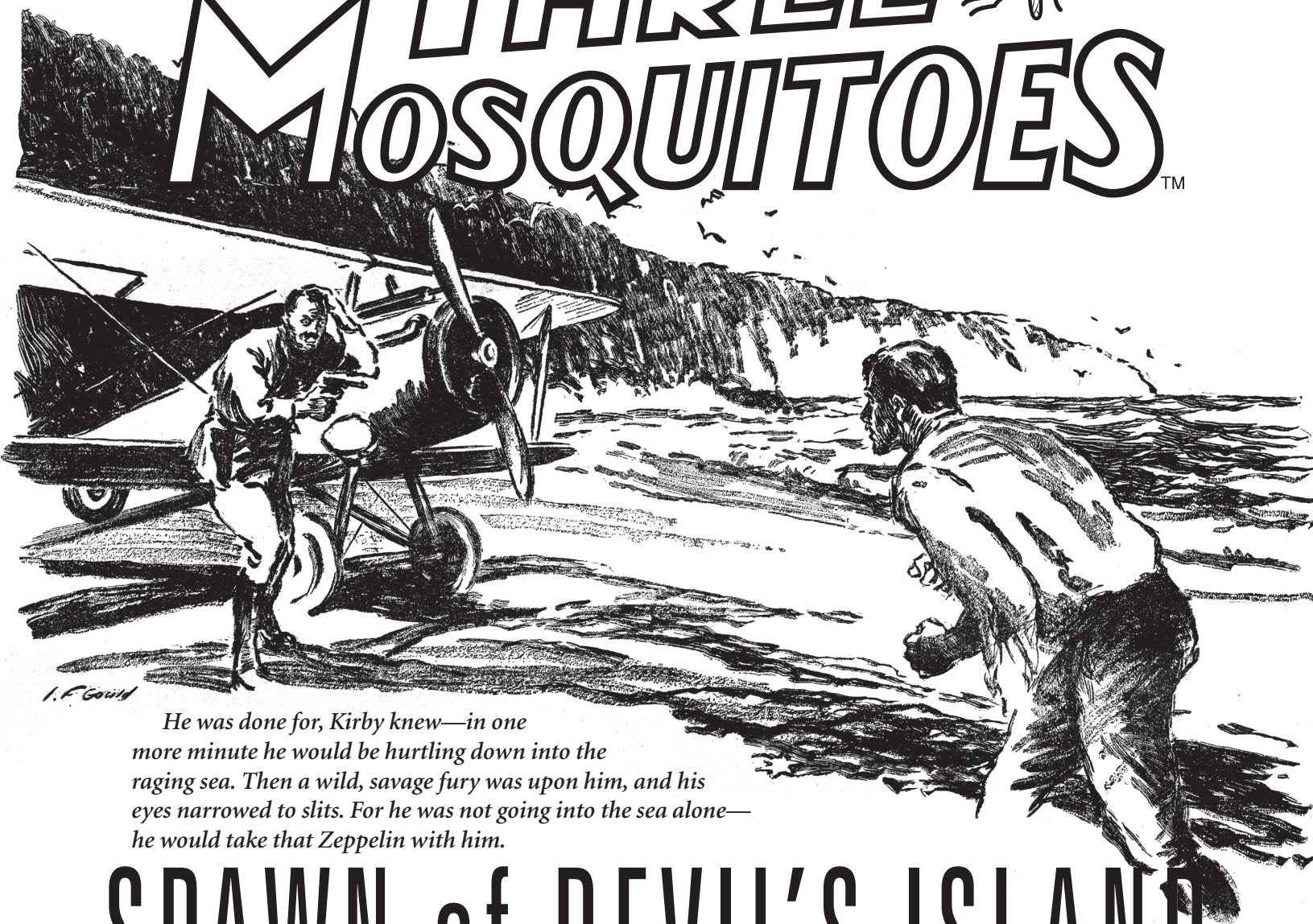


The **THREE** **MOSQUITOES**™



He was done for, Kirby knew—in one more minute he would be hurtling down into the raging sea. Then a wild, savage fury was upon him, and his eyes narrowed to slits. For he was not going into the sea alone—he would take that Zeppelin with him.

SPAWN of DEVIL'S ISLAND

by RALPH OPPENHEIM

FOR TWO HOURS the tropic storm had held the Sopwith in its grip. For two hours the sturdy single-seater had been buffeted and tossed about the blackened sky. Though it struggled with all its might, the whipping sheets of rain and wind kept forcing it down, down—closer and

closer to the treacherous waters of the Indian Ocean, which surged below. Livid blue streaks of lightning flashed on every side of the plane, often striking out toward it like the prongs of a snake. Valiantly the Sopwith plunged and reeled onward, its propeller churning madly at the pelting rain, its engine roaring

defiantly at the shrieking wind and the crashing peals of thunder.

In the cockpit, with only the safety belt to prevent him from being hurled out of his bucking ship, soaked to the skin and exhausted, Captain Kirby, famous Yankee ace, leader of the renowned trio of war birds known as the Three Mosquitoes, was conducting a losing fight against the elements. He had long since given up any hope of climbing above the storm, which had burst on him with such sudden unexpectedness. His wings were water-logged and unable to bear the Sopwith up. And now he was losing altitude while he struggled blindly with his controls—for he was flying as blind as a bat through a wet void in which he could not even see his own wing tips except when they were grotesquely revealed for a fleeting second by a flash of lightning. He had no idea where he was headed, no sense of direction. His compass had gone astray long ago, and was now a dizzy, whirling thing which told him nothing. He might be flying straight or he might be going around in a futile circle. He might be flying toward land, or he might be going farther out to sea. He did not know.

All he knew was that more than two hours had passed since he and his comrades, "Shorty" Carn and the lanky Travis, flying three Sopwith land scouts, had left their base at Kuma, British East Africa. The Three Mosquitoes had been transferred to this hell-hole of shiny natives, insects, and fever, chiefly because their fame had spread to such an extent on the Western Front that the German high command had issued a general order to get them, alive or dead. And so G.H.Q., deciding that it would be wise to remove the renowned trio from the limelight awhile, had lent them to the British down here in darkest Africa.

When the Three Mosquitoes had set out for the usual patrol this morning, the sun had been blazing with its usual skin-warping intensity. The three flyers had swept out over the sea to conduct their reconnaissance along the coast, looking for any prowling German ships or submarines.

Suddenly, and without warning, the sky had darkened. With terrible swiftness huge dark clouds rolled across the dazzling face of the sun, piling together until the air was almost black. The wind had risen to the velocity of a gale, stirring the waters below into that churning, treacherous swell which makes the Indian Ocean feared by even the most hardy mariners. The Three Mosquitoes were struggling madly now to keep their little planes under control in

the terrific wind. They had scarcely managed to turn around and head for land when the storm, like an unleashed monster, broke upon them in all its fury. In the first, blinding cloud-burst, the three flyers were all separated, and it was a case of each man for himself.

Kirby had been steering his bucking ship toward Kuma by his compass when that instrument failed. From that time until now he had been lost, utterly at the mercy of the storm which literally took the Sopwith out of his hands and played with it at will. His only hope was that his two comrades had not met with similar misfortune, that they had managed to get back to Kuma. As for himself, he prayed fervently that he could somehow hold out until the storm abated, and then try to get his bearings again. But even now, though he still had plenty of gas, he knew that he couldn't hold out much longer, knew that it would be physically impossible.

The wet, screaming wind was flogging him to numbed exhaustion as it drove stinging needles of rain into his goggled face. Water was running down under his goggles and blinding his eyes. Water was trickling down the back of his neck in a spine-chilling stream. His cockpit was virtually a bath tub. He was wet and miserable and tired in every muscle from the terrific strain. God, he could not keep this up any longer.

A blinding bolt of lightning cracked right below him like the shot of a cannon, making his very teeth rattle. He felt an electric shock go through him. But it was not the proximity of the thunderbolt that struck cold panic into his heart. It was the fearful sight which the dazzling lightning had revealed to him.

Not more than three hundred feet below him, horribly clear in the infinitesimal flash of light, he had glimpsed the hungry waves of the sea rising into huge mountains which fell away only after they had tried their utmost to reach up and seize the Sopwith above! God, he had been losing altitude all this time, despite his furious efforts to keep his plane aloft. The storm had been pushing the water-logged Sopwith down, down, until now it was right over the sea! And in a sea like this even a giant seaplane could not hope to alight! Kirby was flying a frail little land plane, with wheels instead of pontoons. He wouldn't last more than a few seconds down there!

The thought roused him to a frenzied desperation which enabled him to rally his ebbing strength and fight anew. But it was useless. All his skill, all his experience as a pilot, seemed to be powerless against the force of the storm which pressed his ship

downwards. He managed to hold the Sopwith at its present altitude awhile, but soon the sheer effort had exhausted him completely, and he was dropping again, dropping slowly but inexorably toward those yawning, tumultuous waves right below. He sat back in his watery cockpit, panting, cursing, holding back the joystick in a sort of dumb helplessness. He was through now, and he knew it! In just another moment the sea was going to swallow him and his Sopwith! Sobs choked him. God, what a finish!

In his despair he scarcely noticed the thing which was happening. Not until he heard the roar of his own motor which, all at once, had become deafeningly clear and distinct, did he understand. He was climbing! He was climbing with breathless speed! The Sopwith was rocketing skyward like a bird suddenly freed. A cry of incredulous amazement broke from Kirby. Then he realized that the rain was no longer whipping him so savagely, and the shrieking wind had fallen to a scarcely audible whimper through the flying-wires.

The storm was dying out abruptly. Kirby had passed out of its area. Somewhere, more and more distant, the thunder continued to reverberate. The rain dwindled and presently stopped altogether. The Sopwith shook the water from its flanks like a dog. Its churning propeller scattered the few remaining drops. Kirby, sobbing his relief, climbed the ship with ease, climbed away from the treacherous surface of the sea into the clearing upper air, which was getting lighter and lighter. At five thousand feet he leveled off and circled to look things over. Visibility was fast increasing. The black clouds were drifting away, though the sky remained a dull gray, which still covered the sun. Kirby leaned over the side of his cockpit, and peered downward.

All he saw was a great circle of steel-gray sea. From the air it looked like an immense cup which met the lighter sky at its circumference. Whitecaps danced on the crests of the swelling, tumultuous waves. There was no land in sight, no sign of ships—nothing but water and sky.

Kirby's relief began to give way to a cold apprehension. When the storm had broken, while he had been flying with his comrades, the dim coast line of Africa had been reassuringly visible. He must have drifted out to sea! How was he to get his bearings, find his way back? His compass was gone, and the sun was obscured by the gray blanket of clouds high above, which Kirby knew he could never climb through. He had already brought the water-logged plane almost to its ceiling now—about ten thousand feet.

What could he do? Wait for the sun to come out? He had several hours' gas left, but the sun might not come out for a very long time. Kirby swore thickly. He had been spared from a swift and violent death only for a slower but just as certain finish! He would merely flounder around until he ran out of gas, and then the sea would get him anyway! With neither compass nor sun to guide him, he had absolutely no way of getting back to land.

AND then, suddenly, as he circled in helpless despair, something caught his eye, something which made him stiffen in his cockpit. He swung around, peering toward a distant part of the gray sky, straining his eyes behind their goggles. Was it just a cloud? It must be, and yet it seemed to be moving where the clouds were standing quite still. It seemed to be. His heart leaped and an involuntary shout broke from his lips. For now he saw it clearly.

Sailing serenely through the humid air, its silvery hull barely discernible against the gray of sky and sea, was the slender, cigar-shaped outline of a great Zeppelin!

A thrill went tingling through Kirby, and he found himself in the grip of a strange excitement. The L-99! The huge Zeppelin which had been flown way down here from Germany, and which was now operating, with deadly effect, from its base in German East Africa! Doubtless the big airship had been out on one of its usual patrols over the Indian Ocean, where it preyed on Allied vessels, and it had been caught and swept off its course by this storm. And now, obviously, it was headed back for its African base!

Almost instantly, inspiration came to Kirby, and his hopes rose to the point of enthusiastic joy. The Zeppelin, with all its wonderful equipment, could never have lost its bearings as he had lost his. The Jerries knew where they were going, all right, and they'd get safely back to land. What, then, was to prevent Kirby from following the Zeppelin, following unseen, of course, until it led him within sight of land? Once the coast of Africa was in view, the Mosquito would have no trouble getting back to British territory. His eyes gleamed with keen anticipation as they fell upon the twin Vickers machine guns mounted before him, for as soon as the Zeppelin had served him sufficiently, led him back to land, he would take a crack at it!

He did not hesitate. Even now the L-99 was a few miles distant, though it was moving with comparative

slowness. Kirby opened his throttle full and started to climb in the general direction of the silvery, cigarlike outline. He climbed to the Sopwith's present ceiling, which was about a thousand feet above the ceiling the Zeppelin was holding. Eagerly Kirby urged his little plane on, and went tearing after the L-99. The big airship loomed slowly into larger and clearer outline. Kirby could see its jutting engine-gondolas now, and its great tail assembly with its immense finlike rudders and elevators.

A full mile behind the L-99, and well above, Kirby throttled down. At this distance he was safe; they'd never spot the tiny Sopwith in the grayish sky. The Mosquito now settled down to the task of following the great Zeppelin. It wasn't altogether an easy task. The Zeppelin was not doing more than fifty miles an hour, and the Sopwith's flying speed was seventy. Kirby had to circle constantly to keep the slow pace of the great airship. Thus the strange journey began—with a monster Zeppelin leading a tiny Sopwith, which gyrated like some insect above and behind it.

Time passed. The L-99 sailed on smoothly, in peaceful serenity. Kirby followed, faithfully. The air became muggy and suffocatingly hot. The sky remained a dull gray. No land in sight yet, and no sign of ships. Kirby waited patiently. But when time continued to drag, when the minutes ticked by into a full hour, his patience began to ebb. He reminded himself that he had been lost in the storm for over two hours, that during all that time he might have been going out to sea. It might take almost as long to get back to land now. He must hold on. Besides—he cursed himself for his own silly doubts—where else could the Zeppelin be going but to German Africa? Surely it wouldn't be going out to sea!

Suddenly the sultry, muggy air seemed to turn to steam. A heavy fog was descending. Thicker and thicker it grew, cutting down visibility. The Zeppelin Kirby was following became a vague, dim shape, until presently he could barely make it out at all. He must go closer! Hastily he opened his throttle and sped ahead, closing up the gap between the big airship and himself. But the form of the Zeppelin seemed to be getting dimmer, even though Kirby moved toward it. Could he dare to go still closer? He knew they were not near land yet—for though the sea was now blanketed by the fog, there were gaps in the whitish vapor which showed Kirby that there was still only water below. There seemed nothing to do but follow the Zeppelin still farther, which meant he had to risk going nearer

to it. He nosed down and on, until presently the tail assembly of the L-99 loomed out of the mist like a picture coming back into focus. Kirby was only a couple of hundred yards above and behind now, but at any greater distance he would surely have lost the airship. So he hovered where he was, resumed his circling, erratic flight.

It happened suddenly, and without warning. It took Kirby completely unawares, caught him entirely off his guard. The air was shattered by a shrill staccato clatter which rose to a deafening crescendo. *Rat-tat-tat-tat!* Dazedly Kirby saw several red spurts of flame leaping from the top surface of the Zeppelin's stern, heard the bullets ticking through his wings, and fuselage. And he realized with cold horror that there was a machine-gun platform on the rear surface of the Zeppelin. The gunners had spotted the Sopwith hovering in the mist close above. They had taken careful aim, since they had plenty of time, and now they were giving Kirby everything they could!

With frenzied haste Kirby pulled back his stick to zoom out of range and lose himself in the murk of fog. But it was too late! The terrific fusillade of bullets was taking its toll. One of them grazed Kirby's face and ricocheted from the cowl behind him. Another smashed against a wing strut and split it cleanly from top to bottom. The Germans kept blazing away, with deadly precision. *R-r-r-rip!* There was a rending shriek of metal tearing through metal, which made Kirby's blood freeze within him. They had plugged his radiator full of holes, turned it into a virtual sieve! The water must have drained out immediately, for the radiator thermometer on the dashboard began to shoot upwards like a rocket. He was done for! Without water to cool it, his engine would quickly become overheated and melt, and the end would be swift!

The whistle of bullets at last died away as the panic-stricken Mosquito finally got the floundering Sopwith out of range. Below, the Zeppelin was scarcely discernible in the mist, but he could still see them firing away at him. And then a wild, savage fury was upon him, and his eyes narrowed to slits behind their goggles. Yes, he was done for! In just another moment or so he'd be hurtling down into the sea, probably in flames from the melted engine, but he was not going alone! No, not by a damn sight! He was going to attack that Zeppelin and take it to hell with him!

With a savage oath, he banked the Sopwith and then shoved his stick forward. Down he went plunging, shrieking, in a breathless dive, even though

he knew that his engine was rapidly reaching the melting point. Down, down, straight for the dim looming hull of the Zeppelin, straight for the mid section of the great envelope which held bags of highly inflammable hydrogen. His fingers were on the stick triggers now, and he leaned grimly to his sights.

The Zeppelin turned into a virtual fortress then. Guns began to belch from every part of it. Men were on the narrow walk on top of the envelope, blazing away with rifles and carbines at the descending plane. Machine guns were clattering furiously. Again a fusillade of bullets began to tear into Kirby's ship, but he went right through them, laughing his reckless defiance. And at the same time he pressed his own triggers, and held them. His twin machine guns vibrated as they stuttered into blazing life. Kirby saw the smoking streams of his tracers cutting through the mist. His heart leaped. They seemed to be going right into the Zeppelin! But evidently they did not strike a vital spot, for the L-99 continued to sail on unperturbed, its guns peppering away.

In the next instant Kirby's dive was carrying him past and below the big airship. God, he had missed it! But his motor was still going! If it could last just another moment——

Recklessly, gambling on this last hope, he pulled up and zoomed straight toward the belly of the L-99, guns blazing. And from this part of the Zeppelin, he was met with an even more terrific barrage of fire. The air around the Sopwith became dense with flying, screaming lead, as guns from the engine gondolas and from within the envelope, opened up. But again Kirby defied the fire as he streaked up, ripping out burst after burst from his own guns. And this time he was absolutely certain he saw his tracers cutting into the silvery envelope of the Zeppelin. But nothing seemed to happen to the L-99. Still it sailed on, serenely. Crazy with rage and frustration, Kirby zoomed on, a wild, reckless light in his eyes. By God, if he couldn't hit this Zeppelin with his bullets, he'd hit it with his plane——crash into it! Straight and true for its silver belly, he aimed the Sopwith's nose.

THEN the engine of the Sopwith A conked out at last, and the little plane stopped dead in its zoom. For a moment it hung there, perfectly still; then it started to slide backwards, tail-first; and finally its heavy nose was pulled down by gravity. Kirby hurtled downward through the mist, with wild, anguished sobs wrenching from his throat. He had failed——failed miserably! He was

not taking the L-99 to hell with him! He had been unable to bag the Zeppelin, had been unable even to ram it!

Already the L-99 was lost in the mists above. Instinctively, Kirby put his plane in a glide-dive, but otherwise he made no effort to prolong the descent which must inevitably bring him into the sea. Once more, utter exhaustion had overcome him, and in his frustration he was ready to resign to his fate. Bitterly he sat back and let his plane streak down, down with the wind moaning a weird death song through the wires. The fog seemed to grow much thinner as he went lower. The sea appeared with sudden clarity, and again those surging, hungry waves were looming swiftly toward him. This time, he told himself with grim irony, he was not going to cheat them. In a few seconds they would at last engulf the Sopwith which dived straight for them. Futilely, and without hope, Kirby glanced around for the last time, peering through the mist at the desolate expanse of water which he knew held no refuge, no place where he——

Almost madly, in a sudden spurt of returning strength, he jerked back his joystick and pulled up the nose of the Sopwith with such abruptness that the plane shivered violently from nose to tail. Good God, was it possible? Surely his eyes were deceiving him. Surely it was just a mirage——that vague, jutting mass which seemed to rise out of the sea in the mist. Could it actually be real? Was it land?

With feverish haste, before the motor-less Sopwith had time to stall and go into a spin, Kirby put down her nose again to pick up flying speed. Then, employing all his skill, he banked her around without much sacrifice of his precious altitude. Straight for that dim, jutting mass he headed, in as shallow a glide as was possible. Closer and closer now, with the Sopwith dropping ever lower, but getting there, nevertheless! In another moment, with just a little altitude left, Kirby was sweeping right overhead of the place. And now at last he saw what it was.

By what seemed to be a miraculous coincidence, he had happened upon a tiny island which was obviously isolated in the sea. Even with the mist, which was slowly dispersing now, Kirby's eyes could encompass the boundaries of this island. It could not have been more than a mile and a half long, and it was less than a mile in width at its widest. It rose out of the sea like a solitary mountain, high in the center and tapering off at various angles on every side. Evidently it was composed of rock formations of some kind, judging from the ruggedness of its topography.

Now Kirby was gliding right over the place, struggling to hold his Sopwith up, while he scanned the rough contours of the island for some spot where he could try a landing. And luck was with him! On one side of the island was a strip of beach which sloped gently into the rolling breakers. It was a pretty poor spot for a dead landing, but compared to the rest of the island, it looked ideal! Kirby did not hesitate—there was no time for that. With just enough altitude to spare, he banked once more and nosed straight down for that beach, risking a cross-wind landing so he could follow the direction of the narrow strip of sand. Down he glided, until he was whisking right over that sloping stretch. The wheels of the Sopwith settled, bounced, settled again, and then finally sank into the sand. For a moment the plane threatened to wing over, but Kirby skilfully held her steady. And here, on this strange and unknown spot, he brought the disabled Sopwith up for a safe landing.

For several moments he remained in his cockpit, looking around curiously. To his left, the surf boomed monotonously as it rolled in and sent its foamy spread rippling up the sands. Out beyond the breakers, the sea disappeared in the thinning mists. And to Kirby's right, the beach terminated in a series of jagged rocks which rose slowly to the peak at the center of the island. The rocks were full of peculiar foliage—twisted greenish growth which sprouted out everywhere.

There was a strange atmosphere about the place which impressed itself upon Kirby at once. He couldn't quite define it, but he found himself in the grip of an unnatural loneliness, a desolate feeling of being remote from the world of the living. There was no sign of civilization here; the place seemed untenanted, lifeless. But was it? Wasn't it some charted island, known to man?

He shrugged. No use sitting here and conjecturing. He unstrapped his safety belt and climbed stiffly from his cockpit, alighting on the sand which was still wet from the previous rainfall. For the first time now he felt the insufferable, humid heat which hung over the air here like a sweltering heavy blanket. He took off his helmet and goggles and then his light flying jacket, throwing them all into the cockpit. That was better—though still far from comfortable. He was wet and sticky all over, except for his throat, which was incongruously dry and parched. He pulled out his canteen and took a stingy gulp of the tepid water. Water might be precious here; he could take no chances. His very first thought was for his plane. He commenced to examine the disabled Sopwith from

nose to tail. The Boche had shot it up pretty badly, and the engine and radiator were considerably damaged. But the ship could be fixed—though Kirby soon discovered that it wouldn't do him much good to fix it! There wasn't a drop of gas in the tanks! Evidently the Boche had shot a hole in the feedline, and the fuel had leaked out while he was plunging down. He was stranded here without gas!

But now he must find out something about this mysterious island. He looked around once more, and his eyes finally swept up to the high promontory in the center of the island. It ought to afford a good view of the whole island and as much of the surrounding waters as the slowly dispersing mists would reveal. He decided to make for that plateau. With no small reluctance he left his plane and walked across the wet sand to the jagged hill of rocks. He started to climb, making whatever footing he could from stone to stone, and pushing through the strange, twisted brush and foliage which sprouted here and there. The rocks were wet and slippery, and covered with mossy slime; several times Kirby slid and almost fell. But at last he reached the plateau, stepping onto it. It was a fairly large, level space, and it was covered by foliage far less slimy than the growth Kirby had seen before. On one side the plateau jutted out in a promontory which made a sheer, straight drop into the sea. On all other sides it descended in gradual, jagged slopes such as Kirby had climbed. He started to walk across the plateau. Then a chill sensation of horror drove needles into his spine, and the hair seemed to rise from his scalp. He stopped in his tracks as if petrified, staring at the ghastly sight which lay at his feet. There, stretched out side by side, tawny and bleached by the sun, were two skeletons!

The flesh had evidently been eaten away from them by carrion birds, for the bones were picked clean. There were faded, torn bits of clothing protruding here and there from the gruesome heaps. The two skulls lay face upwards, and they seemed to grin at Kirby with an inscrutable leer which made the Mosquito feel sick. It was all he could do to bend over those skulls and look at the two small discs of metal which were grotesquely fastened by wires around what had once been the necks of two men. With trembling, reluctant fingers, as though he were touching something vile and poisonous, Kirby lifted one of those discs toward him—gently, so as not to stir the crumbling bones. In the eerie, misty light he just managed to discern the letters which were scraped indelibly on the metal tag.

"Emil Wolffram, Leutnant, *Kaiserliche Kriegsflotte*." And the tag on the other skeleton read, "Franz Klein, *Seeman I Classe, Kaiserliche Kreigsflotte*." An officer and a seaman of the German Imperial Navy.

Kirby rose, white-faced and shaken, and his eyes roamed about the plateau, fearfully. And then he saw it—the mute, somber evidence which lay scattered all over the place. He walked around gloomily, discovering and examining one thing after another. He saw tattered clothes lying here and there, and he found caps of German naval officers and sailors. And on the faded black bands of the sailor hats, he could sometimes pick out the tawny, blurred letters which had once stood out boldly in gilded print, "*Unterseeboot 47*." Every one of the hats he could read bore that same legend.

BOOTS, binoculars, canteens, and other equipment lay all over the place in disorderly array. There were guns and carbines, empty rocket pistols and burnt-out flare tubes. And in the center of the plateau was a large, black splotch; and here, still wet from the rain, was a heap of charred wood and brush. There had been a fire here—and quite recently, judging from the looks of it!

Finally, Kirby came upon a long, splintered pole which had evidently been blown down and smashed by the storm. On the end of the pole, still clinging valiantly, though it was wet and torn to shreds, was a piece of white cloth. A makeshift distress flag!

The Mosquito stood there, chilled and sickened by this scene which told a story far more eloquent than words. Somehow, perhaps because their ship had been wrecked on the rocks of this island, the crew of the German submarine U-47 had been marooned on this desolate spot. There had been at least twenty of them here, Kirby estimated from the equipment and clothing. They had put up a distress flag, burned a great fire, and sent up rockets—but all in vain. No rescue had come. And they had stayed here and rotted away—from thirst or starvation or disease. Doubtless, as each man had died, he had been cast into the sea from the high promontory here, until only two were left: an officer and a seaman. Either these two had died together or the surviving one had been too weak to cast the other into the watery grave far below.

Slowly an awful realization came home to Kirby, as he grasped the significance of this lurid story in relation to himself. This must be an island which was never passed by any ships, or surely the combined efforts of this whole submarine crew to signal for

help would have won response. And now Kirby was stranded here alone, with only a disabled plane which held no gas! How could he hope for salvation where twenty well-equipped men had failed before him? How could he hope for any fate except theirs?

The thought was so hideous that he couldn't bring himself to accept it. There must be some way out, he kept telling himself. Perhaps he had misconstrued all this evidence—though it seemed unmistakable. Perhaps, even now, there were men still alive on this island. He hadn't looked all over yet. He must explore thoroughly.

Averting his eyes from the two skeletons, he hastened to get off this plateau. He decided to descend to the side of the island opposite the beach, and work his way around. Kirby started down, again stepping from one slippery stone to another. Painfully, he worked his way down to the foot of the hill, where he found a jagged bed of rocks which encircled the island except where the precipice dropped down from the promontory. He walked along this rock bed, slowly following it around the island. But he found nothing, nothing but desolate growth and rocks and slime.

The fog had lifted almost entirely now, and again the sky was high overhead, dull and opaque in its grayness. The sea stretched out to a far horizon in a dismal expanse of slate-gray—smoother now, almost lethargic, though the waves still crashed and boomed mightily as they broke upon the rocks of the island.

So abruptly did Kirby arrive back at the beach where he had left his plane that at first, in his oppressive state of gloom, he did not realize he was there. He had been pushing and plodding through an unusually dense clump of foliage, and suddenly he had emerged on the white strip of sand.

"*Halte!*" The harsh command made his blood freeze. Through a dizzy blur he saw the black muzzle of a Luger and a tall figure in dripping, blue clothes. And then other dripping figures seemed to materialize from all over the place!

Suddenly the blur began to fade, and he saw that the figure holding the Luger was a German naval officer—a lieutenant. He was tall and cold-eyed, and even in his wet, dripping clothes he had the haughty, supercilious swagger of a proud Prussian. As for the other dripping figures, they were sailors. They were surrounding Kirby and scowling, with drawn revolvers.

And then, in growing amazement, Kirby's eyes took in the rest of the beach. It was swarming with

dripping men, with sailors and officers! A little group was standing around his squatting Sopwith and looking at it curiously. And coming in with the rolling breakers, filled to the brim with shouting sailors who rowed frantically, was a large, collapsible rowboat. It was bobbing and bucking crazily; it seemed incredible that such a frail craft could have ever come in from the sea. But now Kirby noticed that there were other such boats on the beach: this was evidently the last one.

The Mosquito's eyes were wide with awe. "What the hell?" he gasped, dumbly.

The Prussian lieutenant holding the Luger scowled at him in cold contempt, and his voice rose in a sneer. "So," he said, in a heavy and metallic-sounding English, "an insolent Yankee! I thought as much!" He shook his Luger menacingly, and the group of sailors, imitating him, flourished their revolvers too. "Put up your hands, swine!"

Kirby did not make any resistance. He was surrounded, and so he raised his hands obediently. If anything now, he felt a strange sense of relief. Thank God, he was not alone on this island!

The lieutenant snatched the Mosquito's Colt from its holster, and pocketed it. Kirby, far from protesting, grinned almost amiably.

"How come you birds are here?" he queried, cheerfully. "Shipwrecked?"

To his surprise, the German turned crimson at this question, and his eyes narrowed to slits of hate.

"Insolent dog!" he snarled. "You will dare to joke about it, will you? You think we do not know you are guilty—that we will not make you pay? You dare to deny that you shot us down?"

"I shot you down?" Kirby echoed, bewildered, but his bewilderment soon passed. For now he noticed that the lieutenant was glancing out toward the sea. Kirby followed his gaze, and at once he saw it—saw the bobbing line of twisted cloth and metal framework which was sinking slowly into the slate-gray waters, out beyond the breakers.

"The Zeppelin!" he shouted, full realization coming to him. So he had bagged the L-99 after all—his bullets had scored! He had not managed to set the hydrogen on fire, but he had plugged the gas-bags so full of holes that the big airship was completely incapacitated. Somehow the Jerries, during all this time, had managed to bring the thing down close enough to the island to permit a landing in their unseaworthy, collapsible boats. Kirby had not seen any of their operations because of the mists and because he had

been on the other side of the island when the boats were coming in.

Kirby's smile was one of triumph now. "So I got you!" he exclaimed, eagerly. "Well—" he shrugged—"fair exchange! You got me and I got you! If you hadn't started it—"

"Silence, swine!" barked the lieutenant, furiously. "You—" He broke off abruptly, stiffening as a newcomer suddenly arrived on the scene. This was a big and ratherly elderly man in the drenched uniform of a naval captain. His face, with its iron-gray Van Dyke beard, was rough and weatherbeaten, and yet beneath the coarseness of the features was a certain sensitivity, a depth, which impressed Kirby at once. This quality was revealed particularly by the man's eyes, eyes which were deep set and of hard, keen blue.

At once the newcomer dominated the scene. He shot one keen, appraising glance in Kirby's direction, and then he turned to his lieutenant and spoke to him in German. His voice was rich and sonorously deep.

"So you have found the pilot of the plane at last, *Leutnant von Bulow?*"

The lieutenant was all respect, as were the rest of the men. "Yes, *Kapitan Engel*, we have found him, and he has turned out to be a swine-dog of a Yankee." He lowered his voice a bit and went on speaking to the captain in German, obviously assuming that Kirby didn't understand that tongue. But Kirby did understand, for he had at last mastered the Teutonic language during these past few weeks.

"Now, sir," von Bulow was saying, "my idea is this. We have discovered this new island, and, as we can already see, it can easily be converted into an excellent emergency base for our U-boats down here, provided we keep it a secret. I am sure that this American swine is the only one, besides ourselves, who knows of the existence of this island. Therefore, we must make sure that he doesn't escape, so he can't talk. My suggestion is that we tie him up at once and keep him under strict guard. Then we will simply wait until we sight a German vessel, which we can signal without trouble."

Captain Engel frowned and stroked his beard thoughtfully as he said, "I don't know if such extreme measures are necessary: after all the man can't possibly escape—his plane, as our examination showed, is useless, and we are surrounded by water. However," he gave a sudden shrug, as if dismissing a matter which he hardly considered important, "do as you wish with the prisoner, von Bulow. I leave him in your charge—I must see to my men and supplies." He turned on his heel, started to walk off.

"ONE minute, *Herr Kapitan!*" called Kirby in German and von Bulow and the sailors started in amazement. Captain Engel wheeled sharply, and once more his keen eyes flashed to the Mosquito. Kirby had decided now to lay his cards on the table. Rather than be left to the mercy of this sneering, contemptuous lieutenant, he was desperately determined to put himself in the hands of the captain, who seemed to be far more decent.

"I overheard your conversation," he went on, in his fairly good but heavily accented German, while the captain listened with growing interest. "And I want to tell you that while your idea about a German U-boat base may be excellent, it is hopeless! Nor is there any sense tying me up. You are prisoners as well as I am, and"—a grim laugh broke from him—"you are going to wait an extremely long time for that German ship of yours to come!"

A contemptuous snarl broke from the lieutenant. "Do not listen to the swine, sir! A typical Yank—trying to bluff us into not tying him up!" And the group of sailors guffawed in rough scorn, shaking their revolvers. But with, the captain it was different.

Evidently Kirby had expressed a doubt which had been in the Zeppelin commander's own mind, for the captain's face darkened, and the lines in it seemed to deepen into an expression of anxiety and worry. He walked up to the Mosquito, and spoke to him in a low voice and in English, as if he did not wish the others to overhear.

"Just what do you mean by that statement?" he challenged, and his English was flawless. "Is this island in Allied hands?"

Kirby shrugged. "I don't know about that," he replied evasively. "All I do know is that we're here to stay. And," his voice rose in sudden, bitter hopelessness, "probably we'll all of us rot here, rot like rats in—"

"Hush! It is true that only my officers understand English," he whispered, "but I can take no chances of the crew's hearing this. They are quite excitable and—he broke off significantly. "Kindly lower your voice," he requested. "Now on what do you base this assertion of yours?"

Kirby thought a moment. Then, suddenly, he changed his tactics. He turned to the captain almost pleadingly, now.

"Look here, captain, the best thing I can do is to show you just what I've found, and you can judge for yourself. But for God's sake, why must you keep me standing here with my hands in the air like this? It's

hot as hell and uncomfortable enough as it is. You yourself said I couldn't possibly escape; and I'm not damn fool enough to try it. Put up those guns and let me breathe—let me move, and I'll take you to the place where I can show you proof of my statements!"

Captain Engel hesitated, dubiously, as if weighing Kirby's words. Again his keen eyes studied the Mosquito appraisingly. Then, abruptly, he nodded. "Very well," he agreed. "I'll put you on your honor." He turned to the men. "Put away your revolvers," he commanded, in German. "This prisoner can't escape, and we are going to keep him on parole."

The sailors obeyed, sheathing their revolvers with some reluctance. Von Bulow, however, made no move to lower his Luger.

"If it is at all permissible," he said, and there was a tinge of irony in his tone, "I'd like to keep my revolver out, *Herr Kapitan*. I should feel a trifle safer."

Kapitan Engel shrugged. "I see no reason for it, but do as you like. However," he turned to Kirby, "you are free to lead the way now. I presume you have no objections if I get my officers and take them along with me? I may want to consult with them."

Kirby agreed cheerfully, and a few minutes later, after Captain Engel had instructed the crew to remain on the beach and stack up the supplies, the Mosquito was leading the Zeppelin commander and five officers up the jagged hill of rocks to the plateau. Lieutenant von Bulow still kept his attitude of intense hatred and enmity. But Kirby ignored him and the Luger.

Then they were all on the plateau, and the Germans were staring with wide, startled eyes at the ghastly sight before them. Exclamations of horror and amazement broke from them. Only Captain Engel seemed to maintain any sort of calm. The old Zeppelin commander stood very still and rigid, like a man of stone. His eyes seemed to have changed now from a deep blue to a steel-gray, at once hard and stoic.

"It is clear," he said quietly, but his tone was strangely hollow, "that we are doomed men."

There was a ghastly silence as the words, borne out by the unmistakable evidence, slowly sank home. Far below, the tireless sea crashed and boomed monotonously against the rocks. Otherwise there was nothing—not even a breath of wind.

Then Captain Engel spoke again, in the same quiet voice, "Our plan for a U-boat base here will have to be forgotten now. We cannot hope to wait until we can signal a German ship. As it is, it will be a miracle if any ship—Allied or German—shows up. We must

spare no efforts to attract help of any kind. We'll keep up signals constantly, and hope for the best." Then a sudden shadow crossed his gaunt, weather-beaten face, and for the first time his true worry and fear showed itself. "We must keep this from the crew," he said, and now his voice shook. "If they find out how things stand, there will be no controlling them!"

He stiffened, as if overcoming his tremors, and then he faced Kirby.

"Needless for me to say," he told the Mosquito, in English, "the situation is now altered. It would be absurd for us to consider you our prisoner any longer. If a German ship happens to come to our rescue, then you will be captured. If any enemy ship appears, we shall be the prisoners. Either event would be far more welcome than rotting here." He paused. Then he turned to von Bulow, who stood glaring hostilely at Kirby. "Put up your Luger, von Bulow!" the captain commanded sternly, and the lieutenant reluctantly obeyed. "And I believe you have this American's revolver?" With still more reluctance von Bulow silently drew forth Kirby's Colt, and handed it over. Captain Engel gave it to Kirby, who shoved it carelessly into his holster.

"And now," the captain told the Mosquito, "here are the facts: I have only these five officers to help me handle my crew and keep things running properly. You share this secret," he nodded grimly towards the two skeletons, "with us. Also you are an officer—even though of an enemy army. Will you, then, consent to become one of us—that is, practically, one of my officers?"

Kirby looked at him blankly for a moment, wondering whether the man could really be serious. This was an ironic paradox indeed!

"Sounds a bit funny," the Mosquito commented. "My becoming a German officer! But—" his old grin returned now for the first time during this tense scene—"it's a go! I'm with you, captain!"

Captain Engel smiled warmly, though somewhat mirthlessly, and extended his hand. Kirby grasped it and they shook firmly.

"My name," the Mosquito announced, "is Kirby."

The captain nodded. The name seemed to mean nothing to him. In fact only one of those officers showed any change of expression upon hearing the name. Kirby saw von Bulow stiffen, saw a look of surprise turn to venomous hate on his face, and then saw his hand move toward his sheathed Luger as if he meant to whip it out and fire. But the Prussian seemed

to recover himself, and merely stood there scowling and silent.

The captain, meanwhile, was introducing the other officers to Kirby. They shook hands with the Mosquito in a true spirit of sportsmanship and good feeling. Presently the captain reached von Bulow, who drew up with every ounce of Prussian pride he could summon.

"With due respect to the captain," he almost choked, unable to restrain his indignation, "it is my opinion that this whole thing is a ridiculous farce! This swine here is an enemy—whether we are on some unknown island or in Germany itself! He is, and always will remain to me, an enemy! I refuse to shake his hand or to treat him with any friendliness whatsoever!"

Captain Engel wheeled on him, a slow flush suffusing his rough face. "*Leutnant* von Bulow," the Zeppelin commander said, sharply, "I am astounded that my second-in-command can be so obstinate and narrow-minded. Now it is not in my power to force you to make friends with this man—but I wish that you would remember that you are an officer of the Imperial Navy, and above all a gentleman."

The lieutenant's lips were tightly pressed together. And at length the captain shrugged.

"I will press the matter no further," he said, glancing with frank displeasure at von Bulow. "Suit yourself, but," he added sternly, "I warn you that you must not try to make trouble for this man in any way, or there will be serious consequences. As for me, I intend to regard him as an equal, just as I would regard any foreign officer if we were not at war with his country—and I am sure that the rest of my officers will follow my example." He turned to Kirby again. "Now have we come to a full understanding, Captain Kirby, or are there some other points to clear up?"

KIRBY thought a moment. "Well, there's just one thing," he said at length. "Since we've come to this agreement, suppose you tell me just what you know about this island, so I can know as much as you do. As far as I'm concerned, I'm afraid there's nothing I can tell you about it. It was just by a miracle that I happened to land here."

"Perhaps it isn't such a miracle at that," Captain Engel suggested. "You see, we ourselves were looking for this island today."

Kirby stared at him with incredulous astonishment. "Looking for it? But how could that be, if the island is unknown and——"

"It is beyond every doubt, an unknown and uncharted island," the captain hastily assured him. "I believe it has come up out of the sea only recently, through some volcanic disturbance. About a week ago, we were cruising in our Zeppelin when we sighted what we felt sure was land of some kind, in this vicinity. We tried to locate it then, but somehow it slipped from our sight and we lost it entirely. Ever since then we have been hunting for it, in the hope—as you have already learned—of finding an emergency base for our U-boats. To-day we started out for the same purpose, and we, too, were caught in that storm, and almost wrecked. After the storm cleared we proceeded, and just when I thought I sighted the island through my binoculars, a fog closed on us, blotting out visibility. We went on a bit, bearing in the direction where I thought the island lay, hoping for the fog to clear and hating to give up this elusive quarry which seemed to be almost within our grasp. It was then that we had our encounter with your airplane." He sighed, in grim reminiscence. "You disabled us completely, but as we came down, the fog luckily thinned, and we found our island at last and were able to set down our shattered ship fairly close to it. Unfortunately," he added, gloomily, "our wireless had been put out of commission by the storm, and we were unable to signal any of our ships to come to our aid."

Kirby nodded slowly. "But how about the position of this island?" he asked. "Did you manage to chart it in any way?"

"I gauged it approximately by our position as we came down," Captain Engel said, and he reached beneath his jacket to draw out a small log book, which he opened. "The position," he read, "is approximately 3:37 S. Lat., 48:24 E. Lon., which is about 350 miles off the coast of East Africa!"

Kirby was dumbfounded. Good Lord, he had traveled three hundred and fifty miles out to sea, all told! The Zeppelin had only led him farther from land!

"Evidently," the captain concluded, "we are out of the way of all ships. The island is so small that it would hardly attract attention on the surface of the water, anyway." He paused, shaking his head. Then, abruptly, he snapped back to the business in hand.

"We must formulate our plans now and get back to the crew before they become suspicious. I think we have plenty of supplies here—though I do not know about the water. At any rate, we must keep the crew unsuspecting until there is absolutely no hope left, so we can preserve order. The very first thing to do is

to remove—those." And he nodded toward the two skeletons.

The others shuddered at the suggestion. But Captain Engel, with his face gaunt and set, led the way. Without hesitation he went over to one of the skeletons, seized the warped shoulder bones, and commenced to drag the thing toward the promontory which overlooked the sea. Before he had dragged it even a foot, the crumpling bones began to fall apart. The other men, steeling their nerves, reluctantly went to the captain's aid, Kirby among them. Silently and with white faces they took those bones and, without ceremony, dropped them off the precipice into the crashing sea below. It was hardly a burial—for one does not bury skeletons. It was simply a clean-up.

All were relieved when it was over at last. They gathered around the captain again, for his next orders.

"I guess we can leave all these other things here," he said, glancing around at the equipment, the burned-out fire, and the broken flag-pole. "It will do no harm, so long as there are no signs of dead men. We can tell the crew that men have been shipwrecked here already, and rescued. That will bolster up their morale considerably. I will manage to invent some story."

And they left the plateau and filed gloomily down to the beach. Von Bulow now kept at a distance from Kirby, and seemed no longer to notice the Mosquito's existence. Kirby, following suit, took a similar attitude of indifference towards the stubborn Prussian.

THE scene on the beach was one of comparative order now. The sailors had stacked up all the supplies neatly, and laid the collapsible boats side by side. The men were standing around idly, most of them in their undershirts now, and all of them looking tired and hot and anxious. The roll was now called for the second time, and two men remained missing—they must have gone down with the Zeppelin. The rest were here, which made twenty-eight, including Kirby.

Captain Engel gathered the crew around him. They all looked up to him eagerly, for he was their captain, and they had the same implicit faith in him that children have in their father. And his attitude was actually paternal as he addressed them, with calm reassurance.

"Men," he said, in his resonant voice, "there is no need for worry. A brief reconnaissance of the island has revealed the fact that others have been here before us: men who were obviously rescued and who left

much of their equipment behind. We will simply be inconvenienced for awhile, until a vessel sights our signals. In the meantime we must make the best of it."

The men nodded in quiet acquiescence, reassured by the confident words.

"Now, as to this American," the captain went on, nodding to Kirby, "he has been of such great service to me, showing me the island and giving me information, that I have granted him complete freedom while we are here. We will just forget that he is of an enemy army, and treat him as one of us; and he'll do the same thing with us. Is that clear?"

Again the crew nodded, cheerfully. They were so glad to think that they were surely going to be rescued that they were in an amiable mood, and perfectly willing to be friendly to anybody.

The captain got down to business once more. He began to take stock of the supplies which had been salvaged from the Zeppelin. There was plenty of food—canned stuff, hardtack, etc.—enough to last for weeks. But the captain's face darkened as he discovered that there was very little water. In fact, there were just two big kegs of it. Immediately the Zeppelin commander dispatched von Bulow and two other officers to make a reconnaissance of the island for fresh water. The rest of the party, including Kirby, commenced the arduous task of transporting all the supplies from the beach to the plateau, where Captain Engel, emulating the former luckless inhabitants of the island, had decided to make camp. Everything except the three collapsible boats and Kirby's useless Sopwith was taken to the mountain top, and stacked in order. The broken flagpole left by the hapless submarine crew was tied up with some stout cord, and a new piece of white cloth was fastened to it. They put up the signal, sticking it between the rocks, and hoping that some ship would soon notice it. Then the captain divided the watches among the crew, and the first man took his position as lookout on the promontory. He was equipped with a telescope, which had also been salvaged from the L-99, and through which he could look far out across the empty seas.

During this time the sky overhead had grown lighter: its opaque grayness was breaking up. And suddenly the sun appeared—a dull blur which glowed slowly into brilliance. The sky took on a thin blueness, and the sea became a shining expanse of green and silver which danced off to a far horizon. By the time the men had finished making their camp on the plateau, the sun was a dazzling blaze which

blinded the eye and made the head throb. Its rays beat down upon them with merciless ferocity—scorching, withering, drying up everything in no time. They drained their canteens, and began to ask for water. But Captain Engel shook his head, refusing to draw from the meager supply in those two kegs until he knew whether there was more on the island. And presently von Bulow and the other two officers returned from their trip of exploration. They were hot and perspiring, and the look on their faces grimly answered the captain's question even before von Bulow spoke:

"There is no water anywhere," he said, in a gloomy tone. "Not a drop! The little rain water that must have been left in rock cups dried the moment the sun came out. We looked all over: we even dug wells in the beach, in the hope that the sea water might have filtered enough through the sands to have no more salt in it. But it, too, was undrinkable!"

Captain Engel's face once more became a gaunt mask. He spoke quietly to his officers, and Kirby, "It looks pretty hopeless," he said. "Judging from the usual climatic conditions here, we probably will not see rain for months now. And we cannot hold out long with the little water we have. In fact we shall have all we can do to restrain the crew from drinking it all up in no time!"

And to the crew he said, in his paternal way, "Men, we must conserve our scant supply of water, so that we shall be able to hold out until the rescue comes—which ought to be very soon. I expect you all to cooperate."

THE men agreed with surprising cheerfulness. Their captain had told them they would soon be rescued, so they were content. After their first meal of canned bully beef and hardtack, which they shared with Kirby, they commenced to settle down to their new life on this desolate island, confident that they would not have to put up with it long.

And their confidence and cheerfulness lasted exactly two more days—two days of blazing, withering sunshine. Two nights of great bonfires built of dry brush and driftwood, fires which looked as if they must surely attract ships and yet attracted none. Two days of a desolate, empty sea, which the lookout scanned in vain. Two days, with the captain getting stingier and stingier with the water. At first, he had given put drinks whenever he saw that the men were about to complain of thirst. But as the precious supply diminished, as two

kegs became one; and one was now only three-quarters of one, he grew more and more miserly, and gave out the smallest rations at the longest possible intervals. And of them all, he himself drank the least.

Kirby and the officers had not complained: they had cooperated with the captain fully, despite their hopelessness, and despite the silent feud which remained like a shadow between von Bulow and Kirby. The others had all accepted the Mosquito as a comrade, and he would have forgotten that there was a war going on, would have forgotten that he was a lone Yank among twenty-seven Germans, had it not been for von Bulow's continued hostility. The Prussian still never spoke to Kirby, but just scowled at him in silent hate. And yet, as much as Kirby disliked the relentless Boche for his pig-headed stubbornness, he could not help admiring the man's guts. Even when Kirby himself and some of the other officers showed signs of weakening just a trifle under the strain, von Bulow remained calm and composed.

It was motley picture that the twenty-eight marooned men presented on this third day. Dirty and disheveled, with three days' growth of stubble on their faces, they were a disreputable-looking bunch. The crew was beginning to grow sullen and complaining. The captain's stinginess with the water was angering them, and they were dismayed because the promised rescue had not materialized. They began to press around the Zeppelin commander, and this time they looked up at him accusingly, as children look at a father who they feel has broken a promise to them. Their voices rose hoarsely, in sullen complaint.

"Why doesn't help come as you said it would?"

"When is it coming?"

"Why weren't our signals seen?"

Captain Engel shook his head, wearily. For the first time now the strain was beginning to tell on him. His face looked a bit hollow and drawn, with a growth of gray stubble surrounding his Van Dyke beard, which straggled a trifle ludicrously. But his voice was still calm and controlled. "I am sure that help will come soon," he repeated, quietly. "The only thing to do is to be patient."

"That's what you said before!" growled a huge hulk of a man, swarthy of feature and as powerful as an ox. This giant, whose name was Grossbeck, had been a leader of the crew in their complaints. And now, because his voice was surly, the others became surly too. They were beginning to feel resentful toward their captain.

"You told us we would surely be rescued in a short time!"

"And now we are here for the third day!"

"There isn't a ship to be seen!"

"And we are dying of thirst! You don't even give us enough to drink! We want water!"

"*Wasser!*" It rose from all parts of the plateau in a swelling chorus, louder and more ominous. "*Wasser!*" It took on an increasingly surly note. And the captain, seeing that the men were threatening to get out of hand, wearily served out more of the scarce water, though he hated to do it. He himself drank none this time, and Kirby and the other officers, following his example, also bravely refused to drink. The crew gulped down their tiny portions greedily, and they were not at all appeased. They held up their cups and shouted for more, more.

"We're thirsty!" snarled the huge Grossbeck, savagely. "Give us a man's drink—for once!"

Then something seemed to snap inside of the captain, and his coolness gave way to a sudden, tempestuous rage. Perhaps he was more angry at himself for having weakened, than at anyone else. But he vented his fury upon the complaining crew. His eyes blazed fire, and in that moment there was something Jovellike about him.

"You're a bunch of blubbering babies!" he thundered in his deep voice. "And you are going to stop this damned nonsense at once! I'm not letting you die of thirst! I'm doing what is best for you, and by God, you're going to put up with it! Hereafter there will be strict discipline: I'll stand for no insubordination or disrespect! Now keep quiet and stop pestering me, the whole damn bunch of you!"

The crew, abashed and cowed by this outbreak, slunk away from him, sullenly. But they gathered into little knots and commenced to talk among themselves, growing more and more incensed. The sun was blazing in full strength now, and its scorching heat only intensified their anger. Dissension seemed to be creeping into the air—dissension and mutiny. And yet, the crew had no weapons; the captain, with shrewd foresight, had long ago issued orders that only the officers and Kirby were to carry revolvers. The crew, at that time being agreeable to anything, had complied willingly, handing in their guns which the captain secretly put away in safe hiding.

The captain now took a position right in front of the remaining keg, and guarded the precious water as a mother guards her young. There he stood, grim and

impressive. He seemed indifferent to the muttering crew, though he sometimes caught snatches of their angry speech: "He ought to give us water— He is not treating up right— We ought to do something."

Von Bulow suddenly took it into his head to try his luck at placating the men, since he could argue for the captain where the latter couldn't argue for himself. The lieutenant walked over to the group of angry men, and Kirby, happening to be within earshot, heard him address them in a voice of genuine comradeship and warmth, which seemed quite unusual for the proud Prussian.

"Look here, boys," von Bulow was pleading, "you must not have any ill-feelings towards our beloved captain. Remember he has led us through many a storm, and there is no commander in the Zeppelin service as fine and good as he is. We must cooperate with him, for he knows what is best. Besides," he added, and now his eyes narrowed shrewdly, "it is not his fault that we are here, and it is not his fault that an American shot us down and—"

Kirby stiffened, a flood of indignant rage welling in him. Von Bulow, in order to divert the crew's anger from the captain, was trying to turn their rage toward Kirby! Even now the tiny seed he had sown by his words was beginning to take root. The men began to nod, angrily.

"That's right—it is the American!"

"It is his fault! He shot us down!"

"He attacked us!"

Von Bulow, having dropped his gentle hint, turned and walked quietly away from the surly group. Kirby, livid with fury, planted himself right in front of the Prussian's path. The Mosquito's voice was hot with rage, though he spoke low so that Captain Engel, over by the water keg, would not hear and be alarmed:

"That was pretty cheap of you, von Bulow," he said, in English. "You know damn well that if I told the captain about it he'd give you merry hell, but I haven't got that mean streak. All I'm saying is that you've got to quit trying to get me in bad around here, or there will be trouble!"

The lieutenant seemed neither to see the Mosquito nor to hear him. Since Kirby was in his path, von Bulow stepped quickly aside and passed by. The Mosquito clenched his fist until the nails dug into his palm. In that one moment he could hardly restrain himself from taking a sock at the relentless Prussian. But he fought down the savage impulse, telling himself that things were bad enough, and that he would surely get himself into a mess if he tried any such measures.

The crew was beginning to cast ugly glances at Kirby now. The Mosquito pretended not to notice them, but he could not help hearing what they said, for their voices were rising louder and louder with indignation.

"And we have treated him like a friend—after he shot us down!"

"He drinks our water and eats our food!"

"He is allowed to carry a gun—and we are not!"

"He's a Jonah, that is what he is! A Jonah who is bringing us all our bad luck!"

A VAGUE chill began to creep over Kirby, and his nerves tensed. He remembered again that he was, after all, a lone Yank among a crowd of Germans. Things were beginning to look bad for him now. It was then that the captain again spoke to the crew, shouting at them from his position at the water kegs.

He, too, had heard their talk, and once more he was angry.

"What is this nonsense about the American?" he snapped furiously.

For a moment the men all looked guilty, for despite their growing rebelliousness they still respected their commander from sheer force of habit. They were still afraid of his anger. But at last the giant named Grossbeck, overcoming his temerity, answered the captain with a sort of sullen defiance.

"He is a Jonah! He has brought a curse on us! You are treating him as if he were a German!"

The Captain spoke slowly, but each of his words came like the blow of a hammer—terse and emphatic. "Yes," he said, his eyes narrowing, "I am treating him like a German! Nor have you any right to criticize a man who has been far more helpful and loyal than the whole cowardly lot of you!" His voice rose warningly. "You shall not say another word against him, do you hear? I will not stand for it!"

And the crew again fell into silence, though they still continued to scowl both at Kirby and the captain. The Mosquito felt a warm gratitude toward the Zeppelin commander; the man was certainly white, and square as could be. As for von Bulow, he looked a trifle foolish now, for the shrewd captain had given him a keen, scrutinizing glance, as if he suspected that the Prussian had incensed the crew against Kirby.

The crew had at last broken up now, and the men were sitting down apart from one another, and in silence. But then, one by one, they began to leave the plateau! At first their departure was scarcely

noticeable; a man would stroll off unobtrusively and disappear down the rocks. But as more and more of them went, and the plateau began to look strangely empty, the thing took on an ominous significance. Soon only three of the crew remained, as if undecided whether to stay or not. Finally they left too, all together. All this time Captain Engel had not tried to deter any of them; he had said nothing. It was perfectly clear that the men had planned a clandestine meeting on another part of the island. They were all gathering now on a shelf in the rockier side of the place. From the plateau only some of them could be seen, most of them being hidden by a huge protruding crag under which they had taken shelter.

Only seven men remained on the sun-splashed plateau now—the six officers and Kirby. The captain spoke to them. “They have something up their sleeves,” he said grimly. “That is certain, though I don’t know just what they intend to do. At any rate,” he went on, his voice suddenly hardening, “they are not going to guzzle all this precious water and spoil everything!” And he stood there over the kegs, for the first time touching the Luger on his belt.

Kirby was beginning to feel pretty low about the whole situation. After all, he concluded, it was the captain’s determination to treat him as a friend and equal that had really set the spark to the crew’s dissention. That was von Bulow’s fault, of course, and yet Kirby felt that sooner or later the men would have fastened their anger on him anyway, since he was technically an enemy. The Mosquito hated to think that he was causing trouble for the captain, who had treated him so decently. And it was this thought that brought him to a sudden and perhaps reckless decision. He would go down and speak to the crew himself, try to win them over. He usually could win men over when he really tried. Besides, it seemed perfectly safe. The crew was not far below the plateau, and Kirby was armed where they were not.

He decided to say nothing of this plan to the captain, for the latter might prohibit it. Instead he sighed, “Wonder if I could take time off for a little wash in the surf?”

The captain nodded readily. “Certainly. But I’d advise you to keep clear of the crew. And please come back soon. We may need you.”

Kirby gave a cheerful assent, and then walked down the side of the hill which led to the beach. The crew was on the opposite side, but just to make sure the captain would not suspect his purpose, Kirby actually

went down to the beach and bathed his hands and face in the warm surf. Then he started climbing back up the rocks. He had time now to do what he wanted, before he returned to the plateau. The captain would not miss him, but would doubtless conclude that he was taking his time in coming back.

Surreptitiously, dodging behind rocks so that he would not be seen from the plateau, he commenced to work his way around the side of the hill. Painfully, he climbed and crawled and pushed his way over the precarious rocks and through the dense, dry foliage. And at last, sweating and panting, he reached the shelf of rock where the crew was gathered.

At his unexpected appearance, the crowd of men who had been standing in the shelter of the overhanging crag and talking loudly and angrily froze into silence that was almost guilty. Then they all faced the Mosquito, glaring at him with mingled hostility and interrogation. Kirby wasted no time in getting to the point:

“Listen, comrades,” he said, in German, “I’ve come to ask you just one favor. Please do not blame the captain for treating me with such decency. He has no choice but to do so, since he promised it to me when I gave him some information. And why can’t we all be friends?” he pleaded. “I shot you down only in fair combat, and how can you call me a Jonah when I am sharing all your misfortunes? As for the little water I drink—it is certainly not enough to make the slightest difference. And—” He paused, more than discouraged by the unmoved silence of the men, who continued to glare at him with increasing hostility. He turned to them appealingly, and made a last, fervent effort. “Is there no way we can become friends?” he begged.

Still absolute silence from the men. Two or three of them seemed to be almost won over, but they dared not show a different attitude from the sullen majority. And so they all stood there, glowering at the Mosquito and not knowing just what to say or do. It was Grossbeck who took the initiative. The burly giant stepped forward and towered over Kirby. His homely, unshaven face was wreathed in a ferocious scowl, and his piglike eyes were slitted to chinks of hate.

“You are a damned Yankee swine!” he snarled at the Mosquito, with blighting malice. “A stinking pig of an American!”

Kirby choked back a hot retort, his rage turning almost to tense alarm. For now the other men, taking up Grossbeck’s snarls, were beginning to surge around the Mosquito, threateningly. Kirby began to wish

fervently that he had not come here. Too late did he realize the peril of his position: the overhanging crag above concealed this whole scene from the plateau, and the rock shelf on which they stood overlooked the sea in a drop as precipitous if not as high as the promontory itself.

The surly men pressed closer and closer, crowding all around Kirby, mouthing foul names. He was gazing into the sea of savage, almost murderous faces, and the stench of sweating bodies was in his nostrils. His hand was near his Colt—but he felt quite helpless. His first move would surely mean his finish. He summoned all his nerve, and tried to remain perfectly calm so as not to incite them any further. A faint, mirthless smile flickered across his lips.

"Well," he sighed, "if that is the way you feel, I suppose there is nothing more I can say. I am sorry you refuse to make friends." He started to turn, very gently and unobtrusively. "I'll leave you now and——"

It happened then. A savage growl broke from Grossbeck, and somebody else grabbed Kirby from behind, getting a strangle-hold on his neck and pulling him half off his balance. Then the whole mob, stirred to action, was upon him like a pack of wolves. A hand was clapped over his mouth like a clamp of steel, so he could not shout. He struggled desperately, frantically, trying to get out his Colt. He did get it out, but they were twisting it from his hands. Rather than let them have it, he made one stupendous effort and managed to hurl the weapon over the cliff into the sea. But this only spurred the men to wilder fury. They punched and kicked and cracked at the Mosquito until he was almost insensible. Blood was streaming from his face now, and the sight of it instantly roused a lust in the men for more. They went berserk.

"Kill him!" The cry rose fiendishly, and they all took it up with a sort of demoniac glee.

"Kill the Jonah! Kill the dirty Yankee swine!"

"Into the sea with him—nobody will ever know we did it!"

And the Mosquito, to his utter horror, found himself being swept as if by a wave toward the brink of the rock ledge. Weak and inarticulate, he could make no resistance. His arms were locked and his legs had no footing. He was utterly at the mercy of this mob of bloodthirsty men, and in every face now he could read death.

THE burly Grossbeck seemed suddenly to turn into a primitive beast. His face took on a wild, maniacal

expression, and his eyes gleamed with the true lust of the killer. With his brute strength he suddenly seized the Yank from the milling crowd and lifted him bodily into the air with his two hands, as if Kirby were a mere feather. The Mosquito squirmed and writhed helplessly while the giant, amid savage cheers, calmly carried his victim to the brink of the precipice and held him poised over space!

A dizzy nausea overcame the Mosquito and his brain reeled. As if in a dream he was aware of the dazzling sun in his eyes—and below him, the sheer, giddy drop into the crashing sea. He was helpless, utterly helpless. He did not have the strength even to shout.

Grossbeck's voice rose in exultant glee. "Here he goes!" he shouted to his cheering comrades. "Here goes the swine of a Yankee! Watch!" He braced himself for the throw, lifting the Mosquito as high as he could. The sky and sea seemed to merge confusedly before Kirby's dazed vision, and he closed his eyes. Death now—swift, certain death! Grossbeck gave a final yell,

"Now he goes——"

"Stop!" The rasping voice came like the crack of a whip. The men all turned, startled, and Grossbeck stood there still holding Kirby aloft, as Captain Engel, in a perfect frenzy of rage, burst into the midst of the gathering. "Put that man down at once!" he roared at Grossbeck.

A look of surly defiance came over Grossbeck's face, and he raised Kirby high in the air again, determined to hurl the Yank into the sea before he could be stopped. But as the captain roared again, "Put him down!" the impulse seemed to leave Grossbeck, and he turned almost mechanically and dropped the Mosquito to the ground. Kirby got up, shaken and dazed, and stood mopping the blood and sweat from his face with his dirty handkerchief. The whole crew looked frightened now—but they were sullen in their fear. The captain faced them, his eyes ablaze. "I knew you were up to no good," he told them furiously, "when the American failed to return to the plateau. Then I heard your insane howling. And," he burst out, fiercely, "I've caught you—openly disobeying my orders!" He turned to Grossbeck. "You will be disciplined for this, Grossbeck, when we get back to civilization! And as for the rest of you, I can only say that I am disgusted with your behavior and thoroughly ashamed of you!" He then addressed Kirby, and his tone was still angry: "Come on," he snapped. "We shall return to the plateau!"

For just one moment the crew seemed to recover some of their former surliness, and they started to growl and move toward both the captain and Kirby, as if they meant to detain the two. But some tiny thread of military respect for their leader remained to hold them back. And the captain and Kirby left them and climbed the rocks toward the plateau, with Kirby still a little dizzy and weak enough to falter a bit in the climb. The captain was not sparing the Mosquito from his wrath by any means:

"You did a foolish and idiotic thing!" he snapped. "By all rights you should have been killed! I told you to keep away from the crew!"

Kirby felt thoroughly ashamed. He bit his lip. "I'm damned sorry," he said, sincerely. "I certainly owe my life to you now, and I can't forgive myself for the trouble I've made for you." He shook his head gloomily. "I feel pretty rotten about the whole thing." The captain softened a trifle then. "Well," he conceded, gruffly, "I suppose the trouble was bound to come anyway, things being as they are. We'll forget about it."

They reached the plateau. The other officers greeted them with tense inquiries, wanting to know what had happened.

"The crew is getting wild," the captain told them. "They tried to kill this American, but I managed to stop them just in time."

"How unfortunate!" sighed von Bulow, but luckily the captain, in his agitated condition, missed the acrid meaning of the words. The Zeppelin commander was now scooping out a drink for Kirby, since the latter was badly shaken. Kirby gamely refused the precious water, but the captain insisted, and finally the Mosquito drank gratefully. It revived him considerably and he felt much better. His lost Colt was now replaced by one of the Lugers, which he sheathed in his belt.

"I can see that I won't be able to control the crew much longer," the captain was saying, his rage having cooled again to an apprehensive worry. "They are getting more and more arrogant and they haven't much respect left. I am afraid they will try to start real trouble very soon."

No sooner had he spoken the prophetic words than one of the officers gave a sudden shout. "Look!" he exclaimed. "Here they come—the whole crowd of them!"

Sure enough the whole crew, with the giant Grossbeck in the lead, were climbing up toward the plateau. There was a certain boldness about their approach, as if they had taken an attitude and were

determined to stick to it. The captain went over and resumed his stubborn stand by the water keg. The rest of the officers and Kirby waited tensely, instinctively feeling at their revolvers.

The crew came up. They stepped upon the plateau. They faced the captain with sullen defiance. For a moment there was a tense silence. Then the captain spoke calmly.

"Well?" he demanded.

The huge Grossbeck stepped boldly forward. He cleared his throat and spoke, though his eyes avoided the captain's. "We want water," he said, sullenly. "We have come to get it."

The captain thought a moment. Then he gave a sudden shrug. "Very well," he conceded. "Since it is almost noon, we can have something to eat and then I will give out the usual water rations."

This daunted Grossbeck considerably, for he had expected a blunt refusal which would have enabled him to take a definite and opposite stand. The captain's concession left him a little at loss. But exhorted by the crew behind him, he recovered his determination.

"We don't want to eat," he said. "And we don't want a sip of water—we want a drink. And," his voice rose now, as he became more and more bold, "you're going to give it to us!"

The captain's tone was cold. "In other words," he said, wetting his lips, "you are giving me orders?"

"We want water," Grossbeck repeated, with dull evasion. The crew behind him urged him on, telling him to go ahead. His courage began to grow then, and a glare of real defiance came into his eyes. Suddenly he started to walk straight towards the water keg, with the others pushing behind him.

"Stop!" the captain commanded, with stern authority, as he stood in front of the keg like a wall. "I forbid you to come any farther."

Grossbeck halted almost mechanically. The other men shouted at him to go on. He turned around and looked at them, and the sight of their defiant faces gave him fresh strength. Again he started to walk toward the kegs.

"Stop, I tell you!" the Zeppelin commander roared, but this time Grossbeck came right on, his swarthy face taking on its dangerous scowl. The rest of the crew stayed right behind him, their shouts growing more and more savage. It was a tense moment. The officers and Kirby stood watching, waiting, wondering what was to be done. But Captain Engel appeared to have no such doubts. Suddenly the Zeppelin commander

seemed to freeze into rigidity and his eyes again turned to a hard, steel-like gray. He pulled out his Luger and he aimed the revolver unwaveringly at the approaching giant.

"One more step," he warned, in a voice that was deadly in its icy calmness, "and I shoot to kill!"

Grossbeck stopped again, a genuine fear conflicting with his surly determination. But the crew behind him, thoroughly aroused now, shouted out to him, "Go on! Do not let him bluff you! He will not dare to shoot, for we are all with you! Go on!" Still Grossbeck wavered until some of the men began to call him a coward, and offered to take his place. Then a reckless fury seized him. With a savage snarl he literally leaped forward.

There was a sharp report and a spurt of flame leaped vaguely in the dazzling sunlight. Grossbeck stopped in his tracks. A look of blank astonishment came over his swarthy features. Then, with a grunt, he plunged face forward, and lay where he had fallen.

The crew fell back in sudden, cringing horror. A gasp came from the officers. And Kirby stared with incredulous eyes, absolutely dumfounded by this grim demonstration of German military discipline. |

CAPTAIN ENGEL stood, rigid as stone, while a thin wisp of acrid smoke still curled insidiously from his revolver. And in the ghastly hush which had fallen over the whole plateau the captain's voice seemed to ring out clear and loud.

"I see that the time has come to tell you the thing I had hoped to keep from you until the very end," he said to the crew. And so, I want you to know now that our situation here is quite hopeless, that if we are rescued at all it will be a miracle." And he went on in a stony voice, telling them about the skeletons and the hapless submarine crew who had rotted away here.

They listened in tense silence, and with an unbelief which changed slowly to cold terror. At first they were all shocked and nonplussed. They stood there, not knowing what to do. But then their anger returned—and now it was the rage of desperation. Once more they faced the captain with surly defiance, though they had no leader now.

"If it is so hopeless, why can't we drink up the water and be done with it?"

"Why must we hold out just to rot away?"

"Because," answered the captain, with calm patience, "while there is life there is hope—a trite saying but one that is nevertheless true."

They were far from satisfied. They were growing

surly again, and they were glancing with increasing emotion at the body of their former leader, which still sprawled on the ground. Grossbeck's death now began to fill them with a desire for vengeance.

"You killed Grossbeck!" they shouted. "You murdered him in cold blood!"

"I must have discipline," came the captain's cold reply. "And that goes for every one of you!"

A growl of challenging defiance met this last statement.

"What do we care?" some one shouted. "We'd rather all be shot than rot away! We are not afraid!"

"We want water!" the others yelled. "Give us water."

"I am still willing to pass out the usual noon rations," the captain told them.

"No, we want it all!" they insisted greedily. "Give us the keg!" And they began to press forward again, growling and threatening. The officers and Kirby, feeling that an open battle was inevitable now, started to reach for their revolvers. For a moment the captain continued to brandish his own Luger with cold purpose. But then, suddenly, he let the gun fall limply to his side, and his cold rigidity seemed to melt. His face relaxed into haggard, almost tragic lines, and his eyes suddenly glistened.

"Is there not one man among you?" he entreated, in a last desperate appeal. "Is there not one who will be loyal, who will be true to the Zeppelin service? Are you all cowards and babies?"

Again the men fell back a little, some of them looking ashamed. One or two seemed on the verge of stepping forward and declaring their loyalty to the captain. But again their fear of the majority held them back. It seemed that a clear division must remain between officers and crew.

"Not even one of you?" the captain repeated, in despair. And then suddenly he seemed to resign. He threw up his hands in a futile, helpless gesture. "Then we will continue this no longer," he said, and his voice was weary. All at once he looked very old—a tired old man whose strength was gone. "I have done my best to save you from yourselves, but it is useless. Now I am through." He choked, and a tear rolled ludicrously down his hirsute face. But then he pulled himself up with a sudden, proud dignity, and squared his shoulders. Calmly he stepped aside from the water' keg, leaving it unprotected. "Take it," he told the crew. "It is yours."

The crew stared at him in awed surprise, and the officers and Kirby were absolutely dumfounded.

"*Herr Kapitan*, are you mad?" von Bulow

demanded in alarm. "Certainly you do not mean to let them drink all the water!"

The captain looked at him bitterly. "What else is there to do? We can't shoot them down like the dogs they are. That is impossible, and you know it."

Von Bulow bit his lip. He knew it all too well and so did the other officers, and even Kirby.

The crew was still standing there, silent and dazed, not knowing what to do now.

"Go on!" the captain urged them, and now his tone was bitter with scorn. He was disgusted with them, disillusioned. "Go on, like the cowards you are! Guzzle up the water—and destroy our only remaining chance for life—Go ahead!"

Still they hesitated. It began to look as if their shame was actually going to get the better of them. But then their glances went to the unguarded water keg, and in their minds' eye they saw the refreshing, quenching liquid in that keg. The sun was blazing down on them and they were thirsty. That was enough.

One man started forward, then a few more, and then suddenly the whole crowd went in a wild, confused rush. So intent were they all on getting to the keg that many of them tripped irreverently over the body of their fallen leader, Grossbeck. When they did reach the keg there commenced a greedy scramble as each man tried to get at the water first. They fought like a bunch of wild animals, punching, pushing, cursing savagely. And through it all Captain Engel and his officers and Kirby stood apart and watched, grim and silent, their hands at their sides.

After a terrific fight some one managed to get the keg open, and what followed was a debauch of water-drinking. The men went mad in their lust. They yelled and shrieked as they fought to guzzle the precious water. They spilled more than they drank. Finally the keg overturned and they groveled down on the ground, fighting and pushing to catch the spilling water in their dripping mouths. It was a disgusting sight. A feeling of revulsion overcame Kirby as he watched it, and the captain and the other officers seemed sickened. And when one of the men, the only thoughtful one in the bestial crowd, shouted, "*Herr Kapitan*, are you not going to drink with us—you and the others?" the captain shook his head and turned away in rank disgust, and Kirby and the officers turned away too.

IT ENDED as suddenly as it had started. The water was gone—all gone. There was not a drop left. Peacefully now, like gorged beasts, the crew got up and

left the empty kegs smashed and broken. The men were quiet now, and a little dazed, as if they were just coming out of a drunk. The captain turned and spoke to them in a dull, contemptuous voice: "Well, you have done it now," he told them. "I hope you are satisfied. Now we shall simply have to rot."

They looked at him in sudden, open guilt, as a wave of reaction swept them with remorse. Slowly they realized what they had done—realized that they could get no more water now. Their surliness was gone, and in its place was a shame which made them silent and uncomplaining, for they knew they had brought this upon themselves.

The captain spoke again, with the same dull contempt. "Perhaps now that you have all indulged yourselves, you will pay some respects to the dead and help us bury poor Grossbeck."

The crew helped in the burial, all too willingly. Grossbeck's funeral was a brief affair. There was hardly any ceremony. They did not bother to wrap the corpse in canvas: they merely tied a stone to it and tossed it into the sea with a short incantation from the captain. What was the use of a ceremony now, when they were all going to die?

The captain now proceeded to straighten things out as best he could. He assigned one of his officers as lookout on the promontory and the man took his place to resume the futile, hopeless scanning of the empty seas. Then they all settled down—to rot.

Kirby was standing gloomily, watching the sea with the lookout. Nearby was the hostile von Bulow, who also scanned the desolate, shining waters. Prompted by a sudden impulse, Kirby turned to the lieutenant and made a last, warm appeal to the stubborn Boche.

"Look here, von Bulow," he said, "now that things are so hopeless, don't you think you and I ought to forget our quarrel? We're both dead men, so why not die without any grudges? Come on," and he held out his hand, cheerfully, "let's bury the hatchet and be done with it!"

For just one moment von Bulow's hard features seemed to soften a little, and the lieutenant seemed almost about to take Kirby's hand and make friends. But then, as if he suddenly remembered something, his face froze again into that stubborn, relentless mask, and he turned away silently. Kirby shrugged. Von Bulow would hate him until the bitter end.

THE rest of that day was uneventful, except that it seemed to pass even more interminably than the

previous days, and the sun blazed with even more scorching intensity. The lookouts on the promontory were changed with frequent regularity, so that no man would have to stand the strain of peering through the telescope long. Kirby served his turn at this as well as all the other officers, except Captain Engel. As for the crew, they were all silent in their hopelessness, and they made no complaint. Thus far they were not yet suffering any acute pangs of thirst, for they were still refreshed by all the water they had guzzled. Only the officers and Kirby, who had not joined that debauch, really felt painfully dry.

With the coming of night, the usual fire was set blazing. And the night was one endless horror, a lurid miasma of torment and anguish. Thirst was at last beginning to gnaw at the men now, and it grew more and more painful. They lay groaning and writhing, clutching at their dry, burning throats, gulping at the empty air in a frenzied effort to cool. Kirby himself felt a great, choking lump swelling inside of his own throat, and the officers were suffering with equal intensity. None of them could sleep. And the dawn of the fourth day found them still wideawake and in torture. And now the sun again—the hateful, hellish sun! Unrelenting and radiant as ever. The sun, like fire on an open wound. The men's thirst began to grow really dangerous. They clutched at their throats more and more wildly, and passed dry, swollen tongues over their dry, swollen lips. They went down to the beach and wallowed pitifully in the warm surf, some of them even drinking the salt water, which only made them thirstier and seared their burning throats.

And yet the crew, though they complained more and more in their agony, did not again show any anger or surliness toward the officers or Kirby. They still knew that they had brought this upon themselves and that they had to suffer the consequences. Besides, why vent anger on the officers or Kirby when they, too, were only on their way to death? As a matter of fact the Mosquito and the officers, being in a far worse condition than the crew, were beginning to feel deathly weak. And the captain, who had drunk the least of them all, looked so bad that it seemed he must be the very first to go.

None of them could eat now; their throats were too swollen to permit the passage of food, nor did they feel any hunger. Thirst was their only ailment, thirst which burned its way into their very souls, which clutched them in an ever-tightening grip. Death was closing in on them, slowly but inexorably—a slow death of

torture. And as the long afternoon came and started to drag by, they all lay on the plateau, sick and weak and already feeling the fatal torpor of that death creeping over them.

Kirby was serving his turn on the promontory now, standing there quite weakly, and knowing that soon the strength would go out of his legs completely. Wearily he scanned the shining seas through his telescope, and wished futilely that some miracle would take the salt out of all that water. And when he saw something floating out there past the breakers, he did not shout—for there was no sense to rouse the men to look at something that could be of no use or help to them. He merely called Captain Engel, and the latter, walking with some difficulty now, came over and looked.

"That's peculiar," the captain said, without any excitement. "Some of the wreckage of our Zeppelin is still floating on the surface, and we did not see it. One of the deflated gas-bags is holding it up—evidently there is just enough hydrogen left in the thing to do it. It will sink before long, though, when the gas leaks out."

Kirby looked at it again, curiously. Sure enough, he saw that the small mass of wreckage was held aloft by a deflated, fabric bag, for most of it consisted of twisted metal girders. He focused his telescope on it, until it stood out—distinct to the minutest detail.

"What are those big cans there in the middle of all the stuff?" he asked. "They look like depth bombs."

The captain took the telescope to look at them. By this time some of the officers, and two or three of the crew, were also gathering to glance listlessly at the floating wreckage.

"Those are petrol cans," the captain was replying now. "This seems to be the portion of the Zeppelin where we stored our petrol. Those cans are all smashed and broken and the petrol has spilled from every one of them. No," he suddenly corrected himself, "I see one that looks intact."

As he heard these words, a strange change began to come over the Mosquito. His eyes suddenly seemed to shine with new life, and his hoarse voice rose eagerly, excitedly, "You mean it's full of gasoline—that can?"

"Probably," the captain answered, disinterestedly. "We did not open any of those drums there. It ought to have about two hundred liters of petrol in it."

"Two hundred liters!" Kirby exclaimed. "Why, that's about fifty gallons!" The captain and the others stared at him in consternation, wondering whether he, too,

was going insane. He looked strangely animated now, and the color was flowing back into his unshaven face. Suddenly he leaned over the side of the promontory which overlooked the beach, and his eyes fell eagerly on the Sopwith which still squatted there, where he had left and forgotten it. In a sudden frenzy of excitement, he seized the astonished captain's arm almost roughly, "God, captain, if I could fix that plane—if we could get that gas——"

And then at last the others began to understand, and their awe turned slowly to a wild, surging hope, a hope which started to bring back their ebbing strength. Almost all of them crowded around the Mosquito now, looking up to him as if he were indeed a friend. Their voices were pitiful in their frenzied eagerness.

"Can you fix the airplane?"

"Can you fly for help?"

"Do you think you can save us?" More and more excited and eager they grew. Even von Bulow seemed to be in good sorts now, though he did not yet speak to Kirby.

Captain Engel, however, was frankly skeptical. "I am afraid that in your condition you would not be able to fly even if you could fix the plane, and fill it with that gas," he told Kirby.

Kirby laughed—and the heartiness of his laugh seemed to disprove the captain's statement. "I could fly even if I was under ether," the Mosquito maintained, joyously. But then he became furiously impatient. "For God's sake, we must find some way of getting that can of petrol! Do you think we can get it, captain?"

"If it doesn't sink before we have a chance," the captain conceded. "However, it will take a lot of energy and no small risk to bring it in. Suppose you look at your plane first to make sure you can fix it. Then we can try to get the petrol."

Kirby nodded quickly. And, weak as he was, he fairly dashed down the rocks to the beach. And the others, still stimulated by their hope, followed him eagerly. Another moment or so and they were all crowding around the Sopwith, which had suddenly become so conspicuous and important. They watched curiously, while Kirby began to examine the ship hastily, yet with a practiced eye which overlooked no detail.

The plane was in far worse shape than it had been the other day. To begin with, it was lucky to be there at all: its tires, half flat, were covered with slime and seaweed, showing that the high tide had come up this far and threatened to wash it off the beach. The wings

and fuselage of the ship were badly warped and dried from exposure to the sun, and the dope was peeling from them. Still they looked sturdy enough to hold. As for the engine, radiator and gas tank, they were just as Kirby had left them—damaged, but not beyond repair. He could refill the radiator with sea water. Luckily there was plenty of oil in the engine, and the controls, aside from a slight rust on the wires, were in good condition. There still remained a splintered strut to be fixed, and the compass was out of gear.

Kirby turned hastily to the captain, who was also looking over the plane. "It can be fixed," the Mosquito told him, "though it will be a terrific job. Perhaps some of you can help me; you ought to know something about air plane engines, having them on your, Zeppelin."

"We do," the captain admitted, and now he, too, was growing eager. "We shall certainly give you all the assistance we can."

"But now that petrol—" Kirby exclaimed nervously. "We've got to get it before it's too late!"

The captain gave a swift assent. And then a small crew of six was picked out of the men who seemed the strongest. Kirby himself volunteered eagerly, but since he knew nothing of seamanship, he was immediately refused. Instead, the little crew was placed in charge of no other than von Bulow, and again Kirby admired the Prussian's guts. The lieutenant and his party, manning one of those perilous collapsible boats, bravely set forth to salvage that wreckage.

HOW they ever did it was a mystery which Kirby could never fathom, but perhaps that was because he did not know how thoroughly German naval men are trained, even if they are of the Zeppelin division. Thirsty, half dead, that little crew nevertheless rowed out into the treacherous sea beneath a blinding sun, every large wave threatening to overturn them. They rowed out to that floating wreckage, and they fastened a line to it. Then they started back, towing the thing behind them, which meant that they had to row three times as hard.

For a while it looked as if their efforts were going to be useless. It seemed certain that the wreckage would sink before they could pull it in. But then at last the collapsible boat reached the beach, and here the whole crowd of men seized the line and pulled it in with great rapidity. The wreckage was dragged right up upon the beach, and in another moment they had rolled that intact petrol drum out of all the mess. A

quick examination confirmed the captain's statement. Fifty gallons of petrol, untouched by the salty sea, were at their disposal!

It was while they were still looking at the petrol, that Kirby saw the group of officers suddenly gathering around Captain Engel and talking to him in a low voice. Kirby could not hear what they said, but from the looks of their faces, he soon began to suspect. It occurred to him now that, being Zeppelin men, it was quite likely that one or more of them might know how to fly a plane. And it stood to reason that if such was the case, they would not hesitate to take the Sopwith right out of his hands and use it for their own purposes. Captain Engel, square as he was, could certainly have no scruples about such a measure. For after all this was war—now that a rescue seemed so close within grasp. They knew well that if Kirby flew that plane, he would make it his business to bring back Allied help. And they had hoped to make a German submarine base of this island.

Tense, worried, the Mosquito began to rack his brain for some scheme. What could he do to prevent them from taking that plane away from him? And then came a sudden inspiration. Hastily, he ran over to the Sopwith. Fortunately none of the other men were at the plane now—they were all looking at the wreckage and the petrol. Nor did they notice Kirby when, taking a wrench from the tool box, he began to work at the engine. In just a couple of moments he had removed every one of the spark plugs. Then, with his plane serving as a screen which hid his movements from the other men, he buried those spark plugs in the sand, and marked the spot where they were buried with two pieces of shell.

Presently the crowd of men came over to the Sopwith once more. Captain Engel and the officers seemed to look at the plane with close interest now. And as they examined the engine they immediately noticed the missing spark plugs. Kirby did not try to hide the truth. He faced the captain grimly.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but I felt that I had to hide those spark plugs, for my own good, and I can assure you that you will never find them."

The captain stared at him in amazement. "But why on earth did you do that?" he asked. "I thought you wanted to fix the plane as soon as possible."

"I do," Kirby assured him, "but—well, I just had an idea that Zeppelin men might be able to fly airplanes. And therefore," he looked the captain squarely in the eye, "I cannot get back those spark plugs until I have

your promise that I will be allowed to fly my own plane alone—provided we can fix it."

The captain gave a little laugh. "In a way," he said frankly, "I don't blame you for your precautions." Then his face darkened. "Still, if we made a thorough search we might find those spark plugs and—" He paused, and glanced around at the men. He seemed to realize with a shock that they were all in a serious condition, himself, included. They were slowly dying of thirst, and it was only the stimulus of their hope that made them seem momentarily alive. And so the captain faced Kirby gloomily. "Since any delay might be fatal to us all," he said, "I guess you win, Captain Kirby. We should prefer to be rescued by an enemy ship rather than rot away here. I will give you my promise."

"Your word of honor," Kirby insisted, intending to leave no loopholes.

"My word of honor as an officer of the Imperial Navy," the captain promised.

"And I know that word is good," Kirby told him, for added effect. "Very well. That is all I wanted. We'll waste no more time." He dug up the spark plugs, and the work on the plane was immediately begun.

It was arduous work. Kirby supervised it, while the officers and some of the crew who knew about airplanes took turns at helping him. Otherwise they rested, weak and exhausted, for now again their thirst was overcoming them. Toward the end of the afternoon they were all so weak that they could do hardly anything, and Kirby, dizzy and feverish, really began to wonder whether he was going to be able to fly that plane after all. He had hoped that he would be able to take off this afternoon, but because of the condition of himself and the men, the work was going slower than he had expected. And now, with the sun starting to go down, it looked as if darkness would stop them before they were through.

This thought spurred them to fresh efforts. They all rallied their ebbing strength and did their best. And one of the gamest and most helpful of the lot was von Bulow—even if he did scowl every time Kirby spoke to him. As for Captain Engel, the Zeppelin commander was really so ill now that he could not help in the work. He sat on the sand, watching with hopeful expectation. But he did manage, when Kirby was taking one of his rests, to work out a proposed flight for the Mosquito.

"You can take this map," he told Kirby, handing him a chart. "That gives you everything, the position of the island and all. Do you intend to fly to the mainland?"

Kirby frowned. "I don't know," he said. "I think I'll fly straight toward British East Africa, and see if I can't pick up some ship on the way. If not, I'll go on to land, provided the gas holds out."

"And how do you intend to communicate with a ship if you do see one? You have a land plane."

"Yes, but I can risk a crash-landing in the water and get picked up. Then too, I have a dispatch tube and a pad, and I can drop a message if necessary. I can decide that when the time comes." The captain nodded, and Kirby wearily went back to work. The sun was already a glowing red ball, low in the sky. The men hurried to fix the plane, forcing their weak muscles to respond.

At last, even as the sun was sinking into the western sea, they were putting the gasoline into the repaired tank, and filling the radiator with sea water. Five minutes later, with Kirby at the switch and some of the men tugging the propeller, the engine roared into sudden, triumphant life.

A shout of hoarse, frenzied joy rose from the men, and they danced around in glee, though they were as unsteady as drunkards. The plane was fixed, and its engine was purring smoothly. Even the compass was working again.

Kirby would have liked to take off immediately, while he was still physically able, but he knew that a night flight would be reckless and probably futile. With just those fifty gallons of gas to spare, he could take no chances. It was three hundred and fifty miles to the mainland, and with the plane not in its best condition, fifty gallons of gas probably wouldn't take him there. And in order to find a ship, he must have the best possible visibility; starlight was hardly suitable. The only thing to do was to wait until to-morrow morning, when he would have a crystal clear sky, if the present weather held out—and it doubtless would. Then he'd be able to spot a ship miles and miles away.

The crew was bitterly disappointed when he announced his intentions to wait. They begged him, implored him to go immediately and save them from this hellish agony. Even Captain Engel did not seem to like the idea of waiting, but the other officers, including von Bulow, advised the Zeppelin commander that it was the wisest thing to do, and finally he reluctantly agreed.

However, as the night closed upon them, they still remained at the plane, making every preparation for its flight, so that Kirby could get off without any delay the first thing in the morning. The Mosquito even pinned the captain's chart on the dashboard. Then

the little ship was wheeled to the very, extremity of the beach, so that the tide could not reach it. Stones were placed in front of its wheels, and they even put a rude cover of canvas over its wings, to protect them. The Sopwith, which had been so shamefully neglected these last few days, was now being given all the tender treatment of a thoroughbred horse before a race.

THEN the weak, thirst-ridden men climbed back to the plateau—for the beach was too wet and unpleasant to sleep on, and besides they wanted to burn their usual signal fire. Perhaps, after all, a German ship might be attracted before the next morning. But though they did build a fire, they all felt too tired and weak to tend it long. Most of them did not seem to care that they were going to be rescued by Allied help; they only wanted to be rescued. And for the first time during their exile on this desolate island, all of them slept that night, including Captain Engel. Their confidence that they were going to be saved, as well as their feverish condition, enabled them to fall into a deep slumber which was almost a coma. At first Kirby was a little too excited and worried about his fateful flight to sleep. However, by telling himself that he would be in far better shape after a good night's rest, he forced himself to relax by sheer will power. And he too fell into a deep slumber.

The first streaks of dawn were just coming over the dark sky, and the sun had not yet risen, when the Mosquito, prompted by some sixth sense, suddenly awakened with a start. He sat up—and the very move made him groan. His muscles were sore and aching. Needles seemed to be pricking his eyeballs. His head seemed full of lead, and his throat seemed hardly to exist—it was swollen into numbness. He shook his head vigorously to clear it. Then he looked around. In the dim, eerie light, he saw the men sprawling out in various positions, all of them sleeping soundly. Nothing seemed to be wrong, and yet something must have awakened him.

He rose unsteadily to his feet, fighting down dizziness. God, he felt pretty bad this morning!. Again he looked around. And then, suddenly, he stiffened tensely.

Down the rocks which led to the beach, he thought he saw a dim figure descending slowly but furtively between the jutting stones and brush. Instinctively, and without bothering to wake the other men, Kirby followed, staggering down the rocky decline. He did not see the figure again until he came to the beach, and

then he saw the dim form running straight toward the squatting Sopwith. In sudden alarm, Kirby managed to gather enough strength to run after him, shouting out a hoarse challenge. As the Mosquito came right up, the figure suddenly wheeled and faced him. It was von Bulow.

Before Kirby could recover from his surprise, the Prussian Lieutenant, with a low snarl, suddenly whipped out his Luger and aimed it point-blank at the Mosquito. And then, for the first time in several days, he at last deigned to speak to Kirby. And his voice was anything but pleasant.

"Put up your hands, swine!" he commanded, tersely. "Put them up, or I'll kill you this instant!"

Kirby, seeing that the man was quite desperate and meant business, was forced to comply. Sullenly he raised his hands. With a swift gesture von Bulow stripped him of his revolver.

"What is the meaning of this?" the Mosquito demanded, furiously. "The captain gave me his word of honor that——"

"What the captain did is none of my affair," snapped von Bulow, and a crafty look came over his face. He seemed to be animated by a strange excitement—far more full of life than Kirby was. "I can not help it if the captain makes agreements with any Yankee swine. As for me, I am a loyal German, and I am taking this responsibility myself."

"The captain won't let you!" Kirby told him, defiantly. "He'll forbid you to break his promise!"

"He won't have time to stop me," von Bulow said, with sneering triumph.

"And if you wake him or the others up, I'll kill you on the spot—and no one will bother to punish me for it either." He smiled a cold, mocking smile. "And if you are dead, a German will have to fly your plane anyway!"

A feeling of helpless despair began to come over Kirby, as he saw how cleverly this Prussian had schemed. Tears of rage came to his eyes.

"You won't get away with it!" he yelled, trying to put conviction into his voice. "You start the engine of that plane and you'll have the whole crowd down here. The captain will stop you!"

Von Bulow's face again was crafty. "You underestimate my abilities," he sneered. "I know how to get a plane off in a hurry, before I can be stopped. It was not for nothing," he boasted, "that I served for a year in the Imperial flying corps, and became an ace on the Western Front."

Kirby suddenly stiffened. Von Bulow—an ace on the Western Front! The two things suddenly associated themselves. By God, he remembered now. He had heard of the ace von Bulow, who was supposed to be one of the most skilful flyers the Germans had. Kirby had never met him in the air, for they had been on different sectors. And after that von Bulow had transferred to the Zeppelin division, doubtless because they needed men in that service.

"And as for you," von Bulow continued, and the scowl on his face was venomous, "I knew who you were from the start. I have kept you in mind—you and your two damned comrades! I have not forgotten that it was you who shot down my best friend, Baron von Steinhardt!"

Again Kirby stiffened in surprise. Baron von Steinhardt! Clearly he remembered how that ace had crumpled beneath the withering fire of his guns!

"No, I have not forgotten," the Prussian repeated, with increasing malice. "And I had hoped to kill you. But the high command will be more pleased to have the leader of the Three Mosquitoes alive. And unless I find it necessary to shoot him, they will have him alive—as soon as I have flown for German help."

This last statement, spoken calmly but with firm conviction, filled the Mosquito with such desperate fury that he had all he could do to keep from hurling himself upon the Prussian. But such a move would have meant certain death—the wary von Bulow had him too well covered.

"And now," said the lieutenant, "time presses. You will do what I say. Put your hands behind your back, and keep your eyes straight ahead—otherwise I shoot!"

Kirby hesitated stubbornly, hesitated until he saw a sudden fire leap into the Boche's eyes. Then, again realizing that von Bulow would just as soon kill him as not, he obeyed.

Von Bulow walked behind him, and so cleverly and swiftly did the Boche work that Kirby did not have time to realize what he was doing. In a flash von Bulow had trussed up the Mosquito's wrists, with a large handkerchief. In order to do this, he had to shove his Luger back in its holster for the moment, so he could use his two hands. Thus, for a brief instant, Kirby was not covered, but he didn't know it until it was too late, and his hands were already firmly tied. The clever trick made him even more wild with rage.

"You dirty skunk!" he burst out, hoarsely. "I'll make you pay for this!"

"Your remarks are unpleasant," said von Bulow, with cruel mockery. "There is no reason why I should listen to them." And he stepped forward and roughly shoved another handkerchief into Kirby's sore, swollen mouth. The Mosquito choked, trying to spit out the gag, but von Bulow only poked it in farther. The lieutenant then took off Kirby's shirt, and with it he trussed up the Mosquito's legs. Brutally, he gave Kirby a push which sent him sprawling to the sand. He lay there, writhing helplessly, unable, to move or shout.

Von Bulow, with sudden tense haste, now hurried over to the Sopwith. He removed the canvas cover from the wings, and took the stones from the wheels. The sun was beginning to rise now, and the sky was growing lighter. Kirby, still writhing futilely, prayed that Captain Engel and the others would wake up and come to his aid.

Von Bulow was jerking at the propeller now, pulling it through compression. Kirby kept struggling. The Prussian switched on the ignition. He pulled the propeller again, and the Sopwith's engine shattered the morning stillness with its raucous bark.

In an instant von Bulow was in the cockpit, working throttle and choke. But at the same time the crowd of men on the plateau suddenly hurried down the rocky hill. The roar of the engine had roused them all.

Von Bulow did not hesitate. With his motor hardly warmed, he opened his throttle full. The Sopwith moved forward in the sand, a little sluggishly because its tires did not have much air in them. With marvelous skill, von Bulow taxied the little plane around to face the length of the narrow beach. The rest of the officers and the crew swarmed across the sands. Kirby squirmed for all he was worth to attract their attention. They saw him, and one of the officers came to him, and commenced to untie him. The others were staring in bewilderment at the Sopwith which was now skimming down the beach with increasing speed.

Then the gag was out of his mouth, and he was shouting frantically, "Stop him! Stop him!"

BUT all of the men were so confused that they didn't know what he meant. Nor could they have stopped the plane anyway. For in the next second, the Sopwith's wheels lifted from the sand, and the little ship swept gracefully into the air, to climb toward the sky.

Kirby, untied now, was on his feet, in a frenzy of rage and despair. "Damn him!" he shouted, as he saw the Sopwith fading into a tiny distant speck against the

gray dawn. "Damn him to hell!" Sobs tore from him. "It isn't fair!" he shouted furiously. "It isn't right!"

Captain Engel suddenly stood before him. The captain looked ghastly to-day. But he was as firm as ever. He faced Kirby calmly.

"Of course, I knew nothing about this," he told the Mosquito, slowly. "I would have stopped it if I could—for I gave you my word. "But—" a rueful smile flickered over his cracked lips, "I'm afraid I cannot say that I am sorry it happened."

They all went back to the plateau now, to wait and to watch in suspense.

The sun rose and blazed, and the usual scorching morning began. The men sat around, growing weaker and weaker, holding on desperately. Captain Engel's life seemed to hang by a mere thread now. The old Zeppelin commander had to lie down, and he did not move, but stared at the sky with listless eyes. Time dragged. The suspense grew. And then, abruptly, a shout arose, and some one pointed with a trembling finger.

Out of the sunny sky a speck was growing larger. Closer and closer it came, until it assumed clear shape and outline. It was the Sopwith—coming back! Swiftly it approached the island in a shallow descent. The men, again invigorated by their frenzied excitement, rushed down to the beach where the plane was preparing to land. Captain Engel, by a painful effort, managed to get up, but some of the men had to help him descend the rocky hill.

The Sopwith glided in, skimmed over the beach, and settled. It taxied to a stop, and as the engine was switched off, the propeller slowly idled to a standstill. Von Bulow climbed from the cockpit—or rather he almost fell from it, so exhausted and weak was he. But his face was full of joy and triumph. He faced the crowd of men, who hailed him warmly.

"We are saved!" he announced exultantly. "Saved! I found one of our cruisers! By sheer luck, it was only a hundred miles away from here, but it took me some time to discover it. I circled over the ship, and despite the fact that they fired upon the Sopwith, I succeeded in dropping a message to them in a dispatch tube, telling them all the details. They signaled me back with their blinkers! They are coming right here, full steam! Just five hours or so—and they will arrive, with plenty of water for us all!"

The words rang like a knell in Kirby's ears. He stood there, resigned, bitter, while the others all cheered hoarsely, madly. Then Captain Engel, swaying a little

as he stood there, questioned von Bulow wonderingly. "But why did you fly way back here, when you yourself are so thirsty and weak? Why did you not crash the plane and get aboard the ship?"

The lieutenant looked at him almost reprovingly. "And leave you here to wait in suspense, without knowing that help was on the way? No, I wanted to come back and tell you—so you would be able to hold on."

At this the whole crowd cheered the lieutenant in warm admiration, and once more Kirby could not help marveling at the Prussian's amazing courage. Von Bulow was one of the bravest men he had ever seen—there was no denying that fact.

"And now," the lieutenant continued, eagerly, as if he weren't tired at all, "I have just about enough petrol left to reach that ship again. Now I shall fly back to it, and get on board, so I can give them further directions and make sure they find this island. Of course, they would find it anyway but—" He broke off abruptly, and the men all stiffened, listening to a sound which had suddenly become audible.

M-m-m-m! Over the roar of the surf, the steady, beelike drone drifted down from the sky, growing louder and louder. The men all looked up, squinting in the blinding sun. And then again some one shouted and pointed.

Overhead, wheeling in slow circles over the island, was a great seaplane. Its wings shimmered in the sun, as it banked like a monstrous hawk. And at the sight of it, Kirby gave a wild yell. For on it were the tricolored circular markings of the Allies. An Allied plane! Where it had come from, how it had ever gotten here, was something he could not even guess. It was a two-seater, with pilot and observer.

The men all stared at it in bewilderment, not knowing what to think. Then some one called out, "Look! They are waving to us!"

Sure enough, a tiny arm was waving from the observer's cockpit.

Kirby, overjoyed, commenced to wave back wildly. And the men waved too, since the flyers of the plane seemed to be friendly even if they were Allies.

Suddenly the seaplane veered from its circular course and, passing right above the beach, headed out over the sea. But not for long. Another graceful bank, and its nose dipped. Down it came gliding, while the men watched it curiously. Its great pontoons settled on the waves of the sea, and, bobbing and rocking violently, it came skimming in toward the beach. As

it reached the shallow water, the pilot opened wide his throttle and got up enough power to send the big plane sliding right onto the dry sand, where it skidded to a sudden stop. Kirby and the Germans rushed toward it.

The two flyers jumped out of their cockpits with an agility which seemed surprising to the weak, tired men on the island. They were dressed in the khaki uniform of the American air service.

"Holy hell!" Kirby yelled, making a wild rush toward them. "You lousy bums, where did you come from? How did you ever get here?" He sobbed and laughed with hysterical excitement.

And the two flyers, upon seeing and hearing Kirby, let out yells of equal joy. Crazily, while the Germans watched with awe and consternation, the two of them danced around Kirby madly, slapping him on the back, embracing him, while he continued to swear at them with sobbing affection. For they were Shorty Carn and the lanky Travis—the other two Mosquitoes! His comrades!

After awhile they calmed down enough to notice Kirby's sickly appearance. A look of alarm came over their faces.

"Gosh, you look like the last rose of summer," Shorty Carn remarked, anxiously. "What in hell has happened to you?"

"Well, outside of being a bit thirsty, I'm fine," Kirby answered.

"I'm sorry, but we didn't bring along any cognac," Shorty told him.

"You poor idiot," Kirby burst out, "who in hell wants cognac? You try going without water a couple of days in this heat, and see if you want cognac!"

Carn and Travis looked really alarmed then.

"We have a thermos jug with us," the lanky Travis drawled, eagerly. "And there's a gallon of cold water in it, for long flights and emergencies." And hastily he reached into the plane, lifted out the jug.

At the sight of it the crowd of thirsty men almost went crazy. A great cry rose from them and they pressed forward, their faces pitiful in their longing, their hands stretched forth beseechingly, and their voices sobbing and imploring. With trembling hands, Kirby took the thermos jug. But the first thing he did was to offer a drink of the cold, fresh water to Captain Engel, who seemed about to keel over at any moment now. The captain tried to refuse, saying that the others should drink first, but Kirby literally forced the cup he had filled into the Zeppelin commander's hand. The

captain held the cup to his swollen lips, and drained it in one uncontrollable gulp. Its effect was magical. Almost instantly he seemed to recover much of his strength, and he no longer swayed as he stood there now. Carn and Travis insisted that Kirby now take his drink, and he did. The clear water passed down his cracked, swollen throat like a cooling caress. He too was instantly revived.

The crew were now holding out their aluminum cups, still begging and imploring. Kirby now figured out just how much he could give to each man. There was enough, he finally decided, for a good cupful apiece. He poured it out into their outstretched aluminum cups, and they all drank gratefully, men and officers. Von Bulow, however, seemed to hesitate when Kirby came to him, but then his thirst overcame his pride, and silently, averting his eyes from the Mosquito's, he held out his cup. And Kirby scowled at him unpleasantly as he filled it.

When everyone had drunk, and Kirby again faced his comrades. "I don't see how in hell you guys found me!" he exclaimed, incredulously "You certainly must have searched every inch of sea!"

"DON'T flatter yourself," Shorty reproved him. "We weren't even looking for you." This was indeed true. During that storm the other day, Carn and Travis had gotten back to Kuma, and they had soon given up their leader for dead. They had been overcome with grief, but gamely they had carried on. The British now gave them this great seaplane, and daily they were taken far out to sea by a mother ship, where they flew about looking for prowling German ships. To-day they had been doing just such work, and they had sighted a German cruiser. Sailing away from this cruiser, they had seen a Sopwith—a Sopwith which they suddenly identified as Kirby's. They forgot all about their mother ship, and followed that scout plane. But the Sopwith had several miles' start on them, and by the time they had come close enough for signaling, the other plane, to their astonishment, had suddenly descended and landed on this strange little island! Certain that Kirby must be down here, they had come down too. Thus had the Three Mosquito been reunited.

Captain Engel and his officers were now, gathering together again, and talking to each other in low whispers. The captain kept frowning and shaking his head. Kirby's eyes suddenly narrowed, as a vague presentiment came over him. He drew Carn and Travis

very close to him, and spoke to them, also in a low whisper which would not be overheard. "Listen, fellers, is there any British ship near here?"

"Our mother ship," Travis whispered back. "It's a fast cruiser and it was about ninety miles from here when we left it. It will be farther now—because it is moving west, toward Africa."

"It's due west from this island, too," Shorty put in.

Kirby nodded. Then, he said intensely, "Well, don't say anything about it—but get out of here as fast as you can and bring back that cruiser! Tell these Jerries there isn't any British ship from here to Africa, and that will make 'em feel sure they're gonna be saved by the German ship that's coming! Now don't forget and——" He broke off abruptly, as Captain Engel, frowning and sober, stepped forward to face Carn and Travis.

"Did you two men come from a ship or from the mainland?" he inquired.

The two Mosquitoes looked him straight in the eye. "We came all the way from Africa and just found this island by dumb luck," Shorty answered. "We did not even manage to work out its position," the clever Travis put in. "Where is it?"

The captain breathed a sigh of relief. But at the same time, paradoxically, he looked strangely troubled.

"I am extremely sorry," he said, slowly, "but in spite of all your kindness——" He paused, but he did not have to say more. For at that moment von Bulow and the other officers suddenly sprang forward, with their revolvers drawn. Carn, Travis, and Kirby were all covered.

"I am obliged to ask you to put up your hands," said Captain Engel, gloomily.

Carn and Travis, more bewildered than frightened, slowly raised their hands. Their revolvers were taken from them, and then the captain allowed them to lower their hands again.

"What the hell is the idea?" Kirby demanded, furiously. "Here these fellows come down when they see a white flag, and they give you water—and you turn around and hold them up!"

The captain shook his head. "The situation is extremely embarrassing," he said, his voice still bitter. "Especially since I feel I am really indebted to you two men for my life. But what can I do? When our cruiser arrives here, this island will be claimed by us, and since it is necessary to keep it all a secret, we will have to hold the three of you prisoners."

Carn and Travis felt outraged, and Kirby was even

wilder than ever in his fury. But at the same time all three of them knew they were caught. For now not only the officers covered them. Some one had gone up to the plateau and brought down guns for the entire crew. And the crew, though they felt friendly toward the Mosquitoes who had revived them, obeyed orders and covered the three men unwaveringly.

Von Bulow now looked more gloatingly triumphant than ever. His sneer seemed to say to Kirby, "And now we have all Three Mosquitoes!" But aloud, he was saying to the captain, "Well, I shall go back, as I said, and get aboard that German ship. I am almost tempted to take that nice seaplane which has been so conveniently placed at our disposal. It is faster than the patched-up Sopwith, and it is probably full of gas. But the sailors on the cruiser, seeing its markings, might accidentally shoot it down, whereas they will recognize the Sopwith now." And so, calmly, he turned and walked over to the Sopwith again, and once more he set its propeller whirring. He then came back to say a last few words to the captain.

And then something broke inside of Kirby, and he lost his head completely. Weak as he was, he suddenly seemed possessed by a demon which gave him a superhuman strength. He did not stop to think. He simply took one furtive glance at the Sopwith, whose motor was throbbing smoothly, and then he acted. With a mad leap, he dashed straight for that plane. The Germans were thrown into utter confusion. They had expected that if any break came, it would come from Carn and Travis, and not from the thirst-weakened Kirby. They had been concentrating their attention and their revolvers on the other two Mosquitoes, and now, before they knew it, Kirby had reached that Sopwith in one wild dash and was leaping into its cockpit!

Von Bulow, the first to recover from his surprise, suddenly let out a savage oath, aimed his Luger, and fired again and again as he rushed toward the Mosquito. Bullets whistled past Kirby's ear, but he paid no attention to them. He was in the cockpit now, and as he settled into the seat he jerked the throttle lever wide open. The deafening roar of the engine all but drowned out the score of shots which now rang out as other men began to fire their revolvers. The plane moved forward. The Germans jumped from its path in frightened haste, but they continued to fire at it as it went streaking down the beach. But Kirby, performing one of the most reckless take-offs of his whole career, zoomed the ship right off the sand, and then he was

rocketing toward the sunny sky, already out of range of the ground fire. Glancing at his compass, he banked directly toward the west—where Carn and Travis had said that British cruiser must be.

In the meantime, down on the beach, von Bulow, purple with rage, had already run straight for the seaplane which still stood with its engine switched off. He shouted savagely to the men, and in just a few seconds he had the motor started, and was leaping into the cockpit. The men pushed the big two-seater into the rolling surf, pulled its tail around, and von Bulow was skimming out through the water at full throttle. The Prussian also made a split-airing take-off. He sent the seaplane shooting breathlessly into the air, and climbed after the Sopwith in hot pursuit.

Kirby, looking down and behind, saw the seaplane coming, saw that it was gaining on him—and above all, saw that von Bulow was at its controls. The Mosquito's eyes narrowed to gleaming slits, and for a moment he was ready to turn and fight the Prussian, have it out with him once and for all. But then, with a sudden shock, he realized that he couldn't fight. He had nothing to fight with! Though the Sopwith's twin machine guns were still in good shape, there were no bullets to shoot from them. The ammunition belts had been rendered so useless by exposure that Kirby had discarded them when he was fixing up his plane yesterday. At that time he had thought he would not need bullets anyway. But now, he told himself grimly, they would certainly be handy!

Since he could not fight, there was only one thing to do. He opened his throttle to the widest notch, determined to shake off the pursuing seaplane and go on for that cruiser. But the seaplane was faster than the patched-up Sopwith, and von Bulow was just as determined as Kirby. The German kept gaining, creeping up, up, while Kirby tried vainly to widen the gap between them. Now, looking over his shoulder, the Mosquito could see the nose of the seaplane clearly, its whirling propeller—and behind it, the scowling snarling face of the enraged von Bulow.

Rat-ta-tat-tat! The clatter of the seaplane's forward guns rose behind Kirby with deafening shrillness. *Rat-tat-tat! Rat-ta-tat-tat!* A stream of smoky tracers went streaking past the Mosquito's right, and a line of perforations appeared as if by magic in the wing surface above him. Frantically, he rolled and zigzagged, and kept flying towards the west, still hoping to shake off his antagonist.

But then the wily von Bulow, suddenly giving his

ship full throttle, swept right past Kirby in a spurt of breathless speed. With the secure knowledge that the Mosquito had no guns to fire at him, the German boldly cut across the Sopwith's airpath, and attacked it head-on. *Rat-ta-tat-tat!* Again the seaplane's guns blazed, sending forth leaping tongues of flame. Bullets were smashing into Kirby's ship now, ricocheting from the cowl behind him, tearing through the fabric and splintering the wood. Thicker and thicker they grew, until Kirby had to give ground rather than be shot to ribbons. With cold precision von Bulow was forcing the Sopwith back where it had come from. Presently the two planes were over the tiny island again, and down below the men watched them in breathless suspense.

IT SOON became clear that Kirby didn't have the ghost of a chance. Carn and Travis, now seeing for the first time that he didn't have the use of his guns, closed their eyes in anguished horror. The Sopwith was dodging and twisting like an animal in a trap, while von Bulow, cool in his confidence, kept swooping toward it and spraying it with tracer. Slowly but inexorably, the German was closing in for the kill.

And then, in his helplessness, a feeling of reckless abandon came over Kirby. His eyes blazed, and his teeth clenched fiercely.

"Damn you!" he shouted, shaking a fist into the air. "Damn you—I'll show you a trick or two now, guns or no guns!"

Deliberately he banked and steered his ship straight for the seaplane, head-on. Von Bulow, seeing him come, did not budge an inch from his course, but instead met the Sopwith with a withering burst of fire which threatened to tear both the ship and Kirby to pieces. But by some miracle, the Mosquito got through that barrage unscathed, and continued heading right for the seaplane. The men down on the island stared aghast as the two planes, with both pilots stubbornly refusing to give any quarter, rushed toward one another. In just another split second the head-on, fatal collision was bound to come!

But in that split second Kirby's hand had closed tightly around his joystick. He measured his distance, judged his time. Then, with a savage oath, he pulled back on that stick.

The Sopwith's nose, even as it seemed about to meet the nose of the seaplane, suddenly curved upwards. And with terrific speed, since both were coming in the opposite directions, the two planes slithered past each other—Kirby above, von Bulow

beneath. But then there came a rending crash—a shivering impact which reverberated through the skies. The men on the island looked in tense awe. The Sopwith was flying straight on, unhurt except for its undercarriage, which was smashed and dangling. But the seaplane was not flying straight on. Its wings, ripped out of its place by the Sopwith's landing gear, was buckling, and the ship was floundering drunkenly. Kirby's wild, reckless stunt had succeeded!

The Mosquito, hovering above the seaplane, glanced down, watching it grimly. And then he saw von Bulow. The German was standing up in his cockpit now. His face was turned up toward Kirby, and on it—visible even from where Kirby was—a slow, game grin appeared. And then, to Kirby's amazement, von Bulow held out his hand as if he meant to reach up through the space which separated them and clasp Kirby's! He was calling quits with the Mosquito at last, ending his bitter feud! But he was ending it only in death, for in the next moment, the seaplane, its top wing torn completely off, hurtled downward like a stone. It crashed on a rocky hill of the island, and a column of smoke and debris proclaimed its landing.

The shout of joyous relief from Carn and Travis was drowned out by the cry of horror from the crowd of Germans. Some of them rushed to the wreckage of the seaplane—and drew back, nerveless, when they saw the mangled, limp body of the pilot.

Meanwhile Kirby, dazed and shaken, pulled up the Sopwith again and once more headed the bullet-ridden ship toward the west and the British cruiser. And in his mind he still saw von Bulow grinning and holding out his hand. He sighed. A peculiar character that Prussian—but he certainly had guts!

Kirby did not have much time to brood on the hapless lieutenant. He had other things to think of now. With painstaking care, he guided the Sopwith out over the open sea, always bearing west by his compass. The tiny desolate island receded slowly behind him, and presently it faded into a vague blur which merged with the sea itself. Nothing but water now, nothing but that empty, circular expanse of waves over which Kirby had been lost in the storm several days ago. But his compass was working now, and there was a blazing sun to guide him.

On, on, on, getting more and more weak from the strain of his previous thirst and all the harrowing experiences that had followed it. Once more he was aware of the scorching heat which he had forgotten in the greater heat of the battle with von Bulow.

He was watching his gas gauge now, and the indicator seemed to be sinking with relentless rapidity. Then came a moment when he hesitated, when he wondered whether he dared go on. It was the moment when he knew that there remained in his tank just enough petrol to take him back to the island. If he went on any farther, it meant that he must either find the British cruiser or be engulfed by the hungry sea when he ran out of gas. He gritted his teeth and steeled his nerves. He would go on. He would find the cruiser and save his comrades and the island.

He went on, the Sopwith droning over the empty sea. The gas gauge continued to sink lower and lower. Kirby was scanning the horizon ahead of him, with strained eyes. No cruiser in sight yet. Time passed. His gas was beginning to get dangerously low now. It was giving out. And still no sign of the cruiser! God, it was no use! He couldn't find the ship, couldn't get to it. Everything was ruined.

ON THE plateau of the island the crew of the L-99 shouted with wild glee and joy, while Carn and Travis, their hearts sick with anguish, stood in abject gloom and horror. All were staring out toward the sea—where a trim gray German cruiser, with the Imperial eagles flying from its masthead, steamed swiftly toward the island, its sharp bows cutting the waves. Nearer and nearer it came, bringing salvation to the captain and his crew—bringing capture to Carn and Travis. In just a few minutes the island would be claimed by the Germans, and its occupants taken away.

Then the joy faded from the faces of Captain Engel and his men. Out of the west, breaking all records for speed, coming hell-bent, was a slender British cruiser! For just as Kirby had run out of gas, he had seen the cruiser at last—and in a remarkable glide he had managed to crash next to it and get taken on board. Before he had passed out from sheer exhaustion and weakness, he had given the British tars Captain Engel's chart, which he had taken from the Sopwith's dashboard, together with directions to speed to the island.

The German cruiser was evidently taken by surprise, so swiftly had the British sneaked up on it. Just as the Boche warship stood by to give battle, the British guns opened up. From the island the men saw the red flashes of the cannons, and seconds later the thundering detonations reached their ears. The German guns were starting to belch forth now, but they did not fire long. Suddenly the Boche cruiser

disappeared in a tremendous geyser of flame and smoke with an ear-splitting, reverberating explosion. The German ship's magazine had been struck, and when the smoke cleared away there was nothing left but a mass of twisted wreckage and debris which sank swiftly into the tossing sea.

It was night of the same day. Over the dark waters, headed for British East Africa, steamed a British cruiser. Behind her she left a sunken German cruiser and a tiny island from whose plateau fluttered the British ensign. For the British, too, saw that this island would be a good submarine base—for British submarines!

On board the English cruiser were the rescued and captured crew of the ill-fated Zeppelin, L-99—and also the Three Mosquitoes. The Three Mosquitoes, as well as Captain Engel and the other officers of the Zeppelin, with only the hapless von Bulow missing, were all guests at a special mess given in their honor by the British skipper of the cruiser. There they all were, thanks to the ship's doctor. Somehow, after a few drinks of some rare port wine, everyone was cheerful. Captain Engel was taking his capture like the good sport he was.

"And how did your crew behave, captain?" the British skipper was asking him. "I suppose you had plenty of trouble with them, what?"

And a proud smile came over Captain Engel's face, now cleanly shaved and dignified with its little Van Dyke beard.

"Trouble?" he snorted, and laughed at the absurdity of the idea. "Why, I never saw a better behaved crew in all my career. They were respectful, obedient to every order, and not once did they complain. You see," he pointed to the much-impressed skipper, "our German Navy is well-trained! The men are taught to flinch from no hardship, however great it is."

Kirby, hearing this, buried his mouth in his wine glass to keep from saying something that would not only disillusion the Britisher, but also the German—who apparently was convinced in the truth of his statements. For he was the captain, and he was proud of his crew.