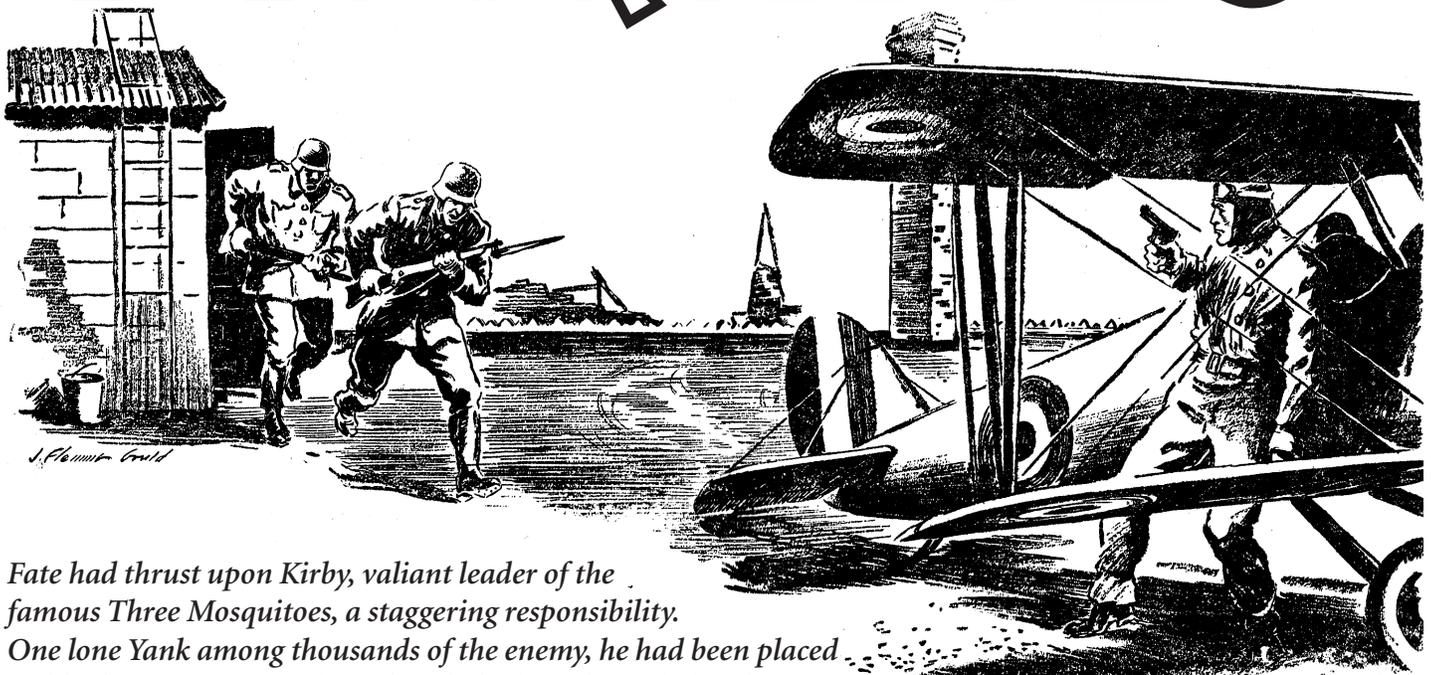


THE ADVENTURES OF *The* **THREE** **MOSQUITOES**™



Fate had thrust upon Kirby, valiant leader of the famous Three Mosquitoes, a staggering responsibility.

One lone Yank among thousands of the enemy, he had been placed suddenly in a position where the whole show depended on him.

He alone held the secret of Remiens in his grasp. And yet, here he was with his plane disabled and only twenty minutes to spare!

ROOF OF TREACHERY

by RALPH OPPENHEIM

REMIENS MUST BE TAKEN! Our push depends on it!"

The erect, broad-shouldered American general, whose name had already become legend and whose picture had appeared in every newspaper and magazine, was speaking as he stood before an immense map which covered a whole wall of the room. Behind him stood

the officers of his staff, listening to him with respectful attention. Their eyes followed the pointer with which he indicated the map. It was a strange map, full of pins and colored ribbons.

It was a sort of chessboard, on which this general and his staff were playing a grim game with the generals on the other side of the lines. The pins and ribbons represented men, thousands of men—and

every move made on the map represented an advance or a retreat of troops at the Front.

Even now, while the general and his aides stood here, in this quiet room of an old chateau, with the sunlight streaming peacefully through the big French windows and the birds chirping and fluttering in the green trees outside, hundreds and hundreds of guns were thundering and belching scarcely twenty miles away, and thousands of doughboys were surging forward, fighting fiercely with rifle and bayonet, gaining ground inch by inch and holding it. Tanks, large and small, were crawling and lumbering over the pock-marked earth, mowing down every obstacle in their path like steam rollers, spitting flame from their gun turrets. Airplanes were zooming and swooping overhead, and climbing with one another in breathless dogfights.

And though the general and his staff were far behind the scenes of this tremendous pageant, they could see it all, in every detail. To them the map on the wall was not a map—it was the actual battlefield, with its bursting shells and swarming troops, its tanks and airplanes. Here in this room, they were directing the whole show, planning and executing each move. They were well aware of their responsibility. The general alone seemed to remain calm and cool—his keen eyes were as firm and clear as ever, and his chin had its usual indomitable thrust. The rest of the officers were obviously worried; their eyes were haggard and bloodshot, and the lines on their faces were deeply drawn.

It was natural. This was the first time the American Expeditionary Force was conducting an offensive of its own, an offensive on which the whole tide of the war depended. The Hindenburg line, that seemingly impenetrable wall, had to be smashed. For almost four years the French and British had pounded vainly against it, and now they were exhausted. It was up to the Yanks now—the Yanks who were fresh and full of energy, but on the other hand green and untried. And some six hundred thousand of the two million who had come to France were now trying to prove that Yankee “guts” could do as much as years of military discipline and training in warfare with the Kaiser’s crack regiments.

Just what these determined Yanks were accomplishing was shown on the map. The white ribbon indicated the line where the offensive had started, two days ago. The red ribbon indicated the present line. Advancing on a sixty-mile front, the Americans had gained fully nineteen

miles in these two days—except at one point. At this point the straightness of the red ribbon was broken by a triangular indentation which stretched way back to the white ribbon. And at the apex of this triangle was a red circle, in which was printed the name—Remiens.

“Here,” the commander-in-chief of the A.E.F. was saying, as his pointer rested on that red circle, “is our one stumbling block—the one hitch in our advance. For some reason we have been unable to take this town.” He wheeled on his staff, and now his eyes flashed a challenge. “Why? Remiens is only a little village, and we have taken much bigger objectives without difficulty. What is holding us up here?”

The other officers shifted with an embarrassed uneasiness that was almost guilt. The general shook his head. “Our artillery alone ought to be able to wipe out that salient with one barrage,” he insisted.

A brigadier general, who bore the insignia of the artillery corps, spoke up somewhat timidly. “We’ve shelled that town until scarcely a building remains, sir. As you know, it is no easy job to range it with accuracy. It is in an advantageous position, being screened from us by several hills, and we’ve had to do all our work by observation balloons—which the Boche have been shooting down as fast as we can send them up. Nevertheless,” he went on, in game defense of his corps, “I’m sure we haven’t fallen down on the job. We’ve certainly covered every advance of our infantry with an effective barrage.”

“I’ll agree to that,” a general of the infantry conceded. “We’ve had plenty of protection and cooperation from the artillery.”

“Then why have you failed to take the town?” the commander-in-chief demanded.

“Simply because our troops are mysteriously wiped out whenever we send them there,” the infantry general replied grimly. His brows knitted, and a look of tense mystification came over his face. “It’s the most baffling thing imaginable. Take yesterday, for example. We picked those seasoned regiments from the second division—every man of them a hard-boiled veteran who has seen active service. They attacked the town behind the biggest artillery barrage ever laid on such a small objective. And yet,” he shook his head, and spoke with grim emphasis, “not one of those soldiers returned to tell the tale. The regiments were absolutely obliterated—wiped out!”

There was a strained silence. The officer shifted nervously, and glanced up at the map as if half hoping to find the key to this gruesome puzzle there. The

commander-in-chief stood lost in thought. And for just a moment a shadow seemed to cross his face, and a look of worried pain flickered in his keen eyes. But only for a moment. Almost instantly he was his usual calm self again—the hard, stern “Black Jack” his soldiers knew and respected. His crisp voice broke the silence.

“It is evident that the Germans are using some new stratagem, some secret trick. We know they haven’t many troops in that town, we know that they can hardly touch it with their artillery, and yet they must have a trap of some kind laid there. But,” again his eyes flashed their challenge, “there is no reason why we have not been able to discover their trap. I still feel that somewhere we are falling down on the job. What about our air force? Our reconnaissance planes are supposed to accompany each advance and see what is going on. Why haven’t they been able to report just how the troops were wiped out?”

Whereupon the staff officer who represented the air force had to spring hurriedly to the defense of that branch. “We’ve been doing our best,” he said. “But somehow the Germans have managed to hold the supremacy of the air over that town. Our airplanes always manage to do their observation work until the actual attack by our troops begins. Then the sky fills with German scouts, and our machines are either shot down or driven away before they can see a thing.”

“Which means,” the commander-in-chief observed, shrewdly, “that this trick, whatever it is, can be seen from the air. Therefore the responsibility rests largely on our air corps.” He faced the flying officer grimly. “Colonel, it is up to you to find some pilots who can fly over that town and stay there long enough to see what is going on. That is the first thing.”

“But, general,” the other protested, “how can any pilots hope to compete with all those German planes?”

The general’s tone was curt. “I don’t want any more excuses,” he snapped, giving the timeworn military statement a new significance. “I want results, it is vital that Remiens be taken immediately. We cannot advance any further until we take it—otherwise the Germans will have a wedge in our line. They will be able to move in and flank us from behind, which would spell absolute ruination to us. In short,”—he spoke slowly, so that each word came like the blow of a hammer—“everything depends on the capture of that salient. It will be the decisive factor of our whole offensive—our failure to take it will mean our complete failure!”

He turned again to the flying officer. “I’m inclined to think that you underestimate our flyers, colonel,” he snapped. “We have some of the most skilled and best-trained aces in the world. Certainly you can find among them a few who can outwit the Germans, despite the enemy’s number. Pick these few—the less the better, so that they will have a chance to slip through unseen. One will not do of course—we must have at least three, so that we can expect at least one to come through.”

THE unhappy colonel nodded in gloomy resignation. “I’ll try to find some pilots who might get away with it, though it seems pretty hopeless to me. And by the way, general, just what are these flyers going to see? The only time they can see the Germans working their trick is when the advance is actually going on—and that will be too late, won’t it?”

The general did not reply directly to this question. Instead, as if he had his plan clearly formulated in his mind, he commenced to give terse instructions.

“To-morrow,” he stated, “you will send the picked flyers over Remiens, right after dawn. Then we will proceed to launch a minor offensive against the town—in which one or two regiments will participate.”

The officer representing the infantry stared at him almost with horror. “Certainly the general does not mean to deliberately sacrifice one or two regiments just so the flyers can see how they are wiped out!”

Again, for just a fleeting instant, a shadow crossed the face of the commander-in-chief. But his voice was calm and crisp. “We are going to attack the town as we have been attacking it right along—and as usual we are going to hope that the attack succeeds,” he explained. “That is all. If the flyers do discover some trick, some trap, they will report it, and we will cope with it accordingly. In any event, if the first attack fails, we are going to follow it almost immediately by a major offensive which will be the biggest we have yet attempted. This will be our final, supreme effort—and it will be a case of do or die. We’ll use almost half of the second division, and we’ll concentrate all the guns we can move there overnight. There must be absolute coordination between the artillery and the infantry. A general bombardment will open the advance, and will cover the whole town. Then our troops will move up behind a creeping barrage, and attack the village from the three unprotected sides. Now are there any questions?”

“Just one, sir,” the colonel of the flying corps put in.

"This second attack you speak of—is this to come off even if the aviators fail to find out the trick the Boche are using?"

"It will come off if the first minor offensive fails—aviators or no aviators," the general replied. "We must expect the flyers to get the information, but we cannot count on it. Nor can we delay any further; it would be disastrous."

The infantry general shook his head. "I'm afraid that both these attacks will only meet with the same results that met all the previous ones," he sighed, hopelessly. "It seems to me a useless sacrifice—"

"If it fails—yes," the commander-in-chief conceded, grimly. "But if it fails everything we have gained will also become a useless sacrifice. It's just what I told you; do or die. But if we die"—his voice rose firmly, and his eyes blazed—"we are going to die fighting!" He turned on his heel, walked briskly to a desk, and picked up a phone. For fully twenty minutes he burned the wires, asking questions and listening to answers. Then he barked into the mouthpiece, "Stop our advance instantly! The offensive will not be resumed until tomorrow at dawn!"

He rose, and in the next moment the quiet room was bustling with feverish activity. Officers came in from outside, where they had been getting their detailed reports and surveys. They pushed a stepladder up to the map, and busied themselves with the pins and ribbons. When they were finished the red ribbon representing the American line had been moved some five miles forward—except for that one, triangular wedge, which was now even deeper.

The moves that were being made on the map were simultaneously being translated into action at the Front itself. All along the line the tired doughboys, sweating and grimy and bloody, were stopping to "dig in" or take possession of the pounded German trenches. Gratefully, they relaxed for a well-earned rest. Rifles and packs were put aside, cigarettes and cards and dice were taken out. The big guns ceased their thundering, and there was a strange lull. Another act of this mighty show had drawn to a close; the curtain was rung down for the intermission.

But though the curtain was down, the scenes were being shifted and the stage made ready for the next act. From G.H.Q. to the first-line trenches the wires were buzzing, and messages were being relayed throughout the marvelous network which had been patiently constructed by the signal corps. Swiftly the orders were flashed from the highest general to the lowest buck

private. Orders were given, and preparations made. And somewhere in this maze of instructions and messages was a confidential paper sent to an airdrome at the Front. Just at dusk a grimy motorcycle dispatch rider steered his bucking machine over the rough tarmac of the 44th pursuit squadron and drew up before the operations office. He dashed into the shack, and to the grizzled old C.O. who rose to meet him inquiringly, he handed the precious document, got the colonel's signature, and in a flash was roaring away on his motor bike.

Minutes later the C.O. was looking up from his desk at the three eager war birds who stood before him respectfully. His voice was grim.

"I suppose you ought to consider yourselves honored," he said, with a tinge of sarcasm that was surprisingly bitter. "G.H.Q. has picked you for a stunt which they admit is impossible. They want you to fly over Remiens tomorrow and watch a minor offensive, see what happens, and then report. As you know, the sky there is lousy with Fokkers, but you're supposed to overlook that little matter." He gave a grim, mirthless laugh. He was good and sore, sore because he felt that he was sending his best pilots, his aces, out to be slaughtered. His voice became strangely gruff. "Here's the order—with full details. Read it and give it right back to me."

Captain Kirby, impetuous young leader of the famous "Three Mosquitoes," took the paper and held it before him. His two comrades, "Shorty" Carn and the lanky Travis, looked over his shoulders and read with him. On top of the message was the usual: "To be Destroyed When Read." Then followed a detailed description of the Remiens situation. The minor offensive was to start at six a.m. The major offensive, which would follow in the event that the first attack failed, would come exactly three-quarters of an hour later—quarter to seven. Finally, the message gave the instructions which the C.O. had outlined.

Very calmly and quietly Kirby handed the paper back to the C.O. The latter held a match to it, held it as the flame slowly enveloped it and threatened to scorch his fingers, then dropped it to the floor and ground it with his heel. Again he faced the three men, and now there was pain in his grizzled face.

"Fellows," he said, "I'm your commanding officer, and it's my duty to command you to carry out this order. I'd never think of sending you on such a mission myself—but I guess the men at G.H.Q. know what they're doing. All I can say is that I'm damned sorry—and damned sore!"

Kirby's cheerful laugh made the embittered colonel stare in surprise. "Hell," the young Mosquito exclaimed, carelessly, "I don't think it's as bad as all that, colonel. Who knows but that we might even get away with it?"

"Yep, who knows?" Shorty Carn chimed in, cheerfully, but not so optimistically.

"At least we can try," drawled the lanky Travis, eldest and Wisest of the trio. "After all, those two regiments in the minor offensive are taking more of a risk that we are. A couple of thousand men—and we're only three, after all. We can't kick!"

"In fact," Kirby continued, "we may be getting a break for all we know."

The C.O. could not be comforted by these words. In fact, the light attitude of the Three Mosquitoes made him feel all the more bitter toward G.H.Q. What a crime to send three such game and courageous flyers on this suicidal mission! But he tried to hide his emotions now. Again his voice was unusually gruff.

"Well, those are your orders. Do your best, and if you see that things are hopeless, give up the idea and come back. You'd better turn in early to-night and get some sleep." He shook his head. "You'll have to be in damn good condition to-morrow!"

The three men nodded, made a crisp salute, and walked briskly from the office. By nine p.m. they were getting into their cots in the tiny cubicle they shared together. And, as always, they slept soundly and peacefully, despite the perilous adventure which awaited them. Even as they slept, the preparations for the next day were going right on throughout the Front. In the darkness of the night troops, scores and scores of them, were plodding and sloshing along the muddy, rutted roads. Trucks and tanks and caissons were lumbering slowly forward in great caravans. Horses were laboring and snorting as they dragged gigantic guns, while their drivers cursed and spat and urged them on with their whips. More than half a division was moving southward to-night, moving towards a tiny village which had become the Boche's great stronghold, which stood as firm and solid as Gibraltar. Remiens!

IT WAS ten minutes to six. In the thin haze of the early morning sky, which was slowly turning to amber, the three Spads wheeled in slow, guarded circles. They were flying at an extremely high altitude—almost four miles above the blurred earth. Their three pilots were huddled up in the cockpits, shivering from a coldness

against which their fur-lined flying clothes were as tissue—the thin coldness of the upper regions, which pierces the very marrow. And yet it was not only the air which made them cold.

Below them, at various altitudes and on every side, they could pick out little swarms of flitting black specks. They looked harmless, those specks—but the Three Mosquitoes were not deceived. They knew that every speck was in reality a trim, speedy Fokker, which could send a double stream of deadly bullets from its twin machine guns. There were scores of those German scouts, lurking everywhere like buzzards waiting for their prey. With their usual cleverness, the Mosquitoes had wisely climbed to this high altitude as they approached Remiens. It was their hope that they could stay above all the Jerry patrols and thus remain unnoticed even by the anti-aircraft gunners below.

But it was no joke, this flying at such an extreme altitude. Kirby, as he mechanically kept his comrades in formation on either side of him and a little to the rear, was already laboring for breath, and because of the lack of oxygen every move of the controls exhausted him. Moreover, he could hear his engine laboring—the propeller was whirling around at a furious speed because the air was so thin that it afforded little resistance. Banking or turning without losing altitude was a feat. And yet they could not afford to lose any altitude—or they would only be falling into the midst of those Fokkers below!

At any rate, Kirby told himself, luck seemed to be with them in one respect. As the sun glowed into its usual morning brilliance, and the haze drifted from the air, visibility proved to be perfect. The day was crystal clear. Looking down over the side of the fuselage, Kirby could clearly see the little village of Remiens. And with the aid of a pair of binoculars he had brought along, he could see every detail of the town.

Having made sure that their position up here was safe, Kirby now signaled to his two comrades, whose goggled faces he could clearly see on either side of him. They waved back, and the three planes spread apart a little. Then, continuing to circle, they all gave their attention to the town below, searching tensely for any sign of a trap that could somehow ensnare whole regiments of soldiers.

But if there was a trap down there, it was certainly well concealed. All there was to be seen was a tiny, quiet village which had been reduced almost to ruins by the terrific shellfire the Allies had concentrated on it. Only a few buildings still stood unscathed.

The most prominent of these was a big, flat-topped stone building about four stories high. It was the Grand Hotel de Remiens, according to Kirby's map. The Mosquito leader wondered why there should be such a large hotel for such a small town. It occupied a whole city block, at least. Then Kirby remembered that Remiens had been a great tourist center before the war. That accounted for it. And perhaps the fact that this big hotel had not even been touched by a shell was what made it stand out so conspicuously. There was also a church that remained standing, but its steeple had been broken off at the top.

The Three Mosquitoes went on scanning the town, pausing from time to time to watch their flying and hold their precious altitude. Below, the Fokkers continued to swarm in serene oblivion. The Mosquitoes were getting accustomed to them now—they did not mind them so much. As long as the Jerries didn't see them, and they held their altitude, there was nothing to be afraid of.

Kirby continued to use his binoculars, focusing them on every portion of the town. But the more he looked, the more puzzled he grew. He could see no sign of any trap—or even of a decent defense. There were Jerries down there, but not many of them. Kirby could see little groups of the tiny gray-clad figures here and there, moving leisurely and peacefully through the streets. The Mosquito cursed and shook his head. How in hell had all those Yankee troops been swallowed up down there? It seemed ridiculous, impossible. And yet—

He broke off with a start, for at that moment a white puff seemed to pop out from the midst of the town below. Seconds later a dull reverberating boom reached Kirby's ears, and the concussion made his plane wobble ever so slightly. Shorty and Travis were waving to him from their cockpits now, waving excitedly and pointing down. The first white puff was followed almost instantly by another, and then came a whole succession of them. Kirby saw one of the broken buildings suddenly rise in a great cloud of smoke and debris which mushroomed out slowly as it settled. Eagerly he brought his wrist watch up before his goggles. He nodded grimly.

It was exactly six o'clock. The shelling of the town, the prologue to the minor offensive, had begun. The Yank gunners were laying the usual heavy barrage. Shells were bursting right and left now, scattering destruction. Kirby and his comrades continued to circle miles above, and watch. Through his glasses

Kirby could see the Jerry soldiers on the streets running like frightened rabbits for shelter. The big church with its broken steeple was suddenly struck by a high explosive shell, and the remainder of its tower crumpled and slid down in a heap of ruins. But that immense hotel down there seemed to stand absolutely unharmed in the rain of shells. Twice Kirby thought he saw a shell burst right on top of it—but when the smoke cleared the building still remained as before, without a scar. It must be a solid structure, indeed. But soon, Kirby figured, a direct hit would knock it over. Even the strongest buildings couldn't withstand those big, high-explosive shells.

As the barrage continued, Kirby glanced about the terrain which spread in a blurred rolling panorama below. Somewhere in the surrounding woods of the hills those two Yankee regiments must be advancing, moving toward the town with rifles ready and bayonets fixed. Soon they would swarm into the town. And then it would be up to Kirby and his comrades to see what happened.

They must watch closely, must watch and—

IT CAME unexpectedly, like a bolt from the blue. Before the Three Mosquitoes knew what was happening, the five high-flying Pfaltz scouts were upon them, and the shrill clatter of their Spandau guns shattered the air. With a curse, Kirby pulled up and waved frantic signals to his comrades, even as the streams of the Germans' tracers began to draw zigzag lines on all sides. The Mosquitoes had been spotted, spotted by a Jerry patrol which had been flying even higher than they were. And now the coffin-nosed Pfaltzes were weaving in and out among them like maddened hornets, their guns spitting flame. Bullets began to pump through the Spads, ricocheting from their engine cowl.

The Three Mosquitoes commenced to zigzag and roll madly to throw off the Jerries' sights. But at this height it was as difficult to maneuver as it was dangerous. They began to lose altitude. And below were all those Fokkers—though evidently they hadn't yet seen what was going on up here.

Kirby waved again to his comrades, waved the familiar signal meaning: "Fight, fellers! Give 'em hell!" Shorty and Travis waved back a cheerful response. And then the Three Mosquitoes commenced to fight, commenced to fight in the reckless, blazing fashion which had won them their fame. They hurled themselves at their five antagonists, and their guns

answered the guns of the Germans. Way up in the sky, in the high upper regions, the dogfight raged, with the planes all maneuvering clumsily and slowly because of the rarified air in which they flew.

The Pfaltzes kept closing in, firing away. But the Mosquitoes, fighting like winged furies, were holding them at bay now. In the next instant one of the German scouts went reeling out of the formation, its pilot crumpled by a well-aimed shot from the guns of Shorty Carn. The little Mosquito had scored! The Jerry plane went fluttering earthward like a dead bird.

Kirby's cheer of exultation changed instantly to a shout of alarmed horror. For now he saw them—saw the two big formations of Fokkers which were climbing swiftly toward the dogfight. During all this time the Mosquitoes had been losing altitude by their wild maneuvers, until they had evidently been seen by the pilots of the Fokkers below. Their goose was cooked! They were done for!

There was only one thing to do, only one fleeting chance of getting out of this fatal trap that was swiftly closing on them. They must run for it, hike for home. They must abandon their mission. It was impossible—it could not be done. Aces though they were, they had failed just as every other flyer had failed before them. Bitterly, in that fleeting second, Kirby looked down at the town below once more. The barrage was still going on—the doughboys had not yet appeared. God, if only he and his comrades hadn't been spotted—if only they could have remained up here a few minutes more, they would have seen everything!

But there was no time for brooding or conjecturing now. The Fokkers were almost right up to them. Resignedly, Kirby waved to his comrades, pointed wildly toward the lines. Shorty and Travis waved back a hasty assent. The three Spads straightened out and at full throttle roared off toward the Allied sky. The Pfaltzes cut in on them furiously, determined to intercept them from the lines. But they were too desperate to be stopped. Guns blazing, motors roaring, they kept guiding their Spads straight ahead, hell-bent. The Pfaltzes had to veer to avoid collisions.

By this time the two formations of Fokkers had reached the altitude of the dogfight. They were leveling off now and rushing after the Spads with the Pfaltzes, in furious pursuit. On they came, a literal swarm of them.

Madly, Kirby and his comrades urged their Spads on, kept flying straight for the lines in spite of the Pfaltzes which continued to harry them. In the rear the

swarm of Fokkers kept following, trying to catch up and join the fray.

The pilots of the Pfaltzes did their best to help them. They attacked the fleeing Spads with new fury. Again their bullets were pumping into the planes of the Three Mosquitoes. And suddenly a cry of horror broke from Kirby. He heard those bullets tearing through his engine casing with a shrill, rending shriek. He heard his engine sputter—begin to cough—

Frantically he reached for his spark and choke, trying to coax the laboring motor into its former power. God, he was losing speed now. He was falling back, back—and those Fokkers were behind him, coming right on. His comrades, molested by the Pfaltzes, evidently did not notice his predicament. They were concentrating on flying straight toward the lines, and they assumed that he was with them. His engine kept laboring, sputtering, and his plane continued to fall back. He cursed helplessly. He was several hundred feet behind his comrades now. The swarm of Fokkers were gaining on him with breathless rapidity. He was falling right into their midst. He—

Rat-ta-tat-tat! Rat-ta-tat-tat-tat!

The shrill clatter behind him froze his blood. He had fallen into the range of the Fokkers' guns now. They were blazing away at him. Again he heard bullets ticking through his fuselage. He fought anew with his protesting engine. It was useless. In the next second the air around him seemed to fill suddenly with planes—scores and scores of them. Everywhere he looked he saw Fokkers, looming toward him, swooping and turning, with jagged red streaks leaping from their gun muzzles. Bullets sang wildly in his ears. An outer-bay strut splintered with a crash, and the wing which it was supporting began to wobble. Futilely, Kirby tried to make his damaged ship roll and zigzag. It hardly responded. Wild sobs of frustration tore from him. God, he was getting shot to ribbons, and there was nothing he could do.

Crash! The dashboard in front of him was smashed to bits, and the flying bits of glass cut into his face, stinging it painfully. A bullet passed right through a sleeve of his flying jacket, another smashed into the back of his cockpit, so close that he could hear its shrill whistle. And then suddenly his face crimsoned, and his eyes narrowed to slits behind their goggles. By God, he was done for, was going to get shot to hell—but he'd go down fighting. He'd take a Fokker or two with him.

He leaned forward to his sights, ignoring the terrific rain of bullets, the shower of lead which kept pouring

down on his almost helpless Spad. His fingers slid down to the stick triggers. A vague Fokkerlike shape whisked by in front of him, left to right. He kicked right rudder and banked—made his crippled ship respond. The Fokker swung before him again, and he caught it right in the ring of his sights. Savagely he pressed his triggers, and his guns vibrated as they sent out their streams of deadly tracer. The Fokker stopped in its flight like a bird surprised by a sudden wound. There was a puff of smoke, followed by a livid red flame which soon enveloped the German scout. The plane plunged earthward like a fiery torch, leaving a trail of dense black smoke in its wake.

Fiercely, Kirby continued his last desperate battle. Though his engine was halting more and more, he made that Spad respond, forced it to maneuver. He banked madly as another Fokker loomed in front and off to the side. Again his guns blazed. Vaguely, through his sights, he saw the helmeted figure in the Fokker's cockpit lurch forward. And the ship reeled and twisted as it fluttered down through space with a dead man at its controls.

But now the rest of the Germans, enraged by the thought that this insolent Yank whom they had absolutely trapped was able to turn on them and shoot down two of their number, redoubled the fury of their attack. With cold, relentless precision, they closed in on the lone Spad from every side, and every one of them blazed away for all they were worth. No ship or pilot could have withstood that hellish barrage. And in just another second the end came.

KIRBY swore grittingly as his engine, once more struck, gave one long sputtering cough, choked vainly for life—and then conked out cold. With the bullets still whining and whistling about him, he fought desperately with his controls—fought until the stick seemed to go limp in his hand, and the rudder bar wobbled futilely under his feet. Dazedly he saw the sky and earth swing around and change places, and then he was hurtling downward in a screaming, dizzy tailspin, with the wind shrieking through his flying wires, wailing like a siren which accompanied the Spad's mad plunge. The swarm of Fokkers, deciding that they had bagged their quarry, did not follow, but instead once more resumed the chase after the other two Spads—which by now were several miles away, still fighting to gain headway among the four Pfaltzes which molested them.

With his breath gone and nausea overcoming him,

Kirby, nevertheless, kept fighting instinctively with his controls. Below him now, looming swiftly toward him in a crazy, blurred kaleidoscope of trees, houses, streets, and bursting shells, was the town of Remiens. Kirby's Spad was headed straight for the midst of the town. God, a crash anywhere down there meant certain death!

He renewed his efforts to get the plane out of the spin, employed all his skill, used every trick he knew. Closer and closer loomed the town. Broken roof tops appeared right beneath him now, came toward him in a breathless rush. In another second, another split second—

And then, in that last fleeting instant, the controls responded at last. With a drunken lurch the Spad was straightening out. Kirby, working like a madman, jockeying his stick and rudder bar until the sweat ran down his face and body, managed to get her into a straight dive, just a few hundred feet over those roof tops. Wildly, he pulled back the joystick. The nose of the Spad came up, sluggishly—so sluggishly that Kirby didn't see how he could avoid crashing into those roofs. But then he was out of the steep dive, and was getting the ship into a shallow glide. Gently now, the Spad descended, with Kirby holding her nose up as high as he dared, just high enough to assure flying speed. His trained eye was searching the terrain below carefully now, searching for any spot where a landing might be possible. It would be a landing in Boche-land, which meant sure capture—but that would be better than getting mangled in a crash.

Then a new peril met him. Suddenly his ears were shattered by a dull, reverberating explosion, somewhere beneath. The Spad wobbled, and he had all he could do to keep from sideslipping. God, that barrage was still being laid on the town! The Yankee guns were still sending over shell after shell. At first this amazed him—he wondered why the barrage was lasting so long. Then he realized that only a few minutes had passed since the first shell had fallen. The dogfight with the Pfaltzes, and his own fight with the Fokkers, had been just a matter of seconds—though it had seemed like hours. The doughboys had not yet started their attack on the town.

B-r-r-room! Again the terrific concussion made Kirby's gliding Spad wobble perilously. He cursed wildly. God, he was descending right into the midst of this terrific shell fire! The thought that he might be killed by the shells of his own countrymen filled him with frenzied despair. But there was nothing he could

do about it. His plane, with its motor dead, could only go down.

All this time his eyes were searching frantically for a place where he might essay a landing. God, there seemed to be no spot within range of his glide! The streets were narrow and crooked—no hope there. What could he do? It seemed hopeless. He was descending into the midst of a town full of crumpled buildings, and to make it still more impossible there were those bursting shells. He was going to crash, in spite of everything!

And then, suddenly, a wild hope flickered in his searching eyes. Below him, a little off to the side, he saw that big hotel once more, the Grand Hotel de Remiens—still standing unscathed in all the shell fire. All in a split second he surveyed that building, measured it with his eye, and reached his desperate decision. It would be a wild, reckless stunt—a stunt such as he had never dared to attempt before. But it was the only thing he could do, the only possible hope of getting out of a fatal crash. And after all, it just might work. That roof of the hotel was flat—and sufficiently large.

There was no time to hesitate. Even now he was losing more and more of the scant altitude he had. He would be fortunate if he had room for his last desperate maneuver.

Hastily, but with expert care, he eased over the stick and kicked the rudder. The Spad banked sluggishly, and the bank cost it about fifty feet of altitude. Then the ship straightened out. The hotel swung right in front of Kirby now, and below. The Mosquito measured his distance, judged his time as he had never judged it before. He kept his eye focused on the flat roof of the building, straight for it he steered his plane. It was either hit or miss now. If he missed that roof he would have no other chance. He would crash and be killed.

Never before had he been called upon to make such a difficult landing—and the fact that he was attempting it with a dead stick made it all the more of a feat. It was a test of his flying skill, all right. Only a superpilot could have hoped to get away with it. But Kirby, calm and cool as could be, kept guiding his plane right on down. The roof of the hotel loomed before him now, closer and closer. He must watch out for that chimney there on the side, and for that little penthouse which was the doorway to the building below. Down, down, he went.

Suddenly a low wail came to his ears, a low wail

which rose to a piercing shriek and was then followed by a terrific, shattering explosion somewhere below. Again he had to struggle madly to keep the Spad from sideslipping, and to hold her to her course. God, that had been close—that shell! He was so low now that he was likely to run into one of those shrieking projectiles. But he went on. Twice more he heard the wail of a passing shell. But now the barrage was beginning to let up. The shells were falling at greater intervals. It could only mean one thing. The attack of the infantry must be on the way.

But Kirby had no time to look and find out. The roof was coming right underneath him now. God, how small it looked after all! It looked so small that he wondered how he would ever be able to set the Spad down on it. Anxiously, he eased his stick forward a little more. The Spad settled, settled. The roof came up, up, to meet it. Then— The wheels of the Spad touched the flat surface of the roof. Twice the plane bounced. And then it was rolling right across the roof, while Kirby worked frantically with his controls to stop it from running right off the edge. He kicked his rudder savagely, and the plane skidded as it swung around. The penthouse loomed before Kirby, and he just managed to miss it with his right wing. Then, to his intense relief, the plane came to a stop—came to a stop right in the middle of a roof some four stories from the street.

He had done it! He had achieved the greatest landing of his career!

BUT before he had a chance to feel any elation over his stunt, before he had even moved from his cockpit, an angry shout reached his ears—and out of the open doorway of that penthouse came two gray-clad figures with coal-scuttle helmets. They had bayoneted rifles, and they were rushing straight toward the plane, covering it as they approached. Boche soldiers!

Kirby acted without thinking. Cursing, he whipped out his Colt and fired blindly as he sat in the cockpit. One of the two Germans gave a shrill scream, his rifle flew in the air, and he dropped, to lay inert where he had fallen. Instinctively, Kirby ducked behind the cockpit cowl as the second Jerry aimed his rifle and fired. A bullet whined over the Mosquito's head. With a berserk yell, he ignored the danger, sat up and again fired his Colt. And again in his desperation he was a perfect marksman. The second Jerry fell face forward, and he, too, lay horribly still.

Gasping and panting, Kirby glanced about furtively.

No one else in sight. But if the shots had been heard—He thrust the thought from his mind. Certainly they would not be noticed amid the voice of the shells which were still bursting on the streets below, though they were becoming less and less frequent now.

What to do now? The Mosquito racked his brain with conjectures. Evidently his landing here had not been noticed, except by these two Jerries he had killed. He glanced toward the sky. No sign of his comrades' Spads—but still plenty of Fokkers up there, though not right overhead. It was lucky for him that those Fokkers were not flying low. Otherwise they surely would have noticed the plane on top of the hotel.

Well, no use just sitting here in his cockpit like this—waiting for some one to find him. The best thing to do would be to see if he could, by some miracle, fix his crippled ship so that it could fly again. Doubtless he couldn't, in which case he'd have to slip down to the street and try somehow to work his way back to the Allied lines.

With this decision, he unstrapped his safety belt, and climbed quickly from the cockpit, alighting on the roof. And as his feet touched that surface he gave an exclamation of surprise. Steel! The roof of this hotel was made of steel—great sheets of it! He could see the rivets where the sheets were pieced together. He stamped his shoe on the flooring. By God, it seemed solid! It must be as thick as the hull of a battleship. No wonder those shells had not been able to damage the roof. And yet the whole building could not be made of steel—he had seen from the air that the sides of it were of ordinary brownstone, with plenty of windows. He became the more puzzled. Damn it, but there was something queer about this hotel. There was—

He broke off, and at first he wondered what had made him start. Then he realized it was the sudden stillness which had come over the air. The crashing of shells, which his ears had become used to, had stopped altogether. The barrage had ended. And that meant—

A shout broke from him, for even then he saw them—saw them swarming into the village—from his position on the roof. Doughboys! Scores and scores of them advancing in great waves of olive drab, with rifles ready. Fascinated, Kirby stood near the edge of the roof and watched. On came the soldiers in olive drab, swarming down the streets.

Then, somewhere, a machine gun began to clatter, then another, and several others, until a score of them were blazing away. The Jerries were firing from nests in the ruined buildings on either side of the streets. Kirby

still stood watching. He groaned as he saw several of the advancing doughboys drop like flies. But then the Yanks showed that a few machine guns were not going to worry them. Groups of them broke up, and charged the various gun nests with a rush, rifles blazing. Vaguely Kirby saw the little skirmishes. In one place he could see some fierce hand-to-hand fighting, with Germans and Americans using bayonet, fist, and gun butt. But it could hardly be called a struggle. In less than five minutes the Germans seemed to be subdued entirely. The machine guns clattered no more—they had been wiped out. And soon a score of Boche prisoners were being lined up and marched away by the Yanks.

Kirby cheered hoarsely as the doughboys resumed their advance, meeting now with absolutely no resistance. In fact, they dropped their battle formation and fell into columns. Down the streets they came marching, rifles on shoulders. It looked like a most peaceful occupation. Certainly Remiens was taken, captured. It was already in the hands of these Yanks.

The doughboys came on, on toward the center of the town where this hotel stood. Kirby saw them looming ahead now—saw the bobbing khaki figures clearly. Closer and closer now, until they were right out there.

And then it happened.

The roof beneath Kirby's feet suddenly vibrated and trembled as if it were shaken by an earthquake—an earthquake which split his ears with its deafening roar. With incredulous horror, he saw the shattering bursts of smoke and shrapnel rising up in the midst of the Yankee ranks—saw the doughboys dropping right and left! A thousand cannons seemed to be thundering in unison, and a thousand machine guns were punctuating the thunder with their shrill, staccato clatter. Where were they—all those guns? Dazedly, Kirby went to the edge of the roof, leaned over, and looked down. And what he saw caused the blood to drain from his face, while his eyes went wide with horror and awe.

The walls of the hotel, the walls which had seemed to be of stone, and many-windowed—were no longer to be seen. The reason was obvious. They had been dropped right down—and on the ground Kirby could see them. They were ordinary canvas, artfully camouflaged to look like real stone.

And what had looked like a big, harmless hotel was now a huge, impenetrable fortress—a fortress of thick steel and cement, protected above by the metal roof

on which Kirby stood. It was a fortress which bristled with guns of all kinds, and swarmed with the Jerries who manned them.

It was all horribly clear—and it was made even clearer by the gruesome slaughter which was now taking place before Kirby's eyes. Those doughboys had innocently walked right into the muzzles of all these waiting guns! This was the ingenious stratagem of the Boche, the mysterious subterfuge which had baffled G.H.Q. and cost so many thousands of lives. This was the reason why Remiens had not been taken, could not be taken now.

Once, Kirby knew, this spot had actually been occupied by a hotel. The Jerries must have torn down the building and replaced it with this fake replica which camouflaged their iron fortress. To all appearances there was nothing suspicious; the Grand Hotel de Remiens, which had always been here, was still to be seen. The only possible clue was the fact that somehow this immense building always withstood the Allied shell fire—but even that wasn't enough to betray the trick.

And yet there was nothing new about the stunt. It had been used on the sea over and over again by the Q-boats, whose harmless looking hulks could suddenly turn into fighting warships, after luring an unsuspecting submarine into their range. The wily Germans had merely taken this idea and put it into practice on land. They had constructed a Q-building—a building which the enemy would hardly notice.

THE absolute unexpectedness of the thing, as well as the terrific, concentrated fire which the Germans could send from this fortress, made it perhaps the most deadly instrument of destruction yet introduced in the war. Kirby's heart was torn as he saw those Yankee doughboys, his own countrymen, being wiped out like so many insects. Retreat was impossible—they were caught dead where they were, for the guns of this fortress covered the whole town, way out to the surrounding hills. Nor was there any hope of attacking this blazing fortress of steel. Gamely, with true Yankee spirit, scores of doughboys tried to rush forward—close enough to use their grenades and rifles. But they were mowed down in no time by the overwhelming number of Jerry machine guns.

Relentlessly, the slaughter went on, with the guns of the fortress continuing to scatter their destruction among the olive-drab troops. And all the time

Kirby stood there, helpless to stop the slaughter. His helplessness filled him with a wild, frenzied rage. He swore fiercely, savagely. "Lousy, dirty Boche murderers!" he yelled, with sobs shaking his voice. "You dirty butchers. You'll pay for this, damn you!"

But he could hardly hear his own voice in the mighty din of guns—a din which was already making his head ache and reel. And at last the anguished Mosquito, unable to bear the ghastly spectacle any longer, turned his eyes away from it. He stood, sobbing and cursing in turn, while the roof continued to tremble beneath his feet, and the guns continued to thunder in his ears. Several minutes more it lasted and then—a sudden, awful stillness, the stillness of death itself.

Slowly, Kirby turned and looked again—looked out into the streets that were littered with inert khaki forms, with the mangled, broken and charred bodies of the Yanks. Two regiments had been wiped out in a mere matter of minutes. Two thousand more Yanks had followed the thousands of others who had been obliterated before them. And now, looking over the edge of the roof, Kirby saw the canvas walls of the Q-building being pulled up again by a system of ropes and pulleys. Another moment and the deadly fortress had become the harmless Grand Hotel de Remiens—with its stone walls and windows.

And in the meantime, a clattering rumble resounded through the streets as several open lorries slowly wended their way among all the dead Yanks and stopped at various places. Jerry soldiers leaped out. Quickly they picked up the dead bodies and heaped them in the trucks like so many slaughtered cattle. With typical German efficiency, they cleared that bloody street in a few minutes, and the trucks, laden to capacity, lumbered off. The evidence had been removed—so that the next victims might be lured unsuspectingly into the trap.

The next victims! Suddenly, with a shock, Kirby remembered the orders of G.H.Q. "In the event that the minor offensive fails it will be followed by a major offensive." The minor offensive had failed! And now more than half of the second division was going to advance on the town at a quarter to seven a.m. Kirby glanced tensely at his wrist watch. It was twenty-five minutes past six! In just twenty minutes the barrage, which would precede the major offensive, would begin. And a few minutes later those thousands and thousands of troops would be entering the town, where the Q-building would be awaiting them.

The Mosquito's face drew into a tight, gaunt mask. Unless the Yanks were informed of this diabolical trap, half a division was doomed to certain slaughter. And that was not all. Well did Kirby know what this major offensive signified. It would be the last supreme effort to capture Remiens, and the whole tide of the war would depend on it. The wiping out of half a division would give the Germans their chance in this sector. They could then easily push into the wedge which Remiens made in the Yankee line, and flank the Americans in the rear. And that would be the end.

Fate had thrust upon Kirby a staggering responsibility. Though he was only one lone man among the odd million participants in this mighty pageant, he had been placed suddenly in a position where the whole show depended on him. He alone held the secret of Remiens in his grasp. He alone could tell the Yanks of this Q-building, so that they could hold up the next advance until they found some way of destroying this fortress. It was up to him entirely. And yet—

Here he was, stranded on the roof of this fake hotel, with his plane disabled, with only twenty minutes to spare, and with the imminent danger of being caught and captured at any time. What could he do? How could he possibly inform the Yanks?

He hurried over to his plane, commenced to examine it with feverish haste. He lifted the engine cowl, looked in with little hope. And then he almost wept in relief. The engine was not badly damaged at all. In fact, with the few parts and tools he had in his kit he ought to be able to fix it. The only question was—could he fix it in time? He must hurry. As for the rest of the plane, it was pretty much shot up—but it would do in this pinch.

He fairly leaped for his tools, got out the necessary things, and began to work with that breathless haste which only a desperate man can attain. Furiously he labored, stopping only to glance around from time to time to see if any Boche were coming. The streets of the town were again full of Jerry soldiers now, but evidently they could not see the plane in the middle of the hotel's roof. The building was too high and broad.

Minutes passed. Kirby kept working as fast as he could. His face was soon almost black with grime and grease, and beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead. He glanced at his watch. Six-thirty. Five minutes of the twenty gone. Fifteen left. He redoubled his efforts. Slowly, tediously, he was repairing that disabled engine, and cursing the time it took to

unscrew stubborn nuts and bolts. Twenty-eight minutes to seven now. Still the Mosquito kept working away.

With a grunt of tired satisfaction, the Mosquito leaped back and slammed the engine casing down. Finished! But now to see if it would start! He rushed to the propeller, tugged it savagely, pulling it through compression. He dashed to the ignition switch, snapped it on. Back to the propeller then. But here he hesitated. If the engine did start, wouldn't the roar attract a swarm of Jerries, either from the street or in the building? Well, he'd have to take that chance. As soon as she started, he'd leap in the cockpit and risk a take-off from the roof without bothering to warm up. It would be a desperate measure, but it was the only way.

Having made up his mind, he hesitated no longer. He seized the propeller and gave it one vicious pull—and then gratefully leaped aside as the blade whirled from his grasp, and the engine roared into life with a series of detonations that seemed loud enough to rouse the dead. Some of the Germans on the streets below glanced up quickly—but still none of them saw the plane on the roof or suspected that it was there. They had heard the roar of the engine, but doubtless they surmised that it was one of their own planes passing overhead. And the Germans inside the building must have come to the same conclusion.

And in the next instant Kirby was turning the throttle lever down to idling speed, and the roar of the engine died out to a gentle, unobtrusive purr. The Mosquito was about to climb into his cockpit and take right off when a sudden thought made him pause. He glanced up at the sky. There they were—those swarms of Fokkers, still flying all over the place. It occurred to the Mosquito that the moment his Spad took off it was bound to be seen, if not from the air, from the ground where the Jerries would signal its presence to the pilots above. And what chance would Kirby have, at this low level, against those Fokkers? Not one chance in a million, he realized with sudden despair. He glanced again at his wrist-watch. It was now twenty-five minutes to seven. Ten minutes left. God, how could he hope to get away, get back across the lines and give his information to the Yanks? The more he thought of it the more hopelessly impossible it seemed. He cursed himself for a fool and a jackass. He should have known, should have remembered those Fokkers.

But he must do something. The thought that only he could reveal this mystery to the unsuspecting

Yanks kept beating against his brain. And his brain raced frantically for some plan, some scheme. If only there were some means by which he could bring this Q-building to destruction within the next nine minutes. Certainly it must have its vulnerable spot. There must be an ammunition storeroom—a magazine. If Kirby could slip into that storeroom somehow—

THE idea grew upon him more and more as the seconds kept passing swiftly by: Even now his glance had fallen on the two bodies of the Jerries he had killed up here. One of them was just about Kirby's size and build. With the Boche's uniform, there was a chance—a fleeting chance at least—that he might get by.

The Mosquito considered the idea from every angle, though he kept telling himself that the precious time was slipping, slipping. Should he try the thing? It would be a most desperate measure, and perhaps he would never be able to find a way of destroying this place—yet the idea seemed more feasible than attempting a take-off and getting across the lines in time to warn the Yanks. Besides, if he couldn't find a way of destroying the building, he could hurry back to his Spad, which he would leave idling, and still attempt a get-away.

But of course if he were caught it would mean that everything was lost. And it would mean the firing squad for him.

A moment more he thought the thing over, weighing it carefully, measuring it. And then, with exactly nine minutes to spare before the Yankee barrage would begin, he decided that he would try the plan. And waiting no longer, he proceeded with frantic haste to put it into execution.

Leaving his plane with its' motor idling, he dashed over to the side of the German who seemed to be nearest his build, and leaned over him. The man had been shot through the head, which was fortunate. His uniform, which showed him to be a corporal, was unstained by blood.

With deft fingers, Kirby proceeded to strip off that uniform. Again he worked with the lightning speed of a desperate man. And it took him less than two minutes to get out of his own uniform and into the Boche's. Buttoning it, he surveyed himself with one swift, comprehensive glance. The uniform was a little too big—but it would do. The coalscuttle helmet gave him some difficulty however; it was small, but he

got it on all right, though it pressed against his head uncomfortably. No use taking the man's rifle—he'd take a chance on being seen without a gun. And as for his own protection, he had his Colt, which he concealed beneath his coat.

Twenty-two minutes to seven. Seven minutes more. Hastily, Kirby dashed straight for the penthouse at one side of the roof. He went boldly into the open doorway, and found a landing with an iron ladder which led downward. He began to lower himself gingerly. Down he went, until he was right inside of the strange fortification.

A confusing sight met his eyes. The interior of the place was dimly illuminated by the daylight which streamed in through several cuts in the steel walls. And in the dim light Kirby saw a maze of ladders such as the one he was descending. They all led to various landings on which were gun platforms and crews. Below were the batteries of the larger guns, all over the place. They were ready for instant action, each one of them trained to cover a certain portion of the town outside. The whole place was crowded with Jerry soldiers and officers, all of them busy at various tasks.

Down, down, Kirby kept descending. No one seemed to notice him, yet he dared not hurry for fear that his haste would attract suspicion. At last, at twenty-one minutes to seven, with six minutes to spare, he had reached the bottom of the ladder—which was the bottom of the fortress. He left the ladder, walked a little ways. Boche passed him on all sides, and his heart pounced lest they might see that he did not belong here. He looked around, furtively. Where in hell was the ammunition storeroom, or whatever kind of a place they used to keep their supply of shells and bullets? How could he ever find it in this maze of guns and men? He could see no sign of it.

Suddenly he stiffened, and his heart seemed almost to stop beating. Confronting him, looking at him with a cold challenge which the fearful Mosquito instantly translated as suspicion, was a tall *Uberleutnant*, who had the supercilious bearing of a proud Prussian. Kirby, despite his tremors, had the presence of mind to snap his hand up in a crisp, Teutonic salute. The *Uberleutnant* glared at him.

"*Was suchen sie, Korporal?*" He demanded sharply. "What are you doing here, standing and looking around like a *dumkopf?*"

Kirby struggled to fight down a growing inner panic. He knew German thoroughly, but he was reluctant to risk speaking it for fear that a mistake

in grammar or a wrong accent might betray him. But he must say something. He steeled his nerve, and pronounced his words with great care.

"Pardon, *mein herr Uberleutnant*, but I was just going to my post."

It was a pretty shabby reply, but it was the only thing he could think of. But now the fear that the *Uberleutnant* might ask for specific details about that post made the Mosquito all the more panicky. Quickly, he pointed towards the other side of the fortress, to show the officer that he knew where he was going.

The *Uberleutnant* continued to glare. His eyes looked keen and hard into Kirby's face. The Mosquito tried to meet that piercing glance unflinchingly, without betraying any guilt. God, surely the German was going to suspect him! A few more terse questions like this, and the Mosquito's goose would be cooked! And throughout it all Kirby was aware that the precious seconds were slipping, slipping.

"There is no excuse for loitering around here," the *Uberleutnant* snapped again, angrily. "It amazes me to find one of our men, especially one above the rank of private, standing around and staring. For such an offense you deserve to be stripped of your rank, and I believe I shall take your name and number now and see that you are properly disciplined." He paused, and Kirby felt the net slowly closing about him, tighter and tighter.

"Well, perhaps I shall let you off this time," the *Uberleutnant* suddenly changed his mind, and Kirby felt a warm gratitude for this supercilious Prussian. "Go to your post at once," the German barked, "and don't let this happen again." And to Kirby's intense relief, he turned on his heel and marched away. The Mosquito started to walk toward his imaginary post, but he walked slowly and his eyes still continued to look about, though more cautiously now. Damn it, where was that ammunition store? He glanced again at his wrist watch. Five minutes left now! It was getting more and more hopeless.

But then another desperate scheme came to him. His eye fell on a near by Boche private who was standing alertly but idly near one of the big guns. Kirby had vaguely noticed that this private had been glancing at him while he was engaged with the *Uberleutnant*. The Mosquito decided to use this fact to his advantage. First he made sure that there were no other officers around here. There weren't—not even a sergeant. Luck seemed to be with him. Without any further hesitation, he approached the private, and adopted the gruff, superior tone of a non-com.

"The *Uberleutnant* commanded that I should take you to accompany me to the ammunition supply to get some machine-gun cartridges," he lied boldly, and now he was more confident of his German. "You will come at once!"

The private looked at him in timid surprise. "But I'm posted here, *Korporal*," he protested, meekly.

"No matter!" Kirby snapped. "This will take but a moment. You are not doing anything important. Come along now!"

The private finally nodded, respectfully. "Very well, *Korporal*." He stepped forward. And very unobtrusively, Kirby let the Boche fall ahead of him, so that the latter was leading the way, though he never knew it. Kirby followed him across the floor of the fortress, through the maze of men and guns.

"*Mach schnell!*" the Mosquito commanded, unable to conceal his haste. "Hurry! There is no time to waste."

The private obediently quickened his pace. They were approaching one side of the building now. Suddenly Kirby's heart jumped again. There was that same tall *Uberleutnant* over by one of the guns scarcely a few yards away. The German officer's back was turned at the moment, but if he should look around—if he should see Kirby walking here behind this private instead of standing at his post—The Mosquito hoped against hope. The slightest challenge on the part of the *Uberleutnant* would spoil the whole game, for the private would surely betray Kirby.

"Hurry up!" Kirby repeated again, almost frantically this time. And again the private quickened his brisk pace. Suddenly, to Kirby's horror, the *Uberleutnant* did turn around. He seemed to look right at Kirby.

But if he saw the Mosquito he did not remember or recognize him as the man he had reprimanded. In the next moment he turned his back once more. And Kirby, almost sobbing his relief, went on with new confidence, continuing to follow the private.

Another second and they came to a stone stairway which led downward. The private started to descend hurriedly. Kirby followed. At the foot of the stairway was a big open doorway. A gate of solid steel was swung back on its hinges. The private walked in, Kirby still on his heels.

THE Mosquito glanced about swiftly. They were in a large room, and the light was dim. But Kirby had no trouble making out the piles of shells and boxes of ammunition which were heaped all over the place. Kirby's hunch had been right. There was an

ammunition storeroom in this fortress—and he had gotten to it at last.

The private was standing there, waiting for Kirby's next order. The Mosquito wasted no more time. He saw that he was alone with the German, and he acted with lightning speed. He stepped forward as if he meant to tell the private something. At the same time his left hand clenched into a fist of iron. His body tensed, his arm drew back. Then—

Sock! Flush on the unsuspecting Jerry's jaw that staggering left hook landed. The German never knew what hit him. He dropped silently and sprawled on the floor—out cold.

"So much for you, Fritz," Kirby muttered, and then glanced once more at his wrist watch. Eighteen minutes to seven. Three minutes left—only three minutes! And in those three minutes Kirby must somehow accomplish the destruction of this Q-building.

He glanced all around the room. Desperation lent his eyes an uncanny keenness. At once he spotted that coil of whitish cord, resting on top of one of the boxes. He knew what it was. Fuse! He went over to examine it. It was a long piece all right. In fact, he could have hoped for nothing better.

Having found this fuse to start with, the rest ought to be simple. He would just look for some stuff here that could be set off, and that would be enough to blow-up all these shells and bullets. The result would be a mighty explosion which ought to blast the whole building and every Jerry in it off the face of the earth.

Searching with frantic haste while the last three minutes kept dwindling, Kirby finally discovered a large open barrel of gunpowder. Again luck was in his favor. His course remained clear now. He got the fuse, started to unwind the coil. It looked just about long enough to give him a chance for a get-away. Doubtless it would take a few minutes to burn to its end. The Yankee barrage would have been started by then, but the explosion ought to take place well before the actual offensive began.

Suddenly, the Mosquito paused tensely in his work, his heart pounding like a sledge hammer. Footsteps—footsteps of some men. Boche were clattering down the stone steps that led to this storeroom. In another moment they would come right in, come in and find an unconscious Boche on the floor and a man in a Boche uniform tampering with a fuse. Kirby would be caught with the goods. God, what could he do? Like a trapped animal he looked around, furtively. All in that split second his eyes took in the huge steel door

of the storeroom—and noticed that it bolted from the inside, too. He did not hesitate. He rushed to that door. Vaguely he saw the four Jerries coming toward him. He seized the door and with one vicious jerk, slammed it in their very faces, and snapped the bolt. He heard a surprise shout outside, and then the Boche were pounding with their gun butts, demanding entry.

"Go to hell!" Kirby shouted, defiantly, and prayed that they would not be able to budge that door—at least until he was through with his work. There were only two minutes left now before the barrage would come. Kirby labored like a demon, while the pounding on the steel door became more and more violent. The Mosquito seized the barrel of gunpowder and half dragged, half rolled it to a corner of the room, behind some boxes where it would not be noticed. He then took the fuse and ran it behind some other boxes, and into the gunpowder barrel. All this took another precious minute. One left now. The steel door was beginning to shake as the Germans outside, evidently realizing now that there must indeed be a spy in their ammunition storeroom, began to batter it with anything they could get their hands on.

Kirby went to the free end of the fuse cord. He reached in his pocket, pulled out his cigarette lighter, and flicked it. He stooped, applied the tiny flame to the end. There was a dull sputter as the fuse was ignited, and the sparkling glow began to eat its way down it slowly but steadily. In a short time—just how short, Kirby did not know—that barrel of gunpowder would be set off, and that would do the trick.

But now, how was Kirby to get out of here and make a try to get away in his plane before the explosion? Those Germans were still pounding savagely at the door—and probably they would break it from its hinges in another moment. Kirby would be cornered here like a rat in a trap. And yet his only hope was that the Boche would not discover the burning fuse. That was really all that mattered. What was his own life, compared to the lives of half a division? He gritted his teeth, determinedly. If he had to go to hell with these Boche, all right—he'd face the music!

And yet he realized that if, by some miracle, he could get away from here alive so that he could tell the Yanks just what had held them from the capture of Remiens, they would be so much the better off. Otherwise, since the Q-building would be destroyed, they would never know anything about it, and the Jerries might work the same trick at some other strategic point.

This thought, as well as the stubborn instinct of self-preservation, was what caused Kirby to hit upon his last desperate scheme of this hectic morning. He dashed over to take one final look at the burning fuse. It was almost half consumed now, and the sparkling little flame was creeping steadily on. Once more the Mosquito's eye went to his wrist watch. He watched the minute hand even as it came right upon the nine. It was quarter to seven. The fateful moment had arrived.

Scarcely a second later Kirby heard a dull, reverberating boom somewhere outside—a boom which was followed by others, in swift succession. The barrage had started. In a few minutes more the doughboys of the second division would be storming the town from three sides. But in those few minutes, that fuse would surely burn down to the gunpowder barrel.

Kirby waited no longer. The steel door was shaking more and more now. In a second or so it would surely give. The Mosquito deliberately pulled out his Colt and fired a shot right toward the ceiling, at the same time shouting in German and in a disguised voice

“Take that, swine of a Yankee spy!” Then, in his own voice, he gave a choking cry as of a man in agony, followed by the shout: “You got me, you dirty Boche!”

He then rushed to the door and calmly snapped back the bolt. A little crowd of Boche soldiers confronted him, staring at him in bewilderment. Kirby, feigning exhaustion and frenzied excitement, pointed toward the unconscious German soldier on the floor.

“He's a spy!” he gasped, in German. “I found him here—and shot him before he could try any tricks!”

There was a gasp of astonishment from the Germans, and one of them—an officer—dashed into the room. The others followed. All rushed to the prostrate man on the floor, leaned over him curiously. Kirby waited no longer. He dashed right out the door, and was not even noticed. But soon, he knew, the Jerries would be after him—as soon as they saw the identifications on the unconscious private and found out also that he had not been shot. Again the Mosquito hoped and prayed fervently that they would not discover that burning fuse. He had concealed it well. Before they found it, the powder should be set off.

He was dashing up the stone steps now as fast as he could. He reached the top and started to run across the floor of the fortress, toward the ladder he knew led to the roof. Hurry, he must hurry—before this explosion

came off. Outside the shells were falling thunderously now, all over the place. The barrage was in its full fury.

SUDDENLY shouts rose somewhere behind Kirby. Looking back furtively, he saw the crowd of Boche from the storeroom rushing from the top of the staircase, shouting out warnings and pointing toward the fleeing Mosquito. Kirby redoubled his pace. He went right on through the Boche all around him, and they let him pass because at first they were too confused to know what it was all about. He reached the ladder, and started climbing it like an agile monkey. By this time the alarm had spread throughout the fortress, and the Jerries were at last waking up to the fact that a spy was in their midst. They swarmed over to the ladder and started climbing after the frantic Mosquito. But, thank God, they did not fire at him—evidently they did not want to take the chance with all the ammunition that was lying around the place. Had they wished to, they surely could have dropped him off that ladder in no time with one of their machine guns.

With new confidence, Kirby went on climbing. The Jerries came right after him. A Boche suddenly came rushing down a narrow cat walk, straight toward the ladder, a bayoneted rifle in his hand. Just in time Kirby saw him. The German lunged with his bayonet, and the Mosquito ducked as he clung to the ladder. The shining steel blade just grazed his side, actually cutting his clothing. Cursing, the Mosquito struck out blindly with that left fist of his—and caught the German on the chin before the latter could draw back to lunge at him again. The Boche gave a terrified cry, and toppled off the cat walk, to go hurtling down to the flooring far below, where he lay in a limp heap.

But this interruption had given the Germans on the ladder time to almost catch up to Kirby. They were right beneath him. Furiously, the Mosquito started climbing again. At last he reached the top landing, and was in the penthouse. He darted out the door. God, if his Spad were not still here, waiting—if the Germans had found it, or it had been struck by a Yankee shell—

His fears proved to be ungrounded. The Spad was here all right, standing just where he had left it, with its motor still purring gently. And while the town still resounded with the crashing shells, the barrage was letting up. None of the shells were falling in this area just now. The attack would soon come. Kirby's mind went to that fuse which must be burning down in the storeroom. Any second now it ought to go off. He prayed that nothing would go wrong with it, that it

would do its work completely. And he prayed also that he would be able to get away before it did its work.

These were his thoughts as he went dashing across the roof toward the waiting Spad. But the crowd of Jerries came rushing out of the penthouse in furious pursuit. A shot suddenly rang out, and a bullet zipped right past Kirby's face. God, they were firing now—firing up here where they were not afraid! *Crack! Crack!* The revolvers barked, and the air around Kirby sizzled with the streaking lead. But he ignored the fire. He was up to his plane now, climbing in. He plopped into the cockpit, just as the crowd of Boche came right up. Kirby opened the throttle, and the plane started to move toward the edge of the roof. But the crowd of Boche, determined to stop it, literally jumped on it, and were holding it back by its wings and tail. Shouting out curses, Kirby whipped out his Colt and fired blindly at the German crowd, which kept increasing as more Jerries emerged from the penthouse. They were not firing at him now, for they were sure of making the capture. And it was no wonder. The Spad, though its engine roared, was hardly moving—that crowd was holding it back, back. God, that explosion ought to be coming now! And if it did come it was going to take Kirby with it.

Then came a sight which crushed Kirby's last shred of hope. Suddenly, and without warning, there was a roar overhead, and like some monstrous hawk a German two-seater with Maltese crosses on its wings came swooping right over the roof of the fake hotel. Evidently this was one of the planes which had been flying above among those swarms of Jerry scouts. Its pilot or observer had seen the Spad trying to take off from the roof of the hotel, and had come down to stop it in case the German soldiers failed.

Sheer amazement came over Kirby as he heard the guns of the swooping plane clatter into shrill life. They were blazing away—the forward fixed guns of the pilot and the rear flanking guns of the observer. And their bullets were showering down. But not on Kirby—not even near him. They were showering down on the crowd of Boche soldiers and dropping them like flies. The Jerries, horrified at this unexpected fire from one of their own planes, began to scatter in terror, and as Kirby's Spad again began to move forward across the roof the Mosquito let out a frenzied whoop of glee. For now, as the Jerry two-seater passed right overhead, he could glimpse the two goggled faces of its occupants. They were his two comrades, Shorty Carn and Travis.

The explanation for their presence here at such

an opportune time was simple. When Kirby had disappeared from their side during the dogfight, they had lost sight of him entirely, and had consequently continued to flee for the Allied lines. They had finally gotten back safely, and then a scheme had come to them. If they flew over Remiens in a German plane perhaps they could get away without being suspected. They could then try to continue their search for the mysterious trap. But, mainly, they could search for their leader, for Kirby.

Obtaining the German ship was simple. There was a captured Rumpler at a nearby drome. The two Mosquitoes borrowed it, with Travis at the controls and Shorty acting as observer. They had flown boldly over Remiens, and had been unsuspected. In the course of their flight they had suddenly spotted Kirby's Spad on the roof of the hotel. Perplexed, they had waited to see what the situation was. Finally they had seen the Spad trying to take off with a swarm of Jerries holding it back. At once they had grasped the whole up-shot of the business, and now they were coming to the rescue of their leader, coming in the nick of time.

Even now the Rumpler was not attracting the suspicion of the swarms of Jerries overhead. If they saw it they also saw the Spad—and to all appearances here was a German plane shooting down at an American ship. But such was not the case. Shorty and Travis, expert shots that they were, carefully kept their fire safely away from Kirby and poured it into the Boche. Breathlessly the two-seater pulled up, to swoop down again and again, its guns clattering. It was Shorty, one of the best marksmen in the service, who was doing most of the scoring. He flanked his rear machine gun around and around, scattering terrible destruction among the panic-stricken Boche.

In their usual breathless fashion, the Three Mosquitoes were fighting together again. While two of them cleared the way with a German plane, the third attempted to guide his Spad off the roof and into the air. By this time the Spad was rolling swiftly across the steel surface, gathering speed. But the Germans had held her back so long that she was not gathering speed fast enough. The edge of the roof was rushing toward Kirby now, and he didn't yet have flying speed. Madly he opened his throttle to the last notch, fed the engine all the gas she could take. And in the meantime he kept praying that the explosion he awaited would not come until he and his comrades could get safely out of the way.

The edge of the roof kept coming toward him with

breathless rapidity. His hopes sank again. God, he could not get flying speed fast enough! His plane was going to fall over the edge of that roof! He fought with all his skill to coax more speed out of the engine. And meanwhile the Rumpler two-seater continued to come down and pepper the Germans, keep them away.

THE Spad came to the edge of the roof. With a lurch it jumped right off, into space. For several seconds it reeled perilously and started into stalling sideslips. But then, Kirby, forcing himself to keep a cool head, did another superb bit of flying. He pushed his stick forward, and let the plane plunge into a dive, straight for the street. In a second the force of gravity had given it flying speed. With the street looming right below him, Kirby pulled back madly on the joystick. And the Spad responded. Its nose literally spurned the cobblestones, and in the next instant Kirby was climbing her, climbing her while sobs of wild relief tore from his throat.

Immediately the Rumpler came speeding by and from its fuselage Shorty and Travis waved a joyous greeting to their leader. Kirby waved back, waved a signal meaning: "Let's get the hell out of here." To his surprise they waved at him to slow down a little. He obeyed. The Rumpler suddenly shot over his head, and took a position directly above him, all but touching his wings with its undercarriage. At first he did not understand, but then he realized that by getting over his Spad with the larger Rumpler, they were screening him from the Fokkers above so that he could get away unsuspected. A wave of admiration for their canniness came over him. They weren't dumb, his two comrades. Good old scouts!

In the last few seconds the two planes, one above the other, had been climbing gently. And during this time the barrage over the town had ceased—and again was that strange stillness. But the stillness did not last long.

For then it came. It came with a rumble which rose to a deafening roar, a mighty thunder which shook the very heavens. And the Grand Hotel de Remiens swayed grotesquely like a leaf in the wind, and then it disappeared entirely as hell itself seemed to erupt. A tremendous column of black smoke and debris rose high into the sky, and for a moment the Mosquitoes could hardly see where they were going. Their planes were wobbling drunkenly from the terrific detonations, and there was the imminent danger that they might collide because of their positions.

But then slowly the air cleared. The debris settled to earth. And as things came back into clear focus, Kirby and his comrades saw what was left of the Q-building. There was very little to see, as a matter of fact. Just a gaping hole in the ground, full of twisted steel discolored from having been melted in the terrific heat of the blast. But here and there Kirby could see scores of tiny gray-clad shapes. He nodded grimly.

"You've paid now!" he muttered, fiercely. "You've paid all right! But you're not through paying yet."

He had been leveling off his Spad now, as the Rumpler above him leveled off too. They were proceeding to the lines. The Fokkers, which had kept thousands of feet above, were still unable to see the Spad.

"No, you're not through paying yet!" Kirby repeated grimly, for even then he saw them—saw the thousands of khaki-clad troops rushing into the village from every side, taking complete and easy possession of it. The second division had arrived—and Remiens had been taken. The stubborn Gibraltar had fallen.

Instead of going on toward the lines, Kirby and his comrades landed on a stubble field behind the outskirts of Remiens—since the town was now in Yankee hands, and the Fokkers had decided to leave. The Mosquitoes landed here because they did not want to run the risk of having the Rumpler attacked by an Allied plane—the sooner they brought the German ship to earth the better.

The two planes rolled to a stop side by side, and a crowd of doughboys rushed up bewilderedly, not knowing what to make of this strange spectacle of a Spad and a Rumpler alighting together. But the Mosquitoes soon reassured them, and everyone was happy.

"Well," Kirby was saying, cheerfully, "Remiens has been taken at last."

"You bet your sweet life it has!" a burly sergeant affirmed, and his tone was proudly superior despite his rank. "Hell, did anyone ever hear of the second division falling down on the job? Why we could take Berlin if they wanted us to. Yes, siree, Remiens has been taken all right—leave it to the old Second!"

"Well, well, that's news!" Shorty Carn murmured, with a sarcasm that was slightly ominous. "I thought the air force had something to do with this capture, but I guess I made a mistake."

"Oh, you sky-guys did your share," the sergeant admitted, grudgingly. "You tried your best, I'll say that for you."

“Don’t flatter us,” said the lanky Travis, and his familiar drawl sounded dangerous indeed.

“Oh, I believe in giving credit where credit’s due,” the sergeant went on, guilelessly. “Yes, you fellers did your best, but after all when it comes to things like this you got to have the infantry. It’s the infantry that has to do the actual dirty work, while you birds are flying around safe in the sky. Yes, we’ve got to do the real job. Only trouble is we never get the credit!”

And yet several officers and soldiers wondered why a certain burly sergeant was found with two black eyes and a bleeding nose.

Which was all, except that three days later, in a quiet room of a quiet chateau, a beaming general and his staff gazed with intense satisfaction at the immense map on the wall. There was a red ribbon on that map, a red ribbon which stretched across it in a straight line, with no breaks or indentations. And that red ribbon meant that the American Expeditionary Force had come through in this great test—and that, as later events proved, the great Hindenburg line, which had withstood the battering of two armies for four years, had been smashed at last.

