

ACES OF DEATH

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What infernal power had loosed those gun-bristling Grummans upon stricken China? And who were the merciless white devils who flew them like madmen and who fought like fiends? This sinister riddle called for the unfailing skill of Richard Knight. But even that ace agent was balked. For the winged killer from whom he sought to wrest its answer leaped into the flaming inferno of his own fallen plane—gave vent in his death throes to a defiant scream of triumph.



N THE CROOKED LITTLE STREET that led to the side entrance of the Smiling Buddha night club there was only one patch of light, a shifting red spot on one wall from the glare of a burning building out in war-torn Shanghai. The three men who stole along by the opposite wall were but shadows moving in shadows, save where their faces made three white blurs in the gloom.

The man in the lead, taller than the others, carefully stepped over a litter of wreckage from a half-demolished shop, then froze with a warning whisper as a U.S. Marine Corps sentry passed the nearby intersection. The marine glanced into the side-street, went on. The tall man moved quickly across to the darkened Smiling Buddha, closed by order of the International Settlement council because of its proximity to the battle area.

Three faces passed through the light—the first clear-cut as a head on a coin, a face of action backed by keen, swift thought, the combination which had made Richard Knight the outstanding secret agent of the United States. The second countenance showed a lumpy profile accentuated by a belligerent jaw and a broken nose—a matter of cause and effect. The battered nose was only one of the relics Larry Doyle carried in memory of his service in the Marine Aviation Section. The third face was round as the rolypoly form of its owner, with wide, innocent-looking blue eyes that had made more than one man disregard Hank "Navy" Larson in the beginning of a scrap—only to find he had a Kansas cyclone in his wake.

Knight unlocked the door, and the others followed him into pitchy blackness. As he closed the portal, something behind him fell over with a thud.

"Don't make any noise," he muttered.

"Talk to this fat lummox, not me," growled Doyle. "What he needs—ouch!"

There was a crash and a splintering of glass, intermixed with Doyle's special brand of profanity.

"I never knew a Leatherneck yet that didn't stumble over his own feet," Hank said disgustedly from the darkness.

Knight switched on a pencil-size flashlight. Doyle

was rubbing his knee and contemplating an overturned table and smashed glasses on the floor beyond. Hank, having bumped against a chair, was now calmly seated upon it, his uniform, that of a captain in the Chinese air force, unbuttoned for more comfort.

"Look at him!" snorted Doyle. "Can't even walk a block without getting out of breath."

Hank placidly folded his hands across his stomach. "Conserve your energy for important things, that's my motto," he grinned.

KNIGHT pointed his flashlight around the room. They had entered a cocktail lounge done in somewhat ornate style with a Chinese motif of red, black and gold. Chairs and tables were disarranged, evidently in the course of hurried evacuation. Down a wide stairway another floor, that of the main restaurant, was visible, with an enormous Buddha smiling woodenly from a shrine against the wall.

"General Brett said he'd meet us down there," observed Knight. "We might as well go down and wait."

"It's mighty queer we have to sneak off here for a conference," said Doyle. "What do you think he's up to?"

The tall agent shook his head. "I didn't even see him—he just sent that message and the key to this place."

"He's certainly given us the run-around," complained Doyle. "And then on top of it, sending word for me to keep away from the Marine compound when I've got a dozen old buddies there—"

"Now that is odd," said Hank, languidly getting up from his chair. "I could understand it if he'd told you "to stay away from the Navy, which has a reputation to keep up. But one bad egg with a dozen other bad eggs couldn't— Oh, oh! What have we here?"

Knight's flashlight had passed across a long barmirror, in front of which numerous bottles still reposed. The plump little man moved around behind the bar with a sudden briskness, Doyle close at his heels.

"Ah, the correct assortment," he said pleasantly.

"If I'm dreaming, don't wake me up!" chortled Doyle. "What'll it be, Dick?"

Knight laughed. "Well, maybe Brett wouldn't object to our having just one. Make mine Scotch."

Doyle started to comply. Hank was placing six or seven bottles on the bar. The ex-Marine glowered at him around his crooked nose.

"Why don't you get your car—so you can take the furniture, too?"

"I am now," Hank said with dignity, "about to

prepare a rare libation once served me in Arabia. It is known, somewhat vulgarly I must admit, as a 'Camel's Gizzard,' but once tasted it will never be forgotten."

"That's what I'm afraid of," retorted Doyle. "I'll mix my own poison, if it's just the same to—" The rumble of heavy guns from the direction of Chapei momentarily drowned his voice. The bar glasses shook, and the windows rattled audibly behind their Venetian blinds and heavy drapes. As the noise lessened, Knight took the glass Doyle pushed toward him, laying the flashlight on the bar. Doyle paused to light a cigarette.

The match flame flickered for a second as though in a slight draft. Doyle paid no attention, but Knight flicked a look toward the mirror. In its polished surface, the room was dimly reflected, the shadows deepening with their distance from the bar. Almost invisible in the now opened doorway a figure was crouching, with something metallic gleaming in one hand.

Knight slowly put down his glass. Then with a lightning motion he sent the flashlight slithering along the bar.

"Drop!" he shouted at Hank and Doyle and flung himself to one side. Something whizzed out of the darkness as he whirled around. It struck with a vicious sound near the top of the bar. He saw it was a knife with something fastened to its quivering hilt.

"What the hell!" bellowed Doyle.

Knight pumped a shot at the assassin, but the slam of the door proved the man had not been hit. He raced to the exit, Doyle and Hank behind him. With a jerk at the knob, he kicked the door open, jumping aside in case of another attack.

The assassin, doubled over, was just vanishing into a tiny alley-way which crossed the side street. Knight raced after him, but halted abruptly as he noted the blackness beyond and realized he was dimly silhouetted by the glare from the fires in Chapei.

"Keep back," he muttered to Doyle as the ex-Marine caught up. "He could pick us off if he had a gun."

"He's probably a block away, the rat," Hank said without any great show of emotion. "These Chinese cutthroats can run like sin. The question is, who put him up to it—and why?"

"There was something fastened to that dagger," said Knight. "We might as well see what it is. A patrol is likely to spot us out here, anyway, and Brett said to avoid being seen."

They returned to the night-club, locked the door, and made a hasty survey to be sure no one else was

lurking in the shadows. Then Knight bent over the dagger, which was imbedded in the front of the bar.

"No cheap killer, at any rate. Look at that gold and silver inlay."

He pointed to the elaborate work on the blade, above which a small packet was secured to the hilt-guard.

"You'd have been just as dead with a butcher knife," grunted Doyle. "Boy, I don't blame you for moving fast—even if you did make me spill a perfectly good drink."

AS KNIGHT unfastened the packet, the figure of a two-headed dragon done in exquisite jade was revealed on the dagger hilt. His eyes narrowed, and he quickly unwrapped the little package. A lacquer box about two inches long and an inch wide was revealed. Hank Larson started as he saw it.

"Good Lord! It's the same as—open it, quick!"
Knight held the box to his ear, sniffed at it, then carefully lifted the lid. Inside was a white silken cord tied in a running noose.

"It is the same—the white cord!" exclaimed Hank. All the laziness had gone out of his face. His eyes were suddenly grim. Knight looked at him a moment.

"Then you know what it means?"

"I know it scared one of my men half to death," Hank answered. "And I know of a guy who got a box and cord just like that and died for no reason at all within an hour!"

Knight opened the box wider, pointed to the inside of the lid where a jade dragon identical with that on the dagger was inlaid. Hank examined it closely.

"Was it exactly like this box?" asked Knight.

"I don't know," said Hank. "I just got a glimpse of it. Li Wong—one of the pilots in my squadron—opened it by mistake out at the field this morning. His eyes popped halfway out of his head when he saw the cord, and he shut the box before I could see anything else. Then he looked at the name on the package and said it was for Li Chang—the mail-boy had made a mistake. I thought it was queer, but I had my hands full getting ready for that raid on Hongkew and so I forgot about it. Li Chang was my number five man in Flight One. He had a scared look when I was giving the outfit our orders, but I thought it was because of the scrap we were headed into.

"Anyhow, we hadn't taken off more than three minutes when his ship dived out of formation. He was tumbled over the stick, and the ship crashed across the river into Pootung without any sign of his trying to pull her out. After the fight, we got a report from a couple of Red Cross doctors over there. They said he must've fainted in the air. No signs of bullet wounds—and anyway there wasn't a Jap near us."

"I'd like to talk with this Li Wong," Knight said abruptly.

"He was out at the field when I left," said Hank. "But what about our meeting with General Brett?"

"He may be an hour late, or more, from what the message said, and this is vitally important."

"Look here," said Hank, "just what do you know about all this?"

"Enough to realize that one of us has been marked for death—probably all three of us. Have you ever heard of the Chinese secret society called 'The White Dragon'?"

"No," said Hank, "but I've only been over here a year or so, and you don't pick up stuff like that easily."

"Unless you're looking for it," replied Knight. "Five years ago I was over here on a mission, and I tangled with 'The White Dragon' then. They made a mistake—or I'd never have lived to be talking about it."

Hank and Doyle stared at the box and the cord. "Then this is some kind of warning?" demanded Doyle.

Knight smiled drily. "It is a pleasant little invitation for the recipient to kill himself—and thereby save 'The White Dragon' the trouble of doing it. If you ignore it, they make it a little more painful, as a rule. It used to be the custom of the old Chinese emperors to send the white cord to subjects who had displeased them. Then the said subjects would bow themselves out gracefully or otherwise—a sort of Chinese hara kiri. The society of the White Dragon is supposed to have sprung up after the revolution, with a number of important mandarins at the head. The Chinese government denies its existence—but I believe it is a powerful influence in Nanking, even though it's unseen."

"Well, hanged if I'm going to bump myself off for half a dozen white dragons!" snorted Doyle. He drew his automatic from the holster under his left arm, glared around into the shadows. Knight grinned.

"That's the spirit, Lothario. Do you mind sticking here while Hank and I go out to the field?"

"Huh?" said Doyle. "Say, if you think—"

"All right, then we'll leave a note for General Brett down in that lower room. We'll probably be back before he arrives, at that."

Hank Larson found a supply of candles down at the

Buddha shrine, and they left one burning beside the note, and two more up in the bar and the lounge so that the G-2 general would know they had been there and would not wait upstairs for them.

FIVE MINUTES later they were on their way in Hank's car to the temporary field near Chenju. They had passed the sentries at the border of the Settlement and were proceeding through a semi-darkened street westward when the bellow of motors sounded from up in the night.

"This is a swell place to be caught in a raid," said Hank. "The Japs blasted hell out of this area the last time they came over."

Searchlights probed up, were readily visible flashing across the tops of buildings through smoke from the burning buildings. Hank stopped the car with a jerk as two ships darted through one of the lights.

"Dick!" he exclaimed, "look at that fool in the second crate!"

Knight jumped out, stared into the sky. An Italian-built Breda 27 with regular Chinese insignia was twisting frantically to escape from a tracer blast that riddled its wings. He started as he saw the pursuing plane. It was pure white from nose to tail, and as it flipped around, blazing another fusillade at the Chinese ship, he recognized the outlines of a Grumman fighter. It bore no identifying marks.

"Where in the devil did that ship come from?" howled Doyle, "Grumman never sold any planes to Japan."

Two more white Grummans plunged out of the gloom, their wings brightly reflecting the glare of a searchlight. All three closed in on the seemingly doomed Breda, but suddenly six more Chinese fighters thundered into the battle, their approach masked by a wall of smoke through which they had dived. One of the Grummans pulled up crookedly, fell off in a hail of bullets from the Chinese planes. The other white ships renversed at terrific speed, with the rescuers and also the rescued pilot charging after them. Knight shaded his eyes as the crippled Grumman whirled downward in a tightening spin.

"He's going to crash near here!" yelped Doyle.

The Grumman came half-way out of the spin, screamed overhead, then vanished beyond a row of buildings. A grinding roar sounded through the din from the motors above. Knight leaped into Hank's car and took the wheel.

"Come on!" he rapped. "We've got to find out the truth about that ship!"

CHAPTER II FACE IN THE FLAMES

ANK AND DOYLE SPRANG IN, and Knight sent the car skidding around a corner. A block and a half away, flames showed where the fighter had crashed. It had struck on a sidewalk, its crumpled wing breaking in the window of a Chinese shop, which also was blazing. Frightened Orientals were fleeing the scene as Knight braked the car, but in the middle of the street he saw two men. One was the Grumman pilot, who had evidently been thrown free in the crash. He was struggling desperately with another man who seemed to be shoving him back toward the burning ship.

Neither of the two was an Oriental. Knight saw that much as he dashed toward them. A gust of fire drove him back for a moment, and he raced to the other side of the street to get around the wreck. Shading his eyes against the glare, he saw the pilot jerk himself free from his assailant. The man's hand flashed to his hip, and the crack of a gun cut through the roar of the flames. The other man staggered backward, his sallow face, suddenly ashen, then his knees gave way and he fell.

The Grumman pilot wheeled unsteadily, and for a second he, too, seemed about to collapse. He rubbed one hand across his face, smearing the blood that streamed from his temple and down over his goggles. Knight tried to reach him, again was cut off by the flames. The pilot's face twitched toward him, and he raised his gun in a shaking hand. A shot drilled the wall behind the secret agent. Knight jumped back, snatched out his own gun.

Doyle's automatic barked before he could take aim, and the pilot's gun fell from his bullet-smashed fingers. With a furious gesture, the man lifted his dripping hand, then whirled and leaped into the inferno!

As Knight and the others stood appalled, the pilot's flying-suit and helmet burst into flames. Sickened, Knight closed his eyes, but a cry from Doyle made him open them again. Stark amazement overcame his horror. Weird yellow smoke was swirling about the doomed man's head, and through it he could see

an uncanny transformation taking place. The pilot's face was changing, blurring—darkening even before the crackling flames touched it. Through that eerie smoke, brown skin and slanting eyes began to emerge where an instant before had been the face of a white man. The smoke brightened, became a yellow flame, and in that second the terrible metamorphosis was complete and the face of a Japanese glared out at them! The fire-swept lips opened, and a frightful scream rang out—a scream that held less of agony than of diabolical triumph. Knight's blood chilled in spite of the scorching heat. For a second longer his eyes rested on that sinister face as it flamed and blurred again. Then the fire mercifully eddied across and hid the burning figure.

Knight saw Doyle's awe-stricken face as he backed away from the heat.

"Good Heavens!" Doyle said hoarsely. "Did you see that?"

Knight dazedly nodded. Hank was staring into the flames as though he doubted his senses.

"He turned into a Jap!" he mumbled. "But that's crazy—it couldn't happen!"

The wail of a distant siren brought Knight out of a trance. He turned quickly to Doyle.

"There'll be fire-trucks and ambulances here in a minute! Help me search that man the pilot shot—we may find a clue to this hellish business."

The victim had fallen on his face. Knight turned him over, stiffened as he saw the man's aquiline nose and olive-skinned features.

"Juan Savilla! What on earth was the 'Ace of Madrid' doing in China?"

"The Ace of Madrid?" said Hank, startled. "The best pilot the Loyalists had," said Knight. "But I don't see what connection—" he broke off, commenced a hurried search of the dead man. He found a pocket-book and two letters, was starting to rip open the lining of Savilla's coat when Hank gave an exclamation. "Look out, Dick—here comes a squad of soldiers!" Eight Chinese infantrymen, led by a corporal, were running down the middle of the street, the light gleaming on their bayonets. Behind them swarmed twenty or thirty Celestials, men, women and children—the start of what would soon be a jabbering mob.

Knight thrust the wallet and the letters into his coat pocket, twisting as he did, so that the motion would not be seen by the approaching soldiers. But instantly, a shout came from somewhere on the other side of the burning ship.

"Thieves! The white men are robbing the corpse!" "Run for the car!" snapped Knight.

Rifles cracked as they raced around the flaming Grumman. Knight blessed the wild aim of the excited Orientals as the three of them reached the car unhurt. Hank took the wheel, threw the engine into gear. A round hole abruptly appeared in the windshield, and another bullet drilled the window on the left side, Knight leveled his gun through the jagged break the second slug had made in order to cover their retreat.

ANOTHER car had arrived on the scene through an alley beside the shop where the Grumman had crashed. A man was firing across the hood, his body shielded as he knelt on the running-board. Knight triggered a swift shot, and the other man's hat was jerked from his head. A swarthy face, made handsome by prematurely silvered hair, was revealed by the glow of the flames, then the driver of the car sent it rolling backward into the alley.

"Step on it!" Knight flung at Hank Larson. "We'll be caught between the devil and the deep sea in a minute!"

The little man tramped on the throttle, and the machine roared away. He took the next turn on two wheels, and the sporadic gunfire of the Chinese soldiers died away.

"No lights!" Knight said tautly. "Keep turning till we're sure we've lost that other car."

"Things are happening too fast for me," Hank muttered.

"And for me," Knight said grimly. "Doyle, did you recognize the man who fired over the hood?"

"No, I was too busy ducking glass."

"It was John Christian."

"Holy cats!" breathed Doyle. "I thought he was dead."

"So did I. There hasn't been a sign of him for two years."

"Christian is a fine name for a gunman," said Hank.

"He's no gunman," replied Knight. "This is the first time I've ever known him to come out in the open. It must have been something desperate."

"If he isn't a gunman, what is he?" Hank said.

"Just about the smartest free-lance spy on earth—and the most cold-blooded. Nobody knows his right name or nationality; he calls himself Christian as a bit of irony. He's been mixed up in espionage all over the world. He'd have been murdered long ago, but he usually has other, spies carry out his schemes."

"It's too much for me to figure," Hank said heavily. He turned into a street running in the direction of Chenju. "That business at the nightclub I could take, but all this—and that pilot who committed suicide! By Heaven, I don't think his face really changed—it must have been some queer effect of the flames. Or else there were two men in the ship."

"No, there weren't two men," Knight answered.

"But, good Lord, Dick—you don't believe in a Jekyll and Hyde act that can change a white man into a Japanese?"

"Not exactly, but I've seen some queer things in the Orient." Knight stared thoughtfully ahead. "Still, it must have been something powerfully important to bring Juan Savilla and Christian into it. According to dispatches from Spain, Savilla was reported to have shot down three Insurgent ships day before yesterday, which proves the Loyalist government is covering up his absence. But maybe these letters will tell us what he was doing in Shanghai."

The first letter proved to be a brief note from the Loyalist premier instructing the Spanish consul in Shanghai to aid Captain Juan Savilla in every way possible. Knight opened the other, held it close to the dash-light. He whistled softly.

"What is it?" exclaimed Doyle, from the rear seat.

"A letter of introduction to General Brett! It gives Savilla authority to speak for the Loyalist government, and asks Brett to cooperate with him. It ends with the phrase, 'in this matter concerning both our countries,' and it's signed by the premier, also."

"Maybe he'd already seen the general," said Hank. "Maybe that's why Brett wanted to see us."

"I think you're right," agreed Knight. "Something's come up which he wants us to do under cover, and he's counting on you for information about the Chinese angle, or to help out in the air."

"Then I'd better take you back there right away," said Hank, "though I ought to get to the field."

Knight leaned out and peered up into the night. Searchlights were still wildly stabbing the sky, and over the Hongkew area he could see a number of planes milling around.

"How soon can you get us to the field?" he asked quickly.

"Fifteen minutes, if those soldiers didn't take our number and send an alarm to the patrol-posts. But Li Wong is probably in the air—where I ought to be."

"That angle can wait. I want to force down one of those Grummans if possible." HANK stared at him. "If the Japs suspect you're United States secret agents it would be just too bad if you were forced down in their area."

"We'll have to risk that. This Grumman business will blow off the lid anyway, if we don't get to the bottom of it in a hurry. It was bad enough when Washington slapped the embargo on those twenty Bellancas intended for China. What are we going to say when the Chinese ask about those Grummans?"

"I was just thinking about that," Hank said glumly. "Where could they have come from?"

"We can probably find out—if you'll let us use a couple of your fighters."

"I'll have to say that you're volunteer pilots, and it'll kick up a rumpus later—but I'll do it."

The plump little captain stepped on the throttle again, and the car sped through the almost deserted streets, slowing only to avoid debris from bombwrecked buildings or to skirt an area where fire was raging. They passed through the old walled city, stopped for identification at a sentry-post on the Chenju road. There was no delay after the Chinese guards saw Hank's uniform, and they went on at increased speed.

"That knife trick at the Smiling Buddha worries me," said Doyle. "Brett might walk into a trap, if any of the 'White Dragon' outfit are hanging around there."

"He isn't coming alone," replied Knight. "General Wu Feng is to be there, and you can bet there'll be Chinese agents guarding him."

Doyle gazed back into the sky over Shanghai, where tracers, shell explosions, and searchlights made a vivid scene.

"Looks like the Fourth of July. Must be twenty ships in the scrap now, and the A-A's are banging away every time they get a chance."

"Yeah, and probably hitting their own planes twothirds of the time," said Hank. He slowed for a bridge across a canal, swore under his breath. "I can't forget that devil's deliberately jumping into the fire. I thought at first your Spaniard was trying to shove him in, but he must've been trying to keep him back."

Knight was silent, as he too recalled that gruesome scene and the eerie transformation of the face in the flames.

"What do you really think?" Hank demanded bluntly. "Was he a white man or a Japanese?"

"I don't know. An Oriental would be more likely to throw himself into the fire rather than be captured—but I saw the pilot clearly. He had the face of a white man." "It's odd how 'white' runs through everything that's happened tonight," said Hank. "The white cord, the 'White Dragon,' those Grummans—"

"What color do Chinese mourners wear at funerals?" interrupted Knight.

Hank jumped.

"I'd clean forgotten that! They wear white, when we'd wear black."

"And the white cord means death. The color was chosen purposely to bear out the suggestion of the noose."

"Then those Grummans must have been painted white for the same reason—so they'd mean death to the Chinese. Death-ships! But—hell's bells, you don't think the 'White Dragon' society is back of it? That would be Chinese fighting Chinese!"

"It's happened before," Knight said somberly.

"There was no Japanese insignia on those Grummans.

It might be part of some plot hatched by a group of traitors. But I don't think it's that simple."

"Well, if nailing one of the Grummans will help, you'll soon have the chance—providing the fight lasts a few minutes longer."

POINTING to three hangars which loomed vaguely a short distance ahead and to the left of the highway, Hank now drove in past the operations office and stopped near the line, where several Breda 27's and Curtiss Hawks stood surrounded by a crowd of Chinese mechanics. A tall, thin Chinese major came running over as Hank squeezed from under the wheel.

"Captain Larson!" he cried shrilly. "What does this mean? Where have you been? Why did you give your pilots leave of absence when—"

"I didn't give anybody leave of absence," Hank cut in. "And I had permission to be in Shanghai."

The Chinese officer was almost dancing with rage. "Six pilots are absent—I was told you let them go! And now the Japanese are attacking—"

"I know that," snapped Hank. "I got here as fast as I could, and I've two new volunteers ready to fly."

He shoved past the major, motioned Knight and Doyle toward two of the Bredas. Mechanics scurried for helmets and goggles.

"Thank Heaven they haven't identified those Grummans yet," he whispered to Knight. "Maybe we can shoot down the others before hell starts popping."

"No, we've got to force one down in the Chinese lines," Knight replied in an undertone. "And with the pilot alive, if possible—so we can drag the truth out of him."

"All right, it's your show," said Hank.

The mechanics came running up with the flyinggear, and in a few seconds the three Americans were ready. Knight looked grimly at Doyle.

"If your engine conks, it had better be over a Chinese area."

"You're telling me?" snorted Doyle. "Boy, there are about a hundred Japs just itching to get their mitts on me, after that 1932 row."

The Bredas' powerful Alfa-Romeo "Mercury" engines had been started and were blasting clouds of dust across the field. Knight swiftly scrutinized the instrument board as he settled himself into his cockpit, then fastened his belt and ran up the engine. Idling it, he let the mechanics swing the ship, then he taxied out after Hank, who was avoiding the rough spots caused by hastily-filled bomb-craters.

A floodlight went on, and the tail of Hank's ship lifted. Knight opened the Mercury, and the Breda hurled itself into the wind. With Doyle at his left, he sent the fighter boring up into the gloom.

SHANGHAI SHAMBLES

ITH PROP SET FLAT, he

climbed steeply, clinging hard on Hank Larson's right wing. At a thousand feet, Hank signalled and swung across for him to take the lead. Knight veered into point position, warmed his guns, then climbed slightly to the south of Chapei in order to approach the Hongkew section from over the Anglo-American part of the Settlement.

Ahead was a wild and brilliant picture. A-A guns were blazing from the fighting lines and from the Japanese cruiser Idzumo in the Whangpoo. Heavier batteries had joined in the action, the Chinese shelling Hongkew and the Japanese vessels lying farther down in the river, and the Nipponese responding with furious barrages on the Chinese positions northwest of Soochow Creek.

In addition to A-A blasts, star-shells of white, blue, and orange color were bursting over an area roughly seven miles square, leaving trails of colored smoke to float through the searchlights as their glow died away. Against this fiercely beautiful background, at least fifty planes were fighting a furious battle, darting through searchlights, renversing at mad speed to avoid collisions, their guns lacing the sky with bright streaks.

Knight hunched a trifle lower in his cockpit, took a tighter grip on stick and throttle. Death waited ahead for the man who made the slightest mistake, whose keyed-up nerves led him into the tiniest error. Behind his goggles, he searched for a flash of white wings.

It came, directly above Soochow Creek, and in a split-second he was hurling his Breda above the twisting Grumman. Three Chinese ships—two Hawks and a Fiat—were pouncing upon the white ship. But before they could drive in a finishing burst, two Nakajima 91's dived frenziedly into the fight.

One of the Hawks burst into flames and went whirling down toward the creek. The remaining Hawk and the Fiat swerved hastily to defense tactics, and the Grumman lanced away, momentarily free. Knight dived after it, driving it toward the Whangpoo with a burst past its left wingtip. The pilot skidded, tried to cut back over Hongkew only to meet a savage blast from Hank's guns.

With a violent zoom, the Grumman pilot tried to shake off Knight, whipping around in a vertical bank. Knight stabbed a burst past the man's prop, and Doyle plunged in with cowl-guns pounding. The white ship slid off, caught itself, then dived across toward the Bund. Knight was pitching after it, with Hank and Doyle about to herd the mystery ship toward Pootung, when four Kawasaki 92's drilled in from the northeast.

Knight caught sight of the first ship as a blue star-shell burst close by it. He snatched a flare-pistol from its clip, sent a red Verey rocket streaking above Hank's Breda. The little man jerked around, flung a swift signal to Doyle. A blast from the first Kawasaki's guns ripped through the fuselage back of Knight. He snapped his Breda into a lightning turn, raked the tail of the Nipponese ship. The Kawasaki rolled over with a shattering force that tore the rest of the crumpled tail to pieces. Knight saw the brown-faced pilot sag down in his pit, either shot or knocked unconscious by the impact of his head against the fast-whipping plane. Engine wide open, the tailless ship plunged down into the heart of Shanghai.

JAPANESE bullets had torn away part of Knight's wind-screen and enclosure. He pawed a sliver of debris from where it had stuck in his cheek, pitched after the now fleeing Grumman. A Chinese Fiat with

both wings shot off came plummeting down the sky. The Grumman pilot skidded wildly to evade the hurtling coffin, and the stripped fuselage dived on and vanished. Knight pulled back his throttle, jockeyed the Breda in behind the half-stalled Grumman. The pilot cast a tense glance backward, went rigid as he saw his pursuer.

Thumb against his cowl-gun's trip, Knight stared at the man before him. In the glow from searchlights and star-shells he could plainly see that the pilot was a white man. But that was not all. There was something familiar about that face. Somewhere, he had seen it before—sometime when it had not had that frozen fear upon it.

Only an instant, he had that glance, that fleeting impression. Head still turned, the Grumman pilot slammed his stick back and sent the white plane rocketing upward. Knight jammed his own stick to his belt, and the Breda screamed after it. Hank and Doyle were also zooming, converging en the mystery ship. Knight held his fire, but his grim eyes kept to his sights. That devil must have guessed they intended to take him alive, or he would never have risked that trick while under the Breda's guns. The next time it might be better to shoot off the Grumman's prop and give the man no chance to escape.

The white ship went suddenly onto its back, its spouting guns aimed down at Knight. But the secret agent had been prepared for that maneuver. At the first flip of the Grumman's wings, he snapped the Breda into a tight roll, and the Grumman roared by with its guns burning only the air. Hank and Doyle were instantly on top of the white fighter, as Knight had intended. He dived after them, triggered a quick burst that kept the pilot from zooming again.

The Grumman was directly under his guns, with Hank and Doyle riding close to its wings, herding it back toward Chenju, when two searchlights weaved across the smoke-filled sky and spotted the white ship's wings. Knight looked around anxiously. They had contrived to isolate the Grumman without being seen, but there were still at least twenty Nipponese ships in the air. A swift glance showed that most of the battle was still over Hongkew, but through the glare of the two searchlights he saw a smaller group of ships fighting less than a mile northward.

Suddenly one of the planes broke loose from the conflict and raced toward the Grumman and the three Bredas. Knight dropped back a hundred feet, ready to fend off an attack but still keeping in line with the

Grumman. Red spots abruptly flashed on the cowl of the approaching ship, and tracer lines probed out at Knight's wings. He threw the Breda into a tight bank, tripped his wing-guns. A burst flamed across at the newcomer, then he hastily lifted his hand from the clamp.

The ship was a Curtiss Hawk from Hank's squadron, and the Chinese pilot, seeing them grouped about the Grumman, apparently thought they were traitors protecting the white ship.

Hank signaled madly to the Chinese, and the Fiat's guns went dark. The interruption took only a second, but the Grumman pilot shot into a lightning zoom before Hank could turn back. Doyle cut loose with all four guns as he chandelled after the Grumman, and Knight—hurdling the open-mouthed Chinese in the Fiat—backsticked to block the pilot from turning toward Hongkew.

The white ship was now clearly visible, for one of the searchlights was clinging tenaciously to its easilyfollowed wings. Knight was driving it back toward the river, and Doyle was chopping short bursts across the right wingtips, when a powerful flare blossomed a thousand feet above them.

Knight's head jerked back for a quick look, then he gazed up in blank amazement. A flight of Nakajimas was plunging down the sky with a U.S. Navy Grumman at the point!

THE Navy ship was almost on him. Suddenly it lanced to one side and charged at the white fighter. The white Grumman spun at amazing speed, and its guns crashed a smoking torrent through the wing of its sister-ship. At once the Nakajimas broke formation and screeched down at the Bredas. In a flash, the sky was a tangle of wings, with tracers piercing the wind-whirled smoke.

A Nakajima plunged under Knight's ship so close that he could have rolled his wheels on its wing. He jerked his stick, kicked frantically away. Then his rudder leaped under his feet, and flicking a look back, he saw that half his rudder was in shreds. The Breda lurched drunkenly as another Nakajima crashed a barrage through the left wing. Knight kicked furiously, slammed a burst dead-on at the Japanese, and the Nakajima's prop went to pieces.

Knight now saw the man in the Navy Grumman fighting desperately with two of the Nakajimas he had seemed to lead. The white ship had zoomed clear of the colliding planes, but now it returned with a fierce

dive at the Navy fighter. Knight crouched behind his sights and jammed his throttle open. A brown face twitched sidewise from the pit of a Nakajima. Knight grimly squeezed his cowl-trips and the brown face vanished.

The pilotless ship fell off to the left, grazed the white Grumman. Knight shot the Breda into the space left as the mystery pilot kicked clear. His guns were almost on the second Nakajima when a third Jap ship flashed in on his right. The blast of the new man's guns tore Knight's cowl wide open. Fragments of metal and rivets pelted him in the face, and a cold splash of alcohol told him that his compass had gone to pieces.

The fumes blew into his mouth, up his nostrils, and he gasped for breath, wiping madly at his goggles so he could see. The Breda was trembling under a battering hail of lead, and a sudden erratic pound proved that the engine had been hit. He flung his goggles away, found the Breda in a tight bank, with smoke coming thinly from under the cowl. The Navy Grumman was in a spin, and Doyle and Hank were battling like demons with three Nakajimas and a Kawasaki which had joined the fight. There was no sign of the white Grumman.

Knight pulled the faltering Breda around for one last burst at the Japanese ships. He saw his "tracers scorch across the tail of a Nakajima, saw the ship slide out of the fight. Then the Breda's nose dropped in a whistling dive.

He pulled it up, nursing the motor. He was about to turn back toward Chenju when he saw the Navy Grumman come out of its spin. A second later, fire spouted from one side of the plane, and he saw the pilot tumble off into space. There was no other ship near, and he knew that the man must have fired into the Grumman's tank to burn the fighter.

Abandoning his first intent, Knight nosed down toward the falling ship. Five hundred feet below, silhouetted against the Whangpoo River, the pilot was swaying back and forth under his parachute. Knight slipped closer, and the pilot stared across at him. The flaming Grumman whirled on by, and by its glare the secret agent could see that the pilot was wounded. His face was ghastly, and the right side of his flying-suit carried a large, dark stain.

With an obvious effort, the man raised one hand, pointed off into the night. Knight ruddered in as close as he dared, jabbed his finger down toward the Whangpoo to warn the Navy man of his danger. But the pilot's head had sunk forward on his breast. Knight

blipped his engine, and circled tightly. The engine roar seemed to arouse the wounded man. He lifted his head, made an effort to haul on the shrouds as he saw the water below.

Apparently confused, he slipped the wrong way, toward the center of the Whangpoo. Knight saw him fumbling with his chute harness as he saw his mistake and realized he would drop into the river. Closing his throttle, the secret agent switched off the sputtering Breda, though he could have reached the field at Chenju. Skidding to kill his speed, he followed the Navy man down.

A searchlight from the Idzumo caught the figure in the chute just as the man settled into the water. Knight fish-tailed vigorously, braced himself as the Breda stalled, nose-high, six feet above the Whangpoo. The fighter dropped, hit with a resounding smack, and buried its nose in the water. Knight flicked open his belt and was tossed twenty feet through the air. He struck headfirst into cold water, came up not far from the struggling Navy man. He hastily pulled off his shoes, ridded himself of helmet and goggles, and swam to aid the pilot.

THE man had freed himself from his chute, but was almost exhausted when Knight reached him. He turned on his side, made a feeble attempt to strike at the secret agent, then gave a gasp of relief as he saws Knight's face.

"Thought you might be a Jap," he said huskily.

"It's all right, sailor," Knight said reassuringly. "Turn over on your back, and I'll get you ashore."

"No—I'm done for," whispered the other man. He clawed at Knight's arm. "But don't let the Japs get my body."

The searchlight from the Idzumo threw a dazzling glare upon the spot, and Knight saw that the pilot's eyes had closed. In the same moment he heard the rapid exhaust of a fast motor-boat from beyond the blinding light. Suddenly there came the crack of a rifle, followed by another quick back. The searchlight went out.

"Good shooting, Jones!" said a crisp voice. "All right, coxswain, get in there before they spot us."

A U.S. Navy gig swung in, and Knight and the other man were hauled aboard by blue jackets. As the gig roared away, another searchlight from the Idzumo found the white spread of the collapsed chute and probed around the water nearby. The crisp voice spoke again.

"Hold those lines tight so the tarpaulin over the

bow can't slip off. They must not see the name if they pick us up with another light. Keep down, men, so your uniforms won't show."

The searchlight danced back and forth but failed to spot the gig. By its glow Knight saw a Navy two-striper bending over in the stern-sheets to look at the pilot.

"He's dead," the officer muttered.

"Do you recognize him?" said Knight.

The two-striper stared at him in quick suspicion.

"Who are you?"

"Admiral Wardell will vouch for me," replied Knight. "You're from the Augusta, aren't you?"

"Yes," said the two-striper after a brief hesitation. He bent closer, spoke in an altered tone. "Aren't you the man who came on board with General Brett about ten days ago?"

"Yes," said Knight. He lowered his voice so that only the two-striper could hear him. "I'm working under cover with both the general and Admiral Wardell. You won't be breaking any confidences if you tell me where that Navy fighter came from."

The officer looked at him blankly.

"I was hoping you could tell us that. Even the admiral doesn't know—he was as startled as the rest of us when he saw that Grumman."

"And those other white Grummans?" said Knight.

"What! You mean the white planes were of American make, too?"

"They were," Knight answered grimly.

"But the pilots! What were they—Japanese or white men?"

Knight gazed up into the smoky sky, slowly shook his head.

"I wish to Heaven I knew."



N THE LOWER FLOOR of the Smiling Buddha night club the rumble of gunfire was almost inaudible, and a grave silence pervaded the room where three men waited for General Brett. Knight, clad in a uniform borrowed from a Navy commander, looked across the candle-lit table at General Wu Feng, and red-headed Arthur Dawson, the American vice-consul.

"And that's the truth, gentlemen. Admiral Wardell has no idea where those planes came from. The only possible clue is that a message to the Augusta, in Navy code, was begun several days ago and suddenly discontinued, as though the sender had been afraid it might be decoded by some one else. It was not from the Navy Department, and the Augusta radio operator thought it came from a vessel in the China Sea."

The Chinese general sat motionless, his black, almond-shaped eyes fixed on Knight's face.

"It is most strange," he said in a sibilant voice. "About the transformation of faces which you describe—that, of course, must have been a mistake. You saw the man's skin darken as it scorched, and you imagined the rest."

"General Wu," Knight said courteously, "I don't blame you for thinking it incredible—but three of us saw the same thing. Captain Larson and Mr. Doyle will tell you the identical story."

Wu Feng's saffron face was inscrutable as he replied. "You are sure, then, that they were not destroyed in the battle?"

Knight sobered.

"They may have been, but they seemed to be getting the best of it when I was forced out, and some Chinese pilots were coming to help them."

Wu Feng took a photograph from a dispatch case at his elbow.

"Mr. Knight, this picture shows you and Mr. Doyle and Captain Larson—the captain is wearing our uniform, you notice—standing beside an American plane upon the deck of a Japanese aircraft carrier and being greeted by Japanese officers!"

"It's obviously a faked picture!" Dawson burst out. Knight calmly picked up the photograph.

"No, it's correct—except that they've left out the guards who were covering us. Look at our expressions—do we seem to be very pleased?"

The Chinese general permitted himself a dry smile.

"On close examination, there does seem to be a certain lack of happiness upon your faces, but the Japanese officers appear to be quite pleased."

"They had just captured us," Knight began, but Wu Feng stopped him with a slow movement of his hand.

"I am acquainted with the details, Mr. Knight. Your esteemed General Brett has told me how you and your two comrades saved Shanghai from even worse disaster than the Japanese bombings, when you destroyed the American invention which froze men by means of a light-beam. I am quite satisfied that you three are innocent—but the average Chinese would see only evidence of treachery in

this photograph. As you must know from previous visits to China, many of our people resent foreigners because of the International Settlement."

"The city has certainly profited by it," began Dawson, but Knight gave him a warning glance and he subsided.

"Yes, Shanghai has become a great metropolis," said Wu Feng wearily. "And more than a million Chinese live within the Settlement borders—living on a much higher standard than those outside. But the masses outside have always resented the situation—as you would be angered by a Japanese city in the heart of your New York with its own laws and police."

"I don't see what that has to do with these white planes," Dawson broke out again before Knight could stop him.

WU FENG'S face became very solemn. "It has everything to do with them, Mr. Dawson. I am trying to show you that there is already a basic peril in this situation." He hesitated, seemed to come to some decision. "I will expect what I am about to say to go no further—may I have your pledge?"

Both Knight and Dawson quickly agreed, and he went on.

"I have heard rumors of an ominous sort, concerned principally with the population outside the Settlement. These rumors come not only through our military intelligence but through the Society of the White Dragon, of which I am a ranking member."

Knight carelessly lifted one hand and adjusted his tie. "The White Dragon, you say?"

Wu Feng inclined his head. "Yes, one of the oldest secret societies in China."

"I am already acquainted with the White Dragon," said Knight. With his eyes fixed on the Chinese, he slowly brought out the lacquer box, which he had transferred from his wet civilian clothes. Opening it, he produced the white silken cord, which the tight-fitting lid had kept dry. General Wu Feng looked at the box and the cord in apparently genuine amazement.

"Where did you get these?" he asked quickly.

"They were a gift," Knight said in a wry voice.
"That's what I meant in my note to General Brett," he explained, watching Wu's saffron face.

"Then it is worse than I thought," muttered the Chinese. "Mr. Knight, this warning was not from the White Dragon. Such occasions are few—and I would have been the one to order it, here in Shanghai."

"Five years ago, another such attempt was made on me," said Knight.

"In 1932, as now, there were many spies in Shanghai," replied Wu Feng. "You were mistaken for an enemy of China, and your death was decreed. I, myself, rescinded the order at the last moment when I learned you were an American agent."

For a moment longer, Knight looked into the elder man's dark eyes. Then he stood up.

"I believe you, General Wu. May I thank you for saving my life?"

Wu Feng bowed.

"I am very happy that the error was discovered in time. But now—"

He stopped as footsteps sounded on the upper floor. In a moment, General John Brett came hurrying down the stairs, with four Chinese agents in civilian clothes. Brett's kindly face was pale and his eyes betrayed a powerful emotion. He nodded hastily to Knight and to Dawson, turned to Wu Feng.

"I apologize deeply for being late, General Wu, but a terrible thing has occurred."

Wu Feng motioned to the four agents to wait at the exit. As the men disappeared up the stairs, he looked at the distraught Intelligence general. "It is, perhaps, this matter of the Grumman planes which Mr. Knight has told us about?" Brett wheeled to the secret agent.

"You saw the fight?"

"I was in it." And Knight swiftly sketched what had. happened.

Brett looked at him in astonishment when he described how the first Grumman pilot had leaped into the flames and the metamorphosis which had followed.

"It's some fantastic trick, of course!" he exclaimed.

"But we've no time to worry about that part now. Those white Grummans must be found and destroyed. I'm counting on you and Doyle, and as many Chinese pilots as can be spared for the search—that's why I wanted to see you here, General Wu, to explain this situation, where Knight and Doyle would not be openly linked with our actions."

Wu Feng looked at him intently.

"Then you already know something about the white planes?"

"Yes." Brett dragged a gilded chair from in front of the Buddha shrine and nervously seated himself. "But not until—"

"And you know the reason for the American Navy plane appearing, at first with the Japanese?" interrupted Wu Feng.

"Navy plane?" General Brett said in consternation. "What do you mean?"

From somewhere in the room came a faint sound, like a sigh of relief. Knight looked around swiftly, then sprang to his feet. The eyes of the Buddha were suddenly alive!

"Thank you, General," a whisper came from the lips of the idol. "You have greatly relieved my mind."

BRETT jumped up, overturning his chair, and. Wu Feng and Dawson rose quickly. Knight leaped to the side of the Buddha, snatching out his gun, but the idol's eyes instantly narrowed to slits.

"Dje li tai!" Wu Feng shouted up the stairs. A cry from his bodyguard answered him, but simultaneously two steel doors shot from niches at the foot of the steps. Dawson ran wildly for the stairway, but the doors clicked together and locked before he could get through. A soft laugh sounded from inside the idol. Knight fired straight at the Buddha's smiling lips. There was a metallic clang and he knew that steel or iron protected the man inside. The seemingly wooden surface was only a clever deception.

A clatter arose from the other side of the stairway door as Wu Feng's guards hammered fiercely against it. Dawson gave a sudden exclamation.

"Look! The corners of the shrine!"

From tiny apertures hidden in the carved wood, two streams of almost colorless vapor were issuing.

"It's goal We'll be killed!" Dayson morned.

"It's gas! We'll be killed!" Dawson moaned.

Knight desperately renewed his attack on the Buddha, pounding it with the butt of his gun in hopes of finding an unprotected spot. Brett picked up a chair, crashed it against the idol's head, but it splintered vainly upon the metal figure.

"Try to stop the gas from coming out!" Knight exclaimed. He ran to one corner of the shrine, but no sooner had he stuffed his handkerchief over the tiny hole when the vapor began to stream from a point at the top of the shrine.

"Kwai hsie! Hurry!" Wu Feng was yelling madly to the guards on the other side of the door. "I will be dead in a minute!"

Knight staggered back from the shrine as a sudden dizziness gripped him. Lifting his gun, he placed the muzzle against the Buddha's mouth and emptied the magazine. The shots roared in the locked chamber, but when the powder smoke lifted he saw that the metal had been merely scarred. General Brett was doubled up on the floor, gasping for breath. Dawson and Wu Feng were both hammering at the steel door, but the vice-consul's blows abruptly ended and he tumbled

down in a heap. Knight tottered toward the other end of the room. He knew the door at that end was locked, for Wu Feng's agents had tried it when they first arrived, but he hoped to find a spot where the gas was less thick.

He realized in a second that the vapor had spread swiftly to all corners, a heavier layer settling to the floor. His half-drugged brain sent him staggering to the nearest table to keep from collapsing in that thicker layer. Just as he reached it his knees gave way and he sprawled across the surface, one arm dangling over the edge. A second later a sharp whisper came in accented Chinese from the Buddha.

"They're all unconscious. Hand me my gas-mask and release the locking-handle."

A faint squeaking was audible above the furious assault of Wu Feng's guards on the steel doors.

"Kwai hsie!" hissed the voice from the idol. "Those doors will not hold forever—they can get a crowd and a pole for a battering-ram in a few minutes."

Rapid footsteps sounded, and Knight felt himself lifted from the table. Even if he had tried, he could not have moved a muscle. His eyes were glued shut, and the voice of the whispering leader seemed to come from far away.

"The ambulances will be in the second alley a few feet from the passage exit," he heard the man say. "Move swiftly and there will be no danger—all the crowd will be around the building and inside."

Knight's shoulder raked against something sharp, and he groggily surmised he was being carried into the passage behind the Buddha. The hammering of Wu Feng's guards quickly died away, for his bearers were now proceeding at a run. Cool, damp air seemed on the point of bringing back his strength. He began to breathe as deeply as he dared, hoping to recover enough strength to free himself and give the alarm when they reached the alley.

He felt himself being carried up a steep stairway. He heard a door open, caught the throb of an automobile engine. Before he could summon his will to what he knew would be an almost hopeless attempt, something hard struck against his head. Sound crashed within his brain, and a black pit seemed to open up and swallow him.

THE MAN CALLED CHRISTIAN

T SEEMED THAT ONLY A FEW SECONDS had passed when Knight felt his senses return. Then he heard a voice speak sharply in Mandarin Chinese.

"Slow down, we're within a mile of the Chenju airdrome. We don't want to arrive until the Condor lands."

It was the voice which had whispered from inside the Buddha, and now, devoid of that muffled effect, it had a cool, incisive note that Knight recognized. The speaker was John Christian.

Knight felt the surface under him jiggle slightly, and from the swaying motion he knew that he was lying on a stretcher in an ambulance. His head ached dully from the blow it had received and from the stupefying effect of the drug.

"Everything has worked out perfectly," he heard Christian continue. "Wu's guards will spread the story that he was abducted by the three Americans, and Shanghai will be seething. With this affair at the field added to it, we will be ready for the final step."

"I do not hear the planes," another voice said, with an uneasy tone. It sounded like a Chinese.

"Naturally," snapped Christian. "They were not to take off until the last moment. The Condor might be suspected if the sound-rangers heard other Japanese planes approaching at the same time."

"Even so, they may suspect it," said the other man.

"Impossible," came Christian's retort. "The plane was captured in the North, near Paotingfu, and there has been no time for a report to reach this far—even if the Chinese up North realized it was not destroyed in the forced landing. Also, the insignia has been changed to that of the Cantonese squadron so that it appears to be an officers' transport."

Knight could see no glow through his eyelids, and after a moment more he cautiously lifted them a fraction of an inch. The roof of the ambulance was about two feet above his head, and from the corner of his eye he could vaguely see the heads of three men who sat on a bench running lengthwise and at the left side of the ambulance. Evidently there was another

laden stretcher slung beneath him, for he could hear its straps creaking. The car was proceeding with headlights extremely dimmed or with none at all, for no illumination came back from the front.

"The vice-consul is stirring," the third man said suddenly. "The gas must be wearing off."

"Tape his hands," ordered Christian, "and his mouth, also. I thought the effect would last longer. When you have finished with him, tape the other one."

"There is no danger from him," replied the third man. "That blow he received when the door flew back is enough, with the gas, to keep him senseless another hour."

"Tape his lips, anyway," said Christian. "A groan coming from a supposedly empty ambulance would be hard to explain to the sentries at the entrance."

"Are you sure, *kuan*, that real ambulance crews have not come for the wounded pilots?" asked the man who had spoken second.

"Do you think I am a fool?" Christian said impatiently. "Every step has been arranged. The sentries will admit the two ambulances without question, and we will not drive in until the Condor is almost on the ground. I told Ho Tiang to fire the four-star signal at exactly one o'clock, and it is now one-thirteen, so the ship should appear within two minutes, and the others will approach down-wind with their engines switched off for the last few miles. We shall have the prisoners transferred to the Condor and in the air before Larson and his men recover from the surprise."

"I hope so, *kuan*. It will be very unfortunate for anyone whom they find has harmed General Wu Feng."

"Think of the gold you are to receive, and it may bring back a little courage to your blood," Christian said with a cold contempt. "Ah! There are the Condor's lights!"

The ambulance speeded up at once. Knight let his head be rolled side-wise, so that he could see the three men better. Christian was leaning forward over the driver's seat, holding a canvas curtain aside. Knight saw close-spaced landing-lights through the opening, as the Condor circled the field. The man in the middle, a pock-marked little Chinese, was also staring at the lights. The third man, a light-skinned Eurasian, was just finishing the task of taping Dawson. He straightened up, peeled a strip of wide first-aid tape from a roll, and cut it with a flick of a scalpel from a surgical kit beside him on the bench.

For a split-second, Knight weighed the chance of immediate action, but Christian abruptly dropped the curtain and turned. The secret agent let his eyes close. The Eurasian reached up, slapped the tape across Knight's lips, laid on a second piece and pressed them both firmly into place.

The ambulance lurched in a swift turn, and Knight was almost thrown from the stretcher. He heard the roar of the Condor's motors diminish as the American-built ship nosed down for a landing.

"Hurry!" Christian snapped at the driver. "And remember, don't stop unless the sentries bar the way."

THE car sped on for a short distance, slowed with a squeak of brakes. The driver shouted something, and speeded up again, his words evidently satisfying the sentries.

"That was simple—the other ambulance has already gone through," Christian said to the traitor. "You and Loo-Fi be ready to rush the prisoners into the plane. The attack should come at any second."

He had barely finished when a raid-siren screamed out a shrill warning, and a thunder of motors came from the sky. The ambulance swerved, amid a bedlam of shouts out on the Chinese base. Light came on in the car as Loo-Fi flung open the rear doors.

Knight lay motionless, but with nerves taut, staring from under his eyelashes. Machine-guns crackled into action, not far away, and the nearer roar of the Condor's motors was swelled by the sputter of fighting-plane engines.

"Turn off those lights!" bawled a voice, and Knight's heart leaped as he realized it was Hank Larson's. "Doyle, help me with the guncrews!"

The Chinese and Loo-Fi were halfway to the plane with the stretcher bearing Dawson. Christian had jerked back the front curtain.

"Help me with the other man!" he rasped at the driver. Knight hurtled from the stretcher just as Christian turned. Dismay shot into the spy's swarthy face, and he dived for the rear of the ambulance. Knight sprawled against the narrow bench, snatched up the scalpel Loo-Fi had put back in the kit. Christian was now outside, a gun half-visible as he plunged his hand into his coat. Knight drew back his arm, whipped the scalpel straight at the other man. Christian threw himself to one side, caught his heel and stumbled. Before he could recover his balance, Knight sprang from the ambulance. The impact knocked the spy flat, and his gun landed several yards away.

The driver was racing around the end of the ambulance, and two brown-faced men suddenly popped from the cabin of the Condor. A bullet ploughed into the ground near Knight's shoulder as he hurled himself after Christian's gun,

"Japs!" Doyle's voice burst through the clamor. "Train that Lewis on the Condor!"

Knight's clawing fingers closed on the pistol-butt. He rolled over, fired pointblank at the ambulance driver, who was almost upon him. The man fell, shot through the chest. One of the Japanese blazed another shot at him. The secret agent's gun crashed in the same second, and the little brown man sagged down with a cry.

"Get into the plane, you fool!" Christian screamed at the other Japanese. He had reached the cabin door, and the big ship began to move even as he shouted. Knight dashed forward, noting with despair that the other ambulance, which was standing nearby, was empty.

He pumped two shots at the nearer propeller. The second Japanese whirled, after vainly trying to catch up with the Condor. A blast from a Lewis gun riddled him as he aimed his pistol at Knight. The secret agent spun around desperately, as the machine-gun tracers flipped on toward the Condor. Waving his arms he ran toward the gun. Doyle saw him coming, let out a yell.

"Dick! Where in the name of—"

Knight lunged against the spouting Lewis', knocking the gunner from his seat. Then he ripped the tape from his lips.

"General Wu Feng—he's a prisoner in the Condor!" he cried. "So are General Brett and Consul Dawson!"

Doyle swore furiously, wheeled to the gunner.

"Wu Feng—prisoner—don't fire at plane!"

The man's eyes bulged, then he leaped up and ran. Knight shouted after him in his own tongue, but the screeching roar of diving ships drowned his words. Knight jerked a tense glance skyward.

A white Grumman was plunging at the field, with nine Nakajimas behind it!

KNIGHT threw himself down behind the lewis, loosed a fierce burst at the white ship. The Grumman jumped sidewise, and the Lewis barrage caught the first Nakajima. The Nipponese fighter pulled up sharply, sheared off its right wing, and struck with an ear-stunning crash.

A dozen machine-guns were pounding from as many points about the field. The Nakajimas now

spread apart, diving for swift strafes at the gunners. Knight raked a ship, crouched as a torrent from another Japanese plane dug up the earth behind him.

Three Curtiss Hawks from Hank's squadron were charging out for hasty take-offs. One of them whirled back to the ground in flames before it had climbed a hundred feet. A Chinese ground-gunner shot the tail off the Nakajima which had dropped the Hawk, and over near the Chenju road another Nipponese plane came plunging down to ruin as three gunners raked it at once. Knight jumped to his feet as Hank dashed up.

"What the devil?" erupted the pudgy captain.

"Condor—Japs and John Christian took Brett and Wu Feng!" exclaimed Knight. "Give me a ship—I'm going to follow them."

Hank's mouth opened and closed.

"Come on!" he shouted. "There's a Hawk and two Bredas left—"

A deafening bellow cut him short as five Nakajimas plunged with machine-guns clattering. A score of Chinese mechanics wilted to the ground, and fire leaped up from a ship on the line as the Nakajimas zoomed.

"There goes a Breda—and the Hawk's flippers are shot to pieces!" groaned Doyle.

"There's a Vought Corsair in that end hangar!" yelled Hank, as a Lewis roared close behind him. "You birds take that—I'll see if I can spot the Condor for you."

He ran to the remaining Hawk as fast as his short legs could carry him. Knight and Doyle dashed for the Corsair, stopping twice to dive back of sandbag emplacements as Nakajimas screamed down again. They started the engine in the hangar, and Knight took the front pit, warming up with a reckless disregard for established procedure. Above and on the field, guns were pounding with an incessant din, altered only by the thundering dives of the Japanese fighters.

"The gunners knocked down one more Nakajima!" Doyle exulted as he came running back from the front of the hangar. "And Hank just picked off another!"

"Good!" said Knight. "Get in— and we'll see if we can help!"

Doyle vaulted into the rear cockpit, and Knight sent the Corsair roaring out into the open. A Nipponese pilot spied them instantly and dived headlong. Doyle swung the rear guns, and the Nakajima whipped aside as Knight lifted the wheels from the ground. With a quick renversement, the Japanese shot back, trying to get under the two-seater for an upward blast. Knight snapned the ship almost beyond the vertical, and Doyle's guns beat out a furious rhythm. The Japanese ship shot up as though for a loop, whipstalled with a fury that tore the motor from its bearers. A few seconds later the wrecked ship melted into the earth.

White wings flashed down, lanced up again, and the two remaining Nakajimas fled in the wake of the Grumman. Knight saw a Curtiss Hawk pitch in toward the white ship. The Grumman whirled, and glowing yellow lines streaked across at the slower ship. The Hawk jumped, then slowly nosed down as though suddenly very tired. Knight saw it crash, and a sick feeling went over him.

"That devil got Hank!" he said huskily through the Gosport tube.

"That wasn't Hank," Doyle shouted back. "I saw him dig out after the Condor—after he knocked off that Jap."

"Thank the Lord," said Knight. The coldness left his heart, and he bent over the stick with a new intensity. The white Grumman was twisting around toward them. He climbed at full speed away from the field, so that the light of the burning ships would not make them an easy target. The Grumman pilot banked, circled tightly, and then shot off after the Nakajimas.

Knight climbed to four thousand feet, keeping the white ship in sight. It was easier to do after a minute, for again the searchlights in Shanghai were splitting the darkness, and the Grumman and the Nakajimas were discernible every few seconds. Anti-aircraft batteries began a fierce barrage, but the fleeing planes were soon out of range.

Star-shells burst below and behind the Corsair, as Knight followed the other ships northward toward Woosung. He waited until only an occasional light or rocket showed, then eased the stick forward.

"They must be heading for a Jap carrier," Doyle said through the Gosport.

KNIGHT peered down into the increasing gloom. Now and then he could make out the exhaust flames of the Nipponese ships. After a minute he looked at his compass.

"They've changed course, Doyle. I wonder if they've spotted us and it's a trap."

"We can give 'em a good scrap," growled Doyle.

"Not until we know which is the Condor," returned Knight. "Wait—they've straightened out again. I think they're headed out into the China Sea."

"Have you got a map up there?" demanded Doyle.

"No. Is there one back there?"

"Not a trace. I'll sure tell Hank about this next time I see him."

Knight's eyes had been roaming across the instrument board.

"You might also tell him to keep his tanks filled. We've enough gas for about 40 minutes."

"Wow!" groaned Doyle. "I wouldn't mind so much gettin' bumped off in a good fight—but I hate like hell to get drowned. There ain't any glory in it."

Knight grinned in spite of his growing sense that their good luck was just about finished. He leaned on one side, shading his eyes against the Corsair's exhaust-flames, trying to keep those other red stacks in sight. Twenty minutes passed, and still the Japanese planes forged on into the night.

"We can still make it back, Lothario," he spoke into the tube, "providing we turn around now."

"Would you turn around if you were alone?" grunted Doyle.

"Maybe," said Knight.

"You're a cock-eyed liar," said Doyle. "And you needn't turn around now, either."

The Corsair droned on through the night. After a minute, Knight spoke again.

"Switch on the radio and see if you can hear anything. They may be following some kind of a beam signal."

There was a brief interval.

"No luck," said Doyle through the . Gosport. "But I can hear the *Augusta* operator talking to Manila in the 'E' code. He's telling 'em about the white Grummans."

"See if he mentions the Navy Grumman," Knight said quickly.

After another minute, Doyle reported.

"He's just ended, and the last thing he said was 'all trace of Garrison and his possessions lost. Do not believe friends or others will find him'."

"Garrison was the name of that Grumman pilot!" exclaimed Knight. "We found the name in his helmet. Admiral Wardell is obviously trying to tell Manila that there's no danger of the ship or the pilot being traced back to the U.S. Navy. But when I talked with him, he didn't mention Manila at all."

"Maybe they called him after you left the *Augusta*. He's probably got a new slant on this business. Shall I buzz him?"

"No, they might happen to tune to that wave-length in the Condor or one of those Jap ships. But hold the dial setting."

The exhaust-flames of the planes they were

following now began to swing northward, then took a northwesterly course.

"Say, they're heading back toward land!" Doyle said in a tone of vast relief.

"It may be too late," Knight warned him. "I don't think we've enough gas to reach the mainland."

"Oh, Lord, please let that gauge be a few gallons off," Doyle asked in fervent prayer.

Knight looked at the indicator, then forced his mind from the thought of their cracking up in the sea. After a few moments he gave an exclamation.

"Doyle, I just remembered where I saw the pilot of that second white Grumman. It was at the National Air Races last year."

"Who is he?" demanded Doyle.

"Jake Overman—one of that stunt team they called the 'Three Flying Fools.' He must have signed up with Japan."

"Not a chance!" Doyle yelled through the Gosport. "Jake Overman may be screwy, but he'd never—say, wait a minute. Didn't I read something about that trio signing up to fight with the Loyalists in Spain?"

"They must've backed out, or we'd have run across them when we were there," said Knight. "Or else—hold on! I'm beginning to get it! What if they doublecrossed the Loyalists and—"

"Look!" Doyle cut in excitedly. "The Condor's going down!"

Knight had caught the glow of the ship's landing-lights at the same moment. He peered over the cowl as he closed the throttle and nosed down. A wide tongue of land became visible in the twin beams from the gliding Condor, and above the transport he saw the white Grumman and the two Nakajimas. He was looking around anxiously for Hank's ship when a bright glare flooded the Corsair from the rear. And out of that brilliant glare came a furious hail of bullets!



NIGHT HAD HIT THE THROTTLE and jerked the stick back at the instant the light appeared. Now he threw the Corsair into a violent chandelle.

Tracers and solid slugs gouged the two-seater's wings,

gashed the crash-pad before him as he hoiked up from the attacking ships.

Doyle was blazing away fiercely with the rear-pit guns. Knight cast a taut look over the side, caught a glimpse of two planes similar to the one he was flying. As one cut swiftly away from the glow of the other's lights, he recognized it as a Nakajima 90-11 two-seater—a Japanese copy of the American plane. The zooming ship stormed through a burst from Doyle's guns, and one of its lights went out. Knight banked vertically to give Doyle a better shot, at the same time crashing a fusillade from his cowl-guns as the other Nakajima came almost in line with his sights.

The second Nipponese flung away, renversed, then came back with its forward guns flaming. Knight lanced up and whipped the Corsair around in a terrific Immelmann. Doyle lost his balance and swore like a pirate, but he managed to scramble up out of his cockpit and seize the spade-grip in time to rake the other Jap ship. By now, the two Nakajima single-seaters and the white Grumman were whirling in toward the battle, but the white ship zoomed clear as the fighters plunged in. Knight made a lightning decision, slammed the Corsair into a vertical dive. The Condor was swinging into the wind at about five hundred feet, and he caught sight of hooded guidelights on the ground below.

With a shout through the Gosport to warn Doyle of what was coming, he hauled the two-seater out of the dive. A force of seven times that of gravity pulled him down in his seat, jerked Doyle's guns from his hands. The side of the Condor leaped out at them. Knight ruddered hard, and the two-seater swung in parallel, hardly ten feet from the cabin. The baffled Nakajima pilots sheered off, twisting and darting up and below the Condor in the effort to get a safe shot at the Corsair.

Knight eased closer to the Condor, snapped a burst just under its lower wings. The pilot instantly opened his throttles, taking the hint to fly straight. Doyle bawled something through the Gosport.

"—in the cockpit!" Knight heard. "When the devil did he learn how to fly!"

The secret agent shot a glance toward the nose of the ship. The window on the left-hand side was open, and he saw Christian's silvered hair gleaming in the light. Abruptly, a window in the rear of the cabin flew open and a machine-gun blazed into the side of the Corsair. Knight dived under the Condor's wings and instantly the four Nakajimas were after him. He pulled

up, trying to fly under the belly of the transport, but a bomb-trap opened and a machine-gun snout appeared.

"Call the *Augusta!*" he shouted into the speakingtube, as he kicked aside. "Tell them we've found the white Grummans' base."

R-r-t-t-t-t-t-t-t-t! A gun-clatter from the nearest fighter drove him into hasty action. He nosed down, then shot up and over the Condor in a tight loop. The pursuing ship turned to keep from hitting the transport. Knight hurriedly looked around at Doyle as the other Japs charged to intercept him in his dive. To his dismay, the ex-Marine was sprawled in his seat, one hand clutching the radio-set switch.

"Doyle!" he cried. "Doyle, old man!"

"I'm all right just nicked a bit" Doyle's voice trailed off. Knight booted the rudder, hammered a burst into the nose of a single-seater that flashed under his guns. The Nakajima skidded madly, fell off from a stall. Knight jerked the Corsair level, released his belt, and reached back for the microphone Doyle had dropped.

"Q—Q to Wardell!" he shouted at the top of his lungs. "Q—55—Wardell. White Grummans—based at—"

Crash! The Corsair was knocked twenty feet sidewise as a plunging two-seater hit its wing-tip. Knight's grip on the stick was all that saved him. He dragged himself back into the seat, snapped his belt as the Corsair reeled into a spin. Three hundred feet below him, the Nakajima fighter had crashed. The sight of that massed wreckage drove him to superhuman skill. A fierce shove at the rudder, a forward slam of the stick, and the Corsair was out of the dizzy whirl, its nose pitching steeply earthward. He braced himself, pulled back with a silent prayer for the bullet-torn wings.

Another blast of Jap lead ripped across the cowl as he brought the nose level. There was a loud crack from the engine, and its throaty roar ended. Knight cut the switch, leaned out to the right trying to see through the oily smoke which was now pouring back into the cockpit. The wheels touched, and the ship bounced two feet or so. He let it settle, bobbing from side to side in the effort to see.

The ship was on the ground and slowing, when to his consternation it dipped down a sharp incline. For a second he thought it was plunging into the sea. He stood on the brake pedals, threw his hand before his eyes. With a splintering crash, the Corsair swung to the left and stopped.

OUT of the blackness came a confusion of voices, mingled with the subdued roar of engines above and behind. Then a flashlight cut whitely through the dark and pointed across toward the ship. Knight had ducked the second the light appeared, and a gabble of Nipponese voices arose as the beam twitched from Doyle to the apparently empty cockpit.

"One has escaped!" a shrill cry rose above the ethers. "Guard the ramp and the exits!"

The flashlight quickly poked around the Corsair and away. Knight could see the beam turning, and as comparative gloom fell over the wrecked ship he swiftly climbed out onto the crumpled left wing. After a moment, he cautiously lifted his head. A short, chunky Japanese lieutenant was standing about thirty feet away, spotting the base of a taxiing-ramp with his flashlight. Six brown-faced soldiers with rifles were strung out along the ramp's inclined surface.

He could see Doyle's head where it rested on the edge of the rear pit. The ex-Marine's right arm was dangling over the side with blood slowly dripping from the fingertips. The swiveled twin-mount was pointing up toward the roof of the underground airdrome. All this he saw in a flash, then the Nipponese lieutenant wheeled, and he had to drop hastily. He bent low, waited.

The man came around the tail of the ship, stooping to pass under the tilted flippers. His flashlight shifted to rest on Doyle—and in that second Knight leaped up. The rasp of his shoes on the wing was lost in the thunder of taxiing ships near the ramp, but some instinct must have warned the man, for hs whirled just as Knight's hands reached out for his throat. His lips flew apart for a cry that never came. Knight's fingers closed, sunk deep into his flesh. Horror shot into the officer's black eyes, and he clawed frenziedly at the hands that were taking his life. His sharp nails tore flesh from Knight's knuckles, and warm blood spurted out, dropping upon the fallen flashlight.

It was quickly over, and Knight grimly laid the inert figure upon the floor. As he snatched up the flashlight to turn it off, white wings shone, a short distance across the underground hangar. He swore under his breath as he saw at least a dozen Grummans. Japanese mechanics were hurrying up the ramp, in response to shouts from above, and he could see others moving around between the berthed planes.

Doyle's eyes flickered open as Knight took off his borrowed Navy coat. His homely face looked blank for a second, then he stared around the base, trying to lift his head.

"Lie still!" Knight said tensely. "I'm going to see if I can trick these devils."

He took off his helmet and goggles, put them on, then shoved the man's arms into the sleeves of the Navy coat, leaving one arm extended so that its three gold stripes would show. In another moment he had the man lying face down. Motors blasted loudly from the top of the ramp, went silent as the Condor started to roll down into the hangar. Knight sprang up on the wing of the Corsair, crouching beside the fuselage to remain unseen. Doyle grinned down crookedly from a few inches above him.

"Good shooting, Dick!" he whispered.

SLOWLY, the Condor came down the incline, rolled to a stop about a hundred feet beyond the Corsair. Mechanics swarmed after it, and the tail was soon placed on a dolly, and the ship swung around to leave space for the others. Dim lights had been turned on at the side of the ramp and within the base, and with fading hope Knight saw an ever-increasing number of Japanese officers and soldiers. In quick succession, the three Nakajimas and the white Grumman came down the ramp and were turned into position.

As the last plane was berthed, a low, grinding sound was audible. Knight peered across the tail of the Corsair, and a weight seemed to settle about his heart. A large balanced door was descending, blocking the ramp. The lights of the underground hangar brightened as the door closed, and Knight heard one of the Nipponese exclaim on seeing the body of the dead lieutenant.

"Ai! There is the other one—tell Colonel Karika!" "Here he comes now," said another voice. "But look! They have captured a Chinese general!"

A third voice, high-pitched and harsh, sounded from the direction of the Condor.

"We are greatly honored, General Wu, that you should visit us. I hope that the reception I have arranged for you and your American friends will not disappoint you."

"Where are the two who flew the Vought plane?" the cool, crisp voice of John Christian broke in.

"There they are, Baron," said an obsequious voice. "As you see, both are unconscious—and probably they are dead."

"Make sure of it!" Christian said sharply. Knight's eyes were on Doyle's face. "Drop!" he whispered. Doyle lifted his dangling arm—unseen by the men on the other side of the plane. As he popped out of sight, Knight sprang up and seized the spade-grip of the twin guns. A chorus of cries rang through the underground base, but he whirled the muzzles toward Christian and the officers before anyone could fire.

"Raise your hands!" His staccato Japanese crackled through the hangar. "Keep them up and stand still!"

Christian, after a start of dismay, elevated his hands and stood impassively staring at Knight. The secret agent's eyes flicked over the others—a colonel above average height for a Nipponese, with a small, scraggly beard and febrile black eyes; five or six other Japanese officers, and at least a hundred mechanics, some their brown faces taut with fear, others glaring like wolves at bay. Close to the Condor, General Brett lay on a stretcher, his lips still taped, like those of General Wu Feng and Dawson, who were standing, surrounded by half a dozen guards.

The nearest man was the pilot of the white Grumman, who had been passing within fifteen feet of the Corsair when Knight leaped up. His face held the same expression of frozen fear which the secret agent had noted there during the battle, but the eyes back of his goggles had an almost maniacal glitter.

"Taisa!" he cried suddenly. "What shall I do?" The bearded colonel's lips drew back in a snarl. "Serve now!" he hissed.

Knight tilted the gun a fraction of an inch. "Keep back, Overman—or I'll cut you in two!"

The pilot took a step backward as though in terror, and Knight moved the gun to cover the group of officers. A wild cry burst from the pilot's stiff lips.

"For the Mikado!" he screamed, and hurled himself at the Corsair.

Knight whipped the gun downward and a thunderous blast struck into the charging man. The pilot's white face vanished in welter of blood, but his frantically clutching hands touched the muzzle of the gun. They were torn instantly into bleeding stumps, and another burst threw his mangled body backward, but his suicidal leap had not been in vain. From two directions, Japanese had charged at Knight as the Grumman pilot sprang.

The secret agent whirled the gun and mowed down a dozen mechanics, but the second group ran in front of the ship before he could swivel the weapon again. Something struck his shoulder, knocked him off balance. He heard Doyle curse a Jap non-com who had leaped on the wing, and he swung to hurl him to

the ground. Three brown-faced guards were dashing around the tail of the Corsair. He threw himself backward, blazed a fusillade at the trio, and at the same time kicked savagely at the screeching non-com. His boot caught the man under the chin, and the Jap tumbled backward. He was trying to spin the twin-mount around to rake the other mechanics when two arms shot around his neck from behind and he was dragged headlong out of the cockpit.

A spindly-legged captain jumped forward with drawn pistol, but a shout from Christian halted him.

"Don't fire! I want them both alive!"

In a second, Knight was surrounded and pulled to his feet, his arms pinioned behind his back. The captain held his pistol against Knight's head, waited until Doyle had been brought down from the Corsair. Then he turned to Christian with a smart salute.

"Your commands have been obeyed, Baron."

Knight recognized the obsequious voice he had heard before, and even in that moment of despair he noticed that Christian and not the Japanese colonel seemed to be more feared by these men.

"Take them to the old altar room," Christian ordered.

As Knight's captors shoved him past the Corsair, he saw the mutilated body of the Grumman pilot. Brown skin showed where bullets had torn away the man's clothes in several places. Nearby lay something of lighter color, curved like a molded section of a man's jaw, and spattered with red.

CHAPTER VII TORTURE CHAMBER

HE SHREWD EYES of John Christian caught Knight's change of expression as he saw the thing on the floor.

"So you finally comprehend, Mr.

Knight? I gave you credit for a faster brain."

The Japanese colonel gave Knight a murderous look. "Then this is the man who wrecked the other scheme?" he demanded.

"With the help of several more, *Taisa* Karika. One was this ugly brute who was in the rear of the plane. And Captain Larson was another—where is he, by the way?"

"He is being brought in through the upper entrance, Baron," the skinny captain replied.

Knight hid his dismay. He had been hoping that Hank was by now racing back to form a raiding expedition. Dully, he noted the details of the underground hangar as he and the other prisoners were taken to a doorway at the right. It seemed to be of recent excavation, and he saw pumps and suction-fans for drawing air from above and taking exhaust gases out of the base. The roof was braced at intervals by steel columns imbedded in concrete. Fuel tanks, boxes of supplies, spare engines, and other material, covered a square section near the doorway, and on the other side he could see rows of cots and some mess-tables.

General Brett had been unbound and removed from the stretcher, and Knight saw a red welt on his face where the strips of tape had been ripped from his lips. The G-2 general swayed once as he was marched along with Wu Feng and Dawson, but he caught himself and strode on, his eyes stonily fixed in space. Knight was the last one taken through the doorway. He found himself in a chamber about fifty feet long, with a raised dais at the farther end, behind which the figure of a white, two-headed dragon was inlaid against black porcelain.

The carving on the throne-like chair behind the dais and the other chairs ranged on both sides of the room was old and blackened, and Knight could tell at a glance that this room had existed many years before the base had been created. He saw General Wu give a slight start and followed his gaze toward what at first seemed a large oval-shaped covered well in front of the dais. It was about seven feet long and four feet across. Its sides were of white brick, now yellowed from age. A metal pin protruded slantwise from a hole in the side of the well toward Knight, with a thin wire cable attached to it and running through a pulley to a ratchet and pawl device on the wall. A similar cable was visible extending from the device to the other end. A black line ran lengthwise down the center of the oval-shaped top, widening at the far end into a dark spot about the size of a man's face. Knight suddenly realized that the black line was a crack where two hinged sections overlapped and that the round spot was a hole with only a sinister blackness beneath. He saw Colonel Karika's lips draw back over pointed teeth in a wolfish grin at Wu Feng.

"I perceive, General Wu, that you recognize the old headquarters of the White Dragon."

Wu Feng looked past him at Knight and General Brett.

"They have brought us to Tsung Ming Island," he muttered. "This is the cellar of an abandoned castle." Karika laughed shrilly.

"Very much good that will do them to know now," he said. Then he looked around sharply. "Where is the other American—the one who flies for China?"

"Here, *Taisa*," bowed the skinny captain, pointing to a door at the left of the dais. Three Japanese soldiers appeared, uniforms disheveled and their faces bearing marks of conflict. With them was Hank Larson, one eye purple and an upper front tooth missing. Hank looked mournfully around the room.

"Well, I gueth they got uth," he lisped through the spot where the tooth had been.

"Tie all but this man into chairs," ordered Christian, pointing to Knight. "Do it quickly—there is little time to spare."

THE soldiers went to work, the skinny Japanese captain importantly overseeing their performance. Dawson resisted and was promptly knocked down. Knight watched helplessly, with two Nipponese holding pistols against his sides. Karika turned to Christian as the captives were being tied.

"Are you sure we are safe, that there is no clue left for them?" he said with a hint of anxiety.

A satisfied smile crossed Christian's darkly handsome, face.

"There is nothing to fear, though my plans were not carried out exactly as ordered. General Wu designated the Smiling Buddha club for the conference place, as was reported, and we were ready—"

"A thousand curses on my feeble mind!" Wu Feng said harshly. He turned to Brett. "I had no knowledge of that secret passage, General, but I should have suspected the place. I recall now it was once rumored to be a rendezvous for foreign spies."

"Your lack of memory," Christian said with a suave irony, "was most helpful to my plans." He glanced back at Karika. "Unfortunately, Knight and these two pilots came early. It was reported to me at once, and I ordered a hatchet-man to kill Knight, using a White Dragon knife and their usual ritual: I expected Larson and Doyle to rush out and report Knight's death, which would spread the White Dragon murder story all over Shanghai. Then when Wu vanished, it would look like a reprisal, as he was known by high officials to be head of the White Dragon society. But the hatchetman missed, and these three started to go to Chenju field. I heard their plans when they came

below to leave a note. We could have captured them then, but I feared Wu and his agents might appear and it would destroy everything. So I let them depart and decided to intercept them before they reached the field. They were intending to investigate the incident of the box sent to Li Chang."

"What was the result of that plan?" interrupted Karika.

"Quite successful," said Christian. "Li Chang died in the air after drinking the poisoned tea, as I intended, and the Chinese pilots who had heard of the White Dragon warning deserted tonight when they received similar warnings. I have already planted the idea that Larson permitted them to leave and thus crippled the squadron."

Karika grinned maliciously as Hank lisped a blistering comment on Christian's ancestors.

"And the Grumman attacks?" he said. "They focussed the attention we expected?"

"Even more," responded Christian, watching the stern face of General Brett. "All Shanghai saw the fight, and my men have already started spreading the word among the coolies that the white planes are from the American Navy, with their insignia painted over."

"No sane man would ever believe that!" grated Brett.

"You mean 'educated' man," Christian said silkily. "And the Chinese masses, my dear General, are not very well educated."

Brett looked anxiously at Wu Feng, who was being tied into a chair across from him, but the Oriental's face was inscrutable.

"One Grumman was lost," Karika said quickly, "but I have no fear there—all the Sons of Death will sacrifice themselves as they pledged."

Christian nodded, his silvered hair gleaming in the light.

"I should never have doubted that. I saw the pilot fling himself into the flames and die."

Karika stared.

"You were there to make sure, Baron?"

"No, I was following these three, and they drove to the scene of the crash. I turned into an alleyway and arrived in time to see the last act. Savilla, the Spanish ace of whom I told you, must have reached there first—undoubtedly intending to force the pilot to tell him where the other Grummans were hidden. He was lying dead, and I think our pilot had shot him, for he was then firing at Knight to keep from being saved. I tried to shoot Knight, thinking he had seen too much, but he seemed to bear a charmed life—then." Karika bared his sharp teeth.

"I do not think it will be so now."

"No, this time he will not slip through my fingers," Christian said with a suddenly ugly note. "But he helped me, as it developed. He was in that fight when the Navy plane appeared with you and your men after it."

Karika grimaced.

"For a while I thought all was lost," he said. "We had been scouting, trying to locate the American aircraft-carrier, and we finally saw its lights northeast of Chinsan Island when some of their planes took off to investigate us. The pilots pursued us, a while, then turned back—all but that one. We hemmed him in and drove him inland, and finally he tried to reach Chenju field. That was when the Chinese planes attacked us."

"The Navy pilot dropped into the Whangpoo, as you undoubtedly know," said Christian. "Knight followed him down, after the pilot set fire to his plane and took to his parachute. Men from the *Augusta* rescued Knight and took the pilot's body—but it will be a boomerang, that affair. They will have a hard time explaining the body when Chinese officials demand to see it."

GENERAL BRETT had been holding in, but now he burst out furiously.

"You'll never get away with this, Christian! I know what you're up to. You found out about those Grumman planes a South American power bought and re-sold to the Loyalists in Spain. You learned they were sending the freighter around Cape Horn to keep from going through the Panama Canal where we could discover the truth, and you sent Japanese submarines to capture the vessel and force her crew to sail to Japan. You covered it up by leaving bits of wreckage on the water and having S.O.S. calls sent from one of your subs after the freighter was safely away."

"Excellent deduction, General!" said Christian. "Or is there, I wonder, a spy in Tokyo whom we have overlooked? At any rate, you could never prove a word of it."

"What have you done to those American pilots who volunteered to fight in Spain?" thundered Brett. "They were on board the vessel, too."

Karika laughed with a shrill mirth.

"They will never tell anything, American!"

Brett glared at him. "Don't lie to me! They're alive—you're making them fly those Grummans by some ungodly means."

"No, General," Knight said dully, "the Grumman pilots are Japanese wearing masks moulded from moulage—the stuff used in the F.B.I., and other crime laboratories for duplicating the face of a corpse. Moulage will reproduce even the hairs on a man's head. I should have thought of it when that first pilot's mask melted and caught fire."

"If it tricked you, think of what it will do to men who never heard of moulage," said Christian triumphantly. "Those Chinese pilots will swear the Grumman pilots are white men."

"You poor fool!" Dawson said in a venomous voice. "China will never believe we've been helping Japan. I happen to know the State Department is about to condemn Japan as the invader of China!"

Christian and Karika exchanged glances, then the spy master shrugged.

"It will be too late. It will appear like an attempt to hide guilt."

"You're stark mad!" General Brett rasped. "The whole world knows our sympathies are with China."

"The whole world—except China." Christian replied pleasantly. "The average Chinese regards Americans as interlopers in his country, the same as the British and other foreigners. Your recent embargo on planes for China lessened belief in American sympathy, as did the law against enlisting men in the United States for Chinese service. Closing the Settlement gates to a million homeless and starving refugees has also helped our cause. You see, my dear General, I too am head of an Intelligence servicethe Japanese think enough of my talents to make me a baron and give me full power. And I have not been idle. My spies have started rumors that you Americans have made a secret deal with Japan to help her if she will not molest the Settlement or curb American interests in China after the war is over. I have circulated photographs of American-made trucks used by Japanese soldiers, and I have spread the belief that these trucks and other equipment were donated by your country. Certain other photographs have been of aid—namely the one which General Wu's agents discovered after I released it in Shanghai —the picture of Mr. Knight and his comrades on a Japanese carrier. Chinese became quite infuriated on seeing a picture of an American volunteer in Chinese uniform paying a friendly visit to enemies of China."

"General Wu's staff officers know the truth about that incident," retorted Brett. "They will smother your lies with an official statement of what happened."

"They will have no time," said Christian. "In less than an hour the sky will begin to lighten, and all of the white Grumman planes will be flown to Shanghai again. This time they will dive from a high altitude and strafe Chinese refugees huddled in certain designated areas. We know from intercepted radio messages that two Shanghai defense squadrons, one a bombing unit, have been ordered to follow the Grummans the next time they appear, and destroy their base. I planned on this, but it came sooner than I had hoped. The rest will be very simple. From Shanghai, the Grummans will fly at full speed to your aircraft carrier off Chinsan Island and will dive as though attempting to land upon it. It will be about dawn, and the United States flag will hardly be discernible—even if the Chinese pilots should look for a flag. And they will not look, for they will never dream of an American carrier hiding so close to China."

"It's hiding, obviously, because the Navy has been ordered to destroy those white ships!" flamed Brett.

"Ah, but the Chinese will not know that," purred Christian. "Their bombers will attack what seems to be a Japanese vessel, and your gunners will defend the carrier and shoot down Chinese planes. Probably some of your Navy pilots will be ordered to repel the attackers—for in the heat of it the Chinese may be suspected of being Japanese using captured planes. A few Chinese survivors will fly back to Shanghai with proof that the white Grummans were American planes operating from a United States Navy carrier. Among those survivors will be two men in my pay who will photograph the vessel after dropping flares to illuminate it brightly. They will radio their discovery at once, and Shanghai will become an inferno. A million maddened refugees, spurred on by the news and that Grumman strafe, will sweep against the Settlement and wipe it out."

"The officials will see through the trick—they'll stop them!" Brett said through ashen lips.

"Have you ever seen an Oriental mob?" the spymaster asked softly. "They will come like a vast tidal wave. Your marines may kill a few thousand before that wave sweeps over them. After that, anarchy. There will not be a white man, woman, or child left living by sundown."

THERE was a terrible silence, and Knight saw the beads of perspiration on Wu Feng's brow.

"He speaks the truth," the Chinese general said in a shaken voice. "Shanghai is a volcano ready to erupt."

"And by that eruption she will be destroyed," said Christian. "The Caucasian world will seethe with fury. World opinion will swing instantly to the side of Japan. The hatreds of the Boxer Rebellion will be revived—Japan may even find allies in her conflict with China. And you, General Wu, will be the martyr whose death will serve to keep Chinese hatred against the white race blazing."

Wu Feng's eyes went slowly to the split oval cover Knight had noticed. He raised his head with quiet dignity. "I am ready."

"You misunderstand—I do not mean the old pit," said Christian, nodding to Karika. The Japanese colonel rattled off swift orders, and the obsequious captain brought a tripod camera from one corner, with a flashlight-powder pan extending out at the side on a long bracket. A cardboard with a square opening was secured over the lens, with small wires fastened vertically in front of the open space.

Wu Feng's chair was now pushed into the center of the room, and the camera focussed so that General Brett's head and shoulders were also included, but not the ropes around his chest. Karika looked anxiously at his wrist-watch as they finished.

"Can we let some of the men go back to their work now, Baron? It will soon be time to start the Grummans warming up for the attack."

"Yes, the fewer witnesses to this the better," Christian said curtly.

Karika sent out all the soldiers but the two guarding Knight. Christian turned to the secret agent, slowly withdrew a knife from under his coat as he approached.

"You are going to play a leading role in this scene, Mr. Knight. I advise no resistance. The lives of your three companions depend on this—as well as your own."

He extended the hilt toward Knight, and the two guards pressed their guns tighter against the secret agent's ribs.

"You are to stab General Wu, standing here so that your face shows toward the camera," Christian continued as coolly as though he discussed the weather. "After that—"

"You butcher!" Knight broke in fiercely. "I'll see you in hell first!"

Silently, Christian stepped to the wall and tripped a small latch under the ratchet device. A spring jerked the slanting pins Knight had seen, and the hinged halves of the oval-shaped cover swung down inside what had seemed the top of a well. The guards pushed Knight closer, and Karika tossed a piece of stone into the blackness. It rattled against the sides of the pit now and then with a metallic clink. The sounds grew fainter and fainter, and at last ended.

"It is two hundred feet deep," the spy-master said calmly. "There are iron spikes projecting here and there from the walls and from the bottom—though the latter are probably covered with the bones of White Dragon traitors. Make your choice!"

Cold horror gripped Knight. As he stared down into the pit, Wu Feng spoke gently.

"Do as they ask, my son. They will kill me, anyway." Christian again held out the dagger. Knight recoiled with an oath.

"No, by Heaven! I won't do it!"

Dark blood flushed Christian's handsome face.

"We will see about that!" he snarled. He made a furious gesture, and Karika whirled the ratchet-handle, drawing the hinged covers level again. The skinny captain inserted the pins holding the covers from dropping, and then hastily placed a candle on a ledge above which three strands of rope ran to the ratchet-mechanism.

"When the first strand burns through," Karika grinned into Knight's face, "the spring will let the pawl slip one notch. When the third strand burns, the pins will be jerked out."

The guards drove Knight backward to the top of the pit. He lashed but frantically at one of them, trying to seize his gun. Karika and the captain leaped to aid the guards, and a terrific kick on the shin dropped Knight to his knees. In a moment he was stretched, face down, upon the hinged covers, with only horrible blackness below.

SONS OF DEATH



OU FIENDS!" Brett was shouting. "You damned fiends!"

The Japanese captain wheeled with his fist drawn back, but

Christian stopped him.

"Not now! I don't want any bruises to show in the photograph."

Knight twisted his head sidewise to keep from looking down into the pit. A cold sweat was rolling down his face, and his heart constricted as he saw that the first strand of rope was smoking. Christian smiled down at him cruelly.

"I regret this is necessary, but I need a final clinching bit of evidence to show American treachery. In my dispatch case yonder I have complete proof that you are, as the Chinese would say, 'Number One Secret Agent of the United States.' A photograph showing you murdering General Wu, with General Brett of the American Army looking on, can never be refuted—especially when General Wu's body will be discovered with this same knife in it. Those wires will look like prison bars, and will confirm the story that the picture was snapped by a Chinese spy through a cell window."

There was a snap, and the hinged covers dropped two or three inches. Knight held back a groan, but his blood was like ice. The two guards kept his arms twisted so that he could move only his head. He saw Brett's ashen face, saw Doyle and Hank Larson struggling wildly but vainly against their bonds.

"Will you kill General Wu?" came Christian's cool voice.

Knight gritted his teeth, his eyes glued to the second rope under which the candle was now burning. There came a quick rapping at the door to the underground hangar, then the sound of idling engines, and in a moment the Japanese captain hurried up to Christian.

"Baron, the Grummans will soon be ready for the Sons of Death to come down from their quarters. But you said you wanted no witnesses—"

"Send word for them to be ready," snapped the spymaster.

Knight saw a Nipponese officer hurry through the room and disappear through the doorway which led up into the old castle. The door closed, and the candle flickered. With a terrible fascination he watched the second rope. It parted abruptly and he dropped several more inches. Only the width of his body now kept him from plunging through to frightful death. He had to twist his head side-wise to keep it from sagging through the open space between the parted iron covers.

The third rope was smoking, blackening. He tore his eyes from it, shifted them across the room for one last look at Doyle and the others. But as the camera came into his range of vision his heart gave a frenzied leap. "Stop!" he cried out. "For Heaven's sake, save him—I'll do what you want!"

Karika sprang to the rachet-mechanism as the two guards pulled Knight to his feet, but the cord burned through before he could hold the pawl and the hinged covers swung down against the sides of the pit. Knight froze in genuine horror at the nearness of his escape.

At a swift nod from Christian, the Japanese captain jumped to his camera and poured flashlight powder into the pan. The spy-master came quickly toward Knight, and the two guards stepped aside. Knight put one hand before his eyes as though to shut out the horror he had escaped. He took a staggering step backward, then seized the candle and tossed it at the powder-pan.

There was a bright flash.

Knight hurtled against the half-blinded spy-master, and Christian went over backward, the upper half of his body dangling into the pit. Knight seized the man's legs and lifted them.

A terrible scream burst from the spy-master's throat as Knight held him at the very brink of the pit. Karika and the two guards, momentarily blinded by the flash, sprang toward the spot.

"Get back or I'll drop him!" Knight rasped.

THE three men halted in consternation. Back of them the Nipponese captain stood with knees shaking. Knight riveted his eyes on the frightened officer.

"Pick up the knife! Cut loose Captain Larson!"

A strangled cry came from the spy-master as Knight's grip on his legs slipped a trifle. The Japanese captain snatched up the dagger in trembling, fingers and turned to Hank Larson. Karika quivered in helpless rage.

"Stand still!" grated Knight. "Tell your guards to lay their guns on that second chair!"

Karika moaned out the order. One of the soldiers obeyed, but the other man crouched for a wild spring at Knight. Hank Larson catapulted himself from his chair as his severed bonds dropped away. A fist backed by one hundred and ninety pounds smacked on the brown man's jaw. Hank wrenched the gun from his hand before his senseless body hit the floor, and in the same whirlwind sweep cracked the second guard over the head.

"Cover Karika and watch the captain till he's cut the others loose," Knight said tensely.

In half a minute Doyle and the two generals were free. Doyle scooped up the second guard's pistol and

took Karika's gun from his holster. Not until Karika and the terrified captain had been driven into a corner did Knight motion for Hank to help him pull the spymaster up from the pit.

"I'd give a month's salary to let him go!" Hank said savagely, but he seized one of Christian's legs. The spymaster collapsed on the ftoor as they brought him out, but after a moment some of the color came back into his pasty face.

"What are you going to do with him?" General Brett asked hastily.

"Give him the medicine he wanted me to give General Wu," said Knight. "Humph! I thought that would bring him around."

Christian's eyes had popped opened, and now he lay there, glaring up at the Q-Agent.

"We're in a tough spot," Doyle muttered. "We'll be bumped off the second we show up in that hangar—and we've got to have ships to get off the island."

Knight looked anxiously at General Wu Feng. "That door by the dais—where does it lead?" "To the main hall," said Wu Feng. "I am afraid—" *Clang-g-g-g!* A bell dinned loudly, out in the underground hangar, cutting through the thunder of motors. Knight shot a fierce look down at Christian.

"What's that?"

"General alarm!" said the spy-master viciously. "It means you're caught."

Some one pounded at the hangar door. Motioning for Hank Larson to cover Christian, Knight prodded Karika toward the door with his own gun.

"Ask him what he wants!" he ordered in a low voice. Karika obeyed, as Knight held the gun at his head.

"Enemy planes approaching the field!" a highpitched voice sounded faintly through the door. "The sound-crews report they are flying straight this way from the direction of the American carrier!"

Karika's eyes dilated wildly. Knight clapped his hand over the man's mouth.

"Tell him to have the ramp door opened and the Condor started at once to rush the prisoners to a safer place! Change one word of it and I'll splatter your brains on that wall!"

Berserk fury came into Karika's eyes, but he gave the command. Knight spun the Japanese colonel around and looked grimly at Brett and the rest.

"The carrier operator must have caught my message to the *Augusta*, when I tried to tell where this base was. Probably they and the *Augusta* took bearings on the message and got a 'fix.'"

"They'll be all set to bomb the place!" exclaimed Brett.

"We've still a chance if we can get to the Condor," Knight returned. "They'll have dim lights out there, once they open the ramp door. We'll have to take Karika and Christian and make it seem they're guarding us—and then break for it at the last second."

Doyle thudded his boot-tip against the spy-master's ribs as Knight opened the hangar door half an inch.

"On your feet, bum! We're going places!"

THE whine of an inertia starter sounded from out in the base. Knight peered through the crack.

"They're starting the Condor's motors and the ship will be in the clear as soon as they taxi a Grumman out of the way. There goes the ramp-door—"

"Amerikaner-jin!" screeched a voice from beside the dais. Knight whirled, stood paralyzed for a second. A figure in American Navy uniform stood in the doorway to the castle. His fear-stamped face was that of a white man but the glaring black eyes back of his goggles were those of a Japanese. Behind the man was a second similar figure.

"Sons of Death!" screamed Karika. "Kill these foreign devils!"

The first man's hand flashed to his side. Knight fired, and a moulage mask split open as his bullet drilled the imposter between the eyes. The second masked figure leaped back and blazed two shots before Doyle dropped him with a slug through the heart. Brett and General Wu threw themselves against the door, but three more of the Sons of Death charged through before they could close it and shoot the bolt.

Knight had kicked the hangar door shut at the first sign of trouble. With his back against it he fired swiftly at the nearest masquerader. The man spun around, fell at full length. Karika dived madly for the pilot's gun. General Brett sprang across the dying man, drove a wicked left to the Japanese colonel's jaw.

Karika toppled over and with a blood-curdling shriek pitched headlong into the pit. His frenzied voice changed to a cry of agony as his body thudded against a protruding spike. For an instant longer that frightful cry was audible, diminishing with a swift and awful significance, then the furore in the room drowned it out

A gun roared close to Knight, and he saw the skinny captain fall. Then suddenly there was no more shooting. He bent over and snatched one of the moulage masks from a dead Japanese.

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"Put this on, General Wu! Hank, you and Doyle take the other two good ones and pretend to be escorting—"

"Look out!" shouted Dawson. "Christian's get a gun!"
There was a loud report, and the light went cut.
Knight jumped to the door, was sent sprawling as a figure leaped from the darkness. The door flew open, and Christian raced through, dispatch case in one hand, two moulage-masked figures behind him. Knight scrambled up and dashed into the dimly-lit hangar, with the rest of the group now hot on his heels.

The Condor was directly in line with the ramp, half a dozen men scurrying around it. Knight whirled, saw a masked figure gripping General Brett by the arm and another man holding a split mask over his face running beside them. Suddenly a pistol flamed, at one side of the hangar, and the mechanics by the Condor dashed across the base. Brett and his two companions ran to the door of the big ship. Knight ducked back of an idling Grumman as he saw Christian emerge between two ships. The two other masked men, whose figures he now recognized as those of Hank and Doyle, both fired at the spy-master, and Christian plunged under the fuselage of a nearby Nakajima fighter.

Dazed mechanics were milling wildly around the underground base, with here and there an officer shouting frantic commands which went unheard. Doyle and Hank raced around a Grumman and ran to the Condor. All but the man with the split mask had entered the cabin. A gun flamed from under the Nakajima where Christian had dropped, and the split mask fell from suddenly nerveless fingers. Knight saw Dawson tumble to the ground, saw Hank lift him aboard as Doyle ran to the cockpit.

The Condor lurched forward, started up the ramp. Christian dashed out, unhurt, from the Nakajima and shouted an order. A Japanese non-com sprinted to a switch-board and gripped a rheostat. Knight had waited purposely to make sure the Condor escaped. He took swift aim, squeezed the trigger, and the non-com fell before the huge door had moved an inch.

KNIGHT vaulted into the pit of the white Grumman which had shielded him and shoved the throttle open. He saw Christian's face blacken with fury as the fighter rolled toward the ramp. The spy-master thrust his dispatch case under his arm, and dashed to the switchboard. Bright lights went on, and the heavy door started downward just as the Grumman hit the incline. Knight shoved the throttle wide open and the fighter

roared up the slope. The descending surface was within three feet of the whirling prop as the Grumman shot past the top of the ramp.

The ship bounced into the air, settled, then took off swiftly. Tracers stabbed after as Knight lifted it into the graying sky. He looked back, saw another white Grumman which had been disgorged from the maw of the hidden base. As the ship zoomed after the Condor he saw the silvered hair of John Christian gleam in the light that came up the ramp. With his plans falling in ruins, the spy-master was making one last desperate attempt to save the scheme by killing the men who knew his scheme. It was his only chance.

Engine blasting, Knight chandelled after the other Grumman. Christian's ship whipped into a tight bank, and his guns raked the transport's tail. Knight clamped both trips, poured a red torrent into the flashing wings before him. With a furious renversement, Christian shot back at him. Engines wide open, the two ships charged at each other, tracers crisscrossing like flaming rapiers. Then in a mad instant when collision seemed inevitable, Christian frantically kicked aside.

Knight whirled his Grumman and the white wings of the spy-master's ship came suddenly under his guns. Crouching, he squeezed the trips. The spouting tracers shot forward to the tail of Christian's plane—and in that instant three parachute flares set the sky ablaze.

For one weirdly dramatic second, the two fighters flew in an ocean of brilliant light. John Christian's handsome face went rigid with fear, as Knight's tracers smoked forward to his cockpit. Then an invisible hand seemed to hurl that rigid figure down upon his controls. Like a flashing arrow, the white Grumman carried the spy-master crashing down to disintegration.

In the blaze that shot up, a dozen white ships were revealed as the Sons of Death raced up to engage a hated foe. Like avengers from Heaven, a score of U.S. Navy fighters pitched down under the flares and dived at the zooming impostors.

Knight flung off toward the sea, lost himself in darkness. That battle was no place for an American in a white Grumman!

A squadron of Navy bombers swept into sight, and then off to one side he saw the Condor circling. He waited until he saw it straighten out for Shanghai, then followed, hidden in the gloom. Once, he looked back to where John Christian had crashed. Navy planes were circling over the bomb-gutted ground. There was no sign of the Sons of Death.

A MOMENTARY silence had fallen in the living room of the suite which served as General Brett's Shanghai headquarters. Then Doyle shifted his bandaged arm and grinned across at Knight.

"Dick, you sure gave me a scare when you dropped that Grumman alongside us as we were landing at Chenju. I thought old John Christian had come to settle things for certain."

Knight chuckled.

"It was the only way I could think of saving my skin. At that, General Wu had to talk fast to the crowd at the field."

"And elsewhere," said General Brett. "But I think he's squared everything now. And that State Department condemnation of Japan came at the psychological moment. By the way, I just heard that Dawson will pull through. We were miraculously lucky not to have any casualties—except Doyle's arm, and Hank's black eye."

"And thith tooth," lisped Hank mournfully. "I think I'll make thome-body pay for that."

"Maybe G-2 can help out," laughed Brett. "What do you think would square it?"

"General," said Hank, "jutht give me the key to the 'Thmiling Buddha' night club. Thereth a little matter of a Camelth Githard to be taken care of."

