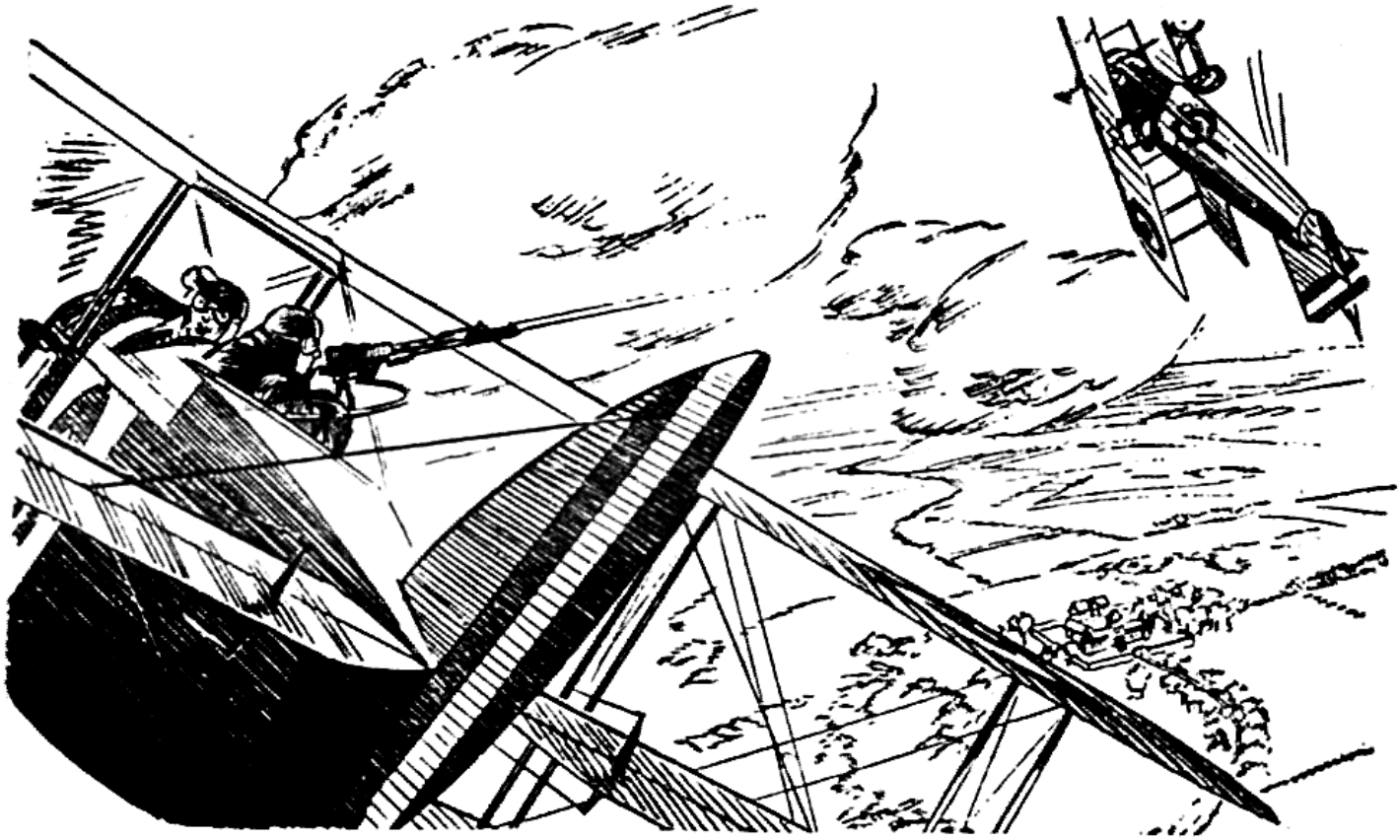

RED IN THE SKY

by H.P.S. GREENE

It was a quiet, peaceful meadow—a haven in the horror of war. Or so Jimmy Brill thought when he slanted down. But it proved to be the hot spot of the whole sector.

AT FOURTEEN THOUSAND FEET, nine Liberty-motored D.H.4s were roaring across the battle lines toward Germany. Their frail structures shuddered, and their fabric fluttered under the jar of the explosions of their great engines, and the thrashings of their club-like propellers. On its lower wings each ship carried two large bombs labeled air mail, and special delivery to Fritz at the earliest opportunity.

Flying the number two position, just behind, above, and to the left of the leader, was Lieutenant Jimmy Brill. Jimmy was nervous. His last raid had been hell.

Out of a ripping, bloody battle with two Fokker circuses, a battle punctuated by bursts of oily flames from burning ships, the American De Havilands had been lucky indeed to escape with the loss of only three ships and seven men. The seventh man had been Jimmy's observer and partner, Buzz Crawford, who'd taken a bullet in the head and died, while their ship had been so badly riddled that it went back to the depot for salvage.

Now Jimmy was up in a new crate, with a brand-new observer just out of school. The pilot wondered how the kid was making out, and looked around to see. Generally they weren't much good until they'd been through a fight or two.

Confound the young sap! There he was, hanging over the side, and looking down, fascinated by the ruins of Verdun. He'd be a ruin himself, if he didn't look out, and Iris pilot with Jiim!

Jimmy shook the stick angrily, and gained the observer's attention. Then he made motions with his head and arm, indicating to the fellow that he'd better keep looking around in the sky, watching for enemies. From his seat between the wings, the pilot's own field of vision was rather poor.

The observer smiled in a slightly sickly manner, and started looking.

Jimmy wondered how long the kid would last. He was a nice young fellow, too good to last. The good died young. Of course lots of bad ones got bumped, too, but they seemed to hang on longer than the good ones.

The pilot started out of his careless soliloquy like a man stung by a hornet. The motor had missed. It missed again, and the ship sank to the level of the leader of the formation. A glance at the instrument board told Jimmy what was wrong. The air pressure in his gas tank was going down. He pumped it up hastily, and wondered what he had better do.

Turn back toward home alone? Or try to go on with the others? He looked up, around, and down. Far below were a large number of climbing ships. Germans coming up to intercept them. And not a protecting Spad anywhere in sight in the sky. The pressure trouble might be only temporary. Better try to go on.

Then again came the sickening silence as the motor cut out—a silence as startling under such conditions as the explosion of a shell in quiet air. Again the sickening downward lurch, as the heavily loaded D.H. dropped from its position. Again the pilot furiously pumped up pressure. Sweat ran down his face from under his fur-lined helmet—hot sweat which instantly became icy cold in the biting air, and stung his face like sleet.

But the pressure kept running out. and Jimmy Brill's guts sank with the sinking bomber. They were clear out of the formation now, and Jimmy waved the following ship up to take his place. Then he turned back toward home.

It was a nightmare flight. He was pumping by hand what gas the faltering Liberty got into the carbureters—pumping his heart out in the high altitude. Waving and howling to his observer to drop their bombs while they were still over Germany. Watching the climbing Fokkers close in. Their tracers fluffed through the air toward them. Brill felt their impact on a longeron near his elbow.

BRILL'S heart was cold with helplessness. With his left hand, he pumped gas to the failing motor. With his right, he jerked the lumbering D.H. out of the path of flaming streams of red hot bullets. He was continually swallowing the lump which as continually kept rising in his throat—the lump caused by swift loss of altitude, frenzied pumping at the air pressure, and rage at his crippled ship.

Then suddenly all was still, save for the wind in the wires. Far across the sky flamed a dogfight between the Fokkers and a squadron of life-saving Spads—life-saving to the crippled bomber, death-dealing to the German hawks who had been attacking it.

The altimeter on the D.H. read fifteen hundred feet, and the ground was leaping into action as the Germans below turned loose machine guns and rifles on the American ship. Jimmy Brill saw that he was crossing the enemy front lines. He looked ahead for a soft-looking spot to sit down on.

And then, as suddenly as it had quit, the Liberty picked up again. With a long sigh of relief, the pilot headed for home.

He turned to grin congratulations at the observer on the other side of the gas tank, and saw nothing of him. He remembered that he had heard nothing from the rear cockpit for some time. He shook the stick, but nothing happened. Hell, the kid must be dead!

Jimmy felt low as he drove on toward his home field. He felt like a murderer. He had carried two men to their deaths in two days. He hated the sight of the muddy fields, the stunted trees. Anger and disgust at everything filled him as he rolled to a stop in front of the hangar, and he took it out on the first man who appeared.

That was his mechanic, Ike Illitzky.

Ike was a short, bandy-legged man, with stooped shoulders, and a nose like the prow of a battleship. He had come honestly by his name, and it fitted him, — fitted him much better than the issue uniform he wore. The men who designed clothing for the U.S. Army had never thought of having to provide for a man with a shape like Ike's.

The mechanic's eyes widened with the hurt to his feelings, as the pilot snapped—

"The dam' gas pressure on this box kite let me down. I dropped out of the formation, and got shot up. What the hell's the matter with you? Why didn't you stick to peddling fish, or whatever you were doing, instead of enlisting in the Army and butchering airplanes?"

"The pressure's O.K. now, Lieutenant," said Ike, climbing up onto the step of the ship, and peering at the gage.

"I don't give a damn about now," snarled Jimmy Brill. "Get the hell down from there, you dirty slob, and look at the kid back there. See if he's dead on account of your lousy inefficiency."

He pushed poor Ike roughly in the face, and climbed out of the cockpit. On the ground, he looked toward the cockpit in the rear, which was separated from his own by the big gas tank. Below it the ship's fabric was stained a dark crimson, and torn and slashed by the hail of bullets which had ripped through it.

Ike was on the step, looking down into the observer's dog-house.

"Oy," he cried. "He's dead, poor little feller. All shot to pieces."

"And all your fault, you—you—" Jimmy Brill buttoned his lip. He couldn't insult a smaller man, his inferior in rank. "Well, see he's taken care of. And fix up that death trap. Find out what made the pressure go down, and fix it. Then let me know."

The pilot rather dimly shoved his way through the crowd of Medical Corps men and mechanics who were crowding around. There seemed to be water in his eyes as he made his way to the empty officers' barrack. He felt bad. Sitting on his cot, he pulled a rum bottle out of a boot beneath it, and took a deep drink. Then he lit a cigarette.

He cursed the war. Good old Buzz gone. Old Buzz, who'd been with him all those months with the French squadron, and shot the Fokkers away from his tail many a time.

The kid gone. Poor young eager kid who had never had a chance to live long enough to find what it was all about. Shot to hell first crack out of the box.

Almost before he'd begun.

Jimmy cursed whoever was running the United States Army. Putting out ships that were obsolete when they started building them, and sending men in them over the lines. Lousy crates with no speed, no strength, no lifting power, and big, tin tanks under pressure that something was always happening to. They were Flaming Coffins, all right—Flaming Coffins.

Why couldn't they have left him and Buzz with the French squadron flying good old Breguets, with rubber tanks, and engines that you could depend on to run fifty hours between overhauls? The French squadron, where they had a bar, with plenty to drink, and a touring car, every time you wanted to go to Nancy? The French squadron, where they pinned another star on your *croix de guerre,* and gave you twenty-four hours leave every time you got a Boche?

Why?

Jimmy Brill took another drink, and felt very sorry for himself, and everybody. After a little while, he fell asleep.

IT WAS only a few minutes before he was wakened by the arrival of the rest of the squadron. They were laughing, and joking, and reaching under cots, and into boots. Their raid had been successful and without casualties, thanks to the protecting Spads.

Jimmy Brill was hot and furious. Only the leak in his gas pressure had done him in, and cost him another observer. He heard a timid voice calling his name from the doorway of the barrack. It was the voice of Ike Illitzky, and Ike's brown eyes held the look of an unjustly whipped child's, as he said:

"It's all right now, Lieutenant. I found the little leak in a joint. I swear it's all right now."

Jimmy Brill felt an instinctive dislike for the mechanic. He wanted to kick him. An idea came to the pilot.

"So you swear it's all right, do you?"

"Yes, Lieutenant."

"Very well!" snapped Jimmy Brill, rising abruptly to his feet. "I'll try it out, and you will come as a passenger! How do you like that?"

The pilot chuckled to himself at the emotion he saw on the mechanic's face, but he misinterpreted it.

Ike Illitzky was one of that sad, misinformed army who had thought at the beginning of the war that the way to learn to fly was to enlist in the Aviation Section, Signal Corps. He did not know that when he signed up he was almost certainly condemning himself to many weary months of manual and mechanical labor, and that, if he wanted to fly, he should have secured an appointment as a cadet.

But, at that, Ike had put in more time flying than almost any other enlisted man in the United States Army.

Ike was crafty. He saw other men begging officers to let them fly, following them around, currying favor. Sometimes they got a chance to go up, but more often not—there were so many of them.

Ike took a different line. He pretended that he was scared to death of flying.

Because of that, pilots liked to take him up for a joke. He got in more flying than most of the other men in the outfit did all together.

"Are you going to fly over the Front, Lieutenant?" asked Ike, as they came up to the ship, which he had managed to patch and clean up in a remarkably short time. Jimmy Brill saw that the mechanic was

trembling, and chuckled to himself. He'd give the dumb mac a ride!

"I may go and look it over, and take a shot at a balloon or two," he remarked casually.

Ike trembled more than ever. The pilot never for a moment suspected that it was from eagerness to go after balloons.

Jimmy Brill took off, and headed south away from the enemy lines, not guessing that he was heading into as much excitement as he would have been likely to find over the Front.

The D.H. flew along as smoothly as such a crate ever flew, and the pilot mapped out what he intended to do. Some time before, a French officer who was going to visit some friends at a chateau had taken him along. He'd had a good time—plenty to eat and drink of the best, and everything pleasant and peaceful. And there had been a girl.

He decided to go back again, as he had been cordially invited to do when he took his leave. On the previous visit he had gone by car, but he'd noticed that there was plenty of room to land in a treeless stretch on the vast grounds surrounding the chateau, which was a fairly modern, luxurious mansion, although there were the remains of ancient buildings and fortifications nearby.

Less than an hour's flying brought him within sight of the towers of the chateau, and he began his campaign. He cut the switch of his motor for a moment, then snapped it on again. Then he looked back and saw Ike staring around wildly. With a grin to himself, he cut the switch again.

Then he turned around, shook his fist at the mechanic, shook it again at the motor, and howled impartial curses into the onrushing wind. They were coming down fast, and he cut the engine in again. High time he did. It choked up, and almost stopped of its own accord, giving him a bad moment of his own.

Cutting the motor in and out with the switch, he slipped gently in over a row of poplar trees, and brought the D.H. to a slowly rolling stop just in front of the great front doors of the chateau. Then he turned around and shook his fist under Ike's twitching nose.

"See for yourself what a wreck I have to fly in!" he roared. "All because of you! Almost broke our necks getting over that row of trees. Now, you get to work and find out what made it act that way. And never mind coming around me till you *do* find out!"

He climbed out and walked away, chuckling to himself.

"He'll have a job finding out what's wrong, for the lousy old firetrap is in as good shape as it ever could be."

"Oy!" Ike muttered in his turn."Now what does the Lieutenant want? He knows there's nothing wrong with the bus. So dumb does he think me that I didn't know he was cutting the switch when we were coming down?

"So! That's what he's up to!" he said, as he saw a young lady of very attractive appearance come out of the door of the chateau, and hasten to meet the pilot. "A girl, eh? Well, I wouldn't bother him. I wonder if the lady has a friend, or a maid, or what kind of a cook she's got? A man, maybe, like most of these Frenchies."

But the mechanic's dreams of ladies' maids and cooks were abruptly cut off, as he saw various men around the place clearly for the first time. One of them came out of the front door of the chateau, as a butler might, and two others, who had been working on some shrubbery not far away, stopped whatever they were doing, and came toward the still American plane.

They were large, uncouth men, with big hands and feet, and bulky shoulders, and dull faces with high cheek bones, and small, unintelligent eyes, and they wore a uniform not at all common in France.

To Ike they recalled vaguely remembered scenes of his childhood, scenes filled with fear and bloodshed, and a flight in the dark toward America and safety.

"Oy!" he muttered. "Russky! What are they doing here?"

ALL Ike knew was that similar men had persecuted his people in Russia, and forced them to flee for their lives to the United States. If he had had a chance to be more familiar with political events in Europe, he would have known whence they came, and why.

A division of Russian soldiers was brought to France to fight, and, which was much more important, to give visible proof to the French that great Russia was with them in their battle against Germany. But when the news filtered through to these soldiers that Russia had made a separate peace after the overthrow of the Czar, and later of Kerensky, they had refused to fight any more.

They had therefore been put to work at whatever jobs they knew best, which, in most cases, was farming. Only the officers, who were mostly Czarist, and against the new regime in Russia, wanted to keep on fighting, and most of them immediately joined the French Army.

And here. . . .

One of the two men who approached the De Haviland asked Ike in Russian who he was, and what he was doing there. Ike was too startled by their appearance to reply. Then the Russian repeated his question in very bad French.

By that time Ike had picked up courage after his first shock, and he replied in worse French that he was an American, and that he had come there with his pilot, Lieutenant Brill of the American Air Service, and who wanted to know, and why.

One of the Russians remarked to his comrade in his own language, as he indicated Jimmy and the girl with a jerk of his head:

"It is evident, Serge, that this American aviator has come here to see the girl. Neither he nor this other fool knows anything. If they had, they would not have come here alone."

"But, Boris," replied the other, "what will Captain Kossnoff do when he comes and finds them?"

The other scowled.

"How many times must I tell you, Serge, that there are no more captains—only comrades? Every man is equal now, in Russia. You should say 'Comrade Kossnoff.' As to what the comrade will do—why, if he finds these Americans here, he will undoubtedly kill them!"

"Oy!" muttered Ike, who understood Russian perfectly. "What shall I do? I must tell the Lieutenant."

His mind immediately began to work, and it occurred to him that they would have a better chance to escape if their enemies believed them to be helpless. He climbed out of the ship, took up the hood, tinkered with the engine for a moment and then remarked in French to the Russians:

"My pilot had to land here because he couldn't go any more. I don't know what the matter is. I'll have to tell him."

The two nodded.

As he walked away, he heard one of the Russians remark to his friend:

"He says they can't get away, Serge. Do you think it would be better to kill them at once?"

"Oy!" muttered Ike, imagining that he could feel bullets severing his spine.

But the other man said:

"Certainly not, Boris! The Comrade Kossnoff might have use for them. Think how angry he would be then, if they had been killed. Besides, he will probably want to attend to them himself. You remember what he did to those German prisoners!"

CHAPTER II
THE RED SPAD

IKE WAS WALKING SO RAPIDLY that he was too far to hear any more. He approached Jimmy Brill and the unknown girl, who were chatting away near the doorway, apparently on the best of terms. Near them was hovering the third Russian, an even bigger and worselooking man than the other two.

"I want to talk to you, Lieutenant!"

Jimmy Brill boiled with rage. Here he was, getting along splendidly with one of the nicest *mademoiselles* he had ever had the good fortune to cast an eye on, and that monkey-minded idiot had to come along and butt in, no doubt to tell him that they were all set to take off.

"Well, what do you want, sap?" he snarled. "Have you found out what was wrong with the motor?"

Nine inches above his own, Ike saw the honestly furious eye of Jimmy Brill. Six inches higher, he perceived the small, wicked, baleful eye of the third, and biggest, Russian.

"No, Lieutenant," he stammered.

"I——"

"Well, then," returned Jimmy Brill, "get away from me, and don't come back until you do find something wrong. If you come bothering me again without being able to tell me why that motor stopped, I'll knock you for two loops and an Immelmann!"

At the moment, he meant it, and Ike could see that he meant it. The mechanic backed away, defeated, and went back and tinkered with the motor some more. As he went away, he heard the girl say: "You may serve tea in the sun room, Ivan."

Ike sighed.

The other two Russians, Serge and Boris, soon got tired of watching Ike do things to the motor which meant nothing, and looked like it, and went away in search of refreshment. As they were leaving, Ike heard the man called Serge address his companion :

"But do you think it safe to go away and leave the airplane? The Captain—I mean the Comrade Kossnoff might not want them to get away."

"That's all right, dumbhead," replied Boris. "They

can't leave without allowing the engine to run for a long time. I have seen airplanes before. If we hear the engine running, we can come out and stop them."

Ike groaned to himself, for he knew that what Boris said would soon be true. The Russian didn't know what it was all about, but Ike knew that the motor would soon be so cold that it would need a whole lot of warming before it would be safe to take off.

"Oy," he muttered, "I must tell the Lieutenant, even if he knocks my head off. The sun room, the lady said. I'll have to find it. Could it be that place, now, with all the big windows like doors?"

Ike meant to find out.

MEANWHILE, Jimmy Brill was feeling fine, especially as the girl had met many soldiers during the past four years, and knew that the majority of them like rum with their tea.

Comfortable for the first time in weeks, in a big, soft chair, with a glow in his stomach, and also in his brain, the pilot was going ahead rapidly.

"You don't know how much it means to a poor American aviator like me, three thousand miles from home, to visit a nice place like this, and talk to a real nice girl like you, *Mademoiselle* Yvette," he was saying. "Ever since I met you when I came here with Lieutenant La Forge, I have been thinking of you, and wishing—"

"Oy, Lieutenant!" came a voice almost at his elbow.

Startled like a barefooted bather who had stepped on a jelly fish, Jimmy Brill turned and saw peering between the flower pots on the low window sill the repulsive mug of Ike Illitzky. With a roar of rage, the pilot snatched a small, withered Spanish orange from the tea table, and hurled it at the face, which disappeared.

"What is the matter with that awful little man?" asked Yvette. "Who is he—your mechanic?"

"Yes, confound him. Only this morning I lost another observer—shot dead—on account of him. I think I'll break his neck. Would you help me hide the body, *Mademoiselle*?"

The French girl was not accustomed to American humor.

"Don't you think it would be too severe—to break his neck. Lieutenant Brill?" she asked. "A good thrashing with a belt, using the buckle, of course, might do him good."

"If I lay eyes on the monkey again. I'll give it to him," promised the pilot, grimly.

"Oy," muttered Ike, from his place outside the window. "I believe he means it. But what's this?" His large, flapping ears were abnormally keen, and had caught the sound of an airplane motor approaching. "It must be Killer Kossnoff," he thought. "Well, if the Lieutenant won't let me speak to him, just for spite I've got a good mind to let this Russian kill him!"

"As I was starting to tell you, Mademoiselle, when that idiot stuck his ugly head in the window," remarked Jimmy Brill, "you can't imagine how much it means to me to be able to talk to a nice girl like you who understands English. Perhaps, after the war—"

"I hear an airplane!" cried the girl. "It must be Captain Kossnoff!"

"Who the blazes is Captain Kossnoff?" blurted Jimmy, angrily. "Another Russian? What are all these Russians doing around here, anyway?"

"Captain Kossnoff is a brave Russian who is flying for France," replied the girl, sharply. "All these other men are common soldiers who wouldn't fight any more, so they were sent here to work in the garden and on the farms. There are only two who are not laborers, the cook, and Ivan, who was butler for a Russian prince before the war. Father let them do the same work here."

"And this Kossnoff—does he come to see you often?" demanded Jimmy Brill, jealously.

"I believe that is one reason why he comes here," replied the girl, with a show of coyness. "Also, he comes to see his men. I believe that the Russians working here were under his command."

She rose, and they went outside to see the Russian land. He was flying a blood-red Spad, and flying it well, as he circled the chateau. Apparently he did not know what to make of the American D.H.4 sitting there.

"What's the idea of having his ship painted red?" asked the American pilot. "What's he trying to do, imitate Richtofen?"

"I wonder," said the girl, abstractedly, almost as if talking to herself. "It wasn't red before. Red is the color of the Russian revolutionaries. Now, I wonder—"

At last the Spad pilot seemed satisfied. He cut his motor and landed, then taxied toward the chateau. He saw the girl standing on the steps, and waved to her, then climbed out, walked over, and greeted her.

She introduced him and Jimmy Brill, who gave each other hard looks.

Kossnoff did not resemble the other Russians around the place any more than a game cock resembles a

Plymouth Rock capon. He was a dark, slim, oliveskinned man, with flashing black eyes and a trim, dark mustache.

Almost at once, Captain Kossnoff excused himself on the grounds that he wished to speak to the men formerly under his command, and Jimmy Brill and Mademoiselle Yvett returned to the sun parlor.

The girl seemed distraught and ill at ease since the arrival of the Russian captain, and the American's advances seemed to make very little impression on her. Her attitude was very different since the red Spad arrived. But Jimmy persisted. He was so occupied that he almost succeeded in forgetting Ike.

IKE himself was forgetting nothing. On the contrary, he was learning things. There was a row of thick bushes along the side of the chateau, where the open window of the sun room was, and Ike lay hidden in them after his narrow escape from being hit by the orange. He thought they provided as good and handy a shelter as he would be likely to find, and Ike craved shelter. He kept himself out of sight during the landing of the Spad, and his prudence was soon rewarded.

The newly arrived pilot came around the corner of the building with Ivan, Serge and Boris, and began to talk. Ike could overhear every word they said plainly.

"How is everything here?" demanded Kossnoff at once. "Is everything ready for tonight? What is that American doing here? Is he alone? Does he suspect anything?"

"Everything is all right so far as we know, Comrade," replied the enormous Ivan. "Monsieur the Count left here with his family two weeks ago. Mademoiselle Yvette came back unexpectedly yesterday. I don't know why—perhaps to meet this American aviator. The American is alone except for a stupid mechanic, who seems to have disappeared. I believe the officer came only to see the girl."

"I don't like it!" exclaimed Kossnoff. "It seems strange that two Americans should suddenly come here—today, of all days. They may be spies. I shall have to dispose of them." His tone made Ike's backbone shimmy as if it were in the grip of a chiropractor.

"I might just as well lock them up in the old dungeons at once," he went on. "I will go and hold up the pilot, and then call you. He might be suspicious if we all went in together, and try to escape. You, Serge, get the rest of the men together, and beat the grounds for the mechanic. He is probably unimportant, so don't hesitate to shoot him if there is any danger of his getting away."

"Oy!" muttered Ike, scuttling silently away through the bushes.

In the sun room, Jimmy Brill was talking fast.

"Are you going to stay on here, Mademoiselle?" he asked. "Maybe I can get over to see you once in a while. Do you have to see that Russian captain?"

"I'd do worse things than that for my country!" the girl burst out passionately.

Then she bit her lip. "Why do you torment me so? I shouldn't have said that. I didn't mean anything."

Jimmy Brill was astonished by her words. But, before he could say anything more, Captain Kossnoff came into the room. He was holding one hand behind his back. There was a smile which he probably intended to be pleasant on his face.

"Lieutenant," he said, coming to a halt about six feet from the American, "it would be foolish for you to resist." As he spoke, he drew the hand which he had been holding behind his back forward. In it was a small automatic pistol which he pointed at the American's belt.

Jimmy Brill felt a faintness at the pit of his stomach. It came partly from the shock of the surprise that the Russian officer's astounding act gave him, and partly because when he had been driving an ambulance, he had seen men spend howling hours dying of a belly wound. Jimmy had never forgotten, and had often felt like covering his stomach instead of his head with his steel helmet when shells were falling around. The muzzle of the gun pointing at his midriff paralyzed him.

"I am informed that there are antiquated, but quite adequate dungeons connected with the ancient part of the chateau," Kossnoff went on. "And, for reasons of my own, I am going to be compelled to shut you up for a short time. Lieutenant."

There was a cold, reptilian cruelty in his eyes which convinced the American that the Russian meant worse to him than locking him up for a short time. The word "dungeon" suggested the torture and starvation which the Russian's eyes seemed to promise. Jimmy Brill resolved not to be captured like a sheep in front of the girl who so attracted him. Better to die fighting. Invisibly he gathered his muscles for a spring at the Russian's gun, even while his stomach cringed at the thought.

Kossnoff moved around away from the door to give free entrance to his satellites, and so placed his back to the open window.

"Ivan!" he called. "Boris!"

The clump of Boris' heavy boots could be heard on the tiled floor of the hallway.

At that moment, things began to happen.

A FLOWER POT mysteriously left its place on the window sill, sailed across the room, and crashed against the back of the Russian officer's head. He crumpled forward, stunned. The thin, spidery form of Ike followed the earthen pot into the room.

"Run!" he cried. "Run, Lieutenant! The Russkies are going to kill us!"

"Run, hell!" growled Jimmy Brill. "Have you gone nutty, too? What's going on around here?"

He was bewildered by such strange happenings at a peaceful chateau.

But the girl snatched up the pistol which had slid from the Russian's limp hand across the floor to her feet. Then she darted across the room, slammed the door in the faces of Ivan and Boris, and locked it.

A heavy hammering an instant later showed that she had not been a second too soon.

"I don't know what it's all about, Lieutenant," said Ike, "but these Russkies are out to kill us—you and me, anyway. There's dozens of them around the place, and they're all in it."

The door, well and strongly built as it was, trembled and creaked dangerously under the combined weight of the two big Russians on the other side.

"Come on!" cried Yvette. "Follow me!"

She ran out through a door on the opposite side of the room from the one she had shut on Ivan and Boris, and into a hall which led toward the back of the chateau. The two Americans followed her, since they knew of nothing better to do. Hoarse shouts in Russian were echoing around the house and grounds, proving that Ike's words about the number of their enemies were true.

Suddenly the girl halted. Before her was a huge figure of a man in a white cap and apron, with a long kitchen knife in his hand. He was well over six feet tall, and his girth must have been greater than his height, for he seemed to fill the whole wide hallway. His tiny, glittering eyes were barely visible in the ranges of fat which surrounded them, and, in comparison with his hand, the long blade he carried seemed no larger than a jackknife.

Yvette stood as though paralyzed. Probably the sight of the man she had been accustomed to seeing as a genial, smiling cook metamorphosed into a scowling demon unnerved her.

Jimmy Brill leaped forward.

But not upon the Russian's upraised knife. He dove down in a perfect tackle, and crashed against the fat man's knees. Surprised by this unexpected maneuver, the giant cook's feet went out from under him, and he sprawled backward onto the floor. Instantly, the American shifted his grip, and seized the wrist of the man's knife hand in both his own.

But, in spite of his fat, the cook proved to be a man of enormous strength. The pilot, strong and wiry as he was, found himself in the position of a terrier who has a bear by the ear. The Russian heaved upward into a sitting posture, and, driven by the force of his mighty arm, the long blade in his hand started inexorably toward the American's chest.

Jimmy Brill saw that he might just as well be wrestling with a gorilla. He tried to loose his hold and get to his feet but his adversary was quick. He seized the pilot by the arm with his left hand and the knife came forward.

A "Pershing special" boot flashed before Jimmy's eyes, and caught the Russian at the base of the brain. When it is recalled, a "Pershing special" that weighed in the neighborhood of two and a half pounds, and had a large, iron cap on the toe. The cook, in spite of his fat head, lost all interest in everything immediately.

"Attaboy, Ike!" yelled Jimmy, scrambling to his feet. A roar from the other end of the hall, and the appearance of Ivan and Boris there, showed that they hadn't an instant to lose.

CHAPTER III
THE SECRET ROOM

THE GIRL DARTED PAST a door into another room, and shut and locked it as the two Americans followed her. Then she sprang to the wall near a fireplace, and did something to the fancy woodwork of the mantelpiece. A panel in the dark wood opened.

Beckoning to the Americans to step through it, she followed. Then she shoved a lever, and the panel shut behind them.

"Oy!" said Ike. "The dungeon that Russky was telling about!"

"Shut up, you fool!" whispered Jimmy Brill, as a crash told him that the door of the room behind them had been smashed down. "It's a secret passage. Lots of these old places have them. Don't make a noise, or they'll hear you." Nevertheless, the cold, damp hole was not reassuring, and when the pilot felt a small, soft hand groping for his, he seized it gratefully.

"Come on," a low voice whispered in his ear, while a wisp of long hair tickled his nose and almost made him sneeze.

Grabbing Ike's hard, greasy paw with his other hand, Jimmy Brill followed his fair guide along the dark passage. Behind, and all around, he could hear the hoarse shouts and clumsy thumpings of the murderous Russians who were hunting them in vain.

The walk in the blackness seemed interminable. The dank, musty air made the pilot feel like coughing, and behind him, Ike was snuffling loudly. Finally they climbed some steps, and the girl halted. She fumbled around for a moment, and then another panel opened, and they stepped out into a small, circular room.

Except for the woodwork around the passage entrance, the room was walled with heavy stone. There was no window, but a tremendous door of studded iron, bolted on the inside, and a flight of stone steps heading upward around the wall. Yvette immediately started to mount them.

At a height of about fifteen feet above the lower floor the building was lighted by narrow slits in the thick, stone walls, but neither of the Americans paused to look out through them. They were too eager to reach the top.

At the head of the stairs they found themselves in another round, stone room, with narrow windows all around at intervals of a few feet. The walls were about two feet thick, and the openings were two feet wide at the inside, and six inches on the outside of the wall.

"Ah," said Ike, "a fine scheme to save window glass!"

Jimmy Brill knew that the shape of the embrasures was intended in the days when the tower was built to lessen the likelihood of arrows entering, but he said nothing. Instead, he ran to a rack on the wall which held a dozen long guns.

"Guns!" he cried, seizing one. "And ammunition. Where is it?"

"Alas!" cried Yvette. "There is nothing but these paper cartridges—blanks."

"Blanks!" gasped Jimmy, looking at a large case of paper cylinders. "Whatever for?"

"Oy!" cried Ike, looking at a large iron tank on the other side of the room. "What a big washer. And wood already, too."

"I might as well tell you," Yvette said to Jimmy. "Uncle Alphonse was wounded by a saber cut on the head in the Franco-Prussian war. He was never right afterwards. He was always waiting for the Germans to come again, and he had these old Chassepot rifles ready. But one day ten years ago, he shot at the Austrian Ambassador, who was visiting us, and after that father would let him have only blank cartridges—no bullets.

"What your mechanic calls a 'washer' is the old arrangement they had for pouring boiling oil down on enemies in the Middle Ages."

"Boiling oil!" yelped Ike. "What a fine thing for Russkies! Is it full of oil now?" he asked, peering into the kettle.

"No—water," replied the French girl. "Oil would have been too expensive. But everything is just the same here as it was when Uncle Alphonse died a year ago."

"And the secret passage?" asked Jimmy.

"It was built by my ancestor who feared a revolution of the peasants," the girl replied.

"It sure came in handy," remarked Jimmy, looking out one of the embrasures. "But, Good Lord, look at all the Russians! Keep back, Ike! Don't let them see you. Wonder if they'll find us here?"

"I hope not!" said Yvette.

ALL over the grounds of the chateau the Russians were beating the bushes, and scouring every inch of ground for the fugitives. Jimmy noted that many of them had rifles—some the long French Lebel, others the shorter American weapon. And he recalled that he had lately heard of a number of soldiers being mysteriously killed, and their rifles stolen. Plainly something big was in the wind, and he was curious.

"What do you know about this?" he asked, turning to Ike.

"I understand Russian, Lieutenant," replied the mechanic. "But of course they didn't expect an American soldier to understand, so they talked right in front of me. First they were going to kill us right away, and then they decided to wait for this Kossnoff. They plan to do something big tonight. I tried to tell the Lieutenant, and he wouldn't let me," he added aggrieved!

"Why, you blamed fool!" exclaimed Jimmy. Then he wondered if he wasn't one of that same variety of fools himself not to have listened.

Two of the Russian soldiers came toward the door of the old tower, and one banged uselessly on the heavy iron with the butt of his rifle. The other pointed out the fact that there were no tracks beside their own in the soft mud near the door, and they went away.

Kossnoff appeared in the front doorway of the chateau after a while, and shouted something, which was at once repeated by the giant Ivan in a roar like a bull. The other Russians all began to troop toward the chateau. Jimmy Brill counted more than fifty of them, all armed with either rifles or pistols.

"What did Kossnoff say?" he asked Ike.

"He told them to come and discuss their plans for tonight," the mechanic replied. "Russians always have to talk for hours before they do anything," he added.

"I didn't notice them doing so much talking a little while ago," remarked Jimmy Brill, grimly. "But what we need is to find out what their plans are. This is an American district, as far as the military goes, and they must be plotting something against us, the way they've been acting."

The girl Yvette, suddenly spoke up.

"We must find out their plans," she exclaimed. "I will go back through the passage, and listen to what they say."

"The passage!" said Jimmy Brill. "That's an idea. But I'll go—not you."

"Listen, Lieutenant and Ma'm'selle," said Ike. "You don't either of you understand Russian, so what good is it going to do you to listen to them? I'll go, myself."

Jimmy Brill knew the mechanic was right, and he protested no more. So Ike Illitzky, with cold fear gripping at his heart, and chilling his fingers and toes, dragged his unwilling feet back along the dark, dank secret passage, leaving the pilot and the girl in the comparative safety of the tower.

"TELL me, Yvette," Jimmy Brill asked, curiously, forgetting the "*Mademoiselle*" in the stress of the danger in which they so suddenly found themselves, "what did you mean when you said 'I would do worse things than that for my country'?"

"I really shouldn't have said that, but I can't see what difference it makes now," she replied. "The French Intelligence officers were becoming suspicious of Captain Kossnoff. They watch all Russians very closely since the revolution in their country. They couldn't understand why he kept coming to see his men. To see a girl, yes. That they could understand. But why should he continue to come here after I had gone?

"He and the other Russians would have wondered if a stranger came around here, but not so much about me. So the chief of the French counterespionage in this section, Captain Dufour, asked me to return here, and see if I could find out anything."

"It was a shame to send a girl like you here alone," proclaimed Jimmy, indignantly, "but lucky for me, for all that. If it hadn't been for that, I might never have seen you again."

He went on with more in the same strain, and might have kept it up for hours, if a sudden outburst of noise had not interrupted him.

"What's that?" he muttered.

Sounds, muffled, yet menacing, came to their ears, apparently from the bowels of the earth. Noises, vague at first, resolved themselves into hoarse shoutings, and the beat of heavy boots.

"They've discovered Ike!" the pilot growled. "The dumb cluck!"

He was right-about the first of his statements, at least.

Looking down into the well of the tower, he saw Ike, black hair flying, come scrambling up out of the doorway of the secret passage, then up the stairs as if the devils of hell were after him. Which wasn't so far from the truth, after all.

He was two-thirds of the way up the circular staircase when a Russian, pistol in hand, appeared. A cruel grin appeared on his flat face, as he drew a bead on the fugitive mechanic.

But Jimmy Brill had taken Kossnoff's pistol from Yvette, who admitted that she was a little afraid of it. The two guns roared almost at once in the narrow confines of the tower, but the American had the jump. The Russian pitched forward, dead as a sardine, his pistol clattering across the stone floor. Other pursuers, who had not been far behind him, halted in the passage, where they could be heard talking loudly and angrily.

"What did you do, you idiot?" demanded the pilot, roughly, as Ike stumbled and lay gasping on the upper floor of the tower. "How did they get wise to you?"

"I sneezed!" gasped Ike, scrambling to his feet. "They were talking in the room where the tunnel starts, and I was behind the door listening, and I sneezed!"

The mechanic looked so woebegone that Jimmy had to laugh in spite of himself, and pat him on the back.

"Cheer up," he said. "I don't suppose you could help it in that cold, musty place. But what did you find out? Did you hear anything?"

"Everything! These Russkies are going to American headquarters tonight. They plan to kill the guards at the general's office, and steal all the maps and plans. Oy! Then they'll blow up the place, and set it on fire, so as to stir up everybody while they get away, and maybe that they stole something won't be noticed. Then this Kossnoff will fly the maps and plans to Germany."

"Good Lord!" breathed Jimmy Brill. He saw the possibilities of the plot. Its success would mean a severe setback, if not a major disaster, to the American Army. He must do something. But what? What could he do, penned up as he was?

But the problem of immediate self-preservation intruded on his thoughts. A rifle was poking its way out of the dark tunnel.

ABOVE, the pilot lay down on the stone floor, and trained his pistol on the rifle. Gradually, inch by inch, it crept forward, until at last a face appeared above it.

The American squeezed the trigger of his automatic, and the face became a bloody mask, which was immediately dragged back out of sight into the darkness.

For minutes, silence reigned, a silence which at last twitched at the nerves of the pilot more than the chatter of the German Spandaus had done that morning.

"With plenty of ammunition we could hold this place against an army without artillery," he said, at last. "But now what we want is to get away."

There came a scuttling noise from below. One after another, Russians began to dart out of the doorway of the passage, and up the circular stairway. On they came, facing death bravely, or perhaps, stupidly. There was room on the stairs for only a single file.

Jimmy Brill was firing. Russians were toppling off the stairway. One man reached the top. Ike dashed the butt of a rifle into his yellow teeth, and he crashed like a sack of bones onto the stone floor below. The stairway was empty.

Voices speaking loudly in Russian came up to the besieged.

"What are they talking about, Ike?" asked Jimmy Brill.

"Kossnoff says, 'Keep on, he ain't got no more cartridges. Go ahead.' Some other guy says, 'You go, Comrade.' "

"It's lucky there are no more officers, only comrades, in the Russian Army," remarked Jimmy Brill. "He's right, for once. I *have* no more cartridges!"

Anxious time passed. There was nothing they could do. But the Russians had had enough. They did not attack again. The sound of voices, however, proved that they were guarding the foot of the stairs from a safe place in the passage.

Darkness was creeping into the ancient tower. The sound of a motor startled Jimmy Brill.

"What's that?" he breathed.

"That must be the gang starting out," said Ike. "They stole a truck somewhere."

"We've got to beat them!" the pilot said. "If only we could get out of here."

The thought of the truck starting for American headquarters at Froidvalle, seventy-five kilometers away, was driving him frantic. What had been a haven of refuge now seemed a trap from which there was no escape.

"If only we could get out of here!" he said again. He spoke to emptiness, for it was so dark that he could not see the faces of his companions.

"We can," said the voice of Yvette.

"How?" the pilot cried.

"Sh!" she said. "They may hear you. One might understand English, just as your friend understands Russian. But there is a rope here. We can get onto the roof, tie it to the battlements, and descend."

"Fine!" Jimmy whispered. "But you! We couldn't leave you here."

"Don't worry about me," she said, with a low laugh. "I climbed down once when I was younger, and almost scared poor father to death."

Silently and swiftly, they boosted and hauled each other through a trapdoor in the roof. Carefully, they tied the rope around a pillar of massive stone work, and cautiously, the pilot leading, they lowered themselves to the ground.

Then the girl led them quietly across the grounds to a small door in the wall around the estate, and out onto the highway. At once they started to walk toward Froidvalle.

CHAPTER IV
WELCOMED

BEHIND THEM CAME A CAR, its lights like the eyes of a swooping owl.

"Got to stop it!" cried Jimmy Brill. He stood in the middle of the road, waving his arms, then sprang back just in time to avoid being run down, as the automobile, a large American limousine with one passenger beside the driver, swept by without slackening speed.

"Damn his hide!" the pilot snarled.

Another car passed them, another, and yet a fourth.

"Quartermasters and remount officers running around after their beans and spavined nags!" the aviator snarled. "If they only knew!"

But they neither knew nor cared.

"What time are those Russians going to do the dirty work?" he asked Ike for the third time. "Aren't you sure? Didn't they mention a time?"

"I told you, Lieutenant, they said they'd do it as soon as possible," returned Ike, aggrievedly. "As soon as everybody but the guards had got through work and gone. Kossnoff said he'd be able to take off any time, for the moon comes up about eight. Isn't that it now?" he asked, pointing to a bright glow which was rising in the east.

"It is," groaned Jimmy. "But what's this coming? It looks like a camion."

Approaching on the road behind them were two dim lights. They came on very slowly, hardly fifteen miles an hour, but still they came, and much faster than any man could hope to go on foot for more than a short dash.

As the truck approached, Jimmy took no chances on being able to make it stop. He sprang onto the running-board, instead. Just able to perceive that the driver was a French soldier, he said:

"Are you going to Froidvalle, Old Cabbage? How about a ride for me and the young lady?"

The chauffeur dragged his big truck to a stop, and inspected Jimmy and each of his companions carefully with a small, dim flashlight, before he replied:

"But yes, I will be glad to transport you and your little friend to Froidvalle. But why do you take that ugly toad with you?" he inquired, indicating Ike. "He is your servant, perhaps?"

"I am a pilot. He is my mechanic," returned Jimmy Brill, patiently. He had learned that it was easier in the long run to satisfy a Frenchman's curiosity in the first place, and be done with it.

"Ah, *pilote-aviateur,* eh?" said the chauffeur. "And he—a mechanic. Well, it may well be. I have learned to expect almost anything of a mechanic. Climb up, then, and we will be going on. You haven't such a thing as a canteen of rum, or even a small flask of cognac with your, perhaps?"

"No, my old vegetable," returned Jimmy, as they all crowded onto the wide seat beside the driver. "But I will give you something handsome to buy drinks with, once we get to Froidvalle."

The heavy truck rumbled majestically on through the night. Jimmy Brill squirmed and fidgeted at its slowness. A dozen times, as fast cars tore by them, going in the same direction, he was tempted to get off, and take a chance on picking up some faster conveyance. But their experience before they caught the truck showed him the foolishness of such an experiment.

"Can't you go any faster?" he asked the driver, impatiently. "It is very important for us to get to Froidvalle as soon as possible."

"It is all very well for young men in love to be impatient," replied the Frenchman. "But when you have reached my age, you will be able to appreciate how useless it all is. Babies are born, grow up, and die, or are killed. Besides, why should you be in such a hurry to get to Froidvalle? You will no doubt be arrested by the American *gendarmes* as soon as you get there. To me, it appears as though your American Army is composed almost entirely of officers and policemen. Police! Ah, they swarm in Froidvalle like mice in a cheese. In any event, this old wagon can go no faster.

"Policemen! I cannot see why you American soldiers allow them to exist. We French, we manage better. I remember, at Verdun, three of us were staying in the cellar of a butcher shop, on account of the shelling. A *gendarme* entered."

"'Alles-oop!' " he said. '"On your feet. Outside!'

"One of my comrades was an Algerian. He cut off the policeman's head with a cleaver which was in the shop, and we threw *him* outside. It was assumed that he had been decapitated by a shell.

"And I remember another time in Marseilles,

before the war. There was a *flic,* a policeman in civilian clothes, you understand, came into a wine shop where we were drinking. Well—"

And so the truck and the driver rambled on through the night, while the three passengers fumed and raged at their slow rate of progress.

"GOT a pass?" asked an M.P., as the three climbed down from the truck three hours later, leaving the chauffeur richer by twenty francs.

"Have you seen any Russians around here? Has anything happened?" asked Jimmy Brill, ignoring the man's question.

"I got nothing to do with Russians," returned the M.P., roughly, "any more than I have to do with French dames. Run along, sister."

"But, Yivette—" cried Jimmy, as she turned away.

"That will be all right," she said. "I will go to the house of my aunt, Madame de Lisle, 38 rue de Colombiers. Do your duty, and you may find me at my aunt's house tomorrow. And—thank you for everything." She walked hurriedly away.

"Let's see your pass!" said the M.P. He was a thick-necked man, whose face ran mostly to chin.

"Where's headquarters?" cried Jimmy. "Are there any Russians in town?"

"I told you, I ain't got nothing to do with Russians," returned the policeman. "What I want to know is—has you and this ugly kike got a pass?" He was evidently a man with what the French call an *idee fixe.*

"Where is the officer in charge of the Military Police?" asked Jimmy, despairing of getting anything sensible out of the stupid cop.

"That's just what you're going to find out, if you ain't got no pass," returned the policeman, "and I guess you ain't, or you'd have brought it out before now. Come on, get along," he said, tapping the .45 on his hip suggestively. "And you too, Kike."

"Kike yourself, you dumb bohunk," returned Ike angrily. "If you didn't have that shooter, now, I'd—"

"Arrrrh!" said the M.P.

Ike made motions to Jimmy Brill suggesting that they leap onto the M.P., smack him down, and take his gun. The pilot would have liked nothing better, but he restrained himself. If the policeman was going to take them to the Provost Marshal, which was where he wanted to go, there was no use gumming things up. Once he could get to see an officer in authority—a man of intelligence—he could tell his story, start things moving, and save headquarters from the Russians. It was evident that nothing had happened yet.

The three men went down the street, turned a corner, and entered a large house which had once been the luxurious mansion of some rich man, but was now crowded with assorted M.P.s. Their captor found a sergeant who helped escort the Air Service men into the presence of Major Blount, Provost Marshal of the town of Froidvalle.

The major was a bulgy man. His eyes and his cheeks bulged, his neck bulged out around his high, stiff collar, and his stomach budged above his Sam Browne belt.

"Well, what's all this?" he mumbled thickly. He appeared to be on the verge of a stroke of apoplexy, perhaps as a result of something he had drunk.

"Couple nuts I caught sneaking into town on a Frog truck, Major," replied the man who had arrested them. "Ain't got no pass. This aviator told me he wanted to see you, so I brung him along. He kept asking crazy questions about Russians."

"I can see he's drunk," muttered Major Blount, who looked as if he might be in the stage where he thought everyone except himself must be intoxicated. "Better lock him up till morning. 'Conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman.' Ninety-fifth Article of War. 'Drunk on Duty.' That will be another charge if he is proved to be A.W.O.L. Eighty-fifth Article of War. Hum," peering intently at Jimmy Brill with his bulbous eyes, "Under the ninety-sixth Article of War, 'Wearing improper uniform—'"

The pilot could stand it no longer.

"Major," he cried "there's a gang of Russians under a Captain Kossnoff, who's a pilot in the French Army, here planning to steal the plans and maps from the general's headquarters, blowing the place up, and carrying the plans to Germany by airplane. I came here to Froidvalle to warn you."

MAJOR BLOUNT frowned, then smiled, then frowned again. He seemed to be trying to collect his thoughts.

"Sergeant," he asked, "have you two guards at the General's headquarters as usual?"

"Yes, sir!" said the sergeant, briskly.

"That's all right, then," said the major. "Now, as for you, Lieutenant, of course if you are given a sanity hearing before a board of medical officers, and found incompetent, that will cut out the necessity for charges and specifications for a regular trial. But I don't think

you're crazy—only drunk. Drunkenness is becoming prevalent in the A.E.F.— far too prevalent, and it's high time an example was made. Might as well start on you. Aviators are terrible drunks—terrible.

"Now, let's see. Conduct unbecoming—um. Drunkenness—um. Improper uniform. Yes. I see you are wearing a blouse with the so-called patch pockets. Haven't you seen the regulation that the so-called patch pockets will not be worn?"

"But, Major," cried Jimmy Brill, "What I have to tell you is important! I tell you there's a whole truck load of these Russians—twenty or thirty—all armed. What are a couple of guards going to do against them? If the general's maps and plans are stolen, think what a blow it will be to the Army! You must do something before it's too late—call out the guard, and round up all the Russians in town."

"That's right, Major. I heard those Russkies talking about it myself," Ike spoke up. "And, I tell you, Major—"

The M.P. who had arrested them gave Ike a poke in the ribs which deprived him of wind and speech for several minutes.

"Shut up, Kike!" he said.

"Also," said Major Blount, screwing up his face, closing one eye, and squinting through the other at Jimmy Brill, "I see that you are wearing a 'U.S.R.' on your collar. There is a new regulation that all officers, whether of the Regular Army, the National Guard, the Reserve, or the National Army, wear a 'U.S.' on their collars. Why are you wearing a 'U.S.R.'?"

"Because I don't want to take any chances of anyone thinking I'm a dumb Regular!" exploded Jimmy Brill.

"Ah," said Major Blout, "another charge. Under the sixty-third Article of War. 'Behaving with disrespect toward a superior officer.' We certainly have enough charges against you now. Sergeant Cassidy, lock these men up." The M.P. sergeant stepped forward, a wide grin on his face. It wasn't so often that he got a chance to lock up an officer—even a flying officer.

A gust of rage at the stupidity of the major swept over Jimmy Brill. He whirled and swung his fist against the sergeant's jaw with a crack like a breaking strut. Ike, who had been eagerly waiting for a chance to get square with the M.P. who had called him a kike, snatched up the major's ripe spittoon, and flung it business end first into the man's face.

But, however slow Major Blount might have been mentally, he was quick enough in some ways.

"Halt!" he roared in a voice like a Hereford bull's. At the sound both Jimmy and Ike were shocked into halting in their tracks and looking at him. In his hand was the largest revolver either had ever seen—a Colt's 1917 model.

"Another charge!" bellowed the major. 'Breach of arrest,' in violation of the sixty-ninth Article of War, specification—in that, having been lawfully placed in arrest at Froidvalle, on—"

Whr-o-o-o-o-m!

A tremendous explosion. The building trembled, and the lights went out. For an instant silence reigned in the building, a silence broken only by the sound of bricks and chunks of stone falling in the street outside. Then yells and shouts burst out on all sides.

Above them all sounded the bull-like voice of Major Blount, into whose fuddled brain the idea seemed to have crept that the two Air Service men were in some way responsible for the catastrophe.

"Another charge!" he roared. "Injuring military property—"

He tried to rise, but his feet got tangled up, and he crashed to the floor, inextricably mixed up with the legs of his chair and a wire waste basket. By the time candles were lit, and order restored, the men whom he wanted to charge with his formidable list of offenses were nowhere to be found.

CHAPTER V
THE CHATEAU

IT TOOK JIMMY BRILL only a small fraction of a second to realize the situation and take advantage of it. Scarcely had the lights gone out than he was out of the door of the major's office, and making his way down the corridor in the darkness. Men were running to and fro, bumping into each other, stumbling, cursing, and yelling for lights, but it was possible to recognize nobody.

The pilot made his way out to the street, and began to put space between himself and the lair of Major Blount. He had not taken many steps before he heard someone approacliing behind him. He turned, prepared to fight off a possible pursuer, only to perceive the unmistakable form of Ike.

"Here I am. Lieutenant," panted the mechanic. "Guess they blew it up, all right. What shall we do now?"

Jimmy halted. Ike's question was very *apropos.* What *should* they do now?

"For two bits I'd throw the whole thing up, and forget it all," the pilot snarled. "It'd serve 'em right for having a stupid sot like that Major Blount for Provost Marshal.

"But then, that wouldn't be right. We ought to try to stop those Russians somehow. And then there's that Kossnoff. I'd like to get a crack at him, and in a few hours he'll be safe in Germany. Also, there's our ship. We've got to look out for that. Got to account for it some way. If we could get back to the chateau ahead of the Russians, get our ship, and disable Kossnoff's Spad! if we only could— Hello, who's this?"

A big Cadillac limousine came tearing and bouncing down the rough, paved street. Its dome light was on, showing plainly the two stars on a field of red on the windshield which marked it as the conveyance of a major general. With a shriek of brakes, it slid to a stop, and a man sprang out and rushed into a house not fifty yards ahead of them, leaving the car sitting at the curb with the engine running.

Jimmy and Ike looked at each other. It seemed like an answer to prayer.

"One charge more or less added to all those that fathead was thinking up won't matter much," the pilot said. "Come on, Ike."

"Sure!" cried Ike.

He climbed behind the wheel of the big car, the mechanic scrambled up beside him, and the powerful limousine roared away as fast as it could go.

Jimmy did not pause until he had passed the last sentry at the edge of town, and crossed a bridge over a narrow river. All the guards saluted the two stars of the general respctfully. When it seemed that they were safely clear of the town, the pilot stopped the car.

"I don't remember crossing that river coming into town," he said. "We must be lost. I've never been in this town before, or even flown over it. But here's a map case. And a map. Let's see, now, where we are. Here, across the river. . . . Good-night! We can't get back to the road to the chateau without going back through the town."

"But, Lieutenant, we shouldn't want to go back the same way," objected Ike, looking at the map. "We'd have to pass the Russkies' truck, and they might not let us by, might even shoot us. Why shouldn't we go on by this road, and back to the chateau by this place—what do you call it—Andalottey. We can go three, maybe four times as fast as the Russkies' truck."

"You had a thought, Ike!" exclaimed the pilot, delightedly. "You had a thought. Well do just that."

He threw the big car into gear, and they sped down the straight, gray road.

THE moon was bright, and they had no need of headlights. Not knowing whether or not lights were forbidden in that area, Jimmy took no chances, and kept them off. He turned on the light inside only when it seemed wise to check their course by the map. The Cadillac spurned the miles behind, and at last they were on the home stretch.

"Pretty soft, Ike," said Jimmy Brill. "We'll beat the Russians by two hours. Now, I wonder what's best to do? Take off, and warn the Spads to get after Kossnoff after he starts? Or tear up his crate, and keep him on the ground? There's something to be said for both schemes."

"Don't forget, Lieutenant, that there's a lot of those Russkies hanging around the chateau. What will they be doing all that time? We better try to get our ship away from there."

"Maybe you're right," the pilot agreed. "We'll stop the car a little way from the chateau, and run it off the road, so the M.P.s won't be able to find it so easy, and get onto our track. Then we'll sneak up real quiet, and get the bus started. We can hold 'em off easy with the Lewis guns until she warms up enough to take off."

"But, Lieutenant," Ike began to object, "I—"

"Shut up!" snapped Jimmy Brill. "She's missing! She's stopped! I believe we're out of gas!"

The big car coasted along for another hundred yards, and glided gently to a halt. A moment's investigation showed that the pilot was right. They were out of gas—all out. The emergency cans were empty, too. Jimmy Brill cursed long and loud.

"Well, it's not over six or eight miles," he said. "We may make it yet. Come on."

He set off down the road with a long, swinging stride which kept the shortlegged Ike panting and half-running to keep up with him. Keeping up a good four-mile clip, he and the mechanic reentered the little door in the wall around the chateau an hour and three-quarters later.

"If I only had a gun!" muttered Jimmy to himself, as he made his way through the bushes and trees which grew thickly around the back and sides of the chateau. But wishing got him nothing.

Still, there was the D.H.4, mounted with four machine guns, and approximately two thousand rounds of ammunition. That ought to be enough armament to satisfy almost any one, provided the guns had not been removed, and they succeeded in reaching the crate.

Imagining that he saw lurking Russians crouching in the shadow of every bush and tree, the American pilot at last reached the open ground in front of the chateau. He breathed a sigh of relief when he saw that the observer's twin Lewises still sat on their *tourelle*. Ike was panting along some ten yards behind when the pilot clambered into the front cockpit.

"Come on!" Jimmy breathed in a stage whisper. "Can you turn her over alone? Switch off! Suck in! Hustle, now.

"All right—contact! Here, I'll help you start her." He was out of the cockpit, grasping Ike by one hand, while the mechanic held onto the prop with the other. Under their combined strength, the big motor caught, stuttered—then caught again, and went into a steady, bellowing rumble.

But, even as Jimmy was chuckling to himself over their unheard-of luck in starting the Liberty so easily, Ike grabbed him by the arm and pointed toward the chateau.

"Look! They're coming!"

Jimmy looked, and saw half a dozen big clumsy figures lumbering across the grass toward them. He laughed.

"All right, well soon fix them. Into your cockpit, now, and do your stuff. Feed them a dose of old Dr. Lewis' medicine while I warm up the motor."

"But, Lieutenant—"

"Shut up, and do what I say!" snapped Jimmy Brill, climbing into the pilot's cockpit. "Step on it, now!" Ike obeyed.

The Russians came galloping heavily but swiftly across the grass. By that time they were scarcely fifty feet away. One of them raised his hand.

There was a flash of yellow flame, and a revolver bullet sang over Jimmy's head. He turned in his seat, and yelled over the big gas tank which separated him from Ike.

"Give it to them, you fool! Load your guns, and feed it to them!"

For answer Ike waved his arms in the air, and hopped about like a ballet dancer—but he did nothing with his guns. The Russian with the pistol raised his hand again, and he was almost at the ship's wing-tip.

Jimmy shoved the throttle forward with a jerk. The ship lurched ahead, but the cold motor wouldn't take the gas, and coughed, and missed, and backfired. Still, the crate was rolling, and the Russian's bullets missed.

Tail dragging, the bomber rumbled along the ground, with its big, lumbering pursuers traveling almost as fast as it could. There wasn't a chance of taking off.

Jimmy Brill was grinding his teeth with rage. What was the matter with that idiot, Ike? With two first-class Lewis guns in perfect working order, he was letting them be chased around by half a dozen men, only one of whom appeared to be armed. The fool was howling something, and the plane had gained almost a hundred yards on its pursuers, who were beginning to slow up. Jimmy cut down the sputtering motor enough to get some of what Ike was saying.

"—told—Lieutenant—didn't—know—use—guns!"

The truth dawned on the pilot, like a wave breaking over a drowning man.

Ike had no idea how to handle a Lewis gun!

Furious anger filled the pilot' brain. What an idiotic situation! What a ridiculous farce! Two men and four machine guns and an airplane—all helpless for the moment.

And only a moment would be enough to be the death of them. Other Russians with rifles could be seen running out onto the field from the chateau.

CHAPTER VI
THE DUEL

WITH A SCREECH OF FURY, the pilot gave her full right rudder, reversed the ailerons, and swept around in a ground loop. Then he charged the enemy.

The Russians scattered, several of them falling to the ground, and letting the wings pass over them. One tried to scramble aboard the ship. Ike knocked him sprawling with a full drum of ammunition. Jimmy had to grin through his rage at that. Ninety-seven cartridges to knock off one man!

It was a ridiculous comedy, but one which might turn into a tragedy at any moment. Rifle bullets from the Russians around the chateau were singing around

them, piercing the fuselage and wings. It was only a question of time before some of them found a more solid target.

Jimmy's own guns were useless. With the tail down, they pointed up with the nose of the ship toward the sky, at a sharp angle from the ground. The engine wouldn't go fast enough yet to raise the tail, and make the forward guns of any use. Still, the ship could go fast enough to keep away from men on foot.

Jimmy gave her as much gun as she would take, and rolled steadily across the open ground to the spot farthest from the chateau which he could reach. There he turned, facing the building—and the Russian's Spad. As he leaned out to look ahead, he noticed that there was a group of men around the red ship. They seemed to be starting it up! Kossnoff must have arrived!

The pilot turned in his seat, cursing the big gas tank which separated him from the observer's cockpit. In a Breguet, for example, he could have reached back, and loaded the guns for Ike. In the D.H., a good four feet separated him from the man in the observer's cockpit. He saw that the mechanic had finally got a drum of ammo onto his left hand gun, but didn't know what to do next.

"The loading handle! On the left side of the gun! Pull it back twice!" the pilot howled. Then he stood up, and made motions similar to those which Ike would have to make at the side of his left hand Marlin. He had no time to see whether the mechanic had understood him.

Evidently urged on by Kossnoff, a large number of Russians, armed with rifles, were attacking the D.H. in a businesslike manner. They were advancing as skirmishers across the ground, firing steadily as they came. They couldn't keep on missing.

There was nothing for the groundbound ship to do but charge them. Jimmy gave her all the gun she'd take. She lurched forward, gaining speed. The Liberty was warming up. The tail came up for a moment, and Jimmy squeezed the triggers on his stick. He was rewarded by the sight of twin streams of tracers lashing the empty sky. At sight of them, the Russians broke. They had no idea how helpless the grounded ship was.

Her tailskid bit the dirt again. Again Jimmy shoved forward on the stick, The ship came up almost into flying position, and he sent a hail of tracers flying over the heads of the men around the Spad. But the tail fell again as the motor choked. The Spad was close, and the American had to slow up to turn, so as not to break a wing.

As he did so, a form leaped onto the step, and grabbed him by the neck. A Russian had been hiding in the grass. He was a big man, and strong, and he had the pilot at a disadvantage.

In vain Jimmy pounded away at the man's face with both fists. In his sitting position in the cockpit, he couldn't get any steam behind a blow. The fellow's hands found a good grip on his throat, and tightened. The ship lost speed, and other figures came loping across the grass toward it. The pilot could see the curtains starting to fall.

Suddenly the fingers loosened, and the attacker flopped off onto the ground. Ike had found a use for another heavy drum full of cartridges! He had hurled the uncouth missile with unerring aim. Jimmy gasped in a lungful of air, and fed the Liberty a bellyful of gas. The ship gathered speed, and trundled away from the Russians once more.

Then, with a sigh of relief, Jimmy heard a roar of fire from Ike's Lewis.

He turned, a grin on his lips. With Ike functioning, they were O.K. To his horror, the pilot saw strips of fabric, and slivers of wood flaking away from the horizontal stabilizer under the stream of bullets from the mechanic's gun!

"It must be a nightmare! It *must!*" screeched Jimmy Brill. "*Never* in this world, cock-eyed as it is, did a man ever get tangled up with so many idiots in one night." But a bullet grazing his knuckles, and the resulting sting convinced him that he was awake.

There was no use talking—he'd got to get off the ground. Once more he charged across the field—tail up this time. The thermometer was going up. Once more he swung until he was heading toward Kossnoff's Spad. Then he gave her the gun in earnest. The motor took it bravely, and the D.H. tore along over the grass. Dawn was streaking the east.

Jimmy was out to riddle the Russian's ship. The tail of the D.H. came up and up, and the muzzles of his Marlin guns came down and down. For an instant he saw the Spad through his sights, and he squeezed the triggers on his stick.

But a rough spot in the ground threw him off, and his bullets went wide. Once more he ruddered onto his mark. The ship started to nose over, and he jerked her up just in time to save a splintered prop. For the last time, he tried to aim his guns.

Too late. The Spad and the milling men around

it were right before his nose, approaching at his own speed of eighty miles an hour. Jimmy heaved the D.H. off the ground into a staggering zoom, and cleared the other ship by inches. At the top of the zoom the motor pooped, and he nosed down. Before his eyes was a jagged row of poplar trees. Then the Liberty took the gas again, and he pulled her round in a vertical bank.

He was in the air once more! Off the dirty ground, where he had been so clumsy and helpless. Even the De Haviland seemed to take delight in being once more in the element for which it had been designed.

Jimmy Brill piqued to dive on the red Spad and riddle it. But, as his tracers leaped from the muzzles of the Marlin guns, the Russian's ship started to move, and the lead, steel, and phosphorous buried itself harmlessly in the dirt.

He swerved to pursue.

His gleaming storm of fire followed the spy's crate, caught it, went licking up the fuselage. The tracers seemed to be entering the cockpit, playing around the motor, but the swift, sturdy Spad kept on. It gathered speed, until it was going as fast as the D.H.

The American kept his hand clamped around the triggers of his guns. His bullets lashed the sky, and the trees and bushes. They seemed to lash the red Spad, but it did not falter. Instead, it came up and around in a chandelle.

WITHOUT flying clothes, the sweat worked up on his long walk chilled on Jimmy's body. It seemed to clothe his body in a shroud of ice. He was just about alone in the D.H. to hold his own with a Spad with a third more speed than he had, and twice the maneuverability. With a good observer, it wouldn't have been so bad. But with Ike!

The initiative lay with Kossnoff. He could either run away with the papers he had risked so much to get, or stay and fight, as he chose.

He chose to fight.

Up and around he came—he was above the De Haviland—boring in. His Vickers pounded on the still morning air, and their streams licked into the tail of the D.H.

With a heave which made the frail wings creak and waver, Jimmy pulled the bomber round, trying to get in a shot. He might as well have tried to chase a squirrel through the trees.

With rear guns dead and silent, he had scarcely a chance of getting a shot at a skilful pilot in a Spad. But—he could try.

Hate made him fly the bomber like a Nieuport. Never before in an air battle had he been able to visualize his opponent. The men he had fought had been faceless figures. But now the olive cheeks and bright black eyes of Kossnoff were ever before him as he flew and fought.

The Russian seemed to be playing with him, like a cat with a mouse. Time after time the Russian could have dived in on his unprotected rear. But perhaps the Spad pilot didn't realize how helpless the bomber was. He kept maneuvering to get under its tail, something which Jimmy had so far been able to prevent.

Then suddenly the Russian outguessed him. He was one move ahead. He was beneath the bomber's belly, pulling his nose up, almost in a stall.

Jimmy knew that he was finished. He instinctively threw over stick and rudder, as if to roll away out of range, but he knew, even as he did so, that the logy De Haviland would never answer the controls in time. Twin machine guns roared.

The American went limp for an instant, expecting to feel the slugs tearing into his body, cutting into the gas tank, and turning it into a fiery furnace.

But no such thing happened. Jimmy realized like a flash that the guns were on his own ship—the Lewises that he had forgotten for the moment. He straightened out, and looked down.

The Spad was falling like a stricken duck. Even as he viraged round to dive and open on it with his forward guns, it hit the dirt in a burst of orange flame.

Weak from reaction, he turned and looked at Ike. The mechanic seemed to be dancing.

Half an hour later Jimmy Brill landed the D.H. on a French field, where he found the commanding officer only too ready to treat to coffee and rum. After two drinks, the pilot felt well enough to talk—to the Frenchman, that is. He couldn't yet bear to look at Ike, who had been escorted to the non-commissioned officers' mess for breakfast.

"Captain," he said, "do you think it could be arranged, if any inquiries are made here, to have it said that I spent the night at your field? Broken down, you understand. My commanding officer is not a man of the world, you see, and he might punish me if he knew where I was. As it happened, I went to call on a young lady yesterday and couldn't get my coffee grinder started until this morning. I have the misfortune to have an extremely stupid mechanic, who is also a terrible liar, by the way, and only got going a few minutes ago."

"But certainly," agreed the Frenchman. "That easily arranges itself. I have noticed an unfortunate tendency among some of your American officers to take themselves and the war too seriously. That is a mistake. The war is too long, as you Americans may find out before you are through."

"Thank you, Captain," said the American. "You are very amiable. And now I must go and attend to my unspeakable kite, and my loathsome mechanic."

"NOW, what do you think of me, Lieutenant?" demanded Ike, as they watched mechanics belonging to the field pour the last cans of gasoline into their tank. "Didn't I shoot that Russian? But, Lieutenant, why don't you listen to me when I try to tell you things? I tried twice to tell you the gunnery sergeant wouldn't let me into the armament hut to find out how to shoot Lewis guns. And, Lieutenant, will you let me fly with you all the time as observer?"

The pilot laughed.

"All right, Ike, I'll let you fly with me—as long as you last," he said. "Taking you along may save a good man.

"Now, about all this business last night, we'll have to keep it dark. I hope you didn't try to tell the Frenchmen anything about it."

"But I did!" Ike exclaimed. "I told them all about the Russians, and about Kossnoff having his Spad painted red so the Germans would know him, and wouldn't shoot him when he came over, and about the M.P.s, and everything."

"It's lucky I told the commanding officer you're an awful liar, " the pilot said. "They won't believe a word you said. Also, I've arranged an alibi for us. The Frenchmen will say we spent the night here. If you keep your mouth shut from now on, maybe nobody will ever connect us with the Russian business at all."

"Oy!" yelped Ike. "Medals we should get!"

"Medals me eye!" returned Jimmy Brill. "Jail, you mean.

"But what are you bellyaching about? I can't figure out how I'm going to get into Froidvalle to see Yvette, unless I disguise myself as an M.P.!"