

# ACES OF DESTINY

by RALPH OPPENHEIM

*"Streak" Davis, Lone-handed, Braves Enemy Air Against a Menacing Hun Swarm!  
Death-Dealing Fokkers Form a Ring of Havoc Around a Hellbent Yank Ace!  
A Complete Novel of Sky-High War-Air Action!*

SKY FIGHTERS (V14N2) AUGUST 1936

## CHAPTER I ORDERS FROM G-2

**B**UTTONING UP HIS TEDDY-BEAR, Lieutenant “Streak” Davis, ace and hellion of the 25th Pursuit Squadron, dashed out of the barracks onto the chill dawn tarmac—a broad-shouldered, lean-hipped figure, with tension etching his bronzed, war-weathered face.

A feverish scene met Davis’ eyes. In the rising morning mist, the nine Spads of “B” Flight were squatting like ghostly birds, wing to wing, trembling with the revving throb of their Hisso motors. About them the ground-crew men swarmed and bustled like an army of industrious ants. From the armory shack wheelbarrows were being rushed out, laden with sinister, pear-shaped things which were handled as delicately as eggs, lifted and tucked beneath the underbellies of the warming Spads. Thirty-pound demolition and incendiary bombs!

All this Streak Davis saw in a comprehensive glance as he skirted down the edge of the tarmac, heading for Operations. He was burning with haste and impatience, and still cursing the C.O.’s orderly, who had awakened him only scant minutes ago. For he had been scheduled to go out with “B” Flight, and now “B” Flight was already preparing to take off, while Davis was scarcely up and awake.

The pilots of “B” Flight, Davis saw as he hurried along, were all out by the ships, strapping down helmets and puffing nervously at cigarettes. Their faces were white and taut in the grey dawn.

“Scared—but game,” Davis muttered grimly. To a veteran like himself every one of those pilots was just a green kid, and he was worried about them, wondering if they could come through the grim ordeal that lay ahead.

THEN his eyes gleamed as they caught sight of one face among all those others that was neither white nor scared. A reckless young face—the face of a red-headed, lithe-bodied pilot who, carrying a helmet in one hand, was rushing among the other men like a human dynamo. He was the youngest of them all, yet it was obvious that all looked to him as their leader.

His shouting voice, vibrant enough to rise above the din of motors, was the voice of a true commander.

“Snap into it, men!” he was shouting. “Every second counts! We’ve got to be off when the mist lifts.” He was slapping backs. “Buck up, buzzard—you too, Pete!”

A warm surge of affection swept over Streak Davis. He paused, and yelled, “Hey, Eddie! Eddie Kane!” The young redhead turned sharply, and as he caught sight of Davis his face lighted up. Davis grinned. For though Streak Davis was a man who flew and fought alone, a lone wolf of the air, he had nevertheless come to like Eddie Kane, young leader of “B” Flight, to such an extent that he was ready to break his rule of solo flying to join “B” Flight’s grim mission of today.

“Hello, Streak!” Kane was yelling eagerly—but just as suddenly the eagerness faded from the redhead’s face, a shadow clouded his features. “Gosh, Streak, it sure is tough luck,” he shouted.

“What the deuce do you mean, tough luck?” Davis cried, bafflement coming over him. But Kane had already turned back to his men, was continuing the preparations. Streak Davis cursed. Something certainly was cockeyed! He hurried toward the rude Operations shack.

As he neared it, his eyes widened. A motorcycle was whisking away from the shack, with a khaki-clad despatch rider bent over the handlebars. It went tearing away in a shrinking cloud of dust. Davis cursed. He was more sure than ever now that something was wrong. He quickened his stride, reached the door of the Operations and pushed into the rude, map-walled office.

Major Johnson, wiry skipper of the 25th, jerked up from his desk.

“Ah, it’s you, Davis!” There was a haggard look in his grey eyes. “Take a seat—I want to have a talk with you.”

Streak Davis did not accept the invitation. He spoke with a tense impatience. “Make it short, Major—please. ‘B’ Flight is warming now. I’ve got to rouse my macks and get out my crate.” He looked at the C.O. with angry inquiry. “Why didn’t you have the orderly wake me earlier?”

The C.O.’s lips tightened. Instead of answering, he silently extended a slip of flimsy toward Davis. The Yank ace seized it, glanced at the official stamp—the brief typewritten message:

By Order of G.H.Q.

Per: G-2.

Lieutenant Davis, of the 25th Pursuit Group, to fly at nine a.m. to G-2 for special consultation.

Davis' heart sank as he read the order, grasped its import. "But damn it," he burst out then, "I can't fly to Intelligence at nine! I'll be out with 'B' Flight then—on this show!" Alarm came into his eyes as he saw the C.O.'s adamant, tight-lipped face. "Good Lord, sir, you wouldn't send those kids on this suicidal mission without me? They'll never be able to bomb that ammo factory—or whatever it is—at Hammel!"

The C.O. spoke slowly then, grimly, as if he had not been listening to Davis. "When the courier brought the message some time ago, I intended to tell G-2 you couldn't be spared from this job. But then something came up. Luckily the courier had been waiting for the light of dawn. I just sent him away with the reply that you would report to G-2, as ordered."

And as Davis, in a near panic now, started a fresh protest, the C.O. held up a restraining hand. "After all, if this job can be done—'B' Flight should be able to do it. I've given Lieutenant Kane all the dope on the anti-aircrafts you yourself marked on this map—" He dabbed a chart on his desk, a chart which indicated a group of buildings at a town named Hammel—thirty kilometers in Hunland. Davis glanced grimly at the map, saw the circle of red crosses he himself had placed completely around those buildings. Every one of those crosses meant an anti-aircraft gun.

Davis cursed. "I tell you, Major, they won't have a chance! I know A.A. fire—and my only hope was somehow to get them through that defense area around the mystery base!" His voice was hoarse. "Good Lord, sir, you can't send Eddie—Lieutenant Kane out alone with those kids!"

"There's no alternative, Davis." The C.O.'s eyes were hard. "You see, there's more under all this business than any of us have suspected. After what's just happened, I'm convinced G-2 will give you a job as important as this Hammel thing—and probably tied up with it. There are several things you don't know about all this, and since there is still time I might as well give them to you—so G-2 won't have to."

He leaned back in his swivel chair. Davis at first was too tense to give full attention to the C.O. His eyes were on the window, against which the first flash of the sun was showing now; and his eyes were listening to those Hissos revving, each minute getting warmer.

"Until H.Q. phoned me the order to raid Hammel this morning," the C.O. was saying, "I had no idea what the factory there contained. But I learned last night, Davis, that it contains a menace which threatens to thwart completely our present big drive."

HE LOWERED his voice tensely. "Pershing, in order to smash the Ludendorf line, has been relying secretly on the new 'Whippet' Renault tanks—baby tanks which can maneuver and make speed but are as invulnerable as battleships. Those tanks were Pershing's ace in the hole. There seemed no Boche defense that could resist them."

Davis, though he had missed none of this, could not restrain himself. "Look here, Major," he gritted, "if you think that telling me some story about tanks is going to hold me on the ground while Eddie Kane and 'B' Flight take off, you're mistaken! I tell you—"

"Shut up, and listen to me!" The C.O. was sore now. But they were his next words, rather than his harsh tone, which suddenly caught Davis' interest, suddenly jerked Davis' nerves taut. "Intelligence learned yesterday, through a spy, that the Huns have known about these Whippet tanks all along! And the Huns have perfected a new, large-calibered rifle, whose bullets can pierce through the armor of any tank, riddle its crew!"

A strange change had come over Davis' face. Realization had leaped into his eyes.

"An anti-tank gun!" he cried, stunned. "So that's what the Boche have been cooking up at Hammel!"

"Right! You're beginning to see the point at last," the C.O. rasped. "To continue: the spy who discovered the secret of the Hammel plant also made an attempt to destroy it—it seems he tried to dig some sort of tunnel into the well guarded grounds. Failing, he just managed to return, wounded, across the lines with this very map you worked on—" he nodded at the chart. "The agent died of his wounds, after conveying the information that at noon today the Germans would ship out the new anti-tank guns to the front. Which means the Whippets will be stopped, and the whole drive will fail, unless—" He broke off, with grim significance. Then: "This much I have told Lieutenant Kane. He will be aware of what this mission means. But now, what I want to tell you, Davis—"

At the mention of Kane, Streak Davis interrupted with impulsive anger. "Good Lord, Major, if the whole war depends on the raid, then how the deuce do you figure I should stay out of it? It doesn't make sense! I'm the only one who knows the Hammel terrain at all—yet you mean to send that bunch of green, inexperienced kids—"

"Green kids, eh?"

The young, infuriated voice broke from the doorway. Davis jerked around, and the C.O.'s eyes

lifted. Eddie Kane, his face almost as crimson as his hair, stood within the room, glaring belligerently at the Yank who was his idol.

"So you think my flight—the best team of men on the front—are a bunch of kiwis, do you, Streak?" he burst out. "Or are you just sore because you're not coming? Well, don't worry—we'll raid that factory. We'll show you what real team-work can do."

Streak Davis masked the worry he felt in a look of icy scorn. "Teamwork? If you think all those pretty formations you fly are going to get you through those A.A.'s you're going to get a mean surprise!"

Kane, flushing, started a hot retort, but the C.O. broke in furiously. "That's enough! Kane, is your flight ready to take off?"

Kane recovered control of himself, turned to the major respectfully. "Just about ready, sir," he said quietly. "I came for the map." He looked at his wrist-watch. "There's plenty of time—it's not yet eight, which gives us more than four hours to get to the place by noon."

The C.O. shook his head, spoke hurriedly. "You'll have to get to it well before noon, Kane. For by noon I must phone G.H.Q. the news of your success or failure. Pershing is holding three reserve divisions at a railroad junction. If this drive is to go on, those divisions will be thrown into it. But if the drive is forced to stop and entrench because of the anti-tank guns—those divisions will be rushed by train to the south, to help Foch attempt a desperate, probably useless blow there,"

Even the flushing Streak Davis stared at the major in tense puzzlement then. "But why must G.H.Q. know on the dot of twelve?" he demanded. "Suppose they hear a couple of minutes after—"

"It will be too late then," the major rapped grimly. "The divisions will already be on their way by train to Foch's front. And after that, even if we learn the anti-tank guns are out of the way, this drive cannot continue—for it depends on those extra divisions."

Slowly, both Davis and Kane nodded. And then Eddie Kane was stirred to action. "In that case, I'll get my gang right off!" He grabbed up the map.

"Wait a minute, kid." Davis' voice was strangely thick now. As Kane paused, the Yank ace of the 25th turned once more to the C.O. "I suppose it's no use asking you again whether you won't let me go, sir." The C.O.'s voice was hard. "I told you, something else has come up. And we can't go against G-2's orders."

DAVIS' lips tightened. Once more he turned to Kane and now he put a hand on the young redhead's shoulder. "Listen Eddie—" No longer was his tone bellicose. It was gripping, husky. "There's only one way of getting at that plant. Strike fast and by surprise. Try to sneak high over the place so they don't spot you. Then—dive in, full throttle with your gang, right for the target. Don't waste any time, but get rid of all your bombs at once. They're sure to do the trick even if only a few of them make direct hits. Also, once they fall, they ought to blast away most of the A.A.s—that will take care of your getaway. But look out for von Honig's yellow-backed Fokkers, They might show up there." He paused, then held out a hand. "Luck, kid!"

An eager, contented flush suffused Kane's youthful face. He grasped Davis' hand warmly.

"Gosh, Streak—with those tips I can't fail!" He straightened. "And now I'm off!" Seizing the map, he dashed out through the door.

## CHAPTER II MISSING KEYS

**F**OR A MOMENT DAVIS STOOD, staring after him. Then, as if unable to restrain himself, he started after Kane.

The C.O.'s hand pulled him back. "No, Streak. I know it's tough, but there's nothing to do about it."

Davis pulled himself together. He was staring out through the doorway—staring at the tarmac which now lay bathed in golden morning sun, at the array of Spads whose wings flashed now with their tri-colored cocardes.

Eddie Kane, pulling on a helmet, was rushing toward the Spad which was his own, at the same time shouting: "Cockpits, men!" And the eight other white-faced pilots of "B" Flight were running like football players to their crates, hopping in.

"Kids," Davis repeated hoarsely. "Just kids and—"

His next words were drowned out completely by a Niagara-like roar which shook the earth. Nine Hisso engines had blasted simultaneously into full throttle—nine propellers were making shiny, transparent arcs which threw off the sheen of the sun.

The Spad of Eddie Kane taxied out in front of the rest. From its cockpit, the arm of Eddie Kane was waving, describing a precise, gesticulated signal even as

mechanics, having pulled the chocks, were scampering hurriedly out of the way.

And, roaring, the nine Spads all leaped forward like race horses at the dropped barrier. In a wavering but orderly line they were speeding side by side into the wind.

“B” Flight was taking off!

Streak Davis, standing at the Operations’ doorway with the C.O. now crowding behind him, watched that take-off with breathless awe and admiration. Team-work—this was it, this was the kind of flying he himself did not do, but always admired when it was done by Eddie Kane’s gang.

As one, the nine bomb-laden planes were sweeping into the morning air. As one, wing to wing, they were climbing toward the sunny blue sky, their exhaust stacks belching smoke. And even as they climbed, they shifted—so subtly that it seemed absolutely natural—into a perfect V formation, with the Spad of Eddie Kane at the apex.

Up over the big drome that V went soaring, and Streak Davis craned his neck to watch it. At about three thousand feet, the perfect V swung, was circling the drome to head for the east. Then, as they were once more overhead, the formation made a shift of wings.

Again it was a blending, unobtrusive motion, full of grace, like a changing pattern in a kaleidoscope. The V became two smaller Vs with apexes joined—the formation took on the shape of a gigantic, perfect X, with Eddie Kane in its center.

Streak Davis suppressed a groan.

“It’s beautiful, but it’s the very thing I feared—the very thing I hoped he’d forget!” he muttered gloomily. “Even with this suicidal job before him, he’s got to spend time making letters in the sky with his formation—just like a kid playing with toys.”

“Just a moment, Davis.” The C.O.’s tone was reproving. The major had pulled out a small book from his tunic, held it open. “Look here—you’ve got to admit Kane has developed a unique idea in this formation business.”

Davis momentarily took his eyes from the formation above, glanced at the book. There were several lines of letters or numbers with corresponding meanings:

V—Regular fight formation.

L—We are about to land.

7—Mission successful.

E—Landing for fuel.

X—Stand by on ground for our return—

“I’ll stand by all right,” the C.O. promised grimly. “I’ll be in the Operations here at the phone, with the wires clear to G.H.Q.—and with my eyes on the east window.”

But Davis was scarcely listening. “I’d feel better if Eddie would drop all this football kind of stuff— Ah, there they go back into a V.”

A final shift of those flashing wings above—battle formation again now, with the Spad of Eddie Kane leading, raising the apex of the V so that it pointed toward the blue ceiling. And then “B” Flight was really off—off with every engine gunned to full throttle. With breathless speed the V was shrinking away in the east—toward Hunland and Hammel, the objective.

“Just eight a.m.,” the C. O. said. “Exactly four hours to go. Lord!” He mopped his brow, his voice heavy. “I only hope I haven’t sent that fine gang to their deaths! If the job can be done, Kane and his men should be able to do it.”

Streak Davis was silent, his face a taut mask. He continued to stare at the shrinking V, until it became a mere speck—until at last it was swallowed altogether by the blue.

Then, his eyes still misty, he was following the C.O. back into Operations.

“Well, you’ve pulled me out of it,” he said grimly, fiercely. “Now tell me what’s so all-fired important that you’re letting the brass hats at G-2 take me in hand.”

The C.O. spoke simply, after glancing around to see that they were in full privacy. “There’s been some dirty work around here. I found out, not long ago, that this Operations office had been rifled—the lock tampered with, and the desk searched.”

AT ANY other time the news would have been enough to jerk Davis taut. But now—

“You mean you kept me back on account of some mere sneak-thievery?” His eyes were blazing.

“I kept you back because G-2 ordered it,” the major snapped. “And also, because I feel that perhaps this dirty work connects with something G-2 knows about. Perhaps whoever rifled this room was after the Hammel map—which luckily I had on my person. There were no other important papers missing. I want you to report all this to G-2 when you go there. I have orders not to use the phone, but to keep it clear for my report on the outcome of the Hammel raid.”

Davis stood there unimpressed. “Okay,” he said. “I’ll do it. But I can’t see—”

He broke off, and both he and the C.O. turned

sharply as a covered figure burst into the room. It was the burly sergeant in charge of the ground crew.

His face was white under the grime of oil. He was dangling a bunch of keys.

“Major, Major!” he cried hoarsely, apparently so agitated he did not even bother to salute. “Something darned queer has happened here! My duplicate keys to all the hangars and sheds—I just found them hanging where they belong.”

Davis and the major stared at the man.

“Are you drunk. Sergeant?” the major rasped. “You found your keys where they belong. Where the devil did you expect to find them?”

The big sergeant shifted guiltily. “Well, sir, you see, when I first went to get my keys I noticed the duplicate set was missing. I figured I had mislaid them somewhere. But now I find them hanging in their place—as if they had been there all along. And none of the men knew a thing about it!”

Streak Davis had suddenly gone utterly rigid, his eyes narrowing to slits. Almost savagely he seized the dazed sergeant, was shaking the man, big as he was, by the shoulder.

“When did this happen? How long ago did you notice the keys were missing?” The questions rapped from him like machine-gun fire.

“It was before the planes were out of the hangars—before dawn,” the sergeant blurted.

DAVIS’ face went white. Of a sudden the C.O.’s report of Operations being rifled took on terrible significance—had been corroborated! Almost in a panic, Davis was galvanized into savage action.

“Sergeant!” he clipped. “Have my crate brought out—this instant! Get her fueled, loaded! Hurry, for God’s sake, hurry!”

The frenzied haste in his voice sent the burly man dashing through the door, off to the hangars. The C.O.’s eyes were wide, staring.

“What’s this, Davis? You’re not starting for G-2 now—”

“G-2 hell!” Davis was madly buttoning up his fur-lined collar. His voice was grim as death. “You were right when you said there’d been dirty work here. The sneak who rifled your office must have ‘borrowed’ the keys of all the hangars and buildings—while the crates were still in the sheds! Don’t you see what that means? Some lousy Hun has had access to those Spads that took off, had time to—”

The grizzled face of Major Johnson was ashen

now. Stark horror showed in his eyes. “Good Lord!” His expression showed that he was following Davis’ terrible train of thought now. The treachery spies could perform on planes ready to take off was all too well known. A little camphor in the gas-tank, emery in the engine, a file on the flying wires: deadly tricks that Hun agents had learned to do so covertly that even the thorough mechanics might never detect them.

“I’ll have to fly like hell!” Davis was already darting for the door. “I’ve got to get to Eddie Kane’s flight, warn them so they can examine their crates—”

“But—G-2?” the dazed major said.

“Let them send me to Blois if they don’t like it!” Davis gritted over his shoulder. And leaving the whitefaced major staring, he dashed across the sunny tarmac. His eyes lighted as he saw his own khaki Spad being wheeled out of Hangar Number One—a trim, stub-nosed ship with the insignia of a painted streak of lightning on each side of its fuselage.

Streak Davis dashed to the plane. The sergeant of the ground crew was supervising the fueling and oiling of the trim, streak-marked crate. Davis watched with impatience, his eyes sharp.

“Bombs!” he shouted. “I’ll need bombs!”

The ground sergeant led the way to the armory shack. “We’ll have to take the bombs from the new shipment,” he said when they were in the musty interior, full of weapons and ammo. “B’ Flight used up the last brace entirely.” He was cutting cords, unwrapping tarpaulin, exposing a shiny stack of thirty-pounders. Davis himself wheeled out four of the missiles to his crate. He checked them, set the nose fuses for impact and pulled out the safety pins. He helped tuck them in the racks beneath the belly of his Spad.

The C.O., meanwhile, had doubled the ground-guard of the drome, now that he knew a Hun spy had actually been at work. Although the spy had had plenty of time in which to make an escape, the C.O. was checking to see if he had been up to any other mischief.

Davis finished fastening on his last bomb. He was clapping on a helmet, strapping it. “Never mind rolling the crate to the deadline!” he rapped at the greaseballs. “Start her here!”

“Switch off!” A mechanic, having put chocks before the wheels, was swinging the propeller. Davis’ big frame vaulted into the cockpit. He jerked down his goggles.

“Contact!” yelled the mechanic.

“Contact!” Streak Davis switched the ignition key on, and his left hand closed on the throttle.

Another tug—an ear-splitting series of detonations, and the propeller was whirling. With mad haste Davis was adjusting the carburetor mannettes, so he would not have to wait even for normal warming time. He waited only until the engine was hitting on all cylinders. Then, with a reckless oath, he waved his arm, at the same time slamming the throttle lever clear across the arc.

### CHAPTER III SPEEDING WINGS

**T**HE HISSO BLARED in a deafening roar. Trembling in every fiber, the streak-marked Spad spurted forward as the chocks were yanked. Just before he steered into the wind, with the width of the tarmac before him, he glimpsed several of the mechanics running after his crate, waving, yelling something he couldn't hear because of his blaring engine.

Had he forgotten something? Yes, he hadn't taken any map with him. But he didn't need any map—he knew the terrain like a book. He ignored the waving mechanics, and in another instant left them far behind as, full throttle, he taxied into the wind.

And then he noticed that the crate was strangely sluggish, clinging to the ground as if earthbound! He cursed, telling himself he should have let the engine get warmer—that he needed full power to take off with his heavy load of bombs. With fierce haste he was working at the carburetor pump now, changing the mixture.

The Hissu revved up to a pitch which threatened to tear the crate to pieces. Black smoke belched from the long exhaust stacks. The Spad spurted forward—but it was still clinging to the ground. Davis had the stick forward, but the tail was not yet lifting!

Panic gripped him then, for he saw the line of poplars which fringed the drome rushing toward him like a green wall, threatening to smash his crate to bits. It was too late to turn, or slow down now. Unless he could get his overweighted plane up—

He hammered at the throttle. He jockeyed the stick wildly. He leaned forward, trying to get up the tail with his own weight and strength. Closer and closer rushed

the wall of trees. Another second—

Then, to his sudden wild hope, he felt the plane pitch forward—felt the tail go up, until his cockpit was level. Desperately, he held the stick forward another instant, until the roaring Spad threatened to go over on its nose. He pulled back on the stick.

The trees leaped at him—then abruptly seemed to drop like falling soldiers as the Spad lurched into the air. The tree-tops whisked past beneath the undercarriage, missing it by inches. With every ounce of flying skill, Streak Davis got the sluggish plane into a zoom. Davis breathed a sigh of relief. Now to get speed, to overtake “B” Flight! He reached down to fasten his safety strap, started to close the buckle when, from the right lower wing surface, an apparition rose into view! A khaki figure with a desperate, wolflike face, with bestial eyes, crouching over the cockpit, lifting a revolver by the barrel!

In that second, recognition came like a flash to Davis. The despatch rider from H.Q.—who had whisked off the drome before! This was the spy! How he had managed to cling on during that lurching take-off Davis could hardly surmise. But he knew that Hun agents were trained to make such getaways.

“*Schweinhund!*” A guttural snarl broke from the crouched figure. With a savage oath he brought the revolver down.

DAVIS ducked to the side. The butt glanced his head, struck his shoulder—and the impact of the metal almost crushed his shoulder-blade, stunned his whole body! Had the blow struck his head, his skull would have been crushed like an eggshell! As it was, he was momentarily paralyzed by the shock. But madly, he was making the muscles of his legs move with stubborn will—he was kicking the rudder bar with all his might.

The Spad slewed crazily, skidding on empty space, curving downward. The lurch threw the snarling spy back—and though his grip on the strut still kept him on the wing, the automatic was torn from his other hand by the powerful slipstream, which carried the heavy metal pistol into space.

Before Davis could move again, the Hun let go of the strut and leaped right for the cockpit. His arms proved as powerful as a gorilla's; they were locking around Davis' head and neck. The Yank was being jerked out of the cockpit. The Spad was now flying like a drunken bird, careening crazily in the sky, yawing and stalling. Davis, lifted to his feet, was fighting for

his life then. Under the blast of the Hisso's roar the two men struggled like maniacs, cursing, panting, locked in a mad embrace.

"You'll never get to Hammel, *Schwein!*" the spy panted. "Your plane will be mine now, and you'll die as your comrades are doomed to die!"

Even as he spoke, he suddenly lunged forward—pushing Davis to the other side of the cockpit. His one hand was on Davis' throat now, closing like a vise. Davis' body was bending backward. He felt the slipstream hit him from the other side, realized with horror that the Hun was pushing him out into space!

"No, damn you!" he choked out. He tried to free his arms, which the confines of the cockpit had partially kept tied up. The Spad was flying straight now—in neutral. The spy pushed harder, harder—and Davis could feel his feet leaving the duck-boards, knew he would go over in another instant—

Out of sheer desperation, Davis used that last instant to kick out again with his foot—but this time he kicked at the joystick, kicked it way over to the side.

The Spad tilted crazily, the wing on which the spy had footing dropping almost vertically as the crate went into a sideslip.

The down-sloping wing made the spy's body lurch backwards, his feet slipping. For an instant Davis was dragged back into the cockpit by the man's viselike grip; for an instant the desperate Yank regained his balance. He freed his left fist. He doubled it into a ball of iron. With a berserk oath he sent it catapulting. *Pough!* The blow caught the snarling spy flush on the jaw. Davis could see the man's eyes roll back whitely. His body went limp. His grip on Davis relaxed. He went sliding down the wing, clutching frantically, for wires and struts. There was an ominous lurch as, screaming, the Hun rolled off the wing—went tumbling into space.

DAZEDLY, Streak was plopping back into his Spad's bucket seat, mechanically pulling the plane out of the sideslip. With the weight of the spy gone, the crate responded eagerly now to the touch of its master-pilot, though it still had four heavy bombs to carry.

Streak Davis did not tarry to check up on the fallen spy—doubtless the men at the drome would find the body, report it all to Intelligence. Davis had already learned enough to fill him with desperate haste.

The spy, he knew now, had come to the drome early this morning as a courier, bringing Davis the message which ordered the Yank ace to report to G.H.Q.

"A forged message, of course!" Davis was gritting now, even as he was swinging the nose of his Spad hastily for the east. "No wonder it came after all the regular H.Q. orders for the Hammel mission—all by itself. That damned Hun wanted me out of the raid!"

He did not feel any satisfaction in this tribute to his flying skill. The Hun must have known that he was the one ace who had reconnoitered the Hammel terrain—and for that reason, and perhaps others, the spy had shrewdly tried to thwart Davis from going with "B" Flight.

But what had he done to "B" Flight itself, with the keys to the hangars in his possession, and plenty of time—while "resting" his motorcycle—to wreak some devilish mischief?

"Your comrades are doomed to die!" the Hun had gloated.

What *had* the devil done?

And, with a prayer in his heart, Streak Davis was sending his Spad thundering toward the east—toward Hunland! Strapped in the cockpit now, he was urging the bomb-laden crate to its utmost, racing against time.

"I've got to catch up to Eddie and those kids!" he kept gritting, under the mighty blast of the Hisso. "Why, probably H.Q. took it for granted I would go with them on the raid all along," he realized, now that he knew H.Q. had not sent those orders for him to stay behind. He must catch up to "B" Flight, and if treachery had not already doomed them, he must see them through the reckless, suicidal mission—help them blast the anti-tank gun factory!

Eyes narrowed behind their goggles, Davis sent his crate streaking on eastward.

Streak Davis needed no map to guide him. He merely watched the green-and-brown relief map earth slowly swimming past far below. His plane was climbing, at a shallow enough angle not to cut down its terrific forward speed.

The relief map below changed in the next seconds. Desolation appeared on its face—as if it were ravaged by smallpox. Clouds of smoke with hearts of flame came into view. And Streak Davis, whizzing high overhead, saw the belching maws of a thousand Allied cannons—saw huge naval guns lurching on tracks, smaller 155s, and little 75s blazing hub to hub!

The battlefield! The hellish pageant of war was unfolding beneath his Hunward-bound crate, a sight at once thrilling and awe-inspiring from the free heights of the sky.



Behind the rolling barrages of shellfire, he could pick out little swarms of brown ants which he knew were eager young doughboys. They were moving forward, moving toward devastated areas of barbed wire, toward trenches filled with stubborn lines of grey. And in front of these Yanks, in the very smoke of the barrage, were scores of crawling beetles.

"The Whippet tanks!" Davis cried. They were zigzagging, spitting flame from their turreted cannon and machine-guns. They were dragging up barbed wire with their steel bodies, mowing down Hun pill-boxes. Behind them the Yank infantry moved steadily, finishing the work of the tanks with bayonet and rifle.

"Hundreds of those tanks!" Davis thrilled. As far as his eye could see, to the south and north, those juggernauts were crawling, making a steady, devastating advance. "By God, they'll break the Ludendorf line all right!"

His goggled eyes jerked away from the flaming drive, were peering with grim anxiety into the sky ahead and above. No sign of Eddie Kane's formation.

He taxed his roaring Spad to still greater effort. The blazing line of Whippets receded beneath him now. Here and there Davis could discern the effect of the tanks. Could see swarms of grey-clad Jerries in panicky retreat. Even the terror of their own discipline was forgotten by the Boclie soldiers in the face of the dreaded tanks.

Enemy sky! As always, the very air seemed changed as Davis was hurling across the invisible air-boundary. There was a sense of danger now, of menace which might drop out of the blinding orb of the sun at any instant. Davis was alert, and watching his surroundings. He glanced at his quivering altimeter needle. Ten thousand feet. He'd keep climbing.

On raced the streak-marked Spad, its nose slightly inclined toward the blue ceiling. Davis had already slipped past the front-line anti-aircraft batteries—the few Archie nests had not spotted him, streaking so high and fast. He watched the shrinking landmarks below, followed a tiny silver ribbon which was the Meuse River, picked up a familiar stubble hill, and then raced southeast.

Deep in Hunland now, breaking all records for speed, Davis began to despair. Had Eddie Kane managed to go so fast with his whole crew that Davis, the fastest flyer in the service, couldn't make up for the handicap? Had "B" Flight perhaps reached Hammel already?

STREAK DAVIS broke off from these conjectures with a sudden start which brought him bolt upright.

Miles ahead and well above his own altitude, tiny invisible mirrors seemed to have caught the sun, were throwing off its reflected rays.

The flash of nine speeding wings! With eager haste, Streak Davis hurled his crate toward those distant flashes, was spurting after them. Seconds, and he had gained enough to see them for what they were: nine graceful, winged shapes outlined against the pale blue ceiling. Nine little cocarded Spads, flying in a mathematically perfect V formation!

"It's them—at last!" Davis shouted. His first emotion was one of unutterable relief—"B" Flight was flying along safe and sound. Nothing had happened. Certainly if that damned spy had tampered with the crates, his work would have brought grim results by now.

#### CHAPTER IV COUNTER-ATTACK

**B** FLIGHT was flying on, high and fast, just as Davis had told Eddie Kane to make them fly. The perfect V was whizzing through the air, as if it were some mighty spearhead.

Even with the thought Streak Davis, prodding his Spad toward that swift V and gaining steadily on it, now saw another sight which jerked his nerves taut.

Looming out of a concealing shroud of green forest, close ahead of "B" Flight's formation, was a wide expanse of grounds from which reared squat buildings of brick. Their chimneys belched smoke—the smoke of a factory going at full power.

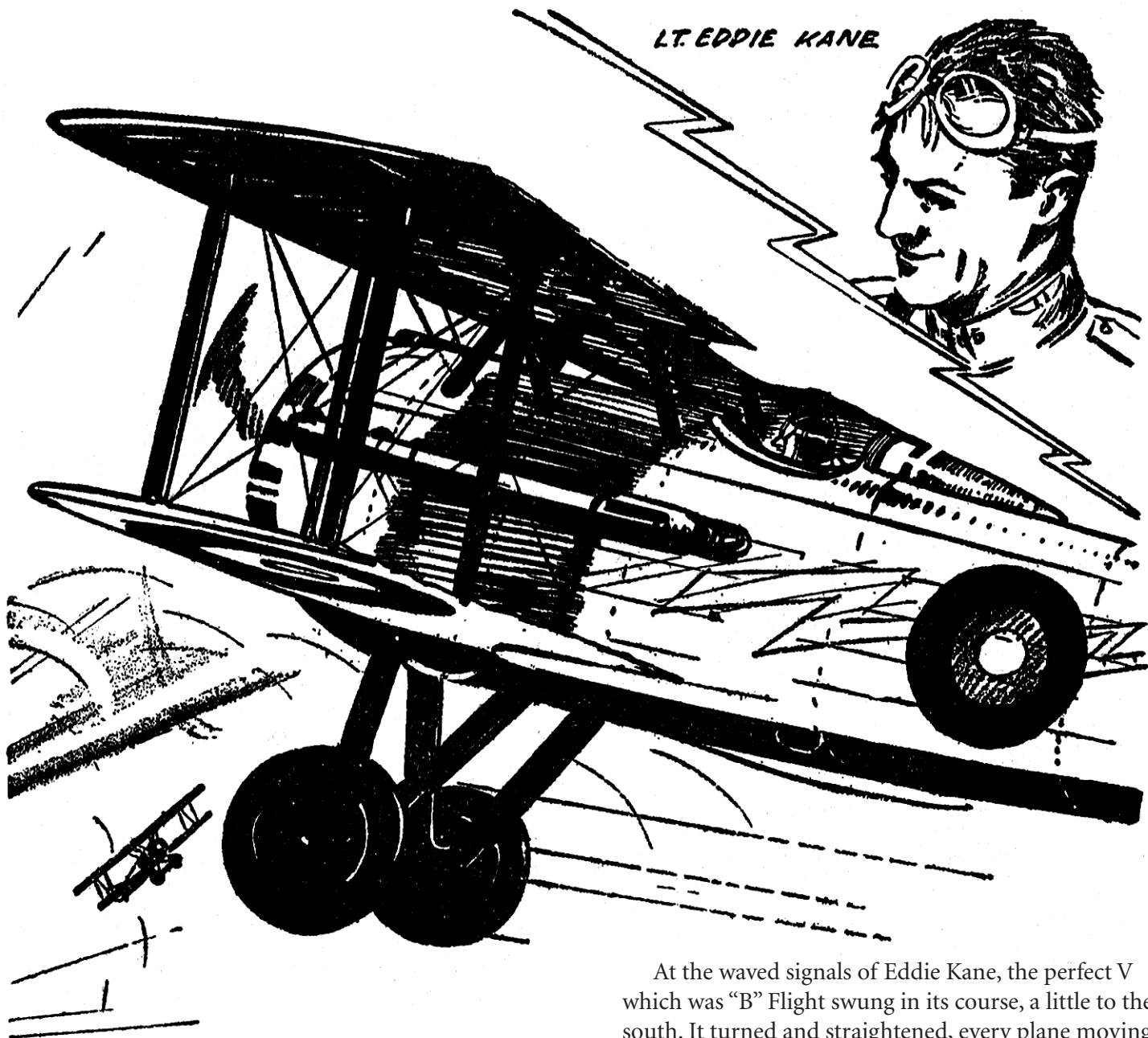
The Hammel anti-tank gun factory! The objective of the raid!

"B" Flight, flying high and swift as the wind, was almost overhead of its grim goal!

And again Davis' heart was full of cold forebodings. Caution made him steepen his own ascent lest his Spad be spotted and betray the rest. For that anti-aircraft circle which surrounded the factory was close now. Somewhere in the camouflage of trees down there would be the scores and scores of deadly Archies which Davis had noted on Kane's map.

Zooming to gain altitude, Davis again sent his ship

LT. EDDIE KANE



hurling forward in an effort to catch that V ahead.

"Eddie's starting to lead them in!" he gritted, cursing his roaring crate for what seemed to him slowness, though the Spad was hurling with all the speed of a projectile now. Davis gained rapidly. The V loomed larger and larger ahead, until he could see each plane distinctly, see the helmeted, knoblike heads of each tense pilot. And in the apex crate in the lead, he could see the arm of Eddie Kane, waving swift, precise signals.

Cursing in a frenzied desire to get to the rest in time to make the attack with them, Streak Davis gunned his Spad in a last effort.

His mad, thundering spurt almost took him up to the formation. Almost—but not quite!

At the waved signals of Eddie Kane, the perfect V which was "B" Flight swung in its course, a little to the south. It turned and straightened, every plane moving as one. It was headed once more then for the factory—headed, Davis knew, for the part of the anti-aircraft circle which had seemed least dense on the map.

Eddie Kane was doing what Streak Davis had told him: sneaking in, high and unseen.

In the next instant, Eddie Kane waved again. Streak Davis was close enough to see the signal clearly: a reckless, almost devil-may-care signal—a signal which could have only one meaning.

"Down on 'em!"

And with an abruptness that took the breath from Davis, the V tilted, stood on its apex, stood behind the crate of Eddie Kane.

They dived like a cyclone from hell!

Davis was about to push his own stick forward—to follow them. But, he realized the folly of the move. His own knowledge of the only possible way to attack forbade him to follow now. For the flight had to go down as one, close together, simultaneously trying to cross the anti-aircraft circle. Any straggler would be blasted to hell, and Davis was far enough behind to be a straggler.

He had come too late!

Cursing in his frustration, he pulled his Spad up in a slow, wheeling circle, safe on the outer side of the anti-aircraft zone. And he watched “B” Flight, sat in the sky and watched them—helpless now to join them, able only to pray for them!

He saw the down-hurling V of nine ships shrinking below and ahead as its terrific dive gathered momentum. He saw the crate of Eddie Kane leading them down—faster, faster, hell-bent for Hammel!

“That-a-boy, Eddie!” he was shouting, as if Eddie Kane could possibly hear him down there in that roaring storm of engines. “Keep going, boy. Faster, faster!”

Shouting wildly, Streak Davis was hunched over the cockpit of his circling crate, waving as he yelled, waving as he saw the V of nine Spads tearing down there at a speed which bent their very wings and made their exhausts vomit smoke.

And then hell broke loose.

FROM every side of the factory, the ground erupted in the most terrifying upheaval Davis had ever seen in his life! *Grumpf! Grumpf!* Scores of A.A. guns were belching flame, filling the sky with horrible sprouting mushrooms of black. “Flowerpots”—those heinous devices—were set off, and they sent strings of flaming onions floating through the sky. Pom-poms added their staccato note, added wasplike bullets to the whizzing shrapnel.

Up around the factory rose that spew in a solid, circular wall of fire, with Davis’ Spad just outside it. With awed, fearful eyes he was wheeling in the clear part of the sky, watching the flaming demonstration.

The swift, headlong dive had carried Kane and his faithful gang almost to their objective, before the Huns had at last spotted them and cut loose with their hellish fire!

“Drop your bombs now, Eddie!” Davis was almost screaming, his free hand clutching the side of the cockpit in mad excitement. “Drop ’em all—hurry, kid! You’ll blast the A.A.s—and you’ll be safe!”

And, as if Eddie Kane had heard and transmitted the command to his followers, tiny, pear shaped missiles were falling from the whole swooping formation like ripe fruit from laden branches. Thirty-six demolition bombs, all loosed at once, as “B” Flight swooped directly over those squat buildings!

The bombs rained down. Through the smoke Davis’ strained eyes could see them raining—all over the place. Done—the trick was done! At least some of them were going to be direct hits—and surely such a deluge of explosives would blast the place and the anti-aircraft guns as well off the earth!

Eagerly Davis watched for the explosions, listened for the concussions, even as “B” Flight, having released all its steel eggs, was madly starting a zoom in the midst of the A.A. fire.

Funny—those bombs took such a long time to hit. At first Davis thought it was just his overwrought imagination. Seconds seemed eons now, with so much at stake. But then—

A cry of horrified alarm broke suddenly from Streak Davis’ throat. His blood turned to ice.

This was not imagination. Not now, when every one of those bombs had struck—had landed!

“Duds!” Davis cried out in agony. “Duds—every one of them!”

And in his mind, all in that horrible second, he visioned the gloating, wolflike face of a Hun spy, victorious even in death. That was why the man had stolen the building keys. There were a million ways in which bombs could be fixed so they would not explode!

The unscathed A.A. batteries now cut loose with double ferocity. By this time every gunner had sighted the target—the V of Spads. And every gun in the vicinity blasted at that target now, hurled its deadly message of hate toward Eddie Kane’s flight.

Streak Davis sobbed, yelled in his utter anguish. His Spad was a drunken bird, floundering outside the trap which was dooming his squadron mates. Utterly helpless, he saw the V of ships waver crazily, become lopsided and all out of shape. A Spad suddenly detached itself, went plunging down like a dead bird. A second blew up in mid-air, as one of the A.A. shells made a direct hit. Two more locked wings as the concussion of the barrage hurled them against each other. Others followed—in horrible succession.

“All your comrades are doomed to die.”

The only thing merciful about it was its swiftness. It was over in seconds. Eddie Kane—the eager kid who to Davis was more than a brother.

The anti-aircrafts had stopped howling, like wolves sated with their feast of blood. The black smoke was dispersed with the wind. The sky cleared, looked incongruously vacant and peaceful.

“B” Flight was no more. The crack team which flew formations such as the war had never seen, which made letters and numbers in the sky, had been led out on its last mission by its reckless, red-headed leader. A mission which had failed—

Failed? A spasm of hate crimsoned Streak Davis’ face. No, Eddie Kane and his gang had not failed. They had done the impossible, the miraculous, when they had managed to break through the anti-aircraft barrage into attack position.

“If their bombs hadn’t been duds,” Davis gritted with a sob, “the plant would have been wiped out!” A bitter pride mingled with the grief in his tone. “Eddie Kane and his kids really came through. It was only treachery that beat them!”

The thought filled Davis with a frenzied, volcanic rage. His eyes, slitted with hate, peered down once more from his Spad, which was describing sloppy circles now beyond the anti-aircraft zone. He looked down at the cluster of rearing buildings, the anti-tank gun factory.

“The Huns down there are probably laughing at the joke that was played on ‘B’ Flight!” he cursed. “The joke that slaughtered nine men!”

With a savage impulse, Streak Davis suddenly whipped his Spad out of its banking turn—swung the nose in the direction of the plant ahead and below. His hand closed on the joystick. For an instant he was ready to throw all commonsense to the winds and go hurling, plunging down for that objective. He was quite sure his own four bombs had not been tampered with. They had come from a new, unopened shipment, and besides, Davis had checked them over himself.

But reason again got the upper hand of the grief-stricken Yank, restraining him from carrying out the wild, suicidal move. Even if he could somehow get through the A.A.s as Kane and his gang had first got through, what damage could he do with merely four bombs? There were five buildings down there—all of them large, sand-bag-roofed.

If I could get two of them I’d be more than lucky,” he cursed. “And two aren’t enough.”

All must be destroyed if the anti-tank guns were to be completely wiped out.

IT WAS this thought alone which stopped Davis.

He was not even thinking about the fact that his four bombs, much less than wiping out all the buildings, would not hurt the A.A.s at all—and that he himself would be doomed.

Frustrated, Davis once more circled back from the invisible danger-line in the sky which he knew marked the anti-aircraft zone. Duty, his job as a soldier, a cog in the war, prodded him now, telling him the only thing to do was to hasten back to the Allied lines—try to organize a new bombing flight and lead the attack—this time with good bombs.

He glanced at his wrist-watch, which he had carefully set before leaving.

One minute past nine o’clock.

Less than three hours left before noon. And by noon G.H.Q. must know that the factory had been destroyed. They must know whether to continue the drive with the Whippets—or to stop it and send the needed reserve divisions to Foch.

Despair grew upon Streak Davis. To fly back, to organize a new bombing flight—it would take hours! And then too, how could any other flight perform as “B” Flight, that crack team, had performed? How could any other gang be fast and precise enough to break through the A.A.s, in one swooping attack?

The whole thing seemed hopeless. Yet there was no other alternative. Bitterly, Davis started to bank his Spad toward the west, was straightening controls, reaching for the throttle.

It came then, taking him completely unaware. It came when his back was to the sun—the most vulnerable position a flyer could be in!

Streak Davis did not see the ominous shadow of wings descending like Nemesis over his head. He did not hear the rising thrum of yammering Mercedes above his own opening Hisso, nor did he hear the clatter of Spandaus when it first pierced the air.

Not until the deadly, smoking streams of tracer came penciling down on every side of him, hissing in his very ears, did Davis jerk up with a cry of wild alarm. And his Spad also jerked, shivering under the impact of lead which hit it in a dozen places, which ticked through its fuselage, drilled through its wings.

With wild instinct, Streak Davis whipped the stick to the side, was half-rolling in a storm of fire. And now he saw them with wide, alarmed eyes. Five of them, flattening out right on top of him. Five coffin-nosed winged shapes with jagged streaks of flame spitting from their Spandau muzzles.

Fokker Ds—the deadliest of enemy scouts! They

must have been flying a high patrol. Hidden in the sun they had spotted Davis' lone Spad—and now they had snaked down on him from behind, were swarming around him like a bunch of hornets.

*Rat-ta-tat-tat! Rat-ta-tat-tat!* From every direction tracer blasted at the khaki Spad. On every side Davis saw the coffin-nosed Fokkers lunging toward him. Their banking wings and slender fuselages flashed in the sun—flashed off a brilliant, artificial yellow.

A wild cry of recognition burst from Streak Davis then, even as the air around him became dense with flying, screaming lead.

“Von Honig's yellowbacks!” he burst out, his blood turned to ice. “Five of that butcher's outfit!”

VON HONIG himself was not with them—in his yellow crate. But Davis knew that all five of them were deadly aces, veterans of many flying combats, selected for the crack Imperial Squadron of Hunland! Like five furies they were roaring around him, cutting off his retreat from the west, boxing him in in a crisscross prison of tracer.

*Rat-ta-tat-tat!* Swiftly Davis was half-rolling and twisting his Spad like a dervish, trying to dodge the thickening, pelting rain of lead. And then, as he saw that they had him trapped on every side, his fighting blood surged to the fore in a flaming, berserk rage.

Face crimson, goggled eyes narrowed to slits, he bent to his controls and sent his Spad thundering into the very midst of his attackers. His fingers closed on his stick-triggers, squeezed them savagely.

His Vickers vibrated as they flamed into life, defying with their twin throats the deafening chorus of Spandaus.

Streak Davis had become the sky-fighter, the rip-roaring, lunging bat out of hell who had sent so many Huns to their doom. His Spad was riddled and bomb-laden, but in his desperate hands it now became a winged rocket of speed and destruction.

A SWIFT, breathless skid turn whipped the Spad toward a Fokker which, even now, was hurling in for a broadside shot. Through his sights, Davis momentarily framed the black-crossed, yellow-backed Hun ship. Deftly, he straightened his rudder, bringing the German's cockpit, with the helmeted, goggled head of the Hun pilot in the ring-sight.

Two spears of tracer leaped in a long burst from Streak Davis' guns. Flaming, they struck the Fokker right in the middle, literally impaling the Boche pilot

to the seat.

The Hun leaped upward against his safety-strap, clutched at the air like a drowning man, then sprawled over the stick. The Fokker keeled over, buckling, wings sheering under the withering lead from the Yank's Vickers. Flinging out parts of wreckage, the yellowback hurtled to earth like the stick of a spent rocket.

And before the other four Huns could recover from their surprise, before they realized that this insolent, lone Yank was matching their attack with a berserk counter-attack, the Spad of Streak Davis zoomed in a streak of exhaust smoke and went slicing right up under a second Fokker.

“Take it, Boche!” Davis gritted, and again he pressed his triggers.

## CHAPTER V

### A BARRIER OF GUARDS

**R**AT-TA-TAT-TAT! The dark underbelly of the Fokker rolled over like a fish above Streak Davis, exposing its yellow top. Madly, he zoomed on toward it, clinging to it with his sights like a leech.

*Rat-ta-tat-tat-tat!*

Again the Vicker streams went true to their mark! The Fokker leaped upwards, staggered. Its wing dropped over, and it was fluttering down like a dead bird, out of control.

Davis had knocked down two of von Honig's crack men—two of them in less than that many minutes! Two of them—to help pay against a score of nine slaughtered Spads! Recklessly, the lone Yank was trying to take on the remaining three Jerries now, lunging, twisting, zooming in their midst—his guns cutting a path of blazing destruction before him.

But the other three Jerries, as if enraged by the fall of their two comrades, were also fighting mad now. With roaring speed, they rallied for a fresh onslaught. They came tearing at the Spad from three sides with engines and guns wide open.

*Rat-ta-tat-tat-tat!* The Spad lurched, as lead battered it back and forth in the sky. Even as Davis, cursing savagely, was once more twisting to get out of the line of fire, one of the Huns sliced in close. There was a short, terrific blast of the Spandaus followed by the shriek of metal tearing through metal.

The Huns' well aimed burst had penetrated the cowl of the Spad's Hisso engine. Davis heard the motor scream at the impact. He heard it sputter, cough vainly for life, and then conk out cold!

His Spad was falling. He could see the horizon swinging up as his motorless nose dropped. The relief-map earth swayed in front of him, then began to whirl crazily, with dizzying speed.

He was corkscrewing down in a flat spin which drove the breath from his lungs and pushed at his eyeballs beneath his goggles. Madly, he fought with limp controls.

The hellish clatter broke out anew over his head. Glancing up, he saw with cold horror that the three Fokkers were diving after him, like vultures determined to finish their prey. Their tracer streams were following his spinning Spad.

Davis stopped struggling with the controls, relaxed in the cockpit, his head lolling, his body limply giving itself to the convolutions of the spin.

An old trick—but it seemed to be working! The Spandaus overhead subsided, but the three Fokkers still dived after the Spad, warily. If Davis showed any sign of life they'd promptly start blasting away once more.

WITH nausea in his stomach, the Yank made no move. Down, down his Spad went screaming, twisting, like a whirling top. A blurred rush of green was spinning toward him now, closer and closer. Tree-tops, the forest somewhere in front of the Hammel factory grounds.

Davis was struck with sudden, wild inspiration. Madly, he reached forward for his bomb-release lever. He seized it, jerked it once.

The Spad lurched, lightened, as one of the four bombs beneath its belly detached itself—was hurled by the momentum of the ship almost straight down.

*B-r-r-ooooom!*

The ear-splitting impact assured Davis now that he was not carrying duds! A geyser of flame and smoke shot up from the desolate trees close behind the Spad. Foliage caught fire.

Eager hope flamed within him as he saw the three Fokkers all flattening over the smoky scene. Just as he had hoped, they had thought his Spad had crashed there, crashed and exploded. They did not see the desperate Yank's crate below and in front of the billowing smoke.

And with just scant altitude to spare, Streak Davis once more bent all his skill to his controls,

jockeying stick and rudder with the lightning speed of desperation.

Sluggishly, the motorless Spad responded. The nauseating convolutions subsided. The crate straightened, plunging straight down now. Grunting with the effort, Davis jerked the stick back to his chest. He lifted the Spad into the shallowest possible glide directly over the dark green fringe of trees, which should now shield him from the Fokkers' view.

Over the tree-tops the Spad went whining, settling, settling. Davis' desperate eyes were fixed on a small clearing—a gap in the foliage. He nursed his crate toward it in a last supreme effort to keep up the wings a little longer.

He made it! Another instant and the tired Spad dropped into the gap which had appeared beneath it. The clearing was rough and stubbled, but out of sheer desperation, with the knowledge that a crash would undoubtedly set off his three remaining bombs and blast him to hell, Davis managed to set his wheels on it, managed to hold his plane on even keel when it bounced roughly, twice. Quickly it dragged to a stop. A perfect dead-stick landing!

Releasing his safety-scrap, Davis leaped to the ground. The thrum of a Mercedes engine once more came to his ears. He stood, frozen, eyes on the gap of sky above the clearing.

Three shapes went rocketing over the tree-tops. The three yellow-backed Fokkers! They were zooming away, apparently satisfied that the Spad had crashed. A wave of tense relief surged through Streak Davis as he saw them shrink into the blue.

"Safe—for the time being!" Davis gritted, pushing up his goggles, and his own voice startled him in the silence of the clearing. Safe? With cold despair he realized that he was stranded thirty kilometers in Hunland—stranded with a dead-engined Spad!

Hopelessly, he went to the nose of the crate. He lifted a cowl that had been riddled like a sieve, peered in at the motor.

A cry of hope broke from him. Why, the engine itself was undamaged—all the rocker arms were in place! It was the distributor only that the Spandau bullets had struck, ripping out the spark-wires.

"If I can fix them—" Hurriedly, Davis rushed to the cockpit, reached into the tool box, pulled out pliers, spare wire. Feverishly, he set to work, spurred by the thought that at any moment Boche might discover him.

Minutes passed. Davis took out wires, installing

new ones, scraping their copper ends shiny and joining them. And at last he straightened up with a sigh of satisfaction. The job was done, the damage repaired.

He glanced at his wrist-watch. It was nine-thirty. Only two hours and a half—why it was hopeless now, impossible!

It would take well over a half hour, at record-breaking speed, for Streak Davis to fly back. It would surely take over an hour to organize a new flight. And the mission itself would never fit into the remaining hour, much less leave a margin of time for H.Q. to be informed of the outcome by twelve noon.

Lines of frustration etched Davis' face. Miles away the blazing Yank drive, he knew, was continuing even now. The Whippets were making their steady, inexorable advance against the breaking lines of Ludendorf. And that advance was doomed, the whole drive was doomed, unless the H.Q. learned by noon that the Hammel factory was blasted!

A new thought came to Davis then, a thought that could only come to a man utterly desperate. He was on the ground now, and not far from that anti-tank gun factory. And even during his perilous fall from the sky, he had kept his sense of direction, which is an instinct with ace flyers.

Alone in the air he had found no possible loophole to attack the Hammel plant. It was all the more hopeless now with only three bombs on his crate. But perhaps alone on the ground.

AN ALLIED spy had failed, died in such an attempt. But the fact that a spy had gone out to do the job on the ground convinced Davis that there was some way of doing it—some way by which a man could destroy that big plant! Perhaps the place had enough inflammables in it to set it all ablaze—

"I'll find out!" Davis gritted. "There's nothing else I can do now, with time so short!"

Walking to the tail of the Spad, he lifted it from the ground, using the wheels as a fulcrum. With all his strength, he dragged at the ship—was rolling it backwards under the overhanging branches of a fringe of trees. Hastily, he adjusted this natural camouflage as best he could and prayed that the plane would not be discovered.

Then, his face set in fierce lines of resolve, Streak Davis—armed only with a Colt automatic in his side-holster—was striding off the clearing, into the trees. Furtively, he was stealing through the woods in the direction he knew the Hammel factory lay.

Working his way over tangled underbrush, weaving past tree-trunks, Streak Davis soon knew, with heart pounding, that he was nearing his destination. His progress became more and more stealthy, more and more cautious.

And of a sudden, still in the wood, he stopped, stood tense, ears listening.

Guttural voices drifted through nearby trees—the sound of moving, scraping hobnailed boots, the clink of metal. Boche!

Davis slid to a tree-trunk, peered around it in the direction of the sound. Scarcely twenty feet away, nested here in the wood, stood a large anti-aircraft gun, its glistening barrel poked up toward the sky. Several grey-glad Boche were grouped around it.

One of the guns of the anti-aircraft barrier! Now, deeper in the wood, Davis could see other A.A.s— all of them swarming with Boche.

Davis was about to sneak by these guns, when one of those, guttural voices—a harsh, barking voice jerked him back with sudden interest.

"*Die Amerikaner sind heruntergeschossen?*" A tall, swart-faced *Oberleutnant* was the speaker. Standing before the men of the first gun, he was rasping out the question. Streak Davis, who knew German thoroughly, mentally translated as he listened. "The Americans are all brought down?"

"*Ja wohl!*" a stocky *Feldwebel*, evidently in charge of the gun crews, replied respectfully. "All those nine who first came. Our guns finished them completely!" He chuckled, gloatingly. "It was fun, that target practise!"

"*Gut!*" The *Oberleutnant* nodded. "There was one more who came later but the flyers of *Exzellenz* von Honig attended to him. The swine shot two of them, but he paid with his life no doubt. It seems his plane exploded with its own bombs."

Streak Davis, lurking behind the tree-trunk, drew a furtive breath of relief. They thought he had crashed, would not be looking for him! He—

"*Ja*, we can thank von Honig alone that our factories are unscathed, and that we can ship out our guns and stop the tanks!" the *Oberleutnant's* voice was awed now. "Von Honig is a genius. It was his idea to trick the swine Americans. He himself sent out a spy to their lines to put oil into their bombs!"

DAVIS stood rigid. So it was von Honig who had been responsible for that slaughter—von Honig, the Boche ace of aces! If only Streak Davis could get a crack at the yellowback leader, he'd make him pay!

“Remain alert!” the *Oberleutnant* was barking to the gunners. “But I doubt if any more will come now.” He chuckled. “It is too late for them now. Their drive in this Sector is doomed; and even if they send reserves to Foch, they will only be cannon fodder for Prince Ruprecht’s south army!”

Too late? Once more defiance blazed in Davis’ eyes. He had heard enough now, enough to double his desperate resolve. Dodging from one trunk to another, he slipped his way past those guns, getting by that circle on foot where he could never have flown by it in the air.

He went on, bent on his desperate and still vague mission. And in just a few minutes more—

Again Davis stopped short, behind a tree-trunk. Right before him the forest terminated abruptly. There was an immense clearing, dazzling with morning sunlight.

The Hammel factories lay in front of him.

The five squat buildings which had looked toylike from the air now reared to gigantic size, their chimneys belching into the sky.

And it seemed half the German reserve army was guarding those buildings! On every part of the grounds, wherever Davis looked, he saw pacing sentries, with coal-scuttle helmets and bayonet-tipped Mauser rifles.

Even the coveredl workmen who came in and out of the buildings were challenged and examined by the guards before being permitted to pass. It was instantly apparent to the tense Streak Davis that no stranger could hope to get onto the grounds at all—even in a Boche uniform, a man would instantly be challenged, checked up, betrayed—

Lurking at the fringe of woods, the Yank cursed in his frustration. There was certainly no access here. He began to skirt around the place, hoping to find some loop-hole through the barrier of watchful guards.

But he found none. On all sides of the plant it was the same: the line of sentries extended up to the very wood itself, so close that at times Davis could have reached out from the trees and touched one of the pacing, stolid Boche guards.

## CHAPTER VI BACK FROM THE DEAD!

**M**INUTES PASSED. Davis had practically encircled the place now. Desperately, he was peering from one side onto the Boche-infested grounds. And now he saw a sight which filled him with growing, icy panic. Alongside one of the buildings ran a small gauge track. Flatcars, linked in a long chain, stood on it, and those cars were being loaded even now by a bustling swarm of workmen. They were being loaded with strange-looking rifles of extraordinary size—so large that two men carried each one.

The completed anti-tank guns! The guns which would doom the Whippets, pierce their armor and annihilate their crews!

A glance at his wrist-watch showed Davis it was now ten-fifteen. Only one hour and three quarters and—

In the act of shifting his position again, his foot slipped. He found himself tripping into a declivity in the ground, full of tangled weeds and brush. Sprawling, he climbed out quickly, was getting to his feet, dismissing this hole in the ground and—

Suddenly he stiffened. Something clicked in the back of his mind, in the keen recesses of his unfailing memory. Of a sudden he recalled the map of the plant with which Eddie Kane had set out—the map brought in by that doomed Allied spy.

There had been a mark on that map which checked with the position of this brush-filled hole in the ground.

The mark of a tunnel that spy had dug! A tunnel, whereby he had hoped to get to the place—

Until this moment Davis had not considered that tunnel, never hoping to locate it—and doubting that the spy had had time to complete it.

But now, with every other access closed, even an uncompleted tunnel was enough to fill the desperate Yank with fresh hope.

Davis stooped, pulled at the underbrush. In minutes the opening was clear, yawning darkly at Davis, slanting at an oblique angle into the depths of the earth.



How far, and where, did it lead? Davis had no idea. For all he knew it might prove to be a blind alley, or a death-trap.

But he was too desperate to hesitate.

Stooping, using his hands to support himself on the ground, he lowered his legs into the steep down-slanting cavity. It was just large enough to admit his broad-shouldered body. Slowly, he wriggled his way down.

Damp earth closed over him. The aperture was now above his head. As best he could he reached up, pulled the camouflage-foliage back over the place, closing out the daylight.

IN A darkness which grew pitch, Davis continued to wriggle down the steep descending passage. His breath soon became labored, panting. He felt stifled, buried alive, as he went down, with bits of earth tumbling after him.

Suddenly his feet struck level flooring. The tight walls gave way to a space which, in comparison, was almost roomy. Davis, unable to see, groped out blindly. He discovered now that this passage gave onto a horizontal passage, about four feet in height and breadth.

He ducked into this tunnel head first, half crawling beneath the low ceiling. Each foot of progress gave him new hope that the spy had carried his tunnel far, but each foot also filled him with growing dread, with icy suspense. He lost all track of time, of distance.

Then, out of the blackness, a cold, hard muzzle was suddenly thrust into his body.

At that moment Davis, brave man that he was, could have screamed. His flesh felt like jelly. His heart seemed to have stopped beating.

He could just see the glint of the revolver. He could just make out a finger on the trigger—tightening! Betrayed! The Boche must have discovered the tunnel long ago! Discovered it and—

“Don’t move, you skunk! I can see you well enough to plug you—and that’s what I aim to do!”

The harsh words grated like a file in the darkness. The words of a crazed man, ready to kill.

It struck Davis like a thunderbolt that they were English words! English words—in a good Yank accent, and in a familiar voice!

“Hold it, Eddie, for God’s sake! It’s Streak Davis! Hold it, kid!” The words burst from Davis almost hysterically just in time to check that tightening finger. The revolver was suddenly withdrawn. Davis heard the

other’s gasp in the darkness. He could just make out a shadowy form now—a form that looked indeed like a ghost.

“Streak—” Only the voice was real, a voice raised in mingled amazement and joy now. “Streak! How in the—” His voice dropped to a sudden tense whisper. “Hush! The skunks will hear us! They’re not far away—”

Davis’ voice was a sob. “Good Lord, kid, I was sure you were dead!” He was grabbing a shoulder in the darkness, as if to make sure it had substance. “I was sure they got you!”

“I wish to hell they had!”

Once more the voice of Eddie Kane, the man who was resurrected from the dead, spoke harshly, in a rasping, fierce whisper.

“They got all the rest—every one of my flight! They slaughtered them, sent them all to hell.” His anguished sobs filled the darkness. “And I had to be the one to pull out. I—when I should have been the first to die! You were right, Streak. We were just a bunch of green kids, unfit for a job like this.” The pitiful words wrenched at Streak Davis’ very heart. “No, Eddie. I was a fool to say that. I saw you lead your gang in. Kids—hell, then I don’t know what men are! It was a lousy spy of von Honig’s who fouled your bombs for you—at least I got the skunk!”

Eddie Kane was not comforted. “A flight commander! Why didn’t I check up on everything before we left? They trusted me, followed me—right to the end! They’re probably looking for me right now in hell.” His laugh was jagged, almost crazed. “Well, I’ll join them soon enough!”

Davis’ grip tightened on the shoulder of the friend he couldn’t see. “Here, steady, kid!” he rapped, trying to soothe the overwrought young flight leader. “Tell me how you pulled out—how you happened to be in this tunnel.”

The words took effect. Kane seemed momentarily to recover some calmness. “I crashed in the woods—plane a total washout, but I was thrown clear. I still had the map and located this tunnel on it. Came here as fast as I could. Been working ever since.”

“Then you’ve been to the end of the tunnel?” Davis’ voice was eager.

“Yes. We’re near the end now. There’s a tight passage going up. The spy managed to dig as far as the floor of the building—I just loosened one of the floorboards myself and—”

“The building?” Davis demanded. “Which building?”

“The ammunition store, from what I saw,” Kane answered. “And even though they’re carting out the boxes of anti-tank bullets, there’s still enough explosives in there to blow hell out of the whole damned outfit!”

Davis stifled a whoop of exultation. “That’s the first break we’ve had! Nice of the Yank agent to fix things so neat for us!” Until now it had not occurred to him that these factories not only turned out the guns, but also manufactured the bullets for them!

“I couldn’t loosen more floorboards, or try to get in,” Kane continued, “because the Boche are busy taking out their shipment. I came down here to wait until they’re finished. Then I heard you crawling along, thought you were a Boche.” He gripped Davis’ arm. “Thank God you showed up, Streak! Were you shot down too?”

“No,” Davis was still dazed by the news he had just heard. “That is, yes—by some of von Honig’s yellowbacks. But I fixed my crate. It’s in the woods.” His voice was eager. “It can carry us both, if we remove the bombs and—”

“It isn’t going to carry us both!” Again that harsh, fierce note was in Kane’s voice. “You’re going back to that crate now. All this time I’ve only been worried about one thing! How the Allies would get the information that the plant is blasted! Well, you’re going back with that information.” Davis glimpsed the luminous flicker of an upturned wrist-watch. “It’s ten forty now. There will be time. You go to your crate, get into the air, and wait until you see the place blow up. Then—”

DAVIS laughed. “Are you off your nut, kid? Even if you could manage to blow up the storeroom, how about your own getaway?”

“There won’t be any getaway!” Kane gritted. “I’m going to make sure the Boche don’t stop me, even if they find me. I’ll find a way to set off that ammo quick—so quick there will be no time for anyone to do a thing about it!”

A chill crept through Davis as he listened to these desperate words, the import of which was all too clear. Eddie Kane, bereft of his flight, regarding his own life as worthless, meant to set off that ammo—and stay with it to see that it exploded!

“Get goin’, will you, Streak?” he grated. “Time is precious.”

“Listen to me, Eddie!” Davis’ voice was hard, grim. “For a long time you’ve been raving about team-work

—while I’ve been standing up for this lone wolf stuff. I don’t know which of us is right, but here we are, two of us, with a job on which the war depends. It’s no time for hero stuff now. We’re both in this, and we’ve got to see it through together!” He paused. There was a strained silence. Then, out of the darkness, the hand of Eddie Kane reached for the hand of Streak Davis. And two Yanks gripped—in the handclasp of men.

“You’re right. Streak!” Kane’s voice was vibrant. “I was thinking more of myself and you, than the job!”

“Then,” Streak husked, “we pull this together, come what may—and we try to get out together?”

“It’s a bargain. Let’s go, Streak!” And two desperate Yanks set out together in that black tunnel! Eddie Kane led the way to the narrow, ascending passage close ahead. He squirmed up first, but Streak Davis was right after him, grunting as he wriggled up, at times reaching to touch Kane’s foot to make sure he was still there. Blindly, panting with effort, the two flyers continued the ascent.

THEN vague chinks of furtive light showed overhead. Another moment and Kane was climbing out in a small, low cellar-way, a two-foot-high area where crisscross beams supported the flooring above. Streak Davis climbed out after him. The two crouched there, amid the beams.

In the dim light, Davis could just see Kane reach up furtively. There was the crackling groan of a moving board. One chink of light widened.

Kane was pushing up a loosened flooring piece, was cautiously raising his head to peer through it.

He ducked down. “Coast isn’t clear yet—but they’re leaving now.”

Davis silently moved beneath the partially upraised board. He lifted his own head, peered through.

He saw a huge chamber, occupying all of the building. Sunlight slanted in dancing, dusty rays through windows, fell upon huge cases marked in red, on piles of anti-aircraft shells, kegs of ammunition.

Kane had been right when he had said there was enough stuff here to blast everything in the vicinity to hell!

Davis’ eyes went down the length of floor. This opening here was in one corner. There was a group of Boche near the open front door of the building—soldiers and workmen. They were carrying out two large boxes: anti-tank bullets no doubt.

Even as Davis watched, the whole party went out. The door closed behind them.

He ducked down, gripped Eddie Kane's arm. "All clear now, kid! But we'll have to work fast! No telling when they'll come back!"

As he spoke he pried up the loosened floorboard further. The opening was still too narrow, however. Hastily, Davis crouched beneath the next board, put his shoulders to it, heaved.

*C-r-r-ack!* With a squeak of rusty nails, the board gave, tilted up. The two men pushed it high enough to create a wide gap.

Then, recklessly, Streak Davis was climbing up—with a helpful boost from his comrade. He scrambled out of the opening, was in the big chamber, on the floor.

He reached down, gave Eddie Kane a hand, and pulled the young flight commander up after him. And as Kane emerged on the floor, Davis saw him now actually for the first time since their tense, unexpected meeting. And Davis gasped, for young Eddie Kane was scarcely recognizable.

Eddie Kane's togs, caked with dirt as were Davis', were also in shreds. His face was bloody from scratches and bruises. He had lost his helmet. His red hair was stained with oil and grime.

"What are you staring at Streak?" the red-headed, disheveled flight commander demanded in a harsh whisper. "Come on, we got to make time."

Hastily, he was bending over the floorboards, pushing them down as best he could, but leaving them loose enough to be quickly lifted—for the escape.

Streak Davis, meanwhile, glanced furtively about the big chamber. Through the windows now he could see the grounds of the plant, could see the other four buildings. He realized the position of this one, the smallest of the group; it was almost in their center.

And though there were no Boche within just now, they swarmed around outside, pacing past the windows with their shouldered Mausers.

"Keep low, kid!" Davis gritted, as the two men commenced to steal across the floor, weaving past the cases of explosives, reconnoitering in grim silence. Both were looking for the same thing. Both were racking their brains for some scheme to set off this room full of high explosives.

Suddenly, near one of the walls, Streak Davis stopped, his eye on one of the red-marked boxes.

"That looks as if it might be— Wait!" Whispering, Davis managed to pry part of the cover of the box up. He pulled out excelsior—saw a dark grey, woolly substance within.

"Gun-cotton!" he whispered. "Stuff that explodes quicker than anything else!" His brow furrowed with concentration. "If we could make some sort of fuse—"

"Got it!" Kane astonished Streak Davis by his swift cooperation, which proved how well this young redhead knew teamwork. Kane was ripping off a torn scarf. It was wet with oil and petrol. "It got soaked in the crash. It will burn all right," he whispered. "And I've got matches—" He began to twist it up, to turn it into a long, make-shift fuse.

Davis, meanwhile, was clearing away excelsior from the gun-cotton. "We'll shove it in, light it—and hope to hell we can get far enough through the tunnel to—"

He broke off and both men jumped up from their work

"Duck! Quick!" Davis jerked out in a frenzied whisper. They leaped across the floor, crouched behind a row of large shell-crates, Kane taking the half twisted scarf with him.

The door of the building had opened once more! A little group of grey-clad Boche had strode in. Motionless, hoping they had ducked in time, the two Yanks crouched tensely behind the shell-crates.

The Boche walked across the floor. One of them, had a book, and was checking off a pile of boxes on the opposite side of the room. He nodded to the others.

"The shipment of bullets for the first load is completed. *Das ist alles.*"

To the relief of the two hidden Yanks, the party was again starting for the door.

A sudden exclamation from one of the soldiers, who had tripped on the floor.

*"Sehen Sie! Was ist das?"*

## CHAPTER VII A PLUNGE THROUGH FIRE

**D**AVIS FELT HIS HEART SINK to his very boots. He looked at Kane, crouching beside him, looked at him with cold despair.

The Boche had tripped over one of those loosened floorboards!

At his shout the rest of the Huns ran over to him. The *Unteroffizier's* face went tense. He barked crisp orders. Rough hands ripped up the two floorboards. Startled eyes peered down.

“*Gott im Himmel!*”

“Spy work! *Spionen!*”

“Sound the alarm!”

The Huns had discovered the tunnel—the tunnel by which the two Yanks had meant to escape when they did their grim job!

Helpless, faces drained of blood, Davis and Kane saw their whole reckless scheme being nipped in the bud! Already, bedlam was breaking loose in front of them! The *Unteroffizier* had lifted a whistle to his lips—its shrill blast shattered the confines of the building. From the open door a whole crowd of sentries came rushing, gripping their bayonets. The swart-faced *Oberleutnant* Davis had seen at the anti-aircrafts also came in, promptly began bellowing orders.

Boche were climbing into the tunnel. For the second time this day Streak Davis witnessed the terrible, contagious “spy-fever”—only now he was on the other side of the fence!

The grip of Eddie Kane was suddenly a vise on his arm. He heard the redhead’s whisper, once more harsh, desperate: “Streak, they’ll be finding us in another moment and there’d be no chance anyway to burn a fuse without their spotting it. Make a break for it, will you? The window there—” he pointed diagonally across the floor, to a window partially open. “Maybe you’ll get back—” As he spoke he was madly untwisting the oil-soaked scarf. He was picking up a long sliver of wood from a split board of the shell case—wrapping the scarf around it.

Davis stared. Horror in his eyes as he saw what Kane was doing. Kane was improvising a torch. He meant to set off the gun-cotton across the room by his own hand.

“The window, Streak!” the youngster’s eyes were filled with reckless purpose. “The cards are stacked the way I first wanted them! Try to get back, to report and—”

He stopped suddenly, and at the same instant Streak Davis leaped bolt upright with a gasp of alarm.

Having come around the row of boxes, a whole group of the Boche, led by the swart-visaged *Oberleutnant*, had suddenly been brought almost face to face with the two Yanks!

The two aviators were spotted—betrayed!

For a moment the surprise was mutual. Then the face of the *Oberleutnant* went utterly mottled in alarmed rage. A guttural yell broke from his throat as he whipped out a Luger.

“*Amerikaner!*” he yelled.

The Boche behind him took up his wild cry. Livid-faced, they were all rushing toward the two Yanks, leveling rifles and revolvers.

But at that same instant Davis, seeing the jig was up, let out a cry: “Give ’em hell, kid!”

Both Yanks whirled—both whipped out their Colts. *Crack! Crack!*

Flame spat defiantly from the Yank muzzles as the reports shattered the chamber. The *Oberleutnant* gave a strangled cry, dropped like a felled tree. Streak Davis had plugged him neatly through the heart. Kane’s first shot had wounded one of the others, sent him howling to the floor. The rest momentarily fell back in a wave—while others, summoned by the shots, rushed to join them.

*Crack!* A Mauser pistol barked, and a bullet whined over Davis’ head. The Boche were at first reluctant with their fire for fear of the explosives which filled the room—though there was actually no chance of a bullet setting them off.

And now Streak Davis and Eddie Kane were fighting at bay, making a last, desperate stand against the charging horde of Boche who were closing in on them. Backs to the shell-crates, bodies side by side, they stood with their revolvers thrust out and blazing in unison—two comrades facing death as comrades should!

Streak Davis, eyes blazing, teeth gritted, was aiming every shot with swift but expert care—and every shot he fired sent a man sprawling, wounded or dead. Kane, however, was more reckless and hasty. The red-headed flight commander was emptying his whole clip at the charging Jerries, not taking time to aim—potting a few of them by sheer luck. His gun went silent, empty, as Davis was still firing.

“Put in a new clip, kid!” Streak gritted at him, above his own smoking weapon. “Keep ’em back until we can blast through for a getaway!”

But Kane was not putting in a new clip! Deliberately, he threw his gun away! And he was stooping, an insane light in his eyes. He was, picking up that improvised torch he had made. And even as several Jerry guns burst loose now, Eddie Kane got out a match—there was a flicker, a hiss. The oil-soaked scarf at the end of the stick was flaming lividly!

“Beat it, Streak! Get out the window! I’m going to—”

Cursing, Davis was now firing his last two shots at two white-faced Boche who, seeing the flaming torch, were trying to level rifles at Eddie Kane. *Crack! Crack!* One Boche dropped right down—plugged through the

head. The second staggered around in a dizzy circle, clutching a wounded abdomen.

Madly, Streak Davis was jamming a new clip into his gun then with the lightning haste of experience and desperation.

TWO new Mausers and a Luger barked in a desperate chorus from the grey ranks—all of them aimed at Eddie Kane, who was even now waving the livid fiery torch above his head like some mad savage.

Eddie Kane's scream, a scream which pierced Davis' very heart as if it brought to him instead of Kane the impact of Mauser bullets—was a scream of defiance rather than agony. Crazily, the youngster staggered across the floor—clutching his torch. He went down then—and Davis, once more firing his Colt with wild fury, saw blood spurting from his comrade's tunic.

Eddie Kane was sprawled to the floor. He was riddled—they had plugged him. But he was still moving. With his last agonized breath and ebbing will-power, he was wriggling forward. Pushing out the flaming torch before him, trying to get to the box of gun-cotton at the wall—

For a moment it seemed he would make it—an awful moment during which even the Germans stood rooted to the floor, transfixed with fascinated horror, while Streak Davis hesitated, realizing that he should have bolted for the window—that someone must live to report—

But then, in a rush which came out of the sheer instinct of self-preservation, the Germans leaped forward as one. Davis, crazily trying to help his dying buddy blow him and the rest to hell, was firing his new clip at the Boche, vainly striving to stem the tide.

But the Huns were not to be stopped. They piled like a bunch of crazed football tackles on Eddie Kane. Scarcely two feet from the ammunition box, the flaming torch was kicked out of Eddie Kane's hands, stamped on until it was extinguished. And Eddie Kane's limp body moved no more.

Utterly reckless, no longer caring what became of himself, Davis was momentarily trying to think of some way by which he could set off the ammo here.

FAILURE! Efforts to get the anti-tank factory had been thwarted. Even now the sun outside was steadily creeping toward the zenith. Time was dwindling away; and on the distant battlefield an army of advancing tanks would be hopelessly checked, a million doughboys driven back! Failure! A flight of reckless

youngsters slaughtered, their leader surviving only to fail in another, different attempt—and now Streak Davis himself left here with this crowd of Boche. Boche who, in the next instant, were leaping up from Eddie Kane's poor body and once more taking enraged notice of Streak Davis!

A mad light lit Davis' eyes. The germ of an idea had come to life in his brain. It prodded his every muscle, it told him that he must see to it that Eddie Kane had not died in vain.

He whipped up his Colt, fired anew, even as the Jerries started to charge toward him. Before they could organize their attack, the lone Yank whirled, dashed to the window. He caught the sill, swung his whole body through the opening. He sprawled five feet to grassy ground, was up like a jack-in-the-box, running for all he was worth across the sunny, Boche-swarmed grounds of the factory.

*Crack! Crack!* Mausers barked after him from the window. He heard alarm whistles, heard a siren moaning on one of the squat brick buildings. The hordes of sentries were whirling from every direction rushing towards his khaki figure like waves of grey. *Crack! Crack!* Bullets sang over his head, whined in his ears. But he ignored the fire now. Body bent double, head low, he was catapulting toward the fringe of woods.

Even as he ran he managed a flashing glance at his wrist-watch. It was just a little past eleven. There would still be time—

A whole group of coal-scuttle helmeted Boche started to cut him off from the right, and their bullets came closer and closer. Davis fired a volley into their midst, and as they momentarily receded, he whirled in his course, zigzagging. Cleverly he ran so that he was between this group of Boche and yet another—charging from an opposite direction. Both groups had to hold their fire for fear of hitting each other, and Streak Davis, running on legs like pistons was reaching the woods. Ducking amid the trees.

Like a hunted fox he was scrambling over underbrush, with the sounds of his hunters filling the trees behind him. Then whistles were blaring in front of him—the anti-aircraft gunners, getting the alarm. He doubled his efforts, hurled forward. Two sweating gunners leaped suddenly out before him, loomed in his path—both raising Lugers.

His Colt spat, and one of the two went down like a marionette from a broken string. The second rushed right up to Davis before he could aim a second shot.

The Yank's left fist flashed out like a ball of iron. *Pough!* The blow sent the Boche staggering into the trees in a heap of brush.

Others were coming, from the nearby guns glistening amid the wood—but Davis was too quick for them now. He darted once more past the fringe of A.A.'s, was using all his remaining wind for the last part of his dash. His unfaltering sense of direction had not left him for an instant. Straight as a bee, he was heading for his objective.

Another instant and he was bursting onto the small clearing where he had made his forced landing. Joyous relief swept him as he found his Spad, safe where he had left it behind low-hanging branches.

With the sounds of pursuing Jerries in his ears, he dragged the plane out in one mad heave of the tail. He swung it with its nose already pointed for the wind. Leaping to the propeller, he tugged it three times—for compression. Then back to the ignition—to switch on.

Again to the propeller, a prayer in his heart, a prayer that the as-yet-untested, repaired motor would take! Even as he started to pull the blade once more, ominous shapes of grey appeared between the tree-trunks—Boche, with leveled, bayoneted Mausers, were bursting onto the clearing!

Davis tugged wildly at the propeller. If it failed now—

There was a blasting roar as the Hisso took and the blade whirled from the leaping Davis' grasp. The plane shivered, started to slew around crazily. The Boche, shouting their rage, closed in.

Davis grabbed the cockpit rim of the moving crate, thinking crazily of the Hun spy who had done the same thing earlier this morning. He was swinging into the cockpit then, plopping down—his feet standing down on the rudder bar, his hand grabbing the stick.

The plane leaped straight into the wind. Vainly the Boche tried to grab its swift wings, others tried to lunge bayonets at the cockpit. Davis, with one hand, emptied his Colt, driving off the few Jerries close enough to menace him. Then he bent low to his controls, sent his crate forward full speed, with Huns scampering before its onrushing, whirling propeller.

And this time, Streak Davis took off in the breathless, straight-away manner which had won him his nickname! Like a bird escaping from a trap, he rocketed his crate off that clearing, over the tree-tops—out of range of the infuriated, frustrated Mauser bullets!

Like a rocket indeed, zooming almost vertically into the sky, here in front of the anti-aircraft zone. Zooming up, yanking goggles over a face set in mad

resolve, as mad almost as the face of poor Eddie Kane had been when he had tried to use that torch.

UP, UP, into the blue sunny sky, until the earth shrank below, and the whirling propeller clawed with more and more difficulty at the thinning regions of the air.

Fifteen thousand feet—

Davis banked his protesting crate around, banked it until the Hammel anti-tank gun factory was a tiny toylike cluster directly below and ahead.

"Now!" he gritted. "*Now*—you damned Boche!"

He slammed the joy-stock forward, almost to the fire-wall.

The nose of the Spad dropped like a stone. Engine full out, the plane hurtled downward in a dive. It was truly a bolt from the blue now, truly the streak of lightning that was painted on its fuselage. Hellbent, with black smoke belching from his exhaust stacks, Streak Davis was diving. Diving alone, straight for the factories of Hammel! Diving with only three bombs on his racks—three bombs which Streak Davis had been helpless to use, but upon which he now depended for his very life!

And then, even as it had happened with "B" Flight, it happened again. The spew of those scores of anti-aircrafts, suddenly belching from the ground. And this time, though Davis was coming down so fast that the eye could scarcely follow his plummeting crate, the gunners were ready. They had known a Spad had escaped, had loaded their weapons.

*Grumpf! Grumpf!*

The heavens turned into hell. Day became night, as the devastating mushrooms sprouted on every side of the down-hurtling, streak-marked Spad. The smoke was illumined only by the even more terrifying strings of flaming onions from the Boche "flower-pots." Shrapnel came whizzing past Davis' very head like stones hurled by a giant. Pom-pom bullets hacked through his fuselage and wings.

But stubbornly, recklessly, he kept plunging headlong through the storm of fire, putting his nose further and further into the trap from which there could be no escape. Unless—

Through the smoke, from the cockpit of his hurtling, screaming crate, Davis' eyes could just discern the five squat buildings of the factory. His whole attention focused on the smallest and central building there, the building which he had only learned about from his hectic, futile escapade with Eddie Kane.

CHAPTER VIII  
THE MAGIC SEVEN

**W**ITH THE STORM of anti-aircrafts cracking his very eardrums, with the shells bursting ever closer to his ship, Streak Davis plunged straight for that central, squat building.

It loomed. It grew from a toy to the large, sandbag-topped structure it was. Grim it looked, almost tomblike. A tomb all right—a tomb for Eddie Kane, whose lifeless body was within it even now.

With the building right below him Streak Davis jerked his bomb-release lever—jerked it once, twice, and yet again, even as his other hand yanked the stick back to his chest.

The Spad leaped upward as the three thirty-pounders went hurling from its belly. Down they went, shrinking through space, and even as they fell Davis was zooming amid the anti-aircraft fire which was so thick now that he knew it must doom him in another instant if—

*B-r-r-r-OOOOOOOOOOM!*

The very earth seemed to explode!

The detonations of the three bombs became lost in the ear-splitting, sky-shaking blast which sent the whole place up in a mile-high column of flame and smoke!

The ammunition building, set off by Davis' three direct hits, had done all that Eddie Kane had figured it would!

The entire factory, including the laden trains, was blown off the face of the earth! And with it were wiped out every anti-aircraft gun in the vicinity—and doubtless every Boche too!

And Streak Davis was zooming safely above the settling mass of smoke and debris, and the subsiding A.A. shells. Streak Davis, who had done for Eddie Kane what Kane could not do for himself.

But more remained. The mission was not yet completed. Tensely Davis glanced again at his wrist-watch. Just thirty-five minutes for him to fly back to the lines, to report the news which must be in the possession of H.Q.—or it was still of no use!

With mad haste, Davis straightened out his

battered Spad. Even as he slammed open the throttle, was spurting toward the west, some sixth sense warned him to glance back.

HE DID and the blood ran cold within him. Sweeping after him, coming like enraged vultures, were three yellow-backed Fokkers—the very three Fokkers which had shot him down before!

Davis cursed his defiance. They would not stop him now—with every minute so precious! He put down his nose to a slanting angle, was hurling his Spad forward with terrific momentum, rushing down a long hill of space towards the lines. He glanced back. The Fokkers were following, but he was outdistancing them.

The deafening clatter of Spandaus sounding right in his very ears, almost made Davis jump out of his skin. With cold horror he felt his Spad lurch with the impact of lead, heard tracer screaming down at him—overhead and in front!

He jerked his eyes up with a cry of wild alarm. A dazzling shape of yellow, with black crosses, was plunging right towards him like some monstrous bird—flame spitting from its guns. And behind the Spandau butts was limned a hard, goggled face, a face which had the look of a born killer.

“Von Honig!” Davis burst out. “Von Honig—himself!”

Flying high like a lone vulture above his flock, the German ace of aces had used the advantage of his altitude to swoop down unaware and cut off the desperate Yank!

And now, determinedly, his dazzling, all-yellow crate was blocking Davis' path with flaming lead!

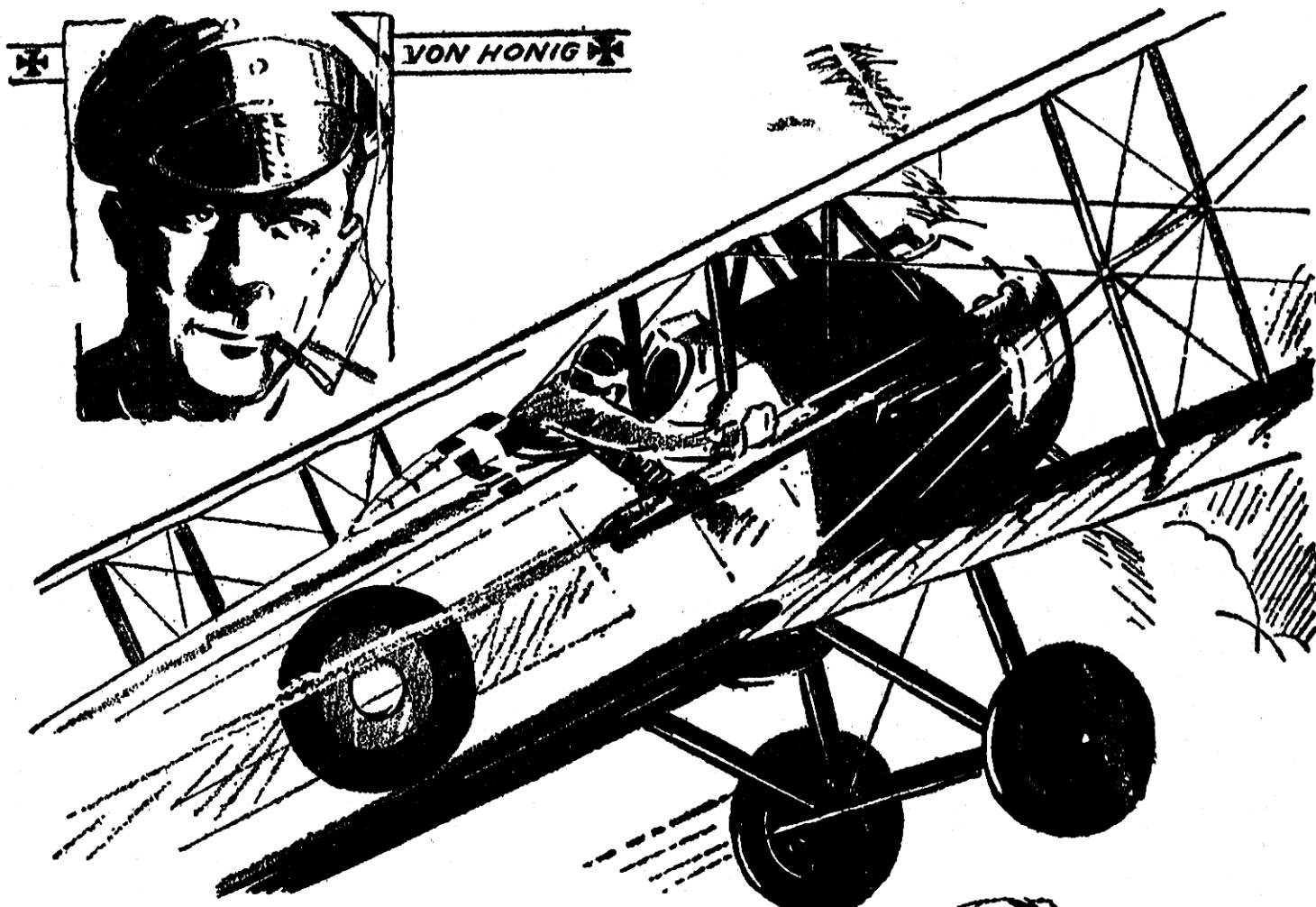
Davis cursed savagely as he saw his predicament. Von Honig cutting him off—and the other three Fokkers rushing in behind! And every minute of time precious!

*Rat-ta-tat-tat!* The Spandaus of Germany's crack killer again flamed red. Slugs rained past Davis' cockpit, ricocheted from the cowl beside him. He swore. At any other time he would have welcomed a fight with this Hun of Huns, but now, with those three Fokkers closing in, with noon approaching—

“Damn you, von Honig!” Davis gritted. “Let me get past this once. I'll fight you any other time you name!”

And desperately, he tried to maneuver past the yellow Fokker. But the German, with Teutonic stubbornness, as if to mock Davis' unheard plea, promptly sideslipped to block the Spad anew, to meet it with a fresh burst of lead.

Perforce then, Streak Davis had to fight. Furiously



now he was firing his own Vickers, hurling his crate at the yellow Fokker, trying to smash past. There in the sky the two aces were going through breathless maneuvers, twisting, turning, spitting lead at each other.

With each passing minute Davis became more and more frantic. If he didn't get through now he'd never get back in time. And those Fokkers were rushing closer, closer! Again he tried to maneuver past the stubborn von Honig—again the German stopped him with a blasting wall of lead.

And then Streak Davis went utterly berserk! His eyes slitted with murderous hate—hate against this German sky-killer who had been responsible for the slaughter of "B" Flight in the first place, who had sent out the spy to make duds of "B" Flight's bombs! Was this hard-faced Hun still going to thwart the mission—after the anti-tank gun factory had already been blasted?

Davis flung all his skill into one frantic maneuver. Of a sudden he whipped away from the Boche ace, stopped trying to pass von Honig—and banked





vertically in the opposite direction, where he saw the other three Fokkers coming on, hell-bent.

Then the desperate Yank gave his joystick a sharp tug backward and to the left corner. The nose of his plane lifted, and he kicked the rudder. The Spad flopped over on its back. Davis hung upside down from his safety-belt for a moment. He jerked the throttle closed. Upside down, the nose of the plane dropped. Down it swung, like a pendulum, clear down and then up in the opposite direction—a breathless, split-airing *renversement!*

It brought Streak Davis swinging right up beneath the surprised von Honig's underbelly. The German had never expected the tactic.

FOR a fleeting moment, the underpart of the Fokker was caught in the sights of Streak Davis. And in that moment Davis, gritting his teeth, pressed his stick-triggers.

Von Honig's Fokker leaped like an agonized bird. It fell off on one wing, flew crazily. A tongue of flame spurted from its engine cowl, went licking down the fuselage. The yellow ship became a mass of red flames.

A fiery cross, the crate of Germany's ace of aces, hurtled down in a wake of twisting, oily smoke.

Too frenzied to realize the mighty victory he had scored, Streak Davis was madly pulling up to resume his race for the lines. The enraged clatter of three pairs of Spandaus shattered the air behind him. Fresh tracers pelted at his crate, beat like drumsticks on the Spad's tail-surfaces.

Enraged by the fall of their leader the three yellowbacks had caught up to Davis, were trying to wreak vengeance.

Davis cursed, put down his nose, and dived, without even attempting to dodge the hail of lead which followed him as the three Huns clung like leeches. He dived toward the lines, flicking up his wrist-watch at frantic intervals. Eleven-forty! How could he possibly make it? There were still miles to go, and those three Fokkers were sitting on his tail. They might get him at any moment!

A glance over his shoulder increased his alarm. For the Fokkers had strung out now in an echelon. The fastest ship was sitting right on Davis' tail. The second had moved into position to its left, behind the wing, the third had moved left of the second: horizontally, the three crates made three jutting steps in the sky.

Three steps, and they were trying to get Davis within the echelon, so that each would have a clear shot at him!

Realizing that such a position would spell swift and

certain doom, Davis rapidly took the time to half-roll to the right, so that all three Fokkers were strung out on a line behind him. This exposed him only to the guns of the lead yellowback, which blasted furiously away at him, kept pounding his tail-fins.

Minutes—precious, dwindling minutes! With his Spad already drunk with bullets, as well as from the terrific A.A. battering it had taken before, Davis continued his mad race with death and time.

Eleven-fifty. The lines, in view at last! The flaming pageant of the big drive, moving at its comparatively snail-like pace, was deep within the former Ludendorf positions now. And again Streak Davis, in a hasty downward glance, saw the steady, flaming advance of the thousands of Whippet tanks—saw the doughboys following them. Those doughboys would need the support of three reserve divisions if the drive was to continue. And unless word got to H.Q. by noon those divisions would be sent to Foch instead. Even with the menace of anti-tank guns removed the drive here would be stopped!

*Rat-ta-tat-tat-tat!* The Fokkers were still strung out behind Davis, unable to get him within their stepped formation, but the lead yellowback was wreaking more and more damage with its gibbering Spandaus.

Across the lines now. God, if only he could drop a despatch or something! But with those three vultures on his back he could do nothing except goad his drunken Spad on, and hold it together by his own strength and skill.

THREE minutes to noon! Streak Davis' desperate eyes sighted the 25th's airdrome at last, looming like a tan bald-spot in the foliage of a wood. He spurred his crate on in a last effort, even as he felt the tail-fins getting sluggish from the hammering of the lead Fokker's Spandaus.

Two minutes to twelve. Almost overhead of the home drome, Streak Davis felt a sudden sense of helpless despair which brought sobs to his throat. How could he possibly get down there with his news in two minutes? Even if these three Fokkers were not clinging to him he could not have hoped to do it!

"I'm too late!" he cursed. To have come so far, to have succeeded to the point where he was right over his own drome—and yet to be unable to finish the job in the scant remaining time!

Even now the grizzled C.O. must be right down below in the Operations—sitting, as he had said he would, with the phone to his ear and his eyes on the

east window! Waiting for “B” Flight, for Eddie Kane’s gang to come home and—

Then, even as those last two minutes dwindled, Streak Davis’ eyes suddenly lighted with crazed inspiration! Thinking of Eddie Kane’s gang, of how they might have come home had they done the job and lived. Thinking of their formation stunting which he had always thought a joke, of the little book with its letters and numbers—

7—Mission accomplished.

He remembered it, that signal. Fate must have made Eddie Kane choose that particular numeral, for certainly Eddie Kane had not been thinking of three Fokkers, flying in a strung-out step formation which—

*One minute!*

A mad, almost insane grin flecked over Davis’ lips. Deliberately then, he once more let his speeding Spad half-roll—to the left!

The Huns must have thought him crazy indeed, for he flew right on the inner side of their echelon. He flew into the position where all three had a perfect shot at him—and all three took advantage of it.

Their Spandaus flamed, pumping the agonized Spad. But Streak Davis, grinning madly, merely drew his lurching ship in a little closer. And now he cut the throttle momentarily, allowing the Spad to fall back so that suddenly, unexpectedly, it was flying alongside the lead yellowback, while the other two Fokkers slanted obliquely behind them both.

If only Eddie Kane were here to see!

For now the Spad of Streak Davis formed, together with the unwittingly collaborating Fokkers, a perfect seven!

A seven with a Fokker and Spad for its top bar, and two strung out ships forming the oblique line of its side.

Would the C.O. get it?

The Spandaus from the two echelon Fokkers flamed in a mighty triumphant burst. The Spad wobbled crazily, sickeningly. But even with the instrument board melting, even with control wires snapping and turning his joystick limp, Davis held the V—held it until he knew the last minute was up, and the sun was in the middle of the sky.

Then, he let his tired Spad flop earthward. He did not expect to live now, for the three Fokkers were already slanting to dive after him and finish him.

But they did not dive! Instead, they pulled up suddenly, frantically—as three cocarded Spads came tearing up on them with guns stuttering into life.

Three Spads of the 25th, which had broken all records to get up at the Huns.

TWO of the Huns were sent hurtling down. The other, crippled, limped like a frightened duck back for the lines, with the three 25th Spads pursuing it.

In a field half a mile from the airdrome, Davis managed to avoid a fatal crack-up. His crate was a wreck—but Streak Davis walked away from the wreck, unscathed.

Major Johnson was out on the tarmac when Streak Davis finally came running onto the drome.

“Davis!” The major’s eyes went wide with astonishment. “Where the devil did you come from?”

Davis’ heart sank. “Then—then you didn’t see?” he choked. “And the push is off?”

“Off?” the C.O. cried. “Who said it was off? Listen!”

Davis listened. His ears had been so deafened by his blasting Hisso and guns that until now he had not heard the sound carried on the wind.

But now he heard it—a mighty, crescendo of thunder from the east, a crashing cadence of triumphant guns, all of which seemed to roar their victory.

“H.Q. got my phone call just in time,” the C.O. said. “The divisions are being rushed into the battle even now. It looks like the war and—” He broke off, suddenly anxious. “But we’ve got to look for Kane’s ship. Someone saw it come down in a spin when we sent up the three Spads after the Fokkers. Did you see it, Davis?”

“Kane’s ship?” For an instant gooseflesh had prickled Davis’ body.

“Yes—didn’t you see? Kane came back with three Fokkers on his tail, and managed to form a perfect seven with them! By God, that was the greatest stunt he ever pulled—and only he could have done it! And to think you laughed at him, Davis, for forming letters in the sky! Never thought he’d do anything like this, did you?”

Understanding had come to Davis as he listened then. The insignia of his Spad had not been seen. They had thought it was Eddie Kane.

And Streak Davis smiled strangely. “No,” he said, “I never thought Eddie Kane would pull such a stunt. But he did, even though it was the last he pulled, Major.”

Though he lied, there was no false note in his grief now.

“I saw him crash. Plane burned completely, just after he pulled that seven stunt. He didn’t want to live anyway—after losing his flight. I think”—and his eyes went wistfully toward the sunny blue sky—“I think he’s feeling glad now—wherever he is.”