

FLYING GHOSTS

by FRANKLIN M. RITCHIE

*Battle on battle surged in the clouds—men leaped to death through tracer-scorched skies
—but when the squadron leaders went down, Eric Folsom just had to find his wings!*

SLIM ERIC FOLSOM was riffling a crisp new pack of cards when the first bomb dropped on the Bull Pup drome. He jumped out of his chair.

The stone building quivered under the shock of the explosion. Breaking glass tumbled inward from the window panes. Folsom's ear drums pained from the thunder of the blast, and he glanced wildly around for a way of escape.

"Looks as if the blighters had found the 'drome," chubby Armour said quietly, without moving from his chair. "Say, Folsom, gimme a cigarette, will you?"

The new pilot quieted his jumping nerves with an effort and drew a pack of cigarettes from his pocket. He extended them to Armour who glanced at them, grunted, and shook his head.

"Like French fags better," said Armour. He turned to the Major of Squadron H.Q., who was sitting at a desk, behind him.

"Want us to go up an' take a crack at those Gothas, sir?"

The Skipper shook his head.

"No," he answered quietly. "The 89th Squadron's after them already. No use bothering."

Eric Folsom sank back in his chair. His heart was pounding and his breath was coming fast, but he couldn't show fear in the face of the sang-froid displayed by these veterans. He dealt the cards around the table, wondering if this were real, if he were actually on the receiving end of an air raid. The faces of his companions gave no sign of the least concern.

Tak! Tak! Tak! Tak! Tak! Spandau guns.

Crack! Crack! Crack! Lewis and Vickers guns answering. There was one last tremendous burst of bombs which shook the whole 'drome, and then the sound of battle drifted away.

The poker game went on undisturbed. Eric Folsom handed out the cards meticulously.

Across the plain, deal table reflectively staring at his cards, Tommy Armour rubbed a wart on the side of his nose and seemed unconscious of the fact that they had just escaped a bomb raid.

"I'll open," Armour said, yawning. The others stayed.

As usual, Armour was rolling between his thick lips an unlighted French cigarette, filled with the blackest of Moroccan tobacco, which he had just drawn from a pink paper package on the table.

"Gimme two cards, buzzard," he told Folsom, with a pleasant grin. "Hate to take your money away from you bimbos, but it'd only be wasted if you had it in your pockets when the Jerries got you."

Eric Folsom's teeth dug into his lower lip and he brushed back his yellow hair with a nervous gesture. He glanced a bit apprehensively at the Skipper. Then he shrugged. Armour had a queer sense of humor.

He turned inquiringly to hawk-nosed Jerry Dale, who was holding his cards close to his chin. Dale never laughed. He was as careful as a girl about his dress. But other pilots had told Folsom that Dale never refused to risk his own life to help a comrade in a dog fight.

"One!" Dale said laconically, his eyes on his cards. Folsom took two cards nervously and dropped his discard.

"Three for me—to keep you birds honest!" Bert Logan said. He had pale eyebrows that were always twitching, and his voice was high and shrill like a girl's—yet in the air he was a grim fighting machine with nine Fokkers to his credit. "I want to be ready for St. Peter if my gun jams some day."

A TELEPHONE bell jangled harshly on the Skipper's desk. The noisy room hushed at once. Half a dozen youngsters halted their dice game and stared tensely at the Major. Even Armour was silent.

"Hello!" The Squadron Commander's strained

voice blared out. "Who?" There was an audible relaxation in his tone. "Oh, yes, Conroy. Go ahead. What is it?"

It wasn't a trouble call. The snapping of the tension was instantly evident, and the pilots resumed their activities with a cheerful bustle.

They were waiting here in the orderly room for assignments. It was the Bull Pups' job to take care of special emergencies in their sector.

Other pursuit squadrons went out on regular patrols, meeting their enemies more or less by chance, but the Bull Pups sat tight in the orderly room until a trouble call came in. Then they went out to a definite rendezvous with Fritz.

"Whoop it," yelled Tommy Armour as he threw a blue ten-franc note down on the table.

"Raise you!" Jerry Dale carefully placed four purple five-franc billets on top of Armour's money. He squinted stoically at his cards, shoved them together and laid them face down on the board in front of him.

"Raise it again!" said Eric Folsom. His heart was pounding and his blood seemed to be coursing through his veins, giving him a new buoyance, now that the tension had relaxed. He wanted excitement. He wanted to forget that Terry Hawkins had gone out that morning after a Rumpler observation bus which had been reported over Sainte-Menehould—and that they hadn't heard from him yet.

"Attaboy!" Logan shrilled. "I'm staying with you."

"Whoop her again!" chubby Armour chuckled.

The gambling fever burned stronger in Eric Folsom. His eyes rested on the rudder of an Albatross which was fastened to the wall opposite him. There were Pfaltz wings there, too, and an insignia from the fuselages of wrecked Fokkers. It gave him a comfortable feeling to gaze at these trophies. They proved that the Jerries were vulnerable. Other Bull Pups had brought them down, and he could, too. He warmed to his comrades.

"It's a great gang!" he grinned at Armour.

The fat man shrugged.

"Yes," he agreed. "Best we've had yet. Too bad the Jerries don't give us a chance to stay long together."

Young Folsom laughed—just a bit too boisterously perhaps. Armour would have his joke, even about the Fokkers which could outfly and out-manuever the tricky little Camels. Folsom decided that they couldn't be so bad or Armour wouldn't take them so calmly. Still, he wished he had had his baptism of fire. A man could never tell what he'd do in a strange situation.

The telephone jangled again, and the room was stilled while everybody stared at the Skipper. The latter's voice came in quick monosyllables. At length he jammed the receiver back on the hook and turned dryly to Tommy Armour, who was the leader of the A Flight.

"Half a dozen Fokkers over Somme-Py, Armour," he said. "Take three men and chase 'em. The Umpteenth Artillery wants observation for a shoot and that damned R.E. squadron won't send a ship out while the Jerries are there."

"Yes sir," chubby Armour chuckled, with a wink at his companions. "We'll go play wet nurse to 'em." He turned to the others at the table. "Coming?" he asked.

Jerry Dale turned his cards face-upward.

"Sure," he said calmly. "Let's see your cards. May as well finish out the hand."

"Two pairs!" said Bert Logan.

Eric Folsom's heart pounded tumultuously. His mouth grew hot and dry and the palms of his hands prickled. He felt warm all over and he wondered if his face were flushed.

ARMOUR HAD picked him as one of the party. He was going to face the big test.

He threw down his cards without looking at them, and his eyes were on the Skipper rather than on his companions. The grim-faced Major was studying him carefully, and Folsom flushed. He would make good. He would! No need to look at him like that!

"My money, buzzards! Got a full house!" Chubby Tommy Armour's throaty chuckle broke the silence as he gathered up the money and stuffed it into his pocket. "No use letting you birds have all that *argent* when you're chasin' Fokkers!"

Eric Folsom frowned. There was no need of carrying a joke too far. The Bull Pups didn't always win. They hadn't heard anything yet from Terry Hawkins.

"By the way," the Skipper's harsh voice interrupted. "Keep an eye out for Hawkins' bus, Armour. The red-legs told me they saw him go down over that way, but they didn't have time to locate him. Nose dived a thousand feet!"

Eric Folsom's stomach seemed to be in the grip of a giant press that was trying to wring it dry. Terry Hawkins shot down! Conked! Washed out! The new pilot's hand trembled a bit as it rested on the back of his chair. He hoped nobody would notice that it was shaking as he reached for his flying coat and helmet.

“Come on, buzzard,” Armour grinned at him, struggling into a baggy Sidcot suit which gave him the appearance of an amiable grizzly bear. “Those Fokkers are our meat, and the Bull Pups are due to get some Jerries.”

Jerry Dale laid a friendly hand on the boy’s shoulder. “I ought to get about three of ’em myself;” he grumbled, although Folsom detected a warm undercurrent beneath the surface grimness. “I’ve had such rotten luck at poker that I’m due for a break in something else.”

“Let’s go!” urged Bert Logan. “Make it snappy.” He was coldly efficient now, in spite of his innocuous appearance.

Eric Folsom felt a warm surge of confidence as he stared at his friends. They were good pals, no doubt about that, and they were doing their best to put him at his ease. He had to make good, that was all. He’d show these good friends of his that he was all right. “Come on!” he said. “I’m ready, buzzards.”

“Attaboy! Lead on!” Armour chuckled. “We’re comin’”

Dangling his goggles in his hand, Eric Folsom walked down the muddy, tree-lined road toward the camouflaged canvas hangars and the dead line where the tricky little Camels were already being wanned up for them.

As they reached the tarmac, chubby Armour slapped him heartily on the back before he turned away toward his own bus.

“Watch that right hand turn,” Jerry Dale cautioned him in the casual tone which one veteran might use to another. Eric Folsom’s chest swelled under his leather coat at the implied recognition of equality.

With a roar, Tommy Armour’s red Camel shot like a streak of living flame across the ‘drome into the teeth of the wind and began to rise. Logan followed, and then Dale. As the latter’s dust died away, Eric Folsom shoved his throttle open, eased his stick toward his instrument board to get his tail up, and hurtled after them.

The ‘drome began to fall away beneath him. The motor roared thunderously in his ears, and the wind screamed in his wires so that it almost deafened him.

As the ships sped forward, Armour took the lead, while Logan and Dale fell in at the rear, herding the youngster in between them and the leading bus. Eric Folsom thrilled with a sense of pleasant security. His friends were taking care of him.

He moved his head constantly from side to side,

watching out for enemy ‘planes. Once in a while he would extend an arm, thumb rigidly at right angle to his hand to protect his eye from the glare, as he stared into the sun for lurking Jerries.

SUDDENLY he saw Tommy Armour’s arm waving excitedly, and he followed the pointing finger. Half a dozen tiny black specks were coming toward him, growing in size with an uncanny swiftness.

Tak! Tak! Tak! Tak! Tak!

Eric Folsom’s heart pounded tumultuously. Greenish-yellow tracer trails wound sinuously toward him. But he wasn’t afraid. Armour and Dale and Logan were all there and they’d look after him. He held his position, his pulses leaping.

Armour’s nose dipped suddenly downward and the red Camel dived with incredible swiftness. Eric Folsom followed the scarlet streak with bated breath.

Flames burst from one of the black Fokkers and the ship sideslipped and went into a spin, plunging earthward. The red Camel looped and came back into position in front of Eric Folsom, who had flown straight ahead without changing his course.

Tak! Tak! Tak! Tak! Tak!

Chips of wood flew out of the instrument board, and, turning around, he saw a grim black shape plunging down on him, red fire spitting angrily from the muzzles of its guns. Eric Folsom’s head was in a whirl. He wasn’t afraid, but the suddenness of the attack had caught him off guard. He fumbled with his gun, wondering wildly whether he should sideslip or loop to get away from this assailant.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Bert Logan’s mottled bus materialized swiftly and Folsom saw the Jerry pilot who was attacking him slump forward in his seat. The Fokker’s mad dive continued. It never slackened, until it hit the ground and burst into flame. Young Folsom grinned happily. Nothing to be afraid of here! The veterans were looking out for him.

Another black ship had come up to engage Logan’s attention, and Armour was circling warily about a Fokker which seemed to be trying desperately to get at him.

Folsom watched them both, circling indecisively, at a loss what to do. They seemed to be quite capable of handling the situation. He fell farther and farther behind them, not noticing, in his absorption, what the others were doing. Dale was battling two Jerries at once.

Tak! Tak! Tak! Tak! Tak!

Eric Folsom's heart stopped beating for a moment and his blood turned to ice. There was a Fokker square on his tail, and another one was off to one side. The veterans were all busy. It looked like a bad situation for him. He couldn't think. A red mist blurred his vision.

He pulled up his nose and changed direction in a swift Immelmann turn, but one of the Germans merely sideslipped out of the way while the other fell into position on his tail once more. Folsom swung his ship desperately this way and that, but he couldn't shake them off. Neither could he bring his own guns to bear on them.

Cold beads of sweat formed on his brow. His breath came in short, hard grunts. His teeth dug hard into his lower lip and his muscles ached under the strain of his constant maneuvering of stick and rudder bar.

Where were the veterans—Armour and Logan and Dale?

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Folsom grinned happily. Jerry Dale had shot down one of his assailants and he was thundering down now in a headlong dive to help the young replacement pilot. He had sacrificed his position of advantage over the remaining German, and was zooming down toward Folsom, regardless of the fact that the black ship was getting on his tail.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

The two crates which were harrying Folsom abandoned their attack and joined in the battle against Jerry Dale. The youngster heaved a sigh of relief and climbed up to get altitude. When he got a chance, he'd dive into the melee. His heart pounded like a trip hammer. Good thing Jerry Dale had had a chance to drop down to help him out!

DAMN! What was happening? In his excitement he almost allowed his Camel to stall.

A great hole was showing in Jerry Dale's wing. The aerofoil was beginning to buckle. It wouldn't hold.

"Jerry!" Young Eric Folsom screamed into the roar of his motor.

The wing was coming off! Jerry Dale, with a last despairing effort, hurled his little bus straight into one of the Fokkers. Eric Folsom saw the wings lock in a twisted mass of wreckage and flames began to lick over them. The two crates dropped plummet-like, fastened together even in death.

Young Folsom's stomach leaped and buckled. He gagged in deadly nausea. Jerry Dale had done this for him.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Armour and Logan had disposed of their opponents and now they were hurtling down onto the last of the Fokkers. Folsom's heart beat more calmly. His friends were coming to look after him. He needn't worry.

Setting his lips, he plunged clumsily after a German. Ordinarily, the fellow could have gobbled him up because of his awkwardness, but with Armour and Logan hurtling toward them, the enemy pilots decided to call it a day and they turned tail. Logan managed to get one of them before they had fled too far over the lines, and then Armour called off the chase.

BACK AT HIS OWN 'drome, Eric Folsom climbed slowly from his ship, his eyes averted. He didn't want to look at Armour or at Logan. Jerry Dale had gone down to his death because he hadn't been able to take care of himself.

"Well, buzzard," chubby Armour boomed at him cheerfully. "You're back O.K. Fooled the Jerries for a while, anyhow. Keep it up, old son, and we'll make a bloomin' ace out o' you yet."

Young Folsom stared into the other's smiling face, wondering if he was being sarcastic, but there was no trace of guile in Armour's grin. Folsom's teeth dug into his lip and his hands clenched. Did the man have no feeling at all? Could he still laugh when Jerry Dale had just been shot down.

"Pretty good for a beginner," said Bert Logan. "Good work."

Eric Folsom brushed at his eyes with a grimy fist. He tried to speak, but a dry sob choked him.

"Jer—Jerry Dale!" he blurted out. "My fault!" His eyes were tragic as he faced the other men.

Tommy Armour's grin gave way to a look of deep understanding, and a comforting arm was thrown around the young pilot's shoulders. His voice was warm and vibrant.

"Don't worry, buzzard," he said softly. "Jerry wouldn't want you to." He was silent for a moment, staring at the mechanics who were coming toward them to service the ships.

"A bird's good for just about so long up here, you know," he went on slowly, kicking at the dirt with his boot as if embarrassed by even this show of emotion. "After all, it's the Squadron that counts, and it's up to us to look after you youngsters till you're ready to take over yourselves."

"That's right," agreed Logan, the ace, who had twelve Fokkers to his credit now. "Can't live forever, you know. A bird's useful for a while. Then it's up to somebody else to take over. Got to get the rookies trained to carry on."

A pleasant warmth pervaded Eric Folsom's being. This was the spirit. He began to grieve less for Jerry Dale.

Too bad, of course, but these things happened.

JERRY DALE'S place in the poker game that night was taken by a pop-eyed youth who talked very fast and very loud, as if he were trying to hide an excitement which was natural enough when one considered that he had come to the Squadron only that afternoon. He looked at Eric Folsom with open admiration when Armour casually mentioned the dog-fight, and Folsom was conscious of a sort of guilty feeling.

Sallow, black-haired Morgan was missing, too, and somebody said that he had gone out to strafe a Rumpier observation bus and had forgotten about the observer in the rear cockpit. Morgan had gone down on the German side of the lines.

"Could—could he—?" Folsom stuttered.

"Not a chance!" his informant told him with a shrug. "Washed out!"

Eric Folsom went on with his poker game. The pop-eyed youth's incessant talking got on his nerves, but he felt quite at home with Armour and Logan. There was nothing to worry about while they were around. He hoped he'd be able to stick with them.

Three more youngsters came up to the Squadron a few days later, after "Blotto" Meyers and Hank Durant had tangled their ships at ten thousand feet when they were both diving at the same Pfaltz near Vigeneulles. And Buck Dugan, out alone, had been caught by an Albatross patrol over Dompierre.

The newcomers were sitting in the orderly room when Folsom came in, and he stared around with a puzzled little frown. The place seemed different now, somehow. The Skipper still sat at his battered desk, waiting for trouble calls. The same yellow spots caused by dampness showed on the stone walls. The red rudder of an Albatross and the wings of Pfaltz and Fokker crates had not been moved, yet it wasn't quite the same.

"Makes us ol' timers figger when we see these kids comin' in here," chubby Armour grinned cheerily. "A bird can't last forever on this front, you know." He was quite unperturbed.

"I'll tell the world!" agreed Bert Logan. In spite of his deadly precision and accuracy in the air, Logan always seemed pathetic and futile on the ground.

With a grunt, Eric sat down in his accustomed place at the table and riffled the cards. Armour and Logan joined him, and he glanced around the room. Pop-eyed Durkee's was the most familiar face in the orderly room now, and he called him over, recalling with a little sinking of the heart all the others who had formerly occupied seats about the place and who were gone now.

"I'll open," Armour chuckled throatily in his familiar way. "No use lettin' you birds waste money when the Jerries—"

Eric Folsom frowned.

"Shut up, Tommy," he said, sotto voce, with a meaning glance at pop-eyed Durkee. Somehow he was beginning to have a feeling of responsibility for the boy. Armour chuckled again.

"All right, veteran," he grinned.

Folsom flushed. He was still a rookie. He had been out every day with Armour and Logan and he had been in several brushes with the Jerries. But he knew just as well as his companions did that they had done the bulk of the fighting and that they would probably have been better off without him because they had to be looking out for him all the time.

"I will make good!" he promised himself, his lips tightening.

At dawn, next morning, they started off together. They climbed through the low-hanging clouds into a sea of pink and purple brilliance where the sun's rays struck slantingly upon the billowing cloud-tops. Eric Folsom leaned back in his seat and drank it all in. It was good to be up here, with friends who knew how to take care of themselves and him. His vigilance relaxed.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

HE GLANCED UP with a start. Tommy Armour was firing his gun to rouse him, and Bert Logan, who always flew in the rear, was driving closer. Armour's hand was pointing upward. Folsom stared vaguely into the ceiling, but without success.

Tak! Tak! Tak! Tak! Tak!

Spandau guns! Dark shapes were suddenly visible. Eric cursed bitterly. Again he had drawn his friends into a trap. They could have gone off and left him and saved themselves, but they had stayed with him.

Armour's red Camel and Logan's mottled ship climbed insolently toward the diving Fokkers. They

were outnumbered, and if they had been alone they would have made a run for it, Folsom knew. Now they had the responsibility of looking after him and they were climbing into the unequal battle. They were giving him a chance to get away.

His jaw set hard and his teeth dug deep into his lower lip. He wouldn't run. But he circled inconclusively, at a loss what to do. If he climbed up there he might be only more of a hindrance to the veterans than if he stayed where he was. His pulse leaped swiftly and his eyes blazed. He wasn't afraid. But he didn't know what to do. He was a rookie still. Damn! It couldn't be!

Tommy Armour's red bus nosed slowly upward, as if the pilot had lost control. It stalled. The ship dropped limply into a spin. Tail swinging in wide, eccentric circles, Eric saw the red ship go down. He leaned over the side to stare after it.

Tommy! Tommy! Tommy!

The Fokkers were closing in on Bert Logan now. Eric pulled back on his stick and climbed resolutely toward the melee. He wasn't afraid. He wasn't going to quit.

Too late! Too late!

Fire spurted from the mottled Camel. A sudden pain seared Eric's eyes and he felt a thin trickle of blood on his chin where his teeth had cut through his lip. A kicking, jerking form leaped clear of the burning crate.

Bert Logan gone, too. Because he'd been too slow about getting up there.

He stared upward at the Fokkers, a dull ache in his heart. He wasn't afraid of the Jerries, but he didn't know what to do. It looked foolish to attack the whole flight without help. Bitterly cursing his own slowness, he turned and streaked toward the Bull Pup 'drome. Damn! He was still a rookie.

That night, in the orderly room, he played poker again. Pop-eyed Durkee was the oldest man there except himself. The other two places were taken by a hair-lipped Southerner and a lanky woodsman from Maine whose conversation was limited to "Yes" and "No." Eric stared around the stone-walled room. It wasn't the same now, without Armour and Logan and the rest.

Instead of chubby Armour with his familiar quip, "Can't let you birds waste money when the Jerries get you," the hair-lipped Southerner was talking loquaciously about the Mardi Gras in New Orleans. Folsom frowned.

"When the Jerries get you!"

Eric snapped his teeth together.

He was sitting in the orderly room next morning waiting for trouble calls when the telephone bell jangled and the grim-faced Skipper picked up the receiver. He answered in monosyllables and then turned to Eric Folsom.

"Take three men and chase those Rumplers away from Hattonchatel, Folsom," he told the pilot.

Eric rose, frowning vaguely. He had been picked out to lead a flight. He! Of course! Armour and Logan were gone now.

FOLSOM WALKED slowly toward the tarmac. He wasn't used to responsibility.

He picked Durkee, the Southerner and another man, who had been with the Squadron all of two weeks. Folsom noticed that they looked up to him with a sort of deference. He dug his teeth into his lip. He had always depended on Armour and Logan to carry him through. This was his first trip with untried men. Why, he was the oldest pilot of them all.

As the ships sped forward his eyes roved constantly about the horizon. He was never still for a moment. He had to look out for these youngsters. He had no time to waste.

Suddenly he spotted the Rumplers, off in the distance, and pointed triumphantly. Folsom thrilled proudly as he saw that he was the first to spot them. The youngsters had been depending on him, the veteran. He drove forward.

As he approached the Rumplers, he was busily outlining a plan of attack. It was up to him now. He waggled his wings, indicating that he was ready to dive, and he shoved his stick forward, his thumb pressing on the stick trigger. The scream of the wind and the rattle, of his guns thrilled him, but he had to keep glancing around to make sure that the youngsters were all right.

The first Rumpler stalled suddenly and rolled over on one wing as his bullets found their mark, and Eric Folsom shouted triumphantly, pounding his knee in jubilation. Even now, though, he had to keep an alert eye on the youngsters. They were hanging back, leaving the bulk of the work to him, but somehow he didn't mind now. Armour and Logan and Dale had broken him in. He was ready to do his full share.

Tak! Tak! Tak! Tak! Tak!

Fokkers! They had been hiding in the ceiling and now they were coming down on the unsuspecting Camels, their Spandau guns barking.

Durkee and the Southerner were right behind him, forming a tight little Y. He glanced around. Damn! The third man, like the rookie he was, had wandered off by himself. Even as he watched, Folsom saw three Fokkers close in on the youngster's tail.

Folsom started toward them. The kid was a fool. Let him get out as best he could. It would be suicide to go in there. Other Jerries were diving at him.

Then, suddenly, the stone-walled orderly room rose before his eyes—and all the newcomers. Tommy Armour wasn't there, nor Bert Logan, nor Dale nor Morgan. He gripped his stick convulsively. Why—*damn it all!*—he was the oldest man in the squadron.

He thought of Jerry Dale. He saw himself straying helplessly around until Jerry Dale came thundering down to help, reckless of the Fokker on his own tail. The pilot saw again chubby Armour's merry face grown suddenly serious.

"Can't live forever, you know," he was saying. "Got to take care o' the youngsters to keep the Squadron goin'."

Eric flushed with sudden shame. Suppose Armour and Logan and Dale could see him now. He frowned. Perhaps they could. Perhaps their ghostly craft were flying—invisible—above this dog-fight. He couldn't let them down. He was the veteran of the squadron. His job to look after the youngsters!

FOLSOM SHOVED his stick forward and screeched down on the three Fokkers. There was no indecision about his movements now. He was no longer a rookie. Tommy Armour and Bert Logan had climbed up to certain death to protect him, because they were veterans. Now he was the oldest pilot in the outfit.

Like an avenging fury he shot in among the Fokkers. The ship responded like a live thing to his touch on the controls. His gun stuttered masterfully. A Fokker collapsed.

The youngsters seemed to draw inspiration from his reckless but masterful attack. The four Camels wheeled and swung and dived together with mechanical precision. One by one they wiped out their enemies. Then they turned home.

That night, in the orderly room, he heard pop-eyed Durkee say, admiringly, to a new replacement, "There's Folsom—the ace. Pulled me out of a bad hole today."

Eric's chest swelled a bit. A man couldn't live forever, of course. The Jerries would without doubt get him some time.

But they couldn't down the Squadron. He'd leave a real legacy behind him.

"I haven't forgotten you, Tommy," he muttered, picturing chubby Armour behind the bottles on the table.