



TERROR TARMAC

A Savage Menace of Whirring Death Hovered Over the Twelfth Pursuit Group—and Dan Healy Set Forth to Find Out All About It!

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LIEUTENANT DAN HEALY, from Intelligence, shivered as he stepped from the motorcycle which had brought him to "Terror Tarmac," near Commercy, where the Twelfth Pursuit Group was stationed. He could feel

the intangible menace reported to grip the place, even before he had spoken to a soul. He waved his hand at the motorcycle driver who had brought him up.

"Rout out somebody and get yourself a slug of cognac," he said. "Then you can beat it."

"Okay, sir," replied the enlisted man. "Jees, this dump gives a guy the screaming meemees."

“Yes, not only one guy, but lots of guys.”

“What’s that?”

“Never mind. How could you understand when nobody else does?” Healy, walking very erectly, at his full height of six feet even, no fat, of power and confidence, strode to the building he took to be the headquarters office. Rain slanted across the tarmac, roaring. It rattled in the shell-blasted trees at the edges of the field like the clattering of dead men’s bones, or the noise made by scuttling sand-crabs. A gust of wind whipped slimy water out of a pond he was skirting and a fine mist splashed Healy’s face.

“Jees!” he echoed the word of the motorcycle orderly. “It does give you the willies—and I’m not supposed to get ’em. I wonder what the hell—”

HE KNOCKED sturdily on the door of the headquarters office. His near-midnight summons sounded, even through the roaring of the rain, like the crack of doom. The short hair at the base of his skull seemed to shift.

Inside the office he heard a chair clatter over, fall to the floor. Somebody was frightened. Then came a querulous voice:

“Who’s there?”

“Lieutenant Healy, sir!”

Major Harris, his hair all awry, his eyes bloodshot and wild, opened the door. He didn’t seem to realize that his right fist clutched the butt of a Colt .45. He didn’t even notice when Healy gently took the gun from his fingers and tossed it on the desk.

“There, Major,” he said quietly. “That stuff won’t help. You’ve got to face it—”

“Face it! Face it! You don’t know what the hell you’re talking about! Face it, you say—and what else have we been doing for ten days?”

The major’s voice was high-pitched, almost hysterical.

“Want to tell me about it?” asked Healy.

Major Harris, a younger man than Healy, apparently, despite the gray at his temples, seemed to relax appreciably. He sat down heavily in the chair Healy righted for him. Some of the lines around his lips smoothed out.

“God,” he said. “I’m glad you’re here. I thought Intelligence never would do anything about it. And I guess you can find out as much as I can tell you. If I didn’t have to go through it all again—and again—but this makes four!”

“I know. I was told three—”

“There was another one this evening, just at dusk,

Healy. But I don’t know that even a dick with your experience—”

Healy shrugged. Plainly Harris was dumping the eerie horror of this tarmac squarely on the shoulders of Healy. Healy accepted the responsibility. After all, he hadn’t had his nose to the grim grindstone the way Harris and his men had.

“Okay, Major,” said Healy. “Tell me where to go. Then you hit the hay and sleep. I’ll send the medico to you. Maybe you’ll need a shot in the arm to sleep.”

MAJOR HARRIS came to the door of the office with him.

“It’s yonder,” he pointed. “See the crack of light under the door. He’s there.”

Harris closed the door and Healy was back on the tarmac, splashing through mud and slime, with rain pouring across his cold face, heading for the building Harris had shown him. He entered without ceremony.

Three men jumped to their feet. One he knew for the medical officer. The other two were his enlisted assistants.

On a table in the center of the room was a white sheet of significant shape, covering something. At one end the sheet bent sharply upward, covering a protuberance.

“Healy?” said the medico.

“Yes.”

“Heard you were, coming. Left things about as they were until you could get here. Want to look?”

“No, don’t want to. But have to.”

The medico tossed back the sheet to disclose the fire blackened figure of a man. His flying togs were torn, charred. He was a first lieutenant. Beyond that little could be discerned about him.

“I don’t know what causes all this,” said Doctor Cairn, “but it’s driving all of us daft—and it’s so utterly impossible.”

FOR the protuberance which the sheet had covered was now exposed. Lieutenant Parsons, by the signs, had been downed in flames—which couldn’t, by the wildest stretch of the imagination, cover the reason why the handle of a stiletto—a stiletto which fire had stained a bit, but which could still be seen to have a handle shaped like the head and part of the body of a bat, with the wings folded, protruded from his left breast. The bat had pink eyes, obviously of coral.

“He had the knife in him when we pulled him out of the wreck, Healy,” said Cairn.

“Up in a ship alone,” said Healy softly, “where nobody could possibly reach him, and even an enemy ship couldn’t come within the right distance, he gets, not a bullet, but a knife through the heart.”

“And comes down within reach of our tarmac,” said Cairn. “The first man to get it was Lieutenant Davidson, in almost the same way. But he was walking home at dusk from Papa Morin’s *estaminet*. We found him. It might have been the same knife, except that we’ve kept the others.”

“Anybody notice a ship fly over just before Davidson get his?”

Cairn shrugged.

“There are always ships—and heavy guns—and machine-gun fire, and musketry. How could anybody be sure?”

“Is anybody here suspected?” Cairn shivered.

“No. It’s German stuff, sure as hell.”

HEALY covered the still form, after removing the knife. He took the other three knives which Cairn brought him and asked Cairn where he should select a hutment—and was told grimly of four which were vacant—and stepped out onto the tarmac.

Through the rain and wind came the ceaseless cannonading of big guns near and far. Flashes of lightning splashed across the lowering black sky. Machine-guns chattered. Rifles clattered.

Healy circled the tarmac, for no good reason except to get the lay of the land and the feel of the terror, then entered his hutment. In one corner were the effects, neatly packed, of Lieutenant Parsons, whose charred figure he had just seen. Healy sat down near two candles he had lighted—which wavered and flickered in the wind that came through the cracks—and hefted the knives. Whatever they told him, his face gave no sign. But when an orderly came to tell him it was time to get up, Healy had scarcely moved. He still stared at the blank wall—at the now pallid lights of the candles. He shook himself, strode out of the hutment to the mess hall—where Harris, his face white and drawn, introduced him to nine pale pilots as a replacement of considerable combat experience.

“YOU’LL fly with my outfit this morning,” said Harris. And then, noting Healy’s look of surprise, Harris continued: “Yes, I fly—and to hell with regulations. These men won’t be asked to face it alone as long as I’m skipper, orders or no orders.”

Ten flyers strode across the tarmac to where ten

Spads idled at the deadline. Healy walked a little in the rear of them, carefully studying each man. He noted their faces, their facial expressions, whether or not their lips twitched—the length and shape of their fingers. When he stopped beside his own Spad there was relief on his face. His eyes were glowing. He had, he told himself, somewhat narrowed the search. He might be wrong, and this thing might have plenty of other angles; but every last inhabitant of “Terror Tarmac” was afraid, fought against his fear, and went forth to face it. If there had been one who seemed fearless—

But he saw none such, unless one of the ten were a marvelous actor.

He looked over his Spad, thankful for his own pursuit experience. Intelligence required many strange things of its crack operators. His own qualification for this duty was—twelve German planes, under a name which would have been known to every pilot here had he reported by it.

He clambered into his Spad. Down at the right of the line Major Harris had his right hand lifted, preparing to signal. Props were a blur of speed. The vibration of so many motors shook the soggy tarmac. Harris’ hand came down. Ten Spads rolled bumpily, loggily down the field, their tails already off. Healy gave close attention to the handling of his ship. His heart hammered with excitement. If he could lift the terror from the tarmac of the Twelfth—

But he had to. His lips formed a grim straight line. He pulled the stick back into his belly and climbed for the sky, paralleling the flight of his new, temporary wingmates. Harris signaled for rendezvous at eight thousand. Healy looked across the abyss from his position at the right rear of the V formed at that altitude, at the white faces of these men who rode with their fear.

FULL of fear they might be, but when Harris signaled them to head straight into Germany, none hesitated. Nor did one—except Healy—look down when they crossed the snake-trace which was the front.

Archie bursts flowered above them, further blackening a still black sky, now almost empty of rain. The flight went through the Archies at top speed. Hands automatically corrected for the shifting, the rising and falling, caused by Archie explosions. The planes flew at top speed.

Excitement mounted higher and higher in Healy as he realized that even now German-held territory was under them, and telephones were jangling warnings

to the nearest fields, where Fokkers, Albatrosses and Pfalzs were probably getting ready to come and face the men of "Terror Tarmac." The Germans must have smiled grimly, for all the front, on either side of the lines, had heard of the terror which came at night, at dusk, at just before dawn—to strike at the men of the Twelfth.

Harris, from his position at point, suddenly fired a Very pistol. Out of a bank of clouds, three miles behind the lines, came a flight of bluetailed Fokkers. They came on with determination, without surprise or hesitation, to join in combat.

HEALY tested out his Vickers. Bullets *b-r-r-r-ted* through his propeller arc. He set himself grimly for combat.

The Fokkers swung into a semicircle, bowed toward the Spads. The Spads broke out of formation to give themselves room. But even in breaking out the Spads continued to the front. The Fokkers now parted in all directions, as though they had opened a mouth to take the Spads in. The sky became a maelstrom of tumbling ships as Vickers and Spandaus challenged and accepted challenges.

Healy found himself being hedged in between two bluetails, one of whom had a pennant fluttering rearward from his hooded-falcon helmet. Disregarding the other German, Healy banked viciously toward the pennanted one. His Vickers sewed bullets along the German's fuselage in one vicious burst. He tried to reach the cockpit as he spun toward the enemy. But the German dived out of danger—while his compatriot caused bees of death to sing past the ears of Healy.

Healy, grinning mirthlessly, dived. Again the pennanted one came under his guns. This time he saw the broad back of the pilot. Automatically his thumbs pressed down the trips—and he saw the German jerk and twist and writhe in his pit. The Fokker dropped a wing down and started earthward like a falling cleaver. Then it began to spin. Then black smoke blossomed about the motor housing—to leave an ebon trail behind the doomed crate.

Healy banked away, then banked sharply back. Without looking backward he had outguessed the second German. The man had been diving on his tail. Healy had allowed him to dive past. Now he sat on the tail of the second Fokker. His Vickers flamed again. Another back blossomed redly as with crimson froth—and then Healy swung aside out of the fight, watched the second ship for a moment,

spinning earthward with motor full out, and looked his ship over. He'd taken a few bullets in the top of the instrument board and his right wing was more or less gutted. He swung back up into the thick of the fight.

IN THE midst of a spirited exchange with a third German, Harris swept past him—his teeth showing in what might have been a snarl or a grin—to wave him home. The Spads, with but one missing, cut out of the fight, headed for home. The Fokker flight glad of the chance to get out and nurse its wounds—with four down in German territory, their pilots dead before crashing—did not try to stop the Americans.

Nine Spads skyrocketed for home. Three miles to go. Ahead was a bank of black clouds. It was huge. Harris was looking it over. He signaled for the Spads to drop below it for a brief dash through a sheet of rain.

They were well under the black blanket when something dropped out of the cloud that was so like coal smoke. It dropped almost about the neck of Lieutenant Healy. But he was ready. He heard a roaring sound, or maybe he even sensed what was coming—for he dived out of the formation, dived as though the devil rode his wings. But the thing dived after him—and he caught a glimpse of knife-blade wings, a Fokker pursuit, with a strange device on the fuselage. He had felt something snap past his head.

He looked back up at his wing-mates, to find the formation shot to pieces. Harris was frantically signaling his men back into formation. All disorganized now, they would have been cold meat had a German formation jumped them. But none did. And ten minutes later nine Spads dropped back to "Terror Tarmac" and nine pilots, with their knees shaking, lifting staring eyes at the haunted sky from which they had dropped, stood ankle deep in the muck and slime.

BEFORE climbing from his Spad Healy leaned forward and pulled something from the dash—a stiletto with a bat-handle that had pink eyes above folded wings. Casually, while none noticed, he tucked it into his tunic. It had been driven almost to the hilt in the instrument board.

Careful estimation told him it had missed his neck by something less than the width of a baby's hair. Only chance had saved him from being number five. Yet he chuckled inwardly. Already he had made the enemy change program slightly. He was no longer a killer who struck at dusk, at night, or just before dawn. This was nine o'clock in the morning. But how had the killer

known whom to attack? Or had that been accident? Healy didn't know. If it were no accident, who at "Terror Tarmac" had given the word to the enemy?

The pilots gathered together around Healy and Harris. "Well, t' id you see it?" said Harris.

"Yes," said Healy grimly. "It was a Fokker. It dived out of the clouds. On either side of its fuselage, painted, was a winged knife—a bat-handled knife—and the tip of the knife dripped three drops of blood. But listen, there's nothing mysterious about it now—miraculous, yes, but not mysterious—and however that knife was shot, a human hand sent it on its way."

"Bullets," said Harris, "aren't so bad. But knives—from speeding ships! It's as impossible as trying to stand on a wing and lassoing the nose of an enemy Fokker!"

"It isn't impossible, for we saw it done," said Healy. "Luck was with us that nobody got it. And now—"

"Well, now?" said Harris, while his pilots shifted uneasily, their eyes studying Healy fearfully.

"You can't run from terror," said Healy. "You've got to face it and fight it out. Have the ships serviced, sir, and we'll take off again right away—and we won't stop—except to service—until we've found the knife-ship and ganged it out of the sky."

THE pilots stuck by their ships during the servicing, while enlisted men brought steaming mugs of scalding coffee.

The pilots held the cups with hands that trembled. Healy found his own hand trembling as he lighted a cigarette. Harris stopped beside him for a moment.

"You've helped, Healy," he said softly. "If you hadn't downed two, to show us it could still be done—" Healy shrugged.

"I know," he said, "and it bolsters up my claim to being a bonafide pursuit pilot. Ready?"

Again the Spads rolled savagely away from the deadline. Frayed nerves held the ships steady until tails were off, until wheels pulled free of the clinging muck. Teeth were gritted against loss of control as the Spads formed in a V again at seven thousand—and Harris ordered them back, by signal, toward the very sector over which they had just fought, in which the ship of the crimson knife had attacked from the cloud. Harris had issued one brief command:

"Get the ship of the knife if you have to crash it! You'll at least save some of the rest of us—so we can go down later in flames with good clean incendiary bullets in our guts!" Harris had given the command

loudly before props had been pulled through, at Healy's suggestion. All the pilots had heard it. So had the greaseballs.

AND now the pilots were going out to make good. They had left "Terror Tarmac" behind them, but they took terror with them into the black skies.

There had been something indescribably terrible about the four deaths. They hadn't been deaths in the regular line of duty—but murders; and the Twelfth was going out new in the role of composite executioner. They might range the sky for days, might engage scores of Germans, might lose one or all of their number, but if Healy had his way they wouldn't stop now until the ghost of fear had been laid—which meant that the knife-pilot must be destroyed. To gang him, to shoot him to shreds, would still not pay him for what he had done to the denizens of "Terror Tarmac."

Then came a flight of Germans—nine of them—out of the blackness ahead—and on the sides of the fuselage of each of them was a bat-handled knife design!

Even Dan Healy's heart stood still with terror for a moment. He had hoped to find a single ship bearing the sinister design, and here were nine ships which bore it. One of those ships, perhaps, held the pilot whose life was forfeited to the wing-mates of the four who had been slain. And yet, he might not be among them after all. How were the Twelfth to know? How were they to tell which to single out for destruction?

There was no way.

And yet, to make sure, they must destroy the entire nine—and even then they might not get their man. And it was impossible for them to down nine ships in any case with no loss to themselves. One might say many things about the Germans, but one never doubted their ability to fight, to take care of themselves. Even without terror riding their wings, the Twelfth would have had their work cut out for them.

Healy knew that the Twelfth was almost hysterical with the incubus of the nine crimson blades. He knew they would fight like demons—blindly trying to save themselves, to down as many Germans as possible; but when men fought blindly they made mistakes, and a single little mistake meant disaster for whoever made it.

THE Germans were coldly methodical against men who made mistakes. All the odds, in the circumstances, even though the Germans were nine to the Americans'

nine, were against the Twelfth. Yet Harris, fighting like a Trojan himself, was permitting the Americans to engage.

Healy ducked and dived through the whirlpool of ships, while Spandaus cut patterns in Spads' wings and Vickers screamed their crazy songs of death, and slid alongside Major Harris. He raised his arm to motion the Spads home. Harris gaped at him. Healy repeated the signal.

Even as Healy tried to wave the major out his eyes were playing over the fuselages of the enemy. Perhaps among the nine there might be one knife design which was etched in paint that wasn't new. But he found none. Every design had been freshly painted.

Harris finally got it, and swerved out of the fight, signaling the others as he did so. The Germans, sensing a retreat, redoubled their efforts. Healy and Harris rose above the fight and dived into it, covering the retreat, while the Twelfth battled manfully to get into some sort of formation.

The wings of Lieutenant Barton's Spad were almost riddled. Even if free of the fight he would have his work cut out for him to win home. The Twelfth had to get out now in order to make it.

BUT the Twelfth managed to get into some sort of formation, while the Germans, like small birds that drive the hawk away, dived and lunged into them, missing collisions by the proverbial hairsbreadth, sending bullets into wings, fuselages, tail-surfaces.

Harris and Healy tried to take the places of a dozen men as they ducked, dived and zoomed, beating back the Germans, giving the Twelfth a breathing space, giving them seconds of time to make the break.

One Fokker went down, apparently out of control; but it righted itself, as though some miracle had given the pilot a new lease on life, and came back up again. It came to Healy to wonder if that pilot might not be the man they all wished dead. There was no way of telling.

Again and again Harris and Healy dived at the Germans who rode the tails of the Twelfth, but not until they were over the lines, within a few miles of home, did the Germans falter. Then they faltered because the anti-aircraft gunners on the Allied sides took desperate chances with the lives of Allied aviators to hurl projectiles at the pursuing Germans.

Healy and Harris took instant advantage of this hesitation, and while they redoubled all previous efforts, the Twelfth gained enough lead to make it back to their own fields. Then Harris and Healy fought

the most savage, bitter delaying action they had ever heard of, to keep the Germans back until the Twelfth had landed. Only the timely appearance of a score of Nieuports, diving down into the thick of the fray, decided the issue. It was the Germans' turn to run—and they cut back for their own *staffel* at top speed.

The Twelfth landed. The pilots climbed from their pits as motors were cut to silence. Healy stood beside his crate. Harris came over. The pilots gathered around them. Some of them had blood on their faces. Healy had been creased. There was blood on his forehead.

"They outguessed us," he said hoarsely. "They must have somehow got wind that we would be out after the pilot of the knife design, so they hurriedly painted it on all their ships. We don't even know for sure that the man we were after was in that flight a bit ago. However, it makes our work tougher, but makes it all the more necessary that we undertake it."

"SOMEBODY'S crazy," said Harris. "I can't fancy a knife thrower so accurate, or with an arm so powerful that it can beat the force of his own ship's slipstream, as to be able to throw a knife into a man from a flying ship."

"It takes figuring—and years of practice," said Healy. "But I think I could learn to do it, given time to practice. I once saw a knife act in which a huge knife-thrower pinned his assistant to a board with a score of knives, three times a day. If that bird had gone into air, and practiced, so that he could tell exactly how to allow for the speed of his ship, the awful force of the slipstream to hinder his throwing arm—it would be as bad as trying to throw a knife under water—he might conceivably learn to use a knife with deadly accuracy from a ship. And if he figured out how to utilize the speed of his ship to help the speed of the knife, he could send it right through a man."

"We understand all that," said Harris. "But what's our next move?"

"I can think of but one—and it will keep us from killing the man, I'm afraid. We can't kill a prisoner of war. What I mean is, we've got to go out to take prisoners. By custom enemy airmen are entertained by us the night before they go to prison camp. I'll wring the truth out of our prisoners. We may be able to catch the proper one. If we do—well, we at least will know that the danger is past, even if the murderer is condemned to nothing worse than a prison camp for the rest of the war. If we don't get the right one, maybe we'll get someone from whom we can get a hint of the man's identity."

“You can’t torture prisoners of war, either,” said Harris.

Healy’s lips writhed back from his white teeth.

He said nothing, but his eyes spoke volumes. All he wanted, those eyes said, was to get the prisoners in his hands—just any pilot of a Fokker bearing the strange design.

“And we’ve got to do it before the Germans figure out what we’re doing and have those designs painted on every Fokker within a radius of fifty kilometers. That means we’ve got to move now.”

DRIVEN to the limit, the Americans responded with a will. Nothing could stop them, now that a way seemed to open up for them. They wished above all things to have a good reason for changing the name of “Terror Tarmac.” They climbed back into their Spads, all too quickly serviced. Harris indicated that from here out, Healy would lead the flight. No one objected to this delegation of authority which regulations maintained could not be delegated. Regulations went into the discard where murder stalked through the ranks.

Now Healy grimly led the way across the lines, glancing neither to right nor left as German Archie bursts splattered the sky with blobs of orange and black. Healy didn’t look around. He knew that the Twelfth rode with him, depending on him, hoping he was right, having confidence in his ability to bring them through. He couldn’t fail them. Death rode with failure, and it was death they flew to cheat. They would cheat her by courting her—and Dan Healy was the John Alden between them.

FIFTEEN minutes later and they were diving on the German field—commanded by Count Felix Shabelitz—with their Vickers flaming. It looked like a retaliatory ground strafe. Healy wished it to look like that. But it might have been noticeable, had not the Germans noted the almost hysterical quality of the Twelfth’s attack, that when any of the knife-design ships tried to get off the field, not too much effort was made to prevent them.

But one ship which did not bear the design started off—and went down in flames above the trees at the edge of the field. That should have been the tip-off to the Germans, had they understood all that was behind this attack.

Now a dozen German ships were in the air, circling in lightning fast, climbing turns to get in thrusts

against the attacking Spads. Healy waited until the last possible moment, until he saw other German ships from other fields, diving down to take part in the fracas, when he signaled for the retreat.

HE WAS almost too late, for scarcely had the Spads started home in formation than the Germans were swinging into their own formation to speed their departure with hails of Spandau lead. Healy’s heart pounded with excitement one moment, felt like lead in his breast the next—excitement at the working out of his plan, fear that something would go wrong and a Spad would go down in flames.

And he watched the knife design ships for an upflung arm, for a figure of huge proportions—to fit the description he had given his wingmates of that knife-thrower of a bygone show—intending to dive in for a fight to a finish with the killer. But the killer, if he were one of the Germans, did not thus tip his hand. But the Germans, remembering how they had just driven the Spads home, gleefully set about repeating.

Imperceptibly, on the return to the lines, Healy fought for altitude for all ships, to take the Germans above fire. He hoped they wouldn’t notice, would think he was trying to keep above German ground fire—else they might, suspicious, draw back and defeat his plans.

But the Germans came on, and the delaying action was fought over again—bitterly, savagely, until Vickers were white-hot under hands that were scorched, almost charred, until eyes were weary and bloodshot and heads seemed to be filled with molten lead, until bodies shrieked out for even a brief surcease from the relentless driving Harris and Healy were giving them.

They seemed to be holding the Germans back over the field, to allow the Twelfth time to get down. But the Germans pressed their advantage of numbers. They could blast ships apart as they slowed to shoot landings. Healy figured on this. The Germans played up to his maneuvering. But eight ships of the Twelfth started down, still in formation, as though desperately trying to land so that their pilots could seek the comparative safety of hangars and other buildings.

But as the flyers went down over the field it might have been seen that they let their motors full out with a savage concerted diapason. That the speed of their dives was beyond all margin of safety in any shots for landing and then the pilots of the Twelfth, in ships that had already all but been shot from under them, zoomed for the sky. They came up like flat rocks

bounced from the surface of water, like projectiles from catapults—and were on a level with the amazed pilots of the Fokkers, even above them, before the Germans realized that a trap had been set for them.

THEN it was too late, for the apparently disheartened, defeated Americans, suddenly seemed to have acquired new leases on life. They fought as even they had never fought before, even in the throes of despair. They put their Spads through didoes they were never intended for.

The Spads seemed, so swiftly did they maneuver, to be hemming in the Germans. And the Americans were careful with their Vickers lead. They were careful to shoot holes in the ships, to rip at tail-surfaces, at wings and struts and braces, even at fuselages forward and abaft of cockpits; but they held their fire when their ring-sights covered the bodies of pilots, held their fire with the skill of inspiration.

Healy all but rose in his pit when the first Fokker started down, with broken control wires standing straight out in the speed of its dive. The German pilot fought his ship, performing miracles in his turn—and Healy nodded to himself. The German had a hundred to one chance of landing and walking away from his Fokker—into the hands of American soldiers!

The Fokker crashed at the very edge of the Tarmac of Terror. Even as it came down, groundmen were racing across to the spot where it would surely land, intent upon taking the pilot prisoner. Another Fokker dived down to cover the falling pilot, to give him a chance to run for his freedom if he were able to leave the wreck. Healy dived on this one—and drove him into the ground almost in the center of the tarmac, by hemming him in with lead on all sides until he forgot whether he flew or walked or ran.

And Terror Tarmac disgorged yet other groundmen to scramble in the wreckage of the second Fokker to take a prisoner—while the first Fokker crashed and was almost instantly surrounded by groundmen armed with bayonets and hand grenades.

Healy went back up. Two men rode past him in two Spads—and those two men were forcing a third Fokker down to a landing, and steering him as straightly toward where they wished him to land as was humanly possible.

HEALY lifted his voice in a great shout of rejoicing. The wind of his speed drove the shout back down his throat, brought tears to his eyes, made him gulp—but he shouted again though none could hear his

shouting, even himself.

Three Fokkers down—and eight Spads striving with all their newborn skill—with all their desperation—to bring down even so much as just one more. But the Germans fought like cornered coyotes. And in spite of all the Germans could do, a fourth ship went down. But this fourth one was a dead loss, for it landed in flames in the woods. Healy's heart sank.

Was *that* pilot the proper one? If they didn't get him, they must go on as they had before, wondering when, and if, the terror would strike again.

The Spads, now eight to five, fought harder and harder.

They tried with everything they knew to drive down the rest of the ships. When some Nieuports dived down from the north, Healy was conscious of a feeling of resentment for French meddling. Though—how could the Frogs know?

And the Germans, taking a lease of new life from their superior foe, fought so savagely that not even the inspired Twelfth could complete their task.

YET another ship was forced down—two miles distant from the Twelfth's drome. That pilot had an excellent chance to run the gauntlet back to his own side of the lines. There was a chance he would be captured, and Healy pinned his hopes to that lone chance.

The last three Germans were dropped over the lines, by all save the Nieuports, which drove them home with their tails between their legs. Healy, jubilant, conscious that something pretty good had been done even if they had not accomplished their main mission, signaled the Twelfth down to their own field.

The Spads landed, rolled up toward the deadline, before a hangar where a score of greaseballs stood grim guard over three pilot prisoners, much the worse for wear, and the Twelfth climbed out. To Healy's joy some of his wingmates were grinning their satisfaction. The Germans saw those grins and looked at one another doubtfully. Healy himself led the way to the group before the hangars. The Germans clicked their heels together, unsmiling, and saluted the victors. Some of the Germans wore decorations for valor on their tunics.

HEALY looked them over, while his wingmates stood back, wondering what his next move would be.

Healy spoke first in English for the benefit of his wingmates, then in German for the benefit of the

prisoners. "Gentlemen," he said, "we welcome you to Terror Tarmac. Tonight you will be wined and dined according to the custom among airmen. Afterward there will be a ceremony: I shall pick out the man among you who accomplishes the impossible and hurls knives from speeding ships into the hearts of his enemies. And when I find him—" And there he left it for a moment, nodding after a dramatic pause to the greaseballs:

"Take them away. Keep them separate until tonight."

He had one disappointment. He had half expected that, if the guilty one were among the prisoners, a swerving of eyes among them might disclose which of them he was. Even while the prisoners were being taken away, four mud-spattered soldiers entered the encampment with another pilot prisoner—and Healy could have shouted. It was the man who had crashed so far from the drome—and he was a big man, with bulky shoulders, sullen eyes, and lowering looks. To him Healy said what he had said to the others, and the man's lips curled in a contemptuous sneer—his only answer.

It was a strange, tense gathering that night in the mess hall. Outwardly the victors drank with and ate with, the vanquished, though when they thought of the four dead, and realized that they probably broke bread and drank wine with the killer, some of them almost choked on their food and drink. But it had to be gone through. Faces broke into mirthless smiles as flyers repeated their experiences. They exchanged "*prosits*" and "*Gesundheits*" without sincerity—for the thought of what was to follow was in the minds of friends and enemies alike.

The meal was finally finished. Greaseballs came in as if at a signal. Only routine guards walked post in the camp. Men moved to stand close to the prisoners, whose faces became empty of all expression. Healy took his place at one end of the mess hall. On the table, within reach of the prisoners, he placed four of the knives with bat-shaped handles. Their ruby, or coral, eyes, glowed balefully in the light of the lamps and candles.

WHILE everybody held his breath, Healy took a fifth knife from inside his tunic. He tossed it up, caught it by the blade, held it flat in his hand. He began to speak.

"One among you," he said to the Germans, "killed four of our men with these knives. He proved himself

a powerful man—so powerful men must stand near him now, near all of you—gentlemen! I shall tell a story. Years ago I saw a knife act about which I told my wingmates today. I did not tell them that the act intrigued me until, youthlike, I tried my best to emulate the knife thrower—until I became so proficient that I could hit a dime at forty paces, ninety-nine times out of a hundred. Then I allowed my skill to grow rusty—until last night. I didn't sleep last night, nor was I all night in my chair. For four hours I practiced to regain my old cunning, to find that I had lost little of it. I can still hit a dime ninety-times out of a hundred—and a man's face, his throat, or his heart, are all bigger than any dime. I ask you to remember that—for I am going to tell you something, make you a sporting proposition. Will you tell us which of you is so mighty with the knife?"

For a full minute he awaited their answer. But stony-faced, the Germans stared straight to the front. Healy backed against the wall, his eyes wary, his lips a firm straight line. "All right," he said. "Then here's the alternative."

He wondered how many of his wingmates noticed how close the knives he had left on the table were to the prisoners. It might be important, for if he made a mistake—well, mistakes in war might well be fatal.

"I shall start counting," went on Healy. "When I have reached five, if the knife-thrower has not disclosed himself, I shall send this fifth knife into his heart as surely as God made little apples! Ready? *One!*"

DEATHLY silence held sway in the mess hall. Nobody moved or spoke. Healy held the knife flat on his palm. The eyes of the Germans never left it, but they did not shift in their seats. "*Two!*"

Healy was like a referee counting over a fallen boxer—but here there were life and death as the stakes. "*Three!*"

The faces of friends and foes alike were empty of all color. Even Healy's face went ghastly pale. He hesitated, faltered a little.

"*Four!*"

Still no one moved.

On the point of opening his mouth to speak the final and fatal number, his arm started back, back toward the wall behind him—and one German moved with lightning speed.

Healy's knife never left his hand. It couldn't—for the good and sufficient reason that four knives sped to their mark so swiftly that they were almost one

continuous streak. No one could have stayed the knife thrower.

AND Healy stood there—pinned to the wall, the fifth knife still in his hand—but that hand was pinned securely to the wall by four knives, two on either side of his wrist having pierced the cloth of his tunic to sew him there, helpless.

For a full minute the tableau held. Then the last of the four prisoners, whom the four mud-splattered soldiers had brought in, spoke harshly.

“Note that I could have driven all four through his heart as easily as through his clothing,” he said in clear, precise, cold English, “but even a master knife-thrower does not care to be lynched.”

And Healy laughed softly. “Thanks, *mein herr*,” he said, softly. “I didn’t know which of you was the right party, but if ever a man prayed we had captured that party, I’m that man. I hoped that fear of my knife might make you act, or that your own egotism would. It doesn’t matter which did it. It does matter that such a killer suffers nothing worse than imprisonment for the rest of the war. Your name?”

“Manfred Shultz.”

“Thank you, *Herr* Shultz!” said Healy. “And now that we know that the terror is passed, may I be permitted to inform you that, as far as knife throwing goes, I couldn’t hit a bull in the tail with a wet sack! Pull out these knives, Shultz! You’re probably the only man here strong enough to do it—and while you do it, keep uppermost in your mind your fear of being lynched! There’s still work in this war for me to do!”