

THE SKY WOLF'S BROOD

by HAROLD F. CRUICKSHANK



It was the "Sky Wolf's" daring scheme—this plan to rescue that stranded garrison of wounded infantrymen. And now unmindful of his blood-drenched face, he was leading his brood straight down into the enemy stronghold—for here was a skipper and a brood that didn't know when they were dead!

CAPTAIN BILL HENNEDY gunned his Hisso and back-sticked hard. Barely missing a fringe of trees, he zoomed, then kicked his Spad into a tight left bank. His Lewis twins flamed, as he pressed the triggers.

Hennedy was making a personal reconnaissance over the drear wastes of the Foret de Chien, a heartless shell-shattered area in which an infantry unit lay

isolated. An odd lump had welled in the skipper's throat as he made a thorough survey of the area below. His keen mind had been plotting, scheming. He must get those doughboys out. For days this unit had been cut off; they were now on their last resources. With little left but guts and cold steel they were making a determined stand against the superior numbers which almost entirely surrounded them.

The skipper's lips parted, displaying a set of almost perfect teeth. Steel-gray eyes flamed through his goggles as he hurled his Spad at two chequered Fokkers. And then, as a flash of sunlight splashed his fuselage a wolf's head gleamed. It was the insignia of Henneidy's special flight—the head of a lean gray wolf, with fangs bared.

And now the "Sky Wolf," as Henneidy was known to the enemy as well as his own troops, was riding his Spad, his own teeth gleaming as was their wont when the skipper was in action. Never had he seen an objective so worthy as this which had brought him on solo patrol over the Foret de Chien.

Hungry, wounded, with tattered sandbags and clothing, the remnant of a gallant infantry battalion stood determined to hold their precarious position to the last man. Completely cut off from any source of supply, they had resigned themselves to whatever fate had in store rather than surrender to the overwhelming numbers of the enemy.

But as Henneidy circled around the area, a couple of Fokkers darted down on him, like eagles plummeting to their prey. Only the keenest showing of ability saved this famous Yank pilot—a hard zoom which almost broke his Spad's back. And now he was in the teeth of the storm, fighting like the cornered gray wolf from whom he had been named.

The Sky Wolf spat a trickle of blood from his mouth and shot a glance overside. One of the Fokkers was bursting into flame as it hurtled through the jagged limbs of shell-ripped elms. He grinned as he glimpsed the second Boche machine gun limping eastward. It had been a great fight, and Henneidy's young heart pounded violently with the spirit of it. Then, as he glimpsed a terribly shattered trench system below, he shuddered. His lips parted, upper lip curling slightly.

"You poor little devils," he breathed. "By God, I'll get you out of that hell somehow."

He scribbled a message, and attached it to a chute sender. Then he put his plane's nose down, jockeying over tree tops until he roared across a cheering, tattered remnant of doughboys whose eager hands reached up to catch the fluttering piece of white which dropped to them like manna from the sky.

A wounded captain eased himself to an elbow and took the message from a bomber. His eyes dilated, then misted as he read the contents aloud.

"Cheer up, doughs, the Sky Wolf's brood will come at dawn to-morrow."

A cheer broke from parched throats. Men craned their necks to catch a glimpse of Henneidy's insignia as his Spad flashed between a port in a cloud bank.

"The Sky Wolf!" jerked the wounded captain. "Boys, that's Captain Bill Henneidy. I know him. He'll be back to help us. Think of it—help, when we thought we were cooked." And, casting a glance around the battered garrison remnant the young captain's eyes misted. His shoulders were shaking convulsively, though he struggled to suppress this emotional storm. Men lowered their heads, or turned away. This skipper of theirs had been a prince. No wonder he was overcome at the sight of his battered buddies. They were all one family now, who looked to Captain Dick Mason for everything. And he had encouraged them, fought with them, buried those who had gone out, and made many a sacrifice for those who were less injured than he.

Up in the sky, scudding westward for the drome of his special independent flight. Bill Henneidy passed the back of a hand across his face, then pushed back on his goggles. His eyes were filmed by an odd mist. As he had ridden above the isolated remnant he had seen enough to crash in the hardest heart.

"Dawn isn't soon enough," he breathed. "But, it's the best I can do, boys. Hang on and, if it's the last flight of the brood, we'll bring you ammo and supplies, if nothing else."

Then with a savage jerk on the stick he shot his bus down in a power dive. His teeth were bared as he streaked for his drome. Through his goggles he glimpsed the handful of pilots and mechanics who formed his brood and he hissed sharply through his set, finely chiseled teeth.

Eager hands helped the Sky Wolf from the cockpit as he cut his ignition. Greasy, unshaven faces grinned a welcome. They looked a hard-bitten crew these men, but to Henneidy they were the finest gentlemen in the world.

A tall red-haired pilot strode up and offered his hand.

"Glad to see you chief," he jerked. "We were beginning to think something had happened. Any luck? Did you find—"

Henneidy nodded, and released the other's iron grip.

"Got 'em, Kelly," he hissed. "Hell of a mess—enough to bring tears to a bullfighter's eyes. A mass of wreckage, buddy. Blood, tattered sandbags and clothing. A jumble of hell's most terrible—God! But was there anything new in from Wing?"

Lieutenant Kelly's brows shot down and he fished into his pocket for a sheaf of papers.

"Some mail, and something that isn't so good, chief. Better come along and read this message. It's—well, here read it."

Hennedy's eyes narrowed as he scanned the typewritten note from Wing adjutant. His head shot up suddenly, and men watched his lips curl back.

"Muster all hands in the recreation hut, please," he jerked at Kelly. "This is—hell!"

HAD some red-tabbled general strode into the dismal old wreck of an outbuilding, which the brood had called their recreation hut, he might have stepped back, amazed. Surely this was no collection of pilots, this dirty, unshaven mob. The place resembled more a hoboes' retreat, as mechanics and pilots lounged around waiting word from their chief.

Bill Hennedy swept the room at a glance and shrugged, the merest gesture. It was tough on these men assembled that no one seemed to realize just what good work they had done. Perhaps, after all, it had been a mistake not to clamor for glory and recognition following their remarkable achievements as an independent patrol. But the Sky Wolf's brood hadn't sought glory or citation. Hennedy's reports had gone in to Wing—simple, honest accounts of his exploits.

A casual visitor to the out-building might not have known that the brood was just back from a flight into German territory—the longest flight by any pursuit outfit, in which Hennedy had led his men down to a landing on German soil. No one would believe, perhaps, that this gutty, unshaven crew had remained hidden in a woods for forty-eight hours; or that they had effectively destroyed a huge German poison-gas plant. Nor had Bill Hennedy included in his reports the rushing of the brood to the help of a Belgian squadron at the Sand Dunes in North Flanders. It was the Sky Wolf's brood which had intercepted the large flotilla of German bombers as they returned from bombing the British Hospital at Doullens.

Hennedy's eyes were almost closed. He was thinking of all these things now, as, teeth bared, he gazed out into space through a battered old window shutter. Then suddenly his head jerked back, and he coughed. The buzz of conversation ceased at that odd little cough.

"Listen, boys," Hennedy commenced. "We've run into about the rawest deal possible. The Sky Wolf's brood is being recalled. Here's a message from Wing adjutant. Raising hell because our shoots have not received confirmation. Do you get that—no confirmation? We've got to back up—go back and let

those new kiwi flyers at 13 squadron point their fingers at us and snigger. Adjutant claims we are no longer reflecting credit on the A.A.F., but are rather bringing in a rain of ridicule. Ridicule! There was a lot of cheap humor in that Sand Dunes shoot, huh? A lot of humor when we buried Martin, and Brice and Fallows. By God! We've pulled a raw jerk, gang, because we haven't blown our trumpets every time we've done a shoot. But we've got to go back. They are calling us in to our old squadron. Got to report there not later than dusk on the 14th. That's day after tomorrow. Well, that's our orders, boys. Go out and do what the hell you like from now until then. Get drunk as the devil. I'll be responsible."

And Bill Hennedy turned. He couldn't, for the moment, face these buddies who had ridden hell's trails so often at his flanks. But a hand closed over his arm, and he wheeled to face Lieutenant Kelly.

"What about that isolated unit forward in the woods, Bill?" asked Kelly. "By God, we can't leave those poor devils now that we know where they are. Why not—"

"Sure, chief," cut in a thick-set pilot whose cheeks were smudged with black grease. "Let's up an' tell Wing to go to hell. Let's go get those gutty doughs out of that mess."

A murmur of approval swelled at this man's remarks, then all eyes turned to focus on the Sky Wolf. His face had taken on a hard light, which belied his twenty-six years. He had suddenly become older—forty, at least—as he gazed on past the sea of eager faces. His eyes were looking into the wastes surrounding the Foret de Chien—looking down from a cockpit rim at that tattered remnant who clung tenaciously to hell's rim, rather than surrender.

The Sky Wolf's eyes closed tight, then he snapped back to face his brood.

"Right you are, gang. The drunk's off. Look to your ships, all of you, and load food and ammo. I'll take spare Lewis guns and ammo in the two-seater. Dawn tomorrow—and, we don't pull out for Wing. Foret de Chien is our destination—those doughs—God! I promised them we'd come."

A cheer broke from the throats of Kennedy's pilots and mechanics. Now all was bustle as pilots darted to the ammo shed, and mechanics rushed to their shop or to the hangars.

Bill Hennedy stood alone, his head a whirl with plans for the rescue at dawn tomorrow.

"If we're a little late reporting, adjutant," he breathed, "we'll just be a little late, that's all. Perhaps

you won't have the pleasure of welcoming us, or riding us. We might not all come back."

His iron hand closed over a message sheet grinding it into a misshapen ball which he flung from him with a snarl. Then he strode over to the hangar which housed his two-seater. He would personally supervise a thorough overhauling of guns and engine.

THREE-THIRTY the following morning found the Sky Wolf at his plane, where he was soon joined by his chief mechanic.

"All ready, sir?"

"I think so, sergeant. You'd better arrange for packing all supplies and equipment and should we not be on hand on the morning of the 14th you will arrange for transportation of personnel and equipment back to 13 squadron."

"Very good, sir," snapped the non com. "But what d'you mean? Don't you expect to pull through? It ain't going to make the gang feel so good if I tell 'em there's—"

"Listen, brother," interrupted the chief. "We never know when we're coming back. A lot of this brood haven't come back, sergeant. Under normal circumstances we have a chance, of course, but this is something different. There's a handful of doughs up back of those woods, doughs who haven't eaten in a long time. There are boys there who need proper medical attention. They need water, ammo, grub and they need relief. If necessary I shall land the brood and storm those Jerries with ground guns. That's why we mayn't get back, sarge."

"Ye gawds!" The sergeant's voice suddenly choked in his throat. What wouldn't this bunch of sky wolves do?

"All ready at the deadline, sir," jerked a mechanic, bursting in on the hangar.

And Bill Hennedy commenced to wheel his two-seater out.

Six engines roared into the creeping dawn. Pilots sat grim-faced and eager, awaiting the signal which would send them zooming into the gray, drab skies, into the trail to hell.

Bill Hennedy cast a last look about him, then waved an arm. His chocks were jerked clear and his Bristol shot ahead to lift sweetly, despite her heavy load. Laden Spads took off in proper order, and from below a group of mechanics waved until the rescue flotilla had faded to mere specs.

Hennedy climbed steadily to four thousand. His escort of five planes was riding above him, at five

thousand feet. A spare scout was at his level but a half mile or so ahead.

THE Sky Wolf's eyes were piercing the half light ahead. His heart thumped wildly as he steered a straight course east. To meet a German sky formation now would mean a fight against severe odds, for all Hennedy's planes were heavily loaded and in no fit condition for fast maneuvering.

All at once, the skipper glimpsed a streak of gray dart from behind a patch of fleece cloud, and then a white flare broke from the cockpit of Lieutenant Kelly's plane. It was the danger signal.

Hennedy gunned his engine and commenced to climb, his brows now drawn. Kelly's was the only free Spad in the flight, the only plane which didn't struggle under a heavy load of ammo and supplies, not to mention twenty-pounder sky bombs.

A green flare broke from Kelly's pistol, the signal that he would engage the enemy alone, giving his buddies a chance to veer southeast across the woods.

Hennedy signaled to his flight, and fired an all's well signal to Kelly. It was all part of the plan, and Kelly must go. He had a chance, for there were few better sky fighters. But the odds would be heavy against him.

Now, according to plan, the two rear end Spads shot across the sky like rampant comets. They would fly low and commence an attack on German machine-gun positions, which Hennedy had charted the previous night. In less than fifteen minutes the Sky Wolf caught the blaze of twenty-pounder bombs as they crashed into German emplacements. And then as he forced his Bristol on, he glimpsed the slash of fire which marked the operation of four Lewis sky guns. The brood had reached the isolated Yank garrison!

A small chute broke out from the side of one of the Spads and Hennedy watched with bated breath the descent of a precious load of food. Another chute flipped out from number two Spad and a case of rifle ammo commenced to drop to eager hands below.

And then, Bill Hennedy's lips parted. He was diving down, down into the teeth of a murderous ground fire, bullets slitting through his fuselage. He gasped as he glimpsed a Spad rebel and roll over on to its back. Number ten—"Chubby's" plane. It was spinning now—

"Poor Chub," hissed the skipper. "Hasn't a cat in hell chance now. Must have got a bullet in the—God above! Look at the crazy fool. He isn't hit at all."

Tumbling like a tumbler pigeon Chubby Dalkin had spun his Spad with reckless abandon to within

four hundred feet of a strong Maxim emplacement. And then when it seemed impossible for recovery, he had flattened out.

A bomb slid out from its rack to drop with telling effect, and as he watched, Bill Hennedy's upper lip curled a trifle more acutely than usual.

All Spads, save Kelly's, were now down like a flock of circling hawks above the garrison remnant. A chute swung down, a Lewis gun dangling from its shrouds. Hennedy watched its progress as he banked around out of range of a Maxim. He gasped as he saw a German detail steal out from an emplacement to grab the chute's precious cargo.

With a snarl, the Sky Wolf shoved down on his stick. He must hold those Jerries off. Back in the Yankee area bedraggled infantrymen watched the flame leap from the snouts of the skipper's twin guns.

The wounded infantry captain jerked an order to a detail of bayonetmen, who sprang forward, cold steel gleaming bright in the clearing light of day. Bill Hennedy had forced the Boche back. And soon, amidst harsh cheering, a Lewis gun commenced to spurt orange-red flame from the Yank position. It was the first machine-gun support the garrison had known for more than forty-eight hours.

His Spads hovering about him Hennedy darted for a clear space at the neck of the woods. It was here he had decided to land, but it was necessary to clear a path first for the stretch of open space below was infested with Maxim snouts.

Six planes went down in a mad dive—twelve guns purring a death song. And then, as though to mar his best chances, an Archie cracked on Hennedy's starboard side. He had hoped to outwit the Archie, but in spite of them he was going down—down—while on the ground men lifted their haggard faces and breathed a prayer of thanksgiving.

Hennedy's tires brushed the ground. He taxied across a straight stretch of road, his guns blazing wide open, and then he whipped his two-seater around. Like a wolf at bay he showed his teeth in a bitter snarl, his guns still streaming lead into a frantic German outpost.

Then came Chubby Dalkin who almost crashed his plane in a bumpy landing. He ranged his Spad alongside the skipper's, chocking the wheels hard against a fallen elm limb.

Bill Hennedy waved to the Yank garrison, and a group of bayonets leaped to view. Anxious doughboys commenced to trot to the planes.

"Take out those two guns in the rear cockpit, men,"

jerked the Sky Wolf. "There's plenty of ammo. Tell your C.O. to mount them over there by that mound so we'll have a covering fire. Four of you stand by here—you'll find grenades strapped to the wings on that other plane. Go get 'em, Yanks!"

The men chuckled hysterically as they sprang to obey the orders of this daring pilot.

MEANTIME, having dropped their last bombs and cargoes, the remainder of the brood had climbed hard into the sky, flying with throttles wide open to the assistance of Lieutenant Kelly.

A mad concerto of sound broke above the garrison. Archie bursts, the crash of exploding shrapnel and the crackle of spitting sky guns rent the air. A Boche heeled over to come spinning down in a fearful whirl of flame and smoke. Then, as Hennedy ventured a glance aloft he glimpsed the end of one of his Spads. Eyes dilated, teeth gleaming, his gaze followed a whirring shape which smashed nose on into a patch of scrub. He barked an order and a doughboy trotted to his side.

"That pilot was my best man," he called, in a tremulous voice. "My second in command, Lieutenant Kelly. Cover me, you two, I'm going to bring him in—what's left of him."

Jerking an automatic from the pocket of his leathers, the Sky Wolf darted to the cover of a willow bush. A German sniper raised his Mauser but one of the Yank's Springfields jerked forward and a scuttle-shaped helmet flew from a drilled head.

It seemed an age before Bill Hennedy was seen crawling back along a sodden draw. Partly covered by a low fringe of indifferent willows he struggled through the mud, the limp shape of his buddy across his stooped shoulders.

Bullets clipped the bushes on every hand and a potato-masher bomb would have put an end to the Sky Wolf's career if Chubby Dalkin had not opened a mad burst of fire in time to deflect the bomber's aim.

A few minutes more and Hennedy staggered into the garrison position and laid out the limp, wounded shape of Kelly. It was then that he recognized the officer in command of the garrison.

"Dick, for the love of heaven, is it you? I thought you had gone back to army H.Q. months ago. God! What a mess here, eh?"

Their hands met—Hennedy's right and Captain Dick Mason's left. There were tears in the infantry officer's eyes, and he made no effort to hide them.

"Bill, what in God's name will you try next? Say,

I'm, I'm so damned happy to see you, buddy. Saw you yesterday, in fact, but I never expected this, Bill. We've had a hell of a time. Who was it sent you? Do they know our location back—back—"

Mason broke off short. A strange look had taken possession of the Sky Wolf's face.

"Nobody sent us, Dick. I'm here on my own. Was supposed to have packed up and gone back to 13 Squadron tomorrow, but—we just took the notion to come on down and say hello. The Sky Wolf's brood is no more, brother. We're swamped. Got called for everything under the sun by Wing. They claim none of our major shoots have received confirmation. Look at poor Kelly there—you remember Kelly at Yale, huh? Best in the world, Dick. The most we can hope for is that we can get him out for—" Hennedy shuddered—"an amputation. Got a stretcher bearer handy? I've a flock of kit at my bus."

"We're all stretcher bearers, Bill," replied the other, with a short laugh. "If I'd had any tools I'd have been a surgeon also. We've needed one pretty badly. Now just what are your plans? Your two planes are down and in a likely spot to get blown off the map anytime now. What happened when you bombed the draw to the west? That's the tough nut, buddy—there where those Heinies are as thick as they can lie, between us and our lines. I'll bet I've counted twenty Maxims firing and the hell of it is our artillery doesn't seem to be able to do anything about it. They have shelled, but—God! They've hit us. Have you thought out anything further, Bill?"

Bill Hennedy looked down at his friend's bandaged arm. Mason was literally out on his feet, but as game as though he were waiting for orders to attack.

"As soon as my boys up skyside have cleaned up that Fokker patrol, they'll be down, Dick. That'll give us quite a raft of machine guns. We'll form a strong line and protect this spot from the east. Tomorrow, at dawn, I'll take a detail of bombers and try and force a gap through to the west. We've got plenty of ammo here now. Just have most of your gang dig in for the rest of the day. It isn't likely Jerry'll do much in the daylight.

Hennedy dropped to a knee alongside Kelly, who was coming back to consciousness. One of Mason's men had applied a tourney and lint—a good job too, thought Hennedy.

"Feelin' pretty sick, Kell?"

"Oh, hello, chief! Not so bad. Where are we all?" The lieutenant looked around him, then shuddered. "I remember now. Bill. We're in hell, aren't we? Thanks,

a drink would go down big. I'll be O.K., chief. Just you run along and finish the war. Yep, I've got smokes." And, as he lit a cigarette Lieutenant Kelly was grinning, grinning as though he were comfortably back at the drome.

With a half-suppressed sigh the Sky Wolf got to his feet.

"I must get him out," he jerked to himself. "Must get 'em all out, by God!"

And as he strode away his keen mind commenced to plan afresh. He found Dalkin and drew him down into cover, where they could be alone.

"Listen, Chub," he said. "We've got to clean this mess up now we've started. Here's what. I want you to take Kelly back in the two-seater. Get him back, and drop in at artillery H.Q. I'll give you approximate range on that draw ahead. Now—we're going to bust something loose, get me?" Chubby Dalkin nodded and shot a cloud of smoke from between his compressed lips.

"Go on, chief," he said quietly. "Then what—"

"You'll see them at 13 squadron and arrange for a shoot. Get 'em up in the sky before dawn. It'll help the morale. Have infantry—it might be the marines for all I know—have them ready to run out to meet us."

"Us, chief?"

"Yep, Chub. Who d'you suppose would lead these few doughs out if I didn't? Mason's out on his feet right now."

"You mean you're going doughboy and lead a foot attack?" jerked Chubby, amazedly.

"Exactly, Chub. I've had infantry experience. But in any case, it's the only way out. Now, you've got it all, eh? Good! I'll twist your prop while you get Kelly. Watch your take-off, bud. They'll bust loose on you with a dozen Maxims just as soon as you show yourself above ground. Now—for time tomorrow. Barrage for three o'clock, lasting only twenty minutes, then a raise of five hundred yards. That'll clear us, Chub. Arrange with 13 to have the artillery shoot observed."

A few minutes later Bill Hennedy watched Dalkin maneuver his Bristol like a mad hawk. The pilot weaved, dived, zoomed or skidded from a murderous hail of ground fire and Archies. Then Chubby waved an arm overside. The Sky Wolf's vision was blurred as he continued to watch the Bristol which scudded now on an even keel. If Chubby made it, there was hope. If not—Hennedy sighed, then wheeled around smartly to organize his defenses and prepare a better landing patch for the planes that were still to land.

DUSK! Following an intense bombardment on the woods area, the German artillery suddenly ceased fire. Bill Hennedy stood to at the grips of his Spad's twin guns. On either side were some of Mason's men, bombers whose hands itched on the safety levers of the Mills.

Things hadn't broken in the Sky Wolf's favor. He had hoped for three more Spads to land but only one had pulled through the fight. Lieutenant Maguire had dropped just before dusk. He was hit in the arm and temporarily out of the scrap.

Suddenly a potato-masher crashed. A doughboy snarled and jerked the pin from a Mills. At a signal from Hennedy he lobbed. A yell registered his hit. Then from every hand came the mad splash of flame and blast of bombs. The Germans were crowding in—bent on a complete clean-up.

Cr-r-r-r-r—The garrison guns crackled, eager men at their grips now; men whose bellies were filled, whose thirst was quenched, save that thirst for revenge. Mills bombs split with fearful, distinctive smash and whine.

Hennedy was standing at the grips of his guns, his teeth bared, eyes flaming into the shell-shattered night. A bullet plucked at the right shoulder of his leathers but he merely snarled and continued to pump lead. The old wound on his face had opened and blood now trickled down into his mouth—a tiny rivulet which gleamed bright against his clear, white teeth when mad splashes of shell fire lit his haggard face.

Infantry bombers nudged each other, pointing to this tall skipper who fought with all the grim determination of the gray wolf.

"That's what I'd say was guts," yelled a big bomber to his mate, as he jerked a Mills pin free with his teeth. "I'll bet in civil life that boy was a mild architect, or somethn'. Look at him now. The Sky Wolf they call him. See them teeth bared, buddy. A handsome wolf, ain't he? A regular pack leader, I hope to tell—God! He's hit!" The man darted forward and grabbed at Hennedy's shoulder.

The skipper jerked himself up and shook his head savagely.

"All right, doughboy. Just concussion, I reckon. Carry on!"

"But, you're hit, captain. Better let me take a look-see."

But Hennedy's fingers closed over the triggers. His guns began to dance, again. The bomber darted to a hole and commenced to lob.

"Hell!" he growled. "That egg don't know when he's dead."

And then, with a suddenness that was awe-inspiring, the mad clatter of gun and bombfire died.

Quiet! A tense brooding quiet had fallen, a quiet which seemed to suit the mood of the shadowy, spectral forest area.

Bill Hennedy pulled himself stiffly to the ground. He had a sharp pain under his left arm. Slipping his right hand across he felt around, then grunted. It was sticky there.

"Can't be bad, though," he breathed. "I feel pretty good."

There was work to do. For hours, it seemed, he had held off the German thrust, had beaten the Boche in their supreme attempt. And now there were the final plans for the dawn shoot. Hennedy crawled back to Mason and commenced to scheme.

DAWN! A dismal half light penciled the eastern horizon. A clammy mist blanketed the woods area, almost concealing the fearful mark of utter devastation.

Bill Hennedy stirred. Someone was shaking him. He blinked and peered up through the uncertain light, then grinned. Lieutenant Maguire was bending over him.

"Some coffee, sir," whispered the looie. "How it was conjured up I'm damned if I know. Reckon these doughs found a way. How d'you feel, chief?"

"I? Oh, I guess I'm all right, Maguire. I—ugh! I'm a bit stiff and sore in the left side, but lucky to be alive, eh? Didn't mean to drop off to sleep. Thanks for the coffee. Gad, it's great to get something hot. You feeling better yourself?"

"Great, chief. Arm's a little stiff. Now what d'you want me to do in the great war?"

Hennedy was sipping his steaming coffee, gazing abstractedly through its steam. Suddenly his head jerked back and he turned his eyes up to Maguire's.

"I'd like you to stand by at the ships, buddy. I'm having all the wounded placed there. Mason'll be with you, and a handful of the bombers. That'll be all I think, son. I will head the other way, just as soon as the barrage lifts. We've got to sandwich those Heinies out of that draw, and—" Hennedy broke off short. "I'm talking like a parrot, Maguire," he drawled. "Figuring things as though I were sure Chub had made the grade. If he didn't get through—well, I reckon I'll have to figure on a new move. But it's great to be alive. Here, let's smoke a pill and think of more pleasant things. I wonder what's new on Broadway! Long time since we saw a decent show, Maguire. I'm dying to get into a lounge suit again and just go where ever I damned well

please. D'you ever long for the delicate odor of violets, Maguire? Perfume on some little girl whom you could just cuddle to death."

Maguire drew in a sharp breath. Violets! Great God! Of all things to conjure up in a place of deathly stench like this. Then his eyes softened and he looked down on the Sky Wolf who was staring—staring into the drab, parting mists.

The lieutenant stole softly away. There were times when a man liked solitude.

HENNEDY started. He jerked out his watch and gasped. Two-forty. A finely drawn hiss escaped him. Chubby Dalkin hadn't made it! He looked around him. Men were dug in, standing to, ready for his signal. The wounded were drawn back to a deep depression almost beneath the planes. Everything was orderly and deathly still, save for an occasional moan from some injured man.

"Too bad, boys, if I have to let you down, after all," Hennedy grunted. Then his face took on a new expression. Gone was the softness. His eyes were gleaming a hard light and his lips were parted.

"Whether they come, or not, gang," he breathed. "I'm going to bust a gap through for you. I—" he broke off short. Out of the drab mass above came the roar of a Hisso. The skipper wheeled. He caught a momentary flash of gray, then a puff of white.

"Chute!" he gasped, and watched a tiny bit of white come fluttering earthwards. Chubby had gone through!

Hennedy detached a message from a large square case which had dropped to earth. His eyes swiftly scanned the sheet.

"O.K., chief. Kelly fine. Plans all assented to. We'll all be there, brother. Lift the lid of the case. I grabbed a bottle of cognac—two, in fact. Give the gang a snort before you go into—"

Hennedy's eyes saw no more. He waved a couple of men to him.

"Bust open this case, men. Extra Mills, some bandage, and cognac. See that every officer and man has a shot. Distribute the bombs and—stand to. There'll be some music presently—music that'll be the sweetest you ever heard. Hustle, it's—"

Ze-e-e-karrumph! A ponderous howitzer shell cut in on Hennedy's remarks. And then as though the gods of war had unleashed every demon in their pack, a flood of 75's screamed through the sky to smash into the draw. Germans began to scuttle eastward, but

Hennedy's gunners commenced to traverse a wicked hail of machine-gun lead.

The Sky Wolf glanced down at his watch. Fifteen minutes to go! And then—*Kar-r-r-roush! Karrumph!* He started at the familiar sound.

"Sky eggs," he snapped. Then he glimpsed a flight of bombers dropping down, headed by a Spad whose insignia was a gray wolf's head.

"Chubby!" he gasped. "One of the brood, leadin' 'em in." But as he continued to look, he saw that this was the Number 8 plane. It wasn't Chubby. By God! Evans must have got through. Of course, Chubby was back observing for the artillery. A wave of intense emotional joy surged through Hennedy's being. Another of his brood was alive. That made Kelly, Dalkin, Maguire and Evans.

"Time, sir?" called a man at his elbow.

"Two minutes to go, bomber. Stand by!" The Sky Wolf jerked out his automatic, stood breathless while he waited for the minute hand of his watch to touch four.

He sprang forward, whistling shrilly through his teeth. A cheer broke from the bombers and bayonetmen at his heels as they raced for the draw. Then as Hennedy cut loose with his automatic, a flight of deadly Mills streaked over his head to smash in a German Maxim post. Hennedy yelled and his bayonetmen echoed the call. Heads down they raced for the draw. They were milling, fighting—led by the Sky Wolf who had picked up a bayoneted rifle.

Back at the planes, wounded men, those who could prop themselves onto an elbow, cheered, though their voices were lost in the terrible roar of the lifted barrage.

Hennedy charged a mortar post, swinging savagely with his bayonet. They had almost won through, but what Germans were left were fighting gamely, and the German artillery was dropping a hellish box barrage between the garrison and their lines.

For an age, or so it seemed, the Sky Wolf led his handful of men into attack. But now he commenced to reel dizzily. He felt all sticky and drunk. Somebody had caught him and was pressing him down, down. Though he fought like a jungle beast he was overpowered.

Bill Hennedy didn't know until many hours later, that it was one of his bombers who had pulled him into cover. He was out, his leathers ripped with Maxim bullets.

Nor did Hennedy see a line of gleaming bayonets which came down through the woods from the west, a line of bayonets backed by yelling, snarling marines. The Sky Wolf had passed into unconsciousness.

"Hello Hennedy!" The skipper of the Sky Wolf's brood looked up through dazed eyes. Hell! What were all these lights? What had happened? He tried to raise himself to an elbow, but again, there was somebody pressing him back. His mind seemed to clear and he struggled madly, his lips drawn back. He was back in that draw again, fighting that power which pressed him down—down. Then something in his mind seemed to snap. He relaxed and looked up into the smiling face of Captain Franks, his old squadron surgeon. Hell! There were faces all around.

"Drink this, Bill," called the surgeon. "You'll be O.K., presently." With trembling fingers Bill took a small glass and gulped down the contents.

He seemed to lapse into a temporary daze, then gradually stirred.

"Doc—that you, doc? Help me up. I feel better. Hello, general. I—uh—suppose you've come to give us all hell, eh? What day's this, sir?"

"The fourteenth, Hennedy. Dusk of the fourteenth."

"Oh! So it's O.K., after all. The brood got here on time. Well, thank God for that. But, what are you doing here, sir. It isn't just regular, is it? Is anything wrong?"

"No, my boy," answered the general. "Nothing is wrong. I've just brought confirmation of your shoot. Here it is—read it."

And Hennedy gasped as he read an official report on the gallantry of the Sky Wolf's brood. Why, this thing was a wholesale citation!

He raised his glance to the general, who was smiling down.

"But you've got 'em all down here, sir. Are they—are all my damn little wolves alive?" There was a suggestion of hysteria in Bill's voice as he put the question with the eagerness of a kid.

"All alive, Hennedy. You shall see them. The damnedest looking bunch of hoboes you ever saw. Bring 'em in, doctor."

And Hennedy couldn't suppress a gasp of mingled delight and amazement as the door opened to admit a group of muddy, tattered, bandaged shapes of men—his pilots who drew up around his cot. Kelly came in on a litter.

For a moment there was silence. The door opened, and a string of mechanics entered.

A short laugh broke from Hennedy's lips. God! He had to do something. He had to pull himself together or he'd be crying like some jilted five-and-ten girl, he gulped, set his teeth, then his lips parted in that well-known characteristic grin.

"Boys," he said. "Listen, I've got some news. We've got confirmation on a shoot!"

It was like a trip wire which pulled the brood out of an emotional fog. Hennedy had said just the right thing and a score of heads rocked back in laughter.

Standing by, the Wing adjutant bit hard at a bristly mustache. He moved forward and held out a hand to Hennedy.

"I must apologize, Captain," he breathed. "But it actually wasn't our fault. Here—" he held out a sheaf of papers. "It isn't our fault if those Belgians don't wake up for a couple of months. Here's confirmation on your Sand Dunes shoot, and we've had a flock of wires in lately. Your last shoot seemed to wake up the whole cockeyed Allied army."

Bill Hennedy sighed deeply and pressed back the sheaf of papers. He squeezed the adjutant's hand.

"It's all right, major. No hard feelin's at all. Take these papers. I won't bother to read them. Hell!" He turned around on an elbow and grinned. "I'd sooner read these faces here. Look at 'em. A pack of glorious, bloody hobo wolves. There's all the confirmation I need. They're it, major, every damn one of 'em. Good—old—brood." Bill slipped back on his cot and his eyes closed wearily.