

# THE DEVIL'S RAY

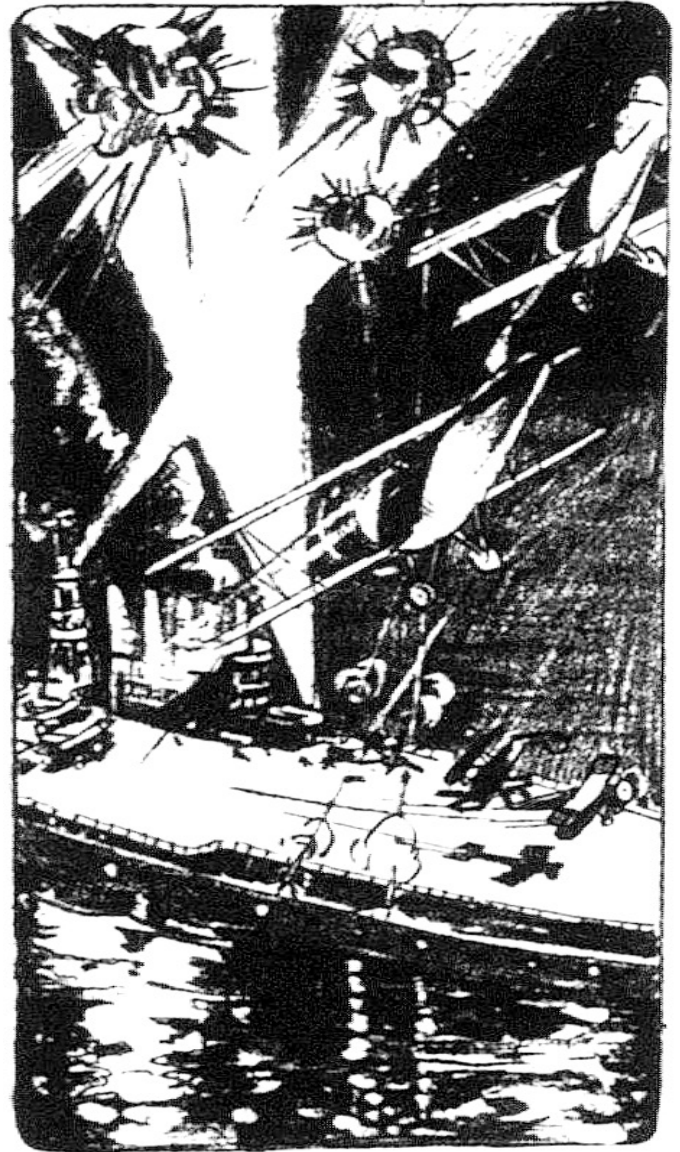
by DONALD E. KEYHOE

*"Stop those planes—before it is too late!" gasped the dying man on the deck of that huge plane-carrier. "Tell the captain Hoi Kiang's—Macao—the dwarf—" Ten feet away a shadowy figure swiftly moved his hand—a shot rang out—and the dying man fell back as a bullet found his heart. And Mike Doyle looked up from the dead man's side and saw six planes taking off—racing madly to the peril that was yet unknown!*

**S**TEALTHILY, the huge plane-carrier slipped along beneath a tropic sky, like a pirate ship upon some evil mission. It was the third night of the *Lexington's* strange dodging about the China Sea, while the whole ship buzzed with rumors. Dark even to her running lights, the vessel ploughed a golden trail through the phosphorescent waters as she raced westward from the deserted island harbor where she had lain hidden throughout the day.

Up on the bridge, a grim old sea-dog with four gold stripes upon his sleeves paced restlessly back and forth, counting the minutes. An hour passed. The navigator came out of his chart-room, spoke briefly. The Old Man grated a curt command. Officers and men sprang into action. Engine telegraph bells jingled. The engines slowed, ceased their muffled beat. The American plane-carrier drifted silently under an Oriental sky, where the Southern Cross flung its age-old banner of glowing stars.

Minutes of waiting. Nervous whispers between officers as the Old Man stalked across the bridge. Waiting—in an empty sea, with an empty sky above. Midnight. The boatswain's eery piping, and the relief detail flitting like phantoms to their posts. Another long dragging hour, with the thump of the captain's



shoes striking on the bridge crew's taut eardrums. Then, suddenly game a call. "Messenger!"

A man sprang to attention. "Yes, sir "

"Get the Senior Flight Officer!" The man vanished down the ladder. "Commander Brown!"

The portly Executive Officer moved ponderously out of the deeper gloom midway of the bridge. The Old Man rattled off an order. "Have that unmarked Corsair plane brought on deck. Guns loaded. Also six Boeing fighters. But take care no lights show on deck."

"Aye, aye, sir."

The Senior Flight Officer scrambled up to the bridge breathless, his cap awry.

"Get me the toughest pair of pilots on this ship," the Old Man barked.

The S.F.O. opened his mouth and forgot to close it. "T-tough, sir?" he stuttered.

"That's what I said. Tough. Hard. Two-fisted. Is that plain enough?"

"Yes, sir—but—officers or enlisted—"

"I don't give a tinker's dam who they are," rasped the Old Man. "I want two men who can fly the red-hot hinges off of Hades—men with guts for fight. And don't stand there gaping at me!"

The S.F.O. fell down the ladder, mumbling to himself. The rest of the men on the bridge stared goggle-eyed at the skipper. The Old Man must have gone crazy.

"Clean balmy, if you ask me," whispered the O.D. to the signal lieutenant.

"Shut up or he'll hear you and throw you in irons," retorted the other hoarsely. "It won't be the first time he's done that trick, either. But he's not cuckoo—not that old fox." The Old Man did not hear their whispers. He was out on the starboard wing of the bridge, peering through tired eyes into the southeast sky, still hoping, listening.

STEPS sounded on the ladder of the bridge. Heavy thumping of big feet, a huge bulk looming through the shadows. Other steps, light, quick, as a less massive figure moved with catlike poise toward the Old Man. Back of the two the S.F.O., his cold disapproval weighing down the atmosphere.

"These your men?" The skipper stared through the gloom. "All right, you two. Step into the chart-house. Officer-of-the-deck!"

The O.D. jumped.

"Half-speed ahead, course 280. Keep a sharp lookout for signal lights of any kind."

The navigator vacated his curtained cubicle at the Old Man's command. The skipper blinked under the light, measuring the pair before him. A brief gleam of amusement touched his weary eyes as he saw the first man, "Dusty" Rhoades, the senior chief-petty-officer, who was still bearing slight signs of his last liberty ashore in Honolulu.

He had asked for a tough pair. It began to look as though one-half of the team would be tough enough for the two of them. For Dusty Rhoades was a blunt Colossus, good-natured if not crossed, with an ex-pug face that was sufficient to make a rookie quake in his shoes, even before he opened that cavernous mouth to emit the foghorn thunder of his amazing voice. Neither time nor circumstance had improved his homely countenance. One cauliflower ear lay crushed against his massive, shaggy head, while the other

perversely stuck out at a belligerent angle. His nose, originally a most noble proboscis, had long ago been battered into a sad remnant of its former glory.

"You're a pilot?" the Old Man demanded, with unconscious incredulity. It seemed impossible that this behemoth of a man could squeeze his tremendous body into a ship's cockpit.

"Nine years, sir," Dusty returned, in a conversational bellow that shook the walls of the chart-room. "All types. No crashes—so far." He looked sideways for a bit of wood, and knocked with a hairy, hamlike hand on the navigator's map table.

"I knew you had flight orders," the Old Man hastened to say. "But I—"

He stopped as his keen gaze fell on the second man's features. His heavily lined brows drew together in a vaguely puzzled frown. There was something about the man in Marine Corps sergeant's uniform that made him wonder.

More than one person had wondered about Mike Doyle, a queer contradiction of a man. Quiet, indolent at first glance, bored—upon the surface. But really alert, hard, with a hint of chain-lightning menace behind his gray eyes and that easy pose of sophistication. More than one man had noted the swift movement of those eyes, their habit of flicking with a quick dart from point to point, leaping at the slightest move or gesture—a habit typical of a man who has lived with hands close to his guns.

The Old Man's gaze rested on Doyle's sharp-cut features, his tanned, lean cheeks, and the firm mouth that crooked up slightly at the right in a hint of ironic humor. Something clicked at the back of his mind . . . a paper lying in his desk, a typewritten description . . . the Department of Justice seal . . .

And Doyle, noting that sudden glimmer in the skipper's weary eyes, knew that it had come at last. He had known recognition would come some time. But three years of life in the Pacific—Manila, Hawaii, Guam—had made him forget at times—forget the trap into which he had tumbled, back in the States, forget those crushing, bitter days when he had hidden by day and moved swiftly at night—with the unearned, ugly brand of murder on his soul.

For an instant the old, bitter rebellion rose within him. He tensed himself. A quick spring onto the darkened bridge; a dash to the flying deck, where fast planes were already being lined up, the roar of an engine—and he would be off into the night, with a fighting chance of reaching China. China—and freedom!

THE Old Man saw—and waited, staring into those suddenly narrowed slits, where two diamond-points bored into his own eyes. Hard! Yes, this man was hard. Harder by far than the big, fierce-visaged Rhoades had ever dreamed of being. But still there was something . . .

"I need two men for a stiff job," the Old Man quietly said. "The two who go may not come back. I'm not ordering anyone—"

"You can count me in," said Dusty in an amiable roar.

Mike Doyle hesitated. Was this a trick?

"It's a nasty mess," the skipper was saying. "Your success will depend on how quickly you can strike. I think you two could make it. But there will be a fight—you may have to kill, and kill swiftly."

Involuntarily, his eyes shifted to Doyle's face, on down to his long, tapering fingers. A curious gleam came into Doyle's eyes, reckless, mocking. "I'll go," he said.

"You've heard rumors below decks, of course?"

"Everything from Japs to bombing the Reds, sir."

"That's ridiculous, naturally. But the truth is deadly serious. If my reports are right—but there isn't time for that now. Get below and shift out of your uniforms, into civilian clothes. Tear out the labels. Be sure you haven't any identification marks on you. No rings, watches, or anything that could be traced. For if you fail, there must be no way this could be traced back to the United States Navy."

"What's up, sir?" queried Dusty, plainly awed.

"I'll explain what you need to know before you take off. You'll use that special Corsair with the Hornet engine. The insignia has been stripped off, and the numbers punched off the instruments, engine, and guns. Get your clothes changed and report to my cabin as soon as you can."

They started down the ladder. The darkness hid the twisted, bitter smile on Doyle's lips. He knew now why the Old Man had not instantly denounced him. Doyle, the fugitive killer, was needed!

A sudden rumble from Dusty cut his thought short. A dim figure was scrambling down the ladder below the big C.P.O.

"Hey, you!" Dusty bawled in a voice that could have been heard clear down in the double bottoms. "Come back here!"

The shadowy figure scuttled off into the night. Dusty leaped to the superstructure deck, and raced after the man. He gave a bellow of triumph. *Crash!* A pistol barked. A spurt of flame split the dark. Dusty unloosed a thundering avalanche of profanity.

The Old Man's startled voice stopped Doyle as he

was tearing to Dusty's aid. "What the devil's going on down there?"

"A man hiding at the top of the ladder," Doyle flung back crisply. "Rhoades went after him—"

"The dirty, murderin' rat took a shot at me," came Dusty's wrathful tones. "Missed me—but he got away, blast his yellow hide."

Below, excited sentries were shouting back and forth. The O.D. seized a megaphone and yelled terse orders, directing the search.

"Never mind this, Doyle," the Old Man said. "You and Rhoades go ahead. But not a word to any one. There's evidently a snooper on board."

TEN minutes later both men were ready, Dusty in a resplendent purple suit that shrieked of Sands Street, Brooklyn; Mike Doyle in quiet, well-fitting tweeds.

"What you think of this layout?" Dusty inquired as he pulled on his helmet. "Class, eh?"

"Red-hot," Doyle assured him without a grin. "But it's liable to get spoiled, if the Old Man wasn't kidding us. He said we'd probably run into a scrap."

"Cripes, I'd hate to ruin these duds. I laid down forty-five smackers to have 'em made; picked the cloth myself. Say—what do you think the Old Man's got up his sleeve?"

"Search me. Something too dirty for an officer to stick his hands in, I guess."

"Well, it's oke with me. Let's move."

"Better take a gat along," said Doyle grimly. "You can have a mech file off the Navy mark and number while we're getting the dope from the skipper."

Dusty took a .45 from his locker and shoved it into his pocket. "How about you?" he asked.

Doyle was stooping over a ditty-box. He stood up and slipped a leather armpit harness under his coat. In the holster reposed a wicked-looking automatic, with a peculiar contrivance at the end.

"What's that?" demanded the C.P.O.

"A silencer," Doyle grinned crookedly. "Just a little token I brought with me."

Dusty's battle-scarred face registered curiosity, but Doyle buttoned his coat over the weapon and strode into the dim-lit passage. Their way led past the radio room. The door was closed. From inside came the whirl of a generator, the sound of a tapping key.

"Say, that's funny," Doyle muttered. "I heard the Exec order that set shut down while we were beating around these waters."

He paused, then with a swift move threw the door

open. A man leaped up from the key. A pistol seemed to jump into his clutching fingers. Cold, pale eyes glared down the blue-steel barrel.

"Get inside!" a low voice snarled. As the man's gaze fell on Dusty, he scowled, "So it's you again, eh?"

Blood flowed into Dusty's leather-brown cheeks. With his hairy arms upraised, he looked like a gorilla about to lunge.

"Then you're the lousy rat that tried to pot me!" he thundered.

"Shut up! One more yell like that and I'll drop you. Stand over here, you two!"

Then Doyle, waiting with narrowed eyes for the first careless droop of the gun, saw the radioman trussed up in one corner of the room, a gag in his mouth. The man with the gun was in yeoman's uniform, but Doyle had never seen him before.

"Face the bulkhead!"

Gritting his teeth, Doyle obeyed. Again came the swift tapping of the key. Doyle listened. Unintelligible dots and dashes at first. Code? Then he caught it. German! What the devil? This was 1931. The war had been over for thirteen years.

"—Heading on course 280," the man with gun rapped out. "Must be planning surprise on base or search. Planes being prepared—"

*Clang-g-g-g!* The shrill jangle of the general alarm bells broke into the tense atmosphere.

"*Alle teufel!*" rasped the man at the key in thick German.

Doyle dropped on one knee and whirled, his long fingers flashing into his coat. Two guns spat lead almost at once. Doyle's automatic ripped from his fingers as a slug from the German's gun ricocheted off the barrel. The German staggered back, grabbing at his shoulder. Outside was a bedlam of shouting voices. Dusty and Doyle moved simultaneously. The huge C.P.O. lunged a big paw sideways for his .45 as Doyle scooped up his pistol.

The German fired blindly and dashed through the doorway. Dusty cursed and punctured the bulkhead with two wild shots. Doyle raced past him and into the passage. It was filled with a milling mob. A score of frightened seamen were putting distance between them and the radio room. Others, dashing to their battle stations, stopped to stare—and then rush on. There was no sign of the German.

Doyle seized a passing sailor. "Untie that bird," he snapped, jerking his thumb toward the bound radioman. "I've got to see the skipper."

HE REACHED the flying deck. It was a furore of activity. Men fell over each other in the dark. In take-off position stood the Corsair, back of it the first three of the six Boeings which had been ordered up from the storage deck. The elevator appeared with another load.

Above the uproar sounded the drone of an airplane engine. A throbbing that grew louder filled the sky. More than one engine, that. Planes—speeding, racing, wide-open. Men shouted wild conjectures across the deck.

"It's an attack," a frightened striker gasped as he tore past Doyle and Dusty Rhoades. "The Japs, by God!"

A flaring rocket streaked across the sky from one of the unseen planes. A red star, followed instantly by a green one.

"Lights!" burst the Old Man's voice from a nearby amplifier. "Floods! Clear for landing!"

The flying deck became a brilliant white floor. Searchlights probed skywards. Men ran to their posts, setting the retarding gear in order.

*Br-r-r-r-r-r-t! Br-r-r-r-r-r-t!* The unmistakable rattle of machine guns ate through the din. Into the beam of a stabbing searchlight flashed a fleeing plane, nosed down in a mad dive. Back of it came a larger ship, thundering down the sky, and charging in from the sides were two screeching fighters, red flames wrapping the muzzles of their spouting guns.

"Judas priest!" roared Dusty. "Look at that bird dive!"

The leading plane came in at a mad and scorching pace. It swept into the zone of light from the floods. Doyle saw that it was a Bristol, devoid of marks.

"Anti-aircraft crews!" thundered the command from the amplifiers. "Get those three ships back of the Bristol!"

Archie batteries spat flame and crashed into the night. The big ship back of the Bristol swerved wildly, sheered off into the dark. The two fighters closed in, twin shrieking furies.

"They're Bristols, too!" Doyle muttered, unheard in the clamor.

The leading plane pulled up from its dive, whipped about and skidded insanely at right angles to kill its speed. Back of it the two other fighters pounced with pounding guns. Tracer lanced gray lines under the glare of the floods. Burst after burst ripped into the fleeing Bristol's wings. But still it flew.

The crash of archie guns was a deafening roar, drowning the lighter snarl of the *Lexington's* machine guns, as deck crews raked the two pursuers.

The leading fighter swung into the wind, down the long flat deck. Wobbling drunkenly, wings still moaning, it thudded to the boards. A vicious bump, a crooked bounce, and back. Then a splintering smash as the landing gear gave way. The Bristol flopped upside down and skidded on its back to a smoking stop.

Down plunged the other two fighters. Through a wall of fire they stormed with tearing, slashing guns. A gun-crew melted into a bloody heap. A screaming mechanic ran straight into that deadly torrent and plunged on his face. Other men went down, like wheat before a scythe. A hail of smoking steel swept across the wrecked Bristol, raking, ripping into the crumpled ruin.

Mike Doyle was halfway across to the smoking wreck. Bullets chewed into the deck at his feet, snarled past his head. He threw himself back. The lethal stream passed on. He tore at the wreckers, lifting a broken wing. Eager hands held it up. Doyle reached in and lifted out the dying pilot.

A BLOOD-STREAKED, tortured face looked into his. An unnatural light burned in two dark eyes. "Get me to the captain—quick!" the dying man cried hoarsely. A spasm of pain contracted his features. He groaned as Doyle raised his shoulders.

"Too late," he said huskily. "Let me down."

Doyle's hand came away wet, sticky. The pilot had been shot in the back, besides that frightful gash along his head.

"Tell him Hoi Xiang's, Macao," the stricken man exclaimed with an effort. "The dwarf—"

Wasp engines sputtered into life near by. The dying pilot turned his head. Boeings were wheeling around for the take-off.

"Good God, stop them!" he shrieked. "Stop them—before it is too late!"

The first of the fighters leaped down the deck. A darting Bristol dived to meet it. Doyle jumped to his feet. Ten feet away, a man in yeoman's uniform swiftly moved his hand. The stricken Bristol pilot stiffened as a bullet found his heart. The yeoman ducked and sped for the nearest Boeing.

A mechanic was jumping from the cockpit. The pseudo-yeoman fired twice. The mechanic slumped in a heap. The killer vaulted into the seat, before the waiting pilot could recover from his daze, and was gone.

"It's the German!" shouted Dusty Rhoades. He tore after Mike Doyle, who was sprinting for the line-up.

There was a flame in Doyle's eyes and black hate in his heart for the devil who had cold-bloodedly drilled that dying man so that he could not reveal the driving purpose that had forced him on.

He started for a single-seater, but the last one whizzed down the deck before his eyes. He whirled to the unmarked Corsair. A mechanic took one look at his savage face and jumped to the starting-crank. The inertia wheel shrieked. The powerful Hornet gave a blasting thunder. Doyle was in the front seat—warming up in one furious roar—when the two-seater shook violently. He jerked around. Dusty Rhoades was jamming his mighty bulk into the rear seat, swinging the scarf-mounted Brownings into place.

Doyle hit the throttle with his fist. The Corsair flew down the deck, hurtled upward. The two Brownings in the nose chattered a wolfish snarl at Doyle's touch. He tripped them again, felt them beat like mighty pulses as he warmed the cold steel.

From out of the gloom the big biplane had reappeared. Guns blazed from gunners' pits, from narrow ports in both sides. A Boeing went slithering down into the sea. Doyle cursed through set teeth. The biplane turned, raced away, with three Navy fighters hot after it.

The stolen Boeing had streaked into the dark. Now it returned, rocketing down on the nearest Navy ship. The Navy pilot, closing with a fleeing Bristol, paid no attention to what seemed one of his own flight, Doyle slammed into a screeching chandelle, but he was too late. Cherry-red tracer stabbed from the spy's guns into the Navy man's pit—slugs tearing through flesh. A dead man was at the stick!

Only one Boeing of the five manned by Navy men remained above the *Lexington*. The three which had trailed the big biplane were out of sight. Doyle stared after them, briefly. A ruddy, fleeting glow showed for a second, as though a bomb had been exploded. The glow faded, increased to a lurid flame. Doyle saw two of the pursuing fighters silhouetted for an instant. But he saw no sign of the biplane, unless it was beyond that peculiar light.

Dusty's guns burst into action. Doyle suddenly came to realization of their position. There was but one other Navy pilot near them—and the spy was darting in on him to repeat his trick. Both the Bristols had plunged under the Corsair, to drill upward with greedy guns. Doyle whipped into a savage bank. One of the Bristols hung on its prop, almost before his guns. He gave a vicious kick at the rudder. The Corsair

jerked about, slid onto its target. He loosed a scorching burst. The Bristol faltered, stalled and spun. Halfway down, it burst into flames.

THE remaining Navy pilot had suddenly found his danger from the spy in the Boeing. Just in time, he came about and began a terrific hammering of the other ship. The last Bristol raced in to the spy's aid. Doyle snapped around to bring the Bristol in his sights. But Dusty Rhoades was ahead of him. With a roar of triumph, the huge C.P.O. swung his guns full into the Bristol's side. The strange fighter pitched off on its last plunge.

The spy, now caught between a blazing cross-fire, made one last desperate move. In a startling reverse-ment, he threw his ship straight into the other Boeing's path. The Navy pilot zoomed wildly—and the spy raced through beneath.

A blistering fire tore the stick from Doyle's hand, splintered the shield before his face. He crouched under that fierce barrage, seizing the stick to roll crazily onto the spy's tail. Suddenly, the Hornet sputtered and went dead. The Corsair fell off heavily, a lifeless thing of cloth and metal.

A dozen planes were taking off from the carrier's long deck. The spy saw—and was gone in a flash of wings before the other Boeing could strike a death blow. Doyle watched, and remembering those pale, deadly eyes of the killer, cursed his dead ship bitterly. He slipped in sideways, kicked once, and leveled off for the dead-stick landing. The Old Man himself ran to the side of the plane as it retarded to a stop.

"Quick, what did Webster tell you?" he rasped.

"Webster?" muttered Doyle, uncomprehendingly.

"The pilot you pulled out of the Bristol. The men said he gave you a message."

Doyle shook his head. "He was trying to tell me, but that damned German got him."

The Old Man started. "What German?"

Doyle explained. The skipper's lips compressed into a flat line. "So that's how they got him," he muttered to himself. Then, louder, "How much did Webster say before he died?"

"He said something about Hoi Kiang's, Macao, and he mentioned a dwarf."

"Nothing else—you're sure?"

"Not a word."

The planes which had taken off to pursue the spy had given up the chase and were landing. The lone Boeing which had been saved by Doyle and Dusty

Rhoades was also down safe. Ten minutes passed, but no sign of the three fighters which had given chase to the big biplane. Then some one gave a shout.

"Here they come!"

They came—but the instant they loomed into the light, it was clear that something was wrong. They flew queerly, one cavorting wildly about the sky, another swooping down only to zoom up crazily. The third shot down in a full power dive, raced crookedly across the deck at two hundred miles an hour or more, and then with a frightful crash pitched headlong into the sea. A column of water spurting up. Then the searchlights played on a heap of wreckage floating suddenly in the water of the China Sea.

"My God, what happened to him to dive like that?" the Old Man cried.

"Looked to me like he lost his flippers," Dusty Rhoades said in an oddly subdued voice. But Doyle shook his head.

ONE of the remaining pair was landing, wobbling down as though a frightened novice held the stick. Twenty feet up, the plane stalled. The nose dropped. The Boeing hit, spun around on one wing and smashed into the massed planes at one side.

The pilot stood up, his face distorted into a ghastly grin. His goggles were gone. Out of his ashen face his eyes glared with a startling, insane fire.

"Harris!" exclaimed the skipper. "What in the name of heaven—"

A bubbling, senseless laugh rose to Harris' lips. It grew into a wild shriek, an unholy mirth that chilled the marrow in Doyle's bones. A mechanic swore, and crossed himself. Dusty Rhoades' jutting jaw hung down, his mouth wide open in amazement.

"Mad?" said the Old Man hoarsely. "Stark, raving mad?"

An officer stepped to the side of the ship, reached up toward the gibbering pilot. Harris' lips drew back in an animal snarl. Brute ferocity gleamed from his staring eyes. He gave a horrible cry. Then with a sudden leap he was out of the ship, at the officer's throat, clawing with his bare hands, gouging, tearing. A dozen men threw themselves on the madman. He tore free, fighting with superhuman strength. At last they got him down.

A panting lieutenant with a scratched, bleeding face looked at the captain.

"Take him below," the Old Man whispered.

He seemed oddly shaken, fearful. He watched the

demented pilot dragged away, then gazed up at the remaining ship. There was dread in his face.

The last Boeing had circled drunkenly three times. Now it came in, after a crazy powerless zoom. The engine went silent. Doyle found he was digging his nails into his palms as he watched that silent plane, slowly settling. Something about it struck the entire group of watchers into tense stillness. On came the stalling ship, dead quiet, like a phantom out of the night.

It hit, crunched its oleo gear with the force of it. Its hooks caught the retarding cable as it slued to one side. The plane stopped. A white, horror-stricken face stared out of the cockpit. A face from which every intelligent expression had been erased—save for a dumb, awful horror and fear in the pilot's glassy eyes.

Doyle felt a shiver run over him. For there was no doubt but that the second pilot was mad, too. What had done it? What had they seen up there—what had happened to them to turn them into brutes, maniacs and imbeciles? Obviously, the third pilot had been insane, also—no sane man would have dived in for a landing at such frightful speed. He looked over to where the rescue boat lay tossing beside the wrecked plane. There was no sign of the unfortunate flyer.

The Old Man waved away the flight officers who were approaching the white-faced, staring pilot. He himself laid a hand on the youngster's shoulder.

"King, my boy, what is it?" he said gently. His voice shook. "What is the matter?"

Then Doyle recognized the pilot. Tom King, the youngest lieutenant aboard, who had been the life of the J.O. Mess. A mere boy, only six months out of the Naval Air School at Pensacola—likable, witty, with a reckless, endearing smile. And now—that pitiful ruin, sitting like a figure carved in stone!

King gave a strange little whimper as the Old Man's hand touched him. He shrank away as though in fear of a blow. There was a look in his eyes Doyle had seen in the eyes of an animal caught in a trap.

"It's all right, King—you're safe now," the Old Man said huskily. "Tell me—what happened?"

FOR a second the briefest glimmer of sanity came to the boy's face. He put out a groping hand, passed it before his eyes. Then a queer sound choked from his throat. He broke into a meaningless babble. It lasted a minute—and then the ship's surgeon pushed his way through the gaping crowd. Two minutes later he turned to the Old Man.

"He's had a terrible shock of some kind. Mind absolutely gone. Same thing happened to Harris, only it hit him harder."

"What could it have been?" the skipper whispered.

"God only knows. I've never seen anything like it before. I'll take him down to the sick bay and see if I can get back of that blank wall in his mind. But I'm afraid he'll get worse instead of better. Harris shows signs of rapid sinking—"

"Dying, you mean?"

"No. But less sign of mental functioning. He's not so wild as he was. He's slipping toward the same state as King here."

"If Webster had only lived long enough to tell," the Old Man muttered.

Doyle had been listening. He stepped forward. "I forgot something, sir. Just as the Boeings were taking off, Webster screamed for me to stop them—before it was too late, he said. I don't know what he meant. That German in the yeoman's uniform shot him before he could say—"

"I know," said the captain hastily. A warning look came into his face. "I want to see you and Rhoades in my cabin," he went on in a low tone. "Say nothing about that spy to any one." King was carried below. The deck was cleared, and the *Lexington* again darkened. Men and officers gathered in little knots, excited, wondering, grim.

Mike Doyle stood under that once-more peaceful sky and gazed westward. That peculiar red glow he had seen, silhouetting two of the Navy fighters! What had caused it? Could there be any connection between it and—

"Say," boomed Dusty Rhoades. "We'd better be gettin' for'd. The Old Man wants to see us."

Doyle fell in step with him. "What do you think happened to Harris and King?" he said.

"Yuh got me," Dusty said. His big voice had an odd note. "Gawd, I can't get that kid's face out of ray mind."

"Poor devil," Doyle jerked out "It might have been us, Dusty. Because that's where the Old Man was going to send us."

"Where?" said Dusty, startled. "Wherever those Bristols came from—and that biplane. We're hardly close enough to China for that to be their base, but there are a lot of islands scattered around the China Sea."

The Old Man was alone in his cabin. The orderly admitted them and went out, closing the door.

"Sit down, men," the skipper said. He went to a locker, came back with a bottle of Johnny Walker.

"It's not according to law and the naval code," he said grimly, "but after tonight you need something."

He shivered, and Doyle knew he was thinking of those two mad young pilots who had gone, out full of life, keen, alert, never dreaming of their ghastly fate."

DUSTY poured himself a generous libation and drained it at one gulp. Doyle drank more slowly, his gray eyes on the Old Man's stern face, probing for an answer to that other question. What would the Old Man do, now that he had recognized a reputed killer, a fugitive, in his command?

"My plans have been changed," the skipper said at last. He gazed into space, his face tired and worn. "As you may have guessed in the past three days, we have been waiting to make contact with some one. That some one was Webster, the man who died tonight. He was a spy, too—a man with no official connection with our government, but secretly in our service. He was to bring important information. But he was trapped.

"I know now what occurred. The German who escaped has been on board since we left Manila. He reported on board at that port, probably with forged or stolen orders. He has been waiting for our first offensive move. As soon as he found I was ready to act, he overpowered the radioman on watch and flashed a warning. Evidently, it was not the first time he had used the ship's radio. He must have guessed we were waiting for an agent. He probably warned them earlier tonight, and they discovered Webster's identity."

He paused, regarding the two men with sudden keenness. "I am going to trust you with information which is a secret of gravest importance. For I see a way whereby we can beat them yet—if Webster's last words meant what I think they did. Seven months ago a notorious international agent came to Washington. He demanded to see the President. The President saw him. This agent told a story of some diabolical instrument of war being perfected at a hidden base, by a German scientist named von Kurtz."

"But von Kurtz is dead," interrupted Doyle before he thought.

"He was supposed to be dead. This agent produced proofs that he is still alive. But he refused to give the nature of the invention. He offered to obtain it, destroy von Kurtz and everyone who knew the secret—for the sum of ten million dollars!"

"Cripes!" exclaimed Dusty Rhoades. He poured himself another shot of Johnny Walker. "Ten million smackers!" he boomed.

"The President felt the same way," said the Old Man drily. "He turned the man over to the State Department, but the agent refused to say any more. Then suddenly he was murdered. Investigation hinted at a German killer, but nothing was proved. Then quite startlingly confirmation of the agent's story came from an American intelligence agent" in Shanghai. The American agent had heard somehow of the ten-million offer, but not of the spy's death. And he recommended payment!"

"He didn't mention the nature of the invention, either?" Doyle queried keenly.

"No. And he disappeared before a detailed report could be made. Then the government got busy. Ten operatives were put to work. Only Webster succeeded, it seems. The *Lexington* was ordered to carry out the maneuvers you've noticed for three days. Webster was to sneak away from the hidden base with a plane, bring us the details of the location—and we were going to blow it off the map."

"But that would mean war!" said Doyle.

"Not at all. The German government would never acknowledge any connection with von Kurtz' schemes—even if there is one. We don't know whether they are back of him or not. It might be another country. Moreover, no one would be left to tell what happened. We were going to send over every bomber and fighter we had and wipe out the place.

"When Webster failed to show up, I was sure he had been caught and that unless I acted quickly, our last chance would be gone. I intended to send you two to search for the base—I have a hazy notion it is somewhere near the Crescent Group. You would make certain, radio back with the set in the Corsair—and we would have done the rest."

Doyle nodded slowly. "But they'll be on guard now. It wouldn't work "

"Right. But somewhere in Macao is a man who knows the truth And you two must find that man!"

DOYLE'S eyes narrowed. "That's a big order, sir. We'll be noticed in Macao—it's not a very big place. And if the *Lexington* puts in there, it will spill the beans. They'll be watching."

"I thought of that. We won't put in. We'll steam to within fifty miles of the place. I'll send you and Rhoades over as passengers in a PN patrol plane. You'll jump in chutes; it'll be at night, and you won't be seen. You can jump well away from the peninsula, hide the chutes, and make your way into the town. I take it you know the city?"



"Slightly. It's Portuguese-owned, if I remember right. Down at the southeast tip of China. A crazy dump."

"It's full of gambling joints, opium dens, and worse. Rich Chinese from Canton and Hong Kong go down there to gamble and get their hop undisturbed. It used to be a haven for smugglers, and maybe still is. You'll find every race under the sun in Macao. No one will notice you, for you'll be made up as beachcombers." "Then we go to Hoi Kiang's and look for a dwarf?"

"Exactly. I found out from the navigator that Koi Kiang's is a notorious den—gambling and hop both. You'll need a little money to get in; I'll see to that. And afterward—" he hesitated, "I'll have to leave it to you. The *Lexington* will be hiding in the northwest bay of Mengtse Island, just east of Singan Reef. The island is deserted, and the bay is almost landlocked, so the vessel won't be seen. Day and night I'll have an operator listening for a signal. I'll give you a code-book; you can radio through the commercial station at Macao. Send the message to the *Lexington*, addressed to the Commandant at Manila. We'll pick it up."

He stood up, looked from one to another. "Will you go?" he said quietly "If you prefer not to do it, I can ask for volunteers—"

Doyle looked at Dusty Rhoades. "We'll go," said Doyle. "I guess we can pass for drifters, all right." He smiled ironically. "Officers might not look tough enough—"

The Old Man stiffened. "I asked for two hard men," he rasped. "Men with the guts for a fight. You two were the men they brought. After what I saw tonight. I decided you were the ones for the job. If you don't want it—"

Doyle flushed. Mechanically, he came to attention. "We want it! And I beg your pardon—sir."

The Old Man bowed. He looked at Dusty. The big C.P.O. was gazing wistfully at the bottle of Johnny Walker.

"Take it with you, Rhoades," the skipper said. He grinned for the first time that night. "Only don't advertise you've got it—or where it came from."

Dusty gulped—and seized the bottle in one huge fist.

"And I used to think the Old Man didn't have a heart," he said to Mike Doyle as they went below.

THE big PN patrol plane roared high above the China Sea, moonlight shining on its silvered wings.

"I don't like its being light like this," Doyle told

Dusty Rhoades, as they sat back in the radio and gunners' compartment amidships. "Even if we are flying high, somebody may spot us from Macao."

They presented a curious picture, Dusty in slightly soiled tropic drill, a two days' stubble on his grim face, a battered cap such as might have been discarded by the mate of a merchant ship, and a torn shirt flapping open at his hairy neck; Doyle with his skin darkened by carefully applied stain, patched khaki trousers covering his long legs, and a brown linen coat completing his ensemble.

"We're gettin' close," said Dusty. He peered out of an opened port. "Say—take a look at this!"

Doyle jumped up. Below and off to one side flew an enormous plane, escorted by three smaller ones. All four were headed out to sea, on a course just south of east.

The PN pilot saw them at the same time. He dipped the big ship into a glide.

"It's one of those new Junkers," stated Doyle. A puzzled look came into his face. "But what's it doing out here?"

"I heard they were startin' a line from Batavia up this way," bellowed Dusty. "But that wouldn't run out here—"

*W-h-o-o-s-h!* The PN fell off sickeningly under a sudden skid. Something thudded into the tail. Splinters flew from the laminated wood hull.

"Hell's bells!" roared Dusty. "Where's a gun?"

Two of the planes escorting the Junkers had whipped up in lightning zooms, twin-guns blazing as they came. The PN pilot yelled a hoarse but unintelligible command back into the big plane's hull. Doyle seized a Lewis gun from its rack and thrust it into a pivot in the starboard port. Fabric and wood leaped from the frame beside him, as bullets ploughed through. Doyle snapped the trigger down. The Lewis clattered. Doyle snarled exultantly as he saw his tracers streak into a racing fighter. He dropped the barrel slightly, raked the fighter as it flung madly under the PN.

Dusty was standing up in the gunner's pit amidships, rolling a Lewis twin-mount around at the second attacker. The PN banked wildly, streaked for shore. The other two of the Junkers' escort were flashing up into the melee. Doyle shouted in fierce joy as he saw that the fighter he had raked was whirling down in flames. He braced himself against the PN's zigzag twists and poured a swift burst into the closest fighter. It fell off, recovered, and dashed in with both guns streaming crimson.

Up forward, the man beside the pilot gave a shriek of pain. Bullets slammed through the hull. A reserve tank, punctured by a solid slug, sloshed gas into the mid-section. Another burst spattered around the thundering engines.

Abruptly, one engine of the PN ceased to roar. The big plane drooped dizzily, tilted on one wing. A fighter appeared from nowhere, not fifty feet away. Dusty Rhoades hurled his guns onto it. Incendiaries flamed into its pit, into the tanks. The ship was a spinning inferno in six seconds. Doyle's bullets ate through space at long range, circling a crippled escort plane. It dived wildly. The fourth fighter turned and fled.

"What happened to the Junkers?" demanded Doyle.

"Must have beat it," roared Dusty. "I lost track of it after those birds lit into us. Are you all right?"

"Yeah. But poor Jenkins stopped a slug up forward, I think."

DOYLE scrambled up past the dripping reserve tank to the back of the pilot's seat. The mechanic, Jenkins, lay sprawled against the hull, almost out of his seat. The pilot was fighting to get inland on one engine.

"Get ready to jump, you and Rhoades," he yelled over his shoulder. "I'll hold her up as long as I can—but I'll have to cut back and make for water or they'll see the ship."

Doyle ran back to the compartment and pulled on his chute. Dusty followed suit, stuffing his cap inside his shirt. The PN swept in toward the tiny Portuguese territory. Taipa and Coloane passed beneath. Then a peninsula three miles long on which the city of Macao had been built, extending uphill from a wide bay. Lights twinkled up from streets, from vessels lying inside the breakwater. A thousand junks dotted the harbor. For more than a mile along the Praia Grande shone the lights of the famous thoroughfare.

Even at that height, Doyle could tell that the waterfront was in a hubbub for some reason. Searchlights were swishing across the harbor. Boats were scudding about crazily. Putting out past the breakwater was an English destroyer.

One of the searchlights flitted upward, crossed the PN and then jerked back. The pilot kicked away from it, lost three hundred feet in a nasty skid, but also lost the beam.

Macao passed beneath, became a glow. The PN was down to 6,000 feet. The pilot banked above the island, shouted for them to jump. Doyle was out first.

He tumbled over and over for a thousand feet, then yanked the ring. The risers hauled him into a vertical position. He looked up. Dusty Rhoades came hurtling down, two hundred feet behind him. In a second both men swayed under the white silk spreads. The PN swung off to the northeast to avoid the lights of Macao. Doyle guessed that the pilot would make a stall landing in the yellow waters at the mouth of the Canton River, repair his crippled starboard engine, and head back to the *Lexington*.

Doyle landed first in a scrubby thicket a mile from the nearest road. He heard Dusty profanely thrashing down from a tree in which his chute had departed him. They struck out for the road, hurried into Macao. It was seething with excitement. No one noticed them. They turned toward the waterfront. Portuguese officials, jabbering Chinese, American tourists, coolies, Macanese and a host of Eurasians were swarming about the docks. Doyle accosted an Englishman with a strong cockney accent, and had the facts in a few minutes.

A brand-new Junkers of the Batavia-Tokio line had been stolen from the harbor. Ten men had seized a launch at one of the docks, put off to the Junkers and killed the two night watchmen who had been aboard. Harbor police had given chase, but three small seaplanes had appealed and dived on the police boats. Under cover of their furious fire, the thieves had made away with the big Junkers flying-boat.

"Blimey if hit weren't a slick business," said the cockney. "Gettin' bloomink bold, blarst me if they ain't."

"Who did it, then?" queried Doyle.

"'Oo?" said the cockney scornfully. "'Oo but the hopium smugglers, of course."

"I wonder," Doyle said grimly. He turned away, toward the Chinese ward, leaving the cockney staring after him and Dusty Rhoades.

IT WAS the second night that Doyle had lain in one of the filthy bunks of Hoi Xiang's opium den, breathing the poisonous air of that shadowy, sordid hell-hole. A half-filled pipe lay on a small table beside his bunk; near it a fixing lamp, and a tin-foiled cube of opium. The small, bright eyes of Ling Su, the wrinkled attendant, rested on him in brief speculation. Doyle groaned inwardly, but raised the pipe, smeared it with a bit of the gooey mess rotated on a stick over the flame, and then pretended to inhale deeply. The sweetish, powerful smell of the poppy filled the air.

He closed his eyes in seeming rapture. Ling Su turned away.

Doyle puffed again and again until he had almost emptied the pipe, though none of the drug had entered his lungs. He lay quiet, listening, waiting. Somewhere near him in another bunk was Dusty Rhoades. They had entered separately.

The first day had failed to disclose any sign of a dwarf in the gaming rooms. Now there seemed little more chance of success! Two nights in the opium den, nauseating hours of pretending, with the taste of the poppy strong on Doyle's lips, had increased his feeling that the thing was hopeless. Webster had been raving. Or else—

Ling Su stood up suddenly and hobbled to the low doorway of the dim-lit den. An odd, squeaky voice interrogated him in swift Cantonese. Doyle cautiously opened one eye—and almost fell out of the bunk.

It was the dwarf!

A Chinaman, squat of figure, with long, dangling arms, and an indescribably malignant face, stood in the doorway. His head was huge, bulbous; from an ugly, scowling face, the color of old parchment, peered two narrowed, crafty eyes. After a prolonged survey of the interior he turned and spoke briefly to some one back of him. A white man stepped into view. He walked down a long row of bunks, staring in at the sleepers and those who were still in that half-stupor between the last pipe and celestial oblivion.

Doyle closed his eyes and lay like one dead. In a moment he felt the man's gaze fixed on him. There was a low conversation.

"Him smokee two—three piecee pipee," chattered Ling Su. "Allee samee blissful. No catchee tubble."

"You catchum number one bhobbery, you yellow cutthroat," snarled the man, "if you make any bust. Savvy?"

"Plenty sabby, masta. You no hab makee palaber, Ling Su shuttee shop now."

"All right—except Fung Hi men, savvy?"

"Me savvy, masta."

The white man spoke again, evidently to the dwarf, Doyle guessed.

"You stay out here till all of them have gone in, Fung Hi. I'm not taking any chances. Nobody ever found out where that PN went. There might be spies—"

"Have no fear, they would not last long here," the dwarf said in his shrill voice.

THE white man went on. Doyle heard a click, felt a current of cooler air, but did not dare look. Silence settled down, broken now and then by the cry of some hop-head drifting out of his rapturous state into the racking stage preceding awakening. From one bunk came a deep, sawing snore. Doyle stiffened. That was Dusty Rhoades. He swore under his breath. This was a fine time to be passing out! If Dusty had really inhaled the hop he had been given, he would be as useful in a pinch as a wooden Indian.

He ventured a careful look under his eyelashes. Fung Hi, the dwarf, was seated with his back to him, facing the door. There was no sign of the white man. Ling Su had gone into the other end of the room and was preparing a pipe for himself.

A peculiar rap came to the door.

Fung Hi shuffled toward it, spoke squeakily. Some one answered in a gruff voice. The door swung open. Doyle, peering through almost closed eyes, saw a sullen, brutal face that stabbed him with a jolt of recognition. Bert Slade, fugitive from the States—even as he himself. Slade had been a pilot for a transport company. He had made off with a valuable consignment, escaped into Mexico, killed a Texas Ranger pilot who had followed him—and was now one of that shadowy legion of wanted men lying low on the China coast.

If Slade saw him, the game was up! Doyle twisted his face away till Slade had passed. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Fung Hi lead the other man to one side of the room. They stopped before a paneled wall. Fung Hi touched a bit of carving. A whole panel rotated soundlessly. A black, empty passage lay revealed. Slade stepped inside. The panel closed.

Five times Fung Hi admitted furtive, crafty-looking men. Five times he opened the panel. Then half an hour passed. Still the dwarf sat in his chair. Ling Su was out of sight. Doyle's nerves were taut. Were any more men coming? Did he dare strike now?

He drew a long breath and leaped from the bunk. Fung Hi whirled, a squeaking cry on his bloodless lips. Doyle's steel fingers closed about his windpipe, shaking him like a rat. Fung Hi went limp, sank like a grotesque dummy to the floor. Steps sounded behind Doyle. He jerked around, his gun raised.

"Hold it, Mike!" said Dusty Rhoades in a hoarse attempt at a whisper. "It's me!"

Doyle grinned. "I thought you'd been hitting the pipe, the way you were snoring," he said.

"Snoring? Who—me? Say, I never snore. I just caught a couple of winks—but what the hell's up?"

"Give me a hand with this Chink. We'll have to take him with us."

Doyle felt for the spring on the panel. The hidden door opened. No one was in sight. The passage stretched ahead darkly. The dwarf was hurriedly bundled inside. The panel clicked shut behind them.

"Cripes, but it's dark," Dusty complained huskily. "Ouch!"

"Keep still," hissed Doyle. "You want them on our necks?"

"I bumped my head," growled Dusty. "I'm going to light a match."

"Wait. I see a faint light up there. The passage turns."

"What about this half-pint yellow peril?"

"We'll take him along. Can't take chances; he might come to."

They followed past two turns of the passage. Voices became audible. Doyle peered around a curve into a strange-looking room. At the back, under a silken tapestry, was a raised dais with a richly decorated ceremonial couch upon it. Gilded panels covered the wall. A lacquered, finely inlaid table stood in the middle of the room and around it sat a group of men, among them Slade. The white man who had entered the hop den with the dwarf was at the head of the table. No one sat on the dais couch, and Doyle guessed that this was the meeting-room of some sinister Chinese society—temporarily being used by the white men now about the table.

"YOU'RE damn sure we'll be covered?" Slade was demanding roughly.

The man at the head of the table scowled. "You heard me say so," he said coldly. He spoke with a thick guttural note. "The two Handley-Page transports will be seized first, at Hong Kong. They'll head for here, and when they signal us, we'll strike from three directions, on the Indo-China planes. They're moored close together, and it will be easy."

"No fighters to pull a ground-strafe?" muttered Slade.

A grim look came into the other man's face. "The Americans wiped out our fighters—all but Barth's—but the dirty swine have taken their last trick!" His teeth clicked angrily. "In forty-eight hours we will have every plane on their carrier. But enough of that. Does every one understand his part in tonight's work?"

There was a gruff chorus of assent.

"Where is Barth, anyway?" growled Slade. "He

seems to think—" A muffled groan cut in on his words. The dwarf had revived. Dusty Rhoades clamped the Chinaman's throat in one big paw, and the groan choked off.

The leader of the group sprang to his feet. Slade and the others whirled. Mike Doyle's gun was out. He leaped into the opening.

"Reach for the roof!" he grated out. His eyes were pinpoint, hard as diamonds. "Reach—damn you!"

One man had whipped his hand to his side. Doyle fired. The silenced pistol gave an ominous grunt. A thin wisp of smoke came from the muzzle. That was all. But the crook was sliding to the floor, a dazed, incredulous stare on his pinched face, and a bullet in his heart. The rest stood like statues, hands in the air.

There was a sudden motion behind Doyle, then a screech from the dwarf. "Barth! Help—quick!"

Doyle leaped to one side, throwing a swift glimpse backward. Dusty Rhoades stood with his hands in the air. Back of him, pistol jammed into Dusty's shoulders, was the sneering, pale-eyed spy who had shot Webster and escaped from the *Lexington*. Suddenly, Dusty ducked, knocked the gun from the spy's hand.

An automatic barked from the conference room. A bullet sang like an angry hornet past Doyle's head. He spun on one heel. The silenced gat growled once, twice. The leader of the group in the room staggered back, gasping a death-cry. Another man lay sprawled forward, a hole drilled squarely in the middle of his forehead.

The dwarf had backed away, screaming shrilly. Suddenly something hissed through the air. A gleaming knife sliced straight into Doyle's left shoulder. He felt his head swim. Above the chaos he heard Dusty's terrific bellow, saw the big C.P.O. striking right and left with murderous fists. Then he seemed to fall into a bottomless pit of blackness.

DOYLE awakened to find himself in semi-darkness, on a floor that moved and vibrated. He discovered that he was on the floor of a huge plane, hands bound behind his back. The knife-wound in his shoulder had been bandaged, but it ached cruelly. The thongs cut into his wrists, but he pulled at them till he was sure he could not free himself. He gazed forward, along the aisle, on both sides of which were rows of seats. He guessed that this must be one of the stolen Handley-Page transports.

Two men sat near the pilots' compartment, barely visible in the gloom. And lying in the middle of the

aisle, apparently dead to the world, was the huge bulk of Dusty Rhoades. Doyle wriggled along the aisle, gritting his teeth at the pain of his shoulder. Suddenly his heart gave a leap. For Dusty Rhoades had lifted his head and was peering at him.

"Hey, Mike!" he said huskily.

Doyle threw himself close to the other man.

"Can you get loose?" he demanded in a voice almost drowned by the engines' roar.

"No luck. Tried it."

"Turn around—quick."

Dusty rolled over on his side. Doyle twisted around till his back was close to Dusty's, then felt for the big man's bonds. In a moment he had one knot loose. Dusty gave a mighty pull. His hands were free. He sat up, yanked a rope loose from his feet. He was tugging at Doyle's thongs when one of the men up forward turned with an oath.

A pistol glimmered vaguely in the darkness. Dusty launched himself as though hurled from a catapult. Both fists flashing like pile-drivers, he struck. The gun flew across the cabin. The second man leaped up. Doyle had his hands free now. He darted forward. The second man was clawing for the pistol. Doyle's hard fist crashed under the fellow's ear. He dropped, inert.

There was a frightful smash back in the cabin.

Doyle jumped up in time to see Dusty gaping through a shattered, banging door. There was no sign of the other crook.

"My God, he went clear through!" Dusty said in an awed tone. "I give him a heave and—"

Doyle had retrieved the pistol. He ran to the door of the pilot's compartment. A lone figure at the controls stared in pop-eyed amazement and fear as the Marine leaped inside the compartment.

"Out of there!" rasped Doyle.

The pilot backed through the door. Dusty Rhoades seized him with a bearlike hug.

"What'll I do with him—bust him cold?" he roared, drawing back a deadly fist.

"Tie him up back in the baggage locker. Make it good. No—wait." Doyle had settled himself at the Dep control of the big ship. He turned and glared at the prisoner. "Where were you headed for?"

"Try and find out," snarled the man.

"Let me smack him once," begged Dusty. "I'll knock it out of the rat—" Doyle was gazing off to the left.

"Never mind," he said. "We don't need him. Take a look."

THERE were four other ships in the air, another Handley-Page and three American-built Fokker-32 flying-boats. They were just visible under the stars, for the moon had sunk and it was that darkest period just before the gray of early Oriental dawn.

"Take that bird back and tie him up. I'll trail with these ships," Doyle said.

He looked at the compass. Almost due east. Nothing but the blackness of the China Sea beneath. He felt a throbbing of his pulses. They were headed for the hidden base at last!

Fate had played into their hands. The fuel tanks were two-thirds full. The base could not be much farther. They could follow until they found the base, make a quick turn and strike for Mengtse Island, east of Singan Reef, where the *Lexington* was hiding.

The gray veil of dawn touched the sky. Ten minutes passed. The middle plane of the five ships waggled its wings in a signal. The formation dipped, went into a fast glide. Doyle peered down. A darker blotch showed ahead, a rugged island jutting upward from the sea.

The plane on Doyle's left sheered into line behind the leader. Doyle eased over slowly—and found the other had closed in behind him!

"This is a hell of a mess," commented Dusty, coming forward. "If we pull anything funny, those guys behind can burn our tail."

"We've got to pull out before it's too late," muttered Doyle. "We know the base is somewhere down there—"

"Holy smoke!" yelled Dusty. "These birds must be goofy!"

The leader had flown straight between two high rock walls five hundred feet apart, heading down into what looked like quick destruction. Then Doyle saw it—a long, narrow bayou that ran to the sea between those cliffs, the existence of which would never have been noted except from the air. His heart was like lead. He had lost his chance to make a getaway. It was impossible to turn in those narrow confines. He pulled the throttles and leveled off behind the plane ahead, stalling down the big flying-boat to the surface of the water.

Daylight was coming swiftly. Doyle could see well ahead, to where the bayou twisted sharply to the left. A fast motor-boat had appeared, throwing a powerful beam of light across the water. It turned, headed up the bayou. A great, dark shadow showed on the side of a cliff. Doyle stared—then gave a cry of amazement. For the shadow was no shadow at all, but an enormous

opening in the wall of rock, a huge natural tunnel worn away through centuries of time as some almost subterranean stream had been swelled by inland waters.

For the first time in three long years, panic gripped Mike Doyle. Once they were inside that opening, in the great cavern that must lie beyond, they were done!

With a vicious twist of the controls, he kicked to the left, flung the left wing pontoon into the water and shoved the starboard engine wide open. The Handley-Page snapped around swiftly in the water. The other engine roared. The big ship thundered back along the bayou, narrowly missing the first of the two planes behind, which had just alighted.

The speed boat boiled through the water after them. A strut splintered at Doyle's right as a machine gun went into action. Dusty seized the pistol Doyle tossed at him and emptied it madly. A prop let go with a crash as the gunners placed a lucky burst. Another burst ripped the roof of the cabin to shreds. Fragments wrecked the other prop. Doyle cursed bitterly and snapped his switches.

The boat came alongside. A fierce little man sputtered at them in German. Doyle started to answer, then hurriedly decided to feign ignorance of the tongue. The German barked an order; the gunners swung their weapon, trained it on the two Americans.

"I guess he wants us to pile off here," said Dusty sourly. "Well, Mike, looks like we've shot the works."

"We're not done yet," Doyle rapped out. "Keep your eyes open; maybe we'll get a break."

THEY climbed onto the boat. It turned and sped through the huge entrance that pierced the rock wall. Lighted lanterns showed both sides of the wide channel. It stretched a quarter of a mile under solid rock, then ended at a flat beach, except for a narrow creek that meandered on toward another opening through which they saw the sky. Planes were drawn up on the beach. The stolen Junkers was in the middle, surrounded by workmen. At this point the big tunnel widened into a great cavern, fully a thousand feet long and four hundred feet wide.

Powerful incandescent lights had been strung on poles. The wires led to one of a group of buildings farther back, some of which seemed to be workshops, others quarters. All were built of rough-hewn timber, most of them thatched across the tops. Some were open on one side. Doyle saw a small lighter of coal moored well over at the end of the beach. Men were

hauling the coal in hand trucks to the small power-plant.

Back of the buildings was the second entrance to the cavern. It was smaller than that opening onto the bayou, but Doyle could see a flat stretch of land, fringed by cocoanut palms and undergrowth where the clearing ended. And in the shadow of the rock wall at this second entrance, or exit, were three or four land planes.

Doyle could see now why the base had never been discovered. The seaward entrance could never be noted from any passing vessel, even if it came close by. The inland entrance was concealed by the bulging rock wall, which leaned out to cast a shadow over the ground for three hundred feet beyond the end of the tunnel.

The boat beached. Doyle and Dusty Rhoades were roughly hustled to one of the buildings, shoved inside, and the door locked behind them. They were not left there long alone. The guards returned in ten minutes and took them at gun-point to the largest of the structures. On the way they passed a group of ten men hauling at a laden truck. Each man had a leather strap around his breast like a harness, and this was attached to the truck. Doyle felt a chill of premonition as he saw one of the men's faces. It was vacant, dead, hardly human. On each face was a reflection of the look he had seen on the ashen countenance of Lieutenant Tom King—save that the horror was gone, and utter blankness remained.

Standing back of these human beasts of burden was a bull-necked German with the air of a Prussian *Unteroffizier*. One of the staring wretches stumbled. A long whip snaked from the German's hand, crackled down the unfortunate man's back. He cried out, dully, hopelessly.

Doyle's blood ran hot. He stopped in his tracks, fists balled, a curse on his lips. A Luger was rammed into his back. A guard with a rifle kicked at him. He went on.

THEY stopped in a well furnished room. Six men sat at a table, sneering, staring at them with hate-filled eyes. Doyle needed no one to tell him that the thick-lipped, arrogant, bearded monster in the middle was von Kurtz, the missing scientist. There was a horrid light in the German's eyes, an almost insane gloating. He rubbed his hands, leered at the two prisoners. Beside him was the man called Barth, the spy; there was a look of cruel satisfaction on his thin face; his pale blue eyes lit with an ungodly gleam of anticipation.

But it was not on these six that Doyle's glance rested. For a door back of them had opened a few inches and a strained, anxious face gazed at him. There was entreaty there, entreaty and warning. He caught a hasty gesture; then the door closed as a guard turned in that direction.

"So you are here at last," said von Kurtz, thickly. "You went so far, when we were really so close."

He looked around the table. The others laughed uproariously at some joke Doyle did not catch. Dusty Rhoades glared down at them defiantly; his big jaw stuck forward belligerently.

"And this one," said von Kurtz, chuckling. He pointed to Dusty. "What a pack horse he will make!"

"*Verdammt Amerikaner!*" spat out Barth in an ugly voice. He rubbed a bruised and swollen jaw and swore again.

"Never mind, Barth," said von Kurtz. "You will have your satisfaction in short order." Then abruptly his manner changed. A menacing note came into his voice. He glared at the two prisoners. "You came to find out the secret—von Kurtz' secret, eh? Very well, you shall find it out. You will learn everything you came to learn—and much more. Yes—much more!"

He leaned forward, hands on the table edge, like an animal about to spring. "Do you know where you are—what this island is?"

Neither Doyle nor Dusty spoke.

"So you are tongue-tied, yes? Well, I will tell you. You are on Mengtse!"

Doyle started. Mengtse—why, the *Lexington* was hiding in the northwest bay of Mengtse!

"So it comes to you," sneered von Kurtz. "Yes, your vessel is very close—hiding twenty-four miles from this very spot. What a rich joke that your stupid captain should pick out the very island he has been trying to find. But it will save us a great deal of trouble. For tonight he and every man on board will go the way of those three that tried to follow me five nights ago."

"You're crazy!" rasped Doyle, but his heart was cold.

"Crazy? I will show you who is crazy," snarled the German. "Wollhecke, bring in the other *Amerikaner*."

A guard went out. He came back leading another of those blank-faced, stupid creatures such as had been hauling at the truck. Doyle looked, then his eyes narrowed. For this was the man who had gazed so strangely at him through that partly opened door. And there had been keen intelligence in that face, anxious and strained though it was!

But now the man stood dumbly, staring, with an air of hardly knowing he was in the room.

Von Kurtz pointed a stubby finger at him. "Five days ago he was like you," he flung at Doyle. He grinned wolfishly. "Tonight you will be like him!"

Barth scowled darkly. "Why tonight?" he demanded. "Tonight we shall be busy. Let it be now!"

"The laboratory is not ready," demurred von Kurtz.

"Then make it so," insisted Barth. His cold eyes ran over Dusty vindictively. Doyle saw a scarlet-purple mark on the German's cheek, where a huge fist had struck solidly. He grinned. Barth saw and leaped up. "Swine—spawn of filth!" he shrieked, and drove his fist into Doyle's face.

TWO sentries seized Doyle as he lunged. Murder shone in the Marine's eyes. Barth jumped back, startled. Then his courage returned.

"Fool! For that you will be my lowest slave; you will do tasks the lowest untouchable of India would not stoop to do!"

Doyle's lips were like a fiat line, but he kept silent.

"You think I lie?" cried Barth. "Then remember those pilots who came back alive—but raving, mad, their minds gone forever. They met a horrible fate, you think. Yours will be worse. You will know your doom. They never knew what got them." Von Kurtz touched his arm. Barth subsided.

"Take them back," von Kurtz ordered the guards. "Bring them to the laboratory, in an hour."

They started out. The other man who had been brought in fell stupidly in line. As they passed through the doorway, something touched Doyle's hand. He felt a wad of paper thrust into his hand. He took it quickly.

Back in their cell, he opened it hurriedly and read it.

"I have changed the circuit; the red ray will not harm you. But pretend to be stupefied. Watch for my signal tonight."

"What the devil is he talking about?" puzzled Dusty. "I think you're wrong, Mike. That guy is goofy as the rest of 'em."

"I don't think so. He's putting something over on that mob. But what the devil can he do—one man in this crowd?"

Dusty shook his head. They waited wearily, tired and hungry. At the end of an hour they were taken to the laboratory. Three dynamos whirred softly at one side, sending current through a score of glowing helices suspended in gas-filled fluorescent tubes, fully three feet high and ten inches thick. From the tubes

ran a number of wires, leading to what appeared to be a compact moving-picture projector, save that there was no film in it.

The projector could be swung in a small arc. Just now it was trained on a chair in the middle of an oddly built chamber. The entire chamber was constructed of thick lead plates, insulated from the floor with blocks of porcelain. The back of it was deeply pitted, and covered with a grayish-brown scum.

Doyle was carried into the chamber by four guards. Lead-covered clamps were tightened about his arms, to hold him rigid in the seat. Barth's thin, rapacious face leered at him from above a small switchboard.

"It will be my pleasure to be the one who rips your mind to ruin," he gloated. "Just as you ripped through my side with your infernal bullet that night in the radio room, so will I send von Kurtz' radium-ray into your brain. One second is enough to soften the tissues of your brain, to start you on the road to madness. But for you I will hold the current two whole minutes! Longer than ever before! And that murdering pig who escaped the slaughter-house where he belongs will sit under rays twice that!"

Beads of perspiration stood on Doyle's forehead. He did not doubt that von Kurtz had discovered such a ray. Too well he remembered stories and articles on the horrible power of radium to eat through tissue. This German fiend had succeeded in finding a ray that hurled a devastating radium-stream through the air—and soon, unless that mysterious writer of the note had told the truth, naught but a brutish body would be left of what had been Mike Doyle.

"The tubes are hot, my friend," von Kurtz warned Barth. "Do not delay too long."

Barth laughed savagely. He leaned down, threw a switch. A crackling crimson flame flared through all the tubes. The spy's pale eyes gleamed across the projector. He touched a rheostat. Something clicked.

With startling swiftness, a blinding red light shot from the snout of the lead-lined projector. A prayer wrenched from Doyle's set teeth. Heat swirled about him. A horrible fear surged through his brain. Had the writer of that note been wrong?

THEN he saw von Kurtz eyes on him in a frown. He drew himself up, cried out in a fearful voice that was not far from true madness, and after another hoarse shout collapsed, his head lolling on one side. The gas tubes crackled on. Von Kurtz' angry tones rose above the roar. The din ceased suddenly.

"Idiot!" the scientist was storming at Barth. "You will ruin the apparatus. Remember some of these tubes must be used in the Junker tonight, or our attack on the *Lexington* will fail."

They were talking freely now, thinking him dazed beyond all understanding, and knowing Dusty was soon to follow.

"You are right," muttered Barth

"I did not think. We must not fail tonight."

"It will be our first great triumph," von Kurtz said thickly. "We will strike them mad—from the captain to the lowest sailor. When they have all sunk into the second state of apathy, we will land, take their planes for this base—and set the vessel adrift in the China Sea."

Barth laughed harshly "It will be a second Cyclops mystery—only more horrible than that, by far. Think—the great *Amerikaner* plane-carrier found drifting, not a plane aboard, her officers and crew stark mad. The story will terrify the world!"

"And then Manila." von Kurtz breathed hoarsely "First, the warning, to frighten them. Then a city, a complete city of madmen. The world will know then that we have the power supreme. And the dunderheads in the *Vaterland*—*Lieber Gott!* How they will flee before—"

Rough hands released Doyle from the chair dragged him out of the chamber.

"Put in the other one," grated Barth "Take this yellow dog to his cell until I am ready for him, tomorrow. When he wakes, give him enough food to keep him just alive no more." For an hour Doyle feigned stupor; then Dusty was dumped into the room like a huge sack of meal. Not till the guards had gone did Doyle stir.

"Dusty," he whispered cautiously "Are you all right?"

Dusty opened one eye slowly, then the other. He shivered. His battered face was gray under its mahogany tan.

"God, I thought they'd got you," he muttered "When I saw you in there—well, I thought that guy was dopey when he wrote that note. I must've got a little goofy at that—I don't remember much but fakin' a pop at a guard."

"You've got a black eye," said Doyle with the ghost of a grin "They must have knocked you out before they gave you the ray."

FOOTSTEPS sounded nearby. They threw themselves prone, lay like logs. The long hours passed. Just after



dusk the door was unlocked. Doyle moved stupidly, opened his eyes and recognized the writer of the note.

"Thank God you're all right," the man said hurriedly. "You two pulled it off so well I thought maybe I'd made a mistake."

"Who are you?" demanded Doyle. "Wells—Navy Intelligence. I was with Webster on this case. When Barth tipped them off by radio from the *Lexington*, they found out we were spies. Webster got away, but they grabbed me and were going to give me the radium-ray. We'd seen that possibility, luckily, and we switched connections so that the tubes wouldn't feed into the projector."

"They ain't lyin' to us, then?" muttered Dusty. "That's what really happened to these guys—and the *Lexington* pilots?"

Wells shook his head grimly. "They're not lying. Von Kurtz is a devil from hell; he's got another invention up his sleeve I heard about, but I don't know what it is. This radium-ray is his pet; the queer part is he doesn't use radium at all. He has some powerful gas in the tubes that combines under high-potential current to give the same effect, only about a million times more powerful."

"Cripes!" exclaimed Dusty.

"They're planning to terrorize the world, use the radium-ray to drive out the present political party in Germany, and rebuild a monarchy. Von Kurtz is to be the emperor. Then they'll exact tribute from the world—and use this damned radium-ray to enforce it."

"They're crazy," Doyle said grimly. "They'll be discovered sooner or later here, and the world will combine to wipe them out."

"Tonight they'll add more than a hundred planes to their force," Wells reminded him solemnly. "They'll strip the *Lexington*. They've installed one of the radium-ray outfits in that Junkers they stole—a big one, too. It will do the work in five minutes—right through solid decks!"

"The archie might knock it off first," said Dusty.

"Not much chance. They've muffled the Junkers engines. No one will hear her coming. Later, they'll cover her with thin armor—but they don't need it tonight. Before a plane could take off—"

"Listen," snapped Doyle. "You're not going to stick here and let these maniacs get away with that?"

"No—there's one chance. The Junkers is full of men, but—"

The dull, almost unnoticeable rumble of an engine cut into the night.

"What's that?" said Doyle.

Wells paled. "They must be starting sooner than they planned. That's the Junkers."

Doyle sprang to the door.

"Wait. We'll need guns," whispered Wells. "I've hidden some back of the shack."

"Can you fly?" snapped Doyle.

"No. But I can handle a twin-mount—"

"You and Dusty make for that Bristol two-seater I saw today. Dusty, you've got to get to the *Lexington* ahead of those devils, if I get stopped."

"Where you goin'?" said Dusty anxiously.

"Never mind. Wells, where's their ammunition storehouse here?"

"A hundred yards down to the left—near the beach. But good God, man—"

"*Donnervetter!*" bawled a German voice outside the door. "*Helfen machen!*"

DOYLE was through the door in a leap. The German went down, still yelling. Raging mad, Doyle slammed a battering fist into the man's stomach, another to his jaw. The German went out like a snuffed candle. Doyle jumped to his feet.

"The guns," he gasped.

"This way," cried Wells. They tore around the shack. Doyle found a Luger clamped in his fingers. Cries of alarm rang through the cavern. Lights went on. Down at the beach, the big Junkers moved ponderously toward the entrance on its errand of horror, its crew oblivious to the excitement.

"Beat it for the Bristol!" Doyle rasped at Dusty and Wells.

Dusty whirled—and ran plump into a charging German. The big C.P.O. seized him, bent him double. Something cracked; the German gave a frightful scream and writhed on the ground. A second man jumped across at Wells. The Intelligence man fired pointblank. From across the sloping ground a guard leveled a rifle. Doyle flung his Luger around for one quick shot. The rifle went to the ground; the guard bent double, holding his stomach.

Two men had rushed on Dusty, like terriers at a mastiff. Dusty drove a terrific uppercut and lifted the first off his feet. The second turned to run. Dusty's enormous boot caught him a resounding whack and he slid on his face. Then the big chief and Wells were two streaks, sprinting for the inland end of the huge tunnel.

Doyle had slipped into the darkness the instant

he saw they were free. He darted behind von Kurtz' quarters, bent low. The store house was two buildings beyond. He reached it, braced himself and rammed a light rear door. It gave with a splintering crash. A man spun around, terrified.

"*Teufel!*" he yelled as he saw Doyle. "*Der Amerikaner—*"

The butt of Doyle's Luger, thudding into his skull, ended that. Doyle was saving ammunition. He smiled grimly as he saw a massed pile of airplane bombs at one side. He found a safety screw, spun it off. From outside came a sudden bawling of orders. Someone had heard the watchman's yell.

Doyle's gray eyes flicked swiftly about the room. His face lit with a queer light. He seized the armed bomb, placed the detonating pin an inch from the main door. One blow on that pin—and destruction! Outside, the clamor became louder. He tensed for a sprint, roared a volley in fluent German.

"The American is in the powder-room," he shouted. "Quick—ram in the door!"

Doubled low, he raced through the rear exit. "If you ever ran before—run now," he said to himself in a gasp.

He fled through the shadows. Ice water seemed to course in his veins. He listened for a frightful roar—oblivion. A hundred yards from the store-room he threw a hasty look back. Several men were holding a battering-ram, heading toward the door. He turned and flew for the valley side of the tunnel. A startled sentry fired wildly at him, missed by three yards.

At the edge of the tunnel was a trim fighter—the Boeing Barth had stolen from the *Lexington* in his mad flight! Near it was a Bristol one-seater—and tugging frantically at the propeller was the American renegade, Bert Slade.

Doyle's eyes went back to that lumbering knot of men running toward the store-room door. He watched in a fascinated horror for an instant. The battering-ram crashed into the frame.

Instantly a livid sheet of flame scorched out into the group of screaming men. A concussion shook the air. But it was nothing compared with the explosion that followed. With a hideous cacophony of sound that seemed to pierce Doyle's eardrums, the entire storehouse blew to smithereens. Flaming fragments went slithering through the cavern. The laboratory was a mass of flames in five seconds. Pigmylike figures ran frenziedly to and fro, trapped in a holocaust.

The Bristol's engine had started. Doyle, whirling to start the Boeing, saw the other fighter leap out into the

clearing, away from that scene of madness. Then he saw the reason for Slade's sudden haste. Zooming up into the sky, against the light of the early moon, was the Bristol two-seater.

Dusty and Wells had made the grade!

A SQUAT, odd figure came reeling, shuffling out of the cave. It was Fung Hi, the Chinese dwarf, tool of the mad von Kurtz. His eyes were horrible, staring. A string of gibberish poured from his twisted lips. The dwarf was mad!

"Caught in the lab," Doyle thought as he flung into the Boeing's pit. "Got a burst of that gas when the place blew up!"

He jazzed the throttle, sent the fighter into the clear. Back of him the entire cave roared with a mighty, devastating fire. Suddenly another explosion shook the night. A sinister crackling cut sharply through. The ground shook beneath the Boeing. Then with a thundering roar the roof of the cave came down. Flame belched out as from a giant's bellows, streaking across the valley floor.

But Doyle was gone, zooming grimly away from that blazing hell. He hunched down in the seat, peering into the moonlit sky. The Junkers! Where was it? Would Dusty be in time?

The fighter screeched upward, leveled out and hurtled across the island. A minute. Two minutes. Then a white light, streaking up from a sheltered bay, slipped across the wings of a racing plane.

The Bristol two-seater! Dusty and Wells.

*Crash!* Archie fire blasting up from the vessel's deck as the Bristol was mistaken for a foe. Sinister puffs, breaking around the Bristol, as gunners got the range. Floodlights on the deck. Fighters being yanked into line. Tiny figures scurrying madly.

Then, high above, Doyle saw it! A gigantic black shape, dropping swiftly down like a bird of ill omen from the skies of hell. The Junkers, sliding down the skyway, closing in to deliver that deadly blow. To turn the crew, the men he had known, the Old Man, all of them, into gibbering, hopeless idiots.

Like a maniac himself, he sheered up and flung the Boeing at that plunging black ship of doom. Back of him tore Slade's ship, trying to slash him down, pounding, ripping.

A ruddy glow shone from beneath the Junkers, as though a crimson mist, a bloody fog eddied there beneath its wings. Then a sudden ray, a darting beam, that whipped about the sky.

A wild, gouging hell-ship rolled in from the Junkers' quarter. Doyle choked a cry that was all but a sob. Dusty! Tiny red lines pierced the air, tracer stabbing futilely into that dark hulk. The red ray whirled—struck at the two-seater. Dusty kicked out—was in the gloom. The ray swirled angrily, seeking like a live thing for its prey.

Now the archie gunners had caught sight of the Junkers. The sky became a mushroom of exploding shells. Searchlights flitted over that black hull, failed to hold, searched the sky. A flight of fighters swarmed down the carrier's deck, one by one, in split seconds, raced aloft.

Doyle threw the Boeing down, careened in at the black monster. Archie boomed about him, shook his plunging craft. He tripped his guns, bared his teeth and went in with a savage snarl. Fire flashed from two red eyes on top of the big plane. A gunner with a twin-mount! Doyle growled a curse deep in his throat and sprayed those winking eyes. Splintering struts beside him. Fabric spitting off in tiny bits. A line of black holes running before his eyes!

Then—triumph! The red eyes went black. The stricken gunner slumped down, tumbled from his pit. A white dot that was a human face showed a new man at the trips. Doyle shoved the stick down. The Boeing leaped in, scorching its fury through red-hot guns. The second man died before he fired a shot.

*Zoom!* Up, up, then around in a vicious twist, straight down, dropping like solid rock. Guns raking the pilots' pit, pouring their deadly hail into men's vitals, rending, gashing, killing!

THE blood-lust of it gripped him. Forgotten was the red ray for the instant. Here were madmen, beasts, things to be slaughtered, wiped from the face of the earth. Crashed, broken and bleeding, from the sky. He shrieked a wild battle-cry.

Doyle, the killer! The killer, they had called him. Had named him fugitive, hunted him down. Killer! He would be a killer. Would rate the name. He laughed, frenziedly, while his snarling guns ate into the Junkers' crew and took a bloody toll.

Hammering at his back! Some one on his tail. Dusty perhaps, blinded in the scrap, taking him for one of von Kurtz' friends! No—the single-seater. Slade. Slade, the renegade—who had been ready to sell his soul to the mad von Kurtz, ready to destroy those hundreds beneath, his countrymen—for gold! A snake! A snake to be ground out with one stamp of

the heel! Doyle was about in a deadly, vicious rage, slugs tearing his ship to pieces—but storming into that leaden hell, grinning, snarling, probing for Bert Slade's heart.

A red beam flicked past him, missed him by not ten yards. Cold sanity rushed into his mind, cooled his blood Madness behind him! Madness—and the end of that last slim chance to save the men below. He zoomed in a breathless climb

Into that crimson ray came a twisting ship. Slade—seeing his Fate too late. Trying to skid away, soul-sick, sliding straight to his doom. The red ray caught and held, blazed with a lurid, awful light. The Bristol seemed to stagger. It fell off, slipped crazily and then pitched up heavenward in a climb straight to the stars. Up and up, as though it would never stop. Then, with a terrific downward whip, it plunged on to its end. Human hands upon the stick, a human being in the pit—but the light of reason stricken out forever.

The Junkers turned, banked and dived past a searchlight beam. A climbing swarm of hornets lay between the black ship and its prey—six fighters, drilling up, going in to certain death or worse. Doyle screamed a mad warning as he dove. Across the sky, Dusty Rhoades slammed a riddled plane back into the melee.

The radium-ray circled like a devil's finger, touching the ships below, flinging its frightful curse into the pilots' brains. Two were gone, faltering into the night. A third slipped off—and the others broke and fled.

Down leapt the winged black horror. Below it stretched the broad white deck of the *Lexington*, blanched under the floodlights' sweep. A score of darting specks raced down that long, white deck. More planes. More pilots. Flesh and blood to the sacrifice—to be hurled back mere brooding ruins.

Down leapt the Junkers. And above it, flashing like a meteor from the sky, plunged Sergeant Doyle—the killer!

A WILD, mad hope. A last, mad chance. Again the twin-guns spat flame from the Junkers' midship pit. Again Doyle's guns raked out their savage laughter as they tore the gunner into bits. And now the back of the black monster crept slowly closer. The red ray, darting down, spreading out into a wide fan to sweep the carrier's deck, suddenly dipped crookedly, swung off, veered into an unguided path, as Doyle's slugs ate through the roof.

The Boeing's ammo belts were nearly run. The

end had almost come. Doyle hissed a long breath into his tortured lungs. The stick went forward. Blazing muzzles pointed a last fire into those blood-red tubes. A gleaming snout whirled skyward—a crimson ray leaping up—madness reaching for him! A devil's ray to blot him out. And then—a blasting livid flame, that streaked its way through a dead black ship. Mike Doyle's last burst had found its mark!

A ruddy glow, spreading like a swirling ball of fire, encompassing that hell-ship. Von Kurtz' madness—the devil-child of his brain—striking him down.

A broken flight of Boeings dipped down to a long, white deck. Dully, Mike Doyle closed his throttle, found his cramped fingers still frozen to the trips of his empty guns. He looked about the sky. There was no sign of the Bristol two-seater.

"Poor old Dusty," he muttered.

The deck lay before him, smooth, clear, inviting. He rolled to a stop. Men rushed about him. There was a barrage of questions, a din of voices. Then came the Old Man—white of face, with burnt-out eyes, but a trembling, shaken smile on his pallid lips.

"Doyle—my God! So it was you!"

Mike Doyle looked at him queerly. "Yes, sir," he said grimly.

The Old Man opened his mouth to speak. A rumble cut him short. A plane slid down out of the night.

"Hey, you birds—lay off the potshots and let me land!"

Doyle's face lit with a joyous glow. "Dusty!" he thundered back.

And thus Dusty came back to the roost.

"IT'S no use, sir," Doyle said quietly. He sat in the Old Man's cabin. It was two days after von Kurtz and his crew had gone to oblivion. "If I go back, they'll get me—for something I didn't do."

"I'll take it to the President," rapped the Old Man. "After what you've done, a pardon isn't impossible."

"I'd never live to get it."

The skipper's eyes took on a queer little gleam.

"The Department of Justice will be looking for you,

the moment we hit Manila. But a lot of things could happen before then." He leaned over a map upon his desk. "You know, we're close to China. A strange land, that. The law seldom reaches out into the Far East. It seems to me I saw an old Loening below decks yesterday."

He seemed to be talking to himself.

"A newly painted ship like that ought to be up on deck, in the sunlight. Maybe it's a bit late, but even the night air won't hurt it. There's hardly any chance that anybody would steal it."

He puffed at his cigar, meditatively. "Still, if it were stolen. I'd hate to send my men chasing out over the China Sea at night. Especially if it happened at chow time, with everybody below, eating. Wouldn't be very considerate, would it, Doyle?"

Doyle's gray eyes were bright. He smiled oddly. "No, sir. It wouldn't. If anybody were to steal it, he ought to do it as quietly as possible, so as not to disturb the boys at mess."

"Oh, most certainly," the Old Man said with a grin. He rose, held out his hand. "Of course. I'll see you again, Sergeant Doyle—but if any unforeseen thing should occur, I'm glad to have met a man!"

TWILIGHT. A Loening amphibian cruised over the lonely China Sea, heading toward the coast, just sixty miles away. Mike Doyle turned to gaze back for a last look at the great plane-carrier.

He started. Something had moved behind him.

"Dusty!" Mike Doyle yelped out. "I'm throwin' in, kid," said Dusty Rhoades.

"You can't do it."

"I'm goin' with you, and that's flat," roared Dusty. "I'm gettin' fed up on Navy beans, anyway. Now where do we go from here?"

Mike Doyle grinned. He pointed ahead, to where lay China—the East, with its promise of adventure, its mystic spell.

"I don't know where we're going, but we're on our way," he said.