



SPORTING CHANCE

by O.B. MYERS

He gambled with death and ran the gauntlet of enemy lead to make good the promise he had given to black wings, but when he found who held the stakes—

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DUKE" HASKELL, B Flight leader of the 22nd Spads, lifted the last two fingers of his right hand, and the murderous stutter of his Vickers stopped abruptly. The smoky stream of tracers issuing from their muzzles was cut off as with a knife; a mere trace of phosphorus fume, blowing back into his face, stung his nostrils acridly. He jerked his plane into a reversal, and looked down.

His attack had been swift and perfect. He had seen his jet of fire slashing the enemy's fuselage, spattering off the motor cowling.

The Fokker, which had shot beneath his undercarriage, was now once more before his nose as he turned. For a moment it seemed to hesitate. Then slowly, almost reluctantly, it slipped into a stiff glide toward the ground, five thousand feet below. In an instant Duke saw the reason; the Fokker's prop, instead of being a whirling glint of light, was standing perfectly still, straight up and down. One of his leaden slugs had buried itself in a vital spot, and the motor had conked out.

Now, hesitation has no place in the temperament of a pursuit pilot, but nevertheless for a long moment, Duke hesitated. The Fokker was directly in front of him. With a dead motor, that black-crossed ship could neither maneuver, run away, nor fire a shot. It was helpless. A touch of the stick, a pressure of his fingers, and Duke knew that he could snuff out a human life without the slightest trouble or risk. His eyes caught the flash of white from the cockpit ahead, as the German pilot turned his face to look over his shoulder, more than half expecting the coup de grace.

Duke's fingers twitched on the triggers, but did not squeeze. He had gained his victory; the plane was knocked out of the sky, and going down to an almost certain crash on the rugged terrain below. Why add unnecessary murder?

He let his fingers slip from the trigger grips, and prepared to pull out of his glide. But those seconds of hesitation had been long enough for danger to gather itself in an unexpected quarter and as he zoomed, it struck.

The vicious clatter of Spandaus broke out behind him. Whining steel fanned his ears, ticked through his wing surfaces, and brought up with a solid thuck against something just in front of him. Zipping gray streaks cut across his vision to disappear into the blur of his propeller.

So sudden was the attack, and so well aimed the

burst, that before he had time even to turn his head, his motor was smashing itself to junk before him. One steel-jacketed bullet, coming in a straight line from the rear, bit its way through one whole bank of cylinders, and the Hisso died an instantaneous death. Without bothering to reach for the useless throttle, Duke threw his Spad into a side-slip, and spat a disgusted oath from between tight lips.

Damn it, that's what he got for hesitating. He should have shot the first Boche down, or else pulled off immediately. Now he was going down to crash himself, probably, and five miles inside the German lines, too. A three second pause—and for him the war was over.

When his altimeter showed a thousand feet, he pulled out of his side-slip and searched for a landing spot below. The only field in sight looked marshy and too small for a dead-stick landing. He'd try it, anyway; as he swung the nose of his Spad in that direction, he saw a Fokker gliding alongside of him. It was the one he had knocked, down a few seconds before. Victor and vanquished were going down together. He started to laugh, but suddenly choked.

THE crackle of a Spandau burst out behind him. He looked around; the second Boche was again on his tail, and still firing, though seeing him helpless with a crippled motor. He cursed in despair, started a turn to the left, and abruptly changed to a slip to the right. His ruse worked; when he again leveled off the second Fokker was in a bank looking for him, too far above to reach him before he reached the ground.

But his maneuver had lost him the chance of stretching his glide to that field. He was now less than two hundred feet above a patch of woods, ending on one side in a rocky hillside, bordered on the other by the road. As the least of three evils he chose the road, and eased carefully toward it. It was barely wide enough for the wing-spread of his Spad, yet he got his wheels down and rolling before a branch snatched at his right aileron. With a jerk the ship careened, the undercarriage crashed in the ditch, and the next instant found Duke hanging face down by his shoulder straps.

The jolt knocked the breath from his body; he was gasping as he let himself slide to the ground and looked about him. A crash made him turn his head; a hundred yards down the road a Fokker was tangling itself in the trees. His first antagonist, trying Duke's trick of landing in the road with a dead stick, was

having even less success than Duke himself. A whirr pulled his gaze in the other direction; the second Boche, using his motor, was slipping in to a landing in the field. Duke watched the Fokker squat down in a perfect three-point, and sighed. On both ships he saw painted in vivid yellow the outline of a snarling wolf's head.

"Both from the von Eltz' circus," he muttered. "After getting two of them last week, too. But it's three times and out for me, I guess. Fight the rest of the war in prison camp, I suppose—ugh!"

It was useless to set a match to what was left of his Spad, and he had no papers of importance on his person. He retreated to the middle of the road and waited stoically. From the direction of the field a man ran clumsily toward him, a short squat figure in black-leather helmet and jacket.

"Jerry," thought Duke to himself, "if you fly like you run, it's a good thing for you that you saw me first."

Suddenly Duke gasped in amazement. The Boche had drawn a Luger from a pocket as he approached; now, less than a hundred feet away, he dropped to one knee and resting an elbow on the other aimed it directly at Duke. The expression of malignant hate on the countenance squinting along that gun barrel left Duke no shadow of a doubt about his fate. His body tensed to spring for the bushes.

From behind him came a sudden shouted command in German. Duke hesitated, then relaxed as he saw the kneeling figure straighten up, pocket the revolver, and salute. Duke turned, and saw another black-jacketed figure walking up the road from the opposite direction. This man was tall and slim, and walked with the easy grace of an athlete.

As he approached he continued speaking to the other Boche in German. Of the words Duke understood nothing, but the tone was plainly one of reproof. The short man, who also now walked toward Duke, made no reply other than a second salute. The tall officer now halted and spoke in almost perfect English.

"FORTUNES of war," said the German pleasantly. "But it might have been worse—for either of us. I see the Indian head on your plane; you are of the 22nd Squadron?"

"Yes, the 22nd," replied Duke cautiously. He was betraying no information there; his *carte d'identite* would show that. "Haskell is my name; first lieutenant."

"And mine is von Eltz, *Hauptmann* of His Majesty's 44th jagdstaffel." At the flash of recognition on Duke's face, he smiled. "You have heard of us, I see. You can congratulate, yourself, lieutenant, on being the first to bring down von Eltz. And it is only your bad luck, and my good, that the fight was over our territory, making you a prisoner instead of me. By the way, this is *Oberst* Graune, in command of my second flight."

Duke bowed silently in the direction of the shorter man; this one neither spoke nor bowed, but regarded Duke with a look of stiff disapproval, as if offended at the very fact of his presence.

"I have to thank you," continued von Eltz amiably, "for my life. Very sporting of you not to press your advantage. My friend Graune, here, has other ideas on that subject, as you may have noticed. But perhaps that is because he remembered your number; one of those two you accounted for last week was his brother."

Duke returned Graune's dark glare, and shuddered slightly, but found time to wonder if he, too, having seen a brother lost, might not have felt the same way about it.

"But come," went on von Eltz. "We must take you to our field, and give, you a night's entertainment at least, before you start for the prisons. Graune, you have your Fokker to fly back. Don't worry, I'll take good care of your prisoner for you. I think I saw signs of troops around the next bend; let's see if we can commandeer an automobile."

Graune saluted smartly and went off in the direction of the field where his Fokker stood idling. Duke and von Eltz walked down the road side by side, the German continuing to chat pleasantly. At first Duke was wary and suspicious, especially of his questions, but the man's easy manner and apparent sincerity broke through Duke's reserve little by little, and by the time they had stopped a car and been driven to the drome of the "Yellow Wolves," even a close observer could have found nothing in their manners to show that an hour before they had been mortal enemies, flinging steel death at each other across the blue sky.

At the field, von Eltz showed Duke to a small cubicle equipped with a cot and one chair, and then excused himself. A sentry was posted outside the door; Duke could hear his regular pacing, back and forth.

The thought of prison camp descended on him like a pall of gloom. Von Eltz was a decent sort, and would probably show him a good time to-night—but after that, what? All the tales he had heard came to him; the

rotten food, the crowding, the dirt, the nerve-grinding inaction. To a nature like Duke's, the last was the worst; it was like being buried alive. And how many weeks, months, or even years, no one could guess. The end of the war was apparently no more in sight than in 1914.

Duke leaped to his feet as the door was flung open. An orderly stood outside, beckoning. Duke followed him across one corner of the field and into a small stone building which stood by itself. He found himself in a large, square room, apparently headquarters of the staffel. Behind a table in the corner sat the commander, von Eltz. Standing about were six or eight young officers; from their insignia Duke guessed them to be flyers, members of the outfit.

Graune, standing by himself, glared malevolently as Duke came in. In a chair at one end of the table sat an officer of a different type. His stiff pompadour was shot with gray, his face was loose and paunchy, and his body fat; his uniform proclaimed him to be from some branch of the army other than aviation, but Duke could not guess what.

A CRACKLE of guttural conversation died away as Duke entered the staffel headquarters. Von Eltz spoke in English. "How do you like the prospect of prison life, Haskell?"

Duke, thinking he was being kidded, regarded von Eltz in some bewilderment, and answered slowly. "I guess it makes no difference whether I like it or not. I don't get any choice, do I?"

"It is because we are thinking of giving you a choice, that I ask," replied the German commander. "A choice which may possibly bring you your freedom."

Duke's heart acted as if it were trying to get out of his throat.

"What—what's that?" he stammered. "My freedom? Tell me what it is—what do I have to do?"

"Don't be hasty, my friend. Perhaps, after I explain, you will prefer to remain a prisoner." Von Eltz, with one wave of his hand, indicated the grizzled officer who sat on his left, and a bulky bundle which lay on the table. "This gentleman is from our ordnance department, and he has brought with him something for us to test for them. We are trying out the possibility of using parachutes, but they are still in the experimental stage. This is our latest model. It has been tested, he tells me, with weights, but has never been actually tried by a man."

He paused, and Duke began to grasp the idea.

"You—you want me to jump with that thing?" he asked.

"Exactly. The experimental chutes are always brought to the Front to be tested, given to a pilot flying into combat, the idea being that if his gas tank is hit by a bullet, he will not hesitate to try the chute. If it works, well and good; one pilot is saved. If it fails, he dies no more surely than if he stayed with his burning ship, and probably less painfully. In other words, he has nothing to lose, and everything to gain."

Duke felt a chill shudder start at the base of his spine. He had heard of parachutes, but had never seen one. They seemed a slim protection against death.

"Now your position, of course," continued von Eltz, "is not quite so urgent. You do not have to try it unless you wish. But I have always heard that you Yankees were always ready to take, and to give, the sporting chance. The deal between us will be this: you make a jump with this experimental chute, and if you are still—er, that is, if it is successful, we will guarantee to give your freedom. If it fails to work—well, we will give you a military funeral. How is that?"

Duke's tongue was cotton in his mouth, and the palms of his hands felt damp. Was this really a sporting chance that was being offered him, or was there a trick behind it? How was he to know? He thought of a hundred things at once, and thought of nothing. He opened his mouth to speak, but the words would not come. He managed to nod his head, twice.

"Of course," said von Eltz with a keen glance at him, "you are at liberty to refuse the proposition, and take the sure thing of remaining a prisoner of war. It is only fair to tell you that the last two chutes which were sent us for trial failed to open. I can guarantee nothing about the success of this device, although the captain here tells me it has been improved."

Duke licked his lips nervously, and spoke in a husky voice. "How do I know there is really a parachute in that bundle, and not a handful of stones?"

"Oh," laughed von Eltz, unbuttoning the coverings, "you are at liberty to inspect it all you want. The captain will show you how it works. I give you my word there is no trick to it. You do not suppose, do you, that it would amuse us to see you jump from a plane to certain death?"

A side glance showed Duke the dark eyes of Graune boring into his own, and he felt that perhaps there were some present who might not agree with the commander's last statement.

"And how do I know," he continued, his voice

stronger now, "that I will get my freedom, if I'm still alive?"

"As for that," said von Eltz, "you will have to depend on my word, which I now give you."

DUKE'S immediate impulse was to accept. This von Eltz had every appearance of a man of honor; his word was good enough for Duke. But a thought suddenly clicked in his brain. If the chute failed, and he died, well, that was that. But if it worked successfully, might not its construction be of some military interest to his own side? The Allies had never used plane chutes. He took a step forward.

"Look here, von Eltz, you seem to be a decent sort, and I'm inclined to take your word. But we haven't known each other very long, and they say that all's fair in love and war, you know. However, I'll take your proposition on one condition, which I think you will agree is fair. Let me make the jump from a plane on my side of the lines, over my own field. If the chute works, I already have the freedom you promise, without further doubt. If it doesn't work, well, my own buddies will be giving me that military funeral you were talking about. Either way, your people will be able to observe results just as well there as anywhere else."

The German commander seemed to hesitate.

"It sounds reasonable to me," he said finally. "But wait. I'll let my comrades decide."

He turned and spoke briefly in German to the others in the room. Instantly a hubbub of conversation broke forth, of which Duke understood nothing. For five minutes the Boche pilots all talked at once, the ordnance officer put in his word, and Graune spoke continuously and violently. From his tones and his looks Duke could tell that he was objecting to the suggestion, but with what effect on the others Duke could not guess. Finally Graune, alone, spoke at length to the commander, and then von Eltz turned and again addressed Duke in English.

"Since you are, strictly speaking, the prisoner of *Oberst* Graune, his approval was necessary. He has consented, with the understanding that he is to fly the plane from which you jump. You will go up, then, with Graune in a two-place plane. He will fly over the lines until he is above your own field—don't worry, we know where it is. Arrived there, you will jump and our little deal is finished. The start will be made before dawn to-morrow. There will be enough of us along to furnish Graune protection on the return trip. But in return for my word that there will be no

double-crossing on our part, I expect you to give me your word that you will make no attempt to escape, or attack Graune, or hinder his safe return in any way."

"My word of honor," said Duke, extending his hand. "The deal is on."

Solemnly von Eltz rose, took his hand, and shook it firmly.

"The captain will take you outside, Haskell, and show you how the thing works. After that, we will dine together."

For an hour Duke studied the contraption of silk and cords which the gruff German officer tried to explain to him in a strange language. If Duke grasped but few of the technical points, he at least learned how to pull the knot which caused it to open. He would not throw away his life through ignorance, at any rate.

The knock which came on the door of his cubicle in the chill hour before dawn did not awaken him, for he was already awake, and had been for many hours. The German wine which he had consumed the evening before, instead of making him sleep, had only made him think, and his thoughts were not pleasant. He wished that he could stop thinking entirely; he had cast the die, made his choice, and the less thinking he did now the better. It was too late for thought to help him now; all he wanted to do was to keep his nerve until the end. He pulled on his helmet, clenched his fists until the nails bit into the flesh, and followed the soldier out onto the shadowy field.

By a cluster of lights in front of one hangar he found a group of planes with motors idling, four Fokkers, and one larger ship which he recognized for a Hannoveraner two-seater. Gleaming cigarette butts marked a small group of helmeted figures; one detached himself from the others and came toward Duke. It was von Eltz himself.

"Good morning, lieutenant. And are you still anxious to take your sporting chance?"

"All set," replied Duke briefly. In the glare of the arcs his hands trembled visibly, and he knew that his voice shook. He hoped that von Eltz would put it down to the dank mist which hung over the field and swirled around the hangars.

"Good," said the German commander. "We're all ready for you. Here, Graune will help you on with the chute."

THE squat, dark figure of the *Oberst* appeared with the pack, and seemed anxious to help Duke get it on. But Duke took pains to see to the fastenings and straps

himself with his own hands. He buckled the belt across his chest, and the two over his thighs, and swung his arms to make sure they were free. The chute pack sat upon his shoulder blades like a hump. Light though it was, it suddenly seemed to Duke to take on oppressive weight. Suspiciously his fingers squeezed and probed, but he could detect nothing amiss.

He climbed into the after cockpit of the Hannoveraner, and slid down in the seat. He noticed that the guns had been removed, and all the controls, even to the throttle, taken out. Even the safety belt was missing; the reason for this he comprehended shortly as a voice spoke in his ear.

"If you want to change your mind, lieutenant," von Eltz was saying, "now is your last chance to say so. For I realize that sometimes a man may lose his nerve at the last moment, and not do something he intends to do, so I have instructed Graune that if you do not jump by yourself at the proper time, he is to fly upon his back until you drop. Satisfactory?"

Duke took one look at the leering black eyes of the Oberst, on the opposite side of the cockpit and shuddered.

"Perfectly," he said, trying hard to keep his voice steady.

His stomach seemed to fold up inside of him, and press tightly against his spine. They might at least have given him a cup of coffee to die on. To die? Why did he think he was going to die?

Hazily he saw the German pilots separate and lounge toward their ships, flipping meteorlike cigarette butts into the dark. Von Eltz returned to his side for a last word.

"We're off now. I want to say one thing to you, Haskell, before we part. Just this—I hope that chute opens."

With a slap on the shoulder he was gone. Graune now mounted the step, climbing into the front cockpit. But no, he was not yet getting in the cockpit; with a grunt of apology he fumbled at the chute pack behind Duke's back, trying, seemingly, to settle it more comfortably for its wearer. Duke raised his hand to indicate that it was all right; with a last twitch at the pack, the *Oberst* swung over into the front seat.

The motor roared, the plane began to move. Other motors roared alongside; the paling night shook with their thunder. Duke saw a faint horizon bobbing ahead of him, then sinking under the lower wing. As the wheels left the ground, Duke gritted his teeth and crushed an impulse to hurl himself from the plane. He

made himself lean forward and study the instrument panel. He glued his eyes to the altimeter needle, watched it crawl around the face of the dial. Five hundred, a thousand, fifteen hundred, two thousand. Suddenly it struck him that every mark that needle passed meant another hundred feet that he would be falling. He grunted as if in pain, and raised his eyes.

The eastern sky was paling into long streaks of pink; below him he could make out the familiar contours of the country. Just ahead, another few miles, were the trenches, a jagged scrawl across the desolate ground. On his left flew two Fokkers, and on his right two more. The nearest one on the right, he saw, had the yellow wolf's head only half completed; one ear was painted in, but not the other. That must be von Eltz, he thought; he smashed his ship yesterday, and this is a new one.

Duke looked down at the earth flowing smoothly far below. Many times had he looked down through thin miles at the distant earth, but never before with the thought that soon he must step out into space, with nothing between him and terra firma but the soles of his shoes, and depend on pulling a little cord to save him from being crushed to fragments. A little cord which already had twice failed to work as it was designed to work.

GRAUNE turned in his seat to look back; Duke started. The man was actually smiling at him—but what a smile! It was a grimace which contained nothing of mirth or encouragement; a leer of pure malice and triumphant hatred. It sent shivers of disgust up and down Duke's spine, until he dragged his eyes away.

Why did that devil grin at him like that? Did he think that he was going to have the pleasure of dumping Duke out, like a sack of potatoes, at the last minute? Duke firmly resolved that when the time came he'd show that Boche how a brave man acts.

But there was something else in that fiendish smile; something that touched a hidden chord in Duke's brain, and woke it to life. Some subconscious instinct, he knew not what, told him that it wouldn't hurt to have another look at that chute pack before they got over the field.

He loosened one shoulder strap, and pulled the pack around until it rested on the other arm. His fingers began exploring, but still could find nothing wrong. He flopped it over, looked at the other side, and his face went ashy gray at what he saw.

Right through the middle was a clean sharp cut, where the pack had been slashed with a knife. About six inches long, and deep enough to show the edges of many layers of folded silk inside. Which meant that the chute when opened would show a whole series of gashes, and be no more support than a punctured balloon. Duke sank back and covered his face with his hands.

He was positive that that cut had not been there last night, and he was almost equally sure that it had not been there when he first put the chute on this morning. He was as good as dead. To jump with that thing was suicide; and if he did not jump, what? To signal to von Eltz would be useless; he remembered the commander's instructions to Graune to fly on his back. For a few seconds he might cling frantically to the narrow rim of the cowl, but not longer. He knew that the first flip of the elevator would dislodge him, and he knew that Graune would not delay giving that flip.

So this was what von Eltz meant by no trickery, was it? After giving his word not to double-cross, this was his idea of a hideous jest. The dirty swine! And he, Duke, had trusted him, had shaken his hand. A sporting chance! Bah!

But suddenly Duke stiffened in his seat. He had just remembered the last moment on the ground, when Graune had solicitously helped adjust his pack in its place. Graune's hands had been behind his back then; that was the only time the chute had been touched after he put it on. That must have been when it was done and it was Graune who did it. A sharp pocket knife, a flick of the wrist, and a horrible joke became reality.

But von Eltz—perhaps he knew nothing about it! Duke's whirling brain struggled with the idea; perhaps Graune had done this frightful thing entirely on his own, through personal spite. If so, von Eltz was not to blame. And von Eltz would expect Duke to keep his word about not injuring Graune, and not hindering his safe return. A man's word to a man is something to be kept, thought Duke, sitting up suddenly, but this swine in front of me—

The sun was just pushing its rim above the eastern horizon as the closely grouped V swung over the drome of the 22nd Spads. Graune, in the cockpit of the Hannoveraner, looked up expectantly; the Fokkers drew off ever so slightly, that their propellor wash might not interfere with the man who was to jump.

Oberst Graune leaned out to look down, then drew in his head and looked at his altimeter. The altimeter said four thousand feet. A slow, crooked

smile writhed across his lips, and he nodded, once, twice. As he nodded the second time the smile changed to a grimace of mortal agony, but no sound came from his livid lips. A lithe forearm slipping with startling swiftness below his chin, had pressed sharply against his throat. It cut off his breath and his voice, and snapped his head back against the fairing with a smack.

Instinctively Graune's hands left the controls, and came up to clutch at that sinewy arm across his windpipe, trying to drag it away. This movement on his part left a perfect opening for another arm to reach down past his left elbow, and unfasten the safety belt which held him to the seat. His fingers clutched and tore and pried, but that arm was like a band of steel, its strength the strength of fury and despair.

DUKE, sitting astraddle of the fuselage between the two cockpits, had his right elbow firmly hooked under Graune's chin. His left hand, after opening the catch on the pilot's belt, grasped the slack of his leather jacket, over the stomach. He put his whole back into one tremendous heave.

The body of the *Oberst* rose into the air as if jerked by a hangman's noose. With his head still firmly locked against Duke's shoulder, his feet described a parabola through the air, and came down with a thump on the rear seat, completing a neat back somersault. Instantly Duke released his grip, let the pilot's body slip into the cockpit behind him, and pushed himself forward.

Within three seconds from the time that Graune's hands left the controls, Duke was dropping into the forward cockpit. The Hannoveraner had slumped into a crazy glide, one wing down, and in another moment would be spinning dizzily. Duke drove his feet against the rudder bar, seized the stick, and brought her out with a jerk. His left hand fumbled for the throttle, found it, opened it wide. The Hannoveraner zoomed powerfully.

The crackling sputter of a pair of Spandaus broke out behind Duke's right shoulder, and simultaneously from the left, but he was ready. He had no illusions about the probable actions of von Eltz and the other Fokkers. From a distance of a hundred feet, they could not miss seeing what had happened. And Duke knew that von Eltz, after extracting a promise and seeing it flouted before his very eyes, was not the man to let the offender get away with it easily, even if attack meant the loss of his own flight leader. From that moment it was battle to the death.

Duke swung the Hannoveraner into a steep bank, nose still up. The Fokker on the tail of the formation was rushing toward him; he pressed the unfamiliar triggers. The Spandaus in front of him responded with a burst which went wide of the target, but told him at least that the guns were working. He clenched his teeth and looked around.

The four Fokkers had split up; two whirled to dive for his tail, while two zoomed for altitude to dive in turn. Duke shoved his stick suddenly forward, and waited. The motor roared a rising crescendo as the ship gained speed. But the two Fokkers were plunging nearer and ever nearer. Now the murderous chatter of their machine guns commenced. Sharp gray streaks darted toward him, fanned the air about his head, sliced through his wings. Swiftly these streaks swung toward the cockpit where he sat. As the first bullet whizzed through his center section, he pulled the stick into his lap, and started an Immelmann.

Had he been in a pursuit ship, his quick maneuver would have succeeded in throwing his pursuers off his tail, and at the same time brought his own guns to bear on the two up above. As it was he caught the silhouette of a Fokker in his ring sight as he came off his back, and cut loose with a crashing burst from both guns. But for the moment he forgot that he was in a two-seater, which can never out-turn a Fokker. Of the two on his tail, one shot past in its dive, but the other, duplicating his Immelmann, rose in his track.

The scream of his own guns drowned the burst which followed him from behind. His first warning of the peril was a tinkle of glass in front of him, as the altimeter shattered into a thousand fragments. Jerking his eyes from his own target, he drove the stick against the side of the cockpit with all his strength, and let the ship drop sideways.

Quick as his action was, it was not quick enough. The tail end of the burst followed him, ripping savagely through the fabric walls of his cockpit. His left shoulder twitched.

"Ah-h-h!" he gasped. A sudden stab of pain sent the breath whistling through his teeth. All the blood seemed to leave his heart at once, and his stomach flopped within him. He turned his head to the left; his chin, touching his shoulder, felt something warm and sticky. A mist seemed to pass before his eyes.

DUKE shook his head savagely from side to side; the mist cleared. He was not out yet, damn them! As another hail of steel poured down upon the

Hannoveraner, he flattened out of the slip and dodged swiftly upward to renew the uneven combat.

One clumsy two-seater, with no gunner in the rear, against four fighting Fokkers. What chance had he? But he could not run, even if he would. A dive was useless; the Fokkers, out-diving him, would slash him to ribbons before he got halfway to the ground. Frantically he twisted and dodged, dove and banked, through air which sang with steel. For every burst he sent from smoking guns, he got ten in return, each closer than the last.

Turning to watch his tail, his eyes rested for an instant on Graune in the rear seat. The Boche was fumbling with the straps of the chute, his face a sickly yellow, his hands shaking violently. Duke promptly forgot him in his next maneuver.

For the third time in as many minutes Duke tried his favorite trick, an Immelmann out of a dive. But that Hannoveraner was no Spad, and performed but sluggishly; it seemed to take hours to get on its back. And the Fokker on his tail was by this time familiar with the trick, and ready for it. As Duke hung, for the moment helpless, at the top of the turn, the Fokker zoomed sharply toward him in a half-loop. A vicious hail of lead from the black ship's nose started in front of Duke's prop, and raked the full length of the Hannoveraner.

In one instant many things registered on Duke's mind. He heard the motor give a horrid cough, and its roar slacken away. He heard the snapping and crashing of bullets, as they tore through the framework of the fuselage. He felt the ship lurch drunkenly upward, as if relieved of part of its load, then sag sickeningly. And last, he felt the rudder bar twitch against his feet, then go slack and loose under his touch.

The meaning of the sounds before him he knew; his motor was hit. The meaning of the twitch against his feet he also knew; his rudder controls were shot away. But the meaning of that sudden lurch he did not know, until he looked downward.

A hurtling form was tumbling through space, and as Duke looked, white silk unfolded above it, blossomed out into a huge circle. Graune had either jumped or fallen, and in desperation had pulled the cord of the chute which he knew to be useless. Then Duke's wing-tip came between, and he saw no more for a moment of what happened below.

His Hannoveraner was dropping in a wide, uncontrolled circle. And on its tail was the Fokker, the same which had just raked him from nose to rudder

with telling effect. On its side Duke saw the head of a wolf, with one ear missing, and knew that in that ship sat von Eltz himself. The Fokker was directly behind him, not fifty yards away. With no motor and no rudder Duke was utterly helpless; he had not the slightest chance of avoiding that licking hail of steel which in another moment would pound him to a pulp. Already his heart seemed to stop beating, and his limbs turned icy cold in anticipation of death.

"Come on!" he grated over his shoulder. "Let me have it. What are you waiting for?"

Suddenly he noticed that von Eltz, instead of sighting his guns, was hanging over the side of his cockpit, looking down. Duke looked quickly down, too, and found that he could now see that parachute again. It bellied and swayed, a thousand feet below, and plainly visible across its broad surface was a long succession of gaping cuts, like a line of dots and dashes.

Von Eltz was staring at it; Duke wondered if he saw the slashes, and if he guessed what they meant. Not that it made any difference now. Duke's doom was sealed, and von Eltz would always remember him as a traitor. Then von Eltz in his Fokker pulled up

alongside the Hannoveraner, paralleling its wabbling course. Across the few yards of intervening air, Duke saw the German commander's hand go to his forehead in a respectful salute. Then, with a brief signal to the other Fokkers to follow, von Eltz pulled off in a climbing turn. Duke gaped after him.

Half an hour later he was sitting in the operations tent of the 22nd, telling the whole story to Major Coyne while the doctor dressed his shoulder.

"So that swine, Graune, got his," he ended. "I suppose when he jumped, the fall killed him?"

"No," said the major, "it didn't. He didn't jump, as a matter of fact. He had looped the chute straps around the seat brace to hold him in. But the Fokker's bullets smashed the brace, and let him drop. And even with the cuts in it, the chute broke his fall enough so that it didn't kill him."

"I examined him myself," spoke up the doctor. "Not a bullet touched him. And there wasn't a broken bone in his body; as the major says, the fall couldn't have killed him. But his heart had just stopped beating, that's all. Near as I can figure out, he died of fright about the time he pulled the rip cord."