



# TORTURE DROME

by HAROLD F. CRUICKSHANK

*Captain Lew Vance Braves Boche Horror As He Flies Hell-Bent into Hunland to Vindicate the Honor of His Half-Brother!*

**C**APTAIN LEW VANCE, of the 17th Pursuit Squadron, roared his bullet-riddled Spad through space. His heart was thumping madly. Blood trickled from a gash in his cheek, but he seemed not to mind it. He was riding hell-bent in search of his young, mad-brained half-brother Cal, who had been posted missing from 17 Drome.

Headquarters had Cal posted as A.W.O.L. He had been crimed for this before; and on one occasion Lew had fished him back from an over-stayed Paris leave. But this time, Lew had a strong hunch that Cal was playing them square, that the kid was attempting to assist his older half-brother in his assignment to get the Baron von Hertzog.

Now Lew himself was absented from his drome without authority. But he didn't care a hoot.

If Cal was out working in his behalf, Headquarters could go plum to the devil.

IT HAD been with the utmost skill that Lew had cut clear of a hellion flight of Hun Fokkers. He hadn't wanted to stop to fight, but the Huns had forced him into a hellish fifteen minute mill before he downed one of them and got clear. Now he was headed for the badlands—headed toward the lair of von Hertzog—to take his chance with death. He was determined to go down some place close to the baron's staffel.

"If—if Cal was dead, we'd have had confirmation of his death from Hertzog. He's alive—alive in the hands of that scientist swine, somewhere down below that rock surface—" he ruminated.

Face drawn in a grim, determined expression, Lew kicked round again. He pushed his prop at a low-hanging cloud bank, and began to search in the half light for a spot on which to land. Down beneath him were a thousand deaths—at any spot there might be eyes, the eyes of von Hertzog's sentinels—waiting, spotting, ready to leap from this cleft or that—

Lew cut his motor and glided down low, grateful for the sudden thunder of the war gods which pronounced the early evening, stand-to, strafe all along the battle front. The drum fire would drown out the growl of his Hisso and prop.

His heart suddenly missed a beat as a flash of flame blasted from some point off his starboard head. But he picked up the beat as he realized that some long range naval gun was in action. That was no signal flash. He kicked into the mouth of an isolated, blind gully, flanked by tortured pine trees which hung above the

rim rock like ghost shapes, their dwarfed and distorted limbs waving wraithlike in a gently swelling breeze.

Lew's mind was made up. He set his nose down. To avert a crash landing, he must exercise all the skill he possessed. Even at that, he'd be mighty lucky to miss those narrow rock-walls with his wing tips.

With a snarl, he pulled his stick back, as a boulder loomed directly below in the path of his landing gear. He was forced into a hard, jarring pancake. But he was down. He shot a swift glance about him, then quickly his hand leaped to his automatic. Voices were heard. They seemed to be booming out of the solid rock at his left rear.

CAUTIOUSLY, with the stealth of a hunted cougar, he stole away from his ship. He moved up into the crags, not knowing where he headed. The chances of ever getting out of his present jam were slim. They seemed to be neutralized with every step he took away from his ship. But, that Spad's tank was empty.

Lew Vance had but one big hope in his heart—the opportunity for a meeting with von Hertzog. The brave Yank skipper would be glad to pass along to Valhalla, if first he could meet the most dreaded enemy the Allies knew at this time.

Out of the unfriendly sky a mantle of darkness now swooped with grim determination, and a host of ghost shapes began to flit and dance in the eerie craglands.

On a westerly breeze there floated the pungent odors of battle—the scent of death, of stale gas, of powder fumes. And then Lew Vance's nostrils were assailed by a newer, more local odor. He gasped, and coughed deep in his chest. He had stumbled on to a low stone building, from which fumed a deadly lethal essence—gas! The one factor in von Hertzog's bag of frightfulness that Allied Headquarters feared most.

IT HAD been Vance's assignment to scout the rumor of a sky gas plant at this zone. By sheer accident now, he had fetched up with this hellish laboratory. He had sniffed the deadly fumes. His eyes were smarting, and his lungs wheezed like age-old gate hinges.

And then, voices boomed again. There was no mistaking their deep gutturals now, nor the point from which they issued. Lew Vance was almost dead in the center of the Staffel of Torture—and he bellied down low and began to crawl on toward the mouth of a tunnel shaft from which issued a pale glow of light, and voices in conversation.

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Back at 17 Squadron's tarmac, Major Dan Norton paced his office hut like some trapped jungle beast. Seated at the major's desk were two officers of the staff, an adjutant from Brigade Headquarters and the Brigade Provost Marshal.

"I want to tell you, it's a runout, Major," snarled the flying adjutant. "The Vances have double-crossed us. They're out—rotten deserters. Lew thought a lot of that harum-scarum kid half-brother. To shield him, and himself, he's been forced to pull out. A devil of a grand state of affairs. Surely you could have read some sign, Norton. Why didn't you tip us off?"

The storm which had been simmering in Major Norton's mind broke. Here was this little squirt making verbal passes at the best flyer ever to come to 17 Squadron. The more Norton thought of the adjutant's remarks, the higher his storm wave rose. Suddenly he swung round and bent in close across the desk.

"You're a lousy little brass-hat squirt, Colmar," he snarled. "Blast you, you'll retract those remarks made about Lew Vance, or I'll cram them down your throat. I'm holding no brief for Lew's brother, but for Lew himself—by God! He had that von Hertzog assignment. He's Lew Vance, my foremost ace—a man of character—a human being, not a damned libelous little red hat like you."

The marshal got to his feet and crossed the floor. He took the major's arm, and squeezed it.

"Easy, Dan. Just hang on to yourself. Maybe you're right. We haven't given Lew half a chance. But, there's no call to lose our heads." He turned and shot a swift meaning glance at the adjutant, who was also on his feet, his small black mustache bristling like a hard toothbrush, as his face purpled.

"VERY well," snapped the adjutant, reaching for his hat. "For the time being, we'll retract my remarks, but—only for the time being. I want those two sky hellions produced. It's up to you, Norton. Either that—or—"

"What! You'd threaten me with the loss of my command?" thundered the C.O. of 17 Squad.

The other shrugged. His meaning in that shrug was obvious. The C.O. of 17 was on the spot. With a curt nod, Major Colmar moved on outside, leaving Norton fuming, together with the marshal.

"And what now, Dan?" breathed the latter. "Can you do anything?"

"H'mmm—I can do lots, Jim. But whether I can

obtain results or not is questionable. Where the devil can I scout? I have a notion that von Hertzog's mixed up in this whole thing. Somehow, I've even a leaning to the thought that Lew and his wild young brother buzzard had something fixed up between them.

"I wish I knew just where to begin—I'll get a flight up. I'll get the whole squadron into action, and be damned to Wing and their orders. But—damn it, I don't know where to begin."

"Can I do anything, Dan?"

"NO—I'm afraid not, brother. This is a matter for sky action. It'll mean a showdown with von Hertzog's outfit, possibly with plenty losses to 17 Squad. You see, Jim, we're afraid von Hertzog is ready to begin the use of gas bombardment from the sky. He— Listen! Did you hear a sky motor!"

Dan Norton dashed to the door and flung it open, the hope that the motor was a Hiss surging through his being. Suddenly the blare of the drome siren shattered the immediate quiet. Groundmen were rushing to machine-gun stations. Out of the black void above came two horrible looking monsters, their noses down—down—

Major Norton blasted a shrill pipe on his whistle. Pilots were scrambling from their huts.

"Raid! Cover everybody," thundered the C.O. He pushed the marshal from him. "You, too, Jim," he ordered. "God! Look at those shapes. They're half dirigible, and half plane. We're in for it—"

But Major Norton didn't run to cover. He barked an order at two pilots standing by.

"Let's get aboard. We might make it," he snapped. "Quick! Follow me." But even before Norton could get his motor started, a hellish detonation shattered the office hut of 17 Squadron.

Von Hertzog's weird sky monster had begun to raze the drome.

Men began to clutch at their throats. A greaseball dropped in the act of pulling a chock from under Norton's Spad. He shrieked as his lungs filled with a deadly lethal essence of hell. And now a low, deathly fog was settling over the drome.

The major's eyes were smarting. He was ready to take off, but he hated to leave his men to that sorry plight.

"Order everybody right out of the area," he thundered at a flight sergeant. "Abandon drome at once— God! I—" He broke into a paroxysm of coughing, which doubled him. Then he straightened,

and with an animal-like snarl, he gave his bus the gun, ripping up through the clinging fog—up, as two more horrible eruptions marked the plunder of the night monsters.

Von Hertzog had struck. His plundering had commenced with deadly vengeance.

BACK at the grim staffel in the badlands, the baron moved with measured, precise tread about his underground office chamber. Now and then he paused to shoot a foxlike glance at a prone, limp shape stretched out on a slab. Suddenly he darted to a wall phone and clapped the receiver to his ear.

“Ja—von Hertzog. *Siebzehnte Staffel, Amerikaner. Jawohl! Gut!*” He turned, and moved over to the bound form of Cal Vance, who stared up with glittering eyes at his deadly captor.

“If you unnerstand German, pig,” snarled the baron, “you will haf heard dat your *verdammte* squadron is no more. 17 staffel was successfully attacked by my special super night ships. *Du liebcr Gott!* So soon as *mein* chemists can furnish more gas—another of your dromes will go. I strike in *der* night. I make—what you call *der* clean schweep, *nicht!*”

“Yeh—you’re too lousy to attempt anything like that in daylight, Baron,” growled young Vance. “You’re even too lousy, too damn scared to release me from these bonds. Hell! Haven’t I any rights under the International code covering the handling of prisoners of war?”

“YOU *schwein*, you are a brother of *der* so great *Hauptman* Vance of 17 Squadron. He is at large. My agents haf informed me that he was not present at *der* drome, as my super ships made ready to raid. Vance! *Der* very name shtinks in *der* nostrils of goodt Germans.

“I met your brother this afternoon. He was spying in too close to this area. But for a fortuitous circumstance which acted in his favor, I should have shot him down. Yet I will get him—*Lieber Gott!*—I will. Hark! A sound. A noise in close. *Ach!* So you too heard?”

Von Hertzog leaped to one side, springing to a door leading off into a corridor. Luger in hand, he jerked open the door, listened, but in a short time he returned. His face was blanched, though. Something had given him a scare.

And then came the snore of heavy sky motors, caught in a cleverly arranged amplifier which the baron had had rigged in a sort of ventilator shaft in the rock ceiling of his chamber.

A suave smile flitted across his features. Now he glanced slyly at Cal Vance.

“You hear, *schwein*—? *Der* return of *der* sky gladiators. And, this for your own private ear, pig. When next my super ships are ready to go, you go, too. *Ja*—I am making a little gift to your *verdammte* Wing Headquarters. And what is more—you go back alive, to be dumped overside in a parachute. But—you might better never haf been born, for you will not haf a mind any more.

“Before dawn, I will begin my scientific treatment of your mind—unless, of course, you will use a little common sense and gif me *der* information I seek. I want information on strength of American Forces in *der* Champagne area, on the strength of your new Flying Force, and of the approximate strength of your heavy artillery on this immediate front. You haf refused it. But, since I haf warned you of your fate perhaps you will change *der* mind, *nicht?*”

“*Leutnant* Vance, we know your record herein. You haven’t many scruples. You were ignominiously run outd from Infantry. We know. I am making a bargain *mitt* you. Think—think—else, else I toss your mind completely to the jackals of nothingness. I—”

THE baron broke off short. He swung at a knock on the heavy oaken door. A tall flying officer entered, in the strangest suit Cal Vance had ever seen. His figure resembled more that of a giant ghoul. A tight fitting linseed oil treated suit covered him from feet to throat, and a cowl mask hung down on his back, drawstrings hanging.

Von Hertzog began a rapid flow of guttural German, some of which Cal Vance could catch. The youngster sat up, craning his neck. His heart began to beat madly. The raid on 17 Squadron had been partly successful, or terribly successful in part.

But—one of the mad-brained baron’s super-monsters had been forced down. Down on German territory, but down. Some member, or members, of 17 had been able to get sky-side.

Was it Lew? God! The youngster gulped back a lump which had welled in his throat. Lew had meant lots to him. He had intended to do plenty for that big-hearted half-brother. He had tried, and had been trapped by this hellion sky scientist.

BUT a new hope had sprung to Cal’s heart. Some of 17’s ships were skyside!

He suddenly found himself alone, with only a

dim light from a fluttering electric bulb to light the eerie chamber. Was there no way out of these cords which bound him? Cal eased his slender frame over to the edge of his slab bunk and began to saw—saw against the side of the stone, each movement bringing excruciating pain through his bound limbs.

Now he lay back, panting for his breath. A million lights began to dance before his vision. A head wound, caused by his crash landing, had opened, and began to ooze blood. There was a swoon threatening.

But a scraping noise in a far corner of the room brought Cal back to full consciousness. It was the same noise that had startled the baron. The young pilot sat up and peered into the gloom. Then a gasp escaped him. He heard a voice, low, tremulous.

“Cal! Cal! Are you here, son? Cal!”

“Lew!” Cal Vance jerked himself forward as far as his bonds would permit. Stealing toward him, out of a supplementary corridor, came Lew Vance.

Lew gathered the slender shape into his big arms roughly, then quickly thrust the kid from him, while he reached for his knife. There were real tears coursing down their battle-scarred cheeks, unashamedly.

“Hang on to your courage, kid,” whispered Lew, hoarsely. “I followed that fellow in here. I can get you out of this dump, and then—well, I don’t know. This place is a hell dive, all round. I was nearly trapped a couple of times. There are sentinels and spies in every crack in the rocks. Had to crack one of them out with the butt of the gun.

“Gee! I’m glad I found you. We can at least go out fighting. Listen! God! This must be the baron coming. Quick! Hang on to me, and duck for that panel there.”

They had scarcely cleared the panel, which slid to at their backs, before the main oak door to the chamber opened, to admit von Hertzog.

IN A flash the baron realized that his victim had flown. He exploded with wrath, turning sharply on to a *feldwebel* aide, who carried a case of surgeon’s instruments.

“*Schnell! Lieber Gott!* The alarm,” von Hertzog thundered. “Move, and spread the alarm. This is the work of that *Hauptmann*—that *schwein* whom I missed this afternoon.”

The baron sprang to his phone and commenced barking orders.

Cal Vance was helped up a dank air shaft by his half-brother. They were out in the open, and Lew began to propel his brother deep into the shadows

of the gullies. To escape completely, unless gas were obtained, seemed even a futile thought. But—for the moment, Lew was glad to be alive, to be breathing God’s pure, fresh air.

All at once there came the snore of a sky motor. Both Yanks stopped in their tracks.

“It’s a Hisso, Cal. One of our ships, I’ll bet a dollar. And, by God! I’ve no means of signaling. I dropped my flashlight down one of those cliffs where I stumbled.”

But Lew was thinking fast. That plane, skyside, was circling in low. Her pilot was looking for some sign.

Lew darted from his brother’s side, and crouched in the lee of a boulder. Quickly he snatched a box of matches from his pocket. Jerking at some dried moss, he then fished out a handful of paper from a message pad. With trembling fingers he struck a light. It was dangerous to do this. At any second it might bring the guard of von Hertzog down on them, but—it was the only means he had of getting a message up to that scouting pilot.

A FLAME darted up. Above, Major Norton jerked his head overside.

Lew Vance was standing over the small fire, and with helmet was attempting to flash a Morse signal aloft, by quickly screening and unscreening the fire.

“V—a—” and then a smudge. Major Norton snarled out an oath. Was this some trap, or—Good God! He suddenly caught on, as he got the letters: “V—a—n—”

A wave of exultation rippled through his being. He snatched a signal lamp from its socket in the pit and Morsed a message down to the brothers.

“Got—you—Vance—will—return—” That’s all there was time for. Dan Norton was forced to press home his throttle and roar his Hisso full out, for out of the eastern sky, like shadowy denizens of the black void above, streaked three fast black Fokkers, their flame stacks scoring a lurid gash in the sky.

Lew Vance squeezed his half brother’s arm.

“It worked, kid. We’ve got to hold on. Stay in close. We’ve only got one gun between us, but—we’re not going to be taken. You get that?”

“I sure do, Lew. Thanks for comin’, buddy. I’ll be right at your back if anything busts loose. Where now?”

Lew Vance was wrapped in deep thought. He was formulating a plan, a plan which would, if successfully carried out, give them their only hope for life. Now he turned to Cal.

"I want you to sneak along to where the crate is bedded down. I've got to hunt gas. Haven't a spot in my—

"Lew—listen!" Cal could scarcely speak. "I had an hour's gas left when I hit in. Uh—listen! Here comes hell in columns of batches!"

Both Yanks sprang deeper into cover at the sound of a guard detail threshing through the scrub. But, in spite of the danger which threatened, Cal had awakened a new hope in Lew's heart. He hadn't thought of Cal's Spad wreckage. Was there a chance that that gas tank had come through without a puncture? At least the thought was a fillip to his nerve fibres.

Together, the Vances eased away from the sector, sliding by the hunting guards like wraiths, like a part of the shadowy host which flitted and danced in the badlands.

IN THE dry rubble-filled bed of the blind gully which housed Lew Vance's Spad, the two Yanks now fought back to back. Cal Vance had been left at the good Spad, while Lew scouted for gas. The skipper had returned to find the youngster fighting a terrible battle with two of von Hertzog's guards, whose duty it was, if at all possible, to take the Yankee and his confederate alive.

Blood flowed freely from a gash in the youngster's forehead, but he fought on. Lew Vance dropped his load of precious gas, and leaped to action. Now the half brothers milled it out with two towering Prussians who were carrying out von Hertzog's instructions to the letter.

Lew Vance had jammed his automatic back in its holster as he hurled himself to action. With left and right hooks, he cut one Boche to his knees, then sprang clear as the other swung a savage blow with a piece of dry elm wood.

Cal Vance was staggering—reeling like someone drunk. He had taken a vicious sideswipe from the club across the base of his neck. The fallen Boche was rising. Lew Vance was faced by odds of two to one. It seemed that there was no further hope of help from Cal.

BLOOD began to gush, to gout. The skipper snorted a clot from his nostrils, and struck out with a straight right which numbed his whole arm on impact.

"Trans—fer the gas—son," he gulped. "Quick. I can take these—two. Ya—ah! I can take the whole damn staff—" He broke off with a gasp as a ham-like fist

caught him a soggy punch in the middle. He almost went down.

He was fighting for his breath, when a slender form hurled itself through space. Through his blurred vision, Cal had seen. With his every ounce of reserve strength, he leaped and struck.

The big Boche he contacted with dropped like a log. Something had snapped at the back of his neck. Now Lew swung in on the other—darting in close.

He whipped a leg round the back of the Hun's knee and as he whipped on pressure, he uppercut with a smart right.

Both Prussians now lay spread-eagled on the rocks. Lew breathed on his damaged knuckles, then reeled over to the gas tank he had taken from Cal's wrecked ship.

"You'd better get ready to rev her up, son," he gasped as he made the transfer of precious fuel. "It's up to you now. I want you to streak back and give Dan Norton the low-down on this spot. Arrange for a big bombing shoot. Have them blow this place to hell, son."

"I'm staying right here—put—with you, Lew," returned the lieutenant. "Unless we can both crowd into this Spad, I don't go."

Lew Vance got down from the engine area. There was a wild gleam in his bruised eyes as he set down the empty gas tank. He strode up to his half brother and took him by the shoulders.

"You'll do just as I say," he snarled. "I'm your superior officer, darn you. Don't start any fool play with me, kid. This is no time, nor place, for it. The safety of the American Army—the safety of the Allies as a whole, depends on your swift get-away."

"Two of us can't get away in this Spad. One of us must go. It's a matter of life and death—we've got to snuff this place out. Now, get under that safety belt. Quick! I hear more stir up above."

THERE was a mist blurring out Cal Vance's vision as he boarded the ship and shot a hand to the switch. Lew Vance was going to offer himself as a sacrifice. There was nothing Cal could do, save obey his brother's orders. But—it hurt.

The Hiss snorted, coughed out, then caught again. It took a lot of humoring to get her into a steady snore; then Cal began to feed her gas with skilful hand, until she began to hum.

Lew came up into the stirrup and slapped his brother's back.

“You’ll make it, kid. You’ve got to. Give my hellos to all the gang. They’ll never take me—alive, here. I have a notion I know where their Fokker layout is. There’s a crane over right above, and a clever piece of camouflage rock bed. I believe, Cal, those Hun ships are hoisted topside up by that derrick, then take off from a flat rock bed, much as planes take off from a sea-going carrier.

“Listen! Lord! Give her the gun! Luck! Take her in a half right turn over that piece of pointed rim-rock. Go get ‘em, Cal.”

*CRACK! Crack!* Lew Vance dropped to the gully bed. A bullet had scored his ribs sector. Cal Vance had sagged against the cockpit rim, a million lights dancing before his Snipers were at work. Another slug zipped through his dash, shattering the altimeter case.

With no knowledge that Lew was hit, the lieutenant forced his full consciousness back, and gave his Hisso the gun.

From blurring eyes, below, Lew Vance watched the kid coil the Spad up out of the gullies, up and over, and in and out. A deep sigh bulged his chest. Cal had looked back over his shoulder as he pressed the throttle lever in full.

He was clear.

Lew Vance was reeling into the thicket. A siren blared. At once the machinery of the heavy derrick began to snort. Lew crept on—on—closer to the Fokker housing. Then a grim black shape loomed up from the very vitals of the earth. The plane’s motor was revved. Lew watched her pilot signal to the derrick operator, who jerked a lever and cut the Fokker free.

A Mercedes roared, and the black ship shot like an arrow down the gently sloping rocky runway, at whose rim was a mild upgrade to give good take-off. That Fokker hurled its prop at the sky with as sweet a zoom as anything Vance had ever witnessed.

The Yank’s heart was beating madly. That super Fokker was miles faster than the Spad in which Cal Vance streaked to westward. Another Fokker appeared, and was shot into the sky; then another, and another.

Then one whose strutting carried the streamers of the Baron von Hertzog appeared. Lew Vance snarled bitterly. He had hoped to take the baron in the sky. It seemed that his last chance, his last hope, was going. Sooner or later, these hunting guards would find him. There would be a fight. Lew was determined to force them to kill him, for he had sworn not to be taken prisoner.

Von Hertzog’s ship zipped into the clearing pre-

dawn sky. Like a weird falcon, he whipped about, a black smudge, and gunned his Mercedes into a throaty roar. Lew Vance watched him until his eyes hurt.

Then he turned sharply. The derrick was snorting and clattering madly again. Another Fokker, the last of the flight, was oozing slowly out of its pit.

Lew bit sharply at his nether lip. He watched the black ship lifted clear to the runway. The pilot bent forward over the throttle, but there was no immediate response. With a snarl, he was obliged to climb out and make an inspection.

LEW VANCE’S pulse was throbbing hard, as he bellied in—closer—closer. That cockpit was empty. There was only one man around at that ship. Those at the derrick were far enough away to—

It was a devilish thought which filled the skipper’s mind, but a thought which was speedily becoming a plan. Hell! Wasn’t Cal racing for his life? The kid was badly hit. There was a chance that he might fog out; and if he did, von Hertzog would go on—on to perfect his hideous plans for the annihilation of every Allied flying squadron on the Western Front.

The Mercedes seemed to have gotten over her idiosyncrasies, for the pilot was stepping back, tugging on his gauntlets.

Lew Vance’s automatic came up. Somehow his mind revolted. He hated murder. If only there was only some other means of putting that pilot out.

*Crack!* In a flash the Yank had made his decision. His bullet, not intended to kill, had just barely grazed the Hun flyer’s right arm. The Boche spun round, clutching at the singed member, then quickly he glimpsed the flying form of the desperate Yankee skipper. He jerked out his Luger.

THIS was just what Lew had hoped for. Now there was no question of murder. The Hun’s pistol had barely cracked before a slug from the Yank Colt took the Boche in the thigh, buckling him to his knees. Lew Vance was shooting on the run. His foot was in the stirrup, when the pilot, who had retrieved his Luger, and his vision, came up shooting.

Lew staggered as a bullet ploughed through the flesh of his upper left arm. God! He couldn’t go out now. Here was an open cockpit and a clear sky ahead.

He swung, bracing himself in the stirrup. The Hun, fortunately for Vance, was reeling groggily, perhaps sure that his last slug had been lethal to the *Amerikaner*.

Lew saw the man stumble toward him. Again his mind revolted. He couldn't shoot down this brave, tottering officer. Instead, he swung with the barrel of his Colt, and dropped the Hun with a sideswipe across the temple.

As he swung aboard, a fusillade of shots cut him short. The derrick man was trotting up with a guard. Bullets were swishing past the Yank's head. Was this engine ready to start? Was there a chance that after all, the Mercedes had conked permanently?

LEW VANCE'S eyes glittered as he spotted a starter switch, something the Allies hadn't even thought of yet. He pressed it home. There was a deep-throated cough. He tried again, and the prop spun.

Breathing cut off, crouched against the right side of the pit, the wounded skipper fed the ship throttle.

Lead was spattering the black Fokker from a number of points. Lew felt a searing pain in his left thigh. But he fought back a wave of nausea. His prop was whirring, the Mercedes was thundering. And now, a grim grin splitting his pain-wracked features, he opened her wide and ripped down the runway, returning his stick to neutral as the tires hit the take-off upgrade.

*Soo-wish—soo-wish.* Hot lead sizzled by with sinister whisper, but the intrepid skipper seemed not to sense its presence. He was bent forward hard over the stick, his head weaving from side to side. His slitted eyes were focused on the rim rocks and outcroppings above.

And then his whole body quivered with a sigh of deep relief. He was clear—clear, with a fast ship, in an open sky. And as he kicked around to westward, he pushed his throttle lever into the last notch and let his Spandaus spew out a smart fifteen-round burst.

Back at the desolate drome of the 17th Squadron, in the paling dawn light, Major Dan Norton sat aboard his throbbing Spad. He had pulled in a composite flotilla of ships from surrounding squadrons. He was ready to take off, when a signaller dashed up to his plane.

"Black Fokker patrol hotly engaging lone American Spad just west of Mont de Cateau," the message read. Norton suppressed a low cry.

"Lew's ship," he gasped. He nodded to the signaller, then plucked his flare pistol from its rack. A red burst gave the take-off signal. A flight of Spads tore across the runway, to be followed by a flight of D.H. Bombers which were to be escorted by a composite flight of Nieuports and British Snipes.

COLMAR, the swivel chair adjutant from brigade, had protested strongly when he heard of Norton's plans. He attempted to institute proceedings, through wing, to have the proposed expeditionary flight stopped. But—Norton raised plain blue hell all round. He got his way, and now he was skyside, at the head of a fast flight of Spads.

Lew Vance was his first thought. The skipper meant more in Dan's life than anything else at the moment. Those flame signals hadn't been for nothing. The skipper was in a spot! So different from that other young cub—Cal, Norton mused.

Now his deputy leader was signaling with a staccato tattoo on his Vickers. He was pointing off the starboard head, off toward the grim wastes of the Mont de Cateau area.

Norton jerked a set of powerful glasses to his eyes. He gasped. A single Spad was cavorting madly in the sky, hemmed in by a flight of four black Fokkers whose Spandau flame seared the dull sky.

"Lew!" The exclamation came in a hoarse croak. He pressed his throttle in full, and his feet began to shuffle impatiently on the rudder bar. Cal Vance was hanging on heroically to his fast wavering wits. He had lost plenty of blood. His orders had been to get through, but his Hisso had bucked on him. He had pulled out before the motor was properly warmed. Now these hellions of the Staffel of Torture had him on the spot.

He zoomed clear of a savage burst from von Hertzog's guns. The baron was bent on a kill. He had waved his pilots out. This was his own private fight now, and he swooped down mercilessly, riddling the maneuvering Spad with about twenty rounds of hot lead. There was a chance that he could have killed Cal Vance outright. But he was so convinced of utter success that he chose to exploit in torture, the essence of his science warped mind. A slow death for a bitter enemy!

Cal zoomed clear again, and shot a glance to his gas gauge. His brows shot up. There was scarcely more than fifteen minutes supply left. But his spirit never wavered.

He was fighting this out for Lew. He must get through now. It was no disgrace to cut out.

FORCED to Immelmann, at a savage burst from the baron's guns, the youngster had his nose set to westward. A low cry escaped him. Those specks coming toward him!

He had no time to observe more closely, for three



of von Hertzog's flight were zipping around him, turning him back into the killing pit. He came back with his Vickers flaming wide open. If he must go out, he would go out fighting—fighting as Lew would have fought.

Back with the racing Spad flight, Dan Norton thrilled as he saw the single Spad ahead zip down to attack.

"Spunk! Sheer, plain spunk. There isn't another flyer over the Western Front who has the spunk of Lew Vance. By George!" He broke off short. Out of the eastern sky, another Fokker raced.

NOT a chance In the world now, Lew," he gulped. "And I can't fetch up in time." He gulped back his words hard. That single Fokker was burning down like a mad, flaming plummet. Dan closed his eyes for the moment.

What was that Hun doing! When the major next glimpsed the mill, he gasped with amazement. The deadly black Fokker of von Hertzog, with his fluttering streamers, was riding prop-on to that newcomer ship. Both sets of guns were yammering.

Dan Norton could scarcely believe his eyes. Then suddenly it dawned on him—von Hertzog was on the spot. By the great guns of Allah! Was this more of Lew's work?

Lew Vance waved his arm overside. It was a signal to his half brother to stand clear. And then he whirled his captured Fokker over in a tight loop. His Spandaus spat hellish flame as he brought her into the dive. Von Hertzog was trapped. His opponent had completely outguessed him.

Slugs tore at his chest, and then with a horrible cough, his gas tanks exploded. Before the red-black mass of flame and smoke enveloped him, he turned slowly, painfully in the cockpit, and bared his teeth in a flash of hatred.

Lew Vance dipped his ship once, then zoomed her hard, to flank the Spad flown by Cal.

DAN NORTON'S ships were racing into action. Lew weakly exchanged signals. He signified his intention to Norton to cut out, and herd young Cal back home. In a few swift flashes, he gave location on the main points of treachery back at the Staffel of Torture. They were all Norton required. Already, his flight was chasing those ships of von Hertzog's to eastward.

But Lew Vance had seen enough. He was down alongside his half brother. Their day was done. And they limped back to the shattered drome of 17—grinning wide through their blood-smeared features.