



*There was a new breed of angel in the sky one that used Vickers instead of a flaming sword;
and the tracer stream of his vengeance spelled death to Prussians.*

BREED OF ANGELS

by WILLIAM E. BARRETT

CAPTAIN FREDERICK DIETTERICH stood straight and tall at the window of the little office that would be his for only a little while longer. With sombre

eyes he watched his demotion marching down upon him in the shape of a broad, swaggering officer, whose uniform shone like the raiment of a demigod. He grunted.

“A blasted pig of a Prussian.” The words were literally spat out of his mouth. Turning on his heel, he strode across to the desk that had been his by the right of Jasta commanders. He sat down and pawed over the papers. He could at least be busy till the end.

This hour was the bitterest in his life, but he was determined to take it without bowing his head. He was not losing rank. He had never been actually a captain. His appointment had been temporary as captain and squadron leader. If he had hoped, after three months, it was but human. Now the hope was gone and he was being replaced, to serve under a Prussian.

Dietterich was an Alsatian and that had been a handicap. The Imperial Government accepted great service from Alsations but withheld its trust while accepting them. His reputation on the other side of the line had hurt, too. He had been known as a clean sportsman. H.Q. had frowned at that. It favored officers who were feared. The last touch was his popularity with his men. The men of his *jagdstaffel* spoke of him as “Fritz”. The Imperial command could not associate authority with familiarity and Dietterich was going back to the flying ranks.

There was the stamp of heavy feet outside the little office, an orderly swung the door open and a vision of Prussian military splendor stood framed in the doorway. Imperial mustaches greased stiff, eyes hard and head high, the new commander swept into the room. Dietterich rose to his feet and extended his hand.

“Ah, *Hauptmann* von Kopf! I have awaited you.”

The cold eyes scorned the outstretched hand and a coarse voice barked gutturally from some depth in the massive chest. “I am accustomed to the salute, *Leutnant*.”

Dietterich bit his lip. The man was ignoring the temporary rank and reducing him before he had actually turned over the command. His hand came up stiffly and he saluted. After all, he had to serve under the great pig and one needs must exert caution.

Von Kopf answered the salute carelessly and swaggered around the desk. Dietterich had to move with undignified haste to make way for him, when he saw that the other intended to take the chair he had been using. The hazing was starting very early.

“I will have a brief report on conditions, lieutenant, and then you may go to your quarters.” The voice was curt. Dietterich’s eyes smoldered but he kept control of himself. In crisp sentences he outlined the general situation on this Front. Von Kopf heard him through,

interrupting occasionally to find fault with some condition or to sneer at the existing order. Dietterich’s flow of speech halted at last and he made a shamefaced gesture.

“There is an American flyer who had been a thorn. He has cost four of our men here. I understand he is credited with eleven all told.”

The Prussian’s eyebrows lifted. “Disgraceful. There are no good Yankee flyers. Raw, untrained yokels, all of them. The insignia of this swine? Do I know him?”

There was a strange gleam in the Alsatian’s eyes. “His insignia is an Angel with a sword. His name, I learn, is Chase.”

“An Angel!” Von Kopf fairly snorted. “The man who would pick that for a fetish is no fighter. Bah. Harp players, hymn singers but not soldiers. *An Angel!*”

Dietterich’s face was guileless but there was a strange glitter in his eyes. “There is a certain breed of Angels—” he began mildly. The Prussian cut him off.

“You are dismissed, lieutenant. You will fly in my flight. I can see I am needed when an Angel becomes a boogie man for fighters of the Fatherland. Faugh!”

Dietterich saluted and withdrew stiffly. His cheeks flamed because this man was not even giving him a flight to lead, but there was a strange gleam in his eyes. This Prussian seemed deficient in a knowledge of Angels and when one’s enemy has a weakness, one may hope.

THEY took to the air at dawn; three full flights flying in jagged tiers like steps of stairs. Dietterich flew in the top tier behind von Kopf while the men who had led flights under him still led. As he nursed throttle on the Fokker D-7 that he flew, he found himself cursing heartily at the ship and at the war and at his leader.

Not that he had any fault to find with the D-7. It was as good as anything on the Front. Nor had he ever hated the war before. He had rather liked it. It was his big adventure and a pretty thrilling sort of thing. It was just that this morning everything was wrong.

They cruised through a vast and silent world of cloud; behind their own lines and high. Dietterich banked precisely with the flight when von Kopf signaled for them to fly closer to the battle line. It was a precise, beautiful bank and he disliked it for that reason. Again he cursed the ship.

“Just like a damned Prussian,” he snarled. “Everything like a stupid clock. The old Albatross! Ah, there was a snorter.”

His eyes became dreamy as he thought of that hell-raising, nose-heavy, roaring ark in which he had first known fame. He was so lost in the memory that he never did know the precise moment when the Spads struck. All that he knew was that suddenly out of nowhere they were there; one seven-man flight that came crashing into the haughty top guard as confidently as though there were seventy of them.

Lead whined and Dietterich's gloom vanished. The blood pumped in his veins and the ship under him came to life. He rolled neatly away from a destructive burst and came up in the climbing, nose-high turn that was distinctly German. He was over his man like a flash and his guns sang. With the fierce glow of battle warming him he saw the design of his Spandaus traced on the other's wing. The fellow went off in a spin. Dietterich laughed.

"Shamming!" he grunted. "He will be back. There are more."

Seldom did he ever follow a spinning foe down; even when he knew that the spin was a maneuver to escape bad position. He liked combat and the glorious feel of superiority over a man who swapped lead to a finish. Killing did not appeal to him; fighting did. He was Alsatian, not Prussian.

A blue-nose Spad flashed across the sky and buzzed angrily on the underside of a Fokker. The Fokker rolled and the Spad came up on his tail. Dietterich's heart dropped down into his boots, but his eyes gleamed. He had seen the Angel insignia. The great Yank was in action.

And the man under the guns was Captain Carl Eitel von Kopf.

"God of my fathers! He will scoff at Angels." Dietterich's voice roared; then his hand crept to his triggers and his nose came down.

As a man he would watch that duel with joy and applaud the Angel when he made his kill. As a flyer of the Fatherland, it was his duty to take that gallant foe off the haughty Prussian's back. His engine roared and the Spandaus coughed.

VON KOPF was scarcely aware that he was attacked, before Dietterich was on the blue Spad. Some instinct warned the pilot and the American ship wasn't there when the lead sang. His ship was up, over and coming back. Dietterich's jaw clamped hard, but his eyes lighted with joy. Here was a foe worth fighting. There was glory in it whether a man won or lost. The Yank was coming down fast now. His guns stuttered

and Dietterich's foot punished rudder as he banked, climbing full gun is the one best maneuver out of a bad spot. He could feel the lead hit the fuselage behind the cockpit and his lips curled grimly. He was headed right into the Yank now, protected by his engine and in a position to get in a burst himself if the man made a mistake.

The Angel made no mistakes. For a split second he hung and flickered like a candle; upside down and with guns spitting. Then he dropped off and Dietterich saw his ship flash past in an impossible position for a burst. They chased each other then in great whirling figure eights, first one man stealing a slight advantage, then the other. Occasionally one gun or the other would spit, but no damage was done. Tense at his controls, Dietterich felt himself grow hot and then chill. The sheer perfection of the duel was unnerving. The man who first made the miscalculation of one foot would die.

WITH a swift, daring maneuver that cost him a few feet of altitude, the Angel beat Dietterich to a turn and the German felt the sweat break out on him. He was scarcely less fast in reacting to the situation, however, and they locked in a deadly ring-a-rosy, worse by far than the eights because it could not last as long.

Dietterich's brain whirled. He had the faster ship and he could win now if he did not err. In a tail-chasing duel, the faster ship could work to the outside, cross the other and rake him with one burst. The flying must be perfect and the marksmanship of high order. Dietterich's hands were wet. *Now!*

Even as he flashed into the maneuver he knew he had failed. The deadly Yank had figured his move and timed it perfectly. Even as Dietterich pulled to the outside and darted in, the Yank crowded the last ounce of throttle and came down on him.

The Alsatian's wide eyes looked right into the muzzles of twin Vickers and nothing happened. The two ships passed and the Alsatian shook as with the ague. He could not believe that Death had passed him by. Impossible. The Yank was too good a man to miss a chance like that. He whirled and caught a glimpse of the other cockpit. Then he knew.

At the crucial moment, the Angel's guns had betrayed him. He was hammering now in a desperate attempt to clear them and Dietterich's eyes hardened. The Angel was his to take.

Many men would have killed, but the erstwhile *Jasta* leader had enjoyed that battle too well. He

wanted to drink beer with this man and discuss the fight with him. He wanted to toast him, and to tell him that there wasn't an Allied fighter in the air who could have fought him that fight with a Spad against a D-7. No one but the Angel.

Like a man rounding up a willful bull, Dietterich herded his man down. He fired across his nose and he flew around and above him, forcing him to lose altitude at every move and counter-move. If the Angel had had a gun, he could not have done this, but with no threat to face, it was easy. Desperately the Yank fought against the inevitable. Every inch of the way he fought. In one last desperate gesture as the Alsatian pushed him back toward the home drome, he hurled his ship nose first in a wild attempt to die with his conqueror. Dietterich barely escaped that and he escaped it with a chill on his spine.

"A Tiger!" he said admiringly. "A terrible fighter, that one. God of my fathers, yes!"

They had swept far from the rest of the battle but now they saw two ships. One was a Spad and it was spinning down. Dietterich's practiced eye told him that this was no fake. The ship was really out of control. Fiercely, vengefully, a Fokker was riding it down; guns blazing. They were right over the two when the Spad hit and Dietterich sickened as he saw the vengeful Fokker fly above the shattered wreck and literally hammer it into the ground with bullets. He didn't need the sight of the insignia to tell him who it was. No one but a Prussian would do that.

All of Dietterich's craft failed to make his captive land on the drome. With a swift and dangerous maneuver, the Yank swerved off, hedgehopped the line of trees and brought the Spad down in a meadow. Dietterich had to gun his engine and go around before he could follow that landing. When he came down, the Spad was blazing merrily and a slim figure was sitting on a rock, a cigarette held carelessly in one hand, an automatic in the other.

DIETTERICH'S eyes narrowed as he saw the Colt. The man was his prisoner by all the rights and he didn't like armed resistance from flyers on the ground. He slid out of the cockpit on the off side of his ship and clutched his Luger. He could speak English fairly well and he called out now.

"I, too, haf a gun, Yank. You are *ein* brisoner. Throw it down *der* veapon."

"Come and get it." The slim figure was still carelessly seated on the rock, but the gun was pointed

at the plane. Dietterich wet his lips and stepped out, his gun leveled. For a full minute the two men faced each other above the guns and then the Angel threw down his gun with a sigh.

"You're a brave man and no yellow murderer," he said resignedly. "I couldn't shoot you. You win."

Dietterich holstered his own gun, picked up the other's weapon and extended his hand.

"God of my fathers!" he said. "You are a boy. Nothing but a little school boy." He was staring in amazement at the slim figure, the round cheeks and the soft lips of this super-fighter of the air. His amazement was a tribute, but the Angel took it for a slur. His fists clenched and he stepped forward.

"You damned Hun. I'll show you who's a—"

He stopped as a shout sounded from a few yards behind him. Soldiers were crashing through the trees and coming on the run. His hands opened and he seemed to fully realize his position for the first time. With an effort he squared his shoulders and turned toward the drome. Fritz Dietterich felt like singing. He could see the glowering Prussian standing down there aloof from the expectant group of flyers and it made his heart jump to think of the triumph that was his. On the first day in which the Prussian commanded, he, Fritz Dietterich had bested and captured the greatest Yank. It was great; the day of days.

He swaggered behind his captive and wished that the man was bigger and more impressive; more frightful looking. It spoiled the effect for a husky six footer to come in with a slim youth walking docilely before him. There was drama lacking.

Just the same he liked this Angel; he was a good fighter and a worthy foe. With jovial friendliness he slapped his baton across the boy's thighs. Like an uncoiling snake, the Angel whirled, chin against chest and body crouched. The amazed Dietterich stared and the slim Yank swung out a fist that hit like a pile driver.

The whole world seemed to flip right over and. the Alsatian could feel the ground coming up to him. Something hit his shoulders a terrific whack and his eyes blinked as he looked straight ahead into the clear blue sky.

It was not for several dazed seconds that he realized he was flat on his back; then he scrambled up with ludicrous haste. A private soldier was holding a bayonet against the breast of the scowling Angel and far away, Dietterich could hear laughter. His eyes flashed. The Prussian had laughed first and the others had taken their cue from him. Dietterich, turned sick.

All of his triumph had dissolved in an instant and he was made ridiculous. Well did he know that the Prussian would never have laughed under such circumstances except for the fact that he was in a jealous rage and anxious to discredit the man he had displaced. Prussians do not usually find humor in the resistance of prisoners.

VON KOPF was advancing now, several flyers at his back. Dietterich's military poise came back to him and he tried to save his face. Without glancing at the Angel, he gave his order to the soldiers.

"Put that man in close confinement. No courtesies."

"The order is countermanded. Bring him to the assembly room immediately," von Kopf snapped out and Dietterich's face crimsoned. No greater insult can be passed to a German officer than to countermand his orders publicly. The Prussian was sneering at him.

"So! And that is the boogie man. That little boy is the fierce American!"

Dietterich stood straight. "He is a great flyer!" he said.

Von Kopf laughed without any expression in his cold eyes. "He would look nice with a hymn book in his hand. He is a great Angel!"

The Prussian turned on his heel. Dietterich's voice halted him. "He is my prisoner. It is customary—"

"You could not control him. Nothing is customary except what I order. He will be sport for the men. He can tell them how he made his captor the laughing stock of the entire *Jasta*."

Dietterich's lips were white and he read sympathy in the faces of the men who stood waiting for the Prussian. He knew his rights, too; rights which von Kopf had no authority to take away.

"He is my prisoner. Will you take responsibility—"

Von Kopf laughed. "'If necessary I will spank him.'"

For some minutes Dietterich resisted the temptation to join the others in the big meeting room; then curiosity got the better of him. He was more interested in the Angel than any of them, although now he nourished a deep resentment. He had been playful and the man had turned tiger. He entered the big, barnlike structure and took a seat apart from the main table; it afforded a view of von Kopf's position and of the prisoner.

Beer was being served and a toast had evidently been drunk already to the American. Dietterich frowned. When he was commander such celebrations

were held at night. To celebrate right one must drink much beer. There were still two patrols to fly and men should stay sober and grim.

"They tell me you downed twelve of our men. Bad flyers, were they not?" There was a sneer in von Kopf's voice which was raised so that all in the room could hear.

The Angel looked around the room at the grinning faces of those who took the Prussian's gibe for wit and at the sober faces of those who considered it an ill tribute to the dead. His eyebrows raised. "Is that the captain's opinion of Germany's flyers?" he asked blandly.

For answer the Prussian slapped him across the mouth. Two men grabbed him as he came to his feet. The captain raised his mug of beer.

"Release him," he said. "He is not dangerous." He looked straight at Dietterich when he said it and the Alsatian's eyes burned. Reluctantly, the two men released their holds and stepped back.

The Angel stood quietly on his feet and the Prussian ignored him. For a few seconds every breath in the room was held against the drama that impended. Then the American sat down quietly.

DIETTERICH felt his heart sink. The Angel had failed him once more. The Prussian's triumph emphasized his own defeat. His head drooped. Excited comment ran around the room and the captain was made. He had proved himself with one swift stroke that his was the greater glory for one cowardly blow on the ground, than Dietterich's victory of a tense half hour in the skies. They drank in earnest then. Toasts were shouted and the "*Hochs*" rang loudly. Through it all, the Angel slumped miserably and Dietterich's depression matched his. Victor and vanquished, they were the only two in all the room who did not glory in the wild debacle. Through it all Dietterich was conscious of a vast amazement. To gratify a personal jealousy and to make a great play for power, von Kopf was betraying the spirit of his caste. Prussians are great soldiers and von Kopf was forgetting the war.

A roar of high-powered engines broke the spell. The mechanical squad worked by the clock and the noon patrol was due. Von Kopf looked at his watch and his voice rang.

"To victory!" he roared. "Not over boys, but men. Number Three will take off first. Number Two in five minutes and my flight will follow."

Dietterich's lips curled. The man said "my flight" instead of mentioning it by number as he did the others. "These Prussian swine are egotists."

The men were filing out with laughter on their lips; von Kopf turned to give an order to the two silent soldiers in the background who had been designated to guard the prisoner. He stopped on the verge of giving it as he saw Dietterich looking at him out of hate-filled eyes. He turned instead to the dejected prisoner.

"You shall see real flyers take off," he said. "I do not fly for ten minutes. I will show you the first flight of those who are about to chase your countrymen out of the air." His insolent brag was directed at Dietterich as much as at the Angel. The Alsatian knew it, but he had a sudden flash at the Yank's face and he hoped. The man's shoulders still slumped. His face was still woeful, but there was something in his eyes—

They went outside; the Prussian and several of his satellites in a group about the prisoner. Dietterich moved off by himself, but he could see the Angel moving spiritlessly in the middle of the group. Von Kopf was strapping on his sidearms and talking with that scornful curl on his full lips. The men of the third flight were adjusting helmets and goggles by the purring ships and mechanics were scurrying about.

Suddenly with a movement as swift as light itself, the Angel spun, ducked, ripped the Prussian's holster from his hand and lashed out with a deadly right to the jaw. Within a second and a half, he was dashing across the ten yard strip that separated him from the first ship, a blazing Luger in his fist.

Like a pole-axed tree, the pilot of that ship toppled with his foot on the step. Two mechanics crumpled beside him and the slim figure of the Yank gave a flying leap that carried him up on to the fuselage, over and into the cockpit.

It was done with the suddenness of lightning striking and by the time that lead started to fly, the Fokker was roaring down the runway.

Off with his right wing low and up. Five ships followed him in a roaring charge down the field and the other flyers raced for the remaining ships. With a flipper turn that defied the Fates, the Angel swooped about and came down with engine roaring just as the wheels of the five pursuers spurned the earth.

BY ALL the rules the Yank should not have had the flying speed that he had; but the D-7 was a great ship and the Angel was born to greatness in things that used the air. A blazing comet of destruction, he whirred over the five, spraying the first two and causing two more to touch wings and fold. One man only escaped the imbroglio and he made a desperate

play for a broadside shot at the Yank who was fighting his ship now to escape a crash.

The attempt failed and the Angel found himself. Two feints and then his guns spoke. With less than four hundred feet under them the two ships fought and the German went down.

He hit the drome right in the path of those who would have taken off to his rescue and the Angel followed him, his guns strafing the drome fore and aft.

Dietterich had reached his own ship, but the crash of that comrade had shut him off. His line of takeoff would have been squarely through the wreckage. With numb horror, he saw men crumpling about him, heard the bullets whistle past his own plane, and then saw the foe depart with a derisive corkscrew climb that hurled defiance at the ambitious machine gunners on the hangar tops.

Pursuit was impossible with five wrecked planes spread about the drome and Dietterich swung down from the cockpit, a grim smile on his lips. What had happened was terrible, but he was conscious of a grim elation. He believed in the strange red gods of retribution and this was their handiwork.

In the commander's quarters he found von Kopf. The man was shouting hoarsely into a telephone and the Prussian look of invincible might was absent. Dietterich rested one leg on the desk and thought little of salutes. His eyes met von Kopf's squarely as the man hung up the telephone. What he read there pleased him.

The Prussian was not deceived. He knew what Dietterich knew; that he was a licked man. His deposed predecessor had captured the enemy's ace and he had let him escape. He had lost men, ships and prestige in a disgraceful affair that a court-martial would drag out into the broad light of day. He was done and the man he had scorned and humiliated would stand out in violent contrast to him. Dietterich smiled.

"I told you there were breeds of Angels," he said quietly. Von Kopf raised haggard eyes, a snarl on his lips.

"What do you mean 'breeds of Angels'?"

Dietterich's hand waved carelessly. "Not all of them sing hymns. There was the blessed Michael, the Archangel. He was the soldier of heaven. A hard fighter—"

Von Kopf cursed and Dietterich turned his back, strutting to the door with that in his mien that showed scorn for the breed of Prussians. His eyes looked dreamily at the sky.

He rather liked that Archangel. A good fighter is to be respected and this one hardly seemed a foe.