

# THE ADVENTURES OF *The* **THREE** **MOSQUITOES**™

## TWO ACES—IN DUTCH

by **RALPH OPPENHEIM**

*Kirby had sworn to get Von Sterner, "The Killer." Now they had met in fair combat, and the leader of the "Three Mosquitoes" was plunging to earth in a plane riddled by the Killer's bullets. But he was not alone. The Killer's Albatross was falling beside the crippled Spad. Then face to face on the ground, these two men, the Yank and the German, found themselves the victims of one of war's strange tricks!*

**V**AINLY KIRBY STRUGGLED to get altitude on the green Albatross which was crowding him, making repeated deadly swoops on his little Spad. The German's tracer bullets were penciling the air on every side of the American, singing wildly in his ears. Splinters were flying from his dashboard, and he heard the lead ripping through the fabric and wood of his fuselage. Mercilessly, the green Albatross kept bearing down on him, its twin Spandaus guns blazing in short, spasmodic bursts.

A strange grayness had crept into the American's face, and his eyes, behind their goggles, were bloodshot and haggard. He was getting licked, and he knew it. For once, in his breathless career as a victorious war bird, as the leader of the famous "Three Mosquitoes," he found himself up against a man who seemed to be better than himself.

It was Von Sterner—the pilot of that green Albatross. Von Sterner, known as "The Killer," because he was never satisfied with merely incapacitating his victims' planes; he followed them as they fell, and

riddled them to bits. He was one of the greatest of enemy aces, and his famed circus was feared and respected on every Front. Kirby, who had sworn to get the man who had shot down many of his friends and comrades-in-arms, had fallen into a duel with the enemy ace only to find that, like all the others, he too seemed marked for the Killer's prey.

The Mosquito had tried every trick he knew, even breathless turn and twist by which airplanes fought one another. But the German knew them all too—and better. Inexorably, in each fierce series of maneuvers, he came out on top, and each time his guns sent out a shattering burst of lead. He was out-matching Kirby in every quarter—out-zooming him, out-diving and out-stunting him. True, the wind was in his favor, for it was causing both ships to drift further and further within the German lines. True, too, this was a strange sector for Kirby—the British front in Belgium—where he and his comrades, "Shorty" Carn and Travis, had just come up with their squadron to aid in the big offensive. But these were frail excuses on which to hang his defeat. And

he was sportsman enough to simply admit that the German was the better man.

Nevertheless, he was determined not to give in, not while he still remained untouched by the bullets, and his Spad still flew. Defiantly he kicked his rudder and jerked back his stick, while the green Albatross pivoted crazily above him for an Immelmann turn. The Spad, its engine roaring thunderously, went curving upwards, to force the Albatross on the outside arc of the turn. The Mosquito was leaning to his sights, and his thumbs were on the stick-triggers. He pressed them savagely, and his twin Vickers blazed. For a moment his eyes lit up. He saw smoky-tracers going into the fuselage of the green ship.

Then Von Sterner, wily flyer that he was, calmly half-rolled, and with a speed which almost took Kirby's breath away, whipped over and came straight down for the tail of the Spad once more. Again his Spandaus guns spat, and invisible drumsticks seemed to beat a vibrating tattoo on Kirby's tail-fins. Bullets were ricocheting from the cockpit cowling right in front of the Mosquito, and a lone line of perforations appeared in the wing above him. Madly he crossed controls and hung in a shivering stall. The German, not expecting this maneuver and therefore unable to slow down his wild speed, came streaking past, so close that Kirby could see his helmeted head, leaning forward between the glistening barrels of his twin guns. The American hurled a berserk challenge out across the space which separated them, and, since he knew his voice was more than drowned out by the deafening roar of motors and guns, he made himself clear by insolently thumbing his nose. But Von Sterner did not seem to notice; he didn't budge from his sights. The German was grimly intent on his business, and he swept past, only to bank vertically and come charging back.

The two planes rushed together, and again the mad jockeying for position began. Furiously they banked, rolled, and gyrated about one another, like two great birds in dalliance. Their wings flashed silver as the bright noonday sun caught them, and the black smoke from their exhausts stained the clear, translucent blue sky.

They were two miles above the earth now, and the wind was pushing them further east all the time. Below them Flanders' landscape spread out like flat, yellowish mat. To their left, plainly visible because of the crystal clearness of the air, the North Sea glistened in the sunlight. Before them, not very far away, was the Dutch border, marking Belgium's boundary.

Now the German was beginning to gain on Kirby again, forcing the Spad into a disadvantageous position. By a series of clever feints and lunges, Von Sterner was slowly but steadily getting above the American. Kirby gritted his teeth, determined that this time he would come out on top. Like a madman he moved his stick and rudder about, maneuvering furiously to prevent that green ship from going any higher. Sweat streamed down his face, despite the cold rush of air, and his muscles ached from the strain of the fierce effort. He tried to zoom, but the Albatross zoomed ahead of him and cut him off. He tried to turn, but the German scout swept in front of him and spattered his ship with lead. Wherever he went, there was that green plane, looming before him, red spitting from its guns. A sob of helplessness tore him. God, there was something inevitable about the way that other ship kept gaining, as if some uncanny fate was guiding its controls.

Up, up, up, crept Von Sterner. In another second he would be in a position to swoop upon the Spad once more! Panic seized the Mosquito then. He became desperate, lost his head. He must get altitude—get it somehow. Recklessly, without realizing the folly of such a move, he pulled the stick all the way back, jerked his throttle wide open, and went roaring up for a wide loop.

If some other pilot had been in that green Albatross, the crazy stunt might have succeeded, might have brought Kirby down on his antagonist's tail. But not with Von Sterner, The German ace, who was cool and mathematically precise where Kirby was flustered, could not have wished for anything better than to have his opponent begin split-airing. Calmly, he waited, waited while the Spad zoomed up past him, waited until it was turning over. Then he pulled up his nose, zoomed straight at the somersaulting ship above, and let go with both guns.

The Spad was caught half-over, directly in the German's line of fire. And there came such a terrific fusillade of bullets that Kirby marveled that he wasn't hit. His plane lurched drunkenly beneath that hail of lead. Frantically, with the tracers screaming all about him, he struggled to straighten out, and then stared dazedly at the patch of blue sky which showed in his wing instead of the taut khaki fabric that had been there a moment ago. The German's guns clattered again. Then it happened.

With a shriek, the bullets went tearing through the engine casing of the Spad. The engine choked, gave a

long, sputtering gasp, stopped dead. Simultaneously, a sudden slackening of the stick told Kirby that half his controls had been shot away.

He was done for. His crippled plane was careening dizzily, lurching and sideslipping, starting to go over into a fatal spin. With all his strength, Kirby worked to keep his nose up. Instinctively, he was trying to get the ship which had now been virtually reduced to a glider, headed towards his lines. But his compass was spinning around crazily, and with the sun right above him he couldn't get his sense of direction at all. Blindly, he kept floundering around, fighting with tooth and nail to prevent the tail-spin which seemed more and more inevitable.

THEN a new peril was upon him. He heard the roar of a motor above, the *rat-tat-tat* of Spandaus guns. Glancing up, he saw that the green Albatross was swooping down on him. Von Sterner, true to his reputation, was coming down to make the kill, unwilling to leave the helpless Spad to its fate. The Killer was diving to finish off his prey. Even now he was right overhead, and again Kirby heard the infernal whistle of his bullets.

Then a deadly, volcanic rage swept the Mosquito, and his eyes blazed behind their goggles.

"No, you don't, damn you!" he bellowed wuh insane defiance. "No, you don't, you dirty skunk!"

In his wild fury he forgot that his plane was literally a wreck, forgot that he had no engine, and his controls were shot to hell. He was guided solely by blind flying instinct, prompted by rage. And somehow he made that wounded Spad of his behave the way he wanted it to.

With a mad laugh he pulled back his stick. The safety control-wire was still intact, and the elevator fin was faithful. Sluggishly the nose of the little plane rose, until the Spad was rearing like a sensitive steed. Since there was no engine to pull it, it immediately began sliding downwards, tail first. And Kirby held it in that position, held it as the Albatross loomed right overhead, until it was directly above the Spad's nose. Then the Mosquito pressed his triggers, pressed them and pressed them, even as his ship, unable to stand the strain any longer, nosed over and went hurtling down in a light spin.

As he went screaming downwards in the wind, flying wires singing shrilly, struts creaking an straining, a blurred shape came streaking down past him. It was the Albatross, dropping like a plummet. It was going down in a steep dive and hence was descending

faster than the spinning Spad. Kirby caught a fleeting glimpse of its pilot, moving wildly in the cockpit, struggling with the control. And despite his own predicament, Kirby felt a surge of savage exultation. He had evened the score! The battle was now a draw.

But his joy was short-lived. For now the blurred earth was looming right below him, rushing up with breathtaking swiftness. He employed all his skill as a pilot to pull his ship out of the spin. Every time he moved the stick, he heard the safety wire creak ominously. It was not strong, that wire, for it was only meant to be used temporarily, in case something happened to the main control. If it broke, Kirby's chance of landing alive would be absolutely hopeless.

Easy now! Despite his furious impatience to get out of that spin, Kirby had to handle that stick as tenderly as a mother handles her baby. Slowly he moved it back, inch by inch. The ground was coming closer, closer. A barren stretch of meadowy field, it seemed to be. Five hundred now—still inching that stick back. Four hundred feet. Three hundred. The Mosquito's breath was coming in short gasps, and his hand on the stick was clammy, cold. Two hundred feet.

A groaning of fabric, a ripping of wood. The Spad was valiantly striving to lift its nose. Kirby, encouraged by his success, worked with fresh confidence. He was getting the stick all the way back to his chest now, as the ground seemed to give a swift jump towards him. The Spad staggered uncertainly, as if undecided whether to nose into the ground or respond to Kirby's efforts and pancake.

That last breathless second was one of the most nerve-racking that Kirby had ever experienced. He could only hold back that stick, sit tight and pray.

And then, to his intense relief, the nose of the Spad spurned the ground, and the ship dropped level like an elevator. There came a shivering impact, as its undercarriage buckled beneath it and smashed, but the rest of the fuselage settled without further mishap.

For a few seconds Kirby, dazed and bewildered, remained sitting in his cockpit. Slowly he unfastened his belt, then tore off helmet and goggles, and looked around him. Sure enough, he had landed on a big meadow, which seemed to stretch as far as the eye could see. It was full of tall grass, and swampy ditches.

Suddenly Kirby started, his eyes fastening on the object they had just picked out. Scarcely a hundred yards away was the green Albatross. It was resting on even keel, though it seemed badly wrecked. But what about its pilot? What had befallen Von Sterner?

The question was answered almost, immediately. Kirby saw a figure come out from behind the wrecked Albatross now, saw him running his way. With an oath, the Mosquito leaped from his cockpit, and his hand groped beneath his tunic for his Colt. The German was coming closer now. He had his helmet in one hand, and a Luger in the other, and was training his pistol right on Kirby.

“Surrender!” shouted Von Sterner, in perfect English. “Surrender, or I shoot!”

And then, once more, rage swept Kirby, rage against the man who had tried to slaughter him so mercilessly. Recklessly, he whipped out the Colt.

“Surrender, my uncle!” he yelled, defiantly, “I’ll see you in hell first!”

Blindly he fired, then crouched next to his ship as he saw a spurt of red leap from the barrel of the German’s Luger. A bullet whined over his head. He cursed, and fired two more shots. But the German had cleverly ducked, and, since he was still about thirty yards away, Kirby missed him. The Mosquito did not fire again, however. For suddenly, to his surprise, the German tossed his Luger carelessly away, and raised his hands above his head. The Mosquito realized that Von Sterner’s gun must have jammed. Triumphant he hurried over to the German, came towards him. Colt in hand. And there he stopped, blank with astonishment.

He could not believe that the man he saw before him was the grim, relentless Killer who knew no mercy in the air. For the German was a tall, young fellow, with a clean-cut face which Kirby could not help liking at once. He was blue-eyed and fair-haired. And as Kirby confronted him, he grinned with cheerful friendliness.

“Let’s call quits,” he suggested, in good Yankee slang. “But it was a hell of a good fight while it lasted!”

For a moment, Kirby was completely at loss. Suddenly he felt foolish, standing there and trying to look menacing, his revolver pointed at the other man. At last he found his voice, but it sounded strangely flat, unnatural.

“Guess it was,” he blurted. Then, trying to play the part of a hostile foe again, he added, “But that’s neither here nor there. And if you know what’s good for you, you’ll——”

“See here, my friend,” the German said, in a voice so soothing that Kirby was again embarrassed. “What’s the use of your covering me with your revolver? Do you realize that you’re far, far from home, way within

the German lines? You’re bound to be taken prisoner. Any minute my countrymen, having seen our planes descend, will be here. Now, my advice would be to just accept your fate and——”

“Never mind!” Kirby flared, his anger mounting anew as he understood too well the truth of the German’s words. “I’m not asking for your advice!” At the same time, his glance swept the green Albatross which squatted ahead, and a momentary hope arose within him.

Von Sterner smiled again.

“Nothing much doing there,” he said. “Believe me, if you can get that ship to fly you’re welcome to it. And it’s your own fault that it’s in such a pitiful state,” he added, with a twinkle. “You’re the one who shot it up.”

Kirby did not answer this time. He looked all about him, furtively, still keeping the German covered. His heart sank. How could he possibly make a get-away, when there was nothing but open meadow here? If——

“Here they come now,” the German suddenly cried, and Kirby wheeled around. He almost groaned. Across the meadow, advancing swiftly his way were a dozen men on horseback. They were galloping towards the scene where the two planes had crashed, and were already starting to level carbines in his direction.

Desperate, the Mosquito obeyed an insane impulse.

“To hell with them!” he shouted, and forgetting Von Sterner, he turned and ran. Madly, he went dashing through the tall grass, though it impeded his progress, and his shoes from time to time sank into the mud. Looking back he saw the horsemen looming closer. Von Sterner had not moved from the spot where Kirby had left him. The German stood, calm and cool a faint smile on his face.

FUTILELY Kirby rushed on, stumbling, splashing into puddles. But the horsemen were now almost up to the planes, and the Mosquito knew he would never escape them.

Then he got a surprise.

Suddenly, as he glanced back, he saw Von Sterner jump like a frightened rabbit, and come running right after him. At first, thinking the German was merely pursuing him, Kirby was going to fire his revolver. Then he saw that the German, far from pursuing, was fleeing even as Kirby was. The Mosquito was dumbfounded, so dumbfounded that he slowed up, jerking his head back, and yelled foolishly, panting between each word, “What—in—hell’s—the—matter?”

The German did not stop running. In fact, he caught up to Kirby, and the latter had to run beside him to hear his reply.

"Those men," gasped Von Sterner. "They're not Germans!"

The Mosquito's jaw dropped. The only shred of logic he could attach to the German's utterance was that perhaps Von Sterner was trying to hold him up, to make sure his capture. But this seemed ridiculous, in view of the fact that he could not get away from those horsemen anyway. So he formed the only conclusion he could.

"You're crazy!" he told the other man.

"No. I'm not!" the German insisted, stubbornly. "I know my own countrymen when I see them! These men aren't Germans, I tell you!"

By this time, the horsemen were right upon them, yelling at them in a strange, guttural language which sounded something like a man clearing his throat and speaking words simultaneously. They came trotting around the two men, and their guns were trained unwaveringly on both of them.

Von Sterner sighed hopelessly, stopped and threw up his hands. Kirby, seeing that there was nothing else to do, followed suit. The soldiers dismounted, and surrounded the two men. Kirby looked at them wonderingly. They were dressed in trim black uniforms which, in cut, looked more German than anything else, and they wore bear-skin caps. Certainly, Kirby decided, they were not Allied soldiers. But, in view of the startling events which had been taking place these last few moments, the Mosquito would not have been surprised even if they had turned out to be Turks.

One of these strange soldiers suddenly detached himself from the others, and walked right up to Kirby and Von Sterner. Evidently he was the officer in charge. He began speaking excitedly, in that same harsh tongue, addressing his remarks to both men. Kirby merely looked a little more bewildered, but Von Sterner at once began to speak German. The officer understood him, and answered in the same language.

Slowly, Von Sterner nodded, and turned to Kirby with a blank expression.

"These men," he explained to the Mosquito, "are Dutch! We've landed in Holland!"

"What?" gasped Kirby, but then at once he realized that the whole thing was quite natural. They had been close to the Dutch border, and engrossed in their battle, they had drifted over the line without even noticing it.

The German was asking the Dutch officer some more questions. Again he turned to Kirby.

"We're eight kilometers from the border, near a town called Baarlzdam. And we're both under arrest, you and I, for violating international law."

And then both the American and the German seemed to see the humor of the situation simultaneously. As if at a given signal, the two men looked at one another and began to roar with hearty laughter, shaking from head to foot.

This did not seem to please the Dutch officer, who barked at them angrily, while the soldiers near by shifted their rifles menacingly. Von Sterner finally managed to recover himself sufficiently to interpret for Kirby again. The young German drew himself up with mock dignity, and said officiously, "Our friend in the fur helmet wants us to understand that this is a very serious business, and no laughing matter. He advises us to hand over any weapons we have."

Kirby, still chuckling, tried to act duly impressed. But it was with serious reluctance that he parted with his Colt. Von Sterner had no weapon to relinquish, having thrown his Luger into the grass previously.

The Dutch officer pocketed the automatic, and barked out another order.

"What's he choking on this time?" Kirby asked.

"He says we must march where they direct us, and that if we make any false move, they'll have to resort to violence."

"I guess we better march then," Kirby suggested, wisely.

"Guess we'd better," Von Sterner

At a command from the officer, the soldiers mounted again. They flanked the two men, and the whole party started out across the meadow.

Then followed what seemed like an interminable journey to the two men on foot, a tiring tramp through the marshy fields, with the hot afternoon sun beating down on them. They were both silent now, as if each realized that his position, was not so funny after all. On they plodded, with the horsemen keeping pace beside them and to their rear.

At last, after they had traveled a distance which seemed to be miles and miles without seeing anything but meadow, they came to an old windmill, whose giant vanes turned around lazily. A peasant was standing in its doorway, a miller in baggy breeches, a peaked cap, and wooden shoes. He stared in dumb awe at the party as it passed, for the sight of the two aviators in their teddy-bears, flanked by the stern

horsemen, was a spectacle indeed. Near by some grazing cows looked up also, but they were not so impressed. They surveyed the group with profound indifference.

Kirby turned to Von Sterner, and resumed conversation at last.

“Is this Baarlzdam?” he asked anxiously.

“I hope not,” answered the German, gloomily.

“Well, my feet are so tired I wish it was,” the Mosquito said. “I thought they said that town was near by!”

They left the windmill behind, and tramped on. Again they seemed to travel for several miles. Then, to their relief, signs of real Civilization began to appear. They came to a road, walked along it. They passed farm houses, more windmills, and more peasants and cows. And finally they came to Baarlzdam.

IT WAS quite a sizeable town, and like all Dutch towns, spotlessly clean, as though it was scrubbed and scoured from end to end constantly. There were narrow, cobble-stoned streets, lined by quaint little houses and shops, with gabled roof and ancient inscriptions written over their doorways. Kirby and Von Sterner were escorted down the main street, which passed right over a canal running through the very center of the town. They crossed the rude, wooden bridge, and saw the barges being towed slowly down the narrow stream by horses.

The townsfolk turned out en masse to see them. They lined the street in groups, and watched the passing party as if it were some grand parade. Most of the people were dressed in the old Dutch costumes, which had not been changed for centuries. They wore wooden shoes, and the men had baggy breeches, dark blouses, and invariably pipes stuck in their mouths, while the women had long, wide skirts, immaculate aprons, and trim, white caps. The children were just miniatures of the grown-ups. There were, however, many people in more modern garb, in the present European style of dress. And there were some who compromised between both costumes, wearing parts of each.

The chief means of rapid transit seemed to be bicycles. Never before had Kirby seen so many of them. They were ridden by persons of all types and ages, from grizzly old peasants to dapper young soldiers in trim, tight fitting uniforms. There were also horse-drawn wagons, and a few dogcarts.

All these things Kirby and Von Sterner caught in

varied glimpses, as they tramped down the street, the horses patiently keeping pace with them. Both flyers felt self-conscious, foolish, as they saw that every eye was fixed on them, saw people whispering to one another. Their spirits were low, for they went tired and hot in their teddy-bears,

“I never felt so out of place in my life,” confessed Von Sterner, bitterly. “We must look like strange creatures indeed, the way they stare.”

“And just look at them!” Kirby added, resentfully, “Why, I never saw such a bunch of freaks in my life.”

Finally, they reached the Town Hall, a little white building which looked like a church. And here, in a spacious room looking out on the main street, they were ushered before the most important personage of Baarlzdam, the chief magistrate of the village, chief of the Baarlzdam police and of the Baarlzdam detachment of the citizen army of Holland—the burgomaster.

He was fat and he was florid, the burgomaster of Baarlzdam. His cheeks puffed out as though he had a tooth ache on each side, his nose was large and bulbous, and his bald pate was just fringed with a halo of gray hair. And he was well aware of his importance, judging from his pompous dignity. Flanked by two young soldier secretaries and the commanding officer of the military detachment, he sat at a table, with his huge pouch resting on his lap, a mass of papers in one hand and a long-stemmed pipe with a china bowl in the other.

The Dutch officer of the horsemen, preceded the two flyers, went up to the desk, saluted, and spoke in an excited voice. At first the burgomaster did not seem aware of his presence, but finally the mighty official looked up, deliberated for several moments, and then replied in a deep, gruff voice which sounded much like the barking of a huge dog. His glance went to Kirby and Von Sterner, whom he gave a look which could only be meant to put them in their places. Then, with effort, he half-turned in his chair, and called the military commander. The commander, a tan, gray-haired soldier with a stern, furrowed countenance, hurried over, and the two spoke softly for some seconds. The burgomaster then looked at the two aviators, and went on speaking in Dutch, addressing his remarks to both of them.

Kirby nudged Von Sterner. “What’s old grandpa want?” he whispered.

Von Sterner sighed. “It’s quite difficult for me to understand this Dutch jargon, even though it’s so

much like German. As far as I can make out, he's demanding all our identification papers, maps, and any other official documents we carry." And while he spoke, he reached beneath his tunic, and began extracting the papers.

"Ask him what the hell's the big idea!" Kirby suggested hotly, as he reached for his own stuff.

This Von Sterner did, in German, though he did not translate Kirby's question too literally. The burgomaster understood him, and looked exceedingly indignant. His barking voice rose again.

"He says we know very well what a grave crime we've committed," Von Sterner told Kirby. "And that if we don't, we'll be enlightened presently."

"Grave crime?" Kirby echoed, incredulously. "Hell, what did we do? I don't remember murdering any Dutchmen or doing anything else like that."

Nevertheless, they placed their papers on the desk. The burgomaster took out a pair of square spectacles, and with much effort, managed to balance them on his huge nose. He went through the documents slowly, studying them with furious concentration, as if he were trying to learn them by heart. He picked up his pipe, puffed on it slowly, and absently blew each mouthful of smoke into the faces of the two aviators. The two men had all they could do to keep from choking, for the burgomaster's mouth was large, and the smoke came out in gigantic clouds.

The burgomaster now turned to the military commander, who was cautiously reading over his shoulder. The two men spoke, earnestly and at some length. Then the military commander rasped out an order, and one of the secretaries jumped up and hurried to a bookshelf. He came to the desk with a huge tome, covered with dust. The military commander took the book, blew the dust from it, and glanced through its pages. Then, having found the place he was looking for, he held it open and laid it before the burgomaster.

The burgomaster studied it with even more industriousness than he had studied the identification papers. He blew more smoke into the two pilots' faces, and they shifted uncomfortably. Then the pompous man cleared his throat with a mighty cough, put down his pipe, and, in a dull, rumbling monotone, read from the book.

He read and he read. Hours seemed to pass, and still his rumbling voice went on. He went from page to page, never tiring, never pausing. A look of acute pain crept over the faces of Kirby and Von Sterner. They

were exhausted enough as it was, but this seemingly endless recitation made them actually drowsy, until they could hardly stand on their feet. They kept shifting, sighing profusely, though Von Sterner, to whom the burgomaster was reading, since Kirby could not understand, tried in vain to look attentive.

At last Kirby could endure it no longer. He nudged the German once more, whispering, "For cripes sake, what's this damned oration all about?"

Von Sterner turned his head a little, and whispered back, "This seems to be a book on international law. He's saying that you and I will have to be interned for the duration of the war, and our wrecked planes confiscated, because we violated Dutch neutrality."

Kirby groaned, and fortunately his groan was drowned by the rumbling voice of the burgomaster, who was reading right on with serene confidence.

"And you mean to say it's taken him all this time to just say that?" the Mosquito whispered. "Good night! I thought he had us drawn, quartered, and hanged by now."

Von Sterner merely sighed, and then made an effort to listen again. Another interminable period dragged by. Then Kirby expressed his thoughts again. "Believe me, we won't have to be interned! At the rate he's going, the war will be finished long before he is! Did he say anything else?"

"Yes, he says that, being officers, we won't have to be imprisoned. We'll be allowed to go free, though we must turn in our uniforms and papers, and dress as civilians. If we lack funds, the Dutch government will provide us with enough to take care of food, lodging, and clothing, the idea being that our governments will have to make good. They'll notify our respective authorities about our internment immediately. And if we don't behave, or if we try in any way to leave this country, we'll be seized and imprisoned at once."

"That's better," was Kirby's whispered comment, "He's improving. He managed to say a whole lot more in this lap. But it he means by civilian dress that we have to wear wooden shoes—"

He broke off, for, with unexpected suddenness, the burgomaster had stopped reading at last, and the abrupt ceasing of his voice was quite a shock. He looked up from the book, and then he began composing his own speech. Von Sterner, from time to time, explained the gist of it to Kirby. The burgomaster explained that the two men could remain in Baarlzdam only until the day after to-morrow, and then they would have to move into the interior

of the country, so as to be far from the border. He advised them to get themselves some clothes and take a room in a hotel which he recommended. He then asked them the state of their finances. Von Sterner found that he had quite a bit of pocket money with him, and Kirby fished out a small amount himself. The burgomaster, thrifty Dutchman that he was, told them that would easily do them for a week or so, and directed them where they could have it changed into Dutch currency.

Then, after much more speech-making, conferences with the military commander, and lots more red tape, the two flyers were finally dismissed.

So they found themselves standing out in front of the building, standing in their trim ground uniforms, for they had taken off their flying overalls in the burgomaster's office. Quite a crowd had gathered near by to stare at them, but by now they were used to being objects of curiosity, and didn't care. They stood deliberating, this Yank and this German, one in khaki and a Sam Browne belt, the other in field gray.

"Well," Kirby was saying, bitterly, "it looks like the *guerre*, is over as far as we're concerned."

"I'm afraid so," the German replied, and shook his head. "What will my squadron do without me?"

"And what will my two pardners do without me?" Kirby sighed.

They looked at each other mournfully. Then Von Sterner made a pathetic attempt to assume a more cheerful attitude.

"After all," he said, forcing a smile, "it won't really be so bad. Just think of it, we have nothing to worry about, no more risking our necks every day. We can just sit back and enjoy ourselves in peace."

"Yeah," Kirby agreed, dismally, and also forced a grin. "There is something in that." He shrugged. "Well, it's all in the game. I guess, though it's a helluva funny game. No use standing here crabbing either. I suppose. What do we do now?"

"Well, I don't know just what your plans are, but if you don't mind my company, I'd certainly like it if we could stick together here. I'd feel extremely lonely if I had to go off by myself now, in this strange town."

"Funny," Kirby said, "but I was thinking the same thing. I'd certainly like to be with a fellow who can speak these Dutchmen's language. But it seems kinda queer, you and I palling together when, just a couple of hours ago we were trying to shoot each other to hell, and I was telling myself you're the worst skunk that ever flew a plane!" He laughed. "But what the hell! We

can't fight the war here, so we might as well be pards," He held out his hand. "Shake!"

Von Sterner gripped it warmly and, blissfully oblivious of the staring townsfolk, they shook.

"By the way," the German suddenly said, with a laugh, "I haven't yet learned your name! I didn't see your papers in there."

At this, Kirby was taken slightly aback, and felt resentful. Certainly Von Sterner must have seen the insignia on his plane, the picture of the mosquito, and the number 1, to show he was the first of the trio. It hurt his pride to think that he had not immediately been recognized by Von Sterner as one of the big American aces.

But he swallowed his indignation, and grinned cheerfully.

"Kirby's the name, and my pardners and I are known as the Three Mosquitoes."

He was rewarded by a look of frank admiration and respect from the German.

"Indeed! No wonder the fight was so hard! But is Kirby your first name or your last?"

"Both," replied Kirby tacitly. "That's the only name I use. My parents inflicted a first name on me when I was helpless and couldn't stop them, and while it may be all right, considering I have Irish blood in me, I'd strangle anyone who used it to address me."

"And what is this terrible name, if I may ask?"

"Timothy," Kirby told him.

"Well, I see nothing bad about that. One might call you Tim."

"No, because that just reminds me of the rest of it." He hastened to drop the subject. And now, mischievously, he tried to get even with Von Sterner, "And what's your name?" he asked.

This time it was the German's turn to be put out. But he also took it like a sport.

"I am the Baron Karl Friedrich Hartzmann Von Sterner. But the Karl will be enough for you. And now that everything is settled, I'd suggest that we attend to the things we were ordered to do."

"O.K. Let's go?"

And they went.

IT WAS near dusk when two strapping men in rather badly fitting civilian clothes entered a little hotel on Baarlzdam's main street. Both acted as though they fell very awkward and loose in their mufti garb, for they were used to trim, tight-fitting military uniforms.

Kirby wore a suit of dubious blue serge, while Von



Sterner's was black. They carried two traveling bags, which were full of haberdashery and toilet articles.

A thin and senile clerk peered at them over the desk. Von Sterner inquired about the rooms, and the clerk replied.

"He says he can give us each a small room," the German told Kirby, "but they're in back, and in different parts of the house. But"—he smiled, quizzically—"he has a wonderful large room for two in front, one floor up, and it's cheaper than the other two put together."

Kirby did not hesitate a moment. "Hell, let's take the big room," he suggested. "It's lonely here, and I'm not used to bunking by myself anyway."

The large room proved to be as fine as the clerk had promised. It was clean and spacious, with a high ceiling, and great French windows which opened out on two small balconies overlooking the main street.

As they came into the room Kirby and Von Sterner were immediately confronted by their own reflections in the big mirror which stood between the French windows. This was the first time they saw themselves in their new suits, for there had been no mirrors in the dingy little tailor shop where they had purchased their clothes. And at the sight of their images, both men stopped in their tracks, as if they had been startled by ghosts. They dropped their bags and stepped closer to the glass, peering at themselves with wide-eyed horror.

"Good night, is that me?" Kirby gasped. "Cripes, why didn't you tell me I looked like this? I never would have put on the suit. You're lucky—you don't look so bad in yours."

"Don't look so bad!" Von Sterner echoed, vehemently, and had to resort to German momentarily to express himself. "*Gott im Himmel! Das ist schrecklich!* It's terrible! You look well, but me—!" He shook his head, and groaned. "What a comedown, what a comedown!"

But then, once more, they looked at each other and burst out laughing. They laughed until their sides ached, they cavorted about the room, they clapped each other on the back, they tumbled onto their beds and rolled around, roaring with robust mirth.

"Boy, if this weren't so damned serious it would be funny as hell!" Kirby gurgled.

"I think we must be dreaming," Von Sterner said. "I'm always expecting to wake up and hear the planes warming up for the dawn patrol!"

At the mention of planes, both men's laughter died in their throats, and a wistful look crept into their eyes. Suddenly they were sober, thoughtful.

"No more dawn patrols for us," Kirby sighed.

"And no more *trinken-vereins*—squadron binges—either," the German added gloomily, and then started with a sudden realization. "Which reminds me that I'm as hungry as a bear, and as thirsty as a fish! Do you realize, my friend, that in all the bustling of the day, we have not eaten a thing?"

"By God, you're right!" Kirby exclaimed, and was suddenly aware of a hollow feeling in his stomach. "Let's go out and see if these Dutch know how to eat—and drink."

"Let's make a celebration of it!" Von Sterner suggested, with increasing enthusiasm. "We have some money, and let's just get extravagant and have one blow-out before we settle down to be sober, thrifty Dutchmen. Well pool our resources, and make a party."

"Passed unanimously!" Kirby agreed, "The binge is declared. But," he asked, anxiously, "do you think there's any place in this hick town where one can have a blow-out?"

"There ought to be at least one grand beer-garden where all the travelers and merchants go when they come here. After all, it's quite a big village."

Sure enough, there was a grand beer-garden in Baarlzdam, a place known as the Casino, which the clerk in their hotel proudly recommended as the finest of its kind in all Holland. It was outside of the town proper, laid in a rustic setting. The tables were built around tree-trunks, and there were lanterns strung all around. There was quite a crowd there, composed mostly of merchants and other transients. There were few women to be seen, for it was a man's place, where one could eat, drink, and be merry.

There was even a band, on a platform in the center of the garden, a band with a violinist conductor, who led his five men with fiery enthusiasm. They blared and blasted triumphantly, their faces red and perspiring, but their zeal never ebbing, and what they lacked in harmony and counterpoint they made up in noise. They deserved all the applause they got, for they were able to make light music seem heavier than Wagner's darkest operas.

Kirby and Von Sterner took a table close to the band, and enjoyed a hearty meal, which they washed down with copious amounts of beer. They kept the stocky little Dutch waiter running back and forth to refill their steins. And with each successive stein, their spirits rose higher, and their conversation became more animated. A warm glow began to envelop them, made them feel well-disposed towards the world. Even the music of the little band didn't seem half bad now.

Kirby could not get over the strangeness of it all—his chumming with the man whom, only this morning, he had faced in relentless combat, and with whom he had exchanged deadly machine-gun bullets. If his comrades could see him now! What would “Shorty” Carn and Travis say if they found their leader sitting at the same table with The Killer, drinking the health of this hated foe whom every Allied pilot would have been delighted to send hurtling down in flames. And, worst of all, Kirby could not help liking Von Sterner more and more as he came to know him better.

“I can’t understand it,” he confessed to the German. “You seem to be a damn decent fellow, and yet in the sky to-day you were certainly a louse!”

Von Sterner smiled, tolerantly.

“The subject is unpleasant,” he replied. “But since it is on your mind, perhaps I can explain. I admit I am quite merciless in combat, but after all it is my explicit duty to kill my opponent—to make sure of my work. I try always to forget that I am shooting at a man, a human being like myself. I simply regard his plane as some quarry which I must bag, and in this way I can be absolutely relentless. Don’t think I relish it, my friend. Don’t think I relish being called The Killer and regarded by my foes as a bad sportsman. Anyone who knows me at all would admit I am as good a sport as the best. It is simply that I cannot regard war as a friendly little game, a playful match where one must be chivalrous and obey rules of etiquette.” His face hardened, almost cruelly. “War means killing, and so in war I am the killer.”

KIRBY shifted uncomfortably. Somehow, the discussion had cast an ugly shadow over their merry party, a feeling of tension, as if it brought both men involuntarily back to their positions as members of opposing powers. And so, tactfully, they changed the subject, and tried to avoid any further mention of it. Their conversation became light and innocent again, they laughed and joked and discussed the amusing incidents that they had experienced.

Also they drank, draining stein after stein of beer. And presently the stuff began to take pronounced effect. Their talk grew louder, their laughter began to assume a boisterous note. Their faces became flushed, and their heads light.

“This is good beer,” Von Sterner was saying, as he wiped the foam from his lips. “This is very good beer,”

“Yes,” Kirby agreed, a trifle vaguely. “This beer is very good.”

“It’s good beer,” Von Sterner insisted with deadly earnestness.

“Yes, it’s good, thish beer!” Kirby replied, with equal vehemence. “Don’t you think sho?”

“Yes, the Dutch are all right. I like the Dutch,” Von Sterner conceded.

“Shure they’re all right,” said Kirby. And then, oblivious of the band which was blaring forth a waltz, he suddenly burst into song:

*“Oh, the Dutch company,  
Ish the best company  
That ever came over  
From old Germany:  
There’sh the Amsterdam Dutch  
And the Rotterdam Dutch,  
And the Potsdam Dutch.  
And the other dam’ Dutch!”*

He sang this loudly, but fortunately it was drowned out by the band, though a few men at a near-by table cast dark glances at the two flyers.

Von Sterner had listened intently, a serious expression on his face. Now he began to shake his head.

“The Potsdam Dutch you will not please mention,” he requested, his English still unaccented, but strangely twisted. “It is not any the Potsdam Dutch “ Then he beamed. “Ah, it I have! The Baarlzdam Dutch!”

“Shure thing!” Kirby exclaimed, and then added, in frank admiration. “Shay, but you shertainly shpeak good English! I’ve been wondering all day how you shpeaked sho good!”

“From old Heidelberg English I learned once,” the German explained, with just pride. “And to America several times I visited *und* American I learned.”

“*Hoch!*” said Kirby, lifting his stein.

“*Prosit!*” said Von Sterner.

“Look at that.” And he pointed to the big, bass horn of the band, the giant tuba, whose opening was gaping at the ceiling. The fat little Dutchman who played it was all but lost in its midst. He was blowing with all his might, and his cheeks puffed out until it seemed they must burst. But, with all his blowing, only deep little grunts emanated from the instrument.

“Thash a horn!” said Kirby, knowingly.

“A tuba it’s!” corrected the German. At the same time his hand went out towards a plate on the table. The plate was full of pretzels, which had been somewhat drenched by the spilled beer. Von Sterner picked up a pretzel, looked about furtively to ascertain

that no one was watching, and then, taking careful aim, he tossed it towards the huge opening of the horn. He missed.

“Line and short!” Kirby muttered mechanically, as if he were directing artillery fire. And he picked up a pretzel himself. “Betsha I can throw more preshels into that horn than you. Watch.” He tossed the salty missile, then groaned. “Short, twenty degreesh to the-*hic*—right!” And quickly he tossed another. This one sailed gracefully into the opening, though the player did not notice it.

Von Sterner tried his luck again, and triumphed. Then they began in real earnest. They threw pretzel upon pretzel into that horn, and did it so slyly that nobody saw them. The conductor himself, who should have been the first one to notice it, was too busy playing his violin, and he never looked at his men anyway—he simply led them.

Before the plate was empty of pretzels, the big tuba began to develop strange symptoms. Its music became more and more muffled, and it sputtered and rattled ominously. The Dutchman who played it blew harder, and the rattling increased. A look of growing alarm spread over the man’s puffed-out face. But he went on blowing valiantly, until the number was over. Then, hastily he pulled out the mouthpiece, examined it minutely, scratched his head. Kirby and Von Sterner watched him eagerly. Slowly he picked up the horn, started to shake it, and then, at last, he turned it upside down. Out came a deluge of pretzels, which scattered all over the floor of the bandstand. The tuba player jumped as though he had been shot, and gave a loud exclamation. Kirby and Von Sterner roared boisterously, swaying in their chairs. And indeed, the spectacle was so ludicrous that many people at the other tables laughed too.

The conductor looked around furiously, and his eye fell on the German and the American. Their wild laughter, their general demeanor, and the fact that they had interfered with the band previously, told him at once that they were the culprits. Drawing himself up with a stiff indignation, he stepped down, marched over to their table, and began to sputter like a steam radiator on a bitter morning.

“Whatsha matter with him?” Kirby wanted to know.

“I think he doesn’t like pretzels us to throw in the horn,” Von Sterner replied, and then addressed the conductor politely, in German. The conductor sputtered some more. Veins stood out on the Dutchman’s temples, and his face kept getting redder.

“Maybe he’sh sore!” Kirby suggested. “He hash a nerve! Hish mushick ish no good anywaysh! Let’sh give ’em better mushick!” And, uncertainly he got to his feet. Then, at the top of his lungs, he bellowed forth:

*“Oh, the Dutch company,  
Ish the worst company  
That ever came over  
From old Germany”*

Von Sterner suddenly rose too, and, putting his arm around Kirby’s shoulder, joined in the song. The conductor almost suffered a fit of apoplexy. He stood there, speechless with rage, his face purple. The majority of people in the place, however, were tolerantly good-natured. They listened to the two men, though very few knew a word of English, and smiled or shrugged. And Kirby and Von Sterner went on, with ever-increasing confidence:

*“There’s the Amsterdam Dutch,  
And the Rotterdam Dutch,  
And the Baarlzdam Dutch,  
And the——”*

Here there came a rude interruption. It was the proprietor of the Casino himself, a squat, fat little man with a Van Dyke beard, who suddenly confronted them. He too began to sputter furiously. What he said was terse, and to the point. He told Von Sterner that he and Kirby must clear out at once, that such rowdyism could not be tolerated in a refined place like the Casino. Von Sterner argued with drunken eloquence, begged him to let the two stay, but the proprietor was not moved. He kept right on sputtering, repeating that they must get out.

“I don’t know what he’sh shaying!” Kirby said, grimly. “But if he doeshn’t shut up, shomething tellsh me hish whiskers will he pulled off!” And, joyously, his hand darted out towards the fat little man’s Van Dyke. But his eyes were just a little bleary, and he missed by a mile.

The proprietor backed away, and his fury increased. He said he was going to call the police. This threat did not fail to bring a pang of alarm to Von Sterner, drunk though he was. He remembered what the burgomaster had warned the two of them—that if they didn’t behave they’d have to spend their internment behind bars. And if they were found drunk—

With clumsy haste, the German dug into his pocket and pulled out a wad of bills. These he stuffed into the astonished proprietor’s hands. The effect was magical.

The Dutchman suddenly changed to a polite, servile person with an oily smile on his countenance. Of course the gentlemen could remain, but, if they didn't mind, would they kindly try to act just a little more—er—dignified? Von Sterner agreed to this with profuse gratitude. The proprietor then turned to the band conductor, who still stood paralysed by rage, and told him harshly to go back and play, and not to molest these customers. The conductor reluctantly obeyed, and then the proprietor himself, after expressing the hope that Kirby and Van Sterner found everything to their satisfaction, went away.

"He I fixed!" Von Sterner told Kirby triumphantly. "Now here we can stay, and out we will not be thrown." Kirby nodded, but then an expression of disgust came over his face.

"Shay, thish place givesh me a pain!" he said. "I don't like thish place."

"It I like neither," Von Sterner agreed with him. "Why here we are staying? Let's home go."

"Shure, let'sh go home!" Kirby exclaimed enthusiastically.

Von Sterner called the waiter, they paid the bill, and started out. But all the beer they had consumed seemed to have run down into their feet. They lurched and staggered, swaying, all but failing. The ground beneath them seemed to be rolling like a stormy sea, while the strings of lanterns were flying all over the place, see-sawing and blinking.

"Shay," Kirby said, sympathetically. "You're shtaggering a little. Let me help you."

"I all right am," Von Sterner said. "But unsteady you are on your feet. You will I help."

And, moved by the same altruistic spirit, they threw their arms about one another's shoulders, and tried to help one another out. The result was that they were all the more unsteady, for each was pulling the other in his direction. The people stared at them as they went careening and lurching out, colliding with tables, tripping over each other's feet.

HOW they found their way back to the hotel they never knew. It was just drunkard's luck. They staggered into the unobtrusive building, singing plaintively:

*"There's the Amsterdam Dutch,  
And the Rotterdam Dutch,  
And the Baarlzdam Dutch,  
And the other dam' Dutch!"*

At the foot of the stairway they halted. The stairs

were narrow, too narrow for the two of them to go up side by side, in the position they were. The problem perplexed them.

"There'sh no room!" Kirby said furiously. "These'sh dam' Dutch don't know how to make shtairs."

"How up can we go?" Von Sterner asked.

They thought hard and long. At last Kirby had a bright idea.

"Lishten!" he shouted. "Well go up one at a time! Shee, Karl?"

"Yes, Timothy," replied Von Sterner.

"Shay, don't you call me-*hic*—Timothy!" Kirby warned, ominously. "I'll shrangle the firsh man who callsh me Timothy! You're my pal! You're my besht pal!"

"*Ja, sei sind mein kamerad!*" Von Sterner agreed.

"*Kamerad* hell! Who'sh ashking you to shurrender?"

As they spoke they were making a furious attempt to disengage themselves from each other's arms. The more they tried, the more hopelessly entangled they became. Finally, however, they managed to pry themselves apart, and started up the stairs, Kirby leading.

They climbed the steps on all fours, and went stumbling into their room. Somehow they found their beds, and they flopped upon them and almost at once fell into a tight sleep.

They were awakened the next morning by a familiar sound. A dispatch rider on a motorcycle was speeding through the town, and the staccato bark of his engine roused the two aviators from their sleep like a shock. Mechanically, both men rolled out of their beds, and blinking and cursing, walked dizzily across the room.

"Wake up, guys!" Kirby was saying, sleepily.

"The patrol's warming up! We gotta go up and plug ourselves a few Fritzes!"

Von Sterner was also muttering, giving orders, directing pilots.

"*Mein Albatross—schnell!*" he commanded.

Then the two walked right into each other, collided head-on. Both cursed, blinked some more, and, as they looked at each other, slowly a full consciousness of their surroundings dawned on them.

The sunlight was streaming through the windows, and it dazzled their eyes painfully. Both had a severe hangover. Kirby's head was throbbing as though two hammers were heating at his temples, and the taste of the beer in his mouth nauseated him, though it had seemed delicious only last night.

"Boy, but I feel like a wet rag!" the Mosquito groaned, as he went over to the basin, poured cold water from the pitcher, and doused his face and head.

"I don't feel so dry myself," stated Von Sterner, dismally. "We'd better go out and get some fresh air, or I'll suffocate."

They did go out, and went to a little cafe where they ordered black coffee. Gloomily, both feeling depressed and irritable, they sipped the hot beverage.

"Our last day in Baarlzdam," Von Sterner reminded Kirby. "To-morrow they take us to the interior." He sighed. "This internment business is not so good, I'm beginning to think. I feel already that I've been here for ages!"

"Me too. Gosh, I'd rather be back on the muddy 'drome, risking my neck, than here!"

"And to think that German territory lies only eight kilometers away." Von Sterner said, and now there was a faint undertone of excitement in his voice. He spoke softly, so as if to make sure of not being overheard, though he and Kirby were quite alone, the only other person in the place being the old woman who served them. "Eight kilometers to-day— but to-morrow, God knows how far! If only I could get through that border!"

"Well, why don't you make a try at it?" Kirby advised him "Once you get back, they'd be damned glad to keep you over there, and they'd manage to top the Dutch from raising a stink about it." He smiled, wistfully. "Believe me, if my lines were as near as yours, I wouldn't wait two seconds. But a hell of a lot of good it would do me to get through the border! I'd only land in German territory, and then I'd really be in a rotten fix!" He took another sip of coffee, then went on, as a new thought struck him. "If it's just on account of me that you're sticking here, forget it! We've been good pals, and I wouldn't feel at all bad if you bolted for it and left me behind."

"That's extremely decent of you," Von Sterner said, gratefully, "though makes it all the harder for me to consider going. Besides, there are numerous other reasons. This escaping business is no job for one man. Two, working together, might have a chance get through the barriers on the border—the lookouts and barbed wire and the other obstacles they have there. And even on the other side I'd run the chance of being shot by my own countrymen, for I bear no papers and have uniform. No, I wouldn't attempt it alone. If only you could come with my friend! If only—" He broke suddenly, his cup poised in the air, a strange gleam lighting his eyes. "By God, I have it! I have it—if only you're willing!"

"Willing to do what?" Kirby wanted know, his curiosity aroused. "Give the dope."

Let's finish this coffee and get back our room, where we can be sure of privacy. We don't want to take any chances."

"They went back, and found a red-faced chambermaid cleaning up the place. Impatiently they waited, walking around, shifting restlessly. Finally the maid went out. They locked the door, drew up chairs, and lit cigarettes.

Quietly, but in a voice which actually shook with tense excitement, Von Sterner told Kirby of his idea.

"You and I—we'll break through the border together, elude the Dutch and German guards stationed there. With both of us working, we ought to get through fast, before we're spotted. Through your help I'll be enabled to carry out my escape, and in return I'll enable you to carry out yours."

A look of puzzlement came over Kirby's features.

"How can you enable me to carry out mine?"

"Once I'm back among the men who know me and in my real position again as *oberst* of my squadron, I'll see that you get safely to your lines. I'll fly you over myself. See?"

Kirby leaned back in his chair, considered. His face clouded.

"I don't know about that," he said slowly. "It's not that I distrust you, but I can't help wondering if you'd really be able to carry out such an agreement. Over here, sitting and talking about it, it sounds fine, but when you're among your own countrymen, back in the war, things may look different." He smiled, half apologetically. "You see, you said yourself that you didn't believe in sport or chivalry in war."

"That's true," Von Sterner admitted. "But this is one time where I must make an exception. It's a sporting matter, and I'll play the game according to rule. I don't know how I can make you believe me, but you can have my word of honor—the honor of my family, who for six hundred years have never broken their tradition of keeping a trust." He smiled faintly. "And after all, my friend, you are not the only one who takes a chance. Do you realize that if I am caught sneaking into my territory with you as my accomplice, there is a nice chance for a case of espionage. If you should betray me—"

"What kind of a skunk do you think I am?" Kirby asked indignantly. "My family may not be six hundred years old but that doesn't make me a liar." Then he grinned "Damn you. I'll take you up on that. It's a go!"

"Good!"

And, solemnly, they shook hands.

"I feel much better now," said Von Sterner. "It certainly cheers one's spirits to think that soon he might be back with his comrades again."

"I can't say I feel so good," Kirby confessed. "I've got a hell of a long way to go, and besides, that beer is playing hide-and-go-seek with my stomach!"

"Well, look here, my friend, let me go out now and attend to the details of our preparation. You couldn't be of much help anyway, since you cannot speak to these Dutchmen. Ill try to get all the things we'll need, and then I'll return, and we'll lay our plans. Meanwhile you can lie down and rest up, so you'll feel better."

This seeming the most feasible idea, Kirby accepted it. Von Sterner left, and the Mosquito sank on the bed and was soon snoring blissfully.

HE DID not stir until Von Sterner awakened him. Then he sat up with a start, and he was feeling much better. The German was flushed and enthusiastic.

"I've worked out everything," he told Kirby. "I secured all the things we need, though I had to ransack the whole town, and bribe more than one unwilling Dutchman."

"I don't see what you could have gotten," Kirby said. "You don't seem to have anything with you."

"I hid the stuff in a little field, right next to a tree, because we can't run any chance of being caught with it. I got us two peasant costumes, which can pass either for Dutch or Belgian. They ought to enable us to go about pretty freely except at the border, where we cannot afford to be seen at all. We wouldn't have a chance in these civilian clothes—we'd be cropped before we got out of the town."

"Also, by bribing a shopkeeper, I secured two revolvers and cartridges, and I don't think the man will dare to betray us because I can always say he accepted a bribe. A blacksmith sold me a pair of heavy shears, with which we can cut barbed wire. And of course I got flashlights. Then, though we ought not to need any food during our journey, I got a few biscuits and some chocolate—also a couple of flasks of Schnapps."

"I've got to hand it to you!" Kirby said, with warm admiration. That's certainly doing things. And now, when do we start? Of course we must wait until dark, but it seems to me we oughtn't to try it too late, because peasants aren't supposed to be up at an unholy hour."

"You're right there, just as soon as it's dark." He reached into his pocket. "Now, here's a very valuable thing I've managed to secure." And he drew out a large

map of the Netherlands, which included just a fringe of Belgium. "We can work out our whole route on this, and I have a compass to guide us."

Kirby shook his head. "I don't know how the hell you do it!" he exclaimed.

Together, they sat down on Kirby's bed, and laid out the map between them. They studied it carefully.

"Here's Baarlzdam," Kirby said proudly and pointed out a scarcely discernible dot, close to the Belgian border. "I guess we landed somewhere over here the other day," and he signified the spot.

"Yes, and can go almost the same way we came. See this road—this little line here leading out of Baarlzdam? That goes straight to the border, and runs right on through Belgium. Now, we can follow the road until we get unhealthily close to the border. Then we'll have to sidetrack, go into this little forest here and see if we can find a lonely place in the line where we can break through without being seen. Of course we'll find lots of barbed wire, for the Dutch have everything fortified to prevent any possible invasion and also to stop spies from going into German territory. But we'll have to get through somehow."

"And then where do we go?" Kirby inquired anxiously.

"We must watch out for the German guards. I couldn't afford to be caught anyway because I'd have to do an awful lot of explaining, and might get into serious trouble with these fellows on the border. And, as I told you, if you and I are caught together, they'll immediately assume that you're a spy, for why else should an American be coming deliberately into an enemy territory from a neutral country. And I'll be held for espionage. Of course, once I'm back with my own crowd, such a thing could never happen, for they know well enough from my past record that I couldn't possibly be a traitor. But at the border, some thick-headed petty official who wants to display his importance might take it into his head to have the two of us shot at sunrise."

"Once we elude the German soldiers there we can come back to this same road, in Belgium now. We follow it a bit, and then branch off on another road which will take us straight to my 'drome at Bernle—a distance of some thirty kilometers. Perhaps we shall be able to 'borrow' some conveyance on the way, but at worst we ought to make Bernle by dawn. As Belgian peasants, we won't be stopped, unless we have already been spotted at the border, and the alarm given."

"As soon as we reach my 'drome, I shall have full

command of the situation, and I'll uphold my word about flying you across the lines. Now, how does that sound to you, my friend?"

"Sounds good enough," Kirby conceded. "And I don't see why it shouldn't work."

"It will—with luck," the German told him.

"Yes, with luck," Kirby echoed, thoughtfully.

And so duly, as night fell upon Baarlzdam, the two interned aviators walked quietly out of their room, descended the stairs, and strolled out onto the street with a leisurely demeanor, as if they were just going out to enjoy another evening. Outwardly they were calm and cool. But inwardly they were tense, apprehensive. As they walked down the main street, it seemed to them that every eye was staring at them with suspicion. A soldier policeman who passed them sent a pang of alarm through them. Their fears, however, were ridiculous, for there was nothing in their behavior that would have given anyone a hint of their intentions.

They came to the bridge, and crossed it. Then Von Sterner led Kirby off the main street, out of the metropolitan district, and they came to a small, secluded field. Here they paused.

Both noticed then, how dark the night was. There were clouds in the sky, and they shrouded the moon and stars from view. The blackness was intense, and there was a damp chill in the air.

"Here's the tree," Von Sterner was whispering, as he groped along the ground. "And here's all the stuff."

A second later a bright beam of light cut through the inky air, as he found a flashlight and turned it on. By its illumination, the two men took off their suits, and got into the rule peasant costumes—pantaloon, blouses, and little peaked hats, though they did not put on any wooden shoes. As they dressed, their ears were strained to catch the slightest sound, and they talked only in whispers. After all, suppose one of the Dutchmen whom Von Sterner had to bribe squealed on them, suppose they had been followed to this field?

Their dress completed, they stuffed all the articles into their pockets, with their revolvers in a handy position, and turned out the flash.

"We must walk in the dark," the German whispered. "All the peasants do. The road is easy to find. Are you all set?"

"Let's go," Kirby whispered back.

They groped their way through the darkness, and slowly their eyes became accustomed to it, and their vision clearer. They came to the road. There were

other peasants on it—going home from the town, and there were also soldiers on bicycles. With their hearts pounding, the two men mingled with the straggling crowd. They walked, briskly, yet not fast enough to betray the fact that they were in a hurry.

The number of people on the road began to lessen, and presently they were alone, tramping through the black night.

THE long, tiring hike to the border was uneventful, though fraught with suspense and anxiety. Often they were passed by wagons or bicycles, whose dim lamps seemed to be glaring spotlights which were trying to reveal them. Once a squad of Dutch cavalry came trotting by, and the soldiers glanced at the two men in passing. Kirby and Von Sterner, sure that now they were going to be caught, held their breaths. But the cavalry went on with serene indifference, and the beat of horse-hoofs on the road died down in the distance.

But these little incidents were nothing compared to the breathless dangers which faced them when, finishing their long journey, they came to the border.

Belgium—it lay ahead of them, scarcely six hundred yards from the spot where they had come to a halt on the road. They could see the outposts there with lights on their conical roofs. And they knew there were soldiers at those outposts, soldiers who did not intend to let anyone pass, unless he had the proper credentials.

"We've got to be very careful," Von Sterner whispered. "We can't tell now where they are—the border patrols. We'll have to take a chance and go through these trees on our right, working our way far from this road."

"Let's go, then," Kirby replied impatiently. "Let's not be standing here. Some of these outpost guys might take it into their heads to stroll this way! Come on!"

Cautiously they slipped into the woods, and groped their way through the trees and brush. The ground was rough and full of swamps, into which they sank up to their ankles, and got their feet full of mud and slime. When they had gone well into the thick forest the German took out his flashlight, though he made sure to train it only on the ground beneath them. Kirby, in turn, took out his compass, and used his own flash to read it from time to time. They were walking due north now, at a right angle to the border.

When they had gone some distance, they changed their course, and headed due east—straight towards the border-line. Now their nerves began to stretch taut,

and their hearts pounded, as they drew ever closer to the frontier. Would they run into a patrol? Would some hidden lookout spot them? Tense, alert, they moved on. The cracking of a twig beneath their shoes made them start like frightened rabbits, and the weird, shadows in the trees caused by the dim glow from their flashes wrought havoc with their imagination. They jumped at the occasional screech of an owl, the croaking of a frog, and all the other usual sounds of nocturnal forest life. From time to time they halted, stopped dead, certain that they saw something moving, or heard approaching footsteps. The strain of it was getting worse and worse. They were almost afraid to whisper now.

Then, with startling suddenness, their path was blocked by a seemingly impenetrable barrier.

Barbed wire! It was strewn from tree to tree in a tortuous maze, twisted and entangled. The first layer of it formed a high fence which was up to their necks, though the other layers ahead were lower. But there was a literal sea of it, spreading before them.

They had reached the border. On the other side of these barbed wire entanglements lay German Belgium.

The two men halted about ten feet from the wire. They turned out their flashes, stood listening, looking about. Not a sign. Furtively they moved closer to the fence, went right up to it. They tried to peer through the entanglements, but there was nothing but inky murk in there.

Von Sterner voice whispered into Kirby's ear, "There doesn't seem to be anyone here," he said "The wire must stretch over a width of at least twenty feet, and this first layer is high, but I doubt if we could find any place along the line which would be easier."

"We'd better try to get through here." was Kirby's suggestion. "If we go prowling around to look for another place we might run into those guards. Let's snap into it! Think there are any men on the German side? It would be damned lousy to break our necks going through only to land right in the midst of some Hein—Germans."

"I think we'd hear them moving about if they were there," Von Sterner reassured him. He was taking out the shears. "Have to take a chance and put on some light again."

Kirby lit the flash, but kept its beam shielded with the palm of his hand. They waited a few seconds to see if it would attract attention. Nothing happened.

Carefully, Kirby trained the shielded light on the first layer of barbed wire. The German started to work. Suddenly a grunt of pain broke from him.

"My hand!" he whispered. "God, but these barbs are sharp? Watch out for them!"

"Better let me take those shears," Kirby told him. "There's a trick to this business, and I think I know how to do it."

Von Sterner readily agreed and handed him the shears. The German held the light. Deftly Kirby got a piece of wire between the blades of the cutters. *Snip!* The wire parted neatly. He went on, and his speed and efficiency increased with each cut. In a few moments, he had made a nice slice in that first layer, almost down to the ground. Quickly, but taking pains not to cut their hands, the two men bent the broken wires out, opened a gap. They squirmed into it, though their clothes tore, and they received several scratches.

Now entanglements were lower, up to their hips, but were so densely laid that they could not simply climb over them. Hastily, Kirby set to work once more.

Progress was slow, painful. They had to tear their way through inch by inch, and every now and then they stopped, hastily turning off the flash, as they thought they heard something. God, if they were caught here, in the midst of this labyrinth of wire, they'd be helpless, shot like rats. The thought of this grim peril was enough to rouse them to feverish impatience, yet they dared not hurry up their work for fear of bugling and getting entangled in the steel-fanged network. Even as it was, they kept getting cut and scratched, and their clothes were being torn to shreds.

It was a nerve-racking procedure, and the suspense was almost unendurable. Neither spoke a word, and in the tense silence the snip-snip of Kirby's cutters seemed loud and betraying. They could hear one another's labored breathing, and the tearing of their clothes on the wire.

But they were getting through—getting through slowly but steadily. They were getting closer and closer to that final layer of wire, the layer which marked the beginning of German territory. For the stuff had been laid there by the Dutch in their own land. In the furtive flashes of their light, they saw that final barrier moving nearer, nearer. Their pulses quickened, their blood raced with excitement. They longed to just throw everything to the winds and try to go leaping and hurdling their way over, but they realized the folly of such an act, and took their time. Seven feet now to go, and nothing moving out there. *Snip! Snip!* Six and a half feet. *Snip! Snip! Snip!* Six feet—the wild bark of a dog!



Out of the night, breaking the tense stillness, rose the wild bark of a dog!

The two men jumped as though they had been shot. Kirby's hand froze in the act of cutting another piece of wire. Von Sterner gave a little gasp, and stifled out the light. The dog was barking furiously now, and presently other dogs seemed to be joining in, until they were howling and barking in a furious chorus. They seemed to be frightfully close, though they must have been tied, for they did not come any nearer.

"Watchdogs!" Von Sterner whispered, with frenzied alarm. "They've heard us—or gotten our scent. *Gott!*" he breathed. "We must hurry, my friend, hurry or all is lost. We must get out of here—it's only a little more

"Don't turn on that light!" Kirby warned him, almost hysterically "Well be spotted. I'll work in the dark. I'll—"

He stopped short, chilled to the very marrow by a prolonged, blood-curdling wail somewhere in the forest behind them a wail which rose slowly to a piercing shriek. Sirens! The dogs, hearing the alarm, also began to wail, and the combined sound was ghastly horrifying, "God, we must get through!" A strangled sob shook Von Sterner's voice. "Hurry my friend, please! Hurry!"

But Kirby needed no persuasion. Frantically he was working in the darkness, cutting away, ignoring the barbs which dug into his hands and arms He worked, with that blind desperation which enables a man to perform the impossible. Clumsily, madly, he was forcing open the last barrier that lay ahead of them.

NOW, suddenly, the forest which had been so quiet began to seethe with noisy life. Whistles pierced the air, and the shouts of men came from different parts of the woods. There were sounds of scuffling feet, of clanking rifles. And through it all the sirens shrieked out their complaint. The din and confusion was becoming more and more intense every second. It seems like some horrible and fantastic nightmare to the two men who squirmed and twisted their way through the wire as fast as they could.

"Only a couple of feet more!" Von Sterner was whispering now "Only a couple of feet—if we can get out before the Germans on the other side are also brought to the scene."

"Well make it!" Kirby assured him, with gripping determination. "Well make it! We've got to!" and he redoubled his efforts. He heard the sound of running men coming his way. The dogs, straining on their

leashes in the general direction of Kirby and Von Sterner, must have put the Dutch soldiers on the track. The two aviators saw little flickering beams from their flashlights, down along the wire entanglement. They were searching hastily, combing the vicinity, and they were shouting out into the darkness in an effort to stop the escape of the unseen quarry. Yells of "*Halte!*" reached the ears of the two men, but they ignored the command, and struggled on forward. *Snip! Snip!* Kirby kept cutting. There was only a little more now.

Then, to their horror, a great ribbon of light suddenly came stabbing through the inky blackness, stabbing right down through the trees from above. A searchlight—from some high lookout post! Its powerful beam was swinging right on to the barbed wire entanglements, which were revealed in every detail to the glare. Back and forth waved that white ribbon, up and down along the wires, like the tentacle of a huge monster groping for its prey. The two men held their breaths as they saw it swishing ever closer. A feeling of helplessness gripped them. There was nothing they could do to stop this deadly spotlight from ferreting them out, revealing them to their pursuers. Even now it was working towards them, swing down the lane of wire right in their direction.

Instinctively both men crouched as it came steadily nearer. Kirby ceased cutting. They remained deathly still, motionless, as if petrified. Then the blinding glare was right upon them. But the operator of the light evidently didn't see, for the beam passed on, and they were in the darkness again.

But though the operator did not see, the soldiers nearby did. The two men heard them running right over to their part of the wire, and smaller beams of white stabbed out at them from portable, searchlights. They were seen! The Dutchmen were shouting at them to come out and surrender honorably, or be shot.

Then a wave of crazy recklessness swept Kirby. He seized Von Sterner's arm, shouted wildly. "Come on, old boy! We can make it! To hell with them! We can hurdle this little bit of wire now and get through! There's no one on the other side yet! As he spoke he scrambled to his feet. "Jump for it!"

"God help us!" cried the German, as he too sprang up.

Madly, side by side, they started to hurdle the wire. At once a series of shrill reports shattered the air behind them, and a fusillade of bullets whined over their heads. They ignored the shots, and jumped, hopped, stumbled over that wire. The skin was torn

from their legs; they were bleeding in several places, but they went on struggling through. Kirby was getting over now, just a little ahead of Von Sterner. The Mosquito had one of his legs clear of the wire, in German territory, and he was lifting the other over.

Suddenly he heard a cry of pain break from his companion, saw the shadowy figure behind him drop to the ground, right in the wire. A pang of alarm went through the Mosquito. Had Von Sterner been hit? Had they gotten his German comrade?

"I'm caught!" the German's voice suddenly came to his ears above the sharp *crack-crack* of rifles. "My foot—it's tangled in the wire!" And Kirby heard him struggling to extricate himself, heard him groan with agony as the sharp barbs only cut him deeper.

"Sit tight!" the Mosquito instructed him. "Don't try to move—you'll only get yourself entangled more. I'm coming!"

And, without thought of self, he was climbing back into that snare of wire, climbing back as firmly resolved to save Von Sterner as he had been to kill him, only yesterday. A moment, and he was beside the trapped man. The Dutch soldiers were blazing away mercilessly and only the fact that they could not see their targets clearly saved the two men from instant death.

Von Sterner was half-sprawled on his back, his left foot securely bound by two twisted pieces of wire. Quickly, Kirby got out his shears, bent down. Bullets were zipping all around them, ricocheting from the tree trunks, sending splinters flying. The great search-light was swishing close again. Kirby groped furiously in the darkness with his shears. The searchlight was creeping up. If they were caught in its glare this time, their goose would be cooked. Kirby must hurry, hurry! He found the wire, and his cutters closed on it. *Snip! Snip! Snip!* Roughly, he was pulling Von Sterner to his feet.

"I'm all right!" the German assured him, gratefully. "Go ahead—I can make it this time!"

But even as they started, the searchlight found them, and its dazzling glare blinded them once more. There came such a terrific hail of lead that both were sure they were done for. Now the fact that they were moving, leaping over that wire, saved them, threw off the Dutchmen's aim. They got over, got over by the skin of their teeth.

As soon as they were across the boundary line, in German territory, the Dutch soldiers ceased firing at them. The two men paused, and drew their first breath.

But it was a short breath. For now a new danger suddenly confronted them. The Dutch, with the two fleeing men beyond their jurisdiction, at once spread the alarm to the Germans guarding the other side of the fence. Immediately the hellish commotion began all over again, as this part of the woods also became alive with noise and activity.

They heard an ominous movement in the trees to their right, and they began to run, galloped wildly, with Von Sterner gasping from the pain of his cuts. Again whistles pierced the air about them, and they heard the shouts of their pursuers. They rushed on. Suddenly, to their surprise, they were out of the forest, emerging on an open meadow. And as they came out, they saw a crowd of shadowy figures running to head them off, running with leveled rifles. Boche soldiers.

"This way, my friend!" shouted Von Sterner, and Kirby followed blindly, trusting the other man implicitly even though they were now in German territory.

They fairly flew across that field, leaping over puddles and cinches. The rifles of the pursuing crowd began to crack, and the whine of bullets was in their ears again. Suddenly the two men tumbled involuntarily into a deep, muddy trench. It was one of the many trenches which the Germans had dug in case they decided to invade Holland. It was empty and the two men crouched in it, waiting. They heard the rush of footsteps going past, heard them stop, as the Germans, losing sight of their quarry, began to hunt about confusedly. The din was increasing, as the alarm kept spreading all along the line. From everywhere came sounds of movement, shouts, whistles.

"Good night!" Kirby whispered. "They've got the whole Hun army after us!" Then he started, realizing suddenly that he was addressing his remarks to one of these Huns. As they had been teaming together, working shoulder to shoulder, he had forgotten completely that Von Sterner was a German. And if Von Sterner had been lying to him about not wishing to be seen by his own countrymen, if the German betrayed him——

He cursed himself for even dreaming of such a thought. Yet, somehow, he could not forget the words which Von Sterner had uttered in the beer-garden last night, the words which had made him feel so uncomfortable: "I cannot regard war as a friendly little game, a playful match where one must be chivalrous and obey rules of etiquette."

"They seem to be moving away from here," Von Sterner's voice broke in on his thoughts, and he felt ashamed. "We shall have to take a chance now and run for it again, though God only knows how we can get through."

"Listen," Kirby whispered, as if to atone for allowing himself to feel any distrust. "I don't want to get you in trouble. Suppose we separate. I'll get away somehow, and at least they won't catch us together."

"No indeed." Von Sterner replied, insistently. "You wouldn't have a chance alone, in this strange territory. I am not a man to go back on my word of honor, the honor of the Von Sterners, who for six hundred years—"

"All right, then, let's go!" Kirby broke in, with slight impatience. "I hear those Jerries coming back! Hurry!"

TOGETHER they clambered out of the trench, and were running across the field again. There did not seem to be any pursuit, though the surrounding territory was fairly bustling with the sounds of the hunt. The two men raced on through the rough field.

The road now! Abruptly, they came to it, and, led by Von Sterner, they started rushing down the highway.

"If we can get far enough," the German panted, "we might pass for peasants again, but we mustn't be stopped here—or they'll question us at once, and arrest us! Come, my friend!"

Before they had gone a hundred yards, their ears picked up a new sound behind them, a sound which filled them with cold dread. It was the beat of galloping hoofs on the road.

"Uhlans!" Von Sterner gasped, in horror. "They're after us! We are lost!"

Furtively, as those hoof beats rose steadily louder, the two men jerked their heads from side to side, looking for some place where they could duck into hiding. But there were only flat, open fields on either side of them, fields where they could easily be run down and caught.

"I think there's a forest ahead!" Von Sterner cried. "If we can make it—hide in the trees until these Uhlans pass—"

They redoubled their efforts, burling themselves forward. They ran as only desperate men can, faster and faster. Somehow, they got their second wind, and bore up. But they were fast becoming exhausted. The strain of their perilous experiences, combined with the effects of their drinking party the night previous, was beginning to get them. They were worn out, and their

nerves were stretched to the breaking point.

Louder and louder came the galloping beat of horse hoofs. *Cippity-clip! Clippity-clip! Clippity-clip!* They were gaining rapidly, gaining because they could travel two feet to every one of the fleeing men. The two began to despair of ever getting through. The forest was now just discernible ahead of them, but it was still a long way off. Still they rushed on. rushed on while the horsemen came closer, closer.

Then suddenly the German gasped: "Look! A dispatch station!" As he ran he pointed to a dimly lighted shack in the road ahead, a shack whose occupants they could see through the windows. Standing outside of the shack, ready to go racing off whenever needed, were two motorcycles with side cars. "Fate is with us!" the German cried, as they were running closer to the spot. "If only those men in the house don't see—"

"I can't handle those things so well," Kirby panted, dubiously.

"I can run them with my eyes shut?" Von Sterner assured him. He was slowing down now, as they neared the shack, and Kirby followed suit. "We must work swiftly, but make no noise. Into the side car my friend, and I'll wheel it out and get it going!"

"All right, but—" He broke off in horror. For, looking back, he could see the horsemen now—a crowd of dark, silhouettes which bobbed in the murk. They were right at hand, coming, coming. "Hurry, for cripes sake!" the Mosquito pleaded.

But they couldn't rush now, for fear of arousing the men in that shack. Cautiously, they moved towards the first motorcycle. The Uhlans were so close now that they stood in bold relief, and their trim helmets, with flat squares on top of their spikes, gleamed in the darkness. With swift agility, Kirby swung into the side car of the machine, and the German started to wheel it silently out onto the road. But even as he wheeled it away, the door of the shack burst open with a bang, and a gray-clad figure came rushing out, a Luger in his hand. Frantically, the German was throwing his leg over the saddle of the motorcycle, shoving the machine forward. A spurt of livid flame spat from the muzzle of the soldier's revolver and a bullet sang by. Furiously, Kirby started to jerk out his own pistol, but Von Sterner seeing him, stopped him with a rough gesture.

"Don't fire, my friend!" he warned, as he was pedaling the motorcycle furiously along—for in those days motorcycles had to be started by pedals. "Don't

shoot at my countrymen!” Cursing, Kirby lowered his pistol, while the man who was chasing them fired again. Simultaneously the Uhlans pulled up to the shack, galloped forward to surround the two men before they could get started.

But then, with a triumphant explosion, the engine of the motorcycle burst into life. Von Sterner turned the rubber handlebar, and gave her gas. With bullets cracking all about them, the two men were off, streaking down the road, faster and faster, with the wind inflating their torn but baggy clothes like a balloon.

In a moment they had out-distanced the Uhlans, gotten way beyond their reach. But now, jerking his head back, Kirby saw the bright headlight of that other motorcycle, which was speeding in pursuit. It was closing closer.

“Give her gas!” he shouted to Von Sterner, above the unmuffled bark of the engine. “Give her all she can take! Those guys are coming fast!”

Von Sterner turned the handle further around, and now they were fairly flying along that road, sending up a geyser of dust in their trail. With wonderful skill, the German, not daring to turn on his headlight, was keeping to the blurred stretch of highway. On they rushed, hell-bent, skidding around guns which lifted Kirby and his side car high into the air. But soon that headlight followed them. They could not seem to widen the gap between themselves and the pursuing motorcycle.

“Hurry, man, hurry!” Kirby yelled. “They’re putting on more speed all the time!”

Von Sterner leaned forward over the handle-bars, fought to get more speed out of the little engine. Now they were going through the forest to which they had been trying to flee before. The roar! went right through the trees, and the darkness here was even more intense, making it increasingly difficult for Von Sterner to keep to the highway. But he did not slow down. The motorcycle went on hurtling forward, bouncing over bumps, threatening to go skidding right into those trees. The pursuing machine followed stubbornly, now creeping closer, now falling back a bit, but never giving the two men a chance to get away from it.

“More gas!” Kirby kept demanding. “More gas, man? If—”

He broke off, as the shrill *rat-tat-tat* of a machine gun rose behind them. The man in the sidecar must have brought out a Spaadaus, and fastened it in front

of him, set it working. *Rat-tat-tat! Rat-tat-tat!* Bullets screamed wildly, tearing up the road behind Kirby and Von Sterner.

“They’re getting our range!” the German shouted, despairingly, trying vainly to get further away from the pursuer. “They’re trying to mow us down! God—”

*Bang!* The shattering report almost made them jump out of their seats. For a second, Von Sterner tried to go right ahead, not knowing what was the matter. But instantly the motorcycle was slowing up jerkily, lurching and careening. There was a prolonged hissing noise, then a sound of flapping and groaning. And Kirby was yelling frenziedly: “Our rear tire! They plugged it! Blow-out!”

Von Sterner cursed savagely, as he was forced to throttle down more and more, and their speed kept slackening. A glance behind them, and they saw their pursuers coming upon them with a breathless rush. The men in that motorcycle had stopped shooting, so certain were they that they had stopped their quarry. On they came.

“We’d better leave this damn thing and run into the trees!” Kirby was saying.

“Just a second!” Von Sterner yelled back. “If we can get around that bend right ahead, they won’t see us. We can wheel this motorcycle into the trees, and try’ to fix it!”

He struggled furiously to make the machine bear up, get to the turn. The pursuers were so close that the beam of their headlights was upon Kirby and Von Sterner. In a second they’d be there!

Then the crippled motorcycle was rounding the turn, and they shook that light off. Von Sterner was jumping to the ground, holding onto the handlebars.

“Be quick, my friend” he urged.

KIRBY was out of the sidecar in a flash. With clumsy haste, they pushed the machine around, dragged and shoved it over the ditch on the side of the road, and onto a path they found in the trees. Nor were they a moment too soon. Just as they got in the shelter of the trees, they heard the other motorcycle roar past, heard its three-wheel squeal on the road as the driver applied his brakes when he suddenly discovered the fugitives were nowhere to be seen ahead.

Meanwhile, Kirby and Von Sterner, maneuvering their machine between trees, were going deeper into the woods. They stopped, listened. Nobody seemed to be on their trail, though they could still hear the din of searching parties in the distance.

Cautiously, they turned on the headlight of their machine, to pick their way through. They were looking for some clearing, where they would have room to repair their tire. They found one suddenly, came upon it. It was a big stretch of field and marsh, surrounded by trees.

They lit their flashes, and leaned over to look at the tire. One glance was enough to crush all their hopes. The shoe was shot to shreds, and the tattered doth and rubber dangled from it grotesquely.

"We could never hope to fix that," Von Sterner sighed. "Even though we have all the supplies in the tool chest."

"What can we do then?" Kirby asked, shaking his head.

"God knows!" Von Sterner groaned. "Ah, but I'm tired! Let's try to snatch a moment's rest."

They did. They sat down on the grass, and took out their flasks.

"*Hoch!*" said Kirby, in a toneless voice.

"*Prosit!*" Von Sterner muttered. They drank. The liquor warmed them, put new life into them. But even while they drank they heard the infernal sounds of the hunt again—the sounds which reminded them that they were fugitives.

"They're combing the whole neighborhood for us!" Von Sterner said. "Surely they must find us sometime, unless we move on."

Kirby swore softly. Then again he voiced his former suggestion. "Look here," he said, "things have gotten complicated in an unexpected way. I'm sure if you just forget me, and let them find you alone, you can explain who you are and——"

"You are wasting your breath, my friend," Von Sterner interrupted. "I explained all this to you before. My family for six hundred years——"

"For the luvva Pete, leave your family out of this!" Kirby pleaded. "They might be five thousand years old, but that won't do you any good now. I'm releasing you from your promise, so you needn't feel you're breaking your word."

"Well, even if I did leave you now, it would be too late. I've been seen here, and though I might convince them of my identity. I'd have a most difficult time explaining why I should be stealing motorcycles and eluding my own, countrymen. No, I cannot afford to be discovered until I reach my 'drome. Once I'm back, no one will have to know that I was the one who raised such a rumpus at the border, and escaped with a man whom the Dutch can prove was an American. And so,

we'll just stick together——" He stopped short, drawing in his breath sharply.

"*What's that?*"

Both listened. From the distance, a familiar sound drifted to their ears, a sound which they could not possibly mistake. *Mmmmmmmmmmmmm*. A steady, insistent drone, somewhere above. It was rising louder.

"An airplane?" Von Sterner exclaimed. "And by its sound, it must be an Allied ship!"

They got to their feet hastily, turned their heads skywards, peering up into the murk. For a while they could see nothing. Then Kirby gave an excited cry: "There it is! See it up there?"

It's a big job, too—looks like a Handley Page!"

And he pointed towards a blurred, bird-like silhouette, which was just a little blacker than the sky itself. Red sparks drifted from its exhausts. It was flying quite low, but was several miles from the two men. It seemed to be right over the borderline.

Kirby was straining his eyes to see it more clearly. There were running lights on its wing tips. He could just about make them out, and as he looked at them——

An electric shock of incredulous amazement passed through him. For a second he thought he was dreaming. But then, as he realized that it was indeed the truth, he became almost hysterical with wild joy. He danced about, clapping the surprised German on the back, trying to drag him around in a clumsy, gleeful waltz.

"Orange lights!" he was shouting crazily. "Orange lights! See 'em on the wing tips? See 'em, Karl?"

Von Sterner stared at him as though he were a madman.

"And what is there so extraordinary about orange lights?" he demanded.

"Our color!" Kirby went on shouting. "Our own private shade, by which we can tell one another at night! Why, you poor nit-wit, my pals are flying that ship! Shorty and Trav! Those two hell-fired devils are looking for me! Can you beat it? They've heard I was interned, and probably they came over last night and to-night, flying all around the border, because they know I'm crazy enough to try to escape!" He laughed, with nervous excitement, his face flushed, his eyes shining. "What do they care about international law! By God, I'm surprised they're not even trying to pick me up in Holland itself! They must have been warned not to cross that border!" Roughly, he seized the German's arm. "We've got to signal them, Karl, old baron! We're got to make them land—and right on this field!"

Von Sterner did not seem to share his violent enthusiasm, but the German was a good sport.

"I'll help you all I can," he promised. "Now how can we signal them?"

Without stopping to reply, Kirby was wheeling the motorcycle out onto the field. Quickly, he turned its pivoted headlight up towards the distant plane.

"We're taking a risk," Von Sterner warned. "The men on the ground might see us."

"To hell with them!" Kirby shouted wildly. "I've got to bring that ship down!" And, recklessly, he turned on the light, sent its beam shooting skyward. He began to blink out signals, turning it off and on, using Morse.

"K - I - R - B - Y," he spelled out, over and over again. "K - I - R - B - Y"

But the men in the plane evidently did not see. The big ship simply kept cruising about, up and down. Kirby cursed, and continued signaling. Minutes passed, and still there was no sign of recognition from the plane.

"I'm afraid the light is not powerful enough," Von Sterner said, sympathetically. "But it's powerful enough to betrays us to those on the ground. We must be careful, or else we'll find ourselves surrounded any minute."

"I've got to make them see!" Kirby said, with increasing anxiety. Again he spelled out the signals in flashes.

And then, to his despair, he saw the big plane turning towards the west—towards the Allied lines. Slowly, but steadily, it was moving away. Carn and Travis, thinking they had failed tonight just as they had failed on the previous evening, were heading home. Desperately, Kirby racked his brain with conjectures. Suddenly a wild idea seized him, an idea which seemed fantastic and ridiculous, yet there was a chance—a fleeting chance at least—that it might work.

"Get wood and leaves!" he was shouting to Von Sterner. "Hurry! I'm building a fire."

"It will give us away, my friend!" the German insisted. "Think what you are doing."

Already Kirby was hunting furiously, with his pocket flash, picking up sticks and dry leaves. And Von Sterner, because he had promised to help his companion, fell in with his plans, also gathered inflammable materials.

THE plane was moving further and further away, but it was still close enough to catch any strong signals from the ground. Working as he had never worked before, Kirby commenced laying out his sticks and

leaves in a peculiar pattern. In fact, he was innr.nv printed letters—two of them.

"T. K." were the letters, which he made large and wide.

"My initials!" he explained, ought to get them!" As he spoke, he rushed back to the motorcycle, took out the gas-pump, and in a second had sucked it full of gas. He came back. Quickly he squirted the stuff all over the leaves and wood. He got out his matches and touched the stuff off. With a hiss, the flames leaped upwards. And in a moment, Kirby's initials were blaz- etted on that field, in livid red.

They only remained in fiery relief for a few seconds, and then the flames began to sink and die. But during those few seconds Kirby watched the plane. With almost prayerful hope. If Carn and Travis didn't see—

They did see! Suddenly, the shadowy form of the plane was turning, banking widely, it was heading his way. With a shout of frenzied relief, Kirby once more commenced signaling messages with the light of his motorcycle. The orange lights on the wing tips of the plane blinked in enthusiastic response. Von Sterner stood by, silent and a bit depressed, as he watched all these procedures.

"VV-h-e-r-e t-h-e h-e-l-l a-r-e y-o-u?" Kirby's comrades were signaling. "A-r-e y-o-u a-l-o-n-e?"

"C-o-m-e d-o-w-n y-o-u b-u-m-s!" Kirby signaled back, as the plane kept coming nearer overhead. "I-m a-l-o-n-e a-n-d i-f y-o-u c-a-n't l-a-n-d h-e-r-e y-o-u'r-e l-o-u-s-y!"

In a few seconds, the giant ship was turning, heading into the wind to glide down. Kirby swung his light across the field to show them the ground. Down came the big ship, its motor throttled and the wind shrilling through its wires.

Von Sterner smiled faintly. "Well, my friend," he said. "I've upheld my words as best I can. You'll get away now, if you hurry. I must say good-bye, and try my best to get back to my 'drome, though I don't know how I'll elude the men down here." Even as he spoke, sounds in the forest came to his ears. The Germans must have seen the plane coming down, or the fire, and they were hurrying to the spot. "You must take off before they come, my friend," Von Sterner warned, and then held out his hand. "Well, goodbye and good luck to—"

"Just a minute," Kirby stopped him, the Mosquito's voice had a strange note in it. "You're not leaving me by a long shot." His eyes went down the dark field, where the big plane was already settling. "You're coming along!"

Von Sterner stiffened, then stared at him with incredulous surprise.

“My friend—are you going back on your word?” he demanded, his tone hurt, and his muscles becoming tense. “Are you going to betray me when I promised—”

“Stand still!” Kirby ordered him, as he saw the German make a furtive move. The Mosquito had whipped out his pistol, and he poked it into the other man’s stomach, “Don’t move!”

Dumbfounded, the German obeyed. The plane had landed now, was rolling across the ground. Kirby, keeping Von Sterner covered, forced the German to march towards it. Meanwhile the sounds of approaching soldiers in the forest was increasing.

The plane, a big, four-place Handley-Page with twin engines, rolled slowly to a stop. Two men sprang from its cockpits. Shorty Carn and the lanky Travis. They rushed over to Kirby, and danced about their leader crazily.

“Hello, guys!” Kirby greeted them. Let’s cut the demonstration and get out before those Jerries come.”

“Who’s this fellow you have with you?” demanded Travis, in his familiar drawl.

“You’d never guess it. He’s Von Sterner—the Killer himself!”

The German winced, but the two Mosquitoes shouted with joy.

“That’s a capture all right!” Shorty Carn exclaimed. “You’ll get a D.S.C. for it!”

“Let’s go!” Kirby repeated. “Those guys are coming!”

It was only a matter of minutes, before all of them were in the plane. Travis took the controls, and Carn sat next to him. Kirby sat in the rear with Von Sterner. The German was silent, miserably depressed.

Travis gave her the throttle, and with a thunderous roar from its twin engines, the monstrous plane began to move. The eldest Mosquito ruddered around, heading back into the wind. As they taxied down the field, a crowd of Boche came swarming out of the trees, rushing up with leveled rifles. Defiantly, Travis kept going, opening his throttle wider and wider. The big plane gathered up speed, sluggishly, Bullets began to whistle around it, but the Germans jumped in confused terror from its path. And Travis got it off safely, climbed it away from that field.

At three thousand feet they leveled off, and headed due west. The first furtive gleams of dawn were just appearing, and the sky behind them was turning pink. Smoothly they droned on, the big plane rocking and swaying lazily.

Kirby looked around at Von Sterner, who was slumped disconsolately in the seat beside him.

“Whats the matter, Karl, old boy?” inquired the Mosquito, shouting above the roar of the engine.

The German flushed with rage, thinking that his former friend was waxing sarcastic.

“I guess I should have known better than to trust you.” Von Sterner snarled in his ear. “I didn’t believe what they said about the Yanks being *schwein-hunde*, but now I see it’s true!”

“That’ll do, baron!” Kirby snapped, but there was a twinkle in the Mosquito’s eye. “Of course, you shouldn’t have believed me. My family isn’t six hundred years old, you know!” Then, suddenly, he seized the speaking tube which ran to the forward cockpit, shouted into it. “Turn southwest, Trav? Never mind why! Do as I say.”

The big plane swung around gracefully, and they headed south-west. A light of surprise began to appear in Von Sterner’s eyes. The light changed to understanding as Kirby gave Travis more directions, made him alter their course. For, as the day began to break, an airdrome slowly appeared in the blurred landscape below them. And it was not an Allied airdrome.

A peal of hearty laughter rang from Von Sterner’s throat, and his face was filled with relief.

“The joke’s on me!” he said. “But, I must say, my friend has a peculiar sense of humor.”

By this time they were almost right over the ’drome, and suddenly the Germans below spotted them. Hastily, they opened up with their anti-aircrafts, thinking that the big Handley-Page had come to bomb them. The shells burst dangerously close to the ship, and left black mushrooms hanging in the sky. Tiny figures on the field were running to their planes, to take off.

“How are we going to work this?” Kirby asked Von Sterner. “I’ll put the busmess in your hands.”

“Drop a white handkerchief or something,” the German said.

Neither he nor Kirby had any. But Carn found one, and though he was demanding to know what the hell this was all about, he dropped it obediently. The little white cloth went fluttering down.

The Germans saw it, and wonderingly held their fire. Kirby leaned to the tube. “Land!” he directed Travis.

“Are you crazy?” Travis yelled back. “Land on a jerry ’drome?”

“Shut up and do what you’re told!” Kirby ordered. “Who’s boss of this outfit?”

Shaking his head, Travis circled into the wind, got into a mild glide, and descended. The Germans below waned, unable to grasp the situation. Here was a plane deliberately placing itself in their hands.

As soon as the plane settled on the ground, and was rolling to a stop, a crowd of pilots, mechanics, and soldiers surrounded it seizing its wings and tail.

Von Sterner leaped out of the cockpit, shouted at his comrades. They recognized him at once, and went hysterical with joy. He was almost crushed in the milling crowd which seized him, pumped his hand, skipped his back.

At last the German ace managed to free himself, and commenced barking out orders. And now it was Kirby's turn to feel worried.

Then, to his relief, he saw the crowd spreading, moving away from the ship, making room. Von Sterner came up to thy cockpit, shouted above the engines: "Good-by, my friend! I am indebted to you, and shall always remember the adventures we shared together! And maybe we shall meet again—though I hope it won't be in the sky." He laughed. "I might be The Killer, but, believe it or not, I shall never be able to conscientiously shoot at you in case we meet!"

"And if I saw your green plane," Kirby returned, "I'd look the other way!"

The German reached up his hand, and Kirby leaned

over to seize it. They shook warmly, while Carn and Travis, and the Boche, stared dumbly.

Then Kirby shouted to Travis: "All right! Let's go!" And turning back to Von Sterner: "Slong, Karl!"

"*Auf wiedersehen*, Timothy!" Von Sterner yelled back mischievously, as the big plane began to roar forward.

"Hey!" Kirby bellowed, shaking his fist "I'll strangle the first man who calls me Timothy!"

"Say!" Shorty Carn yelled through Kirby's speaking tube. "You're going to do some tall explaining when we get back. Since when do you go around fraternizing with Heinies? Especially a skunk like Von Sterner! I couldn't believe my eyes and ears!"

"I'll plead my case afterwards," Kirby replied wearily. He was quite exhausted, and there was a queer expression on his face. Lazily, he reclined in his cockpit. And as they went on, he began to sing to himself, beneath the drone of the twin motors:

*"Oh, the Dutch company,  
Is the best company  
That ever came over  
From old Germany.  
There's the Amsterdam Dutch,  
and the Rotterdam Dutch,  
And the Baarlzdam Dutch,  
And the other dam' Dutch!"*

