

# THE BUZZARD'S GUEST

by O.B. MYERS

*Either that lone Jerry was afraid to fight, or else he thought he was too good. But he needed a better excuse than either of those to run from a Yankee ace and get away with it.*

**P**RESTON SWITCHED OFF HIS MOTOR and lifted his goggles. Unsnapping his shoulder straps, he stretched luxuriously. Two hours cramped in the cockpit of the Spad had stiffened his muscles. Al Herron, the leader of the flight, had already landed and was climbing out of his ship. "Pip" Preston watched lazily while two other Spads came easily to rest on the field and taxied up toward the hangars.

Pip's mechanic stepped over and asked, "How'd she work to-day, lieutenant?"

"Fine, Tom," replied Pip. "That motor of mine sure is a Lulu."

Two other mechanics had strolled over, and one of them asked, "Have any scraps to-day, lieutenant?"

"Hell, no!" snorted Pip. "Plenty or Heinies in the sky, but all of them about fifty miles higher up than we were. Flyin' these contact patrols at 600 feet is no way for a man to hang up a record. But orders is orders. We just have to sit there and wait for the Fokkers to come down—which they never do unless they're two to our one."

"But they shoot at you from the ground, don't they, lieutenant?"

"I'll say they do," said Pip. "They shoot every known kind of bullet from every kind of firearm so far invented. I guess. Over Ablaincourt to-day we were down to about a hundred feet, and they sure gave us hell. Look at the punctures in that left wing; at least six, aren't there? Why, the rough fellows even throw stones at you."

The mechanics looked incredulous and began to smile; but Pip continued, "It's a fact. Why, we were so low I could see the jerries picking up the rocks and pegging at me. All right, if you don't believe me, look!"

Pip stuck his hand down in the cockpit and when it came up his fingers held a stone the size of a peach pit. The mechanics stared with open mouths, too

surprised to speak. Pip may have been kidding, or he may not. They never could tell about Pip. But there was the stone, and Pip's face was solemn as a church.

Finally one of them asked, "Where's Lieutenant Moran? Didn't he start out on this last patrol with you, sir?"

"Oh, he's on the way, all right. He had to leave us to circle that hospital by Verdun to wave to his Red Cross sweetie. Looks like him coming now." They all turned their eyes toward the Spad which was approaching the field from the north. Suddenly Pip shouted, "What's the matter with him?"

They all stared, fascinated, at the ship in the air. It was quite apparent that there was something wrong. He was proceeding in a series of swoops. First the nose would go down in a dive, then the motor would go on, and the nose would gradually rise until she was climbing. The the motor would be cut off, and the ship would stall, and then fall into another dive. It was apparent to those on the ground what the trouble was.

"He's lost his elevator controls; must have been shot away," shouted Pip. "I'll bet they were nicked there over Ablaincourt, and held together until he got almost home."

A group of six or eight had now rushed out of the operations tent, and stood watching the gallant fight for life in the air above them. "Bo" Moran, the pilot, was juggling his motor frantically trying to ease his ship into a steady glide, but it was impossible in her crippled condition.

Now she went into a dive. He pulled open his throttle and she gradually leveled off, about fifty feet above the field. He throttled his motor down again, hoping she would settle gradually, but the nose went up into a stall. As she dropped out of the stall, he pulled his motor on again, in an attempt to flatten out before touching the ground. But it was too late. She dove the last fifty feet and hit the ground, motor full on, with a tremendous crash.

With shouts of "Ambulance, ambulance!" every one on the field started running toward the wreck. The ambulance came tearing down from headquarters shack, bouncing insanely over the turf. Half a dozen arrived simultaneously from different directions, but they might just as well have walked.

The cockpit of the Spad was crushed like an eggshell. They dragged poor Bo Moran out of the mess, but he breathed his last with his head in Pip Preston's lap. Ten minutes later they laid him reverently in the ambulance, and a quiet group walked back toward the operations tent.

Pip was swearing softly to himself as he walked across the tarmac. He and Bo Moran had become very close friends in the four weeks Pip had been on the Front. They had slept within three feet of each other on the floor of the squadron tent. When the war struck close like this it never made Pip feel sad or depressed; it only made him mad, mad as hell. He let go a double-barreled curse as he turned into the tent. He was just in time to see the C.O. lift from the squadron roster the card marked, "Moran, F. J." This was last straw. Pip plodded savagely down to sleeping quarters and gulped a stiff drink of cognac, which only made him feel madder. He refused angrily to go to the mess hall for dinner that night and sat on his blankets muttering to himself.

He cursed every time he looked over at Bo's empty bed-roll, and before he crawled into his own blankets swallowed three more drinks of cognac to make certain he would sleep.

THE next morning Pip was raring to go. He already had two Heinies to his credit, and he swore that within as many days he would make the Jerries pay for Bo with two more. But there was no patrol that morning for C flight. They were on alert, which meant loafing around the operations tent waiting for a possible emergency call. Pip was restless and impatient and puffed nervously on his cigarettes. He did not join in the beefing of the rest of the group.

Suddenly the phone rang and the conversation stopped while the sergeant listened. He hung up the receiver and turned to Al Herron.

"Somebody has reported a lone Jerry crossing the lines near Bantheville, very low. Acts as if he was going after balloons. Also a protecting patrol way up above him, either six or seven in it. They want us to send a bunch out to protect the balloons."

Al looked around at the other boys. "Only five of

us, and seven or eight of them," he said. "Don't look so good."

But Pip Preston was already on his way through the flap of the tent. "Come on, you birds!" he shouted. "Here's where I knock down a couple to pay for Bo."

The others followed his example and rushed out on the field to jump into their Spads. Within a minute the five ships soared off the ground, and falling into a loose V formation headed in the direction of Bantheville without waiting to climb higher than a thousand feet, the usual baboon altitude.

Five minutes brought them in sight of the swaying sausages. Pip in his impatience was continually overrunning the leader, Al Herron, and three times had to swing out to one side to settle back into his proper position. They were headed for the nearest balloon. Pip searched the sky in vain for any sign of enemy planes above it. The next balloon, in line was a couple of miles to the west. As Pip looked, that way he suddenly saw a geometric pattern of black specks several thousand feet above the big bag. Lowering his glance he could just make out another dot, on a level with the balloon, and very close to it. Al must have seen the same thing, because he banked steeply in that direction, followed by the four others.

A couple of miles, to a 220 Hispano wide open, is a little over a minute in point of time. But an incendiary bullet, streaking through an atmosphere of hydrogen, is even faster. They were a little over halfway there when a puff of black smoke left the top of the balloon, followed by a mushroom of flame. Two white flowers bloomed in mid-air below the burning bag, and floated slowly earthward.

"The damned swine," growled Pip. "He's got one already."

Then he saw Al turn in his cockpit and wave at Larry Fadden, pointing at the Boche plane, which was now making a circle around the blazing mass. Larry promptly left the formation and plunged at the Fokker. The other four waited for the crowd above to come down. They had not long to wait, for even as Pip looked up they started down. He watched and waited for an opening as the Fokkers swooped toward him. Just before they came in firing range, Pip noticed that one jerry pulled out of his dive and leveled off overhead.

"Goin' to sit up above and wait for a soft chance," Pip thought to himself.

The next instant Pip found himself in a maelstrom of whirling Spads and Fokkers, maneuvering his own

ship wildly. A Boche was on his tail: a quick bank threw him off. Then one was in front of his sights; Pip squeezed his triggers.

But he had no time to observe the effect of his shots before the Fokker twisted away, and he saw a Spad shoot in front of him. He released his triggers and pulled into a zoom just in time to avoid a collision. He kicked his rudder, did a swing-over, and slid back into the mêlée.

It was a mad, catch-as-catch-can dogfight, in which there was no time to pick an opponent and stick with him. As fast as Pip got on the tail of one jerry, another would pepper him from the rear, and he had to maneuver to save his own skin. As he came out of a reversement he saw a Fokker circling just below him. He craftily slid in behind the Fokker as it turned, and was about to press his triggers, when another Fokker cut across between them. He swore to himself, and pulled his Spad around after the second Fokker. This pulled him out of the center of the fight, and he clung like a leech to the Heinie.

For a few seconds they struggled fiercely for the advantage; then the German pilot made the mistake of looping. Pip caught him at the top of the loop, his Fokker practically stationary, a perfect target. Pip's guns chattered and the bullets raked the enemy's fuselage from end to end. The Fokker never did get off its back. It slipped into a spin upside down and whirled toward the ground in flames.

PIP seized a moment to orient himself, and found that he was outside the main scrap. As he watched, a Fokker plunge down through the very middle of the seething group of planes, spinning crazily. A Spad followed close behind, ready to administer the *coup de grace* if necessary, but Pip could see the pilot of the German ship swaying loosely in the cockpit, his arm hanging limply over the side, and knew that there would be no need.

Then Pip happened to glance in the opposite direction and saw, circling idly, well off to one side, the lone Fokker which he had first noticed pulling up out of his dive before the others.

"Either that bird is afraid to fight, or else he thinks he's too good. But by gosh, I'll make him!"

And Pip banked quickly in that direction and zoomed toward the lone German. It seemed to Pip that for a moment the Boche started to run, but then the nose of the Fokker turned to meet him, and the two planes commenced a furious combat.

For fully five minutes they maneuvered constantly. The German was a clever flyer, and put his ship through every known stunt with a skill born of desperation, but Pip hurled his Spad after him like a streak. Pip was just quick enough on the controls so that never once did the Heinie get a chance to use his guns. Twice Pip squeezed his own triggers for a short burst, but neither time did he have a fair target and none of his bullets found their mark. Their maneuvers had lost them altitude and they were now only a hundred feet above the ground. The German came out of a short spin just over the tree-tops, and straightened out. He must have realized the hopelessness of escape from this devil on his tail, for he raised his left hand and waved it over his head. Pip had just slid into position behind the Fokker and was curling his fingers around his triggers. He hesitated and looked at the gesture in amazement.

What did he see? Was the prop slowing down? Yes, it was. It had stopped turning. The jerry had cut his motor. And as Pip watched over the edge of his cockpit, the Fokker glided the remaining few feet to the ground and landed easily in a lane which ran across a field. Pip recovered from his surprise at this unusual ending to a fight, and gloated to himself. "Hot dog! I'll land and capture both plane and pilot. Maybe that won't be the nuts!"

He circled quickly and glided into the little field. With a neat sideslip he set his Spad down on the ground not a hundred feet away from the Fokker. As his wheels touched the earth and he began to roll, he glanced over at the other plane. The German pilot was standing on the lower wing with his head in the cockpit. Pip's plane rolled to a stop, and he released his belt and hoisted himself out. As his feet touched the ground he saw the German jump away from the Fokker and start to run. A burst of flame and smoke leaped from the cockpit,

"Damn his hide! He's set fire to his ship."

Pip started to run toward the Fokker, but the gasoline caught, and before he had taken three steps she was a roaring volcano.

The German pilot trotted over toward him and spoke, to Pip's surprise, in perfect English, with scarcely a trace of an accent. He smiled as he said, "I am sorry to have to rob you of your souvenir, lieutenant. But since you have captured me, you should be content not to capture the plane also. Would you mind putting away that gun?"

"After I make sure you haven't got one yourself," replied Pip.

He ran his hands over the German's body, but finding no trace of a weapon, shoved his Colt back in its holster.

"You are a good flyer, lieutenant," said the Boche admiringly. "I was afraid you were going to shoot me before I could land."

"You're a damned good flyer yourself," admitted Pip with a grin. "I was afraid you were going to get away from me. But how come you talk English so well?"

"My name is von Stangel," replied the German, and went on to tell Pip that he came of a wealthy German family, had traveled extensively before the war, and had been educated both in France and England and spoke both languages as well as he did his own. As he talked, Pip studied him curiously. He was about twenty-four, of refined appearance, and very obviously of a superior type. Before he had finished speaking a crowd of doughboys had gathered and stared with frank curiosity at the burning plane and the officer in German uniform.

Pip turned to the nearest man and asked, "Where's a telephone around here?"

"In that barn, lieutenant," he replied, pointing, "there's an army central."

"Must make arrangements for your reception, von Stangel," Pip grinned.

PIP took von Stangel with him and walked over to the barn. In ten minutes he had the squadron on the wire and asked that a car be sent up to carry back his prisoner. When he hung up he said to von Stangel, "You're due for a spell in a prison camp, but we'll give you one last dinner at our mess to-night, to remember good food by."

The German officer grinned his appreciation and they strolled out toward the road to wait for the automobile. When it arrived von Stangel got in and rode back toward the airdrome. Pip got his motor started with the help of the chauffeur and flew back in his Spad.

That night the 66th had the unusual pleasure of entertaining an erstwhile enemy at their table, and a very entertaining enemy he proved to be. In his fluent English he regaled them with tales of life on the other side of the lines and back in the German leave areas, and discussed freely the comparative merits of the German and allied planes and equipment. He was such a clever talker, and had such a pleasing and friendly personality, that the boys almost forgot that he had only a few hours previous been trying his best to put

a bullet through their brains—and vice versa. And Pip felt more as if he had brought in a school chum to dinner than as if he had returned victorious from combat with an enemy at his heel. Before the evening was over von Stangel had quite captured the interest and admiration of every pilot in the squadron, and even hard-boiled Al Herron was heard to remark,

"Seems almost a shame that a well-bred, intelligent fellow like him has to be herded into a French prison camp like one of a hunch of cattle, doesn't it? But I suppose we ourselves would get the same—and maybe worse—it the same thing happened to us, so I guess that makes it fifty-fifty."

It was late before the session broke up, and von Stangel bid adieu to all the boys with a fatalistic cheerfulness. Finally he started off across the fields toward the main road, with a single guard at his back, there to join one of the groups of German prisoners which were hourly being marched toward the rear.

The next morning Pip received confirmations on both his victories, and was naturally quite elated. This gave him a total of four, and he thought to himself, "One more, and I'll actually be an ace."

There was a standing prize of a fourteen-day leave for a pilot's fifth victory, which served as an added incentive. For the next week Pip did not miss a single patrol, but although he participated in several scraps, no more victories fell to his luck. In the rapid pace of events, however, the memory of von Stangel quickly faded from his mind, and ten days later he would have had to think twice if anyone had asked him the name. Then one afternoon "Flip" Canaday got separated from his patrol, found himself jumped by five jerries, and shot down three of them before he came limping home with his plane riddled with bullets and his instrument board completely shot away before his eyes.

"A miracle!" declared the C.O. "And a miracle deserves a party any day."

So they threw a party at the little cafe in Erize-la-Petite that night—and when a gang of fighting pilots deliberately sets out to celebrate a miracle, the miracle is that some one isn't killed in the course of the celebration. They drank up everything in the cafe except one bottle of beer, and Pip used that to give Al Herron a shampoo. The kind providence which hovers over fools and aviators arranged that the next day should be dark and rainy, washing out all patrols, thus saving much valuable government property and the skins of several flyers.

That evening Pip was squatting on his bed-roll, wondering if he ever would get all the cotton off his tongue, when an orderly stepped into the tent.

"Lieutenant Preston, you're wanted up at headquarters."

"What's up?" asked Pip, rising. "Punno," the orderly replied. "The C.O. asked me to call you."

Pip struggled into his flying coat, dapped on his overseas cap, and plodded through the trees toward the little headquarters shack, wondering what he was to be bawled out for now.

When he stepped into the lighted room, the C.O. told him, "Telephone message for you; some French captain. Get M-4 central, ask for Perrin 16, and when they answer ask for Captain Rocheforet."

PIP had not the slightest idea what it was all about, but he sat down to the telephone and followed the instructions. Finally a voice replied, "Captain Rocheforet speaking. Who is this?"

"Lieutenant Preston of the 66th. Did you call me, sir?"

"Oh, yes, Lieutenant Preston. I have, *er*—certain things of great importance to tell you. Can you meet me in the cafe in Erize-la-Petite in, say, an hour?"

"Yes. I can be there," replied Pip. "But I don't understand."

"I will explain to you. And please do not bring any of your companions with you."

"All right, captain. At nine o'clock."

And he hung up the receiver. He had never heard of any Captain Rocheforet and he was puzzled as to the meaning of the rendezvous. The C.O. had stepped out for a moment, so Pip went directly back to the tent. At a few minutes before nine he started for the cafe, without saying anything to his companions.

He stepped into the little bar and looked around. There was no one there. The old *poilu* behind the zinc recognized him, however, and said, "*Vous avec rendezvous avec le capitaine, n'est pas?*"

Pip nodded, and the *poilu* pointed toward the blankets screening the door to the rear room.

Pip pushed aside the blankets and stepped through. At one of the two tables sat a French officer. Pip looked at him curiously, and then his jaw dropped in amazement as he stared. It was von Stangle.

"You are surprised to see me, lieutenant?" he asked with a smile, as he rose and extended his hand.

Pip, taken aback, disregarded the hand, and stammered, "Where did you— What the hell are you doing here, in that uniform? If you think I'm going to help you escape, you're wrong, because I am—"

"Wait a minute, Preston. You need have no fears that you are aiding an escaping prisoner. Sit down while I explain some things to you."

They seated themselves at the table, Pip keeping his eyes glued on the man before him. Rocheforet—or von Stangel—began talking in low tones.

"In the first place, lieutenant, I must tell you that I am a French subject. My name is really Armand Rocheforet, and I am a captain in the French army. I will presently show you papers which will prove that to you beyond a doubt I am—" he lowered his voice still more—"in the intelligence department of Quai d'Orsay—the secret service, the Americans call it. I was for nine months in Germany, doing my work under the alias of von Stangel, and actually became an officer in the German army.

"I was sending my reports back regularly through the usual channels, but then I chanced to come across some very valuable information which I deemed too important to be entrusted to any other beside myself. It was imperative that I get to France myself, without being suspected, and divulge this information only to my superiors at Quai d'Orsay. I chose the method of being attached to a flying squadron, crossing the line in a plane, and allowing myself to be captured. This had great advantages. In the first place, I did not have to reveal my identity to a single soul except the commanding officer of the prison camp where I arrived two days after leaving you. Also it placed me under no suspicion with the enemy. I can always return as von Stangle, saying simply that I have escaped, and resume my work where I left off."

Pip listened closely to every detail of the story. At this point he interrupted. "But you actually fought with me in the air. What if you had been killed?"

"Of course," replied the captain, "we in the secret service always have to take chances, perhaps more than others. But you will recall that during the combat, my guns did not fire a single shot at you. I only maneuvered enough to avoid your fire, and to keep it from appearing as if I was landing on purpose."

"But why didn't you tell us as soon as you were on the ground?" asked Pip.

"We always try to keep our identity from our friends, unless it is vitally necessary to reveal it. You know, lieutenant, that the fewer people who know your secret, the safer it is. That is why I have approached you now in this apparently furtive manner. I am now on my way back to Germany, and am very anxious to cross the lines tonight. I have here"—he indicated a

package under his chair—"a German uniform which I can put on as soon as I am there. I am therefore asking you, lieutenant, to arrange to fly across the lines early to-morrow morning, before dawn, and drop me at a point on the other side which I will show you."

"But," Pip objected, "you can't get two in a Spad. It's only a single-seater."

"Oh, yes, you can," said Rocheforet. "I can show you how, by loosening the fabric just back of the pilot's seat, space can be made for a man to crouch there. Not comfortable, but possible. You see," he smiled, "it's been done before."

"Perhaps you had better show me those papers," suggested Pip.

ROCHEFORET laid before him a complete set of French army identifications, which described him perfectly. He also drew from inside his tunic a small card which set forth that the bearer was in the French intelligence service, and was to be given every possible aid by any and every branch of the army whenever requested. They appeared to Pip to be O.K. in every respect, but he still hesitated to comply with the unusual request.

Finally he said, "Look here, captain: this seems to me to be all straight, but I couldn't take the responsibility myself. Would you object to my getting my C.O.'s permission before I do what you ask?"

"Well, no," replied Rocheforet. "Not if you promise to tell him the story in absolute privacy, and agree that if he is willing, not another soul shall be told anything about it."

"That's all right," said Pip. "I'll get the C.O. to come down here with me, and then you'll be able to tell him yourself. It won't take me more than fifteen minutes."

Rocheforet consented, and waited in the little room while Pip went up to the field and got the major to come back with him. On the way down Pip explained the situation. The major was surprised, and at first inclined to be suspicious. But after he had looked over Rocheforet's papers, especially the little card, he had to admit that everything seemed to be in order. The three men arranged to meet in C flight hangar at four-thirty in the morning. That would give them time to fix up the Spad to accommodate an extra passenger, warm up the motor, and leave the ground half an hour before dawn.

At a few minutes after four Pip was aroused from an uneasy slumber by a flashlight in his eyes, and the major's voice whispered in his ear, "Come on, Preston; get up!"

He crawled out of his blankets and thrust his shivering legs into his clothes. It was damp and chilly, he put on two sweaters and then his flying coat, and picked up his helmet. They walked up toward the hangars in silence. As they passed the mess shack Pip muttered, "Wish I had a cup of coffee."

"Not a chance," replied the major. "Nobody even knows we're up."

At the hangar they met Rocheforet, with his bundle under his arm. After a brief word of greeting the three men trundled out Pip's Spad, and Rocheforet showed them how to cut the fabric along the longerons on each side to leave an opening large enough to admit a man's body. He would have to crouch in a cramped position among the bracing wires, but it could be done.

"I don't envy you your seat," said Pip.

"Don't you worry about me," answered the captain. "I know of many worse seats. Before we start the motor I will tell you how to go. You know where tire three-fingered lake is, northeast of St. Michiel?"

Pip nodded.

"We will cross the lines there, and then turn north. You will see the double-track railroad on your right, which goes to Conflans. You know it?"

Pip nodded again.

"About ten kilometres to the north, and three kilometres short of Conflans, there is a tiny village called Friaucville, on a winding stream, just south of Friaucville, along the stream, there are some flats, which serve excellently for a landing held. The spot is totally isolated, with woods on both sides, and a safe distance from Conflans. We will land there, and I will change into my German uniform. Then I will put these French clothes back in your plane, together with the identifying papers, and you can leave me."

Pip guessed that he could find the spot all right, and Rocheforet wriggled himself into his cramped quarters. The major turned Pip's prop for him, and after the motor had warmed up, Pip took off the field and disappeared in the pitch darkness of the sky.

The unusual load in the Spad made it sluggish on the controls, and Pip had to fight to get a thousand feet altitude. There was no moon, and he could only make out the general contour of the ground below him indistinctly. Fortunately he was familiar with every foot of it, and soon picked up the three-fingered lake by the blanket of mist overhanging the water. Here he turned north, and flew until he could see the lights of Conflans ahead of him.

He looked down and saw a little streak of water winding through a wide swath of meadows on either side. There were several towns and he was not sure which one was Friaucville. Then he felt a tap on his shoulder, and Rocheforet's hand was extended in front of his face, pointing downward. He followed the direction, and saw under his right wing where the meadows widened out into quite a respectable field. He throttled his motor, and turned a questioning glance at his passenger, who nodded his head vigorously.

PIP glided down and came into the field from the south. There was not a light to be seen in any direction. Only the light green of the grass on the field made it stand out from the darker green of the woods. By juggling his controls Pip managed a fairly decent landing in the soft grass. The Spad rolled to a stop. The only sound was the ticking of the motor as she idled.

Rocheforet scrambled out of his hole in the fuselage and jumped to the ground. He turned and pulled his bundle out after him, and started to unwrap it.

"Now if you will just wait till I change these uniforms, we'll part," he said. Pip thought his voice sounded nervous. Pip was nervous himself. It occurred to him that spies, and those who aid them, were not accorded the treatment of prisoners of war. but were shot on the spot. He wished Rocheforet would hurry.

It took an interminable time, it seemed to Pip, for him to make his change. He discarded everything he had on, even to underclothes, but he was finally completely dressed in the uniform of a German *oberleutnant*. Pip noticed that it fitted him perfectly, and somehow seemed to become his figure better than the French horizon-blue.

He bundled up the clothes he had taken off, and stepping up alongside of Pip's cockpit, he thrust them down into the fuselage. His nervousness seemed to have left him now. With a smile he said. "Isn't this a nice little field to know, Preston? You must remember it in case you have any calls to make over here."

"Yeah," said Pip. "Good field. But I think I'll be going now."

"The last time I was dropped here," went on Rocheforet, without paying any attention to Pip's remark, "the pilot landed too close to the river bank, where it was soft, and we almost flipped over. Look, you can still see the wheel marks over there."

Pip involuntarily turned his head in the direction indicated, but could see nothing. He looked that

way just long enough for Rocheforet's hand to slip down alongside the pilot's seat without his noticing it. He turned his head back again and started to say something about taking off, but found himself looking into the cold muzzle of his own Colt. He hardly recognized the steely voice which said, "Put both your hands outside the cockpit, lieutenant—and keep them there."

He stared at Rocheforet in astonishment as he obeyed. Then the man in the German uniform began to laugh, a hard, metallic chuckle which chilled Pip to the bone.

"I'm afraid you Yankees are not as clever as you are supposed to be," he sneered at Pip.

"But—what are you? I don't understand," stammered Pip.

"You don't understand, my dear lieutenant?" The tone was coldly sarcastic. "Then permit me to have the pleasure of explaining to you. My name, as I told you once, is and always will be von Stangel. I suffered the inconvenience of being downed in combat by a damned Yankee flyer—keep those hands still!—chiefly because my guns were jammed and would not fire a shot. I found myself in a filthy French prison camp. I decided that I could endure neither the food nor the surroundings, so I escaped." He smiled superciliously at the memory.

"But—the French uniform, and Rocheforet's papers. Where did they come from?" asked Pip, still mystified.

"My seventh night in the prison camp, we were inspected and questioned by a Captain Rocheforet, whom I guessed to be in the French intelligence. While in the room I overheard him tell an aide that he would be leaving alone at ten-thirty that evening. My knowledge of French helped me there. I got through the fences without difficulty—the precautions these French take are ludicrous!—and waylaid the captain on the path to town. I had provided myself with a piece of pipe and I was fortunately able to crush his skull with one blow, from behind, so that his nice uniform was not even soiled. It fitted me imperfectly. However, his physical appearance was so similar to mine that his identification papers tallied very well. After changing into his clothes, I was careful to bring with me my own uniform, which you will now admit fits me much better."

Pip's blood froze at the offhand manner in which he described the murder of his victim. Von Stangel was again indulging in a satanic chuckle at the thought of

his coup. Pip began to wonder if he himself was to be the next victim.

Then von Stangel spoke again, "I must admit that I was very pleasantly entertained at your squadron mess that evening. That is why I am going to spare your life. You are now going to fly me over to Conflans, to my own airdrome, precisely as you flew me here. Just keep both your hands where they are while I get in behind you. And don't forget that I am quite able to climb in, using only one hand, and that my trigger finger is very quick."

PIP was petrified by the turn events had taken, and sat rigid while von Stangel wiggled down into the fuselage behind him. With the Boche holding a Colt within six inches of his head, there was nothing he could do but obey instructions, and he tried to resign himself to his position.

"Proceed to take off," said the voice behind his ear. "You know the direction of Conflans. You will see a large airdrome just west of the city. Land there. And don't try any tricks, my young snipe. Do you feel this?"

And he gave Pip a vicious jab in the back of the neck with the muzzle of the pistol. Pip nodded, swearing softly to himself as he reached for the throttle.

In less than five minutes they were over the airdrome at Conflans and another jab in the neck reminded Pip rudely that here he was to land. Pip could make out the field clearly. The sun was not yet up, but a faint radiance was beginning to lighten the sky to the east, and objects on the ground were turning to gray. He circled once, trying to think of some way out of his predicament, but unsuccessfully. A steady pressure against the back of his helmet and a shout in his ear. "Go on down!" made him push his throttle closed and glide down toward the field. He noticed the figures of five or six men in front of the hangars started to run around, as the Spad whistled over their heads.

He set the ship down in a slow landing far out on the turf, and let her come to a stop. He left the motor turning over.

Von Stangel pulled himself out of his cubby in the fuselage, and perched on top, still holding the Colt menacingly near to Pip's head.

"Perhaps this gun makes you nervous, lieutenant," he jeered. "Well, as soon as you have taxied over to the hangars, it will no longer be necessary to keep it pointed at your skull. Go ahead; swing around."

Pip obeyed, pulling his throttle open and ruddering left until the nose was pointed toward the hangars.

At that moment something happened which von Stangel, for all his cleverness, had not figured on. The German mechanics had recognized the plane for a Spad, but in the faint light of dawn were unable to note any details of the uniform worn by the man sitting atop the fuselage. They did not have any idea what kind of a trick the enemy might be up to, but they were resolved to defend their hangars, at least. And they did the obvious thing of opening fire on the Spad with the machine gun mounted on a post in front of the hangars.

The ship being faced in their direction, Pip was protected by the motor in front of him, but von Stangel's figure made an easy target. The cold chatter of the Spandau echoed across the field, and Pip could hear the bullets sing past. Von Stangel immediately started shouting and waving his arms frantically. He was trying to tell them in German that he was a friend, but his words never reached them above the clatter of the gun.

Suddenly his yells ceased in a ccooking sob. Pip looked around to see him topple from the fuselage to the ground. The shock of the fall knocked the Colt from his hand, and it bounced several feet away. As Pip's eyes stared at him, he raised himself on one elbow with a struggle, and tried to say something. Nothing but blood came through his teeth. His rapidly glazing eyes returned Pip's stare. The chatter of the Spandau ceased: jammed or out of ammo.

The clickety-click of the idling Hispano seemed loud in the ensuing silence. Pip heard himself say in a voice which he hardly recognized as his own, "Good-by, von Stangel. You almost got away with it, but I guess you're done for now. See you in hell!"

Von Stangel's head drooped toward his chest. His eyes caught sight of the Colt lying a few feet away. In a last convulsive effort, he stretched out his arm toward it. But two bullets through the chest had sapped his last drop of lifeblood. He collapsed on the turf.

As Pip jerked open his throttle to take off, he looked back once more over his shoulder. Half an hour later, as he set his Spad down on the airdrome of the 66th, he could still see that sprawled, grotesque figure, stiffened in death, with his finger tips a few inches from the steel-blue Colt.