

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



ENEMY AIR

by RALPH OPPENHEIM

Espionage! That sinister, silent net of war that caught men ruthlessly in its grip and crushed them. Now, in the innocent shape of a Fokker, it challenged insolently to those three sky warriors—the Three Mosquitoes. A story with a most thrilling and startling climax.

A FOKKER—flying alone, and five miles within the Allied lines! Kirby's eyes gleamed behind their goggles as he peered down from the cockpit of his roaring Spad—peered down at the German scout which was moving smoothly some three thousand feet below him, just midway between him and the green, relief-map earth. In the crystal-clear air, under the

dazzling glare of the morning sun, the Fokker looked like a shimmering, fragile dragon-fly. A pretty ship—one of the new D7s, silver, gray in color, and marked with the familiar black crosses.

"Cold meat!" Kirby told himself, and a tight smile flickered across his goggled face. "Cold meat—if there ever was cold meat!"

The Jerry pilot down there must either be crazy

or anxious to commit suicide. Flying insolently low, he was deliberately penetrating deeper and deeper into Allied territory, constantly widening the gap between himself and his own lines. It happened that this was an unusually quiet sector, and there was no anti-aircraft fire to molest the Boche. He was sailing on in serene confidence, unaware that in the blue sky overhead, hidden in the blinding glare of the sun, a khaki Spad hovered like an eagle, ready to pounce. And in the cockpit of that Spad sat one of the greatest of Yankee aces—Captain Kirby, leader of that reckless, split-airing trio of war birds known as the “Three Mosquitoes.”

Even now the Yank’s fingers were moving up his joystick, groping for the trigger-controls that would hurl out destruction in the form of six-hundred shots a minute from the twin, forward machine guns. Even now he was craftily throttling down his engine, allowing his Spad to fall some distance behind the Fokker so that he could dive straight down on the Jerry’s tail. The Mosquito’s blood tingled with warm anticipation; he was fairly itching for the fray.

But he did not dive. Despite his eagerness to send that Fokker crashing to hell, he withheld his attack as a puzzling thought struck him.

“Damn it!” he swore beneath the steady throb of his engine. “But it’s queer—a Jerry way over here, with his tail towards Hunland! Wonder what in hell he’s up to!”

Indeed, this dead sector was just about the last place one would expect to find a German plane. Kirby himself had merely flown over this way from his drome to test out a repaired engine—which had proved itself satisfactory. He had not dreamed that he would find a fight, though a fight was always welcome!

“He can’t be on a reconnaissance,” the Mosquito went on thinking aloud. “Hell, if he can get any information out of this terrain, he’s welcome to it! And if he’s out to do some ground-strafting, he’s picking the wrong hunting grounds!”

Only one possibility remained—and Kirby frowned darkly as his thoughts turned to that grim, clandestine part of the war which ran beneath the active fighting like a sinister undercurrent. Espionage. He remembered that Allied intelligence was having a fierce time combating the usual German spy activity which was being carried on throughout this side of the lines. And it was just in a quiet sector like this that Jerry espionage was most apt to blossom out and flourish.

The Mosquito’s eyes narrowed shrewdly. He glanced down again at the silvery Fokker, which he

had kept following mechanically. The German was still penetrating deeper into Allied territory, as if he had no idea of turning back for home.

“He must be headed for something,” Kirby reasoned. “And as long as his nose is pointed towards our back areas I might as well trail him,” He had reached his decision. “I’ll follow him—try to see what in hell he’s up to!”

And at once he changed from a fighting ace to a flying detective—a role he knew how to assume, for he had done plenty of work for intelligence. Gently he pulled back his stick, climbed a little higher into the blinding orb of the sun. He must not be seen now, mustn’t let that Jerry spot him. For he had a peculiar hunch—and his hunches were usually right—that he was on the scent of something that might prove very interesting indeed.

On moved the German plane, its pilot still serenely oblivious of the Spad which lurked overhead. Cleverly, Kirby duplicated every move of the Fokker, every little change of course. Always he kept his Spad between the sun and the German. A strange suspense was beginning to grip him now. The farther that Fokker went into Allied territory, the more certain was Kirby that the Jerry was on some peculiar mission.

And pretty soon the German seemed to be justifying the Mosquito’s suspicions. Suddenly the Fokker veered in its course, banked a trifle to the right. And Kirby’s Spad, as if it were attached to the German plane by an invisible wire, banked simultaneously. A moment later the Fokker swerved over to the left, and at the same time it dipped lower, swooping closer to the ground. The German seemed to be looking for something down there, trying to get his bearings or—what? Wonderingly, Kirby looked down, scanned the surrounding landscape carefully. Nothing but a lot of barren meadows and, a few miles ahead, the blurred green foliage of a forest. There were not many signs of life. Here and there doughboys could be seen—details working to construct roads, bridges, and encampments, a few artillery caissons moving up a dusty highway, and some supply trucks and ambulances. Otherwise the terrain was quite deserted.

The Fokker climbed again and resumed its former unwavering course to the west. Kirby followed, still playing buzzard, waiting patiently for further developments. Nor did he have long to wait!

All at once, to the Mosquito’s blank astonishment, a bright red rocket popped from the Fokker’s cockpit and soared skyward! And in its wake came a green rocket!

“Very lights!” Kirby exclaimed, incredulously. “What the hell—” He stopped short, even further astonished as he plainly saw two rockets of similar color, red and green, shoot up somewhere from the ground in the distance ahead! Kirby, because he had not watched for them, could not locate the Spot from which they had come—though it seemed to be that forest over there.

“Signals!” he told himself. “He’s exchanging signals with somebody on the ground! Cripes, they have a nerve—shooting those rockets off right over here in our lines.” Yet, it wasn’t such nerve at that. A Very rocket was not apt to be noticed in broad daylight unless you were watching for it.

Again the Fokker below was changing its course—heading now in the direction whence those answering signals had come. Kirby, now tense from head to foot, continued to trail his quarry, wondering what was coming next.

What did come next was such a complete surprise to the Mosquito that it almost took him unawares. Before he knew what was happening, that Fokker below had veered once more, banked almost vertically. Its nose had whipped up and Kirby drew in his breath sharply, gave a loud exclamation.

The Fokker was zooming; zooming at a terrific speed, and its nose was pointed straight towards the Spad overhead!

THE German must have spotted Kirby despite the Mosquito’s precautions. The Boche, evidently realizing that the American had seen his signals, was determined to put his foe where he wouldn’t be able to talk about his discoveries!

Kirby’s hand closed tightly about his joystick, and again his eyes gleamed behind their goggles. From a flying detective he changed right back to a fighting ace! He was a bit peeved that his attempt to find out what the German was up to was now brought to an end but—“If it’s a fight you want,” he said eagerly, as he saw the coffinlike nose of the Fokker looming closer below, “you’re going to get it! Look out, Fritz—I’m coming!”

Savagely, he shoved the joystick forward. Down went the nose of his Spad, and the plane lifted its tail to the sun and went screaming down in a roaring, breathless dive, smoke pouring from its exhaust stacks. Straight for the zooming Fokker it plunged, and the shrill of wind through the flying wires was like battle music to Kirby’s ears. He leaned to his sights, and again his thumbs sought the stick-triggers.

The German saw him coming, and opened up. Jagged streaks of flame leaped from the coffinlike nose of the Fokker, and the shrill staccato of Spandaus punctuated the roar of motors. A line of smoky yellowish tracers penciled the air to the Mosquito’s right. He answered with his own Vickers, set them stuttering into blazing life. In triumph he saw his tracers cutting right through an edge of the Fokker’s top wing. As the Spad came plunging right for him, the German leveled off and half-rolled quickly. Kirby’s dive carried him past his adversary, and he caught a fleeting glimpse of the German pilot’s goggled face. The Boche seemed to be peering at him with murderous rage.

Hastily, the Mosquito pulled up, coming out of his dive. The Fokker, behind and above him now, was swinging onto his tail. Again the shrill clatter of the Spandaus shattered the air, and a few bullets ticked through the Spad’s fuselage. Cursing, Kirby whipped around in a breathless renversement which seemed almost to raise a cloud of dust. Again the two planes, almost face to face, rushed together, guns spitting. They slithered past each other, and then they commenced that mad jockeying for a position which would enable the one who attained it to train his forward machine guns on the other.

It did not take Kirby long to realize that he was in for a tough fight! This German was good, damned good! Must be an ace! He was matching the expert Mosquito skillfully, meeting him at every turn and twist. And his new-type Fokker was a superior ship to Kirby’s older Spad: it was speedier and better at climbing and maneuvering. A sober expression came over the Mosquito’s face, and his lips drew up into a tight little line. Grimly he settled down to business in earnest; commenced that skillful, precise manipulation of stick, rudder and throttle which had won him fame.

Dogfight! Breakneck maneuvers at the rate of one hundred and sixty miles an hour—dueling in a limitless, three-dimensional battlefield of sky—diving, zooming, split-airing. Two graceful scout planes chasing each other’s tails up in the blue, their wings flashing with the glare of the sun at every bank or swerve. Two men fighting by means of machines which each drove against the other. The roar of motors, the clatter of guns. The black, smoke of exhausts, the leaping red flames from the gun muzzles, the smoky crisscross lines of tracer. Dogfight!

The battle ended suddenly and dramatically. There had been another mad jockeying for position.

And this time the German, whether by skill, luck, or because he had a superior plane, found an opening. He came in with a rush and the next thing Kirby knew the Fokker was on his tail, guns blazing away with deadly precision. Bullets began to sing wildly by the Mosquito's ears, and he heard them ripping up the canvas and woodwork of his fuselage, saw them ricocheting from his engine cowl. Perforations appeared in his top wing. With a berserk oath, he commenced to half-roll and zigzag to throw off the German's sights, but the Fokker clung like a leech.

Then, suddenly, Kirby saw red. He was enraged that he had allowed this stubborn Boche to get him at a disadvantage. By God, he'd show the Jerry a few tricks! He was fighting mad now, and over him came that savage abandon which had enabled him to blaze his way through so many times before. He threw caution to the winds, became insanely reckless. Deliberately, he stopped trying to shake the Fokker off, actually let the German ride his tail! The German, certain now that he was about to make a kill, kept closing in, blazing away tirelessly. Thicker and thicker his bullets flew, until the air around Kirby was dense with flying, screaming steel. But the Mosquito ignored the ever-increasing peril. He knew what he was doing, and he waited until he was sure the proper moment had come. Then, taking the already exultant Boche unawares, he acted!

Back came his joystick, all the way back to his chest. His free hand jerked the throttle-lever wide open. With a mighty roar, the Spad shot upwards, shot upwards for a full, wide loop! Too late did the German sense Kirby's purpose, Before the Fokker could move to check the maneuver, the Spad was somersaulting over. Kirby saw the earth and sky change places, then, to his triumph, saw the silvery Fokker swing directly into his arc of vision as the nose of his Spad leveled off once more. His trick had worked! Just as he had planned, the loop had enabled him to come down right on the German's tail. He did not have to lean to his sights. He simply pressed his stick-triggers and held them down, sent one long, shattering burst from both his guns.

The Fokker seemed to stop in its flight, like a bird surprised by a sudden wound. It shivered from nose to tail as the deadly tracers from Kirby's guns pumped it and pumped it. Vainly it staggered to get back on even keel. For a second it flew queerly, drunkenly. Then it seemed to skid sideways on a slippery current of air, and slowly it nosed over to go hurtling down through space in a dizzy tailspin!

And diving after it, still riding its tail, came the

victorious Yank. He saw the German ship crash on a barren stretch of field, saw it somersault over and over in a cloud of dirt and flying debris, until, finally, it settled and lay in a crumpled, twisted heap of wreckage.

And Kirby, who had followed it almost down to the ground, felt that wave of compassion which a gallant war bird will always feel for the man he has just sent crashing to hell in fair combat. Code of the air—sportsmanship—

"If he's alive," the Mosquito told himself, "it's a miracle! But I'd better go down and see. Nobody seems to be around here anyway, to check this up. Besides," again his keen curiosity was aroused as he remembered those Very rockets, "I may find out something about his mission."

Even as he was making this decision, he had mechanically banked to get into the wind. With his usual expert skill, he nosed into a mild glide. The Spad swept down gracefully. Its wheels skimmed the fairly level field, settled, and it drew up just a few hundred feet from the wreckage of the Fokker.

In a flash Kirby was out of his cockpit, leaping to the ground. Leaving his Spad idling, he rushed towards the twisted heap of junk which, just a moment before, had been a trim, silver Fokker. As the Mosquito approached the wreck he saw a figure lying inert on the ground close by—a figure garbed in the greenish flying togs of the Imperial air force."

"Must have been thrown right out of the cockpit when she crashed," Kirby figured and shook his head. "Poor guy!"

Nevertheless he drew out his Colt as he stepped up to that inert figure. He stood over the man, peered down at him keenly. The German was lying on his back. His helmet and goggles were pushed up from his head, and his face, despite the sharp, Teutonic features, looked serenely peaceful. Kirby could see no evidence of wounds or blood—the man must have simply been smashed to death. Cautiously, the Mosquito bent over to examine him more closely. He stooped, reached down to feel for the man's heart.

And the man came to life and moved like a jack-in-the-box! His arms shot upwards, grabbed the stooping Mosquito around the neck in a viselike grip. Kirby, taken completely unawares, had no time to tense his muscles for a resistance. Before he could do a thing, the German, snarling and cursing, had pulled him off his balance. The Colt went flying out of the American's hands as he sprawled on the ground, and at once



the German, who seemed to be a man of amazing strength, was half on top of him, pinning him down. The Boche's fingers closed around his throat like bands of steel, pressed tighter, tighter.

HE HAD been duped—cleverly tricked! Too late did he realize that the German must have escaped death by jumping clear of that Fokker before it crashed. And now, with all the advantage of a surprise attack, the Boche had already strangled the breath out of him, and so weakened him that he could only put up a puny and ineffective resistance. Gasping and choking,

he writhed and squirmed, trying vainly to tear the other's fingers from his throat. He punched madly at the Boche, but his fists landed weakly, harmlessly on the man's body. Mercilessly the German's thumbs kept jamming deeper and deeper into his windpipe, choking, choking. The Mosquito felt himself losing consciousness, saw a red mist swimming before his eyes. His body became numb, his muscles limp. He knew the Jerry was killing him—but there was nothing he could do! The air grew darker, blacker.

Suddenly the snarling German relaxed his hold. Leaving Kirby limp and almost unconscious, he

scrambled hastily to his feet. In alarm he stared out across the barren stretch of flatlands.

Doughboys! There were at least a dozen tiny khaki-clad figures—running from the distance across the barren fields. They were a full half-mile away, but they were heading straight for this spot, coming swiftly! Evidently they had seen the Fokker spinning down, and were coming over to investigate.

The Jerry pilot at once forgot all about Kirby. He turned, dashed straight over to the Spad, whose propeller was turning idly. Kirby, moving his head with effort, saw him through a blur. Realizing the Boche's purpose, the Mosquito made a stupendous effort to gather his reeling senses, to rouse his numbed muscles. He struggled madly to rise, only to fall back again helplessly.

But the German did not climb into that throbbing Spad. Suddenly he had stopped, and was cursing harshly as he stared at the radiator of the American ship—the radiator from which an ominous jet of steam was issuing, while the water trickled out into an ever-widening mud puddle on the ground.

One of the Boche's bullets must have made that leak—a leak which Kirby had not even noticed. But now that so much water had escaped from the radiator, it had to be noticed! Unless the leak were plugged and the radiator refilled, it would be absolutely suicidal to fly that plane. Without water to cool it, the engine would simply melt away.

The German was in a dilemma. Those American soldiers, armed with rifles, were steadily coming closer, looming into clearer outline. In a short time they'd be here—he'd be caught! Frantically he looked around, like a cornered animal. He could not run for it—not over these flat, barren fields! The nearest refuge was the forest Kirby had seen from the air, and it was at least three miles away. The sight of that forest seemed to remind the German of something. His hand darted beneath his flying togs, and Kirby, who was now just managing to struggle to his feet, saw him pull out a small packet. The German seemed to be about to destroy this packet when his eyes fell on the Mosquito again. At once the Boche's face lit up evilly. He shoved the packet back beneath his togs. Then, whipping out a long-barreled Luger, he advanced swiftly upon the still-dazed American.

Kirby, still struggling to get his footing, saw the German charging, saw the murder in the man's eyes, and rallied every atom of his sapped strength. But it was too late. The German, with a savage snarl, brought

the butt of that Luger crashing right down on the Mosquito's soft helmet. The blow sang in Kirby's ears. A myriad of stars blazed before his eyes, and he dropped like a log, passing into complete blackness.

The German pilot glanced about furtively at the approaching doughboys. They were still some ways off—there was still time. The Boche commenced to work with a superhuman speed that only desperate men can attain. He dragged the limp form which was Kirby behind the wrecked Fokker, so that the wreckage would screen them off from the advancing doughboys. Then, working with lightning dexterity, the German started to strip off the Mosquito's uniform.

And when, a few minutes later, the doughboys arrived on the scene, they saw a man in the khaki garb of the U.S. air service puffing serenely on a cigarette while he tinkered at the radiator of a trim, squatting Spad, whose engine had been turned off. And stretched out on the ground, close to the twisted remains of the Fokker, was a motionless figure in the dress of the Imperial flying corps.

The khaki-clad aviator at the Spad turned to confront the doughboys, and his sharp, Teutonic features were not noticeable because he had cleverly smudged them with grease from the plane's engine. The doughboys saluted him.

"Nice woik, sir," said their leader, a huge hulk of a sergeant, with a homely and pugnacious face. "We saw you get the lousy Kraut! That loop of yours was the berries!" His glance fell upon the inert figure on the ground. "Is he dead, sir?"

The khaki-clad aviator flicked ashes from his cigarette, drew another puff and exhaled it slowly. He smiled.

"No, he's merely out for a long time," he replied, in fluent and unaccented English. "But I'm afraid he would be dead if he hadn't been wearing that helmet. He gave me some trouble down here, and I had to strike him on the head with my revolver. Perhaps," he added, in the most casual tone, "you fellows saw that little fracas too?"

"We thought we seen two guys fightin' down here," conceded the burly sergeant, and his men agreed. "So we just come over to take a look."

"And I'm glad you came," professed the aviator, frankly. He flung his half-burned cigarette to the ground, stamped it out. "I have to be getting back to my drome, so I'll leave this prisoner in your charge. However, unfortunately the—the Kraut put a hole in my radiator, which I've just succeeded in plugging. I must have some water, quickly."

"That's a cinch!" said the sergeant, who was all too eager to help this pilot back into the air. For the non-com saw a chance of gaining self-glory if he himself could deliver the prisoner who lay on the ground to headquarters. "There's a stream runnin' through here right near by. Got a pail, sir?"

"Yes, indeed," the pilot replied, coupling his intense relief by a wide grin, he handed the sergeant the collapsible canvas pail he had found in the tool-kit of the Spad. The non-com directed two of the privates to fetch the water, and they hurried off. They were gone only a couple of minutes, but the minutes seemed like hours to the waiting aviator in khaki. Every now and then his glance fell upon the figure on the ground, the figure which still lay motionless.

The privates returned with the pail full of water, and they helped the khaki-clad pilot pour it into the radiator. It was a tedious process, and the khaki-clad one kept growing more and more nervous and impatient. His impatience became unendurable when he suddenly noticed, to his dismay, that the figure on the ground was stirring! *Gott*, the man was coming to! Why in heaven hadn't he managed to kill the fellow? He had certainly meant to—but that *verdampfte* helmet had cushioned his savage blow.

The radiator of the Spad was now replenished, but there still remained the task of starting up the engine again. The man on the ground was showing more and more signs of coming to life. He was moving around, and his eyelids seemed to be fluttering. Desperate, the khaki-clad one could conceal his haste no longer.

"I must hurry!" he said, as he darted to the propeller of the Spad, started to pull it through compression. "And by the way," he added, cunningly, "if that Kraut should come to, I want you men to be careful. He's a tricky customer. I have reasons to believe that he is a German intelligence man, and he will doubtless talk to you very smoothly. Don't be deceived by his lies, but take him straight to the proper headquarters and turn him in."

The sergeant's homely face lit up. A German intelligence man—rare pickings indeed!

"I getcha, sir!" he said, eagerly. And he tapped his revolver-holster significantly, while his followers gripped their rifles. "Don't worry, sir, we won't let the dirty Heinie pull no wool over our eyes!"

The khaki-clad pilot nodded, somewhat reassured. He ran to the Spad's cockpit now, switched on the ignition. Then back to the propeller again, to give it the starting tug.

THE sudden roar of the engine brought Kirby back to full consciousness. The Mosquito blinked his eyes, grunted, and then struggled to recollect his dazed senses. His head was throbbing painfully from the bump the German had dealt him. Slowly he became aware of his surroundings. He moved, raised his head with effort. He saw a dim, bleared picture of a swarm of khaki figures who moved about the Spad which was his—then the haze drifted from his eyes, and the picture came into sharp and clear focus. A khaki-clad man was climbing hurriedly into the cockpit of that Spad! Kirby recognized him. The German—in his flying togs! Simultaneously the Mosquito noticed that he had on the German's uniform. In a flash he grasped the whole upshot of the business, understood the German's clever stratagem. His brain cleared fully, and the realization that in another moment the Boche would take off stirred him savagely to action, brought back his strength. He jerked himself up to a sitting posture, found his voice, and shouted at the top of his lungs.

"Stop him! Stop him, for God's sake!"

His voice was so shrill that it penetrated the roar of the Spad's motor like a knife—a knife which seemed to stab the German icily. The Jerry winced, but he did not stop climbing into the cockpit. The crowd of doughboys had also started, and the burly sergeant and a couple of others made a rush for the Mosquito, who had now struggled to his feet.

"Stop him!" Kirby screamed again, as the German settled himself in the seat of the plane, reached for the throttle. "Stop him, he's a——"

"Shut your trap, you dirty Kraut!" The rough command was snarled out by the burly sergeant, who was covering the Mosquito with his revolver. The non-com's face was wreathed in a menacing scowl. "One peep outa you and I'll blow your damn squarehead clean off your neck!"

But the frantic Mosquito ignored the threat. He lurched forward, even as the Spad began to move. The doughboys grabbed Kirby, held him roughly, brutally. The Spad was roaring down the field now, faster, faster, with black smoke pouring from its exhausts. Futilely the Mosquito struggled in the grip of his own countrymen, cursing and shouting at them to stop the German. But it was to no avail. Helpless, he saw his plane sweep into the air like a graceful bird. The Spad soared up into the sunny blue, turned its nose towards Germany, and soon faded into a tiny speck.

Kirby almost sobbed in his rage and despair.

"You damned idiots!" he shouted at the crowd of

doughboys, who now formed a ring around him and were guarding him closely with their rifles. “Do you realize what you’ve done—you numbskulls? You’ve gone and let a Jerry escape—probably a spy! Damn you for a bunch of lousy, goldbricking sons of——”

“By God, if he don’t speak American!” sneered the burly sergeant. “But,” he growled at Kirby, “you might as well save your woids, because everythin’ you say will be used against you—and don’t-cha forget it, you lousy sausage-eatin’ Kraut!” He poked his revolver brutally into the small of the Mosquito’s back. “Now shut up, because my finger’s gettin’ kinda nervous on this trigger!”

The sergeant’s menacing tone, as well as the violent pressure of that gun-muzzle, sent a sudden shiver through the Mosquito. All at once he realized that he was actually in danger of death! These doughboys, thinking he was a Jerry aviator, were glaring at him with unconcealed hatred. It was natural. Jerry aviators had a nasty habit of making life miserable for them by strafing them and dropping bombs upon them. They would have been delighted to take vengeance on this prisoner who had fallen into their hands!

“Put up that gun, for the luvva Pete!” Kirby appealed desperately to the burly sergeant. “Cripes, can’t you see I’m a Yank?”

“Sure,” sneered the sergeant, with gibing sarcasm. And he poked his revolver even harder into Kirby’s back. “Sure, I can see you’re a Yank by your Goiman uniform and your lousy squarehead!”

The crowd of doughboys guffawed loudly, especially one of them—a little runt of a corporal who seemed to be the sergeant’s yes-man.

“Haw-haw!” roared this half-sized individual. “Didja hear that, fellers? He looks like a Yank because he’s got a squarehead! Haw haw!”

Kirby flushed with just indignation.

“You confounded fools!” he snarled. “Now look here, I’m Captain Kirby, of the 44th pursuit squadron and——”

“Naw!” jeered the sergeant, who had heard of the famous Three Mosquitoes. “You’re Genril Poishin’, and you’re on a special tour for the poipose of inspectin’ all the latrines!”

“Haw haw!” guffawed the half-pint corporal again. “Listen to that, fellers! The sarge says he’s Genril Poishin’ on latrine duty! Haw haw haw!”

The exasperated Mosquito swore helplessly and profanely. He had no way of convincing this thick-headed sergeant, for the German had cleverly taken all

his identifications. Of course, sooner or later, he would be able to identify himself, but meanwhile his life was in danger! If his position weren’t so grimly precarious, it would have been screamingly funny! The irony of it—being captured by his own countrymen and treated just as he would be treated if he fell prisoner behind the German lines.

“Now,” growled the burly, pugnacious sergeant, “you’re gonna march—and you’re gonna like it! We have a long ways to go! Come on, men, fall in!”

The doughboys shouldered their rifles and flanked the Mosquito on all sides. They marched and Kirby, perforce, marched with them. By this time the Mosquito’s head had stopped throbbing—the bump had not been as serious as it had first seemed. He was all right again, physically—but mentally he was in a fever of rage and disgust. He glared furiously at the hard-boiled sergeant, who was stalking proudly in the lead of the party, his chest swollen like a pigeon’s as he embarked on what he believed to be his first experience in taking in a German prisoner!

“The fool!” Kirby muttered. “He ought to lose his stripes for this!” But aloud, he addressed a last desperate appeal to the big non-com. “Look here, sarge,” he pleaded, “you don’t have to believe me, but at least do this one thing! Send one of your men to communicate with my buddies, Lieutenants Carn and Travis, at squadron 44. Tell ‘em there’s a Jerry floating around the sky in my bus and my uniform—and tell ‘em to try and plug him before he gets away. Also——”

“Sure thing, sure thing!” gibed the sergeant, who was not even convinced by this earnest speech, so cleverly had the real German deluded him. “And while I’m at it,” he added, with acrid mirth, “donta want me to go and tell President Wilson that you want to see him poisonally and sign up a peace treaty?”

“Haw haw haw!” It was that damn corporal again! “Didja hear that one, fellers? The sarge says——”

Kirby gave up in disgust. The only thing he could do was to wait until they got him to headquarters—and there he could explain everything, and report all he had seen, including the rockets which had come from the forest. With this thought in mind, the Mosquito held his silence, and marched sullenly between the doughboys. They crossed the barren fields, and presently they came to a dusty road. They had not progressed far along this highway when suddenly a staff car came swirling towards them in a cloud of dust. Swiftly it approached, and the doughboys and their prisoner moved to the side of the

road to let it pass. But it did not pass. With a squeal of tires and brakes, it came to a sudden stop.

In the rear of the car sat a lanky and stern-faced colonel of the A.E.F. Next to him sat a junior officer, a first lieutenant. In the front sat the chauffeur and the colonel's orderly.

The doughboys all saluted the high officer respectfully. And at the sight of that colonel, Kirby's heart rejoiced. For Kirby recognized him. It could not have been more than a month ago when this same colonel had come to the 44th's drome on a tour of inspection. And since he had stopped to give Kirby an embarrassing lecture on the subject: "Why aviators should button their collars and shave every day even though they are at the Front," he ought to remember the Mosquito. And indeed, as the stern-faced colonel leaned out of his car and peered at the man in German flying togs, a light of recognition seemed to appear in the high officer's eyes—eyes that were keen, searching.

The colonel addressed the group of doughboys, barked out that familiar, time-worn military demand: "What are you men doing here?"

And the hard-boiled sergeant replied respectfully, but not without pride: "Beggin' the colonel's pardon, sir, but we're takin' in this Jerry prisoner. *We*," he accented the pronoun, "captured him when his plane crashed and now——"

"Colonel," Kirby shouted vehemently, stepping forward. "I hope you will put an end to this farce! I am an American, sir, and I think you will be able to identify——"

"Shut your trap, Kraut!" the sergeant snarled at him, with a flourish of his revolver. The non-com then went on addressing the colonel, who was frowning darkly. "I think he's a Goimin intelligence man, sir! He's a smooth customer all right. Speaks English as good as me!"

The colonel's eyes narrowed, and so did the eyes of the junior officer who sat next to him.

"A German intelligence man?" the colonel echoed sharply, and Kirby's hopes sank. The Mosquito could have sworn that the high officer had looked at him with recognition—yet it was obvious "that the colonel didn't know him at all. "Did you search him, sergeant?" he asked brusquely.

"No, sir," the sergeant said, and had to make a grudging admission. "The pilot who shot him down frisked him, sir. Probably didn't find nothin' on him, because he didn't say nothin' about it."

"If you'll only let me explain——" Kirby began again, but again the burly sergeant silenced him.

The colonel looked grave." He sat back and stroked his chin, thoughtfully.

"This seems to be a most serious matter," he mused. "Indeed, I think I had better take a hand in it myself, though my time is precious just now." He paused a moment. Then he snapped out with terse authority: "Put this man in my car, and I shall conduct him to the nearest intelligence division myself."

The sergeant's face fell as he saw the glory of taking in the prisoner snatched from his hands. The burly non-com looked as naively frustrated as a child whose toy was about to be taken away. But he had no choice but to obey: a colonel's orders were not to be disputed by a mere non-com. And so the bewildered Kirby, who was still attempting frantically to explain, was taken into the staff car and seated between the colonel and the lieutenant. A word from the colonel to the chauffeur, and the car moved forward, backed, and turned in the direction whence it had come.

The dejected sergeant and the doughboys watched it speed off, saw it finally vanish in a cloud of dust. And as soon as it was out of sight, the big non-com expressed his opinion of the colonel and the whole race of colonels, in no uncertain terms. After going into full details about the high officer's ancestry, he concluded with angry pessimism: "Well, I s'pose we oughta have expected it from the lousy brass hat! They're all alike—always robbin' us poor doughboys of the credit! Now he'll be gettin' a medal and his name in the home papers for takin' that Kraut in! And what'll we get?" His answer to this last question is better left unsaid.

"Ain't it the truth?" put in his yes-man, the corporal, with vehemence. "Now he'll be gettin' a medal! And what'll we get?" And his answer, being identical with the sergeant's, is also better left unsaid.

Meanwhile, in the speeding staff car, with the flat landscape rushing by on either side, Kirby was hurriedly starting to explain again. "Perhaps you will remember me, sir," he said to the stern-faced colonel. "I am——"

But the colonel waved him off with an impatient gesture. The high officer was smiling tightly.

"I know who you are all right," he reassured the Mosquito, and when Kirby stared at him in puzzlement, he added quickly: "*Furcht sich nicht! Wir sind alle freunde—alle Deutsche!*"

"I don't understand German!" Kirby protested,

with heat. "Why try to test me out? I tell you I'm not a Jerry, and I won't——"

The colonel gave a chuckle, while the lieutenant on the other side of Kirby grinned.

"I see you still distrust us," said the colonel. "And also you are right in refusing to speak German on this side of the lines. It is a bad habit and a dangerous one, which all of us ought to stop."

"But—but——" Kirby stammered.

"Let me reassure you," the colonel continued, unperturbed. "You are among friends and countrymen in this car. We saw your signals from the air, and we answered them. Then, before you could get to our secret field, we saw you attacked and shot down by that pig of a Yank! We feared that you would be captured, so we hurried right over to try to snatch you out of your captor's hands. Fortunately," again he gave a tight smile, "we succeeded!"

AND then at last the light dawned on Kirby, and he realized with a shock. Jerry spies—these four men in the car. Jerry spies who had sent up those rockets from the forest, and who now believed Kirby was the pilot of that Fokker, even as the doughboys had believed him to be. The same ironic fate that had gotten him captured by his own countrymen had also caused him to be taken in guilelessly by the enemy! From the frying pan into the fire! For at once he realized the danger of his position.

A glance at the landscape which sped past on either side of the car revealed it to be lonely and desolate, with no visible signs of life. Kirby was alone with these four Germans, alone in a speeding car. He was unarmed, where they all carried automatics. And with the exception of the stern-faced colonel, he noticed that all of them were husky brutes—especially those two in front. Too well did the Mosquito realize, what would happen to him if they now found out that he was a Yank. The colonel, never doubting for a moment that he was the pilot of the Fokker, had already betrayed so much to him that if the Mosquito now revealed his true colors they would have no choice but to do away with him! Certainly they were not going to let a Yank live with information that could bring them all to the firing squad!

Never in all his career had Kirby found himself in such a ticklish situation. Through no will of his own a role had been thrust upon him. If he tried to back out of this role, it meant death! But on the other hand, if he tried to play the thing through, if he fell in with

these Jerries until he could safely escape and find help to capture them——

It would be reckless, hazardous. He would be treading on awfully thin ice. To begin with he didn't know German, and if the necessity to speak it arose he'd be finished! And then there still remained the fact that this colonel had once seen him in his true capacity of an American flyer in an American squadron. The colonel was evidently a double-spy: a German who had somehow managed to become a real colonel in the U.S. army. That accounted for his inspection trip to the 44th's drome about a month ago; he was merely playing his part, and playing it well. He had given Kirby that lecture, and he might at any time recall the Mosquito's face, recognize him. And then—good night!

All these thoughts flashed through Kirby's mind with lightning swiftness. Only a second or two had passed since the colonel had spoken, and in that short space Kirby, realizing that there was no alternative, had reached his decision. He would stake his life on this reckless game, abandon himself to this strange and breathless adventure which had swept him up unawares and caught him in its grasp. After all, he thought grimly, it ought to be damned interesting—while, it lasted!

The staff car was rushing on, with the two husky men in front sitting imperturbable, as if oblivious of their passengers. But the colonel was waiting for Kirby to speak now, and the lieutenant on his other side was waiting too. The Mosquito steeled his nerves. Then, without further hesitation, he set out to show these men that he was a German as conscientiously as he had tried to show them he was a Yank just a moment before. A grim paradox!

The first thing he did was to draw a long and very visible breath of relief. Then:

"*Gott zei dank!*" he murmured, calling upon the scant words of German he knew. "*Ich*—but, as you said, it is best that we speak English on this side of the lines." He grinned. "You can imagine my relief, gentlemen! And you must pardon my slowness in realizing that you are countrymen. It was all so clever—the way you snatched me from those Yankee swine, that even I did not suspect. Of course," he turned to the colonel, "you are——"

"I am S 23." Guilelessly the colonel filled in the space which Kirby, by a scarcely perceptible pause, had left for him. "I am in charge of our activities here, and you can discuss with me whatever business has brought you here. Certainly you must have come on a

most unusual mission: we did not expect a visit from a plane this morning—of all mornings!”

The tone in which he added those last three words made Kirby sit up. This morning of all mornings? A feverish curiosity gripped the Mosquito. Were these Jerries intending to pull off something this morning? Had he actually stumbled into the midst of some nefarious enterprise, some diabolical intrigue? His determination to play this game through was strengthened to a stubborn, purposeful resolve. By God, he would play his role for all it was worth, employ it to find out what these spies were up to, and then somehow effect their defeat and capture. At least luck seemed to be with him so far. These men had not expected a Jerry pilot this morning, and they did not know why he had come. That gave Kirby leeway! Or was it just rope—rope enough to hang himself? He would soon find out!

“Yes,” he replied to the colonel, framing his words cleverly, in the wild hope of drawing these men out: “It is strange that I had to come this morning, of all mornings. As for my mission—” He paused, anxiously. He must be careful; a slip here would surely betray him. He must think, think

To his relief, the colonel suddenly spared him of the explanation—at least for the present.

“We had better wait until we get to a place where we can be sure of absolute safety and privacy,” the stern-faced spy suggested. “Then, my friend, you can tell us everything!” Was there just a hint of challenge in his voice? No, it was only Kirby’s imagination. The man did not suspect, did not remember that day at the drome. The colonel was leaning forward now, to direct the husky chauffeur: “Hurry, Karl!” he commanded. “Let us get there quickly so this gentleman can unburden himself!”

The chauffeur, with a murmured, “*Ja, mein excellenz*,” stepped on the gas. The staff car picked up even more speed, chewed up the road. Vaguely Kirby wondered where they were going. Then he saw trees on either side of the road—trees which thickened as they rushed past in a blur. The forest! The road had led them to that same woods whence Kirby thought the rockets had come. A strange, apprehensive fear began to clutch the Mosquito, a fear which he could not define. His nerves grew tense, and his heart pounded. If only he were armed!

The lieutenant on his left suddenly turned and spoke to him for the first time. He grinned at Kirby amiably.

“By the way,” he said, with warm admiration, “that was a splendid air-fight you put up, comrade. We watched it through our glasses, and we thought you would surely win—until that confounded American got you by a crazy maneuver. But,” his tone suddenly became anxious, “were you not hurt at all, my friend?”

“No,” Kirby said. “I just got a nasty bump on the head.” His hand touched the top of his soft helmet. The pain had practically gone, but the spot was still tender. “I am quite all right.”

During this conversation the staff car had suddenly slowed down. It slowed down moan, and more, until it was moving at a snail’s pace, in low gear. Then it was turning off the road, turning to the right. Kirby’s eyes widened with amazement. Was the chauffeur crazy? He was deliberately heading the car straight for the trees which edged the right side of the road! But the driver skillfully steered his machine right between those trees, and they entered into the forest! For awhile they continued on this devious route, slowly zigzagging to dodge the tree trunks. Then, to Kirby’s further astonishment, they were on another road—a very rough and narrow road this time, which seemed to cut right through the thickness of the forest. The car, picking up a little speed, bumped and lurched over this crude pathway which was scarcely wide enough for the machine’s passage.

The colonel was chuckling. “I hope this little maneuver didn’t alarm you, comrade,” he said to Kirby, as they were jounced along. “This is our secret road—which we constructed ourselves, after months of labor. Nobody has ever been able to find it!”

Kirby nodded, in understanding. The road was certainly well concealed. The foliage on either side was so dense that it shut off the blazing sunlight above. They were in the shade of the trees, and the comparative darkness made the road seem all the more lonely. Again that strange, nameless fear came over Kirby. He felt like a man who is being slowly but inexorably engulfed in a treacherous whirlpool.

Suddenly the sun dazzled his eyes once more, and he saw that they were emerging on a large and fairly level clearing in the midst of the dense forest. The staff car went bounding out across this flat stretch of ground.

“This,” the colonel announced to Kirby, “is our secret field—the field where you were to land.”

KIRBY suddenly stiffened. Now he knew, knew the thing he had been afraid of. The colonel’s words had

brought it home to him with a shock. This was the secret field, where the real German had intended to land. And the real German, alive and unscathed, was flying around in Kirby's plane! Suppose the man should come back here, land after all! A cold shiver tingled up Kirby's spine. He tried to seek solace in the thought that the Jerry had headed straight for Germany when he made his escape. Evidently the Boche had been frightened off, had thought that the game was up when he saw the Spad on his trail. But on the other hand——

The stopping of the staff car brought him out of his somber reverie. The machine had drawn up right before a large shack, which was all but concealed in the trees at the edge of this secret field.

"Here we are," said the colonel. "Let us go right in, so we can get down to business." He climbed out of the car, and Kirby reluctantly climbed out after him. The lieutenant and the husky orderly in front also stepped from the machine. The chauffeur remained at the wheel, however, and drove the car off across the field——evidently to some secret garage.

Kirby, flanked by the three spies, walked to the shack as unwillingly as if he were walking into a trap. But there was no backing out now. The colonel opened the door, and Kirby had to enter with him and the two other Germans.

The Mosquito found himself in a large and fairly well-furnished room. In the center was a table, and lounging at this table, some of them smoking cigars and cigarettes, were several men in various Allied uniforms——English, French, and American. At the entrance of Kirby and his escorts, they all jumped up. They started speaking loudly in German, glancing at Kirby, and asking questions which the colonel answered. Then, smiling and laughing, they came over to the Yank in German flying togs, and proceeded to pump his hand and slap his back, jabbering all the while. Kirby could not understand what they were saying, but he surmised that they were congratulating him on his safe arrival.

"Danke," he muttered, again drawing from his scant vocabulary of German. Then, desperately: "But, gentlemen, I really think you make a grave mistake to speak German. You shouldn't get the habit, for it's likely to catch you at the most embarrassing moments. I know," he lied, frantically, "because I've had experience in that line."

The colonel smiled, tolerantly. "As you wish, comrade," he conceded. "But really your fears are

without foundation. Why," he boasted, "we are as safe here as in our own Fatherland! This is our refuge——our headquarters. Whenever we wish to elude our stupid enemies we come here. You see before you, my friend, several of our most clever agents. All have been doing wonderful work!"

As the colonel spoke, Kirby glanced at the crowd of men. He noticed that all were keen, sharp-eyed fellows with hard, intelligent faces. A nest of spies all right, this place! There were at least a dozen Germans here. A dozen armed Germans and one lone Yank in a German uniform!

"And the——our cursed enemies have never found this place?" the Mosquito queried, tensely.

Some one laughed——a harsh, guttural laugh. "Tell him, *Excellenz*, what happened to that swine of an American who blundered into our nest about a week ago!"

A low growl rose from the rest of the crowd, while the colonel smiled a cold and terrible smile. "Yes," he mused, reminiscently, and patted his revolver holster. "We know well how to deal with intruders——especially with an impudent dog of an American!"

Kirby's scalp prickled, and he felt a tight sensation around the collar. At the same time he struggled to conceal a sudden, dumb fury against these Krauts who had cold-bloodedly murdered an American. Damn them, they'd pay for it! But he must hurry, must find out what they were up to, so he could get the hell out of here, get help! He became reckless in his feverish desire to bring matters to a head.

"Now about my mission, gentlemen——" he began.

"Yes, yes," the colonel agreed, brusquely. "Now if you will kindly be seated, *Herr*——"

"Schmidt." Kirby gave the first German name he could think of. "*Leutnant* Schmidt of the 11th pursuit *jagdstaffel*." Fortunately he remembered the insignia of that silver Fokker.

The colonel nodded, smiled. "Be seated, *Leutnant* Schmidt." Kirby took the seat he indicated, sat down near the head of the table, where the colonel himself drew up a chair. The other men were also seating themselves.

"You know," the colonel suddenly remarked, glancing across at Kirby, "your face looks familiar to me, *Leutnant* Schmidt. Have we met before?"

Kirby's heart seemed almost to stop beating.

"Why——why, it's likely," he breathed, while he fought to suppress a mad impulse to turn his face away. God, the man was studying him intently now! The colonel's eyes were keen and scrutinizing!

“Perhaps it was in the Fatherland?” the colonel suggested. He appeared to be searching his mind for a recollection. “I could swear I have seen you somewhere. Let me see now, you say you are from *jagdstaffel* eleven?”

Kirby felt the net slowly closing about him. A few pertinent questions like this and he’d be cooked! He knew nothing about *jagdstaffel* eleven, did not even know where it was located.

But to his frenzied relief the colonel pressed the matter no farther. The stern-faced spy shrugged. “Well, what difference? We are wasting time. Your mission, comrade. What is it?”

Kirby had known that this question; was inevitable, but it was shot at him with such suddenness that it took him almost unawares. He must answer, answer quickly or all was lost. The Germans were all waiting expectantly. Kirby’s mind raced back to the breathless events on that field where the Fokker had crashed. Suddenly he remembered that packet the Jerry pilot had momentarily pulled out. He took a long chance.

“I came,” he said, trying to keep his voice steady, “to deliver to you a packet. Unfortunately I had to destroy this paper when I was shot down. I just managed to burn it before I was captured.”

Disappointment showed on the faces of the Germans. But the colonel nodded slowly: “You did the right thing, my friend. But perhaps you can tell us what was on that paper?”

Kirby hesitated. He must be careful—damned careful.

“I did not see it,” he said, judiciously. “My orders were to let no one but S 23 break the seal open. However—” He paused. Again he told himself to be careful. But in his desire to find out what was in the wind, he became reckless almost to the point of suicide. “However, I also received some verbal instructions.” He was gambling now, staking his life purely on a hunch. “I am to sort of check up on everything over here, and take back a full report.”

Almost instantly he knew that he had blundered! A murmur of surprise had come from the men at the table. And the colonel shot a puzzled glance at the Mosquito, a glance which Kirby, fearful and apprehensive, at once mistook for suspicion.

“To check up?” the colonel was exclaiming, incredulously, “Why, that is ridiculous! Especially at such a late stage in the game!” He glanced at his wrist watch. “It is ten a.m. already. That leaves just two hours. Certainly there has been no hitch in the plans,

has there? They are going to start at the appointed time.”

“Yes, yes, of course,” Kirby said desperately, and wondered madly what they were going to start at twelve o’clock to-day. He must find out. But good God, he must watch his step now. Another slip like this and he’d be frying in his own grease. And no use trying to correct the mistake he had made either: now that he had said it, he must stick to it: “Yes, they’re going to start on the dot, but I guess they just want to sort of check things up for the last time.”

The colonel shook his head, and groaned. “But haven’t we checked up everything to the last detail? Haven’t we spent the last two months correcting the range of those guns? Why, we took stock of every shell, when from time to time they dropped one over. Now the rest is up to them. That long-range battery is all ready, isn’t it?”

“Yes—absolutely!” Kirby clutched at the straw like a drowning man. “They are all ready, but——”

“Well then, what more can we do? All that remains now is for them to open fire. They cannot miss!” There was triumph in the colonel’s tone now, and there was triumph, too, in the faces of the Germans who listened to him. “No, they cannot go wrong on our calculations! Why,” his voice rose enthusiastically, “they will wipe the town of Rois clean off the map!”

Kirby sat very, very still. The words had stunned him like a thunderbolt. Only by the sheerest force of will could he keep from betraying his emotions, keep his face from registering the horror and amazement which had come over him. Rois—the largest supply base in all France, the supply base which distributed food, clothing, guns and ammunition to the Allied armies. Indeed, the Allied armies depended upon this little town for their very existence. If Rois were wiped out the armies would be paralyzed—at least temporarily. By the time supplies from other sources could be transported over devious routes, and distributed, the Germans might very well launch an offensive which the Allies, being unequipped, would be unable to meet. Consequently the whole tide of the war would be turned!

All this the Allies had known. That was why they always put their chief supply base in a spot remote from the Front, way in the back areas. Rois, at present, was a full thirty miles from the lines. Also, it was guarded with the strictest vigilance. The Germans had never been able to touch it. Their airplanes had never been able to get near it. And though their long-range

guns could reach it, they had no way of accurately training these guns on the unseen objective.

But now the Boche, through the ingenious sagacity of their intelligence corps, had found a means of aiming long-range guns at that town! All too well did the horrified Mosquito understand the clever stratagem. Somewhere across the lines was a big concentration of those guns. And these spies here had served as the eyes of the battery, had ranged the cannons on Rois. The guns evidently sent over a lone shell from time to time. These few widely scattered shells might have fallen around and even in Rois, but they would be just attributed to an accident—often stray shells from long-range guns hit something by sheer luck. But every time one of those shells had come, these German spies, keeping on the job, would note the hit, and send back a corresponding correction—probably by means of a plane. Thus, bit by bit, the guns had been ranged until they had the exact aim on their target. And now, at noon today, they were going to cut loose with a barrage that would wipe Rois out!

“So you see, *Herr Schmidt*”—the colonel was speaking again—“you have come on what seems to be a fool’s errand! There is absolutely nothing to be checked up! We have done our work, the guns have their range, and now it’s up to them!”

KIRBY nodded vaguely, scarcely hearing him. The Mosquito’s mind was racing on another track. God, this terrible enterprise must be checked! Rois must be saved at any cost! But how? In only two hours those distant guns would open up. How could they be stopped, when Kirby didn’t even know where they were? Nevertheless the Mosquito clung to a wild, frantic hope. If he could somehow worm the location of that battery out of these men, and then get right out of here, get to the nearest intelligence headquarters at Chouelly—The idea seemed impossible, hopeless. Chouelly was a full five miles from this God-forsaken spot, and even if Kirby did get out of this spy nest unsuspected, he would still have to find his way out of the dense forest. But somehow he must do it! And he must get it done before it was too late, so there would still be time to destroy those long-range guns. A large squadron of bombing planes could go over and wipe them out before they could fire.

The colonel’s voice again cut in on his breathless train of thoughts. “I can’t understand it!” The stern-faced spy seemed to be getting more and more worked

up about the subject. “I can’t understand why they should make a man risk his life and limb to bring over such a stupid message!” Suddenly his voice snapped out at Kirby: “Who sent you here, Leutnant Schmidt?”

Again Kirby’s heart seemed to stop, could he answer this terse, direct question? For God’s sake, what should he say?

“Who sent you?” For the second time the colonel’s voice seemed to crack at him like a sharp whip, and the other men at the table all looked at him inquiringly. He must answer!

“My—my squadron commander!” he blurted, frantically. “But I think he had orders direct from the battery!”

The colonel shot him another one of those keen glances, and he held his breath, felt like a man who is swaying perilously on the edge of a precipice. Then——

“Well, they must be fools!” the colonel spat. “Utter fools! I never heard anything so ridiculous in my life!”

“But perhaps,” Kirby ventured, in a desperate effort to smooth things out, “perhaps there was something entirely different on that paper I was to bring. Perhaps my verbal instructions were just a trick—just to give me something to say. Yes,” he rushed on, with more and more conviction. “I’m sure there was an important message on that paper!”

To his relief, the men seemed to accept this explanation. They nodded tacitly, and the colonel said, in agreement: “That must be the case. But if the message is so important, don’t you think they will send another man over if you fail to return within a reasonable time?”

“Maybe,” Kirby conceded, grimly. And then, in his desire to get through with this business in a hurry, he took the longest chance yet: “It seems to me that the best thing for me to do is to get a plane somehow, and fly direct to that battery. I can tell them I lost the paper, and there will still be time for me to come back here if there is any message.”

The colonel frowned. “But isn’t that asking too much of you, *Herr Schmidt*? You have done a great deal already. You’ve run enough risks to get here, even though you did not manage to deliver the paper to us. Why not stay here with us awhile and rest up? I’m sure that if the message is so vital, they’ll send some one else.”

But the desperate Mosquito was not to be swayed! “No,” he refused, hastily. “I really should be getting back anyway, so they won’t worry about me. And I

think I know how I can manage it!" A sudden, wild idea had come to him. "Look here, if you can rig me up in—say an American uniform, give me a gun, and then have your chauffeur drive me some place near an airdrome, I'm sure I can manage to steal a plane and get away. I've done that before!" His intention, of course, was to knock that chauffeur cold as soon as he got the car out of the forest—and then Kirby would simply drive the machine straight to intelligence at Chouelly.

But the colonel smilingly shook his head. "It wouldn't be necessary for you to steal a plane or even to change your uniform," he said. "For it so happens we have an airplane of our own right here. It is a splendid two-seater, and is so marked that the Entente aviators won't attack it, and neither will our countrymen. If you flew that plans you would surely get back safely, and we can always secure another ship for our own use here."

Kirby's heart leaped with joy and relief. A plane right here! Why, he could hop to Chouelly in no time! But he mustn't count his chickens too soon! He wasn't out of this spy nest yet, and he still must find the location of that battery! Again he gambled recklessly.

"That will be fine!" he said warmly. "But, as you know, I lost my map—had to destroy it with that packet. While I know my way around pretty well, I'd feel much more sure if I had a roll map with me. Do you happen to have one here?"

To his joy the colonel readily assented. "A roll map!" the stern-faced spy commanded, and one of the men produced it. The colonel spread it out on the table, and Kirby, his heart pounding, glanced at it keenly. But there were no special marks on it to indicate that battery over in Germany. He must make the colonel point it out to him. How? He tried the first scheme that came to him.

"Let's see," he mused, as if talking to himself. "What would be the shortest and safest route to that battery?"

It worked, thank God! The colonel fell for it like an innocent babe. "Well now, why don't you try this route?" he suggested, leaning over the map. "You start here—" his finger dabbed the spot, "and you fly due east until you cross the lines." In fascination Kirby watched the finger move across the map towards Germany. "Then you turn southeast, and find this river here. Follow the river until it turns off to the south, and then you turn east yourself and keep going straight ahead until here you are"—his finger came to a stop. "Here's the battery at Brenne."

Kirby could not help feeling a faint surge of triumph. He had found out just what he wanted to know, quickly and without trouble. But then he suddenly became anxious as he noted the location of Brenne. Why, it was about twelve miles within German lines! Forty-two miles from Rois! Those guns must be whoppers! Evidently the Germans were taking no chances of their battery being discovered and wiped out by the Allies. They were shooting from a spot well within their own territory. It would take a bombing squadron some time to get there. And the bombing squadron would have to locate the battery and attack it unawares—wipe it out before the guns could start firing. But if Kirby hurried, everything would doubtless be all right. He could enable the Allies to take measures immediately, not only to get the guns, but also to come over here and capture these unsuspecting spies.

But he dared not betray his nervous impatience to these men.

"Thank you a lot," he said to the colonel, as the latter folded up the map, proffered it to him. Kirby took it gratefully and shoved it under his tunic. "And now," he suggested, in the most matter-of-fact way, "I guess the sooner I can get started the better." With affected reluctance he rose from his chair, started to fasten the straps of his helmet. The colonel took the hint and rose too, and so did some of the others.

"We'll all go out and get the ship from the hangar," the colonel said, agreeably. "But you are sure you are in a suitable condition to fly? he asked, anxiously. "Didn't you say something about a bump on the head?"

"It's nothing," Kirby insisted, hastily. "I've forgotten all about it. Yes, I'm perfectly all right!"

"Very well!" the colonel smiled. "I must confess I admire you, *Herr Schmidt*, for your daring." Kirby almost winced at this unconscious reference. "It is courageous of you to risk your neck flying back and forth like this! And you also seem a very clever fellow—you speak English perfectly!" The other men in the room all joined the colonel in his praise, some of them resorting to German. Kirby shifted, with furious impatience. "And you know," the colonel was adding again, "I'm still sure I've met you before, *Herr Schmidt*! I've been trying to place you all this time!"

Kirby laughed—though his laugh sounded unnatural to him. "And I've been trying to place you too!" he said. Then he could conceal his haste no longer. "Well, I think we'd better get that plane and get started. Oh, yes"—he put in, as casually as if the

thought had just occurred to him, "I should like to have a gun, if you don't mind."

The colonel nodded. "Get a Luger for him!" he directed. And Kirby's confidence flowed back into him as he saw the man take one of those long-barreled automatics from the sideboard drawer. Now at least he would be armed—and that meant everything in the world. As soon as he got that Luger in his grip he'd feel better and——

He broke off, stiffening from head to foot. A sudden silence had fallen over the men in the room. They were all listening! Kirby strained his ears. At once he picked up that familiar sound!

Mmmmmmm! A low but insistent drone, like that of a bumble-bee: It was drifting down from overhead, and it was growing steadily louder, louder! A horrible apprehension came over Kirby, even he heard the colonel exclaiming: "An airplane—and from its motor an Entente ship! It is coming closer all time! What can this mean?"

The men in the room were hurrying towards the door of the shack, pushing it open. Led by the colonel they all crowded through the doorway, stepped out onto the field. And Kirby, still unarmed and feeling strangely nauseous, followed. The drone was so loud now that the ground seemed to vibrate a trifle from it. The men, their faces upturned, were scanning the blue sky, their eyes squinting in the dazzling glare of the sun. A shout suddenly broke from one of them:

"There it is! And—*Gott*—it's a Spad!"

EVEN as the man spoke Kirby saw the trim scout plane wheeling in slow circles right overhead, its wings flashing in the sun. As it banked around its markings were suddenly revealed. Absolute horror descended on the Mosquito.

It was his Spad!

A glance at the familiar markings had confirmed his awful suspicion. The real German, the real bearer of that packet, had come back. And he had come back in land! Even now he was banking to head into the wind, so that he could glide right down onto this field!

The blood drained from Kirby's face, left it a ghastly white. He felt a strange weakness in his knees. Dizzily he heard colonel barking out: "He's going to land! What can be the meaning of this? Certainly it cannot be that a cursed American has discovered our nest!" A growl rose from the men, and all felt for their revolvers as they watched the Spad swinging into the wind over the opposite end of the field. "But," the stern-faced

colonel glanced inquiringly at Kirby, "do you think, *Leutnant* Schmidt, that it can be another German—in a Spad? He has sent no rockets, but——"

"He's an American——" Wildly the words tore from the horror-stricken Mosquito's throat, as he clutched at the only straw he could. "He's the same American who shot me down! He saw your rockets—that's how he found this place! Don't let him land!" he pleaded, desperately, as he saw that the Spad, having gotten into the wind, was about to descend! "Shoot him! Kill him—the swine!"

The colonel's stern face seemed to grow lean, almost wolfish.

"So that's who it is, eh?" he muttered, ominously. "A damned Yankee swine—daring to land here alone!" Again the men growled, and a wild hope flickered in Kirby. If these Germans got so worked up that they killed the Jerry before he could betray the Mosquito—a dirty trick, but this was no time for scruples! "Well," the colonel continued, grimly, "we shall see. Let him land! If indeed, after we challenge him, he turns out to be a Yank, we shall deal with him accordingly!"

And Kirby's hope was dashed to pieces. Well he knew how easily the German would be able to identify himself and betray his impersonator, once he landed. He had papers—credentials, both his own and Kirby's. He also had that packet. And now he was coming! The nose of the Spad dipped abruptly. It pointed down for the field. The ship was starting to descend. Frantically Kirby searched his dizzy brain for some way out—but the way would not come. Panic swept him. A mad impulse to simply break for it and flee came over him, but he saw at once that such a move would be futile. Suicide would be just as good! The moment he made a break these Germans would know he was an impostor. They would drop him in his tracks, shoot him down like a dog. He was trapped, cornered. God—a strangled sob tore from him—what lousy luck! Just when he was about to make his safe get-away, to go and report the news of those long-range guns and save Rois! Now it was too late—Rois would be wiped out! He was powerless to prevent it!

The Spad was coming down. The pilot was cutting his throttle. The trim scout plane was swooping straight for the field in a mild glide dive. With its engine throttled, the shrill of wind through its flying wires became audible—a prolonged wailing sound. Louder and louder it rose, as the plane drew closer, until the wail became a ghastly scream which seemed

to mock at Kirby with maniacal triumph. The Spad was looming into largeness now, directly ahead and above. Kirby could see its trim wings rocking gently to and fro as it came on down. Down, down—closer and closer. Beads of sweat stood out on the Mosquito's forehead. He stood frozen, helpless, watching that German come down. And the crowd of spies watched too, waited grimly. Lower and lower now—in just another moment the wheels of the plane would be skimming over the leveled field.

Then it happened!

The air was suddenly shattered by a thunderous drone, a yammer of wide-open motors and a clatter of machine guns. And down from the sun, whose blazing eyes had concealed them, two planes came plunging like streaks, with smoke pouring from their exhausts. They were diving straight for the Spad which was about to land, and their guns were spitting flame. Yet, strangely enough, they too were Spads! And as Kirby saw them more clearly, caught their insignias, his heart gave a great leap, and he could scarcely suppress the shout of frenzied, hysterical joy which rose in his throat. His comrades! "Shorty" Carn and Travis! Somehow, in some way Kirby could not guess, the other two Mosquitoes must have discovered that a German was flying their leader's plane. And now they were coming down to give the Boche merry hell! A thrill of warm affection surged through Kirby. Good old buzzards—Shorty and Trav! Damn 'em—he had to brush away tears with his sleeve—they were coming to his rescue, though they could not know that he was right down here on this field, in a German uniform!

The crowd of spies stood rooted to the spot, staring in speechless awe at the strange spectacle of two Spads attacking another Spad, of similar design. It all happened with such breathtaking swiftness that they could scarcely follow it. Evidently Carn and Travis were sore—damned sore! Never before had Kirby seen his two comrades attack with such vicious fury. They pounced on that gliding Spad with a vengeance, their guns, beating out a thunderous tattoo.

The German didn't have a chance. Confusedly, he tried to pull up from his disadvantageous position. His motor roared back into life as he opened his throttle wide and zoomed madly for altitude. But he did not zoom far. Carn and Travis, aces that they were, drove right down on him from either side and caught him dead between their blazing guns. *Rat-ta-tat-tat! Rat-ta-tat-tat-tat!* The German's Spad literally seemed to crumple under that withering burst of, cross-fire. It

reeled crazily, and a tongue of livid red leaped out of its engine, went licking greedily down along the khaki fuselage. The fire spread swiftly. The flames crackled and roared. And the Spad, a blazing cross, winged over and side-slipped slowly to earth. The men on the ground could not see the crash, for the hapless ship landed behind a heavy clump of trees at one side of this field. But though they could not see, they could hear the dull, shivering impact—and the ground shook beneath their feet from the concussion. From behind the clump of trees, where there seemed to be more clearing between here and the surrounding forest, smoke was issuing, billowing upwards in dense black clouds.

But Kirby's elation and triumph over, his victory of his comrades turned almost instantly to tense alarm. For now the Spads of Carn and Travis, having hovered over their fallen victim like two buzzards, suddenly started gliding straight down for the clearing behind the trees, where the German had crashed! Good God, they were landing—landing evidently to observe their grim handiwork! Down they streaked, side by side, until the clump of trees screened their descending Spads from view. The other two Mosquitoes had come to earth right next to this nest of spies, and that meant that—

The Colonel's surprised exclamation cut in on Kirby's thought: "A most peculiar business!" the stern-faced spy was barking. "Now which side, in that combat, was German—and which American? These two have landed here. They are alone. Let us all go over and surprise them. We'll surround them and challenge them. If they are Americans who have shot down one of our countrymen and interfered with our business"—his eyes narrowed to murderous slits—"we'll kill them on the spot!"

The words sent a shudder through Kirby, jerked his nerve-strings taut. Again clammy fear was upon him—a tear not for himself this time, but for his two buddies, Shorty and Trav! Unless, by some miracle, those two Mosquitoes got back into the air before these murdering Boche surrounded them, they were doomed! God, if only there were some way he could warn them, some means by which he could save them! But he wasn't even armed!

The crowd of spies, led by the puzzled S 23, started to move across the field towards the clump of trees, where the smoke had now died to a few wisps which curled insidiously upwards. Kirby, whom they scarcely seemed to notice now, followed them fearfully, searching his mind in vain for some inspiration. A wave of horror went coursing through him as he saw

the whole crowd draw their revolvers, hold them poised, ready. Stealthily but swiftly the party moved on towards those trees, closer and closer.

Meanwhile, behind the shelter of those trees, with their Spads idling near by, two Yankee war birds, one of them tall and lanky, the other short and corpulent, were standing close to the smouldering wreck of another Spad and peering grimly down at the limp German they had pulled out of the sinking fire. And this time the German was not pretending! Though he still breathed, he was dying. He was burned and crushed. His clothes were charred to a crisp: they had practically been burned off his body.

“Look,” Shorty Carn was saying, as the mild-eyed little Mosquito bent over the unconscious man and examined a metal disk which hung around his neck by a wire. “Here’s the poor Kraut’s identification tag.” The disk bore the inscription: Moeller, Karl. *Uberleutnant*. Jagdstaffel 11. “I guess that’s the only thing that could stay unburned! That’s all he has on him.”

“Not quite all,” drawled the lanky Travis, eldest and wisest of the Three Mosquitoes. “He seems to be holding something in his right hand. Let’s see.” He reached down and gently started to force open the fist which even now was clenched convulsively about a small packet. With difficulty Travis pried the clutching fingers loose, got hold of the paper. It was only slightly charred around the edges: the German’s hand had protected the rest of it, though, ironically enough, it had probably been the Boche’s intent to destroy the document. Instead, it was the only thing besides his identification disk that had remained intact!

Getting to his feet, the lanky Travis hastily opened the packet. German writing appeared before his eyes. But the wise Mosquito understood that language perfectly where his two comrades scarcely knew a word of it. Quickly he scanned the message, and as he read, his eyes bulged.

“What does it say?” Shorty demanded.

“Lots,” came the tacit reply. The lanky man’s eyes narrowed grimly. “There’s some damned lousy business going on to-day! Let’s see—we’d better take that identification tag, too.” He stooped quickly unfastened the metal disk. “I don’t know where Kirby is—but we needn’t worry about him: he’ll be able to identify himself for whoever picked him up. Meanwhile,” he spoke softly, “we’ve got something here which we can trust only to intelligence corps. We’ll hop right off with these things——”

“Hands up, swine!”

THE sharp command made the two men wheel fearfully, but even before he wheeled some foresight warned the shrewd Travis to shove the packet and disk beneath his tunic. This he did while his back was still turned. Then both he and Shorty stared in blank amazement at the crowd of apparently Allied soldiers who were leveling deadly automatics directly on them!

“What the hell d’you mean, ‘Hands up’?” Shorty demanded, indignantly. “What do you think we are? A couple of *Hein*——”

A sudden wild outburst of laughter cut off the rest of the sentence and startled every man on the spot. It was Kirby—Kirby who had suddenly leaped through the crowd, jumped to the forefront, where he stood revealed in his German flying togs before his gaping, wide-eyed comrades. But he gave them no chance to speak. Wildly, boisterously, he went on laughing—a strained, harsh laugh which they knew was not his natural one, a laugh which made them wonder if their leader were out of his head!

“What a huge joke!” he bellowed, holding his sides. “*Himmel!*” he roared. “We all thought you were Yankees, comrades! And you thought we were Entente swine too, I guess! What a funny misunderstanding. Why,” he turned to the surprised S 23, “these men are my own comrades, from my own drome!” he said truthfully, and then stretched the truth, “flyers from *Jagdstaffel* 11! They are Germans as sure as my name is Schmidt!” He was careful to work that in, even while his brain raced to think up two more German names. Permit me to introduce *Leutnants* Schwartz and Wolff!” he pointed first to Carn and then to Travis. “Comrades, this is S 23,” he indicated the colonel. “He is in charge of this secret field here. So you see, you are among friends—we are all Germans to the core!”

It was a crazy, reckless measure—one of those wild ideas to which only a desperate man would dare to resort. Kirby had tried it simply because there was nothing else he could do, no other way out. He hardly expected it to work, despite his faith in the cleverness of his two comrades, despite his frantic pains to bring all the facts home to them in that single outburst. And now, having finished his speech, he was waiting—waiting with drawn breath for the response that would mean either life or death for him and his comrades. For now their betrayal must also lead to his!

It was a tense moment. The crowd of spies, having reluctantly lowered their revolvers, were staring at Carn and Travis bewilderedly. And Kirby noticed with growing dismay that Shorty was flustered—so

flustered that surely he was going to let the cat out of the bag! But such was not the case with the lanky Travis. The wise Mosquito seemed to understand the whole situation with amazing clarity. His keen eyes flashed Kirby a single look—a swift, veiled glance which assured Kirby that the lanky Mosquito had caught the cue and would act on it. And he acted a once, before the flustered Shorty could spill the beans! Cool as could be, Travis turned to the still-puzzled S 23, and a tight little smile flickered over his lips.

“*Es freut mich sehr,*” he said, in his fluent German. “*Wir haben nicht gewusst dass ihr war unser Kamaraden und unser Landsleute!*”

“Speak English, *Leutnant* Wolff,” warned Kirby, trying to keep the joyous relief from his tone. “We feel it is safer not to speak German over here.”

Travis shrugged. “English it shall be!” he agreed, and cleverly gave the words a slight, metallic accent which was convincingly Teutonic. By this time Shorty Carn seemed to understand at last, and the little man stood stiffly, kept his mouth discreetly shut while Travis went on talking to the stern-faced colonel “So you are S 23! And you though we were Yankee swine?”

The colonel nodded dazedly, and Kirby quickly supplied: “You see, comrades, we were fooled by your Spads and your American uniforms—ever though we saw you shoot down the Yank pig who brought me to earth before.” He indicated, with a careless and slightly contemptuous gesture, the inert mangled figure on the ground. “I suppose when I failed to return to *Staffel* 11 within a reasonable time, they sent you two over to investigate. And to make sure you would get through they put you in American planes and uniforms so the cursed enemies wouldn’t bother you. Isn’t that the case?” And by a scarcely perceptible wink, he told his comrades to agree. Shorty started to nod, was about to say something. But Travis, who evidently had his own ideas about the matter, spoke first.

“Yes and no,” the lanky Mosquito snapped. He was acting superbly now. He had stiffened up, and he looked every inch the haughty, militaristic Prussian officer. “As a matter of fact,” he spoke crisply, with that same metallic accent, “we have come here on a mission of utmost importance. We bring a message to you, S 23, directly from the Imperial High Command, at present located at Mouens. The message regards the shelling of Rois at noon to-day by our long-range guns!”

It was Kirby’s turn then to be astounded, for he could not conceive how Travis knew such vital facts. And Travis’ pertinent speech had more than convinced

the skeptical S 23. Indeed, at mere mention of the High Command, whose present location was known only by the most trustworthy Germans, the whole crowd of spies stiffened regretfully. They were awed and impressed.

“A message concerning Rois from the High Command?” S 23 was exclaiming, wonderingly. “Can it be that it is the same message which was in the packet *Leutnant* Schmidt was to deliver to us?”

“I had to destroy that packet when I was shot down,” Kirby hastily put in, for Travis’ edification. “And since it was sealed, I do not know what was in it.” Travis nodded swiftly. And then the lanky Mosquito proceeded to take the game entirely out of Kirby’s hands and assume the full burden himself. He became the chief actor in this breathless drama of intrigue, while Kirby gratefully fell into the background with Carn.

“Yes,” snapped Travis, “the message in that packet was the same. Fearing that *Leutnant* Schmidt had met with trouble, in which event they hoped he would be crafty enough to destroy the document, they chose me to come over here with a verbal message—which is much safer than any packet. To protect me *Leutnant* Schwartz here—” he nodded towards Shorty Carn, who smiled faintly—“was sent as my escort. And as a final and thorough precaution we both used Spads and American uniforms, so that we could not possibly fail to get here. We were just arriving when we saw this Yankee swine trying to land. Evidently he had discovered your nest, and was coming down to betray you. We, of course, did not know just how strong you were in numbers down here, and we feared you might not be able to deal with the intruder——”

“So we decided to remove him for you,” Shorty Carn finished grimly, speaking for the first time only because he felt he must play some role in this to keep off suspicion. “Which we did!”

“And made a very thorough job of it!” remarked one of the spies, a hawk-visaged man in the uniform of a French major, who was stooping over the mangled and unconscious figure. This pseudo-French officer evidently knew something about medicine. “He is certainly dying. He has no chance—riddled with bullets, crushed and burned. He is in a coma now, and will probably sink right into death.”

“Well,” decided S 23, “better take him into the house anyway. Strip him—see what you can find. And if, by some miracle, you can stimulate him enough to bring him around for awhile, we’ll try to make the swine talk, tell us how he happened to discover our nest!”

A slight shiver passed through Kirby and his comrades at the thought of this prospect, but the way the pseudo-French major shook his head reassured them again. With affected indifference they watched some of the spies lift the limp man from the ground, none too gently.

S 23 turned to Travis: "And now, *Leutnant* Wolff, we shall all go back to the house, where you can give us full details of your message. You can leave your Spads here—there is no danger from the fire now." He spoke the truth, for the wrecked Spad had now burned itself out; there was just a charred, twisted skeleton of a plane left. "And," added S 23, "you might as well turn off your engines—you will only waste gas."

The Mosquitoes hesitated at this suggestion, realizing that engines, once turned off, took time to start—which wouldn't be so good in an emergency. But before they could do anything about it, two of the spies had darted over to the Spads and performed the simple operation. The motors were switched off—the two propellers stood still, quiet.

Then the whole party, with some of them carrying the limp German pilot, went back through the clump of trees and crossed the field to the shack. During the short journey the Three Mosquitoes tried in vain to get off where they could really talk to one another. It was impossible—the crowd of spies kept close to them all the time. However, the mere presence of his two comrades relieved Kirby considerably. At least now he didn't have to face this dreadful peril alone and unarmed! And Travis was certainly handling the whole ticklish business remarkably—Kirby could not understand how in the world the lanky man had got all his dope on the subject. But leave it to Trav when it came to brainwork—shrewd old Trav! He'd pull them out of this mess! Yet, despite his implicit faith in his older comrade's skill, the words of an old adage were running through Kirby's mind, repeating themselves over and over like a grim refrain.

"Too many cooks!" he was thinking. "Too many cooks spoil the broth!"

BAH! In union there was strength! And the Three Mosquitoes were together—could face the issue as the game, fighting trio they were! Fortunately, Kirby told himself, the colonel had not seen Carn and Travis before as he had seen Kirby. The other two Mosquitoes had been absent from the 44th's drome during that inspection. That was one good thing anyway!

A few minutes later and they were all back in the

large room of the shack. The dying pilot was laid out on a couch. A careful search of his person revealed, of course, nothing—thanks to Travis' foresight. The hawk-visaged spy who served as the crowd's doctor examined the man thoroughly.

"I'll give him stimulants," he said. "But I don't see how he can possibly be brought to consciousness before he dies. He's practically gone now." And the Three Mosquitoes breathed in relief. One menace removed, anyway!

"But now, gentlemen," Travis' crisp, metallic voice rang out. "I fear we are taking up valuable time." He glanced at his wrist watch. "Do you realize it is a quarter to eleven?" Kirby's hopes sank as he heard those words. Only one hour and fifteen minutes more and those guns; would cut loose! God, how could they possibly be stopped within such a short time? It looked hopeless—for Kirby? figured it would take a bombing squadron at least an hour and a half to get organized and go over to Brenne.

S 23 was speaking: "You are right, *Leutnant* Wolff. It is late. Let us have your message at once!"

Travis once more drew himself up with military hauteur. An awed silence fell over the room, as all listened in respect for the words which, because of their source, must carry the weight of great authority:

"The High Command," clipped Travis, "hesitates to meddle into this business of shelling Rois, which it has left entirely to you intelligence men and the ordnance experts who are operating the long-range guns. The High Command however, understands that in the town of Rois is a famous cathedral, looked upon as one of the world's great works of art, and especially cherished by the French. A cathedral, indeed, which is reputed to rank with the one that was at Rheims, and with the Notre Dame at Paris."

The colonel knit his brows in puzzlement. "Yes, yes—the famous Rois cathedral," he said. "But what of it?"

"The High Command," continued Travis, stiffly, "understands that when Rois is wiped out, this cathedral, being in the line of fire, will naturally be destroyed. As you may know, the destruction on our part of various cathedrals, especially the Rheims cathedral has aroused a storm of public criticism throughout the world, and has incensed our enemies to reprisals which have hurt us severely. The High Command is well aware of the gain, that will be made by wiping out the Rois supply base, but they wish to raise this question: Will the destruction of the Rois

cathedral so arouse our enemies that they will have the necessary morale to seriously meet our coming offensive—in other words, will any gain we can make by wiping out Rois be lost by its effect on the enemy?”

He paused, and a surprised murmur arose from the crowd of spies. S 23 seemed anything but pleased. A look of growing resentment came over his stern face.

“With all respect to the High Command,” he said, with polite, irony, “I cannot see how they can raise such a ridiculous question, especially at such a time as this! Evidently they do not realize how seriously the destruction of Rois is going to cripple the enemy. With Rois wiped out, our offensive cannot fail! Furthermore, I can positively guarantee that there will be no reprisals in connection with the Rois cathedral. I have plenty of information which will prove beyond any doubt that our enemies will accept the fall of the cathedral without complaint—will regard it merely as the fortunes of war.”

“The High Command”—Again Travis spoke those two respect-demanding words, “is well aware that you, S 23, know the situation over here better than anyone else. As one of our most clever secret agents, you have had a chance to study the Rois problem from every angle. You are in a position to answer these questions and explain just what moral effect the whole project will have. Therefore,” he snapped out curtly, “the High Command requests your presence at Mouens headquarters any time before noon to-day. You can give them all the facts, and you can quickly reassure them if their doubts are groundless!”

S 23 was thunderstruck. His jaw dropped. “My presence at Mouens?” he gasped. “Before noon? Why, that is preposterous! How do they know I can manage to get way across the lines to Mouens before noon? Suppose I can’t? Do you mean to say they will actually countermand the orders for those long-range guns to send over the barrage?”

At this Travis hesitated for the first time, and his comrades saw the muscles on his face twitch perceptibly, giving evidence of the terrific strain the man was under. The lanky Mosquito seemed to be thinking, deciding. Kirby and Carn, though they didn’t have the slightest inkling as to whether Travis’ message was true or false, nevertheless felt a strange suspense as they waited with the rest of the spies for their comrade to answer S 23’s question. There was a brief silence. Over at the couch, the hawk-visaged doctor still worked futilely on the dying, unconscious pilot.

Then, finally, Travis spoke again, crisply: “If you

do not appear before noon, the guns will be fired anyway at the appointed time. The orders will not be countermanded, for the High Command of course cannot be sure that this message will reach you. However,” he added, in a tone of stern warning, “if Rois is shelled without your assurance, you will be called upon later to give a full account of the matter, and the consequences may be serious indeed if your explanation is not satisfactory in every way!”

S 23 swore furiously. “But,” he fumed, “it is now five to eleven! How can I do it? How can I get over to Mouens in time to reassure them?”

“It is understood that you will fly over in a fast plane you have right here,” Travis told him. “The special markings on this plane will identify you to our countrymen, and you can land without trouble right near the headquarters chateau at Mouens. As for us,” he nodded towards Shorty, “we are to escort you over in our Spads.”

“And look here,” Kirby suddenly put in, though he knew he was taking a shot at something he knew nothing about. “I can fly that two-seater for you, sir, while my comrades escort us. I’ll get you to Mouens in no time, and you can reassure the High Command so there will be no hitch!”

S 23 wavered, began to weaken. “I suppose it can be done,” he admitted. “And I suppose a little rest on the other side of the lines wouldn’t hurt me either. But still, it seems so unnecessary, especially since the guns will be fired at noon anyway, if I don’t appear. As for the consequences—I’m sure I could explain things satisfactorily.”

However, the rest of the spies all pressed him to go. He might as well, they argued. It would please the High Command, and he would lose nothing by it. In five minutes or less he could reassure them about the cathedral. Rois would be wiped out per schedule.

S 23 came to his decision. He nodded, brusquely.

“Very well,” he snapped. “I shall go. *Leutnant* Schmidt can fly me over—I’ll get ready at once.” He turned to one of the spies, barked out an order: “Get out my German uniform and all my identifications—I’ve never seen Imperial staff before, so I can’t count on their recognizing me. Meanwhile,” he faced The Three Mosquitoes again, “you flyers can get out the two-seater and prepare the ship for flight. Three of my men who are skilled mechanics”—instantly three huskies in American uniforms stepped forward—“will help you! Call for me when ready. And,” he added, “you’d better hurry—there isn’t any too much time.”

But the Three Mosquitoes did not have to be told to hurry. With a last anxious glance at the unconscious figure on the couch, they followed the three husky mechanics through the doorway, out onto the field. Still unable to get off where they could talk to one another, they were led to a hangar which was cleverly concealed under the trees. The three mechanics opened the big doors of the shed, and the dim outline of a trim two-seater was revealed.

"Is she all fixed up with gas, oil, and water?" Travis demanded.

"No," said one of the huskies. "But we three can attend to that right in the hangar. "It won't take us long."

"Very well," Travis said, trying to conceal his eagerness. "Go ahead. We'll wait out here and map out our course awhile. As soon as you're ready, we'll help you roll the ship out."

The three mechanics nodded and filed into the dimness of the hangar. Presently they could be seen moving around the plane, attending to their duties. The Three Mosquitoes loitered outside—alone at last! Not really alone though, for they were still within clear view of those men in the hangar. But they could talk in whispers without fear of being overheard. And talk they did!

"Now what in hell is it all about?" Kirby was whispering. "Give us the dope, Trav—for the luvva Pete! First of all, how did you guys happen to come around just in time to shoot down that damned Kraut?"

"That's an easy one," Shorty Carn volunteered. "We were at the drome when a tough sergeant phoned in. He said he had just handed over a Kraut prisoner to a brass-hat colonel. This Kraut, according to the sergeant, swore he was you, and that a German was wearing your togs and flying your plane."

"The sergeant!" Kirby put in, with sudden understanding. "Guess he was so sore when the colonel snatched me away from him that he decided to do what I asked him, hoping it might get the colonel in Dutch! Well I'll be——"

"Not so loud, fellers!" warned the shrewd Travis. "Those birds in the hangar have their eye on us!"

"Well," Shorty put in, lowering his voice, "anyway we decided to investigate , the business. We hopped right off and came over this way, where the sergeant said the thing had happened. At first we saw nothing, but then, as luck would have it, what do we see but your Spad coming along from the direction of Germany. We went right up and signaled to see if it

was you or not. The dirty Kraut answered by cutting loose with both guns, and he nearly sent me to hell! We were sore as pups and chased him all over the sky, but the clever devil got away. But we found him again just as he was about to land—and this time we decided to shoot first and ask questions later!"

"And a damn good thing you did!" Kirby said, grimly. "But now, Trav, how in hell did you get all your dope? What's this line of bunk about the High Command you've been handing S 23?"

"Well," Travis explained, "I took that packet from the real Jerry and I just read it—that's all. When you gave us the cue to play German, my first intention was to hand the packet to S 23 and tell him we brought it over. But when it came out that you, *Leutnant* Schmidt, were supposed to have brought a packet which you destroyed, I changed my mind, thinking that this was the same packet. Besides, it would be more convincing to give the dope verbally—in that case they'd never possibly suspect that I could have stolen it all from the dying peilot, who was so burned up anyway that it didn't seem as if a paper could remain on his person! Well, what I told those Krauts—except for the details about us three being Germans—was exactly what was in the packet, which is now reposing quietly next to my breast."

"Then it's all true!" Kirby murmured, incredulously. "The Jerry High Command really wants S 23 to come over and reassure them? That cathedral stuff is straight!"

"Absolutely. It seems queer that the High Command should get so hot and bothered over it at the last minute, but such is the case. I didn't dare to change that message because, not sure just how much these Jerry spies knew, I couldn't take any chance of arousing their suspicions. One thing stumped me though—when S 23 asked me if the guns would be ordered not to fire if he failed to show up before noon. I felt like telling him they wouldn't fire, so he'd surely want to fly over. But I didn't dare, so I just gave him that line about 'serious consequences.'"

"But what's the sketch?" Kirby wanted to know. "What do we do now?"

"If I had my way," said Shorty, vehemently, "I'd say we all should take a chance and bolt for it, try to get off in those two Spads——"

"Nothing doing," Travis told him quickly. "We've got Rois to consider—and we've got to risk our necks a little longer. The moment we bolted these Krauts would know what we are; and they might be able to

communicate with those long-range guns, have them shell Rois immediately, before measures can be taken to wipe them out.”

“As it is,” sighed Kirby bitterly, “I don’t see how they can be wiped out before noon. It’s after eleven now. It will take a bombing squadron a hell of a long time to go way over and get them.”

“You talk as if you knew where the guns are!” Travis smiled.

“Well,” Kirby conceded, not without pride, “I do know where they are, and I also have a map showing the place. The battery is at Brertne, twelve miles in Germany and——”

A lusty voice from the hangar broke in on his sentence: “Plane is all fueled, gentlemen. Now if you’ll help us wheel it out——”

“Just a moment!” Travis snapped back. “We’re just finishing up the plan for our route!” He spoke the truth as his hastily whispered words to his comrades proved: “Now listen, fellers, here’s the scheme. You, Kirby, take S 23 up in this two-seater. We escort you in our Spads. When we’re up in the sky, you knock that Kraut spy cold—hit him with anything you can. We’ll stand by to see that he doesn’t give you any trouble. Then we simply fly to the intelligence base at Chouelly and turn *Herr* Colonel and this packet in to them. From there on it’s their job entirely. It’s up to them to come over and capture these unsuspecting Jerries here, and to find some way to stop those long-range guns. Don’t worry—they’ll manage it if only there’s still time! Now do you get it?” Kirby nodded, in grim agreement. A movement in the hangar warned them that the spies were starting to wheel out the plane. “Let’s go in!” Travis whispered. “And just hold tight, guys—and we’ll soon be out of this mess!”

THEY went into the hangar then and presently, together with the three husky spies, they wheeled the two-seater out onto the field, brought it right in front of the shack. It was a splendid ship all right, Kirby noticed—a new model which he did not know.

Evidently it was of German make, though its markings were Allied. It was armed with two fixed forward guns synchronized to shoot between the propeller blade, and one movable flanking gun in the rear, observer’s cockpit.

The three mechanics were starting to pull the propeller through compression. Kirby turned to his comrades: “I guess we can get S 23 now.” Then to the mechanics: “You three will start her up, won’t you?”

“In a jiffy!” one of the huskies promised, and the Three Mosquitoes hurried to the shack. They opened the door, walked into the crowded room and

“There he is!” screamed a voice which froze them in their tracks. “There’s the Yankee pig and his two comrades! Kill them—the *verdampfte* swine!”

Propped up on the couch, his burned, blistered face grotesquely distorted with agony and madness, his eyes gleaming points of hate which stabbed at Kirby and his comrades—the dying Boche pilot shrieked and pointed! Somehow, by some miracle of drugs, he had been brought back to consciousness, and under the artificial stimulus, he was for the moment horribly alive. It was as if the spark of life had flared into a final, livid blaze before it died out altogether.

Taken entirely unawares, the Three Mosquitoes stood petrified with horror and amazement, half expecting to be shot down on the spot. And Kirby cursed the fate which twice had interfered just when freedom and safety seemed so close at hand!

But as their eyes swept over the crowd of spies, the three Yanks managed to breathe again. For the crowd of spies, thank God, did not seem to share the dying Boche’s blighting malice. On the contrary, most of them were scowling at the man who had shrieked, though a few of them looked slightly puzzled and dubious.

S 23 spoke quietly. The stern-faced spy was dressed now in the immaculate gray uniform of a German *Oberst*, and the uniform made him look sterner than ever.

“This man,” he told the Three Mosquitoes, “has been telling us a preposterous story about changing planes and uniforms. He claims he is *Leutnant* Karl Moeller of jagdstaffel 11 and that you three are impostors who——”

“Nonsense!” Travis snapped. The lanky Mosquito had completely recovered his former poise. “I am glad you have not been deceived by such utter rot. The Yankee pig is just lying to make trouble for us all and——”

“Search them!” screamed the Boche, his whole body trembling. “Search them and see! They are Yankees! I can prove——”

He choked, gasping for breath. The life was fast ebbing from him now. A strange rattling noise rose in his throat.

S 23 frowned, and suddenly Kirby realized that the stern-faced spy was studying him again—looking at him as if once more trying to place him! Kirby’s heart

began to pound wildly. S 23 spoke again, this time pursing his lips a trifle.

"Gentlemen," he said, slowly, "of course the claims made by this man are ridiculous. He insists that he is the one who was sent to deliver that packet, and that since he could not destroy it, it must be on the person of one of you three—as well as his identification disk. Impossible, of course. But I know you will be as eager as we are to dispel all doubts at once, and to quickly reassure us that the man is just a lying pig. Therefore, I trust you will not mind submitting to a search."

A faint snarl of triumph rose from the couch, and the Three Mosquitoes stiffened, their nerves stretched taut. Travis was the only one who did not show a flicker, even though his heart was beating against that packet—the packet which, if now found on him, would mean certain betrayal!

The lanky Mosquito acted as he had never acted before. He drew himself up indignantly.

"Sir," he snapped, if it will give you any satisfaction to subject us to this humility, search us by all means!" His comrades winced, but the shrewd Travis knew what he was doing. Again he was the perfect Prussian autocrat, whose pride has been wounded. "If you wish to let the words of this lying pig—as you yourself call him—influence you when time is so precious, very well. You will find nothing on us, of course; you will only cause yourself pain for having entertained the slightest doubts—but go ahead. We shall submit, though naturally we can only regard the search as a rank insult, as would any German of the blood!"

A queer-sounding speech, but Travis knew the man he was addressing, knew that S 23 must be a German of the blood himself. It was simply one proud Teuton to another. The fact that Travis and his comrades seemed at all willing to submit to a search should dispel S 23's suspicions, while the fact that they would regard the search as an insult to their pride should make the spy leader feel cheap for having suggested it. And that is just what happened. S 23 flushed a trifle, bit his lip. The crowd of spies in the room shifted uncomfortably. Only the gasping man on the couch persisted in the demand that the trio be searched. "Don't listen to them!" he croaked, as the rattle in his throat increased. "Don't let them scare you! Search them—you will see——"

Again S 23 wavered, and Kirby now came into the argument: "Pardon me, sir," he said hastily, "but if we are to get to Mouens before noon we must leave at once! We are wasting time! Let us go now. And as

for that man—" he glared malevolently at the dying Boche, the Boche who had really been responsible for getting the Three Mosquitoes into this whole, hair-raising intrigue. "As for him, let him rave! He is a filthy Yankee pig, who had the impertinence to shoot me down and—"

"You lie, dog!" In a last frenzy of rage and hatred, the dying Boche strained from the couch, as if he wished to hurl himself across the room at his hated foe. "You lie—I saw your identifications—I know who you are—" A paroxysm of coughing shook him from head to foot. He was going, going. Stubbornly he tried to hold on to life long enough to finish his accusation. "You are Captain Kir——" Again he choked. He was a ghastly sight now. His face had turned to a greenish hue, and blood was streaming from his mouth. But in a final effort he managed to force the words out with his ebbing breath: "You are—Captain Kirby— 44th pursuit squadron—Captain—Kirby——" With a horrible shriek he fell back, shivered, and lay still. But even as his voice died into silence, another voice rose in a savage roar—a roar of wild recognition.

"The 44th Pursuit Squadron! So that is where I saw you— Now I remember! You are Captain Kirby, and you are a dirty, spying Yank who——"

Crazed with rage as he at last identified Kirby, S 23 whipped out his Luger. Before Kirby could move the automatic came up, and its muzzle loomed right in front of the Mosquito's face, seemed as big as the mouth of a cannon. He saw the enraged spy's finger tighten on the trigger, and he knew he was done for!

Bang!

The shot crashed out as the quickwitted Travis fired even as he drew from his holster. S 23, wounded slightly in the arm, dropped his gun with a cry of pain. And then hell broke loose. As if Travis' shot had been a tacit signal, all Three Mosquitoes, with a reckless, berserk yell, plunged into the fray. Shorty Carn whipped out his Colt and dropped two spies before they could move. Kirby, unarmed though he was, hurled himself upon a man he saw charging towards him. He lashed out with fists of iron, right, left, right, left. The man dropped like a log, but not before Kirby had grabbed his gun, gotten it in his hands, and fired blindly at another spy who was attacking him.

The crowd of spies, taken by surprise, were momentarily confused. And before the snarling, wounded S 23 could rally them together and set them upon the Yanks, Kirby and his comrades, fighting like madmen, fighting as only the Three Mosquitoes could

fight, had killed two and wounded three of the enemy. The rest of the Germans, howling with rage, made a rush for the trio, their automatics spitting flame. Cursing, Kirby pushed over the big table in the center of the room, knocking several of the Germans off their balance, and temporarily stemming the tide.

"Outside, guys!" Kirby yelled, lustily. "The two-seater!" And while the confused Germans were scrambling to their feet, the trio of aces, amid a fusillade of bullets, dashed to the door—only to run right into the three mechanics, who, hearing the shots, had rushed over. Shorty and Kirby tackled these huskies with gun, fists, and feet, while Travis turned to fire a few parting shots into the room. The mechanics reeled backwards, and one of them fell. The Mosquitoes brushed past them, tore out onto the field. But to their dismay they saw that the two-seater which squatted out here was not yet revved—the engine had not been started!

The crowd of Germans were pouring out of the shack, rushing out after the trio. A new sound suddenly shattered the air. *Crack! Crack!* Rifles! Some of the Jerries had picked up the guns from inside the shack, and with these more deadly weapons they were firing away at the fleeing Yanks. Bullets whistled by the Mosquitoes' ears, crackled all about them. They knew that they were not going to get away. They were caught, caught with no place to run, since that two-seater was not ready to fly. The Germans, spurred on by the snarling S 23, were closing in on them, rushing around to flank them off as they kept running blindly across the field. Kirby had already fired his last cartridge, and Carn and Travis had only a few left. It would soon be over! A moment more and they'd be dropped!

Kirby's furtive glance again went to the two-seater, which still lay before him and his comrades. And as he looked at the ship this time, his eyes suddenly lit up with a desperate plan. He shouted wildly to Carn and Travis:

"To the plane, guys! Make for it anyway—even though she's dead! Hurry!"

And Shorty and Travis, though they had no idea what their leader intended, did as they were told. The three Yanks literally hurled themselves forward, went tearing towards that plane. But the pursuing Germans kept pressing closer and closer, and their bullets were constantly getting hotter. The air was literally dense with flying, screaming lead. Nevertheless the three reckless aviators, miraculously escaping the bullets, went plunging right on towards that plane. They were

reaching it now, reaching it—though Carn and Travis had fired their last cartridge at the pursuing Boche. The crowd of spies, seeing the trio going right up to the plane, got together and made a wild rush for the ship. Simultaneously Kirby, in one jump, leaped into the rear cockpit of the two-seater. The Germans surged closer, blazing away as they loomed right up. Wildly Kirby gripped the flanking machine gun in that rear cockpit—the machine gun on which he had banked his only hope. Was it loaded? It was, thank God! And while Travis and Shorty crouched on the other side of the fuselage, Kirby swung the gun around, swung it directly upon the oncoming spies. Madly he pulled the trigger.

Rat-ta-tat-tat-tat!

The gun stuttered into blazing life, trembled in Kirby's hands. And the crowd of spies were stopped in their tracks. Two of them dropped, and lay writhing. The others, crying out in terror at this sudden menace, ducked or tried to run. They knew they could not hope to fight against a deadly machine gun which spewed lead at the rate of six hundred shots per minute!

Then the infernal clatter subsided, and some of the most daring of the spies, among them the enraged S 23, again started towards the plane, lifting their weapons. But Kirby's crisp and deadly cool voice stopped them. Grimly, the leader of the Mosquitoes stood behind that gun, peering at the Germans through narrowed eyes.

"Stand where you are, every one of you! And stand still, or I'll mow you down like wheat! No use trying to take pot shots at me either. Even if you do hit me, I've got two buddies here who know how to handle this damn gun like experts!"

Carn and Travis, standing up behind the fuselage of the two-seater, agreed with grim vehemence. S 23, seeing that these three reckless Yanks meant business, cursed and barked out an order. The spies all stood wherever they were—that is, those of them that could stand. There were, to be exact, eight of them. Kirby marveled at the number then he remembered all the men that had been dropped. There was certainly a crowd in this nest!

"Now," the leader of the Mosquitoes continued, in the same, crisp tone, "up with your hands, everybody! Hurry up! Reach for the sky!"

Reluctantly the eight spies raised their hands above their heads.

"Get in line," Kirby next directed. "Line up right in front of me, where I can have a better view of you.

Come on now! This gun is nice and hot, and just rarin' to go!"

The eight spies sullenly lined up, stood in front of the gun with their hands still upraised. Without a word from Kirby, Shorty and Travis leaped forward and quickly stripped the eight men of their weapons. The two Mosquitoes then returned to the plane, and helped cover the spies with rifles they had just confiscated.

S 23 glared at the trio with contemptuous defiance. "Fools!" he spat, "now that you have us here, what good will it do you?"

"Not much good, maybe," Kirby admitted. "But surely a helluva lot more good than it will do you! As soon as one of us fetches a little help, you'll be nicely captured—and it'll be the firing squad for you and your whole lousy outfit!"

"Who cares?" sneered S 23, who was no coward. "We have done our work and," his voice rose with triumph, "no one can undo it now!"

"We'll see about that," Kirby answered grimly, and glanced at his watch. His heart sank.

It was twenty minutes past eleven!

In only forty minutes Rois would be shelled by those long-range guns at Brenne. How could the thing possibly be prevented now? It was too late!

"Listen Shorty, get in here and take this gun. Cover the Krauts. I want to have a pow-wow with Trav."

Shorty obeyed quickly, changed places with Kirby, who jumped down to the ground next to the lanky Travis. The two spoke hastily but quietly.

"What'll we do?" Kirby asked, bitterly. "How can we ever stop those damn guns? If only we all had a bunch of bombs we might fly over and——"

"Nonsense," Travis shook his head. "Believe me, it will take about twenty big D.H. bombers to wipe out any battery of guns that can shoot forty-two miles! And it will take an hour at least for the bombers to get over there—that is, allowing that they have no trouble finding the damn guns. Not so good! But I have an idea."

"Spill it!"

TRAVIS' eyes narrowed shrewdly. You remember S 23 said they'd never seen him at the High Command? Well, I'm just about his build—tall and lanky like he is. With his German uniform and his credentials I ought to pass."

"Pass?" echoed Kirby, in puzzlement. "What's the idea of that?"

"Don't you see?" Travis rushed on, hastily.

"Probably if we had managed to put this thing in the hands of intelligence corps they'd have to work the same trick to delay the firing of the guns and give a bombing squadron time to get there. They'd send one of their men, and of course a real intelligence man would be much better than me. But there's no time to turn the thing over to intelligence now, so it's up to me—and here's my game:

"I take this fast two-seater here and fly like hell to Mouens. It says in the packet that they will know this plane and have a landing T marked on the ground near the headquarters of the High Command. All right, I've got to get there before noon and land. I am S 23 then. I go before the High Command and tell them that the destruction of the Rois cathedral would be, just as they fear, a grave mistake. They'll be all too willing to order the guns not to fire. In the meantime you and Shorty will have seen to it that a bombing squadron is on its way to Brenne. And before the Jerries can catch wise at all, the bombers ought to be able to wipe those guns out. Of course by that time I'll be safely in the air, high-tailing it back for——"

"Hold on a moment," Kirby broke in, a peculiar expression on his face. "Do you know how far this Mouens is, from here?"

"Yes. The packet says it's thirty miles. We'll have no trouble finding it on your map though and——"

"Thirty miles!" Kirby exclaimed. "Why, you could never make it before noon, Trav! There's only one guy who can make the trip in that time—and that one guy," he said, without modesty, "is me." Which wasn't necessarily true. But Kirby had no intention of letting Travis go out on this death-defying excursion alone. "Listen," he said, eagerly, "I'm flying this bus here as *Leutnant* Karl Moeller, the real Kraut pilot who came to deliver the packet. I already have on Moeller's uniform and you can give me his identification disk. Well then, I'm flying S 23—that's you—over to the High Command. I'm sure they don't know Moeller there either. And when were in Germany you'll do all the talking. I'll keep as shut up as a clam. We'll manage it—and if there's any trouble there'll be two of us instead of one!"

"Yes," Travis murmured, realistically. "Two instead of one—to go before the firing squad. But," he agreed, hurriedly, for there was no time to argue, "as long as you think you can get speed out of this crate, you might as well come." Which wasn't true either, because the lanky man was really damned glad to have a

companion—even though the companion didn't know a word of German.

"But how about me?" Shorty suddenly called down from the rear cockpit of the two-seater. The little man, though he was conscientiously attending to the task of keeping the spies covered, had not missed a trick. "Where do I come in on this?"

"You'll have plenty to do," Kirby assured him. "First of all we must try to put these spies some place where they can't get out. Then you'll take your Spad, fly away, get a party sent over to capture this nest and—most important of all—get a bombing squadron sent right out to destroy the guns at Brenne. As for Trav's Spad—you can leave that here to be taken care of later. Now," he snapped, impatiently, "we've got to hurry. Stick by that gun, while Trav and I rev up this ship, so she can warm while we're getting ready."

Shorty looked so disappointed at being left out that one might have thought this was some picnic instead of a grim, hair-raising flirtation with death. But, realizing that some one had to stay back to attend to the work over here, the little man accepted his part like the game sport he was, and grinned.

With Shorty remaining at the machine gun, keeping the spies covered, Kirby and Travis dashed to the propeller, joined hands, and proceeded to pull the big blade through compression. Then Travis dashed to the ignition, yelled the usual "Switch on!" Kirby gave the propeller another tug and jumped back as the engine roared into life—much to the astonishment of S 23 and the other seven spies. For a moment Kirby's expert ears listened to the throbbing motor. He liked its tune. It was the firm, steady tune of power—speed!

The Three Mosquitoes then proceeded to make their preparations with a speed which men can only attain under the most powerful pressure. The knowledge that the town of Rois and the supplies of the Allied armies depended upon their swiftness was what spurred them on.

The first thing they did was to abandon the machine gun and, instead, cover the spies with captured automatics. Then they forced the scowling S 23 and the others to march back to the shack, and made them carry in the wounded from the field. Again they were back in that room, where the corpse of the Boche pilot, and the corpses of two of the spies still lay where they had been left.

A hasty investigation of the shack by Shorty Carn resulted in a discovery which made the Mosquitoes feel that luck was with them. There was a cellar in the

house, a cellar which had evidently been so fixed by these spies that they could use it as a prison if they caught some enemy they wanted to keep alive. There were no windows in this Cellar, and the door which led to it at the foot of a narrow flight of stairs was made of steel, with a small barred peep-hole. It had no lock: merely a heavy bolt on the outside.

Quickly, the Mosquitoes herded the spies into the cellar and bolted them in—all save the scowling S 23, whom they kept up in the room for good reasons.

"Hurry up," Travis was ordering the stern-faced spy, and punctuating his order with a flourish of his automatic, "get out of that uniform and hand it over. Don't touch anything in its pockets either. Come on, we're getting impatient!"

The color drained from the spy's face as he realized suddenly what these daring Yanks were up to. His look of despair convinced Travis that the game was going to be feasible—that he had a chance of getting away with the masquerade.

S 23, however, did as he was bade. He knew that resistance was futile. He was trapped, and these *verdampfte* Yanks didn't seem as if they would mind killing him if he so much as crossed them. Silently, but still scowling, he stripped off his uniform, and Travis, who had already taken off his own, hastily got into the neat German suit. It fit him perfectly as if it had been made to order for him. He felt through its pockets, found some papers, and scanned them briefly. A quizzical smile came over his lips.

"Glad to meet you, *Oberst von Hartwig*," he murmured, with a slight bow towards the sullen spy. "A fine German name you have, eh?"

Only then did S 23 break his gloomy silence. He flared up, his face flushing crimson. "You will not get away with it!" he snarled, furiously. "You will be caught! You are not as clever as you think."

"Neither are you," came the succinct reply, as Travis calmly finished buttoning up the jacket of his uniform.

Meanwhile, in another part of the room, Kirby and Shorty were hastily going over the roll map, laying out a bee-line from here to Mouens. Sure enough, Mouens proved to be twenty miles within the German lines, and thirty miles from this secret field. Kirby had hoped that they would be able to pass over Brenne on the way, so that he could try to get a look at the long-range battery. But Brenne was way off the course.

"Guess we're all set!" Travis suddenly announced. "Have you got Moeller's identification disk around your neck?"

“Yes,” said Kirby. “Let’s go!”

But before they started they locked S 23 in the cellar with his comrades. The spies were all in safe captivity. There was no chance of their escaping.

Out of the shack rushed the Three Mosquitoes, running towards the two-seater, which by now was thoroughly warmed up. Shorty Carn, stout little man that he was, panted as he ran with his comrades to see them off. As soon as they were gone he would go to his Spad and take off to perform his part of the task.

“So long, Shorty old man!” Kirby was shouting as they ran, for there would be no time to stop for good-bys. “If we don’t see you back at the drome we’ll see you in hell!”

“S’long guys!” Shorty panted back, a peculiar expression on his face. “Gosh,” he sighed wistfully, “I wish to hell I were going with you.”

“So do we!” Travis assured him. “But you’ve got to do your bit here. Be sure to have those bombers sent right over to Brenne. And have this gang of spies captured!”

“I will!” Shorty promised, even as they reached the plane, and Kirby and Travis were leaping into the cockpits. Before he was half in his seat, Kirby was pulling out the throttle lever, and the deafening roar of the engine drowned out Shorty’s last “good-by and good luck!” The two-seater trembled like a live thing. Black smoke poured from its exhaust stacks. It bounded forward, went roaring across the field, quickly gathering speed. Travis was putting on a helmet he had found in the rear cockpit. Kirby was fastening his safety-strap and jerking down his goggles with his left hand, while with his right he gripped the joystick tightly. He did not bother to head into the wind. In his savage haste, he simply got the ship right into the air, broke all records for taking off. Shorty, standing on the field, saw that two-seater literally shoot off the ground like a rocket which went whizzing over the tree tops and was gone before he realized it. Dumbly, the little man was still waving his good-bys, a queer smile on his face. He felt lonely. He wanted to be split-airing into this perilous adventure with his comrades so that all three Mosquitoes could face the grim odds in their usual, reckless fashion. But he had his own work to do now—he must hurry! Abruptly he turned and ran towards the clump of trees behind which the two Spads were still squatting.

Meanwhile, at less than six hundred feet of altitude, Kirby whipped the roaring two-seater around in a breathless skid turn which seemed almost to raise

a cloud of dust. He pointed its nose towards the northeast—towards Germany and Mouens!

They were off! Off on a mad race with time, a race which, if won, would only mean the beginning of their daring enterprise. They were out to save Rois from being blasted off the face of the earth! And if they failed, if they were caught, it meant the firing squad!

Kirby glanced at his wrist watch. It Was exactly eleven thirty-five. That left twenty-five minutes to make Mouens. But no—they must allow at least a ten minute margin for Travis to go before the High Command and have them stop those guns. Fifteen minutes, then. Fifteen minutes to do thirty miles. Two miles a minute—but this ship ought to do it!

Kirby’s jaw set grimly, and he bent to his controls. And from that moment on he became a part of the machine he flew. He forgot that Travis was riding behind him in the rear cockpit. He forgot about Rois and the guns at Brenne. All he knew was that there was a place called Mouens which was marked on the roll map he had pinned on the dash board. And he was going to get to this place before ten minutes to twelve.

He was not hurrying to get altitude. He let the two-seater climb at a very mild angle, so he could keep gaining speed while he climbed. Madly, he fed the engine more gas, opened his throttle wider, wider. The ship was responding perfectly to his expert control. It was picking up, going faster and faster. It was streaking through the air. Its engine roared in a thunderous, even bass. Its wires and struts shrilled in the rush of wind. Its whirling propeller drilled through space.

Speed! That became Kirby’s single-desire, his sole purpose. Speed! He coaxed it out of the roaring two-seater like a jockey coaxes it out of a horse. Speed! The plane was trembling from it in every fibre, rocking and swaying. The rush of wind became so terrific that Travis, in the rear cockpit, ducked under the cowl to evade its flogging force. But Kirby did not duck. He let the wind tear right at his face, let it smite his cheeks with all its strength. It was a tonic which stirred him savagely and filled him with exhilaration. A strange ecstasy had come over him. He was in his element—and he liked it.

Three-thousand feet of altitude now, without any sacrifice of power or speed. Below, smoke rolled across the face of the earth in ugly black waves. The Front! Trenches appeared, zigzag cuts in the mud. Allied trenches. Then German trenches—neat and orderly, and made of concrete. The lines! Kirby whipped up his

left arm, glanced at his wrist watch. His goggled face clouded. It was eighteen minutes to twelve. He had taken up seven of the allotted fifteen minutes. Twenty miles more to do—and only eight minutes to do them!

Madly, he redoubled his efforts. He employed all his experience as a flyer, to make that two-seater go even faster. He used every trick he knew. He taxed the plane to its very limit, drained every ounce of speed out of the roaring engine. The machine was shooting through the air like a missile now, vibrating more and more.

WELL within Germany now, but no anti-aircraft shells molested them. The Germans below must have recognized the special markings on the two-seater, and were letting it go through. Travis leaned forward to tap Kirby on the shoulder. The lanky Mosquito shouted something about the route. Kirby didn't hear him on account of the deafening roar of the engine. But he didn't have to hear him, because already he had picked out a tiny winding ribbon of brown which lay on the earth. It was road G 44. He knew from his map that he could follow it, and he did.

On they rushed, hell-bent, with Kirby hastily but carefully steering his course by map and compass. Minutes ticked by, ticked by with relentless speed. But now they had covered another ten miles—two-thirds of the journey was completed. Again Kirby glanced at his wrist watch. A gaunt expression came over his face. Time was winning! It was thirteen and a half minutes to twelve. Three and a half minutes left—and ten miles to go! It looked utterly hopeless. Three miles a minute—it couldn't be done except by a miracle. But—a gripping determination seized Kirby—he'd accomplish the miracle!

His altitude was now four thousand feet. That gave him space enough to try the reckless stunt. Gently, ever so gently, he eased the stick forward a bit. The nose of the plane dipped by a scarcely perceptible degree. By making a slight descent, and at the same time putting on full power, he hoped to gain enough momentum to give him the impossible speed he required.

The two-seater was now rushing down a scarcely noticeable hill of space, while Kirby at the same time fought to get still more power out of the engine. The speed became terrific. Travis, veteran flyer that he was, felt as if the plane were slipping away from him, leaving him, or at least his stomach, behind. The lanky Mosquito held his breath and gripped the sides of his cockpit. Faster and faster now, with the plane lurching and shaking as if the mad pace must tear it

to pieces. Struts began to shiver protestingly, flying wires threatened to snap. The engine lost its even bass note, took on a higher, shriller pitch. The radiator thermometer on the dashboard began to rise towards the danger mark. Straining her, Kirby knew. She was a stout bus, but no plane had yet been constructed for such unheard-of speed. But he couldn't help it. He must make Mouens by ten minutes to twelve. He must rely on the hope that the ship would hold out only a little longer. After that let her crack!

So absorbed was Kirby in his fight for speed that it was not until Travis rapped him violently that he realized they had actually reached their destination. Mouens was beneath them—at last!

The two-seater, in its ten miles of slight descent, was now just about nine hundred feet from the ground. The captured French village spread out beneath them with its scattered houses. And at the far edge of the town, looming swiftly towards the speeding plane, though it was just a trifle to the right, was what had once been a sumptuous country estate but which was now virtually a military encampment. There was a large, palatial chateau, and several smaller buildings. And the acres of ground comprising the estate were literally swarming with Jerries. Tents lay in neat, orderly lines. There were scores of infantry soldiers to be seen, a few detachments of crack cavalry, and even some light artillery. The whole place was a scene of feverish activity. Motorcycle dispatch riders sped to and fro from the chateau. Staff cars drew up and pulled away. All of which gave evidence that this must be, indeed, the headquarters of the High Command. And it also gave evidence that the High Command was making sure of its own safety. There must have been at least a thousand German soldiers encamped right outside that chateau.

Kirby and Travis, however, scarcely noticed this martial scene. Their keen eyes had fastened on a single object—an object which assured them beyond every shadow of doubt that they were here.

On an empty, leveled lawn right outside the big chateau was a large T, whitewashed on the grass.

With reckless haste, Kirby hurled his ship towards this mark, bore down on it. Only when the T was almost right beneath him did he throttle down at last, and even then he almost tore the plane to pieces as he split-aired to head into the wind. He could not risk a cross-wind landing here—not in such a limited space.

Again he glanced at his wrist watch. He hadn't made it—not quite anyway. It was ten minutes to

twelve already. It would require a couple of minutes more to make the landing. But the margin would have to do for Travis.

He got the ship into the wind. Very rockets popped up from the ground—friendly signals. They recognized the plane for which they were Availing, knew that S 23 had come to make his report.

Kirby eased in his throttle, made ready to glide. And above the muffled engine he could hear Travis' lusty shout: "All right, Kirby old man! We're here! Get down as fast as you can! And remember—keep your mouth shut. The whole German army seems to be down there!"

Kirby nodded grimly. He did not hesitate. Calmly, he shoved his joystick forward. The nose of the two-seater pointed for the T below, and the ship went swooping down in a graceful glide. Two reckless Yanks were voluntarily descending into the midst of a thousand Germans. They were putting their heads right into the tiger's jaw—and hoping against hope that the tiger would not be clever enough to bite!

It was exactly eight minutes to twelve when Kirby set the two-seater down for a perfect landing, right near the T. Instantly the crowd of Boche swarmed around the ship, seizing it and greeting the flyers. Calmly, the two Mosquitoes climbed out of their cockpits, pushing up their goggles. The engine of the plane was steaming.

Suddenly Kirby saw Travis' hand snap up to a crisp, Prussian salute. Kirby, surmising that it was the thing to do, saluted too. The two Mosquitoes were being confronted by an important-looking personage—a florid-faced Teuton who must be a brigadier general at least. Travis was talking to him, hurriedly. Kirby stood by silently, pretending to listen to the conversation, as if he understood it perfectly. He saw Travis showing papers, saw him exhibiting that same old packet.

'And so we have raced over,' Travis was explaining, in his best German, "to advise the High Command to stop the shelling of Rois. I hope it is not too late, sir."

The brigadier general started, his face filling with alarm. "*Himmel!*" he gasped "It is six minutes to twelve! The guns must even now be ready to fire! Come," he shouted, "let us hurry in!"

He turned and, moving as fast as his corpulent body permitted, hurried through the crowd of Germans, who stood stiffly, presenting arms. Close on the general's heels went Travis, and close on Travis' heels, following dumbly, went Kirby. The brigadier general, puffing and gasping from his vain effort

to run, led them straight to the large chateau. The Mosquitoes were both amazed by the number of guards outside the building. There was virtually a chain of soldiers surrounding the house!

Straight to the impressive doorway of the chateau the brigadier general led the two Yanks. The sentries at the door presented arms, and the three entered the building. In the large corridor inside the general paused.

"Wait here a moment," he commanded, and hurried to the end of the corridor, disappeared through a large door.

Kirby and Travis both glanced furtively at their watches. Less than five minutes to twelve!

"Remember," Travis whispered, making sure that the sentries at the door could not hear, "don't say a word. I'll do all the talking!"

"Don't worry!" Kirby whispered back, nervously. "I feel so, shaky that even if I could speak Dutch I wouldn't have the nerve to open my——"

"Ssh!" Travis warned, as the brigadier general suddenly reappeared, the high officer spoke tersely.

"You may both come in!"

Travis and Kirby, their hearts beating wildly, followed the general to the door at the end of the corridor. He opened it and they marched in.

A large, lavishly furnished room with sunlight streaming in through the French windows. At a shining mahogany table, where they had evidently been sitting, stood a group of generals some of whom the Mosquitoes recognized. But the two Yanks scarcely noticed these most high and prominent officers. They did not notice them because, from the moment they entered the room, their eyes had been drawn magnetically to the figure who stood in the forefront of the group facing the two visitors. And the sight of this figure almost made the two Mosquitoes pass out on the spot.

There was no mistaking him not after the countless photographs they had seen of him in the newspapers and magazines, the scores of cartoons which had leveled scorn and derision at his head, and the innumerable descriptions of him in prose and song. There was no mistaking the stern, autocratic face with its well-known upturned mustache. And there was no mistaking the left arm which was grotesquely withered, almost ten inches shorter than the right.

Dazed and awestruck though they were, the two Mosquitoes nevertheless had the presence of mind to stiffen up like ramrods and snap out a Prussian salute

of salutes—a salute to the All Highest of Germany: Kaiser Wilhelm von Hohenzollern!

NOW at last they could understand the reason for this last minute interest in the shelling of Rois! The Kaiser himself had poked his nose into this military affair, and was having his say about it. No wonder this chateau was so well guarded!

So absolutely dumbfounded was Travis that he almost forgot why he was here, forgot that the precious minutes were fast slipping. Not until the All Highest himself spoke did the lanky Mosquito come to his senses.

“*Oberst* von Hartwig,” said Germany’s emperor, “we are given to understand that you wish to advise us not to shell Rois. Time presses. Explain at once.” The voice was slightly high-pitched and metallic. The words were clipped out very rapidly.

With much effort Travis screwed up enough nerve to speak. Kirby, meanwhile, stood as still and dumb as a statue. The hand of a large clock on the wall pointed to three minutes to twelve!

“Your Majesty,” hastened the lanky Mosquito, trying to keep his voice steady, “since time is so precious, may I request that the guns at Rois be ordered at once to withhold their fire? If, after my report, Your Majesty still wishes to wipe out the town, very well—the guns can be fired a little later.”

Almost instantly the All Highest nodded, wheeled towards the group of generals: “The guns at Brenne are to withhold fire until further orders!” he commanded. “Communicate with them at once!”

The group of generals looked slightly peeved, as if they did not relish this idea at all, but the words of the All Highest were final and indisputable. Obediently, one of the officers reached for a telephone. The hands of the clock had almost come together now, under the numeral XII. Travis did not see how the officer could possibly get in touch with those guns in time. But evidently this was a special phone already connected up with Brenne. For in another second the officer was speaking tersely into the mouthpiece: “Withhold fire until further orders!” And at exactly twelve o’clock to the dot he turned from the phone and announced: “It is done, Your Majesty. The battery, though all ready to fire, awaits Your Majesty’s command.”

Travis had all he could do to conceal his relief, and Kirby, sensing what had happened, also felt a great weight lifted from his heart. The guns would not fire, and now all that remained was for Travis to give his

report. Meanwhile, by this time, a bombing squadron should be winging its way towards Brenne. Figuring on how long it should have taken Shorty to get a squadron sent out, Kirby decided that the bombers ought to reach Brenne before one o’clock.

The Kaiser spoke again. “Now, *Oberst* von Hartwig, we shall listen to your report. But let us be seated, now that there is time to talk this problem over.” He sat down in a large, upholstered chair. And as he sat down, both Mosquitoes noticed for the first time how tired the man seemed. His face was deeply lined, and his eyes had a haggard, almost haunted look. He hardly seemed the stern, inflexible despot he was reputed to be. On the contrary, he was an old man of sixty years, a war-wearied Kaiser who must carry on a losing fight because his pride forbid him to back out now. His armies were facing defeat everywhere, were even now rallying for a last desperate offensive that was the only hope to which he could still cling. He had got to a stage of the game where he actually paused before daring to destroy a cathedral!

The emperor motioned Kirby and Travis to chairs, and the men sat down. Some of the generals also took seats, while the others stood around.

The eyes of the All Highest, suddenly turned to Kirby, and Kirby’s heart jumped violently.

“I presume you are the flyer who was sent over to deliver our packet?” queried the Emperor.

Kirby, not having the slightest inkling of what the German words meant, shifted nervously, opened his mouth dumbly. But Travis was quick to come to his rescue.

“Yes, Your Majesty, he is *Leutnant* Karl Moeller of Jagdstaffel 11. He had some, trouble getting to our secret field. An enemy craft attacked him, but he succeeded in shooting down his antagonist and courageously got to me with the packet. There was so little time to get here before noon that I bade him leave his Fokker on our secret field and fly me over in my ship, knowing that he was a most skilled pilot, who could make the impossible speed.”

The All Highest smiled. “When we summoned the *Kommandantur* of staffel 11 and gave him the packet, we asked, him to entrust it to his best pilot, and evidently he did. We are indeed proud of you, *Leutnant* Moeller, for your courageous work. Indeed, you gallant knights of the blue are forever winning our admiration.”

Kirby, seeing Tavis smile at this speech, promptly smiled, too. And since he was scared stiff he seemed

properly embarrassed by this flattery from the All Highest.

“But now, Your Majesty,” one of the generals put in, with timid impatience. “shall we not listen to the excellent *Oberst’s* report? The sooner we hear it the better. For I am firmly convinced that, unless his report brings the most startling revelations, we shall want to go ahead with the project and fire the guns without farther delay.” The speech convinced Travis that the Kaiser must have been the author of that packet. The staff here evidently was strenuously opposed to abandoning the shelling of Rois.

The All Highest was nodding: “Proceed, *Oberst von Hirtwig*.” And Travis took a deep breath and plunged, to do or die.

“Your Majesty, may I say that I was actually gratified when I read that packet? The doubt it expressed had been on my own mind for some time. Indeed, I myself wished that the whole project might be abandoned because—”

“What?” rumbled a grizzled old field marshal, shooting a piercing look at Travis. “Indeed, you must have undergone a most remarkable change of mind, *Herr Oberst!* Why, you are the one who suggested this enterprise in the first place! Did you not tell our worthy chief of intelligence, who unfortunately has been detained elsewhere and therefore can’t join this conference, that you thought it would be a great measure to shell Rois, and that you and your men would be delighted to get the range for the guns?”

Travis stiffened a little, realized he had taken a false step. He must be damned careful! One thing was in his favor at least. He knew now that none of these men had met S 23 before. They merely knew of S 23 through the intelligence chief, and the intelligence chief, thank God, was not here!

The emperor knit his brow. “Let us not interrupt our *Oberst’s* report any further. Proceed, *Herr von Hartwig*.”

Travis plunged in again: “Very true, I was the one who suggested this enterprise, and that is all the more reason why I had to carry it through. But times have changed since I first got the idea. I have had a better chance to study the problem from every angle. And, just as Your Majesty intimated, I can now say definitely that the destruction of the Rois cathedral will incense our enemies to the highest degree. There will be terrific reprisals. And what we could gain by wiping out Rois would be lost by the serious opposition to our offensive. On the other hand,” he went on, eloquently,

“if we let Rois alone now, and spring our offensive as a surprise, we shall doubtless win through. That is the way it appears to me, Your Majesty!”

The All Highest nodded slowly, leaned back in his chair, and was lost in thought for a moment. The staff of generals, however, began to grumble in an angry chorus, glaring hostilely at Travis.

“Ridiculous!” snapped one. “The destruction of Rois will cripple the Allied armies completely!”

“What do we care about reprisals?” another growled. “With their supplies shut off, how can they resist us anyway?”

“We ought to destroy the town at once!”

“It would be a great victory for the Fatherland, Your Majesty!”

But the Emperor waved them off impatiently. “Enough, gentlemen! *Oberst von Hartwig*, as his chief has told us, is one of our most clever and thorough-minded agents. He knows what he is saying. His own views correspond with mine. Rois will not be shelled.”

The staff of generals began to argue with even greater vehemence. Travis sat still, listening quietly, and Kirby sat even more still. The generals kept trying to press their own opinions on the All Highest, and Travis knew full well that their opinions were correct! They were military experts and they knew just what value the destruction of Rois would have. But the Kaiser, knowing little of military affairs and yet feeling that it was incumbent upon him to take part in them, insisted on carrying out his own will.

“*Genug!*” he snapped sternly, and for just a fleeting second that inflexible, despotic will which characterized the house of Hohenzollern, flashed back in this weary old man who reclined in an easy chair. “It is settled! I have given my command!”

Again Travis could hardly conceal his relief, and again Kirby could read victory in his comrade’s eyes. Of course, Travis realized, sooner or later the All Highest and his shrewd generals would know that they had been duped. For when Travis and Kirby got out of here they intended to disappear from Germany forever, thus revealing the fact that they were not the real Jerries after all. But by that time, Travis hoped grimly, the squadron of bombers would have rendered those guns at Brenne absolutely useless.

“However, *Herr Oberst*,” the emperor was saying now, “despite the fact that all the work you have done in connection with Rois will go wasted, you are to be praised for your daring and cleverness. We appreciate it. And now that you have returned to our lines, I think

you deserve a leave and a rest from your strenuous activities. But you can arrange for that with your chief, who will be here some time this afternoon.”

Travis suddenly tensed. The chief—here this afternoon! One thing was certain. He and Kirby must not be here when that chief arrived! Now that Travis had finished his work, they must get out as soon as possible, get into the air and streak for home! He glanced at the clock. It was twenty-minutes past twelve. In less than three quarters of an hour those bombers should be at Brenne. A new realization suddenly dawned on Travis. He and Kirby must not only get out before the chief came, but also before the bombers got to Brenne! The moment the Brenne battery was raided the Germans would know just how they had been tricked—and if Kirby and Travis were here then, good night!

The thought made the lanky man desperate. He took a long chance. “Your Majesty,” he said, respectfully, “that will be fine—I can meet my chief here. But first I hope Your Majesty will grant me permission to fly with *Leutnant* Moeller here, back to his drome. I should like to see his commanding officer personally so I can give him a full account of all that happened. No doubt he has been worried about *Herr* Moeller.” As he spoke he smiled and nodded at Kirby, and Kirby, like a mimic, smiled and nodded, too.

“But,” the All Highest suggested, agreeably, “if you are anxious to see the *Kommandatur* of jagdstaffel 11, I can send for him, have him come over here. How would that be?”

Travis’ grin was a little sickly. “But why make him leave his duties to come over here, Your Majesty? This is so unimportant. It is just that I should like to see *Leutnant* Moeller back to his drome.” Again Kirby mimicked his nod and smile.

And to Travis’ frenzied relief, the Emperor assented. “Very well, if that is your wish, *Oberst*.”

BUT if Travis thought that he and Kirby were going to get out of here then and there, he was sadly mistaken. The emperor made no sign for them to go—and since he was the All Highest they could not go until that sign was given. Instead, Germany’s ruler leaned back in his chair and started to talk to the Mosquitoes leisurely, and at great length. He asked Travis pertinent questions about the espionage system across the lines, and displayed keen interest in the workings of the Imperial intelligence corps. Travis, with one eye on the hands of the clock, which seemed to move so

swiftly, did his best, lied like a trooper to answer the questions. Kirby continued to sit like a mummy. From time to time the monarch would address a remark to the young Mosquito, but Travis always interceded immediately, saving Kirby’s neck. Fortunately, thus far Kirby’s silence had not attracted any suspicion. The All Highest and his generals regarded him merely as a youthful, modest *Leutnant* who felt awed and out of place in such a high gathering. It was natural that he did not open his mouth, that he remained dumb. But both Kirby and Travis realized that this could not go on indefinitely. There must surely come a time when Kirby’s inability to speak would prove their undoing! Desperately, Travis tried to ward off such a situation. Whenever the emperor or the generals paused in their speech and glanced at Kirby, Travis would begin to chatter incessantly, glibly. Never before had Kirby seen his comrade so loquacious.

The All Highest was a pleasant conversationalist, once he got started. In deed, though he was never totally aware of his own supreme importance, he could talk to Travis like one man to another. Under different conditions, Travis would have enjoyed it immensely, thrilled at it. But now, with the minutes ticking away, with the danger of betrayal looming closer and closer, the lanky Mosquito could only wish to God it would end. Yet he had to sit here calmly, as if he had all the time in the world, while the Emperor of Germany chatted away. It was now twenty-five minutes to one. If they didn’t get out of here soon——

At last, thank God, the All Highest sighed, gave a wry smile: “But here I am detaining you when you want to get off to staffel 11. I shall keep you no longer. This has been a most interesting conversation, gentlemen.” He rose slowly from his chair. The two Mosquitoes and all the generals who had been seated jumped to their feet respectfully, stood with the emperor. The All Highest turned to the two men.

“Gentlemen, before you leave, I wish to present you with some token of my admiration for your courageous conduct in this enterprise. I may not see you again, for these contacts with my children,” as he was fond of calling his soldiers, “are all too rare.” He turned to one of the staff officers, snapped out: “Make out two citations immediately. For *Oberst* Franz von Hartwig, an award of the *Pour-le-merite* for his daring, ingenious work behind the lines of our enemy. And for *Leutnant* Karl Moeller, of the 11th pursuit jagdstaffel, an Iron Cross of the first order, for extreme valor.”

Travis, though he understood these words, could

not grasp their meaning any more than could Kirby. Dumbly the two Yanks saw the All Highest go over to the table and take two small objects from one of the generals. The emperor came back, faced the two Mosquitoes, who had the sense to stand at stiff attention.

The All Highest went up to Travis and pinned beneath that Mosquito's collar the famous and coveted *Pour-le-merite*—the highest military award Germany could give, and which could only be given by the All Highest himself! The stupefied Travis found his hand gripped by the right hand of the Kaiser, and the grip was warm and firm. Then the All Highest, leaving the lanky Mosquito in a trance, went to the ramrod which was Kirby and pinned on him a trim Iron Cross, the same kind of a cross which marked the scores of Boche planes which had fallen beneath Kirby's guns! And Kirby too felt the royal handclasp.

The two Mosquitoes could have been bowled over with a feather. They could hardly believe the impossible thing which had just taken place.

They had been decorated, actually decorated, by the emperor of the enemy nation. What a paradox! The irony of it, the sheer, ridiculous irony of it! They almost felt like bursting into wild laughter, despite the peril of their predicament. Decorated by the Kaiser!

In a daze they took the two citations which had been scribbled out by the staff officer and signed by the emperor. They pocketed the precious documents. The All Highest was dismissing them. Dazedly, they snapped out another salute. Then, still in a stupor, they marched out of the room, wondering if they were in the throes of some crazy dream. They had seen the Kaiser. They had spoken with him. They had shaken hands with him and he had pinned medals on their breasts. Who would believe such an absurd story? Yet they had proof. They had the medals, and they had the citations, signed by Wilhelm himself!

Here indeed was something they would always remember as the greatest thrill of their lives. That is—suddenly both men snapped out of their daze, became sober, thoughtful once more—if they lived to remember it! For now, as they walked down the corridor towards the door of the chateau, a glance at their watches told them it was a quarter to one. God, they must hurry, hurry if they wanted to get into the air before one o'clock. And yet they dared not hurry, for if they showed their haste they would surely attract suspicion. They dared not run—not even walk fast.

With affected nonchalance they strolled past the

sentries at the doorway, walked out into the sunshine.

"Well, well, so they have come out just when we were going in for them! How do you do, gentlemen! Glad to meet you again! Don't move, please—you can see how well we have you covered!"

The words were English. The voice which spoke them was ultra-cool, but its very coolness gave it a deadly menace which froze the two Yanks and filled them with terror. And they actually cried out in amazement and dumb horror when they saw, confronting them with a large party of Boche soldiers who held leveled rifles, the tall, stern-faced figure of the real spy-leader—S 23!

The real *Oberst* von Hartwig was dressed in Travis' khaki flying togs. His stern face was satanic. His eyes were slits which gleamed murder.

Before the Mosquitoes could even recover from their horrified surprise at seeing this man whom they had thought was in safe captivity, the spy-leader barked out a gruff order, and the Boche soldiers closed in on the Yanks. They were caught, hopelessly caught! Rough hands stripped them of their weapons. The crowd of German soldiers formed an unbroken ring around them, covering them with rifles and automatics.

S 23 was confronting them, a diabolical smile on his tight lips. And next to S 23 was a large, thickset personage in the uniform of a general. He was, it turned out, the chief of imperial intelligence, who had been expected here this afternoon. His piercing gray eyes were scanning the faces of the two Yanks, especially Travis,

"You are right, *Oberst* von Hartwig," he stated, slowly. "These men must both be impostors."

Von Hartwig's smile became an evil leer.

"Spies," he corrected, in that same, deadly cool voice. "Spies who will be treated as we always treat spies!" And he sneered into the blanched faces of the two horrified Yanks. "Well, dogs, do you still think you are so clever? You think you have stopped us from wiping out Rois? Yes, you killed and wounded half of my men—and the rest were captured by those numbskull infantrymen your comrade sent over. But I got away." He laughed, with acrid mirth. "Fools, you were so thoughtful that you left a Spad on the field for me—" His hand gestured out over the grounds. The two Mosquitoes saw a khaki Spad squatting there—Travis' Spad. "Luckily, I was able to glide in here before my own countrymen shot at me, and my esteemed chief was here to identify me at once!"

The two Mosquitoes listened to this speech with varying emotions. At least it seemed that Shorty had done his work! The bombing squadron should be on its way, should be reaching Brenne in another few minutes. Yes, Kirby and Travis were caught and doomed, without any hope of escape, but if only those guns could be wiped out before——

“And now,” clipped the chief of intelligence, in German, “let us go to the High Command so you can give them your report and have them fire the guns at once!”

Kirby did not understand this, but Travis, hearing it, almost groaned in despair. But even then a wild hope flickered in the lanky Mosquito. It was evident that S 23 did not know that bombers had been sent out, or else he would have rushed to the High Command as fast as he could. Doubtless, the spy-leader merely thought that Kirby and Travis had come over to persuade the High Command to call off the shelling and let it go at that. Such was the hope on which Travis gambled.

“Looks like you win, von Hartwig,” the lanky Mosquito said in English. “No, we are not so clever. If we had only had sense enough to instruct our comrade to take some measures to wipe out those guns!”

Kirby stiffened at this lie, but then he quickly saw Travis’ game and joined in the play. “Yeah,” he groaned, “why in hell didn’t we think of that?”

The look of sneering triumph which came over von Hartwig’s face raised the hopes of the two Mosquitoes. If only they could stall off the unsuspecting German long enough, make him think he had plenty of time to report to the High Command! Then the guns might still be bombed out!

“I knew you would overlook that!” S 23 was sneering. “When fool aviators like you try to mess in with intelligence, you only blunder to your own doom! Simpletons! Now all I have to do is to make my report and the trick will be done!”

“God, what fools we were!” Kirby groaned, and did not have, much trouble making his voice sound despairing.

“However,” put in the chief of imperial intelligence, who was keener than the keen, “let us hurry right in. There is no sense delaying the matter. The sooner the guns are fired the better!”

The gloating S 23 nodded at these words from his superior officer. He barked out a command to the soldiers: “Hold these swine until I come out! I’ll attend to them presently!” And to the utter despair of the two

Mosquitoes, von Hartwig and the chief went dashing into the chateau.

Left alone with the swarm of Boche, Kirby and Travis glanced about wildly, furtively, like cornered animals. But they saw at once that escape was hopeless—absolutely out of the question. There were Jerries all over the place, mobs of them. And the two-seater which had brought them over was standing with its motor turned off. So was the Spad which had brought von Hartwig.

Bitterly the two Mosquitoes looked at one another. “Looks like we’re cooked!” Kirby muttered hoarsely.

“Seems so,” Travis agreed, in a toneless voice. “And it looks like Rois is cooked too!”

“Silence, swine!” barked one of the German soldiers, an officer who spoke English. He waved a Luger menacingly at the two men. “Keep quiet! No talking!”

AND in scarcely another moment the tall figure of S 23 came hurrying out of the chateau. He broke through the ring of Boche soldiers and again confronted the two Mosquitoes. He was drunk with savage triumph, and he laughed cruelly, evilly at the two Yanks. “Surprised that I am back so soon?” he taunted. “Well, it did not take long for me to convince his Majesty, our beloved Kaiser. The orders are now being given. In just another minute or so Rois will be blasted off the face of the earth!”

The two Mosquitoes were completely crushed by this cruel blow, and Kirby had to bite his lips to keep back the tears. Lost—utterly lost! The guns were going to be fired! It was too late to stop them now!

“Perhaps you would like to know how I managed to change His Majesty’s mind so quickly?” sneered the spy-leader. “Well, let me tell you something you did not know. Our *verdampfte* enemies cannot complain when we destroy the Rois cathedral. Why?” He laughed, with gibing malice. “Simply because the pig-headed French are using that cathedral as an ammunition base! That means we can blow it up without any scruples! His Majesty was furious when he heard that bit of news—and he did not hesitate to change the orders. And so,” he promised, “if the wind happens to come in the right direction, you will hear the guns at Brenne as they hurl out their barrage!” He paused, his eyes lighting with an almost fanatical gleam. Then he spoke very slowly, through pursed lips. “As for you—I have been given authority to deal with you as I see fit!” Again his eyes narrowed to murderous slits, and in his face the two Yanks read death! There

would be no mercy from this cool, relentless fiend who had them in his power.

"I am going to make an example of you two dogs," continued von Hartwig, spacing his words slowly, "an example which your countrymen will do well to heed!" His face grew lean and wolfish, and his smile was ghastly. "You die at once!"

Even before the full realization of the sentence dawned on the two Mosquitoes they found themselves being hurried across the field, prodded by bayonets, pushed roughly, goaded on by snarling voices. A spy is the most hated of all creatures. When he is caught there is no mercy.

Into the courtyard of one of the chateaux, a smaller house near the headquarters building, the two dazed and horror-stricken Yanks were marched. Rough hands were stripping off their captured German tunics, together with their papers and the medals they had been given by the Kaiser. In their shirt-sleeves they were being pushed up against the wall of the courtyard. An officer, at von Hartwig's command, was picking a squad of eight soldiers.

And as the horrible preparations were being made, there came, drifting from the distance, a dull but reverberating sound. *Boom! Boom!* It sounded like a knell in the ears of the two doomed Mosquitoes. And von Hartwig, hearing it, gave a snarl of savage glee.

"Hear them?" he gloated, fiendishly at his victims. "Hear them? The guns—they are wiping Rois off the map! They cannot miss, not from our calculations! You dogs, you shall die with that noise in your ears! Listen to it! Listen while you still can listen!"

The two Mosquitoes did listen to it, in sheer horror. Travis looked as white as a sheet, and his lips trembled. And Kirby broke down completely. Tears streamed down his cheeks, and his face contorted with rage and anguish.

"You dirty rat!" he sobbed out, hoarsely. "Isn't it enough that you're killing us? Got to torture us too? You lousy, rotten skunk— God, if I could only get my hands on you, you—"

"You will never have that opportunity," S 23 said coolly. "But you did manage to kill some of my comrades, for which you will now pay!" He wheeled, snapped out another order. The eight picked soldiers lined up with speedy precision some twenty paces from the wall.

Bitterly, the two Mosquitoes resigned to their fate. Kirby suddenly calmed down again, brushed the tears from his face. It was no use. They had gone into this

thing knowing what the consequences would be if they lost. And they had lost—even when victory had seemed certain. Rois was being shelled out. The distant booming was still drifting to their ears.

Crushed, defeated, they stood up against the wall. Von Hartwig was speaking again, with gibing sarcasm.

"I need not ask you if you wish to be blindfolded," he said. "Being crazy Yanks you will naturally refuse. Am I right?"

The two men said nothing. They scarcely listened to that gibing, malicious voice. Both of them suddenly felt exhausted, tired out. The strain of this whole breathless morning had sapped their vitality. They were weary and sick at heart, and they didn't care any more. They were ready to die.

Von Hartwig snapped out another order, at the same time stepping off to the side. The eight men comprising the firing squad stiffened, gripping their rifles. They were divided into two groups of four. Von Hartwig was making it a double and simultaneous execution. Each group would fire at one of the Yanks, and both would die at the same time. And for that Kirby and Travis were thankful. One of them was thus spared the agony of watching his comrade drop.

"Now," demanded S 23, "have either of you anything to say before you die?"

A spark of the old fight flickered in Kirby. "Yeah," he grated. "I hope you rot in hell!"

"The same goes for me," Travis clipped out briefly. "With interest."

Von Hartwig scowled furiously. "Insolent dogs! It is you that shall rot in hell!" He turned to the firing squad, rasped out in German. "You will fire at my command." A slight pause. Then, tersely: "Take aim!"

Eight rifles snapped up. Kirby and Travis stiffened against the wall, each looking calmly but despairingly into four muzzles which were trained on his heart.

"S'long, Trav!" Kirby cried. "See you in hell in a minute!"

"S'long!" Travis cried back.

Von Hartwig, smiling, venomously, was raising his hand to give the signal.

Suddenly there came an interruption. The thickset figure of the German chief of intelligence came dashing onto the scene. He was evidently in a high state of agitation. His face was almost purple. He shouted to von Hartwig, who signaled the firing squad to wait.

"What is it, sir?" S 23 inquired, in alarm. "Has something happened?"

"*Gott, yes!*" bellowed the chief, wildly. "The guns—"

they have been wiped out, utterly destroyed! A bombing squadron of thirty planes with an escort of scouts managed to sneak over and find the battery at Brenne before they could be stopped!”

“What?” gasped von Hartwig, his eyes bulging with incredulity. “But that—that is impossible! Have not the guns already shelled Rois? I heard them firing and——”

The chief laughed—a harsh, mirthless laugh. “You heard no guns firing. What you heard were bombs, scores and scores of them. There is not one gun left there. They are all in ruins! These *verdampfte* Yankees have tricked us!”

As Travis heard and understood this excited conversation the blood flowed back into his cheeks, and he gave a cry of frenzied joy and triumph. Eagerly he shouted to Kirby, explained: “The bombers got to Brenne! They succeeded! Those were the bombs we’ve been hearing! They’ve knocked hell out of the battery!” And Kirby, too, felt his strength flow back, let out a joyous whoop.

Von Hartwig, seeing the jubilation of the two Yanks, turned livid. A light of hell came into his eyes.

“You vile pigs! You lied to me! Well, it will do you no good! You die this instant!”

“What in hell do we care?” Kirby jeered. “We’ve won—and you’ve got to admit it!”

“Come on and give it to us!” Travis said, with reckless bravado. “At least we can die knowing we’ve done something in this man’s war!”

The enraged S 23 almost had a fit of apoplexy. He turned to the chief of intelligence. “Sir, I shall do away with these Yanks and then we can try to straighten out this business!”

The chief nodded grimly. “Hurry up!” he said, and proved that he was white. “They are brave—these Yankees! It is unfair to make them wait like this. Get the thing done and over with!”

All too eager, von Hartwig again turned to the firing squad. Again the eight rifles were leveled unwaveringly at the hearts of the two Mosquitoes. But the two grinned their reckless defiance now. They had won. They were not going down in defeat. They were going down with the knowledge that Rois had been saved. And Rois, with its supplies, was worth two lives any time!

“All right,” snapped S 23 brusquely. “Ready——”

Eight fingers tightened on their gun-triggers. Von Hartwig’s hand was again upraised. He was about to give the signal. But he did not give it.

FOR at that moment, with a roar and a shriek, a winged shape came tearing clown from the sky and plunged straight for this courtyard. There was a sudden deafening clatter of machine guns, and the shape flattened out directly overhead, proving to be a single-seater bomber of special design. *Rat-ta-tat-tat!* Guns spitting, the plane swooped right over the wall where Kirby and Travis were standing, and its nose pointed directly for the firing squad! *Rat-ta-tat-tat!* And the firing squad was no more. Three of the Boche dropped like logs, and lay where they fell. The rest at once forgot their grim duties in the face of this menace which swooped at them from the air. They hurled themselves flat on the ground in terror. Von Hartwig and the chief of intelligence stood there gaping dumbly, shouting out orders which no one heeded. And Kirby and Travis, still standing against the wall—where none of the plane’s bullets were heading—watched the trim ship as it Immelmanned up and then came swooping down again. The pilot was waving from its cockpit, waving down to them! They caught a sudden, fleeting glimpse of his goggled face. And then they were yelling with wild, hysterical joy—waving madly back at that aviator.

The pilot of the ship was Shorty Carn!

Actually, Carn had been overhead quite awhile before he had come tearing down at the firing squad. To begin with he had started out from an Allied drome with the bombing squadron which went to wipe out the guns at Brenne. During the trip, however, Shorty found himself worrying more and more about Kirby and Travis. Perhaps it was an intuition. At any rate, he wondered how they had made out at the High Command, and whether they had gotten safely way. He had decided to abandon the bombing party and had sped away to Mouens. Concealing his ship in the eye of the sun, he had circled high over the grounds where Imperial Headquarters was located, and had scanned the terrain below with his glasses. At first all he had seen were a thousand Jerries. But then, in the courtyard of one of the chateaux, he had seen two tiny figures being stood up against a wall, while a squad of Boche soldiers prepared to shoot them. At once he had known who those two men against the wall were. How he could possibly rescue them he did not know. But at least he would stop this execution. And he had!

Again and again he Immelmanned up and swooped clown at those Boche in the courtyard, each time raking them with a deadly spew of tracer. Von Hartwig, mad with rage and panic, was snarling at the

soldiers, telling them to kill Kirby and Travis—who were still helpless to move from that wall, both because of scores of Boche who blocked any escape, and because of the fact that if they went out Shorty would not be able to fire at the Boche without fear of hitting his own comrades. Von Hartwig, beside himself with fury, suddenly whipped out his Luger and began to fire point-blank at Kirby, who ducked fearfully as the bullets ricocheted from the stone wall. Again Shorty swooped down. *Rat-ta-tat-tat!* And von Hartwig, with a horrible scream, pitched forward on his face and lay still. Thus died S 23, in defeat and failure, without even avenging himself on the men who had caused it!

By this time the Germans throughout the grounds were opening up on the enemy plane with everything they had. Maxims and pom-poms blazed away. Rifles cracked. Anti-aircrafts barked. Bullets began to whistle around the little pilot's ears, went ticking through the wings and fuselage of his plane. But he ignored them, and stubbornly kept swooping upon that courtyard. In his desperate determination to rescue his comrades he was trying what soon proved to be a hopeless task. He was trying to blaze a path of escape for Kirby and Travis. But it could not be done! Even if the path were blazed, where were the two Yanks to run, how were they to get away from this swarming nest of Jerries?

Even now the chief of intelligence, incensed over the death of S 23, was using clever tactics to render Shorty quite helpless. The chief rallied a crowd of soldiers and sent them charging for the wall where Kirby and Travis huddled. Vainly Shorty tried to stop that charge. Before he could do any thing about it, the crowd of Jerries had seized Kirby and Travis and dragged them into their midst. The two Mosquitoes struggled and fought uselessly. They were caught again. And Shorty could no longer help them now. He could not fire at their captors without running the risk of hitting the two Yanks. The situation seemed hopeless. There was no way out for Kirby and Travis—they were in a trap, and they were under sentence of death.

The little Mosquito, zooming his ship and then zigzagging overhead to dodge the ever-increasing ground fire, thought with that clear-headedness that will sometimes come in a crisis. How to save his comrades? How to rescue them, snatch them out of this fatal trap? His eyes scanned the landscape which spread below him. And his eyes came to rest on a large chateau which he knew to be the headquarters of the High Command. The High Command! There must be some big and prominent generals there to say the

least. Had he known how important a personage that chateau really sheltered, he wouldn't have had the slightest doubt that the wild, reckless idea which had just come to him might work.

In a flash the little man reached his decision. He had half a dozen big bombs tucked beneath the belly of his plane, ready to be released as soon as he should press the lever. He would take the chance.

While Kirby and Travis were still held by the crowd of Boche soldiers, who awaited further orders from the intelligence chief, Carn split-aired his ship wildly, opened his throttle. Through a maelstrom of ground fire he flew, straight towards that large chateau. As he neared it he swerved to pass over a smaller building near by. And as he passed over this smaller building he savagely pulled his bomb-release.

From the belly of the plane one of the big bombs dropped and went spinning down through space. *Crash! Br-r-room!* A geyser of smoke and debris rose and fell. And the small building was literally reduced to a pile of ruins!

That ought to show 'em what he could do, though Shorty, and he banked to head for the headquarters chateau. He was coming over it now. He spiraled down, and started to circle right over the roof of the building.

The effect of this maneuver was instantaneous and amazing. The Germans on the ground all stood petrified, their faces filling with horror. A mad Yank with a load of bombs was circling over a chateau which housed the emperor of Germany! If he dropped those bombs——

Even Kirby and Travis, amid their swarm of captors, caught their breaths as they saw what Shorty was doing. Good night, was the little Mosquito going to unwittingly bomb the Kaiser?

But Shorty knew what he was doing, even though he didn't know that the Kaiser was in that chateau. Coolly and deliberately, he kept circling right overhead of the building, while a thousand Germans watched him in awe and horror, not even daring to fire at him now. Suddenly, from the circling ship, a tiny white object came sailing down through the air and landed on the lawn near the chateau. Men rushed to pick it up. It was a bit of paper, wrapped around some machine-gun shells to give it weight. And on the paper was a message, crudely scribbled in pencil. The message was taken straight to the chief of intelligence, who scanned it quickly. His eyes bulged at the terse, cryptic words:

If you don't let my two pardners escape unhurt and undamaged in the plane they came in, I'll blow this damn chateau off the map, and the High Command with it. No use trying to plug me by ground fire while I circle—even if I drop I'll first have time to release my five bombs. My fingers are on the release—and I'm a nervous guy.

A Yank who means business.

The chief of intelligence was no fool. He was wise enough to know when he was beaten. When it was a question of letting two Yainks go free or having the All Highest and his staff of generals, and Shorty had counted only on the generals, bombed, there could be no choosing. Indeed, the two Yanks dwindled into microscopic insignificance beside the safety of the emperor and his staff!

And so, without a moment's hesitation, the chief of Imperial intelligence barked out a hasty order. And the surprised Kirby and Travis found themselves released from their captors' grip. The chief scowled at the two Mosquitoes, roared at them furiously: "We are letting you go! Hurry up! Get out! Our mechanics will rev up the two-seater for you!"

At first dumb amazement and then wild joy came over the faces of the two Mosquitoes.

"By God!" Kirby exclaimed, in awe, as he watched the plane which circled monotonously over that chateau. "Shorty's sure some buzzard! Why, he's got all these Krauts bulldozed!"

"And I'll wager," drawled Travis, "that he doesn't even know the Kaiser's in that chateau!"

As they talked they were walking briskly towards the squatting two-seater, accompanied by the scowling intelligence chief. Already orders had been given to start the ship up, and the engine was revving now. Meanwhile, the faithful and stubborn Shorty kept circling over the chateau, rendering a thousand Germans powerless to touch his comrades!

THE two Mosquitoes on the ground could not help appreciating the drama of the situation. A thousand Jerries, and not one of them dared to lift a finger to harm them! It was like walking through hell without getting burned! They had such a sense of power and invulnerability that they were loath to hurry, yet they knew that to delay might be dangerous. The Three Mosquitoes always did have a weakness for grand-standing. And now they were certainly putting on some show!

They reached the throbbing two-seater, and Kirby had the prudence to look over the machine carefully. He was making sure that it wasn't fixed so that it would crack up after it had taken off and Shorty had zoomed away from that chateau. He was also making sure that there was gas in the tanks. As a matter of fact, everything was all right: the Germans had tried no tricks.

Kirby and Travis turned to the intelligence chief, who still scowled at them malevolently.

"Well," said Kirby, cheerfully, "so long, chief! Glad to have met you! Shake!" And he held out his hand.

For a moment the chief continued to glower, and ignored the outstrettdlied hand. But then, suddenly, the scowling mask cracked, and the grizzled officer grinned. He shook Kirby's hand and he shook Travis'.

"You three men," he growled, "have ruined one of my best projects. You have killed one of my best men. You have blackmailed me into letting you go. And yet, by God, I've got to admit I admire you for your—guts, you call it I think. Are you really men, or are you demons?"

"We," said Kirby, not without pride, "are the Three Mosquitoes."

"Well," admitted the chief, "I wish you were on our side of the fence instead of the other. We could certainly use three madmen like you. But of course," he added, grimly, "the only thing we could do with you if we catch you again is to put you up before the firing squad. Which we shall certainly be delighted to do!"

"That'll be O.K. with us," Travis drawled, "because you're not going to catch us!"

"But look here, chief," Kirby suddenly pleaded, "you seem to be a sport. How about letting us have those coats we had, and those tin decorations and citations? We'd like to keep 'em as souvenirs!"

The chief grumbled, but since he was secretly afraid to cross these crazy Yanks, he produced the requested articles, gave them to the two Mosquitoes. Then, quickly, Kirby and Travis hopped into the two-seater. They waved a final, airy good-by, and Kirby opened his throttle. The engine roared, the chocks were pulled from the wheels, and the ship skimmed down the field and soared aloft, like a bird exultant to be free. The two Yanks had got out of that death-trap unscathed!

The faithful Carn waited patiently, hung over that chateau until he saw that his comrades had put plenty of space between themselves and the ground, and were at a safe distance from the guns below. Kirby and Travis, for their part, circled high to wait for the little Mosquito.

Shorty opened his throttle, pulled back his stick. The bomber, still replete with bombs, zoomed swiftly from the Chateau.

And the moment that ship was away from the chateau hell broke loose all around it. All this time the Germans had been, methodically preparing every gun they had to fire at Shorty's bus as soon as it was out of the danger zone. And the barrage which they hurled up at Carn was by far the worst he had ever experienced. Kirby and Travis, watching in alarm from their two-seater, saw their comrade's bus reeling perilously through the terrific storm of fire. Bits of wood and fabric flew from the ship. For one awful moment it seemed that the plane must surely go crashing to earth. But Shorty, ace that he was, got her through—zigzagged out of the infernal zone. Another moment and he was swinging in beside the two-seater occupied by his comrades. With frenzied joy and glee the Mosquitoes waved to one another, congratulating each other on their miraculous escapes from death. Then, side by side, they pointed their noses towards the lines and were winging their way homeward.

But their troubles were not quite over. For, looking back, they saw an ominous swarm of specks sweeping out of the eastern sky. Fokkers! Fokkers rushing in pursuit, intending to get them. But they already had a good start. They merely put on more speed, and soon they had safely outdistanced the German scouts, who became discouraged and turned back. And the Three Mosquitoes flew peacefully home to their drome.

"IT'S a damn shame!" the grizzled old C.O. was barking, as the Three Mosquitoes, all of them now dressed in their proper khaki uniforms, stood before his desk in the headquarters shack. "I did my best to get all three of you slated for a D.S.C, but they

wouldn't pass it through! Intelligence claims that while you did a wonderful thing, you had no business to take the matter into your own hands. You should have taken it to them."

"In which case," drawled Travis, mildly, "the town of Rois would now be in ruins. Believe me, we certainly were wishing we had time to give the job to intelligence! And as far as the D.S.C. is concerned——"

"Who wants a D.S.C.?" Kirby broke in. He pulled something from his pocket, tossed it on the desk. It was an Iron Cross. Travis' *Pour-le-merite* was also tossed beneath the eyes of the C.O.

"What you got there?" the Colonel inquired, with mild interest. "Souvenirs?"

"Souveneers hell!" Kirby exploded, in dignantly. "Maybe the Allies refuse to give us any medals, but by God, we're appreciated by the Germans. I'll never forget the kick I got when the Kaiser pinned these medals on our——"

The C.O. groaned. "Are you going to start that cock and bull story about meeting the Kaiser, again?"

"But it's straight, sir!" Kirby protested. "We have the citations."

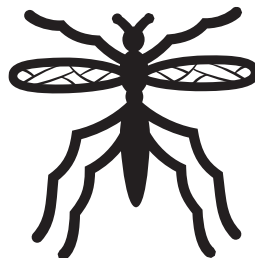
"They're not made out to you, are they?" demanded the C.O.

"Sure, they're made out to the guys we were!"

"To tell the truth," Shorty chimed in, "I sorta agree with the colonel that you guys are spoofing."

"You poor sap," Kirby snapped at him, "don't you realize that the only reason your stunt worked so perfectly was because the Kaiser was under your bombs? Well, we met that guy. And, believe it or not, he's not half bad."

"In fact," Travis maintained, "he's quite a likable fellow."





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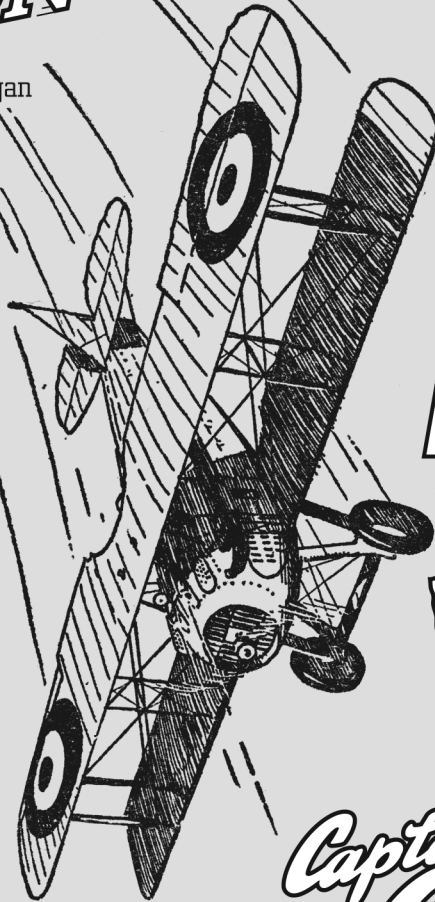
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