



PATROLS OF PERIL

by FREDERICK C. DAVIS

Tragedy and spitting lead fly swiftly in the wake of a joke with a startling climax on the brink of Eternity.

AS HE sat on the steps of the recreation house, Lieutenant "Farry" Fareton gripped the imaginary "stick" of an imaginary DeHaviland and rushed to the climax of his narrative:

"Then I saw it wasn't a bird, either. It was a kite! More than a thousand feet up, but down where the San Angela patrol would miss it. On the end of the tail was swinging a little box. I suspected right away the box was full of cocaine, but I was thinking then about the old air hack I was driving.

"Straight ahead and close, I saw a long, thin flash, reflection of the sun, and I knew the kite was being flown on a steel wire. Gosh! If I buzzed into that wire—zing!—it would maybe split the propeller or at least upset the control connections. Quick as lightning I zoomed over it, with the propeller missing the wire by inches, and when I stalled into the field here, that funny kite was hanging onto the undercarriage, where it'd got tangled, like I'd wanted. I'd thought I ought to bring it along, you see. After that, it wasn't anything for the Cap to figure out where and how the smugglers had been getting their cocaine across the Rio Grande—"

A snore interrupted. Other flyers on the "rec" building steps, likewise members of the Camilla flight of the United States Army Air Service, were catching after-lunch naps. Fareton's recital was on for the twentieth time, and they knew it by heart. The event itself, in fact, was not yet months old. From the mouth of one Porky Stevens issued a yawn.

"And to prove it," Fareton hurried on, "I'll go get—"

"Throttle her!" Stevens' bark halted Fareton's stride away. "Stay where you are, Farry. I swear, I never knew another man like you, with a past composed one hundred per cent of narrow escapes, who takes along with him everywhere he goes a boxful of souvenirs from each and every one of said narrow escapes, just to prove he had 'em. You're a museum, all in yourself. And it's just my luck that I can't sleep through your chatter, like the other boys do, on account of my damn' insomnia."

"I've got to get the old stories off my chest," Fareton excused himself calmly, sitting again, "because I've got new ones coming along all the time. Hello!" he exclaimed. "Hope nothing's wrong with the morning patrol!"

Across the way the radio sergeant had burst out of the shack and run quickly toward Headquarters building. At the door he met Captain Horder and rattled out his message. For a moment the two men talked fast. Then the Captain hurried out.

On the field a reassembled D.H. had been warmed up for a test by the mechanics, and several flying shavetails were about. The Captain spoke briskly to them. They began to move excitedly.

"That's no check ride," Fareton declared to Stevens. "Come along, Porky."

The pair hastened toward the ship. Its propeller was already spinning, the four-hundred-horsepower engine roaring. The plane taxied off, inclined over the fence and deadheaded east. The sting of flying grit still on his face, Fareton turned to Captain Horder.

"Trouble, sir?"

"Something's gone wrong with McKeever and Thompson on the Silver Lode patrol," the Captain answered.

"Reports have been coming in regularly until the last one, a moment ago. The last report said that a strange plane had come out of a cloudbank, Mexico-ward, The plane opened fire on them—"

"Opened fire!"

"—opened fire with a machine gun—"

"Machine gun!"

"—And the message stopped there. The rest we'll know when Clark and Johnson get back," Captain Horder went on, his face pasty. "They've gone to hunt for McKeever and Thompson in the mesquite."

As the Captain strode away, Fareton and Stevens exchanged dazed glances.

"Porky, this is 1927, not 1917, any more. And this is the Rio Grande territory, not the Argonne—"

"I don't get it!" Stevens cut in. "I haven't even thought of a machine gun for more'n five years. Lord, I hope there's a mistake, and the boys get back safe."

Statistics with which flying service men are familiar say that every eighth man in the service is killed every year. The government insurance bureau is not instituted for no purpose; the Border Patrol understand that. To the dangers of the sky their nerves are immune, until the eighth man leaves his crate and keeps on arching straight into the stars, forever; then emotional and alcoholic orgies come.

Fareton and Stevens tramped back toward the rec house silently, until Fareton spoke.

"It reminds me. Porky. Did I ever tell you about the time I glided down in No Man's Land, forced down, and saw a Boche coming straight at me with his hog-sticker all honed and stopped? All I had was one hand grenade I'd picked off a buddy who didn't have any further use for it; and in the excitement I forgot to bite the plug off. There it went sailing straight at that Boche just the same!"

"All he had to do was catch it and toss it back right, and I'd have blown away on the breeze. My subconscious mind must have been working, however, because that grenade happened to hit the Boche right between the eyes, and down he went—to stay, I saw to it. That was a close shave! It happens I've got that grenade yet. I saved it. I'll go get it and show—"

"Don't do it!" Stevens roared. "Just try to show it to me, and I'll use it proper—at you!"

"What's the matter with you lately, Porky?" Fareton came back. "You act as though you'd been looping on a full stomach."

The question touched Stevens' depths. The change which blended through him was profound. The eyes he turned up at Fareton were sad.

"You and me, we understand each other," he admitted. "We both have felt the same ever since pretty Lieutenant Twombly was assigned to the flight two months ago—except that I feel worse than you do. At least, Julie had you up to tea once."

"Just once," Fareton nodded. "And Twombly has tea with her every day in the week!"

"I haven't never been at all," Porky repeated, "and I've got no prospects, either. I've got sense enough to know I haven't any chance with her. And anyway, I promised Minnie, back in Tulsa, that I'd marry her. I guess I just naturally hate to see a lady's man like Twombly get away with all his smooth stuff."

"My hopes are dying fast," Fareton observed, "but fighting for life. Speak of the devil, and also of angels—"

The sleek official touring-car eased to a stop before Headquarters building under the guidance of Miss Juliet Horder, the Captain's daughter. At once a uniformed man sped across the space from the rec building and received a cordial greeting from the girl.

Fareton and Stevens looked away, their eyes smarting with the sight, but they heard the girl say:

"I'm sorry we can't have tea together today, Lieutenant Twombly—"

Fareton grinned in spite of himself and Stevens audibly giggled.

"—But if you'll come up at six for dinner, we can spend the evening together instead."

Fareton and Stevens cursed softly.

"Oh, good afternoon, Lieutenant Fareton!"

Fareton whirled, his face aglow. "Afternoon, Miss Juliet! Well, well, I've been wondering where you've been keeping yourself. I used to see you come down to bring the Captain home around four or five in the afternoon, but I notice lately the Captain's been going home alone, and—"

Fareton realized that he had stumbled into a conversational bog and hastily strove to extricate himself.

"I—I was just telling my friend, Porky Stevens, about the time back in 1917 when a Boche—"

"Oh, yes," said the girl sweetly. "I'm sure he was interested. I'll see you at six, then, Lieutenant Twombly."

Fareton came away dazedly as Stevens pulled his arm. Stevens exploded.

"You big fool! That's what queered you with her—your chatter. Do you think a girl invites a man to tea to hear terrible stories of how he rounded up a bandit gang with a nigger-shooter—and have him show her the very pea he did it with? Nix!"

"I guess I can't help it, Porky," Fareton sighed.

"And tonight it's dinner for that slick Twombly. Curse the day that brought him to the flight! I wish I could—I wish I could—" Stevens paused, meditating. "Sometimes I think I'd—"

Abruptly he turned and walked away, leaving Fareton puzzled.

THE EXHAUST of a powerful Lincoln motor had been beating through the air more loudly with each passing second. Now the plane stalled into the field from due east. It taxied to a stop while the mechanics mobbed around it. Captain Horder hurried out of Headquarters, and close behind followed Warren, the flight surgeon.

The two men in the D.H., who had been searching the mesquite for McKeever and Thompson, did not at once jump out. They had burdens to lower. Others reached up to assist. Stretchers were brought, and, sheet-covered, two bodies carried away. Fareton sidled close while Clark and Johnson reported to the Captain.

"The D.H. they took out on patrol this morning is a wreck, sir. We found it in the mesquite, in pieces. We looked at the motor. The cylinders are cracked, by steel-jacketed bullets. We found one inside. There are twenty-odd bullet holes through the fuselage, sir. McKeever and Thompson—by some miracle, Captain, there was something of them to bring back. Riddled, sir—riddled!"

The Captain strode away, his face beet-red. Fareton whirled, and with the others pushed questions at the two scouts. Porky Stevens and the immaculate Twombly joined the circle together. Theories grew.

"There's only one explanation for it," Fareton asserted. "It's been only a few weeks since the cocaine smugglers were rounded up, and we know we didn't get them all. It looked like a family affair, that smuggling, and family affairs in Mexico get damn' serious. The Velen-zos are hot-blooded, anyway. Now that the old man is in the pen, one of his sons might be gunning for us out of sheer revenge. Ever hear of a vendetta—?"

"Against the whole Border Patrol?" Twombly asked skeptically.

"Certainly! When Mexicans hate, I tell you, they hate. What's left of that little crowd hates us for breaking up the dope ring. Why shouldn't the smugglers be addicts themselves? Hate, dope, tequila—somebody crazy enough to unlimber a machine gun at us—and there you are!"

"It sounds im—"

Fareton sliced into Twombly's comment. "Does it? Well, how do you explain it? With help from all the tea you've drunk recently you ought to get up a nice lavender-scented theory about it!"

Fists would have flown at that moment, had not timely interruption taken away the possibility.

The buzzing of a motor was again disturbing the air. All eyes turned upward in the direction of the approaching craft. It was smaller than a DeHaviland.

It was not preparing to stall into the field, but coming down with motor roaring in a full power drive. Its nose was pointed straight at the group on the field.

"That's not a service plane. It hasn't the markings."

"It looks like—my God above!" Fareton's voice shouted the warning: "Run!"

The plane was close now, and Fareton's startled eyes had seen a mechanical device mounted in the rear cock-pit. Then a helmeted and goggled head had risen and, swung around, straight at them, was the bore of a machine-gun!

Like frightened chickens below a swooping hawk, the men on the ground scattered. In comparison with the dynamic sweep of the plane, their movements were far too slow.

Pr-r-r-r-r! Pr-r-r-r-r!

The machine-gun spat fiery death out at them!

Window-panes shattered. Bullets planked through the corrugated tin roofs of the hangars. Little spurts of dust jumped up from the ground in even rows.

And men fell!

Pr-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r!

Instantly the unknown plane zoomed up, climbing again into the blue at a steep angle. For a moment more it sprayed the ground with deadly slugs; then the sputter stopped. With incredible rapidity the plane receded.

On the ground three men lay still. Two others were writhing in agony. A few muffled curses were audible in the tense silence. One of those only wounded waved wildly, as those unhurt rushed instinctively toward them, and shouted:

"Get that crate!"

Then came the squeak and rumble of hangar doors. Mechanics fluttered around. Two DeHavilands rolled out. Men climbed into the cockpits, two into each plane. In an instant the propellers were humming in a grim rhythm.

One and then the other taxied off, banked south in pursuit of the death-dealing craft, and crabbed after that mere speck in the sky.

Lieutenant Fareton stood backed against the door of Headquarters. As the hostile plane had darted down, his move had been to block the instinctive rush outward of the persons inside—particularly Miss Juliet. As he stepped aside, the rush came;

and he hastened to aid the men who had fallen.

He threw his arm around Porky Stevens' shoulder.

"Thank Heaven, Porky, they didn't get you!"

"Danm it, Farry, they didn't get Twombly, either!"

The field was in a hubbub. The flight surgeon moved frantically. Those uninjured carried into the little board-floored tents the injured and the dead.

Under stern direction of her father, Juliet Horder drove the official car off the field.

After the first hysterical outburst, an enforced calm came into the air.

These names and others came from the lips of Captain Horder like so many shots:

"Lieutenants Twombly—Fareton—Stevens—Jackson—Rich—!"

Alertly the men ducked from the tents and responded. To them the Captain stated in crackling syllables:

"Three more men are dead. Five in all today! The two D.H.'s which have chased the armed ship stand very little chance. The most they can hope to do is locate the field from which the armed ship came. They may not succeed at that. Ill be glad if they come back at all.

"We will stand as prepared as possible, under the circumstances," the Captain went on sharply, "if another attack should come. In the meanwhile the routine of patrol confronts us. Orders are to fly the patrols if flying is possible. It is not impossible yet by any means. The afternoon patrol between Bitter Creek and San Angelo will fly as usual."

"But—" Twombly cut in. Sharp eyes turned at him.

"It happens," the Captain went on more slowly, "that both Hennings and Fulton, who were to take the eastward this afternoon, are dead. King, who was going west with Harper, is injured. Harper will take the west alone. I will send only one man up for the east. I ask for a volunteer for the east patrol—"

A chorus answered.

"One man only. And understand that the machine-gun craft may still be up.

Twombly stepped out. "A moment ago I was about to state that I knew Hennings and Fulton can't take their patrol, sir. Some men—" his eyes shifted toward Fareton, who grew red of face—"some men might think I was objecting to the usual flight in the face of

such danger. In order to offset all such suspicions, I ask to be allowed to take the east to Bitter Creek."

"Wait a second!" This time the treble of Porky Stevens interrupted. "Lieutenant Twombly is a newer man with the flight than I am. He doesn't know the patrol as well as I do, sir. I ask to be allowed to take the east—"

"Twombly will go," Captain Horder interrupted.

"I—I ask again—"

"That'll do, Stevens!"

"Captain Horder, I—I demand—" At a murderous glare from the Captain, Porky Stevens stepped back, his face wet with sweat. "I beg pardon, sir!"

Dapper Twombly turned briskly on his heel toward the tents. A D.H. had been tugged from the hangars by the feverish mechanics and already warmed up. Twombly ran into his tent and loped back jacketed and helmeted, adjusting his goggles.

An instant after he was in the cockpit the propeller was singing. Then the plane taxied, lifted, stalled into the wind, crabbed off south, and deadheaded east. Until it became a dark star on a white sky all eyes kept to it.

Then relaxation came, and men dragged themselves wearily to their tents.

In Fareton's tent Stevens lay on the cot, and Fareton sighed.

"This man Twombly is a dude, but he knows the stick. Also, he has guts. He knows how to fly and—how to make love." Fareton slumped down in his chair. "If he was a rotter, I'd feel that I had some last chance with Miss Juliet, but he's a pretty good guy, and my chance with the girl isn't worth a plugged nickle."

Stevens moaned.

"What's wrong, Porky?"

"God, Farry—you know—ah, God, I couldn't have done a more damn' fool stunt than—what I did—"

"What're you talking about? Not your insisting on going up?"

"No!" Stevens opened eyes heavy with misery. "Farry, just before they brought McKeever and Thompson back, I took Twombly into my tent, friendly like, and gave him a glass of my ginger-ale. Well, I guess I was just naturally sore at his lording it over us so much that he stands in so good with Julie— Anyway,

I thought it would be a good joke—just a good joke, understand—”

Fareton frowned. “What’re you driving at, Porky?”

“Wait a minute! Wait till I get the nerve to tell you what a rotten fool I’ve been—that’s all.”

“Take your time,” Fareton bade him laconically.

The purring of a ship’s exhaust came faintly on the air. Fareton craned out of the tent. In the southwest two D.H. planes were approaching, almost side by side. They stepped down to the landing space and stalled in. The pilots hopped out of the cock-pits. Captain Horder had come out of Headquarters again, and now received their report.

Crowding close, Fareton and Stevens heard.

“We lost it, sir. There are heavy cloudbanks down over the mountains, and the ship sneaked into them. We couldn’t follow too close on account of the gunfire. Also a little short of gas, sir. Sorry!”

“Be glad you’re still breathing!” Horder grunted; and turned on his heel.

When they were together again in their tent, Fareton observed to Stevens: “Whoever it is in that Mexican plane, he’s a flying wild man!”

Stevens again turned worried eyes on Fareton. “You think there’s a chance they might try to fire on Twombly on patrol?”

“Sure there’s a chance. Twombly knew it when he went up. We all did.”

Stevens flung his feet off the cot. “Farry, we’ve got to do something, fast! I told you I wanted to play a joke on the dude. I didn’t know all this was coming up. I thought it would be sweet revenge if I could make him miss that dinner-date. Well, you know about how I can’t sleep at night, always, and have to take powders. Farry, by Heaven, I put two powders in Twombly’s drink. It’ll put him to sleep in the ship, Farry, as sure as you’re cursing me now!”

FARETON STARED. “Good God, Porky! That stuff’s powerful! You mean to tell me he couldn’t stay awake if he tried?”

“Nothing would keep him awake with those two shots in him! It’s almost sure death for him, Farry! I—I tried to keep him from going up—you heard me!”

Farry jumped up. “Come along!” They hastened to the radio shack and put their heads in.

“Sarge,” Fareton demanded of the operator, “Twombly’s reports are coming in regular?”

“One is overdue. It ought to be in any minute—if that machine gun lunatic isn’t chasing him.”

Fareton and Stevens, both paler, turned away swiftly.

“Porky, is it too soon for that stuff to be working on him now?”

“It is not!” Stevens answered tightly. “Right this minute Twombly may be—” and he finished with a shudder.

Fareton ran toward one of the D.H.’s which was still in the field, and signaled to the mechanic to warm it. They hastened out for themselves in caps and goggles. Fareton gestured Stevens into the fore cock-pit. Into the rear one he climbed himself. Before the motor caught, Stevens turned to demand:

“Farry, what’s on your mind?”

“We’re going after Twombly the fastest way possible!”

“But what can we do now?”

“If there’s anything special to be done, little man, I’ll do it. You keep your hand on the stick and do as I say!” Then came a word like an explosion: “Wait!”

He poised thoughtfully, then leaped to the ground. Running straightly for his tent, he ducked under the flap. In the plane Stevens fidgeted anxiously. No matter what could or could not be done, every second was precious now. In a moment Fareton dodged out of the tent again, ran back to the plane, and legged into the rear cock-pit.

Stevens froze his eyes to the controls.

K-k-rrrrrr!

Combined with the staccato notes of the motor came the ground rumble of the ship as it taxied around and nosed into the wind. Then with a gentle tilt the D.H. was skimming over the fence and fast leaving the patchwork of tents and hangar roofs below.

Stevens paralleled into the usual trail of the afternoon patrol to Bitter Creek. At two thousand feet Fareton’s eyes scanned the ground below, spotted, clumped with mesquite, the band of the Rio Grand curling across it. Scudding southward and northward at intervals, the ship went up to five thousand feet as the search went on. Then Stevens waved toward the northeast, where a plane was spinning evenly along toward them.

For minutes Fareton eyed the plane, half believing

it an illusion. It was, however, real. As it came closer, Fareton saw that it was navigating uncertainly. It swerved and veered, and was not maneuvering in a usual manner. It seemed out of control.

Stevens glanced back and through the glass of the goggles. Fareton saw the horror in his eyes.

The plane, they knew, was running itself. No hand was on the controls! They knew that a ship which is accurately aligned and balanced will, if it is driven at the correct speed, fly on by itself so long as the air is smooth and the gas holds out. Both men realized that Twombly, feeling the drowsiness coming upon him, had set the controls to this nice adjustment. As they arched up they could see Twombly in the pit of the other ship, head hanging forward, but, even in sleep, braced back to keep himself from unconsciously pushing against the stick and so driving himself to death on the earth below. The credit for his still being in the sky was due to mechanical perfection and the grace of God.

The self-flying plane passed them, and Stevens banked to the left to chase it. When he leveled off Fareton bent forward, tapped Stevens' shoulder and signaled that he had something to say. Stevens throttled back and let the plane mush out into a glide.

"Porky, how long will Twombly sleep?"

"Hours!"

"Thought so! There's only one thing can be done. I've got to get onto his plane."

"What! You're crazy! You're no wing-walker. You couldn't do it. You've got too much imagination. You'd slip off—and we're up six thousand."

"Under the circumstances, you're doing what I say! Listen to me! I've got to land on Twombly's tail. Give her the gun!"

The motor roared again. Stevens banked right and carefully crowded his plane closer to that of the free-flying D.H. As the two planes straightened out, Fareton divested himself of his jacket and climbed out of the rear cockpit.

More than a mile down, the crust of the earth was rocking giddily, floating on the sea of eternity. Hanging onto the struts and wires as he went, Fareton toed outward on the wing until he was hanging at the verge of space, at the tip of the wing.

Stevens, his face a pasty white beneath the leather

of his goggles, complied. He caught Fareton's signal to close in.

The checkboard of the earth was careening. The fragile bodies of the planes and their death-flashing propellers were appallingly close together. A wind racing at more than a hundred miles an hour tore at Fareton.

Still Fareton kept his eyes on the tail of the loose plane as it swung closer. Sometimes many feet, sometimes only a few, separated the wing of the one plane from the tail of the other, while Fareton's leg stretched out, waiting for his chance.

In the cockpit Stevens gazed on it all as in a dream. A shaky move, a sloppy adjustment, a turn-out at the wrong instant and Fareton would go hurtling a mile down to death. Soon after Twombly's plane would also crash. Delicately Stevens moved the controls, and the planes weaved closer—while Fareton waited, leg outstretched.

Then a moment came when the tail of Twombly's ship leveled with the wing which was carrying Fareton; and Fareton swung out. Both his feet left the wing. His hands still clung to the strut. Stevens grew frigid. The under plane bumped. Fareton all but dangled. Stevens gently swung over; and Fareton whirled off, falling astride the tail and punching his fingers through the linen for a hold.

Stevens frantically banked his plane away.

Fareton crawled rapidly up the tail of Twombly's crate, and fell inside the cockpit. Sitting on Twombly's lap, grotesquely high, he shot on the gas and the plane bored ahead steadily.

As Stevens arched to the other plane's level, Fareton waved broadly to him.

"Get out of the way!" this gesture plainly said. "Go back home!"

Stevens was too shaken to question. Gladly he complied; he banked right and bee-lined.

As Twombly's plane eased down again, Fareton strove to get himself in a position whereby he could work the stick more easily. Having done this he tried to arouse Twombly. But Twombly was not to be aroused. The man was as though dead.

Fareton leveled off again and headed into the wind.

Fareton's compass straightened him. By the time he had found the bearings for the plane, Stevens' own

D.H. was almost out of sight. Taking it easy, Fareton throttled back.

Now an avalanche of emotion, in contrast with his coldness of a few moments back, came upon him. He shuddered, air-sick for the first time. He had never done a plane-change stunt before in his life and he had no desire to repeat it. His one wish, now that he was steadied again, was to get back to his tent and take a rest.

The ironic thought struck him that perhaps, if the man could be revived, Twombly could keep that dinner date with Miss Juliet after all!

He heard, close behind him, suddenly, the drone of another motor merging into the whirr of his own ship. He glanced back—and the blood in his veins became as ice.

In the rear cockpit of the ship which was streaming straight toward him a leather-encased head was rising; and the bore of the machine-gun was leveling straight at him.

P-p-pr-rrrrrr!

WITH INSANE suddenness, even before the rattle broke out, Fareton dove. The earth tilted straight up before the nose of his plane. Through the haze he saw the Rio Grande full ahead! Fareton braced himself madly upon every possible support; he was loose in the cock-pit, without a strap, without a parachute! Downward he went like a shot, until he skimmed off to the south, banked east steeply, and climbed directly below the other plane.

Some of the bullets had penetrated the fuselage in the rear. Luckily the propeller was unhit; one bullet would have splintered it. Twombly was untouched; Fareton's fast drop had saved them both.

Pr-r-r-rrr!

Again a parade of steel-jacketed bullets raced across space at Fareton. He heard the slugs rip through the linen. Madly he stomped on the gas and drove the D.H. upward at a steeper angle.

Fareton knew that if he kept close under the other plane, the machine gun operator could not reach him. The barrel could not drop many degrees below the cowling of the pit. The other plane swerved and veered to get at Fareton, but Fareton, keeping his eyes always on it, duplicated its every move. His life

depended on keeping the bottom of the other plane close above him.

This was a strange game of hide-and-seek with Death in the sky!

The gun-bearing plane swooped, and Fareton swooped likewise. Then the Mexican plane leveled off and Fareton, like a pilot fish on a shark, followed.

"I see! You're trying to make me ease up—think you'll catch me napping, eh? You babies have got something coming you're not expecting!"

His hand dove into his pocket and brought out something black and pear-shaped. It was his precious souvenir hand-grenade, the one which he had forgotten, that memorable time in No Man's Land, to bite off, which had knocked the Boche out cold! On a wild notion, Fareton had run back to fish it out of his box of mementoes, just before taking off the field, on a wild chance that he might need it. Now he gripped it tightly.

He inclined his plane straight up at the other. Directly under it and very close he put the hand-grenade to his mouth, bit it off, and tossed it upward. At the same instant he dove, and the earth swung again before his eyes.

The shock of the explosion shook his own plane. Dimly Fareton saw flashing fragments streaking across his field of vision. The sudden push in the air made one of the wings of his ship crackle and the linen rip slightly.

In answer to Fareton's prayer, the linen held as he put the sky back where it belonged. The ground was very close again now. Then—

Ka-iveeeeeeee!

Another short crash, and the Lincoln motor screamed out like a dying thing.

"Propeller's gone!"

A weighty fragment from the other plane had struck it and splintered it

Desperately Fareton tried to glide down the remaining distance. He gave one glance at Twombly—still asleep. He shot a look toward the one right wing, which was crumbling. And then, all at once, Fareton passed from daylight into a darkness which seemed to reach into the depths of his soul.

He was glad, for he was tired. He thought, as he fell, that he would like to have a cup of tea.

FARETON HEARD Porky Stevens talking, and feminine voices answered. He blinked, but could see nothing. And at that instant something warm trickled between his lips. He almost choked. It was tea!

He opened his eyes again, determined to see. On the other bed lay Twombly, patched with plaster, and at his side Miss Juliet Horder was giving him tea in a spoon. Fareton's eyes turned puzzledly to the girl sitting on the edge of his own bed.

The girl's blue eyes were straight into his. She was almost the double of Miss Juliet; except that she was prettier. Yes, bewitching as Julie was, this girl possessed an even more exquisite charm. As Fareton stared, he gulped down another spoonful of the tea which she was giving him.

"Also," Porky Stevens was saying, irrelevently, "Minnie is coming all the way from Tulsa to see me, right away."

Fareton said bluntly, "Who're you?"

"Mariet—Julie's sister. I just came in on the train today, for a visit—indefinitely."

Fareton swallowed more tea. "Do you ever serve tea—at home? You do? Well, may I come up, please—if I promise not to tell you about the time when I forgot to bite off a hand-grenade and saved it, and took it along up there just on the chance I might need it, and—Go-osh! I'm telling you already. Well, if I promise not to—"

"You may come to tea," Mariet said, "if you promise to tell me every detail of it." Her smile was dazzling. "You see," she added, "I'm a newspaper feature writer, and that's copy."

Fareton sank back contentedly. Then he blinked worriedly. He looked at Stevens.

"Porky!" he exclaimed. "Did you remember to bring back a piece of that machine gun for me—as a souvenir?"

