



BLACK FLIGHT

by WILLIAM E. BARRETT

*Every man but one in that flight hated their commander.
When they pulled a murderous blade from his heart all were forced to shoulder the guilt,
until the Reaper's Scythe hacked the secret from one man's wings.*

ON EASTER SUNDAY, April 9, 1917, the greatest British offensive of the war got under way. A blazing line of steel whipped across France and into Belgium; from Croiselles to Loos, from Ypres to the Nieuport Canal and to the sea. Under the greatest artillery barrage in the history of the world a grim horde of muddy infantry hit the Hindenburg Line.

April ninth was also the day on which Second Lieutenant Teddy Campbell, R.F.C., reported for duty to the headquarters of Fifth Wing at Albert.

He came up jauntily with the pinkest breeches in the entire air force, with his monkey hat at the correct angle and with the glow of training-camp victories still upon him. His heart raced madly but he strove to capture in his expression an attitude of casual indifference to everything. Like all of his breed he succeeded merely in looking like a raw kid.

Fifteen minutes at H.Q. gave him a new slant at his relative importance. Men with medals, ribbons

and amazing arrays of stripes rushed at, around and past him in a mad melee; a bored adjutant took his name, waved him down the hall with a mouthful of vague instructions and turned back to more important things. Twice he was given curt orders and then cursed for not being the man for whom the orders were meant.

Through the mad hours he moved bewildered. Desk soldiers with big voices dispatched him from point to point and he went. They told him to wait and he waited. Finally they ran out of things to do with him, gave him a paper and waved him on his way.

In the gathering purple of twilight he found himself on the fore deck of a lorry with an insignificant Cockney corporal beside him at the wheel. His destination, he gathered, was H.Q. of the 94th Squadron, R.F.C. His C.O.'s name was Kennedy.

"Strike me a ruddy purple, leftenant, if we don't catch the Devil's own fair belting to-night."

The corporal shifted his cud and spat over the

wheel of the lorry as they slid out into a dark road. He seemed not a bit embarrassed about opening a conversation with a commissioned officer. Teddy wondered a bit about the etiquette of the situation. Flying cadets are loose about discipline, but he had an idea that flying officers had dignity.

"Be blazing fit ter wipe yer bleedin' chin out yonder."

The corporal spat again. Teddy tapped his highly polished boot with his swagger stick and frowned. It was a top-hole swagger stick and he had been justly proud of it. The end was formed by a spark plug from a Beardmore engine and the tip was a metal machine-gun cartridge. He had borrowed the idea from a beribboned ace at Tours.

"You think that we'll run into some firing then?"

Curiosity scored on Dignity. It might not be proper to chat with noncommissioned men but it was going to be more comfortable. The ride promised to be a long one.

"Think? I blurry well know it." The corporal deliberated bitterly. "Blimey, they wouldn't send nobody, not even a blinkin' cook's cat out inter what we're a-goin' inter. Nobody, that is, but the poor, perishin' flyin' corps. Orphans, that's us, and nobody gives a ruddy damn. Fair disheartenin' it is."

Teddy Campbell swallowed hard and reached for a cigarette. One by one his dreams of the Front were toppling. He had always thought of the flying corps as being above the other branches, as looked up to and respected. He was beginning to suspect that this was another legend.

They were rolling out on the black highway that stretched from Albert to Baupaume and the roar of the guns had increased. They had no lights but the radiance of distant flares and the steady flashing of high-riding shells created a weird illumination which threw the road and the wreckage that flanked it into bold relief. The effect was paralyzing to a man Who was getting his first taste of it all. The Cockney, too, had ceased to chatter. He crouched low and drove.

SUDDENLY there was a thin whistle distinguishable through all of the wild bedlam of sound. The corporal tensed and the speed of his truck slowed. The whistle swelled quickly in volume until it was an ear-splitting shriek. Teddy ducked and something plunged into the woods on the left with a shattering *cr-r-r-ump*.

The Cockney turned and his round eyes bulged out of his ivory-white face.

"Fairish close, that one," he muttered. "An' 'Un, it were. Them others were mostly our own and sometimes they're the worst. Ah, cripes!"

Three more shells shrieked over in a bunch and struck with a shattering roar.

Teddy shook his shoulders and tried not to think of how many more might be ranging the road ahead.

"We better be getting on," he said. "Be hit as hard one place as another, I suppose."

"Right you are, governor. Sometimes a wee bit harder. Makes a bloke fair itch for the smell of a church and a fair decent life, it does."

Wheeeeeee! Another shell went careening across the road ahead and burst with a roar fifty yards beyond. It was followed by a salvo of four which seemed to burst dangerously close to the dark ribbon they were following.

Teddy's jaw set hard and he clutched the corporal's arm.

"Stop a bit, corporal. They're ranging this road and they're pretty regular about sending the things over. Better time them and then make a run for it."

The Cockney applied the brake and his eyes gleamed appreciatively. "Right you are. Aren't many young liftenants that would ha' thought o' that. Mostly airs and orders that nobody pays attention to. Blimey if—"

"All right. Shut up!" Teddy's jaw was set and he was counting slowly. He didn't like being reminded of the status of young flying officers, and the battering shell fire had become a deafening, blinding attack on the senses that left him tight and jumpy.

"39, 40, 41—"

Another salvo came over, short this time. Great plumes of mud and water spouted from the bog to the right of the road but there was no rain of shell fragments. The shells had gone too far down into the mud for splintered casings to escape.

Three times more Teddy counted, then he snapped a command. There seemed to be forty to fifty seconds between salvos and that was their time to run the gauntlet. No shells had burst on the road yet but the fire had been dropping very close on either side.

Huddled grimly in the cabin, they ran for it. Seconds ticked away into eternity and then hell roared behind them. Teddy's grip on his prized swagger stick relaxed and the Cockney's breath whistled from his nostrils. They were through.

"Lor' lumme but that was close. Fair belting our tail it were."

The Cockney fed petrol and they bounced in and out of jagged holes in the road. From horizon to horizon the world was a mass of flame and Teddy became numb with it.

They passed the shattered scrap heap of a town that had been Ozieres, punished anew now by distant gunners who refused to believe how utterly incapable it was of supporting life.

Three times they stopped on the road while Teddy conducted a shivering count of the seconds between whistling shells; then they ran for it and kept on.

Le Sars, a group of skeletons that once had been houses, loomed ahead of them and the Cockney swept off to the left.

THE world reeled and earth and sky seemed to merge in one vast concussion of sound and sensation, but the shells were not bracketing this road and Teddy Campbell relaxed utterly.

The Cockney talked on. Teddy paid him scant attention. He was already picturing his greeting at squadron headquarters. It wouldn't be as it was back in Albert. Here he would be meeting his own mates, the men he was going to fly and fight with. There would be a personal relationship.

"Bet I'll curl their hair with the tale I can tell them about this trip," he said contentedly. "Boy!"

He fingered the package in his pocket thoughtfully. In there he had an amazingly large set of wings, a British lion and an Uncle Sam insignia worked in braid. He had bought them with the idea that he would wear them on his first leave in Paris after he became an ace. Now, after the baptism of fire through which he had just passed, he was considering the possibility of putting them on immediately. Regretfully he pulled his hand away.

"No. Better wait till I'm an ace and can make the Frogs and Limies swallow 'em," he murmured. "That will be best. And won't I knock 'em dead? Won't I?"

They swung off the road with a rattle and a lurch, bounced three feet into the air and rolled drunkenly across a corduroy field with the mud spattering behind them in an oozy, dun-colored wake. A shell-punished chateau loomed out of the shadows and the Cockney gave a shout.

"Right as rain, liftenant. We blurry well thumbed our noses at the 'Un this night. Fair frantic fer our blood, he were, and here we are, sound as a sovereign."

"Is this it?"

Teddy didn't know what he had expected, but the

black ruin before him did not come up to any idea he had ever formed of a flyer's home on the Front.

"Right. Ye'll find it a bit oozy like as not. Better stick close to the boards and mind yer feet. 'Aul yer own roll in, I would. One of yer mytes will likely give yer a lift with the trunk. Fair loaded with duties I am or I'd do better by you."

The little Cockney was shifting Teddy's French trunk out of the lorry as he spoke. The wind had risen and the guns seemed to be redoubling their thunder. The human voice was lost in the screaming fury and Teddy shrugged helplessly as the corporal passed him his fancy bed roll and swung back to the cabin of the truck. A meshing of gears and a slithering spin of the tires, then Teddy was alone.

For a long minute the flyer looked at the forbidding ruin, at the sea of mud and the broken duckboards over which the mud was crossed, then he straightened his shoulders and started for the cavelike entrance of the chateau, his bed-roll gripped tight.

"So this is the Front," he murmured. "Lovely!"

As he stood before the ruined chateau, which showed not a light nor a sign of life, Teddy's spirits sank. The corporal had told him that the upstairs quarters were unoccupied, that he would find the squadron in the basement. Never in his dreams had Glory dwelt in the dark beneath the ground.

He shrugged and stepped forward. It was not given to him to read the future or he might have hesitated longer. He had no way of knowing that he was to fly through the hell of Bloody April, nor that the coils of Fate were drawing him into the tangled maze of a murder mystery, death within death to the wild accompaniment of the guns. He couldn't see dishonor, disgrace, surprise and hate ahead of him. He only knew that he was disappointed in Glory's dwelling place.

AT THE end of a long, dark corridor Teddy found a door behind which a light gleamed. He turned the knob and entered a large room. Two men bent over a table, intent upon the study of a map. A tall man with bushy, unkempt hair raised his head. "Pardon me. I'm looking for Major Kennedy. Can you—"

"Righto. I'm Kennedy. You're—"

"Lieutenant T. A. Campbell reporting—"

"Oh, yes. Surely. Know the formula by heart. You're needed to plug a hole in B. Back the way you came and turn left a dozen paces down. See Captain Wolverton. Fix you right up."

The major was already turning back to the map. Teddy stood stricken with amazement. He had not known majors like this. The man was dirty, unshaven, and clad in a filthy gray sweater. His adjutant, Teddy assumed it was the adjutant, was equally disreputable and clad in a uniform so ragged that he couldn't have cleaned a latrine in it back in London.

The two paid him no more attention and he turned slowly on his heel to grope his tortuous way back along the passageway on another blind quest. So this was the ninety-fourth and this the famous Major Bill Kennedy, D.S.O.

Three-quarter way down the adjoining passageway, Teddy heard voices. It heartened him and he pushed, through another door. A half dozen men looked up with interest. Teddy dropped his roll and took a quick inventory of the room.

Four men were playing cards in the center of the room, a solitary soul was drinking in a corner and the sixth man was deep in a letter. After one quick glance at the intruder they had all resumed their interrupted diversions. Teddy frowned.

"Wonder which of 'em is the captain." Teddy's thoughts, unspoken, beat staccato on his brain. "Helluva-looking outfit. Got to take a chance." His eyes had singled out the solemn-looking man with the pipe in his mouth at the far end of the table and he moved down on this individual with determination.

"Captain Wolverton?"

The solemn one raised his eyebrows and shook his head, his eyes kindly. A hoarse bark from the other end of the table caused Teddy to spin around.

"I'm Captain Wolverton."

Teddy saluted. "Lieutenant T. A. Campbell reporting, sir."

"Humph!" The captain ran a contemptuous glance down the trim figure. Bloodshot eyes lingered on the pink breeches, took in the details on the swagger stick and then came to rest on the youthful, eager face.

"The replacement, eh? Ever fly?"

The question was so unexpected, so brutally curt, that Teddy was thrown off balance. "Er—of course, sir. Hendon, Ayr, Tours and—"

"Well, we'll see. If you can, you'll be the first we ever got that could." Wolverton's thin, sharp features were twisted in a grimace of distaste. His eyes stabbed at the corner of the room where the man drank alone and then shifted to the square-jawed chap who had been writing a letter. Teddy was not standing where he could see the lone drinker but he could see the other

and he was taken aback by the look of hostility which passed between the man and his commander.

"Campbell, eh?" Wolverton was looking at the new replacement once more. "Another Canuck?"

"No, sir. American. Enlisted in Canada. I—"

"A Yank!" The man spat the word, then he shrugged and waved an impatient hand. "Oh, well! Make yourself at home. Dawn show for us tomorrow. We fly Nieuports."

CHAPTER II BLACK-CROSS MAGIC

HE WAS LOOKING at his cards again and Teddy took it that he was dismissed. In the light of his expectations, this cold actuality took Teddy Campbell's breath.

He had been more important as a raw cadet than he was in this fighting squadron; yet he had just been informed coolly that he would be fighting in the air at dawn.

The other card players, too, seemed to have forgotten him, except for a square-faced, curly-headed heavy weight who bore the map of Erin on his face. As Teddy glanced his way, the man winked solemnly. It was a cheering gesture, the first friendly overture, and it made Teddy feel somewhat at home. He turned away with the feeling that things might not be so bad. The man whom he had first addressed seemed human enough and the Irishman would be friendly. He did not know about the fourth card player; a tall man, handsome as a collar ad, who had barely glanced at him.

"Welcome to our city, Yank. I'll do the honors. Know how you feel. I'm not so long up myself. I'm Dave Tannehill, a Canuck and proud of it."

The square-jawed youngster who had been writing letters was on his feet. His broad, capable hand clasped Teddy's warmly. At the same time he bestowed a glance filled with dislike on the corner of the table where Captain Wolverton sat.

"Canuck, you're a big help," Teddy sighed. "I need an assistant trunk hauler and some one to wise me up to things."

The Canadian grinned and the two men crossed the room to a bunk in the corner. In a few minutes Teddy had spilled the whole story of his hopes. Tannehill seemed amused at his impression of Kennedy.

"Kennedy's all right," he said. "Bit of a grandstander. The rest of the fellows, A and C Flights, are grabbing their sleep."

"Sleep? With all this racket going on?"

"Righto. Part of the show. You'll get used to it."

"Who's the lad getting pipped up all alone?" Teddy indicated the slim youngster in the corner whose sole interest seemed to lie in the tall bottle at his elbow. Tannehill looked thoughtful.

"Got the woofits," he said shortly. "To-day was his first time over. Saw a lad get it. Got his wind up. Wolverton didn't help any. He rode the poor devil. Lad's name is Jimmy Baker."

There was a sharp exclamation from the card table, then the captain's shrill, cutting voice. "Damned if I ever saw any decent luck that ran like yours, Malone."

"Meaning what?" The curly-headed Irishman was rising slowly to his feet.

"Meaning that. When a man tops my cards four times running and when he wins every night—"

"You dirty son!" The Irishman gave a quick lunge and the table tipped over into the middle of the room.

The pipe smoker leaped forward and his lean fingers fastened themselves on the Irishman's shoulder.

"Hold a bit, Malone. Hold a bit. That won't do."

The tall, good-looking chap had stepped in front of the captain.

"Helluva useless row," he said. "Who cares about a few lousy francs. What's the matter with you blighters?"

"Nobody can throw dirt at me. I'll kill the lousy scut!" Malone's face was red, his eyes flaming. He was beyond reason at the moment.

Swiftly, deftly, as though from long practice, the two non-combatants swept the men apart.

TANNEHILL shrugged disgustedly. "It's like that all the time," he said. "Malone has eleven Huns. That's more than Wolverton has by three. He thinks that he'd be wearing the flight ribbons instead of Wolverton if he weren't an Irishman. Wolverton hates him and he's cheated him out of four kills that I know about. Rotten mess, isn't it?"

Teddy nodded. "Who are the other two?"

"Damon and Pythias. The big chap with the looks is Arrelanes. He's an Aussie. The solemn egg is Jeff Hinchman. Jeff's the official peacemaker. He's been trying for weeks to get Wolverton to take a leave of absence. The man's nerves are so shot that he's wild half the time. Jeff's afraid he'll go to pieces in the air some time and get the whole flight killed."

"Rather dislike Wolverton yourself, don't you?"

"Righto." Tannehill made a grimace of distaste.

"The man's a rotter. He's always sneering at the rooks and he'd let a green one get done in without turning a hand. If it wasn't for old Jeff and for Dan Malone, I'd never have lived out the week I've spent here."

One week! Teddy stared incredulously. Tannehill seemed so different from the men he had known in the training camps, so much better poised, that he had sized him up as a veteran. And he had been up just one week.

Teddy Campbell took that thought to bed with him and he pondered it as he tossed sleeplessly to the unfamiliar lullaby of the thunderous guns. He pondered, too, on the Front he had pictured and the Front he had found; on men who hated one another so deeply that no one mentioned the enemy across the lines.

Through the dim haze that lies on the borderland of sleep he saw faces twisted by emotion and he had a premonition of tragedy. The snarling Wolverton, the solemn Hinchman, the handsome Arrelanes, the enraged Malone and the scared Baker; they marched before him as though on parade. Dominating these faces was that of the grim youngster from Canada, Tannehill, a veteran of one week's fighting.

Teddy Campbell felt cold. He had thrilled to the thought of the Front and of fighting. He had ridden the skies of glory in his dreams. Now the guns were clamoring in the night and men were dying out there in the darkness that waited for dawn. In his chill bunk, Teddy too was waiting for dawn.

And now he was frightened.

Dawn in France during April, 1917, meant cold, wet winds, gray sky and a muddy take-off.

Teddy Campbell shuddered out of the battered chateau to a world of misty unreality. Mechanics moved like creatures from another world about the tiny Nieuports out on the line. The guns still thundered and growled, the earth shook and flashes of flame arced across the pale sky.

Captain Phil Wolverton strode toward the warming ships with his head down. He started to pass his newest recruit, hesitated, then stopped. His voice was hoarse, not unkind, but impersonal.

"The idea is," he said grimly, "to damage the enemy if you can and not to damage your own men under any circumstances. Keep your head and fly close. Watch my signals. You'll be all right."

He was gone. Dave Tannehill came running out,

late, but with a grim earnestness about every move of his body. His ship was at the end of the line and he stopped only briefly to shake Teddy's hand. "See you when we come down. Give 'em hell, Yank."

DAN MALONE stopped for a second to sketch a brief outline of conditions over the Front and the tactics of enemy planes. It was brief, pointed stuff but Teddy was grateful. No one else had thought of that.

Hinchman ranged up as the Irishman was speaking. He nodded solemnly and added his bit in the manner of a benign college professor addressing a freshman.

"Watch your leader and let him bring you through," he said. "A bullet travels about 2,500 feet a second, you know, and you'll be traveling 150 feet a second yourself. Skill isn't everything when the hazards are drawn as fine as that. Your chances are as good as the next."

Teddy nodded and Hinchman slapped his shoulder. "You're flying in number two. Ray Arrelanes flies the three spot across the way from you. Keep an eye on him. He's the most finished flyer on the Front."

The veteran turned away but Teddy's heart warmed. The spirit was different to-day. In the face of combat, this group seemed more like the fighting family that he had imagined a squadron to be. Then suddenly the spirit changed.

A lone straggler came across the road toward the apron with dragging feet. Baker! Teddy hadn't spoken to the man yet, but as he glimpsed that forlorn, reluctant figure he felt a surge of pity. It would be terrible to fear like that.

Captain Wolverton had seen the man, too. With an impatient gesture he turned and strode to meet him. They were too far away for Teddy to hear what they said but the captain's menacing crouch left little to the imagination. He was blistering the youngster with his full vocabulary.

Baker straightened and his lips moved. He seemed suddenly defiant rather than terrified and Wolverton lost his head with rage. Head down, he uncoiled like a released spring and his fist lashed from the waist. Baker took it high on the jaw, reeled and measured his length in the mud.

With a growl of rage, Dan Malone left his machine and went charging down the field.

Hinchman and Arrelanes were scarcely less quick and the Australian had a grip on Malone's arm before the Irishman could precipitate a general riot.

Hinchman's face was pale.

"We're fighting odds enough," he said bitterly, "without all this. A man who's fighting his leader won't fight many Huns."

Malone was growling like a bear, his eyes on Wolverton.

"I'll fight as many as the next," he said truculently, "but damn a leader who strikes a rookie!"

Baker, as pale as a ghost, was quietly mopping the mud from his Sidcot suit.

Captain Wolverton's lips curled. "I'm commanding the flight. Anybody who has any kicks to take over my head can take them to Major Kennedy. Anybody who doesn't want to do that will take orders."

Malone was still glaring at him and Wolverton met the glare. "I'll use discipline at my own discretion," he said. "A yellow man who won't fight will get his fighting blood stirred for him if I have to punch it to the surface." With a contemptuous look at the hapless Baker, he turned and stride toward his plane. The others followed his example silently.

Teddy shook his head.

"Wonder if the Jerries are as quarrelsome as this."

The rotary of his little Nieuport was purring softly but it was hard to realize that he was going into battle; far easier to believe that he was going away from one. Wolverton's hand dropped in a signal, his chocks were jerked away and he rushed down the field.

ONE by one all got off, leveling out in a V at two thousand feet to head over the lines toward the drifting puffs of vapor high in the murky sky.

The line of patrol was north to Arras, west to Oppy and south to Perrone, but the flight was not making a defensive patrol this morning. Instructions were, not to protect British two-seaters, but to stop all German observation. It was a British drive and the Germans must not obtain details of behind-the-lines organization. Consequently, Wolverton elected to cross the blazing lines at Baupaume and hit the north side of the Bois d'Havincourt.

Teddy Campbell looked at the blurred outlines of the great wood and felt a tingle run up and down his spine. Shaped, roughly, like the ace of spades, it sprawled behind the German lines south of Queant, the graveyard of more flyers than flew above it this morning. Here Boelcke and Immelmann had hunted when the war was young. To-day?

Teddy was aware of a tenseness, a watchfulness on the part of his leader and a tightening of the formation. The veterans expected trouble here.

Wouff. Wouff. Wouff. Archy suddenly blazed loose with black gobs of frightfulness, and Teddy gripped the stick more tightly. The range was short and red hearts blossomed in the black flowers beneath the cruising Nieuports.

Wolverton signaled and they changed their direction and altitude. Apart from that, no one seemed unduly interested in archy. Teddy tried to divert his mind from the possibility of shrapnel tearing through the cockpit. If the others were not alarmed, he would not be.

Wolverton's arm went up; then he dropped it and pointed down. Teddy followed the gesture and strained to see against the rolling black clouds of battle close to the earth and through the drifting mist that filled the sky. For several seconds he saw nothing; then his heart flipped over and came up in his throat.

Below them eight planes had pushed out of the clouds, whaleshaped planes that plodded steadily toward the battle line.

Again the signal and this time it meant action. Wolverton's nose went down and, scarcely a split second behind him, went the flight, seven ships rocketing out of the high blue.

Teddy forgot his fears entirely in that wild moment when the wind of the world seemed to be blowing into the cockpit and when the engine before him out-roared the war. The gray sky rushed past and black crosses on outspread wings came up to him.

For a flash of time there was a solid flight of German planes before his nose, eight ships that flew so close together that they seemed a perfect target. It was inconceivable that he could miss even the most casual burst. He would get his first Kraut with his first burst and—— The Germans were suddenly gone.

It was black magic and Teddy floundered out of his dive, slipped into a sloppy, over-rudder bank and found his Germans again. He had fought training camp "combats" but he was new to the front-line perfection of the roll.

Lead sang through his struts and his nerves steadied. He knew that he had been over-confident and that he would have to act with a sure hand now or he would pay dearly for his carelessness in coming down. He flashed a look back and half rolled when he spotted the German on his tail.

The German rolled with him and Death reached over the Spandaus. Another Nieuport flashed out of somewhere, dived passed them and came up in a zoom. Lead was clicking over the cowling of Teddy's futilely dodging ship when the other Nieuport hung by

its prop and placed a burst in the checkerboard of the Albatross cockpit.

CHAPTER III FLAMING DIVE

TEDDY DROPPED HIS NOSE and roared away. The German did not follow and Teddy had a glimpse of his savior's ship as the man roared back into battle. It bore the insignia of the crossed trumpets. Jeff Hinchman had lived up to his reputation for taking care of the rooks.

The Albatross was plunging down the sky, a flaming ball on the way to Valhalla, but Teddy had no time for fireworks. The Nieuports, outclassed by twenty miles an hour in speed, were being blasted out of the skies by the foes they had challenged.

One ship fell as Teddy was diving to his rescue. A grim Albatross literally blasted it apart in the air with a burst that started at the engine and sprayed back through the cockpit. Teddy had a brief flash of the pilot's face as the man slumped forward on the controls. Arrelanes!

He recalled that he had been advised to model after this man, then he was plunging wrathfully after the German. No one would ever model after Arrelanes again.

The Albatross had never even seen Teddy. His eyes had located another victim and his big Mercedes was lifting him across the sky. In a flash, he was on the man's tail and then Teddy was on his.

Some instinct warned the German. As Teddy pressed the trips, he saw the Albatross flash up out of range. The pilot Immelmanned and Teddy turned to him as the other came back down in a screaming dive.

Teddy had a hunch that the man he had rescued was Baker but he couldn't be sure. He was going into the Albatross in a climbing turn that gave him the protection of his engine. His guns bucked and his tracers bounced off a checkered wing. The German rolled on his back, presenting the shortest possible target to the American's guns and Teddy cursed softly.

At the risk of a spin, he pulled up to the stalling point and stood on his tail. His fingers pressed tight on the trips and he sought for that checkered cockpit.

Then his nose dropped off and the Albatross roared past him. He had missed.

There was no time to waste now. His hand lifted from the coupe button and the rotary roared. Pulling over in a steep bank, he made a desperate play for the German's tail. The German anticipated him and beat him to the turn. In a wild figure eight, Teddy rode him across the sky.

This was life and adventure and glory. Teddy was tense at the controls but there was a smile on his lips. He had trained long months for this, and Fate had not cheated him as it had cheated those who crashed in the training camps. He was fighting in the sky and he was holding his own.

He came around the lower loop of the eight and the German played his trump. The Mercedes roaring, he pitted his superior speed against the nimbler Nieuport and leaped across the loop.

Teddy kicked over and had time for only one wild burst. Then the German's guns were blasting him.

With a desperate half roll, he got out from under the shower of lead and the German plunged past. Mercedes speed was hard to handle. It built up momentum. That weakness in a great design saved Teddy's life but the smile had left the Yank's face now. What the German had done once he could do again and skill would only postpone the inevitable. A Nieuport had no business in the same sky with an Albatross.

STAKING everything in one play for the German's tail, Teddy kicked around while still upside down. The German caught him with a burst as he turned; there was a howl from the engine, another burst of lead across the fuselage in back of him, and then he was plunging down in a mad spin.

With the hungry nose of the Spandau questing for him, Teddy let the little ship spin its heart out; waiting tensely for the moment when he would dare to try for freedom. Bullets baptized his wings and ricocheted off the cowling, his tail fluttered high and the seamed battlefield came up to him.

He had gone through six revolutions of the spin and he dared risk no more. It was pretty tight now and his hand was forced. He moved the stick lightly, ruddered away from the spin and hoped. He had no engine and he doubted his wings.

For the longest five seconds of his life, the Nieuport strained and groaned. Then he came out and yawed desperately. He gave a shout of joy. He had beaten the spin and the German had left him.

The combat of which he had been a part might be continuing up in the blue but he could not go back. He had a combat of his own to fight against a motorless, unbalanced ship that trembled and yawed and challenged his last ounce of skill to put it down. Setting the nose on all the glide it would take, he pointed toward home and prepared to deadstick his way to his destiny. Archy wouffed at him and he could hear the soft hiss of flying fragments, but he set his jaw and joined the religion of the air. His number was on a chunk of shrapnel or it wasn't.

South of Baupaume where a shattered church spire rested in the trees, he plunged through the smoke and saw the black mud yawning for him. His wing went down and took the shock, then he went head over heels and came up clutching a strut.

He had fought and he had fallen and he lived. An airman could ask no more of the gods.

Dusk was shrouding the landscape in a mantle of purple when Teddy finally set his feet once more on the field of the 94th.

He was weary and foot-sore and a bundle of quivering nerves. Through a long day, he had made his way from one point to another behind the lines, answering innumerable questions, submitting to interminable delays and suspicions, ploughing through mud and struggling for a place to move, in a world of marching men and clanking supply lorries.

On the choked roads of the Arras Front he had learned the lesson well—an airman is important only in the clouds.

Dave Tannehill was sitting on an upended box and smoking a cigarette as the forlorn, muddy figure of a once immaculate, pink-panted flying officer dragged wearily in.

The Canuck blew out a cloud of smoke and grinned.

"Been bathing, I see. Stout fellow. What kept you so long?"

In words of flame, Teddy told him. The Canadian's enjoyment increased. "I could have told you," he said. "Going Tommy Atkins is no good. No comforts at all. A rum life and a dirty one. Stick to flying, son. You'll make out better, be happier, live shorter."

"Shut up, will you! You're stirring the raging beast within me." The quiet banter of the Canadian had awakened Teddy's dormant sense of humor and the world seemed suddenly sane again.

"Righto. From the looks of you, the raging beast might likely be a Hippo or some other jolly mud-wallower."

"I guess so." Teddy was making for the door of the chateau.

The Canuck's face became grave. "Just a minute, old son. Put you wise to something." He stood up and there was a strange dignity about him in excess of his years. "Hell's to pay in this flight, old man. Worse than you've seen yet. Ray Arrelanes went west to-day."

"You mean?" Teddy paused. He knew, but somehow it didn't seem real now.

"Righto. Dead. A flamer, too. Makes it worse. Old Jeff is all broken up. He loved that Aussie like a brother."

TEDDY CAMPBELL recalled that minute before dawn when the solemn Jeff Hinchman had advised him to keep an eye on Arrelanes for a glimpse of aerial perfection. There had been pride in the man's voice, the pride of a blood brother. Teddy could easily imagine the weight of the blow.

"That's not all." Tannehill was looking thoughtfully at his cigarette. "There was a hell of a scene. Old Jeff was white to the gills and he lit into the captain hard. Told him what he thought of a leader that would take Nieuports down on Albatrosses when he didn't have to. Our meat was the observation ships. No good in jumping scouts. He was right, too, and Malone backed him up. You can imagine that, can't you?"

"I can." Teddy was picturing the flaming face of the goaded Malone, the man who should have been wearing the flight leader's ribbons.

"It was a blasted, infernal, undignified row and Kennedy came in to straighten it out. Of course the major backed Wolverton up. That helped like a hoseful of gasoline on a fire." Tannehill looked at his cigarette thoughtfully. "Then, just when things had reached the quiet growling stage, Baker kicked the lid off again."

"Baker?"

"Right. The little squirt reported how you saved his life and how you went down and how he shot down the fellow that was on your tail and then about your making the landing."

"So he shot the Kraut?" Teddy drew a deep breath. "Good egg. How did that start things up again?"

"Wolverton called him a liar. Said he was too yellow to get a Hun. I thought that pasty-faced little squirt was going to shoot him in his tracks. Then he got hysterical and started screaming like a girl."

Teddy groaned. "What a nice show!"

"Wasn't it? Anyway, between one thing and another we didn't fly any more. A and C took the load and lost

four men doing it. We take the dawn show to-morrow again."

Teddy shivered. "I better get cleaned up before I think of it," he said. "I'll be getting the dread woofits."

"Don't. There's enough lunatics in the flight. Pour yourself a tot and a half of rum, get clean and I'll take you on a date."

"A date? Out here?" Teddy looked incredulously at the bleak, shell-tortured landscape, the long muddy flats and out to the west where flame streaked the sky.

"No, you ruddy fool! Down at St. Aubert. Shake a foot."

Teddy shook a foot. The prospect of entertainment after the dismal events of the past twenty-four hours put wings on his feet. He burst into the big bull pen of B Flight with a whistle on his lips and the whistle died in mid-note. He had forgotten that the squadron was in mourning and at war with itself. His first hurried glimpse of the room reminded him of it.

Jeff Hinchman was sitting in the far corner, his mouth pulled into tight lines around the stem of his pipe, Dan Malone was sprawled on a chair with his feet on the table, eyes staring at nothing. Neither man stirred or looked up. There was no one else in the room.

TEDDY crossed to the sleeping quarters in back and ripped off his muddy uniform. His batman prepared his bath in a battered zinc tub and he rubbed down gratefully.

As he was climbing into fresh linens he became aware of another presence in the room. One by one he took inventory of the bunks. A huddled figure lay face down in Baker's and Teddy crossed the room.

"Didn't see you before, Old Man. They tell me you got my Kraut friend. Many thanks."

Baker raised a white face from which red-rimmed eyes stared.

"My debt," he said. "No end gallant of you to barge in. Saved my skin and brought my nerve back." He gulped. "I swear, Campbell, I was cool as ice when I poured the slugs to him. Cool as ice. I was a man again. Then——" He shuddered. "That sneering brute, Wolverton, jumped on me, called me a liar and I cracked. The horrors came back. Now I'm done. I'll never be able to face it again. I know I won't."

A sob racked the slim figure and long fingers wound themselves around the blanket fringe. "I could kill him for it. I could kill him as I killed that Hun. I could. I'd be as cool as ice and——"

"Bosh. You need a stiff drink. He didn't mean anything. The man's probably as badly shot and as badly scared as you are."

That was a new thought to Teddy. He hadn't quite looked at it in that light before until he heard himself voicing the idea.

Baker looked up startled and Teddy had a wild desire to ask him on the date, to buck him up and get that desperate look out of the man's eyes. It wasn't his party, though, and he let the impulse flicker out. He patted the thin shoulder.

"Get a couple of slugs into your system," he said. "That's all you need." He was turning away as he said it. He felt in need of a few slugs himself and the date idea seemed better than ever. Tannehill had been right. The 94th was a madhouse.

Outside, the Canuck waited impatiently. It was quite dark now and there was a motor cycle waiting with a side car. The little Cockney corporal who had driven the truck was sitting in the saddle. He grinned when he saw the American.

"Ev'ning, liftenant. I'll be driving you again and a better trip by the looks of it."

Tannehill was already in the side car. "Button your lip, Graves. It's bad enough listening to the ruddy war."

Teddy climbed in, and the motor cycle kicked away with a roar.

"There's a girl," the Canuck said dreamily, "and I've got her signed. Sometimes there's two and you get the gamble."

They bounced through deep furrows of mud, while the Cockney held his lurching craft. The road was a miserable cow track but it ran east-west and was therefore unchoked by the traffic of war. The heavy shelling was farther away now as the British weight hurled itself against the line at Vimy. The town of St. Aubert nestled into the low ground north of the Somme and was forgotten by the embattled legions.

Over worn cobblestones and through narrow, darkened streets they lurched, and the cycle stopped. Tannehill swung down and Teddy piled after him.

A squatty house with a gingerbread front loomed before them. The Canuck stepped confidently through the low doorway and into an old-world tavern, lighted now a solitary candle that stood upright in the neck of a tall bottle.

An incredibly old woman rose from a rocking chair before a big open fireplace in which a few coals glowed. As she stepped forward to greet her guests, a man strode angrily out of a rear room and stamped across

to the door. The flickering candle caused shadows to dance fantastically across his sharp, fierce features in the second that it took him to cross the room. The door slammed behind him and he was gone. Teddy whistled.

"Captain Wolverton!"

"Right." Tannehill's face lost its look of joyful anticipation. He was suddenly grim and hard. Without a word of explanation, he made for the room from which the captain had emerged.

Teddy thought that he heard sobbing in that room, then the old woman was talking to him and he bent to hear.

CHAPTER IV THRUST OF CAIN

FOR SEVERAL MINUTES Teddy conversed in bad French with a woman who assured him that she was honored by his visit and that she had the finest wine in France and that the war was terrible.

Finally, Tannehill emerged, his face working with rage. He flung himself down before a table and growled an order. Not until he had downed two stiff slugs of brandy did he speak, then his voice was a deep growl that had all the menace of guns that threaten in the night.

"Date's off, Yank," he said bitterly. "That Wolverton is a filthy swine."

"What's the matter?" Teddy felt that he could guess but he preferred not to.

The Canadian poured himself another drink and studied it.

"A fellow up in this filthy hell needs girls," he said slowly. "He needs the decent side of them, I mean. He needs them for the things they remind him of, the fair things, the things he's left back there." Slowly he raised the glass and drank.

"Girls are scarce, damn scarce up close. Good thing, I guess." The man seemed to be talking half to himself. "Yvonne is one of the best." His hand clenched on the table top. "Wolverton's been coming here a long time and he doesn't want girls to remind him of the decent things. He wants to remember the dirty things he left. That's why I said he's a swine, a filthy swine."

The Canuck raised his eyes and looked into Teddy's with blazing intensity. "The pig in him came out a long time ago. I didn't know. Tonight he learned what he'd done and the blasted son got nasty about it! Imagine! He got nasty."

Tannehill hurled the glass into the open grate and called for another. He downed a drink and shuddered.

"I could kill him," he said, "I could tear his blasted black liver out. Damn him!"

Teddy felt the roof of his mouth go dry and he wondered how often that same thing had been said in the one day. Baker had said it and Tannehill had said it. Malone had said it the night before and doubtless again in the heated intervals of the day. And Hinchman! Yes, undoubtedly. Hinchman's best friend had died and he had blamed Wolverton for it.

Teddy shivered and tossed a drink against the back of his throat. It would be terrible, he thought, to be hated like that by the men with whom one lived.

Dave Tannehill was very drunk when Teddy got him home. He was so drunk that he never saw Captain Wolverton sitting alone at the table in the bull pen. For his part, the flight leader paid no attention to either man. Teddy was grateful. The Canuck would be hard to handle once his hatred burst the bonds.

With not a little difficulty, the American succeeded in stripping off a portion of his friend's uniform; then he rolled him into bed and left him. All of the others, with the exception of Wolverton, were already in their bunks. The thought of Wolverton brought a puzzled frown to Teddy's face and he walked to the low door which separated sleeping quarters and bull pen.

WOLVERTON was still sitting in the same position in which he had been when they entered. Smoke curled lazily from his cigarette, his fingers were curled around a half filled tumbler of Scotch, his shoulders were slumped.

Seen there in the feeble light of two sputtering candles, with weariness setting heavily upon him, the man did not seem like a slave driver and a brute. He looked more like one who has traveled to endurance's end, a man crushed by too much responsibility and confused by the constant clamor of the guns.

Standing in the doorway, Teddy was conscious of a deep sympathy that he could not explain. Wolverton was so awfully alone, so completely wrong in everything he did, so terribly hated.

"If only he'd do what Jeff Hinchman has been trying to make him do! If he'd take a leave and get a grip on himself again!"

Conquering the impulse to speak, Teddy turned his back and made his way into the darkened quarters where B Flight slept. He was suddenly tired, and the bunk was a luxury.

As he was settling between the covers, he heard Wolverton rise from his place at the bull-pen table. The candles were snuffed out, and then the man stamped past Teddy's bunk on his way to his own.

With his eyes dropping shut, Teddy deliberated on the disadvantages of being the newest recruit. One drew the bunk nearest the door where one was awakened every time any one entered or left quarters. There was no other way of reaching the bunks except through the bull pen and the tiny door beside which Teddy slept.

"Rotten arrangement," he grunted. "Hard enough to sleep anyway with the guns raising merry hell all night."

His head was settling deeply into the pillow as he growled and he dropped off to sleep on the thought.

How long he was asleep, he could not tell, but he jerked back to wakefulness with such a sudden start that his heart jumped against his ribs. The deep roar of the guns was in his ears but it was not the guns that had awakened him; it was something more sinister, something that seemed to flow about him, a feeling that Death was in the very room.

He could not analyze the feeling nor ascribe any reason for it. He did know that some part of him which retained consciousness during sleep had sounded a warning. A warning against what?

He raised himself on one elbow and strove to penetrate the darkness of the room. There was a faint radiance about the windows but he could not even see the bunks that were closest to his own. The flight was quartered in the basement and the windows sufficed only to let in a certain measure of air. The heavy bars outside of each window and the stone niches into which they were set made the windows inefficient even for that purpose.

For several seconds, Teddy remained tense, supported by his elbow. He imagined that some one moved in the corner of the room near Captain Wolverton's quarters. He was not sure and the impression was fleeting but, with the quickened senses of the newly awakened, he registered something.

"What in hell is up? Something is." He rolled over and kicked the covers aside, letting his bare feet touch the cold floor. There was a thud and a muffled exclamation as somebody walked into the supply closet in the dark.

Teddy rose and moved in the direction of the sound.

A VAGUE, reeling figure loomed out of the darkness and Teddy reached out a detaining hand. The man stopped.

"Who is it?" he asked thickly.

Teddy recognized the voice and his pulse steadied.

"It's Teddy Campbell, Tannehill. What's the matter?"

"Oh!" The exclamation was one of relief. "Glad it's you. I'm sick. Sick as hell, Yank. Can't find my bunk. Help me. That's a stout fellow."

Teddy put his arm around the faltering Canadian and helped him to his bunk. The man dropped suddenly upon the mattress and grunted heavily. Teddy tried to move him into a more comfortable position but gave the task up as a bad job. The man seemed to have gone immediately into a drunken slumber.

"So that's what waked me!" Teddy tried to grin, but the feeling of horror with which he had awakened remained with him. He was not convinced that Tannehill had been solely responsible for his abrupt return to consciousness.

Groping back toward his own bunk, his mind mulled the matter over. He stopped as he realized that he had come too far and that he was as lost as Tannehill had been.

As he stood there he became aware of a sound that had been registering on his ear drums for several seconds without any message going to his brain. Penetrating the screaming din of night artillery was a heavy drone.

"Aeroplane engines," he muttered. "Big ones. Now who——"

He stiffened. Night bombers! If the Krauts should decide to come after the aerodrome of the 94th at night, this basement might easily become a tomb.

Warooooom—puh! Something whistled down and there was a sudden brilliant flash outside the east window. The big room was illumined as though by a lightning flash, and Teddy found that he was standing within two feet of Jimmy Baker's bed. Baker was crouched on the edge of the bunk with one foot on the floor, his horror-stricken eyes fixed upon the American's face.

It was a brief, photographic impression and then, the whole room sprang to life. That bomb had spelled danger with a capital D.

Malone's deep voice sounded from a point close to the wall. "No lights, you rooks! Hold steady."

The basement floor seemed to rock under Teddy's feet and three horrible, ear-splitting explosions followed one another in quick succession. With the last of these there was a sudden rush of flame that glared through the windows and revealed every detail of the underground room as plainly as though lanterns were hung in every corner.

"Flares!"

Somebody growled the word as the flame continued to leap outside.

Teddy looked around. Malone and Hinchman were jumping into their clothes. Tannehill was on his feet, his eyes wide and startled. Baker was still sitting half in and half out of his bunk. There was no sign of Captain Wolverton, and Teddy felt the return of that sensation of horror with which he had awakened, a feeling that outweighed the shock of his first experience with night bombers.

"Where's Captain Wolverton?" Teddy heard himself putting the inquiry to the room at large. It was as though some one else had spoken. Outside, the machine guns of the defenders were in action; the men who fought from the pits and who got their only serious action on occasions such as this.

The outside, however, was not important to Teddy Campbell at the moment. He had a horrible premonition and he was crossing the still bright room toward the captain's cubby hole, a private room in the corner which was separated from the main room by a ceiling-high partition.

FOUR sets of eyes followed Teddy as he crossed the room but he was not conscious of individuals at the moment any more than he was conscious of the hell that was being raised outside nor the possibility of the chateau being blasted off the map.

At the open door of the flight commander's room, he paused; then he squared his shoulders and stepped in.

"Captain Wol——"

The call died on his lips. Through the two windows of the room there poured the red illumination of the flares. Flat on his back, his glazed eyes staring at the ceiling, lay Captain Wolverton. A French bayonet stood hilt up in his chest and blood dripped from his saturated pajamas to the floor.

Teddy turned with a choked cry on his lips and the air raid was forgotten. Malone was the first to

reach the room behind the partition, then Hinchman. Tannehill followed a little dazedly. Baker hesitated, fearfully, by his cot.

"Dead! He's been murdered." Teddy had turned back. He reached for the bayonet as though to pluck it from the wound.

Dan Malone's hand fastened on his wrist.

"Leave that alone!" The Irishman's voice was hard. "Taking it out won't help him." He paused and the leaping shadows from the dying flares emphasized the rugged lines of his broad face. "How do you know it's murder?"

Teddy shook himself to banish the feeling of sick horror that had fastened itself upon him.

"I don't," he said. Control came back to him suddenly and his voice was as grim as the Irishman's. "But I'll be damned if it looks like suicide!"

Jeff Hinchman closed the eyes of the dead captain and turned around. The drone of heavy engines was dying out in the distance, the machine guns were silent and the flares were all but burned out.

"We can light candles now, I think," he said gravely, "then some one had better rouse Major Kennedy. This is a serious matter."

"I'll go after him unless you want to go yourself, Jeff." Malone was tightening his belt.

Hinchman had struck a match and he was applying it to a candle wick. "Righto, Dan. Go ahead."

Malone turned, then he hesitated and looked into Teddy's eyes.

"Didn't mean to blow off, kid," he said, "but that word murder has an ugly sound. If you use it, you have to use the word murderer, too. That will mean one of us."

He was gone and Teddy was suddenly conscious of the chill that lies in the hour before dawn. That "one of us" sounded too grim for contemplation in connection with the grisly thing that lay face up on the bunk.

He turned to grope his way back to his clothes and as he raised his eyes he encountered the horrified stare of Jimmy Baker.

Baker was looking at him as though he were a ghost and there was something deep in the man's eyes that Teddy could not interpret. The words that he might have said refused to pass his lips in the face of that stare. He shivered again.

Death was stalking with a heavy tread through the fields of France, and Death's bony fingers were searching the skies; yet the grim Reaper was not half so horrible where he took his thousands as he was in this room where fighting men slept.

Teddy Campbell fumbled with the buttons on his tunic and cursed his own clumsiness when his fingers trembled. It is cold in France when the dawn is slow in coming.

CHAPTER V DOOM CARD

MAJOR BILL KENNEDY was one of those big men to whom a uniform was incidental. Nobody ever mistook him for anything but an officer of respectable rank; he carried his insignia of rank in his carriage, his bearing, his way with men.

It took less than ten minutes to conduct his investigation into the death of Captain Phillip Wolverton. After a careful look at the body, he took the members of B Flight out into the bull pen and waved them to chairs about the long table. One by one he heard their stories of events leading up to the discovery of the body.

Baker, quivering with a nervous spasm, was the first witness and a bad one. He disclaimed any knowledge of anything up until the attack on the drome. He was the last man to view the body and, according to his story, he had not left his bed until after the body was discovered.

Listening to him, Teddy Campbell strove hard to keep his doubts from showing in his expression. Baker's face when the flash of the first bomb revealed him had not been the face of a man newly awakened. Nor had the man been lying in bed. He had been half in and half out as though he had been about to get up or about to crawl back into bed.

Major Kennedy turned to Dan Malone. The Irishman was puffing hard on his pipe.

"I don't know a thing about it," he said curtly. "The bombs woke me and I was putting my pants on to go out and help the gunners when Campbell discovered the body. There was blood still dripping when I went in the room. He couldn't have been long dead."

Kennedy's face revealed nothing of what might be going on in his mind. His eyes moved down the table to Jeff Hinchman, who was also smoking a pipe. The veteran nodded slowly.

"Dan's story is mine exactly," he said, "except that he was a few seconds before me in reaching the room. I closed Wolverton's eyes. I'd say that he died instantly and had been dead less than ten minutes. The wound wasn't flowing but the blood was fresh."

Tannehill had to be prodded before he realized that it was his turn. He still seemed in a daze. When he did speak, he added nothing to what had been told. He had slept soundly, he said, and was not yet fully awake when the body was discovered. He said nothing about being up, nor about Teddy Campbell leading him to his bunk.

Teddy looked at him sharply.

"Campbell, you discovered the body, I believe. Will you tell us what prompted you to enter the captain's room?"

Teddy came to himself with a jerk.

"A hunch, sir," he said. "I woke up before the bomb raid with a vague idea that something had happened to wake me. I didn't know what. When the flares went off and I didn't see the captain, I got a peculiar hunch and went to call him."

The major was watching him intently. Teddy met his eyes coolly. "You were awake before the bomb raid, you said? Did you hear or see anything that would help this inquiry?"

Teddy thought hard. There was no particular reason why he should conceal the fact that he had been up with Tannehill, except that the man himself had not mentioned it. The Canuck had been good to him and he did not care to cause him trouble. He shook his head.

"Nothing, sir."

"What did you do when you saw that the captain was dead, or did you know he was dead?" asked the major.

"He looked dead to me and I turned and called out something. I don't remember what I said. The others came and that was all."

Major Kennedy nodded. His eyes swept the table. "Anybody know Where that bayonet came from?"

Malone and Hinchman both nodded. The major gave the floor to the Irishman. Malone's brows were creased in a deep frown.

"It was a French bayonet," he said, "and it was here when we came. It was generally kept in the supply closet back in the corner. I don't know whether it was there last night or not."

The supply closet! Teddy's throat tightened. Tannehill's bunk was only a few steps from the closet

door on one side and two full strides from Wolverton's door on the other. The man had spent an entire evening drinking to his hatred of the captain and within a few hours the captain was dead. Teddy didn't trust himself to look up for fear of what he might see in the Canadian's face. Less than ten minutes before the captain was discovered, Tannehill had bumped into the supply closet in the dark.

Major Kennedy was sitting impassively at the end of the table, his clean, level eyes surveying the entire group.

"Men," he said, "I am not going to mince words. Captain Wolverton was murdered to-night. Suicide would be an impossible explanation of such a wound with such a weapon. Lieutenant Campbell's bunk is so situated that, were he awake—and he has testified that he was—no one from the outside could enter or leave without his knowledge. The necessity for twice opening and closing the corridor and bull-pen doors makes the idea of an outside suspect untenable in any case. The windows are grilled and there is no other means of entry."

He paused and leaned forward, his finger tapping the scarred wood. "Gentlemen, the murderer is sitting at this table."

The tension was terrific. No man looked at another and no one spoke.

Major Kennedy's finger tapped the table again like the tapping finger of doom.

"For the honor of the squadron and the flight, I ask the man who did that thing to confess."

The silence became something tangible, something thick and heavy that pressed down over the table and made breathing difficult. Teddy Campbell felt his vocal chords tighten until they ached and he had a wild impulse to get up and cheer or yell or curse, anything to break the damnable spell.

For several seconds the silence held, then the major broke it, his voice still level and controlled.

"Some man at this table," he said, "is making a damnable situation more damnably difficult. Will some one express an opinion as to the probable motive for this deed?"

Dan Malone's head came up with a snap.

"You don't have to ask that," he said hotly. "You know that I hated the ground Wolverton walked on for more reasons than I could tell you in an hour. If you're trying to hang this on a motive that any one at this table will tell you, you know damn well what the answer is."

TEDDY caught his breath. He remembered that Malone had more victories than Wolverton or Kennedy and that Tannehill had commented on the fact and on Malone's bitterness at not receiving either a flight or a squadron. It was evidently an old feud.

Kennedy was leaning back in his chair.

"Just what do you mean, Malone?"

"I mean that the only Irishman that has a chance to lead squadrons is an Ulster man and he's no Irishman at all. You know what I took from Wolverton, the credit he beat me out of and the insults I swallowed. You know damned well, too, how much good it did for Galway to go to Ulster, for me to appeal to you."

"Do you mean to say—"

"I mean anything you damned please!" Malone was beside himself, his face red and the muscles cording in his powerful neck. Teddy had an idea that the man had been brooding for a long time over his grievances and that, if he hadn't killed Wolverton, he had been for a long time in a killing rage. He had shown it in his outburst at the card table and again when Wolverton had knocked Baker down.

"This is not getting anywhere," Hinchman's quiet voice broke the silence that followed Malone's defiance. "Dan is not alone in having a motive. Everybody here has quarrelled with Wolverton and had reasons for disliking him. Several of us have been moved to threats. You can hardly settle this thing on the point of motive."

Kennedy was biting his lip. His hand hit the table, palm flat.

"Then I won't try," he said. "The flight stands convicted. It is a murderer's flight as long as it has a murderer in it."

He rose to his feet. "I should turn in a report of this affair and let Wing handle it. I'm not going to do that because England has just started a drive that may decide her ultimate fate and that of her Allies. She needs every flying man at this crucial hour. A report to Wing would retire this flight at a time when it cannot be spared. Gentlemen, my report says that Captain Wolverton died from wounds received in action. You will all sign it and I will accept each man's oath that no word of this night's happenings will pass this room, that no other man in the squadron or out of it will learn of it."

He paused and looked at his watch. "As for the murderer, I will not rest until I discover who he is. If necessary then, I will shoot him myself for the honor of the uniform that he wears and that I wear. In the

meantime, as I said, it is a murderer's flight. I will share the stigma with the four men out of you five who are innocent."

Major Kennedy moved toward the door. "You are down for the dawn show. You've got five minutes to be on the line. From now on, I'm flight leader of B, replacing Captain Wolverton who was killed in action."

He was gone through the wide door of the bull pen. Behind him, five men moved dazedly about the task of donning their flying clothes.

As he struggled into his sidcot suit, Teddy Campbell found himself repeating over and over again, like a litany, that remark of Dan Malone's, "If you call it murder, you have to say murderer and that means one of us."

"One of us," he muttered, "one of us. Only five men left and it has to be one of us."

THE battle of Arras was in its third day with the coming of dawn. The guns no longer seemed to shriek and howl and roar; instead they were settling into a dull, rolling rumble that endured the clock around. As a matter of fact, of course, the voice of the guns had not changed. There is a point, however, past which the mind of man refuses to record sensation. After that point is reached even the madness of war descends to monotony. So it was when the men of B Flight straggled out into the dripping dawn of April 11, 1917.

Teddy Campbell walked with his head down as Baker had walked the morning before. He did not know any great fear as Baker had, but there was no spirit of high adventure here as he had dreamed. These flyers were under the shadow of Cain's hand. There was a killer walking to one of those Nieuport cockpits and each man held himself aloof from his fellows.

Baker was not lagging this morning. He was walking erect, but stiffly as though under iron control. Malone plodded sullenly, his jaw hard, eyes straight ahead. Tannehill walked beside Teddy but did not speak. Out by the humming planes stood Kennedy, a powerful man who wore a soiled and rumpled uniform with indescribable grace.

Hinchman lagged behind the flight, pulling thoughtfully at his pipe. As they approached their ships, Hinchman quickened his stride.

"You young fellows, just a minute! Campbell, Baker, Tannehill!"

The three men hesitated as he called. He tapped his pipe on his heel deliberately. "Just wanted to remind you that the Kraut is the enemy, not anybody in the

flight. Don't think too much about what happened back there. It will lengthen the odds and they're long enough."

Nobody answered. Teddy kicked a pebble with his foot and mentally thanked Hinchman for that. He had been forgetting the Germans. Hinchman put his pipe away.

"The war is more important than the men who fight it," he said. "We've got a good leader. Let's leave everything on the ground except our ability to do a good job upstairs."

He didn't wait for a reply. Squaring his shoulders, he strode out to his ship.

Kennedy called the men around him, gave terse instructions as to signals and climbed into the tiny cockpit of his Nieuport.

Teddy adjusted his helmet, pulled his goggles down over his eyes and kicked away from the line in his turn. As his wheels spurned the earth, his spirits lifted. It was as though he were escaping from something dirty and foul. Even the dripping mist seemed clean.

It was offensive patrol again and Kennedy swung south over the Somme, headed east over the lines between Albert and Perrone and approached the Bois d'Havincourt, old Mossy Face, from the south.

There did not seem to be a plane in the sky but Teddy had a feeling of confidence behind Kennedy that he had not felt behind Wolverton. The major led his flight from the tip of the V and at an elevation slightly lower than that of his flight. He did not fly on a straight line but rather on a long curve which enabled him to keep check of his flight and of the whole sky.

They had been late in getting away and the pink pennants of the dawn were waving behind the German lines. The light had not yet reached the ground but, by some trick of reflection, the grim Havincourt wood was etched blackly against the background of dingy fog. More than ever, to-day, it resembled the ace of spades; death card of the gypsy pack.

Teddy looked away. It was not good to look long at so grim a symbol. Kennedy's wings wagged and the leaders' hand went up, then down. Again he raised it with all his fingers showing.

CHAPTER VI DEADMAN'S CURSE

TEDDY'S EYES DARTED DOWNWARD and picked up the two broadwinged ships that skittered through a cloud valley far below. Kennedy's signal had called for them all to go down.

Even as he registered the target and the signal, Teddy was pushing the stick away. His nose dropped and the massed clouds loomed large over his nose. The wide-winged planes became more distinct and he could see the dark smudges on the wings that would assume shape as Maltese Crosses in another moment. His hand caressed the trips and he warmed his guns, careful not to have a comrade in the line of fire.

"Rumplers!"

He recognized the silhouettes against the clouds. Such silhouette study had been part of the brief course at Tours. These Rumplers would be slow, ungainly two-seaters with a vast capacity for punishment and the ability to fly after they had been riddled with bullets, if any one lived to fly them.

Zip! He slapped the stick back and the whole world seemed to turn over. Then his sights caught a black cross against a dun-colored fuselage and he pressed hard on the trips.

He saw the tracers bite into the foe a few inches back of the cockpit and then the German wasn't there any more. He had pulled up in a tight loop.

With a renversement and a virage, Teddy was on him again.

As he flashed in with his guns blanketed for a good shot, he saw another Nieuport roll away from the front guns of the German. He hadn't been conscious that any one else was in the flight. It made no difference.

The observer was blazing at him from the rear cockpit, and Teddy felt his blood racing in his veins. This was high sport. He felt invincible and he rode into the singing lead with a grin for the fates. His hand pressed on the trips, and the German one-winger was lifted away from his gun and literally slammed against the back of the cockpit. He was slumping as Teddy hurdled the Rumpier and rolled over for a shot at the pilot.

The pilot, however, was not waiting for him. His nose was down like a flash and he was spinning into the low levels of cloud beneath them.

Teddy was in a poor position to follow and he shrugged it off. *N'importe!* He had scored a victory even if the German escaped and if there was no official notice taken of the fact. Credit is a small thing but the knowledge that you have whipped a foe in the air is something big.

There was a breathing space now and Teddy was able to look around. Three Nieuports had ganged the other Rumpler and, as he sighted them, the Rumpler reeled dizzily, fell off on one wing and took the long dive down. Another Nieuport was coming across the sky from the left. Every one accounted for and a nice Kraut observation party broken up! Good work.

Kennedy was hastily reforming his flight and there was no time lost in making once more for the high levels. Teddy marveled at the coolness of it all and of his own part in that easy precision. Yesterday he had been a scared rookie; to-day he felt like a veteran. He began to understand Tannehill and his air of having flown through the whole war. One lives months in minutes where Death travels with the speed of light.

IN AND out of the clouds they made their way. Soft and fleecy and white from the ground, these clouds were like dark pockets to the men who flew into them.

Then they plunged out into the feeble sunlight and Teddy caught his breath. Three more two-seaters were crossing the lines three thousand feet below them—and these two-seaters were coming from the Allied lines! That meant that not one of them could be allowed to escape. One observer's reports might mean a thousand lives wiped out on the ground where troops massed behind Arras.

Kennedy, however, was not plunging wildly down. Teddy saw his keen eyes scanning the sky in back. Teddy followed his example and stiffened in the cockpit. High in the blue was a dark flight with unmistakable whaleshaped silhouettes. New Albatross scouts!

His eyes flashed back to Kennedy. The leader was letting his ship fly itself and his hands held above his head were talking. How they talked!

The leader had arranged no elaborate set of signals to cover a situation such as this—but he needed none. He pointed for direction and used his fingers for expressing numbers and picked the men of his flight by number. It was only a matter of seconds before

every flyer behind him knew what he wanted to do. Then he struck.

Malone and Hinchman, the veterans, were to accompany him on the first dive on the two-seaters. Tannehill, Baker and Campbell were to let them get down and then come after them. They were to finish their job and get home quickly.

Like arrows flashed from the bows of giants, the Nieuports went down. Teddy threw an anxious eye back to the grim flight of Albatrosses. They were still up there. So much cloud made it hard to see where the sun had not yet spread its rays. The Germans had not spotted them. Teddy looked over the side.

Three tiny ships went past the alert two-seaters, bouncing back almost as one with guns blazing and noses pointed to the blind spots under the gunner's office.

Kennedy's gun did not flame until he was directly under his victim; then he hung on his prop and sprayed the underside with bullets. The two-seater reeled and went over, flame leaping along the cowlings.

Malone got in one burst and then his quarry eluded him. With a short dive to pick up momentum, the Irishman flashed up and over. The gunner on the German ship blasted him hard but Malone flew through the storm and his guns sang. The pilot leaped convulsively and released the controls. His ship hung for a second on the wispy clouds and then it was spinning down.

Hinchman's quarry had been quick on the controls and the veteran's first burst went wild. He did not immediately re-attack, choosing rather to feint around the other and wait until he could get into favorable position for a shot.

All of this registered rapidly, like the clicking of a camera shutter. Then the three reserve men on top were coming down.

Teddy shot another look over his shoulder as he let himself out in his dive, and his heart flipped over. The grim German flight was roaring out of the blue, awake to good hunting at last.

Swiftly the flashing ships below came into the sights, enlarging as the LeRhône pulled the little Nieuport down the sky. Kennedy was streaking across to where Hinchman was sparring with the two-seater. Malone, farther away, was coming across, too.

Teddy had a wild impulse. That dive of Kennedy's had been the prettiest thing he had ever seen and he wanted to test his ability to duplicate it.

A FRACTION of a second before any one else reached the harassed German two-seater, he was under and up, his guns sewing a pattern along the underside. Hanging there on his prop, he saw the tracers hitting home and knew that he had done a good job.

As he dropped off he saw a Nieuport reel away from the German's tail and he knew that some one else had attacked, too, and that the other man had not fared so well.

There was no time for a check-up, though. The two-seater was going down in slow spirals that would rapidly become tighter and faster until the ground came up and finished the job. Out of the high clouds more Germans were pouring and they were the dangerous ones. Already the Nieuports were streaking it.

"Do your job and go home!" Those were the orders and they sounded like the proper caper. Teddy poured petrol into his bus and put his nose down for his own lines. The Albatross flight was still quite a distance back, but coming like hell's fast train.

"Let 'em come. They'll never do a thing but waste their juice."

Teddy shouted it to the winds and nursed his ship down across the "woofing belt" where archy growled and clamored. Then the ruined village of Le Sars rolled into view and beyond it the tiny hamlet of St. Aubert. Half way between was the drome of the 94th and he knew that he was going to make it. His wires seemed to whistle a gay anthem.

It is great to come home from a victory.

The Albatross flight gave up the chase just short of the Allied lines and Teddy Campbell dropped down in the wake of Major Kennedy and Jeff Hinchman.

In the cold light of early morning he could see now the havoc of last night's hasty bombing raid. One hangar had been destroyed and the entire south section of the field torn up. There was landing room to spare, however, along the strip from which they had taken off and Teddy rolled in lightly.

Kennedy slapped him on the back as he jumped down.

"Pretty work on that two-seater, lieutenant. An old-timer couldn't have done the trick a bit better."

"Thanks." Teddy felt his face glow. "You gave me the idea, sir. I watched the job you did."

Kennedy grinned, then his face sobered and he looked at the sky. A Nieuport was coming down in slips and jerks that betrayed an unsteady hand on the controls, the hand of a man who is fainting as he flies.

Close behind him rode another plane, protecting him, herding him in.

"Baker!" Kennedy's expression was grave. "I was afraid he got it. He came in broadside to that gunner; gave the blighter a first-rate shot at him."

Absorbed, the three men watched the drama that was being enacted in the sky; a man's fight against weakness, his ship, and the elements, plus another man's helpless solicitude.

Teddy felt a surge of admiration for Malone. The man might be hotheaded, grouchy and given to sullen rages but he was pretty much of a man.

Kennedy's eyes never left the two planes but his lips moved.

"I say, Campbell," he drawled. "Just a bit of caution. That victory may make you cocky. Don't let it get you. Every day won't be like to-day. When the Albatrosses catch us, it will be hotter—much hotter. They're no end better ships, y'know."

He was striding forward as the little Nieuport hit with a lurch and a stagger, poised as though to tip over on its nose and then jerked forward to a slithering, shaky stop. Behind the wounded bird came Malone in a fast landing that was as precision sure as the ticking of a fine watch.

IN THE cockpit of the Nieuport, Jimmy Baker lay with his head on the crash pad. Blood streamed through a cut in his helmet and surged through in a widening pool across the front of his Sidcot.

Willing hands lifted him from the cockpit and eased him to the ground where he lay with eyes closed and lips slightly parted. Irrelevantly, Teddy registered the fact that this was the first time he had had a chance to note what Baker really looked like. The man was relaxed, peaceful, in spite of his obviously serious wounds. Fear and horror and panic had been wiped from his face, and he looked like a sleeping schoolboy.

Kennedy was gently opening the flying suit while Hinchman pillowed the boy's head on his knee and loosened the helmet straps. Malone stood moodily silent with his fists clenched, head bent forward.

Slowly, Baker's eyes fluttered open and he smiled up into Kennedy's face. "Got it, didn't I?"

For a second Kennedy hesitated, then he nodded his head. "Yes, son. You did. Like a soldier and a gentleman. It took more than most of us have to bring that ship back."

A smile of utter content crossed Baker's lips and a great revelation came to Teddy Campbell. In that

moment he learned the thing that every one learned eventually in the war above a war. Baker was not afraid to die, but he had been awfully afraid that he would be afraid in the hour when his number went up.

Several seconds passed during which the man on the ground breathed deeply, eyes closed. Suddenly a spasm seized him and a look of horror passed across his face. His eyes blinked open and he looked into the face of Teddy Campbell. There was that in his face which Teddy had seen in it after the man first viewed the body of Captain Wolverton. His breath caught with a sob.

"You were kind to me, Campbell. Sorry," he gasped. His lips pressed hard as though they would stop the swift flow of his life for yet another few minutes. His eyes sought for Kennedy and found him.

"Have to tell. I'm going. Want to clear my slate. Duty." He was breathing hard. "The man who was up—was up——"

His breath fluttered through his teeth. Malone seemed to come to life, dropping to one knee and whipping a flask from his pocket. The liquor checked the rattle in the dying man's throat and his eyes swept again to the silent Kennedy.

"The man who was moving around the room last night," he gasped, "was Lieutenant Campbell."

The spark almost flickered out with that effort but he rallied once more and his fast-glazing eyes turned to where Teddy Campbell stood rooted with shock.

"Sorry, Old Man. Conscience. Duty. Dying. Had to. Sorry."

The rattle was coming up into his throat but he forced the disjointed statement out. His body jerked twice, gave a tired sigh and went limp.

Not a man moved for nearly half a minute, then Teddy gave a choked cry and dropped on his knees beside the silent figure wrapped now in a dignity that life never gave.

"No. No. Baker, you didn't mean that. You didn't believe that I——"

He stopped as the realization came to him that he was calling upon the dead. He looked up, dimly comprehending the fact that something had happened to him and still unaware of how grievous was the blow that this dead man had struck.

CHAPTER VII GUILT PATROL

MAJOR KENNEDY HAD RISEN to his feet. His eyes, cold now as the skies above ten thousand, drilled Teddy.

"Lieutenant Campbell," he said, "will you kindly go to your quarters and await me there."

Teddy was still numb with the shock of that unexpected accusation, but he saluted silently and turned on his heel.

He had an overwhelming desire to look around at the others and see what emotion was registered on their features, but he couldn't bring himself to risk it. He wanted to know if they believed him guilty, but he did not dare face the knowledge at the moment. He wanted to get away by himself where he could think.

Back in quarters he threw himself down at the long table and tried to wipe his mind clear of shock, to find some way through the fantastic, impossible maze into which he had been so suddenly plunged.

"If only he had lived," he said miserably, "I'd stand a chance. But nobody will ever believe me now. Everybody believes a dying man. Everybody."

He got up and paced, wishing one minute that Kennedy would hurry and get it over with, wishing the next that Kennedy would stay away and let him think it out.

"If only I hadn't protected Tannehill! If I had told the truth at the inquiry, it would be all right. But I said that I was in bed, and now Baker says that I was moving around. The captain had only been dead about ten minutes when I found him. Nobody will ever believe that there were two men moving about in that ten minutes."

He walked that idea out in quick nervous strides, up and down the full length of the bull pen, recalling now that it would look peculiar to any one that he should have that hunch and that he should be the one who discovered the captain. That fact, innocent in itself, would be another link in a damnable chain once the finger of suspicion was pointed at him.

"Who did kill Wolverton?"

That question flowed across his mind like a cooling

application of water. In the answer to that question lay his salvation. He knew that he hadn't killed him and the list of suspects was small. What had been a matter merely of squadron honor was now a matter of life and death to him.

He opened the door to sleeping quarters, his jaw firm with resolve. Forcing himself to think clearly, logically, on the problem before him and wiping from his mind all thoughts of Baker and of everything else, he walked about the room.

Wolverton was still laid out on his cot in the little partitioned room and Teddy did not disturb him. He started his investigation outside, standing by the door to the room and allowing his eyes to sweep thoughtfully from bunk to bunk. One of those bunks had held a murderer last night and the murderer had left his bunk to cross to this door with a bayonet in his hand.

Wait! Did he have the bayonet in his hand? Teddy recalled Malone's statement to the effect that the bayonet was usually left in the supply closet. If it was there last night?

He looked at the closet door. There were only two men who could have reached that closet door in the dark with any degree of safety—Baker and Tannehill. Malone or Hinchman would have had to traverse the entire length of the room, avoid Teddy's awkwardly placed bunk and open the closet door. Then he would have had to make another journey to the captain's room, commit the murder, leave and return to his bunk. Teddy shook his head. He did not believe that any murderer would have taken that chance.

BAKER could have moved in a straight line to the closet, worked along the partition to the door and then have moved in a straight line to the captain's bed. Tannehill could have slipped out of bed, obtained the weapon, waited, slipped out of the other side and into Wolverton's room. Tannehill's chances were better than those of any one else. Teddy frowned.

"It would have been easy for him to miss his bunk in the dark and bang into that closet, too," he muttered, "or he might have been checking up to see if he forgot something."

That train of thought saddened him. He didn't like to believe it of the Canadian, but it was hard to overlook the man's silence at the inquiry and his failure to speak when Baker's statement involved Teddy.

Teddy moved slowly away from Wolverton's door. Before the wardrobe door he came to a stop. That door

was always open in order to give the sleeping men all the air possible. The wardrobe had a window.

Just suppose that the murder had been planned! Some one could have hidden the bayonet in the wardrobe. It was hardly likely that any one would take it to bed in the face of possible discovery in the case of a night alarm. If it had been hidden in the wardrobe, any one could have retrieved it in a second or two and taken two more steps into Wolverton's room. The thought excited Teddy and caused him to look carefully over the lay of the bunks again.

Malone, for instance, could have moved on a direct line with, scant chance of any one's seeing him. Hinchman could have moved along the partition, turned the corner and have been as safe as Malone with an equal distance to cover. Baker!

Teddy frowned. Yes, by the gods, Baker could have slipped into the bunk of the dead Arrelanes, stepped out at the north end and have moved as swiftly and as easily as either of the other two! Tannehill, of course, was still closer than any one else to the captain's door.

"Baker! Baker! Why do I always figure Baker in? He's dead and he didn't do it."

Even as he put the question to himself, Teddy knew the answer. He figured Baker into all of his calculations because he had believed subconsciously from the first that Baker had killed Wolverton. Baker had hated the captain and feared him. Wolverton had insulted Baker and struck him and ruined his morale; yet Baker would never have dared come to grips with Wolverton. Despite his manner of dying, Baker had been physically a coward, and the killing of Wolverton had been a stealthy thing in the dark.

Swiftly, Teddy ran over the others. Hinchman, quiet, thoughtful, philosophical; Malone, violent, aggressive, unafraid; Tannehill, young, reckless, hot-headed. Where was a stealthy murderer in such a group?

Hinchman's only apparent motive was his anger at Arrelanes' death. He had expressed himself on the subject but he was too level-headed to kill a man in his bunk because of a wartime blunder that resulted in the death of another man. Malone had many motives, but he was the type who would kill his man in combat rather than in the dark. Tannehill had been drunk, and drunken men rarely commit murders of the cold-blooded, planned sort. Baker, on the other hand, would not have dared to kill Wolverton in any other way, and his motives were as strong as any.

"Dammit! He accused me. I won't absolve him.

Dead or alive, he looks like the man to me. He was up himself last night or getting up, and he was the last man to look at Wolverton. Just as if he had some reason not to look at him. Maybe he thought that his memory might be clouded some day for having flown in a murder flight. Maybe he tried to hang it on me to clear it. Maybe——”

There was a click of heels on the stone flags in the bull pen and Teddy turned.

Major Kennedy stood framed in the doorway, his face stern, eyes accusing.

“CAMPBELL, did you kill Wolverton?”

Major Kennedy shot the question abruptly and without preamble.

Teddy's mouth was hard but his eyes were level. “No, sir. I did no?.”

“Will you tell me, then, why you concealed facts at an inquiry that was aimed at getting the truth of the affair?”

Teddy's brain whirled on a dilemma. It seemed foolish to keep on protecting Tannehill's story when his own was under fire. He put the thought aside. To blurt out a statement now that would involve Tannehill, would be equal to the thing that Baker did to him. He shook his head.

“I didn't mean to conceal anything. I had a hunch, as I told you, and I started to get up. I was just out of bed when the first bomb went off and I saw Baker. He was on the edge of his bed with one foot on the floor. He saw me at the same time.”

Kennedy frowned. “Baker had one foot on the floor, you say?” He shook himself as though to shake off an unpleasant thought, then he raised his two fists. “Damn it all. Why don't men tell the truth about things like this? Innocent men lie and guilty men move about freely in the shadow of those lies.”

His teeth clicked together and his eyes burned into Teddy. “You made a stupid mistake if you did nothing else. I'm not passing judgment yet, but I'm grounding you. Lieutenant Campbell, until I get a chance to think. Stay in your quarters or——”

The major's shoulders squared. “The R.F.C. is a strange organization, lieutenant. Our lives are short and we are jealous of honor. Unofficial courts have passed judgments to keep matters from reaching other courts where the name of a squadron might be dishonored.” He leaned forward. “Men have accepted those unofficial decrees and have flown ships that did not come back.”

Teddy's shoulders went back. “Meaning, I take it, that you do not mean to try any one for murder in this squadron but that you think it would balance things if I went on last patrol.”

“Right! If you are guilty.”

Teddy saluted. “I will stay in quarters, major. I did not kill Captain Wolverton and I don't care to go out that way.”

The major turned stiffly. “So be it, but you have no one to blame but yourself if you are under a cloud. I will do all that I can to run the matter down. If I find that cloud justified, be assured that I will act.”

He was gone and Teddy sank down on his bunk. He had been less than two days at the Front and he had passed from rookie to veteran, had flown two patrols, scored a victory, lived through a night attack and was facing the breaking of his bars. Honor and Dishonor, he had found, were neighbors in this wild melee—so closely related that a man might know them both in one swift hour.

One by one the other members of the flight came in, but Teddy gave no greeting and made no sign. The thought of what a rebuff might mean in this, his darkest hour, was not bearable. If he were living in a peace-time community where man's span was theoretically seventy years, and where life moved in orderly channels, he would not have worried. Thought of his innocence would have sustained him. Here there were few men who lived seventy hours of air time and many who did not live seventy minutes. The evidence that might clear him could easily be blazed out of the sky in the next patrol, or the next.

“DON'T take life so seriously, lad. You're the only one of the bunch without a motive for what was done. Nobody can hang anything on you.”

Jeff Hinchman was standing in front of Teddy's bunk, his hand outstretched.

Teddy jumped up and gripped the proffered hand gratefully. As usual, old Jeff had demonstrated his uncanny knack of touching the heart of things. Teddy hadn't reasoned it out himself in quite that way. Of course he hadn't a motive for killing Wolverton. That was the crux of the whole situation.

“Jeff's right, kid. We're all under the same cloud and Baker's say-so didn't change things. Not any.” Malone's gnarled fist was outstretched, too. A little shamefacedly, Dave Tannehill joined the group. “Righto, Yank. Baker was hysterical for days, clean balmy. Just a tough break that he went out like that.”

"Yes. It's tough on Campbell. Mighty tough. I know how he feels and I'm glad that you have all declared yourselves." Hinchman was packing his pipe. "Only decent thing about it is that Campbell is the one man who can stand the accusation. He scarcely knew Wolverton and all the rest of us have had differences with him. I'm going to have a talk with Kennedy."

Teddy looked up hopefully.

"That would help," he said. "He's got me grounded." In terse phrases he outlined his talk with the commander.

Malone cursed.

"That's an Orangeman for you every time. They're a pig-headed bunch and they move in straight lines, damn 'em!"

"Bosh! Kennedy's bucking a tough job and trying to be square with it. And he's God's own prize as a flight leader." Hinchman was pulling hard on his pipe. "If any of you are ignoring that fact, you haven't given much thought to the position we're in. Those Albatross scouts the Krauts have are going to smash us out of the sky before we get new ships, unless men like Kennedy save us. When you get to cussing Kennedy, just remember what fools he made of that Albatross flight to-day."

Hinchman turned and stamped out of the room.

Dan Malone spat. "The Orangemen and their ilk hang together," he said bitterly, "and you young fellows hadn't better be betting too much on Kennedy or any one else to pull you through. It's your own guns and your own wings that will do it—and your own blessed luck if you've got any."

Dan Malone crossed the room to his own bunk, and Tannehill sat down awkwardly on the bunk beside the American.

"Honestly, Yank," he said, "I'm sorry that you're in a jam. I wish I'd been the first to tell you so instead of Jeff Hinchman. I seem to be foggy to-day. Can't believe that it all happened."

He rose to his feet again and hesitated. "Want to thank you, too, for keeping your mouth shut. I said a few things last night when I got binged up. Might have looked bad." He shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. "Pretty tired, Yank. Guess I'll lie down a while."

"Okay. Thanks." Teddy watched the Canadian cross the room and a deep furrow creased his forehead. The man had never mentioned the encounter in the night nor his own silence on the subject which had precipitated the jam in which Teddy found himself. Teddy ran his hand through his hair in bewilderment.

"I wonder," he muttered, "I just wonder where

everything connects up. Nothing quite makes sense and it won't take much more of it to get me wondering if I really did kill Wolverton myself."

CHAPTER VIII SCRAPPED!

IT WAS NOT QUITE NOON when the replacements arrived. They trooped into the bull pen, an eager, excited group.

The major told them to come down, they said. "Jolly old major. Good egg. Promised them action in the afternoon show. No end of a fine prospect. Crack at the ruddy Kraut at last, after the greasy grind of training." Teddy talked with them and listened, kept his troubles to himself and tried to understand the feeling of shock that came over him.

"Bunch of babies," he muttered. "Don't know what it's all about. You'd think they were coming up on a picnic. Wait till they go over."

Baker's scared white face seemed to dance before his eyes and he blinked. Baker had been up four days and perhaps Baker had been like this when he was a new replacement. Baker!

"Blistering Saints! Person would think I was a vet. This is just my second day."

That realization stunned Teddy Campbell. His mind raced back over the last forty-eight hours and he remembered the naive ideas with which he had ridden down the flaming lines. He thought of the big wings and the insignia in his tunic pocket and of the ace swagger stick. He blushed.

"Dammit, I've got a lot to talk about! Raw as any of them, myself."

He said it and yet he knew that it wasn't so. He wasn't raw. He was a veteran in thought and action and bearing. A few short hours and a couple of actual combats had changed him forever. He would never be again as these three eager lads were now. In twenty-four hours, if they lived, they would be different. They would age and become hard, there would be more replacements and these men would not understand them.

Tannehill, who had been friendly when Teddy came up, was bored with these new men. He wasted no time on them. Malone was in the throes of a deep, sullen

grouch. Only Hinchman seemed to have any interest in the youngsters, any concern for their welfare. He had them around him and was giving them his lecture on the speed of bullets and of planes and the uselessness of worry.

"It takes ten pounds of horse sense to apply a pound of knowledge," he was telling them. "You've got the knowledge or you wouldn't be here. The only thing that an ace has that you haven't got is his horse sense. Watch your leader, learn what he does and why, then you'll be as good as any man and your chance will be as good as the next. You've got a leader as good as the best. He won't fly you into any traps. You're lucky." The youngsters had sobered down in deference to Hinchman's record and experience but now they were chattering again. Sure! Major Kennedy was top hole. Anybody could see it. Great egg! Written all over him.

Hinchman got up and crossed the room. He stopped by Teddy's cot.

"Buck up, laddie," he said, "I'm going in and have a talk with Kennedy. Didn't get a chance before. No sense in your moping here. We need you."

Teddy's eyes kindled. "Gee, you're a prince, Jeff. Damn decent doing that for me." He waved to the replacements. "And for the kids, too."

Jeff Hinchman reached for his pipe. His lean, tanned face betrayed embarrassment.

"Morale is all we have," he said. "Anything that destroys morale increases the percentage against us all. Bucking up a man in trouble, or a youngster, is a good investment of time. I might need the man to protect my tail some time and I don't want him thinking about something else. Understand?"

JEFF turned and started toward the door. Before he reached it, it was thrown dramatically open and Major Kennedy stood in the entrance, his face white, fingers fumbling with his tunic buttons.

Talk died in the room.

"Men," he said, "Loerzer's 'Checkers' arrived this morning, moved in the other side of Mossy Face. They're equipped with new Albatrosses and Obs reports four flights of twelve." He paused and Teddy's eyes darted around the room. Hinchman was standing still in his tracks but his shoulders did not seem as straight as usual. Malone was crouched on the edge of his bunk and his jaw line showed hard. His was the face of a man who hears a death sentence read. Tannehill was a chalky white, but his eyes were steady, lips firm. The three replacements looked eager, alert.

Kennedy moistened his lips.

"Two flights of the 42nd and the 13th did not come back this morning," he said. "Four survivors got across the lines, three photography planes were wiped out over Oppy and an R.E. crashed this side of Baupaume. Fourteen planes and eighteen men lost to the R.F.C. in one morning, gentlemen."

His eyes rested on the tightly grouped replacements. "I am emphasizing this particularly for our new men. They will get no easy breaking in and for that I am sorry. We have on our hands the hardest fight of the war."

There was no fear in the faces of the replacements, only a look of reckless courage, of impatience—an eagerness to match strength and skill with the foe.

Kennedy wrenched his eyes away from them. His voice took on a slashing quality.

"Wing expects the Germans to send over a swarm of Obs ships and picture-takers on the strength of the protection. We have to break it up. The orders for the afternoon are for every available ship and flyer to take the air. We start right away. A Flight follows us in ten minutes and C in half an hour."

Malone had been reaching for his tunic before the order was announced. He knew what was coming. Hinchman had turned back to the wardrobe.

Teddy stood up and his eyes sought Kennedy's. For a second the major hesitated, then he shook his head and turned away. Teddy sank back whitefaced on the bunk.

"Every available man in the air"—and he was not being permitted to go.

For half an hour he suffered a torture beyond description as the Nieuports took off one by one and headed into the blue. First, it was his own flight, with a replacement flying in his place; then the other two flights took off and he was alone—the only pilot on the ground along the entire Arras Front.

For a while he stayed in quarters, then he went outside and looked longingly at the sky. If he could only see them fight or know how it was going it would be different. His flesh quivered and he felt a sensation as of hair rising on his skin. There were more planes up to-day than he had ever imagined in combat and well did he know the odds that the R.F.C. pilots were facing with their Nieuports and Sop Pups and D.H.2s.

IT HAD been hard when there were only a few squadrons across the way with the Albatross. Then, leaders like Kennedy could bring their men through.

Now, Loerzer was across the way and Loerzer was second only to Richthofen in the ranks of enemy aces. His Checker squadron was known from the muddy flats of Ypres to the French line. And there were forty-eight Checkers.

"Hell! Grounded or not, I'm going up."

With his jaw hard and a swagger to his shoulders, Teddy strode to the camouflaged hangars.

A shrill voice singing out of tune stopped him. There was something vaguely familiar about it.

*"It's the syme the 'ole world over;
It's the poor wot tykes the blyme.
It's the rich wot tykes the pleasures.
Ain't it all a bleedin' shy me?"*

About the corner of the hangar, he came upon the little Cockney corporal. The man was shining up his motor cycle, hands moving in time to his abominable singing. There was something in the song and in the man's occupation that struck Teddy as so unmilitary, so out of harmony with the idea of war that he felt his spirits rise. In the last twenty-four hours he had forgotten that men could sing silly songs and clean motor cycles and do commonplace things in a commonplace manner.

The little corporal looked up, grinned and came to his feet.

"Bless yer 'eart, liftinint, you give me quite a turn. I didn't figure there'd be anybody left on the ground short of a colonel. No sense of humor, colonels 'aven't. Turn me in most likely for singin' a bit of a ballad. My father, now, he always used to say as singin' soldiers wins a war. In the Boer fuss he were and—"

"All right, corporal, but hang your father! I'm in a hurry. Need a bus right away and no questions. Hunt up the sergeant and get me one."

"A bus, you say? I dawn't know, sir. All in the air, I fancy. There's—"

"You can go and find out, dammit. Hop along!" Teddy felt his impatience bursting the bonds yet, somehow, the Cockney was a tonic. At the same moment that he felt the urge to kick him, he blessed the man, too, for his talkativeness and for his sloppy, unmilitary carriage and demeanor. While this man wore a uniform, one could not think of war as a grim thing. One looked for a chorus to come leaping from the wings, for a comedian in a bowler hat and whatnot.

The sergeant rigger who came up with him a few minutes later, however, was a different type.

Grimfaced, businesslike and with the air of one carrying the cares of the world, he dispelled any ideas of frivolity that the corporal might inspire.

"I can't say about a bus, sir. They're all in the air that's fit to fly."

"Haven't you got one of any kind?"

"I've got one," the sergeant hesitated, "but it needs a spot of work. Wouldn't recommend it, sir. We've been that busy with those that fly and—"

"I know. Bring out the unrecommended!"

Teddy waved off further discussion and walked to the line. If anything further was needed to bring back all his fighting spirit, it was the knowledge that he was going up with a ship that some one said was untrustworthy. It seemed sporting to fly alone with the sky full of Krauts, to know that their ships were better if you had a good one of your kind, to spot them the difference and throw in a few mechanical deficiencies to boot.

"Damned if I don't feel better than I have since I first reported to Albert. This is what I dreamed about."

Teddy looked at the blue skies beyond the German lines and his blood raced. Life was good and there was still romance. Dragons could still be slain and knights still might ride.

THE Nieuport that the sergeant wheeled out was one of those ships that pilots used to dream about when they had the woofits, those screaming dreams that woke an entire barracks while some over-wrought peilot fought one-sided duels in his sleep. Even Teddy, who expected the worst and whose nose was thumbed at Fate, had not imagined this.

Inherent and chronic instability stuck out from all over the ancient craft. It was oil-soaked from the prop boss to the last frayed thread of its rudder covering. Flying and landing wires sagged like skipping ropes and, in repose, the craft had a marked cant to the left. During some frivolous period of its hectic past it had seen service. There was evidence of that in the patches which adorned the wings, two of which were loose.

"Ark of the covenant! You raided a graveyard for that, sergeant. Such devotion is touching."

Teddy looked anxiously at the sky. It would be terrific to waste the mood that he was in. He hoped that this ship would take him to the fighting.

"She's not very good, sir. A bit afraid of 'er, I am, but her engine hits quite well, sir. Prime, I'd say."

"Good for the engine!"

Teddy pulled on his goggles, tugged on the helmet

strap and swung up into the battered cockpit. There was a dark stain on the crash pad and another on the seat, grim reminders of one who had flown before.

"Doesn't look as though the last pilot was Fortune's darling."

Teddy revved the engine up, squinted along the pockmarked field and gave the signal.

Two enlisted men pulled the chocks and he was off to his date with danger.

He quickly verified his hunch that this was an eccentric ship. Most Nieuports had a tendency to go through the routine of *le cheval* when landing; this was the first he had flown that did the same thing on takeoffs. In long, swooping hops it went down the field; then with a swishing sigh of its wings and a whining protest from the ancient wires, it leaped for the sky.

Aloft, it was a rigger's nightmare. The left wing dipped, it was tail-heavy, and the controls responded too quickly or too slowly, depending upon longitudinal and lateral factors too abstruse for an ordinary pilot.

For several minutes, Teddy experimented and worked with his controls, then he pointed his nose for old Mossy Face, the grim Bois d'Havincourt, and the battle lane of the deadly Checkers.

"Going to like this ship," he muttered. "Bet a freak design like this will do things that these Germans never heard about, saw or imagined."

He had resolutely put from his mind all thought of the personal problem that faced him, the death of Wolverton, the shadow of disgrace and the prospect of death across the lines. This was the war as he had imagined it before two grim days had made a veteran of him. It was his war and he was fighting it alone, except for the hopeless ship he flew. A man and a plane, both of them grounded and neither having any place in the sky—it established a bond and, as though the Nieuport realized it, it responded nobly to the touch of his hand and climbed to the high drifting clouds that rolled across old Mossy Face.

Martinpuich and Courcillotte flowed beneath his wing-tips and then he was skirting the wood within sight of Boisieu, former headquarters of the Boelcke Squadron.

There he saw his first German planes. They were flying in straight, staircase formation at about ten thousand feet. He watched them calmly, counted twelve and kept at his own level of fifteen thousand.

CHAPTER IX CRASH COURT

FOR TEN MINUTES he stalked them as they crossed the woods south of Queant and headed toward Croiselles. Suddenly, five planes detached themselves from the formation and swooped down in a roaring dive. Three thousand feet below them, two British observation planes, R.E. 8s, obviously streaked for the lines.

Teddy clutched the stick. He was about to witness a murder and he had a fierce desire to go down, a desire that he recognized as foolish, Quixotic, useless.

What happened took his breath away. Spreading fanlike as they went down, the Germans came in on either side and below the two hapless two-seaters. Like tiny birds they swooped and circled and then the two-seaters disappeared. They seemed to dissolve in the air. It was too far away to mark any firing and Teddy had only a glimpse of one falling plane. It was over in a few seconds and the five Germans were zooming back to their flight.

Teddy lifted his finger from the coupe button and the rotary roared full out as he turned and streaked down the lines toward Arras and Vimy Ridge.

It took some of the glory out of his expedition to see such deadly efficient work done and to be helpless while four lads got the long leave. So this was a sample of how the Checkers worked! Between Monchy and the lines he picked up another flight of twelve Germans. He was still high man. As he looked down, he saw a fleeing flight of Nieuports. Even as he registered their presence, closer to him than to the Germans, the Checker flight leader made the same discovery. The long flight spread out in a semicircle and the Albatross flight went down.

Teddy did not wait for that maneuver to be completed. He was diving on a long angle himself before that crescent-shaped flight had whipped across the sky.

Praying that the wings would hold, he raced down. He was guessing against those Germans and he had a hunch that one of them would be surprised.

The noses of the attackers dipped. Mercedes engines droned up the scale, and wings cut the sky.

Teddy warmed his guns, saw that his line was good and then the Albatross he had guessed for was racing across his sights.

The man, intent on the Nieuports below, never saw him and Teddy poured his slugs into the cockpit with a sure hand on the trips.

The German's hand came up in a convulsive salute, he half turned in the cockpit and then his ship rolled wing over wing and plunged down the long trail to oblivion.

Teddy never hesitated. He was flashing down on the tail of the next man, pulling his ancient ship around with the rudder, defying the inherent instability that was in it and concentrating on his guns.

This Kraut was warned. The stricken ship of his comrade threw its shadow over him as the death convulsion seized it and he cast a wild glance back. Jerking at his stick, he strove to pull out of his dive and Teddy was all over him before he had time to complete his maneuver.

Again the Vickers bucked and jerked, the tracers laid a white line across the space separating the two ships and the pilot threw up his hands. He died almost instantly in a ship that was practically unharmed.

As he spun wildly out of control, his mates hit the Nieuport flight below.

Teddy curved up and over in a wide arc. He had yawed all over the sky in planting that last burst and he had had to dive a bit to get back his speed and bank over before he redressed. In command of his ship once more, he looked over the side.

Two Nieuports were spinning down and one of them was flaming. Another Nieuport was cutting eights with a faster Albatross and two more were boxed by a group of Germans.

Before he could go to the rescue, Teddy saw the lone German cut across the loop of an eight with blinding speed and simply tear his opponent out of the air with his guns.

At almost the same instant, the other two Nieuports reeled through a hole in the trap, a German faltered and fell off, one of the Nieuports followed and the other took the false-spin route of escape.

One survivor, at best two survivors, out of a flight of five.

Teddy turned to escape and the sky literally rained ships. He had been so intent on the drama below him that he had violated the first rule of the air. He had not watched the sky.

For a moment he had a feeling of wild panic

and then he saw the cocardes with their blue rings and flaming hearts. Nieuports, by the gods! Yes, and D.H.2s. It was a trap and the timing had gone wrong. The bait had died.

Epic struggles are fought and won—or lost—in fractional seconds when war takes wing. The attacking flights had closed with the German's before Teddy's consciousness had registered their identity and before his hands obeyed his brain.

Whirling his tiny ship around, he plunged down. The odds were with the British now. There were ten of them and only nine Germans left. Teddy made one more for the English and the Albatross was not a dogfighter. It was designed for the quick, plunging kill and not for the adroit twists and turns of close combat.

Before he joined the wild melee, he saw an Albatross burst into flames and another plunge over on its back and go down. His comrades were throwing real fury into the attack and he could understand that. They had much to avenge.

He came into it on the tail of an Albatross that flew streamers from a strut. The leader! He hoped that it was Loerzer but he doubted. The big gun of the crack flight would never have been caught in a clumsy dogfight.

The German rolled as Teddy's shadow fell on him and the American's first burst went off into the blue. A D.H.2, clumsy little pusher scout, recoiled from the guns of a zooming foe, winged over and slashed across Teddy's nose. For a horrible moment, Teddy saw his prop charging at the nacelle in which a limp figure sagged, then he hurdled the menace and was clear while the D.H. spun away. The accident, however, lost him his kill. The Albatross with the trailing ribbons was streaking it for home.

A Nieuport arced across the sky and the insignia danced before Teddy's eyes. A maple leaf!

"Tannehill!" He breathed the name.

Two Albatross scouts were diving for the tiny ship and three more Nieuports were racing for the Germans. Teddy was closer than the three pursuers. He lifted his thumb from the coupe button and roared into the nearest German. The Vickers stuttered and the German turned like a flash. Teddy had tail position but he was not close enough for an effective burst. Grimly he held his position and tried to close the gap. His foe opened up, tried to shake him and cut back in a wide eight.

At the top of the eight, Teddy had a wide view of

the sky. The fight had spread out in four directions and he had no idea how the rest fared. The three ships that had been on the diving Germans were gone and Tannehill was battling it out alone.

AT THE precise moment that Teddy came into position to see Tannehill and his foe, the two combatants elected to cut across the dizzy circle in which they whirled. Lead crossed lead and both ships staggered. The German stood on his tail and the prop pawed the air; Tannehill whirled wing over wing like a shot bird.

This much Teddy saw and then he was turning on the trail of the German whom he had picked for an opponent. He was terribly alone now and conscious of his foe's superiority in fighting equipment, but he hung doggedly to a chase that was becoming hopeless. The German had far the greater speed and it would take not more than two more fast eights for him to lap Teddy and get on his tail if he did not elect to cut across that and force the issue.

Suddenly Teddy was conscious of the heat of his engine. It bucked, missed a few revolutions and sputtered feebly. For a mad moment he skidded on a turn and then all of his craft's suppressed defects ganged out together and he was in a spin.

As the earth changed places with the sky in a mad plunge downward, he had a swift picture of another Nieuport below him. He did not know if it were spinning and he had no time to worry about it. He wondered whether the German was riding him down, whether he could pull out of this spin and whether his wings would stay on if he did.

Firing the stick into a corner and stepping on the rudder he elected to find out. The old Nieuport shivered as though with an ague, the wires screamed and then it slithered abruptly out of the spin, righted itself and tried to plunge into another. Teddy caught it, shoved his nose down and tried to dive some flying speed into it. To his astonishment and delight, the engine caught and came in with a roar. He leveled off with less than a thousand feet under him and saw the other Nieuport again.

It was fluttering and fighting down as Baker's ship had come down; wounded, crippled, struggling to the last gasp. There was a difference, though. This Nieuport was not coming home. It was landing in German territory.

With one last plunge it gave up the fight, flew into the branches of a tree, hung there for a second and fell crumpled and torn to the ground.

Teddy's mind, numbed by the swiftness of events, took seconds to register the significance of that crash. He gave a groan.

"Tannehill!"

The Canadian's friendliness, his boyish longing for a girl's companionship and trust—a dozen memories thronged as the Maple Leaf fluttered to German soil. Then another thought flashed.

Tannehill alone could answer a question that Teddy had to ask. Tannehill alone knew why he had kept silent about the night that Wolverton was killed, his meeting with Teddy in the dark room, his claim of illness. With Tannehill there passed, perhaps, Teddy's last hope of unearthing the truth that would clear his mind if not his name.

With a quick glance at the empty sky, Teddy whirled the plane about the wide meadow over which he flew, dropped his nose and shot for a landing by the tree. Within a couple of miles, he could see troops marching on a yellow road—German troops. The sun glinted on the lances of cavalry on another road east of the meadow. He didn't care. He would risk Germany to ask the Canadian one question.

"I doubted him," he choked. "He's done in now. I have to know. I can't let him die without knowing. I don't want to think he killed Wolverton. I liked him, dammit. I did."

He was almost sobbing as the wheels hit and he raced for the wreck of the Nieuport.

TANNEHILL'S Nieuport lay on its crumpled wing the other wing pointing to the sky. Huddled into a ball beside the crushed wing surface lay the Canadian, his head pillowed in his crooked arm.

Teddy dropped on his knees.

"Did they get you, old man, did they get you?"

The fact that Tannehill had had the consciousness to unfasten his safety belt fanned a hope in Teddy's breast for a moment.

He turned the Canuck over and the hope died.

The man's face was terribly battered where he had struck some portion of the ship at the moment of impact, one arm hung grotesquely loose and there was a strange shapelessness to him that told its own story. His eyelids fluttered but did not open; his lips moved feebly.

Teddy reached for the tiny flask he carried. Such flasks were standard equipment. A fiery charge of liquor had brought many a stricken pilot home.

Hastily he forced the whisky past the man's lips.

He hadn't much time. The memory of those flashing lances along the far road worried him. Lances meant Uhlans and they must have seen him land. A company of cavalry would not take long to reach him.

Once more Tannehill's eyelids fluttered, his eyes opened and he stared up dazedly.

"Campbell," he murmured. "Good egg. Made it, didn't I?"

Teddy cast an anxious glance across the meadow. Tannehill thought that he had brought his ship home. It wouldn't do to have him die in the knowledge that he hadn't.

"Yes, Dave," he whispered. "You made it, boy. But it's last post, Canuck. You're going out."

"I know." It was a thin whisper.

Teddy bit his lip. It seemed cruel to ask questions now. He looked again down the length of the field. He thought he saw the sun reflect on something bright.

Tannehill's lips moved.

"Yvonne. Good kid. Tell her, Yank, Sorry. Not my fault but I was going—to see her through. Going to—"

He was sinking fast. Teddy bent low.

"Dave," he said. "Please. Wolverton! Did you—"

The Canadian's eyes opened wide. Startled wonder, amazement shone in their depths. He strove to rise and the effort quenched the spark. His body stiffened in one wild paroxysm and he collapsed.

Teddy folded the limp arms across the still breast and leaped to his feet. In that moment he knew that Tannehill had not killed Captain Wolveton.

There were hoofs pounding across the meadow now and Teddy raced for his cockpit. The Uhlans were charging with lances low and he had seconds only in which to get away, fractional beats of time separating him from a German prison camp and dishonor.

The dishonor angle was a real threat. He had been given two alternatives by Major Kennedy. The fact that he had taken the air would be enough evidence of his guilt in the matter of Wolverton's murder. "Men accept the verdict of our unofficial courts; fly over the lines and fail to return." Kennedy had said that and if Teddy did not come back the matter would be closed.

CHAPTER X LAST DECOY

TEDDY WAS IN THE COCKPIT. It had not been much of a trick to turn the little ship around and the engine was still purring. He would have to take off with the wind, but what of that? It was a chance.

With a rush and a roar he went down the field into the faces of the cavalry. Horses reared, riders cursed and then he was through and there was lift under his wings. A scattered volley of shots followed him as he curved for the sky, marveling at the way in which his decrepit ship met all hazard.

"More sense than I have. If it hadn't spun me away from that Kraut, he might have got me. Anyway, I'd never have reached Tannehill."

The thought of the Canadian hurt. There would be no British burial for him, no reverent hands, no comrade's parting salute. He would go into the earth beneath the German eagle's spread, lost to those who might wish to shrine his resting place.

"He doesn't know," Teddy muttered. "He doesn't know. He thinks he got home."

The engine was laboring once more and that was a mercy. It forced his mind away from grief and he concentrated on his ship. To cool his engine, he cruised on his selector, a second magneto which fired certain of the nine cylinders at regular intervals and spaced the explosions. The rotaries had no other cooling system. Flying thus he barked across the sky, as noisily as a carbon-choked motor cycle on a grade.

Archy reached for him as he passed and he weaved an erratic course. The higher levels were not for him now. Petrol was low.

In one last, darting swoop he cleared the lines and banked over the ruins of Pozieres. Down over the Albert-Baupaume highway he came in a fast glide, cleared Le Sars and settled gently toward the bomb-pitted field on the way to St. Aubert.

The old ship shuddered when the wheels touched; it bucked and staggered and rocked. Right up to the line it rolled, sighed like a tired horse and stopped.

Teddy swung over the side and patted the dented cowl.

"Good girl. No end obliged."

At something very much resembling a gallop he crossed the field. Several mechanics had met him but there were no flyers in sight. He charged down the passageway and into the bull pen of B Flight. Three men looked up at his entrance; a white-faced, disheveled youngster, hardly recognizable as one of the gallant replacements of a few hours back, Dan Malone and Jeff Hinchman.

"Where's the—"

He started to say "rest of them" and stopped. It dawned on him suddenly that there was no "rest." This was all.

As though afraid of what he might say, Hinchman finished the inquiry.

"The major? In his quarters. Wouldn't bother him now, if I were you."

Teddy's jaw set.

"I have to," he said tersely.

Hinchman started to his feet but Teddy was gone. He had realized as he flew home that he might have died a dozen times in that mad two hours of flight. He had realized, too, that he couldn't die under present conditions without admitting that he had done something that was beyond him, without taking on his shoulders the guilt of some other man. He had to see Kennedy and get the condition removed.

In the little room at the end of the corridor he found him. The squadron leader was attired in the worn sweater in which Teddy had first seen him. He sprawled forward with his head on his scarred table, arms outspread, fists clenched. He did not look up as Teddy entered but when the flyer pronounced his name he slowly raised his head.

TEDDY was shocked at the deep lines that were etched in the man's face, the bloodshot eyes. The man looked at him but did not seem to see him.

Teddy leaned forward.

"Wanted to report, sir. I flew today; not to admit something but because I was needed."

He paused, then plunged on. In curt, clipped phrases he told of his part in the day's fighting, of Tannehill's death and of the dilemma he had faced. He paused again at the end.

Kennedy's expression had not changed. He seemed not to have heard.

Teddy leaned across the table. "You've got to lift that grounded order, sir. You've got to. I can do a bit and I must. I had nothing to do with killing Wolverton,

know nothing about it. I—"

Kennedy waved his hand in a tired gesture. "Believe you, Campbell. Makes no difference. Order's lifted." He straightened himself with an effort and pulled a pad of paper across the table, picking up a pen with fingers that were far from steady. A few sheets that had been written upon fluttered across the scarred wood. The man had been writing letters and Teddy could guess to whom those letters were addressed. Many men had failed to come back.

"Then you believe me. You don't think I killed Wolverton?"

"I'm not thinking at all." Kennedy shrugged wearily. "A few more days, to-morrow maybe, and the slate will be cleared."

His gesture was one of dismissal. Teddy backed slowly from the room, his brain whirled. He would have liked to have pressed the matter further, to find out what the major meant. Something told him, however, that the man would not explain and that it would be the height of cruelty to press him further. He still had letters to write, the bitterest letters that ever fell to the lot of man. Upon his pen rested the duty of informing those distant ones that they had given a son to a cause.

Hinchman was pacing the bull pen when Teddy entered. He gripped the American's arm.

"I tried to stop you. To-night was no time to talk to Bill Kennedy." The lean face worked.

"C Flight was wiped out to-day because Britton was leading it and Britton blundered."

"The decoy flight that pulled the Germans down too soon?"

Hinchman nodded. "Yes. Kennedy led C himself till he took this one."

"Oh!" Teddy knew now what had brought the lines to Kennedy's face. He could guess what torturing thoughts had passed through the man's mind. He had led that flight himself once. He had turned over the task to another and the flight had perished.

In the same flash of understanding came the answer to the cryptic utterance with which Kennedy had closed the interview. He had said that the slate would soon be cleared. He had reason to believe that.

The 94th squadron had all but been wiped out of existence and Teddy knew how limited was the supply of replacements. More green boys would come up, greener than the last bunch because their training would be speeded up. The veterans would die because they were not protected, supported. The youngsters

could not take care of themselves.

Yes. Kennedy was right. The slate would soon be cleared. Murder Flight would pass out of existence and with it would go the memory of murder and all question as to the murderer.

A few days, the major had said, maybe to-morrow.

MEN herd together when Doom is stalking. The remnants of A and C Flights were in B's bull pen when Teddy got back from Kennedy's office. Dan Malone had been drinking heavily and he had shaken his grouch. His ringing bass baritone boomed off the stone walls of the old chateau. He waved a glass high and a dozen men joined their voices to his.

*"Stand to your glasses steady.
This world is a web of lies;
Then here's to the dead already,
And hurrah for the next man who dies."*

The blood rushed through Teddy's veins, he felt the beat and throb of life at high tide and unreality became reality. The horror of murder and sudden death, of loss, dishonor, grief; all these faded and gave way to the high thrill of being a man in a company of men. The flags of glory waved in the lilt of a song.

He snatched a glass from the tray of a passing orderly and lifted it.

Somewhere a clock ticked but there was no clock made that could measure time in a company like this. Men were spending years with reckless profligacy in a mad hour. The sands of time rushed through the hourglass unheeded as other glasses were lifted and a song hurled in the face of a mocking fate. Somewhere in the shadows were the ghosts of old men; the old men that these boys might have become had there been no war.

"This world is a web of lies—"

On with the song, and before it all ties melted. These men were men without homes, without mothers, fathers, sweethearts and wives; they had crossed a bridge to a world of madness and mist, of valor and of folly. Teddy's throat burned, but his blood raced hotly and his soul quivered to a wild bugle call, a call that sounds only in the consciousness of men who give everything to a cause.

"Then here's to the dead already—"

The walls hurled the echoes back, and ghosts trooped by. The wild drinking bout had swept from

the bull pen to the barracks room. Men who had never known Arrelanes or Baker or Tannehill climbed on the bunks that those men had occupied and roared their song, drank deeply and laughed at the end of the world. Teddy, who had known those men, could feel their presence in the room.

"And hurrah for the next man who dies!"

The corridor door banged and a new group of replacements erupted into the room. With a whoop they fell on the liquor and Teddy was once more aware of shock. The blighters were actually red-cheeked and shiny and full of schoolboy yells. They would make a picnic out of a soul-satisfying, roaring, defiant binge. How could lads like these sing such virile stuff? They didn't know what it meant. Wait till they had seen men drop by the scores, wait till they looked around at empty bunks and saw shadowy faces where once there had been red blood and life and laughter. Wait.

Yes, wait three days! The whisper seemed to come from outside of himself. Three days. God! It couldn't be. It was three years, three hundred years, three lifetimes.

*"And the bells of hell go ting-a-ling-a-ling,
For you and not for me.
I hear the angels sing-a-ling-a-ling;
They've got the goods for me.
Oh, Death, where is thy sting-a-ling-a-ling
Where Grave——"*

Some fool was singing a Tommy Atkins ballad. Teddy cursed and went out into the corridor. He resented the replacements. They annoyed him. He couldn't feel that they would stand by, would know what to do in a scrap. They were so young and boyish-looking, so frivolous. Yet he'd have to rely on them to keep his tail clear of Germans in a melee.

IRRELEVANTLY, Teddy wondered how many of the rookies would go yellow. A picture of Baker, cringing in his bunk, came to his mind. Baker!

As though it had happened years ago, his mind turned back hazily to Wolverton and to the morning when that French bayonet quivered in his chest. Wolverton! Baker! Tannehill! Hinchman! Malone!

They seemed to parade by to the muffled throb of singing in the other room. Wolverton was dead, and one of the others had killed him. Tannehill hadn't. He'd swear to that. Baker was dead. He shook his head slowly from side to side. It was impossible to picture Hinchman as killing his flight leader for the mistake that cost him a friend. Friendly old Jeff Hinchman

who fathered all the rookies that came up, defended Kennedy as the world's finest! No. He couldn't picture that. Malone? Never. That black, brawling Irishman with his quick temper, his reckless courage, his capacity for leading men in song. Malone might kill, but not in the dark. Yet Baker had not died as a murderer dies.

Footsteps beat along the flags of the corridor. Major Kennedy pushed open the bull-pen door and a volume of sound roared out.

*"Stand by your glasses steady.
The world is a web of lies——"*

Teddy went in again and saw Kennedy summon Hinchman and Malone. The two men went out with him and Teddy reached for a drink. It was a mistake to have ever left this room. He got to thinking of unpleasant things when he was alone. He was getting the woofits.

"Be getting in a vertical gust first thing I know," he grunted.

There was a bottle on the bunk, and he tried to catch up with those who had served King Alcohol more faithfully than he. Two or three songs were being sung at the same time now by various groups. A tall stripling from A Flight who had served through the day was dragging a reluctant replacement across the room.

"Bedtime story, little boys and girls," he hiccupped. "Very silly story. 'Bout a little boy who wouldn't take a drink. Wouldn't take a drink on the night before the world ended. Wouldn't take a——"

Teddy pulled at the bottle again. The voice faded and the room got black. He felt that he was in a spin and tried hard to kick it out. Then sensation ceased.

He came to himself with Hinchman shaking him. There was no one singing now and the room was in a wild disorder. A few men, like himself, lay in bunks. There was an argument going on in the corner. The fierce gayety had spent itself. Hinchman was cold sober and Teddy did not recall having seen him take a drink.

"Poor chap," he thought. "Tried to keep a clear head and go out knowing that he's going. Better go at high tide."

His thoughts weren't very clear.

Hinchman shook him again. "Come awake, Campbell. Out of it, laddie. Patrol in an hour. Got to be steady, lad."

The man had some kind of a concoction that he was trying to force into Teddy's mouth.

Teddy fought him off, then succumbed and took it. "We'll need you in there. Malone won't be with us. Just you and me and the youngsters. Kennedy won't be with us either."

CHAPTER XI CLEARED!

TEDDY SAT BOLT UPRIGHT. The effects of the liquor left him and he sobered almost immediately. "What's happened to Malone and Kennedy?"

"Nothing yet." Hinchman shivered, an unusual thing for him. "Only men enough for two good flights, laddie, counting the young ones. Major figures the only protection he can give our Obs is to break those Checkers. He thinks yesterday's plan was good."

"Decoy 'em?"

"Right. He's taking Malone. There are only four of us veterans left now, lad; Kennedy, Malone and you and me.

"Veterans!" And he was one of them. The thought sent a steadying thrill through Teddy. He leaned forward.

"You're leading one flight?"

"Yes!" Hinchman shuddered again. "The top. I want at least one steady man at my back. It's a terrible responsibility to lead, laddie. Too many lives on your shoulders. A leader doesn't just risk his own life, he risks a lot of lives."

Teddy stared. It suddenly came to him that Hinchman, the reliable, was a great follower, but that his caution robbed him of Malone's fiery capacity for leadership. The man weighed things and thought things out. The born leader acts. Hinchman, who knew more about leading a flight than any two ordinary men, was afraid to put that knowledge to the test.

Teddy stuck out his hand.

"I'll be all right," he said, "and I'll do my best behind you. We'll come through."

Hinchman rose.

"Death comes for a man too soon," he said, "if it catches him in the training camp or on his first flight; it comes too late when he's seen as much as I have."

He turned and was gone. Teddy shook himself and his mind turned over the last phrase he had heard when John Barleycorn's punch had landed.

"The night before the world ended—" he murmured. "Now I wonder!"

Ghosts walked again as Teddy lay there in his bunk awaiting the dawn. In the half consciousness that lies between wakefulness and sleep, he felt again the presence of Tannehill. The Canadian seemed to be trying to finish the speech that had fought for utterance in the moment that he died. The last of the revelers had gone to his bunk and the big room was dark. Teddy's brain struggled to catch that elusive message from the somewhere.

He went back again to that night when Wolverton was killed in his bunk. It had been like this. He had been lying awake and there had been a noise.

There was a bang from the darkness and Teddy jumped. The hairs seemed to stand on his body and his heart raced. Somebody had just banged into the supply closet.

For a second he lay paralyzed, then he leaped into the dark. His hand groped, a figure loomed out of the darkness and he gripped something tangible. He was ridiculously relieved. This was no phantom, it was real. He turned the man around and strained to see his face. It was one of the new replacements.

"Lost muh bunk. Can't find it—" The man was muttering.

Teddy steadied him and steered him to an empty bunk, pushed him in and stepped back. The man dropped inert, his breathing coming heavily.

Teddy cursed softly as revelation came to him.

"What a blind fool I was. I should have known." He ran his fingers through his hair. "Tannehill couldn't tell about that night. Tannehill didn't know. He was as drunk as this lad, and this chap won't know tomorrow that he ever got up."

SO GREAT was Teddy's relief that he almost laughed aloud. He had never wanted to believe in the Canadian's guilt and had never believed in it. The man's silence on a matter that would have cleared Teddy, however, had hurt. And it was so simple.

He turned back toward his bunk and stopped. A glimmer of light showed under the crack of the door that led to the bull pen. His senses quickened, Teddy tip-toed softly to the door and opened it.

Hinchman sat alone at the big table, his black pipe tight in his teeth, eyes staring at nothing.

For several seconds Teddy watched him, but the man did not turn. He was obviously unaware of observation, his mind concentrated on some problem

that held him. Softly, Teddy closed the door and stood in the darkness. The whole problem came back now in the still hour before dawn, the hour in which Wolverton had died.

There were only three suspects left and one of the three was beyond human judgment. Malone was probably sleeping somewhere with God only knew what dreams; Hinchman was waiting out the night with thoughts of the new responsibility that was his.

Poor old Jeff! Ever since Teddy had first met him the man had been worrying about others. He had tried to get Wolverton, whom he disliked, to take a leave of absence before he went to pieces. He had coached new men going up to fight and fly. He had all but broken when Arrelanes died, had defended Kennedy's leadership against Malone's criticism, had encouraged Teddy when he was accused.

Now he was worrying because the lives of others were resting on his judgment.

"Almost everybody else believes that when your number goes up, you go. Jeff believes that it's all in the hands of your flight leader."

Teddy shook his head and started back to his bunk. Suddenly a thought hit him that was so startlingly clear that it took his breath, so shocking that it stopped him short. As in the matter of Tannehill's silence, he wondered how he could have been so blind. He turned on his heel and pushed the door to the bull pen open.

Hinchman turned and Teddy closed the door behind him.

With those mild eyes fixed on his face, Teddy found it hard to carry out his resolve, but a long string of memories trooped across his mind and hardened him. He pulled a chair over and sat down.

"Jeff," he said. "You killed Captain Wolverton!"

For an electric second, Hinchman stared. His eyes blinked and he lowered his pipe.

"Yes, laddie," he said. "I did."

"Why?" Teddy's voice had a lash to it, but his mind was numb. He could hardly believe the reality of this yet.

Hinchman made a weary gesture with one hand.

"If you know I did it, you know why."

"Because you thought Wolverton wasn't fit to lead a flight any more and you could not argue him into taking a leave?"

Hinchman raised the pipe to his lips. His hand trembled.

"Not exactly, but that is approximately it. A flight must be a harmonious unit under a capable leader.

Ours wasn't. Wolverton was to blame. No one liked him, no one trusted him. He was going to pieces, laddie. He couldn't lead any more. He showed that when he took us down on the Albatross and lost us Arrelanes."

TEDDY was staring horrified at Hinchman's calm justification. "But murder, man? To kill him in the night like that. A man doesn't merit death because he is incapable. He didn't want to lose Arrelanes."

"Ah, no. You don't understand. We live in different worlds. Your mind gives a different value to things than mine. I didn't kill him to punish him. It was quick, painless. He never felt it."

"But you did kill him because he was incapable?"

Hinchman set his pipe down. "No. I really didn't kill him at all. I merely anticipated his death. The way he was flying and thinking and acting he could not have lasted. He'd have died on his next patrol or the one after. He'd have taken us with him and taken fresh young flyers, trusting youngsters who would follow him and pay the penalty of his shattered judgment. I didn't hate." Hinchman seemed to be pleading now.

"Hate isn't in me, Campbell. I love my fellow man. These youngsters break my heart. I've seen a lot of them come up. Wolverton would have killed them with his obstinacy, his stupidity; not the Germans, but Wolverton. He was a worse enemy of theirs than the Hun and I kill Huns without hating them."

Teddy's mind whirled, but through a fog of ideas too vast for his mind to sort and classify, he saw a glimmer of the truth. The man before him was a murderer but his guilt was above the judgment of men. The strains and the stresses of war had shaken his mind and he had a fixed idea of responsibility which, right or wrong, could hardly be weighed by another mind.

In one occult moment Teddy felt that if one accepted war as normal, then this man's mind was normal; if war was mad, then why punish the madness of one man?

Hinchman had slumped.

"You will tell Kennedy?" he asked.

Teddy wet his lips.

"It's your job," he said. "I'm not a detective or a prosecutor."

Hinchman stared at the table top, then he raised his head abruptly and his eyes blazed. "You think I'm a coward because I didn't tell him when he accused you. Wrong. You had no motive. You were safe. If he

had accused Malone, I'd have spoken. I thought that it would remain a mystery."

Teddy opened his mouth to speak and then thought better of it. This man's mind moved only in one direction. It was evident that he had never considered the fact that his comrades flew under a cloud because of his act. Now it was too late to remind him of it.

"Will you tell Kennedy?" Teddy kept his voice hard although he had nothing but pity for the man before him.

Hinchman shuddered and looked away.

"Another half hour," he said, "and we fly again." His eyes pleaded. "Let me lead this flight once. Kennedy needs the few veterans he has. I can't let him down. I'll lead them well, Campbell. I swear I'll lead them well."

Looking into those tortured eyes, knowing how the man's whole thought turned on the responsibilities of leadership, Teddy believed him. He would lead them well.

Teddy nodded.

"First," he said, "you'll write a confession and I'll leave it with my belongings. You may not come back. Malone may or I may. We will want to be cleared."

"That is fair. Thank you." Hinchman seemed to have aged. He pulled a few loose sheets across the table and uncapped his fountain pen and began to write.

In ten minutes Hinchman had finished, and Teddy took the sheets. His eyes raced over the close script. It was as he had reconstructed it when he had stood alone in the barracks and weighed each man's opportunities, his position in the room and the probable method of retrieving the murder weapon.

Hinchman had slipped out of his bunk, worked along the partition, secured the weapon which he had previously hidden in the wardrobe, struck the blow and retraced his steps. He, of all the members of the flight, had been able to traverse every inch of the way to the captain's quarters and return without crossing a foot of open room. He had run no risk of accidental discovery nor of tripping over a carelessly dropped object.

Quietly, Teddy folded the paper.

"I will return this if we both come back," he said. "Take it if you come back alone. It will be with my things."

Hinchman nodded, then his head came up and there was a catch in his voice.

"Don't judge me too harshly, lad," he pleaded. "You are young. You haven't seen all that I've seen. You think in terms of right and wrong. There is no right and no wrong; everything one does is an aspect of necessity."

Teddy shrugged wearily and held out his hand.

"I'm not a judge, Hinchman. I'm a fighting man. In the only game I know you rate damned high."

Dawn came finally. The rotaries purred and the little Nieuports trembled on the line. In an awkward swarm the replacements crossed the road, more than a little nervous and trying to act like veterans.

The men who had seen one day's service walked less eagerly. Their pose was one of indifference, not any too well carried out.

Major Kennedy stalked silently in a group with his veterans, Teddy, Malone and Hinchman.

Despite a certain weariness, Teddy had a spring in his step. He had not felt as carefree since he came up, despite the grim prospect that awaited the under-powered Nieuports in the Albatross lanes. The murder flight shadow had passed and he could fight a man's fight, thinking only of the battle and not of dishonor.

Malone was puffing a cigar, head bent, features screwed into a scowl. Teddy wished that he could lift the load off Malone, too, but he had pledged his word to Hinchman and he was bound.

For his part, Hinchman looked almost light-hearted. It was as though he had dropped a load that had been unbearable to carry.

"Men!" Kennedy halted the entire squadron at the line. "Before I left quarters just now I received word to the effect that the Canadians had smashed the Hun line at Vimy Ridge. There have been a dozen holes punched in that line all told, and Jerry is going to be pretty frantic. He's going to be sending flyers over to find out what is what."

He paused. "We've got a harder job than stopping the two-seaters. That job went to the 42nd up the line. We have to take care of the protection. Our job is scrapping the Checkers."

CHAPTER XII RACING THE REAPER

THE MAJOR'S JAW SQUARED and he outlined in terse terms the dimensions of the job. He expressed his intention of trying the decoy once more, gave instructions to the men who were to fly with him and then addressed himself to the men who would fly with Hinchman.

"When you come down, hit a Hun and hit him hard. The first ten seconds of combat is worth the next half hour. Don't chase tails with them unless there are two of you and one of him. Hit him quick or get out of his way. Try and take attackers off your comrades' backs and don't get buck fever. The fellow in an Albatross cockpit is as scared as you are. Now hop it!"

Teddy scampered to his ship with a healthy admiration for Kennedy in his heart. Talks such as the major had made were usually given in the squadron assembly hall. Kennedy had not taken the chance of having frightened or cynical members talk to the enthusiastic ones after his own talk. He flagged them all into the air with his speech ringing in their ears.

One by one they roared off to their rendezvous with Destiny. Teddy's hand was steady on the stick and he watched the younger flyers carefully. He felt capable of fighting their battles—and his own—if necessary. He had the high feeling of invincibility that comes to veterans who are old enough to know Danger and still young enough to discount it.

Mossy Face again! Hinchman was leading his squadron at the fourteen-thousand foot level. That was as high as it was wise to take a flight. Individual Nieuports could climb higher, but it was not a good bet that seven of them would.

Kennedy's flight was hidden somewhere in the clouds which had grouped themselves over the spadeshaped wood. Somewhere about the Bois d'Havincourt they would flush a flight of Albatrosses. It was almost a certainty. The three Jerry aerodromes were grouped about that sprawling forest, Boislens, Bertincourt and Velu. The Germans were domestic in their tastes. They hunted, by preference, as close to the home base as possible.

When the break came, it came in a breath-taking rush. One second, Hinchman's flight was sailing serenely in the sky that they shared with no one. The next instant, they saw Albatrosses diving in a long slant for an edge of the clouds. At the same moment another flight appeared off to their left and at about their own level. Then Kennedy broke cover.

Teddy saw Hinchman's face as the man turned and sized up his flight. The man's face was drained of all color and the pale light made him seem pasty. Teddy understood that. His own heart was beating wildly.

Kennedy was making a good run, luring the Germans down and trusting his top to come down and save him. Off to the left, those other Germans were waiting for the top to go down. Twelve planes diving

on Kennedy's seven and twelve more waiting to go down on Hinchman's nine.

Hinchman, devoted to the principle of a flight leader's responsibility to his flight, had seconds to make a decision. He could take his nine and get away in safety, leaving Kennedy to his fate. Or he could keep faith with the decoys, make the *beau geste* and bid farewell to everything.

His hand went up, he spread his fingers, dropped the hand and pushed his stick away. Nine noses pointed to the earth and the Nieuports raced the Reaper.

IT WAS a wild, wonderful ride down the sky with the wires singing their mournful anthem, the rotaries carrying the bass notes, and the hand of Death reaching from the clouds.

At a forty-five degree angle came the plunging Albatross pursuers. Somewhere close to the level of the decoys, that second flight of Albatrosses would hit. The first flight thundered across the line of plunging Nieuports; the decoys turned into them and the fight was on.

Almost at the precise second that Albatrosses and Nieuports met, Hinchman's flight swept into the combat. Teddy squinted down the sights; the cross-marked fuselage of an Albatross flashed for a second and he rammed a slug home. One lone tracer guided that burst, and the Albatross was fluttering down with a limp pilot, on four rounds of ammunition.

Teddy's heart leaped. No quicker victory was ever scored. He knew it. That was how Kennedy told them to do it.

"Get them quick!" he said. Well, Teddy had.

He swung about swiftly and pulled his nose up. There was another exchange to his right. Albatross and Nieuport in the forbidden ring-a-rosie that paid off on the faster ship.

His prop cut the air and he risked a long burst as he saw the Nieuport falter. It was no good. The tracers whipped off through a checkered wing and the Albatross rolled out of trouble.

The Nieuport that he had been fighting staggered and literally broke in two. One wing dropped off and the fuselage whipped dizzily down.

Teddy stepped on the rudder and the sky rained Albatrosses.

The second flight had hit.

In the wild confusion it was impossible to follow individual fortunes. Teddy got away from one of the

diving destroyers with a half roll, saw two Nieuports that didn't get away as they plunged to eternity, put twenty rounds into a flashing fuselage and veered off in the face of odds before he had a chance to note the effect.

There was a German on a Nieuport's tail, and Teddy knocked him off. The Nieuport streaked away, but the German turned. His guns blazed as he came into Teddy out of a fast, climbing turn.

Teddy kicked into an Immelman and the whole world seemed to blow up in his face.

He was conscious of a sharp, stinging pain and everything went black. Blood was running down his face and he couldn't see. Frantically he pawed at his goggles and lead spattered close to him. He could feel the impact as the slugs tore through the fuselage and could hear the click of them against the cowlings. Then he was in a spin.

"Blind!" he moaned. The thought terrified him. If his eyes were gone he would never pull out of that spin. The goggles came off and went over the side, he mopped at his eyes and was conscious of light. Then his head cleared and he knew that he had not been shot in the eyes. Some flying fragment of strut or bracing had broken his goggles and his own blood was blinding him. Possibly his eyelids were cut.

He mopped the blood away and kicked against the spin. The Nieuport came out, trembled and threatened to fall apart. It shivered along its entire length but the wings held.

Teddy headed back into the fray. Letting the Nieuport fly itself in defiance of the fates, he bound a handkerchief across his forehead. His worst cut was above the eyebrow and the bandage slowed the flow of blood. By dabbing at the fresh flow he could see reasonably well.

There was little to see. Off down the sky there was a lone Nieuport that had dropped to a lower level than his own. Two Albatross scouts were diving to it, cutting it off from escape. Another Albatross was circling it and worrying it. From the Nieuport's maneuvers Teddy read a grim story. Jammed guns and no time to clear them. The closest Albatross was pressing the pilot too closely to allow him to spin out and was harrying him with a recklessness which showed that he had no guns to fear.

ALL this registered on Teddy's consciousness as he raced across the skies to rescue—a long race that he had no confidence of winning. Only the Nieuport

pilot's masterful handling of the controls had kept him alive this long.

The other two Germans came down and flattened out at the end of their dives. One of them rammed a vicious burst and missed the trapped Nieuport.

"Stout fellow! Oh, for some speed."

The Nieuport hurdled one of his foes and Teddy saw the streamers wave from his struts, a flash of silver on the fuselage; then he saw another plane shooting down in a wild dive that no Nieuport was built to make. Closer to the trapped man and aided by his dive, this second pilot would get into the melee before Teddy did.

And the trapped pilot was Major Bill Kennedy.

One more desperate turn and it was Kennedy's last. An Albatross was under him as he squared around and the burst of the Spandau literally lifted the tiny ship. It trembled, took a head-on burst from another vengeful Albatross and the other Nieuport came in.

The linen bulged from the wings as the ship flattened out from the dive it should never have made; a perfectly placed burst shattered the Albatross that had just rung Kennedy's number and the wings parted.

Teddy saw the flash of a shamrock on the fuselage as the wing came off, and groaned. Galway had come to Belfast for the last time. Malone, Kennedy, and the Albatross that had destroyed them, were racing to eternity together.

Teddy struck. He came in as Kennedy had told him to come in, and he got his man in the first burst. There was blood in his eyes and in his heart, and the German was dead before he knew that there was a Nieuport left.

The other, fearful that one meant a flight, never stopped to check up. With his nose down he roared away.

Three more Nieuports raced down the sky and two Albatrosses charged to head them off. Teddy pushed his engine to join them and one of the Albatrosses kept going right on down. Something had failed and that was one ship that never came out of a dive. The other picked a Nieuport off the edge of the fleeing flight, missed his death thrust, but forced the man out of the formation.

They were far away and Teddy knew that again he would be late. Ships move swiftly in the sky, but fights are over fast. He looked back. The Germans had evidently scored heavily. At least a half dozen more were coming from the higher levels.

Then, when the picked-off Nieuport seemed

doomed, a comrade turned back. There was no time to fight. The rest of the pack would be down in a matter of seconds. His prop roared straight for the German; their wings locked and two planes plunged the long way down together, while the rescued Nieuport hit his trail for home.

Teddy sickened as he saw those wingless ships go rocketing down. The Nieuport hit first.

And that was Hinchman.

TEDDY didn't know how he got home, but he crashed his landing in the shadow of the chateau and walked away from it.

A sober little group of pilots was waiting for him, looking without hope at the eastern sky. Four men. There were four left.

A motor cycle chugged up the road, bounded over the ruts and creaked to a stop. The little Cockney corporal flung himself down and wrestled with a sack of mail.

"Blimme, but a flying orficer gets' the myle. More letters in that sack than a whole ruddy town should be getting." He was fishing in his pocket and his grimy fingers came forth with a long official-looking envelope. He saw Teddy and grinned.

"Morning, liftenent. Nasty bit on a wound you culled. Got a billy-do here for the major. From Wing it is. Where at is he?"

Teddy shook his head and the corporal's eyes popped.

"Done in? God 'a' mercy on us. And who'd be squadron commander now?" He squinted at the envelope. "Ain't they the bloody optimists though. Figured it 'ud happen. 'Squadron Commander' it says and the major's name ain't on it."

Teddy looked around doubtfully. The glum group of pilots provided no inspiration. They were all new men, youngsters who had come up since he had. Then the truth hit him. He was the senior, and if this could be called a squadron, he was the commander. He stretched out his hand.

"I'll take it," he said.

In his quarters he opened the envelope. There were several sheets of flimsy, orders and routine. One order leaped at him. Under "citations" and "Mentioned in dispatches" was his own name. Curtly, as was official practice, the order informed the world that Lieutenant T. A. Campbell would hereafter best the rank of acting captain and that he had been recommended for the D.S.O.

Teddy's eyes misted. He could see Kennedy again as he had seen him, red-eyed over his correspondence. Tired, harrassed, and seeing his veterans drop, Kennedy had tried to make amends for a false accusation. Well, he had.

Teddy crossed to his bunk and took a folded paper from his effects. Murder Flight was no more and there was no one left who knew how Wolverton died; no one knew but Teddy Campbell and he had forgotten. He tore the paper across, the paper that was Hinchman's confession, and applied a match to the torn bits.

"He went as he lived, taking care of the rookies," he said softly, "and a flight leader could do no more."

He reached for a smoke and his hand encountered the tiny package that had meant so much just four short days ago. There were wings in there, big wings that would startle Paris. With a grim smile he hurled them into the darkest recess of the supply closet.

Teddy Campbell still had hopes of walking the Paris Boulevards but he would never wear big wings. The cadets could do that and the lads who had never seen the Front. He didn't have to. He was Acting Captain Campbell of the R.F.C. and he was a veteran.