



THE BLUE GHOST PATROL

by LESTER DENT

Hot on the trail of those two traitor ships from his own base flew the Black Bat, famous Allied secret agent whose face no man had ever seen. Suddenly five Albatrosses swooped down and sent him crashing into the sea. But in the next second they had gone on—and their Spandaus were hammering at the two traitor ships!

THE BLACK BAT!"

The whisper was a low, excited breath of a sound in the murk. It was almost lost in the thumping noise of a Sunbeam motor warming at the near-by Great Shark Mouth seaplane base.

The man addressed as the Black Bat halted. A darker shadow which seemed all height, he stooped a little to peer into the shrubbery beside the path. Mists clinging to the marshy English coastland made the night intensely dark, although the hour was near dawn.

The man who had whispered suddenly thumbed a flashlight. The glaring funnel drenched all the Black Bat's weird figure with white light.

He was tall, nearly seven feet, incredibly gaunt. His jacket, breeches, boots, Sam Browne, were all regulation in cut—but were a somber raven-black in hue. His helmet was black and hid all his head and face. Raven gloves sheathed his hands. Back of the goggle glasses, his eyes were thin splinters of ivory in the flashlight glare.

The flash went out. The man who held it exploded, "All right!" The bark was directed at someone on the other side of the path.

The Black Bat dropped, twisting around as he collapsed. A club, swung in the darkness with an axe-like chopping stroke, glanced off the side of his head onto his shoulder. His bark of agony was muffled in his mask of a helmet. The blow smashed him prone.

Two clutching, striking forms landed on him—the man with the flash and the other man who had swung the club. One captured his legs with both arms. The other, astride his chest, gripped his throat and hissed, "He's stunned! Use the club on his head! Bust him a good one, damn him! Candide said to kill him if we got the chance—like the other one!"

"Ow about stickin' a knife in 'im?" the other asked in a hoarse Cockney accent. "That'll fix 'im so 'e won't bother the Blue Ghosts again!"

"The club, you goop! They might trace the knife to us! And hurry up!"

The Cockney loosened his clutch on the Black Bat's legs—and the legs promptly bent and straightened. The Cockney shrieked, catapulted through the darkness and slumped into the shrubbery with a tremendous crashing.

The Black Bat's arms came up, got the neck of the man choking him, they tightened like a giant nutcracker. The man gurgled, kicked with both feet,

flailed his arms madly. Terrified at the futility of his efforts, he bawled, "Help me, damn it!"

The Black Bat transferred his grip from the man's neck to the small of his back, holding the fellow's arms clamped to his sides as effectively as though they were two rolls of inanimate cloth.

The man squawled, "He's bustin' me in two! Help!"

The Black Bat, with surprising ease, considering the man in the trap of his arms must have weighed a hundred and eighty pounds, stood up.

The Cockney came staggering out of the bushes, gulping for breath. The Black Bat stepped forward. His foot swung. The Cockney never knew the foot was coming until it caved his middle inward. He shot back into the bushes—a contorted, helpless bundle.

The Black Bat loosened one arm from the man he held. A black-gloved hand, huge out of all proportion to the wrist to which it was attached, drove a blow that traveled no farther than a Sunbeam piston stroke. All of the strength suddenly went out of his captive's struggling.

Carrying the man, the gaunt, weird figure in black went to the Cockney. He dragged the fellow into the path and dumped both men there.

He felt for the flashlight, but could not find it. Holding the two men by the simple expedient of standing with a foot on the chest of each, he fumbled out a match, struck it.

But he didn't get time to inspect the faces of the two who had tried to club him to death.

OUT OF THE DARKNESS came a flung loop of wire. It dropped over his shoulders, tightened just above his elbows with a yank that jerked him off his two captives.

He lunged, launching a kick at this invisible third assailant who had roped him. The kick missed as the fellow changed position with the stealth of an alley cat.

The Black Bat fought the wire. It seemed to be a wrapped brace cable off a plane, and the knot was a clever thing which would tighten but wouldn't loosen. It sank deep in his arms and held them.

He rushed the third man again, only to have the fellow evade him and make off in the darkness. The Black Bat charged a few paces in pursuit then wheeled and lunged back to the path.

The two men there had been enough alive to take advantage of their opportunity. They were gone, and there was no sound, above the idling Sunbeam motor

to show what direction they had taken.

From Great Shark Mouth seaplane base came excited yells and the clatter of running feet on the path. The fight had been heard over the sound of the warmiig plane. The Black Bat listened a moment, then moved stealthily away through the shrubbery, tugging in vain at the wire which held his arms, swearing in a low, puzzled monotone.

He went by a roundabout route, always concealed in the darkness, to the Great Shark Mouth operations office. He looked through a window.

Only Major McAllen, base commandant, was inside, seated at a field desk. He looked up as the Black Bat came in, and his jaw dropped.

"Well, for—what's happened to you?"

The Black Bat grunted, "Loosen this damn wire!"

McAllen was forced to cut the cable with pliers he took from a drawer. The Black Bat stretched his arms and rubbed them. He did not remove his mask.

In a rapid, terse voice, he told the base commandant what had occurred on the path.

"The first two to jump me were undoubtedly the ones who killed that Intelligence man that Wing Headquarters sent here," he finished.

"You—you think they're the key to our nine planes which have so mysteriously disappeared?" McAllen demanded.

"Of course." The Black Bat's shrouded head nodded emphatically. "The two of them tried to give me the same dose they gave that Intelligence agent."

McAllen looked puzzled. "You mean three of them, don't you?"

"No." The Black Bat's head shook. "That's what has me puzzled. The first two tried to kill me, but the third didn't. He could have, after he roped me with that wire, but he ran away. It looks as if he wanted the other two to escape—and I don't understand that."

He stared levelly at McAllen. "You ever hear of the man they mentioned—Candide? He must be their leader."

"No. I never heard that name before."

"They said something about Blue Ghosts. Know anything about them—whatever they are?"

"No-o-o," McAllen began. Then he started. "Wait! We've had three or four reports of mysterious blue planes flying over the North Sea, near the German coast. Our patrolling warships saw them—always at great height. They were painted blue, but bore no other markings. It is that latter which attracted attention to them."

"That must be the Blue Ghosts they meant. Have you any other information about them?"

"None."

THE BLACK BAT went to the door, opened it, and stood looking out. It was still dark. Floodlights bathed the beach and timbered slipways in front of the hangars.

A Short flying boat was preparing to take the air. A stringy man was already in the pilot's cockpit. A stocky, pop-eyed, large-bodied observer was inserting himself in the other pit. The latter wore neither helmet nor goggles and his hair was a drooping shock, like rain-wet hay.

The Sunbeam motor threw out a crash of sound. Sand squirted in a cone past the empennage. Lurching, the Short went down the slipway and floated. The stringy pilot pulled the release of the G.R.W. wheel-mount, dropping the wheels. Minus their drag, the Short gathered speed, went on step and vaulted off!

"That was Grane and his Cockney observer, Neff," Major McAllen said, standing beside the Black Bat. "They're off on morning patrol."

The sepia mask covered whatever emotion was on the Black Bat's face, but he ordered sharply, "Get me a plane—quick!"

"You suspect Grane and Neff!" ejaculated McAllen excitedly.

"I suspect everybody—until I find what is happening to men and ships from this base!" the Black Bat said. "You know that during the week I've been here, I have selected patrols at random and followed them, hoping to learn something. Well, Grane and Neff happen to be on the schedule this morning. That is all."

The commandant nodded. "I'll get you a ship."

Two mechanics in gum boots were holding a single-seater Sopwith boat a few yards offshore while an armorer perched on the lower wing, working over the cowl Vickers.

The Black Bat, approaching the plane trailed by Major McAllen, called to the mechanics, "Pack me out, you birds!"

The request was not unusual, mechanics usually carried a pilot to his plane so that he wouldn't get his feet wet. The greaseballs made a chair with interlocking arms. One of them had a body like a half-filled sack, loose and wrinkled at the top, fat and wide at the bottom. His legs were unnaturally short, his arms overly long. He stared intently at the back of

the Black Bat's head as the gaunt giant sat in the cradle their arms made.

The armorer on the Sop warned him. "Only one of the guns is working, sir! The other has something wrong with the C.C. gear. I haven't been able to clear the trouble yet."

"No time to fix it!" the Black Bat decided.

The mechanics waded out, stepping slowly on the packed sand, water sloshing higher around their rubber boots. The Black Bat held his feet straight out to keep them dry.

Suddenly the mechanic with the sacklike body seemed to slip. He staggered. His right hand, loosening at the Black Bat's back, slid up, the fingers going under the mask of a helmet. The neck-strap parted. The entire helmet slid upward.

The Black Bat moved like a giant sepia leopard. His left hand clamped the helmet, keeping it on; his right shot out and trapped the throat of the mechanic. He twisted, landing on his feet in the surf.

He shook the mechanic and his voice roared out, "Trying to unmask me—damn you!"

The mechanic squirmed, helpless as spaghetti on a fork in that iron vise of fingers. He gargled, "I slipped—"

"Slipped—hell! You're a new man around here—what's your name?"

"Hen Janes!" The mechanic sounded terrified.

"How long you been here?"

"One—two weeks."

The Black Bat glared at the fellow. Then he shot a glance at the Short in which Grane and Neff had taken off. It was a distant winged insect above the lustrous blue flank of the North Sea.

He released Janes with a violence that sent him flailing backward. Saying no word, he wheeled, waded to the Sop and swung into the pit.

The Anzani motor blasted sound. The Sop heaved over a dozen combers, sloughed through some more and jarred and shook as it went on step, the floats barely smacking the surface. The tail dropped, and the crate lifted off.

Back at Great Shark Mouth base, the other gum-booted mechanic squinted curiously at Hen Janes, spat, and said, "Gor blimey! 'E'll wring yer neck if yer try to look at 'is mug again."

Janes gritted, "I slipped!"

"Maybe yer did. Me, I wouldn't want the Black Bat's 'ands on my pipes. I've 'eard of 'im. Whenever there's trouble nobody else can 'andle, they send the Black

Bat, and 'e busts things wide open. Nobody's ever seen 'is face. I 'ear talk 'e's the greatest bloomin' secret agent the Allies 'ave got and 'e keeps that face of 'is'n masked so if there's any German agents around, they won't get a look at it."

Janes snarled, "Find somebody else to empty your guff on!"

He stamped away.

THE BLACK BAT followed Grane and Neff, holding his Sopwith at twelve thousand, keeping his eyes on the other plane which flew at about a thousand feet, low enough to sight marauding Boche submarines which were the principal object of the patrol.

Clouds hung farther out to sea, scattered patches of tall white cumulus. Before long he was dodging through them, keeping track of the Short by an occasional glimpse.

As he flew, he did some intensive thinking. He had not deceived Major McAllen about being en route to the base to follow Grane and Neff when he was attacked on the path. But neither had he told McAllen all he knew. For instance, what he had learned during the fight—that his two assailants were this same Grane and Neff!

They were. The few words spoken during the affray had convinced, him of that.

He had no idea who the third attacker was, the one who had interfered to permit the other two to escape. And as yet, he had been unable to learn what was happening to planes and men from Great Shark Mouth base. That was why he was letting Grane and Neff go their way. He hoped they would lead him to a solution of the enigma.

Enigma it was! Nine British planes had flown out to sea and were never heard from again. Always the ships flew alone when this happened. North Sea patrol boats had never found wreckage. The Germans did not report shooting down the planes—as was their custom. Men and ships simply vanished into thin air.

The Black Bat cursed softly—and his swearing was that of a disgruntled Yank buzzard. He shoved up the black mask of a helmet to rub his nose. His face was long and homely, his mouth a curving, humorous slash. His nose had been broken at some time or other. His ears were thickened tufty, and grayish lines of old scars showed in many places on his features. It had been knocked around a lot—that face.

He lowered the mask and fell to wondering about the mysterious Candide and the Blue Ghosts—and the

mechanic, Hen Janes. The man had certainly tried to unmask him. Why? He would hardly do it out of mere curiosity.

Gr-r-r-up! Lead barbed wires of tracer suddenly tore a gully across the Sop's right wing bank. The Black Bat booted left rudder and planted the stick in the pit wall. The Sop jumped around in the sky.

Five German two-seater boats had popped into the rift among the clouds in which he happened to be flying. Float-fitted Albatrosses! A wing-rubbing, lead-spitting wedge, they dived.

The Black Bat swore bitterly, fought the controls. He had tumbled blindly into a trap! Grane and Neff had flown here to meet the Boche ships, perhaps even to fly back to Germany with them! The pair must know they were suspected, must have been aware they were followed.

Lead on the Sop ailerons set the stick madly a-wiggle. A load wire parted with a dong like a hand coming down on a piano keyboard. The Black Bat slipped out of the deadly torrent.

Two of the German ships continued past him and on downward in a shrieking dive toward the Short of Grane and Neff. The other three flattened and banked to give battle to the Sop.

The Black Bat rolled. Passing Spandau slugs screamed over the Anzani pant, and the screams turned into metallic popping as lead almost brushed, his face, leaving tracer smoke a writhing, grisly mess like cobwebs before his eyes.

He booted right rudder, hung near a stall—and Maltese crosses bulked big on his crossed sight wires. His jet-cased fingers curled on the stick triggers. His long cowl Vickers cackled and shook its iron rump. He swore softly, remembering the armorer's warning that the other gun had a bad C.C. synchronizing gear. But one gun was plenty!

The German, ship bucked and climbed crazily. It hung a moment by its nose; then its prop, evidently nicked, snapped a crankshaft and rose a full hundred feet upward by its own spin. The Boche plane curled over on its back and went down in a terrific, screwing plunge.

The Black Bat got a chance to look below.

The two German planes which had gone on had engaged the Short of Grane and Neff!

THE BLACK BAT blew a surprised grunt. He had thought Grane and Neff had led him to a trap. But down below the two Boche ships had sprung a kill

party on the pair, needle snouts of their Spandau guns threading ravenous tracer.

The Black Bat dropped his Sop nose. He wanted to make sure the scrap below was no sham.

The two German wagons came after him—guns shuttling, Splinters pushed hairy holes in the Sop wings. Doped fabric tore off thin strips that whipped like pennants.

The Black Bat clamped the stick back suddenly. A whine and a grunt from straining struts, and the Sop was going up almost as fast as it had been going down. He got an Albatross fuselage in his sight rings, and tightened on the Bowdens. The German banked in a frenzy to get away—the bank became a crazy, uncontrolled spin. Two down!

Grane and Neff had so far held off the two ships harrying them. The Black Bat, descending in a shrieking vertical, fished for one of the Boche ships with his sight wires. Before he found the boat it had caught fire, the fuel tank ruptured by Vickers lead from the Short.

That ended the affray. The surviving two Krauts, a long, long way from Germany and in mighty rough company, banked about and hoicked for home. Grane and Neff just as promptly turned their Short for Great Shark Mouth base.

The Black Bat circled a couple of times, then trailed after them. But he flew with the throttle only partially open, letting the other plane draw rapidly ahead.

Back of the mask, his forehead was furrowed with thought. After a while he made a decision and stirred the stick, making the Sop reel in the sky as if it were badly hit—almost out of control. Grane and Neff would be watching him, he felt. A bit later, he let the Sop spin a short distance, pulled it level, watching the distant Short draw farther away from him. Then he banked a bit to the southward.

When he sighted the English coastline it was at a point a dozen miles south of Great Shark Mouth base. He peaked the Sop down. Fourscore yards offshore, the floats hit the sea. Butchered badly by Spandau lead, they soaked up water like a desert-dried sponge.

The Sop boat, momentum stubbed, kicked up its tail. The prop beat the sea into a lather.

The Black Bat had loosened the safety belt. When the Sop nosed over, he left the cockpit as if blown out, hit the water and sank like a bolt of heavy blue steel.

IT WAS NEAR NOON when Grane and Neff planted their Short on the sea before Great Shark Mouth base and taxied to a slipway.

To Major McAllen in the operations office they told their story. They had encountered five German boats, they said. They had gotten one Boche; the Black Bat two. The Germans had been driven off and they had hurried back to the base, a bad miss in their Sunbeam motor. The Black Bat had seemed in trouble when last they saw his Sop, but, of course, it would have been useless for them to remain behind and help because some of the German bullets had found the floats of their Short.

Major McAllen questioned them closely, but was careful to keep all suspicion out of his manner. He seemed satisfied. That was a bit of excellent acting. He had orders from Wing to obey to the letter every command this mysterious Black Bat gave him; and one of the weird personage's orders had been to show at no time that anybody at the base was under suspicion.

Late that afternoon McAllen called Grane and Neff into the operations shack again.

"Wreckage of the Black Bat's plane was found in the sea a dozen miles south of here," he told the pair. "A farmer saw the plane come down, but when he got to it there was no sign of the pilot. The Black Bat must have drowned."

Grane and Neff showed just the right amount of regret. It was too bad they had not been able to remain behind and see the other plane gotten ashore safely that morning, they said.

A bit later they both went into Grane's cubicle. Neff closed the door and swore softly. "So they got the pest, after all! 'Is Sop must 'ave gone a cropper before he got to land!"

"What a break for us!" Grane said.

"Gord 'elp us if 'e ain't dead!" Neff muttered. "D'you think 'e was wise to us?"

"How the hell do I know?" Grane put a cigarette in his loose lips, held a match to it and extinguished the match with smoke that came out of his mouth with an ugly laugh. "A lot of good it did him if he was. But I don't think he saw our faces when we jumped him this morning."

"That's another blinkin' thing we better talk over!" Neff said earnestly. He went outside and walked to the rear of the Adrian hut among tall weeds. He broke off a thin weed, took a pipe from his pocket and pretended to clean it, then went back in the shack. "Nobody's around. About that barmy business on the path this mornin'—who the 'ell was the bloke who jumped in an' let us get away?"

Grane cursed harshly. "I don't know!"

Neff persisted, "An' 'ow come them Germans was waitin' where we was to meet the Blue Ghosts? An' how d'you think the Black Bat come to be followin' us?"

Grane shot out blue smoke. "Damned if I savvy how the Krauts came to be there. Maybe they picked up the radio message Candide sent us, telling us where to meet him. As for the Black Bat—he's dead. Forget him!"

Neff pointed a thin forefinger at Grane and made a sound like a shot with his tongue and the roof of his mouth. "If 'e ain't, we're liable to get that!"

Grane ground a savage heel on his cigarette. "It's damn lucky the Blue Ghosts saw that flight of Germans in time to beat it away!"

Neff scratched his thin neck. "I'm tellin' you, I 'ope that Black Bat don't come back!"

Grane squinted his popeyes. "You know what I think?"

"Naw."

"I think you better be the tenth guy in this outfit to disappear." His laugh was like a rattle of rocks in a tin bucket. "You're getting too ga-ga to do us any good here."

Neff scowled, then grinned. "Not a 'alf bad idea."

"We'll talk that idea over with Candide." Grane pulled a cuff back and looked at his wrist watch. "You know we're going on bat patrol at nine o'clock tonight. Candide said in his radio message I picked up after we met them Germans that he would meet us at the mouth of Loony creek in Holbeach Marsh at ten. He wants to know what the Black Bat did when he got back. It'll sure tickle Candide to hear he didn't get back. We'll talk to him about your disappearance."

Neff said, "If you ask me, it needs talkin' about. There's too much funny business 'appenin' around 'ere!"

"Let's go eat," Grane grunted.

THE BLACK BAT, lying concealed in a brush clump two hundred feet away, watched the pair leave their Adrian hut. Then he pulled the watch-case telephone receivers from the ear pockets in his helmet.

His breathing was excited. His somber clothing was wrinkled badly—thanks to the ducking he had received when his Sop sank. He had taken a shaking up when he was tossed from the cockpit, but swam ashore without difficulty.

He breathed into his mask, "So that's what it was—they had a rendezvous with the Blue Ghosts and the Germans laid a trap. Now who the hell are those Blue Ghosts? And where do our missing planes come in?"

Perhaps a minute he lay there, not moving. Then the lids jerked wide off his eyes. He lifted his head slightly, staring. His lips issued an astounded grunt.

Because of the marshy nature of the English coast upon which Great Shark Mouth base was built, the Adrian huts had been erected on piles which held, the flooring several inches above the perpetually sodden earth.

Out of this cramped space beneath Grane's hut a man was squirming. It was the mechanic who had tried to unmask the Black Bat—Hen Janes!

Scuttling on all fours, Hen Janes vanished in the tall weeds.

"He's not a British Intelligence agent!" the Black Bat muttered wonderingly. "Wing Headquarters would have told me if he was! Now what's his interest in this thing?"

He considered the puzzle, and also wondered if Hen Janes had found the wires going under the Adrian shack floor to the microphone beneath the table.

"Probably he didn't find 'em," he decided. "Lucky I punched them in a crack on the chance somebody'd crawl under there."

He disconnected the telephone headset from the concealed wires that led to the Adrian shack microphone, tucked it inside his jacket, then stared for a long time at the shack, thinking.

"Ten o'clock—at the mouth of Loony creek in Holbeach Marsh!" he breathed at last.

Furtively, seen by no one about the seaplane base, he crawled away.

IT WAS DARK, intensely dark, in Holbeach Marsh. Clouds matted the sky. Fog, warm and wet as steam, saturated the air.

The Black Bat, crouched in tall salt grass, up to his ankles in mire, listened to two planes taxiing for the beach. From the motor sounds, he judged they were headed almost directly for where he was hidden. He wrinkled his nose in the stench of marsh vegetation which rushed over him every time the inshore breeze momentarily slackened. That should be two of the mysterious Blue Ghosts out there. Candide, the Blue Ghost leader, should be aboard one.

The Black Bat flattened lower as the two planes approached and grounded not a score of yards from him. The motors went silent and men got out.

A voice, a weird voice, so shrill that it carried through the murk like the cry of a wild bird, said: "We'll meet them down the beach a hundred yards.

No need of taking a chance of them crashing into our ships. You stay here, Joe."

"Okay, Candide," Joe said. He had a hoarse, froggy voice.

There seemed to be four of the Blue Ghosts. Three of them moved off down the beach. One remained. The latter, standing but a few yards from where the Black Bat lay, lit a cigarette. The match glow showed his face—a bony evil thing.

The man's attire was strange—both his helmet and coat were a pale, bilious blue in color. His goggles were shoved up on his forehead.

The Black Bat lay inert and silent, considering. Then he moved away, stealthily, trailing Candide and the other two.

He could hear the faint moan of a distant plane motor now. Grane and Neff coming! He wanted to hear what was said when the pair arrived. The Sunbeam moan changed slowly to a roar. The plane circled. From it a flashlight batted a white eye three times. Candide grunted an order and one of the men with him signaled back.

The circling ship lowered; there was a watery smashing and gurgling as it landed. Sporadic howls of the Sunbeam pushed it shoreward. The Black Bat oozed closer to Candide.

A voice—Neff's—called from the plane. "Candide?" "Sure!" Candide shrieked.

"The Black Bat is dead!" Neff yelled. "Them Boche who laid for us this mornin' got 'im!"

"Great!" barked Candide. "Cut your motor and come ashore."

The idling Sunbeam silenced. Grane and Neff waded to the beach.

The Black Bat, his eardrums cracked to take in everything that was said, heard a sound off to the right. It was a stick snapping noisily.

Candide heard it, also, and hissed, "What's that?"

A flashlight splashed a funnel of luminosity which swept across the marsh growth.

"Hell!" Candide shrieked. "Look! Get him!"

A gun streaked red. From the spot where the stick had snapped, brush fluttered, and crashed as a man ran.

The Black Bat froze where he was. There had been another eavesdropper to the meeting! The man had been unlucky enough to betray himself.

Candide and his men charged after the fugitive. One of them fired again.

"Don't shoot!" a man howled in a terrified voice. "Don't shoot!"

The Black Bat ran his tongue across his lips. That voice! It was the mechanic, Hen Janes!

THE MAN, JOE, who had been guarding the planes, came running up, passing within a dozen feet of where the Black Bat lay hidden. He shouted an excited question.

"How in hell do I know what's happened?" Candide shrilled at him. "We caught somebody listening. Grane, Neff—you know him?"

"He's a new mechanic at the base, Hen Janes," Grane growled.

Harshly, Candide asked: "Why were you listening, Janes? Were you working with the Black Bat?"

"Working!" Janes whined. "I'm not an Intelligence agent! You got me wrong!"

"Yeah—like hell we have!"

In a frightened, earnest voice, Janes declared: "I'm just a mechanic, and that's straight. A few dayn ago I overheard Grane and Neff, here, talking about some big money they were making. It sounded good. So I started snooping to see if I couldn't get in on it."

Neff snarled, "Ow'd you know about this meetin', bloke?"

"I was under the floor of your shack this afternoon—I heard you talking," Hen Janes whined. Then, eagerly, he added: "It was me yanked the Black Bat off'n you long enough for you to get away this mornin'. I was watching you, an' I didn't want him spoiling any of my chances at that money you was talking about."

Candide cursed shrilly, "Grane, Neff, you must have smeared this thing all over that base!"

Grane and Neff began a profane and simultaneous denial of that.

"Shut up!" Candide snarled. "I know you birds, and I've been expecting something like this to happen. You two will have to join us now. We can't take any more chances."

"But what if we needs some more blinkin' planes?" Neff asked. "If there ain't nobody at the base to doctor the gas so they'll be forced down at sea where you can get 'em, 'ow'll we manage?"

The listening Black Bat scowled. So that was what had happened, to those nine missing ships!

Candide swore shrilly. "We'll have to get along with what planes we've got."

"What about me?" Hen Janes whined.

"You won't worry about that, bloke!" Neff growled. "Turn the barmy light on 'im, somebody. Hi've got a gun!"

"No!" Candide squeaked. "We'll take him along. He says he pulled your fat out of the fire this morning. And we need a mechanic damn bad, now that we won't be able to get more ships from the British. If he's lying—we'll have him where we can take care of him."

The Blue Ghosts' leader hesitated a moment. "Joe, go back and start the motors. Grane will ride the rear cockpit of the Friedrichshafen with you. He'll take this Janes with him where he can watch him."

Joe grunted and walked toward the two Blue Ghost planes. The Black Bat hesitated a brief second. Then he wormed swiftly after Joe. The fellow reached the planes, worked for a moment, pulling over a propeller, charging cylinders with essence.

Then he climbed into the cockpit to turn on the ignition. Evidently he considered the motors warm enough to start off mag, without a booster.

When he came back, the Black Bat was waiting. The fellow never knew the jet-cased hands were near him until they clamped his throat. He struggled, kicked. The Black Bat found his chin with a knotty club of knuckles. He struck twice; all his huge, gaunt frame jerking into the blows. After that, Joe was perfectly limp.

Carrying the fellow a few yards away, the Black Bat stripped off the blue helmet and coat and the goggles. Off came his own goggles and masklike helmet, to go inside his coat. He donned the others.

He ran back to the planes, explored them rapidly with his hands. One was a Friedrichshafen, Mercedes-motored. The other was a Sunbeam-powered Short. A German and an English ship! But the Black Bat did not pause to puzzle over that.

He started both motors and was sitting in the Friedrichshafen pit when Candide and the others approached.

He did not look around as Grane and Hen Janes climbed into the rear well.

Candide called to Neff: "I'll show my flashlight every few minutes. Follow my ship. How much gas you got?"

"Tanks about two-thirds full," Neff told him.

"That should be enough."

The Black Bat listened to Candide climb into the Short. Both ships had been sailed into the shore tail first. The Short, Sunbeam blasting, pulled loose from the soggy beach and rocketed across the water. Down the beach, Neff followed in the other ship.

The Black Bat pushed the Friedrichshafen after them, the upright exhaust stacks stabbing yard-long tongues of blue flame above the top wing.

FROM CANDIDE'S PLANE a flash glowed. He was heading into the North Sea.

The Black Bat found the dash lamp, switched it on for a brief moment. The glow made shadow in the gully that was his hard curving mouth; made white the thin ivory slits of his eyes; made the ridges of muscle on his jaws seem larger than they were.

The instrument board was fitted with a pump. That meant extra fuel tanks, probably in the landing floats. He pumped, and the gauge registering the level in the regular tank between the cockpits showed an increase. He settled to follow the blinking beam in Candide's plane.

He had a hunch he was straining his luck, but it looked like the only way. Neff and Grane, fleeing Great Shark Mouth base, would take with them the last possibility of finding what was behind the disappearance of the nine planes. He would have to chance his luck.

Time passed slowly—an hour, two. The Mercedes labored and ran hot to keep the Friedrichshafen at the pace the two Shorts set. The Black Bat eyed the luminous watch dial. Three hours, now. Something should break soon.

The clouds were not so thick above; the vapor banks, having lost their cumulus formation, became higher, threadlike cirrus with edges tinted silver by the moonbeams. The blinking flash from Candide's plane was no longer necessary as a guide—the moon furnishing sufficient illumination.

Long ago the Black Bat had learned that the plane he rode was painted a pale blue, as was that of Candide.

Below and ahead, two green lights suddenly glowed out. Candide's Short dipped. The Black Bat followed, squinting in the moon glow.

In the distance bulked a mainland—dark, nodulose—rent with inlets, hairy with out-jutting headlands. From the course they had followed it would be Norway.

Nearer—the spot they headed for—lay an island. A stony canker on the washboard skin of the sea, it was pocked on the landward side by a deep C of a bay. It was from within this bay that the two eyes of green light peered up at them.

The Black Bat trailed Candide's Short in a low sweep about the bay. Trees matted the rocky shores. The foliage grew close to the water. Too close, the gaunt flyer realized abruptly. Some of the leafage must be camouflage on the roofs of hidden hangars I

The Black Bat's hard lips made a sound. "This is far enough! I've got what I needed—the location of this dump!"

Ducking low in the pit, he peeled off the borrowed helmet and coat. Back on went his masklike head covering. Gripping his pistol, he leaped erect in the cockpit.

Grane chanced to be looking at him as he lifted. Sight of the black mask seemed to paralyze the fellow. He sat dumbly in the path of the descending signal gun, eyes bulging, mouth a moist pit.

Surprise did not petrify Hen Janes. Maybe he thought he was the target of the swung pistol barrel. Up shot his arm in a wild sweep, and knocked the gun aside, so that it missed Grane's head and banged the crash pad harmlessly.

Grane shed his coma, bawled, worked his arms in the cramped pit to lift the gun he had been holding against Hen Janes' side. That lost him time. The Black Bat's pistol barrel hit his skull squarely and he collapsed.

Janes grabbed for the gun with both hands. His mouth came open for a yell. The Black Bat filled it with a fist. They swayed, straining, their breath gusty explosions. Janes had tremendous strength in his long arms. The pistol exploded harmlessly.

The Friedrichshafen, controls abandoned, roared slowly on its tail and bayed at the moon, then careened off on a wing tip and moaned in a dizzy spin for the island. The Black Bat released the pistol suddenly, trying to make Hen Janes go overboard. Janes let the gun fall to save himself with his hands. His mouth was stringing scarlet.

Grane returned to life, came up with a round drum of cockpit gun ammo in his hands. He tried to use it as a club. Lunging, the Black Bat hit him in the throat. Grane lost the ammo drum, and the Black Bat clawed wildly at it as it skittered past, but failed to get it.

The drum fell into the propeller with a report like a pack of firecrackers. The prop dissolved into splinters.

GRANE WENT DOWN, stunned by the Black Bat's driving fists. The giant flyer struck at Janes and connected with the fellow's jaw. Janes' eyes batted shut, his legs got willowy. The Black Bat hit him again and again, beating him down helpless in the cockpit.

Pivoting, he seized the stick and cut the racing Mercedes. The Friedrichshafen came out of its spin with load wires and struts howling like timber wolves.

There was one thing to do—land. The Black Bat

banked, peaked downward, swinging out so as to land in the sea close to the shore. The water pushed upward, and the rocky beach rushed at him. A hundred yards out, he trod the rudder to fishtail speed away. Seventy yards to shore—fifty.

Above, Candide and Neff circled their planes, obviously puzzled. In the hollow C of an inlet, flashlights spat white rods of brilliance. The Blue Ghosts there must be puzzled, too.

The Friedrichshafen dug its floats into the water. It sloughed, coasting rapidly for shore. The Black Bat lifted from the bucket. The plane heeled as he flung out on the left wing. The impact as the ship struck the rocky shore launched him in a flying leap. He landed running, pitched for the shelter of boulders.

Candide and Neff suddenly dived, cowl guns bleeding through their props. Tracer made chemical fire on the boulders about the Black Bat. Among the stones, .303-calibre slugs ricocheted with squeaks like gigantic, frightened mice.

The gaunt, sepia-clad flyer, a shadow among the boulder shadows, scuttled inland. Vickers slugs trickled past with a popping and screaming. Across the little island, frenzied yells of men made a faint chirping over the howl of Candide and Neff's motors and the cackle of their machine guns.

Giving up the hunt suddenly, Candide and Neff boiled over to the other side of the island, cut their motors and came down. The bit of land was small enough that voices carried across it.

A man shouted a question in German-accented gutturals.

"That damned Hen Janes must have made a break!" Candide shrilled in answer.

A hard smile came over the Black Bat's mask; it was wiped out quickly as Neff roared, "Janes—'ell! Didn't yer see who ran away from that crate? It was the Black Bat, no less!"

Candide shrieked a volley of profanity. "The Black Bat did for Joe and took his place! Damn it, we've got to get him!"

The Black Bat could hear him give orders for men to wade out and guide their planes in. Later, Candide directed: "Four of you go look at that Friedrichshafen! Watch your step! That Black Bat is a chunk of hell. We've got to keep him from leaving here. When daylight comes, we'll get him! Too dangerous to hunt him in the dark, and it's too far for him to swim to the mainland. We'll wait for dawn."

A moment later four Blue Ghosts clattered across

the island, making enough noise to show they didn't care for a fight in the darkness.

The Black Bat let them pass him. Then he crept for the bay, his going as silent as the fleeing shadows cast by wind-blown clouds thousands of feet above. When the cup of the bay yawned, he descended. The rocky slope was steep; it was like going down a wall.

Clouds cleared from the moon momentarily and light spilled down. The Black Bat discerned huts near the water's edge—crude things of canvas and poles and stone. Hangars were there, also, primitive structures of stout, rough timbers, but effectively camouflaged with bushes and small trees growing in crude boxes fashioned on the roofs. Hangar walls and roofs were of canvas, painted green to further deceive a chance observer from above.

The Black Bat glided toward a hut, crouched in the shelter of a leafy bush that drooped from his roof. He was there when the search party returned.

While still a hundred feet distant, one of them called gutturally: "No one was there but *Herr* Grane! He is unconscious."

THE BLACK BAT hung inert against the hut wall. Hen Janes must have fled the wrecked plane. But why?

The party shuffled up in the moonlight, carrying the slack form of Grane. They entered a shack. Somebody suggested *Schnapps*.

A cloud shadow oozed across the island and when it had gone, the Black Bat had moved and was pressed against the wall of the shack in which they had carried Grane.

The hangars were to the right. He could see men there, three or four faint figures who paced nervously, weapons in hand. The gaunt flyer moistened, his lips. No one man could get one of those Blue Ghost planes tonight. Escape was going to be a problem.

Inside the shack, voices were grunting questions and comments. Some were German in accent; some were not.

Thick with returning consciousness, Grane's befuddled voice jarred out in a terrified plea. "Don't hit me! Don't—"

Candide shrilled: "You fool! Nobody's hitting you! Snap out of it! What happened?"

Grane mumbled and coughed, and cursed, slowly realizing where he was. "I don't know," he said finally. "It wasn't Joe in the front cockpit. It was the Black Bat. When we got to the island, he jumped us. I tried to bean him with an ammo drum and it fell into the prop."

"We saw that!" snapped Candide. "What about Hen Janes? Where'd he go?"

"How do I know? I was knocked cold."

"Janes must be a British Intelligence agent, after all!" Candide snarled. "Damn his soul! He and the Black Bat are working together!"

"It didn't look that way to me," Crane mumbled. "Janes was helpin' me fight the Black Bat when I got bipped out."

"The hell he was! Maybe he was drowned or staggered off somewhere, then!" Candide came out of the hut, cupped his hands about his mouth, and sent a shout into the moonlight. "Janes! Janes! It's all right, guy! Come in!"

The island returned him silence.

Candide was still listening when two men came scrambling down the abrupt sides of the cove. From a hangar, a machine gun nosed, in their direction and a challenge cracked. The approaching pair cursed the alert gunners in German.

Candide advanced a few paces to meet them, waiting in a patch of brilliant moonlight. For the first time the Black Bat got a good look at the leader of the Blue Ghosts.

From the squeaky voice, he had visioned a man reedy and wasted of frame. Candide was nothing like that. His body was a great square block, his legs and arms longer pendulous blocks. His head was a neckless, square protuberance. A physical giant!

"Damn you two!" he ripped at the newcomers. "I told you not to leave your key!"

"Ja, but we have something," explained one of the two men, speaking with a strong Teutonic accent. "And we have the generator brushes with us. Nobody can use the set."

The Black Bat drank the words in. Key—generator—set—that meant a radio station on the island!

"WELL—WHAT IS IT?" demanded Candide.

"We just copied this, *Herr* Candide. It came in loud. It is in *Turkenkrenz*, but the code book from the German Rumpler we captured two days ago translated it. They have a Zeppelin from Heligoland hunting us. The Z-ship reported it could find nothing; then it apparently received orders to return. We could not tune in the station they were working with, only the transmitter of the Zeppelin."

Candide swore. "They must have a hunch we're located up here! Damn it! We'll have to lay low for a

while. You two get back to that set and see what you can hear, but don't use the transmitter. They might use a direction-finder and locate us. And don't take a chance on reporting to me unless it's hot. That Black Bat is hanging around somewhere on the island. Watch out for him. He's seven feet of hell."

The two radio operators chorused, "*Ja, Ja*," and went back, clambering slowly up the rocky sides of the inlet. Candide returned to the shack.

The Black Bat frowned. This was a complicated mess. The Blue Ghost planes were being hunted by both the Allies and the Boche, it seemed. But there were Germans and English and Yanks among the Blue Ghosts, from the sound of their voices.

His thoughts went to the radio installation. He considered that a bit; then his hard lips made a fierce grin behind his mask. He quitted the shadow, trailing the two wireless operators. The pair veered a bit to the right toward the highest part of the island. Soon there came two dull scrapings, like a door opening and shutting. The voices of the wireless operators were blotted out.

Warily the Black Bat searched for the spot where they had gone. Finding two rocks slightly larger than baseballs, he carried them in his hands to serve as weapons.

The radio was underground, in a dugout, he discovered. Below the out-thrust lip of a rock ledge he located the entrance. Intent staring skyward revealed four thin wires of an aerial taut between trees. A gas engine muttered softly; with the sound mingled a whine like a strong wind among the boulders. The two operators had started the motor-generator of the wireless set.

The Black Bat crouched a few yards from the ledge—debating. With daylight, he knew the Blue Ghosts would hunt him down. He was unarmed, helpless to resist them. But that wireless—if the transmitter had power enough to reach Great Shark Mouth base . . .

He gripped his stones and cautiously approached the dugout entrance. The ledge took him into its blackness like a great mouth. Straining his ears, he could hear the operators talking.

"Now would be a good time to take our shares and quit," one was saying in German. "The *verdammte Vaterland* is on our trail. *Ja!* And the British have this mysterious Black Bat trying to discover what happened to their nine vanished planes—"

The voice stopped suddenly. Listening, the Black

Bat heard sounds of movement, a couple of low grunts. The two operators must be excited about something, he decided.

The noises subsided. Silence fell—strained, intense. The Black Bat hefted his stones uncertainly. He decided that the two men had heard something exciting on the air and would be occupied in listening.

He shoved the dugout door open, leaped through. Both wireless men were sprawled on the hard dirt floor before the table which held their instruments. They were unconscious!

The Black Bat goggled at them splits of seconds—then out of the shadows beside the door came an object, hard and heavy. He tried to whirl, but knew he was not going to get his head in the clear. *Bang!* The back of his head seemed to turn to a gory smear of flame. He went down, jamming his face against the floor. Sharp knees landed on his back.

THE BLACK BAT was not entirely unconscious, but he was too stunned to do more than flounder weakly. The man who had struck him sat on his head, pushing his face against the floor, and twisted his wrists to his back and bound them with wire.

The Black Bat revived a little and kicked more strenuously, but he could not keep his feet from being bound. He rolled on his back, and looked at the man who had captured him.

“Hen Janes!” he exploded.

The mechanic smiled grimly and said in excellent German: “You will not speak so loudly, *Herr* Black Bat! It would go as badly for you as for me if these Blue Ghosts found us here!”

He went to the wireless instruments, threw switches, began to tap the key. The Black Bat could make out some of the letters he was sending from the spark sound, but the words were in *Turkenkrenz* code and he could get no idea of their meaning.

Hen Janes listened a bit, holding the watchcase receivers clamped to his ears, then sent some more.

After that, he hastily bound the two Blue Ghost operators with copper wire and gagged them with greasy cloths from a box beside the motor-generator set.

Looking about, the Black Bat decided Janes must have hidden himself in the darkness under a table in one corner, while the two operators were talking to Candide, and overpowered them in a silent attack.

The wireless men secure, Hen Janes came and looked down at the Black Bat.

“I have heard much of you,” he said softly. “My

superiors would give a great deal for your death. They would give almost as much for a look at your face, whom no one of them has ever seen.”

He bent swiftly, stripped off the Black Bat’s mask of a helmet.

“Ah!” he breathed. “You have a face easy to remember! And I am something of an artist. I shall sketch a likeness of it later. But no—that will not be necessary. I have you prisoner.”

The Black Bat scowled at the man. He knew what part Hen Janes played in this now. The man was a German Intelligence agent!

“You were responsible for the Boche planes being at that rendezvous between Grane and Neff and the Blue Ghosts?” the Black Bat asked.

“Ja,” Hen Janes smiled. “We have a secret wireless station on the British coast. I overheard the information and passed it on.”

He seemed to debate. Then he grunted: “I shall take you outside. The Blue Ghosts will kill you if they find you here—and there is, after all, no need of that.”

“What are these Blue Ghosts?” the Black Bat asked.

“You do not know?” Hen Janes smiled. “Then I shall not tell you. That is to pay you back for manhandling me when I tried to unmask you back at the base.”

He shouldered the Black Bat’s gaunt frame with an ease somewhat surprising, and walked out of the dugout into the night. Perhaps fifty-yards away, among piled masses of stone, he lowered, his burden.

“You will be safe here,” he said.

The Black Bat swore bitter, violent, but perfectly silent oaths as he watched the man vanish toward the bay, evidently to listen to whatever conversation he could.

The Black Bat had a very good idea what the German agent had sent on the set. A summons which would bring Boche planes here to wipe out these Blue Ghosts! The gaunt flyer grinned. That wasn’t so bad! Then he scowled. It would mean his own finish, though. He would be taken prisoner by the Boche, and the Germans wouldn’t keep him in a prison camp—some among their High Command would be Certain to recognize the Black Bat as a certain high-ranking Boche flying officer who had supposedly been shot down over the French lines a few weeks ago. It would be a blindfold and a brick wall at dawn some fine morning for him.

He began to struggle systematically at his bonds. The wire was copper—it would take a lot of bending and straightening before it would break.

IT DID. It took nearly an hour of it before his wrists were free. He loosened his ankles hurriedly.

Staggering a little, rubbing his wrists to restore circulation, he made for the dugout. For fully five minutes he reconnoitered outside. Then, finding two rocks similar to those he had carried before, he leaped through the door.

Hen Janes was not there—evidently he had found something worth listening to at the bay. The two wireless men lay in motionless heaps on the floor.

The Black Bat flung to the instruments. The antenna switch was on the receiving side. He threw it to transmit position. The rotary spark gap started with a whizz, filled with hot blue flame as he dabbed at the key. The transmitter had not been disabled and he could guess why; Janes feared he might need it to guide his fellows to the island.

Rapidly, the big flyer tapped the key. High-frequency crawled and fizzed and spat on the spinning electrodes of the rotary gap, driving the call letters of Great Shark Mouth base into the aerial.

He rapped the call out a score of times, gave what he believed was the approximate position of the island and orders to send every plane that would hold enough fuel to make the flight. He repeated it all twice.

Then he threw the switch to receive and tuned honeycomb coils. Out of the receivers came the buzzing of the Great Shark Mouth operator.

“Starting planes at once,” it read. “Major McAllen asks more particulars . . . K.”

The “K” meant for the Black Bat to go ahead with transmission. He tapped out: “No more particulars available. Speed up those planes.”

Then he cut off the instruments, wheeled and trickled out into the night. His watch—it was still running—said the time was twelve minutes after four. Three hours, maybe a bit more, until daylight! It would take about that long for the planes from Great Shark Mouth to arrive. As for the Boche he believed Hen Janes had summoned, the time of arrival depended on the base they came from.

It was unlikely Candide would find his radio station had been raided. He had told the two operators not to report unless they had something important. The Black Bat found a crevice that offered fair concealment and wedged into it.

THREE HOURS AND FORTY MINUTES LATER—the Black Bat had kept his watch before his eyes almost continuously—a many-throated droning crept toward

the island. The planes were spread in a long line—flying low, their noise indicated.

Listening intently, the Black Bat became aware of a pulsing quality in the motor roar. His long face became disgusted. Motor sound with a quality like that—there was no other quite like it. German Mercedes! The approaching ships were Boche!

He saw them suddenly. Out of the fog and clouds they came in a duck-flight line. A full twenty low-flying seaplanes, sable Maltese crosses of Germany on every one!

The Black Bat peered into the bay. No sign of life was there.

The point ship of the German flight dipped, circled so low the Black Bat could make out the trademark—“*Albatroswerke*”—of the German manufacturer on the tail.

Abruptly the Albatross flipped upward. A signal gun flashed, and the line of ships closed, in. Two dived. Metallic black eggs detached, from the fuselages, and fell.

One of the bombs lifted a geyser of water in the tiny bay. The other loosened lobster-tinted flame on the precipitous inlet side. Rocks and dust jumped high into the air. The wart of an island trembled under the concussion.

The bay shore came to life, then. A tuft of foliage opened like a boil. The snout of a machine gun rammed out, swayed and shook and strung tracer in the fog-dulled morning sunlight.

A drooping wall of vines opened like a bud, and a ghostly blue Short seaplane jumped out. The Black Bat noted something he had not been aware of before—the hangars were built partially in the water, so that seaplanes could be handily floated in and out.

The bay howled with sound as more blue planes, invisible in the camouflaged hangars, warmed motor cans. More bombs loosened. Dust rolled across the island like dirty, wind-blown cotton. The foggy air filled with the reek of exploded cordite.

Hidden hangar doors opened and let flying boats scud out. Four blue planes appeared, then a Short with regulation paint, the dot-and-circle insignia of the Allies on wings and empennage.

The Black Bat stared at the squadron cockades on the bus. It was not the boat Neff and Grane had brought here. He remembered the numbers. It was one of the nine missing ships—evidently one the Blue Ghosts had not yet had time to paint.

German ships were a-swarm over the island like

gigantic flies. The ground machine-gun got one. Controls shot away, it hit the rocks—and there came a terrific concussion of bombs jarred off and debris which pitched high and fell back slowly.

A bomb wiped out one of the Blue Ghost ships as it taxied near the center of the bay. The other three blue ships took the air in a storm of Spandau lead.

The Short with the Allied markings pitched wildly as a bomb tore the bay open before it. The pitching caused the craft to veer so that it headed for the abrupt inlet walls. Holding the floats deep in the water, the pilot fought to get it turned. The craft swung slowly back toward the bay mouth.

But the delay was fatal. It gave a trio of Boche their chance. Gun snouts on cowls and rear cockpits spear-tipped with red, they dived. The man in the Short rear pit stood up—arms flailing—and fell overboard. The pilot himself jerked a few times and died in the metallic storm.

The Short, unguided, sloughed to shore and grounded, the Sunbeam idling over slowly.

THE BLACK BAT gave an elated grunt, pitched out of the crevice and made for the grounded plane. Near the hangars, a Blue Ghost shot at him with an automatic. He dropped and crawled a bit. A bomb scored a direct hit on one of the hangars, hoisting a cloud of debris and black smoke. The Black Bat plunged into the water beside the beached Short. He got the body of the pilot out and rammed a shoulder against the struts, which supported the floats. The Short wheeled its nose toward the bay mouth.

A Boche dived, his lead beating the water into a lather. The Black Bat leaped onto the tapering rear of a float and wheeled the twin cockpit guns on their Scarff ring mount. They rattled, vomiting smoking empties into the grabsacks. The diving Boche sheered off.

The Black Bat boosted the Short a bit more. Streaming water, he leaped into the pit. The Sunbeam blatted sound, and the Short jerked ahead. He rocked the stick. The floats went on step, passing through the bay mouth. A moment later the boat took the air.

He threw a glance around. Across the island, a Boche Albatross had its floats in the sea and was taxiing inshore. A man left the concealment of a boulder, swam out, climbed aboard and wedged himself in the rear pit.

“Hen Janes!” the Black Bat grunted.

A German ship found the Black Bat’s empennage with his Spandaus and spanked it with lead. The gaunt

flyer jerked the stick. Jacketed lead gnashed an end off the instrument panel, and tore the windshield loose. Splinters, glass, torn brass sprayed the Black Bat’s chest. He booted right rudder, got temporarily clear, looked up.

Grane and Neff crouched murderously in the pit of the ship which had nearly downed him.

Another Blue Ghost came sliding down the sky as if greased. Candide! There was no mistaking the blocklike giant. Cowl guns on both ships breathed scarlet. Close enough so that the Black Bat could have reached up and put an arm around them, screaming, writhing tracer ropes crossed.

The Black Bat maneuvered wildly, trying to get upstairs. He was in a bad spot, too low for much maneuvering, and the other two ships were his equal in speed.

He fainted to the left, dived to the right—with a bare two hundred feet to dive in. It was hopeless. He seemed in a swarm of leaden bees. A big rind of fabric peeled off the upper wing. Metal roared in the fuselage at his back, and splinters hit the rear of the seat bucket like gravel. He hunched forward. The back tore out of the seat.

Another eighteen inches and the metal torrent would chop him in half. He needed a miracle to save him.

And there was a miracle! A Boche Albatross crashed the kill party, spilling Spandau tracer like confetti around Candide’s Blue Ghost ship. The slugs fell through Candide’s wings, marching around thirstily in the vitals of his crate. Candide rolled wildly and got himself clear, only to have the tracers search for him like forked snake tongues.

The Black Bat got a look at the Boche who had saved him. Hen Janes was hunched in the aft pit!

THE BLACK BAT gave boot to right rudder and dragged the stick back. The Short, wheeling around, was suddenly under the bus of Grane and Neff. His Vickers let out a gobble.

He could see splinters fall off the floats of the other ship in flurries. One float-strut parted. Neff shuddered, driving rigid arms above his head, and with leisurely slowness the boat turned upside down. Grane had apparently loosened his safety-belt for greater freedom, for he fell out in mid-air—clinging frantically to the cooling-ribs of his cockpit guns. A wild flirt of the plane sent him into space.

The Black Bat whipped toward the jockeying ships

of Candide and Hen Janes. He drove a chance glance into the sky—then let out a howl of relief.

Fog and clouds were spitting flying boats. English ships! The flight from Great Shark Mouth base! They came driving down in three tight fighting wedges.

The Black Bat hit his throttle and went for Candide. The Blue Ghost leader danced around his sight rings, then suddenly filled them. Hen Janes' Albatross apparently got the range about the same instant.

Together they fed Candide his own medicine. Mingled Vickers and Spandau metal threaded through the observer until he must have resembled a much-used pincushion—then soldered Candide to the sides of his pit with his own gore. The Blue Ghost boat wheeled seaward.

The Black Bat banked away, and got a shock. Lead ate at his wings, and waved ashen tendrils up and down before his eyes.

Hen Janes' Albatross had turned on him!

The Black Bat jerked around. A full two minutes he jockeyed for position, and his Vickers shuttled. The right one caught a jam, the lever hanging forward. He struck it with a fist, and the gun started functioning.

The Albatross nearly got out of his sights—but not quite! His Vickers whanged several short bursts—three, five shots. Hen Janes was hanging half out of his cockpit to maneuver his gun.

The Black Bat corrected a bit. His cowl Vickers ate a yard of link-belt. A hit! The Albatross bucked as if it had run into an up-current. A wing tip dipped, and the ship spun.

The German pilot was hanging on the cockpit rim, mouth and nostrils emptying scarlet. Hen Janes fought wildly to get forward to the controls.

Following the Albatross, the Black Bat glanced about. The rest of the sky party was ending fast. Not a single Blue Ghost ship now remained upstairs. And the Germans, outnumbered, were grabbing powders whenever a chance came, streaking away into clouds and fog—Germany bound.

Hen Janes got himself wedged into the forepit of the Albatross, and started to pull up. The Black Bat, not seventy feet above him, gave his Bowdens a twitch. At point-blank, .303-calibre metal-jackets hammered the Mercedes, opened the cowling like a tomato can, and tore slabs off the prop.

Down the Albatross flounced, barely controllable. It lowered a wing. Janes moved the lifeless pilot to get the stick against the pit wall and level the boat. He made a neat enough landing, a hundred feet offshore, not far

from the spot where the wreck of the Friedrichshafen was piled. But the Albatross floats, bullet-rent, sloughed under the surface almost immediately.

Janes pitched out of the cockpit, gained the upper wing, took a flying leap clear of the sinking plane, and swam for shore.

The Black Bat twisted his head, taking stock of things. The scrap had *finis* written on it. Every Boche able to fly had by now headed for home. The bay was a smoking, bomb-shattered shambles. The Blue Ghosts and their base were almost a complete write-off.

Up-ending the Short, the Black Bat went down. He threw a glance at his floats, saw that they were serviceable and slapped the boat on the sea. He taxied alongside swimming Hen Janes.

Swinging astride the camel back, he jerked the Scarff-mounted cockpit guns against their elastic and trained them on Janes.

"If you have a gun—shed it!" he rapped.

Treading water, Janes grinned faintly at him. "I haven't got a gun," he said.

THE SHORT FLOATS grounded gently. Leaping ashore, the Black Bat watched Hen Janes wade in.

The German agent eyed him, and shrugged. "You win after all, *Herr* Black Bat."

The gaunt flyer grinned at the crestfallen German agent. "You still refuse to tell me what these Blue Ghosts are—or were?"

Hen Janes shrugged again. "Pirates."

"Pirates!"

"To be sure. A bloody, murderous crew. They have been raiding deep into Germany. They would pass above a village, drop three or four men in parachutes. Later they would return and bomb the village, and the men they had dropped would rob the local banks during the confusion. Rather a dare-devil scheme, but it worked. Their success was due largely, I am sorry to say, to the fact that most of them were Germans themselves. They knew the country." He smiled wryly. "Although I believe Candide, their leader, was an American ex-convict. They committed other crimes in Germany, of course. They landed and robbed the homes of wealthy Germans, committing ghastly murders and inhuman tortures."

The Black Bat stared at the German agent. He growled: "I'm kinda sorry about this. You'll be shot, of course. We're in the same line of business, and—well, you could have given me another rap on the skull last night and saved yourself trouble. And you yanked me

out of a bad spot upstairs, even if you tried to do me in later.”

Janes spread his hands slightly. “The fortunes of war, *Herr* Black Bat.” He hesitated, then added : “To repay you for your, ah—kind words—I heard them say where their loot is kept. It is buried under the floor of the radio dugout.”

He raised one of his boots to empty water out of it. The water did not leave readily, so he drew off the boot, emptied it and put it back on. Then he tugged at the other.

Over on the bay, Great Shark Mouth flying boats were landing. Major McAllen’s voice was already roaring orders to dismantle cockpit guns and comb the island for Blue Ghosts.

The Black Bat shot a sidewise glance at Hen Janes. Then, carelessly, he turned his head, as if to hear McAllen better.

Wham! Janes’ thrown boot caught his temple. He fell backward stiffly. His head made a hollow thump on a rock, and his lungs emptied out air.

Janes lunged to his side, felt his wrist. He grunted, “He lives! Maybe we shall meet again!”

Then he wheeled and flung himself against the Short, which floated around sluggishly. With a vault, Janes got on the wing, and ran down it to the cockpit. The Sunbeam exhaust pipes blew out a great roar.

The Short wallowed away, slamming across waves on step, and took the air. It sped southward for Germany. An English bus swung in pursuit—but lost ground from the start.

The Black Bat sat up, rubbed his temple and stripped the mask of a helmet off.

“Meet again, eh?” he grunted. “Damn him, he’ll wish we hadn’t when we do! He didn’t need to sock me that hard with his boot!” He stroked the spot where the boot had hit his head, wincing each time his fingers ran across it. Finally he grinned wryly. “He deserved a getaway, even if he did see my face. He was a pretty decent guy—and he saved my neck for me.”

He drew on his mask and stumbled across the island, toward Major McAllen’s bellowing voice.