



THE FLAMING ARROW

by GEORGE BRUCE

"Ace" Avery Whirls His Crate into a Maelstrom of Roaring Air Action!

AVERY WIPED HIS FOREHEAD with a wad of grease-soiled waste and pawed ineffectively at the smeared lenses of his goggles. He turned his head from side to side, studying the earth below him. It was a blurred mass of color. He lifted his goggles impatiently and looked for landmarks. He found them, but they did nothing to relieve

the tension within his chest. They were German landmarks. He was still within enemy territory, still bait for anything that flew marked with the Black Cross.

His eyes followed a serried line of fresh bullet holes drilled through the right wing of his ship. They began close to the wing tip at the trailing edge, and ran up over the wing, toward the forward fuselage—toward

the gas tanks. There was a little shudder within him as he looked at those black dots.

These were not the sharp, clean perforations left by steel-jacketed slugs. They were larger, more ragged. These were the markings of incendiaries.

Ten minutes ago, those holes had not been in that wing. Ten minutes ago a Pfalz had buzzed up ahead of him and, twisting over on a wing, had come screaming down to the attack. A beautiful, new Pfalz, glistening with its black and white paint rubbed to a gloss. Avery had been almost hypnotized by the sheen of a new propeller spinning in the sunshine, and by the screech of the B.M.W. in the Boche ship.

He had rolled out of a snapping line of white tracers, had whipped into level flight above the wings of the Pfalz, had crashed down upon its tail, pumping lead at it out of both guns. And after an instant he had watched the Pfalz, in all of its bright glory, stagger, wallow around in space and then go into a sagging spin.

One terrific gush of flame and concussion, one immense burst of black smoke. And the Pfalz had become nothing more than a mass of splinters, twisted wire and mashed tubular structure. When the smoke of the explosion lifted, it had no semblance to the graceful, gull-like thing which had soared majestically through the heavens but a moment before. It was ghastly—a charnel pyre.

Kill! The word stalked through Avery's brain. Kill! Smash, crush, destroy! Burn, rend and murder. Kill! Every beautiful thing. Months now, since he had come to the front, that was the one word which haunted him. It lived with him, walked with him, slept with him. Kill! Even in his dreams, he was busy with the business of killing. The faces of the men he had killed, imaginary faces, peered horrifyingly out of the depths of those dreams. He was "Ace" Avery! No identity of his own. Nothing left of the kid who had crossed an ocean from the states to follow the Path of Glory, whose nose was eager to sniff the tang of battle, and whose soul strummed to the thrill of flying. None of that boy left.

Today—only Ace Avery, the flying machine, the perfect machine-gunner, the deadliest man with a Vickers or a Hotchkiss or a Lewis on the front. Ace Avery, the guy who could pick 'em off upside down, on his back, straight up—any old way. Just give him a sight at a Jerry in the ring—and that was the cue for the curtain.

Ace Avery, Killer!

But no one thought about it that way, excepting Avery.

And the funny part about it was that he had such a reputation, they were murdering him. Someone want a tough assignment carried out? Send for Avery. Some squarehead raising hell somewhere along the line? Telephone the field and borrow Avery. And now, when they had given him this rotten Hertreaux assignment, they had the nerve to tell him that no living man could hope to carry it out—but that it had to be done!

AT HERTREAUX, the German engineers had established a plant for the manufacture of a particularly deadly explosive. Avery knew all about that explosive. It had been drilled into his brain by a dozen different intelligence agents. Men had died attempting to penetrate the secrets contained in Hertreaux, but the place's secret had been obtained.

In Hertreaux, the enemy was brewing the most terrible of its war weapons, a combined high explosive and gas. Something so terrible that the German High Command, in possession of the secret of the stuff for two years, had not permitted its manufacture or use. The German High Command had been appalled at the thought of the horror this new agent would unleash.

The new explosive, enough to fill a five pound bomb, would wreck territory over an area of a square mile; would unloose a gas against which no mask possessed by any nation was a defense, and which would kill every living thing within a space of ten seconds. So far, no chemical or other extinguishing agent had been found, able to blot out the flame from this deadly bomb.

But now Germany was fighting with her back to the wall. She must take in hand any weapon that might terrify or destroy her enemies.

So, High Command had reconsidered, and the smoke stacks of Hertreaux were belching black smoke.

Night and day, secret manufacture of the new weapon was being pushed to the limit of human and mechanical endurance.

The Intelligence Service had pointed out to Avery that destruction of the Hertreaux plants was vitally necessary. The successful outcome of the war depended upon the destruction of Hertreaux. The lives of millions of combatants and non-combatants depended upon the elimination of the Hertreaux product.

And they had given Avery the job. They had explained that one man had a better chance than a

Wing. The Germans were expecting some kind of an attack against their munitions center and they had concentrated around Hertreaux the most complete scheme of defense afforded any defensive point so far in the war.

Murder was in the air over that place. Murder from three squadrons of airplanes assigned to keep enemy flyers out of the sector. Murder from cleverly placed anti-aircraft batteries. Murder from a dozen sources under the canopy of the blue sky. And sixteen men had died flying planes marked with a red, white and blue circle without so much as getting a glimpse of the factories at Hertreaux, before Scott Avery was given the job.

THE strangest thing about the entire assignment was the fact that while the Intelligence officers were talking to him about Hertreaux and Avery was taking on the job, Avery had known that he would die in carrying out the assignment. It was inevitable.

His thinking so was not madness. It was just a knowledge, born out of the queer prescience which becomes a part of every flying man who brushes wings with death a dozen times daily. Avery knew that no one man could defeat the brains and the strength of the German enemy. No man could hope to enter such a contest and escape with his life.

Until this moment, Ace Avery had been lucky. Through the months of his service he had drawn heavily against Time. He was living, breathing, acting upon borrowed time; and in the ten days he had lived through the Hertreaux assignment, his overdrafts on the Bank of Time had grown heavier and heavier.

THERE had been the first day, for example. There was an element of surprise connected with his reconnaissance that first day. In spite of magnificent brains and planning abilities, the Germans made mistakes. They had grown to believe that no human would run the gauntlet of death surrounding Hertreaux, no experienced flyer would dare to penetrate eighty kilos behind the enemy lines. That was a defense in itself.

Then, if a red, white and blue marked ship or ships did invite suicide by such an insane flight, they would be immediately subjected to the cross fire of a hundred Archies—and those Archie gunners had the skies above Hertreaux plotted so perfectly that it was not necessary to discover ranges when the guns were fired. Each gun was trained upon a certain point and

height, and the gunners merely pumped shells into the breeches without having to worry about targets. The result was a complete barrage from one thousand to twenty thousand feet over the entire Hertreaux area.

So, the pilots and gunners charged with the defense of the factories nodded in satisfaction and considered that they had drawn a very “cushy” billet. They carried out the patrols assigned to them, and they were on the alert, but they didn’t believe in their hearts that an enemy would be foolish enough to come.

That first day, Avery had flown very cautiously. Before he crossed the lines, he had taken his Nieuport to its absolute ceiling, laden as it was with two twenty-pound incendiary and demolition bombs. Under bare cruising speed, to silence the motor, Avery had crossed the lines.

There was a mackerel sky in the heights. Below, at ten thousand feet, there were rolling masses of cumulus. Avery knew that far down, even at the bottom of that tremendous void which separated him from the earth, men with delicate “tin ears” were picking up the tiny sound of his motor, recognizing it as a danger signal and trying to locate the source of the sound.

But he also knew that at twenty thousand feet, at bare cruising speed, the sound would baffle those very clever gentlemen at the “tin ears,” and that he could pass over them without danger.

WHEN he knew he must be in the vicinity of Hertreaux, he throttled the motor to a whisper and descended slowly and cautiously in a glide perilously near to a stall. He had his eyes fixed upon the masses of cumulus below him. After a long minute, a grin of satisfaction moved his face. This flight was planned.

He knew the habits of German pilots. They were methodical. They did things by the clock. If he was correct in his reasoning and a seasoned group of pilots was in charge of the Hertreaux defenses, they were due to fly the morning patrol at this hour.

His reasoning was correct. Below him, at eight thousand feet, outlined against the white background of the cumulus, a flight of twelve Fokkers, in echelon, was winging away in a lazy circle toward the southwest.

Avery had held his breath as he hung over them. The sun was behind him. The Fokkers passed under him, flew on, became dots against the horizon. He continued downward in the unhurried glide. He hugged the masking cloud formations and studied the ground below him. After a moment, he made out

Hertreaux. It was marked against the sky by a smear of black smoke belching from the high flung stacks of a great factory.

He timed his movements carefully. Three minutes to cover that distance and to go down five thousand feet under throttle. He looked at the belts running up to his guns; looked at the bomb releases attached to the outside of his cockpit. He settled himself in the seat and took a firmer grip on the stick.

PERHAPS those warning voices had given him false information. Perhaps this was going to be a job which on paper was gigantic and impossible, and in fact was nothing more than child's play. Perhaps he was going to have one of those confounding strokes of good fortune which astonish the world. Perhaps he was going to dive down into the middle of those stacks, drop his two deadly bombs into the midst of that piled up mass of horror within the factory—and escape, unscathed, and without firing a shot.

His nerves tautened. He could feel the beat of his heart against his ribs. He pointed the nose of the Nieuport at the stacks, took a sight and went plunging through the clouds. No time for deception or skulking now. This was time for a bold stroke at top speed. This was the time for surprise and velocity.

The Nieuport went ahead with a rush. The wires were screeching. The motor moaned and whined. The tight surfacing of the wings drummed. The slipstream that came back into his face was like a hand clamped over his nostrils and mouth.

The stacks grew nearer and nearer. He saw the first buildings of the factory rising out of the horizon. He kicked a little rudder to aim his flying projectile at the exact center of the group of buildings.

He was intent upon his course.

He never heard the Fokker that dropped in behind him until the whiplash crackling of slugs sounded about his head, and until he saw a tracer flick through the top wing of the Nieuport and explode into tiny bits of phosphorescent smoke. He whirled in his seat with a violence that twisted his neck.

He saw the Fokker. It was close—a hundred and fifty feet behind him. At the first glance the Fokker seemed to be a thing of great eyes, and the eyes were squirting an orange-green venom at his Nieuport. The eyes were the muzzles of twin Spandaus, and the man who handled them was an expert. And he was scoring hits.

The bombs in the Nieuport's rack were contact

bombs—delicate things, set to explode at the slightest impact. A slug striking those bombs would result in the Nieuport being blown to atoms. No chance to maneuver, to escape that Fokker with those bombs in the rack.

SO AVERY pulled the releases and sent the twenty pound eggs plunging earthward. There was a fierce sense of frustration within him as he turned them loose. He was being cheated. Hertreaux had been his; life had been his; success had been his—another thirty seconds—and this Fokker had spoiled it all.

He whirled on it with a tigerish ferocity. He was blinded with the desire to destroy this green winged thing behind him. He wanted to trample on it—stomp, tear with his hands, blast it to bits. He pulled up in a straight zoom, giving the Fokker a chance to rake him as he climbed. Five hundred feet up, he twisted over on his back and dived upside down. The Nieuport trembled—but then, it had always trembled under this kind of punishment.

The Fokker slipped sharply to the right. The pilot had his head lifted, studying the Nieuport's maneuver narrowly. He was waiting for the completion of the maneuver. He had watched other ships roll out of a loop and knew the answer to that. How could he know that a dozen times Avery had attacked in this manner—feigning a roll out of a loop, but without ever sliding off his back—and had made his kills shooting in the inverted position?

THE Jerry discovered himself tricked when it was too late. The Nieuport never came out of the inverted dive. The Vickers in the nose of the Nieuport suddenly spurted flame, a short, vicious burst. Every slug in that burst—and they were incendiaries—smacked through the space between the motor and the pilot's cockpit of the Fokker.

The fuel tanks of the enemy ship were contained in that space. There was a wave of flame gushing back over the Jerry's head—and then—the war was over for him. His Fokker, burning like a furnace, fell within sight of Hertreaux.

And the Archies on the ground went into action with deadly intent. The sky vomited black puffs and screeching shrapnel. The atmosphere rocked with sharp, nerve-jarring concussion. The Nieuport was tossed about like a cork in a storm at sea.

Above, below, at each side, those blinding red goutts of flame broke out of invisibility and seared Avery's

vision. Many times before he had flown through Archie fire—but never anything like this. Half-blinded, half-conscious, he ruddered the Nieuport from side to side, tried to climb, tried to escape the bursts. But he was dealing with the business of aimed firing now.

There was one escape. That was close to the earth. The driving bands of the Archie shells could not be set for less than a thousand feet. Avery stood the Nieuport on its nose and dived madly for the earth. A bit of shrapnel gouged the left upper. The fragile ship spun twice on its axis from a wave of concussion. The controls were ripped out of his hands. He fought to regain control of the Nieuport. The ground leaped up at him.

He brought the ship out with tree branches reaching for him. He flattened it into level flight with the wheels spurning the earth. Dimly he saw machine-guns on the ground spitting flame at him. Once a battalion of troops lifted rifles and there were stabbing streaks of flame—and then he was over them.

A dozen feet over enemy earth with a red-hot motor, hurdling trees and telegraph wires. Eyes aching with the watch for obstructions. The Fokker flight he had fooled a few minutes before coming in like wolf hounds on the scent of a kill. Spreading out over the sky, straining to head him off, to batter him against the earth flowing under his spreader bar.

MACHINE-GUNS chattering at him—Spandaus, this time. The nervous shock of slugs thudding through the tail section—and the continuance of the mad rush over the earth, into the south.

This was a nightmare in the full light of day, this flight through the rocketing maws of hell. Minute after minute, over those eighty kilos, he waited for the Clerget to blow up, waited for it to grind itself to powder for lack of oil.

Nightmare—the impossible, and he was doing it.

Until at last he had run away from the Fokkers, had leaped across the front, and had dropped on the home field. For minutes after he cut the switch, Avery sat in the cockpit and listened to the Clerget sizzle. It fired for a full minute after the switches were cut. Men gathered around the ship and grinned up at him, men who believed that Ace Avery was a superman who always did the impossible.

When the tremble went out of his legs, he climbed down on the field and grinned with them—though his nerves were jumping and his muscles were twitching.

But he had to grin—he was Ace Avery.

LATER in the day, an Intelligence Officer came to see him and listened to the story of the flight. There was a queer light in the I.O.'s eyes.

"I don't know," he told Avery. "I'm not a flying man myself, but I don't see how you could drop those bombs there, within sight of the objective., knowing how important it was to carry out the job. There you were—by a stroke of good fortune you may never have again—and you didn't go through with it. Somehow, I think that I would have wangled a way to drop those bombs right on the factory."

Avery glanced at the dapper appearance of the officer, at the glossy cordovan riding boots and the impeccable uniform and well-kept hands. He made a mighty effort to restrain himself from driving his fist down the fellow's throat.

"I'm sorry," he said, instead.

"Well, of course, you're flying the assignment," grumbled the I.O. "But it seemed to me you wasted a golden chance.

"Better luck next time."

"Thanks," grunted Avery. "I'll need it—plenty—"

All that night he was haunted by the Hertreaux factories and the black smudges of shell fire breaking in the skies. From then on it would be tougher—and tougher. They expected him now. They were waiting for him.

And it had been tougher. It had been like battering one's head against a stone wall. Day after day, he went out there alone, knowing that a thousand eyes were watching him and a thousand brains were calculating his chances of life and death. When he turned unexpectedly, he found men stopping a conversation with complete abruptness. They were talking about him, discussing him, analyzing him.

And the damned Intelligence Department—those desk polishers who strutted around in the fancy uniforms—thought he was going soft, thought he was going yellow.

He could tell by the way they looked at him. They were smiling in their sleeves, at the spectacle of Ace Avery—losing the old fire and the old touch. Ace Avery, looking out after his precious hide.

EVEN now he wondered where he got the idea. It just had popped into his mind. Maybe, way back in his younger days, he had read it. How the old Indians when they wished to drive an enemy out of a shelter, and couldn't approach the shelter because of deadly defense, used to wrap stuff around the points of

arrows, ignite the stuff, and shoot it against the roof, or the dry side of the building.

Flaming arrows—setting fire to the defenses—driving the defenders out into the open to be picked off at will.

Maybe that's where the crazy idea came from.

Maybe it was because they expected things of Avery. Maybe it was because he had to provide the sensational and the dramatic at all costs. He was built up to the point where he could not fail! Had to go on and on—until finally it came—like it had come for Richthofen and Immelmann and the Frog Aces.

Ace Avery! The grim smile played about the corners of his mouth. Ace Avery—the Hero! And he had to go on being the hero—right up to the end of the drama.

BUT that was an idea—that packing of the fuselage of the Nieuport with cordite—and that business of stowing a couple of dry cells under his seat with wire running up to a button on the instrument panel. The old Nieuport was heavy under the load—a hundred and fifty pounds of cordite. Enough to blow half of France off the map. Riding behind him—packed into the the open space of the after fuselage.

He glanced again at that ragged line of bullet holes through the right wing. If those incendiaries had gone through the camel back, down into that load of explosive! But suppose they had—wasn't that going to happen, anyway?

Hadn't he known it was going to happen from the moment he thought of the idea? There wasn't anything crazy about the impulse. His brain was calm and cool, calmer than it had been in months—and he could think and plan with a razor edge on the planning.

His mechanic—old Bagger—had been appalled when Avery unfolded the idea and when he had insisted on bringing the cordite onto the field in a battered old car. Bagger had flatly refused to do the job. But then, he had always been a softy where Avery was concerned. Bagger had been the perfect mechanic and wet nurse.

But he got the idea right away, about making the Nieuport into a flying torpedo. And between them they had rigged up the ship. Rigged her up to blow hell out of Hertreaux—and hell into Ace Avery.

Even now there was no feeling in him about the business of dying. He felt numb, as though it was going to happen to someone else. Like going to a friend's funeral and trying to work up something that felt like grief.

The old Nieuport flew around with all the lightness and buoyancy gone out of her wings—and Avery stalled for time, saving his gas like a miser, nursing his motor like a mother with a sick baby—waiting—for darkness. He watched the brass ball of the sun sinking toward that unknown place behind the horizon, and tried to understand that this was the last time he would ever see the sun. The last time he would ever float above the earth in the glory of the sunset.

It sounded crazy—why, he'd see a thousand sunsets like this, but his soul was filled with a whispering voice that said over and over: "Last time—look at it—last time—better let it warm you—it'll be cold—in a little while—"

PFALZES were the most persistent damned things, like the one coming in on his tail now. Suddenly the whiplashes crackled about Avery's head. He swung the Nieuport over on its side, carried it around in a short circle, with the Pfalz steaming in on his tail.

Last fight maybe—unless he had to fight his way into Hertreaux. Last fight—and growing dark. That Old Man Sun was just a red semi-circle above the horizon. The whole world was bathed in red—like blood. Make the last fight a good one, Ace Avery—have to live up to your medals.

The Nieuport stood up on one wing. Nose up, it began the vertical renversement Avery had dared a couple of times in the past, the damned maneuver that scared guys to death watching it. Just pinning the nose of the crate at the zenith of the sky and holding it steady, while the rudder pulled the ship around in a half arc, and the motor sobbed its heart out under the terrific strain.

One miss, one flop, one flat spot in the air, and it was a question of tumbling nose over tail onto the Nieuport's back. But it was the maneuver of the Ace—and the Pfalz behind him was going to see an Ace put on a show.

Avery even glanced back at the Pfalz as the ship hung upright in space. He saw the head of the Jerry pilot turned upward, the sunlight glinting red upon his goggles, his mouth open in consternation as if he might be watching the antics of a ghost ship.

THE Nieuport fell heavily out of the top of the arc. It went into a vertical side-slip, left wing-tip tearing into the atmosphere, the wires shrieking like demons, the wings wrestling with the fuselage. Faster and faster, until it seemed the ship must come apart, and then it

was in a headlong plunge—heavy—weighed down by the cordite in the fuselage. And the Pfalz was skidding dangerously to the right, to see what would be the finish to the insane flying.

But the Pfalz never did see the end of the maneuver. Other men in cross-marked ships had waited for the end in the same manner, and had only found the end—for them.

There was a peculiar, wrenching twist at the bottom of the dive, and a shrill shriek of rage from the wires as they changed direction and stress. The Nieuport lunged upward, its guns cutting yellow-green tracks in the gathering darkness. The ghostly whiteness of tracers sped through space, thudded against the Pfalz—and between each tracer were ten incendiaries.

Little sparks broke out upon the surfacing of the Pfalz; little sparks which became tiny flames, like candles seen at a distance. They grew with a hungry rush, becoming liquid fire which engulfed the outline of the enemy ship.

The Nieuport veered away. The Pfalz went diving for the ground. It began vomiting black smoke and sparks. After a minute, it was flaming from nose to tail—fierce rushes of flame which stormed out over the wings.

The red sun was gone. There was a redder sun in the heavens lighting the space between earth and sky with a terrible intensity.

Avery moved this way and that to escape a random Archie burst, unable to keep from watching the Pfalz. It struck the earth—far down—broke into a million sparks. Avery moved his lips. He touched the front of his helmet with his hand. It was a silent gesture of farewell—of salute—almost an automatic gesture, like a devout person who crosses himself in the face of a dreadful sight.

HE TOOK the Nieuport up five thousand feet. No question of the location of Hertreaux. He knew that by instinct. He studied the amount of gas left in the tanks. Just enough.

He pointed the nose of the ship into the gathering darkness.

Ten minutes later, a searchlight from the ground picked him up. It flashed once over his wings, bathed his silver ship in lambent fire, then clung to him with fiery tenacious intent.

He didn't bother to fly away from the light. He knew that once the first light located him, another would inevitably find him. He was almost too high for

good Archie practice—and he was going to Hertreaux. It was in the cards that he was to die at Hertreaux—nothing would happen until he got to the place.

The red flashes of the bursting shells were beautiful against the black velvet of the sky. They broke in a core of white heat, then changed to red. Like fireworks, fifty of them at a time, they put down a curtain of flame before him and above him and on all sides of him.

And when that curtain became a surging, rocking hell of concussion, he knew that Hertreaux was before him, even if he had not been able to see the red flare above the stacks of the factories.

A BLACK shape ripped at him from out of the darkness. Heck—wasn't there anything in the world but Pfalzes? Where had this one come from, bobbing up at him like that out of the dark? He kicked rudder and drove at the Pfalz.

What the devil—they were going the same way—straight down. Might as well have company on the journey. If the Pfalz wanted to dive, it was right up the Nieuport's alley. Twelve thousand feet down was Hertreaux and the objective. For twelve thousand feet, the game of leap frog could go on—

The Pfalz went screaming over the top wing of the Nieuport. There had been a drumming sound from the after fuselage, a succession of tiny shocks throughout the fabric of the Nieuport. Slugs—hammering against longerons, driving through doped linen. Slugs—and a hundred and fifty pounds of cordite under that linen.

The Nieuport dived like a fury. It picked up the Pfalz, a shadowy blur, in the sights. Avery sat there, hounding the Jerry, his thumb on the trigger. Somehow, he didn't feel like hurting that ship in front of him. Then—the pilot decided to out-manuever the Nieuport.

He pulled up suddenly in a zoom. Avery hadn't wanted to kill that Pfalz—but the fool zoomed right into the path of those deadly little incendiaries.

Smack through the center section of the Pfalz—and the center section was burning—and the fire was showing the face and head of the pilot. He had maneuvered himself out of safety, right into the middle of a blazing furnace. Avery swallowed hard for a moment.

Then suddenly the air about him was alive. Rushing shapes slashed at him. Little trails of fireflies flowed about his Nieuport—a whole flight of the persistent little devils. The Pfalzes flew like wraiths in the night, trying to cut him down.

One thousand feet—and the stacks of Hertreaux were like the flues of hell.

They belched red heat and fury up into the black skies. The flues of hell—and shed Number Four was right under that line of four stacks in a row.

THE Nieuport seemed dissolving. Avery was leaning forward in the seat, driving it faster and faster with the weight of his body. Once he leaped over a black shadow in front of him, and the shadow spouted flame and lead as he went over. He forgot the ships in the air about him, and the frantic play of the searchlight, and the reckless chattering of machine-guns. His eyes were fixed on those four stacks. They grew larger and larger—the flame became hotter and hotter.

His hand moved toward the button on the instrument panel. A jagged, chattering, crackling burst of Spandau slugs ripped above his head, cut the cockpit about him to ribbons, snapped a strut in front of his face—made a hollow, thudding sound from the center of his back.

The Nieuport staggered. A wing ripped from its fittings. The black roof of a shed showed under the spreader bar. There was a large white four on it—in German script.

Avery fell over the tip of the stick—drove it forward with the weight of his body.

The Nieuport crashed through the corrugated roof of the factory.

Avery's thumb jammed down on the button.

There was a rising billow of air which blew the Nieuport back through the galvanized iron roof. A rising billow of air, and then an explosion which seemed to destroy the entire universe with its dull reverberation.

SHOCK smote the world. There was no sound, for there were no eardrums there to hear the sound. There was a mighty avalanche of flame rising higher and higher into the heavens.

And in the flame, the Nieuport disappeared.

Other ships disappeared in that holocaust. The wreckage of the pursuing Pfalzes rained down with the brick and steel and splinters of what had been the Hertreaux hell factories.

BACK on the field a mechanic named Bagger waited—waited for the return of his boss. He sat in a hangar mouth, tears streaming down his face. He waited—because he knew it was his job to wait. He had waited throughout two years for his boss. But this time—the boss was not coming back.

There were the ghostly outlines of gray Nieuports crammed into the hangar behind him. There were other men standing around, digging at the earth with the toes of boots, puffing once or twice on a cigarette and then tossing the cigarette away with an impatient gesture. Pilots and men who had known Ace Avery.

One of them said: "Just what you'd expect of Avery. Just the way he'd pick out to go. Living up to his reputation. Making himself into a blasted flaming arrow and blowing the heck out of that Hertreaux place, and blowing himself into everlasting glory at the same minute."

Bagger lifted his head. "Yes, sir," he said chokingly. "That's almost what he said to me—couple of hours ago—'got to do it—Bagger, my boy,' he said. 'It's expected—when you're an actor, you've got to put on a show—even when they're ringing down the curtain.' Funny like, he said it. Kind of sorry like. Kind of sad like—"

"They'll give him the Congressional posthumously for this," said one of the officers. "They can't miss."

"Yeah," echoed another. "They'll give him the Congressional—he rates it."