



# NO HEROES ALLOWED

by O.B. MYERS

*“Pop” was training these fledglings of his to be careful. He didn’t want any heroes whose medals and extra breeches are sent home through the mail.*

**T**HERE NEVER WAS A WHITER MAN than “Pop” Weller, nor one better liked than he was by his buddies in C flight of the 74th. Somehow Bud Bellingher knew this without being told ten minutes after he first poked his head through the flap of the tent that first week in September and asked, “Is this where I belong?”

Pop led the others in helping him to feel at home. It

was he who picked the least muddy patch of ground to spread his bedding roll on, helped carry in his trunk, and proffered the friendly cigarette before Bud even had a chance to reach for his. And as Bud found out later, when it came to flying, how he could make Spad number 21 behave!

Pop was older by several years than most of the other boys in the squadron, and having been doing

time over the lines ever since the outfit moved up early in May, he was the natural choice of the C.O. to take new pilots in hand and teach them the ropes.

Pop always took this job very seriously, because, as he told Bud, "If a fellow gets by his first two patrols without any trouble, he's got a chance of hearing the bell at the end of this scrap. The foolish virgin who wants to plunge in and shoot down all the Jerries in the sky his first time over will very likely be the kind of a hero whose medals and extra breeches are sent home to his family through the army post office."

And Bud, like most of the other newcomers, was quite ready to listen closely to what Pop had to say. While hanging around the shack that was group headquarters waiting to report in, he had noticed that row of an even half dozen black crosses after the name of Weller, and didn't have to be told that he knew what he was talking about.

Thanks to Pop's oft-repeated instructions and his skill in keeping the little group of Spads out of situations where they could be taken at a disadvantage, Bud got by his first two patrols all right, and began to acquire that confidence in his own ability which is the prime requisite of a fighting flyer.

Just a week after his first flight over the lines, Bud got a real taste of battle and emerged victorious. Four C flight pilots had hopped off, with Pop leading, for the usual morning strafe, but halfway up to the balloon lines Larry Chadwick developed motor trouble and had to turn back. This left Bud and Shep Maxwell following Pop, and they proceeded to cover the sector between the forest and the Meuse, zigzagging in wide sweeps as they bore steadily toward the east over the pock-marked terrain just behind the German trenches.

There was considerable archie fire that morning, and a few flaming onions now and then to help make life pleasant. Bud was kept pretty busy following Pop's irregular course without fouling Shep Maxwell on the left. Suddenly he noticed that Pop had begun to climb, and Bud had to open his motor almost full to keep up with him. Then he saw the cause. A two-seater Halberstadt about three kilometers ahead was buzzing back and forth at the same level, evidently directing an artillery shoot. Bud also noticed that seven pro-tecting Fokkers floated lazily over the same spot, about a thousand meters higher, waiting hungrily to pounce on any foe foolish enough to attack right under their noses. Bud knew that Pop was too wary to get caught in any such simple trap as that, and waited to see what would happen.

Pop climbed to a level about two hundred meters

higher than the Halberstadt, and there started a series of maneuvers that lasted almost twenty minutes. In and out, back and forth, a gradual approach, and then a quick turn away as the Fokkers altered direction. It seemed to Bud that they never would get a fair chance for attack, but eventually Pop's carefully-timed maneuver brought about the opening they needed.

THE Halberstadt had turned west while the protecting Fokkers, headed toward the west, delayed turning back, and kept on their way just a little bit too long. Like a flash Pop swung into a curving dive toward the two-seater, waving to Shep to stay out. Bud followed close behind and a little to one side. He saw the Jerry start frantically toward Germany, but the speedy Spad, in a full-motored dive, overtook the clumsy two-seater in no time.

He saw Pop's guns spit three or four times and then stop. Pop veered slightly, giving him a clear path. Bud squeezed the triggers on his stick and held them down, watching fascinated as a steady stream of tracers poured from his guns into the growing shape of the plane before him. As he did so, he noticed a stream of black smoke begin to pour from the fuselage of the Halberstadt, and saw the observer silhouetted against a flash of fire in the cockpit. He looked no more at the Halberstadt, for he had caught a glimpse of Pop waving frantically at him from the cockpit of number 21. They both streaked for home as the seven Fokker poured down, too late by seconds.

Back in the operation tent, Pop walloped him gleefully on the back. "Great stuff, Bud; nice work!"

"He went down, didn't he?" asked Bud, still not quite fully aware of the details.

"You bet he did—in flames!" affirmed Shep Maxwell. "I watched him hit the ground while you fellows turned and outran that flock of Fokkers. No doubt about that one. That'll be another confirmed Heinie for C flight, and number one for you, Bud."

A suspicion had taken root in Bud's mind that Pop, after carefully maneuvering into perfect position, had deliberately drawn aside to give him an easy chance. After dinner, when the two were alone in the tent, he asked Pop right out if such were the case. Pop swore, however, that no such idea had ever entered his head.

"I started firing, Bud, but before I was close enough to hit the broad side of a cloud, my guns jammed, and I had to pull off. So there's no use being modest about it; that's your Jerry, Bud."

"Well, I won't argue about it, Pop," said Bud, sitting

down on an empty gasoline drum which did duty as a davenport. They dragged on their cigarettes for several minutes in silence—that silence which men recognize as the sure sign of true and understanding intimacy.

The last week in September was a tough one for the 74th. The big push was on, and each flight was scheduled for two patrols a day. The field and the operations tent was a scene of almost continual activity; before one patrol returned the next one was taking off. This meant loafing around the hangars or headquarters, waiting for a special call from wing headquarters for an emergency patrol. Previous to that time such special calls had almost never come, but with the increased activity both on the ground and in the air, they began to be quite frequent.

C flight was on alert one morning about eleven, and as it happened, Pop Weller, Bud Bellinger and Shep Maxwell were the only pilots available. Two of C flight's pilots were in bed with the flu, Harry Chedder had crashed his ship the day before in a forced landing in the woods, and the other two had been sent back to Colombey that morning to fly up two new Spads from the replacement depot. Pop, Bud and Shep were sitting around the operations tent, discussing the relative attractiveness of the leave areas. They had just about decided that Nice would have it all over any other place, when the telephone rang.

The sergeant answered and listened attentively for a minute. With a "Yes, sir; right away," he hung up and turned to Pop Weller.

"Message from the wing," he said. "A Heinie reported crossing the lines near Montfaucon, very low, making for our balloons. We're to send some one out after him before he gets a chance to do any damage."

The three pilots jumped up as one. "Come on, boys," said Pop. "That's us."

PULLING on helmets and goggles, they ran out on the field where their Spads were waiting with motors warm. Within a minute after the sergeant had hung up the telephone, the three ships roared off the field in rapid succession and streaked away toward the north. Bud was still fussing with the chin-strap of his helmet as they approached the balloon positions. Suddenly, about two miles ahead, he saw a flare of flame and a huge, bellying cloud of black smoke. A moment later he watched two white specks open up just below the smoke and float slowly downward.

"Damn!" thought Bud. "He's got one already, but I guess the observers jumped in time."

Then he swung his ship sharply left, to follow Pop who had changed his course. They could not see the Jerry yet, but there was another balloon over there and Pop evidently was figuring on cutting him off if he meant to try for that one, too. This maneuver worked perfectly. They reached the second balloon from the south just a few seconds before the black-crossed Fokker approached it from the north, and trapped him before he had a chance to fire a single shot. At a signal from Pop, Shep Maxwell stayed back and circled the balloon while Pop and Bud attacked.

Pop dove and fired, and the Fokker split aired away from his guns. Bud dove and sent a burst of lead at the enemy who again dodged in a frantic wing-over. But this turn brought him full in front of Pop's nose again, and that was the last turn that Fokker ever made. Pop squeezed his triggers and sent a hail of bullets tearing into the fuselage, one of which must have hit the gas tank, for Bud saw a puff of smoke from the cockpit and the Fokker plunged earthward in flames.

"Gosh! That was quick," thought Bud. "Another one for C flight. Hurray!"

But the natural feeling of exhilaration over their victory was wiped out as he turned to look for Shep Maxwell.

Shep had been circling the balloon while they attacked, and with each circle had swung lower and lower until he was directly below the big bag. The cable which connected the balloon to the ground was a mere thread against the expanse of sky, and practically invisible from a fast-moving plane. Shep, of course, had been completely engrossed in watching the combat, and had utterly forgotten that there was such a thing as a balloon rope. The scrap over, he made one last turn to rejoin his comrades—and ran full into the cable.

Just as Bud looked in his direction he saw Shep's right wing cut cleanly from his ship not a foot from the side of the fuselage. Instantly the plane swooped insanely downward, utterly out of control. Bud realized that Shep was a dead man from the moment his leading edge touched that cable.

Pop and Bud flew back to the field and landed, joining each other at the operations tent.

"Did you see Shep?" Bud asked grimly.

Pop nodded. "Isn't that hell?" he said. "It's bad enough to lose a pilot and friend in a fight, but something like that—God! It's so damnably useless!"

Pop wrote up the combat report, and told what story there was to tell to the C.O., who shook his head sadly.



"He knew all about balloon cables, too," he said. "I suppose he just forgot while watching you two scrapping with the Fokker. Well, there's nothing to do."

And he lifted from the squadron roster the little card marked, "Maxwell, S. R.," and sent back the usual formal request for a replacement pilot.

And that was how, four days later, Charlie Carter came to the 74th. Charlie was very young, even for a pilot in those days, and looked even younger than he was.

"Just a kid, but he looks regular," murmured the C.O. as Charlie walked out of headquarters after reporting for duty. He had the smooth, open face of a high-school lad, with a quick smile that carried a touch of shyness in it which reassured the older pilots.

"He doesn't act as if he knew it all," they remarked to each other. "Guess he'll listen to Pop all right."

BUD first met him out in front of the hangars in the afternoon. His immediate reaction was a slight dislike, based solely on the instinctive feeling that he was expected to accept this stranger as a substitute for Shep, his closest pal. But Charlie's smile and firm grip swept that feeling away. Nobody could really dislike Charlie without trying awfully hard, he thought to himself.

"Glad to know you, Lieutenant Bellinger. You're one of the old-timers around here, too, aren't you?"

"Not nearly as much so as Pop, here, either in time or experience," Bud replied.

Charlie's next remark showed that he was on the right track. "If I can only get through my head all the points that Pop has been giving me, I might be worth something some day."

"You've got the right idea, Carter," Bud said. "You can learn more about combat work by listening to Pop talk for half an hour, and watching him fly one two-hour patrol, than you can in six months at a training school."

"Aw shucks," burst from Pop. "To hear you fellows talk, anyone would think I was both the Wright brothers, Rene Fonck and Rickenbacker all rolled into one. All I'm trying to do is tell Carter how foolish it is to try deliberately to be heroic."

That afternoon Pop had Carter taking off and landing his new Spad six or eight times, just to get the feel of the controls. Then they both went up and Pop led Charlie through a series of turns, rolls, slips and dives until Charlie could hardly tell which side was up. After they came down, Bud noticed that Pop was

still pointing out various details of the ship to his rapt pupil, and did not cease pumping advice into him until they reached the door of the mess shack, on the way in to dinner. It struck Bud that Pop was taking more pains than usual with Charlie Carter.

"Perhaps," thought Bud, "he feels the loss of Shep on his conscience—though, hell's bells, it was no fault of his—and is instinctively trying to make up for it."

At any rate, Charlie never seemed to feel that he had heard enough, and appeared to be drinking in every word that Pop uttered. A pair of planks laid across two barrels served as a bar for the 74th, and that corner of the mess shack was well populated when they stepped up for a snifter before dinner. Charlie echoed Pop's request for a short Scotch and no chaser, and they drank to happy landings.

As they were turning toward the table, the C.O. stepped over to Pop. "How's Carter coming along, Pop—rarin' to go?" he asked.

"Yes, but I wouldn't send him on a deep patrol yet, Jim," Pop replied. "I thought that in a day or two, maybe, we'd get a couple of the boys to make a voluntary, and just buzz around close to our lines so as to give him a look-see."

"O.K. with me, Pop; use your own judgment," agreed the C.O. "By the way," he went on. "I heard a report from wing headquarters to-day that the two pilots from each squadron having the most time over the lines are to be given a promotion and ordered back to the States as combat instructors. For the 74th that would mean you and Bill Bagley, of course. If I were you, Pop, I'd play very safe for a couple of days until it is confirmed. You've already done more than your share, and there's no use getting bumped off just when there's a prospect of going home."

Pop's eyes could not help lighting up at the thought of going home, but then he grinned sardonically and said, "As we used to say at Issoudun, Jim, that's a good rumor, even if it isn't true. Don't get me thinking about such things, will you?"

"I believe it's more than a rumor, Pop; I got a reference to it in writing from the colonel," insisted the C.O. "Anyway, you have my official permission to turn C flight over to Bud Bellinger and stay on the ground from now on, if you want to."

Bud, overhearing the conversation, felt his throat tighten at the thought of taking Pop's place as leader of C flight, but Pop immediately replied, "Time enough to think about that after Carter, here, has had his baptism, and B flight has gotten their two new men

broken in. I guess I'll just stick to the old grind for awhile yet."

THE next morning A and B flights were scheduled for patrols, and C flight was off duty. But Pop was on the airdrome early with Carter, and had him taking his new Spad up to a thousand meters and cutting the motors so that he had to make the field with a dead stick. Charlie was doing it nicely, and it looked to Bud as if he had the feel of the ship already. Bud had been talking to his mechanic when Pop strolled over while Carter was in the air.

"How about a voluntary this morning, Bud?" he asked.

"Thought the C.O. told you to stay on the ground."

"He didn't tell me I had to," grinned Pop. "And besides, all I want to do is see if that little pile of rubbish just above the second bend in the Meuse that is on the map as Mailles is still there. The artillery has probably wiped it off entirely by this time."

"Jake with me, Pop. There's Harry Chedder over there; he'll probably come along. Want to take Charlie Carter with us?" queried Bud.

Pop shook his head. "Not yet. I'd rather give him a little more time to learn the feel of his new ship. We'll take him out to-morrow, maybe."

When Charlie came down and found out what was going on he first asked, and then begged, to be taken along, but Pop was adamant.

"You'll have plenty of chance later, Charlie," he said. "Wait till to-morrow morning. C flight has a patrol at 8:30 and perhaps you can come along then." Bud could see that Charlie was crazy to go, but he did not feel called on to offer Pop any suggestions about his specialty, the breaking-in of new pilots. He listened while Pop instructed Charlie.

"You try about four or five more landings with a dead stick, and then go up to about 2000 meters and stunt yourself to death for about an hour. I want you to feel so much a part of that Spad that you don't know you're sitting in a plane at all, but think you've got wings sprouting out of your own shoulder blades."

While Charlie covetously took in every detail, Bud and Pop and Harry Chedder warmed up their motors, and then, after fastening their shoulder straps and waving for the chocks to be pulled from under the wheels, took off, one directly after the other. Bud, watching Pop make a wide turn, made a short one himself and took his position on Pop's right flank, while Harry, taking off last, cut across the lower end

of the field and fell in on the left. The three Spads climbed as one, and reached the lines at about 2000 meters altitude.

THE weather was perfect, but Bud noticed some cloud formations in the east which looked as if they might spread by afternoon. The three ships flew over the entire sector from the Argonne in the west to the Meuse River in the east, and swung low over the little town of Mailles which Pop wanted to identify. They saw no sign of enemy aircraft during the hour and a half which their gas tank capacity permitted them to remain.

On the way home Bud thought to himself, "Too bad Charlie wasn't along; would have been a good chance for a look-see, with no scares."

They set their planes down on the field with almost monotonous perfection, and climbed out in front of the hangars to find Charlie Carter breathlessly awaiting news of their exploits.

"Not a thing in the sky but air," Pop told him. "Might just as well have been flying over the Gobi Desert. If I had known it was going to be so quiet, I would have let you come."

"I've done everything you told me," Charlie reported, "and I feel as if I had been born in that Spad. Could I come along on the regular C flight patrol this afternoon?"

Pop started to object, but, seeing the eagerness in Charlie's face, finally consented with the mumbled proviso, "Probably be too cloudy to fly, anyway."

CHARLIE was up in front of the hangars an hour before the patrol was scheduled to leave the ground, fussing with his controls, his belt, his gun sights, everything on the plane. He was as nervous and excited as a bride, and could hardly wait for the others to appear. When they came across the road and, after deciding that the weather would do, started pulling on helmets and goggles, Pop walked over to Charlie's plane to give him a few last words of advice.

"Leave your belt loose enough so you can look back over either shoulder. And watch me close all the time so that you don't lose the formation in a quick turn. We won't go deep in, but keep your eyes peeled!"

Charlie nodded, seriously, and Pop walked over to Spad number 21 and spoke to his mechanic for a moment while he listened to the motor. Bud was already in his ship, and it seemed to him that Pop hesitated a second before climbing in, as if he felt there

was something wrong somewhere. But when Bud next looked that way, Pop was waving for the chocks to be pulled. The five ships took off, one after the other, assumed their positions over the field, and started north for the lines. The formation was the usual inverted V. Bud was on the tail end of the left leg of the V, with Al Herron between him and the leader, Pop. He noticed Charlie Carter in his brand new Spad number 28 on the tail end of the right leg, with Harry Chedder in the middle position on that side.

They reached the lines in a few minutes, and each one tried a few bursts from his machine guns to make sure they were working properly. Pop then turned toward the east, and they followed the moth-eaten carpet that was No-Man's-Land toward the wriggling line of blue in the distance, which was the Meuse. The clouds had spread irregularly over most of the sky so that they were flying, first under a low, gray ceiling, and the next minute under a clear, blue hole.

"Bad sky," thought Bud, as he followed Pop's gently winding course. "Too many hiding places up here. If there are any Jerries out to-day, I hope we see them before they see us."

They reached the river where the banks were high and steep, just below Dun-sur-Meuse. Their sector ended there, and Bud was beginning to wonder when Pop would start his turn. They had just come into an open patch of sky, after passing under a long cloud bank, when things began to happen so fast that Bud could never tell about it afterward without stuttering. There was no time to count how many Fokkers he saw pouring over the upper edge of that cloud bank. He just knew that there were plenty, and that this was going to be a tough one.

Harry Chedder, on the right-hand side, must have taken a look by that time, too, for Bud saw him come out of the climbing turn with a quick renversement and cut in under the leading Fokkers to pull up for a shot at one of those in the rear. Just as the chatter of several machine guns started to break through the roar of his motor, Bud noticed that Charlie Carter was still following Pop in a wide turn, apparently oblivious of what was behind him, and that the German leader was heading across their circle, right for Charlie's tail. Then for a few moments Bud was too busy to see anything that was not his own particular business.

A Fokker appeared, almost over his head, diving vertically straight on him, and Bud caught one glimpse of twin flashes in the mouths of the Spandaus over the motor. Then he yanked his Spad into the fastest

wing-over he had ever done, and threw her nose down as he came out. The Fokker had been carried on past him by the force of the steep dive, and Bud saw the thick wings and high fuselage swing right across his sights. He steadied with a little rudder and pressed the triggers on the handle of his stick.

The two Vickers guns before his eyes began to spit a mixed stream of solid lead and smoking tracers straight into the cockpit of the enemy in front of him. But he hardly had the triggers down long enough for a burst of twenty before he heard the echo of his own shots directly behind him. He did not have to look back to realize that one of the other Jerries was on his tail. No sooner had his brain grasped that fact than a neat hole appeared as by magic in the corner of his windshield.

Without even looking to see the effect of his own shots on the Fokker in front of him, he pulled his stick back into his belly and came out of the dive into a tremenodus zoom that carried him almost up to the level at which the fight had started. The enemy who had been momentarily on Bud's tail allowed his dive to carry on too long, evidently fearful of stripping his wings off by too sudden a pull on the stick, and did not level off until he had lost 500 meters altitude. He was hopelessly out of the fight as far as attacking Bud again was concerned.

FINDING himself for the moment neither attacking nor attacked, Bud found his gaze riveted on a spectacle taking place just a little above him and only a few hundred yards away. Pop, followed by Charlie, had completed his wide turn, trying to get into position to dive into the mêlée from the side, if possible. But the German leader had flattened out and shot across the circle until he was sliding neatly into a spot just in back of Charlie's tail.

Either Charlie never saw him at all, or else he was adhering too strictly to Pop's admonitions to "watch me close all the time," because he never made the slightest maneuver to avoid the danger from the rear. It seemed as if the jerry leader must have known through some devilish instinct that number 28 held a green pilot who would be cold meat for his Spandaus, because he clung to his original course like a leech, apparently heedless of all else in the sky.

Pop never missed any phase of what was going on, and when it became plain that Charlie was allowing himself to get in a position from which he could never rescue himself, Pop threw his Spad around in

a lightning turn and came back for the Jerry leader, head-on. The maneuver was so quick that Charlie had no time to follow, and shot straight on for some distance. Bud's eyes by this time were focused on the two ships hurtling toward each other at three times express-train speed—the grim, thick-winged Fokker, and the slender, graceful Spad.

It could not have been more than a few seconds yet it seemed to Bud that he sat there, a chained, helpless spectator, for hours, watching two men greet death. To keep in position for attack on Charlie, the German had to hold his course; to save Charlie from certain death, Pop had to force the German from that course by holding to his own. He never moved his stick an inch after sighting on the enemy's nose. Bud heard Pop's guns fire three or four shots, then stop.

"Good God! They're jammed!" he shouted, though he himself could not hear his words. The Jerry's guns were rapping steadily, and at the rapidly decreasing range he could hardly miss.

"One or the other must pull up!" groaned Bud, and yet he knew instinctively that Pop would never swerve from that straight line, though it might lead straight to a flaming grave. It seemed to Bud that the German started to push his nose down, but too late. There was a terrific crash. The air was filled with splinters, flying fabric and metal, followed instantly by a blinding glare and a dense cloud of black smoke.

Bud caught a glimpse of Pop's Spad disappearing beyond the smoke, and saw the remains of the Fokker, disintegrated by the explosion of the gas tank, fluttering and tumbling earthward. The Spad reappeared, far below the smoke cloud, spinning madly downward, and Bud noticed that the wheels and landing gear were gone, and that shreds of torn fabric followed its wake.

He never could tell how long he sat there, dumbly flying a straight line, heedless of what else there might be in the sky. His brain whirled around one central thought, "Pop is gone! Pop is gone!", and though it had taken place right before his eyes, he could not have related to anyone at that moment how it had happened. The remaining members of the enemy formation must have been equally stunned by the sudden loss of their leader, because they had already disappeared toward Germany.

When he finally looked up over his shoulder, he saw a Spad following on his right flank, and looking closer saw that it was Charlie Carter in number 28. He was seized with a sudden revulsion of hate.

"Why couldn't it have been you, you dumb greenhorn!" he screamed into the wind.

And immediately he regretted the outburst. Although he knew that the other pilot could hear neither remark, he said: "Sorry, Charlie; I didn't mean that."

He pulled himself together by an effort. "Here, I must snap out of this. If Pop gave his life to save this chap, the least I can do is to lead him home now."

He discovered that he had been flying west, parallel to the lines. Now he turned south, and as he did so another Spad wheeled into position on his left flank.

"Number 24; that must be Harry. Thank God he got out of that mess all right. I wonder where Al Herron is."

But no one else joined the formation in the next ten minutes, and it was not until the following morning that he learned that Al had come down inside the lines with a bullet in his motor, and had escaped with a sprained ankle. The three Spads winged their uneventful way back, settled down on the airdrome, and taxied up to the hangars, one by one. As Bud shut off his motor and lifted his helmet, Chris, Pop's mechanic, rushed up to his cockpit with the terrible question in his eyes.

"Pop?"

Bud could hardly look at the man. He stepped out and shaking his head, replied almost brusksly, "Tell you later."

He walked over to the operations tent, and sat down to write up his combat report.

"Crossed the lines at Verlain, 3:10 p.m. Patrolled sector toward the east. About 3:40 p.m. attacked by 8 or 10 E.A.—Fokkers—near Dun-sur-Meuse. Lieutenant Bellinger fired about 20 rounds at one; believe he went down out of control; confirmation requested. Lieutenant Carter attacked by enemy leader; Lieutenant Weller turned on leader, but his guns appeared to jam—"

At this point Bud could write no further. The pencil fell from his fingers and he stood up with a grunt.

PICKING up his helmet, Bud strode off toward the squadron tent, there to throw himself on his bedding roll and by closing his eyes try to shut out the awful picture which continually stared him in the face. Charlie Carter, too stunned by events to talk to anyone at the hangars, followed him to the tent. After several minutes he spoke.

"Bud, I don't know what to say about this

afternoon. It was all over before I knew I was in a fight. But I've doped it out since, and I know what Pop did for me. I don't think I need any more instruction to teach me what's expected of me after this. I just want you to know that you can count on me."

Bud sat up. "Charlie," he said. "You and I have seen the end of the finest he-man that ever handled a stick. Let's us just promise each other—"

He was interrupted by a shout from outside the tent. A breathless orderly from headquarters burst in.

"News for C flight, Lieutenant Bellinger!" the words tumbled out of his mouth. "The C.O. just had a telephone call from evacuation hospital number 214; they've got Lieutenant Weller there! He was picked up half a mile inside our lines near the river. A leg busted, and a couple or three ribs mashed up, but the medic says there's no doubt about his pullin' through. Flopped down with no landing gear and out of control, but it was marshy ground, I guess. Ain't that great?" While the orderly danced for joy, Bud and Charlie gave each other a long look, the light of life beginning to come back into their eyes.

"Oh, yes! I almost forgot!" the orderly went on. "He sent a message to Lieutenant Carter. He said remember not to be in a rush about being a hero."

Charlie stood up. "Can you beat a guy like that? He has to be thinking of me. Where the hell is hospital 214?"

"I don't know," said Bud, "but maybe we can find out at headquarters."

"If we can, let's grab one of the Fiats and go visit Pop before they move him somewhere else."

Charlie's suggestion met instant approval from Bud, and they grabbed up trench coats and overseas caps and started on the run for headquarters shack. Ten minutes telephoning located the hospital at Blercourt, about fifteen kilometers north of the airdrome.

They found Pop sharing with five others the half-light and dank atmosphere of a cellar room about twelve feet square. One leg was bandaged and all trussed up, and half his face was covered with gauze where the edge of the windshield had cut, but he gave them a cheerful grin.

"Hello, Bud," he said. "Didn't expect you so soon. Glad to see you, Charlie."

Charlie gripped his hand, but could get no words past the lump in his throat. His eyes, however, met Pop's with a look that Bud would never forget.

"It's certainly great to find you here, Pop," Bud's voice was husky. "But you've got to hurry back to the squadron, you old son-of-a-gun. There's a combat report that I want you to finish."