



SEA BATS

by LESTER DENT

A flying ship without a pilot; a murder without a murderer; a base without a hangar—Squeak knew something was haywire. It took double-crossed wings to throw the shadow of black crosses where they belonged.

SQUEAK" O'TOOLE YELPED, and stood up in his cockpit. One fist, hairy, hard, as big as a quart pail, hammered the camelback. Shrill, rusty, his voice squawked through the Sunbeam motor's bellow.

"Hell's bells, Limey! Don't you see that wagon?"

In the observer's cockpit of the Short seaplane, Wooley took binoculars from his eyes and stared uneasily. His Cockney twang pierced the motor roar.

"Listen, Yank, what's 'appened to that bloody Blackburn is none of our business. Orders were to fly this 'ooker from France to our base and nothin' else."

Four thousand feet below, a tri-motored Blackburn seaplane rested on the crinkling paunch of the Irish sea. The four-bladed props were idle and a milky cone of wake showed the ship was drifting tail-first away from the Irish coast, a sliver of haze off to the left.

Nowhere else on the sea was there ship or sign of life.

Little Squeak O'Toole, his knot of a chest bloated, glared at Wooley. "Not our business—the hell you say! That buggy may be down with conked motors and need help!"

He hit the stick, booted the rudder, peaking the Short down. But the stick stirred and tore out of his fingers. The plane leaped upward again. Wooley had taken the dual controls from him! Squeak raised, belligerent, in the bucket. "What's the idea, Limey?"

Wooley, big shoulders bunched around his ears, face drained of blood, said, "You 'eard me, Yank! Orders is orders!"

Squeak stared at him, wondering what had hit the man and why he had ignored the Blackburn until his attention was called to it. Wooley had seemed an all-right buzzard when they met in the French Channel port that morning. Wooley had ferried a Wing officer

across the Channel in the Short and he had orders, signed by Major "Blue" Tanner, to carry Squeak O'Toole back with him.

At the instigation of that same Blue Tanner, his old pal, Squeak was transferring from Egypt to the base of the R.N.A.S. on the east Irish coast. Why Blue Tanner wanted him in Ireland, Squeak didn't know. He had got no details.

This Wooley was a pilot, but—and Squeak kept the grin off his homely face—he must be afraid of a landing in the open sea.

"Waves not high enough to bother us!" Squeak yelled.

Wooley ignored him, flung the Short for the distant Irish coast.

Face suddenly flinty, eyes hot behind goggle glass, Squeak flopped across the camelback. "Leggo that stick before I knock you loose!"

Wooley's head ground from side to side between his shoulders. "Listen, Yank, I was 'opin' you wouldn't see that Blackburn, but now that you' ave, I'm tellin' you not to land. It won't be 'ealthy, see?"

Squeak jerked a glance at the Blackburn. The ringed dot of Allied insignia was plainly discernible. An English bus!

"Whatcha mean?"

Wooley's head shook another negative. "I ain't sayin'. Just don't bother yourself about the Blackburn. That's all."

Squeak said, "The hell I won't!" He slapped down and gave the stick a Herculean tug, fighting the muscles of the big man in the other cockpit.

Squeak heard Wooley curse. Then his head nearly jumped off his shoulders and fire specks swam in his eyes. Wooley had belted him on the temple. Squeak twisted upright.

His left fist jumped out, hit Wooley's head just above his goggles. The blow levered Wooley's head back. Squeak's other fist hooked a vicious parabola to the fellow's exposed chin. Wooley shuddered, lurching forward until his face mashed against the crashpad and remained there.

Squeak frowned at him. And, because he had a habit of talking to himself in moments of stress, he bit off, "Damned if I savvy what got into him!"

SQUEAK sank the Short for the big Blackburn, Sunbeam cams backfiring under pinched throttle, wind a-howl around floats and flying wires. The Blackburn pushed up at him, nearness swelling it into

the monster flying boat it was. With two hundred feet of altitude, Squeak threw the Short around in a tight circle.

Startled, he barked, "Nobody aboard!"

From the air, the Blackburn seemed deserted, a derelict.

Squeak studied the sea, made a decision. "We'll land, anyway!"

The Short leaped away down-wind, banked and lowered. Squeak nursed the controls, watching the washboard of waves approach. *Wham!* A wave hit the floats like a wall of concrete. The Short bucked, pitched. Another shock! Then the concussions came too fast to count. Spray sheeted into Squeak's face, drooled down his arms, puddled in his lap. Slowly, the commotion subsided and the Short rocked stagnant on the sea.

Squeak gave the throttle a goose, the rudder a boot, jockeying toward the Blackburn. Still no sign of life was in evidence about the big bombing boat. Squeak closed the throttle until the Sunbeam barely clanked over, then got the coil of braided cotton mooring line from the cockpit pocket.

He scrambled, monkeylike, to the tip of the lower wing. Clinging to a cabane strut, he made a lasso noose in the rope end, tossed and snared the torpedolike snout of a Blackburn wing-tip float.

The other rope end fast to a Short strut, Squeak swung out and gained the Blackburn and tied the planes together more solidly.

The bomber was deserted. He peered curiously into the cockpit and saw the fuel gauge registered tanks two-thirds full. Nothing seemed to be damaged. Hundred-pound Royal Arsenal bombs were in all the racks.

Puzzled, Squeak stared at a big patch on the underside of the upper wing. The patch didn't interest him particularly, although it was not painted the deep green hue of the rest of the wing—but this patch and the rest of the wing surface amidships was spotted with jeweled globules of spray.

Squeak scuttled to the port motor, felt of the cylinders. Barking an oath, he jerked his hand away. Rapidly, he tested the other two motors.

All were hot! That, with the spray on the wings, meant the plane had landed not long ago. Probably within the half hour.

Squeak dug fingernails into his jaw, mumbled, "Now that's funny as hell!" No surface vessel was within half an hour's distance; no plane was visible in the sky. Then, where had the Blackburn crew gone?

In the Short, Wooley's shoulders heaved with returning consciousness. Squeak scrambled out on the wing-tip and changed planes.

Wooley glared at him, asked, "Anybody 'ome?"

Squeak was suddenly sure the Cockney was worried. Worried bad. Fists jammed hard on his hips, he glared at the fellow.

"Why didn't you want to land?" Wooley snarled, "We better drag our bloomin' freight away from 'ere, Yank!" Squeak studied the Blackburn, eyes angry in a baffled face. The tail bore the number 2901. On the hull snout was a flying gull with a dachshund in its beak. The same squadron design was on the flanks of their Short.

Squeak eyed Wooley. "Isn't that ship from our squadron?"

Wooley squirmed, head wagging stubbornly. "Hi'm not tellin' a thing, Yank."

"Why not?"

Wooley kept tight lipped and silent. Squeak jutted his head out, ripped, "Why not?"

"Aw, t'hell with you, Yank!" Wooley's right fist leaped out of the cockpit at Squeak's head. Squeak parried. His wet feet skittered on the doped wing fabric and only an arm hooked over a cross-wire kept him from going overboard. He got his balance, pounced on Wooley. Blows made fleshy smackings. Squeak got an arm down inside the cockpit, pistoned short blows into the nerve center above Wooley's belt buckle. Wooley bawled with each punch and flailed about in the bucket.

Squeak gritted, "You'll talk like a phonograph when I'm through with you, sweetheart!"

WOOLEY struggled out of the cockpit. They flounced on the wing. Squeak got the big man against a cabane strut, twisted his arms behind him, held him helpless.

"What's the idea of acting up?" Wooley cursed shrill Limehouse oaths. Squeak pulped the fellow's lips on his teeth, repeated his question.

"T'hell with you!" Wooley snarled. "You're a stubborn stinker!" Squeak went to work on the Cockney's big frame with short, hairy fingers. Wooley screeched. Foam and blood flew out of his mouth. Tears of pain bubbled from his eyes.

"Ready to talk. Limey?"

Wooley only cursed him.

"You're tougher than I thought!" Squeak hit the big Cockney in the belly, then dumped him bodily into the cockpit.

Barking sulphur, he cast off from the Blackburn and jammed his knotty little frame into the Short cockpit. The Short pitched wildly as it ripped into the wind. Pile-drivers seemed to go to work on the hull as it went on step. But it got off all right and drove howling for the Irish coast.

From the air, the English seaplane base was a clot of squat buildings on the beach, hangar mouths gaping open at a chalky line of surf. Intermingled were cranes, the engine shops and, farther back, the shacks of offices, mess and quarters. Timber slipways slanted into the water. A tractor and a launching cradle stood in front of a hangar. A motorboat, ever-ready for landing emergencies, chugged slow circles close to the beach.

The emergency motorboat sloughed offshore a bit as Squeak banked over the base. He nosed into the wind and landed as near the beach as was safe.

Ground crewsmen ran a G.R.W. wheel cradle into the water, and attached it to the Short floats. Squeak gave the Sunbeam gas and charged the plane up the timber sleepers of the slipway under its own power.

Wooley, bloody-faced, was out of his cockpit before Squeak cut the motor. Squeak flung overside, and collared him.

Wooley wrenched, snarled, "You better forget all about this, Yank!"

Squeak tightened his grip. "Yeah? Come along, honeybunch!"

He propelled the hulking, sullen Cockney past the hangars and into the plank shack office of the base C.O.

A major sat at a field desk in the office, studying the squared-off expanse of an Irish Sea chart. A tall man, thinly fleshed, with a beak nose and a long, out-shot jaw.

Squeak saluted. "Where's Major Blue Tanner?"

Folding his chart, the officer frowned at him. "I'm sure I can't tell you. I never heard of the chap."

"Isn't he in command here?"

The major, still frowning, shook a negative. "No. I am Major Noel Ayers. And I am in command."

Squeak blinked, digesting that. Blue Tanner had maneuvered his transfer up here from Egypt, so he had naturally supposed Tanner was the C.O. Apparently he wasn't, and the fact puzzled Squeak.

He offered, "I'm Captain O'Toole, transferred here from Egypt."

Major Ayers, not nodding, said, "I thought you were. Wing headquarters sent orders to have Wooley

bring you back. Ah—now that I think of it, those orders were signed by a Major Blue Tanner.”

Squeak sucked air into his knot of a chest. “Have you a Blackburn, Number 2901, among your ships?”

Major Ayers was eyeing Wooley’s battered features curiously. “Of course. That is Captain Bride’s bus. He took it up about two hours ago for a test hop.”

Grimly, Squeak said, “Well, it’s down forty miles off-shore, deserted. We landed alongside it and found the motors still hot and the wings still wet with spray splashed on them when it landed. It couldn’t have been down more than half an hour. It sounds dizzy, but there was nobody aboard and there wasn’t a boat or a plane in sight.”

“Eaven ’elp me, Yank!” Wooley yelled. “What’s eatin’ you?”

CHAPTER II MURDER TRAP

MAJOR AYERS STARED AROUND his beak of a nose, puzzled. Wooley emptied more words into the room. “E’s off his top! We didn’t see no ship on the bloomin’ ocean. So ’elp me, we didn’t. We passed ‘Brass’ Bride flying’ along ’andsome. And a minute after we seen ’im, this bloke turns around and pops me in the face with ’is fist. ’E’s balmy! That’s what’e is!”

Squeak cracked, “Well, I’ll be damned!” He lunged, took Wooley’s throat in both his knobby hands. “You lying scut!”

Major Ayers unfolded his gangling length from the chair. With a fist, he clouted Squeak on the side of the head. Squeak puffed out a cussword, knotted a hand. Just in time, he remembered Major Ayers was his superior. He released Wooley, stepped back.

Major Ayers yelled, “What does this mean?”

Wooley pulled air into his lungs in a hoarse roar. With both hands, he waved at the open door. “It means ’e’s barmy, sir! Look!”

Squeak poked an inquiring glance through the door. His eyes stuck out. A Blackburn was banking in for a landing. The underside of the upper wing bore a patch of contrasting color. It was the plane he had found, a derelict, on the deserted surface of the Irish sea!

Major Ayers drew his long jaw up tight, said through his teeth, “This is peculiar.”

“Yeah!” Squeak bit off. “That ain’t half of it, brother!”

The Blackburn came down, throwing fans of spray. Men ran a cradle out and nestled it under the hull and a popping tractor hauled the giant ship up.

THE man who got out was easy to identify. Brass Bride! A big, blocky man, his face smooth and hard and bronzed. A face of brass, expressionless as a casting of the metal it resembled.

He came into the office saying, “The bus handles like a feather.”

Major Ayers asked, “Were you forced down?”

Brass Bride fished out a cigarette, lit it, drooled smoke with his one surprised word, “No.”

“Did you land about forty miles offshore?”

“No.”

Squeak O’Toole shot out his jaw. “That’s funny as hell, fellow. Less than an hour ago I landed alongside that Blackburn and looked it over and there was nobody aboard.”

Brass Bride gushed out smoke and words. “Not that buggy, you didn’t.”

Squeak, eyes sticking out a little, said, “That buggy!”

Wooley croaked, “E’s barmy!”

“If he says he saw that Blackburn on the water, he is,” Brass Bride agreed. “There’s more than one Blackburn in this war, though. He could have seen another.”

“It wasn’t another one!” Squeak rasped. “I know that patch on the wing.”

Brass Bride took his cigarette off his lips and pointed it at Squeak’s nose. “What are you trying to pull, Squirt? I say that Blackburn didn’t land offshore.”

Squeak cracked, “And I say you’re a damned liar! More than that, I’ll say something is screwy as hell about this. The Cockney, here, tried to chill-crack me when I started to land. I worked on him for that, but he wouldn’t cough up a thing except that it would be healthy for me to forget all about it.”

Brass Bride held his cigarette far out to his side and dropped it on the floor. As his fingers let it go, they curled into a brassy knob and came whistling for Squeak’s head.

Squeak squatted, and waded forward. Air from Brass Bride’s knuckles stirred his hair. Squeak put both fists together and put them in Brass Bride’s stomach. Wind leaving the big man’s lungs made a loud squawk. He traveled backward until the wall stopped him with

a shock that rocked the shack. Then he sat down on the floor and put both arms across his middle and his face got blue and congested.

Wooley, retreating to a corner, said nothing, did nothing.

Major Ayers barked a curse, lunged. Squeak backpedaled from the major's lashing fists.

"Cut it out!" he said, his rusty voice imploring. "Cut it out! Or I'll have to bop you one, too!"

Major Ayers stopped. "You're under arrest, O'Toole!"

Squeak, angry-eyed, said, "Brother, these two hunkies are pulling a fast one on you!"

Major Ayers' eyes looked calculatingly around his beak nose. His voice was skeptical. "May I point out, O'Toole, that I have flown with these two men since early in the war. It is their word against yours. Frankly, I believe them." Squeak opened his mouth, shut it without saying anything.

Major Ayers said, "Do you wish to make a formal report of this affair?"

Squeak squinted questioningly. "You sound like you don't think I'd better."

"That is up to you." Major Ayers shrugged. "Under the circumstances—well, it is the word of two men against one."

Squeak showed his teeth. "You think I'm nuts, eh?"

Major Ayers spread his hands. "Not at all. Too much active duty does things to a man's nerves. A few days of rest usually fix it up."

"Well, like you say, under the circumstances, maybe I'd better not report it."

Major Ayers nodded, eyed Wooley. "Do you wish to make a formal complaint that he attacked you?"

Wooley hesitated, said, "No."

Major Ayers pointed a finger at Squeak. "This is highly irregular, O'Toole. But I am going to permit you to remain around the field a few days. But make no mistake, I shall watch you closely."

Squeak stifled a snort. "Thank you, sir. Where do I bunk?"

MAJOR AYERS led the way down twin lines of barracks shacks and halted before one. He eyed Squeak curiously, but walked off without saying anything more.

An orderly brought Squeak's duffle sack. He hung his clothes on nails, brushed his parade uniform, rubbed dust off his dress boots. He took a spikenosed Mauser automatic from the shirt it was wrapped in, grinned at the useful souvenir, put it between the blankets on his cot.

With a cigarette burning in his lips, he lay on the cot and thought. His face began to get purple. He sucked in smoke and spat it out blue with profanity. Whence had Brass Bride vanished after putting that Blackburn down on the sea? Why had the Cockney, Wooley, been so reluctant to land? An hour of puzzling got Squeak nothing but the conclusion, "Blue Tanner let me in for a nice mess. Now, I wonder why that coot wanted me transferred up here."

He answered the supper gong with gusto. Sidelong glances from the other buzzards did not affect his appetite for the heavy English food.

After the meal, he found Major Ayers. "I want you to do something for me."

"Of course." The major's tone was too obliging.

Squeak corked back the swearwords that boiled up in his throat. "Will you wire Wing Headquarters exactly what happened here this afternoon and ask them to pass the dope on to Major Blue Tanner?"

"Certainly."

Squeak pushed his homely little face out, clipped, "And you better do it, too! Whether you think I'm crazy or not!"

"I'll do it," Major Ayers promised.

But Squeak went back to his cubicle doubting that he would. The major was convinced that he was mentally unbalanced. Not that Squeak blamed him greatly. He grinned without humor and lay on his cot.

Instantly, he reared up cursing. His spike-nosed Mauser was gone! He pitched to the door, hesitated, then came back gargling rage sounds in his throat. They thought he was insane, so they had taken the weapon from him. He decided to let it slide and get the gun back later, when this mess was cleared up.

He flopped on the cot again and did some intensive, but entirely barren, thinking. The room darkened, the window becoming a clay-colored rectangle. A couple of planes took off on bat patrol, their multi-motored roar beating down on the base in deafening waves.

Squeak got up and went to the door and sat on the threshold in the darkness. Men passed him, talking, laughing. A serious voice to the right reached his ears, "Poor chappie. Completely off in his head, they said. Attacked Wooley in their plane."

Squeak grinned. Then he caught the flare of a match off to the left. One man was holding it to the cigarette of another. The two faces illuminated—Brass Bride and Wooley!

Squeak was off the threshold and running toward

them in nothing flat. He ran lightly, and he made no effort to accost the pair, only to trail them as they wandered down the barracks street.

They went into a shack and closed the door. The window whitened.

A group of men passed and Squeak flattened in the shadow of a hut to escape notice. He was held there several minutes, for the group stopped almost beside him while one man left the party to turn in.

Chafing at the delay. Squeak circled to the rear of the shack into which Brass Bride and Wooley had gone. Crouched beneath the window, he pasted an ear to the rough boards.

Wooley's voice reached him, hoarse, frightened. "Onest, gov'nor, h'i don't now a thing abaht it!"

The words of the other man were whispered, and only the more sibilant hissings of the whisper reached Squeak's ears.

Wooley abruptly launched a squall of agony that died in its inception. Bumpings, gratings, hoarse breath-sounds eddied inside the shack.

In the muffler of his lung tissue, Squeak told himself, "Maybe I'll learn something now!"

The commotion inside the shack subsided. Then the window blackened, a blanket hung over it. Squeak jammed his ear more tightly to the boards.

Wooley croaked, "So 'elp me, I dunno what you're talkin' abaht. We didn't see no Blackburn on the bloody sea. So 'elp me, we didn't!"

The whisper hissed for several seconds. Wooley croaked, "I said we saw a Blackburn flyin'. This little ape must 'ave read the numbers on the tail. 'E's barmy, h'l tell you. Right after we seen it, 'e 'auled off and busted me in the trap. That's 'ow h'l got bloodied up. So 'elp me if it ain't!"

Squeak hardly distinguished the whisper hissings as the other man inside replied, but Wooley's voice was louder, more terrified.

"I tell you, the little ape is barmy! 'E got 'is whole story out of 'is bloomin' 'ead! H'i ain't never 'eard of this Major Blue Tanner 'e talks about!" Squeak pressed his lips together. This wasn't telling him much!

Wooley's voice lifted to a screech. "'Eaven 'elp me, gov'nor! It's the truth I'm tellin'. Ow—blast yer——"

Blows popped inside the shack; a gun cracked.

Squeak O'Toole jerked upright, pitched along the shack side. One hand out, grasping the boards, told him when he reached the corner. The cubicle door banged open ahead of him. No glare came out, so the lights must have been doused.

Squeak leaped. A man smashed against him. The fellow squealed,

"What the——" His voice was hoarse in the thick darkness.

They went down, pounded the ground in a tangle of arms and legs. Squeak missed two blows, put a third in a man's middle. A gun squirted flame and cracking reports. Lead-dug dirt sprayed Squeak's eyes. He erupted curses. They ended in a yelp of pain as the other laid the gun barrel against the side of his head with terrific force. Squeak struck out madly. The gun hit him again, lower down, on the temple.

Squeak didn't pass out, but he was too stunned to help it when the other man heaved him away and ran off in the darkness.

All about the base, men were bellowing alarmed questions. Some approached, running. Squeak gathered his hands and feet under him, lurched erect. A flash stabbed him with a rod of light.

Blinking, Squeak saw a gun on the ground at his feet. He bent dizzily, got it. A great deal of the whirl went out of head as he stared at the still hot weapon.

It was his spike-snouted Mauser.

Another flash gushed into the cubicle. Squeak pivoted, eyes following the beam.

The Cockney, Wooley, was spilled face up on the floor. And he couldn't very well be anything but dead with that blue-rimmed tunnel through the top of his head.

A man ripped: "It's the balmy chap! Get him!"

Squeak made no effort to resist the avalanche of bodies that bore him down.

CHAPTER III SEA DUMP

O TOOLE SAT ON THE FLOOR, back jammed to the wall, chin gripped in his palms, and glared, mad-eyed, at the jail shack's one high, barred window. He could hear a guard trundling around and around the place. Major Ayers was taking no chances. He had ordered all fittings, even blankets, removed so Squeak would have nothing with which to injure himself.

They were sure he was an insane killer. Loud and long had Major Ayers cursed himself for allowing Squeak to remain at liberty after Wooley's story of the afternoon had shown he was mentally unbalanced.

Squeak ground enamel off his teeth. They thought he had shot Wooley. He saw their viewpoint; he didn't see how he was going to prove them wrong. Nobody believed the killer had run away in the darkness. Brass Bride had smiled and said he was in his quarters when he heard the shot and every man at the base believed him.

It must be midnight or later. Squeak growled, decided to go to sleep. The window bars were solid; the door was heavy. Chances of escape were nil.

Squeak opened the window and was stretching out below it, where the air was fresher, when something thumped beside him. He felt around and found a bundle a foot long and thick as his fist, wrapped in cloth. Wires ran from the bundle up through the open window.

He heard the sentry pace around from the front. When the fellow was past, Squeak investigated and found the wires, a twisted pair, stretched taut from the window over the roof of a near-by shack, high enough that the guard walked under them.

Feeling of the cloth, he concluded the thing wasn't a bomb. He unwrapped it; it was a continental telephone, receiver and transmitter one piece.

The receiver against his ear, he said into the mouthpiece, "Well?"

The receiver diaphragm pulsed a whisper at him, "Keep the wire tight so that guard will walk under it!"

Squeak breathed, "It's tight."

"Who killed Wooley?" asked the receiver.

Squeak spat, "I didn't!"

"I don't think you did. But who was it?"

Squeak recognized the whisper then, gritted, "You did, damn you!"

At the other end of the phone, Brass Bride hissed, "Oh, hell! We won't go into that, then. Listen, you mentioned Major Blue Tanner to-day. What do you know about him?"

Squeak hesitated, said, "He's an old pal of mine, and I understood he asked my transfer up here."

"Why'd he have you transferred?"

"Search me. I haven't the slightest idea."

"Don't lie to me, O'Toole."

"I'm giving it to you straight."

"Hm-m-m." Brass Bride sounded puzzled. "I guess you are, at that. Blue Tanner signed Wooley's order to bring you here, anyway. I'll have to take a chance on you. Will you follow orders if I give you a chance to escape?"

Squeak rasped, "What orders?"

"Your damned curiosity got you into this mess. And I can't tell you things, any more than Wooley could. You'll either do what I say and not ask questions, or you can stay in there. It's no hair off my head if they turn a firing squad loose on you or clap you in the nut house."

"Then why worry about me?"

Brass Bride, whisper angry, said, "You're dizzy as hell if you think I'm worried. I don't think you killed Wooley and I thought I'd give you a chance to help yourself and me, too. Are you interested or not?"

Squeak growled, "I'm interested."

"In a few minutes you will hear a plane being warmed. When the door of your jail is unlocked, walk out and take off in that plane. I'll put a map in the cockpit with a certain spot marked. Fly to that spot and tell whoever you find there that Brass Bride sent you and tell them exactly what has happened here. Now, you got it?"

"I got it."

"Be sure and tell them exactly what you heard before Wooley was killed."

"Yeah."

"Righto, then. Don't take a chance on tossing that phone out of the window. Break the wires when the sentry is in front and I'll pull them in. Take the phone along and throw it in the ocean after you've taken off."

Squeak tore the wires loose.

SQUEAK went to the door and leaned beside it and listened while possibly ten minutes passed. Then a motor popped, coughed and drummed steadily. More minutes passed. Then the door lock clicked.

Clubbing the phone, Squeak jumped out. Near the shack corner, the sentry huddled on the ground. Nobody else was visible in the gloom. Squeak pitched to the sentry, felt his wrists. The man was unconscious from a crack over the head.

Not making much noise. Squeak charged for the plane. The base was silent except for the drum-rattle of the plane motor. He scuttled between the hangars.

A two-place Short seaplane, G.R.W. wheel mounts on the floats, stood on a floodlighted slipway with prop lazily sucking at the Irish Sea. Squeak, seeing nobody around, flung for the ship and plugged himself into the pilot's bucket.

A gun cracked, jabbing flame at him from around a hangar corner.

"The louse! The rat!" Squeak suddenly thought Brass Bride had arranged the whole thing for an excuse to kill him while he tried to escape.

But he changed his mind about that as he saw Major Ayers jump out into the floodlight glow in order to shoot better with his revolver.

Squeak struck at the throttle. The Short charged into the surf. As it wallowed through the water, Squeak yanked the cords running to the catches that held the G.R.W. wheel mount to the floats. The seaplane, rid of the wheel drag, streaked ahead. A bullet from Major Ayers' gun whacked a wing. Another split the windshield.

Squeak hauled, got the Short on step. The batter of waves came faster, then stopped as he hauled off. No more revolver lead hit. He banked, found a map in the cockpit pocket. With it was a flashlight. He threw the telephone overboard and turned the flash on the map.

On the chart of the Irish Sea was penciled a cross. The spot it indicated was fully seventy miles to the north and well offshore.

The Short was headed in the opposite direction. Squeak gathered twelve thousand feet of altitude before he swung and went north. Out to sea, scattered clouds hung. Plunging into these, he felt safe from pursuit.

He kept a wary eye on the Mark II compass, twice dropping down to get an idea of his drift from the waves. At odd moments, he wondered what kind of a wild goose chase he was going on, wondered what he would find where that cross was marked on the chart.

He neared the spot at five thousand feet, peering overside anxiously and spotted a seaplane resting on the surface.

He tilted the Short down. The plane on the sea was a tri-motored Blackburn. A British bus. He circled it. A man stood on the hull and waved his arms in the moonlight. Three more men were in the cockpits.

Reassured, Squeak splashed the Short into the comparatively calm sea and taxied toward the Blackburn. The men put a rubber boat overside and two got in the little shell and paddled toward him.

Squeak eyed the helmeted, goggled faces, barked, "Brass Bride sent me!"

A man in the boat called, thick-voiced, "Good!"

No more was said until the rubber tub muzzled the Short floats. The two men stepped onto the floats and took flat pistols from their belts and pointed them at Squeak.

One cracked, "*Ich bedauere!* The hands very high, *bitte!*"

Squeak blew out—"Krauts!"

He took a good look at the black gullets of the

pistols and put his hands up. He cursed them as they climbed up and searched him, until one grated, "*Ruhig!* Quiet!"

Squeak snarled, "So Brass Bride is a German agent! Well, he did a nice job of making you a present of me and this plane!"

They replied nothing. After the search was over, the spokesman said something in German and the other nodded, "*Ja!*" and got into the boat and rowed back to the Blackburn.

The Boche who remained prodded Squeak in the throat with his flat pistol. "You will take off and follow the other plane. And it will be well to remember I am a flyer and that you are practically worthless to us."

Squeak gritted, "What a bright goober I am! I oughta get my behind shot full of lead!" Hot-necked, he took the Short off, glued it onto the tail of the Blackburn. They went north, toward the ragged west coast of Scotland. And they climbed steadily, attaining great altitude.

UNDER the snout of the German's pistol Squeak stewed and steamed. He could see things now. Brass Bride was a German secret agent. Wooley had evidently known, but for some reason was afraid to voice his knowledge. Brass Bride had killed him, using Squeak's gun to shift the blame, then gotten rid of Squeak cleverly, making Germany a present of a good plane in the process.

Squeak scowled, "The pup!"

And the Blackburn derelict on the sea—Brass Bride had gone out in it to consult his masters. That meant a Kraut submarine. The iron fish must have been under the Blackburn while Squeak felt of the hot motors and wondered and tried to pry information out of the scared Wooley. Possibly the sub had seen the Short approaching and dived to get out of sight.

Squeak's German captor suddenly yelped, "*Silence das motor!*"

Ahead, the Blackburn was slanting slightly, the four-bladed props dead. Squeak cut his ignition and followed. They were high, and the flat glide they were in carried them mile after mile in weird, hissing silence.

Then Squeak grated searing expletives. His figuring had been good! A submarine lay in the little bay they were making for. The bay was a big nick in the rock-cankered shore of an island that was little larger than a pair of good front yards. Some miles to the right lay the Scottish coast, a frayed bulwark of stone.

Studying the island. Squeak could make out nothing but great gouts and ridges of stone, and the submarine. The Blackburn lurched in, silent as a bat, and dead stuck a hundred feet from the U-boat. Squeak came in behind and plunked his floats on the bay surface.

He glared at the oilskin-clad Jerries watching curiously from the ribbed steel deck of the sub. Then surprise rolled the lids off his eyes.

Those big rocks along the bay shore were hangars! Nearly every painted-canvas-over-wood boulder housed a plane! The island was a secret Boche seaplane base. A marvelous location it was, too, for the planes could range around the Irish coast where Allied convoys sailed, bearing priceless food from the United States and England's Colonial possessions.

The Kraut *Kapitanleutnant*, into whose presence Squeak O'Toole was gun-herded, was boxlike of head and flat of nose, with big, pale water-drop eyes. Appended around his neck was a glittering *Pour le Merite*, Germany's prized "for merit" decoration. The way he ripped out orders said he was in command of the secret base.

He slanted his eyes up and down, taking in Squeak's bandy stubs of legs, his puff of a chest, his low-dangling arms with the hairy clubs of fists on the ends, his wrinkled, homely face with the gigantic mouth.

The German finished looking. "If I did not know you had lately come from Africa, I would be at a loss as to how to classify you."

Squeak spat, "Funny Fritz, eh?" Words luridly expressive of what he thought of the joke tumbled up his throat. He turned them back to grit, "You know a lot, don't you?"

"A lot." The Hun's English was good. "We have wireless, you see. Our man who sent you to us used the wireless in his plane to enlighten us much. But some things you can tell me. Why were you transferred to Ireland from Egypt?"

Promptly, Squeak said, "For the simple but good reason that the English needed another buzzard up here."

"That is the lie I expected, of course." The *Kapitanleutnant* frowned. "You'll have to do better. Who is this Major Blue Tanner of whom you spoke several times?"

Dead-faced, Squeak said, "Somebody has been loading you. I never heard of a Major Blue Tanner."

THE German took a black Luger automatic out

of his thigh holster and looked to see if there was a cartridge in the chamber. "You know, Captain Squeak O'Toole, I never heard of a Major Blue Tanner, either. But the existence of such a person interests me greatly."

Squeak asked, "Why?"

"Because I like to know what is going on about me. You can relieve my mind much by telling me what you know."

"What I know wouldn't relieve you."

The German's frown became very genuine. "That is exactly what I am afraid of." He sighted the barrel of his automatic at Squeak's right eye. "I regret to tell you. Captain Squeak O'Toole, that our position here unfortunately makes it inadvisable to take prisoners. One might escape and cause our capture. Due to our disguised planes, we are technically spies, so—"

He stopped to listen to the hiss of wind in plane struts which came from overhead. Squeak followed him to the door. Dawn was making the eastern horizon a scarlet gash and spreading a lurid cherry flush over the rock-scabbed islet and among the hangars that were camouflaged to look like boulders from a distance of even a few yards.

Four seaplanes, two with Whitehead torpedoes clamped to the fuselage bellies, swept in with dead motors, as weirdly silent as bats, and landed in quick succession. A flying *Leutnant* from the quartet came up, shook his head and said, "*Nein*," then some more in German.

The *Kapitanleutnant* scowled at Squeak. "I wonder if this is all a clever plot? You fell into our clutches almost too easily. And your friend—I hoped it would be this mysterious Major Blue Tanner—my men report they did not find him where we thought he would be. I am puzzled."

Squeak stared at the officer. "What the hell are you gabbing about?"

The German shook his head, thinlipped. "We stop pretending, Yankee! You will tell us all you know at once."

Squeak twisted his lips into a grin, said, "Ixnay."

The Boche hefted his gun. "Even a bullet through the head makes a man bleed some. I do not want my office fouled. You will walk outside, upon the sand."

Squeak backed from the gun, out into the warming dawn.

The Kraut said, "Tell us what we want to know and we will make an exception, retaining you alive as a prisoner of war."

Squeak croaked, "Nix."

The *Kapitanleutnant* took out a handkerchief and wiped it across his forehead. "I am genuinely sorry about this. It sickens me, but my orders are to shoot you if you will not talk. Please, is it necessary?"

He did not sound as if he were bluffing. Sweat, oozing on Squeak's face, trickled a globule into his collar, causing his neck muscles to jerk. His tongue, running out loose and flat, spread over all his lower lip. He croaked, "I'm in a spot, Heinie. I could tell you all I know and it'd be so damned little you'd still be sure I was a liar. It's no use."

The German selected a spot between Squeak's eyes and pointed his gun at it. "I'm sorry. You have any one you wish notified?"

Squeak, thick-tongued, said, "I guess not." Then he set his teeth together hard.

The Boche said, "God forgive you, and me, too," and pulled the trigger.

Squeak saw red flame come out of the Luger barrel at him, felt the gun report clap against his eardrums, smelled the stink of powder—and wondered how long it took a man to die. Because he had seen shot men fall on their faces and the sight always sickened him, he sat down so he wouldn't fall on his face. For possibly one grisly second, it was all very unreal. Then Squeak saw the *Kapitanleutnant* laughing at him.

The Boche spilled words. "Several times I use that trick. *Ja*, and always, when they think the first bullet missed, they start pleading not to be shot again and screaming they will talk. You are a brave man, *Herr O'Toole*."

Squeak, jaw down loose on his chest, was mum.

"We really cannot keep prisoners here," the other smiled. "I will send you and one of my men to Germany in your plane. You will take off at once. The Short has been refueled while we chatted."

Squeak, his grin sick, got out, "I'd hate to play poker with you, Fritz!"

CHAPTER IV SHORT CHANGED!

THE HUN ASSIGNED TO ESCORT Squeak to Germany was short and softly fat, with cheeks that looked as if he held half of an apple in each one. When the *Kapitanleutnant* made him known to Squeak, the fat Boche promptly suggested in a bad mixture of German and English, "*Das ist* long flight. *Besser* we should eat a bite now, *ja*?"

His superior agreed, "*Ja*."

Enroute to the mess shack, Squeak got glimpses into several hangars and decided all planes at the secret base were either captured English ships or German busses disguised as English ships. No wonder the Hun base flourished undetected.

They ate, in a mess hut disguised as a canting slab of stone, fried sausages, cheese in tinfoil wrappings, brown bread, preserves and coffee. Squeak, after using the pepper-shaker, placed it beside his plate. A moment later, when he thought nobody was looking, he knocked it off into his lap—and it was nearly empty when he later replaced it and calmly stuffed a piece of cheese into his mouth.

When they went out, Germans in rubber boots were holding the Short near shore while a line from a small motor-boat was made fast to the fuselage underpinning. Squeak, still munching some of his breakfast, started to get aboard.

"*Bitte!*" apologized his plump guard. "I am sorry. A slight formality first, *ja*?"

Smiling proudly, the Boche turned Squeak's coat pocket inside out, emptying it of the pepper he had poured into it. "You see, I watched you." The chubby man turned the rest of Squeak's pockets to make sure.

Squeak scowled and eased his knobby frame into the observer's bucket of the Short. The cockpit had been emptied of ammo drums for the twin Lewis guns and the guns were wired to the Scarff ring mount so they could not be moved. The dual controls had been removed and the wireless set partially dismantled. Ammo boxes of the two synchronized cowl guns were full, however. And two twenty-pound Martin-Hale bombs were racked under each wing.

Squeak squinted at the fuel gauge, said around what he was chewing, "That juice won't take us to Germany."

"That is simple," smirked the fat Kraut. "We meet one of our U-boats in the Channel and refuel. The U-boat already waits for us."

At the last minute, the *Kapitanleutnant* passed up a leather despatch case. That, Squeak decided, was probably the real reason for the flight to Germany. It was not likely the trip was being made for the sole purpose of escorting him safely to a military prison.

Squeak growled futile protest as shiny handcuffs were clicked on his ankles and wrists. The motor-boat, exhaust muffled until it was hardly audible, tightened the tow line and went out to sea. It towed them several miles, far enough that the roar of a plane motor was unlikely to be heard on the Scottish mainland. Then they yanked the Sunbeam over, got it going, cast off. The plane sloughed through the waves, lightened, went on step, took off. Banking, it went south.

Watching overside, Squeak frowned. Back at the island, the U-boat had submerged in the inlet and the water was deep enough to hide it from a chance passing English plane. From the air, the island seemed a deserted, barren mass of rocks.

Cautiously, Squeak tried to snap his handcuff links, the effort forcing his shoulders around his neck in great gouts of tendon. The try failed. So did an attempt on the manacles at his ankles. The Short climbed steadily, finally to level and boom along at ten thousand.

Squeak gazed back, saw the island still in sight, and fell to puzzling. The four German ships which had returned while the *Kapitanleutnant* questioned him had evidently been hunting Major Blue Tanner and hadn't found him. That was about all the information Squeak had gathered—the Boche considered Major Blue Tanner a particular menace.

"Now I wonder how Blue Tanner hooks into this," Squeak grumbled. "I thought I had it all figured, but there's more in it than I thought."

THE islet was out of sight. Drawing his head down, Squeak spat a folded wad of tin-foil out of his mouth. This tinfoil—it had been around one of the cheeses he had for breakfast—he unrolled. Inside was an ample tablespoonful of moist pepper.

Squeak thought of the pepper the Boche had so gleefully removed from his pocket, grinned wolfishly and stood up.

The fat German saw him and clawed for a pistol.

Lunging recklessly. Squeak knocked up the fellow's goggles, managed to smear pepper into his eyes. The Kraut squawked, "*Ach, Gott!*"

Toes hooked in the Scarff ring mount kept Squeak from going overboard as he flung against the German's pistol arm. The gun gulped fire, lead and noise. Squeak got both manacle-hampered hands fast on the gun wrist, twisted and bent. The weapon plummeted overside.

A Very signal pistol came up, gripped in the Kraut's other hand. Squeak struck at it wildly, wracked with ghastly visions of those balls of fire fizzing among his entrails. The shotgunlike barrel emptied, smearing his neck with powder burn.

The Short lurched insanely in the sky, fell off on a wing-tip and went down in a bawling spin. Squeak struck again and again at the fat Hun, hammering him down in the cockpit. The fellow screeched, tried to dump Squeak overboard. Squeak's elbows, hooked in the cockpit, saved him. An instant later, he chucked the German twice under the chin, solidly. The fat man subsided.

Squeak sprawled into the cockpit with the flaccid Kraut. His manacled legs would work the rudder after a fashion. He got the Short to dive out of its spin and nosed up.

He searched for the missing parts of the wireless set, did not find them. Locating the keys, he unlocked his handcuffs, then mopped the pepper out of the fat German's eyes and pulled the fellow's cropped hair until the pain revived him.

"In front with you, Heinie! And behave, or I'll feed you to a fish!"

Spewing guttural oaths, the Jerry scrambled into the observer's cockpit. Squeak passed up the handcuffs. "Put them on!" After the man had done so. Squeak leaned over the camelback and tested to make sure they were locked.

The Short banked for the Irish coast. Squeak studied what charts were in the cockpit. One, a German map, blocked off in small squares, bore a penciled number. He located the square the number represented well out in the English Channel. The Boche sub would be waiting there to refuel them.

"They'll get a surprise!" Squeak gritted. "And so'll the Krauts at that secret base."

He studied the Mark II compass and corrected a bit, heading directly for the English seaplane base he had quitted in such haste.

A speck materialized in the sky ahead. Squeak

stared anxiously, hoping it was a gull. But it sprouted wingbanks and landing floats like big, clubby feet. An English bus, a Camel. Squeak found binoculars in the cockpit and made out the flying-gull-with-a-dachshund insignia of Major Ayers' squadron. And a minute later, he knew it was Major Ayers himself who huddled in the one occupied bucket.

The Camel whipped nearer. Squeak, erect, waved. Major Ayers promptly sprayed lead at him.

"The dumb pup!" Squeak croaked, and flounced out of the writhing threads of Royal Arsenal tracer. "He still thinks I'm a nut!"

Squeak's German prisoner suddenly stood up, waving his arms, bawling, "Don't shoot! *Gott*, don't shoot me!"

Squeak roared, battered him down, bellowed, "You played hell! He seen your Kraut uniform and now he'll think I'm a German spy instead of a plain goofus!"

While he rolled, avoiding Major Ayers' tracer, he debated. Fighting back at Major Ayers was out of the question. That officer was probably doing his duty as he saw it. Flight was the thing. But the English seaplane base was long miles away, considerably farther than the secret German base.

Abruptly, Squeak flung the Short into the north. He would decoy Major Ayers to the secret German seaplane base, let him see its existence for himself!

CHAPTER V TANGLED WIRES

DODGING MAJOR AYERS' VICKERS lead and keeping one eye cocked on the fat Boche prisoner proved considerable of a job. The prisoner, however, had subsided now that they were headed toward his fellows.

Squeak, wary, snarled, "I'll have to watch that kraut-swiller!"

A half-dozen times the chase turned into a lopsided bird battle. Each time Squeak managed to maneuver clear and lead the chase northward. So occupied did the dodging keep him that an object on the surface of the Irish Sea was almost below before he saw it.

A submarine! A big craft, riding high in the water. With the binoculars. Squeak made out the number, U-144. One of the big German "140 class" cruising

subs! But what interested him particularly—a small seaplane was being assembled on the U-boat deck. It seemed almost ready for the air. A swarm of men were struggling to fasten one wing bank in place.

Squeak banked furiously as Major Ayers ringed him and sprinkled holes in the Short wing fabric. They milled in the sky. Major Ayers jockeying with murderous intent, Squeak diving and banking and stalling to keep clear of those squealing gray tracer ribbons.

Down below, a slanting steel beam of a derrick picked the tiny seaplane off the ribbed sub deck and dropped it on the sea. Brownish smoke squirting from the upright exhaust stacks, it streaked across the waves.

Major Ayers abruptly left Squeak and dived for the tiny single-seater. Plying the binoculars. Squeak read on the tail of the diminutive ship "*Albatrosswerke, G.M.B.H.*" A crate made by the Boche Albatross works.

Major Ayers didn't get the little Albatross. It stepped off the surface, banked zigzags, then whipped around. An instant later, Major Ayers was scudding about wildly, spanked by the little ship's Spandau lead.

Squeak clipped, "This won't do!" He circled, squinting down, then leaned over the camelback and gave the bomb trips a yank. Two of the twenty-pound Martin-Hale eggs detached.

They missed the U-boat, as Squeak fully expected, raising boils of water a quarter of a mile wide of the mark. But the little Boche crate left Major Ayers and came boiling up to chase him away. Squeak gave the Sunbeam all the gas it would take and made sky tracks into the north.

The undersized Albatross had the edge in speed, but it had to sacrifice that edge and climb to get at him. Squeak practically held his own. Major Ayers in the Camel trailed along, not climbing much and not losing ground.

The submarine dropped to the rear, and the island of the secret Boche seaplane base came nearer. While still miles away, the islet spawned half a dozen ships. The Germans had seen them, were putting boats into the air without the formality of towing them out where the motor roar would not be heard from the mainland. They approached in a tight swarm.

Squeak ripped, "This is plenty close!" He wrenched the Short around, figuring he had demonstrated the existence of the German base plainly enough. But Major Ayers, far below, made no effort to turn. Instead, he climbed hopefully for the single-seater Albatross.

Squeak abruptly understood. The Boche ships

looked like English boats. Major Ayers was flinging blindly into what was sure to be a kill party. Squeak upended the Short, diving for the Albatross.

A crashing in the observer's cockpit brought him upright. The fat German had ripped out a piece of the instrument board and was set to hurl the hardwood fragment into the prop. Squeak closed with him, sank hard, hairy fingers in the soft wrist. The Boche threshed, nearly hauled him out of the cockpit. A fat fist which seemed very hard hit Squeak in the neck and his throat suddenly felt it was poured full of hot lead.

He caved the Kraut's belly in with a fist. The German melted down, flopping weakly. Squeak hammered the fellow's jaw until the flopping stopped. Then, snarling, he snapped the man's safety belt tight.

BACK at the controls, and the Short out of its wild plunge, Squeak saw the bird scrap was getting under way. Three German boats were making for Major Ayers and the little Albatross. The other trio were already threading tracer about Squeak's Short.

"Seven to two!" Squeak wailed. "And there's more at that Boche base. What a hell of a stew I made of this!"

He stood the Short on its tail. The cowl guns cackled. Eyes on the tracer lines, he stirred the stick. The radiator of a Boche-herded ship vomited water and steam. The prop beat itself to splinters. Rearing up in the sky, the plane fell over backward.

Squeak spat, "One!" and fought his stalling bus. The other two Germans came at him from right and left, their tracer crossing a sizzling X dangerously close.

Squeak, who always talked to himself in a tight spot, was talking now. He said, "Down!" and went down.

Then, below, he saw something that made him rip, "For—what the hell!"

Four planes with the circle-and-dot insignia of English busses were ganging a lone peewee-sized Albatross. Major Ayers in his Camel was rubbing wings with the three German-ridden ships as boldly as though he had flown with them all his life!

Squeak clipped, "If that ain't a break! The Boche must think Ayers is one of them! And he thinks they're his pals! I hope he wises to the mistake before they do!"

He looped tight and threw a dab of lead at one of his opponents. The Boche flailed away, scared but not bad hit. Squeak chased him, trying to finish him while he was still rattled, and before the other ship got on his tail.

Below, the Albatross made a kill. Squeak stared anxiously at the plume of smoke and flames spilling for the sea, grinned, "Kraut eat Kraut!"

He hammered lead into the boat he was chasing. It tipped suddenly, motor dead, and glided for the surface.

The trio survivor backpedaled, skittering off warily, making for the doubtful safety of the other dogfight melee. Squeak followed him. The ship was a two-seater and he had to be careful of the rear cockpit guns.

The tiny Albatross speared another German boat with tracer and sent it flapping down. Major Ayers was carefully remaining clear of the Albatross, although appearing to take a big part in the scrap.

"Wise guy!" Squeak complimented. "Must know what's what by now!" Squeak discovered his fat German passenger wriggling with the return of consciousness, so he stood up and hammered the fellow's plump jaw some more. After that, he circled the outskirts of the sky fight, flirting in for a rattle of guns whenever he saw a chance. The little Albatross was performing like a hawk in a chicken coop.

"I'll let him clean the roost for me!" Squeak reasoned. "If Ayers will just keep out of his way."

Major Ayers was doing just that. The Albatross had but to feint toward him to send him hoicking away. Squeak marveled that the Krauts did not get wise.

The Albatross speedily annexed a third scalp, killing the pilot and observer of a Boche Friedrichshafen boat with one clean burst.

"That guy is good!" Squeak gritted. "Hep—there's my meat!"

He drove the stick against the instrument board, stepped hard on right rudder, tightened on the stick trigger trips. His cowl guns ate metal link-belt and spewed empty links and empty cartridges into the catch bags. The right wing of the Boche hanging in his sight rings folded upward, broke loose and dangled like a big scab.

Squeak yipped, "Now for the microbe!"

But the tiny Albatross was hot on the tail of Major Ayers' Camel. The Camel, wild in flight, was headed for the island which held the German base. And up from that speck of rock climbed a German ship that was painted like an English bus. More flying boats warmed on the bay surface.

Neck a distended mass of muscle, Squeak flung after Major Ayers and the pursuing Albatross. "The dumb goof! He still don't know that's not an English base!"

CHAPTER VI BLUEING THE BOCHE

THE SHORT HAD A LITTLE ALTITUDE to spare. He tipped the nose down and beat the throttle against the pin, overhauling the pair, slowly at first, then with terrific speed as Major Ayers fought for his life.

His shuttling cowl guns put ropes of tracer between the Albatross wings. The tiny fighter rolled clear and skidded around in the sky. For the first time, Squeak was close enough to see the pilot's features.

Squeak's hands loosened on the stick. He reared up out of the bucket. His mouth sagged roundly open and oil stink from the motor gorged his lungs.

He bawled, "My——!" and could find no other words.

For the man in the Albatross was his sidekick, Major Blue Tanner!

Squeak clawed off his helmet and goggles, waved his arms so violently he all but fell overboard.

Blue Tanner stood up, a squat bull of a man with the unlovely and highly efficient build of a gorilla. He tore off his own helmet, shook hands with himself. His hair was a blue-black stack, his jowls blue as gun steel with beard stubble.

Squeak flicked a glance at the island. Two more Krauts were upstairs.

"It's time we got the hell out of here!" he squalled at Blue Tanner, then waved his arms to convey his meaning.

Blue Tanner shook his head, jabbed both arms at the island. Then he sat down. His little Albatross flipped around and bulleted for the on-coming Huns.

"Crazy as a plastered owl!" Squeak howled. "Thinks we can lick that whole German base!"

He plopped down, booted the Short around and piled after Blue Tanner. "We'll get our pants shot off!" His head was in a buzz. How did Blue Tanner happen to be flying a Heinie bus from a Heinie U-boat?

Squeak ground, "If this ain't a wadded-up mess."

Blue Tanner swooped on the first Kraut. Squeak took the next pair. More Germans swirled up like chaff from the tiny bay. The sky boiled with flying boats. Momentum carried the rumpus over the island.

Metal-jacketed lead hammered Squeak's Sunbeam.

One cowl gun went haywire, the oil and paraffin-filled pipe of the C.C. gear that synchronized the fire through the prop probably ruptured. But the other gun still gobbled out .303-calibre slugs.

He got a German in the sight rings, squeezed out a short burst. The fellow flailed down. Convinced the man was pulling a fast one, Squeak followed. Sure enough, the Fritz tried to drag out five hundred feet above the island. Squeak hammered two short bursts and the Boche ship turned into steel and linen and splinters on the rocks.

Remembering the two twenty-pound, Martin-Hale bombs that still made air resistance under his wings, Squeak swooped for the camouflaged hangars around the inlet. But the submarine, coming to the surface with a great bubbling and boiling of water, gave him a better idea.

He hosed the inlet with his lone gun, treading on the rudder to swing his lead from one to another of the planes preparing to take off. Around the bay, ground guns sang like crickets. Squeak waltzed the Short from side to side, trying to avoid their fire, but it didn't help much. The Short's fabric skin got mangy with frazzle-edged holes. A wire parted with a whang. The engine acquired a miss in one cylinder.

Something squealed shrilly and hit Squeak a terrific belt in the chest. He looked down at the ragged holes where the bullet had come and gone in his jacket, felt warm fluid sloshing in his shirt. He sucked air into his lungs and decided the slug had stayed outside his ribs. The scratch began to hurt.

Squeak was hardly three hundred feet high when he reached back and gave the bomb releases a wrench. The U-boat was a barn-side target as his dive carried him over it from bow to stern. The two Martin-Hale eggs plunked aft of the conning tower and hatched out great balls of flame and smoke and flying steel. The sub wallowed, broken-backed, sinking, while Squeak scrimmaged with the controls as the Short jumped about in the hot rush of cordite-driven air.

German lead stormed against the upper wing section. He rolled out of it like a hawk-chased sparrow. His eyes slanted up. Three Krauts were after him.

Half a dozen more had Blue Tanner in a spot, for the Argus motor of the Albatross was sick, hardly able to pull the tiny bus through the sky. Blue abruptly dived for the sea in an effort to get clear.

On the outskirts of the brawl. Major Ayers buzzed his Camel around like a lost soul, making no fight

motions.

Squeak cracked, "The dumb heel! Why don't be pitch in! Can't he see this is a Jerry nest?"

Blue Tanner's motor died the instant he tried to pick his Albatross out of its dive. Because there was nothing else to do, he slashed into the sea, perhaps a hundred yards from shore. The Germans pounced on his wallowing bus, guns murderously red-tipped. Blue went out of his bucket into the sea with a bullfrog leap. He swam underwater for shore.

Squeak suddenly hit trouble aplenty himself. A solid wall of lead seemed to crash against his Short as two Boche ringed him simultaneously. It must have knocked the whole end out of the fuel tank, because gasoline sloshed ankle deep in the cockpit.

Squeak twitched the ignition switch off, slapped the Short down. Blue Tanner, splashing mightily, was almost ashore. Squeak headed for near where he swam, pointed the Short for shore and put it down a hundred feet from the rock-walled beach. The Short skipped a couple of times, settled. But it was still going fast when it hit the rocky island. The floats tore off. Wings crumpled like newspapers in the boulders. The Sunbeam motor jumped bade almost in Squeak's lap.

Squeak knew his face was going to bury itself in the instrument panel, started to put his hands up——

WHEN next Squeak knew things, Blue Tanner was hauling at his shoulders and cursing in an anxious roar. Squeak gurgled, "Leggo!" Wrenching free, he lurched a pace and fell down in smooth sand between two boulders. His eyes rolled. The Short was a washout. The fat German sat beside the wreckage and felt foolishly of his legs inside redly besoaked pants. He apparently had not been damaged anywhere else.

The bullet furrow in Squeak's chest hurt like hell. He rocked his head back, squinting from pain-fogged eyes. Overhead, a dogfight held howling sway. Fully twenty ships in bird battle!

Squeak pitched pointing hands up. "Where'n hell'd they come from?"

Blue Tanner glared, cursed. "They took their damned time getting here! I wirelessed for 'em before I took off from the sub. And the sub was to wireless 'em the direction we went so they could follow us."

Squeak grinned dizzily. "How come you hop a Boche plane from a Boche U-boat?"

Blue Tanner put a smirk on his homely face. "Aw, we captured that tin whale a month ago. Been using it to hunt this base since, hoping the Jerries wouldn't

smell a rat if they saw us. It didn't work so good."

Squeak made out a flying-gull-with-a-dachshund insignia on several of the scrapping planes above, yelped, "Hey, that's my squadron up there?"

"Didn't I tell you I wirelessed for 'em? Figured they'd get here sooner or we wouldn't have tried to clean this place singlehanded."

Squeak, bewildered, said, "I don't savvy half of this dizzy mess."

Blue Tanner grimaced. "I don't, either. Tell me what's happened to you and maybe I can get us straightened out."

Squeak told him, starting with finding the Blackburn derelict on the Irish Sea and finishing, "That damned Brass Bride is a Kraut. He tricked me into the hands of these Fritzes."

Blue Tanner rumbled a laugh. "Nix, guy. Brass Bride and Wooley were English intelligence agents working with me to find this secret German seaplane base. Brass Bride was out comparing notes with me in the sub yesterday when we saw a plane coming and submerged to get out of sight. I guess that was you. And naturally, Brass and Wooley didn't admit anything because they didn't want to give themselves away. You see, we suspected there was a German agent at the base. And I sent for you to snoop around and see if you could find the agent. Just to play safe, I didn't tell Brass Bride and Wooley I was doing that. We didn't have the slightest damned idea who the Kraut agent was."

Squeak frowned, "The guy who killed Wooley was the snooper, then!"

"Sure. He killed Wooley after trying to make him tell whether or not we were on the track of this secret seaplane base. I guess he was hiding in Wooley's shack when Brass Bride left him there. And he must have heard Brass Bride arrange for you to meet me and took the map Brass put in the plane and substituted a fake one. Then he wirelessed his pals the spot where he had sent you and the place I was waiting. We had a rendezvous at sea where Brass would come at night if anything turned up that we couldn't discuss by wireless. Brass wanted to get word of Wooley's death to me, so he sent you. Last night, four seaplanes came after me—the ones from the Boche base—and they'd have gotten us, only four ships made us suspicious and we dived before they saw us. Yeah, it all stacks up."

"How'd you come to take off from the sub when you saw Major Ayers and I?"

Blue Tanner snorted. "Hell! When two English

busses are scrapping, there's something screwy. I came up to investigate."

Squeak gritted, "Who's the German agent?"

Blue Tanner pointed upward. "Get an eyeful! He's given himself away by trying to help his pals."

The flying-gull-with-a-dachshund horde had about cleaned the sky of Krauts. And directly above, three of them were ganged on the tail of a ship that bore their own squadron insignia, but which had been fighting with the Boche.

"They've got him!" Squeak yelled. They had. The pilot flailed his arms. His plane lurched, came cartwheeling down.

Squeak and Blue Tanner sprinted for the spot where it was going to crash.

The uncontrolled ship knifed the rocks with a wing-tip. The body of the pilot hurtled out of the cockpit. Amid a terrific gnashing and rending, the plane beat itself to a shapeless mass among the boulders.

The pilot lay clear, face to the sky, as they ran up. Blue Tanner stopped, grunted, "Well, there's our German agent."

Squeak stared, said, "I'll be damned!" And the eyes of Major Ayers—dead Major Ayers—glared sightlessly back at him.