



*Racing Madly to the Rescue of a Valiant Brass Hat,
Jerry Smacks Up Against Some Real Scrapping!*

SKY COUGAR

by HAROLD F.
CRUICKSHANK

CAPTAIN JERRY COUGAN raced his bullet-riddled Spad for the tarmac of 72 Squadron, of which he was skipper of "A" Flight. Jerry, returning from a solo reconnaissance for Wing headquarters, had run into plenty of opposition, as his Spad plainly showed. But—he had gotten the information required.

His ship had barely kissed the turf of the home tarmac before Jerry was out, hurling his big six feet of frame into the Squadron Major's office. The scowl on his face set a livid battle scar dancing from the cheek bone to the right corner of his mouth. Immediately he sensed that something was wrong.

"What happened, Doc?" he addressed the surgeon.

"Gone. Lit out, solo, Jerry," returned Captain Mallow, the M.O.

"And you guys sat around an' watched Power

go—just like that? You made no attempt to stop him? Where the devil's your sense? Couldn't you see that the major's pulled a sheer sacrifice move?"

Cougan, known to his squadron mates as the "Cougar," was blazing mad. There was no man alive for whom he had more regard than Major Dan Power. Today, definite word had come from Intelligence H.Q. that the notorious German killer, von Scheer, had returned to this immediate sector. Von Scheer, whose pillage of Russian towns, whose murder of aged and innocent citizens had made his name a by-word throughout the entire war zone, was back in France, at the head of a Jagdstaffel of devils, and Dan Power had gone out alone to check up.

It had been von Scheer's Spandaus which had caused that scar on the Cougar's face. Jerry Cougan had cut down the baron at the close of a terrible fight

over Monchy le Preux. Both had been wounded, pretty badly. Von Scheer's services were desired on the Russian front, following the healing of his wounds. Right now, after pulling German wires, he was back opposite the Americans again.

No one need tell Jerry Cougan why von Scheer had chosen this front. And—out of his intense regard and admiration for the Cougar, Major Power had slipped away—had taken a Spad and gone gunning for the baron.

"No use gettin' hot under the collar, Cougan," snapped Col Martin, the skipper of "B" Flight, lounging beside the doctor. "Hell; It isn't our fault the major went. Blame yourself, and your glory-grabbing Cougar Flight. Power feels he owes you a debt. You saved his life—saved the squadron, and—" The skipper shrugged, blowing a fine stream of tobacco smoke through his lips.

Crack! The Cougar struck. Jerry had leaped ten feet and ripped a right hook to the other's jaw, all in a flash. He had promised this man Martin that some day he would do just what he'd just completed. Martin had no use for Power. The only hitch in the harmony of 72 Squadron was the internal strife kicked up by Martin, who had felt that he was due for the command, and not Power.

The surgeon stepped forward and grabbed Jerry's arm.

"Hell, Jerry, you shouldn't have done that, son," he breathed. "I'm surprised you lost your head. It hasn't helped any."

Jerry liked this scrappy sky surgeon. Mallow was all to the good, a square-shooter of the first wave. The Cougar looked him right in the eye, and his drawn lips parted in a thin smile.

"Darn right it's helped, Doc," he snapped. "It's helped show this horn-blower that 'A' Flight is not a bunch of glory-grabbers, but a gang of real honest-to-God, dyed-in-the-wool white men. I resent such cracks from any man; an'—I want you to get that, Martin.

"Any time you're looking for more trouble, well—come an' get it. You let the chief go out to meet von Scheer; took it as a matter of course, huh? I'm not suggesting there was any ulterior motive, but—" "Cougan!" Captain Martin stepped forward. Their eyes met and held. It could be seen that "Cougar" was no misnomer, when one measured the poise and general lines of Jerry Cougan's well-cut frame.

"You just didn't give a damn if Dan Power went to hell," he jerked. "You're bitter, just because Dan got this

squadron ahead of you. Dan made good, but through no help of yours.

"Well, get this, Martin. I'm going after Dan. If anything's happened to him, you'd better start applyin' for a transfer. This tarmac isn't going to be big enough to hold us." Cougan spun smartly on his heel and hurled himself into the open. Captain Mallow hissed sharply through set teeth. He shot a hard, meaning look at Martin.

COL MARTIN was nobody's fool.

He had a record in the sky lanes; but a record wasn't all that went to build up character. It was true he had had an equal right to the command of 72 Squadron, on service, but he hadn't that added factor which makes for better executive ability—that human touch.

To handle a rip-tearing bunch of hellcats such as formed 72 Squad, you had to be character-proof. Power was all of that.

The Cougar had stung the skipper of "B."

Stung him on his most tender spot—his consummate pride. As Martin strode to the door, Doc Mallow wondered just what the outcome would be.

One of Jerry Cougan's most ardent admirers, a lieutenant who had gone to Valhalla a few weeks ago, had conceived the idea of the sleek painted cougars which graced the sides of Jerry's Spad's fuselage. And now—as Jerry led his gritty flight east, slicing sky like a monster flock of migrating gray geese, these cougars seemed to leap alive, a snarl on their drawn lips—painted fangs a-gleam, and strikingly real.

JERRY COUGAN was hunting Major Power. He figured to find him in the patrol area of von Scheer. Or—he shuddered—there was a chance the sky would be clear. If Dan Power should have met the German killer, the odds were dead against the Yank. It was too much to expect that an executive officer, who had directed the destiny of his squadron from an office chair for months, could regain his old touch on controls and guns with sufficient speed and efficiency to take a flight like Scheer's into camp.

Crouched over his stick, Jerry Cougan scouted the sky main on every hand. It seemed, as time tore on, that they had lost Major Power. Save for an occasional reconnaissance ship of the German patrol, flying low across No-Man's-Land, the sky was empty of battle ships. Jerry Cougan's heart pounded hard now. He felt that if Dan Power had gone out, it was the beginning of the end

for 72 Squadron. He had no desire to take over complete command. Martin, who was next in line, would bring ruination to one of the finest units in France.

But, apart from feelings for the squadron as a unit, Jerry's foremost thought was of Dan Power as the man. Jerry knew that the major had come out to scout this German threat for the purpose of gaining first-hand information—information that might save Dan's subordinate officers, his pals. It was a gritty act, this act of complete sacrifice.

Suddenly, Dick Bryan, who was the Cougar's deputy leader, flashed his silver Spad across the skipper's bows. He ripped a short warning burst from his Vickers and with doubled fist pointed.

Jerry shot a swift glance overside, right. Like an automaton, he kicked right rudder and touched right stick.

THE Cougar slipped off for more than two hundred meters before he flattened. A low gasp escaped him, slitting his drawn lips. Below, trapped, hemmed in by a flight of seven Fokkers, Major Dan Power lifted his hand to the trips of Vickers which were nearly dry.

A cry came from Jerry Cougan's throat like the snarl of the animal from whom he had gotten his *nom-de-guerre*. As he pitched his Spad down into a bugling dive his keen eyes watched the play below. Power was hurling his bus into all manner of maneuvers, making a gallant bid for an opening. From time to time, as he zoomed hard, or Immelmanned, there came a brief splash of flame from the snouts of his guns.

But—von Scheer had him on the spot. Slightly above his circling *Leutnants*, the Prussian killer sat back, only occasionally tipping his nose to slit sky with his Spandau lead. It seemed that this notorious Hun flight was playing with Power as a cat might toy with a mouse, before the final slash of claws which ended its life.

Like plummets from some forgotten world beyond, the flight of the Sky Cougar tore down to the rescue. But already von Scheer was putting his Fokker into the death dive.

Jerry Cougan groaned. His fingers itched on the stick trigger, but the range was too long. He had his Spad in power, all she could stand, in the dive. It was a wonder she had not thrown a wing, he thought.

All at once, sensing the danger which threatened to climax a terrible, long fight, Dan Power was seen to throw his body forward in the cockpit. He was hunched low over his stick. The Spad's nose tipped, then cut air up in a hell-defying zoom. With his every

atom of courage in play, the major was hurling his Spad right up into the teeth of the Prussian tiger.

Jerry Cougan took a chance on an outside loop and fed his Hisso another notch of throttle. His slitted eyes never left the twisting Spad below. Suddenly there was a dual burst of flame. Vickers and Spandaus had split loose together. A short burst of no more than five or six rounds blasted from Power's guns. Cougan caught the slivering of a strut on von Scheer's bus. But the gritty Yank major's guns were dry. He was through!

Von Scheer was not stopped. His Spandaus flamed long, and murderously, as Power rolled off to go into a dive, and then a spin.

THE Cougar's feet tensed against the rudder bar; his whole soul weltered in torture. He had come the fraction of a second too late. Now his guns were snarling. Ten Vickers were pouring iron-jacketed lead into the Fokkers below.

Von Scheer signalled frantically and turned up. His *Leutnants* flung themselves in scattered units about the sky. To them, it seemed that the sky had become an inferno of hell. Bullets pattered on fuselage and wing spread.

But, hurtling on earthward in a loose falling leaf spin, Dan Power's Spad was headed for a spot deep in behind the German lines.

The odds against the Yanks had been cut to even now. It was evident, also, that von Scheer's bus must have suffered some slight, but crippling injury, for the killer chief was well out of the mill.

The Cougar gunned his bus and raced her alongside Dick Bryan's ship. He waved his left hand, calling Dick's attention to the falling major far below. The deputy was quick to catch on. Jerry was turning the flight over to him; while he, Jerry, ripped sky down to earth, to spot Power's landing.

Jerry Cougan turned out. He knew that he was taking a long chance, a dangerous chance, in losing altitude as he intended. Von Scheer was as wily as a red fox. But—the Yank skipper had seen his chief offer his life in the interests of the Cougar Flight and all members of 72. No red-blooded man would have refused to do what Jerry was going to do.

Ground guns would blast up at him. There was every chance that von Scheer would tear on down to hem him in with killing Spandaus. Jerry Cougan was going to put himself on the spot; and—he liked it.

"It's the least I can do for you, Dan," he breathed. "Here I come, brother—"

POWER'S Spad suddenly came out of the spin. Almost a thousand meters above, a cry of sheer exultation burst from Jerry Cougar's parched throat. The major had fought his controls all the way down. Now, though still rocking not more than a hundred meters above the ground, the squadron commander was bringing her out. By George! There was a chance that he could scud back across the lines.

Jerry banked around. He intended to sit tight above the major's tail, until Power was safely across the lines, some two miles distant.

The greatest of man's plans, his hopes, are often dashed to bitter fragments in a flash of time. Power was only half turned when, from a system of rear, reserve German trenches, a sheet of flame shot skyward. It came from the muzzles of three Maxims, firing from a redoubt which had once served as a heavy gun emplacement.

Jerry Cougar gasped. A sudden surge of bitter hatred assailed him. Right when Power had freedom in his grasp, the will of fate had shifted. Now the major was going down. What was more, he was headed deep into German territory.

Blasting a volley of oaths through his set lips, the Cougar whipped about and tore earthward like a screaming fiend. His Vickers stuttered madly as he swooped in a hell dive down over the emplacement. Hard striking bullets began to take toll. One Hun gunner pitched over the hot barrel of his ground gun; another crumpled, clutching at his chest. The entire company was routed; then Jerry skimmed the tips of a fringe of elms to bring his Spad down in an indifferent three point, on a patch of level ground a mile or more behind the last of the German guns.

Jerry was down before the major, whose Spad was making heavy weather of it. Her control cables—rudder control, had been cut. Also, blood spouted from a tear in Power's left shoulder. But he was fighting gamely.

Below, Jerry waved his arms wildly to catch the major's attention. Then he signalled to Power to slip off left into a patch of scrub. It was the only way by which the major could hope to break the fall.

Now, eyes red-rimmed, teeth bared, his every ounce of nerve forced into play, the major jammed his foot hard on left rudder and pushed on left stick. His engine was cut. He had switched off. All that could have been done was done.

As the Spad slipped off, Power unbuckled his safety belt. A million blinding lights seemed to fog his vision.

He was consciously leaping into hell's very pit. But he never cracked. He hung on to his nerve.

As the port wing tips smacked in, Dan Power leaped. Jerry Cougar, who had left his Hisso idling, was running, leaping towards him.

THE major's leap had hurled him on to a patch of low scrub. He socked in, a soggy impact almost doubling his knees up around his head. But, as the Cougar darted in, Dan Power grinned, actually grinned.

"A jack-knife dive was—the—only—one I—could ever—" Dan Power's breath choked off and he sagged. Jerry caught the lolling head and held it up.

"Come, Major—Dan. Hang on—hang on. We haven't a moment to—to—uh!" The Cougar's hand had suddenly contacted with the sticky mass which was his chief's blood. Jerry had a plan in mind—a devilish scheme through which he hoped to get the major away. But it was only reasonable to believe that right at this moment German troops of some branch would be hurrying up to effect a capture. Jerry Cougar knew this only too well. And Major Power lay limp and bleeding in his arms.

Power was drooling through his almost clenched teeth. Jerry bent in low.

"Suit—yourself, Martin—Entirely up to you. Don't want—order you up. Final? Right. I'll go—I'll go, Martin—gladly—"

Jerry gasped as the meaning of Power's fumbled words came to him. Great Caesar! Major Power had asked Martin to take this afternoon patrol; Martin and his flight. The skipper had refused, which was his right, as it was not a regular patrol. But—he had refused out of spite for his chief. Like the gritty scrapper he was, Major Power had cancelled a visit to Wing Headquarters and had taken the patrol himself.

"If I wasn't—so sure I'd never see you again, Martin, I'd be glad to—swear that I'd come back an' ram a sky prop—down your rotten throat. You an' your pride are lousy as the devil! You—"

Power was stirring in Jerry's arms. The Cougar bent his gaze on the pain-wracked face. The major raised his head. Jerry straightened and tugged him to his feet. He held him tightly until Power's consciousness returned fully.

"Listen, Major," snapped Jerry. "Want to help me in a little scheme?"

"Help? Sure. Anything I can do—be glad to. What's on your mind, Cougar?" The major's eyes had lost their glassy stare. He was making a splendid comeback.

"Get aboard my Spad an' run her for home," Cougan snapped. "Quick, sir. Take a message to the boys. I'll hide out. Got a flash lamp in my pit. Have Dick come over and spot me. I'll signal in Morse. Dan, both of us can't go. I want you to do this."

"Then you're—out—a—mile son," returned the major. "What sort of a—a coyote d'you think I am? Get away—before it's too late. Worst that can happen to me is to be bedded down in some Hun hospital. Jerry! I hear voices. Hustle. Get going."

JERRY COUGAN'S hand flashed to his pocket. An automatic whipped to view. It jammed its muzzle into the major's back.

"You're goin' in, Major," he growled. "By God, I'll croak you if you don't. I want help. You've got to—got to take my ship. I'll swear to God I've got another idea back of my head. Listen! We're close in to von Scheer's drome. While I'm down I want to spot it."

"There's a chance we can smash his Staffel up completely if you only do as I suggest. March, Chief. I mean it!"

A thin smile played with the corners of Power's set mouth. He had an idea Jerry was bluffing in his interests, but there was a fire of determination in the Cougar's keen eyes. Perhaps, after all, Jerry had a plan for the demolition of Scheer's drome. Perhaps it would be better to act as he suggested.

"But, if I go, do you promise to hide out till after dark?" the major gulped.

"You said it, Dan. I have a cravin' to go on living. Listen! There's voices. Come, get aboard. I'll help chock her down while you give her the gun."

A patrol of trotting balloon men were too late to stop the silver cougar Spad which seared sky as Major Power zoomed her clear. Jerry Cougan hurled himself to cover, a smile toying with his scarred face. Though he had been truthful, in part—he did want to live, to keep his freedom—he realized that his chances were mighty slim.

He had seen a crippled Fokker plane land beyond a bluff to the east, and hazarded a guess that von Scheer's forward drome lay somewhere in that direction.

IN THE thicket, he crouched like a hunted jungle creature. Footsteps pounded. Now the Yank commenced to thread his way deeper into the woods, treading as lightly as the big cat from which he had got his name.

Dusk was beginning to blanket the area. The woods

were particularly dark. Jerry hunched himself under a spreading pine, there to await the coming of full darkness.

BACK at the drome of 72 Squadron, mechanics and off-duty pilots gathered in their respective quarters—men whose nerve fibres were on edge. A flight of Spads throbbed on their chocks at the deadline. "C" Flight skipper, Captain Dave Rand, was ready to take off in search of the Sky Cougar and the others. Their absence had struck a note of fear at 72.

In the mess hut, Dave Rand downed a second cup of coffee. His eyes half closed as Captain Col Martin stepped in.

"This place is like a darn graveyard," Martin observed. "What's wrong with everybody? Hell! You guys sure hang the crepe. I see your buses at the deadline, Dave. Got the heebie-jeebies?"

CAPTAIN MALLOW, the surgeon, standing by, took a step forward, then checked himself and shot a meaning glance at Dave Rand. Rand and his flight had just come in from a patrol to the south. They had worked for the French artillery today. The pilots were tired, ready for bed. But, at Dave's call, they had become peculiarly alert.

"I suppose it doesn't matter a darn to you if the major, and Cougan and the rest don't ever get in, Martin," Rand snapped. "Reckon you wouldn't be much upset if the major had washed out, huh?"

"Meaning?"

"You figure it out," Dave retorted. He pulled on his gauntlets and strode to the door.

Suddenly the roar of a Hiss blasted the silence about the drome; another, and another. Spads were slicing sky down to the tarmac. Men sprang to action. Hut doors opened and pilots and mechanics trotted onto the field.

Like four grey phantoms, in the half-light, Dick Bryan's Spads hit in for a landing. The Cougar's deputy leaped from the pit and darted across the field toward the office hut, to be met by Mallow and Rand.

"Skipper get in?" Bryan jerked, his voice little better than a hoarse croak.

"No—nor the major," returned the surgeon. "What happened? 'You've been hit, Dick. Come in and let me sew up that face.'"

"My flight is ready to take off, Dick," Rand snapped. "Give us map location and we'll take a look-see."

"Look-see, hell! I've combed every inch of the sky

for miles. I cruised around the actual spot both the major an' Jerry landed on, but not a trace of them did I locate. I'm afraid it's a wash-up."

They were striding across the field, a battered trio, whose spirits were low. To his wingmates, Jerry Cougan had been more than a good flight leader. He had been their best pal, a man who understood their every whim and trait.

SUDDENLY Doc Mallow stiffened.

"Hear a Hisso? he asked. "Hear it, Dick, or am I dreamin'? Listen!"

"It's a bus coming in," jerked Dave Rand. "I wonder—" He started to run. Men were yelling. A Spad was hurtling down like some huge, crippled bird. A crash landing seemed inevitable.

But, in the cockpit of the Cougar ship, a form suddenly stiffened. Major Dan Power had awakened from a swoon. He blinked owlishly about him, then a low cry escaped him. He cut his gas, and back-sticked hard. The Spad smacked in hard, a heavy bouncing pancake. As she came down from her high bounce, her undercarriage buckled beneath her, but—she was down, and the major sagged hard against the side of the pit, breathing hard, but conscious.

"Hello—boys," he called, as hands tore at his belt buckling. "Devil of a way to come in, eh? This is the second landing I've made since I left Jerry. Had to come down east of Mont de Servons. Fainted, I guess. Hello, Dick, son. Listen!" The major had seemed suddenly to flash out of his lethargy. His eyes shone with fire now.

"Listen, Dick. Jerry's down—location's pricked here on the map. Thinks he can get a line on von Scheer's drome. Wants you to make a night flight, with signal lamp. Locate him. He has a flash. He'll give you orders—if—if he's okay. Oh! That you, Martin? Well, we got into a jam. I'll be out of 72 for a time—" Dan Power was slowly pulling himself out of the pit, with the help of Doc Mallow.

"As I was saying, Martin, I reckon this busted wing will keep me away from 72 for a time. But, get this: You don't take over. Is that good and clear to you? You refused a patrol this afternoon. You had a whole flight lying idle. You let a single, stale pilot take that patrol.

"I don't mind what's happened to me. But the very finest man this squadron's ever known is down in Hun territory, at the mercy of that killer swine von Scheer. That's all. Martin. I believe, if I were in your shoes right now, I'd begin to drift, to find another hole."

Col Martin took a swift step forward. His eyes were blazing. Major Power had taken down his sails of pride. But Martin was no coward. He was a fighter.

"I'm taking your remarks on the chin, Major," he snapped. "But I reckon I'm not hunting any holes. Get that—all of you."

With that, he turned and strode off to his quarters.

TWO hours later, Dick Bryan and Buck Moore landed their Spads on the tarmac. They had failed in their search for the Cougar.

"Got him, looks like," gasped Dick, to the surgeon. "We've done all we could. At dawn, we'll take up the whole flight. Reckon you'd lend a hand, Dave?" He turned to Rand.

"Try an' stop us, Dick," jerked the skipper of "C." "You're sure there's no use hunting further tonight?"

"Positive. Don't you suppose we'd be there now, if there was the faintest chance? We'll be up at early dawn, boys. If we can do nothing else, we can shoot that Scheer Staffel off the map."

No more questions were asked. The tarmac of 72 was soon deserted. Men huddled in groups at the hangars, or in their huts. Jerry Cougan was missing—the best of them all had failed to return.

THE Sky Cougar was very much alive! In fact, he might have said that he never felt better in all his life. He was terribly hungry, and when Jerry Cougan was hungry, he was fit.

Back at the woods he had left an hour ago, two heavy forms lay draped on the leaf mould and pine needles. Two searching Prussians had been dropped by the barrel of Jerry's Colt. Now, with the first shades of false dawn penciling the sky, the Cougar, in a German uniform, crouched in a patch of willow scrub at the fringes of von Scheer's tarmac.

Sounds of laughter came from a mess hut. Von Scheer was entertaining; an all night affair apparently. Visitors gathered, by the look of the planes at the deadline. They were not all of the same make. A couple of Pfalzes, a Halberstadt and an Albatross ranged themselves near the Fokkers of von Scheer's Staffel.

A couple of men were working at the Albatross. Jerry Cougan licked his lips and his slitted eyes shot flame into the gloom. Cautiously he shifted position to ease the pain in his cramped limbs. He shot a glance at his radium-dialed watch.

"An hour till dawn," he breathed. "Gee, just for one little break right now—just one." But it seemed

that there was no break for Jerry. The mess hut door opened and, lit by a brilliant light, a tall flying officer bellowed his farewells. He strode to the Albatross and climbed aboard. Chocks flew, and the half tipsy pilot gunned his bus across the tarmac.

Jerry Cougan's mind was working fast. The Albatross was gone. He winced at this thought. Next he watched a single Pfalz take off. This time the pilot had not come from the main mess hut, but from a lesser hut.

There was a faint mark of dawn in the sky now. The Cougar trembled. The urge to live, to bid for freedom, surged through his virile being. He thought of Major Dan Power. There was a chance that Dan had washed out in his flight to the drome of 72. At least, there was the certainty that the major would be absent from 72 for a long period of time.

And Jerry Cougan wanted to be back. He didn't want the command of 72, but he wanted to make doubly sure that it didn't fall to Col Martin.

Crouched low, he darted carefully to a point back of the mess hut, then in to one of the other huts. Now, his breathing almost cut off, he straightened, slipped to the front of the hut. He was at the closed door. Any second it might open—

LIPS taut, he strode boldly across the tarmac, humming a tune through his clenched teeth. His German was not of the best, but he hoped to get by. He growled something at the mechanics who tuned up the remaining Pfalz and climbed aboard.

He gunned the Mercedes and at its roar, the door of the hut which he had just left flung open. A Prussian flying officer hurried onto the tarmac. Jerry waved to the mechanics. A floodlight had switched on.

The men sensed that something was amiss. A blast from a Luger pistol awakened pandemonium at the drome of von Scheer. The mechanics ducked. Jerry pressed home his throttle and jammed left rudder hard.

Forms were darting toward him, as the Pfalz jockeyed in an effort to pluck herself from the chocks.

Pfutt! Pfutt! A bullet cut into the dash, narrowly missing the Cougar's head. Snarling an oath, he struck right rudder hard. The bus swerved, bolted. He held her down, then gunned her to the last notch.

Fokker pilots leaped aboard their ships. Curses in German brought extra mechanics into service. A searchlight splashed the sky, flicking the edge of the Pfalz as Jerry zoomed her clear of a bunch of poplars.

He cast a glance over his shoulder. Fokkers were ready to take off, and then he glimpsed the sleek ship of von Scheer cut sky well ahead of the others. Von Scheer's Fokker was miles faster than any Pfalz made, but this knowledge didn't wipe the grin from Jerry's face. He was sky-side, with a brace of Spandaus before him, a full gas tank and a whirring prop.

His big chest bulged as he pressed home the throttle and kicked the ship around to westward.

THEN the smile gradually faded from his scarred face. The feeling of hatred he felt for von Scheer began to purge his being again. He had come out to get von Scheer! This scar on his face was the mark of the Prussian hellion. And this time he meant to settle the score between them beyond any question of a doubt.

Jerry sank to a crouch above his stick. The baron's fast ship was gaining on him. But the Yank made no move to gun his bus up to any possible higher rate of speed. There was only one thing he wanted, and that was American occupied territory beneath him when he started to fight it out.

A GRIM cruel smile toyed with von Scheer's face as he jammed the throttle of his Mercedes in to the last notch. So! This *Hauptman* Cougan thought to escape him, *nicht*? Few had ever escaped the Spandaus of von Scheer!

His feet shuffled on the rudder bar and he leaned forward, as though trying to urge the snoring Mercedes to even greater speed. He wanted to catch the *Amerikaner* hellion before the Pfalz could cross the German lines. Nothing must interfere with his plans. He had signalled to the three Fokkers which followed him that this was his own private feud fight. They must remain back.

Von Scheer began to climb, mildly but steadily, as he forced his ship at top speed. Ahead, Jerry Cougan could not afford to risk any loss of speed in a climb. He flew all out on a level, straight tack.

For another mile he raced; then he glimpsed No Man's Land ahead. He shot a glance over his shoulder, then gasped. The baron's Spandaus were flaming from above and behind. He was much closer in than Jerry had figured. But the Yank's grin returned. He had drawn his hated enemy on to the spot he had chosen for combat.

A swift glance about the western sky brought dismay to Cougan's eyes. Was that a Yank plane just slitting a drab cloud veil ahead? God! To be spotted

now by an American ship! That he might be cut down by one of his own men was a terrible thought.

But the yammer of Spandaus cut all extraneous thought from the Cougar's mind. Von Scheer was calling for action. Tracer was tearing sky past Jerry's head, and the Yank pushed down the nose of his captured ship—down in power, so that the wind bugled through his rigging like a host of storm fiends rampant in the rigging of a hurricane-tossed windjammer.

COUGAN had been right. There was a lone Spad in the sky. Col Martin, for some reason known only to himself, had brought his ship up this morning. Perhaps it was his pride, or the quickly spread atmosphere of unpopularity back at 72 Squadron, that had brought him out alone, with no particular patrol in mind.

He was in a sour mood, until he spotted the Pfalz. Then his spirit changed. Here was a chance to blast the mood from him. He had altitude. That Pfalz was as good as cold meat.

Gunning out of the cloud bank, Martin kicked around. His stick went down. Then, with a quick start, he zoomed. A fast hell-bent Fokker was roaring down on the Pfalz's tail.

What did this mean? Were these two Germans cleaning up some feud between them? Or had that killer in the Fokker's cockpit become a maniac?

Martin gunned up, and kicked his Spad around. He would watch this shoot out; then, if there was anything left, he could streak down and make a kill.

But his brows shot up as he saw the diving Pfalz suddenly zoom into an Immelmann. As the Pfalz made her turn, Martin gasped. There was only one pilot, since Immelmann's time, who streaked up and over in the famous turn like this. All thoughts of assistance were blasted from Martin's mind now by the bitter hatred he held for Jerry Cougan.

"Let him get out of it, or take it," Martin snarled, pushing his Spad up toward the cloud ceiling again.

His embittered soul was so filled with thoughts of his own hurt pride that, for the moment, he forgot he was as likely to see the killing of one of his own countrymen—one of his own squadron members—as he was to witness the fall of von Scheer.

He kicked his ship around and leaned overside to watch the hellish mill which had begun.

And as Col Martin watched, the Cougar came up in another roaring Immelmann. Jerry's keen eyes had seen that Spad slink up into the thinner cloud veiling.

"Some yellow pup too weak in the knees to come on down and see if he could help," he snapped. "But I'm just as well pleased. He might have gotten in the way. Blast you, von Scheer, you nearly fooled me that time—"

Jerry was forced to slip off from the Immelmann turn before it was completed. He roared down on his port wing tips, falling crazily through space. Like a monster falcon, the Hun *Rittmeister* followed him down.

Blood was trickling down the baron's face, a face now cruelly alive with changing expressions. He touched his stick right as the Pfalz began to level. Now his thumb pressed the trips. But, in an amazing flash of skill and speed, the Cougar had again kicked off in a left skid.

JERRY leveled off quickly, dived for ten meters, then thundered up in a full-on zoom, which brought his prop boss dead at the center of the baron's diving ship.

Pr-r-rp—rat-tat-tat. White wood splintered from von Scheer's prop. A sliver zinnaged back and slit a nasty gash in the Hun's already bleeding face.

"*Du lieber Gott!*" he thundered, as he pulled up into an Immelmann. It had been some time since the day when the Cougar had once before got him on the spot. That must not happen again. At all Costs this *Amerikaner* devil must be cut down. The baron snatched at a flare pistol and fired a burst back to eastward. It was the signal to his three pilots to close in!

But, as the baron rolled his ship out of the Immelmann, Jerry pushed up in a new zoom. The belly of the Fokker was exposed. His guns snarled madly. Bullets thumped hard up through the Fokker's undersurface.

Von Scheer staggered. A searing pain tore up his left leg, from the sole of his foot, on up until the slug crashed his knee. He stifled a low groan, as his ship toppled over. He was forced to fight her madly now, for in that split second she had taken the control out of his hands.

Jerry Cougan heeled out of a tight loop. His eyes flamed with renewed courage as he now had the baron on the spot, but he held no false hope, no gloat. The baron was still alive, and one of the best flyers in the game. Jerry prepared again to Strike. A snarl broke from his lips as he went down. His next burst must be perfect!

THEN to his utter amazement, von Scheer's ship took a sudden upward heave. Her nose came over. Her Spandaus crashed. Jerry sagged against the side of the pit as a slug tore through his left shoulder. A million lights danced before his fogged vision. He hung his head overside to catch the blast of the propwash. It revived him. Through a blur he glimpsed his enemy's ship; and then his vision cleared completely.

Von Scheer was kicking around, head to the east, when Jerry touched his stick down. Now there was no mistake. The wounded German leader was doomed. He shot a fleeting glance up at the diving Pfalz. A balled fist shook in Jerry's face. Then both the baron's arms flung out overside. His gas tanks exploded at a sudden mad burst of Spandau fire.

Jerry pressed on down—down—until the notorious Boche ship of death broke out in a mass of enveloping flame.

Weak, reeling, the gritty Yank zoomed clear and set his nose to westward.

He was oblivious of the dread menace at his back, though. Three Fokkers were slicing sky from the east. Three of the late von Scheer's first flight hellions had seen their chief go out. Vengeance burned in their hearts. That Pfalz must not escape.

FROM his point of vantage, Col Martin had also seen. For a split second a smile toyed at his lips. There was no escape for Cougan now. Cougan, who leaned hard against the cockpit rim, as his bullet-battered Pfalz streaked to the west, yawing, staggering, as if flown by a drunken pilot.

His bitter thoughts broke off suddenly. Something seemed to clog in his throat. He was looking down at three Fokker shapes which tore in at the Cougar's tail.

For a long moment Col Martin's eyes were closed. Then began a fight, a fight against his reluctance to interfere, and that spirit of Americanism which had for long been buried beneath his prideful surface. He hated Cougan, hated him for no other reason than that fostered by his own pride.

Spandaus were flaming below. Martin looked down. God! The Cougar had kicked around. Though still leaning against the edge of his pit, Jerry was showing his fighting teeth in a flash of flame from his captured Spandaus.

Col Martin snarled an oath, and hurled his Spad into a dive. There was no particular love for Cougan in

his mind even now, but some stronger force than his own consummate pride was drawing him into hell-bent action.

The three Fokkers split wide out. For upwards of ten minutes they milled in the bullet-stabbed sky. Two hellion Yanks were holding them up. And then Martin made a kill.

Ships were coming out of the west. Jerry Cougan saw them through bleared vision. His whole left arm and side ached, heavy and numb. But he kned his stick and waved to Martin—waved his thanks with his good right arm.

Col Martin signaled him out. There was a fast flight of Spads tearing in. Martin could hold back these two Fokkers now. Heck! He didn't require a sick Cougar's help now—or at any time!

Though loath to turn out, Jerry Cougan was forced by loss of blood to do so. His conquest had been tremendous. And he was glad in his heart that Col Martin, of all people, should have burned on down to help him at a very critical time.

"When you dig down," the Cougar thought, "you'll most always find—something—a bit better in any man."

He looked up as four Spads streaked on by, but his vision wasn't clear enough to get the signals which came from four waving arms. Col Martin had signaled back to these Spads to keep hands off the Pfalz. They understood and now two of the ships kicked around to flank the captured Hun ship.

Two of Jerry's best flight members were guiding him home—the most glorious sky buster of them all. But Jerry was forced to apply all the consciousness left to him, to the control of his ship. One of the greatest fights he had ever engaged in was to stay awake, just long enough to flatten the Pfalz out on 72 Squad's tarmac. This he was determined to do.

One of the Spads flanking him suddenly streaked down. Jerry glimpsed the tarmac below, a distance ahead yet. But a grin split his features. He touched down on his stick—down, teeth gritted hard as a swoon threatened. And then his tires kissed the turf. The Pfalz bounced high, then squatted down in a pancake.

Jerry Cougan sagged back in the pit. This day, for him, was gloriously ended. A term at the hospital lay ahead. But he would come back—back to "A" Flight and the glory of the sky lanes!