



CROSSED CONTROLS

by WILLIAM E. BARRETT

*He would fight as never before, and death to the Allied plane that crossed his guns!
Yet the sight of those British cockades made a bell ring in his clouded mind, and his hands
fumbled on the trips. He could not shoot!*

DICK ESTABROOK WHISTLED SOFTLY as he tightened a turn-buckle and stepped close to squint along his upper longeron. B Flight was out on patrol, and his own flight was taking its ease back at the hut, after having put on the dawn show. Dick didn't care. He'd rather rig his ship than rest, and it didn't bother him any to be kidded about "scabbing" on the Ack Emmas.

A little more tension on the interstrut wire there. His eyes weighed and balanced, compensating for every change in the rigging to preserve the proper

relationship between lateral and longitudinal balance. Few mechanics had the rigging sense that he had, and he knew it. Moreover, the mechanics knew it. The squadron rigger was a rigger only in the sense that he was less ignorant than the rest of the mechs. Dick shook his head. Nothing disturbed him more than to have to fight his ship. Some peculiar quirk of balance in his makeup, he supposed. Anyway, when he got through with a Nieuport, it would fly itself.

He straightened up as a foot crunched gravel behind him. Teddy Blake's voice, tense, excited, sounded in his ear. "Found something, Dick. Maybe

something big. Remember those boots I took off the Jerry officer I downed—bloke in the striped Albatross?”

“Sure. Ought to remember. Those were plenty top-side boots. Too small for you, you dog in the manger. Still you hang on to them while—”

“Shut up! I just found a dispatch in one of them. All scribbled out in German, lines of writing and figures. It may be something big. Don’t want to turn it in till I know what it is. Now if you—”

Dick Estabrook grinned. He knew what was coming. Just because he’d spoken German since he was a kid, and had served an American exporting house in Berlin before *la guerre*, he was called on for all translation and interpretation work. This was an opportunity.

“My services come high,” he said. “German boots. One pair. Payment in advance.”

Teddy Blake roared. “Those boots for a little reading! You’re crazy as—”

“Good-bye, Teddy. Step out of my light, will you?” Dick turned back to the tumbuckle he had been tightening. Teddy groaned.

“Damned Shylock! If there was anyone else around that compree’d Dutch, I’d tell you to roll a hoop. You win and—”

Dick stretched out his hand and took the crumpled sheets. “Go get the boots and I’ll have it translated when you get back.”

With curiosity in his eyes, Teddy hesitated a minute, then sped back to the chateau for the boots. A young man who thinks he has a secret map of the Hindenburg line doesn’t haggle much about boots. Fame was beckoning to him and he hurried. He was back in record time, too, the boots in his hands. Dick accepted them soberly and passed the sheets back, indicating the translation on the back.

“Very interesting, Teddy. Very. A list of the late officer’s debts. Instructive as hell. Shows how much more you can owe in the German flying force than you can over here—”

Teddy clutched the papers and stared at them in disbelief; then he spun on his heel. “Yuh dirty robber!” he growled. “I hope you get bunions.”

“Not a chance.” Dick was measuring the boots against his foot. “But, cheerio, Teddy. If I crack up this side of the line, I’ll will them back to you.”

A GLANCE at the sky showed Dick Estabrook that he still had more daylight than a Nieuport of

limited petrol capacity could use. Nice occasion for a little voluntary patrol. Newly rigged ship, new boots. Perfect.

He was conscious of a bearing-down pain at the base of his skull as the Nieuport took to the air, a pain that had been with him off and on for days. It had come over him several times in brushes with the enemy, and he had had to grope through a mental fog for the proper maneuver to make. It was a dangerous ailment where all action should be immediate and involuntary. He shook his head.

“Funny bug of some kind, I guess. I had to think hard before I could speak English after a few minutes of reading German for Teddy. And sometimes I have to think before I know what to do to land, after I’ve been flying straight.”

Worry creases lined his forehead, but the performance of the Nieuport soon distracted his attention from his personal troubles. He had a craftsman’s pride in that job. The thing would fly hands off. Not many Nieuports would.

Below him, the scarred terrain unrolled like a carpet; the clouds came down to him, and he was content. Then he straightened and squinted down. A single ship was moving out across that expanse of sky, hitting his tail with the gun and full out for Germany—an Albatross. Dick’s hand was on the stick before he took conscious thought of the situation. The nose went down and he was on the hunt.

The Albatross was making speed with a tail wind, but the Nieuport’s angle of dive offset some of that advantage. Estabrook set his sights and became aware of details in the other’s ship—the holes in the wing and the tattered black cross on the big fin. “Been in plenty hard scrap, that boy. Probably the sole survivor, and he doesn’t know that I’m in the sky. Too bad for him.”

Just as Dick pressed the trigger on his stick, the German seemed to become instinctively aware of danger. He pulled up and to the left, sending Dick’s first burst through the already punished wing close to the whaleshaped fuselage. Dick shook his head and whipped over after him, lifting his finger from the coupe button and letting the engine roar as he fought to keep his advantage, top side rear.

The German was not craving fight. He evidently had little confidence in the ship that had been so badly punished. Dick’s position, however, prevented him from utilizing his greater speed for a get-away, so he stood on his wing and tried a fast climbing turn in

a desperate attempt to even things before his enemy could tighten up after his dive. Dick laughed. No chance with this Nieuport. This was one darn good—

There was a rattling crash in front, just as Dick's hands pressed the trigger with his enemy foul, a crash that seemed to lift the ship and shake it as a giant might shake it. The gun stuttered and the prop spun away into space. Dick cut the switch and nosed her down. In a twinkling of an eye, the victor had become the vanquished, and the German was top dog.

AS THE wind whistled past him, Dick tried to figure what had happened. Fairly obvious, of course. He'd been cruising on his selector a good part of the time, and keeping his engine cool. And then he'd gone into that dive. The monosoupape had no carburetor, and the whole time that he'd been on the selector, cylinders had been missing fire in rotation and discharging raw gas into the casserole cowl. When he'd cut the engine in again, he'd ignited it and blown a cylinder head off. The vibration had ruined his gun synchronization and he'd blown a prop off. Now here he was, heading down into Germany, with a German on the tail.

"Is he on my tail?" Dick hoped for a minute that he wasn't. Pilots had been known, on occasion, to make sure that a man wasn't faking trouble by finishing the job on the way down. No, the German was holding his fire.

Dick dropped it into a spin and kicked out after three revolutions. The fellow was still with him and the ground wasn't far away. Meadow land—four clumps of trees—a military road—lorries and a light artillery unit moving up. Pretty deep into German territory. Good-bye, war.

The ground rushed up at him and the tops of the trees were very close. He sighed with relief as the Nieuport floated lightly over them with a few feet of clearance, and headed for the rolling meadow. Tail heavy, she was hard to land, but she hit none too roughly, and specks danced before the pilot's eyes. "That damned head again. No time for mooning. Got to burn this thing."

He was conscious of the German plane landing close as he swung from the cockpit, but he had no time for looking around. Matches. One—two—three. Flames leaped around the little plane, and he heard a guttural roar. A bullet spat into the plane about six inches from his body, and he threw himself down. Another whistled into the wreck at the spot where he

had been. The German pilot was running toward the Nieuport and shooting as he came.

"Crazy as a roomful of owls. No way to treat a prisoner." Dick's service automatic was in his hand, and lead answered lead with less than twenty feet separating the two men. A bullet hit the ground in front of the American and ricocheted from a rock, tearing a hole in his helmet and showering chips and dust into his face and eyes.

Frantically he pawed at his eyes, expecting momentarily to feel the blinding shock of the bullet that would be the end. None came, and as he blinked clear a few seconds later, he saw the German lying on his face a few feet away. He whistled and looked around. Nobody else in sight yet, but there would be quickly. That road wasn't far away, and he was in an awful fix.

"Anybody watching saw that bozo herding me down when he could have killed me in the air. They'll think I murdered him on the ground. Won't figure he lost his head over my burning my ship. Firing squad for mine."

His mind was suddenly clear as he faced his danger; clearer than it had been in weeks. He turned the German over. Dead as the Nieuport's engine, hit between the eyes. Good shooting. His eyes ran down the tall figure and registered the fact that the man wore whip-cord breeches that shrieked London. Trophy from a Britisher. Boots like his own captured German boots. Coat?

In a flash, Dick had whipped off his own coat and was on the body of his foe. A few fast seconds and he had the other's uniform coat, the helmet, credentials, Luger automatic, belt and watch. Then he hoisted the man on his shoulder and heaved him into the blazing inferno of the Nieuport. "Tough," he said. "Very tough. But *chacon pour soi*. It's that lad's body or my life."

HE TURNED just in time to see a squad of men bursting through the trees, a red-faced officer at their head. He turned and made his way to the Albatross, waiting beside it for the others to come up. He saluted the artillery officer stiffly, and spoke in gruff German.

"I was too late. The Englishman burned his plane. I have his numerals." He tapped his pocket and bowed politely to the other's congratulations. "And now, one of your men will spin the air-screw. *Ja*. Thank you." Stiffly as befits an officer of the Imperial Flying Service, Dick swung up into the cockpit, growling instructions at the husky, perspiring artilleryman who threw his weight on the prop. Right.

With a roar, the Mercedes engine took the gun and turned into the wind. With a wave of his hand, Dick took leave of the burning ship and the German field artillery unit—and of Germany. The sky was his once more, for better or for worse.

Only one thing marred his triumph—that blinding ache in his head. Too much war, maybe. He felt awfully tired. Fellows had gone cuckoo with less war than he'd had, and maybe that was it. The Albatross felt nose-heavy and difficult. It was an effort to fly. He wanted to rest, and the roar of that engine was beating his head in. If only he could shut it off and rest.

The world seemed to drop away from him, and all of space opened up before his eyes. The roar of the engine seemed to die, and he sank into oblivion, sank with a scared feeling that he mustn't, that he should hang on just a little longer. Just a while—

As suddenly as his senses left, they came back—came back with no memory of their having gone. He was suddenly conscious as one is conscious on a sudden awakening from deep sleep. Wide awake in a spinning ship, with the horizon going up and over him like a skipping rope. Without thought, and obeying blind instinct only, he kicked rudder and eased the stick forward.

Not till he had skimmed the tops of a clump of trees and was headed back again for altitude did he become fully conscious, and then it was a frightened consciousness. He knew only that he was alive. He didn't remember who he was or how he came to be in this ship. God! He didn't even know how to pilot an airplane.

He was sure of that as he gazed stupidly at the instrument panel and the stick. Nothing in the cockpit awakened any memory in him, and he did not know what they were for, these complicated looking gadgets. Not till the nose was dropping below the horizon did he become scared enough to stop trying to figure it out. At that point, reason told him that since he was in the ship all alone, he must have known about it when he took off. He closed his eyes and tried not to think. His hands moved automatically to the controls, and in a few seconds he was flying level again, perspiration running in streams down his face.

Again and again he tried the experiment, and finally the trick of flying came back to him and he ceased to worry. He could remember what to do. He could even remember that it was a war and that he was flying in it and fighting in the air; he could remember how to fight in the air and the thousand details of

war—everything except who he was and where he came from and the facts of his past existence. All that was a blank, and he fought helplessly through a fog when he strove to remember.

"*Gott!*" he muttered. "I am a *dumkopf*. My papers will tell me." He was speaking in German, the last language he had spoken consciously, and in his fuddled state he recognized it as German, seizing it eagerly as a clue. "I am a German," he said, "a German airman."

WITH the ship flying steadily and easily, he searched through his papers and read them. "Lieutenant Lothar Schilling, Jagdstaffel 14." He shook his head. It awakened no memories, and he repeated the name over and over. It was his name. It had to be, but it was strange. Everything was strange. He would have to learn to live all over again.

Exploring the other pockets, he came upon a batch of papers jammed carelessly into the side pocket. They were in English. He frowned. Reading made his head ache. He could read it, but he wouldn't. He was interested now only in his own language, the language he thought and talked in. These papers in English would wait till later. Captured papers, maybe.

He was watching over the side now. Funny that he could recognize none of this country, remember not one member of Jagdstaffel 14, recall no detail of the field from which he had taken off or of the field upon which he might be expected to land. He put his hand to his head. Blood was trickling down his forehead from under the helmet, and he took the helmet off, feeling the crease where a bullet had grazed through the hair. Funny. That probably had ruined his memory, but why didn't that bullet put a hole in the helmet? He shook his head helplessly.

"I'll find a drome and land," he said. "Maybe I'll remember when I talk to other flyers, and some of them may be able to direct me to Jagdstaffel 14."

His eyes sharpened as he saw a cluster of buildings take form over to his left. He kicked over there and dropped down. A drome. Good. He could rest, and with rest perhaps there would be remembrance.

In wide spirals, he dropped down. As he came closer, he could see the gray-clad figures looking upward and a line of ships standing by—the emergency flight of Fokkers. He put his hand to his head again. How had he known they were Fokkers? Funny. Some things were perfectly clear in his mind,

everything, it seemed but personal details. He rolled in and swung down from his ship.

For a moment he was uncertain. Was he home? No, he couldn't be. These were Fokkers, and his ship was an Albatross. Different outfit. He saluted a group of officers, and his eyes swerved to a pompous individual who was swaggering toward him, a big, blonde brute who struck his thigh with a swagger stick as he walked. A captain, by his uniform. A vast dislike surged up within Dick, and he didn't know why. He tried to shake it off, and only partly succeeded. He saluted stiffly, his voice gruff and curt.

"Lieutenant Schilling, *Rittmeister*, from Jagdstaffel 14. Forced to land by the condition of my machine." The captain's eyes lost some of their chilly aloofness. A shade of something like deference showed in his expression. "Yes, yes, lieutenant. You do us honor. We heard the sad news a short while ago. Come to my quarters at once."

"Sad news." Dick shook his head in a vain attempt to clear it. Some instinct was urging him to be careful, not to confide in this man. What was the sad news? How did it concern him? If only he could remember, just a little, a clue. Through his befuddlement, however, that warning instinct rang like a bell, causing him to reject the obvious solution to his difficulty. It would be so easy to throw himself on the kindness of a countryman, tell him that his mind was a blank, and seek aid. His feeling of natural antagonism deterred him and he waited.

INSIDE the little stone house at the edge of the field, the captain waved him to a chair. An orderly served drinks, and Dick Estabrook stretched his legs and took his ease, feeling the clotted wound on his head gently. The thing hurt.

"Ah, you were hurt, lieutenant. A scratch, eh? Lucky you, that you are here. One man out of von Steren's Jagdstaffel. Incredible." The captain clucked his tongue against his teeth, an annoying sound. "We knew that you had crossed the lines. Infantry report, and then the artillery officers near Crouton where you felled the Britishers, sent word. Nice work, that, after the mess back yonder. Very nice."

Memory stirred faintly. Artillery officer. An Englishman down. It was gone again. Lost it. Dick frowned. Every time he was on the verge of remembering, it slipped away from him. The captain was watching him expectantly.

"I did not know the Baron von Steren personally. I have come lately from the Austrian front. I admired

him, though. Very much I did admire him. How did it happen? How did such a smart leader fall into a trap and lose twenty ships?" The captain bubbled with questions, and Dick was becoming more and more annoyed. Besides, he couldn't remember von Steren except as a vague name, and he knew nothing about the trap and the twenty planes. Never do to tell this blonde pig that. The fellow, even if he was captain, seemed to be awed at talking to a man who flew with von Steren. The baron must have been very good. His men, too, must have been picked men, and he was one. From the captain's tone, the swine was jealous. Dick's annoyance turned to anger.

"I don't feel like discussing it," he said curtly.

Something flickered in the captain's eye, something serpentlike and murderous. Then it was gone. He clucked his tongue against his teeth. "No. No. I understand. A bitter memory. I should not have asked." Something smooth and oily came into his voice. "A great fighting unit, yours, lieutenant. Ours has not such a record, but no big disasters either. Our ships are not so good as yours and—"

The canker of jealousy had long been eating the man, and Dick sensed it. All the antagonism, that strange feeling of enmity that he had felt when he had first landed here, centered on this one man now, and he blazed with anger. Whether he could remember or not, he was from Jasta 14, and this man was sneering at his squadron, was belittling his leader and bragging up his porcine self. Dick drew himself up very straight.

"You will report that I have landed here," he said gruffly, "and assign me to quarters. Tomorrow at dawn, I will patrol with your flight and fly one of your ships. I will undertake to show you, *mein Herr*, how Jasta 14 bags Englishmen."

Anger, resentment, hatred, jealousy—all the base emotions passed in turn across the broad face of the captain. He seemed on the point of bearing down with his rank and annihilating this upstart. Just on the point, but not quite. There was no Prussian iron in him. He was the type that could hate without striking, and watching the stronger emotions fade before cringing respect and fear, Dick felt a sudden surge of pride in Jasta 14. It was some outfit, when one of its lieutenants could whip the commander of a Jagdstaffel, or was he just a flight commander?—like this. The man was summoning an orderly.

"The best we have is at your disposal, lieutenant." He bowed and then a sneer crossed his lips. "We will be honored at the—the demonstration at dawn."

Dick bowed stiffly, with the pride of a ranking Jagdstaffel taking the place of a memory that was gone. "You shall have it," he said crisply.

He went to sleep with the vow that the morrow would prove he had not boasted. He would fight as never before, and woe to the Englishman who crossed his guns. The captain was going to swallow his sneers and find them bitter.

Through his determination, however, there beat something of doubt; a warning whisper that told him that something was wrong; a cry in the night that hinted of danger, but told nothing of what the danger might be. If only he could remember!

DAWN broke hard and cold with a low ceiling and the night mist still clinging to every bit of metal. Dick's teeth chattered, in spite of the iron will that he brought to bear against physical infirmity. There was a wild throbbing in his head, and the awful groping feeling that comes to a man whose memory is blind.

The ships were warming up on the line, Fokker D-4s. Dick nodded. The captain had been right in a degree. This Fokker with the 160 Mercedes was not as good as the Albatross he had flown in here. A staunch ship, though, and good enough. He was going to show these fellows whether a real flyer could do anything with them or not. He'd show them that it wasn't the ship—that Jasta 14 was better because of its men, not its ships.

He was surly with the effort it took to walk erect as he strode down the line. He had no interest in these fellows. They seemed like enemies to him, no doubt because of the feeling of jealousy between Jastas. He shouldn't feel that way about countrymen of his—but he did.

Several cheery hails and a few sincere and cordial handshakes changed his opinion a bit. Some of these men were all right, even if they did have a cur for a captain. He thawed out a bit. After all, it is nipe to feel the friendship of one's comrades in battle. The captain stalked down the line.

"Ah, ha! So you are here, lieutenant. I was in hopes you would be. I am anxious for that demonstration." The man's words sounded innocent, but Dick felt the barb in them. The fellow was insinuating that there was some doubt of his showing up. He'd show him! "If you lead the flight," he said with a bow, "I ask no favor other than that you take me where there are Englishmen."

Some of the assurance left the captain's face, and

he seemed suddenly aware that the morning was cold and damp. "Great God!" he said worriedly. "They will be everywhere this morning. Everywhere you will find them. After yesterday—" His widespread hands were expressive.

One by one they took off, and Dick found himself flying at the captain's right, up at the head of the flight. Fourteen planes this morning. Quite a nice showing.

The big engines roared as they climbed high and turned westward. It was a patrol flight. At this hour, the British would be sending over their artillery spotters, clumsy two-seaters, and their reconnaissance planes. Cold meat. They would also be sending over their escorts, fleet little ships that would fight like blazes, ships such as had brought ruin to Jasta 14. Dick thought of that and his jaw squared. He had been thinking of his pride and his dislike of the captain. He had a greater reason for killing Englishmen. Vengeance. He had to avenge von Steren.

Three planes came into view down there across the lines, dark ships that flew eastward into the dawn. The captain wagged his signal to the flight, but he did not go down. He was searching the sky, looking suspiciously at the group of clouds eastward which remained unlit by the dawn. Finally he seemed to come to a decision. The sky looked clear, and he had a man at his back whom he felt he had to impress with his daring and skill. He signaled for half the flight to go down and the rest to remain as top protection. Dick's nose dropped at the same instant as the leader's. He warmed his guns. Action at last!

IN A screaming dive, the Fokkers came out of the lightening sky. With the wind whistling in a high tremolo that sounded above the roaring Mercedes, Dick rode to the first test of a man who had forgotten, but who had accepted the responsibility of upholding a Jasta's honor. Down on those three two-seaters, already warned and whirling around in a mutual tail-protection circle, aft guns warming for combat.

Down below them and up he went. That was the way to fight two-seaters, Dick knew. He remembered having done it before, but not when or where. He was past the blazing ring and he was zooming up. His eyes registered the cockades on the wings, and he was disconcerted. His memory had leaped like a live thing and then gone back to sleep. Enough. He sprawled his plane awkwardly, and his hands fumbled. He couldn't shoot. Something the matter with him. Something that seemed to be clutching him, holding him—keeping

him back from what he was about to do. The warning bell was ringing in his brain again, that ever-active instinct that warned him but refused to tell him the reason for the warning. He set his jaw. Whatever it was, he wasn't going to let it cheat him and disgrace his Jagdstaffel before this crowd. He was going in and get that two-seater that had eluded his attack and—

The sky literally rained Nieuports. They came from nowhere, and they were flashing in and out like buzzing wasps of destruction. Three Fokkers were going down the sky, out of control already, caught in that first surprise rush. Dick, swung wide by his awkward maneuver against the two-seater, had a second of warning. He got his nose up just as two Nieuports made for him. This was fighting. Better work than jumping two-seaters.

He kicked rudder and fired the stick back as one of the Nieuports pressed him too close on the wrong side for action. Up and over in an Immelmann. Just a little clearance. That was all he wanted. These enemies would pay then.

He had a fleeting vision upward, where the top protection should be—a vision that showed him an angry Camel flight mixing it up with the Fokkers on top. Another trap, and royally did the Fokkers fly into it. Smart man, that captain, sneering at von Steren.

A burst of tracers through his wing turned him, and he blazed at the Nieuport that had come so close to doing him in. Damn it! What was the matter with him? He could have gotten that fellow, but he hesitated too long; a tick of the clock too long. Something about the damned insignia the fellows carried bothered him.

He kicked over again and cursed at the nose heaviness and lack of balance in his ship. That dive had loosened everything, that and consequent maneuvers. He eased away from another burst, and had to literally lift his ship out of the way. "Damn rotten rigging job," he snarled. "That rigger ought to be kicked in the pants. Should have rigged the thing myself and—"

He felt something like a dash of cold water along his spine. He'd been talking in English. *English!* Under stress, he had spoken in English, cursed in it.

AUTOMATICALLY, he squirmed and twisted and maneuvered against the two Nieuports that hemmed him tighter and tighter. His spine was cold and his brow was perspiring. He had talked in English. He hadn't been able to fire on the cockade, and what had he cussed about? Oh, yes, the rigging.

A picture flashed across his mind—the picture of

a sun-drenched field and a Nieuport. Tightening up the turnbuckles. Teddy Blake and the boots. It was all coming back to him, coming back fast, as fast as the jacketed death that was seeking him from the spitting Vickers of the two Nieuports. He had it all now, and the bottom seemed to fall out of everything. He swayed in the cockpit and the Fokker lurched. "My God!" he said huskily. "I'm an American from a British squadron in a German ship and German uniform. I've got to kill or be killed."

A Fokker flashed out of somewhere and broke into the fray, taking one Nieuport away and giving him all he could do for the minute. Dick took immediate advantage of the hole that was left in the ring of death and flashed out. The other Nieuport, disconcerted, gave chase. Dick shivered. There seemed no course of action open to him that did not have the *croix de bois* at the finish.

Another Fokker got into it, blocking off the second Nieuport momentarily and allowing Dick to see the insignia on the little ship's fuselage. Twin head-stones—the personal insignia of Teddy Blake. He groaned. The Fokker had him bad, too, and those other Nieuports streaking to the rescue might get up too late.

The impulse came to him to barge in there and let the German have it with the Spandaus, but he shook it off. He couldn't. These men were brave, too, and they had accepted him as a comrade, had shaken his hand. This fellow had come in to his rescue. He couldn't shoot him. On the other hand, neither could he let the fellow shoot down Teddy Blake.

Awkwardly, as though muffing his bank, he shot across the German's nose and threw him off at the moment his guns blazed. There was a quick pattern in his left wing, and notches in the cowlings, and then he was out of the zone of fire. So, too, was Teddy Blake, a reprieved Teddy Blake who was free once more to follow Dick with his Vickers. The German, cheated of his prey and outnumbered, had his nose down, headed for home. Very few Fokkers remained and Dick fought with the instinct of self-preservation that urged him back to sanctuary in Germany away from this wild bunch of Nieuport pilots, friends of his who would kill him without knowing who he was.

With his nose down, he could out-dive any Nieuport. The Fokker would do that and—he dived.

If his brain hadn't been numb, he would have thought of that. He could dive and yet not race into Germany. The same safety awaited him if he could out-race destruction to an Allied drome and land. It was worth the gamble.

THE wind screamed as the ground came up, and he watched the left wing anxiously. It was pretty badly shot up and liable to fall off. The fabric was loosening. He'd have to take a chance on pulling out now. He leveled off carefully, and the dash exploded in his face. He kicked the ship from side to side frantically and looked back. Teddy Blake was on his tail. The fool had dived his Nieuport, matched dives with a Fokker riding the weakest wings in France.

"Damn fool. He's got more faith in a Nieuport than Mr. Nieuport himself." Dick gritted his teeth and set himself for a death race. He had the edge in speed, but those tracers were coming close, terribly close. That fabric was going, too. He'd have to land soon.

His mind was racing. If he did land and get away with it, what a story he'd have to tell! He might or might not tell them about losing his memory. Might put upstarts like Teddy in their places if he kidded them for a while and made them think that he captured that enemy squadron and led them into this. Then he'd tell them the truth and have the second laugh.

The tracers reached for him again, and one of them plucked his sleeve. There was a burning sensation along his cheek. Kissed there by another. Coming closer—

His mind raced on. He didn't have any headache now, but if he survived, he was going to have some medic look his mental rigging over. No more crossed controls in the belfry for his. Once was enough. He wanted his memory rigged so he could depend on it.

They had crossed the line and archie had let them

alone. The Nieuport was too close to him, and they hadn't dared try for him. The ground was very close. What was that field? Oh, yes, the balloon field before the Boche bulged the lines. No sausages here now. Nice open space. Lovely.

He side-slipped and felt his right arm go limp as the tracers bit. The wing was going. He'd have to race it to a landing, get down before it fell off. It was a dizzy feeling to get bullets in one. A fellow'd never stand it if he wasn't all hot and excited. Whoa there! Ground coming up. Hold everything. Easy does it and—

He crashed on his tail and the Fokker went to pieces around him. A longeron stabbed at him and dug a furrow along his neck, but he didn't care; he didn't even care when he catapulted clear and thumped down on the hard ground. He was alive, and instinct was telling him that he had received nothing fatal. Destiny had offered him the *croix de bois* and then had taken it back. He'd get a nice rest in a hospital and he had his memory again and—

He fought hard to retain consciousness as the Nieuport rolled in fast. With his left hand, he tore the helmet off his head and struggled to his feet, standing spread-legged and weaving before the wide, incredulous eyes of the begrimed Nieuport pilot.

"Dick Estabrook. You—how—"

Dick grinned and shrugged off oblivion. His voice came thickly. "Teddy, you little bum, I—I had no idea how—how damn bad you wanted those boots back."

He was sagging forward when Teddy Blake caught him.