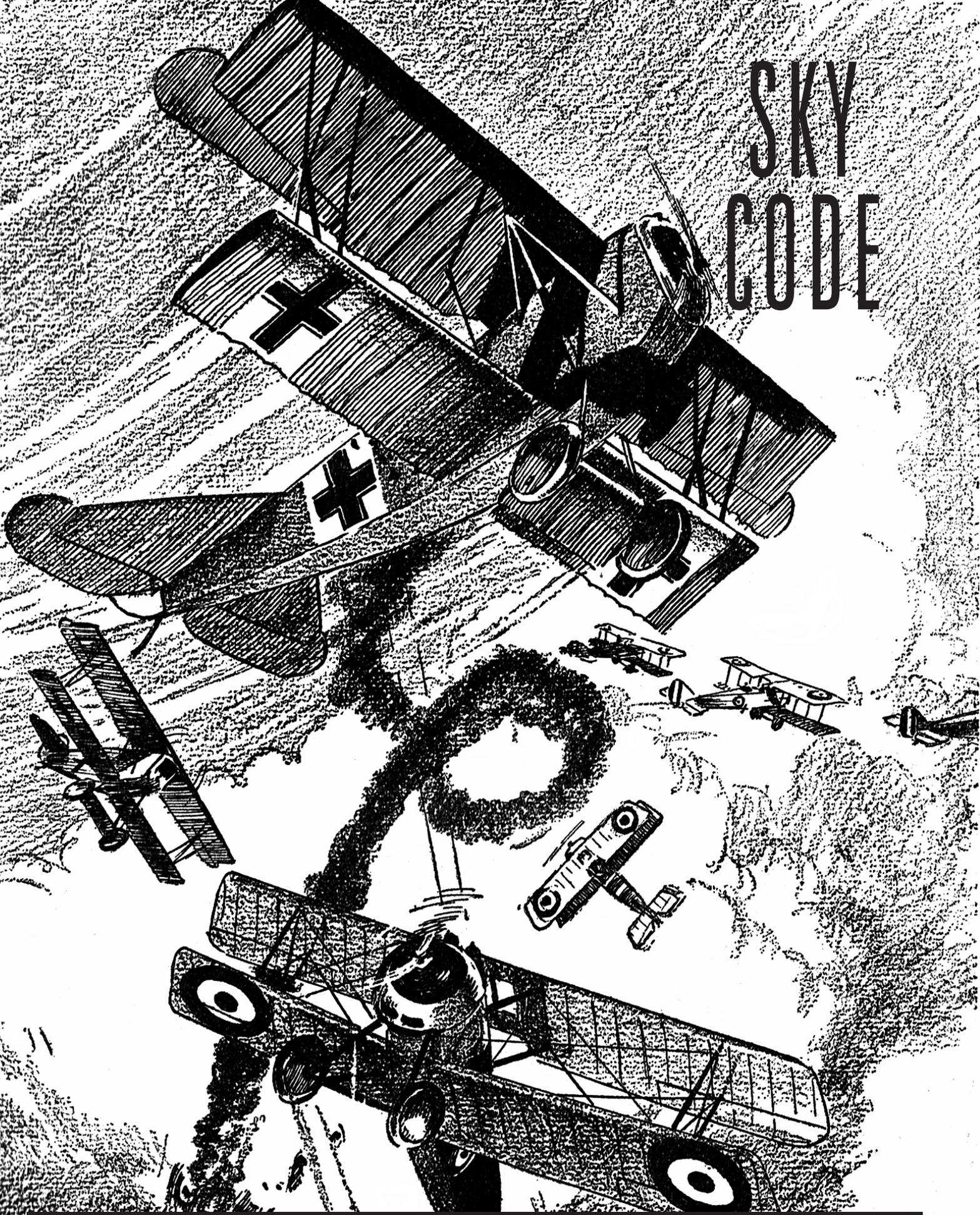


# SKY CODE



*Ordeal by Combat, with a Flaming End for the Loser, was the Grim Sky Trial staged by a Monocled Major to end the Strange Hoodoo that was fast Annihilating a British Scout Squadron! A Great Long Major "Monty" Story of War-time Mystery and Adventure in the Royal Flying Corps!*

## CHAPTER I FROM INFORMATION RECEIVED

**S**CARCELY TWO KILOMETRES down the straight and dusty road that ran east out of Douai was the aerodrome. A few short months ago it had been a farm, but hedges and trees had meanwhile been removed and hollows leveled so that now it bore little resemblance to its former state. It was a fine aerodrome, a worthy headquarters for three of the Fatherland's crack fighter squadrons.

The roomy farmhouse suited Colonel von Lubeck well enough, and especially so during the present heat wave, for it remained cool behind those thick walls. To-day the Colonel seemed well pleased as he sat in the spacious kitchen which he had chosen to be his office. Truly he had reason to be pleased. The pilots under his command suffered few casualties, yet they took heavy toll of the British. And all, so he assured himself, because he brought brains to bear on this business of war.

There was a knock on the door.

At a word from the Colonel a man entered. He wore a pilot's overalls and carried a helmet under an arm. His close-cropped, bullet-shaped head was uncovered. He halted before von Lubeck's table with a click of heels.

The Colonel leaned back in his chair and looked up expectantly at the younger man. "Well, Gleiwitz, and what news?" he inquired.

*Hauptmann* Gleiwitz smiled. "A flight of D.H.4's will bomb Vray railway junction this afternoon, sir. They will be met at 2:50 p.m. at four thousand metres over Doullens by a flight of 99 Squadron's Camels. They will, therefore, reach Vray at 3:10, or thereabouts. Our machines should leave the ground half an hour before that time."

The Colonel beamed. "Good, Gleiwitz! Good again!

I will see to everything. By the way, I suppose you are sure of your information?"

"Sir, we have it straight from the horse's mouth—as the English say—the horse in this case being no other than the commander of the Camel squadron himself."

Von Lubeck gave a loud laugh. "The Fatherland can never lose a war so long as they have men of resource like you, Gleiwitz," he shouted.

"And yourself, Herr Colonel."

"Yes, yes," agreed the Colonel, "that is understood. But tell me . . ." his face grew solemn, ". . . you run no great risk in this work, I hope? Your fame as a fighter is world-wide and we cannot afford to lose you. Your reputation alone is worth to us more than an army corps."

It was the *Hauptmann's* turn to laugh. "I assure you, sir, that it is only the British who run into danger."

The Colonel rose and extended his hand with a smile. Gleiwitz grasped it, bowed, clicked his heels and departed.

Von Lubeck lighted a cigar and strolled to the door. The outer air struck him like a blast from a furnace. To the south-west, miles beyond that church perched on the hill, lay 99 Squadron's aerodrome. It was said that well-handled Camels were awkward propositions to tackle, and von Lubeck was glad his pilots did not have to cross the lines to find them; glad that the British were so obliging, and so stupid, as to come of their own accord to be shot down.

It was nearly lunch time, and the Colonel rang for a mug of Pilsener.

THE sun was at its zenith in a sky of unrelieved blue, and its rays beat down with almost tropical intensity upon the hangars and huts of 99 Squadron, R.F.C. It was the hour following luncheon and, very properly, everyone who was not on duty was taking full advantage of the fact.

Even the C.O., Major Montgomery de Courcy Montmorency Hardcastle, M.C., had gone to his tent, but that was nothing unusual. "Monty"—to give him the name by which he was generally known in the Squadron—was only on duty when he chose to be. Or so it seemed to Sykes. Sykes was in the office, for he was recording officer, which job is really an adjutant's,

and he was always on duty. Night or day he could never say he was free to do what he liked.

Phew! It was hot! Sykes unbuttoned his tunic—with a guilty glance towards the door, for he knew it to be a most unmilitary action—and dabbed his forehead with a damp handkerchief. He got out of his chair and crossed to the window. It looked even hotter outside. There was not a breath of wind to rustle the canvas walls of the hangars; the grass on the 'drome was brown and withered. Over on the far side appeared the tents of the French flight, shimmering specks dancing in the hot air. To Sykes they seemed hardly real. Yet there was nothing unreal about these Frenchmen, as the Army news bulletin—popularly known as “Comic Cuts”—testified. The latest issue of the bulletin, recently delivered, had carried prominently the announcement:

*“The strength of the 10th Wing, R.F.C., has been augmented by the French 100th Flight.”*

Idly, Sykes left the window to peruse it once more. Instead of easing matters, he reflected, the Squadron's losses had become even heavier since the arrival of these allies. The trouble was that the newcomers were apparently under orders from no one. They flew as and how they liked. True, they got results, or rather their commander, Captain Jejeune, did. He was a perfect marvel. He was mentioned farther down the bulletin. Ah, here it was: *“Captain Leon Jejeune, Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, D.S.O., Croix de Guerre, destroyed his sixty-ninth and seventieth enemy aircraft on the fourteenth instant.”*

Sykes was only mildly interested in such matters, however, for not being a pilot, they did not concern him closely. It was the heat which worried him most just now. He sighed and returned to the window.

Five Camels stood in front of “B” Flight hangars in readiness for the afternoon patrol. There was a knock on the door, and Bob Caldwell, who had commanded “B” Flight for a month or more, looked in. He appeared exceedingly hot as he glanced cautiously round the office, but his face brightened on discovering that only Sykes was within.

“Where's Monty?” he inquired.

“In his tent.”

“Good! Then I'm off on that O.P. job. Ten to one if I hang about, his lordship will change it to one of those long-distance shows.”

Involuntarily, Sykes dropped his eyes to the table on which lay an order from Wing for an escort for that very afternoon. It was not for him, however, to anticipate the Major's orders. Indeed, the Major had

lately given instructions that special flight orders were only to be passed to the pilots concerned at the last moment, and then only by himself. There had been rumours of a leakage of information and, absurd though they seemed, the Major was taking no chances.

Anyway, Sykes assured himself as he shifted uneasily under what he felt to be Bob Caldwell's suspicious glance, the Major would surely be out soon.

“Cheero,” said Caldwell, and vanished.

Sykes became more uneasy. It was true that the Major always saw patrols off, but he had left things uncommonly late to-day. Suppose he were asleep, and that the two-seaters found no escort to meet them! There'd be the devil of a row! Clearly it was Sykes's duty to give him a call, but the very idea of such a thing nearly frightened him to death.

So it was with a sigh of relief that at that moment he saw the Major saunter in his usual leisurely manner past the office window just as the first Le Rhone engine awoke to life.

## CHAPTER II A LETTER TO WING

**M**ONTY, eyeglass in eye and immaculately uniformed as usual, seemed the only cool person in the vicinity. Evidently, too, he had no intention of jeopardising his enviable condition by any unnecessary haste. Under one arm he carried a shooting-stick which he presently pressed into the hard ground before seating himself upon it.

He had avoided too close an approach to the Camels so that he would not be inconvenienced by the clouds of dust which would roll away from their propellers when the engines were run up. He beckoned to Caldwell, who looked round just then, and proceeded to wipe his eyeglass with great care as, with evident reluctance, the flight commander walked slowly towards him.

“In twenty minutes, Caldwell,” drawled the Major, after carefully adjusting his eyeglass and fixing Bob, sweating and visibly ill at ease, with a disconcerting stare, “you will meet a flight of D.H.4's at thirteen thousand over Doullens and escort them to Vray,

where they will . . . er, lay their eggs, and so back to the lines. I trust my meanin's clear?"

The words had been uttered rather harshly, and the question snapped in a challenging tone. It was as though Monty hated giving the order, and himself for having to give it. Certainly any form of sentiment was abhorrent to him, and he had to be on his guard against it now. That was why his voice conveyed a harshness he had not intended.

To Bob it seemed that he had just received sentence from a man utterly devoid of decent feeling; a man who was incompetent himself to carry out the tasks he so coldly allocated to his subordinates. Bob thought of his own limited experience, of how early promotion had come to him through the death of better fighters than he would ever be. But he thought even more of the men he would have to lead; men still less trained to that most exacting of all forms of fighting—aerial combat. Rogers, the most junior of them all, had only twice been over the lines. Now they would have to go far over—and the Huns would be waiting for them. The Huns always seemed to expect them and to know just where to lie in wait. They were experienced fighters who had an unfair advantage, but if they were sent far over the British lines it would be a different story indeed. Unfortunately, such things did not happen.

"Is that clear?" snapped Monty.

Bob Caldwell braced himself. "Perfectly, sir, but . . ."

"I want no 'buts'! It's either clear or it's not."

"It's perfectly clear, sir," replied Bob in a voice so unnecessarily loud and defiant as to suggest that its owner's feelings were not under perfect control.

"Then off you go, sir," ordered Monty sternly, and sat watching the retreating figure of his flight commander with an air of bored tranquillity. But a close observer might have noticed that his lower lip was tightly compressed between his teeth in a manner suggesting that he was not altogether pleased with the course events were taking.

FOUR pilots gathered round Caldwell as he approached the Camels.

"The O.P. is washed out," he told them, when the roar of an engine being run up had subsided. "We are to escort some Fours as far as Vray—that's twenty miles over—so we must keep together whatever happens. Remember that, Rogers!"

"Rather," said Rogers, with the optimism of inexperience. He had never been so far over, and found the prospect exciting.

"The old devil seems to enjoy sending us on these stunts," commented Kirk, who had been out three months and knew a thing or two.

"I wish they'd make his lordship do a show occasionally," put in Nixon, another of the flight.

Smith giggled. "I'd give a month's pay to see that show!"

"Majors are not allowed to cross the lines," broke in Caldwell. "Anyway, time's up." Being in a position of responsibility, he did not like the turn of the conversation, which too closely echoed his own thoughts. He glanced over his shoulder—Monty was striding away across the grass.

"Can't even wait to see us off," said Kirk.

Rogers grinned. "Never saw him hurry before."

"The lure of bed is very strong!" Smith sarcastically announced.

Monty was certainly stepping it out at a surprising pace for him, which seemed foolish in view of the heat. His face was red and his whole appearance suggested that he might explode at any moment. His direction was towards his office.

Through the window Sykes saw him and quailed. He fumbled nervously in a hurried attempt to button up his tunic, but had not completed the task when the door burst open.

"Why the blazes are you undressin'?"

"I . . . I wasn't, sir . . . the heat . . ."

"Don't let it happen again! Put on your belt. Write to the Colonel: 'Dear Maitland,—This imbecile habit of sendin' half-trained fledglings miles over the lines in small patrols must cease, exclamation mark, or I quit, underline that. . . .'"

Sykes leapt to the table and grabbed paper and pencil. He had to get a move on when Monty dictated. It was no consolation that this correspondence with Wing had arisen out of his own suggestion. (Sykes began to scribble for all he was worth.) The Major had been in the habit of 'phoning at all #iours of the day, and his manner of speech to the Colonel had become positively terrifying. Hence Sykes's timid suggestion that letters might save Monty trouble, a suggestion which, surprisingly enough, had been accepted with alacrity, so that the Major had not used the line to Wing once since.

"Got that?" stormed Monty. "Or I quit—send in my papers. And you can take your Wing to Berlin to get it clipped for all I care. If there's anythin' left to take, that is."

Sykes scribbled wildly to the end, and stopped. He

looked up. "Anything else, sir?" To his surprise Monty was smiling now.

"Isn't that enough, laddie? Get that written out and send it right away."

"I'll re-word it, I suppose, sir?" Monty's temper flared up again.

"Don't go alterin' one word!" He picked up the copy of "Comic Cuts" and began to read. "Jejeune has got his sixty-ninth and seventieth," he muttered, frowning. "What's the matter with us, Sykes?"

"He's a marvel, sir, and I understand that a pilot of his fighting quality is very rare. One in a million, I've heard it said."

"H'm," grunted Monty, "that's a surprisin' number."

"I believe he gets at least one Hun every time he crosses the lines," Sykes went on hurriedly, in an effort to placate the Major. But his words were drowned by the roar of the Camels as they passed overhead, and before the din had subsided Monty had thrown the sheet down. He seemed to have recovered from his annoyance, for now he spoke quite happily. He yawned.

"Deuced hot, Sykes! I think I'll take forty winks."

He moved to the door, then turned.

"Word that letter how you like, laddie," he said, and departed.

SYKES heaved a sigh of relief and got busy with his handkerchief. Then he settled down to work.

"From O.C., 99 Squadron, to Commanding Officer, 10th Wing," he wrote.

"Sir,—I have the honour to suggest that patrols despatched on special missions far over the lines should be strengthened to at least three flights of single-seaters. . ."

He paused and bit the end of his pen, wondering whether he had put the matter too crudely. Wing colonels were not partial to being taught their business, and one had to be careful. Then he continued to the end, signed the document as for the Major, rang the bell and sent it by despatch-rider to Wing headquarters.

He relaxed, and was more aware of the heat and his own sleepiness than ever. Then why not himself have forty winks? Why not indeed? Why not slip along to his tent for half an hour? Everything was in perfect order. Always was, for that matter. There were the instructions for the evening patrol, neatly clipped, on the table. Thank goodness it was not one of those long-distance jobs. "B" Flight was out on patrol, and would not be back for an hour, at the earliest. The

tender, which had gone down to the Pilot's Pool to collect a new officer, could scarcely return till three. The 'phone might ring, of course, but it was a hundred to one against. Even Wing colonels like a noon-day nap in warm weather. Besides, there was the orderly on the other side of the partition. He would hold the line till the R.O.<sup>1</sup> was found.

Sykes considered the matter and decided it would be better to say nothing to the orderly. He crossed to the door and glanced at the tents and the mess marquee. All was still, except for the drowsy hum of insects. He would risk it. But first he would lock up those documents on the table. One had to be mighty careful with all these rumours about.

### CHAPTER III A PILOT IS INDISCREET

**E**VEN AS SYKES SLIPPED into his tent, the French interpreter, Lieutenant Jules Dubec, raised the flap of his own and held it so for a moment while he glanced around. Then he stepped outside and walked with cat-like tread in the direction of the office. It was a fact that no one ever heard Dubec moving. Even those black leggings of his never creaked against his boots as good leather should.

Reaching the office, he glanced through the window, then, after a cautious look round, he moved stealthily to the door and touched the handle.

Instead of entering, however, he drew back suddenly and hurried round to the side of the building. For at that moment he had heard the familiar scream of the Crossley tender, returned a good half hour before it was expected. The tender pulled up outside the office.

"Seems it's empty, sir," said the driver to the young pilot at his side. "I should go to the mess tent if I was you," he added, with a wave in the direction of the marquee. "Likely Mr. Sykes'll be there. We'll see to your kit."

With a word of thanks, the officer jumped down and walked away, the tender rattled off, and Lieutenant Dubec re-emerged. As the interpreter reached the door for the second time the office 'phone began to ring. He hesitated, and then entered.

1 R.O. : Recording Officer.

Sykes by this time was snoring gently, so that he did not hear the bell. Rodney, over in the mess tent, was dozing, but he heard it and cursed. He knew that 'phone of old and hated it. It had a habit of upsetting every calculation, countermanding every given and accepted order. The last thing Rodney wanted was a change in to-day's instructions, for he was to lead the evening offensive patrol. He loved O.P.'s. On them one was free to fly as one liked, and there was always a sporting chance of bagging a Hun or two.

If the O.P. were cancelled as the result of that 'phone call it could be only to do another of those cursed escort jobs. These escorts were like a conspiracy between Wing and Monty to see how quickly the Squadron could be wiped out.

Now thoroughly awake, Rodney removed his feet from the top of a card table with a sigh, and sat up.

At a corner table, four of his pilots were having a somewhat noisy game of poker. Then a stranger looked in. A glance revealed him as the latest addition to the Squadron; one of a type, excited to be in France, but with just a trace of nervousness as to his reception. Many such had come to the Squadron—and departed. They didn't last long as a rule.

"I'm Bartlett," announced the stranger. "Reporting for duty . . . er . . . there was no one in the office." Grant looked up from the card table. "You don't report in here, anyway," he said in a bored voice.

"Oh," said Bartlett, and hesitated. "Then . . . where will I find the Major?"

"Monty'll be in bed, without a doubt."

"Is he ill?" the newcomer inquired with surprise.

"No, just tired," explained Grant. "He generally is, but I shouldn't disturb him if I were you."

"Thanks, I won't," said Bartlett. But he looked puzzled. "His name's Monty, did you say? What's he like?" Fry, apparently concentrating on a handful of cards, looked up at this point.

His face was solemn. "To be accurate," he said, "his names are, Major Montgomery de Courcy Montmorency Hardcastle, M.C., fourteenth Viscount Arbroath and sixth Baron Cupar. As our breath control won't run to all that we just call him Monty when we feel polite. He is affected and wears an eyeglass, eats his young, washes 'em down with his bathwater and picks the remnants out of his teeth with a tram ticket. In fine, he is a nasty bit of work. He has a big estate in Scotland, which it is a bigger pity he ever left. I'll . . ."

This discourse was suddenly interrupted by Rodney, who had sprung to his feet. "Shut up, idiot!

Suppose he were to hear you. Then your goose would be properly cooked!"

"I don't know about that," said Grant reflectively. "Give the devil his due. It is my opinion that Monty does not care two hoots what anybody says or thinks about him. His all-absorbing passion is the Squadron, and I wouldn't mind betting that he is dreaming at this very moment that he's leading us into action against terrific odds."

"Killing the Squadron off is a funny way of showing his affection for it," Fry protested.

"Shut up, all of you," repeated Rodney. Or try another subject. . . . I . . ."

It was Rodney's turn to break off in the middle of a sentence. Standing in the doorway and smiling quietly as though in approval of the conversation, was Lieutenant Dubec, the French interpreter.

#### CHAPTER IV CAUGHT IN A SPY TRAP

**A** SHIVER RAN DOWN Bob Caldwell's spine. This was not due to apprehension, he assured himself, but was simply a natural reaction of the body on emerging into the chill upper air after the great heat on the ground. He was cold and his clothes clung to him in damp discomfort, while the icy blast of the slipstream which swept round the tiny screen made him feel naked. But this was only a minor affliction, and one which would pass as soon as he became accustomed to the drop in temperature.

It was two o'clock. The watch on his instrument board said so, and it was not an hour since it had been synchronised by telephone from headquarters. In another ten minutes he would pick up the Fours over Doullens. His altimeter needle pointed to 12,500 and, since he had only another five hundred feet to climb he could afford to throttle back. He glanced backwards over his left shoulder with a quick movement of the head at Kirk and Nixon, whose Camels were dead in line to his eye; and then to the right. Smith was close alongside and slightly above, but Rogers . . . ! Rogers straggled behind, spoiling the symmetry of the formation and its fighting efficiency as well. Bob

shivered again, and found himself wishing that Monty were in his place at the head of this patrol. Then his lordship would understand something of what his pilots were up against.

Bob eased the stick forward, the throttle and fine adjustment back, and raised his right hand as a signal to Rogers to close up. Now he could see the Fours over the leading edge of his lower plane as they circled for height against a hazy background of field and wood. Bob did not like hazy weather because it limited his vision. He liked the air to be crystal clear so that he might see from which direction trouble threatened.

He closed up with the Fours, taking his station a little way behind and above so that he might keep them in view. In five minutes they would cross the lines, another ten would bring them to their destination and the two-seaters would lay their eggs. That would only be a matter of a minute or two, and then they would turn for home. And then the trouble would probably start; but he hoped there would be none to-day.

They crossed the lines and were soon speeding east with noses slightly down and throttles wide open. As far as Bob could see, they were alone in the sky. Ahead of the lower "vee" formation, he caught glimpses of the railway line twisting and curving beyond Bapaume, coming into view out of the haze bit by bit. Ah, there was the other line running south towards the junction not yet visible. Bob raised his eyes and swept the sky with an anxious gaze which took in his own formation.

Rogers was too far away to the right, though nearly level with his leader. Confound the fellow! He was not even looking. Now the Fours had opened out and were turning into wind one by one to sight their objective. Then they re-formed and headed west, while Bob swung slowly round to cover their tails.

No sooner had he completed the turn than he sighted Huns to the south-west, blurred and indistinct. It was instinct, indeed, which told him they were Huns even before their outlines were clear enough to convince his eyes. The Fours were racing for home, as was their habit, and now, divested of their load and aided by their big wing-spread, threatened to draw right away from the Camels. Even with the Le Rhones roaring unpleasantly fast under full throttle it was only by slowly using up his extra height that Bob was able to hold the two-seaters.

THE machines to the south were now clearly identified as Fokker biplanes. They were heading to cut off the British formation, and visibly outclimbing them.

Now that a fight seemed certain, Bob had lost his apprehension, but it returned when he noticed that Rogers was a quarter of a mile behind. With reluctance, he eased his throttle, so that the Fours immediately began to pull away, and his head twisted restlessly from side to side. He hoped that the leader down below would slow up so that they might all keep together. But, presently, it was only too obvious that this was not to happen, and when next Bob looked back he got a shock.

A further five Huns had appeared as if from nowhere. They were above and behind, and with their superior height were evidently about to swoop down on Rogers, who straggled along, evidently oblivious of the threat.

Bob's heart missed a beat and his teeth bit into his lower lip. He took his Verey pistol from its clip, fired a red light skywards and pulled his Camel up and round in a climbing turn until he was flying beneath the path of the Huns. The Fours dwindled quickly, and merged in the haze.

The Fokkers dropped suddenly and a few lines of fire, whiter even than the sky, streaked from their leader's guns. An instant later four Camels and five Fokkers were circling madly about each other in frantic combat. The fifth Camel was diving vertically under full engine . . . it flattened out with an incredible jerk, zoomed up, toppled over on its back and dived again.

Fighting desperately and using every trick he knew, Bob caught only occasional glimpses of Rogers's erratic descent, but in a confusion of thought, one fact was firmly impressed on his mind. Wounded or dead, Rogers was already past any help his leader could give him. No Camel yet built could long withstand the strain of that madly plunging descent.

A Fokker was coming at Bob from above. He turned towards it and passed beneath its line of flight with a quick movement of hand and rudder-bar, diving steeply and then climbing again. Even as he came up he caught a glimpse of a fuselage far below speeding earthwards like a plummet, to be followed in a more leisurely manner by a collection of fluttering objects which had once been a Camel's wings.

At the top of his zoom he got a Fokker in his sight and held it for an instant to let off a burst with both guns before dropping away in a half-stalled condition. Clearly Kirk and Nixon were putting up a good show. Out-numbered and out-climbed, they were fighting like men possessed, and even if they failed to press home a victory, at least they were holding their own. But the

time factor and the distance from the lines were strong allies to the enemy. Sooner or later the Camels must break off the fight and then they would be at a double disadvantage—a treble one if they were intercepted by that other formation which must now be somewhere to the west. Perhaps they were scrapping with the Fours. Half guiltily, Bob hoped this might be the case. Already he had his hands more than full, and at least the two-seaters had rear guns to cover a retreat.

If they could only get one victory it would do more than anything to hearten them, but twisting and turning, half-rolling and spinning, the Englishmen were fully occupied in avoiding those streams of bullets, whose sharp cracks were an unceasing warning of what failure would mean. If only they could get one! If only they could climb to the level of the Fokkers; then it would be a different story.

BUT this, apparently, they could not do. Perhaps it was that they lacked experience to get the best out of their machines. Throwing them about as they were doing was certainly not good climbing tactics, but they dare not fly straight even for an instant. Then, suddenly, came a chance.

A Hun who had dipped for a snapshot at someone had overdone it. He flashed across Bob's nose, and for one breathtaking instant it seemed the two machines would touch. Bob flicked his Camel round and, as the Hun pulled up to climb again, he had him in his sight. Ignoring a close burst that crashed into his machine, he held his course and down went his thumbs. It was point-blank range, and to Bob's fierce joy the Fokker flicked downwards in an ever steepening dive. Now there were only four!

That triumphant thought was instantly gone as Bob saw five Fokkers at one glance. Another swept into his view, and then another. He never knew whether it was that first-sighted patrol which had now joined in, or whether yet a third formation had turned up. What did it matter? Retreat was now the only course—every man for himself. But a signal must first be given; his men would not go without a signal. Banking and turning, falling and climbing, he at last extracted the spent cartridge from the Verey pistol, inserted another and fired.

As the light curved upwards, Bob turned on his back and half-rolled away. A crash of bullets followed and he rolled again. He'd have to go down to the ground and might, perhaps, be able to "contour-chase" to safety . . . perhaps.

## CHAPTER V THE VOICE ON THE 'PHONE

**G**ETTING THAT LETTER to the Wing colonel off his chest had done something to soothe Monty, even though he well knew it would be a very different document by the time Sykes had finished with it. But as he went to his tent he was still far from happy. He could not quite account for it, but there was something very wrong somewhere.

Casualties were far too heavy. The Squadron was losing heart, losing the fighting spirit. Small wonder, too, he thought. At the present casualty fate there'd be no Squadron soon.

Entering his tent, he lifted the telephone which reposed on the sugar-box by the camp-bed.

"Send MacPherson," he snapped. He replaced the 'phone, and then removing his eyeglass, hung it upon the instrument. He took off his belt and tunic, threw them to one side and himself on the bed.

The batman arrived. "Yessir?"

"Deuced hot, MacPherson!"

"That it is, sir."

"Tie up the skirting; it'll be cooler." The batman busied himself with the tent, and then stood up.

"Anything else, sir?"

Monty cocked a thumb towards tunic and belt. "Very dusty," he said. "Give 'em the once over; and see I'm not disturbed . . . and, MacPherson—"

"Sir."

"Bring a bottle of whisky, a syphon and a couple of glasses, and if Captain Jejeune should come over give him my compliments and request him to join me here."

Left alone, Monty settled himself comfortably. He had no intention of sleeping, however. He wanted to do some thinking and watching, and thanks to that raised skirting he could see what went on about him. It was surprising how much he did see in this way and, thanks to the deep shadow within the tent, he was himself invisible from without.

He saw Sykes slink away, looking the picture of guilt. He smiled. Sykes was a good lad; he had a lot to

put up with. Monty's thoughts left his subordinate to return to the problem of the Squadron. The trouble was partly due to those fool long-distance shows, of course; but not entirely. Huns were not always in the air; far from it. Then how was it they always managed to cut off these small patrols? It was not as if they could take-off after seeing the Camels cross the lines, for 9. Fokker took at least thirty minutes to reach a height of eighteen thousand. No, there was something wrong somewhere, for Monty was prepared to back the more experienced of his pilots against any others, French or German. Except perhaps against Jejeune, who was said to be unique. Suddenly Monty thought he would very much like to see this marvel in action. Then he became rigid.

He had seen Dubec approach the office and then draw back out of sight as the tender swept in. The tender drew up and a young officer got out—another fledgling for the slaughter. Off went the Crossley, Dubec reappeared and the office 'phone rang.

WITHOUT getting up, Monty stretched out a hand to the telephone beside his bed.

"Hullo, sir?" came the instant reply. "Cut me in on that call to the office," Monty ordered quietly, without taking his eyes off the building. Dubec had disappeared within, and then came his voice in tolerable imitation of the orderly-room clerk.

"Hullo . . . sir."

"Wing Headquarters here, Adjutant speaking, Major Hardcastle there?"

"No, he is out . . . sir."

"Lieutenant Sykes, then?"

"Not here at the moment, sir. Shall I see if I can find him?"

"Never mind now. Take down this message—urgent orders from the Colonel . . ."

"Pompous little monstrosity!" muttered Monty, already seething with indignation. He could guess what was to follow.

"*What's that? What's that?*" The Adjutant's voice was now high-pitched with excitement. "What was that you said? Who's on this line?"

"I am, sir." Dubec sounded a little bewildered.

"Oh . . . then take down this message:—

*"The six o'clock patrol is cancelled. Instead, the flight will meet six of 75 Squadron's F.E.'s at Beaumetz at ten thousand for a very important reconnaissance of suspected troop movements east of Camhrai."*

Is that quite clear?"

"Parfaitly, sir," replied Dubec.

"As mud!" exploded Monty, whose temper was getting the better of him. "Preposterous ass!"

"Who the devil d'you think you're talking to?" stormed Wing.

"Keep the civil tongue!" snarled Dubec.

Monty hung up. So also had the French interpreter, who immediately appeared at the office door and, after a moment's indecision, headed for the mess. There was a pale blue speck out on the 'drome—Captain Jejeune was about to pay his expected visit.

Monty sat up with a jerk—a most unusual procedure for him. But he was not himself to-day. For once he felt that things were getting a little too much for him. Why did they want to make him a major? Perhaps if he was rude enough to someone he'd get court-martialed and reduced. He'd like best to be a second lieutenant with nothing to do but fight.

He grabbed a glass, poured out a stiff whisky and tossed half of it off. He lay back and tried to calm himself; at all costs he must try to be polite to this French fellow. But it would be hard for he could not stand the man. Real fighters did not put on side like this chap—none at least whom he had met. Of course, Jejeune was an exception—an exceptional fighter—but Monty could not bring himself to like him. Why, he ruminated, the fella even made a habit of firin' a Verey light over the 'drome on returning from a flight to indicate he had got a Hun. Two lights went up if he had had a double victory, and occasionally he fired three. Confound his swank! At this point in Monty's thoughts, Jejeune himself looked in.

"*AH, Monsieur le Majeur, comment ça va?*" The Frenchman glanced at the whisky on the table and at the recumbent Monty. His lips curled contemptuously beneath his dark close-clipped moustache. This harmless Britisher was, he decided, sodden with drink.

"Come in, *mon Capitaine*," drawled Monty, avoiding a direct look at the gaily uniformed man with the rows of medals. "Take a pew and a drink; I wanted a word with you."

"At your service," said Jejeune in a bored voice, sitting down and helping himself to whisky. "*Votre sante*." He raised his glass with a slight sneer.

"Thanks," said Monty, and got to business. "Is it possible, do you think, that our friends the Boches have advance knowledge of our movements?"

For an instant the Frenchman's eyes narrowed, then his face relaxed again into a sardonic smile. He spread

his hands and lifted his shoulders in a shrug. "How could that possibly be?"

"Quite," said Monty. "That is the question. But the fact remains that the Huns are always lying in wait for my patrols. Do you know anythin' about my interpreter, Dubec, by the way?"

Jejeune hesitated for a moment as though wondering at the purport of this question. "No," he then replied, "I do not. What for do you ask?"

"Oh, I just wondered," drawled Monty, and then related the story of the telephone call which Dubec had answered.

At the end of the account Jejeune got up. "Now I must be going, my friend," he said. "What you tell me certainly makes me suspicious, I admit. My advice is to trust no one these days. Certainly do not trust Dubec. Watch him closely."

"Um," grunted Monty. "I will. But I wish you chaps could give us a little more help. If you were bargain' around the sky when my lads got into trouble it might make all the difference."

Jejeune's eyebrows went up in indignation. The impudence of this sodden animal! "The help I give you is colossal!" he snapped. "Why, every time I cross the lines there is at least one Boche the less to worry you."

Monty snorted and his face grew red. "Quite," he said, struggling desperately to keep calm. "So I have heard. In fact I should very much like the chance of seeing you in action and studying your methods."

The Frenchman's close-clipped moustache rose in a contemptuous sneer which he made little effort to hide. "That chance you can never get, I fear, my friend, for my work is always done far over in Boche land."

"Agreed, agreed," said Monty quickly. "More's the pity. But if your chaps could manage to be east of Cambrai this evening about six they might save one or two lives."

"Six o'clock, I think you said, *nest ce pas?*" Jejeune questioned quietly and with a faraway look in his eyes.

"Or soon after," nodded Monty. "They meet at Beaumetz at five forty-five."

Jejeune came out of his reverie and looked at Monty with an inscrutable expression. "We will see what can be done. *Au revoir*, my friend."

When the Frenchman had left, Monty lay back quite still on his bed with his eyes closed. He tried to straighten out the confusion that was in his mind. More than ever was he convinced that something was wrong. He had not failed to notice Jejeune's slight hesitations when questioned, or the flash of suspicion in his eyes.

But what he found even more remarkable was the man's careless indifference to the Squadron's troubles. The French flight had been sent up to help, not to look on in amusement. Yet there was nothing he could do about it just now . . . unless he sent up a complaint. He followed the course of that complaint in his mind. It would go to Wing, of course, then to Brigade, to Army, to G.H.Q. From G.H.Q., it would be forwarded to French Headquarters—if it got so far—and what then? Indignation would result. Friction between the Allies. Much harm would be done, and certainly no good.

No, such a plan was not to be thought of, and for the present he would have to be content to keep an even more watchful eye on *Monsieur le Capitaine* Jejeune. And on Dubec as well, for that matter, though Monty felt fairly well satisfied there was nothing much wrong in that direction. The interpreter was transparent, a bit eccentric, perhaps, but with no real vice in him.

## CHAPTER VI DETECTIVE DUBEC

**W**HEN LIEUTENANT DUBEC entered the mess marquee he had scarcely expected to find so many people there. Rodney was the man he sought, but as he stood unnoticed in the entrance he became very interested in the conversation which was taking place. It seemed that these officers were in open revolt against their Major, and that would make his task the easier. He was so sorry for these English officers who got killed so quickly by the Boches.

At this point Dubec was observed, and the talk came to an abrupt termination. The four men at the card table resumed their game. The interpreter approached Rodney.

"Capitaine Rodney, your Oo Pee is washout. You fly on escort this evening—far over, east of Cambrai."

Rodney started. "How the devil do you know that?"

"When I pass the office just now the telephone ring; no one was there so I answer it. That is the message I get, but your Major Monty does not know; he must not know. We cannot trust him."

“Rot!” said Rodney. “You’re crazy. Monty’s a bit queer at times and does odd things; but he’s as straight as a die.” He lowered his voice. “Anyway, what makes you think . . . ?”

“I tell you,” said Dubec. “Before the War I was detective—in Paris. So I see things which you do not notice . . .”

“Evidently,” Rodney put in.

“. . . I have watched him; he does most peculiar things, and I am certain he sends information to the Boches. These things have happened before—earlier in the War, when I was with our army, spies were everywhere. How is it that you are always being shot to pieces, while the French flight never lose a man?”

“You tell me,” said Rodney. “I’d love to know.”

“Because the Major sends information about you. He is the only one who knows, and he never tells you till the last moment. This time he does not know and you will not tell him.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about,” Rodney replied. But his voice was not so confident as before, and the prospect of that long reconnaissance was giving him a nasty feeling in the pit of his stomach. “The Major’d have to know; anyway, it’s nothing to do with me. I know nothing about it officially.”

“Leave it to me,” said Dubec, rising. “Leave it to me.”

Outside, he saw Jejeune walking towards the ’drome with a smile on his face, and hurried after him.

“*Bon jour, mon Capitaine,*” he said, when he reached his side.

Jejeune halted, and the smile left his face. He did not approve of being accosted by people of little account. “Well,” he inquired, “what is it?”

“About *le Majeur,*” began Dubec, a little nervous at his unpromising reception. “I have watched him and believe him to be a spy. Whenever he sends his pilots over the lines they get shot to pieces, while your flight has never a casualty.”

Jejeune’s eyes narrowed. “These English are no fighters,” he vouchsafed. “That, I think, is the real explanation. Still, it is possible that there is something in what you say. No one is to be trusted these times, and you would do well to maintain your watch. You will let me know immediately you have any real proof?”

“I will. A thousand thanks, *mon Capitaine.*”

Dubec stood for a while watching his famous compatriot striding across to the French hangars. When he turned he saw Monty emerge from his tent, whilst

the marquee also disgorged its occupants. Sykes came hurrying towards the office, an anxious expression on his face. The afternoon patrol was returning.

Four Camels circled once in good, though lopsided, formation—for there was no machine on the extreme right—and then broke up before landing. Monty stood by himself in front of the office, watching. He was surprised as well as glad that so many had returned. Kirk and Nixon made good landings, but Smith very nearly turned over on his nose. Now Caldwell was coming in—patrol leaders had to wait until last.

Monty’s hand clenched suddenly on his shooting-stick as he observed that Caldwell was too high to get in. Surely he would open up again. But no, he was not going to do so. The Camel struck the ground far over, bounced, touched again and crumpled in the ditch. Already the tender was on the move and Fergusson, the M.O., was scrambling aboard.

MONTY strolled towards the hangars, reaching them just as the Crossley returned. Caldwell was lifted gently to the ground on a stretcher. His clothing was soaked in blood, but he was conscious. He recognised the Major, were waiting for . . . for us, sir.”

There was a murmur of indignation from those standing around. “He’d better not talk, sir,” said Fergusson. “He’s been wounded several times . . . get him in the shade, you men.”

The M.O. was in command now, so Monty walked away. Then he noticed that Smith was receiving first aid from an orderly. Smith’s wrist had been shattered by a bullet. So, after all, the Squadron had lost three pilots on one show. Monty stood quite still considering the question. At any rate there was nothing he could do about it. The evening patrol would most likely have as many casualties, only they’d probably be missing instead of wounded.

They were nearly always missing, either that or down in flames, and it was quite the exception for two to return wounded. Fresh infants would come up from the Pool to-morrow; and much use they’d be! No, there was nothin’ he could do about it all, that was just the trouble. But at least he could fly up out of this heat and stuffiness, to forget his worries for a while in the cool of the upper air.

“Get my machine out,” he ordered a flight sergeant, and sent a mechanic for his kit. And presently his Camel was tearing over the ground till it bounded skywards. A group of pilots had turned to watch.

“Look!” said Fry. “He’s going to crash!”

"He's tight," Grant announced. "I saw MacPherson taking whisky to his tent half an hour ago."

MONTY'S behaviour was certainly rather exciting, but he was not drunk. The direction of his take-off was bringing him over the French hangars, in front of which were signs of activity. The props of several Spads were ticking over, and Monty was reminded of Jejeune. If that Frenchman were about to take the air there might be a chance of seeing him in action, but Monty did not wish to betray his curiosity.

So he pulled the fine adjustment back, cutting down the petrol supply to the eager Le Rhone. The weakened mixture in the crankcase exploded like a gunshot, but Monty held up the Camel's nose to near stalling point and hovered, precariously balancing his machine with deft touch of finger and thumb on stick and feet on rudder-bar.

"My hat!" shouted Grant, "he's going to spin in!" Evidently the Frenchmen thought the same, for they were scattering to safety. The engine banged again, and Monty notched the lever forward and surged upward. He had seen what he wanted to see. Jejeune was clothed for flight. It was just idle curiosity, perhaps, that made Monty want to see this man at work, but it seemed he had nothing better to do. And there was just the possibility, he thought, that he might discover something of interest. He climbed towards a thundercloud that gathered in the west.

Down below the French pilots emerged from their refuges.

"Now you know how these British manage to kill themselves," Jejeune said with a grin as he watched the Camel climb. Then he noticed the "Z" alongside the Squadron distinguishing mark on the fuselage. "Does anyone know who flies that machine?" he inquired.

"The English Major, *mon Capitaine*," said Lieutenant Gautier.

For an instant Jejeune's eyes narrowed as they watched the Camel. "I did not know he flew."

"Yes, indeed, he does sometimes," said one of the officers. "But never over the lines, I believe."

The Camel was fast disappearing to westward, and Jejeune shrugged his shoulders and got to business. He considered himself a fool for the thought that had crossed his mind.

"I alone will go into action if we sight Boches," he said. "Your turn will come later when you have more experience. For the present leave things to me. It is understood?"

"*Oui mon Capitaine*," replied Lieutenant Delbois quietly. But inwardly he rebelled, as did his comrades. They were sure they could give a good account of themselves were they but given the opportunity. Admittedly their leader always secured his victories and the honours which followed, but surely together they could do still better. They even might help the English, who were hard pressed. Reluctantly they went to their Spads.

## CHAPTER VII

### SKY CODE

**T**HE FRENCH 100TH FLIGHT was on the wing when Monty headed east, and he followed them at a discreet distance, climbing all the way to the lines.

"Archie" was by turns a nuisance and an advantage, his clusters fixing the position of the Spads and occasionally advertising the Camel's movements.

Monty hoped for the best and edged towards the sun.

At seventeen thousand feet the sky was now crystal clear, and there were no Huns to be seen. A wave of indignation suddenly gripped Monty. Why could not this Frenchman have saved up his energies until later in the day, when, for certain, Rodney would have his hands full.

Monty surveyed the ground that lay map-like below. From shattered Albert and the shell-torn Somme, his eyes methodically searched the country northwards to Arras and back again. "Ah!" surely that moving speck against brown earth had been a Hun. A camouflaged two-seater, no doubt, it had disappeared over a wood of many shades. Certainly it would be worth investigating if . . . but no, Monty decided he was not out for Huns to-day. He raised his eyes again towards the Spad flight.

The Frenchmen were a mile or more to the north-east and on a rather lower level; while further east again—Monty rubbed his goggles with the back of a glove—yes, there was a single machine, lower still and flying west. Most certainly a Hun. Had Jejeune seen it? Yes, he was rocking his Spad slowly, and the flight was about to dive. But no, it was the leader alone who went streaking down. So that was it; the famous Frenchman chose single combat. In spite of himself, Monty's heart

warmed towards Jejeune. He could have liked the fellow but for his conceit.

Monty dipped his nose to bring him closer to the scene; and thought it strange that this Fokker—for such it now obviously was—should tumble alone into such a position. The pilot could not have seen the threat, for he held his course. Ah! now he did. The Fokker banked steeply and swung round even as the Spad was upon it. Monty was mildly interested.

He shut off his engine with a flick of the hand, and held up his machine till the rush of wind had dwindled to a gentle rustle, so that the prop, slowed and finally ceased to move except for an occasional flicker as a piston overcame compression. Now he would be able to hear as well as see. How many rounds would this ace of aces use? Not many, surely.

The Fokker and the Spad were manoeuvring round each other, one on either side of the small circle they described. They seemed evenly matched, for neither gained on his foe. Jejeune would have to do much better than that for a quick victory: Monty was disappointed. There'd be no firing yet, he feared.

So his eyebrows went up in surprise as a long burst of fire reached him just as the combatants were lost to view beneath his lower plane. "Bothah!" Jejeune must have sprung a surprise trick out of his hat. It was most annoyin' to have missed it. A short burst followed the long . . . another long . . . and, yes, a second short. It was not to be a quick win, then.

The duellers reappeared behind the trailing edge, and Monty's surprise increased. Those two machines were still on opposite sides of a circle. How, then, in the name of . . . ? There was more firing, a short and a long followed by two shorts, and so on. There was surely a rhythm, a meaning to all this . . . Jumpin' Jupiter!"

THE reason for Monty's sudden exclamation was that the Fokker's nose had dropped suddenly and the machine gone tumbling down emitting volumes of black smoke. On fire! Here was a conclusive victory indeed. And all done, so far as Monty could see, without Jejeune ever getting on the fellow's tail. Monty pushed up his goggles and rubbed his eyes. Either he was seeing things, or his brain had become rusty with too much sitting around on the ground.

He was vaguely aware that his neglected Camel had tumbled into a spin. Never mind, that suited him well enough, for he could watch that falling comet within the circle described by his guns. So with a light

pressure on the stick he held the Camel in her spin until the prop, began to turn again. Then he gave his engine a burst of throttle and tripped his guns, firing them intermittently in his preoccupation like the bursts he had just heard from those other guns:

*long, short, long, short—short, long—long, long—long, short, short, short.*

In Morse that spelt "CAMB," but he could make nothing of that. Add an "S" and it would be short for "CAMBRIDGE." That didn't help either. But . . . ! add *short, long, short—short, long—short, short*, "RAI". . . yes, that was what had followed! Monty was sure of it now, and "CAMBRAI" had a meaning he could understand, for that was where the Squadron's evening patrol was to fly.

There had been more intermittent firing, the sequence of which Monty could not recall, but what matter? Obviously, a few letters in code would suffice to convey time and perhaps the strength and composition of a formation.

Yet, if this were treachery, how was it then, that the Fokker was now flaming down to destruction?

Monty could catch only occasional glimpses of the doomed machine, for the Camel was now spinning down through the trail of smoke the other had left. But as the ground rose close he saw the Fokker more clearly. The smoke was thinning, and it thinned until he could see the machine all the time. Strangely, the smoke seemed to come from a point just beneath the Fokker's tail, not from the petrol-tank, as one would expect, and it was now only a thin corkscrew wisp. Monty became interested.

Was it possible that this might be some chemical contraption from which the pilot could throw out smoke at will—much as the Navy threw out smoke screens? There was no limit to the cunning of these Jerries. He could see the back of the pilot's head—nor did he intend to lose sight of it in a hurry—but since the fellow did not turn, Monty was unable to see his face. Or the smile upon it.

For *Hauptmann* Gleiwitz, the pilot, was certainly smiling—smiling now at the memory of Colonel von Lubeck's words. "Do you not run great risk?"

"Risk! indeed," smiled Gleiwitz, as he eased his Fokker out of its spin.

He flattened out quite near the ground, facing east as he had intended, and gave his engine a little throttle as the speed fell away. He swung round to the north and headed for home.

It was just as he made that turn that he got the shock of his life. A Camel was charging down at him under full engine. He could see the twin muzzles of its Vickers guns, fixing him with their ugly glint. The shock of it paralysed *Hauptmann* Gleiwitz—but only for an instant.

Gleiwitz was no coward, or he could never have taken so heavy a toll of British youth. Besides, his honour, more even than his life, was at stake; for, a bare hundred feet below was a road upon which marched a column of infantry. At least they had been marching until now they stood gazing in amazement at the unprecedented scene above. Clearly they expected this Fokker pilot to get busy against this fool Britisher. Perhaps, thought Gleiwitz, the man had lost his way and so blundered unwittingly to his doom. Gleiwitz got busy.

JAMMING the throttle wide open, Gleiwitz flung on bank and drew the stick back to pull him round in the tight turn that would put the Camel at his mercy. But even as his machine responded his confidence began to ooze. Experienced fighter that he was, he could scarcely fail to recognise the master hand that controlled this Camel. Just as an average tennis player will know his fate from the first ball returned by the champion he might come up against, so it is with fighting pilots.

Never had Gleiwitz encountered such a man as this. The precision of his movement and the closeness of his pressure spoke of ruthless determination and confident skill. Far from Gleiwitz drawing in behind his man, the very opposite was the case. The fuselage of that Camel passed steadily out of his line of vision . . . now only the rudder was in sight . . . now that had disappeared, and the machine would be pulling in behind Gleiwitz, those wickedlooking muzzles swinging slowly into line.

Already something like despair possessed the German. He must turn faster—pull the stick still further back. Doing so, he got an instant's glimpse of the other's tail. But he could not hold it, and it passed from view again. Only by turning his head would he be able to see it, and he was too much occupied to turn.

He was powerless to do more, for, since the ground was so close, the usual spin out of a difficult situation was not possible. There remained the alternative of running for it, but that course could have only one end. True, the Fokker was probably the faster machine, but that would not save him from this inexorable foe.

He might delay the issue by flying an erratic course, but then his superior speed would be used up and the Englishman could choose his moment for a decisive burst. No, to run for it would be futile.

Shameful, too. For since there was no wind, it followed that the combatants circled ever over that road lined with upturned faces, crossing and re-crossing it. Why did this man not fire and have done with it? The silence of those guns was more unnerving than their bark. Gleiwitz's head was wet within his helmet. He would, he must, turn faster.

He hugged the stick still closer to him, and it resisted his pressure. It was as though the Fokker knew the limits beyond which it could not be forced and still survive. But Gleiwitz was now oblivious to such warnings. His mount must be forced to turn more tightly still. He increased the pressure till the stick was touching his stomach . . . and, resistance left the stick.

The Fokker, stalled on a vertical bank, dropped its nose like a stone. Did those fools in the road with their upturned faces realise their danger? Just half a turn and the doomed machine would be upon them. Those fools . . . !

## CHAPTER VIII A SPY UNMASKED

**W**HEN JEJEUNE LOOKED OVER his shoulder as he climbed back to his flight he got a nasty shock. That trail of smoke made it easy enough to pick out the still spinning Fokker, and it was not so thick as to hide another machine which was spinning above it. That other machine was, he thought, a Camel. Yes, now he was sure of it. And instinct rather than reason suggested that it was flown by the English Major. It was not a comforting conclusion.

Could it be that this sleepy Britisher, this often half-drunk and always wholly stupid Britisher had been fooling him? Jejeune recalled their many meetings, and decided that it was very unlikely. And yet there was the possibility after all. He became troubled again, then reflected that the German would no doubt deal faithfully with that Camel pilot.

In case he did not, Jejeune would presently dive

again. For the moment, he had lost sight of those two machines, and now only a faint trace of smoke made a grey smudge against the green where they had passed. His pilots were already forming up behind so he must wait a few minutes, and then he would go down so suddenly they would not know what he was after.

Jejeune dropped his nose and went swooping earthwards.

He swept the growing landscape with an eagle eye and suddenly sighted a machine to westward. It was low down and speeding for the lines. Jejeune cursed. He had left things very late, for if that Camel crossed the trenches he could not with safety shoot it down. He pushed the throttle wide and the already fast revving Hispano screamed its objection.

But he was fast gaining . . . no, it was too late. Already the Camel had crossed the trenches, while the Spad was still a quarter of a mile behind.

To the rear of the support trenches, however, there was a desolate stretch of country which, since it was in full view of the enemy lines, was empty of troops. It seemed to Jejeune that at this very low altitude he might shoot down this snooping British Major without attracting attention. Even while he debated the wisdom of such a desperate course the speed of his dive had closed the range to fifty yards, and the tempting target was in his sight. The "Z" on the fuselage was clearly visible. A bold course was often the safest. Jejeune's thumbs pressed the gun triggers.

EVEN before the Fokker struck, Monty had taken off his bank and was streaking for the lines. He had had no particular quarrel with this German, but was profoundly glad of the result. Especially so because, when he had his sight lined up on the Fokker just now and had pressed triggers, there had been no result. Not a single answering crack. Pressure must have gone from the interrupter gear, and he would have a few words to say to the armourer sergeant when he got back.

But there are more ways of fighting than one. Bluff was another, and Monty had stuck to his opponent even more closely after that discovery, and his persistence had been rewarded. It had been pure bluff, and Monty felt it was lucky indeed that his bluff had not been called for in that case there would have been no one to keep an eye on Jejeune.

Monty was tearing along now about fifty feet from the ground and the surprised troops below him had no time to shoot. To climb high meant delay, and that he could not afford. Jejeune was the real enemy and

must be dealt with immediately. But how? To forward an accusation to Wing in the hope that he would be brought to trial?

No, such a course would prove more hopeless by far than the previously contemplated complaint. Jejeune, popular idol of France, could never be convicted on the evidence of one man, and the fact that the Squadron was suffering abnormal casualties. It would not only prove hopeless, but harmful to international relations. So slight was the evidence indeed that for a moment Monty was himself assailed by doubts. He reviewed the whole position.

There was the fact that Jejeune paid daily visits to the Squadron and was then made acquainted with the movements of each flight. He was one of the very few who knew of orders in advance. It was reported that he always got his victims in flames—in itself a strange circumstance. But the conduct of that fight Monty had just witnessed was the most damning indictment of all. For even apart from the German smoke ruse there was the fact that Jejeune had never looked like a skilful and determined fighter. Then there was that Morsing with machine-guns. . . .

Monty's thoughts were suddenly interrupted. Still flying low, he had just crossed the trenches when he noticed a Spad bearing down in his direction at high speed. Here, very likely, came the man himself, and there was certainly something sinister and purposeful about the unswerving course of his machine.

So that when, a moment later, there came from it a burst of bullets, Monty was ready. He zoomed from the ground in a climbing turn and recognised the Spad and its occupant beyond all doubt. Both machines were now in full view of a number of troops, and Jejeune evidently thought better of his attack, for he now climbed away, apparently to rejoin his patrol. Any doubts of his guilt that Monty might still have entertained were entirely dispelled.

Yet he had no more evidence to demand a court-martial than before. The spy, then, must be shot down, and the sooner the better. Monty had no wish to sleep on his decision. He must hurry. He must land, get another machine and take-off before the French flight returned. After that he would re-cross the lines for the last time. It was tough, but the only way. Monty sighed, and then his face brightened. He'd have a bit of fun before the end. He hoped the Squadron's new Major would give them a helpin' hand from time to time. Heaven knew they needed it!

CHAPTER IX  
BLACKMAIL!

**N**OW WELL BEHIND THE LINES and still climbing, Monty headed south for the aerodrome. Beneath lay another 'drome, and some S.E.'s were dropping down to land. He had taken no account of his whereabouts, but now recognised the place as Villiers. Suddenly he went tumbling in a spin. He had made up his mind to land before those S.E.'s, a thing he had clearly no ordinary right to do. But this was no ordinary occasion, and if he were quick he could nip in first.

He came out of the spin into a dive, and flattened out along the aerodrome boundary, did a neat left turn and touched down with a perfect three-pointer. The machine ran a few yards, and as it slowed in front of the hangars Monty swung alongside a Fokker biplane—the cause of his sudden descent.

It had been a display either of superb judgment or of beginner's luck. Three men who had turned from a proud examination of their squadron's prize evidently thought it a pure fluke that several machines, including the Fokker, had not been written off. Major Murray detached himself from the other two and bore down on Monty with an ominous expression.

"Consummate ass!" he said icily. "What the devil d'you mean by coming in like that? Didn't you see those S.E.'s? They had right of way. There might have been serious results of your incompetence. Well, why don't you answer? Did you see them or didn't you?"

Monty was getting red in the face with suppressed emotion. The two officers standing by the Fokker nudged each other in enjoyment of the situation. Their Major certainly knew how to give people a dressing-down, as on occasion they had known to their cost. This was going to be amusing.

Monty's lips quivered but no sound came therefrom.

"Speak up!" thundered Murray, himself becoming a trifle red.

Monty was in fact struggling to restrain the flow of words which pressed for expression, since he had his own good reasons for keeping on good terms with Murray. "Yes," he stammered gently, "I saw them."

"Humph!" snorted Murray triumphantly. "Then why the blazes didn't you wait? Answer that."

Monty's mind had been so full of other thoughts that he was not prepared for this obvious question. "My engine stopped," he replied after a pause.

Murray subsided a bit at that, and seemed crestfallen. "Oh, well, in that case we'll soon see what the trouble is," he said, beckoning to a mechanic.

"Don't bother," said Monty. "I know why it stopped. You see, I closed the throttle."

It was Murray's turn to stand speechless while his jaw reciprocated violently.

"Don't stand there gapin' like a blitherin' idiot!" exploded Monty at last, pulling off his helmet, loosing his belt and jumping to the ground. "I haven't got all day and night to waste at this perishin' spot."

"Hardcastle!" exclaimed Murray. "Why didn't you say so at first? I thought you were a confounded young subaltern who hadn't learnt the regulations." He lowered his voice. "You ought to know better!"

"I ought," said Monty. "But I'm slow to learn, so let's leave it at that. Where did you get that Fokker?"

Murray, his temper restored for the moment, rubbed his hands together in evident pleasure. "Bit of luck, that! He was a youngster, new to the game; lost his way, I think, and my chaps cut him off. He landed here without a shot being fired."

"Quite a bit of luck!" Monty agreed. "As a matter of fact I'd like a flip in her."

"I'm afraid you can't," said Murray shortly. "I'm the only one who's flown her, and I'm waiting instructions as to her disposal."

"Pity," was Monty's quiet comment.

"But never mind, if it can't be done, it can't." He peeled off his flying-suit as though in acceptance of this ruling.

"Deuced hot, what?" he added, inserting his eyeglass. "Care for a flip in my 'bus?"

THIS was a gesture Murray had hardly expected in view of his own recent refusal, but it was none the less acceptable. The chance to fly a machine of another type presented itself but rarely to squadron officers, and they were not in the habit of declining such offers.

"Thanks, I'd like to," he said.

"By the way," inquired Monty in very audible tones just as Murray raised his foot to step into the cockpit. "That Crossley of yours still goin' well?—The one you keep at Le Treport, I mean." Murray lowered his leg and swung round as if he had been stung in the

thigh by a wasp. He glanced anxiously about him as though wondering whether Monty's words had been overheard by anyone on the tarmac. "Talk quietly, can't you!" he hissed. "And don't mention that Crossley. I never want to see nor hear of it again!"

It had happened in the dim and distant past when the War was young, that Crossley business. Monty and Murray had been young, too, in those days, for promotion had not then come to them; nor the worries and responsibilities promotion brings. They had found themselves together at the Depot and with but little to do. Murray had coveted one of the cars with which the place abounded, so that he might while away his leisure. But it seemed that his desire could not be appeased. Untold gold would not buy one, nor by any cunning could the use of one be wangled.

It was Monty who had suggested a way—the ever-observant Monty. Not that he wanted a car himself for, as he said, he could not abide the messy things. But he was always ready with suggestions, and pointed out that there was a dump of old wrecks which had been crashed or were otherwise hopelessly disabled.

"Not one of them's the slightest use," Murray had observed disconsolately.

"Individually no, but collectively yes, if you get my meanin' . . ." Monty had prompted.

Murray did get that meaning, and to some purpose. He found that there was a sound engine in one frame, a good radiator in another, a back axle was to be had from a third, and so on. He found also that a little judicious expenditure here and there smoothed things down, that a couple of ack-emmas were only too glad to lend their assistance.

In a remarkably short time a fairly presentable Crossley had come into being at the back of Murray's billet; a Crossley, moreover, which had no moral right to exist, since it had no number to figure in an army record book.

It was a demon to travel, that car, as Murray was able to testify the first time he took it out. He drove it to Le Treport on that occasion—lowering the record for the journey by several minutes—and found storage space for it in the town. He picked up a tender which was returning to the Depot—and he had never driven the cursed vehicle since. For the next day he was posted to a squadron.

Much had happened in the meanwhile, Murray had become a squadron commander; the authorities had tumbled to these pilferings, as they unkindly described them, and had taken steps to put an end to such

things. Murray, being in a position of responsibility, was required to give effect to these rulings. Only yesterday he had sat on a court of inquiry over the disappearance of an aeroplane watch, and had spoken his mind in no uncertain voice. For the moment he had forgotten about the Crossley.

He could never forget it for long, however. Every week he paid the rent for its storage, but that was the least of his worries. One day some general would discover the cursed thing. Murray could neither sell it nor give it away. No Frenchman would touch with a bargepole what was so obviously the property of the British Government. It was the skeleton in the wretched Major's cupboard. He never wanted to see it nor hear of it again. Yet here on his own tarmac Hardcastle was openly referring to it.

"I feel very strongly about such pilferin's," Monty was saying.

Murray gasped. These were the very words he had himself used yesterday. "For Heaven's sake shut up! What d'you want?"

"To borrow that Fokker."

"But . . . but this is blackmail."

"Blackmail," said Monty, giving his eyeglass a firmer hold and peering down at his smaller companion, "is attemptin' to obtain money by menaces. It is a crime, like pilferin', but not so bad. . . ."

"Take it," Murray almost wailed, and climbed into the Camel. A moment later he was in the air.

## CHAPTER X A TRAITOR AT BAY

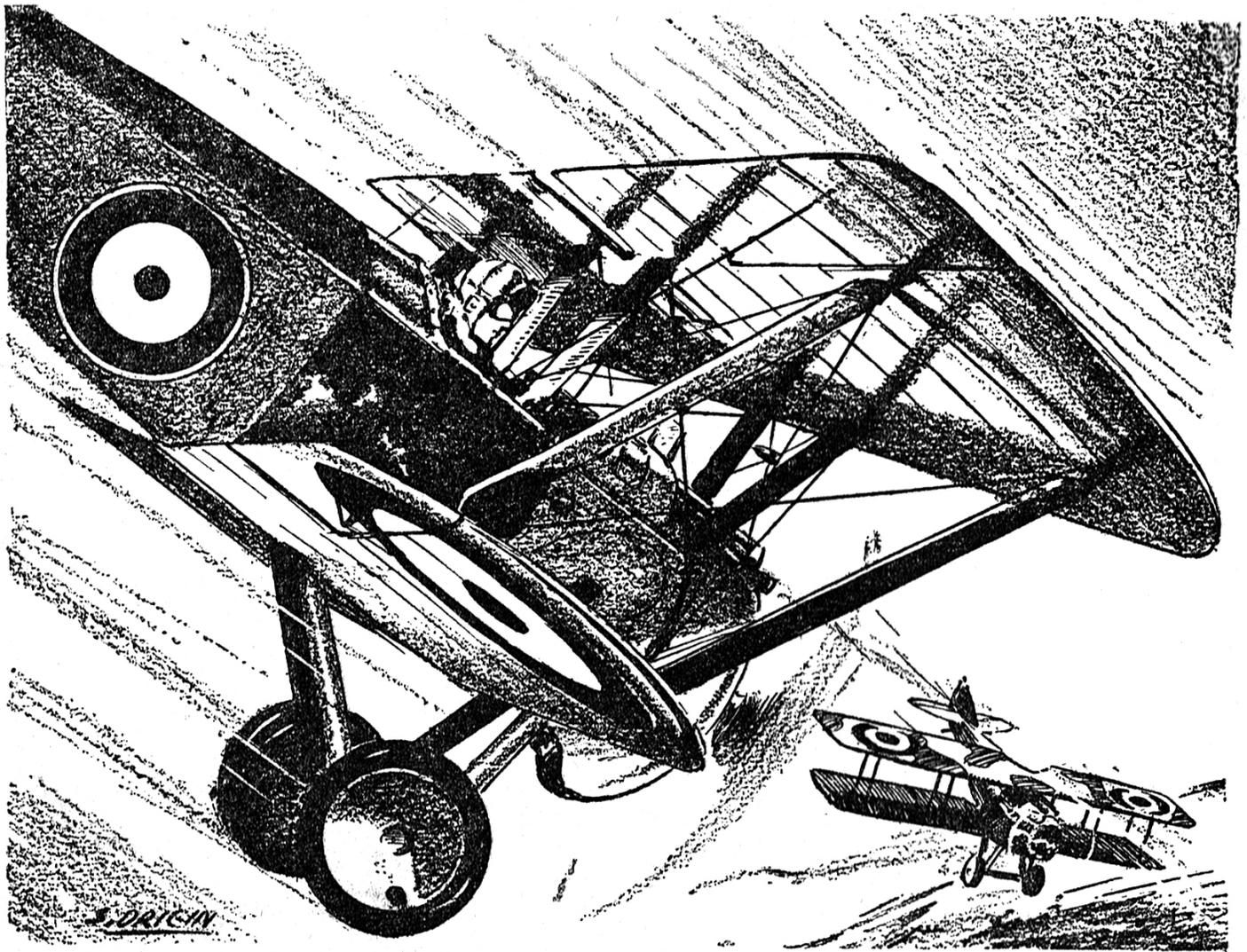
**W**ITHOUT BOTHERING to put on his kit, but with his helmet in his hand, Monty walked quietly to the Fokker and got in.

"Give her a swing, lad," he told a mechanic.

"Contact, sir, please."

"Contact."

The Mercedes being warm, there was no need for further delay, and certainly there was no time to be lost. Jejeune might be back at any moment. Monty made one climbing turn and made off south. For once in his life he felt nervous.



His sudden decision to obtain this Fokker had been guided by one impulse alone. It was this. The spy could hardly be expected to give battle to a pilot in a British machine in the vicinity of his own aerodrome, but he would surely be bound to put up a fight against a German 'plane. Monty wanted him to fight, and fight well, so that if he lost he would die an airman's death. The thought of killing a man who offered no resistance was repugnant in the extreme to Monty, but had it been the only way he must have taken it. The Fokker offered a way out of this dilemma, but its possession could give no further help. When Jejeune was dead it would be Monty's turn, and he would be in the position from which he had spared Jejeune. The rest of the French flight would attack him, and perhaps his own pilots as well. And he could make no resistance.

He reached the aerodrome without a moment to spare, for the Spad formation was already visible in the east. Following his usual practice, Jejeune dived down first, rocketed up in an Immelmann turn, then came

gliding in to land. A single Verrey light, the signal of victory, soared from his cockpit.

"That's the last time he'll play that little game!" muttered Monty, as, hurtling above his hangars with a reverberating roar, he streaked across the 'drome and rose steeply at the Spad. And as he climbed he sent a warning burst from his guns.

Startled at the sound of bullets, Jejeune pulled out of his glide and opened up. He banked steeply and saw the Fokker, and then found himself in a dilemma. The last thing he wanted was to be involved in combat with a German, and yet he could hardly avoid putting up a show over his own aerodrome.

He dived, fired at random and climbed again. Then his mouth set in a gesture of triumph, for at the moment of close approach he had recognised Monty, helmetless and with monocle in position. Here was an opportunity as priceless as it was unexpected, for the one man who might betray him could now be shot down without fear of the consequences. Jejeune got busy.

DELBOIS of the French flight saw the Fokker at the same moment with a shock of surprise. Then he calmed down as, with a sense of disappointment he reflected that Boches did not make a habit of flying low round French aerodromes. This must be a captured machine. Yet why in the name of Heaven was the Capitaine attacking it? The Capitaine was diving on the tail of this wretched pilot, who must, therefore, be an enemy after all—a beginner, perhaps, who had lost himself. Delbois felt sorry for the poor chap, as he pulled out of his glide to avoid a nearer approach. Since this was evidently to be a fight he must obey instructions and keep out of his leader's way.

Monty turned his head and watched while Jejeune dived for the second time. Signs from the ground that a Camel was about to take-off warned him of the danger of his position. He kept his machine at its best climbing angle, and his eyes on the Spad. He banked gently as the French 'plane came within decisive range, so baulking its pilot's aim. He would decide his tactics when he knew the method Jejeune would adopt.

The Frenchman did not attempt to follow the Fokker as it swung round in a climbing turn, but zoomed steeply, did a stall turn and dived again. Monty smiled grimly. That sort of thing might be spectacular, but was bad tactics. It used up height and got one nowhere. It could only prove effective where one's opponent flew dead straight or dived away.

Down came Jejeune again, and now bullets cracked from his guns. This time he had opened fire at long range.

"Bad fightin'," thought Monty, and at the third such manoeuvre he was level with the Spad. Then things happened. Perhaps Jejeune had thought his opponent capable only of those gentle, though infuriating turns. If so, he was quickly disillusioned.

Lifting a wing in one swift movement, Monty let off a burst into the fuselage. Jejeune kicked on bottom rudder and lifted his tail as though to spin away. But this instinctive movement of escape seemed futile now, for the Fokker followed the Spad's every twist, and the second burst decided the issue.

Jejeune went headlong through the roof of the French hangar, which was in an instant a sheet of flame. Monty had done his work.

Now he must pay the price!

HE GRABBED the helmet which he had stuffed inside his seat and pulled it on his head to prevent recognition. Five Spads were diving on him and two

Camels had left the ground. He might as well take what was coming to him quietly and without fuss, he told himself. But as the first whiplash of bullets came crashing through, he was on a wing-tip, fighting for position. He got a machine in his sight and his fingers lightly touched triggers before he realised that the 'plane was a Camel, with Rodney in the cockpit. No, there was nothing he could do about it.

Except perhaps to keep on turning and dodging. Yes, he decided, he'd see what these chaps were made of, and might even get a spot of fun out of it. But tumble and twist as he might, those bullets were never far out. It would not be a long business.

Little holes appeared in the fabric of his wings, like the first drops of summer rain on a hot pavement; struts began to splinter and instruments to disintegrate; and then, suddenly, Monty's eyeglass shattered into a thousand fragments and Monty saw red.

"Bothar!" he muttered.

He absolutely refused to be killed without his monocle, and sought a way cut of this tangle of machines. Then he noticed the road which disappeared into a wood a mile behind the 'drome. The road remained invisible beneath the spread foliage until it re-emerged on the far side. Here was a possible chance. He spun—one turn and he must come out—and found himself immediately over the road. He tugged the stick back—how sluggish the machine had become. She was pretty well shot about, petrol was pouring from the punctured tank on to his knees and hissing on the hot exhaust, sending acrid fumes into his face. Yes, she was responding . . . but only just in time.

His wheels struck the road and he bounced high, level with the tree-tops ahead. Forward went the stick, and the Fokker shot into the wood.

Fortunately the road was clear as far as Monty could see . . . no, there was a car about a mile away. It looked just a speck, but it grew rapidly. Would this confounded thing never sit down? He had no wish to ram the vehicle—it looked like a staff car, too.

The Fokker grounded at last, rushed along a further two hundred yards, bumped the car with its remaining impetus and burst suddenly into flames. Monty was glad of those flames, hot though they were. They would make a clean job of the Fokker, destroying all identification. Also, they formed a screen under cover of which he could escape to the wood unseen by those brass hats.

The only fly in the ointment was that he could not

see the expression on their faces—he'd have given a good deal for a glimpse. He chuckled as he plunged deeper into the wood, and coughed, his throat still full of fumes. He must press on, hanging about here would not be healthy! He heard a tender screaming along the road, and men shouting—his men. But he knew they could not search for the Hun pilot until those flames had subsided.

He would get back to his tent quickly now, while everyone was out of the way—creep in at the back, perhaps, under the skirting. He was in an awful mess, his uniform smoke-blackened and torn. But MacPherson would soon clean him up.

Monty felt extraordinarily happy. A spy had been

removed for good, and, at last, the Squadron would have a sportin' chance. No one could expect more. What else was there to worry about? Murray? No, Monty knew how to deal with Murray. What a good thing he had remembered about that Crossley. He would give him a ring right away. Monty chuckled, and coughed, and pressed on through the wood.

