



STREAKING VICKERS

by RALPH OPPENHEIM

Follow Lieutenant "Streak" Davis As He Sails the Sky Lanes on the Perilous Trail of Hun Horror!

CHAPTER I LONE MISSION

LIEUTENANT "STREAK" DAVIS CLIMBED his Spad at a long, steady angle through the enemy sky, throttle full open. He had left the Allied lines, with their seething stretch of fire and smoke, far behind his tail, and now he was making for all the altitude he could as he neared his objective. The Spad, Hisso thundering, was racing up a long hill of clear, translucent blue sky, its khaki wings flashing in the brilliant afternoon sun.

The big, broad-shouldered figure of Streak Davis filled the cockpit; his knees rose on either side of the joy-stick, helped hold it in place. His eyes, the clear, reckless eyes of a fighter, were slitted warily behind their goggles; now and then they rose to squint towards the dazzling sun and make certain no enemy scouts were lurking behind its blinding orb.

Its black-crossed wings buckled.

Just a couple of minutes more to go now, he told himself. He swung his left knee aside from the stick, so he could look down into the cockpit. There on the floor, where it had been especially installed, was a small, compact maze of copper coils—a wireless sending set. The sight of it brought a chagrined expression to Davis' goggled face, and a curse broke from his lips.

"Hell," he muttered beneath the throb of the Hisso. "Why did they have to pick me for this job? Making me go out like a damn one-wing observer!"

It had been already early afternoon when Streak Davis had taken off on this mission. And he had been told by a worried C.O. how vital it was to the Allies. How G.H.Q. was depending upon him for its success. And how scores of men—good, brave men—had died trying vainly to perform this task.

The central German ammunition and supply base, located in the Villers-Coterets sector, had to be wiped out before three o'clock this afternoon. For at three, those death-dealing supplies would be transported to all parts of the front to equip the new Hindenburg reserve line for its last, mighty offensive. By destroying these supplies the Allies hoped to nip the projected push in the bud—thereby bringing the Boche plans to certain disaster.

Forced to attempt the raid by daylight, because the deftly camouflaged German base could never have been seen at night, two full bombing squadrons—one British and one American—had set out for the supply center yesterday. But they had been completely annihilated before they could get near the place.

It was surrounded on all sides by an impenetrable barrier of ground defenses. A concentration of anti-aircraft batteries filled the sky with a barrage of bursting shells through which even a gnat could not have hoped to pass. The bombing squadrons, caught in that barrage area, had been chopped into so much mince-meat. Not a one had escaped.

That was yesterday. And today. Allied G.H.Q., knowing that the supplies would be moved at three p.m., had become utterly desperate; destroying the base by air had proved a physical impossibility. On the other hand, the Allies' greatest long-range guns couldn't hurl their shells far enough to reach the place.

And then the clever heads at G.H.Q., to whom men in battle were as pawns on a chess board, resorted to one last measure—for they were willing to go to any lengths to prevent another Boche push.

AT DAWN this morning had come the grim order—the order which had sent a whole division of doughboys swarming over the top, yelling recklessly as they fought their way forward in the wake of a low barrage—routing the Germans out of the first-line trenches, out of the second and third, by some of the most bloody hand-to-hand fighting yet seen.

Behind the doughboys, moving into the captured

terrain as fast as ground was gained, came the long-range Yank artillery. Naval guns rolled on hastily laid railroad tracks, other cannon on caissons drawn by tractor and horse.

Into the afternoon, the minor but fierce preliminary drive had continued, until at last the doughboys could move no further—until they were up against the invincible Hindenburg line which would give no more.

But the gain—a gain of several miles—had been enough.

The great Yank guns were now within range of the Boche supply base. Their huge, yawning muzzles were oiled and ready. In huge piles near-by lay the sinister long-range projectiles. The gunners, grimy in jerseys, waited, ready for the word to stuff their ears with cotton wadding and open fire.

The clever heads at G.H.Q. had nodded in silent approval. Their strategy had accomplished its purpose.

But those gunners couldn't see their target, miles and miles away. They had to have an "eye" to go out and spot it for them, to direct their fire by wireless. The distance was too great even for the use of observation balloons. And so the hurry call—for it was already one-thirty p.m.—had been sent to the United States Thirty-fourth Pursuit and Reconnaissance Squadron, the champion flying outfit of the sector.

"A job for you. Lieutenant," was the terse way Major Hopkins, grizzled C.O. of the Thirty-fourth, had put it to Streak Davis as the latter presented himself in the operations office. And crisply the major had explained the details. "Only a single-seater could hope to get there unspotted. Now, you remember your wireless training from Issoudun."

Streak Davis had listened, with clouding features. He had not won his nickname for jobs like this. He was a fighter, and the speed with which he hurled his plane to the attack, straight and true as an arrow, had won him his soubriquet.

BUT here was a mission which had nothing to do with fighting ability. Here he must be a mere cog in the machine of war, an impersonal cog which looked down upon the enemy and killed them by long-range fire from guns miles away. Streak Davis wanted direct conflict, where you personally faced your enemy and attacked with your own flaming guns.

And today he had intended to settle that little score with the new checked-winged Fokker D-7 Jagdstaffel. He had planned to go out with the Thirty-fourth's buzzards, for a hot reprisal against that Jerry staffel

which had cost the squadron almost a dozen planes this last week.

“You’ll have to direct the artillery fire quickly, when you start,” the C.O.’s voice was continuing tersely, “before you attract high-flying Pfalzes. And, above all, keep away from the protecting anti-aircraft barrage area.”

The major’s eyes had met those of the broad-shouldered ace then, and behind their warm admiration was a worried doubt, almost a definite dread.

“It’s rather big, Streak.” His tone was no longer the officious commanding officer’s now. “Keep a cool head, feller, and do your best. Those Yank artillerymen are counting on you, waiting at their guns for you.”

Davis, won over by the C.O.’s concern, had straightened, grinning. “Don’t worry, Skipper,” he said easily. “I’ll tell those gunners how to shoot straight! I’m off as soon as the crate’s ready.”

It was not quite two p.m. when the wireless-equipped Spad had thundered down the Thirty-fourth’s smooth tarmac, to rocket into the blue sky with the breathless, arrowing speed typical of Streak Davis.

CHAPTER II HALF AN HOUR TO GO

NOW, DEEP IN GERMAN SKY, Davis was climbing for altitude on the last lap of his journey. And in another moment, as his Spad zoomed on into the upper reaches of the blue, his keen glance went to the roll-map pinned to his dashboard.

He studied its colored patches, and then, peering down over the fuselage, he compared the map patches with the patches in the green-and-brown terrain far below. Immediately he brought his Spad to a level—straightened out, with his altimeter needle wavering at eight thousand feet.

His left hand closed down the throttle half-way, and he proceeded cautiously—warily.

He was paying special attention to a red line drawn clear across the dashboard map, a red line he must imagine on the ground below, and must not cross. For beyond that red line, concealed somewhere in trees or camouflage, would be the concentrated anti-aircrafts

—the barrage area which had done for two whole squadrons, and which would mean instant and certain death to him if he flew over it.

Streak Davis flew on until he came to what he thought was a safe margin between his Spad and that imaginary line. No fire had greeted him at all thus far—high up here, he had evidently gotten through unspotted.

But if he should get over the concentrated anti-aircrafts, they’d pick him up with their tin-ears and watching telescopes immediately.

His foot pushed right rudder, and he swung the stick over to one side. Here in the high sky his Spad wheeled in slow circles. Using his knees to hold the stick in place, he got out a pair of binoculars, shoved up his goggles, and adjusted the field glasses to his eyes.

HE TURNED the focusing knob as he pointed them earthward. The earth came immediately closer—vague patches turned into distinct copses of trees, hills, winding roads. Circling, Davis scanned them.

At first he saw nothing but those orderly stretches of landscape. But then—

His nerves suddenly tensed, he held the binoculars trained on one spot of the terrain. For he had detected a certain false aspect about a whole area of trees. Something that tried to look like nature, but was a poor copy. Camouflage!

Yes, now Davis could see the customary nets, strung across high poles—painted and covered with fake foliage, and completely screening whatever lay beneath them.

Quickly, he lowered the binoculars and turned back to the dashboard map. His eyes lighted. For that camouflage area below compared exactly with the markings on the chart—the markings which indicated the concealed German supply base! He had spotted his objective!

HE BROUGHT up his wrist-watch. Not quite two-thirty. Fully half an hour to go. But he must work fast. Any time he might be spotted. And enemy planes might show up.

Still guiding his plane almost entirely with his legs. Streak Davis set to work. He unwound the reel which held the antenna wire—and the wire promptly trailed out beneath his Spad, held at a downward angle by the weight at its end.

He snapped on a switch; there was a faint electric

hum within his cockpit, audible under the half-throttled drone of the Hisso motor. The wireless set was alive. Davis had no ear phones, didn't need them—for he had no set with which to receive messages; he could only send.

As he reached for the telegraph sending key affixed to the dashboard, a sense of doubt made him feel almost foolish. The idea of communicating from mid-air with a battery of gunners miles and miles away, somewhere out of sight across the lines, seemed almost impossible, fantastic.

Nevertheless, he tapped the sending key with quick, dexterous fingers. He saw the tiny flame leap across the spark-gap, heard the buzzes as he tapped out dots and dashes, sending the Morse message out into space.

"K-24—" That was his identifying code number. He repeated it several times. Then: "Over objective—Number One gun fire for range."

He turned the key off. The air was silent and clear. Below, peaceful and distinct, he saw the camouflage area he had spotted. A second passed. It was absurd, he told himself again. How on earth could a few dots and dashes buzzed out in a speeding airplane reach that battery of guns and—

A sudden, involuntary shout burst from Streak Davis' throat. For suddenly, as if by magic, down on the ground to one side of the camouflage and in front of it, rose a giant geyser of smoke and flame which mushroomed high into the air and fell in showering debris. An instant later Davis heard a dull but reverberating boom—and his Spad wobbled momentarily from the waves of concussion.

His message had brought immediate response! That explosion was the explosion of a shell hurled across the miles of air by Number One gun!

A STRANGE thrill swept through Streak Davis. All at once he felt a tingling excitement, and his blood pulsed fast just as it did when he went smashing into Borne reckless battle.

Maybe there was something in this artillery work, after all! Maybe, in its way, it was just as interesting as going after that new Fokker D-7 *staffel* would have been!

Why, those Yank guns miles away were actually at Davis' command—he sent them orders through the thin air, and they obeyed blindly! And if he only gave the right orders, they'd blow the German base to hell!

CHAPTER III SKY COMMANDS

HIS HEART IN HIS TASK NOW, he tapped the telegraph key again: "Number One gun—fell short and to the left. Try correction."

Promptly came the second shell. This time the geyser of smoke and flame rose at the very outskirts of the camouflage area—in front of the objective but on a direct line with it.

"Number One gun now on line of fire—" The oscillator buzzed, the sparks leaped. "Hold it. Other guns fire in turn, for corrections."

Like a field of giant mushrooms suddenly sprouting, the answering shell bursts rose from scattered parts of that terrain below. And Streak Davis, in his wobbling plane high above, watched each hit and tapped out corrections.

Like a general getting his troops into attack position, he was lining those guns up in front of the camouflaged target.

It was ticklish work: he had to distinguish one gun from another, remember their turns, and wireless each correction. But he did it all with lightning speed. He had not forgotten the C.O.'s caution to work fast. Soon the Germans below must realize that this was wireless-directed fire, and they'd begin to take measures to find and get the plane directing it!

But in just a few more seconds, Streak Davis saw that he had the guns all lined up correctly. The moment was at hand. By sending a "creeping barrage," the guns could now make their shells march right through that objective. The ammunition in the supply base would be exploded and finish the damage which the shell would begin.

Streak Davis swung around in one more circle, to make sure that all was set. His heart was pounding, and there was a gleam in his eyes. His finger reached for the key. Then:

"Send barrage!"

Scarcely had his finger lifted from the key when it came! No more scattered mushrooms now, but a veritable, thundering hurricane of shells which screamed magically from across the lines.

Like some immense tidal wave of fire, of smoke and shrapnel, those long-range shells were ploughing through the target area, creeping through and scattering destruction in their trail. The mighty, reverberating roar of the barrage shook the very heavens—the air became so rough that Streak Davis had difficulty keeping his lurching, stalling Spad in the sky.

But Streak Davis was cheering wildly from his cockpit, thrilling at the spectacle of it all, seeing in his mind's eye the Yank gunners shoving shells into the breeches as fast as they could.

All the time, he himself, kept that creeping barrage going straight and true through the camouflaged area, and wirelessly corrections continually all throughout the frightful din.

THEN, so suddenly that it startled him, it was over. The barrage had gone clean through the whole area.

The air seemed suddenly still. Davis peered downward at the ugly, settling pall of smoke below.

And his mind was telling him, his every instinct was telling him—that something was wrong! Something was radically wrong.

In a sudden flash it came to him. That base was known to have been full of high-explosive ammunition; yet, outside of the bursting shells, there had been no explosion. He would have seen such an upheaval at once, recognized it.

A cold apprehension gripped Streak Davis. Too worried to hesitate, he pushed his stick forward, spiraled the Spad downward from its high altitude.

The smoke was clearing from the devastated area. Davis trained his field glasses on it. Funny—there was just a clean swath of shell-torn, pock-marked ground, of burning camouflage and trees, and here and there what looked like a broken gun, and a little mass of inert, maimed gray-clad figures. It certainly didn't look like the ruins of an immense supply dump.

It didn't—

A CRY of utter, frenzied dismay broke from Streak Davis' throat then.

For now, from this lower altitude, his binoculars had focused on something beyond and to one side of this devastation.

Camouflage again—the same painted nettings and false foliage. But amid the camouflage, visible because he was low, were dark buildings, and long mounds covered with tarpaulin—mounds such as he had seen before in any ammunition dump!

“God!” he burst out, frenziedly. “I ranged the wrong place! I didn't get near the real base!”

That other camouflage had fooled him!

Yet, he saw even now, it had compared in every respect with his roll map.

It came to him then that the Allies themselves had been fooled—the observers who had tried to map out the base had made a mistake about it.

The spot they had marked was doubtless just a decoy—a deceiving dummy. And the actual base itself was not even indicated on the chart!

It was not Davis' fault, yet he was filled with self-reproach. Damn it, had he been a decent observer he might have seen his blunder. Instead, he had wasted that whole barrage!

But it was no use sitting here in his cockpit, bemoaning the mistake. He must correct the error at once. He must tell those gunners of the stupid mistake he had made, and hope to hell they could send another barrage. With frantic haste his finger reached again for the sending key.

“K-24,” he tapped out the call-signal once more. “K-24. Barrage not—”

A snaking wraith of smoke along his cockpit cowl made him jerk back his head in wild alarm.

At the same instant he heard a roar over his own motor, heard a shrill of wires.

Rat-ta-tat-tat! The staccato clatter was splitting the air. Lines of deadly tracer were penciling the blue on all sides of his ship!

Wildly, Davis jerked up his head—and then the blood drained from his face.

TWO slender-nosed Pfalzes were slanting toward him in a flash of sunlight. Their wings tilted at a terrific angle as they dived to attack.

The Boche on the ground, having guessed that the barrage had been sent by a wireless plane, had evidently summoned these scouts. Now they were here, they were right on top of the Spad!

Rat-ta-tat-tat! Rat-ta-tat-tat-tat! Jagged streaks of flame spat from the forward Spandau guns of the Pfalzes as they came on, like two vultures.

CHAPTER IV
WINGED FURY

STREAK DAVIS HEARD THE BULLETS ticking through his fuselage, ripping fabric and smashing wood. Cursing, he half-rolled, banked and started to zigzag, to elude their sights.

His fingers reached wildly for the wireless key. Send the message, his brain screamed at him! Get it out—before they stopped him! But even as the oscillator began to spark, Davis' hand jumped instinctively from the key; his whole body recoiled as a whole fusillade of tracer came whizzing past his very face.

He saw them ricocheting from the cowl—he saw them chip a weakening indenture in his outer forward strut. His Spad lurched drunkenly, as if a giant hand were shaking it like a rattle.

The two Pfalzes, having leveled off, were darting at him on either side. Davis saw the Boche pilots, grim behind their goggles, leaning between the flaming Spandau barrels, trying to make the kill. Again he half-rolled, yawed, but they were clinging like leeches and their bullets were making the air around him denser with flying, screaming lead.

He saw his antenna wire swinging wildly as he stunted, threatening to tangle with his own control wires. And Streak Davis realized he must fight—fight or simply be shot to hell. He must try to get rid of these determined Pfalzes, then send his message.

Cursing, he reeled in the antenna with one quick hand, while with the other he ripped the throttle lever wide open.

He hunched forward, leaning to his sights, eyes blazing now with the light of battle.

A burst almost stopped his Spad in mid-air as he sent it careening around in a breathless skid-turn. Then he was roaring head-on toward his two antagonists, his fingers pressing the stick triggers.

Rat-tat-tat-tat! His Vickers vibrated and blazed—he was hurling to the attack in the arrowing, reckless manner which had won him his nickname.

THE two Pfalzes met his burst with a withering chorus of their own guns; then like two giant birds,

they separated, each banking off to one side.

Streak Davis saw their purport instantly: if they separated and he went for either one, the other would be on his tail before he could complete the attack. He'd be done for.

"Think up a better one. Krauts!" Davis gritted then. Instead of going for either one or between them, he shot his Spad around wide of the two separated planes—forming an outside circle around them.

Even as he streaked by, he saw their black-crossed wings flash; he heard their guns behind him as the two Jerry ships converged once more, both to leap after the Spad's tail—like two hawks neither of which wanted to miss the easy kill.

And even as there came such a burst from both of them that the bullets smashed all over his cockpit and sang wildly in his ears. Streak Davis gritted his teeth and, crossing controls, hung his Spad in a shivering stall.

The two Pfalzes, wing to wing, slithered past over the Spad before the surprised Boche pilots could check their forward momentum. They passed so close that for a moment Davis feared their wheels would tear off his top wing. They were ahead of him then—he was behind their tails, and they were both flying together. That was what he had hoped for!

He wasted not a second. Grim as death, he leaned to his sights and sent his Spad forward in a furious spurt—a spurt which brought his ring-sight directly upon one of the two Pfalzes.

Rat-ta-tat-tat! His Vickers blazed in a long burst.

The Pfalz at which that burst was aimed was literally smashed to pieces by the withering fire. Its black-crossed wings buckled. Flame leaped from its engine and enveloped its crumpling fuselage.

The Boche plane fell in a flaming wreck, trailing oily black smoke. As it fell, the tiny gesticulating figure of its pilot leaped clear of the flames and dropped to earth like a somersaulting stone—preferring to plunge to his doom rather than be cremated in his burning ship.

The other Pfalz was pivoting up and over in a breathless Immelmann turn then, to get into a kill position and avenge its comrade.

But Streak Davis, like a winged fury, shot up to force the German on the outside arc of that turn—and again the Spad's guns spat their lethal streams.

The Pfalz, caught half-over, slid crazily through a half mile of space on one wing. It lurched, and then flew drunkenly, like a crippled bird, stalling, losing altitude.

DAVIS did not go after it as it staggered eastward over the carpet, trying to make for home. He had damaged it enough to get rid of it, and that was all he cared about. He was alone again, at least for the moment. Now to send that message— Again he unwound the antenna, with desperate haste. His finger reached for the wireless key, tapped it.

But there was no responding buzz—no spark!

Streak Davis shot a quick, troubled glance down into the cockpit. Into his eyes came sheer horror.

The wireless set was a mass of twisted junk, of scattered wires! The German bullets had torn it to pieces, wrecked it beyond all repair.

CHAPTER V HAILSTONES OF DEATH

DAVIS TRIED TO FIGHT down a rising panic. There was only one thing to do now: get back across the lines. Get new wireless equipment—return so he could range the base for those gunners.

But even as he was starting to turn his bullet-riddled crate towards the west, a glance at his wrist-watch made him stop, in utter despair. It was fifteen minutes to three.

It would take him more than fifteen minutes even to get to the lines. And before there was a ghost of a chance for him to get new equipment and return here, those German supplies at the base would be moved! Distributed by fast truck and train, to different parts of the front for the new Hindenburg Push!

A groan which was almost a sob broke from Davis. He had failed—disastrously! Without means of communicating the range to the Yank artillery now, he couldn't do a thing. There was not enough time! The German Push would not be stopped! All because he had made that first mistake, because he had believed his false roll-map!

Helpless, he continued to fly his Spad around in circles like a distraught bird. Racking his brain in vain for some way, some means.

B-r-r-r-r-o-oom!

Only Davis' instinctive quickness saved him from instant death! Even at the instant of that deafening, ear-splitting rumble, he was jerking his joy-stick back

to his very chest, zooming wildly at full throttle.

Zooming as, up from the earth beneath, there erupted such a spew of anti-aircraft shells as he had never seen before! Solid and dense as a mountain they rose—and like a madman, Streak Davis was racing to beat them, to get out of the way.

With cold horror, he realized that, while he had been circling around despairingly, he had inadvertently flown over the area marked by the red line of his map! He had flown into the fatal anti-aircraft barrage area!

In the next instant, while he zoomed on madly, the first shells were reaching his level—bursting with ear-shaking detonations on all sides of him, blackening the sky. Shrapnel began to whizz about him like monstrous hail-stones. The acrid stench of powder clogged his nostrils. He flew as against a mighty, oncoming storm—trying frantically not to be engulfed.

His Spad shivered, lurched, as he urged it on. Darker and darker grew the air—the bursting shells came swifter. He was done for; they were engulfing him as they had those two whole squadrons. They—

THEN, to his dazed, frenzied relief, the dazzling sun and blue sky suddenly met his eyes as his Spad broke clear from the top of the barrage—and he was streaking out of it, safe!

He breathed grateful lungfuls of air. The shells were bursting behind his tail now—and he gasped in sheer awe at the sight of them. They made a solid wall, those shells, a wall of dense black smoke and flame—miles high and miles in circumference, completely encircling the German supply base.

No wonder those other squadrons had been caught! Lucky for him, he had only been on the fringe of that deadly wall, and his quickness had gotten him out of the trap in time. Suddenly he stiffened, sat bolt upright in his cockpit. Banking as close as he dared to that wall of shells, he stared incredulously through his goggles.

FOR in that wall, he saw a gap! A narrow gap, but one that went clear through, nevertheless. And Streak Davis realized—

The Yank shell-fire he had directed had wiped out a portion of the concentrated anti-aircrafts! The Allied shells had blasted a clear swath through them, forming this clear gap in the wall!

So there had been something under that camouflage after all! No wonder he had seen broken guns—dead Jerries down there!

Already, without half thinking. Streak Davis knew what he must do. He had misdirected the guns and could not correct them now. But, he could at least try to make use of the damage they had done! With a gap now made in the anti-aircraft wall, a plane might, with luck and skill, get through to the base! And then—?

He had no bombs. He had only the usual machine-gun bullets of a fighting crate—ordinary tracers, and one incendiary to every ten others, which were intended for balloon strafing. The incendiaries were his only hope. There was a chance, a fleeting chance at least, that if he could shoot some of them into the ammunition piles at that base, he might blow up the works!

He did not hesitate, for he knew that even now the Boche gunners must be moving their batteries to close the gap in their wall. It was quite narrow as it was. Streak Davis steeled his nerves. With clenched teeth he banked his Spad until it was opposite that gap in the anti-aircraft wall. And then—

With a reckless oath he ripped open the throttle, and was racing forward hell-bent, Hisso roaring, flying wires screaming.

Like some immense yawning mouth, that gap in the wall rose before him. At the same time his ears were deafened again by the thunder of shells. He steered his plane as only he, with his famous streaking manner of flight, could steer it. Straight and true into that gap he drove it.

THROUGH that chasm of death, that ravine walled on both sides by bursting shells, he was flying, at all the speed he could make. The heat of the two fiery walls actually seared his flesh—the stench choked him.

The frightful concussions rocked his Spad from side to side, often threatening to hurl it directly into one of the waiting, deadly walls.

But cursing, panting with the effort, Streak Davis held the speeding ship steady—kept it going between the two walls of fire, even though the gap was growing narrower and narrower now.

The Boche guns were moving as he had known they would, trying to close him in! The thought that he would never be able to get out even if he got through did not bother the desperate Yank; his mind was only on his goal, the goal which he had failed to enable others to accomplish, and must now accomplish single-handed!

On, on, he drove his protesting ship. And closer and closer to those walls came his wings. A shell burst

presently, almost under his right wing. He swerved just in time, just managed to avoid the opposite wall.

The black smoke of the burst caressed his wing-tips, seeped through flying wires. He went on. He felt he was flying in some inferno out of a nightmare—some unholy place that didn't exist on man's earth.

Pop! A string of flaming onions hung itself in the gap above him, floating down—those deadly phosphorus balls which never stopped burning no matter where they lodged, which were sure death if they touched any part of his plane. He lowered his tail as they came down—and they passed his tail by scant inches.

Now he could see the two walls of shells actually closing—like those walls, during the medieval Spanish inquisition, which came together and crushed the victim between them to a pulp. In a last frantic effort, Davis opened his throttle to the very widest notch, literally coaxed the Spad forward like a jockey coaxing a race-horse.

Then, even as the walls did come together, and the barrage was now solid again—Davis was through! Like a streaking comet, he had gotten into the center of that circle of fire!

IMMEDIATELY the anti-aircraft guns stopped. The whole solid wall disappeared like some magic thing, leaving only a curtain of thin, dispersing smoke. The Spad was out of their range now, until he got near their range again they would not waste ammunition.

Streak Davis was directly over the camouflaged Boche supply base, which spread in a full, mile-wide area. Here they could not station anti-aircrafts, for fear of the shells falling back on them, and setting off their stored ammunition.

BUT Streak Davis hardly paused to draw a breath, to rest his tired muscles. He saw his goal below—and with a desperate, single purpose, he plunged his stick forward, and dived at full throttle.

Down he went, roaring, screaming, through space. The base loomed, its camouflage growing more and more loose-looking and conspicuous. He saw the squat buildings, saw running, frantic gray-clad figures.

Machine-guns—their gunners unafraid of him—opened up from several places to meet his Spad with whizzing lead. But he ignored the fire—it seemed like so much bee-bee fire after what he had been through—and plunged on.

He was diving, not towards the buildings, but

towards the largest tarpaulin-covered mounds— for he knew that here must be the stores of ammunition. Down he went for those mounds, while his Vickers sent their twin, fiery streams before him.

Almost on top of one of the mounds, he jerked back his stick. The Spad lurched out of its dive and went tearing along, raking the tarpaulin-top from one end to the other.

But even as Streak Davis Immelmanned up to come back anew, disappointment swept him. Not a mark had been left by his bullets! He saw that the ammunition mound was not only covered with tarpaulin, but also with sand-bags—layers of them! They had cushioned his bullets, stopped them!

Cursing, he tried again. Again he dove through the machine-gun fire, raking that mound. But it was futile! He could do no damage here. Desperately, he went for the other mounds then, for the other buildings. He cut loose with everything he had, scattered his lead and incendiaries left and right.

A wake of death trailed behind his plane—he saw tiny gray-clad, coal-scuttle helmeted Germans drop like mowed wheat, saw camouflage poles break and fall. Once his heart leaped with hope—livid flames broke at the edge of some of the fallen camouflage, near one of the shell-piles. But instantly a group of Boche rushed out with fire-extinguishers, and before he roared down and annihilated them, they had the fire out.

Half exhausted, his ammunition already starting to run low. Streak Davis felt a despairing frustration sweeping over him. In his single frail Spad, with only two gibbering guns, he seemed to have no more chance of hurting this immense base than some harmless, buzzing insect!

But, determined to keep trying, he sent his Spad into a steep zoom, hoping that another dive from altitude might bring him better luck.

And he zoomed almost into the very midst of a whole swarm of enemy scouts!

CHAPTER VI BLOOD-CRAZED HAWKS

HERE, SWOOPING OUT OF THE SUN, were fully a dozen coffin-nosed crates with black-crossed wings. Fokkers—D-7's!

As Streak Davis saw their checkered wings, a frenzied oath broke from him. God, this was the very D-7 *staffel* he had wanted to go out and fight with the 34th—the crack *staffel* which had been beating the 34th. By a cruel irony of fate, he was meeting them after all—but meeting them alone, when they were the last thing he could have wanted to see!

No doubt the Boche below had sent for the crack *staffel* to attend to this lone insolent Yank who had penetrated their defenses and was molesting their base!

With frantic haste, Davis tried to pull out of his zoom. But even then those Fokkers were pouncing on him like blood-crazed hawks—and tracer spewed at him from all sides, closing in a criss-cross prison around his ship.

In the next instant the air seemed to be composed of nothing but Fokkers. Wherever he looked he saw them; saw their looming coffin-noses sending out spurts of flame; saw their helmeted, grim-faced pilots.

Davis stunted his Spad with all the energy he had left. Desperate, knowing everything was lost, he fought as only a desperate man can. He hurled his crate upon his antagonists—guns spitting, but sparingly, for his bullets were scarce now.

In the next instant he sent one of the D-7's plunging to earth like a stone, in a tight spin, it crashed near the outskirts of the base. Two more of them he managed to cripple; they limped off like that other Pfalz. But there were plenty more—like the many heads of Hydra they kept bobbing up on all sides, to make his Spad drunker and drunker with their lead.

TWICE, still with that terrible singleness of purpose. Streak Davis tried in spite of the surrounding Jerry planes to dive anew on the base below. Each time he was literally blasted out of his dive by the terrific Fokker fire.

But on that second attempt, his eyes—ever the keen eyes of a fighting ace—noticed something that struck

him as peculiar. Whenever he threatened to dive, most of the Fokkers would all move to one spot off to one side, and bunch there, protectingly. As if, he thought, they wanted to make sure he didn't go there. As if they were protecting that particular spot—

With bullets screaming all around him, smashing into his crate, Davis now looked down the terrain below that one spot. And there he saw something he hadn't noticed before: an immense, metal-rimmed tank which stood upon the ground. Evidently a storage container for some kind of fuel or oil—

That was obviously what the Fokkers were so zealously protecting. And wasn't this an indication that those Jerry pilots knew that if the Spad did dive on that tank, even if it only did have machine-guns, it would be capable of wreaking some real damage?

THE realization was like a tonic, which sent new life-blood coursing through Davis' veins. There, in that swarm of Fokkers, he reached reckless decision. Once more his eyes blazed, his teeth gritted.

Ignoring the bullets which kept pumping his ship, which only by a miracle of luck had thus far avoided his body. Streak Davis banked. He pointed his nose straight at that tank below, and dived—hell-bent! Immediately the German Fokkers darted across his path like dragonflies. They nosed up to intercept him with fierce bursts from below. At the same time, a rattling tattoo on the Yank's tailfins told him they were following furiously from above.

But a demon seemed to possess Streak Davis now, a demon which all hell itself couldn't stop. Straight on down he sent his Spad careening, screaming, giving the dive everything he had. Again his guns blasted a path of steel and lead before him.

They smashed into those Fokkers trying to cut him off; they sent two of them down in fatal spins. And Davis was streaking through the gap even as he had streaked through the gap of anti-aircraft fire before.

Down, down, down—They were all behind him now—the last of them had to swerve to avoid collision, for he would surely have rammed right through them. Down, down—the cylindrical tank looming, the Fokkers like a mad pack of wolves at his tail. *Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat!*

He was pressing his stick-triggers, holding them, praying as he did. He saw his bullets tearing into that metal tank—tearing in. Despair seized him as nothing happened.

He dove on—he smashed on down, so desperate

that he was determined to ram the tank if he had to. With the Fokkers behind him, he was doomed anyway.

Now the metal-rimmed tank was coming in a breathless rush towards him. *Rat-ta-tat-tat-tat!* He fired a last burst—in another instant he'd be crashing into it head-on.

BUT then, in an instant, with a cry of savage joy, Streak Davis was jerking back his stick. He pulled out of the dive with a lurch which almost tore off his bullet-riddled wings.

For, suddenly, out of that tall, steel tank, had leaped a giant tongue of livid, yellowish flame. In the next instant that flame became a sudden, seething volcano of fire—fire which overflowed the riddled tank, broke its sides, and spilled out liquidly to flood the surrounding ground. By God, that fuel was some highly inflammable gas or petrol.

Flaming, it was pouring over the supply base.

Streak Davis, having done all he could, was zooming into the blue for all he was worth. So suddenly, and so close to the ground, had he lurched out of his dive, that the pack of Fokkers, following behind, had been delayed. They dared not pull out so abruptly for fear of stripping their wings. But now they were easing out of the plunge; and in the next instant, even as the flood of liquid flame was roaring over the grounds of the base below, Fokkers were zooming right after the Spad.

B-R-R-OOOM! B-R-R-R-OOM! B-r-r-rrooom!

THOSE reverberating explosions were more ear-splitting, more terrific, than the combined din of shells and anti-aircrafts which had assailed Davis' ears this hectic afternoon. The flood of flaming petrol had reached the ammunitions at that base, and they were erupting in a mile-wide volcano—setting each other off, blowing everything in sight to hell. Davis' zooming Spad was knocked into a half stall, but the Fokkers below fared even worse. Having just begun their zoom, fully half of them were wiped out by the deadly explosions. One pair collided, locked wings, and went down in flaming dalliance. Another was struck in its mid-section by one of the rampaging shells from the dump; in two parts, it fell. And others fluttered earthward like stunned butterflies.

Only five of them kept pursuing Davis, but those five, crazed with fury, were determined on their blood vengeance. Madly, Davis zoomed on, his nose pointed westward.

Then a new terror assailed him. The anti-aircraft barrage—how was he going to get through that fatal

area? But the fear died even as it was born. He saw, with frenzied joy, that the explosions which had already turned the base to smouldering ruins had also reached the surrounding guns. The shells, flying amuck, had made mince-meat out of those A.A. batteries. And Davis streaked on, towards his lines.

But the five Fokkers were still after him, like leeches. His Spad, strained, overheated by all it had been through, was not making speed.

Cursing, Streak Davis kept racing on, on. God, he was too exhausted for any more fighting or stunting—and now those five Boche were right behind him. Their coffin-like noses came closer, closer.

Again came the frightful tick of bullets, the rattle of tail fins. Tired, emotionally spent, Davis was ready almost to give up. It was the end.

He had succeeded in his mission, but death, outraged by the way he had pulled its very whiskers today, was not going to be cheated any longer! In another instant would come the burst that would send him to hell, send him—

Rat-ta-tat-tat-tat!

The burst came—but it was not a burst of Spandaus. It was the more violent, gibbering clatter of open Vickers! Dazedly, Streak Davis was staring behind and above—staring at the seven khaki Spads which came screaming down like eagles—right on top of those five Fokkers.

A HOARSE cheer of hilarious joy broke from Streak Davis' throat then. His own squadron mates—Spads of the Thirty-fourth! The fighting buzzards he had wanted to help get this D-7 outfit! By God, he had helped them get it—for against those diving Spads, the five Fokkers never had a chance.

In the next moment the dog-fight was wheeling around the blue afternoon sky. The fight was a slaughter. Davis wouldn't have had time to join it, even had he not been too exhausted anyway. For one by

one, those Fokkers went down before the flaming guns of the Thirty-fourth.

In triumph, the seven Spads—Streak Davis among them—flew home. Later, Streak Davis learned that the Hindenburg push was successfully checked. Also, that the gas tank he had finally ignited to accomplish his mission had contained a special new high-test petrol for the new type Fokker D-7s.

NOW, not only that petrol was gone, but also the chief Fokker D-7s which would have used it! It was indeed a day of days.

Still later, in the twilight sun, Streak Davis stood facing a grinning colonel of the United States Artillery. To one side of them, still smoking and grimy, were the tremendous long-range Yank guns which had been moved here to send the wireless-directed barrage. The gunners, half-naked, powder-stained, stood around, all beaming on the Yank ace with the silver wings on his breast.

“We all want to congratulate you for ranging the base so expertly,” the colonel was saying to Streak Davis. “Our gunners are damned proud of their job, and they all say they never got such clear and quick range-directions from any aviator in their experiences. It was fine observing, Lieutenant!”

For just a moment Streak Davis' jaw gaped, and a hot outburst rose behind his lips. So they thought their guns had done the stunt!

But then the Yank flyer checked his retort. If he told them what had really happened, he'd have to confess to his awful blunder of making them send the barrage on the wrong target. And then, no matter what his excuse, they'd think he was the dumbest artillery-shooter on the front—they'd give him the razzing of his young life.

Steaming inwardly, he forced a grin. “Yeah,” he said diplomatically, “it was a damned good job.”