



LOST ACES

by JOEL TOWNSLEY ROGERS

*Two aces flew to the edge of the world, one toying with treason, one fighting for life in a circle of death.
Two aces, two bullets—and only one plane to break a deadlock of doom.*

TWO MILES ABOVE the Ostend Zeppelin sheds the Mary Hen spotted Kenny Blair's little Sopwith darting out of the edges of a drifting cloud mountain—a shimmer of silver wings in the high sunset sky. The Mary Hen pulled off her socks, and she began throwing things.

The 38th L.V.G.'s—Baron Fritz von Nachtigal's King Checker squadron—also saw Kenny Blair breaking from the cloud in the clear crimson evening weather. Air sirens screamed on the German field. Shouting and raving, the Jerry pilots and gunners jumped into their two-seaters. They went streaking across their muddy tarmac, with a roar like eighteen wildcats.

To the east of the King Checker field and the hot slamming guns in Marie Henriette Parc, a patrol of

Captain Anton Glick's dreaded Gallows Birds, Fokkers 44th, spinning down to their home field from a sunset prowl over Dunkirk, suddenly straightened out like a flock of pepper grains blown on a strong wind. They drew together on tight black wings. The Gallows Birds, *die Galgenvögel*, the best fighting Huns in that sky. They came slanting up at Kenny Blair's lone little silver Royal Naval scout from a mile below, like a pack of baying foxhounds up a fiery hillside with the fox in view halloo.

Blair of the 19th Camels! The Zeppelin-strafer.

The Ostend Zeppelin sheds saw the audacious young naval ace, too. But the big gas bags were safely stowed away, and the Mary Hen was talking. The Zeppelin ground crews stood in the shadow of their

bombproof hangar entrances, placidly puffing on their big porcelain pipes and watching the shrapnel bursts that smoked around the mothlike British scout high up and overhead.

“One of Blair’s damned 19th, from Kirchenhafen, down Dunkirk way,” they told each other. “*Ja*. And likely the Yankee devil himself. Fifty thousand gold marks to the man or gun that gets him. And watch them do it now.”

Pam! said the big guns of the Mary Hen. *Pam, pam, pam!*

High up, beneath the great cold shadowed masses of the cumulus cloud—cloud that looked fiery hot from the ground, but up there were cold and blue—Kenny Blair felt the air crash and rip around him. *Pam!* above him. *Pam!* below. He snapped his little silver scout over on its ear, and slipped down screaming, half slicing around. The Mary Hen was blasting the sky to shreds where he had been, when, a second later, he leveled out with a snap from his hooking slip, three hundred feet below.

“The hammer landed, but the frog jumped,” he jeered, with a breathless laugh.

THE wind ruffled his unhelmeted black hair. It winnowed the fringes of his thick black brows into ridges and horns, just above his goggles’ rim. For an instant he glanced overside with his broad ruddy shining face, blue-eyed, tight-lipped, and with a watchful mocking smile.

“A thousand berries a crack it’s costing them,” he estimated. “Or six for five grand. Step up, gents, and take a wild swing to win the big black cigar. Ee-yow! There goes eighteen thousand dollars more of Heinie TNT in smoke.” He rocked his wings tantalizingly, skidded like a clowning skater, and slipped down fast again.

Westward below him there stretched the crinkling, flame-filled sea, with the North Foreland of England hazily shadowed in the red fire of the setting sun, at the edge of the ocean’s dip, fifty miles away. Twenty miles seaward a British monitor was lying, barking sluggishly with its 12-inch guns, like a fat pug-dog squatting on its haunches at a safe distance and defying a kennelful of mastiffs. A pair of British destroyers were on the sea to the north of the barking monitor, tiny as ants, and streaking for the shelter of the big guns. Farther up in the north along the sandy Belgian coast three other destroyers—German 120 mm. gun ships out of Zeebrugge—were keeling

around hard off shore, within the shelter of the Banks. Their white wakes were cutting the water like question marks as the young Camel flyer caught sight of them. They had seen his wings high in the sky. They were doing a fast ships-about, and standing up and off again. To the southwest, down off Middlekerke, the shark shadow of a U-boat, running at periscope depth twenty feet below the surface, hauled down its asparagus like lightning and settled lower into dark waters.

Below him, straight beneath his dancing wings, lay Ostend, ten thousand feet down. Long jetties stretching out into the sea. Golden canals where submarines lay moored, with halyards decked in festoons of flags. A network of streets, parks, railroad terminals, with the red sunset spotting them in little points and pools of fire. The field of the 38th L.V.G.’s, Nachtigal’s hard-fighting and dangerous King Checkers, lying to the south of Marie Henriette Parc, with a swarm of the spotted two-seaters skimming off. The field of Captain Glick’s 44th Fokkers to the east, with that wedge-shaped formation of fast black ships a mile above the field, and boring up at him like baying hounds.

All this panorama of sea, ground and sky Kenny Blair took in with one quick glance, as he rocked his wings, slipped, and keeled beneath the great blue-shadowed masses of the cloud.

“Not today,” he thought. “Bunkered again.”

Beneath the trailing edge of his left wing his quick glance had focused on the big mottled Zeppelin sheds, lying like a pair of fat speckled caterpillars two miles below. No Zeps in sight. The big deadly night-cruisers were both safely stowed away, as usual, beneath their armored roofs. It was them he had come for, dodging shadowily in the cloud through twenty miles of Fokker-hounded and Archie-guarded sky.

The Ostend Zeps. The biggest prize a flying man could hope to get.

ONCE, months ago, with the wind and the sky just right, with George Hook, his second in command of the 19th Naval Scouts, acting as decoy to lure away Glick’s fierce black Gallows Birds, in the shadowy and deceptive light which falls between the dusk and the night, Kenny Blair had slammed himself at one of those big silvery bags while it lay moored outside its hangar, and burned it up in a sheet of roaring fire. For that, he carried the two and a half stripes of a lieutenant commander on his sleeves now, though he

wasn't yet twenty-four, and wore the claret-red ribbon of the Victoria Cross above his navy wings, though he wasn't British born. For that, also, he had got a German price on his head.

After Kitchener and after Admiral Lord Beatty, the name of Yankee Blair the Zeppelin-strafer had long headed the secret list kept by the great German War Intelligence of British officers who *must* be got. "Must" in red capital letters.

Well, they hadn't got him yet. But he'd not get one of their Zeps again, either. Since that glorious dusk when he went slamming through the Zeppelin fire, the guns of the Mary Hen had been quadrupled—and the big cruisers were kept hangared. While the patrols of black Fokkers never left the sky.

Watching for Kenny Blair. Fifty thousand gold marks to the gun or ship that nailed him.

Pam! Pam, pam, pam!

Shrapnel rising with a shriek and bursting over him. Slamming hot behind his tail. Rocking his wings in high sky with dynamiting bursts.

Pam!

The Mary Hen had found the range again. She was living up to her reputation as the wickedest, keenest ring of A.A. batteries between the Vosges and the North Sea. She had taken off her socks and garters, and she was heaving up the kitchen stove. *Pam! pam!* she slammed her iron hammers at the sunset sky, till it seemed there wasn't a cubic yard of air space within a mile of Kenny Blair's whirling silver Camel that wasn't filled with those smashing black shrapnel bursts.

"Oh, stop throwing those things!" said Kenny. "If that's a nice way to act!"

With a mocking grin he thumbed his nose down.

Wham!

Something slammed behind his tail. He never saw that one. The air seemed burst apart. There was, a roaring in his head, a sudden dark red crashing blindness. His dancing ship was hurled over like a leaf in a hurricane. And the bottom of the world seemed to drop away beneath him.

"It's happened now!" he thought.

He'd flirted with the buzz-saw once too often.

CHAPTER II CRIPPLED WINGS

DOWN KENNY BLAIR WENT. Down, like a tumble-bug. Spilling with head hanging, and God knew which way. He felt the wind rush on his right cheek and then his left, on his face and the back of his neck, and all the world was black that instant. His skull seemed split apart. He only knew that he was falling.

His whirling eyes focused part way after an instant of roaring blackness. He wiped his goggles frantically with his sleeve. Jamming his controls from him, he came out in a flat stalling spin, breathless and with a roaring head. Eight thousand feet, the altimeter read. The crimson sun on the far off rim of the sea slowed its crazy spinning, like a dying merry-go-round. He fought to steady his dizzy vision. He shook his head. At least it was still on his shoulders.

"Come again!" he gasped.

Apparently they hadn't hit him, after all, in spite of the blinding headache. That was his first thought. But ribbons of silvery linen were stripping off the little scout's right upper wing, he saw, and there was a hole in the fabric through which a patch of careening cloud was visible. The compass on his instrument board had been smashed by a shrapnel splinter, and half the basswood board was in flinders. Altimeter still functioning, that was all. Tachometer and wind-speed indicator knocked galley west. That hot iron slug must have gone whizzing by his belt.

"Two inches closer," he thought, "*and fini la guerre—*"

A pair of Nachtigal's King Checkers were standing on their tails two thousand feet below, climbing up the sky ladder at him like a couple of screeching tigers up a tree, with a dozen more of the checkered L.V.G.'s following all the way from ground. To his left that formation of black Fokker Gallows Birds was clawing for altitude, five of them, rocketing for the roof in a wedge formation. They had reached his level, if they weren't above him now, in the bottom fringes of the cloud. It was hard to get the bearings of them. The whole sky was spinning crazily.

Pam! pam! over him. *Pam!* right and left. *Wham!* on his tail.

The Mary Hen had bracketed him again.

"You win!" gasped Kenny Blair. "Keep your lousy Zeps, Jerry. Did anybody say I wanted them?"

HIS head was still a muddle. He felt air sick. Wildly he went slicing down two hundred feet, like a whistling knife blade through the shattering crashes. He snapped over, and roared upward in a loop. The hot aerial detonations seemed to be following him a yard behind his tail. Above him the great blue-shadowed cloud rolled on. He tried to reach it with his staggering wings. But it was too high, too far. The five black Fokkers had got above him, certainly. Beneath the fringes of the cloud they came tearing at him. As he fell over on his back in the crest of the loop, they dropped headlong down the sky.

The Mary Hen signed off. His motor screamed in the high thin silence.

The earth and sea above him. The cloud and those five diving fiends below. So it looked like. The Fokkers seemed to be shooting vertically up at him, out of the inverted bowl of the sky and cloud, like a swarm of voracious gars striking at the silver belly of a mackerel from the depths of a clear bottomless sea. He wondered if Captain Glick was leading them—Glick, the great, lame, scar-faced Gallows ace in whose very teeth he had once burned a Zep. Who had sworn to get him at any price.

Well, if it was Glick who was going to get him now, that was no disgrace. Glick, the best and worst and most terrible Hun in all that murderous sky.

Kenny Blair hung by his belt, and the five black Fokkers came at his upturned wheels two hundred feet a second, while time stood still.

Glick's Gallows Birds.

He saw the white pattee crosses upon their black diving wings. Their famous and fatal battle insignia of a white crow perched on a dead man's skull, and pecking at its eye-sockets. But he would have known them, anyway.

Br-rrp-rrp-rrp! their double Maxims started the coffee-grinder music in that split second.

Needles of fire were shooting through the young Camel ace's skull. Something had happened to him amidst that Archie crashing—he didn't know what. He wasn't right. With roaring motor, coming down the loop, he hauled his stick against his belt, and half rolled. Again he looped, straight at them, opening up his Vickers hot and blind.

"Come on, you sons of lice!" he heard his voice howl.

SOMETHING filmed across his goggles as he went clawing up. He wiped his lenses desperately with his sleeve, but they were still blind and smeared. He tore them off, shaking his face. Blood was on his dungarees sleeve. His eyebrows were filled with the sticky blinding stuff. It trickled onto his lashes and down in the corners of his eyes. The Mary Hen had creased him, all right. No wonder his head had felt as if it was splitting open. A splinter of the smashed instrument board must have slammed him in the face.

"Eat it!" he gasped.

The sky was full of black dashing wings and hot gun mouths, raining all around. Diving, they split as he came zooming up. His Vickers belt was shaking. The wind cut his naked eyeballs, and he could not see them. Too many of them, and the blind spots were in his eyes.

Br-rrp-rrp-rrp! the Maxims rattled.

On the crest of the loop he did not cut his throttle. He jammed his stick hard away from him, instead. With bellowing club he went S-ing up toward the top of the sky, holding his breath and praying.

A half loop, snapping up into an inverted half. With hanging head and roaring brain.

The only way out, if it would work. It was a trick he had pulled on Captain Glick of the Gallows Birds and a formation of those black Fokkers once before, when jammed in a desperate spot. If the great Fokker sky-king was leading that murder squad in person now, it would not work again. Glick would be ready and waiting topside when the silver Sopwith came to the crest of the vertical snake climb. Waiting on banked black wings to pour in the killing fire. No man ever fooled the scar-faced Gallows captain with the same trick twice, and not many once.

So Kenny Blair prayed that Captain Glick was not among those present.

The little scout's spinning motor screamed as on her back, she roared upward in an arc. Centrifugal force pulled the young Camel ace's heels from the cockpit floor. Pulled him outward taut against his webbed safety belt. For an instant the silver ship seemed to stall dead in the air, half on her back, with her nose pointed at an empty corner of eternity, sliding backwards by her tail, and upside down.

Like a bug crawling up the outside of a slick curved bowl, and slipping as it crawled.

IT SEEMED to the young Camel ace that he hung there forever, on his back in the thin air, with sprawling wings. Yet it was quicker than he could take a breath.

The far crimson sunset horizon came swinging up beneath his bow. Up and over the top of the vertical S climb the silver ship pulled herself with choking motor and dragging wings, sprawling out in normal line of flight once more.

Top of the sky.

Above his motor's ragged thunder he heard Maxims in a crashing burst, as he swung up and leveled out, but he could not locate the direction of the rattle—in front, behind, above, below. Was it Captain Glick, the Gallows king? Had the savage, battle-wounded Hun ace been waiting for the completion of that wild, breath-taking evolution—waiting above, sardonic and steady and gaunt-eyed, behind his leveled ring-sights, while the twisting Camel came snaking up to death?

Gasping, Kenny Blair threw his ship over on its ear, winding around a tight invisible air cone.

No, Glick of the Fokkers was not there. The rattling Maxims came from below him now. He'd twisted up through those hurtling black wings into clear air. The five sable Gallows Birds had been too quick and eager. They had dived on past him, expecting him to complete the loop.

"Catch your rabbit first!" he jeered breathlessly.

On tilted midnight wings, with their white crosses and death insignia gleaming as they banked, they were reforming into their tight battle wedge four hundred feet below him now, and clawing up at him with tracer hail, hot, surprised, and angry. But Kenny Blair wasn't waiting for them, nor for the checkered L.V.G. two-seaters climbing below them, eager to get a share. There was that great blue-shadowed cloud above his head, and it looked sweeter than death and immortal heaven, or anything else the swarming Huns had to offer him. It was all he wanted now.

Lifting his wings to the stalling point, he went climbing for the roof with all he had. Behind him, those black Fokkers as mad as hornets.

"Go on back," he jeered with a pale grin. "Go on back home to mama, and tell her you've chased Kenny Blair of the Nineteenth with your pop-guns."

The billowing cloud came down to meet him softly and swiftly, like a deflated balloon sagging overhead. Breathlessly he pulled up into the cold misty bottom ravel of the cloud, with a tight cool grin but an exhausted heart. The snarling black Fokkers were blotted out below. He climbed. He laid his ship over on its ear, and went boring up.

Gray cloud around him now. The ghosts of fog. And silence. He had lost them.

"By the skin of a hen's teeth, sailor!" he told himself, taking a deep breath of the rain-filled vapor. "And maybe by less than that."

THE keen, tense nervous stimulus which had keyed Kenny Blair up during those desperate few seconds of escape from the Fokker gang, had gone from him like water now. He was groggy. He wanted to sleep. His swaying head fell forward on the cockpit coaming. With an effort of his will he jerked it up. The terrific Archie salvo which had so nearly smashed him to flinders in the air was still ringing in his ears and brain. If it hadn't been for that, he'd have shown those black rats a fight.

"Low and slow, sailor!" he told himself. "There's something wrong with your dinner."

Compass smashed, and blind in the cloud. His club was chewing the bumpy gray puffs of mist into wriggling shreds. His stubby wings were nodding and rocking. He seemed to be balancing on one spot. Shivering, bucking, swaying. Then motionless again. No sensation of forward speed. Yet he was making knots—somewhere. Deep in the high sky mist, he edged his bow around to where he guessed southwest ought to be, and tried to hold it there, pegging down the hidden coast.

His home field of Kirchenhafen east of Dunkirk was still thirty long air knots away.

The keen wind that was blowing the cloud along plowed into his scalp, and cut across his temples like the slicing of a knife. With a wavering glance he watched the torn right wing above him. The stripped linen was fluttering in the cloud fog, but had ceased peeling further, for the time being anyway. And the blood upon his forehead had coagulated and ceased flowing. He touched his head softly and experimentally with his fingertips. There was a ragged cut across his scalp, just above the line of his thick black hair, four inches or more across and an inch wide. It hurt like white hot needles when he put his fingers to it delicately. He locked his teeth, and explored with care.

White hot needles. . . .

"At least my brains aren't oozing out," he thought. "The old sump pan's not cracked."

Just a scalp wound. No fracture. But what a bump.

The mist rocked, rocked around him. Without a horizon. No bottom, top, nor end. But no Fokkers, either. And for the time being they were not what he craved.

Yet above the cloud and below it there would be swarms of Hun ships prowling, all the way down the coast. They would be out in flocks and squadrons like howling hornets, tearing through the twilight sky from the sea coast to ten miles inland. Forming a living aerial net with their darting wings. Trying to catch Kenny Blair, the Zeppelin-strafer, before he got home.

He'd been hit, they knew it. Now was their chance to get him.

CHAPTER III MERRY-GO-ROUND

FIFTEEN THOUSAND FEET the blackhaired young naval ace's altimeter read. And still there was cloud around and above him. Tentacles of flying mist. Ghosts of tumbled shadow mountains into which his silver ship bored with snarling club.

All through the hollow weaving hills and caverns of the cumulus the late somber twilight of the high latitudes was creeping, with a look of tarnished silver. The cloud darkened imperceptibly. The radium dials of Kenny Blair's altimeter and wrist-watch were beginning to glow with phosphorescent numerals.

Three bells. Half past nine. It had been twenty-five minutes now since he zoomed from the Mary Hen and the snarling black Fokkers above Ostend. That meant he had traveled forty-eight miles in still air. Even with a thirty knot wind blowing against him, he must have made thirty-odd knots down the coast away from the great German naval base, he estimated. Well, he was over the Allied lines now. As far as Dunkirk, possibly. With an hour's petrol to spare.

He had slipped the front-line barrages, and the black-crossed squadrons swarming high and low to trap him. Without being sighted by one of them. A smile crinkled his ruddy face, and his thick-set shoulders sagged in relaxation.

"Home!" he thought. "The best word ever invented by old man Webster."

His muscles felt stiff and lethargic. His head was light as a balloon. He was glad to be out of it. He eased his bow over. With half closed gun he went slicing down through the layers of the cloud, spiraling on bent left wing, watching overside to get his bearings.

Twelve thousand feet. And ten. And eight. The thinning fringes of the bottom cumulus drifted around him. At seven thousand he came slithering down below the rolling billows into clear twilight sky.

The last orange glimmer of the sunset had gone beyond the sea curve, fifty miles away. The shadowy mirage of England over there had vanished, too. Just a lean glimmer of fading silver on the west now. The somber twilight horizons had closed in while he had been creeping through the cloud. There were thick blurred stars sprinkled around the edges of the sky, and low in the west the thinnest hook of a new moon was setting, like a curved platinum wire.

He was out over deep water, off shore. That was the first thing he saw.

Below him the sea was black, with long white wind streaks running athwart the waves and crooked lines of comber spume. If there were any ships below, the surface darkness had swallowed them. Though he himself, he knew, must be visible in the lighter upper sky, to anyone watching.

He swept around half way in his tight throttled spiral. Dunkirk? Hardly. Eastward he saw the flashing of the great German coastal batteries, stretching down past Middlekerke toward the last corner of Belgium still held by the Allies. All those great Hun cannon, guarding the Hun coast. And the shadow of the big Zeppelin sheds looming on the land horizon in the dusk, and the long jetties of the sheltered U-boat harbor.

He was not home. He was not past the lines, at all. He was a mile or two out off the Ostend docks, precisely. Almost where he had been a half hour ago.

"Flying wing down," he thought, "in a blind circle."

IT WAS like a nightmare, in which a man runs and runs from some grisly pursuer, yet is not able to move. He'd been swinging in a merry-go-round. Maybe he'd been circling straight above the German naval base all the time, and they'd been listening to him with their detectors.

There were pepper grains of fighting ships heading out at him from shore. Hard below the cloudy roof. They grew large as a load of zinging buckshot in half a second.

"The village fire department on its way," he told himself grimly.

A thousand feet below him, shadowy in the cobweb light, a flight of gull-gray combat seaplanes were climbing up from the dark lower air. Two-seater Taubes. Their

Mercedes exhausts shot banners of blue ghostly flame. With their stubby flat-bottomed double pontoons they looked like a swarm of wild geese with wooden shoes. But they were as clumsy as they seemed. They came swarming up at him in a ragged wedge, with tilted wings.

They'd been listening for him. They knew he hadn't crossed the Yser going home. The Jerry hawks were out for him by land and sea. They were hot.

Well, he wasn't going to be a medal on any of their chests, if he could help it. He had his bearings now. No longer blind. He heeled his ship over and peaked away southwest, with the shore line on his left wing, climbing beneath the cloud.

He walked away from the zooming seaplane flock like an express train down the tracks. But the flight of Hun combat ships from shore were another matter. They were as fast as his Sopwith. They were heading over to intercept him. They were as big as bumble-bees now. In a moment more, as big as birds. He identified their silhouette in the dove-gray light. Fokker D-7's. Black.

Six or eight of them. Captain Anton Glick's Gallows crows once more. And the great Hun ace doubtless with them this time. It looked like it was their day.

Somewhere on that dusky sea a mile and a half below Kenny Blair a ship's searchlight flashed a spear of light straight up into the cobweb shadows beneath the cloud. It was a signal that unloosed a half dozen more blinding beams immediately from other points on the water. Pale shafts reaching up and stabbing at the clouds about the little fleeing Camel. Hun destroyers out of Zeebrugge. The Archie dynamite burst on his tail.

Pam, pam!

They had him netted in the lights now. All focusing on him. But they were firing from rolling decks. He'd take a chance on running the gauntlet of their .77's. He held his roaring little British scout on a line for Dunkirk far down the dark curved coast. The black D-7's were banking in toward him on smooth wings, in a diamond formation underneath the cloud. It was going to be cats and dogs in seven seconds.

"They must want me. Want me bad," he thought.

No doubt they did. Thirty-one notches on his gun, not counting that priceless Zep he'd burnt. Fifty thousand gold marks for the ship that got him. It was their day.

FIFTY feet above him the heavy tumbling cloud went rolling side-wise, spilling away northwestward endlessly, toward Greenland and the ends of the

Atlantic. Like the belly of a great undulating snake, hunching and sprawling and crawling across the sky. Suddenly out of it, a hundred yards ahead of him, a swarm of shadowy wings plunged headlong down.

The cloud had pupped. It was raining bloodhound whelps and hornets.

A hurricane more of Glick's black birds. Their bellies were turned to him as they shot into view before his streaking bow. Diving vertical, one of them half turned like a spinning top, in a nose-down wing-over, and leveled out with flaming motor and Maxim mouths beginning to vibrate.

They were all recovering and Immelmanning at him in the next split second. They had him cut off.

In the lightning flash of time that followed then things happened too quick to see. The dusk beneath the cloud was suddenly full of black-crossed wings hurtling, spinning, and looping from all directions. Fokkers and L.V.G. two-seaters. Taube seaplanes, even, staggering almost at their ceiling in the mile-and-a-half sky. God knew where they all came from. The stocky blackhaired Camel ace could not hear their Maxims drumming above his own Vickers racketing crash. With a wild inaudible screech, with shivering gun mouth and snaking belt, he went straight at them like a bat from hell.

Crash or glory.

Wings all around him. Wings over the North Sea. There was one of the checkered L.V.G.'s that flashed above him upside down, in the bottom fringes of the cloud, with its dead pilot hanging by his safety strap with dangling arms, and its gunner shaking the dead man's shoulder with a look of fear and agony frozen on the white flash of his face that passed. A stubby black Fokker stood on its tail like a trained seal beneath the silver Camel and stitched a spotted swath straight down its fuselage as it went overhead like lightning. Splintered floor-boards, a red-hot searing in his leg, and Kenny Blair had gone by, while the stalling assassin ship sliced tail down below him in the dark air spaces. Another Fokker, spiraling down out of the cloud steep on its ear, stood spread-eagled out on the air and seeming motionless for a flashing instant in front of the Sop's hurtling bow, like a coonskin nailed on a barn door to dry, and Kenny Blair raced his own tracer smoke toward it. Down the line.

Smash it!

He fed the sprawling black ship in the petrol tank, coming headlong at it. Red hot metal and liquid fire. He did not wait to see the sudden flame burst

forth. Zooming, he pulled up over on his back in the beginning of an Immelmann, to shake a gun that was chattering on his tail. He was in the thick ragged cloud ceiling before he had completed the half loop.

Thank God for inventing cloud.

It was all over for the moment. He had lost those darting black wings, and the searchlights and the shrapnel. As if a curtain had shot down between them.

Hidden again. Blind again. A lost fish once more in that misty sea.

BUT better lost and blind than being ganged by all the cock-eyed Jerry crates that roosted between Zeebrugge and Armentieres, Kenny Blair told himself. He'd not come out of it again so long as the twilight was still clear enough for any of those Huns of land, sea, and air to spot him, this time. They had declared a holy war on him, and no mistake. It wasn't a game of tag. It was a mad dog hunt.

"I've had enough," he thought.

Home. Southwest. Down the flat sandy curved coast. Thirty knots to Dunkirk. Only a frog's jump. He held his bow on an imagined horizon, and tried to level his wings. Yet he might be circling once more, for all he knew. Circling endlessly.

Engine torque of his screaming rotary pulling him to the right. Was he giving it too much counter-rudder, or not enough? He had lost the feeling of right and left, of balance, even of up and down. His head was thundering. Time stood still. The darkening fog pockets drifted around him. The walls of the great gray traveling cloud pressed tight and seemingly motionless on all sides for minutes at a time, like the walls of a narrow room. He wiped the mist from his goggles, but immediately they were clouded up again.

Home. Home?

A panic feeling was growing in him. He lifted his nose and climbed, to get above the cloud. To get a glimpse of stars and moon. But at eighteen thousand feet he found the cloud still there. It might reach six miles high.

His right wing fell over while he was still climbing, with a blind swish. He must have been stalling wing-down, without being aware of it. The cloud whirled round him. He felt the thin unseen wind lashing on the side of his face. Spinning tight. He cut his roaring engine, and still the jerking fog went rushing around him. For six thousand feet he went lashing and whipping down through the misty silence, till the spinning stopped and the straight wind blast of a

vertical plunge was rushing against his face. He leveled off and opened up his roaring throttle after another thousand feet. But he'd not try to climb again.

Not this evening.

Luckily he still had almost an hour's more petrol. And deep moonless night would be coming soon, when he could break out into the clear without being seen, and get his bearings on the coast. At the worst, if he should still find himself circling in Hunland then, he would know where he was. There would be some holes in the net where he could slip through. They couldn't have the whole front covered with guns and searchlights, come darkness.

"I can't still be doing a merry-go-round," he told himself. "I'm pulling away from them."

But in his heart he doubted.

CHAPTER IV DROWNED SANDS

KENNY BLAIR DIDN'T KNOW when his watch stopped. He looked at it, and it said nine-forty. And later when he looked at it, it still said the same. He wound it then, and set it at a guess at ten of ten. But he hadn't the vaguest idea of how much time he had lost. Ten minutes, or forty.

The darkness came. The short, deep, black summer night. And even the cloud through which his silver wings were boring became blotted out and invisible. Again he pushed his bow over, and went down with coughing motor.

He had spiraled down to three thousand feet this time, through successive layers of the night cloud, before he saw starlight glinting duskiely on water below. He was still out over the North Sea, then.

The coast lay a mile off his left wing, a dead low shadow rimming the brighter blackness of the water. He did not recognize any landmarks on that low black shore. Was he past the lines? If he had been flying straight southwest for the last thirty or sixty minutes, he must be far down the French littoral by now, past Dunkirk and on his way to Calais, even with the wind against him. Yet there was the possibility that he might have swung around toward the north in his blind flying, and be up beyond Ostend now, with the

German naval base and all that long gun-guarded coast still to be repassed on his way back home.

He had better keep out over the sea till he was sure of his position.

The water a half mile below him looked flat and motionless. More like a quiet inland lake than the storm-hounded North Sea. He could glimpse no stars in the sky to give him directions, though there was starshine glinting on the surface through some fissure in the cloud ceiling ahead of him. Still, he didn't need stars or compass. With that low smudgy shadow of land drifting by on his port wing, he couldn't be going wrong.

It was difficult to make it out at times—that hidden shore. It crept in closer to him, and then swept away, following the margin of its capes and bays, while he kept on a straight line in the night. There was a long four or five minute period when he did not see the coast at all, and waited for it to reappear. But it did not reappear. He changed course when he saw that he had lost it, keeling over on his port wing to pick it up again. There was something comforting in the sight of solid land, even Hunland.

But there was only the dark star-sparkling water beneath him now, in all directions. And rougher and more ragged than it had been. The low curving shore line had disappeared—for better or for worse, for good and all.

It had not been a mirage, certainly. The young naval ace was badly hurt, but he had not been seeing things. The wandering black shore line had been solid and real. Yet now it had dwindled off into some low headland or sand spit, and gone beneath the sea. And that was the end of it.

Deep endless water. The combers rolling.

“Don't let it kid you, sailor,” Kenny Blair told himself with a bewildered grin. “The whole coast of Frogland couldn't have sunk away. It must be somewhere.”

But had it been the coast of France or Belgium he had been following?

HE CAUGHT his first glimpse of the stars in that moment of doubt and anxiety. The black roof of cloud broke in a long triangular shaped fissure ahead of him, showing rolling pillows of cumulus touched to silver by starlight in their core. He saw the well known and unmistakable cup of the Big Dipper swimming into view high in the summer sky in front of him there, with its two pointer stars directed at the Pole.

Dead ahead.

He hadn't been flying south, but north. With the fast storm wind on his tail. For God knew how long. And he was lost over an unknown sea.

He banked around, steep on his ear, laying the pale motionless glimmer of Polaris, the North Star, behind his stubby flippers. No time to lose. But his engine choked and died as he leveled out. A breathless silence. Out of gas. He threw open his emergency tank, and reached down, pumping the hand-plunger furiously. Not a sputter. Still the ringing silence. The lead was choked or else the emergency was empty, too.

It had happened now.

Going down. His club turned over slowly in the night wind pressure. No sound except the humming of wind on wires. The luminous needle of his altimeter slid down like a ghostly finger. The rolling sea below.

“Well, no Heinie will ever collect the reward for my scalp,” thought Kenny Blair.

He tried to laugh.

“Glick's black buzzards will be wondering what became of old Blair of the Nineteenth Scouts for the next eight months or more. And still imagining they see the ghost of my Camel buzzing around their Zep sheds when it's a roost for eels and crabs down on the bottom mud. Sorry to disappoint them.”

Nothing to be done about it. What's up must come down, when the gas runs dry.

He was riding down a toboggan in the night. The black wrinkled water came rushing up at him. No ship, no floating wreckage, no buoy, nor anything else solid in sight. Nothing but those treacherous and unstable waves. It would be better to go beneath them in a straight dive, he thought coolly, rather than to attempt prolonging the inevitable end for a few seconds or minutes. The little land scout would never keep afloat for more than a brief time of futile struggle and strangling and despair. Push her nose down and ride her straight in, cowboy. Down to the bottom of the North Sea in one grand and final splash.

Yet the young naval ace's flying instinct would not let him make the unchecked dive. At the last moment he leveled out, rushing ten feet high across the black heaving troughs and the silver crests of the skipper's daughters. With the ragged water slashing at his wheels, he stalled, as if he were landing on a solid tarmac, and not the drowning sea.

Whoosh!

“A perfect three point,” he thought. “Here comes a flying fish down to the bottom.”

THE silver ship's tail pancaked into the running surge. Her lower wings went wallowing below the sea while she plowed on. Kenny unsnapped his safety belt and half arose.

The freezing black water was flooding in over the cockpit floor when he felt a jar shiver through the ship. Still plowing forward and settling at the same time, suddenly that torn right wing of hers and her undercarriage had struck some obstruction below the water's surface. She skewed around with a lurch and ripping, sending a great splash around her, and fell over on one side with a buckling wing, her dead stick lifted high.

Kenny, standing on his seat, was half flung out by the abrupt jolt. He went sprawling head foremost, clutching and grabbing to keep from sliding down off the fallen wing. His feet slipped off the trailing edge, and he was in the freezing water to his waist before he could draw himself back on board.

The waves were lapping on all sides of the half sunken little wreck, moved by the strong blowing night wind endlessly. But the ship had stopped moving, and had stopped settling. She was roosted on some hidden rock or sand bar submerged five feet below the tide. Her fuselage astern of the cockpit was buried, and her right wing had disappeared. Only her engine head and her portside wing were lifted clear. The waves came slapping at her cockpit coaming. Inside, there was water up to the seat cushion. But the wrecked little fighter did not rock in the waves. She was solidly grounded. There, in the middle of that unknown freezing sea.

Kenny crouched on the seat and shivered. The salt water had got into that wound across his scalp, and there was a dull red hot throbbing in his leg. But he wouldn't have much longer to endure those pains, by the looks of things.

Where was he? If he had been flying a straight course through the cloud for the last hour or more, with the storm wind on his tail, he might be a hundred and eighty knots from Ostend now. Almost to Heligoland, perhaps. He wasn't quite sure about that.

"Too far to swim," he thought grimly.

His watch had been wetted by his half submersion, and had stopped again. This time for good. He had only a vague idea of the hour. But it had been half past eight when he had set out from his home field far down by Dunkirk in the late sunset to raid the big German Z-ships, with two hours good petrol in his tanks. So it must be after half past ten now. Four hours till the breaking of the high early summer dawn.

IF THE tide was on the make, he'd never live to see that dawn. A slow drowning lay in store for him, if he didn't freeze first. The swift warm night wind, blowing from the south, seemed made of icicles now, cutting through his wet clothing and shivering limbs to the bone. He watched the scummy surge that laved around his cockpit, trying to estimate whether it wasn't already higher. Inch by inch, that cold tide flooding up. Waiting for it in the empty shivering blackness. Till it should blot out the dead stick of his propeller, lifted high. Till it should come washing over him, while he stood on tiptoe on the top wing. It would have been better to have gone out at once, than wait for that.

He unloosed the holster flap of his heavy British .455, and felt the butt of the big Webley Navy gun.

"Before I'll wait for the drink to crawl up to my chin—" he said aloud, in a dry voice.

He spun the gun cylinder, rubbing his thumb over the smooth brass cartridge disks.

But the water was slapping up no higher. Not by the fraction of an inch. He watched it with a burning gaze, and knew that it was not rising now. He remembered then that the thin new moon had followed the sun down the west, drawing the tide with it. The high water mark had passed. It would be hours, perhaps eight or ten, before full flood again.

In the meantime, if there was some British patrol ship creeping without lights out on that black sea, he might be able to signal it, perhaps.

He fired his heavy Navy revolver into the air. Counted one hundred slowly, and fired again. The wind carried the crack of the slugs away. Four times he fired the big Webley, with long measured intervals between, until he realized the futility of that. He could hardly hear the repercussions himself against the blowing of the wind that filled the whole outdoors, though there was enough dynamite behind each one of those shots to have killed an elephant. There were two shots left in the Webley when he holstered it again.

He remembered his rocket pistol then, and pulled it out from its clamps above the instrument board, with one star-cartridge in the chamber, and two extra in a waterproof rubber packet. The big paper shells were still dry. He shot one straight at the zenith. His squadron recognition signal. Two blue stars, two yellow, and a red. They flowered high in the cloudy dark above him, and swam down softly, fading out. Again he plugged a shell into the breech, and sent up the yellow, blue and red cluster. And the third shell then, after he had counted a ten minute interval.

Those last stars came drifting down and winkled out above him. No answering signal from any corner of the water. If there was anyone who had seen those distress rockets, it was not a friend.

CHAPTER V THE GALLOWS ACE

AT MIDNIGHT in the officers' hall of the 44th Fokkers, *die Galgenvögel*, the Gallows Birds, east of Marie Henriette Parc in Ostend, a roulette wheel was spinning with a constant whir. A dozen tense and hard-eyed aces of Captain Glick's great circus were clustered around the big oak table, laying crumpled wads of marks and Belgian francs on the green cloth. A visiting staff brigadier general from the emperor's own headquarters and a pair of young naval intelligence officers who had dropped in from the submarine base were in the company. There was an air of hushed excitement, of terrific tenseness and rapacity, over the little throng of gamblers. The game was running high, and Anton Glick himself, the great Gallows captain, was banking it.

"Thirty-six again," announced Anton Glick in a low dry voice. "Pay on red, even, and the third dozen. Do you want to let it ride?"

He glanced around the table at the taut faces and burning eyes.

"Let it ride," said one or two of them.

The rest nodded. Glick looked at the staff general, who stood pale-eyed across the table from him.

"On the 36 again," the general said. "All of it."

Anton Glick wet his lips.

"All of it," he repeated. "On the 36." They had him hooked. Bad. But one turn of the black and odd would almost clear him. And the black and odd were bound to turn up now.

"Hit them, double O!" he said.

He gave the little white ball another spin. It whirled, whirled with a dry, clacking sound. The Gallows captain leaned his ponderous shoulders over the table. Above the loose black silk muffler that was wrapped around the lower half of his bearded face, his dark stony eyes watched the spinning ball with unflickering intensity. Praying for the zero or the double zero.

Praying for the black, the odd. For any number except 36. It couldn't be the 36 again.

In the breathless silence the little ball whirled, whirled, and dropped. The wheel slowed to a halt. The men around the table straightened up with looks of relaxation, with muttered words and soft relieved sighs. One or two of them sucked on cigarets which had gone dead, breathing deeply.

All except Anton Glick. He stood with bent head, a dazed look in his eyes.

"Thirty-six it is, again," he managed to say in a low voice. "The red, even, and the third dozen again."

He lifted up one fist, and banged it down on the table. For the moment he could not utter another word. His throat was strangling.

IT WAS the eighth time running that the ball had stopped on the red, since Glick had been making the bank. The fifth time on the even number. The third time in straight succession it had turned up 36. And most of the gamblers around the table had been riding the red and the even right down the line, doubling their bets. It was the third time that that damned visiting staff general, with his smooth tight smile and his beak of a nose and his cold fish eyes, had bet on the 36—starting off with a ten mark note, and letting his winnings lie.

"You pay me on the number, I believe, captain," the staff general said now remindingly.

Pay on the red, the even, the third dozen, and the 36. There was sweat on the great Gallows captain's forehead as he stared at the green betting cloth. Even the stony irises of his deep sunken eyes seemed glazed with sweat. He dared not try to think how much he had lost. More than he could ever pay. Much more than he could ever pay. With an involuntary strangling gesture he tugged loose his black muffler, partially exposing the huge, clabbered, star-shaped scar that covered one whole bearded cheek from jawbone to nose. A French Nieuport explosive bullet had dealt Anton Glick that wound, above Verdun, last year. It had never entirely healed, and it would never heal, the doctors said. Some day it would eat into his brain, and he would die of it. He was not afraid of death—not the great captain of the *Galgenvögel*. But he could not endure a living humiliation and dishonor, such as threatened him now.

"Tough luck, Toni," Horst Stollweg, the gaunt-faced second in command of the Gallows Birds, said softly. "You got hit. For a loop."

The others were watching him with various looks of elation, greed, or sympathy. Anton Glick managed

to shrug, with a pretense of indifference. He leaned over the table on his clenched fists, relieving the weight from his lame leg, with his heavy ash walking stick beside him. His ponderous shoulders and heavy limbs felt weary as water. He wanted to sag and collapse over that damned treacherous wheel and the green cloth, loaded on all points with its winning bets. It was only by an effort of will that he kept himself on his feet, and with a stony mask on his face.

He picked up the ball to spin again.

“Let the bets lie?” he suggested.

Three times in a row, that damned number. It couldn't turn up again. One more spin would clear him yet. He looked at the little fish-eyed staff general with desperate hope. But the other shook his head.

“I'm going to drag,” the staff brass hat said, rubbing his hands together, with a contented grin. “I've got enough, believe me. *Phew!* I thought for a moment there I was going to lose. My heart isn't strong enough to stand it. Bet you five pfennigs this time, captain.” The rest of them were shaking their heads, too. They wanted to draw down. Salt away their winnings. They were tense and exhausted with the excitement of the game. They had hit him for enough, they were thinking.

THE Gallows captain drew a small white pad of paper across the table toward him. He wrote out a memorandum for a hundred and sixty marks, tore it off, and passed it to the younger of the two visiting naval intelligence officers standing beside him, who had bet five marks on the even number, and let it lie five times.

“I haven't the cash with me,” he explained with a cool pretense of negligence. “Settle next time I see you.” The naval man nodded politely that it was quite all right. Glick wrote out a chit for three hundred marks to Horst Stollweg. One for a hundred and eighty marks to Markheim, the Gallows adjutant, who had been betting on the third dozen. One for sixty-four hundred to little Karl von Kulm, the balloon-buster of the Fokkers, who had put twenty-five marks on the red, and ridden along with it eight times to glory.

“That was a wallop, Toni!” said von Kulm with a brief grin.

“It's all in the game,” the Gallows captain managed to reply.

“Well, it hurts me more than it does you, my boy,” von Kulm said, folding the chit away in his purse with a dry grin. “I guess I'd better wait till you've brought down Blair the Limey Zep-strafer and collected your

fifty thousand gold marks on him, before presenting this for collection?”

Anton Glick did not reply to the little ace's ironic sally. There were other men who would be presenting I.O.U.'s of his when he'd brought down the Yankee sky-devil. God knew how many of them he had out already. Ten, twelve thousand marks. A year's pay. He was swamped. Sunk. Nevertheless he continued writing out chits with a steady hand. Around the board. It was all he could do to save his face for the time being. At least his name was still good.

That little fish-eyed general from the great staff was waiting like a terrier for a bone. Silent, but trembling with excitement.

“I've got to do some arithmetic on you, general,” the Gallows captain said, wetting his lips. “Let's see, how much?”

He hadn't dared to figure that one out.

“Three times on the number, at odds of 36 to one,” said the brigadier precisely, looking at a slip of paper in his palm. “My first bet was ten marks, making 360. 360 on the second roll made 12,960. 12,960 on the third roll—that makes 466,560 marks, I believe, captain. A shade less than a half million. And I don't mind saying that I can use it. I'm a poor man, myself.”

Nearly a half million, starting with that ten marks! Anton Glick's ears were roaring. It was incredible. It was insane. There wasn't that much money in the world.

Little von Kulm whistled softly.

“I SEE you've figured it out,” Glick told the elated staff general in a cracked voice.

“Quite,” said the general cheerfully. “I used to be an accountant in civilian life. However, I want you to check my total up.”

“I'll take your figures,” Glick said indifferently, as though it were a small matter.

Still, the room was swimming around him. He could hardly write.

“Never mind the odd marks,” said the little fish-eyed brass hat with a carefree gesture. “Call it an even four hundred and sixty thousand, in round figures.”

“By no means, sir,” said Glick with a grandiose gesture.

He jotted down a notation of the full amount, scrawled his initials, and passed it to the brass hat with a flourish. The other took the paper, examining it with one eyebrow lifted and a look of disappointment on his weasel face. He pulled out a monocle from his pocket, and examined it again.

"H'm!" he said. "What am I supposed to do with this, Captain Glick?"

"Why, it's a memorandum of your winnings," the Gallows ace said in his dead, dry tones. "As I explained, I don't happen to have the cash with me." He looked at the pompous little man, lifting his thick eyebrows.

"Naturally not. Not a half million," said the brass hat, in a cool unpleasant voice. "But I'm catching an early train back to headquarters in the morning, and it's possible we shall never meet again, captain. It would be more convenient to me to have your check on account. That's what I thought you were giving me."

His check, thought Anton Glick. God knew he didn't have a pfennig.

"My memorandum is sufficient, general," he said. "Between gentlemen."

"All the same, I can't buy any beans with this," the brass hat began to whine. "It's not legally collectible, if anything should happen. I've won a lot of money, and I'd like to see the color of it. Come, come, what have we been playing for, Captain Glick—marbles or scraps of paper?"

The Gallows captain glared across the table at him—at that tight lean mouth, at that monocle and lifted eyebrow, and those cold fish eyes.

"Are you questioning my honor, general?" he snarled.

The lousy pawnbroker! He'd like to kill him.

"Your honor?" said the brass hat.

"I ask you, are you questioning it?"

"I don't know a thing about it," the staff general said. "All I want is my money."

them turned to Stollweg with a tactful manner now, twirling his little gold mustaches and clearing his throat with a cough.

"How are things going in the air. Lieutenant?" he asked conversationally, in a loud, clear voice. "Are you running the Limey's ragged?"

"Are you?" retorted Stollweg.

"You flying buzzards just watch our smoke tomorrow," said the naval man emphatically.

His voice was brisk and penetrating in the silence. His face was fixed in a beaming diplomatic smile. He had the desperate air of a man doing his damndest to keep the conversation going, to gloss over that ugly silence around the table, and avoid a scene. No one else, however, bothered to help him out, and his companion sea dog, a tallish bristly haired man, nudged him.

"Yes, sir," he went on with a loud mechanical laugh, looking around at the hard, tight faces with forced enthusiasm. "Yes, sir, our little old navy's going to give the Limeys a kick in the pants tomorrow. They've got a raid planned on Heligoland Bight, but we've tapped their little code, and we know their schedule to the dot. We're going to—"

"Pipe down, Walther!" his companion sea-dog cut him off, with a growl. "Why don't you send a wireless to the Limey admiralty and tell them we're laying for them, while you're about it? They'd be glad to get the news."

"Well, it's all in the family, isn't it, Fetter?" said the gold-mustached one, with an apologetic glance around at the Fokker aces. "I was just making conversation."

He subsided into mournful silence. Anton Glick rapped the knuckles of his clenched fists on the table, while the fish-faced brass hat examined the I.O.U. backward and forward, turning it over and upside down, with a cold, tight look which, if it wasn't a sneer, was the best imitation of a sneer that ever adorned a human face. Karl von Kulm whistled thinly. The bristly headed naval officer, Fetter, nudged his talky companion, with a curt nod toward the door, and a meaningful rolling of his eyes. Without a word the two picked up their caps and a schnaps bottle which rested beneath the table, fading out silently into the night.

"If you are questioning my honor, General," said Anton Glick hoarsely, after a long, glaring pause, "I'll be happy to give you my cards and demand satisfaction at once, either with pistols or sabres."

"I'd rather have your check than your cards," the brass hat muttered.

He spread his palms.

CHAPTER VI THE NAVY RAID

ATENSE, UNCOMFORTABLE SILENCE had been growing around the table. Horst Stollweg and Markheim of the Fokkers glanced sidewise at each other. Little von Kulm the balloon-buster was whistling "*O du lieber Augustin!*" softly between his teeth. The two visiting junior officers of naval intelligence appeared heavily embarrassed. They were strangers to the Fokker squadron, casual acquaintances of Horst Stollweg. The younger one of

"I've gambled, and I've won," he added placatingly. "And all you're giving me to show for it is a scrap of paper that won't buy any beans. You may be a billionaire for all I know, and don't think anything of such chicken feed. All the same, it's a lot of money to me, and I'd appreciate a check."

The dirty little mucker! The pawnbroker! Anton Glick was strangled with rage and helpless humiliation.

THE squadron pilots all began to talk across the table, when Glick didn't reply. Rotten weather. It looked like there'd be a fog by morning. Thank God if there was, it meant no dawn patrol, said von Kulm. Even Blair's hell-cats from down below Dunkirk wouldn't be out themselves, in pea-soup weather. What did anyone suppose had happened to that damned sneaking Camel assassin of Blair's outfit—probably Blair himself, the Yankee devil—who had slipped away from them at twilight in the cloud? Had he managed to get back home across the lines after all, in spite of all the squadrons out combing the sky to cut him off?

Not likely.

"Lost himself in the drink," said Markheim, the adjutant. "If it was Blair, there's fifty thousand bob none of us will ever earn."

"I'd just as lief not have to try earning it," said Horst Stollweg with a gaunt grin.

They were all talking at once, steadily. And then suddenly they all stopped, not able to think of anything else to say. They had discussed Blair, and the weather, and the war, and politics and the women, for the last several hours, anyway, and there was not another idea in their heads. Karl von Kulm resumed his monotonous ironical whistling. They couldn't ignore the fact that the situation was ugly and unpleasant, involving as it did a stranger to the squadron, and a general from the high command, at that.

"Well, how about it, Captain?" said the fish-eyed little brass hat.

He sighed and made a gesture with his hand when Glick didn't answer him. No doubt he was seeing regretfully, in his mind's eye, his golden marks taking wing like a flight of bees, and go swarming far away.

"I'll write the whole thing off for ten per cent cash," he offered hopefully. "Forty-six thousand. You must be able to spare that much. A big millionaire gambler like you."

His hopeful smile slowly faded at the Gallows captain's shamed and raging silence.

"All right," he said, pessimistically and plaintively. "But how about just one per cent on account, maybe, Captain? I'm a man of the world. A bird in the hand is my motto. Forty-six hundred cash, and write the rest of it on the ice. *Heiliger Gott*, I thought for a minute there I'd won a half million. But at least I'd like to win something."

He peered at Glick expectantly.

Anton Glick swallowed. He couldn't say anything. He would have jumped if he could have at the offer. But even forty-six hundred was out of his financial capacity at the moment. The brass hat picked up his gloves and stretched them while he waited a moment without reply. He pulled his hooked nose, shaking his head.

"Well," he said, "it looks like I got sucked. If that's the way it is, maybe anyway I can have back the forty-six marks cash money I put into the game. I need it to get home on. So please just give me my money back, and call it square."

The Gallows captain found his tongue.

"Stop insulting me, you pawnbroking Jew!" he said hoarsely.

"Maybe you haven't got even forty-six marks yet, is that it, Captain?" said the general sadly.

It was the truth. The Gallows ace hadn't. And there is no insult so humiliating as the truth. With an inarticulate bellow, half oath and half screech, Anton Glick snatched up his heavy walking-stick that was leaning against the gambling table beside him, swinging it at the brass hat's head with force and rage.

THE fish-eyed man dodged with a startled yelp. The blow landed against the spike of his steel *pickelhaube* helmet, knocking it from his head to the floor with a clatter, and just missing braining him.

"Murder!" he screeched. "*Meiner Gott im Himmel!*"

They were all roaring and shouting then. Half a dozen of his flying men grabbed Anton Glick by the arms and waist, bawling at him, as he lunged across the table to swing again at the dazed brigadier.

"You can send me your cards and name your weapons, you pawnbroker!" he howled.

However, he was being effectually held. He shook his stick, and subsided, growling. Someone handed the brass hat his helmet. He wiped it off and put it on his head again in a bewildered cock-eyed fashion, after feeling his scalp. His face was white as foam.

"*Meiner Gott!*" he said. "He hit me!"

"Like a dog!" said Anton Glick savagely. "Like the Jew you are! And you can name your seconds right

now, and accommodate me with your cards—or be forever damned for a coward and a yellow cur. I invoke the code against you!”

He grinned tauntingly and furiously.

The staff general shook his buzzing little head with care. He edged back cautiously well out of range of the murderous scar-faced ace. Against the farther wall he drew himself upright, with the monocle again in his fishy eye, dusting the looped aiguillette cords of a staff aide that glittered on his shoulder. Carefully he folded away the I.O.U. that Glick had given him, and put it away inside his breast, beneath his many ribbons.

“That would be very nice, wouldn’t it?” he said with a cold coughing laugh. “You kill me, or I kill you, and the debt is canceled. No, thanks. Do not forget that before I am required to meet you on the field of honor, Captain Glick, you will have to satisfy me, and the emperor, that you yourself are a man of honor, as becomes a German officer. You have invoked the code. Very well. You will oblige me by paying your debt to me to the last mark. Of course, if you do so I shall be most happy to send you my cards, and obtain more honorable satisfaction.”

He clicked his heels together, and bowed.

“Very well, very well,” said the Gallows captain hoarsely. “If you must hide behind a technicality.”

The bedlam had subsided, and so had his red-eyed fury. It was very quiet. He felt heavy and worn-out. Why had he been such a fool? A half million lost on three turns of the wheel! It had made him crazy. Now he would have to satisfy the fantastic and impossible debt for his honor’s sake, or be forever blackguarded. And there was no way of paying it.

“Certainly,” he said heavily. “Certainly. Do not doubt it. I will satisfy you of my honor. Then you will meet me.”

The room was silent, except for the sound of Karl von Kulm’s soft, ironic whistling. There was a sneer on the little brass hat’s face. He knew that that debt would not be paid. The hard-faced Gallows aces knew it, too. Anton Glick threw back his shoulders with a swagger. He started to say something light and careless to Horst Stollweg and Markheim. But there was nothing to be said. The Fokker aces were looking away from him, down at the table or at their finger-nails. He had invoked the code of honor, and he had been called. He had got himself in an ugly jam. Any disgrace that might come to him would reflect on them, too. And they did not like the thought of it.

The Gallows captain breathed a moment heavily,

trying to collect his thoughts. He heeled away in silence. Swinging on his solid ash stick, he went limping to the door, with that ironic tune of von Kulm’s sounding after him, and the little staff general glaring with tight lips.

Little von Kulm was whistling, with his eyes rolled up in his head, and the pockets of his riding breeches turned inside out.

*“Money’s lost, girl is lost,
All is lost, all is lost!
O you sweet Augustin!
All of it’s gone!”*

Anton Glick closed the door with a slam.

CHAPTER VII THE PRICE OF HONOR

OUT IN THE NIGHT, in the soft summer grass, beneath the deep moonless cloudy night, the lamed Gallows ace paused heavily a moment, leaning back against the wall of the building, rubbing his stony eyes with his hand. The whirling of the roulette wheel still flashed before his eyes. Night frogs croaked. The air was heavy with moist heat. Through an open, blanket-shaded window beside him he heard the voice of the brass hat, raised in pitch and shaken with anger.

“Just how good is this fellow Glick anyway, I’d be obliged if some of you would tell me!”

“How good is Toni Glick?” Horst Stollweg rumbled in reply. “Well, *durch Gott*, he’s the one and only Captain Glick. The best cock-eyed fighting man in this corner of the air. Even a brass hat cootie from the emperor’s dug-out oughtn’t to have to ask how good he is.”

“I’m not interested in the beggar’s professional abilities, nor in your opinion of the staff!” the brass hat retorted with a savage squeal. “That doesn’t buy me any beans. What I want to know is, how good is he financially? Is he a millionaire?”

Karl von Klum laughed.

“I’ll tell you how it is, General,” Anton Glick heard the little balloon-buster explaining soothingly. “We’ve all got some of Toni’s paper. He’s in the red, pretty deep. Ever since they put the fifty grand on Kenny Blair, he’s been figuring he would get it. Of course, he probably will. The higher they fly, the harder they fall.

Toni Glick will get Blair sometime, and collect. When he does, he'll pay up. Anything in reason, I mean. Of course, half a million is just plain crazy. He never meant to gamble that high. He'd never have that much money in fifty years. Why don't you laugh it off? You can't get milk from a bull, anyway."

"Laugh it off!" said the brass hat with violence. "When the beggar calls me a pawnbroker and tries to brain me! No—he'll pay me to the last pfennig now, or I'll see him broken to the black dog gang, I don't care what sort of a fighting man he is! I'll take this up with the emperor!"

In the warm, moist darkness outside Anton Glick listened to the little viperish brigadier with his teeth bared. The treacherous roulette wheel whirled round and round inside his brain.

36 . . . 36 . . . 36 . . .

The full weight of the catastrophe which he had let himself in for was only now beginning to be felt by him. A half million marks lost! It was fantastic. It was a joke. Ten Kenny Blairs—if there had been ten Blairs—wouldn't give him that much money, ever in this world.

That pawnbroking brass hat. The Gallows captain didn't even know his name. But he was on the emperor's staff. Glick understood the consequences if he didn't pay. Dishonored. Ruined. Stripped of his commission. Sent to dig latrines. Death would be much better. A quick crash or a quick bullet—there was nothing in that for a man to fear or regret. But not humiliation and dishonor. He couldn't meet them.

Involuntarily he felt for a pistol at his side. His big ponderous Mauser 11.5. But he wasn't carrying it, of course. It was in his office.

He wiped his dazed forehead again.

IF ONLY the zero had turned up, or any other number except the unbelievable 36, on that last fatal spin! If only he'd never gambled! If only he'd kept his head and compromised on the promise of some rational amount—some figure that he might have been able to look forward to paying eventually, by hook or crook. If only he hadn't gone Berserker wild and tried to knock the teeth out of the whining miser.

But it was too late now for such regrets.

Anton Glick muttered a moment with bearded lips, grinding his molars softly together. He tightened his thick fist around the ash stick in his hand. If he waited till the little viper came fumbling out into the night, he could knock him senseless with one blow and kick

the brains out of him. One heavy crashing slam in the darkness. Bingo! That would wipe off his cold reptile grin and stop his mouth with no more than one last squawk.

But brass hats from the staff were hard to kill, like toads. And they cost a lot when dead. Anton Glick wasn't afraid to die, but he didn't want to do it in front of a firing squad.

He moved on toward his squadron office, limping on his stick, with his heavy shoulders hunched. It had been a black day for him—the blackest day of his life, from start to finish—and ending now at midnight on its most dismal point. Half a million in the red. Shame and dishonor.

"*Wer geht's?*" a challenge came faintly from a remote guard post, down behind the Fokker hangars. "*Halt an!*" a sentry's voice rang harshly nearer by, at the Gallows gates.

Both without reply.

As Anton Glick went limping on with bowed head, a sentry came jogging clumsily but quickly toward him, looming out of the night with staring eyes. He drew to a standstill suddenly as he became aware of the heavy-shouldered Gallows captain approaching in the mid-night gloom.

"*Halt an! Wer geht's?*" the fellow barked a breathless challenge, punctuated by the threatening snick of his rifle's safety lock. "*Halt—ach, der Herr Hauptmann!*" he gasped, with a relieved grunt, as he recognized the lame commander.

He clicked his clumsy boots together, and gave a brisk rifle salute.

"Did he come this way, Mr. Captain?" he queried breathlessly.

"Who?" said Anton Glick indifferently.

"The navy subleutnant, sir."

"I think they've both gone," said Glick. "Why?"

But the sentry had started slogging onward, with sweating eyeballs and whistling lungs, with a slap of bayonet and rifle leather like a draft horse's harness.

"*Halt an! Halt an!*" another cry came through the darkness, from beyond the barracks.

The night seemed filled with unseen panting men hurrying frantically, on all sides. With terror, and suspense, and the silence of murderous pursuit. Only Anton Glick was too immersed in his own dark and desperate thoughts to have any interest or curiosity about it all.

The officer-of-the-day, Leutnant Krover of D Patrol, came bursting out of the closely curtained

headquarters building on the jump, with a pair of guards at his heels, as the Gallows captain reached the entrance of it.

"Pardon, *Herr Hauptmann!*" Krover gasped. "He hasn't got clear away from the field yet, do you think, sir?"

"What are you hunting?" said Glick heavily.

"Navy traitor calls himself Walther," said the O.D. with an incoherent gasp. "Navy's been watching him. Beaned the fellow he was with and tried to get away. He's not armed, but he may be ugly. Better get your gun, sir!"

"I'll get my gun, all right," said Glick heavily.

THE brisk O.D. hurried on, melting into the darkness with his fist on his Luger butt, followed toe-to-heel by the two hard-eyed sentries. Anton Glick had hardly been aware of the interruption. The excitement and the terrific game of war had no meaning for him at the moment. The roulette wheel was still spinning before his eyes, and he could think only of his own tragedy, of himself disgraced and broken.

Anton Glick, the Fokker ace, drummed out of his Emperor's service.

In his outer communications office the Gallows captain found the elder of the two visiting naval officers—the bristly-headed one called Fetter—slumped in a big lounge chair, with a bottle of three-star *schnaps* clutched between his knees. The naval man's short hair glinted with red lights in the lamp gleam, and there was an ugly cut on his scalp, still oozing thick drops. His face was pale as chalk and sweating all over. He tilted the bottle to his lips and staggered to his feet as Captain Glick entered. He stood swaying at attention, and stumbled like a lost dog after the Gallows captain into the inner squadron office, without invitation.

"*Gott!*" he babbled thickly. "If he gets away, I'll be lucky if they don't crucify me. Didn't know he was wise that he was being watched. They're smart, these Limey spies. Damned near as smart as we are. Two years I've lived and worked with that fair-haired boy, and nobody ever suspected him till last month. Have a drink, Captain?"

He offered the brandy bottle to the brooding Gallows ace with an unsteady circular swoop of his arm, ending the gesture by sweeping it to his own quivering lips before Glick could take it or refuse. He emptied the drink, and threw the brightly labeled bottle crashing into a corner. Swaying from side to side, he leaned over the desk behind which Anton Glick had seated himself, resting unsteadily on his fists. His little red eyes were hazy.

"Supposed to keep eye on him," he said incoherently. "Day and night. Eat and sleep and drink with him. Not giving him chance to communicate, if our suspicions were right. Till we'd checked up on him. But the damned spy must have felt how the wind was blowing. Knew his game was up. Got me—*hic! kuk!*—got me cock-eyed—*hic!*—got me cock-eyed drunk. Banged me on the head, see that? Banged me on the—*hic!*—head. I'll say he did. If he gets word through—"

The drunken naval intelligence man hiccuped again and banged down his unsteady fist.

"Oh, get out!" said Glick.

"Listen!" the red-head monologued, with a wandering stare. "You heard what Walther yawped, captain. Around the table. When you were trying to figure how you'd stall off on those paper debts. It wasn't any lie. What he said. Tomorrow morning. This morning. Sneaking up past the Dutch West Frisians. The whole Limey scouting fleet. With two of their battlecruisers leading the parade, plenty of destroyers, and all the fixings. Out to sweep Heligoland Bight of poor old Freddie Dutchman, and scam away like the—*hic! kuk!*—devil on wheels. Been planning it for a long time, old John Bull has. Got it timed to the—*hic!*—dot. Our High Seas Fleet's supposed to be in Kiel. In Kiel. But it's not in Kiel, see? For why? Because we're on to those sons of—*hic! kuk!* pardon me—guns. We've tapped their little code. We're going to box them up and make clean sweep of them—"

His legs wobbled, he half sprawled across the desk, and his head drooped between his shoulders. He shook it heavily back and forth, then managed to peer at Anton Glick. With a blank wavering look, wiping his face with his hand. "What'd they give to know we're on to them, and waiting? They'd give a million marks, big boy. They'd give fifty millions. Now this Mary Pickford Walther. Little gold mustache and all. Cock-eyed louse. Limey spy. Try to communicate. Save them from the trap. *Hic! kuk!* Pardon me. I must be drunk—*hic!*"

His wobbling knees caved under him. He fell down on them with a bump, with his long bony arms sprawled across the desk top and his eyes closing, while the scar-faced Gallows captain set watching him with an impenetrable stare.

A RIFLE cracked. Out in the night.

It was followed by a quick slamming fusillade, not a regular volley, echoing in confusion and mingled with men's shouts. There was a scream, and again a rifle cracked. All very quickly. Anton Glick sat motionless and mute, sunk in his black despairing thoughts. He did not

turn his head toward the window. Only the convulsive tightening of his fists showed that he had heard.

Opposite to him the sprawling naval officer quivered as if he himself had been plugged. With a dazed look around him, he was getting heavily to his feet. "What's that?" he muttered.

He was blinking his red-rimmed eyes. He rubbed his hand clumsily across his white sweating face, and straightened his brass-buttoned coat.

"I must have passed out," he said thickly. "What the devil was I shooting off my mouth about before I faded?"

He seemed to be ninety per cent sober now. He was obviously one of the flash brand of drinkers, getting drunk and sobering again on the shot. His sudden inebriation had faded from him with a moment of sleep. He stared at the Gallows captain's sunken eyes searchingly and with anxiety.

"Did I spill anything I shouldn't have?" he said.

"You were hiccuping something," replied Glick with a dull indifferent gesture. "I couldn't make heads or tails of it. I think you were complaining about your hiccups."

"Well, that's all right."

The naval man rubbed his face again, straightening back his shoulders with a relieved sigh.

"*Gott!* I dreamed I heard some shooting," he said.

Leutnant Krover, the officer-of-the-day, was already stumbling into Captain Glick's office then, wiping his sweating face, walking with a dragging tread.

"Captain, I have the duty to report—" he said with a salute.

His lean hard mouth was working. He tapped the Luger at his belt. The fast sobering naval man, Fetter, stared at him with widening eyes.

"The naval Subleutnant Walther, sir," Krover said. "Wanted for assaulting and attempting to flee from the surveillance of naval Leutnant Fetter here. We ran him down. He had weaseled his way into the wireless room, and was trying to transmit. I had wanted to take him, but someone gave the order to shoot to kill. They all lost their heads, they were all shooting. He was dying when I reached him. However, he confessed in the presence of witnesses that he had taken English pay. In the circumstances, I will take the responsibility."

"Dead?" croaked Fetter. "I wanted him cut off from communicating. Was it necessary to murder him?"

The Gallows O.D. turned with a glare.

"He was my buddy," said Fetter thickly, "once. Two years we worked together. Never suspected till last month. I was the man who first reported him. Of

course he was a dirty Limey spy. Still, he wasn't armed. You might have taken him alive. I'd have liked to have said good-bye to him."

"What good would that have done, sailor?" said Leutnant Krover harshly.

Anton Glick stirred his heavy shoulders.

"You will enter all the circumstances in your log, *leutnant*," he told Krover tonelessly. "Have *Herr* Fetter attest and sign to the facts. There is no blame attached to you. The deceased was caught endeavoring to communicate with the enemy. Who knows what the British might have been willing to pay him for his services, had he succeeded? Millions of marks. Those shopkeepers over the water are rich and liberal. They'll shovel it out for you if you give them what they want. I've heard it said. All the same, there is nothing lower above hell than a man who is a traitor for money. *Herr* Fetter, you will indentify the body of your late companion of the naval intelligence, and certify to the fact and circumstances of his death, to clear our skirts."

The Gallows captain dismissed them both with a bang of his fist. He arose heavily and limped after them to the door, closing it as they went out.

CHAPTER VIII

DEAD HERO—LIVE TRAITOR?

ANTON GLICK WAS ALONE now with his black despairing thoughts. His mind rushed around in circles. The flashing roulette wheel. Half a million marks. 36. Epaulets ripped from his coat. How much is your bond good for, Captain Glick? You will have to satisfy me that you are a man of honor, Captain Glick. 36, 36, 36. Well, this won't buy any beans. Haven't you even got forty-six marks cash money, Captain Glick? A half million in the next two days, or you'll be sent to dig latrines.

Anton Glick pressed the tips of his fingers deep into his black sunken eyeballs. Dishonor and disgrace.

He opened the top drawer of his desk, and took out with slow thick fingers his Mauser automatic in its holster, with attached gun belt. He was a big man, his hand was hard and strong, and he liked a big gun, one with a bite to it, a gun that felt solid in his fist. None of these regulation 9 millimeter Luger popguns for

him. His Mauser automatic was an 11.5, as big a gun as was ever made in Germany, and when it hit it kept on going. Laying holster and belt on the desk, he drew the big gun out. Cold blue steel, and a kick in it that could smack like a Yankee mule. It was his own gun, too. He'd paid his own money for it. He could do what he liked with it.

"Accident while cleaning gun," he thought with a twisted grin. "It's happened to better men than me, and with a damned sight more reason to keep on living."

The clabbered, puckered scar that was spread across half his face was now dead white.

He released the gun's cartridge clip and saw that it was filled. Slipping out one of the greased brass slugs with his thumb nail, he weighed it in his palm a moment, jiggling it up and down. It seemed queer that a small lump like that could tear a man's heart out by the roots from his living body, and send him with one slam and flash into eternal oblivion.

He forced the cartridge back into the clip, and jammed the clip home in the gun butt slot again, with a brisk blow of his palm. Slowly and with deliberate care he drew back the oiled carriage, cocking the hammer and pulling a cartridge up into the chamber with the movement of the mechanism.

"This is going to hurt that brass hat pawnbroker more than it will me," he thought coolly.

SUDDENLY he looked up, with lowered brows. His office door had opened. His ancient batman, old Private Klemm, who had served in the army forty years and never been anything but a private and a boot-swipe, was peering in with his wrinkled monkey face.

"Coffee, captain?" old Klemm squeaked.

His eyes were on the gun, though. Small and beady. Somehow it seemed to Anton Glick a shameful thing to be caught by an old half-witted private blowing out his brains.

"I see you're looking at your gun, sir," old Klemm piped, easing the door open wider and shuffling watchfully in.

"It needs cleaning," said Glick briefly.

He holstered the blue steel Mauser again with a casual manner, tossing belt and all to the ancient monkey-faced batman, who caught it expertly.

"Clean it," he said, "and bring it back at once."

"You'll be needing it tonight, sir?"

"I think I may."

"Your honor isn't planning on going on a hop, sir?" the old batman quavered.

"A foggy black night like this?"

"A long hop, perhaps," said Anton Glick.

He sat in silence, with his whirling thoughts, after old Klemm had gone. He thought of battles he had fought. Against the French around Verdun. Against Blair, with whom he had often brushed wings, yet never met in any decisive way. He thought of high windblown gallops through the two-mile cloud, charging in and out of snow drifts of white cirrus, at the head of his black Gallows cavalcade. He thought of the world, and empty space, and the immensity of eternity. And there were many fine things in life. It seemed a vile finish to it all that a spinning wooden wheel and a little ball, turning up 36, 36, 36, should damn and blast him out of all of life, sending him down the road to ruin or to death.

Sitting there, as motionless as stone, his dark thoughts were shattered by the roar of the enemy Camel that came rushing across the hangar roofs in the blackness of the midnight. He half started from his seat. It had come with a hurricane roar out of nowhere, that unseen ship, and in the instant the thunder of it was hammering through the sky and drumming across the ground and the hot still silence of the night was shattered and broken like a house of jangling glass.

Hura-hura-hura-hroom!

Enemy ship!

Clerget-powered Camel from below the Yser! One of Blair's hell pups!

Over the hangar roofs.

FORGOTTEN instantly was the great *Galgenvögel* captain's brooding and despair. He was a fighting man again. The enemy in the sky! With a hoarse inarticulate bellow he seized his walking stick, brandishing it aloft, as if with it alone he'd bat back whatever bombs came crashing down,

"Blair!" he shouted, springing up, "Feed him the A.A.'s! Smoke him!"

The Gallows captain was hardly on his feet before the crescendo roar had passed at two miles a minute across the roof above him, and gone fading up the sky on the rush of a steep zoom. No Vickers fire, no bombs. It was not a strafe. Heavily Anton Glick went sprawling toward the door.

Horst Stollweg, his gaunt-faced second in command, met him there, hurrying in with a message in his hand.

"From Blair's gang," Stollweg said briefly, handing

the communication to the Gallows captain. "They seem to know where to find us without much trouble. Can you make it out? You read English better than I."

"To hell with the *Schweinhund!*" Glick said. "He gave me a bad minute of the jitters."

He took the message.

From: Lieut. George Hook, RNAS, acting in command Blair's 19th Scouts.

To: Commanding Officer, Fokkers 44th.

1. Information concerning fate of Lieut.-commander Kenneth Blair, Royal Naval Air Service, this squadron, flying SE No. 1411 in mission over lines about 21:00, is respectfully requested.

2. Your reply messenger plane will be honored.

Hook, Lieut.

The Gallows captain crumpled the message up, with a twisted face.

"Inquiring for Blair," he told Stollweg. "I wish I could help him out. I should be honored. Delighted. Nothing could please me more."

"So he didn't get back," said Horst Stollweg softly.

"No," said Glick. "If he'd got back anywhere across the lines, they'd have a report by now. And if he'd landed or crashed behind our lines, we'd know it. Sunk at sea without a trace is the answer."

"Blair gone!" said Stollweg.

"It hardly seems real, does it, even when you say it?" commented Glick.

He straightened his broad powerful shoulders. His face had lightened. There was a grin on his bearded lips, and he hummed a bar of the Dead March.

"Somehow, that makes me feel better, Horst," he said. "I was sunk. Deeper than the bottom of the ocean. But after all, there's a lot of fun in being alive. It occurs to me, now that I think of it, that no matter what you do or what they do to you, there's always some way out of any jam. I'd rather be a live dog than a dead lion, I guess. The luck may have been running against me. But still I'm better off than Blair."

"Blair gone, *durch Gott!*" Stollweg repeated, like a man in a daze.

GLICK'S batman, old Private Klemm, had returned with his big Mauser and gun belt. Slowly and reluctantly Klemm handed them to the Gallows captain, with a question in his wrinkled anxious eyes. Glick shook his head and laughed.

"Thanks, Klemm," he said. "You saved my life."

He spoke in a jocose tone, but he meant it. Cheerfully and grimly, with the expression of a man who has determined on a course of action after much hesitation and doubt, the Gallows captain strapped the gun belt on.

"I've changed my mind about something," he explained.

In company with Horst Stollweg he walked out into the humid night. The stars were covered with a heat haze now. There was a feel of fog in the air.

"Come on back to the mess hall, Toni," Stollweg urged him excitedly. "The little brass hat has gone. Don't worry too much about him. Maybe some kind-hearted Limey night bomber will drop an egg on his dome before he gets back to headquarters. A hundred kilos of TNT would about fix that baby right. Anyway, whatever he does to you tomorrow, you can always get drunk tonight. Blair's gone! Let's rouse everybody out—have a binge. Wait until I pass the word. Come on, and we'll all pot out till the cock-eyed sun comes up!"

By "potting out" Stollweg meant each man filling a liter can of brandy, and the last man to finish his would have to sign the bottle-steward's chits for all the drinks. It was a sporting custom of the Fokker mess. But Anton Glick, in his own mind, gave a different twist to the phrase now.

"No, thanks, Horst," he said. "I was about ready to pot out a while ago. But not just yet."

He left the gaunt excited Gallows ace at the door of the officers barracks. Feeling his way heavily through the moist summer darkness, he went on down toward the Fokker hangars, through the ghostly ground fog that was moving across the tarmac. He summoned the sergeant of the night duty gang there, and ordered out his ship, fueled to capacity.

CHAPTER IX DEATH IN THE FOG

OVER THE SEA the fog was drifting. There were lowering clouds in the late night sky, sagging heavy and motionless above the black fleeing Fokker that was droning steadily northward. And now there was that fog also, which for the hour past had been moving in eerie ribbons over the water below.

Two o'clock, by the Gallows captain's watch. The latter end of the short black summer night. He had been at the stick for an hour and a half, flying straight by compass through the night.

Between the low, heavy roof of rain cloud and the creeping sea fog, the black ship with its skull-and-white-crow battle insignia seemed motionless in the night. Yet it was making knots. A quarter mile off its left wing, the string of low flat islands that lay there were steadily drifting by. A patch of land. An open sea space. And then a ribbon of low black land once more.

The scar-faced captain of the *Galgenvögel* had passed the Hook of Holland at the Rhine's mouth long ago. Passed Haarlem and Helder like a wild goose going north. Those long flat islands moving by off his left wing were the Dutch Frisians—Texel and Vlieland and a hundred more. Anton Glick had spent a summer in this neighborhood as a boy. He remembered obscurely its general lie. That water below him was the Zuider Zee. Beyond it, beyond the barrier of the Frisians lying to the westward, was the empty North Sea without an end.

Along almost this same course, though Anton Glick could not have remotely guessed it, a lost and battered Camel had come four hours before, thinking it was heading south, deceived by the low black shadow of those islands there on its left wing.

But Anton Glick had no suspicion nor intimation of that other ship which had flown along this same fatal course. For the first time in many months, he was in the air without the image and dread of the great dangerous Yankee ace from Kirchenhafen being constantly in his thoughts. Without watching every cloud for the silver lightning of Blair's wings. Kenny Blair was lost. And life seemed happier and more carefree because of it.

"After all," he thought, "hell's no place for a gentleman, if Blair's checked in there now."

His motor coughed and strangled for an instant. Then took up its full loud beat again, so quickly that only a watchful ear would have noticed that dropped thunder. It was the fourth or fifth time it had happened, since the Gallows captain had been in the air. Some tiny bit of lint or wood splinter was lodged in the petrol strainer, he diagnosed it. No serious trouble. Just enough to make the big, powerful, trustworthy Mercedes give that rasping cough about once every thirty miles or so, like a man with a grain of dust in his wind pipe. It could be cleared out in thirty seconds on the ground.

All the same, he wasn't on the ground. He didn't like

that fugitive cough. Nothing to be done about it though. Already he was a hundred and fifty knots or better from home, as the black Fokker flies. He must keep on.

THAT old head wound of his was troubling him. He had queer thoughts. In the wisps of fog that crept along the sea he half imagined at times that he saw ships steaming. Swift British ships of war, steaming up in battle line along the black flat islands. Time and again he had that same delusion. But when he looked again, there was nothing.

It was not quite time enough to meet them.

"Half a million marks," he thought speculatively. "That's only twenty-five thousand pounds in their filthy money. Would they pay it? Well, they ought to, and glad of the chance. *Herr* Fetter said they'd pay millions. And he would know."

The Gallows captain had only the half coherent words that the naval officer Fetter had gabbled in his drunkenness, to guide him in the wild goose flight he was making now. Yet for a man who knew something of strategy, and a great deal of war, as did Anton Glick, those gabbled words, penetrating into his subconsciousness as he sat brooding and half listening, were enough to give a picture of a tremendous sea battle now in process of making.

Racing up past the Dutch West Frisians toward Heligoland Bight, the drunken naval intelligence man had said, the British scouting fleet was scheduled to be coming in its swift raiding dash. Fetter had not named the hour when they were due to reach their objective, it was true, nor the exact point at which the great battleships of von Tirpitz's High Seas fleet were laying their trap to meet the swift light-armored cruisers and cut them off. It was possible Fetter hadn't known those details. All the same, with the amount of information which he had hiccuped, the rest of the picture could be filled in. It would be somewhere this side of Heligoland that the trap would be sprung for the Limeys. And they must be well on their way there by now.

They would be steaming fast. Keeling up through the black night at better than twenty-seven or twenty-eight knots, over the low black tide. No wallowing dreadnaughts among them, to hold their speed back. All of them greyhounds of the sea—vulnerable, but fast as sharks. They needed speed and surprise to make the raid, and hammer, and get away before the devil got them. They would have the speed, all right. But it was the High Seas fleet that would be giving the surprise.

Ach! the thrill of it.

“It would be a sight to watch and never forget,” thought the Gallows captain. “If it should happen. All the big dachshunds pouncing on those rats. Suddenly. Cutting them off from home. No holes for the rats to run to. All of them helpless, running in circles. Smashed, broken. Foundering one by one. And the big guns hammering them like tin cans, till they sank.”

It was an exhilarating picture to imagination, for a German. For the moment he forgot that, if he succeeded in the mad and desperate venture which had brought him out over this far off water, the picture would be spoiled.

He ought to be picking up the enemy raiding force presently, traveling four knots to its one. Assuming that it had started from its base at Harwich at nightfall, just after the setting of the thin new moon. Going full speed, hour by hour through the brief black summer night as the tide ebbed, it would be somewhere in this latitude by now, strewn out with smoking funnels and boiling wakes in battle line across the sea.

Not inside the chain of islands, of course. Not in Dutch territorial waters. But out seaward, to the west. It was time for the Gallows ace to head for deeper waters. Watching his luminous compass, he heeled his black ship over to the port, forty degrees by the card.

THE long flat Dutch island that had been on his left wing drifted toward him and came sliding below him now. It wasn't one of the greater Frisians. Two kilometers long by a kilometer or so wide, it was little better than a sandy bunker standing against the steady assaults of the North Sea, one of the hundreds of obscure and nameless isles along that slowly vanishing coast, doomed in the next fifty years or less to be washed out beneath the tide. So far as the Gallows captain saw as he went roaring over it, it was not even inhabited by a solitary fisherman or any of the half savage and wholly murderous little gangs of sea-scavengers who sometimes took refuge from the law on the more remote of the islands, getting their living by salvaging flotsam and robbing the bodies of the drowned. No boats upon the shore. No chimney smoke, no gleam of light from ramshackle huts of driftwood. Fog in the hollows of the sand dunes. Fog creeping along the water's edge, with a hunched furtive look, like an old woman creeping down an alley in the night. The tide was dead low at this hour. The beach was strewn a hundred yards wide with weed and driftwood and jetsam of all kinds.

A dismal graveyard.

Cutting northwest across the sea-bitten little island, the black Fokker skimmed the dunes. On the farther shore there were long white comber ranks, thin and straight as chalk marks, breaking far out in the shallows and crawling endlessly up the shore. That was the North Sea itself ahead of the Gallows captain now—a thousand miles of empty water stretching north to Iceland and the fringes of the Arctic sea.

For the seventh or eighth time, as he headed out over that immense and stormy water, Anton Click's roaring Mercedes gave its quick ghostly cough, and he cursed it, as if it had been a balky horse.

He shook his control stick savagely. “Don't try any of those tricks on me!” he shouted aloud above his engine's bellowing. “Whether you like it or don't like it, we're going on!”

Nevertheless, his heart had given a quick cold jerk in his breast, in response to the skipped beat of the big Mercedes, and for a long minute afterwards he felt numb in every limb. This was not the land-locked Zuider bay, with the Dutch shore always in gliding range. He had left land behind him now. Had left the continent and Europe. It was the cold black endless ocean in front of him. And he was not a seaman. He had a morbid and irrational dread of all big waters. He did not allow the sea to terrify him, yet God knows he did not like it. He did not like its smell. He hated its lifelessness and gray monotony, its silence and mystery, and most of all he hated the thought of the strange cold sea-beasts which live in the slime and darkness underneath, and which no living man has ever seen. Anton Glick's feeling toward the ocean was like the fear of ghosts that some brave men can never overcome, or the terror of a forest at night which affects many other men. It was not the same thing at all as a simple fear of death. It was an eerie strangling terror without reason. Glick himself did not understand it. But he knew that if the choice were ever placed before him, he would far rather be burned alive than drowned.

IF HE had been able to, he would have climbed two miles into the dark night sky above that lonesome water. The air was his roost. It was never too high and thin. There was something in altitude, in being at the roof of things, which elevated his heart. Yet two hundred meters was the most he could do now. The lowering cloud began entangling him even at that elevation, and he had to edge his wings down fifty feet.

The water below his fleeing black ship was crackled with little wavelets, and occasionally a white-cap threw

up its sharp quick crest. Yet it was comparatively a quiet surface. There was only a little wind in movement, just enough to break up the long tangled ribbons of vapor that were condensing on the waves, and keep them from forming a solid blanket. It was altogether an empty and a ghostly picture. With straining eyes the Gallows captain watched as far as the dark horizons reached for some faintest smoke trail from the British raiding fleet smudging the low cloudy sky, and for the moving track of swift white foam that would mark hard-driven keels racing furiously to their unwarned death.

The impulsive and desperate decision which had suddenly occurred to the *Galgenvögel* ace as he sat brooding in his squadron office, sunk in thoughts of suicide and dishonor, and which had impelled him to hop off on this long lonely flight over a remote and desolate sea, involved a plan as simple in detail as it was bold and desperate. It was to seek out the British fleet as it made north toward Heligoland Bight, and sell it the information that its approach was known, and that a trap had been laid for it.

Knowing the enemy ships' course, it oughtn't to be difficult to pick them up. Once he had located them, he would have to drop into the water in a squash landing two or three hundred meters ahead of the leading ship of the formation, firing a signal rocket as he went down to attract attention. Pancaking into the water was the hard part. He didn't like the thought of it. Still, he could count on keeping afloat safely for eight or ten minutes at the least, after he had pancaked in, and probably much longer, with his now depleted petrol tanks to buoy him up. That would be ample time for one of the Limey ships to lose way and pick him up with a flare-buoy as she came drifting down alongside.

He could count on the Limeys being sure to do their part. They would not pass him by, leaving him there to founder and drown. Not as a humanitarian gesture necessarily, but as an imperative war measure, they would want to get hold of him. For information.

To learn why he was there. Once having been taken aboard one of the enemy cruisers, he would have to rely on whatever cold business ability he had, and on the Limeys' own shrewd sense of values, to bargain with the enemy commanders for a reward.

A half million marks and a free return to Ostend, if he would give them information that would save their damned precious gang of assassin ships from a trap and annihilation.

No less a price, no more.

IT WOULD be worth it to them—and ten thousand times over. If they struck the bargain with him, they would keep it. Damn the Limeys, hide and hoof. But all the same, give the devils their due. They were good business men. They knew how to pay high and liberally for value received.

Half a million gold marks, and his freedom to rejoin his squadron in Belgium after the Limey ships had landed him in England. With the cash to pay off that damned staff general, and save his honor. Well, perhaps it was a queer way to think of saving his honor, Anton Glick admitted to himself somberly. But he would save the public breaking of his sword, anyway, and open disgrace. He would pay the filthy Jew pawnbroker off to the last pfennig, and then slap him with a glove across his dirty face.

"After all," he told himself bitterly, "after all, if there is any treachery in it, the dirty pawnbroker's to blame for making me do it."

Anyway, he was Anton Glick, and that meant something. No other man his equal in the air. He was damned if he wasn't worth as much to the Fatherland as a victory over a handful of Limey cruisers. He would make it all right as soon as he had got back at the head of his *Galgenvögel* flight, by fighting twice as hard, by bringing down four times as many of the flying Tommies as heretofore. And that wouldn't be so hard to do, now that Blair and his sneaking silver ship were no longer to be dreaded in the sky.

His problem was to find the Limey cruisers now, and strike a bargain with them. Say the worst about the British that could be said, still they always kept their word when once they gave it. Even with traitors and spies.

Gott, what a hellish way to be thinking of himself! Glick of the Gallows Birds, a fighting man, turned Judas!

Still, he was choosing the better course, he tried to persuade himself. Better for Germany. Better for the honor of his squadron. He had been forced into doing it. He had rather be a live dog than a dead lion, as he had told Horst Stollweg.

But his thoughts were queer and confused. That old head wound was bad tonight.

THE emptiness of the waters below him, the eternal treacherous fog creeping on the sea, were beginning to oppress Anton Glick. There was something like a strangling grip not far from his wind-pipe, all the time. He took deep slow breaths of the night wind that rushed past his cowl like a hurricane, but still

that choked and strangling feeling only grew worse. He was making out farther over the water than he had expected would be necessary, zigzagging in ten mile stretches northwest, then northeast and east. Covering the sea up along the Frisians. Still no sign of any ship. He had counted on picking up the steaming Limey fleet before this. It had seemed a simple job to locate a moving battle squadron composed of a dozen or more ships, if they were anywhere within a hundred miles of him. And it would have been simple, if he had had altitude and daylight. Yet in the darkness of the sea and sky, forced to wing low above the waves, he was beginning to be afraid that he might miss them altogether, even though they should go racing by within as little distance as five miles.

However, the end of the short black summer night would be coming soon. There was no sign of it yet, to be sure. The eastern horizon was still completely black. But the end of the night was due to break. Not yet, though.

The Gallows captain was fifteen minutes or more out from the Zuider Zee and that desolate little dune-covered barrier island on his erratic course, when a tiny light came up over the sea, miles to the west of him. He sighted it at once. Laying his Fokker over on its ear, he cut toward the approaching ship like a hungry hawk down the sky.

The ship's light winkled, sparkled like a rapid star. It was a searchlight blinker on a foremast, signalling with far off code. Not a merchantman. A merchant ship would not be signalling with lights. Nor was it a German ship of war. None of von Tirpitz's great cautious sea dogs would be ranging this far to the westward, remote from their bases in case of trouble.

"There they come!" thought the Gallows captain. "And like the devil."

Below the horizon curve another searchlight, from another warship, sparkled dimly, following the first. Both ships were making on up the Frisian coast, as nearly as the Fokker ace could estimate their course. Perhaps there were other ships besides those two in the squadron, though they were the only ones whose lights Anton Glick saw.

They were coming on at nearly thirty knots, gleaming far off with masthead and running lights and lights amidships, as well as those shuttering blinkers. All dressed up like Christmas trees. He couldn't miss them. Across the low sky he raced toward them at nearly two knots a minute.

CHAPTER X MAROONED

THE MOMENT AND THE EVENT that he had planned for were near at hand, the Gallows captain told himself fiercely.

His heart seemed hard and tight in his breast, with excitement and suspense. From a half mile away he could see the dark outline of the leading warship moving on beneath the fog veils, its masts and high-built conning tower, its pitching bow that threw the boiling sea apart in two white ranks of spume, its lighted masts and midships lights shining eerily, and the gray fog ghosts drifting palely across its decks. The second ship a thousand feet behind steamed on in even line.

When first the Fokker ace in the sky had spotted their lights, they must have been seven or ten miles off. But they ate down the seaways, and four times as fast he went toward them across the sky. The leading ship was below him in four minutes.

With half throttled motor Anton Glick droned over, six hundred feet in the black air. Below him he could see the dark forms of men on the cruiser's decks pausing and staring up motionless, half curious, half alarmed, hearing that buzzing in the sky, yet not quite believing their senses.

The shuttering searchlights signed off their chin-chin on both ships. The pale beams moved up at the cloud ceiling. They felt around for the droning Fokker, haphazardly and awkwardly. But Glick knew all the tricks of dodging lights.

The fog wreaths rolled, and the ships kept on their even course through the black sea. The Gallows captain rehearsed again in his mind the act that he had planned to stage—the pancake landing into the sea, the rocket shot for help, the bargain with the British fleet commanders after they had picked him up. Slicing around in a tight boring spiral above those two swift keeling ships, he ran through again every detail as he had planned it, while half a second of time passed.

And he knew that it was entirely possible to do. But he knew now that he would never do it.

He opened up his half throttled engine with a bellow. He pushed his black Fokker's bow straight

down. He had the quarterdeck of the leading warship straight in his Maxim ringsight as he went hurtling down at it in a roaring headlong dive.

“*Zum Teufel, Ihr Gott verdammte Englischer See-
räuber!*” he yelled. “Keep on! You’re going to get yours plenty! And don’t mind me!”

HE KNEW now that he could never stand on the deck of a British warship—humbly, with bared head, twisting his helmet in his hands like a beggar—offering to sell the Fatherland for a cash price, while all the cold sneering Limey officers looked on at him and called him a dog to his face. No, he could not go through with it, though it was to do that very thing that he had made this long wild goose flight far from home over the northern sea. But it was too much against the grain. He could not stand the shame of it. He had his pride. A man never knows what he will do or be unable to do until he puts himself to the test.

“Go on, you sons of swine!”

He resisted his impulse to open up his Maxims as he shot down. He might have sprayed a few of those black frozen figures on the warship’s decks. But on the whole he would have done the tough little fighting ship no harm, and himself no good. It was better not to frighten them. To let them believe that this unseen roaring ship of his was a far-wandering British naval airman from another detachment of their fleet. If he peppered them it would only warn them, and perhaps cause them to turn back from the trap they were running into.

Twenty feet high he rushed across the little cruiser’s quarterdeck like a black wind, eating her belching smoke, and snapped over on his ear above the taffrail before any eye aboard her could have seen his battle markings. Shooting down to the sea, he went hurtling like a rocket low up past her beam, with wheels that skipped the waves.

The fog wreaths rolled. There were bright reflector lights set over the cruiser’s rails amidships, gleaming down over her black sides toward the water. And there on the bulge of her midships hull, clear in the light, a huge flag of horizontal stripes was painted, red, white, and blue. The Dutch flag. She was a Dutch warship. With that sister ship of hers behind, no doubt she was the whole cursed Dutch navy. Out on patrol, the both of them, with their lights and their conspicuous neutral markings, guarding the sanctity of their territorial waters.

Men lined her rails, waving their hands across their

blind eyes, staring out through the fog at the black-winged shadow that went past them like a bat across the scum and heave of the sea. They shouted comical words that could not be heard. They blew smoke rings from their big peaceful pipes.

A pair of Dutch ships, that was all. And the ace of the *Galgenvögel* had come perilously near to making a fool of himself with them.

HE HAULED his bow toward the sky.

With an oath at all Dutchmen, Scandinavians, and other such peaceful fish, he zoomed with roaring club. Long seconds after he had streaked away like black lightning headed home, the waddling Dutchman awoke and opened up indignantly with a salvo of two bow guns. Wow-row! she barked. Like a fat sleeping dog, suddenly surprised and alarmed by some bad dream. Heading back shoreward below the cloud, the Gallows captain watched the fat outraged little ship and her tailing consort boil over in their own wakes, and go lumbering out seaward again into the fog, still talking back and forth with their searchlights, stuttering with anger, mad as wet hens. Till their lights went below the sea rim and they had vanished in the west.

A combatant warship, German or enemy, would not be showing any lights, and certainly would not be talking with blinker code that could be seen ten miles away, Glick realized. They would be harder to locate than that.

And he was through with hunting for the doomed Britishers now. That old wound in his head had ceased to trouble him. Thank God that he was a German officer, and would not be a Judas.

He was far from home. Too far to make it back with the petrol supply still remaining to him. He had come on a wild and useless venture which had blown up, and it was time to change his course. It was solid land he wanted to see beneath his wings again, and nothing else mattered.

“I’ve been a fool,” he thought. “A *verdammte* one.”

Fortunately, though he was out of range of the Gallows field back at Ostend, he was in range of Germany itself. Norderney at the mouth of the Ems river, where there was a seaplane station, should be less than fifty miles away. He could hop there in half an hour, and be there by dawn.

He found himself planning ways to explain his wild night flight from the Gallows field. Perhaps he could invent some great heroic story, such as that he had

pursued and sunk a British submarine, or something of that sort, which would cause his name to become suddenly famous over Germany, and make the money grubbing brass hat who held his I.O.U. afraid and shamed to bring him up before a court of honor for a Jew's debt. After all, there was always some way out of any jam, as he himself had remarked to Horst Stollweg. Generally there were several ways. The only trouble was, a man didn't think of them at first.

His financial troubles seemed to be growing less with perspective. He realized that he had overrated them. Even though he didn't pay, the worst that the emperor would do to him would be to give a reprimand, he decided. It wasn't worth suiciding to avoid that.

He was heading back toward shore. The dark night clouds above him were slowly lifting, and in the east ahead he imagined that he saw the faintest pearl gray paling of the dawn. Below him, though the sea fog was closing in. Again his motor missed. . . .

THE night was still so dark, the surface was so obscured by the gray vapor then, that the Gallows captain might very easily have passed over the shadow of that tiny sunken sand bar without seeing it. It was only because of the thin white curl of foam that was slowly washing up on its windward shore that his attention was attracted to its presence in the sea.

His big sturdy Mercedes had coughed again. No worse than before, perhaps. No differently. Still, he had decided not to risk it further without repairing it, if he could help it. He was looking for a lonely beach on which he could make a quick landing and clean out the choked petrol lead, and get away into the air again before the Dutch coast patrol caught him to intern him. A thousand or twelve hundred feet high beneath the lifting rain cloud, he looked overside and saw the dim white curl of foam breaking on the sea below, and curling back again, beneath the fog.

It was land. Whether the Dutch mainland already, or just another of the outlying Frisians, he wasn't sure. Still, it was the first breaking surf he had seen in half an hour, since striking out from the last island. He cut his throttle. With humming load wires and muttering club he went slicing down, on one wing and then on the other, to see if there was a beach that he could drop to, with a clear get away.

The fog was coming in like a blanket, a hundred feet thick. He had come slicing and slipping down on top of it before he could make out the shadow of

the land below, charcoal black against the gleaming blackness of the water.

It was not the mainland. It was not even a real island. Just a long treeless and grassless strip of flat sea-washed sand bar, not more than fifty feet wide and perhaps six or eight hundred feet long, exposed by the dead low tide, and soon to be covered up again beneath the flood.

Beneath the fog Anton Glick had got only a partial glimpse of the sunken sand bar. But it was not for him, he knew. He opened up his throttle with a slam of his fist, pulling his wings steep back.

"No, thanks!" he thought.

But this time the engine did not respond on the instant. The petrol lead had choked again, and at a fatal moment. *Pfui!* it coughed. The speed was spilling out of the black Fokker's wings instantly, and she was wobbling at the stalling point; tail down, with tilted wings. Wildly the scar-faced Gallows captain jammed her nose down to pick up flying speed. The crinkling sea and the black tide-swept sand bar were fifty feet below him. They came sweeping up through the fog at him like the side of a house, and his wheels were in the sea before he knew it.

Swish-sh! the water said.

ALL things considered—the suddenness of the motor failure, the fog and darkness, and the stalling position of his ship when it began to pancake—it was a quick and skilful recovery Glick had made. On two wheels he sliced across the waves. His tires splashed into the sea's edge and went rolling up on the hard flat sand, traveling fast, tail high. It was a flashing two-point landing, and he would have made it safely, and perhaps have gotten off again in due course, if his big Mercedes had not opened up again at that moment with a headlong bellow, as quickly as it had died.

It caught with a roar, throttle full open, while the Fokker's tail was high. She was skimming the sand like a sandpiper, with too much speed. She lurched forward on her nose with the first jerk of the club, tilting her tail to the sky. The propeller blade snapped off like a matchstick, killing her engine with three coughs. Tail up, nose down, the black Fokker bore down on her broken club like an ostrich about to take a somersault. And she came within an inch of doing it. Her wheels left the sand, then settled back again.

The Gallows captain was flung against his belt. The snapping of the mahogany-blade had been like the cracking of his own heart. That was all the damage

he had taken, but he might as well have been a total wreck.

Marooned on the drowned sand.

The lonely sea around him, the fog wreaths rolling. Through the drifting obscurity there were shadows of men. Captain Glick was springing out heavily onto the sea-bitten sand, that was hard as clay beneath his boots, when he suddenly caught sight of those vague forms in the mist.

He staggered on his lame leg, catching his balance as he came to ground. He saw five or six of those dim ghostly shapes at once, within ten to fifty feet away from him. Men in striped jerseys, tattered coats, sea boots or bare-footed. The Gallows ace had a flashing retrospective impression that these shadowy forms had all been crawling across the sand, engaged in stalking some animal or man, when he swooped down into the midst of them on his humming black wings. They were just arising, as surprised as he was. They had all turned toward him, half crouching, stiff as stone figures. He caught the glimpse of matted bearded cheeks and glaring eyes. There was something odd and stiff in the postures of those motionless stony statues standing in the fog. And immediately Glick realized that most of them were carrying unsheathed clasp knives in their fists, with the blades turned toward him, and that the nearest one of them was lifting a shotgun in his hands.

“ZURUCK!” he croaked. “*Was geht’s?*”

He meant to tell them that he was a German officer. That he was Captain Glick of the Fokkers 44th. But he didn’t have time for explanations. And they wouldn’t have understood him, nor have cared.

Some one of them screamed an unknown savage word. Anton Glick had hardly had time to see them. He had barely got his feet on ground. The man with the shotgun snapped the weapon to his shoulder and blazed away from ten feet off. A red flash. The echoes roared through the fog. The zinging load of pellets went tearing between the Fokker’s wings, and something stung the Gallows ace on the cheek as he dropped.

His lame leg had buckled underneath him before he saw the gun flash. And that had saved his life. He was reaching for his big Mauser automatic as he went down. All those murderous shapes were yelling to each other. His gun was caught in its holster. He jerked it out. Before he could get it cocked and leveled the whole ghostly gang were running like rats. Splashing out into the sea with swift staggering strides. There

was some kind of a boat out there, about a hundred feet off. Glick could just make out a bit of its mast and sail in the fog. Screeching like pigs, the splashing shapes faded away through the shallow water, and there was none of them worth taking a shot at.

“Hello?” a voice croaked in English.

Up the sand bar through the fog a man in uniform loomed into view. He came at a staggering zigzag, with his head weaving from side to side. His black hair was matted with blood and sand. His broad face was white. His blue uniform with its brass buttons had been soaked and then partly dried on his body, clinging to him in wrinkled folds. He was wearing the gold wings of the British naval flying service on his breast.

He came weaving toward the burly Gallows captain with his stumbling feet and swaying head, with a big British navy Webley dangling in one lax fist. There was a fixed grin on his lips, like on the face of a man blind drunk. And it was sure that he did not recognize Glick’s uniform nor the black Gallows Fokker ship behind the German ace.

On he staggered.

“Hello, air?” he croaked, with his blind idiotic grin. “I thought maybe you’d find—”

The gold stripes and looped gold cord on his sleeves were those of a British naval commander. He was a prize bird. Anton Glick had never met the great captain of the Nineteenth Naval Scouts face to face before. But he had seen pictures of him, and he had no doubt of this man’s identity.

“Blair!” he croaked. “The Zep-strafer!”

CHAPTER XI TWO BULLETS



HERE the devil is this place?” said Kenny Blair. “The Dutch Frisians, eh? How far from shore?”

“Miles,” said Anton Glick. “Maybe ten. Maybe thirty. It is what the Dutchmen call a Halligen, Commander. A sand bar. The sea builds it up yet, and then washes it away again next year. They are all over under these waters. Some of them never showing. Some that show a little at low tide, like this one. Now we are dry for a little while. But when the tide is full, it will be different.”

The Gallows ace sat shivering on the hard wet sand, with his arms about his knees, staring at the empty sea while the dawn paled. He had thrown off the big, domelike crash helmet from his head. He buried his face on his knees a moment, and pulled at his hair with both hands, as if he would like to pull it and his head with it away from its roots.

"*Gott im Himmel!*" he said. "To wait hours for it to come in yet, and drown us like rats! I would rather be burning in a hot bonfire."

His English was good. Like most educated Germans, he had studied the language in school. There was only a faint guttural note in his speech.

"It was pretty deep, that's true, almost over my ship, when I splashed into it four or five hours ago," said Kenny Blair. "I thought it was going to swamp me sure, I'll admit. But it was ebbing then, and kept on ebbing. So maybe we'll ride it out again, if some help doesn't come before then."

"No help will come, and we will not ride it out, my friend," said Glick. "It is the slack of the dead low now. It is ready to turn again. And it will flood, and keep on flooding. Higher than it was four or five hours ago when you dropped in. Then it was already past its flood. But six and a quarter hours from now, at half past eight, high tide. The spring tide. Twice as strong. It will be above the tops of our ships, that wreck of yours down there and my good Fokker, and tire sea will bury them both together."

"Old man sea makes strange bedfellows," said Kenny Blair with a pale grin. "You and me, Glick."

"Alone on this last corner of hell with the great Kenny Blair," said the scarfaced Gallows captain with a bitter nod. "Undoubtedly it is a distinction."

"There's no other man than me that you'd rather drown with, is that it?" grinned the Camel ace.

FAR in the east the pearl-gray dawn was taking a tinge of rose. The morning fog was slowly lifting. It stood at ten feet high above the water in a white ceiling, and through its folds the clearing sky shone faintly blue, while storm clouds rolled away. Below the roof of low white vapor the North Sea stretched endlessly flat and glassy. It would be a morning of heat and haze, of water vapor steaming up over a baking sea. A burning, blistering noon, eventually, that would fry crabs upon the sand.

But long before the noon should come, this little narrow strip of sand would be beneath the tide.

"Too bad you snapped your prop," said Kenny Blair

coolly. "It's not a bad take-off here. And one of us might have got away for help then. Well, maybe some Dutchman or Limey will barge along, anyway, and pick us up."

He yawned, and once more felt the row of cigarets which he had laid out beside him to dry, though without much hope. They were still gray and sodden.

"I'd like a smoke," he said. "Then maybe I could think."

The dawn was growing rosy. The white mist steamed over the sea. There was no land in sight for fifteen miles, though the surface of the water was visible now to remote distances. Along the far-off horizons there was a narrow silver shine like the edge of a beveled mirror. Dawn mirage. Once or twice Kenny Blair had thought he saw smokes crawling below the sky rim far in the south, though it was hard to be sure because of the false water shine, and it really made no difference.

Except for the ancient little Dutch sailing vessel lying motionless and with canvas furled on the glassy, windless sea four or five hundred feet off the sandbar, there was no ship above the horizon. And there was not apt to be any. This corner of the sea with its hidden banks and shallows was not an inviting water, and it was off the lane of traffic into the *Zuider Zee*. The little boat off shore was all.

IT WAS a moldy looking craft, black and oozing with pitch, half decked over, about twenty-five feet long, with a heavy, stubby bow, and a single mast carrying a fore-and-aft sail which was now furled. The tip of the mast pierced into the low-lying blanket of white fog that covered the hazy scene. The little boat did nothing. It lay there. Whether it was a yawl, pinnace, ketch, schooner, sloop or catboat, Kenny Blair didn't know. He was a sailor, but a sky sailor. He had had to acquaint himself with all the details of ships of war and naval matters to qualify for his commission in the flying navy. He knew a British "Tribal" destroyer from a German "Cities" two miles up and ten sea miles away. But his knowledge of small boats and sailing craft was elementary. Even the scar-faced Gallows captain, with his hatred and dread of salt water, had a better fund of knowledge than he had.

There were no men visible on the ugly little Dutch boat. But they were there, all right. The rudder was moved softly over to starboard, and held there. Some unseen hand warped the swinging yard with its furled canvas halfway across the deck. Sly movements. No man in sight.

Motionless and lifeless the black boat lay on the offshore water. But Kenny Blair had the sensation of shrewd, desperate eyes fixed on him from behind the ship's black sides.

"What are they waiting for, Captain?" he said.

"For the tide to come over us," said the Gallows captain grimly. "They'll float over and fish us up then at leisure, like a couple of drowned rats from a tub. I think it's our guns they want particularly. Guns are the hardest thing to get. They've only got one fowling-piece among the gang of them, it looks like. Otherwise they'd have rushed us long ago. So they're willing to wait for the weapons. That's one kind of flotsam that doesn't often fall their way. It's a prize catch."

He shrugged, staring at the sea with his deep sunken eyes. The young Camel ace watched him curiously.

"What do they want the guns for?" Kenny said.

"What does any man want a gun for?" said Glick with a shrug. "To kill each other off in their spare moments, maybe. To murder any ship's small boat crew that might happen to be washed up on their beach, and that might be too many for them to polish off with clubs and rocks."

"Nice fellows," said Kenny.

"Sea-scavengers," said the Gallows captain. "Jail birds and army deserters. Riff-raff from all over the seas. They roost on the outside islands, and live off whatever the sea brings in. There're several gangs of them. They've got a language all their own. The Dutch authorities used to clean them up once in a while, I remember, and bundle them off to jail. But the Dutch have bigger troubles now, I guess. And maybe they've decided it isn't worth while. There are always more of those fellows, however often they're cleaned out."

He spat.

"They'll wait," he added.

"The sons of lice woke me up," said Kenny. "I'd been hanging onto my ship for hours, about frozen to death and half cuckoo. When the tide went out I just plopped down on the sand and lay there. Dead to the world for a couple of hours. I woke up, and this gang of ghouls and grave-robbers were all around me, looting everything they could from the poor old Camel, and ripping open my pockets. One of them had grabbed hold of my left hand and had a knife out. He was going to cut off my finger to get my ring. It's a real ruby, and worth dough. I suppose they thought I was dead, or they'd have run a knife across my throat to begin with, and I'd never have known the difference.

I woke up with a jump and a yell, and grabbed my gun. They ran like rats in the fog. I guess they waded back to the boat for that shotgun of theirs, and were starting after me again when you dropped down like a bat."

He whistled softly, thinking of that gruesome moment when he had awakened, with the murderous ghouls around him in the mist. It was as near to an idea of hell as he could think of. And that's where he had thought he was at first. His mind was clearer now.

THE sea-scavengers' black boat was drifting slowly and quietly in some lazy ocean current. It was moving about a yard a minute down along the narrow sand bar, toward the other end, where six hundred feet away through the mist the wreck of Kenny Blair's silver Camel lay on its broken wing.

"I could swim out and try to get their boat," Kenny reflected. "But of course they'd bat me over the head. And that's all the good it would do!"

"I can't swim," said Glick.

"Do you suppose it would do any good to take a couple of pot shots at their bulwarks?" said the young Camel ace speculatively. "Of course, it's out of decent pistol range. But you might chip some wood up, and maybe wing one of them a ricochet. If we scared them enough with a little loose lead, we might bluff them into hauling in and ferrying us to shore."

"I doubt if it would be very effective, unless you're a better man with a pistol than I am, my friend," said the Gallows ace somberly. "And I'm not bad. However, you might try it, and see what happens."

"I've only got two slugs left in my gun," Kenny apologized. "And if those buzzards did come in, I'd need them. I hate to throw away the last ounce of lead. Give them a couple, yourself." Anton Glick's bearded lips twisted in a grin. He reached down and pulled out his big Mauser from its holster. Carefully he laid it across his knees, and unlocked the magazine clip, pulling it out. The clip was empty.

"I ordered my batman to clean my gun last night," he said. "I think he must have imagined I was going to suicide. He emptied it, I've found." Kenny Blair whistled.

"A pair of bullets between the two of us!" he said. "We'll have to save them."

"I trust that you will save one of them for me, my friend," said the Gallows captain quietly. "In four hours. When the water has reached to my chin. When there is no more hope. I will regard it as an act of generosity. I will be your friend through hell. For I am

a man who can face death in the sky coolly and with equanimity. Commander Blair, as I think that I have proved on various occasions. But I cannot face a slow strangling by the damned rotten waters of the filthy sea. There's something inside of me that goes sick at the thought of it."

HIS dull and level voice had grown harsher and more violent as he spoke. His look as he glared at the keen-eyed young Camel ace was wild.

"I cannot face it, Blair!" he repeated, in tones of rising agony, half incoherently. "I ask you, don't let me have to face such a *verdammte* filthy strangling!"

He was breathing heavily, as if already he felt the cold rising sea clutching at his throat. He seized the young Camel ace by the knee, with a bruising grip of his fist.

"Promise me, my friend!" he said. "Save one for me!"

"Oh, jerk out of it!" said Kenny Blair. "You're not drowned yet, ace." However, he understood in part and sympathized with the stony-eyed Gallows captain's terror. He himself was afraid of fire, and always had his gun ready in the air, if his ship began to burn. Every man has his terrors.

"Your promise!" said Glick.

"Well, I'll be damned if I'd shoot any man cold-bloodedly in the head, to save him from being drowned," said Kenny irritably. "I figure that whatever way the Big Guy has arranged for anybody to pop off is the way you ought to pop. And not take matters in your own hands. Stick it out to the last. Still, I suppose if my ship was on fire, and nothing else to do—"

He picked up Glick's gun and looked at it.

"The caliber?" he said.

"Eleven-five," said Glick. "Millimeters."

"Eleven-five millimeters," said Kenny with a whistle, doing some quick arithmetic. "Well, that's the same as my old navy Webley .455 within one-thousandth of an inch. So I guess that your big Mauser ought to be able to digest one of my slugs."

He had extracted one of the cartridges from his revolver. He weighed it in his palm, and passed it to the Gallows ace.

"A fifty-fifty split, old ace," he said with a twisted grin. "It's all I've got to give you. I don't advise you to try bouncing that off your head unless you mean it to hurt. What you do with it is between you and your God."

Anton Glick nodded.

"Not except in case of necessity, Commander," he said drily, as he slipped the slug into his Mauser.

He closed the breech and cocked it. "Yes," he said. "It fits."

CHAPTER XII THE SCAVENGERS

ON THE SOUTHERN HORIZON there was that smoke again, beneath the low white mist, far away in the false glimmering water shine that lay along the sea rim. It was not a mirage now. It was the smoke of many ships, moving fast eastward along the Frisians.

"Look at that!" said Kenny. "Don't give up hope. There's some ship bound to turn up yet."

But the Gallows captain shrugged. "They'll pass too far away," he said. "They'll never see us. They're hugging the islands. They're doing us no good."

"I'm afraid you're right," the young naval ace admitted. "They're sliding by, toward Heligoland. And going like the devil himself was after them."

Crouching on the sand, he looked around the sky, with his keen blue eyes all wrinkled up. In the fading darkness of the west, as the dawn brightened, he saw now another ribbon of smoke trailing along the curved sky rim over there. It was bigger, it was nearer than the smoke ribbon in the south, for the ships in the south were fifteen miles away, but the ships in the west were not more than six or eight. Slowly along the western sky in the cobweb darkness beneath the white mist roof, that smudgy smoke went walking on the sea like a cat with nineteen tails.

"Warships!" said the Camel ace softly, staring at the smoke in the west. "And plenty of them! I'll eat my shirt if it's not your whole damned High Seas fleet, Glick."

The Gallows ace looked over his shoulder. The ships in the west were hull-up on the sea.

"How can you identify them?"

"Why, the way they're moving, and the smoke they're making! They're all big ships, and they're not Limeys! That's a Hun battle line! The High Seas fleet is out from Kiel, and there's a big fight making up!"

"Those are the German ships?" said the Gallows ace, staring westward with somber eyes.

"You can bet your pants they're krauts, ace!"

"Then that must be the British scouting fleet in the south, in that case," said Glick.

"The British scouting fleet!" said Kenny Blair excitedly. "Steaming along as if they were in their own backyard, with all those big Hun babies prowling! Great jumping Jupiter, if those big ships of yours ever catch sight of them, they'll be cut off and murdered!"

"That's what our ships are out for. Commander," said Anton Glick with a cool grin. "That's the program."

Kenny Blair stared at him.

"YOUR scouting fleet is heading up for a raid on Heligoland Bight, Blair," the Gallows ace explained. "Quick and fast. Hammer and clean the Bight of all small ships, and get away. But they're not going to get away. Our big ships are out of Kiel. They're going to cut you off. They're going to hammer your sweet little Limey raiders with flatirons and big guns, till there's not one ship left of them."

Kenny Blair had sprung to his feet.

"So that's what the devils are looking for!" he said. "They're hunting for the scent! In the name of the merciful, isn't there any way of warning those poor little cruisers to turn back before they're all hemmed in?"

Anton Glick grinned and shivered. He was remembering how he had thought of warning those Limey ships, and collecting a reward. He was glad now that he had not done so. Had not been able to do so. It had been a temporary madness in his brain, which had cleared away. He was himself again now, the trite German soldier. And he would rather see a victory and die, than no victory at all.

"That's what the big ships are looking for," he said. "Perhaps we will be able to see a tag end or two of the slaughter, Commander Blair. It would be a pleasant play to watch—before our curtain falls."

Kenny Blair had staggered to the edge of the water. The tide had already begun coming in. The little sand bar which had been fifty feet wide at dead low, was now not more than thirty. It would be quickly covered, now that the current had set in. But the young Yankee ace was not aware of the ominous upward creeping of the sea. His eyes were on that smoke trail in the south, moving east toward Heligoland up the Frisian coast.

"The kraut's haven't seen them yet," he muttered to himself. "Can't see them beneath this mist. And still a little too far away. But they know where to hunt for them, and they're spreading out to cut them off. They'll have them cut off, too, in another half hour

of steaming. They'll have them in a pair of pincers, between the shore and the deep. Then they'll be able to lay onto them with their big guns from fifteen miles away, and the cruisers won't have a prayer."

The smoke trail in the south heading east. The smoke billows in the west crawling south, and spreading out. In thirty minutes—well, in forty-five—the German battle line of dreadnaughts would be stretched out in an impassable barrier of steel between the cruisers and their home. As soon as the dawn mist lifted them, the slaughter would be on.

KENNY BLAIR was a naval man, and he had a pride in ships. He had friends in the scouting fleet, too. Boys and men that he had known back home, in Chicago and at Yale. It was a hard thing to watch so helplessly. Sheer murder. . . .

"Keel around! For God's sake, keel around, you half-witted fools!" he raved, pacing up and down the sand. "Helm over, and race back the way you came! You haven't got a quarter hour to lose. Ten miles more, and you're sunk. The big devils are after you. They're setting a trap for you! Back home! Back home! Scram, you fatheads!"

He slapped his fists together with a crack in his helpless fury. He kicked the sand and raved. He turned with an oath to the sardonic Gallows ace.

"God!" he said. "I'd give my life for a ship that could fly!"

Anton Glick had arisen, too. He was looking at the creeping tide with dark lights in the depths of his eyes, and a tight grin on his bearded lips.

"We'll both give our lives because we haven't got a ship that flies, Limey," he said quietly. "You and I together, on the last shore of hell. It's queer. I've tried to get you, and you've tried to get me. But here we are together at the last. I don't know who the joke's on. Us, I suppose."

He looked at the smokes in the sky, and then down again at the tide at his feet. He grinned stiffly.

"Perhaps we'll get a bit of music anyway, Limey," he said, "before that reaches us."

"Oh, to the devil with you and me, Glick!" said Kenny Blair. "We're nothing in the game. It's those poor ships I'm thinking of. I'd be willing to drown with a grin, too, if I were in your shoes."

"I'm not going to drown," said Anton Glick fatalistically, tapping the holster at his side.

They had forgotten, both of them, the ugly little pirate boat off shore, in the excitement of watching

the tremendous drama that was being prepared by the far-off steaming fleets. The sea-scavengers' black craft had drifted down to the farther end of the sand bar, six hundred feet off, and had edged in toward shore at the same time. It was not more than a hundred and fifty feet out in the water when Kenny Blair swung around and looked at it.

"You're right, ace!" he told the Gallows captain. "We may not drown."

The sudden hope had come to him of getting hold of that black boat. The Gallows captain had also seen it. He had the same thought, too.

BEHIND the partial screen afforded by the wrecked Camel lying up at the far end of the sand bar, the sea-scavengers were evidently attempting a landing. Two or three of them had jumped out waist deep into the sea. They were holding the boat against the slow current and walking it in with desperate haste toward the shore. Kenny Blair did not think at first what they were after. He did not know. He only saw the boat, which was in possible reach now.

"Do you think we could get hold of it, Blair?" the Gallows captain croaked. "That's what I was thinking."

"Both together, Limey!"

"Grab your gun!"

They started off with a staggering rush down the hard wet sand, the great lame Gallows captain and the wounded Camel ace. It was a ludicrous picture, but it was not ludicrous to them. It was a matter of life and death. To get that boat before the tide came in. They raced hard and pantingly on their toes down the hard sand, between the curling rims of the tide that were coming in at both sides upon the bar. Anton Glick had forgotten his lameness, and Kenny Blair that wound in his leg which a Gallows ship had given him. Fokker ace and Camel king, sprinting shoulder to shoulder with gasping breath, their guns in their hands. But they could not keep the pace up. In a hundred feet they were stumbling.

The sea-scavengers had seen them start. With a wild, unearthly yell the men in the boat were piling out, following their comrades already in the water in a desperate rush toward shore. They were all screeching and waving knives. With splashing strides they came rushing through the shallows toward the wreck of the silver Camel, whose wheels were now in the tide.

"What are they after?" shouted Glick.

Kenny Blair answered their screeching with a blood-curdling catamountain yell. He waved his arms

above his head threateningly as he staggered down the sand. He had drawn ahead of the Gallows ace by a stride or two. He heard Glick's hard panting breath and stumbling tread behind him.

"What are they after?" he shot back over his shoulder. "The gun! My Vickers! I'd forgotten it! I'd forgotten there was anything still good left on the ship! I'd forgotten—"

With the word he stopped dead in his tracks. He wheeled around at Anton Glick, who had also stopped. The thought which had suddenly struck him had likewise occurred to the great lame scar-faced captain of the *Galgenvögel*, by the same process of reasoning. Or perhaps it was that Glick had read his thought by a process of telepathy.

"I'd forgotten—" Kenny gasped as he wheeled around.

And Glick had forgotten, too. But Glick now suddenly had remembered. Perhaps he thought it was a case of Blair's life or his own. At least what he did was an act justified by the laws of war, in the circumstances. As the stocky young Camel ace wheeled around, with his sudden thought and the light shining in his eyes, with the word still on his lips, Anton Glick raised his heavy Mauser automatic, and fired it point-blank at the wings on Kenny Blair's breast as he had thought of doing once before.

And this time the gun was loaded, with the Webley slug that Kenny Blair had given him.

THE big Mauser knew that it was loaded. The Webley cartridge was a bit too large for its barrel to digest, but it did its best. It went off with a roar that knocked the lame Gallows ace flat on the sand. The oversize cartridge, slamming its crooked way out through the barrel rifling, had thrown the muzzle aside as it went ripping through. It was a wonder the breech end of the gun hadn't blown off. There was a hole in the sand at Kenny Blair's feet in which he could have thrust his fist, and the Mauser was hurled twenty feet away.

Anton Glick sat on the hard wet sand, holding a shattered wrist.

"I'd forgotten," Kenny Blair finished what he had started to say, "that the prop of a Camel might be made to fit on a Fokker with a broken club! And so had you!"

He left the Gallows ace sitting there. Shouting and waving his gun, he went staggering on down the sand bar. The men in the water were hesitating, and one or

two of them had turned back to their boat. From fifty feet away, Kenny Blair sent his last shot blasting into the midst of them, and ran on, waving the Webley threateningly, as if it were still loaded to the gills.

They were a cowardly gang of rats. There was one of them who had got winged. A nick on the elbow. He was standing knee deep in the tide and yelling like a stuck pig. His companions had turned at the slamming shot and were fleeing with their splashing strides back toward their boat. They passed the wounded man with howls and yells, pushing him aside and toppling him over in the water. They were scrambling over the boat's gunwales from all sides in thirty seconds or less than that.

The wounded man arose with gasping splutters, and followed them last of all, still looking back over his shoulder at the bright-eyed young Camel ace who was splashing into the shallows, and still uttering his loud, inhuman bellows. In five minutes more the dingy patched sail was hoisted, and the sea scavengers' boat was crawling away beneath the mist in the grip of an unseen current, with all the human rats aboard it hiding below the bulwarks.

But Kenny Blair was not interested in them nor in their boat now. They could go their own way to hell. He was splashing through the shallow tide toward his submerging Camel.

The propeller of the silver ship was still intact. Wing smashed, and landing gear knocked cock-eyed, but the good red wood blade was still sticking its nose at the sky. Swiftly he got a wrench out from beneath the cockpit cushion, and set to work dismantling the hub locking ring and getting the big club off.

When he went staggering back up the sand bar again, with the club across his shoulder, Anton Glick of the Gallows Birds was still sitting on the sand, holding his broken wrist. The tide had reached to his feet by then, but he did not move.

The propeller fitted.

Snap her over with a roar, boy!

Anton Glick had got to his feet as the black Fokker with its borrowed club opened up and came racing down the hard narrow strip of sand. Staggering, he tried to throw himself into the black ship's course and wreck it, as it came roaring on. His shoulders were swinging, his knees crouched. He was game. A flash of his great body as the black ship came racing down the sand. But his spring had been too short. His lame leg had failed him again. He fell sprawling on his face, and the black wings went roaring over.

God knows what his thoughts were as he lay there—the Gallows captain.

CHAPTER XIII SKY SIGNAL

STRAIGHT DOWN the length of the beaten sand Kenny Blair held her. Beneath his wing tips on each side the white curling surge rushed by. But his wheels were on the hard dry sand, and they were racing like an engine down a track.

He held her down, while the end of the sand bar came like the day of doom toward him, and the air piled up beneath her straining wings. He was at the end of the narrow bar, his wheels were plowing into the tide, before he lifted her. He laid back on her then, and he gave her that old zoom. She took it with a yell, and up she went.

Up through the thin, pale mist, into clear, rosy dawn sky above the sea. Heading south toward those racing smokes on the rim of the horizon. Down the line, five hundred feet above the mist and sea. Fifteen miles to go, in a ship that was doing a hundred and fifteen. Down the line with yelling Mercedes.

A fleet to be saved from slaughter! The racing British battle line seemed to leap up above the sky rim. It came toward him sidewise over the curve of the sea—ten, twelve, fourteen mottled ships, racing five hundred feet apart bow to stern in a long wallowing white foam wake up the shore of the West Frisians!

White battle flags flying. Smoke trailing along the mist. Spume flying at the cut-water.

To Heligoland! To hell.

Black Fokker in the sky.

Black Fokker out of nowhere, out of the North Sea, out of the mist and the place where ghosts are born, black Hun battle crate racing like a headless chicken straight at that running battle line! Black Fokker coming out of nowhere, like black lightning down the sky! Aerial attack! The Huns have spotted us! The surprise raid's all gone blooey! Keel around! Hard starboard! Head 220! Back like the devil for home.

The battle line was doing a boiling ships-right as Kenny Blair came streaking across the mist. Starboarding hard, like a line of galloping cavalry

swinging into platoon front. Still wheeling, still starboarding, with the foam hissing at their wakes, doing a compete ships-about, and bow to stern again, picking up speed and racing off to the west!

Racing off to safety.

They knew what a Hun battle crate in the sky meant. Where there was one, there must be a flock. And where there was a flock, there must be trouble. They knew what that black Fokker meant. At least, they thought they did. It meant a wireless warning broadcast to the shore. It meant the High Seas fleet getting up steam and boiling out from Kiel.

If they had known how near the great High Seas fleet really was to them, some of those fat Limey sea dogs would have sweated more blood than they did,

THEY opened up their three-inch salvos as the black Fokker came streaking up their battle line and diving below the mist. But they had no real A.A.'s. Not in those days. They had only the 3-inch secondary batteries for torpedo defense, and they couldn't throw a shell higher than their nose. Dodging those belching guns was like dodging a flock of puff-balls thrown by a battery of one-armed old maids, to a sky pilot who had tasted the juice of the Mary Hen.

Slam! slam! slam! slam!

Kenny Blair had had just time enough to scrawl a note on a scrap of paper torn from his naval aviator certificate, in the swift flight toward the British squadron. He rolled it up and jammed it into a chamber of his empty Webley, where it could be seen. Streaking low past the flag leader of the racing fleet, he bent the black Fokker over on its ear, and wrapped it around the cruiser's mizzen smokestack. He went shooting down across her quarterdeck in the billows of her smoke.

Big stern-gun batteries below him. Torpedo tubes glittering with brass. An august British admiral standing frozen on one spot like a hypnotized frog, staring up with mouth agape, while his aides tried to rush him beneath shelter. Rifle men, crouching in the cover of stanchions and gun turrets, firing up with hot Enfields that spat without a sound. All the panorama in a lightning flash. And the black smoke and the white mist rolling.

Kenny dropped the Webley like a bomb. The admiral screamed silently. He fell over on his back on the white deck, and all his brass buttons stared up at the sky. The pistol had dropped in a scupper. The black Fokker went shooting away.

Keeling over, spiraling higher, boring up into the

bright red dawn, Kenny Blair looked down and below from a thousand feet. They had picked up the pistol. They were gathered around it. Then they had found the message tucked away. They were reading it. And suddenly all running. Little black spots of men.

*Enemy High Seas fleet 20 knots NW by W
making S to cut you off! Scram, you poor apes!
Blair, 19th Camels.*

Well, they were scrambling. Signal flags broke out on the halyards of the flagship. Speed cones dipped, and then went up again. In boiling line a mile and a half long the fourteen ships keeled twenty degrees to port. Bearing in toward the shore. Boiling back southwest along the Frisians so close their keels must have scraped. A line of as scared and frightened rabbits as ever scampered over the bounding deep blue main back for home and mother.

Kenny Blair headed around.

TWENTY miles away there in the northwest, the High Seas fleet was steaming on. Great battleships spread out mile past mile, with brisk destroyers racing around them like brisk terriers scampering at the heels of cows. The German commanders had not sighted the running Limeys yet, though they had seen the black Fokker in the air, far off and coming on. Two of the convoying German destroyers stopped. They were launching seaplanes over onto the smooth glassy water. Spotting ships, to find the British fleet.

Black Fokker roaring down the sky.

There were four of those seaplanes, altogether. Black and white checkered Taubes. They were cutting the sleek dawn sea with their double pontoons and taking off as Kenny Blair's black Gallows Fokker came toward them down the sky.

Slow and happy clumsy Taubes, clambering up into the dawn. With that fleet black demon coming at them. *Taube*—that's German for a dove. But K. Blair of the 19th Scouts was English for Old Man Death.

Kenny Blair at the twin Maxims of the Gallows Fokker! Blair the Zep-strafer. Blair of the scouts.

He never counted on his record of sky victories those poor clumsy Taube seaplanes which he got in that red dawn, above that glassy sea. It was clay-pigeon shooting. They never knew what had happened to them, poor devils. There was one of them, the first one that he got, who lifted his arm and was shouting some grinning word of greeting as the Yankee ace came at him. Perhaps he was a friend of Anton Glick's, and

recognized the number of the ship. He was lifting his hand, and then he melted from the sky.

Br-rp-rp-rp-rp-rp!

Double Maxims!

Blair of the Scouts!

Three of them, like ripe plums from a tree. The lightning hit them, and they fell. They didn't know what it was all about. Nor did the thousands of shouting, screaming, panic-stricken German seamen on board the dreadnaughts of that great fleet, who watched the slaughter in the sky.

Black Fokker bringing down innocent little doves, and all their feathers fluttering on the sea.

Kenny got three of them. If he hadn't, they might have spotted the fleeing fleet—not safe yet by any means. The fourth ship had sense enough to take a header for the ocean without waiting for the quitting whistle. It went down like a fireman down a pole, and hit the sea with a great white splash, and got its pilot and gunner out on their pontoons to hide beneath their wings from the demon Fokker in the sky.

Kenny Blair headed eastward into the dawn.

SIX miles away, the sand bar had disappeared. There was only a long thin line where the ocean showed green instead of blue. And in the middle of that green water a little speck of a man was standing.

Kenny dived.

Go down, and drop beside him, and give him something to float on, till a ship came by to pick him up? It would be a noble gesture. But they would be hanging Kenny Blair to a tall tree if they ever caught him, as sure as hell.

Dipping, Kenny passed over the great scar-faced man who was standing there in the water to his waist. Three times he dipped, and zoomed. That was for the German destroyers. They would be following him, investigating what was there. Anton Glick was staring up with his scarred bearded face. As the Fokker passed over for the last time, he lifted his hand stiffly in a salute. It must have been a salute to his lost ship. It could not have been for Kenny.

The destroyers were boiling down. They would pick the Gallows captain up before a quarter hour was done. Kenny-hoped they would. He would like to meet Glick again. Wing to wing this time. In the air.

"I liked the way he tried to plug me," thought Kenny "He's not soft, that baby."

Black Fokker racing off southwest after the running Limey fleet, while the fog veils lifted and the sun came

up above the world and over the glassy sea. The British cruisers were on their way now. Miles down the sky. Full speed ahead, forced draft, shovel in the coal, boys, and tie back the safety valve! In the northwest the great German ships, had spotted them. For hundreds of yards around them the sea was punctured with towering white splashes of the German shots.

But the cruisers were on their way, and standing out to the open sea. They were rated at twenty-seven knots, but there wasn't one of them that wasn't doing twenty-nine. And nothing on the seas could catch them now.

Splash, splash, splash! came the German long range shots. From fifteen miles away. At the far sea's rim. But the big wallowing dreadnaughts were falling behind, and their salvos were missing by a quarter mile. The big splashes stopped in five minutes more, and the German smoke faded down the sea.

Kenny's gas was running low.

He came buzzing down the sky at the running Limey fleet. He wondered if they would pick up a poor foundered Fokker pilot. At least, he was glad to note that they weren't firing their batteries at him as he came roaring down past the long line, with wheels that cut the waves. He raised his hand, and they were all roaring at him. Lifting their caps and throwing them overboard. Dancing and shouting by the lifelines.

Shouting the name of Kenny Blair.

He thought they might pick him up. Anyway, he would risk it. He dropped ahead of the leading ship, squash into the sea, and the cold water came in his cockpit. He stood up on a wing, and shouted, as the big cruiser came boiling down.

Passing him? No. She was losing way, and dropping out of line. His ship was sinking under him when he picked up the buoy that was heaved over, and felt himself drawn aboard.

Away from England, on a solid deck. While Anton Glick's black battle crate went down below the sea.