



VON SATAN'S LAIR

by HAROLD F. CRUICKSHANK

Corporal Jack Malone Sails the Sky Lanes Grimly in this Gripping Drama of Sinister Secrets of Hun Hate!

CHAPTER I FROM THE ENEMY DROME

THE AFTERNOON ATMOSPHERE had suddenly become electric. Crouched above the control stick, Captain Jack Malone dived like a deluge of death on the last remaining German out of a whole flight.

"You've got guts, I'll admit, Jerry," hissed the Yank skipper. "You—" Malone broke off short.

There was something in the actions of this Hun pilot that didn't quite get over in Malone's mind. Right as Jack dived, the Boche was in a great position to bring his Spandau into effective play.

In that one split second's period, he had Malone's blind spot right in his ring-sights. But, instead of pulling his trips, he sheered off on a wing, putting himself more and more on the spot.

Malone was forced to bite his nether lip and suppress the wave of sentiment which swept through his iron being. It was going to take a lot of guts to shoot down this particular Boche.

In spite of his bitter hatred of the enemy which had assumed terrible proportions of late, Jack Malone had always displayed the utmost sportsmanship in the battle lanes.

There was a thrill in knocking down a fast flying, accurate shooting Hun pilot who was coldly out for blood. It was another thing, though, to trip the Vickers at some poor devil who was in trouble and wasn't able to defend himself.

There was a day when Malone had thumbed his nose at a Boche whose Spandaus had jammed. The Yank had turned out and streaked with his flight for home. He had gotten hell from the C.O. But—he felt that he was ace-high with his own conscience.

But, some weeks ago, Malone had lost all of his flight that then remained to him. Three of the guttiest scrappers ever to zoom up off the tarmac of 19 Squadron had been suddenly and mysteriously swept from the skies; and Malone had seen them go down.

At least, he had arrived in the area in time to see his flight enveloped in a cloud of synthetic, alien atmosphere which shut them from view. That was the last he had ever seen or heard of them.

Wing Headquarters demanded an explanation. Malone had no explanation to offer. His story sounded like some weird fiction tale, with no foundation. According to the colonel at Wing, Spads and their pilots simply didn't vanish into thin air. Such things just didn't happen.

Jack Malone had had to swallow all this. No longer was he the crack flight leader of 19 Squadron. He became a lone eagle—a soured, embittered killer of Huns. He flew the sky lanes alone, seeking only to kill.

His kills were not recorded in his reports—not all of them. He cared little or nothing for glory. The best pals he had ever known had gone out of his life. Malone's motto had become, "An eye for an eye." And he was exacting a heavy toll from the Hun Flying Force.

Today, in his spectacular manner, he had broken up a strong German flight of Pfalz ships. One had gone down before his guns in flames. Another had fluttered down to a forced landing. One pilot, screaming his curses, had been forced to kick around, dripping blood, and scud eastward to medical attention. A fourth had vanished. Malone couldn't account for his disappearance at all.

Now there remained the one pilot for whom the Yank skipper had built up any real admiration. He flew his ship with a mastery that was nice to watch. Throughout the entire fight, he had fought a purely defensive battle, outguessing Malone's maneuvers, and guns, in a baffling, mysterious manner.

AT THE moment, apparently in serious trouble of some sort, he had pitched his Pfalz right into the track of Malone's Vickers.

The Yank snapped his teeth shut and his lips slid back in a determined grin. He must take this Boche. Hell!

It was part of his scheme of things. He was out to kill.

Suddenly, as Jack's thumb touched his trigger trips, the Pfalz half rolled. Her pilot had a hand to his head. Malone was almost sure that he was unwounded, yet he was staggering, rocking helplessly in the cockpit.

Lead began to squirt from the Yank's Vickers. His red-rimmed eyes were slitted as they centered the ring-sight. There was an unuttered snarl on his drawn lips. But he suddenly snatched his thumb from the trips. Below, in that bullet-riddled crate, the pilot had his left arm upraised. He was making signals.

Malone gulped hard, biting his lip. His cheek muscles twitched. The strange actions of that Boche had gotten the Yank's mind in a whirl—a maelstrom of conflicting emotions. He tried to steel himself, to reopen fire on the Pfalz, but something held his hand.

And then the ship heeled over. The pilot's arm was still jerking out signals.

Suddenly, a low cry escaped Malone. Everything before his vision became a red blur. His heart missed a beat, then seemed to clog up in his throat. There was something in that last move of the Pfalz pilot's arm which had a numbing effect on Jack's every nerve fibre. He was wracked by a terrible storm inwardly.

The Pfalz was fluttering down—down to a crash landing just back of the American lines. And—Jack Malone, dizzy, sick at heart, put his Spad's nose down to a landing, too.

As the doomed Boche ship thundered into a willow copse, Malone flattened into a pancake landing on a small level patch of terrain. He flipped open his belt fastenings and leaped to the ground. He broke into a hard trot for the willow scrub, expecting each second to see a gout of flame erupt from the Pfalz.

The German ship clung like a mess of Monday's washing which had been wrapped many times round the line by a storm. The pilot lay head down, hanging from the belt webbing by his middle.

ALOW cry escaped Malone's set lips. He jerked down on a strut, then pried open the belt catches. As the pilot sagged heavily onto his shoulders, a sinister "*fr-r-rpp*" burst from the engine area. Malone lurched

forward to the open, stumbled, recovered, and lunged ahead as a withering gusher of flame thundered from the doomed ship.

Well clear of danger, Jack laid out the limp form and dropped to a knee beside the gray-clad pilot. There was a lachrymose film in the Yank skipper's eyes as he took the other's pulse, and examined a nasty shoulder wound. He was shaken from head to heels, but not with any effeminate sentiment for an enemy pilot.

Jack Malone was kneeling above the still form of one of his best pals, Terry Burton, his former deputy leader. He had shot him down—probably killed him. And for a long moment he swayed in the clutches of a threatened swoon. He sagged back on his haunches to stare vacuously at the drawn, pale face upturned to him.

HIS fingers reached forward, and he tore off the pilot's goggles. "It's you, Terry," he breathed. "By Gad! it couldn't be anybody else. But they've done something to your face—you're not the same. They've played hell with your mind, or you'd never have come up to fight against an Allied pilot. Terry—son, you tried to signal and I was so damn blind with rage I couldn't get you. Mebbe it was because you weren't quite sure—I'll raise blue blazing hell for this, buddy. If I could only get you talking—only get a word or two from you—" Malone broke off short.

Terry Burton's eyelids were fluttering. The eyes opened to stare amazedly. There was a look of horror in the blanched face, and Jack Malone, the hard sky master, was forced to gulp back an emotional storm which threatened again.

"Von—Satan—Drome—" came in a drooled monotone from Burton's lips. But, it was enough. Malone jerked himself to his feet, and his lips split across his teeth in a snarl of rage.

Von Sachen—known more familiarly to Allied pilots as "Von Satan," was responsible! Burton's crazed mind had given Malone enough to work on—a clue to the whereabouts of the rest of his missing flight.

Malone's throat gurgled in a half-hysterical chuckle. He dropped again to Terry's side, and gathered the wounded frame up in his strong arms.

"Come along, brother, I'm taking you to some pill-rollin' outfit. We'll get right to work on you. Terry—I'm going to square up with Von Satan for this—" Malone talked as he staggered along toward some American artillery emplacements, the heavy limp shape of Burton draped across his shoulders.

"An' if you can only give me the approximate location of that Satan's—lair, by Gawd, son, I'll get him. I'll get the other two boys out. Damn—" Malone broke off, his mind now seething with the most determined schemes. Although a terrific storm of remorse still pounded through his mind at having shot down his old, very best pal, yet through the surging cloud there was a light—the first light Malone had seen in several weeks.

CHAPTER II SATAN'S SURGERY

WHEN AN ARTILLERY CAR whisked Terry Burton back to 19 Squadron's drome, there was a rush of pilots and mechanics to the hospital hut of the unfortunate pilot. Those who got a glimpse shook their heads. Even the surgeon, who knew old "A" Flight as well as he knew his own face at shaving time, shook his head.

"There's a resemblance," he grunted to Captain Jack Malone. "That's all—a resemblance. Hell! He doesn't even talk a word of English. Drools in German all the time. But I can't make out quite what form of pressure there is. I don't see any mark of a head wound."

"Bah!" Jack Malone snorted, as he jerked himself to his feet. "You're nuts if you think this boy isn't Terry. Of course. Doc, he's changed—changed terribly. Look!" Jack Malone pointed a finger at a thin scar behind Burton's left ear. "What's this? See it before?"

THE doctor bent forward over the dazed pilot, and ran a finger along the line of the scar, a mere thin thread.

"By George," he gasped. "Here's something. Stitches not long out. Why, this accounts for the distortion of features. I—look, Jack!" He had run his finger up into the short hair above Burton's temple. "Another job here. By Gad! He's been hacked by some surgeon who sure knew his work. Take a look at this closely. The bird who did this knife job didn't even shave the scalp. It's—monstrous."

Burton groaned, and opened his eyes to stare about him. His distorted lips fluttered, and parted. "Satan—Von Satan," he moaned. "Get that, Doc?" Malone's

voice was like cold death. "That wasn't German. That was plain English. He means Von Sachen, whom we dubbed Von Satan. Dig into your medical brain-box. Know anybody by the name of Von Sachen in medical history?"

"Sachen!—H'mmm—" Suddenly Captain Lister, the surgeon, brought a flat hand down with a bang.

"Got it, Jack. Van der Sachen's the man. He's one of the cleverest surgeons in the world. Brain and skin graft. There's no other knife man that can come near him.

"The medical faculty of Harvard once paid him seventy-five thousand dollars for a clinic of no more than three lectures. He has a Dutch name, but—he'll be the man. Some relative of that hell-binder whom you call Von Satan. He's done a brain job on this boy that we'll have a hell of a time straightening out."

"You mean Terry's beyond hope?" Malone gulped.

"No. There's hope, or how the hell could he have flown his ship at all? It'll mean a most delicate operation. Have to send him to St. Bartholomew's, London. Dallas, of New York, is there, working along with Sir Herbert Malcolm. There's the only chance, brother. I'll rig him up for the trip—Jack, I'm damn sorry, old boy. This hits you pretty hard, eh?"

Malone nodded, shifting swift glances from the surgeon's face to Burton's.

"If I could only get Terry to give me the least bit of a clue as to the location of Satan's drome, Doc, I wouldn't feel so bad. Couldn't you give him some shot in the arm—something in the nature of a heavy brain stimulant? He might just drop a word or two which would give me all I want to know."

FOR a long moment there was no reply. The atmosphere was taut, electric, an ominous silence broken only by an occasional moan from Burton's throat. The M.O.'s face was blanketed in a deep frown. Jack Malone watched the surgeon's sphinx-like face through slitted eyes.

"I've formed a theory!" The surgeon's voice was a slow drawl, but it brought Captain Malone up with a start. "I might be able to temporarily relieve whatever pressure is bearing on Terry's brain, Jack.

"I don't want to get too technical, or professional. Simply, I believe Burton's operation consisted of some form of laceration of the brain substance in the frontal lobe. This would set up brain irritation, and in a short time leave the patient in a state of mental weakness.

"Likely enough, that blasted Von Satan outfit got to

work on him in this state. You'll notice how at times the left side seems sort of deadened—a form of mild paralysis. Now, in this state, you couldn't expect a human being to work. To get him to a state where he could fly a ship would require a strong stimulant of some sort. I'm sure that he's been treated thus."

"I FOLLOW, Doc," Malone jerked. "At least, I get a layman's slant on what you mean. But, can you do anything?"

"H'mmm—I can't guarantee any results. The brain is a very delicate mass of nervous tissue to go monkeying with. However, if you think it's all-important, I'll inject what will do no further harm, even if it produces none of the desired results. Terry might regain a mild form of his normal senses. We'll see."

"How soon, Doc?"

"Not before dark. I'll call you just as soon as I can bring him round. Now scram out. Go get a few beers—anything, but get your mind off this terrible business. Time enough for you to act when—well, when I've done what I can."

Malone nodded and got to his feet. He smiled his thanks to the surgeon and moved out onto the flying field. He had the utmost confidence in Captain Lister's surgical ability.

As he moved to his quarters, he mumbled beneath his breath.

"So they thought you were nuts when you told your story, huh?" he soliloquized. "By Gad!—I'll open their eyes if—if the doc can get just a few words of sense out of Terry." And then a snarl distorted his battle-scarred features. He was thinking of Von Satan, and the other two victims from old "A" Flight: Lieutenants Buck Carlson, and Tom Goodall—

There was more than an hour of daylight left. Malone cocked an eye at the sky. He swung round on his heel and broke into a trot.

In less than ten minutes, his Spad was clipping sky like a mad rocket. He gunned his Hisso wide, as he circled over the drome, then set his course to the southeast.

Somewhere in that direction, Von Satan had his lair. Malone felt better in the sky lanes. At least, up there, there was a chance of action, something to occupy his mind and body. Until Doc Lister had performed his test on Burton, Jack Malone wanted plenty to occupy his mind.

Malone flew with a chip on his shoulder. His broad

back was crouched above the stick, and his head wove from side to side like some denizen of the jungle trails.

He had a keen sky scout's eye. Seldom, if ever, had he been jumped by a Boche formation from ambush. Each dot of cloud strata always meant something to the famous Yank skipper.

IN THE late afternoon atmosphere, when what thin cloud wraiths there were in the sky began to collect the shadows of approaching-early dusk, Malone zoomed, dived, circled, rolled around these formations, ready in a flash to trip his Vickers twins.

But the sky seemed to have emptied itself. It hung above him like a monster inverted bowl. Below, it stretched to the shattered battle wastes like the deserted core of some forgotten world.

Malone gunned his Hisso all in, and tore sky apart on a southeasterly tack.

He shot a glance to his gas gauge, and grunted with satisfaction.

He knew that Von Satan's lair was not on the immediate forward front. He had his suspicions as to the likely location of the murderous buzzard's eyrie.

Somewhere perhaps in the desolate cliff country at the beginning of the Ardennes range. Jack Malone was headed in that direction now. His one thought was revenge—Vengeance—

CHAPTER III A LOAD OF GRIEF

VON SATAN, the terrible, had a hundred eyes to do his scouting; his own, and those of many of Germany's picked sky fighters. He was in league with the cleverest operatives of Intelligence. And, all along the line—infantry, artillery, cavalry—they all kept their eyes and ears open for Von Satan.

At the moment, the nefarious Hun meister could plainly see the lone Spad cruising toward the crags to eastward. A bitter snarl mingled with the grin that slit his features. Another *verdammter Amerikaner* was heading toward the trap.

Von Satan, on word from a forward signal office, had immediately taken to the skylanes, flanked by two of his best associates. He had swung well to the north, to fetch up with Malone astern; and now—glaring

through his narrowed eyes, he was almost ready to strike. He rode at an altitude of over twelve thousand feet. Malone, unsuspecting, alone, rode at no more than seven thousand.

Now a signal flashed from the leader's cockpit. His two crack Pfalz pilots hurled over into steep dives. As they struck down, they drew down ghoulisn-looking masks, which they tied at the throat, then tucked them into the collars of their flying suits.

Instead of attacking Malone directly with Spandau fire, however, they suddenly sheered off, diverging away from the tail of his sky-cutting Spad. And then they banked inward and shot the gas to their heavy 220 Mercedes engines.

They tore through space like the chips from vagrant comets. Now they flanked Malone, slightly above him. He still hung in his characteristic fighting crouch. He had not seen.

A sudden burst of bluish flame off to starboard was the first indication of trouble. He stiffened with a jerk. Off to port another ball of blue flame crashed. And then the entire sky about him began to break open in those deadly ulcers.

He shoved down on his stick, then with a snarl quickly backsticked. A greenish vapor was beginning to blanket the skies below. He roared topside in a bulging zoom. This was an admirable move. Most pilots would have gone down in a dive—a dive of death, for the greenish vapor was deadly gas—heavier than air, slowly dropping earthward.

BUT, when Jack headed up into the clearway, fate met him—allied to Von Satan. Masked, cowed like some mad monk, the Hun scientist sky fighter swooped down. Malone gasped, and struck off in a half roll, left. His slitted eyes had seen Von Satan's left hand reach outside the cockpit. It jerked on a lever.

Again the sky was splashed with those fusing calcium lights, which spewed out a heavy concentration of lethal cloud gas. Von Satan was sprinkling the entire immediate sky area with his deadly anaesthetic.

"Gas!" Malone had fathomed the mystery of his buddies' disappearance. He began to cough. At once he gripped his every nerve fibre tightly, with iron will. He gunned his Hisso hard, shoving in his throttle to the last notch.

Dipping his nose for a hundred meters, he suddenly backsticked. With breathing cut off, he smacked his prop up in a death-inviting Immelmann. He expected each second to see one of his wings shear off.

AS HE came out of the turn, his almost shut eyes caught a blur ahead. He tripped his Vickers, and ran in hard, pouring a deadly blast of flame through the gun snouts.

Hard steel-jacketed lead was stuttering on Von Satan's Pfalz, abaft the cockpit. One of those Yank slugs brought a wince of pain to the Hun meister's cruel features. He thundered a curse in German, then half turned in the pit. Malone could see him plainly—that hideous cowed mask flitting through the thin greenish, wraith-like mist.

Then Malone started. He shut his eyes as he socked his stick back hard. Von Satan had tripped up an after gun, which jerked above the coaming. Two green eyes of light popped out. Two mad splashes of flame erupted.

The Yank skipper's Spad whined a dirge as she ripped sky in that almost vertical zoom. Jack Malone had saved himself from a terrible death. But—he had not completely cleared. Phosphorous globules had caught and ignited tiny fires on the Spad's after part, close to the tail assembly.

Malone spotted this as he turned to shoot a glance down on Von Satan. His brows jerked up sharply. His eyes were smarting. Now his breathing became more and more difficult. By the green-eyed prophet! He was in a bad spot.

But, his guts were still with him, that fighting element which had made him a skyman admired by everyone in the sector.

Shutting his eyes tightly, he took in a half breath, then shoved his Spad down in a furious, hell-bent dive—

Never in all his intrepid sky career had he so callously invited death. He was in power, roaring down like a shooting star, almost vertically, and the trim silver Spad screamed her protestations.

Then Malone socked her into a spin. The fires at the ship's tail *fr-f-rpped* out. But Malone kept on—on—down—down. The wind screamed through his rigging. His temples and ear drums throbbed. His chest bulged, almost at bursting point, for want of oxygen. But, the Yank held her nose down.

ABOVE, in a panic of utter fury, Von Satan signaled to his two lieutenants. They heeled over and began to bring a deadly converging fire on the spinning *Amerikaner*.

It was the slitting of his flesh on the right cheek bone which brought Malone out of his self-imposed semicoma. He smoked the Spad out level, then at once

fell away left on a wing. Then—he opened his eyes. He opened his lungs also, and drank in his fill of pure air. The veil above now shut him from view. As he gunned up his Hisso again, he realized that another veil was falling—that regular veil of dusk.

Spitting blood from his lips, Malone took a last look about him, on every side. There was no more fighting light left in the sky. He snarled bitterly as his cut cheek twitched and poured blood.

It wasn't enough that he had outguessed Von Satan. Hell!—Von Satan had nearly trapped him, the same as he had some weeks ago trapped Terry Burton, Buck Carlson, and Tom Goodall.

"Should have got knocked out of the blasted sky trails for not watchin' my back," he snarled. The thought bothered him for several miles of the journey home. But, a grin effaced most of the gloom now.

"I met you, Von, an' outguessed your damn gas. I've got the low-down on that bit of science. Next time I come for you—*Tcha!*"

Malone was not given to boasting. Next time they met, well—his plans would be made swiftly, as swiftly as those which had so recently pulled him out of that deadly anaesthesia trap which had caught his flight pilots.

BACK at "19" Drome, he handed his Spad over at once to his mechanics and trotted toward the hospital hut. By now, there was likely word from—of Terry Burton. As he neared the hut, Jack's heart began to beat with the force of a small triphammer—More than anything he wanted Terry to live, to get well; next, he wanted just two or three words of a clue to the definite location of the lair of Von Satan.

"Well?" Malone's torn face was a strange picture as he looked across the hospital dressing room for enlightenment from Captain Lister.

There was a thin, enigmatical smile on the surgeon's features, a smile that Jack couldn't fathom at all.

"By God, son, if you saw your face," said the surgeon, "you wouldn't wonder if I laughed out loud; and—I don't feel like laughing, Jack. Slide over to this sink and let me get that face clean.

"Phew!—What's that smell? Lord! It's getting my eyes. Here, you get the hell out and peel that suit off. You're saturated with gas that's begun to fume here in the warmth." Malone began to cough. His eyes were smarting too. He rushed outside and peeled out of his flying suit, then sprang back to have his face dressed.

"Better roll that outfit of mine up in a ball an' get an analysis of that gas, Doc," he jerked. "Doesn't smell very good to me. It hits the lungs, as well as the eyes. Now-ouch! Hell! What was that?"

"Just the needle, brother. Sorry if I hurt."

"Oh—" winced Malone. "Only the needle, huh? I thought mebbe you were skinnin' me from the head down. Now—what about Terry? Did he—"

"Yeh—he did, Jack. I never had to make a test. He spoke—and," here the surgeon placed a hand on Malone's right shoulder and squeezed firmly, "—he died. Jack. He died calling for Jack—Jack."

"He spoke— Then he passed out—?"

"Yes."

"Oh— Finished?" Malone spoke like someone who has not quite gotten on to a foreign language.

"All through, son. Anything else you'd like?"

"YEH, Doc. I'd like to see Terry—That's all, I think except that when I come out I want you to give me what he said. He was a great boy, Doc.

"Reckon even though you liked all my boys, you just didn't get to know 'em as I did. He's dead, huh? You're sure?"

For answer Captain Lister flung open an inside door and beckoned. Walking in a sort of trance, Jack Malone stepped in, to gaze for the last time on the still white face of the best pal he had ever known.

As he tiptoed out of the room, Doc Lister blew his nose. He bit hard at his lower lip then—

"Why the hell can't men cry, unashamedly, like women?" he asked himself. "Great God! What a load of grief the skipper's packing right now; and he's taking it on the jaw. Got it all sealed up in his great big fighting heart. And it takes guts to pack a load like that around in any sized man. I'll bet there'll be hell blazing when he hears what Terry stammered out to me. Jack Malone won't rest until he's torn Von Satan from the skies; and he'll tear him down if he has to drop into hell's broiling cauldron with him."

The doc stepped slowly outside, and moved to Malone's quarters, where he gave orders to an orderly.

"And see you shoot plenty cognac in that coffee, Orderly. Better fry up three eggs—plenty of bacon." "Get you, sir. You said it, all right." Ten minutes later, Malone came out into the open, whistling. There was no music in his whistle, but there was rhythm in the staccato hisses which parted his hard thin lips; and his heart beat a steady, pounding accompaniment.

CHAPTER IV HERR DEVIL

IN A LOW STONE BUILDING, almost completely screened by scrub oaks, Von Satan paced back and forth like a jaguar in a cage. Seated at a desk in the center of the room was a lean, hunched, form, whose facial expression suggested the wolf. In features this man resembled Von Satan, though he was older, leaner, and more crafty looking.

He was Van der Sachen, the surgeon, one of the greatest specialists of all time. But, with the coming of the war, his clever mind had become perverted with the desire to put his skill into the laboratories of the devil.

HIS scientist cousin, Von Satan, the nefarious sky meister, found plenty to occupy the surgeon's mind and fingers. They worked together, in their secluded drome, in the cliff-lands of the westerly Ardennes. Not even the Higher Command knew their secrets, or full details of their terrible accomplishments, until warned by the Allies that again Germany was guilty of a breach of the International Codes.

Codes! Bah! To Von Satan, they didn't exist. This was war. He and his cousin had been given an assignment to perfect a sky gas, for use in the complete destruction of the Allied Air Force. Von Satan had decided upon his own methods.

So far, Van der Sachen had produced a powerful gas which, however, on contact with pure oxygen had no complete lethal effect. It was, none the less, a sure anaesthetic and quite suited the purposes of Von Satan. He now swung on his cousin, a snarl on his thin lips.

"Any further luck with those two other *verdammt* Amerikaners?" he jerked.

"Time, good cousin— Time. You are too impatient. One may not expect the same reactions to the same treatment from all brains. We are not all constructed the same. In the case of *Leutnant* Burton—*pouff!* He was so high strung, my experiment took at once.

"But—with these two *schwein* Carlson, and Goodall, they are slow to react. If I force the treatment you know what happens: They become out and out imbeciles, whom you would never get under your

power sufficiently to fly a kite. Be patient, *Herr Devil*. It is a virtue, *nicht?*”

Von Satan would have given a lot to have slid a knife between his cousin's ribs.

But—Van der Sachen was too valuable at the moment.

“I wanted to push a flight up at dawn, a flight of synthetic German flyers, Gustav. You have those French flyers well under control, *nicht?*”

VAN DER SACHEN beamed, his foxlike face splitting in a grin as he nodded.

“*Ach* so! They were easy, as with Burton, Franz. High strung temperaments. They are ready. In fact, they tire of this prolonged inactivity. Ha. . . ha. . . You were clever with this thought of yours.

“To think that you can command a flight of made-over allied pilots who do your bidding, against their own—*Ach!* It is—*einem zuvor-kommen*—to what the *Englischers* would say—‘steal a march on someone.’

“Come! I will show you the *Amerikaners*. Watch closely, though. Sometimes I fear that Carlson, the surly, has not reacted very satisfactorily to my treatment. He is inclined, at times, to suggest violence. It would be well to have your Luger ready, Franz.”

They moved through a heavy doorway into a dimly lighted chamber. Van der Sachen switched a light button which flooded the stone room with brilliance. Two gray clad forms sat up on their bunks, eyes popping—full of concern.

“Well—*schwein!*” hissed the master surgeon, moving toward the prisoners. At once, one of them jerked himself forward. Van der Sachen swung immediately on his cousin.

“You see, Franz,” he whispered. “It is as I feared. The one who resented was Carlson. I think it would be better to put him out of the way.”

“*Lieber Gott!*” breathed von Satan. “What a job you made of those faces! They're more hideous than anything I have ever seen.” Even the cruel heart of von Satan, the killer, fluttered at the sight of the unfortunate American pilots whose faces had been horribly distorted by the knives and instruments of Van der Sachen.

“I could, in an hour's work on each, restore those faces to even more presentable features than was the case in their original form, Franz,” boasted the other. “I shall make one more attempt tonight, perhaps just before your contemplated action. Then—” Van der Sachen broke off. His head cocked quickly on one side; he strode to a window and unhooked the sash.

Buck Carlson was reaching upward. He too had heard. His badly deformed face twitched with convulsive jerks, and from time to time he ran his tongue over his twisted lips.

“A plane, Gustav—*Lieber Gott!* Switch out the lights. I must get word to the drome. That is not one of our engines. Now—it is shut off. Some *schwein* is down over our area, scouting. The lights!”

WITH a snarl, Van der Sachen snapped off the light switch. Von Satan sprang for his own room and seized a telephone. Searchlights at once began to splash the sky; and archie gunners stood by to fling a horrible barrage up at a second's warning.

Von Satan searched the sky with his powerful night glasses. But he had failed to find a lone dark form which bailed out of the rear cockpit of an American Bristol two-seater—

Captain Jack Malone jerked on the rip cord ring of his chute. The black silk cracked open. Unseen, silently, he dropped down—down to the lair of von Satan.

Off to the northeast, a Bristol pilot fed the gas to the Rolls-Royce engine and banked around to westward.

At the roar of his gunned engine, the sky in his vicinity became a sudden blaze of light. Archies began to splash the area with shrapnel.

BELOW—as he unhitched himself from the chute harness, Jack Malone fastened his eyes on the sky trails. A lot depended on the safe return of that Bristol. So far, tonight, the gods had been kind. They were fickle gods, however. With no warning at all, they could switch their allegiance to the enemy. It was the way of the war gods.

That Bristol pilot had a mind load of instructions—orders to be hurried back to “19” Headquarters. Malone had arranged for a flotilla of American planes—two-seaters, bombers, and pursuit ships, to bear down on von Satan's lair, at his signal. But now, the Yank skipper slipped into the shrubbery surrounding the stone building whose lights he had seen from above.

Buck Carlson had been forced to submit to Van der Sachen's surgical treatment, but the western pilot fought hard against the brain treatment.

At the same time. Van der Sachen had done something which had the American lieutenant in a dazed state most of the time.

In his fight against the threat of insanity, Carlson set himself many exercises. He practiced reciting. He found his speech was slow, and often incoherent.

He tried to talk to his companion, Lieutenant Goodall, but the latter had fallen completely under von Satan's power. Goodall longed to get skyside with the Pfalz flight. He muttered from time to time, cursing France, America, England—

Lieutenant Carlson had heard the approach of a plane. Somehow its drone seemed to register on his half-dazed mind. There was a certain difference in the thrum of that Rolls-Royce. He was now on his feet, pacing back and forth, his cruelly made-over face twitching under the nervous tension which had become electric.

The smallest alien sound brought him round on his heel with a snarl. Suddenly he paused. A footfall sounded. His face screwed up pitiably into an animal-like expression. Tonight, Buck Carlson had decided to kill. That tall shuffling surgeon, whose bidding he had been forced to do, loomed up in his dazed mind as a monster which always threatened to torture.

The door fastening clicked. In the dim light of a shaded globe, Carlson leaped dexterously, and silently, to a darkened corner near the door, his fingers extended like claws which clenched and unclenched with the desire to strangle.

INCH by inch the heavy door swung in. Carlson's breathing was cut off.

And then—he sprang. With a low snarl of rage he closed.

Jack Malone staggered back. Before he could recover, a wiry arm was whipped about his throat. He jabbed with an elbow, and felt the strangle hold on his throat lessen its tension.

Then he hurled his full weight into the defense. Striking hard with a knee, he broke the hold, then leaped in to strike with the barrel of his Colt's. But, the tottering figure which had attacked him now drew his pity. He stared hard into the face of another of his old flight pilots.

"Buck—Buck—" he called.

Buck Carlson had staggered back against a table. He hung there now in pain, gasping for his breath—cursing in a mixed jargon. From his cot at the far end of the room, Lieutenant Goodall now raised himself.

JACK MALONE switched his incredulous gaze. Goodall came in slowly, his red-rimmed eyes flashing flame.

Malone scarcely recognized this man as one of his former pilots. Great God—beads of cold sweat now danced on the skipper's face.

And then—from Buck's drooling lips came one coherent sentence: "Skipper—it—you!"

Jack Malone rushed in, and gathered the tortured form into his strong arms.

It was then that Goodall leaped to attack.

Buck tore himself free of the skipper's grasp, and hurled his thick-set frame to meet Goodall's rush. Malone gasped. He could scarcely believe his eyes.

Here were two of the best pals on God's earth now fighting like two demented cougars.

Carlson had recognized him. Goodall had not. With a low cry suppressed at his lips, Malone hurled himself forward and with a well-timed hook to the jaw dropped Goodall in his tracks. The very act sickened him, and for a second or so he looked down with pitying gaze on the helpless victim of Van der Sachen and von Satan.

CHAPTER V WHINE OF VENGEANCE

A WARNING shout from Buck Carlson pulled Malone back to his normal self. An inside door had suddenly, but silently, opened, to admit the slinking form of Van der Sachen. A Luger leaped out from the master surgeon's smock.

Like a streak of greased lightning Malone jerked up his gun arm and pulled. A bullet from the exploding Luger seared his cheek, but his own slug had socked hard into the middle of the perverted specialist. With a snarled groan, Van der Sachen pitched forward.

"Now—out—Skipper," cried Carlson. "Quick—von Satan. Alarm—"

Malone nodded, and beckoned to the still form of Goodall. Carlson sprang to the side of Van der Sachen and purloined his Luger, then together, he and Malone lifted the limp shape of Lieutenant Goodall, and moved out into the shrubbery.

Already footsteps were pounding along toward the stonehouse. Malone urged his buddy along. But, Carlson needed no urging. He was free, and although his mind was only functioning at much less than fifty per cent of its capacity, yet he realized that he was in the company of his old pal and skipper Jack Malone.

They moved steadily deeper and deeper into the

scrub woods, away from the drome area. Then, when Goodall began to groan, Malone set him on his feet. He produced a length of stout cord from the pocket of his pants, and lashed the lieutenant's hands behind his back—not too securely, but with enough tension to hold him from making any attack. Now, with Goodall able to walk, the three Americans trod deeper and deeper into cover.

Satisfied that they were as secure as it was possible to be in such circumstances, Malone called a halt. He left Carlson to guard Goodall, then stole back to scout. He had heard the warning siren—the alarm at the lair of von Satan.

HE KNEW that the German sky meister would comb every inch of the district; and, what Jack feared most was that von Satan would employ that terrible gas in his effort to check the flight of the Americans.

It was likely that by now, the parachute which had brought Jack down had been discovered. A host of thoughts played the devil with the skipper's mind.

One thing he was terribly certain of was, that von Satan would never get his two buddies back into his clutches—not while Malone packed a gun.

With scarcely less than an hour to dawn, Malone paced back and forth along a path he had worn in the woods. Now and then, he moved out, gun in hand, to search the skyways from a small clearing.

There was no hum of airplane engines. The only sounds which marred the quiet of night were the muffled roll of distant drum fire, and the threshing of thickets at various points where von Satan's men carried on their search.

Suddenly, there came the sound of near-by voices. Malone froze in his tracks. A search party had evidently picked up the fugitives' trail. They were bearing in close, with the utmost caution.

Malone stepped silently back, and got Carlson to propel Goodall deeper into the woods. A gag was forced between the teeth of the unfortunate, resisting lieutenant.

It was the only way—Malone hated himself, but there was no other chance left to them all for possible escape. Goodall was raving, fuming, fighting. He could have brought them to their death had not his skipper stopped his tongue.

Now the voices increased in volume. A German guard was receiving definite orders. Jack Malone slipped back over his trail. A grim shadow crossed his line of vision. Slowly, determinedly, his gun arm

crept up. But he, held his fire. A stalwart Prussian was bearing directly in on him, searching thoroughly each foot of ground.

Jack spotted a dried alder sapling. He drew this to him, and crouched. Thankful that the search party had split up, he waited—waited for the lone Prussian's approach.

Now he raised himself, slowly. The man's back was to him, not more than three feet away. Trembling with nervous tension, Malone raised his club. But, his arm stuck in mid air.

Hell! He couldn't sock this unsuspecting Hun from the back. And then—his ear drums began to vibrate with the drone of many planes in the sky. God!—The Yank flotilla was approaching.

JACK coughed. The Prussian spun round, pistol levelled, but before he could fire, that alder club crashed down on his skull. With a low moan, the stolid searcher slumped to the dew-laden grass and lay still.

Malone jerked out his flash lamp. He began to press the battery button. A single plane had cut out, and now a light began to wink from her fuselage—

Buck Carlson too had heard the approaching planes. In a flash he caught their meaning. It seemed to revive a latent spark in his confused mind—Those French victims at the drome. He must convey to the skipper their location.

The Frenchmen were in a stone hut, a small edifice to the south of the tarmac of von Satan. Carlson knew, for he had been taken from that hut himself.

He and Goodall had spent ten days in the company of three French flying officers.

AND, as he listened to this story, Malone began to flash a correction on his previous message to the Bristol. That stone hutment must be saved—

Less than two minutes later, the early dawn skies were splashed red with the flame of bursting shells, and the flame of merciless, erupting bombs which gouged out von Satan's lair from the core.

A single Spad and a flight of Bristols cut away from the large American flotilla.

By arrangement they were to land at a spot designated by Captain Jack Malone.

Now the skipper was taking his two pals back to a bid for their lives. The planes were diving in, scouting the small flat on the cliff tops which Malone had chosen for a landing field.

The skipper chuckled as he watched that lone

Spad swoop down ahead of the others. Then, his face quickly changed expression. Thundering skyward from a point beyond the thresh of bomb fire, was the crack flight of von Satan.

By the seven-toed prophet! Malone wanted that Prussian devil von Satan.

It looked as if he were to be cheated of the kill, however, for already the German was making plenty of altitude.

All at once, Buck Carlson called out, and snatched up his Luger. Forms were trotting from the woods at their right rear. It was the search party—three men with rifles, and an *unter offizier*. The Yanks had been spotted.

Malone shoved Goodall flat to cover, and ripped a command to Carlson.

As the first of the rifles flashed, from close range, Jack leaped to one side, pulling Carlson with him, then opened a mad burst of fire from his automatic.

The diving Spad came in like a comet. Her pilot had spotted the attack below.

In the clearing light he glimpsed the riflemen, and banked his bus around.

Now a pair of Vickers commenced to stutter. A low hoarse cheer broke from Malone's throat—

The Spad sheered off. Its work was done. It now came down to a pretty fair landing, and Malone trotted up and took over. From the cockpit he looked down on the pilot, whose place he had taken.

"BE SURE you get the boys safely loaded aboard the Bristols, Red," he crisped. "You might have to knock Goodall out, but do it. Then see that three French officers are rescued from the little hutment beyond Satan's tarmac."

"But you, Skip. You're wounded. Hell! You're not going up to the scrap losing blood like that!"

For answer, Jack Malone grinned and spat blood from his mouth. A rifle bullet had reopened the cut Doc Lister had so recently stitched. Malone was thinking of his dead deputy leader—Terry Burton. There was a mighty big score to settle with von Satan.

He gunned his Hisso all out as he split the dawn sky, the flame from his exhaust stack eating into the last of the night shades like some fiery acetylene torch. And the whine of the wind in the Spad's rigging; seemed to cry vengeance—

CHAPTER IV SKY DEATH

DAWN FOUND VON SATAN'S MIND on the verge of a plunge into complete, malevolent insanity. His earthworks were erupting skyward in monstrous volcanic upheavals. His every hope had been blasted to atoms, before his very vision.

Too late, he had attempted to load his planes with gas—his last remaining hope for victory in the skies, but the bomb fire had been too intense. He was forced to rush skyward as an ordinary sky fighter.

But, in spite of the turn of his fortunes, von Satan was no coward. He knew that the odds were against him. One of his lieutenants signalled a suggestion that the Pfalz flight turn out—to eastward, and so save the lives of the last of von Satan's crack flyers.

Von Satan would have shot that deputy down, had he not required every shell he carried in his gun belts. He intended to fight it out—to give up only when the tentacles of death gripped him and his wrecked ship and whorled them down into the shambles below.

The German flight sheered out to get in behind and above a flight of American bombers now banking round to return home. It was here that von Satan hoped to strike first. He signalled to his lieutenants, who kicked around, and gunned their Mercedes up to the last notch of throttle.

But, a lone climbing Spad had suddenly signalled, by red flare burst, to an escort flight of American pursuit ships cruising off to the north-east. Von Satan caught this signal. He banked over, then struck down in a terrible dive. Almost as soon as his thumb brushed the stick trigger, he seemed to sense that the flyer in that silver Spad was familiar. Before he was very much older, he realized that they had met before.

Jack Malone was signalling him. *Du lieber Gott!*—Now von Satan knew. This was the *hauptmann*, the leader of Terry Burton's flight.

Face a gray-ashen color, lips slit back in a leer that expressed his desire to kill, von Satan roared on down in power, his Spandaus spewing flame even at extreme range. Now, there was but one thought in the German's head: the kill!

Jack Malone was forced to take a few slugs in the after part of his screaming Spad. He took a chance with death, to invite the enemy into the trap he had set.

HUNCHED above his stick, calm of mind, the Yank skipper waited, hand tensed on the stick, feet itching nervously on the rudder bar. He had hurled himself off on a wing at von Satan's dive—dropping away seemingly right into the path of those flaming Spandaus. A maniacal grin toyed with von Satan's features now. He could see his slugs ripping fabric on the Spad's fuselage, abaft the cockpit. He pulled his stick an inch toward him, hoping to elevate his gun fire. In that split second, Jack Malone roared his bus up in a rib-straining zoom.

He ran her round in a tight arc to the loop. Von Satan half rolled, flattened. His nose went down, then he screamed back over into an Immelmann turn, his guns flashing spectacularly as he came out of the turn.

But, he stared, aghast. The *Amerikaner* was not in the path of his lead as he roared out of that Immelmann. Instead, Malone had Immelmanned with the baron, and now, he was sitting the Pfalz tail, a savage blood-smear grin splitting his face. He had Terry Burton's murderer in his ring-sights.

HE PRESSED the trips lightly. A five round burst tore into von Satan's plane. But, almost simultaneously, a horrible burst of fire crashed into Malone's Spad, aft. He felt the sudden, rocking jar of pounding lead.

Turning his head, he started, as he glimpsed two shapes diving on him. They seemed to spell his certain doom. But, with a snarl of rage and bitterness he shot round, and dipped his nose again to pick von Satan out of the sky, into his ring-sights.

The baron was hit. He was attempting to spin off. Malone cursed himself for having treated his trigger trips to such a light touch in the first place. Now death stared down at him from the rear. One of those planes at his back was bound to get him, for he, in turn, was determined to get von Satan.

The baron attempted to slip off right, but Malone emulated his actions in a flash maneuver. Then—with lead still stuttering into his Spad, he cut loose his Vickers—

A blinding fog seemed suddenly to envelop him. He was slipping through empty space—falling helplessly. His body sagged against the pit.

How far he had dropped he didn't know. He snapped out of the semi-coma with a start, and stuck his bus out level.

Quickly he turned his head. A plane was still sitting his tail. But, he stared amazedly. That plane was one of 19 Squadron's Spads. Both those diving planes had not been Pfalzes—The Spad's pilot was grinning, and pointing down with doubled fist.

MALONE looked overside. Two Pfalzes were nearing the shattered earthworks below. One was a flaming wreck—von Satan's plane. The other was the ship which had attacked him.

With a deep drawn sigh, the skipper turned in the pit and waved to his friend, then he spotted a Bristol flight scudding westward.

Malone's lips parted. He muttered something weakly, beneath his breath, then kicked around and gunned in for home. Terry Burton had been avenged. Von Satan had gone down to stew in his own devil's broiler.