



GRAPES GRABBER

by LESTER DENT

*Pilot Shack March Shows a Glory Glutton a Thing or Two
in this Zooming Yarn of Exciting Action in Hunland!*

PURSUIT PILOT “Shack” March bit on an old one. He should have known better. But at the moment it happened, Shack was so mad he wasn’t seeing straight. He could have bit anything. He could have gnashed rocker arms off the iron back of the Le Rhone motor that panted in front of his knees.

Shack had just been robbed. Of all the flying men on all the fronts, it had to be Captain Doxsey who robbed him—Captain Doxsey, the “Grapes Grabber.”

“The brassy louse!” gritted Shack, Rounding and looking like an oversize, goaded bull pup.

What Shack meant was that he had thought himself one flyer Captain Doxsey wouldn’t dare pull a grapes-robbing act on. Shack had seriously promised Captain Doxsey a neck-wringing if he ever did.

Well, Doxsey had gone ahead and done it.

SHACK, solo prowling the war skies, had happened on a Boche two-seater observation scow and two escorting Fokkers. He had pounced on the Fokkers with cowl Vickers a-heat. He intended to chase them away, then bag the slow two-seater. With sun and altitude in his favor, it had taken only a minute to rout the two Fokkers. He banked around to gather the grapes, the reward for his daring effort: the two-seater.

And there was Captain Doxsey, the Grapes Grabber! He had popped in from somewhere. And he already had, with little danger and effort, sent the two-seater earthward in flames.

Shack howled. He considered himself a robbed man. That he was the umptieth man Captain Doxsey had gypped thus, made it rankle the more. Shack had personally warned Doxsey there was one buzzard he had better lay off.

A glory glutton was Captain Doxsey. He craved medals, a big string of vanquished Boches, his picture in the papers, and to hell with how he got these things. Captain Doxsey had a handsome face that looked great in the newspapers.

“I’ll ruin that pretty puss of his!” Shack promised himself fiercely. He was ugly as a mule, himself.

But in the meantime, there was nothing he could do but chase the two Fokkers into Germany. He did. They got away in a cloud, and that didn’t soothe Shack any.

It was coming back that Shack bit on the old one.

A point of light flickered down below. It was in a wood fifteen miles or so behind the lines. Shack watched the light point. It was going on and off erratically, making dots and dashes.

“H-m-m!” said Shack, and cocked his Nieuport in a lazy spiral. He watched the light point wink letters and words.

I AM MAJOR ALEX JACKSON OF THE 60TH YANK PURSUIT SQUADRON. HAVE ESCAPED FROM GERMAN PRISON CAMP. HELP ME.

Shack swore again, partly with surprise and partly with still-burning rage at Captain Doxsey. He slanted the Nieuport down in a dive.

THE signaling was being done with the upturned headlamp of a motor cycle, he saw. The dark green of the woods’ background made it visible in the daylight.

Shack flattened and sent the Nieuport in a wide scoot over the wood, looking for Germans. He saw none, but there were plenty of tree tops they could be under. He swung back with undercarriage clipping leaves, and took a look at the signaler who said he was Major Alex Jackson.

He was a stocky man, about Shack’s own hammered-down build. He wore the baggy garments of a Boche farmer. The clothes looked like he had gotten them from a rag basket.

The man’s face was the amazing thing about him. It had the appearance of something once worked on with a sharp hatchet. It was a welter of scars. The fellow’s nose was broken, some of his teeth gone.

“What a map!” Shack breathed, awed by sight of a human countenance more homely than his own.

The ugly-faced man gestured madly, indicating a clearing in the woods, large enough for a landing, a hundred yards distant.

Shack felt a comradely warmth for the fellow. “He could have got that way by pushing his face into an instrument panel,” he admitted. “Probably he is a Yank who cracked up in Germany.”

He was wrong. He found that out in about thirty seconds.

A boot on left rudder, stick slanted, he banked around for the clearing. Nosing down, he starved the throttle, sawed the rudder a few times to fishtail away excess speed. The clearing cupped around him; the ground streaked green under the wheel doughnuts.

THEN, *bur-r-r-rap!* Boche machine-guns chorused on all sides. Rifles joined in. Ghastly gray tracer smoke filmed the air about Shack’s head. Phosphorous tracer fumes itched his lungs. The stick did a St. Vitus in his fingers, as Hun lead punished control surfaces. A yard

back of him in the fuselage, there opened a shaggy hole a shoat could have jumped through.

Shack came down hard on stick and throttle. The Nieuport leaped, then sank a wing as a flap wire was bullet-clipped. He fought the list with stick far over. By grace of the devil's own luck and an up-current of air at the clearing edge, he vaulted the trees. "Whew!" Shack perspired.

The Nieuport slithered about, almost went into a spin. He wrestled it level. Of the ugly-faced man, there was no sign. He had deserted his motor cycle.

Shack looked around back—and his boots promptly held his heart. Fokkers were driving at him, a long undulating line of them. Seven, nine, eleven, he counted. A whole staffel! With this half-a-wing bus, he didn't stand a chance.

The pursuing Boche boomed across the clearing. A couple were already warming Spandau guns.

Shack swore what happened next was the most beautiful thing he ever saw.

A Very ball climbed out of the clearing, burst colored fire before the Fokker swarm. And the Boche, to a plane, instantly banked around and hoicked back the way they had come.

Incredulous, Shack scanned the heavens. Not an Allied ship in sight! He swallowed a couple of times. The Jerries were letting him go for no reason at all.

Unless it was because that Very signal had ordered! Shack fanned eyes over his Nieuport. He saw something else, then. Not a Boche bullet had struck near him or the laboring rotary.

"Bum shooting!" he grunted. But he knew better. It was good shooting. The Boche hadn't wanted to hit him or his motor, and they hadn't. At that range, they could have torn him completely out of the control pit. But they had only thrown a scare.

THE business of coaxing the jammed Nieuport along left little time to mull the mystery. The plane flounced in the sky like an autumn leaf pulled on a string. Worse, lead-torn fabric was peeling off a wing.

Aerobatics of the Nieuport became more unexpected and violent as miles careened past. A couple of kilometers on the safe side of the lines, Shack decided he had to land. He picked out a likely field.

His landing was so-so. He made kindling of the Nieuport, and it was fifteen minutes before he awoke in the wreckage and felt of a knot on his head. He was swearing at the wreckage when a dispatch carrier came along and offered him a ride.

The dispatch carrier generously drove twenty miles out of his way to drop Shack near his own tarmac. By then, darkness had come. Frogs *bur-r-rumped* in waterholes along the path Shack took toward the drome. Night insects made soft racket. The moon cast a light, rich and white as silver.

"Damn Captain Doxsey!" grunted Shack, unaffected by the beauty. "Damn the Dutch and the cookoo things they do! I wonder why they let me go?"

SOMEWHERE ahead of him on the path, a man grunted loudly. A couple of blows smacked. A man fell heavily to the earth. A second, softer thump sounded, as though another man had fallen atop the first.

"I wonder?" Shack breathed. "Has somebody beat me to Captain Doxsey?"

He broke into a dog trot. The jarring made his aching head ring like Big Ben striking a series of twelves. He clamped his temples between his fists. Then he stopped abruptly. His eyes swelled out as though squeezed from behind. Moonlight through the trees made the path before him look like a strip torn from a fairly clean sheet.

A man was balled on the path. One of his hands gripped an Army Colt. A bayonet was pinned into his heart from the front.

No one else was in sight.

Shack took a step forward, recognized the dead man.

"Julius Kalb!" he grunted.

One of the mechanics at the drome! He was the Mutt of the pair of buzzards called Mutt and Jeff. Romero Aguila, the fat, jovial spic armorer, was the Jeff. The two were pals. Neither had an enemy, as far as Shack had ever heard.

Shack took another step forward, then stopped, listened. The killer was still around somewhere, it stood to reason. Down the trail, leaves fluttered slightly. Shack slid hastily aside, getting out of the moonlight.

Wham! The donging Big Ben in his head seemed suddenly to explode.

Sloughing onto his face, Shack understood what had happened. The killer had tossed something down the trail, then reached out and clubbed a gun while the falling object held Shack's attention.

Shack did not lose consciousness. But he pretended he had—for a gun snout was horned into his neck before he even hit the ground. He held air in his lungs. He could hear the assailant breathing over him. Shack

made particular note that the fellow's breath was strongly mint scented.

The assailant cleared his throat softly. Fingers fumbled at Shack's pockets. At first, he thought he was being robbed. Then he knew objects were being put in his pockets, not taken out.

The attacker left him suddenly, running down the path toward the drome.

Shack stared after him. He couldn't tell much. The man ran doubled over, and he had a khaki service handkerchief about his face. He vanished.

ERECT, Shack thrust hands into his pockets to see what had been put there. A purse! A small manual on the care of Le Rhone motors! He flipped the purse open, read the name on an identification card. Julius Kalb!

"Framing me, huh?" Shack drew back an arm, threw purse and motor manual as far as he could. Wheeling, he dove into the undergrowth and ran, not toward the drome, but away from it. He kept close to the path. When only a few yards from the road, he sat down in the darkness of a stone fence corner and waited. Someone was bound to traverse that path before long and find the body. The path was a popular trail to a neighborhood *estaminet*.

A couple of pilots passed, making a good deal of noise with their talk. They were bound for the drome.

Quitting his fence corner, Shack fell in behind them. He walked rapidly and overhauled them. They greeted him noisily, let him help kill a bottle of cognac. Then they went on.

SHACK was telling about his washout ship when they came to Julius Kalb's body.

There was a lot of excitement. Shack, pretending as much astonishment as anybody, yelled for sentries from the drome. They came—and a flock of curious mechanics and pilots.

Captain Don Doxsey swung up with the crowd, twiddling a malacca walking stick in one gloved hand. He was tall and athletic, this Grapes Grabber. In looks, he had everything Shack didn't have. Shack gave him a glare that smoked, but said nothing about the Boche plane Captain Doxsey had grabbed from him. The less notice Shack attracted to himself, the safer he'd be, the way he figured it.

Suddenly one man in the group around the body vented a stifled cry, flung himself weeping toward the corpse. Sobbing uncontrollably, the fellow gazed at

the twisted, lifeless form. Shack craned his neck to see who it was. Romero Aguilla, the fat armorer! The other man of the Mutt and Jeff pair.

"Carrying on like he thought a lot of the dead man," somebody muttered. "They did pal together a lot, at that."

Shack squinted at Jeff's grief display. He wasn't quite sure, but it looked to him like Jeff, under pretense of stroking the body, was very thoroughly searching it!

A suave voice breathed in Shack's ear, "Who do you think murdered the man?"

Shack spun around to scowl at the questioner—Captain Doxsey.

"Why should I have a think about it?" he bridled.

Captain Doxsey shrugged. "Well, it seems to me you—!"

He got just that far. Shack could tell from the tone that he was being baited for some purpose. And it could be for only one reason! Captain Doxsey wanted to point the dangerous arm of suspicion at Shack! But that wasn't all. Shack got a whiff of Doxsey's breath. It was mint-scented. The man who had killed Julius Kalb had had mint-scented breath.

S-s-pop! Shack's fist made a distinct whistle before it hit Doxsey's square jaw. Doxsey's hands flew up and his malacca cane gyrated into the brush. Doxsey himself traveled backward with heels dragging, and measured himself like a log in a waterhole beside the path.

THERE was awed silence. Then a buzzard stepped up to Shack and made elaborate business of bowing.

"Anything I got—anything—you can have!" he said ceremoniously. "You just saved me a roost in the guardhouse."

"Yeah?"

"I was going to give him a polishing myself this very night," said the buzzard. "This morning he claimed a plane I shot down, and got away with it."

Shack blew on his knuckles, thinking swiftly. Murder was a pretty serious thing to lay onto a man just because his breath smelled of mint

At the suggestion that the honor of the squadron was any concern of his, Shack would have snorted loudly and called notice to his own dozen or so near-court-martials. Honor of the squadron, phooey!

Actually, Shack had that very thing at heart. "That's the outfit the murderer was in": the word would go up and down the front. Not so good.

Shack decided to wait a bit, to make sure Captain Doxsey had killed Kalb, before he sprang open accusations. There was something queer about the way Jeff, the fat armorer, had surreptitiously searched the corpse. That would bear looking into, too.

“Doxsey grabbed the grapes from me this afternoon, too,” he said. “That’s why I let him have it.” That was half the truth, anyway.

Captain Doxsey heaved up in the ditch, sputtering.

Shack loomed over him, big-fisted. “Want to put charges against me? If you do, I’ll give you some more to make it worth while.”

SOMEBODY laughed loudly. Nobody liked this Doxsey.

Captain Doxsey grated, “I won’t press charges!” and ambled off toward the tarmac without another word.

Shack was more than a little surprised that Captain Doxsey didn’t want him court-martialed.

He helped take Kalb’s body to the drome. He watched Romero covertly. The fat, swart armorer had quite suddenly recovered from his grief—and Shack was more certain than ever the outburst had been put on as an excuse to search the corpse.

There was a lot of asking of questions at the drome. Shack carefully neglected to say anything about his dramatic experience in Germany with the scar-faced man who had signaled he was an escaped Yank flyer. He wanted to get off by himself and think that over.

There was something queer about the Boche being so careful not to bring him down in that ambush. So he merely said his bus had gotten in the way of too many Spandau slugs and had gone into a crack when he was forced down.

Romero, he noted, wandered away from the crowd at the first chance. Captain Doxsey did not show himself in the operations shack, either. Evidently he was nursing his rage and his jaw in his quarters.

Shack scowled fiercely at a newspaper story about Captain Doxsey which Doxsey himself had pasted on the operations shack wall. That was the kind of a duck Doxsey was. The story concerned a Zeppelin which Doxsey had fought and driven back to Germany. Heroic stuff, his saving Paris like that. Only Shack happened to know the Z-ship had turned back on account of high winds and not the captain.

“We’ll have to send for a fingerprint expert and see what he can find on the bayonet that killed Kalb,” the C.O. decided at last. “It’s damn mysterious, who killed him and why!”

“That’s not the half of it!” Shack commented mentally.

Half an hour after the inquiry, Shack left the drome, taking pains that no one saw him, and went to the murder scene. A brief search, and he found dead Julius Kalb’s purse and log book.

HE WAS ready to confront Captain Doxsey now and demand an explanation. Rage made his nape bristle. “It wasn’t grapes he grabbed, when he tried to lay that killing on me!”

Shack’s headache had become a terror. He decided to go to his cubicle and sample a gallon jug he kept under the floor. He’d traded the jug from a hillbilly in the States, and smuggled it with infinite bother across the big pond. Remarkable stuff was in that jug. If a man had a headache, it’d cure him. If he didn’t have, it would give him one.

It was when nearing his cubicle that Shack chanced to turn around abruptly to apply a match to a cigarette with the breeze at his back. He saw a shadowy form duck suspiciously behind a motor lorry. Acting as though he had not seen, Shack ambled on. Momentarily in the shadow of a cubicle, he looked back. Someone was trailing him!

SHACK entered his cubicle, closed the door. The rear window was already open. He made practically no noise easing his hammered-down bulk out through it. He cast narrowed, expectant eyes right and left in the moonlight, saw nothing suspicious, then sidled around the cubicle.

A man crouched in front of the hut, seeking to peer through a crack. The man held an Army Colt. Shack took two long, silent steps, put a rigid forefinger hard against the hunkering man’s back, knowing it would feel like a gun.

“Don’t try anything!” he hissed.

But, wrecklessly, the man stroked the Colt safely to off position, tilted the weapon up. He meant to take a long chance.

Shack’s fist whipped up and chunked against the fellow’s neck in a stunning rabbit punch. The man weaved, half kayoed. His automatic jabbed about like a venomous black fang. Shack grabbed the gun arm with both hands, twisted. The skulker gurgled, let fall his weapon.

Shack tangled fingers in the man’s hair, jerked his head back, looked at his face.

His conquest was the fat armorer, Romero.

Over toward the hangars, a motor gave a couple of contrary bellows. Shack frowned in that direction. Mechanics had muscled a Nieuport out of a hangar, were staking its innards with gas and ammo belt. The rotary whanged again, caught, began to bellow and warm itself.

Captain Doxsey was with the ship. Immaculate in tailored uniform, but without helmet or goggles, he gave a few orders.

Shack shifted feet, scratched a jaw on which beard stubble was like hardwood splinters. Suddenly he hauled Romero into the cubicle. "Why were you following me?"

Romero rolled his eyes, cursed. "I think maybe you keel my friend for money he carry!"

"Oh, oh!" Shack grinned like a kicked dog. "What gave you that idea?"

"Captain Doxsey, hees act like hees suspect you, *Señor!*" muttered the fat man, after hesitating.

"Why'd you search the body so sneaky-like?"

Romero gave a distinct twitch of frightened surprise. "Ah—ah—I want see if Kalb's money gone."

"Romero, you're a liar!"

Romero tried to fight at that. But he was still too groggy from the rabbit punch to be dangerous. Shack speared a left into the armorer's ample midriff. The man doubled—directly into Shack's right, upward bound.

HE CAUGHT him before he could make a noise falling, dumped him on the bunk. Delving into his warsack, he produced two pairs of handcuffs, keys and all. Those cuffs were souvenirs—they had a history that hearkened back to a certain boisterous night in Paris when a couple of M.P.'s had mistakenly thought a mere two of their breed could subdue one hilarious Yank buzzard.

With Romero cuffed so he could only tumble about, Shack gagged the man with half an O.D. shirt. Then he looked out the door.

Captain Doxsey was walking to his quarters, evidently to get his helmet and goggles.

Shack dove into the darkness, made for Doxsey's cubicle. He reached one of the windows probably half a minute after Doxsey had entered. He looked in.

Doxsey was on hands and knees, hiding something under a loose floorboard. He replaced the board, stood up, got his helmet and goggles off a nail, and went out.

Shack, the moment Doxsey was away, eased around and inside. He got the object Doxsey had been hiding.

It was a packet, swatched in oiled silk that looked like a piece cut from a slicker.

Shack spun for the door, hesitated, then struck a match and looked at the packet contents—several folded sheets of paper covered with penned English words.

Shack read.

"Holy Moses!" he snorted.

He read through the whole thing again. He was grinning when he finished. His homely face had a foxy look. He put his palms under his jaw and cast his eyes prayerfully skyward.

"I BEEN prayin' for the chance for a long time!" he breathed gratefully. "And you sent me this. Thanks!"

He left Captain Doxsey's quarters.

Doxsey was in his Nieuport. With rotary squawling, the pursuit ran across the tarmac and slanted up into the moonlight. Shack made not the slightest effort to interfere. The plane moaned off toward the front.

Shack sought out the pilot who had been so glad to see Captain Doxsey's jaw punched.

"You said you'd give me anything you got," Shack told him. "Well, I wanta borrow your ship."

That particular buzzard happened to think a lot of his Nieuport. He even claimed human qualities for his crate. A few days ago the old bus had prop-whipped a mechanic the pilot didn't like, sending the man to the hospital for a short stay. Since then, the pilot had treated his battle-scarred sky wagon like a favorite child.

"H-m-m!" the buzzard hedged. "My ship wasn't included—"

"So that's the kind of a mug you are!" Shack sneered.

"Oh, all right—take her," grumbled the pilot. "But Heaven help you if harm comes to her. I love that chariot."

It took Shack exactly five minutes to get into the air with the borrowed Nieuport. He lined the bus out on Captain Doxsey's sky trail, heading for Germany in a long climb.

At twelve thousand, he leveled, snugged the throttle against the open-pin and dug binoculars out of the pit pocket.

He had told nobody about the fat armorer, Romero, bound and gagged in his cubicle. The man would keep nicely there.

The moonlight was very bright and the glasses brought the topsoil of Hunland very near. Shack

could distinguish scuttle-helmeted Boche asleep in the trenches, and later, an occasional gray snake of marching troops going or coming from the lines.

HE SMILED craftily to himself, flew the Nieuport with feet and knees, and kept the binoculars sweeping steadily.

“There they are!” he grunted at last.

Far ahead, less than a thousand feet above the earth, there had become visible something that looked like a swarm of hornets chasing another hornet.

Shack hauled his Nieuport up another thousand feet. He didn’t want to be seen, for he knew very well what was going to happen down there. The contents of the papers Doxsey had hidden had told him. And he wanted it to go through without a hitch! He sure did!

The swarm of fighting planes below was composed, with one exception, of Boche. The exception was Captain Doxsey’s ship. Shack could distinguish the Yank squadron cockades on it.

“Give Doxsey credit!” Shack grumbled. “He thought up a smart way of working it!”

Doxsey seemed to be having trouble with his ship. The cloud of Fokkers had overhauled him. They swirled, diving, Spandau guns muzzling crimson. A time or two, red sparks of tracer climbed almost to where Shack lurked.

Suddenly Captain Doxsey’s plane went into a spin. The Huns followed. Close to the ground, Doxsey’s bus came out of the spin. A level field lay directly below him.

“AND he didn’t pick that spot by accident!” Shack grinned.

With the binoculars, he saw Doxsey make a good landing. Then the captain got out of the plane, arms upraised in token of surrender. Fokker after Fokker settled on the field. German flyers surrounded Doxsey, making him prisoner.

Shack arched off another mile or so to one side to make certain he would not be seen. He saw the Boche pilots flag a passing automobile, put Captain Doxsey in the machine and send him away. The car headed due south.

The Hun falcons who had landed took the air again. They winged south also.

Shack stared through the binoculars and made sure no one remained with Doxsey’s Nieuport. Shoving the Nieuport up near its ceiling, he trailed the Fokker swarm. He idled the Le Rhone to soften the exhaust howl. It would be too bad if he were discovered.

Like geese caught out at night, the Hun ships settled on a tarmac edged with hangars. When the last Fokker was down, Shack cut his own rotary.

His Nieuport had the gliding qualities of a rock. But he had a lot of altitude. He coasted a huge circle, still playing the binoculars. Perhaps two miles from the Fokker lair, he located a patch of pasture that would do for a landing.

He made sure the Germans were taxiing planes about on their tarmac, housing them in hangars. The noise would cover his own arrival. He came in low, settled the Nieuport on the pasture, deadstick, as lightly as he could. The ship bounced some, drummed to a stop.

Shack popped out of the pit, turning the switch back on as he did so. He dove under the wingbank and stood by the prop, ready to give it a spin if necessary, and listened for possible Huns. But the countryside remained peaceful. A roosting bird made quarrelsome noises in a bush near-by. He could hear the blooping of Mercedes on the distant German tarmac.

SOME timber knobbed the pasture edge. Probably it would keep his Nieuport from being discovered.

He palmed two Colts he had brought along—his own and the one he had taken from the fat Romero. Then he set out in a bandy-legged lope for the Boche lair.

He covered the two miles in about fifteen minutes, not bad time considering he had never gone in extensively for cross-country running. He lay down a couple of hundred yards from where he thought the sentries would be and caught his wind.

The Boche had apparently hangared their Fokkers and quieted down. Not a Mercedes was now to be heard.

Shack was getting to his feet when the starter of a car clashed. He listened. The car ground in second gear, came directly toward him. It veered a bit to the right and stopped near enough for Teutonic voices to reach him as a guttural mumble.

Shack stalked the machine warily. He found a spot where he could distinguish the car in the moonlight.

THREE Huns stood beside it. But Shack gave all his attention to one of the trio. This man was stocky, about Shack’s own build, and he wore the baggy garments of a German farmer.

This was the same man who had, earlier in the day, signaled with the motor cycle headlamp! Major Alex

Jackson of the 60th Yank Pursuit Squadron, he had claimed to be. His scarred face was a terrible spectacle in the moonlight.

The ugly-faced man said something in German. His two companions hurriedly departed in the direction of the Hun drome. The ugly-faced one shucked a cuff off his wrist to look at a watch, then sat on the running-board of the car.

“*Eine halbe Stunde!*” Shack distinctly heard him grumble.

Shack wrestled with what German he knew, finally concluded the Boche had said, “One half hour!” He was probably complaining because he had to wait that length of time.

Stealthily, Shack circled back, crossed the road at a spot where the scar-faced man couldn’t see him. He crept to the car. His lunge around the machine was a cat-after-a-mouse dive. He swung one of his Colts, overhand. The nearly three-pound gun clanked on scar-face’s skull. The fellow fell off the fender to the road.

A quick search shifted a spike-snouted Luger from the unconscious man’s pockets to Shack’s. The fellow’s features were even more grisly at close range.

The car was a topless touring. Tangled on the rear seat floor-boards was a tow rope. Shack bound his prisoner with it, gagged the man with a grease cloth he found. Shouldering the fellow, he headed at a trot for the pasture where he had left his Nieuport.

The scar-faced man probably weighed a hundred and sixty, but Shack would have sworn he weighed a ton by the time he staggered into the pasture. The captive was still unconscious.

Working rapidly, Shack changed clothes with him. Then he roped the man to a lower wing of the Nieuport, close to the fuselage, and gagged him. The fellow opened his eyes as Shack finished, glared hate, tried unsuccessfully to speak around the gag.

“You,” Shack informed him, “are the grapes! Be a good egg and wait for papa!”

HE DREW a supply of air into his knot of a chest and legged it back for the Boche drome. It took him twenty minutes to reach it. He was getting his fill of running.

Nearing the tarmac, he tied a handkerchief over his face and carried the Luger in one hand. The two Colts were handy in his belt, but out of sight.

He strode boldly along the road and turned in at the Hun drome. Instantly two sentries popped up in

the moonlight. “*Werden Sie gleich fertig sein?*” asked one.

That was too much for Shack’s smattering of the language. He took a chance on its being an inquiry as to whether he was ready, though.

“*Ja!*” he grunted deep in his chest, and waved an arm, boldly ordering the sentries aside.

The two Boche eased into the gloom beneath a tree—and Shack’s spine ceased to feel like ice water was running down it.

He walked on. Hangars appeared. He could smell castor and gas fumes, and the cordite tang from Spandau guns. There was lamplight and conversation in a box of a hut to the right. He made for that, haunting shadows like a black ghost.

His stalk ended under the lamp-lighted window.

CAPTAIN DOXSEY was in the hut. Half a dozen Boche flyers were present, including an *ober leutnant*. The latter was questioning Doxsey. The Grapes Grabber looked less debonair than usual.

Time after time, his gaze furtively sought the door, as though he were expecting something, but didn’t want the Huns to know.

“Oughta let him sweat for a whiie!” Shack breathed. “But something might slip!”

He adjusted a mask carefully, then sidled around the hut. He barged wrecklessly through the door, Luger juttied out. “*Roussmitem!*” he gritted. “Hands up! And keep quiet!”

The readiness with which every German hand sought the ceiling made it look like the thing had been rehearsed. “C’mon!” Shack snapped at Captain Doxsey.

The Grapes Grabber didn’t even tarry to seize a pistol from one of the Boche. He got out quickly.

“Is your plane in flying condition?” Shack hissed.

“Y-yes!” quavered Doxsey.

“Head for it!” Shack directed. He sprinted to the road, turned down it. Captain Doxsey all but trod his heels.

“*Achtung!*” roared one of the two Hun sentries. “*Was ist?*”

Shack fired the Luger. He carefully missed the sentry—it was the wisest thing to do. Both Boche watchdogs dove into the shadows, and their manner of doing it was as though that had been rehearsed, too. They released a volley of rifle bullets, none of which came within a score of feet of Shack and Doxsey.

On down the road, Shack legged. He sprang into the touring car, bore a boot on the starter. Captain

Doxsey slammed down in the seat beside him. With a clank and a moan, the machine started.

Shack wheeled the car toward where Doxsey's plane had been left. Behind them, guns banged and men yelled. The car hit fifty; quite a clip for that heap. It hurdled ruts, missed roadside ditches by miracles.

THE car rocked into the pasture where Captain Doxsey's plane stood. Shack hauled on the brakes, vaulted out. He beat Doxsey to the plane, plunked his squat form into the control pit.

"Wind her up!" he rapped.

"I had better fly the ship!" Captain Doxsey protested. "You may be out of practice. I mean—er, I presume you're a Yank flyer who has escaped from a German prison camp?"

Doxsey had very nearly given away that he had known all this was to happen exactly as it had. "Nix!" said Shack. "Twist her tail!"

Reluctantly, the Grapes Grabber teetered on the prop. The rotary popped and bawled. Doxsey mounted a wing, not at all pleased with the idea. Shack kept his mask on. He ruddered the ship around, fed the Le Rhone cans gas. A jarring run, a couple of lopsided lurches, and they were up in the moonlight.

Shack banked to the south. A couple of minutes and he was over the pasture where his own Nieuport stood. He slanted down.

Glancing over, he saw Captain Doxsey goggling at the Nieuport. He was very surprised to see the plane there, was the captain.

"What a wallop he's gonna get!" Shack chortled.

He swung wide so the Grapes Crabber wouldn't see the scar-faced man bound and gagged on the Nieuport wing, and put the plane down. He taxied over near his bus.

THE Grapes Grapper rolled off the wing. "What does this mean?" he yelled. For answer, Shack took off his mask.

The Grapes Grabber's jaw slapped down on his necktie.

"You—you!" he choked.

Shack shoved a pugnacious jaw at him. "In person—not a movie!"

Captain Doxsey waved his arms, screamed, "You've spoiled my plan! You've made a monkey out of me! You—!"

"Why should I try to improve nature's job?" Shack snorted.

"My plan!" shrieked Doxsey. "I was going to capture the greatest spy Germany has! The assistant chief of the German Intelligence! You ruined it all!" He shook his fists. "Our two mechanics, Mutt and Jeff, were German spies. I overheard them talking and learned that. I ambushed Mutt tonight. He had some papers. I had to stab him in self defense while I was getting them."

"Yah!" Shack snarled. "And you tried to lay it onto me!"

"Only temporarily, until I could consummate my plan!" Captain Doxsey disclaimed. "Those papers told of an elaborate scheme to get this German super-agent into the Yank air service. He was to pretend to be an American flyer who had escaped from a Boche prison camp.

"He had the papers of a Yank named Major Alex Jackson, and he was going to pass his scarred face off as Jackson's, claiming he was disfigured when shot down. He was to show himself to a Yank flyer so word would get across the line that an American buzzard was loose on the Hun side. That was just to make it less likely the Yanks would get suspicious—!"

"It was me he showed himself to!" Shack grunted. "But it looked queer to me, and I didn't report it like he expected."

THE Germans were going to let this agent with the scarred face pretend to escape with the first Yank flyer who was captured," the Grapes Grabber raved on. "It was all explained in those papers Mutt had. I came over and let myself be captured, so as to be the flyer the spy escaped with. I thought—!"

"You thought you'd catch the gentleman and get more medals and your picture in the papers," Shack said sarcastically.

"I tell you—"

"Let me tell *you!*" Shack bit off savagely. "I got those papers of Mutt's from your cubicle. I got 'em, savvy! Can you go back and prove you had reasons to kill Mutt—without those papers?"

Captain Doxsey snapped, "Your story will prove—!"

Shack's leer stopped the Grapes Grabber. Unholy joy had wreathed Shack's homely face. He made a crying-over-spilled-milk sound with his tongue. Captain Doxsey blanched. "You wouldn't refuse to corroborate my story?"

"Wouldn't I!" Shack slid off the pit rim. "Just think, if my memory would fail and I'd lose those papers, where you would be. They will sure find your fingerprints on the bayonet you stuck in Mutt."

The Grapes Grabber hadn't thought of that. "Won't you—can't I— ah-h-h"—he floundered.

"Sure you can get out of it," Shack told him. "Just go back and tell everybody you were over the line on a solo and nothing at all happened. And get this—say a word about this spy-catching scheme of yours, and you're sunk!"

Reluctantly, Doxsey mumbled, "I— I won't mention it."

"Git!" Shack said grandly.

Captain Doxsey plugged into the pit of his plane, sawed the throttle and rocketed up into the moonlight.

Shack grinned after him. By no chance had the Grapes Grabber seen the scar-faced Boche on the wing of Shack's Nieuport.

Shack decided he'd sky-loaf on the way back and give Doxsey time enough to make it clear to everybody at the squadron that his bat solo had been absolutely uneventful. Then, when Shack showed up with his prisoner, Doxsey wouldn't be in a position to claim the slightest credit.

Shack ambled over, gave his Nieuport prop a twirl. While the plane bumped across the meadow, he squinted overside at his prisoner. The prisoner scowled fiercely back at him. "You," Shack chuckled as the Nieuport left the meadow, "are giving the new Grapes Grabber a dang mean look!"