

# THE NIGHT-RAID PATROL

by EUSTACE ADAMS

*A smashing hit! Follow this plucky Yankee flier through hell-popping adventure. See him zig-zag through the air, spewing havoc and destruction, locking wings with his venomous C.O. Here is a thrilling yam from the pen of a master of tale-spinner!*

**L**IEUTENANT BULL MEEHAN, U.S.N., was in a mood. And when Bull was in a mood, let it be said that the United States Naval Air Station at Souilly-sur-mer was a place over which the sun hid behind lowering clouds; where red wine soured on the mess table; where flatfooted gob sentries paced their beats with the snap and the devotion to duty of Imperial Household Guardsmen and where the young naval aviators gathered in the lee of the hangars and cursed with great feeling and remarkable fluency.

Not that Souilly was at any time to be regarded as a rest cure for fair-weather pay-hoppers. Scarcely an evening passed during which the egg-laying Gothas did not roar over the town to rock the very earth with the detonations of their bombs. Few days went by which did not witness the screaming arrival of long-range shells from the German lines, some forty odd kilometers away.

And, lest the occupants of the harried town should find time hanging heavy on their hands, Jerry submarine commanders possessed of a low sense of humor were wont to broach off the Mole at the very entrance to the harbor, lob a few shells into the town and into the air station itself and then submerge before one of the stand-to planes could even be swung around for a take-off.

So, what with this and that, it required a moderately hard-boiled group of officers and men to stand the gaff. But when the Skipper acquired a grouch, the front line trenches during a February rain would have been, compared to the Naval Air Station at Souilly, a place of happiness, peace and utter comfort.

Bull stood behind his pine desk, surveying the little group of flying officers who stood fidgeting around him. Bull's voice was harsh, loud, commanding at all times. When it was, as now, raised in heat, it was more

than likely to shake inkwells and other small articles from adjoining desks.

"The next bird," he roared, "who comes back to this station and reports his plane crashed, will wish that he had sunk with his ship, see?"

They did see. All of them, that is, but Ensign Wadsworth. He, being what he was, spoke up with a trace of peevishness in his tone.

"But skipper," he protested, "what are we going to do when the engine conks? You know there isn't a single one of these French crates that's fit to fly."

The Commanding Officer regarded him unfavorably. This new officer, he felt, would be a blight on the station. Bull had been conscious of a growing distaste for this young man ever since he had presented his orders, a week ago. Now the vague distaste was developing into a positive aversion.

The fact that Ensign Wadsworth wore a *Croix de Guerre* under his gold naval aviator's badge and had a record of two years' flying service with the French Army was a thing of little or no importance. The Frogs were always passing medals around and what was two years of flying when compared to Bull's five? The dangers of war flying, he considered, had nothing on the hazards of sitting out on the edge of nothing and flying the old bamboo-and-haywire Curtiss pushers back in 1912.

HE SLAPPED the desk resoundingly with the flat of a hand that was as large as an elephant's ear.

"Listen, you" he boomed, "you're here to fly, no matter what you've been used to doing anywhere else! If I give you a dory with an engine in it and tell you to fly patrol, you'll fly patrol, see, and bring it back to the station when you return."

He took a long breath to relieve the pressure on his arteries. Ensign Wadsworth observed him critically.

He was not a handsome officer, at best. His ample ears stood out like the handles of a loving cup. The back of his bristling head rose flatly from his collar, as though a careless nurse had dropped him while his skull was still in a plastic state. His thrice-shaven chin was far too angular and prominent. No, Bull may have had his good points, but they were not to be distinguished by a cursory look at his face.

"What are you going to do when the engine conks?" The Old Man's voice was heavy with sarcasm. "Well, I'll give you three guesses, Mister Wadsworth. If you can't keep her in the air, land her. Land her gently, fix the engine and continue your patrol. If that kind of work is too much for you, I'll gladly endorse your application for an additional course of training back in the States. By the twelve smooth-shaven, bald-headed apostles, you'd think I was lecturing to a squad of cadets!"

He glared around the room, his eyes resting challengingly on each of the young, wind-bronzed faces before him.

"Are there any more questions, gentlemen?" he demanded with vast patience. "Or is it clearly understood that patrols are to be made and that the planes are to be returned, undamaged, to the station?"

There was no answer. The sound of gently shuffling feet was the only sound in the room.

"That's all!"

His listeners filed out of the room, attempting to show, by their dignified departure, their unqualified disapproval of the entire conversation.

Ensign Wadsworth thumbed a well-worn cartridge briquet and lit a cigarette as the little group of silent flyers walked toward the hangars.

"Sweet natured chappie, isn't he?" he observed to Red Weeks, who, if he lived another month, would be a lieutenant, junior grade.

"Well, Bull has a lot to put up with," replied Red. "Every time the letter writing squadron at the Navy Department in Washington haven't anything else to do, they send a letter or a cable to Bull, asking him why we don't sweep the Channel clean of U-boats or why our flying time hasn't been doubled.

"And," he continued, "since Bull is a mustang who has reached his present grade by coming up through the ranks, there are a lot of Annapolis-foaled regular navy officers who don't even bother to be polite to him. To them he's something of a social error."

"How did he ever get command of a red-hot station like this, then?" demanded Wadsworth curiously.

"Because Admiral Sims, at Headquarters in London, happens to know that Bull always gets results. His manner of getting results is sometimes a scandal to the entire service, but he gets them. This station is the most important on the whole French Coast. We're nearest the submarine bases in Belgium and there are more sinkings in this section of the Channel than anywhere else. That's why Sims requested Bull's appointment."

"Uh huh," replied the other pessimistically, "and while he's getting results, we'll be having *beaucoup* fun, won't we? I think I'll find me a pub and go and acquire a good old-fashioned crying jag. I ought to have known when I was well off as a sergeant-pilote with the French."

HALF AN HOUR before dawn the following morning, Ensign Wadsworth disappeared in the gray haze which hung over the water, heading up-Channel towards Belgium and Holland. He had circled around over the harbor for nearly twenty minutes waiting for his patrol partner, who had been unable to lift his ship from the surface.

Then, in resentment of Bull's stinging remarks during the previous afternoon's conference, he tilted his little seaplane over on her right wing tip and roared up the coast. One-man patrols were, of course, officially frowned upon. The squadron of Jerry Halberstadts which guarded the Belgian Coast was vigilant and efficient.

More than one Allied patrol had been dismembered and scattered by the fast-flying Germans, whose idea of pure and unalloyed sport was to isolate a single patrol scout or a cumbersome flying boat and drive it down under the concentrated fire of half a dozen Spandaus. Still, a one-man patrol was better than no patrol at all when the waters of the Channel were thick with U-boats.

Three hours later he was sitting in his bobbing cockpit, cursing magnificently, wiping hot oil from his head, face and coveralls, while his little seaplane rocked placidly on the gently, rolling seas of the Channel.

Half a dozen miles to leeward was the low, flat coast of Flanders, the hunting grounds of the Halberstadts. All around him was the Channel, the horizon unbroken except for the German-infested shore behind him.

A brief inspection of the engine showed him that it was ruined beyond repair. A broken connecting rod had smashed a hole as big as his fist through the crankcase. The oil had gushed forth and before he

could cut the switch, the motor had flailed itself into a clanking mass of useless metal.

AT NINE-THIRTY that evening, the British flotilla leader *Lilac* boiled into the harbor at Souilly and landed a young American naval aviator whose walk, as he made his way through the pitch-black streets, seemed slightly unsteady. A careful observer might have noted that if his gait was troubled, his face bore an expression of benign peace. Indeed, through the silent street his voice, a husky tenor, could be heard carolling gaily:

*“Ashes to ashes, Dust to dust,  
If the Jerries don’t get you Coneyak must.”*

Certainly a stranger would never have guessed that Ensign Wadsworth’s was proceeding upon his way to report to an irate commander that one of the cherished patrol scouts was even now resting quietly upon the bottom of the Channel after having disintegrated under the strain of a tow-rope attached to the stern of a busy destroyer.

Still less would he have imagined that this so-happy young officer confidently expected to be beached, court-martialled, run out of France, or what not. No indeed. Said stranger would have been amazed to observe that the flyer was going to his inevitable doom in so cheerful a frame of mind.

Ensign Wadsworth was having a bit of trouble finding his way to the Officers’ Quarters. He was not in a hurry, for the radio had briefly reported his rescue. As he stopped to think about it, he realized that the only reason that he walked toward the Officers’ Quarters at all was that there seemed no other place to go. And since he could not postpone the impending interview forever, he had reluctantly shaped his course in that direction.

A lousy town, Souilly, he decided, leaning comfortably against a lamp post to assist himself in arriving at that conclusion. Yes, it was a town that was thoroughly objectionable in every respect. What with Gotha raids every night, the place was shut up as tight as a gasoline drum.

Maybe after he had been here a while, perish the thought, he’d get so he could find the pubs in the dark. With a visible effort, he pushed himself away from the comfortable lamp post and began to plod onward again.

Good chaps, these Limeys. Carefree as hell, the destroyer service. He hadn’t realized how potent was

their wardroom Scotch until it had been too late. And then it didn’t matter. Nothing mattered, except that the destroyer lads were the best fellows in all the world and that his skipper was, well, quite the reverse.

FROM THE BLACK mass of the wall beside him came a sudden streak of light and a confused babble of voices. Wadsworth halted to consider the matter. Then he approached the wall and fumbled for a doorknob. Being surprisingly successful in his search, he pushed the door inward and blinked owlishly as he entered the well-lighted room. A nice comfortable cafe, where he might ease his weary feet, before continuing on his way to the Officers’ Quarters. What luck!

He ordered a bottle of cognac, squinting through the smoke-fog. It was a typical French cafe, a zinc-topped bar at one side, thirty or forty little tables crowded with men, both civilian and military. Wadsworth felt very much at home and beamed affably at a *poilu* at the next table. He, abandoning the dregs of his *vin ordinaire*, immediately moved over to share the flyer’s cognac and to congratulate the so-brave, so-sympathetic American who had journeyed three thousand miles to save France from extermination.

The American lapsed into moody melancholy with the second bottle. The *poilu* was ridden by an unquenchable thirst. The room was hot and fetid. The cognac was milder than the ensign would have wished. The service was slow, the waiters awkward, forgetful and impertinent.

Try as he might, Wadsworth could not drown the thought that Bull awaited him. The inevitable interview hung over him like the Sword of Damocles. The spirit of Bull Meehan, like Banquo at the feast, bore heavily on his soul and robbed the fiery liquor of both power and tang.

The *poilu* ordered the third bottle of liquor but allowed his host to pay for it. Tight as a tick, too, the fellow was. The American focused his eyes upon his uninvited companion and discovered that he did not like him. The back of his head was flat, like Bull’s. He had a long, bushy beard, the kind Bull would have if he left off shaving for two or three days.

The longer Wadsworth looked at the fellow’s face, the less he desired his presence. Of course his eyes were black instead of blue and his skin swarthy instead of fair. But, through the slight haze that obscured the flyer’s vision, there was much too much about him that reminded one of Bull.

Wadsworth twisted about on his chair and faced the Frenchman, who, having emptied the remains of the cognac into his own tumbler was shaking the bottle hopefully.

"Thou hast a capacious stomach, species of a little pink camel," the flyer observed in idiomatic French.

The soldier looked up, astonished, then drank deep of the liquor. He caught his breath, shivered, brushed the tears from his eyes, then looked expectantly at his host.

"A little more cognac, perhaps?" he inquired thirstily.

Wadsworth regarded the empty bottle with rising color.

"I said," he asserted distinctly, "that you are a little pink camel. Now that I reconsider, I think you are of extremely doubtful ancestry, probably part camel, part goat. You smell like both. Get going, you walking wine bag, before I remove your prominent nose from your regrettable face!"

"Name of a name of a name!" sputtered the *poilu*, deciding that the likelihood of more cognac was remote. "You insult me, *hein?*"

"I am attempting to," admitted Wadsworth, his aversion for the other mounting rapidly.

ACTING UPON the inspiration of the moment, he reached, across the table, seized two generous handfuls of the other's beard and tweaked it lustily. The Frenchman squeaked in anguish, staggered back, tripped on the curved iron table leg and careened against a neighboring table which promptly toppled over, depositing four freshly filled glasses of red wine upon a like number of laps.

The response to Wadsworth's playfulness was instantaneous. The whole place burst into an uproar. The four wine-drenched occupants of the up-tilted table surveyed their laps in open-mouthed astonishment and then, with cries of rage and discomfort fell upon their prostrate countryman who had committed the outrage. A foot soldier of the 142nd infantry, who had observed the cause and the effect of the disaster, jerked Wadsworth's chair from under him.

In the next instant the American, a gleaming light of battle in his eyes, rose to his feet and fetched the offending soldier a smack on the face that caused the recipient to do a half-somersault into a neighboring group behind him.

The affray spread like magic. Persons in far corners of the room found themselves embroiled with perfect

strangers. A slightly befuddled gentleman near the door became imbued with the festive spirit of the occasion and hurled a half-full bottle in the general direction of the cashier's stool.

Its flight through the air was marked by a gentle red drizzle which added much to the picturesqueness of the scene. Not having brought umbrellas, quiet persons sitting beneath the sudden shower were stirred to immoderate anger and leaped into the melee with zest and abandon.

Wadsworth observed few of these phenomena. Buried beneath a squirming avalanche of French citizenry, he was engaged in crawling out from under the heap on his hands and knees. Having emerged at last, he faced about and, with a whoop of unalloyed joy, plucked the topmost man from the pile and, in an exhibition of strength remarkable for a man of his stature, hurled his burden away from him and grabbed the next. He was searching for his original adversary, the thirsty *poilu*, but the hunt threatened to become a long one.

He suddenly received a mighty wallop on the left ear and turned away from his absorbing game of human jackstraws to find that the other patrons of the cafe seemed to have begun to distinguish friend from enemy and were approaching him with intent to throw him out, one piece at a time. It looked as though every man in the room was suddenly craving his heart's blood.

A wine-splotched face appeared close to his own. He reached forward instantly and, seizing the somewhat prominent nose between his thumb and forefinger, nearly wrenched it loose from its anchorage. He saw a foot dart toward him with the speed of a striking snake. He twisted his body sideways, received a numbing kick on the thigh and then put the enthusiast to sleep with a short arm jolt to the jaw.

Then the fight became a blur, a thing of no detail. A succession of faces, grim with determination. Blows on his head, back and body that he scarcely felt. He settled down to steady fighting, a half-smile on his battered face, methodically backing toward the door at every opportunity.

The very numbers of his adversaries handicapped them, for only the innermost ring could reach him and, since he usually reached them first, that position of advantage did not appear to be an enviable one. Those on the inside, faced by those lightning-fast fists, pressed out. The result was tumult indescribable.

LIEUTENANT BULL MEEHAN walked swiftly through the gloom, headed for the Officers' Quarters. He was far from amiable in spirit. Admiral Criseneuf, the French commandant of the naval district, was always irritating and never more so than when he was requesting a dirty detail of his so-valued friends, the Americans. Tonight's sudden demands were serious enough, God knew, without the old squid's getting Bull all confused with his profuse expressions of regrets and esteem.

Funny, how these Frogs could never give a bird time to prepare his outfit for a tough job of work. Everything seemed to be done on the spur of the moment. What if they had just learned that a half-dozen U-boats were to leave the base at Bruges at daybreak? Heinie subs had been coming and going for two-three years, hadn't they?

But no, the Admiral was all up in the air. Had just received orders from somewhere, he said. But at any rate, whether the so-sympathetic Americans had any planes or not, they must bomb the hell out of Bruges. After all the honeyed words, all the involved instruction, that was what it boiled down to.

So Bull, silently nursing his rage, had started back toward the Officers' Quarters, four blocks away, to see if he could round up a full complement of officers. He wondered how he could manage to get a full flight of ships off the water, loaded with bombs, gas, and everything. He had his doubts, but the raid would be made, whether more than one plane went or not.

He stopped short, his ear cocked toward an unusual sound which trickled out into the silent night from a building close at hand. Bull recognized the noise of a first-class bar room brawl when he heard one and his pulses leaped to the unmistakable sound. But no. He turned away regretfully. He was an officer and a gentleman, now. A cafe meant nothing to him. He was on his way to bomb the Jerries out of Bruges.

He took three hesitating steps forward and came to a full halt. What if there were some Yankee gobs mixed up in the ruckus? He had warned all his officers and men to stay out of fights, but there was no telling. He had once been an enlisted man himself.

Well, he thought, it would take but a moment to find out. Just one little peek and he would be on his way. He opened the door and gazed upon a scene which, for action and violence, would have made a Yale-Harvard football game look like a Sunday evening meeting of the Epworth League. He stared incredulously for a moment, his eyes instinctively searching out the vortex

of the milling mass of battlers. He saw a sudden flash of forestry-green and gold. A flier!

BULL'S EYES glinted with satisfaction as he slipped deftly out of his tunic and tossed it into a quiet corner beside the door. Then, with an irresistible charge like that of a ten-ton tank, he hit the outside of the milling circle of the mob. His progress through the mass was marked by the sudden spewing out of flying Frenchmen, the speed and rapidity of their ejection reminding one of the empty cartridge cases whirling out of the breech of a well-manned French 75.

Wadsworth had recovered his second wind and was fighting steadily, having reduced his strategy to a very simple and effective formula. When he saw the blurred outline of a face before his eyes, he slapped it down.

Another face instantly appeared to take the place left vacant. That, too, always vanished under his piston-like punches. He learned that after two or three faces had popped up in the same spot, there would be a brief pause in that sector during which he could bestow his attention on another front.

He shook the blood and sweat out of his eyes and lunged out at a dim figure which was too close to his left shoulder. He landed and his knuckles stung as though he had established contact with a concrete wall.

"What the hell, you dizzy swab!" The voice was familiar. It sounded like Bull. But Wadsworth's left ear buzzed so that he felt he must have been mistaken. Nevertheless, he couldn't afford to miss a possible bet, so he followed his first punch with a right and a left that would have knocked over the Woolworth Tower.

"One more of those and I'll lick hell outa you," panted Bull's voice, "just as soon as we've chucked these Frogs into the street!"

So it was Bull! Well, they never could take those three punches away from him even if they lined him up before a blank wall at sunrise. Life was not without its little compensations. He felt kindlier toward Bull at the very thought.

There was not time to wonder how the Skipper had jammed into this glorious scrap, nor to speculate upon his own imminent punishment. Let the future bury its dead. This was a damn good fight. Best he'd had since he and an unknown Scotch highlander had tried to clean out the joint on the Rue Blanche, in Paris.

He whirled to face some one who had clouded him from the rear.

"Let be!" came Bull's roar. "That's my man!"

There came a sound as of a butcher's knife chopping down on the block. The offending Frenchman passed out without a groan.

"Got him!" Bull's exultant voice rose above the din of battle. "Hard astern, kid. That's it, kid, back to back. Ugh! Attaboy! Watch this spig do a falling leaf! See? Simple. Look out behind you! All right, now, full speed ahead. Four bells and a jingle!"

Wadsworth found himself, miraculously, out in the darkness of the night. The fight behind the closed door seemed to be continuing unabated. Bull, holding a bottle in his hand, was awkwardly shaking himself into his tunic.

"No drinking on duty, kid," he mumbled through a split lip, "but I salvaged this as we came out and a little touch of medicine won't do us any harm. Come on, now, back to the Officers' Quarters. And by the way, where the hell were you all day and what's the meaning of coming back without your plane?"

ONE AFTER ANOTHER the lumbering patrol bombers skimmed over the surface of Souilly Harbor, took off and sped into the darkness, leaving behind them fiery tails of exhaust flames. A few moments later, five tiny single seater sea-planes leaped from the asphalt-black waters and scurried after the flying boats which it was their duty to protect.

Ensign Wadsworth, at the joystick of a little scout, was low in mind and body. Two years of flying over the lines had taught him many things, one of which was the foolishness of sending navy ships to do army jobs. And this bombing of an inland base was, to his way of thinking, distinctly an army detail.

He regarded the next few hours' work with little pleasure. Some of these other birds might tingle all over when they thought of flying through the anti-aircraft defenses of a town like Bruges. But the very idea of it was loathsome to Ensign Wadsworth.

He was cold, having forgotten, in the rush of one thing and another, to don his fur-lined coveralls. He ached from head to foot. His front teeth swayed precariously as he breathed through his mouth. He touched them tenderly with the tip of his tongue and hoped that the chill night air might not bring about a spell of sneezing.

His left eye was in a bad condition; a drooping eyelid and a swollen check tended to make him feel worse. He was not sitting easy; he knew that in the privacy of his own room a hand mirror would show him the sharply outlined imprint of a large foot upon

his person. It was going to be, he decided, a lousy night. He had made a regrettable mistake when he had ever learned to fly.

The shore line had long since disappeared. The flight, following the leadership of Bull Meehan, who piloted a scout, had veered away from the coast so that the noise of their engines and the flares of their exhaust stacks might not prematurely wake the Jerries from their well-earned bunk fatigue.

Up, up, the leader climbed, into ever-cooler altitudes. Wadsworth attempted to crouch under the inadequate celluloid windscreen on the cowl, but abandoned the effort as a half dozen muscles twinged in protest.

He wondered how many hours had elapsed since they had left Souilly. Having lost all track of time, he guessed that they would overshoot their objective by a couple of hundred miles and, having run out of gas, find themselves comfortably interned in Holland for the duration of the war.

Well, it might not be so bad at that. He had heard that, in an internment camp, the differences in commissioned rank were not considered of major importance. He and Bull might, then, be able to finish the bout which had been so inopportunistically interrupted by a pair of amazed and scandalized cops.

Wadsworth, having given thought to the matter, decided that his future as a naval officer was, to say the least, problematical. That being the case, he might as well make a job of it and do Bull up in a neat little package. Such a chance might never come again. He wondered what, if any, privileges were given to officers at the Portsmouth naval prison.

AH, THEY WERE turning inshore, now. He maintained position in the formation, riding hard at the right rear of the vee. After what had seemed to be hours and hours of flying, he saw the faint white blur of the beach as the flight left the Channel and began to fly straight toward the interior of Belgium.

The area below was as dark as the nethermost depths of a coal mine. Wise in the ways of Allied air raids, the Germans had carefully screened every light. From 9,500 feet, the earth was but a dark bowl below, the sides of which offered little contrast to the night sky.

A shimmering, blue-black ribbon cut diagonally beneath their course. That would be the canal, the ensign decided disinterestedly, shivering in the bitter windstream from his propeller. Bruges would be

just ahead. The sooner they reached it and got the bombing business over with, the sooner he could get back to his own room at Souilly, where a comforting brown bottle was hidden in one of his dress boots. He wished he had brought it along.

The flight, in response to a signal from its leader, began to spread out lest a well-placed archie should land in its midst and bring down half a dozen ships with one burst.

Wadsworth waited for the anticipatory tingle of excitement which usually served notice upon him that action was imminent. No. He was conscious only of the bone-biting cold and of the dismal foreboding that the next few minutes would not be happy ones.

Suddenly the blackness ahead was split asunder by a tremendous column of blue-white incandescence, so brilliant, so dazzling that Wadsworth's bruised eye twitched and throbbed as he gazed at it. Bruges, at last! But his pulses failed to quicken, so engrossed was he with his melancholy meditations. Another searchlight snapped into being, and another and another.

The black backdrop of the night was criss-crossed with them. They seemed to form an impenetrable barrier to the onward progress of the formation, a tangible wall against which the fragile planes would crumple and fall. Back and forth they waved, searching blindly, gropingly, for the source of the engine noises which came to the listening devices at their bases.

Wadsworth was looking up and down, back and around, watching for enemy attackers. Whenever he twisted his head, his neck creaked with agonizing twinges. He pulled his stick back and began to climb, knowing that if an attacking squadron did appear, they would attempt to pounce upon the raiders from above.

A pretty little Fourth of July skyrocket showered sparks into the darkness, above and ahead of the formation. Other innocent-looking bursts followed the first, until the air seemed full of them.

The leading flying boat was speared in the rays of the nearest searchlight but continued on its course, slowly, perseveringly. Instantly all the other beams swiveled over in that direction, outlining one after another of the bombers and bathing them in dazzling silver. The archies, too, began to concentrate around the shafts of light. The air became bumpy. Through the rhythmic roar of his engine Wadsworth could hear the steady "*crrrrump, crrrrump, crrrrump*" of exploding shrapnel.

He opened up his throttle and began to cut wide circles around the cumbersome flying boats, watching

vigilantly for enemy aircraft and occasionally glancing downward to mark the progress of the raid. He felt like a disinterested spectator, observing the show from a seat in the gallery. He thumbed his trigger to warm up the cosmoline and was reassured when his machine gun responded enthusiastically.

FAR, FAR BELOW, the black ribbon of the canal glittered and glowed as it reflected the stabbing knife points of gun fire. Just ahead, directly in the path of the squadron, the canal widened into a turning basin, a rectangular pool of redly gleaming water. It looked, Wadsworth noted, like an oblong lake of mercury. Along one side was a row of concrete arches. That would be the refitting quai for the U-boats, the objective of the raid.

It was difficult for him to keep his high-spirited little mount on an even course. The air about him was a boiling cauldron of flashing color, red, green, blue. Before him was a spiderweb of luminous gray lines, straight as a ruler's edge.

He flew headlong into the large-caliber machine gun barrage, wondering vaguely why he was not shot down at once. A whirring noise filled his ears as a jagged flash of fire burst directly below him. Ziz-zag streamers of smoke radiated from the explosion. Those pointing toward him made ugly moaning sounds, as the jagged shell fragments zipped by. His seaplane reared up under him, quivering like a bucking broncho, and he had to exert the full strength of his arms and legs to straighten her out.

The turning basin was directly below, now. The entire earth was erupting. A string of blazing balls, green, red and yellow, climbed leisurely toward him. It seemed to take an infinity of time for them to mount, yet, try as he would, he could not give them sufficient air room. Flaming onions—he had always hated them. They swished past, so close that he might have reached out and caught them. There was a momentary blast of heat against his cheek. Then it was cold again and he shivered.

Far below a dotted line of explosions was cutting a path toward the turning basin. One at a time the dots erupted as the line headed implacably toward the concrete arches. Just to the westward another such line of detonating bombs sprang into being as the second flying boat began to lay her eggs. A third series seemed to fill the gaps left by the first. The hell-swept earth was alight with the searing, leaping fountains of flame.

Wadsworth's attention was diverted by the sight of

an incredible column of yellow fire which mounted and mounted until its glowing crest was higher than his cockpit. Having risen, it stood there like a gigantic column of asparagus, livid and horrible, swaying gently in the wind. He sheered away from it, shuddering.

A burst of tracer carried away a cross wire between the wings. The two severed ends stood back in the wind, straight as sticks. The damned luminous lines were everywhere. No use to dodge them.

The underside of his plane was lighted with a ruddy glare which grew brighter and brighter. He peered over the edge of his cockpit wall. Just below a huge flying boat was enveloped in flames which, like his own broken wire, trailed straight behind, like the tail to a sky rocket.

For hours and hours the boat seemed to fly straight on her course, while awkward little black figures left it and turned over and over, foolishly, as they hurtled earthward. Then, slowly, the blazing ship's left wing sagged and the mammoth fireball followed its crew in a loose tailspin, spattering its oily flames in a mighty corkscrew as it fell.

THE LINE of bombs had crossed the concrete shelter, which was now crumpled and torn. The dotted line of crimson geysers was springing into existence on the other side of the turning basin, smashing its way through quais, warehouses and factories.

A score of conflagrations were belching fiery clouds into the sky and adding their bit to the red glare that illuminated everything. Just to the east of the refitting quais an ammunition dump had caught fire. Shells and rockets were fizzing this way and that in a drunken orgy of destruction, setting new fires wherever they landed.

Wadsworth sucked in his breath and threw his ship over on her beam ends as another little seaplane nearly crashed into him in a head-on collision. He cursed in a veritable spasm of rage. Wasn't he having enough troubles of his own without one of his own men trying to run him down? The whole German army trying to shoot him out of the air and now some cockeyed pilot had to play puss in the corner up here with him for the sole purpose of making him miserable!

The offending plane wheeled around until its uplifted pontoons were within spitting distance of his own cockpit. An archie coughed close by. In its glare he could see every detail of the other plane, even to the grease smears on its fabric-covered fuselage. Yes, he might have known it. Bull. That bird was a jinx.

Another chain of flaming onions caused him to veer sharply to the right. He was sore, now, at the whole damn business. Cold and uncomfortable as he was, tired after two long shifts in the air, wrapped in the all-encompassing shroud of a hang-over, everybody in the world seemed intent upon doing him dirty!

More flaming onions climbed up after him. The babies who were lobbing them into the air were patient men, determined to do him in. The whole thing was becoming unendurable!

He dropped the blunt nose of his little fighter and started downward in a screaming power dive. He hurtled through a very blizzard of tracer. He could feel the solid bumps as his ship cut through the trajectory of archie shells. His teeth clamped together, his eyes little slits, he bent forward against his safety-strap, watching the earth coming up at him with terrific speed. Most of the archies were bursting above him now. But the tracer was getting thicker and thicker. The buildings below mushroomed in size with each passing heartbeat. He swallowed constantly to relieve the pressure on his eardrums.

He veered slightly, observing a wide cobbled street bordering the turning basin. Along the edge of the basin were anti-aircraft and machine guns, their crews working like tiny automatons. The machine guns were curiously foreshortened, their muzzles obscured by a thin smoke haze as they poured their hose-like streams of lead up at him.

He began to pull out of his dive, wondering if the wings would fold up under the pressure, or if his pontoons would clear the granite cornice of a building which suddenly thrust itself in his path. He could see every stone block as he careened over the roof with scant inches to spare. Then down again, down at those birds with the coal scuttle helmets who worked the guns.

HE SCARCELY KNEW that he was squeezing the trigger, that his own gun was vibrating and dancing upon its mount. His heart was too full of anger, his brain too full of his troubles. So this was the navy, was it, where commanding officers prided themselves on being hard-boiled; where flyers had to take up crates fit only for the junk pile; where pilots had to make patrols by day and raids on the same night; where life was just the concentrated essence of hellishness?

After the war, when ensign's stripes had assumed their proper value, he'd find this Bull Meehan and



take him to pieces to see what made him tick. Yes, he would, indeed. To hell with him. To hell with everything.

Funny, how those Jerries wilted and lay still as his smoking tracer probed back and forth among the guncrews on the quai's edge. His pontoons all but skimmed the water of the pool as he zoomed up and pivoted around for another go at them.

This was more like it, fighting those birds face to face. He had almost forgotten to be cold. He wished that Bull were in command of that archie crew in front of him.

At scarcely ten feet altitude he roared at the nearest gun. Its muzzle was hidden behind an enormous billow of incandescent gas. His ship leaped in the air as a shriek filled his ears. But he nosed down and squeezed his trigger gleefully. Back again, and at 'em!

He was feeling better. He had lost consciousness of everything else in the world but his own personal battle with those running, crawling, crouching gray-green figures before him. There was no other fighting anywhere. Nothing else existed. This was action! This was life!

Another little plane suddenly appeared beside him, rocking like a canoe in a whirlpool. He had not remembered that there were any other planes. But here it was, its careening wing-tips almost touching his. He stared at it, automatically pulling back into a zoom to clear a building which leaped at him. The other pilot zoomed, too. As they straightened out over the roof tops, he was vaguely conscious that the other pilot was waving wildly.

Then he became aware that it was Bull, his commanding officer, who was ordering him away from his own little battle-royal. Wasn't that like Bull? Here he was, enjoying himself for the first time since he had joined the navy and Bull had to come along and spoil it all. It occurred to Wadsworth to pay no attention, to keep right on with this fun. But the zest was gone. He was through.

HE NEVER REMEMBERED how they got away, he and Bull. He had a confused, nightmarish recollection of a pair of leaping, bucking, seesawing planes hurdling over a seething, belching volcano of flame. Of trying to dodge the tracers, the flaming onions and the archies and then giving it up and flying straight ahead, neither knowing nor caring whether either of them would survive the next quarter of a second.

And then, somehow, it was all over. They were

flying through quiet blackness again, climbing into colder air, steering automatically. Wadsworth was seized by a spasm of trembling. The cold, probably. Perhaps the reaction from the excitement of the past few hours—or had it been minutes?

God, it was cold! There were planes about him again. He had almost forgotten their very existence. The seaplane beside him was Bull's. Those astern were flying boats. His teeth chattered constantly. His whole body ached.

A white blur streaked beneath their wings. The sand. They were over the Channel again. Then he noticed that Bull's seaplane was beside him no longer. He looked about him, then over the side. There it was, a thousand feet below him. He looked again. It was gliding, its exhaust flames spitting irregularly. Engine trouble. Forced landing.

He jerked at his throttle and cut off the gas, nosing down steeply to follow the crippled ship. So even Bull had to land, eh? In half a dozen seconds, he was beside the other plane. He drifted close to it, noting that the engine had not quit cold. There was no sound, now, but the subdued roar of the other ships, two thousand feet above, the uneven popping of his own throttled-down engine and the singing of the wind through the wires and struts of the two gliding planes.

He pressed carefully upon his rudder bar, edging over toward his companion. He leaned out of his cockpit, hardly thirty feet from the man in the other ship.

"If I give you a dory with an engine in it, fly it and bring it home!" he yelled.

The response was immediate.

"Get the hell outa here and take your ship back to the station!" roared Bull.

"If you can't keep your plane in the air, land her gently," shrieked the ensign joyfully.

The reply blistered the dope on the fuselage. The water was close, now. Wadsworth observed that there were no whitecaps topping the rollers. He kicked left rudder and swung away from the other plane. Then he pulled his stick back and allowed her to settle.

*Crash!* The twin pontoons hit the first roller squarely. There was a spine-jarring jolt and the little ship bounced into the air. Fanning the stick, he let her drop again. She hit on her right pontoon, slewed around into the trough of the sea and stopped, rolling wildly. He jazzed the throttle and taxied around to where Bull's silent plane wallowed sluggishly.

"Would you like a tow, Lieutenant?" he asked with heavy politeness.

"No use." Bull's voice was restrained. "Pontoons all shot to hell. She'll sink in half an hour."

"Well, well, well, another plane gone!" Wadsworth's voice held no tinge of regret.

He taxied slowly into the wind, then cut his throttle and allowed his ship to drift astern until her right wing almost touched the left wing of the Skipper's ship.

"Come on aboard," he called, wearily.

"Hold her there," came Bull's voice. "I want to salvage something from the locker."

Wadsworth held her, shivering so he could scarcely hold the stick. Then the right wing sagged low in the water and he saw the heavy figure of his superior officer crawling through the maze of wires and struts, making his way inboard.

For a moment the older man stood beside the cockpit, staring down at the implacable face of the pilot. Wadsworth met his gaze, striving to control his chattering teeth.

"Cold, kid?" Bull's voice was curiously gentle.

"No. Let's get out of here. You lie down on the wing, close to the fuselage, and hold onto a strut. I'll get you off. Then, at your convenience, we'll finish what we started tonight. After that you can furnish me with free transportation to Portsmouth."

"Here, take a nip of this," commanded Bull.

Wadsworth's bruised lips came in contact with the cold, round neck of a bottle. He tilted his head back and felt a stream of liquid fire burn its way to his stomach. He sat up, coughed, and gasped for breath. He heard the gurgle of the liquor as the skipper drank.

Ensign Wadsworth's next words were uttered in a dark alley, half way between the Naval Air Station and the Officers' Quarters, where he and Bull had repaired by mutual consent immediately upon landing the plane at the float.

His teeth chattering, his face drawn with fatigue

and marred by the earlier events of the evening, his entire body one great ache, he squirmed painfully out of his tunic and faced Bull. The lieutenant, his own features puffed and bruised, was having difficulty getting his right arm out of his sleeve. With exquisite politeness Wadsworth assisted him.

Then the ensign broke the silence which had lasted for many dark, cold and unutterably weary miles.

"What I'm going to do to you will cheer me," he said, "during the next few years at Portsmouth."

"Proceed," said Bull with a sigh.

Wadsworth lifted an arm that was as heavy as lead and swung a roundhouse punch at the other's head. His arm completed its circle, unobstructed, and he sat down heavily, dizzily, remembering that he had, now, been injured in the same spot twice.

Bull's back could almost be heard to creak as he reached down, seized a handful of Wadsworth's shirt and dragged him to his feet. His ham-like fist, aimed at the ensign's jaw, landed weakly upon his chest.

Wadsworth coughed and sat down again.

The younger officer put his hands to the ground and pushed himself to his feet. He stood looking at Bull, trying to focus his eyes. There was something about his enemy that he didn't understand. Gradually the blurred outline became sharper. He stared in amazement.

The other, swaying gently, back and forth, back and forth, was out on his feet! The swaying became more pronounced. Wadsworth grabbed him just in time to save him from pitching forward on his face.

But there was a point that had to be settled before they returned to the Officers' Quarters.

"Are you going to send me to Portsmouth?" he demanded truculently.

"Hell, no!" came Bull's voice, thick and hissing through his split lip. "Never even thought of it!"