



FLY 'EM COWBOY

by ROBERT J. HOGAN

With the wings of a plane, or the bullets of a six-gun, Smoke Wade could cut circles around his enemy.

SMOKE WADE, son of the Arizona plains, shifted his six feet two of sinewy brawn to carry the weight of the heavy old Western six-gun, where it hung low on his right leg. He gave the worn cartridge belt a hitch to make it sit more comfortably.

Slowly, deliberately, he twisted his head round, with a grin curling his thin lips. His keen gray eyes glanced down at his broad left shoulder, on which was pinned the single silver bar of a first lieutenant.

“Reckon you’ll be hitched double ‘fore long,” he drawled, half aloud. “It’s goin’ to cost me a thousand francs, too, but that’s no more than fair to the old man. Old Colonel McGill’s a right fine loser. Couldn’t hardly take his money that a way when he was so darn decent about it. Yes, sir, bein’ made captain’ll be worth the thousand.”

His head, twisted round as it was, faced the pinto Spad against which he leaned. His eyes focused on it. They took in the spotted markings of the ship—his

ship—painted just like his pinto pony back at the ranch.

“Yes, sir, Jake. Your namesake would be right proud, I reckon, if he could see you. Got the markin’s about as close as a locoed sign painter could make ‘em.”

Smoke Wade fingered a roll of franc notes in his breeches meditatively. He’d taken in about every one at the field with his inveterate betting. A bird in from Toul, which had been Wade’s last stopping place, had wisened the gang at the new field that Smoke Wade had been transferred because he had sent the colonel at Toul to the cleaners—mighty near taken the shirt off his back. And the colonel had got rid of him at the first opportunity.

“Yes, sir, Jake.” Wade’s hand caressed the headrest of his pinto Spad. “You’re a good pal. Ain’t let me down, and I know you ain’t agoin’ to. Only thing I got against you. you ornery little cuss, you can’t come nuzzlin’ around like my pinto back home. You don’t like sugar nohow.”

The steady drone of Hissos in the distance shook him from his dreams. He shifted his gaze from the pinto Spad to a flight of ships far to the southwest. He watched them intently as they carne nearer.

Spads. Seven of them.

“Now, I wonder—” he drawled to himself. He grinned in that slow smile of anticipation as they came nearer.

The flight thundered over the field, curled up on its cars at the end, and came slamming down into the wind. A short bounce, a jerky roll, and they had landed. Strung out across the field, they taxied toward the dead line near where Wade was standing by his ship.

He watched them intently as they climbed out. He studied the various members of the flight speculatively.

Experienced pilots all of them. Must be the flight from Colombey-Les-Belles he’d heard was being transferred to the new field.

A slight, cocky little chap, the leader, swaggered toward Wade. The others followed. The eyes of the flight leader swept the field and buildings. He took in the unfinished surface of the ground and several hangars which were still in the process of construction.

He was coming nearer to Wade. Going past.

Smoke moved a little way from his Spad. His right hand held the six-gun. His left an oil can. Without apparent notice of the pilots, he tossed the can into the air and deliberately took aim.

“This is a hell of a reception,” snapped the

swaggering leader. “Looks like the lost city to me—the one they never finished.”

Boom! Wade’s six-gun blazed in the general direction of the can. The leader was going on, paying not the slightest attention to him. The can plunked to the tarmac.

“We’d ‘a’ had the band and the mayor, out for you,” drawled Wade as he walked out to retrieve the can, “but the mayor stole the horns and hid ‘em, and he’s in jail and won’t tell us where they are.”

Again the can zoomed into the air, curving in a low arc.

Boom! The old six-gun barked once more in the general direction of the can, missed, and the can dropped with a clunk.

AT THE sound of the drawling voice the leader whirled and surveyed the broad back of Smoke Wade, who had stopped once more to pick up the can. His eyes took in the six foot two of the Westerner and the empty holster at his side. He burst into a loud, derisive laugh.

“Say,” he chirped, “I’ll bet you’re trying to make me believe you can’t hit that thing. Listen, Buffalo Bill, that trick’s so old it’s got whiskers. First time I saw that one I tipped over the cradle.”

“No trick to it.” Wade was becoming desperate. The fish weren’t biting so well to-day. “You either hit it or you don’t.”

“Show that one to Shakespeare.” The cocky little leader was laughing. “He might take you on.”

The flight walked on toward headquarters building. Smoke watched them go out of the corner of his eye; picked up the can and, slipping the gun back into its holster, walked toward his ship.

“Got kind of a poor hand at that matinee,” he said and grinned. He poked the can into the cockpit. “Oh, well. Some people are harder to please than others. Fish ain’t runnin’ so good. Must be somebody down the stream feedin’ ‘em, eh, Jake? Maybe some other day they’ll be hungrier.”

A figure was coming toward him from the long, low shed that served as a barracks. Brant, leader of Wade’s flight, was grinning broadly.

“That rings one up against you, Smoke,” he laughed. “Just because I was a sucker and bit, isn’t any sign the next guy will.”

Smoke grinned down at him. “Oh, he’ll come round in time. Must be he’s been readin’ Western novels lately. I’ll ride that critter before I finish.”

"If you do, you'll have to play in big money," advised Brant. "That's Stetson. You know who he is. His old man makes soup. Stetson soups."

Wade's grin broadened. Here was his meat.

"Reckon I've opened plenty of cans of his tomato soup out on the range. Keeps, you from getting thirsty. So that's young Stetson. I've heard of him."

"Yeah, and I'll bet he'll hear more of you before he's through," ventured Brant. "He's the lousiest guy with dough on the front. I hear his old man gives him an allowance of a thousand bucks a week. He rolls in it."

Wade did a bit of lightning calculation. A thousand bucks a week. That would be about five thousand francs a week. Five thousand francs a week! His eyes lighted with anticipation. A guy with as much money as that couldn't have all the brains in the world.

"Yes, I reckon he'll hear from me, if he stays around a while." To say Smoke was pleased would be putting it mildly. He was tickled to death.

"By the way," went on Brant. "Replacements are in. Rotten luck losing the rest of the flight yesterday. Come on over and take a look at them. Nice kids, but that's all you can say about them. It'll be tough on them."

Wade's expression changed in a flash. He sauntered toward the barracks beside Brant.

"Reckon it'll be tough on 'em, all right."

HE STARED into each of the five eager faces before him, nodding acknowledgment of the introductions. Just kids. Brant had been right.

Four faces had that tense, eager look of the replacement on his first arrival at the front. One, Quinn by name, stared fixedly, sadly, at a crack in the floor just ahead of him. There was something about Quinn that made him different. Smoke Wade liked the kid. Felt sorrier for him than the rest. He seemed to know, to understand more what it was all about.

"We go out on patrol in an hour," Brant was telling them. "Be on the line ten minutes beforehand. I'll have something to say to you about the flight." Then to Wade: "Stetson's flight is going along, too. They're all experienced men. Colonel McGill thought it would be safer with five new men in our flight."

At the word "safer," Wade saw the four replacements flinch. But Quinn, as though he had not heard, stood studying that crack in the floor. It seemed he hardly realized anything that went on about him. His mind seemed miles away.

"Ruck up, old son," encouraged Wade as he passed

Quinn on the way to his pinto Spad an hour later. "Ain't as bad as it might be. Keep the old lip stiff and you'll get by."

Quinn forced a grin of gratitude for the encouragement. But his eyes were still focused on things far away. Thousands of miles. Maybe the kid was homesick. Wade wondered whether that was it.

Motors blasted deafeningly. The two flights of Spads took the air in two separate Vs. Stetson's flight hovered over the flight below where Brant flew point and Wade right tip. It was up to the older pilots to bring the green replacements back safely.

Up over the front they romped in those two wedges of seven each. Trenches wound back and forth, far below, like the tracks of night crawlers after a heavy rain. Wade glanced over at Quinn, who flew just before him. He was making a good showing with his flying. But, somehow, there didn't seem to be much interest in the way he handled his crate.

Smoke Wade suddenly sat up with a start. His trained eyes had sighted an enemy flight. It was far off yet, but coming in their general direction. Five Fokkers drifting along, oblivious to the two flights of Spads hidden up there in the sun.

Brant was wagging his wings. They were going to attack. Wade got Quinn's eye as he twisted round in his seat. He grinned and nodded to reassure him. He'd picked Quinn as his charge. Smoke would be protecting him in the fight if he got into a jam.

Down, down, the fourteen Spads hurled themselves at the unsuspecting Fokkers.

Then the leader of the enemy flight saw them for the first time. In a flash the five Fokkers broke formation and whirled to the dog fight

Wade saw the ship of the leader. An orange-nosed Fokker. That would be Wolfe. Wolfe and his flying demons were out raiding. He'd rather it had been almost any one else than Wolfe. He was a bad man with his guns and a wonder at the stick. Wolfe, the super German ace.

Wolfe veered to the south as the two flights thundered down. At first glance Wade jumped at the conclusion that he was going to break and run. Then, in a flash, he changed his mind. He should have known better. Wolfe had guts. He didn't run from anything. He wasn't running now. He was merely heading south to cut off the retreat of any members of the flight who might decide to take sudden leave.

The fourteen Spads broke their formation now. Each picked an opponent, two or three to one, and

hurled down to get him. Stetson had kicked over in a sharp turn, and was slamming down in the direction of Wolfe. The rest of Wolfe's pack were trying to protect their leader while Spads hurled down on their tails.

LIKE a flash, Wolfe flipped over, rolled, and came tearing at Stetson. Wade was hugging Quinn tight. The odds were in their favor. The rest of the gang could take care of themselves. There were enough of the old pilots to protect the other four replacements. Quinn was his man.

Quinn took a hasty look around and dived out of the fight on sudden impulse. Wade followed. Then he saw Wolfe racing down, with Spandaus belching death, and his tracers were fluffing thick about that crate of Stetson's.

Stetson yanked out for an instant, whirled, and darted out of range of Wolfe. Again Wolfe took after him, but Stetson had had the fight taken out of him in that first Spandau burst. Its music wasn't to his liking.

Wolfe circled far to the south now. Stetson had left, was racing for home. Quinn dived on toward his lines. He seemed blind to the fact that Wolfe was directly in front of him, coming like an angry butcher straight for him.

Wade hit the gun a vicious crack. His pinto Spad leaped forward. He yanked the nose higher than the line of flight taken by Quinn, and began to climb above him.

The two ships—the Fokker and the new Spad—were howling at each other like wild bulls in mortal combat. Wade watched Quinn anxiously. He was sure that Quinn saw Wolfe tearing at him. "Why, then, didn't he swerve? But maybe the kid knew what he was doing, just the same.

Higher up and hanging over the two now, Wade saw them come almost close enough to crash. Then, like a meteor, he plunged—straight for the cockpit of that roaring Fokker of Wolfe's. He knew Wolfe's trick. Had seen it worked. He had heard about pilots who had died at the hand of that flashing enemy ace. It was an old trick of the Germans. One that seldom failed.

Coming head on like that, it was almost impossible to get in an effective burst at the pilot. The engine might be stopped, the prop shattered, but the pilot would probably live to get down safely. Wolfe was waiting for Quinn to swerve in his course. He could then get a burst into some vital spot of the cockpit as Quinn turned.

Bam! Spandaus ripped out with a short burst. Quinn had turned. But the Jerry ace was too late, for once in his life. Quinn had pulled straight up, his landing gear almost ripping through the whirling prop of the ace. And Wolfe had let go with his burst as he yanked his Fokker up to follow that blind spot under the cockpit from below.

But the instant that Wolfe's hand pressed his Spandau trips a huge form hurtled at him from straight up. He had not reckoned with this. He must dive again or crash that mad, diving pinto Spad.

He swerved sharply. Tracers cut their dots of drumming death through the rear of Quinn's fuselage, missed the cockpit by inches. But missed. With a desperate signal, Wade yanked out, motioning Quinn to follow. Together they ripped on back toward the lines before Wolfe had recovered sufficiently to follow.

STETSON was already at the field when they arrived. He had cut out cold, and left his flight to take care of themselves after Wolfe had given him a good wetting with Spandau rain. But, as he ran, he had seen Quinn tearing down at the famous Jerry ace.

"Hey, you," he demanded as Quinn climbed from his Spad. "They ought to appoint some one your keeper. What were you trying to do, commit suicide? Don't you know that ship of Wolfe's?"

"Quinn's got a keeper," drawled Smoke. "I appointed myself as his bodyguard. Got any objections?"

Stetson laughed derisively.

"Suit yourself, cowboy," he returned. "It's your neck. But not for mine, thank you. Any time you find me playing wet nurse to a damn fool that thinks he's going to get the ace of this sector, there'll be saints in hell."

"You'll probably be there to see 'em come in." drawled Wade.

"Yeah," came from Stetson. "Well, listen, old six-gun. I've got six Jerries to my credit, and I haven't been shot down yet. I'll bet that's more than your record shows."

"Sure," grinned Smoke. "They just naturally heard you were comin', and went out and shot themselves. Couldn't stand the strain." His eyes lighted suddenly with recollection of Stetson's words. "What was that crack I just heard you make about a bet?"

Stetson shook his head. "Just a manner of speaking," he answered, backing down. "I don't know anything about your record. You've been trying to get me to bet with you on something, haven't you, old

six-gun. Well, go bark up some other tree, see. I'm a wise guy. It's got to be a real bet before I'll lay out any money."

"Sure miff," said Wade. "I knew I'd heard of you before. You're the coyote that only bets on sure things, ain't you? Yes, sir, I reckon I've heard of you plenty before now. Well, maybe one of these days I'll be able to figure out a sure bet for you. I'm getting' lousy with franc notes right about now, and before long I may get tired of carryin' 'em around and decide to let some of 'em go easy. I'll be thinking' of you, son, about then."

"And don't forget I'll be waiting' to take you on, old six-gun, when you get that way," Stetson said, grinning at him. "In the meantime, keep an eye on your boy friend here. He looks to me as though he hasn't got his mind on his work."

"Yep." Smoke gave Quinn a playful shove. "I reckon I'll be keepin' an eye on him. Don't let it worry you none."

Then when Smoke and Quinn were alone, he turned to the younger man.

"What's bitten' you, son?" Smoke asked in a kindly voice of the youngster beside him.

Quinn did not answer for a long time. He stared fixedly, sadly, into space.

"You can trust me," urged Wade. "I know you're O.K., but somethin's got under your skin. I noticed when I first met you this mornin'. Get it off your system. Maybe I can fix your saddle so the ridin'll come easier to you."

"I don't know whether you'd understand." Quinn was hesitant. "I don't want any of the gang to think I'm a sob sister. It would kind of make me feel better to tell somebody, though. Did you ever have a mother, Wade?"

"Bet I did, son." Wade's voice was soft. "Best mother that ever lived. Reckon she worked herself to death. There was a big family of us. Dad, he died when I was a kid. Shot by some hombre. Never did find out who. Yes, sir, son. I had a right fine mother. The best. Is that what worries you?"

Quinn nodded. His eyes were on the ground ahead of him.

"I come from a big family, too. Guess that's what's kept father from getting ahead faster. I'm the oldest. He worked like a Negro to give all us kids a good education. Mother has, too. Skimped and saved so we could have a good start. Mother's sick now. She needs an operation. Needs it bad. Dad wrote that unless she has it, the doctor says she won't live more than a year."

Wade's big hand slapped him on the back. He grinned happily at the kid.

"And you haven't got the money to see your mother through," he laughed. "That's it, isn't it? Well, son, listen to this. I got about three thousand francs on me, besides a thousand I'm savin' to pay a bet with. You're mighty welcome to it, Quinn, and you don't have to pay me back. I don't get near the kick out of spendin' money that I do takin' it away from some of these wise hombres. I'd like right well for you to take it and see mother through."

Quinn shook his head sadly, but with determination.

"I wouldn't take it, Wade. I guess maybe I'm too proud or something. But, anyway, it wouldn't do much good. The operation that mother needs will cost about fifteen hundred dollars, with the hospital bills and all. But, thanks for your offer—and for listening to me. I do feel better to sort of get it off my chest."

He rose to leave, and Wade let him go. He wanted to be alone. What funny circumstances there were in this world. Here was a young kid who needed money to save his mother. And too proud to take it as a gift. And Stetson lousy with it, and no inclination to part with it.

Smoke Wade went into conference with himself. For a full hour he sat with his head in his hands, trying frantically to figure a way out. Why, the chances were, the kid hadn't seen Wolfe tearing at him until it was almost too late. The kid had guts. He was there. But as long as he had that worry on his mind, he'd be a liability to the flight. Then, too, he liked the kid. Reminded him a lot of that little blond brother of his. The weak one. Chuck had been dead three years now.

WADE arrived at mess late. He did it with a definite purpose in mind. He had finally figured out a solution to the problem. A desperate one. But one that might work. It would have to work.

He hesitated at the door of the mess. Through the opening came the cocky voice of Stetson, above the drone of other voices.

"You're crazy, Quinn," he was saying "Trying to get Wolfe on your first trip over. Why even good pilots like me don't get a crack at him. He's too good. He'll be pushing Fokkers over the front when guys like you are six feet under."

"I reckon I'll have to disagree with you, Stetson." Smoke Wade stood filling the doorway with his bulk. Every man at mess turned. Stetson fairly spun round to meet his steady gaze.

"Well, I'll be damned," he barked, "if it isn't old six-gun himself. As I live. And disagreeing with somebody. I suppose you think this guy Quinn is going to go out this afternoon and come back, leading Wolfe with a rope around his neck."

"Yep," said Wade, and that was all. Stetson stared at him in astonishment. Then he burst into loud, derisive laughter.

"Wade," he cackled, "you're just as crazy as this guy Quinn. I thought you had more sense."

"Seems to me I heard you sayin' somethin' about likin' sure bets." Wade was sauntering across the mess to Stetson's table. "Well, maybe you wouldn't have the guts to take a sure bet if it was offered to you. I'll leave it up to the rest of the gang here as to whether this bet is a dead cinch or not."

A hush fell over the room. Pilots left their seats and crept noiselessly within the range of the two voices. Stetson's grin froze on his face.

"I'll bet you three thousand francs against fifteen thousand," said Wade, "that Quinn can go out this afternoon before sundown, and bring your friend Wolfe in alive—then land him here right at this field. How about it—or maybe your guts are lettin' you down?"

Every pilot in the room stared at Wade with mingled sorrow and astonishment. It was the maddest wager that had been laid at the front during the War. It would have been bad enough to make a bet that a green replacement from Issoudon could go out and shoot down the famous German ace on a certain afternoon. But to bet that he could go out and bring him in to the field alive was too much.

Stetson leaped to his feet with a delighted cry.

"I'll take that bet, Wade. Any man that's damn fool enough to make a bet like that deserves to lose. I'll take it, and I don't mind telling you that it's the surest bet I've ever made, and, brother, I've made a lot of them"

"You're all witnesses to the bet," drawled Smoke. From the tone of his voice he might have just placed a bet of a quarter that it wouldn't rain for the next week.

Quinn was on his feet, standing before him. His face was white, but not from fear.

"You can't do that for me," he begged. "Why, you'll lose sure. How can—"

Wade grinned down at him. He placed a big hand over Quinn's mouth.

"Come on out, son," he drawled, "I reckon we got a conference on important business."

Then, outside, he spoke again. "Now here's the dope. You leave everything up to me, son. I've got this

thing doped out and I know it'll work. It's got to work. Your mother, she don't know nothin' about this here arrangement, but she'll be waitin' for you when you come back with this Wolfe feller. Just you remember everything I tell you, and you'll be all right. I got to go now. Got a little business trip to make before this here stunt comes off. Wait for me at the hangar. And, remember, we split this bet fifty-fifty, if you win."

WADE busied himself with the writing of a note just before he took off in his pinto Spad. When he had finished, he sat back and ran his eyes across the sheet.

To the greatest ace four-flusher at the front—Hauptman Wolfe. A great record you've made for yourself—with your hound dogs driving one of our planes into your lap so you can get an easy shot. No wonder you have a long record of victories. Maybe you got your ideas of fighting from the wild-boar hunts in your country where the hunter sits on a log and lets his dogs drive the poor critter right up to the end of his gun. You wouldn't have the guts to fight our newest pilot within gliding range of our field if you didn't have your pack along to protect you in case you got in trouble.

"There," Smoke said, grinning. "Sorry I got to call Wolfe names and tell a pack of lies about him. He's got plenty of guts. But business is business."

He folded the slip of paper, slipped it into his pocket, and climbed into his warming pinto Spad. He took his course straight for the enemy airdrome, where the famous ace was stationed. It would still be dinner time when he arrived there. Most of the men would be at mess, drinking their beer and eating *sauerbraten*.

Down over the building he dived, like the mill tails of hell. His Hisso screamed in a high key as it hurled the pinto Spad down on the quiet airdrome, while the great ace sat with the rest of his brood at mess.

Their first warning of an enemy's presence was the rattle of Vickers fire—the thud of the steel slugs as they drummed on the roof above their heads—the clink of china that flew into bits on the table before them.

Suddenly the airdrome fairly swarmed with pilots in gray. They ran like mad toward their ships on the line. But they were cold. They would have to be warmed first.

Down over the line of ships Wade tore, with his voice screaming the old cowman's cattle call of the ranges.

"Yip-yip-yi-yi-yip-yiiii!"

Vickers snorted in one continuous rain of hellish fire. Machine guns from the ground batteries answered with their slightly slower staccato. And Smoke Wade wriggled and twisted like a wild man through their hail.

One pilot raced toward an orange-nosed Fokker. That would be Wolfe. Smoke had just romped over his ship. Now he turned in his seat like a flash.

His six-gun was out in a hand that was steady—firm. His Vickers were headed the other way, until he turned the pinto Spad again. Wolfe would make it.

With a bloodcurdling yell in high falsetto, Smoke let go with his six-gun. Earth spouted about Wolfe as he ran. It cut a circle neatly around him.

He stopped with a start and turned back. But an instant too late. As he raced for the cover of the hangar, Wade snarled down on him once more. This time his Vickers spouted clods of earth in front of the great ace. Wolfe was running around in a crazy circle.

Smoke's hand flashed from the cockpit, and an instant later a white, folded slip of paper dropped at the feet of Wolfe. Smoke waited an instant to be sure he had found it; then, with a grin of delight, he kicked over and raced for home as the first Fokker roared unsteadily into the air.

BACK at the home field he was out of the ship at a bound. Quinn, white-faced with fear for his safety, came running to meet him. Stetson and his whole flight were there, too. Then Wade suddenly noticed that the whole field had literally declared a holiday.

"In here." Wade motioned Quinn into the hangar where his ship was kept.

From the cabinet he took a length of aerial cable with the usual lead fish—a weight shaped like a fish, and used to hang from one end of an aerial cable to keep it from trailing out behind. His right hand drew forth a sheet of heavy armor plate from beside a workbench

"Got a lot of work to do, son," he grinned. "But it's goin' to work. We're having company for supper."

The two worked feverishly. The armor plate was laid along the bottom of the floor of Quinn's Spad. It was fastened down securely with heavy screws. That would give him plenty of protection from Spandau bullets from the blind spot. Quinn was light. The Spad would carry the added weight of the plate without trouble

The aerial wire was attached to the under part of

the fuselage. It hung down from the ship, with the lead fish at the other end of the fifty-foot cable.

The throbbing drone of a Mercedes came to them as they finished their work. Racing outside, they saw men running for cover. The Fokker swooped low. As it roared past the hangar, a white slip of paper dashed out in the slip stream of the prop and floated to the ground. Smoke had it and was reading it eagerly as the Fokker pulled a chandelle at the end of the field and climbed.

"Just like I hoped he'd do," he grinned, handing the note to Quinn, who stood beside him, trembling with excitement.

Hauptman Wolfe will he proud to meet not the poorest pilot at the field, but the two best above the field at two o'clock.

That was all it said. Quinn glanced at his wrist watch. A half hour more.

"And there isn't a fit place to crash in within ten miles of this field," drawled Wade excitedly. "Well, it looks as though you and I are the two best pilots at the field, son, because that lets me go up with you. He fell for the thing like I hoped he would. Now, listen—"

Wade laid out his plan in detail. Quinn listened eagerly. His eyes had no vacant stare now. His mind was here. At the field. In the sky. His mother would have that chance. He would make good for her.

"You fellers just pick out your seats for the show," drawled Smoke, as mechanics and pilots, clustered about the two central figures. "Ought to charge for this show. Better than any fight you ever saw. Wolfe'll be over directly."

"That"—Smoke grinned triumphantly, as he saw Stetson looking at the aerial with the fish—"that there is a sort of invention of mine. Quinn's not only goin' to bring Wolfe in alive, but he's going to send him wireless messages and tell him how he's goin' to do it."

"Hm-m-m," muttered Stetson. He didn't have anything to say now. He still didn't know how this thing was going to work. But he was beginning to have his doubts as to the certainty of this bet he had placed. There was something about Wade's sureness that made him sorry he had done it, in spite of his good judgment.

A Fokker, orange-nosed and alone, droned out of the north. It came nearer. Smoke had said something to Stetson just before he had climbed into his pinto Spad. And Stetson had nodded back his agreement angrily.

HIGH above, the two planes circled aimlessly. Wade's pinto Spad could be seen some distance above the new one of Quinn. The orange-nosed Fokker came nearer and nearer. Grew large on the horizon. It was alone. Wolfe had been as good as his word.

Colonel McGill had come rushing out to the tarmac at the sound of the two ships taking the air. His face was a mask of hope and fear. Still, he had learned, by past experience, to have the utmost confidence in Smoke Wade's ability, not only as a pilot, but as a concocter of seeming impossibilities that somehow worked out satisfactorily in the end.

"Better get those Spads warmed," he ordered to several flights. "I don't like the looks of those clouds up there. They may be full of Fokkers, for all we know. Best to be ready."

The orange-nosed Fokker snarled out of the north. Straight at Quinn's ship he flew. And Quinn, never wavering a fraction of an inch, held his course head on at Wolfe. Smoke Wade still hung high above, as though he was merely up there to get a closer view of the coming fight.

Men on the ground, hundreds of them now, stared open-mouthed as they watched. Nails cut deep into the palms of hands as the two ships came hurtling toward each other. And the fish at the end of the aerial cable dragged back, slightly in the slip stream of Quinn's racing Spad, but hanging fifty feet below the dead spot.

"Gad," muttered Colonel McGill breathlessly. Then, again: "Gad."

It seemed for an instant that the two planes would crash head on. Suddenly there was movement of the flippers on Quinn's plane. His Spad pulled out of the race in a sharp zoom and screamed upward.

"Look," cried the colonel. "Gad, he's got Quinn. Damn such—"

Spandau tracers could plainly be seen snorting from the muzzles of those death dealers over the orange nose. They tore at the under side of Quinn's cockpit. And drummed harmlessly against the armor plate.

The two planes, the orange Fokker and the new Spad, seemed to be climbing straight up. Then there came a rending crash as the fish at the end of Quinn's line slashed into the whirling prop before the orange nose. There was a sudden scream, as though of pain, while the Mercedes raced wildly, with out any load to hold down its speed. Then, sudden silence. Wolfe, in desperation, had cut the switch to save the powerful motor from blowing up in his lap.

Wade dived in close, while Quinn flipped over and bore down on the tail of the hapless enemy ace. He came spiraling down in great circles to kill his speed. His eyes searched hopelessly for some other place in which to set down his orange-nosed Fokker. But there was none. None but that Allied flying field below, where hundreds of men in khaki stood waiting to see a famous German ace, face to face as he landed.

LOWER and lower he swung, while now and then a short burst from the Vickers behind him went wide, but reminded him of Quinn's presence. His wheels touched the field and rolled. And out of the blue, Smoke Wade came slamming down beside him. The old six-gun was in his hand, but he wore a grin that wrinkled, the leathery complexion of his good-natured face.

His great hands frisked the German ace like a flash, recovered a Luger and slipped it into his own pocket.

"Mighty fine of you to come over this afternoon," he drawled. "Wolfe, I'm right sorry for the nasty things I said about you. But I had to get you mad or you wouldn't have come. We're pitchin' a party to-night in your honor, Wolfe, and it seemed sort of too bad for you not to be here."

Hauptman Wolfe was smiling a bit, in spite of his capture. He was a prisoner of war now, and there was nothing to do but make the best of it.

"I accept your apologies," he said. There was relief in his face. It had hurt to think that even the enemy thought him the rank coward that Wade's note had suggested. "And my congratulations." He held out his hand to Quinn. "It was the cleverest trick I have ever seen."

Men clustered about Wolfe. He was a prisoner of war, but from the reception he was getting, he might have been the Prince of Wales. One man in the wild crowd was not so pleased. That man was Stetson. Smoke Wade, with the colonel by his side, was walking past.

"I'll be back to collect that fifteen thousand francs directly," Smoke drawled as he went by. "I'll be wantin' it, so better have it ready."

Stetson did not answer by word. He nodded dumbly, as though he could not yet believe what he had seen.

"Wade," smiled Colonel McGill. "you're a wonder. Cleverest thing I ever saw. And now I've got a surprise for you in my office."

He smiled as he shoved some official papers across the desk at Wade.

“Your captaincy,” he beamed. “I’ll make official announcement now that you are my new squadron commander.”

Wade was fingering a roll of franc notes—counting them out on the desk. He grinned as he shoved a thousand francs across to Colonel McGill.

“And right well worth the loss of the bet,” he drawled.

“That makes us even again,” smiled the colonel, “and if you don’t mind—captain—I’ll be more careful about my betting from now on.”

Wade chuckled. “That may make you even, colonel, but it makes me more than that. Just before I took off I got Stetson mad enough to bet a thousand francs against my next month’s pay that I wouldn’t be a captain in two weeks.”