

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

## THE FLYING SPIDER

by RALPH OPPENHEIM

*Here it is, gang—the greatest flying yarn of the year! Kirby, Travis and Carn, that famous trio of war birds, thought they were going to have a rest. They flew that important visiting Limey, Colonel Haley-Shaw, to England—and then all hell busted loose, for they had landed in the web of the infamous and powerful “Spider.”*

IN THE TINY CUBICLE THEY SHARED together, the “Three Mosquitoes,” that famous trio of Yankee war birds, were packing their bags with eager haste. Clumsily, they stuffed away their best ground uniforms, and a plentiful supply of socks, shirts, underwear and toilet articles. They were packing up, while outside rose the thunder of engines as an afternoon patrol took the air, the shrill clatter of machine guns being tested, and from the distance, like a sinister undertone, the dull booming of the big guns. But the Three Mosquitoes scarcely heard these grim sounds of battle. There was a war going on here, but for the time being they were privileged to forget it. After weeks of hard and desperate fighting, of grueling combat in the enemy’s skies, the longed-for respite had been granted—the answer to every pilot’s prayer—*leave!*

Shortly after the noon mess, when the Three Mosquitoes were taking their usual forty winks before their next patrol, the C.O.’s orderly had brought them the glad news.

“And you’re to have seven days’ leave in England, sirs. The colonel requests that you pack up at once,

get into your flying togs, and report to him as soon as possible for details.” At first, in their elation and glee over this announcement, the three men had not stopped to ponder on the orderly’s words. They had simply hastened to prepare for their departure. But now the lanky Travis, oldest and wisest of the trio, was frowning thoughtfully as he closed up his bag.

“Say, fellers,” he said, in his familiar drawl, “doesn’t it seem strange to you that the Old Man should pick England for us, of all places? He always lets us pick our own vacation spots.”

Kirby, young leader of the three, laughed him off.

“Don’t be a wet blanket,” he snorted. “The Old Man probably figured we’d like England for a change. Of course,” he admitted, on second thought, “I don’t think I’d exactly pick merry England if I had my way. It’s a nice country, but it’s too damned quiet—nothing ever stirring there, no excitement. Now, if we could go to Paree——”

“You guys both give me a royal pain,” “Shorty” Carn, the stocky, mild-eyed little fighter put in vehemently. “You don’t hear me crabbing, do you?”

England, France, or even China—it's all the same to me! All I crave is a place where I can sit down and smoke my pipe. And England is just the spot for a little peace and repose." He sighed contentedly, for though he could be the most active person in the world, he was by nature a lazy man, who loved relaxation.

"But look here," Travis persisted, clinging stubbornly to his original train of thought, "do you fellers realize that flying to England is quite a trip? Three hundred miles easily. Yet the C.O. stated explicitly that we're to get on these flying togs. The Old Man is no fool. He doesn't do such things without reason." The lanky pilot's eyes narrowed shrewdly. "I've a hunch there's something up his sleeve; that this trip isn't just an ordinary leave."

"Well, anyway, it's a leave, or else he wouldn't have said so," Kirby argued, impatiently. "And suppose we get over to him and find out, instead of sitting around here and scratching our heads. Are you ready, guys? I'm all set!" He picked up his bag, and Travis, also ready, picked up his. But Shorty Carn was still struggling to get on his teddy-bear. Kirby glared at him. "Come on, you lazy, goldbricking bum," he urged. "Don't start taking your peace and repose until we get going."

Finally Carn was ready, and the three men, bags in hand, hurried out of the barracks. They emerged on the field, under the bright glare of the afternoon sun. Briskly they walked across the tarmac, towards the headquarters snack. But before the line of camouflaged hangars, they paused in mild surprise.

For they saw two huge De Haviland two-seaters squatting side by side like monstrous birds, their motors stuttering as they warmed up, their propellers idly churning at the air. Mechanics swarmed around the two great ships like industrious ants, revving them, filling their tanks, tightening their wires. Kirby stopped to question one of these grease-monkeys, a small, freckle-faced sergeant.

"Say," the Mosquito spoke with unconcealed curiosity, "I thought this squadron wasn't going to do any more bombing or heavy reconnaissance work. What's the idea of pulling out these big crates? Who's flying them?"

The mechanic's tone was respectful. "Beggin' the captain's pardon, sir, but you're flying one of 'em, and Lieutenants Travis and Carn are flying the other."

Kirby dropped his bag to the ground, and his eyes widened with incredulity. Carn and Travis also were amazed.

"What the hell?" Shorty exploded. "Aren't we going to take our Spads? What do we three men need with two big two-seaters?"

The freckle-faced sergeant shrugged. "C.O.'s orders, sir," he explained, resorting to that incontrovertible answer to all questions. "And beggin' your pardons, but shall we put your bags in the fuselages for you?"

Dumbly, the three men gave their assent. They left their bags and walked slowly to the headquarters shack, while Travis nodded knowingly, and said with faint triumph, "I told you there's something up the Old Man's sleeve!"

They found their grizzled old C.O. sitting at his desk, as usual. But the C.O. was not alone. There was a stranger here—a tall, stern-looking and dignified man whose uniform showed him to be a British colonel. And somehow the presence of this sober-faced stranger gave the whole room an officious atmosphere, an atmosphere which instantly made the Three Mosquitoes feel like soldiers on duty rather than men about to enjoy a leave.

"Men," the C.O. barked, in his gruff voice, after returning the Three Mosquitoes' salute, "this is Colonel Haley-Shaw, of British intelligence. He has been making a little tour of inspection around the Front, and has honored us with a visit." He smiled at the Britisher. "Colonel, here are the Three Mosquitoes."

The Englishman smiled, but it was that cool, tight-lipped smile so common among British high officers.

"A pleasure, indeed," he said. "I've always wanted to meet you three gallant flyers." He spoke with frankness, but again, in his tone, was that English aloofness which to Kirby and his comrades was almost high-hat. "I hope," the Britisher went on, "that these three men will fall in with my little request."

"You see," the C.O. explained, getting right down to the point, "Colonel Haley-Shaw has found it necessary to get back to England at once, to attend to certain business. Since he happened to be in this vicinity, he thought that if he came to us we might be able to fly him back. He has told me this is purely a request, though as a matter of fact it is his right, as a high intelligence officer, to demand such a service. It's up to us to do this little thing for him."

The Three Mosquitoes nodded slowly, as a full understanding came to them. The English officer stood silent, reserved, listening to what was said and at times smiling his approval.

"Then," Kirby spoke suddenly, "we're to fly the colonel to England—all three of us?"

"Exactly," the C.O. conceded, and then lowering his voice a bit, spoke in a confidential tone. "Needless for me to say, the colonel here must always be well protected. There is no telling when a high intelligence officer will meet with danger or trouble, especially on an important trip like this."

Here the Britisher came out of his reserved silence, and chimed in. "I should feel quite safe with the Three Mosquitoes, anywhere."

"Yes," the C.O. rejoined. "Colonel Haley-Shaw has done you the honor of asking specifically for you. Of course, I was reluctant to let you go—we need you here—but then I thought that since you're due for a leave anyway, I might as well kill two birds with one stone. The colonel is to go to London, so you can take your leave there."

"But, sir," Travis put in, wonderingly, "why are we using those two enormous De Havilands? Why can't Captain Kirby fly the colonel over in a small two-seater, while Carn and myself escort him with our Spads?"

Colonel Haley-Shaw himself volunteered to answer this. "Another one of my requests," he said quietly. "It is best, on such a long trip, to take every precaution. These De Havilands, I understand, have an extraordinary petrol capacity, especially when they are not loaded down with the bombs they usually carry. We will thus be taking no chances of being inconvenienced because of lack of fuel."

"In short," the C.O. summed up for him, "those D.H.'s will assure you of a non-stop flight, where smaller planes would have to stop to refuel. Now," he continued, on a different track, "I want you three men to take good care of the colonel here, and see that no harm comes to him. After you have landed him at Croydon, you'll be free to go where you please. You can check your planes at the field and enjoy—" He broke off abruptly, for the Englishman was glancing anxiously at his wrist watch. The C.O. took the cue, and snapped tersely, "You must get off now. It's after one-thirty, but if you take off immediately, you'll surely make London before dusk." He picked up some papers from his desk, and distributed them among the trio. "Here are roll maps, and passes. And from now on you are to consider yourselves at Colonel Haley-Shaw's service, to act under his orders until he releases you. Now, is everything clear?"

The Three Mosquitoes gave a cheerful assent.

"We're all set, sir!" Kirby assured the C.O.

"All right. Take the colonel to the tarmac and see

that he gets a pair of flying togs." The C.O. rose from his desk then, and suddenly his manner changed; he became more human, less officious. He grinned, and extended his hand. "S'long, fellow," he said warmly, as he shook with each of them. "Have a damned good time, but come back sober. I hope you will enjoy yourselves."

"We will," they promised.

And Colonel Haley-Shaw smiled a little more warmly than usual, as he said, with firm conviction, "I am sure they will have a most delightful time in our dear old England."

SIDE by side, their great wings rocking gently, their powerful Liberty engines chanting a thunderous drone, the two huge De Havilands moved through the sunny, blue sky. They flew leisurely and in confidence, for they were not going forth to battle, not going where the filthy spew of anti-aircrafts would molest them. The war was behind them, and they were moving further and further from the seething Front. Below them, the rolling panorama of green and yellow landscape kept assuming a more peaceful and orderly pattern. They were still over war-ravaged France, but they were moving steadily towards the Channel, towards England.

In one plane Kirby sat at the controls; in the other Travis handled the stick. Shorty Carn was Travis' alert observer; Colonel Haley-Shaw, all wrapped up in a flying suit, helmet, and goggles, was merely Kirby's passenger. And thus far, since their departure, the British intelligence man had not once taken advantage of the speaking tube, had not said one word to his pilot. He just sat there, calm and silent, which was not uncommon for an Englishman. But somehow the silence of that man behind his back made Kirby vaguely uneasy, set him to wondering. Why was this Englishman so sober, so grave? Was he worried; did he have some dark apprehension? Was he planning, in reality, to use the Three Mosquitoes for some purpose? These and similar thoughts swept through Kirby's mind.

No wonder, then, that Kirby started, actually tensed from head to foot, when he suddenly noticed that Shorty Carn, over in that other plane, was staring through his goggles towards his leader's rear cockpit, staring obviously at the British colonel. There were both surprise and interrogation in the mild little man's look.

Instinctively, Kirby turned in his seat and performed

that difficult contortion of jerking his head over his shoulder. Deliberately, and perhaps insolently, he looked straight into that cockpit behind him. And as he looked, his eyes opened wide behind their goggles, and his jaw dropped in sheer amazement.

Calmly, in a most matter-of-fact way, the Englishman was stretching a piece of ribbon across the cockpit in which he sat.

It took Kirby a moment to see that the ribbon was in reality a tape measure. The Mosquito could hardly believe his eyes. By God, that Britisher was measuring the width of that cockpit—measuring it calmly and patiently!

The strangest part of it all was that Colonel Haley-Shaw did not seem at all embarrassed by Kirby's discovery of his most peculiar activity. Indeed, he made no effort to hide what he was doing. He neither started nor paused in his work. He merely looked at Kirby and smiled that cool, tight-lipped smile of his, and Kirby could have sworn that he chuckled, though he could not tell because of the roar of the engine. The Englishman's bland attitude filled the Mosquito with sudden indignation, for he felt that an explanation was due, that the colonel ought to account for himself. He wheeled back to his controls, and impulsively he seized the speaking tube. Nor did he succeed entirely in veiling his anger and resentment in polite irony.

"I can spare you the trouble of measuring it, sir," he shouted into the tube. "The width of that cockpit is just thirty-five inches."

This time he distinctly heard the colonel's chuckle, for the latter had at last deigned to pick up the speaking tube. The Englishman spoke for the first time, spoke with bland cheerfulness.

"Thanks, my good man. These tape measures are a bloody nuisance, with the plane in motion. I thought it would be about that width. It ought to do nicely."

"Do?" Kirby echoed, impudent because of his bewildered curiosity. "Do what?"

The Englishman did not answer this question. Instead, he went into a digression. "I say, do you know the location of the American air drome at Apremont?"

"Yes, sir," Kirby conceded, in fresh wonderment. "I ought to, seeing that we three guys used to belong to that outfit, before the war moved up and we transferred to the 44th. I know the bunch there quite well, sir."

"Indeed!" The mild voice of the Englishman came through the tube. "Well, I wonder would you mind passing over that way? It lies between us and the

Channel, and it will not take us much off our course. There's something there I——" He broke off with a chuckle, and changed the sentence mysteriously. "I'd like to have a look at the place."

There was only one answer Kirby could give to this. He was under the colonel's orders. So, though his mind was full of puzzles and questions, he said respectfully, "I'll fly that way, sir,"

And he leaned forward to look at the roll map pinned to his dashboard. Locating Apremont, he figured his course by a glance at his compass, and then turned to wave the order to his comrades. Shorty Carn, who was still looking his way questioningly, caught the signal and transmitted it to Travis, who promptly complied. The two De Havillands swerved as one in a mild bank to the left, a bank which only such skilled pilots as Kirby and Travis could have accomplished with the huge, cumbersome ships. They straightened out and, keeping side by side, headed for Apremont.

In about half an hour the familiar airdrome was looming out of the blurred, distant landscape, a light, triangular patch in the greens and yellows. Kirby pointed it out to his passenger.

"Shall we pass right over it, sir?" he asked, through the tube.

The Englishman didn't seem to hear this at all, for he spoke in an entirely different vein.

"I say, my good man, have you ever had the pleasure of drinking the famous Apremont wine, which they make down there?"

This utterly absurd and irrelevant question left Kirby at loss.

"Pardon, sir," he asked, with rising impatience, "but is this meant to be some joke?"

"No, indeed," the other assured him very earnestly. "Certainly, if you were with that squadron, you must have drunk that wine."

"Well, I did drink it but——"

"And if you did drink it," the Englishman's smooth voice kept right on coming through the tube, "you must have come to the conclusion that it is the finest, the most palatable, the most delicately flavored vintage you have ever tasted."

"I'll even admit that," Kirby said vehemently, hardly able to restrain himself any longer. As a matter of fact, he didn't even remember the taste of that damned wine. "Agreed it's good wine."

"The best you have ever drunk," the Englishman insisted.

"Agreed!" Kirby almost choked, and was so mad

that he found it difficult to hold the big De Haviland to its course. "But, without being impertinent, sir, what in the devil has this damned wine got to do with the case?"

Once more the Englishman chuckled, and now there seemed to be a note of playful mischief in his calm voice. "Look here, my good man. I'd like very much to wangle a bit of that wine with me to England. That is the reason I was using the tape measure." This time he actually laughed. "It would be most simple to do! Why," his voice rose eagerly, "this rear cockpit, provided I sit elsewhere, is large enough to carry a huge, forty-five gallon cask of that wine!"

It was then that Kirby began to doubt whether Colonel Haley-Shaw was sane. The man seemed mad—stark, raving mad. Indeed, Kirby began to pity him, and assumed a more tolerant attitude. He spoke through the tube as one speaks to a foolish, unruly child.

"But we couldn't stop off for it, sir, you know," he reasoned, very patiently. "You are in a hurry, as you told our C.O. This is to be a nonstop flight."

"True enough," the Englishman conceded. "But then, this will take no time at all. Apremont is the only place where one can obtain that wine, and I may never have an opportunity like this again. There is a little estaminet right across the road from the drome there, and it won't take us a jiffy. We simply land there, get the cask, and be on our way again."

Kirby realized then that the man certainly knew what he was up to. Why, the old devil had figured the whole thing out to a T, figured out how he could smuggle a cask of Apremont wine back with him to England. Kirby seethed inwardly, and in his rage he unjustly condemned the whole British race. So this was the way they fought their wars! Went around looking as grave as churches, looking all business and efficiency, while in reality they spent their time chasing after liquor or skirts.

WITH much effort the Mosquito kept his voice restrained, kept reasoning patiently with the persistent colonel, while all the time that airdrome kept looming closer, assuming clearer shape and focus as the two De Havilands continued to drone on side by side.

"It would get us all in Dutch, sir. You know how it is. Besides, if we did put a cask of wine back here, where would you sit? There's not much room in this front cockpit; it isn't as big as yours."

"But it can be managed," the colonel insisted.

"And as for getting in trouble, certainly I shall take the full responsibility. Of course," he admitted, "I cannot order you to do it; it is not in the line of duty. But I can ask you as one sporting man to another." No longer was that high-hat aloofness in his tone now. He seemed to be coming down from his perch, warming up to Kirby. "Come, my good man, you Three Mosquitoes have a reputation of being gallant sportsmen. You see," he confided, mischievously, "I want this cask of wine for a little binge my colleagues and I are throwing after finishing up certain work. And I should certainly appreciate it if you would do me this little favor."

Kirby hesitated. The drome was getting closer and closer now, and he could clearly see the hangars, see the tiny, birdlike shapes of planes squatting here and there. In another moment the two De Havilands would be sweeping right overhead! of that field. Kirby must make up his mind. And somehow, he found himself weakening, giving in. After all, it would do no harm to humor this old codger. If the Englishman wanted to be a jackass, wanted to take time out for this nonsense, it was none of Kirby's affair. It would not affect him or his comrades, who were on leave anyway. And, all in all, it was wisest not to cross these high officers. They could make it hot for you if they lodged a grudge against you.

He shrugged, picked up the speaking tube once more.

"All right, sir. We'll do it, but I hope you'll keep your word about being responsible for it."

"Decent of you, old horse!" The Englishman was sincere in his warm gratitude. "I certainly shall take any blame there is."

Kirby turned once more to wave to his comrades. He waved the familiar signal, "Land," and pointed out the airdrome below and ahead. Carn and Travis were naturally astounded at the order. Kirby saw them staring at him from their cockpits, gaping incredulously. He shrugged again, and then signaled them to obey him and not ask questions now. And they obeyed him.

So it was that the American squadron quartered at Apremont received an unexpected visit that afternoon from two huge De Havilands, which came gliding down from the sunny blue, settled slowly and heavily on the tarmac, and rolled to a stop, side by side. Mechanics and pilots crowded around the visitors, who climbed from their cockpits, pushing up their goggles. A cry of joyous welcome rose from the crowd as they recognized their former buddies.

“Well, well!” It was Captain Lastry, the C.O. himself, who clapped Kirby on the back. “If it isn’t the Three Mosquitoes, come back to their old roost! What in the world brings you hell-fired buzzards here?”

The bewildered Carn and Travis were about to express the fact that they wished they knew, but Kirby, at an anxious glance from Colonel Haley-Shaw, spoke first.

“We’re all on leave,” he explained, judiciously. “Going to dear old blightly with Colonel Haley-Shaw here.” Instinctively the crowd stiffened a bit, as they learned that the fourth figure in flying togs, who stood by quietly, was a high officer. “We dropped down to give ourselves and our busses a rest,” Kirby pursued, “and also to—well, that’s none of your business.”

Colonel Haley-Shaw kept making signs for Kirby and his comrades to break away and follow him. This was not easy, however, for the crowd of pilots were milling around their old buddies, slapping their backs and shaking their hands. Finally the Mosquitoes got away, though it was only Captain Lastry’s terse reminder, “Men, remember you’re on duty and must stay on the drome,” that kept the eager bunch from following them.

Leaving their De Havilands idling, the Three Mosquitoes walked off the field with Colonel Haley-Shaw, and stepped onto the road which edged the drome. By this time Carn and Travis, gathering their information bit by bit, had been able to find out the reason for this mysterious landing, and the looks they gave Kirby made the latter wince. They were not at all pleased that he had submitted to this absurd whim of the British officer.

Sure enough, there was an estaminet right across the road, an estaminet which had not been there in the days when the Three Mosquitoes were with this outfit. Colonel Haley-Shaw led the trio into the musty old cafe, which was empty save for the bewhiskered French proprietor who bowed obsequiously from his counter, smiled his oily “customer’s” smile, and spoke in broken English.

“*Bon jour*,” Colonel Haley-Shaw said pleasantly. “I say, I’d like to take a forty-five gallon cask of your delightful Apremont wine. And,” he insisted, “give me the most aged stuff you have.”

The Frenchman was overjoyed.

“*Oui, oui, monsieur*,” he piped, eagerly. “To you weel I geeve ze oldest barrel in ze estableishment. You can come down to ze cellar wiz me and peek eet out yourself.”

The Englishman nodded, then grinned at the Three Mosquitoes.

“While I’m picking it out, my good men, you must have a nip on me.” And he ordered the Frenchman to give them a bottle of Apremont wine. Leaving them to drink this at the bar, the colonel followed the proprietor to the back of the store, where both disappeared down a flight of stairs.

The Three Mosquitoes were alone. And though the Englishman had bought them wine, they did not feel at all appeased. No longer forced to restrain themselves, they commenced to blow off steam in great quantities.

“I only did it to humor the crazy brass hat!” Kirby was saying, in self-defense. “As it is, I haven’t liked that bird from the start.”

“He certainly has one hell of a nerve,” Shorty Carn exploded, his round little face as red as a beet. “What kind of fools does he take us for, anyway? Making us come over here and stop off just to carry his damned wine for him! Why, it’s ridiculous!”

“Not exactly ridiculous,” Travis drawled thoughtfully, and his shrewd eyes narrowed. He lowered his voice, as if to make sure that he was not overheard. “Somehow, fellers, I still have that hunch of mine. There’s a peculiar smell to all this business, and it’s got me guessing.” He sipped at his wine. “And this wine he raves about,” he remarked, casually, “is rotten. It’s both sour and dirty.”

“Damned if it isn’t!” Kirby agreed. “But, of course, such things are just a matter of taste.”

“Hmm,” Travis mused. “And I suppose it is just a matter of taste to have a handy tape measure in one’s pocket. Or do all British colonels go around carrying tape measures?”

“By God, that’s right!” Shorty put in. “Say, do you think the old rascal actually planned this whole thing out way in advance?”

“Well, this business of our taking big planes—big enough to accommodate his wine—” Travis reminded him, significantly. “Of course,” he went on, unable to resist another dig at Kirby, “that might also be just a matter of taste.”

“But surely you don’t mean to say—” Kirby began, but Travis stopped him.

“I’m saying nothing—yet,” the wise Mosquito told him. “Except, it strikes me that if this brass hat is using us for some secret job, he ought to tell us, instead of trying to make saps out of us. But perhaps he has his reasons. I suppose the best thing to do is to play the game his way, ask no questions, and wait for

things to develop. And at that," he had to admit, with a wry smile, "I may be all wet. The man might just be a confounded fool who really takes this business of wangling a cask of wine to England seriously."

"That's my idea, and I'm the one who's flying with him," Kirby maintained. "But suppose he tries to get us to do some more crazy things like this. Next thing we know he'll be asking us to fly to Paris and pick up some skirt for him! Damn it, but I'm about fed up with his nonsense."

He broke off abruptly, and all three men started as they heard the voice of Colonel Haley-Shaw calling from the cellar.

"I say, will you Three Mosquitoes lend us a hand with this bloody cask?"

The three men responded with unusual alacrity, for all felt that unreasonable guilt that comes when one is talking behind a man's back, and the man suddenly makes himself heard. Silently they went to the stairway in the rear, and descended into a dark cellar where the air was damp and smelled of wine in the making. The bewhiskered French proprietor was holding up a candle, whose glow faintly revealed the stores of wine barrels which were piled up on all sides. The Englishman was standing, somewhat out of breath, over a large cask which he had out in the center of the room, a cask black with age.

"Lord!" the colonel gasped, "I never knew that forty-five gallons were so heavy!"

"We'll take it for you, sir," Kirby said. "Come on, guys." And he and his comrades started to seize the big wine barrel.

"Easy there," warned Colonel Haley-Shaw, anxiously. "That's an old cask and it might crack, you know. Please handle it gently. And don't overturn it; there are some bungs in the top and they might leak."

These finicky directions didn't please the Three Mosquitoes at all, but they complied. Carefully, they started to roll the big cask on its bottom, got it to the foot of the steps. It was heavy indeed; it took all their combined strength to support it. By the time they had hoisted and rolled it to the top of the stairs, they were sweating in their heavy teddy-bears, and fuming inwardly at the Englishman who did not help them at all but stood by, watching every move of that cask, and constantly warning them to be careful, to handle it gently and not overturn it.

Colonel Haley-Shaw paid the French proprietor, and then followed the Three Mosquitoes as they moved the barrel out onto the road. He dogged them

as they pushed and shoved it towards the flying field, and though they longed to simply turn the cask on its side and let it roll along easily, he made them keep it upright. He drove them like slaves, and they groaned and sweated and wondered why they didn't tell him to go to hell.

THE crowd of pilots and mechanics on the drome were astonished by the strange spectacle of the Three Mosquitoes lugging a big wine cask onto the field. They gathered around to stare, at first with awe, and then with hilarious mirth.

"What you got there, fellers?" Captain Lastry asked, and the mischievous twinkle in his eyes belied the innocence of his tone. "What in the world can it be?"

Kirby scowled at his murderously. "What does it look like?" he snapped, viciously. "Canned garlic?"

The pilots and mechanics roared with laughter. Naturally they took the whole thing as a great joke, typical of this gallant trio of aces. And they were so well occupied with appreciating the joke that none of them thought of lending a helping hand. Like Colonel Haley-Shaw, they simply dogged the three unhappy men who labored like horses to get their cask to the waiting De Havilands out on the tarmac.

"You guys aren't taking any chances of not enjoying your leave," some pilot remarked, merrily. "You must have heard how much wine costs in England. Economical, I'll say."

"Go fly a Camel," Travis spat at him, his eyes blazing.

"And don't forget to break your neck," Shorty Carn added, with vehement sincerity.

Finally they reached Kirby's De Haviland, and paused, panting and wiping the sweat from their faces. Fortunately, some of the other pilots and mechanics had the sense now to help them load that big cask into the plane. They had to remove the seat from the rear cockpit, and carefully hoist the barrel up and in. It fitted nicely enough, though there was an ominous ripping of canvas and a creaking of wood as it settled down into the cockpit.

"We had better tie it up," Colonel Haley-Shaw said, and asked for a rope. An obliging pilot brought it, and they trussed the big cask firmly into place. A word from Kirby, and Carn and Travis started for their own ship, wiping their brows again, and breathing their relief. But Kirby's troubles had just begun. He and the Englishman now began a furious struggle to crowd into the small front cockpit of the cask-laden plane, much to the gleeful amusement of the spectators.

"Maybe, sir," Kirby suggested, as politely as he could, "maybe it would be better if you sat with Carn in that other plane, where the rear cockpit will be large enough for the two of you."

"And leave the wine?" Colonel Haley-Shaw reproached him. "Why, my good fellow, certainly I want to fly with my wine."

Kirby bit his lip, and pulled down his goggles with a savage jerk which almost snapped them off. Furiously, he tried to get into a position where he could at least move the controls, while the Englishman pushed and crowded almost on top of him. Somehow they managed to get the safety strap around both of them, and then Kirby dismally waved the signal, groped blindly for the throttle, and pulled it open. The engine of his De Haviland roared deafeningly and the other D.H. joined in at once. Mechanics jerked away the wheel chocks and leaped aside.

Travis and Carn were off first, sweeping down the field. Kirby started his own plane slowly and reluctantly, but then, with sudden abandon, he let her ride. A hilarious cheer rose from the crowd of pilots and mechanics as that big De Haviland, with a wine cask protruding ridiculously from its rear cockpit, and two men sitting all over each other in its front, gathered speed and then actually left the ground, to climb clumsily after the other D.H.

The Apremont bunch waved cheerily after their departing buddies, although only Carn and Travis were able to wave back; Kirby had all he could do to move his hand on the stick and his feet on the rudder bars.

The men on the ground watched the two huge ships swing in beside one another, watched them move off towards the Channel, and saw them fade into tiny distant specks against the sunny blue. And Captain Lastry grinned and shook his head. "The Three Mosquitoes!" he murmured, with something akin to awe, "Still up to their old, devilish, air-splitting stunts!"

Now, a big De Haviland is not an easy ship to fly even under the most favorable circumstances. And to fly a big De Haviland with a man virtually sitting on your lap is a feat which even Kirby, despite all his skill and experience, was finding more and more trying. To begin with, the Englishman, instead of cooperating by sitting still, kept jerking his head around to look at his precious cask and make sure it was there; and every time he jerked, Kirby and the joystick were pushed to one side, and the D.H. wobbled ominously. Then, too, this plane was not constructed to carry a wine cask in

its rear cockpit. As a result, it was badly unbalanced, and Kirby had to fight with tooth and nail to keep it stabilized. No wonder, then, that Kirby's resentment against the British intelligence man kept growing, and that the Mosquito cursed himself for ever accepting this nonsensical enterprise. He cursed, and so did his two comrades, who were watching his ludicrous struggles from their plane with sympathy and anxiety.

By the time they reached the Channel, which lay calm and glistening in the sun, Kirby was telling himself that he had had just about enough of it. And by the time the two big planes had droned almost halfway across that stretch of water which separates two great nations, he was telling himself that the farce must end—and immediately. For now there was a real element of danger to the thing, an element that was becoming more and more serious.

The air above the Channel, like the water itself, is notable for its treacherous currents and pockets; and Kirby's ship, as if to spite him for misusing it, seemed actually to pick out all these danger spots and fly right into them. Unbalanced, and with its pilot unable to give it the control it required, it began to lurch and bump precipitously. Kirby's comrades, who were well able to take care of their own plane—for it was properly balanced and Travis had all the freedom of his own cockpit—watched their leader's erratic flight with growing alarm and apprehension. Way out over the water, flying big and heavy land planes, a forced landing would be fatal. The wheels of D.H. could not hope to alight on the surface of the sea, though the sea was as smooth as glass to-day. And though they could even pick out the distant shapes and smudges of ships, none were close enough to reassure them. Nor was the dim outline of chalk cliffs marking the English coast close enough to reassure them, either.

Kirby was just about to take some drastic action about this situation, when he noticed that the Englishman who crowded next to him was as worried as he was, if not more so. Colonel Haley-Shaw's goggled face had paled, and his lips were drawn up into a tight little line. He looked at Kirby anxiously, and Kirby thought that at least the old devil was sorry he had put the Mosquitoes to all this trouble. Perhaps he had not realized that it would be as bad as this.

The Englishman suddenly leaned closer to speak to his pilot. Speech was difficult now, without the tube, and with the engine roaring in full strength, as it struggled to pull the D.H. through the air currents and pockets. But Colonel Haley-Shaw managed to get his

lips right to the spot on Kirby's helmet which covered the Mosquito's ear, and he shouted at this spot loudly and clearly.

"I say, man, can't you stop this infernal bumping? I wouldn't mind it myself, but certainly if it keeps up my cask will fall out despite the ropes!" And that was the straw which broke the camel's back. Hours of suppressed resentment and disgust rose to the surface and blew off the lid. The color mounted to Kirby's face, and his eyes blazed. He forgot his rank.

"To hell with your stinking wine!" he bellowed savagely, in a voice which out-roared the engine itself. "This nonsense has gone too far—too damn far. I know you're my superior officer and all that, but damned if there's anything in the regulations saying I have to carry a cask of wine all over the lousy sky for you. I'm through, and I don't give a hoot in hell for the consequence."

Colonel Haley-Shaw had listened to this outburst at first with surprise, and then with genuine alarm. The Englishman seemed actually frightened by the Mosquito's tone.

"Come, come, my good man," he pleaded, as they lurched and shook over another bump. "If you are a sport—"

"If being a sport means being a jackass, then I'm no sport," Kirby retorted. "That damned cask is likely to pull us into a tailspin any minute, and we'll find ourselves in the Channel. It's got to go out, and you've got to climb back there where you belong. Yes," he repeated, with deadly conviction, "that wine goes out right away."

The Englishman looked even more alarmed at this. He seemed to be getting more and more agitated.

"But—but you can't throw my wine out," he protested, frantically, while from the other De Haviland Carn and Travis, sensing that something serious was going on by the look of these two men's goggled faces, watched keenly, alertly. "You can't!"

"Can't, eh?" Kirby taunted, defiantly. "We'll see about that. I'm going to cut those ropes and a half-roll will do the rest. That damned cask is going right into the Channel, and to hell with it." And he groped for his scout knife with his free hand, while with his other he struggled with the joystick, trying to hold the floundering plane to its course.

The Englishman, realizing that his pilot meant business, seemed almost on the verge of panic. "But you can't—you can't!" he kept stammering, desperately.

"Kindly move a little, so I have room to work!" Kirby said, as he managed to pull out the knife. "There's no use arguing: that wine's going out." "Stop!" the colonel barked suddenly.

IT WAS a new tone which Kirby now heard in his passenger's voice, a tone which instantly froze the Mosquito and put him back into his place. It was the tone of a stern high officer, giving a command. Of a sudden the Englishman had changed. Now, once more, he was the sober-faced, worried-looking colonel of British intelligence whom Kirby had first met. He leaned, to Kirby's ear, and his words came crisply, almost harshly.

"I see I cannot keep the secret from you any longer," he said. "I'm not quite the silly ass you take me for. Captain Kirby. I'm not in the habit of flying around with a bloody cask of wine." He paused a moment, but only so that his next words, which he rasped out with the terse directness of hammer blows, would have their desired effect. "There isn't wine in that cask!"

Kirby all but let his ship go into a spin. He stared bewildered, dazed.

"Isn't—wine?" he echoed, foolishly, in a voice too low to be audible in the engine's roar.

"In that cask," the Englishman's terse voice kept speaking into his ear, "are a mass of papers—papers of momentous importance. We are now secretly transporting these documents from France to England, and they must arrive at their destination before tonight. Now you see why I chose you three trustworthy men, why I put you through all this apparent nonsense. I am on a mission, and you are working for me, under my orders."

And Kirby felt like a little boy who has been spanked and put back into his place. So Travis' hunch had been right! What had seemed like a farce was in reality a serious drama, which already breathed of intrigue and danger. Yet, there were still puzzles.

"Why, sir, didn't you tell us this before?" the Mosquito wanted to know. "It certainly would have made things different!"

"My orders are that I am to keep this secret as closely guarded as possible," the colonel explained. "In case of any trouble, I should have told you the truth at once. But it seemed wisest, although I trusted you implicitly, to make you believe it was wine— if only for the psychological effect. Not knowing that it wasn't wine, you didn't betray anything to your former comrades at the Apremont drome, and we got through without attracting undue attention."

“And that Frenchman at the estaminet?”

“A secret operative of the French intelligence corps, naturally. He is representing France as I represent England in this stupendous transaction. And now,” he went on, “you see why you must manage to navigate this airplane somehow—must get over there.” He pointed to the chalk cliffs which, Kirby noticed with relief, were much closer now. “I cannot tell you just what these papers are, but I will say”—and there was no doubting the sincerity of his words—“that the fate of a nation—indeed, the tide of the war itself, rests largely on the safe delivery of this cask.”

Kirby nodded slowly, respectfully. And now that the carrying of that cask had become an important duty instead of a meaningless bit of tomfoolery, he found himself far more adequate to cope with the problem. He threw all his skill into holding his plane to its course, guiding it through the dangerous air channels. Very soon he was flying quite smoothly, and his two comrades, always keeping pace beside him, sighed their relief. The two big ships droned onwards, over the blue waters, until at last the coast line was creeping beneath them, and once more they were flying over the firm, reassuring earth—England.

It was then that Colonel Haley-Shaw sprung still another surprise. Leaning again to Kirby’s ear, he said, “Now listen, captain. As you may know, we secret agents make a practice of countermanding our orders for safety’s sake. I told your C.O. I was going to London. As a matter of fact, I am not. I merely told him that so that my true destination would not leak out, and so that no enemy agents would be on our track. I’m sorry that I shall have to take you three out of your way, but you will soon be free to go on your leave.

“These papers,” he continued, “must go to Kingsgate, on the North Sea. They are to be delivered to a certain Lord Wembley, who is really one of our chiefs, and who conducts his work from his own manor at Kingsgate. I shall direct you right to Wembley House, and we’ll find a place to land there. Now, if you’ll change your course, turn sharply to your right and just follow the coast line here in a northerly direction—”

Kirby did not deem it necessary to hesitate. Indeed, of all the things he had been asked to do, this was the only one which needed no further explaining; it was perfectly logical and within reason. Kirby did not relish the idea of going way out to Kingsgate before he and his comrades could get their London leave, but he was a soldier and he had to obey orders. So, once

more, he started to signal his comrades, though it was difficult to wave his arm with the Englishman crowded against him. He managed it, however, and he tried to tell Carn and Travis as much as he could by means of gestures.

Shorty could not seem to understand, and appeared surprised. But the wily Travis nodded tactily; evidently he had expected something like this, and was ready for the order to change their course.

Once more the two big planes banked in unison, straightened out, and were following the English coast line up towards the North Sea, towards Kingsgate. And as they roared on, Kirby asked himself why he felt so strangely uneasy, why a pall of doubt seemed to hang over him. Everything appeared to be in good order. Yet, somehow, he had the vague feeling that there were questions which still remained unanswered, questions he could not seem to put into any definite shape or outline. However—he shrugged—most likely everything would be explained in due time.

Wembley House was situated at the very edge of the sea. High up on the jutting cliffs it rose with its proud and stalwart tower, which in olden days had served as a lookout whence invaders coming in by sea could be spotted. For Wembley House was old, many centuries old. It was a venerable castle of gray stone, with ivy-covered walls and great leaded-glass windows protected by bars of iron.

Wembley Manor itself extended over many acres of ground. The mansion stood with its back and its tower to the sea, but with its impressive front looking out on an expansive stretch of lawns and gardens and woods. The whole estate of the obviously wealthy lord seemed almost a small country in itself. His ancient mansion was quite isolated. The nearest house was almost two miles away, and the nearest village four miles distant.

This, then, was the picturesque spot to which Colonel Haley-Shaw directed the Three Mosquitoes. And it was not yet dusk when they arrived. The sun was still bright when the two great De Havilands came swooping down, to land unceremoniously on Lord Wembley’s immaculate front lawn. It was a difficult landing, and Kirby was surprised that he was able to accomplish it, with the Englishman still crowded against him and that cask still tied in the rear cockpit.

As the two ships rolled to a stop almost at the doorstep of the ancient mansion, a figure emerged from the house and came out to meet them. Colonel Haley-Shaw waved to this figure, and called out a greeting. Meanwhile, the four men were climbing out

of their ships, which were left idling. All stretched and sighed, for the long, dreary flight had tired them.

The figure who had come to meet them proved to be a man somewhere in the fifties—a stern, thin personage, who leaned on a walking stick. He was dressed in tweeds, and as he reached the planes he screwed a monocle in his eye. And he peered, not at the men, but at that cask in the rear cockpit of Kirby's ship.

Colonel Haley-Shaw made short work of the formalities.

"Lord Wembley, these are the three gallant American flyers known as the Three Mosquitos, who have been good enough to fly me over from France." And he introduced each of the trio in turn.

Lord Wembley was all English hospitality and courtesy.

"Charmed, I'm sure," he said. "A pleasure, indeed." Then again he glanced at that cask. He chuckled, but somehow his voice didn't seem as casual as he intended it to sound. "Ah, I see you've brought some of that Apremont wine you've promised us, colonel."

The slightest trace of a shadow seemed to flicker over Colonel Haley-Shaw's face. But he recovered his composure instantly. He smiled, and then winked playfully at Kirby. "These Yankees are much shrewder than we take them to be, Lord Wembley. I found it necessary to inform their captain that there are precious papers in that cask, and that you are one of our chiefs." At this Carn and Travis both started, and stood blank with astonishment, while Lord Wembley frowned and stroked his chin. But Colonel Haley-Shaw went right on as if nothing unusual had passed. "I'm sure, however, that the Three Mosquitoes know how to keep an official secret of this kind. There is no need to worry about them."

Lord Wembley seemed satisfied now. Again he was the amiable English host. "I say, you flyers must be tired. You must come in and have tea with me." The Three Mosquitoes, who were not only tired but also quite hungry, accepted this invitation gratefully.

"But don't you want us to take that cask in first?" Kirby asked.

"No, no," Colonel Haley-Shaw waved him off. "You men have done more than your share. From now on you are on leave, and as soon as you are rested, you can fly right to London." He turned to Lord Wembley. "I'll attend to this cask. If you send some of your servants out, we'll bring it in straightway. I'll join you at tea when I'm through."

LORD WEMBLEY nodded, then invited the Three Mosquitoes to follow him. He led them to the huge doorway of the mansion, and the great oaken door was opened by a man servant. He was an enormous hulk of a fellow, this doorman, a burly giant with a red homely face. He stood very stiffly as Lord Wembley and his three guests, who carried their flying helmets in their hands, walked into the house.

The Three Mosquitoes could not help feeling awed by the impressive interior of this castle. The main entrance led them right into the great hall, where in feudal times the manorial lord had held his court. This was a vast room, whose high ceiling was supported by huge rafters. The wainscoted walls were hung with old armor, breast plates, muskets and swords, and here and there a tattered and faded banner. In the rear was a wide, winding staircase.

Yet, with all this grandeur, this sense of pageantry, the very vastness of the place gave it a peculiar atmosphere of gloom. The sun which streamed through the leaded-glass windows only lit up certain parts of the great hall; the rest was in shadow. There was a mustiness, a feeling of the dead past, as if ghosts of all those old feudal lords who had lived here still walked through their halls and chambers.

There were servants all about, a surprising number of them who came in and out. And somehow, they did not look like servants. Most of them were keen-eyed, alert fellows, who looked very earnest and thoughtful. But the Three Mosquitoes were not surprised at this. They had soon surmised that these men were not servants; they were agents working under Lord Wembley, in British intelligence. All save that burly doorman, who looked too stupid and savage to be an intelligence man. He was probably just a sergeant in arms here, who guarded that doorway against any enemy prowlers.

Lord Wembley led the Three Mosquitoes down through the great hall, and into another and much smaller room which adjoined it. This was a sort of anteroom, which the lord evidently used for his study. It was far more cheerful than the great hall, partly because it was well lighted by a great window which looked out on the sea. It was simply furnished, with antique chairs, a small table, and a few bookshelves.

As the Three Mosquitoes walked into this room, Lord Wembley very unobtrusively pulled together two heavy *portières* which closed them off from the great hall. Then, also very unobtrusively, he seated the three flyers with their backs to these closed curtains. He then

sat down opposite them, and pulled a bell. A butler answered, a tall, thin fellow with dark, brooding eyes. Lord Wembley sent him out for tea. The Englishman, meanwhile, passed cigarettes to his guests, and they lit up.

“Well, my good men,” Lord Wembley said, trying to start a light conversation, “how is the bloody war coming along? It’s hard for one to keep up with it these hectic days.”

Kirby smiled. “I’ll say it is.”

“Especially,” added Travis, thoughtfully, “when it comes to this intelligence work.”

Lord Wembley shot him a quick glance, then drew a long puff from his cigarette and exhaled it slowly from his nostrils.

“True, very true,” he conceded, frowning. “However, my work is not very thrilling, I assure you. I certainly wish I was young enough to go into active fighting, like the rest.” He sighed, and spoke with sudden, reminiscent sadness. “I lost both my sons in the Royal navy. Now I am quite alone in this world.”

Carn and Travers politely sympathized with him, but not Kirby. For the leader of the Three Mosquitoes, whose ears were keener than those of his comrades, had just heard a noise in the great hall behind him, a noise which was unmistakable. They were lugging in that cask. He strained his ears. It seemed as if they had just set it down now, right in that next room. Most likely they were going to open it. And somehow, perhaps just out of curiosity, Kirby wished he could witness the opening of that cask, wished he could see its contents for himself. But it was a vain and useless wish. Those curtains right behind him were closed, and it would be altogether too rude to turn around deliberately and try to look through them.

Carn and Travis were still holding a meaningless conversation with Lord Wembley, who was discussing the various battles of the war, the advance of modern warcraft, and a score of other things. Kirby did not even listen. His mind was on another track. If only he could see that cask! The idea obsessed him more and more.

Suddenly, to his surprise, he noticed that there was a tall mirror on the wall almost directly opposite him. Indeed, he had been seated right between this mirror and the closed curtain behind him. His comrades were spread out on either side.

Mirrors are peculiar things. At first sight they always attract attention, but when one has lived in a house with them for any length of time, the mirrors become an

ordinary part of the furniture, and one ceases to notice them at all. So it is that strangers will often come in and see things they were never meant to see just because of some inconspicuous mirror. And so it was that Kirby found that, by shifting his position in his big chair a trifle, he could clearly see the reflection of that curtain behind him. The curtain was closed—but like most curtains, it was not closed tightly. There was a narrow, uneven opening from top to bottom, where the two heavy *portières* met. And through this opening was a limited but fairly clear view of the vast hall back there.

Again Kirby began to shift, but tried to do it without attracting any attention. The lord did not seem to notice him, nor did his comrades. They were all talking and smoking as they waited for the tea.

What Kirby next saw could only be attributed to a stroke of luck—good or bad. Perhaps it was purely a coincidence which brought that wine cask right into his line of vision, where he could see it plainly in the mirror. They had brought it to the center of the great hall, and the light in the center of the hall was bright enough to reveal it in all its details. Furtively Kirby kept watching that mirror, at the same time puffing his cigarette, and now and then nodding at some remark of his comrades or Lord Wembley.

The cask was not yet opened. A group of servants were standing about it, as if waiting. Now and then Kirby caught a fleeting glimpse of Colonel Haley-Shaw, who also seemed to be waiting. The Mosquito watched. His heart was pounding. He felt a strange suspense.

And in the next moment the hair seemed to rise from his scalp, and his blood ran horribly cold. His mouth opened, and the cigarette dropped burning to the carpet. His comrades and Lord Wembley stared with amazement and alarm, but he did not notice them. He simply kept looking into that mirror with incredulous horror. An ashen pallor had come into his face, and in his eyes was the look of a man who has just seen a ghost.

The whole thing had taken place with horrible swiftness. It was just a matter of seconds. Very suddenly, very unexpectedly, that cask had opened—opened, it seemed, of its own accord, and without any outside help. There was a false top on the barrel, which was like a ‘hinged cover. It had simply popped open. And then the ghastly, hair-raising thing had happened.

Out of that cask, straight from that aged wine barrel, had emerged a man—a man palpably real and very much alive!

The sight of this man, which Kirby caught in the fleeting glimpse the mirror gave him, further heightened the weirdness, the supernatural horror of the whole business. For the man was humpbacked, dwarfed, and a wild mop of shaggy black hair shook on his head when he moved. He had jumped out of that barrel with the agility of a monkey, and for a moment he stood, stretching gratefully and taking long breaths. Then, swiftly, he slid out of Kirby's range of vision, and was gone.

KIRBY was so thunderstruck that, despite the watching eyes of Lord Wembley and his comrades, he couldn't help trembling in his chair. Dazedly, his mind flashed back over the past hours, saw the whole journey from France in lucid snatches. Again he could hear the smooth but concerned voice of Colonel Haley-Shaw, burning his ears with, "Handle it gently, men, don't overturn it. Keep it upright—easy now." Again he could see himself and his comrades sweating as they labored to lug the heavy cask. Obviously it had been weighted down, for its human contents could not possibly be as heavy as forty-five gallons of wine. And those bungs in the top—ventilation, of course!

Yes, thought Kirby, it all fitted together, dovetailed perfectly. The facts were clear and unmistakable. Unwittingly and blindly, he and his comrades had smuggled a man in that wine cask from France to England.

The anxious voice of Lord Wembley brought him back to his present situation with a shock. Vaguely, he heard the words, which seemed to drift to his ears from a great distance.

"My dear fellow, what ails you? You look quite pale! Are you ill?"

And Kirby was surprised when he heard his own voice replying, replying as if it were detached from the rest of himself. For, though his mind was still confused, his voice seemed to know just what to say.

"An old wound of mine," that voice explained. "I sometimes get these little attacks after a long flight. It's nothing at all. It's passing already."

Carn and Travis both jumped at this obvious lie. They looked at Kirby tensely, questioningly, as if trying to divine their leader's thoughts and learn what it was that had so upset him. But by this time Kirby was beginning to recover his composure. The shock had bowled him over for the moment, but now the effects of it were wearing off. Once more he became the keen, alert soldier; his brain cleared, and he began to think

calmly and logically. He was thankful now that he had not betrayed what he had seen to Lord Wembley. His first impulse had been to come out point-blank and demand an explanation. That would have been a foolish blunder. After all, he and his comrades were not supposed to know the true contents of that cask; the men here had tried deliberately to conceal it from them. They had lied to the Yankee flyers twice, and it stood to reason that they wouldn't hesitate to lie again.

Then, too, there was another aspect to the case, a dark, sinister aspect which made Kirby feel strangely tense and apprehensive. Somehow, this business didn't seem to be quite right, didn't seem to be altogether on the level. In fact, the more Kirby thought of it, the more shady it appeared. Why in hell, he asked himself, should a man be smuggled in a cask from one Allied country to another? Would any honest, self-respecting person have to resort to such a drastic method of concealment? Granted the man were sane, only a most desperate urge, a matter of life and death, could have persuaded him to be flown through the air while he huddled, virtually helpless, in a dark wine cask. Of course, Kirby realized, the ways of British intelligence were mysterious; they sometimes did things which, on the surface, looked strange and inexplicable.

His thoughts were interrupted by the arrival of the dark-eyed butler, who pushed in a tea wagon. Lord Wembley rubbed his hands together in satisfaction, and beamed hospitably at his guests.

"A dish of tea ought to brace you up, Captain Kirby," he said pleasantly.

But Kirby had already decided that, in view of his suspicions, he and his comrades were not going to drink any tea—or anything else in this house. In fact, he had concluded that there was only one thing for them to do. That was to get out of here as quickly as possible, fly to London according to their program, and there recount exactly what had taken place to British intelligence headquarters at Whitehall. The British authorities would know at once whether all was as it should be at Wembley House, and if it wasn't, they would know what to do about it. Fortunately, Kirby thought, Lord Wembley seemed ignorant that his guest had learned anything, and doubtless the Three Mosquitoes could get away from here unsuspected.

And so, even as the butler started to push the tea wagon around, Kirby jumped suddenly from his chair. He glanced at his wrist watch, and then out of the window, where the daylight was beginning to fade, and the great expanse of sea was turning from blue to gray.

"Five-thirty!" he exclaimed, as if in surprise. "Gosh, it's a good thing I thought of it." He addressed his puzzled comrades. "Say, fellers, do you realize it's starting to get dark already, and we'll never be able to find our way to London at night?"

They stared.

"But we can fly at night—" Shorty Carn blurted, before a look from Kirby stopped him.

"Not over this strange terrain," Kirby explained, hastily. "Especially with these D.H. jobs. Gosh," he shook his head, like a man who realizes that he has made a stupid mistake, "we never should have taken the time to come in here, Lord Wembley, though we certainly appreciate your kindness. I'm afraid we'll have to let the tea go, and beat it this minute."

Lord Wembley seemed so sincerely put out by this announcement that for a moment Kirby thought all his suspicions were ridiculous. The elderly Englishman rose from his chair.

"But you mustn't bolt like this, you know," he insisted, warmly, while the dark-eyed butler stood perplexed over the tea wagon. "Of course I don't want to detain you, but certainly after keeping you waiting so long I should feel like a blighter if you didn't have some tea and a bite."

Here, to Kirby's relief, Carn and Travis took his cue at last. They, too, jumped up.

"Captain Kirby's quite right," Travis drawled, in firm agreement. "We can't take any chances of flying in the dark. We must go immediately, Lord Wembley."

"But—but," Lord Wembley protested, almost nonplussed, "it won't take you a jiffy to gulp down some tea."

"Oh, but we couldn't think of just gulping it down," Shorty Carn now put in, and the lazy little man didn't have any trouble making his words ring sincere. "The whole idea of afternoon tea, as an Englishman like yourself will agree, is to sit around at leisure and sip it down slowly while you chew the rag. You can't enjoy it unless you have a little peace and repose. As a matter of fact," he smiled sheepishly, though now, being tired and hungry, it was hard to tell this lie, "none of us care for tea at all, but we liked the idea of coming into your picturesque house and having a chat with you."

Kirby had listened to this long oration with visible impatience. He was glad Carn was helping him out, but he had wished the little man would hurry.

"But look here," the persistent Lord Wembley now said, brightly. "Perhaps you would like something stronger than tea, something you can gulp down. I

have the most delicious Scotch—" They started to refuse, but he added quickly, "and rye that is superb."

Kirby shook his head. "Thanks again, Lord Wembley, but I'm afraid we'll have to turn that down, too. We never drink before going up. You see, we can't stand likker at all, and it would be dangerous. Now," he turned to his comrades, "let's get going, guys," and added, cryptically, "while the going's good."

Lord Wembley, seeing that there was nothing he could do to persuade his guests to remain, gave in at last. Still expressing his disappointment profusely, he dismissed the butler, and then pulled aside the dark *portières* which had closed the room off from the great hall.

BACK through that vast, gloomy room he escorted his three guests, and as they passed its center, Kirby could not help looking at the spot where, from the mirror, he had witnessed the hair-raising scene. There was no sign of the cask there now, nor of the man who had emerged from it. But, Kirby thought with a shiver, somewhere in this murky castle, somewhere under this ancient roof, must be that ugly hunchback. Perhaps even now he was watching the Three Mosquitoes as Lord Wembley led them out.

Before they reached the door, Colonel Haley-Shaw suddenly appeared from somewhere and approached them.

"What, leaving so soon?" he exclaimed, when they had told him. "I say, that's a bloody shame. Too bad you can't stay on a bit."

And he joined Lord Wembley in escorting them out through the door, past that burly, ugly-faced doorman, and out upon the lawn where the two big De Havilands still idled. The sky was red in the west, and day was fast waning. A chill damp breeze came up from the sea, bringing with it the tang of salt.

All this time Kirby had been burning to tell his comrades what he had seen, but he couldn't say a word, for Colonel Haley-Shaw and Lord Wembley stubbornly kept walking right along with the Three Mosquitoes. The two Englishmen clung to the trio until they had reached Kirby's De Haviland, whose rear cockpit was now empty, though its slight battered cowl gave evidence of the big cask that had been there. Here the group of men paused.

"Well," Colonel Haley-Shaw said, gratefully, "we are certainly indebted to you Yankee flyers for the valuable service you have done us. We knew we could

depend on you, though it was a most momentous issue. As I told you, the fate of a whole nation rested upon the safe delivery of that cask.”

Here Kirby almost betrayed himself, managing only by the sheerest effort to remain composed. The colonel went right on speaking, expressing his gratitude and wishing the Three Mosquitoes a pleasant leave. Lord Wembley joined in, and also had a lot to say. Kirby, anxious to inform his comrades and also to get out, waited with furious impatience.

At last the formalities were over, and Carn and Travis turned and started for their ship, which stood some distance on the other side of Kirby's. And as Kirby saw his comrades going off, he couldn't conceal his dismay, he wanted to tell them about that cask before they took off, wanted to get their views on the problem. A sudden idea occurred to him. Instead of hopping right into his own plane here, he turned suddenly on his heel.

“Pardon me a second,” he told the Englishmen. “I want to give those two buzzards their flying directions. Be right back.” And he rushed off after them. To his relief, Lord Wembley and the colonel did not follow, but stayed where they were beside Kirby's plane. Kirby stopped Carn and Travis just as they were reaching their own ship. The leader of the Mosquitoes did not have to worry about being overheard, for the motors were droning and the Englishmen were some distance away. Briefly, and in terse sentences, he told his comrades exactly what he had seen in that mirror. They were dumbfounded. And the shrewd, lanky Travis frowned, nodded slowly.

“You're right about going straight to intelligence in London,” he told Kirby, and his drawl was slower than ever. “I haven't liked this whole business from the start. In fact,” he went on, and never before had his stern face looked so lean and gaunt. “I'm thinking we'd better get the hell out of here damn quick. Let's go!”

The other two Mosquitoes did not hesitate. Kirby turned and hurried back towards his D.H., strapping his helmet as he ran. Carn and Travis climbed into their ship. Shorty this time taking the controls. A few more words with Colonel Haley-Shaw and Lord Wembley, and Kirby was at last in his cockpit. He jazzed his throttle, then waved the signal to Carn. The little man's engine roared its response, and his ship moved slowly forward. Kirby followed, off to the side and behind. The two Englishmen watched the ships roaring down the lawn into the wind. They waved a cheerful farewell to the flyers, and the Three

Mosquitoes judiciously waved back.

Slowly the huge planes gathered speed. Carn and Travis, having a head start, got into the air first. Kirby was still taxiing down the lawn, he saw the other ship rise from the ground, saw it nose upwards, start to climb—and then, with incredulous horror, saw it lurch like a wounded bird, stagger around for one crazy moment, and crash swiftly to earth in a breathless sideslip. Its great wings buckled and snapped as if they were the fragile wings of a butterfly. The huge plane rolled over slowly, and lay still—a twisted wreck.

It was only then that Kirby realized that the wreck had settled directly in his path. There it was, right in front of him, as he came roaring down the lawn, his wheels still on the ground. He was charging straight for it, and if his comrades were still alive in that ship he must smash them to bits! Madly, he tried to avoid the head-on collision. He tried to lift his ship enough to clear the wreck, but he lacked flying speed. He tried to veer, but his plane was too big and clumsy to respond in time. With the crashed D.H. looming right in front of his face, rushing towards him in a dizzying blur, he jammed his stick all the way forward, tried to force his nose into the ground. It was a last resort, not to save himself but to avoid tearing into Carn and Travis. But, as he jammed that stick forward, he felt a sudden snapping of wires, and the stick flapped limply and uselessly in his hand. His ship charged right on, and he just had time to turn off his ignition and throw his arms across his goggled face before the crash came.

A rending impact, a shivering smash, a ripping of fabric, the splintering of wood and the groan of twisting metal. Like a crazed monster Kirby's ship went tearing right through the rear fuselage of the wrecked D.H., spreading destruction and debris in its path. For a full thirty yards it dragged that other ship, before it finally came to a stop, and then it buried its nose in the wreckage and its tail lifted high in the air.

And Kirby was hanging out of his cockpit on his safety strap, shaken and bruised, but otherwise unhurt. The fact that the nose of his ship was of such rugged, heavy construction had saved him from being crushed to a pulp. But as he worked with shaking fingers to unfasten himself, his eyes fell with abject horror on the wreck he had made. God! He began to sob wildly, in heartrending agony, as he visioned the mangled bodies of his comrades which must be in that pile of twisted debris.

Dazedly he got out of his smashed ship and lowered himself to the ground. Dazedly he stood beside the

wreck. And dazedly he heard familiar voices shouting to him—from behind. He turned, looked, and at first he couldn't believe his eyes. But then a cry of frenzied joy broke from him.

There were his two comrades, Carn and Travis, both of them very much alive, and apparently as unhurt as he was! They had both gotten clear of their crashed D.H. just before Kirby's ship had come tearing into it. The Three Mosquitoes, by a stroke of incredible luck, had come through that gruesome catastrophe unscathed. No wonder they all looked at one another with awe, as if each couldn't quite believe that the others were real.

Meanwhile, Lord Wembley and Colonel Haley-Shaw, having witnessed the disaster, were hurrying over from the spot where the De Havilands had started, which was several hundred yards away. And now it seemed that the crash had roused the whole castle. Men began to pour out of the great doorway, until at least a dozen of those servants were moving down the lawn towards the scene of the disaster. It was twilight now. The sun had gone down, and it was steadily getting darker.

By this time Kirby had managed to find his voice, though it was hoarse and strangely unnatural.

"W-what—what in God's name happened?" he demanded of his comrades.

Shorty Carn shook his head bewilderedly.

"Damned if I know!" the stout little pilot exclaimed, with awe. "I got the bus off the ground, and everything seemed O.K. But when I jerked back the stick, the damned control wires just went to hell! Next thing I knew Trav was pulling me out, and we saw you ram our crate."

AS CARN spoke, a strange expression crept into Kirby's face. Quickly he recalled how his own wires had seemed to snap when he jammed his stick forward. With a sudden oath, he turned and leaped impetuously towards the wrecked ships. The crowd of men, with Colonel Haley-Shaw and Lord Wembley in their lead, were almost there now, drawing closer and closer. But the Three Mosquitoes didn't notice them. Swiftly and deftly, Kirby's hand was poking about the torn fabric and smashed skeleton woodwork. The other two watched him as he pulled out a broken, frayed piece of wire and exhibited it before them. The light was not very good, but when they leaned over, they could see what he was trying to show them.

"Filed!" Kirby's tone was flat. "We are damn lucky to be alive!"

Slowly the three men got to their feet, looking at

one another somberly.

"They must have been filed while we were in there with Lord Wembley," Travis drawled, thickly.

"Looks like somebody's trying to murder us," Kirby went on slowly, but with increasing emotion. "Trying to send us crashing to hell! Why? That's what I want to know."

It was at this critical juncture that Colonel Haley-Shaw and Lord Wembley arrived on the scene. Close behind them came the crowd of servants, who gathered around quietly to stare at the wreck. The lord and the colonel both seemed absolutely horrified by the catastrophe. Indeed, Wembley appeared so nonplussed he could not speak.

Colonel Haley-Shaw gasped out, "Good Lord, what has happened, my good men? What is the meaning of this bloody wreck?"

For just one moment Kirby was convinced by the naive innocence of the colonel's words. But only for one moment. Then he remembered all the lies and the deceit to which he and his comrades had been subjected. His face turned crimson, and on a furious impulse he wheeled upon the apparently shocked colonel, eyes blazing.

"Damn it, Colonel Haley-Shaw, but I think you know the meaning of it. You ought to—it happened right out here. Somebody's been trying to murder us and by God," he burst out ominously, "I'm going to find out the reason why."

The colonel did not bat an eyelash; his face merely registered mild surprise. Lord Wembley, however, began to shift restlessly, a dark frown on his forehead.

"I am afraid," Colonel Haley-Shaw said quietly, "that a most unfortunate accident has happened—yes, a most unfortunate accident."

"Accident, hell!" Kirby retorted furiously, and Shorty Carn swore, while the lanky Travis stood by in somber silence. "Those control wires were deliberately filed. There's been too damn much shady business going on since we started out with you, colonel, and now we want an explanation."

"I shall be glad to give you whatever explanation I can," was the surprising answer. "Yes," Colonel Haley-Shaw went on, in his bland tone, "I believe I can explain things somewhat. My explanation is simply—he made a casual flourish with his hand—"this!"

A scornful laugh broke from Lord Wembley, while the Three Mosquitoes stiffened, the blood draining from their faces. For Colonel Haley-Shaw's casual flourish had signified the dozen "servants," who had

closed in and were now surrounding the trio. And each of those dozen men held an ugly automatic, an automatic whose muzzle was trained unwaveringly on the three surprised flyers.

“Kindly throw up your hands,” Colonel Haley-Shaw commanded, and now there was something deadly in the very calmness of his voice. “Come, put them up. No, don’t try to reach for your guns!” This last in a higher pitch, as the three men, being soldiers and not willing to surrender so readily, tried to make a furtive move for their Colts. But something in the colonel’s frigid tone stopped them, told them at once that resistance would be fatal. Out here on this isolated manor, taken unawares and with odds so overwhelmingly against them, they were helpless—trapped. Indeed, the group of armed servants seemed eager to kill them.

Sullenly, they raised their hands above their heads, stood silent, scowling. Colonel Haley-Shaw began to search them with a deftness that could only have been acquired from experience. Lord Wembley, whose thin face had twisted into an expression of blighting malice, joined him in this task. Together they stripped the three men of their Colts, their maps, papers, and several other odds and ends, while the lord’s henchmen zealously kept the prisoners covered.

“Yes,” Colonel Haley-Shaw was saying, as he smiled his old tight-lipped smile, “it is, just as I told you, a most unfortunate accident. The accident is that you three men are still alive, instead of dead. The fellow who fixed your wires was perhaps a little too conscientious. He filed them too completely. Otherwise you would have gained altitude and crashed miles away from here, as we intended, instead of messing up our front lawn.”

At this Kirby could not choke back the hot flood of words which rose to his lips. “You dirty, lousy skunk!” he shouted, hoarsely. “So you’re not any British intelligence man after all. You’re just a dirty——”

“Silence, swine!” It was the scowling Lord Wembley who barked this command, speaking for the first time, and punctuating his words with a flourish of his own revolver, which he had just drawn.

“As a matter of fact,” Colonel Haley-Shaw told Kirby, coldly, “I am a British intelligence man.” The Three Mosquitoes stared at him, in fresh wonderment. “But that’s neither here nor there. I’ve wasted enough time answering your stupid questions. Now,” he ordered, “you will march as we direct you. And remember,” he warned ominously, “one false move

means death. Your lives are very cheap now, and I shouldn’t advise you to gamble on them. You are unarmed, and we have you thoroughly covered. Now—proceed!”

Silently, more bewildered than frightened, the Three Mosquitoes obeyed. They were marched right back to Wembley House, back through the huge doorway, and into the great hall. The vast room looked gloomier than ever, for as yet no lights had been turned on. The Three Mosquitoes were led to the center of the hall, and there they were halted, still under the close guard of those twelve henchmen. And as the three flyers stood there, waiting, wondering what was coming next, all felt a sudden shiver.

Out of nowhere it seemed or perhaps from some dark crevice of the room, emerged the hunchback. Like some phantom he materialized from the shadows, and came darting forward. He nodded to Colonel Haley-Shaw and Lord Wembley, and then he walked straight up to the Three Mosquitoes. And now Kirby really got a good look at the man he had glimpsed in the mirror.

At close range, the humpback was certainly not a pleasant sight. He was dwarfed to less than four feet in height, and his face, beneath the shaggy mop of black hair, was sallow and carved after a mean design. But though it was a repulsive face, with hollow cheeks and ugly, misshapen features, it was not by any means an uncourageous face. In fact, something about this repellent creature—perhaps it was his dark, intelligent eyes, which seemed to burn like live coals in their cadaverous sockets—something about him told the Three Mosquitoes that they were in the presence of a brave and daring man, however much nature might have blighted him.

The hunchback was extremely quick and agile in all his movements. As Kirby had noticed in the mirror, the man jumped about like a monkey. It was not nervousness, however—his ability to stay huddled up in a wine cask had proved that. It was purely surplus energy, bubbling over. The man seemed to be a human dynamo, a tiny bundle of concentrated power. He danced around before the Three Mosquitoes, looking up at them from his small stature, and studying them with his burning eyes.

Quite suddenly he spoke. His voice was high-pitched, almost falsetto, and the words came rapidly.

“So you have cheated death! I congratulate you. It is an accomplishment to cheat death.” His tone was sardonic, as if ‘his deformity had made him a

cynic. The ghostly flicker of a smile had crossed his cadaverous face. "My friends here were certainly anxious to do away with you quickly," and his glance went to Colonel Haley-Shaw and Lord Wembley, who stood by as if at attention. "As for me, I bear you no such grudge—and why should I? You saved my life. You didn't know it. If you had known it, you wouldn't have done it; but the fact remains that you saved my life. You enabled me to get here to carry out a most momentous task. Therefore, I am grateful. Therefore it grieves me, truly grieves me, that you three men must die."

The Three Mosquitoes started and felt something tightening about their hearts, as they listened to this grim death sentence, delivered quietly but with a certain, irrevocable finality.

"Yes, it grieves me," the hunchback went on, and now his tone became sneering in its acrid cynicism. "Look at you, big, strapping, healthy men!" His hand reached up to touch Kirby's broad, powerful chest, and Kirby could not help recoiling from that touch. "Perfect specimens of manhood! Heroes! Why should men like you die while I—" he laughed shrilly, but there was pain in his face as he jerked his thumb over his shoulder to indicate the blighting growth on his back, "I—a deformed, twisted thing—should go on living? Still, even a louse is privileged to live, so why not a spider? For that's what they call me—the 'Spider'! The Spider!" Suddenly his voice became savagely harsh, and his eyes blazed in terrible defiance. "Well, then, I shall be a Spider whose sting is death—death to my foes!"

THE crowd of men who held the Three Mosquitoes growled their approval, while the flyers themselves stared in speechless astonishment at the humpbacked creature before them. The Spider! Who had not heard of that grim nickname? It was the nickname of Germany's most notorious spy—the plague and dread of the Allied powers. The whole Allied intelligence system was after this man, but they had never been able to catch him; he seemed to bear a charmed life. Kirby and his comrades had heard many rumors of his wild, hairbreadth escapades, but they had not known that he was a hunchback. It was hard to believe that a dwarf could successfully be a spy; his very deformity would be a dead giveaway, would make it child's play to identify him. Why, it was dangerous enough for a normal man, who could make himself inconspicuous, to be a spy; but for a pronounced hunchback, it

seemed absolutely suicidal.

Yet here was the Spider, still roaming free, still uncaught. Kirby could not help admiring the fellow for his indomitable courage and ingenuity. But though he admired the hunchback, he reviled himself, for now he realized fully the awful thing he had done. He had not smuggled an ordinary man from France to England. He had smuggled over a notorious German spy, a spy who virtually had a price on his head! And now that he had learned the ghastly truth, it was too late. He and his comrades were helpless to do anything about it. They were trapped in this vast, gloomy castle—trapped and on the very brink of death.

"Ah, you recognize me," the hunchback was observing, shrewdly. "You recognize the ugly, sneaking, humpbacked Spider—the most repulsive man in the world, and yet a man more sought after than the handsomest idol of the public. Half the world is chasing me, but they shall never catch me. I can always defeat them. For while I have no body, I have this." He pointed to his head, which was, as a matter of fact, extraordinarily large for the body which supported it. "Brains!" he shouted shrilly, and rapped his skull almost savagely. "Brains, do you see? My brains against your brawn, against your broad chests and powerful muscles. Which can win but the brains? Even now you have played into my hands. Why? Because, with all your strength, you are stupid, dense, like the rest of mankind. You have flown into the Spider's web like guileless flies, or rather," he gave another of his ghostly, sardonic smiles, "I should say Mosquitoes. A most appropriate metaphor!"

It was at this juncture that the scowling Lord Wembley suddenly came over to the hunchback and spoke to him anxiously. The language he spoke was German. Travis was the only one of the Three Mosquitoes who could understand that tongue, but Kirby and Carn could not miss the awful import of Wembley's speech.

"Pardon, *mein Excellenz*," said the supposed English lord, "but we are wasting time. We have business to attend to and it is getting late. Let us kill these swine now and be done with them."

The hunchback flashed him an angry look, as if he resented this interruption. But then, suddenly convinced, the Spider nodded ominously.

"You are right," he replied, also in German. "They must die. But how? Let me decide." And he wheeled about and started pacing madly up and down the great hall, lost in thought. Up and down he marched, while the Three Mosquitoes, sensing with cold horror that

he was devising a means for their death, felt that their nerves would snap. Frantically they shifted, looked for some loophole, some tiny opportunity to make a break for it. But those dozen automatics were still trained unwaveringly upon them, and they knew that any attempt to escape would simply lead to a swifter and more sure annihilation. So, with their faces white, and their hearts pounding, they waited, waited while the agile Spider kept pacing.

It was a breathless and terrible moment. The silence which pervaded the great medieval hall was nerve-racking. The dozen armed servants stood motionless, concentrating on their job of covering the prisoners. Lord Wembley shifted impatiently, and Colonel Haley-Shaw glanced anxiously at his wrist watch. All waited, waited while the Spider paced. In the increasing darkness of the unlighted hall the hunchback seemed to have assumed an even more grotesque and spectral aspect, as he darted to and fro.

Abruptly, the Spider seemed to reach a decision. He stopped short, turned on his heel, and his shrill voice shattered the stillness of the vast hall. He rasped out an order, in German. And before the tense aviators knew what was happening, several of the huskiest servants had leaped forward, jumped on them. The Mosquitoes, prompted by that desperate instinct of self-preservation, struggled wildly but futilely as some sort of cloth covers were thrown over their heads. Helplessly and blindly they writhed and squirmed, while rough hands seized them, lifting them bodily.

Kirby, choking under the cloth which was drawn tightly over his face, felt himself being carried by his hands and feet. He grunted and cursed, and his body twisted, but it was to no avail. His bearers held him roughly, in a viselike grip. Where were they taking him, he wondered fearfully? And where would they take his two comrades? Were the three of them being borne to their execution like cattle to the slaughter house? What awful death awaited them?

He heard the slam of a door, and then he knew that he was being carried down some kind of a stairway. The steps must have been made of stone, for the feet of the men who carried him resounded mightily upon them. Down, down, down, they bore him. The air began to grow cold and damp. The dampness increased, as if they were getting closer to water. A sudden spasm of horror seized the Mosquito. God, were they going to drown him like a rat?

The sensation of downward progress lasted for several minutes. Finally it stopped, and again Kirby had

a sense of forward movement. This for a short period, and then the men seemed to pause with him. And in the next moment, with horrible unexpectedness, he felt the hold on his feet relax, felt his legs drop through some sort of opening. He was being lowered through this opening.

His feet groped instinctively for solid bottom, but found none. There was nothing but space beneath him. A giddy nausea overcame him, and his stomach seemed to drop from its place. God, he was being suspended by his hands over space! In a sick panic he struggled with all his might, kicked out wildly, and tried to grip tighter the hands which still held him up. But they were letting go now—those hands! They were pushing his own clutching fingers away. He cursed and yelled and made a last frantic effort to hold on. Then, with a cry of mortal terror, he dropped.

But his fall was surprisingly short. Almost instantly his feet contacted with something hard and solid and, being unprepared to meet the shock, they landed with an impact which made them bounce. And he sprawled heavily on a rough, hard surface, which bruised him painfully. Dazedly, with his bones aching, he clutched at the cloth which still covered his head. He tore it off.

He was in pitch darkness, and on a floor of stone, which was sprinkled with straw. The air was damp and stifling. He started to move, but at that moment some one seemed to leap on him from above, and he was knocked on his back and the breath was forced from his lungs. In a frenzy of desperation he struggled with his unseen assailant, punching and kicking savagely until, suddenly, he heard the man's frantic but drawling voice.

"Stop! Stop, for God's sake! It's only me—Travis!"

Kirby almost wept in relief. "Travis! You here, too!" The two men had now clumsily untangled themselves in the darkness. "But where's Shorty?"

"Here I am," came a plaintive voice from some other part of the blackness. "They dumped me in first, and I heard you guys fall. Just got this damn cover off my head."

"Well, I'll be a son of a gun!" Kirby exclaimed, and was so overjoyed he razzed the little man unmercifully. "And it took you all this time to get that cover off? By God, if you aren't as slow as ever, you lazy, goldbricking kiwi!"

And the Three Mosquitoes laughed in the face of their fearful predicament. No matter what terrible fate awaited them, they could meet it together, meet it as the brave, inseparable trio they were. Gratefully,

they huddled up close enough to feel one another's reassuring touch, for in the blackness they couldn't see each other at all. Never before had they felt their warm comradeship more fully than they did now in this dank, dark place.

"Where the hell are we, anyway?" Shorty's voice asked suddenly.

"We seem to be in some kind of a dungeon," Travis drawled. "But let's investigate. As long as we seem to be alone, and can move, we might as well do a little reconnoitering. Have either of you guys any matches? They took mine away when they searched me."

The other two didn't have any matches, either, so they had to do their work in the darkness. Getting to their feet, they cautiously started their tour of inspection, groping their way along one of the stone walls. They moved slowly, huddled close together. All were breathing heavily, and their nerves were on edge. There was no telling what they might meet as they groped about blindly in an unknown and pitch-black place. Furtively they followed along the stone walls, never getting out of one another's touch.

THE result of this furtive inspection, which was limited by the fact that they could not see, showed the place to be a fairly small cell of stone, rectangular in shape. There were no windows or doors of any kind, and how the place was ventilated was a mystery; though, as a matter of fact, the air was foul and dank. Evidently the door of the cell was somewhere in the ceiling, whence the Three Mosquitoes had been dropped in. They could not determine this fact, however. But they saw at once that escape was out of the question. Even a rat could not hope to escape from this impenetrable vault of stone.

"God, what a hell hole!" Kirby gasped, as the three men reached the spot where, to the best of their knowledge, they had started out. "Who'd ever think of building a room like this in his house?"

"These old castles are usually full of deep dungeons and secret passages," Travis drawled, and added with grim conviction, "I'll bet if this place could talk, it would tell us some awful stories about the strange and horrible deaths men used to meet here."

"Gosh, you don't think that'll happen to us, do you?" Kirby asked, experiencing a tight feeling around the collar.

"Well," said Travis, who was old and wise enough to look the facts in the face, and grin. "I'm afraid we'd have a hard time getting life insurance just now. That

Spider fellow didn't seem to be joking when he said we must—er—be put out of the way."

"I'll say he didn't!" Shorty put in, vehemently. "Man, but he gave me the creeps the way he danced up and down." And his voice rose shrilly to imitate the diabolical Spider. "Brains! Brains and brawn! I am a louse, but look at you!" And he reached out to touch Kirby's chest in the darkness. "You big strapping man, you! You specimen—"

"Cut it, man! For God's sake, cut it!" snapped Kirby, who had almost jumped out of his skin at the other's unexpected touch. "It's bad enough as it is. Let's cut out the gloom, and try to do something more useful with whatever time we have. For instance, let's try to figure this whole crazy business out. Now, do you think all these guys here are Jerries?"

"Seems so," Shorty conceded. "But what should a bunch of Jerries be doing in an old English castle like this?"

"They're not doing any good, that's sure," Kirby maintained, pursuing his line of thought. "They must have something pretty big up their sleeves, from what that hunchback said. The Spider had reasons for traveling over from France in that wine cask. But," he went on, in a puzzled tone, "I wonder why they specially picked on us—all three of us, too—for the job. I can't figure that out at all. What do you think, Trav?"

He addressed his lanky comrade simply because the latter had not spoken during this discussion; and being unable to see him in the blackness, Kirby wanted to make sure he was still here. It was a tense moment before Travis' drawling voice answered him, answered him soberly and flatly.

"I think that we're foolish to try to work out the mystery now. After all, what good will it do us to figure it out? We'd only feel more depressed, because we can't do a damned thing about it."

"God, if only we could get out of this black hole!" Kirby spoke madly, but his words fell futilely upon the deaf, impenetrable stone walls, which reechoed them with cruel irony. "Damn it," his voice shook with despair, "if only I hadn't fallen for that lousy Haley-Shaw's line of applesauce! We've gone and brought the Spider here, and we're partly responsible for whatever mischief he does."

"Might as well say our C.O. is responsible," Travis argued with him, sagely. "He trusted Haley-Shaw and told us to obey him. No, you can't put the blame on anybody; we've all been cleverly deceived and—Say,"

he broke off, with sudden alarm, “doesn’t it seem to be getting awfully close in here?”

“I’ve been noticing it,” Kirby agreed with him, tensely. “Seems we’ve been in here quite some time now. I wish they’d start doing whatever they intend to do, and get it over with.” An awful thought suddenly struck him, filling him with horror. “Good night, could it be that they’re going to suffocate us in here—that the air will keep giving out until—” he left the rest of that gruesome sentence unsaid.

“It’s stifling now,” Shorty’s voice put in. “I’m sweating all over. Say, I’m gonna take off these damned flying togs!”

“Good idea!” Travis drawled. “Funny we didn’t think of it sooner.”

In the darkness they clumsily scrambled out of their teddy-bears, which left them in their khaki ground uniforms. They threw their flying togs in heaps against the wall, and then, exhausted by the strain of these fearful moments, they sat down upon them, leaning back against the stones.

“Hell!” Kirby swore dismally. “And we thought we were going on leave.”

“Yeah,” Shorty tried to jest, but his tone lacked mirth. “I think you were the guy who said that England was too damned peaceful, that nothing ever happens here—no excitement.”

Travis gave a rueful laugh. “Poor Shorty! You were looking forward to your peace and repose.”

“Well,” Shorty persisted in trying to crack wise, “I sorta think I’ll be getting some permanent peace and repose, the way things look.”

Thus they went on, trying to keep up their courage by mirthless, pathetic jests, while they sat in the stifling blackness and waited—waited for they knew not what. Time dragged, and the suspense became more and more nerve-racking. They ran out of subjects for conversation, and they fell into a silence—a somber, brooding silence which finally grew so unendurable that Kirby burst out frantically.

“For God’s sake, somebody say something!” He paused, as an idea occurred to him. “I know what—let’s sing.” And in a slightly husky voice, he commenced that rollicking anthem of the flying corps.

*“Some go to war for trouble,  
Some go to war for a spree.”*

Here Shorty, falling into the spirit, joined him, harmonizing somewhat discordantly. And the two sang while Travis remained silent, for Travis had no ear

for music, and rather than talk the words he preferred to” sit back and listen.

*“But your life is as safe as a bubble,  
When you fight in the air like we, like we,  
When you fight in the air like we!”*

They grew bolder and unrestrained as they went into the chorus. Their voices rose lustily, as if to defy the gloomy blackness around them. It was a strange scene—these two men shouting out the rollicking song of their service in that dank, subterranean vault, while their comrade listened, silent, thoughtful.

*“Oh, the air force, the air force,  
We sure are a jolly good lot.  
We binge all night, and we’re always tight,  
That is—except when we’re not.  
And we never work, and we fight no more  
Than twenty-five hours out of twenty-four,  
With our feet on the ceiling instead of the floor,  
Oh yes, it’s a jolly good life!”*

By the time they reached the third stanza, they were in fine fettle, going at it with great gusto.

*“But when Jerry’s tracer finds its mark,  
It’s not such fun you’ll agree,  
’Cause your lights go out, and its—”*

They broke off, as if a gag had been thrust into their mouths. Inexorably, that good-humored and trivial song had brought them right back to their present predicament. Their spirits were crushed, and the enthusiasm flowed out of them like water pouring from a bottle. And Travis, Travis who had been thinking all this while, now spoke out the unfinished words of the song. And the fact that he had to speak instead of sing these words gave them an even gloomier significance.

*“Cause your lights go out, and it’s dark, quite dark,  
When you fight in the air like---”*

“God!” Shorty interrupted in a shaking voice. “It is dark in here! And the air’s getting worse and—hell!” A strangled sob rose from him in the blackness, and the sound of it seemed to set Kirby on fire. A savage fury seized the leader of the Mosquitos, and they could hear him leaping madly to his feet.

“Damn them!” he almost shrieked. “Damn their lousy tactics! Why must they keep us waiting like this in a black, stinking dump? It’s inhuman! It’s more than a man can stand. If only we knew just when it was coming, it wouldn’t be so bad. But this way, when it might come any minute, or we might have to wait

all night, it's enough to get you crazy. I tell you, it's—” He choked and they could almost hear him shaking his fists in the darkness. “God damn it!” he ranted, with wild hysteria. “I won't stand for it, I won't go through—”

“Steady, old man.” It was the voice of the firm, wise Travis which rose in the darkness to soothe him. “No use letting it get us. We've got to face the music.”

KIRBY suddenly felt ashamed for his outburst; suddenly remembered that he was the leader of his men and that he must keep his nerve. Resignedly he sat down on his flying togs again, leaned back tiredly against the jagged, stone wall. The nerve-racking vigil recommenced. Again a silence descended upon the trio, a long despairing silence unrelieved by even the smoke of a cigarette. If only they had a short butt—a puff or two; if only they could find something to do, anything to forget the blackness, the stifling closeness. Time kept passing—that awful passage of time which at any minute might mean the end for them. They had no way of measuring this time, no way of keeping track of it. Was it an hour? Two hours? Certainly by now it must be night.

“God, what's that?”

The hushed words came from Travis like a gasp, a gasp which jerked the straining nerve strings of the other two men and brought them bolt upright. They sat rigid, frozen, listening with ears horribly alert. Almost instantly they heard it—a soft, insistent grating noise, as of stone rubbing against stone. It was coming from above, from the ceiling, it seemed. The three men jumped to their feet, every muscle taut. Their eyes strained to pierce the void of blackness, staring up in the direction of the sound. The grating noise continued, grew louder, jarring. For a moment they could see nothing.

Then, in the middle of that ceiling appeared a large square of grayish light. Dimly it stood out from the blackness of the cell, as if there were really no light up there, but just lighter darkness. Nevertheless, the Three Mosquitoes, whose eyes were accustomed to the blackness, could see that lighter patch clearly, vividly. At once they realized what it was. It was an opening which had just been uncovered right in the center of the ceiling; doubtless the same opening through which they had been dropped. But by whom had it been uncovered now? Who was up there? Fearful, apprehensive, the three flyers stood close to their wall, staring at that dim opening with awful fascination.

As they stared, a cold shiver went tingling up their spines, and their hearts jumped. For, over the edge of that opening, making a silhouette against the gray, there appeared the massive head and shoulders of a man. A man who peered down into the black cell, as he lay on his stomach above the opening. The Three Mosquitoes could not see his face, but they could see his eyes, which seemed to gleam in the darkness with maniacal ferocity. Somewhere, some place in this very house, Kirby knew he had seen this massive, savage-eyed man. Where? He had no time to refresh his memory. For at this moment the man's arm suddenly reached down through the opening, and something hashed in his hand. A revolver! The hand was poking into the darkness, and now it seemed to be groping, searching.

Then the Three Mosquitoes realized, and the blood froze within him. This man had come to assassinate them. This was the death which the hunchback had devised for them. A silent, sneaking assassin, who came to plug them in the darkness from a hole in the ceiling, where they could not get at him to defend themselves.

Weak with horror and terror, the three men shrank back against the wall of the cell, huddling together, clutching each other's clothes in a frenzy, daring not to move. They knew at once that they were utterly helpless. They were trapped like so many rats. True, the man up in the ceiling did not seem to have any light, which was strange, for with a light he could ferret them out at once. But sooner or later he must find them. The cell was small. And if he could not find them with his eyes, he would find them with his ears. If they made so much as a tiny move he would hear—and could shoot them in their tracks.

Even now he seemed to be listening for them like a beast listens for its prey. His revolver kept groping, flickering in the darkness up there. His eyes, gleaming murderously now, lit up by the fanatical desire to kill, roved about, trying to pierce down through the blackness. And there were times, agonizing moments, when those eyes happened to peer in the direction of the Three Mosquitoes, and their gleam sent a chill stab through the men's hearts. Frantically, the three helpless flyers pinched one another, as if to warn each other to hold still, to remain motionless. Backed as far against the wall as they could get, they stood like statues. But they could not keep their breaths from panting—panting so heavily that they felt certain the assassin up in the ceiling must hear.

Suddenly a sound came from that silhouetted

figure up in the opening. It was a harsh, snarling sound that pierced through the tense stillness of the cell and jangled horribly upon the eardrums of the three motionless flyers below. The man was speaking words in good English and good German, but his speech was the confused, almost incoherent speech of a madman, a raving maniac.

"Hiding from me, yes, *verdammte schwein?*" he snarled but, savagely. "Pigs, you heard me coming! I did not catch you moving, *nein?*" He paused, listening. The three men did not stir. The fact that he was still unable to spot them seemed to fill the assassin with demoniac fury. "*Gott*, I will find you," he roared. "I, *grosser* Emil, big Emil, can find you in the dark! I don't need some light, see? I can aim; right through the hearts I will shoot you down like rats! Like rats!" he repeated, and cackled insanely. And he gestured with his revolver, as if motioning them to come out. "*Kom heraus, rats!*" he urged. "*Kom heraus, rats!*"

The three men below felt their nerves snapping. Sweat poured down their faces in the darkness, and Kirby felt his knees shaking beneath him, giving. God, what madman was this who had been sent to slaughter them?

"*Kom heraus, rats!*" the fiend in the ceiling kept repeating, over and over. "*Kom heraus, rats!*"

And then it came—that tortured gasp from the throat of Shorty Carn, who could stand the strain no longer. Vainly, he tried to smother the give-away sound, to stifle it before it escaped his lips. But it came, and it struck terror into him and his comrades. For, almost instantly those gleaming eyes seemed to stare straight down at them, and the revolver whipped about, aimed in their direction.

"Do I hear you, yes?" The gleaming eyes seemed to be straining from their sockets now, boring down through the blackness. Futilely, the three men tried to shrink back further against the wall, their bodies pushing against those relentless, unyielding stones. Dark as it was, they had the awful feeling that they were seen now, that the fiend overhead was looking straight at them. "Are you over there, by that wall? How many are over there? One, two, all three?" His voice rose with shrill excitement. "Pigs! We shall see."

And his gun spat! A crashing report which reverberated throughout the stone-vaulted cell, a spurt of livid flame which leaped right towards the Three Mosquitoes! Prompted by soldiers' instinct, they ducked as they heard the bullet ricochet from the wall, terribly close. The demon had made them jump. He had located them.

"So you are there!" he almost screamed in his savage triumph. Again his gun crashed and blazed. This time Travis almost got it; the bullet actually grazed his cheek. God, but that fiend could shoot with deadly accuracy! He knew where the three men were now, and he would simply blaze away until he annihilated them. They were going to get it—going to get it in another moment, another second.

Kirby scarcely knew what he was doing. His wits had suddenly become abnormally clear. His brain thought with lightning speed, transmitted the message to his muscles, and his muscles simply obeyed. All in that last breathless moment he had stopped to pick up one of the flying suits on the floor. All in a flash he had brought back his arm with it. And, with all his strength, he hurled that teddy-bear out across the dark cell. The heavy suit struck the wall opposite—struck it audibly, making a loud, swishing sound as it slid down to the floor.

The fiend in the ceiling heard it just as Kirby had meant him to hear it. He mistook its meaning just as Kirby had hoped he would mistake it. A snarl of surprise broke from him.

"So! A pig over there, trying to jump?" he bellowed. And he turned his attention from the wall where the Three Mosquitos huddled to the wall opposite, whence the sound had come. Madly, he started blazing away towards that part of the darkness, sending a volley of shots at what he believed to be one of the Mosquitoes. And while he was thus diverted, Kirby acted.

WHILE Carn and Travis were still ignorant of what was happening, their leader, in one stealthy leap, was out in the center of the floor, directly under the opening through which the assassin leaned. And while the killer was still blazing away at the blank wall, Kirby crouched, and his muscles tensed like springs. The Mosquito's eyes fixed themselves on the flashing, blazing gun almost ten feet above. He rallied every ounce of his strength and took one, long breath.

Like a jack-in-the-box he leaped straight upwards, straight towards that revolver. And as he leaped, his hands clutched out, to catch or miss. It was a desperate measure of a desperate man. If it failed, it meant certain death, for the assassin would then hear and act quickly. But if it worked—

It did work! Strength and skill, and perhaps a dash of luck, brought Kirby's upraised hands right to their objective. At the top of his jump he clutched that gun by its scorching barrel and, ignoring the burning pain

of it, held onto it with a convulsive, leechlike grip as he fell downwards. The total unexpectedness of the thing, as well as the powerful momentum of Kirby's leap, served to jerk that pistol right out of the hand that fired it. The surprised assassin let out a wild roar, even as Kirby, gun in hand, dropped back to the floor of the cell and tried frantically to land on his feet, to keep his balance. But due to the darkness, he failed.

He tripped, toppled over, and barely managed to keep hold of the gun as he sprawled heavily on his belly. And the man in the ceiling, sensing his own danger now that he had been disarmed, was moving away from that opening as fast as his clumsy body permitted. In another moment, Kirby knew, the hole would be covered—the cell closed. Furiously the Mosquito rolled over on his back, while his fingers sought to twist the pistol, a large automatic, into the proper position. Dimly, in the grayish light of the opening above, he glimpsed the silhouette of the assassin's head, which was moving swiftly away. And Kirby jerked up that gun even as he rolled over, jerked it up, aimed and fired.

The gun vibrated and leaped in his hand as it blazed forth. A choking noise broke from the throat of the demon in the ceiling, a noise which ended in a horrible, rattling gasp. All at once the man's hold on the flooring above seemed to relax, His head and shoulders lurched right through the opening, and dragged the rest of his massive body with them. Wildly, Kirby scrambled to get out of the way as the giant came hurtling down into the black cell. There was a violent thud as the man crashed to the stone floor, then silence.

All this had been a matter of breathless seconds, much swifter than any telling of it could be. Indeed, until now, Carn and Travis had still remained over by that wall. They had been at first confused, then dumbfounded, by the mysterious things which had happened after they heard Kirby jump from their midst. Not until they saw the assassin fall, heard him drop, did they come rushing out, stumbling through the blackness towards the center of the cell, where they heard their leader's dazed, tense voice.

"Dead!" Kirby almost whispered. "I got him!"

"God, how did you ever do it?" Shorty gasped, incredulously.

A grim laugh broke from Kirby. "Brawn," he said laconically. "Just brawn!"

For a moment the three stood there, silent, tense, with the body lying close to their feet in the blackness.

They looked up towards the opening in the ceiling, listening. If somebody else should be up there—if that opening should close on them again!

The thought stirred Kirby savagely to action. He spoke with feverish impatience. "We've gotta try to get out of this dump while the getting's good," he whispered. "I don't know where that opening up there leads, but we've gotta try to get through it. At least," he fingered his newly acquired automatic almost affectionately, "we've got a gun now."

Getting out of the black cell proved to be a comparatively simple task, the only difficulty being that they had to work under great tension, under the constant fear that somebody would come. First Kirby and Carn boosted Travis up to the opening, and when the lanky man had climbed through, he leaned down, told them all was clear, and helped hoist up Shorty, whom Kirby gave a lift. Finally both Travis and Carn, taking off one of their Sam Browne belts and lowering it, pulled Kirby, the heaviest of the lot, through the opening. Their flying togs they left below in the cell; they would only be in the way.

The Three Mosquitoes now found themselves in a murky, low-ceilinged corridor, with the opening of the cell below yawning at their feet. It was quite dark here, but it was so much lighter than the cell itself that the three could see clearly. The grayish illumination, they soon discovered, was moonlight. It was coming from a barred window at the near end of this corridor.

In the dim, eerie light the three men stood for a moment, listening. No one here. But the shadows throughout the murky corridor wrought havoc with their imaginations. Furtively they tiptoed over to that near-by window, which was quite low. They examined it carefully and tried the bars with all their strength. It was hopeless. The bars were imperturbably solid; they wouldn't yield the slightest bit. Helplessly the three men looked through them, out into the clear night. The window was evidently cut in the side of a steep cliff, far beneath the mansion itself. The Mosquitoes were looking right out upon the sea, which lay calm and glistening under the full, bright moon and a myriad of stars.

They left the window and went back to the opening of the cell. They saw now how the opening had been uncovered. Close by lay a huge, stone slab, with an iron-ringed handle on its top surface. Judiciously, the three men lifted this heavy block back into the hole, thus entombing the dead assassin in the vault below.

"And so," Travis whispered solemnly, as if

pronouncing a burial service, "Wembley House is now minus one husky doorman."

"By God, that's who it was!" Kirby suddenly remembered. "I knew we had seen that bird before. Yes, they're minus one doorman, and we're plus one nice, forty-five automatic. Now listen, guys." Once more he became the capable leader of his men, as he whispered out his instructions. "We must try to get out of this place and find help, so we can round up these Jerries. The way things look, it isn't going to be easy. We'll just have to snoop around until we find some way out. And whatever happens," he warned, "let's all try to stick together. We're just three men and a gun, and we can't do much. If they separate us, we're licked sure. But if we keep together, at least one of us might break away while the others fight. Agreed?"

Carn and Travis nodded tacitly. Then, with hearts pounding hopefully, they set forth. This end of the passage being closed by the barred window, they started in the opposite direction. Stealthily, they moved in single file through the murky corridor, with Kirby leading, keeping his automatic drawn and ready. On, on they crept, jumping at every shadow, wincing fearfully as their heads brushed through cobwebs. For several minutes the corridor seemed to be leading them nowhere. But then, with startling suddenness, the passage terminated in a narrow stairway which ascended steeply.

The stone steps were dimly revealed in the fitful moonlight coming from the other end of the corridor. The stairway seemed deserted. They decided to chance it, figuring that they must have been brought down by this route, and it might lead them out. Besides, it was the only way they could go. So, with Kirby still in the lead, they began to climb the narrow steps cautiously, trying frantically to keep their shoes from resounding on the stones. Up they moved, with painstaking slowness. They reached a landing, and there found only another flight of stairs. And after this another, and still another. God, how high were they going to climb? Was there no end to these steps?

There was an end. Abruptly they emerged in another dark corridor. They followed it tentatively, groping their way along. And as they rounded a bend they saw, just a few yards ahead of them, a slanting beam of bright light. It seemed to be coming from a horizontal slit in the wall of the passage. They decided to investigate. More cautious than ever, they moved on towards that gleam. They had almost reached it, were coming right up to it, when they stopped short,

tensing from head to foot.

Voices! Voices which were alarmingly close, and yet they did not seem to be within this passage. They must be coming from without, outside that chink in the wall. The three men groped on a little further, Kirby gripping his revolver tightly. They reached the horizontal slit in the wall and found it to be a long but narrow crack, just about on the level with their shoulders. Furtively Kirby stole up to it, stooped a little, and put his eyes to the slit.

He almost gasped in his astonishment, for he found himself looking right into the great hall of Wembley House, looking in from the rear of the vast room, which meant that this passage must be underneath the great, winding staircase. And the scene which Kirby saw in that hall made his surprise all the greater.

NO LONGER did that vast, medieval room look so dark and gloomy. It was brilliantly lighted now, by two great chandeliers which hung from the ceiling. In the bright illumination, the old, armor-hung walls looked pleasantly mellowed, and the room seemed to have taken on an atmosphere of warmth and good cheer. And good cheer there was! For in the center of the hall, at a long wooden table, some twenty-odd men sat and made merry at a banquet, a joyous fete. Their voices rose loud with laughter, and mingled with the clink of glasses and the popping of corks. The table itself was laden with tempting, steaming viands which brought a pang of acute hunger to Kirby's stomach and made his mouth water, despite the tenseness of his situation. Gosh, but he would have liked to get a bite of that big roast beef there, or a slice of that cake, or even just a glass of that wine.

At the head of this festive table, in the place of honor, looking very small but very important, his dark eyes burning with contentment and satisfaction, sat the Spider. There he sat, eating with that nervous rapidity which is so often the habit of thinking men, wiping his lips with a napkin which was tucked ludicrously under his chin. And on his right, facing Kirby's peephole, was the quiet but smiling Colonel Haley-Shaw, while on the left of the hunchback Kirby could just see the back of Lord Wembley. The Mosquito recognized several of the alleged servants of the house in the other diners, but there were some he had not seen before. Two or three men waited on the table, while two more stood at the great, oaken door of the hall as if on guard. Curtains had been drawn across the large, barred windows.

All this Kirby caught in one swift, comprehensive glance, as he peeked through that chink in the wall. And in the next moment he was tugging silently but excitedly at his comrades' tunics, pulling them towards him. The three men crowded to that slit, managing to get into a position where they could all look through.

"Hear 'em talking, Trav?" Kirby whispered in the lanky man's ear. "It's Dutch, isn't it?"

"Yes," breathed Travis, who knew German perfectly. "But they're all talking at once; I can't make out what they're saying."

"Well, look here," came Kirby's hushed instructions. "As long as we're here, we'd better listen. We may find out something. If nothing else, we might learn the way out of this place. You just keep your ears open, Trav, and tell us whatever you hear."

Travis agreed, and settled himself behind that slit, watching the men at the banquet table and straining his ears to catch their words. The other two Mosquitoes stayed behind him, now and then bending to take a peep. Kirby kept his gun in hand all the time.

For several minutes Travis had nothing to report. But then, at last, he turned and whispered. "They've been spilling a lot of words about a victory dinner. Guess that's what this is supposed to be."

A strange thrill passed through Kirby and Shorty at this announcement. A victory dinner! Well did they know what that meant! The Germans, methodical people that they were, had a habit of celebrating their victories just before they set out to accomplish them. It was something like the Indian war dance. The purpose was to build up morale, to so instill the men with the idea of certain success that they took it for granted, and had the battle won morally before they went into it. But why under the sun should there be a German victory dinner in this quiet, old English castle, so far removed from the field of war? It seemed incongruous, and it filled the Three Mosquitoes with wonderment and awe. Fascinated now, tensely curious to learn more, they held their posts at that chink in the wall, with Travis keeping his ears open.

"It's nine o'clock," was the lanky man's next whispered report. "And it seems something's going to happen at eleven-thirty; the feller who pulled out his watch said they had just two and a half more hours to waste."

"Gosh, what the devil are they going to pull off?" Shorty asked, breathlessly.

"Don't know," Travis replied, as he resumed listening.

Thus it went on. From time to time Travis managed to glean a few hints from the snatches of conversation

he picked up, but there was nothing direct, nothing that brought to light the baffling mysteries which the Three Mosquitoes were burning to know. The men at the table seemed too busy eating and drinking to think of business. They spoke only of trivial things, and told jokes. Warmed by the liquor, they kept growing more and more merry. Their laughter became more boisterous, their voices louder and unrestrained.

But the Three Mosquitoes were beginning to despair of learning anything vital. Indeed, they were almost ready to leave that chink in the wall and resume their attempt to get out of the house when, suddenly, they saw something through that crack which once more made them tensely alert, expectant.

Abruptly the smiling Colonel Haley-Shaw was rising from his chair. He stood over the table, and he tinkled loudly on a glass. Instantly the boisterous voices of the other men died down, until an expectant hush had fallen over the vast hall. All the diners, including the hunchback, looked up from their places listening. And Travis, from his chink, listened, too, while his comrades waited with tense impatience.

"*Meine freunde*—" In the silence the supposed British intelligence man's voice, speaking the highest of high German, rang out clearly, resonantly. "My friends, now that we all have had time to enjoy the excellent dinner our host has given us, let me propose a toast that I know has been on more lips than mine this evening." A murmur of warm agreement rose from the table. "A toast, gentlemen," he held his glass aloft, "a toast to our great leader, the greatest, the most clever, and the most gallant agent in our emperor's intelligence service. I shall address him, not by the unpleasant sobriquet which is known and feared among our cursed enemies, but by his rightful title—Baron Gustav Friedrich von Schulenberg."

The announcement of this name was all but drowned out in the thunderous cheer which rose from the men, who jumped to their feet. And the very rafters of the great hall shook with the mighty "*Hochs!*" and "*Heils!*" as all drank to the scrawny hunchback who sat at the head of the table, smiling at them half sardonically, half amusedly.

"Look at him!" Kirby whispered to his comrades, after Travis had explained. "You'd think he were God Almighty the way he sits there and takes it all in."

"Hush!" Travis warned him, for now, in the midst of the wild acclaim, the Spider was on his feet, holding up a hand for silence. The hunchback's shrill, staccato voice rose above the cheers.

"Gentlemen," he began. "Gentlemen— Silence, please!" He banged his fist on the table, until at last the noise began to subside, and he had the floor. "A most unpleasant task," he observed, "to silence the cheers for oneself. I certainly appreciate this touching tribute, especially since it comes from so gallant a comrade—a comrade who is responsible for my presence here to-night. The least I can do is to propose a return toast to him. And so," he went on, holding up his glass, "let us drink to a man who is not only esteemed by ourselves, but is also esteemed by the pigheaded British, who have gone so far as to make him a colonel for the work they think he has done." Boisterous laughter, and again the hunchback had to bang his fist on the table. "But though he has British blood in him," the Spider shrilled, "though he bears a British name and was raised in this country of our enemies, there never was a truer or more patriotic German than our *Oberst*—Richard Haley-Shaw!"

And while they drank, and Haley-Shaw squirmed and blushed with happy embarrassment, Travis whispered, "He's a double spy, fellers. A damned traitor—that's how he gets away with it. That's why the C.O. trusted him so!" And before he heard Kirby and Carn swear under their breaths, he had to listen again at the chink, for once more the hunchback was speaking.

"There are many more toasts in order at this great victory dinner," the Spider went on. "But perhaps the first one that occurs to me is a toast to this venerable old castle itself, which for two years has served us so well. To-night we are gathered in its great hall for the last time. Many of us will leave it with a sigh of deep regret, for it has virtually become our home. We shall not forget the shelter it has afforded us when our enemies were on our trail, when we were pursued from every direction. Here we could always feel safe from intrusion, as safe as if we were in our own Fatherland, where we shall soon be, thanks to the U-boats which will call for us. And so, as a farewell to this glorious and ancient mansion, a toast—to Wembley House!"

And Travis, swiftly translating, "A spy nest, fellers! For two years—" he told them the rest as quickly as he could.

"Probably been smuggling spies back and forth on those subs," Kirby breathed, drawing swift conclusions. "We should have thought of that, what with the North Sea right out here."

The Spider meanwhile refilled his glass for the next toast.

"We cannot drink to the house without also

drinking to our host," he said "Here again is one of our most clever and most courageous agents, who has helped make our momentous project possible. His task has been a most difficult one; most of us know what it means to live in another man's shoes. We drink to the health of our comrade, Karl Ritter, or should I say Lord Wembley, whom he so closely resembles?"

AGAIN came the loud, cheering "*Hochs!*" and some one yelled "Speech! Speech!" so insistently that the pseudo-lord was finally prevailed upon to rise from his chair. His back was turned to the Three Mosquitoes' peephole, but they could see him clearly enough as he stood, swaying just a trifle from the effects of the liquor.

"I fear," he began, "that our great leader has exaggerated my difficulties. On the contrary, I have found my task quite simple. Fortunately, the life which the late Lord Wembley cut out for me was a lazy, comfortable life—the life of a recluse widower, retired on his manor. I have had no trouble rising late in the morning, reading his morning Times, attending to his accounts and drawing freely from his banking house. It has been simple to do business with his butcher, his grocer, his dairy man and his tailor. Indeed, I have even managed to mourn for his two sons, whose death, in the accursed British navy, left him alone. The only thing Lord Wembley did not leave me are his servants, who, sad to say, had to accompany him on his last journey. All save one, and," he turned to the hunchback, "if I am not intruding, sir, may I suggest that we give a toast to our comrade, Eric Schwartz. By getting himself employed as Lord Wembley's butler, he has not only enabled us to capture this house, but has also given me many invaluable pointers which have made my masquerade far more convincing. To his health, gentlemen!"

And the Three Mosquitoes saw them drink to the same thin, dark-eyed butler who had brought in the tea previously. So this was the man who had betrayed poor old Lord Wembley and his servants.

"And now," the Spider resumed, and his eyes blazed with triumph and enthusiasm, "the great toast, the toast of the evening. Every man on his feet!" They rose, almost solemnly this time. Again the hunchback held out his glass. "We drink to the mighty project for which we have planned and sweated all this time—" His voice rose with shrill excitement, "the project which to-night will bring Great Britain to her knees, will cripple her completely and force her to sue for

peace." He shook his glass. "To victory! Victory for the Fatherland!" And he almost screamed the triumphant boast of his country, "*Deutschland Uber Alles!*"

The cry was taken up by every man in the hall. They bellowed it out in a mighty, deafening chorus. They seemed to go wild. They cheered and yelled and shrieked, until the whole house shook with their din. For several minutes the mad orgy of cheering lasted, and somehow the confidence of those Germans was so convincing that the Three Mosquitoes, in the dark corridor under the rear stairway, shuddered in horror. No sooner had Travis translated that last grim toast than Kirby remembered again the twice-repeated statement of Colonel Haley-Shaw, "The fate of a nation, indeed the tide of the whole war, rests on the safe delivery of that cask." So it was true in the most terrible and unexpected way! These spies, under the leadership of the Spider, had some diabolical scheme which would paralyze all England. It was terrific, and the Three Mosquitoes were overwhelmed by its awful magnitude.

"What in God's name can this plan be?" Kirby wanted to know. "We must find out, Trav! We must stop them. We're the only ones who know."

"I hope they spill some more, that's all," Travis whispered grimly, and went on listening.

At last the men in the hall, exhausted from all the shouting, calmed down and resumed their seats. Like a receding wave the noise subsided, and then Lord Wembley was speaking to the hunchback.

"And now, sir, why not give us the story you promised. Why did you have to risk life and limb to get here, when you might have just sent us instructions from France? If you had informed us where that switch is located, any one of us could have pulled it at the proper time."

The hunchback smiled his ghostly, sardonic smile.

"You have raised an embarrassing question, *Herr Ritter*," he said. "I do not want any of you to feel that I distrust you, but—well, I cannot trust anyone but myself to handle this most momentous task. A blunder would prove fatal. Besides, as most of you know, there were just two of us, poor old Diener and myself, and we planned and supervised the whole thing. We swore absolute secrecy to one another about the location of the switch itself. Then I went to France to do some other work, and Diener stayed here to attend to the project to-night. You know what happened. It was just one week ago, when Diener was out on the skiff, that the *verdammte* English caught him and—" Suddenly his cadaverous face crimsoned with rage, and the look

in his eyes was terrible to see. "We shall avenge *Herr Diener* to-night, gentlemen! He was a great man, a man who had that rare combination—brains and brawn. He was loyal. They could not make him talk, the damned *schweinhunde!*"

A growl of angry agreement swept through the hall, before the hunchback continued.

"When I heard that Diener had been caught, I knew that it remained for me to carry out the task which he and I had begun together. I had to arrive here from France to-night. Of course, if I failed, I should have been forced to give the location of that switch to some one else, who could attend to it. And as a matter of fact," he smiled, grimly, "I came very near failing."

"All through the early part of the week I made several attempts to get here. I had to come out of cover, and the damned French intelligence corps got my scent. I am a hunchback—" Again there was pain in his voice—"I cannot disguise my hump. I stand out like an ugly duckling wherever I go. Once they got on my trail, it was hard to elude them. They chased me everywhere. I tried to get across the lines, hoping to go to Germany and thence travel here by U-boat, but I couldn't. Finally I fled to Apremont, to the *estaminet* there which is kept by our loyal comrade, Klien. I hid in his cellar there, close to the flying field. Another of our brave agents—I do not know his name—tried to get me away in a plane. He was caught, poor fellow, and I was almost caught with him.

"Then, as you know, our own Haley-Shaw here, coming to France on some pretense, got to me, and together we racked our brains for some plan. Time was dwindling. There were only two more days left, before to-night. Still, it was plain that if I moved out of that *estaminet*, I would surely be discovered and captured. Then Klein, brilliant fellow, thought of fixing up the wine cask. A wonderful scheme, but how were we to smuggle the wine cask to Wembley House? Haley-Shaw, as a colonel of British intelligence, could easily procure an Allied plane and a pilot, but how could the pilot be persuaded to carry the cask? Besides, any pilot doing such a thing—especially a man from Apremont drome—would be stopped and questioned. And that would be fatal!

"Our comrade, Haley-Shaw, made a careful but speedy investigation. And he found out that, not long ago, there used to be three famous flyers at Apremont known as the Three Mosquitoes."

He quoted the nickname of the famous trio in English, and the three flyers felt a peculiar shock as

they found themselves being brought into the thrilling story. True, Travis had only time to translate snatches of the speech he was following, but Kirby and Shorty had no trouble piecing those snatches together.

“These Three Mosquitoes,” the hunchback continued his story, while the crowd at the table listened, spellbound, “had a reputation for performing the wildest and craziest stunts. Indeed, if they should stop at their old drome on their way to England—say on leave—they could carry a wine cask out to their planes without causing anything more harmful than a lot of laughter. Anyone who saw them, knowing their characters, would not suspect them in the least. Of course, this meant we had to use three of our enemies instead of one, for in order to carry out this strategem, all Three Mosquitoes had to be in the picture. But this was just as well—if anything happened to one of the planes, the other could finish the trip.

“The only problem, then, was to get these Three Mosquitoes, and inveigle them into stopping for the cask. And of course, after we were through with them, it would be necessary to dispose of them, so they could tell no tales. We could not take any chances, such as merely imprisoning the flyers until we finished our task and cleared the house here. They would have to die.

“Our plans worked perfectly. There were a few minor difficulties, but *Oberst* Haley-Shaw’s wits saved us from any real trouble. We had already sent a secret message to *Herr* Ritter here, and our arrival was expected. And so,” he concluded, “here I am, ready to attend to that switch when the time comes.”

The men at the table were enthusiastic in their praise of their leader’s stunt, and some of them questioned him for further details. Meanwhile, Travis managed to give Kirby and Carn all the salient facts.

“And he hasn’t yet said what they’re going to do?” Kirby whispered, despairingly. “What is this switch he talks about?”

“Wish I could find out,” Travis replied, bitterly. “All I know is that it’s somewhere in this house, and that it’s going to do something damned lousy. I guess after the Spider pulls it, they’re all going to clear out and—” He broke off, listening again at the chink in the wall. “Some one’s asking the hunchback what he did with us three,” he whispered. “Let’s see what he has to say.”

The Spider was considering the particular question thoughtfully.

“Hardly a propitious subject to mention at a dinner,” he said, with his sardonic smile. “However, since it has been brought up, I shall answer it. As soon as the tide

of the sea rises,” he explained, grimly, “it will flood a certain cell down below this house. And it so happens that the Three Mosquitoes are in this cell.”

IN THE dim light of the corridor, Kirby and Carn both saw Travis jump, as if the latter had received an electric shock. Quickly the lanky man told them the amazing announcement he had heard. They were dumbfounded, and chilled by the thought of the death they had escaped.

But they were not the only ones who had jumped at the hunchback’s words, for now Travis saw Colonel Haley-Shaw shifting uncomfortably in his chair. The double spy turned to the Spider, looking at him somewhat guiltily.

“Pardon, *mein excellenz*,” he said, “but I did not wish to make this confession until after we had enjoyed our banquet. Now I see that I must tell you at once. I discovered that the tide rises at exactly 11:25 to-night, instead of ten o’clock, as you believed. I thought it would be wisest to eliminate those three men sooner—get them off our minds. It was too late to bother you about it; you had already sat down to eat. So I just instructed big Emil, who is experienced in this work, to go down and dispose of the flyers.”

The Spider’s eyes blazed at him, and he winced.

“*Vas ist das?*” rasped the hunchback, furiously. “You sent that numbskull of an Emil, that crazy savage? Don’t you realize he has no brains? Well, perhaps you will tell me how he made out!” Again Haley-Shaw squirmed uncomfortably.

“I—I heard shots some time ago,” he replied evasively. “I believe he has done his work all right. He hasn’t shown up since, but that is not unnatural. He usually goes out and gets himself drunk after he finishes his job.”

“*Gott!*” the hunchback groaned. “I wouldn’t be surprised if that blockhead bungled the whole business. Why can’t you remember what I have said over and over? Always send a man whose brains can outmatch the brains of your enemy. However,” he gave a sudden shrug, “I suppose it is all right. They could never get out of this house anyway. The windows are all barred, and the only door they can possibly find is this one—” he signified a huge, oaken entrance of the hall, where two stalwart men held guard. “But I guess it would be wise to check up. Some one might go down to that cell and investigate.” Instantly one of the men at the table jumped up, and Travis’ heart leaped to his throat. But, to the Mosquito’s intense relief, the

hunchback motioned the volunteer to sit down again.

“Not now,” the Spider snapped. “After we are all through here—in a few minutes.”

The uncomfortable Haley-Shaw now seized an opportunity to make amends. He glanced at his watch. “It is just quarter to ten, sir,” he said. “You will remember the man from our skiff is to come in from the shore with his last report. Let me go to meet him up in the secret room, while the rest of you remain to digest your dinners.”

The hunchback thought a moment, then nodded.

“All right. Go ahead. You know how to let the man into the room through the secret entrance?”

“Yes, sir. This British uniform won’t alarm him, will it?”

“No. He’s used to meeting us in various Allied uniforms. Be sure to get a definite report.”

“I shall. Pardon me, gentlemen,” Haley-Shaw rose. The Three Mosquitoes watched him through their chink. He was coming over their way, evidently headed for the stairs. He loomed closer. Soon he was so close that his figure was blotting out their view of the rest of the hall.

Just in time the three men jumped back from that chink; just in time they leaped back into the dark corridor, crouching against the wall. A scraping noise as Colonel Haley-Shaw came right up to the slit had been their only warning. In the next second a flood of brilliant light had burst in upon the murky corridor, as a panel slid open right where the chink had been. And through this panel stepped the spy.

The Three Mosquitoes, hearts beating like hammers, nerves tense once more, stood as still as they had stood down in the dark dungeon. Their only hope of escaping detection was to merge themselves with the shadows against the wall. Fiercely Kirby gripped his revolver, fingered its trigger. Haley-Shaw was closing the panel now. Blessed darkness again. But not for long!

As the colonel stood by the chink, a flashlight suddenly came to life in his hand. Its stabbing beam fell upon the floor, shifted about. The Three Mosquitoes held their breaths. Any second that light might happen to flash on them and reveal them clearly. Kirby was clutching his revolver like a drowning man clutches a straw. There was a crowd of men right out in the great hall, but if worst came to worst, he would use it.

Suddenly the beam of the flashlight turned in the opposite direction of the Three Mosquitoes. Haley-Shaw was moving, not towards them but away from

them. He was walking down the corridor. They saw his light disappear as he evidently rounded a corner.

Only then did Travis whisper, “Listen, fellers! He’s alone, and from what they said, that secret room is a way in and out of the house. If we follow him, we might be able to do something.”

“Let’s go!” Kirby and Carn both agreed. And they had just started when, without warning this time, the panel in the wall slid open again. Again came the brilliant flood of light. The Three Mosquitoes shrank right back against the wall, assuming their former rigid pose. This time one of the servants entered the corridor. He closed the panel, and the three flyers waited. Most likely this man was going to accompany Haley-Shaw to the secret room.

But then, to their horror, he suddenly turned and was coming straight towards them. At once they realized that he must be the fellow who was going down to look at their dungeon. Their muscles tensed. Swiftly the man came right on. All at once his flashlight opened up and flashed about the corridor. Before the three men knew it, they were blinking right in its glare.

The servant saw them instantly and started to cry out. But already they had acted. All three men, as if pulled by the same string, sprang upon the surprised servant. The wise Travis clapped a hand over the man’s mouth, stifling his voice before it could escape his lips. Almost simultaneously Kirby brought down the butt of his revolver on the fellow’s skull. The man sagged, collapsing silently. They stooped over him for a moment. He was out—out cold. Quickly they found his flashlight, and also his automatic. Travis seized the light, while Shorty Carn took the pistol. Two of them were armed now—that was better!

Leaving the unconscious servant on the floor, the three men furtively went back to that chink in the wall. Kirby peered through. He saw the men at the table smoking over their coffee. The Spider was still talking. Everything seemed to be all right; they had not heard.

Travis took the lead now, lighting the way with his flashlight. Kirby and Carn, revolvers in hand, followed. Hastily but stealthily they moved down the corridor in pursuit of Haley-Shaw, hoping against hope that this delay would not lose them their quarry. They rounded the bend in the corridor and looked ahead. No sign of the colonel’s light. But they thought they heard something close softly in the ceiling above and ahead. They stopped, waiting a moment, then went on.

But they did not go far. To their surprise, the passage

now came to an abrupt end. Their path was blocked by a wall of solid stone. Travis groped around with his flashlight. He remembered the sound in the ceiling, and flashed the light up there. For awhile he and his comrades could find nothing. Then, suddenly, they discovered a cord which was hanging from the ceiling.

"It must be something," Kirby whispered, and reached for the cord. Timidly, full of apprehension, he pulled on it. It yielded readily enough. He pulled harder. Sure enough, he was pulling something out of the ceiling, something which opened downwards. It proved to be a folding staircase. Kirby, working very slowly so as to make no noise, pulled it all the way down. He had to put his foot on its bottom step to hold it to the floor; evidently it was counter-weighted so that it would automatically go back into its place.

The three men stood at the foot of the narrow stairway, listening. Not a sound. Deciding to risk it, they began to ascend the steps. Cautiously they sneaked up, in the darkness now, for Travis no longer dared to keep his flashlight turned on. They reached the top of the stairs and found themselves in a small, dim hallway. No sooner did they step onto its floor than the staircase, as if by magic, rose up into its place, closing beneath them.

THEY looked around. Down the hallway they saw fitful slits of light. They moved toward them. They came to a door, an ordinary door this time, with a huge knob. Light was coming through the cracks, and also through the keyhole. Kirby stooped to the keyhole and peered through it.

He caught a vague glimpse of a large and bare room, a room apparently without windows. It was lighted by a single, naked bulb which hung from the ceiling. In the center was a rude table, and at this table, tapping his fingers impatiently as if he were waiting for some one, stood Colonel Haley-Shaw.

"The secret room, guys," Kirby whispered. "He's alone. Stick close now; I'm trying the door."

Very cautiously his hand closed over the door knob. Ever so gently he started to turn it. It squeaked, and he stopped, his heart pounding. Then he tried again, and this time brought the knob all the way around. He put a little pressure on it. The door began to give—it opened inwards.

Kirby turned once more to his comrades. "Here goes, fellers," he whispered excitedly. "Ready with your gun, Shorty! All right—Now!" And with one great push he sent that door flying wide open.

Colonel Haley-Shaw wheeled around as the three men, two of them pointing revolvers, leaped into the room. A cry of horrified surprise broke from the false Britisher as he recognized the flyers he thought were dead. His face went ashen white, and his eyes stared as if they were beholding ghosts.

"Put 'em up, colonel!" Kirby's voice was crisp and to the point.

The colonel seemed to realize at once that he was caught. Silently he raised his hands, and though he tried to look sullenly defiant, he merely succeeded in looking very frightened.

The Three Mosquitoes advanced towards him, closing the door of the room behind them. Kirby and Carn kept their guns leveled, while Travis stopped up to the man, searched him hastily, and found his revolver. The lanky man seized the weapon eagerly. All Three Mosquitoes were now armed.

"Now," Kirby spoke again, and his eyes were narrowed to mere slits. "We'd be damned glad to shoot you like the dirty, double-crossing skunk you are! And that's just what we're going to do unless you obey us at once. Get that and get it straight."

Haley-Shaw got it all right. There was no mistaking the earnestness of Kirby's tone. The colonel grew even paler, and his lips twitched.

"We're in a hurry," Kirby went on. "so we're not going to waste any words. There's a way of getting out of this house from this room. You're going to show us that way out, and you're going to come along with us to keep us company. And no use trying any of your usual tricks," he warned, ominously. "The minute anything goes wrong, we send a bullet into your dirty heart. Now, let's go!"

On hearing these words, a panic seemed to come over the colonel.

"But—but," he stammered, desperately, "there is no way out—here!"

"If that's true," drawled the lanky Travis, with grim irony, "then you are going to perform a miracle. Because I'm quite sure, colonel, that you are going to find a way out of here!"

The colonel winced and shifted about like a trapped animal. It was plain to see that he was torn between two conflicting emotions, between patriotism and self-preservation. If he let these three men out, and they got away, it would probably mean the ruination of the stupendous project which was going to cripple all England. But on the other hand—

"Snap into it!" Kirby ordered, fiercely. The leader

of the Mosquitoes, beneath his deadly calm exterior, was seething with fear and apprehension. Sooner or later, he knew, the man who had been sent to look at the dungeon would be missed, and there would be a speedy search. If he and his comrades were found here— The thought made him almost wild with impatience. “Come on,” warned the reluctant Haley-Shaw. “I’ll give you just three, and if you don’t get busy by then, I’m pulling this trigger.” Steadily he leveled his automatic, took careful aim. “One.”

Haley-Shaw bit his lip. Beads of cold perspiration stood out on his brow.

“Two.” Visibly, Kirby’s finger tightened on that trigger. His teeth clenched. “Thr—”

And Haley-Shaw broke. “You win!” His voice was bitter, resigned. “I will take you out. Follow me.”

The Three Mosquitoes could hardly conceal their frenzied relief. But they still kept their grim, businesslike demeanors, still kept Haley-Shaw covered as he started to lead them across the room.

“And if we should meet anyone,” Kirby said. “It’s up to you to get us by. Remember, if we’re caught we’re gonna take you to hell with us.”

Haley-Shaw nodded dully. He seemed to have thoroughly accepted his defeat. He was a pretty shabby semblance of a dignified, aloof Englishman now; he was just a broken traitor, who had been unable to keep his nerve in the final test.

“Perhaps,” suggested the shrewd Travis, as he saw how broken the man was, “you will tell us something about a certain switch in this house. If you talk, it will be much healthier for you later on.”

Haley-Shaw started, his eyes widening. Then, as if some spark of loyalty and courage still flickered in him, he shook his head stubbornly. “I shall not talk,” he said, firmly. “You cannot make me talk.”

During this conversation, he had led the Three Mosquitoes over to the opposite wall of the room. The wall was oak paneled, but it looked quite bare and blank.

“A panel?” Shorty inquired, speaking for the first time.

“Yes,” said Haley-Shaw, tonelessly. “It will take us right out to the cliffs. I shall open it.”

“Better let us open it for you,” Kirby said, thoughtfully. “You’re much better off keeping your hands idle. Now, how do you work this trick door?”

“A catch on top.” The colonel pointed to a little lever. “Pull it down and the door will automatically open. It is on a spring which—”

He stopped short, for at that moment, right from the very panel at which they were standing, there came a sudden, violent knocking.

The Three Mosquitoes nearly jumped out of their skins, while Haley-Shaw’s eyes lit up with a wild, frantic hope. Fortunately Kirby had the presence of mind to motion for absolute silence by a shake of his gun. The knocking continued, louder now. The panel shook. The rapping seemed to be some sort of signal—a regulated tattoo.

“By God!” Travis whispered, suddenly realizing. “It must be the man from the skiff they were talking about.” He shot an interrogatory glance at Haley-Shaw, and the latter nodded bewilderedly. Travis turned to his comrades. “If only he’s alone, we can—” He broke off, his hope crushed before he could even express it. For now they could hear voices from the other side of that panel. Not one voice, but a few. Four, they managed to pick out. Four men out there, demanding entry. What could they do?

The Three Mosquitoes looked at one another frantically, while the mad tattoo on the panel continued. Haley-Shaw seemed to be growing more and more hopeful and confident; he realized fully the dilemma of the three flyers. If the Mosquitoes tried to make a fight of it—which seemed to be the only way to handle four armed men—they would not only be facing difficult odds, but they would probably rouse the whole castle before they could shoot their way out through the panel.

Suddenly a clear, German voice called out from the other side of the panel. “*Machen sie auf!*” it demanded. “*Offmen sie die Türe.* Let us in, please.”

And to the surprise of his own comrades and Colonel Haley-Shaw, the lanky Travis, in his own flawless German, replied loudly and clearly, “*Bitte, eine minute.*”

At once the knocking on the panel stopped, as the men out there accepted this plea. Travis had decided to take a long chance. He had remembered the hunchback’s words, “He’s used to meeting us in various Allied uniforms.” He would have to gamble on the hunch that those men out there did not know him, would not recognize him. A desperate, reckless scheme, but it seemed the only way out.

The lanky man glanced swiftly around the bare, windowless room. His keen eye fell on a closet in the rear wall whose door was slightly ajar. He spoke in a scarcely audible whisper to his comrades, and now it was as if he, instead of Kirby, were the leader of the Three Mosquitoes.

“You two fellers take Haley-Shaw in to that closet,

keep him mum, and let me try to get rid of these men. Hurry up! And above all, stay on your guard. Keep your guns ready!" He saw Haley-Shaw's face fall, which convinced him that his plan must be feasible. Kirby and Shorty quickly did as they were bade. They marched the unhappy colonel into the closet, which proved to be quite roomy. Pulling the door tightly shut, they stood in the darkness with Haley-Shaw between them, and their revolvers pressed against his body.

"Now," Kirby whispered to the colonel, "one peep out of you and I'll have to knock you cold. Stand still! Keep absolutely quiet!"

MEANWHILE Travis carefully concealed his revolver beneath his tunic. He pulled out a handkerchief and wiped his dirty, scratched face. He smoothed back his hair and brushed down his wrinkled and dusty uniform. As a final precaution he tore the wings from his breast, and shoved the giveaway insignia into a pocket. Then, steeling his nerves for the ordeal, he went to the panel. He reached for the catch, took a long breath, and pulled.

The panel slid open with a bang. Out of the dark passageway came four men, who filed into the room. All were husky, weather-beaten fellows, who smelled of the sea. The first to enter wore the uniform of a British naval lieutenant. The second, a tall man with a hawklike face, was a captain of the German Imperial navy, and his insignia marked him in the U-boat service. The third and fourth, who remained by the open panel as if on guard, were ordinary German seamen, also of the U-boat service. Travis noticed that all were well-armed. The "Englishman" carried a forty-five, while from the holsters of the three Germans protruded the butts of huge, deadly Lugers.

The man dressed as a British lieutenant glanced immediately at Travis' khaki uniform, and Travis, his heart pounding, instantly mistook the glance for one of suspicion. Outwardly the lanky Mosquito was calm and cool; inwardly he trembled with a thousand fears and doubts. By sheer effort he managed to make his voice sound steady.

"*Wie gehts*, gentlemen!" he said pleasantly, forming his words with great care. "I regret that I had to keep you waiting, but I have only just arrived here. As you doubtless know, we have been celebrating the victory dinner with our great leader, *Herr* von Schulenberg. He just sent me up here to meet you."

And he waited fearfully to see whether this would go over. He was banking on the hope that these

men, because they had been making such a noise themselves, had not heard all the voices in the secret room.

To his relief the man in the British uniform nodded and seemed perfectly satisfied by the salient details Travis had cleverly worked in his speech to make it convincing. The supposed English officer smiled.

"Ah, but I should have liked to be present at that dinner," he sighed. "And how was it?"

"Excellent," Travis replied, trying to keep his eyes from shifting to the closed door of that closet. I never enjoyed a dinner so much. But now," he went on, feverishly impatient to get the thing over, "may I suggest that we get down to business? Our baron instructed me to secure a definite report from you."

"And a definite report he shall have," the other replied. "I took out the skiff for the last time, and we sent a diver down to examine the main contact. Everything is in perfect order. The wires are all arranged, and the batteries charged. Also, I have received definite word that *they* will come out at exactly quarter to twelve. You can tell our esteemed baron that if he works the trick at ten to twelve, he will get the best results."

This brain-teasing statement baffled Travis, but he nodded as if he understood it perfectly.

"And the *verdammte* British have no suspicions?" He took a chance on asking, for now, despite his haste to get rid of them, he was so intensely curious to learn their plans that he could not help trying to draw them out.

"None whatsoever," the man from the skiff responded. "Since we have been using a sailboat, they cannot pick us up with their hydrophones, and we have been able to work without fear of discovery."

"Ah," Travis tried hard to make his eyes shine with enthusiastic anticipation. "What a surprise they will get, then, when our gallant leader operates the switch!"

The hawk-faced German U-boat captain laughed. "Indeed they will," he agreed heartily. "It will be quite a shock to them," he went on, with mirthful irony, "when practically their whole navy is blown to pieces by their own mines."

Travis stood very, very still. The mighty bombshell had exploded on him unawares. He was fighting, fighting with all his will to retain his composure. He was fighting even to stop the blood from leaving his face. The British navy—their own mines! In a lucid flash he grasped the whole upshot of the business. From the slight naval knowledge he possessed, he was

able to understand. These must be observation mines, which did not explode on contact with a vessel, but which had to be set off electrically from the shore. Over such mines of their own the British ships would constantly pass, for they knew the men on the coast would only explode the undersea bombs when an enemy vessel was caught in the zone.

What these diabolical Germans had done, as far as the stunned Travis could see, was to somehow connect a wire up a mass—and it must be a tremendous mass—of British observation mines. The wire came to this house, to the much-discussed switch. A turn of the switch would doubtless set off all the mines at once.

And to-night, at ten minutes to twelve, practically the whole British fleet, according to the U-boat captain, would be passing over that mine area of their own. And as they passed, the Spider would simply pull down his switch.

It was all hideously clear. The Germans had played safe; by not planting mines of their own they had avoided detection on the part of the English mine-sweepers. The British would never suspect their own mines. And the Germans had been able to do their work of connecting up the wires secretly, by means of a silent skiff and undersea divers.

All these thoughts flashed through Travis' head in a breathless rush, while he struggled to control, his emotions. So swift indeed had his mind worked that now the German U-boat captain was still laughing uproariously at his own words. The men from the skiff and the two sailors at the door joined in his mirth. And Travis, realizing that it was the thing to do, forced laughter out of his own throat. He laughed boisterously, though half hysterically. He roared and shook and held his sides.

"Ho, ho, ho!" he bellowed, imitating the deep Teutonic laugh. "What a nice surprise package for the British! And we will not fail! We cannot fail—that is," he added, daringly, and in a more serious tone, "unless the pig-headed Britishers change their minds and do not pass over the mines."

"Impossible! Impossible!" the man from the skiff reassured him. "Did I not tell you that I have definite word that the English have already started from their base—the whole high seas fleet? They have to come out of the mouth of the Channel, for, as you know, they intend to cross the North Sea and wipe our own fleet completely out. Well, how can they come out of the Channel without passing that mine barrier they put there to stop our U-boats?" His voice rose

with warm triumph. "We shall catch at least fifty dreadnoughts over those mines, provided our gallant Baron von Schulenberg pulls the switch at ten to twelve."

"And," added the hawk-faced U-boat captain, "with my own eyes, from my command, the U-88, I saw our splendid Imperial *Hochseefleet* gathering secretly in the North Sea. They will be ready to come into the Channel as soon as the mines clear the way. Do you see what a huge trick it is? Not only do we remove the British fleet, but we also remove the mines which would have stopped us. Ho, ho!"

"Ho, ho, ho!" Travis roared again, while the muscles on his face seemed to have grown taut. Fifty dread-naughts—and the German fleet waiting! The Spider's boast was true, horribly true. Great Britain would be brought to her knees. Her proud navy, her chief weapon, would be smashed, and while she lay unprotected, the Germans would make their sea invasion and that would be the end. God, it was tremendous! It was staggering!

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed the lanky Mosquito, and stopped only when a new and terrible thought came to him. If this wild laughter was heard by the Germans down in the hall—and they came up!

THIS very same thought had entered the minds of Kirby and Shorty Carn, who stood in the dark closet with Haley-Shaw between them. Travis' wild, ghastly laughter had terrified his two comrades. They had never before heard the sober, lanky man laugh that way. Indeed, they actually feared that Travis might have cracked under the terrific strain of the part he was acting.

As for Haley-Shaw, who had listened to the German conversation and understood every word of it, and who had heard them giving Travis all the vital secrets—the unhappy colonel was beside himself with horror and panic. He would surely have called out, had not Kirby pressed his revolver so violently against the false Britisher's body that he dared not open his mouth.

"Are you gonna stop moving and stand still?" Kirby whispered. "Or do you want me to brain you and have it over with?"

Haley-Sliaw decided that he preferred to stand still.

Meanwhile, Travis was speaking again, saying enthusiastically, "And as soon as it is over, we shall all leave this house and depart for our beloved *Vaterland!*"

"Yes," the U-boat captain conceded, smiling. "My submarine shall be in wait. We shall accommodate all."

Whereupon the man from the skiff suddenly looked at his watch.

"It is ten-twenty!" he exclaimed. "*Gott*, how time flies on a night like this! I must leave now, and help *Kapiton* Wolff here to make ready his U-boat. But I shall call for you all in the skiff, to take you out."

Travis almost breathed his relief. Thank God, in another moment these men would be gone. He and his comrades could then escape and stop this frightful enterprise.

"Now," the fake British lieutenant who commanded the skiff was instructing him earnestly, "you will be sure to report all I told you to our leader. Remember," he reminded, "ten minutes to twelve!"

"*Ja, ja!*" Travis said hurriedly, hardly able to conceal his impatience to be rid of them. "I will tell him all." "Well, then, we shall be going. However, we had better take a box of that canned food with us. A U-boat seldom can keep enough stocked aboard, and we need a good supply for this return trip to Germany. I presume," he smiled at Travis, "that you have a box handy, as usual."

A cold apprehension came over the lanky Mosquito, and for a moment he was at loss. "I—I'm afraid that in all this excitement of the victory dinner, we have overlooked this important matter. We have no stuff handy now. Perhaps if you could come in later—" The man from the skiff shook his head.

"I should like very much to get it now; these sailors here can carry it." His tone was frankly skeptical. "Surely you must have a box here. Why, this is where we always keep them—to supply our U-boats when they are stuck around here without food. Only the other day I saw several boxes right over there," his finger pointed, "in that closet."

An icy wire seemed to tighten around Travis' heart. He began to feel strangely dizzy. But he managed to laugh, though his laugh had a jagged edge to it.

"How peculiar!" he exclaimed. "Why, that closet is now absolutely empty."

The man from the skiff shot him a puzzled look. Travis met his eyes steadily, though it required all his strength.

"Empty?" the fake Britisher was echoing, incredulously. "That seems impossible! Are you sure of it?"

"Absolutely sure."

"Well," the man considered a moment, then shrugged. "At any rate, it won't hurt to look." And he turned, starting to walk straight towards that closet.

Travis, in a near panic, held out a restraining hand.

"No use," he grinned, horribly. "It's locked."

Again the skiff commander shot him a keen glance, and this time, unmistakably, there was suspicion in his look.

"And you have no key for it?" he demanded.

"I—I'm sorry," Travis stammered.

Here, to the lanky Mosquito's relief, the U boat captain interceded impatiently. "That being the case, let us go," he suggested. "We are wasting time, and after all we can come back."

The man from the skiff hesitated. He frowned darkly.

"It is hard to believe that closet door is really locked," he stated, slowly. "It never has been locked before. Perhaps it is just stuck. Let us try it and see." And again he started straight for the closet. Again the frantic Travis blocked his path. This time the German resented the Mosquito's interference; a deep flush suffused his weather-beaten face. The U-boat captain was also getting suspicious now, and so were those two husky sailors at the door.

Desperately Travis made a final effort. He drew himself up indignantly. "Look here," he said, as if deeply hurt, "is this the way to treat one of your comrades? I have told you the door is locked. Are you going to humiliate me by not taking my word, and finding out for yourselves? I am sure our baron would not like that."

The clever speech had its effect. Both Germans looked a trifle ashamed. But only for a moment. Then the resentful skiff commander stiffened up.

"It is not that we distrust you," he insisted. "It is just that you may be wrong. I see no reason why we should make a scene over such a trivial matter." His voice became grimly determined. "Come on, *Kapitan* Wolff! I can't help what this man says. We shall try that closet door."

This time there was no stopping him. Both he and the U-boat captain brushed right past Travis. They strode swiftly towards the closet. Travis drew in his breath sharply. The two Germans were advancing right up to that door, were reaching toward the knob.

And Travis yelled at the top of his lungs, yelled in good plain American. "Out on 'em, fellers. Come on! Give 'em hell!"

Wildly, he whipped out his revolver, even as the closet door burst open, right in the faces of the two surprised Germans. And then hell broke loose. Travis fired confusedly at the U-boat captain, and saw him drop. Simultaneously he saw his two comrades, Kirby and Shorty, come rushing out of that closet, their

own guns blazing thunderously. Haley-Shaw, his face ashen white, was still standing in there, shouting out crazily. The man from the skiff, whipping out his own automatic, glimpsed the British uniform in the closet, and blazed away at it savagely. Colonel Haley-Shaw clutched his chest, and a horrible cry came from him.

"*Gott*, I knew it! I knew it!" he screamed. And he pitched forward on the floor, and lay where he had fallen. The uniform with which he had betrayed the British had finally betrayed him, to his own comrades.

The whole room was thundering with pistol shots now. The sailors rushed forward, their Lugers barking shrilly, bullets sang all over the place, ricocheting from the walls. But the Three Mosquitoes, fighting in their usual reckless fashion, fighting even as they had fought in the air together, had already gained the upper hand in their surprise attack. The skiff commander, wounded by a well-aimed shot from Kirby, lay writhing and groaning, trying futilely to bring his automatic into play again. Shorty Carn caught one of the sailors and dropped him in his tracks. The only remaining German, the other sailor, made a frantic dash for the door of the room, to spread an alarm. But Kirby saw him, fired blindly, and heard the man shriek as he dropped.

Incredibly, the Three Mosquitoes had cleared that room in a few breathless seconds. And not one of them had been hit.

"Quick, fellers!" It was Kirby who spoke. "Out through that panel. We can make it!"

But first they wisely stopped to snatch up the Lugers of the three dead submarine men, together with several clips of cartridges. Their own pistols were practically empty, so they threw them away and gripped the long-barreled German automatics.

"Let's go," Travis shouted, hastily. "And listen, fellers! In case we're separated, that switch is going to set off British mines in the English channel—ten to twelve—to blow up the whole damn British navy!"

He did not know whether his comrades heard, for all were rushing madly to that open panel. Shorty Carn, being nearest to it, reached it first and darted through. On the other side was a descending tunnel, a steep but fairly wide stairway leading downwards. The little man started to descend at once. Kirby and Travis came through the panel after him.

SUDDENLY the door of the secret room burst open. There were loud shouts, a scuffling of feet, and a crowd of men from the great hall surged into the place, with drawn revolvers. They rushed straight to the open

panel, saw the Three Mosquitoes trying to descend the steps, and started blazing away with deadly precision. A fusillade of lead whizzed after the fleeing aviators, and they ducked fearfully as the bullets sang in their ears. At once they knew that they were not going to get away. It was hopeless. These men would catch them in no time and would shoot them to ribbons.

Then Kirby, looking around, saw that Shorty Carn, having gotten a head start on his comrades, was quite far down those steps. A sudden wild idea came to the leader of the Mosquitoes. He yelled down at the little fat man frantically.

"Go on, Shorty! You'll make it." He laughed wildly, defiantly. "We'll hold 'em back so they can't catch you. Go to it, you little son of a gun!"

"Tell 'em about the switch," Travis yelled after him.

Shorty, seeing that it was the only way out, did not hesitate. Down those steps he went clattering, as fast as his stubby legs could carry him. And Kirby and Travis, their eyes blazing fire, their faces fiercely determined, wheeled around, crouched on those steps, and with their captured Lugers commenced the death-defying work of stemming the tide.

Madly they answered the Germans' terrific fire. Their Lugers spat defiantly. The men on the stairs above began to fall back, in terror. One of them suddenly became detached from the rest, pitched forward and came rolling down the steps. Savagely Kirby and Travis caught him, stopped his fall. The dead man lay in a heap right above the two Mosquitoes, and, since this was no time for scruples, they used the dead body as a barricade, crouching below it. Crazily, yelling out berserk challenges, they kept blazing away, stopping only to shove another clip of cartridges into their Lugers. The acrid stench of powder was stinging their nostrils; their heads were bursting from the deafening reports of their guns. But they gritted their teeth and went on shooting, so that their comrade, Shorty Carn, would have a chance to break out of the house and get away.

In those breathless, terrific moments the two flyers seemed to bear a charmed life. Bullets came down at them like hail, and yet they were not scratched. They were like men possessed by demons, men whom no obstacles could stop. And they were holding those Germans back! They were keeping their antagonists at bay on the top of the stairs. Already a few of the Boche had been killed or wounded. The whole corridor was echoing with their groans and shrieks, which mingled horribly with the crashing guns.

It could not last long, and it didn't. With awful swiftness, the Mosquitoes' supply of captured cartridges dwindled. In another moment they had no more. They were helpless. Frantically, while the Germans started down the steps in a triumphant rush, Kirby searched the dead body above him, trying to locate the man's pistol, but he couldn't find it.

The Germans came swarming upon the two helpless men like a pack of hungry wolves. They seized the flyers roughly, brutally. They yanked them up the steps like sacks of wheat. They dragged them back into the secret room, which was reeking with powder smoke, and which was full of dead or wounded men.

Dazed and bewildered, their ears still ringing with the sound of shots, Kirby and Travis found themselves being held up virtually by their collars in the center of the room. They saw a face before them, a face that was terrible to behold. It was the face of the humpbacked Spider.

"Where's the third?" the hunchback shrielled, furiously.

"*Gott!*" a man replied. "He must have escaped down the passage!"

"So!" the hunchback's tone was nasty. He was in a black rage. His fiery eyes burned into Kirby and Travis. "So that's the idea, eh?" he snapped. "Well, we shall begin this little object lesson by showing you how silly it is to try to escape, especially after killing our comrades."

He turned on his heel and darted over to a wall, which also appeared to be blank. The hunchback, however, pressed a release, and another panel slid open. A large window was revealed. The Spider barked out an order. Kirby and Travis were yanked over to the window, and were held so that they could look out. They caught a clear-cut panorama of the cliffs and the sea. The jutting rocks which spread out down there were etched distinctly in the brilliant moonlight.

"Watch!" said the Spider, malignantly.

Even as he spoke, a figure emerged on those cliffs, some hundred yards away. By the moonlight Kirby and Travis could see that figure clearly. Their hearts leaped. It was Shorty Carn. The little man was running with incredible speed for one so stout. He was scrambling over the jagged rocks, rushing to get away. Kirby and Travis longed to shout out an encouraging cheer to their courageous little comrade, but they dared not. For even now the Spider was speaking with blighting malice.

"Do you see him? Well, take a good look at him.

In another moment he will be on top of that large rock." He pointed to the jagged stone which Shorty was madly climbing. "And when he reaches the top of that rock," the Spider continued, ominously, "watch what happens."

The terrible import of these words struck horror into Kirby and Travis. Frantically they tried to shout out a warning cry to Shorty, but hands were clapped over their mouths. The Spider rasped out orders. Some one went to a mouthpiece in the wall, and transmitted these orders, evidently to some other part of the house.

On scrambled Shorty Carn, dashing straight up the jagged side of that stone, while his two comrades, unable to move or articulate, watched him in helpless anguish. He was getting closer to the top of the stone now. Closer and closer. Now he was reaching it. They saw him scrambling to his feet, saw his figure clearly silhouetted against the night.

Somewhere from the top of this house, a shot rang out—the shot of a rifle.

Shorty ducked instantly. To the frenzied relief of his watching comrades, he went right on running, redoubling his efforts. They had missed him. God, if only he could get out of the way!

Again that rifle crashed out into the night.

Shorty stiffened bolt upright, his body gone rigid. His hand went to his throat, clutching it wildly. For a moment he stood perfectly still, outlined against the moonlight. Then, with a shrill, choking cry, he reeled, toppled over backwards, and rolled right over the edge of that cliff.

Kirby's piercing scream of agony startled every man in the room. The leader of the Mosquitoes, half-crazed, had all but broken out of his captors' grip. It took several men to hold him, to pinion his arms behind him while he struggled insanely. The lanky Travis, however, standing very still and silent, seemed to bear the tragedy stoically. But his face was as white as a sheet, and his lips were trembling.

"You killed him!" Kirby was shrieking out. Tears streamed down his face. "Killed him like a dog, you dirty—" Again he struggled madly. Veins stood out on his temples, and his features were horribly contorted. "Butchers!" he screamed, sobbingly. "Dirty, lousy murderers! Shot him like a dog! God, let me go and I'll—" He choked, unable to give utterance to his wild fury. Suddenly he seemed to relax, exhausted. He broke down and wept like a convulsive child, his broad shoulders heaving pitifully.

His grief was so heart-rending that several men in

the room winced and looked at him pityingly. Even the malignant hunchback seemed moved. There was a softer expression in his cadaverous face as he confronted the two flyers once more.

AT THE sight of the Spider, Kirby went wild again and his insane rage returned. Again he strained wildly in his captors' grip, trying to lurch towards the scrawny, little hunchback.

"Damn you, you dirty little rat," he yelled. "Just let me get my hands on you. I'll break you in two; I'll tear you to pieces!"

The hunchback smiled tolerantly. "No doubt you would," he conceded. "You have the brawn to do it, too. But are you not unjust, my friend?" he argued, patiently. "How can you expect mercy after you have killed several of our comrades? Our beloved Haley-Shaw—" His face filled with pain.

"That was due to your mischief, too. And our skiff commander—he passed away as soon as he had faithfully given me his news. And all the others." He shook his head.

"This is war, my friends, and war means killing. You kill and I kill. It is a game. Now it is my turn. I admire you men; I admire you for your daring and skill. I am almost inclined to believe that you have brains as well as brawn. What a pity," he sighed, "that you are not on our side; we could use men like you. But just because you are on the wrong side, it is necessary now that you die. Do you not see? How can I allow you to live, after all you have learned, all you have done? I ask you, man to man, whether it isn't my duty to put you both to death?"

Kirby said nothing, but the white-faced Travis blurted out furiously, "A hell of a question to ask us."

"Well, then, I shall answer it myself." The Spider's cadaverous face set grimly. "You must both die. But because I respect your courage, I shall give you a chance to die like gallant men should.

"You will recall the dungeon you were in before. The old English lord who built this castle devised an ingenious way of putting his enemies to death. He built that dungeon right on the sea level. When the tide rises, the sea floods the dungeon to its ceiling. It is now about a quarter to eleven. At eleven-thirty the tide will rise."

The two Mosquitoes, dazed, and thinking only of their dead comrade, scarcely heard him.

"You two men," the Spider was continuing, slowly, "will be in that dungeon at eleven-thirty. But I am

going to let you have a pistol, with two cartridges." He paused. "I believe what I have said is clear."

Still the two grief-stricken flyers did not seem to heed, nor care. Both of them seemed to be in a sort of trance, from which they did not awaken until they actually found themselves back in that stilling dungeon again.

The body of the doorman had been removed, and the place was no longer in pitch darkness. A dim lantern hung from the ceiling, and in its glow the two doomed men could see each other.

Their voices were strangely hollow, almost toneless.

"It looks as if it's all over," Travis said. "They've got us licked. They got Shorty, and we're next."

"Yes," Kirby answered, and it was just then that he felt something weighting down his coat pocket. He reached down, and his hand touched something cold and hard. He pulled it out.

"A gun," he said, slowly. "A six-shooter."

"With two cartridges," added Travis, for he had heard the Spider after all.

"Yes, there are just two bullets," Kirby announced, after examining the revolver.

They looked at each other dully.

"Eleven-thirty he said," Kirby recalled.

"Yes," Travis said bitterly. "And at ten minutes to twelve they are going to blow up the British fleet. And we can't stop them."

"What's the use? We did our best. And now I'm so tired and low I can't care any more. Shorty's gone, and I don't mind following him."

"He was a great feller, Shorty."

"They don't come finer!" Kirby agreed, swallowing hard.

"And he could fight, too!" Travis tried to smile, reminiscently. "Even though we always kidded him about his laziness—his peace and repose."

"Yeah, his peace and repose." Again Kirby's eyes had filled with tears. A sob choked him. "He—he went down fighting anyway."

Thus they went on talking, talking. They felt no kind of suspense, no sense of fear. They were completely resigned. They had been licked, and they knew it.

The wait did not seem long. The three quarters of an hour passed in no time. But during that period, the air in the cell became even closer than it had been during their previous imprisonment. The two men began to breathe with difficulty, and both broke into a sweat.

Just when the thing started neither man knew,

so imperceptible was its beginning. Their first real indication of it was a cold, damp feeling in their feet. They looked down. The floor of the cell was shiny. It was wet. Water was covering it, water which seemed to seep in from nowhere, and which rose slowly but steadily.

"So it's true," Kirby said. "This place is being flooded, all right. Well," his eyes met Travis' questioningly, "are we going to die like rats—or like men?"

Travis did not evade the issue. "We are still officers of the United States army," he stated, simply.

Kirby fingered the revolver. It felt icy now in his sweating hand. He nodded. "Yeah, officers."

Travis spoke thickly. "You're the captain. It's up to you now."

Kirby suppressed a cold shudder. The water was now up to their ankles, rising, rising. The leader of the Mosquitoes shook his head.

"Yes, I'm the captain," he admitted. "And as the captain, I'm ordering you to do it. And anyway, you know we guys have always sort of looked up to you as our leader, even though I have the rank. It's your job, Trav." And he held out the pistol.

Travis recoiled from the gun as if it were something vile and poisonous. "No. You must do this," he insisted.

"Well," sighed Kirby, "the only thing I can suggest, then, is that I'll use the gun, and when I'm through—"

"No, for God's sake!" Travis cut him off, in horror. "That is even worse." It was getting difficult to speak now in the foul air. The water kept coming in, creeping up their legs, wetting them more and more. Desperately, Kirby hit upon a plan. Shoving the revolver in his pocket for the moment, he seized one of the buttons on his tunic and ripped it off. He concealed it in one of his fists, then held both fists out towards Travis.

"The odds are fair," he stated. "You choose whichever hand you want. If you get the button, you get the gun. If the button remains in my hand, I'll keep the pistol. Let's go, before we drown like rats."

Travis hesitated, then slowly nodded his agreement. He looked at Kirby's outstretched hands, and Kirby held his breath. Travis wavered.

"I always flew on your left side when the three of us were in formation," he said. "Therefore I choose—the right hand."

He touched it. Kirby opened the fist. And in his open palm lay the button.

And the stoic, calm Travis broke down completely. He stood there in the rising water, choking with sobs, blubbing like a baby.

"God, I can't! I can't do it!"

The water was now almost up to their waists. And then, perhaps because he saw that they must only drown if this delay continued, Travis began to straighten up. The strength seemed to flow back into the lanky Mosquito, and his nerves turned to steel. He faced his comrade calmly, courageously.

"The gun," he said, slowly. "Give me the gun."

He took it from Kirby's hand and fingered its trigger. The two Mosquitoes stood opposite one another, just a few feet apart in the waist-high water. Swiftly Kirby unbuttoned his coat. He tore it open, baring his sweating chest. Travis started to raise the gun. His nerve failed him again, and the weapon dropped listlessly to his side. But then, rallying all his strength, making a supreme effort, he brought the pistol up and aimed it straight at his comrade's heart.

Kirby laughed, laughed his old reckless, defiant laugh. "All right, Trav old boy! See you in hell in a couple of minutes—and Shorty, too! Now give it to me," he shouted, lustily, "and give it to me clean!"

"AT TWELVE O'CLOCK," said Baron Gustave Friedrich von Schulenberg, alias the Spider, "we shall quit the house, instead of at eleven-thirty. The time of our enterprise has been changed a little."

The hunchback was addressing all his remaining men in the great hall of the castle. It was just eleven-twenty.

"But, *mein excellenz*," put in Carl Ritter, otherwise known as Lord Wembley, "who is going to take charge of the skiff now?"

"I have commissioned Vogel to do that," the Spider told him. "And the U-boat will be in command of poor *Kapitan Wolff's* second officer. Everything is arranged, in spite of the tragedy which befell us in the secret room. "And," the hunchback's eyes blazed, "we shall soon be avenging all our comrades. I shall go to that switch now, and wait for the great moment. But," he warned, "I do not wish any of you to follow me. I must do this alone. Do you understand?"

They nodded, solemnly.

"You will hear the explosion," said the Spider, "and as soon as you hear it, start for the skiff, where I shall join you." He paused, looking up. "What is that noise?"

The others listened. They heard a soft, insistent drone, as of humming bees.

"Airplanes," said the fake Lord Wembley, with a shrug. "Probably some British patrol out to look for our Zeppelins."

"They seem extremely close," the Spider observed, for the drone had become quite intense.

"That is nothing," Ritter assured him. "They often pass over this way. Do not worry."

Even as he spoke the drone seemed to fade out altogether. The Spider smiled relievedly.

"That is that," he said. "Well, I shall be going. Good-by, comrades, or rather *auf wiedersehen*, for I will join you again very soon."

They cheered him and wished him luck.

"I shall do my task well," he promised, enthusiastically. "When next we meet, Great Britain will be bereft of her proud navy."

He turned and marched to the oaken door of the hall. He seized the handle, opened it, and fell back with a shrill cry as a crowd of men in flying togs surged into the room with drawn revolvers.

"'Elio, Fritz!" said the leader of this crowd, in cheerful, Cockney accents. "Thanks for h'opening the door."

The Germans in the room were thrown into a panic. Confusedly they started to rush for cover, while some of them drew their guns. But the Cockney flyer soon stopped them.

"Stand where you h'are, Jerries," he warned ominously, and he and his comrades stepped away from the door. The Germans stared towards the doorway in horror. There, its ugly snout pointing right into the room, was a Lewis machine gun, at which three ready men crouched.

The Spider and his men seemed to realize that they were cornered. Their faces fell in abject despair as they saw their project nipped in the bud. The Spider himself tried in vain to scowl his defiance; his face contorted with anguish and frustration.

"Now," the British aviator went on, "h'up with your bleedin' 'ands, you bloody blokes! H'otherwise we'll turn this 'ere machine gun on you and mow you down, gaw'blimey."

The unhappy spies raised their hands obediently. The crowd of Britishers, who were of the Royal navy flying corps, rounded them up with quiet precision, and stripped them of their weapons.

Another Englishman now entered the doorway, passing the Lewis gun. He was a high naval intelligence officer. He took a look at the scene, and smiled grimly.

"Well, well, so it is all done," he observed, beaming with satisfaction. "Good work, men, good work. Now we shall wait for the trucks to arrive, and then we shall take these spies away." He glanced at the scowling Spider. "So we have caught you at last, eh, Spider? You

have led us a merry chase."

The Spider made a snarling sound in his throat. "How did you ever blunder onto my trail?" he sneered

The Englishman did not have to answer this question. For at this moment, a newcomer rushed into the room, and at the sight of him, the Spider and several others gave a cry of horrible surprise, and blinked their eyes.

But it was certainly no ghost they saw. It was Shorty Carn in flesh and blood, very much alive and not even wounded. The corpulent little Mosquito was out of breath.

"Where's my buddies?" he demanded furiously, and glared threateningly at the Spider. "Tell me where they are or I'll—"

The Spider, malignantly determined to enjoy at least one triumph, one assertion of power, shrugged.

"They escaped, the *verdammte* swine," he stated, darkly. "We could not catch them."

He said this with such sincere bitterness that Shorty sighed in blessed relief, and the little man's tense features relaxed.

"But you," the hunchback went on, unable to conceal his furious curiosity. "How did you ever get away?"

Shorty grinned. "Well," he explained, succumbing to the temptation to do a little boasting himself, now that he was on top instead of the Spider, "you see, I just used the little brains I have, plus the little brawn I have, plus a little luck I don't usually have. You thought you plugged me with that rifle, didn't you? Well, that's where you got stung! I heard the first shot, ducked, and knew I was outa luck. But then I saw that right over the edge of that cliff was a nice, wide ledge. I took a chance on it. As soon as I heard the second shot, I ducked out of the way, and then I just put on a little Shakespearean tragedy—did a dying swan dance. I must have acted pretty good," he admitted, modestly, "judging from the results. But I came damn near killing myself at that, when I let myself roll off onto that ledge. Well, the rest was easy. I just waited until the coast was clear, and then I kept under cover and ran, until I came to a house about two miles away."

"*Gott!*" the fake Lord Wembley put in bitterly, "the house of Viscount Witherington."

"Yeah, Viscount Wither-what, or whatever his name is. At first he wasn't so tickled to see me at this late hour, but when I told him what was what, he gave me the best drink of Scotch I ever tasted. He took me right to a telephone, and I called up this here naval intelligence base—is it six miles from here? Well,

anyway, they sent up this bunch of planes, and also some trucks which will soon be here."

"But," the Spider wanted to know, "how did you get here yourself?"

"The viscount loaned me his Rolls-Royce, and I drove here. Then, with the lights of the car, I lit up a nice landing field for the planes, out on the lawns. I tried to make 'em land far enough away from this house so you wouldn't hear 'em come down. And," he concluded, merrily. "It looks like everything has worked nicely."

The Spider swore savagely. The thought that he had been cleverly outwitted by this little Yankee flyer was too much for him. He could not control his rage.

"You think you are clever, don't you?" he sneered, his features twisting with evil malevolence. "Well," he gloated, "at least I did for two of you *verdammte* Mosquitoes."

Upon hearing these words the color left Shorty's face. His eyes went wild. And while the others in the hall stared with awe, the little pilot, in a frenzy of rage, leaped upon the hunchback and seized him by the throat.

"Damn you, you dirty skunk," he yelled, and his fingers closed fiercely around the Spider's neck, pressed harder, harder. "What have you done with them? By God, I'll wring your damn neck if you don't tell me!"

The British flyers had to pull him off, for the hunchback was choking, and his knees were doubling under him. They held the raging Carn back, while the Spider struggled to regain his breath. And even after that the hunchback laughed mockingly.

"Certainly I will tell you—now," he said, and his emphasis on that last word struck horror into Shorty. The hunchback had glanced at a clock in the rear of the hall. The hands of that clock were pointing to twenty-five minutes to twelve. Again the Spider laughed, shrilly. "Yes, now when it is too late. By this time both those men must be dead. The water in the dungeon must be up to their waists already, and since I gave them a revolver—"

Shorty's voice rose in a scream. "Tell me where they are, damn you! Tell me where they are or I'll—" And he might have murdered the hunchback then and there had not the Britishers again interceded.

"AND give it to me clean!" Travis tried his best to share Kirby's mood of reckless abandon, as they stood there in the water, which was now above their waists. The lanky man steadied his pointing revolver.

"All right, Kirby," he choked. "And don't worry, old man, for I'm gonna come right with you."

But then, despite all his efforts, the revolver began to tremble in his hand, he could not hold it straight. Kirby urged him on once more.

"Come on, Trav," he pleaded. "We gotta get it done. The water will soon be too high. Steady it, now—steady it." And again Travis, steeled himself for the hateful task, forced his hand to stop trembling. He steadied that pistol, leveled unwavering at Kirby's bare chest. Kirby did not move. He stood grinning, ready. Travis drew, in his breath. Then, firmly, the lanky man's finger began to tighten against the trigger. He started to pull, saw the gun-hammer rising.

"Good-by, Kirby," he said huskily.

But he did not shoot!

For, at that moment, both Mosquitoes heard a noise somewhere in the corridors above, a noise of running feet clattering over the stone floors. A voice vaguely reached their ears, a voice which made their hearts leap.

"Kirby!" this voice was shouting. "Travis—Kirby! For God's sake, are you still alive?"

Travis dropped the gun from his hand in his surprise, and the pistol splashed and sank in the rising salt water. The two Mosquitoes looked at one another.

"Am I crazy?" gasped Kirby, "or do I really hear Shorty hollering?"

"It's his voice," Travis insisted. "I could swear to it."

Even as he spoke the stone in the ceiling of the cell was suddenly pulled roughly out of its hole. And though the water was now nearly up to their necks, both men shouted with wild, hysterical joy, as they suddenly saw Carn's head poking into that opening.

In no time Kirby and Travis were hoisted out of that flooded chamber by Shorty and some of the British flyers. The two rescued men, dripping wet and disheveled though they were, literally fell all over their little comrade, whom they had given up for dead. It was a joyous reunion, this meeting of the Three Mosquitoes, and the British flyers who watched it smiled warmly.

"I say," put in the Cockney flight commander, "'ow h'about a nip h'off the h'old bottle, what?" And he generously offered his flask to his American brother warbirds.

Kirby and Travis took a long swig. The strong liquor warmed their vitals pleasantly, braced them up, and almost made them forget that they were soaked to the skin. Shorty also took a swig of the Scotch, although he wasn't either wet or terribly exhausted.

The two rescued men were quick to demand an explanation from their little comrade. Briefly, Shorty told them the story.

“Don’t you think I could get on the stage with that acting?” he concluded, his chest swelling proudly.

“Not on your life,” Kirby kidded him. “You’d give the whole audience heart-failure, and people wouldn’t dare to come to the show. But look here,” he went on, in a more serious tone, “have you got the whole gang up there? How about that Spider guy? He’s damned dangerous.”

“We’ve got ’em all,” Carn reassured him, and added grimly. “That is, all we didn’t get before. And now let’s hop upstairs, where we can get some diy togs!”

Together they all ascended the dark corridor, this time walking with serene confidence through the dark passages where they had furtively sneaked before. They had almost reached the panel which led to the great hall when they heard a strange commotion from that part of the house.

There were shouts, a pistol report, and, for a second, the shrill staccato *rat-tat-tat* of a machine gun.

Hastily, the Three Mosquitoes and their British friends rushed into the great hall. A confusing scene met their eyes. The Lewis machine gun, which had been dragged into the room, was pointed towards the open doorway of the castle. Several of the Britishers who had been on guard were rushing out into the night. Only a few of them remained to cover the huddling Germans who were still in the center of the room.

“What’s the rumpus?” Shorty called.

“The hunchback!” one of the Britishers in the room replied. “He’s escaped.”

The Mosquitoes and the men with them stiffened, their eyes widening. This unexpected anti-climax, coming just when everything seemed to be finished, bowled them over.

“Escaped?” Kirby was echoing. “Where? How?”

The man at the Lewis gun spoke. “’Ow ’e did it I couldn’t say, sir! H’all at once I saw ’im jump like a monkey. ’E\_ ran right h’out that door.” He pointed to the open doorway. “I fired a burst h’at ’im and somebody else took a shot, but strike me pink h’if ’e didn’t get away. They’re chysing ’im now.”

Kirby completely forgot how tired he was, forgot his wet clothes. His eyes blazed wildly, and his jaw set. He started to run towards that open doorway, with his comrades after him.

“A gun,” he demanded, stopping by one of the

Britishers. “Give me a gun, quick. I’m going after that rat.”

The Britisher obligingly handed Kirby a Webley automatic, and the Mosquitoes all rushed out to join the chase. In the bright moonlight they could see Britishers rushing everywhere, searching the lawns for a sign of the hunchback. It seemed incredible, that he could have disappeared right out here in the open. Indeed, it seemed so incredible that Kirby was suddenly seized by a thought which froze his blood. Could it be that the Spider had gone right back into the house, gone back to reach that switch?

Kirby groaned. God, he had practically forgotten about that switch. And Shorty had not mentioned it, probably didn’t know about it. Most likely it was now about ten minutes to twelve. Was the Spider going to outwit them all, to prove that he was brainy enough to trick them even after he had been captured?

The thought filled Kirby with desperation. Frantically he started running around the house, scanning the ivied walls as he ran. He had become separated from his comrades, who were also searching, he came to the tall tower of the castle, the tower which rose from the edge of the cliffs. As Kirby neared it, he was sure he saw a door close—a door right at the base of the huge, stone structure. Acting on impulse, Kirby rushed to that door. He tried it, and it yielded. He rushed into the tower and found himself at the foot of a great, spiral staircase. Moonlight came in from above, lighting up the interior grotesquely.

Even as Kirby came in, he heard feet clattering up those spiral steps. He looked up. Suddenly he glimpsed the figure of the hunchback, as the latter rounded one of the spiral twists. The Spider was scrambling up those stairs as fast as he could.

Madly Kirby followed, waving his revolver and shouting, “Stop! Stop or I’ll shoot you to hell!”

A defiant snarl was his only answer. The Spider, unarmed though he was, went right on up, bent on his deadly purpose. Kirby began to fire every time he caught a glimpse of the hunchback. Up, up, they rushed, around and around, and soon Kirby was gasping for breath, and his feet were turning to lead. The fact that he was wet and exhausted was beginning to tell on him. But he kept on chasing that agile hunchback up the steps, kept blazing away at the Spider futilely, blazing away until he suddenly realized he had only one shot left in the automatic. His keen sense told him not to waste this last bullet.

SUDDENLY the Spider had reached the top of the winding stairs. Kirby heard a door slam and a key turn in the lock. The Mosquito, beside himself with panic, redoubled his efforts and scrambled up to the top of the steps. He reached the door. He pushed and pounded futilely. It would not open. Desperately, he rallied all his ebbing strength, stepped back, and then lunged against that door with his whole body. And to his own surprise, it yielded. Its rusty hinges had been broken by the violent impact, and the door crashed in.

Kirby rushed through the open doorway. In a lucid flash he caught the whole scene. A small observation room on top of the tower, whose windows looked out to sea. The moonlight which poured through those windows illumined the place so brightly that it was almost as clear as day. There was a wall of stone, and at this wall was the Spider, who had removed one of the stones from its place. His hand was reaching for something. It was a large, shiny copper switch.

At once Kirby realized that there was only one thing he could do to stop that hand from pulling the switch. He brought up his revolver, aimed as he had never aimed before—aimed at that hand there. If he missed, everything was lost. And this was his last cartridge!

He pulled the trigger. The Webley spat thunderously. A cry of pain broke from the hunchback. His hand dropped from the switch, and he nursed it while it bled. Kirby gave a triumphant shout.

“Brains!” he shouted, crazily. “Brains! Brains!” And he leaped towards the hunchback. The Spider saw him coming, and with a snarl of savage rage met his attack.

And Kirby got a surprise. Before he could grab the Spider, the quick-witted hunchback, despite his wounded arm, had leaped towards the Mosquito with his usual monkeylike agility. He had put all his strength into that one leap, and he was amazingly strong. Kirby was caught unawares, off his guard. The hunchback’s mighty push sent him reeling backwards. He struggled vainly to keep his balance, slipped, and his head banged violently against the stone wall of the room, opposite the switch. A thousand stars swam before his eyes, and with his ears buzzing he slumped down against that wall, virtually knocked out.

He fought wildly to gather his reeling senses. Vaguely, coming from a great distance, he heard the Spider’s shrill, taunting voice. “Brains!” the hunchback was mimicking. “Brains! Brains!”

And through a blur Kirby saw him darting again to the switch. The Mosquito, frantic, struggled to rise, forced his sapped muscles to respond. The Spider was

now right at the switch, reaching again for it with his good hand. Kirby was half to his feet, staggering to get his balance. He saw the hunchback’s fingers close on the switch handle, and he put all his soul into one final effort. He lurched out across the room. But even as he lurched, the Spider, with one savage jerk, had pulled that switch down.

Kirby stopped in his tracks, stood petrified while through the window, down across the sea from the English Channel, there, came a blinding flash of livid fire which illumined the whole sky. And seconds later, the slower-traveling sound reached his ears. There was a terrific, reverberating explosion which shook the very foundations of the house. Like a gigantic peal of thunder it slowly rumbled away into the night.

The Mosquito still stood there, stunned and frozen, while the Spider darted agilely to one of the large windows, threw it open, and jumped upon the sill. For a moment the hunchback poised there, like some ugly gargoyle. Then a shrill scream of triumph broke from his throat. “*Deutschland Uber Alles!*”

And he leaped out into space, and hurtled down to crash on those cliffs below.

Like a drunken man Kirby staggered out of the room, went lurching down the spiral stairway. His eyes had a glassy stare; his terrible despair was too great for tears.

So the Spider had won after all. He had done his frightful work, and had escaped death at the hands of his enemies by dealing it out to himself. And Kirby had failed—failed horribly!

How he got back to the great hall, to which all the men had returned, he did not know. Dazedly, he saw his two comrades confronting him, looking at his pale, anguished face in alarm. The German spies were gone; the trucks had come for them. There remained just the Mosquitoes, a few of the British flyers, and the high naval intelligence officer who had come with them.

Somehow Kirby found his voice, though he could scarcely hear it himself as it told them what had happened.

Shorty’s wild outburst of laughter stunned Kirby all the more. He stared at the little man, wondering if the latter were crazy.

“Of course we heard that explosion,” Shorty exclaimed. “But gosh, you’ve gone and got yourself all frightened about nothing. Don’t you think I heard what Travis told us in the secret room? I reported all about that switch to the naval intelligence base.”

“But the fleet,” Kirby stammered. “The fleet—”

It was the high British naval intelligence officer who replied to this.

“Just to play safe,” he said, “we issued orders for all our vessels to stay clear of that mine area. The fleet remained in the Channel, and is safe and untouched. It is too bad we had to lose all those mines, but in a way it is just as well. Now the German fleet, thinking the path has been cleared, will come sailing in confidently. And they will get a bit of a surprise.” He smiled, grimly. “Our own fleet will wipe them out of the sea.”

Slowly, very slowly, the light dawned on Kirby’s whirling brain. He gasped. “Well, I’ll be a—”

“Quick!” yelled Travis. “Catch him!”

For Kirby, who had fought his way through this whole hellish night, who had been able to stand the most nerve-racking strains, had fainted.

IT WAS one week later. In the lounge of the Army and Navy Club at London, the Three Mosquitoes sat in a secluded corner, enjoying a leave which had been extended to two weeks. The gallant trio of flyers had been binged, feted, and decorated for their remarkable work of exposing the Spider and his crew. They had been lauded by all London, praised in every newspaper, and admired by every man, woman, and child.

And yet they sat with faces long and disgusted, looking bored and listless.

“Another week of it,” drawled the lanky Travis, with a yawn.

“Gosh,” Shorty complained, “I’ve had so damn much peace and repose I’ll never want any more for the rest of my life. I wish we had something to do. Oh, boy, but I’ll be glad to get back to the Front, where men are men.”

“That’s the trouble with England,” Kirby put in, vehemently. “It’s too damn peaceful. There’s nothing stirring here, no excitement. Yeah, we’ve gone to parties, but they’re as dull and dead as funerals. I’m itching to line my sights on a Jerry plane again, and strafe a couple of Boche trenches. This sitting around doesn’t agree with me.”

“Me neither,” Shorty sighed. “But I suppose if we went back the C.O. would be awful sore. He thinks he’s doing us a big favor to let us stay here another week.”

“That’s the way life is,” Travis observed, philosophically. “He thinks we like it and we have to like it because he thinks so.”

“Yeah,” Kirby concluded, “that’s the way life is. Ain’t it hell, fellers?”

