



# THE FROZEN FATE

by  
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KEYHOE

*Upon that desolate drome, where stark black trees reared up grimly from the stripped ruin of the tarmac, those Devildogs landed their ships. Biting cold rose up from the ground on that sweltering August day—and near the deadline lay three figures—frozen to death! A thrilling Devildog mystery.*

**W**ITH A SUDDEN START, Lucky Lane sat up on his bunk, wide awake in a flashing instant. Something unusual was happening out on the Devildog drome. He heard the sound of running feet, then the excited voice of Grant, the adjutant, quickly drowned by the booming accents of "Cyclone" Bill Garrity, the hard-boiled C.O. of the famous Marine fighting squadron.

Lucky Lane shot a look at his wrist-watch. Too early for the dawn patrol. Something certainly was up!

He jumped as the field siren burst forth with an unearthly howl. General alarm! Lucky's audacious blue eyes gleamed. With one movement he leaped from his bunk and jerked open the door of the Nissen hut. The half-clad figure of Grant became visible in the gloom, as the chunky adjutant sprinted past him toward the hangars.

"What's up?" demanded Lucky Lane.

Grant flung a breathless answer over his shoulder without stopping. "Trouble! Snap into it—get Hick awake!"

Lucky ran back into the hut. The lanky form of Hick Jones, second-in-command of the Devildogs, was still stretched peacefully upon the second bunk. Lucky Lane shook him violently. Hick groaned but did not move. Lucky seized a near-by pitcher and emptied it in the sleeping Texan's homely face. Hick sat up, spluttering and cursing.

"Hey, yuh ring-tailed coyote, I ain't on the dawn patrol!"

He broke off as he heard the siren. Just then the huge figure of Cyclone Bill Garrity loomed in the entrance.

"Step on it, Hick!" he bellowed. "Hell just busted loose down by Nancy!" And with that he was gone before Hick could open his mouth.

"Nancy, huh?" muttered Hick as he pulled on his uniform and reached for his flying-gear. "It shore sounds like monkey business. The Limeys ain't in th' habit of callin' fur help—leastwise not the Independent Air Force."

Lucky Lane jammed a cigarette into his lips as he finished his hurried dressing. "Shake a leg, Hick," he urged. "We can catch a shot of coffee and cognac at the mess before they get the ships warmed up."

"An' maybe a shot of lead in some likely portion of yore anatomy if Cyclone Bill lamps yuh," drawled Hick. Then he grinned. "Howsome-ever, seein' as it's dark, an' the Old Man ain't got eyes like a bob-cat—"

THE air was filled with the thunder of engines and shouts of hurrying men as they ran toward the mess. Inside the battered mess shack, which still held evidence of the last night's binge, were more than half of the Devildog brood, the fighting, irresponsible hellions of Garrity's "Mad 28th," which the enraged and despairing Boche had long ago named the *Teufelhund Jagdstaffel*.

"What's the racket, Hick?" shouted Larry Brent, the youthful leader of B Flight, keen eyes glowing from his lean, tanned countenance.

"Yuh can search me," responded the lanky Texan, as he seized a cup of steaming black coffee in a big paw. "Hey, Chubby—how's it fur a chance at that there Three Star?"

Chubby Dexter reluctantly relinquished the bottle. Hick spiked his coffee and drained the libation at one gulp.

"I shore hope we meet up with the Krauts after all this ruckus," he stated. "I've been gettin' stale, anyways—ain't lamped a Jerry in three days."

"One look at that face and the Boche hightail for home," Lucky Lane explained in a grinning aside to Chubby Dexter.

"Yeah?" bawled Hick belligerently. "Well, I can't recall seein' yore mug plastered in the beauty magazine. Yuh may be lucky, yuh ornery hound, but yore luck gave out when they come to handin' out faces."

A thundering bellow in a familiar voice, coming from somewhere nearby, cut short the discussion.

"Holy smoke, it's the Old Man," stuttered Chubby. "Me for the back door—"

He halted, his round face red as Cyclone Bill plunged in from the rear exit of the mess shack.

"What is this—a Sunday school picnic?" he erupted in a voice that shook the walls. Hard eyes glared from his ruddy, square-jawed face. "For five cents, I'd—" he gulped and pawed the air. "I'll deal with you birds later! Now get this—there's something damned queer going on down near Nancy. First, a British Independent emergency unit near Essey called in here for help. The line went dead before they could tell what was wrong. Then G.H.Q. burns in with an order to get down to Nancy and look for a four-motored Siemans-Schuckard bomber escorted by thirty Fokkers."

He gulped another breath and thundered on, "Why in Hades the Boche are pulling a formation like that I don't know. But we've been ordered to get that big ship. Understand?"

"Oke," said Hick Jones laconically. Lucky Lane grinned eagerly, and the rest of the Devildogs nodded.

"Then snap into it!" Garrity hauled his helmet over his ears. "I'll lead. Hick, you take No. 2 spot. Lane, play safety, and don't pull any of your wild tricks on me again or I'll break your neck."

TWO minutes later Lucky Lane climbed his Spad up above the rest of the Devildog formation to his position as safety man. The minutes scudded past. The darkness of night gave way to the shadowy blue preceding dawn. Then gradually the first glow of light from the still unrisen sun struck upward into the massed cumulus clouds at twelve thousand feet.

The Moselle swept beneath, a gray-silver serpent winding around Toul and off again to the southeast. Lucky Lane leaned out of his cockpit for the hundredth



time and searched the sky. This time he started in eager exultation. Off to the east a number of darting specks appeared, and in a few moments he saw that a fierce fight was in progress.

The Devildogs beneath him swerved sharply before he could give a signal. Garrity's keen eyes had spotted the fight. Lucky settled low in his pit, his fingers tapping feverishly against the trips of his Vickers while he watched for Cyclone Bill's first plunge to the attack.

Suddenly Lucky gave an exclamation. Slipping along behind a huge cumulus cloud, almost hidden in the gray-pink mists, was the largest plane he had ever seen.

It was like a Siemens-Schuckard, but its wings were of greater span, and the hull of the air monster was completely enclosed. Even the gunner's turret, projecting from the midsection between the four huge engines, was encased so that the gunner was hidden from view. Atop the turret, almost an integral part of it, was a searchlight, so mounted that it was aligned with the guns that poked through the turret slits. At the lower end of each vast wing was a searchlight of similar size.

Half a mile back of the big ship was a squadron of almost three dozen Fokkers, engaged in a terrific battle with a lesser number of Sopwiths and Bristols.

Lucky Lane frowned. Here was the huge ship which G.H.Q. had ordered brought down. But what was the reason for its strange flight with that enormous escort, of Fokkers? It was quite apparently a new type of night bomber, equipped for operating from an unlighted base. But why was it enclosed so oddly—and what could the Boche hope to achieve by sending only one bomber across, regardless of the size of the fighter escort?

The Devildogs were almost within range. Garrity was climbing swiftly, gaining altitude for the roaring dive that was soon to follow. Lucky Lane eased down a thousand feet lower after a quick glance had shown him that no enemy lurked higher in the heavens. As he tensed over his trips, waiting for the flash of Garrity's signal, he saw a Sopwith dart through the Fokker barrier and race after the fleeing monster. The nearest Fokkers whirled to give chase.

Abruptly, the great bomber swept around on steeply banked wings. The Fokkers whipped away to the right and to the left. The searchlight in the huge ship's turret flicked around as the unseen gunner trained his guns on the charging Sopwith.

The Sopwith flitted from side to side in quick,

almost frantic jerks. Lucky Lane swore as he guessed at the reason. The Boche had cleverly installed that powerful light to blind their victims, to make them helpless temporarily while they shot them down!

Suddenly the Sopwith reeled and slipped off in a wild, uncontrolled dive. Lucky Lane's audacious eyes became grim with a hard light in their blue depths. He tripped his Vickers and jammed his Spad down with a vicious shove of the stick.

*FLASH!* The flare of Garrity's rocket brought him back to his duty with a start. He veered sharply to cover the Devildogs as they dived. A zooming Boche darted up and cut in with devilish skill at the nearest Devildog pilot. Lucky kicked his Spad sideways. The red streams of death from his Vickers struck down the skyway, into the German's huddled form. The Fokker rolled slowly onto its side and pitched toward the forest far below.

With a snap, Lucky reversed his course and drove onto a second plunging Hun. The Boche pulled up and came in like a whirlwind. Blazing Spandaus stabbed furiously past Lucky's head. Bullets spattered, from a glancing burst on his engine. He rolled inside the other man's turn and cut up the Fokker's tail with a slashing torrent of fiery venom. Closer and closer, crept the deadly blast, eating along the Fokker's back to the man at the stick.

*Br-r-t-t-t! Br-r-t-t-t!* Two snarling bursts of Spandau steel tore through the cowlings before Lucky's face. He jerked back. The quarry before his guns flipped off in a wild dive, to join the Boche who had plunged in to his aid.

In thundered B Flight, with Larry Brent cutting a path of destruction and doom through the ships at Lucky's tail. Lucky grinned and roared up to clear air. He saw the British ships crash through the Fokkers' guard, recovering from their disadvantage as the Devildogs tore into the fight. Three Sopwiths streaked after the giant bomber, which by now had almost reached the towering clouds to the east.

As the three Sopwiths closed in, the big ship banked steeply to the left. The Sopwiths snapped into quick turns, spreading out to fire at the monster from three directions. Lucky Lane hurled his Spad after them to join in the attack. The Boche behind him were outnumbered now. And Garrity had said to get that ship!

The lighted turret rotated swiftly toward the nearest Sopwith. Lucky Lane saw the pilot of the fighter throw

up his hand as though to shield his eyes from that blinding light. Suddenly the Sopwith trembled. Before Lucky's staring eyes the propeller seemed to come to a terrific, instantaneous halt. Then the whole engine burst into a thousand pieces that went screeching across the sky.

The pilot sat like a man turned into stone, with his hand still upraised, unmoving—and Lucky Lane knew that he was dead.

Something cold seemed to go through him. In his horror he seemed to feel the icy breath of death. For he knew that no ordinary gunfire had torn that engine to bits. Something more fearful than Spandau slugs had turned that pilot into a statue—of death.

The lighted turret whirled to the second Sopwith. Lucky Lane held his breath. Again came that terrific disintegration of a racing engine suddenly halted in its roaring pace—and once again the horrified Devildog pilot saw a man stiffen under the spell of some mysterious doom.

THE third Sopwith turned to flee. The giant bomber churned eastward to the cloud bank, but as it went, there came a brief flash of that probing searchlight from the encased turret of the mystery ship. In the same second Lucky Lane saw a crimson streak, like the trail of a huge tracer bullet, rip parallel to the searchlight beam from a spot below it in the center of the turret.

Only the edge of the darting beam swept across the ship of the fleeing Briton, and of the crimson streak Lucky Lane could now see no sign in the more powerful glare above. But as the beam raced past and vanished, Lucky saw the pilot's face in a brief but horrible glimpse. Set and rigid, the man's features showed waxen-white. And on his face, as though carved in stone, was a look of utter dread.

Then the Sopwith was gone in a fluttering spin, and fragments of steel raining down the skies were all that remained of a powerful engine which had throbbed there a second before.

Dazedly, Lucky Lane recovered his senses and looked about him. The Boche were breaking up under the Allied ships' attack, the last Fokkers racing fearfully into the east. Cyclone Bill Garrity had pulled up from a vicious dive, a dying Boche falling beneath him with wings aflame. Lucky saw the Devildog commander staring about the heavens in search of the mystery ship. As Cyclone Bill bent over his stick, Lucky kicked down alongside of the major's ship and frantically

pointed north. If Garrity saw that ship and gave chase, he was as good as lost.

Garrity flung a look northward and shook his head. Up and up he went in swift circles, the scattered Devildogs reforming behind him. But the huge bomber was nowhere to be seen. It had disappeared in the mountains of cumulus clouds which lay between the Front and Germany. Here and there a flitting Fokker was to be seen, frenziedly making for the German side of the lines, losing itself swiftly in the billowing white clouds before pursuit could be attempted.

The British squadron, badly battered, formed behind their leader and set off toward Nancy. Garrity signaled the Devildogs to follow as he headed in the direction of Essey. In a few minutes the Devildog squadron was settling over the low hills which surrounded the small British Independent Air Force field.

Lucky Lane, flying higher than the rest of the squadron in his post as safety pilot, had paid scant attention as they neared the Essey field. His usually carefree grin was gone, and once more he saw the face of the dead Sopwith pilot, waxen-white and so rigidly set with terror.

But suddenly he awoke to the realization that something was wrong beneath him. Garrity was leading the Devildogs in a slow circling of the field, making no attempt to land. Lucky Lane stared down; then his blue eyes widened in astonishment.

The Essey drome was a scene of utter desolation. Barren trees, stark black and totally devoid of foliage, reared up grimly from a soil almost as equally barren of grass. It was as though a fiery brush had swept the field, leaving the blackness of charred ruin behind. From a hundred angles ran wide, dark streaks, crossing and crisscrossing so that they covered almost the entire area and extended beyond the drome into the adjacent thickets and fields.

Only in one spot, an irregular triangular area less than a hundred feet from a small steel-roof hangar, was there any sign of verdant foliage such as existed beyond the confines of the strangely stricken drome. In this one triangular spot the ground was still green, and a small tree poked up into the sunlight, its leaves stirring in the eddying air as the Devildogs flew low over the drome.

SUDDENLY the left wing of Lucky's Spad dipped violently. He leveled it and kicked swiftly out of the slip, but the unexpected drop had settled him almost

on top of the Operations shack. He zoomed clear of the roof and then felt himself dropping flatly again in a current of strangely cold air.

The ground flashed up at him. He pulled the stick back and pancaked with thudding force to the surface of the drome, engine still full-on. The, Spad hit with a crunch, bounced, and hit again. Lucky jerked the throttle and fought the bucking ship to a stop.

The exhaust of his idling engine rang sharply through the air, as though it were a winter's day. And to his amazement he felt a biting cold surround him, a cold that seemed to arise from the ground. He cut off his engine and then stood up to wave a warning to the rest of the Devildogs, who had continued to circle at two hundred feet, their ships flopping up and down in the oddly bumpy air.

Abruptly, Garrity straightened out and led the squadron away from the drome. Then with a careful bank he turned and came in with a power glide. Lucky Lane nodded. Garrity had quickly understood; he was not to be caught by those cold down-currents.

Lucky climbed out of his ship. The ground was hard beneath his feet, and after a moment he felt the soles of his boots grow cold. He bent down and touched the ground with his gloved hand. Then he gave an exclamation. It was as cold as ice!

It was a day in August, a day that promised to be as hot and stifling as the one which had preceded it—but this queerly stricken drome was as cold as though it were in the grip of icy winter!

Lucky Lane turned and looked about him, absently noting the frosty steam-white cloud which his breath made as he exhaled. Then, across the field and close to the Operations shack, he saw something he had not noticed before.

Lying upon the ground was the form of a man in British uniform. He lay in a curiously grotesque position. Lucky ran to his side, disregarding the nearness of Garrity's swiftly landing ship.

The body was that of a British pilot, Lucky saw at first glance. On his uniform was the insignia of a lieutenant, and on his breast were the wings of the Royal Flying Corps. He lay partly on his side, both fists doubled and his arms brought up as though he had been running. One leg was bent at the knee.

Lucky took off his glove and shook the inert form. He gave a cry of horror. The body of the British pilot was rigid and icy-cold!

He jumped to his feet as Garrity taxied out of the landing lane and vaulted from his ship.

"Major, this man's frozen stiff!" he burst out.

"Frozen! You're crazy, it isn't cold enough—" Garrity stopped as he felt the frigidity of the atmosphere and saw his breath turn swiftly to a cloud of white vapor. "Good God, it's colder here than at twenty thousand feet," he muttered.

THE rest of the Devildogs were coming in. Lucky saw the first ship settle with wildly swaying wings. Suddenly the Spad's engine thundered to full speed, but the fighter plumped down as though in a vacuum. It hit with a resounding crunch of landing gear. The left wheel gave way and the Spad spun dizzily around to end upside down, with a crash.

An audible cursing followed; then the homely countenance of Hick Jones became visible as the lanky Texan emerged from the wrecked ship.

"Somebody must've moved th' North Pole," he complained glumly. "Dang my hide if I looked fur an ice-cake to squat on down this way. Gosh, that ground shore was cold!"

"I signaled you to watch out for bumpy air," snapped Garrity.

"Yeah, I know," said Hick disgustedly. "But bumpy air don't mean runnin' smack out of summer-time into winter." He peered around the field. As he saw the figure of the dead pilot, he sobered. "Gone West?" he asked grimly.

"Yes, frozen cold," returned Garrity, staring down at the rigid form. "I can't figure it out, unless the Boche have invented some new kind of poison gas. That would account for all the dead grass and trees."

Hick shook his head. "Don't 'pear to me like gas could freeze up a place, like this." He stooped and touched the dead body. "Cold 'nuff to have been packed in th' middle of an iceberg."

"Here comes the rest of the gang," said Garrity. "I hope they see what happened to you and use their heads."

"Meanin' I didn't," drawled Hick. "Well, maybe so, but a man's gotta save his brain sometimes, yuh know."

"Humph!" snorted Garrity. "No wonder this outfit's always in a jam of some kind—just a bunch of wise-crackers!"

He turned his back on Hick, glared at Lucky Lane, and then stood waiting for the rest of the squadron to land. They came in cautiously and managed to land without disaster.

As the last engine died, a heavy silence gripped the drome for a few seconds. The Devildogs stared in

amazement around the uncomfortably cold drome, across the blackened surface where the grass lay dark and dead, and from which the barren trees rose stiffly against the rising sun.

So still was it that Lucky Lane could hear the tense breathing of the twenty pilots, and then the faint rustle of leaves on the lone tree which had escaped the fate of the rest.

Garrity's crisp voice cut into the stillness, a whitish cloud eddying about his lips as he gave his rapid orders.

"Get out of your ships. Hick, take half the men and search around the hangars and shops. Kick the doors of the shops open—but don't go inside. There might be gas inside—if it was gas. Lane, you and Brent come with me. The rest of you stay here by the ships. And keep your eyes open. After this, the Lord only knows what'll happen next!"

He led the way to the Operations shack. Lucky followed with Larry Brent, rubbing his fingers to warm them, for the cold that seemed to emanate from the ground was numbing.

IN THE doorway of the Operations shack lay another motionless figure, and twenty feet away was still another. Both of them lay in curious positions like the first one who had been found near the line. Garrity looked at them sharply and then faced his two pilots abruptly.

"Notice anything about them?" he shot out fiercely.

"Their faces are the same color, sort of bloodless, and they're rigid—" hazarded Larry Brent.

"Look at their arms and legs," grunted Cyclone Bill. "They were running. Something hit them so suddenly they didn't even have time to relax before they died. They died on their feet—and then fell. They were frozen or paralyzed the second it got them—whatever it was."

He looked into the Operations shack. "Go around and knock out those windows," he directed curtly. "If there's any gas inside, it will blow out in a few minutes."

As Lucky and Larry Brent returned from this mission, Hick Jones and the rest of the Devildogs who had made the search appeared in front of the shacks.

"Well?" demanded Garrity. He had filled his pipe and was puffing vigorously. "What did you find?"

"Plenty," reported Hick. "Water-tank was busted open—solid ice cake inside. The whole place is froze up—outside part, 'specially. Counted 'leven dead ack emmas an' two more pilots. Also a cat. An' the cat's

still livin'—I ain't put much stock in that nine lives business up to now, but—"

Garrity's square-jawed face reddened. "Cut out the comedy!" he roared. "You mean to tell me a cat lived through all this—" He waved his hand around the blackened drome.

"Shore did," declared Hick, calmly taking out a huge plug of tobacco and biting off a choice morsel which he tucked in one cheek. "First thing, I heard a meowin' back in th' hangar an' I figured if a cat could get by, it wasn't gonna bother me much, so I went in an' got it."

"You idiot, you might have dropped dead! Don't you know that some gases will kill human beings and won't bother certain animals?"

Hick grinned. "I been accused of bein' unhuman, more'n once. Anyway, the cat was oke—"

"I've got a hunch, major," contributed Chubby Dexter, his round eyes rounder than ever. "The end of the hangar is right next to the green spot where that tree is—the one with the leaves still on it. Maybe whatever—"

"I see what you're driving at," grunted Garrity. "But that tree and this cat business make it more muddled up than ever. If it had been gas, then the cat would have got it—nine lives or not," he added, glowering at Hick.

He turned toward the entrance to the Operations hut. "I'm going to see if the phone is working. G.H.Q. ought to know about this."

As he strode into the shack, there came a dull rumbling from the sky. Lucky Lane squinted off to the west. A flight of planes was heading straight for the drome. Just then Garrity reappeared.

"The line's dead," he said sourly. "I thought it would be—what's this?" He stared at the oncoming ships.

"Spads," volunteered Lucky Lane brightly.

"I know a Spad when I see it!" said Cyclone Bill witheringly. "Get your guns out—we'll make sure there aren't any Boche in those ships when they land."

There were five Spads in the small flight. They came in rapidly.

"Hell's bells!" exclaimed Garrity suddenly. "Those birds are wise to this cold air landing business. Now how did they know there would be down-currents?"

THE leading Spad trundled down the field, then swung back and taxied hastily toward the waiting Devildogs. The four ships behind it remained at a distance, their noses pointed toward the Devildog planes.



The pilot of the first ship cut off his engine and quickly approached. He was a tall man, leaner than Cyclone Bill, and with an air of authority about him. Garrity lowered the automatic he had partly lifted, and a look of recognition touched his face.

"It's Colonel Harland," he said in an undertone to Hick and Lucky Lane. "G-2, air section."

Harland's bright eyes darted keen, birdlike glances about the drome, at the Devildogs, and then rested on Cyclone Bill.

"Hello, Garrity," he said with a brief smile that was gone quickly as his gaze shifted to the body of the pilot who had been found close to the line. "Ah, so it's happened again!"

"You mean you knew about this?" demanded Garrity.

"Not exactly. But first, tell me what you know."

"We received a call from this drome. It was cut short, as though there had been trouble—"

"What time was this?"

"Three-thirty. Then British Independent called for help at Nancy, and on top of that G.H.Q. rushed an order—"

"I know about that," interrupted Harland. "I had it sent. Did you get the big ship?"

Garrity swore. "No. The Boche put up a stiff fight to let it get away. The Sops were being cut to pieces, so we—"

"You stopped to help them," snapped Harland. "Damn it, man, getting that big plane meant more than saving fifty Limeys, or anybody else for that matter."

"I don't pass up any squadron I see being chopped to pieces!" rasped Garrity. "And G.H.Q. can bust me for it. That's my code, and I stick to it."

Harland gave a wry smile. "Well, no use arguing now, but it might have saved you a lot of trouble. For you've got the toughest assignment any outfit ever had."

"Let's have it," grunted Cyclone Bill.

"First, let me signal my men that everything is O.K. I wasn't sure, so I had them cover you." He turned and gestured to the four pilots who waited out on the drome. The four Spads taxied in to the line. "Now," said Harland crisply, "here's the situation. You've already seen what has happened on this field. Well, it's not the first case. Twice before—to be precise, last night and the night before—we've found small outpost fields in exactly the same condition. Men dead, frozen to death! The whole drome about fifteen or twenty

degrees above zero, in each case—and the ground as stiff as a board."

"Any idea what did it?" queried Garrity brusquely.

"None. We thought of gas, but our G-2 chemists have not found a trace of it. And there's no known gas that could produce this effect. No, it's something else, and unless we can check it at once, the Boche may raise the devil. For if they can do this to an airdrome, they can do the same thing to an infantry depot, or to a section of the trenches."

He paused, nervously biting at his lower lip.

"We know only this—each time, that big ship has been seen, with an escort of Fokkers. That's why we were so anxious to get it, and to learn the secret."

SOMETHING stirred at the back of Lucky Lane's mind, but before he could speak, Garrity broke in. "How did you know we were here at Essey?" he demanded, gazing at Harland.

The tall G-2 colonel smiled acidly. "I didn't. I was checking up to see what had happened here. After that mysterious bomber was reported over the lines again, I got in communication with every field on this front. That is, all but Essey and a French observation field forty-five kilometers north. Neither of them answered. I've just come from the French drome. It's the same as this place."

"The Boche must have hit it first," muttered Garrity. He glanced across to where the dead British pilot lay. "You say you've found no trace of poison gas. I suppose you've had your doctors examine the bodies on those other fields?"

Harland nodded slowly. His birdlike eyes were narrowed grimly as he answered. "A post-mortem was held on several bodies taken from the field which was stricken night before last. The surgeons all agree that the men were instantly frozen to death. And they swear that the condition of the bodies indicates a temperature of at least two hundred degrees below zero at the time of death!"

A little stir went around the group of Devildogs. Lucky Lane felt a coldness go up his spine which was not from the chill air of the desolate Essey field.

"Two hundred degrees below zero!" repeated Garrity in a tone which for him was one of awe.

"At least that—maybe much lower," affirmed Harland crisply. "It accounts for the frozen condition of the ground, the dead trees and dead grass—everything but the method and means used."

Lucky Lane pushed himself through a ring of

Devildogs. "I've got something to tell you, sir," he said to Harland. "I thought maybe I was seeing things, but now—"

Hurriedly, he related how the engines of the Sopwiths had disintegrated in mid-air, and how the unfortunate pilots had seemingly been paralyzed in their seats.

"You're sure those engines didn't blow up because their props had been shot off?" queried Harland sharply.

"You know an engine running wild will rack itself to pieces."

"It isn't likely to happen three times in succession," said Lucky. "No, sir—I'll swear it had something to do with that turret."

"Which way was that ship headed when it escaped?"

"About northeast," replied Lucky Lane.

Harland glanced at Cyclone Bill Garrity, "That doesn't mean anything—although in the first thought of getting clear, the pilot may have headed for his home base. But it may help you."

"You mean we're to hunt for that ship?" rapped Garrity.

"Orders from Chaumont. The Limeys have lost eighteen ships and men in two days, trying to shoot down that plane. They're absolutely crippled. And that ship must be found—destroyed! G-2 has a report from an agent across the lines indicating that these flights have been some kind of a test. Apparently, this spy was unable to learn anything else. But G.H.Q. is scared—and they insist that this mystery ship be found and both it and its base wiped out without delay."

GARRITY fixed Harland with a savage glare. "What chance will one squadron have—against this?" He flung one hand in an angry gesture that encompassed the frozen drome and the dead pilots lying upon the ground.

"I can't help it," said Harland. "I advised waiting till tonight, then massing a dozen squadrons along this front to jump that ship when it shows up again. But G.H.Q. is afraid to wait."

Garrity snarled something unintelligible. He faced his expectant brood of fighting Marines.

"I'm not ordering a one of you to go with me on this mission," he barked. "It's a fool's errand and anybody that would volunteer for it is a damned idiot. But if any of you young roosters haven't any more sense—"

The Devildogs grinned as one man. Garrity paused,

and the angry light died momentarily from his fierce eyes. Hick Jones looked around the group and stepped forward with his awkward, rolling cowpuncher's gait.

"I reckon they ain't nobody pinin' to stay home, major," he drawled. "I gotta hunch maybe we're all kind o' curious to find out what kind o' Krauts might be givin' us this here freeze-out."

"You're crazy, the whole bunch of you," grunted Garrity, but there was no harshness in his voice now. He opened his mouth as though to speak again, then coughed gruffly and turned to Harland.

"All set," he reported. "We'll get back to our field and fuel up, and also get some chow. These young idiots may be ready to go out and get themselves frozen into imitation totem poles, but before I go hunting your confounded mystery ship, I'm going to get something hot in my stomach."

"That's a right smart idea," agreed Hick Jones. "Sorta like givin' the condemned man a hearty breakfast, huh? Let's go, gang. I shore feel food a-callin' me."

"Hold on," said Cyclone Garrity. "How are you figuring on getting home without a ship?"

Hick Jones scratched his head without the formality of removing his helmet. "Looks like somebody's goin' to have t' carry double," he observed drily. "Chubby, I guess you're it," and Hick stretched his lanky form carefully on the lower wing of the rotund Devildog's Spad.

"I might have known it," mourned Chubby Dexter. "I'm the only guy in the outfit he owes money to—he knows darned well I won't let him spill off."

UNDER an overcast sky, three Devildog Spads droned deeper into Germany on the second search of the day for the mystery plane's elusive base. Lucky Lane, flying well to the left of Hick Jones, the leader, wearily scanned the wood-patched terrain beneath, now and then glancing to the north to be sure they were not losing sight of the Devildog unit searching a mile away.

Under Garrity's direction, they had divided into seven units of three Spads, each one keeping the other unit in sight while they hunted the hidden base.

The first search had been fruitless, save that the returning squadron had encountered a flock of Pfalzes and sent two down in flames before the rest broke and fled. Now, having crossed the Front at a high altitude, they were dropping down to the dangerous height of six thousand feet to cover the second section of German territory designated by G-2.



At that altitude the air was thick and warm. Off to one side came flashes of lightning as a thunderstorm broke and spread. The light of the late afternoon sun became completely shrouded with somber clouds. Lucky Lane sat up and stared around him. The three-ship unit to the southward had disappeared, and the one to the north was almost obscured in a drizzling rain that began to fall.

Hick Jones waggled his wings and turned to the north, heading across the edge of a forest that stretched into the east, toward the Saar basin. Lucky Lane followed, watching the third ship, flown by Slim Carson, one of the latest replacements in the Devildog brood.

Carson was leaning out, peering up into the fast-drifting clouds above the forest. Suddenly he whirled around in his pit, signaling frantically to Hick and Lucky.

Lucky followed his hurried gesture and then groaned in dismay. Ten Fokkers had pitched out of the leaden sky toward the Devildog ships on the north. The rattle of Spandaus came in a snarl that was audible above the roar of Lucky's droning engine.

Climbing furiously, Hick led the two others straight into the horde of diving Boche. Lucky Lane clenched his Vickers trips savagely. Hot lead spat from his flaming muzzles as he closed the gap in a headlong dash. The Devildogs to the north had sheered out and were twisting from under the diving Boche, scorching up in tight chandelles.

A thundering Fokker screeched out of its dizzy plunge as Lucky's tracers struck through its wings. Half of the diving Jerries rocketed on down at their first prey, the rest pulled up frantically to meet their unexpected attackers.

The first zooming Boche corkscrewed around dizzily and hammered two torrents of searing slugs into Slim Carson's Spad. Slim whipped up and around, momentarily blanking off Lucky's fire. The Boche dove under Slim's whirling ship and crashed a staccato burst up Hick Jones' tail. Instantly, Lucky snapped his ship down in a snarling, twisting turn. Crimson fires bathed the snouts of his pumping Vickers. The German's Spandau went dark as the pilot fell, riddled, in his cockpit.

FOUR leaping Fokkers drove in swiftly. Hick Jones caught the first in a centred burst as straight as the shot of a six-gun. The Fokker burst into a mass of roaring flame and went down like a shooting star. The

second Boche swirled up for an Immelmann, only to be caught by Slim Carson's chattering Vickers before he could whip about at the top of the loop. Upside down, it slued out of the fight, the pilot hanging limply out of his pit on his belt.

The remaining two Fokkers split and zoomed up wildly for the advantage of height before returning to the attack. Lucky Lane snapped his stick back and drilled straight up behind one of the steep-climbing ships. A black cross lay in his ringsights. He kicked the rudder with a practiced foot, while the Vickers before him sprayed their deadly hail up the back of the zooming Boche.

The climbing Fokker seemed to flutter like a wounded bird. Slowly, it ceased its steep ascent, while the pilot slumped forward in a bloody heap. For a second it hung without apparent motion. Then with a queer little whip, it jerked to the left and careened down the sky, to be lost in the gray drizzle that now hid the ground from view.

Lucky Lane rolled out of his climb and hastily surveyed the skies. The sole remaining Boche was darting frenziedly away from Hick Jones' well-aimed guns, while the Texan hunched low and held his fire for a finishing burst. Even as Lucky watched, flame spurted from the Vickers on Hick's cowl. One burst—and that was all. The next instant Hick was pitching down to the aid of the Devildogs below, without waiting to see his stricken victim fall.

Something tightened in Lucky's throat as he saw that only two Marine Spads flew beneath. One of the reckless Devildog crew was gone. There would be at least one empty seat tonight at mess. Lucky Lane gave a hoarse cry as he hurtled down to even the score. Not one life for a Devildog's life—three Boche would pay for that vanished pilot of the fighting Marine Corps brood!

Down they went—three Devildogs with but a single thought—guns lusting for revenge. Four Boche who raked the two Spads below saw them coming. Four Boche sheered out madly from under that triple-threat of doom.

Four Boche—but in a moment only two remained, as the bitter crossfire of six pounding guns cut into the Fokkers' pits. Caught in a trap of panting, greedy Vickers, the last two fought like fiends. The crackle-of lancing tracer sounded in Lucky Lane's ears as the nearer Boche whipped viciously toward him. A splintering strut made the Spad's wing tremble. Spandau lead ripped up the side of his ship and tore, screaming, into his cowl.

A fear-tortured face glared out from the Fokker's pit. Lucky drove through the battering rain of slugs and probed fiercely for the German's heart. The Boche skidded out and ducked to plunge under the nearest Devildog Spad. With a frightful crash the two ships met and telescoped with a blinding flash of fire. Locked together in a spinning mass of fiery debris, the two planes catapulted off with their ill-fated pilots.

IN THE moment of the crash, Lucky Lane forgot the last Boche while he gazed in horror at the whirling inferno that carried one more Devildog to eternity. The German raked him with a devilish hail of red-hot lead. Something dug into Lucky's arm. The stick fell from his numbed and pain-racked hand. The compass broke into fragments as a second burst crashed across the pit. Then the Boche was gone, racing through the gap where Lucky had flown, heading at top speed down into the gray mist.

The banging of the stick between Lucky's knees brought him out of his brief daze. He gripped the stick and pulled the Spad back to its level for normal flight. Something was trickling down his forehead, seeping under his goggles and half blinding him. He pushed up the goggles and dashed it away. It clung to his eyelids, warm and sticky. Then he saw the blood on his glove. The shattered compass had gone in all directions, and a jagged splinter had gouged his face.

Suddenly the thought of the compass aroused him to his danger. He looked hastily upward. But of Hick and the others there was not the slightest sign. He had fallen more than two thousand feet before he had recovered, and now the steady gray drizzle hid the rest of the Devildogs from sight.

He stared around him. Nothing was to be seen. Below, he glimpsed the blurred darkness of the forest. It came to him with a jolt. He was lost, and not only that but he was deep in Germany and with barely enough gas to carry him back on a straight course across the Front.

Panic gripped him for a second. Then with an effort he brought his usual reckless grin back to his lips. He had been in a worse fix than this when he had run into von Baden and the now notorious jagdstaffel of drug-mad pilots. He had been blinded by his crash on von Baden's field by the old monastery, and only a miracle had relieved that pressure on his injured optic nerves, restoring his sight.

But he had pulled through that time—and he would pull through this time, too!

Buoyancy was the keynote of Lucky Lane's impulsive nature. Within a minute the grin had become as settled as ever, and he was easing down to find some guiding landmark as blithely as though he were back at training school and momentarily lost on a cross-country flight.

The heavy growth of trees became more distinct as he settled lower. At last he was skimming their tops, searching for a highway or railroad off to the sides, keeping one eye open for Bocfte ground forces at the same time. But the forest seemed endless. The grin on Lucky's face was getting somewhat ragged when almost directly below him he saw a narrow road running straight as an arrow through the trees. He banked quickly to prevent losing sight of it and then sent the Spad droning along above the narrow lane.

Abruptly, the road widened into a clearing of some kind. Lucky strained his eyes to see through the constant misty rain that beat upon his face and covered his goggles. What place could this be—a clearing evidently in the heart of the forest?

THERE was no time left him for speculation. Out of the drizzle loomed a steel mast, directly in his path and not two hundred feet away. Lucky kicked furiously to the right and jerked up in a breath-taking chandelle. The top of a radio mast and antenna grazed his wheels as he zoomed. He leveled out with a fervent ejaculation of thanks to a guiding Providence.

And the next second a dozen Maxims cut loose at him from as many angles!

Dimly, he saw the outlines of a long, low structure along the edge of the clearing. It was from the roof of this that most of the firing came. Lucky set his teeth and thrust the Spad's nose down for a quick strafe of the almost invisible gunners.

A wrenching pain shot up his arm from the wound he had received. But he gripped the stick more tightly and tripped the guns with his aching hand. Maxim lead was hurling its way through his already battered ship. He felt the crippled wing quiver. The first Maxim sprang into view, gray-clad Boche working feverishly behind it to bring him down. He stared grimly into his sights.

A flick of the rudder and two lightning-like streaks leaped down to blot the gunners into death. Through the second river of scorching bullets he flew like a whirlwind, and behind him two *feldgrau* shapes sank into lifeless heaps of flesh and blood-stained cloth.

A sputtering light showed suddenly just ahead.

Then the ray of a searchlight flickered across the clearing, to jerk up at the plunging Spad.

Back of the light was a queer turret—like the turret of the mystery ship! Lucky Lane felt his heart contract. He banked fearfully away from the shifting beam. Almost at once a second beam flickered into existence off to his right. He threw a frantic glance in that direction. A vast wing loomed before his eyes, the wing of a mighty ship, drawn up beside the low building on which was mounted the first light turret.

Lucky Lane felt a surge of horror go through him as he recognized the mystery ship. He had found the hidden base. But unless a miracle occurred, he would meet that frightful death he had seen dealt out to the Sopwith pilots in the fight near the. Essey drome.

There was one chance—and one alone. With a violent shove of the stick, he nosed down in a screaming dive. Between the two darting beams he plunged, so swiftly that they could not follow until he was below the first turret's level. Wheeling in a mad vertical turn, with his wings all but scraping the ground, he sought to fly the Spad back of the protecting wall of the structure which flanked the mystery plane.

The Maxims had gone silent as the searchlights flared up. Now, as though at a sudden signal, they burst forth with renewed fury. Two scarlet muzzles blazed straight before Lucky's thundering ship. With a fierce snap of the stick he whirled out of the nearest leaden stream.

Something cracked loudly in the wing of the Spad. The splintered strut collapsed, and then with a rending groan the wing folded and the fighter whipped sideways to the ground. There was a flashing second when Lucky Lane saw the dark surface of the secret drome spring up at him. With reversed controls, he threw one hand before his face, hurling his goggles aside. Then a million stars seemed to blossom overhead and he felt a dreadful pain dart up his injured arm. His senses whirled. For what seemed an age he felt himself spinning in a black void. Then slowly he began to realize that he had not been killed in the crack-up.

HOARSE voices sounded from out in the gloom. He forced his eyes open. Heinies in *feldgrau* were running toward him. He tried to move, but the effort was too much. He slipped back with a moan. A torchlight was flashed into his face. He blinked.

"Gott, he is still alive!" came a guttural cry. "He must have a head of iron."

Rough hands dragged Lucky out of the broken cockpit. He was half-led, half-carried into the building beside which he had fallen. As they passed through the entrance Lucky saw a Prussian flying officer hurrying toward the door. He was a man of medium build, with a clean-cut, almost delicate face in which there was just now a hint of strongly mixed emotion.

"Take him to the guard-room, quickly," he ordered the Heinies who held Lucky captive. There was a hurried, uneasy note in his voice.

The guards exchanged odd glances. One of them cleared his throat and then spoke in a low tone, "But von Warwitz, *mein Hauptmann?*"

The German pilot went taut. A grim light came into his eyes and the muscles of his jaw suddenly bulged. Underneath those delicate features Lucky saw there lay the face of a fighting man.

"I will take care of him!" he snapped. "Do not forget I am in command here!"

The Heinie mumbled an answer and turned back to his men. Lucky was led toward a side corridor, opening off of which he perceived a small, barred room. From somewhere farther off, apparently in the basement of the building, came the steady whirl of generators, mingled with a muffled sound of a powerful gas-engine. Lucky guessed that it was a motor-driven generating plant which furnished power for the base. They were almost at the door of the cell-room when a strange, disagreeable voice halted the guards in their tracks.

"Korporal, bring the prisoner here!"

Instant fear became visible in the faces of the guards. Quailing perceptibly, they turned about, taking Lucky with them.

A man stood at the junction of the main corridor and the side passage they had taken. Lucky started as he saw the fierce, almost mad face which leered at him. The man was obviously a Prussian, but he was in addition the largest Prussian Lucky had ever seen. Enormous arms hung from shoulders which would have made even Cyclone Garrity's broad shoulders seem like those of a boy. A hairy, barrel-like chest showed through the open shirt the man wore.

A thatch of unkempt blond hair topped the huge head of the Prussian. Beneath the massive brow the man's eyes showed in startling contrast, seeming almost tiny through the heavy double-lens glasses he wore. But if they were small, they made up by their insane glare for their apparent lack of size. A lustful, curious light touched them as he saw Lucky Lane.



"Bring him here!" he said harshly, and the ugly rasp of his voice touched some unsuspected nerve in Lucky's mind as though it had been exposed and bare.

THE huge man stared down at Lucky for a moment; then his great thick lips drew into an ugly grin. Suddenly he laughed, and Lucky saw the men about him shiver. Off to the side stood the flying officer, watching with narrowed eyes, his sensitive face drawn and white.

Lucky waited tensely. He was no ordinary prisoner, he knew that already. The man in pilot's uniform had sought to hide him from this grinning monster. Why? In that thought Lucky felt a swift dread. He would soon know the answer—and a cold premonition told him that it would be something frightful. This leering devil was either mad or devoid of any soul. It showed in his eyes, in his sensuous, gloating face.

"So, you come hunting trouble," the huge Boche said at last. His eyes struck into Lucky like gimlets. He gestured to one of the guards. "Strip off his flying suit. I wish to see what kind of prize I have this time."

The man obeyed. Lucky could feel the guard's hands trembling as he tore off the outer garment. Suddenly the big Prussian drew in his breath with a queer, exultant hiss.

"*Teufelhund!*" he said hoarsely. An odd glare flew into his lens-masked eyes. "At last I have one of the *verdammt Teufelhund Jagdstaffel* to complete my specimens!"

Abruptly, the pale flying officer spoke "You will not touch this man, von Warwitz! He is my prisoner, and will be treated as a prisoner of war!"

The guards fell back hastily as the Prussian monster wheeled toward the white-faced pilot. There was a look of black murder on von Warwitz' face. But the pilot did not move.

"Again you try to cross me, you stupid *Schwein!*" The huge hands worked convulsively as though they held the pilot's throat within their frenzied grasp. "I have warned you! If you do not wish to join those in the cabinets—"

A burly Heinie back of von Warwitz turned a dirty yellow at the huge Prussian's last words. Lucky saw him raise a shaking hand and cross himself. Von Warwitz took a step forward, and there was a glare in his narrowed eyes.

"For the last time, Landroff, I warn you! Interfere once again and I will deal with you as I dealt with your snooping *Leutnant!*"

There was a frightful tension in the air. Lucky could

feel it, and he knew that on the outcome of this terrific battle of wills rested his own fate.

For almost half a minute the white-faced pilot stood facing the Prussian monster who towered over him. There was no fear in his face, only a great hate. At last he gave a hopeless gesture, though Lucky saw something in his face that belied the motion.

"I shall remember," he said huskily.

Von Warwitz snarled something under his breath. Then he signaled to the frightened guards.

"Take him to the room of the cabinets," he rapped and now there was a new note of gloating and triumph in his ugly voice.

For a second Lucky Lane's anxious gaze caught the glance of the pale German pilot. And in that instant he read a swift warning of some kind. It was gone in a flash, and then the pilot was turning away to join a group of staring officers who had appeared from the side passage.

IN THE center of the main corridor the guards halted. One of them fixed a fearful look on the door before which they had stopped.

"Open it, fools!" came von Warwitz' fierce tones.

The door slowly opened, to disclose a small anteroom. Through this the guards led Lucky. They stopped inside the entrance of the room adjoining. It was in darkness.

Von Warwitz' mirthless chuckle sounded from one side, and Lucky guessed that he had come in from some other door. Then the light flashed on. For a second Lucky stood blinded by the bright glare. Then a cry of downright horror burst from his lips.

Lining the wall opposite him were a dozen glassed-in cabinets. And in each cabinet was the body of a uniformed man, rigid and unmoving, each face wax-white except where scars showed in ghastly blue on two or three countenances.

Lucky Lane felt himself grow cold with dread. He was in the toils of a madman. And he was destined to fill one of those horrible cabinets!

"I see you understand, *mein Freund!*" came von Warwitz' voice, with a harsh attempt at a purr which was more sinister than his ordinary tones. "That is good. It will save so much time. And tonight I am very busy."

Lucky Lane did not speak. His tongue seemed stuck to the roof of his mouth.

Von Warwitz addressed the guards sharply. "Secure him to the chair. Then come with me and help me test

the projector upon the roof. I think this blundering *Dumkopf* cut through the secondary conduit with his *verfluchte* bullets."

The guards seized Lucky and forced him into a big chair which was bolted so that it faced the hideous gallery of the dead. Von Warwitz laughed crazily as he saw the look on Lucky's face.

"Sit there and see your future comrades," he chuckled. "And if you look far enough to the left, you will see your future resting place awaiting you!"

He lumbered out of the room, the guards hurriedly following, without looking back at the dreadful things across the room.

Left alone in that chamber of horrors, Lucky Lane closed his eyes to blot out the scene. It could not be true! It was surely a nightmare! But he knew it was no dream. It was all a part of that terrible day, part of the mysterious deaths of Sopwith pilots, connected with the frozen drome at Essey. And back of it all was the madman, von Warwitz.

He opened his eyes in spite of him self. Against his will, his gaze stole to the left. At the end of the row was an empty cabinet. He shuddered. In a short time, perhaps in only a few minutes, he would be turned into one of those rigid figures—literally frozen into a human statue!

But if they were frozen, how did the mad Prussian keep them in those cabinets, apparently without any steps for preservation? A vacuum?

Lucky drove that gruesome conjecture from his mind. It mattered nothing. Soon nothing in the world would matter to him. Life would be blotted out!

HE STIFFENED. Some one was stealing into the room from a door at the right, beyond the row of cabinets. His heart beat fiercely as he saw that it was Landroff. The German pilot's delicate features were set in lines of grim resolution. He touched his finger to his lips and tiptoed to Lucky's side.

"Not a sound, or we are both as good as dead," he whispered. He quickly set to work on Lucky's bonds. "Give me your word you will not attempt to trick me, *mein Teufelhund Freund?*" he added earnestly. "You will remain my prisoner without question?"

Lucky Lane nodded hastily. "After von Warwitz, a German prison camp would look like Heaven," he said with a shiver.

"He is mad—stark mad," said Landroff. "You may as well know the truth—it may be you will need to know, to help me tonight. He was once a great

scientist—working with electricity—as you and I work with planes and guns."

He smiled whimsically, though the pallor of his set face had not changed. "It seems strange to be helping an enemy of the Fatherland," he muttered. "But we Germans are not all beasts—only a few madmen, like him!"

"He threatened to kill you," said Lucky. "But I heard you say you were in command here."

"I am supposed to be," was the grim answer. "But von Warwitz has terrified my men till they are afraid to obey me. But tonight he has gone too far. He has gone clear out of his head. He threatens to kill all of us, to turn his horrible discovery against the Fatherland, as well as against our foes."

The ropes slid away from Lucky's arms and legs. He tenderly rubbed his right arm, which was almost numb from the effect of his wound, though the blood had ceased to flow.

"Come, we must hurry," warned Landroff. "I have cut the secondary conduit to his projector on the roof, but he is clever and will discover it quickly."

He hurried into a passage which ran down to the basement stairway. In the basement several frightened Germans waited. Landroff ran to a stalwart Boche who was tending one of the peculiar-looking generator sets and globular greenish tubes that ranged in banks on both sides. The mechanic nodded half-fearfully, casting a furtive look up toward the stairs. Landroff spoke in an undertone to his pilots. All but one went out cautiously into the gloom. As the door opened, Lucky saw that dusk had come, adding to the gray murk from the steady drizzle.

"My men are preparing the planes," Landroff said abruptly. "We are taking a desperate chance. We cannot reach the big Siemens-Schuckard without his seeing us from the roof. When the Fokkers are ready to be started, I shall wreck the generators here in the basement. But if he reaches the big plane before we take off, we are finished. One touch of that projector beam and we shall be frozen to death instantly."

"I have seen it strike," muttered Lucky. "But I did not know it was the searchlight—"

LANDROFF flinched nervously as a door banged somewhere above. His hand closed about the butt of his Luger pistol.

"The thing you saw is not a searchlight," he said, after listening intently for a second. "It is a projector for this terrific force he has accidentally discovered—the force of cold light rays."

"Cold light?" exclaimed Lucky.

"Not so loud," cautioned Landroff. He stared up the steps, then looked anxiously toward the door leading outside. "Yes, the thing which he was trying to perfect was a light that would pierce fog. We hoped to use it in bombing your supply bases and ammunition dumps." He smiled, an odd, lifeless smile. "But he stumbled onto this horrible power. Scientists have talked of the possibilities of cold light, a light that would glow without the dissipation of lost energy through so much wasted heat. But no one ever dreamed what it would mean. Von Warwitz has found it—but the ray creates its light at a temperature of the absolute zero, more than two hundred degrees below your Fahrenheit zero!"

"Then that's, what stopped those Sopwith engines! They were simply frozen to a dead stop from full speed."

Landroff stared at him. "You were one of those we fought today!" he said hoarsely. "But it has all been a frightful mistake." His nostrils flared with emotion. "We were detailed to help with his invention for the fog searchlight, not for this ghastly butcher's work! But the realization of this great power has unsettled his brain. He has driven us with threats of turning the ray on us if we failed to obey his orders. He has frozen both my men and our captives. Twice, I have sent men out of here at night to take word to the Supreme Command. Both times he has suspected." He shivered. "Poor wretches—they are in those cabinets you saw—"

"What are you going to do if you get away tonight?" Lucky demanded.

"Get to the nearest bombing squadron. Bring back every ship I can get and blow this place to pieces—von Warwitz with it! I have seen too many terrible things done by that awful force. I will see no more men frozen to death by that horrible light—not even for the Fatherland!"

"But the Siemens-Schuckard—if von Warwitz takes off before you get back, he will kill all of you with that damned beam."

"There is a vulnerable spot—for one who would take a desperate chance," said Landroff with a queer gleam in his eyes. "The plane is armored against machine-gun fire except for the trap in the bottom through which they climb in and out. It was to be finished tomorrow. Perhaps—" his voice sank to a tense whisper—"perhaps there will be no tomorrow—for *him*!"

A sudden roar from out on the secret drome made Lucky Lane jump.

A Fokker engine had thundered into life. Landroff whirled with an exclamation toward the generators.

"Something has gone wrong! They were to wait for my signal."

He seized a heavy wrench from a bench near by. The mechanic flung back from the generators. The wrench hurtled into the glowing greenish tubes. Emerald gases rushed out, hissing, blazing. Landroff jumped to the switchboard, spun a rheostat. Then with a jerk he reversed the central triple-bladed control switch. There was a scream from the fast-moving rotors; then a cloud of black smoke belched out, followed by a tongue of angry flame.

"Run for the planes," Landroff shouted at Lucky. "There is a reserve ship back of mine."

A WILD yell came screeching down from the roof as Lucky and Landroff raced out into the shadows. Von Warwitz had discovered the trick. Above the sound of starting engines, the mighty voice of the mad scientist roared furious commands at the men upon the roof.

A streak of white light whirled down into the area where the German pilots struggled to start their engines and escape. A chorus of frenzied shouts went up. Then came Landroff's swift cry.

"It is harmless! The secondary circuit is dead!"

Men were pouring out of the basement. From up on the roof came a mad bellow; then von Warwitz' voice died in the thunder of a Fokker that shot down the field to take off. The drome became a bedlam.

Lucky Lane jumped up on the step of the Fokker Landroff pointed out. A snap of the switch and he was at the prop. The engine coughed and died. He tried again. It caught, with a sudden sputter. He warmed it hastily.

A mechanic came screaming across to Landroff's ship.

"Von Warwitz has reached the plane!" he shouted, and then fled wildly for the fringing forest at the side of the drome.

From back of the long laboratory came a leaping beam of light. Across the ground it swept, and back of it whirled a whitish, frosty cloud. A fleeing Fokker two hundred feet above the field veered crazily back in a violent turn away from the ray of searching light. For a second it swung frantically back and forth, evading that eery finger of doom.

Then the light whipped straight onto the plunging Boche. The roar of the instantly frozen motor as it disintegrated to fragments drowned every other sound.



Landroff ran to the side of Lucky's ship. "Your life is in your own hands!" he cried. "I am going to the Siemans. If the trap is still open, I may—"

*Crash!* Again came the weird and nerve-racking sound of a stricken ship, and Lucky knew that another terrified Boche had been frozen into icy death.

The Siemans-Schuckard rumbled suddenly from behind the laboratory building. Lucky threw himself prone in one leap from the Fokker to the ground. Like a dead man, he lay motionless, though the fierce pain of his wounded arm stabbed through him until he groaned.

A hundred feet away a panic-stricken wretch ran toward the forest, screaming at the top of his lungs. The deadly freezing beam moved in a single jerk and spotted the unfortunate German. The scream choked off in a sibilant hiss. Frozen into rigidity the man fell on his face. Lucky Lane, breathing a prayer while he waited to know his fate, felt the freezing breath of death as the light lifted up and away.

THE huge death-plane had ceased to taxi forward. Slowly the turret rotated so that the death-beam covered the boundaries of the field. Lucky stifled a cry. They were lost!

Von Warwitz was covering every inch of the field with a madman's diabolical cleverness, sweeping into each corner, leaving no shadow unexplored! In a few seconds—

Lucky started as a new and different rumble came floating out of the leaden skies. The roar of engines suddenly increased till it seemed a hundred ships flew somewhere up behind the mists.

The Siemans-Schuckard jerked into a swift take-off. Up sped the freezing light ray. Lucky Lane drew a long gasping breath of relief. Then he saw Landroff racing toward his ship.

"He must not escape!" cried the German fiercely. "You must help me! If he escapes and hides away to build more of those terrible machines, we shall all pay!"

"Let's go!" snapped Lucky Lane. He vaulted into the Fokker he had started. Again he was a Devildog, with a fighting ship beneath him and guns ready to flame at his touch. A German ship—but what did it matter!

The Mercedes roared as he slammed the throttle on. Landroff raced down the drome, back-sticked into a sheer vertical zoom. Lucky Lane grinned and followed suit. The Fokker soared like a trembling eagle at his touch. Up and ahead was the plane of the mad

scientist, wheeling around to strike down a third man of Landroff's shattered flock.

With startling abruptness, a score of ships flashed out of the heavens above. Down through the graying murk they came with guns flaming from every angle in the sky. And behind them a thundering squadron of bombers cruised straight for the forest-ringed drome.

American ships! British night bombers! Lucky Lane gave a triumphant shout. Devildog Spads!

Hick and Slim Carson had brought a veritable armada back with them! The joyous grin of Lucky Lane once more blossomed out on his lips—only to fade as he saw the death-ship whirl its freezing doom up at the hurtling planes.

With a frantic yell, he jammed the Fokker's stick hard down and then zoomed straight for the big ship's bottom. The trap! Landroff had said the trap was not yet armored.

Up and up, till the Fokker shook to a stall. And still the death-ship roared on untouched.

A pitching shadow fell out of the skies. Lucky groaned. Somewhere in that flitting wreck of an engineless ship sat a man whose heart had frozen at the flick of a mad fiend's hand.

THE death-plane was almost above him now. A scudding ship flickered in from the left. Landroff—his Spandaus spitting a lurid fire! Lucky hurled his Fokker up beside the Boche. Together they drilled their flaming vitriol of destruction into the unarmored trap.

The vast bottom of the bomber flashed closer to Lucky's prop. Still he held grimly on, while fifty feet away a white-faced Boche fought with him to bring a madman down.

For a second the bomber faltered onward. Then the nose dropped crookedly. A gush of oily black smoke spurted down through the riddled trap. Lucky Lane pitched the Fokker away in a tremendous dive. Back of him a vast red flame lit up the gray heavens. The light in the death-ship's turret spun crazily about the sky. Suddenly it glowed to an awful brilliance. Then the turret blew up with a crimson flash and the huge bomber slithered off to its end.

Lucky Lane eased out of his dive and watched it go. A hundred yards away it plunged, a mighty mass of fire. The mad scientist was gone and his frightful discovery had died with him. Below, the flames of the burning laboratory mounted into the sky.

A flitting shadow at his side made Lucky jerk

around. He was in a Fokker—and the sky was filled with Allied ships!

But the ship beside him was like the one he flew. As he leaned out of his pit, he saw the white face of Landroff, uncovered by goggles, lit by the leaping flames not far below. The German raised his hand in a gesture of salute. Slowly he pointed off to the west, away from Germany.

Lucky Lane felt something odd go through him. There beside him was a sworn foe—whom two hours ago he would have tried to kill. They had fought side by side. And now the German was releasing him from that promise not to attempt escape.

He raised his hand in answering salute. Then Landroff was gone with a swift flash of wings, plunging off into the darkness away from the drome he had wrecked. Lucky stared after him. Would they ever meet again, perhaps to be flung together in some fierce battle-sky?

“God forbid!” he muttered.

A significant thudding of bullets past his legs made him jump. He whirled around, then swore in sudden

wrath. Two Devildogs were enthusiastically coming in to shoot down the supposed Boche!

Ignominiously, Lucky Lane zigzagged out of their raging bursts and streaked off into the dark for home.

An hour later the Devildog Squadron droned down out of the night to land on their own tarmac.

“Th’ place won’t quite seem right without pore old Lucky ‘round,” muttered Hick Jones, as he fell in beside Cyclone Garrity.

“He was a crazy kid—but he was a good scrapper,” said Garrity huskily. “Poor devil—his luck couldn’t last forever—”

He stopped abruptly. The door of the mess had opened. On the threshold stood Lucky Lane, a large strip of court-plaster on his forehead and one arm hung in a sling.

“What I want to know,” said Lucky Lane, with a note of belligerence in his usually sunny voice, “is just who was the mug that shot two holes in one of my brand-new boots?”