

# DREADNOUGHTS OF THE AIR

by RALPH OPPENHEIM

*Lieutenant Jim Edwards knew it was coming, though he did everything he could to stop it. Somehow, he just couldn't catch on to this flying. He knew he was in disgrace, that from the C.O. down the men laughed at him. Jim Edwards faced Blois—and disgrace—dishonor. Then came the C.O.'s amazing suggestion, and Lieutenant Jim Edwards gritted his teeth—that would be worse than disgrace!*

**G**LOOMILY, the young pilot entered the operations office of the 44th pursuit squadron. Shoulders bowed, he slouched up to the C.O.'s desk and performed a weak and sloppy semblance of a salute.

"You sent for me, sir?" inquired Lieutenant Jim Edwards, in a tone of despair.

Major Harvey, commander of the famous, crack squadron, looked up from his papers. He was a short, stocky little man with graying hair and kindly blue eyes. But just now those eyes were stern as they regarded the unhappy figure standing before the desk.

"Yes, Edwards, I sent for you," the major replied slowly. "And I guess you know why."

A dark flush of shame spread over Edward's face. "Guess I do, sir," he conceded. "You're going to,"—his voice faltered—"going to break me, sir."

The major did not reply at once. He rose from his desk and took a few paces across the room. Edwards waited.

In the silence the staccato bark of airplane engines outside sounded unusually shrill. A dawn patrol was taking off.

Abruptly the major stopped, wheeled, and faced the pilot again.

"Edwards," he said tersely, "you know as well as I do that you've failed—utterly failed—as a pursuit pilot. In your two months with us, with the crack 44th, you haven't shot down one enemy plane. Your flying has been faulty, incompetent. You've crashed four new ships just through nervousness. In short,"—he shook his head, and now he spoke more in sorrow than in anger—"you've made a general mess of your work. By rights I should have broken you long ago. I kept you, though, because I liked you, believed in you. I thought that you were doing your damndest, and

that eventually you'd come through. But you haven't justified my belief at all."

Edwards averted his eyes from those of his superior officer, looked down at the floor. He bit his lip.

"I know, sir," he said, bitterly. Then, in a desperate attempt at self-defense, he rushed on: "But I've tried, sir. God knows that. I've tried my best. I'm not yellow!" The last word seemed to rouse him strangely. His voice rose hoarsely. "No, not yellow, major—let them say what they want. I've never run away. I'm not afraid of the gaff. And I want you to know—"

The major's eyes suddenly were kindly again. Gently, he laid a restraining hand on Edwards' arm:

"No, not yellow, Edwards," he said softly, as though he were reassuring a child. "Not yellow. Just—bum. Yet,"—he gave a dry laugh—"it's funny—but when I form an idea about a man, it seems to stick. I've always thought you were a born flyer, and that if you once broke through—"

Edwards' eyes lit up with a wild hope. "Gosh," he burst out, "if you'd give me another chance to—" He stopped, his hope instantly crushed, as the major slowly shook his head.

"No, Edwards, it can't be done. In this war we have no time for sentiment or experiment. I've given you all the chance in the world. I've let you fly with two of the best men in the force—Davis and Brooks—great aces, both. But it hasn't seemed to help. And now,"—his tone suddenly changed, took on a new significance—"there's only one thing I can offer you instead of disgrace—instead of stripping your wings and sending you to Blois. And that one thing," he said, his eyes narrowing, "while it's big, is so rotten and humiliating that I'm ashamed to offer it to any man."

Despite the grimness of the major's tone, his words again brought hope to Edwards.

“Then,” the lieutenant said eagerly, “there is something I can do? Good Lord, major, I’d do anything to keep these wings!” His fingers caressed the insignia on his breast. *“Anything!”*

A faint smile came over the major’s lips. Again the C.O. stepped up to Edwards, put an arm on the younger man’s broad shoulders.

“Anything?” he asked, and now he spoke in a lower voice. “Well—here now. Would you be willing to spend the rest of the war in a German prison camp?”

The question was so startling, so unexpected, that Edwards was completely taken aback. He stared.

“Sounds crazy, doesn’t it?” the major said. “But I’m asking it in all seriousness. It’s the one thing I have to offer you. As I said, it’s rotten and humiliating. But if you do it, you will be performing a bigger service than any of us—Brooks and Davis included. And in the end—when the war is over—it will bring you the glory we are all striving for.” He paused, studied the young pilot’s face shrewdly. “Now would you care to hear the details? Say ‘no’ unless you’re sure you can stomach the idea of the German prison camp.”

Edwards considered a moment. He was still a bit bewildered. “Gosh, sir,” he sighed, “it all sounds so queer that I can’t quite get it. But I’m not taking back what I said about being willing to do anything. So, I’d like to hear those details.”

THE major nodded, then silently went back to his desk and sat down. He motioned Edwards to a chair opposite.

“Before I begin,” the C.O. warned, “I want you to understand that this is strictly confidential—intelligence stuff. Under no circumstances, no matter how hard it may be to keep your mouth shut, must you breathe a word of it to anyone.” He paused, just long enough to let this fact sink home. Then: “As you know, Bueler and his Fokker circus have been raising hell with us these days. Every clear night they raid all our important dumps and stations. We’re going to start reprisals to-night—we’ll raid their ammunition factory at Staffletz. But that’s aside from the point. The main thing now is to put a stop to Bueler’s work. And Intelligence think they’ve found the way.” Again he paused. He glanced about the room as if to ascertain that no one was eavesdropping.

Then he leaned forward in his chair and his voice lowered almost to a tense whisper. “First of all, they’ve moved all the objectives of the raids to new and secret spots, so that the Germans can’t find them. Second,

they’ve seen to it that our aviators stop carrying maps or important documents on their persons, for,”—he stressed his next point, gave it a significance which Edwards did not miss—“from captured aviators the Jerries have been getting most of their information lately. And that’s just what has given intelligence their big idea. They want now to give Bueler and his crew false locations, which will not only cause them to go out on worthless raids—wasting precious ammunition—but will also lead them into traps where we can slaughter them.”

Again the major glanced furtively about the room. Then, carefully, he extracted an oil-cloth packet from an inside pocket. Edwards shifted a trifle, sensing what was coming. He waited. The major was leaning still closer over the desk now. Finally the C.O. spoke again, and now his words came like the blows of a hammer, terse, direct.

“Edwards, because you’re a rotten flyer, because you can’t be of any use in the service,”—Edwards winced, and the major hastily added: “but also because you’ve got guts, you can be the one who delivers this false map right into Bueler’s hands!”

Edwards stiffened in his chair, and a strange chill crept up his spine. Suddenly, with a shock, he realized the whole upshot of the business, realized what the major was asking.

He tried to keep his voice steady, but it sounded strained and unnatural.

“Then,” he said slowly, “you want— want me to carry that map on my person and deliberately land in German territory, get captured—” He broke off, his lips twitching, his face contorted with pain. “I’m to look like a deserter, giving myself up to—” He choked.

Suddenly his eyes filled with tears, despite his struggle to hold them back. He shook his head, snuffed, clumsily wiped his face with a sleeve of his flying tunic. “Cripes——”

The major’s eyes were not upon him now. For the C.O., more deeply moved than he wished to show, had half-turned away, and was staring gloomily at the floor. But his voice, though sympathetic, was still firm.

“It isn’t quite as bad as you think, Edwards. You won’t look like a deserter. What you’ll do is to go up now as you always have—with Brooks and Davis, in a three-plane formation. It’s just about time now; they’ll be waiting. You’ll all go up for your patrol, which will proceed within a mile or so of Bueler’s drome. There you are bound to be attacked by some of his crew. In the ensuing combat, before you have to fire a shot, you

will simply spin out as if disabled and land as near to the drome as possible.

“No one will suspect, under the circumstances, that you did it on purpose—such a thing would spoil our plans. Before being captured, you will try to burn your ship. Then as your captors appear, make a pretense of trying to hide the map. They’ll take it and your mission will be done. And after all,” he repeated, “it isn’t so bad. This war can’t last much longer. And when it’s over there’ll be citations, decorations—” But his consolation fell upon deaf ears. Edwards simply sat, wrapped up in his own despondency, dazed and hurt, telling himself that this was more than he could ever go through with. To deliberately get captured—it was too much! The major was speaking again. “Of course, you’ll have to decide for yourself. But you must decide at once—it’s time for you to go.” He tossed the oilcloth packet on the desk. “There’s the map. You may take it or leave it, Edwards.”

Edwards wavered, torn by doubt and anguish. He looked at the map with horror, as if it were some deadly poisonous thing. He moved toward it, reached out, only to withdraw. Yet if he refused—Through his mind swam visions of Blois, of returning home after the war in disgrace, stripped of his wings, broken, seeing the others welcomed as heroes.

He picked up the map and stuffed it roughly beneath his tunic. And somehow, as soon as he had done it he felt better, stronger. He would go through with it! A determined expression came over his face, and his lips set stubbornly. He rose from his chair and faced the major bravely, almost arrogantly. The major also rose.

“Well, major,” Edwards said huskily, but with a grin, “it’s been good to know you, sir. Good-bye—and good luck!” He stiffened, snapped his hand up for a salute.

But before the salute could be made, the major grabbed the hand and shook it warmly. The C.O. did not waste any more words, for he knew that words were inadequate now. He merely smiled, and said: “Good-by, Edwards.”

That was all. And Edwards turned and strode quickly from the room. Had he looked back he would have seen the major, pale and haggard, leaning against his desk for support, suffering as one would suffer when sending a man out on such a mission.

TWENTY minutes later Lieutenant Edwards, strapped in the cockpit of his tiny white Nieuport, watched his airdrome receding beneath him as he

climbed through the sunny, morning haze. Above and in front of him, two other Nieuports were climbing too, but his eyes were not for them now. All he saw was that triangular patch of field below, lined with tiny camouflaged hangars and specked with little white crosses which he knew were planes. Smaller and smaller it grew, and drifted farther behind him. But he tilted his plane and turned his head to keep it in sight as long as possible. Nor was it strange that he should do so. For though it was only a rough and tumble aviation camp, set up in a hurry and likely to be moved any day, it was home to him. There he had slept, ate, mingled with his friends—lived.

And now he was leaving. The wheels of his Nieuport had lifted from Allied ground for the last time: the ground they would next touch would be German territory. Already Edwards felt a desolate sense of homesickness, a rending pain. Again his eyes filled with tears, and he sobbed like a convulsive child as his Nieuport, unperturbed, roared on upwards.

At last he could see the drome no longer: it had become merged with the rest of the blurred, greenish landscape below. With a sigh, he turned back to his controls, looked ahead. The two other Nieuports had slowed down to three-quarters throttle, and were already starting to take their designated places. Mechanically, Edwards sped up to meet them. The first Nieuport remained in the lead, and the second flanked it on the right and a little above, with Edwards swinging in to the left and still higher. In this V-shaped formation, the three planes climbed towards the lines, while the sun rose higher and brighter, and the mist kept thinning, drifting away under the churning blades of their propellers. They kept close together, close as safety permitted, which was close enough for them to clearly see one another’s goggled face.

There was Brooks—in the lead ship—stern, tight-lipped, always intent on his business, seldom smiling. And there was young Davis, reckless, carefree, always eager for a hot fight. A famous pair of aces. A pair with whom Edwards did not deserve to fly. Even now he was not properly keeping formation. He kept swinging out wide, while the other two held their places so perfectly that their two planes seemed to be one.

They must have great contempt for him, thought Edwards. Though it might have just been his imagination, it seemed that the glances they directed toward him were full of scorn. In their eyes he could never be excused. For—again he winced—they thought he was yellow, thought he had failed because

he lacked nerve. They were gentlemen enough not to tell him so to his face, but he had heard them say as much. When he had gone to fetch them in the messhall, after leaving the C.O., he had unwittingly overheard part of their talk.

"The Old Man's busting him now," Brooks had said, in his sober way. "He should have been broken long ago. He never did have guts."

"Got his wind up when he saw his first Jerry," Davis had agreed. "He can't stand the gaff. Yes, he's through now."

And Edwards, in a moment of fierce defiance, had stepped up proudly, had faced them both.

"Through, eh?" he had challenged them. "Guess again, boys! The Old Man didn't mention anything about it. We're going up the same as usual—and maybe I'll surprise you to-day!"

But though he spoke with pride, his humiliation was only the more intense, as he saw the irony of the situation. If they really knew the truth!

They wouldn't know the truth. Of that he would make sure. They would never know that he was spinning out deliberately. This was his last flight, and into it he would throw his heart and soul. He would make his plane behave in the crucial moment, perform the difficult maneuvers which a disabled plane went through—which, in the real circumstances, were hard not to perform.

Such were his thoughts as he and the other two continued their climb towards Germany. They had already reached five thousand feet, but the wily Brooks led them on higher, for it would be best to have good altitude on the Fokkers which would soar to meet them. At eight thousand feet they were skirting through the straying cirrus clouds, roaring through their thin, fingerlike wisps. At ten thousand feet they left the clouds floating serenely below them, and they leveled off at last in the thin, higher regions where the sky is a clear, translucent blue, infinite in its range.

Smoothly, their engines chanting a thunderous drone, they sailed onwards. And Edwards concentrated on keeping formation, on staying in place. It was best to think only of his flying, of the mechanical actions he had to perform. He mustn't think of the meaning of it, of the experience itself.

Yet, even as he told himself this, his mind was ironically being brought right back to the awful thing he was about to do. For, looking down, down through the sea of clouds to the blurred gray landscape below, Edwards saw with a shock that they were about to

cross the lines. God—he shook his head—how swiftly they had reached the Front! Usually the trip had seemed interminably long; now it seemed to have been a matter of seconds. Yet there was the scarred battle Front below—a maze of rolling smoke and fire, zig-zagged by fine white cuts which he knew to be the trenches.

And in the next second the air was suddenly shattered by a loud, rasping cough, and something burst behind the three Nieuports and left a black mushroom against the translucent blue. Archie, the anti-aircraft! That was his greeting—welcoming them into Germany. And somehow that greeting brought home to Edwards more painfully than anything else the full significance of his mission.

He was in German territory now, in the land of deadly enemies who hated him and were bent on his destruction, but to whom he must deliberately surrender himself! He had crossed the boundary—for even in the sky there was a boundary line. The territory which had practically come to mean his native land was receding behind him. And Edwards choked as a great lump welled in his throat; and gritted his teeth to stop his childish sniveling. He gritted his teeth and fiendishly applied himself to his flying again.

A SECOND archie shell had followed close upon the first—this one bursting off to the right. As the third came, the veteran Brooks hastily signaled with a wave of his arm, and the three Nieuports swiftly broke apart a little and assumed an erratic course to throw off the range of the gunners below. And Edwards, His mind on flying, faithfully counted fifteen, ruddered over a few degrees, counted fifteen again and kept repeating, his eyes glued on the two bobbing white Nieuports of Brooks and Davis. For awhile the anti-aircrafts continued to blotch the sky with their black spew, but presently, when the barriers of ground-defense were passed, the air grew still and clear once more, and the three Nieuports closed in and flew on serenely.

But not for long. Even before Edwards had time to begin brooding again, the wings of Brook's Nieuport suddenly waggled, and the leader fired a burst from his guns. At the familiar signal Edwards tensed, and instinctively began scanning the sky in every direction. They were well within the lines now—must be quite near Bueller's drome. Edwards strained his eyes. For awhile he could see nothing. But then, of a sudden, he picked them out—the objects which Brooks was trying to signify.

Below them, climbing swiftly out of the East, were four grayish shapes which looked like fragile, darting dragon flies. Straight towards the three Nieuports they came, their wings shimmering in the sun.

Edwards' fingers involuntarily tightened on his stick, and the muscles in his face grew strangely taut, as he watched the approach of those four shapes with awful fascination. They were Fokkers. And as they loomed closer, assuming color and size, he saw that they were the familiar gray-striped ships of Bueler's circus.

Now Davis, off to Edwards' right, was firing his guns, both to warm them up and to acknowledge Brooks' signal. Mechanically Edwards leaned forward to trip his own Brownings. He pressed his stick-triggers, and the twin guns stuttered into life with a deafening clatter which, to his own amazement, startled him strangely. He pulled himself together, told himself he must be cool, must keep clearly in mind just what he had to do. The map—he must see if he had it. He fumbled beneath his tunic. Yes, there it was.

Watch Brooks now—keep an eye on the leader to see just how he intended to cope with the situation. He must wait until they got into the fight, and then he must spin right out as if disabled. But—he started with the sudden, grim realization—if he spun right out there would be four Fokkers against two Nieuports. It wouldn't be fair to Brooks and Davis. They would have to fight like marvels to handle odds like that! Yet—

He broke off, drawing in his breath sharply. For, from the cockpit of the lead plane, an arm shot upwards, waved. Brooks was signaling, signaling for them to dive to the attack. And in the next second the leader's Nieuport plunged over and went roaring down. Immediately Davis plunged after him. But Edwards, his mind in confusion, hesitated for several seconds. God, he couldn't just spin right out, couldn't leave his comrades in such a tight fix. He must help! He must fight, fight until it was safe for him to withdraw.

A fierce, gripping determination suddenly came over him. His eyes blazed defiantly behind their goggles. By God, he would fight this time! He would carry out his resolution to make this last combat a good one. He'd go down, but he'd go down fighting!

With a savage oath he shoved his stick all the way forward. Over he plunged, went screaming down in the wind, his motor roaring wide-open and his frail Nieuport trembling, shaking as if it must break into bits. Vaguely, he saw the other two American ships

below, dropping right down on the Fokkers, which had spread to receive the attack.

Then he himself was pulling in range. He was leaning to his sights, and trying desperately to frame one of those fleeting gray Fokkers below in the little ring. He began to fire. But the smoky, zigzag streamers of tracers went too short, and he cursed the haste which always made him shoot too soon. He waited another split second, then opened up again as he came plunging right into the midst of the fray.

Quickly, he jerked his plane out of the dive, sought to level off. All about him now the other planes were gyrating, circling, zooming madly, their guns blazing away. In the general mix-up it was hard to distinguish friend from foe. But Edwards' eyes were keen, and soon he had separated the four gray-striped Fokkers of the Germans and the two white Nieuports of Brooks and Davis, who were streaking in and out among the enemy ships with their usual breathless fury.

Edwards had leveled off now. But because he was not a good flyer, he had let himself drop far too low. And he pulled up, to find himself right beneath a gray-striped Fokker, which was jockeying above him like a buzzard, seeking to rain lead down on him. Furiously, Edwards shot up for an Immelmann turn. He threw his whole soul into the maneuver, concentrated on every move of his controls. But the very fact that he had to concentrate wholly on the process of flying itself, instead of guiding his plane instinctively and giving all his attention to lining the German in his sights, gave the Jerry a decided advantage.

At once the Fokker whipped over, forcing Edwards on the outside arc of the turn. Edwards tried to veer out, but bungled clumsily. And in the next second the shrill clatter of the German's Spandaus guns rose behind, and a fusillade of bullets whizzed past him. The German was swinging onto the Nieuport's tail, and Edwards tried in vain to throw him off. Again the Fokker's guns blazed away. Bullets began to tick through Edwards' fuselage, perforated his wings. For a moment he thought he was done for. But then, to his dazed surprise, the bullets suddenly ceased coming. He glanced back. A sigh of blessed relief came from him.

The Fokker was no longer on his tail. It was veering giddily, and as he watched, it suddenly nosed over to go fluttering earthward like a dead bird. And above, Edwards saw the gyrating Nieuport of young Davis—Davis who had come to his rescue as he had been forced to come so many times before. Gratefully, Edwards pulled up, and as Davis came close by above

him, he waved his thanks to the latter. But Davis did not acknowledge the salute. He was sore doubtless, sore because he had to keep protecting Edwards like a nurse protects a child.

Three Germans left now. If one more was shot down, Edwards thought, he would leave. It would be fair then.

IN THE meantime, though, he must fight. He banked around, searching for an antagonist. A Fokker streaked past to his right, but it was followed closely by Brooks' Nieuport, which was blazing away at its tail. Then Edwards saw another German ship doing half-rolls beneath him, and he nosed down for it determinedly. But again poor flying stood in his way. He overshot as he came down, and skidded on his turn.

The German simply flipped over and whipped around to cut Edwards off from in front. Edwards leaned to his sights, but by the time he had taken aim the Fokker was somewhere else. It was above him, Edwards discovered in dismay, and bullets were streaking down from its nose. The unhappy lieutenant let out an oath which all but brought the blood to his mouth, and then pulled up desperately, resolved not to lose out this time. He fired, but with nervous haste.

His guns jammed, and he cursed as he struggled to clear them. He pounded on the breechlocks, and meanwhile his ship, no longer controlled, floundered around crazily. Bullets kept tearing into it, as every one of the Germans took pot shots at it when they had the opportunity.

Edwards was getting more and more confused, and each blunder he made seemed only to increase his deficiency. Finally he cleared his guns, just in time to realize that he was on the verge of colliding, head-on, with one of the Fokkers. With his heart in his mouth, he veered away, and then flew blindly right between Brooks and the Fokker which the latter was chasing. Brooks, thus cut right off from his victim's tail, was forced to hold his fire. He swept above Edwards, and looked down at the latter with an expression of rage which his goggles did not conceal; then, shaking his fist, zoomed away.

Edwards, torn with anguish and shame, tried to get a shot at the German as, seizing the opportunity, the latter nosed down at him. But he jammed his guns again, and then he resigned. What was the use? The C.O. was right. He was rotten. He was just going through a lot of clumsy and ludicrous antics which

had no meaning. He was absolutely worthless as a fighting pilot, and was hindering rather than helping his comrades. He cursed and sobbed in turn. No sense waiting any longer. He must spin out now and be done with it—even if he was leaving Brooks and Davis against three Germans.

Despairingly, he looked about to see that the way was clear. It was. The other planes were still churning madly about, firing short bursts at one another. Edwards would go into a spin—as if his machine had been hit—and no one would know the better.

For a final second he hesitated, wavered. God, it was hell! But it was the only way.

Abruptly, he kicked at his controls. Slowly, his Nieuport lurched, winged over, began to descend. And Edwards had to laugh at the irony of it. Even spinning was difficult for him! He knew that his plane didn't look at all as if it were out of control, knew that what he had just done seemed deliberate. But as long as no one saw, it was all right.

The blood drained from his face. Someone had seen! Even as his Nieuport gathered up speed, started to hurtle down with breathless fury, Edwards caught a fleeting glimpse of Davis' plane, which had just swept past him. And he knew, knew for certain, that Davis must have watched him spin out! He couldn't have missed it. And he would form his own conclusions—would always think that Edwards had deserted out of cowardice.

That last and most humiliating blow served completely to crush his spirit. A feeling of savage abandon suddenly came over him. He didn't give a damn what happened now. In fact—a wild light came into his eyes—he wished he'd crash and be killed. It wouldn't matter; they would find the map on him anyway.

Recklessly, like a man gone mad, he fed his engine gas, until the Nieuport was plunging at a speed which its frail body was never meant to withstand, tearing down hell-bent in its dizzying drop. Down, down, down, with the wind rushing up in great blasts which flayed Edwards' cheeks and all but tore off his helmet and goggles. Struts shrieked protestingly; flying wires snapped with shrill, musical pings. The top wing began to creak, straining against the braces which held it. A mad cackle broke from Edwards' throat. Maybe it would break! So much the better!

Now the ground was spinning up towards him in a sickening, grayish blur. He didn't bother to look whether the place would be suitable for a landing. He

didn't care. He merely wanted them to find him whole enough to get that map.

Closer and closer the ground came. It was rushing up at him, as if to give him a sharp crack. His plane, lurching and screaming, was headed straight for it. Dimly he saw figures swarming down there—tiny, gray-clad men. With reckless defiance, he pressed his triggers to rain lead down on them, and laughed shrilly as he saw them scatter like scurrying rats.

But then, despite his desperation, that strong instinct of self-preservation forced him to try to avoid crashing. Mechanically he was struggling to pull his plane out of the spin in the last, breathless seconds. And as the ground surged up with a mighty heave, the Nieuport, shivering and groaning, pulled up sluggishly, and Edwards pancaked her. The ship settled with a violent thud which smashed its undercarriage, but otherwise left it intact.

At once the gray-clad figures were surrounding the plane, rushing out from all directions. They were infantrymen, wearing coal-scuttle helmets and carrying rifles, which they leveled upon Edwards' cockpit. But Edwards, as if serenely oblivious to them, simply went about the work he must do. Unstrapping himself, and tearing off his helmet and goggles, he reached for the switch which would automatically set his ship afire.

Rough hands seized him, started to pull him out of the cockpit. With all his strength he resisted, struggled until he got that switch in his fingers. He turned it. Then he let them pull him out. Dazedly he tumbled on the ground, vaguely aware of the confused murmur of guttural voices around him. They moved away from him a bit, and he got to his feet. He found himself standing in the midst of a ring of Boche, who stared at him with hostile curiosity, and cohered him with their rifles and revolvers.

He glared at them sullenly. Then he realized that there was one more thing he must do. Quickly, he reached for the map, took it out, and made as if to tear it up in desperate haste. At once someone snatched it from his hands. Also they searched him, and took away his Colt and some other odds and ends.

Then a startled shout rose from the crowd of Germans. The Nieuport had just broken into flames. The fire was eddying about its slender body, blazing constantly brighter. The Germans, dragging Edwards with them, hurried away from the ship for safety. They were not a moment too soon. In another second there came a deafening explosion, as the gas-tank was ignited, and the ship went up in a shattering mass of smoke and

debris. And Edwards faced his captors with a faint sneer. At least he had managed to burn his ship! He had done his work well, regardless of how rotten it was.

AND now, abruptly, the murmur of voices ceased, and the crowd of Boche spread a little apart, to stand at attention. One and all they saluted respectfully as a tall, slender officer came through their ranks. He must be a captain at least, thought Edwards. He was of the haughty, military Junker type, and he carried himself with an air of aloof importance, tapping his swagger stick against his shining boots. Without so much as a nod to the men, he came up to Edwards and stood before him. He screwed a monocle in his eye, and surveyed the American as if the latter were some animal just bagged in a hunt. Then he rasped out something in German. One of the soldiers replied, and handed him the map. He glanced at it, and Edwards saw his cold gray eyes light up with a glint of triumph. The German stuffed the map in his pocket.

"Amerikaner?" His tone was icy.

Edwards nodded dully. The officer then asked him something in German, but he showed that he didn't understand the tongue. The Boche went through a series of pantomimes. Still Edwards did not comprehend, and shrugged. A flush of rage spread over the officer's face.

"*Dumkopf!*" he spat. "*Schwein!*" And deliberately, he struck Edwards across the face with his swagger stick. The blow stung fiercely, and the American stiffened, clenched his fists until his nails dug into his palms. He would have given anything for a chance to bash in the German's haughty face. But he knew that any protest would just make things all the worse for him. And after all, such humiliating experiences as this were just part of his hateful task. He had volunteered to accept them, and he must put up with them.

The officer tried again to ask him the question. This time the German pointed to the sky. Edwards, suddenly remembering the dog-fight, looked up. No planes in sight. Either they were too high, or the battle had ended. The whole thing seemed very far away now—as if it had happened some time in the dim past. He could not quite believe that he had just spun down a few minutes ago.

The German captain was becoming angry again, as he impatiently tried to make himself clear. Edwards did his best to understand, and at last sensed that the man was asking him how he had fallen.

"*Bueler's jagdstaffel,*" he replied tersely.

The officer nodded, satisfied. He pulled out the map and looked at it again. Then he rasped out directions to the men. Two of them took places on either side of Edwards. Another couple got in front, and a third fell in at the rear. All shouldered their rifles, while the officer held a Luger in his hand. He barked at Edwards: "*Marsche, schwein.*"

Edwards obeyed. Sullenly, he trudged between his two guards. They all came to a road, and followed it. No more words were spoken. In the silence the sound of the men's hob-nailed boots against the road rose with jarring scrapes. The six soldiers kept their eyes to the front. The officer, walking wherever he pleased, kept his eyes on Edwards, watched him with disdainful contempt. And Edwards kept his eyes on the ground. He felt desolate, lonely among all these silent and hostile strangers. His heart ached for just one touch of comradeship, one friendly word.

At last they turned off the road, and, with startling suddenness, came right upon an aviation camp which Edwards knew at once was Bueler's airdrome. The officer marched him across the big, wide field. With its camouflaged hangars, it was much like the field of Edwards' own drome, and it seemed incongruous to see black-crossed ships squatting on it.

Mechanics and pilots were rushing about, but all ceased their activity to stare at Edwards with that same expression of hostile curiosity. Finally, his escort paused before a small shack which he surmised was the operations office. The German captain entered, motioning the two soldiers at Edwards' side to follow. They took him in, while the other four stationed themselves outside to keep guard.

The room was quite similar to the room where Edwards, only a few hours ago, had stood before his C.O. There were maps and charts on the walls, a small, high window to the right, and a crude desk with a few chairs near it.

Standing at this desk was a short, rather nervous individual with hawklike eyes and a battle-scarred face. He wore the uniform of an officer of the Imperial flying corps, and on his collar was pinned the coveted medal for merit. And the sight of that man could not fail to rouse Edwards' interest and curiosity. This was Bueler, the famed German ace, who had seventy-five Allied planes to his credit and who was feared all along the Western Front.

The officer who had brought Edwards here saluted respectfully. He spoke to Bueler, who replied in terse, staccato tones. The German ace shot a quick, keen

glance at Edwards, then turned again to the other officer and voiced another inquiry. Proudly, the captain extracted the map, handed it to Bueler. The flyer looked at it, and slowly a faint little smile came over his lips. He spoke to the officer in a commending tone, seemed to congratulate him. The officer listened with a smug satisfaction which only increased Edwards' hatred towards him.

Then Bueler rapped his desk, and called out. Magically, an orderly appeared. Bueler gave him the map, and seemed to be directing him to take it somewhere—doubtless to put it in safe keeping, Edwards thought. The orderly vanished as swiftly as he had come, and Bueler proceeded to give instructions to the officer. The latter nodded, saluted, and, to Edwards' surprise, departed with the two other soldiers. And Edwards found himself alone with Bueler. Not really alone though, he soon realized. For the six soldiers were stationed right outside.

Edwards stood, waiting. He was prepared for anything. He had heard how German commanders got information out of captured flyers, and he wasn't going to have any wool pulled over his eyes.

FOR a moment Bueler did not seem to notice him. The little man paced up and down a few times. Then he came over to the desk, and stood at it again. In his hand, resting on the table-top, was a long-barreled Luger. Carelessly, the German was letting its muzzle play on the American.

Suddenly Bueler spoke, in clear and perfect English. "So one of my boys bagged you, eh?"

The tone was anything but friendly, yet the joy of hearing his own tongue spoken at last filled Edwards with a warm gratitude towards his foe.

For the first time since he had set out from his drome, his old, cheerful grin reappeared, and he replied good-naturedly: "Yes, and I've got to admit your boys are good!"

"That stands to reason," the German snapped, without cracking a smile, and Edwards winced, realizing that the Boche didn't share his friendly spirit. Bueler waved a hand with nervous impatience. "Now tell me, do you speak any German?"

"Not a word of it."

"Then you'll have to bear up with my rather poor English." As he talked his fingers restlessly tapped on the desk, and the rapping was so disconcerting that it was hard for Edwards to follow him. "Now, I wanted to see you alone because there are certain things I'd

like to discuss with you before I turn you over to the authorities—certain things which are both to your and my own advantage.”

He paused, cleared his throat with a jarring cough, and then he spoke with faint but piercing sarcasm: “I’m already indebted to you for the great favor you’ve done me. Certainly, it was obliging of you to bring me that map, giving me the locations I’ve tried so hard to obtain. And if you’ll just be a little more obliging, I’m sure I can make your stay in Germany far more agreeable than it would be otherwise.”

Edwards’ eyes did not flicker. He had expected this, and he was well prepared for it. He simply looked at Bueler with an expression of naive innocence.

“I’m afraid I don’t understand.”

“Perhaps my English is too poor?” the German taunted. “Well, to make myself clearer, you’re from squadron 44, and we’re very much concerned with your activities—especially,” he added, significantly, “as regards to raids.”

Still Edwards did not budge. He shrugged. “Raids?” he queried, in mock surprise. “I’m afraid I couldn’t tell you much about them. I’m a pursuit pilot, and my work—”

Again the German waved his hand impatiently. He sighed. “I see you are a stubborn person, not to be trifled with,” he observed, but his tone was even more cutting. “Yes, you Americans have a great sense of honor, have you not? You know nothing about fighting, but you will—as you call it—bluff! But cowards always must bluff.”

Edwards stiffened, and the blood monted to his face. But he said nothing, for Bueler was again toying carelessly with the Luger.

“Yes, cowards,” the German repeated, with even stronger conviction. “And we are ashamed to shoot you down. You know less about flying than babies, and more about running away than scared rabbits. Again using your own expression, you’re yellow!”

Edwards turned even redder. He knew that Bueler had no inkling as to his own circumstances, yet that last insinuation had cut deep. Again he was being called yellow—this time by a German. He could not restrain himself:

“That’s a dirty lie!” he burst out. “And, if you’d give me the chance, I’d make you eat those words!”

The German gave a contemptuous snort.

“A lie?” he challenged. “Well now, what have you done in the air? Nothing! We raid you, shoot your ships out of the sky, and you don’t even try to avenge

yourselves. Why, you even let us get hold of your maps, so we can do even more accurate work. If you had any courage—”

“Think so?” Edwards returned, with impetuous fury. “Well maybe you’ll have another think coming when——” He stopped himself just in time, fell silent. And inwardly he cursed himself for a fool. He had almost allowed the German to taunt him into giving precious information. He calmed down, went on in a different tone. “After all, we’ve only been in this war a short time and——”

Bueler grunted with disgust. “I give up,” he admitted. “I see that my English is too poor to urge you to talk. And I shall not beat it around the bush any longer. I won’t even ask you whether your squadron intends to raid Staffletz to-night.”

And then Edwards jumped, taken completely unawares. He tried again to conceal his amazement and worry, but he knew he had betrayed himself. Bueler’s expression had not changed in the slightest, but if the German had had any doubts regarding that raid, they must have been dispelled by the start which Edwards had shown.

“A ridiculous question, anyway,” the German was continuing, as if nothing had happened. He smiled. “Yes,” he said with acrid mirth, “I guess you win. I can’t make you talk. No use keeping you any longer.”

However, he did not make any move to send Edwards away. He continued to stand at his desk, studying the American shrewdly, as if he expected to draw him out even further.

And Edwards stood, crestfallen beyond words, his mind in a turmoil, yet Struggling not to betray his emotions any more. God, he had failed again—failed as he had always failed. At least partly through his own fault, Bueler knew that the 44th squadron was coming over to raid Staffletz to-night. And knowing that fact, Bueler would be ready for them. Nor did Edwards dare to think of the consequences, of the awful slaughter that would befall the men of 44. His fellow pilots would be going to certain death.

Slowly a fierce determination began to come over the young American, a determination which grew to a stubborn, unyielding resolve. Yellow—that’s what they had called him, even Bueler. Yellow—and Brooks and Davis thought he had deliberately given himself up rather than face the gaff. His fists clenched tightly, and his lips straightened. He’d show them whether he was yellow or not! He’d show them more! He’d show them he could fly! He’d——

Bueler's harsh voice broke in on his thoughts. "Thinking deeply, my friend?" the German sneered. "Thinking about the prison camp where you're going? Or is it some other profound problem which disturbs you? I'm sorry I cannot allow you to remain wrapped in your thoughts. Unfortunately, it's time for you to go. I shall call your escort now."

A DEADLY calm had come over Edwards. Never before had he been so cool or clear-headed. His wits were sharpened to the keenness of a razor blade. And even as the German made to call for the guard, the American stopped him with a hasty plea.

"One moment, Bueler. I've been thinking over what you said about making my stay more agreeable. And maybe I can tell you a few little things."

Bueler eyed him with surprise, and Edwards waited in suspense, praying that the German would not suspect him. His prayer was answered. With a little sigh, Bueler sank into the chair at his desk.

"I see my friend has come to his senses," he observed. "After all, he has nothing to lose and everything to gain. Now just what are these few little things?"

Edwards thought hard. He was not thinking, however, of what he should say. His mind was working along a far different track. He was scheming shrewdly, going over every plan that came to his head. If only those damned guards weren't right outside!

Bueler was shifting impatiently. This time he rapped his Luger on the desk.

"Yes," Edwards began. "Well, here's something to bite on. We haven't had nearly enough planes lately, and we've been forced to fly old crates which all but fall apart in the air. One of your Fokkers could take on three of them easily, and lick them. That's a good thing to know, because a few of you can safely tackle a big formation of our ships, which—"

"What nonsense is this?" Bueler snapped angrily, but not with too much conviction. "Certainly you are not trying to joke with me?"

"No, indeed," Edwards assured him hastily. And now, out of the corner of his eye, he was looking at that revolver which Bueler held on the desk, looking at it with fierce concentration. It was only a small object, with a few cartridges in it, but for Edwards it had suddenly assumed gigantic proportions. It seemed to mean more than anything else in the world. It seemed to stand for the solution of all his problems. In fact, it was the key to his redemption; through it he could recover the precious things he had lost.

"You tax my patience," the German snapped, irritably, and started to rise. "I have no time for foolish jests. I shall call the guard and—"

"But didn't you hear what I said?" Edwards insisted with such sincerity that he almost believed it himself. Carelessly, he drew closer to the desk, but saw Bueler's fingers tighten at once about that Luger. "Here I give you some precious information and you call me a liar! What do you want?" He brushed against the desk a little now, as he struggled to divert Bueler's interest. "Do you want to know how many men we have? Twenty-six. Or how many ships?" Slowly, his muscles began to tense, wound up like springs. "A couple of dozen. Or just what are our plans for the present?" He measured his distance, at the same time glancing at the window and then the doorway. No one watching—though he could see one of the guard's legs out there. "Well now, you said something about a raid—"

It was Bueler's turn to jump. The German glanced up quickly, started to reply.

And then Edwards acted. Like a streak, his hand shot downwards. It fell right upon the revolver. In one move he had grabbed the gun, and in another, before the surprised German had time to resist, he had wrested it out of the latter's hand. Bueler sat back, a cry on his lips.

"One sound," Edwards warned him immediately, in a voice low but extremely convincing, "and I'll plug you like a rat. Sit still now. Don't move."

The German, still more amazed than frightened, sat with a face gone blank. He stared in wide-eyed unbelief at the man who, a moment before, had been at his mercy. Edwards, calm as could be, carefully concealed the Luger beneath his teddy-bear, and kept Bueler covered.

"You may think I'm crazy," he told the German, still in a low enough voice not to be heard outside, "crazy to hold you up with all your men around, but I'm in a tight fix, and I'm desperate. And if I'm caught, I'll take you to hell with me. Get that!"

The German got it all right. There was no mistaking the earnestness of Edwards' tone. And Bueler, being only human, had the discretion to obey instructions. He sat motionless.

"Now," Edwards continued grimly, "you're going to do just what I say. You're going to get up, come beside me, and walk right out of this room with me. You'll tell the soldiers at the door that they needn't follow, that you're taking me to the mess to dine me as you sometimes do with captured flyers. And don't think

you can tell them something else. I admit I lied to you about not understanding German. I understand it quite well." He paused to see if Bueler would believe this absurd untruth. The German, however, just looked a bit more surprised. "Then," Edwards pursued, "you and I will stroll across the field, in the direction I decide on. Understand?"

The German looked askance. His eyes bulged. "Gott!" he muttered. "*Sie sind vericht!*"

Vaguely, Edwards understood the words, and replied at once: "Yes—I told you you'd think I'm crazy. But no matter. Now," he snapped tersely, "get up!"

Slowly, as if in a trance, the German rose from his chair. And then Edwards played his trump card in this strange game of deceit and intrigue. Deliberately, he started, as if a sudden realization had come to him. His eyes narrowed to mere slits.

"That map you took from me," he said ominously. "You'll be so good as to hand it back now. I'm taking it home."

"But—but—" the German stammered, alarmed, "I've already turned it over to Intelligence. I haven't got it here."

Which, of course, Edwards knew. But the American affected great disappointment. He swore softly.

"Looks like you've licked me on that. And when I get back I'm going to catch hell for letting that information slip out of my hands. Well,"—once more his voice became grim—"that makes your life all the cheaper to me, Bueler. Come on now. And remember," he repeated, with strong emphasis, "if anything goes wrong, if you make one false move, I pull my trigger—and the consequences be damned. Keep that in your square head. All right, let's go. You'll go out of that door first, with me and this Luger right behind you. And careful how you talk to those soldiers."

OBEDIENTLY, the German walked to the door. Edwards dogged his steps, keeping the Luger beneath his tunic. The two soldiers stiffened to attention, saluted the ace as he came out. Then, of their own accord, they started to fall in beside Edwards as he emerged. Bueler spoke to them sharply. Edwards had no idea of what he was saying, and his heart began to pound. If Bueler took a chance, gambled on the hunch that Edwards could not understand German after all, he was lost.

He almost sighed in relief. The soldiers, with another salute, had suddenly fallen back. Bueler, following instructions, came beside Edwards, and

the two started across the field together. Edwards, watching the ace out of the corner of his eye, led him straight in the direction of the tarmac, where a few Fokkers stood with propellers whirring. Silently they walked on, and Edwards, though he still appeared to be perfectly cool, found himself growing more tense all the time, he could feel that the German at his side was secretly scheming, trying to find a way out. The man's face was pale and drawn, and his eyes had the look of a cornered animal, desperately searching for some path of escape.

Men began to pass them now, pilots and mechanics, who all saluted their commander respectfully. Some of them spoke, and Bueler replied. And each time that the German spoke Edwards waited with drawn breath.

They were getting closer to the planes now. Edwards had already picked out the ship he intended to get to—a ship which the mechanics had just finished revving, and which was waiting for a pilot. It was just about a hundred yards away from Edwards and the German, and Edwards quickened their pace. Briskly they approached the Fokker. Fifty yards now—forty—thirty. Then Edwards' heart stopped. Confronting him and Bueler, having just walked out from behind the planes, was the haughty captain who had brought Edwards here! He saluted. Bueler, stopping as Edwards stopped, returned the salute. The captain began to talk, and by, his tone Edwards sensed at once that he was asking what Bueler meant by taking the prisoner out unescorted. Bueler started to reply, and choked on his words.

Carelessly, though he was on pins and needles, Edwards nudged him with the Luger. Bueler talked more smoothly, but Edwards saw beads of perspiration standing on the ace's brow. The captain, his voice more and more unmistakably suspicious, kept asking one question after another, and Bueler kept getting more and more rattled.

A growing sense of panic gripped Edwards. He knew Bueler wouldn't dare to betray him, yet he didn't see how the captain could help guessing what was up by the ace's tone and the look in his eyes.

The captain was speaking again now, his voice rising excitedly. Suddenly, to Edwards' horror, he stepped up to the couple, and his hand reached out as if to pull Edwards' arm from beneath his clothes.

But he never finished the act. Blindly, Edwards fired pointblank." The captain tottered, his face contorting. Clutching his heart, he collapsed, and lay where he had fallen.

A frenzied shout broke from Bueler, and he leaped frantically at Edwards. But the American had leaped first—in the opposite direction. Luger in hand, he was dashing madly towards the Fokker, while around him hell was breaking loose. Every man on the field sprang into the chase, rushed after the fleeing prisoner. Shouts rose behind Edwards, and presently came the shrill *crack-crack* of revolvers and rifles. Bullets whined unhealthily close.

But he ignored them, and kept running as fast as he could. The Fokker was right before him now—in a second he'd be in it. But the Germans were trying to intercept him. A crowd of mechanics and pilots were racing to get to that ship before he did, thus cutting him off. Furiously, he redoubled his efforts, hurled himself forward. He got to the ship, started to hoist himself in. A Boche mechanic caught up to him, started to seize him and pull him out. Edwards kicked with all his might, and the man sprawled on the ground.

The American got in the cockpit, and without waiting to seat himself, seized the throttle and turned it wide open. The Fokker engine burst into a series of deafening detonations, and the whole ship began to sway and lurch. There were chocks in front of its wheels. He must get up enough power to jump them.

But his hopes sank, as he saw that the crowd of Germans were surrounding him, closing in on all sides and demanding his surrender. He refused to give in, however, and stubbornly kept that throttle wide-open, praying that the ship would pick up.

Men began to climb up on the fuselage now. He used the Luger, managed to wound one and scare another. But the Germans answered with such a fusillade of shots that Edwards couldn't comprehend why he wasn't hit. Surely, he'd never get away now. He was caught, cornered!

Then, to his dazed relief, the Foker suddenly gave a mighty leap which scattered the men clinging to it in all directions. Straight into the mob it roared, and the Germans jumped from the path of its churning propeller with terrified haste. Edwards ducked low in the cockpit as the bullets whizzed after him.

And, blindly, he took that ship off—took it off perfectly, though it was a strange and unfamiliar plane. He was flying well, because he had to fly well. And he soared up from that crowded field and climbed away like a bird exultant to be free.

But as he climbed, higher and higher, he looked down and saw another ship streaking across the field

to take off. It was pure black in color, and he knew it was Bueler's. A cold thrill tingled through him. Bueler, one of the greatest aces alive, was pursuing him! And he was a poor flyer, who couldn't fight! If Bueler caught up to him it would soon be all over.

THE thought spurred Edwards to desperate efforts. He fought with tooth and nail to get more speed out of his Fokker. At three thousand feet, he swerved around in a bank which he had never dreamed he could perform, and raced straight towards the lines. His motor was roaring mightily, hitting away at full strength. He leaned out to glance behind him again. The rush of wind which tore at his face, unprotected by helmet or goggles, all but blinded him.

But he saw that black Fokker, which had already climbed to his level and which was now scarcely a half a mile behind him, in relentless pursuit. With dismay, Edwards realized that the German was gaining on him. Bueler evidently had a wonderful ship, and it was slowly but steadily chewing up the gap which separated it from Edwards.

Cursing, Edwards tried in vain to make his plane go still faster. Already he was coming over the Front now, streaking above the shell-torn battle grounds. But the black Fokker was creeping up on him, closer and closer, yard by inexorable yard. A feeling of helplessness began to come over Edwards. There was no way by which he could stop that black ship from coming, coming. In another moment the German would be upon him!

Now he was crossing the lines, and immediately he was greeted by the Allied anti-aircrafts. At first he was surprised when the white bursts broke out around him, but then he remembered that he was flying a German plane. He didn't bother to dodge or maneuver, however. No time for that now. He kept right to his course, headed hell-bent for his airdrome. He must get there, must get there before Bueler caught him.

*Rat-tat-tat-tat!*

He jumped as that familiar, staccato clatter rose behind him. Looking back, he saw the black Fokker almost right on his tail, both guns spitting red. The tracers were whizzing by, and Edwards frantically began to zig-zag to throw off Bueler's sights. But Bueler clung like a leech, and his bullets soon began to tell. They ticked through Edwards' fuselage, and ricocheted from his cockpit cowling.

But at that same moment Edwards saw a sight

which gave him new strength and courage. Below and ahead, he picked out the big field which was his airdrome! He was almost home! God, if only he could keep Bueler off a little while longer!

*Rat-tat-tat!* Again that hellish clatter was shattering the air. With a crash, the instrument board in front of Edwards' face was smashed, and pieces of glass came flying up at him, cutting his cheeks. He half-rolled, zig-zagged, went through every maneuver he knew. But now, as always, he was a little too slow. And Bueler, swifter than them all, was calmly sitting on his tail and peppering his ship with lead. Edwards must do something! If he didn't act at once, he was done for! And there was that news he had to bring in!

Guided by desperation, he crossed controls, hung in a shivering stall. The German, taken by surprise, swept past before he could slow down his ship. Edwards caught a fleeting glimpse of the little scarred-faced man, who seemed to look at him with scornful triumph. Bueler was sure he had his victim cold. And now, sweeping in front of Edwards he sought to intercept the latter from going any further towards his drome.

Hastily, Edwards sped forward to get by, nevertheless. But he sped right into Bueler's line of fire, and his ship actually lurched beneath that hail of lead. A bullet tore through a sleeve of his tunic, another grazed his cheek. He side-slipped to get away, and at the same time felt a sharp, stabbing pain in his shoulder. *Hit!* He felt the hot blood flowing beneath his clothes, and his arm was beginning to grow numb.

Bueler whipped above him with frenzied speed and dived, guns spitting. He was coming down to finish Edwards now—and Edwards knew it. For a moment, feeling absolutely helpless and incompetent, the American was ready to resign, to throw up the sponge. But only for a moment. For then it seemed to him that he heard the combined voices of Brooks, Davis, and Bueler, all speaking in his ears with taunting mockery, telling him: "You're yellow! You're yellow!"

And then it was that a deadly, volcanic rage came over Edwards, a rage which made him forget the pain in his arm, forget that he couldn't fight. And again that determination was upon him—he'd show them!

With a berserk challenge, he jerked back his stick and deliberately zoomed right for the plunging Fokker. He wasn't thinking of his flying now; he was flying instinctively, guided solely by rage. He was fighting mad, and his only thought was that he would knock that damned Fokker out of the sky so that he could get to his drome with his precious news.

BUELER, surprised, hurriedly pulled up from his dive and attempted to half-roll onto Edwards' tail. But Edwards half-rolled away from him, then whipped around in a skid turn which seemed almost to raise a cloud of dust. For a moment he caught the fleeting Fokker in his sights, and he pressed his triggers savagely. A surge of triumph went through him as he saw his tracers going right into the Fokker.

Bueler began to side-slip and roll, shaking him off. It was a fight now—and not just an execution. Furiously the two Fokkers whipped about, going through the breathless maneuvers which would mean death for the one who let himself get into a disadvantageous position.

All the while, the wind had been carrying them farther and farther towards the American airdrome. And now the men on the field down there were gathering in crowds, to stare in awe at the strange spectacle in the sky above. Two Fokkers—one black and one gray engaged in deadly combat! They knew it could mean but one thing: one of those Fokkers was manned by an Allied pilot. And so they did not fire the antiaircrafts, nor did any planes take off to join the conflict. There was no way of telling which was foe and which was friend.

Edwards' right arm was almost paralyzed with the burning pain of his wound, and it was agony for him to move his stick. But he went right on fighting, fighting like a demon, reckless beyond words, getting better and better with each maneuver. Bueler, desperate, stunted as no pilot should ever stunt, and was skillful enough to again roll onto Edwards' tail. But Edwards, grinding his teeth as he pulled back his stick, shot up for an Immelmann turn.

As always, the German whipped about to force him on the outside arc, but Edwards was not to be forced anywhere this time. He came up and over, and then, with his engine roaring, he nosed down for the Fokker which twisted below. Again the American leaned to his sights. Again he pressed his triggers, shooting as he had never shot before.

Then it was over. The Fokker lurched in the midst of a turn, staggered, and seemed to skid down on a slippery current of air. Out of its nose leaped a ribbon of flame, which went licking along its fuselage, until the whole plane was enveloped. And Edwards, gyrating above, stared with dazed unbelief as the German ship slowly went spinning earthward—a fiery torch which left a trail of oily black smoke behind it. He stared, until he saw it crash, scarcely half a mile from the field of the drome.

He had shot down Bueler. In even combat, he had beaten one of Germany's greatest aces.

But he was too tired and bewildered and burning with the pain in his arm to enjoy any sense of triumph. Dazedly, he guided his bullet-ridden Fokker down towards his field. Dazedly, still without thinking of his flying, he landed it with perfect precision.

The crowd of men rushed up to the ship. They lifted him from the cockpit, examined him closely and suspiciously.

"Holy hell!" somebody exclaimed—and it was young Davis. "If it isn't Edwards! Edwards bringing in a Fokker! Well I'll be jiggered!"

And not long afterwards, Edwards, beaming with just pride, his shoulder neatly bandaged up, stood before his C.O. once more. He had turned in his news, and his ears still rang with the praise of the whole drome. But what the C.O. said had more significance than anything else he had heard.

"I told you that when I formed an opinion about a man, it stuck," the major said proudly. "And I was right about you. You've certainly done more to-day than any one man is expected to do during the whole war. As for Staffletz—we'll raid them yet, but not when they

expect it. And Bueler—may he rest in peace—is out of our way at last!" His eyes twinkled mischievously, and he spoke with mock anger. "But say, what was the idea of kidding us all into believing you couldn't fly? Why, if I could fly as well as you—"

Edwards grinned. "I guess I was kidding myself as well as the rest of you," he said thoughtfully.

"Well, now that the joke's over, I hope you'll settle down to the serious business of becoming an ace. And don't you let me send you out on any more missions like this. We can't afford it."

After the C.O. came Brooks and Davis—who took an entirely different attitude towards Edwards now.

"The Old Man let us in on the secret about that map," Brooks said, in his earnest way. "Man!" he sighed, "and I thought you had your wind up—thought you were yellow when you've got twice as much guts as I have!"

"You bet!" young Davis chimed in enthusiastically. "Believe me, when old man Bueler's come scooting down on my tail, I've turned and run more than once!"

"Well," Edwards admitted modestly, "I ran too—only I couldn't run fast enough."