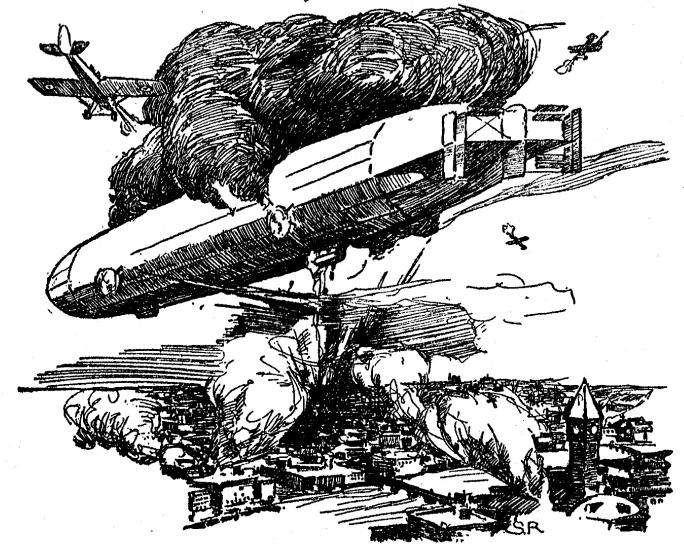
THE ADVENTURES OF THE ADVENTUR



THE PHANTOM ZEPPELIN

W RALPH OPPENHEIM

London was being mysteriously bombed by this "Phantom." Forty miles within the German lines winged the famous Kirby. He was on the trail of the invisible raider.

AR WITHIN THE GERMAN LINES in captured Belgium, drawing ever closer to Ghent, a lone Allied plane winged its way through the night sky. Like a graceful dragon fly it darted on, its wings shimmering silver in the light of a full moon and a myriad of stars.

The plane was a Sopwith, of special design. Though well-armored with two forward-shooting machine guns, it had been built more for endurance flights than for combat. Its extra large tanks held sufficient fuel for ten hours in the air—a long time for a scout plane.

In its cockpit, the faint glow from the hooded lights of the instrument board reflected on his goggled face, sat Captain Kirby, leader of that renowned trio of Yankee war birds, known as the "Three Mosquitoes." Carefully, with expert skill, the young pilot was guiding his ship towards Ghent, correcting his course by the dim landmarks below. It was a difficult task, for the shadowy earth was revealed only by the moon and a few clusters of lights sprinkled here and there. The Boche kept everything as dark as possible to prevent night-flying enemy bombers from spotting their objectives.

It was a strange and hazardous mission on which Kirby was embarked tonight, a mission which would not really begin until he reached Ghent. Once more the Mosquito had stepped out of his character as an ordinary peelot and assumed the role of a flying detective. He was out to unravel a mystery which had been baffling the Allies—or rather the British for the past two weeks: the mystery of the "Phantom Zeppelin."

The Phantom Zeppelin! The mere name was enough to send a chill tingling up Kirby's spine. Of all the uncanny happenings which had taken place in this strange war, the Phantom Zeppelin's raids on London seemed the most awe-inspiring. Here was another of the wily Boche's subterfuges—a trick so inexplicable that it actually appeared to be supernatural.

Months ago, the Germans seemed to have abandoned definitely their series of Zeppelin raids on the English capital. The British had perfected a defense system which made it suicidal for the big, vulnerable dirigibles to appear over the metropolis. Giant searchlights would ferret the raiders out, and if the improved anti-aircraft guns didn't get them, the swift, night-flying scouts, using a new incendiary

bullet which could immediately set off the highly inflammable hydrogen which inflated the Zeppelins, would make quick work of them. In short, the Zeppelin seemed to be conquered, and the London populace heaved a great sigh of relief.

But then, without warning, just two weeks ago, the Phantom Zeppelin had come. On a bright, moonlit night, the instruments at the anti-aircraft stations had picked up the unmistakable sound of engines—Zeppelin engines. As always, the streets and houses of the metropolis were darkened instantly, and the great searchlights commenced sweeping the skies. But though they made the heavens as light as day, and large fleets of scout planes combed every inch of air, not a sign of any Zeppelin could they see. It was uncanny. The motors seemed to be close overhead, yet that ship could not be seen. It seemed absurd that a huge Zeppelin, the size of a large ocean liner, could actually make itself invisible.

Then the bombardment had come—one of the most terrific raids ever experienced. With awful precision, the unseen monster of the sky dropped its deadly cargo on important centers of the city, and left a trail of fire and destruction in its wake. Buildings, docks on the Thames, streets were torn asunder, and scores of people were killed or wounded. And throughout it all the scout planes and the anti-aircraft guns were helpless, helpless to tackle a ship which seemed as intangible as the air in which it flew. True, the guns fired salvoes in the direction whence the sound of motors seemed to come, but, not seeing the Zeppelin, not knowing its altitude or position, they could not possibly range it—and they were simply-wasting their expensive ammunition.

At last, its bombs exhausted, the unseen raider had departed as mysteriously as it had arrived. It left a horrified and terror-stricken populace, who tried to drown their fears in rage, and demanded quick reprisal. And it also left a baffled group of military authorities and aeronautical experts, who convened at once and tried to puzzle out the phenomenon. But staring them in the face, leering at them, was the inevitable question: how could a huge, 500-foot airship conceal itself?

Some took note of the fact that there had been clouds in the sky that night—high, floating cirrus clouds. But the Zeppelin had not used those clouds as a shield, had not flown above them, for above them were fleets of scout planes which would have spotted the raider at once. Nor could the Zeppelin possibly have flown right in the clouds, covering itself completely in the mist. For while this would conceal the ship from the earth, it would also conceal the earth from the ship; the crew of the Zeppelin never could navigate under such conditions, never could pick out their targets on the ground. And, it must be remembered, the bombs were dropped with amazing accuracy.

Indeed, every theory that could be advanced was exploded almost immediately by the grim, indisputable facts. The authorities became so befuddled that they began to talk seriously about a system of mirrors and colors which the Germans might have devised to render the Zeppelin invisible.

However, when the discussion had gone thus far into the wild realms of imagination, they decided to call it a night; and they adjourned after drawing up resolutions to further increase the defense system of the city.

More anti-aircraft guns were set up, on roof tops and in Hyde Park and other localities. New and even more powerful searchlights were put into use. The number of planes which patrolled the metropolis was almost doubled. The greatest flyers available throughout the Allied service were called upon. And among those who came to London for this special patrol duty in conjunction with the British were the famous "Three Mosquitoes," whose sector in France was unusually inactive just now. Each night Kirby and his two comrades, "Shorty" Carn and the lanky Travis, soared over the English capital in high-flying S.E.5s.

But when, three nights later, the unseen invader returned again, and thereafter, up to the present time, made five more raids in terrible succession, each one more telling than the last, Kirby and his comrades were as mystified as everyone else; they failed to see a trace of the ship. The situation was reaching a crisis. The mysterious raids were bringing a reign of terror upon the people of London. The newspapers took the subject up, and it was through their columns that the term, "Phantom Zeppelin," originated. Superstition ran high; many were the wild legends that grew up around the unseen ship. Some thought that it really was a phantom airship—one of the Zeppelins which had been shot down during the old raids, but which now

returned with its ghostly crew to continue wreaking havoc upon the city.

In the meantime, work was being done in another quarter—in the underworld of military activities. The British intelligence system, one of the greatest the world had ever known, was tackling the problem with tireless effort. And the gallant spies over in enemy territory were getting results. Presently they sent in a most momentous bit of information.

They had discovered that at Ghent, Belgium, was nested the great naval Zeppelin, L 99, the latest and most powerful military dirigible yet turned out by the factory at Friedrkhshafen. It was one of the newtype super-Zeppelins, with a gas capacity of almost 2,500,000 cubic feet, was wonderfully armored, and equipped to carry a crew of twenty and over four tons of bombs. It was commanded by the famous *Kapitan* Heinrich Stresser—the most renowned veteran of the London raids. Stresser was the Richthofen of the Zeppelin fleet, and had been decorated by the kaiser for his remarkable skill in handling the big ships.

The British agents, risking their lives in the dangerous business of espionage, tried to watch the activities of the L 99. And as time went on another startling revelation came to light. On the same nights that the mysterious raids took place over London, the secret agents reported that they had previously seen the L 99 take the air. The great ship didn't head towards the British capital, didn't go out towards the North Sea, but it might merely be taking a roundabout course to throw any watchers off its track.

The spies, encouraged by their success, grew even bolder. Three of them, in turn, made gallant attempts to slip aboard the Zeppelin with false papers designed to enable them to pass as members of the crew. Their object was to see just where the big ship went, and if it did really go to London, how it worked the trick of rendering itself invisible. But the Germans were too wary, too much on the lookout. All three spies were caught before they boarded the Zeppelin, and met their death at the hands of a firing squad.

AND NOW, this morning, British intelligence headquarters at Whitehall had decided to try different tactics. Out of the scores of flyers available, Captain Kirby, a Yank, was chosen, summoned for a secret interview wilh the British chief of Intelligence.

Seated at a great desk, the chief, a stern, gray-haired man with battle-blue eyes, surveyed the young pilot who stood before him.

"Captain," the high official began, in his gruff, rasping voice, "I've heard of your wonderful record. You are the finest flyer we have here to help us solve this bloody mystery. And I say this without hesitation, even though you are not a Britisher.

"We have just received word," he continued, in a lower voice, "that the Germans intend to fly the L 99 again to-night—from Ghent. Our past experience forces us to conclude that there will be another raid."

He paused, tapping his fingers on the desk. Kirby shifted a bit uncomfortably, sensing what was coming. The chief seemed to consider the matter he had in mind carefully.

Then, suddenly, he barked out, "I say, why can't an airplane follow that Zeppelin right from Ghent, see where it goes?"

Kirby stared at him. "But, sir," the Mosquito asked, incredulously, "isn't that a long trip for an airplane? Hundreds of miles and——"

"It can be done!" the chief insisted. "It has been done before. Look—you take off over in Belgium, as close to the lines as possible. You fly to Ghent, arriving at approximately 9 o'clock pip emma, I lie lime, when the Zeppelin is supposed lo start. If it is indeed flying to London, you follow it right out across the North Sea, taking care that you are not seen by any of its crew. Then, if you can see how it manages to hide over the city here, you shoot off your flares, and all our antiaircrafts and planes will be ready to act.

"Of course," he went on, in the same harsh tone, "it's dangerous—that stands to reason. But there ought to be a nice chance for success. Since you will fly a small scout, you ought to be able to get by the defenses at Ghent without being spotted. If you are spotted there—well, you still have a chance to bolt for it and get back to your lines. And, under no circumstances, must you carry on if you find the odds too stiff. Now," he shot out the question abruptly, "what do you say? The choice is yours. Yes or no?"

Kirby was just a little taken aback by this sudden attack. But he did not hesitate. "I might as well take a crack at it," he stated, tacitly. "It ought to be fun—if it works!"

The chief smiled, then proceeded at once to give him full instructions. He concluded by warning Kirby not to breathe a word about the scheme to anybody, for if it ever got to the Germans, Kirby's goose would be cooked. The Mosquito found this warning hard to obey, however. Back at the airdrome outside of London, where he prepared for his journey, his two comrades pumped him unmercifully.

"Give us the dope," drawled the lanky Travis, oldest and wisest of the trio. "Where are you going?"

"Oh, just for a little trip," Kirby replied, casually.

"A little trip!" exclaimed Shorty Cam, holding his beloved briar pipe poised in the air. "Where? To the U.S.A.? It looks like it, the way you're getting your stuff together."

"Don't be a couple of old maids!" Kirby snapped, impatiently. "I'll see you both to-night. Be sure to get up into the air, and look for that Zep." He smiled, grimly. "You might get it this time!"

So now, just a few minutes before nine, having taken off from Bergues, Belgium, Kirby was nearing Ghent. Thus far, his trip had been smooth and tranquil, clear sailing through a peaceful, starlit sky. Fortunately the engine of the Sopwith, specially designed to make as little noise as possible—the use of a muffler was prohibitive because it would mean the sacrifice of necessary power and speed—had not been detected by the Germans at the anti-aircraft stations below. Nor had any night-flying Boche patrols come Kirby's way.

But this fact did not deceive Kirby, nor give him any false illusions. On the contrary, he was alert to his finger tips, keyed up to a nervous pitch of excitement and apprehension. He was forty miles from his lines, the farthest he had ever flown into Bocheland, and he was flying in a danger zone which kept thickening as he drew nearer to Ghent. The ground below him, he knew, was infested with anti-aircraft batteries. If they spotted him—

He broke off with a grim laugh. No sense starting to worry so early in the game, when his real task had not even begun. This trip to Ghent was just a mild preliminary, a curtain raiser. The real show wouldn't begin until he was following that Zeppelin, following it, most likely, right across the North Sea in England. The mere flight itself, piloting the frail Sopwith scout over that stretch of ocean, was risky enough, and even if this was all Kirby had to face, he'd be in for an exciting night, a night fraught with thrills and perils.

Suddenly his eyes lit up, as they peered down through their goggles at the shadowy landscape below. Ghent—there it was, looming towards him. Only a few lights twinkled down there, but in the moonlight he could see the cluster of buildings which marked the city.

His nerves grew even tauter, and his heart began to pound violently. He must watch out now, be on his guard. Watch the sky for night-flying Fokkers, And try to slip over that city quietly, without attracting attention. He glanced at his altimeter. Ten thousand feel that ought to be high enough. His hand reached for the throttle lever, shoved it in a bit. Better to go slowly, as slowly as possible, rather than make any noise.

He was coming over the city now, slipping far above it like a quiet bird. The town seemed to be asleep; nothing stirred down there. But Kirby knew that if they became aware of his Sopwith, a score of searchlights would hurl forth their blinding glares, and a score of guns blaze into life. Damn it, but the Sopwith's engine seemed to be making an unearthly racket! As a matter of fact, it was purring along softly, but to his keyed-up senses it seemed like a deafening roar, whuch must surely betray him. Certainly they would hear it down there.

Now he was watching for the drome where the L 99 must be nested, straining his eyes to catch sight of it. He found it almost immediately; indeed, it would have been difficult to miss. It was a tremendous field, just outside the city limits, and it appeared as a lighter patch on the dark earth. Cautiously Kirby approached it. It began to loom into clearer detail. There were lights down there, quite a few of them. And there was a great, long building which, with its rounded roof, squatted like a gigantic beetle in the moonlight—the Zeppelin shed.

WITH every nerve throbbing, Kirby, two miles above that field, commenced to circle in a wide arc, waiting. He did not have to wait long. His arrival had been well-timed. Peering down, his vision becoming clearer as his eyes grew more and more accustomed to the darkness, he saw that drome begin to stir with feverish activity.

Dimly, he picked out a crowd of tiny figures, literally an army of them, which swarmed around the doors of the gigantic hangar. Lights flashed here and there, and the crowd surged back and forth like a great wave.

Presently, a great silvery thing began to nose out of that hangar. Slowly, almost inch by inch, borne by the crowd of men, it emerged. Out of the shed it slid, out onto the field, a huge, cigar-shaped form which gleamed in the bright moonlight. It was a stirring sight, this leviathan of the air, and it did not fail to send an awed thrill through Kirby. Here was the L 99—the greatest of all Zeppelins. What a ship it was!

The length of two city blocks, the breadth of a fivestory building.

Was this indeed the Phantom Zeppelin? Like so many others, Kirby could not believe that the great ship, which even looked enormous from his position two miles above, could possibly render itself invisible. Well—his lips drew up into a light little smile—he would soon find out. Even now the big ship was preparing to Soar upwards, was straining against the scores of men who held it down. And Kirby was ready, ready to follow it like a buzzard until it—

A cry of horror broke from the Mosquito's throat, and the blood drained from his face. Too late did he realize his grim predicament. Too late—because, absorbed in that Zeppelin on the ground, he had not seen what was coming.

The air was shattered by a roar of wide-open motors, a yammering of struts and flying wires, and then, more ominous, the shrill staccato clatter of machine guns. Bullets sang wildly in the Mosquito's ears, and the smoky tracer streaked past in chalklike lines against the sky. And then he saw them—five wraithlike shapes which whisked and bobbed all around him, dived and zoomed. Red flames bit into the darkness from their guns. Red sparks streamed from their exhausts.

Fokkers! A Boche patrol had spotted Kirby's Sopwith, had crept upon him unawares while he watched the Zeppelin. And now they were swarming all around him like maddened hornets, seeking to wall him in a fatal prison of cross-fire. *Ping!* A bullet richocheted from the cowl of his cockpit. *Zip!* A tracer streaked past his face, almost grazing his cheek. Frantically, he switched off the give-away lights on his instrument board, and then he commenced to zigzag and half-roll in a furious effort to throw off the German's sights. But he knew it was useless, knew that he didn't have a chance against these five Fokkers which had already cut off every path of retreat.

With grim precision the Germans continued to close in on the lone Sopwith, peppered away at it. Everywhere Kirby looked he saw those Fokkers looming up in dark, fantastic shapes which spat flames. Cursing, he pressed his own stick-triggers, fired at them wildly—and missed because he dared not straighten out to take aim. But their shots were telling. Thicker and thicker grew the bullets; the air seemed dense with flying, screaming lead. Kirby could hear the missiles ticking through his fuselage, tearing up his wings, pelting against the metal parts of his ship

like hail. Vainly he kept maneuvering for all he was worth, kept firing his guns defiantly. But he was getting shot to hell, and he knew it. He was trapped like a rat cornered, with his lines forty miles away. A helpless sob tore from him. His mission had been nipped in the bud, stopped before it was begun. Well, he should have expected it, should have realized that the chances of his escaping detection, either from the ground or in the air, were all against him.

Down on the field where the great Zeppelin prepared to lake off, the men heard the sounds of the fight two miles above, heard the roar of motors and the clatter of guns. They could not see the battle; the ships were too high. And they could not bring their searchlights and anti aircraft into play; that would only endanger the Fokkers and hamper their work. When enemy planes came, it was either a question of fighting them from the ground or in the air, and this time it was in the air.

However, the scrap was delaying the departure of the Zeppelin. Not knowing just what the situation was, they hesitated to send the big ship into the air until they were sure that the sky was safe.

Already the five Fokkers had riddled Kirby's Sopwith until it resembled a sieve. The little scout plane actually lurched beneath the merciless hail of lead. Torn canvas and splintered wood dangled grotesquely from its wings. A strut shivered in its place, cracking. Flying wires snapped with shrill, musical pings. With a crash, a bullet ripped up the dashboard in front of Kirby, and sent splinters of wood and glass into his face. The Mosquito was cut and scratched painfully. Blood streamed from a gash in his cheek, and the taste of blood was in his mouth. Realizing that it was only a question of seconds now before they must either get him or the ship, he became desperate, as a hopeless man will. His eyes blazed wildly behind his goggles, and his teeth clenched.

"Square-headed sons!" he muttered, fiercely.
"You've got me, but, by God, I'll take one or two of you down with me!"

With savage abandon, he stopped half-rolling and zigzagging and deliberately straightened out. The fusillade of bullets which met him was the most terrific he had ever experienced, but he laughed recklessly at them. Vaguely, he saw the blurred shape of a Fokker streaking across his path, left to right. He kicked right rudder, banked. Again the Fokker bobbed in front of him. Cursing, ignoring the guns which peppered away at him, he lined the jerry plane in his sights, pressed

his stick-triggers. His twin Vickers blazed—a long burst of tracer.

Out of the dark shape of the Fokker leaped a tongue of flame which went licking greedily down the flanks of the ship, until the whole plane was etched in bold relief by the fantastic glow. Then it was swallowed up by a mighty burst of flame which lit up the whole sky, revealing all the other ships so clearly that Kirby could see their Maltese crosses, and the tiny helmeted heads of their pilots protruding the fuselages. The flaming Fokker plunged like a fiery comet, to crash in a wood close to the Zeppelin field.

But even as Kirby had been firing the shots which brought him victory, the four other Fokkers, with the Sopwith an excellent target because it was no longer dodging their sights, swooped upon the lone scout in one terrific, overwhelming attack which meant the end. With a shriek, their bullets tore through the casing of the Sopwith's engine. The motor choked, struggled vainly for life, and then, with a hissing sigh, conked out. At the same time a big piece of the elevator fin was shattered to bits. The Sopwith, literally shot to shreds, lurched and reeled perilously, tried vainly to struggle back to even keel like a drunken man tries to stagger to his feet. Then, resignedly, it nosed over—and Kirby, following close on the heels of his victim, was hurtling down in a tight, fatal spin.

The Germans, evidently deciding that the enemy ship was done for, let it go. Down it plunged, dropping like a plummet, with the wind rushing through its flying wires, making that weird, sirenlike wail that comes from a ship falling with its engine off. The wind was so terrific that it tore Kirby's helmet and goggles clean off, and knocked the breath out of him. Dizzy nausea overcame the Mosquito as he hurtled down in that break-neck plunge. He swayed giddily in his cockpit, his hand limp on the joy-stick because his muscles were too weak to respond. Vaguely he saw the Zeppelin drome spinning up to meet him—a crazy merry-go-round of twinkling lights, crowds of men, and the big silvery Zeppelin itself.

Down, down, down, with the ground looming closer. It was tearing up at him now with breathless speed, as if to give him a mighty slap. And then at last, when he saw the fatal crash coming, some reserve store of strength in him, some second wind, came to bear. Suddenly he commenced struggling with his controls like a demon, fighting with tooth and nail to get out of the fatal spin. With his tail shot to hell, and

no engine, he knew how slim his chances were, yet he worked stick and rudder furiously.

A second, and the Sopwith's nose would plunge into the earth, and there would be certain, instantaneous death. But in that second, Kirby managed somehow to make his riddled ship respond. Even as the ground leaped right towards the plane, its nose came up—shunned the hard earth. And Kirby, sobbing crazily, pancaked it, managed to set it clown with a crash that smashed it but left its pilot intact.

DAZEDLY, while his fingers unstrapped the safety belt, he looked around him. He had crashed right at the edge of the Zeppelin field, scarcely a hundred feet from the trees which bordered it. Lucky he hadn't landed in those trees—

Lucky? Even before he could draw a breath of relief, he saw a crowd of shadowy figures rushing towards him in the darkness. Boche soldiers, with rifles leveled towards his plane. They had seen the crash, and now they were shouting for the pilot's surrender. A feeling of panic gripped Kirby. Capture—prison for the duration of the war!

No, they would not get him. His desperation gave him new strength. With a wild cry, he whipped out his Colt automatic, fired blindly at the approaching Germans as he sat in his cockpit. He saw one of the figures fall, saw the others pause for a moment, taken aback. He seized his opportunity. In one leap he was out of his cockpit, dashing madly towards the trees in the hope of losing himself among them. The Germans followed in furious pursuit. Kirby heard the shrill crack-crack of their rifles and revolvers, and a fusillade of bullets whined right over his head. But the firing only spurred him on to greater effort. He hurled himself forward. The trees wore right ahead. But then, to his horror, another group of Germans came rushing out from those trees, right in front of him. He was caught—caught between two crowds of Boche. Like a trapped animal, he glanced about furtively, looking for some path of escape. There was only one, and he took it.

Wheeling around, he went galloping right out across the field. Both crowds of Boche followed, firing away at him. The alarm began to spread. Whistles shrilled in the night, shouts rose from all sides. Still no bright lights were turned on, for the field must not be betrayed to any other enemy aviators who might be lurking above.

Kirby's wind was almost gone, and exhaustion was

overcoming him. But he rushed on, rushed as fast as his legs would carry him. Looming right ahead of him, was the enormous hulk of the great Zeppelin. He had all but forgotten the L 99—the object of his mission. Now, pursued by the swarm of Boche soldiers, he was running straight towards the stern of the big ship—the fishlike tail with its pattern of fins and rudders. He could see the engine gondolas suspended beneath the belly of the monster, see the dimly lighted control car up near the bow. The engines were running, purring smoothly.

As Kirby, still dashing on, came nearer, he saw that the ship was slowly, rising. It was taking off, for its crew was evidently assured that the sky was safe. The army of men who were slowly releasing the aerial leviathan were all up at its bow, gripping handrails and guy ropes. The stern which Kirby approached seemed deserted; it was already some twenty-five feet in the air.

On rushed the Mosquito, simply following his nose as he fled from his pursuers. But the Germans were gaining, and the whine of their bullets became more and more unpleasant. Panting and knowing that he could not go much farther, Kirby darted under the stern of the Zeppelin. In the great shadow of the L 99, it was pitch dark, and the darkness helped. Kirby's pursuers lost sight of him for the moment, looked about confusedly. The Mosquito paused, not knowing which way to turn next.

The Zeppelin over his head was still rising very slowly. Suddenly the Mosquito saw a rope which dangled from the rear of the L 99's belly. It was right before him. Without a moment's thought, he rushed for it, and his hands clutched out. He missed it, saw it lifting away from him. Simultaneously he heard the shouts of his pursuers, coming closer, closer. With frantic effort, he leaped at the rope again, got it this time, and clung to it with all his remaining strength. A moment later and he was being lifted into the air, holding on for dear life. Below he saw the crowd of German soldiers, running around confusedly. They did not see him as he clung to the rope, right in the shadow of the Zeppelin.

Suddenly, at a given signal, the men who held the Zeppelin down released their hold on the ship altogether. The huge monster, buoyed up by its gas bags, fairly leaped upwards. The sickening lift brought a horrible feeling to the pit of Kirby's stomach. He saw the ground drop away from him with dizzying speed. The rope he clung to swayed and twisted, almost throwing liim off. Desperately, he wrapped his legs about it, trying to get a firm hold. God, what ghastly predicament had he put himself into now? Here he was, dangling from the belly of the L 99, which was probably going to cruise way over to England. It was too late now to jump off again—a glance into the dizzy stretch of space beneath told him that.

Higher and higher rose the L 99, with Kirby still clinging desperately to that dangling rope. And now the purr of the Zeppelin's engines became a steady, full-throated roar, and Kirby could see its propellers whirling furiously. The nose of the great ship was pointed towards the starlit sky; it was climbing at a sharp angle, climbing fast with the combined power of buoyant gas and sturdy engines. The drome below was now just a small, blurred patch which receded in the night.

Exhausted from the strain of all he had been through, Kirby knew that he could not hold onto this rope much longer. Every muscle shrieked in protest, and the skin was being torn from his hands and legs. God, in another moment he must fall, go tumbling into space! He could not stay here. He must move. There was only one way to move, however, he had to chance it.

Rallying all his ebbing Strength, he started to hoist himself up that rope. The fierce exertion of it made him groan, but he kept on. Slowly, little by little, he kept pulling himself upwards. He had no idea where the rope was going to lead him; perhaps he was just climbing into a new trap. All he saw was that the rope went into a hole in the belly of the Zeppelin, well behind the rear engine gondola. Perhaps Kirby could slip through that hole, manage somehow to stowaway on the big ship until it was over Allied territory. And perhaps then—a faint hope flickered in him—he might find a parachute somewhere.

So, slowly and painfully, he kept climbing. It was becoming more and more difficult for him to pull himself upwards, and the distance that still remained between himself and the belly of the Zeppelin seemed interminably long. But he gritted his teeth and struggled on. His face was covered with sweat, despite the cold night air, and his breath came in short, spasmodic gasps. Still he kept hoisting himself up. At last he was getting there, coming right beneath the silvery fabric covering of the ship. Now he could pick out men in the engine gondolas nearby, could see the machine guns they had for protection against airplanes. If they saw him—

He broke off, for his keen eyes had suddenly picked out something else on the underpart of the Zeppelin. Bombs! He could see them, strung along on wooden racks. There were scores of them, some of them as large as a man. Well did Kirby know what destruction lurked in those steel missiles. The L 99 was obviously out on a raid. But was the raid going to be on London? If so, then this was indeed the Phantom Zeppelin.

The hole from which Kirby's rope emerged was right over his head now; it was just about large enough for a man to pass through. Kirby didn't know where it led, but he was determined to enter it anyway. Closer and closer now. Just a little more and he'd be up. Hold on—don't let that rope slip, even though it was cutting painfully. And don't make any noise; there might be men listening up there.

With one, final effort, he brought himself up to the hole, started to pull himself into the narrow opening. Cautiously, he poked his head through, peered about furtively. A strange sight met his eyes. He had never before seen the inside of a Zeppelin, though he had heard many descriptions of it.

THE hole through which he had poked his head was just an opening in the fabric, leading directly into the gloomy interior of the ship. The rope which came through it was suspended from a girder, above. And the hole was right alongside of the cat-walk, the narrow planks which ran along the bottom of the Zeppelin's interior, extending the length of the ship. On either side of the cat-walk, and above, were the huge, billowy gas bags. There were several of these gas bags, so that if one or two should be destroyed, the others would still be able to lift the ship.

There were dim electric lights to illuminate this gloomy corridor which ran between the gas bags, and their glow revealed a complicated network of aluminum girders, ladders, companionways, and shorter cat-walks leading to the various engine gondolas suspended from the sides of the ship.

All these things Kirby caught in one swift but comprehensive glance as, still clinging to his rope, he poked his head through the hole. The sight of this fantastic interior awed him, made him feel lost. What artifice of man was this strange flying giant, this monster of aluminum and fabric, which was lifted by a thin, highly inflammable gas and pulled through the air by the motors whose throbbing roar Kirby heard! A dangerous monster it was, too, a monster which could bear down upon a city and scatter destruction

throughout the metropolis. But—again Kirby asked himself—was it *the* Phantom Zeppelin, the Zeppelin which rendered itself invisible? Or—

He stopped short, drew in his breath sharply. For now he saw two figures coming down the dimly lighted catwalk, stepping gingerly and gripping the little side rail for support. They were coming right this way. Their footsteps were so soundless that Kirby hadn't noticed them until they were almost up to him. This was because they wore felt-soled shoes, for they must take no risk of striking sparks when they walked among the hydrogen-filled bags.

With frantic haste, Kirby's head ducked back into the hole like a turtle's head withdraws into its shell. He lowered himself by means of the rope, though by this time his seared hands were growing numb, and he didn't see how he could hold on a moment longer. Had he ducked in time? Or had they spotted him? Furtively, he peeked out to see. The two men were coming closer. They were both in naval uniforms, and had on pea-jackets. One was a tall, stern-looking man with an almost cruel looking face. He seemed to be an *ueberleutnant*. The other, a nervous little man with a hawklike face, was a captain.

Kirby knew at once that the captain was Heinrich Stresser, ace of Zeppelin commanders. Fascinated, Kirby watched the famous person approach. His companion was evidently the mate of the ship, second in command. They were doubtless on an inspection tour.

Now they were almost up to the hole through which Kirby peeped, which was just a foot or so from the cat-walk itself. Hastily, the Mosquito ducked altogether, waited, his heart pounding. The men were passing. He heard the planks creak softly, heard the guttural voices, of the two Germans. If they looked into the hole—

They didn't. In a moment they were past. Again Kirby peeked out. The two officers went on down to the end of the corridor, and started to ascend a ladder which led to a hole in the very top of the Zeppelin's envelope. They were gone. Again the gloomy interior seemed deserted. It was Kirby's chance. With furious effort, he pulled himself up through the hole, scrambled to the cat-walk. Quickly, but cautiously, he got to his feet. And it actually seemed strange to feel firm flooring beneath him, after hanging out there in space for so many minutes.

He stood, listening. All seemed silent, save for the throbbing engines, which made the floor vibrate slightly. He could feel the ship's movement through the air; it was no longer climbing now, for it seemed to be quite level and steady.

He must find some place to hide, some refuge where he could wait. He began to move along the cat-walk, his hand on the rail. He tried not to make a sound, but his heavy leather shoes seemed to bang on those floorboards with reverberating intensity; the vast interior was full of echoes, and every sound was magnified. Still Kirby moved slowly along the walk, looking everywhere for some place of shelter.

Suddenly he stopped dead in his tracks, stood as still as a statue. Shouts reached his ears, sounds of cheerful conversation. More men were coming. They seemed to be coming from below, perhaps from the control room. For a moment Kirby felt absolutely helpless, frozen. There he was, standing out on the narrow cat-walk, not knowing where to hide. The sounds of the approaching men were getting closer. God, if they found him here! He knew that by boarding the Zeppelin he had virtually become a spy, and he knew what happened to spies if they were found!

Frantically the Mosquito looked all around. To his left was a narrow little walk leading right between two big gas bags, inclining sharply up the side of the Zeppelin. It was the only course open. Quickly, Kirby darted towards it. He pushed his way between the two soft bags which pressed against him. He could scarcely keep his footing on the steep and narrow board. He faltered, gripped a girder for support.

Nor did he conceal himself a moment too soon. Peering out of his hiding place, he saw the quiet interior of the Zeppelin swarm suddenly with life. Men emerged from manholes and companion-ways. They came down the cat-walk, and some of them ascended ladders. They busied themselves with ropes, wires, and devices on the gas bags. Like sailors they labored to make everything shipshape. They pulled up all the ropes, including the one which Kirby had climbed, and closed up the holes with covers.

Then Captain Stresser and the *ueberleutnant* reappeared, and the captain barked out orders. From all the activity, it was evident to Kirby that they wanted to make sure the ship was absolutely all right before setting forth on some hazardous trip. He watched. Suddenly his heart stopped. For now he saw that men were going to every gas bag, going up walks like the one on which Kirby stood, stepping in a trifle to examine the bags. He could not stay here. Even now

he saw a man coming to these two bags. Quickly, he started to move in further, groped his way up the steep inclining path, it was pitch dark in here, and he had more and more difficulty in keeping his footing on the narrow plank. Again his shoes seemed to be making an unearthly clatter. He kept on, groping along. Up, up, he moved. Suddenly he came to a wall—wall of fabric. It was the side of the Zeppelin. He could go no farther. There was a little platform here, and just about room enough for a man to breathe.

He heard the men outside, heard them on the catwalk between these bags. But they were not coming way in here. He was safe—for the time being.

Gratefully, he slid down, squatted on the platform, with the fabric wall of the Zeppelin right beside him. God, how tired he was! He must get a few minutes' rest, relaxation. He sat there in the darkness, breathing heavily.

For the first time he realized that he had been badly cut by the bullets from those Fokkers. As soon as he relaxed, his face began to sting in a hundred places. He pulled out a handkerchief, mopped the scratches and cuts. Then, to his joy, he found a small metal flask of cognac which he usually carried with him. He took a good swig of it, and the strong vitriolic liquor warmed him, gave him fresh life-blood. Then he poured some of it on his handkerchief and cauterized his cuts with the alcoholic stuff. He felt much better, fresher and stronger.

The sounds of activity out in the corridor were lessening. The men were leaving. But Kirby decided to wait here, to squat on his platform until he could work out some course of action.

Where abouts were they, anyway? The big ship was rocking a bit now, as if in a wind. It seemed to be moving fast, for the throbbing of its engines had increased in violence.

AN IDEA came to the Mosquito. He fished in his tunic until he found his penknife, opened it. Then, very cautiously, he commenced trying to cut the fabric wall of the Zeppelin, The cloth yielded easily. Working slowly and carefully, Kirby cut one slit, then two more. When his work was done he had completed a flap which be could open like a window. It was just large enough for his head to fit through. He poked out through it, looked.

What he saw made him start strangely, sent a cold thrill playing up his spine. The Zeppelin seemed to be very high—cruising swiftly through the night, with fingerlike wisps of cloud caressing it as they whisked by. Far below, gleaming in the bright moonlight, were dancing whitecaps.

The North Sea! Already they were far out over the surging ocean, out of sight of land. Kirby smiled grimly as he recalled his first intention of trying to get a parachute and jumping for it. He couldn't jump now. There was nothing but miles and miles of cold, rough water below.

Now he was certain that the L 99 was London-bound. And it was the Phantom Zeppelin! He had no choice, but to stay here until they reached England; then, perhaps he could do something. Maybe—he laughed at his ridiculous optimism—maybe he would be able to discover the mystery of the Zeppelin's invisibility yet.

Kirby pulled in his head, let his improvised flap drop again. He settled back on the platform, and began the long wait. The air seemed to be getting colder and thinner all the time. The ship kept moving on, cruising over the sea. For a full hour, as he peered through the flap from time to time, Kirby saw nothing but those dancing whitecaps below. He kept sitting on his little platform, and his muscles became cramped and stiff. It was freezing cold now—the damp coldness of sea air, which penetrated to the very marrow.

Then, at last, as he kept watching, there appeared on the shadowy horizon a faint, chalklike line. It was the English coast. In a few minutes they would be over Britain. The realization filled Kirby with a frenzied desire to get into action, to do something. Yet he dared not move from his platform, for now, once more, the corridor outside seemed to be bustling with activity. Again he heard the shouts of the men, and also sounds of moving objects and splashing water. At first he couldn't understand the meaning of these noises. But then, when he felt the ship rising once more, climbing still higher, he realized. The men were dropping ballast, so they could attain greater altitude as they neared enemy territory.

Restlessly, Kirby waited in his hiding place, praying that the men would leave the corridor. But the sounds outside continued, continued while that chalklike line moved nearer and nearer, assuming clearer characteristics, growing into great cliffs. Then, a moment later, the Zeppelin was passing over that coastline. They were in England. Kirby shifted furiously, like a tiger in a cage. God, would he have to remain here throughout the trip? Would he have to just sit here while the raid took place, and then ride

back to German territory? It looked that way, for if he dared to show himself outside of this platform he was sure to be caught.

Again he peered through the flap, looked down. They were passing over the sleepy little English coast towns now. A few lights twinkled here and there, and the moon revealed clusters of houses. Thus far the L 99 had not done anything to make itself invisible, that was certain. Though the Zeppelin was flying quite high, any powerful searchlight could have picked out its great silvery hull as it sailed through the clear sky. But the fact that it hadn't yet performed its trick—or whatever it was—seemed natural enough. It was unnecessary for it to become invisible here. There were few defenses on the ground below and the towns were never the objects of raids. Doubtless the people, asleep in their beds, did not even hear the monster which droned high above them. But—Kirby mused grimly when they neared London there would probably be a different story.

Smoothly and swiftly, the Zeppelin kept moving over the English countryside. Kirby, though he was fairly bursting with furious impatience, had to keep waiting, waiting while he still heard those men out in the corridor. Time dragged on. Fifteen minutes passed, thirty, forty.

They must be nearing London. Despair seized the Mosquito. His one great hope had been to get out of here, find a parachute if there were any on board, and jump to earth in time to secure a plane with which he could still carry out his mission, follow the L 99. But now, with London so close at hand, he realized that it was too late to do this. His only hope now was to solve the mystery of the Zeppelin's invisibility while be remained on board. Then, perhaps, he might manage somehow to prevent the raid, find a way of disabling the huge ship or making it go into a trap. But even this plan meant that he must get off this platform. He realized that so long as he was here, way up among the gas bags, he was helpless to do anything, and his vision was so limited that he probably wouldn't even be able to see how the L 99 became the Phantom Zeppelin.

On cruised the big ship, engines still droning monotonously. Closer and closer it drew to London. Kirby cursed bitterly beneath his breath, and tears of helpless rage came to his eyes. Lord—his fists clenched—if only he could do something!

He caught his breath, and thought at first that his ears were deceiving him. Then, when he realized that they weren't, a wave of frenzied relief swept him. The sounds out in that corridor were lessening once more, the voices of the men were fading. They were leaving. Evidently the crew were going to their stations.

Instantly the Mosquito rose to his feet, again gripping the girders. He listened. Not a sound now. He could chance it. He began to slip out of his hiding place, gingerly picking his way down the descending planks. A few seconds, and he was again peeking out at the dimly lit corridor. It was deserted. He sneaked out from the gas bags, got out on the cat-walk. He started to move forward, towards the bow of the Zeppelin. He had to walk uphill now, for the ship was climbing. Cautiously, Kirby moved along. If he could get a look down into the control car—

He worked his way up to a semicircular rail up forward, a rail which had been put around a well right in the center of the cat-walk. Kirby approached it slowly, looked down.

Far below, just a small portion of it visible through the circular well with its descending ladder, was the control car. Kirby saw a man or two moving down there in the dim light, but that was all. He tried vainly to see more, leaned over the rail.

"Herauf hande!"

The sharp, guttural command right behind him almost made him jump out of his skin. He wheeled around, fearfully. Then the blood drained from his face.

There, confronting him, training their Lugers upon him as they stood grouped about the cat-walk, were five grim-faced Germans. They had evidently come from some other part of the ship; had seen Kirby as he went along the cat-walk, and had at once identified his American flying togs. They had crept up on him unawares, with the aid of their felt-soled shoes, and now they had him cornered.

In the forefront of the group was the tall, stern *ueberleutnant* Kirby had seen before. It was he who had barked out the command, and his cruel face! was wreathed in a malignant, almost murderous scowl.

"Surrender, swine of a Yankee!" he snarled at Kirby, in perfect English. "Throw up your hands!"

For a second, as he stared into the dark muzzles of those Lugers, Kirby felt strangely faint, unable to gather his wits together. But only for a second. Suddenly his brain cleared, told him that men who wore felt-soled shoes to safeguard against making sparks among the inflammable hydrogen bags would hesitate still more to fire revolvers in here.

But at the same time he saw the *ueberleutnant* and the others moving towards him, to seize him.

"Surrender!" the officer repeated.

Then a wave of savage recklessness swept Kirby. His eyes blazed. "Surrender my uncle!" he bellowed defiantly.

With one animal-like leap, he had darted around the circular rail, was rushing down the cat-walk on the other side, towards the bow of the ship. The Germans gave chase, shouting threats at him. Wildly he tried to dart off between gas bags, as he had done before. But then he lost his footing, stumbled, sprawled on the cat-walk.

The Germans were rushing up. Desperately, he whipped out his Colt, not-giving a damn whether he set off the gas bags or not. He aimed at the approaching Boche, pulled the trigger. There was a dull, hopeless click. *Empty!* He had used up his cartridges down on that Zeppelin field before.

IN THE next moment, while he tried frantically to get to his feet, the Germans, led by the snarling *ueberleutnant*, were upon him. They seized him roughly, pulled him up. For awhile he struggled madly in their grip. But then, overcome by the strain of all this fighting and fleeing, he gave up, relaxed. The *ueberleutant* confronted him, his eyes gleaming cruelly. Kirby glared at him sullenly.

"Sneaking spy!" muttered the German. "You think you are quite clever, don't you?" He laughed, with blighting malice. "You'll pay, *schweinhund!*" Then, turning to the men, he barked out an order.

Instantly they searched Kirby, who stood silent, resigned. They stripped him of all his weapons and maps. Then they forced him to the well which led to the control car, made him climb down the ladder, he obeyed, moving as if in a trance.

A moment later, again held firmly by his captors, he stood in the control room of the L 99, a strange-looking cabin with many windows, and only a few dim lights. He saw the helmsman standing at the wheel, and close by, before a complicated system of gauges, wheels, and levers was the little, hawk-faced Captain Stresser himself.

The men in the control room all turned to look at Kirby and his captors. The nervous Captain Stresser glanced around quickly, and barked out an inquiry without leaving his controls.

The *ueberleutnant* went over to the commander, spoke respectfully.

"I've just caught this spy, sir," he said in German. "The swine was hiding among our gas bags." Then

again his voice was murderous, though cool: "We can't afford to be bothered with him. Why not throw him overboard and be done with him?"

Kirby, knowing only a little German, could not understand these words, but the tone in which they were said made him sense their grim significance. A cold fear gripped the Mosquito, and again he struggled vainly in his captor's grip.

Captain Stresser frowned darkly.

"Nonsense!" he snapped at the *ueberleutnant*. "We can't use any such barbarous tactics! Hold that man there for a moment, until I have time to deal with him." He went on in a lower voice, so that Kirby could not hear, for he didn't know that the Mosquito couldn't understand German. "We are getting near the danger zone, and it is time to work our little trick. We've been waiting for you, *leutnant*. Forget about this spy and make ready to perform your gallant duty." He smiled. "Again you must mystify the swine British!"

The subordinate officer drew himself up, stood stiff as a ramrod.

"I shall go at once, *mein herr kommandeur!*" he said, and with a brisk salute, he marched out of the control compartment, disappearing into the radio room at the rear.

Captain Stresser again devoted himself to his controls, jumped about nervously from one gadget to another. Kirby's four remaining captors still held on to the Mosquito with a viselike grip. But he was no longer relaxed, indifferent. Now, as if he sensed what was coming, he was watching Captain Stresser with fascinated eyes.

The little ace of Zeppelin commanders shouted into a speaking tube, and pulled down a handle. At once the violent throbbing of the ship's engines ceased, and the floor beneath Kirby's feet no longer vibrated. They were shutting off the motors, letting them idle. Why?

Suddenly Kirby felt the ship rising again, rising like an elevator now, with its keel level. Up, up, up, with Captain Stresser leaping from control to control, shouting out one order after another through the tubes.

In the next moment, to Kirby's blank astonishment, a sort of steamlike vapor came pouring through the open windows of the control car, pouring into the room. At once Captain Stresser barked impatiently, and the men about him hastened to close the windows. But the room was already full of the whitish vapor, and in it the men appeared like wraiths.

But it was not steam. Abruptly, Kirby realized what

it really was. Mist! The Zeppelin had just entered a heavy cloud, was right in the midst of the damp stuff. And now the ship had stopped rising; it seemed almost to be standing still, hanging in the clouds. The mist in the room began to clear away, though through the closed windows nothing could be seen but the billowy white vapor.

Captain Stresser yelled through another tube. "We're all ready, *leutnant!*" he said in German. "You can start down now! We'll wait for your directions!"

Then, having nothing to do until he should hear from the other man, he left the controls to someone else, and walked over to Kirby. He surveyed the Mosquito critically, and smiled agreeably.

"How do you like our little London fog?" he queried, and his English was also perfect.

Kirby tried to be sullen, but somehow the commander's voice was agreeable, so free from the malice and hatred which had characterized the *ueberleutnant's* tone, that the Mosquito could not help feeling a warm feeling of gratitude for the man. Like most great aces, Stresser was a good sportsman, who could regard his foes as human beings instead of vile creatures only fit to be scorned and despised.

So Kirby grinned, though his grin was rather weak. "What's the big idea of hanging in a cloud?" he replied. "You can't do much navigating in this mist."

Stresser smiled quizzically. "You're quite right, my friend," he concede "One cannot navigate in a cloud. But that is neither here nor there." He paused, lost in thought for a moment. Then he went on, musingly, "So you are a spy for the British, eh? Well, I commend you for your audacity, but I am afraid you have made a very serious mistake, my friend. It will cost you your life. And it will not stop us at all from carrying out our mission. Doubtless you have already discovered that we are out to raid London. Therefore, I need not hide from you the fact that in a few minutes now, we shall be over the city, and shall be dropping our great bombs."

At these words, Kirby flushed with sudden rage, glared angrily at the commander. "Don't be too sure of that!" he warned. "I'm not through yet! And I'll find out how you're making this ship invisible if it's the last thing I do!"

The commander shook his head, in genuine sympathy. "No, my friend—sneaking aboard this ship was the last thing you'll ever do. And even granting that you should discover our trick, the British will never learn of it from you, for you will not be alive to

tell them, But you couldn't discover it anyway, because now, I am sorry to say, I shall have to put you in irons and confine you to the interior of the ship."

The grim sentence came like a blow which crushed out Kirby's last atom of hope, filled him with frenzy. He was going to be put away, put away where he would remain helpless while the Zeppelin dropped its deadly bombs. He wouldn't have a chance to discover anything. God, if only he could get away! But it seemed hopeless; there didn't even seem to be a parachute on board. The men were not wearing any.

At a command from Captain Stresser, a man went off to fetch the manacles. And then, realizing that the game was completely up, Kirby lost his head. Something snapped inside of him, literally made him go mad. A wild light appeared in his eyes.

Like a crazed animal, he lurched in his captor's grip, gave one mighty pull to break away. That superhuman strength which sometimes comes to desperate men was in Kirby's muscles, making him almost inconquerable. Yelling and cursing, he suddenly pulled himself free. And before the astounded Germans could seize him again, he lashed out with fists of iron, right, left, right, left. He sprawled two of them, made a third double up from a punch in the stomach. Then he darted towards the ladder leading up to the Zeppelin's interior.

But a man standing there whipped out a Luger, and Kirby, knowing that here, outside of the gas compartments, they could fire their guns, saw that he couldn't get to that ladder. He wheeled, ran towards the rear of the control room. He heard Stresser shouting out harsh orders, heard the crack of a pistol, and a bullet zipped past him, imbedding itself in the wall. The men in the room were rushing towards him, all shouting at once.

Reaching the rear of the control room, he was stopped by a wall. The Germans were closing in on him. Cornered again! But he darted along the wall. Suddenly he came to the door of the radio room. Without thinking he pulled at the handle. The door yielded, flew open. But into Kirby's face came clouds of mist; the radio room was full of the stuff—evidently the windows there were not closed.

That mist would help. Kirby darted into it. Vaguely, he saw the shadowy form of a man spring from the radio, who leaped towards the Mosquito as he heard the shouts of the other Germans. Again Kirby lashed out with his powerful fists, sent the man down. He ran across the room like a crazed hare. The others

were pouring through the doorway, pursuing him, but having difficulty in keeping track of him because of the mist.

Kirby kept running, looking for some ladder which might lead him back among the gas bags, where he could at least hide. He was running towards the rear of the radio compartment, with the angry Boche close behind, trying to corner him again. He redoubled his efforts, hurled himself forward.

THEN, with horror, he saw it—looming before him in the mist. At the rear of the radio room, right in front of him, was a big doorway, obviously leading into the empty air; for the cloud vapors were pouring through it.

Before Kirby had seen that opening, he was right up to it. His brain gave the signal to his muscles, but his muscles couldn't respond in time. Vainly, he tried to stop his furious forward speed, draw up to a stop. It was too late. With a cry of frenzied terror, he went lunging straight through that opening, to go tumbling head over heels into space!

The Germans who had followed him into the room, among them Stresser, shuddered in horror as they saw him go over, and peered down after him. But the cloud was so dense that they could see no sign of him. Captain Stresser shook his head.

"He's gone," he sighed. "Poor fellow—to fall down through the space. Well, he died gallantly, at any rate." But this was not the truth.

One of those miracles which take place once in a life-time had happened to Kirby. As he went plunging out of that doorway, his hands had instinctively clutched out, trying to grip something that might check his fall. As luck would have it, he felt a cable brushing past, a cable which was evidently suspended right outside the doorway, from some point above. Frantically, Kirby had kept clutching for that elusive rope, and somehow, he had gotten hold of it, before his fall had really begun. It tore the skin from his hands, and seemed strangely slippery. The reason was obvious. It was a steel cable.

How he was able to hold on to it in the exhausted, spent condition he was in, he never knew. He simply clutched it like a drowning man will clutch a straw. Somehow he got a grip on it, wrapped his legs about it, and was able to hang on. And he was so relieved that he had not hurtled down through space that he did not feel the excruciating pain made by the steel cable as it cut into him, did not feel the chill moisture of the

cloud which was soaking him to the skin. Slowly, his dazed and reeling brain began to clear.

It was only then that he realized that the cable was moving, that it was descending with breathless swiftness. Good God, what new horror was this? He was being lowered right on that cable. Though he could not see a thing in the dense, moist clouds, he knew it was the cable and not the Zeppelin which was descending, because he could hear an engine—doubtless a winch—above, an engine whose sound drifted further and further away.

Down, down, down, went Kirby on that cable. It was a horrible sensation to feel that steel rope dropping through the pitch dark void of cloud. Where would the ghastly descent end? He had no choice but to cling on, for if he let go he'd just go hurtling to his death.

Suddenly the mist began to clear. A whiff of fresh air came through his nostrils, revived him considerably. No longer was it pitch dark now; it was much lighter. The cable, still descending swiftly, had just emerged from the cloud. Looking up, Kirby saw the fluffy white mass receding above him. As a matter of fact there was a sea of those clouds overhead, though there hadn't been any in Belgium. The fleecy cirrus was piled in great banks, and through the gaps and breaks in the cottonlike mass the moon and stars shone.

There was not a sign of the Zeppelin, though Kirby knew it must be in the cloud right overhead. The fact that he could not see the big ship gave him the weird illusion of being suspended from a cloud, hanging onto a cable which led into thin vapor.

The cable was still descending swiftly, going right on down. Kirby continued to hold on for all he was worth, though the steel was so slippery that he found himself sliding down a few feet several times. His hands were raw and bleeding. God, how much longer would this agony last?

He looked down, and shuddered as he saw how far the earth lay below. And then, as he scanned the landscape which was plainly visible in the moonlight coming through the clouds, his heart pounded wildly. Right below was a ribbon of silver which the Zeppelin seemed to be following. The Thames! There was no mistaking that landmark which always stood out like a beacon, even on the darkest nights—a beacon which led to London.

As Kirby's eyes became better accustomed to the darkness, and his vision improved, he saw, further

down along that ribbon of silver, the darkened, shadowy blotch which was London itself. There was scarcely a light to be seen there; they expected the Zeppelin, and were preparing for the raid as best they could.

The L 99, its engines stopped, was hanging in a cloud just outside of London. As Captain Stresser said, this was the beginning of the danger zone. A little further ahead were the searchlights and anti-aircrafts, and fleets of night-flying planes.

By this time Kirby had at last found a way of holding onto this cable that didn't cause him such agony. The steel rope was quite thin, and Kirby found that by wrapping a leg around it he could make himself quite secure. He still had no idea of where the descent would end, but as long as he had to stay here, he'—d devote all his time to watching things, seeing all he could.

The clouds above were getting further and further away. The cable almost dropped a half a mile now. Suddenly it began to slow up. Slower and slower—until, at last, it ceased descending altogether. Kirby, now hanging quite still in mid-air, asked himself, "What next?"

Why had this cable been lowered and where did it lead to? He looked down again, tried to follow the steel rope with his eyes. This was difficult, for the cable was so thin it was swallowed in the darkness. But suddenly Kirby thought he saw the end of it.

About fifty feet below him, straight down, was a dark object whose shape he could not clearly distinguish as yet. Evidently it was attached to the cable, which explained why the steel rope had hung so tautly, without swinging or twisting. The object weighted it down. But what was the thing?

All at once Kirby's ears caught something, something which made him start as he poised on that rope. He listened, straining to better catch the sound. No, there was no mistaking it. It was a man's voice. How eerie to hear a man talking out here in midair! Then Kirby noticed that the voice was drifting right from below, right from that object on the end of the rope. And the voice was strangely familiar; it was not loud, but harsh and guttural. Suddenly Kirby remembered. That was the *ueberleutnant*, the cruelfaced male of the Zeppelin! But what the devil was the officer doing down there, and to whom was he talking? Kirby listened, tried to catch the words.

"Bereit!" the voice of the *ueberleutnant* was saying, and by his tone he was obviously giving directions.

"Geh vorwaerts, nach London. Ja, nur langsam!"

Kirby could grasp little from these words, but no sooner had the men finished speaking them than the Mosquito heard the drone of motors overhead, way up in the clouds. And the cable he clung to began to move—forward this time. The Zeppelin was moving.

Again the German below spoke in that directing tone: "Ganz gut!" Then, after a little pause: "Ein wenig zu rechts jetzt!"

Immediately, Kirby, by watching the landscape below, knew that the great Zeppelin above was swinging a little towards the right. Slowly it moved on, following the silvery line of the Thames towards London. And all the time the *ueberleutnant* below kept speaking, obviously giving directions.

Then, like a bolt from the blue, it came to Kirby, and in one lucid flash he grasped the whole upshot of this weird business. So this was the subterfuge which had baffled all of London. The same miracle which had saved Kirby's life had also enabled him to stumble unwittingly right into the solution of the mystery.

IT WAS all so simple, so devoid of complicated trickery; yet its very simplicity was probably the thing that had made it so baffling. Kirby had to admire the ingenuity of these Germans. It had taken brains to invent this trick.

The object which Kirby saw below, he knew now, was an observation basket of some kind, which had been lowered from the Zeppelin. The man in it was speaking over a telephone, connected to the control car of the L 99, above. That was the whole thing in a nutshell.

The L 99 became a phantom Zeppelin simply by flying right in the midst of the clouds—something which the experts had refused to consider, because they didn't see how the Zeppelin crew could navigate in the heavy mists. As a matter of fact, they didn't navigate. It was the *ueberleutnant*, sitting in this basket half a mile below, with a clear view of the landscape beneath him, who did their navigating for them. The basket was so small that it could never have been spotted either by searchlights or airplanes.

That was all there was to it. The L 99 soared serenely through the concealing blankets of fog, while the observation basket hung in the clear air far below, like a gigantic periscope which the Zeppelin poked out of the clouds so that it could see where it was going. Only this periscope had a human eye at its end instead of a system of reflecting prisms. And the *ueberleutnant*

evidently was a fine navigator, who knew London well. This accounted for the accuracy of the bomb hits.

The *ueberleutnant* must have started his descent in the observation car just a few seconds before Kirby had fallen out of the radio room of the Zeppelin, for the Mosquito had caught the cable only fifty feet above the basket.

And now, with the mystery completely unraveled in his mind, Kirby poised above that car while the unseen Zeppelin above, directed by the *ueberleutnant*, moved on. It was going faster now. The rope was tilting back at an angle, as the ship above dragged it through the air.

Suddenly, while Kirby remained up here, trying to work out a course of action, the dark earth below seemed literally to awaken with a shock. From all directions, great searchlights opened up like eyes, sent their narrow beams stabbing through the darkness, into the heavens. Back and forth swished those bands of white, like giant feelers groping for the danger which threatened the city. They whisked right on the clouds, making portions of the fleecy white banks stand out fantastically. If only they could pierce through those clouds, thought Kirby grimly!

Then the Mosquito's keen eyes suddenly spotted a few formations of airplanes in the surrounding sky. Sometimes the searchlights would accidentally flash upon a squadron at other times Kirby could see the red sparks of exhausts. It was strange to see these planes looking hopelesly about for the Zeppelin, while in reality the ship was flying right in their midst. But though they could hear the motors, they could see nothing but a clear bright sky, and high banks of clouds.

And now a grim realization came to Kirby, stirred him to action. In a moment the raid would begin, the L 99 would start dropping its bombs. They were not over the city proper yet, but the suburbs spread below them. He must do something! He could not keep hanging to this cable anyway, for by now even his new grip on the steel rope was failing him. The cable had cut right through the clothing on his legs, and was searing him literally to the bone.

Quickly he made his plan, and started at once to carry it out. He looked down, listened. The *ueberleutnant* was still busy giving directions. Kirby could only hope that the German would not see. The Mosquito wrapped both his arms around the steel rope, for his hands were so cut and bruised that they could not serve his purpose. Also he gripped the cable

with both legs. Then, breathing a little prayer, he began to let himself slide right down, swiftly, but silent as a cat.

Down he went, and the basket below loomed closer, assuming clearer outlines. Now he saw that it really wasn't a basket, but a car. It resembled the tiny fuselage of an airplane; there was a tail on it, to keep it going straight, prevent it from twisting around. And it was fastened to this steel cable, whose core must be a telephone wire, by braces which rose from its side.

Kirby was almost down to those braces now, for his descent was quite swift. And now he could see the shadowy form of the *ueberleutnant*. The German was bending to his phone, leaving it only to glance down at the terrain below. He was quite unaware of Kirby, did not hear or see the Mosquito as the latter slid down above him.

With his heart beating wildly, Kirby came to the braces right above the observation car, and his feet rested on them. Still the *ueberleutnant* did not look, though Kirby was peering right down at him. The Mosquito noticed suddenly that there was a familiar looking pack on the German's back. A surge of joy went through him. A parachute! Perhaps luck was going to be with him, after all.

The sight of that parachute gave him fresh confidence, gave him the nerve and strength to carry out his daring actions. He drew in a long breath, and his muscles tensed. He measured his distance, judged his time.

Like a tiger, he leaped, leaped right down into that observation car, landing right on top of its surprised occupant. The German at once tried to make an outcry. But the Mosquito, knowing that the cry would be heard through the phone by the men up in the Zeppelin, at once clapped a hand over the other's mouth.

The *ueberleutnant* began to struggle furiously, but Kirby had the advantage of a surprise attack. Soon he had gotten a viselike hold on the other man. Again the German tried to cry out, and again Kirby stifled him. Fiercely they wrestled in the small cockpit of that observation car. Suddenly the *ueberleutnant* jerked a hand free, and Kirby saw him pulling out his Luger. With an oath, the American grabbed for the gun, wrested it free in one violent jerk. He got it in his hands, and poked it viciously right into the body of the other man.

Suddenly the receiver of the phone, behind the German, buzzed with a voice, the voice of Captain

Stresser, from the Zeppelin. And the voice was interrogative. The captain was evidently asking for more directions.

"Sit down at that phone," Kirby directed the *ueberleutnant*, "and tell 'em to keep going straight. And remember," he lied beautifully, "I understand German perfectly, and if you try to say anything else I'll pull this trigger. Go on, now!"

The *ueberleutnant* sank meekly into the seat before the phone. No longer was he the stern, proud officer who had looked upon Kirby with scorn and contempt up on that Zeppelin. He was scared stiff, scared of this brazen Yank who had miraculously jumped into his observation car and overcome him.

He leaned to the phone, and the pressure of the Luger against his back gave him the power to make his voice steady, even. He rattled off the German words.

Kirby waited, gripped by suspense, waited to see if there would be any change in the unseen ship's course—which would mean that the Mosquito had been betrayed. The course did not change, however. The observation car kept sailing right ahead.

INSTANTLY Kirby reached his grim decision. Again he spoke sharply to the *ueberleutnant*. "Take off your parachute!" he ordered. "Hurry up—no stalling. Take it off and hand it over."

The German winced, hesitated. But then, obediently, he pulled the harness off his back, handed it to Kirby. The Mosquito, keeping his Luger poked into the other man's body with one hand, started to hitch the parachute on himself with the other.

Again the receiver of the phone was buzzing with inquiries. Kirby wasted no more time, he spoke quietly, but emphasized each word.

"Now," he told the ueberleutnant, "you're going to tell 'em this: there's a big gap in the clouds through which they're flying, and they'll be seen if they go through it. Get that? Then you'll tell 'em that there's another layer of clouds beneath that one up there. They can dive from one to the other without being seen. In other words, tell them to descend."

At this, the *ueberleutnant* could not contain himself. His face twisted in horror.

"Gott!" he muttered, in a frenzy. "If they descend the English will certainly get them—with the guns!"

"Exactly," Kirby conceded tacitly. "But if you don't tell them to come down, I'm going to shoot you like the cowardly dog you are. Do as I say, and I'll let you live, save your life, though it isn't worth a tinker's damn! The two of us can jump on this one chute." The buzzing of the phone's receiver was getting more and more insistent. "Now hurry, tell them to come down!"

Still the *ueberleutnant* wavered, torn between a desire to live and his innate loyalty to his country. Kirby knew that if this had been Captain Stresser, instead of the *ueberleutnant*, there would have been no such conflict. The gallant Zeppelin commander would never have obeyed Kirby's grim instructions even if the Mosquito killed him. But the *ueberleutnant* was made of weaker stuff. And in the end, his desire to live overshadowed all else.

He leaned to the phone, started giving instructions. A moment, and he turned to Kirby, whispered fearfully, "They are reluctant to descend. They want to know if I am sure of what I say."

Kirby poked the revolver into him vigorously. "You get them to comedown—I don't care how you do it. It's up to you, if you want to live!"

The *ueberleutnant*, now having a difficult time to keep his voice from trembling, spoke again into the phone. Again he turned to Kirby, and even in the darkness the Mosquito could see the beads of sweat on the other's face.

"They're coming!" the German said, in a hollow voice.

Even as he spoke, Kirby could feel the observation car starting to move downwards. The L 99 was coming down. In a moment it would appear beneath the clouds, would descend right into a fatal trap.

And then, as the German felt that Zeppelin coming down, he seemed to realize at last that he had done a cowardly thing. A spark of courage and determination flickered in him. Kirby, at that moment, was a little bit off his guard; the Mosquito was busy trying to get into the parachute, and his hand which held the Luger was not as firm and steady as it had been. The *ueberleutnant* was quick to seize his opportunity.

With a swiftness which took the Mosquito completely unawares, he lunged forward, his hand darting towards the revolver. He got the pistol, was twisting its muzzle away from his body. Then, at the top of his lungs, so that the men at the other end of the phone would surely hear, he voiced a frenzied cry that would have roused the dead.

But before that cry came, Kirby, warned by some intuition, acted with wonderful presence of mind. Disregarding everything else, he reached out and seized that phone, pulled it clean off the wires. And the

German's shouts were wasted—the Zeppelin was still descending.

However, by reaching for that phone, Kirby had put himself in a disadvantageous position. And the German was right upon him, wrestling wildly, using fists, teeth, and feet. The Luger went flying out of Kirby's hand, right over the side of the observation car. His parachute was wrenched off his shoulder, and the German fought wildly to seize the pack. Cursing, Kirby hurled himself upon his attacker. Like madmen they fought over that parachute, while all the time the unseen Zeppelin above continued its slow but steady descent.

The little observation car rocked and swayed giddily while the two men struggled. The German held onto the parachute with a leechlike clutch. Suddenly he gave a mighty push which sent Kirby back on his heel. The Mosquito almost tumbled out of the car, and as he tried to get his balance, the *ueberleutnant*, with a murderous snarl, leaped on him again, was pushing him off.

The German had the Mosquito down on the edge of the cockpit, and only Kirby's feet were on the floor. The rest of his body was leaning out in space. And the *ueberleutnant* was forcing him down, down!

But then, rallying all his strength, Kirby lunged upwards with his whole body, and brought himself back into the cockpit. He lashed out with a terrific uppercut, an uppercut which landed flush on the Boche's jaw. The blow literally lifted the other man bodily. With a shriek of terror, he toppled over the edge of the cockpit and then, screaming, he plunged into space.

Kirby stood alone in the observation car. In his hand was the much-battered parachute. The German's grip on it had relaxed when Kirby had brought that fatal punch to his jaw. With frantic haste, Kirby began struggling into the harness again. And at that very moment, looking up towards the clouds, he saw it coming.

It appeared as if by magic, a silver shape emerging from the mists above. The Phantom Zeppelin—coming out of its hiding place!

The wary soldiers down below saw it at once. Almost immediately a great searchlight caught it in its glare, then another, and still another. Like the tentacles of a huge monster those white bands of light fastened themselves to the flanks of the great Zeppelin—and in the glare the L 99 shimmered in all its silvery glory.

Too late did the gallant Captain Stresser and his crew realize that they had been duped. Too late did

the Zeppelin try to change its course abruptly, making an attempt to climb back into the clouds. Down in the observation car, Kirby felt those frantic movements; the car began to rise swiftly, lurched forward, as the cable made it duplicate all the maneuvers of the Zeppelin above.

Yes, it was too late. For in a second, a score of livid red flashes leaped out from the earth below, as the anti-aircrafts hurled up a mighty barrage. As the barrage came, Kirby, gripping the release ring of his parachute in one hand, leaped out of the observation car.

Down he shot into space, head-over-heels. He pulled the ring. In a moment there came a jerk which pulled him up, almost wrenching his arms from their sockets.

Suddenly, as he went floating down, he became aware of a bright red glow which illuminated the whole sky. He looked up. His face filled with awe.

Above, the L 99, her hydrogen bags set off by the incendiary shells, was a blinding ball of fire, a sun in itself. It was descending, with flaming pieces of debris falling from it, and its descent kept increasing in speed as more and more of the ship burned away. Suddenly it crumpled in one flaming mass which hurtled straight to earth.

Kirby's parachute brought him down on a field, right next to an anti-aircraft battery. Dazedly, the Mosquito untangled himself from the ropes of the chute, walked over to the guns. Some British Tommies stared at him in awe, startled by his disheveled appearance.

"Gawblimey!" exclaimed a sergeant, scratching his head. "H'if it hain't a bleedin' Yankee h'aviator! Where did you h'ever come frum, sir?"

Kirby looked at him vaguely. "Hell," he replied, in a hollow voice.

ON THE following day the Three Mosquitoes lounged near the bar of the officers' club, in London. And Kirby's comrades, Shorty Carn and the lanky Travis, were still praising their leader enthusiastically.

"The only thing that gets me," Kirby said. "Is that you guys weren't in on the thing. Why in hell didn't you come along and shoot that Zep down?"

"Say, what do you think we are?" Travis drawled, with a laugh. "Do you think we'd shoot down a Zeppelin when you were on it? Not that we exactly saw the Zeppelin but—well, that's our story and we'll stick to it."

"Speaking of stories," chimed in Shorty Carn, holding a copy of a metropolitan daily in his hand, "just listen to this! Here's a paper that prides itself on the accuracy of its news." And he read them the following extract:

"The bagging of the Phantom Zeppelin must be credited to Captain Kirbin, a daring American who is in the Royal navy. This gallant Yank slipped on board the Zeppelin by jumping right from an airplane onto the top of the L 99. He soon discovered how the Zeppelin made itself invisible. This was done by an ingenious camouflage which made the big ship look exactly like a cloud, and could not he distinguished from the many other clouds. Captain Kirbin then held up the crew of the Zeppelin with two cow-boy six-shooters, and tying

all the men securely, he seized the controls and piloted the L-99 right into an anti-aircraft zone.

"He escaped from the burning ship by means of a remarkable parachute of his own invention. He landed on the roof of the Palace hotel, where, it is said, he promptly registered and went to bed for a well-earned repose."

Kirby gave a low whistle. "Well, I'll be a—" he exclaimed. "Good-night, I didn't think anyone could imagine a more crazy adventure than the one I've been through. But this reporter's sure a genius. No wonder people think that truth is stranger than fiction! What do you think about it, Trav?"

"I think it calls for a drink," drawled the lanky man. And his proposal was passed unanimously.





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