



GORILLAS OF THE AIR

by O.B. MYERS

Flying beasts of the air—the sight of their hairy animal heads meant death and their Spandaus never missed.

DAVE SMALL stood in front of the operations tent and squinted anxiously into the northern sky. An hour and three quarters had passed since, standing in this identical spot, he had watched the six Spads of C Flight take off and wing their way toward the lines. By this time they should be on their way back, should be coming into sight any moment now.

C Flight was his own flight, but he was not with them for the simple reason that this was only the second day since he had arrived to join the 99th Pursuit. His first forty-eight hours had been spent breaking in his new Spad above the field, making landing after landing, and getting acquainted with the men with whom he was to live, fight, and perhaps die. Three times he had asked the same question, and had finally gotten a nod in reply.

“To-morrow morning, perhaps,” Major Ripley had said with a smile of understanding. “You seem to

handle the bus all right, now. We’ll see what C Flight reports after late patrol to-day.”

Dave stopped his pacing and shaded his eyes with his hand.

Yes, there were some specks. They were coming this way. But how those boys were scattered! Now Dave could see that there were two close together, and a third much lower and apparently behind, and—

A strange feeling crept up his spine as his eyes searched the sky behind those three ships. He saw a blank curtain of blue, flecked with the fleeciness of cumulus clouds, but search as he would, his gaze could not find another speck behind the first three. He lowered his hand weakly.

Now the first faint drone of the approaching motors came to his ears. At the sound heads appeared at the barracks windows, and the door of the Red Cross hut, and the pilots of A and B Flights who were off duty came trotting up toward the spot where Dave

stood to watch their comrades come in. The drone grew louder.

"But, hell! I only see three," said a voice behind Dave. "Where do you suppose—"

To the unfinished question there was no reply.

"Look at that one behind," blurted the same voice. "Will he make it?"

The first two ships were almost at the edge of the field now, and the song of their motors came down clear and strong. But through that steady hum could now be distinguished the sound of the third motor, and the difference in its tune made Dave's blood run cold. It was throbbing and sputtering like a wounded animal gasping for breath; every few seconds it stopped entirely with the vicious bang of a backfire, only to pick up again weakly. The ship was still a half mile away, laboring painfully a scant hundred feet over the tree tops, and losing precious altitude every second.

The first two did not land, but circled overhead to give their crippled brother a clear field. On came the third Spad, swaying and sinking as it came. The trees by the barracks fairly brushed its undercarriage. With a bare fifty feet to go, the overwrought engine backfired again, twice in rapid succession. Those on the ground could see the prop stop turning, then spin in the opposite direction. With a last cough the motor was silent; the Spad dropped down like a wounded bird.

The wheels struck and by a miracle, in the middle of the road, where the ground was hard and firm. The Spad bounced once, high enough to clear the ditch and with the stick back to the pilot's belly settled heavily on the field.

"Good for Johnny!" sighed a voice, feelingly.

Only then did Dave recognize the number on that third Spad which told that its occupant was Johnny Pierce. The other two ships dropped swiftly to earth; one Dave saw was number 22, which would be "Pop" Hand, leader of C Flight. One last, appealing look Dave cast at the northern sky; its emptiness hurt him like a stab in the side and he turned away.

THE MAJOR had come out of the tent, and stood before the flap, waiting. Three pilots walked slowly toward him. A few paces away they halted, and the major's look shot a question at Pop which needed no translation into words.

"Bill Maguire's all right, sir, I think," said Pop quickly. "Landed this side, and I could see he didn't crack up. You'll probably have a phone call from him, soon."

"But the others?" said the major softly.

Pop shook his head slowly from side to side. There was an instant of silence.

"But how come?" blurted a voice from the group. "Tell us what happened. What'd you run into?"

Pop turned toward the speaker with an unfathomable look in his eye.

"The 'Gorillas,'" he said quietly.

A chill fell upon the group, as if some unnamable horror had stalked into their midst. Each man seemed to feel the cold hand of fear laid upon his heart.

Dave, without comprehending the meaning of the curt remark, nevertheless felt an icy sweat trickle down his spine. The genuine horror manifested in every countenance caught him in its grip, and he could feel his heart pound wildly. Whom did Pop mean by the Gorillas? Why, even the major looked as if he had seen a ghost; his livid lips moved twice before a sound came forth.

"Come inside, Pop," he got out finally, "and write your report. The rest of you go along."

Slowly the group broke up and drifted away. Dave stepped to the side of a figure who was headed toward the barracks.

"What does he mean, Johnny; who are the Gorillas?"

But Johnny Pierce hurried on without even turning his head. Not until he was seated on the edge of his bunk, with a bottle of cognac between his knees and two stiff drinks in his quivering stomach, could Dave get him to speak. Then, wiping chalky lips with the back of his hand, he blurted clipped sentences.

"The Gorillas—God grant you never meet them, Dave. An outfit of aces. The cream of the Jerry flyers and the surest shots on the Front. Sure death, they are, every time. They're good, and they know it, and so do we, damn them. They must be. Every time we meet, it's the same story. Got it over us like a tent."

"But why, Johnny? Better ships, or what? And why do you call them Gorillas?"

"No," said Johnny, gulping another drink. "Fokkers, just the same as the rest. But they wear a helmet with hair on the outside, that makes them look like gorillas. That's the only way you can tell them except that they fly rings around you. And they're killers, every one. Just like gorillas."

"Are they up every day?"

"No, thank God!" grated Johnny feelingly. "Only show in this sector about once a week. That's why we figure they're a crack outfit. Move from sector to sector, to throw the fear of God into us. And they do, curse them!"

With that Johnny rolled over with his face to the

wall and would say no more. But Dave had heard enough to set his nerves on edge, and the atmosphere in the mess hall and the barracks during the rest of the evening only increased his feeling of trepidation. A grim spectre had joined them, to cast a pall of gloom over their customary lightheadedness. The thought of his first patrol to-morrow morning filled him with dread.

DAVE was on the field early the next morning, not because he was anxious to start, but because sleep was impossible. The others appeared one by one, mumbled brief greetings, and climbed into their waiting ships. Dave took off last, and dropped into position on the tail of the formation, a horrible foreboding like a leaden weight upon his chest.

For an hour and fifty minutes he rode the tail of that little V through deserted skies, and never once did that awful feeling of oppression let up until he once more set his wheels down on the tarmac. On the afternoon patrol it was with him again; his hand shook continuously on the stick, and his head jerked wildly from side to side as his imagination conjured up attacking foes boring in out of the sun. But nothing happened; the patrol returned without firing a round.

That evening he heard more talk of the Gorillas, from other lips, all of which confirmed and even outdid Johnny's description. They were marvels with the stick; they could do anything. They were invincible; not one of them had ever been shot down. They only came out when they felt like it, but always bagged at least three before returning to their lair. One look at their hairy heads was enough to freeze a man's guts. Some even averred in whispers that they were actually gorillas, imported from African jungles and taught to fly, beasts who knew not the meaning of death, or fear.

Dave's thoughts as he lay awake in his bunk that night were colored with what he had heard and his feelings were of gruesome horror. But again he was early on the field.

"Just one thing I hope," he muttered to himself as he climbed shakily into his cockpit. "That I don't meet the Gorillas before I get a scrap with some ordinary Jerries under my belt. Then I might have a chance." This hope was destined to be fulfilled. They had been out but fifteen minutes, and Pop had just made a wide turn over the river. In executing the maneuver Dave had crossed from left to right of the formation, and was keeping his eyes glued to the banking ships below him to avoid collision. From where the sun glared

bright over his left shoulder came a sudden rapping sound, and slender gray streaks seemed to stab the air just before his whirling propeller.

Dave's heart came up into his throat with a jerk. He did not need to be told what those gray lines were. Hot steel was coming in his direction, and coming fast. It was pure muscular instinct that made him do the right thing. His right hand and right foot moved together, and his Spad swooped into a diving turn.

Gasping to swallow the lump of excitement in his throat, he threw his head back over his shoulder. He saw a plane which he knew instantly for a Fokker, twin muzzles leering at him over the square, blunt nose. He pulled his stick back as far as he could, tightening his turn to a steep spiral. The Fokker did the same, but could not get into position to shoot again. Dave was staring with protruding eyeballs at that other ship, but not at the nose, nor yet at the twin mouths of the guns. His gaze searched out the head of the pilot, plainly visible above the cowl, and when he saw it, his breath whistled through his teeth in one long gasp. The Boche wore a helmet of smooth brown leather, just like his own. These were not the Gorillas! A great load seemed to slip from his shoulders and a new strength came into his fingers. The old confidence which had always been his during training school days returned with a rush.

A violent kick on top rudder lifted him bodily from the bank. The Fokker followed, but before the Boche could realize it, Dave had gone back into a right turn again. Confused, the German hesitated, and was lost. Dave's swoop brought him around onto the Fokker's tail, and he slammed both triggers down hard.

TWIN streams of death gushed from Dave's Vickers, lashed the thick wing of the Fokker to shreds. Down with the stick, just a little. Now his tracers were battering the motor hood. Before he could jam his nose down the next fraction of a degree, the Fokker plunged like a stone. His bullets had ripped the vitals out of the motor, and the crash of its disintegration had warned the German pilot that his battle was over.

Lest his foe be merely shamming defeat, Dave followed in a vertical side-slip. The Fokker flattened out once, then dove again, but evidently under control. Finally, just above the earth Dave saw it flatten out again, and dip into a glide toward an open spot below. As he pulled out of his side-slip to circle Dave saw the Fokker pancake flatly, bounce crazily over the rough ground but finally come to a rolling stop still upright.

A glance overhead told him that the scrap was

over and a succession of sharp coughs near at hand told him that he was still over German soil, and uncomfortably low. He pulled his nose around and climbed swiftly for the lines, marveling at the speed with which he had achieved his first victory. True, he had not hit the pilot, nor had he destroyed the plane. He had merely forced a landing with crippled motor in German territory. Nevertheless, for his first combat, that was enough. He felt a swell of pride, and a strong confidence in himself, and realized fully that it was his own aggressive attack which had swung the delicate balance of victory his way. As he flew swiftly toward the field he even forgot for a time that there were such things as Gorillas in the sky.

"Why, Johnny, I was right on top of him with the first twist." He was excitedly retelling his tale for the third time. "I was so close that I could see where his center section struts were bent bow-legged, as if he'd landed that ship on its back sometime. He never had time to move. It was a cinch. I feel as if I could do that to the whole Jerry air service, any day."

"That's great, kid," said Johnny soberly. "I'm glad you feel that way. Nothin' like confidence for a pursuit pilot. But don't kid yourself; when you bump into the Gorillas it'll be different. If he'd been a Gorilla, he'd have had lead in your neck before you started that first turn, probably. This Jerry you knocked down to-day was likely a green bird, like yourself. But there ain't any green recruits in the Gorillas, worse luck!"

"Aw, listen, Johnny," protested Dave, the confidence produced by his victory fighting hard against the pessimistic dread of the older man, "don't you think you might be putting it too strong about those Gorillas? You've just let them get the Indian sign on you. Because you think they're better than you are, they are. You expect to be licked, so you are licked. If you forgot about them all being aces, and just waded right in—"

"Just a minute, Dave," said Johnny, rising and running a hand nervously through his hair. "You haven't been here as long as I have, and you haven't seen your pals go down in front of the Gorillas' guns—some of the best flyers I ever knew, too. There's something those birds have got that we haven't. What it is I can't tell you, but it's there. They've just got it on us, that's all. So have all the confidence in yourself you want, kid, but just the same keep a strong grip on your nerve and a sharp eye out for those devils in the hairy helmets."

A chorus of grunts and muffled curses from the surrounding group told of their agreement with

Johnny's sentiments. Again Dave felt that strange foreboding, that weird and uncanny fear which seemed to transmit itself from one pilot to another at the mere mention of the dread word, Gorillas.

Dave sat down on his bunk and felt his own confidence ooze from his pores like water. These were not cowards, these others; their records instantly silenced that thought. They were veterans, and himself but a green recruit. If they felt that way about the Gorillas, who was he to make a show of confidence?

THREE days later, Pop led the patrol along the river, several miles into Germany, and then, turning about-face, struck back for the lines. Being the middle of the day, the sun was almost directly in front of them, but high in the sky. Dave was watching the east, where lay the larger German dromes, and Pop was probably doing the same, although he never lived to tell just how it happened. Dave's first intimation of danger was the instantaneous flicker of a shadow across his eyes.

He looked up toward the sun, and his heart tried to hammer its way out through his chest. There, not two hundred feet above him, were six Fokkers, flying a perfect V in the opposite direction. Dave tried to catch his breath, looped his fingers around his triggers and prepared for immediate maneuver when he dove. But, to his intense astonishment, they did not dive.

Instead, the Boche formation executed a perfectly timed about-face, one leg of the V turning to the right and the other to the left, resumed formation just above and behind the Spads—and there they stayed.

In an agony of suspense Dave twisted his head over his shoulder and looked up at those looming shapes. Why didn't they come down? What were they waiting for? For the Spads to attack from the lower position was impossible. But still the Fokkers made no move. It was as if the Boche leader, fully aware of his superiority, wished to allow the Spads to become quite aware of what was going to happen before he launched his attack. His every move said as plainly as if put into words, "When I get good and ready, I'm coming down and shoot you out of the sky. In the meantime, sweat!"

Pop must have seen them now; he swerved slightly, first to the right and then to the left. The Fokkers followed, as steel follows the magnet. The head of every Spad pilot was over his shoulder, and Dave could sense the nerve-shattering suspense in their glances. Again he looked back himself.

Instinctively his eye focused on the pilot's head in the leading Fokker. At what he saw, a wave of revulsion

and horror swept over him. His stomach twisted painfully within him, and all the strength ran from his limbs like water. Fascinated he stared, unable to drag his eyes away. That pilot's head was covered with a fuzzy growth of dark brown hair, which swayed and rippled in the wind as he turned this way and that. It gave to the man—if man it was—the uncouth appearance of a beast. In the very sight there was something inhuman, something unnatural, which was strengthened by the blank, expressionless stare of the goggled eyes.

Dave shuddered away, as if from contact with something unclean. Even if the unique helmet used by the Gorillas had never been explained to him, the sight of that animal-like skull would have turned his blood to water. But that water turned to ice when he realized what the sight meant. They were the Gorillas, the pick of the German aces, the invincible killers of the air!

No wonder they took their time about attacking, held off while their identity made its impression on the morale of their soon-to-be victims. Well did that Boche leader know that an exhibition of cool and imr placable confidence in the final result is half the victory. Well did he know that nerves tuned only to defense can never stage a successful offense, nor successfully resist determined attack. With crashing Spandaus the Fokkers dropped.

DAVE repeated the opening maneuver of his first combat. As he went into his turn steel shivered against his motor cowl, and the whine of it drove all the blood from his heart. He craned over his shoulder at the furred head which dogged his trail and felt the stick tremble against his knee. He had the wild thought of trying the same stunt which had brought him his first victory, but instantly dismissed it. Such a simple trick would never fool experts, such as the Gorillas, and would probably only get him into trouble. Against such opposition he dared only play the defensive part, wait for the other to unmask his attack. He had not long to wait.

With a vicious kick the Boche threw his nose down and swooped across the circle in which the two ships spun. As swiftly as the reflex could travel from eye to brain to hand, Dave did the same, in the opposite direction. But for the fraction of a second which it took Dave to act, the Boche had a target. Bullets tore through space, and bit hungrily at the after part of Dave's fuselage. The shiver of the splintered longerons transmitted itself through the stick to Dave's hand.

Again they were on opposite sides of a circle, wings perpendicular to the ground. A small voice whispered to Dave, "Get the edge by starting your maneuver before he does." But he hesitated, dared not risk it. Against some other opponent, yes. But against one of the Gorillas, he dared think of nothing but defense. He hugged the stick doggedly to his belly and waited.

He saw the Fokker leap suddenly out of the top of its bank. He jammed on rudder and stick and did the same. As he did so, his eyes were for an instant in his cockpit. When he looked up again the Fokker had gone. Puzzled, he hesitated, and raked the sky with his eyes. A cold chatter like that of a rattlesnake came from behind his right shoulder.

Horried, he realized that the Boche had immediately gone back into his turn—had pulled his own trick on him, and was swinging onto his tail. He slammed his stick forward as the tracers ripped through his center section. With bulging eyes he saw gray streaks flash by, stab lower and lower until neat holes appeared before his eyes in the cowl. His nose was dropping faster and faster, but not fast enough to outpace flying steel.

Hiss-s-s-s. The thunder of his motor ceased to pound his ears, faded away to nothing. Frantically he jerked his throttle, but it was loose under his fingers and brought no response from the Hisso. He was in a vertical dive now, and the stabbing gray streaks had disappeared. But his motor was done for.

Straight before him he could see the earth rushing up at blood-curdling speed. Zigzag scars crawled with brownish dots; those were the front lines. He began to pull out, instinct steering him toward the south. The terrific speed of his plunge drove him slanting toward the rear positions; a half mile rushed under his wings like a few yards. He was not yet level when his ears caught the sound of hammering, and the air close by buzzed viciously. His foe was on his heels.

Again he dove steeply. Trees swelled and grew before his eyes, but he forced himself to wait. When he finally leveled off a scant hundred feet separated his wheels from the ground. A far-away rattle came to his ears, but in the dive his Spad had outrun the Fokker, and he knew that he would have time to land.

There was an open space. He banked and swung at a precarious angle and side-slipped hastily. With neither time nor space to lose, he dropped her flatly and watched a wall of trees roll toward him. When his prop was six feet from the nearest trunk she finally stopped with a lurch. With a surge of amazement

he realized that his motor was running, ticking over smoothly at idling speed.

from above made Dave lift his head over his shoulder. The Fokker was careening across the field, straight at him. With the thought that the Boche meant to shoot him up on the ground came the instant realization that it was useless to try to escape. There was no time to extricate himself from his belt and climb out; the hail of steel would be upon him in another second. Frozen, he sat and stared straight into the muzzles of the Spandaus looming through the center section of that Fokker. The second became an eternity of suspense.

Without a shot the Fokker rocketed past over his head, and climbed in wide spirals toward Germany. But still Dave sat, tense and quivering, staring after that black-nosed ship as if his eyes had seen something which his mind refused to believe.

"Damn queer, that," he was thinking. "I'd swear that Fokker had bow-legged struts, same as the one I shot down three days ago. But it can't be the same—guess my eyes are seeing things." With a shrug and a puzzled frown he climbed to the ground to meet the khaki-clad figures who ran toward him from the woods.

"A telephone?" said the artillery captain in reply to his question. "Not now but we will have in about an hour. They're layin' the wire now. Come in my dugout and have a drink."

The promised hour dragged out to two, but at last the line was ready, and Dave struggled to get a connection.

"Major Ripley? . . . Hello, Major; this is Lieutenant Small . . . Yes, I'm all okay. I'm down near Baonville. A bullet cut my throttle cable, and the spring pulled the throttle shut, of course. But I've fixed the cable, and I'm all set to take off. Shall I come right back to the field?"

The major's voice came small and metallic over the long wire.

"Glad to hear your voice, Small. That means only one we lost. No, don't come back here now. Wait about ten minutes, and then you can join the three o'clock patrol on their way up. They're taking off here any minute. Look for them. Jake Forsman will be leading. Good luck!"

The line clicked, and was silent. Only one we lost? Jake Forsman will be leading? That meant that Pop Hand had gone down. Oh, hell. The oldest man in experience in the squadron, and the best flyer. Bad

medicine, those Gorillas. And they would probably be out again this afternoon, too. Dave passed his hand across his forehead, and noticed that it felt cold to the touch.

"Well, aviator," the artillery captain was saying, with a jollity which seemed somewhat forced, "I wish I was takin' off with you. I've always thought I was cut out for the air service, instead of the artillery. May transfer some time."

Dave's mind was busy elsewhere; he made no reply. The captain picked up Dave's helmet, tossed carelessly on a box, and fiddled with the straps.

"This the way you wear these things?" he asked, lifting it, upside down, and pulling it down over his head.

Dave, staring absently toward the entrance, turned his head. An electric shock ran up his spine. His jaw dropped, and his eyes started from his head. He fell back against a crude table, clutching at it for support. He gasped and stuttered in amazement.

"What's the matter, looey?" asked the captain in wonderment.

"Why—why—it's the — ah-h-h!" Dave could not get the words through his lips. Thoughts raced each other through his whirling brain. His face was a gaunt mask of stupefaction. Suddenly he leaped upon the captain.

"What the hell?" began the captain. Before he could finish the sentence Dave had snatched the helmet off his head, and with a wild cry of, "Now I get it!" was dashing up the steps cut in the solid earth. The captain followed as fast as he could, to see Dave throwing one leg into the cockpit and yelling at a sergeant to swing the prop. By the time the captain reached the side of the ship the motor started, and Dave's parting yell was blown into oblivion by the blast of the propeller.

DAVE lifted his ship into the air by sheer strength. His wing-tip grazed the earth as he split-aired toward the south. In five minutes they would be taking off, the three o'clock patrol, to fly into combat with almost certain destruction. But if he could get to them first, tell them what he knew, they would equally certainly avert that destruction, turn defeat into victory. He bent his throttle lever in his impatience.

His head swam with a surge of elation and relief. He boiled with eagerness to shout his news; he laughed aloud in glee. He felt as if he had drunk a heady wine, which made him see the world through different eyes, though, in fact, he had not touched the captain's

liquor. The spell was broken; the horrible cloud of suspense was dissipated in the wind of understanding.

Two minutes had passed when he saw specks before him in the sky. Anxiously he peered, and when they grew in rapid approach and took on familiar outlines, his heart sank. The boys were already in the air, were on their way to the lines. It was too late to tell them. Across fifty feet of rushing ether no message could be transmitted. They would have to go on without knowing. Dave gnashed his teeth in despair.

As the formation of five Spads drew abreast, he swung his own ship in a clean circle and took up a position on the tail of the V. He would go along with them, anyway, as the major had told him to. Perhaps they would not meet "the Gorillas at all. Perhaps they would all get back safely, and then he could tell them before the next patrol. His anxious lips muttered a brief prayer.

They only had five thousand when they crossed the lines. But then it never seemed to matter very much at what altitude the Gorillas were encountered; the result was always about the same. Around the jutting height of Montfaucon Jake Forsman swung his little group, and then droned up toward the eastern end of their sector. Dave noticed an artillery reglagé two-seater which scuttled away at their approach, and saw two new balloons which had appeared since the early patrol. But mostly his eyes were sweeping the air above and before him, and before long his vigilance was unpleasantly rewarded.

A string of dark specks, from which came an occasional glint of reflected sunlight, moved steadily across the sky out of the north. They were several thousand feet higher than the Spads, and Dave could tell that in a very short time their course would bring them directly over his head. That they were Boche there was no doubt, and now as they became momentarily nearer he was sure that they were Fokkers. He wondered if Jake saw.

Suddenly the Spads ahead of him began to rise, lifting themselves right up before his nose. Then he knew that Jake had seen, and was climbing to cut the altitude difference to a minimum before coming into contact. Dave opened his throttle wide and stuck his own nose up. He watched the Fokkers ceaselessly.

The Boche were almost overhead when he saw their formation begin to change shape. But they were not diving; they were turning. At right angles they swung until they were flying a course parallel to and above that of the Spads. There they stayed, sailing serenely along, to

all appearances oblivious of the enemy which climbed toward them from below. But Dave knew differently.

As soon as the purpose of the maneuver struck him, he knew what it meant. Those Fokkers would remain at that level disdaining any maneuver of defense until the Spads were close enough to look into their cockpits. Then when their identity had made its impression, they would calmly and irresistibly attack. And the Spad pilots, fully away of who their opponents were, would falter and hesitate, and lose the inestimable advantage which is on the side of the aggressor. And by such a seemingly small but potent factor would the tide of superiority swing to the Boche.

THE SPADS were within two hundred feet of the still unmoving Fokkers. Dave saw heads before him turn and look up. Then he noticed that Jake was not climbing quite so fast, and instantly knew the reason why. Jake had seen a German head, and recognized its covering, and was already gripped by a premonition of disaster.

Across the intervening space Dave could almost feel the other's surge of apprehension. From the leader the foreboding seemed to transmit itself instantly to every other Spad. Heads came up, faces whitened, and ships wobbled slightly in their courses as hands jerked spasmodically on the stick. They would not run, Dave knew that. Too strongly grounded in the American tradition of guts for that. But they would enter the combat beaten before they started, and would finish beaten worse—or dead.

Dave ground his teeth and cursed. If he could only tell them! A dozen words, or less, whispered into their ears, would be enough to swing the whole tide of battle. He writhed in despair at the physical impossibility confronting him. But wait, If he could not tell them in words, might he not tell them in actions? Would they understand?

Dave held his stick level for a moment, allowing his Spad to gain speed with motor full open until he was overrunning the tails of those ahead of him. Then he yanked it back to his belly, and felt the ship zoom mightily. The Fokkers seemed to sink alongside of him as he rose; when he saw the German leader eye with him, he swung in a sharp bank to the left. The next instant his guns were spitting a vicious stream of hot lead.

The suddenness and violent audacity of his attack struck the Boche leader senseless with amazement. Expecting, from previous experience, nothing but defensive tactics, he was astounded to find himself being

fired on before he even got his fingers on his triggers. As if dazed he dropped into a dive but did not turn.

Dave dropped after, and cut diagonally for the Boche's nose. The Fokker swooped into a bank to elude the hail of fire from Dave's guns. Without waiting for the Boche to make up his mind what to do next, Dave hurled himself into a zoom, from which he side-slipped onto the Fokker's back. The Boche was forced to spin to escape. As he came out of the spin, Dave pounced again.

At no stage of the combat did he allow the Boche to start his own maneuver. Continually Dave was the aggressor, giving his foe no pause to collect himself, and seizing always that first instant while the other got started to get in a withering burst of fire. The German, feeling insensibly the superiority of his antagonist, began to get panicky. His Spandaus ripped out long wasted bursts at an empty sky, and the Fokker began to lose altitude on every turn, at first imperceptibly, then rapidly.

Dave swooped from a bank into a zoom, and looked down. The Boche, uncertain what was coming, floundered and hesitated. With a kick Dave was in a dive for the Fokker's tail. He opened up with both triggers, and forgot his sights as he steered that deadly stream of tracers as one directs a garden hose with a twist of the wrist. As they crept up the black fuselage, and impinged on the cockpit, he grunted, once.

The Fokker started a frantic turn, but never completed it. A little puff-ball of smoke blossomed in its middle, pierced by a dagger of livid flame. In an instant the whole ship was obscured by the cloud into which the puff-ball distended. As Dave jerked aside and looked down, he saw writhing wings, flame-licked, tumbling earthward at the foot of a lengthening black column. He also saw an anguished figure with a fur-covered head fling itself beyond the reach of the flames, and hurtle madly downward. With grim eyes he turned away.

DURING these few brief seconds of action, the two groups, Spads and Fokkers, had circled warily about each other, each seemingly anxious to see the outcome of the individual battle of their leaders. Now, as Dave zoomed back, he waved over his cowl at the Spads.

"Come on!" his gesture said. "Gorillas hell; they're easy. Come on!"

And as one man the Spads came on. The sight of one of their dread foes, one of the invincible Gorillas, going down in flames before the guns of a green recruit seemed to give them new life, to brush the

cobwebs of pessimism and foreboding from their eyes. The example of victory was before them; if one man could do it, so could they. Gorillas? Hell! The occupants of those Fokkers were men like themselves, and equally vulnerable to a well-placed bullet. An immense confidence seized them, and with spitting Vickers they plunged at the shaken Boche.

The spell was broken, and the tables were turned. Within fifteen seconds another Fokker careened crazily downward trailing its long black plume of defeat behind it. With the acrid taste of battle in their mouths, those Spads became madmen, berserk avengers of many an unforgotten comrade. Their bullets ripped wide swathes of flaming death across the hard bright sky, and Fokkers faltered and fled before them like chaff before the wind.

From watching his second victim spin helplessly into the ground, Dave looked up. Two specks faded hastily into the distance, and above five Spads circled hungrily. His drawn face cracked in a smile of victory, and he pointed his nose for home.

"But how did you get up nerve enough to jump those Gorillas in the first place?" asked Jake Forsman, as the group surrounded him in front of operations tent later.

"Why, you fellows have just been kidding yourselves," said Dave, with just the faintest touch of pride. "You let them build up a reputation at your expense, and then you fell for that rep yourselves. Because you thought they were better than you were, you were licked before you started, every time. The man that starts the scrap always has the edge and you always let them start. Why, they're no better than the ones we meet every day. In fact, they are the ones we meet every day!"

A simultaneous gasp of amazement from a dozen throats.

"Sure, it's the same bunch. I remembered a bent strut on the Jerry I shot down three days ago—and the Gorilla that brought me down this morning had the same ship. So I knew they were one and the same. And after I knew that, I lost all sense of their being such marvels, and I knew I could beat 'em if we met again. And I knew you'd feel the same way, too."

"But the Gorilla helmets?" stammered a voice.

"Look," said Dave with a wry smile. He lifted off his own fur-lined helmet, turned it inside out, and pulled it on again, fur side out. No further explanation was necessary.