



RICHARD KNIGHT in MASKS OVER MADRID

by DONALD E. KEYHOE

Above those barrage-battered buildings of Madrid, vengeful Heinkels had hemmed in a lone flyer, were pouncing in for the kill. Fascinated, Richard Knight stared up at that grim drama, saw the doomed airman cast from his lead-flailed cockpit an oddly-fashioned chest bound to the chute that would have saved him. But when Richard Knight pried the lid from that strange box, he halted, transfixed. Inside was naught but a yellowed human skull! Why had a man given his life for this?

CHAPTER I THE SKULL IN THE VELVET BOX

IT WAS 9:30 p.m., and the siege of Madrid had quieted for the evening. In the shadowy entrance of a half-wrecked shop, at a less pretentious corner of the Gran Via, a man in the garb of a street-vendor stood pressed back against the door. One taut hand was inside his ragged coat, and his narrowed eyes were fixed on two approaching pistoleros—self-

appointed aides to the police—who wore campaign hats and arm-bands showing the sign of the hammer and sickle.

The light from a passing car slanted briefly across the entrance, revealing the ragged fellow's swarthy face, intense black eyes, and neck-strap supported tray of combs, cigarettes, and soap. The man stiffened as the glow passed over his figure, but the pistol-guards were talking fiercely to themselves and did not see him.

"The accursed Fascists!" snarled the nearest man. "They'll never take Madrid now. With the new planes coming in all the time, we'll be rid of their bombers before the month is out."

"Si," muttered the other, "but I wish it were now, so we could get food from the coast. I'm tired of eating red beans."

They went on. Then the man in the doorway hurried around the corner and down a street which was roped off and marked with lanterns. An Insurgent shell had blasted an enormous hole in the street, at the same time tearing out the side of an office building. Fire had followed the explosion, and now the cold wind sent little whirls of ashes and dust along the dark and broken sidewalk. The vendor stole past the shattered wall, came to a huge breach, and stepped inside.

Here he paused, for a hasty glance over his shoulder, as though he had heard a disturbing sound. But he saw no one, and all that came to his ears was the intermittent rumble of artillery off to the northwest in University City, with now and then a faint, staccato clatter of machine-guns nearer, along the Manzanares River or farther south near the trench-guarded Jarama. He waited a moment longer, then turned and felt his way into the blackness of the wrecked building.

HE HAD barely disappeared when another figure, in the uniform of a Loyalist pilot, arose from behind a heap of stone where he had swiftly concealed himself as the vendor looked back. He was a tall man, and he moved with a quick, silent step, as though from practice in stalking human quarry. His face was browned from sun and wind, but a single glance would have told, an observer that here was no Spaniard.

Without a sound, he reached the break in the wall and noted that a faint light, hurriedly shielded, shone from somewhere within. He peered cautiously around the jagged edge of the wall and saw the vendor descending a stairway to the building's basement,

using a flashlight to guide his feet. With that fading glow to help him, the tall man swiftly stepped around the litter on the floor and came to the top of the stairs. He waited a few seconds, then slowly went down, a snub-nosed automatic gripped in his right hand.

The vendor had vanished again, but his flashlight shone from an opened door beyond a fallen girder. Water dripped from holes in the charred floor above, and the air was filled with the odor of smoke. The tall man crept around the girder, halted near the doorway. The vendor had tried to close the door, but a sagging beam wedged it and, swearing under his breath, he went on to a jumble of packing-boxes in a corner. Moving one of them, he lifted a square board and took a telephone from a recess below.

"*Diez y nueve*," he said in a low voice. "Nineteen reporting."

A reply rattled the diaphragm of the receiver, and the tall man edged closer to the door to catch the full import of the words.

"—and no report from you for two days. Explain!" The words were Spanish, but with a faintly foreign accent. The vendor cringed at their harsh note.

"I was at the new air field east of Arganda, carrying out your orders. Number Eleven was unable to reach there until today, and I had no way to communicate until now."

"*Very well*," snapped the unseen speaker. "*Proceed*."

"I have located the *Americano*, Richard Knight," said Nineteen, in a strained voice. "He is in Madrid, at a cafe on the Gran Via very near here."

In the shadows outside the doorway, the tall man smiled coolly to himself. The vendor would be surprised if he knew just how near that American was.

"*Give the full details, from the first of your assignment*," came the crackling voice from the other end of the wire.

"He had left the field at Arganda," said the vendor. "He had sprained his wrist, so that he could not fly for a few days, and the commander of the squadron had given him leave. With an American reporter, he ran the gauntlet on the Valencia-Madrid road and got through. This I learned when I arrived there, but I could not get back at once, so I set about getting the other information until Eleven could help me return. I found that Knight arrived there from Valencia only a few days before, using his right name, and ready to volunteer on the side of the Loyalist government. It seems he is a rich man in the *Estados Unidos*, and flies for pleasure and excitement—"

"That is only a blind!" grated the voice over the wire. *"Knight is probably the most powerful secret agent of the American government. He is known as 'Q,' and he has connections with several of their departments."*

"Then that explains the resignation of several American volunteers," said the vendor, excitedly. "More than half of them left while I was there. They seemed to have become afraid to fight, and even the commander was alarmed about something. In fact, just before I left I heard that three more Americans had deserted in the night. This agent, Knight, must have been sent to stop all *Americano* pilots from fighting in Spain."

"We already know that," was the metallic response. *"His government wishes to propose a peace conference, and the presence of those pilots here would embarrass their President. Knight's assistant, a former Marine officer, has been on the Insurgent side, doing the same work with the squadron of Colonel Morton, who commands the Americans there. This man's name is Doyle, and he will probably meet Knight secretly within the next twenty-four hours. He is a shorter man than Knight, thick of body, and he has a broken nose so you can identify him easily. If you see him, you will at once—"*

The crackling voice suddenly lessened in volume, as the vendor shifted the phone and tightened it against his ear. Outside, Dick Knight came a step closer to the door. A quick glance from the shadows showed him that the spy was kneeling by the phone, his back half-turned. His flashlight lay on the floor, spreading a fan of yellow across the grimy boards.

Gun poised, Knight tiptoed into the room. The vendor was answering a question from his invisible chief.

"Yes, Number Eleven is there. But the girl you mention—I do not understand. Who is this *Senorita Navarre*?"

AT THAT name, Knight started, and the vendor jerked around in consternation. The man's black eyes dilated with terror, but before he could make a sound Knight's left hand was at his throat. The phone fell from his hand and he toppled backward on the floor, dropping his tray.

"Keep still or I'll kill you!" Knight whispered savagely. He held his gun against the vendor's head and snatched up the phone.

"Que es eso—what's happened?" the unknown speaker was demanding fiercely over the wire.

Knight answered in Spanish, modifying his voice to a low tone like the vendor's.

"My flashlight went out—I tripped over a loose board."

"Clumsy fool!" fumed the other. *"With all that noise, you'll have the pistol brigade down on you."*

"No danger," mumbled Knight, "the street is roped off and deserted. But you were telling me something about a girl—"

"Her name is Benita Navarre," the other man cut in impatiently. *"She is an American citizen, but of Spanish blood. She is descended from the Duke Medina de Navarre who fled from this country about 1840. He and his followers were trapped in a mountain canyon in a desolate part of the United States, when an earthquake closed the only entrance to their gold camp. This girl and the other descendants were only recently found by airmen. And now she is here in Spain."*

Knight hid his dismay at the last words. "I think I read of the girl, some time ago in our papers," he muttered. "They call her the '*Senorita of Lost Valley*,' *no es verdad?*"

"Yes, but the important point now is that she is a spy," snapped the unseen man. *"She is the ward of an American general, who is the chief of their military intelligence. It is obvious she has been sent here to bring some vitally important message to Knight. We know she is here, but she slipped through our hands at Granada, and how she came there is also a mystery. I am explaining this, so that you will be on guard for other agents of the United States. She must have had help in getting away from us, but the next time she will not succeed. You will be ready to seize her as soon as possible; this same order is being relayed to the other groups, and you will pass it to Eleven and his men."*

Knight kept his eyes on the trembling vendor.

"But where will she be? How will I know her?" he said into the mouthpiece.

"She will get in touch with Knight," the harsh voice responded, *"and you can recognize her from this description: She is nineteen years old, five feet four, with dark hair and eyes, and said to be very pretty. Before we lost her at Granada, she was dressed as a Red Cross nurse, and she called herself Maria Velasques. But remember in capturing her that the conditions are the same as for Knight, also be careful that Fascist spies do not learn of—"* the unseen man broke off and a sudden commotion became audible to Knight's straining ear.

"Something has just happened!" the unknown speaker rasped. *"Remain there until I call back!"*

The phone clicked, and Knight laid the instrument down. Grimly, he looked over his gun at the frightened man on the floor.

"Get up," he ordered. "You've some fast explaining to do."

The vendor's swarthy face turned a pasty hue. "Please, *senor*—I know nothing. I was told to follow you—that is all I—"

"Who gives you your orders?" Knight interrupted sharply.

Beads of perspiration came out on the man's oily face. "I swear, *senor*—I do not know!"

"Maybe General Miaja's secret police will make you talk," Knight rapped. "Start moving."

The vendor shrank back in an agony of fear.

"Mercy of Heaven, don't turn me over to them! If they force me to tell, I shall be killed most horribly."

"By whom?" Knight demanded. "You're not Loyalist, and you're not Fascist. What the devil are you?"

"I—I am only a poor man—a victim of circumstances," whined his captive. "Please, *senor*, do not—" his words ended abruptly, and he threw an alarmed glance toward the ceiling. In the same moment Knight heard the muffled drone of airplane motors.

"Fascist bombers!" groaned the vendor. "If a bomb strikes anywhere near this building, it will collapse on us!"

His knees seemed about to buckle under him. Knight made a gesture with his gun.

"All right, we'll continue this up above."

The vendor, cringing, started toward the door—then turned and with a sudden kick sent the flashlight crashing against the wall. In the instant darkness, Knight heard him fleeing wildly through the basement. He followed as best he could, stumbling over the girder, thudding against a packing-case. The rumble of engines was growing louder, and when he reached the top of the stairs he could hear a raid-siren shrieking furiously. He made his way to the street, but there was no sign of the vendor.

UP ON the Gran Via, lights were being put out. As he reached the corner, he saw people rushing for shelter. Automobiles pulled in to the curbs, and a street-car, passing on an intersecting boulevard farther down, halted and darkened its lights.

Knight sent a keen glance up and down the Gran Via, but the spy had made good his escape. He put his automatic back in the holster under his arm, buttoned his uniform coat. From the direction of the Puerta del Sol, a flickering searchlight stabbed slantwise at the heavens. Another, from the Toledo Gate, crossed the

sky, and the red flash of A-A guns blossomed above the beam. A plane streaked through the second light, whipped off into the dark. Faint tracer lines shot after it, and four more ships plunged through or above the beam. The plane they were pursuing changed direction with amazing swiftness, came roaring back over the center of Madrid.

From a point over Carabanchel, southwest of the capital, still other planes howled down with guns blazing. Knight stared up, puzzled. That first ship was an Italian fighter, a Fiat single-seater biplane of the C.R. 32 type. But the first four pursuers were also Fiats, and the ships diving from above Carabanchel were Heinkel He-70A's—bomber-fighters. This was no bombing raid—there were no "eggs" under the plunging Heinkels. It was plainly a desperate attempt to down the lone Fiat before it could land within the Loyalist lines.

"Probably a government spy," Knight muttered to himself. He stepped out into the street, oblivious to the shouted warning of a policeman, and calmly watched the fight. The Fiat, trapped, was screaming down over the city in an evident attempt by the pilot to bring his pursuers under the defense crews' guns. Suddenly, the beleaguered fighter zoomed. Up it shot, barely missing another Fiat, and then a brilliant glare shone in the sky. The harassed pilot had released a flare.

Two of the other Fiats and a charging Heinkel were caught squarely under the light. The pursued pilot hurtled back, his high-speed Vickers pounding. The nearest Fiat pitched down headlong and struck the earth in a geyser of flame. The man who had downed it rolled frantically away from the light as the Heinkel came after him. His dive had brought him almost to the tops of the buildings, and a swift renversement took him above Knight's head.

In the dazzling light, a grim white face was for an instant visible. Knight jumped as he saw it, and recognized the thatch of red hair above the ashen face. The pilot of that Fiat was "Red" Bailey, one of the volunteers he had persuaded to go back to the States. Bailey was supposed to be in France en route to New York—and here he was in a Fascist ship, with almost a dozen Insurgents trying to bring him down!

A flaming burst from the Heinkel's guns drilled Bailey's right wing. The Fiat careened, dropped two hundred feet, grazed a hotel roof. With superhuman skill, Bailey pulled out of that half-started spin, zoomed again for darkness. A thousand feet above the city, he flung into a vertical turn. Three Heinkels and

two of the Fiats were charging him with a mad fury. Knight swore in helpless rage. If he could only be up above those devils for a second . . .

Something plummeted down from Bailey's ship. A speck of white popped out behind it, opened into a tiny parachute. Knight guessed it was the "pilot chute" of the one which Bailey wore. The doomed Yank had sacrificed his only chance, to drop the dark object under that spot of white silk!

Knight whirled, ran to the first car he saw. The driver was huddled back under an awning above the sidewalk, and he burst into a frantic protest as Knight shouted for him to take the wheel. The secret agent sprang in, switched on the engine. With the driver in full chase, hurling Spanish oaths after him, he spun the car around and raced back along the Gran Via.

Glass shattered in a window behind him. Some one along the curb had fired a shot. Knight threw a hasty look toward the sidewalk. A pistol spurted flame just as he turned his head, and he saw the man's face in the flash. It was the escaped vendor!

The man seemed to be firing at the tires, for his next bullet thudded into the running-board. Knight jammed the throttle down, and the cab was quickly out of range. Above him in the air he saw an abrupt whirlwind of fire. Two ships had collided, were tumbling down in a roaring inferno. One of the two was a Fiat, and with a shiver Knight realized that Red Bailey had purposely rammed one of his foes in his last moment of life.

The tiny chute was swinging down on a westward wind, and he turned into a cross-street with a hurried estimate of where it would land. In the mirror, he saw another car skid around the corner, following him. Some one was on the running-board, and he thought he saw a gun. He increased his speed.

A bellowing motor made a deafening cacophony in the narrow street, and a Heinkel dived toward the plaza which was Knight's goal. As he came into the plaza he saw people scattering in panic. A number had started to run toward the descending parachute, but now a dozen of them lay on the ground, riddled. The rest fled for safety. The Heinkel pulled up, twisting into a steep bank, dived again with guns blasting at the thing under the chute. The stream of tracer struck the white silk, and the box underneath it dangled by a single uncut cord. Just as the Heinkel zoomed, the cord broke and the box fell the last thirty feet. It struck glancingly on a stone statue in the center of the plaza, missed a small fountain and landed on the grass.

Knight braked to a stop, jumped down, and seized the box. It was of black wood with an ancient look, about ten inches square and almost as high. Tarnished silver bands held it together where the fall had splintered one side, and he saw a silver plate on the front bearing some kind of an inscription. There was no time to try to read it, but he managed to open the lid as he ran back to the car. Inside was another box, covered with thick red velvet. He lifted the cover, and halted, transfixed with amazement.

Inside that red velvet box was a human skull!

CHAPTER II THE HOODED SQUADRON

KNIGHT HAD TIME for only that amazed glance. The next second the car which had followed him came lurching around the corner into the broad plaza, and the driver made straight for him. He closed the box as he sprang to the wheel, but his brief delay was fatal. A gun barked, and he heard the whistling explosion of a ruptured tire. Pistol in hand, he whirled and fired through the shattered rear window. The other machine hastily stopped, and its three occupants jumped out. One was the vendor, the others fairly well-dressed Spaniards. The second man blazed a shot toward Knight, but the vendor quickly knocked his gun aside, spoke crisply.

"He must not be killed! Hurry—we must capture him!"

Knight leaped down, fired as the baffled gunman ran around to the left. The man sprawled, a bullet in his leg, and his howls for a moment rose above the roar of the planes overhead.

Something bright hissed down with a trail of sparks, and a crimson rocket struck between the two cars. The vendor-spy looked up, gave a yell.

"He is going to land for the box! Watch out that the *Americano* does not escape!"

Knight, crouching back of the hood, flung a glance upward. A Fiat was sideslipping toward the plaza, dropping against the wind. From the angle of his approach, Knight saw that the ship would land on his side of the plaza—the north. It would be a tricky landing—the street was less than a hundred feet wide—but the ship was coming into the wind. He made a swift decision. There were several cars on the

other side of the street, and the vendor had said they must not kill him. It was a good chance . . .

With the box under one arm, gun in his other hand, he dashed across the plaza. The vendor and his unwounded comrade tore after him, yelling. Knight was half-way to an abandoned car when another shout came from ahead.

"He must be a Rebel spy! He is taking the box the Fascist pilot dropped!"

A small crowd of Spaniards appeared from an arcade between two shops. The leader, a bearded Syndicalist, pulled out a huge revolver and jerked the trigger. The bullet went wild, and Knight shot him down before he could aim again.

Wings screeching, a Heinkel now dived to cover the Fiat's landing. A hail of slugs sent the crowd milling into the arcade and down the street. Knight's cap was whisked from his head, a bullet-hole in the visor. He hurled himself back of a column, saw three men and a woman go down under that murderous blast before the Heinkel pulled up.

The Fiat was stalling down, wings swaying. It hit, bounced, slid to a stop with wheel-brakes set. As the pilot jumped up, the vendor-spy ran toward him, pointing at Knight.

"He has the box! But it is Knight—the American!"

"Get around behind that car!" shouted the pilot.

"You—" to the other Spaniard—"close in on him from the right. Fire at the column—when he runs out I'll shoot him."

"But the orders—" cried the vendor in loud protest.

A wailing siren cut him off as a police car raced into the plaza. Behind it came another machine. The Fiat pilot turned pale under his goggles, then leaped to the ground and sprinted toward the column. Knight flung himself to one side as a bullet chipped the stone. The pilot pumped two more shots as he darted forward, and the second ripped through Knight's sleeve. His pallid face was distorted with fear, but it was clear that something even stronger than that dread of death was driving him on. Knight threw himself back to the wall as the man sprang around the left side of the column. Their two guns spoke as one. Flame seared the back of Knight's hand, scorched his coat. The Fiat pilot tottered back with a gasping cry. As he fell, Knight shot a lightning look about him. The vendor and his accomplice were trying to carry away their wounded comrade before the police could see them. The crowd in the arcade, encouraged by the arrival of the police, was starting to rush out toward him. Before he could

start a car they would be on him or the two police machines would have him blocked.

HE bent swiftly, put down the box, pulled the helmet and goggles from the dying pilot's head. Quickly putting them on, he seized the box again and ran at top speed for the idling Fiat. The first police car veered to intercept him. As though it had been a signal, the circling Heinkel nosed down and dived. The shriek of its wings halted the crowd coming from the arcade, and one of the policemen jumped out with a sub-machine gun lifted.

A vindictive clatter came from the Heinkel's cowl-guns, and the unfortunate Spaniard fell in a bullet-torn, heap. The smoking lines of the Heinkel's tracers swept over the other men in the car, and the suddenly unguided machine smashed head-on into one of the columns.

Knight tossed the box into the Fiat's cockpit, vaulted in after it. Two more Heinkels moaned down to cover his take-off as he pushed open the throttle. He bent over the stick as the Fiat's twelve-cylinder engine roared to full speed. Pistols were flaming at him from the second police car as he thundered by. He crouched low, partly to avoid their bullets, partly to keep his face from being seen at close range by the crew of the Heinkel near him.

An A-A battery stormed three shells across his path as he zoomed up from the end of the plaza. He whipped into a tight bank, wings skimming a roof-top. Machine-guns on buildings near the Puerta del Sol probed through the gloom at his ship. One burst cut a ragged track through his upper left wing. He twisted aside, climbed steeply. Several of the Insurgent ships were diving, firing at the Loyalist gunners. He realized that this was his chance, while they were occupied trying to cover his escape. With a quick turn, he headed East.

Almost instantly, another Fiat dropped out of the dark skies beside him, and to his consternation one of the defense searchlights flicked toward the two ships. He zoomed up from the beam, but the light at the Toledo Gate abruptly swung toward him. As he turned his head to keep from being blinded he glimpsed the Fiat pilot for the first time. To his astonishment, the man's head and face were almost completely hidden by a black, cowl-like hood. The black cloth which formed it was fastened together in front so that it covered the pilot's chin and left only an opening for his goggles. The glass lenses, reflecting the light from the depth of

this queer hood, gave the man the appearance of some strange creature with enormous, fiery eyes.

As the two beams crossed Knight's ship, the hooded pilot made a peremptory gesture with a black-gloved hand. Knight nodded, pointing down into his cockpit. The other man lifted his ship a few feet, staring down at the box which Knight had wedged beside him, though outside his safety-belt.

An A-A shell burst uncomfortably close to Knight's ship. He kicked away, and the skid sent a sudden blast of air across his pit. His goggles, none too tightly fastened, started to whip from his head. He snatched at them, but the damage was already done. For a split-second, there in the edge of the beam, his face was clearly revealed to the man in the other Fiat.

The hooded pilot jumped as though he had been shot. His gloved hand snaked inside his pit, and the next moment a green-and-yellow rocket flared into the sky. Knight renversed with a howl of struts and wings. The other ship plunged after him, and two sparkling streaks lanced by his right wing-tip. He went into a half-roll, and almost crashed headlong into a zooming Heinkel. Two more Fiats pounced from the darkness above the searchlights, and in another second he knew he would be trapped. These devils were trying to herd him into their center, to force him to fly to some spot where they could recover the box with the skull.

He feinted a hasty left turn, saw one of the Fiats skid away. With a lunge at the stick, he shot over the Heinkel and drilled up for altitude. A sinister pounding at his tail told him the hooded leader had given up the attempt to get him alive. Evidently, destruction of the box and its gruesome contents would serve their purpose. He grimly charged the two Vickers enclosed in the blunt cowl before him. There was no other course now—it was kill or be killed!

Two Heinkels and a Fiat were silhouetted by the lights as he snapped the fighter around. Down he hurtled, trigger clamped hard against the stick. The Heinkels darted to right and left, but his raking fire caught the tail of one of the German-built ships. The Heinkel slid off, its rudder crumpled, and spun down into the shadows. The Fiat sped off to the south, with Knight close on its tail. The spinning Heinkel crashed and burned, and by the flames Knight saw a dozen ships racing down at him.

In the lead was the hooded pilot who flew the Fiat. Knight left off his chase of the other ship, corkscrewed up for a hasty dive. Two Heinkels zoomed with him, and with a second surprise he saw that their pilots also

wore the peculiar black hoods. One man's hood had come open, flapping back so that it gave him a comical look. But there was nothing amusing in the face thus disclosed. Murder and hate showed in that glaring countenance. Murder, hate—and fear!

Knight slammed the Fiat into an Immelmann and shook off two attackers. Tracers smoked past his shoulder as he pitched toward the first zooming Heinkel. As he ruddered aside, he cast a look back and saw more hooded pilots dropping out of the night. There were more than twenty against him—and some of those screeching ships carried gunners as well as pilots.

BUT the odds against him brought him to a sudden height of fury. Cold fury—more deadly than blind rage as it showed on that face beneath him. The glaring Heinkel pilot was curving in to give his gunner a change. A blurred figure whipped a twin-mount in the rear, and a hammering torrent beat at Knight's wings. He tripped the hidden guns again, and red-hot cupro-slugs raked over the pivoting ship. The gunner fell back, a shapeless thing that fell out of sight in the gloom of his cockpit. Knight booted his rudder, and the fiery lash of his guns went forward to the nose, leaving two more dead men in the riddled ship. He saw the black hood fall away from the pilot's tortured face—but a withering fire from above drove him into a hasty turn before he could tell what it was that made it vaguely familiar.

In those next three seconds, Death rode his trembling ship. The Fiat shook under a terrific crossfire, as planes hemmed him in. A ragged crack sprang into existence in the center section before him, and he held his breath for fear a spar had broken. Above the "V" of the left wing struts one venomous burst left a hole with smoldering edges, but luckily the wicked little red lines slowly turned to black.

Only three seconds—but in that brief eternity Knight thought he was lost. Twisting, zooming, whipping from side to side, he waited the fateful crash of bullets into his back. There was blood on his face, and his right arm was oddly numb.

Then suddenly he saw a break in the ring of winged foes about him. Two Heinkels had renversed to avoid collision. He charged through the space where they had been, yanked the stick to his chest.

Three Fiats plunged through after him, but he lost two of them in his reckless zoom. The ship was almost on its tail, snapping eastward at the top of the

climb, when the third Fiat streaked up to his level. It was the hooded leader—he recognized the huge “X” that marked the side of his ship. He kicked around for a final burst that would send this mysterious killer plunging to the ground.

But his fingers froze on the trip-clamp. For in that second, five magnesium flares lit up the sky above him, and down came a squadron of Loyalist fighters from the Arganda air-field!

Spanish-built Hawker Furies and Russian Avion fighters! Cream of the new Madrid air fleet! Down they came, a full thirty of them.

The hooded leader flung a last murderous blast at Knight, then whirled and raced into the southwest. Knight dived after him, engine wide open. Those diving pilots would make no distinction between him and the others. In his precipitous flight, he passed two of the Heinkels. Like their leader, they were fleeing wildly into Insurgent territory.

Something blazed in the sky behind Knight. He did not turn, but he knew that at least one Insurgent pilot had met his end. He kept the Fiat in a dive until the flashing searchlights of Madrid and the swaying parachute flares were no longer a menace. With a prayer for the weakened wing, he slowly brought up the nose. Throttle partly back, he headed on into the protective darkness beyond the Manzanares, climbing slowly while he considered his next move.

He was in a spot, there was no doubt of that. If he returned to Arganda in this ship, he would probably be shot within twenty-four hours. No one would believe his story. And if he landed in Insurgent territory while wearing a Loyalist uniform, he would probably meet the same fate there.

A bit whimsically, he eyed the fuel gauge and estimated the chance of reaching France or Portugal. Then he remembered that startling message about Benita, and his face became grave again. There was something going on in Spain which he had not suspected until tonight; the affair with the vendor-spy proved that. But where did Benita fit in? Why had she been sent to Spain, when his mission seemed about to be finished successfully?

He looked down at the box. It had dug hard into his side during the fight, and as he bent lower he saw two bullet-holes in the outer side. Holding the stick between his knees, he turned the shielded cockpit light toward the box and opened the outer lid. Perhaps here was the answer to the riddle.

CHAPTER III “THE IVORY IDOL”

HIS CAREFUL EXAMINATION failed to show any message in the outer box. He lifted out the red velvet box, raised the cover, carefully took out the skull. There were two holes in its yellow surface, and he realized then that but for the box and the skull he would have been killed.

“Thanks, whoever you were,” he said with a queer smile that had something of reverence in it. It was a spine-prickling thought, that some one long dead had saved his life. He reached down, set the stabilizer so that the ship would fly itself on at that level, and returned to his examination.

The skull was old and yellowed, but it had quite obviously been preserved with care. Its surface, except where the bullets had gouged it, was smooth and shiny, as though it had been painted with colorless varnish or lacquer. He turned it over, peered inside. There was no message hidden there, and an exploration of the velvet lining of the box also proved fruitless.

He looked around the dark sky to be sure no one was near, then took up the outer box and studied the silver plate on the front. A bullet had creased one corner of it, and the inscription was so badly faded that he could not make out anything but the date, which was inscribed in a large flowing script: *Mil y seiscientos y ochenta*.

Sixteen hundred and eighty! Then this skull and the box were two hundred and fifty-seven years old! Knight looked down at the yellowed skull with increasing bewilderment. What meaning did this thing have? Why had Red Bailey been so desperately anxious to drop it into Madrid—and why had those Insurgent pilots—the hooded squadron—been as feverishly determined to prevent it?

A skull in a red velvet box. In the midst of Spain’s bloody civil war, it seemed an almost ludicrous note for this to have happened. But men had fought and died over it. The vendor-spy had known something about it, too; for he had recognized that rocket signal and had known that the Fiat pilot intended to recover the box. Perhaps the vendor had not fled at once from the wrecked building, but had hidden and returned to the secret telephone, and then had received new orders from the unknown man at the other end.

Knight's brows drew together. Doyle and Benita and he were connected with this, also. The vendor had received instructions pertaining to the three of them. And then Benita's presence in Spain . . . that added still another puzzling element. He had no doubt now that General Brett had sent her to find him. That, in itself, indicated a grave emergency; for in spite of the rapidity with which she had learned the customs of modern civilization, there was still a trace of naivete in her manner, a relic of those years in Lost Valley, when all she knew of the outside world was from the books and tales handed down from generation to generation of Navarres. Old Jim, the prospector who later had tumbled into that closed canyon, had told her a little more, and she had sought to make up for lost time, once she had been freed from the valley. Her share of the community gold store, and possession of the famous "Green Madonna" emerald—an heirloom dating back eight hundred years—had given her the means to smooth that path from almost primitive life to the complexities of twentieth century existence. But she had never been in Spain . . . she knew little of war . . . and but for a natural talent for espionage she was utterly unequipped for such a mission. Brett must have been desperate indeed to have sent her into this powder-keg of Europe.

WITH a last glance at the skull, Knight closed the inner box, then the outer one. Taking the stick in his hand, he circled for a minute longer. The solution lay not in Loyalist territory, but in the Insurgent area. His only link with the Insurgents was Doyle, and if Doyle were not at the American Squadron field south of Avila he might run into trouble. But it seemed the only course.

Switching off the cockpit light, he set the Fiat on a compass course of 285. Avila, the main supply base and Insurgent headquarters of the Old Castile region, lay just fifty-five miles from Madrid. The Fiat reached it in fifteen minutes, flying at an altitude of seven thousand feet. As the ship neared Avila, Knight veered off southward, until he was above the field the American volunteers had been using. It was hidden in darkness, but he knew the approximate location.

Spiraling down, he blipped out the code-letter "Q" with his engine, repeating it at ten-second intervals. He was down to five thousand feet when an answering twinkle of light came from the blackness beneath.

"D" said the light, flickering. "D" . . . "D to Q."

Knight replied with three Q's in succession, and

the light began a hurried message in the special cipher which he and Doyle had worked out.

"Don't land here. Wait ten minutes and land three miles southwest, on signal. Will give you landing light—D."

Knight acknowledged the message with a final "Q" and circled at half cruising speed until another signal blinked from the point Doyle had mentioned. As he glided down he pulled off his Loyalist coat, rolled it up and put it under his seat. A smoky light appeared on the ground, as Doyle set off a bucket of gas-soaked waste. Knight dropped into a slip, let the ship howl down until it was two hundred feet from the field. Rudder into the wind, he fishtailed to a stall landing less than fifty yards from a gloomy canvas hangar.

Doyle immediately extinguished the burning waste and ran to the plane as Knight climbed down.

"Dick!" he exclaimed, gripping Knight's hand and pumping it joyfully. "Fella, am I glad to see that mug of yours!"

"That goes double," Knight told him. "Are we alone?"

"Yeah, though I had a little trouble sneaking off with a motorcycle after you signaled. I told the gang it was one of the Italian pilots bringing some dope from General Franco, at Salamanca. Why, what's wrong?"

"Plenty," muttered Knight, "But what's this place?"

"A decoy field, so your friends across the lines won't blow us outta bed," grunted Doyle. "Same trick as both sides used in the World War—a couple of old hangars, a fake barracks and some broken-down crates on th' line. There's supposed to be some lights on, to make sure th' Red bombers pick the right spot, but the line must've broken down somewhere."

"Let's go into your dummy barracks," said Knight. "I've got something to show you."

Doyle led the way, and Knight brought the box from the Fiat. A motorcycle stood near a shell of a building, and Doyle produced a flashlight from the sidecar. Knight followed into one corner of the false barracks and set the ancient box on a carpenter's bench which had been left there. Doyle's eyes popped as Knight took out the skull and showed it to him.

"Judas!" he howled. "What's the idea of carrying that thing like it was a diamond crown?"

"Then you don't know anything about it?" demanded Knight.

"Me? How the devil would I know anything about it—I never laid eyes on it before."

"It means something to the Insurgents," Knight

said grimly. He explained what had happened after he had become aware that he was being watched at a cafe in Madrid. When he concluded, Doyle's mouth was hanging open.

"Boy, you've sure got horse-shoes in your pants! You're the first bird that ever got away from that mob without two or three bullets in him."

KNIGHT started. "You mean they've attacked your squadron? They're not an Insurgent outfit?"

"Hell, no! We thought they were Reds, using some captured ships and pullin' that hooded act to try to scare us out."

"Then who are they?"

"Search me! Colonel Morton, C.O. of this gang, has been trying to dope it out ever since I got here. That bunch of night-riders has shot down five of our pilots, and ten or twelve others. One bombing outfit has lost about all of its pilots and ships, too. I haven't had a chance to carry out our orders—it isn't even an American squadron any more. Only three or four left, besides me, and th' rest are Italians, Germans, and a couple of Spaniards who used to be government pilots."

"What about Morton?" Knight asked, momentarily shelving the other matter. "Did you tell him the War Department message?"

"I gave him the works," growled Doyle. "I showed him my confidential Order, but he's still here. I think he's scared, but Franco is paying him two thousand bucks a month—and he figures if the war lasts long enough he can afford to lose his Army reserve commission."

Knight's jaw hardened.

"He's going back if we have to kidnap him—and those others, too. I just about cleaned up the bunch at Arganda, but Morton's more of a danger. It looks bad for an American Army colonel—even a reserve officer—to be commanding a squadron in Spain. And some American pilots have been writing back home about strafing infantry and bombing towns—the stuff's getting into papers and being copied in Europe."

"It's a dirty mess," agreed Doyle. "And all the dirty work isn't on one side, either. But what are we going to do? And what about Benita?"

Knight was gingerly rolling up his sleeve, examining a surface gash made by a steel splinter.

"I'll go back and find her," he said slowly. "But first, we'll have to discover the secret of this skull. It may explain everything."

He bandaged his arm with his handkerchief, wiped blood from a cut on his cheek, and then brought the flashlight closer to the silver-bound box. Doyle bent over, also, his broken nose making a crooked shadow across his face.

"It beats me," he rumbled. "Bed Bailey lettin' himself get bumped just to drop this in Madrid. And where'd he been, after you headed him for home?"

Knight shook his head. "He may have double-crossed me, but that wasn't like him."

"No, Red was a pretty good egg," grunted Doyle.

Knight rubbed the silver plate with his sleeve. The inscription began to be more discernible, and he was stooping for a closer look when his ears caught a faint sound outside one of the glass-less windows. Surreptitiously, he reached toward his arm-pit holster, but a brittle command instantly halted him.

"Get up your hands, both of you!"

Doyle swore and lunged around. Knight rotated slowly, his hands partly raised. But in spite of his coolness, a stab of dismay went through him as he faced the window. He was looking on the leader of the hooded squadron!

"Back against the wall!" the man said in the same staccato tone. Knight could tell that he was masking his true voice, though the cowl-like hood, snapped together in front, hid his lips.

Swearing under his breath, Doyle obeyed the order. Knight backed up beside him, watching the goggled eyes of the mysterious leader. The man stepped back a few inches from the window, so that he stood in shadow, but the Mannlicher pistol in his thinly-gloved hand remained on the sill. Knight heard a whispered conversation, then a second figure appeared, this one at the doorway. He wore the stained dungarees of a mechanic, and the lower part of his face was covered with a soiled handkerchief. A cap was drawn low over his eyes. Despite the revolver he held, he seemed to be frightened, for his hand was quivering.

"Take their guns!" ordered the hooded man. "Careful—move in from the side."

Knight made a mental note that the leader spoke English without an accent. The mechanic took his gun, scurried across to Doyle and fumbled inside the ex-Marine's leather jacket. Doyle cursed him roundly, and the man jumped back, almost dropping Knight's automatic.

"This one has no weapon," he stuttered to the man at the window.

"All right, then get the box!"

The mechanic backed to the carpenter's bench, laid down Knight's gun, and slid the box along into the crook of his left arm. Keeping his eyes on the captives, he edged sidewise to the window. The hooded man reached out with his free hand and pulled the box to the sill. It was almost balanced when the tilted lid came open and the velvet case fell out. The mechanic made a wild grab at the inner box, and in doing so threw himself in front of the window.

DOYLE and Knight leaped simultaneously for the automatic on the bench. The hooded leader, his aim blocked, snatched the outer box and jumped back from the window. A shot blasted from his Mannlicher as the terrified mechanic sprang aside. The bullet drilled the top of the bench. Doyle scooped up Knight's gun, hurled two shots through the window. The mechanic jerked around and frenziedly pulled his trigger, but this slug likewise buried itself in the bench. As Knight dived for the man's legs, the smoking muzzle whipped down at him; but the report that roared through the building was not from the mechanic's revolver.

A stupefied, stunned expression came into the man's eyes. The revolver fell, clattered on the floor. He took a staggering step backward, and died on his feet. His body, doubling like a broken stick, thudded upon the boards.

As Knight yanked the revolver from the dead man's fingers, another shot crashed. He saw Doyle crouched by the doorway, firing out into the darkness. There was no answering shot. Doyle spun around as Knight started to his feet.

"Look out, Dick! He might plug you through the window. I don't know where he went!"

Knight crawled to the bench, put out the flashlight. Joining Doyle, he stared out into the night.

"I think I heard him making a getaway," Doyle whispered. "It sounded like some one running—but I couldn't see a thing."

"He's probably gone," Knight said glumly. "Too bad we didn't nail him."

"We're lucky we're still clicking," growled Doyle.

"I know that. And thanks for that shot—he just about had me."

"I didn't bump off that bird," said Doyle. "Your friend with the hood shot him."

"He must have been afraid we'd capture the mechanic and make him talk," Knight said somberly. Then a new thought struck him. "He obviously just

landed here—but how did he know I was coming to this field?"

"Probably followed you—saw my signal—waited till you were down and then cut off his engine and came in with a dead stick."

"He couldn't have followed me—too dark," objected Knight. "Come on, let's see if we can locate his ship. He'll be trying to get away in it."

They went outside, and Knight briefly flashed the light under the window.

"He took the outer box," he told Doyle. "That inscription was the key, all right."

"Listen!" exclaimed the ex-Marine. "They've heard those shots—the gang's heading over here from the barracks."

The sound of speeding cars increased, and in a moment Knight saw the headlights of the first machine. He glanced around quickly as the lights came nearer.

"There's the ship!" he said to Doyle.

The Fiat flown by the hooded pilot had rolled almost into one of the canvas hangars. Doyle and he ran over to it, searched around the hangar, but the fugitive was not to be found. They made a hasty examination of the ship, then returned to the dummy barracks building just as the leading auto swung onto the field. Before Doyle had time to explain, Knight and he were surrounded by half a dozen German and Italian pilots. Another machine squealed to a stop, and two of the American volunteers jumped out, followed by an excited Italian waving a pistol.

"Who is thees man?" he shouted, pointing his gun at Knight. "Signer Doyle—what you do here?"

"This is one of General Franco's agents," snapped Doyle. "He was bringing word to Colonel Morton—a spy in a Fiat tried to kill him."

A German with cold blue eyes stared from Doyle to Knight.

"There is something very odd about all this," he said in precise English. "*Herr* Doyle, you have been acting in a suspicious manner tonight, and now this pilot—"

"What is the trouble here?" an authoritative voice interrupted. A third car had come up behind the others, and Knight saw Colonel Morton step out. With concealed irritation, he saw that Morton was wearing an American Army uniform, with colonel's eagles, a campaign bar, and Sam Browne belt. Only the "U.S." insignia was missing. Army Air Corps wings adorned his left breast. An olive-drab cap, with a pair

of wings in place of the U.S. Army shield, was set at a rakish angle on his head, and underneath it the man's prematurely silvered hair made a handsome frame for his face, contrasting with eyes so dark they appeared almost black.

"I'd like to see you alone," Knight said coolly. "I have a personal message to deliver."

MORTON studied him for a second, nodded. "I think I understand, Mr. Knight. Doyle inadvertently prepared me for your arrival."

"I never said a damn word," Doyle whispered, but Morton was already motioning Knight to one side, while the German and Italian pilots stood muttering in two little groups.

"I know what your mission is," Morton stated calmly. "We've had word through Franco's spies of the Americans leaving at Arganda. But I'll tell you right now, I'm not quitting Spain. I've been promised a general's commission, if we win. So get it out of your head that any War Department threat is going to scare me."

Knight heard him through without interruption.

"You're heading for trouble," he said curtly. "But that's beside the point now. I've run into a strange situation tonight."

He sketched the evening's events quickly. Morton showed no emotion until he mentioned the hooded squadron. Then he looked astonished, and his amazed expression deepened as Knight went on.

"But this is impossible!" he burst out as Knight finished. "It must be a 'Red' squadron—they've practically wrecked two of ours, including a bombing outfit."

"It's not a Loyalist group," Knight contradicted. "That fight over Madrid proves it."

"But who could they be? What could be their purpose?" Morton pressed further.

"I don't know, but if you can capture that hooded leader we ought to get the answer. And there may be some clue on the dead man inside."

Morton put the cold-eyed German in charge of the other pilots, ordered a search begun and a warning rushed to Avila for broadcasting. Then, with Doyle and Knight, he entered the dummy barracks. The red velvet box lay on the floor, its lid open and the skull half-way out. The immaculate colonel gazed at it incredulously.

"What in Heaven's name could anyone want with that thing?"

"It wasn't the skull they wanted," Knight said

shortly. He handed Doyle the flashlight and knelt by the corpse. The search netted a vicious-looking knife, several thousand peseta notes, and a diary filled with figures and seemingly innocent notations.

"Might be a code," said Knight, putting the book into his pocket. He glanced at a simple religious medallion, which hung on a chain about the dead man's neck. "That looks unusually thick—I've a hunch it's hollow."

He took the knife, pried the point into two or three places, and suddenly the medallion flew open. Out tumbled a small idol carved of ivory, a four-faced, six-armed figure. So carefully had it been carved that the tiny faces were identical, from their deep-set, shadowy eyes, to their expression of brooding menace.

There was a hush, as Doyle and Knight stared at each other over that sinister idol. Morton looked at them blankly.

"What's the matter? You two act as though you'd seen a ghost."

Knight slowly got to his feet.

"Not one ghost—but four," he said. "The ghosts of the four most dangerous men in the world!"

CHAPTER IV THE RED CARMENS

WHAT ARE YOU DRIVING AT?" Morton demanded.

"Did you ever hear of the Four Faces?" Knight asked

him. At the colonel's negative gesture, he went on: "It's an unscrupulous international organization with roots in every branch of society from the gutter on up. A large number of its members have been forced to join, through blackmail or for fear of their lives. And it's headed by four men whose identity is still a secret, though I've a strong suspicion that they're four great financiers, mad for power. One might even be Lowenstein—the great Belgian multi-millionaire who was supposed to have fallen or jumped from his private plane while crossing the Channel. There have been other cases of financial leaders vanishing and not proved dead."

Morton's first astonishment slowly changed to a derisive look.

"Listen, Knight, I've heard a lot of crazy ideas in my life—"

"You asked what the idol meant!" Knight said coldly. "I don't care what you believe—the Four Faces are back of this whole business. They're the ones who guide that hooded squadron, and God only knows what they're up to."

"You really believe that?" Morton demanded.

"Enough to tell you that you'd better get out of Spain before something happens to you! And to revert to that other matter—" Knight took a flat tobacco pouch from one of his pockets, pulled the zipper, and brought a folded sheet of paper from inside the lining. "If the War Department order which Doyle showed you means nothing, perhaps this bit of advice from the White House will."

Morton's black eyes raced over the unfolded paper, to the signature at the bottom. His face slowly lost its color.

"It's a trick!" he said harshly. "They can't get away with it. I'll resign my Army commission tonight—"

"You've seen the order," Knight cut in without emotion. "You'll have forty-eight hours to get out of Spain, and take the rest of the American pilots with you."

All the resistance faded from Morton's face.

"Very well," he mumbled. "I'll get out. What are you and Doyle going to do now?"

"I'm going back to Madrid. Doyle will wait and go with you."

"Like so much, I will," retorted Doyle. "If the Four Faces are tangled up with this, you'll need help in Madrid."

"And in that Insurgent uniform, you'd last three minutes—if you were lucky."

"I'll get rid of it. That bird on the floor won't need his dungarees any more, and this leather jacket could belong to anybody. I'll fly the other Fiat."

"Too risky," objected Knight. "I'll have to chance a dead-stick landing in the dark, but I know several spots to try, and you don't know any of that terrain."

Doyle rubbed his crooked nose, turned suddenly to Colonel Morton.

"How about letting us have that Russian crate von Greim brought down last Sunday? It'd be a darned sight easier being caught with a Loyalist ship than a Fiat, if we're spotted."

"I guess it's all right," Morton said dubiously. "But don't blame me if you get shot down by some Insurgent outfit between here and Madrid."

"We'll be plenty high," grinned Doyle. "Okay, Dick—let's beat it on up to the other field."

Knight gave in. If he refused, he knew Doyle would follow by hook or crook. Doyle hurriedly changed his clothes, left his uniform covering the corpse. As they went out to Morton's car, the reserve colonel looked back at the dead man.

"I can't understand about him. Your hooded pilot was flying a single-seater—so where did the mechanic come from?"

"He must've been riding th' wing," offered Doyle. "The boy with the hood probably figured he'd need some help."

Morton nodded, and as soon as a platoon of groundmen arrived to guard the Fiats they started for the other field. Half an hour later, Knight and Doyle took off in the Russian plane in which a Loyalist pilot had been downed. It was a modified R-5 biplane, with a small cabin instead of two open cockpits. The seat behind Knight had been originally designed for two passengers, and he guessed that the ship had been a small Staff plane until converted into a light fighter-bomber. A sliding panel had been arranged in the roof, so that the Lewis twin-mount could be lifted up on a Scaarf-ring, and a single Lewis was swiveled below so that it could be fired on either side, or through a hole in the floor. The engine, a 650 horsepower M.17, had the usual Fairey Fox motor mount, but instead of the customary Vickers there were two of the latest Brownings on the cowl.

AS THE R-5 thundered down the Insurgent field, Knight knew they were taking off with odds stacked heavily against them. He looked around at Doyle as the ship began to climb.

"Well, you asked for it, you crazy Irishman."

"Okay by me," Doyle yelled back. "I've been hankering to see the other side of the scrap, anyway."

"You may get a close-up—of a firing-squad," Knight said comfortingly.

"Don't be a Pollyanna," chuckled Doyle.

Knight grinned, turned back to the controls. The R-5 climbed well, and at 8,000 feet he leveled out, cruising at 150. As the ship roared on through the darkness, he swiftly thought over the situation. If Benita had aid from American agents, as had been hinted, then she could easily learn that he had left the Arganda field and gone into Madrid. It would be less simple for American agents to help her reach the capital, though they might attempt the dangerous Valencia-Madrid road by night. At any rate, he would have to seek her in the capital.

And in Madrid, probably hidden securely, were either the dreaded Four Faces themselves, or their representatives. More likely it would be the latter. Madrid would be unsafe for those four grim men, despite their power. They would be hidden elsewhere, perhaps somewhere in Europe, directing this scheme through the spies of their invisible empire.

But what could be their motive, what was the explanation of that hooded squadron which struck at both sides? Money and power—those were always the basic forces which actuated the Four Faces. But where was the gain or the power this time?

Knight remembered that evil day when Benita and Doyle and he had been trapped at the “Center,” the secret equatorial base from which the vast criminal league was directed and controlled. He remembered the toneless voice of the First Face, spokesman for those four black-robed figures behind the long judges’ bench. Four robed men, with four identical masks like the brooding faces of the idol which was their symbol—four devils who pronounced the sentence of death on any who dared to disobey or defy their stern mandates.

It had been almost a miracle, their escape, and since then they had again encountered the evil force of those four mysterious men. He had hoped against reason that they had been destroyed in their last encounter. The Four Faces hated them, he knew, and they could expect no mercy if they were captured. But revenge alone did not explain everything which had occurred. There was something deeper, more sinister . . .

He turned his mind to the problem of landing behind the Loyalist lines. There was one field, two miles from Arganda, which had been used as a fuel depot when the less powerful Madrid air fleet had operated from farther East. It was gutted along one side with bomb-craters, but the western side was safe enough for a stall landing. It was uncomfortably close to the Arganda station, but with his engine cut off well in advance he should be able to land unheard and unseen. The wind was in the right direction.

He swung the R-5 well around to the north, climbing as they passed over the Guadarrama Mountains. At twelve thousand feet, with the desultory fire at University City to guide him, he nosed down and closed the fuel valve. The engine died and he cut the switch. Gliding as flatly as possible, he began the long descent.

“Where we landing?” said Doyle, his voice booming above the faint moan of the wings.

Knight told him, adding: “If we make it all right, you’d better stay with the ship while I sneak over to Arganda and see what I can learn. If it isn’t safe to try anything there, I’ll come back and we’ll work out a way to get into Madrid.”

“You’d better hop into that Loyalist uniform again,” grunted Doyle, “if you expect to get away with anything.”

Knight put on the coat he had transferred from the Fiat, and then for several minutes neither man spoke. He swung carefully to the southeast, calculating his position by the gunfire at Madrid, scattered lights in Chinchon and Arganda, and occasional machine-gun tracers along the Valencia-Madrid highway.

That gunfire would help drown the sound of their approach, but he brought the stick back still farther as they reared Arganda, so that the R-5 barely whispered in its stalling glide.

They were down to two thousand feet before he realized that there was an unusual activity on the Arganda field. He could see cars moving in from the highway, others departing, and a number of people swarming about the hangars and shops. A floodlight was focused at one place, and he banked away as he realized the glow might reflect from their wings.

“What’s up?” Doyle asked hastily.

“Something wrong down there. We might be—”

Knight rammed the stick forward as the R-5 rocked in suddenly bumpy air. Too late he remembered the constant air currents above the old rock quarry east of Arganda. The ship slued off, was almost into a spin before he could get up enough speed to bring it out. With a groan, he knew that they could never reach the old fuel-depot field now. They had lost four hundred feet and the R-5 had come out heading back toward the village.

“We’ll have to land at the government field,” he said tautly over his shoulder. “Be ready to throw a big bluff—we may get away with it at that, if they’re as busy as they look.”

“No chance to switch on the motor?” muttered Doyle.

“No—she’s colder than Pharaoh’s heart. We’d be on the ground before she’d pick up.”

THE ship was already moaning down over the treeless plateau on which the Loyalist field had been built. Knight banked into the wind, glided down toward the flood-lit area. Now that they had to land, they might as well make it as brazen a move as possible.

A blur of faces, a crashed ship, slid beneath the R-5's wings. Knight leveled off the Russian ship, landed her with a tight groundloop at the end of its run. As the ship snapped around, he looked swiftly about the field. The line of cars suddenly materialized into ambulances; some were marked with the familiar red cross, and others were trucks which had been pressed into service. Figures on stretchers were being carried to a first-aid station near the field dispensary. Another row of figures, their faces covered, lay on the ground by a hangar.

"Good Lord!" Doyle said hoarsely. "They've been gassed! Look!"

Knight followed his pointing finger and saw a limp form being lifted onto a stretcher. The man was alive, for his stertorous breathing was clearly audible, but there was no light of sanity in his glaring eyes, and his swollen and bluish face was like that of the dead.

There was time for only that brief glance, for the next moment a Loyalist captain and three soldiers with rifles ran to the side of the machine.

"Señor Knight!" the officer exclaimed. "I thought you were unable to fly. Where did you get this machine?"

"I can explain everything, Capitano Lugas," Knight said earnestly. "But what terrible thing has happened here?"

The look of suspicion faded from the captain's olive-skinned face.

"*Madre de Dios*, but those fiends of Fascists have begun to use poison gas! Tonight—during the fight above Madrid—one of their planes flew down low here and dropped a huge gas bomb. A pilot just taking off was killed—over there is his wrecked plane. And all but five of the field force were overcome. At least a third have died already, though we have summoned every doctor and nurse within reaching distance."

Another government officer hurried up to the plane as Knight and Doyle climbed out. Knight's heart sank, for it was Major Gomera, the Spanish commander of the American unit which he had practically dispersed.

"Where did this plane come from? Who are these men?" Gomera roared. Then he recognized Knight, and the blood rushed into his dark face. "Lugas! Arrest this man—seize both of them!"

"But the *señor* Knight said he could explain—"

"You imbecile, he is a Rebel spy! It was he tonight who took off in that Fiat which was landed in the plaza! I just received the report."

"But now he is in an R-5—one of the planes the Soviet lent to us," objected Lugas.

Gomera's flashing eyes swept over the Russian ship, then an unholy joy came into their depths.

"Here is proof of his treachery! This is the machine which was brought down at Avila a few days ago. It was downed by one of the American squadron."

Gomera's thundering denunciation brought a tense silence. Ambulance drivers, special guards, doctors and nurses all halted their work for a second, staring toward the group at the plane. Then a low muttering, like a rumble before a storm, began to be audible. Knight heard it and went cold, for he knew the unleashed fury of a mob.

"Give me five minutes to explain—in your office!" he said hastily to the major. "I've learned something you should know—about the hooded squadron!"

Gomera jumped as though Knight had struck him.

"*El Diablo!* You are one of them! You received their message tonight—flew with them! Perhaps you were the one who dropped the gas-bomb on this field!"

BUT now the muttering of the crowd had swollen to an angry roar. A bare-headed woman leaped upon the running-board of an ambulance.

"Did you hear, comrades?" she screamed. "They are the ones who killed our men!"

A dozen other women left off their aid to the wounded men and ran toward the R-5. The one who had shrieked the alarm sprang down and snatched a scalpel from a doctor's kit.

"Follow me!" she cried shrilly. "We'll show them how to kill!"

Knight fell back. Gomera he might have persuaded—men he might have handled—but no one under the sun could stop the "Red Carmens" once they were aroused! In the defense of Madrid, even the savage Moors had once given back before the terrible fury of these women who had fought side by side with men.

As the women surged forward, Knight whirled to Gomera.

"If you let them kill us, the secret of the hooded squadron dies with us!"

The major started, barked a command to Lugas and the soldiers.

"They can't do anything!" Knight said fiercely. "Get us into that first ambulance! You can beat the mob to the guard-house and then stand them off!"

"But you die—later!" roared Gomera. He yelled at the soldiers, and with the Red Carmens screaming at their heels, Knight and Doyle were hustled into the ambulance. Captain Lugas jumped to the wheel,

and the car lunged ahead just as the woman with the scalpel sprang at the rear step.

A howl of baffled rage went up from the Red Carmens, who were now augmented by half of the men. Gomera's face dripped perspiration as the ambulance careened around the crowd and toward the guard-house.

"They are devils, those Carmens!" he said huskily to Lugas. "When we get these two locked up, put all our men around the building until I can talk to them."

"You had better let them cool off," advised the pallid captain. "They might tear us to pieces."

Gomera gave Knight and Doyle a murderous glare.

"I would gladly let them have these two—but for the information we would lose."

The ambulance whirled around between two ships, stopped in front of the guard-house. The mob, left well behind, was filling the air with angry yells. As Knight jumped down from the ambulance, he saw a groaning Spaniard lying on the ground a few yards away. A doctor was bending over him, and a slender figure in the garb of a Red Cross nurse was handing the doctor something from his kit.

The nurse looked up quickly as the two prisoners were hurried toward the guard-house. Knight's heart almost stood still.

It was Benita!

Her face turned a deathly white as she recognized him, and she gave a stifled cry. Gomera jerked around, but Knight gave him no time to analyze her emotion.

"Get us inside, you fool—before this hellion takes a notion to use a knife on us!"

CHAPTER V THE RUSE OF THE RENDEZVOUS

GOMERA CURSED HIM, but the words had had their intended effect. Benita's expression changed at his savage look, and her pretended anger was enough to satisfy the major. The door to the guard-house was speedily unlocked, and the two men were thrust inside. As the door slammed shut, Doyle spoke for the first time.

"Boy, what a sweet mess!"

"If only Benita weren't mixed up in it," Knight said hopelessly. "I never dreamed she'd be out here."

"You heard what the captain said—they were

dragging in all the doctors and nurses they could reach. She was scooped up with the rest."

"We've got to get her out of here," Knight muttered.

"How about getting ourselves out first?" demanded Doyle.

"If Gomera can hold off the Red Carmens, I think I can prove we're okay," replied Knight. "That little document from the White House will carry a lot of weight, and we'll use it as a last resort."

The cries of the mob grew louder, and for the next ten minutes it seemed that Gomera's men would be overpowered. Then the tumult gradually lessened, and Knight could dimly hear the major exhorting the crowd. At last his arguments seemed to have effect, for through a small, barred window Knight saw the women begin to go back to their first-aid work. The ambulances began to move again, going toward the village, and after a while the ring of guards was reduced. Doyle was now at the window.

"I think they've left just a couple of men at the door," he whispered, craning his neck. "One of 'em has a Russian 'Tommy-gun.' If we can grab that when they unlock the door—"

"That won't work," said Knight. "We might make the break, but what about Benita? Agents of the hooded squadron are closing in upon her."

Doyle swore. "Sometimes women are a damn nuisance!"

He sat down on a hard bench beside Knight, and they were silent, there in the dark, for a few minutes. Suddenly, a faint scratching sounded at the barred window. Knight stole across the room, went rigid as he saw the white-clad figure standing on tiptoes beneath the opening.

"Benita!" he said tensely. "Keep away from here—the guards may see you!"

"No, I have bribe' them," she whispered. "I have give them the 'Green Madonna'—I had it in the heel of my shoe."

Knight groaned.

"If Gomera catches you, he'll have you shot!"

"Si, I know—so we work quick, *querido!* The guards—they will unlock the door and you mus' be ready to run to the ambulance on this side. *Sabe usted?*"

"Yes, but for Heaven's sake get away before—"

"*Dios!*" a voice shrilled wildly from somewhere back of Benita. "Quick—I have caught a traitor!"

A wave of horror swept over Knight, and he heard Doyle curse helplessly behind him. A light flashed

between the guard-house and the nearest shop, and one of the Red Carmens charged triumphantly at Benita. It was the woman who had led the others.

Captain Lugas came running from the other direction, followed by three or four soldiers. Knight heard the two guards flee around the other side, caught the quick bark of a pistol. For the next five minutes he waited in an agony of fear, then he heard Benita speak in an abrupt lull of furious voices.

"It was this one at the window—she was trying to throw her dagger at the prisoners!"

"She lies!" came the Red Carmen's speech. "She bribed the guards with a huge emerald! She was plotting to help the prisoners escape!"

"Rebel spy!" a voice yelled. "Kill her!"

Knight hurled himself furiously against the door. The shriek of the Red Carmens' drowned the noise, but the bar held. Doyle was lunging with him against it, when above the angry cries sounded the unmistakable bellow of diving planes.

"Air raid!" he heard Gomera shout. "Lugas, get your men to the guns! Turn out all lights!"

There was brief darkness outside, then brilliant light shone from above. A machine gun hammered close by, abruptly went silent. Pistols cracked faintly above the din, and there was a loud smashing at the guard-house door. In a few seconds the door was flung open, broken lock dangling from the bar. Knight sprang to the opening, then halted in stupefaction.

Their deliverer was the vendor-spy, now smartly attired in the uniform of a Loyalist lieutenant!

BACK of him were a dozen men dressed as government soldiers, apparently just arrived in a closed truck which stood behind them. Two of the men held Benita.

"These are the ones!" said the erstwhile vendor. "Get them back of that first hangar—the plane will land there!"

The sky was filled with roaring ships, a score of Fiats and Heinkels. As Knight and the others were driven at a run toward the hangar he saw one Fiat dive headlong at a machine gun crew. The Fiat's guns flamed, and the ship zoomed, leaving five dead Spaniards behind. And as it howled upward, Knight saw a hooded pilot at the stick.

The truth crashed into his brain. The Four Faces had sent the hooded squadron to rescue them for some more sinister fate!

"The prisoners!" a voice bawled from one side.

"The prisoners are being saved while we are left to die!"

Aroused to uncontrollable anger, two stretchermen snatched guns from their hips, fired point-blank into the group. The man at Benita's right fell with a bullet in his back. The false lieutenant spun around, dropped one man in his tracks. The second stretcherman fired two shots before he toppled to the ground. The prisoners were rushed on, at gun-point, but the alarm had spread. Several Red Carmens, dashing to ground-guns or for shelter, halted in their flight. Gomera, who was just climbing into a Spanish-built Hawker-Fury, bellowed a command which sent a machine-gun pivoting hastily toward the three Americans and their captors.

Knight hurled himself forward, knocked Benita from her feet just as the machine-gun crashed out a furious burst. The vendor-lieutenant dropped, cut half in two and five of his men fell, dead or wounded. The rest ran pell-mell for their truck, on which a Lewis was mounted. The clattering gun swerved after them, and Knight seized the chance to drag Benita into the shelter of the hangar. Doyle hastily crawled in beside them, with a pistol he had taken from one of the impostors.

"Those 'Four Face' pilots will finish off these poor devils in a few minutes," Knight said tautly. "You and Benita stay here. I'm going to try to start the R-5."

"Look out!" Doyle broke in. "There's a ship diving down at us!"

It was a Junkers, a small mail-and-passenger type such as had been converted into a bomber for use in Spain. But as it leveled off for a swift landing, Knight saw that it carried no bombs, and there seemed to be only one man in the cabin.

Three Fiats were shrieking down near it, strafing the other side of the hangars and the nearest gun emplacements. Knight pulled Benita back as the plane braked to a jerky stop.

"Stay here! Doyle, we've got to grab that ship before he finds out his men have skipped!"

A hooded pilot had flung open the door to the cabin and was half-way out. As Doyle and Knight raced toward him, the masked flyer jumped back. A Luger was almost out of his holster when Doyle fired. He sagged, fell on his face, and at Knight's quick signal, Benita ran to the ship.

"I can't read this lingo—you'd better take it," Doyle exclaimed, indicating the German words on the instrument board.

Benita sprang into a seat, and Knight flung himself down at the stick. A Loyalist sergeant and two Red Carmens ran around the end of the hangar as he opened the throttle. Two holes quickly appeared in the slanted windshield, and a third bullet, from the sergeant's gun, ricocheted from the engine-mount. The two women, both brandishing pistols, ran after the ship, but Knight kicked around into the wind and their shots went wild.

Two Loyalist machine-guns blazed toward them as he sent the Junkers thundering into a take-off. One of the guns was swiftly silenced, as two Fiats pounced on it with their Vickers smoking. The other gun drilled the rear of the cabin, tore a gaping hole in the top, before the hooded pilots cut down the enraged ground-men.

THE Arganda field was a shambles as Knight pulled into a climbing turn. The hooded men had caught five ships, including Gomera's Fury, before they were off the ground. Both hangars were now ablaze from incendiary bombs, and all the field defenses had been silenced. The suddenness of the attack, as the mysterious squadron approached down-wind, had been the downfall of the Loyalists, in spite of their courage and bitter resistance.

Two Heinkels angled down toward the climbing Junkers. Knight banked away, raced at full speed toward Madrid. Both the Heinkels plunged after him, and he saw three Fiats detach themselves from the strafe of Arganda and join in pursuit. The Heinkels were almost even with them when the glow from the hooded squadron's flares died out, and the Junkers was shrouded in welcome darkness.

Knight kept the engine full out, climbing now and circling back to the southeast so that they would not come in range of the Madrid A-A guns. When two thousand meters registered on the German dial, he leveled out and reduced the thundering B.M.W. to cruising speed.

"And now what?" grunted Doyle.

It was the first word anyone had spoken since their dramatic escape. Benita, gazing back at the flame-torn sky, seemed to awake from a trance.

"I thought we were about to die," she said in a shaken voice. "How you ever know I am there?"

"We didn't," said Doyle. "Unless maybe Dick's got some kind of instinct like a homing-pigeon."

"Never mind the wisecracks," retorted Knight. "We've a lot to figure out—where we're going to land, mainly."

"But I can tell you that," exclaimed Benita. "You are to fly to the southern coast, and land on the beach at a place I will tell you."

"What!" said Knight. "You mean Brett's fixed up something—"

"But of course," said Benita. "Why you theenk I come here—just to see you, *Señor Ricardo* Caballero?"

Knight looked around in the gloom of the cabin, and thought that she was laughing. He shook his head.

"Whatever you take for your nerves, I'd like to have some. Here we are, alive by a thousand-to-one shot, and you laugh—"

"No, I do not laugh," said Benita. "Maybe I not laugh ever again, until I forget all the horrible things I see. Spain—I have always think of it as so beautiful, with people singing and playing in the sun, and everybody happy—"

"I know," Knight said gravely. "But we cannot help them now, *querida*, and all we can do is carry out the orders to keep the United States neutral."

"Listen, you two," said Doyle, "maybe it's not important, but we're going in circles, and using a lot of gas. Just where is this place we're going to put down?"

"I tell you everything," said Benita. "It is a beach at a little bay below the mountains of the Sierra Nevada—"

"Huh?" said Doyle. "That's back in the States!"

"No," cut in Knight, "there's a Sierra Nevada range southeast of Granada."

"That is eet," assented Benita. "And the submarine, she comes in every night to wait for the signal."

"The submarine!" said Knight and Doyle in one breath.

"The one I land from," Benita said calmly.

"General Brett sent you over here in a submarine?" Knight said, amazed.

"No, I come in what they call the destroyers, and change to the submarine nearby the Strait of Gibraltar. The submarine men, they are very nice and they land me at night with Navy agent, who help me to Granada and then part way to Madrid. And he say you are to fly exactly south from Madrid to the beach, and then along east for twenty-seven miles. There you signal your Navy number with the motor. Then they put a light on the ground for you."

Knight made a quick estimate, changed his course to intersect Granada, which was almost due south of Madrid.

"Now," he said. "Just why did Brett send you instead of an Army agent? And why the submarine?"

"He send me because they hear a great war about to start in a few days. Some important person is to be keeled, and soon all of Europe will be fighting."

"An assassination!" exclaimed Knight. "That's all it would take to set off another World War—if they picked the right person. But what has that to do with us?"

"Very much. The general—Uncle John, I mean—do not know who is to be keeled. But you are to be blamed as the one who does it!"

KNIGHT stared around at her. "Me? They're going to frame me as the assassin?"

"That is et. And Uncle John send me to have you hurry away. And the reason he has me is that you would not believe somebody else."

"Holy smoke!" said Doyle. "Now that 'Four Faces' business begins to clear up."

"The Four Face?" Benita cried in alarm. "Do not say those horrible men have come after us again?"

"They're up to something, all right," growled Doyle. And with Knight adding a word now and then, he told her the details.

"But I do not see," she said when he concluded. "Why do they want a skull in a red box? And who are these men who wear the hood?"

"That's what we'd like to know," Knight said. "There's a lot more to it than an assassination. Brett may have been given a false tip, or the rumor may have been garbled. Did he tell you anything else?"

"Only for you to get Doyle, too, and if you can to bring the *Señor* Colonel Morton, even if it is with the force. But if you cannot do it at once, then to leave him and fly to the submarine. And then we go home."

"Just like that," snickered Doyle. "Well, I never hoped to see the day when they'd send the U.S. Navy to bring me home."

"I don't like it," Knight said.

"Neither do I. It'll be hotter in that boat than the hinges of Hades, and I'll probably get seasick."

"I'm not fooling," Knight insisted. "I've got a hunch this is a lot bigger than Brett knows. What he heard may have been only one small part. I can see the implications, if they could prove that a secret agent of the United States killed some ruler or dictator, but that doesn't explain the other things."

"Well, in a little while we won't have to worry about 'em," said Doyle, practically. "Unless this bus lets us down before we get to the coast."

But the Junkers droned on smoothly through the

two hundred and forty miles to the Mediterranean. Knight climbed to a chilly height and passed well west of Granada, then started down over the last mountains which fringed the shore. As they neared the sea, the lights of several vessels could be seen, strung out in both directions and not far from the coast.

Benita, shivering in her white nurse's garb, gazed down at the lights.

"Look, so many ships!"

"The international blockade," said Knight. "Those must be the German battleships. The Italian vessels are strung along the east coast, down to Alicante, and the Germans pick up there and patrol as far as Malaga, where the British connect and go on through Gibraltar to Portugal."

"The submarine captain—he was so careful," said Benita. "I heard him say it was that the Germans must not see the boat. And that is why he say for you to land at the bay—it curves, the beach, so no one outside can see in."

"A swell place to land," complained Doyle. "We'll probably smack headfirst into a cliff."

Knight had Benita repeat her directions, as he made a power-glide to the east. He had found a map of Spain in the cabin, and had located the bay. It was well chosen, in the barren stretch between Cape Sacratif and Albunol, with a mountain range concealing the view from the little town.

He located Albunol by a few lights, and spiraled down toward the bay, using his motor to signal as he had called Doyle earlier in the night. It was all of eight minutes before his Navy "Q" number brought an answer from below. It was a brief flash, followed by another on shore, and then a faintly lighted area became visible. As he glided closer, he saw that the light came from a point just offshore, either from a shielded spotlight on the submarine, or from a light in a small boat.

With a last blip of the motor, he banked into the wind and then turned off the switch, so there would be no fire in event of a crack-up landing. The Junkers plumped solidly on the hard sand, veered toward the water, straightened under hard rudder, and stopped.

The spotlight lessened in brilliance, and in a few seconds he was able to see the dark snout of a huge submarine about three hundred feet offshore. A small boat was putting away from it, the spotlight having been transferred from the larger craft. Doyle helped Benita from the Junkers and Knight followed. The boat grated on the sand, and its motor was immediately cut off.

Knight noticed that it was larger than any boat which could have been carried on a submarine, but the light prevented his seeing more. He stepped to one side, aware of an odd silence, and was startled to find the muzzle of a machine-gun poked over the gunwhale.

"Welcome, Mr. Knight," said a strangely familiar voice. "You have saved us a great deal of trouble."

Knight shot a look at Benita. She was gazing in bewilderment at the gun.

"Ricardo!" she moaned. "Some one—this is not the boat—"

Doyle reached for the pistol he had seized at Arganda. The suave voice back of the light changed to a sharp, brittle note.

"Stand still, Doyle! Another move like that and we'll fire."

Then Knight knew that voice. It was the pilot of the Fiat which had landed at the Insurgent's decoy field. He took a step nearer, placing himself to shield Benita. The man behind the light laughed softly, and Knight stiffened with a new astonishment.

"Morton!" he cried. "You damned traitor!"

THE other man spoke an order, and five or six men jumped from the boat. He followed them as they surrounded Knight and the others.

"Yes, my astute Mr. Q," he said with a calculated sneer. "Your hooded menace proves to be an old friend."

Knight held himself back with an effort, while he grimly appraised the other man. Morton still wore his American uniform, but a priest's robe billowed around it in the breeze, secured at the middle by a black cord. The cowl, which he had closed with a snap-fastener in front, now hung back from his helmeted head. His goggles, pushed up on his forehead, were smeared with oil, and his face was also spotted.

"Yes, you've led me quite a chase," Morton said sarcastically. "But after your heroic rescue of the young lady, I knew she would give you the message and you'd fly here. So I decided to come ahead of you and have you properly welcomed."

Then Knight saw, for the first time, wheel-tracks on the sand. Morton had simply outdistanced them with a faster ship. He eyed the sneering colonel for a second.

The boat was only two yards away, and Morton's men seemed to have accepted non-resistance as the only course left to the captives. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, you have the drop on us. Just what—"

With a pantherish leap, he knocked Morton backward and sprang for the machine-gun.

"Stop him!" shouted the prostrate colonel. "Get him, you idiots!"

Knight's hands were on the muzzle of the gun. He yanked it over the gunwhale, whirled frantically. His finger was almost on the trigger when a blackjack swished down from one side, and the night seemed to burst into a million stars. He heard Benita's anguished cry as he tumbled into blackness.

CHAPTER VI SHADOWS OF THE SHAFTS

WHEN he recovered his senses, he found himself lying on an iron cot in a small, dimly lighted room, with Benita and Doyle anxiously bending over him.

"*Gracias a Dios!*" Benita cried thankfully as he opened his eyes. "Deek, you mus' not move—you have been very much hurt!"

Knight slowly turned his head, felt a throb of pain go through it.

"The blackjack," he mumbled.

"Yeh, th' lousy rat!" grated Doyle. "I tried to sock him, but they got me first."

Knight smiled with an effort, looked around at the dungeon-like chamber. It was lit by two candles which stood on a table. A solid door, studded with bolt heads, seemed to be the only entrance until he turned his eyes in the other direction and saw a door of iron bars, which separated them from a shadowy hall.

"Where are we?" he asked Doyle in a thick voice.

"Down in the cellar of an old monastery," Doyle replied glumly. "As near as I can figure, it's on a small plateau, in the mountains somewhere southwest of Granada."

"Loyalist territory?" Knight said dully.

"No—must be across the lines. I don't know where—and neither do the others."

"Others?" Knight said, puzzled.

"About thirty of 'em," replied Doyle, "not counting the old monks they've got locked up in some other place. Most of 'em are the pilots you sent home from Arganda, and several we thought the hooded outfit had shot down on our side."

Knight raised himself up on the cot, despite Benita's objections.

"I don't get it," he said dazedly. "Tell me everything that happened."

"It's plenty," Doyle grunted. "In the first place, the sub was captured by a trick—I don't know just how. A bunch of 'Four Face' agents have got the officers and the crew tied up in a cave about two miles from that bay. The sub is manned by a crowd of foreigners—riffraff from half a dozen navies, if my guess is right. And I heard Morton tell one of 'em to be ready for tonight."

"What for?" said Knight, then a stunned expression came into his eyes. "Good Lord! An American sub—torpedoing one of those German battleships!"

"You've probably come near it," Doyle said, "but that's not half of it. I learned the rest when we got here. Morton flew us back in the small Junkers—tied so we couldn't start anything. We landed just before dawn, and I couldn't figure where the place was. It's pretty well isolated, and Morton's men wear those monks' robes, so if anybody happened around it would look okay. And I figure they wear 'em in the air so they'll know each other and not bump off one of their own gang."

As Doyle paused, the mournful tolling of a bell came, muffled, from somewhere above. Knight looked around the room.

"That is the bell in the tower," Benita explained. "It has ring like that ever' once in a while—she must be the wind."

Knight nodded his aching head, and Doyle went on.

"Wherever this place is, it's a regular arsenal. And they've got about twelve bombers under camouflage tarpaulins, besides those Fiats and Heinkels we saw. They're the Insurgent bombers we thought were shot down—five big Junkers and seven Italian Savoias. What's more, they've painted off the Insurgent insignia and have put back the German swastika and the Italian crown and colors. Pete O'Connor told me how they grabbed the ships."

"Pete O'Connor?" said Knight. "The California chap who was in Morton's squadron?"

"That's the bird. The night we thought he was shot down somewhere, he'd been transferred temporarily by Morton to the Savoia outfit, because he used to fly transports. Half-way to Madrid, the observer pulled a gun on him and made him fly here. Changed course a couple of times to mix Pete up, in case he happened

to get away later. Most of the others were grabbed the same way—ships and pilots both. Except the bunch from Arganda—the ones you sent back. A crowd of 'Four Face' agents kidnaped them somewhere between Arganda and Valencia, and brought them to a place where they could get through the lines."

"Did Pete tell you what the 'Four Faces' intend to do?"

"As much as he knows—and you can guess the rest," Doyle said savagely. "Morton is the head mogul here—but he gets orders somehow from the Four Faces. The pilots and the guards they've got here—the ones that took the place over from the monks—are members of the Four Faces either because they're scared for their skins, or because they've been paid for the job. Maybe both. Anyway, they're going to take those Italian and German ships and bomb Gibraltar!"

Knight stiffened.

"And that's not all," said Doyle. "They're going to drop some eggs on British battleships close by—and some of 'em are going to be gas-bombs, like the stuff at Arganda, likely. But what I can't dope out, is the reason the Four Faces want to start a war."

"Munitions," Knight said grimly. "They're evidently owners of a lot of munitions and war-product factories. I should have suspected it before. They'll start a world war, play both sides against each other with every dirty trick in the bag."

Doyle's homely face sobered, and Benita's dark eyes filled with horror.

"Four men—to put the world to war! And blame it on America—that is most terrible of all!"

DOYLE nodded gloomily. "Pete O'Connor told us," he said. "He and the others are locked in some rooms across from that hall. They've got a barred door, too, and you can talk to them through the hall if you whisper so the guards outside don't hear you."

"What did he tell you?" Knight asked.

"The Four Faces aren't taking any chance of this being traced to them. I can see the reason now. Even if a war got started, people would likely quit if they found a munitions ring was back of it and had started it by a trick. They'd be liable to wreck some factories and maybe wring a few necks, in some of these hot-headed countries."

"You're right," said Knight. "A man may give his life for patriotism—but not willingly to make some other man rich."

"Well, they're set to hang it on the United States.

Pete says they think they'll get away with it without any proof by the powers. The war will start with a bang and England won't believe Germany or Italy if they deny they attacked her. England will probably blow off the lid and start fighting back in the Mediterranean, and that'll be that. But they're going to keep us here just in case—and they've taken your White House paper and our War and Navy Department orders that we used on those other reserve officers."

Knight stared at the flickering candle nearest him, his aching head forgotten.

"On the face of it, they couldn't convince anyone that the United States was in on it. We've tried too hard to be neutral. But once the war starts—with mob hysteria running wild—people will believe anything. Half of Europe thinks we're a world 'Shylock' and that we'd break our pledges and sell to both sides, to bring back our post-war prosperity. And they'd probably call it a trick to get Japan involved and weakened, so she couldn't trouble us in the East for a long time. She's bound to go in with Germany, by secret treaty. That'll put her into a war with Russia. And even if she wins, Japan will be in no shape for a Pacific war for years. The Four Faces could trump up other reasons that would sound logical to Europeans after the war is begun."

Doyle wagged his head sourly.

"Those devils could cook up anything. And with that White House letter it'll be pretty bad. You could take that as an order for all Navy, Marine Corps and Army reserve pilots in Spain to follow your orders in some scheme like this."

Knight stood up, sat down again, suddenly dizzy.

"And to think I had the truth right in my hands," he muttered. "I can see the answer to that skull riddle now. This monastery must be several hundred years old, and I remember now—a little too late—something about monks preserving the bones of saints. That must have been the skull of an important saint here in Spain, and his name and that of the monastery were probably inscribed, on the silver plate. Bailey obviously tricked Morton's guards and got away. He didn't know where the monastery was, but he realized the inscription on the box would identify the place. He must've intended to land at Arganda, where he'd be known, and spread the warning. The Loyalists don't want any world war—it would send Germans and Italians pouring into Spain and the Insurgents might end up winners before Russia and the others could fend it off. Madrid would have broadcast the

scheme to the world, and the Four Faces would have to run for cover."

"You've doped it, all right," said Doyle. "Pete told me that Red Bailey saw the box when he was brought in, and had it all figured out. But this mob was after him ten seconds after he got away—and you know what happened."

"Yes," agreed Knight, "but if he escaped, then there's a good chance for us to make the break, too."

"Uh-uh," said Doyle. "Pete spiked that idea. He and Red had figured they'd pretend to 'sell out' and go in with the rest of the riffraff, and Morton listened to them because he was short of big-ship pilots. When Red got away with the skull, Morton said nix on anybody else bein' let out of this hoosegow."

"We've got to get out!" Knight said harshly. "If we don't, there'll be a war that'll make the last World War look like a picnic. How long have we been here?"

"Must be around noon. It was just before dawn when we hit the place. You had a hard knock, fella."

"I can tell that," Knight said ruefully, feeling his head. He glanced toward the table, which was bare save for the two lighted candles, and several others lying flat. "Unless they intend to starve us, maybe we'll have a chance when they bring us some food."

"No, *Ricardo*," said Benita. "There is no opportunity for that. They bring' the food into the hall and leave it on a table there. Then they turn on a bright light and bring a machine-gun to the hall-door before unlocking these barred doors to the rooms."

"She's right, Dick," said Doyle. "They set up one of those new 50-caliber trench Brownings on a tripod—and you eat with that baby staring you right in the eye. And two ugly-looking bruisers with gats stand back of the gunner. Helps your digestion."

"Has Morton said anything to you?" Knight asked.

"Not since you socked him back at the submarine," grinned Doyle. "Boy, that was a lollapalooza! He's got a shiner as big as a doorknob."

Then his grin abruptly vanished. "Here I was, right on the spot at Avila, and I never got wise to that double-crossing rat! But he had quarters away from the field, and whenever he was gone I thought he was at headquarters or off drinking *vino* with some *señorita*."

"I should have suspected him last night," Knight said bitterly. "If our 'hooded pilot' had wanted to escape, he could have started his engine and been away before we could stop him. The answer is that he'd been keeping that special ship hidden at the decoy field—

and that mechanic was helping him, giving him signals when it was safe to land and keeping the ship in condition. It may have been coincidence that we hit that field at the same time, or he may have guessed that I'd go there to meet you."

"Anyway, he pulled a fast one," admitted Doyle. "That black robe was what kept me from seeing him in the dark, and he must've had his car hidden near there. So all he had to do was jerk off the robe and drive up after he'd let some of the others get there first."

THE bell on the roof tolled again, three or four mournful notes, and the last reverberation slowly died away. Knight looked around the room, stood up and made his way to the barred door. The hall was half in gloom, but candlelight shone from the dungeon on the other side. An unkempt figure with a two-weeks' growth of beard jumped up from a cot as Knight called through the Intervening space. He had to look twice before he recognized Pete O'Connor.

"Can you hear that bell on your side?" he said in an undertone.

"Sure," O'Connor whispered back. "What of it?"

"Nothing, I guess," muttered Knight. "It must come down through here."

He gazed up toward the dark ceiling of the improvised mess-room. Several of the American prisoners crowded around O'Connor, staring across at Benita as she and Doyle joined Knight at the door. Knight was starting to ask O'Connor the layout of the old building when a rasping sound announced the unbarring of the hall doors.

Precisely as Benita and Doyle had described, three or four surly men brought in the noon-day ration—black bread, some greasy soup, and water. The heavy machine-gun was set up, the dungeon door's unlocked, and the captives ate their scanty repast under the glowering eyes of the "Four Faces" guards.

There was no conversation, and in that atmosphere of despair and ill-repressed hatreds Knight had little appetite. He was glad when it was over, and they were again locked in their room. His head was filled with a dull pain, and after a while a stupor sent him back to his cot.

"When he awoke, the throbbing pain had almost gone, and he felt stronger. Half an hour later, when the niggardly evening meal was brought, he watched with a veiled intentness for the slightest slip by their guards, but the scowling Greek renegade who sat behind the gun never once took his finger from the trigger.

The old bell tolled several times while they were eating, and Knight listened carefully each time, though the guards paid no attention to the sound. When he had again been locked into the small room, with Benita and Doyle, he waited until the hall door was closed before he spoke.

"Did you notice how the bell sounded out there?" he whispered. "It was fainter. The sound doesn't come down through there, after all."

"What are you getting at?" demanded Doyle.

"This! There must be an air shaft leading into this room, and I'll bet it's connected with an opening in the bell tower."

Knight took one of the unused candles, lighted it, and climbed onto the table. Holding the candle at arms-length, he surveyed the high walls. After a few moments, he made out a rectangular opening in one wall, almost up to the ceiling. It was about two feet wide by slightly less than a foot high. An iron grating had formerly barred the hole, but the centuries had rusted away all but a few spidery wires. They were sagging and ready to fall.

Knight jumped down, his eyes agleam with a new hope.

"Help me move the table," he said to Doyle.

"You're crazy," Doyle protested. "Even if you could get up there, there's apt to be another grating in the shaft. You don't know where it leads. And you're too weak to go climbing through there. If anybody goes, I'll do it."

Knight looked at Doyle's thick-set figure and chuckled.

"You'll have to reduce that tummy, my boy, before you can play Santa Claus. Come on, give me a hand."

"Deek!" moaned Benita. "It may go to some awful place. Please do not take the chance."

MOURNFUL but clear, the sound of the old bell came down through the air shaft. "Hear it!" Knight said quickly. "*Querida*, it's our only way out. Where there's a bell-tower, there's a rope. If I can get that far, I can slide down the rope to the floor, or climb up to the roof. Doyle, after I get up into the shaft, go tell Pete to spread the word—quietly. I'm going to see if I can lay hands on a gun and get down into the outer hall. One of those guards has the keys to all three doors."

He cut short their objections and placed a chair on the table, resting the back of it against the wall. At his direction, Doyle climbed on the chair, cupped his hands. Twice Knight tried to swing up onto Doyle's

thick shoulders, and failed. The third time he made it, and his clawing fingers gripped the bottom edge of the rectangular hole. Standing on Doyle's shoulders, he raked off the few remaining bits of rusty iron, except for a stubborn one at the corner. Inside the opening, it was dark, but he could feel where the shaft led straight ahead for at least three feet.

Benita, at his request, handed Doyle a lighted candle, and Doyle reached it on up. Knight set it carefully inside the shaft, looked back into the room.

"All right, old man," he said to Doyle. "One last boost."

"*Mañana, Ricardo*," the girl said, with a catch in her voice.

"Keep your fingers crossed," he replied.

"Here goes—you old pirate," Doyle said with a crooked grin. He caught Knight's feet with his hands, shoved straight up.

Knight landed inside the shaft, almost knocking over the candle. He edged it ahead, crawled on until he came to a turn, six feet from the wall. He moved the candle again, and wormed around the turn, holding his breath once when he thought he was stuck. A draft made the candle sputter. After that, he moved it a few inches at a time, shielding it with his hand. The shaft was now slightly inclined upward, and after what seemed an interminable period he came to a wider space. Here another shaft connected, and he guessed that this was the one to the other dungeon. He crawled ahead for about eight feet, and almost shoved the candle into a dark emptiness which suddenly appeared.

At the same time, a deep, echoing note from the bell up in the tower came down through the blackness. The sound swelled, reverberated for an instant with a deafening volume, then slowly faded away. The vibrations of the sound waves set the candle-flame to flickering wildly.

He inched out to the edge of the shaft, lifted the candle. Then he saw that the edge was rounded like the lip of a horn, projecting out and upward from the circular wall of the tower. A few feet away, another horn-shaped projection was discernible, and slightly higher than his level was a third.

WITH dismay, he realized that there was no bell-rope in sight. Holding the candle sidewise, he looked downward. The rounded surface of the masonry curved in abruptly about twenty feet below, then the walls were straight for the remaining distance. He saw

no break in the walls from his level downward, but above him were three more of the rounded ends of the shafts, and about seven feet higher than the last opening he spied the frame of a small platform, or balcony. It was there, he decided, that the bell-rope ended.

It was more like a tiny altar than a balcony, for there was a slanting rest built as though to support a Bible. Knight gazed up at it blankly, then as the bell sent another deep note crashing upon his ear-drums, he guessed the answer.

The narrow passage he had just traversed was not an air-shaft, at least not primarily built as such. He had wondered; for in many ancient dungeons there was no ventilation at all, and unfortunate prisoners had lived in the foulest of atmosphere. But the purpose of the shafts, he could now see, was to carry the fervid exhortations of a priest or monk to the rooms thus connected with the bell tower. There was no way to tell why this had been desired—it perhaps had been intended to carry to the ears of religious prisoners in chains below; or to novitiates in those gloomy chambers at some time when they were not used as dungeons. It might have been planned to create some startling effect on superstitious Spaniards in centuries past.

Whatever the reason, the tower had been constructed with acoustic qualities and it was this which had caused the tolling of the bell to be carried deep down into the basements.

Knight's first dismay grew less as he saw that it was possible to climb from the lip of one projection to another. It was a difficult task, and if he slipped he would go plunging to the stones some fifty feet below. He set the candle firmly at one side, then wormed his way by it, twisting sidewise until he could touch the projection on his right. Gripping the inner edge tightly, he swung loose, dangled for a moment. When he pulled himself up, panting hard, he was able to reach the next "lip."

He waited five minutes until his strength came back, then stood up and reached for the first of the three projections above. He was astride the middle one, and was about to go on up to one which would permit him to reach the balcony, when to his consternation a voice spoke almost in his ear.

"*This is X. I am ready with the final report.*"

Knight froze. It was Colonel Morton's voice!

The words seemed spoken hardly a yard behind him. He turned as swiftly as he dared, on that narrow

ledge, then with vast relief, he realized that the sound had come through the up-tilted shaft on the edge of which he stood. He squatted down, listening tensely. There was a faint humming, like that from a radio tuned to a station which is on the air but is not yet broadcasting. Then a slow, toneless voice spoke.

"Before your detailed report, what of the man called 'Q' and his two companions?"

"They are here—as ordered," came Morton's hasty answer.

Two words, on a sharply indrawn breath, came up to Knight's ears.

"At last!"

Two words, almost devoid of emotion, but something like an icy hand seemed to touch Knight's scalp. For that slow, deadly tone was the voice of the "First Face," the unknown spokesman of that vast power-mad empire. And he knew that in the next moment, instant death might be ordered.

CHAPTER VII THE VULTURES STRIKE!

CLINGING to the rounded edge of the "lip," Knight waited for the words that might seal their fate. The toneless voice spoke.

"The Four Faces hold you responsible in the custody of the prisoners. An error would be most unfortunate!"

"There's no change for them to get out," came Morton's quick answer. *"They are in the dungeons, with a triple guard at the door."*

"Proceed with the report," ordered the First Face.

"Everything is ready," Morton's somewhat strained answer sounded through the tilted shaft. *"The bombers have been loaded. Pilot Seventeen brought the British plane last night, and I'll fly it myself, to drop the gas-bombs on Gibraltar. The submarine is within ten miles of the British aircraft carrier, and will fire her torpedo at precisely the instant I dive at Gibraltar. The bombers have their targets assigned."*

"One moment," interrupted the sinister voice of the spokesman. *"You are certain that the pilots will not fail at the last second?"*

"No chance of that," Morton replied with a sudden grimness. *"I have ordered certain of the Breda pilots to open fire on any bomber trying to leave before unloading on its target."*

"Very good," the First Face said tonelessly. *"And remind them it would be unwise to talk of this later. If the truth were to be known, the agents of six nations would be tracking them down—not to mention our own emissaries. This applies, Number X, to you also. Do not forget it."*

"I won't," Knight heard Morton mumble. *"But the prisoners—are the plans the same for them?"*

"Yes, but there has been an addition. When the submarine has finished action, it will return to the bay and be sunk in one hundred feet of water. The American crew will be placed on board before it is sunk—except for three officers and two enlisted men. These five, along with the submarine's log, will be transported in one of your planes to the present base, and the men will be incarcerated with the others. If it becomes necessary, later, to provide a culprit nation for tonight's work, we shall arrange that the Americans will be found, hiding there, apparently because the submarine in which they intended to flee to their country was damaged during the battle. They'll find the sub—"

"But I thought—" broke in Morton.

"Don't interrupt. This is only an emergency step. If all goes as planned, there will be no time for any careful investigation by the various nations. And later, when we need resources from the United States, and perhaps cannon-fodder to help one side or the other, their government will find it dangerously hard to refuse it—when they see the evidence pointing to them, and learn of the trap we can spring."

"Then we're to stay here, after the attack, until further orders?" Morton asked nervously.

"Correct. Four pilots will later be sent to remote points, where we shall have them watched. You will remain in charge of a skeleton force, until relieved, detain all the papers there—and do not take them on tonight's flight. And finally—have you made arrangements to destroy any one who might be shot down but not killed?"

"The three Breda pilots have their orders on that," Morton replied in a lowered tone.

"Be sure no living person is left behind," ordered the First Face.

There was a brief pause, and Knight kept motionless on the edge of the shaft, though his limbs were cramped. Then, as though there had been a short conference at the unknown headquarters of the Four Faces, the voice of the spokesman came with a sudden new note of tension.

"You have your orders. Take off at once!"

COMMAND to war! Knight could almost hear, in that fateful instant, the tread of marching millions, the crashing rumble of guns, the screams of the dying, as Europe plunged into another inferno.

He stood up carefully, caught the edge of the last shaft-lip, pulled himself up. As he gained that precarious perch, he faintly heard Morton's voice from the opening below. He was evidently giving orders to his men, for almost at once an engine sputtered outside, and by the time Knight grasped at the balcony-altar a dozen aircraft engines were thundering.

But when he was almost over the tiny rail, he slipped and had to grab wildly at the bell-rope. The bell gave forth a furious note which ended in a metallic clank as the clapper fell and remained against it. Knight tensed, but the roar of the engines seemed to have held the attention of Morton and his men, for no alarm followed.

Knight found that a small door opened onto the balcony, and this led to a narrow, spiral stairway. He went down quickly, until a square patch of light showed in the darkness beneath. Flattened against the curving wall, he crept closer.

"Have the Hawker started," Morton's voice said sharply from inside the room. "I'll be there in a minute."

Some one growled an answer, and Knight heard a door close. He cautiously looked around the edge of the window. The room was Morton's office. A radio set, with a receiver built for the ultra high-frequency band, stood on an old desk, back of which hung a map of Spain and the Mediterranean. On the map were marked the positions of all the international patrol vessels, an attack plan, and the posts of the neutral observers on French and Portuguese borders. Courses were laid out from a spot in the mountains about eighty miles northeast of Gibraltar, and Knight then knew that this was the location of the secret squadron.

Morton was placing a packet of documents in a niche in the wall. He replaced a smooth-fitting stone, and dropped an old tapestry over that part of the wall. Then, buckling on a Mannlicher pistol, he turned to a peg where a black robe hung, with gloves, helmet and goggles.

Knight ducked under the window, ran down the steps toward Morton's office door, secure in knowing that the roar of engines drowned his approach. There was no one in the short corridor. He opened the door a fraction of an inch, and waited. The traitorous

colonel was donning the robe and helmet. As he reached up to adjust his cowl-hood, Knight plunged into the room. Before Morton could fling his hand to the Mannlicher, Knight snatched it from the holster.

"Take off that robe and your coat!" Knight said grimly.

Ashen-white, his dark eyes blazing with fury, Morton obeyed.

"Now get that packet from the wall!" Knight ordered. "Move!"

With a snarled oath, Morton turned and lifted the tapestry. Knight stepped back well out of the other man's reach, hurriedly took off his Loyalist uniform coat and put on the olive-drab one Morton had worn. Slipping into the black robe, he put on the goggles and drew the cowl over his head. As Morton turned with the leather packet, some one hammered at the door opposite to the one through which Knight had entered.

"What is it?" Knight rasped.

"Your ship's about ready, and the bombers are taking off," came the gruff response.

Morton opened his mouth for a shout, but Knight thrust the Mannlicher into his ribs.

"Tell him to have the rest wait till you get there!"

MORTON ground his teeth in rage, but repeated the order, and the man outside indicated his departure with a surly affirmative.

"You'll never get away with it, Knight!" Morton said in a furious whisper.

"If I don't, there'll be a dead Reserve Colonel around here," Knight said curtly. "Get into that Loyalist coat."

Fuming, Morton put on the uniform blouse, though it failed to meet over his middle.

"Now tear down that map," rapped Knight. "Fold it up, hand it here, and head for the door."

"What are you going to do with those?" Morton snarled, as Knight put the packet and the folded map into a bellows-pocket.

"You wouldn't like it, so I'd better not tell you," said Knight. He prodded the raging colonel to the opposite door, had him unlock it. "We're going down to the dungeon floor. Which way are the stairs?"

"That hall to the left," muttered the other man.

"You're lying," said Knight. He drove Morton along the right-hand hall, saw steps descending away from the front of the building. As they neared the dungeon level, he halted his captive for a second while he drew the hood closer about his face.

"When we get to the bottom, turn around and walk backward," he said in an undertone, so they won't see your face. "The first attempt to tip off the guards, I'll put a bullet between your eyes."

It was about thirty-five feet from the bottom step to the door of the dungeon mess-hall. The three guards had heard them coming, and they stared as he marched Morton backward toward them.

"Unfasten the door," he flung at the man with the keys. "I've another prisoner for you."

The man sprang to the bars, slid them back. The Greek gunner swiveled the Browning around, but Knight stopped him impatiently.

"Your pistols are enough. We'll put him with those three."

Morton's face was dripping, his color a sick yellow in the glow of the acetylene lamp which lit the hall. He kept his eyes riveted on the Mannlicher.

"Hurry up!" Knight said savagely, to the turnkey, raising his voice so that it would carry to the prisoners.

The man jerked open the door, and a sudden draft blew the cowl back from Knight's face, revealing his dark hair instead of the premature silver of Morton's.

"A trick!" howled the man beside the Greek. He clawed at his gun. Knight fired past Morton's shoulder, and the guard slumped to the floor. Morton, half-blinded by the flash, staggered back against the wall, and the Greek hurled himself down at the Browning. His finger was an inch from the trigger when the Mannlicher blazed again. A black hole appeared in the man's forehead, and he tumbled from the gun-saddle.

The turnkey had whirled in the doorway. Dropping his keys, he started to reach for his pistol. But as Knight's smoking gun whipped toward him he frantically raised his hands.

"Don't kill me! In Heaven's name, don't shoot!"

Knight plucked the man's gun from his belt.

"Open those other doors!" he commanded.

There was a rush of feet at his left. He spun around, but the acetylene lamp crashed to the floor before he could fire, and Morton fled madly along the darkened hall. Knight pumped two shots after him, sprang in after the turnkey. The man had opened the cell in which Doyle and Benita were locked, was now cringing back before the yells of the imprisoned pilots.

Doyle, charging out, seized the keys and hastily unlocked the other dungeon, and Knight shoved the terrified guard into the first room, bringing Benita out into the hall. Pete O'Connor and the half-bearded prisoners were swarming from their cells.

"You know the quickest way out!"

Knight said swiftly to O'Connor. "Go ahead—take this gun!"

He handed O'Connor a pistol, and two of the pilots scooped up the other automatics. Two more seized the Browning and dashed after the Californian as he ran down the dark passage.

"There's another stairway at this end!" O'Connor shouted, as Knight and the others followed. "And if we can get to their arsenal—"

He sprinted up the gloomy stairs, the men with the Browning close behind. Knight caught Doyle's arm, shoved the packet of papers and the map into his hand.

"Take these—they prove the whole set-up! Stay clear, with Benita—and grab a ship at your first chance."

"What're you up to?" demanded Doyle.

"Never mind! Take Benita—make for Portugal and show these papers to the neutral observers!"

"Deek!" Benita cried after him, as he raced up the stairs. "Wait—I weel not do this—"

HER frantic protest was lost in a sudden clamor from above. Knight gained the top of the stairs in time to see a dozen armed pilots plunge down a broad hallway toward the fugitives. Flame spurted from their pistols and two of the escaping prisoners went down. Then a deafening roar split the air, and a smashing torrent from the 50-caliber Browning struck into the charging men. In a flash, the hall was a charnel-house with a dozen corpses and writhing figures stretched upon the floor.

As the spouting gun went silent, a yell of terror rose from the entrance.

"They've got a machine-gun! They've wiped out Luigo's men!"

O'Connor's men swept in hot pursuit as the remaining Four-Face pilots fled toward their Fiats and Heinkels. Knight reached the entrance as a huge Piaggio bomber took off, following the Junkers and Savoias. Evidently the bombing pilots had not known of the prisoners' escape.

Rows of flares lit the area beyond the camouflage tarpaulins, and he saw a Hawker Hind with British insignia idling about a hundred feet from the small Junkers in which they had flown from Arganda. Four 100-pound bombs were in its racks. Morton was running toward the British two-seater, another man at his elbow.

Knight caught up with O'Connor, just as the men with the heavy Browning opened up on the fleeing pilots.

"Bombers heading for Gibraltar—got to stop them!" he panted. "Tell the others—take those Fiats and Heinkels—"

"I get it!" O'Connor shouted back.

Knight raced on toward the Hawker. A Heinkel gunner threw a smoking burst after him, and bullets kicked up dirt at his feet. He dived back of a fuel drum, dropped the gunner with a hasty shot as the first tracers bounced off the metal barrel. The pilot of the Heinkel hurled his ship down the flare-lit runway, cutting off a taxiing Fiat. Knight jumped up, dashed to the Hawker. Morton was on the wing, about to spring into the front cockpit. As he saw Knight's lifted gun he leaped to the ground and darted behind a Fiat. The second man frenziedly clutched the Fairey-type Lewis mounted on the hump. As the Lewis whirled around at him, Knight hurled his last shot at the gunner.

For a heart-pounding second, he thought he had missed. Flame spurted from the snout of the Lewis, but the deadly yellowish streaks went over his head, and the gun abruptly ceased to fire. A limp body hung over the side of the cockpit, and as Knight reached the ship he saw that the man had triggered the gun with his last dying movement.

Above the crash and rattle of guns behind him, he heard a voice bawling his name. He spun about as Doyle ran up, breathless.

"I told you—" he began fiercely.

"Pete's taking care of her—going to use the small Junkers!" Doyle broke in. "He's got the papers and the map. I'm going with you!"

There was no time to argue. Knight pulled the dead man from the ship, and clambered into the pilot's seat while Doyle sprang into the rear. The Kestrel-V engine blasted an eager roar as he opened the throttle, and the Hawker thundered down the narrow plateau. A Fiat scorched past on the left, zoomed up wildly, and he saw Morton bent over the controls, then the Italian fighter was swallowed up in the gloom above the flare-lighted ground.

Knight banked swiftly, plunged for the darkness. He climbed to a thousand feet, then sent the Hawker roaring straight toward Gibraltar. It was eighty miles at the most—and the bombers had several minutes' start.

A map was clipped at the right of the instrument board, showing Gibraltar and the surrounding area. The barracks at Windmill Hill, and several points from

Breakneck Stairs to Rockgun were marked as targets. Just inside the New Mole, the outline of a vessel was indicated and five others outside. One outlined in red he knew must be the British carrier. And somewhere within ten miles of that ship lurked an American submarine with loaded torpedo tubes!

He climbed, with the wide open Kestrel bellowing. The Hind, designed to fly at 200 with a full load at 14,000 feet, drilled up with the air-speed hand quivering on 220. A tiny electric bulb flickered on the instrument board; Doyle had switched on the cockpit interphone.

"What's the dope?" Doyle howled. "We can't stop those bombers by ourselves!"

"Going to drop a flare—spot them for the rest!" Knight flung back. "See if you can get Gibraltar by radio!"

"No luck—only a receiving set in here."

"Look for an Aldis signal lamp! We may need it!"

THE altimeter showed eight thousand feet when Knight shoved the stick forward. The attack plan had showed the bombers were to fly at seven thousand, so that their insignia would be sure to be recognized. The British, not expecting attack, would hardly have time to man their defense guns before the bombers struck and fled.

Below and slightly ahead, lights showed a village, and to the East of it other lights showed a passing steamer. Knight hurriedly inspected the map, looked at the clock. This must be Estapona, only twenty miles from Gibraltar Rock! And there in the distance was the glow of the Rock itself. Between Estapona and Gibraltar, the bombers would be cruising waiting for Morton's signal as he dived at the Rock. He stared into the night, watching intently, and after a minute he saw a vague winged armada pass through the glow from Gibraltar. The bombers were beneath the Hawker at this very instant!

"Pull one flare when I zoom!" he shouted into the interphone. Then he hauled back on the stick.

The two-seater shot upward five or six hundred feet, and the blue-white brilliance of the flare shone out underneath. Knight looked quickly over the side. The bombers were spread out over two miles of sky, with the huge Piaggio in the lead. Above and to the rear were three Breda fighters and a Heinkel with swastika markings.

Swarming in from the northeast came the first group of Americans, in their Fiats and Heinkels. A lone

Fiat was diving madly across the path of the bombers, and Knight saw Morton fire a rocket signal above the Piaggio.

The huge bomber nosed down a trifle, raced toward Gibraltar, and the Junkers and Savoias swiftly followed. Knight rammed the stick forward and pitched steeply under the light.

"Look out—there's a tail gunner in that Piaggio!" Doyle shouted, then dived down to adjust his own guns.

The hammer of Knight's Vickers was his answer. The Piaggio tail-gunner, blinded by the flare as Knight had prayed he would be, never saw the Hind until it was almost on him. From his post under the fin, he wildly elevated his gun, but the grinding Vickers chopped him down before he could fire a shot. The top-gunner hurled a flaming ribbon of steel through the Hind's right wing as the two-seater screamed down.

Over the cowl, Knight saw his tracers eat through the glassed-in pilot's compartment. The big ship veered to the left, went up on its tail and thrashed off in a power spin.

Behind the British ship, one of the Bredas and the Heinkel which flew with them were charging in desperately. Doyle raked the Heinkel with a head-on fire, and the ship burst into flames. The Breda, zooming to miss the flaming mass, was out of range in a flash.

As Knight dived on toward Gibraltar, searchlights sprang up from the Rock and the British vessels beyond. In the suddenly bright sky he was stunned to discover the small Junkers flown by O'Connor. Instead of heading for Portugal, O'Connor was hurtling straight for the aircraft carrier beyond the Rock. And Benita was in that Junker's cabin! And on the tail of that Junkers was a Fiat with blazing guns. Morton, mad with fury at the wrecking of his scheme, was trying to down the ship before the truth could be spread below!

With a furious kick at the rudder, Knight went after the traitor colonel. All three planes were plunging in power dives, and the British-owned peninsula seemed to leap up at Knight as he closed on the Fiat's tail.

Then, just as the Italian fighter was nearly in his sights, he saw the submarine! Around Europa Point, its long black hull almost awash, it was speeding—and it was almost within range to sink the anchored aircraft carrier!

Trips hard against the stick, Knight blasted a red-

hot hail into the tail of the Fiat, saw it whip aside as he hurtled on. Wings screaming like a thousand devils, the Hawker went down the beam-stabbed sky. Phosphorus lines flashed toward the right wing, kicked through the tip, just missing the straining N-strut. Morton was diving after them, fighting insanely to save his hellish plar.

The black hull of the sub swiftly grew to grim dimensions. It had slowed, was ready to fire . . .

WITH a wild jerk at the toggles, Knight sent his four bombs flashing down at the monster. And hardly an instant later, white foam streaked the surface of the water as a torpedo shot from the sub!

A terrific explosion shook both sea and sky as Knight's bombs struck. The zooming Hind yawned crazily in the churning air. Knight brought it level again, stared down at the churning sea.

He'd hit the sub! Its ugly black prow was lifting high from the water, as air boiled out of its hull. Suddenly, another explosion blasted, showering flame at the base of Gibraltar. The torpedo, deflected by the bomb-tossed water, had struck harmlessly against the giant rock.

A searchlight from the carrier flicked over toward the sinking sub. Then a shout from Doyle snapped Knight's eyes from that grim scene to the charging Fiat. Morton, his uncovered face a murderous mask, was diving down the beam at the Hind.

Knight half-rolled, pitched back, then squeezed his Vickers trips as the Fiat shot by. Morton threw the Italian ship into a madman's turn, not a hundred feet above the water. It seemed to hang there for an instant as Knight's blazing guns struck.

Across the tail ran a shining path of tracers, and as the flippers crumpled the Fiat dropped sidewise into the gray-covered sea. In the battered wreckage which lifted into view he saw a face gone white with horror.

He climbed swiftly, expecting British guns to blaze at any moment. But the guns were still, and no planes took off from the huge carrier. He stared across Gibraltar and saw that most of the bombers were missing from the sky. An enormous Junkers was fleeing northward, with several Americans pouncing on it, and the last Savoia was whirling down, in flames.

Suddenly Doyle thumped him on the back. "Cut in your phones! I've caught a message from the commander of the carrier!"

Knight threw the switch, heard a voice with a British accent:

“—and this brave young lady has explained the situation. Britain is deeply grateful that you have saved us from a terrible mistake, and to avoid the obvious complications of landing in Spain, we shall be glad to have you use the flight deck. Please signal those pilots who do not have radio receivers and then—”

“Benita! The little rascal did it!” Doyle yelled, as the British officer went on with instructions for approaching the carrier. “She made Pete come here instead of taking her to Portugal. Boy, I can hear her threatening to yank out his hair, or maybe she even pulled a gun on him!”

Wordless, Knight gazed down at the now lighted expanse of the flight-deck and saw the small Junkers and a figure in nurse’s dress with a group of officers. Benita and Pete O’Connor had probably saved them all. But for their daring, with the chance that the Junkers would be blown to pieces by A-A guns, the British pilots might have been rushed up to repel the supposed attackers.

There was an unspoken tribute in Knight’s eyes as he looked down at the girl on the flight-deck. Not only had she done this, but she had lost a fortune—the

Green Madonna—without a whimper. Perhaps later, Doyle and he might secretly return to Spain and follow the trail of the emerald.

Benita had lost that valuable jewel—and the United States had lost a submarine, but Mars had been held back, and the sinister black cloud of war no longer hovered over America. The crew of the sub would speedily be rescued by the British, and word to the Insurgents would send help to the imprisoned monks.

He watched the other planes land—some crookedly, with narrow escapes. Finally, a light blinked toward the Hawker. Doyle answered with the Aldis. As Knight started to close the throttle, Doyle howled through the interphone.

“Hey, you’d better get rid of that black robe. Th’ Limeys will be shipping you back to th’ monastery!”

Knight grinned, gave him the controls. As he slipped off the cowled gown, he glanced down at the spot where Morton had crashed by the sinking submarine.

But only a faint gray haze showed upon the sea.

