering once more at the bend in the road. There was no mistaking the sound that reached their ears—the clattering rumble of a heavy vehicle on the road. Louder and louder it grew. The two men watched that curve.

A feeling of desperation began to grip Kirby, as he realized that there remained only one second for him to act. Trapped, cornered, he was willing to risk all in one break.

But the wary Bremmer must have detected his feelings, must have read the look on his face. The spy’s voice again had that deadly, icy tone: “Stand still, at attention!” he commanded. Cleverly, he had backed a few paces away from the Mosquito, far enough away to prevent Kirby from making a pass at him. His Luger

was still trained unwaveringly on the pilot. It would have been extremely simple to pump Kirby with lead. Out on the open road, with no place to duck, Kirby had no alternative but to throw up the sponge. Frustrated, defeated as he had never been defeated before, the Mosquito resigned.

AND in the next moment, a big, lumbering truck came swinging around the bend, came rumbling towards the two men. Dully, Kirby watched it. It was an open lorry. In addition to the driver and the men who sat beside him, there were six gray-clad figures standing in the truck, all holding rifles. German infantry-men, with coal-scuttle helmets.

Bremmer, still keeping Kirby carefully covered, waved to the approaching truck. The driver evidently saw the two men in the road, for he slowed down at once.

“March!” Bremmer ordered Kirby, and forced the Mosquito to walk towards the lorry, which was now coming to a stop scarcely a hundred feet away. The spy then bellowed in German, and Kirby surmised that he was explaining the situation to the soldiers. Answering shouts came from the truck. The driver pulled up to the side of the road, stopped. The soldiers, rifles in hand, started climbing out hastily. There was no hope of escaping now. In a moment Kirby would be surrounded.

Then, all at once, everything changed.

Even as the first German soldier was getting down to the ground, the air was shattered by a thunderous roar—a roar of wide-open motors and a scream of flying wires in the wind. As if by magic, two khaki planes had suddenly appeared right overhead, were diving down hell-bent, smoke pouring from their exhausts. And as Kirby saw them a great thrill surged through him, and he could have wept for sheer joy. His two comrades—Carn and Travis! Good old scouts, they had hunted for him until they found him. By good fortune they had spotted the crippled Bristol, and as they came diving down they had seen the two men in the road, and the approaching truck. At once they had put two and two together. And now they were swooping upon that lorry, plunging straight for it even as the Germans were climbing out.

*Rat-tat-tat-tat!* Livid streaks of flame leaped from the noses of the Spad as their twin machine guns stuttered into life. They were pouring a hail of lead right into that lorry, peppering away at it.

All this had happened with breathless swiftness,

much more quickly than any telling of it could be. And now confusion reigned down on the ground. Frantic shouts of terror broke from the men as they tried vainly to escape from the monsters that roared down at them. And Bremmer, cool and wary though he was, had been taken momentarily unawares. He was confused, and Kirby suddenly saw that he was off his guard. Though he still held the Luger, his eyes were on those planes—not on the Mosquito. It was the chance Kirby had been waiting, praying for—the great opportunity!

With a berserk oath, the Mosquito leaped for the spy. Bremmer, stirred instantly to action again, saw the move, tried to aim the Luger. There was a sharp *crack*, and a spurt of flame darted close past the Mosquito's face. But then Kirby was upon the man, grabbing wildly for that gun. He caught the German's wrist even as the spy was firing again—aimlessly this time. Simultaneously, the Mosquitos' left fist crashed out in a terrific hook. The blow landed square on Bremmer's jaw—a stunning impact into which Kirby had put his whole body. Dazedly, Kirby felt the man sag, to fall heavily upon the road. He was out—cold. Hastily, Kirby snatched up the Luger.

Meanwhile the planes of Carn and Travis had been zooming, banking, and diving like blood-crazed vultures. They were making short, breathless swoops upon that lorry, raking it with bullets. The Germans, caught like rats in a trap, didn't have a chance in that merciless attack. One after another they fell—riddled, shot to bits. Two were sprawled out on the road, others collapsed in the truck. The driver was hanging grotesquely out of his seat, a bullet through his skull.

It was a gruesome sight that met Kirby's eyes when he turned to look at the truck. Not one of those Jerries remained alive. The hellish clatter of machine guns had stopped at last, and the two Spads were now gyrating peacefully overhead. Kirby was just a bit appalled by it all. With Bremmer out, and all the rest killed, the Mosquito was the only man on his feet.

Travis and Carn were both leaning out of their cockpits now, waving excitedly. Kirby waved back, shouting with joyous relief.

But his relief was short-lived. Suddenly he remembered where he was, and how serious was his predicament. Any moment, more trucks would be coming! He must get out of here! And—his lips set grimly—he must take that spy with him.

He hurried over to the huddled figure of Bremmer, glanced down at him. The man was still cold. He

would be out for a long time, Kirby figured. The Mosquito now waved again at the planes above, began using the familiar gestures by which the trio could almost converse. Travis circled above, watching. Kirby pointed in the direction of the wheat-field, signified that Travis should try to make a landing there. Though the Spad was only a single-seater, it could carry Kirby and the spy on either wing. A dangerous stunt—but with the Bristol crippled it was the only way.

Travis waved in hasty assent, began to fly over the trees, while Carn remained on guard above. Kirby leaned over the unconscious spy, started to pick him up.

But the whole plan was thwarted before it was even undertaken. For at that moment, Carn's machine guns suddenly blazed forth anew—blazed forth in three short bursts. It could mean only one thing, that firing—a familiar signal. Hastily, Kirby got to his feet, looked up. A groan broke from him, and his heart sank.

Enemy planes! Three of them, diving from the blue, plunging straight for the Spads of Carn and Travis! Three speedy, coffin-nosed Fokkers! They had evidently seen the ground strafe, and were coming to avenge their comrades-in-arms. The shrill staccato clatter of their Spandaus guns were already breaking forth.

Taken at a disadvantage as it was because of their inferior altitude, Carn and Travis had no choice but to pull up immediately, and face their attackers. For a second Kirby feared that his comrades were going to get it—for the jerry planes were right on top of them, and he could see the yellowish streams of tracer streaking into the Spads' fuselages. But the Mosquitoes had not won their reputation for nothing. Their fighting blood roused to the highest pitch, they hurled their planes right at the Germans, and answered those streams of lead with their own guns. Kirby fascinated by the tense drama in the air, forgot his own surroundings for the moment, stood gaping at the sky. It was a dog-fight, and though it was three to two, Carn and Travis were more than holding their own. Always thinking of their comrade, they were cleverly drawing the Jerries away from the spot, so that the fight, would not attract the other Germans to the scene, and thus betray Kirby. The group of ships moved further and further away, until Kirby could only discern a lot of tiny specks which danced in the sun.

THEN, with a shock, the Mosquito awoke once more to his own wretched predicament. Here he was, stuck on this road with a bunch of dead Germans, a truck, and an unconscious spy. And sooner or later, other lorries were coming.

What to do? He racked his brain with conjectures. He looked about him, seeking for some path. Should he simply hot-foot it away, try to flee for the lines? And Bremmer—he would have to kill him if he left him there, a task which, despite his hatred of the spy, would be hell. Besides, Bremmer alive would be an extremely valuable catch to the Allied authorities. And in addition to this, his chances of getting back to the lines, even if he put on one of the dead Germans' uniforms, would be pretty slim. Though he could find his way about easily in the air, the terrain down here was absolutely strange to him.

But, if worst came to worst, if he could find no other means, he would have to resort to this measure.

His eyes went back to the wheatfield once more, he could barely see it through the trees and brush. Vaguely he made out the shape of the Bristol, still squatting helplessly. Yet was that plane so helpless? Slowly a wild idea began to dawn on the Mosquito. His eyes now fastened their gaze on the lorry over there, the lorry which, despite its cargo of dead, despite all the bullets that had been pumped into it, stood with its engine still running. By God, could he attempt the thing?

He glanced down at the unconscious Bremmer, to make sure the man was not stirring yet. He wasn't; that powerful blow seemed to have a lasting effect. Reassured, Kirby hurried over to the truck. He climbed on the running board. The driver was still hanging out of his seat. The man who had been sitting next to him lay on the road. With strong hands, Kirby lifted the driver, hoisted him into the rear of the lorry, where five other soldiers lay huddled. Then, working with swift, deft fingers, the Mosquito proceeded to pull out the seat-cushion. He got it out, and the gas tank and tool chest were exposed. He didn't turn off the engine, because there was no telling but that he might have to move the machine, and he didn't want to waste precious time cranking it again.

Unscrewing the cover of the tank, he shoved his hand through the opening. His eyes lit up. Almost full! Encouraged, he started rummaging through the tool-chest. He did not have to search long for the thing he wanted. It was a collapsible canvas water-bucket, which most trucks carried for the purpose of filling their radiators.

So far, luck was with him. He had everything he needed. It would be a simple operation to transfer gas from the truck to the Bristol. After all, Bremmer had merely cut the two feed-lines leading from the reserve tanks in the wings of the ship. The main tank, which was under the pilot's seat, could not have been accessible to the spy. A couple gallons of gas, and that plane could fly again!

Eagerly, Kirby seized the canvas pail, started to open it. Then, of a sudden, his hands paused in the act, as if paralyzed, and he stopped tense, rigid. For now, once more, he heard that unmistakable sound down the road. Not one truck this time—but several of them! They were coming closer and closer. In a moment or so they would be rounding that curve ahead! And if they found him here—

Again his common sense told him to drop everything and flee. Yet, somehow, he couldn't swallow the thought of abandoning his scheme, now that it had become possible. God, he must find a way to carry it out! He must work fast, before they got here!

He glanced again at the field. Perhaps there was a chance—a fleeting chance at least—that men passing in trucks wouldn't notice anything going on in the clearing unless their attention was directly attracted to it. To see the plane there, one had to look for it.

But unless all evidence was removed from the road, the approaching Jerries, coming upon the dead, would stop. In that case they would see anything that was taking place on that field.

It was a desperate chance that the Mosquito must take. The odds were all against him. It would be a feat indeed to drive that truck onto the clearing, through all those trees and brush. And getting the truck on the field was only a preliminary to the stunt.

The rumble of those approaching trucks was getting louder, louder. There was not much more time. Hesitation would mean sure failure. He swore huskily. Hell, he'd try it! He'd stake everything on this one, reckless gamble!

Reaching his decision, he slung the driver's seat-cushion back into place, then sprang from the truck.

Now for Bremmer! He ran down the road, where the spy lay inert. With all his strength, Kirby lifted him, got him over his shoulders, and carried him back to the truck. He placed him next to the driver's seat, half-propping him there. Then he got in himself. Hurry—he must hurry! Those trucks must be right here now—the clatter of them was getting deafening. The only reason they were taking longer to arrive than the first

one was that, traveling together, the noise of them had reached Kirby's ears sooner.

The Mosquito, an expert driver, sped up the truck's engine. The powerful motor roared thunderously, drowning out the clatter of the lorries which were approaching. But the mere fact that he could no longer hear those trucks didn't reassure Kirby. Hastily, he jammed down the clutch pedal, and cursed as he ground the gear into first. Then, with his heart pounding, he released the pedal, gave her all the gas he could.

With a lurch, the big truck moved forward. Kirby swung hard on the wheel, steered straight for the ditch on the side of the road. The heavy lorry jumped and see-sawed drunkenly, almost throwing Kirby out of the seat. He seized the unconscious man beside him, just in time to keep him from falling out. Then they were plunging through the brush, mowing down the foliage like a steam-roller.

The trees now! Were they far enough apart to let that truck through? With his heart in his mouth, the Mosquito maneuvered his clumsy machine towards a gap in them. How he got through he never knew, but he made it.

And he sighed with relief as he finally came out on that wheatfield, came out and bounded along, to stop close by the Bristol.

As yet the job of concealing the field from the Jerries was not quite complete. Was there still time? He jumped from the truck again, rushed back. Looking down the road, he saw the first lorry swinging slowly around the bend. For God's sake, he must hurry! He pulled, tugged at the bushes which the truck had mowed down, fixed them as best he could. There—that would have to do! Turning he dashed back to the clearing.

Immediately, he got to work. And never before had he found it harder to perform any task than he did now. For, scarcely a stone's throw away, out on the road which Kirby could see through the trees and brush, the trucks were passing—a seemingly endless line of them, all filled to the brim with, gray-clad figures. God, it seemed as if the whole German army was going by. And if just one of those men happened to spot the Bristol, the Allied plane on the wheatfield, Kirby's goose would be cooked!

His first care was to attend to Bremmer. Though the man was still dead to the world, Kirby could take no chances. He lifted the spy from the truck. Using handkerchiefs, he bound his hands and feet hastily but

securely. Then he placed him in the rear cockpit of the Bristol.

Next he inspected the ship as quickly as he could. Sure enough, Bremmer had cut two neat slices in the emergency feed-lines, while the main line was intact. Kirby went back to the truck, got out the canvas pail, and worked like a fiend. In no time he was under the truck, opening the drain-cock of the gas tank. The petrol trickled out into the pail with a slowness that made Kirby curse. Damn, would the thing ever be filled? And those trucks out there, still rumbling by! Confound the hellish racket they made!

At last, after what seemed like interminable hours, though it was only a matter of a couple of minutes, the pail was filled. Ought to be about three gallons, Kirby figured. He wouldn't take the time to get any more—this would get him across the lines.

Carefully, with all the tenderness of a mother carrying its young, Kirby took the pail of gas to the Bristol, proceeded to pour it into the main tank. It was hard to keep his eyes on his work—he had to fight the constant impulse to watch those passing trucks out there, to see if any Boche were heading this way. But if he looked at the road, he would spill the gas—and every drop of it was precious. Nor could he hasten the business up: he had to pour the stuff in with painstaking care.

When the pail was finally empty once more he heaved a sigh of relief. But not for long. Now came the most dangerous part of the stunt—the part which, unless he acted with lightning speed, must surely spell disaster for him.

He realized well enough that when he started the Bristol's engine, the Germans on the road, despite the roar of the trucks, would hear the thunderous detonations. But he had his plan. First he would make sure that everything was ready. Then he would start the motor. He would chance a take-off without warming up. The Jerries would be on the field as soon as they heard the noise, but by the time they arrived, Kirby was determined to be in the cockpit, streaking off the ground.

In short, everything depended on keeping the Germans out there oblivious of his presence until that motor burst into life.

With this in mind, Kirby took the time to prime the engine, flood her with gas. Then he seized the propeller, began pulling her through compression. Four revolutions—all set now. The big moment had arrived. The Mosquito went to his cockpit, reached for

the ignition switch to give her “contact.” He got the switch, turned it.

AND at that moment his ears were split by a blood-curdling yell which almost made him jump out of his skin.

It was Bremmer—Bremmer whom Kirby had all but forgotten, but who had suddenly come to. And, like all men who have become accustomed to being constantly on their guard, he was at once acutely aware of his surroundings, alert to everything. Bound, helpless to fight, he threw every atom of his power into his cry for help, a cry that would have roused the dead, and which the men in the passing trucks must certainly hear.

“*Hilfe! Hilfe!*” he screamed, and added a long stream of words in his native tongue.

For a split second Kirby was so absolutely startled that his muscles failed to function. The Mosquito, taken completely unawares by the yell right behind him, was shaking like a leaf.

But then his bewilderment gave way to rage. His face turned crimson, and his eyes blazed.

“Dirty skunk!” he muttered, through clenched teeth, and again that terrific left crashed out, and Bremmer slumped back into oblivion.

But the spy’s brief spell of consciousness had been enough. He had accomplished his purpose. And, to Kirby’s horror, shrill whistles began to sound on the road. There was a groaning of brakes, a sound of tires skidding to a halt. Trucks were stopping! Through the trees, Kirby could see the gray-clad figures clambering out of the lorries. He was caught!

And then a wave of reckless abandon swept the Mosquito.

“Try and get me, you square-headed sons!” he bellowed, defiantly. Crazy, he leaped once again for the Bristol’s propeller. He seized it, gathered all his strength for the one, final tug. Shouts rose in the trees before him. They were coming! Cursing, he pulled the big blade around, then jumped back to keep out of its arc.

The Bristol’s engine gave a series of deafening explosions. The propeller churned around furiously. But before Kirby could make for the cockpit the first of the Boche soldiers were pouring out of the trees—some half dozen of them. They were shouting at him, leveling their rifles. The Mosquito, eyes blazing, whipped out the Luger he had taken from Bremmer. He fired blindly, at point-blank range, even as his

antagonists were right upon him. Three of them dropped, and the others, somewhat daunted, fell back a few paces. Kirby, seizing his opportunity, rushed for his cockpit. Rifles began to crack, and bullets whistled about his ears. He ignored them, and in a leap was in his cockpit.

And then they came—came in a rushing, surging mob of gray. The whole wheatfield was swarming with Germans, who were surrounding the plane. Bremmer had evidently made it clear to them just what the situation was. They were not firing heavily, for fear of hitting their own comrade—which was the only factor that saved Kirby from instant death. But they were taking pot-shots at him, and the bullets were whining unhealthily close.

God, how could he take off? They were grabbing his plane now: a crowd of them had rushed up to the tail and were seizing it. Desperately, the Mosquito stood up in the cockpit, disregarding the fact that he was making a good target of himself. With bullets cracking all around him, he leaned back, until he could reach the observer’s cockpit, where Bremmer was huddled. The Mosquito got the flanking machine gun in his hands, noticed with a glance that it had a drum pretty near full of ammunition. Furiously, he swung it down on the men in the rear, jerked the trigger.

The gun blazed, spitting out its terrific stream of lead. At close range, it was literally right in the faces of those Boche. They were mowed down like flies. Relentlessly, Kirby flanked the gun around, scattering bullets all over the place. His face was covered with sweat, and he was panting for breath. But he clung to that gibbering gun, worked it with fiendish precision.

The Germans, despite their overwhelming numbers, were thrown into momentary confusion. They spread out a bit, though Kirby saw that they were trying to set up machine guns across the field. It was his chance now—or never!

Releasing the gun, which was smoking and giving forth the acrid stench of powder, he plopped down into his cockpit, and pulled the throttle out wide.

With a roar, the Bristol began to move, and Kirby kicked the rudder with all his might to taxi around so he could run down the length of the field. One of the machine guns the Germans had brought out suddenly opened up. They were not shooting at the cockpit of the plane now, for fear of hitting Bremmer. They were trying to cripple the ship’s engine. The Bristol went on, however, faster and faster, and the men in its path jumped hastily aside. Kirby opened the throttle to the

highest notch. The big ship rocked and swayed, and its tail began to lift. Kirby worked those controls like a demon.

And he made it! With a defiant rush, the Bristol swept off the ground, and in the next second it was climbing gracefully away from that infernal spot, leaving the crowd of Jerries staring after it helplessly.

At two thousand feet, Kirby leveled off. Then he drew his first breath. Dazedly, he realized what he had done. He had escaped, and was taking Bremmer with him!

And as he banked to the west and started back for the lines, Carn and Travis—who were always bound to meet him—suddenly swung in on either side of him. They had evidently fixed up those Jerry planes, and now, though it was all over but the shouting, they were with Kirby once more. All three waved with joyous excitement, and then Kirby led them homewards in their usual V-shaped formation.

And as they neared the lines, with Kirby realizing

that he had just about enough gas left to get him back, Bremmer, refusing to stay out of the picture long, stirred once more. Kirby sensed him moving about, and looked around. The Mosquito was happy enough now to speak cheerfully to the man who had made him go through all that hell. He cut the throttle.

He yelled, a bright smile beaming over his face. “What? You here again?”

Bremmer glanced at him tiredly. He was hardly the cold-blooded, nerveless fighter now. He was a beaten man—a captured spy.

But if his enemies thought he had no spark of sportsmanship in him, they were mistaken. For now, slowly, a faint smile came over his lips. And as Kirby cut the throttle once more, the spy raised his voice as loudly as he could and said, with stern officiousness: “Proceed straight across the lines, captain—to the drome.”

And Kirby, nodding his head, yelled his cheerful response: “O.K.!”

