



# ACES AND BOSES

by C. M. MILLER

*No Vandyke-bearded, college-prof cadet was going to tell Bull McGrady which way his propeller was turning—for Bull was head man of the Peppermints, and no mistake! "Those whiskers," he told the tall newcomer, "will have to come off!" And they finally did—but not the way Bull expected . . .*

**W**ELL, I'll be damned! Jim, look at this!" Bull McGrady's bellow filled the Peppermints' small operations office as he called Jim Baird, the deputy leader of the flight, to the window.

Jim pried his lanky form out of a chair, dropped his brown paper cigarette in the wastebasket, and strolled to Bull's side.

A trim, new Spad had just taxied to the entrance of Number 1 hangar. Its pilot had climbed out and was giving some instructions to the rigger sergeant.

"Did you ever see anything like that before, Jim?" Bull rumbled. "A college professor!"

"Looks it," Jim said shortly. "What do you suppose he wants?"

Bull McGrady's coal-black eyes followed the stranger as he started toward the office. The man was trim and neat, but the thing that had brought the shine to Bull's eyes was his face. It was covered with whiskers—neatly trimmed black whiskers that ended in a pointed, professional-looking Vandyke!

Shaking his massive head, Bull turned back toward the desk and waited for the door to open on the terrible disaster.

Bull was a tall man, almost six feet four, and he looked nearly as broad across the shoulders as he was up and down. His long arms hung almost to his knees, and his hair stood straight on end from being clipped so short. His whiskers were shaved close, making the lower part of his face blue-black in color.

Jim Baird sauntered across the room, sat down and, crossing his long legs, began rolling another cigarette. The office door opened, and the be-whiskered stranger walked in, saluted and reached in his inside coat pocket.

Bull McGrady said nothing, but there was a shiny glitter in his black eyes that meant trouble. He took the envelope the man handed him. But not until he unfolded the paper it contained did he take his eyes off the stranger's face.

When he had read the note, his teeth clicked together, and he looked up.

"So!" he said. "Lieutenant Philip Rogers, reporting for duty with the Peppermints, eh?" Then his voice rasped. "The first order you get here is to shave off that brush you got on your face. We're not going to have anything like that on the Peppermints' field."

Rogers' level gray eyes clashed with Bull's black ones. He shook his head firmly. "I'm sorry, captain,

that I have to disobey the first order you give me, but I'm going to."

Bull McGrady's heavy nostrils flared. His big hands knotted themselves into bigger fists as he leaned across the desk. Jim Baird took his cigarette out of his mouth and uncrossed his legs expectantly.

"A hard guy, eh?" Bull rumbled. "You'll either shave those whiskers off or I'll take you down and yank 'em out. This is no menagerie, and we don't want any hairy-faced baboons running around here. This is the Peppermints Squadron, mister, and I run it in my own way. Shave 'em off, that's all!"

ROGERS' square shoulders seemed to tauten and hunch just a bit. Jim Baird's eyes were darting from one man to the other, and there was a tight little smile on his lips.

"I'll obey your orders when they refer to my duties with the Peppermints," Rogers said coolly, "but as to my own personal appearance, you can go to hell. At that, I don't look as much like a baboon with my whiskers on as you do clean-shaved."

Bull McGrady's face was almost purple as he walked around the desk. Bull was hard. He had a reputation for hardness that had reached all the way to Chaumont. But it was a just hardness. He rode his men, but he'd fight at the drop of a hat if anybody else tried it. And he was boss!

"Listen to me, Mr. Wise Guy," he said, with his face close to Rogers'. "You can take your choice of three things. Either shave 'em off; or get knocked down and have 'em pulled off; or go back to the Pool where you come from. Help yourself."

Rogers' voice was steely hard when he said, "I'm not shaving them off. As for going back to the Pool, I've got a little influence myself that can stop you from sending me there. And if you want to try knocking me down and pulling them out, you're welcome to start at any time."

For a long moment it looked as if McGrady were going to bash in Rogers' defiant face.

"Where would a monkey like you get a pull?" he growled.

"From Colonel 'Hell-Fire' Turner," Rogers said. "Get the point?"

Bull snorted in disgust. "Colonel Hell-Fire Turner may be comin' to Wing to take over the command from Stokes, but he isn't there yet, buzzard, and Stokes is gone."

Jim Baird chuckled.

"So you think," Rogers snapped. "Hell-Fire won't



stand for any monkey business from anyone, even you. Now, have you any sensible orders to give me?"

"Yes, two," Bull rumbled. "One of 'em is to be on the field ready for business at five a.m. in the morning. The other is to shave off them whiskers, and if you don't—" He bit off his words and turned to the desk. "Now get out of here before I punch your head off. I don't want to have to hit you and get murdered for killin' somebody's pet."

He turned back to the desk.

For a moment, Rogers' steely gray eyes bored into Bull's broad back. Then he spun on his heel and walked out the door.

JIM BAIRD dropped his cigarette in the wastebasket and began rolling another. "What's the idea, Bull?" he asked. "Why the sudden dislike of whiskers?"

Bull fished a cigarette out of his pocket. "I don't give a damn about his whiskers, Jim," he said. "That isn't the point. In an army in war, somebody's got to be boss. On this field I'm it." He held a match to his cigarette.

"Did you see those eyes of his, Jim?" he went on. "You got to get the jump on a man like that or he'll be bossin' you inside thirty days. Orderin' the whiskers off him was just my way of gettin' the jump on him. If I don't get 'em off him, he's goin' to try to be the boss of the Peppermints."

Jim studied his cigarette for a moment. "Somehow I don't think he'll take 'em off. He's not that kind."

Bull's big hand slammed down on the desk. The envelope in which Rogers had carried his orders fluttered off the desk. "Then you're going to see one of the hell-roaringest fights around here you ever laid your eyes on," Bull announced.

Jim picked up the envelope, fumbled it a moment and drew out a folded bit of paper. He handed it to Bull. "Here, you overlooked this."

Bull jammed his cigarette in the corner of his mouth, closed one eye to keep the smoke out of it, tilted his head and, unfolding the paper, read aloud:

*"Captain. Edward McGrady,  
C.O., Peppermint Squadron,*

*The bearer, First Lieutenant Philip Rogers, has the makings of an excellent member of the Air Force.*

*I would appreciate it greatly if you will see that he obtains the necessary experience at a very early date to fit him for a command.*

*(Signed) Turner,  
Colonel U.S.A.S."*

"Holy jumping horn toads!" Bull roared. "He wants him to have experience, eh? And it's from Hell-Fire Turner, a chair-warming kiwi that wouldn't know an airplane from a wheelbarrow. Experience, huh! He'll get it!"

He scooped the phone off the desk and roared, "Wing!" A voice answered, and he demanded to talk to Colonel Hell-Fire Turner.

"Oh, so he isn't there?" he mimicked sourly. "Hasn't taken over command yet. Well, you tell him that Bull McGrady says that the Peppermints is no training camp, and for him not to send any more students down here; but that when we send this one back, he'll have his experience, and a clean face."

He slammed the phone back on the desk. "We'll start on him in the morning, Jim," he said. "You take the gang out on the regular patrols. Me and Mr. Experience are going over behind Deuelle to have a look at those artillery placements."

For once, Jim Baird was stirred out of his customary drawling ease. He sat up stiff in his chair.

"Holly mackerel, Bull!" he exclaimed. "They want him back alive! You'd better let me go look at Deuelle and make the report on it. Keep Rogers with the flight till he breaks in a little. The Jerries are touchy about those placements."

Bull's teeth clicked stubbornly. "Hell-Fire says he has the makings, and wants him to have experience. Well, I'll cover his tail all the way over and back, and he'll get his dose of experience—a good big dose."

The gang trooped on the field next morning at the crack of dawn. Bull was already out, and so was Jim Baird. They strolled down the line of red and white striped ships, looking them over.

Jim nodded at Rogers' bright new Spad and shook his head dolefully. "I wouldn't do it, Bull," he shouted above the roar of nine Hissos. "That ship is brand-new, and it's just an advertisement that you got a green hand with you. The Jerries will ride hell out of him."

Bull snapped. "He's got to have experience." Then he stopped dead in his tracks.

The new man was just coming out of the squadron room. Swinging his helmet in his hand, he started for his ship. But he had not shaved!

"I told you so," Jim said under his breath.

Bull started across the field at full stride. The rest of the gang stopped where they were and stood watching hopefully. Bull stepped squarely in front of Rogers. His black eyes glittered and his hands opened and shut angrily.

Rogers coolly pulled on his helmet, snapped the chin strap and, drawing his goggles from his pocket began polishing them with his handkerchief.

"Any orders, captain?" he asked gravely. "It's five o'clock."

Bull snorted. "Orders! Last night I gave you orders to shave that mug of yours. Why didn't you do it?"

Rogers drew on his goggles. "And I told you that my whiskers were none of your business. I mean it. Now if you want to give me some sensible orders, I'll be glad to obey them."

Bull's open right hand drew back as if he were going to slap the face off Rogers. Rogers didn't bat an eye, but there was a sudden pantherlike taut-ness to his whole body. His gray eyes were like ice.

Jim Baird grabbed Bull's arm. "Say," he drawled, "we'd better be goin'. It's ten past five now."

Bull's hand dropped to his side. "Okay, Jim," he said. Then, "Rogers, you wanted experience. I'm seeing that you get it. Wait till the flight takes off and follow me. We'll see about those whiskers later. Go ahead, Jim. I won't kill him till I have time to clean up afterwards."

SEVEN battered Spads roared down field in a cloud of dust, swung east and disappeared behind the rim of hills between the field and the trenches.

Without looking back, Bull prodded his Hisso and swept down for a takeoff. He climbed at a gentle slope; then, as he reached the hills, he looked for Rogers. The new man was holding steady just back and to the right of him.

Bull adjusted his goggles, settled in his seat and pointed north and west. There was just a suspicion of a grim smile on his lips whenever he flicked a look at that new ship.

On out past the hills, artillery placements, an occasional observation balloon, pock-marked and shell-churned ground. The trenches—zigzag ditches whose northern edge was strewn with a tangled mass of barbed wire. Another mass of wire, one more ditch. Germany!

Bull looked back. Rogers was riding easily, but his head was constantly swiveling on his shoulders as he swept the sky around and above. Bull nodded. That was the way to do it, all right.

On ahead about six and a half miles was a tiny white spot on the ground.

Deuelle! It was a wrecked village that had been fought over half a dozen times. Now it was merely a scramble of splintered stone walls and scattered roofs,

but the Germans had taken advantage of its wine cellars and had put some long-range artillery down in those damp holes. They made excellent places for hiding big guns, and American HQ wanted to keep posted on the situation. The Peppermints had orders to make a daily observation on the place and report any change, however small. The Germans were making strenuous effort to prevent that observation.

Bull's eyes grew a bit sharp as he spotted five tiny dots to the left, and those dots were buzzing his way. He fired a burst from his Vickers to catch Rogers' eye, and pointed. Rogers nodded and fired five shots from his own guns. They bored on.

Deuelle was getting close now. The white stones had spread out until they made quite a patch. Bull's eyes flicked to the Fokkers. They were getting close, too—close enough to meet the Spads squarely over the little town.

Bull eased his stick forward. The horizon tilted past his prop as the ship slanted down. Rogers was following. The Fokkers were dropping, too.

Just as the two Spads scudded low across Deuelle, the Fokkers hit. Bull had been studying the ground below as he dived. As the Fokkers hit, he roared up through them in a tight Immelmann with Rogers close on his tail. They broke through the mad swirl of Fokkers and came out on top of the heap. But Bull thought he had seen something unusual down there that first trip across. He banked in tight circles, studying the ground closely.

Rogers stayed close by. The Fokkers were swarming up like mad hornets. One of them poured a burst at Bull. Bull swerved out. Another came on. He dodged away from it, his head jerking around to get another look at the ground. But the Fokkers went right on past him, and with a sudden curse, he realized what they were doing. They were after Rogers! His bright new ship was just like a sign board that said, "I'm a green pilot. Get me!" One Fokker was under his floor boards. Another was coming in from his beam, and a third was getting on his tail.

BULL McGRADY'S jaws set. He swung his ship and went roaring after that zooming Fokker. For one long breath Bull had that ship dead in his ring. His thumb came down, and his Vickers began their battering pound on his cowl. The Fokker's fire broke off suddenly as its pilot shot a scared look back over his shoulder. Then he slumped.

Rogers wriggled clear for a second. Bull pulled

on over on his back, rolled out and dropped flat on another Jerry. The Fokker started to yaw away from him. Bull's foot stabbed at his rudder bar, and his Spad's nose jerked around. The crossed wires in the ring sight centered for an instant on the Fokker's pit. Five shots clacked from the Vickers—no more. The Fokker went wabbling down.

Bull straightened and looked around. The fight was getting spread out. Rogers was away back of Deuelle and dodging like a twitching leaf. All three of the remaining Jerries were literally making a sieve of him.

"Damn bringing these green guys out, anyway!" he growled. "Experience! He's getting it, and I've got to help him out." Then he reared stiff in his pit. "Got him!" he croaked. "He got him!"

A Fokker had seemed to stumble for a second as it swept recklessly past Rogers' slug spurting prop. The green guy had knocked him down! But the other two bored in furiously. Bull got there just in time to drop on one that was maneuvering onto Rogers' washboarding tail. The Fokker saw Bull coming and zoomed away.

Bull instantly dived on past Rogers and dropped on the second Jerry. It was coming around in a steep bank and picking up speed for a zoom. Rogers went down past them in a steep dive. The Fokker saw its danger and tried to reverse its maneuver. For a second, its wings quivered as they slapped air with a jerk. Something gave away, and the ship started a zigzag whip toward the ground below.

Bull pulled up and pushed his sweat-fogged goggles on his forehead. "Musta broke a control wire," he grunted. "Let him go."

He looked around for the other one. It was high up, and going away from there full speed. Then he looked for Rogers, whose dive had taken him away down. His Spad was at least a thousand feet below Bull, and directly over an old farmhouse.

Then, as Bull McGrady watched, something went tumbling down from the new Spad—something that seemed to glint dully in the rays of the morning sun.

With a rasped curse Bull slammed his stick forward and went down like a bullet. "A brass message cylinder," he croaked. "Damned spy! He didn't think I'd see that. No wonder he hides his face behind a black brush. But he'll never live to roll his trucks on Jerry ground. I'll fill his hide so full of lead he'll bury himself when he lands."

But Rogers did not try to land. Instead, he came climbing up to meet Bull.

Bull pulled out of his dive and circled, watching Rogers, puzzled. For an instant he was tempted to drop flat on the new man and blast him out of the skies. Then Rogers hilariously waved both arms high above his head and held up one finger, signaling his first air victory.

Bull's eyes slitted. So that was the game! Rogers didn't think he had been seen dropping that message. Bull nodded, satisfied. For a moment he studied Rogers across that narrow canyon of space, then looked at the ship. The new Spad was a slug-riddled mess. It had taken a terrific whipping. Bull nodded again, and motioned for Rogers to go ahead back toward Deuelle.

"I let you follow comin' over," he grunted, "but you'll be ahead goin' back. I'm not taking chances on you any more."

Over Deuelle, he waved Rogers to go lower and stay ahead. Rogers kept looking back as if he were puzzled, but he obeyed orders.

Bull slanted on down toward the town, his eyes darting watchfully from the ground to Rogers, then back to the ground again. His tongue clicked against the roof of his mouth as he saw what he was looking for.

A heap of stone had been moved down there. A tumbled-down wall had been partly rebuilt so that it still looked shell-torn, but was higher than it had been yesterday. And those rocks hadn't been there before, either. The Jerries were busy. That was enough. He waved Rogers on toward home.

AS THEY flew low over the ridge of hills at the field's edge, Bull slapped his hand against the Colt at his thigh, then unbuttoned the flap on the holster. They circled into the wind and rolled down to a landing.

Bull reared his broad shoulders out of his pit, shoved up his goggles, climbed down and headed for Rogers.

The rest of the flight was coming in now. Bull paused a second and counted the ships as they landed. All there. He went on.

Rogers' face was split with a smile of satisfaction that showed his white teeth through his black beard. "I got one," he said.

Bull's lips thinned. "And that's not all you're goin' to get, spy!" he rasped.

His big fist flashed straight for Rogers' chin. The new man's head jerked sideways. The fist shot past his cheek, missing it cleanly. Bull's eyes widened in surprise. He didn't often miss like that.

Rogers asked coolly. "What's the big idea?"

"Oh, sweet innocence, eh?" Bull rumbled sarcastically. "Didn't know I caught you dropping information to the enemy. Thought I was too high up and too busy. Well, I wasn't—and you're under arrest."

"What for?"

Bull whirled. Jim Baird had come in, and now was standing at his elbow. "What you arresting him for, Bull?" he asked again.

"Caught him dropping a message cylinder to the enemy over back of Deuelle a while ago."

Jim began rolling a cigarette. "No wonder he wears a disguise," he said.

Bull reached out and drew Rogers' Colt from its holster. He hefted it significantly in the palm of his big hand. "Do you deny droppin' that message?" he demanded.

Rogers shook his head. "Since you saw me, I can't very well, can I?"

"I didn't ask you, can I? I asked you, did you?"

"Yes, I did."

Bull's big hand clamped down on Rogers' shoulder. "Now my tin buzzard, we're going to handcuff you, shave you, then send you down to HQ to be shot."

Rogers reached coolly up and gripped Bull's wrist in iron fingers. He jerked the hand off his shoulder.

"Oh, no, you're not," he said evenly. "I heard you were a fast actor and a hard guy. Well, read this, then see how you act."

He reached in the inside pocket of his tunic, and drew out an envelope. Bull, for the first time, saw the ring of taut pilots, mechanics and riggers standing close around them. He waved his hand. "Go on, you buzzards. Get about your jobs. We can tend to this without any help." He handed the gun to Jim. "Keep an eye on this whiskered bird while I read this billydoo of his."

He ripped the envelope open, pulled out a sheet of paper and read:

*"Captain Edward McGrady:*

*This will inform you that First Lieutenant Philip Rogers has my permission to drop messages to the enemy if he sees fit.*

*(signed) Turner,*

*Colonel U.S.A.S."*

"Well, for the love of Pete!" Bull managed all in one breath. "Here, look at this, Jim, and see if I read it right." His eyes bored into the cool gray ones of Rogers. "How come he gave you a note like that?" he demanded.

Rogers shrugged. "Because he wanted to, I suppose."

Jim handed the paper back. "Looks all right," he said. "I don't see anything wrong with it, but it sounds nuts."

Bull wrinkled the note in his hands for a moment while he considered. "Sounds nuts to me, too," he said. "Rogers, I'm not putting you under arrest until I've had time to check up on this, but hey, sergeant, come here."

The sergeant came up and saluted. Bull handed him Rogers' gun. "Keep an eye on this buzzard and don't let him leave the field. He's under open arrest until I tell you different. Come on, Jim, let's look over these ships. We've got some nasty work ahead."

WHEN they came out of the hangar and got back to the office, the sergeant met them just outside. He jerked his head toward the door.

"He's inside," he said.

Bull snapped, "What's he been doin'?"

The sergeant said, "Just settin' there by the desk, smokin', sir."

Bull nodded. "You keep an eye on that bird till I tell you different. If he starts to leave the field, knock him down, and if he gets away, I'll break your neck, savvy?"

The sergeant grinned and nodded. "He won't," he said grimly.

They went on into the office. But before Bull had a chance to say a word, Rogers was on his feet, talking.

"Captain," he said, "I've been thinking about the things we saw at Deuelle. The Germans are evidently strengthening that place and adding new guns—Probably eight-inch howitzers, and they can do a terrific damage. I'd suggest a bombing raid on Deuelle tonight."

Bull walked on to the desk. He put his hands on its scarred top and faced Rogers deliberately. Jim Baird sat down.

"Oh, you do, do you?" Bull growled sarcastically. "And, Mr. Strategist, how do you happen to know that the Jerries have made some changes over there when this was your first trip across the lines?"

Rogers' gray eyes were steady. "It happens, sir, that when I got orders to report to this Wing, I made a very careful study of photographs of this region, and of Deuelle, especially since it is one place that the Germans are strengthening. There is a new pile of stone over there now, and a wall on one of the houses has been changed considerably."

"So what?"

"They are, of course, moving in more guns."



"And you remembered all that from pictures?"  
"I did."

"Some memory! And I suppose that is why you dropped that note."

"We'll leave that part of it out," Rogers said firmly, and there was something in his voice that said that he meant it. "But my suggestion about that bombing raid stands. It is good."

Bull's temper flared. "Get out of here," he growled. "When I want your advice, I'll ask for it. And my suggestion about your not leaving this field goes, too. Don't forget that."

Rogers saluted, turned on his heel and walked out.

Jim Baird chuckled. "You've met your match, Bull. That guy is just as hard as you are, and you didn't get the jump on him, either."

Bull wiped his hand across his face. "My God, Jim, I forgot all about those whiskers! But I'm telling you there's something queer about him. Imagine a colonel writing a letter, giving him permission to drop notes to the enemy!"

Jim shook his head. "You imagine it. I can't. Say, maybe he's a G-2 man."

Bull pondered a moment. "I don't think so," he said, and reached for the phone. "I'll find out."

WHEN Wing answered, Bull growled, "Say, what kind of a buzzard did you send down here yesterday? He's got notes from Turner plastered all over him. Who is he?"

The voice said. "I don't know who he is, but Turner just called up here and said for you to release him from open arrest."

Bull's eyes opened wide. "For me to release him," he howled. "Hell, man, he hasn't been under open arrest more than thirty minutes and—say, are you sure it was Turner called you?"

"Well, it sounded like his voice."

"Sounded like him," Bull bellowed, "Don't you nuts know it is easy enough to imitate a man's voice? When is Turner going to be there?"

"I don't know."

"Find out." Bull shoved the phone across the desk and stared at Jim. "Jim, it gets worse and worse. That bird was using the telephone while he was in here and knows just where Turner is or he couldn't have got him that quick—if it was Turner. And Hell-Fire isn't at Wing yet."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I'll release him from open arrest, but you and I are going to keep a sharp eye on that bird."

Jim chuckled. "Bull, you're losin' your hold. This guy is getting your goat. You're easing up, and you haven't got the whiskers off him yet."

Bull's big hand slammed down on the desk so hard that the telephone jumped. "We will, though," he promised.

"And how about that bombing raid?"

"He's right about that, Jim. I was going to suggest the same thing to Wing. The Jerries are busy back there, and we've got to get the jump on them."

Jim chuckled again. "Like you did on Rogers?"

Bull roared, "Jim, shut up before I throw you out of here on your ear!"

Jim Baird ignored the threat. "Suppose this note business was to rig up a trap on us," he suggested.

"I was thinking about that, too. If it is a trap, we'll send Rogers down before we begin to even shoot at the Jerries. Besides, it will be Hell-Fire's fault for backing this bird's play."

"How about the rest of the gang getting caught in it?"

Bull snapped. "Those buzzards could shoot their way out of anything, and you and I will be there helping 'em. I'd never send a man any place I wouldn't go myself."

Jim puffed on his butt. "You better arrange with Wing about the raid before you start to take off."

Bull called Wing again, staled his reasons for the raid and got instant approval of the plan. Shaking his head dazedly, he shoved the phone across the desk.

"Jim," he said slowly, "that's the quickest that bunch of chairwarming aviators ever approved anything I ever said. I don't understand it."

"Maybe Hell-Fire has called 'em up again," Jim drawled.

Bull lunged to his feet. "He might have, at that," he agreed. "Come on. We rendezvous those bombers at eleven fifteen tonight. We've got work to do."

Jim got up. "How about Whiskers?" he asked.

"Not time for him now. Got to get this raid over first."

Jim chuckled again. "Followin' out his plan, eh? Well, he's startin' to take over."

"Get out of here!" Bull bellowed.

FROM then on, the hangars were a hive of feverish activity. Planes were checked, oiled, gassed and readied. Rogers' ship had to have a new strut, two bracing wires and dozens of tiny maltese cross patches were pasted over its many bullet holes. It didn't look quite as new as it had.

At ten-fifty that night the gang was all on the field.

Rogers came out, his face still covered with the black whiskers, and headed deliberately for Bull McGrady.

"Captain," he asked crisply, "am I still under arrest?"

"Why?" Bull asked.

"Well, I'd like to go along, and I don't suppose you usually let men under arrest accompany you across the lines, do you?" His hand started for his breast pocket. "Now I've got——"

Bull shut him off. "Don't tell me that that cockeyed colonel gave you another note. I couldn't stand the shock." Then his voice became low, deadly, serious.

"I'm going to tell you something, Rogers. That blasted colonel wants you to have experience, and you're goin' to get it—plenty. But if you drop another note or try to pull any monkey business, you'll never come back with the flight. Now get over there in your ship and watch where you go. It's mighty easy for a greenhorn to get lost at night, so stick close to the flight."

For a moment, Rogers' eyes glowed almost green then he slipped on his helmet and stalked stiffly toward his ship.

They rendezvoused the two big wide-winged Handley-Pages right on the dot. The Spads were riding in a spread out V above the huge bombers. Bull was at point, and Jim Baird was a thousand feet above the V, riding at safety.

Bull eyed the stars sourly. It was a bad night for a raid. There was not a cloud in the sky for the Handleys to use as a hiding place in case of trouble. The moon would be up in an hour, and the Germans had some pretty good searchlight batteries around Deuelle, and a good anti-aircraft defence.

They were nearing the trenches now. A finger of light stabbed into the sky half a mile ahead, then another, and another, a whole battery. The Jerries had heard the Handleys!

The searches began sweeping the sky. The Handleys were climbing now. Bull slanted the Spads up. He knew that already phone lines back there would be hot with excited, German words. A raid coming! Fokker Staffels, attention! Handleys loaded with bombs, on a direct course toward Deuelle, height about three thousand meters! Stop them!

Another battery of searchlights popped out. Five more beams of light began knifing the sky. The Handleys and Spads bored on.

*Wham!* Bursting balls of anti-aircraft fire began popping out in the sky. A black bat came streaking through a search beam straight at the Handleys. Fokkers!

A beam caught one of the big bombers, and it tumbled down the sky in a corkscrew fall that got it out of the glaring light. Bull fired a red Very rocket and streaked ahead of the V. Jim Baird dropped down and took the point of the flight.

ANTI-AIRCRAFT fire stopped suddenly as the Jerries spotted their own ships coming in. Then the whole sky was crisscrossed with lanes of orange-red tracer and looping, blue-flamed exhaust streaks.

They were almost over Deuelle now. Bull McGrady shot straight through the fight and went diving down on the spot where he judged the town to be. Then with a start, he leaned far around his windbreak and peered ahead between his wings.

There on the ground was a diamond made up of four tiny, winking lights. One point of the diamond pointed straight north. The other one was to the south. For an instant, he wondered if this was a trick. Did that brass message cylinder Rogers had dropped have anything to do with it?

"They just about outline the town," he muttered. "But why?"

He went on screaming down, dropped two parachute flares and zoomed. As he went up, he looked back down his tail. The white stones of Deuelle were starkly outlined in the glaring light of the flares. And the town sat in the very center of that diamond of tiny lights!

"How the hell?" he growled as he roared up toward the fight over head. But those lights would help the Handleys tremendously. They could tell just where to unload, even if they didn't get any more flares.

One of the bombers was coming down now. Two black hell bats were on its tail riddling it with fiery slugs, trying to drive it away from its target. The gunner in the bomber's rear pit was pumping his Lewis as fast as it would go.

Bull tore in. For an instant, a searchlight outlined the bomber. The two Fokkers shot in desperately. Bull hunched toward his sight. He outlined one of the Fokkers between him and a light beam, and his guns leaped. Orange-red flame danced on their muzzles. Fire balls spurted out and hit the Fokker's wings. It looped instantly.

The Handley lurched as four white eggs tumbled out of its belly and fell below the searchlight beam. It roared around out of the light and into the dark. Bull looked around for the other bomber. A spurt of slugs pounded against his fuselage. He zoomed out. Rogers came streaking across a light beam tight on the tail of a



Fokker—and another German was on his tail!

Bull was after them. The searchlight beam moved and he lost them. Then a light hit him. Its glare blinded him for an instant until he ducked out.

The second Handley was unloading now. He could tell that by the red explosions down there on the ground.

Another ship high up came rocketing down, spreading fire behind it. The first Handley came around for another run over the target. Bull caught the arc of an exhaust flame far below it as a Fokker came zooming into the bomber's belly.

Instantly he up-ended the Spad and went down. The Handley seemed to be leaping up at him. He moved his rudder and shot past the bomber, almost rolling his trucks on its big fuselage.

The Fokker saw him coming and tumbled away. The Handley went on down toward that tiny diamond of lights. Bull zoomed out of his dive and again saw Rogers' light colored ship in the sky. It seemed to be a bit wobbly. Its wings weaved crookedly as if the pilot were drunk.

"He's hit!" Bull croaked.

Then a Fokker came streaking down on Rogers just as a searchlight caught the new Spad and pointed it out in the black sky. Bull heeled his Spad in a screaming bank and went tearing at the Fokker on Rogers' tail. The searchlight held the new man as he wobbled sickeningly through the sky.

Desperately Bull stabbed at his trips. His tracer sliced across the sky, making a stuttering trail of fire. But they lost momentum and arced down long before they caught the Fokker. He jabbed at his throttle, trying furiously to force more speed out of the Spad. The Fokker was shooting now, and its slugs seemed to be riddling Rogers' ship.

The light beam lost the wobbling Spad, but a split second later, it picked it up again. Rogers had made a half-turn, and the Fokker had followed. Now they were close to Bull.

WITH a bellow of satisfaction, Bull hurled his ship down on the Fokker. The mad chatter of his guns sounded like hellish cackling. His ship quivered and shook. But the Fokker was getting it!

Its pilot instinctively heaved his stick back as a spray of slugs riddled his fuselage and split a longeron. As he jerked up in a zoom, Bull back-sticked. His prop followed the Fokker on up, his guns spraying it mercilessly. The Fokker rolled over on its back, hung

for a moment, then tumbled into the inky blackness below.

A white Very light arced up from one of the Handleys, signaling "Unloaded!" They swung around and started back. Bull took one last look below. The four tiny lights had winked off.

Rogers' Spad wobbled and weaved all the way back. Bull watched it anxiously, and as soon as he got his feet on the ground, he rushed to the riddled ship and lifted the new man out of his pit.

Rogers' shoulder and the front of his coat was a mess of sticky, clotted blood that streamed from a slug slice on his face. Bull scooped him up in his arms and headed for the medical office. The M.O. took one look at him and poured out half a glass of whiskey. He handed it to Bull.

"Pour this down his throat," he snapped, "while I get the razor. We've got to shave his face before we can dress that wound."

Rogers looked at Bull and grinned the best he could with a face like he had. "You win, Bull, two ways," he managed. "The whiskers are coming off, so I might as well tell you who I am."

Jim Baird pushed in just then and stood smoking.

"I'd a taken the damn whiskers off you, anyway," Bull rumbled, "even if I'd had to pull 'em out. Now, who are you?"

"The name is Hell-Fire Turner," Rogers admitted. "Oh, don't get too fussed up. You see, I wanted a top grade major down at Wing, and I had heard of you. When they assigned me to the Air Force, I learned to fly. Then I grew these whiskers and came down here as a lieutenant in order to look you over. Besides, I wanted some experience that I never would have had if you had known I was a colonel. You're going to Wing with me, Bull, as a major."

Bull shoved his helmet on the back of his head. "What the hell!" he breathed. "Then those notes and that message—"

Hell-Fire nodded. "Wrote 'em all myself, and the one I dropped back there was to a G-2 man to set out those lights for the bombers to aim at. You. see, I arranged for all that, too."

Jim Baird chuckled. "I told you you weren't gettin' very far with him, Bull. He is running the Peppermints now, isn't he? And you, too."

Bull whirled on him. "Say, you get out of here before I throw you out on your blasted ear. He's runnin' us all, now."