

# NIGHT BIRD

by SYL MACDOWELL

*He was an Indian and proud of the red blood than ran in his veins. When other wings failed to smash the force of that attacking horde, he tried in his own way and showed them that the redman knew the meaning of courage.*

## CHAPTER I NIGHT BIRD

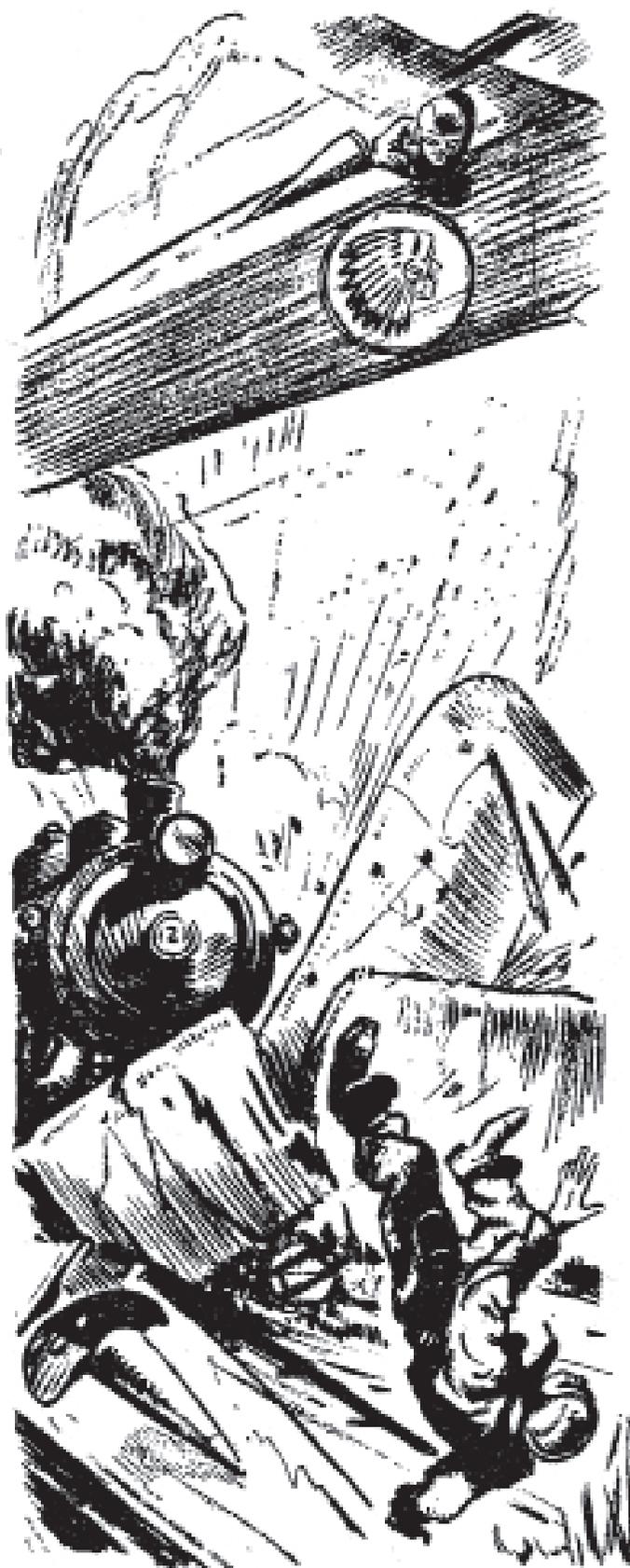
**J**UST A FEW DAYS BEFORE the mid-summer moon, a dark star swung low over the Western Front and beckoned to Vospigny airdrome. It was a summons to many brave pilots in Z Squadron to leave this world, and to go plunging, whirling, screeching on their fiery journey to the next.

It was one afternoon in this tragic month of June, 1918, that St. Peter sat at his desk in the headquarters hut of Z Squadron, fingering the pages of a long, black book. "St. Peter" was Z Squadron's nickname for Lieutenant Titterton, their personnel officer, and aide to Major Humphreys. The book contained the roll of Z Squadron's living and dead.

Fate had drawn a straight, red line through half of the names recorded there, a bloody line like a spurt of tracer from a Spandau. St. Peter was studying the crossed-off names of men recently dead but almost forgotten, when a long shadow fell across the pages of the black book. He glanced up through his horn-rimmed specs, then gave a nervous jump.

"Hel-lo!" he chirped. "Funny, but I didn't hear you enter!"

St. Peter stared up at a stranger, the weirdest, yet most majestic specimen of humanity that had ever reported for duty at the ill-starred Vospigny airdrome. Silently the specter stared back. Then reaching into



a blouse pocket, under the gold-embroidered army wings on his chest, the specter brought into view a report order. This he dropped on the open pages of the long, black book. The personnel officer picked up the order, opened it, and read.

“Oh!” he exclaimed. “Then you are Replacement No. 13!”

The specter nodded. His silence made him the more impressive. He stood like a giant in his cordovan boots, fully six feet and as many inches tall. He was slim as a strut and his hatchet face was totally devoid of expression. But most remarkable of all was his long, yellow hair and his curious, piercing green eyes, under singularly low, straight brows.

The report order identified him as “Willie Begay, second lieutenant.”

Willie Begay! “Hm-mm. Odd name,” commented St. Peter, fingering his horn rims and wondering how long it would be before he would cross this one off with red ink. “Is it American?”

Willie Begay’s chest rose. The specter was about to burst into the miracle of speech. St. Peter gripped his chair and waited. Then it came with a rumble like a freight train entering a nursery.

“American? Damn right!” The volume of the voice was utterly demoralizing.

“Of course, of course!” St. Peter hurriedly agreed. “Good old American name! Very!”

“My full, tribal name,” thundered the specter, without changing a facial muscle, “is Hostun-Wili-Begay, which in the Navajo dialect means Night Bird!”

“Bless my stars!” cried the personnel officer. “Then you’re a—a——”

“AN AMERICAN—an American Indian! Damn right!” The declaration was immediately followed by a faint squeak emanating from the other side of the room and a chair tipped over as its occupant sprang out of it and darted through a doorway that led into the august presence of Major Humphreys, commandant of Z Squadron. It was “Old Blighty,” the rum-nosed British liaison officer.

“I say, majah!” he gasped. “There’s a bally redskin in there! A bloody savage!”

“Say, have you gone dotty?” Major Humphreys looked up and grunted. “What in the devil do you mean?”

“A blawsted wild man! Prepare to be jolly well scalped!”

The major decided to take a chance with his scalp. He got up and poked it into the adjoining office.

“I was just coming in, sir,” St. Peter said, “to introduce this—er—Replacement No. 13. Begay, this is Major Humphreys.”

Willie Begay saluted gravely and shook hands with the major. Old Blighty peeked at proceedings over the major’s shoulder.

“Begay is an interesting ethnological specimen, sir,” added St. Peter, to whom all men had become mere impersonal entries in the long, black book. “If my comments may be pardoned, sir, you will note that he is not copper-skinned, with black hair and eyes, like most of his race. No indeed. Instead, he is as white as—as Old Blighty, there.”

Blighty ducked.

“Which means,” concluded St. Peter impressively, “that Begay is that rarest freak of human nature, an albino! Now an albino——”

“Don’t be an utter ass, Titterton!” the major finally burst out. “Show Begay to his shelf over in billets. Make yourself comfortable, Begay. I guess you’re a better camper than the rest of us, at that. And don’t mind this jittering popinjay!”

Willie Begay saluted again.

“Damn right!” he said.

His face was still as emotional as that of a cigar store statue as he turned and followed St. Peter out. As before, his officer boots trod the board floor as noiselessly as moccasins on a forest carpet of pine needles.

“Now!” gasped Old Blighty when he was gone. “Now we’re in for it, majah! ‘E prowls around nights, likely, with a bloody tommy’awk behind ‘is back! I knew a Brahmin in Calcutta who was one o’ these ‘ere albinos. So ‘elp me, the balmy blightah could see at night! Sober truth, majah! Like a bally owl ‘e was.”

Before many days to come, Old Blighty’s words turned out to be something in the way of a prophecy. Willie Begay prowled at nights. But it was not his mates who suffered.

These same mates did not extend any royal welcome to Willie Begay that night, his first at their mess. He was silently resented. Silently, that is, by all except Montgomery Biltway, the flight commander.

“Upon my word,” Captain Biltway declared over a glass of cognac, “a commission was once a bit of a distinction. But now, with these ‘gentlemen by Act of Congress’ entering the service in droves. Bah! Even this ignorant savage——”

“Hold on, skipper, hold on!” Eddie Dawson interrupted. He was Z Squadron’s shining ace, and

one of the few who dared contradict Biltway, the aristocrat.

“Let me straighten you out on that, skipper,” Eddie went on with a friendly grin. “Begay is a long ways from being ignorant. Not unless you classify yourself, a Harvard man, as a dumb-bell!”

“Just what,” Biltway demanded stiffly, “are you driving at?”

“Oh, nothing,” Eddie grinned, “except that Begay is a Carlisle man.”

A CHORUS of laughs went up from the listeners. Biltway flushed. He did not enjoy being laughed at.

“I saw Begay play in the big game with Cramford last fall,”

Eddie continued. “Man what a quarterback! He won the game with a thirty-yard run. It was just dusk, and it seemed that Cramford couldn’t see the play. But Begay, according to the story the sport pages told next day, has the gift of night vision. Anyhow, I hope he can fly like he plays football, that’s all I gotta say!”

Biltway’s annoyance had not departed, so he persisted.

“All right, Eddie, put it on a social basis then. Would you claim that this—this aborigine is a social equal?”

“Why not?”

“Why, dammit, he is a governmental ward! He’s an Indian!”

“Listen, Monty. I happen to remember something else about Begay. He doesn’t go around bragging about it, but he’s the son of a Navajo chief. There’s royal blood in his veins!”

“Bah!”

“Think of it—his ancestors were chiefs and warriors. They were counting coup before your Dutch great-grandfather immigrated to New York and started a head-cheese factory down by a slaughter-house! Besides, skipper, this outfit is not an exclusive club. We don’t need gentlemen—we need fighters!”

There was a murmur of approbation around the table. Eddie forced a laugh as he finished. But Captain Biltway’s annoyance remained plainly written on his face.

“All right, let it go at that,” he said shortly. “But it takes white-man courage for air fighting. Little Hiawatha won’t——”

At that moment, Captain Biltway became aware of a new presence in the mess hut. He turned and saw Willie Begay! That catlike tread was disconcerting. Biltway arose, a bit flustered.

“Oh, there you are, old man,” he said. “Met everybody?”  
The way that Willie Begay looked at the skipper

was proof of the Indian’s gift of instantly recognizing a hypocrite. But he acknowledged the introductions very gravely. Without so much as a flicker of an eyelash he shook hands around, then found his seat on the bench alongside Eddie Dawson. Eddie was still a little aroused over the argument and he went out of his way to be cordial to the Indian.

“How did you happen to enter the air service, Begay?” he asked.

The Navajo paused before answering. The others waited in silence to hear him.

“It was this way,” he finally replied in his deep voice. His English was as perfect as Biltway’s own. “One year ago I saw an airplane for the first time. I said, in a single hour this birdman travels as far as I can travel by riding hard all day and all night on a horse.”

“So then you decided to fly, too?”

“Damn right!” It was this frequent interjection that was Begay’s only uncouthness. The others watched him covertly as he ate. In his conduct he was no different from the rest. Yet, lurking in back of that broad, straight brow, every one realized that there lurked the mysticism of an ancient people. He was one apart. After awhile he turned to Eddie Dawson.

“My father,” he said, “is very old. He is a Navajo medicine-maker and once fought Hopi, Ute, Sioux and the Apache. He is a leader of chants and a priest of the sand-paintings on the Little Colorado. My people call him a very wise man. Yet——”

He smiled reminiscently.

“Yet, he has some strange ideas. He doubts even now that men fly through the air and make war beneath the waters. Before I came to France he said, ‘The telephone I can understand, though it is white man’s magic. It is a hollow wire through which words pinched thin will travel. But such things as flying and wireless—excuse me, that is too much!’”

EDDIE laughed. The others finished and one by one left the table. When Biltway was gone, Willie Begay leaned close to Eddie and asked:

“He, then, is our air boss?”

“Yes. What do you think of him?”

The Indian shook his head.

“My old grandmother,” he answered, “Abieta Isleta, is a better man than he. She carried a pinon-pine log, which burned all last winter, from Corn Rock to Laguna Canyon, which is many miles!”

Eddie laughed again. He found Willie Begay’s views amusingly quaint, yet keen.

In some vague, mysterious, aboriginal way, Willie Begay sensed Eddie Dawson's genuine friendship. That night there began one of those strange friendships that were sometimes born at the Front.

The latter part of June, 1918, will never be forgotten by those who live, of the intrepid buzzards who flew and fought above Vospigny sector. The Boche was preparing his last, desperate counter-offensive with the ferocity of a tiger at bay. The hellish death welter on the tortured earth was splashed like blood across the skies.

Thus Willie Begay was plunged at once into Germany's fiercest air fighting since Verdun. And opposed to Z Squadron was that dread staffel whose ships bore the ugly Scythe and Hooded Skull insignia, Baron von Boehme's Circus.

Ten days from the time that Willie Begay reported at the desk of St. Peter Tttertton, Z Squadron had proudly claimed him for one of her honored sons. His picturesque tribal name had become his *nom de guerre*. From the St. Etinee to the Marne, the fame of the Night Bird had spread. Lone, hair-raising voluntary patrols were his fierce delight. Most of them he flew at night, often in uttermost darkness. Roaring wings in a black sky presaged many a raid over enemy concentration points.

Eddie Dawson tried to warn the Navajo against the dangers of night-flying. But the Indian with the strange catlike green eyes, only scoffed at him.

"I feel very much at home," he said. "No-Man's-Land looks like the Navajo country—like the Little Colorado Desert, which is all the white man has left to us. The rending and scarring of earthquakes, the slashing of violent rains, the wind-swept buttes and barren arroyos of my country looks like this shell-blasted Front. Yes, my friend, I feel at home over No-Man's-Land."

"That is all very poetic," answered Eddie, "but suppose you get lost on one of these crazy midnight hops?"

"What, an Indian get lost?" Willie Begay chuckled deep in his throat. "Does the wild bird lose its way?"

He was a born hunter, too, Willie Begay was, and he stalked far over German areas. He flew fearlessly and sensationally. His was the combined skill of an educated mind and a primitive warrior. The day he bagged his fifth Boche, crashing a master-duellist of the Scythe and Skull pack within two kilometers of his home tarmac, then actually descending and ripping the helmet from the dead aviator's head for a scalp-lock—the day he did this and became an ace, he found himself a rival as well as a friend and confidant of Eddie Dawson, the flaming meteor of Z Squadron.

## CHAPTER II THEIRS BUT TO OBEY

**B**UT THE RIVALRY did not diminish their strange camaraderie, and Captain Biltway proposed a celebration. With a fine sporting gesture he rushed over to Vospigny in the major's motor-cycle side car and returned with an armload of genuine old Chateau Yquem, covered with cobwebs that looked as though they had been spun some time previous to the Franco-Prussian War.

"We'll drink to-night to 'The Vanishing American,'" the skipper proposed.

But when the bubbling joy was poured, Willie Begay turned down his glass! There was an awkward silence. Biltway reddened.

"Just an old Western custom?"

Willie Begay, expressionless as usual, merely shook his head.

"A prohibitionist, I suppose?"

Willie Begay's mouth opened and he rumbled his usual laconic utterance.

"Damn right!"

Biltway got to his feet. He swayed slightly and clutched at the table for support. He was getting that way often nowadays, the skipper was. There was an ominous silence.

"Listen, Begay. There are times when prohibitionists—even prohibitionists, if they happen to be gentle men—" He put a nasty emphasis on the word.

Eddie Dawson sprang to his feet.

"Hold it, skipper!" he pleaded. "Listen, fellows! Begay, here, won't speak up in his own behalf, but by thunder I'll speak for him! I'm going to tell you why he doesn't drink.

"Most of you know that there is an old law back in the States that makes it a felony to supply liquor to an Indian. Why is that law? I'll tell you why. I'll tell you why that law holds just as strongly as it did in pioneer days. Firewater does things to an Indian that it doesn't do to us! It makes a crazy demon out of him. He cannot distinguish between friend and foe. That is why Willie Begay, man that he is, passes it up!"

Everybody started to breath again. "Red" Brink spoke up, "Is that right, Begay?"

The Night Bird nodded.

“He says ‘damn right,’” grinned Eddie Dawson.

Then everybody started talking at once, and laughing, and drinking the genuine old Chateau Yquem without any toast. The awkward moment had passed, but the breach between Biltway and Willie Begay had widened appallingly.

The days passed. Glorious midsummer came, with its promise of bounty from the vine-clad hills of France. But the only fruitage that the Allies saw and hoped for was peace. Every effort on land and sky was bent on crushing Germany. From Rembercourt to Vospigny, and from Vospigny to Neufchatel, von Boehme’s Scythe and Hooded Skull was the sinister symbol that marked the fall of scores of Allied airmen. Replacements continued to pour into Z Squadron. Almost daily, little red lines were drawn through some fallen flyer’s name. But the Night Bird survived, and his coups increased.

Major Humphreys was fast becoming a nerve-frazzled wreck. The constant death toll was bringing white to his hair, lines to his face, and a lurking dread in his eyes that bordered on despair.

“Ten men lost in a fortnight,” he groaned one night, glancing through Titterton’s long, black book.

“Ghastly, old fellow, simply ghastly,” sympathized Old Blighty. “And von Boehme always gets the wrong ones. Suppose, now, that he downed this grumpy wild Indian——”

I WISH I had a whole tribe like him!” vowed the major. “He could stop more Fokkers with a bow and arrow than some of these youngsters can with their Vickers!”

“I say, I say! That’s just what makes me afraid of him, majah! On my word, I’m afraid of ’im!”

“Childish!” snorted the major.

“Oh, very likely! A childhood fear that was bred, I suppose, when as a little tot I read Wild West tales and——”

“That’s the trouble!” put in St. Peter Titterton happily. “You’ve got a lingering psychosis! What you need is a——”

“Is a drink, dammit!” finished Major Humphreys. “Pour me one too!”

“Right,” said Old Blighty, reaching for the cognac.

The cognac was gurgling into glasses and Old Blighty was raising his drink with a “cheerio” when they heard the sputter of an approaching motor cycle.

The three of them stopped and listened. The

sputter drew closer, became a roar. Then with a squeal of brakes it stopped at the door of headquarters hut.

“Some new, impossible order, I suppose,” growled the major. “It sounds like a headquarters messenger.”

It was. The messenger entered with a large, official envelope in his hand. Major Humphreys ripped it open.

“Orders!” he groaned. “More orders!”

Old Blighty and St. Peter peeped over his shoulder to read.

“Confidential” was stamped in large letters over the top of the following order:

“G.H.Q. has received reliable information revealing the enemy’s plans for a determined drive on Vospigny sector and the whole St. Mihiel area. The drive begins at sunrise to-morrow. Z Squadron will employ all possible vigor in keeping the enemy blind to American troop movements. At the same time, the railway train that will bear the Imperial High Command from Murvaux to Ste. Mondelle must be halted or destroyed at any cost. This drive is the most desperate offensive of the German Third Army since 1914 and sacrifice must not be considered at the cost of results.”

“God!” The major’s voice was husky. “It is impossible! Ste. Mondelle is twenty kilos behind the lines. And Murvaux is twenty kilos beyond that!”

“I say! And you may be sure that the Imperial train will be jolly well escorted. The pick of von Boehme’s fighters will protect it.”

“To say nothing,” Titterton put in, “of the twenty kilos of defenses that undoubtedly border the right-of-way between Ste. Mondelle and Murvaux! A terrible assignment, sir!”

But the major did not hear them. He was wondering how he was going to order his best pursuit pilots on this suicidal mission. At length he spoke as one stricken.

“We have barely enough men and ships to maintain the close-in patrols, to keep the enemy blinded,” he said. “It means just one thing. A Flight must go across the lines—alone!”

That night a scrawl on the call-board informed the outfit that at dawn A Flight would proceed on the train-destroying mission. A flight was composed of five ships. And the names of their pilots were chalked on the call-board like a list of the doomed.

IN THE order of their flight positions they were named.

Biltway  
Brink     Anderson  
Dawson     Begay

“At any cost!” The cost assuredly would be a heavy one to Z Squadron, to lose any one of these five aces. And the odds seemed depressingly great against any one of them returning!

There was a cessation of the usual banter and song and clinking of glasses that night. The usual roistering that had come to be the only respite of these hard driven pilots from cankering care.

It was shortly after mess, when Captain Biltway, grim, silent and pale-lipped, called his little command around a table, that Eddie Dawson noted the absence of Willie Begay. He climbed the rickety stairs and saw that the Indian’s cot was empty. He descended and, crossing the smoke-filled mess room, he lifted the blanket that hooded the outer door and slipped outside.

For a few moments he could not see, out under the stars. Then he listened. There was the usual distant din of the Front, the reverberation of heavy firing. But as he listened there came to his ears another sound. It seemed to come from beyond the hangar sheds. He crossed the tarmac and as he walked the strange sound became more distinct. He rounded the hangars and approached a small hillock that bordered a patch of woods, overlooking the runway. And then he saw Willie Begay. He stood, silhouetted against the sky, his face upraised, his long, yellow locks a-flutter in the night breeze.

Eddie Dawson felt himself strangely affected. He was embarrassed, too, as though he had come upon some one at prayers. All at once he realized that he did not know, perhaps never could really know, this mysterious, taciturn, blond-haired Indian. They were more than creatures of a different race. There was a gulf of centuries between them, a separation of creed and culture which even the deepest friendship could only thinly span.

The aborigine’s voice was raised in song. It came, a quavering cry, a weird medley, a long-sustained note; now a crooning refrain, a sad, halt-wild cry, an abysmal wail; then a glad, lilting paeon of victory. And through it all was woven eerie minors of despair.

It was a medicine song.

Very silently Eddie Dawson turned back, re-crossed the tarmac, and reentered the mess hut. It was some time later when Willie Begay made his characteristic noiseless appearance. Biltway by now had seated

himself at the table. A map was spread under a light. He studied it for a while, then touching a match to a cigarette with a hand that was not entirely steady, he called his flight about him.

“Really not much for me to say,” he told the four of them. “No use expecting a miracle. They just don’t happen. You know what we’re up against, every one of you.”

It was not a cheering attitude for a leader to take. The pilots shrugged and felt uncomfortable. Eddie Dawson thought he saw the barest flicker of disgust cross Willie Begay’s usually expressionless face.

“Nevertheless,” Biltway continued, “we hop at the crack of dawn and head for Ste. Mondelle. At Ste. Mondelle, or a little beyond, I will give a signal which will mean for you all to cut and go into a long glide.”

“BUT, will it be light enough then for us to see a visual signal, skipper?” Eddie Dawson asked.

Biltway flushed, but covered up quickly.

“Let us say, then, when I dip, then nose down, that will be the gliding signal,” he stammered. “At any rate, we will be around 12,000 then, barring unforeseen circumstances. We will form in echelon and proceed eastward hedge-hopping, grass-cutting, even dragging dust. The light will be uncertain still, as you say, Eddie, so we will be fairly safe from ground fire. What is more important, we will stand some chance of escaping the eye of von Boehme.

“Mind you, there will be no B Flight upstairs to fend off an attack. B Flight will be back here, patrolling our own positions. We will be out on our own.

“The odds are twenty-to-one that we’ll ever reach that on-coming train. Nevertheless, the major has ordered me to equip each ship with a bundle of bombs. Now here is the dope.

“If we are attacked by hopeless odds, and the train is not in sight, lay some of those eggs on the track. Empty your racks before you go into action with the Fokkers, of course. Destroy track, bridges, stations. Telephone lines, even. Fight it out with von Boehme, but keep going! Now, any questions?”

At this, Eddie Dawson, who was half-reclining with one leg thrown over the corner of the table, straightened up and faced Biltway.

“No,” he said, “no questions, skipper. But may I offer a suggestion?”

“Shoot.”

“Suppose we were the backfield and an end on a football team, we five. How would we get the ball past a strong line?”

"I don't play football," Biltway snapped. "Besides, this isn't——"

"I can answer that question, Eddie," broke in Red Brink, who had been a fullback sensation. "We would signal for a trick end run, then play interference to beat hell!"

"Right, Red! Go to the head of the class," said Eddie. He turned again to the flight commander.

"Now skipper, every man on A Flight, except yourself, is a football man. Willie Begay, here, is a star. Now let us suppose he is carrying the ball, which in this case would be enough explosive to blow that train to hell. Why not let him try a wide end run while we block von Boehme?"

"Damn right!" ejaculated the Indian, edging in close.

Biltway shook his head.

"I can't see the idea, at all, Eddie," he protested. "After all, war isn't football. And the big chief here will find it out before he gets back to-morrow. This will be a little different than chicken-roost raids after dark!"

"But, skipper! If just one man reaches that confounded train, that will wreck the Imperial High Command! And it will halt the advance!"

"Sorry, Eddie. Football isn't war. That's all. Better turn in, fellows. Good night."

Whereupon Biltway turned his back to them and strolled off, leaving four indignant pilots.

"So!" snorted Red Brink. "Football isn't war, huh? Like hell it ain't! I bet if our coach back at St. Mary's was a general, he'd win this cussed war in six weeks!"

"Damn right!" agreed Willie Begay.

There wasn't much left to say. One by one, the fated flyers of A Flight headed billetwards. The inexorable hours were ticking off, and four a.m. comes early, when beyond lies—Eternity!

The aroma of coffee, the clump of bootheels on rough pineboard floor, the crackle of revving motors down by the hangar sheds greeted A Flight as they awakened from fitful, uneasy slumber. Day brings a renewal of hope and they rose eager to brush wings with the Unknown out there where dawn was spreading a fan of peacock hue across the eastern sky.

### CHAPTER III WARLOCKS

**T**HE FIVE PILOTS OF A FLIGHT lingered on the starting line, puffing parting cigarettes before climbing into their Spads. Biltway snarled last-minute words of instruction. He was haggard from a sleepless night. His nerves seemed fuzzier than ever.

In the bomb-racks of the under-wings, each of the five ships carried four demolition bombs. Biltway insisted on his original plan. There would be no interference play, no wide end-run of a single explosive-laden plane.

Willie Begay was carrying one bit of a burden more than the others, however. Eddie Dawson had seen him take it from his plunder in billets when he arose. It was a small, tightly-rolled package.

Biltway noticed it, too. His eyes fastened on it and he came up to the Indian and laid a hand on the object.

"Nothing useful in there for enemy information, is there?"

Willie Begay shook his head.

"A war bonnet, perhaps? Or the scalp of some early settler?"

But the Navajo was as mute as usual. He climbed to his pit without even troubling to answer. Biltway scowled, then turned away, flinging his cigarette down the slipstream. Willie Begay tucked the little package under his arm like a football as he clambered from the wing to his seat, pulled down his goggles, and wiggled his controls.

The motors were turned up. Chocks were pulled, and five Spads, following one another in quick succession, sped down the runway and leaped off into the murk of dawn. They became whirring blotches, with spurts of orange fire licking out from their exhausts. A Flight's desperate mission had begun.

They rose as they passed Emerycourt, an American ammunition dump. The terrain was rolling hills, with here and there a rectangle of dark woods. The Spads bucked and plunged in their ascent through bumpy air.

The air grew thin and cold between Emerycourt and Pont-a-Mousson, which was in contested territory.

Over Pont-a-Mousson they received their good-morning salutations from the Boche. A flaming onion blazed in the sky ahead and slightly under them.

It was close enough so the concussion smote their underwings with a rather solid impact. Biltway, being in the point of the phalanx, probably received the severest jolt. But the fragmentation missed them by a wide margin. For that reason, the following pilots were surprised and dismayed to see their leader fall out of formation.

They cut their guns, thinking his pause was caused by some minor mechanical difficulty. But Biltway continued to lose altitude. His wings rocked uncertainly. Surely he could not be hit! Archie was evidently encouraged because a shower of bursts broke close around them now. It was no time to linger at this lowered level. They had dropped below 10,000.

They saw the flight commander stand up in his cockpit. He waved a "highball" at them. He wanted them to go on! Simultaneously they poured on the juice and rose out of Archie range, Biltway falling behind. Eddie Dawson looked back. When Biltway was almost out of sight in the murky dawn, he saw him turn back—toward Vospigny!

Behind their goggles, more than one pair of eyes narrowed suspiciously. Biltway, contrary to his own last orders, had turned back! It did not seem possible that he had been hit by Archie. The bursts were not close enough. Eddie Dawson looked across at Begay. The Indian raised a hand and jabbed down his spine. It was sign-talk of the air, signifying, "he felt a wind up his back!"

BUT the remaining four headed on into the east. The pink of dawn was on their wings now. They left the futile Archie bursts behind them without further casualty. Leaderless, they flew on to Ste. Mondelle. It was fighting light when the smoke pall above the railroad terminal hove into view. All four flyers scanned the sky for sign of Fokkers. Ste. Mondelle was dangerous territory—an important town, mobilization point and ammunition dump, usually well-guarded.

They were beyond the reach of ground fire, though, and had only flying foe to fear. They put the town behind and with a common accord slanted off into the long glide that had been a part of Biltway's strategy. As they neared the earth, the gleaming twin ribbons of steel that marked the railway came into view. The right-of-way followed a long, winding valley toward Murvaux. Somewhere, less than twenty kilos—less

than ten minutes of flying time ahead of them—was that special train bearing the Imperial High Command!

They had not gone far before Archie became furious. The four Spads darted and dodged like snipe to evade the bursts. It was a veritable barrage, a part of the Third Army's preparedness for protecting that vital train. A curtain of steel!

The war-god Oraibi must have been on all of their wings during that perilous passage, perhaps Willie Begay's medicine song had enlisted the aid of that pagan deity. For they were unharmed in a sky that screamed with hurtling missiles bent on their destruction.

The air was filled with myriad blossoms of lemon-colored smoke. The Spads rocked dangerously as the closer bursts sent vast billows which wrenched at their wings. Fragments of exploded shells clutched like phantom fingers for their fragile targets. But A Flight roared on.

In one way, Archie is like a noisy jay. His behavior is a tell-tale method of detecting an unheralded presence. It was so this day. A sudden cessation of firing brought the senses of these veterans of the air instantly alert. They scanned the skies around them with renewed vigor.

Willie Begay was the first to see them. He jabbed a pointing finger upward and Eddie Dawson followed the direction he indicated.

A Fokker pack! Like fowl, rapacious birds of prey, these enemy planes waited in ambush. They were high up, poised for a diving attack. Eddie counted them. Twelve! He groaned inwardly. What hopeless odds—twelve furious Fokkers, already holding the battle gauge against the four desperate Spads.

Willie Begay ripped off his helmet. It was his way, when going into a fight. His long yellow hair streamed out like a Viking's mane. It was a battle plume that was fast growing famous along the Front. Von Boehme's killers would know now that they were pitted against no stripling. This blond battle flag had flown before over their vanquished comrades.

Brink and Anderson saw the enemy overhead a few seconds later. They wiggled their wings in uncertainty. What to do? Should they carry out Biltway's orders and release their bombs on the rails beneath, then meet the enemy? Those slivers of lightning on their underwings weighed heavy. They impeded a fighting ship appallingly. They had enough explosive to create terrific havoc, yet damage to the railroad would not be

a decisive thrust at the advance. Orders could emanate from the Imperial train, even though its arrival at Ste. Mondelle were delayed. The Third Army would crunch onward.

Eddie Dawson decided. They must bomb that train! At least one man must reach the main objective! He must live long enough to carry through.

DAWSON dipped for attention and tried to zoom into the lead. Could he signal his meaning to his fellow-flyers in time, before that Fokker pack was upon them?

But the problem was suddenly wrested from him. Willie Begay casting off his safety belt, stood erect in his cockpit. He raised an arm with a gesture like a chief in battle. He thus gained the attention of his comrades. They watched him closely as he brought into view the cylindrical package which he had carried from the tarmac, the package that Biltway had so pointedly queried him about.

As they watched, he whipped the thing loose. It caught the slipstream and extended behind him. It was a red pennant!

They blinked and looked again. A Carlisle pennant! A glad light sprang to three goggle-masked visages. They cheered into the roar of their Hissos as Willie Begay hooked the pennant against the trailing edge of his top wing. He twirled a hand over his head. It was an eloquent gesture.

"Stand 'em off!" it seemed to mean.

Dawson, Anderson and Brink, football men, all grasped the message instantly. The Fokkers were nose down now, plunging on them at vicious velocity. Willie Begay waited until the ugly brood was almost upon them, then he rolled out of formation. He slipped perilously on his right wing for a distance that brought him almost flat upon the earth. Then he headed at a sharp tangent for a gap in the hills to the south!

Dawson, Anderson and Brink gathered like a well-drilled backfield does when a fumble is recovered. They gathered to throw themselves at the enemy so that the man with the ball could twist free of the near-by tacklers.

Aerial football! Between him and the on-coming Fokkers, Willie Begay had left his teammates. Theirs was the task to play interference! He was repeating the famous play that had vanquished Cramford!

It was the same half-light, in which he was master, but in which the enemy followed his maneuver vaguely. For the outline of his Spad was fairly lost now

upon the multi-shaded pattern of the ground. But instead of ten players left to balk the enemy he had now but three. Eddie Dawson, Brink and Anderson waited to catch the brunt of von Boehme's attack.

For all the gravity of their position, Eddie pounded the edge of his cockpit and babbled joyously. What noble savvy Brink and Anderson had. That fluttering red pennant had instantly told them the story. It was a symbol which they, as gridiron veterans, understood. No doubt they, too, were howling football cheers into the scream of their racing Hispanos.

Von Boehme did not attempt to divide his forces. He centered his onslaught on the three ships grouped in a pitifully short echelon. The breaking away of one of their fellows he had assumed to be a bolting, a cowardly getaway!

All of these elements conspired together to give Willie Begay those precious moments he required to get away from the Fokkers and speed beyond the screening hills. Once beyond them, he paralleled the valley of the railroad. On full throttle he rocketed toward the on-coming Imperial train!

Back with Eddie Dawson, Brink and Anderson, things were less serene. The Fokker horde descended upon them with a screaming rush and a ripple of slugs. But the overwhelmed Americans had at least one advantage! Their targets were four times as numerous! The sky seemed filled with Fokkers, black-winged Fokkers, their fuselages decorated with that grisly emblem, the Scythe and Hooded Skull.

AS ONE of these enemy ships stitched a row of black holes in his right wing, Eddie put another in his sight ring and pulled the trigger stick. One of von Boehme's killers went over on one wing, a trickle of smoke spurting from under its fuselage. Then a tongue of flame. It nosed down and started to spin. Dead bird!

He spun around and saw Anderson flash past him, a Fokker close on his tail. Eddie swung his nose toward the pursuer and had the satisfaction of seeing the German throw his stick back and zoom out of what, in another second, would have been a deadly head-on collision.

That saved Anderson for a while, anyhow. He saw a second Fokker falling. The Boche pilot lolled limply in his seat, whipping from side to side as the Fokker's death-spins increased. Brink had gotten his man!

The air, despite the losses, seemed fuller than ever with the diving, zooming, whirling, madly maneuvering planes. Black crosses whipped in and out

of Eddie's ring sights. He fired burst after burst. He saw his own wing fabric tatter and ripple, as spurts of tracer ripped it.

Eddie's right gun, heated from too constant fire, jammed. He cursed and dived from between two Fokkers. Even the stoutest fighter now could see that the battle was hopeless. Defeat was certain. The plucky trio had only staved it off for a time.

As Eddie dove, Spandaus rained slugs on him from several angles. Such a cross-fire no flyer could escape. His ship was almost shot to pieces. Now came a stream of steel, flicked against his instrument board, shattering dials and gauges. Particles of flying glass cut his hands and face. Then oil spurted against him—not burning oil!

His Hiss sobbed and died. Ragged bits of fabric flapped on his wings, threatening to strip off.

He fluttered giddily and slanted down on a dead stick. But as he did so, there floated into the crazy pattern of earth and sky and whirling planes a sight that brought a thrill of hope. Around a bend, a kilo up the track, perhaps a thousand feet below, came a train—the Imperial High Command's special!

He must stretch out that glide, so as to strike at that train as he fell. He balanced the Spad with the stick, and cheered as he felt the tattered wings grip the air as though they understood this final demand that was being made of them. Then his cheers died in a groan.

He groaned, because he saw whirling wings, down close to the ground. They were marked with two starred cocards. It was Red Brink. Poor Brink, having to die with his goal in sight!

Writhing in that uncanny semblance to the death throes of a living thing that a falling plane so often acquired, the Spad crashed. There rose a column of dust and debris that formed a merciful shroud for Red Brink, as his load of bombs spent their fury on the craft that bore them.

As the pall of dust floated away, it revealed only an ugly crater. No vestige of the Spad was left. What could such terrific force have done to that on-coming train!

Von Boehme's Fokkers were so intent on pursuing the sole remaining survivor of the tragic expedition—Anderson—that they neglected to follow Eddie Dawson. His crippled ship, ragged like a bird with many missing wing feathers, glided toward the train.

In the train was the nerve center of the German Third Army. In it were four coaches full of gold-braided staff officers and their corps of assistants. Machine guns bristled from the front of the

locomotive. Anti-aircraft batteries rode on flat-cars. Shadows of swirling, vigilant Fokkers flitted beside the train. But all of this maze of defense, including the batteries lining the right-of-way, were made impotent now. Hundreds of eyes stared up, in dread suspense, as the falling Spad plunged dead-on toward the gleaming coaches.

BUT Eddie Dawson stretched the glide a fraction too far. The Spad rocked dangerously, then fell off on a wing and slipped the last few feet of its earthward plunge.

Sideways the Spad fell crashing a half-coach length ahead of the on-rushing train, throwing its pilot clear of the cockpit into the swamp alongside the tracks.

The last image that registered on Eddie Dawson's mind was the horrified face of the locomotive engineer. The German's head was thrust from his cab window. He was in the agony of indecision. He did not know whether to apply the brakes, or to speed past the falling menace.

He never lived to regret his choice. Because Eddie Dawson's Spad, a crumpled heap, was under the front of the locomotive almost instantly. Then—the terrific explosion!

Eddie Dawson was under several feet of water and soft, clinging ooze when the blinding roar disintegrated the locomotive like a cardboard toy.

The roar was followed by a dense cloud of steam and flying metal, a vortex into which the four coaches bearing the Imperial High Command toppled, crumpled, shattered and telescoped.

Eddie Dawson came to the surface of the stagnant pond mercifully spared from the thunderous concussion. As he came up, sputtering and gouging mud from his eyes, he heard the prolonged grind and roar of the train that had toppled onto the other side of the raised track embankment! A shower of gravel and cinders and debris was falling and he ducked under the bulrushes.

In a few seconds he stood up again. There was a gap blasted in the right-of-way. Through it he glimpsed the heap of what a short time before had been a train, laden with Germany's destiny! Dust and smoke rose from the ruined coaches, and spurts of flame were licking out like serpent tongues. He stood there, shoulder high in the rushes, and stared. The fearful medley of screams from injured and dying filled the air; harpish chords like wind moaning in wires.

Although caution bade him remain hidden,

that awful windrow of death created an irresistible attraction for Eddie Dawson. He crawled out of the mire and through the gap blasted in the embankment. From the mass of twisted steel rails and shattered ties, he gazed in awe upon the wholesale destruction his bombs had wrought.

From a near-by battery, rescuers already were pouring and running toward the wreck. Several bodies, thrown clear of the wreckage, were in plain view. One of these was the motionless corpse of a staff officer. The body was hideously misshapen from the violence that had crunched it lifeless. But it wore a resplendent uniform. The gold braid and shoulder markings proved the dead Boche to be a staff general.

Eddie dimly wondered what the death toll was. Somehow, he felt no responsibility for this holocaust of suffering and destruction. Surely, the act had not been deliberate on his part. He felt a strange detachment from the scene. He was but a spectator.

Unconsciously Eddie reached for his cigarettes, not realizing that he was mud-soaked from head to foot. His eyes again traveled to the dead general. He had to act quickly. He ran out and knelt by the corpse, depending upon his disheveled condition to conceal his American uniform. He plunged a hand into the officer's pockets until he was rewarded with a case filled with cigarettes, and matches. Then he ran back to the cover of the bulrushes.

As Eddie Dawson lit one of the German's cigarettes, he heard a hum far above. He looked up and was thrilled to see a familiar outline—a Spad!

It was a day for miracles, even though Biltway had told his flight, the night before, that miracles could not be expected. For the lone Spad was making a sun-dive on the wreck. It hurtled down at comet speed, its Hisso howling. The ground batteries were disorganized, nearly deserted; for their crews had run to the wreck and were now extracting the living victims from the blazing debris.

#### CHAPTER IV BOCHE AND BULRUSHES

**T**HE ON-COMING SPAD thus was ignored. No Archie bursts harassed it. Machine-gun nests were silent. Not until the Spad swooped low over the wreck did Eddie Dawson recognize it. He had not dared to hope. But now he saw a red bit of cloth fluttering from the trailing edge of the top wing.

It was Willie Begay! Willie was completing his amazing end-run!

The sky was clear of enemies, so he circled. Eddie stood up in his clump of rushes and waved wildly, as Willie Begay zoomed the wreck again. The Navajo passed so close that Eddie saw his thatch of yellow hair.

Willie Begay was craning behind him. He had seen the waving. There was a moment of gripping suspense, then to Eddie Dawson's vast delight he saw the Indian pilot drop his hand over the side of the plane. The recognition signal! Willie Begay had seen his fallen comrade! The Spad did not circle the wreck again, but climbed steeply. For rescuers were running from the wreck, back to their batteries. They would soon be splitting the air with projectiles.

Eddie Dawson watched the Indian's Spad until it was out of sight. Willie Begay was heading for Vospigny. But Eddie felt confident that his friend would find some way to return and rescue him. So he settled down in his clump of bulrushes like a moor hen, and waited.

As the rescue work proceeded on the wreck, a field kitchen rumbled up and stopped within a hundred yards of the spot where the American was hidden. His soaked clothing was uncomfortable and his feet were numb. The odor of cooking wafted to his nostrils. He could hear the rattle of messgear as the rescue squads visited the field kitchen.

The day dragged on. When a Red Cross stretcher crew picked up the dead general, Eddie was compelled to almost submerge himself to avoid detection, because some of the Boche passed within a few feet of his hiding place. His legs grew cramped. He alternately stood and sat neck deep in the mud and water. A train from Murvaux came up and carried away scores of dead and injured.

Late in the day a special train came from the direction of Ste. Mondelle and a labor company began to patch the bombed track. As night came, the workers piled the debris of shattered coaches into huge bonfires and worked by the glow of them.

Eddie was glad when darkness came, because he then did not have to be so vigilant to escape the eye of the many Germans working near him—so near that he could hear their talk, their grunts as they bent at their task.

He was weak and cold and hungry. The nearness of the field kitchen was tantalizing. He wondered how long it would be before he would collapse.

“Yet I can’t take a chance on slipping away from this place,” he told himself, “because if Willie Begay took the risk of returning and didn’t find me here—Besides, I wouldn’t have a chance in a thousand to get out of Germany.”

The thought of surrendering had not entered his mind. There was a thin sliver of moon in the sky and Eddie, hopeful of another miracle in this day of miracles, scanned the sky in search of wings, avenging wings. For Willie Begay.

He must have grown careless and stood erect among the screen of rushes. For all at once he heard a soft exclamation near him. He spun around and saw the dark shadow of a man beside the pond. The man spoke to him in German. Eddie’s heart beat with terrific thumps, but that was his only answer. He knew not a word of the Fatherland’s tongue.

“*VERZOGT!*” The fellow was suspicious, thinking this silent one in the rushes was a deserter.

“I’ll have to bluff it through, somehow!” Eddie told himself.

He peered at his challenger, who was evidently one of the workmen. He carried no rifle. But he hunched up his shoulders now and put one foot in the water. It was time for quick, decisive action. Eddie took three steps, then flung himself on the man with a hearty curse.

“So!” ejaculated the German in English, much to Eddie’s surprise. “Un American, by golly!” He had barely got the words from his lips when a fist caught him on the chin and he tumbled over on his back, with a shout. Eddie pounced on the man and seized his windpipe. But the one call had aroused unwelcome attention.

“You lousy weinerschnitzel butt-in!” Eddie told him, as he saw a sentry clambering down the

embankment. From overhead came the sput-sput of a retarded motor, and Eddie glanced up to see a plane skim low over the scene of the wreck. It flew so low that the firelight glinted on its under-wings.”

The sentry made the mistake of coming too close. Eddie released his hold on the kicking, struggling man on the ground and grabbed for the Mauser. He and the sentry locked in handgrips, fell down, and rolled into the pond.

Eddie, with an agility born of desperation, landed on top and jammed the sentry’s head deep into the mud.

He jerked away the rifle, and pressing the muzzle on the chest of the first interloper, growled, “One yell from you, Fritz, and I’ll blow your buttons through your gizzard! Come in here!”

Eddie was so accustomed to frequent duckings that by now it seemed natural to be dripping from head to foot. He waded onto the bank and with the Mauser muzzle shoved the reluctant Boche No. One in on top of the sentry who was rising to his feet spluttering.

“Tell him to shut up or I’ll shoot you both!” Eddie warned. Obediently the English-speaking German translated. Then he added:

“After der war iss over, mebbe I come back to America unt effen with you get fer diss!”

But Eddie was more interested in the aerial visitor. Was it Willie Begay? The workers on the embankment were just as interested. They dropped their tools and stared upward. The arrival of the plane had providentially kept their attention from the struggle by the pond.

There it came again, circling still lower! As Eddie watched he saw Willie’s streaming yellow hair and saw him wave his hand.

The workers babbled now with confusion and scampered for cover. An American night raider! Tales of the Night Bird’s daring had become a legend. Here was that dread roamer of the night skies, the Night Bird!

There was no mistaking Willie Begay’s meaning. He wanted Eddie Dawson to run along the railway, to burst away from the enemy, if still free, where Willie Begay might land and rescue him. Without hesitation, Eddie obeyed. It was a desperate plan but his only way for escape. He ascended to the right-of-way and once between the rails he ran at top speed away from the work camp!

Two things aided him. The momentary confusion of the unarmed workers, who were seeking cover from

the sky marauder, and the fact that his mud-daubed uniform was not readily recognizable in the dim glow of bonfires.

He had no more than started, though, than he heard the shouts of the two Boches he had shoved into the pond. There came a rattle of rifle and pistol fire and bullets kicked up gravel at his feet and crackled past his head. His toe struck a tie that projected a diabolical inch. He fell in a heap and the Mauser clattered from his grip? There was a triumphant yell from behind him. His pursuers thought he was shot! He staggered to his feet. He picked up the Mauser and as he started to run again, his left ankle turned under him. He was barely able to hobble.

IN THE meantime, his pursuers gained. The nearest of them were only a stone's throw behind him now! God, would they get him, after all that he had survived!

Just then that dear old lady, Luck, again intervened.

With her on this visit was Willie Begay! The Spad had circled again and out of the black sky, over the bunched-up Boche down the track, there was a rush of wings.

"Good Lord!" gasped Eddie, pausing and looking back. "Is he going to——"

There was a double streak of fire and the *rat-tat-tat* of Vickers mingled with the roar of the motor. The Boche pursuers crumpled, leaped for cover, were swept clear of the tracks in an instant! Clear except for the fallen, dead and dying.

The Spad stalled past Eddie lower and lower. Groaning with the pain in his ankle, he hobbled up the track, listening alertly for the return of the plane. He was panting from exertion and weakness.

Willie Begay was going to land on the track! It was well ballasted with cinders and gravel, fortunately, making a reasonably smooth path for the landing wheels.

Eddie heard the wheels land. He kept up his crippled pace, the exertion dragging out his waning strength rapidly. He collided with the tail of the Spad before he realized that the Indian's daring maneuver had been a success. The striped tail markings gave him the same thrill that a wanderer feels on glimpsing the flag of his country. He staggered past and threw himself onto the underwing. The slipstream fanned him and helped restore him as he paused there.

"Eddie! Are you hit?"

Eddie Dawson straightened and grinned up at Willie Begay.

"Rotten shots, weren't they?" he gasped.

One of those rare occasions when the Indian's face reflected emotion was at hand. He was plainly thankful for his friend's deliverance.

"Quick, climb up beside me!" He reached down a helping hand. It was a two-seater Spad that the Navajo was flying this time. He helped his friend into the rear pit.

"I saw you in *lu-kah-des-chin*," he said. "I mean, back in the place of the reeds." It was a sign of more than casual friendship when Willie Begay mixed Indian words into his speech. As Eddie Dawson settled into his seat, Willie Begay poured on the gas. The Spad jolted forward, skimmed along the track. The earth whizzed past, then disappeared. They were immersed in the immensity of the night.

From Willie Begay there came, mingled faintly with the road of the climbing motor, the song of *ta-be-chai*. His cockpit had become a ceremonial altar. In his aboriginal way this strange youth was giving thanks to his triumphant pagan gods. He was a wild, nocturnal thing, was Willie Begay. His curious green eyes saw into the night, like those of a cat or owl. He flew with the sureness that was his in daylight. He was the Night Bird.

THE propeller blast rapidly restored Eddie Dawson. His uniform dried and the mud caked stiff. They rode on through the night until finally he saw the lights of Ste. Mondelle drift past underneath them, ten thousand feet down. Halfway back to Vospigny! What a feat this would be for Z Squadron. He and Willie Begay would share honors for performing one of the greatest aerial coups of the war.

Passing over the Front, Willie nosed down. The rush of air chilled Eddie Dawson. He was shivering when his friend leveled off above a long line of German trenches, visible in the glow of an occasional star shell.

He dipped low, flew the length of one of the trenches, spending the rest of the ammunition in his Vickers in one long burst. The tracers streaked groundward like liquid fire. Once more terror was flung into German hearts—terror of the Night Bird, appearing like a phantom out of dark skies.

Up went a shower of star shells from a back position, as news of the raid was flashed through the sector. The sky suddenly became brilliant. The Spad, for a few fleeting seconds, made a perfect target. And in those seconds, an eruption rose from the earth, an eruption of

hurtling steel and explosive, a rattle of small-arms, and luminous spears from machine-gun nests.

Not until he had emptied his guns and zoomed away did Willie Begay realize what this final gesture cost him. One of those missiles fired from below had gone true. It had pierced his petrol tank. The Hisso sputtered and coughed, then both men knew that their mad flight was at an end. Willie Begay steadied the craft and headed on a long glide toward the American lines.

The dark earth floated up at them. Willie Begay stretched the glide past No-Man's-Land, but when a hillside in back of the front-line positions rose before him, there was nothing left to do but pancake down and wish for the best.

Eddie Dawson saw it coming. He unsnapped his safety belt and hoped, if there was enough fuel left in the tanks to cause a fire, that he would be flung clear. He stood up in the cockpit.

A terrific jolt, a rending crash, then—a whirl of dazzling, delirious stars, and Eddie Dawson sank into unconsciousness.

LATER, he knew not how much later, he drifted from the shadowland of unconsciousness into the realm of reality. Even before his eyes opened he sniffed. There was a hospital scent about him, a scent of ether and iodoform. He blinked and looked about him. He felt the sway of motion under him. Was it real or did that dreamy, floating feeling of unconsciousness persist?

He saw it was real. For he was being borne on a stretcher and laid on a cot. He blinked again and stared at the man who was leaning over him.

Doc Meeney, Z Squadron's flight surgeon.

"Hello, Doc!" Eddie's voice was a weak squawk, hardly recognizable.

The surgeon scowled at him with his characteristic professional severity.

"Would you mind telling me," he said witheringly, "in your own simple words, just how you happen to be afflicted with a sprained ankle? First time in my experience a bird got a sprained ankle flitting around."

But Eddie wasn't listening to Doc Meeney's sarcasm. He was gathering his wits rapidly. He struggled upright.

"Where's Willie Begay?" he demanded. "Come on, tell me! Where's——"

A pair of brass hats, with Red Cross arm bands, just then came into the emergency dressing station, carrying a stretcher.

"Here's the other one," said one of the stretcher bearers. "We picks 'em up over in the Pont-a-Mousson sector."

Eddie gazed with trepidation upon the long, still form of Willie Begay. Was he dead? There were blood streaks on his face and a gash in his scalp.

"Is he done for?" he pleaded. "A guy like that don't deserve to die, Doc! Don't tell me he's dead!"

Doc Meeney laid a hand over Willie Begay's heart but didn't answer. But one of the stretcher bearers answered for him. As he started to talk, Major Humphreys and some Z Squadron pilots, aroused by this arrival of a field ambulance, crowded one by one through the door into the dressing station.

"I kin tell ya that, sir," he said. "Y'see, we picks the both of yez up in back of our dugout. You was done in from a bad bump and your buddy here was sorta shook up and dazed, but not hurt.

"We takes ya into our dugout and the captain pours yer buddy here several stiff jolts o' cognac. To sorta bring him to, sir."

"Well, did it?" asked Eddie anxiously.

"Did it! Did it, ye say? It did more'n that, sir! This here buddy o' yours rares up of a sudden and begins fightin' us with all his hands and feet! I was sorry ta do it, sir, but I had ta comb his hair with the butt o' my pistol!"

A moment of stunned silence, then Eddie Dawson yelped with sudden, shrill, half-hysterical laughter.

"I'm glad ya take it that way, sir," said the stretcher bearer, as he backed toward the door. "Yer buddy is good enough, I'd say, to belong to the infantry. He scraps like hell, so he does!"

At that moment the long figure of Willie Begay stirred. He grinned! It was the first time his mates, assembled anxiously about him, had ever seen Willie Begay grin.

"He's coming to!" said Doc Meeney.

The stretcher bearers hurried out of the door.

"He's one tough bird," was the remark that floated back.

The strange green eyes blinked and Willie Begay sat up.

"Damn right!" he grinned.