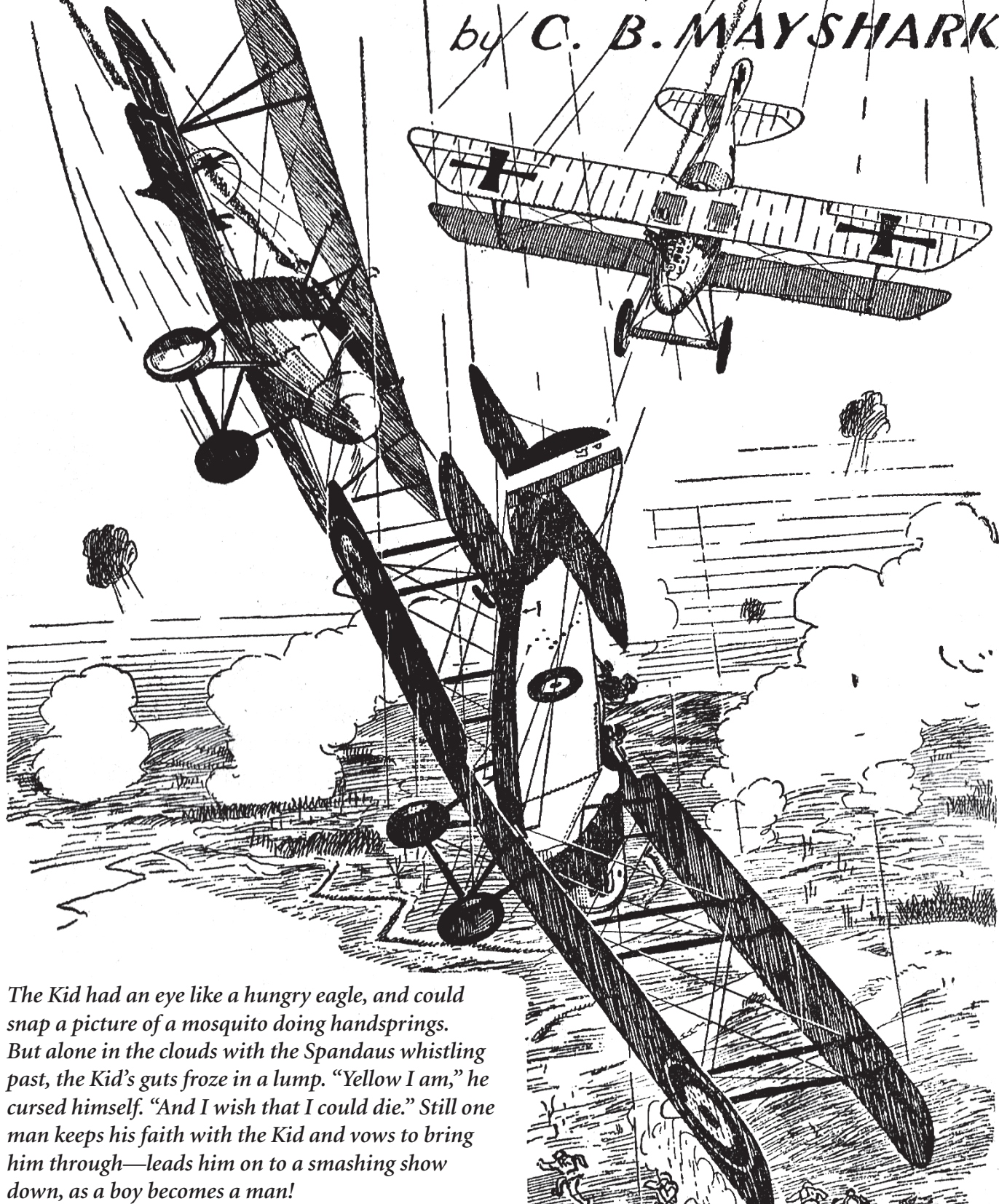


The Camera Kid

by C. B. MAYSHARK



The Kid had an eye like a hungry eagle, and could snap a picture of a mosquito doing handsprings. But alone in the clouds with the Spandaus whistling past, the Kid's guts froze in a lump. "Yellow I am," he cursed himself. "And I wish that I could die." Still one man keeps his faith with the Kid and vows to bring him through—leads him on to a smashing show down, as a boy becomes a man!

LIEUTENANT TOMMY ASHWORTH, 22 Squadron, R.F.C., rammed the gas into the throbbing Rolls Royce of his Bristol Fighter and maneuvered the ship skillfully out of a tight barrel roll. He cut the gun and hoiked up sharply, opening up with both clattering Vickers. But the Hun pilot in the Albatross single-seater was smart too; he wasn't where Tommy figured he would be. Instead, he had side slipped over when the Bristol fell into the barrel roll and was still right on Tommy's tail, pouring burst after burst of withering fire into the already riddled two-seater.

Tommy looked back quickly, his mouth going dry with fear as the Albatross drew up closer. Then he saw the "Kid" in the gunner's cockpit. The Kid was just standing there letting the slip stream press him against the back edge of the gun ring. His arms hung listlessly at his sides, his face was contorted in horror, his eyes stared unseeingly ahead.

"Fire," screamed Tommy. "Fire, you damn fool!"

Still Tommy knew it was no use. He had seen the Kid act this way before, knew damn well that if a hail of Spandau lead singing past his ears didn't snap the Kid out of it, nothing would.

Tommy fought madly at the stick as another burst of death dealing lead ate into the leather covered crash pad before him.

"Lord, that devil's getting in close," he breathed. "Hope the Kid doesn't get hit."

Tommy eased his crate into a loose left bank that sucked the German in. He knew that the only way to save his life and the Kid's was to out-manuever the Albatross on his tail. Now he called upon all his three years' experience at the Front, breathed a fervent prayer, took one look back at the Kid, still standing transfixed with fear, then passed him at the zooming Albatross.

"Yea, the guy's being sucked in all right," said Tommy to himself. "Gotta time this just right."

Now the Jerry pilot was drawing a bead on the Bristol. But suddenly he saw that two-seater rise up before him like a mountainous wave, and before he knew it, the quivering Bristol tail assembly was directly before his throbbing prop. To save itself, the Albatross skipped up and over the almost stalled Bristol without being able to fire a shot. Then, as the German pilot looked down, he saw the two-seater fall off on its left wing.

"Damn fool," he muttered to himself. "Yank, I'll bet. Only a Yank would have the guts to pull one like that."

He spun his ship around, and headed back to his own field, while the Bristol crossed the lines below him. The Jerry pilot knew he'd had a close one and so did Tommy Ashworth.

Once they were safely over Allied territory, Tommy Ashworth looked back. The Kid was relaxed now, but he still looked scared. He was crouching down in the cockpit, his hand on the butt of his Lewis Gun. "God, Tommy, I'm yellow. I'm no good. I wish the Hun had got me." He was croaking in a staccato voice and tears were welling up in his blue eyes. But Tommy didn't hear him. He only looked at the Kid in wonderment, then turned his attention to his controls.

The battered Bristol arrived over the tarmac of 22 Squadron with motor missing badly. Tommy circled the field and then brought the ship in with difficulty, almost carrying away the wind sock as the crumpled right aelron failed to respond. He cut the switch as the ship rolled to a stop and leapt over the side to the ground. Then he looked up at the Kid who had by this time regained his composure.

"Keep your mouth shut. I'll attend to everything. If the C.O. asks any questions refer him to me. Give me those plates." Tommy spoke sharply. He was still sore, but under his anger there was kindness. He couldn't understand why the Kid froze as soon as trouble approached over enemy territory, but still he stuck with him. The Kid was a good egg and Tommy liked him better than any man in 22, and he had vowed that he would cure his gunner of the queer twist in his nature that would be sure to end in his death.

Luckily the C.O. wasn't on the field. Instead an orderly approached them as Tommy and the Kid were stowing the plates and the camera into a kit.

"Tough time, eh, Lieutenant?" he said as he saluted. "Looks like the Jerrys didn't want their pictures taken."

"Take these plates and give them to Elverson," said Tommy without looking up. "Tell him-we 'shot' the whole terrain of section nine. Plenty machine gun nests there."

"Yes, sir." The orderly took the kit and scampered off towards headquarters. Tommy looked at the Kid again who was standing on the ground beside him. The Kid's curly blond hair was ruffled and there was a flush on his face. He was a good looking kid, no more than nineteen. He had been with 22 only a month, but already he was the most popular man in the squadron. He was one of those unusual types who knows how to josh everyone, even hardboiled Captain Elverson and all had fallen immediately for his humorous good

nature. Beside that he had gained the admiration of everyone for his uncanny ability with a camera. There wasn't a man in 22 who could get pictures like the Kid. As Tommy flew on a line as straight as a string the Kid could snap a twelve strip mosaic with less overlapping than any camera man on the Front. Already word of his unusual faculty had passed along the line to other squadrons. He had become known as the "Camera Kid" and every pilot in 22 was pestering Elverson for an assignment with him.

But Elverson wouldn't let the Kid get away from Ashworth. No use in breaking up a team as long as it was clicking. And the C.O.'s determination to keep the Kid with Tommy was the only thing that saved the young observer's life, much less his reputation.

It so happened that Tommy Ashworth was the only man who knew anything about the Kid's queer twist that threw him into a panic as soon as an enemy plane approached them when they were over German territory. The Kid was all right on his own side of the lines. He could handle that old Lewis like a veteran then, and a Hun couldn't get within miles of them. But once they were over the lines it was a different story. He seemed suddenly paralyzed with fear, didn't even know enough to duck down in his cockpit.

IT WAS on these occasions that Tommy was compelled to use all the skill and cunning at his command, and it wasn't only occasionally that their Bristol came home looking like a sieve. Even so, Tommy decided that he'd take his chances and attempt to make the Kid snap out of it. He didn't want to see the Kid humiliated, and he knew that a report would mean that the boy was all through. He kept thinking that one more flight would cure him. But so far, the Kid was just as bad as ever, with no sign of encouragement. Today's flight had simply been a replica of other discouraging failures.

"Listen, Kid," said Tommy irritably as the two turned to walk towards their hut, "do you realize that the scrape we had today was the closest so far? You've just got to snap out of it, that's all."

"I know," doggedly replied the young observer, "but it's no use, Tommy. I can't help it. I saw black when that Albatross dived down on us today. Froze solid. Couldn't move a finger. Dammit, I wish he'd got me. Tommy, you better tell Elverson; I can't last long at this game and neither can you."

"Don't be goofy," Tommy retorted. By now they stood at the entrance to their hut. "You'll be okay with

another flight. Got an easy assignment tomorrow. Well, so long. I've got to write up my report." Tommy ran off towards headquarters, leaving the Kid standing there looking after him. "Swell guy," said the Kid to himself. "Best pilot in 22. I wish he wouldn't take any more chances with me, though. He's going to get it sure."

The Kid shook his head and ran his fingers through his curly hair. He watched the receding figure of Tommy Ashworth disappear into Headquarters across the field. Then he entered the hut and threw himself on a bunk where he flopped over on his belly and went to sleep.

Tommy Ashworth, after making out his slightly off color report, stopped to chat with Captain Elverson. Elverson was a man of breeding and some culture, but the war had taken away any charm that might once have been his. He was a typical R.F.C. commanding officer, and he made the men under him step. Not that he was tough; he merely was one of those types who demand strict discipline, and none of his men received any favors which were not granted to all.

"That kid observer working with you gets better every time he goes out," he said to Tommy. "Those last pictures he got were wonders."

"Yea, looks like he's making himself known, too. I was talking to Bently from 28 the other day. Says he was going to get himself transferred over here so he could pilot for the Kid. He was only kidding, though."

"No, he wasn't, Ashworth," returned Elverson evenly. "Bently's a big shot. He's got pull up above. God only knows why he wants to come over here, but the transfer papers came through this morning. I'll have to let him pilot the Kid. Bently's good, though. Best two-seater pilot in this section. They ought to work well together."

Tommy's heart was in his mouth. "You can't mean it, sir. The Kid's my boy. He's been with me ever since he came out. Why he—"

"That's enough, Ashworth," interrupted Elverson thickly. His anger was easily aroused. "I told you I'm not responsible for the shift. Bently takes the Kid up tomorrow, and that's all there is to it. I'll assign someone else to you. Anything else on your mind?"

Tommy didn't answer right away but looked at his C.O. a little defiantly. He deliberated for a moment, then decided to let well enough alone. "That's all, sir." He saluted and walked out of the office.

As he hurried across the field, Tommy turned the situation over in his mind. Why the devil did Bently

want to transfer over to 22? Bently wasn't the type to be admired on any account, and Tommy by now decided that he thoroughly disliked him. Bently was good, all right. No doubt about that, he was a flight commander up at 28 and his prospects for taking over the outfit were good. All the more strange why he would want to come to 22. Surely a man doesn't give up a bright future just because he wants to pilot for a kid observer who happens to be good at taking pictures. Finally Tommy gave up. "Beats me," he said to himself.

"Hey, Kid," he said as he shook the still form that was stretched at full length on a bunk in the hut.

"Hey, Kid, wake up!"

The blond haired observer rolled over on his back and rubbed his eyes. Then he looked at Tommy.

"What's on your mind, pal. Anything wrong?"

"Bet your life there is," returned Tommy as he sat down on the opposite bunk. "You're getting a new pilot. You go up with Bently from 28 tomorrow. Elverson just spilled it. God help you if the Jerries get after you when you are over the lines. Provided you're lucky enough to get back, Bently'll sure as hell report you." Tommy leaned back on the bunk and rubbed his chin. He had resigned himself and come to the conclusion that the kid's fate was entirely out of his hands. It was a tough break, he thought, but what could he do?

"Bently?" asked the Kid. "Who's Bently?"

"He's a flight leader up at 28. Got drag someplace. Seems that he can do anything he wants. He's all right, though, good pilot. Only I don't like the guy— still you can't hold that against him."

"I was afraid before I came out here that I was going to run into that bird," said the Kid, falling back on the bunk again. "Meanest devil I ever knew."

Tommy was up on his feet in a flash. "You know him?"

"I'll say I know him if he's the same Bently I'm thinking of. Comes from good old Brooklyn. Lived next door to me until two years ago."

"What have you got against the guy? Come on, let's have the lowdown." Tommy's excitement was overtaking him.

"Well, it's like this—"the Kid began. Then he unfolded a weird tale to the attentive Tommy Ashworth.

He told of how Bently's old man was a Wall Street stock manipulator, of how he had made thousands in the market and of how occasionally he floated phony

stock issues and swindled innocent people out of hard earned cash. Finally the Kid's father, in the course of a business deal with old man Bently, discovered the man's fraudulent enterprises and dug up the evidence that sent him to Sing Sing. The Bentlys had moved from the neighborhood then, but before they went, young Bently had vowed to the Kid and his father that he would get them some day.

"And maybe that day's come," said the Kid as he wound up his yarn.

"I don't believe that Bently even knows who you are," retorted Tommy.

"He knows, don't worry about that. He wouldn't be going out of his way to come over here if he didn't. He's all set to fix my wagon."

"And as soon as you freeze over enemy territory, your wagon is as good as fixed. Bently would have his sweet revenge. He'd turn in a report that would make you look like the Kaiser's nephew, and you wouldn't have a leg to stand on. We've got to figure some way out of this, Kid."

"There's nothing we can do, Tommy. All we can do is hope, maybe we'll get shot down the first time I go out with him. I would rather take my chances in a crash than face what that guy will have to say about me."

EARLY the next morning Lieutenant Bently reported to Captain Elverson.

The transfer had been completed without a hitch, and the new man was ready for his first orders.

"You go up at eleven," said the C.O. as he handed Bently his order slip. "You fly due east until you come to the south boundary of section twelve. I want to get pictures of the whole section if possible, but what you don't get today, you can get tomorrow. Your observer knows the routine perfectly.

"Yes, sir, I imagine he does. He's made quite a name for himself. I'm going over now to see him." There was a slight trace of sarcasm in Bently's voice, but if Elverson noticed it he kept it to himself.

"Go to it, Bently. I'll expect to have your report before one. And watch out for that Archie. You'll be right near the front line. Make sure you keep your altitude."

Bently saluted and walked out of headquarters.

He strode jauntily across the field whistling a merry tune. He was one of those cocksure birds who is always very confident of himself—sometimes a little too confident. He walked with a swagger as if he were a big shot. Well, he was a big shot. Almost, anyway.

But he never reached the other side of the field. Suddenly he heard a low whine coming from the direction of Boche territory. Instinct told him to throw himself into a prone position. The mighty shell explosion threw debris around his ears as he fell flat on his face. Unhurt, but shaken up by the concussion, he rose warily to his feet. The bomb had struck on the north side of the tarmac, tearing a yawning cavity in the smooth ground. A Bristol, standing nearby, was annihilated, but outside of that, no other damage was visible. Suddenly officers and men began streaming from huts on the south side of the field. Mechanics were racing from the hangars—all dashing for Elverson's headquarters. Pulling himself together, Bently joined the mad scramble and started off across the field. But the bombs were still coming. They were soaring high over the tarmac of 22 now, finding their mark at some point further back into Allied territory. That first one that struck 22 had fallen short. The range had been defective.

As the men crowded into Elverson's office, he was frantically garbling into a telephone. In the confusion, his words were indistinguishable, but it was apparent that he was getting orders from up above. Suddenly he slammed down the receiver and turned around.

"The Boche are opening up with 155's," he yelled. "The gun's concealed about ten miles due east behind the lines. To us that's somewhere in section nine. Their objective is the Cannes ammunition dump." The C.O. was in a sweat. "Ashworth," he went on, "you flew over that terrain yesterday. Your observer got the pictures. Dammit, I haven't got the plates here, though. I sent them up the line." Elverson gesticulated wildly while every man stood breathless, awaiting his orders. "Orders are to wipe out the emplacement. God, the only thing we've got here are six pounders. This is an observation unit and not a bombing squadron. Elstrom must be crazy." The C.O. stopped talking suddenly and rubbed his hands over his face. When he looked up again he was calmer and spoke more collectedly.

"Bently, where's Bently?" he asked.

"Here, sir," spoke up the man walking to the edge of the desk.

"Bently, you take the six pounders—God knows we haven't got enough of 'em to equip more than one ship—and go out there and wipe out those guns. I'll send two other ships with you for a convoy. Don't take any observer with you, though. This is no time to get used to a new man. You can drop the eggs yourself. It's

the best we can do." Elverson looked out the window resignedly.

"But, sir, the Kid—"

"Never mind the Kid," snapped back the C.O. "I'll send him and Ashworth along with you. Layden and Copely will go too. Ashworth, you lead the flight over. You know just where section nine is. Watch out for the—"

The telephone buzzed and Elverson grabbed for it.

"Swell," he barked into the receiver after listening for a moment. "We'll wait for them." As he hung up his face was beaming. "They're sending the pictures of section nine right down. They say the gun emplacement shows. Be here by plane in five minutes. In the meantime, Saunders, you can equip Bently's plane with the six pounders. That's all—clear out."

The men left the office jabbering excitedly among themselves. Tommy and the Kid, however, moved off to one side and talked earnestly together once they were out of the door. Bently eyed them belligerently, then moved off with Saunders to fix up his Bristol for the bombing expedition. He was fed up. He knew that a direct hit would be required to put those 155 guns out of commission. Could he do it? He shrugged his shoulders. For once the confidence he had in himself was slipping a bit.

"That the guy?" Tommy asked the kid. "It's the same Bently all right. But I can't figure it out. Maybe he got wind of how I act when we get in a scrap. Maybe he figured he could put me on the spot. God, I hope everything will be okay today."

"Yea, we'll make out all right, Kid, don't worry." The confidence that Tommy tried to put across with words was belied by his tone of voice. The Kid looked at him searchingly, but said nothing. They both started for the hangars in silence.

In a minute, a Camel swooped down from the north and made a perfect landing, then taxied up close to headquarters. Tommy and the Kid turned around to gaze with admiration at the trim looking ship. They guessed the reason for its presence. The map of section nine. Quick work for those dead heads up at H.Q., they thought. But those dead heads at H.Q. often weren't as dead as many imagined. This time they were right on the spot.

The shells from across the lines were still coming fast and furiously. To those at 22 the din of the bombs had changed from a series of explosions to a constant roar. The concussion could be felt for miles around. Those guns would have to be silenced in a hurry if the

ammunition dump was to be saved. But maybe it was already too late? Perhaps the dump was a smouldering wreckage by now, shuddering convulsively each time a fresh shell blasted its way into the ruins? But that made no difference to Elverson. He had his orders, and by God, they'd be carried out.

Within five minutes after the Camel arrived, the three Bristols had taken off and headed East. Tommy Ashworth and the Kid were leading the vee formation, with Bently to the right and Layden and Copely to the left. The ships circled the field a few times to gain height, then headed for the lines, still climbing. At twelve thousand feet they found a protective layer of clouds, which they ducked behind, just as the lines were crossed. So far everything was going smoothly. The Bristols were in a tight formation now, but Bently had shifted over to the center of the vee while Ashworth dropped to the right. It was more difficult for Tommy's signals to be seen by the others this way, but it was safest for Bently. It was tough as hell having to protect a guy you didn't like, thought Tommy as he dipped a wing tip pulling the other two ships over to the right more. "Well, if this guy turns out to be as good as he's supposed to be," he said to himself, "we won't have much trouble. It's going to be tough with six pounders, though."

The three Rolls Royce motors were beating a thunderous staccato roar on the still morning air. The fleecy white clouds rolled out majestically below the fast moving planes, giving the impression of solidity and security. But those clouds were just as treacherous as they were insecure. They might well be hiding a batch of Albatross or Fokker single-seaters who were only waiting for the Bristols to get well within German territory before rushing in for the kill. Tommy didn't know. As a matter of fact, he didn't even speculate on the matter. He was busy navigating toward the objective, and once in a while, the Kid would tap him on the shoulder and indicate the direction with his arm. They couldn't fly blind much longer. Tommy could arrive at the right general location, but he'd have to drop below the clouds to find the exact boundaries of section nine.

SUDDENLY the Kid nudged him and Tommy turned around. The Kid was pointing down, and Tommy nodded. He pushed the stick forward as he signaled, and all three ships started to descend together. At the same time the Kid carefully examined the map that was pinned to the board in front of him.

There was no doubt in the world about the location of that gun. It was well camouflaged, but still the point of its emplacement was unmistakable. Then the Kid slid back the panel in the floor of his cockpit and fitted into place a small balloon observation camera that he had grabbed just before leaving. He never did like to fly without a camera of some sort, and that was better than nothing. Never can tell when you'd fly over something that was worth mapping.

And then the three Bristols charged through the clouds. Tommy's heart thrilled to the sensation as the mist enveloped his Ship, and he heaved a sigh of relief when he came out into the clear on the other side. The other two ships still held their formation, and as Tommy signaled, they pulled out of the dive and leveled off at about nine thousand feet.

They were over section nine all right. There was an old German communication trench on the right that marked the east boundary, and as he spotted it, Tommy thought he had done a pretty neat job of blind flying. He looked back at the Kid questioningly. The young observer nodded and turned to his map once more after squinting at the terrain below. Then he settled back in his cockpit and adjusted his phones. Tommy switched in the line and the Kid barked into his mouthpiece:

"About a mile to the left of that clump of trees ahead," he said. "Small knoll covered with shrubbery. Good place, all right."

Tommy took in the information as his eyes scanned the clouds above. He straightened out the formation and headed for the objective, at the same time losing altitude. Then he saw what he knew they'd have to contend with. About a mile in front of them and on a line with the hidden gun emplacement, six Albatross single-seaters dropped out of the protecting strata of clouds.

With his eyes glued on the enemy aircraft, he grabbed the mouthpiece of his phone and spoke with no show of emotion to his observer.

"They're right ahead of us, Kid, and coming this way. Get your hands on that gun and swing it forward over the top plane. All you gotta do is press the trigger. I'll dive under them. For God's sake, don't flop now. It's your last chance." Tommy bit his lip until the blood came. He was praying fervently that the Kid would be all right. He also realized that if he wasn't, his own chances of getting back alive were slim. He switched around in his seat and smiled reassuringly.

The Kid's face was set, and his hands trembled as

he fumbled with the Lewis. But Tommy could see a determination in his eyes. The boy was going to try this time, anyway.

Tommy looked over at Copely and Layden and signaled for a tighter formation. Then he pointed down. Bently waved back and nodded. He had spotted the objective, too. Then the three ships started down in the power zoom that would take them directly over the 155's, just as the Hun anti-aircraft began to crackle about them. Those babies on the ground were right on the job, no doubt about that. But suddenly the Archie stopped. The flight of Albatrosses had cut down to intercept.

With screeching wires and whining motors they knifed down, intent on chopping the three Bristols to pieces. Then, as the first Spandau lead streaked passed him, the Kid froze. Tommy threw himself around and yelled hoarsely with horror as he saw his observer. He still had his hands on the gun, but he wasn't even looking at the Albatrosses. He was gazing glassily over at Bently's diving two-seater. He looked as if he were in a trance.

Tommy turned around savagely. He realized at last that there was no hope for the Kid. He'd have to fight this out all by himself. The Bristols were still about half a mile from the gun emplacement when the single-seaters struck, and they charged in like a pack of wild bulls. Slicing lead darted in around the British ships forcing them to break formation. As they fell apart, the Germans cut in between them, still tearing up the sky with spurting tracer. An Albatross tore down on Tommy, but as it neared, he suddenly pulled out of his dive to meet the Hun head on, exchanging burst for burst. But Tommy had more guts than the German. He kept up the withering fire as the Vickers trembled rebelliously before him, and the Boche became panic-stricken. His hands left his trips as Tommy's tracer found its mark, and the Albatross fell away with motor smoking. "One out of the fight already," yelled Tommy gleefully as he slammed his ship around to join the battle. Temporarily he had put the Kid completely out of his mind.

Copely, Layden's gunner was working furiously. Layden was a smart pilot and he maneuvered his ship so that his gunner would have the most advantageous arc of fire. He spun his ship into a tight barrel roll with three Huns on his tail, but he fooled them all. He artfully pulled the Bristol out of the maneuver, leaving the three Albatrosses above and behind him. Then Copely opened up. He got the tail assembly of one of

the Boche ships with his first burst. His guns spoke savagely again and the other two Huns veered off to the right. But Tommy was right there to meet them. As one of the Germans felt the slugs smash their way through his ship, he glanced quickly around at Tommy surprise and horror written on his face. Then blood gushed from his mouth, and his head flopped crazily over on the cowling of his cockpit.

Then Tommy glanced below. Layden and Copely were diving at a dizzy speed toward the green earth below, with the two remaining Boche on their tail. And suddenly Tommy's heart was in his throat. The Bristol burst into flames! A moment later Layden and Copely passed into the great beyond. With a gigantic concussion, their ship crashed into the ground, and the two Albatrosses leveled off and spiraled up once more.

Tommy looked around frantically. Where the hell was Bently? And then he suddenly felt a sharp blow on the shoulder, and he turned around quickly. By God! The Kid had come to life. His face was flushed and his mouth was set in a straight line. He pointed down meaningfully, as he fondled his Lewis.

"The gun emplacement," he yelled above the roar of the motor. "We'll strafe it."

"You're crazy as hell. We'll never get away with it."

"Shut up and dive the ship. And bank."

The Kid was yelling, but he was cool and collected. Tommy shrugged and turned to his controls. He could see that the Kid meant what he said. He scanned the sky once more looking for Bently, and then he pointed the nose of his plane down. At about five thousand feet he met the climbing Albatrosses. But his speed carried him safely passed them, and they turned to follow him down. As he neared the ground, Tommy leveled off, meeting a raking machine gun fire. He dropped down to within a hundred feet of the knoll, then zoomed up. As he banked, the Kid opened up and splashed lead across the whole breadth of the emplacement. Tommy switched the ship around, and headed for the knoll once more as the two Albatrosses came tearing down across the sky.

But the Kid didn't even let them get near. He emptied his gun at them as they frantically pulled off in opposite directions. Coolly the boy changed the drum and waited until Tommy dived again. They sliced back and forth across the hidden gun at least six times, with the Kid opening up with everything he had each time. With the third trip over, the machine gun on the ground was silenced, and all they had

to contend with were the two Albatrosses. The Kid handled them like a demon. One was forced to land with a wing shot to ribbons, the other made only half hearted attempts at interceptions after that. With the fourth trip over, the two big guns ceased firing and men began to stream out from under the camouflaged covering. The Kid mowed them down mercilessly. He was like a madman with that gun. Then Tommy hoiked up. He looked back at the Kid as he climbed. The boy grinned sheepishly as he fitted a new drum into the Lewis.

As he leveled off at five thousand and headed for home, Tommy saw a batch of enemy single-seaters approaching on his left. But he and the Kid were way ahead of them. A few minutes later the battered Bristol crossed the line unmolested, and as they did so, Tommy cut the quaking motor and glided the rest of the way in.

AS THEY pancaked into their field, Tommy and the Kid could see a group of men on the field below. Then Tommy suddenly remembered Bently. Where the hell did that guy go to? He hated the prospects of having to report to Elverson that the new man was lost.

In a moment, the ship had landed and rolled to a stop. As Tommy and the Kid climbed out, a group of men with the C.O. at their head came charging across the field. Tommy whistled.

"By God, Kid, there's Bently. How the devil did he get back so soon?"

"He quit, the rat. I saw him do it. Watch it, here comes Elverson."

As he got within ear shot, Elverson boomed:

"Ashworth, you and your observer are under arrest. What the hell do you mean by deserting Bently?" The C.O. was sore as hops, and Bently, standing next to him looked sort of nervous.

"But, Sir—"

"No excuses, Ashworth. You two get into my office. If it wasn't for Bently here, those 155's would be still firing. Go on, move."

Silently Tommy and the Kid marched off across the field.

"Looks like our goose is cooked, Kid," whispered Tommy. "Bently must have put a phony report in and they'll take his word before they will ours."

"Take it easy, Tommy. We'll get out of this mess okay. Bently's trying to pull a fast one, but he won't get away with it." Tommy and the Kid walked into Elverson's office with their chief at their heels. He shut

the door, keeping the others out, and sat down at his desk. He was grim and red faced.

He accused the two men before him with cowardice in the face of the enemy. He told them how Bently had seen them veer off when the Albatrosses had attacked; of how they had refused to assist Layden and Copely, letting them fall to their deaths unaided, of how Bently, under the most difficult conditions, had dropped the six pounders, putting the 155's out of commission.

"And when he first landed, Bently said he thought that you had been shot down, too. But you were luckier than you should have been. After you get through with your court martial, you'll wish you had gone down. What have you got to say for yourselves?"

"Nothing, sir, except that Bently is lying like hell. He's the bird that scrambled when the Albatrosses intercepted us, and he never dropped those six pounders on those guns. The Kid and I straffed them. Why I never saw the guy—"

"Won't do you any good, Ashworth." Elverson was sneering. "Bently's uncle will be one of your judges. Another thing. He charges that you, Kid, wouldn't fire your gun. Says that a Boche, shot down near 28 the other day, gave him the low-down on you. You'll have a tough time explaining that away."

"I've got nothing to say to that, sir. How long before you'll ship us out?"

"About two hours. Consider yourselves under open arrest. You can go to your hut and pack." Elverson was talking softer now. "Ashworth, I'm sorry. I never thought you'd turn yellow. That's all."

Tommy was about to make a retort, but the Kid nudged him. Then they left the office.

"What's the matter with you," said Tommy when they were outside. "Can't you let a guy speak in his own defense?"

"Never mind. We're okay." There was a crafty look on the boy's face.

"Kid, I think you're going crazy."

"Come on, this way, Tommy. Over to the plane."

Tommy looked startled, but he complied in silence. As the two walked across the field, several officers, standing near headquarters, eyed them reprovngly. As they reached the Bristol, the Kid climbed into the rear cockpit and dragged out his camera.

"This is what does the trick," he said triumphantly.

"What do you mean?"

"Never mind. Wait till we get the plates developed."

"Now I know you're goofy," retorted Tommy. "We'll never get out of this jam."

“All right, let’s go to the lab. We’ve only got two hours.”

An hour and a half later, the Kid and Tommy walked into Elverson’s office.

They saluted, and then the C.O. spoke.

“Truck’ll be here in a few minutes for you. Are you both ready?”

“No, sir, we’re not ready and we won’t be.” Tommy was grinning like a school kid.

“What do you mean?” Elverson was getting sore all over again. “You’ve got my orders, haven’t you?”

“Yes, sir, but these pictures,” said the Kid. “We’d like you to take a look at them.” He laid two positives, still wet, on the desk.

Elverson looked down without saying a word and studied the prints before him. Then he looked up and whistled.

“By God, you fellows are all right.” Then he yelled for an orderly.

“Get Bently and bring him in here right away.”

Fifteen minutes later a patrol truck from H.Q. arrived. But Tommy and the Kid didn’t leave with it. They were sitting in their hut laughing to beat hell while a very disillusioned man by the name of Bently rattled back to H.Q. in the wagon.

“Kid, those were the swellest air pictures I ever saw. Elverson certainly changed his mind in a hurry when he saw that when Bently dropped all his eggs, he was headed for home and nowhere near that gun emplacement. It’s a good thing you were watching him. I didn’t see him at all.”

“Yea,” laughed the Kid. “When I saw Bently turn tail, I got sore as hell. I figured he’d come back with a cock and bull story, so I decided that I just had to snap out of it. Besides, ground strafing isn’t the same as fighting in the air. It’s swell fun.” The Kid was beaming all over.

“You’re all right, Kid,” said Tommy slapping him on the back. “The guy that named you the ‘Camera Kid’ sure knew what he was talking about.”