



AT TARGET 808

by O.B. MYERS

Down upon that swiftly moving Fokker dived the ancient Sop Strutter—and the Fokker fled. But those two Yanks should have guessed that tohen a speedy German scout ran from a clumsy observation crate, danger lay ahead—a danger greater than Spandau bullets.

B AT ARMSTRONG, in the rear cockpit of the old Sopwith one-and-a-half-strutter, leaned over the tourelle to look downward, and waited. Three thousand feet below him a narrow lane, half obliterated by weeds, cat across a broad, open field and disappeared into a patch of woods.

A short distance farther there was a clearing, where the lane ended; this clearing was empty, but in its exact center was a single shell-hole, so fresh that it was still smoking. Now suddenly, from the large field, a fountain of earth and stones spouted upward, to blossom into a mushroom of dun-colored smoke which drifted away.

"Lousy," muttered Bat, and reached for his key. Swiftly his practiced fingers hammered out the message. "*B46—200 sh, 50 rt—rpt.*" Which, rendered into intelligible English, meant, "Battery No. 46—your last shell was two hundred feet short, and fifty feet to the right of the target; correct and repeat."

Again he slouched against the side of the cockpit and watched. The field below was barren and still; nothing moved along that weed-grown lane, nor had for many months. All signs of bivouacked troops were missing from those woods, nor was there the slightest movement in the clearing.

From a point many miles to the south a six-inch shell started on its journey, though to Bat's ears its hair-raising shriek was not audible. In a tremendous geyser of flame and smoke it came to earth, and Bat exclaimed in satisfaction. This time the explosion was right on the edge of the woods, barely ten feet from the spot where the lane entered. A battery salvo, consisting of half a dozen rounds from each of the four guns, fired at that same range and elevation, would make an utter shambles out of that spot, and smash neatly any force of Germans attempting to use that path to the clearing. Again the key crackled and jumped under Bat's finger. "*O.K.—Mark R.T. 808.*"

That spot had now ceased to be merely a lane running into a patch of woods; it was now Registered Target No. 808, and the guns of Battery 46 could find it with their missiles at any time they wished. There were no Germans down there now to shoot at, but at some future time there might be. Very probably would, in fact; that clearing had the look of a good place to set up a battery of 77's, and the lane was the only access to it.

When the next Yank drive started—and the air was full of rumors of its starting soon—this whole area would be alive with Boche, backing up their first defenses, and the guns would be working overtime. Which explained the presence of Bat and his pilot in an empty sky, over a vacant field, spotting individual shell-bursts.

He pin-pointed the spot on his map, wrote down the number in red alongside of it, and gazed at it musingly. 808—there was a swell number for you! Why, that used to be the signal for that end-around play, with which he had run to the winning touchdown in the big game against State University last fall—how well he remembered! A long time ago, last fall, with its football formations and text-books.

He was recalling the excitement of the last game

when a jerk as the plane rounded into a bank recalled his wandering thoughts, and he reached hurriedly for his binoculars. Far to the south, against a sloping hill, he found a speck of white; on it he focussed the glasses.

Magnified by their lenses, the speck became the battery signaling panels—a square crossed by a single line, and next to it a triangle. The first meant that the last point had been registered as instructed; the second meant that the shoot was ended for the morning. He turned, dropped the glasses into their case, and seized the end of the speaking-tube.

"Chuck!" he shouted. "Feeneesh! At ease. Let's go home!"

THE pilot in the seat ahead of him sat up suddenly and peered about him; his change of attitude told plainly that he had been, up till now, bored stiff. Bat saw him glance at the dash-clock, then point toward it, gesture into the east, and look back questioningly.

"All right, you fire-eater!" bawled Bat into the tube. "But only ten minutes, mind you—and watch out sharp!"

At once the plane tipped into a quarter-turn, and slid off into the east. Bat stowed his map, put the cover over his radio key, and unlocked the Scarff mounting of his Lewis guns. Over there, toward Corcette, they might find some action. That's where it was supposed to be thick; this area was dead as a doornail. He almost licked his lips with anticipation and hope. Chuck Pearce wasn't the only one bored by artillery spotting for registration fire. Bat would give his eye-teeth for a good, hot scrap, even with only an antiquated Sop to fight in.

How he wished the two of them were in pursuit, with Spads or Nieuports under them! Then they could show the Boche a thing or two, strike at least one brilliant blow for the cause before the war was over. This damned artillery *réglage*—what a rotten way to fight a war! Mathematics and bookkeeping, that's all it was.

Over this quiet sector in the old Sop he was as safe as driving down Main Street in a Ford. Of course they told you that once the drive started it would be different. With the activity on the ground would come activity in the air, and observation crates would come in for their share of attack. In the meantime, however, Chuck could not wait—nor could Bat.

Up went the right wing tip, and the creaking Sop was twisting into a one-sided dive. Bat, gripping

the tourelle frantically, knew that Chuck had seen something; he pulled himself up and stared overside. It was a few seconds before he found it; then a glint of sunlight from a doped wing-surface caught his eye. A plane, headed away from them—no, turning back toward them it was, its upper wing surface exposed to full view. And on the tips of those wings, plain as day—black crosses.

Chuck was already hurling the Sop across the intervening sky, straight at that wheeling Fokker. Bat swung his guns into firing position with nervous fingers, and let off a trial burst. As the gap shrank, he saw the Fokker straighten out, still a hundred yards or more away, and show its tail. His mouth opened to emit a wild cry; the Boche was running! He fingered his triggers impatiently; in his excitement it never occurred to him to wonder why a fighting scout was fleeing from a lone two-seater, nor to look in any direction but at the German tail just beyond reach of his muzzles. For a few moments the ridiculous chase continued; then, almost before he knew it, the Fokker had spun about and was rushing toward him, and a hail of tracer bullets was smoking past his ears.

He slammed his triggers down, and the Lewis guns chattered and spat. But Chuck had started a turn, and his aim was spoiled. The Fokker careened past, very close, and Bat jerked his tourelle around. He caught a flash of the black-crossed wings, banked vertically behind his tail—but a stream of tracers was still pouring down from above. His head jerked up—there was another, and another!

They had fallen for the oldest, simplest kind of a trap known to the sky. Instead of one Boche, they were faced with three. Three single-seater fighters, any one of which would have been more than a match for the slow, clumsy Sopwith. Looking for a scrap, were they? Well, here it was!

The Fokkers wheeled neatly into position, and seemed to chuckle and smack their lips over this luscious morsel which had been so kindly delivered into their hands. But their chuckling was the sound of fast-firing Spandaus, and the smack was the smack of flying steel against the flat side of a strut. In an unbreakable circle they ringed the hapless Sop, coolly alternating their bursts so that first one wing, then the other, was riddled with their bullets.

Bat, yanking his tourelle from side to side, fired burst after burst. This was more than they had bargained for; this was a fight to the death, and the death portion was the one allotted to Chuck and

himself. Grimly he set his teeth; he would—he must—get one of them before he went down to ignominious defeat!

The enemy bullets, first flicking his wing tips, were now ripping closer and closer to the cockpits. A long sliver of wood started out from the instrument panel; a row of jagged holes appeared in the fabric of the fuselage at his very elbow. Bat hauled his sights onto the nearest attacker, and at the same instant Chuck, for some reason not apparent, straightened out in a long swoop.

Bat squeezed his triggers, held them down, watched the long, smoky fingers stab closer and closer to their mark. Another jerk on the spade-grip, and his bullets were slashing a Fokker cockpit. He thought of the others—they must be gathering on his tail for the final blow—and kept on firing. The Fokker in front of him whirled sharply, and slid off into space. He spun in his cockpit, to look behind. But instead of facing a hail of steel, he saw only empty sky. No, not empty; some distance back wheeled three planes, and the uppermost was unmistakably a Nieuport. Saved!

They were three miles to the south, and crossing the lines, before Bat relaxed his grip on his gun-tourelle. But as the miles fled behind, the memory of their dire peril was submerged by just pride; before Chuck dropped the wheels on the tarmac of the 166th, Bat was telling himself that it had been a fine fight while it lasted. Now if they had only been in Spads!

“Y’OU’RE late,” said Major Raines, emerging from B hangar as they slid to the ground. “Did it take you all this time to run off—” He stopped speaking, and his eyes widened as he saw the scarred struts and bullet-punctured canvas. “What—what happened to you?”

Bat looked at Chuck, and Chuck looked at Bat.

“We had a little trouble—Fokkers jumped us,” explained Bat.

“Fokkers! Where—in the sector you were working?”

“Well, yes, sir—a little to the east. Just as we were starting home. Three of them; we didn’t have time—”

The major had turned violently upon Chuck.

“And what were you doing—sleeping? Don’t you know yet that it’s the pilot’s job to watch out for enemy aircraft, and avoid them? That you’re sent out there, not to fight, but to work? Don’t you?”

Chuck, fidgeting nervously, was trying to think of a reply, when the major’s attention was fortunately distracted by the roar of a strange motor from overhead. The plane which made it circled sharply in

to a landing. Bat saw that it was a Nieuport, and with certain misgivings recognized the insignia. When it rolled to a halt a few yards away, and the pilot leaped to the ground. Bat knew him instantly. It was Captain Barrie, premier ace of the nearby 94th; he strode directly to the little group, and spoke familiarly to the major.

"Morning, Raines; how goes it? I see they're here ahead of me—the embryo aces you've been holding out on us."

"Embryo aces—what do you mean?" queried the major, mystified.

"Why, these two birds, in Sop 16. I never saw a more nervy exhibition in my life. I suppose they're too bashful to give themselves credit; that's why I dropped in. I saw the whole works; you're certainly to be congratulated on having men like these. Deliberately went out of their way to attack three Fokkers—three, mind you—and in that old crate that maneuvers like a turtle! Fighting spirit, I call it! Having a tough time, they were; but they sent one of the Jerries down out of control before I jumped in to lend a hand. Some scrappers, major! I wish I had those boys in my outfit."

The major went pale with surprise; then very, very red.

"Well, I—I'm glad to hear you say so, Barrie. No, they Hadn't told me the details yet." Then, with a telling glance at Bat and Chuck, "I'll see to it that they are properly rewarded."

Inside of another minute Barrie had shaken hands cordially with both Bat and Chuck, refused the major's offer of a quick gulp, and was calling back over his shoulder as he started for his ship, "Good luck, you two! When you switch to pursuit, let me know!"

As his Nieuport bounded gracefully into the air, the major gestured meaningly with his head, and the two doubtful heroes preceded him into headquarters, guessing what was coming.

"So that's it!" grated the C.O., as he seated himself behind the desk. "Deliberately attacked—went out of your way—having a tough time, were you? Only saved your skins, and the ship, because Barrie happened along to pull you out of the jam. Purposely violated orders—what do you think you are, anyway—a couple of lone eagles?"

"But, major, we thought we—" began Bat hurriedly.

"Don't tell me any more lies!" interrupted the C.O. angrily. "You know your job as well as I do; you've been told often enough. You are sent out there to regulate artillery, and to avoid combats, not to look for

them. There are plenty of pursuit to take care of the fighting; your work may not be as spectacular, but let me tell you it's just as important."

"Excuse me, major," began Bat again, in a different tone. "We don't deny that we were out looking for a scrap—we were. That's the way we feel about this war, both of us. We want to fight, not ride around in a flying wheel-chair. Why, even Captain Barrie said we ought to be in pursuit! If you would only give us a transfer—"

"No!" said the major. "No transfer to pursuit for you—yet. In the first place, you're needed where you are. In the second place, you were sent to this squadron in disgrace, as punishment for spending three days A.W.O.L. in Paris. Until you do something remarkable, to counteract the stain of that disgrace, you'll stay right here—and obey orders to boot!"

THE C.O.'s tone was exasperatingly harsh; Chuck muttered between his teeth, and Bat was on the point of making a rash reply, when there came a slight sound from behind him. Startled, he turned, to see a stooping figure in gray-green slacks slide in through the open door, carrying rags and a bucket half-filled with water.

The man's face was sharply drawn, as if from hardship; his hair was gray, and long and scraggly, and on the back of his well-worn German tunic was scrawled in huge, white letters, "P.G." At the sight Bat grinned familiarly; it was Hans, the Boche prisoner whom the major used as office orderly, and whose simplicity was the butt of all the squadron jokers.

"Get out of here, Hans," snapped the major. "I'm busy."

The German, who had already dropped silently to his knees to commence scrubbing, looked up with a vacant, lifeless expression.

"*Nicht verstehen*," he murmured apologetically.

The C.O. moved to rise, but then settled back again.

"Oh, all right," he muttered carelessly. "Now as for you two, there's one thing else. If you could restrain your warlike instincts just a little longer, you might get a pleasant surprise. It's not officially announced yet, but before the drive starts there will be some new ships delivered to this squadron; we expect them any day now. When you see them, you might feel differently about that transfer."

Both Chuck and Bat at once pricked up their ears, and opened their mouths, but the major cut off their eager questions curtly.

"No, that's all you need to know now—and don't

repeat it all over the place, either. Your next shoot is at three—see that you're on the job."

It was the tradition among the flyers of the 166th that it was lucky to arrive on the tarmac at the last minute before leaving time, and Bat and Chuck were staunch adherents of this tradition. Today, however, by some strange accident, quarter before three found them loafing in front of the hangars, and they were thus among the small group which watched a lone plane slide down out of the western sky, and dip its nose toward the center of the field with idling motor.

"It's a Spad!" cried one.

"No—it's a Camel; look at that dihedral!" cried another.

It was not until the plane was rolling its wheels off the turf before their very noses that Bat guessed' right.

"By God, it's an S.E.5—one of the latest models! Say, you don't suppose that's what they're sending up for us to use, do you?"

With the others he ran to meet the taxiing ship, not noticing that Major Raines had issued from headquarters and was following close behind. The S.E. stopped moving, its motor was switched off, and to Bat's surprise the ferry pilot who stepped from the cockpit wore the gold leaves of a major on his shoulder-straps.

"Major Raines? Ah—there you are!"

"Glad to see you, Colton," responded the C.O., shaking hands warmly. "Well, what's the news from Chaumont?"

"All kinds of news this time," replied the newcomer; whereupon the group of flyers gathered closer to hear. "The best news is—that!"

His glance indicated the plane which he had just landed, its every strut and streamlined wire glistening with fresh varnish.

"You mean to say," gasped the C.O., "that they're giving us S.E.5s to use for observation work? But how—"

"Listen a minute." smiled the man from G.H.Q., "and I'll tell you how. The rest of you may as well listen, too; you'll all have to hear this sooner or later. The idea is this. These new S.E.5s will carry one man; and in addition either a radio or a camera, but not both at once. Hence they are practically a one-man observation ship, if need be, and a damned good fighter at the same time.

"Now Chaumont has seen to it that every observer sent here to the 166th is qualified as a pilot, and every pilot has had training in radio and photography, so

we're sending up a new ship for every man in the outfit. A dozen will be here before dark, and another dozen the first thing in the morning, and there'll be plenty of replacements in the pool for those that are lost or washed out. So go to it!"

EXCITED exclamations went up on all sides; the flyers were devouring the new bus with eager eyes, admiring every perfect detail of its construction and speculating on its performance.

"Now there's something else," went on the flying staff officer. "The big push for which we have been preparing for weeks is scheduled to start Thursday morning—that is day after tomorrow. With these planes under you, we at headquarters are expecting great results from the 166th, and for a very good reason. It's like this: the Boche, as you know, when they wish to protect some particular area from observation or directed artillery fire, have only to go up and drive off the two-seaters, since they know it must be the two-seaters doing the observing or directing the fire.

"But that's just where these S.E.s will fool 'em. They'll take you for scouts, and leave you alone—and since they'll have no way of guessing that your S.E.s are equipped for observation, you'll have an enormous advantage right from the start. That is, of course, if the Jerries don't discover the secret."

Bat and Chuck had been listening half absently to the last words, while their eyes were glued to the trim little fighter which stood before them.

"Say, I wonder if he'd let me use her this afternoon, Chuck!" muttered Bat.

"Swell chance!" snorted the pilot sarcastically. "There's the bone-pile we ride in this afternoon—right over there!"

Bat looked; their Sopwith, its bullet-holes patched and its struts mended, stood just before the second hangar, the prop already turning over in readiness for them to take off at three o'clock.

"Ugh!" he muttered, with a grimace of distaste. "By gosh, I'm going to ask the old stonewall, anyway."

He stepped over to the C.O.'s side, saluted smartly, and Chuck heard him speak in a low tone.

"No," said Major Raines promptly. "No, you're supposed to be leaving the ground in two minutes, by my clock, and there isn't time to service this ship. Go ahead with Pearce, in the Sopwith. Besides, I was just thinking of taking a test hop in the S.E. myself."

While Bat retired disconsolately, the major looked about him. "Here, somebody go and tell Hans to bring

—oh, here you are, Hans!” In turning, the C.O. found his orderly standing at his elbow. “Look, I want the helmet and goggles that are on my desk. Helmet—” he made a motion of drawing something on over his head. “Goggles—” he pointed to a pair hanging from the staff officer’s wrist. “*Schnell!*”

The German prisoner gaped stupidly for a moment, then nodded in understanding and trotted obediently toward headquarters.

Bat, returning to Chuck’s side, heard the newcomer say to the C.O., “No reason why you shouldn’t try her out, Raines. Not for long, though; she’s short of gas from the trip. Here, I’ll show you the switches; one of you greaseballs swing that prop.”

Bat and Chuck were backing slowly away toward their own plane, so that they heard no more of the words that passed next to the S.E., but Bat, looking back over his shoulder, saw Hans come trotting up to the group with something in his hand.

IT SOMETIMES happens, in a swift-moving emergency, that the man at some little distance can see and grasp what is happening better than the one close at hand, in the very midst of the action. Thus it was that Bat registered every detail of what occurred next, while those within an arm’s length either failed to see, or failed to understand until too late.

Hans handed over the helmet and goggles to the C.O., who attempted to put them on. But for some reason they were tangled up, so that the major, with head bowed, stood fumbling and tugging for several seconds. The officer from G.H.Q. chose this moment to step back toward the tail, bending over to slide his fingers, along the taut control wires of the elevator. There stood the S.E.5, cockpit empty, motor running, about it a dozen Yanks, all gazing at the ship itself.

Bat saw Hans, the stupid German prisoner, take one quick step, which brought him to the side of the plane. Even at thirty paces Bat could see the expression on his face change; instead of the habitual dumb and sleepy vacancy, his countenance instantly showed a keen strength, an acute wit, and unlimited daring. It was as if a mask, long worn, had been suddenly cast aside; even as he vaulted easily into the empty cockpit, a sardonic smile flickered on his thin lips.

Bat emitted a stentorian bellow; the popping exhaust half drowned it. Before anyone could move, the popping rose to a steady roar, and the S.E. was moving. Bat sprang into a run, and some of those nearest leaped for the wing-tips, but it was too late.

The major from Chaumont rolled in the dust as the leading edge of the tail fin caught him in the shins, and the ship was bounding across the open field.

Bat rushed at the group, waving his arms and yelling. No one seemed yet to quite understand what had happened; Major Raines stood erect, with his helmet askew and his jaw gaping, while the other major picked himself up spluttering and swearing.

“Damn, a thousand damns! Who took that plane off without—”

“What—what happened?” gasped the C.O.

The words of explanation poured from Bat’s mouth. “Hans—the Boche—he’s running away—he stole the ship!”

“Stole the ship! Stop him—stop him at once!”

“Stop him!” wailed Bat. “How can you? Look!”

The S.E.5, zooming smoothly off the far end of the field, was turning to head back toward them, a hundred feet up. While their wrathful faces turned up to watch, it sailed overhead, and from its cockpit a hand waved, coolly, insolently, insultingly. Then calmly it began to spiral upward. The man from Chaumont suddenly came to life.

“A Boche, did you say? How come?”

In a few words the C.O. explained the presence of Hans. The other’s face at once became tragically serious.

“My God, man—this will ruin everything! He may have been a spy, planted for just such a purpose. Even if he’s only a prisoner, seizing a chance to escape, the effect will be the same. If that plane lands in Germany, we’re lost. Its secret will be enemy property within twenty-four hours, and its usefulness will be nil. My God—we must do something—stop him—catch him—quick!”

The C.O.’s mouth opened to bark orders, but Bat did not wait to hear. There was no need of listening to instructions. There was but one possible thing to try, and he saw it as plainly as Major Raines. Only one Sopwith stood ready on the tarmac, his and Chuck’s; that old crate held the only hope.

As he turned, Bat yelled for Chuck, but then saw that his pilot was ahead of him, racing for the cockpit. Bat sprinted after.

“Full gun, Chuck!” Bat yelled as they took off, “We’ve got to hold him till his gas runs out!”

For Bat had remembered the major’s words; the gas in the S.E. was low, probably just enough to carry it to the lines. If they could delay the other’s flight by attack, lack of fuel might bring him down on this side of the lines, even though their own guns could not.

Throbbing under full motor, the aged Sop strained in pursuit, while mile after mile dropped behind. But even at cruising speed, the S.E. was holding its own; by Bat's most hopeful calculations he could see that they were not gaining an inch.

He groaned dismally, and unlocked his gun mounting. Carefully he set himself, and trained his guns, allowing for deflection and distance. Then he pressed the triggers; a slim sheaf of tracers arched up into the blue, to become almost invisible before reaching his target. A long burst, and he stopped; it was ridiculous to hope for a hit at that range. But then he gasped; the S.E. was turning aside—was reversing its direction! With a rush it came back at the Sop, while Bat yelled in satisfaction.

The burst of tracer, while not even touching the plane, had told the German that he was being pursued, and seeing a single Sopwith behind him, Hans had apparently decided that nothing was to be lost, and possibly a victory gained, by indulging in an easy combat. The S.E. plunged close, zoomed into a turn, and the Sop went into a spiral.

CHUCK held it long enough to give Bat two quick bursts, then came out level. But the S.E., unharmed, swooped like a hawk, and was almost instantly on the other's tail. Bat cursed, yanked his guns around, and again pressed the triggers. His stream of tracers found empty air, while a hail of steel sliced his rudder from below. The S.E. had slid neatly under his belly, to pelt him from a blind spot.

Bat pounded his pilot's shoulder frantically; Chuck tipped up into a sideslip. Bat struggled with his tourelle, but by the time he got it pointed down, discovered that the S.E. had zoomed and was now above him. Smoking steel hissed through the upper wing tip, and Chuck ruddered out hastily.

For minute after minute the uneven combat continued. Chuck hurled the decrepit Sop about the sky as a Sop had never been hurled before. Bat swung his guns and delivered burst after burst of vicious, biting steel. But all to no avail. The S.E. avoided every attack, dodging, slipping and wheeling away like a hawk playing with a chicken. Bat cursed and wiped the sweat from his cheeks. It was no use; the German was playing with them.

Suddenly the S.E. straightened out and shot away; in amazement Bat saw that it was again heading across the lines. Relinquishing the battle so easily? Why? He looked about; against the southern sky half a dozen

specks were growing into the likeness of Sopwiths; the rest of the gang was in the air, and coming at top speed. Bat grabbed the tube.

"After him. Chuck! Don't give him a minute!"

Unhesitatingly Chuck threw the Sop in pursuit. But again the chase was a farce; their straining motor, at its best, could not keep the gap from slowly widening. Bat fumed and cursed; though he knew from his first attempt that his chances of bringing down that fleeing plane in combat were nil, yet again he longed to come to grips.

Five miles of German soil were behind them before once more the S.E. turned suddenly and darted back upon its pursuer.

But now there was plainly a change in its method, a sinister directness about its charge. No longer did it merely play with the Sop, spraying it with long bursts which wounded but did not kill. The German in its cockpit saw that he was now over friendly soil, and that there was no longer any object in toying with his victim. He had nothing to do but shoot down this foolish pursuer, and then land in triumph. Why waste time?

The S.E. rushed close before firing a shot; then a brief burst vomited from its guns. The bullets ripped lengthwise along the fuselage by Bat's very elbow, nicking a longeron within an inch of where his hand was resting. He jerked his own guns into action, but the other plane rounded out a half turn with the speed of light, and his slow-moving tourelle could not catch up. The S.E. wheeled overhead, but Chuck threw the Sop into a wing-over, and the enemy overshot his mark.

But the S.E. held every advantage; the cards were stacked in its favor before it even started. With its next plunge it sent a withering burst between the cockpits of the two-seater; a single foot more, either forward or back, and Chuck, or Bat himself, would have been riddled with steel.

The next blow came from the rear and above. A hail of steel sang about Bat's ears, and frantically he tugged at his guns, only to discover that they would not move. As the shadow of the diving S.E. swooped past, he saw the reason. A bullet from that last burst had struck the mounting, jamming it. His guns were out of commission; now indeed he was lost!

Chuck attempted a whirl and a burst with his forward guns, but the S.E. dodged it as easily as a cat dodges an ice-wagon. In the next instant it was settling into position on Bat's tail, calmly drawing the bead

that should finish this absurd combat once and for all. Bat, looking back into the German's sights, saw death staring him in the face. He rose to his full height, and shook his fist in a last, defiant gesture. Then he froze with astonishment.

WITHOUT firing a shot the S.E. was dropping away. In a long curve it slid off and down—and its prop had ceased to turn! It took Bat's stunned brain a moment to grasp the reason but at last he remembered. The gas had run out, and the German was going down, while he and Chuck still lived.

But his surge of relief was shortlived. For at once he saw that the secret of the S.E.5—the vital reason for their futile chase—was just as lost as ever. In a few seconds that plane, and its pilot, would be on German soil, and then it would be too late.

Desperately he pounded Chuck's back, and screamed something into the tube. The Sop went at once into a vertical dive, but their altitude was only a thousand feet. By the time five hundred of it was above them the S.E. was flattening out over an open field.

The S.E. was landing—its wheels were already on the ground—it was rolling to a stop. With a groaning of struts the Sop came out of its plunge directly above the field; Bat looked down to see the S.E. bounce to a halt near the edge, and its occupant, without getting out, raise his head to look up.

Bat could almost see the grin of triumph on that German's face—and no wonder! He had failed to bring down the Sop, but he had made his escape, captured intact a brand new plane, and brought back with him a secret whose knowledge would enable the Boche to cripple the coming drive of the Allies.

Bat ground his teeth in dismay. He had no bombs, he had no guns. Even if he riddled that ship from the air, and killed Hans, its secret would still be discoverable to the shrewd German intelligence. What could he do? Crash the Sop on top of it? But what if even that, though killing both Chuck and himself, failed to destroy utterly the S.E.? At that moment his eyes saw something which touched a chord in his memory.

On the edge of that field were woods; from their depths a lane emerged, to slant across the open toward the distant road. It was a mere track, unused, fringed with weeds strangely familiar. Why? Ah—he knew

why! Only that morning—yes, there was the shell-hole, just to the right—a few paces from where the S.E. stood now. That spot was not merely a lane entering a forest; it was a registered target!

He reached for his map, but stopped. No need for that; the number he knew well—the old end-around play. As for the battery—they would be ready, expecting the regular three o'clock shoot! His finger leaped to the radio key.

"B46—Emergency Target—Salvos—R.T. 808—Fire!"

A few seconds of silence passed; nervously he repeated the number. His finger had scarcely tapped the key the last time before hell broke loose below him. One on the heels of the other the six-inch shells came. The earth rose in chunks, and rose again before it had fallen back. Within a hundred-foot circle that field ceased to be a field, and became a raging inferno of death and flame and smoke. A dense pall of light brown smoke rose into the afternoon sky.

"B46—Cease firing—Mark one hit!"

The other Sopwiths were at his side as Chuck turned the plane for home. Its motor labored, its wings sagged, and its spars creaked where the bullets had bitten out great chunks, but in triumph it made the field. Bat descended to meet Major Raines rushing toward him.

"O.K.," Bat answered the unspoken question. "He landed right on R.T. 808. Hans and the S.E. are now mincemeat!"

"Thank God!" cried the major, wringing his hand. "Thank God! You boys—I don't know what to tell you—you have foiled the worst blow our armies could have suffered. I don't know how—but wait! Weren't you asking to be transferred to pursuit? Anything you want is yours—I'll arrange the transfer first thing in the morning!"

Bat looked at Chuck, and Chuck returned the look. They said nothing to each other, but Bat guessed that his pilot's thoughts were similar to his own. And he was thinking of how that S.E.5 had outflown, out-maneuvered, and outfired their Sop in combat.

"Well—I'll tell you, major. I guess we—we've kind of changed our minds. If you don't mind, we'll just stay here, with the 166th, for a while. Spotting shell-bursts won't be quite so slow, we figure, if a fellow doesn't have to do it from a flying wheel-chair!"