



ACES FLY HIGH

by **FREDERICK C. PAINTON**

Daring Rescues and Savage Strife in the Flaming Skies Above No Man's Land

THERE WAS NO ONE TO BLAME but young Pup Grenfell himself. He had been warned not to break formation, for the Krauts around Mont Sec were tough and killers. But he saw the Halberstadt two-seater over Nonesard and dove helling from nine thousand feet to chew it up.

Dugger Banks, skipper of the Fifteenth Aero Pursuit, saw the lad screaming down the sky like a fired bullet. He cursed once obscenely and spat a gob of tobacco juice into the slipstream. "Let him die, damn his reckless soul!" he swore. "I've had enough of that louse's half-witted idiocies."

And thereupon he signaled for the rest of the sixteen crates to hold the stepped-achelon formation. For Dugger Banks had seen that this was a trap.

And so it was. Young Pup Grenfell tore down the sky in a vertical dive, flattened off a thousand feet below the Halberstadt and came zooming up at the two-seater's blind spot with both his Vickers spitting a torrent of tracer stream. He might have got in perhaps fifty slugs when the Fokkers came.

They had been hiding above the clouds, twelve of them, black like hawks, barbed with wicked Spandaus and flown by the best Kraut pilots on the German front. Outnumbered by the Yanks, they had prayed for just this: that some silly American would detach himself from his squadron to kill off the white meat two-seater, and when he did the Jerries would slaughter him. It was an old sucker trick and Pup Grenfell went for it.

The Halberstadt flung itself over in a pivot turn, nosed down and dove for home. The black Fokkers

fluttered in like striking hawks, circled Pup Grenfell and began to give him a belly full of hot steel. He fought like an inspired madman. He dodged the two on his tail, attacked magnificently against the circle of ships that surrounded him. But the odds were too great. He was a dead man and he knew it.

Another man among those orange Spads high above knew it, too. That was Blake Grenfell, who was Pup's half-brother and three years older. Blake Grenfell was the squadron ace; sixteen German crates had fallen before his battering guns. His splendid good-nature, his utter fearlessness, and his generous personality made him adored by the Fifteenth from Dugger Banks down to the last greaseball.

Three times Blake Grenfell had saved his half-brother's life when the youngster's hot-blooded recklessness had got him into trouble. He had watched over Pup on the ground, took him to room with him, protected him as if he were his real brother.

All this he had done because of two facts: Blake Grenfell adored his father and loved his step-mother who was Pup's mother. They had asked him to watch over the lad and bring him safely back. He had made a pledge he would. More important still, Carolyn Farthing loved young Pup Grenfell. When Blake had proposed she had told him so. And Blake, being the man he was, had hidden the heart-break her refusal of him had created.

"If you love him and want him," he had said, "I'll do all one man can to bring him back to you."

"I LOVE you both," she had rejoined gently, "but it's Pup I want to marry."

Blake Grenfell loved her with a whole-hearted passion that was completely unselfish. It never occurred to him to be jealous, to see in Pup's death a chance for him to push his own case. He was fond of Pup and if Pup would make Carolyn happy then she should have him.

So he had saved Pup from his own impudence three times. And down there, now, Pup was shooting it out for his life, a life already forfeited. Blake Grenfell must act for the fourth time.

But he had seen, skittering through the clouds, another handful of Krauts in Aviatiks. The third layer of this trap. Grenfell knew what would happen. If he broke formation and went to Pup's rescue, the rest of the squadron to a man would come down, too. And just when they were dogging it with the Fokkers, the Aviatiks up there would scream down and strike

a hammer blow. Men would die, and broken ships would strew the plains of St. Mihiel.

But Blake Grenfell never hesitated. He had made pledges, and he kept them. Ignoring Dugger Banks' peremptory signal to hold formation, he kicked left rudder, flung over the stick and poured the gun to the Spad.

In vertical dive his crate howled down the sky. He struck the outside circle of the Fokkers with the impact of a cannon shell. The blue-steel twin Vickers bolted to the cowling of his crate, began to yammer. Forked lightning leaped from the muzzles. Tracer stream poured like molten fire into the German who never knew what hit him. He coughed out his life against the instrument board, dead so quick that his soul was confused.

He crashed through to climb onto the tail of Pup Grenfell and stave off the kill burst. One by one the Spads above wheeled and dove like falling stars. Dugger Banks, cursing and yelling, led the way.

"By God!" he screamed, "if it wasn't for Blake I'd—"

He smashed out a steel rain and a German looked around, suddenly green, and made a frantic skid turn.

Up above a narrow-eyed German saw what had happened. His wings waggled. The sky suddenly rained German crates. The whole instantly massed into a great wheeling circle. Tracer bullets glinting like gold fireflies lit the sky. Planes, German and Yank, climbed in roaring circles to the top of the wheel and then dove like madmen down, chasing some other crate as a big fish pursues a smaller one.

MEN died there then. Some took a slug through the head and they were the lucky ones. Others, arms broken by bullets, and helpless to control their falling ships, screamed with bared teeth at the brown carpet spinning up at them, and hit, and knew the agony of broken death.

Blake Grenfell drove through the pack like a shot javelin. His guns hammered, usually briefly, but always accurately. Smoke burst from a German Fokker and the ship nosed down as a frightened pilot prayed to his *Gott* that he could reach the ground before being consumed. Twice Blake Grenfell drove ships off Pup's tail. Three times he saved a fellow pilot by the swiftness of his thrust.

And yet Hanrahan went down, dead before he hit the ground, with his chest and heart splattered in chunks of red meat on the instrument board. Jerry Lane's Spad broke up in mid air, and Blake Grenfell, sick at heart,

saw the fuselage dive like a spear to the earth below with Lane standing up and waving the last farewell.

It was a madhouse, that scrap, while it lasted. The Yanks, outnumbered by the arrival of the Aviatiks, lost two more men. But seven Krauts went down in the last plunge. And then it was over, ended by common consent, as most dog-fights are ended, when the pilots see their ammo and their gasoline reaching the end. A drawn battle.

II

BUT four good men had died because of Pup Grenfell, and Dugger Banks was not the man to forget it. Dugger Banks led the bullet-nicked squadron back to the tarmac at Seicheprey, set down and hoisted his bulky frame from the cockpit. Silently the other pilots got out and grouped themselves around him.

Babe Carson began to vomit, leaning his head against his fuselage. Jerry Lane had been his chum.

Blake Grenfell waited and fell in step with his half-brother. "God, Pup," he muttered, "won't you ever learn? Ever?"

Pup Grenfell had a tall, slim body made of taut steel, blazing eyes, impetuous mouth and a slight attitude of arrogance underlying his natural charm. Even now his high-strung body was not wilted by the hell he had wrought. He had his own mind, and he followed it regardless of what happened.

"We're out there to fight, aren't we?" he asked carelessly. "Banks acts like an old lady chaperone sometimes."

Dugger Banks heard him. He didn't get sore about it; a man who has done eight years in the Foreign Legion has seen fighting, knows his own courage and cannot be insulted about it. But the attitude of the boy, with four good men and true dead, broke his last restraint. He barely saved himself from striking the lad.

"Enough is enough," he said harshly. "The Germans will be giving you the Iron Cross, you kill so many men a hell of a lot better than yourself."

He spat a yard of tobacco juice, and said flatly: "You're through, Pup! I'm grounding you here and now. You'll go back to Blois and be benzined and get a job drilling hump-backed clerks in the S.O.S."

If he had struck a blow young Pup Grenfell could not have cringed more. Grounded! Denied the ecstasy of seeking combat in the heights. Where now were the medals which he would show Carolyn? Where now was the record by which he would become the ace of the A.E.F.?

"NO!" The word burst from him. "You can't do that, Captain Banks. You can't. My God!" he cried, "you're taking away my very life."

"Better your life," rejoined Banks brutally, "than that of a man whose laces you weren't fit to tie." He spat again, a chocolate flood. "You might as well know that but for your brother I'd have kicked you to hell out, long ago. You're no good, Pup. You're thick inside; you're weak. You're reckless of other people, and I'm damned sick and tired of throwing good lives to the Germans to save your lousy hide. That's all."

He turned on his heel. A change had come over young Pup Grenfell. From white his face went red, his lips peeled back from his teeth. "You lousy mud-crusher!" he cried thickly, and sprang forward. "You hate me because I'm a gentleman. You hate me because I'll beat your record, and Blake's, too. You're yellow with your men, and when I force you to fight, you belly-ache."

HIS blows began to fall on the huge beefy arms of Dugger Banks. He was crying now with impotent rage. His fists flew, hard fists, but they were like so many fly-taps to the tremendous Dugger Banks. The latter suddenly reached out an arm like a steel beam. He caught Pup Grenfell by the collar. He flung him sprawling, ten yards away. He went after him to pick him up and slap his face.

He stopped when Blake Grenfell's arm interposed.

"I'll take care of him, Skipper," said Blake quietly. "After all, he's blood of mine."

"Good, I wouldn't believe it if you didn't tell me."

Banks liked Blake, always had, but at that moment a chill fell on their friendship. Blake was interfering and Banks didn't like that. He turned abruptly and walked away.

Blake took Pup to the little cubicle they shared in the galvanized iron huts at the far end of the tarmac. He sat him down and wiped the blood from Pup's face. "You'll never grow up," he muttered. "Never. But maybe Banks did the right thing. Grounded, you'll live longer and take a worry off me."

Pup Grenfell sprang to his feet. He placed his arms on Blake's shoulders and pressed his handsome young face forward. He had irresistible eyes, and was boyish and pathetic with his hair ruffled in a golden cloud.

"Blake," his voice trembled with emotion. "Blake, you've got to get Banks to change his mind. I didn't mean to attack him. I—I—I was beside myself. The thought of not flying again." He paused, smiled sadly. "Why, it's meat and drink to me, Blake. I live on it. Just

think, I've got four victories. One more will make me an ace. Then Carolyn will be proud; mother will be proud. I've just got to go on—be an ace."

Blake summoned his will to resist the impassioned imploring. He had done much for this boy, he could do no more. And it was for the best. If the kid went on he'd get killed. Some day the squadron wouldn't be there to save him; he, Blake, wouldn't be around.

"No. Pup," he said gently. "It's all for the best."

Pup Grenfell had the charm and sweetness that had made his mother beloved by Blake's father and by Blake himself. He exerted it now. He implored, he cajoled, he begged, he promised.

"I'LL obey orders," he cried. "I'll protect the others. I'll play the game the way Banks wants it played. Oh, Blake, you must see him. He likes you. He'll give me a chance if you ask it. Please—oh, please."

Pup's face was streaked with tears, his voice a sob, he was a lad verging on heart-break. And Blake couldn't resist. As he had always done when this boy asked anything he finally consented. "I'll see," he promised heavily.

That night while Pup was in Souilly with the gang playing a wild, reckless game of poker, Blake sought out Dugger Banks in the worry room, as Dugger called the operations office, and they sat down together. As two soldiers they admired each other. They liked the bravery, the resourcefulness, the modesty that each possessed. But like two soldiers they did not know how to express it. So Dugger said gruffly: "Sit down, you horse-faced crab-apple, and pour yourself a drink."

Blake lit a cigarette. Dugger stowed a new chew in his bronzed, scarred cheek. They poured a drink, said gravely, "Here's to death," and turned bottoms up. For a moment there was silence, through which struck the dull rumbling note of the hot guns baying fifteen kilometers to the north.

DUGGER BANKS said: "It's about Pup you've come, Blake, eh?"

"Yes," nodded Blake. "It's breaking the kid's heart. He's promised to obey orders if you'll give him another chance."

"He hasn't got it in him," protested Dugger. "I've been soldiering ten years, Blake, and I know. He's brave, but uncontrolled bravery is too dangerous. He likes to put on the lone wolf act. He wants to be a hero—an ace. He's thinking about himself instead of the squadron, or the war. All that will happen is

that he'll get a few more of us killed, and finally kill himself."

Dugger Banks spoke temperately. All his anger had fled.

He was a great leader, the kind who dismisses the past and lives for the future.

"I thought so, too," admitted Blake, inhaling, "but seeing him tonight makes me think he's got a chance. And another thing, Dugger," he went on, "he's the kind of a kid who will crack and go all to pieces if you keep him grounded. Anything might happen—he might even kill himself."

"You're dead right there," growled Banks, "but he's got to get it through his thick skull that the war in the air is no longer individual combat, but squadron fighting. *One for all and all for one.*"

"I've told him," said Blake. There was a pause. Then Blake said simply: "I'd like to have you reinstate him as a favor to me, Dugger."

Captain Banks frowned and spat a foot or so of tobacco juice at the gaboon. Blake was interfering again. He didn't really like it. But Blake was the main spring around which the squadron was wound. Banks smiled suddenly, the warm, friendly smile that made him so well liked.

"I'll do it," he agreed, "and trust to you to keep him in line."

III

TO GIVE Pup Grenfell a sense of responsibility, he was made squadron mess officer and collected for the mess fund. Blake talked to him long and seriously, and for a time matters went well. Pup behaved, but he groused and gloomed a lot that he had not gotten his fifth victory. The war was quiet for the moment at St. Mihiel, but the dogs of war were getting ready to spring.

Pup, however, didn't know this. He merely complained there was no fighting. At night he continued to play poker.

Blake didn't see a lot of him on the ground these days, for Blake had gone on leave to Paris with his bosom friend, Dick Mander. The two were of an age, they liked the same things, and their friendship had ripened into such affection that they decided to bunk together. Pup didn't seem to mind.

One dawn patrol Dick Mander took a big risk to make sure young Pup wasn't cut off in a deadly little skirmish above the clouds. Blake protested with him when they got back to the tarmac.

Mander, dark and very grave, smiled gently. "You

weren't around, Blake, and I knew how you felt about the lad. I really didn't take much of a chance."

"Well, don't do it again," Blake said seriously. "I think a hell of a lot of you, Dick."

Each dawn when the golden tints carne to the east the orange Spads climbed the eastern skies and droned toward the barbed wire. Sometimes a deadly spatter of machine-gun fire bespoke a day's hunting. Sometimes the Germans turned and ran. In the afternoon at the dusk patrol the steady-eyed Yanks searched the skies.

AND so, one morning came a peremptory order from Corps. "Attack in preparation. At all costs no German plane must get behind our lines."

That was war. It meant no longer patrols or reconnaissance, but combat raids. No German photographic plane, or bomber or pursuit ship must see the khaki-clad columns slowly forming for the attack. Must not see the guns, the ammunition, the cavalry.

Pilots must stand and die at the barbed wire.

Any one who wanted extra patrols could not make them. The day of the lone wolf hunter had come briefly once again.

And so, this blazing sunny afternoon tragedy struck sure and hard at Blake Grenfell.

He had made a lone patrol north as far as Vigneulles to protect an American Salmson photographer. Coming back by way of the Rupt de Mad he broke down through cumulus cloud—and saw two Yanks circling madly in the claws of four Fokker D-7's!

The fight was fifteen hundred feet below him. The six ships milled around in tight circles, diving and zooming, banking and chandelling. None of them had seen Blake.

Blake Grenfell's mouth flattened. His hand thrust the stick out, and the Spad turned nose down and screeched down the sky. Grenfell rode the rudder bar with his feet, his thumbs hovered over the Bowdain stick trips. He picked out a red and blue checkered Fokker that was riding the tail of one of the Yanks.

He struck with the impact of a thunderbolt.

One second the German was pounding his Spandaus, the next he looked back and up his fuselage and saw the Spad ripping at him. The first burst of Blake raked him from tail assembly to cowling. A slug tore across the German's eyes, swept away the top of his nose and left him blind.

The second burst cut his brace wires and elevator controls. Then Blake Grenfell was past, sliding down the sky. He redressed, zoomed and, as he shot up the

sky to crawl into the circling ships, he caught sight of the insignia on the two Yank planes.

"Dick!" he yelled. "Dick Mander!"

EVEN as he yelled Dick Mander was hurling his ship into the breach where Pup Grenfell was trying to shake off a German whose Spandau slugs were clawing his back. Looking to the right Blake saw the blinded German in his half-crippled Fokker wheeling madly. The German, knowing he was as good as dead, was flying his Fokker toward the sound of the fighting. He wanted to collide, take down with him one of these enemies who had stolen the sunlight from him forever.

His ship was howling toward the spot where Pup Grenfell was trying to escape a rain of slugs.

"No!" Blake Grenfell climbed up in his cockpit. "No, Dick. Back! Let him go!"

BUT the slipstream mocked his voice, the thunder of the motor drowned his words. Madly he twisted the stick and hurled his own ship like a javelin toward the danger spot. His breath was coming in sobs, for he knew he was too late. He opened fire at long range on the German that he had crippled. It whipped around the Kraut, that tracer fire. And the blinded German, feeling that he was now in the fight, cut loose his own guns. He went on his last mad ride with Spandaus thundering. Blake Grenfell sobbed. He flung aside his goggles. He waved. Anything to keep Dick Mander from that death trap.

Too late. Intent on driving the German off Pup Grenfell's tail, he swept in. His tracer fire began to comb the German's hair.

Blake yelled. Into the mad vortex came the blind German. Too late now Dick Mander knew he had to deal either with an insane man or a blind one. He hauled back on his stick. But still wanting to save Pup he only did it sufficiently to dodge the blind man and kept his tracer fire going at the German.

And so Dick Mander suddenly felt the flames of hell. Squarely into the rain of bullets that spattered in never-ending stream from the blinded German's guns, he rode. The next instant the blind German's ship swept away the landing gear of Dick Mander's crate.

And so his blind vengeance done, the sightless German, his neck broken by Mander's spreader-bar, took his death ship down the sky to pile it in splinters on the carpet.

Up above, however, death had also come. From the nose of Dick Mander's ship a sudden spray of black

smoke had shot back. At its base deep orange flame suddenly guttered.

Blake Grenfell felt his heart cracking. "Dick!" he screamed, "in a flamer!"

Mander was going down now. The orange mass was growing. The drip pan, soaked in oil, was blazing. The inflammable dope of the wings had caught, and the wings were burning off at the pins. Mander made a gallant effort to side-slip his ship and get down. But it was eight thousand feet, and he knew he could not make it. The flames spread until they rolled in a churning yellow mass over the cockpit. Dick Mander was riding a flaming coffin.

Somewhere to the left Pup Grenfell was shooting it out with a German. But Blake did not know; he did not care. For once the fate of Pup was a matter of indifference to him. His friend, the lad he loved, was riding a flamer.

HE DROVE his own ship close, actuated by some mad hope that Dick could jump from his ship onto Blake's wings. He came so close that the smoke of the doomed crate filled his nostrils, the heat burned his face.

"Side-slip it, Dick," he screamed. "You'll get it down. Sure!"

But there was no side-slipping that crate now. Dick Mander, mad with pain, suddenly emerged from the rolling flames. He slid to the tail of the ship. His clothes were afire. His face a blackened mass.

Blake put his ship close. He drove it under the tail. "Jump!" he yelled. "Jump!" If Dick Mander had hit his wings the weight would have torn them off.

As Blake stood looking, his face an agony of heart-break, he saw Dick Mander hang by his hands from the elevator control wire. His body was like a blazing torch now.

Then Dick Mander let go.

A HORRIBLE moan came from Blake Grenfell then. He saw the body shoot down. He saw the last wave of farewell that Dick gave him as he hurtled through space to hit the earth a mile and a half below.

"No! No! My God, no!" The words tore from Blake Grenfell's blue lips. He stared fascinated at the falling body. It looked like a shooting star now, for the swift fall was fanning the clothing into a brighter flame and the doomed man was a falling torch.

Down it went, turning over and over, then it started to turn sideways so that the arms and legs flopped grotesquely, like a scarecrow's. And then it merged into

the brown of the carpet, far, far down. Blake Grenfell was saved the final horror of seeing that body smashed to ruin upon the earth.

He drew a shuddering gasp, switched his eyes stiffly from the grimness below to the hell above. Even as he did so Spandau slugs began to peck at his wings, smash at his center section. Blake Grenfell's eyes thinned to slits. His teeth showed in a wolfish snarl. He flipped his ship up in a tight chandelle, rolled away—and went berserk.

The German behind him never knew exactly what happened. Only a tornado of sound screamed down upon him. A raking smash of a hundred bullets tore his Fokker to pieces under him. So terrible was that rain of continuous fire that the Fokker broke into bits as the German tried to pull up to avoid it. The wings sliced off at the pins. The motor, the propeller broken, screamed a horrid song and then burst of its own power, throwing a sheet of broken bits to the four winds.

Riding the narrow boat-like fuselage the German went down. Went down past Blake Grenfell, who had redressed to zoom for still another burst.

The German's hand came up—the salute of the dying.

Grenfell looked on and through him, and up to where another German was boxing Pup Grenfell in. Blake sent his ship up there, but the ferocity of his first attack scared the German. The man flung the Fokker into a tight spin and went down the sky. The other one fled. And Pup and Blake Grenfell were alone in the sky. Side by side they fell in and droned for the home tarmac.

Blake Grenfell set down, cut his switch and lifted his leaden body from the seat. He climbed out. And then reaction hit him. He leaned his head against his fuselage and sobbed. A man does not cry gracefully. The sound was raucous and the sobs shook his body with an ague.

Pup Grenfell, his face white and drawn, approached and laid a gentle hand on Blake's shoulder.

"I'm sorry," he said softly. "I tried—"

BLAKE GRENFELL turned on him. Once again his eyes walled and his lips skinned wolfishly back from his teeth. "He went out trying to save you," he said thickly. "Trying to save your damn worthless hide."

"But," cried Pup, falling back a step.

"He gave his life for you," Blake was saying hoarsely, wildly, "just like the others. A good man for a worthless swine."

He stepped quickly forward. His arm flashed. The sound of his fist exploding against Pup Grenfell's jaw

was like a pistol report. The youngster shot backward at the impact and crumpled face downward on the ground. Blake stood over him, cursed him, ordered him to get up.

It was Dugger Banks who led Blake away. "What's done is done, boy," he said gently. "Come on and get outside a quart of cognac."

"I hope the Germans get him," yelled Blake. "I hope they burn him down the way he let Dick die for him."

Dugger Banks took Blake to his own cubicle and got him very drunk. Then he tucked him in bed and hoped that the affair was over.

But it wasn't—it had only begun.

IV

THE WAR went on as it always did. The day for the big push was coming. The Fifteenth patrolled days on end from dawn to dusk. Men died, and nerves got numb, and pilots walked like men in a trance.

Blake Grenfell was different, too. He was harder, and he ignored his half-brother.

The youngster was in a half dozen hot fights and came off with his life only by miracles. But Blake Grenfell never went to his help. He wouldn't speak to the lad, wouldn't even see him.

And then, one morning, Blake got a letter from Carolyn. He was sitting in his cubicle reading it.

"Pup," it read in part, "seems awfully upset that he doesn't get his fifth victory. His letter hints that you and he are at odds. Oh, Blake, please don't let him down now. Nor me. I want that boy. There's good in him, and I can bring it out.

"ISN'T there some way you could arrange to let him have his fifth victory, and then make plans to have him safely on the ground? He means so much to me. Even you or your mother don't know how much. As you love me, I ask you to bring this boy back to me."

Blake finished the letter, a brief summary of local gossip, an account of the family doings. At home the Grenfells were wealthy and of high social standing. The door opened quietly as he read.

Blake looked up. Young Pup stood framed on the threshold. His blond hair was rumpled, his eyes haggard, with pockets under them. He looked very badly.

Blake's lips compressed. "Well?" he said.

Pup licked his lips and swallowed. "Blake, you've got to help me," he muttered, "not for myself this time. F-for the family."

"What have you done now?" Blake was uncompromising.

The lad's eyes were miserable, and it took him a moment to screw himself to the telling point. Then: "I've gambled away the mess fund. Forty thousand francs!"

"What!" Blake came to his feet staring incredulously at the youngster. "You gambled other people's money—stole it—to play cards!"

"Yes." Pup's eyes fell to the floor.

Blake slowly sat down again. Pup, a thief! The boy had been reckless, there was talk of him and this French girl in Souilly. But to take money! Pup Grenfell to steal, when the Grenfell name was as old as the very United States itself, and as esteemed—my God, this was impossible!

"Why did you do it?" asked Blake. His voice was stern, hard.

"Because I was driven to it," sobbed the boy. "You turned me down. Banks hates me. The rest of the pilots get away from me as if I was hard luck itself. I had to do something or go mad. I spent some money on Antoinette and gambled to get more. I lost. I—I—" Whatever it was he intended to add, he failed in the courage.

"You've had a big allowance."

"I'VE drawn it all. I sent home for money and spent that. Now Banks, for some reason is looking over my—"

"And I found them forty thousand francs short!" The huge body of Dugger Banks loomed in the doorway.

Stern and uncompromising that face. In the Foreign Legion a man might kill another, he might desert, he might even curse his superiors. But the man who stole was beaten by the Legionnaires themselves. That was the code.

"And that's not all," went on Banks in a voice of ice. "Young Rolph Cardigan gave you ten thousand francs to keep for him. Told you to put it in the Corps safe. And you spent that, too."

"Yes." It was a mere whisper. Pup's head drooped and he could not look at either of them.

"Well, you damn well made a mistake there," said Banks grimly. "Cardigan was pals with Hanrahan and he never did like you. He's asked me to arrest you, charged with burglary, larceny, conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman. So I'm doing it."

He stepped aside. The sergeant of the guard with

an enlisted man come forward. "Take him to the guardhouse and keep a close watch on him," ordered Banks.

They took young Pup Grenfell out.

For a while then there was silence, through which beat the kettle drum roll of the guns.

Banks went to Blake's cupboard, found a bottle of cognac and poured two drinks. "Take a slug," he suggested and himself sat down and swallowed the hooker.

Blake said: "That means they'll cashier him, eh?"

"If the court-martial finds him guilty on the specifications, they'll send him to Leavenworth for five years," rejoined Banks. "I'd have asked you to cover the mess fund balance and sent him to hell down to Blois. But my hands were forced. Young Cardigan demands a court-martial."

"No chance of beating the court-martial?"

"Not one. The kid didn't know how to cover his shortage."

Blake lit a cigarette. Banks said softly, "I'm sorry, fellah."

"I know, Dugger." Blake exhaled. "I suppose you know that my father is president of the State University. This will kill him. Disgrace him. Ruin the family."

BANKS cursed and spat a yard of tobacco juice. "Sure, I know. I asked Cardigan to withdraw the charges. Told him I'd get rid of the kid and see that he got his dough back. But he hates Pup."

"Yes, I know." Blake stood up. "For anything possible I know I can depend upon you."

"Sure—but it's got to be possible. Where you going?"

"To see Cardigan."

Young Rolph Cardigan was a lad who had let the war get on his nerves.

Tall and dark, slender and stern, he faced Blake across the flat-board surface of his table. His eyes held a wild light as he responded to Blake's presence.

"I know why you're here, Blake," he half-cried, "and I won't do it. Oh, hell, it's not the money I'm thinking about. But Pup Grenfell is a Nemesis. He's not only reckless and crazy, he's a Jonah. Better men than he have died here, and he'll kill others if he's permitted to fly."

"If you'll withdraw the charges, Rolph, I'll see that he leaves this squadron—for good," said Blake quietly.

"Sure, you will. But what'll happen then? He'll go to some other squadron and kill a lot of other men.

Damn him, I've had a notion twice to shoot him down myself. He's a jinx. He killed Hanrahan, and he killed Dick Mander, your own pal, as white a fellow as I ever knew."

"THAT'S right," admitted Blake. "But I'll see that Pup doesn't fly any more. Remember, Rolph, he's my half-brother. You're disgracing not only him, but me as well. And my father and my stepmother."

"I know," nodded Rolph. "I've thought it out. But if he goes away from here, merely transferred, he'll find some way to get back to flying. He's the devil. I'm sorry, but I'm going to get him cashiered and keep him ever from flying again and killing better men."

For the next half hour Blake argued with the half-mad youngster. But he got nowhere. Cardigan liked him, would do anything for him, but his hatred for Pup Grenfell was a blazing insane hatred that would let nothing interfere with its object—to keep Pup off the front.

Blake went out, knowing that he had failed. Knowing that Pup Grenfell was about to wreck his father, break the heart of his mother—and Carolyn!

Slowly he walked across the grassy tarmac toward the operations room. A stiff wind blew and made the canvas sides of the hangars crack like pistol reports. Mechanics swarmed over the ships making them ready for another foray on the morrow. From the machine-gun testing range came the slamming rip of Vickers being corrected. But Blake had neither eyes nor ears for this.

What was he going to do about Pup?

He entered the operations office. "Jimmy the Ink," the kiwi officer, looked up from the big scale map. His homely face screwed up in a frown of sympathy. "Tough luck, Blake."

"Where's Dugger?"

"Inside. But it won't do any good."

Blake went through to the little private place where Dugger Banks came to worry. The huge skipper sat glumly in a chair, spitting at a brass spittoon he had lugged one night, when drunk, all the way from Paris.

He looked up as Blake entered, poured two drinks and motioned to a chair.

"No go?" he asked.

"The kid's half crazy from grief over Hanrahan."

"I knew it. Here's mud."

THEY drank. Then Banks waited patiently for Blake to speak. The latter was thinking of the letter

from Carolyn that day. What chance to save Pup now? He was thinking of his father, tall, white-haired, distinguished. And of his mother—step-mother—but still beautiful and kind. He was seeing newspaper headlines: “PERRY GRENFELL SENTENCED TO LEAVENWORTH FOR THEFT.”

Blake had to save them that.

“Listen, Dugger,” he said quietly. “Suppose Pup should—should die? They wouldn’t press a charge against a dead man, would they?”

“No.” Dugger Banks spat and shook his head. He looked swiftly, covertly at Blake. “What you got in mind, friend?”

Blake let his hands drop limply between his outstretched legs. “They think of Pup back home as young Galahad,” he said simply. “They think of him baring his bright head to the sun, staring through clear eyes at the enemy. They think of him as a young crusader going forth to save the world for democracy. They don’t know what the war is like. They think he’s a young God.”

“AND the fact that he had clay feet and was a common thief would hurt them as much as the disgrace he’s bringing on them. Is that what you’re trying to say?”

“Something like that,” admitted Blake. His face was gray, his soul cowering at the decision he had to make. “You see, Dugger,” he swallowed and went on, “it’s a lot better that they should think he went down gloriously, dying for his country. Think of him as a clean, honorable lad whose patriotism they would be proud of as long as they lived.”

Banks poured himself a drink. “I see,” he said quietly. “But will the boy go out and get himself bumped off? Has he got the guts?”

“I don’t know,” rejoined Blake, “I suppose not. Everybody wants to live. He’s got—in his own mind—a lot to live for. Carolyn—and his desire to be an ace. To kill five Germans. Get one more ship.”

“Well?” said Banks questioningly.

“He wouldn’t know he was going to die,” said Blake simply. “He’d go out there. I’d go with him. I’d get him in a German trap—” he swallowed, his head sunk on his chest—“and there I’d leave him.”

Only Dugger Banks appreciated then the magnificent courage it took for Blake Grenfell to make such an utterance. To lead a boy to sure death. To take him out there, confident and trusting, to throw him into the maw of wheeling German Fokkers and then

run away and desert him. Banks’ eyes misted. He was filled with admiration and respect.

A silence followed. Then Blake said, “If I explained—or you did—to Cardigan what he planned. Not exactly what we planned, but that Pup would never be a jinx again, couldn’t we make him consent?”

Dugger’s feet came to the floor with a crash. “That won’t be necessary,” he exclaimed. “I won’t have anybody have anything on you that way. I’m in command of this tarmac. The High Command is getting ready to drive. We need all the planes we have in the air. It’s my own judgment that until Pup comes up for trial he should be permitted to go on flying. We’ve got to think about the war. Is that clear?”

BLAKE’S mouth twisted. He got up silently, came over and held out his hand.

“Thanks,” he said simply. “I’ll take care of the rest.”

“I’ll turn Pup loose now,” promised Banks.

“Have him come to me,” said Blake, and went back to his own quarters.

He was sitting there, reading again the letter from Carolyn when Pup Grenfell came quietly in and squatted on the edge of the bunk.

A change had come over the youngster. A wistful light gleamed in his eyes and his mouth drooped pathetically.

“You did it, Blake,” he said, “you got me out. You’re always getting me out of trouble.”

Blake looked at him. He was seeing, not a golden-haired lad of twenty with bright eyes and a glorious body. He was seeing that body broken and smashed; the flesh on it turning blue with rot, giving off evil odors. A dead flesh, a rotting flesh, a brain shoved into the Great Beyond. And he was to send the boy there—to kill him as the only answer to an unanswerable dilemma.

“It’s all right,” he said in a dead voice.

“I’m grateful,” said Pup. “I’ll try to be fine and decent the way you want me to. I’ve learned my lesson, Blake, I swear to God I have.”

Blake kept thinking, “Maybe—maybe—but it’s too late.”

Aloud he said, “You’ll be flying in the morning with me. Special patrol.”

PUP looked up quickly. Usually Blake never flew with him on two-ship patrols. “Isn’t this unusual?” he asked.

“A big push is coming. We’ve got to keep the air

clean of Krauts." Blake knew the explanation sounded feeble. But he could think of no better.

"Oh," said Pup. He was silent for a while, his face screwed up in a knot of thought. Then he began to talk. He spoke about Carolyn, and Blake could see the love he had for her. He spoke of his mother, of their common father. "I've got to do something to make them think fine of me," he said. "I've got to get the fifth ship. Get to be an ace."

"The hunting is good," said Blake, forcing himself to speak lightly.

"Yes, the hunting is good. I'll be an ace, Blake. I'll make them proud of me. I'll make you proud of me."

He stood up and moved slowly toward the door. "By the way, about that day Dick Mander—"

Blake's lips tightened. "We won't discuss Dick Mander. Go and get some sleep. You'll need it at dawn."

Pup shrugged. He stared again thoughtfully at Blake. "It's almost," he muttered, "as if you—" he shrugged again—"oh well, you've always been as fine and splendid as I've been rotten. Good-night."

V

LIQUOR usually enabled Blake to sleep. But though he killed nearly a quart of cognac, he lay there flat on his back, eyes wide open, staring at the blackness of the ceiling. The guns rumbled like far away thunder.

The call of death—the breath of war. He kept seeing Pup dead. Mangled. His beauty ruined. He kept seeing the faces of Carolyn, of his mother, of his father when the curt War Department telegram came. He kept seeing himself—if he survived—in future years always knowing, always remembering that he had deserted his younger half-brother and left him to die alone.

It would be a terrible memory. How could he endure going on, thinking of it? But there was no other way out. It was best for them all—this way—the death way.

Huge pockets were under his eyes when he got up at the call of the sentry and climbed into his flying clothes. He felt exhausted, yet clearheaded; but he knew he was going to be sick when he saw the death. He walked out into the cool of the pre-dawn. He got a cup of coffee. Then he strolled across to the deadline where the mechanics were grooming the Spads.

The sky was rosy in the east, a bright clear day, a high ceiling. The breeze was chill. A spark of a cigarette coal glowed near the first ship. It was young Pup Grenfell.

In the faint light he looked superbly handsome. And his eyes were strangely gentle as he turned to greet Blake.

"Nice day for it," he said in an odd tone.

"Good hunting," rejoined Blake. "We'll climb to ten thousand feet and look for those Aviatiks near Mont Sec."

"Right."

THE motors began to warm up. The cartridge belts were inspected, the ships checked to the last minute. Dugger Banks came out and gripped Blake's hand. "You're the next thing to God in my estimation," he muttered, and strangely enough for him, shook hands with Pup. "Good huntings lad," he said.

"Thanks, Skipper," Pup was not jaunty. He looked oddly at Banks. "You've been damned decent, Skipper, and I want you to know I think you're immense."

He started to climb into his ship. The motors were idled down to tick-tock.

Across the tarmac a lunging figure came.

"You can't get away with it," snarled the voice—Cardigan's voice. "Going to let him fly. Going to let him be an ace, so that the court-martial will dismiss charges. Going to let him go along the front and get men killed. The jinx! The fool killer!"

Cardigan had been drinking. He was half-mad. He grabbed at Pup Grenfell and dragged him back and swung on his face. "I've been wanting to do that," he gasped. "And I'm not going to let them make an ace out of you. I'll call Corps. I'll tell the general."

He turned to dart away. Dugger Banks saw the chasm of peril. An order from a general, or from Corps, would keep Pup on the ground, and there was not time to get him away.

Blake understood, too, and he was the first to act.

One jerk of his powerful arm stayed Cardigan's flight. "Wait, you fool!" he said. "I promised you once that Pup would get no men killed. And I mean it."

He held Cardigan's face a matter of inches from his own. "This is Pup's last flight," he gritted, "do you understand?"

The man's befuddled gaze sank. And then some wild alcoholic inspiration told him the truth. "I get you," he muttered. "He's sent other men West, so he goes West himself, now. For the honor of the family."

Blake cursed him and clapped a hand over his mouth. "Who told you that rot?" He dragged him away. A quick glance at Pup indicated that the youngster had not heard, or, if he had, did not

understand. Banks came alongside. "I'll take care of Cardigan," he said briefly. "Hop along."

BLAKE turned quickly to rejoin Pup and soothe him if it were necessary. But Pup needed no soothing. He stood quietly smoking a cigarette with fingers that did not tremble. He looked at the east, where a glorious fan of color was shooting upward, drowning the stars in the radiance of a new day.

"We'll meet the sun at five thousand," he said evenly. He turned to climb into the cockpit. Then suddenly stopped. "By the way, Blake, I left my good-luck piece on the table. The little tin knight that Carolyn gave me. Would you mind getting it for me, please?"

It was an odd request; why didn't he get his own good luck charm? But Blake did not hesitate. He nodded, swung swiftly and trotted to the cubicle. The good luck piece was on the table all right, its little blue ribbon was wound around it.

It was holding down a sealed envelope.

As Blake reached forward to pick it up he saw the envelope was inscribed to him. Intuition told him much was wrong. Swiftly he ripped the envelope open, jerked out the single sheet of paper.

"I knew last night from your expression," it read, "that you had failed to save me from the court-martial. So I reasoned as you reasoned and saw that my death was the only decent tribute I could pay my family—and you and Carolyn. You didn't have to lie and cover up, Blake, old man. I'm old enough to know fear, and he who knows fear has also courage and is not afraid to die. The man who fears death dies a thousand times; he who does not, dies but once. I'm sending you back for my good luck charm, and when you read this I'll be gone into the heights to join the sun of the day. And there I'll stay.

"I know you thought Dick Mander died that day trying to save my goose. So just to keep the record straight let me say, as God is my judge whom I shall presently face, I swear that Dick Mander got tangled with the Krauts and I dove in to save him. You loved him, and I wanted to repay you for what you've done for me. So long, and good luck. Kiss Carolyn for me and tell her I had one decent spot."

BLAKE GRENFELL stood paralyzed. Pup had known he was to die. Pup had tried to save Dick Mander and had taken a blow without whimpering. The innate splendidness that Carolyn wanted to bring

to the surface was showing in the boy now. He mustn't die. Things could be done for him. He must live. He was worth living. There was a dull roaring in Blake Grenfell's ears that he thought was blood. But as it slowly died away he understood. Pup's Hispano-Suiza carrying him off to the new dawn for the rendezvous with death!

VI

BLAKE GRENFELL swore once, terribly. He raced madly from the cubicle. He didn't stop when he saw Dugger Banks. He stopped for no one. His mechanic shrank from his blazing eyes, his savage face. He hurled himself into the cockpit.

"Pull those chocks!" he screamed.

He jazzed the throttle, blipped the ship and goosed it out of line. A sweep of the rudder nosed him into the wind. He poured the gun to the crate and the Spad trembled, gained speed, flew like an orange streak of lightning toward the sky.

There was Pup up there, curving into the glory of the day. A black speck growing smaller.

"He shan't die!" swore Blake. "I won't let him! Never! Never!"

He horsed the Spad through the air. The Hisso strained and the exhaust stacks grew cherry red as he cut the throttle to the last notch. Linen drummed, brace wires shrieked, and the whole ship vibrated to the terrific speed. Yet Blake did not gain. It was as if Pup Grenfell knew that pursuit would follow and he meant to out-run it.

And then the Fokkers came.

Black specks that grew bigger. Vultures that spotted white meat in that lone Spad out there, climbing so gallantly to meet them. Four Fokkers and one Spad! The issue could not be in doubt.

Blake groaned in agony as he saw them wheel, separate. Two shot behind Pup to cut off his retreat. Two came at him from the front. Down below, a million men in trenches, mud stained, wearied from the night's vigil, saw the lone airman up there, the single Yank, fling himself savagely at the leading Fokker. Blake saw it, too. Would he be too late?

TRACER fire glowing like sparks from an emery wheel blazed across the sky. A German spilled his brains on the crash pad. His dead body locked the controls and the Fokker, carrying its burden of death, wheeled around the sky in solemn circles.

But now the three Fokkers had made a box. One rode on each side of Pup to keep him from veering. The third, savage and burning with the lust to avenge his comrade, stormed in behind, and caught that sunny helmetless head in his ring-sights. He pressed his triggers.

Rac-rac-rac-rac!

A human tornado spilled upon the German and nearly blasted him from the sky. Blake Grenfell's Vickers hammered savagely. The ribbon of cartridges leaped into the breeches of the clattering guns. The empties spilled in a brassy stream to go glinting in the new sun. The web belt hung down almost to his spreader bar. The German with death reaching out steel claws for him, madly chandelled, and Blake's Spad screamed beneath him so closely that his tail assembly nearly hit Blake's whirling club. Instantly Blake was alongside of Pup. He held up both hands, he shook them. He pointed to the earth.

"Down!" he screamed. "It's all right, lad, we'll fix it."

A faint sad smile lifted the battle expression on Pup's face.

The Germans, scenting a real fight, grew cunning and decided to take these *verdammte* Yankees one at a time. With the cleverness of cow punchers they started to cut Pup loose from the protection of Blake's guns. The latter saw the trick. Rapidly he drove his ship ahead, and became himself the bait.

As he went ahead, forcing a German to turn rapidly away, and letting another sweep back for the vantage of the tail position, he again pointed to the ground. "Go down. Go home!"

He lured the German away, took a twenty shot burst that sawed a four foot seam in his right wing. He saw Pup apparently hesitate, then turn. Blake felt sure he could dodge this trap at any moment. To avoid having Pup wait around, he made a swift pivot turn, drove straight at the German on the right and let his guns hammer. Propeller to propeller, the two ships started toward each other.

THE German's nerve broke and he leap-frogged, and felt Blake's steel ripping through the flesh of his arm. The other German, hitherto hanging back, leaped on Blake's exposed tail. His guns hammered. Blake felt a sharp pain crease his back, saw the crash pad begin to vomit stuffed hair. The instrument board splintered before his eyes. Slugs cut the strap of his helmet.

He tried to curve away. But the day never came on the Western front when a Spad could out-turn a Fokker-D-7.

The Fokker came upon him. The other side-slipped to block a further turn. The guns hammered again. The trap had formed as quickly as that.

Blake the invincible, who had dodged death for months, saw it coming now. He was caught.

The steel sprayed around him like lightning blasts. His legs leaped to the impact of two slugs. Splinters from the cowling gashed his face. His wings suddenly became ragged with wind tearing the holes bigger.

He chandelled. No good! He dove. No good! He went up in a renversement, but the German met him halfway and exploded both tires on his landing gear. He tried a loop, and then he tried two wing-overs. But the German was meeting his moves as if pre-guessing them.

The Spad began to waver. It would fall to pieces if bullets struck any more vital parts. Two hundred slugs tore through it in less than that many seconds. Blake—wounded, unsteadied by pain in back and in legs—made one supreme decision.

He would dive.

If the crate held together he lived. If it didn't—well, he was dead anyway. He thrust the nose down, left the throttle open and rested his weight, standing upon the rudder bar. The Spad howled down the sky in a vertical dive.

Behind him came the Germans. And, strange to say, the Fokker which men said would not dive with a Spad, hung to him. The bursts were long range. But they were getting home. One German in. Two Germans in and firing. Blake did not see the third. He had no time.

The hammer of hot guns rose above the smashing crescendo of power diving ships. A slug burned a red mark across Blake's temple. Half-stunned, he rode his rudder bar. The wings wavered, the linen drummed, the ship strained and groaned to the terrific velocity.

BUT the two Germans gained. Blake realized it after a three thousand foot drop. They had him. Two angles from the back. Four Spandaus smashing at him. Defiance leaped into his eyes. He gave a yell and hauled back on the stick. For an instant his life hung in the balance as the wings wobbled. But by some miracle, they stayed on. He leveled off, zoomed. Straight into the teeth of his enemies he drove the ship, determined to die, but to die fighting them.

His guns began to pound almost at once. But the Germans leveled off, came in to thirty yards behind his zoom. And this time they clinched their teeth for the kill-burst.

BLAKE turned, smiling. Take it in the chest.

And so he saw. Down out of the sky came a pelting meteor. An orange meteor with an iron hand at the stick. A Spad. It was diving on the Germans at two hundred miles an hour.

The Fokkers, close together, never saw it. They were concentrating on Blake.

Blake, seeing the angle of Pup Grenfell's dive, instantly perceived what the youth intended. He raised in his cockpit. His mouth opened in horror. "No!" he screamed. "Not that, you fool!"

He waved his arms frantically. A bullet smashed through the palm of the left hand. In and out, a small hole streaming blood. "No" yelled Blake, not even feeling it. "Back off. Veer! Oh, my God, boy, *don't do that!*"

The Germans, alarmed by his strange actions, paused in their strafe and looked behind and up. They must have cringed at the speed of that projectile that shrieked down upon them. Too late the right Fokker tried to turn away.

Too late the Fokker nosed down. Between them was a distance of some twelve yards. Into that hole Pup Grenfell thrust his diving bullet. There was a splintering terrific crash.

Fokker wings flew like gliding boards through space. Pup Grenfell's wings had clipped the Fokkers' and had ripped them from their sockets as if they were tissue paper. Two wingless fuselages, motors wide open, pointed downward. Two Germans covered their faces in horror.

And Pup Grenfell, that strange sweet smile on his face, thrust his stick out and nosed his snub-winged Spad toward the earth. A million eyes below grew walled with horror at the fate that awaited him. Blake Grenfell watched in utter stupefaction. Suddenly he flung over his stick, and sent the Spad to gliding alongside Pup.

"Flatten out," he screamed. "Try to set her down. In a tree! In a tree!"

Pup rode his wingless creation with the calm of a man not afraid of the end. He knew from what Blake was signalling what was wanted. But he did not change the angle of his dive. He didn't do that until he was nearly upon the gray carpet. And then he only changed because he was heading straight into a road filled with moving troops. He lifted the nose to glide on. And so it was that, tearing like a screaming rocket, his Spad smashed into a huge tree.

The tree was denuded of limbs, broken off at the

trunk as if an axeman had cut it there. The broken fragments of the Spad sifted down like yellow rain.

BLAKE saw it, moaned in utter agony. He forgot his wounds. He forgot the fragile conditions of his ship. And with an uncanny skill he set the ship down on the road, rolled it to the ditch and let it ground loop. He got out of the wreckage somehow, and was helping the broken body of his half-brother from the wreckage in the tree when Yank troops came to help him.

Pup's body was horribly broken. Arms hung at awkward angles, the legs splayed out, horribly burned by the red hot motor that came crashing back into his lap to smash his poor chest. But he was alive for the moment. He was even conscious.

"Pup!" sobbed Blake, "Hang on, lad. We'll have you to a hospital. They'll—"

Somehow Pup Grenfell found words to speak, strength to say them. "Don't waste the space, Blake," he replied gently. "I'm in no pain. In a few minutes, I—" His head sank.

BLAKE let the tears run down his face. The hardened Yanks who had witnessed that feat gulped and cursed for want of words to speak.

The Pup looked up, and again he smiled. "I got the fifth, Blake," he said. "And the sixth and the seventh. So I guess—maybe—I'm an—ace—after all. Go—"

He died between two breaths and the smile stayed on his face even in death.

* * *

Back in Wemberly you'll find a statue of a young eagle in the city square and beneath it the name of Pup Grenfell. Not Pup, rather, but Perry Grenfell, second lieutenant, who died gallantly for his country on the eighth of September, 1918. And his mother will show you, if you go there, the Medal of Honor that the Congress awarded him posthumously.

And Blake Grenfell will tell you how he got it, even as you've read it here. They're proud of his memory, all of them, particularly old Dr. Grenfell. "He was a hero," he often said, "and he died that another man might live. Greater love hath no man than that."

Which is a good epitaph and a good place to end the story of a hero.