



The Dornier went down in flames

KID BROTHER

By DAVID GOODIS

*Allan Darwood Had Soldiering in His Blood—but
He Denied His Own Heritage of Glorious Combat!*

HE LOOKED up at the blue sky. He looked down at his greasy hands. He muttered a curse, bitter, unhappy. He hadn't been brought up to do this sort of work,

blast it! But neither had he been born to fight. No man had really been born to fight. That was his conviction, and he would stick to it.

But again he looked up at the sky. It seemed

to hypnotize him, to draw him up toward its vast magnificence. He fought the spell, and he was trembling. Again he was looking down at his hands, covered with grease. Again he muttered a curse.

He was Allan Darwood, youngest son of General Arthur Darwood, who had done wonderful things in India and South Africa and New Zealand and the Somme. The general was one of England's great heroes, and it had always been his wish that his three sons should follow in his footsteps. Two of them were already climbing up the ladders of glory. Herbert and Paul were accomplishing big things with the Royal Air Force.

But their honors had been obliterated by the black mark drawn by Allan's actions. He had refused to fight. As a high-ranking student at Cambridge he had been leader of a peace group. And after graduation he had spurred his energies, and the group had expanded. At the outbreak of war, Allan made a series of flaming denunciations. He insisted that it was not necessary to fight. He claimed that it could all be settled by arbitration.

There were unfortunate interludes in the Darwood home. The general himself led a concerted attack on Allan, and it was followed through by the combined assaults of Herbert and Paul. At first they pleaded. They used political arguments to prove the justification for this war. Then they asked Allan not to disgrace the Darwood name. Finally they told him to consider his self-respect.

And his answer was that it was self-respect that was keeping him from surrendering to their viewpoint. He had given himself an ideal to follow, and he would follow it, at all costs.

The other Darwoods gave up. Allan presented himself as a conscientious objector. He was placed in a labor camp, in the south of England. It was hard work, and he was up at five every morning.

But at first he didn't mind. Then, because he had for so long been used to an easier way of life, he became restless. For one thing, his main interest, outside of his political studies, had always been aviation. He had set up his own hangar on the Darwood country estate and he was an accomplished flyer. But now he could only

look at the sky, instead of soaring through it.

Another source of trouble was something a bit more vague. It was like a parade of imps, making endless circles in his brain, seeming to laugh at the work he was doing, the life he was leading.

IN THE labor camp he toiled long hours on a belt-line, doing the same thing over and over again. Winding coils and more coils and more coils. He was spending most of the meager allowance on cigarettes. At night he begged the imps in his brain to let him sleep. And in his free hours during the day he looked up at the sky, and then down at his greasy hands, and muttered curses.

It was not fair! This was worse than prison. At least in prison he would not have a chance to look at the sky. It would not taunt him.

He was looking up there again, and then his eyes were narrowing, and he was peering into the distance, where three dots made a triangle in the blue. The three dots were growing, taking shape. They were moving at high altitude, but he could see that they were British planes. The clear sky and a ribbon of sunlight outlined the circles on their wings.

They were still climbing, but their props were headed toward the labor camp. Then Allan heard a droning sound, coming from the other direction, and he turned, saw seven planes. Their wings carried crosses. Their rudders bore the swastika. They were losing altitude, and making a weird crisscross formation in the sky. He recognized two of the Nazi ships as Dornier bombers. The other five were Heinkel single-seaters.

Allan was breathing hard, oblivious to the fact that he was getting excited, that by all the rules of plain reasoning, this sort of thing should disgust him.

But the labor camp had been placed in a quiet area, and not once during all the long months of war had Allan seen a Nazi plane, let alone a meeting of the belligerent parties. His knowledge of what was going on in the air had been gathered by a somewhat sneering appraisal of newspaper articles and the picture magazines.

Now he was actually witnessing the approach of German aircraft, and mechanically he was

forgetting everything else. Not until the Nazi planes were close did he sense real danger. Then he was realizing that this vast labor camp, with its factories and store-houses and railroad outlets, was a natural target for German bombs. The only reason it had been ignored until now was because Nazi Intelligence had not been sure of its location.

But the findings had been made, the order had been given, and the two Dorniers, with their Heinkel escort, had crossed the Channel, were preparing to send down messengers of destruction.

But the British Air Ministry was making a reply to this. It couldn't spare more than three Spitfires, because this sort of business was taking place all across the east and southeast coast of England, and pilots were working a double shift. But the three Spitfires were seemingly sure of themselves. There was something defiant and downright admirable in their approach toward the Nazi group. Allan was thinking that, not realizing its contradiction to his ideals.

A blast of sound reached his ears. He turned, startled, then heard the alarm pounding out its warning across the camp. Workers were running from the factories and store-houses. Gas masks were being adjusted. Supervisors were shouting orders. Each passing second brought doubled excitement and confusion.

One of the uniformed guards ran up to Allan.

"Step smartly, ye bloke!" he shouted. "Cawn't ye see that we're in for a bit of a drubbin'? Mybee ye think that your conscientious objectin' can do somethin' to hold back the Jerries!"

"Close your mouth and attend to your own affairs," Allan muttered absently, his eyes fastened to the Nazi group and the approaching Britishers.

"Oh, so hits gonna be that way, is it?" the guard muttered. He pulled a revolver from a holster at his side, gripped the barrel, holding the weapon as if it were a club.

ALLAN didn't see that. He was watching the area of impending battle. He was unconscious of the alarm whistle screeching across the camp, the shouts of fear from the tips of running men, the urgent orders of the guards.

"I'm warnin' ye once more!" the fellow who

stood at Allan's side said loudly. "Are ye gonna get your feet to movin'?"

"Oh, be on—your way and stop annoying me," Allan said.

He half-turned, saw that the guard was raising the revolver, intending to bring the butt crashing down on his head. He dodged the blow, then shot out a fist, felt it crash against the guard's jaw. The fellow went back, twisted and fell on his face, and was still.

Not interested in the unconscious guard, Allan turned, again looked up at the sky. Even as his gaze focused on the German group the first package of bombs came down. He could see them whizzing earthward like tokens of doom from another planet. For an instant he was stricken with a sickening horror of the hate and destruction that man visits upon man. Then a more practical thought took possession of his senses. He knew that he had to get away from here. The bombs were hitting close by!

Allan was running, but looking upward as he ran. There was an explosion not far behind him, another, and still a third. But he scarcely heard it, scarcely felt the earth tremble about him. His eyes, wide with fascination, were watching the Spitfires make a vicious lunge onto the German squadron. The Heinkels were moving up to reply to the British attack, then the formations were broken, and the planes dipped and whirled and dived in a frantic maze of sky scribbling.

But the Dorniers continued their deadly business, and more bombs were coming down. The string of explosions blended with the crackle of fire, the groans and screams of wounded men.

Allan heard a shriek behind him, whirled to see a wall of flame falling upon a man who was struggling to get to his knees, but who was too weak to make any headway. He recognized the guard, then it flared at him that he had struck the fellow, had knocked him down.

There didn't seem to be a chance to save the man, but Allan was running toward the wall of flame, bending down, his hands getting a hold beneath the man's armpits, as a shower of fire started to pour down on him. Then the wall was coming down fast, smashing to the ground with a crackle and a hiss. It missed Allan and his burden by inches.

Stretcher bearers were already picking up

victims, and Allan hurried toward the nearest of the first-aid men to place the guard in a stretcher.

"You'll have to leave him here," said the man who wore a red cross on his sleeve. "We'll pick up the dead later. We've got to attend to the wounded now!"

"But this man isn't dead," Allan pleaded. "I dragged him away before he—"

And then he sensed that the burden he carried was a dead man. Slowly he placed the motionless figure on the ground, stating unbelievably.

"A bomb splinter must've tagged him in the head while you were carrying him away from the fire," the stretcher bearer said.

Allan was staring down at the small greenish-black hole in the dead man's temple. His voice was a hollow whisper when he spoke.

"I killed you—I killed you—I'll have to make up for it—some way—some way—"

Slowly he reached down, unbuttoned the dead guard's tunic. He took a wallet from an inner pocket, stared at the identification card, at the home address, and the family list that read: "Wife and three children."

Allan's fingers that held the card were trembling as he nodded slowly.

"I'll have to see her," he muttered, "tell her—ask her what I can do."

He moved away as if in a trance. The stretcher bearer looked at him pityingly, then gazed down at the corpse, and shrugged. This was all part of the game . . .

AND at five thousand feet up, the three Spitfires were slamming hard at the German group. Three Heinkels had already been destroyed, a Dornier had been crippled. The English planes zoomed up, whizzed in steep-banked breakouts and lunged at the remaining Nazis. Both Dorniers were falling in flames. The remaining two Heinkels were making a frenzied attempt to get away. Only one of them escaped. The other went down beneath angry blasts of Brownings.

But Allan Darwood did not see the British triumph. He was walking dazedly through the smoking wreckage of the labor camp. "I've got to make up for it," he was muttering. "I've got to ask her how I can make up for it . . ."

She sobbed for a while. She showed Allan

pictures of Alf. Before the war he had been a postal clerk. She sobbed harder as she recalled how he had been in line for promotion, then the war had made a battering interruption, making his job, their family plans unimportant.

But she was not bitter. She seemed, to understand the anguish in Allan. Even when he described the details of Alf's death, and took full responsibility, she showed no hate toward him.

"I know how you feel," she said understandingly. "But these things happen in a war. You must forget about it. You can't let it get the best of you."

"I want to make up for it," Allan said. "I'll do anything. I'll see that you and the children have the best of—"

"We have enough to get along," she said, "I won't take a shilling from you."

"But you must let me do something. Please! Tell me—"

She gazed at Alf's picture for awhile, then looked up.

"That labor camp," she said, "it was for conscientious objectors, wasn't it?"

Allan nodded. "I've been there practically since the beginning of the war."

"Then—you don't believe in England's cause?"

"I'm against war," he said mechanically. "I'm against killing my fellow men."

"But the Nazis killed Alf," she said. "They come over in their planes and drop bombs—not only on factories, on munition centers, but on little villages, like this, on women and children. Only yesterday we had a raid, and a children's hospital was bombed—" She shuddered, and her eyes closed. But then she was staring hard at Allan, and her voice was cold. "You ask me what you can do to make up for Alf's death. Very well, I'll give you an answer. *You can fight!*"

That took him by surprise.

"But I—I can't do that!" he choked.

"You're afraid to fight!"

"No! It isn't that. It's just that I have an ideal."

"Yes," she said bitterly, "I guess a lot of us have ideals. We want to be kind, we want to be peaceful. But that can't win a war. That can't save a cause. That can't give us our freedom, the right to choose our own way of life, our religion, our

work.”

Alan wanted to argue with her. He wanted to repeat all the things he had said at peace meetings, at debates, at forums, at the countless arguments that had taken place in the Darwood home. But somehow he could not grab at the right words. Somehow he lacked the enthusiasm, the fervor, that had gripped him on all these former occasions. He could only sit there, looking at this tired but brave-faced little woman, the wife of a man for whose death he had been responsible.

“If my sons were old enough,” she was saying, “I would tell them to go out and fight, to avenge the death of their daddy. But they are little children. They don’t understand what war is. They can’t do anything, and surely I can’t. But if I thought that Alf’s death was making a conscientious objector realize his duty toward England, toward himself, I would feel some sort of consolation.”

Allan stood up. For a moment he couldn’t speak. He gulped hard.

“I—I’m sorry,” he managed to say then, “but I can’t. Please—you must understand.”

“I understand only that you came and asked what you could do, and I told you, and you are refusing. There is nothing more for either of us to say.”

She walked across the room, opened the door for him.

He looked appealingly at her, then his eyes were unable to meet hers, and his shoulders were drooped. He was silent as he made his exit. Behind him the door slammed hard.

On that same afternoon he walked into an R.A.F. recruiting office . . .

WHIZZING out of a loop, Lieutenant Paul Darwood brought his Spitfire down hard on the back of a Messerschmitt. He thumbed the black button, and eight streams of red death sizzled out and made contact with the Nazi plane. The Messerschmitt whistled a melody of doom and spun down toward the earth. Paul leveled and drew up on the parallel thirty feet away from another Spitfire. He grinned and waved at Lieutenant Herbert Darwood.

“Not bad for five minutes work, eh what?” he said into the radio telephone.

“The governor would’ve been quite pleased,

if I do say so myself,” Herbert said.

In truth, the senior Darwood would have been extremely happy to have seen the little debate which his two older sons had just won. They had neatly dispatched four Messerschmitts, part of an escort that had run into unexpected British resistance, and now was being systematically annihilated in a sky circle less than three miles in diameter. The Darwood brothers had just about used up their fifteen-second ammunition supply, and now were heading back home.

The place they called home was Fighter Squadron 43, some twenty-odd miles north of Plymouth. That squadron had been extremely busy of late, and urgent calls had been sent out for more planes, more new pilots. Although Browning machine-guns were accounting for many of the German planes that harassed the lads of Forty-three, Madsen slugs were also taking a toll, and the north-of-Plymouth outfit now desperately needed ships and capable flyers.

All across the wide field, Spitfires were coming down. The battle was just about over. Weary but grinning pilots were being helped from their planes by mechanics and armorers. Chatter was more than just thumbs-up stuff. There was no doubt but that on this particular morning, Forty-three had won a major air triumph, with the loss of only three planes as opposed to destruction of nineteen German ships.

Walking toward the squadron office, to make their report, the Darwood brothers congratulated each other on the morning’s work.

“Come to think of it, our little brother wouldn’t be any too pleased with us today,” Paul said.

“Rather not,” Herbert said. “He’d be frightfully disgusted with all this killing.”

“I’d like to bash some common sense into that stubborn skull of his,” Paul muttered.

“Yes, so would I,” the other Darwood said dryly. “But where would we look for him? The official word is that he escaped from that labor camp, following a Nazi air raid. By this time he may be in Spain or South America, or God knows where.”

“Probably lost his nerve, after that raid,” Paul said. “It hurts me to say so, but he’s yellow. Even though I disagreed with him, I always inwardly

admired him for having the nerve to cling to his convictions. But after this run-out I'd be just as happy if I never saw him again."

They went into the squadron office, made their report, then walked over to the lounge of the officers' mess. They muttered orders to a white-coated waiter, waited impatiently for tankards of ale. When the brew did come, they tipped the silver tankards together, and in one voice said, "To our name and to England," and raised the thick metal cups to their lips.

But they did not drink.

The tankards were suspended, and the fingers that gripped the handles were stiff, then trembling. Finally Paul dropped his tankard, and ale sloshed over his boots.

"Do you see it?" he said staring out the window.

HERBERT also dropped his tankard. Then the Darwoods were outside, they were walking together, fast, and then they were running. They dashed across the field toward the slight figure with light brown hair, the figure that was walking toward the squadron office.

"I say there—Allan!" Herbert shouted. The slight young chap turned at the shout, then stepped back, as if startled. Then he calmly waited for them to come up. There was a quiet that seemed to swing slowly, like a pendulum.

"Well, Allan," Herbert said, "explanations would seem to be in order."

"Rather," Paul added.

Allan looked at them. "Please don't make matters any more difficult than they are already," he said shortly.

"But look here, old man," Herbert blurted, "we're deucedly glad to see you. Why, just think of it! Allan, the conscientious objector, the bloke who wouldn't harm a flea, wearing an R.A.F. uniform! Why, it's ripping!"

"It jolly well is," Paul put in. He put his arm around Allan's shoulder. "Wait'll the governor finds out about this!"

Violently Allan pushed Paul's arm away, stepped back and faced his brothers, cold fury in his eyes.

"You'll do me a big favor by not informing the governor of my presence here," he said. "You'll do me a further favor by—by leaving me

completely alone. I didn't want to come here. I—I was forced into it!"

"You were what?" Paul said, frowning.

"Never mind the what or why or wherefore," Allan clipped. "I'm not obliged to do any explaining." He turned stiffly, walked away.

Herbert scratched his head. "Well," he said, "that's the first lad I've ever seen who wasn't happy about earning his R.A.F. wings."

Paul watched the slight figure with light brown hair enter the squadron office. "In a way—I'm sorry he's here," he said, worriedly.

"Why? I should think you'd be jolly well overjoyed. In fact, just a few moments ago you were—"

"Yes, I know," Paul muttered, looking at the ground, kicking at gravel, with a toe, "but he isn't entering into this business in the right frame of mind. Whatever his reasons for joining up, he's not too enthusiastic about it. And that's bad. You know that as well as I do. A man's got to have his heart and soul in this show. He can't go at it half-way. If he does—"

"I see," Herbert groaned. "If Allan doesn't snap out of it, he won't have a chance up there."

The brothers looked at each other, then looked away fast. They didn't want to see the concern in each other's eyes. There was no place for personal feeling in the R.A.F. It was hard, bitter, soul-tearing work. It was war. . . .

TIGHTENING the straps of his chute, Allan Darwood walked toward the dispersal hut. He was not even slightly affected by the thought that this might be his first day of battle. He was thinking only of the fact that he had shattered his own ideals. On the day that he had enlisted in the R.A.F. he had broken faith with himself, what he considered almost sacred faith.

He was forgetting the reasons for his enlistment, forgetting the words of a sad-eyed but brave-lipped little woman whose husband had died in a bombing attack.

Entering the dispersal hut, Allan saw that Paul and Herbert were seated near a window. The flight lieutenant was talking to an adjutant. In the midst of the calm was an atmosphere of expectancy, of grimness.

He sat down, lit a cigarette. He knew that his brothers were watching him. He knew what their

thoughts were. He looked up, faced them. Their features were clouded. They thought he was afraid. Well, they thought wrong. He did have fear, but not of Nazi bullets. That was unimportant. He was frightened only of his own actions, his own sellout to a war-crazed world.

There was a buzzing sound in the dispersal hut. The adjutant grabbed at a phone. Allan could hear a voice clicking away at the other end of the wire. The adjutant muttered a crisp, "Right ho!"

The flight lieutenant asked, "A scramble?"

"A scramble it is," the adjutant said. "Ten-plus Heinkels, escorting five Dorniers toward Plymouth. Working at eleven thousand feet, and—"

As the adjutant gave direction and course details to the flight lieutenant, the other flyers were hurrying out. Already another phone call had given the signal to the mechanics who waited at the lineup of fighting planes. Rolls Royce motors were throbbing, wings were trembling, as if eagerly anticipating a flight into battle.

Allan was out on the field, running toward his Spitfire. For an instant he wanted to turn back, wanted to shout his defiance at the R.A.F., at the war that was making him a killer. But he kept moving forward, and then he was climbing into the narrow office of the combat ship, he was sending it across the field, following Herbert and Paul, who had already taken off.

There were seven Spitfires in the unit, climbing fast, working up to ten thousand feet within a stretch of four minutes. The flight lieutenant, coming up fast, passing on the outside lane, was chirping orders.

"Our vector is a hundred and forty. Bend it thirty degrees. We'll contact them approximately ten miles out, over the Channel. Assume echelon formation!"

The Flight lieutenant went into the lead spot, and the six other planes designed a widespread echelon behind him. Still climbing fast, the British unit streaked at an eighty per-cent throttle through the clear blue sky.

Allan, flying the No. Three spot, peered ahead, saw a herd of Nazis far out in the blue. He was counting fourteen Heinkels up there. And directly beneath them were five big bombers. In the cockpits of those planes were men whom he must try to kill.

He shivered, closed his eyes. And when he opened them again he saw the planes once more. He was thinking that maybe he could fake it. Maybe he could just pretend to fight. Maybe he could avoid killing anyone.

"Take V-fighting formation," the voice of the Flight lieutenant was saying in his earphones, "and race them in the climb. Follow up!"

THE echelon widened, then closed again and became a climbing V in the sky. The Nazi group was likewise going up the invisible hill, negotiating for altitude advantage. The range was tightening fast, and already Allan could see the markings, the insignia on the sides of the Heinkels.

"We have a jump on them, lads! At fourteen thousand feet," the Flight lieutenant said. "Make this a good one! Tallyho!"

It was the battle signal. The seven Spitfires speared down, grabbing full advantage of the height lead they had gained over the Nazi unit. It wasn't much—not more than five hundred feet—but it was enough to give the Englishman a lunge position. They whizzed down, and the flight lieutenant was the first to use his Brownings.

The chatter of machine-gun fire banged against Allan's ears. A mad mixture of anguish and horror and self-hatred made a torturing flame within him. All about him now there was battle, there was death and hatred, and lead slugs aimed at flesh and bone.

But even as this feeling overpowered him, he was reacting to the stimulus of combat. Mechanically he was reaching out, touching his gun-button. And then, as a Heinkel rolled out, trying to escape a side attack from another Spitfire, he saw that he had a sight on it. He pressed the button, and through seventy yards of sky the eight streams of fire lanced out, stabbed into the Nazi plane.

Allan saw a gush of fire blob out on the nose of the Heinkel, and then the Nazi crate was twisting backward, screaming like a mortally wounded bird. The sight sickened Allan, brought dizziness to his brain. He watched the German plane plunge down, throwing smoke and flame.

He had killed a man!

He threw the Spitfire into a fast turn, telling himself that there would be no more of this. He

would get away from it, never go back to it. It was ghastly, fiendish, and he would rather die than cater to this lust for blood and fire.

But as he came out of the turn, he heard more bullet chatter, and it came from behind. In his rear-view mirror he saw that a Heinkel had placed itself on his tail. He could see the jets of fire in the muzzles of Nazi guns. He could see the streams of orange-red leaping toward him, trying to kill him!

The urge for self-preservation made Allan react like a robot, responding to the pull of a lever. He was working the Spitfire into a screeching roll-out, then diving hard. The lightning maneuver took him away from the Heinkel, but immediately placed him in another trouble spot. He was caught in a web, drawn tight by two other Heinkels and a Dornier. But as he twisted and climbed, took fire in his wings and twisted again, he promised himself that he would not return the enemy bullets.

And then he was looping back, hard and fast, dragging himself away from death, congratulating himself on his escape. He was breaking out of the loop, then turning again. He was still determined to get away from the fight.

He seared on the rim of the battle circle, edging for an opening through which he could streak southward. Perhaps he could land somewhere in southern France. From there on, it did not matter, as long as he was not taking part in a war, killing anyone.

The opening loomed before him. Three Heinkels had been drawn to the left, as an equal number of Spitfires whizzed down on the Dornier bombers. Allan grabbed at his chance, and made the Spitfire leap. And just as he passed the thickest muddle of battle, he saw something that made his nerves twist and stretch and freeze.

Herbert and Paul were in a deathtrap!

HE RECOGNIZED the numbers on their planes. They were being converged upon by four Heinkels. Below them, two Dorniers were in perfect position for underside attacks from the rear turrets. The two Spitfires were hemmed in—and there was no way of getting out!

Allan's mind was like a bubble of fire. And then the bubble burst, and the fire wriggled down to his muscles, and he was taking the Spitfire on a mad journey upward, cutting into a vicious turn,

and throwing himself into the midst of the Heinkels. His gun-button pressed in hard, he watched his Brownings throw heat and death into a Nazi cockpit.

He swerved hard, brought his lead-lines to bear on another Heinkel. The German plane broke out in forks of fire and thick black smoke. Allan didn't watch it go down. He was already giving fire talk to a third German plane.

The Heinkel shuddered as its pilot took Browning slugs in his throat and chest and belly. Allan pushed his Spitfire into a dive, streaked down with guns still raging. He sent bullets splashing into the rear turret of a Dornier, silenced the guns that had been spitting lead at Paul's Spitfire. He twisted hard, feinted a turn, worked it into a dive, came up on the under side of the Dornier, and finished it with a burst through the left motor. The bomber went down, ignited.

Across twenty yards of space, Paul and Herbert looked at each other. At first their eyes were wide with amazement. And then they were grinning.

The wild exhibition put on by Lieutenant Allan Darwood seemed to have a contagious effect on the rest of the British squadron. The result was sad for the Germans. The few Heinkels that escaped Browning fury made a frantic rush for the French Channel ports.

Allan wiped oily sweat from his features and accepted the tankard of ale that was eagerly offered by Paul. "Well, let's have it," Paul was saying. "I'll jolly well not stand for any more of that no explanation talk."

Allan smiled and took a long drink. "I'm only too willing to tell you everything," he said. "Now that I understand it myself, it'll be easy to make it clear to you."

And he told them what had happened at the labor camp, and his meeting with the widow of the guard who had died in the bombing raid. He told them how he had abhorred the idea of killing anyone, and how he had started to run away from the dog-fight.

"But the sight of you two blokes being ganged up on by those Nazis sort of did things to me," he confessed. "Before I knew it, I was on a bloody binge. And now that I've started, I can see that it's not such a bad business. In fact, it's taken a rather rough sky party to prove to me that you

can't fight Nazi bullets with peace pamphlets. But it was too bad that we had to be mixing it up over the Channel."

"Why so?" Paul said.

"I would have liked to make a landing to cut

the insignia from the wrecks of a few Heinkels," Allan said. "It would have been rather nice to send them to a little woman whose kids weren't old enough to fight."