

TALONS OF THE "DOVE"

by HAROLD F. CRUICKSHANK

*Dovely was the queer egg of "C" Flight—
But he sure knew his botany!*

CAPTAIN DAVE DILLON emptied his mouth of a volley of unsuppressed oaths. It was not often that Dillon swore like this, or made any show of temper, on the ground. He found no reason to resort to bullying to get the best out of his men. And, until Lieutenant Harcourt Bryson Dovely joined "C" Flight, of which Dave was skipper, Dillon was considered a mighty easygoing, albeit a stern and efficient, flight leader and sky fighter.

Dillon had been pacing the office hut floor for upwards of thirty minutes. Until, in fact, the C.O. had threatened to throw him out on his ear.

"You're like some fussy old hen who's lost her chicks," the major of the 78th Pursuit Squadron had snorted. "Who's out now? That precious roughneck Fergy? Thought they were all checked in."

A wry smile toyed on Dillon's thin lips.

"So they were all in," he snarled; "that is, all but that darn cuckoo you wished on to me a couple of weeks ago. Why, he—"

"You mean Dovely?"

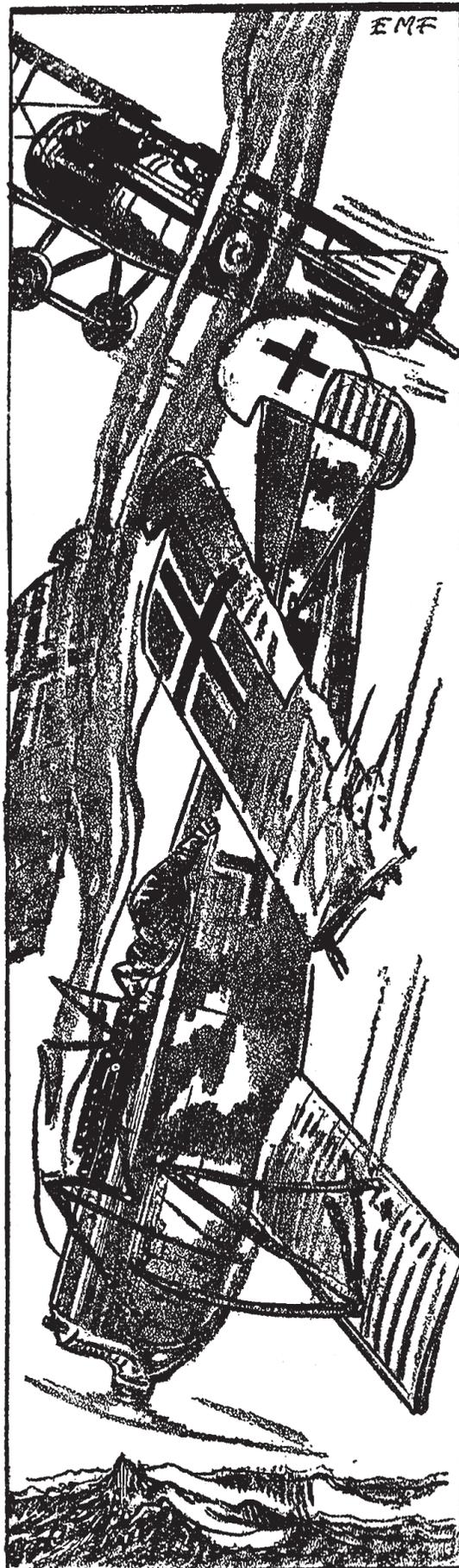
"Yeh, an' that was a dirty, low trick, George. I thought you and I were pals. Man alive! That sap's nuts from the heels up."

Major George Malcolm smiled. He had a powerful regard for Dillon. Together, they had taken over and organized 78 Squadron from its inception.

"H'mm. . . It would be odd as hell, Dave, if this 'Dove' bird of yours turned out to be a real dyed-in-the-wool eagle, eh? Look at this."

MALCOLM reached into a desk drawer and fished out what appeared to be the dried stem of some weed. Actually, that was what it was—a weed.

"That egg's got brains, Dave," the C.O. resumed. "This thing, for



example. For years, American chemists have been searching for the source of this—er—damned if I know its proper Latin handle; Dovely can give it, though. It's one of the main properties in antidote formula for some kind of poisoning. Ask Dovely some time, he'll give you the whole story.

"Last Friday, when he was out with Ferg, he was forced to land beyond the forest of Le Breuille. He spotted this plant, and risked his neck to bring in a sample. That takes nerve, when you're in German territory, old son. Of course, I don't approve of such work; and if he pulls it again I'll have to earmark him for Blois. But—he's a chemist and right now has pulled a big stroke for his profession. He—"

"He's pullin' a stroke oar in my flight, an' I'll be damned if I'm going to stand for any plant or bug-hunting," Dillon exploded. "Mebbe you're right. He's likely a clever botanist, but what the heck do I want with a little Dove runnin' round 'C' Flight, in action, with a bit of weed in his bill? I'm going to— Listen! Spad!"

Dave hurled himself to the door. A Spad was roaring down on the tarmac. Malcolm joined him on the tarmac, as the diving ship leveled off to a sweet three point, and to scud up to a stop almost outside the office hut.

"Fergy," Dillon jerked. "Looks bad, Major. I'm afraid our little Dove has gone where there aren't any weeds. Humph! Here comes Ferg. Let's hear what he has to say."

Jim Ferguson lounged up, pushing his goggles back and revealing a heavy frown.

"Any sign, Jim?" Dillon shot.

"No, Skipper, not of the Dove, but I sure ran into a nasty mess of Hun hawks. Lookit my crate—like a sieve. Seven Pfalz, all in a lump. I'm afraid our little bug-hunter's gone West. Sorry—but, I'm mighty lucky to be here."

Dave Dillon turned to the C.O. and shrugged.

"I'm sorry, too, George," he breathed. "I hate to see any man go out. If you think another search would be any use, I'll turn out the whole flight till dark."

BUT Major Malcolm realized that if Fergy had found no sign, there wasn't much use wasting the energy of the whole flight. Fergy had an eye like a falcon, and the courage of several.

He had combed every inch of that sector in which Dovely had been missed from patrol.

Slowly, in silence, the officers strode on to the

mess hut. It was tough even to lose an oddity. After all, Dovely had been an inoffensive, gentlemanly little devil, ever ready to advance assistance to mechanic or pilot who was down on his luck—a man who never frowned, or spoke back when an extra patrol was called.

Darkness had settled over 73 Drome. Dave Dillon played an indifferent rubber of bridge. Until he got confirmation of Dovely's whereabouts, he wouldn't be able to settle at anything.

"Think I'll turn in and read, gang," he at last mumbled, getting to his feet. "Get Johnson to take my place." Yawning, he moved to the door. A signaler met him, informing him that Brigade Headquarters was on the phone.

EAGERLY the skipper trotted to the office hut. He snatched the receiver up and barked into the mouthpiece. Major Malcolm was absent from the squadron for the evening.

Dave was second in command.

"No—Dillon speaking—Captain Dillon. What's that? You're confirming two Jerry washouts—a flamer and another which crashed beyond the Breuille woods. Say that again, will you? No, I mean the Spad's lettering. S Five—holy mackerel!"

"Oh, never mind, I was just—Hello, what happened to that Spad? Crash, huh? Oh—Either in No-Man's-Land or—beyond the enemy wire. I—see. You've got an infantry patrol out, an' will let me know, huh? T-thanks—thanks a lot—"

Dave slowly clamped the receiver in its hook. Two Hun washouts. Dovely—He turned to the door. It was not long since he had made caustic reference to a Dove skittering round "C" Flight with a piece of stinkweed in its bill.

The skipper came to an abrupt halt out on the tarmac, his eyes focused on the mad eastern horizon where chains of jagged flame slashed gaps in the sky. Was it possible that Dovely was out in that inferno!

Dillon was lost in the weird fantasy for a long moment of thought. His shoulders suddenly hunched in a gesture of finality, and his teeth gritted hard. Dovely was an utter darn fool! In pre-Victorian times they employed a much better term: "Popinjay!" In modern America, "little squirt" might have been applied.

"I'm handling men of nerve—skymen, not plant and butterfly chasers," Dillon growled. "Too bad if he's washed up, or taken prisoner. But—they will give

these college boys commissions. I—*tcha!*" He spat disgustedly, and moved on to the mess hut.

Dovely's victories should be properly recorded, and the strange little lieutenant given full credit. After that—well, pilots came, and went. Dillon and his hard, battle-bitten flight had learned to take losses.

BUT sleep failed to overtake Dave Dillon's tired frame. He lay back in his bunk, wide awake, smoking—thinking. At shortly after two o'clock, an orderly tiptoed into the billet, with a message from the signaler on duty.

"Wanted by Seventh Infantry Brigade, sir. Urgent," the man snapped.

"Thanks, Walter. Better roll in now." The skipper jerked himself to the floor. "Reckon this is news on Lieutenant Dovely."

"MEBBE, sir. Hope he's okay. Kind of a queer little egg, but—gosh!—say, was he good to us grasshoppers! One day he cornered me in Number Two hangar an' pinned me down while he talked for a whole hour on plants. I got hell from the C.O.; but—the Dove handed me twenty francs. Think he's all right, sir?"

"Umph! Don't know, Walter, I'll soon hear. Don't wake up Fergy. He's tired out—" Dave shot a glance across the room to a mound of blankets. Fergy, his deputy leader, was part of that mound. His breathing was deep, steady—If it had been Fergy who was posted missing, Dave Dillon would have slept in the cockpit of a ready Spad.

With a sharp click of his teeth, Dave moved out on the heels of his orderly.

His stride quickened as he neared the office hut.

He eagerly snatched up the telephone receiver.

"Yeh—Captain Dillon speaking," he gruffed into the mouthpiece. "You say what? You did, huh? The Spad was found, b-but, its pilot was nowhere around. Patrol hunted for an hour, huh?"

"Then you think it likely the pilot was taken prisoner by a German patrol? Likely—yeh? Have you exact map location? Thanks."

Dave swung from the phone. Both the orderly and signaler had their eyes focused on him in wide stares.

"Captured!" This from the orderly.

"Guess so, but button up your mouths, boys," Dave returned. "Too bad—to land in No-Man's-Land, then have those Krauts pick you up. Walter—get me a cup of coffee, and order the side car. Make it plenty snappy. There's a couple of hours, nearly, till dawn."

"You goin'—"

"I'm going out into No-Man's-Land," cut in Dillon. "And it's nobody's business, get me?"

WALTER understood. He had been with Dave Dillon too long not to understand that the skipper would never rest until he had confirmation either of Dovely's death or his whereabouts.

"He'd go right clean through to hell even for that bug-hunter," the orderly informed the signaler, as Dillon tramped out of hearing.

"Yeh— But I wouldn't, buddy," growled the telephone operator. "If that Dove bird had done what he was supposed to do, he'd be on his back now, under a brown blanket, an' alive. I heard some of the looies talkin'. Hell, Walter, when you're flyin' Spads, you're huntin' Jerries. Or ain't you?"

"I ain't got time to argue, Pete. Got to get the skip his coffee. But, you can't convince me the Dove was just plain dumb. Didn't he get him two Kraut crates? Don't overlook that. Fergy, one of the best there is, has only got five."

"Yeh, but Ferg's also got all of Fergy left, brother. Go brew that there dishwater you call coffee, Walter. You can't convince me the Dove ain't just a plain dove bird. I got to try pick up some code."

MINENWERFER shattered a period of local quiet, close to the American wire. Captain Dave Dillon, together with an American infantry scout, flattened low to the clay. The burst had been close, too close for comfort, but Dave had known such nights before, when he had been a platoon officer in the line.

He nudged his companion, and they flung themselves through the wire. A Maxim chattered, spraying the zone with sleeting lead. Flares sooshed skyward, to burst with blinding brilliance; but between bursts, Dave pushed on.

Now they arrived at a shambles of brick and masonry—an old sugar refinery long since crushed beyond all semblance of architecture, save for the odd steel girder and clinging fragment of fractured brick wall.

A screaming salvo of whizbang fire sent Dillon and the scout diving for cover. For the next ten minutes the German gunners combed No-Man's-Land with a raking of H.E. and shrapnel.

"Think they must have seen us, sir," whispered the scout.

"Not us," Dillon jerked. "Nobody saw us. Must have

been somebody, or something, else put the wind up those Jerry sentries." And as he voiced his opinion, Dave's breathing became sharper, his nerves more tensed.

"What's that? Look out, sir!" hissed the scout, jerking up a Colt revolver.

Dillon clamped a hand firmly over the man's gun arm. He too had caught the scraping of a boot on metal. But, in the inky blackness, he knew they were safe, comparatively safe, so long as they remained still.

OFF to the left front, in a small broken woods copse, Dillon had glimpsed the tail of a Spad silhouetted against the horizon—

Voices! German voices. A work party was approaching from somewhere, or a patrol. Suddenly, Dave glimpsed a shadowy shape take animate form before him. A hatless human shape was backing toward him. Dave breathed a whispered command to the scout at his side.

"Just cover him. Don't shoot until I give the word," he cautioned. The skipper's heart was beating madly.

All at once, a number of scuttle-shaped helmets emerged from behind a mass of broken bricks. There was a quick move on the part of the man crouching ahead. Two shots ripped out, then pandemonium broke loose. Dave jabbed his scout in the ribs, and leaped forward to the further cover of a broken wall.

He had seen, in a flash of gunfire, a teddy suit—flying leathers. Dovely!

What other thought would flash to his mind!

Crack! Crack! Luger and automatic fire blasted the quiet. Flares shot skyward from both sides of No-Man's-Land.

Dave Dillon jumped forward. His automatic spewed a burst of flame. Two forms were clinched, off to his right. One of these was Dovely, who weighed no more than one hundred and thirty-five pounds. The German, who had the advantage of a throat hold, had also an advantage of some fifty or sixty pounds of weight.

With a crisp order to the scout, Dave hurled his big frame forward. He struck with the barrel of his Colt. A Luger flashed. Dovely sagged. Dillon whirled, and his gun spoke again.

A burly German Hauptmann gurgled and sank to the debris. Now the German front line was stirred. Men were leaping the bags. Dave Dillon's breath came in hard-won gasps. He called to the scout, who stood reloading his Colt.

"You'll have to cover me," the skipper jerked. "This boy's out, bleeding badly. I've got to get him in. Watch yourself. Give 'em plenty, but see you get in yourself."

Stooping, Dillon raised Dovely in his arms. Blood soaked his coat as he stumbled on. Alert, ever ready for an emergency, the American seventy-five gunners now cut loose a withering barrage on the German front line. But, it was a game at which two could play; and, in turn, the German artillery opened fire on the American wire.

DAVE DILLON was forced to drop to cover in a shell crater, while the gods of war snarled and tore at each others' throats around him. He found that Dovely's left arm had been slashed below the elbow. Quickly the skipper applied a tourniquet and field dressing.

Now he caught the flash of a signal lamp from a sap head at the American sector.

"This—way—this way," came the message. The American outpost company was signaling the only possible gap through the hellish wall of flame and flying steel. Dillon watched for a moment, hoping to glimpse the scout. Then, with a grunt of satisfaction, he again raised the limp shape and tore on to the sap, Dovely hanging limp and pale in his arms.

"BUT, what I can't get into my head, Dovely, is why in heck you didn't make a strike for the American lines as soon as you cleared your Spad."

Dillon looked down at the pale, twitching face of Lieutenant Dovely, stretched out on a cot at the hospital hut of the drome.

"Ah, yes. It does sound a bit foolish, old man, doesn't it? It'll likely sound more so, when I tell you the whole story. You see, as soon as I hit into that copse, there was just enough light to tell me that I'd made a find—a rare botanical find. Right under the blessed under-carriage was a clump of wild digitalis purpurea, one of the specimens we've been hunting for, throughout the world, for months."

Dave Dillon groaned, and shot a glance at the C.O.

"But, you see, Dovely," he snapped. "You ought to be spanked, an' sent to Blois. You had no business, at any time, chasin' moths an' weeds. You were up here to fly, to chase Halberstadts, and Fokkers. Hell's fire, man, you've darn near made a nervous wreck of me. To hell with your digitalis. I've grown it in my backyard—lots of it. Now, you've got yourself nicked, and came near getting me washed out."

"I reckon you know you're washed up, as far as flying goes. In spite of your two-ship victory yesterday, I've got to recommend that you be passed out of the American Air Service. That arm won't bother you much, now it's stitched up. I'm sorry, but you're out, as a flyer."

Dave Dillon's voice had lowered a couple of tones as he finished. He squeezed the pilot's good arm, and then got up from the side of the cot.

"Yes, of course, I quite see your point, Skipper," Dovely breathed.

"You're a man of blood and—er—fire, aren't you? It's just plain nerve that counts with you. Brains, unless they run in the groove of the physical butcher, don't count, do they? Well—listen to me." Dovely had raised himself on his good elbow.

"The search for the proper specimen of digitalis was no flight of fancy. We weren't after specimens to press and mount in some one-horse museum. We are after a chemical neutralizer against a new gas the Germans are about to discharge; we want a solution for use in forward hypodermics—" Dovely paused to let his words sink in.

"Captain Dillon," he resumed. "As soon as my left arm gets well, I'm going to smash you one on the nose; not because I don't like you. I do, immensely. But, I want to have the satisfaction of just—er, as you'd put it, busting you one."

"NOW listen: While hunting for more of the digitalis, I became hemmed in by Germans. My only course was to strike for that old sugar refinery. I received an awful fright there, when forms began to emerge from underground. By George, I was in a mess. Then it dawned on me that I had hit onto something—something sinister, something which Intelligence might like a line on."

Dovely paused, and reached with trembling fingers for a glass of water. Dillon shot out an arm, and held the glass to the lieutenant's pale lips.

"Thanks— Thanks, Skipper. Now, where was I? Oh, yes. I understand German very well, so I backed away, to listen. Dillon—I'd stumbled onto a find," Dovely resumed. "I had found the last air shaft in the great mine system, which has had Intelligence and Infantry completely at a loss for so long. By George, I could see the Hun officer of the Engineers studying a plan, or specification. So—oh, hang it all, it's in my report. Read it."

Again Dillon shot a glance at Major Malcolm,

who nodded. The squadron surgeon darted in to catch Dovely, but the pilot had slipped into unconsciousness—a dead faint.

FOR the next three days, Lieutenant Dovely stuck around the tarmac. His arm had healed nicely, though still carried in a sling. These three days had been heart breakers for Dillon and "C" Flight, for all possibility of flying had been smothered by a burst of vile weather, which drenched the entire sector. Fogs, hurricane blasts of drizzle-laden wind.

The skipper of "C" prowled the tarmac like some caged jungle beast. But, at dawn of the fourth day, four Spads throbbed on their chocks at the deadline. Dave had called his pilots about him, in a huddled conference. Major Malcolm was just leaving the drome in his side car. Spare pilots stood by, ready to take off at a second's notice.

"And get this, gang," Dillon jerked. "This flight's for Dovely. We sort of got him all wrong. He's done more in the past few days, more for the Allied cause, than all us punks have who've been out here for years. We called him the 'Dove.' Why, we've only sprouted battle pin feathers compared to that buzzard.

"Now, here's what: Beyond the forest of Lc Breuille, is the gas plant from which the German engineers discharge their new lethal gas. How this gas is transported forward, is still a mystery, but we think it's conveyed underground. From Dovely's report, we get a good idea of the Boche plans. They cut loose this gas, then explode their mines. Just get a picture of what'll happen. Get it!"

"So we go over an' shoot up the main plant, is that the idea?" Ferguson asked, snapping his helmet straps shut.

"No. We cover one of the biggest bomber flotillas that ever crossed the lines," Dave prompted. "The 19th Squadron's Handley Pages and the 27's D.H.'s. A flight of Sop Snipes'll cover their own Handleys and we will ride herd on the D.H. squadron, and keep a general eye over all. Boys—this isn't going to be any picnic. The German command is on the alert. Take your orders skyside, and keep formation unless I give you the nod. Right. Get aboard."

Dave Dillon looked about him. He had hoped to shake Dovely's hand before he took off. There was a chance that he—wouldn't get back. But Dovely was nowhere in sight.

With a shrug, the skipper climbed aboard and beckoned to a man at the checks. Four Hissos roared

wide open. Dillon gave the signal. Chocks flew, and a line of trim Spad shapes cut the horizon.

The weather gods had favored the Allies. The blanket of fog, and switching winds, had held up the discharge of German gas. As he pulled up hard for altitude, Dave Dillon's lips moved. His big chest bulged, then he hunched himself over the control stick. His job now was to pick up the bomber flotilla, and then—Fate, the gods of battle, would decide.

IT WAS scarcely full dawn, when Dillon shot a glance to the small radium dial of a watch on his instrument panel. He next took a reading of his altimeter. In exactly eight minutes, the heavy guns of the American and Allied artillery would open up a monstrous bombardment. In exactly eight minutes, Captain Dillon's charges, a flotilla of monster bombing planes, would be due to unload their death eggs on the buildings screened beyond the forest of Le Breuille.

But, the German air force was not asleep. Nor were the ground engineers, who now rushed to their tunnel shafts to complete the last of the tamping of their mines. Today, they must not fail. If the Le Breuille sector were not definitely won for the Fatherland, the idea of attempting to hold important points of vantage along the Meuse to the south was futile. Hindenburg had issued his great order of the day. The Le Breuille zone must be taken fully, and consolidated at once, at all cost.

DILLON frowned at a long arm of drift cloud coming out of the east. A freshening nor'easterly breeze had sprung up—ideal for the discharge of gas. The skipper shot a glance down overside. Far below, a covey of British Snipe planes scudded eastward at the head of a droning echelon of Handley Pages. Above the bombers, a covering flight of Camels ripped along, darting in circles about their charges.

Dave ran his keen eyes over the formation of D.H.'s, riding to the north of the Handleys. Never had he seen so great an Armada of sky ships in one formation. Now, thundering Archies began to clutter the sky with blood-red splashes of flame and inky black smoke.

It was amazing, to Dillon, to watch the way those heavy bomber pilot! jockeyed their ponderous machines out of the line of fire. The Yank skipper's heart seemed to leap to his throat on more than one occasion, when a murderous burst of black-red seemed almost to envelop a bomber. But—the flotilla of death kept on—on, heavy 360 motors roaring defiantly.

Dillon thought of Lieutenant Dovely, the pilot who had brought all this action to a head.

"Too bad the little devil had to get winged," he breathed. "I'd have liked him alongside; an' I reckon he'd have liked it too. He—"

Further rumination was cut short. Ferguson had zoomed up over his chief's ship to inspect the far side of the floating cloud mass. Now he came down on his prop in a screaming power dive, his Vickers slitting a fiery lane ahead of the diving ship. Fergy was pouring out a warning burst from his guns.

Almost in the same second, five black Fokkers split the cloud bank. Ten Spandau guns crashed in a fearful, ear-splitting concerto. There was little time for Dillon to even waggle his wings in signal. However, a hand came overside, and he screamed off in a long, slicing skid.

Ferguson had gone tearing by, to carry the warning to the Camels in the next elevation below. Now "C" Flight came out of slip-offs, or dives. Each pilot knew what the skipper expected. They were shock troops, their duty being to hold those Fokkers—

Dillon knew that, in turn, the Fokkers were just an advance guard ahead of a big German battle formation. The skipper's lips tightened. He couldn't afford to lose a man now. With a snarl of rage, at having been nearly trapped, Dave pressed home his throttle lever and stabbed the sky with flame from his guns.

THE American flight was quick to learn that this Fokker formation was no rookie flight. As Dillon zoomed to the fight, the Hun leader half-rolled in spectacular manner, his Spandaus crashing even before he reached level again. Bullets spattered through Dave's instrument panel. His watch was blasted clean from its socket, and a bullet tore open his helmet close to the right temple.

Now the Yank skipper set his teeth hard. His red-rimmed eyes were slitted, shooting glances this way and that, head weaving like an angered cobra. Suddenly his nose tipped down. His wings waggled before his Spad took the bit between her teeth in a dive—a crafty signal to his boys to keep hands off.

SNARLING excitedly, the Boche leader looped showily, to come down in to a dive on Dillon's tail. Spandaus crashed, but the Hun had grandstanded just a little to the extreme for accurate sighting. His lead did little more than score one of the Spad's struts.

However, it was close, murderously close; but not as close as Dillon expected it might have been. Dave had purposely ridden right on the edge of the rim-rock of hell, in order to bait the Hun chief down.

Ripping a volley of gutturals through his set lips, the crack German pilot now settled himself in a crouch, his thumb ready on the trips. Something must have gone wrong with the controls of that *verdammte* Spad below! That was no fake dive. No sane man would hold in that position for as long as Dillon did, with a brace of deadly Spandaus at his back.

It was this thought that lost the Hun skipper his one big chance. Even as he touched the trips with his thumb, the Spad below gave a sudden upward flirt of her prop. Her rigging bulged defiantly, as Dillon forced her over in an Immelmann.

"*Gott im Himmel!*" The expression came in more of a gasp from the German's throat for, at the half turn, that silver devil Spad had suddenly hurled herself off. She came over in a tight vertical, and two gushers of flame spouted from the snouts of those grim Vickers guns.

Cut through the chest, shorn of his big chance, the Boche pilot cursed himself soundly. Blood oozed from his chest wound, but his brain was clear. For the moment his hands were off the stick, and the black Fokker took her own head. Now she rolled.

She was kicked out of it. But, Dillon came down like a merciless plummet, breathing flame—terrible flame.

The Fokker pilot gasped as a starboard strut buckled. His upper spread folded. With a snarl he whipped out his Luger and turned in the pit. He faced flame, a sheet of it, grimly menacing—the end. But, Dave Dillon took his thumb off the Vickers trip, and zoomed. A thin smile of half-pity, half-admiration, cracked the Yank's set features.

"Game as a cougar," he breathed. Then his eyes snapped shut. A horrible gout of flame gushed from the Fokker's engine area, an enveloping mass of red-black death.

Dave forced his Hisso to the last notch. His buddies had drawn the fight back up to the upper altitudes again, and now, it seemed that the sky was part of some infernal region—a place of hell's design, blasted, ripped by flame and sheets of whining steel and lead.

TEN minutes later, Captain Dave Dillon led three of his ships eastward. One of his flight was missing—Jones, a pilot who'd been with "C" for four months.

No one had seen Jones go down. Now, far below, and ahead, the sky eggs of the Handleys and De Havilands were threshing the earthworks of the gas plant with murderous, gouging missiles.

Dave could see the British Snipe flight in trouble, a horde of Albatrosses milling above them. That was his next objective. With a signal to his boys, he put his prop down—down, in a long, oblique dive. His guns began to chatter at extreme range. Again "C" was enfolded in a terrible mill—a pall of smoke and flame.

Below, and to the eastward, a fearful bombardment raged. Empty Handleys were gunning back to the west, mostly alone, harassed by Archie— One of the big ships lay wallowing in a mass of smoking wreckage; close by, was the scarred shape of a Camel.

THE four Spads sliced skylike red-tipped arrows, splitting two Albatrosses, which were converging on a single Snipe. The Britisher waved his thanks, as he staggered out of the fight. His guns were jammed; he was hit fairly badly. Now, like rampant eagles of death, "C" Flight barged full into the fight, and Dave Dillon became detached.

The major task assigned to them was done. That is, the plant below was utterly demolished, but those nery bomber pilots and navigators had still to get their ships home. It was Dillon's job to see that they made it.

But, it was the job of the German sky command to make sure that they didn't.

Dave was forced out by sheer weight of numbers. Four red devil Ships had singled him out as their meat. He was on the spot, being driven farther and farther to eastward. Now, as he catapulted over in a saving Immelmann turn, he was faced with the full odds against him. Smoke and drift cloud shut out all signs of his flight, or the other Allied ships.

He snarled bitterly, as he next touched his trigger trips. There was only one thing left to him—one move in his bag—and that was to blast a way through those sitting ships ahead. He gave his bus the gun, jamming the throttle in to the last notch.

Then, his Vickers crackled.

But the Germans were wise. They banked out, off, to come screaming on in at the Yank's tail. Dave began to jockey his stick. He wanted to pull the Boche back into the main fight. But a bullet smacked his left shoulder, driving him hard against the side of the pit. He sagged, a million blinding lights dancing before his blanked vision. Still, there was a powerful reserve of

cold nerve back of Dave's mind. He staggered out of the fog. He touched his stick down. By God! Now he would at least take a Hun down to Valhalla with him! A noble thought this, the nervy last thought of a man who hadn't very much chance of saving his life.

As he came into the zoom, a silver shape flashed across his bows. Dave ducked, instinctively, as he glimpsed red flame leap out from that shape ahead. Great Heaven! Had he run into a trap again?

DAVE didn't complete his loop. A fast flying ship had circled his tail, a pair of Vickers guns describing a fiery arc about him. Below, off to starboard, an

Albatross kicked and wallowed in a maze of flame. Dillon dashed sweat from his eyes. He was staring—staring, wild of eye, unbelievably now at the tail of a lone Spad which bared its teeth in a mad red flash of firing Vickers. One lone word hissed a way through Dillon's set lips.

That lone pilot ahead flew with his left arm strapped to his side.

"Dovely!" Dave Dillon came completely out of the fog. And when his last round of ammo was expended, he streaked down to put his wing-tips alongside the "Dove's." It was thus they landed together on 78's tarmac.