

# CRUMPLED BUZZARD

by FRANKLIN M. RITCHIE

*Lanky Jeff Dayton, a war bird, saw nothin' to get het up about in this man's war,  
but when he did, he saw red—red streaks of flame jetting from angry guns.*

**L**ANKY JEFF DAYTON of the Bull Pup Squadron stretched lazily. He cocked a whimsical eye at the nervous Skipper, who was sitting on the edge of a three-legged stool on the other side of the bare little estaminet which served as orderly room. Big Dayton grinned as he watched the Major drumming tensely with his fingers on the mahogany table and jumping about on the stool, his face drawn and tense.

"This war's goin' right on even if a bird does get all het up about it," Dayton drawled, addressing prim, thin-faced Pilot Tabler who was sitting next to him on the bench, leaning back against the stone wall. He chuckled at Tabler's reproving glance and thrust his hands deep into the pockets of his oil-stained "teddy-bear" flying suit. He laughed outright when Tabler, immaculate in a trim leather flying coat and whipcord breeches over polished cordovan boots pulled away from Dayton's greasy outfit.

"Damn!" the Skipper exploded in a shrill, cracked voice. The bang of the telephone instrument against the table made Dayton stare calmly at his superior, who leaned tensely across the table, his black eyebrows meeting in a single, concentrated line of worry. The Major pounded dramatically on the table, clenching his fist until the knuckles showed white.

"You've got to get von Hellenbach!" the Major shouted at Dayton.

Dayton raised his big body slowly from the bench, like an extension ladder going up in sections, pulled his limp leather helmet from his pocket and slipped it on his head.

"Yes, sir," he agreed unemotionally, adjusting his chin strap with meticulous care. The big fellow stared inquiringly at Tabler, who had uttered an ejaculation half of fear and half of relief at the Skipper's order. "What's the buzzard up to now?" Dayton leaned

negligently against the deserted bar and waited for orders. The little Major rose tensely to his feet.

"Von Hellenbach's carrying out his threat to get ten Bull Pups in revenge for that bird, von Engel, that you shot down. He's up over Ancemont now—and he's just shot down Brill and Clakins!" The little Major paced angrily back and forth on the stone flags of the former estaminet, his face flushing red while he squared his shoulders dramatically.

"I don't care if he is the best man the Jerries have in this sector!" the Skipper thundered. "You've got to get him!"

Dayton shrugged and moved toward the door.

"Reckon I'll have a try," he said easily.

"Dayton!" the Skipper stopped him at the entrance to the room. "Don't you ever get mad? Do you realize how important this is?"

The big pilot merely shrugged. "I'll make out!" he drawled. "No use gettin' all het up now."

Major Derry mumbled under his breath explosively and his face turned purple. "Fool!" he muttered. Tabler coughed apologetically.

"That buzzard can get bo-koo mad, sir," he told the Major in a low tone so that Dayton couldn't hear. "I saw him lay a redleg looey out cold for kicking a dog. Just seemed to forget everything and go crazy for a minute."

"Humph!" the Skipper sneered. "He'll need something now to pep him up." The little man stared at immaculate Tabler. "And you can go along with him, too!" he added raising his voice.

Tabler's face turned whiter than usual and he bit his lower lip, but Dayton, who had heard the Major's last words, turned and grinned over his big shoulder. His calm bearing seemed to quiet the other man's fear, and he followed silently.

"All in the day's work!" Dayton told him

nonchalantly as they walked down the cobbled street of the village, past the white-washed stone houses with their red tiled roofs. At the end of the village street they came to a wide field, one side of which was marked by a row of trees and the other by a ditch. Canvas hangars, camouflaged against prying enemy airmen, housed the ships, and "grease-balls" in blue denim were moving busily about. A crew was warming up a trim S.E.-5 on the edge of the tarmac.

"O.K.?" Dayton asked the corporal in charge.

"Yes, sir," the man answered, with a grin which bespoke the big pilot's popularity. "First class."

"You take this bus, Tabler," Dayton told his companion. "What have you got for me?" he asked the corporal.

"Not a thing, sir," the man answered. "Leastways, there's not a crate in shape to fly except an amphibian bus that one o' those naval pilots flew over here for experimentin' on."

DAYTON shrugged his shoulders. "Guns on it?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Then trot her out. No use gettin' all worked up over a Jerry ace more or less. We'll take a crack at him." He grinned reassuringly at Tabler who was still pale and nervous.

"Von Hellenbach's conked more ships than any Jerry on the whole front," Tabler said, wetting his lips with his tongue, while his weak eyes shifted before Dayton's level gaze. The big fellow chuckled easily.

"You might have motor trouble, so you'd have to hang back," he grinned, lowering his voice. "I'll take a crack at the buzzard." He turned away to inspect the amphibian which was being wheeled out by four men who clung to the wing tips while two others held the fuselage up off the ground. When they had rolled the crate up to the line and started the motor, Dayton climbed slowly in and pulled his goggles down over his eyes.

"All set?" he yelled at Tabler, who nodded silently. Dayton waved a gloved hand to reassure his companion and watched the S.E. streak away across the field in a cloud of dust. When the other ship started to rise in a long slant over the trees at the end of the 'drome, Dayton shoved his own throttle wide open.

Thrilling to the answering roar of his engine, he moved his stick forward and grinned as the tail came up and his bus shot across the tarmac. Then he eased

back on his controls and watched the field fall away beneath him, camouflaged hangars melting into the protective green of their surroundings. He swung toward Ancemont, staring down into the patch-work of green and brown and blue for the shell torn ruins of the village.

"Hope that Jerry buzzard's still there," he soliloquized, throwing the bus into a steep-banked "figure eight" to get the feel of the unfamiliar controls. That done, he looped joyously and continued on his way. Von Hellenbach, crack Jerry ace, was waiting for him of course, but there was no use getting "het up."

Black smoke puffs became suddenly visible to the big pilot as he neared the lines and he felt his ship rock and sway like a frail boat in a heavy sea, but he merely grinned at the Archies whose shrapnel shells were causing all the commotion.

Kicking his rudder bar with his left foot and shoving his stick in the same direction, he banked steeply, watching the left wing dip down as the ship whirled, making the kaleidoscopic colors of the earth whirl before his eyes. Then he swung the other way, zig-zagging to throw off the aim of the German gunners.

He leaned over the side of the ship, staring good-naturedly down in an effort to locate the gun positions. It was all part of the game. That was part of their job, trying to pot him. He bore them no ill will, no more than he did to von Hellenbach who was probably waiting for him up at Ancemont.

DAYTON glanced around, searching the cloudy horizon for Tabler's red S.E., but without result. The big pilot chuckled and drove on toward Ancemont. The kid needed seasoning. The Skipper shouldn't have sent him along on a job like this. Turning a cub pilot loose against von Hellenbach was like putting him up in front of a firing squad. Dayton shrugged. It was different with himself. He'd been around a bit in the air. Of course, meeting the Jerry ace wasn't exactly like playing tag, but it was all in the day's work. No use worrying!

The big fellow grinned as he recalled the nervous little Major's question, "Don't you ever get mad?" What was the use. He didn't have any grudge against these Jerries. It was just part of the job. There were lots of good fellows among them.

Dayton rubbed the back of his glove across his goggles to clear his vision, obscured by spattering oil from his motor. The roaring of his motor and the

shrill screeching of the wind in the taut wires of his ship recalled his task. He cast his eyes this way and that and held a hand in front of him while he squinted into the sun for a moment, searching for traces of von Hellenbach.

*Tac! Tac! Tac! Tac! Tac!* The staccato rat-tat-tat of a Spandau machine gun, audible even over the noise of his engine, assailed his ear drums. A sudden rush of air off to one side made his 'plane rock and quiver and a streak of black shot down past him. A Fokker!

*R-r-r-ip!* Glancing upward, he saw blue sky through a hole in the center section fabric just over his head. He whistled softly. Pretty close, that! Glancing after the diving black shape he saw the wispy, yellow-green streaks of tracer bullet phosphorus trails weaving toward him. The longer on which he leaned his elbow trembled under the sharp impact of a bullet.

Dayton grinned widely. This Jerry was good, no doubt of that. He'd shot down, unseen, out of a cloud before Dayton had got a glimpse of him, and the American waved at his enemy in good-natured acknowledgment of his cleverness. There was no doubt who it was. Painted on the fuselage, Dayton saw a golden eagle, von Hellenbach's insignia. The "Yellow Buzzard," the Americans called him.

Shoving the joy-stick hard over, Dayton shoved his left wing straight down and held it there for five hundred feet, grinning as the air beat swiftly against his left cheek. Then he pulled out, changed direction in a breath-taking Immelmann, and looped.

The buzzard was clever! When Dayton came out of his loop, he saw the shadow of the other bus on his engine. Von Hellenbach was still on his tail, between him and the sun! He felt the crate quiver as a burst of lead from the Spandau knocked splinters from one of his struts, and he heard the shrill keening of bullets. He swore softly, wishing he had an S.E. such as he had allowed Tabler to take. This amphibian was clumsy.

Dayton jerked back on his stick, which brought his nose up unexpectedly and stalled the ship when it lost flying speed. He grinned again as he saw von Hellenbach sideslip out of the way to avoid a crash. Shoving on his power just in time to avoid a spin, he dived for the tail of the other crate. A thrill shot through him and the blood pounded in his veins. This was a good game!

Staring down, he saw the blades of the German's propeller, twirling idly, like a man swinging Indian clubs, no longer the invisible blur of a whirling stick. Von Hellenbach's motor must have gone bad! The Jerry ace was gliding down helpless. Dayton had him

at his mercy. The big fellow's thumb tightened against the trigger on his joy-stick.

HE SHIVERED and felt suddenly cold. The muscles of his hand loosened and relaxed, and he shrugged his big shoulders. He couldn't do it. That wasn't war, it was murder. Waving his hand gaily at his late antagonist, he shoved his nose upward and started to climb. He'd meet the Yellow Buzzard some other time, in a fair fight. Glancing back, he saw the black ship settling down onto a Jerry 'drome.

*Tac! Tac! Tac!* Another Spandau! Two hundred feet above him, between him and his own lines, he sighted a Rumpler two-seater. Tracer trails were already weaving through the air, and he saw red flashes from the gun muzzles. There were three of them, he could see, two guns in front, firing through the propeller, and a movable gun on a swivel in the rear cockpit, operated by the observer, who was leaning over the side.

Standing on his tail for a moment, Dayton pressed his trigger. Nothing happened. The gun failed to respond. His heart fell swiftly seeming somehow to have become tangled with his stomach. The gun had jammed! He swore softly, fumbling at the gun with his big fingers while sweat rolled down his bronzed forehead under the edge of his helmet.

Would this fellow show him the same chivalry which he had just displayed toward von Hellenbach? A bullet tore through his tail assembly and he bit his lip. Didn't look like it! The big fellow shrugged his shoulders. Oh, well, there was no use getting mad. Some played square and some didn't. It was all in the day's work. Unexcited, he settled down to the grim game of playing tag with his pursuer.

Dayton sideslipped out of range and dived under the Jerry crate, coming up on the other side. He saw that the observer was working desperately, trying to follow him with his movable gun. But the big American merely grinned and swung out of the way, handling his bus like a humming bird, changing direction so swiftly and so constantly that the German couldn't keep pace with him. It was hard work, of course, but nothing to get 'het up' about.

Dayton waved derisively at his opponents. This had become a battle of wits—one ship trying desperately to bring its gun into play while the other, unable to sting, dodged for its life. The wind screamed a wild paeon in the tense wires as the two crates whirled about each other, the sun glinting on their wings, and the motors roared thunderously.

The Jerry looped, and Dayton stayed with him. Then the Rumpler stalled into a spin from which it zoomed with startling suddenness, but Dayton held his place nonchalantly, and he was still just above and just behind the other bus when they both leveled out—and the German observer was clinging desperately to his gun mount to hold his balance.

HOLDING his stick between his knees, Dayton tried desperately to work on the jammed gun, but without success. He was afraid to dismantle the weapon for fear of losing some of the tiny parts in the terrific rush of air, so he gave it up. This Rumpler was playing a dirty trick on him, after he had given von Hellenbach a chance. Oh, well! He shrugged unconcernedly.

The Rumpler zoomed swiftly at him in a sudden, steep climbing turn which made Dayton wonder how the motor could hold the ship in the air without stalling. The crate kept coming at him and its fire was effective, so that he had to give ground. With a sudden twist, the ship reached his own level. A new burst ripped a hole in his tail assembly, and he felt his ship growing sluggish.

For a moment, his cheeks paled under the tan and the freckles and the spattered oil which smeared them. Then his blue eyes danced again with the thrill of the contest.

Looping, he came out above the other crate, though he was still ahead of it where the fixed guns could rake him.

Shrugging, he decided he'd have to do something. Still calm and deliberate, though every movement was swift and effortless, he banked around, shoved his stick forward, and plunged down, motor roaring at full speed, toward the Rumpler. The thunder of his engine and the Valkyrie screaming of the wind in his wires quite deafened him. The nose of the other crate came nearer, closer, looming larger and larger before his eyes.

One hundred and fifty—one seventy five—two hundred miles an hour! Gravity and pounding cylinders combined to hurl him like a great projectile at the other ship. His senses reeled under the dizzying speed. A collision seemed unavoidable. He clung grimly.

It was the other pilot's nerve which broke first, and the Rumpler nosed swiftly over to drop plummet-like out of his way, just in time to avoid the crash.

The blood singing in his veins, his pulses pounding,

Dayton followed the other bus in a wild nose dive. He had no idea of his speed except that he wondered desperately whether he'd be able to pull out without breaking the back of his ship in this terrific rush of air. However, the other fellow was going just as fast, so he resolved to stick and see what happened.

Only a couple of hundred feet from the ground, Dayton began to ease slowly up on his stick, checking the speed of his drop. The Jerry seemed to be doing the same thing, and Dayton grinned as he realized that he had anticipated the move. The American levelled off, hedgehopping now, his landing gear almost scraping the tops of trees which flashed beneath him in a gray blur.

*Crash!* A spurt of yellow flame shot upward, followed by thick clouds of black smoke. The Rumpler had failed to pull out! A little sick at his stomach, Jeff Dayton nosed skyward. Too bad! The Jerry had given him a good fight and he'd borne the fellow no ill will. He headed back home, his throat a bit tight and his eyes a bit hot as he thought of the Rumpler's unlucky occupants. Enemies or not, they had been men. He couldn't find it in his heart to be glad of what had happened to them.

Getting plenty of altitude, he sailed swiftly toward his own 'drome, high up over the white cumulus clouds. Above him the sky was blue, filled with golden sunlight, and beneath him danced a billowing white sea of mist, with here and there a break which revealed the earth, with its greens and browns and blues.

Some distance ahead, he spotted a Jerry Albatros, and he grinned, driving straight ahead. He didn't want to mix up with one of those buzzards in his helpless condition. He opened his throttle all the way, hoping the Jerry hadn't seen him.

Suddenly the German ship nosed down, diving through the clouds. Dayton leaned over the side, his brow wrinkling in a worried frown. Of course, it was none of his business, and he'd have all he could do to get home himself. Still, he supposed that Jerry must be after an Allied ship when he dived like that. An irresistible force seemed to be pulling him that way. Dayton dived after the Albatros, staring hard.

As he plunged through the cloud curtain, he spotted a red S.E.-5. His eyes bulged. He knew that bus. It had a yellow patch on the right-hand stabilizer. It was young Tabler's crate! The kid hadn't run after all.

Dayton watched with bated breath as the Albatros dived. He screamed a warning, forgetting that his puny



voice meant nothing up there in the sky. He pounded his fist against the longeron of his fuselage. Look! Tabler, look! He's coming!

Dayton shouted in his glee as he saw the S.E. swing around as its pilot saw the Jerry coming. Circling above them, wishing he had a gun, Dayton watched the fight. It was pretty! Tabler was doing wonderfully for a new man. Dayton saw the Albatros stagger under a sudden burst of fire.

Damn! Dayton gripped his stick until the blood almost spurted from his finger ends. Damn! Damn! The S.E.'s tracer trail had ceased. More of that damned ammunition! Pilots had been kicking about it for weeks. Jambs were almost daily happenings. The S.E. was trying to get away now—streaking toward the American lines. Jeff Dayton shouted imprecations at his own useless gun. Poor kid!. He'd been putting up a first class fight as long as he had a chance.

HOT DOG! The Jerry was playing square! Dayton saw the Albatros bank over and turn backward, unwilling to shoot down a helpless enemy. The American waved gaily at the German pilot, though he knew the man hadn't seen him, and then he turned his amphibian after the S.E. This was the life, after all! Dirty as war was, there were some, here in the air, who played the game, who fought hard but shot square.

Dayton grinned. "Twistin' tail-spins!" he muttered. "I'm glad that kid got away. He's so sort of helpless that I feel responsible for him, somehow or other. I'd sure hate to see a Jerry conk him."

*Tac! Tac! Tac! Tac!* The big pilot's brows drew angrily together. The sound was ahead of him and below him. Once more he saw a black shape drop swiftly out of the clouds—not after him but after the S.E. On the black fuselage he saw a golden eagle.

The Yellow Buzzard! Von Hellenbach! Dayton bit his lower lip until the blood came, running down his oil-smeared chin in a thin, dark, stream. He stared after the two ships ahead of him. Surely Von Hellenbach, after having been given a fair chance himself, wouldn't kill the boy in cold blood. Dayton swore under his breath. Why hadn't he killed the buzzard? Some minor engine trouble had been repaired, no doubt, in time to let the Yellow Buzzard climb back into the air in search of new prey.

Forgetting his own useless gun, Dayton shoved his stick forward and screeched down on the other ships. He could see the tracer bullet trails making a greenish, smoky pathway between the two ships. Tabler was

trying to dodge now, but Dayton could see that the kid was no match for von Hellenbach, the German ace.

Damn! Damn! Damn! He pounded his own knee in helpless rage, and he leaned tensely forward as if he could urge the ship forward like a living mount.

Suddenly he went limp, sagging against his stick. His stomach turned over inside him, leaping and twisting like a crazy thing. Hot pain stabbed his eyes, and the inside of his goggles was misted. His cheeks felt wet and he brushed at them absently with the back of his glove.

He had seen the yellow tracer trail streak toward the S.E.'s gas tank. There was brilliant orange flash and he strained his ears for the sound of explosion, though it was eclipsed by the roar of his own motor. Tabler's ship ripped suddenly apart, fuselage and wings. Struts and spars and pieces of blazing fabric showered earthward. The motor and the cockpit, a mass of roaring flame, shot downward.

Young Tabler was in there!

And the Yellow Buzzard had done it, had caught the boy when he was helpless, after the buzzard had himself been given an even break!

What had the Skipper said? "I wish I could get you mad!" And Young Tabler had stood up for him. "Seemed to forget everything and go crazy for a minute!" Over cruelty to a mere dog! Damn that buzzard! There were some things a man couldn't do!

A red mist floated suddenly before Jeff Dayton's eyes, bathing the whole horizon in the color of blood. Waves of heat seemed to shoot upward through his body. His mouth was hot and dry and his eyes seemed to bulge forward out of his head. Forgotten was his calm philosophy of life. Jeff Dayton was willing to play square but you couldn't push a decent man too far. This was too much!

FORGETFUL of his own helplessness, he roared after the Yellow Buzzard like an avenging comet. Von Hellenbach had played a mean trick on Young Tabler.

The black Fokker loomed bigger and bigger before him. Dayton dived blindly, with no definite plan in his mind. All he cared about was to crumple the Yellow Buzzard and send the cruel shape hurtling downward.

Von Hellenbach saw him, however, before he got down on the Fokker, and the German Immelmanned cleverly, so that Dayton saw his enemy drop into position on his tail as the amphibian flashed past. The American heard the clatter of the Spandau gun and felt the leaden hail strike into his ship. He felt fluid

being dashed into his face by the wind and he saw a gaping hole in his fuel tank from which the precious petrol was gurgling.

Caught!

Above him he heard the droning of the Mercedes motor, and he saw that the Fokker was nearly overhead. Jaw setting firmly, he drove after his enemy. He'd keep going while he could! He forced the bus up at a steep angle, risking a stall. He'd get the Buzzard if his gas only held out! With one hand he whipped out a handkerchief and stuffed it into the hole in his tank. Though the liquid still seeped through, it came more slowly, and Dayton sighed with relief. He wasn't out yet!

Machine gun bullets rattled about him as he neared the enemy. He knew he should have zig-zagged to throw off the other man's aim, but the blind, unreasoning anger which filled him drove all reason from his mind. Forget everything, that was it! He drove straight ahead, eyes staring into the red flashes from the muzzles of the Buzzard's guns. No mercy there! The man must know that it was the pilot who had spared him!

A new burst of machine gun bullets tore a big hole in the linen covering of the fuselage within six inches of his own seat, but Jeff Dayton, blinded by the wild anger of a calm man roused to action, never swerved. He leaned forward, shouting curses at the Buzzard. He'd fight him as long as his bus would stay in the air!

Before they crashed, Dayton saw the other crate sideslip out of the way, and he shook his fist at the Yellow Buzzard. He grinned as he recalled that two bombs were fastened under the amphibian, and he shoved his stick forward. There was a chance!

The wind roared in his ears like a hurricane as he hurtled earthward. Teeth set grimly, he eased back on his stick, using all his strength against the mighty rush of air, yet handling the controls with all the delicacy of a surgeon, sensing what the ship would do before it responded to his touch. The crate swung over in a loop, light and swift and sure as a hawk, trembling under the tremendous pressure.

Dayton was on the Buzzard's tail!

At that moment, his motor conked. The gas had all leaked out! The muscles of his face twitched queerly and the palms of his hands tingled, but his wild, unreasoning anger drove him on. Nothing else mattered!

HIS eyes gleamed and he half rose in his seat, glancing overside. He wasn't licked yet! He grinned as he made sure that the bomb sight was in place, the

triangular arrangement of projecting bars which guided the pilot in placing his deadly "eggs".

He stared tensely. It was a long chance, trying to hit one moving 'plane from another with a bomb!

A grim little smile played about his tight lips, and he fumbled swiftly with the height and wind speed adjustments, making sure that everything was ready. The Fokker was beginning to level off from the dive it had started, and Dayton bit his lip, knowing that if the Jerry began to climb the game would be up. With a dead motor he couldn't follow him up. All he could do was dive.

His dry lips pressed tight together and his eyes narrowed as he stared along the sight, following each move of the bus below him.

He knew that the bomb, when released from the 'plane, would not only be pulled downward by the force of gravity but would also be carried forward with the momentum the ship had at the moment of release, so he had to let his "eggs" go while the enemy was both below him and ahead of him.

Lips taut, he jerked the release cords and watched with haggard eyes. If it had only been a fixed target! Would he get the Buzzard? He stared at the long black bombs with their whirling vanes as they swept forward in a long, curving parabola. He breathed a silent prayer.

Damn! He cried out in the bitterness of his disappointment, pounding his head against the instrument board.

They had missed! He saw the bombs flash harmlessly past the Fokker, and he shook his fist impotently at the other man. The Buzzard, seeing the bombs, glanced around, and Dayton was sure that the German was grinning at him. He saw the man point down, derisively, at the spot where young Tabler had crashed a few moments earlier.

That was too much. Jeff Dayton could stand a lot, but it wasn't safe to push him too far.

He went suddenly berserk. His eyes blazed. He tried to shout and his tight, constricted throat smothered the words before they could escape. His heart seemed to be gripped by some giant hand which was trying to squeeze it dry. The earth, the sky, the Fokker below him, and the German pilot staring back at him with his taunting sneer, all seemed to be bathed in red. Black spots danced across this background.

JEFF DAYTON forgot everything but the desire to smash the Yellow Buzzard. He shot downward, downward, closer and closer.

He shouted in sudden triumph. Maybe it was Providence which had given him this amphibian—a machine which had both a wheeled landing gear for alighting on the earth and pontoons for coming down on the water. He remembered that the naval pilot had explained that the wheels could be dropped off while the ship was in the air.

Shoving his nose straight down, Jeff Dayton shot at the Fokker before it could pull away from him. Beside the bomb release cord was a lever which released the landing gear. Just over the German ship, so close that he was almost touching, so near that there was no chance to miss, Dayton jerked the lever.

He sobbed drily. He had cut off his own chance of escape. There was no water near and his pontoons would be useless on land. He was bound to crack up. Then he smiled calmly. At least, he had paid off the Yellow Buzzard. Dayton stared over the side at the other ship.

Below him he saw a falling mass of struts and spars and wheels and an axle. His muscles tensed as he saw the whole thing shear through the wing of the Fokker. The ship rolled over and plunged downward.

Gliding in its wake, Dayton saw it crash in a shell

hole in No-Man's-Land. Red flame burst out at once, in a great, roaring sheet. The Yellow Buzzard was through. He had paid for his cruelty to Tabler.

Jeff Dayton's wild passion disappeared, and he felt a bit sorry. Too bad the fellow hadn't played square. Nonchalant in spite of his own peril, he stared around, looking for a place to land. He had height enough to clear the lines, and he flattened his glide as much as he dared. As calmly as if he were making a practice landing on a smooth field, he held the bus off to the last moment, killing his speed as much as possible without actually stalling the ship.

Three feet off the ground, his speed almost gone, he jerked back on his stick and pancaked. The bus struck with a jar and the sound of rending and tearing. Dayton felt the frame ripping apart and he leaped out. Catching his foot in a hole he plunged headlong.

Bruised and cut and battered, he rose slowly and saw a group of doughboys gathered around him.

"Boy, howdy!" they greeted him. "Some wreck!"

Jeff Dayton shrugged easily and stuck his goggles into his pocket while he rubbed a sleeve of his flying suit across his oil-smeared face.

"Nothin' to get het up about!" he drawled.