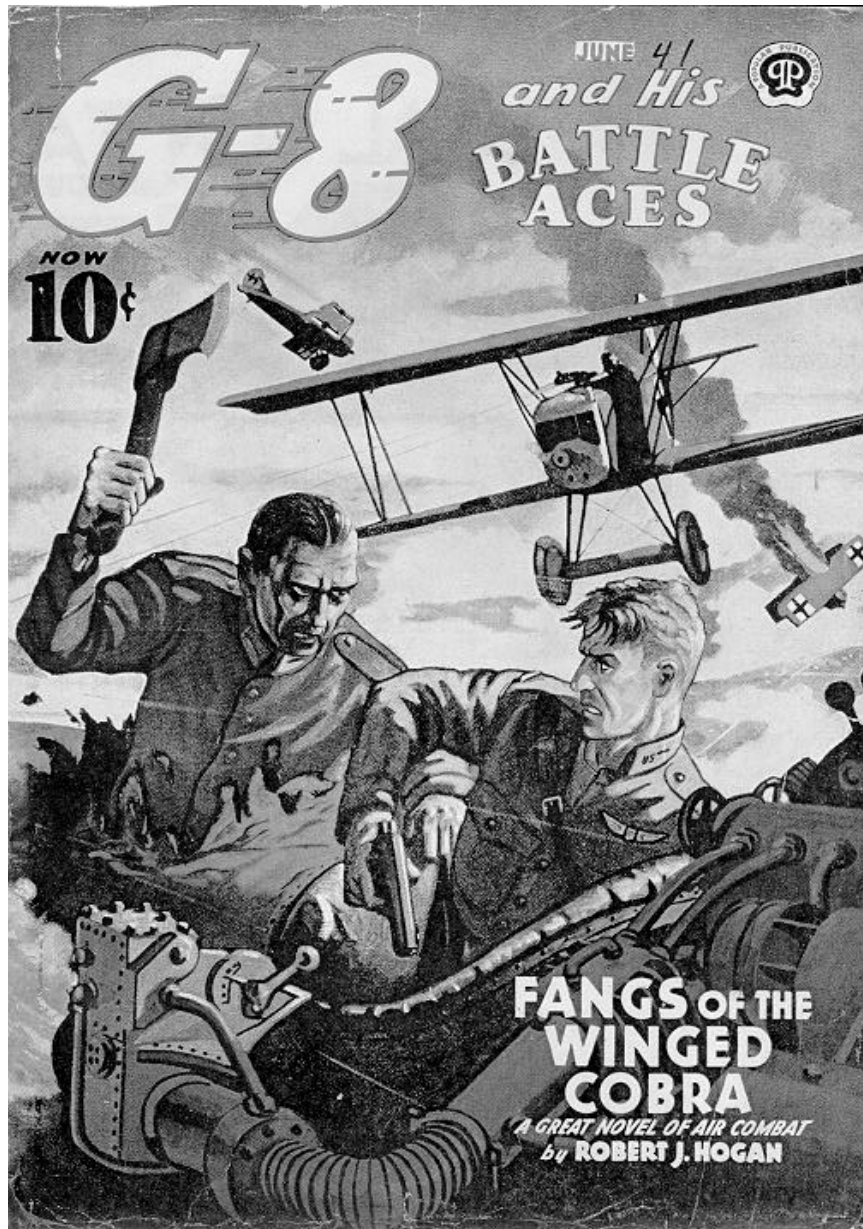


fangs of the winged cobra

By Robert J. Hogan

Allied Aces, silenced by the eye of doom, wing blindly into enemy skies—to search for their own death.... What is this new horror that menaces the very life blood of civilizations... Only the Master Spy knows—but can he race through danger-studded holocausts of terror in time to pluck the Fangs Of The Winged Cobra?



CHAPTER ONE

Menace in the Air

THE clear gray eyes of G-8 held a strange light as he landed his Spad at Le Bourget Field and taxied to the end hangar. His motor was throttled back. Slowly he released the safety belt and climbed out of the cockpit.

G-8 turned toward the apartment attached to the end hangar, the apartment that was home to this Master American Spy and his Battle Aces. But before he reached the door, a small, lithe body hurtled backward out of it and hit the tarmac with the seat of his pants. That was Nippy Weston. In spite of this undignified exit, the little terrier ace had a wide grin on his face.

Suddenly, Bull Martin was framed in the doorway. He was the big Battle Ace of the square rock jaw and fists that were like sledge hammers. He was afraid of nothing that his fists could lay low, but he had confessed on several occasions that he could use all the luck he could get. That was why he flew a Spad with number 7 painted on it.

The big, All-American football star bellowed at little Nippy Weston, "Next time you pour ice water down my neck when I'm taking a snooze, I'll break you in two."

Nippy Weston got up, still laughing.

"Don't be a sour-puss," he chirped. "I was only fooling. We've got to have some excitement around here. If the Heinies are all washed up with their fighting, then we've got to make our own fun." He glanced at G-8. "Hey, Chief," he chirped. "What luck? Could you make any of those Heinies come out and fight this afternoon?"

The Master Spy's face was still troubled as he shook his head.

"Not a sign of a German plane anywhere," he said. "It's got me buffaloed."

"Holy herring," Bull grunted. "You're the toughest man I ever saw to please. If somebody set the best banquet in the world before you, you'd probably suspect there was poison in it."

"Now isn't that typical of that big ox?" Nippy grinned. "Always thinking about food. Don't you ever think about anything except eating and sleeping?"

"I'll think about murder," the big fellow growled, "if you try any more tricks like that. I'm a dangerous man when I'm mad."

"Poof!" Nippy scoffed. "You're just about as dangerous as a rhinoceros. Anybody with any brains can keep out off the way of a rhinoceros."

The argument drifted into the living room now.

"Yeah," Bull flared, "but how would you go about keeping away from a rhinoceros if he were charging you? I suppose you'd climb a tree."

"That shows how much you know about it," Nippy scoffed. "A rhinoceros can knock over a good-sized tree in one charge."

"Sure," Bull nodded, "but I didn't think you had brains enough to know that. Well, tell us what you'd do if a rhinoceros charged you."

"Well," Nippy said, "I generally keep a few tricks up my sleeve. I'd just pull a vanishing act and when the rhinoceros got to where he thought I was, I wouldn't be there at all."

"You give me a pain in the elbow," Bull snorted.

AT THAT moment, Battle, the English manservant and master of the makeup kit, appeared in the doorway of the kitchen.

"Begging your pardon," he said, "but might I ask are you having your potatoes baked or French fried tonight?"

Bull Martin immediately lifted his nose into the air like a bird dog taking point.

"Boy," he boomed, "make mine French fried."

Battle blinked.

"Begging your pardon, sir," he said. "I was asking the master here how he would like his potatoes. I fear the rest of you will have to eat your potatoes the way he would prefer them."

"Holy herring," Bull groaned, "you get all the breaks, G-8. If you live through this war, you'll be a regular spoiled brat."

For the first time since he had landed, the Master Spy smiled.

"How about you, Nip?" he asked. "What would you prefer?"

"What have you got for meat?" Nippy asked Battle.

"I think it's something you like, sir," the manservant said. "I have a good, big chunk of pot roast, sir."

"Boy!" the terrier ace exclaimed. "And that means brown gravy to go with it. If it's all the same to you birds, I'll take baked potatoes. You know, Battle—scrub the dirt off the skins, then bake them with the jackets on. Then we can cut them up and put the brown gravy over them."

"Hey," Bull boomed, "that sounds good to me, too. Cancel that order of French fries that I put in. I'll take the same as Nippy, Battle."

But the manservant's mild eyes were on G-8.

"I'm waiting to hear your decision, sir," he said.

"Make mine the same," G-8 said. "It suits me."

As Battle vanished into the kitchen, Bull exploded, "Hey, squirt, where did you ever develop a sense for knowing good food from bad?"

Nippy shot back, "Did you ever know the difference between a hog and a connoisseur? A hog will eat anything so long as he gets lots of it. That's you. But a connoisseur knows what he likes."

"Why, you ingrate!" Bull bellowed.

He reached for a davenport cushion. Nippy ducked behind G-8. The Master Spy smiled a little wearily.

"Sometimes I think this war is just one great picnic for you two birds," he said.

"Jumping Jupiter," Nippy protested, "we have to get some fun out of life, even if I have to amuse myself with a big clown like Bull here. No kidding, G-8, how was the hunting this afternoon?"

"I've already told you," the Master Spy said, "that I couldn't find a German plane in the skies. It's got me worried."

"Look," the terrier ace said. "Don't you suppose that there's such a thing as the Heinies getting ready to quit?"

"I don't know," G-8 said, "but when a lull like this comes along, I'm inclined to think that there's probably a storm in the offing. It's my belief that when the Germans are finally licked, we won't be allowed to see much indication of it before they ask for an armistice."

"You know what you need?" Nippy demanded.

"Well," G-8 ventured, "I could think of one thing that would help bolster up my spirits considerably. I'd like to hear that the Germans want to surrender unconditionally."

"What?" Bull boomed. "And end this war so quickly? We're just getting into the swing of things."

The Master Spy was smiling again.

"Bull," he said, "I can think of several occasions when you were in a tight spot and didn't exactly like the way things were swinging. That's apt to happen again and again, you know. If I were you, I wouldn't pray for this war to continue any longer than necessary."

The Master Spy strode into his room, stripped off his clothes. A moment later, they heard the sputter of the shower.

Bull Martin wagged his head at Nippy Weston.

"You know," he said, "that guy G-8 can find more stuff to worry about. Now he's got me worried for fear the Germans have got some trick up their sleeves."

"Whatever comes," Nippy said, "don't forget this. We've got a few tricks up our sleeves, too. Let those Heinies drag out all they've got. We'll trump every one of them before we're through."

G-8 had just finished dressing in a freshly pressed, American captain's uniform when he heard the close-clipped roar of a Liberty engine. A plane was circling the field. He stepped to the door, threw it open, and stared out.

"I expected there would be trouble before long," he said. "That's a Liberty D. H. and it's flying a star flag. I wouldn't be surprised if the general in command of the American air force is making us a little call."

G-8 and his Battle Aces stepped out onto the tarmac and watched the D.H. land. There were two heads, one sticking out of each cockpit. As soon as the D.H. had stopped its roll before the end hangar, G-8 and his Battle Aces strode toward the rear cockpit, where a general was climbing out.

Their guess had been correct. The American general in charge of the air force was paying them a call.

After G-8 had saluted him, they shook each other's hand warmly. The Yank general was an old friend of the Master Spy. They had worked together many times on serious problems. The general didn't smile. His talk came at a rapid-fire pace.

"G-8, the said, "I'm worried about the situation at the front. Nearly all the squadrons report that they can locate only a few German planes flying over the lines and it's almost impossible to engage any of them in combat."

The Master Spy nodded.

"I've noticed that myself, sir," he admitted. "I've just returned from a flight over the lines. I spent half the afternoon, not only flying over No Man's Land, but over Germany. In fact, I circled over several German airdromes. There were no planes in sight. Apparently they were stored in the hangars."

"I don't like the looks of it," the general said. "I'm afraid that this means something rather serious is in the making. We've got to be ready for them."

"That's my opinion exactly," G-8 confirmed.

"G-8," the general said, his eyes fastened on the Master Spy's face, "I want you to go into Germany and find out what's going on. Good luck!"

He turned abruptly and climbed into his cockpit. Then, with a wave of his hand, the General's plane took the air and headed back toward headquarters.

CHAPTER TWO

Assigned to Danger

IN THE waning light of evening, G-8 watched the general until he was out of sight; then he turned with his Battle Aces and strode silently into the living room.

"Holy herring," Bull boomed, "does that mean that we don't get to eat that swell feed Battle's preparing before you go?"

G-8 glanced at the time.

"No, I think we'll eat first," he decided. "I'd hate to miss that dinner. Besides, there's no use of my going over until it grows dark."

"Well," Bull breathed, "that's a relief. I thought maybe everything was going to be turned upside down, dinner and all, so you could tear off to enemy country."

"You big ox," Nippy snorted, "will you ever stop thinking only of that big belly of yours? You give me a pain in the neck."

"I'll give you a pain in the kisser," Bull retorted, "if you call me dumb again. I'm getting sore about that."

G-8 took a long breath.

"I'd appreciate it, men," he said, "if you'd cut out the chatter for a little while. I want to get things set in my mind."

"Sure," Nippy nodded. "Shut up, Bull. The chief wants to think."

G-8 sprawled on the floor, spread out maps of the various sectors of Germany and began studying them. Finally he looked up. The Battle Aces had quieted down and seemed to be waiting for some word from him.

"Remember Gurst, the German ace?" the Master Spy asked.

"Do I?" Bull boomed. "I'd like to tangle with that guy just once more. There's a bird who can take it and dish it out."

"That's what I have in mind," G-8 said. "As I recall, before the war Gurst was a young German movie star, famous in his own country."

"Wasn't he the bird," Nippy asked, "who, three or four years ago, was voted the best-looking young German?"

"The same," G-8 nodded. "The thing that strikes me as strange is that we haven't even seen him of late. Up to several days ago he was in our hair about half the time—a hard man to handle, but a fair air combat opponent."

"Yeah," Bull boomed, "I've been wondering what's become of him myself. I was hoping maybe he'd been put out of commission, but if anything serious had happened to him, you'd think we would have heard about it. We usually hear if one of their big aces has been shot down."

"I think," G-8 said, "that *Herr Hauptmann* Gurst is going to be investigated—let's hope without his knowledge."

"You mean you're going over to his *Staffel* and see what's up?" Nippy demanded.

"Holy herring," Bull exploded, "if all of his buzzards are like him, that'll be like walking right into a nest of young eagles."

"The point is," G-8 ventured, "if Gurst isn't flying, he's either been shot down without our knowledge or else there is something very definitely up over there that is keeping him out of the air. If the latter is true, there's no better place to start my investigation than right there at *Herr Hauptmann* Gurst's outfit."

From the kitchen came the odor of pot roast being browned to within a hair of the burning point. The smell of baking potatoes mingled with luscious meat flavor. Bull licked his lips and kept looking hungrily toward the dining room.

IN SILENCE, G-8 went on studying the one map he had chosen. He was making himself as familiar as possible with the country surrounding Gurst's airdrome. It was located at the edge of the little town of Burkell. A railroad ran into Burkell from up north in Germany. He ran his eyes along that track marked on the map. About fifty miles north, he saw another airdrome—a sort of German training field. It was marked *Pilot supply base?* The question mark after it signified that the map-maker was not quite sure whether this northern airdrome was a pilot's pool or merely a training field for new pilots.

That point to the north gave G-8 an idea. He could come down from there as a new pilot to join Gurst's *Staffel*. That would give him the excuse that he wanted.

There was, however, one possible objection against that approach. Suppose something had happened in the German air force that made new pilots, replacements, out of the question. The Master Spy pushed that from his mind. It was highly improbable and he must take his chances on it.

G-8 got out pen and official German order forms from his desk. He began writing in German script the order that would name him *Unter-Leutnant* Engelhart, a new replacement to be attached to the *Staffel* of *Herr Hauptmann* Gurst.

He worked with great pains to make it appear genuine. When he had finished, he studied it carefully, made a change here and there, and finally nodded with satisfaction.

A moment after the Master Spy had finished his forged German order, Battle bowed in the kitchen doorway, announcing dinner. All during

that luscious meal, Nippy and Bull babbled back and forth across the table. But G-8, sitting at the head, ate slowly, thoughtfully.

G-8 hurried through his dessert and rose without a word. He went to the phone and put in motion part of what he had been planning.

"Have that captured German two-seater brought down to the end hangar as soon as possible," he said. "Have it fully gassed and serviced and ready to go."

His face was serious as he gave Battle his orders.

"I want to be made up as a German *Unter-Leutnant*."

Battle bowed.

Coming back a moment later with the big make-up kit and a freshly pressed German *Unter-Leutnant's* uniform, he asked, "Any particular shape to your nose, sir?"

G-8 brought out a German record book that he had been working over along with the special orders.

"Take a look at that picture," he said, "and see how close you can make my face look like it."

Battle went to work;

After several minutes had dragged on, Nippy burst out, "You might at least tell us who's going to have the fun of flying you into Germany."

"Yeah," Bull Martin cut in, "how about giving me a crack at taking you over this time? The squirt here gets all the fun."

"That," said G-8, "is because he's smaller than you and it gives us more leeway for landing and taking off from small fields. But if you want to fly me over this time, Bull, it's okay with me."

When Battle had finished and had helped him on with his uniform, he nodded and said, "Nice work, Battle."

Now he spread out the map again and pointed.

"There, Bull, is where I want you to land me. You can circle the field with this German job and no one will suspect anything. Besides, from the looks of the country on the map, it's rather open, with few houses. I'll land, and you can take off again and come on back."

"Is that all?" Bull demanded. "Don't I get a chance at any fighting that may turn up?"

"You know," G-8 said with a slight trace of a smile about his lips, "if you pray too hard for a

fight, you might get more than you're looking for. As far as I'm concerned, I'll take the line of least resistance. I'm sure I'll get enough fighting without asking for it. Have you got it all straight now?"

Bull nodded, grinning.

"Clear as a bell," he said.

It was already growing dark. G-8 climbed into the rear cockpit of the German two-seater, and Bull squeezed himself into the pilot's seat. He turned when all was ready and called back, "All set?"

"Let's go," G-8 sang out.

THE engine blasted, and the enemy two-seater took the air. Darkness fell as they droned over the enemy lines. Bull was flying a straight compass course toward that pasture well to the north of Burkell, in Germany.

As they flew, G-8 turned on the little light over the map case in the rear cockpit and studied the map once more to check their course. Everything was all right. He kept track of the time. He knew Bull was watching it too.

The German artillery had ceased to blast under them, and the pin points of flame lay behind. There was only dark country ahead, blacked out against Allied bombing raids.

Minutes ticked away; then the time came. Bull throttled back his engine and stuck the nose of the German two-seater down. They were gliding nicely now. The field should appear somewhere before them in a moment. It was all black now. They couldn't hope to see plainly, but they expected to see a long, narrow, lighter shadow on the ground that would be the field.

Suddenly G-8 spotted the field and pointed. Bull was already aiming for it. His landing was as smooth as silk. The Master Spy climbed out and gave Bull a slap on the back.

"Good luck on the way back," he said in a low voice.

"You're going to be the one who'll need the luck," Bull said. "Lots of it to you, and I hope you find the Heinies are just plain scared of us."

"I'm afraid I won't have that much luck," G-8 countered. Then the Master Spy went trotting across the field for the nearest patch of woods. He had just gained cover when he heard a shout—a shout that was answered by the blast of Bull's engine roaring into action.

Before the thunder of Bull's motor had died away, G-8 turned and started at a rapid gait through the woods.

He had made his plans well. A mile from this patch of woods stood the little village of Datrique, merely a station storer on the railroad that ran on south to Burkell, where Gurst's drome was located.

IN DATRIQUE, he bought a ticket for Burkell, learned that the next train was due in less than an hour and waited. When the train came puffing into the station, he boarded it and took a seat. There was one other soldier in his compartment, a big, heavy-set fellow with a *Leutnant's* uniform. He merely glanced at G-8 and then went on with some reading that he had been doing.

The train chugged on through the night and then came to a stop. The trainman called the name of Burkell, and G-8 rose. Again the *Leutnant* glanced at him then he closed his book quickly and got up.

"Is this Burkell?" he asked.

"*Jawohl, Herr Leutnant,*" G-8 answered.

"I get off here," the *Leutnant* said.

G-8 waited for him to step out first. He waited, playing with time until the other should have time to get a little distance away.

It was not far from the station in Burkell to the airdrome of Gurst's *Staffel*. A guard stopped the Master Spy and examined his record book and the special order making G-8 a replacement at the field. The guard jerked his head toward the inside of the field.

"Pass, *Herr Unter-Leutnant,*" he said.

G-8 hesitated.

"*Bitte*, where will I find the headquarters of *Herr Hauptmann Gurst*? He is commanding here, *nicht wahr,*"

The Master Spy tensed as the guard scrutinized him in the darkness. Then the guard nodded slowly.

"*Jawohl,*" he said, "*Herr Hauptmann Gurst* is almost the only one left here now."

The guard pointed through the darkness with his flashlight beam toward a small building.

"Perhaps you will find him there," he said. "It is a little building beyond the officers' barracks. Just go straight ahead."

G-8 gave a short nod and marched on. He paused again when he came in front of the little building that the guard had designated. He could see light coming through the crack of a shade. He glanced about. It seemed to him that perhaps he had been followed. He wasn't quite sure. Maybe it was only a feeling, but it served as a warning, nevertheless, for him not to make any false moves.

G-8 walked straight to the door and knocked. There was no answer from within. He knocked again.

This time, a melodious voice called, "Come in. What do you want?"

The voice was deep and musical, the trained voice of an actor.

Without further hesitation, G-8 opened the door. The light half blinded him for an instant. Then he saw several things—a desk and two chairs, and behind the desk a man he would have recognized from even a meager description as *Herr Hauptmann* Gurst.

Gurst was about G-8's own size. He had a firm chin, a most even set of teeth and large blue eyes. His hair was light and he was smiling just a little now. He was, perhaps, one of the most strikingly handsome men that the Master Spy had ever seen. His uniform was freshly pressed and spotless. His hair, which was not as close-cropped as most other German officers, was perfectly groomed. He seemed to have stepped from a tailor's box. With a click of heels, the Master Spy stood rigidly at attention before Gurst. He held out the order to report as a replacement—the order that he himself had drawn up.

"May I introduce myself, *Herr Hauptmann*?" G-8 said. "I am *Unter-Leutnant* Engelhart, reporting as a replacement."

Gurst looked at him with quite some surprise.

"So?" he said. "A replacement at this time, when there is no one flying? That is strange. Who sent you?"

G-8 pointed stiffly to the signature at the bottom of the order.

"I do not know the major's name," he said, "and I could not read the writing well, *Herr Hauptmann*."

Gurst glanced over the forged order more carefully and nodded.

"It seems to be in order," he said. He sighed. "Very well. You are a replacement. Where did you come from?"

"I was sent here from the training field at Verouch, fifty miles north," the Master Spy answered.

At that moment, there was a thunderous knock on the door behind G-8. Gurst boomed, "Come in," and waited. The door opened, and the *Leutnant* who had been the Master Spy's companion in the compartment strode into the room.

The big *Leutnant* nodded to *Hauptmann* Gurst, clicked his heels in salute, and bowed. His eyes shifted quickly to G-8 and he nodded.

"*Ach*, my traveling companion from Datrique," he said.

Hauptmann Gurst's clear blue eyes narrowed on the Master Spy menacingly.

CHAPTER THREE

Port of Lost Men

G-8 realized that he was suspected. He knew what was coming even before Gurst spoke.

"You say your name is *Leutnant* Engelhart?" he asked.

"*Jawohl, Herr Hauptmann*."

The *Leutnant* was watching him closely.

"And you say that you came here from the training field at Verouch?"

"*Jawohl, Herr Hauptmann*."

"Then how do you explain the fact that the *Leutnant* says you were his traveling companion not from Verouch, but from—Datrique?"

"You see, *Herr Hauptmann*—" G-8 began.

"*Eine Minute, bitte*," Gurst cut in. He turned to the *Leutnant*. "You say, *Herr Leutnant*, that he got on at Datrique?"

"*Jawohl*," the *Leutnant* nodded. "Is there something wrong with that?"

"Only," Gurst said, setting his blue eyes on G-8 more menacingly than ever, "that he has just told me that he came from the training field at

Verouch. How, then, could he have gotten on the train at Datrique, which is between here and Verouch? "

"I will try to explain," G-8 hurried on. "You see, I have an uncle and aunt who live at Datrique. I took time off there between trains to see them and then came on. Since it was already dark when I reached Datrique, I did not think there was any hurry about getting here."

Herr Hauptmann Gurst gave a short nod.

"You had no pass that permitted you to stop off, *Herr Unter-Leutnant*,"

"*Nein*," G-8 admitted.

For a moment Gurst hesitated; then he settled back in his chair and nodded slowly.

"Apparently there is no hurry for the time being—*niche wahr, Herr Leutnant?*"

The *Leutnant* nodded.

"No hurry except perhaps for the *Unter-Leutnant* to leave, *Herr Hauptmann*."

That was a cue for G-8 to ask the question that was uppermost in his mind. "To leave?" he repeated. "You mean that I am to leave, now that I am here? I do not understand, *Herr Hauptmann*."

The *Leutnant* laughed, but *Herr Hauptmann* Gurst did not. He stared down at his desk top.

"I do not think you will leave at once, *Herr Unter-Leutnant*," he said. "You see, we do not know whether you are skilled in aerial combat or not. Likely you are not. This is your first time at the front?"

G-8 hesitated for an instant, not sure what reply would get him the information he wished sooner.

He decided to stall with, "I shall do my best, *Herr Hauptmann*, to increase whatever skill I have and to become one of the best air fighters."

The *Hauptmann* was staring at him under half-lowered lids as though he were acting in one of his plays.

"*Herr Unter-Leutnant*," he said profoundly, "you are likely one of the most fortunate pilots in Germany. I can tell already that you are inexperienced in aerial combat. *Jawohl*, you are fortunate."

"*Jawohl*," said the big *Leutnant* earnestly.

The *Hauptmann* turned his attention to the *Leutnant*, almost as though G-8 were not there at all.

"On the other hand," he said, "perhaps you will not be so lucky?"

G-8 looked bewildered. He didn't have to do much acting to put on that expression. But he realized that he must move with extreme caution. He had barely escaped suspicion and perhaps he was not quite clear of that yet. He wondered how much of that train matter was retained in the mind of *Hauptmann* Gurst.

But there were several vital questions to which he must gain the answers. It seemed quite apparent that there were no other pilots at this field. But if they were all away for some special reason, why was *Hauptmann* Gurst left behind? Was it merely because he was the commanding officer of the field? Why had Gurst said that perhaps he was lucky because he had had little air fighting experience? There was something going on that *Hauptmann* Gurst and the *Leutnant* knew about.

Herr Hauptmann Gurst seemed suddenly kindly disposed toward him. He nodded to the *Leutnant* and said, "May I suggest, *Herr Leutnant*, that we go to the dining room and have a night meal with perhaps some champagne?" He shifted his clear blue eyes to the Master Spy. "And since you are the only other pilot besides myself at this airdrome, perhaps you would care to join us."

It was the opening that G-8 had been hoping for. He nodded at once.

"I would be honored. *Herr Hauptmann*."

The *Hauptmann* got up and led the way through the night to the officers' mess. A cook and his assistant leaped to attention at their entry.

"Pigs' knuckles, fried noodles, sauerkraut, and black bread," Gurst ordered. "And a bottle of that champagne. *Macht schnell!*"

The food was hurried on the table. The champagne cork popped as the cook loosened it. There were three glasses, and the *Herr Hauptmann* filled them with a steady hand.

G-8 tensed for the toast. There was usually a toast given by the commander when a bottle of champagne was opened. As he expected, the *Hauptmann* got to his feet, holding his full glass. The *Leutnant* and G-8 followed him up.

Hauptmann Gurst raised his glass high.

"To victory!"

That was his only toast. There seemed to be a little sadness in his voice as he spoke those words.

G-8 drank with him, as did the *Leutnant*. Then they sat down. The Master Spy was already trying to formulate his inevitable question so as to make it sound innocent when the *Hauptmann* began interrogating him.

"You say, *Herr Unter-Leutnant* Engelhart, that you came from the training field at Verouch?"

G-8 nodded.

Gurst's blue eyes were full on him now and they held a cold light. G-8 knew that he was being put on the spot. He hastened to cover up any discrepancies that might arise. That was well, because the *Hauptmann* shot another direct question at him.

"Let me see," he said. "Who was your commanding officer at Verouch?"

That was a tough one, almost like a blow below the belt, for G-8 had never been in Verouch. He was thinking with lightning speed. But he gave his answer without any apparent hesitation.

"My immediate commander was *Herr Hauptmann* Hershelldinger," he said, "or something like that. I remember it was a very long name that sounded something like that."

The cold blue eyes narrowed quickly.

"Don't you know the name of your commanding officer?"

"*Jawohl*," G-8 said, managing to smile a little. "The name of my commanding officer is *Herr Hauptmann* Gurst."

"Fool," Gurst spat. "I don't mean that. I mean don't you know the name of your commanding officer at Verouch?"

"As I say," G-8 explained, "it was somewhat like the name I have mentioned already."

"Who was in command of the entire training field there?"

G-8 shook his head.

"I do not know his name," he said. And here he played his top card. "You see, *Herr Hauptmann*, I was only at the training field near Verouch for a little over a day. One does not become acquainted with his superiors in that time, particularly if he does not come in direct contact with them."

"HOW is it," Gurst demanded, sipping his champagne, "that you have been here less than an hour, yet you know my name very well? But in twenty-four hours and more, you could not learn definitely the name of your commanding officer at the training field?"

"I have always had trouble with names," G-8 explained, "and, as I have said, the name of the *Hauptmann* was a long one and especially difficult to remember. But you, *Herr Hauptmann*, have a short name. And, what is more, you have the same name as the famous motion picture actor."

A slow smile spread over the finely chiseled features that had made female hearts flutter all over Germany.

"*Herr Unter-Leutnant*," Gurst announced, "I am *Herr Hauptmann* Gurst of the motion pictures."

G-8 let his eyes widen in amazement. Then he moved somewhat nervously.

"*Himmel*, *Herr Hauptmann*. My apologies for not recognizing you. You see, I never dreamed that you were—"

"It doesn't matter," Gurst shrugged. "We are in a war now, and an officer is merely a man of rank, regardless of who he was before, *nicht wahr*, *Herr Leutnant*?"

The big *Leutnant* nodded and gulped at his drink. But G-8 was becoming increasingly aware that the *Leutnant's* eyes were upon him every second as though he were trying to look into his very soul.

The break that G-8 had been waiting for had arrived. He hurried to take advantage of it.

"Well, then, *Herr Hauptmann*," he smiled, "perhaps that explains something that has made me very curious since I arrived."

Herr Hauptmann Gurst waited.

"I could not help wondering," G-8 continued, "why you seem to be the only one of the pilots left at this airdrome. But I can understand readily now. Because you are so famous and so important to the *Vaterland* in motion pictures, they have spared you from being taken to whatever fate awaits the pilots, *nicht wahr*?"

The cold, blue eyes were narrowed more than ever now.

"What," demanded *Herr Hauptmann* Gurst, "makes you think that some strange fate awaits my pilots who are not here?"

"*Bitte*," G-8 hurriedly explained, "I do not wish to probe into something that is none of my business. But I am also a pilot and I cannot help being curious. So it seems from what you said in your headquarters office that whatever is happening to your pilots is not too pleasant for them, to say the least."

"And what makes you think that?" Gurst demanded.

The *Leutnant*, with glass still in his hand, had moved a little nearer to G-8—menacingly so, the Master Spy thought.

"Because, *Herr Hauptmann*," G-8 hurried on, "you said that perhaps I was lucky in not having proven my skill over the front."

"Did I say that?" Gurst demanded.

"Perhaps. not in just those words," G-8 hedged, "but that is the way I understood it."

He waited, almost breathlessly, for the *Hauptmann's* reply. Slowly Gurst nodded and glanced past him toward the *Leutnant*.

"Perhaps I did say that," he admitted.



THEN G-8 felt something strange taking place. He had been wearing a German Luger in

the holster at his side. Now the holster was growing light. Without turning, he realized that the *Leutnant* had carefully lifted the Luger from its holster.

"Just to be on the safe side, *Herr Hauptmann*," he heard the *Leutnant* say.

Then he heard the gun clatter a little as the *Leutnant* laid it on the table out of his reach. G-8 was positive that he was on the spot. Nothing much to lose now. He shot his next question boldly.

"I can't help wondering, *Herr Hauptmann*, just where all your pilots have gone. What is happening to them? Will there be any flying for me while I am here—at least until they come back?"

Gurst smiled for a moment as though there were nothing tense and menacing about this meeting.

"For you, *Herr Unter-Leutnant*," he said, "there will most likely be no flying—at least until they return."

"When do you expect them back, *Herr Hauptmann*?"

Gurst sipped at his champagne and ate his food with maddening deliberateness.

When he had chewed a mouthful of pigs' knuckles garnished with sauerkraut, he answered, "I am beginning to feel that their return will be of little concern to you, *Herr Unter-Leutnant*."

G-8 wasn't surprised. He knew exactly what Gurst meant, but he asked the natural question. He must continue to carry out his role of innocence.

"May I ask, *Herr Hauptmann*, what you mean by that?"

Gurst shoveled in another portion of knuckles.

"You shall see in a little while."

G-8 ate in silence. The food was good, and he decided that, whatever might come, he would be in better condition to meet it with a full stomach.

Not once did he look at the *Leutnant*. He wanted to put off as long as possible the inevitable question as to why his Luger had been removed. He pretended that he did not realize that it was gone.

Suddenly he realized that *Herr Hauptmann* Gurst had given a short nod to the *Leutnant*. The *Leutnant* rose and so did Gurst.

"I think it is time to retire," Gurst said. "Come, *Herr Unter-Leutnant*. We will show you to your quarters."

They went out into the darkness once more. This time they walked past the pilots' barracks and the headquarters office. They turned in at a black hulk of a building, half hidden in trees. A heavy door swung open at the front. With Gurst leading the way and G-8 being followed by the *Leutnant*, they went in. At the front of the building there were shadowy doorways, one on either side of the corridor. There was another door at the back. It was dark, and G-8 couldn't be sure that he saw bars on the door. Gurst was swinging back the door.

He stepped aside and said, "These will be your quarters tonight."

G-8 stepped past him. No lights had been turned on and it was very dark, but in spite of that fact, G-8 realized two things immediately. The first was that he was entering a large, barred prison cell. The second was the fact that the *Leutnant* held a Luger at his back.

The door clanged shut.

The *Hauptmann* was speaking through the bars.

"You are a prisoner held for investigation."

CHAPTER FOUR

Flight at Dawn

AS Gurst spoke, a light went on and G-8 could see where he was. But he wasn't so much concerned with the place of his confinement at the moment as he was with the trick that had been used to trap him without even a struggle.

"Might I ask why I am here?" he demanded. "I have done nothing."

"*Halt's Maul*," Gurst snapped. He smiled. "There is perhaps one thing that you did not know. Orders were given that there would be no replacements sent to the airdromes while our pilots are on their vacations."

Then Gurst turned out the light and, with the *Leutnant*, strode down the corridor and out into the night. But G-8 had seen several things while the light was on that raised a number of questions in his mind. However, he had seen nothing that gave any hint as to the reason for the pilots' absence.

The cell in which G-8 was a prisoner was quite the largest prison cell that he had ever been in. It was at least thirty feet square and had over an eight-foot ceiling.

There were two windows along the back side. G-8 strode over and looked out of both of them.

He could see nothing but the blackness of night.

During the short time that the light had been on, G-8 had noticed that the walls of the cell appeared strange. He felt of them now in the darkness and realized, as he had first suspected, that he was in a padded cell. He stood up on the cot and, touching the ceiling, found that was padded also.

The padding was covered with a heavy, tarpaulin-like material. He tried to dig it with his fingernails, but he could make no impression in it.

"It looks," the Master Spy said to himself, "as though they're expecting to put a gang of lunatics in here."

But the bars were the most puzzling part of all. The whole front side of the cell was composed of vertical bars fastened together at intervals with stout cross pieces. If they had expected to put maniacs and lunatics in here, men who might do themselves harm by batting their heads against solid surfaces, why had they left those iron bars across the front?

FEELING his way along the wall, G-8 went to the front of the cell. His hands closed over two of the bars. He was immediately surprised. The bars were better than two inches thick; although they were probably iron or steel on the inside, they were covered with more than a half inch of padding that was in turn covered with the tarpaulin material.

The bars were so close together that there was not room for a man's head to be poked between them.

So this was the answer to the iron bars. G-8 realized that a lunatic could bash his head against

these padded bars for quite some time without doing himself a great deal of harm.

Still there was no answer here to the Master Spy's vital question. He wondered how long they would keep him in this cell. Probably long enough to make some investigation. Perhaps he would be taken out and shot at dawn on the simple assumption that he was a spy.

He felt his way around the rest of the padded wall; then he sat down on the cot. For a long time he sat there, trying to figure things out and plan his escape.

It had been dark when he had come to the place, and he hadn't had much chance to inspect it from the outside, but he had been able to see enough to tell him that this was a one-story building with an almost flat roof that seemed to slant from the rear to the front. As nearly as he could figure it out, the cell was in the rear of the building. The two walls on the sides were the outside walls. He remembered that the cell ceiling was flat and level. Therefore, he estimated, at the rear of the cell, above where the two barred windows had been cut in the wall, there must be a space of at least two or three feet between the ceiling and the top of the building. That gave him an idea.

His Luger had been taken by the big *Leautnant* in the dining room, but they had not searched him further for hidden weapons. He felt in his pocket for his knife. It was there.

With that much assurance, he moved the cot over between the windows. Standing on the cot, he could reach the padded ceiling nicely. With his knife, he ripped into the tarpaulin covering. It was a simple matter to pull down enough padding so that he could get at the ceiling above. But that barrier, he found, was made of hard wood boards that strongly resisted all the desperate slashings of his knife. But the Master Spy struggled on.

One hour slipped by, then another and another. Intermittently he changed hands so that the blisters would be more evenly distributed. The insides of both his hands were almost raw. But this was a matter of life and death and more. He must live to continue his investigation into this strange circumstance of the vanished pilots.

Finally he managed to break off a big board that he had cut in two. He wrenched it free from the ceiling. Again and again he glanced out of the window, expecting to see the first signs of daylight dawn at any moment, but it was still dark.

Folding his knife again and carefully placing it in his pocket, he leaped from his cot straight up into the opening. His hands caught hold of a cross bar, and he pulled himself up through the hole he had made. It was pitch black up there.

There was not as much space as he had supposed. His head smacked a rough timber with a bang, and the impact left him dazed and gasping. He steadied himself, sat down on the edge of the hole with his feet sticking through the ceiling until he could get his bearings. When the dizziness left him, he began fumbling along the low, upright portion of the back wall, where it rose from the cell ceiling to the rough timbers. He felt solid studding and boards of heavy hard wood like the one he had just taken hours to cut through. He knew it would be almost noon of the next day before he could get through one of those. Fumbling along with hands extended, he moved in the other direction.

Suddenly he felt a chill blast of air coming out of the early morning darkness. Eagerly his hands sought the opening through which the air was coming. There seemed to be a vent there. He couldn't see it, but he could feel the slanting flanges of wood. This wood was of a soft variety, like soft pine or fir.

G-8 leaned back, braced one foot up against the side wall and yanked inward with all his might. A low, splintering sound echoed through the attic. He yanked again. The ventilator still resisted stubbornly. Again and again the Master Spy tugged on it. Finally he succeeded in splintering it and swinging it back.

He felt about the opening that he had made. It was large enough for him to crawl through. He stuck out his feet, slid his body through. For a moment, he hung on the outside of the building by his hands; then he let go and dropped to the ground.

WHEN he had first yanked out the ventilator, he had seen that day was dawning. He could make out the trees behind the prison building. He realized that there was probably a wire fence surrounding the entire field. At least there had been a wire fence leading up to either side of the gate through which he had entered.

He crept to the corner of the prison and peered around. There seemed to be no one in sight at this early hour. The hangars were farther down the field. He stepped back into the thicker

portion of the woods that skirted that side of the field and the rear of most of the buildings and started toward the hangars.

He would like most of all to remain here so he could watch the pilots if they should return, to see what condition they were in, to see if anything had happened to them, but he knew that his escape from the prison would be discovered any moment now.

Even as that thought flashed into his mind, he heard the clump of boots along the tarmac in front of the prison building and he heard voices. One he thought belonged to the big *Leutnant*. The other was that of *Herr Hauptmann* Gurst.

"There is no doubt in my mind that he is a spy," he heard Gurst say.

"I suggest that we take him out and shoot him," the *Leutnant* said.

"Perhaps," Gurst agreed. "We shall see. "

G-8 hurried on toward the hangars, but he had covered scarcely twenty feet when he heard a cry from the interior of the prison. Gurst was shouting. "Close the gates! Watch everywhere for the escaped prisoner!"

G-8 broke into a run. He reached the rear of one of the hangars, came to a door, and tried it. It was open. He slipped inside. He saw the great doors at the other end roll back. Mechanics were just reporting for work.

The Master Spy crouched behind a Fokker and waited. The two mechanics who had opened the great doors came back into the hangar and strode off toward the machine shop, which was in a lean-to on the west side of the hangar.

Step by step, keeping well covered by the planes, G-8 made his way toward the door that had been opened. The Fokker nearest the door was headed out. He didn't know whether it was ready to go or not. He would have to take that chance.

He stole up alongside of it. There wouldn't be time to try sucking in gas and then set the throttle and switch. He would have to set everything ready to go and trust that the Mercedes would start and pull through a few times.

The controls were set. He stole around the wing to the propeller. There he was out in the open. Off toward the prison, he could still hear the voice of *Herr Hauptmann* Gurst shouting commands, ordering all men to be on the lookout

for the prisoner. G-8 could tell he was coming near the hangar, for his voice was crowing louder.

The Master Spy paused a moment before the propeller, then gave it a yank through. The engine made a sucking sound.

Twice more G-8 yanked the propeller desperately.

He heard a warning cry from the door of the machine shop, glanced in that direction as he yanked the prop through once more. It was now or never. One of the mechanics was standing in the doorway, his eyes wide with dismay and astonishment.

"*Donnerwetter!*" he yelled. "What are you doing? Who are you? Leave that plane alone! Stop!"

Once more, G-8 pulled the prop through savagely. There was a snort, a banging backfire; then the Mercedes was running.

The mechanic made a dive for G-8, but there were three Fokkers between him and the one the Master Spy had started. He would have to run around to reach G-8.

The Master Spy made a dive for the cockpit. Even as he climbed in, he slammed the throttle half open. The motor snorted, backfired, sneezed, and picked up again with a roar.

The mechanic headed for the tail of the ship. As G-8 dropped into the cockpit, he whirled to see the mechanic, lying flat on his belly, grab hold of the tail skid of the Fokker.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Mystery of the French Ace

THE motor was bellowing out in a full-throated roar. The Fokker had already begun to move ahead as the mechanic grabbed it. He was yelling for help.

G-8 hit the throttle another crack with the base of his hand. In spite of its being cold, the Mercedes thundered out in a new burst of power. The racing wind from the whirling propeller was lashing at the mechanic. The plane had already dragged itself out on the tarmac in spite of the added load of the mechanic's body.

In desperation, G-8 tramped on the rudder bar, kicked left and right. At the same time, he

slammed the stick ahead and yanked it back, fighting frantically to break the mechanic's hold. Then, even above the scream of the Mercedes engine, G-8 heard the shouting which came from *Hauptmann* Gurst and the big *Leutnant*. He jerked his head around. He could see them running toward him. Each had a Luger in his hand and was firing wildly. One bullet seemed to whisper to G-8 as it almost creased the back of his neck.

Herr Hauptmann Gurst was running for him at full speed, firing as he came. But G-8 decided that the *Leutnant* was more dangerous. He had dropped to one knee, had both hands free to steady his Luger.

From the way the Fokker was acting, G-8 was certain that the mechanic was still holding on. Again and again he tried desperately to shake him off, but the mechanic held on and kept yelling for help.

G-8 ducked low and jerked forward as he slammed the stick about. He hadn't acted any too quickly. Something ripped through the back of his uniform coat at the shoulder blades. He felt a stinging burn there. A split-second afterward, he heard the blast of the Luger. That second shot must have missed him by quite a margin.

He had managed to drag the mechanic across the tarmac out into the open field. *Herr Hauptmann* Gurst was almost upon him. G-8 made a last, frantic effort to free himself of the load under his tail. The Mercedes engine was blasting full out.

Suddenly, just as it seemed that the end was about to come, the Fokker leaped ahead. G-8, doubled over in the cockpit, heard Gurst's Luger blast away at close range. Two holes appeared close to each other, cutting away part of his instrument panel. But the tail was up now. The wings were growing light.

With a steady hand, G-8 eased back on the stick and picked the Fokker off. He stared back at the German airdrome that was receding behind him. *Herr Hauptmann* Gurst was running for the open hangar. The big *Leutnant* was close behind him. They were wheeling out another Fokker, starting the engine.

G-8 pushed on his throttle to make sure it was wide open. A wooded hill lay before him. He skimmed the top of it, then dropped on the other side so that he was out of sight of the airdrome. That done, he swerved to the east and went thundering on. He had a good lead on Gurst's

Fokker. He decided it ought not to be difficult to shake him off his trail.

IN TWO or three minutes, he topped another ridge and dropped on the other side of it. Then he turned and headed back for Le Bourget.

A great sea of puffy clouds had come up with the first appearance of the sun. G-8 ducked behind them and droned on, gaining altitude as he went.

In another few minutes he was able to see the smoke haze that always accompanied the front lines. He settled back in his seat to relax.

But suddenly he sat bolt upright again.

Straight ahead and a little to the east, he saw another ship. It was still a mere speck, but he recognized it as a Fokker. It was heading somewhat across his path, but still ahead of him, so that the pilot wouldn't see him unless he looked back over his shoulder.

Then G-8 realized that the pilot of that Fokker had another objective. Off across No Man's Land, G-8 spotted another plane moving along parallel to the Allied lines. He stared at the plane in perplexity. There was something familiar about it. He realized that it was a French Nieuport. As yet he wasn't near enough to tell the color. He pushed on the throttle again for all the speed he could get and raced toward it.

Suddenly it all came to him. That plane was a Nieuport painted snowy white. He knew of only one ship like that. It was the pursuit ship flown by Dupre, the famous French ace. On closer inspection, G-8 noticed that there was something strange about the way Dupre was flying. He held a straight course over the Allied lines, and all the time the German plane was bearing down on him. He was apparently unaware of his danger. It was amazing, ghastly.

G-8 went tearing down on the tail of that German plane. As yet the attacking Fokker was well out of range, but at the speed he was going, it would be a matter of only a few seconds before he would be near enough to blast Dupre out of the sky.

Could it be that the French ace didn't see that German plane coming? That seemed almost unbelievable to G-8, for the German ship was attacking him from the side. Surely Dupre knew enough to keep his eyes open to that extent.

There was something strange going on here, something that G-8 didn't understand. He clenched his teeth and leaned forward, his fingers tightening over the triggers. He pushed again on the throttle for more speed. He must get that German pilot and save Dupre.

Then G-8 realized the most startling thing of all. He was near enough now to see Dupre's goggled face. Strangely enough, Dupre was sitting there in his cockpit, staring directly at the German plane, yet he wasn't doing anything about it. In another moment the Jerry would be within range.

G-8 found himself almost trying to yell a warning across that great space, but he knew that Dupre would never hear him. He saw that the enemy plane was just coming in range. He could see the pilot's head. He saw him prepare his Spandau guns for delivering the death stroke.

Still Dupre sat in the cockpit of his small white plane, rigid as a statue, staring directly back at the attacking ship, giving no sign that he realized he was in any danger.

There was a warning burst from the Spandau guns, just a short, stuttering staccato. Then the guns of that attacking Fokker fell silent. Surely that would be a warning to Dupre. The blast of those guns would let him know that it was time to stir himself and whip over in some trick maneuver that would save his life as well as down the German plane. But Dupre didn't move. He flew on that same unswerving course, oblivious to the fact that in another second or two he would be dead.

The whole thing was too strange, too ghastly for the Master Spy to figure out, at least in this short time. If Dupre was to go on living, it was up to the Master Spy. Could it be that the great French ace was deliberately trying to commit suicide?

G-8 was crouched in his seat, glaring across his sights. He was riding the Jerry pilot's tail without the enemy's knowledge. Now he squeezed his triggers. The Spandau guns on his Fokker clattered out in a wild burst of slugs. He watched them slam into the cockpit of the plane ahead.

Some of them pierced the head of the German pilot. Others went slithering into his body like tiny, frightened mice scurrying into their holes. The head of the German pilot snapped forward; then his body leaned forward. The

Fokker plunged into a dive and went screaming down into No Man's Land,

G-8, thundering on, watched the Jerry crash midway between the Yank and German lines. Hastily the Master Spy scribbled a note.

GET THAT GERMAN PILOT AT ALL COSTS. BRING HIM BACK TO THE AMERICAN LINES.

He signed it G-8 so that the Yank commander would know why this message was being dropped from a German plane. He went screaming down, roared over the Yank lines, saw gaping faces turned up at him. There were no shots, for everyone in those trenches had seen him shoot down the German plane. He hurled out the message streamer in a wad, saw it fall in a communicating trench. Then he hauled back on his stick and headed at full throttle for the white Nieuport of Dupre.

And now the strangest thing of all suddenly took place. Dupre seemed to have come to life. He kicked over his Nieuport and came tearing in to give battle to the Fokker that G-8 flew, apparently not realizing that the Master Spy had just saved his life.

CHAPTER SIX

Battle for Life

FROM that moment when G-8 saw Dupre seemingly come back to life in his Nieuport cockpit, the Master Spy knew he was in for plenty of action. True, he might take the chance of shooting down Dupre to save his own hide, but such a thing never entered G-8's head. He must save Dupre for more than humanitarian reasons; he must talk with him. This was the most essential point in his plan. He must learn from Dupre why he had acted so strangely before the attacking German plane.

But it looked at this very moment as though G-8 were going to have little or no choice in the matter. Dupre whipped over his Nieuport and came screaming at him. G-8 rolled out and roared up in a steep chandelle, moving away, curving, cutting out and in constantly to throw Dupre off his aim.

Dupre's aim was nothing to toy with. For months he had had the reputation of being the

best machine-gun shot in the French air force. His record of enemy planes downed by this same snow-white Nieuport was proof of his skillful shooting. An ace couldn't just be a good pilot and lucky. He must be a good shot as well.

All of these thoughts flashed through G-8's mind as he ducked and zoomed and weaved to escape the desperate French ace. Then the fight was on in earnest and there was no time to think, only time to act by instinct. He had thought of waving to Dupre, but had given that up. He knew the little French ace was reputed to be fast as lightning as well as a dead shot.

Dupre's machine stuttered once. A line of white tracers slashed across in front of G-8 and made him duck. Those tracers seemed to miss his nose by inches. Good heavens, Dupre wasn't fooling. He was even shooting for G-8's head. The Master Spy remembered now that many of Dupre's victims in the past had been drilled squarely in the head. It was a quick and painless finish.

G-8 went into as tight and desperate maneuvers as he had ever tried—around and up and over and down, but Dupre seemed to be glued to his tail. He kept on rolling and ducking.

There was one thing he must do. He must not take a chance killing Dupre or even injuring him. This made the battle almost impossible. G-8 wanted to duck out of the fight and run for it, trusting to the slightly faster speed of his Fokker, but Dupre wasn't giving him a chance for a clear break. One straight flight of a half mile and G-8 knew that he was gone.

He caught a glimpse of the earth below him. They were fighting now back of the Allied lines. If he or Dupre went down, they would land or crash in their own territory. That was something.

Now Dupre was storming at him from the side. G-8 kicked rudder and turned away. As Dupre followed him close, G-8 stuck his stick forward and yanked it back. That would throw Dupre off his aim.

The Fokker zoomed higher and higher. This Jerry ship really had an engine on the nose, from the way she could hang on her prop.

Dupre was coming in for the kill as G-8 seemed about to hang there. But an instant before he lost flying speed in a stall, the Master Spy whipped over in a half bank, half dive, and went screaming down from that perilous position.

With perfect timing, G-8 dived in a wide turn. Then, with a speed that appeared to be surprising even to Dupre, he kicked over the other way, reversed his turn, and came screaming in at the Frenchman.

NOW G-8 had the advantage. It was only for a short time, but it would give him a breathing space and show Dupre that for once he was not entirely master of the air.

The French ace Immelmanned, rolled, chandelled and verticalled to shake G-8 from his tail. Nothing seemed to work.

But all of this time, G-8 felt helpless. He had to smile at his predicament. Here he was holding the advantage, riding Dupre's tail without considerable trouble to keep from being shaken off, but he couldn't use his advantage except to save himself from being spattered with lead.

He saw Dupre look back as he went into another Immelman. There was desperation in Dupre's glance. He looked like a man who had never met an opponent as tough as the one he was tackling now. The next time he looked around, G-8 wasn't there. He was riding his tail still, coming in from the other side.

G-8 saw the Frenchman's jaw set with determination. He'd get this Heinie or know the reason why.

The Master Spy tried to signal him, to tell him that he was a friend, and to stop all this foolishness. He waved his hand, trying to put as much meaning into his gesture as possible. But apparently Dupre thought he was being kidded. He fought all the harder.

It was here that the turning point took place. G-8 was waving, pointing to himself and then down to the Allied lines, trying to make Dupre realize that he was an Allied flyer. But Dupre opened his mouth, apparently let go an oath, and pulled a reversal that must have almost separated his stomach in two parts.

Before G-8 realized what was taking place, Dupre was upon him. A yammering of lead from the Nieuport came crashing from the side, slashed into G-8's cockpit, and shattered the right side of his instrument panel.

No fooling now. Something plucked at G-8's sleeve; then he felt a sting in his shoulder as a bullet creased the flesh.

The Master Spy almost lost control of himself for the moment. Why wouldn't this fool Frenchman pay attention to his signaling? But then he acted much more strangely than this with the other Fokker. He had simply stared at him and gone on his dangerous way.

G-8 lashed the stick about and kicked rudder. Dupre was there just the same. G-8 half-looped and rolled, came out in a tight spiral, but when he came slamming out to turn the other way, Dupre was there. Down went G-8's Fokker in a deadly power dive. Dupre cut loose with his machine gun to finish his man.

Bam! The windshield of G-8's Fokker shattered and then vanished before his unprotected eyes. There had been no time for him to don goggles in his hasty escape from Gurst's airdrome. The racing slipstream blinded him, made tears well up to blur his vision.

Madly the Master Spy flailed the stick and rudder about, caring little what maneuver the Fokker did, so long as he could get back his sight.

He heard Dupre's machine gun yammer twice during those frantic, almost blind maneuvers of his. Once he heard slugs drumming on his tail and again he heard them slamming down from above on his right wing. Dupre was above him now, pouring lead at him.

Instantly G-8 sent his Fokker zooming up in a wild climb. He passed Dupre before the Frenchman could recover from the shock. G-8 had deliberately turned directly into Dupre's line off light.

The Frenchman would have to duck or crash into him. In ducking, Dupre might accidentally throw himself off his aim and lose his balance. It would smash the Frenchman's plans if the trick worked.

G-8 came out of his zoom and sent the Fokker kicking over in a tight vertical. Dupre was under him, but he was turning the nose of his Nieuport up into the air, pouring slugs at the Master Spy's Fokker. There was a rumble as the slugs missed the cockpit by inches and drummed their way back toward the tail.

Now it was G-8's turn. Dupre had hung on his prop—a poor trick in a Nieuport, but not so bad in a Fokker. With a sickly turn, the Nieuport half rolled and started down. Dupre was fighting to get control. By this time G-8 was after him, hurtling down full throttle in a power dive. Dupre pulled

out, managed to get level just as G-8 went shooting by in his dive.

It would seem strange for an expert pilot like G-8 to pull this maneuver, since it obviously put him in the wrong. But he was counting on one thing. He had seen before how this particular Fokker would hang on its prop, almost like a helicopter. He was putting a desperate hope into operation.

Dupre saw he would have the advantage, whirled to take it, and started down. But the Master Spy had put his plan into effect. As Dupre had made his half turn before peeling off in his dive, G-8 had zoomed up in Dupre's path.

The Spandau guns sputtered and roared. It was the first time that G-8 had cut loose with his machine guns in the whole fight. But those guns were going mad now.

Yellow tracers slammed up directly in the path of Dupre's flight. Dupre couldn't change his course quickly enough to get out of the line of fire. His Clerget engine was hurling him uncontrollably into the spitting lead from G-8's Spandau guns. They'd rip Dupre's engine and Dupre himself to ribbons if G-8 held down the triggers long enough.

The Master Spy was hanging almost straight up on his prop. The Fokker wavered. Dupre had kicked, was trying to turn, but too late. Yellow tracers slammed up through the front of his engine mounting.

At that point, G-8 let go of the triggers. Black smoke belched from the round cylinder cover of Dupre's rotary engine. Then pieces of metal and propeller began flying in every direction.

The Nieuport was shaking violently, almost ready to fly apart. But even then Dupre did not give up. No wonder he had become one of France's greatest aces.

With eyes glaring in rage, Dupre managed to stick the nose of his crate down. He went into a dive with only gravity to propel him down toward the Fokker. His guns belched flame.

With the white tracers lashing at him, G-8 whipped over. He had already begun to fall from the top of his stall, was gathering speed and veering to the right.

Tracers cut through the space between him and the right lower wing of his Fokker. But he was going away from them, making the space wider and wider.

He horsed back on the stick and kicked rudder. The Mercedes was thundering full out. Dupre tried to follow him, but he didn't have any power to climb and he didn't dare stall so close to the ground. The French ace was going down now.

G-8 kept his distance. He took a long breath and watched Dupre glide off toward a fairly level spot behind Yank artillery.

When Dupre was about to land, G-8 followed him down. He intended to use that same field for his own landing, come what may.

CAREFULLY, G-8 brought down his Fokker. He glanced below at Yanks who had been watching. They gaped at him with open mouths. Little wonder, for these men had seen him shoot down the German ace and then seen the Nieuport pilot whose life he had saved attack him and almost shoot him down.

Dupre was rolling. His Nieuport pitched over toward a shell crater and slowly rolled into the slimy water. G-8 saw Dupre get out of his cockpit, apparently unharmed.

Now the Master Spy needed all his attention to guide his Fokker down. He chose a ridge to the right of where Dupre had landed.

Already Yank troops were swarming toward the line of roll that G-8's Fokker would take. It was evident from the fact that they all had their guns out, ready for action, that they were going to place him under arrest.

G-8's landing turned out a little better than Dupre's. His ship stopped its roll a few feet short of a shell hole, and he climbed out. It looked as if the whole American Expeditionary Force was about him. He figured there must be at least five hundred automatics pointed directly at him.

Dupre was crowding his way through the mob, shouting in French, "He is my prisoner! I shall take command of him at once."

G-8 stood there with his hands in the air. There was too much shouting to take a chance of trying to identify himself and lower his arms. A Yank captain came up behind Dupre.

"Get down out of that cockpit," Dupre ordered in French.

G-8 nodded and shouted in English, "It will be a pleasure." To the Yank captain, he said, "Captain, may I identify myself? I am G-8."

There was sudden consternation. Above the babble of voices, G-8 turned to Dupre and

shouted in French, "Why didn't you fight that first German plane that attacked you—the one I shot down?"

Dupre stared at him in amazement.

"The other, *monsieur*?" he cried. "*Mon Dieu*, you are mad. I do not know what you are talking about."

CHAPTER SEVEN

Strange Story

THE sun was well up. Standing no more than three feet from Dupre, G-8 could study his face in detail. Always the Master Spy had trusted his sense of judging other human beings. In Dupre's face now he saw a mixture of anger and amazement. But there was a look of earnestness also. Beyond all doubt, Dupre was telling the truth, or at least what appeared to him to be the truth.

The Master Spy stood surrounded by the mob, still holding up his arms. He realized that he was getting nowhere with Dupre, and as yet his identity hadn't been satisfactorily established.

The Yank captain said, "You claim to be G-8. You will have to accompany me to the headquarters dugout for full identification."

"I will be delighted," the Master Spy nodded. "And now may I lower my arms? You see I have no weapons. A German *Leutnant* over at *Hauptmann* Gurst's airdrome relieved me of my automatic."

The captain turned to what seemed hundreds of men surrounding them.

"I will take care of this man," he announced. "Holster your arms."

But it was evident that the captain wasn't too sure of G-8's identity even now, for he still held his own automatic in his hand.

"I would like to make one request," G-8 said. "It is vitally important to the Allied cause that I continue my questioning of Monsieur Dupre." He turned to the Frenchman and asked in French, "Would you be so kind as to accompany us? There are a number of things I would like to discuss further with you." Dupre nodded without the slightest hint of a smile.

"I consider it my duty to go with you," he said. "If you are not G-8 as you claim, then you

are my prisoner, and if you are G-8, there are some questions I would like to ask you."

They strode along across the pockmarked field into a communicating trench. From there, they marched along single file with G-8 in the lead, following directions of the armed captain behind him.

Then they were in a dugout where a major was sitting behind a desk made from an upturned packing case. The captain explained the situation to the artillery major. The major's eyes widened a little as he stared at G-8.

"You claim that you are G-8?"

"I not only claim to be, but I am," the Master Spy smiled. Then, in his own secret way, he identified himself to the major beyond a doubt. The captain and the major were most apologetic for having caused him all this trouble and delay.

"It's quite all right," the Master Spy assured them. "You must make sure at all times. But now, if you don't mind, I'd like to do some questioning of my own."

Monsieur Dupre, who apparently didn't understand English, had stood patiently by. He had, in fact, stood near the door so that anyone leaving the dugout would have to pass him. The Master Spy turned to him and began speaking in fluent French.

"Dupre," he said, "that's one of the toughest air battles I have ever had in my life."

Dupre hesitated.

Then he said, "You have identified yourself as *Monsieur G-8*?"

The Master Spy nodded and turned to the major.

"How's your French. Major?"

The major shrugged. "Not very good. Why?"

"Would you mind telling *Monsieur Dupre* here that I am the genuine G-8?"

The major nodded. Then, in his faltering French, he tried to explain. Dupre nodded.

"So you didn't lie," he said. "Then that is all the more reason why I must ask you some questions. How was it that you were flying a Fokker? Of course, I know, what your answer is going to be to that, *monsieur*."

"Listen," G-8 cut in, "I may as well tell you from the beginning. The general commanding our American air force sent me over to see why the Germans haven't been doing much flying of late.

Perhaps you have noticed that yourself, *Monsieur Dupre*."

He nodded slowly.

"*Oui, Monsieur G-8*," he said. "I have been wondering where all the German planes have gone."

"Well," the Master Spy went on, "that's what I was sent to Germany to find out. That is why I'm dressed as I am. I think it will be sufficient for now to say that I got tangled up in a prison over there, managed to escape and steal a Fokker. I was flying it back to Le Bourget when I saw you."

"That is what I want to ask," Dupre exploded. "I insist upon knowing why you attacked me. I had no way of knowing that you were on my side, since you were flying an enemy plane. But you knew that I was an Allied pilot—more than that, you could tell from the color of my plane that I was Dupre, the great French ace. My plane is the only white Nieuport in all France."

The major pointed to a couple of supply cases that were used as chairs in the dugout and suggested, "Why don't you two sit down?"

The Master Spy smiled.

"It's a very good idea," he admitted. He sat down on one box and Dupre took the other. G-8 took out a pack of cigarettes and they lighted up.

"Now, *Monsieur Dupre*," the Master Spy went on, "I'd like to have you try and remember everything that's happened in the last hour, or since you took off from your airdrome."

G-8 stopped abruptly.

"Just a minute, *Monsieur Dupre*," he said. He turned to the captain. "Would you mind seeing what's being done about bringing in the body of the dead German? It's most imperative that we have his body out of the wreck. I want to have some medical officer look him over; then I want to see him myself."

The captain hedged for a moment.

"I'll be glad to call up," he said.

It was apparent that he didn't want to miss any more of this story than he had to.

"I'd rather you'd do it in person," G-8 said firmly.

"Very well," the captain nodded.

He stepped out of the dugout, and the heavy, rough-planked door banged behind him.

The Master Spy turned to *Monsieur Dupre*.

"Pardon me," he said. "Now if you will go ahead and tell me everything that happened since you left your airdrome this morning—"

"*Mais monsieur*," Dupre objected, "you have not answered my question yet."

"If you don't mind," G-8 said, "I'd like to get your story first. After that, I'll be glad to tell you anything you want to know."

Dupre shrugged.

"My story is very simple," he said. "It was not yet daylight when I left my airdrome, but when I reached the front it was light enough to see. I flew back and forth over No Man's Land, searching in vain for some enemy plane. I don't know how long I had been flying when suddenly I sighted a Fokker bearing down on me at a fast rate of speed. Instantly I went into action, banked my plane, and tore into that Fokker."

FOR the first time, Dupre smiled a little.

"I must admit, *monsieur*, that that German pilot was the most skillful flying man I have ever encountered. *Mon Dieu*, how he could handle a plane! On several occasions, I was sure I had him, but each time he pulled one trick or another and escaped me. Suddenly, when I was sure I had him at a great disadvantage, he swerved abruptly and, before I knew it, my engine began falling apart in my lap."

Dupre shrugged.

"Of course, then I was forced to land. But, strangely enough, the Fokker that had shot me down landed in the same place."

He was smiling broadly now.

"Of course, you know, *Monsieur* G-8, that the man I was fighting was you." He shrugged. "That's my story."

The Master Spy was staring at Dupre in utter amazement.

"*Monsieur*," he said, "your story seems to be perfect—except that you've forgotten one little item. Permit me to refresh your memory. Suppose I tell my story. I was flying out of Germany, and when I came within sight of the front, I saw another Fokker ahead of me. That Fokker was making a direct attack upon a white Nieuport flying across his path. Instantly, I recognized the white Nieuport as the combat ship which you fly. But as I came closer, I saw that you were doing nothing to protect yourself against this attacking German plane. You were sitting erect in

your seat, staring at the German pilot who was attacking you. It seemed almost as though you were frozen there just like a statue, in your seat. "The German pilot ahead of me hadn't come quite within range of your plane yet. Naturally, I expected Dupre, the great French ace, to do something immediately about it. I expected you to have a trick up your sleeve at that moment by which you would turn the tables on that attacking Fokker, but you did nothing but sit there, staring at the enemy pilot.

"I gave my motor all she had and went tearing down on the tail of this Fokker. Just as he gave his Spandau guns a warning burst—a warning that you did not even then heed—I sent slugs into his head and body from behind.

"After he had gone down and crashed in No Man's Land, I dropped a note to our boys telling them it was imperative that they bring back his body for a post mortem. Then I zoomed up to follow you wherever you were going, because I wanted to question you about your strange conduct. And what did you do but turn on me and give me one of the toughest fights I have ever had."

Monsieur Dupre appeared incredulous. Slowly he smiled.

"You must have been day dreaming, *monsieur*. I assure you nothing of that sort happened to me. I am positive that the first enemy plane I saw this morning was the one that shot me down, your Fokker. You must be out of your head, *monsieur*."

G-8 studied Dupre for a long time; then he said with a rather hopeless feeling, "Try to think back. Can't you remember anything about the incident?"

Dupre laughed again.

"I assure you again, *monsieur*, that you must have been day dreaming. Perhaps you fell asleep at the controls or perhaps you bumped your head when you landed." Then he sobered. "No, that couldn't be the case, because you didn't run into a shell hole, like I did when I landed."

At that moment, the door opened and the captain entered.

"G-8," he said, "the body of the German pilot whom you shot down has just been brought back from No Man's Land."

G-8 leaped to his feet.

"Where is he?" he asked.

"They are bringing him back to the field hospital," the captain said.

Hopefully, the Master Spy cried, "You mean he's alive?"

The captain shook his head.

"No, G-8," he replied. "He's not only dead, but he's a rather horrible looking sight. Wait until you see him."

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Man Without a Face

MONSIEUR Dupre was on his feet also now. His quick eyes shifted from the captain to G-8 and back again. Their conversation had been in English and he hadn't understood, but he knew something was up.

The Master Spy explained, "You see, *Monsieur* Dupre, the captain and I were discussing the German pilot who was trying to shoot you down when I came along."

Dupre looked blank for a moment.

"*Mais, monsieur*," he protested, "I do not understand. There was no German pilot."

The Master Spy turned to the captain.

"Did you by any chance see the battle in the air?" he asked.

The captain nodded.

"Yes," he said, "I saw the whole thing. I saw the first Fokker attack the white Nieuport; then I saw you shoot down that Fokker. Then, of course, I saw the combat afterward between you and *Monsieur* Dupre."

G-8 turned to the Frenchman.

"I will try to explain," he said. "The captain has just told me that he saw the whole thing, that it was just as I explained it. First, there was the Fokker, then my ship."

Dupre shook his head stubbornly

"But that is impossible, *monsieur*," he argued. "I am sure there was only one Fokker."

"Nevertheless," G-8 replied, "we are going now to view the body of the German who tried to shoot you down first. Come on."

The captain led the way through a series of supporting and communicating trenches until they

came to the field hospital, an emergency station set up under cover behind the long range artillery.

Already the German's body had arrived. As they went in, G-8 said to Dupre, "I am hoping you will recognize this fellow's face."

But Dupre shook his head.

"I insist, *monsieur*, that there was no face to recognize, nor was there any other plane. I know what I have seen and what I haven't."

DUPRE had been talking as they strode along through the tent hospital. Presently they came to the post mortem room. There, on an improvised, raised slab of wood, lay the ghastly, blood-smeared body of a German pilot. His chest was punctured by a dozen holes.

But G-8 was staring at that face. For an instant it made him shudder to think that he had been the cause of that; but then he realized that death had come so quickly to this German that there could not have been any pain.

It seemed that more than a dozen of G-8's machine gun slugs had gone crashing through his head. The rear of his skull was flat against the slab as though it had been blown half apart. Then the bullets, after entering his head, had blasted their way through his face, carrying away his nose and the eye sockets, leaving only the bloody pulp of his mouth.

Dupre stared at the mass of blood and torn flesh, then he glanced at G-8.

"*Monsieur*," he said, "am I to understand that you shot this man down?"

The Master Spy nodded.

"Permit me to compliment you," he said. "That was excellent shooting."

In desperation, G-8 turned on him.

"Look here," he said, "I was hoping there would be more left of this pilot's face to recognize. You've got to try and think, Dupre. If you're trying to kid me about not remembering, you'd better stop it right now. This is serious business; I've got to know."

Dupre stared at him, amazed.

"The truth is," G-8 said, "that you don't remember this fellow? You don't remember that Fokker attacking you?"

"*Oui*," Dupre nodded. He held his left hand over his heart and his right hand in the air as though he were taking all oath. "I swear it,

monsieur. I swear to God that such a thing never happened."

"But it did happen," G-8 insisted. "The captain saw it, and I was there, too. I dare say twenty or thirty thousand men witnessed that sight, yet you, who were the center of it, don't remember anything about it."

Dupre shook his head sadly.

"I am sorry, *monsieur*," he said. "I remember nothing whatsoever about it. As certainly as I'm standing here, I am sure that such a thing did not take place. And now, *monsieur* G-8, if you do not mind, I will return to my squadron. If I do not leave soon, you will have me thinking that I am a lunatic."

"I think," the Master Spy nodded, "that would be an excellent idea. I will get in touch with you if I need you. And if you should remember any of these things, *monsieur*, call me up at once."

"Most assuredly," Dupre agreed.

Then the French ace left. The captain shook his head.

"He must have gone crazy," he said.

G-8 nodded slowly, then turned to the chief surgeon.

"Can you tell anything about his face?" he asked.

The major was a solid, stocky, hard-boiled army surgeon. He laughed as he jerked his head toward the mass of pulp and blood.

"Tell anything about that mess of blood?" he said. "I wouldn't even swear that the man ever had a face."

"Suppose you cut away what little flesh is left," G-8 suggested. "Let's see what the bone structure of his face is like."

The surgeon followed his suggestion. When the flesh was laid back, only the remains of the grinning skull was there. The nose bones had been blasted away, and most of the jaw had been torn apart, but there were a few back teeth left on the side.

"How about the eye sockets?" G-8 asked.

"Well, you can see for yourself," the major commented dryly. "The bone structure, what remains of it, seems to be that of a normal face. I'd have to be a magician to say much more."

There was a long pause while G-8 studied the form on the slab.

Then the surgeon asked, "What do you want us to do with him?"

"I guess," the Master Spy said, "you might as well have a fitting burial for the fellow. It looks as though we've learned all we can here."

WITH the captain at his side, G-8 strode back to where he had left his stolen Fokker. Some of the enlisted men helped him turn the ship about and wheel it to the northeast end of the flat space. The wind came from the west. He would have to take off slightly off-wind in order to dodge the shell holes.

He started the engine and climbed into the cockpit. With the Mercedes engine thundering out, he took the air and headed for Le Bourget Field. As he brought the German pursuit plane down on the field, Nippy, Bull and Battle all came running out of the apartment of the end hangar. G-8 had blurped his engine in signal to them, and they knew that their chief had come home.

Battle prepared breakfast as G-8 changed into his American air force captain's uniform, talking as he dressed.

"Well, if you ask me," Bull exploded when the Master Spy had finished, "this guy Dupre must have gone nuts."

"But he's not," G-8 said. "That's the strange part of it. At the present time, at least, he seems to be as perfectly normal as you or I."

Nippy had remained silent for the most part while G-8 had been telling his story, but now he said thoughtfully. "The only explanation I can give for it is that in that brief moment Dupre must have had a lapse of memory. His mind must have gone blank at the time that Jerry attacked him. You can't say that that isn't possible, G-8."

The Master Spy shook his head.

"After what I've seen this morning," he said, "I wouldn't dare say that anything is impossible."

By the time G-8 had finished dressing, breakfast was ready, and they sat down to the table. As they ate, they continued the discussion, with both the Battle Aces contributing fantastic suggestions.

It was mid-morning when the telephone rang. The commander of the American air force was on the other end of the line.

Oh, you're back, G-8," he said. "I'm glad to hear that. What did you find out?"

The Master Spy tried to make his story brief. He finished with, "What's your explanation of it, General?"

"After all, " the general admitted, "this is only one isolated case. We've had some very strange things happen in this war. I don't think you can build up any definite theory based on this one case."

"Perhaps you're right," G-8 admitted. "At any rate, what do you suggest? What would you like to have me do next?"

There was a long pause. Then the general said, "If you're stumped, G-8, you must realize that I am much more in a fog than you. I'm going to leave any further movements up to you. But remember, if this Dupre incident is an example of what's going to happen wholesale later on, it's up to you to stop it."

G-8 hesitated a moment, deep in thought. Then the general spoke again, excitedly.

"Wait a minute!" he cried. "Something has just come in. Hang on. I'll be back in a moment."

The Master Spy waited, tense, anxious. What had happened? Why didn't the general come back and tell him the story? A minute dragged by. He could hear excited voices at the other end of the line, but he couldn't tell what was being said. Then the general was on the wire again.

"Hello, G-8. I've just learned that this isn't an isolated case. Listen to this report!"

CHAPTER NINE

The Massacre of B Flight

THE Yank general began reading aloud from the report: "59th Pursuit Squadron. At eight o'clock this morning, five planes of B Flight were on the line. Engines were warmed, pilots in their cockpits. At 8:01 the signal was given for the take-off. The flight was made up of the leader, a veteran airman; two men flying tip with more than a month's experience on the front; and two replacements, one who joined the flight three days ago and the other who arrived only yesterday.

"B Flight was seen to circle the field in climbing; then they headed directly across the

field for the front lines. They were not yet out of sight when a single Fokker appeared, coming out of the north. This enemy pursuit plane attacked at once.

"As viewed from the field of the 59th, the fight resolved itself into a mere slaughter of the members of B Flight. Not once since the single attacking Fokker appeared did any member of B Flight conduct himself like an experienced combat pilot.

"The first attack appeared to begin head-on, but the Fokker rose in its flight, turning slightly as it climbed. It is certain that at least one of the members of B Flight could have seen the Fokker, as it was directly in their path to begin with.

"The Fokker turned, quarter-rolled, and, peeling off from its climb, dived on the five Spads. The Fokker pilot began firing from above just as he came within range. First the lead Spad went down in flames; then the next Spad zoomed up and spun in. The third Spad dived straight for earth and crashed. The left tip Spad was shot down, a flamer. The remaining Spad fluttered down in a sickly falling leaf with the pilot dead at the stick. The enemy plane then returned the way it had come. (Signed) A. R. Smithson? Captain, commander of the 59th."

The general paused. Then he asked, "How do you like that one, G-8?"

For a long moment the Master Spy didn't answer. Then he managed to say, "It's even worse than either you or I feared, General. I'll go to work on it at once. "

"Right, " the general snapped. "This can't go on. And remember, it's up to you to stop it."

G-8 heard the receiver bang at the other end of the line. Nippy and Bull had noticed G-8's tension as they stood close to him.

"Holy herring," Bull exploded, "give us the dope, Chief. What's up?"

"The general just told me about a report that he received," the Master Spy answered. He repeated the contents to them, watched both their mouths drop open.

"Then this Dupre wasn't an isolated case," Nippy said thoughtfully.

The Master Spy shook his head.

"I'm afraid not," he said. "We're up against a proposition that's going to be tough to crack."

"Yeah," Bull boomed, "and if we don't crack it right now, our whole air force is going to be

slaughtered." His face grew purple and he clenched his fists. "Boy, I'd like to get my hands on one of those buzzards. I'd choke all the information he had out of him."

THE Master Spy lifted the receiver and said to the operator, "Get me Captain A. R. Smithson, commander of the 59th Squadron. "

Two minutes later, a voice said from far off, "Captain Smithson talking."

"This is G-8, " the Master Spy told him. "About that report you sent to our air force commander. Can you give me any further information on that?"

There was a pause; then G-8 hurried on, "Were any of the pilots still alive after that crash?"

"We got to one of the replacements," Smithson said. "He went down in a spin. He had a bunch of slugs through his lungs

"Did he talk?" G-8 demanded.

"Yes, for a few seconds after we reached him," Smithson answered. "But we were worse off after talking to him than we were before. He doesn't remember anything that happened. He thinks he crashed because the plane got out of control. It's the most amazing thing I've ever seen, G-8. The boys are feeling pretty jittery around here now."

"I imagine so," G-8 admitted. "You'd better ground the whole bunch of them for the time being. They can do more by staying on the ground and keeping alive than they can by being slaughtered in the air. Were there any markings on this enemy plane?"

"The fight took place some distance from our field," Smithson said. "It happened so quickly that we didn't get much of a look at the Fokker. However, so far as I could see, there were no markings on it, no spectacular colors. It was painted an ordinary dark gray-green."

"The pilot—" G-8 said, "could you see his face?"

"No," the captain answered. "He was too far away. Anything else?"

"I can't think of anything at the moment," G-8 said.

"If anything else turns up, I'll let you know," the captain promised.

G-8 felt rather like dish rag as he hung up the receiver.

"Well, what do we do now? " Bull demanded.

The Master Spy shook his head slowly.

"That's the trouble," he said with a baffled expression. "I can't think of a thing. If I could only get some sort of a break. "

"Listen," Nippy chirped, "I've got an idea. How's this? Let's all three of us get in our crates and go after these devils. We'll climb up to three thousand feet and stay widely separated, but as soon as we spot an enemy plane, all three of us will streak down at it from different angles."

G-8 thought that over; then he shook his head.

"I don't think we're ready for that yet," he said.

BULL boomed, "Do you mean that you're scared of these buzzards?"

G-8 studied Bull for a moment. Then he said, "Bull, you've always said you weren't afraid of anything that was human, anything that you could fight, but you've always been scared of things that seemed inhuman or supernatural."

Bull sobered.

"Well, sure," he said. "I never could see fooling around with ghosts and things like that. That stuff gets under my skin. But this is different."

"How?" G-8 challenged.

"Well," Bull suggested, "it looks to me like one of these German pilots does something to attract our pilots' attention."

"Yeah," Nippy said, "like putting a spell on them or something like that."

"The point is," G-8 explained, "I've actually seen this happen to Dupre. He's one of the best flyers in the Allied air force, yet he sat there, staring at the German pilot like a wooden dummy. The German would have cut him into ribbons in another second if I hadn't come along. There's as much sport to this as there is to going out and shooting tame chickens with a shotgun."

"That's what I just said," Nippy muttered. "This pilot must put some sort of spell on his enemies in the air."

G-8 nodded. "That seems perfectly obvious, Nip. Take Dupre and then this young replacement at the 59th. Both of them were apparently oblivious to the fact that there was a plane in the sky. The minute one of the Fokkers appear, the

minds of the pilots seem to go blank." He shook his head savagely. "I wish to heaven that there had been enough left of that pilot's face for me to study."

Bull Martin shrugged.

"Well, maybe next time you'll be a little more careful where you hit these buzzards. "

"I'm afraid I may not have another chance for such a clean, easy shot," G-8 explained.

"Just the same," Nippy chimed in, "I'm willing to go over with you and try to clean house with them, even though Bull is scared."

"What do you mean, scared?" the big fellow demanded. "Who said I was scared of any of those dirty buzzards?"

"Well, " Nippy grinned, "you didn't look as though you liked the idea after G-8 explained that these German pilots seem to have some supernatural power over their victims."

"Well, I don't," Bull admitted. "But that isn't saying that I wouldn't go out looking for them with you two birds if you were crazy enough to take the chance. "

"I think we're going to let well enough alone for the time being, " G-8 announced. "The general says it's up to us. That means that if we're going to do anything about it, we've got to protect ourselves enough so that we don't become victims of the menace ourselves."

"Sounds like a lot of sense to me, " Bull agreed.

Suddenly the telephone blasted out. A high ranking general whose headquarters was in Paris, answered G-8's "Hello." He was the only commander in France from whom the Master Spy took orders.

"The chief of the air corps told me that you're working on this massacre of B Flight," the general said. "Something has come to my attention. It is the story of a young East Indian. It may not have any bearing on this matter, but I know you like to check every possible phase of a situation. He's on his way to you now. His name is Ihsan. If you have time, listen to his story. If not, he can wait until it's more convenient for you."

"Right, sir," G-8 answered. He slammed up the phone.

CHAPTER TEN

Mystery from the Jungle

MINUTES passed. Then a car drove up in front of the end hangar. G-8 stepped to the door, flung it open, and stood there waiting. The car was a regular officer's car. A corporal sat behind the wheel. From the rear tonneau stepped a wiry little man. He was one of those human beings whose age is a question. As G-8 stood there, he found it difficult even to guess whether the fellow was twenty or forty-five. He was dressed in the uniform worn by East Indian troops. His skin was rather dark but his features were very finely chiseled. His eyes and eyebrows were jet black. It was natural to assume that the hair on his head was the same color, but it was impossible to see it because he wore a neatly-wound, snow-white turban.

The car waited, and the East Indian strode with quick steps to where G-8 was standing in the doorway. He saluted with a smart, upward whip of his right hand.

"You're G-8?" he asked in English with only a slight accent. The Master Spy nodded and answered the salute.

"Yes, " he said.

He opened his mouth to go on, but the East Indian spoke first.

"I am Ihsan," he announced. "I believe the general called you to tell you I was coming."

"That's right, " the Master Spy confirmed. "Come in, Ihsan. The general tells me you have a very interesting story."

Ihsan entered, and G-8 closed the door. He motioned the Indian to a chair.

"I'll try not to take up too much of your time," Ihsan said. "Since this story concerns a happening of several years ago, it may be of no value to you. However, I told it to my commanding officer and he considered it worth repeating, so he sent me to the great commanding general. He, in turn, sent me to you."

"Go right ahead," G-8 nodded.

He lighted a cigarette and settled back to listen.

"Back at my home in India," Ihsan began, "I worked in various capacities. When I was much

younger, I was an elephant boy, then later I became a guide. I believe that takes us up to the adventure that I am going to relate to you."

"You seem to have a mighty good education, Ihsan," G-8 observed.

The East Indian nodded.

"Thank you," he said. "I received my education in one of the mission schools in India, and at Cambridge before I entered the war. Many things have happened since the incident years ago, and I had almost forgotten it until recently."

"Go on," G-8 urged.

"You have heard, perhaps, of the Makuu Jungle?" Ihsan asked.

The Master Spy thought for a moment, then slowly shook his head.

"No," he admitted. "I can't say that I have."

"It's one of the wildest unexplored territories of the globe," Ihsan went on as calmly as though he were talking about Piccadilly Circus. "As an elephant boy, it was my good fortune to make many trips into the Makuu Jungle. You see, the natives there carry one single trade with the outside world. That is an herb which these wild natives get out of the jungle. The herb is used as a source of drugs for medicinal purposes."

"To explain a little further, the Makuu Jungle is almost impenetrable except by guides like myself. It extends between Argaton and Hyma. I was not at all loathe to accept a proposition to guide a party of German scientists and explorers into the jungle. At that time, several years before the war began nothing was thought of being connected with a German party. You must understand, please, that I am, above all else, loyal to my people and therefore loyal to the Allies. It is because the Germans are our enemies now that I am telling this story."

HIS account of the story was so deliberate that it was maddening. However, after G-8 had expressed his impatience, he continued at a more rapid pace.

"So, as I say, I accepted this expedition into the Makuu Jungle. There were a number of Germans in the party, but the principals were a small man about my size by the name of Tackim and a large, over-bearing German doctor by the name of Kommer. I have always thought of the latter as one of the most brutal appearing men I have ever met. But in spite of his fearsome

appearance, he had slim, long-fingered hands like those of a girl.

"We had two weeks in the jungle. I do not yet understand quite what they were searching for. However—"

He stopped, for the Master Spy had suddenly jerked bolt upright in his chair. From the north, he heard the steady drone of a Mercedes engine. A Fokker was bearing down on the field.

G-8 barked a sharp command, "Everybody out! They may have bombs."

He raised his voice to a louder tone and yelled to the manservant in the kitchen, "Battle! Get out!"

There was a mad scramble for the open tarmac, where at least they wouldn't be trapped in a bombed building. But by the time they reached the outside, the Mercedes was sputtering. The Fokker pilot had circled the middle of the field, cut his engine, and was landing.

"Hey," Bull boomed, "that bird is having engine trouble. "

G-8 shook his head.

"I'm not so sure," He said. "It sounded to me like he was working his throttle on purpose to give us that impression."

Bull Martin clenched his square jaw. "All I hope is that it's one of these buzzards that's been murdering our pilots. Once he gets down here, I'll squeeze enough information out of him to fill a set of encyclopedia's."

The Fokker was landing. Wheels and skid touched, and the ship rolled straight for the end hangar. There was undeniable skill in that deft handling of the ship. The pilot had made a spot landing so that his roll carried him within a hundred feet of where G-8, Nippy, Bull, Battle and Ihsan were standing.

The Master Spy ran toward the cockpit, his automatic held ready. A helmeted, goggled head appeared over the cockpit padding. Then the pilot began raising himself up out of the seat. Suddenly G-8 stopped stock still and stared at him.

"Good heavens, it's you, *Herr Hauptmann* Gurst," he said in German.

Gurst stared back at the Master Spy. There was no recognition in his face. G-8 laughed.

"I don't wonder that you look at me that way, *Herr Hauptmann*," he said. "You see, the last time

you saw me, I was disguised as *Unter-Leutnant* Engelhart. Of course, now I'm wearing my own uniform and I have removed the make-up from my face."

Gurst's blue eyes popped for a moment.

He gasped, "You mean you are the one who escaped?"

The Master Spy nodded.

Gurst's eyes narrowed and he demanded, "Who are you?"

"Since you happen to be a prisoner here," G-8 retorted, "I may as well tell you. I am known as G-8."

Hauptmann Gurst relaxed a little and nodded slowly. A rather warm smile spread over his handsome face.

"You know," he said, "I rather suspected as much, but naturally I was surprised when I landed here to meet a man who recognized me, yet whom I was sure I had never seen before."

"Naturally you will be questioned," G-8 told him. He smiled. "I may as well begin now. What is the reason for your landing here, *Herr Hauptmann*,"

Gurst shrugged.

"It's very simple," he said. "I was out on patrol and my gasoline ran out. So"—He shrugged again—"there was nothing for me to do but land here at your field."

"I see," G-8 said. He jerked his head to Nippy and Bull. "Take him inside. I'll join you in a minute."

ALREADY half the mechanics and pilots of Le Bourget Fiend had gathered about the Fokker. G-8 motioned to his sergeant mechanic.

"Listen," he said, "find out if there's any gas left in his tank. I think he's lying."

Then he turned and went into the living room. Gurst was seated in a comfortable chair. Bull Martin towered in front of him with fists clenched as he talked to the German in the best German he possessed.

"Listen, you swine," G-8 heard him say, "you're going to tell us all you know or I'll pull you apart, limb from limb."

"Lay off, Bull!" G-8 barked. "I'm taking care of this situation." He smiled reassuringly at Gurst. "We try not to be too brutal about these things."

Now, let me see. You said that your gasoline ran out while you were out on patrol."

"*Jawohl*," Gurst admitted.

"You know," G-8 said, "it didn't sound to me like your motor had run out of gas, but, of course, I may be wrong. We'll know for sure in a moment."

"It might not have been my gasoline," Gurst said. "Perhaps my motor failed for some other reason."

"You know," G-8 said, "when I was a guest at your airdrome. You shot questions at me pretty fast. I tried to answer them as best I could."

Gurst smiled.

"With lies, of course."

From outside on the tarmac came the roar of a Mercedes engine. The whole hangar echoed and shuddered for a moment with the sound. A moment after the engine had died again, G-8's hangar sergeant appeared in the doorway and saluted.

"May I see you, sir?" he asked G-8.

The Master Spy went outside with him.

"Don't let that *Hauptmann* kid you," the sergeant said. "He had enough gasoline to get back to his own side of the lines, and his engine is working perfectly."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Gurst Returns

G-8 GAVE a quick order to the sergeant.

"Have this Fokker ready to go at any moment that I'm ready. If you're sure there's gas enough to take her to Germany, leave that as is. But check everything else to make sure this is no trick."

The Master Spy hurried back into the living room.

"It seems," he snapped, "that we've both lied to each other. You stated that you landed because you had run out of gasoline. My mechanic sergeant tells me that there's plenty of gasoline to carry you back to your base. Moreover, he tells me that there is nothing wrong with your engine."

Herr Hauptmann Gurst smiled calmly.

"Suppose I did lie to you," he said. "I have surrendered as your prisoner. My reasons are my own concern, *nicht wahr?*" G-8 said. "You admit then that you purposely gave yourself up rather than face your fate in Germany?"

Gurst's face clouded.

"If you mean I'm a coward, you're wrong. I have demonstrated my courage in the air many times."

The Master Spy was still glaring at him.

"You may be telling the truth," he said. "but did you ever hear of a country making a hero out of one airman for the effect it would have on the rest of the pilots?"

"Do you mean to insinuate," Gurst demanded, leaning forward as though he were about to leap at G-8's throat, "that I am a fake?"

"I think that's about what you might call it," G-8 flared. "It's been done in other cases. Why shouldn't it be done in yours? You, the great motion picture star, a man who is almost more of a hero to the people of the *Vaterland* than even the Kaiser himself. And now we find that you are only a fake, that you have been practically given these victories with which you are credited."

Gurst acted with lightning speed. He leaped from his chair and let fly a beautiful right to G-8's jaw. The Master Spy staggered back from the blow.

It was the excuse that Bull Martin had been waiting for. The big Battle Ace stepped in with fists flying. His left measured Gurst's finely-chiseled chin. Then he stepped in and let go his right.

Gurst's head snapped back. He went hurtling backward before that blow, landed with a crash in the chair where he had been sitting, and then toppled over backward on the floor.

Strangely enough, the Master Spy was still on his feet. He was laughing at Bull and helping Gurst to his feet.

"*Herr Hauptmann* Gurst," he said, "please accept my apologies."

Gurst stared at him, still angry. The Master Spy continued to laugh.

"It was only a trick," he said. "I only wanted to see how far I could goad you. You've got a beautiful right there, *Herr Hauptmann*. My compliments."

EVERYONE was staring at G-8 as though he had suddenly gone insane. The Master Spy glanced from one blank face to another and laughed all the harder.

"You birds certainly look funny," he said. "Like dying fish. Anyone would think that you had never seen a trick like this pulled."

Again Bull Martin began to plow in for Gurst, and the German threw up his guard. But G-8 pushed back the big football star.

"He's had plenty," he said.

Bull was leering at Gurst. Out of the corner of his mouth he snarled, "G-8, if this buzzard has put some power on you to keep you laughing like that, so help me, I'll kill him. I'll tear him apart."

G-8 stopped laughing and confronted Bull.

"Gurst hasn't done a thing," he said, "except to prove that he's the genuine article."

In German, Gurst cut in angrily, "If you are saying insults in English, you will please say them so I can understand."

G-8 hastened to explain, "We have no insults for you *Herr Hauptmann* Gurst. Not one. You've done yourself proud so far."

"But I do not understand."

"You will," G-8 said. "Listen—I wanted to prove to myself for certain that you were not a fake ace. You've got a good reputation as an air fighter, but I had to make sure. The fact that you'd fight to protect your name is enough for me. There's nothing yellow about you—at least in that respect." G-8 wasn't laughing now. "But this little act that we've just put on convinces me that my hunch is correct about you," he said.

"I do not know what you are talking about," Gurst said.

"Here are the facts so far as I have them worked out," the Master Spy explained. "You did not come here to give yourself up as a prisoner because you were afraid to fight in the air. You are here because you fear something much more than death."

The German flyer just stared at him.

"We shall see about it," G-8 said. He raised his voice. "Battle! Bring in the make-up kit at once. We've got a rush job to do."

Battle's voice came ringing back, "Yes, sir. On the fire, sir."

A moment later, he appeared with the make-up kit. Gurst watched in silence. G-8 jerked his head to Nippy.

"Go out into the hangar, Nip, and get me a pair of mechanic's overalls, clean ones, if possible, and I want shoes and everything else that goes with them."

G-8 settled into the chair usually used for make-up. Under his breath he said to Battle, "Make me look exactly like Gurst."

Battle nodded and went to work. Gurst was watching him like a hawk. Bull was standing over Gurst, ready to bash in his face at the slightest sign of an attempt to escape.

Nippy returned with the overalls and shoes and socks.

"Take them over to *Herr Hauptmann* Gurst," G-8 ordered. "*Herr Hauptmann*, you will put them on. Do you understand? Take off your own uniform and put on these overalls."

Gurst nodded.

"It will be a pleasure," he said. "In these I will not be noticed so easily if I should have a chance of escape."

"You'll escape over my dead body," Bull growled.

"Don't worry," G-8 said. "Gurst wouldn't escape for a million dollars. He thinks too much of that good-looking face of his to go back to Germany."

"What," demanded Bull, "do you mean by that, Chief?"

"I'll tell you all later," G-8 promised. "Go ahead, Battle. Work your head off. I've got to get going. We haven't any more time to lose."

BATTLE hurried on with his make-up. He stood so that his back shielded G-8's face from Gurst's eyes. From time to time, the master of the make-up kit turned and glanced at the face of the German movie star for reference.

G-8 gave another order, "Ihsan, you can go on with your story."

The East Indian bowed before G-8 then glanced furtively toward *Herr Hauptmann* Gurst.

"Perhaps it would be best if I left out the names of the two Germans?"

"Perhaps you're right," G-8 admitted. "Call them the little one and the big one and I'll know what you mean."

"Very well," Ihsan continued. "Where was I? Oh, yes. To be sure, this expedition was most dangerous. I had been in the Makuu Jungle many times with a trading party, but I could see as soon as we came to the first village that the natives did not like the sight of these men who had such white skin.

"We camped there the first night and nothing happened, but I was aware that a runner or two had gone on ahead to warn the other native savage tribes. On the following day, I became certain that our entourage was being followed. I had no way of proving this. It was merely a feeling as one senses in the darkest night that one is being followed."

G-8 nodded. "I know what you mean. I've had that feeling myself. Go on."

"I believe I said we had been two weeks in the jungle when it happened. I was awakened by a scream, followed by silence. Instantly, our whole camp was aroused. I was sure that the cry had come from one of the men. It was the smaller of the two, I thought. We made a search of the camp and found that he had disappeared.

"I knew it would be impossible to follow him that night, as it was very dark. The natives of the Makuu Jungle are like cats. We had no natives in our party. If we had had, they probably would not have guided us in our search. But I assured the larger man of the party—the doctor—that we must find his friend as soon as possible or circumstances of the most dire nature would befall him.

"We started out at dawn and tried to follow the trail of the abductors. But when we came to a lake, we lost the trail. They were hours ahead of us, and we had no boats. It was necessary to go around the lake and continue. We inquired at native villages when we came to them. Of course, they had heard nothing of the smaller man.

"Almost a week passed, sir, and then we heard a moaning cry in the jungle to the east. We hurried in that direction and there we found the smaller man. He was tortured beyond recognition. He—"

Battle stepped back.

"Begging your pardon, sir," he said, "but I think you'll pass all right except for the eyes."

HE TURNED and bent over *Hauptmann* Gurst, who had taken off his uniform and boots

and had dressed in the overalls and hobnail shoes that Nippy had brought.

"Blue," Battle said.

He rummaged in his big make-up kit and came out with a small bottle.

"A most lovely shade of blue, too. Only a touch, sir, will turn your eyes from steel gray to blue."

G-8 leaned farther back in the chair. The air grew tense. Even Ihsan did not go on. Battle worked for a moment and then straightened. He turned again to glance at the blue of Gurst's eyes and back to G-8's eyes. He nodded, smiling.

"Quite a good likeness," he said. "There you are, sir. Done, except for the uniform. "

G-8 got up from his chair and turned to face Gurst. The German movie star almost lost his lower jaw. He stared at G-8 as though he were seeing a ghost.

"*Himmelkreuzdonnerwetter!*" he spat. "What goes on? You are—*Gott im Himmel!* You look exactly like me. Exactly!"

G-8 smiled. He was stripping off his Yank uniform and putting on the *Hauptmann's* clothing.

"I hope there is no mistake this time," G-8 said. He was staring hard at Gurst, studying him as he added, "You see, I am going back in your plane before too much time has elapsed. I will fly back to your airdrome and take your place in command of your *Staffel*."

Gurst caught his breath.

"*Himmel*, you can't!" he cried.

"On the contrary," G-8 said, "I expect to." He jerked his head toward the outside. "Nippy, will you tell the sergeant to start the Fokker? I must be shoving off so that I'll get back before the German officers who are waiting for you will suspect something from my being away longer than a tank of gasoline would permit."

Gurst swallowed, and his blue eyes were bulging.

"Are you a mind reader also?"

Now G-8 laughed.

"No," he said, "but from what you have just said, I judge I'm a fairly close guesser. And this is my guess as to why you have come here to give yourself up for the duration of the war."

The room grew tense. It seemed that no one, not even Nippy Weston, had begun to guess what G-8 was going to say.

"*Herr Hauptmann* Gurst, I know that you are not a coward. But as I said once before, there is one thing that you value more even than your life. Your good looks mean more to you than anything else."

Gurst's face was white and he was staring in frank amazement. The others in the room were amazed, too, for G-8 was speaking now in the rich, mellow voice of Gurst himself. He had gradually worked into an imitation of Gurst's voice while he talked.

"It is apparent," G-8 went on, "that something most unpleasant has happened to your pilots. They are, let us say, being disfigured in some weird way. It is your turn now to suffer this disfigurement for the *Vaterland*. But you have fled from it, knowing that it will mean the end of your acting career. So I am going to take your place."

G-8 turned to Ihsan.

"I'm sorry I haven't time to listen to more of your story now. When I come back, perhaps you'll tell me the rest of it."

"I will be honored," Ihsan bowed.

The Mercedes engine of Gurst's Fokker roared. With a wave of his hand, G-8 strode out onto the tarmac and climbed into the cockpit.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Officers in Waiting

IT WAS very evident to the Master Spy as he hurled that Fokker toward Gurst's airdrome that he was deliberately flying into one of the most dangerous adventures of his active career. Apparently, something was happening to German pilots that made even courageous men like Gurst shudder.

He turned purposely away from a direct course to Gurst's airdrome. It might cause suspicion if Gurst's plane should come romping in from the direction of Le Bourget Field.

From what Gurst had said, G-8 was convinced that his pilots had gone out to undergo some ordeal that probably included disfigurement of their faces.

He flew for almost five minutes directly over the Allied lines, then turned back and headed for Gurst's airdrome, flying a wide arc. He hoped

desperately that Gurst's pilots would already be back at the airdrome so that he could see them and get an idea what was going on.

Another minute dragged by, and another. Presently, he could see Gurst's airdrome ahead and a little to the west. He was certain that by now whoever was waiting for Gurst could see him, but he took his time, circling above the drome leisurely. When he was ready, he cut his throttle and stuck the nose down into a glide.

As he had circled the field, he had seen a big staff car leaving the drome. Now, as he landed, it turned around and came back. By the time G-8 had taxied up to the deadline before the little headquarters office, the car had already stopped there. Two big, important-looking German officers got out. The Master Spy sat in his cockpit for a moment, letting the motor idle. Then, as mechanics came running out to meet him, he cut the switch. Leisurely, he climbed out.

The two officers were almost upon him. One was an *Oberst*, a German colonel, and the other was a major. G-8 saluted them smartly. Both were glaring at him.

The Master Spy stood tense, waiting for the first words, the first acknowledgment of recognition. Of course, Battle usually did an excellent job at make-up, but there was always the chance of some flaw that might give away the fact that G-8 was only an impersonator of *Herr Hauptmann Gurst*.

IT WAS in reality only a matter of seconds before the colonel spoke, but that short space of time seemed like years of terrible suspense to the Master Spy.

The colonel exploded in an oath.

Then he stopped. The Master Spy grew still more tense. Could it be that the man had detected something in his make-up that was not exactly like *Herr Hauptmann Gurst*?

After a long pause, the colonel let go again. "You *Dummkopf*, why have you kept us waiting?"

G-8 was about to open his mouth to begin the explanation he had made up on his way over when the major barked, "*Herr Hauptmann Gurst*, you have done the unpardonable."

G-8 was standing rigid. Mechanics had already taken charge of his Fokker and were rolling it toward the hangar. Other mechanics were standing not far away.

The colonel eyed them for a moment. Then, apparently realizing that it was not good form to bawl an officer out in front of his own men, he boomed, "We go into headquarters office at once. *Macht schnell*."

G-8 felt relieved as he quickly obeyed. He strode into the little headquarters shack ahead of the two officers. The major who was last to enter, slammed the door shut.

G-8 stood stiffly at attention at the end of Gurst's desk. The major remained with his back to the door as if to prevent any attempt at escape by the man they took to be *Herr Hauptmann Gurst*.

The colonel's eyes were fairly blazing.

"Now," he snorted, "we are alone. We will have this out. *Herr Hauptmann Gurst*, you have not yet spoken a word."

G-8 started to speak, but the colonel roared, "*Halt's Maul!* The *Herr Oberst* has already stated that what you have done is unpardonable. You saw us, two superior officers, arrive at the field and you knew why we had come, but you deliberately ran to your plane and took off."

G-8's mind was working like mad. He wondered if he did know exactly why these two men had come. His guess was that they had come to escort him to suffer the same fate, the same possible disfigurement that was being wrought upon *Hauptmann Gurst's* pilots.

G-8 had stared about the airdrome in vain for a sign of those pilots, but if they had returned, they certainly were not in evidence. He decided not to try to explain until he was asked to.

The colonel was raving, "Do you know what penalty we could make you suffer for what you've done? You could be sent to Eisenhower Prison for the rest of your life."

Both the *Oberst* and the major wore full dress uniforms. The *Oberst* had his gloves tucked into his belt. For a moment, it looked as though he were going to draw them out and slap G-8 across the face. Then he seemed to get control of himself and think better of it.

The *Oberst* was bellowing with rage now, "Why did you leave just when we arrived? I am sure you saw us."

For the first time G-8 had a chance to explain.

"*Herr Oberst*," he bowed, "and," with a second bow, "*Herr Major*. I will try to explain with apologies."

He was speaking now in the deep, rich voice of Gurst.

"Perhaps you may not realize what I am about to do means to me. When the war ends—and, we hope, victorious for the *Vaterland*—I want to go back to my profession as an actor. As you may know, I have tried to put off this moment of leaving the field as long as possible, for, as you must realize, to go through this ordeal with the possible disfigurement means definitely the end of my career."

The colonel's face turned purple as G-8 uttered those last few words.

"How do you know what is to happen to you?" he roared. "Do you know where you are to be taken?"

For once, the Master Spy could speak the truth.

He shook his head and answered, "*Nein, Herr Oberst.*"

"Then how," the colonel demanded, "do you know what will be done to you? How do you know about the disfigurement? No word of it was given out."

G-8 hesitated, his brain working like mad.

"As you know, *Herr Oberst*," he said, "there are always rumors in the army. A little news leaks out here or there and it is passed from man to man like wildfire."

"You have no right," the *Oberst* roared, "even to suspect what is to come. It is your duty to trust the *Vaterland* to do what is best for the German people."

FOR a moment, G-8 stood there, stunned by this last blow. Could it be possible that the German pilots—even their commander, like *Herr Hauptmann* Gurst—wouldn't know what was to be done with them when they were taken away? It seemed too incredible for an American to understand and yet it was evidently true.

G-8 bowed stiffly.

"*Bitte, Herr Oberst*," he said, "my deepest apologies. Nevertheless, I am afraid I am human—perhaps too much so. For that reason, I decided that I would like very much to make one more flight alone in my normal condition before your arrival."

"But you kept us waiting," the major barked from the door. "That is unforgivable. "

"Perhaps," the colonel cut in with a sneer, "you think because you are considered the greatest male motion picture star in all Germany that you have certain rights above your army rank. Let me assure you, *Herr Hauptmann*, that that is not so. Regardless of what you were before the war, you can expect no more consideration now than any other *Hauptmann*. It is your duty to wait upon us, to cause us as little inconvenience as possible. But instead you leaped into your plane as soon as you saw us coming and flew away.

"I must admit frankly that the *Herr Major* and I believed that you were running away from your duty to your *Vaterland* and were going to the other side of the lines to give yourself up so that you would not have to go through with the ordeal that your pilots have undergone."

The colonel's eyes narrowed as he turned to G-8.

"I am not so sure yet that you are telling the truth."

G-8 remained rigid and silent throughout the colonel's talk.

From his position at the door, the major said, "If you were just going to make a last flight, *Herr Hauptmann*, why were you gone so long? We checked with the mechanics and they told us just before your return that your gasoline should have run out by then."

"*Jawohl*," the colonel boomed, "yet you had no difficulty in returning to this field. How do you explain the fact that your gasoline did not run out?"

"I believe if you will have the mechanics examine my gasoline supply," G-8 said, "you will find that my tank is practically empty. It so happened that I had a little ignition trouble while I was flying to the east of this field. I was forced to land in a pasture. It took me some time to make the necessary repairs, but I managed to get my engine going again and came back here."

Oberst glared at him menacingly.

"Very well," he said. "We shall check your story." He jerked his head toward the door. "Come. We go to your plane and you shall show us what repairs you made. "

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Death in the Forest

THE Master Spy's heart was pounding double time. Through his brain raced a jumble of thoughts. He had never looked under the cowl of that engine, but fortunately, he knew a Mercedes engine quite well, knew the timing arrangement and the electrical wiring. He knew that the wiring and the timing of a Mercedes ignition system was quite complicated. As he led the two officers out on the tarmac toward where the mechanics had taken the Fokker, he wondered whether the two men at his side knew a great deal about motors. If they didn't call in the mechanics for advice, he might have a chance.

He reached the nose of the plane, and G-8 began to remove the small piece of metal cowl that covered part of the engine.

"*Eine Minute*," the major said. "Let us call one of the mechanics to do the dirty work, *Herr Hauptmann*."

But G-8 shook his head.

"It won't be necessary," he said. "It will take only a moment."

Working quickly, he removed the cowl in record time. Out of the tail of his eye, he had seen a couple of mechanics working on a plane over near the machine shop. It so happened that this was the same hangar from which he had stolen a Fokker. Because he didn't want the mechanics to hear, G-8 spoke in a low voice.

"You see, while I was flying, my motor began to miss badly. I knew I would have to land. As a matter of fact, the motor had stopped completely by the time I reached the ground. You see here—" He removed the distributor head. Both the officers were standing on tip-toe so they could see the motor assembly. G-8 pulled one of the members out of the distributor.

"Here's a removable carbon segment," he said. "It's usually held in with a spring, but apparently this spring was too weak. After considerable trouble, I found the segment where it had dropped out lying in the bottom of the distributor. You see, it had gotten loose and caused my engine to skip. Sometimes it would make contact and sometimes it wouldn't. Then, finally, it dropped out and my motor stopped. That was when I was absolutely forced to land."

His keen eyes shifted quickly from one face to another. The colonel seemed to take him at face value.

"I can see how that might be possible," he admitted.

"*Jawohl*," the major agreed.

Quickly, G-8 put the distributor back together and slipped the cowl into place. He moved slowly toward the entrance of the hangar. He must get away from those two mechanics as soon as possible. They would know, if questioned, that it was impossible for that removable carbon segment to fall out unless it broke.

When they reached the entrance to the hangar, G-8 offered, "I shall be honored to fly you to the pasture where I landed my plane. I believe the farmer who watched me fix it will be glad to verify my statement."

It was a desperate risk, but G-8's manner was so confident that the two German officers took him at his word.

"That will not be necessary," the colonel said. He turned to the major. "I believe we have delayed long enough, *nicht wahr*? It is time we were getting on with *Herr Hauptmann* Gurst as our traveling companion."

They ushered G-8 into the staff car. The Master Spy sat between them on the back seat. The driver shut the door after them, climbed in behind the wheel, and drove off.

UP to now, everything had been horseplay by comparison, to the Master Spy. He was on his way to the object of his trip. He thrilled at being taken to the headquarters of this new menace to the Allied air force. He had been working diligently to solve that problem, but he was little closer to the solution than he had been at the beginning. However, that would soon be remedied.

Turning to the major, he said, "I suppose that since I am now accompanying you willingly, it would be almost an act of treason to ask any questions about where I am being taken and what is going to happen."

"I believe treason would be a proper term for that," the other said grimly.

The colonel eyed G-8 coldly.

"Have you not been told already, *Herr Hauptmann* Gurst, that nothing is to be said of

this? I believe you were giving those orders to deliver to your pilots."

G-8 caught on instantly.

"*Jawohl*," he answered, "and naturally I delivered those orders. But I am their commanding officer. It doesn't seem unreasonable to me that I should be in on the secret, since I have already said that I am ready to go through with the ordeal, whatever it is."

"Remember this," the colonel reminded. "Whatever takes place is all for the welfare of the *Vaterland*. Our success in the war depends upon the success of this"—He glanced at the Major—"shall I say, crusade?"

"*Jawohl*," the major nodded. "Crusade. An excellent word." Looking at G-8, he went on, "It is enough to tell you that all those who aid the *Vaterland* in this way will be decorated with the highest medal of honor that it is possible to bestow."

All during this conversation G-8 had been trying to ferret out the menace that lay behind this secrecy, but he was not losing track of the territory through which they were traveling. It was still clear daylight. They had passed through one small town and were now approaching another. In a moment, they would be whisking through the main streets of that village and on out into the country again.

They turned left and right, but he knew that they were heading generally northeast. Now and then, as they topped ridges, he could see some distance ahead. Beyond, the country rose to a higher level, became more mountainous. The hills and mountains were covered with a thick growth of tall trees. This country would afford a good hiding place for something as secret as this new menace appeared to be.

While the minutes dragged by, they rode in silence. Finally the car began winding up through a kind of mountain pass. Then the road leveled off.

At all times, the trees overhung the narrow highway. Even though the sun was still up, it was nearly dark in the woods. Almost before G-8 realized it, the car was slowing.

He saw before them a strange-looking building. It had evidently been constructed recently. The reinforced concrete side walls rose to a height of about thirty feet. There they leveled off to a flat roof. All of these things G-8 could see from the interior of the car.

The car came to a stop. The driver threw open the door and stood rigidly at attention as he waited for them to get out. The major alighted first. He turned and nodded to G-8.

"Now you will come," he said.

It was apparent that these two German officers were trying to make it look as though G-8 were not under guard, but the Master Spy realized that he was under as thorough surveillance as though he were actually a prisoner of war. He carried no visible arms, since Gurst's uniform had had no holster attached to the belt.

G-8 stepped out, and the colonel followed him. As he stood there, the Master Spy took another quick, searching look at the building. It was at least a hundred feet wide across the front. He had seen, as they approached from the side, that it was more than two hundred feet long.

Tall tree branches overhung most of the flat roof except for a space down the center where a wireless aerial was stretched. It was a wide aerial, extending perhaps ten feet or more above the roof, and was held by strange-looking insulated towers.

Strangely, the building had no windows—at least, G-8 hadn't seen any in the front and the one side. He had noticed a small opening down near the lower left hand corner of the building that he decided might be a ventilator for a basement.

"We go now," the major was saying.

G-8 marched between the two officers to the front door. That was the only opening he had seen in the entire structure aside from the ventilator. They paused before the door, and he saw a small panel in it open. A pair of eyes looked out at them for a moment; then the panel was slid back into place and the door opened. Two guards came out, each carrying a Luger in his hand. They nodded to the colonel and the major.

"You are late," one of them said.

There seemed to be no salutes, no military formality. These guards were tough looking men, skilled in their work, as was demonstrated when they ran their hands swiftly over G-8's uniform.

"We could not help our tardiness," the colonel said.

This high German officer actually seemed to be apologizing to two Germans who, from their uniforms, appeared to be mere privates in the German army.

The colonel and the major stepped a pace away from G-8, and the guards took their positions, one on either side of him.

"March," one guard ordered.

With that, they strode through the doorway.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Enlistment in Hell

G-8 blinked his eyes to accustom his sight to the darkness as quickly as possible, but the place he had entered was pitch black.

His ears were tuned to catch the slightest sound. He heard a rasping, then a clanking behind him. He knew that not only had a great lock been slammed to in the door, but a heavy iron bar had been slid into place as well.

Suddenly an almost blinding light appeared ahead of him. Vise-like hands seized his arms and pushed him ahead, too quickly for him to see anything in the outer room that he had first entered. Another door boomed shut behind him and he found himself in a second room. He was standing before a desk, with a guard on either side of him.

Behind the desk was a German with flat ears and cruel but far from unintelligent face. He had massive shoulders, powerful arms and big stubby fingers. Between the fingers of the right hand, he held a bulky-looking pen poised over a paper printed with German words and many blanks.

The room itself was small and had no windows. The floor was either of stone or reinforced concrete. The walls and ceiling were plastered. There was a light burning in the center of the ceiling.

NOW G-8 realized that the cruel-looking man behind the desk wore a white coat not unlike that of a hospital attendant. He made the Master Spy think of a powerfully-built guard in an insane asylum.

And, what was stranger still, was the fact that the man hadn't yet looked at him. His eyes were focused on that sheet of paper before him. Without looking up, he asked in guttural German, "You are *Herr Hauptmann* Gurst?"

G-8 nodded and answered, "*Jawohl*."

The German nodded to a chair at the side of the desk.

"Seat yourself," he ordered.

G-8 obeyed. All this time, one of the guards was standing at his side and the other directly behind his chair.

"Take off your coat and your shirt."

The Master Spy stripped to the waist. From a drawer, the powerful German produced a stethoscope. Slowly, methodically, he went over the Master Spy, listened to his heart beats, his breathing. He made notes on the printed form as though G-8 were being examined for a life insurance policy. But the Master Spy knew that this examination was for something far more sinister.

When all those details were set down, the German wrapped an inflatable bandage around his arm above the elbow and proceeded to take his blood pressure. Except for a short command now and then from the white-coated German, not a word was spoken.

Finally, the German appeared to be finished. He shoved the blank toward G-8 and indicated a line at the bottom with a stubby finger.

"Sign," he commanded.

As the Master Spy signed the name of *Herr Hauptmann* Gurst on the bottom of that sheet, he realized that he was literally signing away his right to live, at least as a normal human being.

HE had just finished writing when the light in the ceiling began to flicker. It went on and off rapidly. At first, G-8 thought that the light bulb was about to burn out; then he realized that it was a signal.

The guard behind him guttured, "The new contingent has arrived from Maton."

Instantly, the Master Spy was sure what he meant. He knew that Maton was over on the Belgian front and that the Germans had an airdrome at the edge of that town.

"Let them wait," the German in the white coat boomed. "They will be brought in one at a time as usual."

He nodded to G-8 and pushed his coat and shirt across the desk toward him. The Master Spy began to put them on again slowly.

Then, for the first time, the German in the white coat appeared human. With eyes focused

on G-8, he said, "You should do very well, *Herr Hauptmann*. You are not nervous like most of them."

G-8 didn't answer. He put on the rest of his clothes and remained standing. The German jerked his head toward a door at the other side of the room. The guards took their positions on either side of G-8 and marched him toward the door.

Beyond that door, the Master Spy found himself in a short corridor. It had only two openings, the door through which he had just passed and a stairway directly ahead that evidently led down into the basement. There was a light above those stairs, but it grew quite dark as G-8 descended, accompanied by the guards. At the bottom was a corridor lighted only by the bulb above the stairs. In the dimness, G-8 made out a door on either side of the hallway. When they came to the end of the corridor, he saw that it was blocked by another door of steel. There was a great key in the lock. One of the guards stepped ahead of the Master Spy and turned the key. Then he stepped back, and his cruel eyes fell on G-8.

"Get ready to go in," he said.

The Master Spy was sure that he wasn't going to be trusted to enter solely on his own power, for the larger guard had taken a position behind him.

"Now," the smaller guard said.

He swung back the heavy door. G-8 was ready. He took a step forward. Suddenly he was propelled violently headfirst through the doorway. A fleeting figure lunged at him out of the dark cavern beyond. G-8 saw enough of him to realize that he was a German pilot making a wild dash for liberty. His eyes were dilated in terror and his face was a ghastly white. The Master Spy stumbled as the pilot rushed by him.

He heard the big guard yell, "Get back!"

The German, petrified with fear, cried, "No, no! I won't go through with it. You're not going to keep me in there! I'll die first!"

Another German pilot came tearing past G-8. There was a fight taking place behind him. In all this commotion, the Master Spy's feet seemed to be tangled with other legs. He was going down in the darkness.

A heavy boot trod on his neck. These men inside the dark room were panic stricken. They

were making a break for it. He heard the bark of an automatic echoing again and again.

G-8 struggled to his feet. Everything was chaos. Men were screaming like lunatics. The Luger barked again.

The Master Spy was half up when a heavy body fell on him, then another. He was crushed to the floor again. He chose to lie there. No use trying to fight in this dark place.

It was apparent that these German pilots making a break for freedom weren't doing so well. They were dropping in their tracks. He could tell that from the fact that the body that fell on him quivered a little and then lay still, apparently dead. It was like a ghastly nightmare.

He heard the big guard bellow, "Any more of you swine who want to die, come out!"

A German lad back in the dark pit was sobbing wildly with fear. G-8 lay still. The load on his back grew lighter. A moment later, he heard a limp body fall with a thud ahead of him. Then another form was picked off his back and hurled to the chamber, apparently by the guards.

Next, G-8 felt his legs being picked up. He was twisted around in a grotesque position. The guards didn't seem to be worrying much about whether he was alive or dead. Their only concern was to get him out of the way so they could close the door. A second later, he heard the door boom shut.

The Master Spy continued to lie there in his cramped position. He wasn't harmed except that the wind had been knocked out of him by the dead bodies falling on top of him.

He heard the German lad stop crying to breathe a prayer, "*Gott in Himmel*, help us." Then he went on sobbing.

Aside from that, G-8 could hear no other sound except one. That was a strange hissing that seemed to come from some distance away.

Slowly, cautiously, the Master Spy picked himself up.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The Hiss of Death

AT first, it seemed almost jet black inside that horror chamber, but gradually G-8 became aware that some light was filtering in. He stood still so that his eyes would become accustomed to it. From where he stood, he could study the situation as well as from any other point.

In a moment, he shifted his position, bumped against someone standing very close to him. That man uttered a startled cry and leaped away.

The young German lad at the other end of the room continued to whimper.

G-8 shifted his position again. He realized now what it was that made him move almost constantly. There was a wet, sticky substance on the floor. From the smell, he could tell that it was fresh blood that had flowed from the bodies of the dead German pilots who had tried to escape. The guards hadn't even bothered to remove the bodies, but had hurled them back in the dark hole to lie there, heaven only knew how long.

G-8 got out of that pool of blood and found that he was in another one. Gradually, as his eyes became more accustomed to the darkness, he could make out certain things about the room.

Always his ears were tuned to that constant hissing sound. He tried to figure out where it might be coming from. He thought it was directly in front of him. But it was not coming from this particular room.

Now he could make out faces and figures, although not clearly. They were merely light and dark shadows in the dimness. So far as he could tell, the room was about twenty feet long and fifteen feet wide. The ceiling seemed to rise about ten or twelve feet.

He couldn't be sure of the exact size of the room, but he was certain of one thing. The wall on one side didn't go up all the way to the ceiling. It rose about seven feet from the floor. From there to the ceiling, the space was filled in with iron bars set vertically about six inches apart.

He realized that very small amount of light came through those bars. And also through that grille work of bars came the hissing sound. That sound was not a steady hiss, but seemed more like a hundred angry cats hissing at each other. The whole effect was nerve-wrecking.

Another German pilot broke down and began to cry; then a guttural voice at the very corner of the room muttered, "*Halt's Maul!* Anyone would

think we were going to die to hear your childish sniveling."

There, G-8 decided, was a German pilot who might give him some information. Gradually he groped his way around the walls of the room.

HE had almost made his way through the trembling, shivering pilots to the one fellow with bravado when there came a clanking sound. Then a scream rent the air. There were other cries, a babble of voices, then another clank and a bang. Half a dozen of the men were sobbing with fear now. G-8 guessed there must be a dozen men waiting in this room, besides the dead bodies on the floor.

The Master Spy stopped and tried to figure where that clanking and banging sound originated. It had seemed to come from somewhere near the door, yet he was certain that the door hadn't opened. Nevertheless, the sound had come as though an iron door had clanged open and shut again. The screaming had come from that quarter, too.

Again the German who was not afraid barked, "Stop your wailing, you yellow swine! Why don't you be like me?—*Himmelkreuzdonnerwetter*, you can only die once—and we are not going to die."

"But it may be worse than death," another said. "Perhaps we would be better off dead than to suffer the fate that is coming to us."

"How do you know what is coming to you?" the boastful German demanded.

G-8 was beside him now. He saw the lighter shadow that was the German's face close to him.

In a low voice, the Master Spy said, "I have just arrived. Permit me to introduce myself. I am *Herr Hauptmann Gurst*."

"*Herr Hauptmann Gurst*?" the man repeated. "You mean of the motion pictures?"

"*Jawohl*," G-8 said.

"*Donnerwetter*," the German ventured. "It looks like you've got more to lose than the rest of us."

"That's what I'm wondering," the Master Spy admitted. "Do you know what's waiting for us?"

The other laughed coarsely.

"Well, from what I hear, it won't make you look any prettier."

"What is it?" G-8 persisted.

He saw the white blotch that was the man's face shake in a negative gesture.

"I don't know," he said. "I have only heard some talk. But there is one thing I do know. No one who has undergone the ordeal has ever been seen again."

"It must be some sort of a surgical operation," G-8 guessed.

"*Jawohl*," the other agreed. "That is what I thought because of the man in the white coat who gave me a physical examination."

"What was that clanking sound?" G-8 asked.

"Whoever put in this floor had a pretty cute idea," the German said. He tapped the floor with his toe. "Hear that?" he asked. "The floor is made of metal. As nearly as I can judge, it seems to consist of a series of steel trap doors very neatly joined together. When it's time for the next man to leave here, they'll spring one of the trap doors and the man standing on it will drop through. That's what makes the clanking sound."

"That's a neat trick," G-8 agreed. "You never know when your number's up."

"That's it. Did you hear that guy scream as he went down? The men in here are scared to death." He lowered his voice to a whisper. "I'm scared myself. But I'm sure of one thing. There wouldn't be any object in the Kaiser bringing all the best pilots in the German air force here just to kill them."

"No, of course not," G-8 agreed.

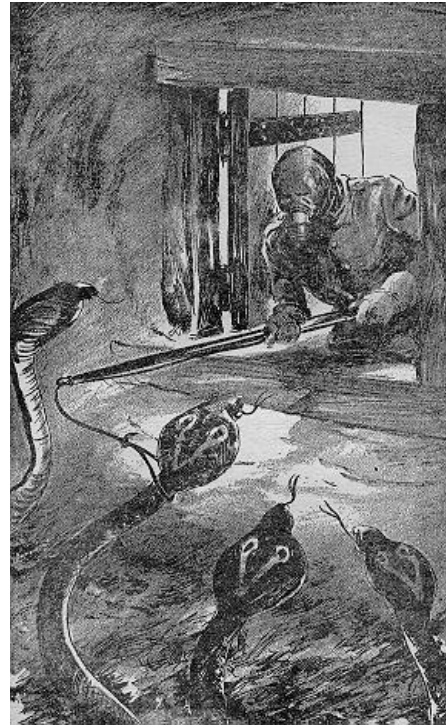
"I heard it rumored that after we leave here, we'll be able to shoot down all the enemy planes we like as easily as picking tame pigeons off the ridge of a house."

"That ought to be something," G-8 admitted. "How fast do they take us?"

"You mean how often does somebody drop through a trap door?"

"*Jawohl*."

"I'd say about once an hour, maybe a little sooner."



MINUTES passed, then they heard the clank of boots far away beyond the steel door. The German beside G-8 spoke in a louder voice.

"You men had better get hold of yourselves. Don't try to make a break for it when that door opens this time. You saw what happened to the others. You might better go through with this than be killed. That's my advice."

They heard the key turn in the lock. There was a long pause; then the door was suddenly swung back. Another German pilot catapulted into the chamber, and the door clanged shut on him. In the dim light, G-8 saw him pitch headlong as he stumbled over a dead body.

Suddenly he cried out, "Blood! I've fallen into a whole pool of it. What are these men doing on the floor?"

The man beside G-8 spoke up again.

"They're dead. They tried to escape when the last man was shoved in. Get up and hang on to yourself. Crying isn't going to do any good."

The new arrival picked himself up off the floor.

G-8 nodded toward the seven-foot wall and the bars above it.

"What makes that hissing sound over there?" he asked.

"I'm not sure," the big German admitted, "but I think it's snakes—big ones."

"Snakes?" G-8 repeated.

"*Jawohl*. What little light we get comes from there."

"I can see that."

"I pulled myself over a while ago and looked in. It's not a very pleasant sight. Here, I'll give you a boost so you can see. Grab hold of the bars."

The German bent down and formed a stirrup with his hands for G-8's foot. The Master Spy took hold of the bars at the top of the wall and pulled himself up so he could see over.

The den beyond was much larger than the room where he was, and somewhat brighter. A wall of jagged rock extended on from the back wall of the human prison, apparently to the outer wall of the building. There was a long, cavern-like chute about two feet square beyond. In that was a frame with a screen over it.

G-8 lowered his eyes to the floor of the den. There was a mass of huge, wriggling bodies there. He couldn't make them out very well, but as he looked down, a strange feeling came over him—a rather ghastly feeling that he couldn't describe. It was as though he were not quite in possession of all his faculties.

The German was lowering him, and G-8 felt loathe to lose sight of those huge, wriggling bodies.

"It isn't good to look at them," the German was saying.

"No," the Master Spy admitted. "It gives you a queer feeling."

He realized that, now that he wasn't looking at the snakes, he no longer had that queer feeling.

Suddenly the German tensed and hissed, "Listen!"

Beyond the bars, they heard a door open. A voice babbled in a strange tongue. The sound of the hissing increased almost to a roar.

"Do you know what is going on over there?" G-8 whispered.

The German shook his head slowly from side to side.

"No," he said. "Do you want to take a look?"

G-8 nodded.

As the big fellow hoisted him up, he warned, "Don't look at the snakes. Just look at the door."

Along the right wall of the den, G-8 saw a door open. More light sprayed in through that opening. The door was about three feet square. A strangely-garbed figure was leaning in through it. Over his face and head he wore a helmet-like affair not unlike a gas mask. But instead of the large goggles of a gas mask, his headgear had beady little eyes. They were transparent and seemed little larger than a marble.

The queer-looking figure jabbed in a pole with a loop of rope on the end of it. Expertly, he threw the loop over the head of one of the snakes, made the loop taut, and dragged the huge, wriggling body out. Then the door slammed shut, and the den became dark again.

G-8 kept his gaze away from the snakes. He looked at the ventilator at the other end of the jagged back wall.

The German lowered him again and asked, "What are they doing in there?"

"They just took one of the snakes out," G-8 told him.

"That," the German nodded, "is what I guessed."

The Master Spy's mind was reeling.

"You know," he said, "if you could get through these bars, there might be a chance of working your way along so you could escape through the ventilator."

"That's what one of the other boys had in mind," the German told him. "Look there at the other end of the wall. He's got the three bars loose. You can just pick them out. He was standing next to me, trying to work up nerve enough to carry out his plan. It's about a hundred to one chance that you'll fall in the den of snakes, you know."

"I imagine so," G-8 said. "But what happened to the fellow?"

"He got ready to make a jump for the wall, but just then the steel trap door that he was standing on dropped and he went down with it. No one else here has had nerve enough to try to escape that way."

Suddenly that clanking sound came again. A trap door opened and snapped back into place again over near the other end of the room.

"I guess nobody's number was rung up then," the German said.

"You mean no one was standing on that door?"

"I don't think so. Perhaps one of the bodies is lying across it and won't fall through. But they will try another one right away. Wait and see."

Then the Master Spy, in spite of his self-control, started violently. Directly in front of him and below, there was a clanking sound, and the German pilot to whom he had been talking vanished through the floor.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Den of the Lost Ones

AS the steel trap door directly in front and below G-8 snapped shut again, he sensed a tense sigh about the room. The German pilots were given a breathing spell for a time. It would be an hour before another trap door would spring open, drop the man standing upon it, and then slam shut once more.

The pilot close behind G-8 uttered the first words.

"Your friend is gone now. You seem very brave about it all."

The voice was vibrant with fear, but brave, too, as if the speaker were fighting to control his real feeling.

G-8 shrugged his athletic shoulders.

"After all," he said, "there is no good giving in to your fear. We stand up better and are better for trying to control ourselves."

The German moved closer to him. He was a little fellow, smaller than G-8, so he looked up at the Master Spy as he talked. He sounded as though he were little more than a kid.

"Do you know what is going to happen to us after we shoot through the trap door?"

"I haven't much of an idea yet," G-8 admitted.

Suddenly, he was aware that the youngster was sniffing the air. G-8 tried to smell that odor that seemed to be in the room.

"Ether!" the kid gasped.

G-8 sniffed again and nodded.

"It certainly smells like it," he admitted.

"Know something?" The youngster was shaking now. "That smell came up through the opening of the trap door that your friend just dropped through."

"I wouldn't doubt it," G-8 said.

The Master Spy was working on a strange hunch now. The German with whom he had been talking last before he had vanished had been standing close to the partial wall. G-8 had been standing a step away from him. Now the Master Spy stepped to the exact spot where the other had just gone through. The youngster behind him caught his breath.

"*Gott in Himmel!*" he choked. "How can you do that?"

"Do what?" G-8 asked.

"Step there where your friend just dropped."

"I want to get closer to this wall," G-8 said. "Unless I'm very much mistaken, you'll hear a door open in the snake den in a few minutes and then you'll hear much louder hissing than before. I want to be in a position to see what is going on."

But the Master Spy had not given out his real reason for moving over to the spot where the last man had gone through. He was working on his hunch that no trap door would be sprung twice in succession. It was natural to assume that whoever controlled the releases of the trap door below would most likely pull a different trap door each time.

He heard a German pilot praying softly, fervently, off in another corner of the room. A guttural voice began babbling crazily.

FROM over the lower side wall came a breath of fresh air that swept away the ether smell. Then everything grew quiet as a key grated in the lock of the door.

A moment later, the heavy steel door swung open quickly. There was a yell from that end of the room.

The guttural German, out of his head with fright, screamed, "I'm going out! I'm not staying in here!"

Instantly, G-8 threw himself to the floor. He was just in time. A Luger began pumping lead into the dark chamber. The youngster who had been standing just behind the Master Spy cried out with pain and fell across the threshold.

A newcomer was hurled into the horror chamber and the steel door clanged shut again.

G-8 got to a sitting position, moving the youngster's body just enough to permit him to turn. The kid slumped back in his lap. He was shuddering and G-8 could feel the blood gushing from a wound in his chest.

"I-I'm glad I'm going to die," the kid said. "I couldn't stand it much longer."

"You're not going to die," G-8 said.

He ripped the clothing from the kid's chest and, tearing a part of his shirt, began sopping up the blood. He poked a wad of the shirt into the gap. It was the best he could do with what he had to work with. The flow of blood slowed.

"Feel better?"

There was no answer from the German youngster. G-8 tried to rouse him, but he was limp in his arms. He felt for heart action. The heart had stopped beating. There was nothing more he could do.

He lowered the poor dead youngster to the floor and got up. From beyond the lower side off the room, a door had opened. They were coming to get another of those giant snakes.

The hissing became thrice as loud as before. He could even hear the slithering of the giant, serpentine bodies as they apparently tried to get away from the open door.

Waiting there beside the wall, G-8 tried to figure the thing out. Why were these snakes here? There was something about their presence and the vanishing of each man that made him wonder about certain things. The smell of ether. Perhaps an operation took place after a man and a snake left their respective cells. It was ghastly.

The body of the wriggling reptile could be heard being dragged over the threshold. The door boomed shut again.

Now it was his turn. G-8 moved to the very back corner of the room and raised his arms. He touched the top of the lower wall. He could reach the iron bars at this point. He felt them, found them loose to the touch. The poor kid who had loosened them had never had his chance for escape.

SAVAGELY, the Master Spy began yanking on the bars. He managed to tear the first one loose and then he attacked the second. He found he could lift that out of its socket in the concrete.

The third was tougher. It almost came, but when moved to the extreme point, refused to go any farther. Again and again he attacked it. He had to stand on his tip toes to work and that made it difficult to put strong pressure on the bar. Again and again, he jammed it back and forth.

He made a last tug at it with all his strength. It came free in his hands. The Master Spy realized that every eye in the darkened chamber was upon him. They must not cry out. He turned to them.

"Watch me," he whispered. "If I'm successful, perhaps you can try it, too."

In one leap, G-8 caught hold of the top of the wall and pulled himself up. This part was easy. He could almost stand straight on top of that wall.

From where he stood, he glued his eyes on the screened window about two feet square that opened to the out-of-doors. That screen, he was sure, could be ripped out once he reached the spot.

The whole back wall of the serpent's den had been constructed as if it were the jagged side of a cave. There were large sections of rock allowed to protrude outward. Perhaps this was meant to imitate a cave, the natural haunt of these strange, large reptiles.

Not once did G-8 look down at the snakes. Even then, in spite of his strong will power, something seemed to be drawing his eyes to the snakes below. He fought against that power and reached out for the jutting rock.

The rock felt solid. He felt for a foothold to begin his dangerous way into the den. The hissing increased as he moved from one jutting rock to another. Hand over hand he worked his way, sometimes only an inch at a time. Then he was able to move across a three-foot gap. His foot slipped and he clutched to the jutting rocks and fought like mad for a strong foothold.

One foot hung free. There was a hiss below and something as sharp and resilient as a saber slashed the back of his boot. He hung there for a moment, resting.

Even in his present position, G-8 felt the slimy rock that his right hand held slipping from his grasp. He stared toward the screened ventilator. A rock jutted out almost at the level of his waist. He caught it with his left foot and swung to where another rock farther on made a hook shape that would not slip.

ALMOST a minute passed. He heard a voice whisper from the wall he had left, "Go on. Can't you go any farther?"

G-8 turned his head. A German pilot was on the wall, ready to follow.

"Stay there until I'm sure I make it," G-8 said. "Don't crowd me."

He took a long breath and began moving again. Where there were rocks jutting out, he caught hold and moved his feet to other holds. The hissing became a din. He dared not look down, but he knew that the powerful serpents were writhing and lashing at him, trying to scale the rough sides of the wall.

Another hand hold and another. He was almost directly over the three-foot door through which the snakes were snared and dragged out one at a time. He wondered if that attendant didn't wonder what was causing the snakes to set up such a din of hissing. Would someone come to investigate?

He moved faster with that thought driving him on. Suddenly, he stopped. Before him was a gap of perhaps three feet where no rocks projected. Frantically he felt for crevices in the rock where he might bury his fingertips.

He could feel the pulse beating in the back of his head like a tom-tom.

There were no crevices, nothing to cling to. He moved a few inches closer to the three-foot smooth wall gap. Likely the wall had been built like this to tantalize anyone who might try to escape.

Clenching his teeth, he reached for the nearest jutting rock, three feet away. He was fairly sticking to the face of the wall like a fly, but without the suction caps of a fly on his feet.

The snakes beneath him were going mad. One made a wild leap and struck his boot. He felt the leather of the boot give way and felt a sting across his foot as though it had been quickly gashed by a razor edge.

Clinging desperately, he tried to move on. The stones were slipping from his grasp.

He heard the key scrape in the lock of the steel door that was the only entrance to the pilots' chamber. The steel door was swinging back.

A voice bellowed, "Where is the man who calls himself *Herr Hauptmann* Gurst? Where is the swine? Answer, *Herr Hauptmann* Gurst. We know you are G-8, the *verdammter Hund*."

G-8 tried to freeze against the wall, but his hands were slipping. Then he lost his hold completely and plunged backward into the den of striking, hissing snakes.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Hauptmann Gurst's Trick

WHEN he had started for Germany, G-8 had left Nippy and Bull in charge of the real *Hauptmann* Gurst. As the Fokker that had brought Gurst roared out over the field, the German *Hauptmann* leaped from his chair. But Bull Martin was there before him, itching to smack him down. He let go with a slumbering right to Gurst's jaw and sent him spinning backward across the room.

Gurst lay there for a long moment, then slowly he got to his feet and, staggering as if he were going to faint, flopped back into the chair.

"Now, you yellow-livered Heinie," Bull bellowed, "stay where you're put or I'll crack your skull."

Gurst did not move from the chair. He sat there, half-dazed, rubbing his jaw.

Finally, he asked quite calmly, "Am I to understand that this *verdammter Kerl*, G-8, has gone over to take my place at my airdrome?"

"You guessed it right," Bull growled. "Want to make something of it?"

Gurst smiled slowly.

"I am only thinking of the trouble he will be in when he lands in Germany," he said.

"Listen, Bull," Nippy said, "if you ask me, the best thing we can do is get this bird locked up and under heavy guard. He knows where G-8 has gone. He's liable to start out and try to put a crimp in G-8's plans."

Bull thought that over for a long moment, then nodded.

"I guess you're right," he admitted. "Let's go." He nodded to Gurst and said in German, "Come on. Get up. You're going to the prison."

Gurst took a long breath.

"I'm not feeling so well," he pleaded.

"You have a terrific punch, *mein Herr*." He got up, nevertheless, and clung to the back of the chair, swaying dizzily. Nippy had his Colt

automatic out, but Bull was relying only on his powerful fists.

"Get going," he said, "and quit stalling. If I really sock you, you'll never wake up."

Gurst staggered toward the door, took hold of the sides of the casing as he went out. Then, as if the fresh air had soothed him to sleep, he pitched over and crashed to the tarmac.

Gurst lay there, not moving. Nippy and Bull stared down at him, not knowing for the moment what to do.

"Okay, big boy," the terrier ace grinned. "You socked him and made him like this. Let's hear a bright idea from you."

They stood staring down at him. Gurst hadn't moved. Bull scowled and turned to Nippy.

"Hey, Nip," he said, not a little surprised, "this bird is either the best actor in Europe or he's really out cold."

"He's probably one of the best actors in Europe," Nippy said, "but that doesn't mean that he couldn't have fainted. That sock you handed him was no caress."

Bull still stood there, staring down for a moment, then he said, "Better get an ambulance and we'll take him to the hospital."

Nippy made the call and in a few minutes a little meat wagon came sputtering up the tarmac. They loaded Gurst inside and went sputtering back to the hospital.

The Battle Aces followed the stretcher bearers as they carried Gurst into the hospital. A medical lieutenant took command.

"What's the matter with this man?" he demanded.

Nippy jerked his head toward Bull.

"My big pal here smacked him."

"But he got up after that," Bull argued. "I think he's trying to pull a fast one to keep out of prison. I don't think he's out cold at all."

They followed as the lieutenant directed that Gurst should be placed in a private, guarded room. The medical officer made a hurried examination.

"His heart action is all right," he said. "But yet he is unconscious. At any rate, he'll be guarded."

"We're going to make sure of it," Bull said. "I'm going to stay here and see that he is. If he escapes, G-8 may get into a mess of trouble."

Nippy and Bull waited until an armed guard was brought and posted at the door of Gurst's room; then they returned to the end hangar.

It was perhaps an hour later that they heard shouting. Bull looked up and listened, but Nippy was suddenly blasted from his chair.

"Jumping Jupiter! Hear that? Somebody's yelling that the prisoner has escaped. Let's go!"

The two Battle Aces went racing out on the tarmac. They could already see a Spad halfway down the field roaring out for a take-off. They could see an overall-clad pair of shoulders protruding from the cockpit. The head and face belonged to Gurst.

Bull bellowed for their Spads to be brought out. But Nippy was running on down the field to where a D. H. was turning over on the line. Mechanics were working on it. It might be ready to go and it might not. At any rate, it was the only plane in sight ready to shove off.

"Come on, Bull!" Nippy yelled. "We got to get that two-seater going."

He barked to the mechanics to stand clear and, with a running jump, landed with both feet in the forward cockpit of the D. H. He was batting the throttle open as Bull Martin climbed into the observer's cockpit. The Spad was climbing as they took the air in hot pursuit.

They went thundering on. But they were staying down low, hedge-hopping. Gurst was climbing the Spad. That would take more time. There might be a chance of catching him that way.

Nippy and Bull were straining forward in their cockpits, trying to cut down as much head resistance as possible, fighting to gain even inches in that race.

The lines whirled under them. They hadn't climbed a hundred feet since the take-off, were simply skimming along over the tops and upper branches of trees. They had caught up to the fleeing Spad as they crossed No Man's Land, but the Spad was above them.

Nippy yelled back to Bull, "Try a long-range shot with your Lewis guns."

A sickening announcement came from Bull.

"Hey! These guns haven't got any ammunition in them."

"That's swell," Nippy barked. "And I'll bet Gurst's tanks have enough gas in them to fly clear to Berlin."

The terrier ace pressed his triggers.

A rattle of Vickers sounded and he yelled, "My guns are working. Let's go."

He stuck the nose of the D. H. into a steeper climb. They were roaring over the German lines. There was a pounding of slugs on their fabric as troops below cut loose with rifle and machine-gun fire. They thundered back behind the lines and past the artillery positions. Suddenly the Spad, still out of range, kicked over, peeled off its level flight, and came screaming down.

"Look out! Here he comes!" Nippy yelled.

DOWN, down the Spad screamed in a wild power dive. The Vickers guns on the nose cut loose with a warming burst before he was within range. Nippy clenched his teeth and held the stick firm. He was staring up, gauging the distance, ready to move an instant before the Spad came within range of them.

Now. The nose of the D. H. staggered. The Vickers guns snarled at the Spad thundering down at them. Tracers lashed up and slashed through the wings.

"Lousy shooting!" Bull roared. "Why couldn't I have been up there?"

Nippy cut loose with another burst and another. He was almost hanging on his prop. His tracers seemed to miss that Spad cockpit by inches.

Brrram! The Spad cut loose with a long burst from its Vickers guns. The white tracers slithered down at the D. H. Nippy kicked over instantly and sent the D. H. into a half turn. He kicked the other way, but the Spad had swerved and Gurst was still above them. Without Bull's guns working, he was master of the situation.

The Spad screamed down again in another quick dive. Once more the Vickers guns blasted and tracers slashed down at Nippy and Bull. They buried themselves in the Liberty engine on the nose of the big ship. The ship shivered violently and black smoke belched from the engine cowling on the Liberty. Then, with a cough and a groan, the Liberty stopped.

In desperation, Nippy stuck the nose down in a glide. He stared about. Nothing but German territory below them. There was only one field that

they could glide into and German soldiers were swarming out along that field.

They were gliding in when Gurst swung his Spad in front of them and dropped a message streamer to the German troops on the field. He zoomed up again and went thundering off to the northwest.

The wheels and skid of the D. H. touched at the same time. Even with imprisonment and probably death facing him, Nippy could still make a perfect landing.

As they rolled, German troops with drawn guns came running alongside.

A swaggering *Leutnant* strode through the crowd of Germans. He held a piece of paper in one hand and the message streamer in the other.

In English, he announced, "I have here a message from the great *Herr Hauptmann* Gurst. He informs me that you are among his choicest enemies. He leaves orders as to where you are to be taken—at once."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The Mystery of the Blue Light

NEVER had the Master Spy been in a tougher spot than he was now. From what he had heard the big guard bellow into the room, his identity was known. That same thing had happened to him many times before, but on this occasion he had been crawling along the perilous face of the wall, clinging to the jutting rocks. His hold had suddenly slipped and he was plunging backward into the den of snakes.

A million thoughts flashed through his mind as he fell. There was double peril from those reptiles below. They were huge creatures, almost as large as boa constrictors, and no doubt capable of crushing him to death. If he should somehow escape being crushed, the chances were very strong that these snakes possessed a deadly poison in their fangs. Even as he fell, the Master Spy felt a razor-like fang gash his leg.

He landed on his back, but not directly on the floor. He could feel the writhing bodies of

serpents that had broken his fall. One cold, clammy form wriggled across the back of his neck as he landed.

Then, almost before he realized what was happening, he saw in the dim light a gigantic serpent's head rear up directly in front of his face. That was all he knew.

WHEN G-8 regained consciousness, all was deathly still about him. He realized that he possessed his full mental faculties. At various places on his body he felt stinging pain, as though he had been cut many times by sharp knives.

G-8 realized that he was lying on something soft like a mattress. He moved tentatively, felt covered spring under him. So he was lying on a cot.

He heard a slight creaking sound not far away from him as if someone else had moved on another cot. A moment later, he heard breathing, then a step. The whole situation was most mystifying. How had he gotten here? What was it that had carried him into a state of unconsciousness? He tried to think back. The last thing he could remember was landing on the bodies of wriggling serpents, then that serpent's head appearing for only an instant in front of his face. How long a period had elapsed between then and now? How had he gotten out of that den of snakes?



He moved his fingers, felt of his body. He was naked from the knees down. His only garb was a short, hospital night shirt. A fine thing to try to escape in.

Suddenly, a light appeared. It was blue and seemed far away and very tiny. It went out. G-8 waited, breathless. Again the light appeared, this time a little nearer.

He heard a low, deep, rumbling voice say, "You are doing very well."

Then the light went out. Strange, he couldn't see anything else in the room, even when that blue light was on. He decided it must be a very small pocket flashlight with blue lenses that permitted the light beam to travel only to the exact spot that the owner of the light wished to see.

G-8 heard footsteps coming nearer. The light went on again and off. Sometimes there were a few words spoken in that low, deep rumble.

He listened for a moment. The footsteps were not more than ten feet away from him now and coming nearer. On a hunch, G-8 closed his eyes. One, two, three minutes passed.

Then, almost directly above him, G-8 heard a voice say, "About this one." The Master Spy lay

motionless, eyes closed. Then he realized that a blue light had been turned on directly above him.

The guttural voice said, "He will be out of it before long. He is only under the spell of the serpents."

There was a muffled sound of footsteps that stopped near the foot of G-8's bed.

"Guard him most carefully," said the guttural voice

"*Jawohl*," came a low, answering voice. "I will stand here at the foot of his bed and see that he does not escape."

Those words meant one thing to the Master Spy. Those snakes were not poisonous. If he were lying here about to die from snake venom, the guard would not expect him to try to escape.

"You know, *Herr Doktor Kommer*," he heard a low voice say, "*Herr Tackim* is most anxious to know when the first contingent will report back to the airdrome for duty."

The deep, guttural voice answered, "Tell him that the first contingent will be ready to leave the hospital by noon."

Footsteps moved away a few paces, then stopped.

"One more thing," Kommer rumbled. "Tell him that this patient who is known as G-8 will, in all probability, be ready to be placed in a detention chamber not long after his assistants arrive."

"Assistants?" repeated the other voice.

"*Jawohl*," said the *Herr Doktor*. "I have just received word that the two assistants of this *verdammter Kerl*, named Weston and Martin, have been captured. They are on their way here now."

THE sound of the footsteps began again and died away. G-8's brain was fairly throbbing with conflicting thoughts. So Nippy and Bull were on their way here as prisoners! He wondered how they had been captured.

And there were the two German names he had heard, Tackim and Kommer. The story that Ihsan had told flashed into his mind. The two principals in that story had been named Tackim and Kommer. Perhaps he should have waited to hear the rest of that story instead of running off. Now, perhaps, he might never have a chance to hear the rest of it.

G-8's mind became a mad jumble of confused thoughts. What was this hospital for, and why was there only that mysterious blue light used by *Herr Doktor Kommer*? G-8 opened his eyes and stared into the darkness. Now that he knew he was there, he could almost feel the guard standing at the foot of his cot. He was the one whose breathing he had heard.

Minutes dragged on. So Nippy and Bull were on their way here now. He made vague plans for his escape, began fumbling about the cot. Without making a sound, he slipped his right arm from the covers. There seemed to be nothing there but springs. He moved his hand farther down in search of something that could be used as a weapon. His fingers touched a wood cross member of the cot. He took hold of it and strained to pull it loose. It wouldn't budge. Again he tried, this time to turn it. He twisted it in one direction and it stuck. Now he turned it back the other way. It came, at first grudgingly, then more and more.

He considered for a fleeting moment the possibility of sliding out of bed and slipping past the guard in the darkness. But even if he managed to get out of this hospital room, it was quite evident that he wouldn't get far, dressed only in a short hospital night shirt. His first objective must be to get the uniform that the guard wore. Putting that guard out of commission would solve the whole problem.

So he kept on tugging silently at that heavy wood cross member. Again and again, he twisted it. Then it seemed to stick. He could turn it, but he wasn't getting anywhere. He pulled on it tentatively, then harder. One end came loose in his hand.

He realized now that the cross member had probably been held in place by two screws. He had turned it so that one end became unscrewed. He pulled that out. Now he must turn it the other way to unscrew the other end.

Suddenly, he stopped. He had heard the guard leave the foot of the bed and come toward him. Then he heard the guard breathing directly above him.

A light went on. It was blue like the one used by *Herr Doktor Kommer* and it shone directly into the Master Spy's face. G-8 stared up into it. He knew that the blanket was hanging off the edge of the cot, covering the arm with which he was turning the wood cross member. Moving only his fingers, he kept on turning that cross member.

"Ach, so you are awake," the guard said.

G-8 half lowered his eyelids.

"Jawohl," he said. He tried to look very sick. "I—I am going to die," he gasped. "I am certain of it." He made his voice almost inaudible. "Lean closer so you can hear. I—have a—confession to make."

The German guard turned off his blue light and they were in pitch darkness again. G-8 could tell from the sound of his breathing that he had lowered his head. Everything was ready now if he could only get that wood cross member free to use as a club.

"Jawohl," the guard was saying. "I am listening."

"Closer," G-8 gasped. "I must tell—something before—I die."

As he uttered those words, the cross member came free in his hand.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Rescue Flight

HE COULD hear the guard breathing very close to his face. G-8 spoke in a very low whisper.

"I am—an enemy spy."

"What did you say?" the guard asked.

"Listen closely," G-8 said, speaking so low that the guard bent even nearer to him. "I am an—Allied spy."

Slowly, inch by inch, he was working his right arm, in which he held the club, out from under the cot.

"I am—dying. Before death comes—I must tell you—"

His words came slowly, indistinctly. He was playing for time. Now his arm was out, free. He was raising the club.

"Listen. The *Vaterland*—is about to lose the war—because in France they are—preparing a—"

The club was high enough now. The guard's body was tensed as he strained to catch the important information which he thought was coming. He would get an Iron Cross for this work.

Suddenly, in one desperate effort, G-8 delivered the blow. He could tell from the guard's

breathing exactly where his head was. He knew that he must, above all things, make this one blow do the trick. So he put every ounce of strength he possessed into that blow. With a dull thud, the club struck the guard's skull. G-8 felt that club bury itself into the German's brain.

The Master Spy lay there quietly, listening. There wasn't a sound in the place. Strange, if this was a hospital, that there was no moaning. Then someone coughed and the place grew still again.

Stealthily, G-8 wriggled out from under the guard and got off the cot. With lightning fingers, he began undressing the guard. He stripped off his hospital night shirt and began dressing in the guard's uniform. When he was finished, he slipped the night shirt on the guard, rolled him onto the cot, and covered him up to his neck in the blanket.

Everything was set now. He crept slowly through the darkness in the same direction that *Herr Doktor Kommer* and his assistants had taken when they had left the place. With hands extended, he moved cautiously so as not to bump into anything. His one outstretched hand finally touched a wall. He moved along that wall until he came to a door. The door opened easily, noiselessly to his touch.

Closing the door behind him, he went on, feeling now with his feet as well as his hands in case there should be a stairway. He found that he was in a small, pitch-black room. There was another door about six feet from the hospital door through which he had just passed.

Around the edges of the door before him, he saw light filtering in. He felt for the knob and turned it. Everything so far seemed to work noiselessly like well oiled machinery. In spite of the fact that there was only a dim light filtering in as he opened the door, his eyes blinked involuntarily, for they had been accustomed to darkness. He stood there with the door open only a crack, permitting a small amount of light to come in.

Suddenly, he tensed. From outside, in the lighted corridor came the sound of heavy footsteps. There must be a dozen men there. He moved nearer to the crack and peered out, and his heart began pounding double time.

Nippy Weston with Bull Martin behind him was coming up the corridor toward the hospital. The terrier ace had two guards, one on either side of him, and so did Bull. Behind them came four

other guards, bayoneted rifles ready for instant action.

FOR a moment, the Master Spy felt that he was trapped. To be sure, if this entire group were entering the hospital section of the building, he could go back into the darkened hallway and wait. But he found that that was not necessary. They stopped before the last door of the corridor. G-8 could just make it out. It was made of solid oak.

Now the guard who was on the right of Nippy, a German corporal, brought a string of keys from his pocket. He unlocked the oak door, then turned to the terrier ace.

"Enter," he commanded.

Nippy went in and the guard beside Bull shoved him in after. They slammed the door shut and the corporal took up his position before it.

Long minutes dragged by. G-8 waited to make sure no one else was coming. He realized that before he tried to release Nippy and Bull, he must know about the layout of this end of the building.

He must learn whether the hospital was located in an upper part of the structure, as he guessed, or in the basement. He must find the easiest avenue of escape.

Boldly, he pushed back the door and stepped out into the lighted corridor. He glanced only momentarily at the corporal stationed before the door of the Battle Aces' prison. The corporal was eyeing him. G-8 closed the door and started down the corridor, eyes straight ahead.

As he passed the corporal, the German asked, "You have been guarding the *verdammter Kerl*, G-8?"

The Master Spy gave a short nod and answered in a low voice, "*Jawohl*. But the swine is still unconscious. I go to report."

"See that you do not take too long," the corporal warned G-8.

HE STRODE on down the corridor. There were doors on either side, two of them on the left side and another on the right. After he had walked perhaps forty feet along the corridor, it turned sharply to the right. He took the turn, found that it wound back to the left again some ten feet farther on. Just around that bend and again to the left, a narrow staircase led upward.

The Master Spy paused for a moment, glanced on down the corridor. It seemed to wind to the left again after proceeding another twenty or thirty feet. But this staircase gave him an idea. He wanted to see if it led to the roof. That was very desirable. He wanted to see that roof, to see whether it was dark outside. Furthermore, he wanted to have a look at that wireless aerial that appeared to run the length of the building on top of that flat roof. Then, too, there might be a good chance of escape from that roof.

Moving on his toes, G-8 slipped up the stairs. At the top, he came to a trap door. The light was very dim up there, only the reflection of the illumination in the hall below. The trap door was fastened from inside.

He removed the hook and raised the trap door.

Looking up, he saw the stars in the heavens. It was a clear night with no moon. He stepped out onto the flat roof and lowered the door so that no draft would blow down the corridor and let the corporal on guard know that something was up.

Cautiously he moved about the roof. On all sides tree branches extended far over the rooftop. There was a low parapet rising a foot or two around the entire edge. Down the middle, where the tree branches didn't cover it, spruce and pine boughs were laid down as a camouflage from the air. He knew that when looking down from a plane, the whole roof would appear like part of the woods.

He hurried back to the trap door. Suddenly, his foot struck something lying on the rooftop and there was a low, clanging sound. He bent down and picked it up. It was a short, thick piece of reinforcing steel, about a foot long. That was exactly what he needed.

He poked the iron bar into his pocket and moved swiftly down the stairs, lowering the trap door as he went. He made his way back along the winding corridor until he reached the corporal. There he stopped. From his coat pocket, he drew out a folded slip of paper. He didn't know what it contained inside, but that didn't matter, since it was merely to draw the corporal's attention.

"Here," he said, "is an order from *Herr Tackim*."

He handed the folded paper to the corporal and grew tense there beside him.

CHAPTER TWENTY

A Frantic Message

THE corporal unfolded the paper and stared at the contents. G-8 didn't wait for him to read even one word. His hand closed over the heavy iron bar and he raised it.

The corporal turned to face G-8 saw the bar coming down, and ducked quickly away. The blow landed on his shoulder. "*Donnerwetter!*" he exploded.

His right hand went for his Luger. Again the Master Spy raised the iron bar. The Luger was half out of the corporal's holster as the bar made a pinging sound on his skull.

G-8 rushed in to catch his body so it wouldn't crash to the floor. He lowered it and began swiftly searching for that ring of keys. In a flash, he had them out and was unlocking the heavy oak door.

As he drew back the door, he hissed, "Not a word out of you birds. Help me get this guy in here."

Nippy and Bull rushed forward and helped him drag the corporal's body inside. G-8 slipped the Luger belt off the guard and strapped it around his waist. They stepped out into the corridor. G-8 closed the door and locked it with the corporal's keys.

"Now come on," he said, "and don't make a sound."

He led the way down the winding corridor to the stairs. At the top of the steps, he threw up the skylight. They climbed up onto the roof and lowered the trap door again.

"How did you birds get here?" G-8 demanded.

"We wouldn't be here now," Bull growled, "if Nippy hadn't missed Gurst at the first shot."

"There isn't time for argument," the Master Spy snapped.

The terrier ace explained in a few words about Gurst's escape.

"So," the Master Spy said, "that's how they knew that I was G-8 instead of *Hauptmann* Gurst. What time is it?"

"It seems like forty years," Bull said, "since we landed up near the front in our D. H."

"Listen," the Master Spy said, "there's no time for fooling around. I want definite answers to my questions."

Nippy was looking at his wrist watch.

"It's about a quarter to four o'clock in the morning," he said.

"Then it ought to be daylight in an hour or so," G-8 said. "Now—here's what we do. You can slip along one of these overhanging branches to the main trunk of the tree and get down. Let me see." He paused in thought for a moment. "I think there's a German airdrome about three miles from here. See if you can make it. You've got to get back as soon as you can."

"Have you found out anything about this business?" Nippy demanded.

The Master Spy nodded.

"Some," he said. "I think the rest of Ihsan's story will tell us what we want to know. Is he still at Le Bourget?"

"I'll say he is," Nippy told him. "The general ordered him to wait. If anything happens to you, G-8, he'll probably stay there for the rest of his life."

"Good," the Master Spy nodded. "Now listen carefully. Try your best to get back to Le Bourget Field. This place has got to be blown off the face of the earth. I still don't know exactly what the menace is, but I know we've got to destroy the whole business. We've got to do it at dawn. The first contingent of murderers will leave here about noon today."

"We'll get back," Bull growled.

"Listen," Nippy said. "How about staying here and helping you? You'll need some assistance if you're going to stay."

"I'm staying alone," G-8 said firmly.

"Listen to reason," Bull pleaded. "One of us can get back to Le Bourget as well as two. Let Nippy go. I'll put on that corporal's uniform and help you."

"The corporal's uniform would be too small for you and too big for Nippy," G-8 countered. "Besides, I've got to get these orders back. As soon as you reach the field, call the general in charge of the Allied air force. Tell him that I've got to have every available bomb in France unloaded on this place. It's pretty well camouflaged by the overhanging tree branches and boughs, but there's this long aerial extending above the center of the flat roof. I'll get some kind

of white material to string along that so the pilots can pick the place out. Now get going, both of you. There isn't a minute to lose."

G-8 stood there, watching them in the light of the stars until the evergreen branches hid their movements. He heard little scraping sounds as they slid down the two tree trunks. They were gone now. There was nothing more the Master Spy could do for them.

G-8 HURRIED to the back of the building. There he saw something that he hadn't noticed before. The back of the strange, reinforced concrete building was built on the very edge of a cliff that dropped away into a flat valley below.

Then he turned his attention from that to the strange machinery that held up that end of the wireless aerial. Perhaps these gadgets were insulators—he didn't know—but in the darkness, they appeared to be much more menacing than that.

He hurried along the roof toward the front of the building, following the wires. There were more gadgets and insulators holding up that end of the aerial. Here he found that the aerial terminated, for no wires led from it into the building at this point.

So far, he hadn't found the point where a termination cable led from inside up to the aerial. If he could locate that, it might give him the approximate location of the wireless room.

The final destruction of this building and all the horror that it contained was of such importance that he dared not chance leaving it entirely up to Nippy and Bull to accomplish. Something might happen to them to prevent their getting back. He must get a wireless message through to Battle.

Again the Master Spy made his way back along the aerial wires. This time, very near the stairs and the trap door, he found wires going off at an angle toward the east and then dropping through insulators through the roof.

Marking the point well in his mind in relation to the stairs, he lifted the trap door and started down. At the bottom of the stairs, he moved along the corridor again, heading for the general location of where those wires came down through the roof.

Before him, he found a door. He tried the knob, found it unlocked. Boldly, he opened it,

stepped inside and quickly closed the door behind him.

A wireless operator with earphones on his head sat at a great table on which was a large wireless set. He turned and stared at G-8 with a startled look in his eyes. The Master Spy strode over to him.

"I have just come from *Herr* Tackim," he announced. "He wishes this message sent at once."

The operator took another quick look at G-8 and his hand poised on the key.

"I am ready," he said.

The Master Spy's hand rested on the butt of his Luger. He began to give the secret code letters that would ring the buzzer in the end hangar and awaken Battle. The operator jabbed them out. G-8 went on with the message, giving it letter by letter in the secret code known only to him and his assistants. The operator stiffened suddenly and his fingers stopped tapping out the letters.

"That is a code I do not know," he protested. "Who are you?"

There was no time for argument. G-8 whipped out his Luger. It rose and fell with a quick, swishing sound that ended in a thud as the butt buried itself in the operator's temple.

G-8 dragged the body of the operator away from the table and sat down at the key. He put in the call letters, repeated them several times, then he began sending the message in his secret code.

BATTLE:

IMPERATIVE! GET OUT MAP 355. I AM AT SECTION L NEAR CROSSPOINTS 23-67. THIS PLACE MUST BE BLOWN UP COMPLETELY. CALL COMMANDER OF ALLIED AIR FORCE AND TELL HIM EVERY AVAILABLE BOMB MUST BE DROPPED HERE. IT IS A REINFORCED CONCRETE BUILDING WELL CAMOUFLAGED BY PINE BOUGHS ON THE ROOF. THERE IS AN AERIAL RUNNING THE LENGTH OF THE ROOF. I WILL TRY TO STRING WHITE CLOTH ON THIS AERIAL SO IT CAN BE SEEN FROM THE AIR.

THIS PLACE MUST BE BLOWN UP AT ALL COSTS. ACT AT ONCE.

Again and again he sent that message over the air. Now and then, he stopped to repeat the call letters in case the manservant hadn't been

awakened the first and second time. He didn't know how long a time had elapsed. He simply knew that he must get this message over. Nippy and Bull would probably get there in time, but this method was more certain—if Battle would only wake up and get the call.

FINALLY, the Master Spy finished the last message and slipped out into the corridor. Now he must get some white material. He closed the door to the wireless room, locked it, and dropped the key into his pocket. He moved on down the corridor to the first door, opened it, and peered in.

He saw a large room with the walls almost completely covered with heavy German tapestries. A large, thick rug lay on the floor. But the most amazing thing was the furniture. Across one corner was a couch. It was not a conventional couch, for it rose only five or six inches off the floor, just enough height to give it softness. Beyond the low couch was a piece of furniture that might be a desk if it were higher. Pens, pencils and papers were strewn about the smooth top. But that top was only a foot above the floor.

Across the room was another, wider couch or bed. That, too, was only about six inches above the floor. On it lay a twisted, contorted figure. His back was toward the door and he was apparently asleep.

Somehow, the Master Spy had a hunch about this man. He couldn't help feeling that in this sumptuously-carpeted and draped windowless room was the fiend behind this horrible menace. G-8 had a hunch, also, that this deformed, sleeping man should not be disturbed. So, without realizing quite why he did it, the Master Spy softly closed the door again and went on down the corridor.

He opened the next door at the far end, near the hospital. The room was filled with medical supplies. There were many bottles on shelves and at one end there were rows upon rows of bandage gauze. Hurriedly, the Master Spy ducked inside, filled his arms with all the bandages he could carry, slipped out, and climbed the stairs to the roof.

He began working feverishly with those gauze bandages, stringing them like bunting in crazy shapes, looping them back and forth across the aerial wires. He unwound roll after roll of bandage and hung it on the aerial until he came

to the rear end of the building, where it hung over the cliff.

As he stood there, stringing up almost the last roll of bandage, he noticed that it was growing daylight. Suddenly, a cry echoed in the early morning. He spun around to see a head and a pair of powerful shoulders sticking up through the trap door opening. A powerful brute in a German uniform leaped out onto the roof and came tearing at him. Another came in back of him.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The Devil's Cockpit

AFTER sliding down the trunks of the two great trees, Nippy and Bull hurried off through the early morning darkness. For a long time they strode through the woods, single file, with Nippy in the lead. They came out into the open. It was still dark.

Bull glanced about. They seemed to be alone. He spoke in a guarded tone.

"Where do you figure G-8 meant that German air drome was located?"

"Search me," Nippy shot back. "I'm just heading where my nose tells me to go."

"Humph," Bull grunted. "Let's hope that nose of yours isn't lying."

They hurried on. The minutes raced by. They came in sight of the German air drome. It was still dark but they could make out the phantom-like dark blotches that were the hangars. Several planes were idling out front. An early morning patrol of some sort was going into operation.

Under cover of one hangar, they crept along to another, smaller building. Nippy, with Bull close behind, slunk along the edge of the smaller building. Light was coming from a crack in the window blind. Rising, Nippy peered through the crack.

"Look, Bull!" Nippy hissed. "An automatic on that table. A Colt automatic."

Bull took a squint and breathed, "So what?"

At that instant the light in the room went out. They heard the clunk of boots as the officer who had been occupying the room strode to the door. They heard the door open and close with a bang.

"Bull."

"What?"

Nippy was grinning, his face close to Bull's. "Never let it be said that one Nippy Weston did not do his best to return property belonging to Uncle Sam, "

"Meaning what, you lunatic?"

"Meaning if I can get this window open I'm going to get that Colt automatic."

Nippy was forcing the window open. It came, but grudgingly.

"Give me a boost."

Bull obeyed. "You'll get your neck in a noose for this, you crazy kid."

"If I get that automatic, I'll have something to help me get my neck out again," Nippy grunted.

In a moment the terrier ace had slipped through the window and was back with the automatic in his hand.

"Now we got something to work with," he said, silently lowering the window again.

"Just for this fool move," Bull growled, "we may both be caught or shot. Look, you crazy idiot. It's beginning to grow light and we haven't got any ship yet."

"Come on," Nip hissed. "No use wasting time talking about it."

They strode boldly on to the tarmac through the early morning gloom. It was light enough for their uniforms to show plainly

TWO planes nearest them were running. A mechanic was working on one. His form looked like the shadowy form of a ghost in the early morning mist. This mechanic was working on a strange machine mounted ahead of the cockpit. They couldn't see the mechanism plainly, but Nippy nudged Bull and nodded.

They slipped up closer. Daylight was coming fast. A German officer shouted an order from somewhere.

The mechanic turned just as Nippy struck. The butt of the GI automatic missed, landed at the side of his neck.

Suddenly, Nippy was hurled backward. Bull had jerked him out of the way. The big football All-American let fly with his pile driver right as the mechanic tried to grab a heavy wrench. There was a smack that sounded like a small explosion.

The mechanic's head snapped back and his legs gave out under him.

"Get going," Nippy said.

But Bull lingered long enough to shout at him triumphantly, "Yeah. And where would you be if it hadn't been for my right?"

Nippy was in the cockpit. Bull was running for the next Fokker, standing wingtip to wingtip with Nippy's crate.

The terrier ace had a tough job seeing over the strange contraption before him as he took off. He almost had to stand up in the seat to see where he was going But the wings grew light after a long run and began to lift the ship.

Instantly he noticed that it wasn't flying right. The tail was heavy, as though there were a cargo behind him.

It was growing daylight and he could see bombers and Allied ships roaring in above. Fokkers were also taking off from the field, coming in hot pursuit of the two stolen planes.

But that wasn't the greatest of Nippy's worries at the moment. That tail was heavy. He could feel a movement behind him and now he instantly realized that the mechanic had been talking to someone else, another German inside the fuselage just behind the cockpit.

There was an instant bursting sound behind him, as though a balloon had let go. Nippy was reaching for his Colt automatic even before he turned. In that swift whirling turn he caught sight of a German. The Jerry had burst out of the fuselage fabric, and with ax raised was about to bash Nippy's skull in two.

The ax was whistling down as Nippy managed to turn the automatic in an awkward position and pull the trigger.

In mid-air the ax wavered, and then fell into space. A ghastly expression crossed the German's face, a look of utter astonishment and then of sudden fear and pain. He pitched over the side.

Nippy stared down to see him fall. Now he saw also that from the strange nozzle of the machine in front of him a weird, fiery display was hissing straight down toward the earth.

Frantically he began turning valves and pulling levers on the machine—fighting like mad to stop this menace which he did not understand.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Bombs at Dawn

THE Master Spy was backed against the insulator towers. As the first two Germans came lunging at him, he whipped out his Luger and cut them down. But more yelling, screaming Boche came up out of the building. Crouching there, G-8 blasted until his clip was empty.

Everything was wild confusion. One brute of a German hurled him back against the wireless towers and pinned him there with a savage grip on his throat. He raised some heavy weapon—a club, G-8 thought.

Insane desperation seized the Master Spy. He ducked, felt as if he were tearing his shoulders out by the roots as he struggled against that cruel hand.

Suddenly, he realized that the air seemed filled with screaming planes. Pursuits were coming to his rescue. Above the din of the fight, he heard the chatter of machine-gun bullets.

Somehow, he broke free and dove for one of the stout tree branches that overhung the roof. The fight had taken place so swiftly that he could scarcely remember any of the details. He only knew that he was getting away, working himself hand over hand along that limb, sliding down a tree trunk, running like mad through the forest.

As the first bombs fell, the earth shook under his running feet—shook so violently that it knocked him flat. He got up and went racing on down toward the flat valley below the cliffs. Down there he came out of the forest. He caught a glimpse of German uniforms in a field ahead of him, ducked back again before they saw him, and ran toward another field.

He heard a Spad and two Fokkers screaming down at the Germans in that first field. There was a clatter of machine-gun fire. He broke out into another open space. There he realized that he was still carrying the last roll of white gauze. As he ran across the field, he held it by one end and let it unroll. It trailed off behind him, forming a white strip against the green grass.

A Spad was coming down onto the field to land. G-8 ran toward the spot where he thought it would finish its roll. A half minute later, the plane

landed and he ran up to the cockpit. Good old Battle grinned at him from the cockpit.

THERE was no time for words. The roar of the exploding bombs was still going on up there on top of the cliff.

Parts of the cliff itself were breaking away. Sections of reinforced concrete were being blasted high in the air, to fall crashing in the woods and the valley below.

G-8 leaped onto the wing of Battle's Spad. He clutched the wires and gave the manservant the nod. The Hiss thundered and they staggered precariously to the air.

As they climbed, the two Fokkers that G-8 had seen fell in behind. Looking back, the Master Spy saw the grinning faces of Nippy Weston and Bull Martin in the cockpits.

Battle climbed the Spad high above the cliffs as they started home. G-8 looked down and saw only a huge hole where but a few minutes before had been the seemingly impregnable concrete building. The ghastly horrors that had been housed in that building would never again threaten mankind, for all was utter destruction down there now.

They droned on back across the lines. As they climbed out of their ships before the end hangar, G-8 turned to Nippy and Bull.

"How is it that you two are flying Fokkers?" he asked.

"Well, " Bull boomed, "after we left you, we hurried as fast as we could, but that German air drome you mentioned was farther away than you thought. We just managed to steal a couple of Fokkers in time to join in the raid. I guess you must have gotten a message through to Battle to come over on a bombing raid."

"Righto," the manservant beamed.

"Wait, Nip," G-8 said. "What's that queer looking machine on your Fokker? I've been trying to figure it out."

Nippy grinned and shrugged. "Search me," he said. "After I got rid of my passenger, I noticed it was spitting a strange-looking fire straight down along the side of the ship. I got a hunch that it's something the Heinies were testing. Maybe it's some kind of a death machine and again it might be a kind of supercharger or something. I'm going to find out what it does."

"Later," G-8 said. "Right now we've got the rest of Ihsan's story to hear. That will likely tell us a lot of things that we don't know—I hope."

THEY found Ihsan, the little East Indian whom the general had sent, still waiting faithfully in the living room.

Ihsan nodded.

"I stayed," he said, "because I thought you might be interested in hearing the rest of my story."

"We certainly are," G-8 said.

With Nippy, Bull, and Battle, he sat down to listen.

"Let me see," Ihsan said. "Where was I? I believe I mentioned the fact that the little German, *Herr Tackim*, had been captured by the natives and we found him later in the Makuu Jungle. He had been so terribly tortured that *Herr Doktor Kommer* said he would never be able to walk again. He would never be able to do more than crawl. Even worse the natives had put out his eyes."

Ihsan stopped and looked across the room as though he were staring thousands of miles away and seeing again those horrors of the Makuu Jungle.

"I shall never forget the sightless eyes of *Herr Tackim*," he said. "I learned then for the first time that *Herr Doktor Kommer* had been traveling in the jungle for one explicit reason. He was searching for the source of a new medicinal drug that he had discovered. I remember his looking at those empty eye sockets *Herr Tackim* and saying that if his new discovery worked, he would be able to transplant new eyes to *Herr Tackim's* head."

"But that," G-8 cut in, "is impossible. Any man of medicine will tell you that once the optic nerves are destroyed, it is impossible to restore sight."

Ihsan was nodding slowly.

"I heard *Herr Doktor Kommer* say that, too," he said. "But he also said that this new discovery of his made possible to weld in the optic nerve of other eyes, even the eyes of animals or reptiles."

"Reptiles!" G-8 exploded. "Good heavens, that may be the answer."

"There is more to my story," Ihsan went on. "The Makuu Jungle is the home of a strange

species of snake known as the Wakula cobra. But it is not really a cobra, as we think of cobras in India, because it isn't poisonous. It has sharp edged fangs like pointed razors.

"The remarkable thing is the peculiar power it possesses in its eyes. Once the Wakula cobra gets its eyes focused on a living thing, it has it completely in its power. When it stalks an animal, that animal seems to lose possession of all its faculties, is completely unaware of what is happening. The cobra has such power that it can force its prey to come to it. After it has come within reach, the cobra gashes it to death, licks the blood as it flows, and later devours the carcass."

"Now I know," the Master Spy said, "why I seemed to lose consciousness after I fell into the den of snakes. They must have been Wakula cobras. All I can remember is that head appearing in front of me."

"But I must tell you about the operation and the result of it," Ihsan continued. "I was there when *Herr Doktor Kommer* asked *Herr Tackim* if he would submit to an experimental operation. He proposed to transplant the eyes of a Wakula cobra into *Herr Tackim's* eye sockets."

Bull gasped, "Was it successful?"

"Yes," Ihsan said. "*Herr Tackim* was able to see again with the cobra's eyes. But, more than that, he acquired the peculiar power of the cobra along with his sight. He could look at any one of us and make us do whatever he wished, even if it was a crime.

He took a long breath.

"I do not know the whereabouts of *Herr Doktor Kommer* and *Herr Tackim*," he said, "but the thought occurred to me when I heard the report of the strange thing which had happened to *Monsieur Dupre* that perhaps my story might be of interest to you since it was quite possible that the *Herr Doktor* and *Herr Tackim* had returned to Germany."

"They did return to Germany," G-8 said. "I have every reason to believe that that was *Herr Tackim* whom I saw lying on the low couch."

Ihsan looked startled.

"Did he see you, Captain G-8?" he asked.

"No," the Master Spy said. "He was lying on the couch with his back toward me, apparently asleep. Somehow, I had a feeling that I shouldn't disturb him, so I closed the door and went on.

That's one hunch that probably saved my life as well as the lives of thousands of our airmen."

"Jumping Jupiter!" Nippy exploded. "You haven't told us all the things that happened to you, Chief."

Bull Martin scowled.

"Listen," he said, "I want to hear about that as much as anybody, but can't we eat first?"

The Master Spy smiled.

"That's an excellent idea, " he said.

"Let's all get cleaned up; then I'll tell you my end of the story while Battle is getting breakfast."

"Righto," the manservant beamed. "Coming up, on the fire, and all that sort of thing."

He hurried off into the kitchen.

THE END

