

HUNTED VULTURES

by ARCH WHITEHOUSE

An amazing, hair-raising story of a spectacular air battle and an observer who was bitten by a most peculiar bug. It brought him nothing but trouble until, in the thick of the fight something happened that wasn't on the program—

ALONE BRISTOL FIGHTER WINGED its way home from the line, a weary falcon, battered and torn. The setting sun sent its fleeting rays up into the blades of the whirling propeller, and spun off shafts of light that made ghastly gleams on the pearl-white surfaces of the wings. Rips and gashes formed weird designs here and there and splintered struts stood out like stark saplings that had withstood the ravages of a tornado.

The Rolls Royce engine growled its song of war, as if disgusted with what had gone before. The very vents of the cowlings seemed to scowl and the picture of animosity was completed by the sullen visage of the pilot who had glared through malicious-looking goggles, straight ahead to where spread the broad green aerodrome of 22 Squadron.

In the rear seat, his back to the pilot, crouched a pathetic looking individual, who appeared to be bearing the brunt of all this umbrage. His head was drawn into the folds of his leather coat and an ill-shaped helmet had slipped down over one eye while his goggles were drawn up on top and looked like misplaced inkpots. His Lewis gun hung dejectedly from the Scarff mounting with its muzzle pointing upwards with a devil-may-care attitude.

On the three-ply flooring at the observer's feet lay an upturned drum of ammunition. He kicked it with an oath and it spun away into a corner near the Very light cartridge rack. There it stopped and rocked upon its handle.

"Regular, armor-piercing, tracer; regular, armor-piercing, tracer," droned Lieut. Teddy Tear to himself, nodding as he checked off the cartridges as they were loaded in the black steel drum.

The ammunition laying in the upturned cylinder

glistened back at him. The even lines of steel-jacketed death annoyed him and he kicked it again. This time he bruised his toe, for the soft leather, fleece lined flying boot offered little protection against the heavy drum.

"Damn!" cursed Teddy, scowling harder than ever. Then he went back to his musings.

"Regular, armor-piercing, tracer, —Regular, armor-piercing, tracer. Damn stuff's no good—ought to leave out the fireworks. Get's me in trouble all the time. Damn tracer stuff . . . makes a pretty display an' that's all."

Teddy realized he was in for it when they got in, and he was prepared for the flare-up.

The engine was throttled back and a weird jumbled panorama spun around behind the fish tail of the Bristol and Teddy knew they were about to land. He jerked his Lewis gun into its retaining slot, stuck the offending drum on its pin jutting from the ammunition rack and picked up his much abused map-board.

Suddenly the tree tops appeared beyond the rubber and Teddy grabbed the longeron struts at his side to steady himself. There was a swish as the axle streamline covering tore through the long grass that fringed the outskirts of the aerodrome. A dull bumping echoed down the fabric-covered fuselage indicating that the wheels had touched and they were down again.

The tail-skid found the sod and the Bristol taxied up to the cab-rank, nose pointing to the skies, leaving Teddy sitting on a seat that had suddenly been tipped forward, as if by some mischievous urchin.

A RASPING roar and the machine was jerked around into place in line with four others of the flight that had landed ten minutes before.

Teddy stood up in his cockpit and faced the music. Without waiting to get out of his seat, Lieut. Carlton Kelsey, a hotheaded son of the Long Island Kelseys, opened up.

"A hell of a fine observer you are!" he bellowed. "How many more times do we have to go over this tracer business? That's the third Hun you have missed this week, shooting tracer aim instead of using your sights."

"Holy smoke, Carl! I thought we were close enough to him to get him without the sights this time. Don't see how I could have missed him," explained Teddy lamely.

"Close enough! Why you could have pushed that Heinie out of his seat with a curtain pole, yet you go and let him get away by shooting tracers at him. Will you ever learn?"

"I'll try. I'm gonner get the Armorer to quit putting fireworks in my drums. It put's me off, Carl," went on Teddy climbing over the side, hoping to find refuge in the R.O. office where he would be let alone long enough to make out his report.

"I'm gonner give you one more chance, Ted," snapped Kelsey, getting very abrupt. "I can't take chances with a guy like you. Either you are going to use those sights or you are going to take over the M.G. school job until you cotton on to what that gadget on the rear end of the barrel is for."

Teddy was stricken with the same weakness, that seemed to beset many observers at the front during the dizzy days of 1917 and 1918. In the gunnery schools he had been taught the art of firing at moving targets with the aid of his ring sight and wind vane.

The theory and practice, in school, had been religiously digested by our Teddy, but out at the front where excitement plays a big part in the game, he had forgotten all about laying off for direction, speed of machines, angles of approach and all that data.

When an enemy bus appeared in sight, it was Teddy's idea to point the muzzle of the gun at the black-crossed vulture, pull the trigger and move the muzzle so that the tracers appeared to be eating their way dead into the enemy cockpit.

Airmen who have been through this pleasant pastime know the futility of such gun-laying. Tracer bullets are phosphorescent missies that burn in flight. As they burn, they change in weight and thus lose accuracy and direction. Often they spin off at crazy angles a few feet from the blazing muzzle of the gun. Tracers are loaded every third round with regular and armor-piercing, making up the aerial trinity of death.

Teddy's tracers were directed at the enemy machines but his armorpiercing and regular ammunition was perhaps being fired yards ahead or behind and recklessly wasted. Unless the aerial target was within a few yards of the Lewis gun muzzle, such firing and aiming was useless.

As an observer, a loyal member of the Eyes of the Army, Teddy was a knockout? His reports were lengthy affairs crammed with accurate data. He knew every German trench from Dixmude to Cambrai. He could take and read aerial photographs like a wizard.

"Here," he would point out, "is a little difference in this part of the trench beyond the wood. They have enlarged it since yesterday."

Then he would show with a number of reasons why he believed it to be a machine gun emplacement.

"See that battery there?" he would remark. "Isn't it plain?—Well, it's a dummy. The grass in front isn't scorched and the road leading to it hasn't been used in a week."

Teddy was a great observer, as even Lieut. Kelsey would agree, but he would shoot on tracers, and when an observer gets that way, it's too bad.

Take their case that afternoon.

"C" Flight had been out on an offensive patrol. For more than an hour Capt. Clement had led his flock of falcons up and down the line without drawing even an Archie shooting at them.

SUDDENLY out of the sky, using the sun as a blind, had swooped ten Fokkers, guns ablazing. Clement had signalled with his wing-tips, just in time and the Bristol observers trained their Lewis guns on the leading Fokkers barely soon enough to break up the first flurry of hate.

The Bristols, still in tight formation, wheeled around to get their own line at their backs, and they went at it. Clement climbed as much as possible while the Fokkers reorganized for another attack. On they came and the Bristols met them like game cocks, and the dog fight was on.

This is pilot gun offensive. Both formations broke up and the wild exotic scramble blazed into full flame. The observers swung their Scarff mountings from one side to the other in an effort to get their guns trained on enemy fusilages, but the pilots are grabbing all the action and the rattle of Vickers crank-handles is almost audible above the screech of wires and the roar of motors.

Clement went down on the spining tail of a two-

seater that had a bright red band around its belly. Off to the left Lieut. Robinson was battling two Hun scouts while his observer directed a bitter fire at a single seater that was pecking away with a beak of flame at Lieut. Fitch in the sub-leaders machine. Teddy swung his gun across the fusilage to pick off a Hun attempting to settle on Lieut. Carew's tail and a trail of blue smoke was shooting from the cowl of Lieut. Lincoln's bus.

The battle was on in full swing. The bright insignias of the Bristols lent almost a sense of gaiety to the mad scene. Teddy laughed, a dry cackling gurgle as he blazed away at a Hun scout above attempting to get back on Fitch's tail.

He pumped the whole drum at the scout, using the tracer aim, and swore aloud to see the Fokker screech around and get back into position for another burst at the sub-leader. Still Teddy did not pull out of his tracer stupor.

Kelsey swerved around, shouting something at his observer, but Teddy was busy ramming on another drum of ammunition.

Through the center-section struts, Kelsey saw a black-crossed wing curl around directly in his path. Down went the nose of the Bristol and the crank-handles rattled out their song of wrath. Kelsey's lips were drawn tight and his eyes were gleaming slits from which snapped veritable sparks of fighting hate. Through his telescopic sight he saw the enemy observer stiffen up and sprawl forward on his Spandau.

Another short burst and the two-seater climbed up into a breathtaking stall. The Bristol charged at the dead-sticked Fokker, spitting steel-jacketed lead like a flying fiend. Kelsey yanked his wheels over the wing-tip just in time and curled around to see it start a slow ghastly spin earthwards,—down where Capt. Clement was finishing off his banded two-seater.

The wild plunge had hurled Teddy with a crash to the floor of the cockpit. Scrambling up, certain something had happened to somebody somewhere, the frantic observer was relieved to see Kelsey's eyes beaming at him for a fraction of a second. Then they went at it again.

Up above, Fitch was attempting to shake off the two Hun scouts that were diving on him from front and rear. Teddy aimed at one that evidenced evil intentions on the subleader's tail-section. Again Teddy directed his tracers at it with no result. Kelsey wheeled around and pulled up into an Immelman and let drive with a

burst of fire at the forward Fokker banking away from Fitch's top plane. The sub-leader pulled up after him and with a wild jerk stood his bus on its tail and took a pot shot at the Fokker.

It was a short burst—just, *rat-tat-tat-tat*, but it was enough. The Fritzie never came out of the bank. A short side slip and a flash of flame leaped from the cowl, blotting out all view of the pilot's cockpit. A puff of white smoke fluffed out from beneath the fusilage and away she went,—a flaming man-made comet that almost crashed into a diving Bristol.

Teddy dropped his spade-grip and watched the sizzling aerial torch with its cargo of death, go swirling to a sparky crash 10,000 feet below.

"I'll bet a tracer did that," he half-laughed to himself.

Then he went back tracer firing at the Hun still trying for Fitch's tail. Before he could get another shot at it, Fitch's observer blazed away at it and the Fokker scout wheeled off and high-tailed for Hunland.

It was about all over. Robinson had shook off the Fritzie that had been blazing away at his top plane and Clement below was firing white Very lights for a re-formation. Lincoln was scooting for his own lines, and Kelsey went down after him to make sure that he made a safe landing. He had plenty of height and would be able to get over the line with ease if he was protected from above.

A GREEN flare shot up from Lincoln's cockpit indicating that he was O.K., but Kelsey took nothing for granted and he nosed down after him and sat on his tail. The smoke from Lincoln's engine was diminishing and Teddy knew that the winged Bristol's engine had conked. They continued to hover over the brother machine until Lincoln had reached the 1,000 foot level and then they waited to see how he got down.

They saw him S-turn his way into position before a long narrow field. Smoke from a burning dump nearby streaked up the field and Kelsey knew the damaged bus had the wind in its favor. Teddy marked the map position of the field on his note pad and watched the Bristol glide down and run all the way down the green patch and turn into a far corner where it was shielded from the enemy kite balloons by a tall hedge. A second later a white Very light went up from the observer's cockpit, and Teddy and Kelsey knew they were O.K.

Kelsey turned his nose back to the lines in hopes of picking up his flight again. He made a couple of

turns up and down his own back areas to get height and then went over, smiling grimly at the burst of welcoming Archie fire.

Teddy peered through the struts for signs of the flight led by Capt. Clement, making notes here and there of ground activity that struck his vision while he searched for the other Bristols.

At 7,000 feet they were in the sky alone again. Below, two R.E. 8's prowled up and down on an artillery shoot. Off to the east, two miles ahead of the point where the spotters curled back and forth, Teddy saw white puffs of smoke mushroom up as salvo after salvo searched for hidden gun emplacements.

They cruised from St. Quentin to Arras without getting a sign of the rest of the flight and Teddy became interested in his wrist watch. Tapping Kelsey on the shoulder he showed him the time.

Kelsey looked at the timepiece, thought a moment and then nodded.

"Right," he answered with exaggerated lip language.

Teddy was adjusting the drums on his ammunition rack when a sudden swinging of the machine pulled him up with a jerk. Without looking at Kelsey he grabbed the spade handle of the Lewis gun and pulled it from its retaining bracket.

Just as he expected, trouble was at hand.

TWO Albatros two-seaters came charging out of the west, with the sun dead on their tails. Spandaus spat fire and bullets slashed their way into the wings leaving long gashes and gaping rents. Teddy yanked his Lewis around and blazed away, firing point blank and the two ships showed their white stomachs and curled off.

"Where the hell did they come from?" spluttered Teddy.

Kelsey pressed his Bowden trigger cable again to make sure his guns were still warm. The two Huns roared around again and nosed down for the kill. Teddy waited his turn with his Lewis pointing over the right side of the fusilage.

The Bristol pilot accepted the challenge and threw his machine headlong at the enemy scouts with both guns spitting hot lead. Without giving an inch, he yanked his stick back and almost chewed the undercarriage off of one with his propeller as he watched his guns bite out chunks of fabric from the bottom of the spattered fusilage.

Then he yanked around giving Teddy his chance at the other. It had slewed away to the right, just where

Teddy wanted it, and *per-rip-rip-rip* snarled the Lewis with Teddy directing tracer fire at it, and as usual—getting no result. Kelsey watched out of the corner of his eye as he searched for the other Hun.

"Damn his eyes," spat the pilot. "Shooting tracer aim again, the cockeyed fool!"

Teddy streamed lead after the retreating two-seater until Kelsey slapped him on the shoulder with a malicious glare.

Kelsey's Hun had gone down, out of control. It was in a flat spin now, two thousand feet below and they watched it as they headed back for their own lines.

The observed was sore at himself. He knew that Kelsey's flying had put the Hun well within range, but again he had forgotten to use his sights. Tracer firing again had lost him an enemy machine. With these depressing thoughts, Teddy let the gun hang from its mounting and squatted on the folding seat to glare at the drum of ammunition at his feet.

CHAPTER II

THAT NIGHT LIEUT. LINCOLN and his observer, Lieut. McKeever, were brought back to the squadron in the wing lorry.

The damaged Bristol was being towed back, with wings removed, and all was merry and bright again. Kelsey still harped on Teddy's tracer firing, but considering the result of the dog fight he was not quite so insistent that Teddy go and soak his head in a petrol tank, as he usually was after such occasions.

According to a notice on the bulletin board the squadron was slated to present an entertainment in the mechanics' mess hut and everyone was keyed up for the big affair. The floor of the hut had been swabbed and sanded for the occasion and special benches were placed up near the front for the officers and a few privileged civilians from the village.

The stage was made up of mess tables grouped together at one end of the long hall and footlights fashioned from bully beef tins shot out tawdry glares from the spluttering wicks of candles.

A back-drop, a ribald affair daubed with red, white and blue paint, was supposed to represent the entrance of the Waldorf Astoria Hotel, according to the

program which had been churned out on the orderly-room mimiographing machine. It looked well as one entered the door from the far end of the hut, but like all "good paintings" it did not stand close scrutiny.

"My word! Look at it," grinned one of the unappreciative officers. "Fairly makes your eyes water."

Sergeant Mole took up the cause in favor of the painter with:

"I don't think it is 'arf bad, Sir. It might be because the paint is new and pretty strong."

There was no further argument.

At the bottom of the program ran such terse remarks as: Boots and shoes in first act by Lord Kitchener. Hats by the Air Ministry. Costumes in third act by Quartermaster Sergeant. Music by Messrs. Victor and the Royal Flying Corps Silver Temperance Band.

Major Montlear led a hatless brigade in from the officers' mess and soon the seats were filled all the way to the creaking door. Clouds of cigarette smoke rolled toward the partially opened windows and the feminine members of the civilian party choked and spluttered while attempting to translate the programs that were being handed out.

At this Major Montlear took matters into his own hands and asked that all smoking be dispensed with, pocketing his own briar as an example. Majors had some tough jobs in the war zone.

A dull thud and an earthly squeak came from the stage as the wings were opened up allowing Corporal Alf Spotts to take the center of the stage and announce that the program would now be opened. Nodding to the Major, Corporal Spotts stood to a grotesque position of attention while Air Mechanic Ernie Edginton at the piano, battered out something that sounded suspiciously like the national anthem, with fingers that were still grimey from a recent tussle with a top overhaul.

Like all good soldiers they struggled through the salutary anthem with an um-de-um-da here and there to fill in forgotten lines, and the big show was on.

"THE first number, loidies and gen'lmen will be a song and darnce by Air Mechanic 'Erbert Oshkins. 'E will sing 'The 'Eart Bowed Down.' Thenk yer."

'Erbert 'Oshkins, a palid youth with an enlarged Adam's Apple, appeared a bit late from the opposite side of the stage armed with a bundle of papers which were supposed to be his music, and made for what he could best judge as the center of the procenium.

Long loud cheers greeted 'Erbert, and the boys in the rear encouraged him with, "Come on 'Erbert. Give 'em one for 'C' Flight!"

'Erbert did, and just managed to scramble through the chorus to be picked up by a sympathetic audience who took up the refrain with lusty fervor and enthusiasm. When it was all over 'Erbert forgot his dance and beat a perspiring retreat and nearly tore down the scenic effects in his haste to make his exit.

On came Corporal Spotts again. He had lost his touch of stage fright by now and was monarch of all he surveyed.

"The next number loidies and gen'lmen, is a noice little act by ower Corporal Albert Axminster. Corporal Axminster will offer his program of card tricks and magic which 'e 'as shown before many of the 'ighest class 'ouses in London—Corporal Axminster. Thenk yer."

This artist had the professional touch down to perfection. He set out his little table and paraphernalia while getting off his opening patter.

"Now 'ere you are, loidies and gentlemen. I want's yer to watch me close. 'Ere wer are 'appy as 'unters on the highway. Watch closely and 'ark in case I drop anything."

"'Ow about yer H's?" yelled one wag from the rear of the hut.

"We'll 'ave no remarks from the loges," glared Corporal Axminster going a deep scarlet.

The interruption so upset him however that a canary, secreted somewhere about his person, struggled out of his tunic neckband and escaped just when the flustered Corporal was supposed to be drawing a bowl of goldfish from under a handkerchief.

There was a mad scramble at the rear of the hut as several joyous mechanics attempted to retrieve the feathered fugitive which was attempting to escape through a window.

"Let's have a little order here, please," pleaded Major Montlear, barely able to stifle a loud guffaw.

Corporal Axminster, the martyr of the evening, true to his race continued on without the assistance of the canary, but he devoted the rest of his act to card tricks. He tried the famous handcuff and shackle trick for which he was "noted throughout the length and breadth of the land" as his finale, but owing to the fact that something slipped somewhere, he had to be assisted out of his plight and he bowed his way off the stage still shackled like the trapped lion in Aesop's fable.

THE crescendo of the piano was drowned out by the cheers of appreciation offered by the pilots and observers in the choice seats. The French civilians looked on in speechless awe.

Corporal Spotts, the master of ceremonies, was slightly miffed himself by this time and he appeared again with dignity and hauteur clouding his countenance.

He heaped coals of fire on their head with: "Thank yer, loidies and gen'lmen. We must give Corporal Axminster credit for doing his best."

Off stage there was a distinct hammering and clanking of iron chain indicating that the master of shackles and handcuffs was being released. With a glare towards the wings, Corporal Spotts went on:

"And now, loidies 'and gen'lmen, we 'ave as our next number. Air Mechanic 'Orace Fillpots, our noted female impersonator, who will offer his full repertwah of well-known musical comedy 'its.—Air Mechanic Fillpots. Thank yer."

And out danced a fluffy, heavy booted nymph with rouged lips that showed up dentistry with a yawning gap in the middle. Muscular arms, tattooed with flags and scarlet hearts through which gorry daggers were stuck, flounced from the folds of a voluminous evening gown that might have been worn by a portly dowager of the early nineties. 'Orace pirouetted and strutted up and down the stage offering ogling glances at the officers in the front seats. The tin-pan piano made a gallant attempt to drown out the thunderous applause that rolled up from the rear of the long hut.

"Good old 'Orace!" they yelled. "Oo la la, 'Orace. You can sleep in our 'ut to-night."

"What ho, our 'Orace," they cried. "'E ain't arf a bit of orlright, ain't 'e?"

The mechanic at the piano continued to vamp for an opening and 'Orace made the most of his time, swishing his skirts and tossing saucy glances over a well-floured shoulder.

"Come on 'Orace. Let's 'ave it, old girl," yeped a lusty lunged greaseball just as the roar of applause was subsiding, and 'Orace let 'em have it.

They remember that chorus to this day. It went something like this:

*Here comes Tootsie.
Make a little music on the band.
(Bamb! Bamb! Bamb!)
Cheer ho, Tootsie.
Tootsie you are looking simply grand.
Ripple out the rags,
On the piccolos and flutes*

*That the man who wrote the rags,
Wrote especially for Toots.
Here comes Tootsie.
Make a little music on the band.
(Bamb! Bamb!)*

'Orace carried his audience into three choruses and single handed made the show a complete success. They roared for it again and just as they were on the last two *Bam! Bams* a dull unearthly moan rolled up from the aerodrome outside and started to work itself into an ominous growl. It continued as the motley audience sat stupified, and raged into an ear-piercing screech.

'ORACE stopped dead in his tracks, half way through his curtain dance that displayed what lacy articles of underclothing he had been able to slither into.

The pianist turned on his petrol box and stared blankly at Major Montlear. 'Orace dropped his skirts and ran to the footlights.

"'Ad I better stop, Major? It sounds like our siren," he almost whispered.

But Montlear never heard him. He was heading out of the hut as fast as the confined seating arrangements would allow.

Halfway out he stopped and barked an order.

"Get out at once, men. Got to the hangars and have every machine ready within five minutes. You officers—into your flying kits at once!"

Horace dashed off holding his skirts high above his husky ankles. The show was over and another had come to take its place.

Chairs, benches, tables and petrol boxes were scattered left and right. Still the siren's wail went on sending shivers of trepidation up many a backbone.

The dull squeal of hangar-door pulleys added to the mournful wail. Trembling booms could be heard off to the east and splashes of fire seared the sky where 'anti-aircraft guns were ferretting the clouds for invaders.

Still, above it all could be heard that wailing drone of relentless enemy motors. On they came, the breath of hate was in the air and men flinched below with petrifying shudders rippling up and down their spines as they ran from one side of the aerodrome to the other.

Twinkling lights were doused but the silvery moon above lit up the stark world below. Ponds and rivers might have been filled with milk. Railroad tracks shone out from their roadbeds like long strips of silver

that had just been polished for a special occasion. Woods were brought out as if by a magic brush, their queer outlines forming crazy quilt effects on the green plains below.

The eerie moan went on overhead. Where were they? First it came from over here and then from over there. Men who had scrambled over sandbagged parapets two days before to charge through barbed wire with a shout of half-crazed enthusiasm, cringed and huddled together now, strangely helpless.

There was something evilly compelling about those unseen vultures above. They strewed their venom and vitrol with little fear of comeback from below. You just huddled together and waited. Waited for what?

On they came, their droning hate freezing men's blood in their veins. God! would they ever go away? How long were they going to sit over this damned hole? Why didn't they drop their load and get it over? Come on you dogs, let 'em go and let's have it over with! Damn! Why don't someone stop them once in a while?

And still that wailing moan above while men waited for what seemed an eternity.

CHAPTER III

THE BRISTOLS WERE RUN OUT one by one. "C" Flight's were out on the tarmac first and within a few minutes their engines were being warmed up for action. Horace, still in his wierd costume, was racing up and down the cab rank, adjusting guns, holding down tails for engine tests and pulling away chocks to allow the Bristols to taxi out for a formation take-off.

Pilots and observers adjusted helmets and goggles while peering at the sky for the unseen enemy. Short leather coats and long flying boots were the mode of the evening and Major Montlear, in trench coat and flying helmet led the way down the field.

"C" Flight was to take off first and as soon as they were well away "A" Flight was to join the patrol. "B" Flight was to stand by for further orders from Wing headquarters.

Montlear carried the leader's streamers on his tail and Capt. Clement took the left hand corner. Kelsey and Teddy were ordered to sit above the wedge and

take over any position left vacant during the expected action.

"Suits me fine," grinned Kelsey when informed of his job. "Won't have to worry about side-slipping Sammy on the turns. Now if only Terrible Teddy in the back seat will use those sights, we ought to be in for a pleasant evening."

Teddy jammed on a drum of ammunition and said nothing.

A white light leaped up from Montlear's machine and almost immediately a belch of flame curled up from an emergency ground flare at the far end of the field.

The war birds screeched up and over it like scared bats and widening their formation for night flying, they turned once and roared on over the aerodrome like a flight of spectral griffons spitting fire from their exhausts. Another turn and they were well over 2,000 feet, their formation being grimly outlined to ground observers by the high moon.

Montlear settled back for a fast climb as he headed the flight over Holthurst Foret, dead for the lines. His observer, a corporal aerial-gunner watched the skies like a hawk. Off to the left toward Poperinghe the anti-aircraft guns were spitting fire at a savage rate. The aerial gunner watched the display for a time and then discovered enemy activity.

Yes, there they were—fighting the flare of searchlights and the flame of Archie fire. In the glare of bursting shells and the long silver fingers of the tell-tale arcs, the formation of Gothas was intermittantly visible.

The corporal gunner tapped Montlear on the shoulder and pointed north. It was some time before the squadron leader could adjust his vision from the flickering needles of his dashboard to the Gothas flitting in and out of the beams from mobile searchlight batteries. At last he saw them and turned to his observer with a grim smile of acknowledgment. Then, wagging his wings he drew the attention of his observer again and stuck up three fingers.

The aerial-gunner nodded and picked out a flashlight from his rack and adjusted it for a red beam. He pressed the button of the torch several times and assured himself that all had noted his signal and then tapped the pilot on the shoulder again, indicating that all was in order. Montlear swung his machine dead north and the rest of the flight was on it's guard.

This was something new and strange to the Allied pilots. They seldom had a chance to fight the Hun on their own side of the line. In addition, the thrill of

fighting in the air while night flying, left a haunting feeling at the pit of the stomach. It wasn't funk, exactly, but there is something sickeningly ghastly in chasing the almost unseen. It's like fighting your way out of a barroom in which the lights have suddenly been put out.

Not ten minutes before, these pilots and observers had been enjoying the antics of 'Orace, the female impersonator. Within another ten minutes they would be at death grips with a ghostly enemy, 10,000 feet in the air. War presents some dizzy contrasts.

ON THEY roared toward the flight of Gothas that was now well within view. Bursts of fire a few miles ahead indicated where they were hurling their eggs of death, battering shell-torn buildings into hideous piles of crumbled masonry. The spinning projectiles buried their blunt noses into mud-splattered roads and hurled death-dealing showers of granite and packed earth skyward to settle back with a snarling boom that rent the nerves and spirits of cringing humans to shreds.

Swish! Crash! Boom! was answered below as their bombs thundered into the blackness of a hell upon earth. The ditches of death offered no sign of human life. Storms of gunfire went up again.

Banks of smoke formed a stinking pall over this area of the war. Men were being shattered at cross-roads. German guns were potting at the flashes of anti-aircraft batteries that raced away after every salvo and let someone else take the tornado of hate.

"Very boring," snarled an officer peeping out of a funk hole. "Not a damn thing to be seen anywhere, and yet all this. God! What a war!"

"And the damned Germans are probably playing cards in their dug-outs," added another who was also very bored. "Hell must be a pink tea compared to this."

Along the roads of war, soldiers tramped through the blizzard of moonlight. Mounted men with their heads bent in submissive resignation to the hurricane of flying steel, rode on like white knights of old through a wilderness of terror.

Then the cadence of the Gotha engines suddenly boomed into a new tempo as though some mad organist had taken over the keys in a church at midnight. Fear was uppermost in their new scream of hate. Below, the tempest died down and men crept out of their rabbit burrows, still dumbly silent but cravenly curious.

They stumbled through newly churned shell-

holes. Some peered up through roofless ruins. Badly wounded men were dragged through piles of dead bodies, headless trunks and pools of blood to be laid in the filth of shambled cellars.

Men who had huddled together like sheep without shepherds when wolves were about, looked around with eyes of bewilderment. They crowded into battered trenches broken in spirit. Men smashed their rifles in moments of madness. Boys cursed and wept at the same time. Disorder reigned above and below.

But above, the panic of rage and fear was even more tragic and pitiful.

THE Gothas swarmed together in wild confusion. Out of the south swept an aerial cavalcade of fury. Flaming exhausts snarled a hatred that chilled the life blood of the German airmen who before had been droning up and down the Poperinghe road spreading their deafening obscene terror. Now they were crowding together like startled ducks over a marsh.

Montlear took the first in a screeching dive that almost wound up in a collision. His Vickers guns spat a staccato hymn of hate as he nosed down on the leading bomber. The German shivered from prop to rudder and zoomed up suddenly like a wounded snipe. There was an almost-audible crack that made every airman who sensed it, cringe to the marrow, and a wing fluttered away into the moon-flecked mist below. The rest of the machine spun, wailing its way down to a ghastly self-churned pit of horror. It was splendid and pitiful.

The Major banked around and tore at another Gotha that had strayed away from the pack of hunted vultures. Again his guns barked, spitting streams of fire that burned its fangs into the enemy cockpit. This time he dove under and received a blast of bullets from the fusilage tunnel gun that gnawed away the base of a strut. The corporal replied with a steady hand that pressed the trigger as the Gotha swirled around to get back to its flock. His burst ripped through the wings and bit a strange design on the fusilage. This time the Hun did not zoom. When dead men fall on joy sticks a dive of death is the result. Wings of bombers cannot stand that gaff and another fusilage, strikingly like a spinning coffin, sped to its finish in a water-logged hole, littered with gaping sandbags.

THE furies of hell were loose now. Bristols shot across the moonlit heavens spewing lead and fire at inky Gothas that curved and glided out of range.

Other Bristols raced away to the west to head off the retreating invaders. The air was filled with flying lead, fluttering bits of fabric, spinning machines and splinters of pure white spruce.

Kelsey and Teddy Tear sat over the lot waiting for a chance to pick out a fleeing Gotha. One shot across the melee of dog-fighting machines belching a leaden hail at Major Montlear's tail. Down went Kelsey's nose like a plummet and his guns foamed with fire and spinning steel. The Gotha squirmed away drunkenly and slithered into a flat spin. Suddenly it burst into a flaming aerial charger and with a final puff of anguish fell away like a tired rocket.

Kelsey's Bristol slewed around in a breath-taking flat turn and headed for a vulture that spat lead into a faltering two-seater. The Gotha poured a ceaseless fire into the hapless bus, sending it away in a wailing nose dive from which it never pulled out.

Another dead man on a joy stick. The triumphant Gotha swirled around and showed its tail to Kelsey and Teddy, and from under its tail-skid came a volley of steel-jacketed bullets that clipped at the Bristol's struts and flying wires. The Gotha heeled around and another burst came from a cockpit gun.

Teddy returned the fire, his gun chattering a blistering vitrolic fire until something smacked him, something like the tap of a sledge hammer, on the shoulder and spun him into a heap on the floor of the cockpit. The tail of the Bristol jerked up and Teddy looked out bewilderedly at the jumble of moonlight, sky and flaming horizon.

Wires whistled and screeched. The propeller wailed and the engine roared like a shafted bull.

Down, down, down, they went. Teddy's ears sang and his temples throbbed. He grabbed at the edge of the cockpit just in time to stop his swinging gun handle which clouted him full in the mouth. Blood spurted out of scarlet gaps where seconds before teeth had been.

"What the hell!" cursed Teddy, grabbing at the rim of the Scarff mounting which was not in the right place, somehow.

"Hey Carl! Carl? What—what's the matter?"

The Bristol still hurtled toward the flame-splashed earth below and Teddy knew something was wrong somewhere.

He spat out a mouthful of blood and a tooth. The gore streamed back on his goggles and partially blinded him. They were thumbed up on top of his helmet with a jerk and tears streamed down his face

adding to the strange salty taste in his mouth which he could not explain.

Still the Bristol sped on down, down, down.

"You bloody fool, Kelsey. Pull that stick back. You'll rip her wings off. What's the matter, damn your eyes!" he screeched. But Kelsey heard nothing.

Teddy tugged at his pilot's collar. A button snapped somewhere, and Teddy slipped. Still he held on like one straining at the bars of a chamber of horrors.

"Carl! Carl!" he blubbered, tugging and pulling like a fiend.

Finally he found secure footing against the folding seat and he dragged the prostrate pilot back. The Bristol gradually pulled out of the screaming dive. How the wings held on, Teddy never knew, nor did he care much. Kelsey's head fell back on his shoulder and the observer stared with glazed eyes into the pilot's face. He nearly went mad.

Two dark splotches on Carl's cheek, framed in white flesh, burned their impression into Teddy's half-numbed brain. Dull stains streaked out of the corner of the gaping mouth and the eyes opened and closed like those of an overturned clothing store dummy.

Teddy felt quakingly alone in the sky.

A TIGHT cord within him twanged like a bowstring and his head partially cleared. The Bristol was on an even keel now, but heading north. Teddy spat out another mouthful of blood—all over Kelsey's helmet this time, and holding the pilot back with one hand he struggled through the contortions of getting out of his bulky leather flying coat. Letting down the folding seat in his own cockpit, he put one foot over into Kelsey's lap, steadying himself with one hand on the center-section.

Carl's body jerked and Teddy's foot slipped off the pilot's thigh, kicking the joy-stick over into a corner and down went the nose of the Bristol again. Another scramble and he dropped like a sack of coal into the confined quarters of the front seat, and grabbed for the control lever.

At the best of times there is little extra room in the front seat of a Bristol and Teddy was unable to get Kelsey's foot off the rudder-bar. The pilot's left leg had stiffened out again and the bus was in the sickening throes of a flat spin. Hooking one hand under Carl's knee, he finally released the rudder and made a temporary seat for himself on Kelsey's gore saturated lap.

He snuffled and spat cut blood—this time all over the dashboard.

"I've got to get her down," he chanted, half

hysterically. "I've got to get Carl back quick. The hellions, they plugged him."

Pushing the stick forward, he ruddered around gingerly and finally found the black inky outline of a familiar wood just beyond his radiator cap.

He giggled hysterically again and looked back, surprised to see his tail so high in the air. What was that horizon business, pilots were forever talking about? He jerked back on the stick and flattened out again. Still not certain, he turned around once more to judge by his tail—and almost swooned. Right behind him the black foreboding outline of something was spitting fire at him in a torrent.

Teddy ducked under the cowl and pushed the stick forward with him and up went his tail again. No respite. Flaming ammunition whined past his head and through his wings. He could see them hurtling on ahead, and he babbled out his tale of woe.

"Carl! Carl! They are shooting tracers at us, Carl! Did you hear? Tracers! Shooting tracers!"

He glanced back to see if Carl had noticed. No answer or sign of recognition. Only the blank ghastly stare of the pilot greeted him. No comfort there. On and on again came the enemy machine. *Spiff! Spiff! Spiff!* went the tracers past him.

Teddy looked back again—and saw the shining drum of his Lewis gun lying across the Scarff mounting where it had fallen after smashing his teeth out. He raved again.

"Tracers! Drum's loaded with 'em. Tracers! Can aim with tracers. Don't need sights. Good ole tracers," he babbled.

He leaned back, shoving Kelsey's battered head on to the cold ring of the Scarff mounting. He grabbed the spade-handle just as the Hun was swinging around for another burst.

Teddy yanked on the gun handle and the mounting swung around toward him so that he could reach the pistol grip. The Bristol was slewing around in a crazy flat spin. Teddy's numb finger found the trigger guard and slipped through. Teddy giggled again.

Fire poured in a chattering storm from the shiny steel barrel barely missing the top of the rudder post, and Teddy laughed. The chuckles of a madman.

"Come on damn you. Shoot your tracers, kid. Here come mine," he raved, whirling the nose of his gun in a crazy circle.

ON CAME the Hun plane hurling its steel-jacketed venom in fiery profusion at the side-slipping Bristol. On it came—to its doom as Teddy's tracers were directed dead into the nose of the charging vulture.

One exploded under the pilot with a roar that could be heard above the shriek of engines. The bus jerked up in a wild climb to settle back on its tail with Teddy's tracers still biting their way into the fuselage. The Lewis gun barked on and Teddy babbled through lips that were slashed and bruised. The flaming fangs of destruction barked out until the drum was exhausted and with a breathless curse the half-mad observer tossed the gun around into the back seat.

He steadied the Bristol with quivering hands and watched the Fokker as it swirled and slid in wide curves to its final resting place.

His wood was off to his right and he suddenly realized that he was not more than 500 feet above the scrambled cottages below him. He climbed without thinking what he was doing and hedged around him again for his landmark.

He prowled around over the wood for what seemed a year, looking for his landing ground. Suddenly a flare plumed up in front of him and he nosed down dead for it.

The Bristol screeched its swan song and Teddy jerked the throttle back to listen to it closer. The flare below held him fascinated as he ruddered and stuck until his wheels skimmed over the flames that licked up to welcome him. He could smell the burning oil of the petrol drum as he slid through the choking cloud of smoke. He drew the stick back—and that was the last he remembered.

THEY said he made a pukka landing. Just as if he were trying to get in without waking anyone up. They found him sprawled out over the edge of the cockpit with Kelsey under him, roaring and cursing through shattered jaws. The engine ticked over like a clock as the bus rumbled up on its own speed to within ten feet of the tarmac.

How did Teddy get into the front seat? And how the devil did he make a landing like that?

But all Teddy would answer for days was: "Tell Kelsey I got that damned Hun with tracers."