

THE ADVENTURES OF *The* **THREE** **MOSQUITOES**™

GET THAT GUN!

by **RALPH OPPENHEIM**

Intelligence was desperate. The huge Tarniers munition plant, 130 miles from the German lines, was being shelled. What mysterious gun could shoot that deadly H.E. so far? Then orders came for the famous “Three Mosquitoes” to tackle the job—clear the mystery, wreck that gun. A dramatic, thrilling yarn.

A GUN THAT SHOOTS a hundred and thirty miles? Impossible!” Kirby, young leader of the “Three Mosquitoes,” laughed incredulously at the fantastic idea.

“Shorty” Carn and the lanky Travis, his two comrades, laughed with him. But their amusement was not shared by the man who sat at the desk before them—Colonel Black, of intelligence corps. The colonel’s lean, earnest face, furrowed by many lines from the strain he had undergone these last few days, looked even more sober and thoughtful.

The four men were in the privacy of the intelligence chief’s office, a large room of an old French chateau in Tarniers, the seat of one of the biggest munitions plants in France. It was early morning and the first gleams of day light were just coming in through the large French windows. To the Three Mosquitoes, who had just flown up here from the Front, the place seemed strangely quiet. These were the back areas, far from the din of the battle, the thunder of guns and shells. And yet——

“Facts are facts,” the colonel said, slowly, grimly. “We are over a hundred and thirty miles from the German lines. But,” his fist came down on the desk to emphasize the words, “we are being shelled. Shelled, mind you, by high explosive projectiles!”

The Three Mosquitoes looked at him with mingled doubt and wonder. Certainly he must know what he was saying. But it was so unbelievable—the thought of a shell coming from such a great distance—that they simply couldn’t swallow it.

“Of course there was Big Bertha,” drawled the wise and lanky Travis. “But that could not cover more than seventy-five miles, and we considered it little less than a miracle. But a hundred and thirty miles——”

“The strangest thing about it,” the colonel broke in to explain, “is that these shells seem to be much smaller than those fired by Big Bertha on Paris. We have not found any duds—they seem to manage not to send any over, so we have no tangible evidence to work with. But, judging from the extent of the damage, we cannot help believing that these are just six-inch shells. Moreover, where Big Bertha was inaccurate in its hits,

its projectiles landing at random places, this gun—if it is indeed a gun—is aimed with deadly precision.

The shells have been drawing a straight line towards our ammunition factory, each day creeping nearer, as the gunners elevate their range a bit more. And if they score a direct hit on those buildings”—he shuddered involuntarily, shook his head, then gave a mirthless laugh—“there won’t be much left of this town!”

The Three Mosquitoes shifted uncomfortably, as a tense feeling began to grip them. A moment before, the colonel’s words had seemed like some ludicrous jest; now, at the mention of the munitions plant, everything took on a different light. There was a long silence. Outside a truck clattered by, rumbling over the cobblestoned street.

Finally the colonel spoke again. “We’ve always managed to safeguard that factory against enemy activities, secret or open. But now the crafty Boche has found a way of penetrating what we thought was an invulnerable defense. This is the third day now. The first day they shelled us once, at dawn, for a period of fifteen minutes. Eleven shells were counted in all. Yesterday there were two terrific sessions, one at dawn and the other late in the afternoon.” His voice rose tensely. “It would be impossible for me to fully impress upon you the ghastliness of these bombardments—the scores of persons killed or wounded, the damage done to buildings, shops, streets, and especially, the effect on the morale of the munitions workers, who must remain at their posts because ammunition is so urgently needed at the Front.

“I’ve done everything in my power to solve this baffling mystery. I’ve been getting hold of everyone who might be of any assistance at all. I’ve listened to theories of military experts covering every subject from a bomb which, dropped from an airplane, can be mistaken for a shell, to an aerial torpedo guided by wireless.”

He looked up at the three earnest-faced men before him, looked at them almost hopefully. “Fellows, I called you three on a blind hunch. You’ve done this kind of work before, and you’re about the best flyers we have. If, indeed, the shelling is, in your opinion, due to a long-range gun, I want you to make an immediate flight over the lines and,” he almost spat out the words, “spot that cannon!”

The three men nodded slowly, soberly. But then Kirby said with firm decision, “Tell you the truth, sir, I can’t believe in this long-range, 130-mile gun business

at all, especially since you say the shells seem small. I’m sure it must be something else.”

“Well, if it has anything to do with airplanes, I’m trusting you to locate it. But I’m sure you won’t see any German planes here. We’ve got three squadrons patrolling the place, and though Gothas have made several attempts to raid us, they’ve never gotten near Tarniers. True, they’ve been raiding a lot of neighboring villages lately, but the closest they’ve ever come to this place is ten miles. And so you see—”

He stopped short, stiffening from head to foot, as a reverberating explosion shattered the stillness of the early morning. The Three Mosquitoes started, stood rigid. The explosion did not seem to be in the immediate neighborhood of this building, but its concussion was powerful enough to shake the floor beneath their feet.

Suddenly the colonel jumped from his chair, an almost wild light in his eyes. The strain of all the suspense and worry was beginning to tell on him. He shouted madly at the three men, his voice hoarse.

“There you are!” he bellowed, waving his arm towards the window. “There you hear it with your own ears! That’s the first shell. They’re at it again,” his voice broke, “damn ’em! At it again!”

B-r-room! Again came the explosion, and the shaking of the building. And now other strange sounds became audible. Frantic shouts rose in the distance, shouts of men and women. The people out on the streets at this early hour were scurrying for shelter. And presently the wild clang-clang of the *pompier*s, or fire-engines, could be heard as they went clattering through the streets.

The din seemed to stir Kirby to savage action. He faced the pale colonel.

“We’re taking off, sir!” he shouted, excitedly. “We’re going to look at this from the sky, and try to get the low-down on it. Come on, fellows! S’long.”

“Let’s go!” Shorty agreed enthusiastically.

“We’re off!” said the lanky Travis.

Before the surprised colonel could say anything, they were out of the room. He hurried to the window, saw them running down the street. Somehow he felt a bit relieved. At least something was being done.

THROUGH the almost deserted streets of Tarniers rushed the Three Mosquitoes, while, at minute intervals, they heard the shells bursting on the other side of the town, the side where the ammunition works were located. They ran as fast as they could. In a

flash they had reached the big drome on the outskirts of the town, where they had landed their Spads. The squadron which nested here was already in the air, and more ships were taking off now.

The Three Mosquitoes shouted orders to the mechanics, who wheeled their three trim, slender planes to the line and revved them up, while the trio fastened on helmets and, at Kirby's suggestion, equipped themselves with powerful field glasses. They did not wait until their engines were thoroughly warmed up; they took a chance, hopped into their cockpits, and signaled the mechanics to jerk the chocks from the wheels. All three opened their throttles, and their planes roared forward. Down the field they went streaking, into the wind, one after another. They took the air with breathless grace, and Kirby led them in a steep, curving climb over Tarniers. The sun was bright now, and the early morning haze was drifting away beneath the churning blades of their propellers. Visibility was good for many miles.

Presently, at about three thousand feet, they were circling over the village, swinging around in a wide arc. They flew in their usual V-shaped formation, with Carn and Travis flanking Kirby on either side and a little to the rear. Tilting his plane slightly, Kirby looked down over the side of the fuselage. At once he picked out the munitions plant—a great stretch of buildings which covered almost three acres of ground. And in another moment, he began also to pick out the shells as they burst in slow but deadly succession. Sure enough, they were right on a line with that factory, but well short of the buildings. He watched each hit, saw a gigantic geyser of smoke and debris rise into the air, sometimes taking a whole house with it, and then slowly settle in a scattered mass. Certainly that was a shell-burst—it could be nothing else! But where in hell did it come from?

Instinctively, he glanced towards the east, as if indeed he expected to see this long-range gun which, if it existed, must be a hundred and thirty miles away. Then he began to scan the sky all around him. There was a formation of planes in sight, off to the north, but they were one of the regular Allied patrols which guarded Tarniers. They were seven tiny Nieuports, which cruised swiftly about, their wings glinting in the sun. Kirby laughed grimly. There was not much connection between them and those bursting shells below.

Again, mechanically, he found himself glancing towards the east. Damn it, he must take a good look

in that direction, the direction from which these shells must be coming. He waved an arm to his comrades, signaled them to bank and head towards the east. The three Spads swerved as one, in graceful unison. Kirby strained his eyes. He saw nothing. He jerked off his goggles, put the field glasses to his eyes, and turned the focusing knob slowly, while he guided his plane instinctively, trusting his comrades to avoid collision with him.

For several seconds he kept peering through the field glasses, turning his head slowly from side to side, up and down, to cover every inch of sky.

Suddenly he started, his nerves tensing. Then, swiftly, he was turning the focusing knob again, and this time his glasses were glued to the object which had been caught in them.

Far off, at least ten miles away, but directly in the east, were three specks against the blue. At first they were blurred, but as Kirby got them into better focus, they began to assume shape and proportion. They were planes. And by their long wing-spreads and twin tail-fins, Kirby knew, knew beyond any shadow of doubt, that they were Gothas, the dreaded bombers of the Imperial air force.

They seemed to be flying pretty low, close to the ground. And in the next second Kirby saw the reason. They were dropping bombs, those Gothas. Through his glasses, he could see the bursts of the explosives on the ground beneath them. They were circling around their objective, which Kirby could not make out at all from where he was, and raiding hell out of it.

To connect those Gothas ten miles away with the shelling of Tarniers seemed ridiculous, and contrary to all reason. Yet, somehow, Kirby had a strange hunch—and his hunches were usually right—that there was a connection. After all, those three Gothas were right on the line which the shells were following.

Acting solely on an impulse, Kirby again waved to his men, pointing to the east. They gestured interrogatively, but he answered their questions by simply opening his throttle full, and racing forward. They followed. On rushed the three Spads, faster and faster, their engines roaring thunderously, and black smoke pouring from their exhausts. Miles were chewed up in breathless succession. Soon the Gothas became visible to the naked eye, off in the distance. Kirby urged his plane forward, anxious to get to the scene of the bomb raid before it was over, so he would have time to investigate matters. His ship sputtered forward, literally shot through the air. Vaguely, he was

aware of the bobbing noses of the two Spads on either side of him; Carn and Travis were faithfully keeping formation. They too saw the Gothas now, and began to understand why Kirby was leading them eastward.

The wind was in their favor, coming strong on their tails, and helping them forward. Their speed became more and more terrific. In minutes they were closing up that ten mile gap that lay between them and the Gothas. The three German bombers loomed ahead of them, until they stood out distinct to the minutest details. They were enormous ships, twin-engined four-seaters, black in color, with Maltese crosses and the famous white skull-and-bones insignia of the German raiders. They were much lower than the three Spads, down to bombing altitude, and they were separated from one another, circling widely as they dropped their bombs, wheeling around like gigantic birds, somewhat clumsy and yet amazingly swift and powerful.

FIVE minutes was all the time that Kirby and his comrades took to reach the scene of the bomb raid. Now, swiftly, Kirby led the other two upwards, so they could get close to the Gothas without being spotted. At the same time, Kirby was watching those bombs, trying to see the objective against which they were directed.

The Gothas were flying over a dense forest which covered many miles. From all appearances there was nothing down there, not even the usual anti-aircraft batteries. Yet those Gothas were dropping bomb after bomb on the place. The missiles burst in great sheets of flame, sometimes sending trees and foliage scattering all over, and the concussions were strong enough to rock the three frail Spads of the Americans high above. The strange paradox of it, the apparent absurdity of raiding an empty woods with such fierce intensity, filled Kirby with bewilderment.

Perplexed, he led his comrades on. They passed far overhead of the German bombers, and climbed up into the brilliant orb of the eastern sun, where they could safely conceal themselves. Here they circled, watching, and Kirby racked his brain with conjectures, trying to figure the whole business out. He glanced at his comrades, as if hoping to obtain the answer to the problem from them. Travis shook his head dubiously, and his goggled face looked stern. Shorty shrugged, gave a grin. Kirby's eyes went once more to the bursting bombs below. Damn it, but he still had that same hunch of his. There was some meaning to this seemingly meaningless raid.

Then, suddenly, his keen eyes picked out something in the green landscape below. There was a gap which ran through those trees. In that gap lay the steel tracks of a narrow-gauge railway. It too seemed deserted, as if it were long out of use, judging from the rustiness of the tracks. At the sight of it, Kirby's hopes sank. So that's what the Gothas were aiming at? There was nothing mysterious about the raid, after all. In fact, it was quite natural that the Jerry pilots should try to wipe out any railways they spotted.

His whole premise—that the Gothas had something to do with the shelling of Tarniers—seemed knocked to pieces. He cursed himself for a fool. He should have known better than to expect to fly right over here and solve the mystery. After all, how could he hope to succeed when so many experts had failed to untangle the riddle? Yet, despite everything, that hunch of his still persisted and he could not entirely suppress it.

Suddenly Travis was waving to him, gesturing excitedly, pointing down. Kirby looked. His eyes narrowed. The Gothas had stopped dropping bombs. They were wheeling slowly about, turning towards the east—and Boche land. They were starting home.

Kirby's first impulse was to lead his men right down on them, try to shoot hell out of them. His fighting blood was roused, and he was tingling with eager anticipation. His hand closed tighter on the joy-stick, ready to push it forward, while his thumbs hovered about the stick-triggers, literally itching to send the streams of tracer from the twin Vickers machine guns mounted on the engine. His comrades, too, were eager for battle. They had come out here on what appeared to be a wild-goose chase, and they wanted to derive at least some profit from the enterprise.

But then Kirby thought better of the idea, realized that it would be an act of folly. After all, he and his comrades had been sent up to determine the reason for the mysterious shelling, not to fight Gothas. Besides, three Gothas were more than a match for three Spads, regardless of the fact that the Spads were piloted by expert aces. Those Gothas were heavily armored, and three of the four men who manned each ship had a big flanking machine gun to himself, while a tunnel in the fuselage permitted them to cover the blind-spot below. Ordinarily, Kirby would have laughed at the odds, and taken a reckless chance, gambling on hitting one of the giant bombers. But now things were different. There was work for the Three Mosquitoes to do, work that must be attended to immediately.

Still, Kirby hesitated, hating to miss the opportunity of bagging one of these valuable prizes. He hesitated until his keen eyes caught something off to the right. It was a big formation of some dozen Allied ships, which advanced in a beautiful V. And they were headed straight for the Gothas.

The men in the Gothas saw them too, for the gigantic bombers straightened their noses and put on full speed for home. But the Allied squadron, which Kirby now distinguished as an American outfit flying 220 Spads, gave chase, and were soon coming down in a breathless glide-dive, shooting down a long hill of space.

Then Kirby breathed a sigh of relief. The Gothas would be taken care of, most likely. Even now the Spads were upon them, below and ahead, weaving in and out among them as if in some furious snake-dance, with streaks of flame leaping from their noses. The Gothas were fighting back like cornered beasts, holding their tiny attackers at bay while they struggled clumsily towards home.

Kirby signaled his comrades once more then, and, though they showed that they were disappointed, they banked with him and headed back for Tarniers. Once more the three little planes were racing along the course from the woods to the town. Glancing back, Kirby saw the dogfight fading into the distance—a mass of tiny specks which danced around three larger shapes. Presently, the blue sky swallowed them all.

A FEW minutes later the Three Mosquitoes again stood in Colonel Black's office. The siege of shelling had ended, and to everyone's intense relief, the ammunition works still remained intact, though the damage of the projectiles had been even more severe than on the previous occasions. All realized that if it kept up much longer a direct hit on the munitions factory was inevitable.

Colonel Black looked utterly exhausted. He sat back in his chair, and almost seemed an old man, though he was only forty-five. Some other military experts were also in the office, arguing, trying to piece together their confused theories.

Tersely, but in a voice which did not altogether conceal the bitterness of his failure, Kirby made his report.

"Yes," sighed the colonel wearily. "Gothas have often raided that railway in Femaux Woods, though God knows why! We have nothing of value anywhere around there, yet the stubborn Boche persists in

coming over there from time to time and dropping a bunch of bombs."

"Well, that's their loss," a wing commander spoke up. "They're only wasting-valuable ammunition."

As these words were spoken, a strange change came over Kirby. Slowly, the dejection faded from his features, and a look of hope, of eagerness, came over his face. His comrades stared at him, surprised, unable to understand.

"Look here, sir," Kirby spoke eagerly, "you say that woods is deserted? And the Jerries seem to be so dumb that they keep dropping bombs there, anyway?" He stepped closer to the desk, leaned over it. "Now just about when did this shelling stop to-day?"

"At exactly 5:22 the last shell was reported," the colonel replied. "That was about fifteen minutes ago."

A flush of excitement spread across Kirby's face. "Then," he exclaimed, "there is some connection! It was just about fifteen minutes ago when the Gothas stopped dropping bombs. That means something, Colonel Black, I could swear to it. Remember, the Gothas were right on the line which those shells are following."

The colonel looked at him, perplexed, and so did his two comrades, while an artillery captain said gravely, "I don't quite follow you, captain. Your idea seems far-fetched, if you mean that Gothas, ten miles away, can have anything to do with—"

His speech was cut short by the sudden arrival of another artillery officer. This man burst into the room with frantic excitement, though he staggered a bit, for he was carrying a heavy burden—a large steel object which he held to his chest with both arms. Triumphantly, he laid it down on the floor, while the men crowded around him, staring with wide eyes.

"There it is!" he told them, proudly. "A dud from the long-range gun. I found it out there!"

Excitedly, the men examined the projectile. Incredulous exclamations broke from several of them.

"Why," exclaimed the artillery captain who had been arguing with Kirby, "it's an ordinary six-inch, .155 millimeter shell! And it's our own make—French!"

For several minutes they continued to voice their incredulous amazement. Then, a furious argument began. Everyone began giving his own theory, and laughing at everybody else's. The majority claimed that this was not really one of the shells fired by the German gun, while a stubborn minority thought that the Boche must have perfected a new means of firing

such a comparatively small projectile over a great distance. And they got into a hopeless muddle.

But Kirby did not share in their consternation. The flush on the Mosquito's face had deepened, and every nerve in his body tingled. He could hardly wait for a chance to speak, yet when his comrades asked him what was on his mind, he was strangely reticent.

Finally he managed to get the floor. "Look here, gentlemen!" he said, excitedly. "I know I'm no military expert or anything like that—I'm just a simple peeler and I can only figure things out by ordinary horse-sense. But it seems to me that when you find a .155 millimeter shell, you ought to assume that it was fired by a .155 millimeter gun!"

They stared at him, as if they considered him crazy for giving this simple reasoning.

"Impossible!" the artillery captain exclaimed. "How could it be done? The captain has those Gothas on his brain. But I'm sure you don't mean to say that a five-ton .155 could be mounted on a Gotha." And he laughed hilariously at the mere idea.

Kirby glared at him indignantly, and had an impulse to proclaim his solution of the problem with triumph. But he didn't. Somehow, the fact that all these men were experts, where he was just a soldier, abashed him a little, made him afraid to give his full views.

"It's only a hunch," he said, almost apologetically. "And it may be wrong." He gave a short laugh. "It's so damned obvious and simple that I'd be ashamed to tell it unless I could back it up with proof." His glance went to Colonel Black. "Now when do you suppose the Jerries will start this business again, sir?"

"Lord knows!" the colonel sighed. "The chances are that they'll give us another dose to-day, as they did yesterday, but no one could guess when it will come." He laughed bitterly. "There won't be many more though. A few more shells, and, if they keep progressing as they have, they're bound to hit that ammunition factory."

"In that case," Kirby said, "we'll be taking off again—at once." He saluted, and his comrades did likewise. "S'long again, sir. I think we might find this here long-range gun very soon."

Outside the building, Carn and Travis began pumping their comrade furiously.

"What the devil's on your mind?" Shorty demanded.

"Yes," Travis drawled, "give us this solution of yours."

But Kirby, far from taking pity on their uncomfortable curiosity, seemed to be enjoying it.

"If you guys are so dumb that you couldn't see the thing with your own eyes, that's your hard luck," he told them. "And besides, I'm probably wrong!"

They were nearing the drome again now, and he assumed a more serious attitude, became the leader of his men once more. "Listen, fellows, here are your orders. We're going up right away, because there's no telling when Gothas will be coming to raid that railway again. But you're not flying with me this time. Give me a ten-minute start—I don't want to take a chance of being seen, and one plane will be harder to spot than three. Then you guys go up and hang around at about ten thousand feet over Femaux Woods, just where we were this morning. If you see any Gothas come along, don't bother them, but be ready to attack them whenever you get my Very signal—our usual orange rocket. If there are too many for us three to handle, you skiddoo away and bring some other planes to help us. But remember," he repeated, with grim emphasis, "don't attack them until I signal you, even if they are bombing that forest. And don't let any other guys attack them either."

"Say!" Shorty exclaimed, "What makes you think that they'll be any more Gothas around there in the first place?"

"I have a hunch," was all Kirby would tell them. "Now, listen. You'd better carry a rack of twenty-pound bombs under your fuselages. We may need those too."

SOME twenty minutes later, a lone Spad winged its way over Femaux Woods. Kirby, strapped in its cockpit, scanned the landscape which passed slowly beneath him. He had laid his course with painstaking care, and kept getting his bearings from the lubber-line of his compass. He had started directly over the line of ruins and destruction in Tarniers, which clearly marked the direction from which the shells had come. Keeping in this direction, he had reached the forest, and was now about half a mile in front of the spot where he had picked out the Gothas before.

This would be far enough, he decided. If he was to keep on the line of those shells, he must not go past the spot where the Gothas had been.

Swiftly, he glanced at the sky around him. Nothing in sight. He piqued down a bit, searching the forest below, picking out clearings in the trees. His eyes lit up. There was a pretty big field down there, and it lay right on the line of his route. Quickly, he ruddered over, and cork-screwed downwards.

A turn into the wind, and he was gliding right for the field. It was a big wheat field, and was fairly smooth and level. With his usual expert precision, he set his Spad on the field in a perfect three-point landing.

The place seemed absolutely deserted—no signs of anyone here. He climbed out of the plane, walked around to its tail. He had better swing it into the wind, so he could take off swiftly in case of trouble. He seized the tail-fins, and dragged the ship around.

Then, after a final glance at the plane, he set off. He had a pocket compass, and from this he got his bearings once more. Into the trees he went, and by the compass continued to follow the approximate line of the shells.

The forest was not as dense as it had seemed from the air. The trees were wide apart but their foliage was so heavy that they screened the sun from view. Slowly, Kirby walked on. He was getting more and more alert now. It was necessary to be on his guard. He mustn't stumble into any trap!

By this time his comrades ought to be overhead, though he could not hear the drone of their engines. They would be too high for that.

Minutes passed, and presently he knew he must be nearing the spot over which the Gothas had flown. His heart was pounding now, and a feeling of tense apprehension gripped him. Would his hunch prove to be right? A thousand doubts tormented him.

He broke off, stopping in his tracks to listen. Voices! Vaguely, they drifted from somewhere ahead. There must be men there! He pocketed the compass and, letting the sound of those voices be his guide, he made his way forward. He was walking stealthily now, trying to make no noise. True, the voices were probably those of ordinary soldiers on some duty in the woods, but he could take no chances. Cautiously, he went on, his heart jumping when his boots cracked twigs.

The voices were close now—extremely close. In fact, they seemed to be right ahead of them, though as yet he could not distinguish them clearly to determine the speech of the men. He peered through the trees. The foliage and brush was unusually dense there. He could see nothing. Slowly, with painstaking care to make no sound, he moved closer. He came to the heavy brush, stopped. His hand reached forward, pushing the bushes aside. Easy now! He was opening a gap, and he crouched beside it, put his eyes to it.

Then he saw some half-dozen men in the uniforms of French *poilus*. They were in the trees there, and an

officer was giving them instructions. But—something tightened about Kirby's heart—that officer did not seem to be speaking French. The language he spoke was harsh and guttural. Kirby had heard that language before. It was German.

A faint surge of triumph went through the Mosquito. Thus far, his hunch was right. These men were German spies, masquerading as French soldiers. Now he could see how badly their uniforms fitted them. And their clothes were shabby and tattered too, as if they had been having a rough time of it.

He drew in his breath sharply. The man in charge, in the uniform of an officer, was walking right towards these bushes. Kirby remained as still as death, though he could almost see his heart beating beneath his teddy-bear. And as the officer came nearer, Kirby stared at him with puzzlement. That man looked familiar. Where had the Mosquito seen him before?

But before Kirby had a chance to get a really good look at him, the German spy turned, and gave some more directions to the men. They sprang into action.

And then, before Kirby's incredulous eyes, there took place one of the most astonishing spectacles he had ever in his life witnessed. Those men in French uniforms seized small trees and calmly pulled them out of the ground. They had no roots, those trees: they had obviously been stuck in holes to create an appearance. The men piled them up off to the side. Then they began to pick up bushes, tossed them into the heap. They worked with feverish industriousness, removing foliage, branches, and pieces of brush.

And slowly, bit by bit, as they cleared all this fake growth away, a huge thing of steel was uncovered. There, nested right among the trees, squatting on its wide, tractorlike wheels, its dark muzzle gaping at Kirby, was a French .155 millimeter gun.

In a moment the men were at its control wheels, turning them. Sluggishly, the great barrel began to rise, pointed upwards, pointed at an angle, straight towards the west and Tarniers.

Kirby's triumph rose even higher. The mystery was solved. The riddle which had baffled all the experts was unraveled. His hunch had been absolutely correct.

These Germans, unable to attack Tarniers through any other means, were shelling it from a spot less than ten miles away, shelling it with a French gun in French territory. How they had secured the gun and ammunition, how they had managed to bring it here, Kirby could not fathom. But they had certainly succeeded in concealing it perfectly, making its

detection almost an impossibility. They were evidently most careful about this. Here they had been firing the gun only an hour ago, and now they seemed about to fire it again, yet they had gone to all the trouble of putting on the camouflage and then removing it.

It was all so simple, so obvious, yet because of its very simplicity only a man of genius could have conceived it. Kirby marveled at the sagacity as well as the reckless daring of these Germans. They had overlooked nothing. Those Gothas—there was a brilliant finishing touch which made the whole thing a masterpiece. No wonder they were dropping so many bombs on this empty forest, feigning an attack on the useless railway tracks. They simply dropped their deadly missiles at a short but safe distance from the gun, so that the bursts from the cannon would be identified as the explosions of some of the bombs themselves. In short, even the keenest eyes would see no more than a bunch of bombs exploding in the forest.

But, as flawless and mathematically precise as the scheme was, it had its weak and vulnerable points, and these Kirby had found, largely through a hunch. By connecting the apparently meaningless raid of the Gothas and the shelling of Tarniers, finding out that they were simultaneous, and then, as a climax, seeing that .155 dud shell, Kirby had been able to read the baffling riddle.

He smiled grimly. The Germans were calmly going on with their work, making ready to send another bombardment of shells into Tarniers. But they wouldn't send another bombardment, not if Kirby knew anything about it. No, that gun had fired for the last time. All that remained now was to go for help and capture this group of spies.

IT HAPPENED so suddenly, so unexpectedly, that he was taken completely unawares, he heard the rustle of brush behind him, heard the sound of someone leaping this way. He wheeled fearfully, but too late to brace himself for the attack. And in the next second, the man—one of the pseudo-French soldiers who was evidently on sentry duty—was upon him, dragging him to the ground with a fierce strangle-hold, and at the same time shouting in German to the others.

With the breath half knocked out of him by the sudden ferocious tackle of his aggressor, Kirby struggled desperately, trying to stifle the other's cries with his hand. Furiously they rolled about on the ground, wrestling and punching. The German was of

amazing strength and agility. He kept his arm wrapped around Kirby's neck with relentless stubbornness, and the Mosquito began to cough and choke. Shouts from the other side of the brush and the sound of hurrying footsteps told him that the rest of the men had heard. They were coming. Frantically, he tried to break away, to run for it. But it was too late.

In the next second all the Germans were jumping through the brush, surrounding the Mosquito and training revolvers upon him. His opponent released his hold then, rose panting to his feet. Kirby, half exhausted, also struggled to a standing posture. He glared sullenly at the ring of men around him. The ring suddenly broke, and the man in officer's uniform, who seemed to be in charge of the proceedings, came forward. Again Kirby asked himself where he had seen this person before. The German was tall and powerfully built, with a bronzed face and cold, steely gray eyes. He walked right up to Kirby, surveyed the Mosquito with keen scrutiny. Slowly a light of recognition came over his face, and then his lips twisted up into an almost evil smile.

"And so we meet again!" he sneered, in perfect English. "Do you recognize me, my friend? Look closely!" And he bared his head so Kirby could get a better look at him.

Instantly the Mosquito started, his eyes wide. "Bremmer!" he gasped, for now he recognized this famous German intelligence man, who was known all over the Western Front as one of the greatest and craftiest of spies. Once before Kirby had clashed with him, when the German had tried to make an escape to his lines in a ship which Kirby was flying. At that time Kirby had captured him, brought him back. But before they could even sentence the spy to be shot, he had escaped again. And now he was here, with his latest and most ingenious stunt—the brains behind the mysterious shelling of Tarniers.

"Yes, Bremmer," the German was echoing now. "Bremmer, this time on your side of the lines, and this time holding the whip in his hand!" His evil smile widened, until it became a contemptuous leer. "We are indeed pleased to receive this unexpected visit, though it will naturally cost my friend his life."

The casual tone in which he said these words had such a terrible import that Kirby felt a cold chill creeping up his spine. But then, suddenly, an overwhelming rage swept the American. His eyes narrowed to mere slits, and his fists clenched so tightly that his nails dug into his palms.

"Damn you, you won't get away with it this time!" he bellowed savagely. "You'll pay for this stunt—you and all the rest. You won't get away with this underhanded shelling any longer." His fury mounted, and his voice rose hoarsely. "By God, you'll—!"

Furiously, he lunged forward, tried to make a break for it. But immediately his arms were seized roughly, and he was held secure. He was stripped of all his weapons, and also his compass and roll map.

One of the men turned to Bremmer and said in German, "Why not shoot the dog now and be done with him? And, as if in anticipation, he raised his revolver menacingly. But Bremmer shook his head.

"*Nein!*" he warned. "*Lass ihn gehen!*" Then he went on in English, for Kirby's benefit. "We shall not shoot him now, for we have other and more important duties to attend to. And, besides," he added, with piercing irony, "as long as he has gone to such trouble to discover our business, we shall allow him the privilege of watching us while we fire the shells that will blow up that ammunition plant. Then, when he can die with the happy thought that our plans have succeeded, we shall give him a decent execution—worthy of such a renowned Yankee flyer."

He turned to the men then and barked out an order. They dragged Kirby, who was silent now and scowling, into the brush, to the spot where the gun was located. The Mosquito's eyes roamed furtively about the place. He saw the shells now, piles of them, over in the trees.

They forced Kirby to march past the big gun, brought him behind it. There was a large tree there. Someone brought out rope, and they bound the Mosquito to the trunk, so tightly that he could not move. Bremmer then directed the men to get back to work, and they hurried over to the gun, which they commenced cleaning with a huge ramrod.

BREMMER watched him for a while, continuing to give directions. Then he turned towards Kirby, and again that malignant leer was on his lips.

"Now you may watch us," he said. "In just a few minutes we shall start firing. Five shells at the most will be all that we'll require to score the hit we've worked so hard for."

"Yes!" Kirby snarled back at him. "But you won't dare to fire unless the Gothas come and start dropping bombs."

For a second the German seemed slightly taken aback, and his eyes flickered. But then he recovered himself, and his tone was bland.

"Ah, so my friend understands everything." He shrugged. "Well, this will be an object lesson to him then, although unfortunately he shall not live to profit by it. An aviator should know better than to try to adopt the role of a detective. It costs him dearly in the end."

"Think so, eh?" Kirby said defiantly, through clenched teeth. "Well, we'll see!" An idea had suddenly come to him, an idea by which he might frighten the German, delay the firing in the hope that some fate would intervene afterwards. "Don't think I'm a fool," he went on. "I wouldn't come into this woods alone. And in just a minute—"

"My friend's words prove that he should not try to play the detective," Bremmer taunted, and Kirby was forced to realize that he could not match wits with this most cunning of men. "The very fact that he tries to impress upon me the idea that help is coming assures me that no such thing is true. Besides, our sentry has learned a little object lesson too, and will be far more wary now. He will certainly spot anyone who comes within half a mile of this place. In that case, before help can arrive, my comrades and I will be far away, while this gun and the ammunition will be blown to atoms—and you with it!" He laughed softly. "Don't think we haven't made such arrangements, my friend. All I must do is open that box over there and pull down the switch." He pointed to a small wooden box mounted on one of the tree-trunks. "Three minutes later the shells will be set off."

Again Kirby felt that cold chill creeping up and down his back, and again he marveled at the German's thoroughness in preparing for any contingency. That switch most likely ignited a hidden fuse, which would burn down to the shells in three minutes, giving the Germans plenty of time to run to a safe distance.

"I'll admit you're clever," the Mosquito said, furiously. "You're clever but you'll—"

"I quite agree with you," Bremmer said, with frank sincerity. "Yes, it took brains to do all this, but it also took more." His voice rose, and he spoke now with intense feeling. "We've worked for this, sweated blood for it. We've labored weeks and weeks. Perhaps you, the bold Yankee aviator, think it is no feat to steal a gun right out of our enemy's hands, and operate it in his own territory."

"I admit I don't see how you did it," Kirby said, and could not entirely conceal the admiration he felt for his hated foe.

Bremmer smiled, with just pride. "Well, since there

is still ample time to pass away before we must get into action, I might as well amuse you with the story of our strange adventure. I should hate to send you to your death curious to know the details.”

And so, purely out of vanity, which was Bremmer’s one weakness, he told Kirby the story. It was a simple enough tale, yet packed with such breathless thrills and intrigue that Kirby found himself absorbed by every word of it, despite his wretched predicament. It was a story of rare courage, too, of true patriotism.

It had all started weeks and weeks ago, when Bremmer, through secret communications, was ordered to make a concerted effort to blow up the munitions works at Tarniers, an accomplishment which would severely cripple the Allied armies, by cutting off one of their chief sources of supply. But, with all his craftiness, Bremmer found himself blocked. Such strict surveillance was kept over Tarniers and the munitions factory that no enemy spy could possibly have gotten near the place.

In the earlier days of the war, before the Imperial intelligence corps had discovered his wonderful gift for espionage work, Bremmer had served as an artillery officer. Quick to grasp any subject he applied himself to, he had soon become an expert on ordnance, and had learned the science of directing shellfire to the highest degree. That was why the idea of attacking the munitions plant from outside with an ordinary .155 gun had come to him so readily. He had worked out his plans eagerly, realizing that, in addition to destroying that factory, he would also strike a hard blow to the Allies’ morale by mystifying them with his long-range projectiles.

His first step was to get together a band of other German agents, who had the nerve to carry out his plan with him. The whole group rendezvoused in Femaux Woods, where they brought enough supplies to cover the necessities of living, and enough tools for the work they must do. Here, in the midst of the forest, they established their secret camp. One of them had stripped French uniforms from the dead bodies of a detachment of *poilus* at the Front, and had smuggled them in. The whole party put them on, to insure themselves still further protection.

Before they had taken any measures to get the gun and ammunition, they made preparations to get it into the woods and conceal it. The tortuous labors they had to perform, the strain of working constantly at night, under cover and on their guard, could hardly be imagined. It took incredible perseverance, and infinite

patience. And they had lost one of their party in the strenuous process. The man, his resistance weakened by the overwork and lack of sleep, had caught a severe cold which developed into influenza and proved fatal. They had buried him with deep grief, and had sworn to avenge his death when finally they achieved their great goal—firing the gun.

The result of all this arduous work was a hidden road which ran from the military highway just outside the woods, to a spot in the forest where they intended to place the gun. The road was naturally a rude one, which curved in and out because they wanted to cut down as few trees as possible. Where-ever they did have to remove a tree, they stuck it back into the ground, set it up again, and also laid down all the bushes and undergrowth which they had been forced to clear away. The camouflage was so perfect that even they themselves sometimes had difficulty in finding the road. From every appearance, the place seemed absolutely unchanged; it was just a part of the forest, as it had been before.

GETTING the gun itself was not so difficult. It was just one of those little tricks which Bremmer knew so well. There was an artillery supply base at Renallie, a town about twenty miles away. Bremmer, with false requisition papers supposed to come from a battery up front, papers asking for another 155 mm gun with a tractor to haul it, secured the big weapon with ease. Since the real battery was going to be away at the Front for several weeks, no one would find out immediately whether or not they had really asked for the gun, and whether they had received it.

So Bremmer and his band of men, all dressed as French soldiers with artillery insignia sewed on their uniforms, had calmly gone to the supply base one late afternoon, called for the gun, attached its trailer to the tractor, and driven off. They drove along serenely, passing many trucks and men, but always getting by unsuspected. By the time they had reached the highway outside Femaux Woods, night was falling, which was well in accord with their plans. They stopped the tractor right beside their hidden entrance to the forest, made sure no one was watching, and then worked swiftly, realizing that everything depended on this part of the enterprise.

The tree which barred the entrance to the woods was taken out of the hole in which it had been placed, and the tractor went crawling and lurching in, dragging the heavy gun with it. Then the tree was put

back. Thus, by removing the loose, rootless trees and brush which barred their way and then putting them back again as soon as the gun went past, they made slow but steady progress along their strange, winding road. The going was rough and hard; often the tractor got stuck, and they had to work like demons to get it going again. They moved on, progressing for some twenty feet, halting to remove a tree, creeping forward again. They had to use these painstaking methods to absolutely insure themselves against detection, to keep as much of the rough road as possible concealed.

Finally, exhausted and with nerves that were raw, they reached the spot where they had decided to set up the cannon, and, working for the remainder of the night, they got the gun into position and put on its wonderful camouflage.

They had to wait a few days before they had an opportunity to secure ammunition. From time to time, trains of trucks would be conveying the shells along the road outside the woods, from Tarniers to dumps near the Front. This was done at night, of course, to avoid possible detection by enemy airplanes.

Through secret communication from other German agents, Bremmer had learned just when a train of trucks bearing 155 mm shells was coming up the road. Fortunately, the night they picked out was intensely dark. Bremmer and his men, hiding in the trees at the edge of the road, had waited until the last truck was lumbering past. Then, with furtive leaps, they jumped on the big lorry and killed the driver and his companion by blows on the head with the butts of their revolvers. All this they did so silently that the men in the trucks ahead did not have the slightest suspicion that anything was amiss. The Germans kept the last truck in line, but, almost imperceptibly, they slowed down little by little. In this way they fell behind the convoy, and in the intense darkness they were not missed.

Still bearing the dead soldiers with them, the daring Germans had maneuvered their truckload of shells onto their secret road, and by the same tedious process they had employed to transport the gun, they had brought it into their camouflaged artillery placement. Quickly they unloaded the scores of shells, piled them up. Then, to make the whole tiling absolutely foolproof, they drove the truck with its dead occupants back to the main road, proceeded for several miles and then, with a few of the shells which they had left in the lorry, they blew it to atoms. And sure enough, the report that reached the Allied authorities merely

stated that the shells of one of the trucks in the convoy, through some ghastly accident, had exploded, blowing up the truck and the soldiers who manned it.

The rest of this strange enterprise was just pure brain work on Bremmer's part. From his position in the forest, he had no way of seeing his target, ten miles away. But, by mathematical calculations, using maps, compass, and other instruments, he was at least able to train his gun on a line which must lead straight to the munitions plant. The only difficulty was to make the shells fall on the right point in that line. The clever German had decided to deliberately fire his projectiles short of the target, which was easy to do, because he knew approximately how far he was from the munitions buildings. By elevating his range a little more each time, he could make his shells creep steadily up to the factory.

But then came the most trying problem, the problem which almost threatened to spoil their plan. How were they to fire off a big gun without attracting attention? For days Bremmer had been thinking about it. And at last he had seized on the idea of the Gothas. Again, through secret communications, he delivered instructions to the German air force. Gothas were to be sent over to drop bombs on Femaux Woods, but not in this immediate zone. The first day they would come at dawn, and would make only one trip whether the munitions plant was hit or not. Bremmer could not be sure just how the Allies would react to the shelling, whether their suspicions would be aroused, and he did not want to overdo the stunt on the first occasion. The second day, however, the Gothas were to come not only at dawn but, if the factory still remained intact, they were to make a second raid in the afternoon. The third day, if necessary, they'd make the usual dawn trip and then, if still more shells had to be fired, they'd come over about an hour later, thus surprising the Allies if by this time they suspected the gun.

There could be no signaling from the Gothas, as that might give the whole thing away. The crews of the German ships were not even told why they were carrying out their strange activities, for the secret had to be guarded as closely as possible. However, they had orders to keep scanning the west, where Tarniers lay, and if they saw the munitions plant blow up, to shoot off a few rockets, which would tell Bremmer that he had scored. At such a time in the game it would be all right for them to signal, because the job would be completed.

“So you see, my friend,” Bremmer was concluding, with mingled triumph and enthusiasm, “we cannot fail. Nothing can stop us.” His eyes flared defiantly. “Nothing! Not after all our work, all our suffering. Any minute now, when the Gothas come, we shall see our cherished goal accomplished. A direct hit is sure, for from the reports of outside agents I understand we are very close to the munitions plant now.”

Kirby, more awed by the German’s words than he wished to admit, tried hard to refute Bremmer’s statements:

“No,” he said, but his voice lacked conviction, “you won’t get away with it, Bremmer. It’s clever and all that, but it’s too damned big to get over. You’ll be frying in your own grease as soon as—”

The German shook his head slowly, smiling. “You are wrong, my friend. We will get it over, and as soon as we’ve scored our hit, we’ll simply pull that lever.” Again he nodded towards the box on the tree—“and run away. And all traces of this gun will be removed, and our enemies shall never solve the mystery of the shelling of Tarniers.” Then again, that evil smile was on his lips, and he spoke with acrid sarcasm, “I neglected to mention the fact that when the gun is blown up, my friend will remain tied to this tree. Of course that’s just a little detail which—”

Kirby winced, and tried desperately to move, though the rope held him still. So they were going to blow him up—blow him to bits! The thought filled him with cold horror, especially since he realized that his death would mean that the secret of the gun would never be learned. God, he must do something, do something!

HIS face went white. Bremmer had uttered a short, joyous exclamation. The men at the gun had paused in their work. All were listening, straining their ears to catch that familiar sound which was rising in the distance.

Mmmmm—mmmmra—came a faint drone, like that of a bumble-bee, a drone which was rising steadily louder, coming ever closer. There was no mistaking it. It was the intermittent drone which could only come from the static engines used on German airplanes. Gothas!

At once Bremmer seemed to forget all about Kirby. He rushed over to the gun, shouted out wild orders. The men ran about, bustled like industrious ants. They brought out shells. Bremmer began operating the control wheels of the gun again, and was elevating its

muzzle a little more. He read his instruments, worked swiftly and with expert precision.

And Kirby was left tied to the tree right, behind the big steel monster where he could only watch the proceedings with helpless fury and panic. He cursed under his breath, employed all his strength to struggle free. His powerful muscles expanded as they tried to burst the bonds which held him. He squirmed, and gritted his teeth as the ropes cut into his body with excruciating pain. The drone of the Gothas was almost a roar now. They were coming. God, his comrades must be up there somewhere. If only he had told them to attack the German bombers instead of waiting for his signal. Why had he been so overconfident?

Bremmer, having adjusted the big gun, was stepping aside now, glancing up through the trees. With great effort, Kirby managed to lift his head, look up there. At first he saw nothing. Then he caught sight of them—vaguely discernible through the foliage. There were only two this time, two gigantic bombers which were turning to start their circling.

B-rrr-rooomm! The dull explosion reverberated through the forest, as the first bomb struck a good distance away. It was followed swiftly by others, which burst in noisy succession, until the din became deafening. *Boom! B-rrr-rooom!* Throughout the woods, but always quite far from the gun itself, the bombs kept falling.

Bremmer shouted another hasty order, and a shell was sent sliding into the breach of the gun.

“*Bereit! Ready!*” the German leader cried. The breach-lock was closed, and the men backed away, one of them holding the lanyard. Bremmer raised his hand. A split second of final hesitation. Then the hand dropped. “*Feuer!*”

The ear-splitting report shook the ground, made Kirby’s head reel. A sheet of livid flame leaped from the muzzle of the cannon as the shell was sent shrieking on its deadly mission. The barrel of the .155 recoiled, and the acrid stench of its smoke stung Kirby’s nostrils. Fearfully, torn by suspense, he waited, watching the Gothas. There were no rockets—not yet anyway!

Furiously, the Mosquito redoubled his efforts to break free, while Bremmer worked with lightning speed to elevate the gun’s range a bit more. In a moment another shell was being put into the breach. A sob of helplessness tore from Kirby’s throat. How could he stop them, stop them before they hit that factory? Frantically, he gathered all his strength for

one supreme effort. Like a madman he hurled his body against those ropes, this time without feeling the searing cuts they gave him.

Blam-bang! Again the big .155 belched forth its steel projectile. But at the same moment, to Kirby's bewildered joy, he felt the ropes which bound him yielding at last. One of them had been worked loose by his furious lurch. His success gave him new strength, and he threw himself into his task anew. From time to time he stopped fearfully, as one of the men at the gun glanced in his direction. But slowly, surely, he was working out of those ropes.

For the third time Bremmer was correcting his range, and they were reloading the smoking gun.

But before the signal to fire was given, Kirby knew he was no longer shackled. The ropes were loose around his body. He was holding them up, waiting to make sure that no one would see him. Then he would simply drop them to the ground and be free.

Now Bremmer was raising his hand to give the signal once more. Instantly the eyes of the Germans were all glued on the man who held the lanyard, who was watching Bremmer. It was Kirby's chance. The Mosquito's muscles tensed, while he measured the distance from his tree to the tree where that strange little box was located. It was his only hope, that box, his only means of stopping the shells. If he could pull down that lever without being seen, there was a chance, a fleeting chance at least, that the fuse would burn to its end before the Germans had a chance to score.

The box wasn't far from him. It was only two trees away, a distance of some four yards. He waited a split second longer. All right—*now!*

And at the same time that Bremmer's hand came down and the mighty gun thundered again, the Mosquito dropped the ropes and made two futile leaps for the tree. In the excitement of firing the gun and watching vainly for the victorious rockets from the Gothas, the Germans did not see him. Swift as a flash, he reached the box, pulled open its hinged cover. The switch was in his fingers. With his heart in his mouth, not sure that the whole place wouldn't blow up immediately, Kirby pulled the lever down. He slammed the cover shut, dashed towards the trees, hoping to lose himself.

BUT a shout from one of the men told him they had noticed his escape at last, though, thank God, they didn't know he had set the hidden fuse burning and

that in three minutes they'd all be blown to atoms. He redoubled his efforts, hurled himself forward, galloped, he heard the sharp report of a revolver, and a bullet whined over his head. Two of the Germans were after him, leaping furiously behind him. They were not needed at the gun, and they were determined to stop their prisoner from escaping.

Kirby ignored them, rushed on. Then, to his horror, that same sentry who had attacked him previously was blocking his path. The Mosquito lashed out with savage strength, sprawling the man. But before he could go past, the other two Germans were upon him, and the sentry, recovering from the terrific blow, helped them. Kirby struggled wildly, punching and kicking, knowing that his life depended on getting out of here. But they overwhelmed him with their superior force, and dragged him roughly back to the gun.

Bremmer, his face white with impatient rage at this unexpected interruption, shouted to Kirby's captors in German, "Hold him there! We'll attend to him in a minute, as soon as we score our hit." He bellowed at the crew which manned the gun. "Hurry! We're going to work faster now! Two more shells and I'm sure we'll be through!"

Kirby did not understand the words, but as he saw the men speeding up their work, his hopes sank. Again he tried to break away from his three captors but they held him in a grip of iron. He prayed that the fuse would touch off those shells before Bremmer could fire those last shots. But the thought that he had to remain here and get blown up too filled him with panic. He gritted his teeth, steeled his nerves. Better that he go to hell with them, than to betray to them the fact that the fuse was burning.

Blam! Again came the deafening report of the 155. Still no rockets from the Gothas. They were reloading as fast as they could, while Bremmer again elevated the range. But all the time that hidden fuse must be burning, creeping down.

Suddenly, with dramatic unexpectedness, two men came leaping out of the trees, leaping right into the midst of the scene, with Colt revolvers in their hands. They were dressed in the khaki teddy-bears of pilots, these men. And as Kirby saw Carn and Travis, he almost wept for sheer joy. How they had come here, how they had ever found the place, he could not guess. But now they were right upon the Germans, and their Colts began to bark.

The Germans, taken by surprise, were momentarily confused. They abandoned the gun temporarily, to

spring to the defense. During the confusion, the men who held Kirby were off their guard. The Mosquito wasted no time. With a mighty surge of strength, he hurled himself upon them, his fists lashing out, right, left, right, left. One of them crumpled, knocked cold. Kirby dashed towards his comrades, who were now half-crouched behind trees, blazing away with their automatics. Two of the Germans dropped, with cries of agony. The others were firing their revolvers furiously, trying to put the three stubborn Yanks out of business.

Bremmer, whose Luger was barking too, urged his men on with desperate fury, "Hurry!" he shouted. "Kill the dogs! We must finish our work."

But Bremmer was not the only one who was shouting so frantically. Kirby was shouting too, shouting at his comrades. He did not want to betray to the Germans the fact that the fuse was burning, but he had to make his comrades leave this place with him at once.

"Come on, fellows!" he bellowed. "Run for it! We'll be dead men if we don't! Come on, run!"

"Run, hell!" Shorty flared back, as he reloaded his Colt. "Not while they can still shoot that .155!"

Furiously, Kirby fought his way closer to the little man. "Come on, damn you! Do as I say! Run for it!" He was beside the squatting figure of Shorty now, and he leaned close to him. "This place will blow up any second. I set off the fuse. Come on!"

He did not have to use any more persuasion. Like a flash, Carn jumped up, and Travis, getting the news from Shorty, followed. The Three Mosquitoes made a dash into the woods. A fusillade of bullets whined after them, but they ran on. Two of the four remaining Jerries started to give chase, but Bremmer called them back.

"Man the gun!" he ordered. "Let them go! By the time they can get help we'll be through. Hurry up!" The two men turned obediently, dashed back to their posts. They made ready to fire again.

Meanwhile, the Three Mosquitoes galloped madly on, determined to separate themselves from that spot by as wide a gap as possible. A new danger confronted them now, for the bombs from the Gothas, which kept bursting continually throughout the whole breathless period, began to rock the ground dangerously close. But they ignored the deafening explosions and rushed on.

Suddenly, as if some sixth sense had prompted him, Kirby shouted, "Down on the ground!" He dropped quickly. So did the others.

And as they lay there it came—came with a tremendous burst which rocked the very foundations of the earth and drowned out the explosions of the bombs. The concussion shook the three men so that their teeth rattled and their breath was taken away. Dazedly, they rose to their feet, and swayed uncertainly. Dazedly, Kirby glanced in the direction whence they had come. He saw a lot of thick, vaporish smoke rising out of the trees.

The long-range gun was no more, nor were the brave men who had manned it. Bremmer, greatest of spies, had failed in his last and greatest stunt. But he had died as he could only have wished to die—fighting, instead of facing a firing squad.

Kirby confronted his comrades, his face grim. "Where are your planes, fellows?" he asked.

"Just where yours is," Travis replied. "Same field in the woods. Hope the Gothas haven't dropped a bomb on 'em."

"We'll see," Kirby said, strangely anxious to plunge into action. He didn't like to think of Bremmer and the others being blown to atoms. "Come on!"

The Gothas were still bombing the woods furiously, for their crews knew nothing of the gun and were simply carrying out orders. But the Three Mosquitoes reached the field safely, and found their planes intact. The German ships had not been over this way. The trio set their motors going, and revved up.

"Now," said Kirby eagerly, his fighting blood roused once more, "we're going to bag those two Gothas up there. Feel up to it, guys?"

"Let's go!" they chorused.

A moment later they streaked down the field in turn and took the air with breathless speed. Once more Kirby was leading his men into action, leading them straight up towards the two gigantic bombers which cruised above the woods. Up they went, closer and closer, till the German ships loomed before them. The Three Mosquitoes leaned to their sights, and their fingers were on the stick-triggers. They were almost in range now.

Then the Germans became painfully aware of them. The Gothas wheeled around slowly, and the men in their cockpits sprang to their flanking machine guns. As Kirby and his men hurled their Spads right at the two monstrous bombers, they were met by a terrific fusillade of smoky tracer bullets.

But at this moment Kirby and his men were in top form, and nothing could have stopped them. Their guns stuttered into triumphant life, blazed away. Like winged furies they whipped about the two great

German planes, peppering them with lead. They were fighting as they had always fought now, fighting in the breathless, lunging fashion which had won them their nicknames.

It was all over in a breathless moment. Kirby and Travis caught the first Gotha in a withering burst of crossfire. Its gas tank was struck by the smoking tracer bullets, and it plunged to earth—a gigantic, fiery torch which left a trail of oily black smoke in its wake. Before it reached the earth, its remaining bombs were set off, and blew it to atoms.

Carn accounted for the other Jerry ship. One of his bullets drilled the pilot, and the ship nosed down in a furious dive. A column of livid flame proclaimed its landing in the forest-below.

AN HOUR later a much-relieved and grateful colonel beamed at them from his desk. Kirby had told the full story of the gun, and everything had been cleared up.

“It was certainly a remarkable feat, captain,” Colonel Black was saying, “I don’t see how you did it.”

“Just horse-sense,” was Kirby’s modest reply. “You see, not being a military expert, I didn’t have the brains to think of aerial torpedoes and the like. When I saw a .155 shell I could only figure it from a .155 gun. Yes, it was just horse-sense. But,” he turned to his comrades, “how the hell did you fellows come busting in on the gun?”

“How do you suppose?” Shorty answered. “Just remember you’re not the only horse around here. Travis has a little of that horse-sense too, but I’m only human and have none.”

“You see,” Travis explained, in his familiar drawl, “while we were hanging around waiting for your signal to attack those Gothas, I began to do some figuring. Pretty soon I thought I saw what was on your mind. I doped out the idea of the gun, and then I realized you were down there looking for it. That gave me a scare,

especially since you’d been gone such a long time, and we didn’t get any signal from you, though the Gothas were raising hell. I waved to Shorty, and we went down, picking out the field where we had seen you land before. The rest of it you know. We walked east, on the line of the shells, and we found you.”

“And it’s damned lucky you did!” Kirby exclaimed. He gave a whistle. “Whew! No more of this intelligence work for me! I’m fed up with it, and I won’t volunteer again. I like to die whole, and not in pieces. No, sir,” he repeated, with firm conviction. “Hereafter, I’m just a peelot.”

“Me, too!” Shorty Carn agreed whole-heartedly. “This here es-spinach doesn’t agree with my digestion at all.”

“And the intelligence corps will have to get along without my service, too,” said Travis.

Colonel Black nodded with sympathetic understanding. “I don’t blame you,” he said. “It’s no fun, and inasmuch as it is purely voluntary, there’s no reason why you should do it.” But then his eyes twinkled mischievously. “Of course, I had another little job in mind for you, but—”

“Another job?” Kirby echoed, eagerly. “What is it, colonel?”

“Give us the dope!” Carn demanded.

“When do we start?” Travis wanted to know.

“Say!” Kirby burst out, completely forgetting his rank. “What in hell do you think we are? When it comes to throwing our heart and soul into this kind of work—man, we’re there! We’re just the men you’re looking for, colonel. So what’s this job?”

And Carn and Travis agreed.

“Well, to tell you the truth,” the colonel admitted, with exaggerated gravity, “I don’t know what the job is myself, for I haven’t had time to think one up as yet. But I’ll find one soon—and I’ll give it to three flying fools who were born to be intelligence men but are too dumb to realize it, and persist in being peelots.”

