



CLOUD-KILLER

by O.B. MYERS

They called him a joy-rider, a cloud-killer—and a war going on! Tremaine waited to answer the slight—and a day came when his guns didn't jam and his motor carried him through to a winged target.

BERT EASED THE STICK BACK just a trifle; the nose of his Spad rose correspondingly, but she did not gain any altitude. Instead his hand felt a slight shiver travel up the stick, the first warning of a stall. He eased it forward again, and glanced at his altimeter.

"Fifty-one hundred meters. Guess that's about as high as she'll go."

He glanced over the side of his cockpit; Pete Cobden's Spad hung about a hundred feet below him and to one side.

Apparently Pete had reached his ceiling also. The two were doing a voluntary patrol, and had decided before taking off that they would climb to maximum height before crossing the lines.

The air was clear as crystal, and at this altitude icy cold. When Bert stuck his head out from behind the windshield, it felt as if a piece of ice had been drawn across his cheek.

Not a sound of the vast conflict on the ground arose to tell him there was a war on; from this distance his eyes could not pick up the slightest movement below him. He seemed to have severed every connection with Mother Earth, which lay like a faded and dirty tapestry unrolled on a floor miles beneath him. He felt himself to be a disembodied speck, floating in a frigid and limitless void, his ears deafened by the roar of his motor to every other sound and feeling. A sensation of drowsiness stole over him, induced possibly by the thin air; certainly helped by the fact that he had been doing one or two patrols daily for the last week.

There was not a thing in the sky at their level; he allowed his thoughts to wander as his Spad soared steadily through the blue.

He was thinking of his first meeting with Anne Hastings in Paris a month before. She had just arrived in France, and was bewailing her luck at being assigned to a hospital far from the front. Bert was on his way up

to join an American pursuit squadron, and had three days to spend in Paris before he had to report.

He had been in France for almost two years, including two months over the front with the Lafayette, but had no Huns to his credit. He regaled her with his experiences, dwelling naturally on the amusing incidents and glossing over the unpleasant parts. He had been somewhat abashed when she said: "Sounds as if you'd been having a wonderful time."

"That part is going to be all over three days from now," he had replied, "but you can bet I'm going to make the most of these three days."

BEFORE he went back to his hotel that night he had an engagement for tea the following day, and for the rest of his stay in Paris he had seen just as much of Anne as her duties allowed. They called each other Anne and Bert as if they had been acquainted for years, and she had come to the train to see him off when he left. He had wanted tremendously to kiss her, but hadn't dared, and then, just as the train began to move, she had kissed him.

Just one brief instant with her warm lips on his—"For good luck!" she had said, as she pushed him onto the running board, but Bert liked to imagine that her eyes had said more. As he hung precariously out of the open door, waving his cap, he thought that those dark eyes were laughing at him, but he was already too far away to be sure.

Bert was recalled abruptly to the present by a sharp *rat-tat-tat* on his right. His head snapped around to see Pete's Spad alongside him; Pete had fired a few rounds to attract his attention. Pete was waving and pointing down.

"Oh ho," said Bert to himself, as he looked below him and saw five Fokkers. "About two thousand feet to dive. Good!"

He waved his hand to Pete, and pushed the nose of his Spad down in a power dive. The beat of the motor became faster and faster, the wires began to sing, then shriek. The whole ship quivered in the hurtling rush of air.

With his eyes behind the windshield Bert saw that the Hun formation had broken up; the Fokkers were circling and zig-zaging. Bert set his jaw and passed his fingers around his trigger grips; he picked one enemy and set a course for his tail. The Hun swung off to the left; Bert gave her a little rudder and kept the Fokker in his sights.

Now he was in range; deliberately he squeezed the

triggers. *Rat-tat-tat-tat!* His Vickers spoke with a staccato clatter. The Hun reversed into a sharp bank to the right; Bert's tremendous diving speed carried him on by.

HE HAD caught a glimpse out of the corner of his eye of one of the other Fokkers shooting at him as he swooped past. Now as he pulled up and over to get back in position, his motor slowed down, slowed some more, idled—and stopped dead.

"Damn the luck!" he muttered nervously, and quickly pushed her nose over into a vertical dive. He realized that his motor had been taken by a chance bullet and that the only course open to him was to dive out of the fight and glide to a dead stick landing—somewhere.

AFTER a couple thousand feet straight down he pulled into a flat glide and looked back—the Fokkers were not following him. He gave all his attention to nursing as much distance out of his glide as possible. Luckily he still had over three thousand meters altitude, and the gliding angle even of a Spad would carry him back of his own lines from that height. The important question was to find a spot where he could set her down without a crash.

His eyes searched the ground below him. Woods, the river, roads, trenches, hills, more trenches—there did not seem to be a single open space left unmarred by four years of war.

He glided on and on, lower and lower, in an oppressive and nervous silence. Two thousand meters, one thousand, six hundred; his altimeter needle swung inexorably toward the little post which marked zero—and the end of his glide.

He was now nearly over Verdun, whose shattered buildings and blasted hills told an eloquent tale of years of death and destruction. His eyes raked the earth under him frantically in search of a landing field. Suddenly he saw, between the road and the river, a flat green space.

"Huh," he grunted. "Probably soft ground. But it's the only spot big enough in sight, so here goes."

Cautiously he stretched his glide to the uttermost limit of safety; he passed over the trees at the end of the meadow with not a foot to spare. He dropped to within a foot of the grass, and sailed across a hundred feet, losing flying speed. It was just at the last minute, as his wheels were touching the ground, that he saw the telephone wires.

They were army wires, strung right across the middle of the open space, on short posts about two feet high.

He had just time to yell, "Damn it all!" before his undercarriage hit the wires.

Swish! Crash! His Spad described a neat somersault through the air and landed hard on upper wings and tail. Bert was momentarily stunned; his shoulder-straps were just loose enough to let his head come in contact with the ground, which luckily for his scalp was soft and yielding. He released his belt and lay where he tumbled under his cockpit, trying to collect his wits.

He became aware of two figures running toward him across the field. Still half dazed, he watched them; there was something funny about one of the figures, he thought. He looked closer; then stared with astonishment.

He dropped his head and rubbed his eyes, as if to brush away the cobwebs of hallucination.

"Am I nutty?" he muttered.

BUT when he raised his head he still saw the same thing, only closer. "Anne!" he exclaimed. "What in thunder—how did you get here?"

She disregarded his question in her own surprise.

"Goodness, it's Bert! Are you hurt?"

"No, I guess not." He crawled on hands and knees out from under the ship, but remained seated on the grass. "Forced landing—mussed the ship up a bit, all right."

The man who was with Anne—a hospital orderly—decided that the pilot being unhurt he was more interested in the plane than anything else, and began poking around the wings and the cockpit.

"You're the last person I expected to see here," Bert told Anne. "A month ago I leave you in Paris, and you tell me you're stuck permanently at Neuilly. Now I find you in a field a few kilometres south of Verdun. How do you do it?"

She explained that she had gotten herself transferred, over many official objections, to duty in the advanced area, and had been in Hospital No. 214, just below Verdun, for a week. She had driven over to the depot for supplies that morning, and was on the way back when the Spad had crashed right alongside of the road she was on.

As she talked Bert looked at her, and decided that she was just as charming as ever. In spite of her nondescript "working uniform" her attractiveness did not

seem to be one whit lessened—at least not to Bert's eyes. Suddenly she noticed Bert's eyes fastened on her, and stopped speaking. Bert came back to earth; he said hastily:

"Hospital 214, I know. I've seen it from the air a couple of times."

"Oh, was that you over our heads yesterday afternoon?" Anne asked.

"No," replied Bert. "Must have been some one else. My Spad was laid up with motor trouble yesterday, and I spent the day up with the artillery getting confirmations."

"Confirmations for yourself, Bert?"

"No, I haven't had any luck yet. Didn't even fly the first week, no ships. Since then we've done mostly contact patrol work; flying low over the trenches, you know. Hard on the nerves, but you never get any opportunity to attack enemy planes."

ANNE did not seem interested in his explanations; she started telling him about her boys in the hospital.

"And Jack Ames is there. You knew him, didn't you?"

Bert said he remembered meeting him once.

"He was a doctor, you know," she went on. "He was medical officer with an infantry regiment: they were in the trenches, and he was treating the wounded under fire when his own arm was smashed by a piece of shrapnel. He stayed there for hours, until they made him go back. It was the following day before he got back to the hospital; that was last Tuesday."

"He's been telling me all about their life in the trenches. Why, it's simply frightful, Bert! The poor boy; he's had a terrible time!"

Bert murmured sympathetically, "Yes, I suppose so."

He suddenly remembered the man who had been with Anne. He looked up to find the orderly regarding them with a twinkle in his eye. Bert clambered to his feet, feeling rather foolish.

"Did you say you were on your way back to the hospital?" he asked Anne. She nodded.

"Guess I'll ride that far with you, and then hop a truck going in the direction of my field."

They walked out to where the ambulance stood in the road. Anne slid behind the wheel; Bert churned the crank until the motor started up with a cheerful clatter.

"Sounds like a machine gun calling to its mate," grinned Bert, as he jumped up on the seat beside Anne. But he soon discovered that she knew how to handle the old crate, and ten minutes later—much too soon to suit Bert—they drew up in front of the hospi-

tal. The orderly jumped out of the back; Anne nudged Bert to get out. But he asked, "Can't we talk a while, Anne?"

"Haven't we talked enough? The boys in there will be expecting me; I promised them I'd be back before dinner, and it's getting dark now."

"Aw, they see you all the time," Bert protested.

"Oh, you know where to find me now, Bert, and you will have plenty of chances to run over and bother me—when your Spad is laid up."

BERT looked to see if she were smiling, but her face was turned away. He spoke sharply.

"Say, are you getting sarcastic, or are you kidding me?"

"Don't get sore, Bert; I was only kidding," she hastened to reply.

"What do you think I do, put sand in the gas line on purpose, so I won't have to fly? I'd rather do a patrol than spend half a day having my spine massaged by the seat of a motorcycle, over these imitation roads."

"I should think you would," Anne agreed, cryptically.

Bert regarded her suspiciously.

"Now what do you mean by that?" he asked.

"Why, I think you aviators have an easy time of it, compared to the poor doughboys in the trenches. They fight twenty-four hours a day, live in muddy holes in the ground, and stand a chance of being maimed for life at any instant.

"You flyers live back where you're safe and comfortable, never schedule a patrol too early in the morning, and when your Spad is—*er*—laid up, off you go to Paris for a good time. I used to hear a lot about our heroic airmen, but it seems to me you spend most of your time doing everything else but shooting at the Germans. You're just a cloud-killer, aren't you?"

"Oh, is that so!" snorted Bert. "And I suppose you never stand a chance of so much as splitting a finger-nail when you're flying around a couple miles inside the German lines, with every Heinie on the ground shooting everything at you but his back teeth?"

"Oh, yes," Anne admitted. "You do take some risk, of course."

"I'm glad to hear you admit that, anyway," Bert grumbled. "Some of those birds must have been filling you up with a lot of bunk about never seeing the aviators except in Paris. That's 'cause they never stick their heads out of the dugouts. But listen, Anne; let's forget the war; there's something else I wanted to ask you."

He pulled her closer to him.

"Do you remember—in the train?" he asked softly.

"N-n-no," said Anne.

"No!" he ejaculated, dropping her hand. "You don't remember—you don't remember kissing me?"

"No—I don't know—I may have been foolish. Did I?"

HER calm smile enraged him.

"Well, neither do I!" he retorted. "I thought you—I didn't think—what do you do? Kiss so many you can't remember?"

She stiffened and regarded him with hostile eyes.

"If that is what you care to believe"—she shrugged her shoulders—"go ahead and believe it."

"Oh, all right, if that's the way you feel about it. I'm glad to have seen you, Miss Hastings; hope we meet again soon."

He leaped out of the ambulance; made a stiff little bow and strode off down the drive.

"Good-bye, Lieutenant Tremaine," she called after him. "Hope your guns don't jam!"

He gritted his teeth.

Before he reached the road he thought he heard her laugh behind him. He stopped in his tracks and wheeled around, but she was just disappearing through the door. He turned and walked on into the gathering darkness.

"Fresh little minx," he muttered to himself. "Damned if I ever bother to look her up again."

He soon hopped a truck going toward Erize-la-Petite, where his squadron was located, and after a couple of hours' bumping over the rough and rocky roads got off and walked across the fields to the aerodrome.

He reported to the C.O. with the story of his forced landing; the Major was too delighted to see him alive to make any unpleasant references to the loss of the ship. Bert made no mention of Anne Hastings; she was, he reflected, nobody's business but his own—and not much of that.

"Lucky it wasn't worse," commented the C.O. "We got some new ships in this afternoon, anyway; Herron was testing them. So you'll be able to join B flight's regular patrols in the morning."

"Good," said Bert. "I'm anxious to keep going. Guess I'll dive into bed and tear off some sleep now; I feel tired."

"Right-ho," said the C.O. "See you in the morning."

And Bert went to sleep that night thinking what a nice girl Anne could be if only she weren't so fresh.

BERT went through the usual routine of patrols for three days without any exciting incidents. Then, on the afternoon of the third day, he got in a scrap, maneu-

vered after considerable difficulty into perfect position on the tail of a Hun two-seater, but his guns jammed after the first shot and the Hun got away. Lucky for Anne she wasn't in the cockpit with him that day; his language would have blistered the sole right off a rubber boot. He asked the ordnance officer back on the field.

"How much does the Kaiser pay you, Watson, to keep my guns fixed? Why don't you do the job right, and take these Vickers off the ship entirely, and give me a pea-shooter? I might actually raise a pimple on an enemy aircraft."

The next morning his guns were again in working order, and Bert led the ten o'clock patrol in Al Herron's absence. But it was the first patrol for Charlie Bartow, a new pilot who had just joined the squadron, and Bert didn't want to take any unnecessary chances, so he didn't go in very deep. Result, no scraps.

For the next few days Bert spent considerable time with Charlie Bartow, coaching him in flying his Spad, using his guns, and giving him the benefit of all his experience over the front. He liked the youngster, and took a genuine interest in seeing him make good.

Nevertheless, it caused Bert some chagrin when, a week after Charlie's arrival, the kid himself got a Hun, which was confirmed the same night. It was on a regular B flight patrol, but Bert had blown out a tire that morning, and there being no spares available, he had to remain on the ground when the others took off.

When they returned with the story of the fight, and the news that Charlie had sent a Fokker down in flames, Bert was among the first to rush up and congratulate him. Afterward, though, he couldn't help feeling a twinge of envy, and walked off the field muttering to himself,

"Look at that. He's on the front a week, and gets a Hun, and I've been flying over the front for months, and can't even get one. Wouldn't Anne give me the raspberry if she heard that?"

And then promptly told himself that he didn't care a whoop what Anne thought

THE next afternoon B flight flew an uneventful patrol, and while he still had gas left for another half hour, Bert decided to go scouting off alone to see what he could find. He winged his way across the Meuse toward the east, way beyond their sector, but had no luck. Once he saw a two-seater way below him and started to dive, but recognized the French cocades and pulled up again.

Finally he turned homeward and crossed the river at Verdun; a little farther south he saw the enormous red crosses on the roof of Hospital 214. He had no intention of stopping, but then he saw a small field just across the road which had once been used as an advance aerodrome.

"Be a good idea to see if that field is still in decent shape," he thought. "Might have to land there some time." He throttled his motor and circled the hospital twice as he glided down; he side-slipped across the road and set his Spad down neatly in the small field. A number of people had run out of the hospital as he passed overhead; they now ran across the field toward his plane. He jumped out of his cockpit and lifted his goggles.

"Any trouble, flyer?" asked the first man to reach the ship.

"Oh, no," said Bert; "I just dropped down here to look over this field. Seems to be about as good as it ever was—except for that shell-hole over on that side."

"Yeah," said the man, "and we only got that there day before yesterday."

"Why," said Bert, in surprise, "have they been shelling the hospital?"

"Not exactly," was the reply, "but they might almost as well. They been poundin' hell out of them railroad tracks over there for the last three days, and every once in a while their aim ain't quite so good, and one falls on us. Yesterday one lit on Ward C—see that hole in the roof?—and two cases were killed in their beds and one of the orderlies was hit—my buddy."

"Anybody do anything about it—was it reported to G.H.Q.?" asked Bert.

"Each time there's been a Jerry plane overhead, flyin' around in circles; I s'pose directin' the firin'. They telephoned—the C.O. did—to some flyin' field for help, but before they come the Jerries was all through and gone home to dinner. I took some pot shots with a Colt myself, but I don't suppose he even knew I was shootin', the son-of-a-gun!"

"What time of day was this?" Bert asked.

"Always between three and four in the afternoon," he replied.

"And did he have any protection—I mean were there any other planes flying up above him?"

"No, didn't see any; not any time."

"Well, we'll see," said Bert thoughtfully, "maybe we can fool this bird. By the way, none of the Red Cross nurses were hurt, were they?"

"No," said the man, "the girls are all right." He

smiled as he asked, "Why, did you know any of them?"

"Well, yes; I did," Bert admitted, with some embarrassment. "I knew a Miss Hastings—slightly."

"She's in the first ward on the right inside the door," volunteered his informer.

BERT had not intended asking for Anne at all, but after that turn in the conversation he could hardly help going in. He found her as directed; she seemed so little surprised to see him that she might have been suspected of peeking out of the window, if such a thought had ever occurred to Bert. He had intended to be quite formal in his greeting; instead he found himself grinning foolishly, and saying,

"Hello, Anne! Here I am again."

"Yes, so I see," she replied coolly, without extending her hand.

Somewhat rebuffed, he went on,

"Hear you've been having a little trouble around here."

"Oh, nothing we're not used to," she replied calmly. "And aren't you a little late to be of help?"

Her coolness began to annoy him, and he said bluntly, "I only heard about it five minutes ago—what do you expect? I came in here purely, by accident."

"Was your Spad laid up again?" she asked sweetly—too sweetly for Bert's composure.

"No, it's not laid up; it's right out there in the field," he retorted. "Maybe you don't believe I have one—you'd better look at it."

"I see it," she said, glancing out of the window. "It looks very deadly."

"I—I was going to say," Bert went on, "that I might try to catch that Hun who has been directing artillery fire around here the last few days, if he is still at it tomorrow."

"Oh, I don't believe you could," she replied, with a trace of scorn in her voice. "We've telephoned twice, when he was overhead, but once no planes came at all, and the other time they took so long coming that the whole hospital could have been blown up while they were on the way."

"I suppose the pilots were busy having an easy time in the bar, or something, and couldn't start in a hurry. Don't worry about us; we'll muddle through on the ground, somehow."

"Oh, very well," said Bert, stiffly. "My visit only seems to annoy you; I won't bother you again." And he turned to leave.

"Wait a minute, Bert; I didn't mean to be nasty—"

"Good-bye!" he called from the door, as he went through.

HE STRODE to his ship and climbed in. He taxied to the far corner of the little field, and took off diagonally, clearing the trees along the road by inches. He flung his ship into a chandelle, and headed back for the drome, which he just managed to reach before his gas ran out.

The next morning no B flight patrols were scheduled; Bert nursed a grouch around the hangars. The regular patrol at three o'clock was all set to go, but Bert had disappeared; finally they took off without him. Five minutes later he showed up and climbed into his ship. The motor had already been warmed up; he waved for the chocks to be pulled.

The C.O. came dashing across the field, and shouted above the noise of the motor,

"Think you can pick them up?"

Bert nodded, and reached for the throttle. The C.O. started to say something else, but his voice was drowned in the roar of the Hispano as Bert opened her up.

The Spad bounded across the field, her tail rose, and she soared gracefully into the air. Bert struck out straight north, climbing as he went, but instead of leveling off at a thousand feet he kept on up and up until he had three thousand metres when he crossed the lines.

For five minutes he kept on straight into Germany; there was no sign of the B flight patrol, but Bert did not seem to be looking very hard. As a matter of fact he had no particular intention of joining the formation. He did not know just what he wanted to do; he was filled with a feeling of disgust with himself which made him reckless. He was ready for anything.

Absently he made a wide turn toward the east; five minutes later, over the river Meuse, his hands and feet seemed to automatically turn him to the south, toward Verdun.

"I'M NOT going to bother with that damned hospital," he muttered to himself—but nevertheless his Spad held to its course. He had not yet seen another plane in the sky, but as he left the chalky hills and broken walls of Verdun under his tail, his eyes picked up a black speck below and a couple of miles in front of him.

Unconsciously his grip on the stick tightened; he leaned forward a trifle. Another minute and he could

see that the speck was a Hun two-seater, and was almost directly over Hospital 214 .

"That's the baby," he growled. He thought of Anne's sarcastic remarks, and for a moment considered going away and leaving the Hun alone. But then he erased Anne from his mind, and muttered,

"By God! I've never got one yet, but I'll get this Jerry, or give up in disgust."

One quick glance at the sky above; no protection in sight. Bert's jaws clamped tight as he shoved his nose down into a steep dive toward the Hun's tail. The wind whistled through his wires, and buffeted his head as he rushed down to the conflict.

He plunged to a level just below that of the two-seater, and there flattened out. His fingers stole around his triggers; his eyes held, were glued to the enemy's cockpit. He zoomed up under the belly of the German plane; grimly he brought his sights to bear. A slightly increased pressure of his right hand, and his Vickers cut loose their twin streams of death.

BUT the men in the Halberstadt had seen him; like a flash the enemy pilot went into a steep bank. The observer in the rear cockpit gave him a burst from his machine gun, but Bert shot by and threw his Spad around in a lightning-fast turn. He was again under the tail of the Hun, and without bothering to use his sights, he pressed both triggers on the handle of his stick.

His two Vickers guns spit a stream of solid lead and tracers through his whirling propeller with a vicious *rat-tat-tat-tat*. A touch on the rudder, a twitch of the stick.

Bert could see the smoking tracers raking the fuselage of the enemy ship. Though it was a matter of split-seconds, it seemed an interminable time to Bert before he saw the telltale puff of black smoke from the cockpit.

The Halberstadt careened madly toward the earth, the center of a growing mass of flames.

Bert's heart was pounding like a trip-hammer as he yelled wildly above the roar of his motor.

But his elation was short-lived; suddenly he heard behind him a *rat-tat-tat-tat!* and instinctively pulled his Spad up in a sharp climbing turn. As he did so he looked over his shoulder, and saw no less than six Fokkers, one already almost on his tail.

The two-seater had had a protecting group above, but they had been hovering to the south, expecting an attack, if any, to come from that direction. They had

arrived too late to save the Halberstadt, but not too late to catch Bert, alone and outnumbered.

Abruptly Bert's feeling of excitement left him; his nervous elation over shooting down his first Hun was forgotten and he turned cold mad clean through. He was experienced enough to know that he was fighting against impossible odds, with the chances a hundred to one that he would never live to tell the tale. He knew that it could not be a long-drawn-out combat, and he concentrated all his energies to a single end:

"How many can I get before they get me?"

THROUGH a sky which seemed to him to be filled with Fokkers he dove, he turned, he spun and banked. Every time a plane appeared before his sights he pressed his triggers momentarily, but took no time to aim or to look for the effect of his shots, lest the few seconds lost in so doing give one of the enemy a chance to get in position on his tail.

One aspect of the fight favored Bert: he did not have to choose his target. He could not grow confused between friend and foe; for him there were no friends. Any ship that crossed his sights was an enemy, and his maneuvering was so quick and so constant that his guns were going almost continually.

The Fokkers, on the other hand, had to corner him before they could get him. And they were all so anxious to administer the *coup de grace* to this devil that they kept getting in each other's way and blocking off their own fire.

Bert came out of a loop to find a Fokker full in front of him; he got off a good burst from both guns—thank God they were not jamming now!—and zoomed away, but not before he saw the enemy pilot throw both hands into the air as the ship fell into a spin.

"Ah, one less!" thought Bert.

But as he started another turn there was a *rat-tat-tat* from one side. Neat holes appeared as by magic in the fabric on either side of his cockpit, and he involuntarily looked down to see if a red-hot iron had been drawn across the top of his leg.

He realized that he had been hit, but knew that there was no time to think about it. One enemy was coming up on him from the rear, two others were cutting him off in front, one from each side.

In a flash an idea struck him; the next instant he had kicked his rudder. The Spad went over in a reversement and came out in the opposite direction. The Fokker which had been behind him shot over his head;

the two coming in from the sides both turned to follow him. Regardless of what was in front of him, Bert turned to look over his shoulder.

The two Fokkers with one idea were converging on his tail. They were both in a bank; their upper wings kept each pilot from seeing the other plane. They swung closer and closer to each other.

Bert watched, fascinated. His hand gripped his stick; he held his breath. They were only a few feet apart; one Fokker started to level off. Involuntarily Bert yelled,

“Look out!”

ANOTHER instant and he could no longer see blue sky between their wing-tips: with a crash they locked wings. Bert shuddered and let out his breath with a hiss as he watched a confused mass of wings, motors and fabric plunge toward the ground.

But he had neither the time nor the wish to keep his eyes on the frightful spectacle; his fight was not yet finished. There were still three enemies, now triply intent on revenge.

He turned back sharply in a zoom, and saw one slanting downward in front of him. Bert reversed his rudder and swooped into a position behind the Hun's tail.

For some reason the Hun did not maneuver, but held to his course downward, apparently trying to outrun the Spad. Bert's motor was full on; he rocked back and forth in his seat, as if urging his ship to greater speed, like a jockey. He gradually caught up; when they were two hundred feet off the ground he started firing.

Still the Hun did not maneuver; Bert prayed that he would hold that straight line just one more minute—just one more. He could see his tracer stream cutting the air just below the fuselage of the Fokker; he eased his stick back a trifle.

Almost instantly there was a burst of flame in front of him, and the Fokker disappeared downward through a cloud of its own smoke.

But at the same instant Bert heard close behind him—too close—a vicious *rat-tat-tat-tat*.

One of the remaining Huns had seized his opportunity. Bert tried to level off and turn, but the roar of his motor had died away to nothing. His nostrils caught the dreaded odor of gasoline.

“Well, I guess that lets me out,” he muttered.

WITH one hand he reached for his switch and with the other put the Spad in a side-slip. He looked down, and thanked his lucky stars; just below him was the little advance field across the road from the hospital. There was no time to calculate distances; he knew he would be lucky to get on the ground alive. He pulled her out of the sideslip and felt the wheels touch the ground.

As he rolled toward the edge of the field, his ear caught a hissing and crackling under the hood. *Fire!* He stiffened with fear. He was now at the edge of the road, still rolling.

The landing gear crashed into the ditch; with a sickening lurch the ship went over on her back, leaving Bert hanging by his belt, head down. He heard the hiss increase to a roar as gas poured from a broken line onto the hot exhaust. With one blow he released his belt and somehow scrambled out from under the cockpit.

He tried to run, but one leg didn't work very well, and he staggered drunkenly. He got about a hundred feet down the road before he collapsed against a tree; when he looked back his Spad was hidden in a mass of flames as the main tank caught. Warily he closed his eyes.

THEY hollered for a stretcher and five minutes later he was being carried toward the hospital. As they approached the door, he raised his head and saw a familiar figure in the doorway. He quickly dropped his head again and closed his eyes.

The next instant there was a shriek of surprise, and he heard Anne's voice, “Why, it's Bert! Here, bring him right in this ward!”

He kept his eyes closed while she superintended his transfer to a bed and prepared things to dress his leg. When he thought no one else was around he opened them and looked up at her.

“Are you all right, dear?” she asked anxiously.

“Huh!” he grunted. “Don't worry about me. I've just been havin' one of those easy times.”