



THE ACE SHIP

by O.B. MYERS

Billy Preston needed only one more plane to make him an ace, and the 77th needed just one more ace. But Spandau bullets carried his number—in that grim battle with the green-diamond Fokker.

AND FOR CRIPES' SAKE, Preston," growled Hal Marvin, "stick to the formation and follow instructions. Don't get the idea that you are going to win the war all by yourself. Smarter men than you have to obey orders, you know!"

Billy flushed angrily. His fists clenched, and he took one step forward. Then he remembered that the major was standing just behind him, so he caught himself

with a sharp retort on his lips.

"All right," he muttered, and turned toward his Spad, which waited with an idling motor.

Five minutes later, five Spads had roared off the ground behind Pop McCauley, the flight leader, and pointed their noses through a murky sky toward the hell-infested air above the strip of bloody dirt known as No-Man's-Land.

Hal had been one of Billy's instructors back at

Issoudun that spring, and he kept on acting as if he felt that Billy was still a pupil. Billy, on the other hand, had joined the Air Service because it gave him an opportunity to fight as an individual in man-to-man conflict and not as one unit in a mass of cannon fodder.

Preston had been watching the sky above; he never saw the German patrol below until Pop nosed over in a dive. Billy followed automatically. Then his eyes found the compact group of black-crossed fighters—two, four, six, eight—“Gosh! Nine of them. And only five of us! Let’s go!”

Pop led them into a dive toward a spot just behind the tail of the last Boche. Billy pulled a boner and selected a German on the right. This upset Pop’s calculations, and the flight leader, who had planned, to swoop up from beneath, had to plunge in from above also. In no time at all, the sky was filled with a roaring maelstrom of Spads and Fokkers.

Billy’s opponent swerved out of the mess; Billy followed him. The Boche did this to give one of his companions a chance to get on Billy’s tail. Billy did not realize this, but luckily, none of the other German pilots saw the opportunity. Suddenly the Fokker did an Immelmann, and Billy saw the blunt nose of the enemy ship coming straight at him, spitting fire. He pressed his own triggers; the tracers crossed paths in mid-air. In the space of two seconds, they were upon each other. The German’s nose dropped and Billy shot over.

Then his motor gave a cough and died. His prop stopped turning.

He pulled out of a mad dive after a minute, and discovered that his opponent had not followed. By stretching his glide, he just managed to make the flates near the river south of Verdun.

“Hell!” he muttered, with a long face. My first scrap, and I get my motor hit before I fire a dozen shots. I hope they won’t think I ran out of the fight on purpose.”

He telephoned back for a car, and two hours later, walked rather sheepishly into the operations tent. To his surprise, Pop McCauley, who was sitting there, jumped up and clapped him on the back.

“Congrats, Billy, on your first Boche!” he cried.

“What!” stammered Billy, “What do you mean?”

“Didn’t you know that German went down?” asked Pop. “I saw out of the tail of my eye. As you pulled over him, he went into a spin, and never did come out. You must have beamed the pilot.”

Billy, expecting reproof or raspberry, could only stammer, embarrassed thanks at receiving congratulations instead.

“We got four altogether out of that scrap,” Pop went on. “Ed Willis here got two, which makes him an ace. That’s seven aces in this squadron now; there never has been an outfit with more than nine aces in it, and the major says that when we get ten, the whole gang will get a three-day leave in Paris, to celebrate. You sure got a good start, today, Billy. Keep it up, fella.”

Billy grinned, and after a couple of minutes, stepped out and started down toward the barracks. Hal Marvin followed him out and fell into step alongside of him.

“If I were flight leader,” said Hal, “it would have been a bawling out for you instead of congratulations.”

“Yeah?” said Billy, nettled. “How do you figure that out?”

“You should never have cut in on that Fokker from above. You’re supposed to wait until the flight leader starts the firing. Didn’t anybody ever tell you that?”

“I suppose,” retorted Billy, “that it’s against the rules to shoot down a Boche if you don’t find out about it until afterwards?”

“Keep on the way you’re goin’, Preston, and it’s a cinch I’ll be a flight leader long before you are!”

“That may be,” retorted Billy airily, as he turned away, “but personally, I’d rather be the squadron’s tenth ace.”

As he entered the barrack’s door, Hal still stood there, glaring after him sourly.

THREE days later, Billy got his second German, a two-seater which Pop caught circling over Grand-Pre.

After they had returned to the airdrome, the major was saying a few words of advice and encouragement to a group of pilots in the operations tent.

He ended by telling them, “I’ve had several reports of Fokkers with green markings on them in the last few days. I guess our old friend von Jagow must be opposite us again—and you know what that means. Keep your eyes peeled!”

The older pilots indicated by a silent nod that they knew what that meant—and Billy found out rudely in the week that followed. In just seven days, the 77th lost nine pilots, all on the wrong side of the lines. In the same space of time, they were credited with six victories, but those nine men were hard to lose.

In the course of the six victories, two new aces had been added to the squadron, making a total of nine.

Hal Marvin had not added to his record and neither had Billy; they still stood three and two.

Billy walked out on the field on the morning of the fourteenth with a dangerous glint in his eye. First, he had an overpowering desire to be the squadron's tenth ace. More than that, he wanted to exact revenge for the nine comrades, who had been plunged to death, or worse than death in a prison camp, during the last week. But more than anything else, he wanted to show that big stiff Hal Marvin that the way to win a fight was to fight, not to work out problems in discipline.

The day was bright and clear. A and B flights put on a big combination patrol of eleven planes in the morning, but ran into no excitement outside of a lot of Archie. In the afternoon, B flight had a regular patrol scheduled at two-thirty. When Billy reported at the operations tent, he found, besides himself, only Larry Chadwick and Spud Carrigan, talking to Pop McCauley, the flight leader.

"Is this all we got?" he asked. "From eleven this morning to four this afternoon. How our ranks do dwindle!"

"What with the flu and cranky motors, this is all we got for this patrol," Pop replied. "If I see any of those green Fokkers, you can bet I'm going to give 'em a wide berth unless I'm sure there aren't too damn many."

"Well, don't take us for powder-puff pilots, Pop," said Billy. "Give a guy a chance to do something if you can, will you?"

"Don't you get in a sweat now Billy," Pop cautioned him. "We might bag one of those two-seaters near Grand-Pre, if they're still out."

They climbed into their ships and warmed up the motors; promptly at two-thirty the four Spads roared into the air and left the airdrome behind as they climbed toward the lines. Billy was on the tail of the formation; he kept making wide S-turns from side to side as his eyes roved the sky for signs of trouble. Billy's first few combats had only whetted his ambition to build up a record for himself, and he would not allow himself to consider the possibility of an unsuccessful fight, in which he himself might be shot down.

FOR three-quarters of an hour the little group of four planes flew over their allotted sector, but nothing more exciting than a few Archie bursts annoyed them. They reached the river Meuse, and Pop wheeled for the return trip toward the West, followed by the others. But as they banked, Billy could just see, several miles

further east, what looked like a Boche two-seater about a thousand feet below them.

"Wonder if Pop saw that," he thought His eyes scanned the skies above to see if he could pick up any protecting group, but he saw nothing. The enemy plane was away out of their territory, and Billy had more than once been advised, nay, ordered, never to leave a formation to go off by himself. But the opportunity looked to him too good to let slip.

"Hell!" he thought to himself. "I can jump over there, knock off that two-seater, and jump back again before they even know I'm gone. Let's go!"

He pulled his Spad around and headed her for the east with motor full on. The sun was at his back, he thought with satisfaction; the Germans probably wouldn't even notice his approach. As he neared his quarry, he could see that it was a Halberstadt, apparently doing observation work. He took another look around for protecting Fokkers, but saw none, and with a grin on his face, shoved his nose down and rushed at the enemy plane with his wires singing. He held his fire until he was quite close; by this time he had been seen, and the German observer swung his gun into action.

As Billy squeezed his triggers, he saw his own stream of tracers crisscross those from the other cockpit. The Halberstadt started a steep turn; Billy pushed on his stick and shot down by the black-crossed tail. He held in his dive for several hundred feet, then pulled on his stick and came up in a tremendous zoom. The enemy plane had flattened out again, and Billy was right under her belly. Billy kept his nose pointing straight up at the Halberstadt until his Spad was just about to fall off in a stall; then he pressed his triggers.

Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat—a murderous stream poured into the fuselage of the ship above him. Billy held his triggers down until his own ship came to a stall, and fell off on one wing. He saw the Halberstadt also fall off on one wing, but he could see the observer hanging limply from his cockpit, and a tell-tale wisp of smoke puffed out from in front of the pilot. Billy brought his Spad out of the sideslip, but the other ship never did come out. The last Billy saw of her, she was hurtling toward the earth in a spin, with a rapidly swelling tail of thick black smoke behind.

THEN his attention was abruptly distracted by a vicious *rat-tat-tat-tat* behind him, and sharp penciled lines of gray shot across his vision. Almost

automatically he jerked his stick back and kicked his rudder. The maneuver took him momentarily out of the line of fire, and he had time for one glance which told him that three Fokkers were upon him.

“Holy smoke, where did they come from? Now I *am* caught!”

There was no choice left to him but to fight it out and pray for luck. They were between him and his own lines, and he soon noticed that while he was engaging two, the third hung back, waiting to pounce on him if he broke loose. He threw his Spad around frantically, and for an instant was in a position to get in a short burst at one of his opponents. As he pressed his triggers, he saw a green band around the belly of the Fokker. He glanced at the other quickly; he also had the same green ribbon painted around his fuselage.

“Ah,” thought Billy, “from von Jagow’s gang! That won’t make it any softer.”

For a moment he broke away from his two closest enemies, and tried to seize the advantage of the moment to gain a little altitude, but the third member of the group was on his tail in one swoop. Billy pulled into a tight bank; the Fokker followed instantly. In a glance over his shoulder Billy saw that this plane carried, instead of a green stripe, a large green diamond painted on the side of the fuselage.

“Must be a flight leader,” thought Billy, “and how that bird can maneuver!”

For fully a minute the other two Fokkers hung back while Billy and the German in the green-diamond Fokker engaged in a frenzied individual combat. They wheeled around and around about an invisible pivot; they spun and dove, and zoomed up again. Every twist of Billy’s ship was followed relentlessly by the German flyer, who never conceded the least advantage. Billy’s arms began to ache; his neck was cramped from continual craning over his shoulder, and his head was dizzy. He wondered how much longer he could keep this up. Suddenly as he came out of a reversement, one of the other Fokkers saw an opportunity and cut in; the leader with the green diamond drew off again. Billy threw his Spad into a steep turn with the madness of desperation, as the tracers zipped by his face.

This last turn brought him full onto the third member of the group, whom he now saw directly in front of his sights.

“I’ll get one of them, anyway,” he growled, and as he pulled out of the turn, he pressed his triggers.

The enemy pilot was unprepared for this sudden attack on the part of their victim, and hesitated just

too long in starting his turn. The bullets from Billy’s machine guns ripped into his cockpit. The pilot threw both his arms into the air as a slug of lead pierced his heart, and the Fokker tumbled down out of control.

BUT these few instants had been enough to place Billy wide open to renewed attack from the rear. As he looked up from the falling plane, he saw the green diamond sitting on his tail. He started a series of mad maneuvers in an attempt to shake off that awful shadow, but no matter what he did, the square nose of that Fokker was always there when he looked back. And every time he snatched a second for a glance over his shoulder, *rat-tat-tat-tat*—the streaks of tracer smoke seemed to graze his very cheek.

The constant struggle had cost much altitude, and they were now only about five hundred feet above the ground. There would not be room to maneuver much longer. Billy’s head was reeling; the sweat poured down into his eyes, and his legs and arms felt stiff from the ceaseless muscular strain. He screamed over his shoulder.

“For God’s sake, hit me and have done with it!”

He pulled out of a dive into a zoom; as his ship hung there for an instant before falling off, he again heard the Spandous spitting viciously behind him. His windshield was neatly pierced with two round holes. His instrument board was shattered to bits before his very eyes, and his motor died with a sickening gasp.

With a fervent curse, he pushed his ship into a steep glide. His opponent followed, but fired no more, apparently seeing that his victim was crippled.

Right in front of Billy’s nose was a small field, well strewn with shell-holes; this was divided from the next field by a row of trees. The next field was larger and did not seem to be nearly so rough. Billy tried to glide over the trees, but he was too low. Just as he crossed the upper limbs, his Spad went into a stall, and fell off on one wing. With a rending crash, the ship settled into the branches; the motor broke loose, and carried all before it until it ended with a terrific thud on the earth below.

Billy found himself hanging by his safety-belt, half in and half out of the crushed cockpit. Getting a grip on a nearby branch, he released the button that held his belt. Slowly he climbed down from limb to limb until he stood on the ground.

“Swell chance I have of bein’ the squadron’s tenth ace now!” he exclaimed to himself. “Well, I got two of ’em, anyway. Wonder who that Jerry with the green diamond was!”

HE DID not have to wait long to find out; the Fokker was even then landing in the next field. The German pilot, jumping out of his cockpit, walked over to Billy and asked in guttural English, "You are wounded?"

"No," replied Billy.

"You make a very goot fight," the German said; then his face darkened for a moment. "You shoot one of my best pilots. But that is the luck of the air—*nichts?* I am the Baron Felix *Hauptmann* von Jagow."

Billy mentioned his own name, and found his chagrin lessened upon finding out that he had been shot down by von Jagow himself. The Baron telephoned from a near-by house, and twenty minutes later, Billy found himself in the tonneau of a car on his way back to the Baron's airdrome.

Lieutenant Rammer, a member of the Baron's staffel who spoke perfect English, took personal charge of Billy, and kept up a continual conversation with him. Arrived at the German field, he showed Billy the barracks, the mess-hall, and even took him through the hangars. Billy was very much interested in the layout of the hangars, the equipment of tools, and the planes themselves. He stared long at the Baron's guns, the very ones which had brought him down. Billy had little to say, but his eyes were busy; he noticed that Rammer's own ship carried the number 22.

At mess, Billy was entertained as a guest; with good food and plenty of wine to wash it down, there was considerable hilarity toward the end of the meal. Later Rammer led Billy to a little room in the end of the supply shed where he was to sleep that night, before being turned over to a convoy of prisoners in the morning. It contained a bunk filled with straw and some blankets, a box—and nothing else.

Here Kammer said, "The Baron wants for souvenirs your helmet, your coat and belt, and your boots. These would all be taken away from you, anyway, later on, so you may as well part with them now. Here is a sweater and some shoes to replace them."

There was no choice in the matter, as Billy could plainly see, so he sat down on the box and removed the specified articles of clothing, donning the dirty gray sweater and the worn-out shoes in their stead. As he finished lacing the shoes, Kammer sat down next to him on the bunk.

"Before I say good-night, there is one thing I would like to take up with you, lieutenant. Er—how does the prospect of an indefinite period in a prison camp strike you?"

BILLY thought of the tales he had heard—poor food, and not much of it, winter cold biting through insufficient clothes, sickness, crowding, solitary confinement as punishment for trivial offenses. It was a gloomy prospect.

"Rotten!" he replied, emphatically. Rammer's tone was insinuatingly cheerful. "I have here a paper, signed by the Baron," he said, "which states that the bearer has rendered certain valuable service to the High Command, and therefore is to be treated with respect and receive all possible privileges. If you were to have that paper in your possession, and show it to the proper people, life would be much easier for you for the next few months, lieutenant."

Billy's eyes studied him closely as he said, "And under what terms do you give me that paper?"

"In return for just one piece of information. We know the location of your airdrome; what we do not know is the spot on the airdrome where the ammunition is stored. When you tell me that, the paper is yours."

Billy stared at him coldly. Kammer urge him further.

"Consider, lieutenant," he said. "You are injuring no one, and helping yourself. A single plane at dawn will set fire to that ammunition dump with incendiary bullets, but none of your comrades will even be hurt. They do not sleep near it, I am sure. Your factories in America will easily replace the loss; no one will ever know." Billy was silent for several minutes; then his eyes gleamed with a strange look.

"Done!" he cried. "If you yourself, Kammer, will agree to make that dawn patrol tomorrow morning, and attack nothing but the ammunition dump, I will tell you where it is."

"Agreed!" replied Kammer with a smile. "I was thinking of doing it myself, anyway."

"Listen," said Billy. "You know that the field is on a road, which is some five or six feet above the level of the field. Under that road is an empty space, covered by only a few inches of turf on the side toward the field. Incendiary bullets would easily penetrate the sides."

"Good!" said Kammer, rising. "Here is your paper. You are a wise young man. I wish you a pleasant sleep, and a happy life in prison camp."

Billy murmured a good-night as Kammer stepped out of the door and closed it behind him; Billy heard the key turn in the lock. He applied his ear to the key-hole; soon he could distinguish voices a short distance

away, and then a measured pacing of footsteps, up and down before the door. A sentry had been set. Billy removed his shoes, blew out the candle, and lay down on the bunk.

A thought of Hal Marvin flashed across his mind; he scowled. Then slowly a grin spread over his face as another thought followed in its wake.

UPON leaving Billy's room, Kammer walked directly to the barracks and knocked on the door of a separate room at one end, which was the private apartment of von Jagow. Getting a gruff reply, he entered, closed the door behind him, and saluted smartly. Von Jagow looked at him with cold, glittering eyes, and uttered but one word.

"Well?" he said.

"As is our custom," began Kammer, "I have been talking with the American prisoner ever since he arrived, and my time has not been wasted. The fool—" he allowed his lips to curl in a smile—"in return for a worthless piece of paper, has betrayed to me important information. We already knew the location of his airdrome; further than that, I now know the exact spot on that airdrome where all of their explosives are stored."

Von Jagow rubbed his hands together in anticipation. "Ah, that is excellent, my dear Kammer," he purred. "We will arrange to send over a little party with a few small bombs—or even incendiary bullets in their Spandau belts would be enough—and that ammunition dump will be finished. These Yankees, who think they are so clever—"

He smiled broadly. Kammer spoke again. "May I make a suggestion, *Herr Baron*? he asked.

Von Jagow nodded.

"A party is unnecessary, in my opinion. One plane arriving at dawn, could do the job just as well, and there would be less risk of loss if anything went wrong."

"Perhaps you are right," von Jagow murmured. "I will ask for volunteers tomorrow morning."

But Kammer spoke once more.

"I would beg to ask a favor of you, *Herr Baron*. I myself had the good fortune to procure this information; I should like also to have the honor of being the one to put it to its use. I therefore beg your leave to make a solitary patrol tomorrow at dawn for this purpose. It is well to lose no time; the Yankee pigs might think to move their stores."

Von Jagow regarded him with a gleam of pleasure

in his eye. "Very well, my dear Kammer," he replied. "Your request is granted. I perceive that you are not only a clever man, you are a brave one. May success attend you!"

Kammer bowed and retired from the room.

He notified his own mechanic to be at the hangars early, and then went to bed himself.

SEVERAL hours later, Billy, without having been asleep, sat up in his blankets and looked at the luminous dial of his wrist-watch. "Lucky von Jagow didn't notice this watch," he thought to himself. It was two-thirty. The minutes passed while he sat there, straining his ears for the slightest sound. He could hear no footsteps outside his door, but thought he could distinguish the sound of regular breathing. The sentry was evidently asleep. Finally he crawled out of the bunk, and crept in his stocking feet over to the door. He listened at the key-hole; yes, he could hear the heavy breathing of the sentry close to the door, and low down. Apparently the man was sitting on the ground with his back against the building, dozing.

Billy tried the knob; it was locked. He pushed gently with his shoulder; it did not budge. He then put one foot against the jamb on one side, and got his back braced against the jamb on the other side. By straining his utmost, he felt the two uprights give a fraction of an inch. He got his right hand on the knob, and as he heaved the uprights apart with all his might, he pushed gently outward on the door. It swung free.

He held his breath, and listened intently before he let the door open more than a crack. The regular breathing of the sentry continued, within three feet of where Billy stood. He stepped out, keeping his eyes on the indistinct shadow which was the sleeping guard. The man continued to snore softly; Billy backed away.

When he was twenty feet from the building, he turned and slipped silently through the wet grass in his stocking feet. After a dozen paces, he paused and listened. Not a sound came to his ears; there wasn't a glimmer of light to be seen anywhere. He continued until he came to the edge of the field; here he turned left and walked toward the hangars. There was no sign of life; apparently the only sentry set was the one in front of his door.

He reached the hangar he had been in that afternoon, and entered by the small side door. Inside the hangar the gloom was so thick it could have been cut with the wrong edge of a rusty knife. He again stopped and listened intently. He got a hand

on the end of the workbench, and discovered that the luminous dial of his wrist-watch gave off a faint radiance that was enough to recognize an object by if he held it within an inch or so. By means of this ghostly illumination, he located a coil of stout iron wire and a pair of cutting pliers, both of which he had spotted that afternoon.

Then he tried to find Rammer's ship, but in the gloom he had gotten turned around. He had to go back and open the door again to get his directions straightened out. Finally he laid his hand on what he thought was Rammer's Fokker. He moved his wrist back and forth, close to the fuselage, until he positively identified the numerals, "22". Then he felt his way up to the guns.

He lifted the cover of the magazine. The canvas belt, filled with cartridges, led down from the breech of the Spandau into this magazine, where it was wound around a drum. The back of the magazine chamber was not solid; there was a space two inches wide giving into the space occupied by the motor.

Billy took off the rear cover-plate on the side of the cowling, and felt around inside. In a few minutes he had located the magneto on that side; a handful of wires led from it to the spark plugs. He moved his hand up and back until he touched the opening in the back of the magazine chamber; about a foot and a half, he guessed.

"Good," he murmured. "This is easy."

HE CUT off about two and a half feet of wire; then he extracted one cartridge from the belt, inside the magazine. The end of the wire he slipped through the vacant loop left by the cartridge, and with the pliers twisted it tightly in place, so tightly that it contorted the canvas out of shape. The other end of the wire he then thrust through the opening in the back of the magazine. Reaching around with his other hand, he got hold of it and pulled it fairly taut. With the lower end of the wire, he then took a couple of turns around the bunch of ignition cables leading away from the distributor on the magneto. With his pliers he twisted the loop up tight until it had a firm grip.

In daylight, under normal conditions, he could have done the job in ten minutes. In the pitch darkness of the hanger, with no illumination but that of his wrist-watch, it took him more than half an hour. He carefully replaced the cover plate and closed the cover of the magazine.

Then he groped his way around to the other side of

the ship and proceeded to do exactly the same thing to the other gun and the left hand magneto. Another half hour of laborious fumbling in the dark—but he was chuckling softly when he finished. He reached for the sheet metal cover-plate to put it back in place—and suddenly there was a clatter at his feet which awoke the echoes.

He had dropped the plate on the concrete floor. His every muscle froze into complete rigidity; he held his breath in an agony of fear. The utter silence of the blackness before his eyes seemed to beat upon him, to mock him. Every instant he expected to hear footsteps, voices, shots—he knew not what. To get this far, and then fail it would be heartbreaking. He let his breath out with a sobbing gasp, then held it again.

For fully ten minutes he stood there, rooted to the floor; the sweat of fear poured down his face. Gradually he returned to himself; he moved first a hand, then the whole arm, finally his head. He crouched, trembling, and felt cautiously along the floor for the cover plate. He lifted it as if it were the most valuable and fragile piece of Haviland china in the world, and fastened it in its place. Then he heaved a sigh of relief.

He started to grope his way toward the door; halfway there, he suddenly stopped as a thought struck him.

"Did I, or didn't I, close that magazine cover?"

Painfully he groped his way back through the labyrinth of wings, made sure of the number on the side of the fuselage—and found the magazine cover in place. Again he started toward the door.

He tried to put the coil of wire and the pliers back in the exact spot he had found them. After he had opened the door, it took him five minutes to screw up his courage to the point of stepping out. That clatter on the floor of the hangar seemed to have shattered his nerves to bits.

Pressing himself close to the wall for an instant, he took in his surroundings with a careful sweeping glance. Then like a silent ghostly sprinter, he shot across the airdrome and disappeared into the mist beyond.

BACK on the airdrome of the 77th, a few hours later, the major was listening to a report from Jake McKinnon, one of the mechanics who had been on the field for the dawn patrol that morning.

"It's just about daylight, sir, when I hears this motor, and when I looks up, I sees the Fokker flying

very low. He noses right down for the road and the first thing I know, he lets go a half-dozen shots. Plunked right into the bank, they did. From the way he was actin', you woulda thought he was pluggin' at an ammo dump, but o' course that's way down the other end o' the field. Then he turns sharp and comes back at the road again. About three more raps out of his guns, and they stop and his motor stops all at the same time. He lands—what else could he do—right in the middle of our field, and an easier prisoner was never took. When I look over the motor, I find a piece of wire looped in each machine-gun belt, which has jammed the guns, the other end bein' hitched onto his ignition leads, which has been jerked off the magneto when the belt feeds into the guns. And in the left magazine I finds this note, addressed to you, sir."

The major took the piece of paper and unfolded it. As he read, a grin spread over his face. The group of pilots who had collected to hear Jake's story waited expectantly. He finished, and burst into a loud guffaw.

"Boys, this is good. I'll read it to you; it's from Billy Preston. On one side it says something in German, over a signature which looks like von Jagow, and on the other side Billy writes:

Lieutenant Preston requests confirmation on enemy two-seater shot down about three-thirty, September 14th, near Vaulvanne. Also one enemy pursuit plane—Fokker—with green stripe, shot down about three-thirty-five, same day, between Vaulvanne and Dun-sur-Meuse. Also on one enemy pursuit plane—Fokker No. 22—with green stripe, brought down about dawn, September 15th, on or near airdrome of 77th. The lieutenant respectfully requests that special efforts be made to get these confirmations, as these three victories will not only make him an ace, but will give the 77th ten aces on roster.

*Respectfully,
William Preston.*

PS. Tell Hal Marvin I couldn't wait for instructions on the last one, and had to go about it in my own way. So long. Hope to report in person within a day or so—depending on my ability to crawl through the German front line.

Billy.