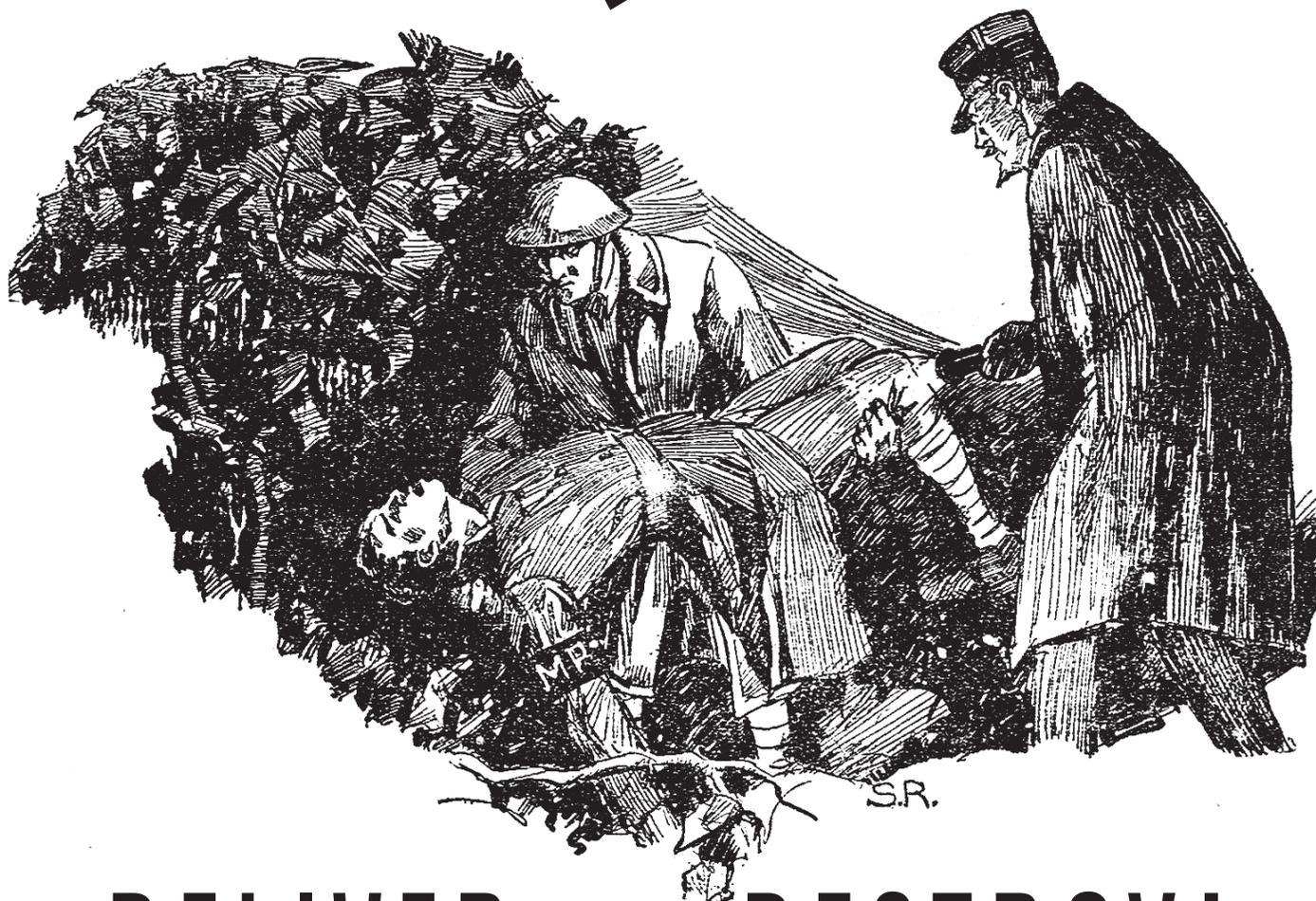


THE ADVENTURES OF  
*The* **THREE**   
**MOSQUITOES**™



# DELIVER OR DESTROY!

by RALPH OPPENHEIM

*That simple mission that Kirby was on suddenly turned into a seething cauldron of intrigue and mystery. Death and the sinister shadows of the Imperial Intelligence crossed his path, and there was the wily von Hertz who always did the unexpected.*

**“YOU MEAN TO SAY,”** Kirby, leader of the famous trio of airmen known as the “Three Mosquitoes,” whispered tensely, “that there might be a dictaphone right in this room, sir?”

Colonel Drake, of general staff, nodded slowly. “There’s no telling how far these tricky Boche spies will go. We can’t be too careful.”

The two men were alone, in the privacy of Colonel Drake’s office in the chateau where G.H.Q. was located. It was shortly after nine p.m., and Kirby had come here in response to a mysterious and unexpected summons. Now he sat opposite Colonel Drake at a big, flat-topped desk. And he was acutely conscious of the strange, tense atmosphere which pervaded the whole room. The shades at the French windows were drawn, the door locked. The single, naked electric bulb which hung from the ceiling, projected huge, distorted shadows of the two men upon the wall. And the stern-visaged colonel seemed nervously apprehensive, on his guard. His piercing gray eyes shifted furtively; he kept glancing about as if to make certain that no one was eavesdropping.

In short, everything here seemed to breathe of mystery and intrigue. And Kirby knew that there was something big in the air, something momentous.

“It’s a special mission, of course,” Colonel Drake was whispering now. “And I’m going to give you all the details in as few words as possible. As I said, we can’t be too careful—can’t take any chances of being overheard.” He spread out a map on the desk. “Instead of mentioning specific places, I shall, wherever possible, point them out to you on the map, and also try to convey facts to you by means of gestures. Listen carefully—be attentive to everything I say or do.”

And so, by speech and pantomime, the colonel explained to Kirby the nature of this special mission. And the gist of it all was this:

At the office of the war ministry in Paris, French and American war chiefs were now drawing up maps and papers which gave full details of future troop movements, positions, and plans for offensives. Naturally such documents were of paramount importance. And not only were they important to the Allies, who must use them as a guide, but also to the Germans, who would be able to get information from those papers which might very well turn the tide of the war in their favor. Every precaution had been taken to prevent German operatives from learning anything about the documents. But the ways of the Imperial

intelligence system were tricky—not often did they fail to ferret out any intrigue that was going on.

The documents would be ready tonight at exactly 11 p. m. They had to be transferred from the war ministry at Paris to G.H.Q. here at the Front. And the sooner they got here, the better.

The military chiefs at Paris had decided at once that an airplane was the best means of conveyance. It could deliver the documents in the swiftest possible time, and also, because it had the freedom which the sky affords, it was less apt to run into the obstacles which German spies might successfully put before any conveyance on the ground.

The main problem was to find an aviator suited to the important task. As in the case of most such enterprises, the chiefs wanted to entrust the whole mission to one man only—it was always safer, less apt to be detected. And this one man must not only be trustworthy in every sense of the word; he must also be a skilled and experienced flyer, and a man who could fight. It was deemed advisable to get one of the war birds from the Front—such a pilot would know the terrain where he would have to deliver the papers, and, still more important, know how to conduct himself through skies where night-flying Boche planes often appeared.

“I was entrusted to secure this pilot,” the colonel explained to Kirby. “And all these details were told to me by—” he whispered the name of a famous French general, a name which had already become legend—“at a secret conference at—” he signified the war ministry of Paris on the map. “After considering numerous pilots,” he went on, and now his piercing eyes studied the Mosquito shrewdly. “I picked on you, captain. You’re one of our best aces, you have guts, and you’ve done enough of this intelligence work to convince us that you can handle this most momentous assignment. Now here’s just what you’re to do.”

And, again using pantomime wherever possible, he gave Kirby his instructions. They were simple enough. Kirby was to fly to Paris, landing at Le Bourget Field, and his two comrades, Carn and Travis, would accompany him as escorts—though under no circumstances should he breathe a word to them about the purpose of the flight. They were to arrive at Le Bourget at 10:40, at which time a closed car with armed American and French secret service men—who knew nothing of the papers, but had their specific orders—would be on hand. After an exchange of countersigns, Kirby would enter the car and be driven

into the city, to the war ministry. His two comrades would wait for him at Le Bourget.

In the car, Kirby would remove his flying togs, beneath which he would be wearing the uniform of an M.P. sergeant. This would further insure him against suspicion, for many M.P.s were seen around the war office.

Colonel Drake told him just what to do once he entered the war building, and how he would make his exit through a door leading out on a different street, thus throwing off anyone who might be on his track. Here he would find the car again, and he'd be whisked back to Le Bourget. Then, with his comrades, he'd fly full speed to the Front, landing at a secret field near here, where Colonel Drake would be waiting for him. It all sounded so easy, so ridiculously tame, that Kirby could not help smiling. "I must say it looks like a cinch, sir," he remarked. "Why, just flying across the lines is far more exciting."

"Possibly," the colonel conceded. "It's quite true that, considering all the precautions we're taking, this ought to be one of the easiest and most peaceful assignments you've ever been given. But," a grim smile flickered across his lips, "on the other hand, it may turn out to be your most perilous and nerve-wracking experience! Either it will be child's play or," he spat out the word, "hell!" Then he lowered his voice to such an extent that Kirby had to lean forward and strain his ears to catch the words.

"I must warn you that a notorious German spy has been operating in Paris of late, a man named von Hertz, who is called 'The Hawk' because of his uncanny knack of finding things out. And if Von Hertz knows that you're after those papers—" he made a grimace more eloquent than words. Then, suddenly, he seemed stirred to action. He glanced at his wrist watch. "Seventeen past nine! You must leave at once—you've got an hour's flight before you, at least." He seized a bundle from beneath his desk, handed it to Kirby. "Here's the M.P. uniform. Now remember," he warned ominously, "not a word to anyone. And if you should find yourself in a jam, if you see that the jig is up, destroy those papers! Don't let the Boche get them! In all events, arm yourself well and," he spaced the last words slowly, so that they came like the blows of a hammer, "be on your guard from the moment you leave this room!"

The grim warning had its effect. It brought Kirby back with a shock to the seriousness, the bigness of the situation. Instinctively his hand went beneath his

tunic, felt the cold but reassuring steel of the Colt automatic which was holstered there. Then, tucking the M.P. uniform beneath an arm, he stiffened, made a crisp salute.

"I'm off, sir!" he said, cheerfully. "And I'll be back with the—the bacon!" The colonel nodded from his desk, wished him godspeed by a gesture of his hand. Kirby unlocked the door, opened it, and carrying his bundle with him, went out.

THE CORRIDOR OUTSIDE was dimly lit and empty, and the shadows in it wrought havoc with Kirby's imagination—they seemed to take on the forms of crouching men. With nervous haste, he walked to the doorway of the building, conscious of a strange, weak feeling in his back—a feeling that someone might be behind him, watching, following, though Kirby could see nobody. He was grateful when he came to the door, where two big Yankee sentries held guard. They presented arms as he passed them and stepped out into the brisk night air. A full moon and a myriad of stars glowed in the sky overhead, an ideal flying night.

There were sentries all about the grounds, and the sight of them reassured Kirby, made him feel more confident and secure. He walked down the little gravel pathway which led to a road, where he found the waiting motorcycle.

"Snap into it!" he ordered the sergeant-driver tersely. "Get me back to the drome toot sweet!" He swung into the side car, putting the M.P. uniform on his lap. "Let's go!"

"Righto, sir!" replied the sergeant, and in the next moment the motor cycle went roaring down the dusty road.

They reached the drome at about nine-thirty. And Kirby's two comrades were waiting for him. They met his motor cycle when it came to a stop on the tarmac. Nor could either one conceal his keen curiosity.

"Well," drawled the lanky Travis, eldest and wisest of the Three Mosquitoes, "what did the brass-hats at G.H.Q. have to say to you?"

"Did they wash you out or give you a D.S.C.?" "Shorty" Carn wanted to know.

Kirby's tone was curt. "Cut the humor! Get ready to take off at once!" He lowered his voice, so that only they might hear him. "We're flying to Paris."

At this announcement, both the others let out a whoop of joy.

"Paree!" exclaimed Shorty, gleefully. "Boy, if that isn't——"

“Shut up, you damn fool!” Kirby snapped at him, furiously. “Don’t be telling the whole world about it! As far as everybody else is concerned—even the Old Man, if he should come snooping around—where we’re going is nobody’s business. Get that! Now,” he ordered hastily, “you guys get the ships ready. See that the tanks are full, and take plenty of ammunition. I’ll be right back.” And, leaving them somewhat surprised by his terse, officious manner, he rushed off to the barracks to slip on his M.P. uniform and his flying togs.

It was just 9:40 when they took off by the light of the moon. The three trim, night-flying Spads roared out across the field, sparks streaming from their exhausts. They swept into the air like graceful dragon flies, and climbed swiftly towards the starlit sky. At five thousand feet they leveled off, and got into their usual V formation. Carn and Travis flanking Kirby on either side, a little to the rear, and led by Kirby, all three planes sped forward—bound for Paris!

The flight to the French capital was quite uneventful; clear sailing through a peaceful, star-illuminated sky, though Kirby was tense and alert throughout the trip, constantly on the lookout for enemy planes. The Mosquitoes made excellent time. In less than three-quarters of an hour the lights of Paris loomed out of the dark landscape below and ahead—brilliant lights, for Paris, the gay, carnival city, refused to darken her streets even in these times of airraids.

Kirby had no difficulty in locating the landing T which marked Le Bourget Field, just on the outskirts of the French capital. But as he and his comrades were coming right overhead of the great airdrome, a glance at his luminous wrist watch told Kirby that it was only 10:30! Their orders were to arrive at Le Bourget at exactly 10:40, and he was determined to obey those orders to the dot. Signaling his comrades, whose goggled faces he could see clearly in the glow from the tiny, hooded lights of their instrument boards, he began to circle high over the field, to kill time. They followed, kept formation perfectly.

Impatiently, Kirby kept circling, anxious to go down and get his job finished with. At last, at 10:38, he decided to descend. That would give them two minutes to land and get out of their ships.

Again he waved to his comrades, and they corkscrewed down to lower altitudes. Kirby pulled out his Very pistol, fired three white rockets. That was the signal. Instantly the floodlights of the drome below made the big field as light as day. Kirby and his

comrades circled into the wind, cut their throttles, and went gliding down.

All landed perfectly, and taxied right up before the big headquarters building, according to instructions. A swarm of mechanics rushed out to meet them, seized their planes. Kirby cut his switch, pushed up his goggles, and, unstrapping himself, climbed out. There were men all about: mechanics, soldiers, pilots. Engines roared and coughed in the night. Surrounded by all this activity, Kirby felt quite safe.

At once he looked about for the car which was to meet him. No sign of it! He glanced again at his watch. It was 10:40 now, but he might be a little fast, or the car might have been held up by traffic.

While he waited, he took his two comrades, into a hushed conference.

“Now fellers,” he said, “the idea is this. You’ll wait right here, and keep an eye on those ships—don’t let anyone but the mechanics get near them. Have fuel put in the tanks, and get water and oil. And have them all revved up for a take-off by 11:30, though I may be later. When I come back—you’ll see me drive up in a car—don’t ask any questions. The minute you see me, hop into your planes. We take right off—and fly full throttle. Get that?”

“It couldn’t be clearer,” Shorty Carn conceded. “But, for cripe’s sake, what is this all about?”

“No questions!” Kirby snapped. “Just do as I say and—” He broke off, starting as his eye caught the approaching headlights of an auto. The car was just passing through the gate from the road outside, and was swinging onto the field. There was a squeaking of brakes, and the machine, an inconspicuous looking sedan, came to a stop close to the headquarters’ building and the three planes. Kirby, after a few more whispered words to his comrades, hurried over to the auto. Two men climbed out of it. He went up to them. In the glow of a near-by lamp they all observed each other keenly.

One of the two men, a big, broad-shouldered fellow with a serious, intensive-looking face which at once stamped him as a member of the intelligence corps, wore the uniform of an American captain. The other, a smaller man with a mustache and a goatee, was dressed as a French lieutenant. The chauffeur of the car, who remained at the wheel, his engine idling, wore civilian clothes. But Kirby knew this was only to keep suspicion from the car, this man was also a soldier.

Kirby stepped closer to the two officers, who were waiting for him to speak. After glancing about, making

sure that no one was near—though his two comrades, over by the planes, were peering this way—Kirby whispered the password.

“Lafayette.”

They nodded. The Frenchman gave his countersign.

“*C’est la guerre!*”

The American captain gave his, which was also in the nature of an introduction.

“My name’s Baker and this is Lieutenant Marquet.”

Kirby nodded. Then all three men drew papers from their pockets, exchanged them. The lamp near by wasn’t bright enough for reading, and the man named Captain Baker produced a flashlight. They examined each other’s papers, and everything was in order.

“I guess everything’s O.K.,” whispered Captain Baker. “Hop right in.” However, he preceded Kirby into the machine. Kirby climbed after him, sat down beside him. The interior of the car was dark and cramped. It was one of those old boxlike limousines with hard seats and creaky springs. The French lieutenant climbed in last, and the Mosquito sat between the two intelligence officers. Captain Baker rapped on the glass partition which separated them from the chauffeur.

“*Tres bien, Pierre,*” he said. “*Alles!*”

THE DRIVER NODDED, and the meshing of gears sounded. The old car lurched forward, turned around, and moved to the gate. A word with the sentries, and it passed. They drove down the road through the little squat village of Le Bourget, and then they were speeding towards Paris, springs squeaking, motor rattling, and Kirby and his escorts being bounced about unpleasantly. There was plenty of traffic on the road; cars and lorries passed them frequently.

The three men in the rear were all silent. Kirby, who had orders to be reticent, didn’t know what to say, so said nothing. However, as soon as they had proceeded a ways, he began to remove his flying togs. The two men at his sides helped him. He wriggled out of the teddy-bear, handed it over with his helmet and goggles to Captain Baker. He was an M.P. now—the band on his sleeve bore the well-known letters.

The silence was becoming embarrassing. The car kept bounding onwards, bumping over the road in its surprising speed. At last Captain Baker, as if desirous of starting a conversation, asked cheerfully, “Well, captain, what news from the Front?”

“None,” Kirby replied. “Things are rather dead just now. What’s the news here?”

“Plenty,” the other replied, and Kirby was flattered

by his confidence. “We have our hands full these days. Paris is just a hot-bed of spies. The lieutenant here and myself have caught quite a few of them, but there’s one guy we’ve never been able to lay our hands on.”

“Who’s that?” Kirby queried.

“Von Hertz.” The Mosquito started at the name.

“Guess you’ve heard of him. Boy, that fellow sure is a bag of tricks! He’s pulled off more stunts than anybody else—and I’ve never seen him fail yet! *N’est-ce pas,* Lieutenant Marquet?”

“*Oui!*” replied the Frenchman, with vehemence.

“He ees one *diable!*”

“A devil and a jokester!” Captain Baker added.

“He has a rare sense of humor—always like to put one over on us. His motto seems to be: ‘Always do the unexpected.’ Some day,” his voice filled with grim determination, “we’re going to catch him, but I’ll bet he’ll go to the firing squad with a laugh on his lips!” He chuckled, then added in a different tone, “I don’t know what this game of ours is tonight—Lieutenant Marquet and I merely have orders to see that nothing happens to you—but whatever it’s about, I’m hoping this Von Hertz fellow isn’t interested in it!”

Kirby shifted a bit uneasily. “So am I,” he confessed.

In fifteen minutes they reached the noisy metropolis, and were flowing along with the lanes of traffic through the boulevards. Though it was after eleven, Paris was still wide awake. The cafes on the streets were crowded, mostly with soldiers and sailors of all nationalities, and their lady friends. Taxies, busses, trucks, and ambulances filled the avenues. Horns tooted, brakes squeaked, and gendarmes cursed as they directed traffic.

They crossed the Seine and swept onto the Boulevard St. Germain. Down the quaint avenue with its pretty trees they sped. And presently they drew up before the entrance of a large, impressive-looking building, a building guarded by many sentries. It was the *Ministre de la Guerre*.

Before the car had come to a stop, Captain Baker whispered to Kirby, “We’re meeting you around the block, you know.”

“Yes, but be sure you’re there when I come out,” Kirby insisted.

“Don’t worry, we’ll be there!” Captain Baker promised, and the Frenchman joined in agreement. “And if anyone tries to stop us we’re ready for ‘em!”

Kirby wriggled past Lieutenant Marquet, climbed out. And again, the moment he left that car, he had the strange feeling of being watched. But he must not act

suspicious; he must remember that he was just an M.P. now, an M.P. sauntering into the war office. He walked up the steps, at the top of which he was halted by two businesslike *poilus* who made a gate of their rifles.

“Lafayette! Kirby whispered. At once their rifles snapped back to their shoulders, and Kirby passed. He opened the door and entered a huge corridor.

An American officer, a major, who was evidently waiting for Kirby, rose from a lounge at the side of the corridor. He came over, confronted the Mosquito. Again Kirby gave his password. The major nodded, then led him into an anteroom. There he examined Kirby’s credentials, made him sign his name so that he could compare it with the signature on the papers, and asked him several tricky questions, for which Kirby had already been prepared by Colonel Drake.

At last, evidently satisfied, the major led him out again, and up a flight of wide stairs. At the top of the stairway a guard opened a door. The major stood aside, motioned Kirby to walk in. He did.

He found himself in an enormous, high-ceilinged room, brilliantly lighted. In the center was a long table, and at this table sat some twenty men. One glance at those twenty men caused Kirby to draw himself up as stiff as a ramrod, and snap out a salute such as was seldom seen outside of West Point. He was more than awed. Not a one of these men whose name wasn’t known all over the world, whose picture he hadn’t seen in the newspapers—French and American war chiefs. And at the head of the table sat a small, wiry Frenchman with a grizzled, battle-scarred face and a bristling white mustache. He was the famous French general whom Colonel Drake had mentioned previously.

The major who had brought Kirby in said a few words, and the men at the table nodded. Then a literal barrage of questions came at the Mosquito from all parts of the table; every man who could speak English voiced some terse inquiry. They were sparing no pains to make sure that he was the right person. It was a grilling cross-examination they gave him. He felt almost like a criminal on the witness stand.

When, after several minutes of questioning, examining, and whispered conferences, they were finally satisfied, the little French general at the head of the table jumped up, signaled Kirby to follow him. He led the Mosquito into another and smaller room. There were no windows here, and Kirby was quite certain that the walls were soundproof.

The great French general surveyed the Mosquito for

a moment, with shrewd, foxlike eyes. He was a high-strung little man, always moving about, and every moment was quick and agile. Quite suddenly his hand darted beneath his tunic, pulled out a packet wrapped in oil-cloth. He held it out.

“Guard this,” he said, and his English was perfect, “as you would your life. It means much to us.”

That was all. Kirby took the packet, fingered it as though it were some priceless gem, and then carefully shoved it into an inside pocket, where he could feel it against his chest. He saluted, and the general returned the salute. Then the Frenchman opened the door for Kirby and walked out with him.

The general barked out a command, and two *poilus* appeared. The general accompanied them as they escorted Kirby out of the big room, down the stairway, and around to a side exit of the building. At the doorway not a word was spoken, nor a salute made. Kirby simply walked out.

All this had happened so swiftly that the Mosquito had no time to think about it. But now, as he stepped out of the door, he found himself gripped by a cold apprehension and nervousness such as he had never felt before. The papers were on his person. He could feel them, feel his heart beating beneath them! God, but he felt that everybody could see them, could look right through his uniform and spot that important packet.

He steeled his nerves, passed the guards at the door. There were no steps here; he was out on the side-street. He looked towards the curb. There was the car—it was waiting. He walked towards it, nerves strained taut, eyes shifting from right to left. He jumped at the sight of a passerby, and again imagined he saw crouching, watching figures. Damn it, but he must stop this childish worrying.

He reached the car. The door opened and in the light of a street lamp he saw his two escorts, Lieutenant Marquet and Captain Baker. They looked serious, alert. Quickly they helped him in.

As he sat down between them he saw that both men were holding revolvers in their laps. The automatics gleamed in the darkness.

“We’re taking no chances,” Captain Baker whispered. “We were ordered to be strictly on our guard during the return trip.”

This preparedness made Kirby feel relieved. He drew forth his own Colt automatic, laid it before him.

“Let’s go!” he whispered. “And I hope we can make it fast!”

Captain Baker nodded. He signaled the chauffeur, and the car started. They were off. They swept onto the Boulevard St. Germain, and were once more flowing with the streams of traffic.

Kirby found himself unable to sit still. No longer did the crowded boulevards, the scores of cars about, the sight of gendarmes, soldiers, sailors, make him feel secure. He could not fight down the awful premonition which chilled him, a premonition that something was surely going to happen. Too well did he remember the stories he had heard or read of daring hold-ups or attacks by spies right in the most crowded districts. A few shots fired—confusion—and by the time anybody knew what was going on the spies had escaped and left their dead enemies behind.

His heart galloped when they had to stop with traffic, and some car happened to pull up alongside of them. Many of those cars looked suspicious; had small windows and very dark interiors. But usually, when Kirby strained his eyes to peer into them, he merely saw a man and woman locked in embrace.

Lieutenant Marquet and Captain Baker also seemed tense now, perhaps because they had been warned that this return trip was dangerous, perhaps because Kirby's excitement was contagious. They gripped their revolvers tightly, sat silent.

"You have my flying togs?" Kirby whispered to Captain Baker.

"Yes," came the reply. "But you don't want to put 'em on now, in the crowded city, do you?"

"No, I'm supposed to slip into them when we get near Le Bourget."

THEY RODE ON, recrossed the Seine, and swept through north Paris. It seemed hours before they were finally getting out of the congested part of the city, though Kirby's wrist watch told him it was only 11:14—and he didn't have to be at Le Bourget until after 11:30. Nevertheless he whispered to Captain Baker. "Traffic's getting thinner now. Can't we put on more speed?"

Captain Baker nodded assent, told the chauffeur. The engine of the car roared in shrill protest, and the machine went bounding forwards, careening perilously around curves, bouncing over bumps. Out of the city now. Out on the open road, where it was dark because there were no street lamps, and where the traffic kept lessening. And now Kirby's tense excitement rose to the highest pitch. In the city, in all those crowds, there had been a reasonable amount

of safety, but here, on the open road, anything might happen. Every car which passed made him jump.

But the number of passing cars kept diminishing. Presently the road seemed actually deserted, theirs seemed to be the only car on the highway. Kirby wondered at this for a moment—there had been plenty of traffic before. But perhaps at this late hour there never was traffic.

On they sped, engine rattling, and the headlights keeping a fantastic aura in front of them. The chauffeur at the wheel sat like one apart, performing his duties mechanically. The three men in the rear were silent. And all the time Kirby was conscious of that packet against his chest. His hand gripped the Colt automatic tightly, ready to bring it into play. He glanced from time to time out of the tiny rear window—nothing coming that way. He looked out of the side windows. There were few houses to be seen; widely-scattered little buildings which squatted in the moonlight. And there were heavy bushes lining either side of the road. What an excellent place for an ambush! If there should be men waiting there, armed men ready to stop this car with a hail of lead—

He struggled to thrust the thought from his mind. Ridiculous! Nothing was going to happen. Everything was going like clock-work, according to schedule. Most likely the spies knew nothing about these papers—the papers he felt close to his chest.

"This von Hertz guy," he said suddenly, anxious to break the tense silence, "have either of you two fellows ever seen him?"

"Indeed!" Captain Baker answered. "Yes, I've seen him more than once—and pretty close too, though I've never managed to clash with him."

"I too have seen heem!" The Frenchman chimed in, coming out of his somber silence at last. "Nevair, though, have I had ze fight wiz heem!"

"What's he look like?" Kirby asked, curiously.

"Well, now, that's a hard one," Captain Baker said. "It's difficult for me to describe him. They call him the Hawk—you know, but he doesn't remind you of a hawk at all. He's a rather big fellow, powerfully built, and not at all bad-looking. Pleasant face, though rather studious. In fact, I guess the best way to describe him is to say that he bears a close resemblance," his tone did not change a bit, he went on in the same, casual manner, "a most striking resemblance—to me!"

Kirby turned to stare at him with puzzled bewilderment.

And he stared right into the dark muzzle of Captain

Baker's automatic, which was pointed unwaveringly at his head.

The cold gleam of that revolver seemed to enter Kirby's spine and go tingling up and down electrically. Confusedly, the Mosquito's eyes went to the Frenchman on his other side—only to find another revolver staring him in the face! He glanced frantically towards the chauffeur. The man sat immobile at the wheel, driving on serenely, and his broad back seemed to express the fact that he knew what was going on and was in full accord with it.

An icy wire seemed to tighten around the Mosquito's heart, and the blood drained from his face. He was absolutely thunderstruck by this unexpected development. But almost at once the reckless fighter in him rose to the surface. There was an automatic in his hand—he was still armed. With a savage oath, he made to bring it into play. But instantly both men beside him reached out, grabbed his wrist with their overwhelming strength, and pulled the revolver away from him.

"Now," came the voice—the murderously cool voice of Friedrich von Hertz, alias Captain Baker—"one false move, my friend, means death. Remember that. Sit still, don't try to make any resistance, otherwise," he flourished his revolver, "I pull this trigger."

There was no mistaking the earnestness of his tone, and Kirby knew at once that the other would just as soon shoot him as not. Despair seized the Mosquito, as he realized how utterly cornered he was. He was helpless, caught like a rat in a trap! Here, on a deserted road, with not a soul in sight, he was wedged in a speeding car between two Boche spies who could easily send a bullet through him without attracting attention. And in spite of his terrible predicament he could not help admiring the ingenious sagacity of this man von Hertz. How in the world the wily spy had worked this amazing game he could not guess, but von Hertz had worked it so cleverly—even to the extent of talking about himself, which had completely insured him, as Captain Baker, against suspicion—that Kirby had been wholly tricked.

"Surprised, my friend?" von Hertz was saying, in a tone of mingled amusement and mockery. "Well, you shouldn't be! Didn't I warn you, tell you my motto? 'Always do the unexpected!' Now you see how it works!"

He chuckled, and the pseudo-French lieutenant, really a lieutenant of von Hertz's, named Schmidt, laughed with him in scornful contempt. Kirby burned

under their taunting mockery, and a wild, futile rage welled in him. God, if only he could hurl himself on them, smash in their grinning faces! But he knew well that if he moved those two menacing revolvers would blaze in his face. However, he couldn't suppress the hot torrent of words which rose to his lips.

"You dirty, lousy spies!" he spat savagely. "You yellow-livered rats! You'll be frying in your own grease soon, you—"

The spy named Schmidt growled with anger, moved towards Kirby threateningly. But von Hertz, still chuckling, stopped him.

"*Lass ihn gehen,*" he warned. Then he remarked, casually, "There's an old adage about sticks and stones and names. All of which is aside from the point. We can't waste any more time. Doubtless my friend is aware of our business." His tone literally dripped with sarcasm now. "Unless I am very much mistaken—and I never am—I believe he has some papers on his person. And, to quote a somewhat trite and time-worn saying so popular in your delightful melodramas: 'Gimme them there papers!'" And another flourish of his revolver took all the humor out of the words, made them grim, real!

A feeling of panic gripped the Mosquito. He had known this was coming, known that it was inevitable, yet somehow he had clung to the crazy hope that it would not come after all. Frantically, like a cornered animal, he looked all about, looked for some loophole, some means of escape. The car was still speeding along; the road was dark and deserted—not even a house in sight now. He tried to use his wits, tried to feign ignorance.

"Papers?" he echoed, while his heart beat against them. "What papers?"

In the darkness he saw von Hertz shake his head. "As an actor," the spy said, "you're an excellent aviator." Then suddenly he barked out, in a crisp, harsh voice, "Enough of this delay! I'll spare you the humiliation of being searched. That paper is somewhere on your person, and we'll strip you naked if we have to! Now I'll give you just three counts to hand it over willingly." He paused, then rasped out: "One!"

Kirby felt utterly frustrated, and his face filled with anguish. Through his whirling brain raced the words of the famous French General: "Guard this as you would your life! It means much to us!" Yet, even if he gave his life to these two grim spies, he'd lose the papers! And if—

"Two!" von Hertz counted, relentlessly.

Kirby shifted. Now he thought of Colonel Drake, telling him sternly: "If you should find yourself in a jam, destroy those papers!" God, how could he destroy them? Even if he managed to tear them in two, it would do no good—von Hertz would simply put them together again.

The German was pausing before giving the final count. He was giving Kirby a last chance. And the Mosquito, tortured by anguish and despair, decided that he might as well give those papers over. These men would get them anyway. And if he yielded to their demands, acted submissive, resigned, there was a chance—a fleeting chance at least—that they would think him a gutless coward, and would relax their vigilance a bit. Then, if he could catch them off their guard, snatch those documents back, escape——

"Three!" von Hertz snapped, and moved towards Kirby.

"ALL RIGHT," the Mosquito said, bitterly. "You win!" Slowly he reached beneath his tunic. The two Germans watched him keenly, to ascertain that he wouldn't make a false move. He drew out the oil-cloth packet. Von Hertz snatched it greedily, and at once barked out an order to Schmidt. The latter took on the full burden of covering the prisoner, while von Hertz drew out a flashlight, and in its glow opened the packet. The wily spy wanted to make sure he had the right papers.

Only one revolver menaced Kirby now—only one man held him. Reckless beyond words, determined to take the first chance he saw, the Mosquito decided to act. With furtive eyes, he measured the little man who covered him. If, somehow, he could grab Schmidt's revolver, bring it into play before Schmidt, von Hertz, or the chauffeur had time to realize what had happened.

Von Hertz, glancing over the papers, gave an exclamation of triumph and joy. Cool and unemotional as the spy was, he could not conceal the elation he felt as he found in his possession the coveted documents—the documents which meant so much to his Fatherland.

But while von Hertz was absorbed in those papers, Kirby, his eyes on Schmidt, was measuring his distance, judging his time. The Mosquito's muscles tensed.

Like a tiger he lunged at Schmidt, and his hand darted out. Quick as a flash he had the wrist which held the revolver, was wresting the gun away with that superhuman strength which sometimes comes to desperate men. Schmidt, struggling, gave a loud

outcry, but already Kirby was getting that gun in his hand, fighting to bring it into play. God, just a second, a second more——

There came a sharp blow on his head which sang in his ears and made a myriad of stars whirl dizzily before him. Weakly, all but knocked cold, he sagged in his seat. And in his dazed ears he heard the calm voice of von Hertz; von Hertz who had acted swiftly with the butt of his revolver.

"One more trick like that, my friend," warned the Hawk, while Schmidt, having recovered his gun, again brought it to bear on Kirby, "and I won't show any such mercy. As a matter of fact," he went on thoughtfully. "I'm debating as to whether it wouldn't be advisable to kill you and be done with it. I've gone to the limit to get these papers, and one more life means little!"

And Kirby, his head reeling, his last hope crushed out of him, slumped in his seat resignedly. It was no use! He was beaten! There was no way he could fight these wary spies. His strength was gone, his spirit broken.

Carefully, von Hertz refolded the packet, shoved it away, and once more pointed his revolver at Kirby. The old car sped onwards, its chauffeur still sitting placidly at the wheel, as if serenely oblivious of the drama which was being enacted behind him, in the cramped interior. Dumbly, futilely, Kirby wondered where they were going anyway. Not to Le Bourget—that was sure!

Von Hertz seemed to be lost in thought now, brooding over some plan. At length, as if coming to a decision, he turned to Kirby once more.

"Sorry to trouble you again," he said, in that same tone of cutting irony, "but now I must ask you to hand over all your papers, letters, and whatever other articles you have on your person."

Kirby looked at him miserably, and again the gleam of von Hertz's menacing revolver chilled him.

"Can't you let me keep my personal stuff?" he asked, bitterly. "What good will it do you?"

Von Hertz seemed to resent the question. "I'm not here to make explanations!" he snapped, with irritated impatience, and Schmidt, his yes-man, growled in agreement. "Now hand over those things," the Hawk commanded, "and be quick about it! You're making me more and more anxious to pull this trigger."

Resignedly Kirby obeyed, handed over his possessions. Nor was von Hertz satisfied until he had taken every last article—even Kirby's wrist watch.

Pocketing the stuff, the Hawk suddenly began

glancing out of the windows of the car, though he was careful to keep his prisoner covered all the while. Keenly, he scanned the shadowy landscape which sped past. Nothing in sight. He started speaking rapidly to Schmidt, in German, and the latter replied. Kirby, not knowing the language, could not follow their conversation, but suddenly he caught a familiar word. *Todt!* Cold horror gripped him. *Todt* meant death! Good God, they were debating as to whether or not they should kill him. And he could only sit here helplessly, waiting for them to decide his fate.

The Mosquito was no coward, but there was something so horrible about these two men discussing his fate as coolly as if he were some pig whose slaughter they were considering, that he felt sick with terror. For the first time in his career as a reckless fighter, he found his knees actually trembling. Lord, if only he could fight, put up some kind of a scrap, he wouldn't mind taking it! It was hell to just sit here at their mercy. Yet what could he do? They had him cold, trapped; a mere whim on von Hertz's part would give him either life or death. And he was all the more helpless because his head was still splitting from the blow von Hertz had dealt him previously.

Suddenly the conversation between the two spies was ended. Kirby waited, his heart thumping, his breath strangely weak. He saw von Hertz lean forward, rap on the chauffeur's window, and signal the man. The car began to slow down. It pulled over to the side of the road. With a squealing of brakes and of tires skidding against the dirt, it came to a stop. Kirby, gripped by cold suspense, wondered fearfully what would happen now. The chauffeur was staying at the wheel, keeping his motor going, but in contrast to the racket the car had been making as it bounded along, everything seemed strangely silent now.

Quietly, von Hertz reached down to the seat beside him, fished up something. In the darkness, Kirby was just able to make out what it was. It was a coil of rope.

"Now, my friend," the Hawk warned Kirby, "if you know what is good for you, you will relax—submit peacefully. I am in a hurry, and there must be no more delays."

Kirby said nothing. But he did not struggle when von Hertz, with an adeptness which could only have been acquired from experience, began to bind him. At first the Hawk worked in the darkness, again trusting Schmidt to keep Kirby covered. However, when the Mosquito's hands were tied securely behind him, Schmidt put down his gun and held a flashlight over

the proceedings. Von Hertz, not at all hampered by the close quarters of the car, kept working expertly. He pulled his knots mercilessly tight, and Kirby grunted with pain as the ropes cut through his clothing. When the spy was finished, the Mosquito was bound hand and foot, trussed up like an Egyptian mummy. He could not move. The ropes were so tight that it even hurt him to breathe.

Von Hertz again glanced out of the windows of the car. He seemed satisfied, and barked out a command. The chauffeur of the car, leaving his motor running, climbed out of his seat, walked around to the rear and opened the door. He was a big fellow, with a surly, unshaven face.

Von Hertz now jumped out to the road himself. Schmidt, on the other side of Kirby, waited in his seat, revolver in hand once more. Von Hertz and the chauffeur seized Kirby as if he were a huge bundle and lifted him out. Schmidt followed, holding a lighted flashlight. For a moment the spies paused next to the car, looking all about furtively. Not a sign of anything. The road was dark and deserted.

Von Hertz gave another command, and Kirby, unable to move or struggle, was carried off the road, into the dense bushes. Schmidt lit the way with his flash. Von Hertz and the chauffeur, bearing their human bundle, threshed their way through the foliage until they were several yards from the road. Then, none too gently, they deposited the Mosquito in the midst of a thick mass of brush. Brambles cut into Kirby, twigs scratched him, and the dew on the ground seeped through his clothing, chilling him to the very marrow. Helplessly, he lay there, a stricken look on his face, a look which he tried in vain to change to a sullen scowl.

"Unfortunately," von Hertz said, "you will have to remain in this uncomfortable position for awhile. Perhaps someone will find you tomorrow morning. If not," he shrugged, "tough luck. At any rate, we shall bid you fond farewell now."

The thought of being left to rot in this forsaken place, helplessly shackled, while von Hertz calmly made off with those papers, was too much for Kirby. In a sudden frenzy of desperation and rage, he strove with all his might to struggle in his bonds, but as a result the ropes only seared into his flesh. The agony of it spurred him to wilder fury.

"You dirty skunk!" he burst out, hoarsely. "You'll pay for this." Again he tried to struggle. His face turned livid; veins swelled on his temples. "Damn you to hell!"

he shrieked, with shrill hysteria. "If I ever get my hands on you——"

Von Hertz listened to this outburst with calm amusement. Schmidt, however, kicked at Kirby viciously, while the chauffeur swore.

"Why not kill this yelping swine and be done with him?" Schmidt asked, in German. And, in cruel anticipation, he flourished his revolver. "Let me send a bullet through his brain."

Von Hertz shook his head, and then leaned over Kirby, whose livid face was revealed in the glow of the chauffeur's flashlight.

"My friend's voice is unduly loud," observed the Hawk, critically. "With such lungs he might rouse the dead." And he pulled out a handkerchief, started rolling it up into a ball.

"No you don't, damn you!" Kirby shrieked wildly, and writhed like an animal in a trap, tried to turn his head away. But von Hertz roughly stuffed the handkerchief in his mouth, crammed it down his throat. The Mosquito's voice was completely stifled, and he choked on the gag, which von Hertz made secure with another handkerchief.

The Hawk then turned to his two accomplices, barked out another order. Immediately they marched off through the bushes. Von Hertz lingered to take a last look at his prisoner, who writhed mutely at his feet.

"*Au revoir*, my friend!" the Hawk said cheerfully. "Hereafter, stick to your flying, and don't try to match wits with von Hertz, of Imperial intelligence. You can't win! I'll always do the unexpected!" And so saying, he turned on his heel, and departed.

KIRBY, LEFT SQUIRMING in the pitch darkness, heard the Hawk threshing his way through the bushes, heard the footsteps of the three spies on the road. The Mosquito, realizing that in another moment they'd be gone, felt that he'd go mad. Wildly, he renewed his struggles to break free, ignoring the excruciating pain of those ropes. His body writhed and lurched, and his powerful muscles expanded, tried vainly to burst the bonds which held him. He became a mass of sweat, and the gag in his mouth choked him until he thought he'd suffocate.

The sound of a slamming door came from the car out on the road. They were going! Helplessly, he listened to the crunch of shifting gears. Helplessly, he heard the car start, roaring in low speed. The gears meshed into second and then, more faintly, went into

high. Slowly but inexorably, the sound of the motor car died out in the still night.

Von Hertz and the papers were gone!

And Kirby lay powerless in a dense mass of bushes near a desolate road, a handkerchief stuffed in his mouth which stifled the wild, convulsive sobs that rose in his throat.

So he had failed, failed horribly! He had not lived up to the faith which G.H.Q. and the war ministry had placed in him. Like a true soldier, he blamed only himself, cursed himself for a thick headed fool. A score of *ifs* loomed before his mind like demons, tortured him cruelly. If only he had remembered Colonel Drake's warning to be on his guard at all times. If only he had taken more pains to identify the men in that car. If only he had acted quicker, used his gun before they could stop him. If——

All this time emotions alone had controlled him as he lay there sobbing in the dark bushes. But now, when these emotions were spent, his keen mind suddenly awakened once more, began to fasten on things tentatively. What would be von Hertz's next move? Having those precious papers, what would the Hawk do with them?

Try to take them across the lines, of course. But how? Of late the Allies had been maintaining such rigid vigilance that it was little less than a miracle for a spy to succeed in slipping back into German territory. True, von Hertz seemed to have a genius for doing the impossible, but even so Kirby didn't see how the Hawk could manage it. Yet, von Hertz must be confident of accomplishing a quick getaway, else he would have killed Kirby instead of giving the Mosquito the slightest chance of breaking free and being thus enabled to spread the alarm. Why, the Hawk had even admitted that by tomorrow Kirby would probably be found by some one.

And what about the men who were really supposed to have called for Kirby in that car, the real Captain Baker and Lieutenant Marquet, and the chauffeur, whom von Hertz and his accomplices had evidently been impersonating. Unless they had been killed, those men were doubtless being held prisoners somewhere, and one or more of them might get away, though von Hertz must have taken ample precautions in that direction. Probably not much hope there. But—a warm surge of affection suddenly went through Kirby—there were still his two comrades, waiting for him at Le Bourget! Carn and Travis were no fools. If they missed Kirby to-night, if he did not show up

within a reasonable time, they would certainly raise a rumpus that would lead to an immediate investigation. The war ministry would hear of it. They would be combing every inch of ground, throwing a cordon around all France to ensnare the spies.

Had the wily von Hertz, thorough Teuton that he was, neglected to consider those other two Mosquitoes? Or——

Like a thunderbolt, the thing came to Kirby, and his heart stopped. Good God, could it be that von Hertz——

It seemed preposterous, ridiculously impossible. Yet, the more he thought of it, the more convinced Kirby was that it was true. Otherwise, why had von Hertz kept his flying togs, why had he taken all Kirby's credentials and personal articles—even down to the wrist watch? The Hawk was just about Kirby's size. In the darkness of the night, dressed in a baggy teddy-bear, with his face all but concealed by helmet and goggles, he might pass!

Perhaps von Hertz could not fly, perhaps he would have some one else work the stunt, though it was doubtful whether he would trust anyone else to deliver those precious papers. But in any case, Kirby was certain, terribly certain, that a Boche spy was going to impersonate him, fly his plane. A more excellent means of getting across the lines could never have been devised. The spy would cover up his tracks completely. He would prevent the seed of suspicion from being sown, and would also confuse any possible pursuit by having Kirby's two comrades as escorts. Worst of all, Carn and Travis, ignorant of the truth, would trust this imposter implicitly, believing he was their leader; consequently it would be child's play for the spy to turn on them unawares and shoot them to ribbons before they knew what it was all about.

The mental picture of his two comrades innocently following a German spy, probably von Hertz himself, filled Kirby with a panic such as he had never felt before. Again he began to struggle wildly, uselessly, and his panting breath tried to force the gag out of his mouth.

But only for a moment. All at once the feeling of panic left him, and he became deadly calm—calm with a set determination, a singleness of purpose which enveloped his whole being. He was going to get free. He was going to get free and stop von Hertz. True, the Hawk—or whoever was impersonating Kirby—might have taken off already, that depended on how far Le Bourget was from here—but nevertheless Kirby would stop him.

Once, back in the States, he had witnessed the performance of a man famed for his miraculous escapes from ropes and chains. This man had extricated himself from much tighter shackles than Kirby's, and he had said, with due modesty, "Anyone can do it. The trouble with most men is that when they are tied up they lose their heads, become panicky, and waste all their energy in reckless, useless struggling. The trick is to keep cool, and work yourself out by your wits more than your strength."

Small comfort, those words, when he was lying in the dark bushes and the ropes were scaring through his clothes. But it would not hurt to experiment. He began to consider his position objectively. He was bound and gagged, lying on his side with his hands tied behind him. He could move a little from side to side—no hope there. But he could move his bound hands quite a bit, upwards and downwards.

For a moment, he relaxed completely, to gather energy. Then, coolly, he commenced his task, working systematically where before he had just struggled like a dumb beast. He began to move his hands, worked them upwards, downwards, upwards. For a long time he got no results, but he went on with infinite patience. And then, suddenly, to his joy, the painful pressure of the ropes on his hands seemed to be lessening—as if one of the knots were working loose! Encouraged, he continued with more confidence. Now he could actually move his hands separately—just a trifle. He could stretch his fingers enough to pick at one of the knots. It was hard gruelling labor, working in the dark, arms behind him. But he was getting results now. The knot his fingers picked at suddenly yielded, came loose. The ropes were slackening more and more. In another moment——

With a surge of triumph, and a blessing on the performer whose words had brought salvation, Kirby pulled out both his hands—free!

He jerked the gag from his mouth, and greedily gulped down the cool, fresh air. Never before had he imagined that ordinary air could taste so good. It was like a tonic, it revived him, gave him new strength.

He found his voice and shouted "Help!" several times. Nothing but hollow echoes came back. Realizing that there could be nobody around here, he decided to save his breath. Again he resumed the work of unbinding himself. And now, with both hands free, it was practically child's play. In a few seconds he was scrambling to his feet, pushing the slack ropes from him and stepping out of them. He felt stiff and

bruised, his muscles ached, and there was quite a lump on his head from the revolver blow von Hertz had dealt him. But he ignored all these pains, Blindly, hastily, he went stumbling through the bushes.

He emerged abruptly, found himself on the lonely road. Compared to the denseness of those bushes, it seemed quite light out here beneath the glow of the moon and stars.

KIRBY STOOD A MOMENT, considering. What to do now? He was in an 'M.P. uniform, a uniform which had become badly tattered and soiled; he was hatless, having lost his overseas cap somewhere in the bushes; his hair was disheveled, his face scratched and cut. He didn't have a thing to his name, no credentials, weapons, money—not even a cigarette! And in this condition he was getting out in his determined chase for von Hertz and the papers!

He looked down the road in both directions. Not a sign. He decided to move in the direction whence the car had come. He hurried along, at a fast trot. Due to the strain of all he had gone through, he was soon out of breath, but he got his second wind and hurried on. He must have gone a full half mile before his keen eyes made out a dark shape which looked like a house, in the distance ahead. There were no lights there, but he would go and investigate anyway.

He hastened his pace. Sure enough, there was a house—a crude cottage with a slate roof. Kirby walked right up to the door, seized the knocker and banged it for all it was worth—shouting in noisy accompaniment.

Presently a window at his side flew open. A head, poked out, then an arm with a lantern. In the light Kirby saw a grizzled old Frenchman, a peasant, who was peering out at the Mosquito sleepily. Kirby shouted at him, and the man seemed confused. Also he appeared frightened by Kirby's disheveled appearance. He could not speak a word of English. Kirby, knowing little French, tried hard to make himself understood, used words and pantomimes—though he was burning with feverish impatience. To reassure the peasant he explained, after much difficulty, that he was an M.P. who had just come from a motorcycle smash-up.

The peasant seemed to accept the story, nodded, reassured. Kirby, again employing his "dictionary French and a lot of gestures, began asking questions. God, but this was taking a hell of a long time! He asked the Frenchman what time it was now.

The peasant's head disappeared, to poke out a moment later.

It was one minute to twelve.

Kirby was amazed. To think that he had left the war ministry less than an hour ago! Why the whole ghastly experience seemed to have lasted interminably long.

He turned again to the Frenchman at the window. He asked how far Le Bourget was from here.

"*Onze kilometres.*" The Frenchman replied. Eleven kilometers!

Kirby did some fast thinking. Certainly, judging from the time it was now, it could not have been more than twenty minutes ago when von Hertz left Kirby in those bushes. And it would take that old car at least twenty minutes to make the eleven kilometers, considering the traffic at Le Bourget. There was still a fighting chance!

Hastily, Kirby managed to ask if the peasant had a telephone. He might have known what to expect for an answer. The nearest telephone was in the village of Le Brenne, which was one and a half kilometers away! Kirby's hopes began to sink. He asked the Frenchman if he had any conveyance, anything that would be faster than walking. The man had a bicycle, he confessed, but he was reluctant to let it go. Kirby, cursing von Hertz for taking all his francs, for he would gladly have bought that bike at any price, began to argue as profusely as his scant knowledge of French permitted. He told the Frenchman that he could serve his country by lending that bicycle, which Kirby would leave in the care of the police at Le Brenne. He pleaded and argued, all the while telling himself that in the time he wasted in pleas he might be walking the distance to the town.

Suddenly, however, the Frenchman yielded in the name of patriotism. His head disappeared again and then, after what seemed like hours, he came trotting out of the cottage with a faded coat thrown over his nightshirt. He ducked beneath the house and miraculously produced an old, rusty bicycle. He hung his lantern on the handlebars, and gave Kirby directions.

A moment later the Mosquito, feeling somewhat childish, was pedaling that creaky, ancient vehicle for all it was worth. And in his furious desire to get to that telephone on time he made the old bike fairly fly down the dusty road. In a few minutes, after swinging onto a crossroad, he was sailing into Le Brenne, which proved to be one of those quiet little suburbs of Paris. The streets were quite deserted, but luck was with Kirby.

He almost ran down a French military policeman, who was doing sentry duty on the road.

The French M.P. looked at the disheveled bike rider with suspicion, began sputtering out a rapid string of questions in French. He too was unable to speak a word of English, and again Kirby had a devilish time making himself clear. His M.P. uniform helped, however, made the Frenchman more inclined to listen to him. There is a bond between the much-abused military police of all nationalities.

Finally, the Frenchman led Kirby to the military police headquarters of the town. Kirby left his bike with one of the soldiers outside, told them to hold it until called for by its owner. Then, accompanied by the French M.P., he went in.

He was ushered before an officious-looking captain, who sat at a desk in an unobtrusive office. And on that desk was an object which caught Kirby's eye at once, an object which at this moment meant more to him than all the riches of the world—a telephone!

The hands of a big clock on the wall were pointing to nine minutes past twelve. It was getting later and later, but still Kirby had hope! Everything depended on the traffic at Le Bourget—and there was apt to be plenty of military traffic even at this hour.

Fortunately, the M.P. captain spoke English, though with a heavy accent. He looked at Kirby interrogatively, then accusingly. The Mosquito wasted no words.

"I'm Captain Kirby," he said, hurriedly. "U.S. air service. I can't waste any time to explain things now, but a most momentous issue is at stake—and you must do as I request or everything is lost! Please phone Le Bourget Field at once, ask them if—"

"One momant," the captain spoke through pursed lips, and his shrewd eyes narrowed. "You say you are ze captain from air serveece. You wear ze uniform of sergeant M.P. And," he pointed an accusing finger at the Mosquito, "you look like you have come from ze what-you-calleet—ze binge! Now—"

"Listen, for God's sake!" Kirby broke in, besides himself with wild impatience as he saw another minute go ticking past. "You've got to phone that——"

"Do not interrup' me," the captain snapped ominously, and Kirby moved and shifted about like a victim of St. Vitus' dance. The French captain, who was by no means in a hurry, went on with slow deliberation. "A strange beeze-ness, *monsieur*—I do not like eet." He stroked his chin. "Eet ees ver' suspicious."

Kirby, inwardly fuming at this man though he

could not blame him for being so skeptical, leaned over the desk, a beseeching look on his face.

"Damn it, man!" he pleaded, his voice hoarse with excitement. "You don't realize what this means! I swear to you I'll identify myself later. That call to Le Bourget must get through—at once! You'd regret it all your life if you didn't make it, regret that you didn't help save your country from a helluva lot of trouble. I'm working for intelligence, understand? Now, for God's sake, phone that field, ask them if Lieutenants Carn and Travis are still there—if the aviators known as the Three Mosquitoes have taken off yet! Hurry, please! Every second counts!"

Something in his tone must have convinced the skeptical captain that this man was sincere. After all, no harm could be done by phoning Le Bourget. Still, he hesitated for a few seconds longer. Then, in the characteristic French manner, he shrugged.

"We weel see," he murmured, as he reached for the phone.

IN THE MEANTIME, at the great airdrome at Le Bourget, Kirby's comrades, waiting near the throbbing, refueled Spads, were beginning to worry about their leader. They paced up and down, watching the gate for the car. The lanky Travis took nervous puffs on cigarettes, threw them away before they were half smoked. Shorty Carn kept relighting his beloved briar pipe.

"It's after midnight," Travis drawled. "Of course he said he might be late, but I have a queer hunch that all is not so well."

"Same here," Carn confessed. "Think we ought to ask, in the headquarters building? Maybe he got into some kind of jam."

"If he doesn't show up soon we'd better ask 'em."

Again they resumed their nervous pacing. Minutes dragged. The three Spads, engines turning over idly, poised on the line like squatting birds, ready to take off.

Suddenly Carn and Travis both started, eyes glued on the entrance to the field. Through the gate came the gleam of headlights. The car swung onto the field, pulled up near the planes, stopped. And Carn and Travis, overjoyed at their leader's return, failed to notice that this time the car did not stop near a lamp, but in the dark shadow of the headquarters building.

The door of the machine flew open, and a big figure in flying togs, helmeted and goggled, leaped out with obvious haste. He started running straight towards the

plane which was Kirby's, seemed to be in such a rush that he scarcely noticed Carn and Travis. And the two Mosquitoes, remembering Kirby's orders to hop right into their planes the moment they saw him, were not at all suspicious. They turned obediently and made for the ships.

Thus had the wily person who was really concealed in those heavy flying togs figured. By arriving late—using leisure time to put Kirby where he'd be harmless—he could create an atmosphere of haste which would prevent Carn and Travis from taking the time to scrutinize him closely.

All three men were climbing into their cockpits now, and the mechanics were gathering at the wheel chocks. The motor car close by started once more, turned and passed through the gate.

Carn and Travis watched their leader's ship. The pilot did not even wave them the signal—but again they did not suspect, thinking he was too preoccupied with his desire to make time. And when the man they thought was Kirby opened his throttle, they followed suit.

The three motors roared forth thunderously, sending streams of sparks from the exhaust stacks. A mechanic rushed to a switch, to turn on floodlights.

And at that moment, in the headquarters building just a few hundred feet away, a telephone was tinkling shrilly.

The adjutant of the drome picked up the instrument.

Ten kilometers away, at Le Brenne, Kirby leaned nervously over a desk, while the M.P. captain began talking rapidly in French.

"*Pardon, monsieur l'adjutant,*" he began, "but this is the military police headquarters of Le Brenne. There is a man here who claims to be one Captain Kirby, of the U.S. air service. He doesn't seem to have any papers, he looks pretty disheveled, and he's wearing an M.P. uniform. He seems to be telling the truth, though, and he wants to know if Lieutenants Carn and Travis are still there."

"What?" gasped the voice at the other end of the phone, in alarm. "Hold that wire a moment."

There was a long pause, a pause during which Kirby could scarcely breathe. Then: "The man claiming to be Captain Kirby," came the voice of the adjutant, "is either an imposter or a fool. Captain Kirby just took off with his two comrades, and everything was in good order."

As the M.P. captain repeated these words, translated

of course, to Kirby, the Mosquito's face went white. Once more the awful picture of his two comrades blindly following a Boche passed through his mind. God, his hunch had been right! For once—he thought grimly—von Hertz had *not* done the unexpected, not where Kirby was concerned!

Once more a feeling of panic swept him. Unable to control himself, he snatched that phone right out of the M.P. captain's hands. The latter, amazed and still unable to make out what it was all about, let him take it, and sat back with staring eyes.

"Hello!" Kirby shouted into the mouthpiece. "Speak English?" Receiving an assent, he rushed on. "Listen I'm Captain Kirby! The man flying my plane is a dangerous German spy! He must be stopped at all costs! Get that?"

"Ridiculous!" came the reply, The adjutant's English was perfect, "Captain Kirby's own comrades ought to know the captain by this time. They saw him, followed him, We cannot listen to your wild story at all, not unless you can positively identify yourself!"

Kirby all but crushed that phone in his two hands. "Damn it, I tell you I'll identify myself later! You've got to take my word! We've got to stop that spy! Now look here," he pleaded, "if you hurry I think I can catch him. I know how to signal my comrades—and I think the spy will lead them over the same route I came; he doesn't know whether or not I told them how we were going back. If you'll get some one to fly a plane over here right away, I'll take off and——"

"In the first place," the adjutant told him, "if your preposterous story is true, by the time we could get a plane to you it would be too late. No, you get the higher authorities to tell us what to do and we'll do it! For all we know, you may be a spy yourself, trying to interfere with that flight for some reason. Now——" But Kirby, realizing that he was only wasting precious time, slammed the one-piece phone back in its stand, cutting off Le Bourget. He turned to the adjutant with a face stricken.

"God, I've got to do something!" he shouted. "I've got to do something!"

The M.P. captain frowned darkly. Again he stroked his chin. "Eet ees ver' suspicious," he repeated. "Ver' suspicious!"

And all the time the big clock on the wall kept ticking away minutes which to Kirby meant miles, miles that were being covered by those three Spads.

The Mosquito realized that the only thing to do was to call up the war ministry and, after identifying

himself by passwords and other means, explain to the famous French general just what had taken place. He had hoped against hope that he would not have to do this. To begin with, he felt that he could redeem himself if only Le Bourget would cooperate with him. Secondly, it was going to use up precious time. Finally, it was not a good policy to discuss such momentous things over the phone.

But he would have to do it. Again he turned to the M.P. captain. "I'll identify myself for you," he said. "Just call up the war ministry at Paris."

The Frenchman was willing enough. He was just reaching for the phone when Kirby gave a sudden start.

"What's that?" the Mosquito asked.

The captain, and the other French M.P., who was standing quietly by the door, both listened, strained their ears. At once they picked up the familiar sound—a soft, steady drone like that of a bumble-bee.

The M.P. captain's voice was tinged with sarcasm. "Eef eendeed you are ze flyar," he told Kirby, "you should know zat sound. Eet ees one of ze planes wheech patrol, and keep us eenformed about raids by wireless."

Instantly, Kirby's hopes mounted once more. A plane—near here! Even now the drone was rising louder, as the ship was coming closer overhead. God, if he could get that plane down somehow, he would be enabled to take right off from here, as soon as he was identified! Of course, if this was a wireless plane, it must be a two-seater, and two-seaters could seldom make as good speed as scouting single-seaters. But on the other hand, as the adjutant at Le Bourget had said, by the time Kirby could get a single-seater it would be too late—the spy and Kirby's comrades would be too far. Well, damn it, he'd catch up to them in a two-seater—catch up to them somehow!

All these thoughts flashed through his mind in a breathless second, while the M.P. captain was picking up the telephone to call the war ministry. With sudden dismay, Kirby realized that by the time he was identified that wireless plane would surely be gone! Indeed, as if to ironically corroborate this thought, the drone of the motor, after rising quite high, was beginning to grow fainter now. The plane was passing! God knows when it would pass again! It was now or never!

With a wild gesture, Kirby stopped the Frenchman from picking up the phone.

"Listen," he demanded. "Is there a landing field near here—or any spot where a ship could land?"

The captain, a little bewildered, nodded. He confessed in his broken English that there was an emergency field right near here—scarcely a stone's throw away.

Kirby's eyes lighted. "Good! Now listen, captain!" He clutched the Frenchman's arm with frantic eagerness. "I'm sure you have the power to get that plane down! If we do not get it instantly it will be too late! Have some one wireless from that emergency field, asking the pilot to land at once! Then, as soon as I am identified and given full authority by the war ministry, I can take off without delay!"

The captain shook his head dubiously. The drone of the plane kept getting fainter and fainter.

"I realize it's asking a lot," Kirby admitted. "But it's our only hope!" Again he began to plead eloquently, inspired by the fading hum of that plane. "Please do as I say—give me this one more chance! It can't do any harm; you can always invent an excuse for bringing that ship down. And in another minute, I'll have myself identified. It's up to you now." His grip tightened on the other's arm. "Up to you to decide whether we are going to catch that notorious spy or not!"

And once more the M.P. captain weakened, impressed by the sincerity of the Mosquito's tone.

"I weel take ze gamble," he conceded. Hastily he turned to the other French M.P., at the door. He barked out a string of orders. The man saluted, rushed out. Kirby gave a sigh of relief, though the drone of the airplane was scarcely audible now. If only they could signal it in time!

ONCE MORE THE M.P. captain was picking up the phone, was trying to get the war ministry at Paris. It took him a couple of minutes. When the connection was made, Kirby again took the instrument, spoke hurriedly, gave a few guarded passwords. They were accepted! Immediately he was connected with the great French general who had given him those papers.

"This is Captain Kirby, sir," the Mosquito began, in a husky voice. "I'm calling from military police headquarters at Le Brenne. I——"

"Impossible!" the crisp voice of the general cut him off, incredulously. But Kirby noticed with relief that his tone wasn't as incredulous as the Le Bourget adjutant's. "Before you say another word, proceed to identify yourself immediately."

"But I haven't any papers!" Kirby protested, frantically, as visions of being completely blocked

by all this red tape swam before him. "Please hear my story! Von Hertz and two other Boche spies were in that car, posing as the detectives. They held me up, took everything. And now von Hertz—or some other spy—is flying my plane, impersonating me, heading back for the lines with my two comrades! I tell you——"

"You must identify yourself!" The general insisted, and his voice was getting more and more agitated. "Is there nobody there who can speak for you?"

"They don't know me from Adam!" Kirby moaned, in despair.

"How are you dressed?"

"I still have on the M.P. uniform."

"That is fortunate," said the general, who now seemed all but convinced. He began to speak more freely. "Luckily, we prepared for such an emergency. You can identify yourself. I wrote down a secret formula which Colonel Drake concealed in that uniform. Reach down and turn your right-hand coat pocket inside out. Read to me what is written there."

Kirby laid down the phone, glanced at the specified pocket. There was a big tear in it—a tear that might spell disaster! Anxiously, while the M.P. captain looked on dumbfounded, the Mosquito turned the pocket inside out, held the torn pieces of lining together and scanned them keenly. At first he saw nothing, but then he made out some faint scribbling on that cloth.

"There's a number on it," he announced into the phone. "It's 69318."

The general's voice sounded strangely hollow as it came over the wire. "You are Captain Kirby. Your story is true. And," the voice shook, almost broke, "it means we are lost—lost!"

But at the same moment Kirby, to his joy, heard that airplane again—the droning was coming closer and closer. Then the Mosquito could hear the pilot cutting out his engine. The ship was coming down!

"Listen, sir," he yelled into the phone. "I'm getting a plane right here! I can take off at once, chase them——!"

"*Dieu!*" the general shouted back. "You would have a slim chance! It must be von Hertz, flying that plane! He is a wonderful flyer, having served a year with the Imperial air force! But," he roared, "he must be stopped! Perhaps there are other measures we can take!"

But every other measure they could think of seemed to be hopeless, seemed to be blocked by an impenetrable wall of facts. Should they have planes

from Le Bourget pursue, and send word to the Front to get the night-flying squadrons to intercept the three Spads? Impossible! There would be too much confusion, confusion as to who was the spy-pilot and who were the Mosquitoes. And those squadrons would probably be jumping, on every trio of American planes in sight—not knowing one from another. Worst of all, even granting that they did get down von Hertz, the precious papers would probably never get to their rightful destination. The documents, if indeed they were found on the spy, would fall into the hands of some soldier or pilot who wouldn't know what to do with them, and would probably mislay them.

"And we can't be telling the whole Front about those things," the general went on. "We can't make this momentous business public news! There would surely be a leakage!"

And then there was that awful thought which chilled Kirby, the thought that von Hertz, the moment he saw any signs of pursuit or interference, would doubtless shoot down the two Mosquitoes unawares and soar off by himself, lone-scout it back, thus making it even more impossible to find him. For that reason signals from the ground, to stop the planes, would be useless.

"It is all too complicated," the general said. "It seems there is only one possibility." His voice came grimly, emphatically. "It rests with you! This is your mission and only you can handle it. Perhaps luck will be with you; perhaps your comrades will get suspicious when von Hertz starts to go across the lines. There might be a delay—" Grimly, Kirby pictured that delay, saw a Spad whipping about on its two followers, saw the other two Spads hurtling down through space. "You might be able to catch up in that case!"

"I'll catch up in any case!" Kirby promised, with gripping determination, just as the other French M.P. rushed into the room, announced something in French which the captain M.P. repeated in English. The plane had landed, was waiting! Kirby's voice rose with eagerness. "I've got a plane now, sir! Just instruct the captain here to let me have full authority, and I'll be off! And"—his voice was vibrant now, strong—"I'm going to deliver that stuff, as ordered! I won't fail!"

"May the *bon Dieu* be with you!" the general wished. "Meanwhile we shall try to round up the rest of von Hertz's gang here, and find Captain Baker, Marquet, and the chauffeur." He then asked for the M.P. captain, and Kirby called the latter over. A strange

change had come over the Frenchman after hearing Kirby's phone conversation. There was a look of awe and respect on his face now. Obediently, he picked up the phone.

Kirby waited impatiently. He glanced again at the big clock on the wall.

It was twenty-six minutes past twelve.

Those three Spads had left Le Bourget fully fifteen minutes ago. And Kirby knew how far a swift Spad could travel in fifteen minutes!

The M.P. captain suddenly put down the phone, jumped from the desk. His tone was almost servile now.

"*Tres bien*, Captain Kirby," he said. "Shall we go to ze field, yes?"

"Toot sweet!" the Mosquito responded vehemently. They rushed out into the night. Through the quiet streets of the village they ran, and in a couple of minutes, passing the outskirts of the town, they reached the field—a small clearing at the edge of the wood. Sure enough, a plane was waiting there, squatting in the moonlight with its propeller turning lazily. The pilot and the observer of the ship, both Frenchmen, stood near by, smoking cigarettes. There were no mechanics, however, this being merely a place where planes could alight in emergencies, although near by, on the other side of a road, was an antiaircraft battery and a wireless station—the wireless station which had signaled the plane down.

The M.P. captain spoke hurriedly to the two French aviators, explaining the situation as briefly as he could. Kirby, meanwhile, went up to the plane to give it the once-over.

It was a two-seater, but Kirby noticed to his joy that it was one of the new-type fighting two-seaters which were claimed to be as fast and maneuverable as scouts! Luck was with him! The ship had dual controls, could be operated either from the front or rear cockpit. It was well-armoured, having two fixed machine guns synchronized to shoot between the whirling blades of the propeller in front, and a movable, flanking gun for the observer in the rear. There was also a most up-to-date wireless set in the rear cockpit.

The French pilot of the ship suddenly turned from the M.P. captain, confronted Kirby. He spoke fluent English.

"Glad to meet you, Captain Kirby," he said warmly, extending his hand. "I've heard much about you and your Mosquitoes. I am Captain Renier."

"Howdy," Kirby said brusquely, as they shook

hands. "Now look here, Captain Renier, I've got to borrow this ship and fly like hell—stop a notorious spy who is leading my two buddies to the lines! As long as this is a two-seater, I'd like to take a man with me to help. We'll have to leave your observer out—it's better to have two pilots, in case of emergency, especially since there are two sets of controls. Now have you had any experience in this line?"

"Plenty!" the other stated, not without pride. "I served several months at the Front, and managed to bag six enemy planes."

"Good stuff," Kirby commended. "That makes you ace-high—and I want an ace. Now as to leaving your usual duty and taking this jaunt, I can authorize it—the war ministry will stand behind me. But of course it's up to you. How about it? Do you feel like risking your neck with me, racing for the Front to nab that Boche?"

"I like excitement," came the tacit reply. "And patrolling these back areas is not excitement."

"You're on, then! Now suppose I take the front cockpit, and you handle the gun in the rear. I'll take the controls too—we may change over later. How about gas and ammunition?"

"The tanks are almost filled to the brim, and since we never get into any fights, there's enough ammunition to shoot down a whole flock of Boche! But," the Frenchman added anxiously, as he noticed for the first time Kirby's tattered garments, something which had escaped his eye in the darkness, "you need a flying suit. Perhaps my observer's will fit you." He turned to his co-flyer, spoke quickly. The man nodded consent, slipped off his teddy-bear. Hastily, Kirby tried it on, and though it was a bit tight he managed to get into it. While he was buttoning up, he mapped out his course with Captain Renier, who produced a roll-map and examined it under a flashlight.

The map proved that luck was again with Kirby. By comparing the positions of Le Bourget and Le Brenne in connection to the route which Kirby believed the spy to be following, they found that they ought to be able to swing right onto the trail of von Hertz and the two Mosquitoes by a short cut.

Kirby was strapping on the observer's helmet now. The latter also gave him the loan of a wrist watch and, what was even more important, an automatic revolver.

"Let's go!" the Mosquito shouted, and clambered into the front cockpit, strapped himself in. Captain Renier hopped into the rear seat. They pulled down their goggles. Kirby glanced at his borrowed watch.

It was twelve thirty-six! Von Hertz had a twenty-five minute start on them! Good God, it looked hopeless—utterly hopeless!

The thought stirred him savagely to action. He seized the controls like the experienced veteran he was, pulled open the throttle. The motor roared mightily. The M.P. captain stood by, watching in fascination. The French observer made ready to act as a mechanic, to remove the chocks from the wheels. Kirby picked up the speaking tube.

“All set?” he shouted.

“*Allez!*” the Frenchman replied.

KIRBY WAVED THE SIGNAL, the observer jerked away the chocks, and the plane leaped forwards, responding to the Mosquito’s control. It roared across the field, and swept into the air like a bird of prey. Kirby, in his haste to beat time, zoomed that ship with reckless abandon, went roaring up into the starry sky. He whipped around in a wild, breathless skid-turn which seemed almost to raise a cloud of dust.

“*Dieu!*” gasped the astonished Frenchman through the speaking tube. “But you must be in one terrible hurry!”

“You bet your sweet life I am!” the Mosquito replied grimly, and, straightening out, he bent to his task in real earnest. With his free hand he hung Captain Renier’s roll-map on his lighted instrument board, got his bearings. If his calculations were correct, he should now be cutting in on a line that would bring him on von Hertz’s trail. Madly, he kept feeding the roaring motor more gas, using all his skill to get the utmost speed out of the ship. They were literally shooting through the air like a missile now, wires screaming in the wind, struts shaking.

The chase was on! What would be the outcome? Would they get on von Hertz’s trail, or would the wily spy take a desperate chance and lead the two Mosquitoes back on a different route? Everything depended on that question—that, and Kirby’s ability to accomplish a miracle in the way of speed. And, by God, he would accomplish a miracle! He redoubled his efforts to make the two-seater go faster. He flew madly, insanely; he broke all the laws of aeronautics, he shattered all the conventions of how to fly. Only his innate flying skill enabled him to get away with it, for another man it would have been plain suicide.

The Frenchman in the rear cockpit, despite his eagerness to “get excitement,” was beginning to get his fill of it already! The plane was going so fast that

it seemed to be slipping away from him, leaving him behind, though he was strapped in securely. Breathlessly, he held onto the sides of his cockpit while the ship kept whizzing forward, rocking and swaying. *Bon Dieu*, what kind of a demon was this wild Yank who sat at the controls?

On they rushed, streaking madly through the night. And a voice within Kirby seemed to keep shouting, “Hurry!” over and over again, until that single word rang in his brain like a refrain. *Hurry!* Even the roaring, ear-splitting engine seemed to be booming it out now. *Hurry!* The flying wires and struts shrieked it at him wildly. *Hurry!* All else was forgotten. He forgot how tired he was, forgot his cuts and scratches and the lump on his head. *Hurry!*

Suddenly, with a sharpness which had a strange effect in the pit of Captain Renier’s stomach, Kirby banked.

“We ought to be on their tails now!” he shouted through the tube. “We ought to be behind them, following them.”

And foolishly, as if he expected to see three planes which must be miles and miles ahead—he scanned the starlit sky before him.

But though he could not see those three planes, they were there! Kirby was behind them all right, though, in spite of the remarkable speed he had made, a gap of fully twenty miles separated him from his quarry.

The three Spads were also flying fast—damnably fast! The fleet little ships were cleaving the air like swift darts, chewing up mile upon mile.

And Kirby’s comrades, flying behind and on either side of their leader’s plane, kept formation faithfully, kept up the terrific pace set by the pilot they believed to be Kirby. From time to time they glanced at his cockpit. They could not see his face, however, for in addition to the protection of helmet and goggles, his fur collar was turned up high. But the glow from his instrument board was full upon him, and had they pulled up closer and looked carefully they might have seen——

Von Hertz, most clever of German spies, was conscious of that glow, and though he longed to switch off those lights, he dared not. For the first time in this whole, amazing business, the Hawk found himself unable to maintain his usual air of calm. He was nervous and worried.

Thus far, everything had gone like clock-work. There had not been a single hitch, not one of his

plans had failed. He smiled, with grim triumph. Never would his enemies be able to conceive how he had found out about those papers, how he had managed his daring trick to capture them.

But now the most important part of his business lay before him—getting those papers across the lines. And he was worried. Not that he couldn't fly; he could handle this Spad, even though it seemed a bit strange to him. He had not flown a ship for a year, and then he had only had experience with German planes. But he'd get used to it.

No, what bothered him were other thoughts. His mind was full of doubts and conjectures. Suppose these two men, whom he had been forced to fly with in order to accomplish a take-off, should suddenly discover that he was not Kirby? Instinctively, his eyes peered through their goggles at the two gleaming machine guns mounted on the engine before him, and his fingers touched the stick-triggers. He must be ready to act quickly, must be ready to shoot these two innocent fools down the moment they became too suspicious. Meanwhile, they would serve him good protection, would confuse any possible pursuit. Of course when he got across the lines, and they saw him about to land, he would have to make short order of them anyway.

But he must be wary. Watch for signals from the ground, watch for pursuit, for squadrons that might sweep out of the night to intercept him. If, somehow, they had discovered back at Paris that he was impersonating Kirby— He tried to thrust the thought from his mind, but it persisted relentlessly. What if Kirby himself had escaped, had managed to spread the alarm in some way? Why had he not killed Kirby in the first place? It had been foolish to let the fellow live.

The more he went on, the more tense and apprehensive he became. He too felt a frenzied urge to hurry, *hurry!* He too struggled to make his plane go faster—gave her all the gas she could take. And always he was conscious of the vague forms of the two ships which bobbed on either side of him, a little to the rear. On they rushed, faster and faster.

But von Hertz, though he was almost as reckless and desperate as Kirby, did not have Kirby's remarkable flying skill, or even the skill of Kirby's two comrades. Now his unfamiliarity with the Spad began to tell. All at once his engine commenced behaving queerly, sputtering and rattling. *Gott*, what was wrong? The spy glanced apprehensively at his radiator thermometer. Horror gripped him.

It was at the boiling point!

In his wild haste, he had been feeding that engine too much gas. It was overheated. The water was boiling—and boiling water evaporated swiftly! If that water disappeared, it would spell von Hertz's doom! The bearings of his engine would melt, the engine would crack, and he'd be lucky if he could make a forced landing in Allied territory—a landing which would mean capture, failure!

There was only one thing for him to do, and he did it. He eased in his throttle, to let his engine cool off. Instantly the Spad began to slow down. Von Hertz watched the two other pilots apprehensively. They slowed down with him all right, to keep in formation. But then they began to wave, wave interrogatively! They were inquiring by gestures if anything was wrong. Von Hertz took a chance, waved back to them, and pointed to his radiator. They accepted the signal—understood!

He had slowed down considerably now, but that thermometer was still at the boiling point! He throttled down even more. Their speed continued to slacken, until presently they were flying along at an almost leisurely pace. It was agony for von Hertz, and he was cold with suspense. But he cursed himself for a fool, told himself that his fears were ridiculous, without foundation. There was no pursuit—of course not. So he went on, flying quite slowly, letting his engine cool.

And consequently Kirby and Captain Renier, thought they did not know it, began to gain by leaps and bounds! They had been gaining slowly as it was, for Kirby seemed to make that two-sealer do the impossible. And now, with their quarry forced to slow down, they were lessening that big gap between the three Spads and themselves with remarkable rapidity. Seventeen miles now from von Hertz and the other two Mosquitoes. Sixteen miles—fifteen— Minutes passed, and Kirby stubbornly continued to urge his plane on with all his skill. Twelve miles!

Perhaps some intuition, some sixth sense, warned von Hertz. Suddenly he could stand this no longer. The radiator thermometer had gone down a bit, but whenever the spy tried to go faster, it started rising again immediately! There was only one other way he could throw off any possible pursuit, and that was by changing his course completely. He had hesitated to do this because he thought Kirby had previously laid out the return-route to his comrades, and they would become suspicious if this route were altered in any

radical degree. But von Hertz decided that he would take the chance and alter it anyway. And if they did get suspicious—well, so much the worse for them!

His left arm shot outwards, signifying the turn. Such signals were used by practically all flyers, so Kirby's comrades did not think for a moment that it was not their own leader's gesture. Carefully, von Hertz banked to the right, and they banked with him in graceful unison. They were not alarmed at this change of route at all, for Kirby had not told them how they were going to return to the Front.

The three Spads were still flying quite slowly, but now they were moving right off their former track, moving off at a sharp angle.

And Kirby and Captain Renier were no longer behind them, were no longer following them! They were simply speeding madly on what was now a wild goose chase.

But if von Hertz was helped by intuitions, so was Kirby, though he called them hunches. Suddenly, for no reason at all, he remembered that here was a wireless on this plane. He picked up the speaking tube.

"Look here," he shouted. "Maybe we can get some dope on those three Spads. Suppose you get that wireless working, get in touch with some of the towns ahead of us. The anti-aircraft stations all along surely won't miss those three ships. Just give them the signal: X-2-X—that will tell them we're authorized by the war ministry, and they'll answer our questions. Funny we didn't think of that before."

"A great idea!" the Frenchman agreed, glad to be able to do something—anything which would take his mind off the terrific speed of this plane through the air. Instantly, he got to work. He let out the trailing antenna, bent over the wireless set. At first he got no results. He was able to establish communications with the town all right, but none of them had seen any Spads pass overhead. But then, suddenly, the message came. It was in French, but Captain Renier quickly translated it for Kirby through the speaking tube:

*"Rois: Anti-aircraft battery, B. Three scout planes in V formation passed here just a moment ago, flying quite slowly at about five thousand feet altitude. Their direction was northeast."*

Kirby's first reaction was one of joyful relief. It was the first evidence he had gleaned that his two comrades were still in the air, still safe. Of course these might not be the three Spads after all, but he could not help feeling certain that they were.

But then, quickly, he glanced at his map, to locate the town of Rois. A savage oath broke from him.

"The son of a gun!" he bellowed. "Changed his course! Rois is way over to the left." He shook his head. "Whew! Lucky we thought of that wireless. Keep it working, man. We need it now."

WATCHING HIS COMPASS, Kirby banked wildly to the north, and was once more speeding on the trail of von Hertz. From now on he was able to follow the spy with grim precision, for messages kept coming in, each indicating the exact movements of the three Spads. Also, to Kirby's joy, they indicated the fact that he was gaining incredibly on the spy. By God, it looked as if he were actually going to catch the Hawk! Only five miles behind him now, and still gaining!

By this time von Hertz's engine was quite cooled, and with frantic eagerness the Hawk put on more speed. Again Carn and Travis followed his lead. The three Spads commenced to pick up, darted forwards. And Kirby, notified almost immediately about the increase in speed, fought as he had never fought before to keep gaining, to close up that gap. Only three miles now—only a little more and he'd make it.

Thus the mad chase continued. And presently, with surprising suddenness, the four planes involved were all coming over the Front!

A surge of triumph and joy went through von Hertz as the fiery inferno, the seething stretch of bursting shells, rockets, and "flaming onions" which indicated the battlefields loomed ahead and below. *Gott*, he was nearing the lines! In a few minutes he would be in German skies! He longed to put on still more speed, but dared not. Just be patient now, and he'd get back.

And Kirby, now less than two miles behind, also was longing to put on more speed. "We've got to catch him quickly!" he told Captain Renier, "Got to stop him from crossing those lines!"

He was scanning the sky ahead now, watching for those Spads. Nothing in sight yet. But soon he must see them! Now that Kirby and Renier were over the Front, they could no longer be kept informed by wireless—they must trust to luck, and hope that von Hertz would not change his course again.

And luckily von Hertz was now too eager to get across those, battle lines to think of changing his course any more. He went straight on, as fast as he dared.

And then, suddenly, Kirby's comrades began to feel

the first signs of suspicion. As they saw their leader's plane continuing unwaveringly towards Hunland, they began to wonder. Why should Kirby be leading them into German skies? Certainly, he should have said something to them about it.

They began to wave at the leading pilot questioningly, demanding an explanation. Von Hertz's heart began to pound. He waved back, signaled them to come on, but they were not satisfied. *Gott*, one of them was pulling up close beside him now. It was Travis, who was determined to find out just what his leader meant to do. He was pulling in closer and closer. Von Hertz's nerves strained almost to the breaking point, and again his fingers closed around his stick-triggers. He tried to duck further into his collar, to hide his face more. Travis was right beside him now, peering right across at him. Confound those lights on the instrument board.

Suddenly something snapped in the German, turned him into a madman. With a savage oath, he switched out those tell-tale lights. And then, taking Carn and Travis completely unawares, he acted.

Opening his throttle wide, ignoring the fact that his engine was overheated, the Hawk pulled back his slick and zoomed up for a half-loop. This brought him directly above the other two Spads, which he saw moving confusedly beneath him. And while Carn and Travis, dumbfounded and frozen with horror, wondered what it was all about, von Hertz, somersaulting over, dived!

Down he came, and his guns stuttered into blazing life, sending out the deadly streams of tracer bullets. Too late did the two Mosquitoes realize they had been tricked. Too late did they try to spring to the defense, start to maneuver to throw off the descending German's sights. Von Hertz had them both cold. With merciless precision he continued to pull his triggers, sending out burst after burst.

Travis got it first. A fusillade of bullets shattered his propeller to bits, tore up his engine, and shot away his controls, though miraculously he himself received only a few cuts from splinters. His Spad lurched, flew queerly for a few seconds, then started to nose over in a fatal spin! Desperately, the lanky pilot struggled with his controls, managed somehow to change that spin to a glide. Down he went gliding, his nose pointed for his drome, though he did not see how he could make it.

Meanwhile, Shorty Carn, before he had time to do a thing, was getting shot to hell. A big piece of his top wing had been cracked right off and his rudder was

shattered. With all his strength, he tried to keep his staggering ship under control. But von Hertz, enraged because his first victim had succeeded in gliding away, was determined to make the kill this time. His guns kept blazing away, and Shorty realized that he was done for. Helplessly, with his ship careening and lurching, he waited for the end. Von Hertz zoomed in a final dive.

But the hawk did not dive! Instead, his blood froze with horror, and a cry broke from him. It was his turn now to be taken unawares!

Coming in on a long but breathless glide-dive, swooping down out of the starry sky, was a French two-seater!

For while von Hertz had been taking the time to shoot down Carn and Travis, Kirby had caught up with him at last, and had gained altitude. With rage and anguish the real leader of the Three Mosquitoes had seen Travis fall, had seen von Hertz making to finish the staggering ship of Carn's. And now he was coming down with a vengeance, his teeth clenched, his eyes narrowed to murderous slits behind their goggles. His fingers were on his stick-triggers. And in the rear cockpit Captain Renier gripped the flanking machine gun, ready to bring it into play.

In another second the two-seater would be in range. Like a trapped animal, von Hertz looked frantically for some path of escape. Hope surged in him. He saw that the German lines lay just a few hundred yards away; looking down he could see the calcium of the German trenches. Guided by sheer desperation, determined to get those papers into German territory at any cost, he banked wildly, headed for those lines, hell-bent, scarcely noticing that his radiator thermometer was rising again. And meanwhile Shorty Carn, sobbing with relief, started to pilot his bullet-ridden Spad back for the drome—though he too didn't see how he could make it.

Madly, Kirby swept after the fleeing von Hertz. They were getting in range now. Eagerly, Captain Renier was swinging his movable gun around, to train it on the enemy. Kirby was leaning to his sights, lining the wraithlike shape of the Spad in the darkness below and ahead. His fingers made ready to press the triggers. But he did not press them!

With a shock of despair he realized that von Hertz had crossed the lines!

God, he was checkmated again, stumped once more by this wily spy. Here, when he had von Hertz in a most disadvantageous position, had his sights trained

right on that Spad and his fingers were fairly itching to pull those triggers, he dared not shoot! For if he shot down von Hertz here, the papers would go down with him—into German hands! There would be no chance at all of recovering them.

A feeling of helpless panic seized him, and a strangled sob tore from him. What could he do? Certainly von Hertz could not be forced to fly back into the Allied lines! Even now, while Kirby held his fire overhead, while Captain Renier waited expectantly for the signal to get into action, von Hertz kept flying straight ahead—further and further into Hunland!

And then, once more, Kirby heard in his dazed brain the voice of Colonel Drake, saying: "If you should find yourself in a jam—destroy those papers! Don't let the Boche get them!"

With wild fury, the Mosquito shouted through the speaking tube. "Damn it, Captain Renier, I can't explain this complicated business to you, but we've got to blow von Hertz, his ship, and everything there, to smithereens! We've got to get his gas tank even if we have to follow him to the ground and strafe him like hell! Understand?"

"The captain certainly wants vengeance!" the Frenchman remarked, for only thus could he interpret Kirby's deadly purpose. "I'll do my best to help him get it."

FURIOUSLY, Kirby shoved his joystick forward, and went swooping clown for his grim attack—the attack which must destroy von Hertz and those papers completely and leave no traces of the documents. Down on that Spad he went, trying now with all his skill to train his sights on that part of the scout-plane's fuselage where the gas tank was located. Again his fingers closed on his stick-triggers, and this time he pressed them, held them down. *Rat-tat-tat-tat!* Jagged streaks of flame leaped from the twin machine guns in front of him, and he watched the whitish lines the tracer bullets drew against the night. Triumph swept him. Those bullets were going close to their target! They were incendiary; if just one of them hit the gas tank——

Then it was that von Hertz realized that there was no use trying to avoid combat with this two-seater any longer. He would have to fight! And he would fight! As long as he was in German territory he felt secure—secure in the knowledge that even if he were shot down those papers would be found on his person by his countrymen. Little did he know that his

antagonists were determined to shoot him down in such a way that those papers couldn't be found.

Recklessly, the Hawk pulled back his stick, zoomed madly for altitude. The maneuver surprised Kirby; he had not expected to see the fleeing Spad suddenly roar into action and accept battle. The scout plane went up right past the two-seater. Faithfully, Captain Renier swung his flanking gun at it, and Kirby heard the weapon clattering shrilly behind him. But von Hertz got past, went on up, and pivoted around in a breathless Immelmann turn. Then, with furious speed, the spy came tearing down, guns blazing defiance.

The fight was on! And it proved to be one of the most terrific and deadly dogfights ever waged.

Von Hertz seemed at last to have gained full mastery over his Spad, learned just how to handle it. No longer did he overheat the engine, he had discovered just how much gas he could give her. And let it be said to the Hawk's credit that, once having gotten familiar with his ship, he was no amateur. He held his own against that two-seater, blazed away at it continuously. In this way he had a slight edge over Kirby and Renier, for the latter men had to aim each shot with care, lest they merely disable their opponent without causing his ship to burst into flames.

Up in the starry sky, the two ships whipped at one another like giant birds of prey, guns sending little tongues of flame licking at the air. And Kirby was overjoyed at the way his co-pilot was throwing himself into his grim task. Over and over again Captain Renier flanked that gun of his around, fired telling shots at the German.

But von Hertz's shots were also beginning to tell. Kirby could hear the bullets ticking through the fuselage of the two-seater, hear them ricocheting against the cockpit cowl. The sound of them spurred on his rage, roused his fighting spirit to the highest pitch. Damn it, but he would finish that spy now!

However, von Hertz was at that moment thinking a similar thought. He was getting tired, and he was anxious to finish this damned two-seater and land with those papers. He became even more reckless. He split-aired wildly, and by sheer luck found himself in a most advantageous position, right beneath the two-seater's blind spot—under the fuselage where neither the pilot or the observer could train their guns at him. Furiously, the Hawk zoomed under the belly of that two-seater, and again blazed away with both guns.

The bullets went tearing through the canvas and wood of the French plane, right into the observer's

cockpit. A cry broke from Captain Renier, a cry which Kirby heard above the thunder of motors and guns. Anxiously, the Mosquito turned around, saw the Frenchman clutching his shoulder. A large blood-stain which was growing even larger showed on the gallant French captain's flying togs,

"It's nothing!" Renier insisted. "Just a scratch in the shoulder! My arms are still *bien!* Let us keep up the fight!"

And gamely, he clung to his gun, ignoring the pain of his wound.

Meanwhile Kirby, fuming with rage at this hit by the German, redoubled his efforts. He shook the German off his blind-spot, and nosed down.

And at that moment a new element, an element not in control of the flyers themselves, entered the conflict—turned the tide completely. It was the element of Fate.

Suddenly, to von Hertz's horror, both his guns jammed!

The result was that he was absolutely helpless, helpless until he could clear the stoppage and get the guns to fire again! He was at the mercy of his foes, who even now were in an advantageous position.

In a panic, the German tried to flee, to break away. But he couldn't. The two-seater was not only above him, it was also in front of him, cutting off the path that led further into German territory. His enemies could get him no matter which way he moved!

Frantically, the German half-rose in his cockpit, began pounding the breech-locks of his jammed guns, trying to fix them. There was nothing else he could do. His plane, meanwhile, continued to fly in neutral, fly straight ahead.

Kirby at once saw his foe's predicament, and had a strong impulse to show the customary chivalry of the air, which forbade a true sportsman to dive on a pilot whose guns had jammed. But here was a case where sportsmanship might prove disastrous to the whole Allied army! Kirby had to destroy those papers, had to take any chance that came! Grimly, the Mosquito steeled his nerves for the hateful task. Von Hertz, still struggling with his guns, continued to fly on—as helpless as a babe in arms.

Then of a sudden, as Kirby watched that Spad flying along on level keel in the darkness below, it came to him! It was a wild, reckless idea—absolutely crazy! It would mean pulling the very whiskers of death. But if it worked, if he could only do it, he would be able to deliver those papers to Colonel Drake after all!

There was no time to brood on it, to figure it out. Any second von Hertz might succeed in fixing his guns, and then it would be too late. It was now or never!

Reaching his decision, Kirby once more spoke through the tube. "Listen, Captain Renier," he shouted eagerly. "Can you fly this ship in spite of your wound—take over the controls back there?"

"I sure can!" the Frenchman responded in good U.S. slang.

Tersely, wasting no words, Kirby gave him instructions. At once the Frenchman, horrified by the mere thought of the thing Kirby meant to do, protested vehemently.

"No, it is impossible!" he shouted. "You could never do it! Please, my friend," he implored, "do not try. It would be suicide."

"Suicide be damned!" Kirby snorted recklessly. "It's a legitimate stunt—I've seen circus flyers do it. We can work it as long as that squarehead down there keeps flying steady. Now stop arguing—we're wasting time. You have my orders. Grab those controls and get to work!"

The Frenchman, realizing that there was no stopping this reckless dare-devil of a Yank from breaking his neck, had no choice but to obey. He seized the joystick in the rear cockpit, and his feet found the rudder bar. His right arm was almost paralyzed from the burning pain of his wound, but he ignored it and began to guide the ship expertly, as Kirby relinquished the controls.

"Now," the Mosquito was giving his final instructions, and his tone was grim, "if I should fail, I'm trusting you to remove all traces of von Hertz and that Spad even if you have to ram them!"

And so saying he unstrapped his safety belt, stood up in his cockpit. He did not hesitate for a moment. As calmly as if he were going out for a stroll, he climbed from that cockpit and, gripping struts for support, got out on the lower wing of the two-seater. Carefully, crawling on hands and knees, grabbing struts and wires, he made his way towards the outer-edge, the wing-tip.

Meanwhile Captain Renier, following Kirby's instructions, eased his stick forward and commenced descending in a long glide towards the Spad below. The Frenchman used all his skill to keep the ship steady, to take no chances of shaking Kirby off. The Mosquito continued crawling out along the bottom wing, and as he got further and further from the fuselage of the ship he began to feel a peculiar dizziness, in spite of

himself. After all, it was not a pleasant sensation to be crawling out on a fragile platform, with only a giddy drop of dark space below—a full mile of thin air! But he went right ahead. Reaching the tip of the wing, he crouched there like a monkey, holding the two outer-bay struts in either hand.

And all the time, down below, von Hertz struggled like a madman with his jammed guns. All at once, to his overwhelming relief, he was beginning to get results. He was succeeding in extracting the bullet which had gotten stuck in the breech!

But at that same moment he saw the two-seater swooping straight for him again, coming down in a dive which von Hertz knew would mean his finish! In horror, he abandoned his gun, started to half-roll, twist, zigzag for all he was worth. The two-seater was right on top of him now, leveling off. And then Von Hertz's eyes widened with incredulity. *Gott im Himmel*, that ship was not firing at him—not blazing away at him, though it had him cold! Could it be that his antagonist's guns had jammed too? That must be the case! Probably the observer had been wounded, was helpless, and the pilot's guns had jammed.

The Hawk, perhaps because of the darkness, failed to see the figure of Kirby crouching on the wing-tip of that two-seater overhead.

Reassured, von Hertz decided to take a chance and get back to work on his guns. In another second he would have them fixed, and could deal with his foes. Again he set his plane in neutral, bent over his guns.

And Captain Renier, working his controls with painstaking care, did a most excellent bit of maneuvering. Carefully, he kept easing down, down, until the lower wing tip on which Kirby was perched was sliding right above the upper wing-edge of the Spad. Skillfully, the Frenchman held this position, kept easing that wing-tip down more and more, closer and closer to the Spad's top wing—even as von Hertz, with a cry of triumph, succeeded in fixing his guns!

But before the German turned back to his controls, Kirby acted. The top wing of that Spad was less than three feet below him. He measured his distance, judged his time. For a split second he hesitated, as once more a wave of nauseating dizziness swept him. But then, right off the wing-tip of the two-seater he dropped, dropped into space.

He landed, feel first, on the top wing of the Spad, saved himself in the nick of time from rolling off by clutching the control wires of the ailerons. He had made it! The Frenchman, relieved but by no means

satisfied, zoomed upwards, leaving Kirby sprawled out on the wing of the Spad.

But von Hertz knew he was there!

The Hawk had felt him drop on the wing, felt the sudden tilt of the plane under Kirby's weight. Now he saw the Mosquito's legs protruding over the edge of the wing-surface!

WITH A BLACK OATH, the German got to work. He'd show this damned swine! He pulled back his stick and looped the loop furiously. Kirby felt himself being hurled off the wing, and he held on with frenzy. Captain Renier, flying overhead, stared on in horror, helpless to come to the rescue of his comrade—for he could not fire for fear of hitting Kirby. Mercilessly, von Hertz kept stunting, looping, rolling, twisting all over the place. The Mosquito was finding it more and more impossible to hold on. He was exhausted, and he felt sick to his stomach. God, soon he must let go—drop into space! Vaguely, he was aware of a new peril which suddenly faced him. Von Hertz had whipped out his revolver, was taking pot-shots at the man sprawled above the wing. The Mosquito heard a bullet whine close by. He gritted his teeth, and rallied all his strength. He could not stay here! He must move; move and take von Hertz by surprise! Painfully, he started crawling along the wing. Von Hertz, thinking the man was still out near the aileron, kept firing his revolver in that direction. Meanwhile Kirby was making slow but steady progress. He did not see how he could go on much longer, but he forced his protesting muscles to obey, kept crawling along that wing, while the Frenchman in the two-seater circled above, watching.

Now Kirby had succeeded in reaching the center of the wing. He was right above the German's cockpit, and the latter did not know it. It was a tense moment for the Mosquito. Would he manage it? He could not have the help of his revolver—he needed both his hands to hold on.

Again he measured his distance, peered down at the German's broad shoulders. He rolled over on his stomach, wriggled his way to the edge of the wing over the cockpit.

Then, once more, he dropped! Right on top of the astonished German he landed, and his arms grabbed the latter's neck to stop himself from tumbling off. Savagely he crowded into the small cockpit, on top of von Hertz, and he kept tightening his viselike grip on the other's throat more and more, choking out the spy's breath.

“Always,” he panted, with a mad, defiant laugh, “always do—the unexpected!”

Von Hertz’s eyes widened behind their goggles as he recognized his assailant. Frantically he struggled in Kirby’s grip, while the Spad responded to the erratic movements of the Hawk’s hands and feet on the controls, floundered about crazily. The German tried to use his revolver, tried to press it against Kirby. But Kirby, who seemed to be guided by a demon now, managed to send that gun flying out of the plane.

Madly, the two men struggled in the narrow confines of that cockpit, while the Spad flew on like a crazed bird. Madly von Hertz kept pushing Kirby off, trying to send him out into space.

But then the Hawk’s safety belt, the belt which held him in the cockpit, became unfastened, and Kirby, in a surge of strength, literally lifted the spy out of his seat. They were standing up now, fighting like wildcats. Both were desperate, and all sportsmanship was forgotten. They wrestled, punched, and kicked. It was fierce, grim conflict—elemental.

The controls of the Spad had swung back into neutral now, and the ship straightened out, flew along more evenly. And the French two-seater kept hovering above, with Captain Renier watching tensely, though in the darkness he could hardly make out what was taking place in the cockpit of that Spad.

Suddenly, by a lucky punch, Kirby momentarily dazed the German, dazed him enough to take the opportunity of looking for those precious papers. Holding the Hawk to him with one hand, the Mosquito hastily started searching his flying logs with the other. But though he hunted and hunted, not a trace of that packet could he find! Despair seized him. Good God, had he gone through all this hell only to fail anyway? Had the wily von Hertz perhaps tossed those documents to the Germans below, with a message to deliver them to Imperial intelligence? Frantically, he prayed that the packet was somewhere on the spy’s person. Otherwise everything was lost!

While the Mosquito kept searching fiendishly for those papers, the German suddenly recovered from the effects of the punch. The Hawk, seeing that Kirby was now off his guard, rallied his strength. Then he hurled himself upon the Mosquito with a force which sent the latter reeling backwards. Kirby lost his balance, felt himself falling out. The German was pushing him, forcing him over the edge of the cockpit! Throwing all his remaining strength into one supreme effort, Kirby lunged upwards with his whole body. Up he came,

pushing the German with him. And then, when he was again standing in the cockpit, he lashed out with a left uppercut that might have killed an ox. It landed flush on the German’s jaw, and the man sagged. Then he too reeled backwards, started to fall out. But Kirby, who wouldn’t have grieved much over von Hertz’s death, seized the falling man’s collar in a frenzy and pulled him back—impelled by the thought that those documents must be somewhere on the spy.

The Hawk was limp in Kirby’s grip. He was out—out cold! For a moment Kirby stood there, stupidly holding him up in the cockpit, while the Spad kept flying on in neutral. Then, with a shock, Kirby realized that all the time they had been going further and further into the German lines—with the French two-seater above faithfully following.

Clumsily, the Mosquito tried to put the unconscious von Hertz in a position where he would not fall out, but also would not be in the way. When at last he had completed this task, the spy’s legs were in the cockpit, while the rest of his body was lying over the fuselage in back. Kirby sat down, strapped himself in, and seized the controls. Holding onto his unconscious prisoner with his free hand, he banked carefully. The French plane flew down, its pilot waving interrogatively. Kirby waved back, signaled Captain Renier to follow. The two ships started back for the lines.

Soon they were safe within Allied territory, and Kirby, still holding onto his prisoner, headed towards the field near G.H.Q. where General Drake was to meet him. And as they went on, two other Allied ships suddenly swung in towards them. They were Spads, and Kirby knew at once that they were piloted by his two comrades, Carn and Travis! A warm surge of joy and relief swept Kirby. Evidently the two men had managed to get back to their drome after all, had secured new ships and hurried up into the air again to find out what this strange business was all about.

At first there was a little confusion. Kirby’s comrades, recognizing the plane which had shot them down, regarded it with suspicion and rage, despite the signals which Captain Renier gave them. But then, as Kirby pulled up close to them, and Carn and Travis saw the unconscious figure sprawled over the fuselage of their leader’s plane, they began to understand. With enthusiastic joy they recognized Kirby as he snatched off his goggles and revealed his face in the glow from his instrument board. But they couldn’t for the life of them understand how he had gotten into that single-seater.

With his two comrades and that French two-seater

escorting him, Kirby flew to the field where he was to land, and went down very carefully, taking pains to keep his precious prisoner from being shaken off. All four ships landed on that field.

FIVE MINUTES LATER, in the glare of several floodlights, Friedrich von Hertz, who had just come to after Kirby had landed, stood slightly dazed and bewildered in the midst of a ring of soldiers, who covered him with their revolvers. Confronting the spy was Colonel Drake, who had waited all this time for Kirby's arrival—and who looked quite haggard and pale.

The Three Mosquitoes stood among the others, watching the proceedings with interest. But for Kirby it was more than just interest, he was waiting in suspense for them to search the spy, see if he had those papers. Captain Renier, the gallant Frenchman, was at another part of the field, getting his wound dressed.

Colonel Drake's rasping voice suddenly barked out, "All right, we can take him to the office and search him now."

At these words von Hertz glared at him sullenly. But then, abruptly, the spy's features relaxed. Like a good sport who has played the game and lost, he grinned. Once more he was his old self—the cool and sardonic von Hertz who laughed at his enemies.

"Why go to all the trouble of searching me?" he asked innocently. "You didn't tell me you wanted anything from me." And, to everyone's astonishment, he calmly reached down, rolled up the left trouser-leg of his teddy-bear. And Kirby's eyes shone with relief, as the Hawk produced that coveted packet, handed it cheerfully to Colonel Drake.

The colonel could not hide his frenzied joy at getting those papers. He held them in the glare of lights, scanned through them swiftly. They were all in order. He stuffed them away.

Kirby had accomplished his mission! The papers had finally reached their destination!

And not long afterwards, as soon as Colonel Drake got in touch with the Paris war ministry and told them it was no longer necessary to keep this business secret, he was informed that Von Hertz's whole gang, following Kirby's report from Le Brenne, had been rounded up and captured. The real Captain Baker, Lieutenant Marquet, and the chauffeur of the car had been found in an old house on a secluded street, where they were being kept prisoners by some of von Hertz's accomplices.

And by picking up all the threads and tying them together, they had found out just how von Hertz had

worked his amazing game. One of his men, to begin with, had managed somehow to be right in the war ministry, posing as a guard. He it was who had given von Hertz the tip about those documents. Then, in some miraculous fashion, this lieutenant of von Hertz's had managed to plant a dictaphone right in the soundproof room where the famous French general held all his secret conferences. Von Hertz or one of his gang listened in on this dictaphone from outside the building, listened in shifts, so that they could keep it covered at all hours. Thus they had heard the general telling Colonel Drake to get an aviator, had learned who this aviator was to be, and had found out all the passwords. Also they had heard Captain Baker, Lieutenant Marquet, and the chauffeur, getting their instructions.

When the latter three men drove to Le Bourget they had to go over one stretch of road that was usually deserted. It was here that the wily von Hertz and his accomplices had stopped them by a clever ruse. The spies, driving here in their own car, had stalled their machine right in the middle of the road, making passage on either side impossible. When the war ministry auto came along, its occupants saw a group of men standing at a car on the road, tinkering with the engine. The war ministry men had been forced to stop. And, by taking them unawares, von Hertz and his men had easily overpowered them. Then von Hertz, Schmidt, and another man had taken their respective uniforms and papers, and while the captured men were driven off in the German's car, the Hawk and his two trusted accomplices had simply climbed into the war ministry machine and gone on to Le Bourget. And the rest was Kirby's story.

As von Hertz learned that all his crew had been caught, and his ingenious trick discovered, he had all he could do to maintain his calm. He was beaten, crushed—an utter failure in his biggest assignment.

"Well," he sighed, glancing arrogantly at his captors, "so you finally caught me—after I ran you ragged! You caught me not because of your wonderful intelligence system though, but," his eyes suddenly rested on Kirby, who stood among the ring which surrounded the German, "but because of a damned gallant flyer! Allow me to congratulate you, Captain Kirby!" He chuckled. "And I was telling you before that you ought to stick to your flying, and not try to match wits with von Hertz, of Imperial intelligence. Guess that could be reversed. I should have stuck to my intelligence, and not tried to match brawn with Captain Kirby, of the U.S. air service!"